

LAWRENCE DENNIS: REVISIONIST OF THE COLD WAR

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DURING THE LATE 1940's, many World War II isolationists remained suspicious of Cold War involvements. Led by Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio, they fought against economic aid to Europe, peacetime conscription, and the North Atlantic military alliance. Often veterans of the America First Committee, they found ominous parallels in Roosevelt's "back door to war" and Truman's crisis diplomacy. Yet their bitterness over the fate of Eastern Europe and China led many of them to embrace both McCarthyism and Douglas MacArthur's proposals for Asian victory. Although deeply disappointed over Taft's defeat in the Republican convention of 1952, many old noninterventionists were mollified by Eisenhower's presidency, with its stress upon limited government and ending the Korean War. With the dying Taft himself embracing NATO, and with the Senate ratifying the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization 82-1, only a handful of isolationists continued adamantly to oppose the nation's major overseas commitments. Included in this rapidly diminishing group were advertising executive Bruce Barton, former Congressman Hamilton Fish, steel magnate Ernest Weir, Senator William Langer, editorial writers Felix Morley and Garrett Garet, and Lawrence Dennis. Of these, only Dennis maintained a sustained critique, commenting weekly on Cold War policy.

Most students of American history come upon the name of Lawrence Dennis only once, in connection with "fascist" dissent from New Deal policies. According to one textbook, Dennis was "the intellectual leader and principal adviser of the fascist group."¹ Many of those who followed the politics of World War II recall Dennis in several roles: the supposed brainchild behind the speeches of Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh, prophet of a nationalistic corporate state, and successful defender of a motley band of agitators indicted in 1944 for sedition. Yet few realize that his postwar newsletter, *The Appeal to Reason*, offered a scathing attack upon the entire range of American Cold War policy, an attack similar in many ways to the current critique offered by the New Left.

Dennis, a rugged, burly man of dark complexion (described by Lindbergh as one who "would seem more in place at some frontier trading post along the eastern border of Europe" than in some Washington salon),² was born in Atlanta in 1893. After a brief stint as a boy evangelist, he received his formal

¹ Arthur S. Link and William B. Catton, *American Epoch* (3rd ed., New York, 1967), 448. See also Alan P. Grimes, *American Political Thought* (New York, 1955), 415-428; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Politics of Upheaval* (Boston, 1960), 74-78.

² *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh* (New York, 1970), 391.

education at Phillips Exeter and Harvard. Although personally opposed to American entry into World War I, he was commissioned an infantry lieutenant and served overseas. Then followed several years in the foreign service, including a term as chargé d'affaires during the Nicaraguan Revolution of 1926. From 1927 to 1930 he represented the international banking firm of J. W. Seligman in Peru. Soon regretful over his own role in suppressing the Nicaraguan revolt and citing Seligman's financial failures in Peru as revealing the folly of overseas investments, Dennis claimed that only a regimented corporate state, based upon domestic self-containment, could alleviate the Great Depression.

A prolific writer, his articles appeared in such liberal journals as the *Nation* and the *New Republic* (which welcomed his exposés of investment banking overseas), as well as such periodicals as the *Annals of the American Academy*, *Foreign Affairs*, and the *American Mercury*. Almost immediately Dennis became a defender of what Charles A. Beard called "the open door at home." His first book, *Is Capitalism Doomed?* (1932), contained the proposition that "Our frontier days are over. . . . Capitalism has run down for want of new worlds to conquer."³ His second book, *The Coming American Fascism* (1936), presented a stark choice for his countrymen: a communist bloodbath, which would liquidate 40 per cent of the labor force, or a fascist regime, presided over by a managerial class and devoted to centralized control and national unity. But while Hitler and Mussolini were predicating their systems upon inevitable imperial expansion, Dennis claimed that a disciplined elite, governing a "strong authoritarian executive state in the national interest," could avoid the destructive snares of war.⁴

Dennis' apologetics on world politics, *The Dynamics of War and Revolution* (1940), offered even less comfort to defenders of competitive capitalism and parliamentary democracy. Here again—long before the imaginative interpretations of William Appleman Wil-

liams—Dennis stressed the frontier thesis, writing, "Probably most of the army of students who have read and written on Professor Turner's great thesis have missed the force of his tradition-shattering idea."⁵ Much of Dennis' argument resembled orthodox Marxist gospel: history was predetermined, involving an "inevitable process of social change the world over"; ideology simply masked material interest; ethics and morality reflected the values of the predominant economic plutocracy; law—both national and international—legitimized the supremacy of the victors; social science defended the rule of its capitalist patrons; and religion provided moral sanctions for property rights. It was hardly surprising that the earmarks of democracy itself—national assemblies, checks and balances, civil liberties—were inexorably tied to world capitalism.⁶

No one trained in Marxist dialectics would have been surprised to hear of the triumphal reign of nineteenth-century capitalism—a system nurtured by abundant land, cheap labor, expanding markets, huge populations, and easy and successful wars; of the eventual drying up of all these sources; of capitalism's increasing vulnerability to overproduction and depression; or of the inevitable triumph of collectively directed societies throughout the world. Marxists who preferred a headier brew, mixing the teachings of the Red Prussian with a dash of Lenin, would be grateful to hear that capitalist rivalries would end in fratricidal war, a conflict which would invariably revolutionize the internal societies of the belligerents. In the field of international relations, only the have-not nations possessed the necessary order and discipline—to use one of Dennis' favorite words, the needed "dynamic"—to triumph.⁷

Yet the thrust of Dennis' logic was far from Marxist. There were strong differences. First, his definition of "socialism" bore little resemblance to the utopias of Norman Thomas, much less that of Frederick Engels. His world did not evolve into the classless society; nor

³ Lawrence Dennis, *Is Capitalism Doomed?* (New York and London, 1932), 91-92.

⁴ Lawrence Dennis, *The Coming American Fascism* (New York and London, 1936), 170-172.

⁵ Lawrence Dennis, *The Dynamics of War and Revolution* (New York, 1940), 70.

⁶ *Ibid.*, vii, 218, 14, 34, 156, 117, xix.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 13, 222, 237, 17, 189, 68, 96.

did it lead to the violent overthrow of the existing order. Rather, the organic state, replacing parliamentary chaos with corporatist order, would guarantee the welfare of the entire nation by leveling income and increasing public ownership. Once socialism centered around the nation-state and lost its "internationalist" encumbrances, it could create a genuine "folk unity." No longer trapped by log-rolling and pressure politics, the nation could engage in such projects as working-class housing, socialized medicine, subsidized fuel and transportation, free milk and foodstuffs, and varied cultural projects. Freed from dependence upon world finance and markets, and realizing the folly of obeying Adam Smith's invisible hand, the ruling elite could exert the economic controls necessary for maintaining full employment. A nation's biggest problem would be solved.⁸

This leads to a second distinction. Like his intellectual mentor, Oswald Spengler, Dennis was an elitist. Lacking faith in any proletarian upsurge, Dennis portrayed a globe populated by rootless masses—people buffeted about by propaganda, forever prey to politicians and promoters, manipulated by symbols, unable to absorb ideas. Given the ineptitude of the general populace, industrial societies were forced by technological imperatives to be governed by a managerial elite. And there was a third dissent from Marx. The inevitable "socialist" triumph over "capitalism" did not imply permanent dominance by "proletarian" countries. Despite Marx's vision of world proletarian unity, "socialist" nations would invariably fight among themselves.⁹

The United States was not exempt from the general trend towards corporate collectivism. Her inevitable participation in World War II would only accelerate this development. Roosevelt's New Deal had already laid the foundations for the new society; his desire to preserve British and French hegemony and international capitalism would complete the job. However, even if American intervention was temporarily successful in defeat-



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Lawrence Dennis.

ing the immediate enemy, in the long run it could not work. Irrespective of her present strength, neither she nor any other power would ever be strong enough to dominate the globe. Admittedly, such Western nations as America would be wiser to maintain full employment through public work projects, foregoing debilitating foreign conflicts. However, only an anti-Axis "crusade for righteousness" could possess the necessary drawing power to mobilize her kinsmen and alleviate their suffering.¹⁰

DENNIS would soon find himself applying this schema to the Cold War. His six-paged newsletter, *The Appeal to Reason*, mimeographed at his farm house in Becket, Massachusetts, never attracted much public attention. With an annual subscription fee of twenty-four dollars a year, it remained confined to between three and five hundred subscribers from among the nation's more conservative business and political elite.¹¹ Dennis'

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 174, 242.

¹¹ Among the subscribers were Herbert Hoover, Senator Burton K. Wheeler, General Robert E. Wood, General Albert C. Wedemeyer, Amos Pinchot, Colonel Truman Smith, and Bruce Barton. Dennis to author, January 27, 1971.

⁸ *Ibid.*, ix, xxiv, 57, chapter XVI plus p. 243; 207, 165-166.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

immediate influence was limited. Sometimes his bulletin would find its way into the radio commentary of liberal J. Raymond Walsh, a column of World War II interventionist Dorothy Thompson, a history by revisionist Charles C. Tansill, a pamphlet by industrialist Sterling Morton, a speech by Congressman Howard Buffett of Nebraska, a brief note in the *Nation*. But the significance of Lawrence Dennis lies not so much in his outreach as in the rigor of his analysis and the consistency of his logic. Dennis challenged defenders of American intervention to reconsider fundamental assumptions, and critics of particular Administration involvements to remain faithful to a broad noninterventionist posture. For more than any other figure on the American Right, Dennis developed a systematic critique of the Cold War. Stressing how America's drive towards hegemony in both the world economic marketplace and the marketplace of ideas would invariably lead to defeat abroad and ruin at home, Dennis' work often reads like an early-day edition of such contemporary revisionist historians as William Appleman Williams, Gabriel Kolko, and Lloyd C. Gardner.

Although he received strong financial support from such veteran America Firsters as Clarence Hewes, former State Department hand, General Robert E. Wood of Sears, Roebuck, and salt manufacturer Sterling Morton, Dennis was basically a "loner." Despite the fact that his critics accused him of being obsessed by the possibility of wielding power in a forthcoming corporate state,¹² Dennis never was active in any political organization or strongly attached to any candidate. His writings on fascism severed him from many associations among the liberals; his Cold War analysis found few converts among the increasingly dwindling ranks of World War II isolationists. As the years passed, Dennis found himself more and more in disagreement with such old friends and militant Cold Warriors as Freda Utley and William Henry

Chamberlin. They wanted a more militant American stance; Dennis found the nation far too militant already. At the same time, such a staunch liberal as the provocative political scientist Frederick L. Schuman, who had strongly differed with Dennis over World War II, found him a prophetic figure.¹³

The very first issue of *Appeal to Reason*, dated March 30, 1946, posited a choice that Dennis would often present: national preservation through traditional neutrality or ruinous participation in yet a new world holocaust. His anxiety was greater than his hope. Winston Churchill's "iron curtain" speech at Fulton, Missouri—delivered that very week—sounded the dangerous call for an "alliance of war against Russia." The strident language of Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg and Secretary of State James Byrnes, when coupled with the recent arrest of Russian spies in Canada, foreshadowed a propaganda barrage against the Soviet Union similar to the still recent anti-Nazi hostility. "Everything said against Hitler," he noted, "can be repeated against Stalin and Russia."¹⁴ Finding his warnings against participation in World War II fully justified, and Russia's continental expansion inevitable, Dennis claimed that America should have learned her lesson, rather than to continually search for new commitments. Further American intervention could only spread world communism, while speeding up the very domestic "statism" and "intensification of class warfare" conservatives most fear.¹⁵

In the immediate future, both communism

¹² For the milieu of Dennis' circle, see Freda Utley, *Odyssey of a Liberal* (Washington, 1970), *passim*; Frederick L. Schuman to author, November 15, 1971.

¹³ *Appeal to Reason*, no. 1, March 30, 1946, hereinafter cited as *Appeal*. Recent revisionist scholarship corroborates Dennis' analysis. See Les K. Adler and Thomas G. Paterson, "Red Fascism: The Merger of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in the American Image of Totalitarianism, 1930s-1950s," in *American Historical Review*, LXXV: 1046-1064 (April, 1970).

¹⁴ *Appeal*, March 30, 1946. America, said Dennis, could have only controlled all of Europe by negotiating peace with Germany in 1943, "while German armies were still deep in the heart of Europe." Now that America had needlessly given Russia her present position it "made no sense to denounce Russia for pursuing self-interest and taking advantage of our imbecilities." *Ibid.*, no. 2, April 6, 1946.

¹⁵ For a critical interpretation of Dennis' ethos, see Matthew Josephson, *Infidel in the Temple: A Memoir of the Nineteen-Thirties* (New York, 1967), and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Politics of Upheaval* (Boston, 1960), 74-78.

and revolution were bound to win. "We have to ride it out, not stop it," he kept stressing. Later, "We shall have opportunity to encourage and aid genuinely popular local resistance movements." In the meantime, showdowns were insane. In any conflict, Russian armies would overrun Europe within a few weeks. True, American air power could destroy key cities, but her troops could never occupy nine million square miles of Eurasian soil. In fact, an American victory would leave her worse off than ever, for "once Western Europe had been destroyed by our bombers, communism and the Asiatic hordes would be residuary legatees."¹⁶

How best to contain world communism? In Western Europe, a variety of factors—Catholicism, regionalism, traditionalism, nationalism, and high living standards—could block permanent Russian penetration. A Franco-British alliance could well be an effective buffer between the Russian and American superpowers. In the Near East, Islamic culture offered strong resistance to the Soviets, while in the Far East the Russians faced "nearly a billion people who could never be made puppets of the Slavs, even though they all turn communist."¹⁷

FROM the very start, there was little to admire in Truman's foreign policy. The varied loans to Great Britain were grounded in expediency. "We need," Dennis said, "a contented Britain to help us fight World War III." America's continual demands for convertibility of sterling and the lifting of Commonwealth tariffs were "utterly immoral—as well as being impossible of realization without continual disaster."¹⁸ Her opposition to Russian control of the Dardenelles was equally hypocritical, for Soviet penetra-

tion was "as logical and inevitable . . . as our military control of Panama or Britain's of Gibraltar and Suez." Diplomat Spruille Braden's outburst against Argentine dictator Peron offered "the most valuable aid to the spread of communism in South America," for "nothing provokes nationalism like foreign crusading."¹⁹

Nor in Dennis' eyes was this all. Truman's endorsement of universal military training would permit "our corn-fed would-be universalists" to "use the army to indoctrinate the nation's youth."²⁰ His appointment of General George C. Marshall as Secretary of State was a skilled ploy to put Cold War activity beyond debate.²¹

The Truman Doctrine was particularly infuriating. Designed partially to protect Standard Oil interests in the Middle East, it involved "a daring and utterly unprincipled strategy." It assured Truman's re-election in 1948. It also guaranteed a new "holy war on communist sin all over the world, . . . a messianic crusade all over the planet." Most important of all, it was an effort to continue the heavy exports seen necessary to American prosperity. Because America refused to import as much as she exported, the Truman Doctrine served as a substitute for the large-scale foreign loans which underpinned Wall Street in the 1920's. "We shall," wrote Dennis, "have a limitless market for American farm products, manufactures, and canon fodder."²²

¹⁶ *Appeal*, no. 22, August 24, 1946; no. 41, January 4, 1947.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 42, January 11, 1947. Truman had appointed a civilian commission to study Universal Military Training and had instructed it to approach the problem "with the idea of insuring the continuation of our form of government." Dennis found such orders a violation of the Declaration of Independence which "expressly postulated the right of the people to alter or abolish any form of government they deemed destructive of their rights."

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ One should note that the March 10 draft of Truman's speech, delivered two days later, referred to the Middle East, as "an area of great natural resources which must be accessible to all nations. . . ." Will Clayton, Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, wrote on March 5, "If Greece and then Turkey succumb, the whole Middle East will be lost." See Thomas G. Paterson, "The Economic Cold War: American Business and Economic Foreign Policy, 1945-1950" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, 1968), 380-381, 385; *Appeal*, no. 52, March 22, 1947; no. 57, April 26, 1947.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 3, April 13, 1946; no. 51, March 17, 1947.

²¹ *Ibid.*, no. 19, August 3, and no. 22, August 24, 1946.

²² *Ibid.*, no. 5, April 27, 1946; no. 74, August 23, 1947. Lloyd C. Gardner notes that American demands to lift the sterling bloc could assure the United States access to new markets in Egypt and India, as well as in the rest of the British Empire. See *Architects of Illusion: Men and Ideas in American Foreign Policy, 1941-49* (Chicago, 1970), 126-127. See also Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-1966* (New York, 1967), 9.

Much of the current market anxiety, said Dennis, was rooted in such architects of expansion as Theodore Roosevelt, William McKinley, Elihu Root, and Albert J. Beveridge, men who fought with Spain not just to pursue imperial dreams but to secure places to sell their goods.²³ The address by Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson at Cleveland, Mississippi, on May 8, 1947, in his eyes was merely the latest installment. The speech, which received little attention in the nation's press but which was later closely scrutinized by revisionist historians, asserted that American prosperity depended upon export subsidies.²⁴ After Secretary of State George Marshall outlined his recovery plan at the Harvard commencement on June 5, 1947, Dennis wrote, "We are deliberately giving away money to foreigners to keep up war inflation to prevent postwar deflation, depression and unemployment." Such subsidies he found "sheer idiocy," especially if they could only be maintained through war.²⁵ Truman's Point Four plan, with its stress upon government subsidy of American overseas enterprise, was merely another act in the same drama. Profits were bound to be short-run and costly. Dennis wrote in 1949, "It is no mere coincidence that the theatrical smash hit of the year in New York is the DEATH OF A SALESMAN."²⁶ Rather than inaugurating plans which simply postponed the eventual

communist control of Europe, the United States should be financing huge domestic welfare projects. America's slums, highways, and aged should come before the maintenance of such conservative regimes as that of Alcide de Gasperi.²⁷

Dennis was one of the strongest dissenters from George F. Kennan's doctrine of containment. The notion was ludicrous: "A stop anything policy which knows no geographic bounds is an absurdity." Strongly endorsing Walter Lippmann's critique of Kennan's famous "Mr. X" article of July, 1947, the Berkshire pamphleteer warned his countrymen that "American can no longer count on Western Europe against the Soviets."²⁸ At the height of the Berlin blockade Dennis declared that the United States should withdraw from Germany within five years. Even if both Germany and France were to be taken over by "nationalists, calling themselves communists," Russia would be better contained than by American "gift billions" or by having our bombers "raining destruction on Europe." At that very moment Belgrade's break from Moscow seemed proof of Dennis' Cold War stricture: "Give them time. Give them plenty of rope. No nation can ever dominate the world, no matter how much or how fast it may, for a time, expand. . . . Russia and communism have more to fear from their nationalism and heresies than from our billions and bombs."²⁹

America, unfortunately, stubbornly ignored such trends. The new North Atlantic Treaty Organization merely saved "the Reds from their own mistakes and follies." Arguing that NATO was a foolish imitation of the Anti-Comintern Pact of 1936, Dennis wrote, "We fought Hitler, now to ape him." The alliance would force Russia into permanent partnership with the non-Western world, while saddling the United States with the futile task of

²³ *Appeal*, no. 170, June 25, 1949. For a strong revisionist argument showing the continuity of the 1890's and the 1940's see William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (rev. ed., New York, 1962).

²⁴ *Appeal*, no. 60, May 17, 1947. For revisionist analyses of the Acheson speech, see William Appleman Williams (ed.), *The Shaping of American Diplomacy: Readings and Documents in American Foreign Relations* (Chicago, 1970), 354-355, 412-413, and LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War*, 49.

²⁵ *Appeal*, no. 65, June 21, 1947; no. 154, March 5, 1949. The economic roots of the Marshall Plan can be found in Thomas C. Paterson, "The Quest for Peace and Prosperity: International Trade, Communism, and the Marshall Plan," in Barton J. Bernstein (ed.), *Politics and Policies of the Truman Administration* (Chicago, 1970), 78-112, as well as in Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1954* (New York, 1972), 359-360.

²⁶ *Appeal*, no. 170, June 25, 1949. For ties between America's 1949 recession and the failure of the Marshall Plan, see Kolko, *Limits of Power*, 453-456.

²⁷ *Appeal*, no. 67, July 7, 1947; no. 154, March 5, 1949.

²⁸ *Appeal*, no. 95, January 27, 1948; no. 77, September 13, 1947. Kennan's original article can be found in *Foreign Affairs*, XXV: 566-582 (July, 1947); Lippmann's critique is found in his *The Cold War: A Study in U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York, 1947).

²⁹ *Appeal*, no. 119, July 3, 1948.

preserving Western imperialism.³⁰ Truman's accompanying demand for a Military Assistance Program was, in Dennis' words, tantamount to a "declaration of war" against Russia.³¹

CHINA was the classic case of American ineptitude. Declaring in May, 1946, that American involvement could only backfire, Dennis found neither the Communists nor the Kuomintang desiring that their powerful Chinese state be encroached upon by Americans. A Sino-Soviet split was inevitable, he declared, writing, "If the communist nationalists win out in China, they are bound to be anti-Moscow."³² The mediation efforts of General Marshall were bound to fail; United States aid simply hastened the communist triumph. When the area fell to Mao's forces in 1949, Dennis called it "the biggest defeat ever suffered by American forces in our entire history." The Open Door policy, recently responsible for our war with Japan, was now bearing even more bitter fruit.³³ Out of the China episode, there was only one lesson: "The more Americans and westerners supply arms and know-how to the colored world, the sooner the latter will use them against the west."³⁴

Increasing ties to Chiang's Formosan regime also met with Dennis' scorn. When conservative Republicans Herbert Hoover and Senator Robert A. Taft demanded on January 2, 1950, that the American navy interpose itself between Taiwan and the Chinese mainland on the

grounds that Asian communism must be contained, Dennis wrote: "The right is confused. It doesn't read THE APPEAL TO REASON and it can't think for itself." Rather than continue the futile bombing and blockading of the China coast, "We should write off China and try to save America." Dennis was soon calling for recognition of Communist China.³⁵

America's fight in Korea found no more bitter opponent. The United States, Dennis wrote, was again committed to a "corrupt, incompetent and locally unpopular regime." Her war conduct was barbarous, with her planes "committing mass murder" and "turning large areas into scorched earth."³⁶ Such crusading "reminds us of the Battle of Tippermuir in 1644, when the Knoxites fought the Cromwell religious fanatics, the two gangs being as much alike as two peas, under the same banner proclaiming 'Jesus and no Quarter.'" Indeed, the whole venture was counter-productive, creating an artificial alliance between Russia and China. Even victory would be disastrous: the peninsula was a "permanent liability," with occupation costs alone staggering. (And, warned Dennis prophetically in noting Truman's announcement of aid to French forces in Southeast Asia on June 27, 1950, "Indo-China is now beckoning thousands of Americans to fresh dug graves.") Within a month of Truman's intervention, Dennis called for withdrawal: "To quit is the only sensible course ever in respect to a holy war."³⁷

Unlike many conservative isolationists, Dennis held no reverence for MacArthur. Even before Communist China sent her troops into Korea, Dennis blamed the flamboyant general for "pushing red China into war with us." "Would America," he said, "bow to the fiat of a European bloc, calling itself the UN, and stay out of Mexico while a European nation dominated Mexico and approached our border with a large armed force?" MacAr-

³⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 156, March 19, 1949; no. 159, April 9, 1949. For the relationship between NATO and America's tacit support of colonialism, see Kolko, *Limits of Power*, 501, 628.

³¹ *Appeal*, no. 176, August 13, 1949.

³² *Ibid.*, no. 8, May 18, 1946. Louis J. Halle expresses the general consensus when he writes that Moscow "recognized and supported Chiang's Nationalist regime, while knowing full well its weakness; it mistrusted Mao's regime and apparently gambled on its not winning the civil war." See *The Cold War as History* (New York and Evanston, 1967), 200.

³³ *Appeal*, no. 17, July 20, 1946. Kolko, *Limits of Power*, 538; *Appeal*, no. 136, November 30, 1948. For a scholarly defense of the argument that the United States went to war with Japan over the Open Door and Japan's refusal to evacuate China, see Paul Schroeder, *The Axis Alliance and Japanese-American Relations, 1941* (Ithaca, 1958).

³⁴ *Appeal*, no. 151, February 12, 1949.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 198, January 7, 1950; no. 170, June 25, 1949; no. 192, November 26, 1949.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 222, June 24, 1950; no. 253, January 13, 1951. For stinging commentary on the destruction created by the American air force, see Kolko, *Limits of Power*, 615-616.

³⁷ *Appeal*, no. 223, July 1, 1950; no. 229, August 12, 1950; no. 239, October 21, 1950; no. 227, July 29, 1950; no. 241, November 4, 1950.

thur's removal was the best news Dennis had heard since the Crash of 1929. The general's proposals for meeting the new Chinese threat would involve more "mass murder of millions of innocent, non-combatant Chinese, a la Hiroshima or Dresden." Any invasion of China would be "at limitless cost" to American taxpayers, and would necessitate "a limitless supply of American cannon-fodder" as well.³⁸

Given Dennis' hostility to Truman's entire foreign policy, he found few American politicians who could meet his standards. To some degree, Henry Wallace was an exception. While finding Wallace too pro-Russian, the *Appeal to Reason* backed the Secretary of Commerce's critique of "American war measures," reiterating that "Our intervention and occupation provoke Russia and foster conditions favorable to the triumph of Communism." Wallace's famous Madison Square Garden speech of September 12, 1946, calling for meeting Russia "halfway," broke the bipartisan ice. "We are against national unity based on fraud and leading to war," Dennis wrote. "Byrnes and Vandenberg are doing an FDR-Willkie." Yet the Massachusetts commentator was upset by Wallace's overt realpolitik, as exhibited in his endorsement of American and Soviet spheres of political (but not economic) influence. "We believe," said Dennis, "America and democracy mean local self-government, not attempts by one or two nations at world domination."³⁹

Yet even given the Iowa visionary's hazy fellow-traveling, Wallace seemed far wiser than most American rightists. "Most conservatives today," Dennis noted, "want laissez-faire at home and intervention all over the globe, freedom for private enterprise and the draft for globaloney." While Dennis called for Truman's defeat in the 1948 election on the

grounds that only a Republican victory could avoid war, such GOP advisers as John Foster Dulles met with biting scorn. Referring to Dulles' frequent addresses to the Federal Council of Churches, Dennis wrote: "For getting America into war, nothing would be better than a Wall Street lawyer who can preach peace through power to the church folks. A professional soldier like Marshall is always a poor salesman of war. It takes a good lawyer or a good preacher or a good teacher to sell it."⁴⁰

By 1952, Dennis, fearful of what he saw as Eisenhower's "real fuhrer possibilities," found Taft's candidacy the only safeguard against perpetual war. He had often differed with the Ohio Senator. Taft's repeated pronouncements favoring a world running in accord with the principles of international law were naive, his backing of Chiang Kai-shek was foolish, and his emphasis upon air power was irresponsible. When Taft declared on January 6, 1951, that America was engaged in a worldwide struggle against communism, Dennis responded that Russia and China were no more messianic than "Pax Anglo-Americana" and the concept of United Nations rule. Both powers were fundamentally nationalist, bent upon continental expansion, with Marxism simply a tool to help "the sophisticated nationalist elite of the Kremlin and Peiping to bring home the bacon." Yet, while admitting that Taft was really not a thoroughly committed isolationist, and critical of even the moderate interventionism Taft espoused in his campaign book, *A Foreign Policy for Americans* (1951), Dennis found Taft the candidate least enticed by overseas crusades. "The case for him," said Dennis, "is not so much what he would do as what he probably would not do."⁴¹

Eisenhower's election called for the following headline: "IKE VOTE WAS FOR A HERO. RELIGIOUS WAR IDEAS—NOT ECONOMIC SELF-INTEREST." When Dulles, who had been stressing the "liberation" of Eastern Europe, was

³⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 241, November 4, 1950; no. 242, November 11, 1950; no. 264, April 14, 1951.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 44, January 25, 1947; no. 26, September 21, 1946. Dennis was one of the few contemporaries to catch Wallace's endorsement of spheres of influence. For similar revisionist interpretations of Wallace, see LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War*, 38-39, and Ronald Radosh and Leonard P. Liggio, "Henry A. Wallace and the Open Door," in Thomas G. Paterson (ed.), *Cold War Critics: Alternatives to American Foreign Policy in the Truman Years* (Chicago, 1971), 86-87.

⁴⁰ *Appeal*, no. 31, October 26, 1946; no. 108, April 17, 1948; no. 118, June 28, 1948.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, no. 107, April 10, 1948; no. 303, January 12, 1952; no. 324, June 7, 1952; no. 250, January 7, 1952; no. 318, April 26, 1952.

appointed Secretary of State, Dennis said, "Nothing short of total global victory over red sin will satisfy Dulles." While endorsing Eisenhower's Korean truce as fulfillment of his long-desired "quitter's peace," he was appalled by Dulles' pronouncement of "massive retaliation." Drawing upon the specious reasoning that "Korea is no different from Kansas," the Secretary's comments of January 12, 1954, could involve the nation in atomic war "when and wherever sin starts popping."⁴²

Involvement in Southeast Asia was particularly foreboding. In October, 1951, Dennis used the occasion of endorsing George F. Kennan's *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950* and Hans J. Morgenthau's *In Defense of the National Interest* to voice his apprehension. "Washington," he said, "is committed to fighting another Korea in French Indo-China and can't make a face-saving run-out on its Korean commitment as yet. Apparently, Washington wants to keep its perpetual wars for perpetual peace limited to not more than two or three at a time." When talk of full-scale military action in Indo-China resumed in the spring of 1954, Dennis commented that in any skirmish with the "colored world," "We can't pick a winner, for the winner will not pick us." The fall of Dien Bien Phu caused the *Appeal* to remark: "Don't forget. We told you so." Efforts of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, established in September, 1954, to check subversion were simply the latest installment of the Spanish inquisition.⁴³

AS DENNIS OPPOSED foreign crusades against communism, he also fought against domestic ones. The Federal Bureau of Investigation was "a bureau of flatfeet," led by a "publicity hound," forever incapable of determining "questions of doctrine or ideological loyalty." Long before revisionist historians were asserting that much McCarthyite hysteria was rooted in the Truman Administra-

tion,⁴⁴ Dennis found the trial and imprisonment of eleven American Communist Party leaders a Truman political ploy, designed to prove his leadership in the ideological crusade. Referring to the proceedings as part of an "espionage red herring," Dennis, who himself had recently suffered under Department of Justice prosecution, wrote, "What is needed in a criminal case is facts showing criminal intent and the commission of a criminal act, not a lot of bilge about ideologies and the war of ideas which has absolutely no place in any decent, properly run Anglo-Saxon court of law." Finding little at stake in the Hiss case, Dennis noted, "Any spy dumb enough to get caught by our F.B.I. is a good riddance for the reds." "Burning witches or lynching subversives," he continued, "won't save America from the consequences of World War II or present policies." Ex-communists, such as Elizabeth Bentley and Whittaker Chambers, who testified against former associates, were simply "anti-red renegade squealers" of the "on again, off again, rice Christian variety."⁴⁵ Dennis did back Truman in vetoing the McCarran Internal Security Act, a bill which Dennis found "a big step towards the worst features of Communism in action in Russia."⁴⁶

Senator McCarthy's sudden popularity was indeed proof that Americans preferred "crime and mystery stories" to any discussion of "real issues." Far more advantageous for McCarthy to imitate Hitler's big lie technique than to discuss global policies rooted as far back as Theodore Roosevelt. When it came out that Owen Lattimore, the Asian expert whom McCarthy had labeled the "top Russian espionage agent" in the United States, had released a memo calling for American withdrawal from

⁴² See Athan Theoharis, "The Rhetoric of Politics: Foreign Policy, Internal Security, and Domestic Politics in the Truman Era, 1945-1950," and his "The Escalation of the Loyalty Program," in Bernstein (ed.), *Politics and Policies*, 196-268.

⁴³ *Appeal*, no. 186, October 15, 1949; no. 123, July 31, 1948; no. 125, August 14, 1948; no. 143, December 18, 1948.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 235, September 23, 1950. The bill, passed in 1951 over Truman's veto, provided for registration of Communist and Communist-front organizations, the internment of Communists during national emergency, and the termination of all Communists employed in national defense work.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 346, November 8, 1952; no. 348, November 22, 1952; no. 410, January 31, 1954.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 289, October 6, 1951; no. 421, April 17, 1954; no. 422, April 24, 1954; no. 518, February 25, 1956.

the Orient, Dennis praised the scholar for repeating the wisdom of George Washington's Farewell Address. Although by 1953 the United States was undergoing a "domestic inquisition a la Torquemada against Communism," the Wisconsin Senator had his uses. So long as he created turmoil, the nation would have no time to escalate the Cold War. When McCarthy died Dennis offered what might have been the most original obituary in America. Calling him a "typical, sincere, roof-raising American—a most authentic type," Dennis found McCarthy a man caught up in lynch justice who "never quite grasped that sin is here to stay and has to be lived with."⁴⁷

Despite the furor over McCarthy, foreign affairs remained Dennis' primary focus. And to him it was the Suez crisis of 1956, more than any other event, which symbolized the coming of age of what many now call the "Third World." Even before Gamal Abdel Nasser had nationalized the canal in July, Dennis claimed that Arab control of the entire Middle East was inevitable. "Numbers count," he tersely remarked. When the Western powers accused Nasser of breaking international law by seizing the canal, Dennis turned to one of his favorite themes—allied duplicity. Recalling that Britain had barred certain neutral ships from the Suez Canal during World War I and that the United States had done likewise in Panama, he wrote, "You have to hand it to the British, French and even us Americans for knowing how to invoke law and justice as instruments of national policy." The joint invasion of the British, French, and Israelis was pure folly. The cease-fire revealed the real forces at work in the world. "The Israelis just won the big battle of Gaza, but Nasser and the Allah boys, defeated in battle by the Yahweh boys, now seem to be the winner of Suez." Yet the Becket editor was fearful, seeing in the Middle Eastern warnings of the Eisenhower Doctrine a "really foolproof dependable formula for perpetual war."⁴⁸

While Russia's suppression of the Hungarian uprising also revealed the follies of overextended empire, the United States again showed her hypocrisy. It was certainly as logical for Russia, who had been invaded three times in the past 130 years, to suppress her satellites as for America to "promote military alliances against Russia." "Of course," the *Appeal* noted, "if we do it, it is right or defense, while if they do it, that is, if Russia does it, it is wrong and aggression."⁴⁹

In 1960, however, Eisenhower and Nixon received Dennis' backhanded endorsement. "Bigger and better phonies" than the Democrats, the two Republican politicians were capable of "keeping the cold war phony." "The fact," he declared, "that neither ever was enough of a thinker or an intellect to understand what a big war is all about has been a great point in their favor." Although Dennis did not endorse either of the 1960 presidential candidates, he soon found Kennedy an "operational pragmatist," one who made decisions upon the basis of likely results, not on visionary hopes or dogmatic ideologies. Kennedy could occasionally be disillusioning, as in his hard line over Berlin and his stridency during the Cuban missile crisis. But when the President was assassinated Dennis concurred in the most flattering of eulogies, while at the same time finding the Republic "deeply fortunate to have Lyndon Johnson its new chief executive." Like many of his former foes among the liberals, Dennis favored the Texan in 1964 over Senator Barry Goldwater.⁵⁰

For a few years, the world appeared to be settling. The Kremlin's ouster of Khrushchev, "the world's most important psychotic," was reassuring, one more example that despite tides of unreason, the communist world was being run on pragmatic, "operational" lines. Indeed, the editor of the *Appeal* was heartened by the supposed convergence of the Western and Soviet systems. Capitalism and communism were both rapidly evolving into techno-

⁴⁷ *Appeal*, no. 209, March 25, 1950; no. 210, April 1, 1950; no. 211, April 8, 1950; no. 383, July 25, 1953; no. 411, February 8, 1954; no. 580, May 4, 1957.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 529, May 12, 1956; no. 547, September 15, 1956; nos. 556 and 557, November 11, 24, 1956; no. 571, March 2, 1957.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, nos. 552 and 553, October 20, 27, 1956.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 683, July 16, 1960; no. 704, May 6, 1961; no. 711, August 12, 1961; no. 739, September 8, 1962; nos. 770 and 771, November 16, 30, 1964; no. 786, August 1, 1964.

cratic welfare states, complete with planned economies and managed currencies.⁵¹

At any rate, Dennis wrote in 1961, future conflicts were bound to be racial, not ideological. Recalling his Spengler, he declared, "The Decline of the West is the most important fact of the 20th Century." Vietnam, in fact, marked the final turning. Even before President Johnson had ordered the bombing of North Vietnam, Dennis commented that to maintain employment and consumption, "We need lots of small or limited wars, like the one in Viet Nam." By 1966, the *Appeal* cried out, "PRESIDENT JOHNSON COMMITS HIMSELF TO THE PURSUIT OF WORLD EMPIRE." By 1969, one could see "the beginning of the end of American intervention and overseas imperialism." What he had foreseen for years had finally become visible. After a "long and brilliant record of success" in empire-building, America's time had come.⁵²

FOR Lawrence Dennis the period of the Cold War revealed the validity of many of the theories he had formulated concerning war and revolution in the 1930's. Each new event—the Greek-Turkish crisis, the Marshall Plan, the Korean War, the Suez crisis—offered additional fulfillment of his predictions. Refusing to enlist in any crusade but the one for absolute neutrality, Dennis' doctrines of realpolitik, bolstered by a new abhorrence of mass warfare, served him well. Always more fearful of domestic dictatorship than of totalitarian conquests, his isolationism remained pure.

Few political columnists could feel so confident in the validity of their analysis. World capitalism continued to decline. Ideologies of "communism" and "freedom" often masked traditional aims of national interest, as shown by the Sino-Soviet split or United States quarrels with France. America and the Western world continued to try to impose a "world rule of law" upon recalcitrant and expanding societies through such mechanisms as the

United Nations. The United States kept on "socializing" her economy, not in any way longed for by Norman Thomas or Eugene Victor Debs, but by forming a centralized, militaristic bureaucracy. Her inflation prevented the occurrence of another crash, her war scares and countersubversive activity easily whipped up her irrational masses, and her massive foreign aid and space programs⁵³—both substitutes for the old "frontier"—gave her capitalistic system a new lease on life without solving the gnawing problems of overproduction. Her world interventions accelerated revolutionary tides at home and abroad. Her conservatives, possessing an irrational fear of Bolshevism, remained inept in combatting the interventionist leadership and eventually fell into a paranoid Birchism with hysterical cries of "total victory."

In Dennis' eyes, the Cold War has remained functional. The United States needed it to ensure full employment, Russia to maintain the hold of the present rulers and to protect the nation from another Hitler. To end the conflict, other means of combating unemployment and curtailing underconsumption would have to be developed.⁵⁴ Yet the Cold War must be terminated; the survival of the planet was at stake.

Of course, not all of Dennis' early analysis has remained intact. With liberal democracy today facing the greatest crisis of its existence, Dennis' early solution of rule by a technocratic elite might only compound the problem. True, Western powers have never formally adopted the corporate state that Dennis once advocated and have maintained parliamentary forms. But the centralized bureaucratic superstructure endemic to large democracies as well as to dictatorships has sown new seeds for the remoteness, impersonality, and inaccessibility which often immobilizes political action.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Dennis revised Bishop Berkeley's famous aphorism to read, "SPACEWARD THE COURSE OF EMPIRE TAKES ITS WAY (OR DOES IT?)" and tersely wrote, "NORTH AMERICA HAS A LOT TO OFFER. WHAT HAS SPACE OR THE MOON TO OFFER?" *Appeal*, no. 705, May 20, 1961.

⁵² *Appeal*, no. 681, June 18, 1960; no. 716, October 21, 1961; no. 679, May 21, 1960.

⁵³ For a cogent and eloquent description of the present plight of liberal democracy, see William Pfaff, *Condemned to Freedom* (New York, 1971).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, no. 790, October 24, 1964; no. 700, March 11, 1961.

⁵² *Ibid.*, no. 704, May 6, 1961; no. 795, January 22, 1965; no. 817, April 18, 1966; Lawrence Dennis, *Operational Thinking for Survival* (Colorado Springs, 1969), 126.

Indeed, with the coming of World War II, Dennis ceased to offer his own "patent office model of the good society," seeing his task as more analytical than prescriptive.

Much of his older speculations suffered from the problem of definition. His lumping of communism and fascism together in a Spenglerian definition of "socialism" was often extremely misleading. For example, did the Soviet system ever depend upon external conquest for internal stability to the degree that the fascist ones did? Was Germany ever really "consciously and avowedly anticapitalist"? Were property relations really changed under Hitler, and did the traditional industrial, commercial, and agricultural elites lose their power?³⁶

If early appraisals of abstract systems were often too encompassing for crucial distinctions, later evaluations might have placed too much faith in human rationality. True, Dennis soon recognized that Eisenhower really did not possess "real fuehrer potential," and he often appreciated the President's caution. It also must have been refreshing to note that Kennedy and Johnson—unlike Franklin D. Roosevelt and Truman—could live out their daily lives without crying for "unconditional surrender" of the enemy. Yet his evaluation of the more recent Presidents, whom he portrays as representing varied degrees of pragmatic rule, failed to account for the new breed of "crisis managers" who served them, counselled them, wrote their speeches, and who, most important of all, created and executed Cold War policy. Such experts, trained in Ivy League institutions, moved freely from production drafting boards to State Department receptions to Pentagon map briefings with equal agility, never questioning the Cold War doctrines upon which they were raised.

Here Dennis' analysis possessed a double-edged sword. The very bureaucratic elite which, in his eyes, should muffle the crusading ardor of the warriors could also be the repository of the mindless dogmatism he so often

mourned in the masses. If anything, he overstressed the reasonableness of the new managerial system, just as he had overstressed common goals among the "have-not" powers of the 1930's.

IT IS from the vantage point of historical analysis that Dennis' comments are most cogent. He caught the relationship between frontiers and markets at least twenty years before the "Wisconsin School" of diplomatic history was born. He noted, almost in passing, the relationship between internal economic strains and the way the United States entered World War II; Truman's initiation of the anticommunist hysteria; the hypocrisy of American stridency over the Dardenelles and later Hungary; and the deliberate linking of Communist and Nazi "blueprints of world conquest." While some historians might accuse him of confusing causes with results—such as in the case of Truman's embarking upon global crusading to achieve full employment and re-election at the polls—many related questions are far from resolved.

Dennis' political exile certainly did not detract from his candidness. Relegated to a relatively obscure mimeographed newsletter, he was free from advertising and editorial pressures in a way known to few professional writers. Unaffiliated with any movement, party, or cause, he could damn a Harry Truman or a Douglas MacArthur with equal passion. If his writing style occasionally lacked polish, it still contained aphorisms that a Henry Louis Mencken might appreciate.

Underconsumption and mass unemployment, wars of conquest and ideology, the rise of the non-West—these Dennis saw as the main currents of the twentieth century. He projected what he called an "operational" method of thinking to cope with these crises. By judging measures in terms of their results, not their intent, America might have the tools to survive for at least another century. While his remedy, an enlightened managerial elite, might have been misplaced, his diagnosis was often astute. Crisis, revolution, one armed conflict after another, to determine—as one anonymous writer put it—not "who is right, but who is left," Lawrence Dennis had seen it all coming, and somehow in retrospect he must have found it all rather inevitable.

³⁶ For a negative answer to the questions raised, see Arno J. Mayer, *Dynamics of Counterrevolution in Europe, 1870-1956: An Analytical Framework* (New York, 1971), 17, 20-23; compare Dennis, *Dynamics of War and Revolution*, 147, with David Schoenbaum, *Hitler's Social Revolution: Class and Status in Nazi Germany, 1933-1939* (New York, 1967), chapter IV.