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Article Summary: North Dakota had consistently opposed "foreign adventure" until after World War II. Residents' German roots and/or a concern for liberalism may have contributed to that attitude. The author suggests that increasing prosperity and the growth of larger towns and cities since the war might change those opinions.

*Scroll down for complete article.*

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## THE NON-ETHNIC ROOTS OF NORTH DAKOTA ISOLATIONISM

BY ROBERT P. WILKINS

THE strength of the isolationist impulse, which in North Dakota has arrayed its spokesmen against such popular national figures as Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Dwight D. Eisenhower, is attributed by most authorities to the concentration of Germans within its borders. The continuing existence in that state of the most virulent form of isolationism for almost half a century—into a period when Germany is no longer the national enemy—would suggest the inadequacy of the ethnic interpretation.

North Dakota was the least urbanized of the forty-eight states in 1914, the last agricultural frontier in America. Almost four fifths of its population was rural in character: 72 per cent lived on farms; another 17 per cent lived in villages or towns of fewer than 2500 persons. Country people, as described by James Bryce, tend to be less liable

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to be "moved by sudden excitement . . . less eager and volatile and hasty than the dwellers in cities. . . ." <sup>1</sup> Pro-war agitation and propaganda did not have the appeal for these people which it had for classes with more leisure, wrote Herbert E. Gaston, an observer of the people of North Dakota in the critical years, 1916-1917. War to them meant labor and hardship rather than a great adventure. <sup>2</sup> The conservative *Fargo Forum* explained in 1916 that the reaction by the North Dakota farmers to world affairs stemmed from a deeper understanding of the issues than was general among the people of the Eastern states. <sup>3</sup> Twenty years later, in the same vein, Congressman William Lemke declared that the North Dakota farmer had the "same love of country, the same patriotism . . . that every American citizen has," but that he was "more of an individual, tending to his own business and thinking more deeply on fundamental subjects than his brothers and sisters in the cities, because there are not so many other matters that attract his attention." <sup>4</sup>

Resistance to foreign adventure, instilled in the farmer by his rural environment and its psychological effect, was reinforced by the proverbial hostility of developing frontier regions to the Eastern financial and industrial interests. <sup>5</sup> This common frontier attitude was intensified in North Dakota by several factors: by the grain trade's extraordinarily brazen exploitation of the farmers, by the presence of large numbers of socialists among the Scandinavian settlers in the valley of the Red River of the North, and by the anti-capitalist bias of the German-Russians in the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert P. Wilkins, "North Dakota and the European War, 1914-1917: a Study in Public Opinion," in West Virginia University Library, 1954.

<sup>2</sup> Herbert E. Gaston, *The Nonpartisan League*, New York, 1920, p. 175.

<sup>3</sup> *Fargo Forum*, Jan. 20, 1916.

<sup>4</sup> "The Farmer in World Peace," Radio address over WOL, Feb. 4, 1936. Lemke Papers in O. G. Libby Historical Manuscripts Collection, University of North Dakota Library.

<sup>5</sup> John C. Miller, *Origins of the American Revolution*, Boston, 1943, p. 15, refers to the "attitude . . . of a Dakota dirt farmer toward a Wall Street banker."

western half of the state. Among the German-Russians, opposition to "big business" was the rule, as they considered profit-taking by the middlemen and the professional classes to be robbery.<sup>6</sup> Thus any discussion of political questions in the state, whether by socialists or United States Senators, was couched in terms of "the interests versus the people." Given such a climate of opinion, it was inevitable that the relationship of the United States to the European war should be seen as a clash between the "people's welfare" versus the advantage of "the interests."

Naturally, therefore, friction with the Allies in the early months of the war and with Germany after February, 1915, was widely attributed in North Dakota to greed and arrogance on the part of Easterners, "effervescent patriots" who promulgated a "sort of tin-horn patriotism."<sup>7</sup> When a demand was made by these same Eastern groups and interests for an America strong enough to deal with international crises, even the most conservative of North Dakota's daily newspapers decried the publicity as propaganda calculated to create hysteria.<sup>8</sup> "Preparedness" was "a fallacy and intended deception," benefiting only the military element who desired war and the Eastern industrial interests. "Stripped in its true light," declared Congressman Patrick D. Norton, preparedness meant only "more graft for business."<sup>9</sup>

Both Democratic and Republican editors were loud in their denunciation of rearmament, not only because it carried the country along the road to war but because, short of war, it endangered liberalism. It threatened to militarize America, and the designs of the militarists would drain the nation's resources. Through introduction of compulsory service, moreover, the militarists would bankrupt the coun-

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph P. Voeller, "The Origins of the German Russian People and Their Role in North Dakota," manuscript in University of North Dakota Library, 1940, p. 100.

<sup>7</sup> See for example *Grand Forks Daily Herald*, Jan. 16, 1915.

<sup>8</sup> *Jamestown Daily Alert*, Aug. 14, 1914; *Minot Daily Optic Reporter*, March 19, 1915.

<sup>9</sup> *Minot Iconoclast*, Jan. 14, 1916.

try's "moral strength."<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, domestic reform was threatened by the atmosphere of crisis which had been created by the "munitions making pirates of the east."<sup>11</sup> Already corporate greed had its eyes fixed on water-power sites which it intended to grab from the distracted American public. But more fundamental still, militarism was bent on crushing the "workers of America."<sup>12</sup> The "shrewd schemers" trying to put across the preparedness "deal"<sup>13</sup> were playing upon the "patriotic sentiments of the people with a feudal and felonious purpose in view,"<sup>14</sup> for they were intent on destroying the "free democracy" of the United States. With taxes, the danger to freedom, and the loss of life in battle in mind, a North Dakota editor warned:

Beware of Predatory "Patriotism." Don't be fooled. It makes dollars out of you for the privileged interests who "befuddle" the mind with patriotism. It is murder and makes money for some.<sup>15</sup>

While the idealistic pro-Allied interpretation of the war generally current in the East was in due time to be echoed in the daily papers of the three largest cities in North Dakota, small-town editors of weekly papers continued to speak out vigorously against pro-war propaganda.<sup>16</sup> As war approached, they exhorted the people of the state to a desperate effort to save themselves from being "farmed by a capitalist class,"<sup>17</sup> demanding a referen-

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<sup>10</sup> *Fargo Forum*, Dec. 20, 1916; *Jamestown Daily Alert*, Dec. 21, 1916; *Devils Lake Daily Journal*, July 28, 1916.

<sup>11</sup> *Fargo Forum*, Jan. 10, 1916.

<sup>12</sup> *Fordville Chronicle*, April 21, 1916.

<sup>13</sup> *Jamestown Daily Alert*, March 11, 1916.

<sup>14</sup> Resolution of Stutsman County Local of Farmers Union in *Carrington Record*, Jan. 13, 1916.

<sup>15</sup> *Bowman Citizen*, March 10, 1917.

<sup>16</sup> See remarks of Porter J. McCumber in *Congressional Record*, 65 Congress, 1 session, pp. 210-212.

<sup>17</sup> *LaMoure LaMoure County Chronicle*, March 9, 1917.

dum on any declaration of war and the conscription of wealth in the event of war.<sup>18</sup>

These strongly worded protests were to be re-echoed some twenty years later in the period 1935-1941 in an almost uncanny fashion by headlines and editorials in North Dakota newspapers and by the politicians of the state. Early in this period the large daily papers assumed the internationalist - interventionist attitude which they had adopted in the last phase of the World War I crisis.<sup>19</sup> But opposition was strong in other quarters. Both the Farmers Union and the Farmers Holiday Association resisted rearmament, loudly denouncing the threat of war. In the United States Senate, both Lynn J. Frazier and Gerald P. Nye deplored hysteria, resisting the formation of a "national" government by Franklin D. Roosevelt's inclusion of Republicans in the cabinet, and voting for conscription of wealth.<sup>20</sup> Throughout the state, the weekly press, as well as the politicians, leveled charges against the commercial and industrial East for favoring rearmament while cutting government spending to the detriment of the agricultural West. While millions for farm relief were unthinkable to Eastern interests, billions were being spent on "defense." If war came, it was believed, the farmer would again be made the "economic goat"<sup>21</sup> as he had been in the first World War.

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<sup>18</sup> *Journal of the House of Representatives* . . . 1917, pp. 995-996; *Journal of the Senate* . . . 1917, pp. 630-632. See *Cong. Rec.*, 65 Cong., 1 sess., p. 409, for Norton's proposal to establish government operation of railroads, munitions plants, large industries, and to establish federally owned and controlled elevators, warehouses and cold-storage plants.

<sup>19</sup> Nels M. Lillehaugen, 'A Survey of North Dakota Newspaper Opinion on Foreign Affairs, 1934-1939,' Manuscript, University of Wyoming Library, 1951, pp. 96 ff.

<sup>20</sup> *Nonpartisan Leader*, July 9, 1936; *Grand Forks Herald*, Aug. 27, 1940, Aug. 29, 1940, July 11, 1940, Sept. 10, 1940, Aug. 22, 1940. Harold V. Knight, *Grass Roots*, Jamestown, N. D., 1947, p. 180. On conscription, see "Preparation for War," a speech on June 7, 1940, by Usher L. Burdick. Burdick Papers, Libby Hist. Manuscripts Coll., UND Library.

<sup>21</sup> "Why Additional Battleships?" Radio address by William Lemke, May 31, 1938; "The Farmer in World Peace," Lemke Papers.

In 1940 as the policy of the Roosevelt administration brought the nation closer to involvement with Germany, Governor William Langer, campaigning for a seat in the United States Senate, pledged himself to vote against war. He called for "hemisphere defense" in a fashion reminiscent of his predecessor Frazier's call for "armed neutrality" in 1917 when Wilson was asking for a declaration of war.<sup>22</sup> The NPL *Leader* pleaded for a cool, level-headed, unemotional approach to foreign policy questions. Most Americans, it agreed, approved plans for protecting the United States from possible aggression which required that such "springboards" for invasion as Dakar in French West Africa remain in friendly hands. But

. . . seizure of Dakar would look to the Germans like Nazi seizure of Brazil would look to us. . . . In this day of long range bombers, the far-flung bases in the Atlantic and Pacific which we consider essential to our own defenses are equally essential to the defenses of European and Asiatic nations. The fight for these strategic points could well result in never ending inter-continental warfare.<sup>23</sup>

The idealistic interpretation of war in Europe was questioned in 1941 as it had been in 1917. The Second World War was in reality a "world revolution" which would produce a future different from the present: "Nobody can or will win this war. . . . You can't block changes even though it may appear that those changes will wreck civilization." Because the world had "survived other upheavals and . . . will probably survive this one . . .," the United States need not rush into war to maintain the *status quo*.<sup>24</sup>

Although this record of consistent opposition to two wars has appeared to some observers to have its roots in the cause of liberalism, it is more generally ascribed to pro-German feeling. Samuel Lubell, one of the most widely quoted writers on the subject of isolationism, holds the lat-

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<sup>22</sup> *The Leader*, Sept. 5, 12, 19, 1940.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, May 29, 1941.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, April 17, 1941.

ter view.<sup>25</sup> But a survey of nearly fifty years of North Dakota opinion (1914-1962) may lessen the force of the contention that its isolationism stems from sympathy with Germany.

Those attitudes toward World War I which were to be characteristic of the state through April, 1917, were fully formulated before the end of 1914. Suspicion of Eastern money power and of the militarists, as well as vigorous opposition to preparedness, were full-blown before the submarine war created an outcry against Germany. Moreover, peace was an important issue as early as the campaign of November, 1914. Republican Representative Henry T. Helgeson, later to be much abused in the press of the East for his advocacy of the surrender to Germany of what the Wilson administration insisted were American maritime rights, charged in the campaign that Wilson's solicitude for the profits of Eastern corporations would involve the United States in war with Great Britain.

Democrats, on the other hand, emphasized the fact that America was at peace while war raged in Europe and hinted at the existence of a war faction within the United States.<sup>26</sup> At the close of the campaign, the Democratic party managers reprinted an editorial by Senator Robert M. LaFollette praising Wilson's peace policy, in which the Wisconsin Republican employed the phrase: "He is keeping us out of war."<sup>27</sup>

Although the peace issue failed to bring about a Democratic victory in the state in 1914, its second use in the 1916 campaign brought success. For the first time in a straight two-party fight the Democrats carried North Dakota. Wil-

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<sup>25</sup> See Eric F. Goldman, *Rendezvous with Destiny*, New York, 1952, p. 241. Ray Billington, "The Origins of Middle Western Isolationism," *Political Science Quarterly*, LX (March, 1945), pp. 51, 54, 56, notes prejudice against Eastern money power, but attaches significance to a large German population and suspicion of a Democratic President in the years 1914-1917. *The Future of American Politics*, New York, 1952, pp. 132-133.

<sup>26</sup> *Grand Forks Daily Herald*, Oct. 25, 1914; *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, Oct. 27, 1914.

<sup>27</sup> *Grand Forks Daily Herald*, Nov. 1, 1914.

son had won the electoral votes of the state in 1912 only because of the split in Republican ranks and had received less than half the votes cast. In 1916, however, the slogan, "He kept us out of war," almost completely demoralized the Republicans. In some rural districts, for example, Republican precinct committeemen were actually wearing Wilson buttons.<sup>28</sup> Republican leaders and editors recognized that their criticism of Wilson's foreign policy had cost the party the electoral vote of North Dakota.<sup>29</sup> It was not the German vote that gave the victory to the Democrats. Of the twelve most German counties (those having 30 per cent or more German population) the Democrats carried only three. In the heavily German villages of Ashley and Strasburg, Wilson polled only 2 per cent and 9 per cent respectively of the votes cast.<sup>30</sup> But he did carry three of six other counties which were more than 30 per cent Norwegian, and sixteen of twenty-three other counties in which the native-born accounted for at least 30 per cent of the population.<sup>31</sup> It was indeed the vote from the preponderantly native northwestern counties which tipped the scale in Wilson's favor.<sup>32</sup> Merlo J. Pusey misunderstood these Western people when he wrote that they, "feeling remote from the war, swarmed to the polls and voted their illusions."<sup>33</sup> Far from it, remarked the editor of the *Jamestown Daily Alert* within a week of the election: they had defeated Hughes because they sensed that the United States was being drawn into war, and they "well knew that in case of war they would be called upon to face the enemy, to bear the burden by themselves and their families."<sup>34</sup> The outcome of the election was determined not by pro-

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<sup>28</sup> Victor Wardrope to William Lemke, Nov. 3, 1916, Lemke Papers.

<sup>29</sup> W. H. Alexander to Lemke, Nov. 15, 1916, Lemke Papers.

<sup>30</sup> *Ashley Tribune*, Dec. 1, 1916; *Linton (Emmons County) Record*, Nov. 16, 1916.

<sup>31</sup> Based on 1910 census figures and election tabulations in *North Dakota Blue Book*.

<sup>32</sup> Porter J. McCumber to Lemke, Nov. 10, 1916, Lemke Papers.

<sup>33</sup> Merlo J. Pusey, *Charles Evans Hughes*, New York, 1951, I, p. 359.

<sup>34</sup> *Jamestown Daily Alert*, Nov. 10, 14, 1916.

German feeling but by a strong anti-war attitude based on a conviction that Eastern interests were conspiring to put the nation in an unnecessary and unjustifiable war.<sup>35</sup>

Suspicion and distrust of Eastern capitalism, so conspicuous in the years 1914-1917, did not disappear with the postwar victories of the national Republican party and the years of peace which followed 1918. These suspicions found expression in a little-known resolution introduced into the North Dakota legislature early in January, 1933, which recommended that North Dakota and certain other Western states secede from the Union. This resolution charged that Wall Street was the first to suggest the use of troops to protect loans made unwisely all over the world. When in those days of comparative peace and conservatism, the resolution carried in the Senate, the applause of hundreds of people in the gallery rang through the chamber.<sup>36</sup> Clearly anti-business sentiment was not confined to periods when war with Germany was the issue.<sup>37</sup>

But it is the history of the years following World War II that most strongly suggests foundations for North Dakota isolationism other than the ethnic one. With the close of the second German war, a re-alignment took place among the great powers. Germany, the traditional enemy, became an ally while the late allies, Soviet Russia and China, now under Communist leadership, became the new enemy. How then did North Dakota, so largely populated by Teutonic peoples, devout Lutherans and Roman Catholics, view, and react to, an interventionist policy when directed not at Germany but at "godless Communist states?" An examination of these years when ethnic sympathies cannot have had any influence on North Dakota attitudes assumes the character of a controlled experiment.

The Farmers Union, although supporting the bipartisan internationalist foreign policy, was troubled by a sus-

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<sup>35</sup> Gaston, pp. 173-174.

<sup>36</sup> *Grand Forks Herald*, Jan. 17, 18, 1933.

<sup>37</sup> See on this matter Lubell, *Future of American Politics*, p. 138.

picion that business and military groups saw a mutual advantage to themselves in a vigorous foreign policy and the rearmament it would entail. Editors of leading daily newspapers in the state enthusiastically shared President Harry S. Truman's opinion, which he advanced at Fargo, that "to defeat isolationism . . . is the way to defeat Communism." He believed that the bipartisan policy, which was costing only 1.5 per cent of the national income, was giving splendid value to the country.<sup>38</sup>

Politicians, on the other hand, were closer to the point of view of the Farmers Union than to that of the editors of the city dailies. In 1947 William Lemke, one of the founders of the Nonpartisan League, repeating the familiar isolationist arguments, declared in opposing the President's Greek and Turkish aid bill:

We are told that if we arm the Greeks and Turks Communism will cease. . . . To arm [them] . . . is an undeclared war, just as raising the arms embargo and lend lease were. . . . There never was the arming of other nations that did not end in war. What would we say if Russia armed Canada and Mexico to prevent American influence . . . ? [The] internationalists tell us that the way to peace is to arm half the world against the other half. America wake up—watch your step! There is danger ahead.<sup>39</sup>

While a poll taken in the state in 1948 indicated that townspeople and farmers alike favored foreign aid and the Marshall Plan,<sup>40</sup> Senator William Langer and Representatives William Lemke and Usher L. Burdick did not feel any risk to their political futures in voting against these proposals. Senator Milton R. Young, most interventionist in outlook of all North Dakota politicians and who at the outset had favored foreign aid, felt obliged in time to vote to reduce and then to end overseas expenditure. To left-of-center politicians such as Burdick, Langer, and Lemke, foreign aid was a policy promoted by the "industrial East" which would benefit from the "giveaway," and, after 1949, from the rearmament of western Europe; it was all a "sub-

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<sup>38</sup> *Grand Forks Herald*, May 14, 1950.

<sup>39</sup> Statement by Congressman Lemke (undated), Lemke Papers.

<sup>40</sup> *Grand Forks Herald*, March 25, 1948.

sidey for big business."<sup>41</sup> Repudiating all alliances, Langer voted against the North Atlantic treaty and with Representatives Burdick and Lemke voted against the bill to supply arms to the NATO powers. The entire four-man delegation united against attempts in Congress to establish universal military training. A poll of opinion in the state indicated that voters also rejected the principle of UMT with the strongest opposition coming from farmers. Some criticism of UMT had definite anti-capitalist overtones, and the Farmers Union described compulsory peacetime service as part of a sinister attack on American civil liberties.<sup>42</sup>

Reaction to the Korean War was violent in North Dakota. Senator Young called for evacuation of American troops from Korea, for he saw no advantages in a war with China, whether in Korea or in China itself. The North Dakota legislature sent to Congress a resolution calling for withdrawal of American troops from Korea, and Governor Norman Brunsdale asked the federal government to withdraw its army recruiters from the state.<sup>43</sup> In the State Senate, a resolution demanding the conscription of wealth was passed; in the United States Senate a similar proposal was introduced by Senator Langer. During the period of the Korean crisis, men as different from one another in temperament and political philosophy as Langer and Young urged negotiation with the enemy.<sup>44</sup>

In 1951-1952, Usher L. Burdick, Republican-NPL Representative from North Dakota, deplored the capture of both parties by the interventionists. He averred that if the choice were between an interventionist on the Republican ticket and President Harry S. Truman on the Democratic one, he would favor Truman. When in June, 1952, the Republican nomination went to Eisenhower, Burdick was

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, May 7, June 22, 1950. Statement by T. H. H. Thoreson campaigning against Young.

<sup>42</sup> *North Dakota Union Farmer*, Nov. 22, 1948.

<sup>43</sup> *Cong. Rec.*, 82 Cong., 1 sess., p. 908 (Feb. 5, 1951); *The Leader*, March 20, 1952.

<sup>44</sup> *Grand Forks Herald*, Aug. 3, 1951; *Cong. Rec.*, 82 Cong., 1 sess., pp. 982-983 (Feb. 5, 1951).

troubled. He described the General's policy of liberation outlined to the American Legion convention as "the sort of talk you'd expect from an asylum." By October he had resolved the dilemma. On the opening broadcast of the Republican party in North Dakota, he announced that because, confronted with two internationalists — Stevenson and Eisenhower—he could not choose between intervention and isolationism, he had decided to urge support of the Republican ticket. "General Eisenhower," he charged, "knows less about the government of the United States than I know about the hereafter." The salvation of the American people lay precisely in the General's ignorance; with no ideas or policies of his own, his actions would be determined by advisors. The people could hope that the right advisors would be chosen. But should Stevenson—a man with ideas of his own—be elected, there would be no chance of a hearing for isolationism.<sup>45</sup> Senator Langer, abandoning all hope of change in the course of foreign policy, urged that North Dakotans vote for Stevenson to save themselves from the Republican farm planners.<sup>46</sup>

Both Democrats and Republicans in the state have agreed that the Korean war provided the paramount issue in the November, 1952 election.<sup>47</sup> As a result of Eisenhower's dramatic proposal to go personally to Korea in an attempt to end the war, the Democratic fortunes fell to an all-time low. Adlai Stevenson received only 28.5 per cent of the vote, and the Democrats lost every county. In only one did Stevenson's percentage of the vote equal that of Roosevelt in 1940; that was in heavily German McIntosh County where he received 8 per cent. Even in some of the least foreign counties, Stevenson's percentage of the vote dropped twenty to thirty points below that of Roosevelt. In 1948 with World War II behind them and the state confronted by agricultural depression, North Dakota Germans had re-

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<sup>45</sup> Author's notes of interview with Burdick at Washington, August 22, 1952, and of radio address, October 1, 1952.

<sup>46</sup> *Grand Forks Herald*, Nov. 2, 1952.

<sup>47</sup> *North Dakota Union Farmer*, Nov. 17, Dec. 8, 1952; *Grand Forks Herald*, Nov. 9, 1952.

turned in considerable numbers to the Democratic fold. In 1952 when the party of Wilson and Roosevelt had again involved the United States in war—even an undeclared war—they voted Republican. The outcome of this election suggests that the North Dakota voter reacts vigorously against wars, whether or not they are with Germany.

Both Ray Billington and Samuel Lubell contend that isolationism in the Northwest and in North Dakota is associated with distrust of Democratic leadership or with exploitation, during Democratic administrations, of anti-British, pro-German prejudices by Republican leaders. The years following January 20, 1953, afford a control on the factor of Republican manipulation of such prejudices. In this period Langer and Burdick opposed the Reserve Forces Act as in 1948 Lemke had opposed the Selective Service Act. Burdick spoke out against American involvement in Indo-China:

I have pointed out many times . . . that our participation in European and Asiatic affairs . . . would in the end settle nothing and that we would be condemned for our insistence on world leadership. . . . It is a pretty far-fetched theory that the defense of the United States against the aggression of Communism is in some other country than our own.

“International meddling” by the United States, he declared, was “breeding distrust and war and keeps the American taxpayer in a straitjacket.”<sup>48</sup>

With the nation's fortunes in the hands of a Republican administration, Langer was so greatly alarmed at the prospect of war over Formosa that he—one of two Senators voting against the United Nations in 1945—urged that the crisis be turned over to the world organization. He voted against the Manila pact and the treaty of alliance with the Kuomintang government of Formosa. The NPL *Leader* hoped that the country might be spared any more of the “calamitous mistakes in its Far Eastern policy” made ear-

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<sup>48</sup> *The Leader*, May 13, 1954; *Grand Forks Herald*, April 29, 1954; *North Dakota Union Farmer*, June 1954; *The Leader*, Oct. 7, 1954.

lier by General Douglas MacArthur, the "pet of the reactionaries" with whom he "continuously played footsie."<sup>49</sup>

Public opinion reflected in polls taken in the state in 1954 was greatly concerned with peace. As the most important issue facing Congress and the nation, peace received 1109 votes to 345 for Communism. In the following year when the questionnaire sent out by Senator Langer was concerned with the crisis in Asia, tabulations showed that the principle of the Formosa resolution was favored 4474 to 2651. But when actual intervention was the issue, such as a guarantee of the Quemoy and Matsu Islands, the margin of approval was much smaller—3458 to 3277. War to "back up Chiang Kai-chek" was rejected, 3914 to 3256. Another poll in January, 1956, showed the state overwhelmingly opposed to foreign aid. As a result of this poll, Senator Young believed that isolationist sentiment in the state was increasing.<sup>50</sup>

Accordingly, when the peace issue was injected into the 1956 campaign with the charge at the Republican state convention in May that the Democrats were the war party, candidates for Congress immediately seized upon it. Usher L. Burdick promised that there would be no more killing if Eisenhower were re-elected, and with equal lack of subtlety Langer declared: "The issue is: Shall we have more carloads of coffins?"<sup>51</sup> Senator Young in his appeal for votes noted that he, as well as his left-wing colleagues Langer and Burdick, had voted against the "foreign giveaway programs" and declared that he had opposed and would continue to oppose the sending of "our sons to the slaughter

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<sup>49</sup> *Grand Forks Herald*, Jan. 25, Feb. 28, 1955; *The Leader*, April 12, 1951.

<sup>50</sup> Young release, March 3, 1954, Feb. 28, 1956; Langer release, May, 1955, in Young and Langer Papers, Libby Collection. Milton R. Young to writer, June 28, 1956. The declining enthusiasm shown in response to the Langer questions reminds one of Harry Elmer Barnes' comments to Dexter Perkins on the phrasing of pollsters' questions made in the session on F. D. Roosevelt foreign policy at the Chicago meeting of the American Historical Association, December 29, 1950.

<sup>51</sup> *Grand Forks Herald*, May 20, 1956; *Cong. Rec.*, 84 Cong., 2 sess., pp. A6672-73 (July 27, 1956).

fields of Europe and Asia."<sup>52</sup> At a moment when the Soviet Union was crushing revolt in Hungary and when Britain, France and Israel were at war with Egypt, this open appeal swept the Republicans to triumphant victory despite very considerable discontent among farmers because of declining farm prices.

It would appear from this survey that there is much more to North Dakota isolationism than sympathy for Germany. Certainly the prejudice against Eastern business classes and interests as well as the belief that wars, while to the advantage of the rich who promoted them by act and word, had to be fought by the poor, was equally important. For, noticing that preparedness and a strong line with Germany were advocated by the East, a great many of the people of the state immediately opposed them. The fact that "Big Business" seemed to favor war turned many North Dakotans against war, no matter what arguments were mustered in its support.<sup>53</sup>

The importance of liberalism in the pattern of opposition to foreign involvement must not be overlooked. In the isolationist ranks in the pre-1917 period were those politicians and editors who had fought against the "financial Romanoffs" and "predatory shiesters [*sic*]" who were the enemies of economic and social justice in America.<sup>54</sup> After

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<sup>52</sup> Letter of Oct. 10, 1956, to his constituents.

<sup>53</sup> This logic was remarked on by the contemporary observer who wrote "The Farmer and the War" in *New Republic*, XIII (Nov. 3, 1917), pp. 8-9. Resentment over the opportunities for "business" to profit from war was noted by the *LaMoure County Chronicle*, March 9, 1917. The very general suspicion that the East is less than fair in its dealing with the rest of the nation is reflected in a letter by Guy L. Ireland to Winthrop Aldrich, May 14, 1946, copy in Lemke Papers. Ireland, a conservative, was the owner of a chain of lumber yards. Lubell, in *The Revolt of the Moderates*, p. 101, notes the existence from Populist and Bryan days of a prejudice against "big business" but attaches the greater importance to the presence of Germans in the state.

<sup>54</sup> *Belfield Times*, March 25, 1917; James A. Peterson to Samuel C. Torgerson, June 14, 1917, Torgerson Papers, Libby Collection. Torgerson, a Norwegian banker, was a Bryan Democrat who by June, 1917, regretting his support of Wilson's demand for war, was urging the President to negotiate for peace on the terms proposed by the European socialists.

1940 Burdick, Langer, and Lemke championed the cause of organized labor, favored improving and extending federal social and welfare legislation, and opposed the Mundt-Nixon, Mundt-Ferguson, and Brownell anti-subversive measures. Burdick insisted that Attorney General Herbert S. Brownell's bills restricting application of the Fifth Amendment seemed "very much like Gestapo bills, and when it comes to the suppression of our liberties a Nazi system is not superior to Communism."<sup>55</sup> In 1954 Burdick cast one of the two votes against a Republican measure to "outlaw" the Communist party, declaring:

It may win votes but in the long run it will reflect upon our good sense. A vote for "political expediency" will soon pass away, but a vote [on] principle will last as long as there is a Congressional Record. The coming generations will not be moved by the first vote, but the second will attract many generations who are in search of the truth.<sup>56</sup>

The isolationists of 1914-1917 claimed to oppose Wilson's strong policy toward Germany because of the threat it posed to the progressive cause. From the mid-thirties their successors resisted infringement of traditional American liberties while speaking and voting on behalf of the historic American policy of non-intervention.

But perhaps a more telling argument against the claim that isolationism is based on pro-German feeling is its continuation in North Dakota into the post-1945 period. These years produced the same arguments against war, the same attempts to conscript wealth. The North Dakota Congressional delegation after 1945 was as vociferous in its opposition to the foreign policy measures of the national administration as were its counterparts of 1914-1917 or 1935-1941. Though decades have passed and the national enemy has changed, North Dakota's attitude toward foreign adventure remains substantially unchanged. A small-town resident, irritated by attacks on the loyalty to the United

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<sup>55</sup> *The Leader*, Aug. 12, 1954.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 26, Sept. 9, 1954. In the Senate Judiciary Committee, Langer's was the only vote against the Mundt-Ferguson bill; there were ten cast for it. *North Dakota Union Farmer*, April 3, 1950.

States of those persons who opposed the Korean war, wrote in a letter to the editor of *The Leader*: "Mud throwers of today . . . link us with 'commie fronts.' Yesterday we were pro-Nazi and before that [in 1917] pro-Huns."<sup>57</sup>

Will these attitudes survive? Selig Adler has called North Dakota a living fossil surviving into the second half of the twentieth century with foreign policy attitudes characteristic of and suitable to the early years of the century.<sup>58</sup> But the isolationist "stalwarts" have now gone from the political stage. With the economic lot of the farmer much improved and with more and more of her people living in larger towns and cities, North Dakota's outlook may become less isolationist. Only time can supply the answer to what the future will bring.

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<sup>57</sup> *The Leader*, Mar. 27, 1952, letter of Harry Biso of Michigan, N. D.

<sup>58</sup> Comment at foreign policy session at AHA meeting, St. Louis, December 28, 1956.