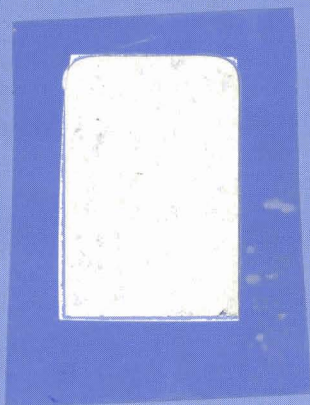
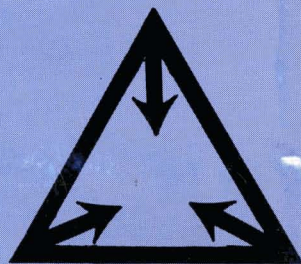


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# THREE FACES OF MIDWESTERN ISOLATIONISM

Gerald P. Nye  
Robert E. Wood  
John L. Lewis



The Center for the Study of  
the Recent History of the  
United States

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Gerald P. Nyquist  
Burt E. Wood  
John L. Tew

Edited by John N. Schmitt

THE CENTER FOR THE  
STUDY OF THE RECENT HISTORY OF THE MIDDLE STATES  
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THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF  
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THE UNITED STATES

*A cooperative undertaking involving*  
The State Historical Society of Iowa  
The Herbert Hoover Presidential Library  
*and*  
The University of Iowa

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## Foreword

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THE PAPERS presented in this volume were delivered at a conference held on April 2, 1980, in Iowa City under the sponsorship of the Center for the Study of the Recent History of the United States, a cooperative undertaking involving the State Historical Society of Iowa, the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, and The University of Iowa. Representatives of the three named institutions had been encouraged in the fall of 1975 by President Willard L. Boyd of The University to consider how they might work together to make a larger contribution to the study of the history of the United States in the twentieth century, and we decided that our efforts should focus at the outset on the resources for the study of recent American history available in the three libraries. This conclusion led to the publication in 1977 of *A Guide to the Resources*, which had been compiled by Boyd Keith Swigger under the direction of an advisory committee.

After a generous gift to help the proposed Center make a beginning had come from Mr. and Mrs. Clem T. Hanson of Moline, Illinois, the advisory committee, composed of Peter T. Harstad, director of the State Historical Society, Thomas T. Thalken, director of the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, Lawrence Angove, executive director of the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library Association, Professors Lawrence E. Gelfand and Ellis W. Hawley of The University's history department, and the undersigned, decided that the funds in hand should be used to conduct a conference on "Three Progressives from Iowa: Gilbert N. Haugen, Herbert C. Hoover, and Henry A. Wallace." Instructors of recent American history and closely related subjects in all of Iowa's colleges and universities and other residents of Iowa believed to have an interest in the purposes and potential of the Center were invited to the conference, and about 170 attended. Additional funding for the conference on "Three Progressives from Iowa" came from the Procter and Gamble Fund of Cincinnati, Ohio, and this enabled the Center to plan for printing the three papers and the commentary delivered in an afternoon session on March 22, 1979, and the single, longer paper presented in the evening. All five of the speakers had been requested to submit manuscripts which could be published in a separate volume, and these appeared in a bound volume of eighty pages edited by John N. Schacht and published in 1980 by the Center under the title of *Three Progressives from Iowa: Gilbert N. Haugen, Herbert C. Hoover, Henry A. Wallace*.

The success of the meeting held in March of 1979 created among the participants a desire for the Center to sponsor a second conference, and the advisory committee which had planned the first agreed to arrange for a second and decided at the outset to follow the pattern of a one-day meeting with papers to be delivered in afternoon and evening sessions. A theme, "Three Faces of Mid-western Isolationism," with papers to be presented in the afternoon on Gerald P. Nye, General Robert Wood, and John L. Lewis, plus a commentary, and an after dinner presentation reviewing American foreign policies between the two world wars was proposed, and the five scholars whose papers appear in this book agreed to present segments of the topic as outlined. The conference held on April 2, 1980, and the printing of the papers delivered then were funded by a second gift to The University from the Procter and Gamble Fund of Cincinnati and by additional support from The University of Iowa Foundation.

All of the members of the advisory committee who planned the second conference sponsored by the Center are grateful to the Procter and Gamble Fund, to The University of Iowa Foundation, to the five speakers whose papers appear in the pages which follow, to John N. Schacht of the Reference Department in the University Libraries, who prepared the copy for the printer, and to the many others who helped to make the second conference a worthy successor to the first. Enthusiastic reactions to the first two conferences conducted by the Center are voiced in the encouragement received from participants for a third, and, as this is written, arrangements are underway for another to be held in the fall of 1981.

LESLIE W. DUNLAP  
*Dean of Library Administration*  
*The University of Iowa*  
*Chairman of the Advisory Committee*

November 15, 1980

## Gerald P. Nye and Agrarian Bases for the Rise and Fall of American Isolationism

WAYNE S. COLE

ON SUNDAY afternoon, December 7, 1941, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Republican Senator Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota addressed a large audience that had crowded into Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall for a meeting sponsored by the America First Committee. The lean, brown-haired midwesterner looked younger than his forty-nine years. Nye stood five feet ten and one-half inches tall and weighed less than 160 pounds. He was an unusually talented speaker. His low, resonant, almost musical voice projected an earnest intensity and conviction that moved and captivated his audience. Nye's message was of vital concern to his listeners, for he was discussing influences that he said were moving the United States ever closer to involvement in the bloody wars then raging in Europe, Africa, and Asia. He was admonishing his listeners against intervention in World War II. In the midst of his speech a reporter handed the senator a brief note informing him that Japanese military planes had attacked United States naval and air forces at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. That shocking news brought Nye's speech and the meeting to an abrupt end.<sup>1</sup> It was the last of some 160 America First meetings that Senator Nye addressed. And it was the last public meeting sponsored by the isolationist America First Committee. The Japanese attack ended the Committee's long, losing battle against intervention in World War II. It very nearly ended Nye's much longer isolationist efforts. In 1944, the next time he faced election in North Dakota, voters brought his nearly twenty-year career in the United States Senate to an end.

Senator Nye was one of America's leading and most controversial isolationists, opposing intervention in foreign wars and arguing against entanglement in alliances or the League of Nations. In 1934-1936 he led the Senate Committee Investigating the Munitions Industry that was both an expression of and a force for isolationism. He was a key figure in the enactment of neutrality laws in the 1930s, helping in hundreds of speeches throughout the country to publicize and popularize noninterventionist views. He provided colorful leadership for opponents of the increasingly internationalist and interventionist policies of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. And Nye was a tireless spokesman in 1941 for the Amer-

Wayne S. Cole is Professor of History, University of Maryland.

ica First Committee, the leading mass pressure group battling against intervention in World War II.<sup>2</sup>

Senator Nye was important in his own right. But if he had been unique or "one of a kind," he would have been less significant in the history of American foreign affairs than he actually was. Insofar as Nye represented foreign policy projections of agrarian interests and values, however, he was part of long-term patterns extending back through Nebraska's William Jennings Bryan at the turn of the century to Virginia's Thomas Jefferson at the beginning of the history of the United States. Jefferson wrote that "those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever He had a chosen people." He worried about that day in the remote future when land in America would be so filled that people would be "piled upon one another in large cities, as in Europe." Jefferson doubted that democracy could long survive in such a setting.<sup>3</sup> In his "Cross of Gold" oration Bryan exclaimed that "the great cities rest upon our broad and fertile prairies. Burn down your cities and leave our farms, and your cities will spring up again as if by magic; but destroy our farms and the grass will grow in the streets of every city in the country."<sup>4</sup> On that subject of farmers and farming, Nye spoke the language of Jefferson and Bryan with vigor and conviction. And in his own day Nye's agrarian perspectives were shared in varied degree by most of the leading Senate isolationists, including William E. Borah of Idaho, Hiram Johnson of California, George W. Norris of Nebraska, Burton K. Wheeler of Montana, Arthur Capper of Kansas, Lynn J. Frazier of North Dakota, Henrik Shipstead of Minnesota, and Robert M. La Follette, Jr., of Wisconsin.<sup>5</sup> Even important midwestern business men, such as General Robert E. Wood of Sears, Roebuck and Company in Chicago and Henry Ford of the Ford Motor Company in Dearborn, Michigan, shared some of the perspectives that moved Nye to isolationism.<sup>6</sup>

Specifics varied from individual to individual, but there were common strands running through the lives and values of those and other leading isolationists. One may highlight some of those patterns by examining Nye's background, values, and activities. Born on December 19, 1892, in the small town of Hortonville, young Nye was reared in the agricultural state of Wisconsin during the Populist-Progressive era. He was guided to manhood by the example of his newspaperman father. Nye and his father followed Wisconsin's "Fighting Bob" La Follette in progressive paths. From 1911 to 1925, as an aggressive young newspaper editor, first in Wisconsin, later in Iowa, and finally in North Dakota, Gerald P. Nye crusaded for progressive reforms. As editor of the *Creston Daily Plain Dealer* in Iowa in 1915-1916, he endorsed much of President Woodrow Wilson's New Freedom program.<sup>7</sup>

Though Nye supported Wilson on most issues, acute agricultural difficulties in North Dakota and protests by the Nonpartisan League moved the young newspaper editor to agrarian radical political activism after World War I. Ap-

pointed to the United States Senate as a progressive Republican from North Dakota in 1925, he served nearly twenty years, until defeated near the close of World War II. In the Senate he was an insurgent Republican, agrarian progressive, a "son of the wild jackass," and an isolationist. On both domestic and foreign policy issues he worked with other western agrarian progressives, including Borah, Johnson, Norris, Capper, Wheeler, Frazier, Shipstead, and La Follette.<sup>8</sup>

Many variables go into the making of any individual's character, style, and values. So it was with Nye. To a striking degree, however, Senator Gerald P. Nye's foreign policy views grew directly out of his agrarian radicalism and his opposition to dominance by urban industry and finance. Traditionally, the western farmer put a premium on self-reliance and hard work. But from the farmer's frame of reference, nature on the one hand and "special interests" on the other robbed him of the fruits of his labor. In coping with drought, grasshoppers, and winter storms, the farmer supplemented his labors by turning to his God and to Lady Luck. But in contending with "special interests" he increasingly turned to political action. Financiers who held the mortgage on his farm, industrialists who manufactured his equipment, railroads that carried supplies to the farmer and his products to the market, and merchants who distributed his produce all seemed, in the farmer's view, to take an unconscionably large part of the returns from his labor. And the farmer identified those "special interests" with cities—whether those cities were as nearby as Fargo, St. Paul, and Chicago, or as remote as New York and London. The farmer saw those eastern urban business interests as selfish, exploitive, and evil. They reaped where they had not sown; they enriched themselves at the expense of the farmer. And the farmer often saw the government as serving those "selfish interests" by showering special privileges upon them.

Western farmers and their political spokesmen generally did not want government ownership of the means of production and distribution. Most at that time did not even want subsidies for agriculture. But they wanted to end the special privileges of their urban exploiters. They wanted the government to restrain abuses by urban industry, railroads, and creditors so that the farmer would be charged fair prices for their services. As young Nye phrased it early in his North Dakota political career, the government should "give equal privileges to all; or take them away from those specially privileged now." Those were the circumstances and attitudes that spawned the Populist movement in the 1880s, the Nonpartisan League during and after World War I, and agrarian progressivism. In the depression decade of the 1930s they supplemented other interests in sustaining President Roosevelt's New Deal.<sup>9</sup>

But those agrarian considerations did not stop at the three-mile limit. When projected into foreign affairs, those same attitudes became variations of American isolationism. Most farmers (and most isolationists) were patriotic and fa-

vored building and maintaining military forces to defend American security and interests. Most farmers realized that they were affected by foreign markets and foreign suppliers. But many objected to foreign policies they believed were inspired by the same "selfish" urban interests that exploited them on the domestic scene. They objected to being taxed to pay for expensive battleships whose purpose was not so much to defend America as to subsidize eastern steel manufacturers and shipbuilders. They opposed sending those high priced ships to distant lands to defend the investments and businesses of eastern financiers. They opposed imperialism that seemed not so much for spreading democracy and freedom as for guarding the investments and loans of Wall Street financiers. They opposed involvement in foreign wars that, in their judgment, were not essential for national security but were, instead, designed to further enrich eastern urban financiers, munitions makers, and shippers. And they resisted war propaganda that used patriotic appeals to arouse support for ventures abroad that seemed more essential to urban business interests than to American national security and freedom.

Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota fully shared those general attitudes on both domestic and foreign affairs during his years as a progressive Republican in the United States Senate. Those attitudes moved him to battle against pro-business policies of the Republican Coolidge and Hoover administrations. They led him to support much of Roosevelt's New Deal while at the same time criticizing pro-business policies of the National Recovery Administration. And those attitudes projected him into the national limelight as chairman of the Senate Special Committee Investigating the Munitions Industry in 1934-1936. Senator Nye's attacks on Wall Street's House of Morgan, on the Du Ponts and other munitions makers, and on shipbuilders were consistent with his agrarian radicalism and with that of his rural and small town constituents. Furthermore, it was logical that the neutrality legislation he proposed in the 1930s would have imposed no direct restraints on farmers but would have restricted the economic activities of urban financiers, manufacturers, and shippers. The isolationist movement was by no means exclusively rural and small town. But Gerald P. Nye and most leading Senate isolationists reflected in varied forms those agrarian values in both domestic and foreign affairs.<sup>10</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s Nye and other western progressive isolationists attacked the war-making activities of big business and big finance. Like Thomas Jefferson long before, however, they feared bigness of almost any sort, including big military, big government, and big labor. In January, 1935, Nye said that nothing in his munitions investigation had astonished him so much as discovering that "instead of munitions-makers promoting the military activities of governments, governments—especially our own war and navy departments—have been actively promoting the munitions-makers, for years." He complained of "a partnership" that the United States government had "in the business of sell-

ing American munitions of war." At that time he did not directly criticize the presidency; he sympathized with the chief executive's difficulties in withstanding pressures from powerful urban economic interests. He favored legislation limiting the president's role in foreign affairs to help him resist such pressures.<sup>11</sup> By the latter part of the 1930s and on into the 1940s, however, Nye increasingly attacked the war-making proclivities of the presidency in general and of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in particular. By 1941 he denounced President Roosevelt for leading the country toward war while professing to be working for peace. He charged that the president was using dictatorial methods on the pretext of fighting dictatorships, that in fighting for the Four Freedoms abroad Americans were losing their freedoms at home. He objected to excessive presidential power in foreign affairs, to secrecy and deception. He feared that Roosevelt was deliberately using American aid to Britain *short-of-war* as *steps-to-war*, and that the president sought and hoped for shooting incidents in the Atlantic that might propel the United States into wars raging abroad.<sup>12</sup> Despite the attention now focused on Iowa and New Hampshire briefly once every four years, in the twentieth century political parties, presidential nominations and elections, and administration policies are shaped and controlled largely by urban considerations—not by farmers or by rural and small town America.

It is easy to illustrate how Senator Nye's foreign policy attitudes fell within the framework of agrarian interests. Nye blamed American participation in World War I for many of the farmers' economic difficulties in the 1920s and 1930s, and he saw no reason to believe that American involvement in a second world war would have any better effects on the farmers' lot. The munitions investigation was a logical extension in the realm of foreign affairs of Nye's long crusade against big business, international bankers, and Wall Street. Initially the munitions investigation was at least as anti-business as it was anti-war. Later the investigation broadened its attack so that the executive branch of the government as well as big business came under fire. The neutrality laws supported by Nye imposed no significant limitations on agriculture; the self-denying provisions in the legislation applied primarily to the urban segments of the economy. For example, the arms embargo that Nye supported prohibited the export of certain types of industrial products but placed no comparable restraints on the export of agricultural and mineral products. The bans on loans and the cash-and-carry provisions inhibited urban financiers and shippers, but the effects on the farmer were indirect at most. Nye opposed large naval appropriations and thus would have restricted government "pump priming" in urban shipbuilding and steel manufacturing centers of the East. Since North Dakota got very few war contracts, limiting military appropriations might have been to its economic advantage; in effect such limitations would have reduced federal subsidies to eastern urban areas and made tax increases for North Dakota less necessary.<sup>13</sup>



Some of Senator Nye's proposals were never enacted; some were passed in modified forms; some became law much as he wanted; and nearly all were repealed before the United States declared war in December, 1941. Recommendations by Nye that never became law included nationalizing munitions industries, taxing the profits out of war, banning the sale of non-munitions to belligerents, and a constitutional amendment that would have required a national referendum to declare war except in case of attack or immediately threatened attack by a non-American state against the Western Hemisphere. The failure to adopt much of Nye's program, and the repeal of most of the neutrality legislation before Pearl Harbor, prevented isolationists from demonstrating whether they could or could not have kept the United States out of war without endangering American security. For all practical purposes the neutrality laws were gone before Pearl Harbor.<sup>14</sup>

Explanations for the decline and fall of Senator Gerald P. Nye and American isolationism may be found in both international and domestic developments. On the world scene, part of the explanation may be traced to changing power relationships that undermined the comfortable security the United States had enjoyed earlier. The gradual erosion of the relative power of Great Britain and France, plus the emergence of the increasingly powerful and ambitious Germany in Europe and Japan in Asia, upset nineteenth-century security arrangements. World Wars I and II not only dramatized the deteriorating power positions of Britain and France, but contributed to their decline (and to the lessening of American national security). After World War II the weakened condition of Britain and France, the temporary eclipse of German and Japanese power, and the emergence of the Soviet Union as a major world power presented the American people with an extremely disturbing international situation in which the security taken for granted in the nineteenth century was gone.

That alarming state of affairs was made more terrifying by the destructive capabilities of weapons created by science and industry and commanded by the leading adversaries in the Cold War. The first atomic bomb was not set off until after Gerald P. Nye had been retired from public life in 1945. Intercontinental bombers (even with conventional bombs) were not a practical reality during his years in the United States Senate. Nonetheless, the changes in power relationships on the world scene and the destructive capabilities of weapons developed rapidly during his public career. The disintegration of the old balance of power, the rise of aggressive challenges from the Central Powers, the Axis, and later from the Soviet Union, the creation of fantastically destructive weapons—all those developments on the world scene combined to endanger American national security and to help defeat Senator Nye and American isolationism.

The developments and conditions that doomed isolationism were not, however, limited to other parts of the world. In addition to external influences, forces within the United States also contributed to the decline of isolationism.

Among those were fundamental socio-economic changes within the United States. Those changes related to the rapid urbanization of American society that accompanied the phenomenal growth of American business, industry, finance, and labor. The foreign policy views represented by Thomas Jefferson, William Jennings Bryan and Gerald P. Nye fell into disfavor partly as a result of the rise of the city and the decline and "urbanization" of agriculture in the United States.

At the time of the first census in 1790 (when Jefferson became secretary of state), 95 percent of Americans were classified as rural, and most of them were farmers. Only about 5 percent were urban, and those Americans lived in relatively small communities by European or twentieth-century standards. Throughout American history, however, the urban population has increased at a faster rate than the rural population. Even before Nye was appointed to the Senate in 1925, the total urban population exceeded rural—though not in North Dakota. By 1980 more than three-fourths of Americans were classified as urban. Urban population and income exceeded rural in most states, including such traditionally farm states as Iowa and Nebraska. Some 20 percent of the American people lived in the "supermetropolis" extending almost continuously for nearly five hundred miles along the northeastern seaboard. That huge concentration of people, talent, industry, and capital exerted an influence on American thought, taste, education, national politics, and foreign policy that far exceeds its proportion of the population. Urbanization was both a cause and an effect of fundamental economic developments. When Nye became a senator the United States was already the leading industrial and financial center in the world. In 1980 less than 4 percent of the American people were farmers, and many of those got part of their incomes from non-farm sources.<sup>15</sup>

Farmers and farms not only declined in numbers, they also changed greatly. Science and technology revolutionized farming methods just as they affected urban manufacturing. Commercial farms grew strikingly in size, capitalization, mechanization, and production. The enlarged operations, coupled with marketing difficulties, inspired sophisticated managerial and organizational innovations that often gave the producer, processor, and distributor a community of interests cutting across rural-urban lines. The spectacular increase in grain exports in recent years gives midwestern farmers a keen awareness of the importance of foreign markets that is comparable to the awareness held by tobacco growers in the eighteenth century, by cotton planters in the nineteenth century, and by many industrialists in the twentieth century. Furthermore, the modes of living for twentieth-century commercial farmers differed little from those of persons on comparable social and economic levels in the cities. The "urbanization" of American agriculture did not wholly eliminate differences between rural and urban interests and views on foreign affairs, but it did reduce many of those differences.

Senator Nye's analyses were perceptive and accurate in some ways, but fundamentally they were many years behind actual economic, political, and foreign policy developments in the United States. Agriculture had ceased to be the primary base for the American economy; industry and finance had taken over that role long before. He underestimated the importance of foreign markets to the farmer and overestimated the capacity of the domestic market to absorb the tremendous output of American farms. Furthermore, rural purchasers, though still important, could not begin to absorb all the goods and services that cities had to sell in order to achieve and maintain prosperity. Substantial urban and foreign markets (including tremendous military preparedness programs) have seemed essential to absorb the phenomenal production of urban America. Nye's prediction in 1940 that "two- or three-billion-dollar military programs annually" would be insufficient if agriculture became "a secondary consideration" grossly underestimated the 150 billion dollar military budgets of our own time. His explanation for military preparedness programs overemphasized economic influences and neglected national security considerations. Nonetheless, the huge expenditures for national defense have helped sustain an effective demand for American goods and services—predominantly urban and industrial. The economic benefits derived from exports and defense programs extend into every state. But Nye's North Dakota's share of defense contracts was always at or near the bottom of the list.<sup>16</sup>

Since North Dakota remained largely rural, Nye's agrarianism did not, by itself, doom him to defeat there. With more skilled handling of his political lines in North Dakota, it is conceivable that he might have been returned to the Senate in spite of urban dominance elsewhere. But even if he had managed to get reelected, his influence in Washington on foreign policy matters could only have been negligible. The reverses he had already suffered on the national level symbolized the erosion of the agricultural base for isolationism. Insofar as isolationism was rooted in the interests and values of agriculture in the upper Missouri-Mississippi-Ohio river valley, the relative decline of agriculture virtually assured its defeat. That is *not* to say that isolationist views grew only out of economic influences or that the economic bases were only agricultural. But the decline and "urbanization" of the farmer in the United States reduced the political power that isolationists could command. The views that Gerald P. Nye represented were overwhelmed partly by an urban society based on commerce, industry, finance, and labor.

In an age when most Americans were farmers, Thomas Jefferson was twice elected president of the United States. He became the revered symbol of an era and of a way of life and thought. Even William Jennings Bryan a century later could win nomination to the presidency three times on the Democratic party ticket. But the shattering of the old agrarian sectional alliance between the South and West, the growth of cities, and the revival of farm prosperity

(and complacency) combined to assure Bryan's defeat. Gerald P. Nye could and did win political victories in the agricultural state of North Dakota. Exceptional circumstances plus his own considerable political abilities enabled him to win some skirmishes on the national scene. He was even mentioned as a dark-horse possibility for the Republican party presidential nomination. But his efforts to restore the farmer to the political dominance he had known in the age of Jefferson were doomed to defeat in the twentieth century by the changed nature of the American economy and by changed world conditions.

Isolationism may not be completely dead in the United States. It is, nonetheless, so much weaker than it was forty or fifty years ago that it seems almost a negligible element on the American political scene. And insofar as it depends upon agriculture it cannot expect a significant revival. If isolationism ever becomes powerful in American attitudes and policies again (which is unlikely), it will have to find other sources of sustenance to replace and supplement agriculture.

#### NOTES

1 Interview with Senator Gerald P. Nye, Washington, D.C., July 20, 1959; M. E. Armbruster to Page Hufty, Dec. 11, 1941, and attached undated clipping from *Pittsburgh Press*, America First Committee Papers, Hoover Library on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford, Calif.; U.S. Congress, Senate, 77th Cong., 2nd sess., Oct. 23, 1942, *Congressional Record*, 8574; and, in the Gerald P. Nye Papers, the following items: clippings from *Pittsburgh Press*, Dec. 8, 1941, and *Pittsburgh Sun Telegraph*, Dec. 8, 1941; John B. Gordon to Nye, Dec. 9, 1941; Nye to Gordon, Jan. 7, 1942; undated account of Pittsburgh America First meeting in Nye's handwriting, apparently written Dec. 9, 1941; and memorandum, Nye to Whomsoever May be Concerned, July 3, 1969. When I researched the Nye papers, they were in the Nye home in Chevy Chase, Md. Since that time most of those materials have been deposited in the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa (hereafter cited as "HHPL").

2 For a detailed account of Nye's life and career, see my *Senator Gerald P. Nye and American Foreign Relations* (Minneapolis, 1962). Much of this paper is drawn from that book, in revised form, and from my earlier address, "A Tale of Two Isolationists—Told Three Wars Later," *Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Newsletter*, 5 (March 1974), 2-16.

3 The most detailed scholarly biography of Jefferson is Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and His Times*, 5 vols. (Boston, 1948-1974). See also Charles A. Beard, *Economic Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York, 1951), 415-64, *passim*; *idem*, *The Idea of National Interest: An Analytical Study in American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1934), 50-56, 84-88, 166-68, 549-51; and Gilbert Chinard, *Thomas Jefferson: The Apostle of Americanism* (2nd ed. rev.; Ann Arbor, 1957), 132-36, 211-14, 326-30, 351-52, 396-99, 468-88, 491-97, *passim*.

4 The most detailed scholarly biography of Bryan is Paolo E. Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan*, 3 vols. (Lincoln, 1964-69). See also Merle Curti, *Bryan and World Peace* (Northampton: Smith College Studies in History, 1931); Paul W. Glad, *The Trumpet Soundeth: William Jennings Bryan and His Democracy, 1896-1912* (Lincoln, 1960); and Paxton Hibben, *The Peerless Leader: William Jennings Bryan* (New York, 1929).

5 I have researched the following manuscript collections on this subject: William E. Borah Papers, George W. Norris Papers, and La Follette Family Papers, all in the Library of Congress; Hiram Johnson Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; Arthur Capper Papers, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka; and Henrik Shipstead Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul. Among the published volumes on those senators are: Robert James Maddox, *William E. Borah and American Foreign Policy* (Baton Rouge, 1969); Richard Lowitt, *George W. Norris*, 3 vols. (Syracuse, 1963; Urbana, 1971, 1978); Burton K. Wheeler with Paul F. Healy, *Yankee From The West* (Garden City, 1962); Homer E. Socolofsky, *Arthur Capper: Publisher, Politician, and Philanthropist* (Lawrence, 1962); and Patrick J. Maney, "Young Bob" La Follette: *A Biography of Robert M. La Follette, Jr., 1895-1953* (Columbia, Mo., 1978).

6 I interviewed General Robert E. Wood in his offices in Chicago on Dec. 23, 1947, and Aug. 11, 1949. In 1949 General Wood allowed me to research papers relating to his role in the America First Committee that were then in his personal custody in Chicago. More recently I have researched the Wood Papers in the HHPL. For Ford's agrarian and rural orientation see Reynold M. Wik, *Henry Ford and Grass-roots America* (Ann Arbor, 1972), 10-11, 105-06, 115-16, 187, 231.

7 Cole, *Gerald P. Nye*, 17-23.

8 *Ibid.*, 24-59.

9 On the Populist movement see John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt* (Minneapolis, 1931). On the Nonpartisan League see Robert L. Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire: The Nonpartisan League, 1915-1922* (Minneapolis, 1955). Broader accounts of agrarian values and activities include Russel B. Nye, *Midwestern Progressive Politics: A Historical Study of Its Origins and Development, 1870-1958* (East Lansing, 1959), and Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land* (Cambridge, Mass., 1950). The Nye quotation is from his platform, printed on letterhead stationery of the La Follette-Nye Club of Griggs County, Cooperstown, N.D., 1924, Nye Papers.

10 I first became aware of the agrarian bases for Nye's foreign policy views and of the parallels between his perspectives and those of Jefferson and Bryan when, in 1957-58, I was researching Nye's speeches and statements in the *Congressional Record*. My intellectual groundwork for that awareness, however, had been laid earlier for me by the lectures and seminars of Professor Fred Harvey Harrington at the University of Wisconsin in 1947-50, by my study of Beard's *Idea of National Interest*, and by my observations and experiences as a boy and teenager in Iowa in the 1920s and 1930s. For details on Nye see Cole, *Gerald P. Nye*, 60-67.

11 Cole, *Gerald P. Nye*, 79-96.

12 *Ibid.*, 153-201.

13 *Ibid.*, 97-132.

14 *Ibid.*, 91-123, 153-96. The best and fullest scholarly history of the neutrality laws is Robert A. Divine, *The Illusion of Neutrality* (Chicago, 1962).

15 U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1960), 9, 537-51, 563-66; Mervin G. Smith, director, and Carlton F. Christian, ed., *Adjustments in Agriculture—A National Basebook* (Ames, 1961); Bureau of the Census, *Pocket Data Book, USA 1969* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1969), 50; Bureau of the Census, *USA Statistics in Brief, 1972* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972).

16 The Nye quotation is from a wide-ranging speech he gave opposing extension of the reciprocal trade agreements program in 1940. U.S. Congress, Senate, 76th Cong., 3rd sess., April 4, 1940, *Congressional Record*, 4001-06.

## The Isolationism of General Robert E. Wood

JUSTUS D. DOENECKE

ALTHOUGH we have no full-length biography of General Robert E. Wood, we have long associated his name with American isolationism. In 1940 and 1941, the prominent Chicago manufacturer headed the America First Committee, the leading isolationist action group organized before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. In addition, and for a much longer period, he led Sears, Roebuck and Company, and in the process became one of the most powerful business leaders of modern times.<sup>1</sup>

General Wood's career contained several paradoxes. Although a military man, he was deeply opposed to American involvement overseas, and although an articulate defender of capitalism, he endorsed much of the New Deal. Even in later life, when he was a staunch conservative, his business record was unorthodox, perhaps even a bit radical. He was a leader, for example, in anti-trust campaigns, and he pioneered in corporate decentralization, profit-sharing, and philanthropy.

Wood challenged the label of isolationist. He said in 1951, "To the best of my knowledge there has never been a real isolationist, one corresponding to the definition of an isolationist generally attributed to that word by the easterners. I have never met a man who believed that we could let this country live by itself and have no relations with other countries. On the other hand, there are a lot of people who believe in America First, who have been generally opposed to the foreign policy of the government and are still opposed to it."<sup>2</sup> Yet, if one defines isolationism in terms of opposition to United States involvement in European war and America's unimpaired freedom of action, as does Wayne S. Cole, Wood certainly qualified.<sup>3</sup>

Let me be brief about the general's military and business career. Wood was the son of a coal and ice merchant who had served with John Brown's raiders. He was born in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1879. He graduated from West Point in 1900 and was sent to the Philippines to help suppress the insurrection there led by Emilio Aguinaldo. "I was in the saddle all the time," Wood recalled, "chasing all those guerillas in the mountains."<sup>4</sup> In 1905 he was sent to Panama, where he became director of the Panama Railroad Company. While there, he became a protégé of General George W. Goethals, who promoted Wood, then

only twenty-six years old, to chief quartermaster. During the construction of the Panama Canal, Wood hired thousands of employees and distributed millions of dollars worth of supplies.

Upon retiring from the army in 1915, Wood became assistant to the president of General Asphalt. Two years later, when the United States entered World War I, he was reactivated and sent to France, serving as a colonel in the Forty-second, or "Rainbow," Infantry Division. The following year Goethals called him back to Washington, where Wood—at age thirty-nine—was commissioned brigadier general and acting quartermaster general for the entire army. During the war he bought and distributed food, clothing, and materiel for some four million troops.

In 1919 he became a vice-president of Montgomery Ward, but less than five years afterwards he moved to Sears, where in 1928 he became president. A dynamic and innovative businessman, he pushed retailing, pioneered in profit-sharing, and launched scores of new manufacturers as Sears suppliers. A short, wiry man, he would often be seated at the rolltop desk in his modest office on Homan Avenue in Chicago, where he would doodle incessantly, eat caramels with the wrappers still on, and preface a decision with the cry, "Let's charge!" He studied census reports and the *Statistical Abstract* in order to plan new Sears operations. He lived modestly, driving a Ford, riding the commuter train from his home in Lake Forest, and wearing clothes "picked off the pile" at Sears. Company executives still recall his sloppy attire.

But despite Wood's flair for innovation, few would have expected him to embrace the New Deal. Yet in 1932 Wood, a Republican, endorsed Roosevelt for the presidency. His reason, he later claimed, was that "a pretty cold selfish set of men" from New York and New England had gained control of the Republican party. Between 1933 and 1935 Wood served on several New Deal agencies: the Industrial Advisory Board of the National Recovery Administration, the Federal Allotment Board of the Works Progress Administration, and the Business Advisory Council of the Department of Commerce.

Certain Roosevelt policies in particular drew Wood's support, among them currency inflation, the Agricultural Adjustment Act, the Securities Exchange Act, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and reciprocal trade. He backed Roosevelt for a second term, although by 1935 he was having second thoughts. For example, he was strongly opposed to the codes devised by the National Recovery Administration. As time went on, he became increasingly critical of the New Deal. FDR's purge of southern party leaders, the court-packing plan, his alleged encouragement of John L. Lewis's effort to unionize industrial workers, the anti-business rhetoric of certain prominent New Dealers—all these roused the general's ire.

It was, however, the outbreak of war in Europe that turned Wood definitely against the Roosevelt administration. True, he was a member of the National

Nonpartisan Committee for Peace Through Revision of the Neutrality Law, a group headed by Kansas publisher William Allen White and devoted to repealing the arms embargo.<sup>5</sup> And true, he backed universal military training. He also backed FDR's bid, made in May, 1940, for fifty thousand planes within the next calendar year. In July, 1940, he went so far as to hint of his availability for the post of secretary of war; three months later, he wrote Colonel William J. Donovan, soldier-diplomat close to FDR, asking to serve with American ground forces.<sup>6</sup>

Yet the whole course of Roosevelt's interventionism disturbed him greatly, and he made no secret about it. He might privately tell Roosevelt of his continued "affection and high regard," but publicly he endorsed the Republican presidential candidate, Wendell Willkie.<sup>7</sup> Wood told the isolationist Senator Burton K. Wheeler, Democrat from Montana, that had he been nominated, he would have had Wood's support.<sup>8</sup> No president, Wood believed, should have three terms; besides, in Wood's eyes Roosevelt was heading the nation for war.

American intervention, Wood believed, would only bring disaster: capitalism could survive Hitler's domination of Europe but not America's participation in a European war. The United States would be dissipating its strength by organizing an expeditionary force, while experiencing communism, fascism, and dictatorship.<sup>9</sup> Said Wood to the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations in October, 1940:

Victorious or not, we will be faced at the conclusion of such a war with great economic dislocations—the rich would face a capital levy, the middle classes impoverishment, and the masses a lowered standard of living and the loss of most of the social gains so far secured. Competent observers believe that if the war is prolonged in Europe over one or two years, it will result in communism in all Europe, and a species of national socialism in England. If we are involved, it probably spells the end of capitalism all over the world.<sup>10</sup>

Wood did not limit his protest to words alone. In July, 1940, he agreed to serve as temporary head of the embryonic Emergency Committee to Defend America First, soon renamed the America First Committee. At first he had misgivings, fearing that he might lose business for Sears, fail to get the needed backing, or harm the candidacy of Republican standard-bearer Wendell Willkie. But he agreed, in September, 1940, to become acting chairman, a position he retained until Pearl Harbor. He later commented that he took the AFC position because "the so-called best people" refused. He spent considerable time at the national headquarters in Chicago, occasionally gave speeches under AFC auspices, and testified before congressional committees. More significantly, he personally approved every decision of consequence.<sup>11</sup>

Wood's association with America First brought him great personal abuse. Harold Ickes publicly accused him of being "apparently a fellow-traveler" of Nazism. Wood replied that it was an "old trick for a war party to claim a monopoly of patriotism;" he declared that the secretary of the interior spoke for "the swivel chair patriots."<sup>12</sup> Lessing Rosenwald, board chairman of Sears until 1939 and a prominent Jewish layman, never forgave Wood — according to another Sears official — for not condemning the Des Moines speech of Charles A. Lindbergh, in which the prominent aviator accused the Jews, as a group and by name, of "pressing this country toward war."<sup>13</sup>

Opposition did not keep Wood from hammering away. Roosevelt, he maintained, was going beyond legitimate defense needs; the president sought overt involvement. Lend-lease, Wood claimed in February, 1941, could lead the nation into war within ninety days, and convoys virtually guaranteed American participation in the conflict.<sup>14</sup>

At times, however, Wood was optimistic about America's staying out of war. Speaking to an America First rally at St. Louis in May, 1941, he declared, "If we can keep this country out of war for the next few weeks we've got the battle won." And when Roosevelt and Churchill released the Atlantic Charter two months later, Wood thought that their war aims might "find a receptive hearing even in Germany." By September, 1941, however, Wood believed that FDR had committed the United States — so much so in fact that he considered further immediate antiwar activity useless. America First, he believed, should wait until the congressional campaign of 1942. Other Committee leaders, such as Charles A. Lindbergh, talked him out of that idea.<sup>15</sup>

Although a businessman, Wood little heeded administration warnings of Axis economic threats.<sup>16</sup> He denied that he admired Hitler, but thought that the fascist regimes had made considerable economic progress. In 1938, for example, he wrote Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace, "I do not believe in autocracy and I am certainly not an admirer of Hitler, but in comparing results during the last five years under the Fascist regimes with those of our own country and other democracies, it does not look so good for us."<sup>17</sup> In the spring of 1939, Wood sought to trade American cotton and lard for German barbed wire and nails. Such barter, he maintained, would reduce United States farm surpluses and thus drive up hog prices. In October, 1940, Wood challenged administration claims that the totalitarian nations could out-produce and undersell the United States. "After all," he said, "when two nations on two continents each have things the other needs, trade eventually results regardless of the feelings each may have for the other." In any "mutual commercial undertakings" between the Americas and Germany, the relatively self-sufficient United States would have the advantage. Wood soon asserted that the importance of foreign trade was exaggerated: "We have the best home market in the world and only about 7 percent of our stuff is exported."<sup>18</sup>

According to Wood, Nazi military strength was overrated. While powerful on the European continent, it was "very weak" some three thousand miles away. The Germans did not have a single bomber that could fly from Europe and back. In addition, he found it inconceivable that German forces could cross the ocean to attack a country of 130 million people.<sup>19</sup>

Any alliance alongside Great Britain, Wood believed, was most unwise. In a letter to Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, Wood wrote: "We are weakening our defense by trying to bolster up a decadent system and nation. Nature's law is survival, and if a race is not strong enough to survive unaided, it will perish."<sup>20</sup>

Wood was not as militant as some isolationists. He favored limited aid to Britain. For example, he endorsed the destroyer-bases deal and endorsed sending food and war supplies on long term credit. Important for Wood, however, was the possibility of eventual repayment, adherence to the neutrality laws, and transfer in Britain's own vessels.<sup>21</sup>

In December, 1940, Wood suggested that the press discuss a negotiated peace. He revealed his terms to publisher Roy Howard: the restoration of much of western Europe, as well as Britain's retention of its empire, with perhaps the return of two German colonies. Such a peace would involve German economic control of the European continent. But Wood felt compelled to ask, "Wouldn't it be better to arrange peace on such terms than for England to continue the battle? And if she refused such terms, why should we go to her assistance? The average man in the street thinks if peace were negotiated now it would mean stripping England of her colonies & fleet. While none of us knows, there is reason to believe that peace might be negotiated on the above terms."<sup>22</sup>

Besides, Wood argued, the causes of the war were fundamentally economic, not ideological. In no way did they concern the fate of democracy. "We are letting our dislike of Hitler and Nazism run away with our feelings," he had declared in September, 1939. When he testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in February, 1941, he claimed that Churchill had personally told him five years before, "Germany is getting too strong and we must crush her."<sup>23</sup>

Despite such isolationism, Wood stressed closer ties with South America. In 1940 he claimed that "our true mission is in North America and South America." The United States, he continued, had the resources and organizing ability to develop the "virgin continent" south of its border. "The reorganization and proper development of Mexico alone," he said, "would afford an outlet for our capital and energies for some time to come."<sup>24</sup>

A strong United States presence in Latin America, Wood said, must be sustained. On the one hand, he declared that the nation should "try in every way to maintain the friendship of our neighbors to the south." On the other, he asserted that "no government in Mexico, Central America and Caribbean South

American countries will be tolerated unless it is friendly to the United States." "If necessary," he went on, "we are prepared to use force to attain that object."<sup>25</sup>

Wood was not surprised by the Pearl Harbor attack. As soon as he heard the news, he said to Lindbergh, "We have been asking for war for months." Roosevelt, so Wood believed, realized that Congress would not declare war on Germany. Hence he had sought other means to precipitate that action. (By 1954 Wood claimed that FDR and General George C. Marshall, army chief of staff, knew that the Japanese would attack. "They have the blood of Pearl Harbor on their hands," he said.)<sup>26</sup> "I am sure history will vindicate us," he wrote an America First leader in 1942. "While not excusing the treachery of Japan in their attack on Pearl Harbor, I cannot help but feel that she was practically forced into action at the time by the notes from our own Executive and State Departments."<sup>27</sup>

Yet Wood felt that he had no choice but to dissolve America First. "With nothing for the chapters to do," he wrote Lindbergh, "they would gradually fall apart or get into the hands of extremists or radicals who might create conditions which would give the government an excuse to attack us on the ground of subversive activities." There were also, he added, difficulties in raising money.<sup>28</sup>

In subsequent years Wood urged the provocative historian Harry Elmer Barnes to write a revisionist history of the origins of World War II. "No one is better fitted to write it than yourself," he told Barnes in 1943, and by 1954 he had given Barnes well over \$2,000 for various revisionist projects.<sup>29</sup>

Wood also sought an investigation of the treatment of Tyler Kent, a minor diplomat jailed during World War II for indiscreetly disclosing secret messages between Roosevelt and Churchill. In addition, he encouraged the distribution of such biting critiques of Roosevelt's foreign policy as journalist William Henry Chamberlin's *America's Second Crusade* (1950). Chamberlin, he said, "certainly vindicates our stand prior to the war," while Rear Admiral Robert A. Theobald's *Final Secret of Pearl Harbor* (1954) belonged "in the hands of every person in the United States."<sup>30</sup>

Once the Japanese struck, however, Wood sought to serve with a combat division. "Hap" H. Arnold, commanding general of the Army Air Forces and Wood's closest friend in the military, recommended that Wood be activated with two stars; Roosevelt, however, would not permit it. Hence, operating as technically as a civilian, Wood taught supply, inspected every air depot in the United States, and made five trips abroad, including a trip around the world with General Walter H. Frank. Each year he spent six months with Sears, then six months with the air force.<sup>31</sup>

If Wood ever had a pressing anxiety, it was the Soviet Union. By 1944 he feared that the Russians would dominate Europe, a situation he seemed to find more dangerous than Nazi control. A year later, John T. Flynn testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee against United States membership in

the new United Nations. Wood backed the journalist completely. "Sometimes," said Wood to Flynn, "I think our people are drugged or crazy. Certainly, the other side has done a complete job of propaganda, so much so that the people do not realize what they are being led to."<sup>32</sup>

The general objected to the trial of some twenty-six "native fascists" for sedition. Moreover, he contributed to the defense of Lawrence Dennis, a so-called "fascist" theorist, whose work he had admired since 1941. If, in 1945, Wood found Dennis "erratic" as well as "brilliant," there was self-interest at work in defending the defendants. He wrote Colonel Robert R. McCormick, publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*, "The danger in this case is that if these people are convicted (though outside of a few crackpots I cannot see that they are guilty of anything), the decision will be used to smear all so-called isolationists including members of Congress."<sup>33</sup>

Ever the isolationist, Wood opposed much Cold War policy. In August, 1945, he wrote Lindbergh, "I believe all Europe will go communistic with the exception of Britain and they are going to have a very tough row ahead of them unless we underwrite them for the next five years."<sup>34</sup> Yet he preferred outright relief to the loan voted for Britain in 1946, which he called a futile subsidy for "a sick and worn-out system." Soon Wood was attacking the Marshall Plan. The larger part of Europe, he said, was "finished," and he suggested that Englishmen, Belgians, and Germans emigrate from the continent *en masse*.<sup>35</sup> Wood said in 1952, "While we have to give some aid to Europe, I regard the money we do give them as probably lost. Europe is old, tired and overpopulated. I am convinced that with the exception of the Greeks, they will not fight, and they cannot develop their economic possibilities with this problem of overpopulation always present."<sup>36</sup> Wood initially supported America's Korean effort. In June, 1950, he told General MacArthur that he hoped the war could be ended quickly; at age seventy-one, he volunteered to serve MacArthur in supply liaison. (Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson graciously replied that he would call on Wood if the war spread.)<sup>37</sup> Yet in January, 1951, Wood endorsed Herbert Hoover's pleas for total withdrawal of American forces from the peninsula.<sup>38</sup>

By the early 1950s, the general was contemptuous of Soviet power. He doubted that the Russians could really make an atomic bomb or that the Red Army was capable of offensive warfare. Not only was the Russian air force greatly overrated; if the Russians sent an army into Western Europe, part would revolt and part would desert.<sup>39</sup> Wood did see some merit in making alliances so as to establish overseas air bases, for he found air power the one retaliatory weapon that could dissuade the Russians. But he sought drastic cuts in the military budget, with the money saved to be used on much-needed roads and schools in the Great Plains.<sup>40</sup> One of the most curious ventures entered into by Wood concerns one C. W. Boldyreff, a leader in the National Alliance of Russian Solidarists. The Russian émigré was formerly a member of MacArthur's intelli-

gence staff. In July, 1954, Wood wrote several corporation presidents, including the heads of B. F. Goodrich, United States Steel, Bethlehem Steel, Standard Oil of New Jersey, Quaker Oats, the Texas Company, and Continental Oil. He declared that "there is no compromise possible with the present regime in the Kremlin" and that "the only possible way out is an internal revolution in Russia and the removal of the present government." Since the death of Stalin, Wood continued, there existed partisan forces that, if guided by Boldyreff, "at a given moment could be activated and deployed to produce the 'trigger' effect for a general revolution in Russia." If ten corporations each contributed \$5,000, such operations could be launched.<sup>41</sup> There is no record of any reply.

The real threats to the United States, so Wood continually stressed, lay within. As early as 1939 he charged that the administration tended "to soft-pedal anything directed against Communism;" in 1943 he referred to "a hidden force behind the Executive." He blamed the Korean War and the fall of China on General George C. Marshall, the firing of Douglas MacArthur on the British.<sup>42</sup> When journalist Freda Utley wrote *The China Story* (1951), an indictment of American policy makers, Wood contributed \$2,000 to the project.<sup>43</sup>

Given such sentiments, it is hardly surprising that Wood backed the McCarthy movement. Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, said Wood in 1951, had "performed a great and valuable patriotic service to this country." A year later Wood served as host for a McCarthy campaign broadcast. During that program, the Democratic presidential candidate, Adlai Stevenson—a personal friend of Wood's—was accused of being the captive of "communist-line thinkers."<sup>44</sup> The general resisted such policies as enforced school integration and less restrictive immigration.

Given such views, and given Wood's obvious means, it is hardly a surprise to find that he supported practically every right-wing action group of the post-war era. In 1954 he was named co-chairman of For America, a nationalist organization that combined its isolationism with beliefs in broadened states' rights. In 1958 he helped form the American Security Council, an agency established to run loyalty checks on individuals and organizations.<sup>45</sup>

For twenty years Wood sought a charismatic leader for the nation. In 1944 he backed Senator W. Lee ("Pappy") O'Daniel's short-lived American Democratic National Committee.<sup>46</sup> As World War II came to a close, he tried to convince Lindbergh and Philip F. La Follette, former governor of Wisconsin, to supply the needed political leadership.<sup>47</sup>

And in both 1944 and 1948 he helped organize MacArthur-for-president movements.<sup>48</sup> In 1944 Wood claimed that MacArthur was probably more interventionist, at least as far as the Pacific was concerned, than he, Wood, was, but he still admired the general greatly. Wood had known the Pacific commander for many years, from cadet days at West Point to service in the Canal Zone and the Rainbow Division. He claimed that MacArthur "has an unusually

brilliant mind and magnetic personality and was that rarity—a fighting soldier with brains." In 1951 he hoped that Truman would relieve Acheson: "As a matter of fact, MacArthur would be the best possible man as Secretary of State."<sup>49</sup>

When it became obvious that MacArthur lacked broad political appeal, Wood gravitated to Senator Taft. In 1952 he headed an Illinois citizens' committee for Robert A. Taft for president. In fact, when Taft lost the nomination, Wood's wife feared that he would have a heart attack.<sup>50</sup> Wood soon, however, endorsed Eisenhower, telling Taft that while he could not be enthusiastic, "I do feel that anything would be better to get a change."<sup>51</sup> In 1955 in Chicago, he advised some two thousand Republican advocates of a third-party candidate, Governor J. Bracken Lee of Utah, that the time was not right; he suggested that they wait ten years. "While a lot of us get irritated with Eisenhower out here," he said in speaking for many midwestern conservatives, "we still figure he's a lot better than anybody the Democrats can put in."<sup>52</sup>

But Wood's days of involvement were over. He died in 1969 at the age of ninety. Although he remained on the Sears board until 1968, he had long since withdrawn from political activity.

The career of General Wood raises a series of questions. As Wood had ample access to the nation's military and governmental elites, and was certainly part of the business elite, why were his views so divergent? In the thirties, his endorsement of the New Deal placed him in a distinct minority among midwestern business circles. In the forties and fifties, his isolationism made his views anathema in Washington. Are we dealing with an incurable maverick, or a reincarnated populist, or have we deeper forces at work?

This takes us to the whole question of midwestern economic perceptions. To what degree did Wood represent a regional economic bloc, one that ranged from the steel mills of Lake Erie to the grain fields of the Dakotas? If he did represent such a bloc, to what degree was Wood conscious of a distinct interest and of how isolationism would protect, not weaken, this interest? Are we dealing here with instinctive suspicion of foreign involvements, or have we any consciousness of survival in a national and global market place?<sup>53</sup>

Another series of questions concerns the nature of Wood's ideology, for it was an ideology followed by a host of people who opposed American entry into World War II. In my book *Not to the Swift*, I trace the positions of isolationists from the days of America First to the days of the Bricker Amendment. Wood adopted the position of many such people: Pearl Harbor revisionism, hostility toward the Marshall Plan and NATO, endorsement of McCarthy, support of the Taft and MacArthur presidential candidacies. Wood claimed to respect Lawrence Dennis and read Dennis's newsletter, *The Appeal to Reason*, faithfully.<sup>54</sup> Yet the general never adopted Dennis's neutrality toward Russia, suspicion of Asian involvements, and abhorrence of McCarthyism. Is Wood's position—one so typical of many old isolationists—based upon a conspiratorial

view of history, nostalgia for a simpler and less urbanized America, or militant nationalism? If we have a combination of such factors, where does one put the most weight? Because Wood's odyssey is so typical of many isolationists, and of others once sympathetic to FDR's presidency, it deserves a much more careful look.

## NOTES

- 1 Some material in this paper has been published, at points in quite different form, in my article "General Robert E. Wood: The Evolution of a Conservative," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 71 (Aug. 1978), 162-75. There is no full-scale biography of the general. For profiles of him see "The Reminiscences of Robert E. Wood" (1961), Columbia Oral History Collection, Columbia University (hereafter cited as "Wood Reminiscences"); "General Robert E. Wood, President," *Fortune*, May 1938, pp. 66-69, 104-10; "War and Peace: Follow What Leader?" *Time*, Oct. 6, 1941, pp. 18-20; "The General's General Store," *Time*, Feb. 25, 1952, pp. 84-95; *Current Biography*, 1 (1940), 933-35; Irving Pflaum, "The Baffling Career of Robert E. Wood," *Harper's*, April 1954, pp. 68-73; James C. Worthy, "Giants in Management: General Wood of Sears, Roebuck" (unpublished address to the Academy of Management, Aug. 11, 1978), in the possession of Mr. Worthy, Sanibel Island, Fla. Obituaries are in the Nov. 7, 1969, issues of *New York Times*, p. 35; *Chicago Tribune*, p. 1; and *Chicago Sun Times*, p. 4. Accounts of Sears may be found in Boris Emmet and John E. Jeuck, *Catalogues and Counters: A History of Sears, Roebuck and Company* (Chicago, 1950), and Albert D. Chandler, Jr., *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of the Industrial Enterprise* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), 225-82.
- 2 General Robert E. Wood to Edward J. Bermingham, Feb. 28, 1951, Papers of Robert E. Wood, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa (hereafter cited as "Wood Papers").
- 3 Wayne S. Cole, *An Interpretive History of American Foreign Relations* (rev. ed.; Homewood, Ill., 1971), 321-22.
- 4 Wood Reminiscences, 5.
- 5 "Telegram by William Allen White and List of Members of the Committee," reprinted in U.S. Congress, 76th Cong., 3rd sess., Oct. 14, 1940, *Congressional Record*, Appendix, 619-20.
- 6 Wood to Marvin H. McIntyre, May 5, 1941; to Franklin D. Roosevelt, May 17, 1940; to Snell Smith, July 10, 1940; and to W. J. Donovan, Oct. 3, 1940, all in Wood Papers.
- 7 Wood to Roosevelt, Sept. 11, 1940, Wood Papers; *New York Times*, Sept. 8, 1940, p. 12.
- 8 Wood to B. K. Wheeler, June 14, 1940, Wood Papers.
- 9 Wood to Roosevelt, Feb. 7, 1941, Wood Papers; Wood to Ward Cheney, May 26, 1941, Papers of the America First Committee, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford, Calif.
- 10 Wood, "Our Foreign Policy," address to the Council of Foreign Relations of Chicago, Oct. 4, 1940, reprinted in U.S. Congress, 76th Cong., 3rd sess., Oct. 14, 1940, *Congressional Record*, Appendix, 6300-03.
- 11 Wayne S. Cole, *America First: The Battle Against Intervention, 1940-1941* (Madison, 1953), 12-14, 18-19, 168; Wood Reminiscences, p. 88.
- 12 *New York Times*, April 14, p. 19, April 15, p. 9, 1941.

- 13 Interview with Pennell Brooks, Sanibel Island, Fla., March 25, 1979; cf. Wood Reminiscence, 91.
- 14 *New York Times*, Feb. 5, p. 1, Oct. 23, p. 4, 1941.
- 15 *Ibid.*, May 4, p. 1, Aug. 15, p. 5, 1941; Wayne S. Cole, *Charles A. Lindbergh and the Battle Against American Intervention in World War II* (New York, 1974), 198.
- 16 For examples of the administration argument, see my "Power, Markets, and Ideology: The Isolationist Response to Roosevelt Policy, 1940-1941," in Leonard P. Liggio and James J. Martin, eds., *Watershed of Empire: Essays on New Deal Foreign Policy* (Colorado Springs, 1976), 132-35.
- 17 Wood to H. A. Wallace, Feb. 21, 1938, Wood Papers.
- 18 Wood to Wallace, March 8, 1939, Wood Papers; Wood, "Our Foreign Policy," 6302; Wood interview with Kenneth Crawford, *P.M.*, May 25, 1941, pp. 4-6, 8. For administration claims of totalitarian economic strength, see Doenecke, "Power, Markets, and Ideology," 132-35.
- 19 Testimony of Robert E. Wood in U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Defense Aid Act of 1941*, 77th Cong., 1st sess., Feb. 4, 1941, pp. 343, 356.
- 20 Wood to F. Knox, June 21, 1940, Wood Papers.
- 21 Wood to R. J. Finnegan, Jan. 22, 1941, Wood Papers.
- 22 Wood to Roy Howard, Dec. 14, 1940, Wood Papers. See also "War and Peace," pp. 18-20.
- 23 *New York Times*, Feb. 10, p. 10, March 17, p. 4, 1941.
- 24 Wood, "Our Foreign Policy," 6302.
- 25 *Ibid.*; Cole, *America First*, 97-98.
- 26 Entry of Dec. 8, 1941, Charles A. Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh* (New York, 1970), 561; Wood to Wheeler, April 10, 1942, Wood Papers; Wood quoted in Pflaum, "The Baffling Career," p. 72.
- 27 Wood to Otto Case, March 31, 1942, Wood Papers. It was undoubtedly the note sent on Nov. 26, 1941, by Secretary of State Cordell Hull to the Japanese that aroused Wood's ire. Wood wrote, "Any intelligent and well-informed person who was acquainted with the attitude of the Japs would have known that the dispatch of that note meant war. Either Hull is [so] incredibly stupid that he did not realize it or he is a liar and a hypocrite." Wood to Robert R. McCormick, Nov. 29, 1945, Wood Papers.
- 28 Wood to Charles A. Lindbergh, Dec. 12, 1941, Wood Papers.
- 29 Wood to H. E. Barnes, Sept. 17, 1943, record of payments to Barnes: 1952—\$800, 1953—\$900, 1954—\$1300. See also Lindbergh to Wood, June 4, 1946. All in Wood Papers.
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- 31 Wood to Donovan, Feb. 30, 1942; and to J. C. Loughlin, Feb. 27, 1946, both in Wood Papers; Wood Reminiscences, 93; interview with General Bonner Fellers, Washington, D.C., June 12, 1973.
- 32 Wood to Frank P. Lahm, Oct. 30, 1943; to C. B. Hazeltine, June 2, 1944; and to Flynn, July 17, 1945, all in Wood Papers.



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- 41 Memorandum of C. W. Boldyreff, June 22, 1954; Wood to Wilson, July 8, 1954; Boldyreff to Wood, Aug. 3, 1954, all in Wood Papers.
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- 46 *New York Times*, May 8, 1954, p. 6, and July 10, 1958, p. 56. The Wood Papers are replete with materials from various action groups.
- 47 Wood to Lindbergh, Oct. 21, 1946; and to Isabel La Follette, Dec. 18, 1944, both in Wood Papers.
- 48 Wood's activities on behalf of MacArthur are covered in Howard B. Schonberger, "The General and the Presidency: Douglas MacArthur and the Election of 1948," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 57 (spring 1974), 201-19.
- 49 Wood to Mrs. George P. Marshall, Nov. 10, 1943; to Philip F. La Follette, Dec. 10, 1942; and to Dirksen, April 24, 1951, all in Wood Papers.
- 50 Wood to Sterling Morton, June 6, 1952, Papers of Sterling Morton, Chicago Historical Society; interview with James C. Worthy, Sarasota, Fla., Jan. 22, 1979.
- 51 Wood to Robert A. Taft, Sept. 9, 1952, Wood Papers.
- 52 *New York Times*, Feb. 14, 1955, p. 35.
- 53 The same questions would hold for a host of midwestern industrialists, such as Thomas Creigh, Michael F. Cudahy, Ernest Weir, Leon D. Clausen, Sterling Morton, Charles H. Swift, Max Wellington Babb, Henry Ford, Edward Ryerson, and Robert Young.
- 54 Worthy interview. For Dennis's view, see my "Lawrence Dennis: Revisionist of the Cold War," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 55 (summer 1972), 275-86.

## John L. Lewis and American Isolationism

MELVYN DUBOFSKY

THE ROLE of the American labor movement and its leaders in the making of United States foreign policy has rarely received scholarly scrutiny. Probably that has been so for good reasons, none better than the labor movement's marginal relationship to the making of foreign policy and its members' lack of interest in the world beyond our borders. If, through most of our history, citizens have been inward-looking, few have been more so than union members and their leaders.

Those scholars who have examined American labor and foreign policy, most notably Ronald Radosh, have focused either on World War I or the Cold War eras.<sup>1</sup> In both instances labor leaders clearly served as advocates and agents of official American foreign policy. During and just after World War I, Samuel Gompers and his associates in the American Federation of Labor faithfully promoted the liberal, democratic capitalist objectives associated with Wilsonian diplomacy. A generation later, during the Cold War, Gompers' heirs in the A. F. of L. and their opponents in the CIO proved equally faithful in serving Harry S. Truman's policy of global containment. And, of course, we know that no citizen played the hawk with greater enthusiasm during the war in Vietnam than "Mr. Labor," the recently deceased George Meany. In short, American labor has generally swum comfortably in the prevailing tides of diplomacy.

One notable exception to that rule, and a controversial one at that, was John L. Lewis's opposition, from 1937 to December 7, 1941, to the foreign policies of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Alone among noncommunist labor leaders in the period between the signing of the Hitler-Stalin pact and the Nazi invasion of Russia, Lewis opposed America's drift into war. Whereas most other political critics of Roosevelt came either from conservative political or corporate circles—well-known enemies of the New Deal—Lewis's opposition came from the heart of the New Deal coalition, its labor constituency. So unexpected was Lewis's hostility to Roosevelt's diplomacy that, at the time and since, most analysts of the subject have thought Lewis to be either a communist dupe, a conspirator of the Nazis, or an egotistical, irrational enemy of Franklin D. Roosevelt.<sup>2</sup> Few have sought to understand Lewis's position in terms of his historical experience and underlying principles. Today I want to take this occasion to do so.

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Not until he was thirty-seven years old did Lewis have his first real experience with foreign affairs. And even then, during World War I, it was primarily with diplomacy's domestic impact. Lewis strongly supported Wilson's wartime domestic and foreign policies, as did the other labor leaders in the A. F. of L. and the United Mine Workers of America with whom he was closely associated. In return for endorsing Wilsonianism overseas, labor received tangible benefits at home: trade union growth, higher wages, shorter hours, and better job security.

But labor's wartime gains proved short-lived. No sooner did the war end than employers counterattacked. No union felt the employer offensive more severely than the United Mine Workers, in which Lewis in 1919 had just risen to the acting presidency. As mine owners tried to push back union gains and deflate wage rates, Lewis and his union found themselves involved in a struggle not just against capitalists but also against the federal government. In 1919 Lewis was subjected to federal court injunctions, presidential edicts, and most galling, Justice Department taps of his telephones. Hounded by federal agents, its foreign-born members subject to peremptory deportation proceedings, and watched by federal troops, the United Mine Workers had no choice but to end the 1919 strike on government terms.<sup>3</sup>

From his World War I and immediate postwar experiences, Lewis derived principles from which he never thereafter deviated. World War I taught him that workers suffered as employers benefited from war-induced inflation, especially since the few gains which labor won during the emergency period were quickly lost after the war. He also saw that, however much influence labor gained in Washington as a result of its support of Wilsonianism, it could not compare to the power exercised by corporate interests, which dominated all the major federal war production agencies. Because workers paid the primary financial costs of war (as well as the human costs), Lewis believed that the labor movement should oppose all involvement in foreign conflicts not immediately threatening to national security. And if war did come despite labor's best efforts to maintain peace or as a result of foreign attack, Lewis vowed that trade unions would then obtain their essential goals before they pledged support to the government and wages were frozen for the duration.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout the 1920s, however Lewis's main concerns were domestic, not foreign. On the one hand, he worked diligently, and sometimes deviously, to gain unchallenged control of the United Mine Workers. On the other hand, he desperately sought to save his union and its members from the perils of a declining coal industry. He succeeded in the former objective but failed abysmally in the latter.

Yet in no way during the 1920s did Lewis seem out of tune with the prevailing American impressions of the world overseas. Within the labor movement and outside it, he appeared as a bastion against communism and Soviet influ-

ence. "No one seems to recall that you alone for ten years were the only bulwark against Communism penetrating the United States, when it was a true menace," a prominent businessman later wrote to Lewis, "and that you were the obstacle to the recognition of Russia."<sup>5</sup> Anticommunism brought Lewis gains within his union and among his Republican party friends. But he was never personally a principled, or knee-jerk, anticommunist. Indeed, in 1926 at the suggestion of his economic adviser, W. Jett Lauck, Lewis considered serving as the head of an American trade union delegation to Soviet Russia. Then sober second thoughts about the domestic political implications of such a trip caused Lewis to decline Lauck's proposal. "On the face of it," he wrote to his adviser, "I scarcely like to identify myself with an expedition which might be believed by many to be the forerunner of an attempt to bring the Russian situation to the forefront in our country."<sup>6</sup>

During the "Prosperity Decade," Lewis also expounded in print certain key concepts which shaped his view of the United States and the world. He believed that the United States could develop a prosperous and equitable economy without involving itself commercially beyond the Western Hemisphere; that the United States together with its northern and southern neighbors contained a market large enough to sustain mass production, economies of scale, and high wages. The American system, Lewis asserted, was based on expensive, not cheap, labor—labor that earned enough to buy the products of American industry and provided a home market insulated from the vagaries of international commerce. Thus he wanted the domestic market closed to imported coal, oil, and natural gas, and he opposed the efforts of private United States capital to develop energy resources overseas as well as federal and state programs which benefited fuels competitive with coal. In sum, he believed that the United States, as the giant of the Western Hemisphere, could create a self-contained, autarkic, corporate society based on high wages, mass consumption, and steady profits.<sup>7</sup>

The Great Depression, to be sure, shattered Lewis's dream of a prosperous, contented America. But it also reinforced his vision of how to construct an equitable American system. Everywhere around the globe during the 1930s, nation-states focused on their domestic difficulties and moved toward neo-mercantilistic and autarkic economic policies. Tariff walls rose; import quotas tightened; currencies became non-convertible; the gold standard collapsed. Domestic recovery transcended international comity. The United States proved no exception to these trends, and that suited Lewis admirably. Moreover, during the depression, Lewis initially had no time to devote to foreign affairs. First, he had to resurrect the moribund United Mine Workers and next build the CIO and the first successful mass production unions in American history. Only then could Lewis even begin to think about the real problems which were emerging around the globe and which threatened a new wave of international anarchy and war.

By the end of the 1930s Washington policymakers, especially the president, clearly concentrated more on foreign affairs than domestic issues. The fascist military challenge replaced mass unemployment as public enemy number one. As the New Deal tide ebbed, Lewis found himself as critical of Roosevelt's emerging foreign policies as he had heretofore been supportive of the president's domestic reforms. Not that Lewis had the least sympathy for fascism or such aggressor nations as Japan, Italy, and Germany. In fact, for years Lewis had publicly repudiated fascism and argued that trade unionism and the New Deal were the best antidotes against a fascist threat in the United States. By and large, however, Lewis defined fascism as a domestic, not a foreign, problem. In his view, neither the Japanese assault on mainland Asia, nor the Italian attack on Ethiopia, nor German aggression in Central Europe threatened American security. Quite the contrary. At an anti-Nazi rally in New York's Madison Square Garden in March, 1937, Lewis warned an audience of Jewish-American trade unionists that "Europe is on the brink of disaster and it must be our care that she does not drag us into the abyss after her."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Lewis never departed from his belief that American security lay in domestic reform, not overseas entanglements. He even refused to lobby actively for Roosevelt's prewar preparedness program, which might have reduced unemployment substantially.<sup>9</sup>

Lewis's position on foreign affairs sowed confusion in Washington political and diplomatic circles. Observers of the union leader's behavior could not decide if he was a Nazi or a communist sympathizer. They were especially dismayed by Lewis's role in Latin American affairs. At a time when the United States government was involved in delicate negotiations with the Cardenas government in Mexico over the property claims of foreign oil companies, Lewis conducted his own private dealings with the Mexican president. In September, 1938, Lewis attended a mass left-wing labor rally in a Mexico City bullring and in later discussions with Mexican labor leaders raised the possibility of founding a new American Hemisphere labor federation to replace the defunct A. F. of L. Pan-American Federation of Labor. He also conferred privately with President Cardenas, for whom he delivered diplomatic messages to Roosevelt. Such activities led members of the State Department to suspect that Lewis was a conduit for Soviet funds passing to Latin communists.<sup>10</sup>

Roosevelt was even more perturbed by Lewis's Mexican oil diplomacy. Working closely with William Rhodes Davis, a Texas entrepreneur, oil wildcatter, and Democratic party contributor, Lewis used his influence in Mexico to enable the Texan to purchase oil for sale to Hitler's Germany. Davis had clear motives for his own part in the transaction: to buy oil cheaply from Mexico and to sell it dearly to Germany. For his part, Cardenas saw an opportunity to break the Anglo-American oil companies' boycott on the sale of nationalized Mexican oil. But what were Lewis's motives? It is unlikely, despite what some recent writers have suggested, that Lewis was involved, unwittingly or not, in Nazi

diplomatic intrigues. More likely he believed that by enabling Mexico to break the oil blockade, he would earn the friendship of Cardenas and the leftist Mexican Federation of Labor, raise the influence of the CIO south of the border, and strike a blow against imperialism. Regarding the latter point, one must remember that Lewis had a peculiar concept of imperialism. He viewed the United States as primarily an anti-imperialist nation, which had been sucked into its few imperial adventures by the machinations of Wall Street interests (mainly the Morgans and Rockefellers) allied with traditional British imperialists.<sup>11</sup> In a sense, he thought that America was an innocent abroad.

But Europe, not Mexico, remained the focus of American diplomacy between 1937 and 1941, and it was on this front that Lewis and Roosevelt broke most sharply. On Labor Day, 1939, Lewis told the nation:

War has always been the device of the despairing and intellectually sterile statesmen. It promises employment in the gun factories and begets enormous profits for those already rich . . . Above all war perpetuates in imperishable letters on the scroll of fame and history, the names of its political creators and managers.

Labor in America wants no war or any part of war. Labor wants the right to work and live—not the privilege of dying by gunshot or poison gas to sustain the mental errors of current statesmen.

Any attempt to involve the United States in a European war, he concluded, would be a betrayal of the national interest.<sup>12</sup>

Lewis had good reason to suspect just such a betrayal. Informants provided him with details of United States war contingency plans and also asserted that the Roosevelt administration was committed to eventual involvement in a European conflict. Equally disturbing to Lewis, the contingency plans neglected to accord labor as large a role as corporate interests in war production planning.<sup>13</sup> This raised for Lewis the spectre of his World War I experiences. Thus, although he allowed the 1939 CIO convention to endorse a proposed revision in the neutrality laws which would permit the United States to sell war materials to England and France, he still told the same convention audience that, "Safety and security for Americans lie in non-participation in this [European] conflict and the addressing of ourselves to the major problem now confronting us in our internal economy and domestic establishment."<sup>14</sup>

By the time of the United Mine Worker convention in January, 1940, Lewis had grown even more hostile to Roosevelt's foreign policy. He told the union delegates in no uncertain terms that no statesman should "believe or dream that he is going to solve the unemployment question . . . by dragging America into war with foreign countries." The answer to the questions that concern us, he went on, is not to make cannon fodder out of our young men and cover the rest

of the nation with grief and lamentations. "That day is gone if my voice and my strength can make any contribution to prevent it." And finally, in his closing address, Lewis warned that "labor in the United States wants no war or any part of war, and that it will hold to strict accountability any statesmen who depart from that declared policy."<sup>15</sup>

Nazi intrigues had little, if anything, to do with Lewis's position on foreign affairs. Lewis honestly believed, as did his former political associate Herbert Hoover, Republican presidential aspirant Robert A. Taft, and U. S. Steel executive Tom Moses, that the European war did not directly threaten United States security, and that the Atlantic and Pacific oceans provided America with unbreachable defenses. To go to war unnecessarily, all these men asserted, would turn the United States into a garrison society, expand dangerously the power of the presidency, make America irremediably imperialist, and turn citizens into servants, not masters, of the state.

Committed to such beliefs, Lewis in the spring and summer of 1940 fought Roosevelt's foreign policy. He told one audience that our youth "are not again going to be butchered in a European country, or upon a foreign shore."<sup>16</sup> And he told 10,000 Flint auto workers that any politician who seeks to involve the United States in a foreign war "is going to show himself as nothing more or less than a fool."<sup>17</sup> Lewis also spelled out for his audiences the domestic implications of war. "Build up a gigantic military instrumentality and quarter it upon the people under a Roosevelt or under any other president, call it a defensive mechanism," he warned, "but sooner or later will come a Chief Executive on horseback . . . [who] will carry out his imperialistic dream and conception."<sup>18</sup> By summer's end Lewis prophesied to a left-wing union audience that when Roosevelt finally had his war, American liberties would disappear as "the United States first becomes a militaristic nation, and second, becomes an imperialistic nation, to carry out the dreams of conquest of some would-be dictator."<sup>19</sup> Finally, a week before the election, he informed a national radio network audience: "May I hope that on election day [you] will with the sacred ballot, lead the revolt against the candidate who plays at a game that may make cannon fodder of your sons."<sup>20</sup>

Roosevelt's reelection proved to Lewis that United States involvement in the European war was only a matter of time. But it also partially silenced his public criticisms. He continued quietly to involve himself in antiwar activities with such conservative and isolationist groups as the America First Committee. But Lewis now concentrated more on guaranteeing trade unionism further gains before war came, insuring the labor movement a role commensurate with business influence in defense planning, and protecting labor's interests during actual war. Here, too, Roosevelt stymied Lewis. The president permitted corporate executives to dominate defense planning, and he appointed Sidney Hillman as his adviser on labor matters, a direct slap at Lewis.<sup>21</sup>

When war came after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Lewis played the role of true patriot. He ceased all public criticism of Roosevelt's foreign policy and announced his own support of the war effort. Moreover, he wasted little time in joining with other labor leaders in offering the administration a "no-strike pledge" for the duration of the war. The UMWA backed all the war loan drives, encouraged miners to achieve record levels of production, and saluted the men in uniform. Lewis personally demanded that every union effort must be aimed at total military victory.<sup>22</sup>

During the war, however, Lewis concentrated on how federal policy affected workers on the home front, not on Roosevelt's diplomacy. He wanted to insure that labor did not suffer unduly from war-induced inflation, and he feared that the government was implementing "a paradoxical policy that runs to the premise of rewarding and fattening industry and starving labor." That fear and the reality that coal miners did in fact bear the costs of inflation led Lewis to confront Washington during the 1943 wartime national coal strike. Yet, however much Lewis fought governmental policies in the economic and production spheres, he never allowed wildcat walkouts or authorized strikes to pose a real threat to the war effort.<sup>23</sup>

Neither during the war years nor in the immediate postwar era did Lewis publicly break with basic United States foreign policy. He did not criticize the United Nations or the diplomatic settlements which ended the war. Privately, he may have conspired with the Asia-First wing of the Republican party and sympathized with the Fortress America view of such leaders as Herbert Hoover.<sup>24</sup> But publicly the labor leader maintained a circumspect silence. Indeed, at the height of the Cold War, Lewis's views on foreign affairs seemed as much an enigma as they had been during the 1930s. That he disliked Truman's foreign policies was soon a matter of public record. After all, when Truman had complained that he would not appoint the labor leader national dogcatcher, Lewis quipped back: "The President could ill afford to have more brains in the Dog Department than in the State Department."<sup>25</sup> Yet most Americans could not really know whether Lewis thought Truman to be too hard or too soft on the Soviets. For, by the early 1950s, the labor leader's closest business associate was the entrepreneur-financier Cyrus Eaton, one of America's foremost exponents of improved relations with Soviet Russia.<sup>26</sup> Lewis, it seemed, flew simultaneously with the hawks in the "Fortress America" school and the Eaton-style doves.

But as was true during most of Lewis's active public career, domestic developments in the coal industry and within his union overwhelmed his thoughts about America's role in the world and actual events overseas. In the 1950s coal mining entered a period of decline comparable to the 1920s, in which mass unemployment afflicted miners. As a result, the UMWA suffered grievously. Competition from oil and natural gas—cheap, plentiful, and clean energy sources—

largely explained coal's plight.<sup>27</sup> This domestic reality led Lewis during the 1950s and early sixties to combine isolationism of the Fortress America variety with harsh anti-Soviet rhetoric.

Alone among labor leaders, Lewis criticized United States economic aid to Western Europe. Commenting in 1954 on a \$100 million loan to the European coal and steel community, he first whined, "It's a moral certainty that that money will never be paid back." But then he added more pointedly, "We're building up in Europe with American taxpayers' money a device that is economically designed to further cripple the American economy and throw Americans out of work." It was time, Lewis suggested, that the United States stopped building up foreign competitors to the domestic coal industry or encouraging the nation to rely on imported oil. He even portrayed a scene redolent of the present. What happens, he asked, if the Soviets sink our tankers en route from Venezuela? What happens when they sink modern supertankers coming from the ports of the Persian Gulf? And what happens when West Coast oil can't be transported to the Northeast?

Lewis's answers to those questions were meant to be frightening. The Russians would demand an American surrender and "thrust their cast iron Oriental philosophy down our throats as a nation." To avert that possibility, Lewis recommended that the United States become less dependent on imported oil and develop its own abundant coal deposits as a substitute. Only if the United States kept its domestic house in order, Lewis argued, would it be able to defend the "free world." In Lewis's image of world affairs as of 1954, a triumph over the oil lobbyists and Rockefeller imperialists would be more important than a French military victory at Dien Bien Phu.<sup>28</sup>

Seven years later, in a speech before the National Coal Policy Conference, Lewis reverted to this theme. Again he criticized the nation's untoward reliance on oil and natural gas, especially the imported variety, and raised the spectre of a Soviet threat to world shipping lanes. If the Russians cut off oil shipments, he warned, our transportation would be stopped, our railroads would not even be able to carry coal to market, and "our economy would collapse." And if the economy collapsed, as he prophesied, the Russians would not even have to invade the United States. In short, to Lewis, coal was vital to national economic well-being, and domestic prosperity was more important to security than foreign military bases.<sup>29</sup>

Aside from an occasional resort to Cold-War rhetoric and the spectre of American dependence on oil, Lewis played a marginal role during the 1950s and sixties in the public discussion of foreign policy. He gladly entertained visiting delegations of foreign labor leaders at UMWA headquarters in Washington, and he just as willingly served as a member of honorific United States labor missions abroad. But unlike other labor leaders, who during the 1950s cooperated covertly with the CIA and the State Department in opposing communist in-

fluence in Western European trade unions, Lewis refused to participate in such programs. Even flattery on the part of high Eisenhower administration officials—for example, C. D. Jackson's statement that in Lewis's case, "a problem, a project, and a man fitted together perfectly"—failed to budge him.<sup>30</sup> Lewis proved no more receptive to Kennedy-style cultural diplomacy. Asked to participate in a government-sponsored international lecture series on the concept of freedom, Lewis replied: "I cannot believe that a cultural program, however virtuous and well-managed, will be a controlling factor in the adjustment of world-wide problems. I would probably be out of character in lecturing on a subject on which, heretofore, I had not been recognized as an authority."<sup>31</sup>

What, then, can one conclude about Lewis and his view of America's role in the world? First, it can be said without hesitation that, for Lewis, domestic concerns always outweighed overseas considerations, and that among domestic issues the health of the coal industry and the stability of the UMWA were uppermost. That being said, it must be added that Lewis's concept of America and the world was comparable to that of such contemporary midwesterners as Herbert Hoover, Robert La Follette, George Norris, and Charles Beard. And all of them could probably harken back to the young Abraham Lincoln's words in 1837, as cited in a recent column by James Reston on Jimmy Carter and Afghanistan:

All the armies of Europe, Asia, and Africa combined, with all the treasure of the earth . . . in their military chest, with a Bonaparte for a commander, could not by force take a drink from the Ohio or make a track on the Blue Ridge in a trial of a thousand years.

At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer: if ever it reach us, it must spring up amongst us; it cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of free men, we must live through-out all time or die by suicide.<sup>32</sup>

## NOTES

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## Three Faces of Midwestern Isolationism: Comments

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FREDERICK ADAMS

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I WILL PREFACE my comments with a few observations about the way in which I approached the assignment.<sup>1</sup> Having had ample time to read and reflect upon the papers, I found myself favorably disposed toward all of them. Each paper provides a clear description of the principal figure's foreign policy views and of the reasons why he arrived at these. There is little reason to quarrel with any of the authors' major arguments. I have taken a cue from Professor Doenecke and tried to address some of the questions he raised at the end of his paper. That is, I have tried to focus on the socio-economic and ideological environment within which the three individuals operated in an attempt to see whether they were mavericks or representative figures whose actions reflected the presence of deeper forces. My comments will lean heavily toward the latter view, though Lewis occasionally is troubling on this point. My interpretation of the course taken by agrarian radicals, a view heavily influenced by Michael Rogin, appears to differ somewhat from that of Professor Cole, although I do not believe that we are too far apart.<sup>2</sup>

Midwestern isolationists have bequeathed a puzzling legacy to Americans. As these papers ably demonstrate, isolationists were drawn from diverse backgrounds. What, after all, is one to make of a phenomenon that included a spokesman for agrarian radicalism, the head of Sears, Roebuck and Company, and the era's most controversial leader of organized labor? While agreeing with one another on some issues, these individuals obviously disagreed on others. Even the term "isolationism" caused confusion since it provided only a partially accurate description of their views.<sup>3</sup>

The analyses provided both by contemporary commentators and subsequently by academics have muddied the waters further. Occasionally individuals have used the term loosely, trying to make it apply when it does not. Any foreign policy critic counseling withdrawal is open to the charge of advocating isolationism.<sup>4</sup> In addition, there is a tendency to understate the ways in which the tumultuous events of the 1936-54 period altered and eventually reshaped the na-

ture of isolationism. Furthermore, one must remember the degree to which isolationists' views were influenced by domestic considerations. Individuals often had sharply different reasons for supporting a policy of aloofness. As conditions changed, they no longer were in agreement about foreign affairs. Any analysis of isolationism, therefore, must move beyond an acknowledgment of surface similarities to an examination of the social, economic, and political roots of these views. For the most part, it seems to me that these papers have succeeded in this task.<sup>5</sup>

In spite of their many differences, Nye, Wood, and Lewis agreed on two major points, ones which initially gave an element of cohesiveness to midwestern isolationism. First, they insisted that neither America's national security nor its material well-being was dependent upon European or Asian events. The probability that a foreign power could conduct a successful transoceanic invasion always hovered around zero. Although the advent of air power created a more realistic threat, isolationists insisted that no nation could inflict massive destruction upon the United States through bomber raids. These individuals also denied that access to European and Asian markets and raw materials was necessary to insure American prosperity. The existence of a vast internal market combined with the availability of western hemispheric trade was sufficient to guarantee a stable domestic economy. One should note that most isolationists thought in terms of an insular hemisphere rather than an insular nation, a fact that has to alter somewhat the connotation of "isolationism." Mexicans, for example, would be hard-pressed to believe that Wood's definition of an acceptable foreign policy meant that America was a non-interventionist power. Nevertheless, one essential aspect of the isolationist world view was that, within limits, Americans did not have to worry about the rest of the globe.

The second major point of isolationist belief was that US involvement in a foreign war would have a devastating impact at home. Though isolationists often had different versions of the types of disasters that a war would bring, nearly all agreed that participation in another overseas conflict would lead to the destruction of American democracy. At the very least, war would result in the total eclipse of Congress by the president and in the adoption of policies that would revolutionize the nation's economic and social system.

Midwestern isolationists, however, traveled very different roads in arriving at these conclusions. They represented distinct, and at times antagonistic, groups. I would suggest that, during the 1930s, there were three isolationist traditions, that these changed significantly over a fifteen-year period, and that, in the final analysis, the differences were more significant than the original surface similarities. The papers have dealt perceptively with two of these tendencies, which is understandable since these probably were the dominant ones in the midwest. For the sake of comprehensiveness, I will discuss briefly the third tradition in a moment.<sup>6</sup>

For the lack of a better term, the first tendency might be called the liberal-labor one. This tradition drew upon two quite different bases of support, ones that shifted in strength over time. Historically, agrarian radicalism was the major element of the liberal-labor camp, and it remained strong during the 1930s. Gerald Nye obviously was a representative of this viewpoint. As Professor Cole has shown, Nye's major concern was the farmer's struggle against eastern financial and industrial interests. From the late nineteenth century into the 1940s, agrarian radicals insisted that industrialists and bankers exploited rural America, robbing farmers of their just rewards. They also believed that these same forces advocated foreign wars in order to protect and expand their overseas interests. Foreign conflicts, moreover, would result in domestic policies that aided corporations and banks as well as caused the death of large numbers of farm boys turned soldiers and sailors. In short, overseas entanglements benefited agrarian radicals' domestic opponents.

Another important aspect of their position was a bitter hostility to imperialism, which they believed was primarily the product of industrial and financial capitalist greed. They were especially incensed by British imperialism, both because of its exploitive nature and because of the influence British financial institutions seemed to exert over Wall Street. Their attitude also caused them to oppose any American attempts at overseas annexation. Consequently, it is hardly surprising to find that agrarian radicals argued against American entrance into another European or Asian war, particularly if by so doing the US found itself propping up Britain's empire.<sup>7</sup>

To a degree, John L. Lewis represented the other element of the liberal-labor camp. The experience of World War I and its aftermath had a profound influence on labor leaders. Professor Dubofsky has carefully described Lewis's bitter recollection of those years. Despite its support of the war effort, labor was thrown on the defensive in 1919-20. Not only did Lewis come under attack from his traditional conservative foes, but he also found that the federal government swung anti-labor by issuing injunctions and presidential edicts against his union and by even tapping his telephone. During the massive labor unrest of 1919, the government forced a settlement upon the UMWA. In a fashion similar to that of Nye, Lewis concluded that wars enabled corporate leaders to increase their power and to control government policy. In addition, workers, not business managers, would do most of the fighting. For Lewis, isolationism was in the best interests of the American working class.<sup>8</sup>

While the first strain of middle western isolationism drew upon a liberal-labor base, the second grew out of conservative business sources. General was a leading spokesman for this viewpoint. As Professor Doenecke has described at some length in his informative book, *Not to the Swift*, businessmen involved in mining, service areas, retailing, and light goods manufacturing were inclined to believe in national self-sufficiency. Furthermore, they became leery of the



New Deal in the late 1930s, when they thought it was heading in a socialist direction. These individuals feared that participation in a foreign war would destroy capitalism by tipping the internal balance of power to advanced New Dealers. Like other conservatives of this type, Wood developed a nearly pathological fear that US involvement in a European conflict would reproduce within this country all of the class strife and hatred that plagued the Old World. Opposing both British imperialism and Soviet communism, conservative midwestern businessmen clung to a view of American innocence and exceptionalism: somehow the US had not developed the class cleavages of European societies. Doubtless the domestic unrest that began in 1937 heightened their fears of internal conflict. In any event, they became increasingly shrill in their warnings of the disastrous impact that overseas involvement would have on America's social structure.<sup>9</sup>

At least two important differences existed between these strains of isolationism, and they were of sufficient magnitude to make a stable, long-lasting coalition unlikely. First, the groups obviously represented sharply distinct social bases. Liberal-labor isolationists had mass support, especially among agrarian radicals, and could thus muster considerable electoral impact, while the conservative position was primarily that of an elite who relied upon pressure group tactics to exert influence. Second, the two groups had opposite views on the proper role of the federal government. On the one hand, liberal-labor elements believed that state intervention was necessary to regulate the activities of large corporate and financial institutions, to protect the interests of farmers and laborers, and to enact necessary social reforms. They worried that America's participation in a foreign war would destroy any chance for success in these ventures. On the other hand, conservative midwestern businessmen became bitter foes of governmental regulations and feared that the New Deal was the opening wedge for socialism or worse. By 1940-41, many thought that Roosevelt was trying to maneuver the country into war in order to aid the left-liberal cause. The groups, thus, were natural enemies, with each convinced that Roosevelt's foreign policy would aid its opponents.

The third element in midwestern isolationism was an ethnic one. Where the other groups were concerned about the domestic implications of foreign policy, ethnic isolationists were primarily interested in foreign events. Irish, German, and Russian-German middle westerners saw Britain as their traditional enemy. They had opposed America's entrance into World War I and reacted in a similar fashion when a new European crisis seemed in the offing. In many ways innately conservative, they were anticommunist and did not wish to aid the Soviet Union. For some ethnic isolationists, furthermore, a strong Germany served as a bulwark against the spread of Russian and British influence.<sup>10</sup>

Midwestern isolationism, therefore, consisted of a number of discrete elements which at best were in uneasy alliance. This arrangement was a fluid

one that could shift in response to changing circumstances at home and abroad. During the crisis conditions of the late 1930s and the 1940s, an important realignment took place. The papers suggest this dynamic quality. General Wood withdrew his support for the New Deal and began moving to the right. By the early 1950s, he was a supporter of Senator Joseph McCarthy. Likewise, Senator Nye moved steadily rightward into the McCarthy camp. Lewis became a harsh critic of Roosevelt and Truman, but not to the point of indulging in red-baiting tactics at home and rabidly anti-Soviet posturing abroad. What is the significance of these shifts? Do they indicate anything about the changing nature of isolationism?

To make sense of them, one must remember the highly charged environment of the late 1930s and the 1940s. These were years in which foreign and domestic events became closely intertwined and identified with each other. As Arno J. Mayer contends, it was an era of international revolution and counterrevolution played out across and within national boundaries. By weakening the moderate forces of accommodation, the crisis conditions had a polarizing impact that altered the complexion of midwestern isolationism. Some individuals became supporters of Henry Wallace's campaign for the Century of the Common Man while others moved logically into the conservative ranks behind McCarthy.<sup>11</sup>

Beginning in 1937, if not earlier, a combination of domestic and foreign events produced this transformation. Creating powerful internal tensions were Roosevelt's attempt to pack the Supreme Court; the mounting controversy over labor relations, especially in light of the wave of sit-down strikes; the recession of 1937-38, which suggested both that the New Deal had failed and that additional welfare measures were necessary; and Roosevelt's bid to purge the Democratic party of conservatives in 1938. During this same period, the international situation rapidly deteriorated as fascist powers expanded. Taken together, these conditions produced a highly volatile environment.<sup>12</sup>

The war years added to these tensions. Convinced of the need for bolder domestic programs, liberal-labor supporters sought an expanded New Deal. In 1943 the National Resources Planning Board, headed by Harvard economist Alvin Hansen, published a report calling upon the federal government to assume responsibility for maintaining prosperity in the postwar era by pursuing expansionist monetary and fiscal policies. Government spending, moreover, could solve such social ills as poor housing, inadequate medical facilities, urban decay, and inferior educational opportunities. Though not anticapitalist, the left-liberal program would curb corporate influence by increasing government power and forcing greater competition. Organized labor also made important gains during the war and moved in an explicitly political direction with the formation of the CIO's Political Action Committee. The left wing of the labor movement could provide important support for programs like those outlined in the N.R.P.B. report. Though still small, the Communist Party of America

reached peak strength at this time. Its members held influential positions in several CIO unions, and the party was pledged to joining with left-liberals in a united front against fascism. On the international level, liberal-labor groups championed an alliance with the Soviet Union in behalf of a war to destroy fascism and to usher in a new era of worldwide reform.<sup>13</sup>

With his advocacy of the People's Century, Henry Wallace was the most prominent national spokesman for the left-liberal cause. In many ways Wallace represented a fusing of traditional agrarian radicalism with urban liberalism. In domestic affairs he advocated the social liberalism, including a commitment to civil rights, that was embodied in the left-liberal position. Once an isolationist, he recommended that the United States take the lead in dismantling old-world imperialism and in instituting economic policies that would bridge the gap between wealthy and poor nations. He firmly believed that close ties with the Soviet Union were essential for world peace. According to Wallace, the US and USSR were becoming more like one another as America began to enact social reforms and as Russia allowed increased political freedom.<sup>14</sup>

The same forces that moved Wallace to the left drove conservative isolationists like General Wood to the right. Until the late 1930s, Wood viewed the New Deal as a moderate attempt to restore stability. After that point he became fearful that Roosevelt was going to lead the country to socialism. Like Robert Taft and other influential conservatives, Wood was convinced that the paramount dangers facing the country were internal ones. Liberal-labor advocacy of new reforms at home and cooperation with the Soviet Union abroad heightened conservative apprehensions about the subversive nature of advanced New Dealers. By 1950 Wood was prepared to support McCarthy even though he might dislike some of the senator's antics. Most conservative midwestern isolationists made a similar decision, as Professor Doenecke has demonstrated elsewhere.<sup>15</sup>

The path traveled by Senator Nye was less straightforward than that of Wood, a fact that raises certain questions. Did Nye represent the logical outcome of agrarian radicalism? Did populism give way to McCarthyism, as some have charged? I am persuaded by Michael Rogin that this did not happen, that McCarthy drew his main backing from the conservative wing of the midwestern Republican party and from various ethnic groups that were troubled by international communism. What happened in the case of Nye was that he became conservative. According to Rogin, in 1938 Nye campaigned as a progressive and received support from the traditionally liberal areas of the state. He did poorly among Russian-Germans. In the 1944 primary, he ran as a conservative isolationist. This time he carried the Russian-German counties but lost in the rural counties where agrarian radicalism remained strong. These same counties later supported the Farmers Union movement that was sympathetic to Wallace and tended more to Soviet-*philia* than Soviet-*phobia*. Agrarian radicals' appro-

val of Wallace was consistent with their historic opposition to industrial and financial dominance and to imperialism, as well as their desire for expanded governmental powers to aid those exploited by capitalism.<sup>16</sup>

There remains the question of what to do with John L. Lewis. One cannot easily use him as a representative figure. He remained a bitter critic of Roosevelt, but in this he was nearly alone among labor leaders. I am uncertain what his opinion was of Wallace and the campaign for the People's Century. He may have disliked both of them.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, there seems to have been some similarity of purpose between Lewis and Wallace with respect to aiding left-labor groups in Latin America. Professor Dubofsky has shown how Lewis maneuvered to strengthen left-leaning Mexican labor leaders. Part of his objective was to assist the reform-oriented Cardenas government in its struggle for greater economic nationalism. Wallace displayed a comparable concern with encouraging Latin American socio-economic reforms when he was head of the Board of Economic Warfare. He wanted to make American purchases of hemispheric raw materials contingent upon the recipient nation improving the wages and working conditions of labor. In spirit and sympathy, Lewis may not have been too far out of step with Wallace.<sup>18</sup>

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, therefore, midwestern isolationism underwent important changes, with the liberal-labor experience being the most diverse. Though the agrarian radical component remained strong during the pre-war period, its influence declined thereafter as its social-economic base shrank. Agrarian radicals, moreover, had sharply different reactions to the shifting conditions. Some followed the path of Nye to conservatism: they opposed domestic reform and supported McCarthy. Others remained true to their older principles, becoming supporters of Wallace. As such, they often were highly critical of America's Cold War policy. Instead of arguing that the US should remain aloof from the rest of the world, however, they emphasized the necessity of improving relations with the Soviet Union; and they supported international relief organizations. George McGovern seems a contemporary representative of this tradition. Finally, some agrarian radicals supported the administration's Cold War policy.<sup>19</sup> Most of organized labor, the other major segment of pre-war liberal-labor isolationism, eventually adopted a similar stance, especially following the CIO purges. Hence individuals such as Hubert Humphrey combined with union leaders to favor containment, a position that had the unintended result of playing into the hands of the right at home.<sup>20</sup>

Conservative and ethnic isolationists responded in a more uniform manner to the crisis conditions. They moved to the right, becoming increasingly vituperative in their denunciations of spreading Soviet influence and of internal subversion. The careers of Wood and Nye reflect the way in which these two strains of isolationism converged, thereby creating the necessary conditions for a movement such as McCarthyism. By the early 1950s, the interlocking questions of

revolution and counterrevolution abroad and of reform and reaction at home had transformed middle western isolationism. The liberal-labor wing was divided and on the defensive, whereas a conservative, super-nationalist wing was able to have an important influence on both foreign and domestic affairs.<sup>21</sup>

### NOTES

1 For simplicity's sake, I have footnoted only the material not drawn directly from the three papers.

2 Professor Doenecke makes a similar point in his insightful book, *Not to the Swift: The Old Isolationists in the Cold War Era* (Lewisburg, Pa., 1979), 13. As will become apparent, I have drawn upon Michael Rogin, *The Intellectuals and McCarthy: The Radical Specter* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967); and Arno J. Mayer, *Dynamics of Counterrevolution in Europe, 1870-1956: An Analytic Framework* (New York, 1971).

3 For an idea of the diversity of views, see Ray Allen Billington, "The Origins of Middle Western Isolationism," *Political Science Quarterly*, 60 (March 1945), 44-64; William G. Carleton, "Isolationism and the Middle West," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 33 (Dec. 1946), 377-90; Richard P. Wilkins, "Middle Western Isolationism: A Re-Examination," *North Dakota Quarterly*, 25 (summer 1957), 69-79; Samuel Lubell, *The Future of American Politics*, (rev. ed.; Garden City, 1955), Chapter VII. See also Wayne S. Cole, "A Tale of Two Isolationists—Told Three Wars Later," *Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Newsletter*, 5 (March 1974), 2-16; and Justus D. Doenecke, *The Literature of Isolationism: A Guide to Non-Interventionist Scholarship, 1930-1972* (Colorado Springs, 1972), 8-12.

4 "Isolationism" remained a discredited concept until the mid-1960s, when some academics began to reassess the earlier generation of foreign policy critics. See Doenecke, *Not to the Swift*, 19-20, 246-47; *idem*, *Literature*, 60-61; *idem*, "Review Essay: The Isolationists and a Usable Past," *Peace and Change*, 5 (spring 1978), 67-73.

5 The task is similar to the one Arno J. Mayer has prescribed for those concerned with fascism. Academics must focus on the causes of isolationism rather than its practices and consequences. Thus far, historians have been too preoccupied with intellectual, cultural, and psychological characteristics but inattentive to the social, economic, and political roots. See Mayer, 19.

6 I have added a conservative tradition to the strains of middle western isolationism identified in Rogin, 79-80.

7 As Professor Cole indicates, the agrarian radical tradition extended from Bryan through Robert La Follette, Sr., to Nye. For more on this issue, see Wayne S. Cole, *Senator Gerald P. Nye and American Foreign Relations* (Minneapolis, 1962); Rogin, 79-80, 176-91; Wilkins, "Middle Western Isolationism," 69-76; and Billington, "Origins," 44-52, 63.

8 For more on this point, see Selig Adler, *The Isolationist Impulse: Its Twentieth-Century Reaction* (New York, 1957), 55-72; Manfred Jonas, *Isolationism in America, 1935-1941* (Ithaca, 1966), 70-86; and Justus D. Doenecke, "Non-Interventionism of the Left: The Keep America Out of the War Congress, 1938-41," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 12 (April 1971), 221-36.

9 See Doenecke, *Not to the Swift*, 21-27. Conservative middle western businessmen played an important role in the influential America First Committee. Wayne S. Cole, *America First: The Battle Against Intervention, 1940-41* (Madison, 1953), 17-34. Most conservative middle western politicians shared these views. See James T. Patterson, "Alternatives to Globalism: Robert A. Taft and American Foreign Policy, 1939-1945," *Historian*, 36 (Aug. 1974), 670-88; and Gary Dean Best, "Totalitarianism or Peace: Herbert Hoover and the Road to War, 1939-1941," *Annals of Iowa*, 44 (winter 1979), 516-29. The anti-New Deal aspect of pre-World War II isolationism is noted in Lubell, 163.

10 For a discussion of the ethnic issue, see Lubell, 140-63; Rogin, 79-80, 106-36, 160-65; and Adler, 74-89. Some conservatives also saw Germany as a bulwark against the Soviet Union. See Best, "Totalitarianism," 520-25. Doenecke describes the isolationists' attitude toward Germany after World War II in *Not to the Swift*, 131-52.

11 Only the naive can assume that the US was immune to the social and political crisis of the period. For more on this issue, see Mayer, 2-5, 9-14, 20-55, 72-74, 84-85, 119-33.

12 See James T. Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal: The Growth of the Conservative Coalition in Congress, 1933-1939* (Lexington, 1967); James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox* (New York, 1957), Part IV; Richard Polenberg, "The Decline of the New Deal, 1937-1940," in John Braeman, Robert Bremner, and David Brody, eds., *The New Deal*, 2 vols. (Columbus, 1975), I, 246-66; and John Robert Moore, "Senator Josiah W. Bailey and the 'Conservative Manifesto' of 1937," *Journal of Southern History*, 31 (Feb. 1965), 21-39.

13 Norman D. Markowitz, *The Rise and Fall of the People's Century: Henry A. Wallace and American Liberalism, 1941-1948* (New York, 1973), 57-65; James Caldwell Foster, *The Union Politic: The C.I.O. Political Action Committee* (Columbia, Mo., 1975), 16-21; Joseph R. Starobin, *American Communism in Crisis, 1943-1957* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), 21-47, 55-78; Joshua Freeman, "Delivering the Goods: Industrial Unionism during World War II," *Labor History*, 19 (fall 1978), 570-93.

14 I have relied heavily on Markowitz's analysis in *Rise and Fall*. See also J. Samuel Walker, *Henry A. Wallace and American Foreign Policy* (Westport, 1976); and Jerold A. Rosen, "Henry A. Wallace and American Liberal Politics," *Annals of Iowa*, 44 (fall 1978), 462-74.

15 Doenecke, *Not to the Swift*, 82-83, 164-65, 206, 212-26.

16 Rogin, 104-36. See also Cole, *Nye*, 140-49, 211-16.

17 Studies of Lewis and Wallace scarcely mention one another. See Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine, *John L. Lewis: A Biography* (New York, 1977); and Markowitz, *Rise and Fall*. Whatever the attitude of the UMWA leader, CIO-PAC initially provided Wallace with much of his organized support. See Markowitz, 88-89, 96-99; and Foster, 6, 46-48.

18 Markowitz, 65-74; Walker, 93-97.

19 On the changing nature of agrarian radicalism, see Rogin, 106, 134, 137-38, 189-91, 209-15, 262-69. See also Robert Griffith, "Old Progressives and the Cold War," *Journal of American History*, 66 (Sept. 1979), 334-47.

20 David M. Oshinsky traces the path of the CIO into its Cold War mold in "Labor's Cold War: The C.I.O. and the Communists," in Robert Griffith and Athan Theoharis, eds., *The Specter: Original Essays on the Cold War and the Origins of McCarthyism* (New York, 1974), 116-51.

21 Rogin argues that McCarthyism represented a fusion of traditional conservative opposition to domestic reforms with heightened ethnic sensitivity to international communism. This situation enabled conservative elites to mobilize a mass following. See pp. 52-58, 91-103, 134-36, 157-67, 216-60. See also Lubell, 141, 150-66. Mayer describes the way in which crisis conditions can force otherwise pragmatic conservatives into the hands of extremists in *Dynamics of Counterrevolution*, 54-55.

## Between the Wars: The Intellectual Climate of American Foreign Relations

NORMAN A. GRAEBNER

WHEN THE GUNS fell silent on the Western Front in November, 1918, American power, actual and potential, dominated the European scene. At the Versailles Conference, for the first time in history, an American diplomatist became a major arbiter in the affairs of the world. Historically, nations that dictated a peace carried the responsibility for its preservation. Because power and interests shift through time, the great treaties of history seldom survived the generations that created them. To perpetuate what they had wrought at Versailles, the victorious democracies had no choice but to integrate American power and leadership permanently into European politics. This challenge to national performance had not escaped American scholars and statesmen during the war's final months as they contemplated a proper postwar role for the United States in European affairs. Those concerned with world order had long identified American interests with international stability; in the future, they agreed, the United States, as the world's leading power, could not avoid commitments to preserve what mattered in the postwar treaty structure.

Those who advocated continued American leadership in world affairs had two policy concepts before them. One would seek to preserve the framework of the international system—the balance of power, employing force if necessary to prevent major changes in the established hierarchy of power while permitting a myriad of minor changes to occur under the assumption that not all change challenged the security or welfare of the United States. This approach to world order demanded essentially that the country maintain, in alliance with Britain and France, the preponderance of power that had triumphed over Germany. As the war approached its end, American diplomatist Lewis Einstein warned the government and people of the United States: "At no time even unknown to us, were European politics a matter of indifference to our vital interests, but if hitherto we were impotent to alter their march, a fortunate destiny preserved the existing balance independently of us . . . . We have today a distinct and legitimate duty in the family of great nations in contributing to preserve those elements which compose the balance of power, and to which we can only be blind at our later cost."<sup>1</sup> To sustain Europe's new equilibrium

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American policy would of necessity avoid the extreme goals of escaping all obligations abroad or identifying the nation's interests with the cause of humanity everywhere. Rather, postwar policy would attempt to define and protect a wide variety of specific historic and geographical interests in competition with peoples who would pursue traditional interests of their own with whatever means came to hand.

Another group, far more dominant in the country's foreign policy elite, preferred to place the nation's interest in world stability not on the altar of power but on the altar of human reason. This group looked less to precise, tangible goals, to be pursued through force and diplomacy, than to abstract, reasoned objectives such as peace and peaceful change, order, justice, and self-determination. Any world environment in which such purposes emerged triumphant would indeed serve the American interest admirably. Against such bulwarks of stability and the status quo, nations could alter the established order of power, or even the world's territorial arrangements, little if at all. For this foreign policy elite it seemed proper that the United States should take the lead in the twentieth-century search for non-power devices, such as arbitration and conciliation, a world court or a league of nations, as the only legitimate means for settling international disputes. Woodrow Wilson, who emerged in 1916 as the primary spokesman for American internationalism, sought above all to erase the historic notion that world stability rested on superior power committed to its defense, and to attach the status quo to "a general association of nations . . . [that would offer] mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike."<sup>2</sup>

President Wilson waged his public war on secret diplomacy, the balance of power, and the concept of national interest—three fundamental accoutrements of power politics—with sufficient success to eliminate them from the main currents of American thought, but without removing them from world politics. The great debate on League membership in 1919 ignored almost totally the concepts of interest, equilibrium, and alliance; it terminated abruptly all United States commitments to Europe. The country withdrew its power from the continent in the conviction either that the decisions made at Versailles, including the establishment of the League of Nations, would maintain world stability, or that any future breakdown of the peace need not concern the United States. Europe's recent experience had challenged the validity of both assumptions.

What promised a new age of competence in the conduct of foreign relations, with its corresponding guarantee of peace, was the anticipated democratization of diplomacy. Even in democratic states external affairs traditionally evolved outside the boundaries of legitimate public discourse. Foreign offices had determined the world's foreign policies; the masses could judge but not control them. After 1914, however, the failure of Europe's officialdom to prevent the Great War discredited the old diplomacy; never again would foreign relations

be the exclusive preserve of the professionals. The human sacrifice which the Great War had levied made it clear that future decisions would have public support or fail. In the United States the constitutional division of powers permitted, even encouraged, public and congressional discussion of external policies. Still, the perennial debates before 1914 had never engaged the American public in any systematic study of foreign affairs. After Versailles Western writers and statesmen anticipated the emergence of an educated public, prepared to exert its influence in behalf of a peaceful future. Democratically-controlled policies would be responsible; they would limit governmental actions to what the public regarded decent and proper. Elihu Root, elder statesman of the Republican party, promulgated this encouraging view of the public in the first issue of *Foreign Affairs* in 1922:

When foreign offices were ruled by autocracies or oligarchies the danger of war was in sinister purpose. When foreign affairs are ruled by democracies the danger of war will be in mistaken beliefs. The world will be the gainer by the change, for, while there is no human way to prevent a king from having a bad heart, there is a human way to prevent a people from having an erroneous opinion. That way is to furnish the whole people, as a part of their ordinary education, with correct information about their relations to other peoples, about the limitations upon their rights, about their duties to respect the rights of others, about what has happened and is happening in international affairs, and about the effects upon national life of the things that are done or refused as between nations; so that the people themselves will have the means to test misinformation and appeals to prejudice and passion based upon error.<sup>3</sup>

This vision of an informed nation, conscious of its interests and those of other peoples, exerting its will through democratic procedures, was an appealing one. "There is no guarantee of peace," declared Senator William E. Borah of Idaho, "like the guarantee which springs from the common sense of the people in those matters which contribute to peace or war."<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately the notion that public-based policies would attain unprecedented levels of wisdom and responsibility expected too much of both governmental and educative processes. Public opinion could neither formulate nor execute external policy; the public possessed no voice or institution through which it could act. Only with a widely distributed and understandable body of knowledge could it even discuss external issues intelligently. Where the country's citizens would secure that knowledge was nowhere apparent; they would be no wiser than the public of-

ficials and editors who instructed them. What troubled Root was the prospect that not all individuals who wielded influence would practice restraint, that political demagogues would seek popularity and newspapers would seek additional circulation by insulting foreign countries and involving the public politically and emotionally in external matters that transcended the historical interests of the United States and thereby defied the creation of genuine policy.<sup>5</sup>

Practicing politicians, sharing the post-Versailles euphoria, with its central assumption that power politics had vanished from international life, would logically deny that conditions abroad necessitated any special American responsibility for the maintenance of order. This welcome denial would merely reinforce the public's distrust of traditional diplomacy, its assumption of America's moral superiority, its disinterest in foreign commitments, and its preference for avoiding rather than facing the recurring challenges to international stability. At the same time the universal concern for peace would encourage opinion makers to exaggerate the importance, even the unique morality, of the status quo. It was true that any major disturbance of the treaty structure could endanger regional if not world stability. Still, the appealing conviction that only peaceful change could be legitimate would burden diplomacy not with the traditional management of change but with its total elimination. The only defense against such forms of overexpectation lay in the public's capacity to recognize and resist them. Unfortunately, the American people possessed no special competence to judge. Any national approach to world affairs that offered leadership without commitment would command overwhelming public approval.

American universities met the challenge of creating an informed, discerning public by introducing the new studies of diplomatic history and international politics. From the beginning the new intellectual efforts were utopian. Even as those engaged in them pursued projects designed to perpetuate the peace, they ignored the persistence of power politics in history and in the world around them. What dominated their thought was the Great War and their passionate desire to avoid the recurrence of such a catastrophe. It was not strange that wishing and generalization prevailed over any analysis of the ongoing realities of international life. The end of lasting and universal peace overwhelmed the problem of means. Woodrow Wilson once quieted the doubts of his adversaries who questioned the effectiveness of the League with the assurance: "If it won't work, it must be made to work."<sup>6</sup> Schemes guaranteeing a new international order, devoted largely to the task of rendering the League of Nations more effective, did not require explanations of how they would work simply because the consequences of failure were too disastrous to contemplate. This propensity of laudable purposes to cloud the importance of means led the economist Alfred Marshall, in another context, to compare utopian programs to the "bold facility of the weak player who will speedily solve the most difficult chess problems by taking on himself to move the black men as well as the white."<sup>7</sup>

## II

Americans, whether isolationists or internationalists, shared a deep concern for the peace and stability of post-Versailles Europe. What separated them was their perceptions of a desirable and necessary role for the United States in a peaceful and promising international order. For isolationists nothing in the nation's experience dictated the necessity of a permanent or continuous American involvement in European politics. The widespread disillusionment with the war itself merely reinforced this conviction. Too many Americans had expected too much of victory. Not satisfied with the preservation of the traditional order of power, they anticipated no less than President Wilson had promised—a new order, free of all assaults on peace and democracy. The disillusionment quickly focused on the country's wartime associates, Britain and France, whose leaders had warred so effectively on American neutrality and now refused to pay their countries' wartime debts to the United States. The powerful newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst reminded his readers that Britain had often been the target of American patriotism. Unable to discern any demonstrable gains from their wartime efforts, millions of Americans entered the 1920s determined to avoid all future European involvements. "We ask only to live our own life in our own way," declared California's Hiram W. Johnson in March, 1922, "in friendship and sympathy with all, in alliance with none."<sup>8</sup> For Indiana's Albert J. Beveridge the country's "divinely ordained mission [was] to develop and exercise, by friendship to all and partnership with none, a moral influence circling the globe."<sup>9</sup>

Isolationists recognized no danger to the nation's interests in their advocacy of American political and military detachment from Europe. Europe's problems, they charged, were not the concern of the United States; nor did the country carry any responsibility for Europe's peace. Isolationism would not prevent another European war; it would enable the United States to avoid it. Indeed, argued Beveridge, the European powers would carefully avoid any action that might involve the United States in their future conflicts. "After the incredible blunder of the German High Command in attacking us and thus forcing us into war," he asked, "does anybody imagine that any other nation hereafter at war with another nation will repeat that tragic folly?"<sup>10</sup> Isolationists admitted that the United States was not isolated from Europe commercially or intellectually; they insisted simply that the country could avoid the quarrels, intrigues, politics, ambitions, and animosities which had driven other countries to war for centuries.

Isolationists centered their attack on the League of Nations, a program for peace at once too ambitious and too threatening to national sovereignty. If the United States entered the League, declared Hiram Johnson, "I must abandon the lessons of my youth, which until this moment have been the creed of my

manhood, of American ideals, American principles, and American patriotism." Borah's distrust of the League was equally profound. To submit a vital issue to the decision of foreign powers, he complained, was nothing less than moral treason. As the Senate's leading proponent of isolationism, Borah insisted that he did not oppose cooperation with other nations. "What I have opposed from the beginning," he declared, "is any commitment of this nation to a given line of procedure in a future exigency, the facts as to which could not be known before the event." Congressman Ogden L. Mills of New York agreed that effective cooperation did not require prior commitments. "We believe," he said, "that the United States can better serve by maintaining her independence of action than by pooling her influence in advance."<sup>11</sup> Such isolationists never explained how the country could prepare for an emergency unless it had ordered its affairs with such possible exigencies in mind. Borah denied that cooperation and independence were incompatible. By setting a good example and limiting cooperation to voluntary behavior, the United States could exercise effective world leadership. For Borah, however, the United States could exert that leadership only if it stayed out of European affairs. "I do not think we can have here a great, powerful, independent, self-governing republic," he said, "and do anything else. I do not think it is possible for us to continue to be the leading intellectual and moral power in the world and do anything else."<sup>12</sup>

Anti-League sentiments controlled President Harding's policies toward Europe. At a celebration of his election at Marion, Ohio, Harding delivered his obituary to the League. "You didn't want a surrender of the U.S.A.," he reminded his fellow townsmen, "you wanted America to go on under American ideals. That's why you didn't care for the League *which is now deceased*."<sup>13</sup> In his inaugural Harding declared that the United States was "ready to associate with the nations of the world, great and small, for conference and counsel . . . [and] to participate in suggesting plans for mediation, conciliation, and arbitration." For Borah, Harding's commitment to associate was unnecessarily dangerous to the country's freedom of action. His verdict conformed to the nation's mood; thereafter the Republican administration exercised greater care. Until 1923 it refused to answer League communications. Shortly before his death that year Harding remarked: "I have no unseemly comment to offer on the League. If it is serving the world helpfully, more power to it. But it is not for us. The Senate has so declared, the Executive has so declared, the people have so declared. Nothing could be more decisively stamped with finality."<sup>14</sup> Apparently the anti-League forces had triumphed.

## III

Internationalism in the 1920s encompassed the pro-League forces who insisted that the United States redeem its pledges to the past and the future. League proponents, unlike the isolationists, argued that the United States would not avoid a future European war. Therefore the country would fulfill its obligation to its own and the world's peace by preventing, not merely by escaping, a breakdown of the peace. For editor Hamilton Holt, writing in *The Independent*, the single issue before the American people was whether or not the United States would play its part "in substituting cooperation for competition in international affairs [by joining the League]."<sup>15</sup> John Eugene Harley, professor of political science at the University of Southern California, explained that the League would maintain international order by making international law the rule of conduct. To achieve this purpose the League might require sanctions, but not war. "The desire for order as expressed by the public opinion of the world," he wrote, "is the true and ultimate force which will sustain the League in the effort to maintain order through international law."<sup>16</sup> Raymond B. Fosdick, briefly Under Secretary-General of the League and thereafter a New York lawyer, predicted in 1920 that the League would prevent war by making compulsory all the forces for peace that were absent in 1914—delay, discourse, arbitration, and law.<sup>17</sup> He, no less than others, assumed that all countries would follow League rules, that argument would dictate behavior, that governments, having argued the issues, would ultimately prefer any settlement to war. Should a crisis demand League intervention to prevent aggression, the Council, as a last resort, would recommend military force. But membership would not obligate any country to enter military or naval action.<sup>18</sup>

If League membership carried no military obligations, then its power to prevent aggression was moral or nonexistent. Indeed, it was the League's reliance on moral force that made American adherence so essential. Specifically, internationalists agreed, United States membership would guarantee the League its needed effectiveness by increasing its prestige and its command of world opinion, the only genuine foundation of peace. "The League lives by and through public opinion," noted author G. Lowes Dickinson reminded readers of *The New Republic* in October, 1923. "It has practically no other power. To refuse to mobilize this opinion, to damp it down, to pretend that it does not exist, is in effect to destroy it."<sup>19</sup> Yale economist Irving Fisher argued that United States adherence to the League would give the organization the moral influence it required to sustain international order. This country, he explained, was the world's "greatest reserve of moral power, with ideals . . . more unselfish than those of other countries and therefore [able to] exert a special moral influence against the ill-conceived and little restrained European scramble for spoils."<sup>20</sup>

Internationalists attributed the apparent successes of the League in the early 1920s to the growing force of world opinion. Fosdick noted in *The Atlantic* of August, 1922, that the League had settled the boundary dispute between Yugoslavia and Albania. "The method was effective," he wrote, "not because it represented force, but because it had behind it the *moral* judgment of civilization." Again Fosdick attributed Italy's retreat from Corfu in 1923 to the opinion of mankind, given cohesion and force by the League of Nations. Fisher arrived at the same conclusion. The small states, he wrote, "made their protests vociferously in the Assembly of the League, and public opinion throughout the world was quickly mobilized against Italy."<sup>21</sup> Internationalists pondered the additional triumphs which the moral leadership of the United States might have brought to the League. Franklin D. Roosevelt observed as early as August, 1920, that, except for the American rejection of League membership, Poland would not be fighting the Russians with its back to the wall. Had the United States entered the League, Fisher argued in 1924, "war would be outlawed, universal disarmament would be no longer a dream, and reparations and debts and balanced budget and currency stabilization and gigantic standing armies would be problems solved or on their way to solution."<sup>22</sup>

Still Republican leaders, following Harding's death, remained adamantly opposed to League membership. On October 23, 1924, President Coolidge explained his party's foreign policy. "We have," he averred, "a well defined foreign policy, known to all men who will give it candid consideration. It has as its foundation peace with independence. We have abstained from joining the League of Nations mainly for the purpose of avoiding political entanglements and committing ourselves to the assumption of the obligations of others, which have been created without our authority and in which we have no direct interest."<sup>23</sup> By 1924 the Coolidge administration had inaugurated a policy of cooperation with the League's humanitarian ventures. The president acknowledged the role of the United States in formulating the Dawes Plan of 1924 on German reparations. Under Republican leadership, observed Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes, the United States had achieved much for peace and humanity without entangling or injurious commitments. At its 1924 convention the Republican party reaffirmed Coolidge's decision to avoid League membership. "The Government," declared its platform, "has definitely refused membership in the League of Nations, and to assume any obligation under the Covenant of the League. On this we stand." The United States, continued the platform, would maintain both its independence and its concern for other nations "through cooperation without entangling alliances."<sup>24</sup> So thoroughly did Coolidge's victory reflect public approval of Republican foreign policy that the Democratic party dropped the League issue completely. The Republican conquest of the nation's mind on matters of external affairs was complete.

## IV

Consigned by adverse opinion to failure on the League issue, internationalists seized upon World Court membership as an alternate approach to effective international cooperation. Eventually the Court battle comprised the most determined internationalist counterattack of the decade. When in May, 1922, the Court officially opened for business, the noted American international law expert, John Bassett Moore, was among its eleven judges. Many anti-League Republicans such as Elihu Root shared the confidence of pro-League leaders in the World Court. Secretary of State Hughes pressed Harding to submit the question of Court membership to the Senate. To satisfy congressional isolationists, he suggested four reservations which would absolve the United States of all commitments to the League but would demand for the United States all powers on the Court enjoyed by League members. Harding proposed membership to Congress on these terms as early as February, 1923, but Borah, as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, opposed the plan as an overcommitment of American power and prestige to the League cause.<sup>25</sup> Both major parties endorsed Court membership in their 1924 platforms. Still anti-League isolationists in the Senate continued to stall, convinced that adherence to the World Court, a creation of the League, would gradually entrap the United States in the League itself. Coolidge argued for Court membership in his March, 1925, inaugural. "The weight of our enormous influence," he declared, "must be cast upon the side of a reign not of force, but of law and trial, not by battle, but by reason."<sup>26</sup> Finally, in December, 1925, when the issue of Court membership had won the support of peace societies, women's clubs, pro-League forces, countless mass meetings, and much of the press, the Senate agreed to act. Early in 1926 it approved membership by a vote of 76 to 17. To forestall an assault on the question of advisory opinions, Senator Claude A. Swanson of Virginia introduced a fifth reservation, which denied the Court the right to render an advisory opinion on any question touching the interests of the United States.<sup>27</sup> In response the Court demanded the right to impose reservations of its own. Coolidge acknowledged the impasse and, in November, 1926, announced that United States membership in the World Court had become a dead issue.

Unfortunately, the World Court, without compulsory jurisdiction or means of enforcement, was scarcely the agency to settle issues on which hinged the future of peace and war. Thus the great debate over Court membership which raged across the nation during the mid-twenties bore little relation to the realities of world politics. Court proponents viewed membership simply as a matter of moral obligation—the obligation of the country to support any movement or institution that contributed to peace. The *New York World* voiced the convictions of many editors when it declared: "President Harding's recommendation represents the shortest step forward that could be taken in the way of meet-



ing the nation's moral obligation to sustain the peace of the world." During the final Senate debates over membership, Swanson argued characteristically: "I am strongly persuaded from every moral consideration . . . that we should adhere to this World Court."<sup>28</sup> United States membership, argued Irving Fisher, would strengthen the Court's influence. "The Court has no sheriff except public opinion," he declared. "America's adhesion would double its authority in the minds of men."<sup>29</sup>

What made United States membership so appealing was the Court's alleged capacity, magnified by American support, to assert the primacy of law over force. The Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America appealed to its member congregations, "Pray and speak for the extension of the sway of law over force and for the wholehearted readiness on the part of our nation to play its part in bringing this about." By joining the World Court, Harding assured a St. Louis audience in July, 1923, the United States would promote the substitution of "reason for prejudice, law for obduracy, and justice for passion . . ."<sup>30</sup> Fisher reminded Americans that courts had displaced conflict in every field where they had been instituted. "It only remains," he added, "to apply this great principle between nations . . . to abolish war as an institution wholly and forever." Students of international law took the lead in urging the American people to accept their responsibility for promoting international justice through Court membership. Manley O. Hudson of Harvard University asked the nation to throw "the full weight of [its] moral influence [behind] a movement for the substitution of law for force in international affairs." Not even the absence of enforcement machinery seemed detrimental to the Court's effectiveness. "It is not unreasonable to believe," asserted Southern California's Harley, "that civilized nations will honor the awards of a tribunal which they have solemnly created to make such awards."<sup>31</sup> World opinion would enforce the Court's decrees.

Court membership, finally, would solidify the world's peace structure without any specific American obligation to a system of force. Herbert Hoover, secretary of commerce, reminded a Des Moines audience in April, 1923, that in joining the Court the United States would "enter into no obligations to use arms or take no commitment that limits our freedom of action."<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the United States, through Court membership, would undertake only two commitments: to participate in the selection of judges and to pay its share of the Court's expenses, estimated at forty thousand dollars per year. But whatever the annual cost of maintaining the Court, Congress would reserve the right to determine what the nation's share would be. During the final Senate debate, spokesmen for the Court insisted repeatedly that membership carried no national obligation except to the Court itself. As Senator Thomas A. Walsh of Montana declared, "We enter into no covenant to do or refrain from doing anything."<sup>33</sup> The battle over Court membership, like that over the League, revealed the nature of American internationalism in the 1920s. The United States

would support world peace, not through specific commitments to the defense of the Versailles settlement, but through the encouragement of any organization or procedure that promised to limit change in international life to peaceful processes.

Internationalists agreed that neither the League nor the World Court had confronted any major political issues; nor had they demonstrated any capacity to restrain a major power. "The League," noted *The Independent* in April, 1923, "is discreetly keeping its hands off crucial matters, and the 'balance of power,' which had been held up as a devilish thing, still goes on."<sup>34</sup> The cooperative effort was new, Fosdick reminded the skeptics. In time, he predicted, the League could become a "central rallying-point around which the forces of law and peace may gather and slowly develop new approaches to common dangers and new methods of common action." Similarly, journalist and historian Francis Hackett observed in July, 1924, that the League, given time, would grow into an effective organization. "The more complex the creature," he wrote, "the more helpless its youth. When the League's members recognize the full value of their creation, it will become incredibly strong."<sup>35</sup>

Realists, that tiny minority which challenged the decade's euphoria, saw no future in either the League or the World Court as guarantors of peace. Their reasoning was clear. Such international agencies, whatever their devotion to peaceful change, would always serve the status quo; they would never find a standard equally acceptable to all countries. No state dissatisfied with the distribution of power, resources, or territory would entrust its future to an international agency. The fallacy in the concept of peaceful change lay essentially in the fact that international disputes were overwhelmingly political, not judicial, in nature; their resolution would reflect power, not the judgments of deliberative bodies. For that reason the satisfied peoples would protect their world, not with law and peaceful procedures, but with superior force. "The League conception," warned H. H. Powers, an economist and student of European affairs, in 1924, "is that world order, as regards the nations, is static. The nations are finalities. They are to stay at home, avoid trespass, and maintain neighborly relations. . . . Mussolini and his like regard the world order as still dynamic. The nations are not finalities. The forces of aggression and absorption are perilously active, and the nation that assumes a passive attitude is doomed."<sup>36</sup> The impulse toward self-assertion would keep the world dynamic and sorely troubled. Those who shaped the public's perceptions of world events during the 1920s did not prepare the country to recognize this central warning. Little in their instruction challenged the notion that the United States would fulfill its obligations to international stability without power, commitments, or alliances.

## V

What made the Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact of 1928 attractive to American isolationists and internationalists alike was the absence of enforcement machinery and Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg's firm denial that the United States assumed any obligations under the pact. Many lauded the treaty's reliance on international morality; such reliance seemed to assure success with a minimum of risk. But Roland S. Morris, professor of international law at the University of Pennsylvania, wondered how a pact based on moral force alone could protect the peace. Speaking before the American Society of International Law in April, 1929, Morris questioned the pact's importance. ". . . I am not," he admitted, "unmindful of the *moral* obligations which are implied in such a strong statement of intention to avoid all war and to seek pacific means. But let us never forget that the legal import of a national or an international document is no measure whatever of its social or political potentialities."<sup>37</sup> For the more resolute internationalists, however, the Kellogg Pact opened new possibilities for binding the United States more closely to the European security system through active consultation with the League. David Hunter Miller, a drafter of the League Covenant, declared that the treaty "links the United States to the League of Nations as a guardian of peace; it makes the aim of that institution and the aims of our foreign policy in the largest sense identical. It is not too much to say that the Treaty in fact, though not in form, is a Treaty between the United States and the League."<sup>38</sup>

For other internationalists the Kellogg Pact's essential contribution to peace lay in its challenge to neutrality. Columbia University's Joseph P. Chamberlain reminded the American Society of International Law in 1929 that the pact gave nations both the opportunity and the right to stall aggression by pledging not to aid any treaty-breaking power. Similarly Quincy Wright, professor of international law at the University of Chicago, argued in 1930 that aggression against any state was an aggression against all, including the United States. If the pact imposed no obligation to act, it did not deny any country the right to help the victims of aggression. "By ratifying the Kellogg Pact," he concluded, "the United States gave up the rights of neutral trade with violators of the Pact and was relieved of the duties of neutrality for the benefit of such states . . ."<sup>39</sup> Clyde Eagleton, professor of government at New York University, insisted again that the United States would strengthen the Kellogg Pact most effectively by rejecting the rights of neutrality and threatening sanctions against would-be aggressors. "The world," he wrote, "stands waiting for us to translate our frequent words in behalf of peace into some form of actual support for peace . . . . If we want peace, as we have said in the [Kellogg Pact], we must support peace when the Pact is broken. We must consult and cooperate with other states to that end."<sup>40</sup> Eventually those who favored peace enforcement advocated

consultation, nonrecognition, and neutrality revision. These responses to aggression did not imply any commitment to the direct use of force; nor did they receive the support of the American public or congressional isolationists.<sup>41</sup>

Henry L. Stimson, secretary of state after March, 1929, believed that the Kellogg Pact carried the potential for American collaboration in a system of collective security. Two issues in 1932 presented Stimson the opportunity to commit the United States to a policy of consultation under the Kellogg Pact. The first was the Geneva Disarmament Conference; the second, the Japanese assault on Manchuria. What threatened the success of the Geneva Conference was the question of French security. Article Five of the Versailles Treaty had assumed that the limitations on German armaments would lead to "the initiation of a general limitation of the armaments of all nations." The German delegation at Geneva argued that Germany's forced disarmament was part of a broader agreement that eventually all the major powers would disarm. The French agreed, but insisted that France had accepted the obligation to disarm under the assumption that the United States would enter the League of Nations and that Britain and the United States together would guarantee French security.<sup>42</sup> Stimson recognized the French challenge to American leadership; only the United States could break the deadlock between the German demand for equality and the French demand for security. How Stimson could satisfy France's need for security was not clear. He was not free to offer France an alliance or even American membership in the League. Yet the Kellogg Pact seemed to imply an obligation to consult in the event of a threatened aggression. French Premier Pierre Laval had sought a consultative pledge during his trip to Washington in the autumn of 1931, but the Hoover administration regarded the promise of consultation a dangerous departure from American isolationist tradition.<sup>43</sup> It avoided the commitment.

Before Stimson could resolve the question of French security he faced a more urgent challenge in Manchuria. There Japanese aggression threatened what remained of China's political and military control over a rich province. At stake in the Manchurian crisis was not America's vital interest but rather the credibility of the entire post-Versailles international treaty structure that supposedly had eliminated force from relations among the states. Hoover and Stimson were faced with the challenge of making United States will effective in Japanese-Chinese relations without resorting to either economic or military sanctions. As early as November, 1931, Stimson contemplated a resort to moral sanctions. He concluded that month that it might be wise "to outlaw Japan and let her sizzle [under a Chinese boycott] and all the moral pressure of the world."<sup>44</sup> On January 7, 1932, Stimson, in his first effort to terminate Japanese expansion through moral sanctions, sent identical notes to Japan and China declaring that the United States could not "admit the legality of any situation *de facto* nor does it intend to recognize any treaty or agreement entered into between those Gov-

ernments" that might impair either the treaty rights of the United States or the territorial and administrative integrity of China.<sup>45</sup> Both Hoover and Stimson believed that the note would be effective. Hoover declared in January that it had mobilized world opinion against Japan and would stand as one of the country's great state papers.

Japan, undaunted by Stimson's moral strictures, continued its assault on China. On January 28, 1932, the Japanese invaded Shanghai. Stimson was outraged. He hoped, he confided to his diary, that the Japanese would not withdraw until the United States could pass firm judgment against the new aggression.<sup>46</sup> "As I reflected upon it," he recalled later, "it seemed to me that in future years I should not like to face a verdict of history to the effect that a government to which I belonged had failed to express itself adequately upon such a situation."<sup>47</sup> On February 16 the League Council supported the nonrecognition doctrine and called upon Japan to fulfill its obligations to peaceful procedures. Thereupon Stimson leveled his second moral blast at Japan in the form of an open letter to Senator Borah, dated February 23, 1932. Nothing, declared Stimson, had occurred to challenge the validity of the Kellogg Pact. The world had taken such action, he reminded the Japanese, "for the purpose of aligning the conscience and public opinion of the world in favor of a system of orderly development by the law of nations, including a settlement of all controversies by methods of justice and peace instead of by arbitrary force." Stimson warned Tokyo that nonrecognition, if adopted by the other powers, "will eventually lead to the restoration to China of rights and titles of which she may have been deprived."<sup>48</sup> Never before had Stimson made such extravagant claims for the coercive power of nonrecognition. Still Japan continued to move. During March the Japanese smuggled Henry Pu Yi, the former emperor of China, into Manchuria and installed him as the head of the new Japanese-controlled puppet state of Manchukuo.

Throughout the spring and summer of 1932 Stimson concentrated on the concept of consultation, convinced that an American pledge to consult could resolve the Franco-German quarrel over equality in armaments at Geneva as well as the Manchurian crisis. A trip to Europe in April reaffirmed his suppositions. Upon his return to Washington, Stimson assured Hoover that an American promise to consult under the Kellogg Pact would break the Geneva deadlock. For Hoover the potential political price in the forthcoming election was too high. Borah agreed to Stimson's scheme, provided that the United States retained the right not to consult. Both the Republican and Democratic parties wrote into their platforms the principle of consultation as a fulfillment of the nation's pledge to uphold the Kellogg Pact. Still Hoover opposed any public commitment to consultation.<sup>49</sup> Despite the president's hesitancy, Stimson, in July, prepared a major speech on the Kellogg Pact. The Secretary noted his intention in his diary of July 20:

During the morning I was developing some more of my plans for the future, particularly with regard to the Far East. The Japanese are still pushing on with their imperialist plan. It is evident that we are going to be up against the issue this fall. I am trying to think out ahead what to do . . . This speech that I am at work on is really for the purpose of laying the foundation stone for the whole policy by giving my view of the Kellogg Pact and the importance of the concerted action of the nations under it.<sup>50</sup>

After a successful maneuver to secure an invitation from the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, Stimson delivered his speech before that body on August 8, 1932. "War between nations," he declared, "was renounced by the signatories of the Briand-Kellogg Treaty. This means it has become illegal throughout practically the entire world . . . Hereafter when two nations engage in armed conflict either or both of them must be wrongdoers — violators of this general treaty law. We no longer draw a circle about them and treat them with the punctilios of the duelist's code. Instead we denounce them as law-breakers."<sup>51</sup> Stimson implored the nations to strengthen the Kellogg Pact by adding their words of condemnation to those expressed by the United States. "Moral disapproval," he said, "when it becomes the disapproval of the whole world, takes on a significance hitherto unknown in international law. For never before has international opinion been so organized and mobilized." Stimson reviewed his repeated efforts to preserve peace in the Far East, then moved to his central theme: "Another consequence which followed this development of the Briand-Kellogg Treaty . . . is that consultation between the signatories of the Pact when faced with the threat of its violation becomes inevitable."<sup>52</sup>

Stimson received the anticipated approval for his peaceful disposition of the challenges confronting the nation. Few Americans regarded consultation as a dangerous assault on American independence. In his acceptance speech before the Republican convention that summer, Hoover declared that the United States would, "under the spirit of the pact, consult with other nations in times of emergency to promote world peace."<sup>53</sup> The *Times* of London accepted Stimson's speech as the necessary guarantee of European security which a disarmament agreement required. "His main point, the point upon which the world will seize," noted the *Times*, "is that the pact . . . necessarily carries with it the implication of consultation. There can be no doubt that, given this interpretation, the Briand-Kellogg Pact can be made, as Mr. Stimson says, 'an effective reality' protecting the peace of the world."<sup>54</sup> Writing in the April, 1933, issue of *Foreign Affairs*, Stimson asserted that the Hoover administration, in supporting the Kellogg Pact, had made it "a living force of law in the world."<sup>55</sup>

Stimson's August 8 speech carried the promise of American cooperation to its

highest point of the decade. Clearly the secretary shared the internationalist conviction that the preponderance of power, placed firmly on the side of peace, would prevent dissatisfied countries from employing force to alter the status quo. But Stimson's warning to would-be aggressors that the bulk of the world's power opposed them failed to rescue the Geneva Conference or halt Japanese aggression. Yale's Edwin M. Borchard challenged Stimson's assumptions regarding collective security. No country, he charged, had agreed to combined action; nor would the world ever succeed in stopping aggression with consultative pacts. For Borchard the world would not have peace until it discovered a rational approach to change. Any peace structure which sought merely to perpetuate the status quo, he predicted, would ultimately collapse. By accepting aggression as a fact of life the old system had achieved occasional peace; the new system, bound to the defense of the status quo, would not achieve even that.<sup>56</sup>

## VI

Nothing in the Manchurian experience prepared the United States to confront the burgeoning aggressions of Adolph Hitler and Benito Mussolini after 1935. Recognizing no clear and inescapable interest in Europe's Versailles order, politicians, journalists, and even scholars sustained the illusion that diplomatic and military isolation from Europe's strife could still guarantee the nation's peace with a minimum of risk. What separated Americans in their response to the Nazi challenge was not their desire to avoid war but their varying perceptions of the price that such avoidance would demand. Isolationists assumed that continued peace would require its price in diminished trade and a changing international order. Many agreed that Versailles had imposed unfair restrictions on Germany; the democracies, therefore, could serve their interests more effectively through treaty revision than through sanctions against Germany, which would save neither the treaty nor the peace. Isolationist Senator Gerald P. Nye insisted that the American people would not "consciously endorse a war which had no other object than to maintain the particular status quo which was established at Versailles."<sup>57</sup> Isolationists after 1935 favored preparedness that would defend the Western Hemisphere. There the Republic could flourish without regard to what happened in the outside world.

Some American and European experts responded to the threat of aggression with more frequent appeals to collective security. In 1934 and 1935 the Collective Security Committee of the League-sponsored International Studies Conference met in London. The committee sought some formula that would enable the United States to discard neutrality in favor of collaboration. In August, 1935, C. A. W. Manning, of the University of London, delivered a lecture on collective security at the Geneva Institute of International Relations. "I sus-

pect," he declared, "[the term collective security] was invented, quite recently, as a sly means of suggesting to the more 'soft-boiled' Americans that somehow their country, in signing the Kellogg Pact, had inadvertently and against its desires assumed a quasi-membership in the League."<sup>58</sup>

Strangely, those who advocated collective security almost invariably regarded it as a substitute for power politics. They assumed that the preponderance of nations, dedicated to preserving the status quo, could prevent aggression without war. Sir Alfred Zimmern, the noted British publicist and professor of international relations at Oxford, defined collective security as "*the safety of all by all.*" Happily, for him, the free, constitutional, and democratic states which he trusted controlled the bulk of the world's resources; through cooperative economic policies they could defend their universe against aggression without compromise or war. Denna Frank Fleming, of Vanderbilt University, writing in November, 1937, insisted that the United States take its place at the center of a collective security system, whether the commitment be to the League or to an alliance. But he denied that collective security would lead to war. "No collective action taken by a preponderance of the nations against an aggressor," he wrote, "can hereafter be legally called war, nor be morally considered as war." He agreed with Zimmern that preponderant economic power, if used effectively, would prevent aggression without the danger of war.<sup>59</sup> Clyde Eagleton, in a speech at Harvard in December, 1937, agreed that collective action did not mean war. "Collective security," he explained, "means the combination *omnium contra unum*—of the community against the lawbreaker, whoever he may be." Such a combination of all countries would render aggression futile; thereafter, Eagleton wrote, "no state would have to demand the blood of its mothers' sons. . . . An international police force recruited by volunteer efforts would be sufficient."<sup>60</sup>

Those who advocated collective security through the League generally denied that League action need involve the United States in the politics of Europe or Asia. James T. Shotwell, of Columbia University, insisted in 1936 that the world could sustain the peace no better "than by maintaining an international organ of cooperative pacification. The League is that one body." For Shotwell, typically, collective defense under the League would require only a regional commitment. Edwin DeWitt Dickinson, professor of international law at the University of California, argued that League sanctions, if organized regionally, would eliminate the United States from a European or Asian security system. Dickinson presented his formula for global security at the University of Chicago in June, 1936:

Collective security may encompass the globe without universalizing every sanctioning device. In our time the universal league of nations will be a league of consultation and co-operation . . . fortified

by a sanctioning procedure which supplements universal commitments with regional undertakings graduated with due regard for the geographical position of members of the international community. As regards the assurance of collective security, this probably means that we shall have a league of nations for Europe within the universal league.

For Fleming also the League's collective security system would not commit the United States or even the European powers to the protection of peace everywhere. Geographic safety permitted a graduated responsibility. Those most directly endangered by aggression would carry the major responsibility for opposing it. More distant countries would fulfill their obligations by applying economic sanctions. It was not strange that critics of collective security, such as Borchard, predicted that the system would always fail. "In practice," he wrote, ". . . the collectivists do not remain collected and . . . the divergence of their interests is disclosed as soon as they are asked to act." Nations, he suggested, would never defend interests other than their own.<sup>61</sup>

Roosevelt and his secretary of state, Cordell Hull, desired a formula that would convey their deep concern for Europe's stability even while it permitted the United States to avoid all responsibility for its preservation. Hull perfected a uniquely American tactic for upholding the status quo by urging aggressors to follow the treaty-abiding example of the United States. He called on all countries to observe faithfully their international agreements and to modify them, if necessary, "by orderly processes carried out in a spirit of mutual helpfulness and accommodation." How appeals to international law and the precepts of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which avoided both commitments and risk, could be effective in preventing aggression was not clear. In the past, nonrecognition and the enunciation of principles had served only as a device to escape responsibility for what occurred.

As Europe drifted toward war, Roosevelt concluded from time to time that he might display world leadership, without accepting any unwanted commitments, by calling an international conference. Such a conference, conforming to Hull's emphasis on orderly and peaceful procedures, would search for the principles whereby nations might resolve their differences through mutual agreement. Unfortunately, this reliance on rules of conduct, with its concomitant burden of eliminating Hitler's demands totally without the necessity of war, rendered United States diplomacy irrelevant. Hitler had warned the democracies that he would ignore any efforts at collective diplomacy. Ambassador to Poland John Cudahy reminded Roosevelt in January, 1937, that any intervention "without some specific remedy for the difficulties over here would not only be unavailing but would be a mistake from the viewpoint of Ameri-

can prestige."<sup>62</sup> Only if Roosevelt were prepared to address Germany's demands directly, Cudahy concluded, would the effort achieve anything.

Throughout 1937 Roosevelt toyed with a variety of conference proposals. Finally, in January, 1938, he presented to the British government a proposal for an international conference to work out principles of international conduct, disarmament and trade.<sup>63</sup> Those principles would give Hitler the choice of accepting the limitations imposed on Germany by the treaty system or defying that system through force and accepting the risks of that decision. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, convinced that the challenge of Hitler and Mussolini required a series of specific settlements, could find no solution to Europe's problems in Roosevelt's proposal. He rejected it. "The plan," he wrote in his diary, "appears to me fantastic and likely to excite the derision of Germany and Italy. They might even use it to postpone conversations with us and if we were associated with it they would see in it another attempt on the part of the democratic bloc to put the dictators in the wrong."<sup>64</sup> Negotiations with Germany and Italy, ran the basic theme of the prime minister's reply, required some concrete bases of agreement. Britain, therefore, would recognize the *de jure* Italian conquest of Abyssinia and in time would propose similar measures to satisfy German aspirations. Chamberlain suggested that Roosevelt delay his conference call while the London government tackled some of the specific questions in European politics.<sup>65</sup>

Roosevelt's second message, withdrawing his project, clarified the depth of his tactical disagreement with Chamberlain and demonstrated again the American dedication to peaceful changes and the preservation of the status quo. He reminded the prime minister that the *de jure* recognition of Italy's claim to Abyssinia would undermine the efforts of other countries to defend their territories against aggression. Specifically, noted Roosevelt, it might have a harmful effect "upon the nature of the peace terms which Japan might demand from China." He warned, moreover, that a surrender of the principle of nonrecognition would seriously damage public opinion in the United States. The American people would support measures of international cooperation only if they were "destined to re-establish and maintain the principles of international law and morality."<sup>66</sup> In Washington Hull reminded British Ambassador Sir Ronald Lindsay that United States policy rested primarily on moral precepts and "the sanctity of agreements and the preservation of international law, both of which rest on this moral foundation. . . ."<sup>67</sup> The desperado nations, he warned Lindsay, would herald British recognition of the Italian conquest as a virtual ratification of their treaty-breaking policies. The secretary admitted that the policy of nonrecognition, as one of indefinite duration, presented difficulties; he insisted, however, that a policy so central to the maintenance of international order could be modified only by general agreement among the nations of the world.

Hitler began his assault on the territorial provisions of the Versailles Treaty with the *Anschluss* of Austria in March, 1938. Hull's response was predictable. "It is our profound conviction," he wrote, "that the most effective contribution we, as a nation sincerely devoted to peace, can make . . . is to have this country respected throughout the world for integrity, justice, goodwill, strength, and unswerving loyalty to principles." The State Department's official pronouncement on Hitler's annihilation of Czechoslovakia a year later differed only in language from Hull's response to the Austrian *Anschluss*:

This government . . . cannot refrain from making known this country's condemnation of the acts which have resulted in the temporary extinguishment of the liberties of a free and independent people. . . . The position of the government of the United States has been consistently clear. It has emphasized the need for respect for the sanctity of treaties and the pledged word, and for nonintervention by any nation in the domestic affairs of other nations; and it has . . . expressed its condemnation of a policy of military aggression.

Several days later Hull reminded the press of America's role in European affairs. "We in this country," he said, "have striven, particularly in recent years, and we shall continue to strive, to strengthen the threatened structure of world peace by fostering in every possible way the rule of law. . . ."68 For an isolationist nation the merit of such internationalism lay in its total irrelevance to the existing conditions in international life.

With the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact on August 24, 1939, what remained of Europe's Versailles structure began to crumble. Roosevelt met the challenge to peace by addressing a message to King Victor Emmanuel of Italy, inviting the Italian government to frame specific proposals for a solution of the Danzig crisis. In London Ambassador Joseph Kennedy advised the president, if he contemplated any action in behalf of peace, to work on the Polish government.<sup>69</sup> Assistant Secretary of State Adolf A. Berle wondered how Washington might word a strong message to Poland, for the Nazi-Soviet Pact granted western Poland to Germany and eastern Poland to Russia. The message, wrote Berle, would need to begin: "In view of the fact that your suicide is required, kindly oblige etc." Britain, Washington assumed, wanted the United States to do what it could not do. "As we saw it here," noted Assistant Secretary Jay Pierrepont Moffat, "it merely meant that they wanted us to assume the responsibility of a new Munich and to do their dirty work for them."<sup>70</sup> Roosevelt refused to arrange what might have led to the sellout of another country.

Again on August 24 Roosevelt responded to the accumulating pressures by

addressing messages to Hitler and President Ignacy Moscicki of Poland, urging them to settle their differences through negotiation, arbitration, or conciliation. Berle discounted the president's effort. "These messages," he recorded in his diary, "will have about the same effect as a valentine sent to somebody's mother-in-law out of season, and they have all that quality of naiveté which is the prerogative alone of the United States. Nevertheless, they ought to be sent. The one certain thing in this business is that no one will be blamed for making any attempt, however desperate, at preserving peace." As the European situation continued to disintegrate, Washington focused its attention on London, hoping that Britain might still avert war by negotiating a Danzig settlement. "There really is not much for us to do other than wait," Moffat observed on August 28. "What trumps we had were long since played."<sup>71</sup> Chamberlain, Kennedy reported, doubted that Danzig was worth a war and hoped that Poland would compromise. But no Polish officials would follow the footsteps of Czech leaders to their destruction. Hitler's invasion of Poland on September 1 dragged Britain and France into war without any assurance of support from the United States. The promising world of Versailles, resting on the preponderance of allied power, now lay in ruins.

Throughout the crisis years of the 1930s Roosevelt and his advisers assumed that in a rational environment the highest interests of nations would automatically converge on the question of peace. In rejecting war a government had no choice but to accept the limits imposed on it by the world's treaty structure. It was logical, therefore, that Roosevelt and Hull would direct their major diplomatic effort toward the goal of impressing on all governments their obligations to honor their international agreements. Tragically, the status quo that Washington sought to preserve did not serve the interests of all countries equally. The effort to prevent change in the Versailles order served the interests of the United States and the Western democracies quite as admirably as the destruction of that order would serve the interests of other, less satisfied countries. The rigid principle of peaceful change based world politics not on the rights conveyed by strength and efficiency but on the rights of possession. This would-be utopia formed the bulwark of an unchanging order.

Writers on world affairs, no less than national leaders, examined the critical problem of peace, stability, and change in international society. Scholars agreed that peace assigned no special merit to the status quo. Shotwell observed accurately that the central problem confronting international relations was "the need for a more flexible structure than that which identifies justice with the *status quo*." It was better to permit change, even through force, echoed Borchard, than to "endow the existing *status quo* with moral sanctity." To uphold a decaying status quo, he noted, might be "anything but constructive."<sup>72</sup> Dickinson warned that the organization of effective sanctions dared not take precedence over "the development of procedures for orderly modification of the *sta-*

*tus quo.*" In emphasizing the need for peaceful change, Dickinson added: "If security for the society of nations implies an assurance of orderly progress, collective security may be defined as co-operation in the attainment of such an assurance." Eagleton observed that the community of nations would never prevent war until it provided individual states with peaceful procedures to remedy injustices. "If force is used merely to maintain the *status quo*, to preserve for the *beati possidentes* their happy situation," he predicted, "the system is bound to fail."<sup>73</sup>

Unfortunately the problem of peaceful change among sovereign nations defied solution. In practice any system of collective security would seek order rather than change. For British historian Edward Hallett Carr, collective security was merely a device of the status quo powers to prevent unwanted change in the international system. Carr observed in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (1939):

Just as the ruling class in a community prays for domestic peace, which guarantees its own security and predominance, . . . so international peace becomes a special vested interest of predominant Powers. In the past, Roman and British imperialism were commended to the world in the guise of the *pax Romana* and the *pax Britannica*. Today, when no single Power is strong enough to dominate the world, and supremacy is vested in a group of nations, slogans like "collective security" and "resistance to aggression" serve the same purpose of proclaiming an identity of interest between the dominant group and the world as a whole in the maintenance of peace.<sup>74</sup>

Against such an alliance of status quo powers change would come through force or not at all. Ultimately the lack of machinery for peaceful change gave the satisfied powers no choice but to cling to the treaty structure, whatever their limited will to defend it. Fleming exposed this critical dilemma confronting the democracies. He admitted that the status quo was imperfect, but, he predicted, any effort to smash the map of Europe would produce enough slaughter and destruction to render justice even more elusive. "Sometimes," he wrote, "a European *status quo* must be accepted as sufficiently definitive to be preferable to any continental war designed to end it. . . ."<sup>75</sup> Unfortunately, the Western preference for the status quo did not recommend the means for preserving it.

Students of international relations, no less than spokesmen of the Roosevelt administration, defined a proper American response to aggression not in terms of the world that existed but in terms of the world that they thought should exist—one that could, through rules of proper international conduct, resolve the conflicting purposes among the satisfied and dissatisfied powers peacefully and without change. Tragically, the realities of European politics were differ-

ent; the choices confronting the democracies were limited, immediate, and inescapable. Europe's arbitrary boundaries, no less than Europe's peace, rested on strength of arms. The makers of Versailles had either to revise those boundaries as time passed through diplomatic procedures or keep potential aggressors weak by force. They did neither, preferring to behave on the assumption that they could protect their privileged positions without sacrificing their freedom in binding defensive guarantees or accepting a new European order of power. Having abjured the historic courses available to them, they would now defend what remained of their universe through the very alliances and destruction they had sought to avoid.

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## Appendix

### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

GERALD PRENTICE NYE was born December 19, 1892, in Hortonville, Wisconsin. After graduating from high school he engaged in newspaper work in Hortonville (1911-14), in Creston and Des Moines, Iowa (1914-15), and in Fryburg and Cooperstown, North Dakota (1915-19, 1919-25). He married Anna Margaret Munch in 1916. They had three children.

North Dakota's governor appointed him to the U.S. Senate to fill a vacancy in November, 1925, but Senate opposition delayed his seating until January, 1926. He was elected senator as a Republican in a special election held in June, 1926, and won reelection in the regular November elections of 1926, 1932, and 1938. From 1934 to 1936 he chaired the Senate's Special Committee Investigating the Munitions Industry. In 1940 he was divorced and married Arda Marguerite Johnson. They had three children.

Nye failed to win reelection in 1944, and in a June, 1946, special election he failed in another Senate bid. Maintaining his home in Chevy Chase, Maryland, he organized a firm in 1946 which aided business and governmental units in the handling and microfilming of their records. He headed the firm until its demise in 1960. He died in Washington, D.C., July 17, 1971.

ROBERT ELKINGTON WOOD was born in Kansas City, Missouri, June 13, 1879. After graduating from West Point in 1900, he served as an army officer in the Philippines, in Montana, at West Point, and, from 1905 to 1915, in the Canal Zone. He married Mary Butler Hardwick in 1908; they had five children. Wood retired from the army as a major in 1915 and accepted jobs with Du Pont and then General Asphalt, but in 1917 he reentered the army. He served in France and then in Washington as acting quartermaster general, retiring in 1919 with the rank of brigadier general.

In 1919 Wood became a Montgomery Ward executive. He joined Sears, Roebuck as vice-president in 1924, and he became Sears' president in 1928. When Wood joined the firm, Sears was solely a mail-order house, whose sales had declined because the automobile had made retail stores accessible to rural residents formerly dependent upon mail-order houses. By the time Wood left the Sears presidency in 1939, Sears maintained over 500 retail stores as well as its mail-order operation, and it was the largest merchandiser in America. Wood was Sears's chairman of the board from 1939 until 1954 and a director until 1968. He died in Lake Forest, Illinois, November 6, 1969.

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