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The ANTIWAR DILEMMA of the FARMER-LABOR PARTY

GEORGE W. GARLID

WRITING IN 1946, Eric Sevareid recaptured the atmosphere of his years as a student at the University of Minnesota. He described the world view that he had shared with other liberals during the middle thirties. Most revealing is his profound sense of having been caught up in a historical perspective which later he could neither accept nor explain.¹

For many Minnesotans the 1930s were years when convictions concerning world affairs were held dogmatically. They were years when occasionally these convictions were undermined and gradually altered. They were years when the all-pervasive commitment to peace made impermanent allies of individuals clinging to disparate views. They were years when Americans

often were, in the words of Reinhold Niebuhr, complacent "about evils, remote from our lives."² Finally, they were years when the revisionist thesis won its widest acceptance.

Sevareid and his fellow students were ashamed that their fathers and uncles had accepted the official propaganda during World War I. Many took the Oxford oath; still others agitated to end compulsory military drill at the university. Sevareid recalled a campus meeting at which the antiwar oath was debated wildly by two or three hundred students. A vote of those assembled indicated nearly unanimous approval. In 1934, after a week of antiwar agitation at Carleton College, four hundred students voted neither to fight in nor to support any aggressive war. The Optional Drill League at the University of Minnesota was organized as early as 1926 and received consistent support from the *Minnesota Daily*. Two weeks before the regents moved to make drill optional, a large antiwar meeting was held on the campus to coincide with the annual R.O.T.C. parade. Fifteen organizations and 1,500 students took part.³

Sevareid believed that "war came from the economic system, from the conspiratorial efforts of a few occult groups, and

¹ See Eric Sevareid, *Not So Wild A Dream*, 59-65 (New York, 1946).

² Reinhold Niebuhr, "Some Things I Have Learned," in *Saturday Review*, 48:23 (November 6, 1965).

³ Sevareid, *Not So Wild A Dream*, 60; James Gray, *The University of Minnesota, 1851-1951*, 368 (Minneapolis, 1951). See Committee on Militarism in Education, *Breaking the War Habit* (October 1, 1934), a pamphlet in the Brin (Fanny Fligelman) Papers, Box 12. All manuscripts cited in this article are in the Minnesota Historical Society. See also *Farmer-Labor Leader* (St. Paul), March 15, 1934, p. 1; *Minnesota Daily* (Minneapolis), May 19, May 24, 1934, both on p. 1.

from ignorant distrust and fear between peoples." The sole corrective lay in exposure, in changing the system, and in creating trust among nations. Liberals were intensely suspicious of the military. They believed the professional soldiers "wanted war, enjoyed war."⁴ The military establishment was the most hated pillar of the existing order. Niebuhr, writing in 1965, described this response, which he had shared, as "an almost neurotic neutralism."⁵

Nor was this view confined to a small group of students. The leaders of the Farmer-Labor party held similar sentiments. It was Governor Floyd B. Olson and Mrs. Anna O. Determan, an Olson appointee to the board of regents, who succeeded ultimately in ending compulsory military training at the University of Minnesota.⁶ As a depression governor, Olson naturally exhibited little interest in foreign policy. When he did express opinions on the subject, his position was typical of that held by other liberals in the state. He assailed the munitions makers and alleged that the profit motive was behind all propaganda for war. Shortly before his death in 1936 he wrote Senator Elmer A. Benson praising the latter's efforts in the struggle for rigid neutrality legislation. Olson told Benson that he "wouldn't trade the life of one youth for the whole damned 'freedom of the seas.'"⁷ He suggested that peace would be well worth the price of subsidizing any American business adversely affected by a rigid embargo. He advised Benson that he believed in absolute neutrality decreed by Congress with the president having no discretionary powers. It is of course impossible to tell what Olson's position might have been had he lived. His pragmatic approach to politics suggests that he never would have clung to the isolationist position as tenaciously as did Senator Henrik Shipstead or Senator Ernest Lundeen.⁸

Speculation aside, Olson's position in the thirties was consonant with the intensification of isolationist sentiment in Minnesota. It is impossible to assess accurately the extent to which Minnesotans accepted the

revisionist position, but it is reasonably certain that large numbers fell under its influence. When Eric Sevareid recalled that he and his friends had plowed through Sidney B. Fay's *Origins of the World War* (1928) and were convinced that there were no basic issues underlying the conflict and that with a little intelligence and forbearance the war could have been averted, he spoke for thousands in the state who were certain that the war had been a mistake.⁹

THE FARMER-LABOR party, having had its genesis in the climate of fear and ultra-patriotism which marked the war years, long had viewed the struggle as an egregious departure from the American tradition. Since the early twenties the party had been steeped in revisionism. Its representatives in Congress had opposed the mildest efforts in the direction of internationalism. They had fought for reduced military expenditures.

⁴ Sevareid, *Not So Wild A Dream*, 63.

⁵ Niebuhr, in *Saturday Review*, 48:23.

⁶ The campaign against compulsory military drill was initiated in 1925 by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. A Minnesota Committee on Militarism in Education was organized in 1926. The original committee of twenty-four was composed largely of prominent Twin Cities clergymen and included several women active in the peace movement. In the late twenties and early thirties attempts to eliminate compulsory drill at the university were blocked by the state legislature, but on June 18, 1934, the board of regents, acting upon a resolution introduced by Mrs. Determan, voted 6 to 5 in favor of optional drill. The National Committee on Militarism in Education gave significant credit to Governor Olson and Mrs. Determan but noted that the persistent efforts of Minnesota's numerous opponents of compulsory drill should not be overlooked. See *Breaking the War Habit*.

⁷ See George H. Mayer, *The Political Career of Floyd B. Olson*, 272 (Minneapolis, 1951); Floyd B. Olson to Elmer A. Benson, February 4, 1936, Benson Papers.

⁸ It is significant that Governor Olson's close friend and personal secretary, Vince A. Day, later played an active role in the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. Howard Y. Williams, who was very active in the Farmer-Labor party in the 1930s, has expressed his belief that Olson would have abandoned the isolationist position. Interview with Williams, November 9, 1965.

⁹ Sevareid, *Not So Wild A Dream*, 62.

EXTRA!

The Minnesota Daily

The World's Largest College Newspaper

MONDAY, JUNE 18, 1934.

Al Koeck, Arne Sevareid, Editors

COMPULSORY DRILL KILLED BY REGENTS

By Arnold Sevareid

Compulsory military drill at the University of Minnesota is dead.

It died this morning.

The board of regents killed it with a vote of 6 to 4.

The resolution to abolish compulsory drill and to continue it as an optional feature of the school's curriculum was made by Arne Sevareid, the only woman member of the board.

Mrs. Sevareid was appointed to the board by Governor Floyd Olson last winter.

The resolution came as a surprise move. There apparently had been no knowledge of it among the many outsiders interested in this highly controversial question.

The resolution, if it takes for

becomes effective next

moves again

years

The other reason is that some body omitted his vote. Why it was would not be ascertained for certain, but the rumor is that the issue was Mr. Wilson.

Last fall a similar vote was taken on the question and the board voted to retain the compulsory feature by seven to five.

So that matter stood during the second year. A new commissioner of the army came to, Colonel Fredlund, and the school's military service continued their work as in former years. But the agitation went on by family members by church and peace organizations by individual students, and by the *Minnesota Daily*, which has waged a fight against drill for the last decade.

Today's showdown on the vote could not be determined, but on the action last fall, the sides were as follows:

In favor of compulsory drill:

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Today's action represents the most significant change in the policy of the college since its history began, as far as thousands of students are concerned.

Compulsory drill is 46 years old—as old as the University itself—and until today there has never been a crack in its heavy armor.

That is, except for one or two minor cracks which occurred the year, which may have had something to do with today's decision. Last fall, a young freshman, Ray Olson of Minneapolis, was released from compulsory drill by a conscientious objector. The president, however, insisted that that more did not represent a "peace test" in his policy on drill.

Several other cases of conscientious objection have been hanging fire this year but none of them warranted action by the administration. Also, naturally, were waiting for a report.

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next year very drastically a former peace student. About 2,000 are now enrolled in the basic course.

The advanced course will consist of courses and should result about the same as in a "I had been only in the University drill who have gone on into the advanced course."

However, if the number of hard students drops too much, some of the officers on the present staff no doubt will be transferred to active duty by the war department or to some other school.

Minneapolis in the second "hard grant" enlarges to abolish compulsory drill. Woodrow did several years ago and the basic enrollment there has dropped very much.

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A special issue of the Daily was published to announce the end of forced military drill. Eric Sevareid, who then went by his first name of Arnold, was co-editor of the paper.

They thundered against imperialism. America's ills, both foreign and domestic, they ascribed to the malevolent influence of the international banker and the wily European diplomat.

In 1922 Knud Wefald, Farmer-Labor aspirant for Congress, expressed this view with striking simplicity. Asked what constructive measures he favored to ensure greater international co-operation and security, Wefald replied: "Take the handling of our foreign [sic] policy out of the hands of the international bankers." Henrik Shipstead, soon to become the state's senior senator,

was no less certain that the United States was "economically and politically entangled in foreign alliances and the intrigues of foreign nations." He declared that "American diplomacy and foreign policy must be divorced from its Wall street influence."¹⁰

Following the congressional memorial service for Woodrow Wilson, Wefald, by then a congressman, sent his constituents a newsletter describing his impression of the service. He characterized the foreign representatives attending the service as "a flock of black silent, vultures" sitting on the trunk of a great fallen tree. Four years later, Representative Ole J. Kvale caustically criticized plans for Herbert Hoover's inaugural because a parade glorifying war would over-

¹⁰ Knud Wefald to Marguerite M. Wells, June 16, 1922, Wefald Papers; *Minnesota Leader* (St. Paul), September 27, 1922, p. 1.

shadow the ceremony itself. Sardonicly, Kvale suggested that the parade would not be complete until officials added a few lions, a few bodies on crosses, and a float depicting a city undergoing a gas attack.¹¹

In 1924 Senator Shipstead predicted that a world-wide depression would follow in the wake of the war.¹² When the depression arrived it strengthened Shipstead's conviction that another war would mean economic disaster. Indeed, the depression exacerbated the deep mistrust of Europe and the mistrust of power, both economic and military, that marked the isolationist position.

By the middle of the 1930s the revisionist view of the war had become the quasi-official position of the Minnesota state department of education. In August, 1936, the department initiated the distribution of three home study pamphlets on *War or Peace*. Each of the pamphlets emphasized economic competition as the primary factor in historical causation. The Allies desired victory not only because they wished "to crush Germany's military power, but [because they] wanted to get rid of German industrial competition as well." America had entered the war because "American bankers, manufacturers, and merchants were in no mood to give up the huge profits from this rich war trade." The press in the United States had condemned submarine warfare "largely because German submarines threatened to injure and perhaps to stop our rich foreign trade." The pamphlets taught that war resulted from the clash of powerful interests and they confidently declared that the "common people in all countries are naturally peace-loving."¹³

In April, 1937, John G. Rockwell, commissioner of education for Minnesota, believed the question of peace important enough to issue a memorandum reminding all superintendents that April 22 was "Peace Day." Rockwell enclosed a copy of Governor Elmer Benson's peace proclamation, and he suggested that every school hold a peace assembly.¹⁴ On Peace Day Governor Benson addressed a students' peace strike at the

university. His speech perfectly portrayed the recurrent and ever-deepening disillusion which was inextricably a part of the revisionist thesis. After the horrors of trench warfare President Wilson had offered the world a messianic vision of hope, but disillusion had returned as Americans realized the inequity of Versailles. Then the slight chance that the League of Nations might prove worthy of its ideals partially redeemed the sins of Paris. This slim ray of hope faded with the onset of the depression, bringing in its wake fascism and a new arms race abroad. The governor praised the students for their dedication to peace. He affirmed that war was rooted in the economic ills of society and asked that they carry on the struggle to eliminate competitive, capitalistic imperialism.¹⁵

By the mid-1930s most Republicans had joined the Farmer-Laborites in accepting the revisionist thesis. Congressman William A. Pittenger agreed fully with Senator Shipstead that Washington often was influenced by the financial community in shaping foreign policy. Critical of Republican efforts in the 1920s which had encouraged American bankers to assist in the economic recovery of Germany, Pittenger declared the policy had failed dismally. Instead, the United States had been "led into the mire and the quicksand of European problems."¹⁶ Congressman August H. Andresen, in considering the question of extending the moratorium on debt and reparation payments, declared America would never collect from its credi-

¹¹ Newsletter issued by Wefald, December 18, 1924, typescript copy in the Wefald Papers; *Congressional Record*, 70 Congress, 2 session, 426.

¹² Martin Ross, *Shipstead of Minnesota*, 84 (Chicago, 1940); *Minneapolis Star*, October 8, 1924, p. 6; October 8, 1931, p. 2.

¹³ State of Minnesota, Department of Education, *War or Peace*, Unit I, *The Struggle for Peace*, 2, 4, 5, 13 (August, 1936).

¹⁴ Letter from John G. Rockwell to all superintendents in Minnesota, April 15, 1937, copy in the Henry G. Teigan Papers.

¹⁵ For an account of Benson's speech, see *Minnesota Leader*, April 24, 1937, p. 2.

¹⁶ *Congressional Record*, 72 Congress, 1 session, 261.

tors. He attacked the "trickery and subterfuge" of Europe's diplomats and of the international financiers.¹⁷ Speaking against the proposal that the United States enter the World Court, Senator Thomas D. Schall alleged that membership would benefit the Rothschilds and the Rockefellers. He wondered if America had "government by the people . . . or government by Europe and the international bankers?"¹⁸ Congressman Theodore Christianson believed the 1936 Naval Appropriations Bill should be reduced by 20 per cent. Wondering if we were arming because of Japan's actions in the Far East, Christianson claimed America could avoid all difficulties in the Pacific if Americans would forget their "Messiah complex" and decide to concern themselves exclusively with their own affairs.¹⁹ When President Roosevelt, in January, 1938, requested a 20 per cent increase in naval expenditures, Congressman Harold Knutson noted that Roosevelt recently had opposed a half per cent reduction in the interest rate on farm mortgages and charged that the administration now wished to spend "166 times that amount to enrich the munitions makers."²⁰ It is a rather curious commentary upon the nature of American politics that by the 1930s even conservative Republicans in Minnesota had adopted the rhetoric of the Farmer-Labor movement when foreign policy was under consideration.

WHETHER Farmer-Laborite or Republican, the intensified isolationism of the 1930s produced a consensus that peace must be preserved regardless of events abroad.

¹⁷ *Congressional Record*, 72 Congress, 1 session, 15502.

¹⁸ *Congressional Record*, 74 Congress, 1 session, 1122.

¹⁹ *Congressional Record*, 74 Congress, 1 session, 6333.

²⁰ *Congressional Record*, 75 Congress, 3 session, 3596.

²¹ Address to the Emergency Foreign Policy Conference, April 30, 1924, typescript copy in the Shipstead Papers.

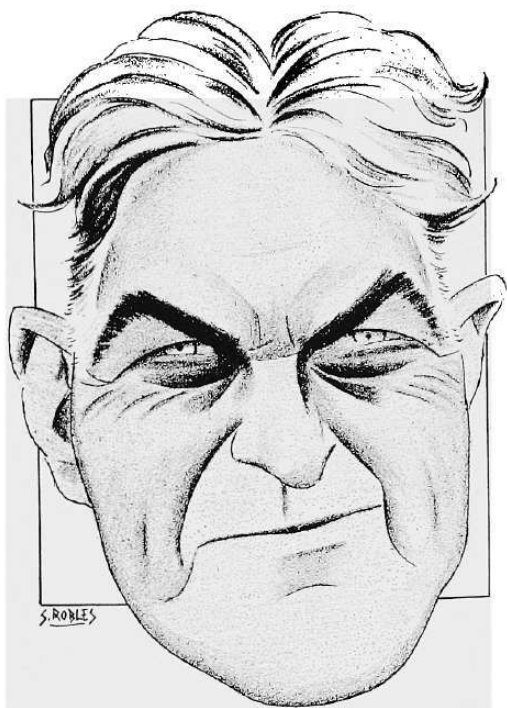
²² *Congressional Record*, 74 Congress, 1 session, 875; *Minneapolis Journal*, November 6, 1935, p. 17.

Nevertheless, this consensus was deceptive from the beginning. All agreed upon the need to preserve peace; how to accomplish this was another question. The congressmen from Minnesota during the mid-1930s exemplified the complexity of isolationist thought. While they often were in agreement on issues of foreign policy, their reasons for being so differed. These differences perhaps can be seen best in the response of several Farmer-Labor congressmen to the increased threat of war abroad. The isolationism of Congressmen Henry G. Teigan and John T. Bernard — and neither would have called it such — differed significantly from that of Senators Shipstead and Lundeen.

Senator Shipstead's world view remained remarkably unchanged during the twenty-four years that he served in the United States Senate. Of all the senators from Minnesota during the interwar years, he most consistently viewed Europe as the antithesis of the United States. Implicitly, Shipstead assumed that man's capacity to act rationally and morally depended upon his being free. It followed that nondemocratic governments rarely would conduct their foreign policy in the interests of mankind.²¹ Because the United States was democratic, it was capable of developing a virtuous foreign policy while nondemocratic Europe was not.

Shipstead liked to tell his colleagues that America could learn from history. The first lesson required that Americans realize there was nothing new in diplomacy or in statecraft. Since the American Revolution, Shipstead maintained, the victorious powers in Europe had written treaties and developed organizations to guarantee their conquests. The League of Nations and its tool, the World Court, were in that tradition. During the Ethiopian crisis, Shipstead warned the administration to avoid co-operating in any plan involving sanctions against Italy because this was "none of our business."²²

Nor did the senator believe the United States should become involved in Asia. After the Japanese attack upon the "U.S.S. Panay"



Senator Henrik Shipstead — a cartoon portrait from the Washington Post

in December, 1937, he asked for a total American withdrawal from China. A few months later, Shipstead sardonically rejected any policy of involvement. Opposing the Vinson Naval Authorization Bill, which called for an increase of 20 per cent in expenditures for naval construction, he told his colleagues that until Americans knew what kind of foreign policy they were developing, they should not embark upon a large naval program. He declared that he knew "nothing except some loose talk about 'quarantining' peoples who think differently from the way we think. We used to send missionaries with Bibles all over the world to induce people of other countries to adopt Christian teachings. I am wondering if it is contemplated to send battleships . . . and bombing planes as missionaries to foreign countries to do missionary work among people whom we consider to be political heathen, or who have been called 'outlaws' because they have done what every nation in the world has done; namely, broken and violated treaties."²³

While Ernest Lundeen shared many of Shipstead's isolationist convictions, he displayed less restraint and he frequently exhibited his scorn for the nations of Europe, particularly Great Britain. Three days before the London Economic Conference of 1933 convened, Lundeen labeled France "the most militaristic nation on earth." He lauded President Andrew Jackson's firmness in forcing Louis Philippe's government to pay debts owed to the United States. Like Shipstead, who frequently cited Washington's farewell address, Lundeen was attracted to historical incidents which seemed to serve as precedents for present difficulties. Jackson's forcefulness particularly appealed to him and he referred to it again and again. On the day the London conference opened Lundeen alleged that the American delegates would "sit there at the feet of the British King and Emperor of India . . . without protest, tamely and lamely failing to sustain an American-Jacksonian position." The senator hoped that President Franklin D. Roosevelt was not about to emulate Wilson by involving the United States in "conferences . . . with consummate, scheming diplomats . . . brought up in the European school . . . to believe that real diplomacy is the art of skillful twisting of the truth."²⁴

Lundeen became Shipstead's junior colleague following the Farmer-Labor victory in 1936. He joined Shipstead in opposing the Vinson Naval Authorization Bill, and he ranged far and wide in the speech he made against it. The United States had erred at the Washington Conference of 1921-22 by listening to foreign diplomats and agreeing to naval limitation. The navy was justified in asking for increases if America were to have gunboats on Chinese rivers, but Lundeen did not believe this was "the policy of the founders . . . of this country." The senator flatly asserted that no nation or group

²³ Cited in *New York Times*, December 14, 1937, p. 18; *Congressional Record*, 75 Congress, 3 session, 5618.

²⁴ *Congressional Record*, 73 Congress, 1 session, 5511, 5631, 5819.

of nations was going to attack the United States within a generation. Criticizing Americans who maintained that the nation must co-operate with other democracies, Lundeen declared they misused the term "democracy." England was an empire and seemed "arm in arm with Hitler"; France was a dictatorship. He concluded with an attack upon the munitions makers, the House of Morgan, and the defaulting British.²⁵

On another occasion, he maintained that peace required that the United States limit its defense efforts to the Western Hemisphere. Affirming that he was "not an internationalist. . . not for collective action and collective war," Lundeen said that he had been sent to the Senate to act for Minnesota and the United States rather than for Great Britain and France.²⁶ Unlike several of his Farmer-Labor colleagues, he was little affected by the Spanish Civil War, opposing any policy which might involve the United States. "If the people of Spain want to try out this revolutionary scheme under Franco's dictatorship," he said, "that's their funeral."²⁷

While differing in many respects, Shipstead and Lundeen agreed that to preserve peace the administration must confine its interests to the Western Hemisphere. Both were distrustful of Europe. Neither made an effort to disguise this mistrust; indeed, as the decade wore on Senator Lundeen expressed his Anglophobia more often and more spitefully. Convinced that America's entry into the first World War had been a mistake, Farmer-Laborites such as Shipstead and Lundeen were determined that the United States must never again repeat that error.

²⁵ *Congressional Record*, 75 Congress, 3 session, 5519, 5850.

²⁶ *Congressional Record*, 75 Congress, 3 session, appendix, 3000.

²⁷ Cited in *Minnesota Leader*, March 13, 1937, p. 2.

²⁸ Platforms and programs are in Farmer-Labor Association of Minnesota Papers, Box 1.

²⁹ Williams to Cordell Hull, October 15, 1935, Williams Papers; *Congressional Record*, 75 Congress, 1 session, 99.

So far as the party's platforms and official pronouncements during this period paid any heed at all to issues involving foreign policy, they reflected the same general position. In 1934 the Farmer-Labor Association declared that private ownership of munitions industries was one cause of war. The 1936 platform urged that the United States adopt a rigid neutrality policy prohibiting the sale or delivery of arms and implements of war to belligerents. It further called for a ban on loans to warring nations and asked for public ownership of the munitions industries. In 1938 the platform called for the United States to co-operate with all nations genuinely seeking peace but simultaneously declared its opposition to entangling alliances and increased armaments appropriations.²⁸

NONETHELESS, among the party's radical wing there were those who never were comfortable with a rigid policy of isolation. It conflicted with their ideal of the brotherhood of man. Ever hopeful of achieving an earthly utopia and often doctrinaire in their thinking, these Farmer-Laborites were caught between their desire for peace and their opposition to fascism. As fascism became more of a threat to world peace some of the party's radicals urged that the United States participate in international endeavors to preserve peace. Howard Y. Williams, long-time party activist, wrote to Secretary of State Cordell Hull during the Ethiopian crisis and requested that the United States co-operate with the League of Nations in imposing economic sanctions upon Italy. Congressman John T. Bernard was the lone member of the House of Representatives to vote against the joint resolution which applied the arms embargo to the Spanish Civil War.²⁹

The difficulty of reconciling the longing for peace and the desire that fascism might be checked is evident in the congressional career of Henry Teigan, who served a single term as representative from the third district following the sweeping Farmer-Labor victory of 1936. Intellectually able, Teigan

was dedicated to the Farmer-Labor cause; he had been active in the party from its inception, and a Nonpartisan Leaguer before that.

After his election victory, Teigan wrote to Frederick W. Libby, executive secretary of the National Council for the Prevention of War, saying that he was wholeheartedly in sympathy with the council's program concerning neutrality legislation. Despite this statement, the extension of the arms embargo to the Spanish Civil War unsettled Teigan even though he voted for the measure. He quickly saw that it aided the fascists, either by intent or through ignorance, and he wrote to a friend in Minnesota complaining that "every damn Fascist-minded bird in Congress was in favor of this particular resolution."³⁰

While not a communist, Teigan admired the Soviet Union. He believed that Russia was passing through the transitional stage of the proletarian dictatorship which Marx had considered necessary and that democracy was bound to make progress in Russia. Teigan predicted that "within ten years, the Russian people will enjoy greater political democracy than do those of any other lands."³¹ The popular front in France heartened him. He contrasted the situation in 1937 with that of 1916-17, when, as he saw it, there had been little ideological difference between the Allies and the Central Powers. Therefore, it would have been in America's interest "to see the war end in a draw, which would probably have operated to discredit all of the governments engaged in the conflict."³² This result, he felt, would have been favorable to the development of democracy throughout the world. Teigan believed the situation was different in 1937: reactionaries no longer controlled France, and the Loyalists might prove victorious in Spain. The question now confronting the American worker was how to combat fascism at home and abroad while at the same time preserving the peace.³³

Two weeks before the House of Representatives voted on the 1937 Neutrality Act,

Teigan wrote that if he were certain that the United States would align itself with its fellow democracies he would unalterably oppose neutrality legislation. He thought it more likely that the American government would side "with the Fascists than with the Socialists and Laborites of Europe."³⁴ Some kind of neutrality legislation was necessary, but Teigan voted against the act because he believed it gave excessive discretionary power to the executive and particularly because its provisions not only continued the embargo against Spain but also applied an embargo to all future civil wars.³⁵ Shortly after Congress passed the 1937 act, Teigan declared that America "would have had a far better cause for going to war on behalf of the Spanish government than it had for engaging in the World War on the side of the allies."³⁶

After the Sino-Japanese War began, Teigan refrained from criticizing the administration's decision not to invoke the 1937 Neutrality Act. He told Libby that he was interested in seeing Japan defeated. Now quite determinedly in the camp of those who believed in collective security, he approved of Roosevelt's quarantine speech. His attitude at the end of 1937 was stated succinctly in a letter to a friend: "The unfortunate thing about all this neutrality business is that too many of our good folks back home feel we Americans can live apart from the rest of the world. This is impossible today and for that reason it is of vital concern to us when democracy is being attacked by the hand of

³⁰ Teigan to Frederick W. Libby, December 18, 1936; Teigan to A. F. Lockheart, January 17, 1937, both in Teigan Papers.

³¹ Teigan to O. B. Grimley, January 13, 1938, Teigan Papers.

³² Teigan to Alfred M. Bingham, April 27, 1937, Teigan Papers.

³³ Statement by Teigan, April 3, 1937, copy in Teigan Papers.

³⁴ Teigan to Andrew Trovaton, March 3, 1937, Teigan Papers.

³⁵ Teigan to Earl E. Hunner, March 19, 1937, Teigan Papers.

³⁶ Teigan to Ruth Gage Colby, April 23, 1937, Teigan Papers.

Governor Elmer
Benson (left) with
Senator Ernest
Lundeen, in 1937



reaction and fascism, even if those directly affected are thousands of miles away.”³⁷

Along with Governor Benson, Howard Williams, and Congressman Bernard of the eighth district, Teigan represented an ill-defined group within the Farmer-Labor party that increasingly accepted collective security as the means to check fascism. Bernard was more certain than Teigan that the Neutrality Act of 1937 aided the fascists. Implying that the American people had rejected fascism when they had defeated “Landon and his Liberty League and German Nazi backers,” Bernard told Congress that the neutrality proposals of Senator Key Pittman and Representative Sam D. McReynolds encouraged aggression against peaceful nations. If Americans were sincere, he declared, they would admit that their neutrality plan favored the fascists.³⁸

³⁷ Teigan to Libby, October 6, 1937; Teigan to Trovaton, November 15, 1937, Teigan Papers.

³⁸ *Congressional Record*, 75 Congress, 1 session, 2292, 2406.

³⁹ *Congressional Record*, 75 Congress, 3 session, appendix, 3199; article written by Teigan for *Champion of Youth* magazine, typescript copy dated May 5, 1937, Teigan Papers.

⁴⁰ *Congressional Record*, 75 Congress, 3 session, appendix, 1671; Teigan to Mrs. Colby, April 23, 1937; Teigan to Libby, July 12, 1938; Teigan to Jesse M. MacKnight, September 24, 1938, all in Teigan Papers.

The collective security that Teigan and Bernard advocated was a truncated policy. Unwilling or unable to rid themselves of assumptions which they long had held, they rarely thought of collective security as a sharpened weapon to be used against aggressors. To them it meant the employment of economic sanctions against aggressors and the extension of economic aid to their victims. Mistrustful of the military, both Teigan and Bernard had opposed increased arms expenditures. They so feared the military that they criticized the Civilian Conservation Corps for allegedly allowing excessive military influence.³⁹

Convinced of the affinity between economic conservatism and fascism, they were suspicious of England. Bernard claimed that the “Spanish embargo was made in England.” Teigan linked Toryism and fascism together as enemies of democracy. He apparently saw nothing incongruous in telling Frederick Libby that he intended to use his opposition to military expenditures in appealing for votes, while two months later he wrote to another official of the N.C.P.W. and bitterly criticized England and France for not providing Czechoslovakia with military aid.⁴⁰

Determined to check the spread of fascism, ardent in his belief that economic

greed must not cause war, and fearful of the consequences of military power, Teigan manifestly indicated his faith that peace could be preserved without resort to military coercion. In a letter to Libby he wrote:

"It is obviously difficult to outline a program that will keep our country out of war. The best we can do is to prepare a program that will make it more difficult for our war-makers to plunge us into another world conflict.

"I want to say, however, that I am not of the isolationist school. We cannot avert war by merely sticking our heads in the sands, as it were, when troubles develop between other nations. It is my candid opinion that the United States should lead in bringing about united action on the part of the democratic governments of the world in putting a stop to the activities of Hitler, Mussolini, and their allies. This could be done by refusing to sell war materials and supplies to these aggressor nations. In other words, I am for what may be termed 'collective security,' as the best means of keeping this country out of war."⁴¹

ALTHOUGH there was a distinct and growing difference between Farmer-Laborites who endorsed a limited form of collective security and the "neurotic neutralism" of the party's two senators, no great split in the ranks occurred. Both groups shared many of the same convictions. Senator Lundeen's Anglophobia did not antagonize Teigan because he himself was suspicious of the English Tories. Conversely, when Howard Williams, who accepted a policy of economic sanctions, charged that Republican Representative Melvin Maas believed "in an out-worn theory of neutrality which says the flag, plus some good guns, should follow the dollar of the International Banker," Lundeen or Shipstead might have made the criticism as easily.⁴² All Farmer-Laborites were certain that war resulted from economic greed. Influenced by bitter memories of World War I, affected by revisionism, and possibly mesmerized by their own rhe-

toric, they were extremely wary of the use of power, especially military power.

Moreover, the difference within the party over foreign policy was of little significance in 1938, for in that year the Farmer-Labor party met disaster. The depression years had created the political climate needed for the party's rise to power. The despair and discontent accompanying those years were fertile ground for the zealous and often doctrinaire radicalism always present within the movement. Blind to the popular front tactics of the Communists and lacking since Olson's death the tempering guidance of their only influential pragmatic politician, the party's radicals rarely considered the political consequences of their actions. While few observers expected Governor Benson to win re-election in 1938, practically no one foresaw the total repudiation the party suffered. Only one Farmer-Labor congressman, Richard T. Buckler of the ninth district, was able to salvage his seat from the wreckage. Even Teigan, ensconced in what had been considered a safe constituency, went down to defeat.

Since the party never again experienced a significant electoral victory, it is impossible to say now whether the difference over foreign policy that was developing within the ranks would have created a major rift. In any event, the Farmer-Labor congressmen who represented Minnesota in the seventy-fifth Congress, although isolationists, did not agree on what America's foreign policy should be. Likewise, differences existed among the state's isolationist Republican congressmen on the issue of foreign policy. What is significant is that the response of the isolationists to American foreign policy as the second world war approached displayed considerable diversity. They could agree on little more than keeping war away from America.

⁴¹ Teigan to Libby, September 1, 1938, Teigan Papers.

⁴² Speech by Williams over WTCN, September 30, 1938, typescript copy in the Williams Papers.



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