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THE UNION PARTY OF 1936

DISSERTATION

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By

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INTRODUCTION

The birth of the Union party was announced by Representative William Lemke of North Dakota at a Washington press conference on June 19, 1936. At the same time, Lemke made public the new party's platform and declared that he would be its presidential candidate and that Thomas C. O'Brien of Boston would be his running mate. A few hours after Lemke's announcement, Father Charles E. Coughlin told a nation-wide radio audience that he would support the new party and its candidates during the coming election. Several weeks later, Dr. Francis E. Townsend and the Reverend Gerald L. K. Smith agreed to campaign on Lemke's behalf. Although Lemke also promised that a national convention of interested groups would be held later in the summer to organize the party and approve the candidates and platform, no such meeting ever took place.

The nature of the union which this party represented has generally been misunderstood. It has usually been assumed that it was an attempt to bring about a merger of Coughlin's National Union for Social Justice, Townsend's Old-Age Revolving Pension organization, Smith's followers from the late Huey Long's Share-Our-Wealth Society, and Lemke's agrarian supporters, and to integrate their respective economic programs. Actually, however, the four leaders of the Union party were united in only a very narrow and restricted sense and never attempted any real amalgamation of their individual organizations or programs. The defeat of Franklin D. Roosevelt in the election of 1936 was the main issue upon
which the Union party was founded and upon which its campaign was conducted. It was only upon this negative idea that these four men could unite; they had little else in common. Like the Whigs during the days of Andrew Jackson, the leaders of the Union party of 1936 found unity only in common opposition to the man in the White House.

In order to understand the origin and formation of the Union party, it is necessary, therefore, to examine in some detail the public careers of Coughlin, Townsend, Smith, and Lemke with particular emphasis upon the period between the presidential elections of 1932 and 1936. In the former year, these four men had neither the potential political power nor a valid reason for forming a third party. Although Lemke and Coughlin had attracted some national recognition, both were warm supporters of Roosevelt; Townsend and Smith, on the other hand, were unknown nationally at that time and had no voice in the world of politics. Yet, four years later, each of these men had become a public figure with a nation-wide following estimated in the millions; moreover, each of them was eager by 1936 to bring about the defeat of President Roosevelt.
PART I

THE BASIS FOR UNITY
CHAPTER I

FATHER COUGHLIN

Father Charles E. Coughlin's early life did not differ significantly from that of many young priests. Born in 1891 in Hamilton, Ontario, he was the son of Catholic parents of Irish ancestry. At the age of twelve, he left the security of his home, where he had received the attention usually showered upon an only child, and entered St. Michael's, a Catholic institution federated with the University of Toronto. There he concluded his high school education and subsequently studied classics on the college level. During these years, he was recognized as a well-rounded student whose "oratorical ability, fluency of tongue, and quick wit" were outstanding. Under the influence of the Basilian fathers at St. Michael's, young Coughlin decided to enter St. Basil's seminary to study for the priesthood.¹

Following his ordination in 1916, the young priest spent seven years as an instructor in philosophy at Assumption College in western Ontario where he came under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Detroit, the Right Reverend Michael J. Gallagher. In 1926, after several

¹Ruth Mugglebee, Father Coughlin of the Shrine of the Little Flower: An Account of the Life, Work and Message of Reverend Charles E. Coughlin (Boston, 1933), 123; Louis B. Ward, Father Charles E. Coughlin (Detroit, 1933), 15-16. Unless otherwise cited, the material on Coughlin's early life is based upon these two authorized biographies.
temporary assignments in churches of the Detroit Diocese, Father Coughlin was sent by Bishop Gallagher to Royal Oak, a growing suburb thirteen miles north of Detroit, to erect a church and shrine in honor of the recently canonized St. Therese.

It was at Royal Oak that Father Coughlin entered upon the radio career which was to make him one of the most popular and powerful public figures of the 1930's and perhaps the most controversial Roman Catholic priest in American history. Looking for a way to improve the financial condition of his tiny parish of thirty-two families and to combat the religious bigotry which the Ku Klux Klan was spreading in Royal Oak and the Detroit area, Father Coughlin hit upon the idea of broadcasting a religious program over the radio. Encouraged by the full support of his Bishop, Coughlin made arrangements with Leo Fitzpatrick, manager of WJR, a small independent Detroit station, to broadcast a sermon every Sunday direct from the Shrine of the Little Flower, the small frame church which had been erected shortly after his arrival at Royal Oak. October 17, 1926 may be said to mark the beginning of Coughlin's public career, for it was upon that date that he presented his first sermon over the air.

During these early years of local broadcasting from 1926 to 1929, the programs emanating from the Shrine were religious in nature and usually dealt with complicated theological questions. "We avoid prejudicial subjects, all controversies, and especially all bigotry," the priest told a reported for the Detroit Free Press in 1927. The weekly sermons were an immediate success; in the words of the manager of WJR "Father Coughlin clicked." His warm personality, his pleasing Irish
brogue, his simple and direct style plus the fact that he was the first Roman Catholic priest to make use of the relatively new and exciting medium of radio, all contributed to his initial triumph on the air. To defray the costs of broadcasting and to raise funds for the construction of a permanent shrine in Royal Oak, Father Coughlin relied upon contributions from his listeners, who began almost immediately to form Leagues of the Little Flower in the Detroit area.²

For three years, the priest was content with his local success and watched with satisfaction as his parish expanded, the power of the Klan waned, and plans were laid for a magnificent shrine in honor of St. Therese. However, he was basically an ambitious young man and yearned to extend the range of his radio voice; therefore, in the fall of 1929, he negotiated through Fitzpatrick to broadcast his weekly program over local stations in Chicago and Cincinnati as well as Detroit.

This expansion of his radio facilities coincided with the stock market crash of 1929 and the subsequent collapse of the American economy. As poverty and despair spread throughout the nation, Coughlin began to fear the growth of revolutionary economic and political ideas. It is not surprising to find, therefore, that his Sunday evening programs underwent a marked change in the early months of 1930. He became, in the words of one of his biographers, "a radio crusader against socialism, communism, and kindred fallacious social and economic theories." Under such dramatic titles as "Christ or the Red Fog," his sermons warned that

²Mugglebee, Coughlin, 166, 169. On the origin of the League of the Little Flower see John L. Spivak, Shrine of the Silver Dollar (New York, 1940), 82.
the United States was "seriously tainted with the purple poison of Bolshevism" and that the "red serpent" was everywhere.\(^3\)

The enunciation of these views in a series of discourses from January to March of 1930 was greeted with both the bitter criticism and enthusiastic approval which so characterized the rest of Coughlin's public career. Demanding equal time to answer the attacks on socialism, the head of the Socialist party, Norman Thomas, complained of "serious misrepresentations of the nature of socialism and the Socialist party and hopeless confusion of it with communism." From the other side of the political spectrum, however, approval of the priest's views was registered when he was invited to testify before the congressional committee headed by Hamilton Fish during its investigation of communist activity in the Detroit area. On this occasion, Coughlin demonstrated his ability to gain publicity by charging that Henry Ford was contributing to the growth of communism in America by his "ignorant" industrial policies. His biographer, Ruth Mugglebee, has noted that the priest was the only one of ten witnesses at the Detroit hearings to "make" the headlines of newspapers throughout the country the next day.\(^4\)

With a weekly fan mail of about 15,000 letters as evidence of the popularity he had attained through his attacks upon such dissimilar individuals as Norman Thomas and Henry Ford, Father Coughlin was able to convince the Columbia Broadcasting System to schedule him for a weekly Sunday evening broadcast over its basic chain of stations. By this

\(^4\)Mugglebee, \textit{Coughlin}, 185-188.
agreement, the priest's voice was now carried into such far-flung urban centers as New York, Boston, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Minneapolis, and Kansas City, and his potential audience was expanded to some 40 million listeners. In order to finance his costly broadcasting schedule, continue the construction of the shrine, and pay for the expense involved in answering his mail, Coughlin incorporated the Radio League of the Little Flower in 1930. In return for the payment of "$1.00 per broadcasting season," contributors received a membership card and "remembrance in the daily mass offered at Calvary Hill, Jerusalem."^5

When the "Golden Hour of the Little Flower" made its debut over CBS in October of 1930, Father Coughlin was faced with the problem of attracting and holding an audience which was virtually nationwide in scope. Instead of returning to his original policy of avoiding all controversy in his sermons, the priest turned more and more to discussions concerning the economic problems related to the depression and to outspoken discourses on such emotional and controversial subjects as prohibition and birth control.

Pointing out the increasing danger of communism and socialism as the depression grew worse and demanding that the government take full responsibility for the provision of work for the unemployed, the priest claimed that his sermons were based upon Christian principles as outlined by Pope Leo XIII in his famous encyclicals and concluded that the alternative for the future was either "Christ or Chaos." Early in January of 1931, Coughlin delivered a sermon on the causes of the

^5 Spivak, Silver Dollar, 34-44, 83.
depression which foreshadowed the type of economic thought which later led him first to support and then to reject the efforts of Roosevelt and the New Deal to combat the depression. Coughlin's explanation of the origins of the depression involved an interpretation of history which was a familiar theme in American political and economic thought: all important events were the result of a conspiracy on the part of the international money power. In 1931 he expressed this "conspiracy" theory in unmistakable terms:

This post-war catastrophe to which I refer has not simply happened and grown to its present magnitude. . . . It was a deliberate, scheming, dastardly contrivance on the part of certain European diplomats and bankers.  

Coughlin's free-wheeling and sensational comments concerning two other controversial topics drew attention to the "Golden Hour" early in 1931. Ignoring his earlier promise to avoid all discussion of prohibition and claiming to be neither a "wet nor a dry," he lashed out at the "noble experiment" as the most "diabolical influence outside the actual negation of religion that is destroying the youth of America and the hope of our future."

His pronouncements on this subject, however, were mild in contrast to his sermon on the question of birth control. While it was not unusual for a Catholic priest to brand this doctrine as "perhaps the most heinous and vicious of sins" and to insist that it was a subject for discussion only between the "Christian and the pagan," Coughlin's slanderous insinuations with regard to the Federal Council of Churches, which had

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6Charles E. Coughlin, Father Coughlin's Radio Sermons (Baltimore, 1931), 134, 149-150.
recently stirred up the old controversy over birth control by endorsing it, were unprecedented at that time:

Those of us who are acquainted with the activities of communistic doctrines in this country have long since breathed rather nervously at the activities of certain officials in the Federal Council of Churches ... in abetting the program of Lenin and of advocating the ideals of bolshevism.7

The 1930-31 broadcasting season over CBS had been a highly successful one from the priest's point of view, for he had proved beyond a doubt that he could attract a large national audience. His mail had grown to staggering proportions: one broadcast had resulted in a record 350,000 letters, and the Detroit post office had to assign the entire second floor to his mail. One hundred secretaries were kept busy at the Shrine opening, sorting, and answering letters. Moreover, membership in the Radio League continued to increase, and financial contributions were ample to cover all expenses. When CBS refused to renew his contract at the end of the season, apparently because of the controversial nature of his sermons, Coughlin turned to his old WFR friend, Leo Fitzpatrick, who arranged for the program to be broadcast on a number of independent stations. This new chain of stations eventually exceeded the coverage the priest had had on CBS.8

Although Father Coughlin announced in October of 1931 at the beginning of his new series of addresses that "primarily, my friends, these broadcasts are of a religious nature," it was soon apparent that the religious orientation of the "Golden Hour of the Little Flower" had been almost entirely eclipsed by discussions which were primarily

7 Ibid., 213, 223, 238-239.
8 Mugglebee, Coughlin, 201-205; Ward, Coughlin, 75.
economic and political in content. As in the past, socialists and communists were found lurking in every corner ready to spring out and take full advantage of the chaos which the international bankers had conspired to bring about, and prohibition was exposed as having been "conceived in the lust of lying and nurtured at the breast of bigotry."9

As the election year of 1932 approached, however, the emphasis was shifted to an increasingly bitter critique of the policies of the Republican administration in relation to the depression. The government was accused of hiding behind a "false and stupid" definition of the "dole" in order to justify its cherished belief that direct relief was the responsibility of local authorities rather than of the federal government. The Reconstruction Finance Corporation was exposed as a "dole of $2,000,000,000 extended to banks," and together with most of the other depression measures of the administration, it was condemned as "financial socialism." Secretary of Treasury Mellon's philosophy of granting aid to the top of the economic pyramid but refusing immediate payment of the veterans' bonus was characterized in the following words: "Billions to international bankers who never fought. But none to the soldiers who risked life and limb!" Finally, in February of 1932, the President himself was described by the priest as the "banker's friend, the Holy Ghost of the rich, the protective angel of Wall Street."10

9Charles E. Coughlin, Father Coughlin's Radio Discourses 1931-1932 (Royal Oak, 1932), 11-12, 33.

10Ibid., 127, 149, 154, 157, 178.
Although Father Coughlin took no active part in the election of 1932, there can be no doubt that his followers knew that he was supporting the Democratic nominee. As early as November of 1930, after praising Theodore Roosevelt's record as president, the priest predicted to his listeners that the "glorious sunrise of yesterday shall return. ... Another Roosevelt shall have the courage to uncloak the hypocritical human factors who have debased our system. ... Another Roosevelt shall labor for the development of our own country!" Moreover, Coughlin's criticisms of the Hoover administration's policies corresponded to those which Roosevelt made during the election campaign.\textsuperscript{11}

It was during the so-called interregnum between Hoover's defeat in November and Roosevelt's inauguration in March that Coughlin began advocating a specific program designed to reverse the downward spiral of the American economy and restore prosperity. Convinced that the money and banking system and the men who controlled it were chiefly responsible for the current economic plight of the United States, it was only natural that Father Coughlin should begin proposing various monetary solutions. He soon became the most effective popular advocate of monetary reform. To Coughlin this meant the restoration of government control over the monetary and banking system by using the power of Congress to "coin and regulate" money in such a way as to restore prosperity. To accomplish this purpose, the priest urged the adoption of a variety of inflationary proposals which ranged from the relatively

\textsuperscript{11}Coughlin, \textit{Radio Sermons}, 91.
mild heresy of revaluation of the dollar to an outright resort to printing-press currency.

In making these proposals, Coughlin was not advocating anything new or alien to the traditions of American politics and economics. From Shays' rebellion to Bryan's crusade, the demand for a managed and inflated currency had been a distinctly dominant theme of political protest in the United States. Furthermore, in 1932 the stage was already crowded with a large number of speculators, western politicians, representatives of farm organizations, and even an occasional professional economist, all of whom shared a common interest in the money question and voiced a common cry for inflationary action.¹²

As early as April of 1932, in testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee, Coughlin had revealed his addiction to monetary nostrums by urging the immediate payment of the veterans' bonus through the issuance of United States notes (greenbacks), calling for the revaluation of the dollar, and expressing no alarm over the fact that such action would probably drive the United States off the gold standard. The following October he began presenting his views on this subject to his vast radio audience.¹³

The politically astute Roosevelt fully realized the value of Coughlin's support and began to cultivate his friendly attitude by implying that the priest's opinions were of great interest to the future


President of the United States. "I do hope if you come East you will stop off in Albany to see me," Roosevelt wrote in July of 1932, "I want to talk with you about many things." Following Roosevelt's triumph at the polls in November, the priest was frequently invited to visit the President-elect and often conferred with members of the Brain Trust such as Raymond Moley. In view of this, Father Coughlin was generally considered to have influence at the White House during the early days of the New Deal. Like many others who either misunderstood Roosevelt's real intentions or were deceived by his pragmatic attitude, Father Coughlin possibly concluded that FDR's eagerness to discuss any possible depression cure meant that he was willing to adopt the priest's inflationary proposals.14

Regardless of the exact nature of Father Coughlin's influence, the monetary policies of the New Deal during 1933 leaned in the direction of his unorthodox ideas and are probably the chief explanation of his original enthusiasm for the new president. Roosevelt's inaugural address with its critical references to the "money changers" was interpreted by Coughlin as an endorsement of his crusade against bankers and was described by him as the greatest document since the Declaration of Independence. Moreover, the New Deal's early abandonment of the gold standard and approval of the inflationary Thomas amendment to the Agricultural Adjustment Act, together with its later adoption of the gold

purchase program, were at least partial surrenders to inflationist demands.\textsuperscript{15}

At any rate, the Royal Oak priest was certainly one of the warmest supporters of FDR and the New Deal throughout 1933 and early 1934. In August of 1933, before a grand jury investigation of bank failures in Detroit, Coughlin defended the President as a man who "thinks right, who lives for the common man, who knows patience and suffering, who knows that... human rights are more sacred than financial rights." The next month he was quoted as saying that Roosevelt had already won a niche in the "American Hall of Fame" equal to Lincoln and Washington. In one of his regular radio broadcasts on November 5, 1933, he coined the famous slogan "It is either Roosevelt or Ruin," and later told his listeners that they could choose between "Roosevelt and Morgan, between liberty and slavery, between prosperity and depression." Following a visit at the White House on January 18, 1934, the priest told reporters that the President was "about twenty years ahead of the thought that is current in the country today." The day before he had informed a Congressional committee that "President Roosevelt is not going to make a mistake, for God Almighty is guiding him."\textsuperscript{16}

Although the priest always put more emphasis upon personalities than upon policies in his addresses, his praise of the New Deal during 1933 often approached the same level as his enthusiasm for the President.

\textsuperscript{15}Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Coming of the New Deal (Boston, 1959), chap. 12, 14.

\textsuperscript{16}New York Times, Aug. 24, 1933, Sept. 6, 1933; Charles E. Coughlin, The New Deal in Money (Royal Oak, 1933), 110, 115; New York Times, Jan. 18, 19, 1934.
"I am a fervent disciple of the New Deal" was a typical comment during the fall of 1933. During the same period, when criticism of the National Recovery Administration was already developing, it was Coughlin who defended it. Comparing the NIRA to the Magna Charta, he asserted that it represented the "first time since the thirteenth century that a national move has been made on the part of government to control labor hours and wages and to prevent exploitation and also to guard employers from unfair competition. . . . It is an immortal step back to the principle of being our brother's keeper."¹⁷

His most spectacular and wholehearted defense of a New Deal measure was sparked by Al Smith's famous blast at the administration's gold purchase program: "I am for gold dollars as against baloney dollars." Listeners of the "Golden Hour of the Little Flower" were quickly informed that Smith was a "wealthy banker" who was "content to squint at the future with his face turned toward the past." When Smith continued his criticism and was joined by other conservatives, Coughlin and other monetary reform advocates such as Frank Vanderlip and James H. Rand of the Committee for the Nation staged a gigantic rally in support of the administration at the Hippodrome in New York. In the main address, the priest decried the threat of inflation as a "hobgoblin spread on the pages of the Saturday Evening Post" and lashed out at the "Barons of Wall Street" and everyone else opposing the gold purchase program. "Two more years of this lying commodity system as advocated by Smith, Morgan, Woll, Acheson, and the rest of them," he warned, "would

leave us a nation of carcasses." The rally later adopted a resolution endorsing FDR's entire monetary policy and requesting him to continue it until the "1926 level of commodities, salaries, wages, conditions of employment and the solvency of the people of the United States are restored." Budget Director Lewis Douglas might foresee in the administration's monetary policies "the end of western civilization," but to Father Coughlin the New Deal was "Christ's Deal."  

The Hippodrome rally marked the high point of Coughlin's support and defense of President Roosevelt and the New Deal. Although it was not immediately evident, the priest and the President were now taking up positions on the money question which would later prove to be irreconcilable. Pleased with his supposed influence upon the administration's monetary experiments but convinced that only a "frontal attack against the disease of debt and the famine of money which afflict us" would suffice, Coughlin now urged a more radical inflationary program which included the remonetization of silver as well as the issuance of greenbacks for a multitude of purposes. Roosevelt, on the other hand, soon lost his enthusiasm for monetary manipulation and was prepared to bring his political pressure to bear upon an inflationist-minded congress in order to forestall further action in that direction.  

Although not yet making any real criticism of FDR or the New Deal and probably still believing that the administration was amenable to his ideas, Father Coughlin nevertheless began to put increased emphasis upon

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18 New York Times, Nov. 27, 28, 1933.  
19 Coughlin, New Deal in Money, 11.
the necessity of congressional leadership and action in monetary matters. At the same time, he renewed his plea for the remonetization of silver as the best method of relieving the famine of money which he insisted was the chief cause of the economic troubles of the United States. The same religious fervor accompanied Coughlin's silver crusade as had been so much in evidence in 1896. "Forward to Christ all ye people!" the priest commanded, "March! March today! God wills it--This religious crusade against the pagan god of gold!" 20

The radio priest was not alone in his campaign to "do something for silver." Early in 1934, the Silver Bloc in the Senate grew stronger when William E. Borah, Elmer Thomas, and Burton K. Wheeler united to support an amendment to the administration's gold bill which involved the purchase of large quantities of silver. When this amendment was only defeated by a vote of 45 to 43, the administration decided that some dramatic action had to be taken to beat back the silverites; thus, late in April, Secretary of Treasury Henry Morgenthau began publishing lists of individuals and firms engaged in silver speculation. Although the names of such prominent silverites as Frank Vanderlip, Robert M. Harris, and William Jennings Bryan, Jr. were revealed, it was the name of Miss Amy Collins of Royal Oak, Michigan which soon became the center of publicity. Miss Collins turned out to be one of Father Coughlin's secretaries and the treasurer of the Radio League of the Little Flower. In the latter capacity, she had invested the Radio League's funds in 500,000 ounces of silver. Although Coughlin denied that he was in any way

20 Ibid., 83.
personally involved and claimed that all profits had gone back into the treasury of the Radio League, his "religious crusade against the pagan god of gold" lost much of its luster, and the issue was used quite effectively at that time and later by his enemies. "Every time Silver Charlie orated and the price of silver went up one cent," it was charged, "he made $5,000."21

Coughlin was understandably infuriated by the administration's actions and immediately issued a statement denouncing Secretary Morgenthau, impugning his motives, and criticizing the recovery policies of FDR's "assistants." The publication of the silver lists is of importance not only because it represented the first open break between Father Coughlin and the New Deal but also because it gave the priest indisputable proof that Roosevelt had gone over to the ranks of the opposition in the crusade for an inflated currency. In addition to this obvious conflict over future monetary policy, Father Coughlin had other reasons for feeling resentment toward the President even before the silver lists were used against him. Although he had been one of the most faithful adherents of the New Deal throughout its first year of existence, he had never received any public recognition from the administration. When six senators and fifty-nine representatives had seen fit to petition FDR requesting that the priest be appointed as an economic adviser to the London Conference, no action was taken. Finally, the invitations to confer with the President at the White House appear to have ceased during

the early months of 1934 and even his letters were answered with only a brief acknowledgment, and occasionally ignored completely.22

On the other hand, Coughlin fully realized that his identification with and support of the President and the New Deal had increased his own power and influence with the American people and had substantially added to his radio audience. One indication of the extent to which the priest's own popularity was related to his support of FDR is revealed in the results of a poll by a New York radio station which asked its listeners the question: "Aside from the President, who was the most useful citizen of the United States politically in 1933?"

Although the priest won the poll and received over 50 per cent of the 22,000 votes cast, the great majority of those who voted for him gave as their reason his support of Roosevelt and his loyal defense of the New Deal.23

Judging from his future action, Coughlin apparently decided during the summer of 1934 that the time was not yet ripe for an open break with Roosevelt. For the time being, the risks involved in such a course outweighed his own personal resentment of the actions and attitudes of the administration; instead, he adopted a policy of building up his own following and delaying any clash with FDR until the circumstances were more favorable.


Yet a close analysis of the priest's addresses during the fall of 1934 reveals the fact that he had lost interest in the New Deal and was on the verge of becoming openly critical of its failure. Often his changing attitude could not be detected, but occasionally he expressed it cautiously. Less than six months before he had said, "I will never change my philosophy that the New Deal is Christ's Deal"; however, in the opening broadcast of the 1934-35 season, he stated that "more than ever I am in favor of a New Deal." Only the careful listener would catch the significance which this change of article implied.24

On November 11, 1934, the radio priest took his first step toward independent political action. After proclaiming the week before that the "old parties are all but dead," Coughlin announced the formation of the National Union for Social Justice. This organization was to become, he told his radio audience, an "articulate organized lobby for the people." Several weeks later, he met with three of the leading inflationists in the senate, Wheeler, Thomas, and Patrick A. McCarran, to map strategy for the coming session of congress.25

Two months later, Father Coughlin found an issue upon which he was willing to test the strength of the National Union for Social Justice. This issue was the administration's proposal to authorize American participation in the World Court. Charging that the idea of joining the court "stinks of diplomatic deceit," Coughlin opened his campaign by professing to be "old-fashioned enough to prefer Washington

24Charles E. Coughlin, A Series of Lectures on Social Justice (Royal Oak, 1935), 7, 95. Italics have been added.
and his logic and principle to Wilson and those who follow him with their crude internationalism and their unsound love of minorities."

Urging his listeners to wire their objections to their senators, Coughlin called upon every "solid American who loves democracy, who loves the United States, who loves the truth, to stand four square back of those tried and true Senators of long experience in their hopeless yet honest fight to keep America safe for Americans and not the happy hunting ground of international plutocrats." An avalanche of telegrams descended upon Washington, the bill was defeated by seven votes, and Father Coughlin was widely credited with a leading role in its defeat.26

Obviously delighted by the apparent success of his assault upon the World Court proposal, the priest was now ready after months of hesitation to attack the New Deal directly and felt strong enough to challenge FDR in a contest for public support. Congratulating the members of the National Union on their victory on the World Court issue and informing them that they now had the "power to override the invisible government," Coughlin warned that the "lesson gained from this victory must neither be underestimated nor forgotten!" "Our next goal," he told his listeners, "is to clean out the international bankers now that the international politicians have suffered." If there was any doubt in the minds of his followers concerning the exact nature of the next goal,

Father Coughlin made his objective perfectly clear on February 3 with his first real indictment of the administration and the New Deal:

I would rather be a rebel with Washington that a patriot with George III. I would rather be a crack-pot for social justice than a hired "yes-man" and an internationalist for the present monetary policies of this administration. . . . This administration while professing and expressing fine ideas . . . is wedded basically to the philosophy of the money changers. No serious attempt has been made on its part to rescue the coinage and regulating of money from the hands of the private manufacturers of money. No serious attempt has been made on the part of the government to issue United States currency. . . . On the contrary the administration is still engaged in borrowing money--credit money--from those who create it with their purple fountain pens. The administration is still engaged in keeping America safe for the plutocrats.27

In addition to following policies which were favorable to the international bankers, Coughlin charged the next Sunday that "through the agency of his appointed high officers, Mr. Roosevelt shares the responsibility of having endorsed a most radical leaning toward international socialism or sovietism in relation to the rights to private property ownership." Citing as evidence the charter of "The Public Works Emergency Leasing Corporation," which was incorporated in Delaware by Public Works Administration officials but never put into operation, Coughlin concluded that "certain agents of our present Administration at Washington are, to say the least, theoretic communists, while the Administration itself is, in practice, still wedded to the chief error of capitalism."28

On March 3 in a review of the administration's first two years in office, Coughlin delivered a comprehensive onslaught against various

28 Ibid., Feb. 11, 1935.
phases of the New Deal which sounded like an admixture of the charges which might have been made by such diverse New Deal critics as Al Smith, Norman Thomas, and Earl Browder. Not only international bankers and communists but also "big business" had influenced the New Deal and benefited from its policies. The Roosevelt administration had "out-Hoovered Hoover" in assisting banks through the RFC. The NRA was a "farce" and the AAA a "failure." In addition to all this, the New Deal was guilty of a "tendency to substitute undemocratic methods of government for the democratic usages and legally established institutions" and had established "unnecessary bureaucracies which inordinately have transgressed the fundamental rights of State government." Concluding that he could not support a "new deal which protects plutocrats and comforts communists," the priest placed the blame squarely upon the President:

President Roosevelt not only compromised with the money changers and conciliated with monopolistic industry but he did not refrain from holding out the olive branch to those whose policies are crimsoned with the theories of sovietism and international socialism.29

The reaction of the administration and its supporters to Coughlin's assault does not appear to have been very consistent. According to a New York Times report, Democratic senators and cabinet members generally refused to comment upon the priest's charges because they were "too absurd to dignify with a reply." Louis Howe sent FDR a newspaper account of Coughlin's February 10 blast against the PWA with the innocuous comment that it was "not without interest." Finally, former

29Ibid., March 4, 1935.
NRA Administrator Hugh Johnson took it upon himself to defend Roosevelt and the New Deal against the growing criticism of Coughlin. After a violent tirade against Huey Long, Johnson lashed out at the "political padre":

Added to that there comes burring over the air the dripping brogue of the Irish-Canadian priest—pounding home points of pure political propaganda by calling on . . . the saints and the very precepts of the Master . . . musical, blatant bunk from the very rostrum of religion . . . . We expect politics to make strange bedfellows but if Father Coughlin wants to engage in political bundling with Huey Long, or any other demagogue, it is only a fair first move to take off that Roman Catholic cassock.  

The only official of the administration to answer Coughlin's attacks during this period was Harold Ickes who delivered a three-way denunciation of Coughlin, Long, and Dr. Townsend before the Associated Press luncheon in New York on April 23. Without mentioning the priest by name, Ickes referred to the "voice of the cloistered individual whose rich but undisciplined imagination has reduced politics, sociology and barking to charming poetry which he distills mellifluously into the ether for the entrancement of mankind."

Roosevelt, however, had apparently not authorized either the Johnson or Ickes attack upon Coughlin, for he told a private meeting of political advisers the next month that Ickes had "done harm" in his address and that his "reference to Father Coughlin was very unwise." Moreover, upon the same occasion, the President indicated that he was more interested in placating than in antagonizing the priest: "Right

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now Frank Murphy is doing a splendid job in handling Coughlin. I'm going to make him [Murphy] High Commissioner of the Philippines and [then] bring him back after a month or two so that he may devote his entire time to the Coughlin situation."32

In the meantime, the Royal Oak priest had announced an organizational drive to build up membership in the National Union to 10 million for the 1936 election. Before an overflow crowd of 15,000 in Olympia Auditorium at Detroit on April 24, Father Coughlin launched the membership campaign and declared that the intention of the National Union was to drive out of public office the "men who practice the philosophy of plutocrats"; furthermore, it did not matter whether these men were in the house of representatives, the senate, or the presidency. This meeting was followed by another record breaking rally of 25,000 at Cleveland on May 8, and the drive was climaxed at New York on May 23 with a meeting of 23,000 at Madison Square Garden. Here for the first time the President's name was booed along with the "Morgans, the Baruchs and the Warburgs," and it was announced that the National Union now had a membership of 8,500,000 qualified voters. The New York Times commented that the rally resembled a "reincarnation of the multitude that stormed the Old Garden" to hear Bryan in 1896.33

Although the priest still appeared hesitant to make the break with FDR final and even expressed the hope that the Supreme Court's

32 James A. Farley, Jim Farley's Story: The Roosevelt Years (New York, 1948), 52.

striking down of New Deal legislation would bring the President back to his senses, the rapid expansion of the National Union and the threats of political retribution during the summer of 1935 were indications that the day of reckoning was not far off. The exact nature and result of Frank Murphy's mission are unknown, but another prominent Catholic adviser of the President, Joseph P. Kennedy, did arrange a secret meeting between the priest and the President at Hyde Park in September of 1935. Following the disclosure of this conference, rumors were current that a reconciliation had been effected; however, Coughlin scotched these reports by informing the New York Times that he was not going to scrap the National Union and support FDR: "I am neither supporting President Roosevelt nor opposing him. I am determined to support principles and not men. 34

Finally, on November 17, 1935, Father Coughlin abandoned the administration completely by informing his radio audience that the New Deal and the National Union were "unalterably opposed" in relation to questions involving money, labor, and agriculture. Charging that the New Deal was still upholding both the extreme of "Communist tendencies" and the "error of plutocracy," the priest repudiated his earlier support of Roosevelt:

On March 4, 1933, I thrilled to the ringing words which promised to drive the money changers from the temple. I thought that the death-knell for plutocracy had sounded. Today I humbly stand before the American public to admit I have been in error. Despite all promises, the money changer has not been driven from the temple. 35

34 Ibid., Sept. 12, Oct. 17, 1935.
As the election year of 1936 approached, Father Coughlin's future course was a subject of widespread speculation. Even his followers were confused, and the priest did not appear to be ready to reveal any plans which he might have had. Insisting that the issue was still "Roosevelt or Ruin," one disturbed listener informed the priest that he was still for Roosevelt. "Who or what are you for?" the listener asked. Coughlin's only answer was that "Mr. Roosevelt is not the only man who can save America."36

CHAPTER II

DR. TOWNSEND AND REVEREND SMITH

Dr. Francis E. Townsend was sixty-seven years old in 1934 when almost overnight his old-age pension plan became the most popular of the many depression-born programs designed to alleviate the economic collapse which plagued the nation. He was considerably older than some of his rival political and economic prophets of the 1930's—in 1934 Father Coughlin was forty-three, Huey Long forty-one, and Gerald L. K. Smith thirty-six. Beginning new pursuits at an advanced age had been quite customary in Dr. Townsend's life, however, for he had been thirty-one when he entered medical school, forty when he married, and fifty when he enlisted in the army during World War I.¹

Born in Fairbury, Illinois, only two years after the close of the Civil War, Townsend followed in the footsteps of his English forebears who had moved West in succeeding generations from New Jersey to Ohio, Indiana, and finally Illinois in search of free land and new opportunities. After migrating with his parents to Nebraska as a boy, he moved on to Kansas, South Dakota, and Colorado before finally making his home in California in 1919. During these years, his occupation changed as

¹Unless otherwise cited, the material on Dr. Townsend's life prior to 1933 is based upon Francis E. Townsend, New Horizons (An Autobiography), ed. by Jesse George Murray (Chicago, 1943), 1-135.
frequently as did his habitat—in Nebraska he was a stove salesman, in Kansas a homesteader and school teacher, in Colorado a miner, and in South Dakota a general medical practitioner.

Neither California's renowned climate nor the general prosperity of the 1920's had much impact upon Dr. Townsend—his health was poor and his medical practice unsuccessful. Although an appointment as a physician for the Long Beach health department improved his economic situation late in the decade, the depression soon brought an end to this steady income, and he was forced to sell real estate in order to eke out an existence. It was at this stage of his life that he hit upon the old-age pension idea which was to bring him fame and power. Unemployed and well past the age when employment was available even during prosperous times, it was not surprising that he sought some method of relieving the economic burdens of the aged.

"Unlike many of the gadgety new ideas," the New Republic commented in 1934, "[The Townsend Plan] seems like simplicity itself."

The plan provided that the national government pay each citizen over sixty years of age a pension of $200 a month, on the condition that he cease working and spend the whole of each month's pension within thirty days. The money necessary to pay the monthly pensions was to be raised by a "2-percent transactions' tax." According to its advocates, the Townsend Plan would not only provide income for the aged but would also cure the depression by providing jobs for the unemployed through the removal of old people from the labor market and by stimulating industry through the purchasing power created by the monthly pensions.²

Critics of the Townsend Plan immediately pointed out that it would be impossible to raise anything like the amount of money necessary by means of a transactions' tax without inducing wholesale inflation. Furthermore, it was charged that such a tax would fall most heavily upon those least able to pay and would therefore retard recovery by reducing the purchasing power of the masses. In spite of the fact that no recognized economist would endorse it and criticism of it was given wide circulation in the nation's magazines and newspapers, the Townsend Plan had become by late 1934 the "most popular panacea for the economic troubles of the times." 3

Dr. Townsend first introduced his plan to the public on September 30, 1933 in a letter which appeared in the vox pop column of the Long Beach Press-Telegram. Within a few weeks, much to his surprise, the newspaper was printing a full page of letters each day discussing the pros and cons of the plan. Little did the readers of the Press-Telegram realize that the name of Dr. Townsend would soon rank with those of Father Coughlin and Huey Long as one of the most popular leaders of the 1930's. 4

Although he was later pictured as being politically naive by the national press, Dr. Townsend was shrewd enough to recognize a few essentials of practical politics and pressure group tactics. "Economics

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3 Townsend, New Horizons, 153. For analysis and criticism of the Townsend Plan see Harry D. Gideonse, ed., The Economic Meaning of the Townsend Plan, A University of Chicago Round Table (Chicago, 1936); Committee on Old Age Security, The Townsend Crusade (New York, 1936); Temporary National Economic Commission, Recovery Plans (Washington, 1936), 45-60.

4 Townsend, New Horizons, 137-141.
in America is something controlled by politics—and politics by votes," he recalled a decade later. "We [he and his wife] might be too old to work, but we were not too old to vote. And there were millions of others... too old to work but not too old to vote!" On the other hand, he realized that "no elected representative of the people is going to listen to any of the 'little folks' unless they are organized into a reasonably strong bloc of voters." Thus, Dr. Townsend concluded that the only way to get his plan adopted was to build a nation-wide organization by means of which he and his followers could bring pressure to bear upon their elected representatives.5

In November of 1933, Dr. Townsend and his real estate partner, Robert E. Clements, opened the first headquarters of the Townsend movement. A few elderly men and women volunteered their services and were sent out to circulate petitions addressed to the local congressman demanding enactment of the Townsend Plan. The appeal of the plan was immediately evident; within several weeks, thousands of Long Beach residents had signed the petitions. On January 24, 1934, Townsend and Clements incorporated the Old-Age Revolving Pension, Ltd. as a non-profit corporation under California law.6

After 15,000 signatures had been added to the petitions in Long Beach, Dr. Townsend "deemed it time to carry the message outside the confines of the city." During the summer of 1934, the movement spread

5Ibid., 137, 142.
6Ibid., 144-145, 149; U. S., Congress, House, Hearings before the Select Committee Investigating Old-Age Pension Organizations, 74th Cong., 2d Sess., 1936, I, 16.
up and down the Pacific Coast and as far East as Iowa and the Dakotas; by September of that year, it was established in thirty states. As the OARP mushroomed into a nation-wide organization, the founder realized the necessity of enlisting his followers into local units through which "their zeal and enthusiasm might be amalgamated into a declared purpose."

The first local club was chartered at Huntington Park, California in August of 1934 and was soon joined by hundreds of similar units throughout the United States. A few months later headquarters of the organization was transferred from Long Beach to Los Angeles, and eventually national offices were established in Chicago and Washington, D. C.  

In January of 1935, Townsend and Clements began publishing the Townsend National Weekly, and ten months later its circulation had grown to 300,000. In addition to this official newspaper, the other chief forms of publicity and propaganda of the OARP included newsletters to the local clubs, pamphlets, slide-sound films, talking motion pictures, and advertisement in the leading metropolitan newspapers.

The potential political power of the Townsendites was demonstrated in the fall of 1934 when the young organization elected John S. McGroarty, the poet laureate of California, to Congress from the Long Beach district. In the gubernatorial campaign during the same election, Frank Merriam, the Republican opponent of Upton Sinclair, recognized the growing strength of the Townsend movement by promising to urge the California state legislature to memorialize Congress on behalf of the

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8 Townsend, New Horizons, 183-185.
plan. George Creel, who had been defeated in his bid for the Democratic nomination for governor by Sinclair, predicted national significance for the Townsend Plan and stated that the Los Angeles area had gone so far to the left that "Hiram Johnson, in comparison, looks like a hidebound conservative."\(^9\)

Newspapers and magazines with nation-wide circulations and representatives of powerful pressure groups began taking critical note of the Townsend crusade during the last few months of 1934. "In an era of planners," the New York Times said in a sarcastic editorial, "Dr. Townsend is for the moment foremost." In the November issue of Social Security, publication of the American Association for Social Security, headed by Bishop Francis J. O'Connell of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the plan was denounced as a "social menace" and was said to be playing into the "hands of demagogues and charlatains [sic] and ... thwarting the consideration of sound legislation." President William Green of the American Federation of Labor felt obliged to announce in December that while organized labor favored old-age pensions, it did not favor the "illusory question of the Townsend plan" which he believed was "economically impossible."\(^10\)

Despite these and other criticisms, the movement continued to grow. Late in December of 1934, Dr. Townsend opened a membership campaign in New York City by announcing that at that time there were


2,000 local Townsend clubs with a minimum membership of 100 each and that the petition to Congress contained 15 million names. With some exaggeration but with an element of truth, Dr. Townsend later looked back at the rapid growth of his organization during its first year and boasted:

No such crusade as ours had been seen on the earth in 2000 years. No such ardent army has ever enlisted in any cause in all the world. Where Christianity numbered its hundreds, in its beginning years, our cause numbered its millions.\footnote{New York Times, Dec. 22, 1934; Townsend, New Horizons, 146.}

At the opening session of the new Congress in 1935, Representative McGroarty, the movement's chief supporter in Congress, introduced a bill which embodied the ideas of the Townsend Plan. When told by newsmen that Eleanor Roosevelt had been quoted as saying that the Townsend Plan was raising false hopes among the aged, McGroarty sternly replied: "Roosevelt has raised a hell of a lot of false hope. I have a real hope that this bill will pass the House this session." Commenting on the administration's social security plan which was announced several days later, the New York Times reported that it had been designed to "head off" what the President had called other "fantastic schemes."\footnote{New York Times, Jan. 17, 21, 1935.}

The phenomenal popularity of the Townsend Plan appears to have been based primarily upon the simplicity of the economic ideas which it involved. In contrast with Father Coughlin's complicated program of sixteen points, which was somewhat vague, contradictory, and difficult for the average person to fully comprehend, Dr. Townsend's one-point program was clear, concise, and easily understood; moreover, it promised
not only immediate relief for the aged but also a long-range cure for the major economic maladies of the depression decade. Although its leaders claimed that the movement attracted both young and old members, the primary appeal was to those elderly persons who had been impoverished during the 1930's. Many of these "senior citizens" throughout the nation saw in the Townsend Plan their last hope of financial independence and came to venerate the frail old doctor as their patron saint.¹³

Mrs. Roosevelt's charge that the plan was raising false hopes among the aged was at times clearly evident. According to the testimony of a salesman from Battle Creek, Michigan, one elderly customer wanted to buy an electric refrigerator on the strength of "his Townsend money."

"I get my first Townsend check the 1st of January," he told the salesman and promised to pay $100 down on that date and the balance in 30 days. Early in 1935 it was reported that the San Francisco naturalization authorities had noted that there had recently been a "rush of ... decrepit applicants for citizenship papers--in sharp contrast to the usually hale, hearty and youthful individuals . . . and most of them frankly say they are after the $200 a month spending money Dr. Townsend advocates."¹⁴

In addition to the giant petition to Congress, the Townsendites also brought political pressure to bear upon state legislatures to memorialize Congress on behalf of the plan. The Wyoming lower house and both sections of the legislature in Nevada were among the first to comply.

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with such a request. In California Governor Merriam carried out his campaign pledge by requesting similar action; with little hesitation, the state legislature agreed. The strength of Dr. Townsend's followers in one area of Oregon was displayed when a member of the legislature of that state was recalled by his constituents because of his refusal to support such a memorial to Congress.\textsuperscript{15}

The OARP received its first political reversal with the passage of the administration's Social Security bill in 1935. After the Townsend plan had been given a hearing before both the House Ways and Means and the Senate Finance committees, an attempt by its supporters to substitute a revised version of the McGroarty bill for the old-age pension section of the administration's bill was defeated by a decisive margin in the House. Furthermore, the passage of the administration measure, although far from Townsend demands, tended to take some of the steam out of the movement and some of the pressure off Congress.\textsuperscript{16}

If one of the purposes of the social security aspect of the so-called Second New Deal was to head off the "thunder on the left" as represented by the Townsend movement, its success was not very long lasting. Bouncing back from what appeared to be a setback, the OARP began expanding again in the late summer and fall of 1935. In October of that year, the first national convention of the Townsendites was held in Chicago. The 6000 delegates, representing 4552 chartered clubs in 48


states and Alaska, were told that the receipts of the organization had totaled $636,000 and expenditures $585,000 since its inception.

The main purpose of the convention was to lay plans for the election of a majority of congressmen in 1936 pledged to support the Townsend Plan. In the opening address, Dr. Townsend informed the group that it was the "greatest political convention ever held under the Stars and Stripes, ... In six months' time we shall have 80 per cent of the voting strength of the nation demanding enactment of the Townsend plan." That the Second New Deal had not placated the Townsendites was obvious from the cheers of the delegates when social security was condemned as being "utterly inadequate" and "cruelly unjust." After some debate concerning the possibility of forming a Townsend party, the convention finally authorized the co-founders, Townsend and Clements, to use the Townsend votes wherever and however they wished in the 1936 election. The New York Times reported that this action gave Townsend and Clements a "political army" estimated at between 6 and 7 million men and women.17

Shortly after the October convention, the Townsendites demonstrated their political power in Michigan where their candidate, Verner W. Main, won the Republican nomination in a field of five candidates for a vacant seat in Congress. Dr. Townsend had campaigned personally on behalf of Main, and the latter credited his nomination to the doctor's support. Following this primary victory, the New York Times commented that the movement's "surprising strength" in this traditionally conservative Republican district had politicians worried and that some were predicting that Dr. Townsend could defeat at least seventy-five sitting members of

the House of Representatives. Fully agreeing with this analysis, Dr. Townsend warned that the Michigan primary was "merely the beginning of what will become commonplace before the 1936 election is held."18

Late in 1935, congressmen from the Far and Middle West were reported to be increasingly worried over the rapid growth of the Townsend crusade. Representative Buchanan, Democrat of Texas, revealed in December that he had received 5000 letters supporting the plan, and other congressmen complained of being "deluged" with such mail. At the same time, Duncan Aikman reported in the New York Times that the movement had even begun to penetrate such Southern states as Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina. After Main won by a two to one margin over his Democratic opponent in the special election in Michigan, other Townsend candidates began announcing their intention to seek nomination for election to Congress in 1936.19

By January of 1936, the OARP had reached the peak of its popularity. Richard L. Neuberger reported from the Pacific Coast that it was the "No. 1 political issue" in that region. A poll of Oregon editors revealed that the Townsend Plan was expected to be the leading issue in that state in 1936. Other reports indicated that the movement was strong enough in California, Oregon, Idaho, Nevada, and Colorado to "pick and choose the Congressional victors" in those states.20

18 Ibid., Nov. 20, 21, 24, 1935.
19 Ibid., Dec. 15, 18, 28, 1935.
20 Ibid., Jan. 12, 1936.
Unlike Father Coughlin, Dr. Townsend had never been an active supporter of FDR or an advocate of the New Deal; moreover, if there had ever been any possibility of his becoming a New Dealer, it had ended with the passage of social security in 1935. "For a while we thought we could support President Roosevelt," Dr. Townsend commented at that time, "but we have given up hope in him." Prior to 1936, however, there had been no real feeling of enmity on the part of Townsend toward the President. He of course resented the fact that Roosevelt refused to endorse his plan, but in this respect FDR was no better or no worse than any other leading politician. 21

On the other hand, Roosevelt and his administration had virtually ignored Dr. Townsend and his plan. In contrast to his solicitude in relation to Father Coughlin, FDR apparently never appreciated the potential political power of Dr. Townsend or at least did not take it as seriously as he did that of the priest. Harold Ickes appears to have been the only member of the administration who felt that the Townsend movement was worthy of public condemnation. While censuring Ickes for his criticism of Coughlin, Roosevelt said he had "no objections" to the secretary of interior's attack on Dr. Townsend on the same occasion. This lack of concern about the Townsend movement was evident even among the more practical politicians of the administration such as Vice-President Garner. In answer to a reporter's question concerning his

21 Ibid., July 5, 1935.
opinion of the Townsend Plan in December of 1935, the usually politically astute Garner replied with the innocuous query "What's that?"\textsuperscript{22}

The OARP was primarily a non-partisan pressure group. It patterned its action after that of the American Federation of Labor and the Anti-Saloon League; in fact, many ex-officials of the latter organization found employment with the Townsendites. Rather than becoming partisan, in the sense of identifying itself with any particular party, its policy was to endorse candidates of any party who would pledge themselves to support the Townsend Plan. Although there was occasionally talk of forming a new Townsend party and of nominating a presidential as well as congressional candidates, this idea was never adopted, and serious consideration was never given to joining with other protest groups to form a new third party.\textsuperscript{23}

However, the attitude of Dr. Townsend toward President Roosevelt and toward more direct participation in politics was transformed primarily because of a congressional investigation of the OARP early in 1936. Had it not been for this investigation, it is doubtful that Dr. Townsend would have taken any active part in the presidential election of 1936; but, as a result of it, he became an implacable enemy of FDR and was determined to do anything within his power to prevent the President's re-election.

It was early in March of 1936 that the House of Representatives adopted a resolution which authorized the appointment of a select

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., April 23, 1935; Farley, Jim Farley's Story, 52; New York Times, Dec. 16, 1935.

\textsuperscript{23}New York Times, Nov. 24, 1935.
committee to investigate old-age pension plans and organizations with special emphasis upon the Townsend Plan and the OARP. The membership of the committee was equally divided between Democrats and Republicans, and C. Jasper Bell of Missouri was appointed chairman. Hearings relative to the Townsend movement were conducted by the committee from March 26 until June 18, 1936; although the committee had authorization to do so, no other old-age pension plan or organization was investigated.  

Like many congressional committees throughout American history, the Bell Committee was openly hostile to the subject of its investigation; six of its eight members were confirmed enemies of the Townsend Plan. It was clearly evident that the committee was bent upon discrediting Dr. Townsend and his associates with a view to destroying their political power. The newspaper columnist, David Lawrence, himself an opponent of the Townsend movement, charged that the investigation was politically motivated and that Congress was guilty of using the "tactics of inquisition and intimidation" against the Townsendites.  

When news of the impending investigation became public, the Townsend National Weekly claimed that it was welcome because "We have nothing to fear." Even before the public hearings had begun, however, it was charging that Bell's "gestapo ... is busy at work in Washington in a campaign of espionage and inquisition, attempting to bull-doze the Townsend organization." In the House of Representatives, Charles Kramer, a Townsendite from California, accused the committee of

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"back-alley tactics" and of "methods which generally are used by cheap shyster detective agencies."  

The Bell Committee's investigation centered largely around the personal lives and financial circumstances of Dr. Townsend and his associates and the fund-raising techniques and fiscal practices of the OARP. As the investigation progressed and the hostility of the committee became increasingly evident, the Townsendites became more enraged. When Dr. Townsend himself was put on the witness stand on May 19, it was obvious that he was quite irritated with the committee's tactics. "It has appeared to me from the beginning," he said frankly, "that this committee is more interested in besmirching the characters of people than in ascertaining anything of truth concerning the virtues of the movement." Of more importance was the fact that Townsend had become convinced that FDR was personally responsible for the committee's actions. During the first day of his testimony, he was asked to identify the "hostile force" which the Townsend National Weekly had referred to as being behind the investigation. "The hostile force, in my estimation," Townsend replied, "is this administration."  

After two more days of intensive questioning, Dr. Townsend surprised the committee by refusing to testify further and by walking out of the hearing room with these parting words:  

In view of the apparent unfriendly attitude of this committee and the unfair attitude it has shown to me and the members of my organization, I deem it my duty to say that I shall no

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27 U. S., Congress, House, Old-Age Pension Organizations, IV, 603, 609.
longer attend these committee meetings. I am retiring from
this sort of an inquisition and I do not propose to come
back again except under arrest. And I do refuse absolutely
to make any further statement pertaining to this movement to
this committee.
Thank you, and good-bye, gentlemen,

Following his own action, Dr. Townsend also advised two other officers
of the OARP, John B. Kiefer and Dr. Clinton Wunder, to refuse to testify
before the Bell Committee. The House adopted a resolution on May 28
citing all three for contempt of Congress.28

After his bitter experience with the Bell Committee, it was clear
that Dr. Townsend held the Roosevelt administration directly responsible
and was determined to find some method of retaliation. Several days
after his walkout, he issued a threat of political action: "I predict
this administration has committed political suicide with this unjust,
unfair attitude in connection with this movement." On June 5, Dr.
Clinton Wunder issued a statement which left no doubt that he was in
favor of seeking revenge in November:

Farley and his man Roosevelt have thrown down the gauntlet
and have created the issue which will be the only issue before
the people when they vote in November; namely, are we going
to be completely Russianized, ruled and run by an Americanized
edition of Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini, or are we going to
remain a free people?

In his official explanation of his actions to his followers on June 1,
Dr. Townsend summed up his feelings on the entire situation and revealed
his hatred and fear of the Roosevelt administration:

The conduct of this so-called investigation . . . convinced
me that it was primarily a political move, such as has
characterized the present political leadership of this nation

to intimidate any who dare to oppose the "New Deal." Threats have reached me that the ultimate purpose is to use the power of "Farleyism" to deny to our Townsend Weekly . . . the right to use the United States mails. . . . But I will no longer tamely submit to a politically inspired, unfair, unjust, and un-American Smearing Committee, . . . 29

In addition to alienating him completely from Roosevelt and the New Deal and putting him in a frame of mind which would make him receptive to overtures from anyone interested in forming an anti-Roosevelt coalition, the Bell Committee investigation also drove Dr. Townsend into a strange alliance with the pretender to the throne of the late Huey Long, the Reverend Gerald L. K. Smith.

When Dr. Townsend walked out on the Bell Committee, a husky, good-looking young man rushed to the gaunt old doctor's side and helped escort him out of the committee room. Townsend later recalled that this was his first meeting with Gerald Smith, "a big hombre . . . who does not fear the devil nor any of his cohorts." For the next several months the doctor and the reverend were boon companions. 30

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Gerald L. K. Smith is an elusive and shadowy character who was to hover on the fringes of American political life for many years. It was only during the early period of his public career, however, that his influence extended beyond the so-called lunatic fringe; furthermore, he


30 Townsend, New Horizons, 204.
had not yet earned the title of "America's No. 1 Fascist" and did not at that time devote his energies to the distribution of anti-semitic publications.

Unlike Dr. Townsend, Smith was neither kindly nor old, but he was, according to Hodding Carter, "next to Huey Long and Mississippi's Bilbo, probably the most talented rabble rouser in the South." Long placed an even higher estimation on Smith's talents along this line. "Next to me," Long is quoted as saying, "Gerald Smith is the greatest rabble rouser in the country." Without going into an extended discussion of the comparative ability of Smith, Long, and Bilbo to stir up the rabble, it can be concluded that this was Reverend Smith's outstanding capability.31

Little is known of Smith's early life. Born in Wisconsin in 1898, he was a fifth-generation minister of the Disciples of Christ. As a preacher Smith was a "sweating, shouting Bible thumper" who could "use 'ain't' with the best of them, . . . and whip up a fine pity or indignation or sawdust-trail frenzy, as the case demanded." After ministering in Indianapolis, Indiana and allegedly being active in the Ku Klux Klan during the 1920's, he moved to Louisiana in 1929 to become the pastor of a large fashionable Shreveport church.

Reverend Smith did not limit himself to activities of a religious nature; instead, he was a "go-getter" and "vitalizer" who expended vast stores of energy in a number of directions. Soon after his arrival in

Shreveport, he had, in addition to increasing the size of his congregation, "taken over the Community Chest Drive with phenomenal results, joined businessmen's clubs, sponsored athletic teams, and inaugurated a radio program of his own. . . ." When he was named a representative to the Olympic Games in 1932, however, his congregation began to criticize his variegated activities; moreover, his frequent trips to Washington soon started rumors that he was involving himself in some way with Senator Huey Long. In June of 1933, Smith and Long were photographed together in Washington, and a reporter identified him as the Senator's bodyguard. This was more than his congregation could endure, and eventually Smith was forced to resign his position; whereupon he became actively associated with Huey Long. 32

When he joined the Long forces early in 1934, Smith became the paid organizer of the Share-Our-Wealth Society, which was officially established by Long in February of 1934. Although the exact program varied from time to time, the most outstanding features of Long's version of wealth-sharing included a maximum limit on individual wealth, a $5000 estate (home, automobile, and radio) for every family in the country, and a free college education for young people at government expense. "Every person . . . who can read, and many who can't," Hodding Carter pointed out in 1935, "know at least vaguely who Huey Long is and what he is driving at." 33

32Harnett T. Kane, Louisiana Hayride: The American Rehearsal for Dictatorship 1928-1940 (New York, 1941), 150-152.

As "high priest and prophet" of the SOWS, Reverend Smith traveled throughout Louisiana and surrounding states spreading Long's gospel and recruiting new converts. Unlike the Coughlin and Townsend clubs, the Share-Our-Wealth Society required no dues, and each new member received a free copy of Long's autobiography as well as editions of his newspaper, American Progress. By February of 1935, Smith boasted that there were 326,000 members in Louisiana and 3,000,000 more throughout the United States.34

The assassination of Huey Long in September, 1935 put an end to what had been considered the greatest political threat to the Roosevelt administration. It has been taken for granted for some time that the Kingfish would lead the anti-Roosevelt forces at the Democratic convention and, if necessary, run as an independent, third-party candidate in 1936 in order to defeat the President. Long's death left a vacuum not only in national politics but even more so in the state of Louisiana where he had been the undisputed dictator. As usual when a dictator passes from the scene, there was a struggle for power among his lieutenants.35

Although he had never been considered more than a "hired-hand" while Huey was alive, Reverend Smith attempted to take advantage of the

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confusion following the assassination to assert his leadership over the Share-Our-Wealth Society and to establish himself in a position to share the political spoils of the Long machine in Louisiana. In order to gain recognition as head of the SOWS, Smith planned to build up his own reputation by exploiting the martyrdom of the late Kingfish, intensifying the wealth-sharing campaign, and carrying on Long's feud with the Roosevelt administration. To assure himself of a lucrative position within the Long machine in Louisiana, Smith attempted to keep the rival factions divided and to play one group off against the other. If he had succeeded, Smith might have become one of the most powerful men in the United States.

Unfortunately for Reverend Smith, there was a powerful group of practical politicians and grafters within the Long machine which was completely opposed to him and his plans. These men were primarily interested in ending Long's personal feud with President Roosevelt and restoring friendly relations between the national and state Democratic leaders. In order to accomplish this rapprochement, they knew that the Share-Our-Wealth Society, which had been mainly the vehicle of Long's presidential ambitions, would have to be scrapped and that open opposition to FDR and the New Deal would have to be suppressed. As a result of a reconciliation with Roosevelt, this group hoped that the administration would see fit to drop the indictments for income tax evasion which had been filed in federal court against ten of them and restore federal patronage and relief funds to their control in Louisiana.

The funeral of Senator Long provided Smith with an excellent opportunity to gain nation-wide publicity for himself. Although six of
Long's top lieutenants, three of whom were under indictment for income tax evasion, had the honor of serving as pallbearers, the chief star of the affair was Reverend Smith who delivered the funeral oration in which he urged Long's followers to "take up the torch, complete the task, subdue selfish ambition, and sacrifice for the sake of victory." As the state university band played the funeral dirge—a medley which included "Nearer, My God, to Thee," the "Star-Spangled Banner," and "Every Man a King," Long's spirited campaign march which had been transcribed into a minor key for the occasion—Smith hailed his departed chief as a martyr for the people who would be remembered "as long as hungry bodies cry for food, as long as human frames stand naked, as long as homeless wretches haunt this land of plenty." 36

During the week following the funeral, Smith used every opportunity to keep himself in the limelight. "As head of the Share Our Wealth Society of America, with 10,000,000 members," he wired FDR and the speaker of the House of Representatives urging them to conduct a full investigation of Long's death. In public addresses and press releases, he repeatedly charged that the assassination had been a result of the "most subtle plot in American history." Among others, he implied that Roosevelt Democrats, the district attorney in charge of the investigation of Long's death, and Senator Theodore Bilbo of Mississippi were involved in the "plot." Bilbo snorted in reply that Smith was a "damnable self-made liar." The result of all this controversy was that Smith's name appeared most prominently in the headlines and feature

stories of the many newspaper reporters who had traveled to Louisiana to
cover Long's funeral and the aftermath of his death.  

In the meantime, the practical politicians of the Long machine were
quietly organizing to thwart Smith's ambitions. Publicity was no substi-
tute for political power; while he had an abundant supply of the former,
Smith had little if any of the latter. When he attempted to interfere
in state politics by endorsing a slate of candidates for the upcoming
election, the opposition united behind a rival slate suggested by
Governor O. K. Allen. This was the first real indication that Smith was
out of favor with those who were now in control of the Long machine;
moreover, when he realized that the forces opposed to him were too strong
to resist, his belated offer to repudiate his own slate of candidates was
ignored by Governor Allen.

Within the next several months, Governor Allen and his colleagues
cut the ground out from beneath Smith completely. His $650 a month
position as organizer of the Share-Our-Wealth Society was abolished, and
he was denied access to the organization's mailing lists, which were in
the hands of Long's former secretary, Earl Christenbury. For all
practical purposes, the SOWS ceased to exist as a political force. The
memory of the Kingfish was kept alive, but his ideas concerning wealth-
sharing were played down and soon forgotten by his successors.

On the national scene, peace was made between Louisiana and
Washington. The Louisiana members of Congress began supporting New Deal
measures, and the state's delegation to the Democratic convention was

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37Ibid., Sept. 15, 16, 17, 1935.
solid for FDR; on the other hand, control of federal patronage was restored to Long's lieutenants, and the income tax indictments were dropped. Westbrook Pegler aptly dubbed the entire development the "Second Louisiana Purchase." Everyone seemed happy with the turn of events with the exception of Gerald L. K. Smith who was now without power or position and was *persona non grata* in Louisiana. He was, in short, a "wealth-sharer without portfolio."

Smith refused to accept the oblivion into which he had been cast by his former wealth-sharing associates in Louisiana. He still claimed to be the leader of the now defunct Share-Our-Wealth Society and was eager to find a new organization with which to affiliate himself and his supposed followers. His first effort in this direction was made at the so-called "grass-roots" convention which met at Macon, Georgia in January of 1936 under the auspices of Governor Eugene Talmadge. Together with John Henry Kirby, a Texan lumber and oil magnate and head of the Southern Committee to Uphold the Constitution, Talmadge had issued a call on January 4 to all "Jeffersonian Democrats of Southern and border States to meet at Macon, Ga., on Jan. 28 to repudiate the New Deal."  

At this stage of their public careers, Smith and Talmadge appeared to have little in common. While Smith claimed to be Long's successor and fully embraced the wealth-sharing philosophy, Talmadge had announced publicly even before Long's death that he had no use for the Kingfish's program of the "government doing everything." "I believe," Talmadge said on the same occasion, "in small government and small taxes and getting the government out of business." Despite the differences in

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their professed political and economic beliefs, however, Smith and Talmadge could join together to do battle against a common enemy—Roosevelt and the New Deal.  

On January 25, Smith announced the formation of coalition of his followers and the Talmadge forces to prevent the renomination of FDR. "We are going to have a united front," Smith declared, "in the presence of an emergency that threatens the South." In New York several days later to confer with "unnamed" associates, Smith predicted that the new coalition would go to the Democratic convention with five states pledged against Roosevelt. "We cannot trust the brain trust," he warned. "The ghost of Huey Long is haunting all his foes in the South; he has a copyright on all reform south of the Mason and Dixon Line."  

During the last few days of January, 3500 Southern Democrats met at the Macon convention. The delegates were united, according to the New York Times, in a "common opposition to Negroes, the New Deal and the teachings of Karl Marx, . . . ." The high light of the meeting was an address by Thomas L. Dixon, author of The Clansman, the novel upon which "Birth of a Nation," the pro-Ku Klux Klan film, was based. After denouncing the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People as the "worst communist organization in the United States," Dixon accused Eleanor Roosevelt of encouraging the Southern Negro to take up the "tenets of collectivist philosophers." Earlier the same day, each delegate had found on his chair a sample copy of the Georgian Woman's

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39 Sindler, Long's Louisiana, 113.  

World which featured a two-column wide picture of Mrs. Roosevelt being escorted to her car by a Negro—apparently to be used as a visual aid during Dixon's address.\textsuperscript{41}

Although politics often makes strange bedfellows, the "grass-roots" convention appears to have set some type of record in that respect. Talmadge had said before the meeting that he and Kirby would throw their weight "behind any conservative member of the party in preference to the President. . . . We will nominate a Democrat and not a Socialist, . . ." At the same time, Reverend Smith had been more specific as to the possible identity of that conservative Democrat: "We are friends of all the foes of Roosevelt. We'll support Al Smith in his opposition to Roosevelt." Three months later, the Senate Lobby Committee revealed that the "principal" financial backers of the Macon convention had been John J. Raskob and Pierre S. du Pont. The conclusion that the "grass roots" convention was nothing more than a Southern White edition of the American Liberty League is inescapable and fully reveals the political opportunism which motivated Reverend Smith's search for a new affiliation.\textsuperscript{42}

The Talmadge movement was short-lived and completely unsuccessful. FDR won the Georgia preferential presidential primary, and Governor Talmadge was even defeated in his bid for the Democratic senatorial nomination by Richard B. Russell, who campaigned in support of the New Deal. The "united front" of Smith and Talmadge which had appeared so

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid., Jan. 30, 1936; Luthin, \textit{American Demagogues}, 194–195.

\textsuperscript{42}New York \textit{Times}, Jan. 27, 28, April 16, 1936.
formidable in January disappeared almost as suddenly as it had emerged. When Talmadge later announced that he would support "whatever candidates and platform are adopted" at the Democratic convention, Reverend Smith offered it as his opinion that the governor had been "buried." 43

For several months following the collapse of the Talmadge anti-Roosevelt movement, Smith dropped out of the national political scene. In fact he was not heard from again until that day in May when he rushed to the side of Dr. Townsend as the latter walked out on the Bell committee. The most logical explanation of Smith's rallying to the doctor's defense is that he saw in the prosperous Townsend movement an opportunity for the power, prestige, and financial reward which he had been denied in Louisiana and Georgia. Smith later told a reported that he was first attracted to the Townsend movement because he believed that the missing mailing lists of the Share-Our-Wealth Society had been turned over to Dr. Townsend. At any rate, Smith took up the cause of Dr. Townsend and began defending him against the Bell "inquisition." 44

One week after their joint exit from the committee room, Smith announced that he was determined to join Dr. Townsend in a "bloodless revolution to be expressed with ballots this Fall; a revolution against this damnable tyranny set up by the Farley-Roosevelt regime." Two days later, the two men announced that they were joining forces in a "common front against the dictatorship in Washington." "I have every reason to


believe," Dr. Townsend said in a statement issued through Smith, "that if Roosevelt is re-elected my associates and myself will be imprisoned; or at least persecuted to the point of impotency." Finally, Smith told reporters on June 2 that he and Dr. Townsend had stood together "under the historic arch in Valley Forge and vowed to take over the government"; furthermore, they had agreed to hold a joint convention of Townsend and Share-Our-Wealth forces in July with the slogan "Anybody but Roosevelt."45

CHAPTER III

REPRESENTATIVE LEMKE

William Lemke was fifty-seven years old in 1936 when he became the presidential candidate of the Union party. Unlike Coughlin, Townsend, and Smith, who had only become actively engaged in politics during the depression, Lemke had been a professional politician for twenty years. Although he had been a lifelong Republican, his career was marked with the political insurgency so evident among Western Republicans during the early decades of the twentieth century. After supporting La Follette for the Republican nomination in 1912, he campaigned for Taft but finally cast his own vote for Wilson. During the next two presidential elections, he threw his support to his party's regular candidates, Hughes and Harding. In 1924, however, he joined the movement away from both major parties and campaigned for La Follette and Wheeler on the Progressive ticket. Finally, he deserted the Republican party of Hoover to campaign and vote for Smith in 1928 and Roosevelt in 1932. Lemke liked to picture himself as a nonpartisan who was ready to support liberal or progressive candidates regardless of partisan considerations.

Born in Albany, Minnesota, in 1873, Lemke moved with his parents to Grand Forks in the Dakota Territory shortly thereafter. Like many of the settlers who populated that frontier area during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, his parents were of German stock. One source of his later opposition to America's entry into war against Germany and on the side of Great Britain may be traced to the influence of his father, an extreme Anglophobe who blamed the British for prolonging the American Civil War by aiding the South. Likewise, Lemke's later preoccupation with the money question and hatred of Eastern financial interests had their roots in the ferment which the Populists and Bryan had brought to North Dakota during the formative years of his boyhood.

When he was twenty years old, young Lemke entered the University of North Dakota where he completed an undergraduate course in liberal arts and one year of law school. After continuing his legal training at Georgetown University and completing it at Yale, he returned to North Dakota. As a lawyer he was never more than moderately successful. Although his political popularity later rested in part on his legal reputation as a friend of the farmer, this type of practice yielded little in the way of financial reward.

Seeking some other road to economic prosperity, Lemke soon became intrigued with the possibilities of land speculation in Mexico. In 1906 and 1907 he organized land companies to finance his speculative dreams south of the Rio Grande. Unfortunately for him and many of his friends who had invested heavily in the venture, the Mexican Revolution resulted in the collapse of the land boom there and brought financial hardship to those involved. Later, credit stringencies in the United States
prevented Lemke and his associates from raising the money necessary to pay the taxes on their Mexican empire, and eventually the entire investment was lost.

The failure of the Mexican scheme left Lemke deeply in debt and had a profound influence upon his life. It was during the years immediately following this misfortune that he first became absorbed with the money question and turned to politics to seek a possible solution. Like many unsuccessful entrepreneurs throughout American history, he became a radical monetary reformer. He found the major weakness of the prevailing economic system in the overwhelming influence of Eastern banking and financial interests. He came to believe that Western economic difficulties in general and his own in particular were the result of a gigantic conspiracy on the part of Wall Street and its political puppets. To expose these conspirators and to crush their political and economic power became his chief objective. To accomplish this task, he advocated the traditional Western demands for currency inflation, lenient bankruptcy laws, and easy credit and became a devoted follower of the patron saint of the 1890's, W. H. (Coin) Harvey, and his twentieth century counterpart, Charles A. Lindbergh, Sr.2

Lemke's own financial plight and his resulting economic and political views corresponded to a great degree with those of the

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2Lemke and Harvey corresponded frequently during 1934 when Lemke was one of the leaders of the monetary reform bloc in Congress. For example see Lemke to Harvey, Jan. 13, 1934, Harvey to Lemke, Jan. 20, 1934, Lemke to Harvey, May 26, 1934, William Lemke Papers, O. G. Libby Historical Manuscript Collection, University of North Dakota Library. Hereafter cited as Lemke Papers. On the subject of entrepreneurial radicalism see Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform, From Bryan to F.D.R. (New York, 1955), 58-59.
debtor farmers of North Dakota and surrounding states. It was not surprising therefore that Lemke saw in those depressed agricultural areas a vast source of potential political power which had not been fully exploited since Bryan's first campaign. Together with another unsuccessful entrepreneur, Arthur C. Townley, Lemke helped found and organize the Nonpartisan League in 1916. The NPL's program, which included such advanced examples of government intervention and regulation of the economy as state-owned and operated grain elevators, flour mills, and rural credit banks, reflected the wants and desires of the farmer-debtor class of the North-Central states. Under the able and energetic leadership of Townley and Lemke, the NPL grew rapidly and soon became the dominant political force in many areas. Although claiming to be nonpartisan, the League usually worked through or took over the local and state Republican machines.3

The NPL was highly successful in North Dakota, and Lemke was its undisputed leader there from 1916 until 1923. In recognition of his influence, he became known as the "Political Bishop" of the Nonpartisan League. He plunged into North Dakota politics with the backing of the League and was elected state chairman of the Republican party in 1916. Four years later, he was a successful candidate for the office of attorney general of the state. That election marked the high point of his political career prior to 1932. Because of financial scandals in

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3The best study of the NPL is Robert L. Morlan, Political Prairie Fire, the Nonpartisan League, 1915-1922 (Minneapolis, 1955).
the state administration, he and two other League-endorsed state officials were recalled from office by the voters of North Dakota in 1921. The following year he was unsuccessful as an independent candidate for governor, and in 1926, he was defeated by a margin of twenty to one by Gerald P. Nye in a race for the United States senate. At this point, Lemke's political career appeared to be at an end.

The coming of the Great Depression restored Lemke's political fortunes. Like Father Coughlin he found that the popularity of his unorthodox monetary ideas blossomed with the downward spiral of the economy. As the "sound" money of the Hoover era grew scarcer, the farmers of North Dakota and debtors throughout the nation turned more and more to the rhetoric and reforms of the Populist period. Having suffered renewed financial hardship himself as a result of the depression, Lemke was ready and willing to champion the cause of agrarian radicalism and at the same time to seek the economic security of public office.

The popular demand for monetary reform took many forms during the depression decade. Although Lemke was a loyal supporter of this demand in all of its manifestations, his chief interest centered on the problems of bankruptcy and credit. To meet the farmers' demands in these areas, he devised two major pieces of legislation which were to become known as the Frazier-Lemke Bankruptcy bill and the Frazier-Lemke Refinance bill. Before Lemke's election to Congress in 1932, these bills were introduced and supported by his old friend and colleague from North Dakota, Senator Lynn Frazier. Lemke and Frazier had formed a close-working team since their days as co-captains of the football squad at the University of
of North Dakota. As the endorsed candidates of the Nonpartisan League in 1920, Frazier had been elected governor and Lemke attorney general. Both were defeated in the recall election one year later. Although Lemke lost in his bid for the governorship in 1922, his running mate, Frazier, won the senatorial contest. "So closely did their outlook on economic and political philosophies agree," Lemke's biographer has concluded, "that the ideas of one could almost be predicted if those of the other were known." 4

The Frazier-Lemke Bankruptcy bill was an amendment to federal bankruptcy legislation and provided for the readjustment of a bankrupt farmer's debts to a more realistic amount in comparison to the value of his property. Under the supervision of a federal court, such a farmer could retain possession of his property and had the opportunity to repay his adjusted debts over an extended period of time. The Frazier-Lemke Refinance bill provided for the refinancing of farm mortgages by the federal government in order to provide the farmer with cheaper credit. The most controversial aspect of this bill was that it authorized the issuance of $3,000,000,000 of Federal Reserve notes in order to raise the necessary funds to refinance farm mortgages.

The two Frazier-Lemke bills met with widespread approval in the more radical agricultural circles and were the chief sources of Lemke's political appeal during the 1930's. Under the auspices of the Farmers' Union, Lemke traveled throughout North Dakota and surrounding states

during 1930 and 1931 explaining his proposed legislation and seeking agricultural support. In 1932 he won the Republican nomination for congressman-at-large from North Dakota largely on the strength of the popularity of these two bills.

Having no faith in Hoover and the conservative leadership of the Republican party on the national level, Lemke began searching for a Democratic presidential aspirant whose attitude might be more favorable toward the farmer and his problems. As early as May of 1930, he expressed interest in the governor of New York as a possible presidential candidate. By December of that year, he was an enthusiastic supporter of FDR and reported to an old friend that "things are shaping themselves beautifully here for a Democratic victory, with Roosevelt for president and ... some other real progressive for vice-president." At the same time, he stated that the "progressives" should "quietly go into the Democratic party and make it step forward and become progressive." 5

In spite of his own congressional candidacy on the Republican ticket, Lemke worked hard for Roosevelt in the North Dakota presidential primary in 1932. He urged his supporters to follow his example by voting in the Democratic primary to help FDR defeat W. H. (Alfalfa Bill) Murray, the bizarre governor of Oklahoma who was attempting to divide the Roosevelt forces in the agricultural West and South. Lemke was one of Roosevelt's key men in North Dakota, and he was in close contact with Farley, Howe, and FDR himself throughout the campaign. In order to woo

the farm vote away from the popular Murray, Roosevelt endorsed a large-scale program of federal aid for agriculture which included a demand for more lenient bankruptcy laws and cheaper credit. After his sweeping victory in North Dakota and his nomination by the Democratic convention, Roosevelt continued to seek Lemke's advice in relation to farm problems and the farm vote. "I know that I can count on your continued support," he wrote to Lemke in September of 1932, "and I am sure that with our united efforts I will be successful."  

In return for his loyal support of FDR during the election of 1932, Lemke apparently believed that he would have some influence over the new president's agricultural and monetary policies. At any rate he was certainly confident that he had an understanding with Roosevelt concerning the nature of New Deal policies in these two fields. Mrs. Lemke recalled years later that her husband had traveled to Hyde Park to explain his legislative program to Roosevelt and that FDR had told him "Yes, yes I am for all that."  

Instead of becoming an adviser to the president and an architect of the New Deal, however, Lemke soon found that he was being ignored by the administration and had no more influence than a new member of the minority party in the House of Representatives might expect. Moreover, it was soon evident that the agricultural and monetary policies of the

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New Deal, which were being designed by the Brain Trust and a small group of professional economists in the department of agriculture, were heading in an entirely different direction than Lemke had expected.

In addition to his own bankruptcy and refinance bills, Lemke also favored the "cost of production" plan, which called upon the government to fix the prices of major farm products without restricting their production. He also favored the maintenance of a high protective tariff to prevent the entry of competitive farm products into the United States. In all this, Lemke had the full support of the two most radical farm organizations of the 1930's, the Farmers' Union and the Farm Holiday Association. Needless to say, the New Deal agricultural program ran counter to these ideas. The Agricultural Adjustment Act with its production limitations and destruction of farm products was anathema to those who maintained that the crux of the problem was underconsumption rather than overproduction. On the other hand, the idea of restricting production at home while encouraging the importation of foreign agricultural goods by reciprocity agreements seemed to be a complete betrayal of the American farmer. Finally, the administration's abandonment of inflationary monetary policies was as great a disappointment to Lemke as it had been to Father Coughlin and other advocates of radical monetary reform.  

Lemke expressed his disapproval of the agricultural policy of the Roosevelt administration early in the "First Hundred Days." During the brief House debate on the AAA, he pointed out that it was based upon an "erroneous assumption of fact." "It is assumed that there is an overproduction of agricultural products," he said, "when we all ought to know that there is underconsumption—we ought to know that there can be no such thing as an overproduction of agricultural commodities as long as millions are hungry and in want." In spite of his objections, he joined with the vast majority of Congress in supporting the new president and explained his vote in favor of the AAA in the following statement: "Normally there are not enough Democrats in my state to fill the post offices. But we gave Franklin D. Roosevelt a 160,000 majority. We had confidence in Franklin D. Roosevelt; we still have confidence in Franklin D. Roosevelt." Privately, however, Lemke expressed his disappointment and complained that "since my arrival in Washington, we have done very little to help the farmers."^9

Expressing Lemke's resentment over the fact that he was being ignored by Roosevelt and his advisers, his secretary wrote to Bernard M. Baruch in April of 1933 that the administration did not seem to "remember or appreciate the fact of the tremendous turn to the Democratic ticket in North Dakota, for which Mr. Lemke was very largely responsible." At first, however, Lemke did not place responsibility for the

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administration's attitudes and actions directly upon the President; instead, he put the blame upon the fact that FDR was "surrounded by the same bunch that surrounded Hoover." To Lemke the chief source of difficulty within the administration was obvious—the influence of Eastern banking and financial interests. "The coupon clippers are still strong in this neck of the woods," he informed a correspondent, "and New York college professors are writing the bills for the coupon clippers."  

Lemke tended to oversimplify the complicated problems which plagued the United States as a result of the depression. "Any three persons of ordinary intelligence could solve the problems confronting this nation, and end the depression," he wrote in 1933, "but we have been getting nowhere." He had not the slightest doubt that the legislation he supported would provide a quick and complete remedy for the nation's ills. "Pass the Frazier-Lemke bill and, in addition, give the farmers the cost of production," he advised the House in 1934, "and these conditions will right themselves and we will have national prosperity." Gradually, as it became clear that the administration's agricultural and monetary policies were in open conflict with his beliefs, Lemke became less restrained in his criticism and began hinting that the ultimate responsibility for the failures of the New Deal must rest with the President. In April of 1933 he warned that unless "something real" was done for the farmers "somebody will have to answer for

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10 William Skeels to B. M. Baruch, April 10, 1933, Lemke to Carl D. Thompson, May 4, 1933, Lemke to M. Bacon, April 6, 1933, Lemke Papers.
the betrayal of the people last November. They are not going to follow false gods much longer."

By January of 1934 Lemke was making public as well as private attacks on the New Deal. "While the nation is in misery," he wrote in an article in Plain Talk, "the 'Brainless Trust' broadcasts false propaganda, and continues its wanton destruction of property, and its program of restricted production." Having hoped to help write New Deal legislation himself, he became particularly irritated with the college professors in the administration who were responsible for many of the measures which he opposed. In his opinion these men were not qualified for their positions because they had never had any practical political or farm experience. His correspondence and speeches were full of sneering references to the Brain Trust—"humorously so called in the same sense, and to the same extent, and for the same reason that the tallest man you ever knew was called 'Shorty' and the fattest man you ever knew was called 'Slim.'"

Like others who could not get used to the complexity and multiplicity of New Deal measures and agencies, Lemke at times complained of the growing bureaucracy in Washington. "All this C.W.A., P.W.A., and all the other letters of the alphabet are doomed to failure unless

11Lemke to O. S. Gunderson, March 31, 1933, Lemke Papers; Coupon-Clipper Legislation, Speech of Hon. William Lemke in House of Representatives, January 16, 1934 (Washington, 1934); Lemke to Carl D. Thompson, April 18, 1933, Lemke Papers.

something more substantial is done," he wrote to a friend early in 1934. Several months later he complained that the New Deal was "building up a feudal system with the bureaucrats, lords and barons in Washington, the vassals in small towns, and the laboring people and farmers as the feudal serfs."\(^13\)

Yet, it is easy to overemphasize Lemke's opposition to the New Deal. Lemke himself put much more emphasis upon those aspects of the New Deal which he opposed than those which he supported; moreover, he became so vindictive in his criticism that he sometimes sounded like the most reactionary Old Guard Republican. An examination of his voting record indicates, however, that with the exception of agricultural, monetary, and tariff issues, Lemke was in perfect accord with Roosevelt's domestic policies. Among the major acts of Roosevelt's first administration, Lemke supported the National Industrial Recovery Act, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Security and Exchange Act, the Works Progress Administration, the Holding Company Act of 1935, the Income Tax Law of 1935, and the Wagner Act. Although he voted in the negative on the Social Security Act, it was not because he opposed the idea of social security but because he felt that the administration bill was too meager, particularly in relation to old-age pensions. As late as February of 1934, Lemke described FDR as "far more progressive than the reactionary Democratic machine" and added: "I am not sure of where he is going, but he certainly has done things that no other person would

\(^{13}\) Lemke to C. Hall, March 7, 1934, Lemke to Fred E. Sims, May 21, 1934, Lemke Papers.
have done. I am sure he has gone a great deal further than Norman Thomas would have."¹⁴

Following the same course as Senator Thomas, Senator Wheeler, and Representative Patman, all of whom supported the New Deal in general but held dissenting views on agricultural or monetary policies, Lemke turned to legislative action when Roosevelt failed to make the Frazier-Lemke bills part of the administration's program. In both houses of Congress, he was faced with the opposition of the Democratic leaders and had to resort to various parliamentary tactics in order to get his bills out of committee. In 1934 he concentrated his efforts on behalf of the least controversial of his two measures, the Frazier-Lemke Bankruptcy bill. Although it had been approved by the House Agricultural committee, it was pigeonholed in the administration-dominated Rules committee, and Lemke was forced to circulate a discharge petition in order to get it before the House for a vote. In spite of the opposition of House leaders, who brought pressure to bear upon signers of the petition to remove their names whenever it approached the necessary 145 signatures, Lemke was finally successful in forcing a vote on the bankruptcy measure. This was an unusual accomplishment for a freshman congressman, and the New Republic commented that it was the result of an "almost inconceivable feat of one-man lobbying and buttonholing" by Lemke. Once the bill was out of the Rules committee, the administration

relaxed its pressure and let it pass the House, confident that it would
die in the Senate.  

Much to the administration's dismay, however, the fight in the
Senate was led not by the comparatively easygoing Senator Frazier but by
that expert parliamentarian and adroit politician, Huey Long. Threaten­
ing a filibuster and other delaying tactics, Long forced a vote on the
bill as the Senate leaders were pushing for adjournment late in June.
"As the price to be paid for adjournment," the administration withdrew
its opposition, and the bill passed by an overwhelming vote. After
delaying a decision as long as possible, FDR surprised both the opponents
and proponents of the measure by signing it into law on June 28.  

The administration's belated acceptance of the bankruptcy act did
not pacify Lemke. He had never considered that act to be more than an
emergency measure and now looked forward to the enactment of the Frazier-
Lemke Refinance bill and other radical agricultural and monetary measures.
In April, 1935, he expressed his growing criticism of Roosevelt and the
New Deal in a long letter to Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr., an old friend
who was writing an article on Lemke for Liberty magazine. "The New
Deal," he wrote in words similar to those which Father Coughlin was
using at the same time, "... is turning out to be only a new shuffle
with the cards stacked. ... So far, nothing real has been accom­
plished. ... No fundamental changes have been made, and while the
President drove the money changers out of the temple on the date of his

16 New York Times, June 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 28, 30, July 1, 1934.
inauguration, they soon all got back in the basement, and many of us feel that they are still there."\textsuperscript{17}

Lemke was easily re-elected to Congress in 1934, and Usher Burdick, leader of the Farm Holiday Association in North Dakota and a supporter of Lemke's legislative program, won the other congressional post from that state. Arriving in Washington in December of 1934, Representative-elect Burdick endorsed Lemke for the position of minority leader in the House and threatened that the "insurgent" Republicans would bolt the party unless some "progressive" was selected for that post. As usual, however, the "insurgents" were a small minority within the GOP, and Lemke was never given serious consideration by his conservative colleagues.\textsuperscript{18}

In the meantime, Lemke was devoting all his energy to the passage of the Frazier-Lemke Refinance bill and was using the same tactics which had been so successful in relation to the bankruptcy act the preceding year. His task was made much more difficult in January of 1935 when the new House increased the number of signatures necessary on a discharge petition from 145 to 218. Realizing that this move on the part of Democratic leaders in the House to tighten their grip on the legislative process meant that they were determined to block his refinance measure, Lemke warned that such a policy would bring about dire political results:

\begin{quote}
The battle line is being drawn for 1936, and unless this administration wakes up, --and the days in which it may wake up are not many, they are numbered--the largest army . . .
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{17}Lemke to Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr., April 22, 1935, Lemke Papers.
ever assembled under the Stars and Stripes will assemble on November 3, 1936, march to the polls, and America will again be a government of, for and by the people, and not by bureaucrats and the brainless trust. 19

Just as he appeared to be making some progress toward his second legislative goal, however, the Supreme Court handed down a unanimous decision declaring the Frazier-Lemke Bankruptcy Act unconstitutional. The importance of this decision was overshadowed by the fact that the court struck down the NIRA on the same day; in addition, the interesting observation that this was the first time Justice Brandeis had written an opinion nullifying an important piece of recovery legislation was generally overlooked. Within several days, Lemke introduced a new version of the bankruptcy act, revised to conform to judicial objections, which was later passed by Congress and signed into law by the President on August 30, 1935. 20

Lemke did not allow his consternation over the Supreme Court's decision and the necessity of introducing a new bankruptcy measure to deter him from his primary goal of getting the refinance measure out of the Rules committee. In fact the high court's ruling seemed to intensify the determination of Lemke and his supporters in their campaign for the second Frazier-Lemke bill. Realizing that he would need all the support he could muster in order to overcome the opposition of the White House, Lemke began cooperating with Father Coughlin. In May he spoke at a large Detroit rally of the National Union for Social Justice and endorsed that organization's nation-wide campaign for new members. After a


friendly exchange of letters, in which each hailed the other as a true champion of social justice, the radio priest began using his extensive influence on behalf of the refinance bill. Late in June, Lemke announced that only twelve more names were needed on the discharge petition, and the New York Times reported several weeks later that the inflationist bloc in Congress had put the measure at the top of its list of "must" legislation.\(^{21}\)

During these hectic months, Lemke became more exasperated with New Deal policies and more hostile in his attitude toward FDR. As the expenditures of the New Deal's vast relief and public works programs continued to increase in 1935, he became more critical of the administration's method of financing those programs. Although he never opposed the idea of government spending as a method of combating the depression, he believed that such spending should be financed not by increasing the debt of the United States but by simply issuing greenbacks. "This administration," he charged in 1935, "still thinks it can stop this depression by borrowing more money and issuing more tax-exempt, interest-bearing bonds, in place of giving us an intelligent expansion of the currency, . . ." In May he predicted that Congress was about to prove that it was not "overawed by a chief executive who at one time was nothing short of a deity, but who has dethroned himself, and now must stand upon the merit of his performance rather than the theory that the king can do no wrong." A month later he complained that the

administration leaders were not concerned about the invalidation of the bankruptcy act because "they are not worried about the farmer, and do not understand his problems."  

However, it was the controversial Frazier-Lemke Refinance bill which increasingly became the real source of discord between Roosevelt and Lemke. The latter charged that whenever the total number of signatures on his discharge petition approached the required 218, the White House would exert pressure upon a few signers to remove their names. "It is pretty hard here to tell who the double crossers and liars are," he said bitterly after ten Representatives had removed their signatures in July, "but we intend to find out." Reflecting his penchant for "Populist demonology," Lemke usually described his opposition as a wicked conspiracy on the part of Eastern financial interests and other clandestine forces which worked in mysterious ways:

There is no opposition to this bill, save and except in Wall Street, where the international bankers preside, and a subterranean force here in Congress, on which no one can place his finger. It works in devious ways, under the ground and thru subterranean channels--it is an evil, invisible force, hard to detect, yet it is real and very powerful. Here in Washington, it operates at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue.

When Congress adjourned in 1935, Lemke's petition did not yet contain enough signatures, and the refinance measure was still firmly in the hands of the Rules committee. Returning to North Dakota to build up popular sentiment there and in neighboring states for an all-out drive


to bring his inflationary bill before Congress during the election year of 1936, Lemke identified the Roosevelt administration as the chief obstacle in his path. In an address before the South Dakota Farmers' Union on October 9, he branded the AAA a "national lunacy" and Secretary of Agriculture Wallace the "greatest vandal in history"; furthermore, he concluded that the only course left for the bankrupt farmer was either "inflation or repudiation."  

Since the Frazier-Lemke Refinance bill represented not only more direct aid for agriculture but also a definite step in the direction of an inflated currency, it became in 1936 the chief objective of those who favored such policies. By January of that year, thirty-two state legislatures had petitioned Congress to pass it, the Farmers' Union had thrown its full weight behind the measures, and Father Coughlin had made it a primary issue on his broadcasts and in the pages of Social Justice.  

The struggle over the measure made the headlines of newspapers throughout the nation in February when Father Coughlin and Representative John T. O'Connor of New York, chairman of the Rules committee, exchanged angry words. After Coughlin had attacked him on a weekly radio broadcast for preventing the refinance bill from reaching the House floor, O'Connor, himself a Catholic, wired an unprecedented challenge to Royal Oak in which he invited the priest to Washington and threatened to "kick

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you all the way from the Capitol to the White House, with clerical garb and all the silver in your pockets which you got by speculating in Wall Street. . . ." Although the Coughlin-O'Connor feud eventually subsided without anyone actually being kicked, it provided the Frazier-Lemke bill with a great deal of publicity and probably tended to unify Coughlin's followers behind it.  

Finally on May 1, Lemke succeeded in getting 218 names on the discharge petition, and on May 12, the House began consideration of his controversial measure. Although it was widely predicted that the vote would be close and that either side might have the edge, the House rejected the bill on May 14 by a vote of 235 to 142. The decisive margin by which the bill was defeated appears to have been the result of heavy pressure from the White House and a last minute appeal from President William Green of the American Federation of Labor asking the "friends of labor" in Congress to vote against it because of its "inflation feature."  

The defeat of the Frazier-Lemke Refinance bill left Lemke bitterly disappointed and completely alienated him from Roosevelt and the New Deal. In 1934, he had said that "if this administration does not make good, then the only hope of the Nation that I see is either a new Party, . . . or the taking over of the Republican Party by the Liberals, . . ." It was now abundantly clear to him that the Roosevelt

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27 New York Times, May 1, 10, 12, 14, 1936.
administration would not "make good." On the other hand, the impending nomination of Landon banished whatever hope he might have had that the Republican party would become liberal. Having convinced himself that he could not support either of the two major parties in 1936, Lemke turned to his third alternative—a new party.28

PART II

THE FORMATION OF A NEW PARTY
It had been widely predicted throughout 1935 that the leaders of the so-called "thunder on the left" of Roosevelt would combine to form a new political party in 1936. The New York Times claimed in January of 1935 that the New Deal's social security proposals were designed to head off "a grand combination between Senator Long and Father Coughlin, Dr. Townsend, and Upton Sinclair,..." Four months later, the New Republic reported that it still seemed "probable that he [Coughlin] may work out an understanding with Huey Long and possibly Dr. Townsend and other leaders before the campaign of 1936 and that this amalgamated group may strongly affect the result of that campaign."\(^1\)

The prospect of a Coughlin-Townsend-Long party was particularly feared by those who were already engaged in third-party activities. The Farmer-Labor Political Federation, which favored the formation of a new party under the direction of such recognized third-party leaders as Governor Floyd B. Olson, the La Follette brothers, and Norman Thomas, warned in March of 1935 that the whole third-party idea was in danger of being captured by the "demagogic movement" headed by Long and Coughlin.

In a similar vein, the National Committee of the Socialist Party advised labor groups "against the danger of building up a party around Huey Long

and the Reverend Charles E. Coughlin, who would use the party for their personal advantage and probably destroy the labor movement.\textsuperscript{2}

From time to time some of the prospective leaders of such a new party made statements which implied that they favored a union of forces or which were interpreted by the press to mean that negotiations were actually in progress. In April of 1935, Milo Reno, head of the radical Farm Holiday Association, announced that he hoped to see a "political union of Long, Father Coughlin, and Dr. Townsend" emerge and predicted that the "rank and file of our citizens" would support it. Several months later, Father Coughlin renewed speculation when he told reporters that he felt a new party was "inevitable." Just before the first national convention of the OARP in November of the same year, Dr. Townsend stated that unless the two major parties met his demands the Townsendites would "view with sympathy a third party in 1936."\textsuperscript{3}

In view of the evidence available today, however, there appears to have been little basis in fact for the persistent rumors in 1935 that such leaders as Coughlin, Townsend, and Long were about to amalgamate their organizations and form a new party. Actually these groups had very little in common. Each of these leaders had his own particular economic and political program, tended to consider anything else a waste of time, and feared the competition of rival groups.

Robert E. Clements, co-founder of the OARP, testified before the Bell Committee in 1936 that he had met with Senator Long in May of 1935 and that the meeting had revealed the lack of any common principles.


\textsuperscript{3}\textit{Ibid.}, April 22, June 14, Nov. 25, 1935.
between their respective organizations. "Senator Long did not seem to agree on the Townsend Plan any better than I agreed on the share-the-wealth plan," Clements recalled and concluded that "at no time during that conversation was it ever remotely intimated that there could be any joining of the forces." A meeting between Townsend and Coughlin a few months later yielded a similar result. "When I saw Coughlin," Townsend told a reporter in December of 1935, "I told him the trouble with his program was that he had sixteen points, which were fourteen too many. And he told me that I have fourteen too few." Coughlin was once quoted as saying that the Townsend Plan was "economic insanity," and as late as May 22, 1936, Social Justice bluntly asserted that it was "absolutely not practical." 4

Not only did the "Big Three" hold conflicting views, but they also had similar differences of opinion with the less important individuals and groups with whom they were often said to be ready to unite. Although Townsend's OARP and Sinclair's EPIC both had originated in southern California and many of the members of the latter became active Townsendites after Sinclair's defeat in 1934, there was never anything but distrust and jealousy between the leaders of the two movements. As early as July of 1935, Dr. Townsend singled out Sinclair as his organization's "very greatest menace." For his part, Sinclair had nothing but disdain for such leaders as Townsend and Long. "Thumbs down on both

of them," he told a reported and dismissed the Townsend Plan as a "novel whirligig." Father Coughlin was somewhat less than enthusiastic when Milo Reno suggested a Coughlin-Townsend-Long ticket in 1935 and in fact told the press that the NUSJ was more in favor of the Farmers' Union than Reno's Farm Holiday Association.\(^5\)

Although the Share-Our-Wealth Society was clearly designed to further the political ambitions of Huey Long, Father Coughlin usually insisted that his organization was "above politics and above politicians, ... seeking to establish no so-called third party, ..." In spite of journalistic reports to the contrary and Harold Ickes' charge that there was an "open alliance between the great Louisiana demagogue and the political padre," Coughlin consistently maintained during 1935 that the NUSJ was primarily a pressure group interested in influencing the two major parties. A new party, he concluded, would only "add to the confusion." "I foresee none," he replied to a reporter's query about the possibility of one developing in 1936 and added significantly, "What would it be? A gathering of political malcontents with personal political grudges to air?"\(^6\)

The attitude of Dr. Townsend toward third-party action was less rigid than that of Father Coughlin. Although he usually ruled out the possibility of his followers uniting with any other groups to form a third party, he at times flirted with the idea of forming a Townsend


party which would have as its sole platform the Townsend Plan. In September of 1935, he urged this course of action in a private letter to the co-founder of the OARP, Robert E. Clements:

The cry everywhere I go is, "Why don't we have our own party?" Now, that is just the thing I believe we should begin to do, talk about the Townsend Party, not wait in the foolish hope that one of the old groups will adopt us... To hell with them. If we begin to announce ourselves soon and work like the dickens for the next year we should be able to lick the stuffing out of both of them."

In October of 1935, the Townsend National Convention endorsed the doctor's attitude toward direct political action by adopting a resolution stating that the OARP should "steer clear of any embarrassing alliances" with either major party or "any new political party." This resolution, however, left Townsend and Clements free to organize a strictly Townsend party if they deemed such a course advisable.

For a short time late in 1935 it seemed probable that a Townsend party would emerge in the next election. The New Republic reported that Townsend was "peacefully confident he can be elected President next autumn." At one point the doctor formally announced that his organization would put a presidential candidate and a full congressional ticket in the field in 1936. Richard L. Neuberger predicted that a Townsend-endorsed candidate for president would "greatly deplete President Roosevelt's strength, ... probably giving ten or twelve Western states to the Republicans." The idea of an independent party, however, was opposed by Clements and other more cautious OARP officials; as a result,

Dr. Townsend eventually gave in to this opposition and agreed that the organization should remain a pressure group for the time being.9

The name of William Lemke did not figure very prominently in all the discussion in 1935 concerning the possibility of a new party the following year, and he was apparently never mentioned as a potential presidential candidate of such a party. Moreover, at that time, Lemke himself was more interested in the possibility of rejuvenating the Republican party than in any third-party activities. "Personally, I am not sold on a new party," he wrote to a friend in February of 1935 and added: "I feel that we should take some good progressive Republican, and take the Republican party over; or if we cannot find a good progressive Republican, what is the matter with taking Huey Long and electing him on the Republican ticket?" "As to the formation of a new party," he assured C. Vanderbilt four months later, "I have not taken any part in that."10

After the assassination of Huey Long in September of 1935, the newspaper talk of a new party subsided temporarily, and instead the political pundits began predicting that Coughlin and Townsend would throw their support behind Senator Borah's bid for the Republican nomination. There is, moreover, convincing evidence that the Lion from Idaho was the one prominent political figure who might have successfully united the divergent forces which made up the "thunder on the left" of Roosevelt. Borah's monetary and agricultural views coincided

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almost exactly with those of Coughlin and Lemke. Furthermore, although he had originally been critical of the Townsend Plan, the Senator was quickly impressed with its potential political power and soon began ardentley wooing Dr. Townsend and his followers.

Although Father Coughlin never openly committed himself to Borah's candidacy, a careful reading of Social Justice reveals that the Senator from Idaho received consistently good copy. His inflationary monetary views appear to have been the chief factor which distinguished him from the rest of the politicians in Father Coughlin's eyes. Early in 1936 Social Justice pointed out that his candidacy was annoying to the "Gold Crowd." A month later, it observed that the only candidate of either party "who has approached the ticklish money question is the leonine battler, . . ." Because of the similarity of their views in general, it would seem logical that Coughlin would have endorsed the Republican ticket in 1936 if it had been headed by Borah.¹¹

Borah's appeal to such agrarian radicals as Lemke was only natural. In October of 1935, Lemke urged him to enter the race for the Republican nomination and assured him that he would receive the support of the "farm groups." Noting that the Senator was leading in some recently conducted newspaper polls to determine the popular choice for the Republican nomination in 1936, Lemke concluded that Borah was "the only Republican so far mentioned that can be elected."¹²

¹¹Social Justice, April 10, May 3, 1936.

¹²Lemke to Borah, Oct. 35 [sic], 1935, Lemke Papers.
In relation to the Townsend movement, Borah demonstrated the political opportunism which might have enabled him to unite the divergent anti-Roosevelt forces behind his candidacy. "My casual view," Borah had commented on the Townsend Plan in November of 1934, "is that the old-age pension should not be so large, and certainly the revenue should not be raised by a sales tax." In all probability this statement represented his continuing attitude toward the revolving pension scheme; however, as the Townsend crusade developed momentum, Borah skillfully began cultivating its support. "Any measure," he declared little more than two months after his original criticism of the plan, "which has gained such popular favor, already counting by the millions the signatures on its petition, ought to have an instant and unlimited hearing before the Senate." \(^{13}\)

The popularity of the Townsend Plan in his native Idaho as well as its possible national significance undoubtedly led Borah to take a more friendly attitude toward it. In October of 1935, he introduced Dr. Townsend at a mass meeting in Boise and evoked the cheers of 10,000 Townsendites by stating that the revolving pension idea would "not cost as much as a single year of depression." Within a few days, the local Townsend club began issuing windshield stickers which indicated the enthusiasm which the wily old politician had stirred up. "Get the Townsend Plan with Borah," "Save the Constitution with Borah," and even "16 to 1 with Borah" were some of the slogans which were plastered on automobiles by the avid Townsendites. \(^{14}\)


\(^{14}\) Ibid., Oct. 20, 1935.
Although he never actually endorsed the plan, Borah's sympathetic attitude could not help but impress Dr. Townsend who was generally subjected to nothing but ridicule from other prominent politicians. The senator's name was the first mentioned by Dr. Townsend when he was asked whom the proposed Townsend party might nominate in 1936. By March of the election year, he appeared to be moving in the direction of a formal endorsement of Borah's candidacy. "Senator Borah has not come right out for our plan," Townsend announced at that time, "but he has moved a great deal further toward our ideals than any other candidate in sight in either party."\textsuperscript{15}

Had Borah become the Republican nominee in 1936, it is probable that the Union party would never have been formed. Lemke would have undoubtedly campaigned on his behalf; moreover, all the evidence would seem to indicate that Coughlin and Townsend would have followed a similar course. The truth is, however, that there was never any real possibility that the GOP would nominate such a maverick as the Idaho senator. None the less, his rejection by the Republicans and the subsequent nomination of Landon, who was naturally considered a conservative by Coughlin, Lemke, and Townsend was an important factor in bringing the Union party into existence.

In the meantime, Lemke, Coughlin, Townsend, and Smith were moving rapidly in the direction of the uncompromising hostility which led to the formation of the Union party. The struggle over the Frazier-Lemke Refinance bill had served to draw Coughlin and Lemke closer together.

Its defeat on May 14 was the final blow in a long series which had gradually driven these original Roosevelt supporters into bitter opposition. In similar fashion, the Bell committee investigation completely alienated Dr. Townsend from the administration and led him to join Smith in an anti-Roosevelt crusade. It was under these circumstances that the Union party was born.

The immediate events which led to William Lemke's announcement on June 20 that he was to be a candidate for President on the Union party ticket are shrouded in mystery. His voluminous private papers and correspondence shed little light upon this crucial phase of his career; moreover, the only other probable source of such information, Father Coughlin, either will not or can not discuss his public activities during the 1930's. Thus, the historian must rely upon scattered and sometimes fragmentary bits of evidence to piece the story together. In spite of these obstacles, however, a fairly comprehensive description of these events must be attempted.

From the available evidence, it would appear that Father Coughlin took the initiative in forming the new party and therefore fully deserves the title, founder of the Union party. Lemke, on the other hand, was ready and willing to accept the priest's idea and to become a presidential candidate. Furthermore, it can be asserted that neither Townsend nor Smith played any significant role in organizing the party. At the time of Lemke's official announcement of his candidacy, he was only certain of the backing of the Royal Oak priest and in fact did not gain the support of Townsend and Smith until mid-July.
On or about May 14, the date upon which the Frazier-Lemke bill was defeated in the House of Representatives, Coughlin and Lemke began a series of negotiations which ultimately led to the formation of the new party. These negotiations were carried on in complete secrecy, and their exact nature will probably never be known. Based upon interviews with intimate friends of Lemke from North Dakota, Professor Blackorby has stated that these negotiations were carried on "by telephone and personal messengers." In light of this statement, the campaign slur that the nominating convention of the Union party was held in a telephone booth appears to have had literal as well as figurative validity. 16

Another version of these negotiations, for which there is no documentary proof, maintains that Coughlin and Lemke met secretly near Boston at the estate of Francis P. Keelon, a New York foreign exchange speculator and long-time friend and supporter of Father Coughlin. Circumstantial evidence suggests that such a meeting might have taken place. Father Coughlin was in Boston several days before Lemke announced the birth of the new party; moreover, Representative Harold Knutson of Minnesota, one of Lemke's closest friends in Congress, told reporters he believed that Lemke was out of town conferring with the priest. 17

The main reason for the strict secrecy which surrounded these negotiations appears to have been to obscure the major role which Coughlin was playing in bringing the new party into existence. Coughlin had no desire to identify himself or the NUSJ too closely with the new

16 Blackorby, "Lemke," 504.
party, for he undoubtedly realized that such a course would completely
discredit him and his organization if Lemke failed to make a good
showing in November. In addition to this, Lemke would be more likely to
gain the support of Townsend, Smith, and other disgruntled forces if
his close ties with the controversial priest were not too apparent.

The only document in the Lemke papers relating specifically to
the formation of the Union party clearly places Coughlin in the position
of its chief organizer. Moreover, it proves that Lemke was originally
slated to play a relatively minor role in the new party. In a letter
of June 8, Father Coughlin appointed Lemke to the post of state chairman
of the new party for North Dakota and informed him that the names of the
party's candidates for president and vice-president would be forwarded
from Royal Oak at a later date. 18

It would appear from this evidence that the candidates of the new
party had not been decided upon as late as June 8, only ten days before
the birth of the party was announced. Moreover, there is reason to
believe that before Lemke agreed to head the ticket that both Senator
Nye and Senator Borah had rejected similar offers by Father Coughlin.
Nye subsequently denied rumors to that effect; however, Lemke is the
authority for the story that Borah had been offered the position before
him. "When I heard that Senator Borah of Idaho wouldn't take the
nomination," Lemke told Barnett Lester of the Boston Post, "my friends
kept pressing me and said I was the only man who could make a real race."

18Blackorby, "Lemke," 505. This author was unable to find the
letter which Blackorby quotes from the Lemke Papers.
It was in this unconventional and unprecedented manner that William Lemke became the Presidential candidate of the Union party.\(^{19}\)

Despite the secrecy which attended the formation of the Union party, there had been from time to time hints and rumors that a new party was likely to emerge in 1936. As early as April 19, Father Coughlin told his Sunday afternoon radio audience that "the time has come, my friends, when perhaps it is necessary to establish not a third party, or a fourth party or a fifth party but a PEOPLE'S PARTY." Denying that the priest was actually proposing a new party, Social Justice, nevertheless, warned that "when and if public indignation is pushed to a point of breaking with the old line-up they will not set up a third party but a FIRST PARTY!"\(^{20}\)

Public speculation concerning the possibility of a third party was renewed again late in May when Dr. Townsend and Gerald L. K. Smith joined forces and appeared to be eager to unite with others in an anti-Roosevelt crusade. Arriving in New York City on May 23, Smith predicted that Townsend, Coughlin, and he were about to "congeal under a leadership of guts" to get rid of the "synthetic bathtub gin" leadership of James A. Farley. In order to build up the role which he would play in the event of such an amalgamation, he bragged that he had "5,000,000 personal followers" and could "control by suggestion" the election in almost any southern state. "We are not uniting ourselves," he told

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 509; Barnett B. Lester, "Just Who Is Wm. Lemke, Fr. Coughlin's Candidate?" Boston Post, July 5, 1936.

\(^{20}\) Social Justice, May 22, 1936.
reporters, "but the Farley leadership is driving us together." "We are presenting a common front against the dictatorship in Washington," Dr. Townsend was quoted as saying on May 31. Three days later Smith told reporters that he and Townsend would meet with representatives of Father Coughlin in Cleveland the following month under the slogan "anybody but Roosevelt." 21

Although these statements have been cited as evidence that Townsend and Smith were actively participating in the formation of the Union party at this time, it seems more likely that they simply reflected a desire on their part to cooperate with other anti-Roosevelt forces. It should be noted that neither Townsend nor Smith expressed any desire to form a third party or mentioned Lemke as a possible member of their "common front." There can be little doubt, however, that these statements convinced Coughlin and Lemke that their new party would receive a warm reception from Townsend and Smith. 22

Following Smith's forecast on May 23 of a Coughlin-Townsend-Smith union of forces, the New York Sun asked the priest to clarify his views on the 1936 campaign. Coughlin answered with a carefully phrased telegram which further confused the situation:

I have not been in favor of the policies of the New Deal, which, to my mind, tends toward bureaucracy, dictatorship and extreme socialism. . . . Further than having given expression to these opinions I have not contemplated the launching of a so-called third party. A renovated Republican party possessing contrite heart for its former misdeeds and

22 Schlesinger, Politics of Upheaval, 555.
an honest standard bearer in whom I could repose complete confidence are all that are necessary to convert this nation from ruinous Rooseveltism.23

In an effort to find out exactly who this "honest standard bearer" might be, the New York Times was able to elicit only a flat rejection of the front-running Republican candidate. "Well, I will not support Governor Landon," the priest told a Times reporter.24

In the May 29 issue of Social Justice, Coughlin began a series of editorials which were apparently meant to prepare his followers for his subsequent endorsement of Lemke. The tone of the May 29 editorial "Where Do We Go from Here?" suggests that his negotiations with Lemke had reached a fairly definite stage by that date. "Within two or three weeks," he asserted, "I shall be able to disclose the first chapter of a plan which, if followed out, will discomfort the erstwhile sham battlers, both Republican and Democrat."25

"To ask the National Union . . . to support either Roosevelt or Landon," Social Justice complained bitterly the following week, "is to invite this organization to choose between carbolic acid and rat poison." Reflecting much the same sentiment, Coughlin attempted to explain his disillusionment with FDR in an editorial entitled "Why I Cannot Support the New Deal." Recalling the days when he had told his followers that it was either "Roosevelt or Ruin," the priest accused the President of breaking his word:

On March 4, 1933, I was thrilled by the ringing words which promised to drive the money changers from the temple. I

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thought that the death knell for plutocracy had sounded. Despite all promises, the money changer has not been driven from the Temple.26

The June 12 issue of Social Justice clearly reflects the impending announcement of the formation of the Union party. The lead article on the front page dramatically revealed that the radio priest would be "heard over a nation-wide hook-up within the next thirty days." Furthermore, it asserted that this special broadcast would be a "message of hope to the American people, confused and driven into No-Man's Land by the smoke screens and gas barrages of the Tweedle-Dee and Tweedle-Dum political sham battle." In an accompanying editorial appropriately entitled "Stand By!" Coughlin informed his followers that "activities of the . . . National Union will increase tremendously immediately following June 16th or 17th." About that time, he promised to present a "plan for action which will thrill you and inspire you beyond anything that I have ever said or accomplished in the past."27

Although he would later deny that he had actively engaged in the organization of the Union party, the priest revealed in this editorial, fully eight days before the birth of the party was announced, that he was not only aware of such developments but was indeed playing the leading part. "Already the plan is completed. . . . The element of time prevents my mentioning it at this moment. . . . My plans are well made. Our resources and assets are well counted. Our objective is as clear as the noonday sun." Asking the NUSJ members to give him their

27 Social Justice, June 12, 1936.
complete confidence "for the next six months," he concluded with a promise to the faithful:

No matter what eventuates, no matter what headlines may appear in the paper this week or next week or any week, I pledge and promise you that I still remain your leader.23

In Boston on June 14, Father Coughlin told newsmen that four more years of the New Deal would result in a "Tugwell dictatorship." As far as Roosevelt and Landon were concerned, he made it perfectly clear that he had no intention of supporting either of them. "Neither is worth a nickel and a plugged one at that. One is a promise breaker. The other is dumb. The Democrats put the country on the dole standard. The Republicans want to put it on the booby standard." Finally, he concluded the press conference by announcing that he would deliver his special radio speech on June 19, that it would deal with his affiliation during the presidential campaign, and that it would "startle America."29

The priest arrived in New York on Monday, June 15, to make final arrangements for his nation-wide broadcast scheduled for Friday night. When questioned by reporters, he denied that he had personally taken any part in the setting up of a new party but admitted that there might be a third-party candidate in the field by Friday. In that case, he asserted that he might endorse the new candidate at that time.30

28 Ibid.
At about the same time in Chicago, Gerald Smith issued a joint statement on behalf of himself and Dr. Townsend saying that a "united front" had been formed by the Coughlin, Townsend, Smith, and Lemke forces. Emphasizing that it represented a "federation" or "loose working agreement" rather than an actual merger, Smith asserted that their combined forces would control "more than 20,000,000 votes" in November. The basis upon which the new federation had been formed, Smith asserted, was a common opposition to "the communistic philosophy of Frankfurter, Ickes, Hopkins and Wallace." 31

The significance of this statement by Smith is debatable. Professor Schlesinger has concluded that Smith had "jumped the gun" in order to be the first to announce the birth of the Union party. This conclusion implies that Smith and Townsend were privy to the Coughlin-Lemke negotiations and had already agreed to support Lemke's candidacy. As will be pointed out in detail later, however, the fact is that neither Smith nor Townsend consented to endorse Lemke until July. Except for the inclusion of Lemke, Smith's statement of June 15 did not differ in any significant way from his earlier predictions of a "united front" which he had been making since he allied himself with Townsend in May. At any rate, Dr. Townsend made it clear the following day that he was not joining any third-party movement for the time being. "We are not endorsing anybody at this time," he stated, "if they come to us with any kind of a satisfactory offer we'll consider it." It would appear,

31 Ibid.
therefore, that neither Townsend nor Smith had taken any real part in
the negotiations which led to the formation of the Union party.\footnote{Schlesinger, 
\textit{\textsuperscript{32}}}

After weeks of speculation and rumor, the newspaper reporters
finally found a weak spot in the veil of secrecy which had surrounded
the formation of the Union party. The Washington Post reported on June
17 that unnamed "Washington sources close to Father Coughlin" had
confided that the priest would endorse a third-party ticket headed by
Lemke. Although Lemke was not available for comment, the Post quoted
his close friend Congressman Harold Knutson of Minnesota as saying that
he believed the report was true and that Lemke was out of town conferring
with Father Coughlin.\footnote{Washington Post, June 17, 1936.  
\textit{\textsuperscript{33}}}

Returning to Washington on the day that the Post story broke,
Lemke professed complete ignorance of any third-party movement but added
significantly that it should "surprise no one if the great majority of
the American people are not willing to go backward." Even in his per-
sonal correspondence during this period, there is no hint that he was
about to become a candidate for the presidency. Writing to his son on
May 25, Lemke predicted that there "will be a Progressive party formed
and that there will be candidates in the field this fall," but he made
no reference to the part he was playing in the formation of the new
party. Ten days before he announced his candidacy, he went no further
than to tell an old friend that he believed "there will be a new aline-
ment of the liberal groups and that the American people will have an
opportunity to vote on a real platform and candidates." "I think this new alinement will take place shortly after the two conventions are over," he concluded. Even Mrs. Lemke appears to have been kept in the dark and was surprised to find herself the wife of a presidential candidate.34

Finally, at a Washington press conference on June 19, William Lemke formally proclaimed the birth of the Union party and announced his candidacy. The statement which he read was brief and left many questions concerning the exact origin, nature, and support of the new party unanswered:

I have accepted the challenge of the reactionary elements of both of the old parties and will run for President of the United States as the candidate of the Union party, which I am instrumental in establishing officially, in accordance with the thousands of messages and requests which I have received from over the nation. Thomas Charles O'Brien of Boston has signified his willingness to seek the Vice Presidency on the same platform. I have arranged with friends of mine to proceed with filing the name of "The Union Party," the emblem, my own name and that of Mr. O'Brien in order to fulfill the specific law of each State relative to filing. I am hoping that the platform which I have submitted to my friends, and have asked them to publicize, will meet with wide approval. To my mind, it is the only platform which will embody the principles which will save democracy and put a permanent end to the so-called depression.

Comparing the crisis of the 1930's with that of the 1850's, when the issue of slavery had brought forth the Republican party, Lemke asserted that a new party was again necessary:

Today we are again at the crossroads and the issue again is slavery--economic slavery. . . . Two major parties have had ample opportunity to seriously attempt to remedy the economic

ills of our nation. They have been found wanting. There is only one solution. That is through the formation of a new party which I am launching today, . . .

When newsmen pressed the self-proclaimed presidential candidate to identify his associates or backers, he grew somewhat irritated and refused to divulge the names of any individuals or groups. "Everything is in a formative state," he said, "and I do not wish to mislead you."

In a pledge that was never to be fulfilled, he promised that the new party would be formally organized at a national convention of "interested groups" in August. It would be, he declared, "a mass convention similar to the one at which Lincoln launched his party, . . ."35

Thomas C. O'Brien was an active member of the NUSJ in Massachusetts and his selection as Lemke's running mate was probably at the suggestion of Father Coughlin. Three days before the birth of the Union party was announced, Lemke had welcomed him into the fold: "I am happy that you have consented, at my request, to seek the office of Vice-President on the Union Party ballot. We will stand or fall together on the principles which are so dear to both of us."36

A graduate of Harvard College and Law School, O'Brien had gained some recognition as an advocate of prison reform during the 1920's and had served as district attorney of Suffolk County from 1922 to 1927. Returning to private practice and specializing in labor law, he became a counsel for the railway brotherhoods in New England during the depression years. As a Democrat and Roman Catholic, O'Brien brought a

36 Lemke to O'Brien, June 16, 1936, Lemke Papers.
certain measure of political balance to the Union party ticket; however, lacking a nation-wide reputation, he contributed little to its over-all strength.  

The new party's platform, which was made public at Lemke's press conference, is an interesting document and deserves more attention than is usually accorded to it. Since most authors have only made brief reference to it, their generalizations about it are open to some criticism.

It was not as Professor Schlesinger has stated "essentially a condensation of the sixteen principles of the National Union for Social Justice." Only about half of the MUJ's principles found their way into the Union party platform--mainly those relating to monetary questions upon which Lemke and Coughlin were in full agreement. Neither was the platform "designed to contain the essence of the Townsend, Coughlin, Smith, and Lemke groups" as Professor McCoy has maintained. No specific reference was made to either the OARP or Share-Our-Wealth plans. Finally, it is not accurate to say as Mr. Lubell has that "most of the planks in the Union party's platform were lifted from the 1932 platform of the Farmer-Laborites in Minnesota." While both platforms certainly had some similar planks, the implication that the former was a duplication of the latter is misleading.

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37 New York Times, June 20, 1936; Boston Post, July 5, 1936.
The most striking resemblance between the Union party platform and the programs of the NUSJ and the Minneosta Farmer-Labor party was in the area of monetary reform. In this respect, of course, the platform was merely restating in modern terms the traditional agrarian demands for currency inflation. It proposed that Congress alone should have the power to coin and issue currency and regulate the value of all money and credit through a central bank of issue. Moreover, Congress should use that power to retire all tax-exempt, interest-bearing bonds and certificates of indebtedness of the government and to refinance all farm mortgages as well as those of the city home owner.

The fact that Townsend and Smith had played no real part in the formation of the new party was revealed by the absence of their pet panaceas in the platform. The Union party demand for "assurance of reasonable and decent security for the aged" was a far cry from the revolving pension plan. The only hint of wealth sharing was a plank calling for a limitation upon the net income and inheritance of any individual. As will be pointed out later, one of the reasons Townsend and Smith withheld their endorsement of Lemke was their dissatisfaction with these vague allusions to their programs.

Reflecting the rigid isolationism of both Lemke and Coughlin, the platform clearly supported that historic American foreign policy. "America shall be self-contained and self-sustained--no foreign entanglements, be they political, economic, financial, or military," the first sentence of the platform stated. At the same time, however, "an adequate and perfect defense for our country from foreign aggression" was demanded "with the understanding that our naval, air and military forces must not
be used under any consideration in foreign fields or in foreign waters. . . ." Finally, an idea from Lemke's Nonpartisan League days was added for good measure: "If there must be conscription, there shall be a conscription of wealth as well as a conscription of men."

Discontent with specific policies or alleged tendencies of the New Deal was reflected in demands for a return to the protective tariff, enforcement of the antitrust laws, the restoration of states' rights, and "the ruthless eradication of bureaucracies." Resentment over what Lemke and Coughlin usually referred to as "Farleyism" was contained in a plank calling for the distribution of all federal offices "through civil service and not through a system of party spoils and corrupt patronage." Each of the planks specifying some action by the federal government was prefaced with the words "Congress shall," reflecting dissatisfaction over executive domination under the New Deal.

Support for increased efforts in the field of conservation and an endorsement of the economic philosophy behind the NPA were contained in one section of the platform: "Congress shall organize and institute federal works for the conservation of public lands, waters, and forests, thereby creating billions of dollars worth of wealth, millions of jobs at the prevailing wage, and thousands of homes" Both Lemke and Coughlin had frequently charged that the NPA was paying its workers less than the prevailing wage.

Some of the planks of the platform were vaguely worded and open to myriad interpretations. To labor, it promised a "living annual wage"; to the farmer, "production at a profit"; to youth, "a decent living while in the process of perfecting themselves in a trade or
profession." One plank outdid the rest as far as duplicity was concerned: "Congress shall protect private property from confiscation through unnecessary taxation with the understanding that the human rights of the masses take precedence over the financial rights of the classes." Critics later pointed to the first part of this statement as a sop to big business, which supposedly proved the fascist tendencies of the Union party. Little notice was taken of the Jeffersonian conclusion however, which placed quite a qualification on the alleged sop.

In an analysis of the Union party platform, it is easier to say what it was not than what it was. Like the party itself, it was a hodgepodge of different and sometimes contradictory elements. At any rate, since the party's campaign turned out to be essentially an anti-Roosevelt crusade, its platform was virtually ignored and was of even less importance than such documents usually are.

Six hours after Lemke's press conference, Father Coughlin gave the new party, its candidates, and platform his personal endorsement on a nation-wide radio broadcast. Much of the priest's address was devoted to a rambling and highly emotional critique of the Roosevelt record--"Where is the 1932 Democratic platform? Under the direction of Rexford Tugwell, ... it was plowed under like the cotton, slaughtered like the pigs." Republican "ragged individualism" was curtly dismissed--"Their sun has set, never to rise again." Referring to what would be one of the major themes of the new party's campaign, Coughlin described the situation in which he and his followers found themselves: "Neither Old Dealer nor New Dealer has the courage to assail the international bankers, ... both ... uphold the old money philosophy. Today in America there is only one political party--the banker's party."
After a dramatic pause, the priest pointed the way to the promised land:

My friends, there is a way out, a way to freedom. There is an escape from the dole standard of Roosevelt, the gold standard of Landon. Six hours ago the birth of "the Union party" was officially announced... thereby confirming information which hitherto was mine unofficially. The new candidate, together with his sponsors, formally requested my support as they handed me his platform. I find that it is in harmony substantially with the principles of social justice.

"Who is the candidate for president of the Union party?" Coughlin asked in his usual rhetorical fashion. "He is one who has left his mark for erudition in the halls of Yale University and who has already carved for himself a niche of fame in the industrial and agricultural temple of America... He is an American and not an internationalist." "We declare him," he added, "on the strength of his platform and his splendid record, eligible for indorsation sic."

In an enthusiastic conclusion, the priest summed up the academic, occupational, political, geographic, and religious balance of the Union party ticket:

Lemke and Yale, Agriculture and Republican! O'Brien and Harvard, Labor and Democrat! East and West! Protestant and Catholic, possessing one program of driving the money changers from the temple, of permitting the wealth of America to flow freely into every home.

Following this historic broadcast, reporters attempted to interview Father Coughlin in an effort to clarify some of the mystery surrounding the birth of the new party. When newsmen attempted to find out exactly when and from whom he had received a copy of the platform, Coughlin became "annoyed" and several of his aids became "irate." 40

40 New York Times, June 20, 1936; Washington Post, June 20, 1936.
Lemke's announcement of the birth of the Union party and Coughlin's immediate endorsement of it left many questions concerning this new political alignment unanswered. The one factor which stands out clearly is that at this point it was the personal creation of two individuals. Without benefit of any of the usual democratic methods by which new parties are generally formed in the United States, the Union party was thrust full-blown upon the political scene. It was assumed by most politicians and the press that to the Lemke-Coughlin forces would be added those of Townsend, Smith, and possibly other dissident factions; however, for the time being, the union consisted only of Father Coughlin and Congressman Lemke.
CHAPTER V

REACTION AND RESPONSE

William Lemke announced his candidacy three days before the Democratic convention convened in Philadelphia. "As the last rehearsals for the big show at Philadelphia take place," the New York Herald Tribune commented the following day, "a cloud at least as large as three men's hands comes up over the horizon. That third party, which the Administration thought had been silenced by the shots that ended Huey Long, suddenly takes form as a serious menace." In view of Roosevelt's overwhelming victory in 1936, it is difficult for historians today to realize that the Union party was ever looked upon as a "serious menace." During the early months of the campaign, however, most observers were convinced that the election would be close; as a result, the birth of the new party was treated as a major political development by the nation's press.¹

"The new party can hardly elect Lemke," the Los Angeles Times concluded in a typical reaction, "but it may defeat Roosevelt, which may be its real objective anyway." Reporting from Washington, William P. Helm wrote in the Minneapolis Tribune that "the launching of the Lemke third-party ticket is regarded here as placing a dozen or more

agricultural states, Minneosta among them, in doubt next November." The New Republic warned that the danger to FDR was "more formidable" from the Union party than from the Liberty League and predicted that "enough votes may be drawn from the more progressive of the two parties to change the result in doubtful and critical states."²

While recognizing the political potential of Lemke's candidacy, some observers were skeptical of the new party's unity and tended to minimize its importance. The New York Times described it as a "hurried alliance between radicals on the monetary question and radicals on the other issues... with a platform which makes the legislative enactments of the New Deal seem essentially conservative... a class appeal addressed to the discontented and unthinking." As far as the South was concerned, the Nashville Banner reported, "the real threat of a new party passed away with the death of Long." The morning and evening editions of the Baltimore Sun disagreed as to the significance of the new movement. While the former warned that it "might take enough votes away from Mr. Roosevelt to promote the election of Mr. Landon," the latter asserted that "people go right on being Democrats and Republicans, regardless of four-dimensional promises by minor parties." The Washington Post suggested that the proposed union of forces was an indication that Coughlin and Townsend were losing their strength. "If that were not the case," the Post concluded, "one or the other of the major parties

²Los Angeles Times, quoted in the Literary Digest, June 27, 1936, p. 6; Minneapolis Tribune, June 21, 1936; New Republic, July 1, 1936.
would be bidding for the large number of voters which these movements claim but obviously can not deliver.  

Speaking on the basis of long experience in third-party politics, Norman Thomas expressed doubt that the new party would become a serious threat because of the difficulty of getting on the ballot. "The only chance of success is a kind of triumvirate of Coughlin, Townsend and Smith," the Socialist candidate observed, "and historically triumvirates have usually fought among themselves. . . . Two and a half rival messiahs plus one ambitious politician plus a platform which reminds me of the early effort of Hitler to be radical do not make a very strong party."  

New Dealers, liberals, and generally those on the left of the political spectrum were the most concerned over the emergence of the new party. "An independent party will injure the cause of social justice," William Green pointed out, "by splitting forces of progress and liberalism when all liberal groups should be united." In relation to the new party's platform, the New Republic charged that "inflation is of course no remedy for anything. . . . When coupled, . . . with exclusive nationalism and heavy armament, it becomes definitely fascist." Sinclair Lewis bluntly asserted that it was "the most dangerous approach to Fascism we have ever had."  

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5 Social Justice, June 29, 1936; New Republic, July 1, 1936; Los Angeles Illustrated Daily News, July 1, 1936.
Practical politicians of both major parties took a less philosophical view of the new party and tended to evaluate it more in terms of its likely impact at the polls. Republicans were generally reported to be in a "jubilant mood" over the new party and were predicting privately that it was worth at least fifty electoral votes to Landon and might even decide the outcome of the election. The keynoter of the Republican convention, Senator Frederick Steiwer of Oregon, predicted that the Union party "would take more votes from the New Deal than from the Republican party." The North Dakota Leader reported that Governor Landon "welcomed" the new party and quoted the Republican vice-presidential candidate Frank Knox as saying that it would make "serious inroads in territory upon which the New Dealers have relied heavily."^6

In contrast to the jubilant Republicans, Democratic leaders were reported to be "badly worried" over Lemke's candidacy. New Deal politicians from the northwest warned that Minnesota, the Dakotas, and possibly Montana as well as other states from that region might now be in jeopardy. One report from Minnesota forecast that the new party would force Chairman Farley to "play ball with the Farmer-Labor state and local candidates or face the loss of the state to Landon." Farley, however, displayed at least an outward calm in the face of such reports. "We are not a bit disturbed about a third party and how it will affect our nominee," he assured reporters.^7

^6Minneapolis Tribune, June 21, 1936; Philadelphia Record, June 21, 1936; North Dakota Leader, June 25, 1936.

The most favorable reaction to Lemke's candidacy came from other radical agrarian members of Congress and from the representatives of farm organizations. Lemke's senatorial colleagues from North Dakota, Lynn Frazier and Gerald P. Nye, praised the new party's platform but withheld further comment. "Whether I support the new third party depends entirely upon what the Democrats adopt in the platform at Philadelphia," commented Senator Elmer Benson of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor party. "I am pleased with the bearing the new movement will be sure to have on Labor and the Money situation." Senator Borah told reporters, "I thoroughly agree with the money and wage planks . . . the new party will have a decided effect on the coming election." Although he would support Roosevelt as in 1932, Senator Elmer Thomas of Oklahoma stated that he agreed "one hundred per cent with Father Coughlin's view on money" and endorsed "heartily the Union party plank against tax exempt bonds."

The most enthusiastic congressional support of the new party came from Representative Charles G. Binderup of Nebraska who had worked closely with Lemke on the Frazier-Lemke bills in the House of Representatives: "Many outstanding factors will contribute to the election of Bill Lemke. One is the excellent support of Father Coughlin. . . . Another is the dirt-slinging campaign of the Democrats and Republicans. The two parties will do more campaigning for Lemke than he could do for himself."  

Edward Everson, President of the Farmers' Union, predicted that the 250,000 members of his organization "very largely will support the

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8 New York Times, June 20, 1936; Philadelphia Record, June 21, 1936; Social Justice, June 29, 1936.
third-party Presidential campaign of William Lemke" but added that it was the duty of the executive committee to decide whether to endorse him formally or not. "The platform drawn up by the leadership of this movement," the Ohio edition of the National Union Farmer enthusiastically proclaimed, "is the most remarkable document ever to be presented to the people of the United States in the long history of the republic."

Finally, eighty-two year old General Jacob Coxey of Massillon, Ohio, the patron saint of agrarian insurgency, withdrew his nominal presidential candidacy on the national Farmer-Labor ticket in favor of Lemke.9

Not all representatives of agrarian radicalism, however, were eager to embrace Lemke's candidacy. In fact the most important of them, the La Follette brothers of Wisconsin and Governor Olson of Minnesota, maintained a "stony silence." Moreover, one of Olson's most important lieutenants, Howard Y. Williams, national organizer of the Farmer-Labor party, openly branded the new party a "tragic mistake" and declared that it would "split the progressive vote and let the Republicans in." Others who had urged the formation of a national Farmer-Labor party in 1936 rejected the Union party as a poor substitute. "I am not interested in the movement," Congressman Vito Marcantonio of New York stated, "except in an academic way. A real Farmer-Labor-Progressive coalition would be a horse of a different color."10


10 Philadelphia Record, June 21, 1936; North Dakota Leader, June 25, 1936.
Much of the initial reaction to his candidacy must have been disappointing to Lemke. The ultimate success or failure of the new party, however, depended less upon such reaction than upon the response of various dissident forces which were expected to rally to its support. In the days immediately following his announcement of June 19, Lemke eagerly sought the endorsement of numerous individuals and groups.

By far the most important potential source of support for the Union party was the Townsend movement. Although it had been considered a foregone conclusion by most observers that Dr. Townsend and Reverend Smith would join Father Coughlin in support of the new party, it soon became apparent that such action would not be automatic. Smith told reporters on June 19 that the decision as to whether he and Townsend would endorse Lemke would depend upon the outcome of a conference to be held "somewhere in the east" the following week. "Any bid for our support," he continued, "will have to convince us that the bidders have the intention and power to carry out the Huey Long and Townsend programs." 

The following day, Dr. Townsend was quoted as saying in Syracuse, New York that it was "all right" with him if the Townsendites endorsed Lemke at their national convention in July. "Right now, however," he pointed out, "I know of no talk whereby I would join a third party movement with Lemke." At the same time, Smith hinted that he and Townsend were not satisfied with Lemke's platform:

We are convinced that a Presidential candidate who will permit the Rev. Charles E. Coughlin to define his money plank--Dr. Townsend to define his old age security plank--

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Gerald Smith to define his plank on labor, education and homesteads—the Farmers' Union to define their plank on agriculture—this man will be the next President of the United States.12

In the meantime, Smith and Lemke had been trying to set up a conference at which their differences could be ironed out. Finally the meeting was scheduled for June 23 in Lemke's Washington office. "Doctor and I will arrive for conference with you tomorrow Tuesday morning between ten and noon," Smith wired Lemke on June 22. On their way to Washington, Townsend and Smith stopped off in New York and Dr. Townsend told reporters that he would "personally" endorse Lemke if "he accepts unequivocally the old age pension idea" but that any decision by the OARP would have to be deferred until the convention. "Our first attempt," Smith added, "will be to unseat the contemptible and damnable Farley dictatorship with its false liberal foreground and Communist background."13

On June 23, Lemke held an hour-long conference with Townsend and Smith at the nation's capital but was unable to extract a firm commitment from them. Emerging from the meeting Dr. Townsend issued a statement to the press:

We are not taking any action at the present time on a Presidential candidate, ... We wish to cooperate with Mr. Lemke as much as we can and I hereby extend to him an invitation to attend the Townsend National Convention and he will be given

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an opportunity to address our people. . . . If Mr. Lemke can co-operate with us in putting this Plan [Townsend Plan] into operation, then I say co-operate, but I must repeat again that any decision about candidates is up to the Convention.

Speaking for his supposed followers from the Share-the-Wealth organization, Smith said he would inform Lemke within thirty days as to their support. In the meantime, he invited Lemke to speak at a "huge mass meeting" to be held in New Orleans the following month.  

The main stumbling block in the negotiations between Lemke and Townsend appears to have been a hesitancy on the part of Lemke to include the Townsend Plan in toto in his platform. He came close to saying as much a few days later when he emphasized to newsmen that the new party did not represent a merger of dissatisfied groups but rather a temporary combination aimed at restoring representative government. "Each group will keep its own identity," he asserted, "but our common object will be to unite so that our own legislation can be brought up and voted on in congress and need not depend on a 'must' bill or the approval of some department head or cabinet officer. We don't accept each other's ideas in their entirety. That's why we call it the 'Union' party."  

In the meantime, Townsend and Smith had embarked on a tour of local Townsend Clubs on the West Coast. During his swing through California, Dr. Townsend appeared to lose interest in Lemke's candidacy. He was probably influenced in this respect by California leaders of the

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Townsend movement who opposed any endorsement of Lemke and feared the growing power of Smith in the OARP. In an off-the-record interview with B. W. Horne of the San Francisco News, some of these state leaders expressed their views. Complaining that Townsend and Smith had come to California to build up sentiment for the Union party, they asserted that the OARP should steer clear of any political affiliations. "I don't know whether we can persuade the doctor to give up the third party idea now that these slickers have had him to tow for all these months," one official commented, "but we'll certainly try." "We have nothing in common with these other people who want to become political bosses," another added, "What we want is our pension plan, not political control." 16

The advice of his California lieutenants apparently had some effect upon Dr. Townsend, for he did not mention Lemke's candidacy during his public appearances in the state. Instead he told 20,000 followers at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena that the Townsendites must "use the antiquated machinery of the Democratic and Republican parties to carry out our purpose." The following day he defined that purpose: "We are going to resort to every legitimate means to achieve a change in the administration in Washington. . . . Defeat Roosevelt or suffer four more years of bitter prosecution." The most logical conclusion to be drawn from these statements is that he was now thinking of supporting the Republican nominee as the most effective method of defeating FDR. 17

Arriving in Chicago on July 13 on their way to the Townsend convention in Cleveland the following week, Townsend and Smith again met

16 San Francisco News, July 3, 1936.
with Lemke but failed to reach any agreement. Townsend later told reporters his reason for withholding any formal support. "He never has endorsed our plan fully," the doctor pointed out and added forcefully: "He thinks some revisions should be made, but knows that he has to be 100 per cent for it, as 99 per cent won't do." Revealing his irritation with Lemke's stand, he even held out the possibility that the Townsendites might still put their own candidate into the race. "I'd like to see it go to some young man," he commented, "like Gerald Smith." 18

As the Townsend national convention got under way a few days later, it soon became clear that there would be no formal endorsement of Lemke's candidacy. The opening speeches of the convention were filled with warnings against any involvement with the new third party. Representative Martin F. Smith, Democrat of Washington, the temporary chairman, declared that "every true friend of the Townsend plan, ... should resist to the utmost any and every effort . . . to capitalize the Townsend plan for partisan advantage, and prostitute it to the political ambitions of any man or group of men or make it the instrumentality of any third-party, second-party or first party." Emphasizing that they should concentrate their efforts on the election of pro-Townsend congressmen and forget the presidential race, he concluded with a frank disavowal of the Union party: "My friends, we are not going to 'Lose with Lemke,' we are going to 'Triumph with Townsend.'" 19

19 "Detailed Proceedings of Convention," Townsend National Weekly, July 27, 1936. Unless otherwise cited, the account of the Townsend convention is based upon this official source.
The official keynoter of the convention, Otto Case, state treasurer of Washington, reminded the delegates that their first and only objective was the enactment of the Townsend plan: "Let us then lay aside every personal, partisan or controversial question which might tend to disunion and detract attention from our real and precious objective." Nathan J. Roberts, regional director of the OARP in the South, warned that supporting a third party in his area would be "meaningless" and that the only way to win in Dixie was to capture the Democratic party. Finally, asserting that the Townsend movement had accomplished its great success "by kindness, by persuasion, by education," Sheridan Downey, a candidate for the Democratic senatorial nomination in California, echoed the earlier warnings: "I pray you, do not be led astray into partisan vicious battles in which you will become arrayed against each other and great masses of the American people."

The main purpose of all this anti-Lemke sentiment appears to have been an effort on the part of the convention leadership to prepare the delegates for the appearance of Father Coughlin who was scheduled to speak the following day. The invitation to address the convention had been extended to the priest shortly after Lemke's candidacy had been announced. At that time, Dr. Townsend had talked of letting the convention decide whether to support the Union party. In the meantime, however, Townsend had become convinced that there should be no formal endorsement by the OARP. Fully aware of the persuasive powers of the radio priest, the Townsend leaders were obviously trying to prevent him from sweeping the convention off its feet and into the Lemke camp. In
view of Coughlin's subsequent performance, they had not taken any unnecessary precautions. 20

Shortly before Coughlin's scheduled appearance, Chairman Frank Arbuckle reminded the delegates that the OARP was "non-partisan and non-sectarian." In a cautious introduction, Dr. Townsend emphasized that the advocates of any political faction were welcome to address the convention. "This does not bind us to follow the trend of thought which shall be expressed here," he added. Father Coughlin then mounted the platform and delivered one of the most controversial speeches of his career.

Beginning on a conciliatory note, he denied newspaper reports that he had come to the convention to persuade the Townsendites to support the Union party. As usual he heaped criticism upon bankers, the money system, and the Roosevelt administration. Then, he brought the delegates to their feet with a bitter attack on FDR. No candidate endorsed by the NUSJ, he declared, could support "the great betrayer and liar, Franklin D. Roosevelt, . . . ." A few minutes later, he urged the delegates to "purge the man who claims to be a Democrat from the Democratic party, . . . Franklin Double-Crossing Roosevelt."

20 For a different interpretation of the events at the Townsend convention see Schlesinger, Politics of Upheaval, 558-559. Professor Schlesinger contends that Dr. Townsend sent out a "hurry call for the Detroit priest to come to his rescue" because of a "sudden surge of Roosevelt sentiment" at the convention. There is little evidence, however, upon which to base such a contention. Gomer Smith was the only Townsendite to openly defend FDR at the convention, but his speech could hardly have led Townsend to call in Father Coughlin as Schlesinger asserts, for he spoke after not before the priest. Most of the leaders of the Townsend movement seem to have supported Dr. Townsend in his anti-Rooseveltism.
After this tirade against Roosevelt, Coughlin borrowed a page from Gerald Smith's book of platform techniques. Shedding his coat and vest and finally throwing his clerical collar to the floor, he demanded that "all those who are in favor of a free America from the double-crossing Democrats and from the gold-standard Republicans, stand up." Everyone in the hall stood up.

Now, fully in control of his audience, Father Coughlin made his pitch for the Union party:

Ladies and Gentlemen, you haven't come here to endorse any political party. You stultify yourselves if you endorse the Socialists, Roosevelt and Landon. The principles of Dr. Townsend, and the principles of Dr. Gerald Smith have been incorporated in the new Union party. You are not asked to endorse it. Your beloved leader endorses them (sic), and how many of you will follow Dr. Townsend?

Once again, the delegates were on their feet, wildly cheering the radio priest. With one arm around Townsend and the other around Smith, Coughlin told the convention that he stood four-square with them. Later in the day, Townsend and Smith told reporters that they would personally support and campaign for the Union ticket.21

It is easy to overemphasize the impact of Coughlin's address upon the convention. "At this gathering of elderly patriots who frown on smoking, drinking, and urbanity," F. Raymond Daniell commented in the New York Times, "it isn't so much what is said but the way it's put that brings the cheers." The accuracy of this observation was clearly shown a few hours after Coughlin's speech when Gomer Smith, a Democrat from Oklahoma, defended FDR as a "golden-hearted patriot" who had saved

America from communism. The cheers and applause were just as long and loud for this Oklahoma "spellbinder" as for any previous speaker.\textsuperscript{22}

Judging from the reaction of the delegates, it appeared that they were ready to follow in whatever direction the speaker of the moment led them. It soon became clear, however, that Dr. Townsend was not going to allow the convention to get out of hand. Chairman Arbuckle ruled that any motion regarding the endorsement of any political party or candidate would be "out of order at all times at this convention." Later, a resolution was adopted stating that the Townsend movement "shall not at any time during this campaign directly or indirectly . . . endorse any Presidential or Vice-Presidential candidates." Thus, there was never any formal endorsement of Lemke and the Union party by the Townsend organization.

The main reason for the sudden decision of Dr. Townsend and Reverend Smith to lend their personal support to Lemke's candidacy was that Lemke had finally given into their demands that he fully endorse the Townsend Plan. In a signed statement which was not made public until later in the campaign, Lemke pledged his unqualified support of the plan: "I am one hundred per cent for the Townsend Old Age Revolving Pension plan. As President, I will sign such a bill to provide an honest and fair pension to our old people who have helped to create the wealth of the nation. I will veto any subterfuge or substitute."\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{22}New York Times, July 17, 1936.

\textsuperscript{23}Townsend National Weekly, Oct. 19, 1936.
In his appearance before the convention later in the week, Lemke told the Townsendites that he was "one hundred per cent" for the revolving pension plan and at the same time made a bid for the votes of the remnants of the Share-Our-Wealth organization which Smith claimed to command. Although he did not specifically endorse the ideas of the late Huey Long, he did refer to the Kingfish as "the greatest Democrat that this nation produced in the last hundred years" and promised that his aim was not only to create conditions under which "every man is a king" but also "where every woman is a queen. . . ."

Although Dr. Townsend had finally agreed to campaign on Lemke's behalf, his actions betrayed the fact that he was somewhat less than enthusiastic about the new party. Not only had he prevented the Townsend convention from endorsing the Union party, but he had also failed to make his own position publicly clear. At no time during the convention did he formally announce to his followers that he would personally support Lemke or urge them to vote for the Union party. Moreover, the next issue of the Townsend National Weekly, although it was devoted to the minutest coverage of the convention, failed to mention Townsend's endorsement of Lemke. It can only be concluded that while Townsend was willing to join Lemke and Coughlin in an anti-Roosevelt crusade, he had no desire to identify himself or his movement too closely with their new party or its platform.

In contrast to the failure of the Townsend National Weekly even to mention the fact that Dr. Townsend had endorsed Lemke, Father Coughlin's Social Justice attempted to create the illusion that the Townsend movement as a whole had joined in support of the Union party.
"Forces United!" it announced in a banner headline beneath which appeared a half-page photograph of Townsend, Smith, and Coughlin standing together. Under the misleading title "Townsend Group Hears Lemke; Gives Support," it reported the enthusiasm of the Townsendites: "Ten thousand Townsend delegates departed from Cleveland over the weekend for their homes in every part of the country, determined to spread the cause of the Union Party. . . ."

In spite of the fact that he could hardly have considered Townsend's half-hearted support a resounding victory, Lemke told reporters that he was "delighted" with the results of the Townsend convention. "As far as the Townsend people are concerned," he added, "they have always been with me—about 90 percent, which is all I could ask for."25

The addition of Townsend and Smith to the Union party forces brought down a new wave of criticism upon the party. "Mr. Lemke, broadly speaking, has taken all the worst elements of these various quack prescriptions and compounded them into a potion that would be certain to kill the patient instantly if he ever had to take it," the New Republic editorialized. "Thus are the principal elements of the lunatic fringe united," the New York Herald Tribune commented and added sarcastically: "It is Mr. Roosevelt's misfortune that most of this fringe were formerly New Deal supporters." When asked his opinion of the new Colonel Robert McCormick of the Chicago Tribune grumbled that it "just

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goes to show that there are a large number of unstable people in the
country."\textsuperscript{26}

There was considerable speculation in the nation's press concern­
ing the ability of Townsend and Smith to deliver their followers to
Lemke. One report, while noting that many Townsendites might not vote
for the Union party, pointed out that there were "hundreds of thousands
of old men and women to whom there is something definitely anthropo­
morphic about 'the doctor's' status" and who would "follow him anywhere--
into Old Guard Republicanism, socialism or a movement to set up a Stuart
monarchy in Kansas." Smith's claim that he could influence the former
followers of Huey Long, on the other hand, was usually dismissed as pure
bluff on his part.\textsuperscript{27}

Lemke pictured the Union party not only as a rallying point for
the Coughlin, Townsend, and Smith forces but also for all groups which
were dissatisfied with the old parties. "As a candidate on the Union
party ticket," he told the press, "I welcome into its ranks any one and
every one who believes in and can subscribe to its principles."\textsuperscript{28}

During the weeks immediately following the birth of the new
party, Lemke worked hard to gain the support of several farm organiza­
tions and third-party movements. On June 28, he met with Edward Everson
of South Dakota and Edward Kennedy of Illinois, respectively president
and secretary of the Farmers' Union. It was after this meeting that

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{New Republic}, July 29, 1936; New York Herald Tribune, quoted in
\item New York Times, July 28, 1936.
\item New York Times, July 17, 1936.
\end{enumerate}
Everson predicted that his followers would "very largely" support Lemke but added that a formal endorsement could only be made by the executive committee of the organization. Unfortunately for Lemke, when the committee met in July, they rejected a motion to endorse the Union party. In spite of this action, however, Everson and Kennedy personally supported the Union party ticket and campaigned extensively for Lemke in the farm states. Moreover, the state organizations in Illinois and Iowa formally endorsed Lemke and O'Brien. 29

Lemke also hoped to win the support of the radical Farmers' Holiday Association. Had Milo Reno, the founder of the organization, still been alive in 1936, it is probable that he would have led his followers into the Union party. As was pointed out earlier, he had urged just such a combination of dissident forces in 1935. After Reno's death, however, the leadership of the FHA became less friendly to such leaders as Coughlin and Townsend. As a result, when a resolution supporting Lemke's candidacy was introduced at the national convention late in June, it was tabled, and a resolution was adopted stating that "the Farmers' Holiday Association is strictly an economic organization. . . . We do not support any organization or political party not working for fundamental changes in our economic system." Congressman Usher Burdick, Lemke's campaign manager and president of the FHA in North Dakota, represented Lemke's interests at the convention, and when this adverse

action was taken, he and four other state presidents bitterly criticized
the delegates and finally walked out of the meeting. 30

As has already been noted, General Jacob Coxey withdrew as the
presidential candidate of the national Farmer-Labor party and threw his
support behind Lemke. While Coxey's support may have been of some
symbolic value to Lemke, reflecting as it did a tie with the Populist
ferment of the 1890's, it meant little in terms of actual votes, for the
national Farmer-Labor party had never been much of a force in politics.

The most important possible sources of support among the estab­
lished third parties on the state level were the Minnesota Farmer-Labor
party and the Wisconsin Progressive party. Two days after Lemke
announced his candidacy, the Wisconsin Farmer-Labor-Progressive Federa­
tion, a recently formed coalition of the Socialist and Progressive
parties of the state, met at Oshkosh. Although there was some Lemke
sentiment among the Progressives from the rural sections of the state,
their urban counterparts and the Socialists were opposed to the new
party. "We have nobody to vote for," Walter Graunke of Wausau said in
defense of Lemke. "This would give us an opening wedge so we can win in
1940. All the Republicans and Democrats give us are promises and smiles
that mean nothing. Do we want to wait until the farmers and workers
starve to death?" Another Progressive, Richard Eisenmann of Superior,
agreed that Lemke had tried to help farmers, but said the new party had
been "too hastily put together." Reflecting the Socialist point of view,

30North Dakota Leader, July 9, 1936; New York Times, July 2, 1936.
Max Raskin of Milwaukee dismissed the Union party as a "potpourri of political clap trap." After some heated debate, a resolution supporting Lemke was tabled. 31

Lemke fared no better at the hands of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor party. In one of his last statements before his death, Governor Floyd Olson said that although he had the "utmost respect for the Union ticket candidacy of William Lemke and for Father Coughlin, whose program of monetary reform is sound," it was necessary under the circumstances to support FDR. "If we liberals by splitting our vote place Landon in office," he warned, "we will have performed an act for which we never will be forgiven." Late in August, officials of the party met in executive session with leaders from the Wisconsin Farmer-Labor Progressive federation and officially decided not to support the Union party. 32

Not only did the leaders of these two powerful third parties refuse to give their support to the Union party, but they even worked vigorously to stir up enthusiasm for Roosevelt in their own states and throughout the nation. Olson and the La Follette brothers were instrumental in bringing about a so-called "Conference of Progressives" which met at Chicago in September and endorsed FDR. Although Lemke dismissed the delegates to the Chicago conference as "11¾ prima donnas," the New Republic more accurately reported that the action of this group "should effectively quash the notion that there is any important element of the

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31 Washington Post, June 22, 1936.

32 North Dakota Leader, August 27, 1936.
genuine progressive movement in the country that is now supporting the Lemke-Coughlin-Townsend-Gerald Smith Union Party."33

There were several important reasons why Lemke failed to gain the support which he had expected from these dissident groups. He obviously had little chance of becoming President, and, therefore, neither the farm organizations nor the established third parties would gain any material advantages by joining in his protest campaign. On the other hand, they would sacrifice whatever influence they had with the Roosevelt administration by such action. Moreover, the most probable outcome of a large protest vote for Lemke would be to strengthen the chances of Republican victory. While most of these groups were far from satisfied with Roosevelt and the New Deal, they had no desire to see the GOP return to Washington.

In addition to these more practical political considerations, there were some serious questions raised concerning the nature and purpose of the new party. In a thoughtful statement reflecting this point of view, the American Commonwealth Federation, which had been one of the most persistent advocates of a new third party, urged its followers to withhold judgment for the time being. "While many people see this as the long hoped for and long awaited third party movement," the ACF stated, "there are many serious objections to the new set up."

First of all, the ACF objected that the announcement of the formation of the new party had come "from the mouth of one man rather than as a democratic expression of the will of the people through organized groups." Secondly, the ACF asserted that it could not "view with

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complete confidence a political move that appears to have been so directly sponsored by a single powerful radio speaker [whose] motives . . . are not above suspicion." Thirdly, the Union party platform was criticized because it had been "secretly drawn without public discussion or approval" and was "inadequate in several respects." Finally, the ACF declared that Lemke's associates had been "unwisely chosen" and singled out particularly the choice of Newton Jenkins, "a notorious Jew-hater and admirer of Hitler," to represent the new party in Illinois. 34

It was largely because of Lemke's failure to recognize the validity of such charges that he was unable to gain the support of any significant farm or third-party groups. Instead of rallying to his cause those who were genuinely dissatisfied with both of the old parties and sincerely wanted a new party, Lemke became more and more dependent upon those who were mainly interested in bringing about the defeat of FDR.

In his search for additional support, Lemke seemed ready to accept the endorsement of almost anyone who claimed to be able to deliver votes to the Union party. As a result of this indiscriminate policy, a bizarre array of individuals became associated with the Union party campaign. Typical of these associates was a group of opportunistic Chicago politicians headed by William Hale ("Big Bill") Thompson.

Thompson's career in Chicago politics had been a long and turbulent one. Exploiting anti-British feeling among Irish and German voters in demagogic fashion, he was a professional anglophobe and had been elected mayor of the city on that basis during the 1920's. After a

34 Sioux City Unionist and Public Forum, July 16, 1936.
brief retirement from politics, he attempted a political comeback during 1936 in alliance with Newton Jenkins, a perennial third-party organizer, who was frequently accused of fascist tendencies.35

It was apparently through Jenkins that Lemke and Thompson became friends. In March of 1936, Lemke endorsed Thompson's bid for the Republican nomination for governor of Illinois. "Congratulations on your fight for honest elections, the foundation of representative government," he stated in a telegram which Thompson proudly displayed at a press conference. On June 11, Thompson wrote to Lemke expressing his regrets over the defeat of the Frazier-Lemke bill in Congress: "The American home is the bull work [sic] of this nation and to have farmers ousted from their homes because of the arrogance of organized wealth is the best way to destroy the patriotism of our Nation and to prepare for the lowering of our flag and the hoisting of the British Union Jack under a foreign dictator."36

On June 28, Lemke conferred with Jenkins in Chicago and later told reporters he thought there would be "perfect cooperation" between the two groups. After the Union party headquarters had been established in Chicago, Jenkins became somewhat of a fixture around the office and was in charge of getting the Union party on the ballot in Illinois.

Finally, after Thompson had been defeated in the Republican primary, he and Jenkins decided to run for governor and senator on the Union party ticket in Illinois. "We are all together," Big Bill

35Luthin, American Demagogues, 100-102.
enthusiastically told reporters, "Lemeites, Townsendites, Coughlinites, Huey Longites, Thompsonites, Laborites and the American people are going down the pike together in November." "And best of all, we are going to find out whether this country is a tail to England's kite," he added with apparent glee. "With a broad smile," the Chicago Herald and Examiner reported, "he gave the old City Hall rallying cry of the days when they proposed to make a bonfire on the lake front of all school histories that wrote kindly of Great Britain: 'Friendly to all nations, alliances with none.'" 37

In addition to such crass politicians as Thompson and Jenkins, Lemke also became associated with certain elements of what might truly be described as the lunatic fringe. One such group was an organization called the National Club of America for Americans. Among other things, this group proposed that Congress "prohibit the selling in the United States of any American bunting, or American flags not made in the United States, with American goods or materials, nor made by workers who are American citizens." In reply to a letter from this organization, Lemke stated that "with perhaps a very few exceptions, I am in full accord with your views and the campaign of the Union Party will be carried on along the lines suggested in your letters." 38

One eager Union party organizer, Thomas W. Myles, a young Negro from Los Angeles who was director of the colored voters' division of the

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37 Chicago Tribune, June 29, 1936; New York Times, July 26, 1936; Chicago Herald and Examiner, August 7, 1936.

party, even attempted to get Father Divine, the famous leader of a Harlem religious cult, to bring his devoted followers into the Lemke camp. After a conference with Divine on September 8, Myles told reporters that there were 400,000 Negroes in Harlem "who are waiting to be advised by him on how to vote" and announced that Father Divine would "take the platform" at a Harlem meeting of the party the following night. There is no evidence that the meeting ever took place or that Father Divine actually endorsed Lemke's candidacy. That such an endorsement was sought, however, illustrates the extremes to which Lemke was willing to go to gain votes.39

39Chicago Tribune, Sept. 9, 1936.
CHAPTER VI

ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEMS

A newly formed political party in the United States immediately faces a number of almost insurmountable problems. Among the most important of these are securing a place on the various state ballots, building effective national, state, and local organizations, fielding supporting tickets on the state and local level, and raising an adequate campaign fund. Since the Union party was born relatively late in the election year, the element of time complicated these problems even further. In large measure, Lemke and his supporters failed to work out satisfactory solutions to them, and, therefore, the chances of waging an effective campaign were considerably diminished from the beginning.

In his excellent study of the Progressives of 1924, Professor MacKay has pointed out that state election laws "must be considered one of the most effective devices to discourage the formation of a new party." In order to win a place on the ballot in most states, a new party has to file a petition with the secretary of state or state election board from ten to one hundred days before the election. In this respect, Lemke faced an even more difficult task than La Follette had in 1924, for the latter had the option of running under the Socialist label which was already on the ballot in forty-four states. Lemke had no such
advantage as this; instead, he had to start from scratch in each of the forty-eight states.¹

At the time of Lemke's announcement of his candidacy, the date for filing petitions in Kansas, Michigan, New Jersey, Oklahoma, and West Virginia had already passed, and, therefore, it was ruled that the name of the Union party could not appear on the November ballot in these states. In others, the nominating petitions had to be signed by anywhere from 2000 (Maryland) to 333,000 (Ohio) registered voters. In the case of the latter state, the law further stipulated that one-half of the signatures had to be obtained in forty-four of the eighty-eight counties. In still other states (Pennsylvania and Illinois), Democratic officials were able to pre-empt the use of the name of the Union party and thus force Lemke to run under a different label. It can be clearly seen, therefore, that securing a place on the ballot was one of the greatest problems with which the new party had to cope.²

As a result of these state election laws, Lemke and O'Brien failed to appear on the ballot in fourteen states. This group included two states (California and New York) in which there is good reason to believe that Lemke would have gained a large number of popular votes. In addition, it included a number of states (Florida, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Nevada, Oklahoma, and West Virginia) in which there is some


reason to believe that he would have done fairly well. The remaining states (Arkansas, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Vermont) probably did not detract from his total vote in any significant way.

Finally, in addition to the states in which the candidates of the Union party were completely excluded from the ballot, there were six states in which they were forced to run under a different label or as independent candidates without any label: Illinois—Union Progressive, Michigan—The Third Party, New Jersey—National Union for Social Justice, Pennsylvania—Royal Oak, Oregon—Independent, and South Dakota—Independent. The influence of such a handicap is of course impossible to estimate; however, it would seem fair to say that the appearance of a name other than the official name would tend to confuse voters and would certainly hurt the party's chances.

Thus, primarily because of the intricacies of the state election laws, the Union party appeared under its own name in only twenty-eight states. Moreover, the time and money devoted to the task of gathering signatures for nominating petitions in the various states could certainly have been used to better advantage in actual campaigning. "Tricky laws devised by the machinations of political bosses," Social Justice complained, "have sought to make it impossible to place a third political party on the ballot..." 3

Of no less importance were the difficulties involved in setting up effective national, state, and local organizations. Like most new parties, the Union party never approached an adequate solution to this

vexing problem. Although a skeleton national organization was eventu-
ally formed, it was poorly managed and did not provide Lemke with any-
thing even remotely resembling the smooth-running machines over which
James Farley and John Hamilton presided for Roosevelt and Landon. State
and local organizational efforts were even less effective.

Shortly after he announced his candidacy, Lemke told newsmen that
his old colleague from North Dakota, Congressman Usher L. Burdick, would
serve as national chairman of the party and as his personal campaign
manager. "I've always wanted to run a presidential campaign," Burdick
naively remarked. It soon became obvious, however, that Burdick was too
busy with his own campaign for re-election to Congress to handle any real
responsibility in the Union party organization; as a result, Lemke
appointed another old friend from North Dakota, John Nystull of Fargo,
as his campaign manager, and Burdick retained the honorary position of
national chairman. Nystull had formerly been chairman of the state
executive committee of the North Dakota Nonpartisan League. 4

For reasons which remain unexplained, Nystul failed to set up a
national headquarters until mid-July. In the meantime, there was a
complete lack of coordination between Lemke and his supporters. William
Skeels, Lemke's administrative assistant, urged that a central head-
quarters for the campaign be established as soon as possible and com-
plained that the congressman's Washington office had neither the time,

4Newspaper clipping, n.p., June 24, 1936, Lemke Papers; New
Republic, August 19, 1936; Nystul to Lemke, Nov. 16, 1932, Lemke Papers.
money, nor personnel to handle all the demands which were being made on it. The pathetic drift of the situation is vividly revealed in several letters from Skeels to Lemke during this period. "I have been investing some personal money in postage in order that the mail would not lie here unanswered," he wrote to Lemke on July 2 and added: "A great deal of it should have very much more consideration and a more definite answer than has been given same and I am in hopes that we will learn of the opening of the Chicago headquarters so that it may be forwarded on to them for final disposition." Five days later, he informed Lemke that everyone was "patiently awaiting the . . . opening of your headquarters so that they may be able to get to work assisting in your election. We still need money for postage. $20. to $25. would bring us out of the present financial slump."5

Finally, on July 13, Nystul informed Skeels of the opening of the Chicago headquarters at the Congress Hotel. "Things are progressing in a most satisfactory manner," he reported, "except that we are desperately in need of funds." Even after the new headquarters had been in operation for one month, the Union party campaign was still poorly organized and little effort was being made to coordinate activities. "We are not very active here in Washington and we would appreciate being of some assistance in this campaign," Skeels wrote to Lemke's son, William Jr., who was working with Nystul in Chicago. "If there is anything we could hand out at your father's Washington office, we would appreciate having it here for public disposal. Many people drop into the office requesting

information and finding us with nothing to hand out, it places us in a rather negative position." The best Lemke Jr. could provide were some campaign buttons. "There is not much other campaign material available right now," he said, "but later I will see that you get whatever is put out."6

Herbert F. Sweet, another long-time friend of Lemke from North Dakota, was director of organization for the Union party. A real-estate and insurance salesman by profession, he was charged with the difficult task of supervising the efforts to secure a place on the ballot in the various states. Under his direction, a number of individuals worked on the state level to see that petitions were signed and other technicalities worked out. Big Bill Thompson's colleague, Newton Jenkins, was in charge of such matters in Illinois, and Fred Zimmerman, an active Coughlinite, held the same position in Ohio.7

Richard W. Wolfe of Chicago, another supporter of Thompson, was the national treasurer of the party. According to campaign literature, Wolfe had held the same office under La Follette in 1924. The validity of this claim is doubtful, however, since the same honor has been claimed for William T. Rawleigh of Illinois. Thomas W. Myles of Los Angeles as

6Nystul to Skeels, July 13, 1936, Skeels to Lemke, Jr., Aug. 6, 1936, Lemke Jr., to Skeels, Aug. 15, 1936, Lemke Papers.

director of Negro voters and Louis A. Paeth of Chicago as director of publicity rounded out the headquarter's staff of the party.  

State and local organizations were practically nonexistent as far as the Union party was concerned. In some cases, Lemke worked through the Coughlin, Townsend, or Farmers' Union groups on the state and local level and frequently spoke under the auspices of one of these organizations. In scattered instances, local clubs were set up to work for the Union party ticket. According to Nystul, these included Neighborhood Clubs, Lemke-For-President Clubs, Lemke Booster Clubs, Union Party Clubs, and Speaker's Bureau Clubs.  

Imbued with the enthusiasm with which amateurs usually approach politics, some of Lemke's local supporters carried on extensive campaigns which probably strengthened the party in those areas. One such group in Manitowoc county, Wisconsin was particularly active, and its chairman, John J. Pekarske, sent Lemke a detailed account of their efforts on his behalf:

We had a very extensive program here and worked about 18 hours a day. On the Friday before election we sponsored the news, every hour on the hour, we continued this program with 10 announcements a day, from Friday noon until Tuesday noon, the day of the election. We also sponsored radio talks for our candidates in this state. . . . We also appointed block men, men whose duty it was to contact so many homes in each block, talk with the voters in each home. We distributed literature and the Union Party platform to every home in the city.

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9 Nystul to All Charter Members of the Union Party, Dec. 8, 1936, Lemke Papers.
and we went out through the county with speakers. . . . We also went to the larger cities in the 8th congressional district. And what is more, we financed our program ourselves, we gave card parties, dances, a dinner and beno party.\textsuperscript{10}

Since Manitowoc county turned in the second largest percentage for Lemke of all Wisconsin counties, the efforts of this group appear to have been effective; however, among the local organizations, it was probably an exception rather than the rule. Moreover, no real effort to coordinate or integrate these local efforts was made until after the election. On the whole, the generalization that these local clubs contributed little to the campaign and were no substitute for professional local organizations is not likely to be disputed.

Closely related to the organizational weaknesses of the Union party was its lack of supporting tickets on the state and local level. As Professor Mowry has pointed out in relation to the Progressive party of 1912: "No national political party can endure unless it is supported by local offices." In this respect, the Union party more closely resembled La Follette's example in 1924 than that of Theodore Roosevelt in 1912. The latter had not only a full slate of candidates for national office in most states but also thousands of local candidates. La Follette, on the other hand, had only a relatively few Progressive and Socialist candidates to support his campaign. In contrast to Roosevelt, therefore, La Follette and Lemke had only a

\textsuperscript{10}J. J. Pekarske to Lemke, Dec. 18, 1936, Lemke Papers.
small number of campaign workers whose own future was closely related to the party's success. 11

Early in July, Lemke decided that the Union party would not even attempt to contest the congressional elections but would simply endorse Democratic or Republican candidates who met the standards of the new party. "As far as Congressional elections are concerned," he said in a formal statement, "the Union Party will be nonpartisan in the coming election. It will support those Members of Congress who voted for progressive legislation. It will support those Members who favor a change \[\text{sic}\] in the rules of the Lower House of Congress in order to re-establish representative government in the Congress. . . . It will support these Members regardless of party or party affiliations."

About the same time, Father Coughlin announced that the Union party would support only those members of Congress who had voted for the Frazier-Lemke Refinance bill. 12

As the campaign wore on, however, a sprinkling of individuals announced their candidacies for Congress on the Union party ticket; in addition, a few others became candidates for state office. But, by election day, the Union party could only boast of forty-six candidates for the House of Representatives and seven for the Senate. Moreover, these congressional candidates were concentrated in only fourteen states, and one-half of them in four states. The closest the party
came to fielding a full slate was in Illinois where it had a candidate for governor, secretary of state, senator, and two seats in the House which were elected at large.

In addition to this lack of supporting tickets, those who did run were not the type of candidates who would be likely to strengthen Lemke's candidacy. With the exception of William Hale Thompson in Illinois, they were largely amateur politicians who were running for their first political office and who probably never would have had an opportunity on either of the major party tickets. In almost all states, Lemke received more votes than did the local Union party candidates.

In conclusion it might be added that Lemke did not set a very good example in relation to the problem of supporting tickets. He was unwilling to trust his own political future to the party he founded. In addition to his presidential candidacy, he also ran for his old seat in Congress on the Republican ticket. Republican congressional candidate Lemke outpolled Union presidential candidate Lemke almost four to one in North Dakota. 13

Perhaps the most crucial task of all for a new party is that of raising a sufficient campaign fund. With the exception of Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive party of 1912, American third parties have generally floundered badly as a result of their failure to raise money. The Union party did not prove to be an exception to that rule. Shortly after he announced his candidacy, Lemke told reporters that "the Union

Party campaign will have to be financed by the nickels and dimes of our toiling classes. Certainly, we can expect no million-dollar donations from the wealthy interests, . . ."  

According to the official reports which the party submitted to the clerk of the House of Representatives, its total receipts were $62,884.13 and its expenditures were $65,696.28. To these amounts should be added those of the Union party's state campaign organizations which reported total receipts of $29,149.34 and expenditures of $29,045.79. Thus, the Union party collected and spent a total of approximately $95,000.00 during the 1936 campaign.

In comparison, Republican expenditures were approximately $14,000,000; Democratic, $9,000,000; Communist, $270,000; and Socialist, $38,000. It is interesting to note that the Union party's expenditures per vote cast were far less than that of the other parties. The Union party spent approximately $.11 per vote; the Republican party, $.85; the Democratic party, $.33; the Communist party, $3.37; and the Socialist party, $.20. If Lemke's later estimate that the Union party spent approximately two thirds of its funds getting on the ballot is true, it is obvious that its expenditures for regular campaign purposes were even smaller in proportion to the other parties than these figures reveal.  

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During the campaign and after, there was more discussion concerning the source than the size of Union party expenditures. Father Coughlin is usually assumed to have been the chief financial angel behind Lemke's candidacy; moreover, the priest announced late in June that he had $500,000 to spend on the campaign. In view of the bulging treasury of the Townsend movement, it is also frequently taken for granted that Dr. Townsend contributed handsomely to the party. Finally, there were numerous campaign charges that William Randolph Hearst, the American Liberty League, John J. Raskob, Francis P. Keelon, and Robert M. Harriss were the real financiers of the new party.16

In relation to the charge that the American Liberty League, Hearst, and Raskob were secretly financing the Union party, it should be pointed out that there is no evidence available that would lend credence to this view. The entire allegation that these extreme conservatives were the progenitors of Lemke's candidacy appears to have been an aberration of the liberal mind. Imbued with the supposedly fascist character of the Union party, liberals naturally concluded that big business must have had a finger in the pie. Until some concrete evidence is produced, however, this charge will have to be placed in the same category as Lemke's charge that the communists were actively supporting FDR.

In accordance with the law, the Union party listed its chief contributors as part of the official report submitted to the clerk of the House of Representatives. According to this report, twelve

individuals contributed a total of approximately $36,000 or a little less than three fifths of the entire receipts of the national organization. Following are the names, addresses, and contributions of the individuals so listed:

W. Thompson, 33 North La Salle Street, Chicago, $5,000
Philip Johnson and Allen Blackburn, Congress Hotel, $5,000
John Nystul, 181 West Randolph Street, Chicago, $2,000
D. H. Wilson, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, $5,000
W. Seigel, Chicago, $5,000
T. W. Myles, Los Angeles, $3,000
E. H. Byrne, Chicago, $1,800
George Taylor, New York City, $4,000
B. Henry, Chicago, Illinois, $500
H. F. Sweet, Steele, North Dakota, $900
Richard W. Wolfe, Chicago, $3,162.17

Most of these contributors were closely associated with the Union party in some capacity. W. Thompson was of course William Hale Thompson, the ex-mayor of Chicago who ran for governor of Illinois on the Union ticket. John Nystul was Lemke's campaign manager. T. W. Myles was director of the Negro voters section of the party organization. H. F. Sweet was director of organization for the party. Richard W. Wolfe was the national treasurer of the party. E. H. Byrne was listed as secretary of the Union party national committee in 1937. Philip Johnson and Allen Blackburn were young Harvard graduates who had been admirers of Huey Long and who in 1936 were lieutenants of Father Coughlin and worked closely with the Union party during the campaign. The identity of

D. H. Wilson, W. Seigel, George Taylor, and B. Henry is apparently lost to history. 18

It seems extremely doubtful that the individuals identified, with the possible exception of Thompson, would have been in a position to make such substantial contributions. It is at least plausible, therefore, that their names were simply used in an effort to cover up the real sources of the campaign funds. Since most of these individuals were closely connected with the headquarters of the party, it seems likely that their names might have been used for this purpose.

In light of Father Coughlin's statement at the beginning of the campaign that he had $500,000 to spend, it seems logical to conclude that he was in fact the chief source of these funds. As far as Harriss and Keelon, the two Wall Street gold speculators who were old friends of Coughlin, are concerned, the evidence tying them in with these funds is rather sketchy. A few weeks after the election, Harriss congratulated Lemke on his "courageous fight" and assured him that the "good seed you have sowed will bear fruit that will greatly benefit our country."

Moreover, in 1937, when Lemke published a book on the money question and donated the proceeds to clear up the Union party debt, Harriss bought fifty copies. It would not seem farfetched then to suggest that Harriss and Keelon quite possibly contributed to Lemke's campaign. Without even such circumstantial evidence as this and remembering the lack of

enthusiasm with which he finally endorsed Lemke, it seems extremely
doubtful that Dr. Townsend contributed anything more than his name to
the Union party.\footnote{R. M. Harriss to Lemke, Nov. 19, 1936, Lemke to Harriss, Aug. 27, 1937, Harriss to Lemke, Sept. 21, 1937, Lemke Papers.}

At any rate, the significant factor was that Coughlin obviously
did not live up to his original financial promise to Lemke; furthermore,
no one else made up the difference. At the end of the campaign the
party books showed a deficit of $6,400 which Lemke assumed himself. In
1939 he complained to a friend that he had been "left holding the bag to
the tune of about $7,000 after the 1936 campaign. . . ."\footnote{Lemke to C. Hall, May 2, 1939, Lemke Papers.}
PART III

THE CAMPAIGN AND ELECTION
CHAPTER VII

CAMPAIGN TACTICS AND ISSUES

With speeches at Burlington and Des Moines, Iowa on June 28, William Lemke launched one of the most extensive third-party campaigns in history. Not since the days of Theodore Roosevelt's unsuccessful Progressive party had the candidate of a new party equalled the pace which Lemke set in 1936. While the two major party candidates vacationed during the last days of June and the early part of July, Lemke was out on the hustings drumming up support for the Union party. Early in the campaign, he informed an admirer that he intended to "make at least one speech in every state in this Union." With the exception of the South, which he even invaded at one point, he came close to carrying out that promise. During the campaign, he visited every major geographic area of the country, and it was reported that he traveled a total of approximately 45,000 miles.¹

Introducing the use of the airplane to a degree perhaps unequalled by any major party candidate until 1960, Lemke reportedly logged a total of 30,000 air miles in a barnstorming exhibition which made the slow-moving campaign trains of Landon and Roosevelt appear outmoded. This extensive use of air power gave Lemke a great deal of mobility. One

¹North Dakota Leader, July 2, 1936; Lemke to H. L. Grace, July 21, 1936, Lemke Papers; Fargo Forum, n.d., Clipping, Lemke Papers.
sultry afternoon in August, he addressed a group of Kansas farmers at Merrian; the following day, he opened an eastern tour at Worcester, Massachusetts. On September 25, he and Gerald Smith campaigned hard in Birmingham, Alabama; the next evening, he shared the platform with Father Coughlin at a huge rally in Philadelphia.²

In appearance the Union party candidate was in striking contrast to his Republican and Democratic opponents. If Landon looked like a Midwestern businessman and Roosevelt looked like an Eastern aristocrat, Lemke certainly looked like a prairie-state farmer. Short in height but slim and erect in stature, his clothes always had the ill-fitting appearance of the ready-made, mail-order variety. His usual attire for campaigning consisted of a wrinkled gray suit, dusty black shoes, and a blue work shirt. Atop his head, he invariably wore a tan tweed cap—the brown derby of the campaign one reporter remarked—and when he unbuttoned his coat, bright colored galluses were often visible.³

Lemke was almost completely bald, and where there had once been hair was a "brilliant constellation of yellow freckles" which thinned out only slightly on his long, pock-marked face. His chin was "anthropoidal" and frequently unshaven. One eye was glass and the other was "always screwed up a little as if he were on the verge of imparting some secret information."⁴

²Fargo Forum, August 29, 1936; Philadelphia Public Ledger, Sept. 26, 1936; Birmingham Age-Herald, Sept. 25, 1936.


⁴Baltimore Sun, July 20, 1936; Harris, "Third Party," 91-92.
Making the best of a bad situation, Lemke attempted to exploit his appearance for political advantage. "The best president you ever had," he once told a group of followers, "was almost as homely looking as I—Abraham Lincoln." In typical Lincolnesque fashion, he drew attention to his appearance as evidence of his authenticity as a common man. "My clothes may be wrinkled," he would point out, "but my record isn't wrinkled with duty to Wall Street."^5

Although he was considered a "right smart talker" in the Dakotas and surrounding rural areas, Lemke suffered badly in comparison to such spellbinders as Coughlin and Smith. On formal occasions, he spoke from a prepared text and seemed at his worst under such circumstances. When reading a speech, his voice became flat and monotonous and he used few gestures; moreover, his penchant for detailed economic analysis with plentiful reference to statistics tended to make his poor delivery even less interesting. H. L. Mencken described his address at the Townsend Convention as "dull from end to end."^6

Out on the stump and away from the rhetorical competition of Coughlin and Smith, however, Lemke was quite effective. Freed from the printed page, he became more natural and animated and life came into his voice. During a rally of 2000 Townsendites in Oregon, the microphone

^5Portland Oregonian, Sept. 14, 1936; Union Party Advocate (Elkhart County, Ind.). Frequent reference to Lincoln was made in Union party campaign literature. See The Union Party Will Win With Lincoln Legal Tender Money Instead of Usury-Sucking Bond Money, Campaign tract, Lemke Papers; also, certificates issued to charter members of the Union party bore engravings of Jefferson, Lincoln, and Lemke, see Charter Membership Certificate, Lemke Papers.

^6Harris, "Third Party," 91; Baltimore Sun, July 20, 1936.
suddenly went out, and, according to the Portland *Morning Oregonian*, "the explosive mid-westerner merely raised his voice and made it heard to all corners of the auditorium." In the heat of such impromptu efforts, he was less prone to overwork economic statistics; instead, slapping both hands down sharply on both legs for emphasis, he proved himself almost as capable as Coughlin and Smith at excoriating Roosevelt and the New Deal.\(^7\)

Hardly less impressive than Lemke's own campaign efforts were those of his chief supporter, Father Coughlin. He threw himself into the campaign with gusto and bent every effort to persuade his followers and others to support Lemke's candidacy. From Hawkinson, North Dakota to New Bedford, Massachusetts, he tirelessly berated the President whom he had helped elect and the New Deal which he had once supported; moreover, his powerful radio voice and forceful editorial comments carried the same message to every state in the Union.\(^8\)

The active campaigning of Townsend and Smith was far less extensive than that of Lemke and Coughlin. Before the campaign ended, however, Dr. Townsend made it clear to his followers in speeches and in the *Townsend National Weekly* that a vote for Lemke was the best way to assure passage of the revolving pension plan. Reverend Smith, moreover,


threw his well-known rabble-rousing talents into the fray on numerous occasions.  

An over-all campaign strategy was tentatively agreed upon by Lemke and his three chief supporters early in the summer. This plan called for the four men to campaign individually or in pairs during the opening months of the campaign and then to appear together at a series of monster rallies during the month of October. Such joint appearances were originally scheduled for Chicago, Philadelphia, Kansas City, New Orleans, Dallas, Los Angeles, Des Moines, Detroit, and New York City.  

In actual practice, however, most of the campaigning was carried on individually, and the final October rallies failed to materialize. Although Townsend and Smith made several extensive speaking tours, their chief attention was directed at the election of Democratic or Republican congressional candidates who had endorsed the Townsend Plan. Occasionally throughout the campaign, Coughlin, Townsend, or Smith joined Lemke on the stump, but generally all four men seemed to prefer campaigning alone. It appears that they shared the same platform only at the Townsend Convention in July and again at the National Union for Social Justice Convention in August.  

Since the tradition of the two-party system always militates against the successful establishment of a third party, it is necessary  

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9 Townsend National Weekly, Oct. 19, 1936. Frequent reference is made to Townsend’s and Smith’s support of Lemke in Union party campaign literature. See campaign tracts, Dr. Townsend Tells Why He Is Supporting William Lemke for President and On to Victory. Lemke Papers.  


for a new party to justify its existence by insisting that the two major parties have ceased to represent public opinion and that there is no longer any real difference between them. "This country is passing through another of those infrequent periods when a new party is being born," Dr. Townsend told his followers in June and added: "Both old parties look to me like a 1928 model which my friend sold to the junk dealer the other day. Both of the gang-ridden political parties ought to be replaced by a new shining model, . . ." Other Union party partisans referred to the Democratic and Republican parties as "the same breed of cats," "Siamese twins," and the "left and right wings of the same bird of prey." Dr. Townsend summed up the Union party's attitude most succinctly: "We know what Roosevelt has done and we know what Landon and his crew would do. . . . I say damn them both."¹²

Whenever the domain of the two major parties is threatened by the emergence of a new party, the welcome extended by the old parties is usually exceedingly hostile. One of the curious facets of the election of 1936 is that the Democratic and Republican parties virtually ignored the Union party. It appears that neither Roosevelt nor Landon ever mentioned Lemke or his party publicly during the campaign.

From the Republican point of view, it was undoubtedly sound strategy not to attack the new party. Although the GOP was even more fundamentally opposed than the Democrats to all the radical ideas of the

Union party and its supporters, Lemke's entry into the Presidential race was clearly to Landon's advantage. It was correctly assumed by Republican leaders that the new third-party candidate would take many more votes away from Roosevelt than from Landon. As the campaign progressed, moreover, the evidence to support this thesis became stronger. By the end of July, Hulbert Taft reported that Lemke was "showing surprising strength in Ohio" and that as a result Landon would undoubtedly carry that crucial state. The Literary Digest polls consistently revealed that four to five times as many Lemke supporters had voted for FDR than for Hoover in 1932. In a similar vein, the more reliable Institute of Public Opinion poll reported that 70 per cent of those who intended to vote for Lemke had supported Roosevelt in 1932. Obviously, the Republican party had little reason to be critical of Lemke and the Union party.13

Bearing the brunt of the Union party attack and expecting a relatively close election in which a large third-party vote might tip the scales in favor of the enemy, the Democrats had reason to be alarmed. The President himself, however, was never unduly fearful of the new combination. In spite of evidence to the contrary, FDR wrote to Vice-President Garner in July that he did not "think the Lemke ticket will cut into our vote any more than it will into the Republican vote."14

Other Democrats were not as sanguine as the President and felt that the administration should take the offensive against the new party.


Late in July, Chester Davis of the Federal Reserve Board delivered a
speech in which he referred to Coughlin, Townsend, and Lemke as "a mad
priest, an impractical dreamer, and a political charlatan" and warned
that such a combination was a dangerous threat to the nation.15

Always fearful of the influence of Coughlin and Townsend, Harold
Ickes grew increasingly worried and pessimistic as the campaign pro­
gressed. He recorded bitterly in his Diary the fact that Coughlin and
other critics went unanswered: "Father Coughlin one day in Cleveland
last week denounced the President as a liar and not a word in reply from
anyone! The President is having too much fun sailing and fishing to
resent a gross insult or to designate somebody else to resent it."16

Finally, early in October, Ickes took it upon himself to answer
the attacks upon FDR and the New Deal. In a typically vitriolic speech,
he struck out at the opposition by describing the "interesting game of
political football" which was in progress. Against the administration
team, he charged, was "as incongruous and ill-assorted a combination as
could well be imagined:"

In the backfield we see Governor Landon, light and inexperi­
enced. But withal a clever dodger who is hard to pin down; Her­
bert Hoover, back on the gridiron after an enforced stay
on the bench for four years; Father Coughlin, the great
triple-threat, who does the kicking for the team; and Al
Smith, one time "All-American," now turned professional.

With the "well-known du Pont brothers" on the line and Hearst as the
coach, Ickes relegated Lemke to the second-string status of a substitute

16 Ickes, Secret Diary, I, 645.
along with Mellon, Rockefeller, Pew, and Pinchot. Becoming more serious, Ickes charged that there was a "common understanding" between the "Republican high command" and Father Coughlin, that "the Detroit Fascist" was really working for Landon, and that Lemke was only a 'stooge.'

Other than this isolated assault by Ickes, however, the Democrats appear to have joined the Republicans in what amounted to a conspiracy of silence as far as Lemke and the Union party were concerned.

The main theme of the Union party campaign had been fully anticipated by earlier attacks which its supporters had made upon FDR and the New Deal. If any additional proof were needed that the main motive behind the formation of the Union party had been to bring about the defeat of Roosevelt, it was supplied during the campaign. No less than the American Liberty League, Lemke and his supporters made the President and his record the focal point of the campaign.

Central to any consideration of the type of campaign waged by the Union party is a recognition of the fact that Lemke, Coughlin, Townsend, and Smith believed that the current political, economic, and social ills of the country could be almost instantly cured by the adoption of their particular remedies. It was impossible for them to understand why others could not see the truth which was so clearly visible to them. While the sincerity of Coughlin and Smith in this respect might be open to question, few critics have ever doubted that of Lemke and Townsend. Convinced that they had the right answers and unable to understand the opposition which had been thrown in their paths, these men became true fanatics. As is characteristic of such personalities throughout history,

they became increasingly convinced of the righteousness of their own cause and correspondingly obsessed with the idea that the enemy was at best completely ignorant and irrational.

Lemke was particularly imbued with the idea that ignorance was at the root of the administration's failure to support the Frazier-Lemke bills and other inflationary monetary schemes. "Any child of eight years old," he asserted, "could understand it if the present monetary system were properly presented." In his view, both Roosevelt and Landon were hopelessly uninformed in these matters and therefore could not be expected to understand the basic problems with which the country was faced. "I regret that neither the candidate for the Republican Party nor the candidate for the Democratic Party," he said in a nation-wide radio broadcast, "understands what is going on in this Nation. They are deaf and blind to the appeals of the men and women who have made this country what it is." 18

Not even Roosevelt's ignorance, however, could explain the administration's agricultural and tariff policies. "We submit that this is the work of madmen," Lemke charged in relation to the reciprocal trade agreements act, "it is the work of men that know not what they are doing, . . ." As far as the agricultural measures of the New Deal were concerned, he could hardly find words strong enough to express his condemnation:

There is an overproduction of just one thing, and that is an overproduction of ignoramuses. We are afflicted at Washington at present with a cruel and un-American type of national

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insanity—the kind of mental condition that will permit
the destruction of food and clothing while we still have
millions who could use that food and that clothing.\footnote{New York \textit{Times}, Oct. 25, 1936.}

Ignorance and insanity, however, were not sufficient explanations
for the situation in which the Union party imagined it found the nation
in 1936. It was painfully obvious to Lemke and his supporters that the
New Dealers who had blocked the Frazier-Lemke bills and the Townsend
Plan in Congress were not only intelligent and completely sane but also
remarkably clever. A more convincing explanation was needed—one that
would emphasize the cleverness of the enemy without recognizing it as a
merit. In the conspiracy theory of history, the Union party found a
solution to this dilemma.

Like most individuals who attempt to explain historical develop-
ments by reference to some gigantic conspiracy which has duped the people
and is actually selling them out while claiming to be working in their
interest, Lemke and his supporters were most vociferous in their denunci-
ations but rather vague in their explanations of the nature of the con-
spiry and the identity of the conspirators. In practice the conspiracy
charge took several different and frequently conflicting forms.

In its vaguest form, the conspiracy theory consisted of the
charge that the New Deal was un-American and that internationalists were
secretly manipulating its policies. In contrast, the Union party was
pictured as being unalterably opposed to internationalism in any form
and therefore more devoted to Americanism. "The truth is we are getting
altogether too internationally minded," Lemke warned his followers. If
elected, he promised to "clean out" the State Department and make it a "real American department." "The Union party," he told an audience in October, "is an American party. It is not hampered by a foreign inferiority complex." More specifically, he informed the New York Herald Tribune Forum on September 23 that his party "advocates that we eat, drink, wear and buy American products." 20

If in general the Union party campaigners were vague in their charges that a conspiratorial, un-American force was in control of the administration, they were at times more specific. Depending upon which aspect of the New Deal was being denounced, and perhaps upon the audience to whom the denunciation was being made, Lemke and his supporters asserted that various unpopular groups and ideologies were secretly guiding the destiny of the nation.

Quite frequently Roosevelt and the New Deal were linked with communism. Echoing the accusations of such divergent Roosevelt critics as the American Liberty League and Norman Thomas, the Union party accused FDR of accepting the support of Earl Browder and the Communist party in the Presidential race. Speaking before the New York Herald Tribune Forum, Lemke challenged the President on this point:

I do not charge that the President of the nation is a Communist. But I do charge that Browder, Dubinsky and other Communist leaders have laid their cuckoo eggs in his Democratic nest and that he is hatching them. The American people demand that he roll those eggs out of the Democratic party. 21

More sinister was the charge that the administration itself was actually inclined toward communism. Lemke frequently insisted that some of Roosevelt's policies were "leading us directly into socialism and other semi-communistic fields." More specifically, he claimed that communists had infiltrated the ranks of the New Deal and had stationed themselves in strategic positions. Pointing out on one occasion that FDR's re-election would result in a financial collapse, he added: "That is why the Communists in his administration call him the little Kerensky. They think they will step in and seize the power." Perhaps sensing an air of disbelief among the reporters to whom he made this statement, he went on defensively: "You all know there are lots of young Communists in the Administration, but understand I do not accuse the President himself of being a communist. He is just a New York capitalist coupon clipper." 22

As a rule, Coughlin agreed that Roosevelt himself was simply a dupe of communist advisers. He often referred vaguely to the New Deal "surrounded by its real and pink Communists." On at least one occasion, however, he bluntly implied that the President was guilty of more than innocent complicity in the communist plot. "As I was instrumental in removing Herbert Hoover from the White House," he promised in one of the most passionate outbursts of the campaign, "so help me God, I will be instrumental in taking a Communist from the chair once occupied by Washington." After he had been roundly criticized for this and other personal attacks on the President, Coughlin retreated to his former position: "President Roosevelt has been a great victim of those who

circumscribe him," he stated toward the end of the campaign, "Tugwell, Hopkins, Mordecai and the litany of Pinks who surround him."²³

As the campaign moved along, even mild-mannered Dr. Townsend lent his support to the communist charges leveled at the Roosevelt administration. "The official family at Washington is made up largely of those with Communist ideas," he stated on August 4. As usual, the President's private as well as public family came in for its share of abuse. "Mrs. Roosevelt, always a pink-tea socialist," Gerald Smith informed the press in Birmingham, Alabama, "has done more to encourage Communism in the South than anyone else ever did." According to Smith, Roosevelt's advisers were "a slimy group of men culled from the pink campuses of America with friendly gaze fixed on Russia. . . ." The possible ramifications and consequences of the red conspiracy in Washington seemed to know no bounds. "I charge that Roosevelt is now unwittingly a party to a diabolical plot to enlist the United States in a war on the side of Soviet Russia," Smith warned in an accusation which would become more popular several years later.²⁴

If the communist conspiracy explained some aspects of Roosevelt's record, however, it was not the full story. Communist advisers and theories could hardly be held responsible for the New Deal's conservative monetary policies. In the eyes of the Union party, there could be only one explanation of this phenomenon: the traditional Populist


scapegoat—the Wall Street conspiracy of international bankers and the money interest. Moreover, this conspiracy ensnared not only Roosevelt and the New Deal but also Landon and the Republican party. "The result will be the same regardless of whether you elect the Republican or Democratic candidate," Lemke told the NJSJ Convention, "because Wall Street will then continue behind the scenes in full control of the money and credit, . . ." Vice-Presidential candidate Thomas O'Brien warned his audiences that the "old parties have failed because they were shackled by the international bankers."25

The apparent contradiction in the idea that Roosevelt and the New Deal were at the same time under the influence of international bankers and international communists did not seem to bother the Union party supporters. In fact both charges were frequently included in the same speech—apparently on the assumption that two conspiracies were better than one. Father Coughlin concluded his final address of the campaign with one of his favorite similes: "The New Deal," he asserted, was a "broken down Colossus straddling the harbor of Rhodes, with its left leg on ancient capitalism and its right leg mired in the red mud of communism."26

Appeals to emotional symbols such as home, flag, and religion are part and parcel of American politics; however, reliance upon this type of emotionalism to the virtual exclusion of more rational appeals is a chief distinguishing feature of the demagogue. Gerald L. K. Smith was

of course the outstanding exponent of that political style; but, as the campaign wore on, Coughlin and Lemke proved themselves to be capable practitioners of the art also. "I'm going to continue to fight for principle," Coughlin informed the nation in September, "to save America, Christianity, our constitution and capitalism—and I won't stop." Lemke concluded a radio address with an "appeal on behalf of the Union Party to the women of America to give us their full support because the Union Party stands for the fire-side, the home and for womanhood."^27

An admitted rabble-rouser, Reverend Smith did not hesitate to reveal his formula for success. "Religion and patriotism, keep going on that," he told a reporter in the midst of the campaign, "it's the only way you can get them really 'het up.'" No less a critic than H. L. Mencken has attested to Smith's success in applying that formula. Asserting that he had heard "all the really first-chop American breast-beaters since 1900," he recalled in his memoirs that there was "none worthy of being put in the same species, or even in the same genus" as Smith. Ranking Coughlin "a much inferior performer," Mencken dubbed Smith "the greatest rabble-rouser since Peter the Hermit."^28

At the Townsend Convention in July and again a month later at the Coughlin Convention, Smith put on the most outstanding displays of demagoguery of the 1936 campaign. At the beginning of a speech, he always took complete charge of the audience and frequently issued orders


to them as to when they should applaud, cheer, or keep quiet. He informed the delegates at the NUSJ Convention what was expected of them in the following words:

I want everybody to sit still. Pick your spot and stay on it. If you clap your hands every time I speak the truth that is all you'll have time to do. I learned a long time ago a nursin' baby don't cry as long as he's getting milk and so you sit and take it and I'll pour it to you.29

At the Townsend Convention, he enumerated the questions which were before the voters of the nation in 1936: "Shall it be the Russian primer or the Holy Bible, the Constitution or the philosophy of Marx, ... Lenin or Lincoln? ... Stalin or Jefferson? ... Franklin D. Roosevelt or William Lemke?" Summing up all the emotional appeals which he could muster in one sentence, he answered his own rhetorical questions in unforgettable fashion: "We are going to keep and re-establish the Old Holy Bible, Red-White-and-Blue, Honest-to-God, Go-to-Meetin', bread and butter, wood splittin' America." When the Reverend Smith had finished, according to Mencken, "the 9000 delegates simply lay back in their pews and yelled."30

From time to time throughout the campaign, Lemke attempted to introduce a more positive note by discussing what the party supported instead of what it opposed. At a press conference in Chicago on July 31, he and O'Brien explained the meaning of the controversial and vague plank in the party platform concerning limitations on individual incomes. Lemke stated that he thought a $500,000 maximum would be an equitable

one. "It won't be any higher than that," he said, but added that "of course it will be up to Congress..." Asked how such a limitation would be enforced, O'Brien replied that a "100 per cent tax" would be imposed on all incomes over the maximum figure. "It isn't correct to call it confiscation," he added defensively, "that connotes thievery. This would just be a tax for services rendered."  

The Union party was frequently criticized because its platform did not contain a clear-cut plank in relation to organized labor. In his speech at the New York Herald Tribune Forum, Lemke attempted to set the record straight on that point. "The Union party stands for a living wage for labor," he asserted. "That means labor unions, not company unions or governmental regimentation. It means collective bargaining for labor."  

In relation to public power and conservation, Lemke asserted that under his administration "TVA would be extended so that consumers all over the country would get electricity at cost. I am for the utmost conservation of water throughout the country." More specifically, at Los Angeles, he called for the development of a "great national system of dams, ponds, and lakes to reclaim the drought-stricken areas."  

Although the Union party platform made no reference to the problem of judicial obstruction of progressive legislation, Lemke dealt with

33 Philadelphia Public Ledger, Sept. 26, 1936; Los Angeles Examiner, Sept. 12, 1936.
that issue more openly and more candidly in 1936 than did Roosevelt. "If the Court persists in erroneous interpretations of the Constitution," he told reporters, "an amendment would be needed, not because the Constitution is wrong, but because the Supreme Court errs." Such an amendment, he stated, "would prevent the Court from interfering with social legislation and give the Congress power to pass acts limiting hours of labor and setting minimum wages." He did not, however, believe that such action would really have to be taken because "though the Supreme Court does err, it goes forward." Stating that if he were elected he would change the personnel on the court, he added that he did not believe it would be necessary to "pack the court" because the "next President will appoint two or three Judges since the present ones are aging."\(^{34}\)

These and other rational and constructive discussions of the issues, however, were lost in the generally negative and demagogic Union party campaign. The party had been formed not because of any broad political and economic agreement among its chief supporters but in spite of the lack of any such agreement. More and more as the campaign progressed, Lemke, Coughlin, Townsend, and Smith went their own diverse ways, occasionally plumping for their own particular programs, but becoming increasingly fanatical and extreme in their attempts to insure FDR's defeat.

\(^{34}\)Philadelphia Public Ledger, Sept. 26, 1936.
CHAPTER VIII

DIVERSION, DISUNION, AND DEFEAT

The high point of the Union party campaign was reached in July when Dr. Townsend and Reverend Smith joined Father Coughlin in support of Lemke's candidacy. At that time, it seemed possible that Lemke and his odd assortment of supporters might be able to gather together a formidable number of disillusioned and dissatisfied voters. As the campaign progressed, however, the new coalition grew weaker rather than stronger. Particularly important in that respect was the tendency of Father Coughlin, Dr. Townsend, and Reverend Smith to divert public attention away from the Union party and its candidate and toward themselves. Moreover, as the prospects of a Roosevelt victory became greater during the final stages of the campaign, internal dissension mounted in the party, and the tenuous unity of Lemke's chief supporters began to crumble. By the time the voters went to the polls in November, the harmony of July was all but dissipated.

From the very beginning, one of the weakest features of the Union party campaign was the fact that Lemke's three most important supporters tended to overshadow him and to dominate the party's campaign efforts. In part this was almost inevitable, for they had all been well-known national figures long before Lemke became their presidential candidate. Moreover, they were much more colorful and controversial individuals than Lemke would ever be. Finally, it was clearly evident that any
success which the new party might achieve would be mainly due to the support of these men.

At the birth of the Union party in June, much wider and fuller news coverage was given to Coughlin's endorsement of the new candidate than to Lemke's own announcement of the formation of the new party. In similar manner, at the Townsend Convention in July, it was Coughlin's sensational anti-Roosevelt speech and Smith's platform antics which were the number one news stories. While the New York Times and other national newspapers featured front page stories concerning the newly found harmony of Coughlin, Townsend, and Smith and printed large pictures of the three men in fraternal embrace, little note was taken of Lemke's presence or the fact that he had delivered a major campaign address.¹

Nor did the unhappy situation in which Lemke found himself improve as the formal campaign got under way. Whenever he appeared on the same platform with one of his chief supporters, he was automatically relegated to a secondary position. Although a Union party rally at Hawkinson, North Dakota on July 26 was billed as "Lemke's Homecoming," the fifteen thousand farmers who attended were more interested in seeing and hearing the famed Radio priest. As usual Coughlin stole the show, and the headlines in the national newspapers were mainly concerned with his radical advice to the debt-ridden farmers that if either Roosevelt or Landon were elected "there is only one thing to do—repudiate

your debts, and if anybody tries to enforce them, repudiate them also."

Not only did Coughlin's extreme campaign statements in themselves divert public attention from Lemke and the Union party but they also stirred up new controversies which served the same purpose. Most important of these was the growing criticism of Coughlin's conduct by other Roman Catholics. The situation finally reached such proportions that it was rumored the Vatican itself was about to take a decisive hand in the matter. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising to find that Coughlin remained at the center of the public spotlight while Lemke garnered only an occasional, reflected ray of publicity.

Prior to 1936, most of the criticism of Coughlin from within the Church had come from conservative quarters. The most outspoken member of the Church hierarchy in this respect was William Cardinal O'Connell of Boston. However, the fact that Coughlin became directly involved in politics in 1936 and openly aligned himself with the anti-Roosevelt forces was bound to arouse the ire of pro-Roosevelt churchmen as well. It was his violent attack upon FDR at the Townsend Convention in July which first brought this controversy into the open. In fact the resulting adverse comment and criticism eventually forced him to issue a public apology to the President. Even his strongest supporter within the Church, Bishop Michael J. Gallagher of Detroit, was dismayed and may

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2New York Times, July 27, 1936. Coughlin later claimed that he had been misquoted and that he had really said: "If something is not done forthwith to aid the farmer, he will be forced to repudiate his debts and those who engendered his debts." North Dakota Leader, July 30, 1936.
possibly have urged his priest to apologize. "Father Coughlin is 
entitled to his own opinion," Gallagher told reporters on July 19, "but 
I do not approve of the language he used in expressing himself on the 
President." ³

At any rate, Father Coughlin addressed an open letter to FDR in 
which he made a carefully worded apology for his harsh language:

In the heat of civic interest in the affairs of my country 
and in righteous anger at the developments that, it is my 
conviction, have contributed to want in the midst of plenty, I 
addressed to the President of the United States, in a speech 
at Cleveland, Ohio, July 16th, the word liar. 
For that action I now offer to the President of the United 
States my sincere apology." ⁴

Bishop Gallagher's mild criticism on this particular occasion did 
not in any way represent a significant shift in his general support of 
Coughlin's activities. Lest there should have been any misunderstanding 
on that point, Gallagher made his position perfectly clear at the time 
of his criticism: "There are a lot of folks who would like the Church 
to discipline Father Coughlin because they would like him out of the 
way, but so far as I am concerned, and he is directly under my authority, 
he is working along the right path and he has my support." ⁵

Shortly after Coughlin's speech at the Townsend Convention, a new 
factor came into play which tended to give the controversy surrounding 
Coughlin's political activities an international flavor and added 
significance. On July 19, Bishop Gallagher embarked on a journey to the

⁴Ibid., July 24, 1936; National Union Farmer, Ohio edition, 
Aug. 1, 1936.
Vatican. The timing of this trip, coming as it did at the height of the controversy which Coughlin's "liar" charge had provoked, led to a great deal of speculation that the Bishop had been summoned to Rome to report on, defend, or receive instructions concerning Coughlin. In light of the available evidence, this appears to have been largely wishful thinking on the part of anti-Coughlin Catholics and other critics.

The rumors of papal intervention in the Coughlin affair spread rapidly throughout the United States and abroad. Upon his arrival at Rome on July 25, Bishop Gallagher was met by a barrage of questions concerning the validity of such reports. Scotching all such rumors, he pointed out that the discipline of priests within his diocese was entirely under his supervision. Once again he endorsed Coughlin's actions: "I have no complaint against Father Coughlin for his political activities and approve much of his argument." Moreover, he added that he would tell the Pope: "Father Coughlin speaks for the people."^6

The rumors of Vatican censure died out during August, but were revived again the day before the Bishop returned to the United States. On September 3, the New York Times quoted the Osservatore Romano as saying that Coughlin's criticisms of FDR had been "improper." The Times went on to note that this newspaper usually reflected Vatican opinion. When Bishop Gallagher arrived in New York the following day, however, "3 assured reporters that "there was no criticism of Father Coughlin in Rome. . . . There will be nothing done to restrain Father Coughlin's activities." Moreover, Coughlin was at the dock to greet the Bishop and

^6 Ibid., July 19, July 26, 1936.
informed him that he was about to resume his radio broadcasts. "It is about time you got back on the air," the Bishop was quoted as replying.  

Apparently reassured in private as well as in public of his Bishop's firm support, Father Coughlin did not mince words on the subject in an address to a mass rally of the NUSJ at Chicago a few days later:

Don't let them deceive you by false propaganda originating from Rome or anywhere else that the Vatican has cracked down on Bishop Gallagher or Father Coughlin. That's a lie. If they had cracked down I wouldn't be here today.

In spite of such unequivocal denials, rumors of Vatican displeasure persisted. On September 10, the New York Times again quoted the Osservatore Romano in a bluntly worded warning. Insisting that its earlier criticism of Coughlin "mirrors the opinion of responsible Vatican officials," it stated ominously that the "Holy See cannot indifferently see its authority challenged in public polemics by attacks on persons representing the Vatican, especially when the assailant is a priest."

In conclusion, it added that "Bishop Gallagher knows only too well what was said to him in this regard." Undaunted by this threatening report, Coughlin continued to deny the validity of such statements and defended his activities as simply carrying out the famous encyclicals of Leo XIII and Pius XI.

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7 Ibid., Sept. 4, 1936; Time, Sept. 14, 1936.
In the meantime, there were signs that the hierarchy of the Church in the United States was becoming increasingly apprehensive about Coughlin's conduct. On September 23, the New Republic reported that Cardinal Mundelein of Chicago was "distressed" by Coughlin's attacks upon FDR and that Cardinals O'Connell of Boston, Hayes of New York, and Daugherty of Philadelphia, although not Roosevelt partisans, were all "strongly against Coughlin." A few days later, Coughlin delivered a speech at Cincinnati in which he called FDR "anti-God" and advocated the "use of bullets" against any "upstart dictator." Archbishop John T. McNicholas of Cincinnati immediately issued a statement in which he said there was "no excuse for inciting in the people a spirit of violent rebellion against conditions which do not actually exist and may never exist" and charged that Coughlin had "transgressed bounds" by his anti-God reference to Roosevelt.  

In reaction to this and a few other mild criticisms, Father Coughlin struck the pose of a martyr and said he remembered "very well how they persecuted Mohammed." Bishop Gallagher felt obliged to support him once again and even added that he was in full agreement with Coughlin's advocacy of the use of bullets against upstart dictators. When asked by a reporter whether this new incident might not result in further rebukes from Osservatore Romano, the Bishop, pounding his fist on the desk for emphasis, declared that "the Osservatore Romano has no

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10 New Republic, Sept. 23, 1936; Time, Oct. 5, 1936; New York Times, Sept. 26, 1936; Philadelphia Public Ledger, Sept. 26, 1936. McNicholas took a great deal of the sting out of his remarks by heaping praise upon Father Coughlin for his public campaigns against the "evils of capitalism, the corruption of public officials, and the dangers of communism and destructive radicalism."
authority over me. As for all these reports from Vatican City, the officials there told me 'we never give out interviews.' There never was a rebuke from the Vatican to Father Coughlin."\(^{11}\)

The most outspoken criticism of Father Coughlin by a leading Roman Catholic during the 1936 campaign came from Monsignor John A. Ryan, a liberal scholar at Catholic University. It is interesting to note that Ryan, a stanch supporter of FDR and the New Deal, had come to Coughlin's defense at the height of the controversy over Coughlin's outspoken support of Roosevelt's monetary policy in 1933. At that time, Ryan had said that Coughlin was on "the side of the angels." In 1936, however, Ryan condemned his fellow priest's charges against the President as "ugly, cowardly, and flagrant calumnies" and asserted that Coughlin's monetary theories were "90 per cent wrong." The angels had apparently changed their monetary theories since 1933.\(^{12}\)

Not to be browbeaten by the highly respected Monsignor, Coughlin retorted several days later that Ryan was the "ecclesiastical spokesman for the Democratic National Committee" and referred to him as "the Right Reverend New Dealer." Noting that there appeared to be only two politicians out of "30,000 Roman Catholic priests in the United States," the Catholic Review of the Archdiocese of Baltimore suggested that if Coughlin and Ryan would "retire for some time to the Carthusian order where perpetual silence is observed, they would do a great favor to the Church and to the country at large."\(^{13}\)

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\(^{13}\) Ibid., Oct. 11, Oct. 16, 1936.
As the campaign ended, Coughlin was still stirring up controversy with his scurrilous attacks upon FDR, and reports of Vatican displeasure were still being circulated. On October 27, in a speech at Cleveland, Coughlin called Roosevelt the "scab President" and charged that he had been the "greatest employer of scab labor in all history."

The New York Times reported "authoritatively" the following day that the Vatican was perturbed and might "clamp down" on the priest after the election.14

Without more evidence than is available, it is impossible to judge the attitude of the Vatican toward Coughlin at this stage of his career. On the other hand, it is clear that some members of the Church hierarchy were concerned about his conduct. It seems highly doubtful, however, that any real pressure was brought to bear upon Bishop Gallagher to silence or even to tone down the outspoken priest; at any rate, it is obvious that the Bishop did not take any decisive action. As far as Lemke and the Union party were concerned, the significance of all this controversy was that it became perhaps the most important distraction of the campaign.

From the time that the Hamiltonians first denounced the Jeffersonians as Jacobins, it has been a favorite American political pastime to identify the opposition party with some hated foreign ideology. The Union party was following in that tradition when it attempted to paint Roosevelt and the New Deal with the red brush of communism. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the opponents of the new party replied

14 Ibid., Oct. 28, 1936.
in kind. The charge of fascism was leveled at the Union party with increasing frequency as the campaign progressed. Moreover, from time to time, Coughlin and Smith made, or were quoted as making, statements which gave some color to this charge. The result was much the same as the controversy over Coughlin within the Catholic Church: Lemke and his campaign were frequently ignored while his supporters made the news of the day.

The term fascism was used during the 1930's with a typically American disregard for precise or even meaningful definition. More often than not, it was hurled as a political epithet in order to discredit an opponent without recourse to careful analysis or refutation of his point of view. As Professor James P. Shenton has noted, the term was used to describe "the Daughters of the American Revolution, Boss Frank Hague, the New Deal--and particularly its NIRA experiment--Huey Long, Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Roman Catholic hierarchy, local chambers of commerce, the American Legion, Tammany, and the Reverend Charles E. Coughlin, among others." By 1936, liberals, New Dealers, and others on the left of the political spectrum were convinced that the leaders of the so-called "thunder on the left" were more or less an American species of fascism. As a result, they were quick to point out any sign or symptom of fascism in the new party.\footnote{James P. Shenton, "Fascism and Father Coughlin," \textit{Wisconsin Magazine of History} (Autumn, 1960), 6-7.}

In substantiating the charge of fascism, critics made much of the fact that the formation and organization of the Union party were undemocratic. Norman Thomas noted that the party was "started without a
convention" and that "Lemke was chosen by Father Coughlin in an essentially dictatorial fashion." Dale Kramer, editor of the National Farm Holiday News, observed that "all Union party officials are self-appointed." To this was frequently added the charge that Father Coughlin and Dr. Townsend exercised authoritarian leadership over their vast organizations.16

The Union party platform was frequently dismissed as a pseudo-radical document which was meant to veil the real motives of its authors. Norman Thomas said that the platform "closely resembles Nazi theories, basically, in its appeal to middle class discontent." The New Republic warned that the new party's program was "definitely fascist." In much the same vein, Dale Kramer asserted that the platform had a "liberal-reactionary vagueness which definitely smacks of fascism" and contained a great deal of "pure nationalism such as Hitler used so effectively. . . ."17

Guilt by association was sometimes resorted to by critics who could find little if anything in Lemke's own public record to justify the charge of fascism. Noting the "old saying that 'birds of a feather flock together,'" Dale Kramer went on to point out that some of the Union party hierarchy, such as Newton Jenkins and Big Bill Thompson were "openly fascist." In similar fashion, Father Coughlin's endorsement of


Italy's aggressive actions in Ethiopia and his violent opposition to the Loyalists in Spain were frequently cited as proof of his fascist inclinations.  

More sensational were certain statements which were attributed to Coughlin and Smith and which appeared to give more convincing proof of the validity of the fascist charges. That these statements were taken out of context, widely misinterpreted, and perhaps even inaccurately reported did not lessen their importance as distracting forces as far as Lemke and his campaign were concerned.

One of the distinguishing features of European fascism during the 1930's was its blatant anti-Semitism. At one point in the campaign, Father Coughlin delivered a vague and confusing speech which appeared to reveal a tendency in that direction on his part. At the NUSJ Convention, in an "extempore" lecture in which he was supposedly answering certain allegations made against him by the columnist John T. Flynn, Father Coughlin launched into an account of the historical development of usury which included frequent reference to the role played by Jewish bankers.

Upon close examination, this speech reveals an odd mixture of criticism and defense of the Jews. Describing the early persecution of the Jewish people, he blamed "bad Christians." "You can talk of the persecution of the Irish, the Polish and other nations," he told his followers, "but there never was such persecution as the Christians inflicted on the Jews without reason." Condemning the role of both Christian and Jewish bankers during the time of Constantine, he warned

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his audience: "Don't blame everything on the Jews. That's Hitleresque."

On the other hand, referring to the concept of Christian brotherhood, he threw out a challenge which was bound to stir up controversy: "I challenge every Jew in this nation to tell me that he does or doesn't believe in it."19

The latter statement was widely publicized, and some commentators interpreted it to mean that Father Coughlin had "embarked . . . on a campaign of Jew-baiting." Criticism of the priest poured forth from The Day, a national Jewish publication, the National Conference of Jews and Christians, and the Detroit Jewish Chronicle. The latter publication roundly condemned him in a strongly worded editorial:

Obsessed with a self-imposed mission to "drive the money changers out of the Temple," Father Coughlin has made it a point to mention only Jewish names, to give the impression that only Jews are money changers, to emphasize the myth that the Jewish people . . . is dominating the world in finance and in politics."20

In answer to such criticism, Social Justice published on August 31 a long and involved article entitled "Father Coughlin on the Jewish Question" which only tended to add to the confusion. Again, as in his original remarks on the subject, denial of anti-Semitism and defense of the Jewish people were mixed with comments which had more sinister overtones. In the former category was the concluding paragraph: "As far as Father Coughlin being anti-Semitic, such an attitude on his part would be illogical, unchristian, and impractical. Neither he nor the National

19 Social Justice, August 31, 1936; Schlesinger, Politics of Upheaval, 628.

Union ever will consent to any program, political or otherwise, launched against any race or any creed." In the latter category was an ominous warning: "If certain groups of politically- swayed Jews, like similar groups of spoil-minded gentiles care to organize against Father Coughlin or the National Union they will be entirely responsible for stirring up any repercussions which they will invite." 21

The furor over this episode eventually subsided, and Father Coughlin did not at this time embark on a "campaign of Jew-baiting." In light of his subsequent career, it is obvious that this incident revealed a latent anti-Semitism on his part which became clearly visible in 1937 and thereafter. It should be emphasized, however, that in 1936 this incident represented no more than an isolated event which is not sufficient evidence upon which to brand him or the Union party as anti-Semetic or fascist. Be that as it may, Coughlin had once again diverted public attention from the Union party and its candidate.

No sooner had the controversy over Coughlin's remarks at the NUSJ Convention died down than a new one arose to take its place. On September 25, in an article in the National Farm Holiday News, Dale Kramer wrote that Father Coughlin had confided to him in an interview that he was taking the road to fascism. Noting that the priest had "thousands of times been labeled as fascist-minded, a forerunner of fascist dictatorship," Kramer announced that Coughlin had finally laid "aside his liberal mask to reveal his open support for fascism, a vision of himself as fascist dictator, and his plans for the hoped for rise to power."

21 Social Justice, August 31, 1936.
"We are at the crossroads," he quoted Coughlin as saying, "One road leads toward fascism, the other toward Communism. I take the road toward fascism."²²

The accuracy of the quotations which Kramer attributed to Coughlin is open to serious question. During the campaign, Kramer published at least three different accounts of the interview. In each of these accounts, Coughlin's admission of taking the road to fascism is phrased in a substantially different way. This alone is sufficient grounds upon which to question the accuracy of Kramer's entire account.²³

The New York Times published an Associated Press report of an interview with Coughlin which took place about the same date as Kramer's. Since Kramer stated that an Associated Press reporter was present during his interview, it seems logical to conclude that the Times article was based upon the same interview as Kramer's. While similar to Kramer's report in most respects, the Associated Press account is far less damaging. According to it, a reporter asked Coughlin whether, if he had to make the choice, he would "choose communism or fascism." "I could never choose communism," the priest replied, "it denies the existence of God. I am fighting both communism and fascism in the hope of saving


²³The other accounts of the Coughlin interview by Kramer were published in an article in P.M., Sept. 16, 1936 and in a campaign tract entitled Coughlin, Lemke and the Union Party. The former is quoted in Myles M. Platt, "Father Charles E. Coughlin and the National Union for Social Justice: A Bid for Political Power" (unpublished Master's thesis, Wayne State University, 1951), 126-127. The latter is quoted at length in A. B. Magil and Henry Stevens, The Peril of Fascism: The Case of American Democracy (New York, 1938), 190 and more briefly in Schlesinger, Politics of Upheaval, 629.
Needless to say, although this quotation expressed an abstract preference for fascism as opposed to communism, it had none of the implications of active support of or conversion to fascism that the Kramer quotation contained.

A possible third version of the same interview was contained in an article by Herbert Harris in *Current History*. Again the question and answer were similar but not identical to the Kramer report. "If the show-down came between communism . . . and fascism?" Coughlin is quoted as saying, "I wouldn't like the regimentation of either, but I would have to choose fascism, if only for religious reasons." 

During a heated political campaign such as that of 1936, there is not much tendency on the part of either the candidates or voters to examine calmly or dispassionately such statements as those which were attributed to Coughlin. On the basis of any of the articles quoted above, it was easy for critics to discredit not only Coughlin but also Lemke and the Union party. Once again Lemke was a victim of his controversial supporters.

On October 20, before an audience of less than 600 persons at New York City's Hippodrome, Gerald L. K. Smith delivered a speech which was widely condemned as revealing a swing toward fascist activities on his part. Exactly what he said on that occasion is still shrouded in mystery, for, while reports of the speech were carried by the New York Times and other national newspapers, they contained only interpretive summaries of his remarks. The Times reported vaguely that he had

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announced plans "to head a nationalist organization against a supposed Red menace, . . ."\(^{25}\)

When reports of Smith's actions reached Chicago, the impact upon the harmony of the Union party was shattering. Both Dr. Townsend and John Nystul, Lemke's campaign manager, strongly condemned fascism and denounced Smith. "If the press reports concerning the Fascist action of Gerald L. K. Smith are true," Townsend stated unequivocally, "then I hereby disavow any connection that Mr. Smith may claim in the organization of the Townsend National Recovery Plan." He concluded by saying that he was against fascism because it "is un-American and smacks of the dictator-like policies of the New Deal and President Roosevelt."\(^{26}\)

The following day, however, Nystul issued a statement saying that "Reverend Gerald L. K. Smith has personally assured me that . . . the statements accredited to him and published in New York are utterly false—that he was grossly misquoted and that the whole matter is entirely without foundation in fact." Nystul's explanation, however, was not given wide publicity, and, therefore, the impression remained that a serious rift existed in the Union party ranks. At any rate, the hasty denunciation of Smith by Townsend and Nystul on the basis of newspaper reports and without waiting to hear Smith's side of the story


\(^{26}\) Ibid.
was convincing proof of the disintegration of the unity which the founders of the Union party had earlier professed.27

Even before Townsend and Nystul had disowned Smith in October, there had been signs of increasing tension among Lemke and his chief supporters. From time to time throughout the later stages of the campaign, Father Coughlin and Dr. Townsend made remarks which appeared to reveal that they were dissatisfied with Lemke's campaign. Early in September, Dr. Townsend was quoted as saying he considered it "a lamentable thing that we did not organize our own party for the November elections." A few weeks later, Father Coughlin told reporters that Lemke "may carry eight states--no more" and added: "It doesn't make any difference. I'm just as certain that he won't be elected as the manager of your Phillies is that he'll lost the pennant."28

There were also indications that the basic differences between the economic and political programs of Coughlin and Townsend, which had made unity so difficult in June but which had been glossed over in July, were returning to the surface and making their coalition more difficult to maintain in September. According to an article in the New York Times of September 22, Coughlin had told a reporter that the Townsend Plan was "mathematically impossible." Possibly in answer to this comment, Dr. Townsend expressed indirect criticism of Coughlin's program as well as

27 *Lemke Leader*, Oct. 12, 1936. That Father Coughlin also had some serious doubts about Smith was revealed years later. "I was frightened by Smith," he recalled and branded him as "a professional anti-Semite, an anti-Christian." "Calm for a Stormy Priest," *Life*, Nov. 14, 1955, p. 120.

that of the Union party. "We have our own program which we believe is basic," he told Herbert Harris, "and if once put into operation it would eliminate, . . . the necessity for the various reforms advocated by the Union Party and also the National Union for Social Justice."29

That the primary aim of the chief supporters of the Union party was to defeat Roosevelt rather than to elect Lemke was proved conclusively by the growing affinity between them and the Republican candidate. In the case of Dr. Townsend, this finally led to a public endorsement of Landon. Father Coughlin followed a more covert course.

In public addresses throughout the campaign, Father Coughlin always emphasized the absolute necessity of Lemke's election. "Go back and tell your friends," he told North Dakota farmers in July, "that if either [FDR or Landon] is installed in the White House there will be no election in 1940. Fascism will be here and Communism will be making a bid for power." In a press conference the same day, however, he admitted that Landon was the "lesser of two evils." Landon's election "might mean a return to 'Hooverism,'" he told reporters, "but it would solidify the forces now backing William Lemke, and give them a walkaway in 1940." On the other hand, he warned that if Roosevelt won "it probably will be the last presidential election we'll ever have, because the New Deal appears to be headed straight for a dictatorship."30

In contrast to his violent attacks on Roosevelt, moreover, Coughlin ignored Landon or made only passing reference to him. On the latter occasions, he usually made light of the Republican candidate's platform technique. "This fellow from the West--what's his name?" he jokingly asked his audience. "When he goes on the radio everybody shuts off. That's why I don't know his name." At one point, he described Landon as "the world's worst radio speaker." In comparison to the epithets which he hurled at FDR, however, this was mild criticism. The ardent Coughlin follower in the states in which the Union party did not appear on the ballot could hardly have failed to vote for the "world's worst radio speaker" in preference to the "great liar" and "anti-God."\textsuperscript{31}

At the beginning of the campaign, Dr. Townsend appeared to be securely in the Lemke camp and firmly opposed to both of the major party candidates. "I would vote for a native-born Chinaman or a Jap from Hawaii rather than vote for Roosevelt or Landon," he told a rally of 2000 Townsendites in Kansas, "William Lemke gets my vote." On occasion, however, he admitted his preference for Landon as opposed to Roosevelt. "Of course I prefer Landon," he told reporters as early as July 27. "It would be the most disastrous thing that could befall this nation to have the present administration go back into power."\textsuperscript{32}

When the Union party was denied a place on the ballot in California, Dr. Townsend felt obliged to make his preference for Landon public. "I cannot and will not support for the Presidency the man who

\textsuperscript{31}Literary Digest, Aug. 15, 1936, p. 32; Chicago Tribune, Sept. 7, 1936.

is our sworn enemy," he told his followers in California on October 7. "I advise that we choose the lesser of two evils. Not being permitted to vote for Mr. Lemke as my choice for the Presidency, I shall cast my vote for an untried man--Mr. Landon--in the hope that he may prove of greater value to the nation." A few days later, he extended this advice to his followers in other states in which the Union party had not succeeded in getting on the ballot. "It is imperative that Franklin Roosevelt be defeated November 3 if we are to enact the Townsend National Recovery Plan into law during the next administration," he said in a statement issued to his supporters in California, Florida, Nevada, Oklahoma, Kansas, New Jersey, North Carolina, and West Virginia.\(^{33}\)

Although the Republicans were engaged in a campaign to save America from such radicalism as the New Deal represented, they gleefully accepted the support of the Townsendites whose pension scheme made the Social Security Act look conservative. "It was because of the shift of the Townsend support to Landon," the New York Times commented, "that the Republican nominee suddenly decided to campaign in California." Republican leaders were now convinced that they were certain of carrying California and West Virginia as a result of Townsend's endorsement. Governor Landon rushed out to California and made an open bid for Townsendite votes on October 21. After reciting a number of New Deal errors and offenses, he pointedly referred to the Bell Committee investigation of the Townsend movement: "And recently a Congressional investigation has been carried on for what seems to be purely political ends. In this case, the thinly veiled purpose apparently was to

\(^{33}\)Ibid., Oct. 8, Oct. 12, 1936.
discredit a political movement which the controlling party wished to curb." He conveniently forgot to mention that the committee had been bipartisan in make-up and that the most hostile investigator had been a fellow Republican, Clair Hoffman of Michigan.34

The impact of Townsend's endorsement on Landon's showing in California and other states is of course impossible to calculate. In view of Townsend's unquestioned strength in California, however, it may be estimated to have resulted in a significant number of additional votes in the Republican column. To the Union party, the spectacle of one of its chief supporters openly campaigning for one of the major party candidates could not have been anything but demoralizing. It clearly demonstrated that the Union party was nothing more than a temporary anti-Roosevelt alliance.

In spite of the odds against him, Lemke maintained from the beginning to the end of the campaign that he would be the next President of the United States. "I see the Union party on top," he told reporters shortly after he announced his candidacy. He was particularly irritated by the charge that the real purpose of his candidacy was to defeat Roosevelt. "Some tell me," he informed a mass meeting of North Dakota farmers in July, "I am going to take more votes from Roosevelt. I don't care who is the hindermost. I am going to win."35

Lemke never asserted, however, that he would win a clear-cut victory in the electoral college; instead, he insisted that he would

34 Ibid., Oct. 18, Oct. 21, 1936.
carry enough states to throw the election into the House of Representatives. Usher Burdick, national chairman of the Union party, explained the probable outcome of the election from the viewpoint of the Lemke camp in a newsletter to his constituents: "Should Lemke carry four states, the next President will not be elected by the Electoral College. The election will go to the House of Representatives, and if it does, New York with 45 house members will have but one vote and North Dakota will have one vote." From this unlikely prognostication, Lemke drew the even more unlikely conclusion that he would be chosen "as I have more friends in the house than both Roosevelt and Landon together." 36

Toward the end of the campaign, Lemke grew more vehement in his predictions of victory in a vain effort to lift the low morale of his supporters. "Only the dullard accepts the yoke and says that Lemke can't be elected," he told a group of North Dakotans in October. "Only the coward and the slave yields to the regimentation and gives up in despair. This election is going to be thrown into the house of representatives, the Union party is going to win." 37

As the voters went to the polls, the top officials of the Union party were philosophical about the outcome. "That you will be overwhelmingly reelected to Congress is unquestioned," O'Brien wrote from Boston. "May the people of America exercise the same good judgement as your neighbors and select a president who will strive for social and

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economic justice in this wonderful nation of ours." From his old friend and campaign manager, John Nystul, came a telegram: "On the election eve I congratulate you on the forceful campaign you have made. You have fought the good fight for the American people." As Lemke and his wife cast their votes at Fargo, he told reporters: "The Union party is here to stay. It is the party of youth and all the liberals of America."\(^{38}\)

It is doubtful that Lemke and his supporters were surprised by the outcome of the election. That Roosevelt would be re-elected had been fairly obvious during the closing weeks of the campaign. Only the Literary Digest had been able to delude itself as to the identity of the victor. With the exception of James A. Farley, however, no one had anticipated the magnitude of Roosevelt’s personal triumph. The final count revealed that Roosevelt had polled 27,476,673 popular votes, Landon had trailed far behind with 16,679,583, and Lemke had run a poor third with only 892,240.

Union party hopes of defeating FDR had been based upon forecasts of a close race between the two major party candidates. In that situation, it was thought that a strong third party might control the balance of power between Roosevelt and Landon. In no state, however, was the Union party’s vote of sufficient size to have been of any possible significance in determining the outcome of the electoral vote. Coughlin had once predicted that the Union party would draw in the neighborhood of nine million votes. The overwhelming nature of Roosevelt’s victory

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is revealed by the fact that even if Lemke had siphoned off nine million votes from the Roosevelt column, the President would still have led Landon by a substantial three million votes.

Although the Union party had completely failed to challenge the position of either of the major parties, it had replaced the Socialist party as the most powerful minor party by gaining 60 per cent of the total third-party vote. The emergence of the Union party as the leading third party did not mean that voters had switched from the other minor parties to it. As far as can be determined, Lemke's vote came almost exclusively from the ranks of former supporters of the Democratic and Republican parties. The poor showing of Norman Thomas in 1936 can only be explained in terms of a mass movement of former Socialist voters into the Roosevelt camp. FDR probably picked up as many votes from the Socialist party as he lost to the Union party.39

It is significant to note that the Union party votes were heavily concentrated in a few states. In the nation as a whole, it could boast only 2 per cent of the total vote case in the Presidential race. On the state level, Lemke's best showing was in his native state of North Dakota where he won 13½ per cent of the vote. In a handful of other states, his vote was significantly higher than his national average: 6½ per cent in Minnesota, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island; 5 per cent in Oregon; 4½ per cent in Michigan, Wisconsin, South Dakota, and Idaho.40

39 The last two statements are based upon the findings of the Literary Digest and Institute of Public Opinion polls, New York Times, Oct. 16, 24, 31, 1936; Social Justice, Aug. 10, 1936.

40 The percentages are based upon the presidential vote on the national and state level as recorded in Eugene E. Robinson, The Presidential Vote, 1936 (Stanford, 1940), 87-91.
In view of the relatively small proportion of the total vote which the Union party received in these ten states, it is difficult to speculate with any degree of accuracy concerning the motivation of the voters who cast their ballots for Lemke. It may be noted, however, that in all of these states Lemke, Coughlin, or Townsend had large followings. Lemke and his program of agrarian radicalism were particularly popular in North Dakota and the surrounding farm states of South Dakota, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Father Coughlin had considerable strength in his home state of Michigan, in Ohio, and in heavily Catholic Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Finally, Dr. Townsend had established two of his most effective state organizations in Oregon and Idaho.

On the other hand, there appears to be little if any evidence to support the contention that the Union party voters were primarily German and Catholic in background and were motivated by isolationist sentiments. Although the Union party vote in some states was heavily concentrated in a few counties, there is no discernible pattern in the ethnic or religious make-up of those counties. Furthermore, although Lemke and Coughlin were confirmed and ardent isolationists, the fact is that foreign policy simply was not an issue in the election of 1936. Nor was there any attempt on the part of Lemke, Coughlin, Roosevelt, or anyone else to make it an issue. Lemke and his supporters were chiefly concerned with the domestic economic issues of the day and opposed Roosevelt primarily upon those grounds. 41

41 The only real attempt to analyze the vote of the Union party has been made by Samuel Lubell in his significant study of American voting patterns, The Future of American Politics, 137-167. His major
logical to conclude that those who voted for the Union party shared with Lemke, Coughlin, Townsend, and Smith a common desire to defeat Roosevelt. Convinced that the only way to achieve the Frazier-Lemke legislation, the Coughlin inflationary program, or the Townsend plan was to defeat the enemy in the White House, they followed the advice of their respective leaders and voted for the Union party ticket. The relatively poor showing of Lemke revealed the fact that by 1936 Roosevelt and the New Deal had succeeded in winning the support of the vast majority of those who had once been nominal followers of the leaders of the "thunder on the left."

Conclusion is that "foreign policy rather than economics explains the Lemke vote. . . ." "Drawn primarily from Irish and German Catholics," he asserts, "Lemke's following represented the most belligerently isolationist voters in the country." These conclusions are based chiefly upon the following analysis of the religious and ethnic character of the Union party vote: "Outside of North Dakota, Lemke got more than 10 per cent of the vote in thirty-nine counties. Twenty-one of these counties are more than 50 per cent Catholic. In twenty-eight of the thirty-nine counties the predominant nationality element is German."

While Mr. Lubell's analysis of the Union party is persuasively presented and has been widely accepted by historians, it appears to be based upon some misleading assumptions and to draw conclusions which are unwarrantable on the basis of the facts which are presented. Moreover, statistical information concerning the religious and ethnic make-up of the American population on the county level is extremely sketchy and incomplete; as a result, estimates based upon it must be used with a great deal of caution. Mr. Lubell, however, fails to make clear either the source or the exact meaning of such crucial phrases as "more than 50 per cent Catholic" and "the predominant nationality element is German."

Thirty-three of the thirty-nine counties upon which Mr. Lubell bases his case were located in the four states of Ohio, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Oregon. Even a cursory examination of the ethnic and religious make-up of these counties casts a great deal of doubt as to the validity of Lubell's conclusions in relation to them. Unless otherwise cited, the Union party vote on the county level is taken from the following official state sources: Ohio, Secretary of State, Election
In Ohio, Lemke won more than 10 per cent of the vote in six counties. According to the United States census reports of 1870 and 1920, the predominant nationality of the foreign-born population of these six counties was German. The significance of that fact is considerably diminished, however, when it is noted that no less than fifty-six of the eighty-eight counties in Ohio also had a predominantly German foreign-born population. It would appear, therefore, that a predominant German element in the population of Ohio counties is so common as to be of little importance as far as Lemke's vote is concerned. See U. S., Bureau of the Census, Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, I, 318-319; U. S., Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, III, 776-783.

In Minnesota, Lemke received more than 10 per cent of the vote in seventeen counties. While six of these counties were predominantly German and heavily Catholic, five were predominantly Scandinavian and heavily Protestant, and the remainder fell between these two extremes. In Wisconsin, two of the four counties in which Lemke won more than 10 per cent of the vote were German and Catholic, but the other two were Scandinavian and Protestant. In Oregon, only one of the six Lemke counties was predominantly German, and five of the six were well below the state average in terms of Catholic population. Obviously, there is little if anything that may be concluded from such a mixture of ethnic and religious backgrounds as these counties represent. See U. S., Bureau of the Census, Ninth Census, I, 313-315, 324-325, 319; U. S., Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census, III, 509-517, 1124-1130, 839-842. Statistics concerning the religious make-up of these counties may be found in National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, Churches and Church Membership in the United States: An Enumeration and Analysis by Counties, States and Regions (New York, 1957), Series C. #18, 19, 20, 56.

Although the Union party received its most substantial share of a state's vote in Lemke's native state of North Dakota, Mr. Lubell excludes that state from his analysis of the Lemke vote. E. C. Blackorby has clearly demonstrated, however, that there is no correlation between the Union party vote and German-Catholic predominance in North Dakota. See Blackorby, "Lemke," 502-505.

Even if Mr. Lubell's conclusion that the Lemke counties were predominantly German and Catholic is accepted in spite of the evidence to the contrary, one basic question remains: Was there any reason for
Germans, Catholics, or anyone else to vote on the basis of foreign policy in 1936? In answer to this question, Lubell stresses the fact that Lemke and Coughlin were outspoken isolationists, asserts that by 1936 it had become clear that Hitler and Roosevelt "were locked in an epic duel," and points out that Roman Catholics were particularly upset over the Spanish Civil War. In answer to these points, it might be noted that during his first term Roosevelt had steered clear of any issues which might have provoked the powerful isolationists in Congress and that in 1936 he had the unqualified endorsement of such ardent isolationists as George Norris and Robert La Follette. Moreover, it was far from clear at that time that Hitler and Roosevelt were "locked in an epic duel." Finally, as far as the Spanish Civil War was concerned, FDR was following and would continue to follow an essentially isolationist policy. In short, there appears to be little if any reason to accept Lubell's conclusion that "foreign policy ... explains the Lemke vote. . . ."
CHAPTER IX

EPILOGUE

The more important third parties in recent American history have shared a common fate: four years after they were founded amid predictions of permanency and victory, the Populist party, the Progressive party of 1912, the Progressive coalition of 1924, and the Progressive party of 1948 had all faded completely from the political scene. So it was with the Union party. In 1938, two years after its formation, it was formally disbanded.

The collapse of the Union party after the election of 1936 illustrated once more the fact that it had been only a temporary anti-Roosevelt coalition and not a real attempt to form a lasting party. Coughlin, Townsend, and Smith lost all interest in the party immediately after the election. The action of Townsend and Smith in this respect came as no great surprise, for they had never played more than peripheral roles in the party. Father Coughlin, on the other hand, had been the chief founder of the party and might have been expected to have had a more lasting interest in it. Instead he abruptly washed his hands of it. His attitude tended to embitter Lemke and others who wished to see the party maintained. "The Reverend gentleman at Royal Oak when queried about the Union Party," complained the chairman of the party in
Massachusetts in 1938, "invariably answered that he was not interested in the Union Party and that all politicians, good and bad, were the same."  

For his part, Lemke seemed determined not only to maintain but to expand the party after the election. "The Union party is here to stay," he had told reporters as he cast his own ballot on November 3. "There will be a permanent organization effected in every state." His crushing defeat did not lessen his determination to make the party a permanent one. "The election is over," he said in a statement issued the day after the election. "We have no apologies. The Union Party is not defeated. We just lost the first skirmish. Right is never defeated—it may be postponed."  

More than brave words were needed, however, if the party was to be established on a firm, permanent basis. The campaign and election had clearly revealed the basic organizational weaknesses of the party on the national, state, and local levels. To correct these and other problems and to plan for the future, Lemke and John Nystul organized a national conference of the Union party in December of 1936. It is interesting to note that this meeting is the closest the Union party ever came to holding a national convention. 

The December meeting was devoted largely to a series of reports by Lemke, Nystul, and other party leaders describing the general condition of the organization. It was announced that the party debt stood at

1Joseph M. Heffernan to Lemke, Oct. 4, 1938, Lemke Papers. 
2Fargo Forum, n.d., Clipping; "Statement" by Lemke, Lemke Papers.
$6,400. In an effort to restore close relations with Lemke's former supporters, a resolution was adopted expressing "thanks for the loyal support rendered" by Coughlin, Townsend, and Smith during the campaign. Reflecting the usual third-party suspicions concerning the accuracy of the election results, a new "plank number 16" was added to the party platform: "Congress shall establish a supervisory system over National Elections, non-partisan in character, by a Board composed equally of members of all parties represented in Congress, that will assure honest elections and correct returns of all votes as cast."  

Chairman Nystul announced plans aimed at improving the party's organization at the local level so that "when the next election rolls around, this Party will be so thoroughly and efficiently organized that defeat will be impossible." According to this plan, all of the various local organizations which had been formed during the campaign were to be consolidated into "one great, nation-wide organization to be known as the National Federation of Union Party Clubs." The new aim was to establish one or more local clubs "in every community, and . . . in every precinct in the larger cities." "I believe with proper organization," Lemke told the conference, "we should have sufficient strength to put over say fifteen or twenty congressmen in 1938 and in 1940 we will sweep the Nation."  

During the next two years, Lemke spent a great deal of time and effort trying to keep the Union party alive. He wrote numerous letters

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to local leaders urging them to maintain an active organization. On the national level, party headquarters at Chicago was under the direction of Miss E. K. Byrne who was apparently the only full-time staff member during 1937 and 1938. Nystul remained as national chairman, Clyde Backus of Chicago became vice-chairman in 1937, and L. P. McAney, an old friend of Lemke's from Fargo, replaced Richard W. Wolfe as national treasurer after the election.  

In spite of these efforts, however, the maintenance of a real organization grew more and more difficult. The chief problem was a lack of money. The debt incurred in 1936 remained unpaid, and the party got deeper in the red as a result of its failure to raise funds. The situation finally reached the point that current operating expenses of the Chicago office could not be met. Miss Byrne informed Lemke in December of 1937 that the office had been without a telephone for "six or eight weeks" and that she could not afford to pay out $10.00 per week for a stenographer.  

The critical financial situation was not the only problem to plague the party. One woman from Chicago charged that the Union party in Illinois was being infiltrated by Nazi leaders. Among other things, she informed Lemke that "the only meetings are held in the same rooms that other branches of the Nazi Organization are held in and by the same leaders of their organizations." Lemke refused to put much credence

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6Byrne to Lemke, Dec. 8, 1937, Lemke Papers.
in these reports and criticized his informant for spreading such malicious scandal.\(^7\)

In 1938, however, he received convincing proof that it was indeed possible for others to use the party for their own purposes. In that year, Lemke's old political rival William Langer ran for the United States Senate on the Union party label in North Dakota. Commenting on this unexpected development, Lemke complained that "that baby of mine was kidnapped."\(^8\)

In face of the continuing financial plight of the party, Nystul suggested in November of 1938 that the Chicago office be closed. "It is, of course, understood by all of us that this does not mean abandoning the Union Party," he wrote to Lemke in an effort to soften the blow, "but a necessary temporary move to curtail further expenses." After some delay, Lemke reluctantly agreed to the move "because the boys did not seem to be able to make a go of it and simply got us deeper in debt."\(^9\)

The abandonment of the Chicago offices proved to be more than "a necessary temporary move"; it marked in fact the official termination of the Union party as a national third-party organization.

That the Union party passed from view in the waning months of 1938 was only fitting. The turbulent political era which had witnessed its birth was also rapidly drawing to an end. The fearful phantom of


\(^8\)Lemke to E. B. McCutcheon, July 21, 1938, Lemke Papers.

\(^9\)Nystul to Lemke, Nov. 3, 1938, Lemke to Nystul, March 8, 1939, Lemke Papers.
depression, which had bred all manner of political leaders and programs such as those which had led to the Union party, was giving way to the frightening specter of war. Questions of foreign policy were rapidly overshadowing domestic issues in national politics. The chief recipient of Union party wrath in 1936, Franklin D. Roosevelt, would soon proclaim the New Deal to be at an end and was already devoting his main efforts toward the vexing problems of international relations.

The changing times also had their impact upon the men who had supported the Union party. Each was adjusting to the new situation in his own way. The popularity of Dr. Townsend and his revolving pension plan declined after 1936 almost as rapidly as it had risen. Although he actually lived to see his dream of $200 per month for the elderly become a reality, he was little remembered except as one of the "demagogic agitators" who had helped push Roosevelt toward social security.

Others took much different paths. After his short foray into national politics, Gerald L. K. Smith descended into the underworld of political life and became one of the leading spokesmen of the lunatic fringe. Although his name occasionally appeared in the national headlines, he seemed content to play the role of an "Apostle of Discord" and to publish scurrilous anti-Semitic tracts.10

As for Father Coughlin, the climax of his career did not come for seven long years after he had founded the Union party. Following a brief retirement from public life after the debacle of 1936, he returned

10 For an account of Smith's more recent career, see Ralph Lord Roy, Apostles of Discord, A Study of Organized Bigotry and Disruption on the Fringes of Protestantism (Boston, 1953), ff.
to the air in 1937. He soon fulfilled the predictions which had been made in 1936 and became one of the chief advocates of what may properly be termed American fascism. Like its European counterpart, its main ingredients were anti-Semitism, cynicism toward political democracy, and advocacy of the corporate state. After Pearl Harbor, he opposed the war effort and continued to defend Germany and her allies. Finally, in 1942, after Attorney-General Francis Biddle had begun a federal investigation of Coughlin's activities and *Social Justice* had been denied use of the mails, Archbishop Edward Mooney of Detroit ordered the priest to disassociate himself from all public controversy. "The golden brogue was finally stilled." "I would have done the same thing in his place," Father Coughlin commented on Mooney's order years later and added: "It was a horrible mistake to enter politics." 11

While William Lemke lost his bid for the Presidency in 1936, he retained his seat in Congress. When the new Congress convened in 1937, however, the Republican caucus stripped him and his North Dakota Colleague and backer Usher Burdick of their committee seniority. In a typically blunt reaction, Lemke snorted: "I'm not begging anything from the damned, reactionary Republicans." When told that the caucus did not want any Bolshevik committee chairmen when the Republicans regained control of the House, Burdick curtly replied: "Gentlemen, the Bolsheviks of the type you mean will man every committee of this Congress long

before the Republican party is returned to power under your leadership.\textsuperscript{12}

Although his biographer has concluded that Lemke's decision to head the Union ticket in 1936 was the "major error of his career," Lemke never seems to have shared this pessimistic view. His only regret was that he was not elected. Twelve years later, he informed an old friend that "if I had been elected President, we would not be in the mess we are in now, and the world would not be."\textsuperscript{13}

The most consistent trait of Lemke's congressional career from 1936 until his death in 1950 was his stanch adherence to the isolationist views he had held since World War I. The fact that Roosevelt eventually emerged as the leading internationalist spokesman undoubtedly tended to confirm Lemke's views on foreign policy, for his hatred of FDR never waned. From the Quarantine speech to Lend-Lease, he consistently opposed every measure of the administration's foreign policy. Moreover, unlike some isolationists, he did not alter his views during or after World War II. In the post-war era, he opposed the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and NATO with unrelenting vigor. Yet, like many former isolationists, he supported additional aid for Chiang Kai-shek and was attracted to the nationalism and militarism of General Douglas MacArthur whom he supported for the Republican nomination in 1948.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12}New York Times, Jan. 15, 1937.

\textsuperscript{13}Blackorby, "Lemke," 500; Lemke to Charles W. Reeves, Feb. 17, 1948, Lemke Papers.

It has been asserted that Lemke and other isolationists who once held liberal economic views eventually gave up these views and became conservative Republicans because of their opposition to Roosevelt's foreign policy. While this transformation from liberal isolationist to conservative isolationist can be observed in the careers of such men as Gerald P. Nye, John T. Flynn, and Burton K. Wheeler, there is little evidence to support such a conclusion as far as Lemke is concerned. To cite just one example, it should be noted that Lemke had a consistently liberal record during his congressional career in relation to organized labor. Not only was he a strong advocate of the Wagner Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act in the 1930's when it was relatively popular and common to support such measures, but he remained a dedicated friend of labor during the darker days of the 1940's. During World War II, he opposed the severe Smith-Connally Anti-Strike Act which was finally passed over Roosevelt's veto. Even more significant is the fact that he stood almost alone among Republicans in opposition to the Taft-Hartley Act and in support of President Truman's veto.¹⁵

Some historians have attempted to discredit the Union party by putting great emphasis upon the later fascist and racist tendencies of Coughlin and Smith. Others, seeking the domestic roots of American fascism, have generalized about the inclination of latter-day populists to veer off in the direction of anti-Semitism and related fascist directions. None of this is applicable to Lemke's subsequent career.

Although he minimized the threat of Hitler as far as the security of the United States was concerned, he never expressed any sympathy for or attempted to excuse the actions of the German dictator as did Coughlin and Smith. More significantly, he stood firmly opposed to any fascist tendencies at home. While some of his erstwhile supporters were dabbling in anti-Semitism, he publicly and privately condemned such activities.16

The careers of Townsend, Smith, Coughlin, and Lemke after 1936 tend to confirm what has already been pointed out about the Union party. It did not represent an attempt by the forces of the "thunder on the left" of Roosevelt to merge their organizations and to integrate their programs into a new, unified movement. Rather, the Union party may more accurately be described as a temporary coalition of disgruntled, disappointed, and ambitious men who had little in common but a fanatical desire to defeat Roosevelt and the New Deal. Quite naturally then, once the election was over and the chief aim of the party had been defeated, the Union party rapidly disintegrated and its leaders went their own separate ways.

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I, David Owen Powell, was born in Rochester, Pennsylvania, January 3, 1932. I received my secondary-school education in the public schools of Rochester, Pennsylvania, and my undergraduate training at Grove City College, which granted me the Bachelor of Arts degree in 1954. From Miami University, I received the Master of Arts degree in 1957. In September, 1957, I was appointed Graduate Assistant at The Ohio State University, where I specialized in the Department of History. In September, 1959, I was appointed University Fellow at The Ohio State University. In September, 1960, I was appointed Instructor in History at Hope College. I held this position for two years while completing the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.