

Portrait of a Native American...

Merwin K. Hart Says Democracy Stems From Moscow... Ickes Calls Him Fascist-Minded

When the N. Y. State Legislature opens its 1941 session in Albany Thursday, one of the most intense pressure boys is likely to be Fascist-minded Merwin K. Hart. As president of the N. Y. State Economic Council, Mr. Hart is continually busy denouncing democracy, attacking school budgets, carping at text books, championing professional 110 per cent patriots. In normal times he might have been dismissed as a harmless reactionary. But in these critical hours professional reactionaries invite closer scrutiny. PM assigned Willard Wiener to examine Merwin K. Hart. This is what he found.

By WILLARD WIENER

Merwin K. Hart has decided that democracy (as democracy) has no place in our scheme of government, a decision that has made him a prominent target for those who disagree with him.

In a recent fiery name-calling speech, Secretary of the Interior Ickes denounced Mr. Hart as a "fascist-minded native American who missed few occasions to sneer at democracy." Secretary Ickes placed Mr. Hart in the same group of the "fascist-minded" as Col. Charles A. Lindbergh (recently defended in the *Saturday Evening Post* by the *Herald Tribune's* C. B. Allen), Father Coughlin and Lawrence Dennis. Mr. Hart demands a retraction.

"I will retract my statement gladly," replied Mr. Ickes in an open letter, "when I hear that you have come out to fight against the asserted gangs of native fascists and fifth columnists that are trying to pave the way for dictators here as they have prepared it in other lands; when I hear that you have come out in defense of civil liberties."

Name-calling aside, what are the facts regarding Merwin K. Hart, founder and president of the New York State Economic Council, friend and conferee of Col. Lindbergh, outspoken sympathizer of Gen. Franco and staunch advocate of Herbert Hoover's brand of private enterprise as against Franklin D. Roosevelt's program of social legislation?

I called on Mr. Hart in his office at the Council (505 Fifth Ave.) by appointment. I found him to be an angular, square-jawed man, solidly built, gray-haired, his face deeply lined. He wears glasses. I was struck at once by his graciousness and studied nonchalance. Mr. Hart is obviously a gentleman.

But I had the added impression that he was a gentleman of many suspicions, constantly on his guard. He spoke to me only in the presence of his stenographer.

Served in Legislature

Mr. Hart is 59. He was born in Utica. He was admitted to the bar in 1911, served two years in the New York Legislature (1907-'09), for years had a successful practice as a lawyer for corporations (and was a director in several), served in France as a captain in the World War, and was a member of the New York State Industrial Survey Commission (representing employers) 1926-'29.

Mr. Hart has given up his practice to devote all of his time to the work of the New York State Economic Council, which he founded ten years ago.

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Father Coughlin

Mr. Hart said the Council had about 2000 members, and that its bi-monthly *Letter*, sent out under his name, as president, went approximately to 17,000 persons throughout the state.

The Council has always had two objectives: (1) to keep down the cost of government, and (2) to prevent too great encroachment of government upon private enterprise. (Mr. Hart, incidentally, was chairman of the short-lived Committee of American Private Enterprise). The Council has always fought for a reduction in the state budget for education, and is now engaged in a noisy campaign against so-called subservise teachings in the public schools, a program made notable by its attack on the text books of Professor Harold O. Rugg, of Teachers College, Columbia University, and by the support it has received from the Hearst press.

The Council is supported by contributions, and I asked Mr. Hart from whom the Council received its chief support. He said that James H. Rand, Jr. (president of Remington Rand), notorious labor-baiter, "contributed off and on." Mr. Rand is the author of the Mohawk Valley formula for breaking strikes, the basis of which is terroristic propaganda, the employment of labor spies and strikebreakers.

Mr. Hart is a Harvard man (class '04), a Mason, and a member of several clubs, including the University, Harvard, Uptown (N. Y.), and Fort Schuyler (Utica).

So little for Mr. Hart's background. But where does he stand today when everybody everywhere is counting noses in an effort to distinguish between friend and foe?

Mr. Hart provides the answer in the record of his own activities, his writings and public utterances.

In his talk with me, Mr. Hart either bluntly denied or indifferently brushed aside the inescapable implications of several portions of his public record.

Denies Coughlin Connection

He denied, for example, any connection with Father Coughlin. He said he did not have the slightest idea what Father Coughlin stood for. Yet an article appeared under his name in Father Coughlin's *Social Justice*.

Further, in February, 1939, Bernard T. D'Arcy, "chief distributor of *Social Justice*," assisted the General committee (of which Mr. Hart was chairman) "to make a big success" of a pro-Franco rally.

Mr. Hart denied he had ever had anything to do with the discredited Christian Front. Yet John Eoghan Kelly, propagandist for the Christian Front, was secretary of this same general committee of which Mr. Hart was chairman, and the Christian Front was advertised as one of the chief sources of ticket distribution for the pro-Franco rally (heralded as a "Great Pro-American

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Merwin K. Hart granted an interview to Willard Wiener after exacting a promise that PM would publish a statement which he would have prepared. Mr. Hart was told that PM would publish any statement he might make "providing it was reasonable, printable and met PM's space requirements." This is Mr. Hart's statement:

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Mr. Hart told me quite frankly, and with considerable emphasis, that he did not believe in American democracy. He does not like the word democracy, and he especially does not like to hear it applied to the U. S. A. because he believes it is synonymous with Communism. He expressed this belief publicly last September in an address before the Union League Club of New York.

"So far as I can see," he said, "the great impetus to the use of this word (democracy) appeared after the meeting of the Communist Internationale in 1935." He added:

"It is time to brush aside this word with its connotations. It is time to return to the conception of the Republic—a conception so clear that all can understand."

Again: "I wonder sometimes if one of the causes of our troubles today does not arise from the fact that we have been over drilled into believing we are a democracy. This, too, may be one of the latest 'insidious wiles of foreign influence.'"

A begrudging smile came to his face when I suggested that the late James Bryce in his classic *The American Commonwealth* (1888) had devoted two chapters to the strength and weakness of American democracy (as such), and that Woodrow Wilson had declared in 1917 that the participation of the U. S. A. in the first World War was prompted by the desire to make the world safe for democracy.

Belief Unshaken

But Mr. Hart was unmoved, his belief unshaken that the word stems from Communists and is being popularized by Moscow.

The year 1935 was a Red Letter one for Mr. Hart. It was the year of two great awakenings. Mr. Hart awoke not only to the fact that democracy got its impetus from Moscow in this year, but that the word "fascist" came into its own in this same year and from the same source, as the following statement from the Dec. 15, 1940 issue of the *Economic Council Letter* makes clear:

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the worker as for the business man. It believes that neither can prosper without the other likewise prospering. All are in the same boat.

I believe that the principles that have underlain American success the first 150 years of its existence are the only principles upon which the people can be prosperous and happy in the future. The work of the Council is devoted toward trying to promote contentment and prosperity among the whole people.

I am utterly opposed to all foreign influence in America whether Fascist, Nazi or Communist. Of these we consider the Communist influence is much greater than the other two combined. Hence I have given especial attention to opposing the Communist influence.

unconsciously) by Communist dogma and technique, dates from the speech of Georgi Dimitrov at the Seventh World Communist Congress in Moscow in 1935."

Mr. Hart's hatred of democracy in America is equaled only by his hatred of Communism anywhere. He has given his support to pro-Nazis and anti-semites whose professed objective is the elimination of "the Red menace."

He has publicly credited Hitler and Mussolini with having driven Communism from their respective countries, and in his widely distributed pamphlet, *Is Your Town Red?* recommends the work of two Nazi sympathizers, Harry Jung and Mrs. Elizabeth Dilling, both of Chicago.

Mrs. Dilling is the author of a book, *The Red Network*, recommended by Mr. Hart, although he told me that he himself had not read it, explaining this oversight by the statement that the volume was a reference book and not one to be read.

"However," he said, "I've looked into it." Mrs. Dilling's "ready-reference" purports to list the leading Communists and radicals in the U. S. A. It includes such names as Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt and Mayor LaGuardia, and has found much favor among Nazi leaders in this country.

I asked Mr. Hart whether he regarded this book which he hadn't read as authoritative, and he replied:

"It's been admitted in court, and I suspect it has a high degree of accuracy."

Jung's Activities

Harry Jung's pro-Nazi activities are well recognized. He has collaborated with Bundists in various sections of the country, and his organization, the American Vigilant Intelligence Federation, has published and distributed pamphlets which have been recommended by the official German propaganda agency, World Service.

Mr. Hart is the author of a book, *America—Look at Spain*, in which he admitted the existence of a Nazi movement in the U. S. A. But he dismissed it (as Hitler once did) as a reaction against Communism.

"Indeed," he wrote, "if Communism is rooted out of the United States, any danger of Nazism and Fascism will disappear overnight."

This statement by a sincere man with a straight face must have proved embarrassing by the subsequent close collaboration between Stalin and Hitler.

Mr. Hart said to me that fascism is an Italian word without meaning in America.

Merwin K. Hart, then, is Communism's implacable foe. But what about Fascism,

...Who Has No Use for De

the "word without meaning in America?"

Mr. Hart has nothing but outspoken admiration for fascist Spain and Gen. Franco



Gen. Franco

has been the recipient of his unstinted praise. "Generalissimo Franco," he said in a radio broadcast, Sept. 29, 1938, "is one of the ablest men of his time," an opinion he reiterated to me.

"I have not changed my views about Spain," he

said, adding that in his opinion the U. S. A. should cultivate a closer relationship with the present fascist government of Spain.

Mr. Hart has given generously of his time and talent to the furtherance of Gen. Franco's cause in this country. He was chairman of the American Union for Nationalist Spain (1938-'40). John Eoghan Kelly (the same Christian Front Kelly who served with Mr. Hart on the committee for the pro-Franco rally in February, 1939) was secretary of this organization.

Other spokesmen for Father Coughlin's Christian Front who served with Mr. Hart on the general committee for the mass meeting in the 7th Regiment Armory, Feb. 19, 1939, included Patrick Scanlan, managing editor of *The Tablet*, official organ of the Catholic diocese in Brooklyn, and Dr. Edward Lodge Curran.

Mr. Hart opened this meeting with an attack on Communism, and his mention that Hitler had driven it out of Germany and Mussolini out of Italy was applauded, according to the *New York Times*.

"However great our individual sympathies with any oppressed persons," Mr. Hart said, "we are Americans and cannot permit ourselves to be concerned with the internal affairs of other nations."

Police estimated that more than 10,000 persons attended the rally. Speakers, other than Mr. Hart, included Ogden H. Hammond, former U. S. Ambassador to Spain, and Dr. Alexander Hamilton Rice. The *New York Times* account of the meeting said:

"References by speakers to Gen. Franco, Premier Mussolini and Chancellor Hitler were applauded. A picture of the Rev. Charles E. Coughlin carried down the aisle while Dr. Alexander Hamilton Rice, geographer and explorer, was speaking, was greeted with such boisterous enthusiasm by a section of the audience that Dr. Rice could not make himself heard."

Anti-Semitic Allen Zoll, former associate of Mr. Hart (an association which Mr. Hart now denies), was one of the most important collaborators who worked along with Father Coughlin's Christian Fronters to make this meeting a success.

It was Zoll who organized a picket line in front of radio station WMCA which had barred Father Coughlin from its air. Zoll was subsequently arrested and indicted on a charge of attempted extortion in connection with calling off the picket line.

Mr. Hart, previous to the 7th Regiment Armory meeting, appeared as principal speaker at a luncheon sponsored by Zoll at the Hotel Iroquois, 49 W. 44th St. This was a regular meeting of the Patriotic Luncheon Club.

As our interview continued, I asked Mr. Hart what he thought about Hitler. He said he had "a hunch," but would rather not express it. He was glad, however, to quote "a Jewish friend" (whom he did not identify) respecting "the dignity which Hitler has returned to the German people, a dig-

nity which they had lost in the years following the World War."

"I am only telling you," he said with a slight smirk, "what this Jewish friend of mine told me a couple of years ago. I don't know what he would say today. He hated Hitler, and I am just telling you what he told me."

"Does what he told you reflect your own opinion?" I asked.

"Well," he said, with an air of dismissing the subject, "I'd rather let history answer that."

Mr. Hart told me that he conferred with Col. Lindbergh from time to time, but he couldn't recall the last occasion. Nor did he remember whether he had conferred with him before or after Lindbergh's broadcasts.

I asked him what he and Col. Lindbergh talked about.

"We talk on all sorts of subjects," he said, and when I pressed him for a more specific answer, replied:

"I'd rather not say."

He conferred, too, he said, with William R. Castle, former Under-Secretary of State (in the Hoover Administration), but he couldn't recall whether he had held joint conferences with Col. Lindbergh and Mr. Castle.

"Castle," he said, "is a friend of mine. I know him well. I may have seen him with Col. Lindbergh, and then again I may not have."

Mr. Hart scoffed at the suggestion that he was a supporter of Father Coughlin.

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Merwin K. Hart Photo by Mary Morris, PM Staff

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I asked Mr. Hart whether he would make
a statement disavowing Father Coughlin.
"I don't feel," he said, "that it's necessary
for me to disavow anybody. There's no rea-
son why I should."
As for Allen Zoll, Mr. Hart said that he
knew him "slightly," but did not number
him among his friends. Then, expansively:
"All men," he said, "are my friends—in a
sense."

Likes James True

James True, publisher of the anti-Semitic
Industrial Control Reports, fell into the cate-
gory of Mr. Hart's "slight acquaintances-
hips."
"I've met Mr. True and I like him," he
said. "But I rarely see him."
This is Mr. Hart's answer to me on the
charge of anti-Semitism:
"I think Jewish citizens are among the
most useful we've got, but many have a
trait of seizing upon something that doesn't
exist and spelling out a grievance. I think
that's what they've done here."
"In what respect?"
"Why, the very statement that I'm anti-
Semitic," he said. "I think Jews are over-
sensitive, and in the long run this sensitive-
ness will react against the Jews themselves,
and I regret it. I wish they wouldn't be so
over-sensitive."
"Most of the people with whom we (the
Council) do business are Jews. Why, we
have Jewish members on our board of di-
rectors. Does this look to you like anti-
Semitism?"
Then, in a tone of unmistakable con-
descension:
"You're Jewish, aren't you?"
"Please," I assured him, "don't let that
bother you."
"No, no—I'm just saying."
Mr. Hart has always been a fighter. To-
day he is fighting Communism. Six years
ago he was fighting the school budget.
Today, through the Council, personally,
and through the American Parents Commit-
tee on Education (which he created), he is
attacking the schools again. But from a dif-
ferent angle: subversive teaching, with the
social science text books of Professor Rugg
as the immediate object of attack.
Mr. Hart's hunt for Reds apparently
knows no bounds, and as recently as last
month discovered PM.

"New York City," he says in a Council
Letter (Nov. 15, 1940), "has long had one
Communist paper—financed in part at least
from Moscow. Now she seems to have two
communist papers, for it two recent maga-
zine articles (*Harper's* for October and
American Mercury for August) are correct
in the picture they draw of the afternoon
paper PM, that certainly can be called a
communistic newspaper. This sheet beauti-
fully carries out Lenin's promise that the
capitalistic system is to be made to pay for
its own funeral. For it was financed by capi-
talists—is now said to be largely owned by
one capitalist who bought out the others
after PM had lost part of its capital and
threatened to go on the rocks."
And from this Mr. Hart seems to draw a
moral:
"Organizations like the Economic Coun-
cil," he writes, "have difficulty getting the
few thousand dollars they need to run. Yet
some New York City capitalists are so little
wise to what is going on in the world that
they shell out a million and a half to found
a left-wing newspaper which at once adds
mighty strength to the forces working to
destroy the capitalist system itself!"
There seems to be no doubt where Mr.
Hart stands. He has been specific.