

## BETWEEN THE WARS

*by Robert Woito*

Europe, 1940. In a stunning blitzkrieg, German troops invaded Denmark and Norway in April, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France in May. The British force in France, cut off from its French allies, was evacuated from Dunkirk, leaving most of its equipment behind.

As Hitler's Panzers drove toward Paris, Winston Churchill, the new British prime minister, made a desperate plea. He secretly asked President Franklin D. Roosevelt to declare an emergency and lend warships, aircraft, and other arms to Britain. Roosevelt was sympathetic. But "neutrality" laws passed by Congress were an obstacle. Churchill warned that delay might bring a British government that would *not* fight. By June 12th, when Paris fell, FDR's dilemma was acute. Should America abandon Britain and prepare to defend the Western Hemisphere? Or should it aid the British and hope that they could hang on? There were not enough U.S. arms to do both.

Resisting pressure from isolationists, peace movement leaders, and pessimists like Joseph P. Kennedy, the U.S. ambassador in London, who thought Britain a lost cause, Roosevelt decided to send aid. Between June and October 1940, some 970,000 rifles, 200,500 revolvers, 87,500 machine guns, 895 75-mm artillery pieces, 316 mortars, and ammunition were shipped to Britain. After obtaining from London a pledge that Britain's fleet would never be surrendered, and obtaining the use of bases in Newfoundland and Britain's Caribbean isles, Roosevelt bypassed Congress to transfer 50 aging U.S. destroyers to the Royal Navy by presidential order.

The drama helped to expose America's unpreparedness. As late as July 1940, the American army, with 291,031 men (and 350 usable tanks), was not much larger than the Belgian army, which had succumbed to the Nazis in a few days. The nation's unreadiness had many causes. U.S. military strategy had been based on a World War I model that assumed a ground stalemate in Europe and British control of the Atlantic. And after the Great War, a disenchantment with European politics had set in among Americans, who came to view that conflict as a blunder from which European leaders had learned little. When the Depression struck, the economic crisis reinforced this isolationist impulse.

Perhaps most important, as we shall see, a small band of peace movement leaders succeeded in shaping the U.S. approach to world politics. Their constituency expanded to include mainstream business, educational, women's, and world affairs organizations. Their goals



*"Come on in, I'll Treat You Right. I Used to Know Your Daddy." In 1937, when the New York Daily News ran this cartoon by Clarence D. Batchelor, conflict loomed in Europe and Asia, but memories of World War I were still powerful. Batchelor's work won a Pulitzer Prize.*

became U.S. policy in the 1929 Kellogg-Briand Pact "outlawing" war and in the Neutrality Acts of the 1930s. Yet their failure to recognize the true face of totalitarianism, and their perennial discomfort with the reality of power in world politics, had much to do with the crisis that Roosevelt faced in 1940, as Hitler gazed across the English Channel, a conquered Europe at his back.

For two decades, the peace movement had capitalized on the backlash of U.S. public opinion against World War I. The war to make "the world safe for democracy" had seen the fall of the Hohenzollern and Hapsburg dynasties—and U.S. troops had tipped the balance in favor of the Allies in 1917–18. But little more than 12 months of combat had cost America 116,516 dead and more than \$30 billion.

World War I was the first modern war. Before it, as Paul Fussell has written, the word "machine" had a positive connotation; it was "not yet inevitably coupled with the word *gun*," as it would be after horrors like the Second Battle of the Marne, in which 280,000 men perished in twenty days. The barbed-wire realities of trench warfare shredded Wilsonian idealism. As Hemingway would write in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), "abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments,

and the dates." Antiwar novels such as Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) became best sellers.

The Treaty of Versailles mocked President Wilson's promise of "peace without victory." The victors imposed a reparation debt of \$33 billion on Germany, helping to frustrate the nascent German democracy and fuel a desire for revenge. And Britain and France ignored the Wilsonian principle of self-determination by dividing up Germany's colonies. Wilson *did* get the Allies to create a League of Nations, which would provide for collective security against aggressor states. But he could not win Senate approval of the League Covenant. His hopes for U.S. participation in the League (and the World Court at The Hague) were dashed by forces led by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge (R.-Mass.), who saw the League as dominated by European powers who had stumbled into war in the first place.

### A Naval 'Holiday'

In 1920, an electorate weary of the sacrifices required by the pursuit of idealistic world goals turned against Wilson's Democrats and elected Republican Warren G. Harding, who promised "not nostrums but normalcy." The United States was soon launched on what F. Scott Fitzgerald would call the "gaudiest spree in history." Industrial growth, the Tin Lizzie, jazz, and the booming stock market signaled what Harding's successor, Calvin Coolidge, called "a state of contentment seldom before seen."

Not everyone was as content as Silent Cal thought. The Senate's rejection of the League gave new impetus to the formation of peace advocacy organizations like the League of Nations Association and foreign affairs education groups like the Council on Foreign Relations. Three months after the Armistice, the American Union Against Militarism persuaded Congress to reject the War Department's proposal for compulsory military training. The Great War had already given birth to the pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). But the main instrument for broadening the movement was the National Council for the Prevention of War (NCPW), launched in 1921 by Frederick Libby, a Maine-born Quaker and Congregational minister who had served with the Friends' relief group in France.

Libby wanted to unite what he saw as the big five natural opponents of war—farmers, churchmen, women, labor union members, and educators—behind such goals as arms reduction and "the sub-

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stitution of law for war." He recruited 26 major organizations as NCPW members, among them the Foreign Policy Association, the American Farm Bureau Federation, the National League of Women Voters, and the National Education Association (NEA). With a board that included such notables as Mrs. Louis Brandeis and Mrs. J. Borden Harriman, and a Washington staff of 52 and six regional offices, the NCPW promoted its views via its member groups. The NEA, for example, reevaluated how war/peace issues were treated in high school textbooks and urged teachers to talk about Woodrow Wilson's ideals and about arbitration of international disputes.

To be sure, the new peace groups had opposition. The Navy League, for instance, was created in 1920 to counter the postwar "tide of anti-preparedness and pacifism." But President Harding courted the peace lobby, and pressed the first U.S. attempt at strategic arms control, a nine-nation conference on curbing the size of navies, held in Washington in 1921.

The conference led to treaties under which the United States, Britain, France, Italy, and Japan agreed to a 10-year "holiday" from the building of capital ships (battleships and aircraft carriers) and set limits on the size and number of such vessels.\* The treaties, widely hailed as a triumph for peace, in fact were gravely flawed. They imposed no limits on smaller ships, such as submarines. The lack of enforcement provisions made their violation by the Japanese a simple matter. (The Germans, who agreed to similar terms in a 1935 treaty, also cheated with impunity.) Yet, this first effort at arms limitation was popular with Americans; Congress did not authorize Navy ship construction up to the treaty limits until the eve of World War II.

### Enter the Left

President Coolidge, in his turn, paid heed to the peace movement. When Mexico's nationalization of U.S. oil and mining properties stirred talk of war, pressure from Protestant clergy and pacifist groups prompted the Senate to call for arbitration, and Coolidge went along. Coolidge retained enough leeway, however, to dispatch the Marines in 1927 to end a generals' rebellion in Nicaragua.†

Developments overseas should have given pause to the peace movement. At the end of the decade, Adolf Hitler took control of the Nazi Party in Weimar Germany. In Italy, Benito Mussolini dissolved

\*New capital ships were limited to 35,000 tons displacement each, and an overall tonnage ratio of 5:5:3 was set for Britain, the United States, and Japan; i.e., the British and Americans could each have capital ships totaling 525,000 tons, and the Japanese could have 315,000 tons. France and Italy were limited to one-third of the U.S. and British tonnage, or 175,000 tons each.

†There were few protests from pacifists. But one of the rebel generals, Cesar Augusto Sandino, who fled to the hills to launch an abortive guerrilla campaign, was hailed as a hero by the U.S. Communist Party and by the pacifist editor of the *Nation*, Oswald Garrison Villard.

parliament and established his fascist dictatorship in 1928. That year, in the Far East, Japanese forces made their first moves toward an invasion of Manchuria. But Americans, said the *Philadelphia Record*, "don't give a hoot in a rainbarrel who controls North China."

The peace movement reached its diplomatic apogee in 1928-29. In Paris, a 15-nation conference adopted the Kellogg-Briand Pact outlawing war, drafted by U.S. Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg. In all, 62 countries agreed to "renounce war" and settle disputes by "pacific means." The Senate added reservations to U.S. ratification: No one *had* to act in case of a treaty violation, and Washington would reserve the right to interpret the pact's application in the Western Hemisphere. Skeptics like Senator Carter Glass (D.-Va.) viewed the treaty as "worthless, but perfectly harmless." But peace leaders such as the FOR's Kirby Page were euphoric: "Delegalizing war," he said, was the movement's "most vital" idea yet.

With Kellogg-Briand, pacifists like Page and Libby believed that their no-more-war goals were in sight. To liberal internationalists, such as James Brown Scott of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Clark Eichelberger, influential head of the Chicago office of the League of Nations Association, the 1920s had been a less



*In February 1941, a "Mother's Crusade" prayed that Congress would not send Lend-Lease aid to Britain. Yet, asked a Presbyterian Tribune editorial, "what do pacifists propose while the world is under the German terror?"*

auspicious decade. The Senate spurned the League of Nations; a Coolidge-led effort to bring the United States into the World Court also foundered on isolationist opposition. But neither the president nor the Congress nor the press bemoaned such setbacks.

Domestic woes dominated the headlines with the 1929 Wall Street crash and the worldwide depression. By 1932, U.S. unemployment reached some 12 million. Socialist ideas and organizations gained favor as capitalism faltered, and they fit comfortably in the peace movement. A. J. Muste, the Marxist labor organizer turned pacifist, became an FOR leader. Socialist Gus Tyler spoke for the Marxist Left when he asserted that "capitalists" would "fling workers into war." The U.S. Communist Party, obedient to Moscow, had its own League against War and Fascism, and controlled the American Student Union. The "merchants of death" analysis—which blamed the Great War on a conspiracy among munitions-makers—became popular; even business-oriented *Fortune* magazine spread the notion. But the conspiracy theory gained its greatest impact through the 1934 Nye Committee hearings on the arms industry.

That probe grew out of the joint labors of Dorothy Detzer, leader of the WILPF, and progressive Senator George Norris (R.-Neb.). They went over the Senate's 96-member roster to determine who should conduct hearings on the arms manufacturers. One by one, senators were eliminated: copper interests too strong in one state; impending elections in another; militaristic sentiment too high in a third. Finally, one name was left: Senator Gerald Nye (R.-N.D.). Detzer persuaded Nye to lead the investigation; he, in turn, let Detzer choose his committee's chief investigator, and join its staff.

### FDR Afloat

Bankers like J. P. Morgan, munitions makers such as the Du Pont brothers, and others who had been involved in arming the Allies in World War I were called to testify on Capitol Hill. Every new witness seemed to confirm that a conspiracy among greedy capitalists had drawn America into the conflict. Even scholars who had once advocated U.S. intervention, like the eminent Charles Beard and Harry Elmer Barnes, concluded that there had been a conspiracy. The theme of the hearings, as historian James MacGregor Burns has observed, was that "Germany was not so guilty after all. The Americans had been saps and suckers."

The Nye probe led to passage of a series of Neutrality Acts (1935-37), reluctantly signed by President Roosevelt, that made it illegal to lend money or export arms to belligerents. Initially, at least, U.S. arms could not be supplied even to *victims* of aggression.

The isolationist mood expressed by the laws reflected popular sentiments. The American Legion's motto was "Keep Out, Keep

### WAR AND PEACE ON CAMPUS, 1935-41

"We consider that America is endangered. We are for American peace as part of world peace. For peace, we maintain, is indivisible."

So argued a November 1940 letter to the *Yale Daily News* from August Hecksher II, a recent graduate. Hecksher, chairman of the campus William Allen White Committee—named for the Kansas editor who had abandoned pacifism to champion U.S. arms aid to embattled Britain—was ahead of his time. Even then, when Axis forces were on the march in Europe, North Africa, and Asia, isolationist and pacifist sentiment dominated U.S. college campuses. The chairman of the *Yale Daily News*, Kingman Brewster—later a Yale president and Jimmy Carter's ambassador to Britain—led the campus chapter of the America First Committee. Brewster argued that "the peace and sovereignty of the United States is the 'last best hope on earth,'" and that U.S. involvement in the war on Britain's side would be "disastrous."

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Many other students agreed. In 1940, Cornell undergraduates sent the White House a dummy tank bearing a plea to "Dear President Roosevelt" to "keep America out of war." The nation, argued the University of Iowa's *Iowan*, must stay out "at any cost." America, echoed the University of Minnesota's *Daily*, "can be an effective democracy only if it can remain at peace."

Such sentiments were fraught with ironies. U.S. students had been prowar in 1917, and appalled during the 1930s by Franco's rebellion in Spain. But by the late 1930s, their save-democracy zeal had faded: A Gallup poll after the 1940 Nazi invasion of Norway found only two percent of college youth in favor of U.S. intervention on the Allied side. Far less war-wary than their students, faculty members and university heads largely backed President Roosevelt's efforts to increase U.S. military strength. Speaking at Berkeley in 1940, Robert Gordon Sproul, president of the University of California, endorsed the arms build-up "without reservation" and warned that "those who prefer to fiddle while Rome burns . . . shall get little sympathy from me."

The backlash after World War I had been exploited by several youth organizations, mostly on the Left, through the early 1930s—e.g., the Young Communist League, the National Student League, the Young People's Socialist League, and the Socialist Student League for Industrial Democracy. Such groups, often in concert with religious organizations, sponsored numerous demonstrations; on a "Peace Strike Day" in April 1935, some 175,000 college

Ready." The Girl Scouts modified their "too-militaristic" uniform. The *Chicago Tribune*, the *New York Daily News*, and the Hearst press were strongly isolationist. Women's groups supported neutrality, and farmers opposed increased armament (96,000 signed a petition to that effect in 1934). College students chanted "No more battleships, we want schools" (Vassar), organized the Veterans of Future Wars (Princeton), joined national one-day boycotts of classes,

students (out of a total of perhaps one million) across the country briefly quit their classrooms.

But more important than the Left (on many campuses, students were generally conservative during the 1930s) was the pull of pacifism and isolationism. At the University of Kansas, students put up white crosses "in memory of the tragic betrayal of 1917" and otherwise demonstrated to show that, as peace leaders said, the student body was "declaratively against war and all the agents of war." At the University of California, worry over war was so strong by 1937 that the elected student government created a "Peace Committee"; after Hitler took Poland in 1939, its leaders circulated a petition saying that "we will volunteer for prison rather than volunteer for service if the United States enters this war."

Why did most students oppose intervention against Hitler for so long? Following the June 1940 fall of France, a *New Republic* writer found a generational cause: "After two decades of faithful tutelage by their formerly disillusioned elders, students profess to understand both the causes and the effects of wars and are determined to keep out of them."

But some students felt otherwise. At Harvard, senior John F. Kennedy wrote to the *Crimson* arguing that "the failure to build up her armaments has not saved England from a war, and may cost her one. Are we in America to let that lesson go unlearned?" A Yale senior, McGeorge Bundy, a future Kennedy national security adviser, led a chapter of the interventionist Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. Taking the other side, a future *New Frontiersman* (and Kennedy in-law) at Yale, law student R. Sargent Shriver, joined America First because, he said, "we weren't prepared" for war.

By the time classes resumed in the autumn of 1941, stay-out sentiment was fading. The *Daily Princetonian*, stoutly antiwar in 1940, now considered isolationists to be "merely obstructionists." At the University of Missouri, undergraduates held a "War Dance," and Harlan Byrne, the new editor of the *Student*, declared that "we must tip our weight to the British side of the battle scales. Perhaps this will mean war participation." The *Cornell Sun* asked: "When shall we declare war?"

The answer, of course, came that December. With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, student pacifism and isolationism all but vanished—even at such antiwar citadels as the University of Kansas. Said the *Daily Kansan*: "This shall be a bitter fight to the finish."

and took the Oxford Pledge against military service.\* Of Libby's "natural constituencies" for peace, only labor stood aloof.

Such were the domestic political circumstances under which Roosevelt had to operate. Burns notes that during his first term

\*The pledge stemmed from an Oxford Union debate in 1933, after Hitler came to power, on the proposition, "That this House refuses in any circumstances to fight for King and Country." The Union voted 275 to 153 in the affirmative (which Winston Churchill, then out of office, called "shameless").



(March 1933–January 1937), FDR “seemed to float almost helplessly on the flood tide of isolationism.”\* A Roosevelt proposal in 1935 that America join the World Court was not only blocked in the Senate but publicly derided by such varied critics as Louisiana populist Huey P. Long (“the Kingfish”), humorist Will Rogers, and Father Coughlin, the “radio priest” who blamed the nation’s ills on internationalists and the “Morgan, Mellon, Mills, Meyer” cabal of Eastern money men.

Roosevelt’s hope, according to Burns, was that the American people would be “educated by events” as to the impossibility of isolationism. Events were not lacking.

### Sympathy for the ‘Have Nots’

The Japanese had invaded Manchuria in 1931, ignoring international protest and the Kellogg-Briand Pact. In America, both the pacifist and internationalist wings of the peace movement urged an embargo of arms shipments to Japan, and backed U.S. diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union as a counter to Japanese influence in Asia. But fissures in the movement appeared. Eichelberger and other liberal internationalists called for “collective security” measures, e.g., arrangements with America’s European allies to try to contain aggression via the application of diplomatic and economic sanctions. The radicals turned their focus from preventing a war to keeping America out of the war whose opening moves had already begun.

Hitler’s rise to power in 1933 was followed by German rearmament (while the U.S. Congress focused on the Nye hearings and neutrality legislation). In 1935, the League of Nations proved impotent (again) in the face of Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia—another blow to those Americans who had put faith in international organizations. Then the Japanese advanced from Manchuria into China proper. Hitler repudiated the Treaty of Versailles and in March 1936 his troops reoccupied the Rhineland; again Britain and France did not rise to the challenge. General Francisco Franco, with help from Italian “volunteers” and the German Condor Legion, won a brutal civil war in Spain, ousting the Republican government supported by Stalin’s Soviet Union. The Axis was taking shape.

Yet, in America, movement leaders like Kirby Page urged sympathy for Japan and Germany. These nations, said Page, were “have nots” who were shut out of global markets; they wanted only a larger role in a world economy dominated by the trans-Atlantic powers who sought peace only because they were “haves.” The AFSC, the WILPF, and the FOR, leading an Emergency Peace Campaign (1936–38), proposed to “Keep America Out of War” and urged political and economic steps to build “a just and peaceable world order.”

\*Indeed, his wife Eleanor gave the \$72,000 in speaking honoraria that she earned in 1935 to the pacifist-isolationist American Friends Service Committee.

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The new facts of totalitarian intent and capability were ignored.

After his 1936 reelection, Roosevelt moved gingerly to challenge the isolationist consensus. In a famous speech in Chicago, FDR likened aggression to an epidemic that must be placed "in a quarantine," and warned of "international anarchy" that could not be avoided "through mere isolation or neutrality." Although the Kellogg-Briand Pact had long since been mocked by bloodshed on three continents, Roosevelt still shared the internationalists' view that concerted action could avert a world war. But what to do?

Time was short. In November 1937 the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis was established, and Hitler revealed to his generals his plans for Eastern Europe's subjugation. Roosevelt considered various responses, including an Armistice Day conference at the White House where foreign diplomats would be pressed to join a new effort to agree on principles for peaceful international relations. In January 1938, Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles argued that a comprehensive conference called by the United States (now the world leader in industry, finance, and trade) might avert war; the agenda could include economic sanctions against aggressors (which neither the League nor Kellogg-Briand required) and the reshaping of the depressed world economy to deal with the have/have not issue.

### Niebuhr's 'Suffering World'

Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain of Britain, when sounded out on the Welles plan, asked Washington to wait. A "measure of appeasement," he suggested, might lead Germany and Italy to spare the militarily feeble democracies. Roosevelt consented; in any event, he doubted that a U.S. initiative in Europe would have much domestic support. And America had little military strength, aside from its fleet (concentrated in the Pacific), to support its diplomacy.

Pacifist leaders feared that the White House aimed to break down antiwar sentiment in the country, perhaps with an eye to an alliance with Britain. In March 1938, the month that Hitler annexed Austria, the main peace groups—Libby's NCPW, the FOR, and the AFSC—joined the Socialist Party in a rally at New York City's Hippodrome Theater. Some 4,500 of the faithful, including Dorothy Detzer and Wisconsin senator Robert La Follette, Jr., applauded as Norman Thomas argued that "collective security means war."

A countercurrent was slowly building, however. At the same time as the Hippodrome rally, 650 prominent members of such internationalist organizations as the Carnegie Endowment, the Foreign Policy Association, and the League of Nations Association met in Washington. The League's Clark Eichelberger called for an international conference to reform the world economic system. Failing that, he advocated collective security and changes in the neutrality laws to

permit the president to embargo arms to aggressors only.

In September 1938, Neville Chamberlain, meeting Hitler in Munich, agreed to Nazi territorial claims on strategically critical, heavily armed, democratic Czechoslovakia as a guarantee of "peace in our time." Press commentary on Munich illustrated shifts in American opinion. The *New York Times* editorialized that Hitler had "accomplished by a mere ultimatum what Bismarck failed to achieve with armies." Collective security with Britain was "indispensable."

Chamberlain's "peace in our time" was short-lived. In early 1939, Mussolini sent Italian troops into Albania (his first European conquest) and signed a "Pact of Steel" with Hitler. Shaken by these events and Franco's triumph in Spain, FDR sent appeals to Hitler and Mussolini; the messages called for peace and asked the dictators pointblank to promise not to attack any one of a list of 31 nations. Responding sarcastically in the Reichstag, Hitler said he understood the impulse of "Mr. Roosevelt" to feel "responsible for the history of the whole world," but regretted that he could not help. "I, sir, am placed in a much smaller and more modest sphere."

After concluding his surprise Nonaggression Pact with Stalin, temporarily uniting the world's two largest totalitarian powers, Hitler



*At a New York "America First" rally, May 1941: Senator Burton K. Wheeler, Charles Lindbergh, Kathleen Norris, Norman Thomas. After Pearl Harbor, Wheeler said, "The only thing now to do is to lick hell out of them."*

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invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, and subsequently divided that stricken republic with his new partner. Britain and France finally decided to oppose Hitler. World War II had come—and with it, turmoil in the American peace movement.

Some former movement leaders had already changed their minds. Influential Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, once a mainstay of the FOR, had abandoned pacifism in the early 1930s; now he abandoned neutrality as well. "In a suffering world," Niebuhr wrote, it was wrong to "identify the slogan 'Keep America Out of War' with the Christian gospel." Other recantations came from historian Walter (*The Road to War*) Millis and liberal lawyer Charles P. Taft. Taft still admired the pacifists he had known in the Emergency Peace Campaign, but he was "glad there are not too many."

### Debating the Draft

Libby, Thomas, and Detzer still claimed that the United States could best serve peace by observing strict neutrality. Yet events were thinning the diehards' ranks. Libby's NCPW, which lobbied hard (and unsuccessfully) against increased funds for the U.S. Navy in 1938, lost several affiliates, among them 11 Jewish organizations and the American Association of University Women. Libby soon moved into a strange-bedfellows alliance with the militantly isolationist (but decidedly nonpacifist) America First movement. The NCPW even mailed out some 140,000 copies of a "stay out of war" speech by America First's hero-aviator, Charles Lindbergh.

As the conflict began in Europe, America's military weakness preoccupied the White House. During the months of deceptive calm following Poland's division between Hitler and Stalin, Roosevelt began to press Congress for rearmament; but the strength of isolationism was such that he also pledged not to send "your boys" outside the Western Hemisphere.

The "phony war" in Europe ended in 1940. As German bombers began the Battle of Britain and U-boats threatened to cut the island nation's Atlantic life line, Roosevelt sent Churchill the 50 destroyers he had requested. Isolationist reaction was intense. FDR, said the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, was "America's first dictator."

While Britain struggled against the Luftwaffe, Italy readied an attack on Greece, and Japanese forces threatened Indochina, Roosevelt sought an unprecedented third term. His Republican challenger, Wendell Willkie, charged that FDR's promise to avoid a foreign war was "no better than his promise to balance the budget." But the isolationist-pacifist opposition had begun to crack. Willkie, an internationalist, did not fight Roosevelt over foreign policy until just before the 1940 election. In September, with Willkie's backing, Congress passed a Selective Service Act—providing for 900,000 conscripts

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who would serve for one year and only in the Western Hemisphere.

In 1941, Roosevelt proposed the "Lend-Lease" bill, authorizing him to sell, lend, or lease supplies to Britain. Senator Burton K. Wheeler (D.-Mont.) charged that the aid program would lead to war and "plow under every fourth American boy." Norman Thomas asserted that the "certain evils" of U.S. involvement in the war against Hitler outweighed "the uncertain good we might accomplish." But this was the isolationists' and pacifists' last rhetorical hurrah.

The bill passed, with the aid of some reformed anti-interventionists. Although Libby thought the bill "monstrous," one of his NCPW founders, Mrs. Harriman, testified that the Norwegians had been subjugated "like sheep" because they were "peace-loving" and the Germans had posed as "their best friends." Reinhold Niebuhr argued that a war to prevent "the exploitation of the weak by the strong" was just. He launched the new journal *Christianity & Crisis* to combat pacifism and isolationism in Protestant churches.

Even so, as the 1940 Selective Service Act neared expiration, scarcely four months before Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt faced bitter isolationist and pacifist opposition to an extension. The measure passed the House of Representatives by one vote. The *New York Times* found that narrow margin "deeply regrettable," but was relieved "that the new American Army will be kept intact."

### Nothing but Faith

Thus, while the peace movement had begun to unravel as war loomed during the late 1930s, the antiwar sentiment that it fostered and exploited remained strong in Congress and among the public. As late as autumn 1941, polls reflected a kind of national schizophrenia. Gallup surveys showed that 70 percent of Americans felt that it was "more important" to defeat Germany than to stay out of war; but 83 percent opposed a congressional declaration of a state of war, even as FDR dispatched Marines to Iceland, and U.S. Navy ships began to escort convoys to Britain.

During the interwar years, the various elements of the peace movement—internationalists, pacifists, isolationists, and assorted opportunists on the Left and Right—converged, diverged, recombined, and split again under the impact of world events. And yet the movement gained an unprecedented level of influence on U.S. foreign policy. Disillusionment over the Great War, traditional isolationism, and liberal Protestant moralism made for a powerful combination. Franklin Roosevelt is widely considered to be the paradigm of a strong president; but FDR clearly felt constrained. Only at the eleventh hour, with the 1940 election behind him, did he seek to break the hammer lock that the peace movement and its isolationist allies, with their mass following, had on U.S. foreign policy.

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But the movement's legislative success during the 1920s and '30s was soon mocked by events. The Kellogg-Briand Pact, the movement's great achievement in diplomacy, became a synonym for wishful thinking. The chief effect of the neutrality laws was to make Europe safe for Hitler and East Asia safe for Tojo.

The peace movement, like the isolationists, fundamentally misread the signs of the times. Movement leaders looked back to World War I as an evil to be avoided, and forward to a future without war; but they never looked down, as it were, to the facts on the ground in front of them. Attacking the "merchants of death" may have been morally and politically satisfying. But it diverted attention from the rise of totalitarianism. The movement's leaders were largely blind to the aggressive designs of Germany, Italy, and Japan. When such designs were acknowledged, they were explained away as the reactions of "have nots" to trans-Atlantic economic hegemony.

And finally, when the totalitarian threat could no longer be ignored, the movement ran out of ideas: As Norman Thomas admitted, it "had nothing to offer in the problem of stopping Nazism . . . except for a religious faith."

Could the internationalist approach to peace—championed by Clark Eichelberger and, after 1937, less forcefully by FDR—have worked? The question is moot, since the alliance between isolationists and organized pacifists eroded the liberal internationalists' constituency. Could Roosevelt have helped rally such a constituency? His anxieties about Hitler, expressed as early as 1933, were not matched by a willingness to challenge the ideas that the peace movement had been teaching the U.S. public.

FDR believed that the White House would be an ineffective base from which to confront the radicals' allegations that "American intervention" in Europe, even in the form of collective security arrangements, would only lead to war. "Events," the president hoped, would undercut the peace movement and dissolve isolationism. Eventually they did, but at the expense of American military readiness, and at the cost of an Axis-dominated Europe and East Asia.

Isolationism was routed, not by argument and presidential leadership, but by the Japanese bombs that struck Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Roosevelt now had the constituency to support an active U.S. role in the struggle for the survival of freedom. From a distance of decades, it is difficult to avoid the judgment that, because of their chronic difficulties in grappling with the realities of power in the world, the leaders of the American peace movement of the inter-war era made World War II more, not less, likely.