

The American Legion in Politics

by **MARCUS DUFFIELD**

TWO PREDICTIONS are being made in Washington about the American Legion ten years hence: first, that it will dominate politically the legislative and probably the executive branches of our government; second, that thanks to this political power, the government will be appropriating three billion dollars a year to ex-soldiers. The problem no longer is what will the nation do with its returned soldiers, but what will the returned soldiers do with the nation.

The country has recently watched its legislators, over the protest of the President, throw open the doors of the treasury to the veterans by the passage of the so-called bonus bill increasing the loan value of the adjusted compensation certificates. In doing so, Congress realized that it was running the risk of jabbing the taxpaying constituent in his tenderest spot; furthermore, Congress was deliberately defying the important moneyed interests who are usually credited with having rather more than their share of influence. In a contest against the taxpayers and the bankers, the American Legion won.

This startling result could not have been achieved by any unorganized demand, no matter how many veterans might have wanted the money. Many of them probably did want it all along; certainly their desire did not spring up overnight. But not till almost the end of the recent Congressional session was anything done about it or much said. Within a few days, the bonus bill suddenly became the most imperative matter on the calendar, everything else was swept aside, and a measure distributing perhaps a billion dollars was rushed through with virtually no debate and repassed over the President's veto. What happened was simply this: the American Legion cracked its whip; Congress obeyed.

The Legion national convention in Boston last November took no stand on the retirement of the adjusted compensation certificates. The matter was debated, but the Legionnaires decided not to ask the nation for more money. Congress pursued other matters. Then late in January the Legion Executive Committee decided that the Legion wanted the money, after all, and said so. This announcement unleashed

the tremendous energies of the Legion's lobby in Washington, and within one month the bonus bill was law. As one Washington correspondent, commenting on the resultant depression in the bond market, put it, the present bill is only a beginning of what may be feared from "the most tightly organized lobby which Washington has known since the heyday of the late Wayne B. Wheeler and the Anti-Saloon League."

Our national legislators are asking themselves: "What next? Where will it end?" The answer to the first question is pretty generally admitted in Washington. These adjusted service certificates originally were intended to discharge in full the government's financial obligation to able-bodied ex-service men, and thus avoid the pension scandals that followed the Civil War. The certificates are in the form of paid-up life insurance, the principle payable in entirety in 1945. But it is doubtful whether the veterans will ever be called upon to pay back the present loans, for before long Congress will cash the certificates in full. Long before 1945 the money will be all spent. Then the Legion will lead the fight for pensions, and again the gates of the United States Treasury will swing wide.

A leading Republican Senator and an administration official sat down together the other day and figured out what the government will be spending every year for all ex-soldiers of the World War, counting in pensions for veterans and for widows with additional allowances for children, and they arrived at the fantastic figure of three billion dollars. To be sure it was guesswork, but they are in a position to guess knowingly. If they are right, every man, woman, and child in the country will be paying about twenty-five dollars a year each to the veterans.

What can be done about it? Nothing. The American Legion, whose constitution says the organization "shall be absolutely non-political," has become the most powerful political bloc in the United States to-day.

LEGION LOBBYING

THE ACHIEVEMENTS of the Legion in politics are by no means accidental. Bills do not just happen to pass Congress. As the

Legion was informed long ago in national convention, "You cannot get things merely by resolving. Your Senators and Representatives will not vote for legislation you favor unless you bring to bear all the pressure of your local organizations."

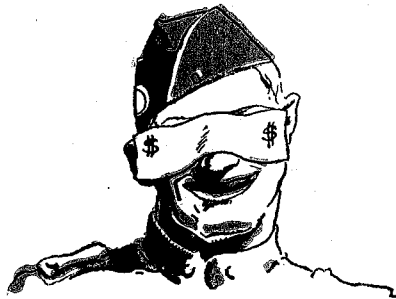
When the Legion was first organized, a small committee was appointed to represent it in Washington. Thomas W. Miller, later the ill-fated Alien Property Custodian, took charge of affairs and became the moving spirit. He had

a way of producing results, so the Legion, encouraged, appointed a permanent Legislative Committee. Miller introduced John Thomas Taylor, a Washington lawyer, into it; they opened offices, hired a staff, and gradually began creating a lobby. John Thomas Taylor took over the work

when Miller left, and with aggressiveness and skill built up a machine which to-day, still under his direction, is the envy of all other lobbyists in the capital.

This Legion lobby costs twenty-five thousand dollars a year, and is well worth it. As Taylor says, what other organization in Washington can boast of having forced three bills through Congress over the vetoes of presidents? Surely a record to be proud of; also a record of rather deep significance to taxpayers in the United States, and, in fact, to all those who are not quite sure whether it is desirable to hand so considerable a share in the conduct of the government over to the American Legion. It may be perfectly all right, but at least it is a phenomenon worth observing.

The power of the Legion's lobby machine can be properly appreciated in its true light only when we consider what a comparatively small proportion of the nation's population it represents. Just who exerts this power? The five million men who served in America's armies in the World War? No, for only 700,000 of them are members in good standing of the American Legion. This means that the Legion, before whom the country's legislators quake, represents less than a fifth of the veterans in the nation. The official desires of the Legion are recorded by the annual conventions, at which the attendance may be 100,000, or two per cent of the nation's veterans. Actually, the im-



Drawings by Thomas Benrimo

portant decisions are arrived at by a dominant group which probably numbers little more than one hundred men, of whom a mere handful stand out as the moving spirits.

The internal workings of the Legion's political machine, mysterious to the outsider, actually are simple. The secret is organization, alert efficiency, pressure skillfully applied. Oddly enough, the Legion has become one of the foremost exponents in practice of the system of government contributed by their worst bogey, the Bolsheviks. Government by the Legion, reduced to its ultimate terms, is unofficial Sovietism. A bloc of the citizenry makes known its wishes through a series of assemblies and delegations progressively waning in numbers and waxing in authority. There is a pyramid of power: the twelve thousand Legion posts throughout the country constitute the base, the National Legislative Committee, or John Thomas Taylor, is the apex. "It must be recognized," the Legion itself has noted, "that Congress does not lead in settling questions of public, political, or economic policy. . . . Legislation is literally made outside the halls of Congress by groups of persons interested in legislation, mainly with economic motives, and the deliberating process within Congress constitutes a sort of formal ratification."

Let us suppose, for example, that the Rockyville, Oregon, post feels that there ought to be a United States veterans' hospital in Rockyville. The post passes a resolution to that effect, and sends its delegates to the next national convention of the American Legion primed to push the project. At each of the annual conventions there is a Rehabilitation Committee to consider such matters, so the Rockyville hospital proposal is taken up with perhaps a score of similar ones.

Some staid member of the Rockyville delegation realizes that there are times and ways to put through a resolution in almost any national convention committee. So the Rockyville project is endorsed by the Rehabilitation Committee, passed on to the convention for approval, and becomes a part of the American Legion's "legislative program."

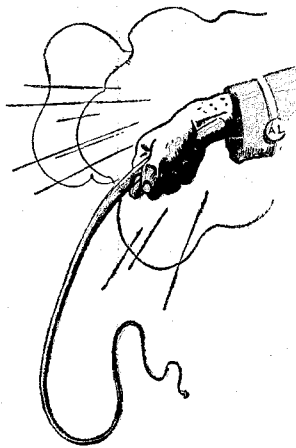
After the convention, a description of the

desired institution, with an estimate of its cost, is conveyed to the Legion's Legislative Committee in Washington, where Mr. John Thomas Taylor jots down the cost, \$225,000, and adds it in with the various other items which the convention has decided the government ought to spend. The sum total of these items he presents in the form of an omnibus bill. Leaving nothing to chance, he writes the bill himself. He, personally, has written, he estimates, between fifteen hundred and two thousand bills in the ten years he has been in charge of the Legion's lobby in the capital. A goodly percentage of these bills have become engraved, word for word, on the nation's statute books.

The next step is to have the bill introduced in Congress. This is a formality. Mr. Taylor has, as he terms them, "key men" in all branches of the government. Whatever the proper committee of the House of Representatives or Senate, there will be found either a Legionnaire or a sympathizer who will not only introduce the bill but see it through committee and right onto the floor of Congress. Representative Royal C. Johnson, a Legionnaire from South Dakota, probably holds the record for the highest number of official Legion bills introduced. But it would be difficult to find a Representative at the present time who would refuse to present an American Legion measure.

The Rockyville hospital project, once launched, is by no means abandoned. In the Legislative Committee headquarters in Washington is a "status book" in which is kept the daily history of every bill in Congress of interest to veterans. No physician gives more minute and painstaking attention to a patient's chart than does the Legion lobbyist to this status book. In its prosaic leaves is many a thrilling story of a bill carefully drawn up, introduced, steered into committee, nursed through it over impossible obstacles, and then triumphantly jammed through Congress in the last hours of session over the corpses of a dozen luckless measures by dint of devious tricks and maneuvers of politics known only to a seasoned lobbyist.

The Legislative Committee takes over the duty of providing hearings before the proper committee, frequently arranging the programs



of the hearings and supplying the witnesses. In behalf of the Rockyville hospital, one or more veterans from Rockyville would travel all the way to Washington to tell of the need. Occasionally the Legislative Committee realizes that more dramatic hearings are necessary. In one instance disabled ex-soldiers suffering from loss of limbs or maladies were brought right from a hospital out of sick beds in order to bring vivid testimony to the legislators.

This matter of hearings alone keeps the Legislative Committee more than busy when Congress is in session. Mr. Taylor says he sometimes has as many as three hearings to



superintend at the same hour of a morning. Hundreds, possibly thousands, of witnesses have been marshaled. The Legislative Committee, however, reports that not a cent is spent in lobbying because the witnesses all pay their own way, or at least have their expenses provided from sources at home.

So from day to day the key men pilot the Rockyville project along its legislative course, along with its brother measures from the Legion, constantly getting directions from headquarters. There comes a day when John Thomas Taylor's telephone rings in the Legislative Committee office and one of "his men" says the bill is ready to come up for vote in the House. "Is it all O.K., this Rockyville \$225,000?" he inquires. "Yes, O.K., Jeff. Shove it right through. And by the way, how is 'Widows and Orphans' getting along this morning, Jeff?" The government builds in Rockyville.

HOW IT WORKS

THE NATIONAL Legislative Committee, in a recapitulation of its accomplishments to the sixth convention, boasted that it had persuaded the Sixty-sixth Congress to appropriate \$358,545,000; the special session of

the Sixty-seventh, \$267,000,000; and the rest of the Sixty-seventh, \$1,033,452,000, and so on. It all mounts up. The total sum disbursed by the government for veterans' aid of all sorts is now nearing a billion dollars a year.

One difficulty early in the history of the Legislative Committee in Washington was that of getting bills through. Most of its measures were referred to the Committee on Interstate Commerce, which had so many problems on its calendar that Legion items frequently got lost in the shuffle. After this had happened a number of times, the Legislative Committee began to bring pressure for a separate standing committee in the House of Representatives to devote its time to Legion legislation. Representative Hamilton Fish, Jr., a Legionnaire from New York, introduced a motion to alter the House rules to provide for such a committee and in time it was constituted — the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, of which Royal C. Johnson is chairman.

But suppose some measure more debatable than the Rockyville hospital bill finds its progress blocked by adamant opposition — what does the Legion do then? The proper persons are seen, from the President down to the last Representative. Sometimes the voice of the Legion is relayed in person to cabinet officers, committee chairmen, hesitant solons. More often a form letter is mailed by the Legislative Committee to every Senator and Representative, setting forth the Legion's demands. Nearly always there is a "release" to the press broadcasting the Legion's desires. These methods have often been found effective.

Occasionally a legislative crisis comes, and then the Legion machine shows its full strength. From the Legislative Committee goes forth a telegram to forty-eight State Commanders of the Legion who relay it to twelve thousand Legion Post Commanders throughout the country who in turn pass it on to seven hundred thousand Legionnaires. The telegram reads like this: Use every legitimate means to see that the Senate passes the Blank Bill with enough majority to override a presidential veto. Use letters, telegrams, and radio to bring pressure on your Congressmen and Senators.

So Congress is flooded with Legion messages. Thousands upon thousands pour in and pile up on the legislators' desks. "Get your form letters ready to answer," John Thomas Taylor once

cheerily told a House committee. "The word has gone out to the Legion."

The American Legion official magazine printed some testimonials at the height of one important contest. "I am getting from twenty-five to fifty letters and petitions a day," said Representative Burton E. Sweet, of Iowa. "Many are from Legion posts, more from Legion members." And Senator McCumber, of North Dakota, testified: "It looks as if every Legion post in North Dakota and every one throughout the country will have asked my support before it is done." It was estimated that 63,500 petitions, letters, and telegrams, mostly inspired by the Legion, filled Congressional mail bags in that battle.

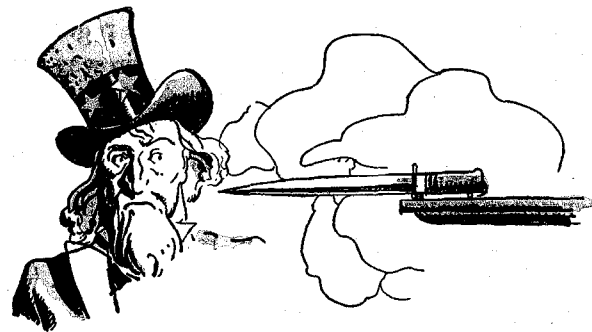
There have been legislators who tried to play King Canute to such a tide, but few are to be found in Congress now like Senator Borah, who on one occasion frankly said that he did not intend to buy votes with public money by supporting a Legion proposition. "I observe in your telegram," he wrote to the Pocatello, Idaho, post which had urged him to support the bonus, "the threat which you impliedly make as to future political punishment. But . . . I have never sought to purchase political power by drafts upon the public treasury or chosen to buy continuation in office by putting four billion dollars upon the bended backs of the American taxpayers." Many are the Congressmen and Senators who occasionally rebel in private at being so stampeded, but they shrug their shoulders and reason with themselves that the measure will pass anyway, so what good will come of futile opposition?

On the other hand, they have learned that much harm might come. The feeling, in fact, is that opposing a Legion measure is like poking one's political head out of a train window. Not that the Legion ever enters the electoral lists in a body and campaigns against a lawmaker at the polls back home; this cannot be done (at least as an organization) because the Legion is strictly non-political. What happens is this: Politician X is running for Congress against incumbent Representative Y. Mr. X, who, as a matter of course nowadays, has contact with some Legion post, gets that post to write to the National Legislative Committee in Washington for his opponent's record. The Legislative Committee, which has a complete record of every piece of legislation even re-

motely affecting ex-service men, and records of how every legislator voted on each bill, responds with Representative Y's bill of health. If the luckless Y has ever been on the wrong side of the fence, his opponent, X, finds it out, and so is furnished ammunition for his campaign speeches. His foe, Mr. X informs the district, is wanting in gratitude and patriotism — is against the soldier boys. That, Representative Y finds out, is a political sentence of death.

POLITICAL INFLUENCE

ALL THE WHILE there remains in the background Article Two of the Legion's consti-



tution which says: "The American Legion shall be absolutely non-political and shall not be used for the dissemination of partisan principles or for the promotion of the candidacy of any person seeking public office or preferment." This is a thorn. "The G.A.R.," Hanford MacNider declared when he was Legion National Commander, "dominated the United States for years after the Civil War, although it had a membership of but twenty thousand. What an opportunity for the Legion!" Wistfully, or perhaps only as a matter of form, he added that the Legion, of course, was not in politics.

There is good evidence for believing that the Legionnaires originally had the firm intention of abiding by Article Two. They did not know, at first, that political power could be theirs for the grasping. Some of them still feel that the fault lies with sly legislators who dangle alluring laws in front of the Legion in order to further themselves. A plaintive get-thee-behind-me-Satan resolution was passed at the Boston convention last fall. "We do declare," it said, "that we condemn the practice of proposal of legislation primarily designed to attract our votes."

No prettier illustration can be found of the gradual sensing of political power, the progressive reaching for and claiming of it, than in the Legion's attitude toward the adjusted compensation. From the very beginning, Legionnaires did not want a bonus, which would have been a gratuity; adjusted compensation was another matter — back wages to make up the difference between what they received as soldiers and what they would have earned had they not entered the army.

Even in the matter of adjusted compensation, however, the Legion was diffident in its first national convention. When the question was brought up, the Legion felt that propriety would not permit it to take a stand in so delicate a financial matter, lest it be regarded as selfish. "While the American Legion was not founded to promote legislation in its selfish interest," said its resolution, "yet it recognizes that our government has an obligation to all service men and women to relieve the financial disadvantage incidental to military service . . . but the Legion feels that it cannot ask for legislation in its selfish interest, and leaves with confidence to Congress the discharge of this obligation."

This reticence lasted only ninety days. Then the Legion national executive committee met in Indianapolis and took a cautious step forward by resolving that all service men and women were "entitled" to adjusted compensation and drew up a bill.

By the time the Legionnaires met for their second convention, they were a trifle less shy. In as much as Congress had asked the Legion what they thought about adjusted compensation, it was only polite of them to reply. So the convention approved the action of its Executive Committee and approved the bill as well, then directed the Committee to "take such action as is necessary to insure its prompt passage." Here, indeed, is the voice of a stronger, bolder Legion than the timid fledgling of 1919.

President Harding, newly in office, stopped the Senate from passing the bonus in 1921. "Powerful as is the Legion," the Legislative Committee apologetically reported at the fourth convention, "it could not be expected that we could create a breach between the national administration and the Senate so early in the administration's history." But the convention was not to be pacified. "We do now

instruct our new Commander, the Executive Committee and the Legislative Committee," read the report, "to continue the fight for this legislation until it is enacted into law." This was a flat admission that the Legion was definitely fighting to exert its power over Congress.

By the fifth convention the angered Legion had fully realized its political power in the nation and felt itself in position to make a definite threat. "The time has arrived," trumpeted the resolution, "for the acid test of the government's intentions to finally dispose of this measure, as it cannot longer delay its passage and retain the confidence of the veterans. We do hereby insist that there be no further delay."

Then in 1924, Congress, thoroughly frightened, passed the adjusted compensation act over the veto of President Coolidge and the Legion in its sixth convention permitted itself to exult. "We have been placed in a mighty position," said the resolution. "Great confidence is ours. In our hour of victory let us remember that our great influence must be used for the welfare of this nation which we are pledged to guard in peace as in war."

Coincident with this crescendo of political ambition and ascension to almost royal status there has been a curious artificial erosion of the Legion's definition of the term "political." The word has been whittled away almost to the point of becoming meaningless in the effort to stay within Article Two, which laid such a heavy interdiction on politics. The National Judge Advocate (their supreme court) has been kept busy answering calls to define it, and he has not been harsh.

The Legion soon felt that it should be regarded as legitimate for them to help the government see that veterans' affairs were properly handled, even if that did involve occasional stimulation of the government. At this point, a distinction was drawn between matters pertaining strictly to veterans' welfare, and so-called controversial questions. So long as the Legion refrained from expressing itself on such disputed topics, surely it was not in politics. Gradually the word "controversial" came to indicate issues that were in dispute within the Legion itself. When the Legion could agree on a national policy, no matter how controversial it might be for the rest of the nation, it ceased to

be so from their point of view, and issued forth under the simple description "patriotic." Under this somewhat dubious chain of interpretation the Legion now feels itself justified in demanding that Congress take specific action on all variety of matters of grave public concern, most of which are highly controversial, not to say inflammable, and certainly no more relevant to the veterans than to everybody else.

Perhaps the most satisfactory idea of the Legion's shriveled definition of politics, and its relation thereto, came from their official organ, *The American Legion Weekly*, which said editorially: "The mistake is frequently made of ruling the American Legion out of politics because of its Minneapolis action (the constitutional interdiction against politics). It should be clearly understood that the American Legion is very much in politics. . . . But they are merely keeping their collective voice free from party entanglements. They are not keeping their organization out of the political life of the country but out of the clutches of practical politicians.

If the American Legion as an organization has chosen to hold aloof from the old parties, if it is going to work through them rather than with them . . . it is because it prefers being a political spur to being a political asset. . . . The American Legion merely escaped its extinction when, at its charter convention, it refused to divide its strength into rival political camps and cast its hat with a whoop into the political arena."

The legislative programs of the Legion have come to assume the proportions of a major political party's platform. The chief difference is that the Legion suggestions are forthright, never equivocal, and they usually materialize. In the first national convention, the Legion put forth with politeness amounting almost to hesitancy twenty-nine ideas about legislation which they thought would prove beneficial. Self-confidence waxed from convention to convention, and with it grew both the total of the legislative proposals and the insistence with which they were put forward. In the latest gathering in Boston, the Legion modestly

demanded one hundred and eight separate and specific pieces of legislation by Congress.

Once a year the National Legislative Committee chronicles its legislative accomplishments for the national convention in a closely printed report the size of a small book, both massive and impressive. "Your committee," it proclaims, "has contributed to the enactment of the following legislation," and there follows a list from two to five pages long of public laws, resolutions, and executive orders dealing with subjects ranging from Japanese exclusion to Gold Star mothers. Now and then there are thrilling passages recounting legislative battles won or lost. To the tenth convention in San Antonio, the committee reported that it had kept track, day by day, week by week, urging here, maneuvering there, of 1,064 pieces of projected legislation of interest to the Legion.

"Like a watchtower overlooking the battlefield, the National Legislative Committee stands at Washington," it told the convention. The committee may also be said to have some of the attributes of a super-tank.

THE LEGION PREPARES

THE LEGION," one of its commanders said, "is the cradle for the whole future of America." He spoke truly. Granted the now virtually avowed political ambition, and the almost irresistible power of the organization, the question arises as to what policies the Legion is going to prescribe for the nation. Are we going to find ourselves wisely, tolerantly guided? The reply naturally depends on one's own point of view. Some persons will feel unable to give a whole-hearted affirmative.

The principal preoccupation of the Legion, after strictly veterans' affairs such as adjusted compensation, is with preparedness for the next war. "The people of this country," Commander Spafford once told an Armistice Day gathering, "are coming more and more to the realization that the last war did not end war. They realize that only an armistice was signed. . . . Instructors of the youth of this country must be filled with fervid patriotism." Usually



Legionnaires are not so outspoken, but they are motivated by a psychology of war-anticipation.

This, obviously, is antithetical to a peace psychology. In the early years the Legion went on record as urging the United States' adherence to the World Court, and they had a Committee on Peace and Foreign Relations. The enthusiasm for the World Court flagged, and the matter dropped when a convention resolution on the subject was tabled. Of late the word peace has been dropped out of the title of the standing committee and the Foreign Relations part of the name indicates merely the committee's duties of cooperating with the FIDAC, the inter-allied veterans' association. As with all vigorous campaigns for preparedness, the danger lies in overstepping the indistinct line that divides such activity from jingoism.

The Legion wants America to have a navy, if not the biggest in the world, at least second to none. This desire is put forward with insistent emphasis in memoranda to Congress and the President and in public addresses throughout the country. When the question of navy building has come up in Congress, the Legion has never failed to exert pressure to have construction authorized on more warships of all categories. In between sessions, there have been numerous complaints that the United States was falling behind the 5-5-3 allowance of the Washington Conference and lapsing into the error of supporting only a paper navy.

After Prime Minister MacDonald's visit to this country in 1929, there was so much good feeling between America and England that the Prime Minister went home and ordered work stopped on two new British warships. This practical manifestation of the will to peace pleased nearly everybody; there was but one dissenting voice, that of E. E. Spafford, National Commander of the Legion, who issued a public rebuke to the President for his pacific act. The Legion has felt that the safety of the United States was not adequately cared for by our official delegations in international parleys, and has recently become emboldened to

request that hereafter a representative of the Legion be permitted to accompany American delegations to all disarmament conferences, as an observer.

Similarly, the Legion is interested in promoting what it conceives to be adequate preparedness on land. In so doing, it has sponsored two rather radical propositions, universal military training and universal draft. These suggestions would have startled our perhaps too peaceful, liberty-loving forefathers, and, in fact, come as something of a shock even to

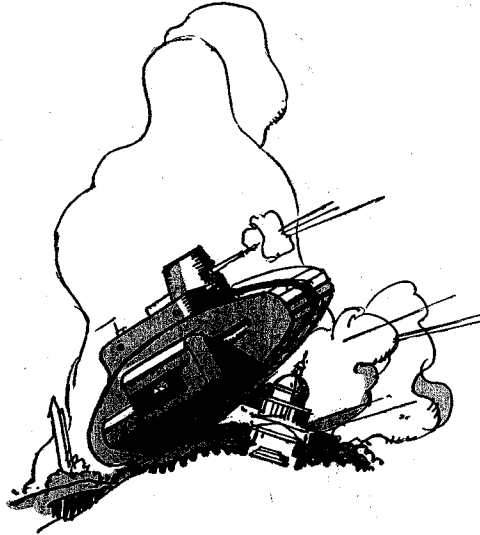
this generation, indicating as they do that we are drifting away from our traditional abhorrence of militarism in any form.

Although this country never has enforced conscription except in wartime emergencies, the Legion proposes to enact a law now by which men could be drafted immediately on the outbreak of war. The first bill to provide this failed of passage but the Legion recently succeeded in having enacted

the Snell Resolution calling for the President to name a commission to study and report on its universal draft plan.

The United States likewise has never demanded that all its youth serve time, about their nineteenth or twentieth year, under army training, but this also is demanded as a measure of preparedness for the next war. The Legion explains that its project differs from the European system in as much as our young men, while in military training, would not be compelled to take part in regular army service in peace time, such as border patrol. So far the Legion has not pushed this matter to success.

Temporarily the Legion is devoting its attention to stimulating voluntary military training. One of the boasts of the National Legislative Committee was that it obtained increased appropriations from Congress to allow more men to be drilled annually in the summer Citizens' Military Training Camps, and to permit of holding the national rifle matches at Camp Perry every year instead of spasmodically. The Legion is insistent that every college and university aided by govern-



ment funds must maintain a compulsory Reserve Officers' Training Corps, and is quick to rebuke any institution which harkens to student demand to abolish this arm of the service. The most recent Legion proposal is that each of its posts should have its own rifle team, so that the twelve thousand posts may become nuclei throughout the country not only for men with some knowledge of war but for propaganda to encourage the use of arms.

Another matter on which the American Legion feels strongly is that of One Hundred Per Cent Americanism, which is now construed quite literally to mean that foreigners are *ipso facto* to be suspected and preferably eliminated from the American scene. The Legislative Committee did its best, on motion of the national convention, to have all immigration barred for a time, but, failing that, was instrumental in helping to put through the "two per cent law" that restricted the incoming flow of aliens.

By the same token, the Legion is inclined to find evidences of Bolshevism lurking everywhere among the people of foreign extraction who are already here. National convention resolutions have for some time demanded a most drastic policy of deportation, hence it was with the greatest relish that the Boston convention last fall heard that Hamilton Fish, Jr., was conducting an extensive inquiry into the hidden Communists within our midst. So confident was the convention of Representative Fish that the Legion put itself on record as endorsing in advance the conclusions of his inquiry, urging that they be embodied in statutes. Mr. Fish did not fail the Legion, for his final report after months of impartial investigation embodies almost exactly the Legion's ideas on the matter, and in places re-

sembles the phrasing of the convention resolutions. This may not have been entirely a coincidence as Mr. Fish, who is the author of the Legion preamble, has long been active in its affairs.

The interests of the Legion are wide enough to encompass a remarkable variety of subjects. It has been working effectively in state legislatures to obtain laws requiring all school children to salute the flag, and providing for properly patriotic history textbooks — to the extent of having them rewritten if necessary. The Legion has pronounced in favor of government operation of Muscle Shoals, doubtless as a valuable source of nitrate for munitions in wartime, and in favor of government development of Boulder Dam, perhaps because more land might be opened up for grants to veterans. One of the minor triumphs of the Legion was a government intercession on behalf of the army mule, increasing his daily ration of hay. Nothing is too small, nothing too great to merit the attention, and the active political participation, of the Legion.

"The Legion," its Legislative Committee triumphantly proclaimed to a convention, "has made a lasting impression upon the nation's capital such as no other organization, educational, religious, or patriotic or historical has been able to make." In nearly every case its powerful influence is thrown on the side of ultra-conservatism in shaping the policies that will rule America.

The ancient legions dominated Rome with spears, and set up emperors at will. No doubt it is much better that the American Legion exerts its very considerable force in this country's affairs by the more modern method of the ballot. It might be even better not to have any more wars.

In an early issue *The Forum* will publish further revelations concerning the activities of the Legion.



Good Old 1913

Reminiscences of a Golden Age



Drawings by Weldon Bailey

by **ELMER DAVIS**

I

IT WAS lately and casually remarked in this magazine that 1913 was the peak year of human felicity; to which opinion persons older than its author, and persons younger, have taken some exception. Everybody, they object, thinks that the peak of human felicity was the year in which he first began to sit up and take notice. Why should a man who happened to leave college in 1913 erect an accident of chronology into a philosophy of history, to the discredit of all the years in which other men left college and went out to see if the universe was as represented? . . . Well, I shall try to tell you.

Granted that I am prejudiced in favor of 1913 because it was the year in which I first came to the surface; on the other hand, it was the year in which I first had to go to work for a living. Granted that the middle generation to which I now belong finds the Golden Age always in the past — the good old days when you could get a dinner with wine for what the hors-d'oeuvres cost now, when traffic and livers were less congested, and everything was veiled with a glamor which seems beyond recapture. Granted too that for the young, except in times of direst cataclysm, the Golden Age is always here and now, so that Ovid spoke

for all the Younger Generations of all time when he wrote —

Prisca juvent alios, ego me nunc denique natum

Gratulor; hæc ætas moribus apta meis.

Still, I think that we of 1913 found a better here and now than any generation for centuries before us, or any generation which will follow us for some decades to come. Every younger generation is the heir of all the ages; but in our time the assets of the estate had accumulated to a legacy beyond all imagining, and we had not yet discovered that they were offset by some appalling liabilities. In other words, we came up before the war — just before the war — in what seems to the retrospective eye an age of incredible innocence and security.

II

SECURITY. . . . For forty years in Europe, for fifty years in America, there had been no great war to check material and intellectual progress. Wars were still fought, but only in remote and romantic regions such as Manchuria, South Africa, the Balkans, Mexico; and only outlandish nations engaged in them on any considerable scale. Never since