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John T. Flynn: Exemplar of the Old Right

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Prior to World War I, liberals held two guiding principles: distrust of Big Business and opposition to war. As the approach of World War II darkened the political horizon, the American Left's hatred of capitalism and embrace of "democracy" overwhelmed its traditional abhorence of war. Liberals of the *New Republic* variety, along with their radical confreres, leaped on the Popular Front bandwagon, jettisoned their anti-interventionist and anti-militarist baggage, and rode the wave of war hysteria all the way to Pearl Harbor. The war accelerated and strengthened the statist tendencies in the Left until, in a very short time, the anti-militarism of such old style liberals as Oswald Garrison Villard seemed archaic.[1]

The career of John T. Flynn—journalist, author, and master polemicist of the Old Right—is highly unusual in that its course reveals a pattern the exact reverse of this massive and relatively rapid degeneration. Flynn started out as a liberal columnist for that flagship of American liberalism, the *New Republic,* and wound up on the far Right, defending Joe McCarthy and denouncing "creeping socialism." Now this in itself is far from unique. A whole generation of New York–based left-wing intellectuals, traumatized by World War II and "the God that failed," went from Stalinism to Trotskyism to Reaganism, moving inexorably from left to right. For some, like James Burnham, the transformation occurred with dizzying speed; for others, like Max Shachtman, it took decades. What is unusual about Flynn is that his journey turns the familiar neoconservative odyssey on its head. Instead of being seduced by the New Deal and the Popular Front into supporting the war, Flynn was led by his thoroughgoing anti-war stance to challenge the developing state-worship of modern liberalism.

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As the New Deal liberals and Popular Front radicals deserted their former anti-war position, they blazed a path that would be followed by the anti-Stalinist leftist intellectuals of the post-war period; the pattern of their defection from left to right was virtually always the same. They almost always broke with leftist orthodoxy over some foreign policy issue, itself invariably motivated by the imminence of some military conflict involving the U.S. In these moments of crisis, with the whole weight of public opinion bearing down on them, the left-liberal intellectuals broke down; it was easier to go with the flow.

I. Swimming Against the Tide

Certainly "go with the flow" is the one phrase that *least* describes the career of John T. Flynn. When liberal and leftist intellectuals enlisted as the propagandists of Roosevelt's war, Flynn dared to swim against the tide, and became one of the central leaders of the America First Committee. For this he endured a campaign of calumny, lies, blacklisting, espionage, and the ever-present threat of government repression. But Flynn rose to the occasion, and became one of the outstanding founders and leaders of the movement we know today as the Old Right.

John T. Flynn was born in 1882, in Bladensburg, Maryland, where he grew up in a devoutly Roman Catholic family.[2] He studied law at Georgetown University but soon switched to journalism. After a long struggle, he finally found a position in 1920 with the New York *Globe*, where he specialized in financial analysis. By the start of the 1930s, his muckraking articles exposing fraud in the financial markets were featured in *Colliers, Harpers,* and other major magazines. He also wrote a series of muckraking books: *Investment Trusts Gone Wrong!, Graft in Business,* and a very fair biography of John D. Rockefeller, entitled *God's Gold.*[3]

There was little or nothing in Flynn's writing at this time that indicated his future direction; he was a conventional liberal, whose views were not out of place in that bastion of liberal orthodoxy, the *New Republic.* In March 1933 he began a weekly column, "Other People's Money," for the magazine, in which he campaigned for a federal investigation of banking practices. When Roosevelt was swept into office, Flynn welcomed him, sharing the hope that the new President would get the country moving again. Flynn supported the Democratic party platform of 1932, which called for an end to the extravagant spending of the Republicans, a balanced budget, and the abolition of the many government bureaus and commissions that had

begun to accumulate. Flynn believed that the way to beat the Depression was to stimulate private investment, trim the "rough edges" of capitalism, and avoid big spending schemes. In his campaign speeches, Roosevelt had said: "I am opposed to any form of dole. I do not believe that the state has any right merely to hand out money." Big spending projects, Roosevelt said, would only be a "stopgap" measure and would ultimately fail to solve the problem of unemployment. In July of 1932, Roosevelt cited the Democratic platform which promised "a saving of not less than 25 percent" of the cost of the federal government. Lashing out against Hoover for not reducing government expenditures he said: "I accuse the present administration of being the greatest spending administration in peace times in all our history!" Then he added: "On my part, I ask you very simply to assign to me the task of reducing the annual operating expenses of your national government."

But Flynn was soon disillusioned. In fact, the New Deal that Roosevelt sold to the American people in 1932 bore absolutely no resemblance to the one he immediately imposed on an unsuspecting nation. During the first 100 days of his Administration, Roosevelt racked up a deficit larger than the one it took Hoover two years to produce. Worse, from Flynn's viewpoint, was the blizzard of new government agencies the President created, agencies that sought to regulate every aspect of economic life, and the billions in borrowed money that financed them. He used his column in the *New Republic* to attack the President, and in 1940 came out with a short book, *Country Squire in the White House,*[4] in which he excoriated Roosevelt for betraying the trust of the people who had elected him.

Flynn was particularly horrified by the National Recovery Administration (NRA), which he denounced as "one of the most amazing spectacles of our times," that "represented probably the gravest attack upon the whole principle of the democratic society in our political history." With prices, wages, hours, and production quotas set by trade associations, and an industry-wide code set up to regulate every aspect of commerce, competition would be eliminated and business would ensure for itself a secure and profitable niche in the new corporatist order. This was all couched in the language of liberalism, Flynn said, but it was championed primarily by the Chamber of Commerce and other business groups. Flynn saw himself as the defender of true liberalism, which had been betrayed by That Man in the White House. He argued:

> While at the same time proclaiming his devotion to democracy, he [Roosevelt] adopted a plan borrowed from the corporative state of Italy and sold it to all the liberals as a great liberal revolutionary triumph. And, curiously, every American liberal who had fought monopoly, who had demanded the enforcement of the anti-trust laws, who had denied the right of organized business groups, combinations and trade associations to rule our economic life, was branded as a Tory and a reactionary if he continued to believe these things.[5]

Flynn predicted that Roosevelt's spending on vast domestic programs could not continue, for he would run out of useful peacetime projects. At the beginning of his first term Congress had dumped $32 billion in Roosevelt's lap for "recovery," to spend as he chose; this was the source of his power, and he would be determined to maintain it. Suspension or even contraction of government spending would lead to an economic downturn much worse than the Great Crash, and would sink his chances for reelection. But the government had borrowed up to the limit; further funds would have to come out of tax revenues, and this was bound to run into resistance from conservatives. The President, Flynn said, would turn to preparations for war in order to solve his dilemma, for the fantastic extravagance of the administration had reached the point of no return.

> When this point is reached in spending programs, there is always one kind of project left that breaks down resistance—which particularly breaks down resistance among the very conservative groups who are most vocal against government spending. That is national defense. The one sure and easiest way to command national assent from all groups is to ask it for national defense.[6]

World War II would be the ultimate New Deal jobs program. The Supreme Court may have declared the NRA unconstitutional, but there were other ways to militarize the economy—such as actually going to war. Roosevelt would pursue military adventure abroad to take the people's minds off their troubles at home—troubles that were not getting any better, and that the New Deal was only making worse. The President had thrown off the pretense of neutrality in the war between the European empires, and was now "the recognized leader of the war party." Flynn charged that "[t]here is not the slightest doubt that the only thing that now prevents his active entry on the side of the Allies is his knowledge that he cannot take the American people in yet."[7]

Though Roosevelt's enemies often attacked him as a dictator, Flynn's analysis was more subtle. The President, he said, was not a dictator: he lacked the "blazing certainty" of the ideologue, and, besides, "too many people would hate him" if he played the role of dictator, "and he could not endure that."[8] Instead, Flynn feared that the New Deal was the prelude to a new despotism, the first two or three steps in the direction of a corporatist oligarchy. Roosevelt had breached the walls; the future oligarchs had only to step through the breach and take possession of the fortress.

Flynn was unrelenting in his assault on the President, and Roosevelt, not one to stand idly by and take it, was quick to respond. After reading an attack on himself and his aide, Harry Hopkins, in the *Yale Review*, the President wrote to the editor of that publication in which he declared that Flynn had become "a destructive rather than a constructive force." Roosevelt went on to say that Flynn "should be barred hereafter from the columns of any presentable daily paper, monthly magazine or national quarterly, such as the *Yale Review*."[9]

This is exactly what happened. We hear much about the alleged effect of the anti-Communist blacklist at the height of the Cold War, especially in Hollywood. Any number of outright Stalinists and fellow travelers have spent the greater part of the last twenty years whining and wailing about what a great injustice it was. But this was nothing compared to the blacklisting of so-called "isolationists" during the Roosevelt era. As Garet Garrett wrote about the war hysteria, "[i]n the orchestration of this policy the intellectuals had the drums, the percussion instruments and the brass."[10] The sound of it was deafening, and all dissident notes were drowned out. Flynn had been using his column in the *New Republic* to denounce Roosevelt's "deliberately selling to our people the baleful notion that some enemy is about to assail us." Were liberals really so "enfeebled by confusion and doubt that they will permit themselves to be marched off behind this fantastic banner"? He bitterly attacked the Communists, who had agitated against foreign entanglement until 1937, and were now interested in only one thing: that the United States should enter the war "on the side of Russia." That is why the Communist Party was now engaged in "entangling this country in the politics of Europe."[11]

The Left had joined FDR's campaign to substitute an arms program for a true economic recovery. For all its alleged "anti-fascist" fervor, the "progressive" element was marching down the well-trod path to war singing

the praises of the corporatist New Deal. "The present curse of Italy and Germany," said Flynn,

> is that the dictators there have made vast arms operations the medium of spending money and creating employment. You can't build battleships and make guns and war materials without putting great industries to work. The support of the economic system of both Hitler and Mussolini is the employment they have created and the income they initiate by means of the armament industry . . . but the continuation of these war preparations requires the ceasless unloosening of war alarms upon the people. The war scare is an essential implement to the war-preparation program.[12]

This time it wasn't just the munitions makers, the economic royalists, or the Republicans who were beating the war drums. "It is being done," said Flynn, "by a Democratic administration in possession of its liberal wing."[13]

The war scare and the New Deal were, in Flynn's mind, inseparable; they were two aspects of the same inexorable trend. "Thus," he declared,

> the great preparedness industry grows. I dare say no one can stop it. The Democrats have come around for it, and the Republicans have always been for it. The liberals favor it, the radicals favor it. Business favors it; the idealists favor it. Hence we shall have it.

But Flynn could not, and would not, reconcile himself to it:

> Here I shall merely drop this futile warning—that you cannot prepare for war without doing something to yourselves. You cannot have a war industry without a war scare; and having built it and made it the basis of work for several million men you cannot demobilize it and you will have to keep on inventing reasons for it.[14]

II. America First

When war broke out in Europe in 1939, Flynn devoted his energies to keeping America out of the conflict. The President wanted to repeal the Neutrality Act, which imposed an arms embargo on the combatants, and sell arms to the Allies. From there, Flynn believed, it would be a short time before America was herself embroiled in the war. Flynn was instrumental in forming the Keep America Out of War Congress, a non-interventionist association of liberals, labor leaders, and socialists such as Norman Thomas. Speaking before that group on November 10, he declared that the Presi-

dent was determined to get the U.S. into war indirectly, by setting up a situation that would lead inevitably to war. It would then "take fifty years of research to find out how we got in." The President's policy, he said, was to divert attention away from the failure of the New Deal to get the country out of the Depression. The proposed $3 billion "defense" budget was an effort to create employment by putting the American economy on a wartime footing. Far from inevitable, the drive toward war was a "strategem of befuddled politicians," who could think of no new excuses for deficit spending. This was the real reason for Roosevelt's scare campaign, which was supposed to justify America throwing a 300-mile belt around the Western hemisphere. Germany may have swallowed up Poland, but we had annexed "the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans."[15]

In a letter to Senator Bennett C. Clark of Maryland, Flynn warned against the specter of government repression bound to accompany the coming war. The increase in the power and visibility of the FBI as an adjunct of the military was ominous, especially given that it was J. Edgar Hoover who had "carried on J. Mitchell Palmer's atrocities after the last war." The whole campaign was "a part of Roosevelt's deliberate plan to disturb the peace of mind of the American people with his spy scares and submarine scares." It was necessary "to terrify the people before they will authorize military expenditures."[16]

Flynn feared that America, already moving toward a corporate state, would fall into a dictatorship if war came. The President had already demonstrated that the "leader principle" had usurped the Constitution when he secretly traded fifty destroyers with Britain in exchange for bases. That move was "an invasion of the rights of Congress so grave" that a Congress not already sunk in "servile submission to the executive" would "meet this usurpation promptly with impeachment proceedings."[17]

As the year 1940 wore on, the liberal war cry grew louder and more aggressive. The Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, headed by a group of prominent liberals, was formed; together with the unending barrage of propaganda and provocation emanating from the White House, it began to have an effect on the previously isolationist American public opinion. The shift was felt in the offices of the *New Republic.* The magazine had previously rejected Roosevelt's policy of collective security, but it abandoned this position as soon as it became inconvenient. Flynn refused to abandon his anti-militarist stance just because the editors of the *New Republic* had done so, and his column became controversial.

Flynn insisted that it wasn't he who had changed, but the editors of the *New Republic;* he had simply retained his anti-militarist position and deep suspicion of executive power. Yet his attacks on Roosevelt were taking on a new slant. In a review of a book by Gustav Stolper arguing that the road to Nazism in Germany had been paved by the movement for social reform, Flynn detected the same pattern in this country: "[W]hen we get through with this last phase of the New Deal, we shall have added the elements of militarism, the shifts of power to the executive and the militant chauvinism, basing our economy on a war industry promoted by an aggressive foreign policy."[18] As James J. Martin has said in his *American Liberalism and World Politics,* by the end of 1940 Flynn was "almost a solitary voice defending what had now become a minority viewpoint. The passage of five years had seen no change of heart so spectacular as the about-face performed by American liberals in general on the subject of arms manufacture and the growth of military institutions."[19]

While American liberals, exemplified by the *New Republic,* were changing their views on the war, Flynn, too, was undergoing an ideological transformation. His analysis of the New Deal as carrying within it the seeds of the corporatist idea, and that the war drive was the outgrowth of New Deal domestic policies, had moved him out of the liberal mainstream. His column in the *New Republic* was now prefaced by an editors' note, expressing their disagreement with Flynn's sentiments. After an angry exchange of letters with editor Bruce Bliven, Flynn's column was discontinued.

Roosevelt's suggestion to the editor of the *Yale Review* that Flynn should be barred from the pages of the "respectable" press was rapidly becoming a fact. Flynn found that he was blacklisted along with Garet Garrett, who had been fired from the *Saturday Evening Post,* Oswald Garrison Villard (unceremoniously dumped from the *Nation*), and many others.

Flynn plunged into anti-war activities. In August 1940 he joined with General Robert E. Wood, of Sears, Roebuck and Co., and a group of prominent right-wing figures to form the America First Committee. Flynn was on the national executive committee as well as chairman of the New York chapter, and he took up the cause with a furious energy. In January 1941 Flynn went on a national speaking tour on behalf of the AFC. At a rally in Kansas City he declared that America "stands on the brink of war"—not a war for democracy, as the interventionists claimed, but a war "between empires" and "about imperialism." The bombing of England had changed nothing; Britain was merely the "biggest of all these imperialist grabbers," which had declared war on Germany not out of any great love for Poland,

but because she "has an empire of her own which she seized exactly as Germany seized Poland and she sees the rise of a German empire threatening the safety" of that empire. The rise of Germany was threatening British control of the Mediterranean, which Britain needed to "hold India and millions of people in Asia and Africa in subjection." Why, he asked, should America risk her own democracy on behalf of the British Empire? The war was yet another "chapter in the long, age-old struggle of European empires about dividing up the world . . . and it is out of this abominable world of imperialism, the scramble for dominion, the fight for trade backed by armies and guns, that I want to keep this great peaceful democratic America of ours." Flynn accused a "small minority" of conspiring to drag the U.S. into war, motivated by Anglophilia and a misguided attempt to preserve democracy that could end only in destroying it. If war came, predicted Flynn, then the very democratic institutions in this country that the interventionists claimed to defend would be annihilated.

By this time a smear campaign against the America First Committee had begun. The ultra-interventionist pro–New Deal group led by the Reverend Leon M. Birkhead, the "Friends of Democracy," was in the forefront of this vicious campaign, which sought to equate anti-war sentiment with support for Hitler and Mussolini. Birkhead hired the notorious John Roy Carlson as an *agent provocateur.* Carlson's real name was Avedis Derounian; using yet another alias, "George Pagnanelli," he passed himself off as an Italian and joined the isolationist movement. "Pagnanelli" pretended to be an anti-Semite, even going so far as to put out an anti-Jewish hate sheet, the *Defender,* the purpose of which was to spread the calumny that the anti-war movement was pro-Nazi. While there undoubtedly was a pro-Nazi fringe, Carlson's effort to smear all or even most America First supporters with the brush of Hitlerism was a crude lie. In his book *Under Cover,* he uses the old trick of focusing on the activities of marginal bigots, who are then quoted expressing agreement with the anti-war arguments of AFC members like Flynn and other leading figures. The atmosphere of war hysteria and leader worship that permeated the pre-war years is brought home in *Under Cover* and its sequel, *The Plotters,* where Carlson equates all criticism of the New Deal and Roosevelt with treason and support for Hitler. The tragedy of those years is that Carlson's diatribe was put out by a major publisher and became a bestseller, reviewed in all the mass-circulation journals, while Flynn's reply, *The Smear Terror,* was privately published and received only a limited circulation.[20]

Although Carlson and the smear artists of the left-wing press blew pro-facist sentiment way out of proportion to its actual influence in the America First Committee, Flynn did not deny the existence of such an element. At an America First rally in Madison Square Garden, when Flynn discovered that American fascist leader Joe McWilliams was in the audience, he denounced McWilliams from the podium: "What he is doing here, how he got in, or whose stooge he is I do not know . . . but I do know that the photographers for the war-making newspapers always know where to find him."[21]

Flynn was no anti-Semite, and certainly no fascist or Nazi sympathizer. Unlike the war party, however, he was more concerned with fighting fascism on the home front than in Europe or Asia. When Lindbergh made his famous Des Moines speech, in which he singled out the Jews as one of the three major groups pushing the country into war, Flynn was furious. Though a member of the AFC national committee and a leading light of the group, Flynn had not seen the text of Lindbergh's speech until he read it in the newspapers. Flynn wanted the AFC to publically disassociate itself from Lindbergh's remarks, but the AFC national committee refused to do so, instead deploring what it termed "racist smears" against Lindbergh.

In a letter to Lindbergh in 1941, Flynn politely but firmly reprimanded the isolationist leader. The Des Moines speech had disrupted the work of the AFC, especially in New York. While he was sure Lindbergh was no anti-Semite, he was equally sure that attempts to introduce "shades of meaning" into the controversy would be fruitless. Lindbergh's error was that he had allowed the AFC to be "tagged with the anti-Jewish label." Yes, it was true, Flynn acknowledged, that virtually the entire Jewish population of New York backed the war drive; he agreed with Lindbergh that war was not in their interests, just as it went against the interests of the rest of the country. He went on to say that some Jewish leaders had equated all opposition to Roosevelt's interventionism with anti-Semitism, and that making the war an ethnic issue could have unpleasant consequences. "It has seemed," said Flynn, "their [the Jewish leaders'] responsibility for this should be brought home to them. But this is a far different matter from going out upon the public platform and denouncing 'the Jews' as the war-makers. No man can do that without incurring the guilt of religious and racial intolerance and that character is poison in a community like ours."[22]

On June 25, 1941, Hitler broke his non-agression pact with Stalin and invaded the Soviet Union, and Communist parties all over the world changed

their position on the war. Whereas before they had opposed U.S. intervention, which they denounced as "imperialist," now they were all in favor of it. It was now a war for "democracy," a "people's anti-fascist struggle," and suddenly the American Communist Party and its fellow travelers were the biggest patriots around. Hours after Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union, the pro-war elements of the Left in this country were agitating for aid to Stalin. In a radio talk, Flynn pointed out that both Hitler and Stalin were enemies of the American system. He did not want "to spill the blood of one American boy to make the world safe for either" Hitler or Stalin. Why, he asked, should we bleed ourselves "white with taxation," "disrupt our whole economic system," and "plunge ourselves into bankruptcy" to fight in a war "whose peace terms will have to satisfy Communist Russia." Flynn believed that from that time on Roosevelt's interventionist foreign policy would mean kowtowing to Stalin—a prediction tragically fulfilled at Yalta.[23]

By the fall of 1941, the entry of the United States into the war seemed only a matter of time. Still, Flynn fought on. On September 11, Roosevelt ordered U.S. naval and air patrols to sweep all Axis warships from waters "vital" to America's national interest. Flynn appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, testifying against a proposal by Roosevelt that would allow armed merchant ships to enter combat zones. Oswald Garrison Villard and other opponents of Roosevelt's war provocations appeared as well, but to no avail; the proposal carried.

Unlike some in the AFC, who gave up even before Pearl Harbor, Flynn fought to keep the U.S. out of the war, right up until the very end. The AFC was dissolved after Pearl Harbor, but Flynn continued to speak out against the war hysteria. He published *The Smear Terror,* an attack on the virulent hate campaign that equated all opposition to the war as Nazi-inspired, and *The Truth About Pearl Harbor* and *The Final Secret of Pearl Harbor,* the earliest "revisionist" histories of that fateful incident.[24]

III. The Transformation

The entry of the United States into World War II completed the transformation of Flynn from a disenchanted liberal to a proto-libertarian advocate of *laissez faire* and non-interventionism. As Murray Rothbard points out:

> [T]he drive of the New Deal toward war once again reshuffled the ideological spectrum and the meaning of Left and Right in American politics. The left and liberal opponents of war were hounded out of the

> media and journals of opinion by their erstwhile allies, and condemned as reactionaries and Neanderthals. These men . . . found themselves forced into a new alliance with *laissez faire* Republicans from the Middle West. Damned everywhere as "ultra-conservatives" and "extreme Rightists," many of these allies found themselves moving "rightward" ideologically as well, moving toward the *laissez faire* liberalism of the only mass base open to them. In many ways, their move rightward was a self-fulfilling prophecy by the Left. Thus, under the hammer blows of the Left-liberal Establishment, the old progressive isolationists moved *laissez-faire*-ward as well. It was under this pressure that the forging of the "Old Right" was completed.[25]

Flynn's final and definitive shift from left to right was completed with the writing of his greatest work, *As We Go Marching*,[26] which is, today, sadly out of print. In this work Flynn stepped back and tried to see the trends he had been fighting—militarism, centralism, leader worship—as the interlocking components of a system. The growth of a huge bureaucratic appartus, the partnership of government and business, social welfare schemes, huge public debts, and the need to resolve economic problems by creating a permanent war economy—all of these phenomena had become dominant first in Italy, then in Germany, and then in the U.S. under the New Deal. The theme of the book is that while the U.S. was fighting fascism in Europe, the seeds of that doctrine had already been planted at home; the war itself would accelerate their growth.

In Italy, Germany, and the U.S., the pattern was frighteningly similar. All three societies were modeled on the four basic principles of the new managerialist order: (1) the institution of planned consumption, or the spending-borrowing government; (2) the planned economy; (3) militarism as an economic institution; and (4) imperialism as the handmaiden of militarism. New Deal programs like the National Recovery Administration resembled the corporative structure of the Italian fascist state, with its great guilds organized along industry-wide lines; the economic arrangements of Hitler's Germany were similar. Flynn's great contribution in this book was to illustrate the relationship between the elements of the welfare-warfare state. To garner political support from the Right for deficit spending, public works boondoggles, and cradle-to-grave social security, the Left had turned to militarism. With peacetime conscription to soak up idle labor, there would be a permanent war economy. America's war against fascism may be won on the battlefield—and lost on the home front. For "[t]he test of fascism," Flynn wrote, "is not one's rage against the Italian and German

war lords. The test is—how many of the essential principles of fascism do you accept . . .?''

American fascism would not have the gaudy trappings of its European cousins, but would take a more familiar form, ''Fascism will come,'' said Flynn,

> at the hands of perfectly authentic Americans . . . who are convinced that the present economic system is washed up . . . and who wish to commit this country to the rule of the bureaucratic state; interfering in the affairs of the states and cities; taking part in the management of industry and finance and agriculture; assuming the role of great national banker and investor, borrowing billions every year and spending them on all sorts of projects through which such a government can paralyze opposition and command public support; marshalling great armies and navies at crushing costs to support the industry of war and preparation for war which will become our greatest industry; and adding to all this the most romantic adventures in global planning, regeneration, and domination, all to be done under the authority of a powerfully centralized government in which the executive will hold in effect all the powers, with Congress reduced to the role of a debating society. This is your fascist.[27]

The theme of *As We Go Marching* is nearly identical to that of James Burnham's *The Managerial Revolution*: A new ruling class—call them managers or Brain Trusters or whatever—is seizing power all over the world. From country to country this new ruling class utilizes similar devices in order to keep and gain power: The bureaucratization of the economy, militarism, and the rise of the centralized state appartus. These are the dominant factors in modern society.

Burnham is cited in *As We Go Marching*, and the similarity between the two books is obvious. But there is one vital difference: while Burnham celebrated the rise of the new elite, Flynn was doing his best to prevent it. In Flynn and Burnham, then, we can begin to see how the two rival camps of contemporary conservatism began to diverge and eventually split.

IV. A Man of the Right

After 1945 Flynn made a formal move into right-wing circles. Working with the National Economic Council, the Committee for Constitutional Government, and America's Future, Inc., he moved into the realm of radio commentary, and had both daily and weekly syndicated programs. Flynn used

this platform to carry on the fight against statism and globalism, attacking the developing Cold War and warning that, while the First World War had prepared the way for the Second, and the Second had put the U.S. on the road to collectivism, World War III would make the "Constitution and our traditional free life" a relic of the past. It was not necessary to launch a war to annihilate the Communists; rather "the course of wisdom for the American people would be to sit tight and put their faith in the immutable laws of human nature." We must "make an end of the cold war," he said, and Communism would crash on the rocks of its own inner contradictions.[28]

Flynn staunchly opposed the United Nations "police action" in Korea, declaring that the same State Department that had handed China over to the "agrarian reformers" of the Chinese Communist Party was now leading the U.S. into an unwinnable land war in Asia. In Flynn's view, the Korean war was yet another excuse for a power grab by the executive branch, another rationale for spending billions in borrowed money that would flood the country and induce a false prosperity based on debt.

Flynn had foreseen the coming of the Cold War as early as 1944, in *As We Go Marching*. What is truly remarkable is that in 1950 he clearly foresaw the Vietnam War. In his weekly radio address of July 30, he observed that Korea was not the only Asian hotspot likely to involve the United States. Vietnam, he explained to his listeners, had been in the middle of a rebellion against French colonialism. Truman had promised to aid the French, and, he noted with some disquiet, "an American military mission is . . . on its way to that country." In asking "Who is next on Stalin's list?" Flynn's answer was that either Indochina or Malay could be the new Korea. He warned his audience that "[i]f we are preparing to make war to save Asia from dictatorships we will waste every dollar, every pound of steel and every precious life that is snuffed out in that foolish adventure."[29]

Throughout the 1950s Flynn sounded the alarm about the growing scope of U.S. intervention in Indochina. It was, he thought, only a matter of time before "the United States may have to make a decision as to whether or not it will get into another Asiatic war," probably in Vietnam, he said on January 15, 1952. To be put in the position of defending French imperialism from the Communist-led Vietminh would be an unmitigated disaster for the United States. "Indochina is not part of the free world," he said. "It is a captive country. The captors are the French."[30]

Flynn was a major force on the American Right during the 1950s, through his radio broadcasts as well as his books *The Road Ahead, The Roosevelt*

Myth, While You Slept, The Lattimore Story, and others. A staunch defender of Joe McCarthy, he saw the crusade of "Tail Gunner Joe" as a way to hit back at the pro-war liberals who had made his life a hell during the Roosevelt years. In his thoughtful and informative study of Flynn,[31] Ronald Radosh attributes Flynn's defense of McCarthy to personal bitterness that distorted his political judgment. "Thinking perhaps of his own career," Radosh writes,

> and the agony he had suffered at the hands of liberals, Flynn saw triumph for McCarthy as validating his own lifelong fight. He himself, Flynn told [Senator Karl] Mundt, had had his "share on a scale equal to almost anyone's"; it had been easier to "liquidate writers than politicians." Flynn embraced McCarthy as the liberals' major foe, and in so doing, he turned against his libertarian beliefs.[32]

Radosh's idea of a "libertarian belief" in this matter is questionable. He shows nothing but disdain for Flynn's argument that McCarthy was not "investigating any man's right to be a Communist," just "whether Communists ought to be employed in the American army, the American State Department, the radar installations, atomic energy laboratories, and other government departments."[33] But nowhere does Radosh address this vital point, except to say that

> [h]is argument implied that belief in communism was automatically equatable with commitment to acts of treason, and that therefore an individual could be deprived of employment in government jobs because of his beliefs. McCarthyism, of course, affected many more individuals, depriving them of employment in private areas and occupations. Flynn had nothing to say about their plight. He did not ask whether it was valuable to have the right to be a Communist if it meant losing one's job.[34]

Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether Communist ideology would have permitted a Party member from serving the interests of a nation other than the U.S.S.R., there is nothing "libertarian" about the idea that Communists have a "right" to private sector jobs. There is nothing in libertarianism, properly understood, to prevent any employer from immediately firing one of the comrades just as soon as his or her Party membership is exposed to the light of day. The conditions of liberty are fulfilled just as long as one has the right to speak out on any subject, to

espouse any political belief, no matter how irrational or repulsive; but there is no corollary to this principle that insists on making the exercise of this right profitable or even painless

McCarthy's appeal to Flynn and other Old Right stalwarts was his value as a battering ram against the liberal establishment. While it may be true that McCarthyism provided a context and rationale for the Cold War, on the other hand it turned the main thrust of the search for new enemies inward, rather than outward; toward Washington, D.C., rather than Europe or Asia. While Flynn's defense of McCarthy may do violence to the delicate sensibilities of New Deal liberals like Radosh, who would rather not entertain the thought that the Roosevelt administration was honeycombed with Communists and fellow travelers, it is hardly the case that Flynn "turned against his libertarian beliefs" in championing the cause of Tail Gunner Joe.

V. Flynn's Legacy

While Flynn's defense of McCarthy was not an unprincipled stand, it proved to be a tactical error: The McCarthy crusade had temporarily blurred the newly emerging distinctions between Old Right and New Right. But as the 1950s wore on, Flynn was considered increasingly out of the conservative mainstream. The downfall of McCarthy when he took on the Army, and the diversion of anti-Communism to targets abroad, changed the political landscape. Once again, Flynn found himself back where he had been during the days of the Popular Front: an outsider railing against an overwhelmingly powerful Establishment. When the *National Review* was founded, editor William F. Buckley Jr. solicited from Flynn a review of Arthur Larson's *A Republican Looks at his Party.* But when Flynn submitted a piece attacking militarism as "a job-making boondoggle" and denouncing Eisenhower for prolonging the Cold War, Buckley rejected the article. He sent $100 along with the rejection letter, stating that Flynn failed to appreciate the "objective threat of the Soviet Union," which, he maintained, poses "a threat to the freedom of each and every one of us." Flynn returned the $100, and in a note to Buckley said that he was "greatly obligated" to him for "the little lecture."[35]

Although Buckley apologized for his incredible arrogance the next day, and tried to flatter Flynn by calling him "a mentor in whose writings I never cease to delight and from whose courage I draw strength," it was clear that there was no room for Flynn in the New Right of Bill Buckley and James

Burnham. The old warrior Flynn, who had fought against statism and globalism all of his life, was not about to be taken in by the new brand of globalism pushed by Buckley and his fellow Cold Warriors. Communism, Flynn realized, was an *idea.* The threat was not military, but ideological. The main danger was not to be found in Moscow, or Korea, or Vietnam, but home.

Flynn ended his public career in 1960, at the age of seventy-nine; his health was failing and he retired from journalism. He died in 1964, as Buckley and his followers were eradicating the last remnants of the Old Right, his work largely forgotten. That he died isolated from the Right as well as the Left, his books neglected, his legacy largely unknown, is due to the fact that the history of any conflict, both military and ideological, is written by the victors. Neither the Buckleyite conservatives, who thought World War III had already begun, nor the globalist liberals who idolized Roosevelt and hailed the rise of empire, had any use for Flynn.

As the Cold War draws to a close, Flynn's essential insight—that the threat to America is not to be found in any foreign capitol, but in Washington, D.C.—takes on new immediacy. His analysis of the structure of the welfare-warfare state as a system based on centralized government control of the economy and a permanent war economy is vital to understanding where we are today, how we got there—and how we can get out. Along with Garet Garrett, Flynn is the great prototype of today's paleoconservatives and paleolibertarians, an exemplar of the Old Right whose life and work represents the best of a long and proud tradition.

Notes

1. For an in-depth analysis of the sudden switch in political polarity, see James J. Martin's neglected masterpiece, *American Liberalism and World Politics,* 2 vols. (New York: Devin-Adair, 1964).
2. I am indebted to Ronald Radosh's *Prophets on the Right: Profiles of Conservative Critics of American Globalism* (New York: Free Life Editions, 1975), especially the chapters "John T. Flynn and the Coming of World War II" and "John T. Flynn and the Cold War," for much of the factual information presented here. Readers of both pieces will see where we diverge in our interpretation of those facts.
3. John T. Flynn, *Investment Trusts Gone Wrong!* (New York: New Republic, 1930); idem, *Graft in Business* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1931); idem, *God's Gold* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1932).
4. John T. Flynn, *Country Squire in the White House* (New York: Doubleday, 1940).
5. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
9. Cited in Radosh, *Prophets on the Right*, pp. 204-05.
10. Garet Garrett, *Ex America* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1951), p. 17.
11. "Recovery Through War Scares," *New Republic*, November 2, 1938.
12. Quoted in *American Liberalism and World Politics*, vol. 2, p. 759.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, p. 766.
15. Quoted in Radosh, *Prophets on the Right*, p. 212.
16. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 213.
17. *New Republic*, July 22, 1940; cited in Radosh, *Prophets on the Right*, p. 213.
18. *New Republic*, September 9, 1940; cited in Radosh, *Prophets on the Right*, pp. 214–15.
19. Martin, *American Liberalism and World Politics*, vol. 2, p. 777.
20. John Roy Carlson, *Under Cover* (New York: Dutton, 1943); idem, *The Plotters* (New York: Dutton, 1946); John T. Flynn, *The Smear Terror* (New York: privately published, 1947).
21. *New York Times*, May 24, 1941; cited in Radosh, *Prophets on the Right*, p. 221.
22. Flynn to Lindberg, Sept. 15, 1941; cited in Radosh, *Prophets on the Right*, pp. 223–24.
23. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 225.
24. John T. Flynn, *The Smear Terror*, op. cit.; idem, *The Truth About Pearl Harbor* (New York: privately published, 1944); idem, *The Final Secret of Pearl Harbor* (New York: privately published, 1945).
25. Murray N. Rothbard, "The Betrayal of the American Right," unpublished MS., p. 49.
26. John T. Flynn, *As We Go Marching* (New York: Doubleday, 1944).
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 252–53.
28. Quoted in Radosh, *Prophets on the Right*, p. 251.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 253–54.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 256.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 197–273.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 269.
33. Flynn radio script, May 16, 1954, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 266.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 267.
35. See *ibid.*, pp. 272–73.