HERBERT HOOVER: My White House Years

Our only living former President begins an exciting story of his stormy and controversial administration

RICHARD BEATTIE

I AM well aware that uninformed persons recall my Presidency solely as the period of the Great Depression. That was, indeed, the nightmare of my White House years. The defense of our social and economic life against this terrible, overwhelming hurricane compelled me to turn in part from a broad development-and-reform program for which I had held high hopes.

Only in part was the depression a product of our own misdeeds. In the main it was the penalty paid for a world war and that war's impact upon Europe. It forms so vital an experience that I shall set forth a separate analysis of it in later chapters.

I deal first with actions on other fronts during my Presidency, for despite the depression we made substantial strides—in foreign relations, in the development and conservation of our resources, and in reforms achieved or started under way.

A number of important policies and reforms were defeated for purely political reasons. Midway through my term the Democrats won a House majority and effective Senate control. At times this opposition was surreptitiously encouraged by older Republican elements in Congress who never forgave my elevation to the Presidency. I also had to deal with those perennial members of my party who wished to demonstrate—by grasshopper bites—that they had greater liberal minds than the President and that they did not wear his collar.

I am making no complaint, offering no justification. I accepted the job of my own free will.

Collier's is privileged to present herewith its third series of the memoirs of former President Hoover. The current series, to be published in eight consecutive installments, covers Mr. Hoover's White House years, including the depression, and ends with his appraisal of the New Deal. An expanded version of these memoirs will be brought out by Macmillan in two volumes. The first, dealing with the nondepression aspects of his administration, will appear at the end of this month, entitled The Cabinet and the Presidency: 1920-1933. The second volume, which will be devoted entirely to the years of the Great Depression, will be published in the fall

I am so immodest as to believe that had we been continued in office, we would have quickly overcome the depression and approached economic and social problems from the viewpoint of correcting marginal abuses, not of inflicting a collectivist economy on the country. We would have better preserved the personal liberty to which the nation was dedicated.

During the months between my election and inauguration, one primary task was to select major policy-making officials sympathetic with my ideas. With the background of the Harding regime scandals, it was vital—as it had been for Mr. Coolidge—that we have an administration which would reflect rigid integrity and avoid the slightest color of yielding to special influence.

We had no scandals, no misfeasance whatever. There has never been substantiated challenge to the integrity of any of my appointees.

Three of my Cabinet choices had been my colleagues in the Coolidge Cabinet: Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg, who wanted to retire but agreed to remain until June, 1929, when he was succeeded by Henry L. Stimson of New York; Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon, who, wishing to be relieved of the Treasury burden—he had served in the post longer than anyone else—was succeeded in 1932 by Ogden L. Mills of New York (Mr. Mellon became our ambassador to Great Britain); and Secretary of Labor James J. Davis, who, on becoming senator from Pennsylvania, was succeeded in 1930 by William Doak of Virginia.

I came under strong pressure to appoint John L. Lewis to the Labor post. A complex character, Lewis was the ablest man in the labor world and of very superior intelligence. His word was always good, his loyalty to his men beyond question.

But there had been an incident some years earlier at Herrin, Illinois, in which some of his United Mine Workers had

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Hoover and Coolidge on way to former's inauguration in 1929. In front (l.) Senator George Moses (N.H.), Representative Bertrand Snell (N.Y.)

been implicated in the killing of non-UMW miners —an incident since wrongfully used against Lewis. And in any event Senate confirmation of his Cabinet appointment was impossible. If his great abilities could have been turned to the government they would have produced a great public servant. Lewis maintained a friendly attitude toward me. He later said. "I at times disagreed with the President but he always told me what he would or would not do."

My other Cabinet selections were: Attorney General, William D. Mitchell of Minnesota; Postmaster General, Walter F. Brown of Ohio; Secretary of War, James W. Good of Iowa, who died in 1929 and was succeeded by Patrick J. Hurley of Oklahoma; Navy, Charles F. Adams of Massachusetts; Agriculture, Arthur M. Hyde of Missouri; Commerce, Robert P. Lamont of Illinois, who, resigning to resume his private business, was succeeded in 1932 by Roy D. Chapin; and Interior, Ray Lyman Wilbur of California.

A second major task prior to my inauguration was a six-week journey to Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil.

As Secretary of Commerce I had grown increasingly dissatisfied with our policies toward Latin America, such as our "dollar diplomacy" of intimidation on behalf of our speculative citizens when their investments went wrong, and our interpreting the Monroe Doctrine to mean we had to keep order in those states by military force so as not to give excuse for European intervention.

At this time we had troops in Haiti and Nicaragua. To put it mildly, the United States was not popular in that part of the hemisphere. Convinced that unless we displayed an entirely different attitude we would never dispel fears of the "Colossus of the North," I decided to do what I could to lay the foundations of greater good will.

I asked Mr. Coolidge for a battleship for the journey. He suggested I take a cruiser—"it would not cost so much." Since battleships as well as cruisers must always keep steam up and crews aboard, that did not worry me overly, and I also wanted to take along a large group of American correspondents, hoping that they would thus be better able to interpret Latin America to our own country (which they did).

Finally Mr. Coolidge put the battleship Maryland at my disposal going south, and the battleship Utah met us at Montevideo and brought us home.

We had a real welcome. Our Latin neighbors are exquisitely polite and hospitable. In all I made 14 short speeches aimed at establishing what I referred to as "Good Neighbor" policies (a phrase the New Deal later took up). I suggested immediate measures to promote our relations; one was better organization of intellectual exchanges. Another, more materialistic, theme was the development of inter-American aviation; in each country visited I discussed the question with the chief of state and his officials. From this initiative came Pan American Airways.

Another result of my journey was settlement of the bitter, long-standing Tacna-Arica border dispute between Peru and Chile. The United States had some time since been asked to arbitrate, but attempts hitherto had failed. By cautious inquiry I learned from each government the approximate limit of concessions each could make. On my return home we were able to work out a compromise.

A third result was the withdrawal of all American troops from Latin-American countries, abandoning the military intervention practiced in the Wilson, Harding and Coolidge days. I recall an interesting side light on this score during my visit to Nicaragua, where Mr. Coolidge had indirectly imposed a presidential election to stop a civil war, and had it conducted by our occupying Marines.

The Marines required each registering voter to dip a finger in a chemical solution which stained it yellow. On Election Day only the yellow fingers were permitted to vote. As they left the polls voters were required to dip another finger in a red solution. Thus repeaters were eliminated.

I asked the Marine officer in charge where he got the idea. He replied, "I once lived in New York and proposed it as a cure for one of Tammany's bad habits—but everybody said it would be insulting."

On March 4, 1929, I became the 30th President of the United States. In my inaugural address, I was somewhat hampered by the fact that I was succeeding a President of my own party, who was also a man for whom I had the warmest personal feeling. I could not, in good taste, say anything indicating differences in policies. I therefore confined myself mostly to American ideals and aspirations.

Inauguration Day was, as usual, cold and rainy. Tradition insisted on an outdoor ceremonial at

the Capitol, and by the time we arrived at the White House both Mrs. Hoover and I were soaked through.

At the time of my inauguration the whole world was at peace—at least no consequential wars were going on. Mussolini rattled his tin saber periodically but without worrying anybody much. In Japan, the military party was not to seize control until three years later; Hitler was not to come to power until after my defeat in 1932.

When I took office, American attitudes were so isolationist that we were neglecting our proper responsibilities in world affairs. Wilson's idealism—which America had felt deeply—had been mostly rejected at Versailles. In the American mind, the League of Nations had become an instrument for enforcing a bad treaty instead of—as Wilson had hoped—an instrument for amending and revising it. Even to suggest that we collaborate with the League in its many nonpolitical activities raised howls.

I had no desire to see the United States involved in European power politics. From the beginning I believed that the hope of peace lay in friendly support for representative governments the world over. I also felt that there was some security in the world-wide recoil of horror from the war. But I believed that there were more solid bases for peace, and I fervently wanted the United States to contribute to them, to work with every sincere movement whose aim was to reinforce peaceful processes.

This meant taking larger responsibilities in world affairs, and so my broad foreign policy was one of co-operation with other nations—in the moral field as distinguished from the field of force.

Moves to Achieve World-Wide Peace

During my Presidency I made many specific proposals in line with this general policy: to limit naval arms even more than had been done by the Hughes naval-limitation treaty of 1922; to reduce land armies; to eliminate points of friction we had with Britain and with Latin America; to co-operate with other nations on pacific means for restraining Japanese aggression in China; and to advance pacific methods of settling all international disputes, such as joining the World Court, working with the League of Nations in its nonforce activities, increasing the number of arbitration and conciliation treaties we had directly with other nations, and putting moral teeth in the Kellogg Pact against war.

I also offered measures for international economic co-operation when the depression struck; these I take up in later chapters.

My proposals met with varying fates.

In Latin America we established an era of good will not known for many years. To prove my determination to end American military interventions, I asked authority from Congress, on December 7, 1929, for an official commission to examine the Haiti situation and advise as to when and how we ought to withdraw. Immediately on receiving the commission's report, I began the removal of our forces from Haiti. I also directed the withdrawal of our Marines from Nicaragua, which began on June 3, 1931.

Through our minister in Switzerland we actively joined with the League of Nations in a wide range of international nonforce activities. As a result we became parties to a score of treaties covering commerce, aviation, merchant marine, protection of intellectual property, control of international traffic in narcotics, black and white slavery, and disease.

During my White House years we signed treaties of arbitration with 25 nations, treaties of conciliation with 17. We were jointly obligated with practically every country in the world to refer to these processes any differences which we could not settle by negotiation.

Secretary of State Stimson and I had greater success in getting the Senate to confirm these treaties than with my proposal that the United States join the World Court.

A study of the Senate gave promise that we might get that body to accept membership in the court if we could eliminate certain criticisms of its protocol. At least the necessary *(Continued on page 52)*

INTERNATIONAL

Chief Justice William Howard Taft administers the oath of office at Mr. Hoover's inauguration. Before taking the helm, the President-elect had occupied himself mainly with picking a Cabinet

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Hoover and first Cabinet: (l. to r.), W. F. Brown, Post Office; J. W. Good, War; Frank B. Kellogg, State; Hoover; Andrew Mellon, Treasury; W. D. Mitchell, Justice; rear, J. J. Davis, Labor; R. P. Lamont, Commerce; A. M. Hyde, Agriculture; Vice-Pres. Curtis; R. L. Wilbur, Interior; C. F. Adams, Navy

Watching a parade in Washington in 1932. Left to right: General Douglas MacArthur, Mrs. Patrick Hurley; Hurley, by now War Secretary; Hoover; Mrs. Hoover; Admiral William S. Sims and Mrs. Sims

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