

Liberty League Liberty

II: Liberty in Politics (Continued)

IN THE first article on Liberty League liberty, we reviewed some of the revelations of Senator Black's Committee about the political activities of the liberty-savers—the holding-company executives and a few of the minor leagues. Here we may continue with these precursors of the American Liberty League.

MORE MINOR LEAGUES

Crusaders.—The Committee learned about the Crusaders from Mr. Fred G. Clark, their National Commander. The organization was originally formed to repeal the Eighteenth Amendment—a popular cause to which promising young men flocked. When that was done, it looked around for other possibilities of public service. It decided to fight "all forces destructive to sound, free government." In doing so it opposed the Tennessee Valley Authority, the "death sentence" of the Wheeler-Rayburn bill, the A.A.A., the banking-reform bill. Its most telling argument, according to a letter from Mr. F. W. Blaisdell, of the organization, was "We ought to be having a labor shortage right now. The only thing holding back prosperity is politics. Let's get together and get the politicians out of the road and go ahead." It opposed tax bills, upheld the Constitution and the Supreme Court. It sponsored many broadcasts, issued pamphlets, and sent telegrams asking for comments on its arguments to Frank Kent, Mark Sullivan, Prof. E. W. Kemmerer, James P. Warburg, Alfred P. Sloan of General Motors, Ogden Mills, Cleveland E. Dodge, John W. Davis and other prominent men. It campaigned for "sound money." As a result of its activities, it received large contributions from a list that reads like a Who's Who of big business executives. Many of these contributors also contributed to the American Liberty League and other similar organizations. Among its backers were such men as Irénée and Lammot Du Pont, Walter P. Chrysler, E. T. Weir, Alfred P. Sloan, E. F. Hutton.

The Crusaders carefully refrained from telling anyone how many members they had. According to a letter by Mr. Blaisdell, "If they do not know how many members you have, they will always credit you with having a much larger membership than is really the fact." About sixty rich men paid for the expenses connected with its broadcasting (although it was given free radio time for five months by the Columbia Broadcasting System. Later it was paid for time on the Mutual System and the Yankee Network). It did not inform its listeners who was putting up the money. Mr. Clark even went so

far as to say in a public speech, "The Crusaders file no brief for any particular group in this country. . . . We make this statement because misinformed or malicious individuals have charged us with being the agents of big business." On another occasion he said over the radio, "We did not receive a dollar in contributions from any public utility company. We should immediately return it had we received one." Yet the records uncovered by the Senate Committee showed that the Crusaders received substantial contributions from important officers of Cities Service Power and Light Co., Stone and Webster, Commonwealth Edison Co. and others. "Your object," said Senator Black "was trying to influence people into shaping their thought with reference to legislation. . . . Do you not think the people are entitled to know, under those circumstances, that your expenses, the whole expenses of the program, were being paid by a small group of big business men in this country?" To which Mr. Clark's revealing reply was, "I have been trying to make business men realize that this was a worthy movement, and I have been very unsuccessful. I am very glad if this committee points out to them that it is to their interest to support this program, because it is going to help them a lot." Mr. Clark was trying to help big business men, his organization was being paid by them for doing so, but in public he represented himself as being "for no particular group."

Mr. Clark protested, and probably believed, that the concealment was of no importance, because what is good for big business is good for everybody. He was candidly and honestly trying to serve the country. It is curious, however, that with all their campaign for budget balancing and lower taxes, their drive against politics, the Crusaders did not more strongly oppose the soldiers' bonus bill. The Committee found the explanation. A telegram from Mr. Blaisdell to Mr. George E. Dickie read, "Please wire me first thing in the morning whether bonus matter is being left out of broadcast so that we can get out our news releases. Our disapproval of bonus bill will lose us support of one nation-wide newspaper chain." Mr. Dickie wired back, "Clark advises bonus matter will be eliminated from tonight's broadcast." Neither Mr. Clark nor Mr. Blaisdell could remember at first what newspaper chain objected. After Senator Black had refreshed Mr. Blaisdell's memory by naming the principal chains, Mr. Blaisdell tentatively admitted, "It was quite probably in connection with the Hearst newspapers."

A light upon the influence that the Crusaders

exerted in the press was thrown by a letter from Mr. Sherman Clark, director in eleven states. He wrote: "In the Sinclair campaign [the campaign against Upton Sinclair in California] we contributed six or seven hundred dollars to the newspaper association, or whatever it is called, and that opened the way to free publicity in the newspapers. I understand it is an old 'gag,' though continually used, and apparently it works."

Farmers.—The Farmers' Independence Council was organized by a few men in a room in the Raleigh Hotel, Washington, D. C. It attacked the New Deal's agricultural program by radio and otherwise. Its Secretary and Treasurer, Dr. S. V. Wilcox, who is known for his anti-New Deal articles in *The Country Gentleman*, displayed a surprising ignorance concerning its affairs. He could not name any farmers who were members of the Council. He did not know that Mr. Lammot Du Pont had contributed to the Council. (Other contributors were Mr. Alfred P. Sloan of General Motors, Mr. J. N. Pew of the Sun Oil Co., Mr. Aldrich of the Chase National Bank, Mr. F. G. Baldwin of Libby, McNeil and Libby, Mr. R. E. Fisher of Pacific Gas and Electric Co., Mr. Silas H. Strawn, Chicago corporation lawyer, Mr. Ogden Mills.) He did not know that Mr. Samuel F. Morse, vice president and general manager of the Council, who apparently did most of its work, was working for the American Liberty League, as consulting agricultural engineer. Authority had been given to Mr. Morse to keep the records, to receive and to issue checks. Dr. Wilcox could name only one farmer—Mr. Dorsett, a past master of the Grange in Pennsylvania—who had had anything to do with drafting the Council's declaration of principles. This declaration, in addition to praising industry, thrift, economy, freedom, Americanism, impartiality, etc., and expressing its interest in the welfare of the farmer, insisted "that the government shall not by law or by subsidy control or attempt to control any farmer in the management of his own farm," and that "government shall not enter into competition with any legitimate organized or unorganized business activity." It also opposed "destructive radicalism, in whatever form it may appear."

The little group of men, under the general managership of Mr. Morse of the Liberty League, who drew up this declaration in the Raleigh Hotel, set out to organize farmers by states and to exert influence on existing agricultural organizations. It is still a mystery how many farmers they organized and how much influence they exerted. Mr. George Peek did conduct an exhibit under their auspices attacking the administration's reciprocity treaties by showing imported farm products. Apparently, however, the Council never really flourished. Perhaps they would have gone further if the Senate Committee had not asked Dr. Wilcox so many questions.

THE TALMADGE AFFAIR

Governor Eugene Talmadge of Georgia, it may be remembered, started a boom of his own to win the Democratic presidential nomination from Franklin D. Roosevelt. He talked a good deal about supporting the Constitution, reducing taxes, balancing the budget, abolishing the A.A.A. A graphic article in *The New Republic* of February 19, 1936, by Hamilton Basso, described his "convention" in Macon, Georgia. The Senate Committee learned something about this affair from Mr. John H. Kirby of Houston, Texas, president of the Kirby Lumber Co. and the Kirby Investment Co. and chairman of the board of the Kirby Petroleum Co. Mr. Kirby was chairman of the board of the Southern Committee to Uphold the Constitution, a member of the executive committee of the Sentinels of the Republic, and a member of the Order of American Patriots. Obviously a most patriotic gentleman. He was also formerly listed as an officer of the American Taxpayers' League, and is president of the Southern Tariff Association. Mr. Kirby's chief service to the Senate Committee was to identify Mr. Vance Muse as the manager of the Southern Committee.

From Mr. Muse's reluctant lips the rest of the story was learned. (Mr. Muse had also been working for the American Taxpayers' League and was a member of the Order of American Patriots.) The Southern Committee for the Constitution paid the expenses of men who worked up attendance at Governor Talmadge's Macon convention. It paid \$1,000 to *The Statesman*, Governor Talmadge's organ. It paid the expenses of delegates to the convention. It paid for advertising, for flags, for the band. But the Southern Committee upheld something besides the Constitution. Through Mr. Muse, it upheld race prejudice, for Mr. Talmadge's political purposes. Mr. Muse helped to prepare the copy for, and had printed, a circular which, according to him, "covered and littered over the South." It contained "a picture of Mrs. Roosevelt going to some nigger meeting, with two escorts, niggers, on each arm." This picture was in fact taken at Howard University, a Negro institution. The circular, according to *The New York Times*, contained editorials "hinting that Negroes were frequent guests at the White House during Mr. Roosevelt's term as President." Mr. Muse took some of these circulars to Macon with him. They were reproduced by *The Georgia Woman's World*, a copy of which was on the seat of every delegate at Macon. They were sold broadcast by the Election Managers' Association, which had an office in the Kirby Building.

Who paid the expenses of the Macon convention, through the Southern Committee to Uphold the Constitution? Southerners who might be expected to be excited about white supremacy? No; principally Mr. John J. Raskob and Mr. Pierre S. Du Pont, who together gave \$10,000. "And did

you go to see Mr. Raskob and Mr. Du Pont personally before they would let you have this money?" asked Senator Black. "Yes, sir," was Mr. Muse's reply, "I told them what I wanted it for." But other Northerners equally prominent contributed before and after the meeting. There was Mr. Alfred P. Sloan of General Motors, Mr. Prentiss of Hornblower and Weeks, Mr. H. C. Hopson of Associated Gas and Electric, Mr. E. W. Mudge, director of the Weirton Steel Co., Mr. Ogden Mills, and a long list of other business men and capitalists. A small minority of them actually did live in the South. But particularly well represented were millers in Minneapolis and bankers in Duluth. "Mr. Muse, this is a Southern Committee to Uphold the Constitution, is it not?" asked the chairman. "But it raises its funds anywhere there is people that believe in maintaining our institutions," replied Mr. Muse. Evidently. One doubts, however, whether there would have been much response from the poor farmers of Georgia to Gene Talmadge's bold effort to split Mr. Roosevelt's support if they had known he was being financed by the backers of the Liberty League. After the Senate Committee's revelations, Gene's revolt went up in smoke.

SENTINELS AND LIBERTY LEAGUE

One of the older liberty-saving organizations, a forerunner of the American Liberty League, is the Sentinels of the Republic. The Committee learned about it from Mr. David F. Sibley, its assistant secretary, a Boston attorney. It was organized as a "charitable corporation" in 1922, by persons who had been active in opposition to women's suffrage, and chose as one of its first activities opposition to the Sheppard-Towner Maternity Act, which it succeeded in repealing. Since 1924 it has waged a continual campaign against ratification of the Child Labor Amendment to the Constitution. It has likewise opposed the movement for a federal department of education. More recently it fought against the Social Security Act, and took part in the agitation against publicity for income-tax returns.

Its "primary object" as stated in a letter by Mr. Alexander Lincoln, president, "is to maintain the fundamental principles of the Constitution, whereby a dual system of national and state governments was established." In another letter he wrote that the organizers of the Sentinels "had observed the growing tendency to centralization and bureaucracy in the federal government and viewed the situation with anxiety." The chief enemy of liberty at the beginning was regarded as the Children's Bureau and its allies. "Now we have a new element—the Brain Trust—and the Children's Bureau is in temporary obscurity."

The Sentinels were later quite ready to adopt the more recent temper of their natural allies. A letter from Mr. W. Cleveland Runyon to Mr. Lincoln quoted from a speech by Under-Secretary of

Agriculture Rexford G. Tugwell in Los Angeles the following sentence: "For the movement will go on in any case; it lies in the brains and the blood of a people bringing into substance the stuff of old racial dreams." Mr. Tugwell was speaking, of course, of Americans and American dreams, but apparently Mr. Runyon mistakenly assumed that Mr. Tugwell was a Jew, for he commented somewhat ungrammatically, "Certainly, after that, not to mention the Jewish brigade Roosevelt took to Washington, there is no reason why the real issue should be smothered any longer." To which Mr. Lincoln replied, "I am doing what I can as an officer of the Sentinels. I think, as you say, that the Jewish threat is a real one. My hope is in the election next autumn, and I believe that our real opportunity lies in accomplishing the defeat of Roosevelt." And Mr. Runyon answered, "The people are crying for leadership and not getting it. Our leaders are asleep. The Sentinels should lead on the outstanding issue. The old-line Americans of \$1200 a year want a Hitler." It is only fair to say that there is no record of a reply to this last suggestion, but it is also prudent to point out that the kind of person who wants an American Hitler is attracted by the Sentinels.

Another letter, from Mr. W. A. Wilson, of the faculty of Yale University, suggested upholding the Constitution by amending it on the reactionary side. "My own proposal," he said, "would be to strike out the general-welfare clause in Article I, Section 8." The idea was to prevent the government from using its existing constitutional right to serve the general welfare, aside from the specific powers granted it in other sections of the instrument. This suggestion was carefully considered by the Sentinels; such an amendment, if their plans mature, may be introduced in the next session of Congress. But it would hardly seem necessary, since a majority of the Supreme Court has already narrowly restricted the meaning of the existing welfare clause.

The Sentinels decided in August, 1935, not to oppose the Tydings-McCormack sedition bill (a bill that, as the American Civil Liberties Union points out, might be employed virtually to destroy freedom of speech and the press) but to oppose the Guffey coal bill and the Wheeler-Rayburn bill. At a later meeting it was reported that 1,900 papers "are taking our weekly editorials." Most of these journals are in small towns. The Sentinels, among their major activities, found time to oppose a bill to establish a juvenile court in the District of Columbia.

The principal financial supporter of the Sentinels has been Mr. Raymond Pitcairn, their national chairman, of the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co. Others of equal prominence, however, have helped him nobly with the burden. There is Mr. E. T. Stotesbury of J. P. Morgan and Co.—also Mr. Alfred P. Sloan of General Motors, Mr. Arthur W. Sewall of General Asphalt and Baldwin Locomo-

tive, Mr. Samuel D. Warriner of Lehigh Coal and Navigation, Mr. Atwater Kent of Atwater Kent, Mr. John E. Zimmerman of the United Gas and Improvement Co., Mr. Irénée Du Pont, and many other business executives, bankers and utility men. There is a considerable overlapping between those who have contributed to the Sentinels and those who financed the Liberty League, after it was founded. Apparently the older organization suffered some loss of revenue to the newer one.

In a letter from Mr. W. M. Stayton, later secretary of the American Liberty League, to Mr. Lincoln of the Sentinels, we discover something about the origin of the Liberty League. The directors of the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment, meeting in New York on December 6, 1933, passed a resolution "suggesting that the individual members of the Executive Committee of the A.A.P.A. continue to meet from time to time and have in view the formation of a group, based on our old membership in the Association, which would in the event of danger to the federal Constitution stand ready to defend the faith of the fathers." They did so meet, not long before June 27, 1934, the date of Mr. Stayton's letter, and were unanimously of the opinion that the time had come for action. Mr. Stayton believed that perhaps the first duty of the new organization should be to oppose the Child Labor Amendment—though later he was convinced that this would be unwise. He was considering, he wrote on this and other occasions, what should be the relationship of the new organization to the Crusaders, the Sentinels, and the American Taxpayers' League. The older bodies, he wrote Mr. Lincoln on October 2, 1934, "are composed of good people," they have "very dignified and very able literature, and yet I am not able to make up my mind that they have accomplished very much, and feel rather sure that they have not been properly financed. . . . Now, on the other hand, when I look at the American Liberty League, I am astonished at the reception it has had. The number of members coming in and the amount of money coming in has been very extraordinary." Apparently the right formula had been found.

In the same letter Mr. Stayton said what he thought the policy of the Liberty League would be. "Broadly speaking, my feeling is that the federal jobholders are in effect a public enemy and they must be fought, and that the American Liberty League will in the long run be found fighting against the doings of federal jobholders, for they are seeking to enlarge their jobs and to spend the money of the people while doing it. I doubt very much whether the League will ever take up a mere question of expediency, but I do believe that it will not allow a single constitutional question to pass without challenge." And, to reassure Mr. Lincoln, Mr. Stayton wrote in a subsequent letter, "In most of the fights which you have named, I would be with you without reservation"—that is, fights the Sentinels had fought.

We now know how prophetic Mr. Stayton was. The Liberty League, both in names and in contributors, was successful in assembling most of the reactionary and wealthy of America. Its principal supporters were members of the Du Pont family, but in the list of contributors were most of the prominent men who had given to the other liberty-saving organizations, and many others besides. It did fight all extension of governmental power, no matter what the emergency or what the possible benefits. In "preserving the Constitution," it even went so far as to form a committee of prominent corporation lawyers, who issued reports—in advance of the Supreme Court decisions—denouncing as unconstitutional the N.R.A., the A.A.A. and the Wagner Act to establish labor's right to collective bargaining, and to outlaw employer influence in forming or sustaining company unions. The League's pamphleteering has been voluminous and skillful.

LIBERTY LEAGUE IN POLITICS

No doubt the leaders of these liberty-saving movements are, in their own minds, sincere and desirous only of noble ends. But, objectively considered, the above data would seem to establish that this particular crusade for liberty conforms largely to the following formula:

1. The crusade is supported largely by big business and finance, in their own interest.
2. In ideas it assumes the protective coloration of American traditions, by using stereotypes like "liberty" and "the Constitution," which arouse automatic loyalty.
3. In action it assumes the protective coloration of a popular movement, while the support by men of wealth is concealed, or at least not advertised.
4. Its general objective is to limit or even to reduce the power of government as a dangerous rival which can, if not in the hands of big business and finance, challenge their economic power and their opportunities for profit.
5. The detailed and contributory objectives are to defeat legislation imposing taxation on those of large income, regulating or establishing competition with big business, or offering governmental protection or aid to women, children, the aged, the sick, or to small investors, labor and the farmer.
6. Those behind this crusade particularly fear and resent governmental investigations which reveal their objectives and methods. They defend themselves in some cases against publication of their telegrams, letters and documents by the plea that their activities, so closely concerned with public affairs, are private matters subject to the constitutional guarantees against search and seizure, or of freedom of the press.

GEORGE SOULE.

The third article in this series will discuss "Liberty in Industry."—THE EDITORS.