

Epilogue, 1920: Journeys from Conviction

By STUART I. ROCHESTER

"What did you think
We should find," said a shade,
"When the last shot echoed
And peace was made?"
"Christ," laughed the fleshless
Jaws of his friend;
"I thought they'd be praying
For worlds to mend;
"Making earth better,
Or something silly,
Like whitewashing hell
Or Picca-dam-dilly."

—Alfred Noyes
"A Victory Dance"
(June, 1920)

The 1920's have become a favorite playground for American historians. One of the most widely studied phenomena of the period has been the effect of the First World War on American society, and in particular the fatigue and eventual collapse suffered by the Progressive movement following the war. The intellectuals, journalists, and social reformers who had been instrumental in the formation and success of the Progressive movement, and who were committed to a philosophy of individual and national fulfillment through collective action, experienced severe frustrations during the war. The hysteria, the profiteering, and the repression that accompanied American entrance into war served to refute the very assumptions on which their philosophy was founded: the essential rationality and goodness of man, and the inevitability of progress. The perversion of liberal principles at Versailles compounded their disillusionment, and in the twenties many of these alienated progressives withdrew from the mainstream of American reform.

The "journey away from conviction,"¹ as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., has described Walter Lippmann's course in the twenties, was a trip many liberals took after the Versailles debacle. For some the journey

1. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Crisis of the Old Order, 1919-1933* (Boston, 1957), 150.

was a vacation from the relentless and exhausting pursuit of ideals; for others, a pilgrimage back to their fathers' more conservative and provincial faith; for most, a nomadic period of meditation and soul-searching. Whatever his route of escape, the pre-war liberal, through the twenties, traveled a path of doubt and disillusionment. Whether he wound up in Bohemia or in some secluded country village or on the French Riviera, he had confessed a loss of faith in that "promise of American life" that had seemed so near to fulfillment in 1914.

The resignation from public life of so progressive, articulate, and influential a group of men obviously had profound implications for the future course of American history. Most historians who have examined the so-called "tired radicals" have concerned themselves mainly with the effect of their letdown upon *domestic* affairs—upon American culture and institutions, and upon the reform movement itself.² What has more often gone neglected, although Robert Osgood and Selig Adler have made important contributions in this area, has been the effect of the liberal abdication on this country's *international* policies and attitudes. Not only, as Arthur Link remarks, were the spark plugs removed from the "engine of [domestic] reform,"³ but they were also removed from the companion engine that had been geared to generate cooperation and understanding on an international scale. Those men who in 1914 envisaged the imminent realization of the American promise had anticipated beyond that a global millennium in which progressive principles would govern relations within and between all nations. Consequently, they shared, in most cases, a cosmopolitan outlook and at least a tacit commitment to internationalism. When the war and its aftermath demonstrated the tragic shortcomings of human behavior and the inefficacy

2. There has been a tendency among historians recently to view the twenties as a period of continuing reform despite the decline of the Progressive movement. Most of these studies have shown that reform energies in the twenties were channeled from "soft" moral and ideological areas into "hard" socio-economic areas. See, for instance, Paul W. Glad, "Progressives and the Business Culture of the 1920's," *Journal of American History*, LIII (June, 1966), 75-89; William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-32* (Chicago, 1958), chap. VII; and Arthur S. Link, "What Happened to the Progressive Movement in the 1920's?" *American Historical Review*, LXIV (July, 1959), 833-851. An excellent study of continuing reform efforts in the twenties among grass roots groups—voluntary citizens' associations and social welfare agencies—is Clarke Chambers's *Seedtime of Reform: American Social Service and Social Action, 1918-1933* (Minneapolis, 1963). A historiographical essay on the course of the reform movement in the twenties is Herbert Margulies, "Recent Opinion on the Decline of the Progressive Movement," *Mid-America*, XLV (October, 1963), 250-268.

3. Link, "What Happened to the Progressive Movement?" 844.

of moral arguments, they confined their once expansive vision and prodigious activity to pettier and more self-serving pursuits. The cause of internationalism perished as much as progressivism.

This essay constitutes an epilogue to the experience of 1914-1920—a kind of montage of the post-war disillusionment that surveys the general descent from the lofty heights of Wilsonian idealism to the “bungalow minds” of normalcy and the particular directions in which the disillusioned liberals traveled. The term “liberal,” always an awkward one, signifies here a state of mind rather than a definite program of action or a rigid set of principles. It is used in the same broad sense with which Arno Mayer grouped a sweeping array of progressives and internationalists—men who shared a common commitment to progress and peace—under the heading “forces of movement.”⁴ Hence, for the purposes of this study, the term “liberal” encompasses such diverse personalities and thinkers as Walter Lippmann, Oswald Villard, John Dos Passos, and Herbert Hoover. Whatever the nuances of their “liberal” profession, they all shared in the illusions of Progressivism and they all shared in the disillusion which followed and which became more universal and substantial as the events of war and peace unfolded.

Fifteen years ago came the Armistice and we all thought it was to be a new world. It is! But a lot worse than it was before.

Is this old world as safe for democracy as it was before all these lives were lost?

There is no democracy east of the Rhine. Tyrants have risen where constitutional monarchs ruled twenty years ago. . . . The boys who died just went out and died. . . . Yet the next war will see the same hurrah and the same bowwow of the big dogs to get the little dogs to go out and follow the blood scent and get their entrails tangled in the barbed wire.

And for what?

Look at Russia, ruled by the proletarian tyrant!

Behold Germany, governed by paranoiac sadists!

What a glorious war! All wars are like that.

The next one will be worse.⁵

4. Arno Mayer, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917-1918* (New Haven, 1959).

5. William Allen White editorial of November 11, 1933, cited in William Allen White, *The Autobiography of William Allen White* (New York, 1946), 640.

On the same occasion one year later, in 1934, H. N. Brailsford, the British socialist and veteran *New Republic* correspondent, wrote that "it was not our dead that we mourned on this day [but] our faith that we buried again."⁶ More than a decade of Armistice Day commemorations had passed since the conclusion of the First World War, each more cynical and fatalistic than the last. The twenties only widened the gulf between ideals and reality, and increased the anonymity of responsible and conscientious men. They were a spiritual wasteland, locust years eaten away by debauchery and nonsense and expediency, years in which people were on a picnic and had as little patience with gadflies as with other pests. But it did not really matter to liberals that there was no one to listen to them, for they made little effort to be heard. Their voices of conscience were silent, engaged more in introspection than exhortation. They had lost both faith and commitment, and the aftermath of war called for soul-searching rather than soul-stirring. This was their occupation in the twenties, and, for many, long after that.

The illusions that were dimmed by the war-time experience were extinguished at Paris. There were some pollyanas who briefly managed to regard the crusade as a success. Samuel Gompers was satisfied with the vague labor clauses written into the peace, and could write that the Versailles Treaty "measurably expresses the best and most constructive thought of the world"⁷; and William Allen White could tell Republican National Chairman Will Hays in August that the country wanted a man with vision to follow up the treaty and would never elect a Lodge or a Harding.⁸ But a year later, with the nominations of Cox and Harding and with the "solemn referendum" shaping up inevitably as a vote for isolation, White was so low that he "wouldn't laugh at Charlie Chaplin throwing a whole custard pie at Cox or Harding or both."⁹ With few exceptions, liberals recognized the entrenchment of the old order. Ray Baker observed that during the winter of 1918-19 Italians had named cities and squares after Woodrow Wilson, and four months later were taking down the signs and renaming them after Fiume or D'Annunzio, the poet-pa-

6. H. N. Brailsford, "Machinery Turns Nationalist," *New Republic*, LXXXI (December 5, 1934), 92.

7. Samuel Gompers, "The Labor Clauses of the Treaty," in Edward Mandell House and Charles Seymour (eds.), *What Really Happened at Paris: The Story of the Peace Conference, 1918-1919, by American Delegates* (New York, 1921), 335.

8. Letter to Will Hays (August 6, 1919), in Walter Johnson (ed.), *Selected Letters of William Allen White* (New York, 1947), 199-200.

9. To Herbert Croly (September 11, 1920), *Letters*, 207-208.

triot.¹⁰ The Fourteen Points lay either spoiled or in limbo. Europeans were busily staging a new card of minor bouts over the remains of the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires, while Americans recoiled like ostriches, their heads buried in the stock index. Where was the elevation of the human spirit, the expanded public control and responsibility, the cooperation and harmony and humanitarianism? All of those Olympian ideals had spilled into the gutter of normalcy. The vaunted "new order" had been but a fleeting phantasm, an invention of the same quixotic minds that proposed to "make the world safe for democracy."

Post-war reckoning yielded a twofold revelation. Not only was the old world not dead, but the new one was powerless to be born. Palmerism and Machiavellianism, and not ecumenism and altruism, were the verities of history. It was a terrible shock to men accustomed to thinking confidently and in terms of tomorrow instead of yesterday or today. What now was there to look ahead to? Their tomorrows were shattered. "Faced by the victory of political reaction and the disappointment of their hopes for a new international order," one student has commented, "they felt an overwhelming sense of their own impotence. Society seemed infinitely less malleable than it once had."¹¹ Ideals had been their staple, and with their depletion nothing remained to sustain them. And so they staggered through the twenties groping for some new lifeblood, whether it be the self-gratification of the business culture, the opiate of cynicism, or the fresh elixir of Communism. Those once "fervent apprentices in the school of Wilson," wrote Harold Nicolson, left Paris "as renegades."¹²

The disillusionment did not crystallize immediately. First there was a sort of numbness—not unlike that which befell Hans Fallada's "little man," the German who had been knocked off his pedestal and left to flounder about bewildered and disoriented. Reinhold Niebuhr, a young man of German extraction and priestly vocation who supported the war only after great deliberation, asked himself, "How can we ever again believe anything when we compare the solemn pretensions of statesmen with the cynically conceived secret treaties?"¹³ Upton Sinclair, one of the muckrakers who followed Wilson's commission, winced:

10. Ray Stannard Baker, *What Wilson Did At Paris* (Garden City, N.Y., 1920), 75.

11. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity*, 124-125.

12. Harold Nicolson, *Peacemaking 1919* (London, 1933), 187.

13. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Leaves From the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic* (New York, 1929), 42. See also Niebuhr, "What the War Did to My Mind," *Christian Century*, XLV (September 27, 1928), 1161-1163.

How could I have been trapped into supporting the war? I thought that Woodrow Wilson really meant his golden, glowing words; I thought he was in a position to know what I couldn't know, and would take the obvious steps to protect us against diplomatic perfidy. I knew nothing of the pre-war intrigues of the French and Russian statesmen against Germany . . . ; I knew nothing of the secret treaties which bound the allies for the war. . . .¹⁴

Randolph Bourne perceived very early in the war the confused plight of liberals like Niebuhr and Sinclair who would be abandoned by the captains of government—"like brave passengers who have set out for the Isles of the Blest only to find that the first mate has gone insane and jumped overboard, the rudder has come loose and dropped to the bottom of the sea, and the captain and pilot are lying dead drunk under the wheel."¹⁵ Fred Howe later wrote that "like children when first punished, [we] did not understand."¹⁶

Their initial reaction was similar to the Germans': they had not been defeated or discredited, but *betrayed*. This was the essence of William Bullitt's impassioned letter of resignation from the American peace commission and Oswald Villard's savage indictment in the *Nation*¹⁷ and a spate of post-war editorials which featured the invectives "fraud" and "hoax" and "treachery." It was the source of Bullitt's bitter and spiteful testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee¹⁸; of the *New Republic*, *Nation*, and *Dial* decision to editorially advocate the rejection of the treaty even though it supplied their reactionary opponents with "intellectual ammuni-

14. Cited in Louis Filler, *Crusaders for American Liberalism* (New York, 1939), 373.

15. Randolph Bourne, "A War Diary," *Seven Arts*, II September, 1917), 540.

16. Frederic C. Howe, *The Confessions of a Reformer* (New York, 1925), 279.

17. William C. Bullitt, *The Bullitt Mission to Russia* (New York, 1919), 96-97; Oswald Garrison Villard, "The Truth About the Peace Conference," *Nation*, CVIII (April 26, 1919), 646-647.

18. After his resignation Bullitt fled to the Maine woods for a camping spree. When the opportunity arose to discredit Wilson, he literally jumped at it and rushed to Washington in September to testify in behalf of the President's senatorial enemies. For a complete record of the testimony, see Bullitt's *Mission to Russia*. Bullitt's motivations are discussed in a footnote in Joseph Grew's *Turbulent Era* (Boston, 1952), I, 397-399, which is a diary entry of November 12, 1934 recorded after Grew had discussed the 1919 episode with Bullitt while he was in the Tokyo embassy and Bullitt (then Ambassador to the Soviet Union) visited him.

tion"¹⁹; and, most of all, of the crucifixion of Woodrow Wilson himself. Wilson became a convenient scapegoat for the fiasco. In him resided the hopes of all liberals at Paris and at home. The writings of Nicolson and the others are permeated with gushes of awe and veneration and expectations of the supernatural from this messiah, and even in moments of despair there was the trust that somehow he would deliver. With failure, the leader of the great crusade was unmasked as a Pied Piper. "His rhetorical phrases," reviled the *Nation*,

torn and faded tinsel of a thought which men now doubt if he himself ever really believed, will never again fall with hypnotic charm upon the ears of eager multitudes. The camouflage of ethical precept and political philosophizing which for long blinded the eyes of all but the most observing has been stripped away, and the people of the world see revealed, not a friend faithful to the last, but an arrogant autocrat and a compromising politician.²⁰

Walter Weyl, five months before his death, found Wilson to be at once "celestial and subterranean," standing "on the mountain top and in the cellar," surrendering the role of prophet and accepting the lesser role of opportunist politician.²¹ John Maynard Keynes granted in his famous post-war treatise that Wilson was "generously intentioned," but added that he was all too ordinary to be "a hero or a prophet."²² The editors of the *New Republic* admitted dispassionately that "he was not like Lincoln the finely tempered and thoroughly unified instrument for the accomplishment of a great human purpose."²³

After they had disowned Wilson, liberals reviewed their own role in the crusade. Gradually, they came to realize that Wilson was not the *author* of their hopes but merely the translator, and that his shortcomings and failures were also their own. They were all guilty of the same oversights and misjudgments. It was not a tragedy of betrayal, but of self-delusion. "Ideals . . . have been defeated," wrote John Dewey even before the Paris conference,

19. Selig Adler, "Isolationism Since 1914," *American Scholar*, XXI (Summer, 1952), 340.

20. "The Madness at Versailles," *Nation*, CVIII (May 17, 1919), 779.

21. Walter Weyl, "Prophet and Politician," *New Republic*, XIX (June 7, 1919), 178.

22. John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (New York, 1920), 39.

23. "The Paradox of Woodrow Wilson," *New Republic*, XXXVII (February 13, 1924), 299.

because we took into the war our sentimentalism, our attachment to moral sentiments as efficacious powers, our pious optimism as to the inevitable victory of the 'right,' our childish belief that physical energy can do the work that only intelligence can do, our evangelical hypocrisy that morals and 'ideals' have a self-propelling and self-executing capacity.²⁴

Harold Stearns in his 1919 *Liberalism in America* pinpointed the "technique of liberal failure" as an unwillingness to continue to analyze and remain detached.²⁵ But their most grievous error was the assumption that the peoples of the world (their own countrymen included) even longed for or were ready for their gift of democracy—the assumption that "liberty could be passed around as alms or material benefits."²⁶ In the end, as General Smuts realized, it was "not Wilson, but humanity" that failed them.²⁷ And it was this heavy revelation which crowned the disillusionment and launched them on their "journeys away from conviction."

"Anyone with a brain," wrote Oswald Villard in his memoirs, "must have moved during those years to the Left or to the Right."²⁸ Whether he became "a cynic or a revolutionist," as John Chamberlain defined the alternatives, he "moved."²⁹ For some American liberals, the movements were physical—taking them to retreats in Paris and Bohemia which afforded asylum from the traffic of ideals, or to Russia and a new lease on idealism. John Dos Passos, in what one of his biographers calls his "radical-experimental period,"³⁰ wandered from French battlefields to the serenity of Spain and Portugal to revolution in Russia.³¹ Francis Hackett, the former literary edi-

24. John Dewey, "The Discrediting of Idealism," *New Republic*, XX (October 8, 1919), 285-286.

25. This intellectual detachment, however, was precisely what the *New Republic* men found so repulsive; to "continue to analyze" amounted to stalling or circumventing the pressing issue of the German threat to American security. Harold Laski punctured the Stearns-Bourne argument with the rebuttal "one can not stay at Armageddon to philosophize upon the abstract injustice of war." See Harold Laski, "The Liberalism of Randolph Bourne," *Freeman*, I (May 19, 1920), 237.

26. White, *Autobiography*, 576.

27. Stephen Bonsall, *Unfinished Business* (Garden City, N.Y., 1944), 291.

28. Oswald Garrison Villard, *Fighting Years: Memoirs of a Liberal Editor* (New York, 1939), 461.

29. John Chamberlain, *Farewell to Reform* (New York, 1932), 323.

30. John H. Wrenn, *John Dos Passos* (New York, 1962), 44.

31. Dos Passos was one of several sensitive young artists—including Ernest Hemingway, E. E. Cummings, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Malcolm Cowley—who served in the Ambulance Corps during the war and

tor of the *New Republic*, nestled himself in the seclusion of the Pyrenees.³² William Bullitt, after his Senate testimony, returned to a life of gentlemanly resignation—a “bookworm, rolling stone, and domestic man,”³³ writing satire and passing time between the sands of the Riviera and the gardens of Vienna.³⁴ Another vagabond, Fred Howe, Commissioner of Immigration during the war, retired to a country hideaway and invited others to his self-styled Walden who “were interested in finding themselves, who wanted to understand life and its meanings.”³⁵ Howe cultivated an attachment to the locomotive engineer in a desperate and pathetic search for the qualities which the war had seemed to destroy. “I think,” he wrote in his 1925 autobiography, “that the locomotive engineers are the finest hundred thousand men in America.”

A man can only be promoted to a locomotive because of a native power to command. Facing death at every moment, they are fearless and resourceful. They hold in their hands the lives of a train-load of people. And they are always conscious of and responsive to their tremendous responsibility. Epics could be written about the railway engineer; his daily life is necessarily heroic. And rarely is there record of any betrayal of responsibility.³⁶

There were some who found those same qualities in the calling of the Communist. Lincoln Steffens, who since his early muckraking days had been gradually divorcing himself from capitalism, lingered in Paris after the peace conference “to watch the consequences of the

emerged with gruesome memories on which to base their disillusioned novels of the twenties. An interesting catalogue of their experiences is Charles A. Fenton, “Ambulance Drivers in France and Italy: 1914-1918,” *American Quarterly*, III (Winter, 1951), 326-343.

32. Selig Adler, *The Isolationist Impulse: Its Twentieth Century Reaction* (New York, 1957), 170.

33. Janet Flanner, *An American in Paris* (New York, 1940), 68.

34. Bullitt had always been impressed with the Communist cause (he married the widow of John Reed), and it was this affection which was the source of his rejuvenation and internationalism in the thirties. After a stint as United States Ambassador to the Soviet Union (1933-36), however, he gave up on Communism as well. In *The Great Globe Itself* and in a number of articles that appeared between 1945 and 1950 in *Life* and *Reader's Digest*, he assailed Yalta as a sellout and vigorously denounced the Stalinist regime. His remaining years were spent in disinterested retirement back on the Riviera.

35. Howe, *Confessions of a Reformer*, 340.

36. *Ibid.*, 337. Howe, like Bullitt, recovered his sense of commitment in the reform renaissance of the thirties, and contributed to the New Deal as head of the Consumers' Counsel.

treaty."³⁷ He challenged a group of war correspondents "to name all the wars, big and little, that were going on in the world,"³⁸ and, reassured that Communism offered the only hope for the future, embarked on a career of expatriation. Max Eastman, John Chamberlain, and many other new and old votaries of Marxism joined him in exile.³⁹

Among those who stayed at home and tried to pick up the pieces without resigning outright from their country or from society, there were nonetheless the sometimes more distant emigrations of the mind. Herbert Croly and Walter Lippmann, their *New Republic* declining rapidly,⁴⁰ ranged far from their intellectual roots of the pre-war years. As one writer has said, "[they] could leave no dynamic legacy of liberalism to the next generation because the heart of their philosophy—the culmination of progress in an evolutionary, middle-class Utopia, created by rational and good men—was shattered."⁴¹ When one charts the "journeys" of the *New Republic* men, he finds that they corresponded to the men's personality make-up and intellectual heritage: the first to break with conviction was Weyl, the sensitive Jeffersonian and staunch believer in the human capacity for good; then Lippmann, who had drunk at the fountains of both socialism and the less intoxicating progressivism; and finally Croly, the staid Hamiltonian. Weyl died shortly after the estrangement from his colleagues, in November 1919, his frail spiritual constitution spared any further agony of soul-searching.

37. Lincoln Steffens, *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens* (New York, 1931), 803.

38. *Ibid.*

39. These spirited Marxists would suffer through a second disillusionment in the thirties when the Socialist utopia they envisioned turned into a police state more oppressive than capitalism. Like Bullitt after his ambassadorship, their "convalescing from Socialism" (as Eastman entitled one of his autobiographical chapters) brought them inevitably around to the Right. Eastman supported American intervention in World War II, fraternized with Commonwealth and Southern boss Wendell Willkie, and in the fifties became a roving editor for *Reader's Digest*. Dos Passos, who once wrote for the *Masses*, backed Barry Goldwater in 1964. Chamberlain's career has been just as remarkable: a sympathetic Marxist in the thirties, he has since written a heroic saga of American business (*The Enterprising Americans*, 1963) and participated in the conservative litany of the *National Review* and *Fortune* and no less a capitalist organ than the *Wall Street Journal*.

40. Decline in circulation from 37,000 in 1919 to 12,000 in 1929. See Theodore Peterson, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana, 1956), 373.

41. David W. Noble, "The New Republic and the Idea of Progress, 1914-1920," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXXVIII (December, 1951), 388.

Lippmann took leave of the magazine in 1921, and went immediately to work on the long chain of books—*Public Opinion* (1922), *The Phantom Public* (1925), *Men of Destiny* (1927), *American Inquisitors* (1928), capped with the most recent and most emphatic *The Public Philosophy* (1955)—which would chronicle his loss of faith in the common man, whose brutish and purblind public mentality paralyzed capable officials and rendered enlightened government and diplomacy impossible.⁴² His post-war trek took him to the arch-conservative New York *Herald Tribune* where he began his "Today and Tomorrow" column in 1931. From behind his columnist's desk and safely above the arena of reform, Lippmann pontificated on the evils of demagoguery (for fear of which he distrusted Roosevelt and voted for Landon in 1936) and the virtues of elitist government, glorified "the old liberalism of natural laws and individual rights that once he had so effectively satirized,"⁴³ and questioned the viability of democracy in an uncertain and malevolent world. In a Phi Beta Kappa oration delivered at Columbia University on May 31, 1932, he spoke of the preoccupation of democracy with the present moment, and the tyranny of emotion and passion over reason; he warned his young audience, who were no doubt eagerly awaiting some noble commission, that the scholar can have little influence in these circumstances and can best serve by remaining detached. "[The world] will go on best," he said, "if among us there are men who have stood apart, who refused to be anxious or too much concerned, who were cool and inquiring, and had their eyes on a longer past and a longer future."⁴⁴ Although not intended as such, it was a firm confession of failure, guilt, and abdication.⁴⁵

42. As Harold Nicolson would do, Lippmann in large measure blamed "democratic diplomacy" and its narrowing of conventional diplomatic channels and freedom of action for the suspicion and hostility at Paris. In his first post-Versailles publication, *Liberty and the News* (1920), he called for an elaborate plan of press censorship to eliminate yellow journalism and its dangerous consequences.

43. Charles Forcey, *The Crossroads of Liberalism* (New York, 1961), 299. Forcey provides a crisp summary of Lippmann's post-war course in pp. 296-299.

44. Walter Lippmann, "The Scholar in a Troubled World," Phi Beta Kappa oration delivered at Columbia University (May 31, 1932). Printed in *Atlantic Monthly*, CL (August, 1932), 148-152.

45. Lippmann's "journey" has attracted the interest of his contemporaries down to today. Articles appearing in the transition years of the thirties include: Amos Pinchot, "Walter Lippmann: 'The Great Elucidator,'" *Nation*, CXXXVII (July 5, 1933), 7-10; "What Has Happened to Walter Lippmann?" *Christian Century*, LIII (September 23, 1936), 1245-1246; Louis J.A. Mercier, "Walter Lippmann's Evolution," *Commonweal*, XXX (August 4, 1939), 348-350; and J.C. Aldrich, "Lippmann Retreats to Yesterday," *Scholastic*, XXXVIII (March 17, 1941), 1-T. More

Herbert Croly stayed on with the *New Republic* until his death. Whether it was his antediluvian faith in the efficacy of education or stubborn pride as the architect of the American promise, Croly from time to time summoned his old gusto and managed to bounce through the twenties with amazing resiliency. After his death, a colleague wrote of his post-war perseverance:

There were several easy temporary courses for those who had been engaged in the [Progressive] movement. Some progressives . . . held their noses and voted for Harding. . . . Some merely supported the colorless Cox. Some were satisfied to rail and ridicule, condemning the shallowness of American culture, the lack of intelligence of the average citizen, the fat-headed complacency of the dominant business man. . . . Some ran to the fringes of utopian radicalism, vainly hoping for an apocalyptic crisis. It was characteristic of Herbert Croly that he rejected all such escapes.⁴⁶

But the termination of many long friendships and the defection of much of the *New Republic's* audience to the maverick *American Mercury* took their toll on Croly, and his mind turned in the direction of Lippmann's toward private speculations and an interest in the individual instead of society. Although his sentiments were different from Lippmann's—he believed in redemption—his orientation was the same. Like Lippmann, he sought explanations for past miscalculations and sources for new directions in a detached, impersonal realm outside the reform arena. Where Lippmann turned to psychology and the institutional aspects of government, he turned to ethics and religion. Edmund Wilson, another of his colleagues, said after

recent and comprehensive works are David Elliott Weingast, *Walter Lippmann: A Study in Personal Journalism* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1949); and Marquis Childs and James Reston (eds.), *Walter Lippmann and His Times* (New York, 1959). A brilliant essay that suggests Lippmann's journey was begun as early as 1913 or 1914 is Heinz Eulau, "Mover and Shaker: Walter Lippmann as a Young Man," *Antioch Review*, XI (September, 1951), 291-312.

So contemptuous and condescending has Lippmann become of late that he has been the butt of several not-so-good-natured jibes. Art Buchwald recently quipped with clear reference to Lippmann: "God is not dead. He is alive and appearing twice a week in the Washington Post." A cartoon in the *Washington Evening Star* May 22, 1967 pictures a homely couple gazing at an ivory tower which parts the clouds and overlooks the skyscrapers of New York, with the caption: "Dear, I see the Lippmanns are all moved in!"

46. George H. Soule, "Herbert Croly's Liberalism, 1920-1928," *New Republic*, LXIII (July 16, 1930), 253.

his death that in the days following the war "he despaired of politics and really never quite took them seriously again; and when he turned away from politics, he gravitated naturally toward religion."⁴⁷ When his search became more trying, he permitted himself an escape and hired a bearded Englishman named Alfred Orage to teach him the mysteries of yoga.⁴⁸

In 1928 Croly suffered a crippling stroke. He died two years later—retaining more of his conviction perhaps than Lippmann, but nevertheless a shell of his former self.⁴⁹ Because of Croly's process of readjustment in the twenties and his death within a decade of the war which prevented him from distilling his thoughts as Lippmann was able to do, it is difficult to evaluate the precise nature of his disillusionment. He was vague, inconsistent, and towards the end mystical. Sidney Kaplan says "it is doubtful that even his most loyal admirers have been able to unravel a coherent strain of thought from the variety of editorials, articles and reviews that appeared over his name in the *New Republic* from the end of the war to his retirement in 1928."⁵⁰ But what is clear is that despite the residue of his old Progressive faith he was a deeply troubled man, and in his hopeless confusion of values and abortive struggle to discover some new gospel, some new "promise," Herbert Croly demonstrated how dark and inscrutable the world of the twenties had become to the prophets and dreamers of 1914.

There were other journeys also. Nicholas Murray Butler seemingly came to Lippmann's elitist conclusions when at a convocation of Columbia freshmen in September, 1931, he declared that totalitarian systems often produce men of greater intelligence and stronger character than free elections.⁵¹ John Dewey, one of those liberals who

47. Edmund Wilson, "H.C.," *New Republic*, LXIII (July 16, 1930), 268. Charles Forcey in his discussion of Croly's transition (*Crossroads of Liberalism*, 299-306) contends that Croly moved left in politics and became a "quasi-socialist" supporter of the farmer-labor cause, and then after the collapse of the movement in 1924 was driven "more and more within himself."

48. Eric Goldman remarks that the rigors of the cult, according to some friends, hastened Croly's death. See Eric F. Goldman, *Rendezvous With Destiny* (New York, 1952), 288.

49. Croly died on May 17, 1930. The editors of the *New Republic* and others who had worked with him prepared a memorial issue which appeared on July 16, and which represents the best collection of articles on Croly. Besides the Soule and Wilson articles, two other very revealing ones are Waldo Frank, "The Promise of Herbert Croly," 260-263 and Walter Lippmann, "Notes for a Biography," 250-252.

50. Sidney Kaplan, "Social Engineers as Saviors: Effects of World War I on Some American Liberals," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XVII (June, 1956), 363.

51. Schlesinger, *Crisis of the Old Order*, 204.

broke away from an instinctive pacifist position to support the war, at the risk of being denounced by protégés such as Randolph Bourne,⁵² acknowledged that "the pacifists who were converted to war are obliged to undertake an unusually searching inquiry into the actual results in their relation to their earlier professions and beliefs." "Were not those right," he asked, "who held that it was self-contradictory to try to further the permanent ideals of peace by recourse to war?"⁵³ Dewey's process of rationalization convinced him that it was the inherent wickedness and decadence of Europe which was responsible for the failure at Paris, and his course in the twenties became one of isolationism. In March, 1920, he wrote that "we owe monuments to Clemenceau, Sonnino and Balfour" for making America realize how incompatible American democracy is with European imperialism.⁵⁴

Herbert Hoover, like Dewey an enthusiastic internationalist before the war, concluded in a similar vein in his 1923 *American Individualism* that American democracy could only become infected by intercourse with the Old World; in his memoirs, he wrote that the rejection of American idealism was the result of "the collision of civilizations that had grown three hundred years apart."⁵⁵ Charles Beard was another who executed an about-face and turned to isolationism, although his internationalism did not wane until the late twenties.⁵⁶ When he did embrace isolationism it was as much out of disgust for Machiavellian capitalism at home as for the Machiavellian politics of Europe. Oswald Villard, as if strengthened by the confirmation that war was a futile pursuit, resumed the cause of pacifist internationalism with all of its disarmament and peace-pact nostrums; but the new breed of liberal which staffed the *Nation* was more concerned with art and morality than politics,⁵⁷ and in any case

52. Bourne and many of the young intellectuals accepted Dewey's philosophy as their "American religion." With Dewey's conversion in 1917, Bourne wrote that "a philosopher who senses so little the sinister forces of war, who is so much more concerned over the excesses of the pacifists than over the excesses of military policy, . . . is speaking to another element of the younger intelligentsia than that to which I belong." See Randolph Bourne, "Twilight of Idols," *Seven Arts*, II (October, 1917), 689.

53. Dewey, "Discrediting of Idealism," 285.

54. John Dewey, "Our National Dilemma," *New Republic*, XXII (March 24, 1920), 117.

55. Herbert Hoover, *Memoirs* (New York, 1952), I, 479.

56. As late as February, 1929, Beard was calling isolation a myth, urging membership in the League, and finding some redeeming qualities in "international capitalism." See Charles Beard, "Prospects for Peace," *Harper's*, CLVIII (February, 1929), 320-330.

57. Michael Wreszin, *Oswald Garrison Villard* (Bloomington, 1965), 149.

the popular brand of internationalism in the twenties was most often Chinese checkers or the Latin samba. Villard did not alter his course perhaps, but he was surely no closer to his destination.

The alienation of the intellectuals, the departures from the mainstream of American liberalism into cynicism or Communism or simply indifferent private life, the isolation from Europe or from society itself, the absorption into the business culture, the escapes and retreats and self-exiles—all involved a journey away from conviction, all were manifestations of the great disillusionment that set in following the First World War. The "post-war disillusionment," as the phenomenon has too simply but customarily been called, is a very complex matter, of which the war is actually only one thread in a crazy-quilt pattern. The letdown caused by the war became infused with other elements, many having their source *before* the war, such as realism, relativism, and Freudianism, which together conspired to produce a climate of intense skepticism and alienation in the twenties. It was the shattering experience at Armageddon and at Paris, however, which galvanized the forces of discontent and which formed the mainspring of the great disillusionment.

There is perhaps no better commentary on the state of American liberalism following the war than John Dos Passos' *Nineteen Nineteen*—a kaleidoscopic, fragmentary montage of death and destruction and spiritual decadence. In Dos Passos' work, all the old spirits are gone—Randolph Bourne and John Reed and Joe Hill and John Doe and Richard Roe and the other Unknown Soldiers both dead and "living." Such was the emptiness with which liberals picked up their lives in 1919. The void was still there a decade later in 1929 when Joseph Wood Krutch published his *The Modern Temper* and Walter Lippmann his *Preface to Morals*. "The world may be rejuvenated in one way or another," wrote Krutch, "but we will not. Skepticism has entered too deeply into our souls ever to be replaced by faith."⁵⁸ Lippmann chose for chapter headings "The Problem of Unbelief," "False Prophecies," "Deep Dissolution," "The Loss of Certainty," and "The Acids of Modernity." Three years later, when Edmund Wilson observed that American liberals were floundering about hopelessly devoid of leadership and solutions, Lincoln Steffens replied uncontestingly that "we liberals have had our day, we and our liberal principles, practices and promises."⁵⁹ The famous *Survey*

58. Joseph Wood Krutch, *The Modern Temper* (New York, 1929), 249.

59. Edmund Wilson, "What Do the Liberals Hope For?" *New Republic*, LXIX (February 10, 1932), 345-348; Lincoln Steffens, "Bankrupt Liberalism," *New Republic*, LXX (February 17, 1932), 15-16.

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symposium of February 1, 1926, brought many of the pre-war radicals together to discuss their eclipse; the author and economist Stuart Chase contributed the most telling remarks:

Them was the days! When the muckrakers were best sellers, when trust busters were swinging their lariats over every state capitol, when "priviledge" shook in its shoes, when God was behind the initiative, the referendum and the recall, . . . when the Masses was at the height of its glory, and Utopia was just around the corner.

Now look at the damned thing. You could put the avowed Socialists into a roomy new house, the muckrakers have joined the breadlines, Mr. Coolidge is compared favorably to Lincoln, the short ballot is as defunct as Mah Jong, Mr. Eastman writes triolets in France, Mr. Steffens has bought him a castle in Italy, and Mr. Howe digs turnips in Nantucket.⁶⁰

Such was the legacy of World War I. All wars are disillusioning. Even after the Second World War, when America had been through the crucible for a second time, a youthful veteran destined to become a president of the United States but then fresh with memories of fallen relatives and friends attended the San Francisco Conference and left with disappointment at how idealism had suddenly become obscured by self-interest.⁶¹ For most people, wars are forgotten in the long furlough that follows. For those nobly committed, the abstractions of glory and honor and justice—still vague, still untranslated into concrete terms—pale (or as Hemingway put it in *A Farewell to Arms*, "become obscene") beside the lasting monuments of leveled villages, khaki-stained rivers, and regimental casualty lists. Feelings of regret and guilt and resignation accompany each war, to be sure. But the First World War, in the infancy of America's international experience and in the prime of her domestic Progressive experience, was especially traumatic. Lippmann, Croly, Steffens, Beard, and the rest of the liberal vagabonds never did return; they never were quite the same. The journeys from conviction of the twenties were no mere excursions. They were emigrations, and they took men and their minds further and further away from their moorings of 1914 and from the once sparkling and manifest promise of American life.

60. "Where Are the Pre-War Radicals?" *Survey*, LV (February 1, 1926), 563-564.

61. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston, 1965), 87-89.