

# *The American* MERCURY

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## INSIDE THE AMERICA FIRST MOVEMENT

BY JOHN ROY CARLSON

*As we go to press, Japan has attacked us. The America First Committee has indicated its support of our war effort, but the sinister, subversive elements which have infiltrated the movement are now more dangerous than ever. Mr. Carlson's analysis of these elements therefore becomes doubly important. — THE EDITORS.*

FOR three years I worked as an undercover man in the Nazi-fascist underworld of America.

In those years my feigned zeal as a volunteer worker in endless campaigns and mass meetings and secret sessions made me useful to the assorted pro-Nazi, hate-mongering groups in which I became active. I have been a card-bearing member of eleven pro-fascist organizations. I have been friendly with leaders like Fritz Kuhn, Joseph McWilliams, James True and on terms of comradely intimacy with countless rank-and-file fanatics, crackpots, Naziesque Americans and outright foreign agents, both native and foreign-born. I have cor-

responded with many of them at great length. I know the set-up from the inside.

"Movement" is the proper word. I am able to attest that the America First Committee is not merely an isolationist organization but the spearhead of an American fascist movement. It grew out of the swamps of the scattered pro-fascist groupings and it is headed for a "manifest destiny" that is frankly and fanatically totalitarian, though it may not come to flower for some years. Many America First leaders will deny this in all sincerity. They are honest isolationists and are greatly disturbed by the character of their associates and their mass

following. A few of them have hopes of cleansing their organization.

But the best of these leaders know in their hearts that America First has been too deeply polluted by the fascist crowd for redemption. Its active local leadership in many places is too firmly in the grip of shrewd pro-Nazi elements. The honest isolationists in the movement are outnumbered already by a coalition of rabid anti-Administration businessmen and industrialists with an overwhelming following of appeasers, Nazis, fascists and sundry enemies of the democratic way of life. Insiders have little doubt that the pro-Nazi components of the movement are gaining the upper hand, and will dominate it in the end.

I am convinced, after close-up observation on the inside, that the central, directive nucleus of the America First Committee — the astute, unnamed strategists operating behind the scenes and manipulating the “front” composed of General Wood and his Committeemen — has in it no more of the democratic spirit than the followers of Joe McWilliams or Father Coughlin. When these men are finally exposed, they will appear as American replicas of the Nazi hierarchy.

The rôle of the behind-the-scene

leaders is to foster a know-nothing, totalitarian mood, and to stab American institutions to the heart when social and political conditions are ripe. They are doing their utmost to expedite that day. Ambitious politicians are being seduced easily to act as stooges for the political movement crystallizing out of the America First organization and its camp-trailers. The next few years are earmarked for a relentless propaganda campaign to channel all discontent and all desperate emotion into one reservoir of revolutionary dynamism. A crucial rôle has been assigned to a resurgent Ku Klux Klan, which is already distributing America First literature along with its own.

Whatever a few leaders may think they are doing, the larger movement, of which their America First Committee is only a focal center, does not so much aim to keep America out of war as to use war, if it comes, and its aftermath as an opportunity for a totalitarian anti-democratic revolution. The technique deliberately used is to stir up social discontent, racial cleavages, and distrust of all democratic government. Consciously or innocently, the known “front” leaders of America First are serving as transmission belts of Nazism. They are corraling tens of thousands of

honest opponents of war into enclosures where they can be more conveniently inoculated with the virus of fascism.

I declare unequivocally that America First today is the voice of American fascism. Nearly all fascist and near-fascist groups here have given their support, openly or secretly, to the movement. The Bund, the Christian Front, the Silver Shirts and a dozen others still maintain a separate existence but their best energies are siphoned into America First.

## II

The America First movement — its nature, its future, its dynamic drive — is as misunderstood and *underestimated* here today as was Hitlerism in Germany in its earlier stages. I have seen it from its inception, boiling and seething, desperately seeking a common denominator and the perfect “white man on a horse” to restore “Christian constitutional government.” General George Van Horn Moseley, retired, was being groomed when the Dies Committee exposed him in 1939 as a puppet of Baron Manfred von Killinger and Paquita Louise De Shishmareff, foreign agents. I recall what Joe McWilliams, head of the self-styled Amer-

ican Destiny Party (also known as Christian Mobilizers) once said at a confidential meeting to which I had been admitted:

In a few years we will need a leader who will be like a knight of old — a man in shining armor, a champion of the people, a man who is a mystic, a man that the mob can look up to — but not touch.

“Committee” is a misnomer for America First. It is a nationwide mass movement, organized in a vast network of branches, units, sub-units and neighborhood groups throughout the country. More important, through interlocking leadership and duplicating memberships, it is meshed with a great many other groups. It is much like the communist movement in this respect. The claimed total adherence of America First is fifteen million signed-up members and fellow-travelers in forty-three states of the union. No Third Party — or One-Party — movement could hope for a larger operating base.

Its Board of Directors includes some of the wealthiest industrial magnates. Its directing genius was regarded during the first world war as second in rank only to General Pershing. Its supporters include such distinguished figures as a former under-secretary of state, our former ambassador to Belgium and

the president of the University of Chicago. Its hero was once America's most popular idol. Its support in the Congress of the United States has included, in my judgment, more than one hundred Representatives and 31 Senators known to be in sympathy, openly or clandestinely. It has been endorsed repeatedly by the Reich.

America First is no overnight phenomenon. It has been eight years in the making. Its beginnings were in whirlpools of social discontent, stirred into motion not only by Nazi agents but by old-stock Americans who were convinced that "America needs a Hitler." The story goes back to 1933, the year which saw the inauguration of President Roosevelt and the ascent of Adolf Hitler. The phrase "America First" in its current political sense was first used in August 1934, simultaneously with "Britain First," which later became the slogan of Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists. The name popped up that month as America First, Incorporated, with headquarters in the National Press Building in Washington, and with James True as director. True obtained a patent (No. 2,026,777) of a special nightstick which he called a "kike-killer" — which characterizes him sufficiently.

James True eventually developed into one of the most effective Nazi transmission belters in the country. His weekly *Industrial Control Reports* became a veritable bible for American fascists. His offices became a clearinghouse for anti-democratic, anti-Semitic, pro-German propaganda. He was an intimate friend of William Dudley Pelley, Fritz Kuhn and Joseph McWilliams, and was applauded in *World Service*, bi-weekly bulletin of Dr. Goebbels' overseas propaganda network. His associate, Michael Ahearn, is now active with an "isolationist" group, lobbying in Washington and collaborating closely with the America First Committee.

The ground for fascism in America was expertly plowed by Hitler's propaganda agents and by Nazi-esque Americans, but the effort got nowhere for a time. The failure may be attributed largely to excessive frankness — the "front" organizations made no secret of their Nazism. McWilliams, for instance, until two years ago, spoke publicly at Bund meetings. "I want to do in America what Hitler has done in Germany" was his favorite phrase. The timid and conservative were horrified; the "respectables" were alienated; the "smart money boys" were scared off. Only crack-

pots, fanatics, hoodlums of every breed, gun-toting would-be revolutionists and such men as True and his gang of outspoken Nazis were drawn in. That kind of fascism had no chance whatever to succeed. But the leaders even then knew what they were about. I once criticized the lunatic-fringers to a New York leader of the Christian Front. "We've got to have the bums with us now," he explained. "They are the only guys right now who'll stick out their necks. Their job is to agitate and publicize the movement. After they get the ball rolling, we can throw 'em overboard."

The retreat from open Nazism to the present camouflaged American fascism was gradual, subtle and fairly complete. Subsidies for James True, George Deatherage (führer of the American Nationalist Confederation whose emblem was a red-white-blue swastika), Robert E. Edmondson (*American Vigilante Bulletin*) and similar leaders were gradually reduced and entirely cut off within the past year. The Bund banned the swastika from its meetings and the Hitler salute was shelved. McWilliams no longer permitted the playing of the Nazi "Horst Wessel Lied." Sam Browne belts and military uniforms were put away. The "pogrom boys" were silenced.

Nazi groups changed their names, their officers and even their meeting halls. The Bund organ overhauled its masthead and became *The Free American*. Greater emphasis was placed on "Christian Americanism" and less on the savior-like qualities of Adolf Hitler. Naziesque Americanism became more and more nationalistic, more and more "respectable." As one leader remarked to me: "We must squeeze the American flag until it squeaks."

### III

A turning point in the movement came with the emergence, from a totally different direction — a most respectable direction — of the America First Committee. It was born on the Yale University campus, in the spring of 1940. As the romantic story goes, told by the Committee's own publicity department, the founder was a handsome, 24-year-old Yale law student: R. Douglas Stuart, Jr., son of the first vice-president of the Quaker Oats Company. He got twenty classmates to join him. The collegians attracted the attention of Chester Bowles, of Benton and Bowles, Inc., an important advertising agency. Stuart's committee next attracted William R. Castle,

former under-secretary of state and former ambassador to Japan. The circle of influential persons was slowly closed: Philip LaFollette, former governor of Wisconsin; Senator Burton Wheeler of Montana; General Robert E. Wood, chairman of the Sears, Roebuck board; Robert Bliss, of the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency.

Young Stuart thus found himself among experts in promotion, organization and public relations, staunch champions of the *status quo* and ardent enemies of the Administration. Using the Yale group as a convenient front, the astute political minds invited Charles Lindbergh to make the first of his defeatist speeches, on October 30, 1940. After that speech, which prophesied the victory of the totalitarian powers, General Wood took active charge.

The Committee set about organizing the nation, working quietly, mainly through the mails and without the fanfare of mass demonstrations. My first notice of the America First Committee came in a letter postmarked November 11, 1940. It was signed by a well-known fascist of German lineage. A few weeks later, I met unctuous, tongue-in-cheek John Snow, known in democratic circles as the "gentleman fascist." He was di-

rector of the League for Constitutional Government and also sold the notorious anti-Semitic forgery, *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*. He gave me copies of General Wood's Chicago speech and at my request mailed me ten additional copies.

But the Committee was regarded as highbrow by the "rabble" fascists. Because an American Jew, Lessing J. Rosenwald, was on the National Board, pro-fascist haranguers for a time denounced the Committee as subsidized by Jews. To placate this element and direct their energy, the No Foreign War Committee was set up for them in the fall of 1940, with Verne Marshall, editor of the Cedar Rapids (Iowa) *Gazette*, as leader. According to Marshall himself, he was invited to a dinner at the University Club in New York by Merwin K. Hart, a friend of James True. Also present were George T. Eggleston, editor of *Scribner's Commentator*, leading organ of appeasement, and Lindbergh. Marshall claimed that it was Lindbergh who finally persuaded him to accept the chairmanship.

Marshall's mission was to whip up the emotions of the extremist groups, mobilizing their support under a single leadership. A promoter and a clever exhibitionist,

the Iowan spotlighted national attention on the isolationist issue. He performed his task so well, so endeared himself to Nazi-fascists that he put the parallel America First movement in jeopardy. Lindbergh, who had selected him, denounced him as an anti-Semite, and with good reason: Marshall's advisors were Charles W. Hudson, publisher of *America In Danger*, and Colonel E. N. Sanctuary, both veteran crusaders in the cause of racial persecution, both intimate friends of General Moseley and openly pro-fascist.

After a three-month barnstorming tour, Marshall was urged to resign and did so. I visited his New York offices just before they closed and asked for copies of the organization's literature. The stack I was given contained the standard material distributed at Bund and Christian Front meetings. The No Foreign War Committee convinced me that any anti-war crusade which accepted the multitude of Bundists, Coughlinites and fascists in general for support, would inevitably turn anti-democratic, Nazi-esque, and serve Hitler's interests rather than our own.

By March 1941, the No Foreign War Committee was virtually extinct. Its sole heir was the America First Committee, by this time be-

ginning to operate as a mass enterprise on an ever broader popular base.

Much of Marshall's personnel and his entire mailing list of sincere isolationists, sundry appeasers, pro-Nazis, etc., had been safely transferred to the offices of America First throughout the country. The America Firsters by that time had set up shop at 49 East 53rd Street, in New York City. Flocks of sincere isolationists at once signed up, assuming that here at last was a respectable anti-war organization not dedicated to the transmission of Hitlerism. But the pro-fascists who had rallied around Verne Marshall also joined in droves. Once inside, these elements grew in strength, if only because they worked with fanatic enthusiasm. Soon they became the organization's backbone.

In filling out my own application as volunteer worker in America First, I wrote down my membership in a notorious pro-Nazi organization. I purposely called attention to it to see what the reaction would be. There was none. When I asked the America Firster who accepted my application if he was familiar with this organization and its Nazi-minded leader, the answer was a silent, smiling nod. I was accepted as a volunteer worker for America First — my "fascist record" not-

withstanding — just as I had been accepted on the No Foreign War Committee.

#### IV

General Wood and his staff of expert organizers, promoters and propagandists marshalled some of our best-known citizens. The roster began to glitter with big names: Lindbergh and Rickenbacker; Senators Wheeler, Nye and Reynolds; Congressmen Fish, Short and Day; Archbishop Beckman and Father Curran; Authors Irvin S. Cobb and Kathleen Norris; Industrialists Jay C. Hormel, Sterling Morton and Ernest T. Weir. Some served the movement's purposes knowingly. Others — the Rev. John Haynes Holmes, the Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick, Robert E. Hutchins, Lillian Gish, etc. — were clearly innocent, sincere isolationists who gave their support to a movement which is still able to camouflage its true character.

John T. Flynn, chairman of the Manhattan Chapter, more than any other America Firster I know, has tried to weed out the fascist elements. He denounced the support of the Bund. He denounced Joseph McWilliams before an audience of 22,000 in Madison Square Garden. He made many enemies on both

counts. Father Coughlin turned on him furiously. But Flynn has been consistently outvoted and America First's ranks remain wide open to the Christian Front and similar groups. Flynn would be the first to admit that he has no jurisdiction over outlying chapters of the Committee. Being more or less autonomous, these can either dignify or corrupt the Committee. The evidence points overwhelmingly to corruption by the Nazi-fascist elements which have infiltrated the Committee and are gradually taking control.

An impressive example of the manner in which autonomous chapters can take on a sinister character as they are captured by Nazi-fascist elements is provided by the America First movement in California. Fortunately, that section has been submitted to a pitiless study by the Americanism Committee of the American Legion of Los Angeles, which became convinced that "the striking similarity between Nazi propaganda technique and America First methods of operation can be no mere coincidence."

The Legion report shows how the German-American Bund, under the pressure of public opinion, went underground, and how above ground the Bundists proceeded to



utilize more respectable channels, especially anti-war and isolationist organizations. Then follows a categorical listing of the activities of known pro-Nazi propagandists in the ranks of America First. It is a most instructive compilation, as these samples should suffice to prove.

F. K. FERENZ: "Distributor of subversive books, exhibitor of Nazi films, publisher of a swastika-decorated volume of essays entitled *Hitler*, attended twenty-one America First meetings between March 6 and August 23, 1941." He helped prepare posters and banners and participated in the motor parades of the America First Committee.

JOHN L. RIEMER: who testified that "a German consulate had paid \$215 for printing part of the literature he had been sending from Los Angeles," has extensively advertised America First in connection with his mailings of Nazi propaganda.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN BULLARD: "Organizer of the American Guards, sponsoring Hitler-style abolition of labor unions, distributor of Nazi propaganda, regular attendant at meetings of the League to Save America First . . . chairman of the downtown chapter of the America First Committee. His talks to America First meetings are outspokenly anti-Semitic."

T. W. HUGHES: "who founded the Bund-reinforced League to Save America First, conducts meetings largely directed to inciting intolerance and class dissensions." He wrote *The Truth About England*, distributed at the Aryan Bookstore and also sold at America First meetings. Many Amer-

ica First speakers originally spoke for Hughes' League. Verne Marshall has also spoken for it.

MRS. FAITH McCULLOUGH, alias Mrs. Frances Waxey, former secretary to the German agent, Paquita Louise De Shishmareff, is active in the Pasadena and Glendale chapters. Her close associate, William Hunt, is chairman of the Glendale chapter.

JAMES McBRIDE: "Bund Stormtrooper and his wife, a Deutches Haus waitress, have attended twenty-three America First meetings within the last few months."

BRUCE TARKINGTON DOWDEN: "co-operates with F. K. Ferenz, and advocates 'whispering campaigns' to slur the morals of teachers who support defense programs." He has spoken at least four times at America First meetings.

The American Legion report concluded: "There is every indication that they have joined the America First movement for the express purpose of presenting their subversive propaganda to those sincere isolationists who have been attracted to meetings of America First." An ironical touch is added to the California picture by indications that the local communists and communist fellow-travelers, in their period of fervid isolationism which ended abruptly on June 22, 1941, made attempts at "united fronts" with Nazi-infested America First groups. It should be noted for the record, too, that the communist press, which remained silent about

America First and on occasion reported its speeches sympathetically, began vehement exposés of the organization immediately after Hitler attacked Stalin.

## V

The subversive penetration of America First in California is decidedly not a local phenomenon. Similar situations in other centers have not been detailed for the delectation of the public only because thorough investigations have not yet been completed.

Donald Shea, leader of the National Gentile League and a veteran pro-Nazi, arriving in Chicago to address America First, also talked at secret meetings of lunatic-fringe groups. Shea spoke before America First rallies also in Cincinnati and Indianapolis. It was in Chicago that the German-American Alliance, a Bundist-type organization, urged its members to "assist them [America First] financially and morally." They did — and General Wood has not repudiated this support.

In Detroit and Philadelphia, the Reverend Gerald L. K. Smith has spoken at tumultuous rallies of the Committee. Smith is a former member of Pelley's Silver Shirt Legion, a militarist organization based on the Nazi model. Smith also was

an associate of Huey Long and has collaborated with Father Coughlin. In New Rochelle, New York, William J. Baxter, propagandist for the Japanese and a political associate of Father Coughlin, heads the America First chapter. At Peekskill, New York, the Reverend John Cole McKim, columnist for a Japanese propaganda weekly which is registered with the State Department, heads the America First chapter.

In New York City I am on most familiar ground. I can affirm from intimate knowledge that here the mass following of America First is probably even more dangerous than in Los Angeles. A prominent official described it as "80 per cent Coughlinite." This is true, if we interpret the term loosely to cover a variety of pro-Nazi groups parading shamelessly under labels like Christian Front, Christian Mobilizers, Paul Revere Sentinels, etc. In years of close association with them, I have learned to recognize hundreds of fascist-minded New Yorkers. Attending America First meetings, as far as I am concerned, is like going to the familiar Bund or Mobilizers meetings. I see the same faces, the same fanaticism, and the same contempt for democracy, the Administration, Great Britain — and also the same clamor for a

“new leadership” and a “new order” in the United States.

For instance, there is the first Lindbergh rally which I attended at Manhattan Center on April 23, 1941. The hall overflowed with American flags, and in addition the eight thousand persons who packed the hall waved small American flags. It was the wildest display of super-patriotic nationalism I had ever seen in New York, and in other respects recalled the spirit of the Nuremberg rallies. The steaming, raucous mob behaved in typical “Christian Front” fashion, interrupting speakers with cries of “Jew,” and cheering wildly every pot-shot at the democracies, every forecast of Nazi victory.

I counted representatives of sixteen subversive organizations in the hall. The roster included my “best friends.” I recognized August Klapprott and Gustave Elmer, New York chieftains of the Bund; Gentleman John Snow; George A. Van Nosedall, who as führer of the Crusaders for Americanism, Inc., used to give the Hitler salute during the playing of our national anthem; Lawrence Dennis, who readily admits to being the country’s outstanding intellectual fascist; Edward James Smythe, liaison man between the Klan and the Bund; etc. The invocation was delivered

by the Reverend Edward A. Hunt. Next day, I visited his home, where I talked for more than an hour to him and his wife. I have documents in my private files identifying both of them with a number of ardent pro-fascists.

I have heard rank treason committed at countless meetings of the Christian Front, the Bund and the Christian Mobilizers. I have seen uniformed Bund troopers marching in military formation, yelling a lusty “*Sieg, heil*,” amidst swastika flags. I have heard the “Horst Wessel Lied” of blood and vengeance echoing through New York halls and have watched Joe McWilliams and Fritz Kuhn pledging mutual support. But on October 17, 1941, I witnessed a meeting that exceeded them all — because I saw the same stormtroopers, the same fanatic mob, only this time posing as America First patriots! This meeting took place in Ebling’s Casino and was reported in a few paragraphs in next day’s papers: just a routine America First rally. Those reports did not indicate what I knew about the audience, and that is the essence of the story. All the dregs of New York’s fascist lunatic fringe were there. The Christian Front was out in full force. It distributed leaflets signed by Jack Cassidy, ringleader of the “Sports

Club," seventeen members of which had been arrested by the Department of Justice. Cassidy urged the election to the City Council of one John H. Henihan, a Christian Fronter, and he urged one Thomas J. Goodwin for mayor of New York. I interviewed Mr. Goodwin at the Murray Hill Hotel. "There's nothing wrong with fascism," he told me. "Hitler has done a good job in Europe."

Among others present at the Casino that day were Benno Eibach, busy selling *Social Justice*. He had sold out all his copies of the *Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter*, the Bund's weekly newspaper. Chief New Moon, alias Thomas Dixon, who was once arrested with Fritz Kuhn, was distributing leaflets. My hand soon tired of waving at those I knew or had met at subversive meetings.

I could write many pages about the fascists I know who are active in the various America First branches. I got my first public notice to join America First at a Christian Front meeting in Brooklyn staged for the benefit of those seventeen men arrested in a fantastic alleged plot to overthrow our government. Thomas Kennedy passed out membership cards. Kennedy, a member of the Front in its heyday, is at this writing employed in the main

New York headquarters of the America First Committee at 515 Madison Avenue.

I know that the Christian Mobilizers have postponed at least one regular meeting to attend an America First rally. I know that F. Guy Juenemann, a spy once engaged in the service of True and Deatherage, was engaged by John Flynn "to gather evidence" against the "war-mongering" movie industry and that he turned over the "evidence" to America First and Senator Nye. I could tell of the leaflets distributed by the 47th Street branch of America First bearing the imprint of the Russian-American National Committee. The director of this Committee is Boris Brasol, the first to introduce the *Protocols* in the United States, and a Nazi propagandist. I could cite dozens of instances linking the America First following with the worst totalitarian elements in America.

But it is needless. General Wood himself has bowed to Father Coughlin, spokesman for the corporate state as a substitute for democracy. Note the General's letter, as published in *Social Justice*:

Replying to your letter of July 5th, I have not rejected the Christian Social Justice movement. I welcome their support in our common objective —

preventing this country from getting into the war.

## VI

What about the leadership of the America First movement? Here we find a paradox which is ominously reminiscent of Germany. It is the paradox of Fritz Thyssen and Goebbels — entrenched wealth and revolutionary ardor — in one camp.

The America First leadership includes men who justly count themselves bulwarks of the *status quo*, pillars of capitalist society. The thing they fear most is change, any kind of change, and it is the potential threat of an overturn in the established social order which gives them nightmares. Yet the growing roster of their America First membership includes hordes of the fascist-minded, determined to overthrow the present social order of political democracy and private business. The comi-tragedy of the America First movement, as of Hitlerism in its early years, is that the larger part of its leadership most fears what some leaders and the most dynamic element in the following most desire: an overhauling of the social and political order.

It is inevitable that at the present rate, as the paradox sharpens, the hierarchy will soon prove itself

unable to control its mass following. The mob will have its way and it will be hell-bent for civil war, however the process may be disguised with slogans about “constitutional methods.” Those fascists with whom I associated always stressed “constitutional” procedures, invariably adding that when such methods fail, a resort to “bullets instead of ballots” will become the birthright of “every red-blooded American.”

A few months ago an *Emergency Bulletin No. 1* was sent out, attached to a letter from General Wood. The bulletin outlined a plan which showed clearly that it had been conceived by a military strategist, possibly General Wood or General Thomas Hammond, also a member of the national committee. This semi-secret bulletin — sent only to chapter heads — commissioned key workers as “Generals.” It stated:

Each General’s assignment is to get ten “colonels” who, in turn, will get ten “captains” who, in turn, will get ten “lieutenants.” Under this plan of action, you or the mail marshal appointed by you, should be able to phone each General, each General in turn, his or her ten Colonels, each colonel his or her ten captains, and each captain his or her ten lieutenants, all in one day’s time.

Bear in mind none of these letter writers are just to write letters. They are to follow instructions . . . Na-

tional headquarters will decide when, to whom and, in general, what to write and notify the state and chapter chairman.

These military techniques have a familiar ring to anyone who has followed the rise of fascist movements in Europe.

Although the America First leadership is predominantly Protestant, it has enlisted the support of a considerable number of American Catholics. For instance, William T. Leonard, chairman of the important Brooklyn chapter, is also president of the Catholic Laymen's Committee for Peace. Among the rank-and-file, especially in the great population centers, Americans of German, Italian and Irish descent are exceedingly in evidence. This is not difficult to understand, considering the historic Irish animosity to Britain and the cultural and racial call of the Axis lands on a portion of their American sons. Their number in the America First movement is augmented by Ukrainian and White Russian elements.

Members are under constant barrages of propaganda. An extensive variety of literature, expensively printed in color, is sent out free or at a nominal charge to all chapter heads. The radio is used liberally. During the summer months of 1941, hordes of speakers addressed

audiences at street corners. The fires are fed by the monthly *Scribner's Commentator* and numerous other isolationist publications.

The effort is being made to organize virtually every "100 per cent American" except children in the kindergarten grades. The Youth Division of America First aims at youth from 16 to 23 years of age. There is a division, Colleges for America First, which already has representation on dozens of campuses. In addition, the College Committee for Defense First, in New York, functions independently but is an integral part of the movement. It recently sponsored a month's tour of colleges in the East for Senator Nye. There is also a Women's Division of America First. Women United and Women Determined, in addition to the Women's Division, are all active as propagandists in New York. America First collaborates with other "isolationist" women's groups. One of these, the Women's National Committee to Keep the United States Out of War, located in Washington, is directed by Catherine Curtis, whose office manager is Michael Ahearne, a former associate of James True.

A highly raucous group collaborating with America First is the Mothers of the USA, and affil-

iated mothers' groups. They are in general a Coughlinite specie. First marshalled through the pages of *Social Justice*, they soon spread in a wide network over the country, taking on such names as the National Legion of Mothers, Mothers of American Sons, and Mothers of America. I was with them during the famous "Mothers' March" to Washington, staged to protest against the passage of the Lend-Lease Bill. The rank-and-file mothers — many of them kindly, submissive, politically innocent — are among the most prized instruments of the conniving fascist leaders behind the "front" names.

Obviously the movement couldn't operate one month on the nickel-and-dime contributions of most of its members. It maintains a large paid staff of employes throughout the country. Many of its top-notch speakers are paid. It is certain that the real contributions which keep the machinery going are supplied by those most seriously interested in the future of the movement.

Ernest T. Weir is known to have given heavily. Thomas N. McCarter, former chairman of the Public Service Corporation of New Jersey, is another heavy donor. H. L. Stuart, president of the leading investment house in the mid-west, is a financial supporter and so

is Sterling Morton. The wealthy meat packer Jay C. Hormel has given liberally, as have Mrs. Janet Ayer Fairbanks and Max Wellington Babb, president of Allis-Chalmers. A glance at this list makes it apparent that the movement is backed by a small clique of industrialists and big businessmen. Every one of them has bitterly opposed New Deal policies. Roosevelt-hate has been one of the most powerful forces which has impelled the America First movement.

Beneath the official purposes — "to keep America out of foreign wars" and defense against invasion — are the deeper impulses of the mass which has flocked to the Committee's standard. A revealing interpretation of policy came from Miss Isobel French, chairman of the Washington, D. C. chapter. "We of America First" she said, "believe that you can come to an understanding and do business with Hitler. The interventionists think you can't come to an understanding and do business with Hitler."

Yet America Firsters shun the term appeasement and protest against being called pacifists. They like best the term "isolationist." That isolationism may be defined by their own declarations. Lindbergh has gone on record time and

again for a "negotiated peace" and an "understanding" with Germany. Senator Wheeler was one of the first to come out for a "peaceful settlement" of Hitler's war against democracy. Senator Robert R. Reynolds saw "no reason for breaking off relations with Germany . . . Hitler is looking after his own people and that is what we should be doing here . . . the democracies are the real aggressors and not the dictatorships."

Speaking to a prominent official of America First, I asked how we could best serve the current needs of the United States. "By negotiating an immediate peace with Germany and putting an end to this war," the answer came back, unhesitatingly. To one who has studied the America First movement at first hand and experienced intimately the process by which it built up its membership, the policy of appeasing Hitler seems to be a major, if not *the* major long-term objective.

What is the program of the America First movement for the future? The answer is not too mysterious to anyone who has followed the movement seriously. You will find it in Verne Marshall's declaration, at a meeting of the League to Save America First, in Los Angeles:

We must stick together, for a leader will arise at the opportune moment, who will unite people who think as you and I do: who shall impose the will of the people upon the Washington administration.

The entire movement has been clamoring for "a new leadership." In 1936, Pelley (running on a platform of "For Christ and Constitution") called on "every Gentile to form with me an overwhelming juggernaut. . . . The time has come for an American Hitler and a pogrom." George Deatherage called for "constitutional fascism." Followers and sympathizers of such men are strongly entrenched in the America First movement. Their sentiments, I am convinced, are the sentiments of the bulk of America First's following.

## VII

The main impetus comes from the emotionalized mass movement. It is stimulating the political glands of power-hungry and vengeful Roosevelt-hating men throughout the country. Speaking recently to a clergyman who has taken a prominent part in America First rallies, I asked where the present course of the Committee would lead it. "We will surely have a Third Party," he told me. "It will be a Christian party. It will be an American party.



Its slogan will be America First. We are organized in every part of the country. One year before the next Presidential election, we will swing into action. We will have nothing to do with the Republican or Democratic parties."

On October 27, 1941, the New York *Daily News* declared the need for an America First Party. A few weeks later, plans for the formation of an American Party became known: The first hint had come from Philip LaFollette, speaking in Indianapolis on November 8: "There are still two parties in the country, the War Party and the American Party." A big step toward organization was the secession of the Indiana Chapter of America First from the parent outfit. It set itself up as an independent state organization, not responsible to the national body. Merle H. Miller, chairman of the chapter, was elected permanent state chairman. Farmer-Labor strength in Minnesota and Progressive strength in Wisconsin are now being pooled, with isolationism as the common element and with Philip LaFollette in the directing rôle. Philip has been an America First tub-thumper since the beginning.

That the America First groups have political aspirations is apparent. The ultimate form these

aspirations will take is a matter for speculation. The movement achieved respectability, strong financial backing and promotional and organizational acumen only eighteen months ago. Politically it is still in its infancy, but it has already demonstrated itself to be a national headache. It has made an unsuccessful attempt to keep its skirts clean of the fascist rabble which has fastened itself to the main body. That it will be unable to shake off this element is obvious.

On December 2 General Wood outlined what the press described as "a reorganization plan transforming the America First Committee into an active political agency in the pattern of major political parties." "We may have to dissolve the present corporation," the General said, "and reorganize along political party lines." Though he disclaimed third-party intentions, the movement is clearly stronger than Wood and the other ostensible leaders. The fascist-Nazi revolutionary impetus will sweep them along helplessly in its own know-nothing direction.

For the present, aside from the preliminary skirmishes of the American Party, the Committee is attempting to bring into line Congressmen who are opposed to the principles of America First.

The Committee is still feeling its way around, sounding sentiment, consolidating its support.

The dream of the rank-and-file that Lindbergh will one day be President of the United States amounts to an adoration of the flier. It is promoted assiduously. The *Deutsche Weckruf* has declared: "A new man on a horse has arisen." Pelley's *Roll Call* runs banner headlines: "Lindbergh, Ford, Moseley, Wheeler, New U. S. Leaders." *Publicity*, an avowed anti-democracy, anti-Semitic organ published in Kansas, screams: "Lindbergh would prove a 'Moses' in 1944 to lead this nation out of a political wilderness."

One of the most dangerous aspects of the movement is in its encouragement to older groups. The resurgent Ku Klux Klan is on its program. The Klan has launched an "Americanization program" with one million dollars as its goal. Senator C. Wayland Brooks, a prized America First sympathizer, participated recently in a gigantic rally at Rockford, Illinois, at which fifty thousand persons are reported to have been present. A member of the Klan, who also has worked actively for the Bund, wrote to me in November 1941: "The unit you want to watch is the Klan. . . . We will take over the

America First Committee before this time next year, you can rest assured."

Of course I don't believe it will do anything of the kind ever — at least under the Klan name. But the boast is symptomatic. Forces akin to it are seeking power and the Klan is being cleverly channeled to serve the larger cause of the America First movement. It's part of the jigsaw puzzle. It fits into the Third Party feelers, the American Destiny talk, the Lindbergh and Wheeler demands for "new leadership." Pieces of the puzzle are easily picked up on the pages of *Social Justice*; consider this, editorially, on September 1, 1941:

We predict an attempt to establish a National-Socialist Party in America with emphasis on the word "nationalist" . . . The Marxist democrats, turned militaristic, will obstruct the formation of this party . . . We predict that if such happens, the National-Socialists in America — organized under that or some other name — eventually will take control of government on this continent . . . We predict, lastly, the end of democracy in America.

The strong following of the Fundamentalist preacher, the Reverend Gerald B. Winrod, in Kansas, also is playing into the hands of the America First Committee.

The current Nazi-fascist propa-

ganda drive for impeachment of the President — echoed lustily at every America First meeting — is a device to keep the pot boiling. It plays directly to the “rabble” element and obviously dovetails into the Nazi plans to conquer us from within. All of these things are heading us towards a fundamental split of the American people. The American Legion report told a simple truth when it declared:

While carefully avoiding giving any hint of a consistent defense policy for this country, many America First speakers apparently stop at nothing that will further confuse the defense issue, weaken our morale, or otherwise embarrass our government. . . . In meetings of America First, processes are at work whereby a person attending merely to seek information, may unwittingly be transformed into a Nazi sympathizer, and even into a potential traitor to his country.

Knowing and unknowing, hordes of fascist-minded Americans now in process of conversion, are integral to the America First movement. They constitute tributaries which will go to feed the main artery.

Let me recapitulate. This is what every sincere American, and particularly those who are honestly isolationist, ought to know about America First:

The organization has batted on the support of essentially sub-

versive and un-American elements. The honest leaders and followers are outshouted, if not yet outnumbered, by open or disguised pro-fascists. Behind the “big name” front of innocent or indifferent leaders are those who manipulate the mass following. All the large and small streams of totalitarian emotion in dozens of fascist-type organizations are being channeled into America First. If the organization undertook the task immediately, energetically and honestly, it could still conceivably dam that flood of support. But it isn't trying — because the power of the organization and the inflamed political ambitions of some valuable supporters rest on the very elements who would be excluded.

America First, I repeat, is today the voice of American fascism. Here, as in pre-Hitler Germany, the preparations thrive on public indifference and hush-hush tactics by those who might do something to stem the tide. Come with me to America First meetings, listen to the speakers, and after the rallies talk with some of the chapter officials. See with me the burning fanaticism, the galling hatreds etched in the faces of frustrated men and women — and you will agree that America First is playing with dynamite.



*Forward To Victory!*

► *He yearned for surrender in World War I — and achieved it in 1940.*

## PÉTAIN: TRIUMPH OF A MYTH

BY HENRY TORRÈS

A WHOLE country with faith in one man . . . a man who had no faith in his country. These are primary elements in one of history's most tragic dramas.

For more than twenty years Marshal Henri Philippe Pétain had been a living legend.

A full professor in the Military Staff College at the age of forty-one, Pétain's promotion was held up because his heretical defensive views undermined the doctrine of offensive action advocated by the French General Staff. In August 1914, though past his fifty-eighth year, he was only a colonel threatened with old-age retirement. At the beginning of the war he led a brigade of six thousand men; at the end of the war he commanded an army of three million soldiers. Having distinguished himself as commander of a division at the Marne, of an army corps in Artois and an army in Champagne, on February 21, 1916, he was given the task of stopping the formidable German offensive at Verdun. He checked the enemy and won world fame as

the savior of his country. In the spring of 1917, General Nivelle succeeded Joffre. After the failure of his reckless offensive, Pétain was appointed generalissimo.

Aroused by the heavy and futile losses resulting from inadequate preparations, the soldiers were full of resentment and disillusion. Here and there the spectre of mutiny raised its terrifying head. Less severe in his acts than in his words, less impatient to repress outbreaks than to prevent them, moderate despite his rigor, Pétain won his most difficult victory over his own excited troops. The temper of the men calmed down; their morale was strengthened. The army regained its discipline and the country rallied around the army.

Ultimately it was Foch who played the decisive part in winning the war because of his energy, his swift intelligence, his prodigious gift for large scale maneuvering, his ability to overcome material difficulties and his infectious faith in himself, his soldiers and the eventual triumph of France. With