

---

## THE OPEN FORUM

---



---

### WALLACE'S COMMUNIST-FRONT PARTY

SIR: As a reader of the *MERCURY* for almost twenty years, I would like to commend you on the article by Charles Angoff in the October issue on the Wallace party. Mr. Angoff has given us a penetrating analysis and a lucid exposure of Wallace; the piece is nothing short of devastating. The article adds to the accumulated prestige of the *MERCURY* as a magazine of intelligence and courage. . . .

LLOYD E. PRICE

*Fort Worth, Tex.*

SIR: Mr. Angoff's clear analysis of the forces behind Wallace makes significant reading. Probably the single most important aspect of the article is the realization that the largest group supporting the former Vice-President, outside of the Communists, is the youth of the nation. Were we faced with a grave economic depression, comparable to what we had in the thirties, there might be some justification for these people's dissatisfaction with our present form of government. That economic hardship is not the reason for their support of the Progressive party can be shown by statistics: many of these young people come from the upper economic strata. For many of them support of Wallace is just a fad, similar to the antics of the flappers and raccoon-coat set of the twenties. . . .

HARVEY GREENFIELD

*Cambridge, Mass.*

SIR: The *MERCURY* and Charles Angoff are to be congratulated on his fine article. . . .

Much has been written about Mr. Wallace's current third party, but the "primer" style of Mr. Angoff's article takes the reader over the hurdles step by step, shows us how Mr. Wallace got that way, and puts the spotlight on his party in such a way as to leave no doubt as to who controls it.

I think it would be a fine thing if reprints of this article were made available to the school children of our country. The election is over, but reading this article would show them why the vast majority of our people were not taken in by Wallace.

ANN TANNER

*New York City*

SIR: In Mr. Angoff's article there occurs this statement (on page 414): "When three delegates from Vermont urged that a declaration be inserted in the platform stating that it is 'not our intention to give blanket indorsement to the foreign policy of any nation,' . . . the leadership permitted no discussion."

This is a flat untruth. As a matter of fact there was extended and rather heated discussion of this proposal.

Of course, the logical reason for rejecting this proposal, although it was not very clearly brought out in the discussion, is that the purpose of a political party platform is to set forth promises or intentions of what the party will undertake to do when it comes into power. "Blanket indorsements," or condemnations, of the foreign policy of any

other nation are entirely extraneous and have no rational or legitimate place in such a document.

HENRY PRATT FAIRCHILD

*New York City*

SIR: Dr. Fairchild's notion of the meaning of "extended and rather heated discussion" differs sharply from mine, as, I imagine, his notion of the meaning of the words *democracy* and *progressive* differs sharply from mine. He seems to think that discussion and one-sided denunciation are the same things. I don't think so.

The facts were clearly enough set forth in the major newspapers of the country, and in the British press. A good deal of the time — about a half hour, according to a letter from Dr. Fairchild to me — devoted to what he calls discussion, was, according to the *New York Times* and *Herald Tribune*, taken up by denunciations by such Progressive party leaders as Rexford Tugwell and Lee Pressman, and numerous party-liners from the floor. The Vermonters and their supporters did little more than present their proposal. So one-sided, indeed, was the "discussion" that nearly the entire American press implied that it was a sham. I could quote from several reliable papers. I limit myself to quoting only from the correspondence of Mr. Richard L. Strout in the *Christian Science Monitor*, a paper distinguished for its fair and objective reporting. According to Mr. Strout, the revolt of the Vermonters was "promptly squelched," and their amendment was "immediately denounced . . . and overwhelmingly defeated. . . . The amendment was shouted down in a roar. . . ." In view of these facts I think it is entirely legitimate for me to say that there was no real discussion but rather the kind of strangulation of free democratic debate usual in Communist or Communist-front organizations. I am sure that if similar treatment to a similarly important subject were given at the Republican or Democratic convention, Dr. Fairchild would have felt about it precisely as I feel about what went on at the Progressive convention. I am appalled

that Dr. Fairchild thinks otherwise. I had expected something enormously better from a man with his background.

I am also puzzled by his last paragraph. I'm not sure I get his point. Does he imply that the Vermont amendment was a blanket condemnation? Of course, it was nothing of the sort. If he does not see that, then I am almost tempted to say he should have a literacy test. But perhaps it would be more charitable to say of Dr. Fairchild's protest what Mr. Strout says of the feeble protests made by some delegates to the Progressive convention, namely, that they revealed "the utter lack of comprehension of some of the politically inexperienced groups as to what was going on."

CHARLES ANGOFF

*New York City*

## HAROLD ROSS

SIR: I don't know when I have run across a profile that delighted me as much as the one in the August *MERCURY*, on the editor of the *New Yorker*, Harold Ross. I will now read my *New Yorker* with a more seeing eye, and most certainly a broader smile. Thank you for giving your readers such a story. Allen Churchill, who wrote the article, did a good job.

MRS. FRANK MARTIN WEBBER

*New York City*

## PHRASE ORIGINS

SIR: In his phrase origin in the September *MERCURY*, Mr. Louis J. Herman declared that the phrase "to peter out" is derived from the word "saltpetre." I have consulted the following dictionaries: Webster's, *Century*, Funk and Wagnalls, *Oxford*, Wyld's *Universal Dictionary*, and the *American College Dictionary*; and in none of these do I find any mention of "saltpetre" in relation to "to peter out." Ditto for Weekley and Shipley. Some are silent on the derivation; others relate it to the French *peter*, to crackle; none is certain. Where then does Mr. Herman find his authority and what makes him so certain?

In answer to my letter in the August issue, in which I objected to his statement that most authorities favored his derivation of "hoodlum," Mr. Herman cited a few, who hardly make up a majority. Moreover, the authorities he did cite, did not by his own admission feel certain of that derivation but qualified it by "probably" and the like. Moreover, either by negligence or actual design, Mr. Herman forgot to note that Weekley's *Etymological Dictionary* had a question mark in front of the alleged derivation. Moreover, Holt, whom Mr. Herman called "charitably disposed," was utterly sarcastic and Mr. Herman apparently mistook none-too-subtle sarcasm for generosity. No dictionary supports Mr. Herman. Add up the evidence, or count authorities, and the verdict is that very few support Mr. Herman's idea that "hoodlum" is Muldoon in reverse, with one letter changed. Mr. Herman should be more careful and should label as fanciful or conjectural that which is so. Etymology may not be an exact science but an etymologist should use scientific methods and he should remember that etymology means "the true word" or "the study of the truth."

MORRIS ROSENBLUM

Brooklyn, N. Y.

SIR: It is regrettable that Mr. Rosenblum's earnest inquiries have not led him to the source of my derivation of the expression, "to peter out." Authority for the origin I cited in the September AMERICAN MERCURY exists, nonetheless. It is to be found in *Crowther's Encyclopaedia of Phrases and Origins*, published in London in 1945. To forestall possible prolonged and acrimonious discussion on the question, I quote verbatim the explanation offered therein:

To peter out means to have reached the end of the profitable supply, either of money or commodity, from which one has been drawing. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the source as the U. S. gold-mining camps, but adds that the origin is obscure. The writer is indebted to an old gold-digger [sic] of British Columbia for the origin. He was among the earliest men

to use the phrase. "The dictionary is correct," he says. "It did originate in gold-mining camps. The method of panning gold is known as 'Placer mining,' and is obviously surface work. But actually to mine gold, the rock is drilled and charges set to blast the rock. The explosive, in the old days, contained saltpetre, and was colloquially known as 'peter.' After a lead, or seam, had been exhausted, and there was no further object in blasting, we were wont to say that we had petered it out, or that it was 'petered out.' This is the correct origin of the word."

It might be added that the *New English Dictionary* and Funk and Wagnalls both agree that the term harks back to the gold-mining profession, while the latter and Webster's cite "peter," in the noun form, as a colloquial term for "saltpetre." This would seem to lend substance to the origin presented by *Crowther's*.

As for Mr. Rosenblum's *bête noire*, "hoodlum," I should like to refer him to my rebuttal to his earlier letter, published in the August MERCURY. In it, I cited four authorities whom he has not yet been able to refute. Weekley, as he astutely notes, did, indeed, precede his derivation ("perverted back-spelling . . . of *Muldoon*") with a question mark. I concur fully; in fact, in my original note, I described my derivation as "a matter for debate."

Here, in full, is what Holt has to say in his *Phrase Origins*:

[The] guess that this California word is either Spanish or pidgin English is perhaps no worse than the story that a notorious thug's name was Muldoon, which, spelled backward, became "Noodlum"; and this by association with *hooligan* soon gave birth to *hoodlum*.

[He observes further:] The supposed derivation of *Hooligan* [from "a rowdy Irish family of that name that lived in Southwark, London, in the 1890's"] would seem to strengthen the possibility that another Hibernian surname [Muldoon?] may have figured in the development of the word.

It would thus appear, at this writing, that I have succeeded in marshalling to my colors a total of six authorities, four of them reasonably unassailable and two more some-

what watered down. Mr. Rosenblum, by dint of his unflagging labors, has obviously rallied a goodly host behind him. Having fought it out on this line all summer, however, I would now suggest a truce. Frankly, inasmuch as I carefully qualified my original note in the May *MERCURY* and have presented the aforementioned authorities, I believe that my opponent is wasting an inordinate amount of ammunition firing at straw men.

LOUIS JAY HERMAN

*New York City*

### BRITISH SOCIALISM

SIR: As a recent immigrant from England, may I be allowed to comment on Mr. H. W. Seaman's article, "Life Under Socialism In England," published in your September issue.

Mr. Seaman's article may have "news value" for those readers who are unfamiliar with the difficulties which confront the Labour government, but if this is how he presents what is, presumably, his considered judgment on the situation in England today, I cannot think that it does him credit.

In the first place, I fail to see what follows from his quoting of the GI veteran who bemoaned the inability to purchase "a quart of milk and then another quart." Surely if one accepts the general principle of equitable distribution, the rationing system cannot be disputed.

It is, too, of interest to note that according to figures taken from *Hansard* of May 12, 1947, the consumption of liquid milk during the period June 1946-June 1947 showed an increase of 44 per cent above the 1934-38 figure. This augmented quantity has been equitably shared, with extra allocations to priority groups: cheap milk for babies, nursing and pregnant mothers and school children, and priority milk for invalids.

And however much Mr. Seaman may decry the effect of the government food subsidies of £470 million per year, he cannot but agree that in this way the prices of basic

foodstuffs have been brought within purchasing range of all classes of the population, a situation which before the war, when there was no control of food purchasing, did not exist. Though on balance the country as a whole is eating less, a not inconsiderable number of people (that is, those who constituted the lowest income group) are, as a result of fairer distribution—the rationing system and food subsidies—buying and eating appreciably more than before the war. This is a long way from saying that people are eating as much as they would wish, or that the diet is anything but monotonous.

How can Mr. Seaman scorn the social security legislation under which, for the first time in their lives, the working classes have freedom from want and can feel secure that ill health will not mean degrading poverty? Whatever else he may wish to say against the present régime in England, he must agree that legislation has been designed to raise the standard of living of the lower income groups, who are the majority of the population.

His story (I do not doubt its veracity) of the businessman who was granted petrol coupons for a one-way journey, but told he must return by bus, may make amusing reading but it proves nothing except the inefficiency of a clerk. Nor do I wish to say anything about the Ministry of Labour official who directed a carpenter to return to his old job when there appeared to be a shortage of work in his particular situation. But no one can say that the government has abused its powers in regard to direction of labor. Indeed, under the Control of Engagements Order, the number of directions has been pitifully small. In point of fact, the government has, for the most part, elected to appeal to the worker's sense of national interest and the providing of incentives in the undermanned essential industries, a policy which is generally acknowledged to have largely failed.

The regulations concerning foreign travel and the limitations on pleasure motoring have been designed for perfectly sound reasons not, as Mr. Seaman seems to infer,

merely to cause annoyance to the foreign traveler and to the motorist. Quite clearly, the conservation of foreign currency was a matter of vital importance; in regard to the question of how much a motorist might be allowed to run his car for his own private enjoyment, the government was clearly faced with no alternative. In the interests of a real effort to make some headway on its adverse foreign trade balance, imports for non-essential uses (however irksome it might be) were out of the question. . . .

Admittedly, where controls and regulations exist, some measure of freedom is given up, and it may well be true that the time is ripe for the lifting of some of the controls. But controls are necessary where there are insufficient goods and services available, and where the home consumer market must take second place in the interest of increased exports. I make no apology for the shortcomings of the Labour government, and they are many, but the government took over in 1945 after a war which had disrupted the country's economy much more than many realize. It is important to realize too that all the faults are not on one side; the workers themselves have not cooperated as much as they might—for example, the conservative attitude with which the miners have approached new methods and new tasks.

Even the most loyal supporter of the Labour government cannot feel too happy about the economic state of the country, but this is no excuse for the presentation of an unfair summary.

CLIFFORD CAIN

*Poughkeepsie, N. Y.*

SIR: If Mr. Cain will do me the kindness of reading my article again he will find in it no denial that some people are better off, materially, than before socialism came to this island. These beneficiaries include some well-heeled citizens as well as the poorest. I cannot agree that even the poorest are better fed than before the war. Some poor people of my acquaintance now sell their points because they cannot afford to buy

pointed goods. A can of salmon, for example, costs not only four times its prewar price but also a whole month's points for one person. Canned salmon, one of the many luxuries that were common vittles before the war, is now going off the market because our government have decided that we cannot afford to buy it. But caviar, unpointed, is in the shops, compressed ham, in the form of Danish salami, is freely on sale at 5s. 4d. a pound; and anyone who cares to run the risk of jail and can tolerate the smell of spivs can buy butter, tea, beefsteak, bacon and sugar at approximately American prices. So much for "equitable distribution."

Mr. Cain suggests that before the war basic foodstuffs were out of reach of certain classes because there was then no control of food purchasing. Possibly it was so during the depression. There is no depression now, but, our legislators assure us, full employment. Nearly all of us are hard at work, but how little we have to show for it! Hardships and shortages were inevitable after an exhausting war, and surely the government's first task should have been to tackle the problems of food, clothing and shelter. Instead, they embarked at once on a grandiose programme of doctrinaire socialism, and after three years they are still at it. When the workers asked for incentives, such as goods to buy with their wages, they were promised more nationalization and prettier locomotives. When they kicked they were told, on the billboards, to "Work or Want." Now they have the whip, in the form of compulsory labor, which seems a little thing to Mr. Cain but strikes me as the most reactionary measure since the Statute of Laborers, A.D. 1351. "Under the Control of Engagements Order," he says, "the number of directions has been pitifully small." Why pitifully? Would he like to see wholesale direction?

Mr. Cain appears to give socialism credit for the social legislation which he accuses me of scorning. But surely he knows that compulsory health insurance and social security, in much their present form, were in the programme of the non-socialist parties, which did most of the spade-work be-

fore the socialist government arrived. As another Englishman, he knows, too, that the discomforts and nuisances I mentioned in my article are common causes of grouching when Englishmen meet. The picture was certainly not exaggerated, and I was careful to speak of our statesmen with respect, even though he and other correspondents have dragged more politics than I intended into the discussion. The only adverse criticism of the article that I have seen in print in England — and that in a socialist publication — is a suggestion that to tell foreigners such things is hardly cricket: "It is the sort of thing Tory politicians do." I am no politician, and hardly a Tory; and I felt that I could do my country no disservice, but possibly some good, by describing our present way of life.

H. W. SEAMAN

Norwich, England

## BORAH AND IDAHO

SIR: The article on Glen Taylor by Richard L. Neuberger in the September number is very interesting in spite of the fact that Mr. Neuberger does not seem to be too well informed on Idaho and its politics.

In the last election in which he ran for the Senate, Mr. Borah received something like a 100,000 majority, while Mr. Roosevelt and the Democratic state officials got something like 25 or 30 thousand. Yet Mr. Neuberger says Borah was diminishing in popularity. I think this was the largest majority that Mr. Borah ever received in any election and in a state where we cast less than 250,000 votes 100,000 is quite a majority. . . .

BEN H. MATKINS

Hamer, Ida.

SIR: Mr. Matkins cites the formidability of Senator Borah at the polls as evidence that I am wrong regarding the diminution of Borah's reputation in Idaho.

The article specifically referred to Borah as "Idaho's dominant public figure for nearly half a century." I am well aware of the

Senator's political talents. My point was that Borah's *posthumous* standing in Idaho has deteriorated as a result of the total failure of isolationism as a foreign policy for the nation. . . .

RICHARD L. NEUBERGER

Portland, Ore.

## NEW HAMPSHIRE'S STANDARD OF LIVING

SIR: I have heard and read much indignant criticism from my friends and neighbors of Mr. Arthur K. Smart's article, "The State of New Hampshire," which appeared in the July AMERICAN MERCURY. Mr. Smart has drawn some erroneous conclusions. Notable among these are: (1) that industry is moving out of the state, (2) that wages are below normal, and (3) that there is a movement of people out of the state because of the absence of opportunity.

New Hampshire's population is not declining but is increasing. According to the Bureau of the Census, only seventeen states had a greater rate of civilian population-growth between 1940 and 1946. Between 1935 and 1946, there was a net migration into the state of over 22,000 people. Only fifteen states experienced a greater immigration in this period, and 29 states had a net out-migration.

Mr. Smart cites the New Hampshire 1946 per capita income, ranks it with the Southern states, and concludes that wages and salaries are low here. In the first place, our per capita income is well above the Southern states, according to government statistics from which source the following figures were obtained:

### 1946 PER CAPITA INCOME

United States . . . . .	\$1200
New Hampshire . . . . .	1048
South East . . . . .	801
South West . . . . .	927

In the second place, per capita income is not a good measure of wage levels, since it includes all forms of income — proprietors, annuities, social security, property, etc. A

(Continued on page 764)

# INDEX TO VOLUME LXVII

Adams, J. Donald: Reporting Vs. the Art of Fiction.....	213	Eustis, Helen: In the Good Old Summer-time.....	203
Angoff, Charles: Memorandum for Eternity.....	41	Evans, Bergen: The Skeptics' Corner 74, 177, 322, 475, 592, 721	
Last Words of a College President.....	163	Everts, Lillian: He Had a Dream.....	47
Wallace's Communist-Front Party... ..	413	Flynn, John T.: What Liberalism Means to Me.....	169
Auction Sale.....	547	Frost, Frances: Cradle Song.....	14
Bendiner, Robert: Mudslinging in National Elections.....	450	Fuller, James, and Fuller, Peta: What We Know about Diet.....	281
Bouton, S. Miles: Our Mistakes in Germany.....	156	Gaver, Jack, and Stanley, Dave: Brooklyn, the Forty-Ninth State.....	467
Brandt, Albert A., and Payne, James E.: The World Population Crisis.....	295	Griffith, Ann Warren: Love in the Pulp Magazines.....	406
Brant, Irving: Church and State in America.....	685	Harvey, Frank L.: The State of Florida... ..	326
Buligin, Dmitri: Memoirs of a Soviet Author.....	180	Herman, Louis Jay: Phrase Origins — 32... ..	32
Chamberlin, William Henry: Ten Fallacies of Fellow-Travelers.....	345	Phrase Origins — 36.....	288
Check List, The.....5, 248, 261, 504, 516, .....	751	Phrase Origins — 41.....	660
Christowe, Margaret: The Miser.....	693	Hines, William: The Fresh-Water Colleges.....	712
Churchill, Allen: Ross of the <i>New Yorker</i> ... ..	147	Hines, William, and Cottrell, Edward: The University of Virginia.....	194
Clayton, John Bell: Smart as a Pony.....	595	Holbrook, Stewart H.: The Aurora Communists.....	54
Cottrell, Edward, and Hines, William: The University of Virginia.....	194	Bunco Kelly, King of the Crimps... ..	488
Craft, William Ellsworth: Streptomycin and Tuberculosis.....	724	The Great Boorn Mystery.....	735
Davenport, Russell W.: The Independent Voter and Mr. Dewey.....	527	Howe, Irving: The South and Current Literature.....	494
Dawson, Mitchell: Law and the Right of Privacy.....	397	Huie, William Bradford: Navy Brass Imperils Our Defense.....	7
DeBaun, Everett, and Maurer, David: Phrase Origins — 34.....	155	Shall We Abolish the Marine Corps?.....	273
Phrase Origins — 38.....	412	Hull, William: Common Occurrence.....	458
Phrase Origins — 39.....	542	Huttner, Matthew: The <i>Police Gazette</i> ... ..	15
Devoe, Alan: Not in the Books.....	100	ImMasche, F. W.: The Truth about the Meat Situation.....	548
Hot-Weather Piece.....	230	James, Ed: The Radio Give-Aways.....	430
Animal Play.....	351	Jennings, Leslie Nelson: Outsider.....	229
The Phoebe.....	484	Turning Point.....	405
Jesus and Little Lord Fauntleroy... ..	587	Johnson, Falk: Should Spelling Be Streamlined?.....	356
Facts about Hydrophobia.....	605	Keith, Joseph Joel: Definitions.....	99
Natural History of Christmas.....	730	By Natures Alien.....	176
Drummond, Roscoe: Are Communists Traitors to America?.....	389	The Hands.....	684
Eaton, Walter Prichard: Playwriting in a Vacuum.....	302	Kluckhohn, Frank L.: Behind the Scenes in Berlin.....	519