Article Title: George W. Norris: Nebraska Moralist

Full Citation: Norman L Zucker, "George W. Norris: Nebraska Moralist," *Nebraska History* 42 (1961): 95-124

URL of article: http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1961NorrisMoralist.pdf

Date: 10/11/2016

Article Summary: The turbulence of international affairs in his time forced Norris to think about the problems of war and peace. Unfortunately he lacked a mature understanding of the intricacies of foreign affairs. Although his world vision may have been idealistic, no one doubted his sincerity.

Cataloging Information:

Names: George W Norris, Woodrow Wilson, the Kaiser [Wilhelm II], William Jennings Bryan

Place Names: Austria, Poland, Japan

Keywords: World War I, Wall Street, neutrality, isolation, disarmament, Embargo Law, interventionism, Lend-Lease Bill, League of Nations, Monroe Doctrine, Versailles Treaty, Bryan Peace Treaties, World Court, Norris Amendment [to reduce naval appropriations], Pearl Harbor

Photographs / Images: Norris in 1903, Senator Norris, President Roosevelt presenting to Norris the pen with which he had signed the act creating the Tennessee Valley Authority, Norris campaigning for Roosevelt in 1936; Norris and E H Dunmire of Kansas City, Christian A Sorensen

GEORGE W. NORRIS: NEBRASKA MORALIST

BY NORMAN L. ZUCKER[1]

ALTHOUGH George W. Norris was primarily interested in domestic reform and made his greatest contributions to American democracy on the national scene, he was also very much aware of international events. The years from 1903 to 1942 in which the Nebraskan served in Congress marked the reluctant end of America's traditional policy of national-continentalism and saw the inchoate stages of a new foreign policy of internationalism. The United States, which had vigorously entered the twentieth century by triumphing over a declining Spain in a "splendid little war," within two decades was embroiled in a European war which was neither splendid nor little. World War I was followed by the Versailles Treaty, the League of Nations, a rejuvenated World Court, the pious Kellogg-Briand Pact, unfruitful disarmament conferences, and then by aggression and another World War.

[1] The assistance of Professor Edward McNall Burns, chairman of the Department of Political Science, Rutgers University, for his counsel in the preparation of this paper is gratefully acknowledged.

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The turbulence of international affairs forced George W. Norris to think about the problems of war and peace and to formulate a philosophy for the conduct of international affairs. He carried into his conception of world politics a confidence in the democratic processes of logic, reason, and law and a humanistic belief in the brotherhood of man. His philosophy of world democracy was conditioned by his rigorous concept of moral justice and tended to be a combination of idealism and naivete. He reduced the multiple causes of international conflict to the nefarious activities of Wall Street and the arms and munitions makers. Similarly, his peace panaceas lacked sophistication because he unquestioningly assumed that the nations of the world would readily accept disarmament. Unfortunately Senator Norris lacked a mature understanding of the intricacies of foreign affairs and the complex subtleties of international power politics.

Nonetheless, one should not castigate him too harshly. His greatest energies were directed toward solving pressing national problems. And his sincerity remains unquestioned. If, like Micah, he longed for a civilization in which nation no longer warred against nation and there were no swords and no spears but only plowshares and pruning-hooks, he held a vision worth dreaming.

Perhaps of all the votes which George W. Norris cast in his Congressional career he is best remembered for his vote against the United States' entrance into World War I. When President Woodrow Wilson reluctantly presented to Congress his idealistic request for America to "vindicate the principles of peace and justice"[2] so as to make the world safe for democracy, Senator Norris listened but could not agree.

Two days after the President's address, on April 4, 1917, Norris arose in the Senate to oppose Wilson's request for a declaration of war. America's entrance into this foreign war, he believed, was not inspired by humanitarian

[2] Woodrow Wilson, Address to Congress, April 2, 1917.

considerations and would serve no cause for humanity. The United States was on the verge of war because "of the influence of money."[3] Norris contended that the American people had been tricked into a war hysteria by a large number of newspapers and news agencies in "the greatest propaganda that the world has ever known to manufacture sentiment in favor of war." America had been misled as "to the real history and true facts by the almost unanimous demand of the great combination of wealth that has a direct financial interest in our participation in the war." The Nebraskan charged that the real reason the United States was entering the war was the fact that Wall Street had "loaned many hundreds of millions of dollars to the Allies in this controversy."[4]

To support his views that financial involvement was a factor in causing America's entrance into the war, Norris quoted from a letter written by a member of the New York Stock Exchange which expressed "the Wall Street view" that stocks and bonds would appreciate when the United States entered the war. The Senator had now been carried away and in emotional terms gave hyperbolic expression to his devil theory of war. In answer to the rhetorical question: "To whom does war bring prosperity?" he stated that war brings no prosperity to the great mass of common citizens, but it does bring prosperity to the monied classes. As anger seethed throughout the Senate Chamber Norris vehemently asserted:

> War brings prosperity to the stock gamblers on Wall Street. To those who are already in possession of more wealth that can be realized or enjoyed . . . Human suffering and the sacrifice of human life are necessary, but Wall Street considers only the dollars and cents . . . the stock brokers would not, of course, go to war, because the very object they have in bringing on war is profit, and therefore they must remain in their Wall Street offices in order to share in the great prosperity they say war will bring. The volunteer officer, even the drafting officer, will not find them. They will be concealed in their palatial offices on Wall Street, sitting behind mahogany desks, covered with clipped coupons—cou-

[3] *Congressional Record,* 65th Congress, 1st Session, 1:215.
[4] *Cong. Rec.,* 65th Cong., 1st Sess., 1:213.

> pons soiled with the sweat of honest toil, coupons stained with mothers' tears, coupons dyed in the lifeblood of their fellow men.

America was going into the war "upon the command of gold." A vote in favor of the war resolution was the equivalent of committing a sin against humanity. Norris continued his diatribe: "I would like to say this to the war god; 'You shall not coin into gold the lifeblood of my brethren' . . . I feel we are about to put the dollar sign upon the American flag." The only reason America was entering the war was "to preserve the commercial right of American citizens to deliver munitions of war to belligerent nations."[5]

Norris predicted that the munitions makers would make immense fortunes at the expense of society. Dire consequences might possibly follow. The balance of society would become poorer and poorer with the burden of increased taxation, until the country in time would become bankrupt, or else society would become bipolarized. Carried away by his own rhetoric he warned that there would be "a class of aristocracy and another class of citizens who would be practically slaves. All the property would be held by a few and in the end it would mean revolution."[6]

The argument outlining economic involvement was then buttressed by an appeal to traditional isolationist sentiments.[7] The troubles of Europe should be settled by Europe and the United States should remain absolutely neutral. If America entered the war, Norris warned, there would be entanglements which would continue and bring their evil influence upon many generations yet unborn. In an attitude of a plague on both your houses, he traced the route by which America had slowly retreated from neutrality to its current position on that unhappy April day. Both England and Germany had established military zones and

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[5] *Cong. Rec.*, 65th Cong., 1st Sess., 1.214.

[6] *Cong. Rec.*, 64th Cong., 1st Sess., 11:11189.

[7] Norris never changed his mind that the United States' entrance into World War I was motivated primarily by economic reasons. Twenty years later in a speech advocating President Franklin D. Roosevelt's cash and carry principle he reaffirmed his belief that the dollar sign had been placed upon the American flag.

warned neutral shipping from entering into the prohibited areas. In order to enforce her prohibitions, England had resorted to the use of submerged mines and Germany had resorted to the use of submarines. These were actions on the part of the belligerents which were contrary to all principles of international law and humanity. Germany was behaving with more humanity than England because the submarine was capable of exercising some degree of discretion and judgment, whereas the sea mine was an absolute unthinking menace to shipping.

In elaborating on the consequences of the establishment of the war zones Norris accused President Wilson of pro-British feeling. Of course, he reasoned, more ships and more American lives were lost from the action of submarines than from English mines in the North Sea simply because the Administration had acquiesced in the British zones and kept American ships out of it while we refused to recognize the legality of the German war zone. Both the English and German orders declaring military zones were illegal and contrary to international law. "The only difference," stated Norris, "is that in the case of Germany we have persisted in our protest, while in the case of England we have submitted."[8]

Senator Norris postulated a series of four alternatives which the American Government could have followed in the face of the extraordinary orders establishing war zones. First, America could have defied both England and Germany and have gone to war with both these nations for violating international law and interfering with neutral rights. Second, America had a technical right to defy one and to acquiesce in the other. Third, America could have denounced their actions as illegal, acquiesced in them, and thus remained neutral with both sides. In short, this would have amounted to a declaration to American ship owners that these orders were contrary to international law and were unjust, but that the provocation was insufficient to cause the United States to go to war in defense of its neu-

[8] *Cong. Rec.*, 65th Cong., 1st Sess., 1:214.

tral rights. Fourth, America might have declared an embargo against either one of the belligerent governments that had persisted in maintaining its military zone. Norris was of the opinion that if America had followed this last alternative the zones would have been of short duration. America should have maintained from the beginning the strictest neutrality and would have avoided the present unhappy circumstance.[9]

Congress did not heed the anti-war position of George W. Norris, Robert M. La Follette and others, and declared war against Germany. Once America had joined the hostilities, Norris, notwithstanding his firm opposition to the war, supported the military program. However, he remained convinced that America had entered into an unholy crusade for unholy reasons.

The Nebraskan's suspicion of Wall Street and the arms and munitions makers also extended to diplomatic secrecy. One of the difficulties with existing international relations, Norris maintained, was that there was too much secrecy. "Secrecy in government of any kind," the Senator once wrote, "always brings on suspicion and many times serious difficulties resulting even in war."[10] Norris believed that complete publicity in the conduct of international relations would go a long way to preserve the peace of the world. It was the problem of armament, however, that disturbed him the most. "It is a historical fact," he stated, "that no nation that has kept on increasing its army and developing its navy has not finally found an excuse to use them in battle."[11]

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[9] Norris had previously offered an amendment to the ship purchase bill in the hope of maintaining neutrality. This amendment provided: "That no vessel shall be purchased under this act which sails under the flag of any nation at war with any other nation which is at peace with the United States, unless prior to such purchase an understanding or agreement shall have been reached that will avoid any international difficulty or dispute regarding such purchase." *Cong. Rec.*, 63rd Cong., 3rd Sess., 3:2543.

[10] George W. Norris, "If I Were President," unpublished manuscript, n.d., 26, George W. Norris Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

[11] *Cong. Rec.*, 66th Cong., 1st Sess., 3:2592.

There would always be pressure, he admitted, for national armament. The militarists and corporations who had made billions from the manufacture of war materials would want to continue making their unconscionable and immoral profits. Programs of military preparedness were a waste of sustenance for things which brought no economic return. Furthermore, such programs acted as divisive elements in society. "War and the preparation for war," Norris asserted, "makes the rich richer and the poor poorer." The desire for profits on the part of the arms and munitions makers constituted the motivating force behind public sentiment in favor of a large military establishment. "If the governments of the world made their own armor plate and eliminated private gain," the Nebraskan reasoned, "we would see the navies to a great extent disappear from the waters of the earth."[12]

As far back as 1910, while still a member of the House of Representatives, Norris had introduced an amendment to reduce naval appropriations.[13] And during the Senatorial debate on military preparedness prior to the First World War he unsuccessfully offered an amendment to the naval appropriations bill designed to forestall the building of new battleships until after the conclusion of the European War. The Norris Amendment unrealistically provided that construction on the naval vessels appropriated within the bill could not be commenced until the President had made an effort to secure an agreement for the establishment of a permanent international court of arbitration.[14]

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[12] *Cong. Rec.*, 64th Cong., 1st Sess., 11:10934.
Norris was realistic enough to realize that his jeremiads against additional military expenditures would amount to nought. And so, in an effort to mitigate some of the evil consequences involved in armament procurement he advocated raising the additional revenue by increasing the income tax on large fortunes and by imposing a progressive federal inheritance tax. The munitions-bankers thesis that Wall Street had beguiled the country into war, held by Norris and many others was revived in the 1930's. Both *Merchants of Death* edited by Helmuth C. Engelbrecht in 1934 and the Nye Committee report of 1935 imputed war guilt to the world's international munitions tycoons.

[13] *Cong. Rec.*, 61st Cong., 2nd Sess., 4:4443.

[14] *Cong. Rec.*, 64th Cong., 1st Sess., 11:10934.

An increase in naval appropriations, to Norris, implied an initiation of a parade of horrors. If America would start out on a race to surpass the world in naval armament, soon other nations would join the race. The effect would be cumulative, with every country of any consequence eventually joining the mad race. It was nothing more than common sense to limit the navy. If such limitation was not forthcoming, dire economic consequences would surely follow. Bankruptcy would overtake America and blossom into political and social chaos. "When a nation goes through the court of bankruptcy," Norris warned, "every step that it takes is moistened with the blood of innocent human beings." The end result is revolution followed by bolshevism.

> Always without exception Bolsheviks hold their sway where revolution takes place, and we can, by overtaxing the people of the world and the people of this country more quickly than by any other means known to man, drive this world into Bolshevism and destruction, into bankruptcy, into rebellion, into revolution.[15]

If social and financial disaster did not occur, then war would be the inevitable result of such a naval race. Inexorably, conflict is the result of armament races. Norris dolefully predicted that if the world continued to arm, ultimately there would be another World War.

America, accordingly, was in a unique position to contribute to the peace of the world by not increasing its navy. Great Britain in persisting in its continuance of the armament race was doing a disservice both to herself and to the world. However, if England refused to stop constructing more ships, the United States should not worry about the matter. Norris, to support this view, was fond of quoting from Theodore Roosevelt's *Fear God and Take Your Own Part*. Roosevelt, always a proponent of a strong American navy, had pointed out that the American navy need not surpass the British navy in size and efficiency because the probabilities that the United States would go to war with Great Britain were exceedingly negligible. Even if Eng-

[15] *Cong. Rec.*, 67th Cong., 1st Sess., 2:1415.

land decided to continue her foolish arms race, the United States must unilaterally cease constructing monsters of destruction. "The question of naval armament for practical purposes reduces itself," Norris declared, "to that of Great Britain and the United States."[16] The other nations of the world were building battleships only because they considered it necessary as a result of the position of hegemony held by the United States and Great Britain. Therefore, Senator Norris, in 1929, the year in which President Herbert Hoover declared that the current expenditure of the American government on military activities constituted the largest military budget of any nation in the world, proposed an amendment to the naval bill then pending in the Senate.

The Amendment sought a conference between Great Britain and the United States for the purpose of limiting naval cruisers. The Nebraskan believed that it would be a great deal easier to reach an agreement between the two major powers and on only one issue of armament. This would eliminate the possibility of excuses being given by either or both of the conferees. Norris was of the opinion that if America made this proposal to its rival on the sea, especially coming so soon after the great powers had ratified the Kellogg-Briand Pact of Paris which solemnly condemned recourse to war for the solution of international controversies, the sentiment of the entire world would be directed toward Great Britain. The people of England would force its government to accept the American offer. Thus, it would not be necessary to have the agreement approved by the other nations of the world. Bilateral action on the part of the United States and Great Britain was all that was needed to stop the foolish armament race.

The Senator from Nebraska was not particularly surprised when his amendment for bilateral disarmament talks died quietly. At times Norris despaired of ever seeing the fruition of disarmament meetings. During the discussion in the Senate of the disarmament article (Article 8)

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[16] *Cong. Rec.*, 70th Cong., 2nd Sess., 3:2674, 2620, 2840.

in the Covenant of the League of Nations, he had predicted that it would be highly doubtful if disarmament would ever occur. He believed that Great Britain would never consent to any form of disarmament that did not leave her in full control of the seas.[17] And in a letter to his biographer, Alfred Lief, he expressed scant hope for successful disarmament conferences because these sessions were always composed "of men who do not believe in disarmament." Nothing would come of the conferences but an empty gesture. "If our delegates and the delegates of other countries are navy men who believe in big navies, it would not make much difference what they discussed. The outcome would always be the same."[18]

Nevertheless, despite his occasional discouragement, the Senator's abiding faith in the ultimate triumph of public opinion justified his continued advocacy of disarmament proposals. Norris always believed that:

> In every civilized Government public sentiment is the great moving force that will ultimately and finally be victorious. Statesmen do not always know it, rulers do not always recognize it, but in the end it will always prevail. . . This sentiment that comes up from the common people will finally reach the rulers and make its influence felt upon thrones.[19]

Although the Senator never lost his faith in the collective wisdom of the common people and the utility of international meetings, his traditional opposition to armament and American involvement in world affairs began to undergo a slow transformation during the middle 1930's as a reaction to the harsh policies of militant dictatorships in Germany, Italy, and Japan. He staunchly approved of President Roosevelt's 1935 neutrality proclamation; the proper policy was "to abstain entirely from foreign en-

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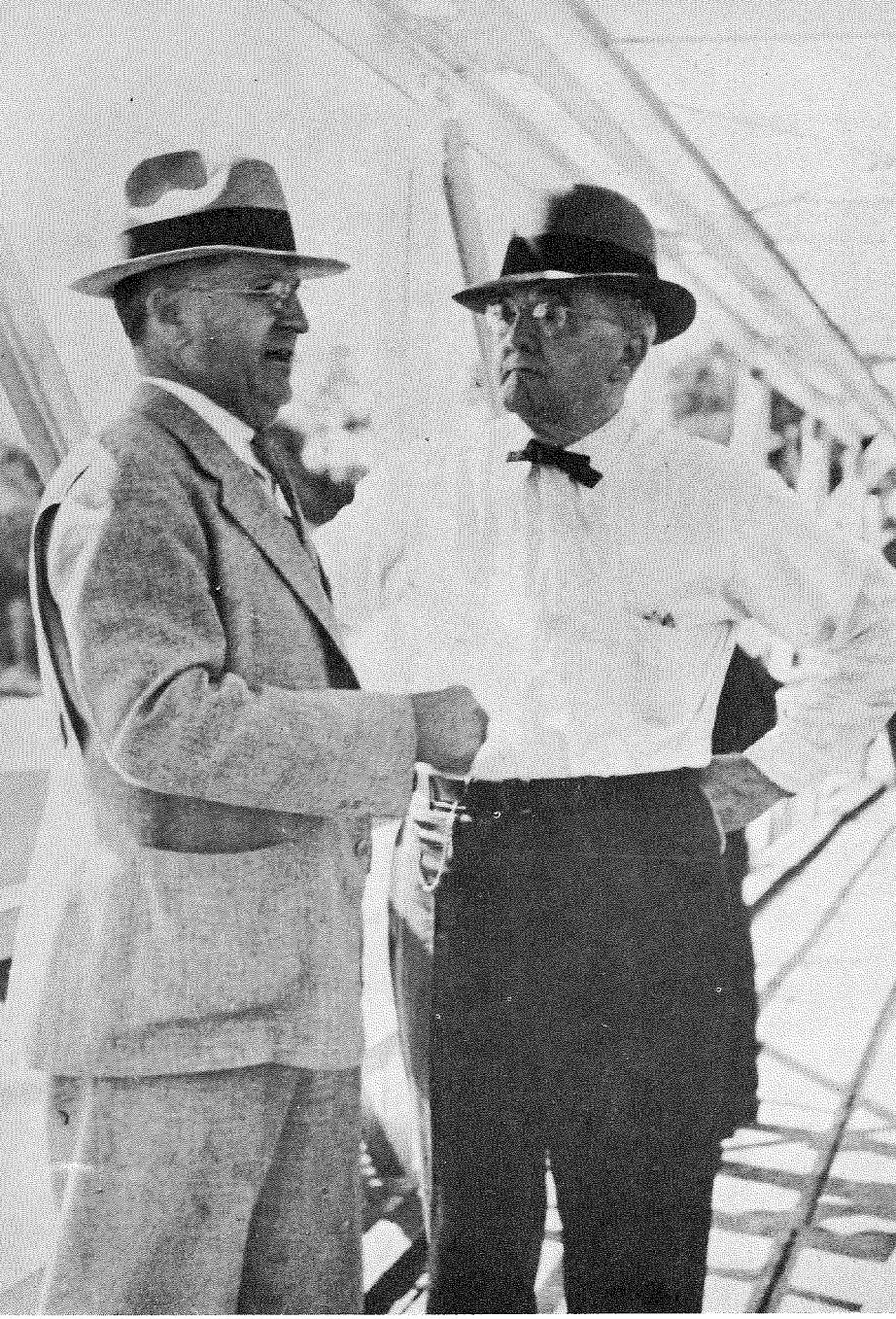
[17] *Cong. Rec.*, 66th Cong., 1st Sess., 1-9: 8567.
[18] Norris to Alfred Lief, December 30, 1931. Norris Papers.
[19] *Cong. Rec.*, 64th Cong., 1st Sess., 11:10931.

George W. Norris in 1903

Senator Norris
(Photograph by Harris and Ewing, Washington, D. C.)

President Roosevelt presenting pen, with which he has signed the act creating the Tennessee Valley Authority, to Senator Norris

Norris Campaigning for Roosevelt, 1936



Senator Norris and E. H. Dunmire of Kansas City inspect a project

Christian A. Sorensen

tanglements."[20] But his belief that an armaments race led only to a holocaust began to be modified under the pressure of foreign events. Armament, he reluctantly admitted, although extremely distressing, might become an unwanted necessity.[21]

By March, 1938, after Hitler had occupied and annexed Austria to Germany, the Nebraskan had come to believe that developments outside American borders might invite war unless the United States was prepared. He stated that he had modified his position somewhat "on the question of a large Navy at least to the extent" that America should be "armed to a greater extent than Japan is armed or greater than either Italy or Germany is armed." He had begun to realize that "if the policies of Hitler or Mussolini or Japan are carried to their logical conclusion the doctrine they advocate will spread and the civilized world ultimately will have to contend against the barbarous conduct they have inaugurated. "Force," he observed, "is the only thing which stops them from conquering the world." Six months before the Munich debacle signaled the impending European struggle, Senator Norris expressed a desire to have the United States participate in a conference with the other nations of the world that opposed the Rome-Berlin Axis. However, he was not in favor of any conference in which America would "be bound in any way to engage in war in Europe or Asia."[22] Armed neutrality should be the watchword for America.

Shortly after Hitler's armies invaded Poland, Norris, on October 3, 1939, delivered a nation-wide radio address

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[20] Neutrality would prevent Wall Street from pushing the United States into another war. In a letter to one of his correspondents, Norris reaffirmed his financial-interest theory of war. "If we continue to trade with warring nations, the danger will be that those who have thus obtained a financial interest in the war, will start propaganda in order to get America into the war to save their financial investments." Norris to Richard Manthey, October 14, 1935. Norris Papers.

[21] The first indication that Norris was altering his preparedness position came after Mussolini's rape of Ethiopia. *Cong. Rec.*, 74th Cong., 2nd Sess., 6:6805.

[22] *United States News*, March 28, 1938.

in which he outlined a policy for the American government to pursue which would be least liable to get America into another European war. He predicated his argument on the isolationist doctrine that "the struggle going on in Europe is Europe's struggle." It is a catastrophe which is beyond the jurisdiction of the United States. America should learn from the lessons of the last war. The United States government, during World War I, had become a collection agency. "Financial influence was brought to bear to bring the American Government into the war." In order to prevent a repetition of American blood being coined into gold it was necessary to change the Embargo Law.

Senator Norris followed President Roosevelt's foreign policy urging a change in the neutrality legislation. He advocated the principle of cash and carry—it should be unlawful to export or transport to a belligerent nation anything of any kind until title to the property had been transferred and the goods paid for. "Therefore, no American citizen will have any interest whatever in the property sold, and if the property is destroyed on the seas, no American citizen will have any financial interest in it." The Nebraskan was in favor of making it unlawful for any American vessel to carry passengers or war materials to any port of a belligerent nation. In addition, no American citizen or vessel should be permitted to proceed into any combat area upon the seas. No American citizen should be permitted to travel on ships of any belligerent nation, and no commercial American ship should be armed. Norris favored FDR's proposal that it be made unlawful "for any person within the United States to purchase bonds or securities or other obligations of any belligerent government, or any political subdivision of such government."[23]

In short, Norris took the position that the prevention of economic ties and the elimination of possible incidents would prevent the United States from being catapulted into a European war. He conceded that the proposed changes

[23] George W. Norris, "American Neutrality." *Cong. Rec.*, 76th Cong., 2nd Sess., 2:A128.

in the Embargo Law—particularly the cash and carry principle—might be somewhat favorable to France and England. But favoritism was permissible insofar as France and England were fighting the battle of humanity and civilization against immoral and dishonorable foes.

George W. Norris had evolved slowly a rationale which permitted him to depart from his traditional isolationism and enter into a form of modified interventionism.[24] The Senator now believed that the "world is confronted with two radically different philosophies of government." These forms of government were either democratic or dictatorial. The dictatorial philosophy of government—the Hitlerian ethic—hithertofore had never been proposed in any civilized society. "That theory is that any government has the right to conquer any other government or any other people if it has the power to do so."[25] This philosophy of government started first with Japan when she stole Manchukuo. Then Mussolini adopted the policy and conquered Abyssinia. Finally Hitler carried the precedent further, and Russia followed suit by making war on Finland.

By 1941, Norris had come to the conclusion that America must give aid as well as moral support to England in her battle against Hitler. Nevertheless, when the Lend Lease Bill, bearing the numerical designation H.R.1776, a date so redolent of freedom, arrived in the Senate, Norris,

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[24] Although Norris was willing to modify his previous stand against an increase in naval armament and support to the Allies, he nevertheless remained adamant in his opposition to compulsory military service. His great objection to such legislation was the effect it would have on America in the years to come. It would bring about a radical change in the historic course of the American nation—it would lead to militarism. "If we are to have compulsory military training in time of peace," he said in the Senate, "we shall put ourselves on a level with the dictator nations of the world." Compulsory military training was synonymous with militarism and all its evil effects. *Cong. Rec.*, 76th Cong., 3rd Sess., 9:10113.

[25] This rationale on forms of government and the need for American aid to England was set forth in Norris' radio address "The Lend-Lease Bill" on February 26, 1941, and reached its climax in a commencement address given by him at Wooster College, Ohio, on June 16, 1941, in which the dictatorships were characterized as having "pagan philosophies of government." *Cong. Rec.*, 77th Cong., 1st Sess., 10:A873.

despite his deep attachment to the cause of England, could not completely abandon his traditional ties to American isolation. He proposed an amendment designed to insure America against being drawn into a foreign war:

> Nothing in this act shall be construed to authorize the President, without the consent of Congress, to send the armed forces of the United States to fight on foreign soil outside of the Western Hemisphere or the territorial or insular possessions of the United States, including the Philippine Islands.[26]

The Senator recognized that the passage of the Lend-Lease Bill would convert the United States from a friendly neutral into a full-fledged non-belligerent. However, aside from the idealistic reasons for aiding Great Britain, he believed there were sound economic reasons for the lend-lease program. Should Hitler vanquish England, Europe would then be under his domination and the United States then would be shut out of European commerce. Furthermore, Hitler would be able to infiltrate the South American countries. America would be confined to her own borders and her foreign trade would dwindle and then disappear. Common business sense, Norris pragmatically asserted, should show it was cheaper for England to fight Hitler than the United States. "If England goes down to an honorable grave, there will be no one left to confront these Axis Powers except our own Government, and we shall have to spend $2.00 to $1.00 of theirs to build the same amount of armaments. If England fails, America will soon reach the time when our own efforts at preparation will destroy us."[27]

The problem of lend-lease to Great Britain, however, had become moot after Pearl Harbor. Once again George W. Norris sat in the Senate and listened to a President gravely request a declaration of war. This time the now aged Nebraskan voted for war. Norris always maintained that there was no inconsistency in his attitude toward the two war resolutions. The circumstances in 1917 and in 1941 were dissimilar. The basic difference was that in 1917

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[26] *Cong. Rec.*, 77th Cong., 1st Sess., 2:1979.
[27] *Cong. Rec.*, 77th Cong., 1st Sess., 10:A874.

there was no immediate threat of war reaching American soil, whereas in 1941 an act of aggression had been committed against the United States.

However, even before December 7, 1941, Norris had recognized that the character of the Fuhrer's aggression was not the same as the Kaiser's machinations. In an article provocatively entitled "US Must Save Britain Even If It Means War" Norris wrote:

> We were, in my opinion not justified in entering the last world war, but conditions which confronted us then have no similarity to the conditions which confront us now. At that time there was still honor among nations and men, even though they were enemies upon the battlefield. The enslavement of peoples was not then at stake. There was no likelihood that the life of our own nation, as well as that of every other democracy in the world, would be endangered, no matter what the outcome of the war might be. There was no claim or belief in the mind of anyone that, if Germany won the war, it would be followed by a war in this hemisphere. However, in this war, we are confronted with an enemy whose ambitions are known to the world and that means destruction of every democracy in the world.[28]

Norris' willingness to defend democracy even at the unhappy price of war was thoroughly consistent with his previous attitude despite his first anti-war vote. As far back as 1916, when he opposed the Wilson preparedness program he had conceded that war often had settled questions in the interest of liberty and humanity.[29] World War I had been instigated at the command of gold and involved no humanitarian considerations, but World War II was a struggle to preserve democracy.

Although war might be justified to preserve democracy, Norris still contended that recourse to it to solve international disputes was illogical, atavistic, and archaic. The greatest disgrace of the century was the fact that war between civilized nations remained a possibility. War, a relic of barbarism, was a condition painful "to every lover

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[28] George W. Norris, "US Must Save Britain Even If It Means War," *The Sunday Oregonian,* September 14, 1941.

[29] *Cong. Rec.,* 64th Cong., 1st Sess., 11:10932.

of humanity and to every believer in the great brotherhood of man."[30]

George W. Norris with his abiding faith in the wisdom of the common man and his belief in the progress of civilization entertained the hope that logic and humanity would ultimately triumph and war would become an unpleasant memory. Fully five years before the outbreak of World War I and a decade in advance of the fight in the United States Senate over the confirmation of the Versailles settlements, Norris in a Chautauqua tour had advocated a League of Nations to prevent war and ensure permanent peace.[31] He did not, however, develop a systematic expression of his views that arbitration rather than war should be the basis for the settlement of international disputes until Europe was actually at war.

Arbitration to settle national disputes, he believed, is a manifestation of being civilized. Insofar as every civilized nation of the world requires its subjects to submit their differences to law courts for settlement there is no justifiable reason why kings and rulers should settle their disputes on the battlefield. The ruling clique of the world should begin to realize that sentiment for world peace has been growing rapidly for many years. "This is because the great common people of the world who have been compelled to fight the battle of kings and rulers have realized from their own experience and their own observation the unreasonableness and criminal folly of going to war." This sentiment for peace, Norris contended, has not come down from the throne but has come up from the people to the ruling classes. The people know that might does not make right and that war is not only wrong and useless but it brings misery to the victor as well as to the vanquished. The time had come to build for international peace. The difficult problem was agreeing to the method of attaining this peace. Norris optimistically believed universal peace

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[30] *Cong. Rec.*, 65th Cong., 1st Sess., 1:215.

[31] George W. Norris, *Fighting Liberal: The Autobiography of George W. Norris,* (New York, 1945), 203.

would be capable of attainment, for the passions of men are the same throughout the world. "Humanity is broader than nationality and embraces within its scope the entire world."[32] The English, French, Germans, and others, he said, will ultimately come to realize that there is no real enmity among them; there is only friendship. As soon as the peoples of the world realize that it is the rulers who bring on war they will have a different attitude. The German farmer and the French farmer who till the soil with only an imaginary line between their farms are basically friends.

However, Norris granted that the inherent friendship of people toward other people is subject to the historical tensions caused by a strain of jealousy that is the residue of barbarian times. The early national rulers had resorted to trickery, chicanery, and dishonesty in their attempts to conquer additional territory. This created mutual distrust among the nations which still permeated the framework of the whole European culture. But, in the New World these conditions did not prevail. The divine right of kings and the right of conquest had been repudiated. America, thus, was unique among the nations of the world in this respect. "Our entire national life," Norris affirmed in the Senate, "has been emblematic of an unselfish respect for the right of other nations and is not tainted with that suspiciousness which has come down to others from ancient times.[33] As an example of this, Norris uncritically cited the role President Theodore Roosevelt had played in the termination of the Russo-Japanese War.[34]

In the midst of World War I, Norris contended that the world was ready for permanent peace. Certainly Europe would welcome eternal peace. He suggested, accordingly, that at the close of the struggle the President of the

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[32] *Cong. Rec.*, 64th Cong., 1st Sess., 11:10931.

[33] *Cong. Rec.*, 64th Cong., 1st Sess., 11:10932.

[34] Norris, perhaps bedazzled by Theodore Roosevelt's subsequent Nobel peace prize, failed to recognize that TR's diplomacy during the Treaty of Portsmouth had been preceded by the secret Taft-Katsura memorandum and was a product of *machtpolitik* rather than idealism.

United States, after having been duly authorized by Congress, should propose to the belligerent nations that the United States would be willing to enter into a treaty of peace with them. In such a treaty a permanent court of arbitration would be established for the settlement of all future international disputes. This treaty of peace would also provide for the limitation of both land and sea armament. An international navy would be maintained to enforce the decrees of the international court.

In elaborating the conditions for the establishment of a peace mechanism Norris adopted as his model the Hague Permanent Court of Arbitration. In instances of national disagreement that could not be settled by diplomacy the contending parties would select a tribunal from a panel of this international court. Norris, at this time, believed that the judges of this court would be free from any bias and would dispense equal justice to any of the petitioning countries. Ultimately, the world would have a body of international jurists who would devote their full time and energies to the settlement of international disputes. Any question once determined by this great court would become a beacon light of peace for future generations.

It was indeed a sad commentary on modern civilization, he argued, that the great nations of the world while compelling their own citizens to submit their disputes to tribunals organized under general law, themselves violated the principles of the very law which they enforce upon their subjects. Norris naively believed that "the same principle of law and equity that settles an ordinary lawsuit before a justice of the peace will, if properly applied, without any change or addition, settle every dispute that can possibly arise between nations."[35]

George W. Norris was an idealist who accepted the American concept of mission. He felt "the eternal hand of fate . . . beckoning for America to take the lead." "The American government," he asserted, was "the one nation

[35] *Cong. Rec.*, 66th Cong., 1st Sess., 3:2592.

in all the world that can take the first step" in establishing permanent world harmony.[36] Yet when the test came to help create an international league and establish arbitration courts, Norris opposed these proposed plans. Essentially the Nebraskan based his opposition to the ratification of the treaty of peace with Germany and the establishment of the League of Nations on the contention that they were offensive to principles of justice. The Versailles treaty, he moralized, was founded on no principle of equity and contained within itself the seeds of wickedness and injustice. He insisted that the constitution for a League of Nations should concentrate only on those elements absolutely necessary to carry out the object of the compact. All other items would be extraneous and lend themselves to the creation of additional problems. Accordingly, the peacemakers should devote themselves to four major issues: the elimination of armament among nations, the abolition of conquest, the renunciation of secrecy in international relations, and the establishment of a mechanism of arbitration for disputes among nations.

In 1919, Senator Norris was not afraid that entering such a League of Nations would amount to a surrendering of America's sovereignty. Admittedly, complete liberty of action would be circumscribed by the constitution of the League; but this, he insisted, is something which is true of every agreement in civilization. "Absolute freedom in any civilized society can not be had, and the assertion and attempt to practice such freedom is anarchy. The only man who has complete personal liberty is the barbarian living alone in the woods." Norris acknowledged that "human society is built upon the principle that we must surrender some of our individual freedom for the benefit of the whole."[37]

He was willing to include the Monroe Doctrine within the purview of the proposed League of Nations. In this respect Norris was unlike many isolationists who feared

[36] *Cong. Rec.*, 64th Cong., 1st Sess., 11:10932-10933.
[37] *Cong. Rec.*, 66th Cong., 1st Sess., 3:2593.

that joining the League would mean that henceforth European nations might encroach upon exclusive American control of the Western Hemisphere. He argued it would be acceptable to do this because the Monroe Doctrine would never have been promulgated had there been no secret treaties and secret agreements. The object of the Monroe Doctrine, he said, was to prohibit conquest within the Western Hemisphere by the nations of the Eastern Hemisphere. Norris, again contrary to prevalent isolationist sentiment, saw in the League a means whereby America might avoid entangling alliances.

Norris pointed out, however, that the Versailles Treaty contained not only a provision for a League of Nations, but a remaking of the entire map of the world. It violated every sense of justice with the transfer of a great portion of the Chinese Empire to Japan. Section 158 of the Treaty provided that all rights, privileges, and possessions of Germany in China would be turned over to Japan. The Senator strongly believed that the practical result of this provision would amount to giving Japan control over China. Germany initially had no right in China "that any honest man was bound to respect." This action transferred millions of innocent people to the rule and control of their worst enemy and was violative of the principle of self-determination of peoples. Japan's bestial activities in Korea were a prelude to what would happen in China. The Nebraskan did not wish to build an international tribunal founded "upon the betrayal of any people, however weak."[38]

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[38] On September 7, 1919, Senator Norris delivered in the Senate a lengthy and sometimes painfully obvious allegorical dissertation on the Shantung settlement which embodied a covert attack on President Wilson. The allegory had to do with characters whose identity was plain from the descriptive names given to them—Bill Kaiser, John Chinaman, Mr. Jap, Miss Korea, John Bull, Mr. French, Mr. Italiano, and Miss Columbia. These people lived in a place called the "Troubled Community." Bill Kaiser breaks loose and begins preying upon his neighbors. The allegory touches only incidentally the First World War; it is devoted to the Shantung seizure by Bill Kaiser and the subsequent course of Mr. Jap in driving out Bill Kaiser and his taking possession of Shantung for himself. *Cong. Rec.*, 66th Cong., 1st Sess., 3:2593-2595.

Not only was the transference of Chinese sovereignty to Japan indefensible, but the procedure by which this was brought about was reprehensible and indefensible, for it involved the use of secret diplomacy. The treaty then would be giving sanction to the employment of secret diplomacy. Sanctioning Japanese control over China would also amount to giving Japan free reign to destroy Christianity and establish paganism. The secret treaties entered into by England, Japan, and France, by which Shantung was turned over to Japan were in direct violation of the Fourteen Points, and particularly of that portion which provided for self-determination of peoples.

Norris wanted to strike Article 10 from the Treaty because the real object of it was "to maintain the world supremacy of the British Empire, and the next object . . . to maintain the Japanese Empire." The Nebraskan, along with many others who had reservations about joining the League, was of the opinion that the British Empire would have too much voting power in the League. "It seems to me," Norris observed in the Senate, "that the wording of the document demonstrates beyond the possibility of doubt that this one Empire has in the League under this treaty six votes as against any other nation whose representatives signed the treaty and which becomes a member of the League under the treaty."[39]

In a fervor of righteous indignation Norris emphasized that Article 10 would not help the weak nations. It would only serve to uphold the cruel aristocratic reigns of greedy kings and pagan monarchs. Article 10 was inserted in order "to stifle the cry of freedom from Ireland, . . . to keep in subjection the 400,000,000 of people in India, . . . to compel Egypt to remain as a part of the British Em-

[39] Article 10 of the Covenant of the League of Nations provided: "The Members of the League undertake to respect and preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all Members of the League. In case of any such aggression or in case of any threat or danger of such aggression the Council shall advise upon the means by which this obligation shall be fulfilled." *Cong. Rec.*, 66th Cong., 1st Sess., 8:8274, 7688.

pire, . . . to nail down the coffin of Korea and hold Shantung in subjection to Japan."[40]

The Senator particularly opposed the treaty provisions concerning Egypt which he categorized as another Shantung. The same thing that Japan did when she took Korea had also been done by Great Britain in Egypt. But people were unaware of these things because censorship in London, Tokyo, and in Washington kept the world in ignorance of the crimes committed at Versailles in the name of peace.

Norris could not possibly sanction the treaty because to do so would violate every principle for which the American forefathers fought. To condemn the treaty it was sufficient to know that every pledge made by which hostilities were ended and the armistice signed had been violated. One could not build a permanent peace upon a foundation of broken pledges. Such attempts had always failed and would continue to fail because they violate the eternal principles of human progress. "This treaty, if approved," warned Norris, "while containing these inhuman and dishonorable things, will bring misery, suffering, and war to those who shall follow us, because they are in violation of nature's laws which are as immutable and unchangeable as the heavens."[41] The treaty as presented to the Senate "absolutely means future war."[42]

Although Norris rejected the Versailles Treaty he always looked for a royal road to peace. He entertained a great deal of respect for the pet peace schemes of his distinguished fellow Nebraskan, William Jennings Bryan. The Senator maintained that the Bryan Peace Treaties were of great benefit to civilization and even ventured the opinion that "had such treaties existed between the nations of Europe there would have been no World War." The utility of the Bryan Peace Treaties, he thought, lay in the proposed waiting period during which time neither of the aggrieved countries would begin hostilities. During this

[40] *Cong. Rec.*, 66th Cong., 1st Sess., 8:8274.
[41] *Cong. Rec.*, 66th Cong., 2nd Sess., 4:3576.
[42] *Cong. Rec.*, 66th Cong., 1st Sess., 7:6791.

waiting period "passion would be held back; reason and logic would be given an opportunity to operate."[43]

Although Senator Norris remained in favor of international cooperation as manifested in the Bryan Peace Treaties and disarmament conferences, the willingness with which he had previously endorsed an international tribunal began to wane in the 1920's. Norris' changed attitude toward a World Court was coincidental with his growing disillusionment and distrust of the European nations occasioned by the Versailles settlements and the disposition of the allied war debts. In the mid-1920's the Nebraskan expressed a cautiously ambivalent attitude toward United States adherence to the World Court. In a statement to the New York *Times* he said:

> Fundamentally I was in favor of the League of Nations then came the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations Covenant. I had to vote against them because they did not do those things for which I could conscientiously give my vote. As to membership in the World Court, I do not believe the court is nearly as bad as its opponents paint it, nor as good as its friends say it is. Possibly it may do good, and I do not believe it can do us harm if we say we will not be bound to use force to enforce its decisions; if it does not entangle us in any way, and if we agree to take our cases before it when we, under our right, are willing to do so.[44]

Some years later in a letter to Carrie Chapman Catt, Honorary Chairman of the National Committee on the Cause and Cure of War, Norris again conceded that the World Court was a good thing, but for Europe, not for the United States. One must never forget, he maintained, that the European nations were selfish and had pushed the

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[43] The Bryan treaties provided for the submission of all disputes to permanent commissions which would investigate the controversies for a period of one year. During this interval of investigation neither country would resort to war or increase its armament. After the completion of the investigation, the parties might accept or reject the commission's findings. Although war was not renounced, it was the intent of the treaties that peace would be maintained because of the "cooling-off" period. Bryan, as Secretary of State, negotiated thirty such agreements with Great Britain, France, Italy, and lesser powers in 1913 and 1914. George W. Norris, "Bryan as a Political Leader," *Current History,* XXII (September, 1925), 860.

[44] New York *Times,* December 29, 1925.

United States into an unwanted foreign war. They had taken all the spoils of victory for themselves and were unwilling to return the money America had lent them to make their victory possible. The Nebraskan was convinced that Europe had only one use for America; that was to have the United States "at the sacrifice of human life and treasury make it possible for their selfish chestnuts to be pulled out of the international fire." Senator Norris' letter to Mrs. Catt continued:

> I have seen this Court organized by nations, every one of which is jealous to a very high degree of our country. After we sacrificed the lives of many of our noblest citizens to help them out, they demanded that we cancel the debts which they owe us, and because we have been unwilling to do this, I am satisfied there had grown up among these selfish nations a hatred of the American Government which a fair investigation will demonstrate is bitter and relentless.[45]

Insofar as the World Court was a good thing for Europe, the Senator did not want to interfere with any movement or organization which would have a tendency to decide questions in dispute between nations in a court of reason rather than on the battlefield. He had voted for the World Court when it was before the Senate for the first time, but he did so because of the reservations which had been attached. When the World Court proposal was again pending in the Senate in January, 1935, Norris cautiously insisted on qualified membership and introduced a reservation which called for "the express condition and understanding that no dispute or question in which the United States Government is a party shall be submitted to said Permanent Court of International Justice unless such submission has been approved by the United States Senate by a two-thirds vote." The Nebraskan was opposed to submitting all issues to the World Court because "the nations of Europe are part of another form of civilization." He was reluctant to have the United States join an international court where "the judges are men who have lived under

[45] Norris to Carrie Chapman Catt, March 7, 1932. Norris Papers. The sentiments expressed in this letter were part of a form letter used by the Senator's office at that time.

different conditions, who have different ideas of society, who have different ideas of government, who come in the main from different kinds of governments than under which we live."[46] Norris feared that these cultural differences would create a bias against the United States in the determination of some questions to which the United States was a party.

Senator Norris' post World War I distrust of unqualified adherence to a Permanent World Court represents a departure from his previous attitude toward international arbitration. In 1916 when Norris first systematically developed his ideas concerning a world court he had not been worried about American loss of sovereignty or about national interests influencing the tribunal. He believed that the court would be removed from the currents of international power politics. But the experience of World War I and the peace settlement soured him. He now recognized that international politics were immoral. "During the war," he explained in a letter to one of his constituents, he had had his "eyes opened to many things which . . . demonstrated that our Allies were not always acting in good faith." A clear indication of Allied bad faith, Norris thought, was the war debt problem. This only proved the European nations were not to be trusted and that the United States should not enter the World Court without reservations. He agreed with Coolidge's myopic view that the Europeans had "hired the money" and accordingly were legally and morally obligated to repay it. To Norris the entire debt question was summed up in the proposition "whether the American taxpayer or the European taxpayer shall pay these debts." The Senator was opposed to all of the settlements which were made with European nations because America had made those loans under a statute which definitely defined the conditions. The American Government had borrowed the money from its citizens; now the European nations were failing to live up to their obligations. It would be better to forgive some of the debts

[46] *Cong. Rec.*, 74th Cong., 1st Sess., 1:965.

entirely than to accept the settlements that were made. Italy, Norris charged, boasted that she headed the world in military air strength. If it were not for Italy's military preparations she then would be able to repay the United States. France was also guilty; she refused to pay America even interest while at the same time she had carried on an African war and had supplied men, money, and munitions to Poland. Furthermore, the Young Plan and the Dawes Plan were makeshifts "brought about mostly by the international bankers."[47]

Neither the pressure of domestic troubles nor foreign aggression against the European democracies induced Norris to change his attitude regarding the debt question. In an attempt to ameliorate the widespread agricultural depression of the early 1930's, Henry A. Wallace, future New Deal Secretary of Agriculture and then editor of his family's influential agricultural periodical *Wallace's Farmer*, wrote to Norris suggesting that it might be wise to go along with President Herbert Hoover's war debt moratorium because "it fits in with the fight we in the midwest are making for an honest dollar and higher prices." The Nebraskan was unimpressed with Wallace's logic and in his reply reiterated his moralistic position that the European nations were not acting in good faith. America was "paying through taxation for the building of armaments, battleships, etc. . . . by these foreign nations."[48] In the spring of 1940, when Hitler's *Blitzkrieg* ended the "phony war," Democratic Representative Andrew J. May of Kentucky, Chairman of the House Military Affairs Committee, urged the relaxation of the Johnson Act which banned American credits or loans to nations which had defaulted on their World War I debts. Norris strenuously attacked May's proposal and stressed his economic-interest theme that the best way to become embroiled in a foreign war

[47] Norris to John W. Little, January 20, 1926, L. T. Youngsblood, May 15, 1926, H. N. Jewett, May 22, 1925, C. G. Binderup, December 29, 1931; Norris Papers.

[48] Henry A. Wallace to Norris, December 18, 1931. Norris to Wallace, January 21, 1932; Norris Papers.

would be to permit America to become financially involved overseas.[49]

Although George W. Norris was greatly disillusioned by the Versailles Treaty and exceedingly critical of the European powers for defaulting on their war debts, he nonetheless always recognized the necessity for international cooperation. A year after the aged Marshal Petain had surrendered France to the Germans and a week before Hitler launched his attack against the Soviet Union, Senator Norris in a commencement address delivered at Wooster College, Ohio, in June, 1941, warned against repeating the mistakes of Versailles and optimistically philosophized about the peace which would come after the overthrow of the Axis powers. "The peace which should follow the destruction of Hitler and his pagan philosophy of government," he opined, "should be one which will give prominence to the liberality of the conquerer in the day of his victory." America should sit down with the victors at the peace table and help construct a world order founded on human love and brotherhood. It should be a peace which would include no reparations or indemnities which would mean the sentencing "of the conquered people to a life of servitude." The peace should call for complete disarmament of Germany and the restoration of all the conquered nations. England and the restored nations should be called in conference to make an effort to bring about universal disarmament. Norris still believed that "if the world is disarmed everlasting peace will follow."[50]

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[49] New York *Times,* May 13, 1940.

[50] George W. Norris, "A Pagan Philosophy of Government," *Cong. Rec.,* 77th Cong., 1st Sess., 12:A2862.
In an interview with a *New York Times* reporter on the occasion of his eightieth birthday, Norris gave a homely and exceedingly unsophisticated illustration of the evil effects of armament. He told his interviewer that once he had a cow who possessed a very fine pair of horns; but because of those horns she was a mean animal. Norris related that he "went to a neighbor who had a dehorning machine and asked him to come down and dehorn that cow . . . she lost her armament . . . she didn't want to fight anymore. It's the same way with nations. When they are disarmed and get used to it, they are only too glad to go back to their peaceful way of living." Harold Hinton, "This is Not Like 1917—Says Norris," *New York Times Magazine,* (July 6, 1941), 7.

During World War II the Senator reaffirmed his belief that the successful termination of the conflict would bring a new opportunity to create a peace that would be carved "in the image of eternity." In a lecture at the University of Nebraska he presented a broad outline of the principles underlying the future settlement to be concluded at the cessation of the then current hostilities. A permanent peace must be established, he reasoned, because "this impoverished, battered world of ours cannot afford the luxury and the crime of a third world war." Despite the nature of the war, the Allies must guard against violence producing violence, and hate breeding hate. "Restraint of the determination for revenge," he counseled, "is one of the sacrifices we must impose upon ourselves." It was only by contemplating the future and thinking in terms of endless time that the Allies would find "the strength, the inspiration, and the vision to restrain the natural impulses ... and forego revenge upon enemies who do not deserve mercy."[51]

The prime requisite for a lasting peace, he emphasized, would be the imposition of complete disarmament upon the subjugated enemy. "The predominating and the great preliminary step in the attainment of perpetual peace," Norris always insisted, "was the outlawing of those weapons which make war possible."[52] Manufacture of all kinds of military weapons must be made impossible by the complete destruction of every plant devoted to war production. The victorious Allies must instill into the hearts of the vanquished Axis the recognition that their disarmament is necessary for the peace of the world. Initially the Allies would have to police the aggressor countries but this would be only for

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[51] George W. Norris, *Peace Without Hate,* (Lincoln: 1943), 36, 12, 18, 23.
The spirit of charity, however, did not preclude the punishment of war criminals. Where there had been a wanton violation of ordinary conceptions of justice and decency the course was clear and simple. "Those men," wrote Norris in his *Autobiography,* "who are guilty should be brought to trial. Punishment should be meted out based upon the conceptions of justice which have governed civilization in its wisdom." Norris, *Fighting Liberal,* 384.

[52] Norris, *Peace,* 20.

a period of fifty or sixty years. An international commission could be established with adequate power and facilities to investigate any possible move to violate the disarmament provisions of the treaty. Ultimately, the Nebraskan was certain, the problem of disarmament would take care of itself. One must have faith in America and her Allies if perpetual peace was to be achieved.

In addition to disarmament, Norris maintained, the victor nations must not demand of the defeated aggressor nations unconscionable indemnities. The defeated nations must be given time to recover and to rehabilitate their peacetime productive capacities. All war debts should be repudiated for two reasons. First, repudiation would have a tendency to cause the financier, who furnished the money for war and profited by war, to hesitate before he lends money to any nation that sets out to conquer the world. Second, it would permit the aggressor nations to pay a larger sum into the indemnity chest to help reimburse the Allied nations for some of the losses which they had sustained.

But the supreme obligation of the Allies was to be Good Samaritans, to feed the starving and clothe the naked. America must take the lead in hope of restoring a tortured world to plenty and to peace. The burden of peace which America and the Allies must want is the burden of helping the enemy to his feet. The concept of *lex talionis*—an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth—must be repudiated. America must lead the Allies in building a peace without hate.

A peace without hate, Norris believed, could be established through international cooperation. In one of his last published articles he advocated the post-war creation of some sort of a League of Nations which would be open to all the countries of the world, including Germany.[53] But the Senator never lived to see the Allied victory and the establishment of the United Nations. Whether or not he

[53] George W. Norris, "Germany After Defeat," *New Republic,* CX (May 22, 1944), 704.

would have agreed with the details of the peace settlement following World War II would be dangerous speculation at best. One, nevertheless, can be certain that he would have agreed to many of the principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations. George W. Norris always affirmed his faith in human rights and international brotherhood and always opposed the scourge of war.