

# Whose Culture for Latin America?

Socony ueber alles. A scion of the oil monopoly is made "coordinator" of inter-American cultural relations. Samuel Putnam traces the progressive ties that bind two continents.

**I**N THESE dark days of war—days laden with menace, with portent, and with an unconquerable hope—Americans, amid all the new and bewildering problems that are being forced upon them, find themselves suddenly made aware of Latin America and Latin-American culture. This awareness, functioning reciprocally between the peoples of the northern and southern continents, is in itself something altogether to be desired. For more than a century, patient, painstaking scholars, and a number of the finest creative minds which the two great civilizations of the Western Hemisphere have produced, have labored to bring about just such a state of affairs. Their effort has been a consistently uphill one, and has received in the past little more than lip-service and a limited and by no means disinterested support from the governments involved. The various agencies set up, the Division of Intellectual Cooperation of the Pan American Union, the recently created Division of Cultural Relations of the State Department at Washington, even the Hispanic Foundation of the Library of Congress, have been, and still are, compelled to operate on a pitiful financial shoe string. The vast public, meanwhile, north and south, has remained ignorant of the existence of these agencies, to say nothing of their work.

## "COORDINATOR OF CULTURAL RELATIONS"

And now, of a sudden, in connection with the war drive, one objective of which is obviously a course of imperialist aggrandizement at the expense of our southern neighbors, the people of the United States rub their eyes as they are told that they must, overnight as it were, become conscious of Latin-American life and culture. At the same time our own "culture," in allopathic doses, is being sent out over the air waves, by way of the motion picture screen, the printed page, and every available medium, for Latin-American consumption. And to make sure that all is as it should be, Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller, grandson of John D. Rockefeller, is called to Washington as a dollar-a-year man, is presented with a three-and-a-half-million-dollar appropriation, and is given a free hand and presumably full control over all inter-American cultural activities. Mr. Rockefeller's official title is "Coordinator of Commercial and Cultural Relations between the American Republics for the Council of National Defense." What the other "American republics" had to do with it is not clear; for Mr. Rockefeller was appointed by President Roosevelt, and is directly responsible to him alone. This, it may be observed, is hardly a democratic beginning, and inspires not a great deal more confidence than does the combination of "culture" and "commerce" in the hands of one

"coordinator"—a word that has its unpleasant connotations from Hitler's Germany.

The repercussions have not been slow in coming; but to date the reaction has been limited chiefly to specialists in the field of Latin-American scholarship, on the one hand, and to the press of Latin America on the other hand. These reactions will be considered in more detail later on. As for the average North American, it may safely be said that he has not so much as heard of Mr. Rockefeller and his aides (there has been rather surprisingly little publicity on the subject). Indeed, it is remarked in Washington that Congress has yet to discover them. All the ordinary citizen knows is, as has been said, that there is a "drive on," and that he is supposed, patriotically, to manifest an interest in anything or everything "south of the border," from the latest rumba or tango to the painting of Candido Portinari. Scenting the fashion, if not deftly guided from above, the women's clubs of the country are swinging into line; and from a correspondent in Lawrence, Kan., comes word that each of the twenty-one organizations of this type in a city of 14,000 is clamoring for lecturers and material on Latin America!

The short of the matter is, whatever the motives of those at the top, the interest of North Americans in the civilization to the south of us has been definitely aroused, and is bound to grow in the months and years that are to come. The importance of seeing that this interest is legitimately satisfied, and not perverted or exploited for reasons alien to the cause of a true culture, scarcely needs to be pointed out. But before an adequate criticism can be made of the government's present program, or an intelligent discussion launched with respect to aims, methods, and a possible alternative program, it is imperative that we first go back and review briefly the history of inter-American cultural relations.

It was, most significantly, under the sign of liberty and democracy that the Latin and the Anglo-Saxon cultures of the Western

Hemisphere were at last brought together at the beginning of the nineteenth century, after they had grown up side by side, with no contact for hundreds of years, throughout the entire colonial period. This early lack of intercourse was due to two causes primarily: the influence of the Catholic Church hierarchy, which feared the democratizing influence from the north; and the closed economic policy of the Spanish empire. It was as a result of the national liberation struggles of the Latin American peoples that the first inter-American cultural contacts were effected, when, in the year 1806, the great liberator, Simon Bolivar, and the Venezuelan patriot, Francisco Miranda, visited this country. And it was, confessedly, the democratic ideals of Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin which drew them here. The ice had thus been broken; but for the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the cultural inter-change between the northern and the southern continents continued to be, on the whole, "meager and sporadic," as one South American writer puts it. There was still the formidable linguistic barrier, and the almost equally formidable barrier of religious difference, along with a certain amount of racial feeling.

The first Latin-American students in the United States were two Chilean youths who, by special permission of President Madison, were permitted to enter West Point in 1816. About this same time, Bolivar's nephew was attending a private school in Philadelphia; and in a touching letter to his uncle he asks permission to change to the University of Virginia, since this was the school founded by Thomas Jefferson, the father of American democracy.

## THE CUBAN STRUGGLE

It is from the year 1823 on, that a more or less steady stream of intellectual intercourse between the United States and Latin America may be traced; for it was in the third decade of the last century that the Cuban struggle for independence began sending to our shores a wave of exiles, among them a number of the island's best writers. The famous poet, Jose Maria de Heredia, friend of William Cullen Bryant and author of the "Ode to Niagara," was one of these. Another was the poet, Rafael Maria de Mendive, Longfellow's friend and Spanish translator. It was these two men, Heredia in particular, who first awakened an interest in Spanish-American literature among English-speaking men of letters of the New World.

The ideal of North American liberty continued to be the lodestone; and not merely our great freedom-founding statesmen like Jefferson and Franklin, but our educators like Horace Mann, who were engaged in creating



Rodney



a new type of free school, served as an attraction. It was on a pilgrimage to the Boston home of Horace Mann in 1847 that one of the greatest writers South America has produced, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, author of the famous *Facundo*, came to these shores. *Facundo* has rightly been termed the first great Spanish-American novel. Sarmiento was an educator as well as a novelist, and was inspired by Benjamin Franklin as well as by Horace Mann. He became the friend of men like Emerson, Longfellow, and Ticknor, and wrote a biography of Abraham Lincoln, which Horace Mann's wife translated, but which was never published. (Mrs. Mann also translated the *Facundo*.) After receiving an honorary doctor's degree from the University of Michigan, Sarmiento returned home to become president of his native Argentina.

Another Argentine writer, the poet Jose Antonio Miralla, had come to the United States in 1823, after having participated for seven years in the Cuban fight for independence. He, among other things, translated Gray's *Elegy* into Spanish, thus bringing a taste of English literature to the southern peoples by way of North America. After 1861, as a result of the mid-century "Ten Years' War" for Cuban freedom, more exiles arrived, including the poet beloved of his countrymen, Juan Clemente Zenea. It was Zenea who made the first study of our literature to be published in the Spanish language. And finally, as the century was drawing to a close, came the great Cuban leader and thinker, Jose Marti, who from 1880 to 1895 resided in New York City, and for more than ten years contributed to the *New York Sun*.

It was, in brief, Latin America's fighters for freedom, her exiles, her pilgrims to what they regarded as the shrine of liberty, who throughout the greater part of the nineteenth century kept the two continents in cultural contact with each other. These men were not intellectuals of the ivory tower or the arm chair variety. They were men who valued culture as they did freedom, who realized that the two were inseparable, and that culture like freedom was something that you had to fight for. They were, at the same time, among the finest artists that their respective lands have produced; and they made known to their peoples Whitman, Emerson, Longfellow, Bryant, Poe, and other outstanding figures of our literature, before we had scarcely become aware that such a thing as a literature existed south of the Rio Grande.

#### LITERARY REFUGEES

It is to be noted that this intercourse remained for the most part extremely one-sided. With the exception of a few scattered items of interest chiefly to scholars, there is little to indicate a reciprocating concern on the part of North Americans with the culture of their Spanish-speaking neighbors. There are a number of reasons which might be adduced for this. One is the historic fact that it was the political-literary refugees from the south who were compelled to come to us; whereas, our own intellectuals had little if any oppor-



TREASURE HOUSE OF THE AMERICAS is what the imperialists are calling it. South America is an almost virgin land, where 120,000,000 hard-working, liberty-loving people are trying to retain their sovereignty and independence against pressure from Wall Street.

tunity to visit Latin-American countries, or even to become acquainted by way of the printed page with the cultural output of these nations. The problem of book exchange between the two civilizations of the hemisphere has always been, and remains, a vexing one.

On the other hand, such a psychological factor as the Yankee's proverbial uni-lingual insularity, commonly explained by geography, is not to be unduly stressed, but must rather be taken in its social-historic context. The Latin Americans are quite as "insular" as ourselves, with no more need than we have of learning a foreign language, e.g., English;

yet North American authors are widely read by them, in the original and in numerous translations. Among the works recently done into Spanish for the South American market the present writer has noted John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* (a number of versions); Hemingway's *Farewell to Arms*; Dreiser's *Jennie Gerhardt*; Louis Bromfield's *A Modern Hero*; etc. Other writers who are well known to Spanish Americans, and to Portuguese-speaking Brazilians also, are Sinclair Lewis, James Branch Cabell, Upton Sinclair, Willa Cather, Eugene O'Neill, Carl Sandburg, Sherwood Anderson, Langston Hughes,



Mike Gold, Edgar Lee Masters, Amy Lowell, Edith Wharton, etc. The point is: how many of us could name half a dozen important writers of Latin America?

In the nineteenth century, there can be no doubt that the well known "genteel tradition," against which writers like Whitman and Emerson raised their epic voices, had something to do with the matter. For this tradition was but a prolongation of that colonial spirit which permeates our early literature; it was in reality a form of Anglophilic kow-towing which was to have its apotheosis in Henry James, and which in turn led to a disdain of other colonial cultures.

The United States, meanwhile, was busy with her own problems and with working out her own destiny, with completing the conquest of the frontier and laying the foundations of what was to become the world's greatest industrial empire, as the Rockefellers, Astors, Guggenheims, and others gobbled up the nation's resources, preparatory to fastening the chains of economic slavery, not merely upon their countrymen, but, in a still worse form, colonial exploitation, upon the peoples of the southern Americas. It is not surprising, then, that our intellectual class, faithful mirror of the North American bourgeoisie, the Dollar Diplomats, continued to look upon the southern cultures as colonial, and hence inferior.

#### THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

From 1870, or about the time that American monopoly capital began forming and Wall Street's foreign policy began taking shape, the stream of cultural intercourse between the continents shows a definite ebb. Jose Marti was the last of the great Latin-American fighters for freedom to find refuge on our shores; today we accord our hospitality to fascists like the Chilean Davila! Already, a deep-rooted suspicion of Yankee aims had been engendered among the other American republics, a suspicion which had been growing ever since our war with Mexico. It was in an effort to ward off this feeling of distrust that the First International Conference of

American States was called in Washington in 1889, out of which was born the Pan American Union. Conferences, however, were to prove of little avail in this regard, as Wall Street relentlessly continued its march of empire.

The Spanish-American War and its aftermath, which marked the beginning of the first imperialist struggle for the division of the world, came as a great shock, the final disillusionment, to the Latin-American peoples. What were they to think of their "beneficent" big neighbor to the north, as they beheld that neighbor grabbing Puerto Rico and the Philippines and imposing the odious Platt Amendment on Cuba? There was, too, the Panama affair of 1903, and the aggressions in Central America.

The reaction of Latin-American intellectuals was swift and intense. In the early years of the century we find springing up a continent-wide literary movement, which has as its common basic theme: *resistance to Yankee imperialism*. The finest of South American writers—Ruben Dario, Manuel Ugarte, Rufino Blanco Fombona, and many others—enlisted whole-heartedly in the cause and gave the best that they had to fighting "the Colossus of the north." Commenting on this, a courageous Spanish-American educator, Dr. Manuel Pedro Gonzalez, took occasion to speak his mind plainly a couple of years ago in the course of a lecture at the University of California at Los Angeles:

The preaching of these crusaders, on the one hand, and the aggressions of the United States, on the other, prepared the soil, and today we are harvesting the fruits. In the political field we find a deep current of fear, distrust and resentment of the United States, which contrasts sharply with that of confidence and admiration that marked the period prior to the Spanish-American War; in the literary field there exists an anti-Yankee literature which is reaching epidemic proportions. . . . The term Yankee in Spanish America is almost always synonymous with North American, that is, a citizen of the United States, only pigmented with an element of contempt and sometimes even of hate. . . . We can hardly find today a poet or writer in Spanish

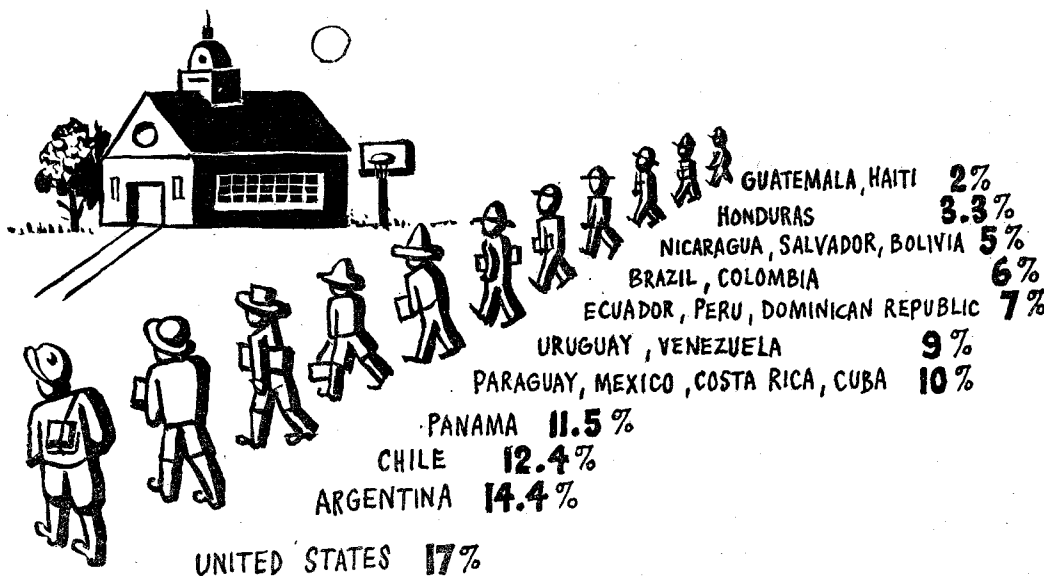
America who is not strongly antagonistic to American economic penetration. Regardless of political and social views, we may say they are fairly unanimous on this point.

Words such as these, one would think, well might give occasion for pause to those who, capitalizing upon culture, would put it at the service of imperialism. And these words, it is to be remembered, were spoken in 1938. The situation which Dr. Gonzalez has described as beginning with the birth of the century has prevailed down to the present time, with only one noticeable break. That break occurred during the all too brief interlude of the "Good Neighbor Policy." Following the Montevideo conference in 1933 and that of Buenos Aires in 1936, there was a visible bettering of cultural relations, and it seemed as if the new spirit that had been engendered might bear in time a gratifying fruitage. During this interval, Latin-American intellectuals may be said to have been holding their judgment in suspense. They were skeptical still, but willing to be convinced—hoping to be convinced. Dr. Gonzalez sums this up in speaking of the work of the Pan American Union, what it accomplished and failed to accomplish:

The Pan American Union was for many years looked upon with fear and distrust on the part of most enlightened men in Latin America. It was considered chiefly a one-sided commercial agency under the direct control of the State Department at Washington. During the first forty years of its existence, we must admit, the Pan American Union did not accomplish much. Since the Montevideo Conference, in 1933, however, there has been a notable change in the activities of this institution, and both the Montevideo and Buenos Aires conferences have been more fruitful than any of the previous gatherings. There has also been a noticeable change in the attitude of American delegates to the last two conferences, which is largely the reason for their success. During the last few years, the Pan American Union has devoted much more attention to cultural matters than before. If the several conventions of a cultural character signed at Buenos Aires in January 1937, were to be ratified and put in practice by all the governments concerned, it would be a decisive step forward.

Then came the war and with it the scrapping of the New Deal and the Good Neighbor Policy. The corollary on the cultural plane is the appointment of one of the Standard Oil heirs to his present post. The result—well, the result can be imagined. The very name, Rockefeller, in Latin America, is the embodiment of that "Yankee imperialism" against which Dario and Ugarte and Blanco Fombona and all the others have struggled so valiantly all these years. The disillusionment of the Latin intellectuals is, accordingly, greater and deeper than ever. Their thoughts instinctively go back to the days that followed the Spanish-American War, the Platt Amendment, the marines in Nicaragua. Culture? they ask. *Whose culture?* And these, it must be granted, are questions they have a right to ask. But more of this in my next article.

SAMUEL PUTNAM.



EDUCATION FOR THE MASSES is South America's foremost demand. Figures show the proportion of population in the elementary schools. Most kids below the Rio Grande don't get the chance.





# "OUR WAY OF LIFE"

"Our way of life"—what does it mean if your skin is black? Here is part of the answer: you have seen their faces. Last to be hired, first to be fired, the poorest houses, the highest rents, jimcrowed, persecuted, disfranchised, lynched—this is "our way of life" for thirteen million black Americans. Why go to Germany to find racism and fascism? Hitler merely imitates the bourbons of our own South. And they are not in the South alone. The President of the United States declaims lofty odes to democracy—while Jim Crow presides at his inaugural. Everywhere throughout the length and breadth of America the Constitution is being violated with impunity by those who seek to build a rich man's way of life on the oppression of poor black men. Is this what thirteen million negroes are to defend? Is this what liberty-loving white Americans are to defend?

"I can read,  
I read books, too  
I once bought \$7.00 worth of  
books,  
Real ones.  
The Bible, and "Our War For  
Human Rights!"  
All good folks have the Bible,  
But, I can read it."  
South Carolina

"I don't go in the stores,  
This part a-town.  
But they can't stop me from  
walkin' the streets."  
Georgia

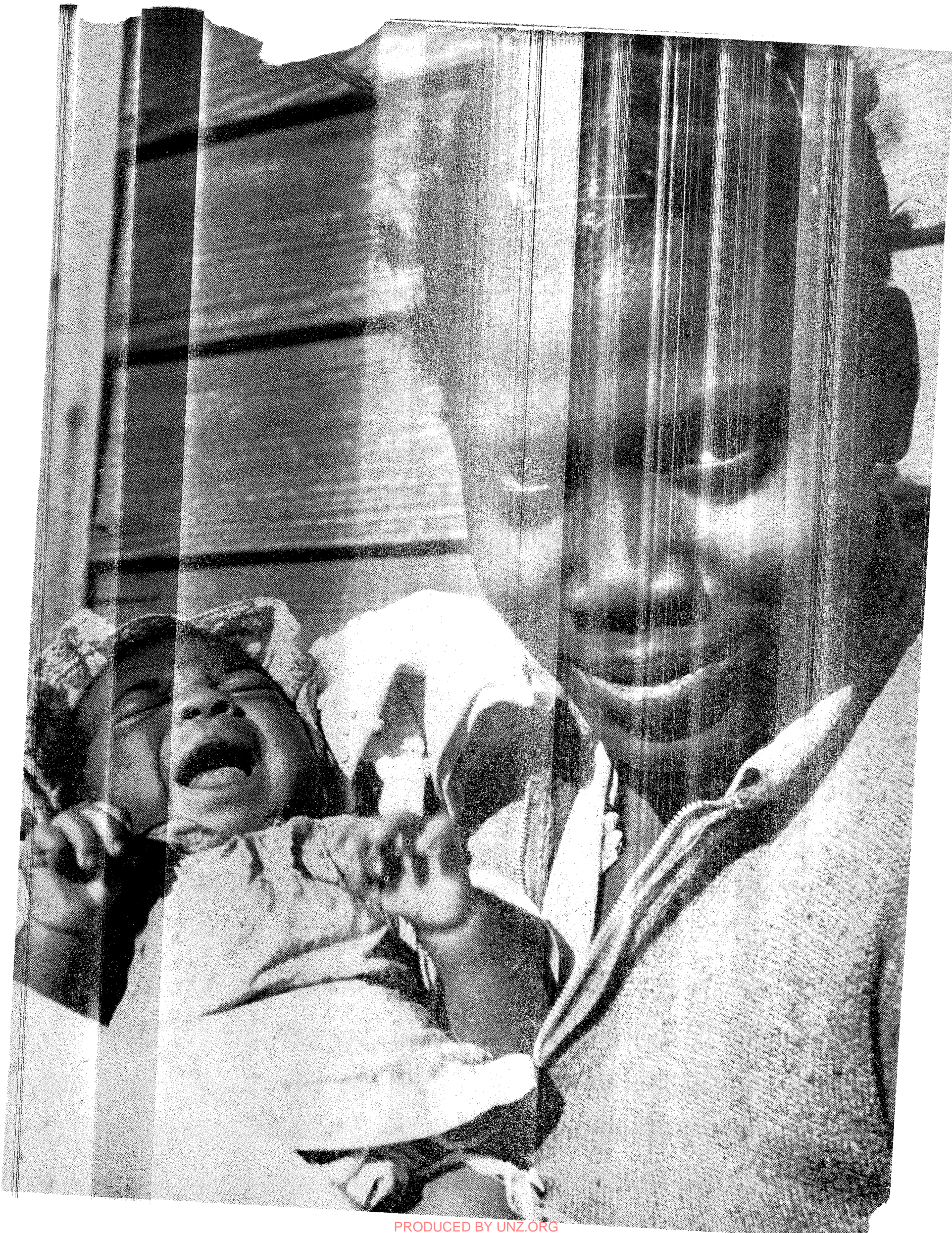
"I bin dyin' for a smoke,  
Glad you offered, I was afraid to  
ask.  
It's funny workin' tobacco and not  
ownin' a butt."  
Virginia



"All we want is work, that's all.  
Maybe you folks know  
Where us black folks can get work,  
All we want is work, that's all."  
Alabama

"I don't know how much lan' we  
work,  
We jus' work all the lan' we can,  
We pay near a quarter what we  
grow for rent,  
We pay near a quarter what we  
grow for ginnin' and seed,  
We pay near a quarter what we  
grow for tools, bags, shippin'  
and other stuff  
The res' is ours for livin'."  
North Carolina







# Two Men on a War Horse

FDR is embraced by the chairman of Rockefeller's Chase Bank. New for old thefts. The coupon clippers okay the budget.

THERE was a moment of purest farce last week when Winthrop W. Aldrich was reading his statement as chairman of the board to the annual meeting of the stockholders of the Chase National Bank. In the middle of a speech about balance sheets and profits Mr. Aldrich interpolated his endorsement of the "lend-lease" bill. Reported the *New York Times*: "This declaration took the bank's stockholders completely by surprise. Several protested vigorously. One woman stockholder on being recognized by the chair asked: 'Why have you gone over to the New Deal?' Mr. Aldrich replied that it was the only course that a great bank like the Chase could pursue. This stockholder left the meeting abruptly."

We fly to the defense of Mr. Aldrich. He has not gone over to the New Deal. The "New Deal" has gone over to the Chase National Bank. The lady stockholder was too hasty. She evidently left before Mr. Aldrich began to review the bank's investments. The Chase Bank, he told the stockholders, has no German loans, "and its foreign security holdings are chiefly those of Canada and Cuba with some British securities required by law in England." Its holdings of United States government obligations at the end of 1940 amounted to \$1,098,108,000, or almost 3 percent of the total national debt. In other words, Chase Bank is sitting pretty.

## BANK LOANS

Nor did this unfortunately dim-witted lady stockholder pause to realize that Mr. Aldrich was really presiding as high priest at a meeting of solemn thanksgiving. Even the Rockefellers' own banker could not resist a flight into the ecstasy of war profiteering. For at long last *everything* was finally going *exactly* the way the Chase Bank wanted it to go. True, Mr. Aldrich wagged a prudent finger at the boys in the Treasury. He urged them to forego the "easy way" of financing by relying on the banks to purchase new issues of government securities. Reiterating the injunctions of the Federal Reserve Board in its report to Congress, he told the administration to go to the private investors. Float bonds with high interest rates. Put them up in small as well as large denominations. That will help prevent inflation. It will enable the rich to make money clipping juicy coupons.

As for bank loans to industry for the armaments program, Mr. Aldrich said that "while individual loans have been large, notably in the aircraft industry, taking the nation as a whole, only the surface of possibility has been scratched thus far." Of course the government could stake the munitions contractors to loans by selling bonds to the banks. But that would be inflationary, he warned.

Observe that Mr. Aldrich wants issues floated by the Treasury to siphon off the increased purchasing power of the masses and, through higher interest rates, provide a good return to the patriotic Wall Streeters as well. But the government is not to finance the armaments manufacturers directly. The banks are to do that—at a respectable rate of interest, of course. That will take care of the funds which have so long been idle. Thus finance capital wheels into position to drain the gravy out of the war preparations.

Except for the Cro-Magnon lady stockholder, the others present knew that it was a great day for the Chase Bank, for Mr. Aldrich, and for the Rockefellers who own both. The chairman of the world's largest bank refrained with charming delicacy from overfilling their cup. But the plain fact is that Mr. Aldrich was announcing the endorsement of the war and imperialist program of Roosevelt. He was joining hands with the Morgans, who are already represented in the "defense" grab by Knudsen and Stettinius. He was telling Congress that the Chase Bank wants that "lend-lease" bill passed, and above all it approves of the federal budget.

Every admonition of Mr. Aldrich had been dutifully heeded by the President. Said Mr. Aldrich, laying down the law: "There is, however, a certain limit beyond which taxation for defense, as for other purposes, should not go. This is the point at which taxation becomes destructive, in the sense that it encroaches upon the capital equipment of the country. Determining where this point lies is one of the most difficult and delicate decisions that Congress is called upon to make."

Said the President: "Only very drastic and restrictive taxation which curtails consumption would finance defense wholly on a pay-as-you-go basis. I fear that such taxation would interfere with the full use of our productive capacities."

Let us put this into very blunt language. Both gentlemen are saying the same thing. Both want the war paid for out of the toil and the sacrifice of the workers and farmers and small business people. Both want to raise as much money as possible out of taxes. And both agree that when certain taxes get too heavy they tend to slow up production. Why? Because they take away the capitalist's incentive. Obviously, then, neither excess profits taxes nor income taxes on the upper brackets are to be permitted to become really burdensome. But as for the rest of the people, lower the restrictions, let the bars down, reduce the exemption for single people to \$800 a year and for married men or heads of families to \$1,800 a year. Pile on the taxes.

Taxation that hits the people serves another purpose: it helps curtail the activity of the

consumers' goods industries. Said Mr. Aldrich: "Defense financing by taxation has the merit, among others, of diverting productive effort into channels directly serving the national defense. It does this by limiting useless or postponable expenditure, and by utilizing the funds so relinquished to pay military or other defense costs."

## OTHERS SPEAK

Other spokesmen for business talk in similar vein. In his keynote address at the opening session of the convention of the National Retail Dry Goods Association on January 13, Frank M. Mayfield, president of the association, asked, "Can the production of consumer goods be maintained at normal? Can the country have all the defense it needs and at the same time produce all the consumer articles it has been accustomed to have? The country apparently thinks it can. . . . The problem is summed up in the phrase, 'Guns vs. Butter.' Sooner or later we will have to curtail the production of consumer goods, and the prospect is not pleasant for the consumer."

To which add the comments of Dr. Paul F. Cadman, economist of the American Bankers Association, in the *New York Sun's* "Voice of Business" section of January 11. Under the title "Defense Prosperity—Reality or Illusion!" he wrote, "It will be a major tragedy if the American people now indulge in a false sense of prosperity and thereby conceal or defer the realization of the immense sacrifices which the national defense program inevitably entails. It would have been far better if we, too, had been invited not to 'blood and tears' but to toil and trial and a definite curtailment of our standard of living."

All of which is in line with President Roosevelt's statement in his recent fireside chat: "I am confident that if and when production of consumer or luxury goods in certain industries requires the use of machines and raw materials that are essential for defense purposes, then such production must yield, and will gladly yield, to our primary and compelling purpose."

This is the reality behind the proposed new budget which the *United States News* (January 17) calls "a war budget." The message on the state of the Union which preceded it was the smokescreen behind which the machinery is being put into motion to crush the American people, drag their standard of living to the levels of Hitler's forced labor, to the levels of Japan's imprisoned working class, if that's necessary to give American imperialism the sceptre of world power.

For the two years from June 1940 to June 1942 the total appropriated, authorized, and recommended for the war program amounts to \$28,480,000,000. This is already \$1,000,-