

► *"They All Hate Willkie" was one possible title for this article.*

WHAT'S HAPPENED TO WILLKIE?

BY HENRY F. PRINGLE

AT PHILADELPHIA in June 1940, the boys suspected they were right. Wendell Willkie was no true Republican and his nomination chilled their hearts. The GOP party hacks are now blasphemously certain they were right. They have watched the astonishing spectacle of their nominee forcing the fighting on the lend-lease bill, for repeal of the neutrality act and for all-out aid to England. They see him supporting the foreign policy of President Roosevelt and in their bewilderment they grumble, complain and even mutter that he should be cast out of the party. Relatively few of them dare say so publicly, of course, for they are not sure how much Democratic strength he has gained.

The confusion and resentment are not limited to the party hacks. Late this fall, Willkie was the luncheon guest of a group of prominent businessmen and financiers. They were not members of the America First Committee, nor in any sense appeasers. Yet they pleaded with him to abandon his

reckless, non-partisan conduct. Couldn't he realize, they begged, that the 1942 Congressional elections were fast approaching? Party unity could not possibly be achieved while Willkie stood with Roosevelt on all the war issues. The boys down in Washington — anyway, most of them — weren't with him and the complexities were terrible.

"I won't trim," said Mr. Willkie in that middle western twang which has somehow survived the elegancies of a lucrative corporation practice and Commonwealth & Southern. "I won't trim because I can't. I won't because I'd lose whatever effectiveness I have if I did."

Possibly half of his listeners agreed he was right. The other half left the gathering convinced that their one-time savior was even more of a turncoat than the son of Groton and Harvard who had spent nine years in the White House betraying his class and would, unless impeached, continue happily doing so for another three, if not for life.

On another occasion, Willkie spoke confidentially before a similar group. He said that had he been President in 1933 to 1941 it was entirely possible that he might have supported most of the social policies of Franklin D. Roosevelt. He believed, he said, in a greater distribution of wealth — whether for the farmer or for labor. But he drew a sharp line between the inept, ignorant, theoretical, amateurish way in which the New Deal sought to distribute wealth and the way in which he, himself, would seek to accomplish it. The New Deal believed in cutting production, and in doing so decreased the nation's wealth. The Republican Party must increase production and wealth, and then distribute a fair portion of it.

All of which was exactly and precisely what the gentlemen who controlled the wealth did not want to hear. It was sometimes difficult, during the 1940 campaign, to know what the choleric businessmen meant when they pounded the table at lunch and denounced That Man. The object of their wrath might be Hitler; more probably, it was President Roosevelt. But now that the campaign is a year in the past it is impossible, as they voice their wrath, to know whether That Man is Hitler, Roosevelt or Wen-

dell Willkie. The choleric businessmen were sorely distressed, of course, when Roosevelt was elected and a few among them murmured darkly about secession. They didn't mean this. They knew that all evil things, even a New Deal, would ultimately pass and that things would return to the Old Order. The National Labor Relations Board would not be merely restricted. It would be extinguished. So would public housing projects, old-age relief and all the other socialistic-communistic policies of the professors and reformers.

In all of these sentiments, the businessmen are joined by the Old Guard of the Republican Party. They are suffering now from malnutrition and other ailments, but they imagine that they see a better day ahead. Their hopes have, to a lamentable degree, been thwarted by That Man Willkie. The Old Guard cares little for the possibility of greater efficiency in national affairs. Its cohorts want the good old days of Harding and Coolidge, and regarding this they hear ugly rumors.

"The administrations of Harding and Coolidge were administrations in which business ruled the government and went too far," Willkie keeps repeating indiscreetly. "That's why I was a Democrat."

Wendell Willkie is getting it these days from all directions. Let us take the case of Industrialist Y. Mr. Y was among the men of wealth who were scared half out of their wits when the banks closed in 1933 and when revolution, not prosperity, was around the corner. He implored President Roosevelt for help. He called for dictatorial powers for the executive branch and he thought that NRA was certain to save his hide. Soon, though, he changed his mind. The economic situation became a little better. He had no stomach for the reform aspects of the New Deal. Within a year or so, he was black in his hatred of the President and his hatred mounted as the years dragged by. Willkie was a ray of hope. True, he had been a Democrat. But he was a corporation lawyer. He had licked the New Deal in the TVA fight. He understood business and the mysteries of production. But Mr. Y has lately been hearing ugly rumors, too.

"People like that," Mr. Willkie says, "hate me because they know I stand for limitation of corporation profits. They didn't expect anything of the President, but they thought I was entirely on their side."

The Congressional jitters regarding Willkie are mainly due to appre-

hension that he intends to purge the party of isolationists. He has no such idea. He knows how ineffective were Roosevelt's attempts to purge. On the other hand, he will certainly make no speeches on behalf of the appeasers. But the boys aren't sure of this, so they continue to shake, quake and damn him. The irritation extends to state GOP organizations. Last February, the leaders from sixteen states met at Omaha and behind closed doors said innumerable unkind things about their one-time nominee. Publicly the state bosses indicated a policy of "watching, waiting." The out-and-out isolationists pull few punches, on the other hand. Senator Taft, repeating the purge rumor, thought it "unfortunate that Mr. Willkie should attempt to read out of the party those who disagree with him on foreign policy." Bishop Gerald Shaughnessy, of Seattle, said that Willkie was not "the man he used to be and in fact never was." Representative Burdick of North Dakota offered the shopworn charge that he had been nominated "by a Republican clique" dominated by the House of Morgan.

The 1940 nominee seems not at all disturbed by the abuse or even by the possibility that he is wrecking the GOP. This may be because

he is convinced that he is winning many followers from among those who supported Roosevelt. He is also comforted by the pleasant knowledge, so rarely enjoyed by the publicist, that he is living up to his convictions and is doing right. The writer spent part of a morning with Wendell Willkie recently; he was buoyant, happy and completely forthright as he discussed the situation in which he finds himself. The hatred stemmed in the main, he said:

From the small minority who want to see Hitler win.

From those who think the United States could survive and prosper despite a Hitler victory.

From those who want a negotiated peace.

From the members of Congress, possibly one hundred in all, who mistake the organized pressure of America First and other groups for the true sentiment of their constituencies.

From possibly thirty members of Congress who shrewdly, coldly and with calculation believe that appeasement will rule in the United States and therefore have cast their lot with it.

From political hacks who cannot conceive of cooperation with any aspect of the Roosevelt Administration.

From disillusioned conservatives, such as Mr. Y, who believed that a vote for Willkie was a vote for what, in the antique days of 1920, was termed a return to normalcy.

The truth is, of course, that from any practical, partisan viewpoint, Willkie has made outrageous assertions. Last February, for instance, he said he had done his utmost to defeat Roosevelt, but he was elected and he is "my President now." This was sheer partisan treason. A few weeks later, he said that the isolationists did not regard international trade as vital while the internationalists believed "that to remain free, men must trade with one another — must trade freely in goods, in ideas, in customs . . . that the open market is one of the keys to liberty." And what would happen to the GOP's high tariff policies under any such doctrine as that?

Last June, Mr. Willkie denounced as "a wholly outrageous interpretation" the charge that the President surpassed Hitler in his dictatorial yearnings. He has even dared to say that it was "the clear intention of the founders of this country that in emergencies the President should lead." He added that "most of the great measures which have shaped this nation's

position in the world have been the decision not of Congress but of the President," and cited the Louisiana Purchase, the Monroe Doctrine and the building of the Panama Canal in proof.

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Willkie hasn't been silent since his defeat. He hasn't trimmed. He hasn't equivocated and thus the impression is current — a wholly false one — that he is slavishly supporting Roosevelt on domestic as well as foreign policies. His criticisms have been lost in the turmoil over intervention. Yet he has made his position clear enough.

"The Administration Democrats have the right foreign policy," he said in June, "but they lack administrative ability and they have not learned that wealth must be created before it is divided. The Republican Party, as represented by some of its Congressional leaders, has the wrong foreign policy, but the liberal element in it proposes the right domestic policy. It also contains the administrative ability of this country." Another time he said that Roosevelt had failed "in the most elementary task of management, the task of delegation, the task of calling in the ablest men in

the country and giving them power to act."

However Willkie may have failed as a party leader, he has not, at least, permitted himself to fade into the bucolic insignificance of an Alf Landon. During the six months after Election Day he was making two speeches a week and his mail averaged two thousand letters a day. A large part of the mail was obviously organized. Until the German and Italian consuls were sent home, he received, almost daily, five hundred postcards denouncing his pro-British policies. Most of them were typed in red ink and they repeatedly carried noxious phrases.

Not all of the mail was inspired, however. Last June the Willkie Clubs of America discovered — a phenomenon in political campaigns — a surplus of 7 per cent in its treasury. It had been decided to change the name to Independent Clubs and to continue to work for good government in a less partisan manner. The remaining funds could not be used by the new organization, though, without the consent of the eleven thousand donors, and so each was asked whether he desired a refund. Only a small fraction of the contributors demanded their 7 per cent, but a large number sent blistering let-

ters. An analysis of them, permitted this writer, indicates that Willkie's support of Great Britain and the lend-lease bill was the chief basis of this hatred. The writers were not a little confused.

"Mr. Willkie obtained my money under false pretenses," sputtered a woman in Forest Hills, New York, "and I certainly have no desire to help an organization which encourages Mr. Willkie to wipe his face in the mud at the feet of the New Deal." A woman in Chuckery, Tennessee, asked that her balance be sent to the America First Committee because she assumed the new organization would "put the New Deal plans through behind the Republican Party."

"When I realized just what Willkie stands for, I was glad that Roosevelt did win," wrote an angry Republican in Plainfield, New Jersey. "Of the two evils it is best to keep the one you know best. Every time I hear Willkie on the radio I am nauseated and shut it off as soon as I can reach it."

Good manners marked few of the outraged donors. "I thought I was aiding Republicans in place of a jack-ass," said a lady in Overland, Missouri. "No one respects a toad," wrote a man from Greenville, Kentucky. "I would vote for Norman Thomas first."

A high point of invective was reached by a woman in Delaware, Ohio: "I believed in this man Willkie only to be betrayed by this traitor. He was working for the House of Morgan. When I think of how we excused his illiteracy, his utter crassness, terrific misuse of English, his crude manners, I blush that I could have so completely fallen for this country bumpkin. Now he has licked the boots of the President. . . . Willkie should go back to his farm and raise swine. He fits into such a setting."

The onslaughts have not been merely by mail. In Chicago, last June, his hotel was picketed by the We, the Mothers, Mobilize for America Committee. Earnest lady pacifists paraded past bearing such signs as "Me Too Willkie, Stoooge for F.D.R." and "Washington Crossed the Delaware; Willkie Double-Crossed the United States."

Such letters and incidents are far from pleasant, for Willkie makes no secret that he is willing to be a candidate three years hence and does not pretend that he will refuse the nomination if it is offered to him. Meanwhile he is cheered by the Gallup poll, which reveals that he may have lost as much as 15 per cent of his own vote but that 39 per cent of the Roosevelt voters now agree that he

would make a good President. There is consolation, too, in a poll taken by *The Republican*, a party publication, two months ago. Some four thousand local leaders were asked to state their preference for President among 1940's aspirants. Willkie had lost ground, but he still led the field. In February, he received 51 per cent of the total. In October the tally stood: Willkie, 38 per cent; Taft, 20 per cent; Dewey, 16 per cent and Hoover, 9 per cent.

Willkie will not, in any event, be deflected from his demand for all-out aid to England and for all possible action to defeat Hitler. On this he has led, not only in his own party but in the Administration ranks as well. He has demanded that the GOP cleanse itself of the "ugly smudge of obstructive isolation." His plea for radical amendment or outright repeal of the Neutrality Act, a "hypocritical and degrading law," made it far more difficult for tem-

porizing Republicans or Democrats, fearful of the appeasement vote, to hold back. Repeal would almost certainly have lost in the House. It is Mr. Willkie's profound conviction that the GOP will be out of power for decades to come unless it takes an emphatic stand against isolation. For he has no doubts at all that liberty will be dead if Hitler wins.

"If Hitler wins, nothing matters," he told me. "If Hitler is crushed, the power in this country will go to those who led the fight to defeat him. That's the way it's always been. It was that way after our American Revolution. The third of the people who were against it left the country as soon as they could. The third who had been lukewarm were quickly converted. The third who had been the leaders held the positions of power in the new nation. The Republican Party will be impotent unless it plays its part in leading the fight to crush Hitler."



ITEM: Local pride established the historical myth that Plymouth Colony (1620) and the Boston Puritans (1630) were America's first colonies. Nineteenth century historical writers, New Englanders all, chose to ignore the country's first English settlement in Jamestown, Virginia (1607).

► *Why opera survives and thrives despite attack and ridicule.*

A DEFENSE OF OPERA

BY WINTHROP SARGEANT

NOBODY but a confirmed opera-goer ever has a good word to say for opera. The most elaborate and comprehensive art form known to modern civilization, it is also admittedly the most corrupt. The great bastard problem child of the musical and theatrical worlds, it is fervently disowned by both. High-brow symphony-goers look down their noses at its overfed stars, its vulgar showiness, its often trivial music. Theatre-goers are appalled by its antiquated traditions, its creaky staging, and by the hopeless code of semaphoric gesticulation that usually passes for operatic acting. The man in the street distrusts it because it is nearly always sung in a language he doesn't understand, because most of its exotic-looking personalities are anything but glamorous, and because his wife is likely to drag him to it as a social duty. The modern intellectual, who never goes near it, thinks of it as a royally-scented fad of the idle rich. He is always solemnly pronouncing its doom and enthusiastically burying it. It is obviously altogether out

of tune with the age of Marx, Hemingway and the skyscraper. According to the best Hegelian dialectics, it should have died long ago.

But opera, in its wholly preposterous way, goes on and on. Every year thousands of sane Americans troop to the Metropolitan, Chicago, St. Louis and San Francisco opera houses and sit solemnly while ancient Germanic gods dressed in animal skins and burlap disport themselves in primeval Nordic forests, or while Renaissance Italians exuberantly poison and maim each other to joyous music. Opera not only shows no signs of dying, it is doing its biggest business in twenty years. Movie competition may have been a blight to the Broadway theatre, but it has not affected opera at all. Radio has evidently given it a boost. Before this winter is over, according to the statistics of *Variety* magazine, no less than seventeen companies will have presented regular opera seasons or tours in the United States. This is probably not an all-time record. There was a time when fourth-rate