The Most Unsordid Act

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House Majority Leader John McCormack was somewhat uneasy. He was personally willing, even eager, to do all he could to insure the speedy passage of the President’s Lend-Lease Bill for the anti-Christian aspects of naziism had long ago convinced him that Germany threatened those things in life he held most dear. But the professional Irishmen who dominated his south Boston constituency were likely to become irate over any aid-to-Britain legislation, and having it tagged the “McCormack Bill” would put him at the receiving end of their anger. Yet if he introduced it in the House—as planned—that is just what would, in all likelihood, happen. Long-standing political tradition, both inside and outside Congress, caused bills to be tagged with the names of their sponsors or co-sponsors, unless the reporters attached something more colorful. Massachusetts’ Twelfth Congressional District was safely Democratic, but no smart politician—and John McCormack was certainly that—gives some unknown future opponent any sort of ammunition if he can avoid it.

Lewis Deschler, Parliamentarian of the House of Representatives, was aware of McCormack’s discomfiture. For no real reason that he could ever recall, it occurred to Deschler that numbering the bill, H.R. 1776, could solve Mr. McCormack’s problem. Certainly it would be an easy thing to arrange since they had reached the 1700’s in bill numbers for that session anyway, and no reporter could ask for any-

thing more ironically fitting than to assign the number 1776 to a bill designed to aid England.\(^2\)

Deschler suggested the number to Speaker Rayburn, who casually gave his approval, and instructions were sent to H. Newton Megill, Assistant Enrolling Clerk, to assign 1776 to the bill when McCormack introduced it on the floor, and as simply as that a famous number was attached to an almost as famous bill. Following the enrolling of the bill, Deschler told McCormack what he had done and why. The Majority Leader was most appreciative. Not only would it end any mention of the “McCormack Bill” and thus solve his own private dilemma, but the implicit appeal to patriotism would aid in building public support for the bill itself.

We have a great desire to attribute such fortuitous actions to careful planning, or at least to our national heroes, and are most reluctant to admit that minor officials could have come up with what hindsight shows to have been a clever maneuver. Publicly, the Clerk of the House insisted the number was a mere coincidence, but no one believed him. Robert Sherwood cautiously admitted he was not certain but wrote that the number sounded like a “Rooseveltian conception,” and others have taken a similar line. In reality it sprang from political necessity. An ineffective floor leader who also happened to be a Jew, an Irishman who preferred to avoid being known as a friend of the English, and an imaginative minor bureaucrat, all combined to stamp a number permanently in the history books—for the second time.\(^4\)

In spite of this shrewd move, McCormack remained somewhat uncomfortable for about ten days—at which time he returned briefly to Boston. While there, an argumentative female constituent vigorously attacked him for having introduced and supported a bill designed to aid the English spalpeens. McCormack’s reply was the classic example

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\(^2\)Mr. Deschler, who is still the Parliamentarian of the House at this writing, surmised that he thought of that number because he happened to notice it was about due on the calendar. Deschler interview, Oct. 26, 1966. His memory was probably correct, for the last bill introduced in the House before it convened on January 10, 1941, was H.R. 1764. See CR, 77th Cong., 1st sess., LXXXVII, pt. I, Jan. 8, 1941, p. 80.


\(^4\)The Clerk’s claim of coincidence is reported in the New York Times, Jan. 11, 1941. On the assigning of the number 1776, see Sherwood, Roosevelt and Hopkins, p. 228; Langer and Gleason, The Undeclared War, p. 258, where they sarcastically state the bill was “happily designated” 1776; Blum, From the Morgenthau Diaries, II, 217, who calls the number “symbolic”; and two contemporary historians who blandly call it “reminiscently numbered,” Davis and Lindley, How War Came, p. 184. All imply that it was a planned stratagem.
of a politician thinking on his feet—yet it also reflected, in a small way, what may well have been his own deep-felt conviction. He calmly answered: "Madam, do you realize that the Vatican is surrounded on all sides by totalitarianism? Madam, this is not a bill to save the English, this is a bill to save Catholicism."\(^5\)

Shortly after noon on Friday, the tenth of January, 1941, McCormack introduced on the floor of the House of Representatives "a bill further to promote the defense of the United States and for other purposes." In accordance with plans, Alben Barkley introduced the same piece of legislation at almost the same time on the floor of the Senate. A press release, prepared in the Treasury Department and issued in the name of Barkley and McCormack, outlined the basic nature and purposes of the bill.\(^6\)

The press release laid down the guidelines for the Administration's defense of the bill. Although no attempt was made to hide the extensive grant of power given the President, the emphasis was placed on other items. It noted that only American-type goods would be ordered under this act and further explained that Congress would still maintain control since a separate appropriation was required. In an attempt to anticipate an opposition argument, the release stated that the bill in no way authorized sending American merchant ships into the war zones. Nevertheless, in spite of the attempt to speak of other things, the repeated use of such phrases as "the President is empowered" or its equivalent made it clear that this gave Mr. Roosevelt all he had requested.\(^7\)

On January 9, the day before the bill was scheduled for introduction, Roosevelt began his push to gain public support for the legislation. He passed on the word to the interventionist Century Group that he wanted outside aid on the Lend-Lease proposal since he feared party lines would be drawn which would delay the bill's passage.\(^8\) The President himself started the public campaign in a low key during his

\(^5\)I must confess to having repeated a story for which I have only hearsay evidence. D. B. Hardeman interview, Aug. 26, 1966. During my interview with Speaker McCormack I repeated the story to him and asked him if it were true. He propped his long legs up on his desk, grinned broadly, took a long puff from his cigar, and told me he was not going to answer my question. Then he pointedly commented that all sorts of things leaked out from Capitol Hill. Taken within the context of the interview, I consider that comment as verification. True or not, the story bears repeating, and I suspect that even if Speaker McCormack did not say it, he wished he had. McCormack interview, March 18, 1967. Lewis Deschler recalls hearing the story but could not vouch for its authenticity. Deschler interview, Aug. 1, 1967.


\(^7\)The bill as it was finally passed is in the appendix. The amendments are discussed in chap. VII.

\(^8\)Chadwin, *The Hawks of World War II*, p. 152.
press conference on January 10. He denied that the bill effectively repealed the Neutrality and Johnson Acts and claimed that the phrase “not withstanding the provisions of any other law” was a standard legal phrase. As with the Barkley-McCormack press release, he too emphasized that Congress would still have to pass an appropriation and specifically asked the press to publicize that. For the record, Roosevelt disavowed any power grab, saying “nobody wants—Lord knows I don’t want—the power that is apparently given in this bill” but went on to warn that situations could well arise which would necessitate immediate response and “if the policy of the Nation is to help the democracies survive, you have to have methods of speed that are legalized.” In spite of a dozen different peripheral issues that were raised, the major question that opponents and proponents of the bill discussed was that very one—Presidential power.⁹

The opposition was quick to attack the bill from all angles. The most famous remark—thanks to Roosevelt’s reaction to it—was made by Senator Burton K. Wheeler of Montana, one of the isolationist Democrats whose greatest joy in life seemed to be to plague Roosevelt. During a radio debate on the Mutual Broadcasting System program, “American Forum of the Air,” Wheeler labelled the bill “the New Deal’s triple A foreign policy; it will plow under every fourth American boy.” Although the New York Times made little mention of the crack in its report of the debate, Roosevelt himself brought up the subject at his press conference on January 14, after one reporter asked about the “blank-check” label some had attached to the bill. Heatedly, and telling the press they could quote him, the President said he regarded the comment (he did not know who had said it, or so he claimed) “as the most untruthful, as the most dastardly, unpatriotic thing . . . that has been said in public life in my generation.”¹⁰

Samuel Rosenman, one of Roosevelt’s speechwriters and friends, noted eleven years later that it was difficult to really remember “the force and volume” of the isolationists. He recalled that although men like Wheeler constituted a small minority, they were “quite vocal and efficient.” Vocal they were. Representative Hamilton Fish called Lend-Lease a Fascist bill and echoed Wheeler by claiming it was a

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¹⁰Wheeler’s talk was reprinted in the CR, 77th Cong., 1st sess., LXXXVII, pt. 10 (app.), pp. A178-79. For Roosevelt’s press conference, see Roosevelt, Papers and Addresses (1940), pp. 711-12. The day after Roosevelt’s attack, Wheeler told the press he supposed that the President had lost his temper. Years later, in his memoirs, the Senator recalled that when he wrote his speech he had given the phrase little thought, but—repenting somewhat—commented that the words had sounded “somewhat harsh” when he spoke them. New York Times, Jan. 13, 15, 1941. Burton K. Wheeler with Paul F. Healy, Yankee From the West (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1962), p. 27.
declaration of war. Senator Hiram Johnson of California said he declined "to change the whole form of my government on the specious plea of assisting one belligerent," while Robert Taft of Ohio asserted only a "rubber-stamp" Congress would pass such a bill. The accusation that the bill constituted an act of war—a position that most directly challenged the President—was also made by Senators Gerald Nye, Bennett Clark, Robert LaFollette, Jr., and C. Wayland Brooks. Clark, an isolationist and anti-Roosevelt Democrat from Missouri, had called the original suggestion on December 17 "the King's royal tax for the support of the British Empire" and had continued in this vein after the bill was introduced by commenting that the number should correspond to the date of the French and Indian War since America was then a British colony. The most influential and responsible of the isolationist organizations, the America First Committee, found it impossible to believe that Hitler could defeat Britain and ludicrous to assume that Germany could threaten the United States under any circumstances. Since these were the only valid reasons for such an extensive grant of power to the President, the Committee opposed the bill as a power grab by Roosevelt.11

German papers published stories about the imminent financial collapse of Britain and futile British hopes of being bailed out by the Americans, while the Italians—playing the unaccustomed role of defenders of the democratic rule of law—labelled the proposal as both antidemocratic and unconstitutional, although they glumly admitted it would easily pass. Privately, the German Foreign Ministry advised that the only practical policy was to work at widening the gap between the isolationists and the interventionists and suggested that the German propagandists stick to a strict reporting of the facts, leaving American readers to draw their own conclusions. Shortly thereafter, the German government, ignoring the Foreign Ministry’s suggestion, stepped up its anti-American propaganda, reasoning that it could do little harm now that Lend-Lease had been introduced in Congress.12


12Regular reports on Axis reactions were made to the State Department by various persons: See State Dept., Morris to Hull, Jan. 11, 1941, 841.24/406; Kirk to Hull, Jan. 11, 1941, 841.24/407; Phillips to Hull, Jan. 11, 1941, 841.24/408. The German Foreign Ministry’s recommendation was probably the work of Ambassador Dieckhoff; see memo by Weizsäcker, Jan. 16, 1941, *DGFP*, XI, no. 666, p. 1117. The German government’s change in propaganda tactics is mentioned in Saul Friedländer, *Prelude to Downfall: Hitler and the United States, 1939-1941*, trans. Aline B. Werth and Alexander Werth (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), p. 168n. It should be noted that the Charge in Washington had earlier reported that the German Embassy had excellent connections with the America First Committee and another isolationist group, the No Foreign War Committee. He had recommended their work be ignored by the German propagandists to avoid their being tagged as pro-German. Money was funnelled into these groups by the German Embassy, although most of the leadership and the overwhelming majority of the members were unaware of the source of these funds. Thomsen to the Foreign Ministry, Dec. 25, 1940, *DGFP*, XI, no. 563, pp. 949-50.
Generally, the response was quite favorable. In addition to support from the expected areas—the New York Times, the Christian Science Monitor, members of the Administration, the White Committee, and such—the legislation received an enormous boost when Wendell Willkie, the defeated Republican candidate in the 1940 presidential election, came out strongly in favor of the bill. Greatly concerned by the highly partisan "frontal assault" made on the Lend-Lease Bill by such leading Republicans as Herbert Hoover, Alfred Landon, Thomas Dewey, Robert Taft, and Arthur Vandenberg, Willkie felt it his duty to speak out in favor of the bill. He denounced those who would oppose the legislation merely because the Roosevelt Administration had proposed it and asserted that "if the Republican party . . . makes a blind opposition to this bill and allows itself to be presented to the American people as the isolationist party, it will never again gain control of the American government." Willkie's commitment was largely achieved through the efforts of another Republican whose foreign policy ideas ran along the same lines—Secretary of War Stimson. Stimson had gotten in touch with Willkie two weeks after the Presidential election and from that time on took pains to keep the Republican leader as fully informed as was reasonably possible. There is no evidence to indicate whether Roosevelt was aware of Stimson's actions, but the ease with which Stimson arranged a meeting between Willkie and Roosevelt just before Willkie's visit to England in mid-January is suggestive.13

With the hearings in the House Foreign Affairs Committee scheduled to begin on January 15, the Administration forces had only a few days in which to organize their strategy. Morgenthau, afraid he would be accused of a lack of objectivity because he was Jewish, instructed Ed Foley to suggest that Hull lead off for the Administration at the hearings. Rayburn and Bloom agreed with that choice, and Foley suggested it to Hull, giving as a reason the fact that it seemed fitting for the Secretary of State to be the first witness before his counterpart committee. Hull's reaction was that of a petulant little boy. He complained that he had not been informed of all the financial aspects of the bill and was not clear on the technical sections either. Morgenthau countered that a State Department representative had been present at all the important conferences, but Hull remained obstinate. He warned that he would testify only regarding international affairs and would refer all technical questions to the Treasury. He again raised the ques-

tion of collateral and told Morgenthau that the talk with Sir Frederick Phillips had not been "worth a pewter nickel." After talking with Hull, the Treasury Secretary called Knox and Stimson to enlist their aid in persuading the Secretary of State to put forth more than just a minimum effort. Knox indicated he sympathized with Hull regarding the collateral question, and Morgenthau replied that that was why he wanted to talk to the two of them together. Stimson, after obliquely commenting that an alliance was the proper step, agreed that Hull was wrong and said he would attend the conference with Hull and Knox scheduled for the next day.¹⁴

At that meeting Hull continued his opposition to Morgenthau's proposals. Although he reluctantly accepted the job of testifying first, the word in the State Department was that the Secretary was consulted only when the bill "struck snags." More significant was his strong opposition to Morgenthau's plan to divulge, in open session, the full state of British finances. The question had first come up at a meeting between Hull and Morgenthau on January 10. Morgenthau had tentatively volunteered to go up on the Hill and disclose the complete British money situation, but Hull had demurred, fearing such a public confession would cause a collapse of British morale. Morgenthau agreed then to talk it over first with the President and Hull before going any further.¹⁵

Hull's position was somewhat contradictory, for although he staunchly advocated forcing Britain to put down two or three billion dollars in collateral, at the same time he advised against publicizing the United Kingdom's financial status because the picture would be frighteningly bleak. The illogic of holding those two ideas simultaneously never seems to have bothered Hull, for he steadfastly continued to maintain them.

As Treasury Department officials had warned earlier, Morgenthau asked Joel Pinsent of the British Embassy to obtain permission from his superiors for the Secretary to open up to Congress the secret financial statistics that had been made available to the Treasury Department. Morgenthau argued that he had to be in a position to show that it was absolutely necessary for Roosevelt to act as he did in proposing the Lend-Lease Act. He promised not to disclose data on Empire finances unless he were asked but believed he should be ready for any and all questions. With Hull a reluctant and unenthusiastic witness, Morgenthau obviously anticipated rough treatment from the

¹⁴Morgenthau Diary, Jan. 13, 1941, 347:7-15, 30-31. Information on Morgenthau's reluctance to lead off at the hearings because he was Jewish is from the Foley interview, Nov. 3, 1966. Vice-President Garner also supported the collateral idea.

Foreign Affairs Committee. The Chancellor of the Exchequer agreed that England had no choice but to trust the Americans.16

Annoyed by Hull's reluctance, Morgenthau spoke that same day to Roosevelt who was taking a weekend rest at Hyde Park. The President promised that Hull would definitely testify, but Roosevelt was hesitant about changing the approach at that stage. He pointed out to Morgenthau that the Treasury had carried the ball up to that point, and the unasked question was "Why change?" Hull, in his memoirs, claimed the President asked him to lead the fight in Congress because he had more influence than Morgenthau with the isolationists and the waverers, but Hull's performance—and the fact that Roosevelt wrote at least part of Hull's opening statement—indicates he led the fight only in the sense of being the first to testify. The burden of carrying out the Administration's aid to Britain program remained where it had been since 1939—in the Treasury Department.17

The final strategy meeting before the hearings started was held on January 14. Hull continued to oppose full disclosure of Britain's financial position, but Morgenthau—hoping to place aid to England "on an idealistic plane"—believed Mrs. Roosevelt summed it up when she commented; "Henry, unless you tell these people everything, we are no different than J. P. Morgan was during the last war." Hull also returned to his collateral notion, but both Stimson and Morgenthau firmly rejected it. Stimson eschewed the role of pawnbroker, while Morgenthau warned that the "Birmingham crowd"—the appeasers in England—might cry that America was trying to take advantage of the war in order to bleed Britain dry and thus might agitate for ending the war. Although Knox, Stimson, Hull, and Morgenthau all agreed that ordinary business methods of loans and security would demoralize the British and probably have an untoward effect on her postwar position, Hull warned that care had to be taken to avoid giving the impression that Britain was bankrupt and not worth aiding. He told Morgenthau that throwing open the British books would only further convince Congress of the truth of Joseph Kennedy's cry that England was "busted." Hull again firmly insisted he would testify concerning only two basic themes: the dangerous world situation and the necessity of getting the weapons to England as quickly as possible. They all agreed that financial matters that arose at the hearings would be referred to Morgenthau, while Stimson would confine himself to the managerial and production

16From the Morgenthau Diaries, II, 219-20; Hall, North American Supply, pp. 268-69. Unhappily, Hall and the other official British historians do not comment on the reaction in London to the Secretary's request. One suspects it was less blasé than they make it seem.

17Morgenthau, Collier's, CXX, 74-75; Morgenthau Diary, Jan. 15, 1941, 348:32; Hull, Memoirs, II, 923.
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aspects. That evening, Morgenthau, by telephone, told Roosevelt of their plans, and the President gave his approval.¹⁸

Morgenthau and Roosevelt were fully aware of the possibility of Hull’s gloomy prediction coming true, and they were attempting to prevent it in other ways. If the public and Congress could be convinced of Britain’s good faith, then they would tend to believe the steady stream of promises emanating from 10 Downing Street, guaranteeing an all-out, to-the-bitter-end fight by Britain. As further proof of British candor, over and above the disclosure of her finances which was planned, Morgenthau exerted heavy pressure on London to begin liquidating British-owned direct investments located in America. As the negotiations progressed it became clear that the Administration was primarily interested in some type of flamboyant, grand gesture, which would demonstrate that Britain was willing to make every possible sacrifice, but the nagging suspicion persisted among the British that the Americans were trying to milk the Empire dry.

Like the interim question, the sale of such direct investments was a problem that continued well past the passage of the Lend-Lease Act. The idea had come up earlier, but with the “aid to democracies” bill before Congress, Morgenthau believed the time had arrived for action. Obviously, the great British fear and complaint was their inability to obtain a fair price for such investments. As early as December, 1940, the Treasury received reports of attempts by American buyers to take advantage of even the small sales which were then being made.¹⁹

Unhappy with the efforts made by Britain in this area, Morgenthau asked for and got a special agent from London, Sir Edward Peacock, the personal financial adviser to the Crown, to come over and organize the sale of direct investments. It was too late to accomplish anything in time to impress the House Foreign Affairs Committee, though Morgenthau, annoyed by the persistent British stalling on this matter, commented that he had been trying to get some action out of the British since July, 1940, before forced sales would cause the price to drop. Finally convinced that too many members of the Roosevelt Administration suspected Britain of holding out some of its dollar assets, Phillips and Purvis obtained permission from the Churchill government to sell direct investments and to put the money toward the “old commitments.” Purvis was told to let Morgenthau know that negotiations were to begin immediately on the sale of $100 million

¹⁸ The conference of January 14 is reported in the Stimson Diary, Jan. 14, 1941; and Blum, From the Morgenthau Diaries, II, 220. No mention was made in the notes on the conference of Knox’s assignment, but all apparently assumed he would testify—as he did—on the general military threat that a British defeat would pose to America. Roosevelt’s approval of the strategy is in ibid., p. 221. Stimson’s pawnbroker remark is from Morgenthau, Collier’s, CXX, 74, though, as with the entire article, the chronology is somewhat vague. Mrs. Roosevelt’s remark is from the Morgenthau Diary, Jan. 15, 1941, 348:18.

¹⁹ Morgenthau Diary, Dec. 21, 1940, 342:2-3.
worth of the investments, and at Morgenthau's request Purvis authorized him to make the news public at the Foreign Affairs Committee hearing. In what was apparently an attempt to prevent any drastic cut in the market price of the direct investments, Morgenthau mentioned no specific investments at the Foreign Affairs Committee hearing but admitted that such negotiations were being held since the news had already leaked out to the press. The matter rested there until the Administration attacked it with renewed vigor shortly before the Senate hearings were scheduled to commence.

Determining the tactics and strategy adopted by each faction during a Congressional hearing is a most difficult job. Congressmen are notoriously reluctant to talk or even write about cloakroom strategy, even after they and the participants have left Capitol Hill. Most of the analysis must depend on a posteriori reasoning. Occasional bits and pieces can be gleaned from the Morgenthau Diary, interviews, and some of the other primary sources, particularly the newspapers, but these do not tell the whole story.

The Administration forces on the House Foreign Affairs Committee should theoretically have been led and organized by the Chairman, Sol Bloom. But that was not the case. Although much of the routine administrative control could not be removed from the Chairman's hands, it is very evident from the hearings that the key man for the pro-Lend-Lease forces was Representative Luther Johnson of Texas. Bloom was unpopular with both Republicans and Democrats on the committee and many considered him pompous, arrogant, and an inveterate publicity hound. It was said that some of the Democrats on the committee once approached the Republican minority and asked if they would support a move to give the chairmanship to someone else. The Republicans said they would, provided the someone else was a Republican, and the suggestion was quickly dropped. True or not, the story is indicative of an unhappy committee. That Bloom was chair-

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20 The Peacock mission is discussed in Blum, From the Morgenthau Diaries, II, 236; and Hall, North American Supply, p. 274. The decision of the British government to proceed with the sales is reported in ibid., pp. 274-75. See also, Stimson Diary, Jan. 14, 1941; Morgenthau Diary, Jan. 9, 1941, 346:156, and Jan. 10, 1941, 346:315. Morgenthau admitted the news leak at his press conferences of Jan. 13, 1941; Morgenthau Papers, press conferences, vol. 17, pp. 44-53. The only mention of the question of direct investments made by Morgenthau at the House hearings is in HFAC, Hearings, p. 62. The official British estimate of their direct investments in America was $900 million. This was quite close to the estimate made by the Federal Reserve as of Aug. 31, 1939, which was $1,185,000,000. See ibid., p. 81.

21 The Morgenthau Diary is presently available only up to January 20, 1941. The period from then until January 20, 1945, will be opened in 1970. Thus, from this point on, the most valuable primary source for this study is no longer available. Blum's excellent summary, From the Morgenthau Diaries, II, helps fill the gap, but not completely. The Diary volumes in the closed years have been used by some privileged historians besides Blum, but of those only Langer and Gleason, in The Undeclared War, have written anything germane to this study.

22 Interview with Senator Karl Mundt (R.-SD), member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in 1941 (Washington, D. C., April 29, 1967). Bloom was replaced by Luther Johnson as floor leader during the debate over the attempt to revise the Neutrality Act in
man of the committee was not the result of the seniority system alone. The Democratic leadership was happy to see him in that job rather than some other, since the Foreign Affairs Committee had historically been a minor one. Not until World War II and particularly the Lend-Lease Bill did that committee come into its own.23

On January 15, the House Foreign Affairs Committee began the hearings on H.R. 1776, the Lend-Lease Bill. Boyd Crawford, a member of the committee staff, later recalled that he had never seen any hearing draw as large an audience before or since. It was held in the Ways and Means Committee room in the Longworth Building and was packed almost every day with some five hundred people. The crush was great enough to require forty special police on duty to handle the crowd. On days when controversial and popular figures like Charles Lindbergh and Joseph Kennedy testified, seating was by reservation in much of the gallery, and long lines of hopefuls waited to get into the chamber. On such days attending the hearings became somewhat of a social obligation, and the society writer for the Washington Post dutifully reported such items as the attendance of Mrs. Sol Bloom, Mrs. Robert Taft, and Alice Roosevelt Longworth.24

Public attention throughout the country focused on the hearings. They continually rated front-page coverage in the daily papers in the major cities, and even the small-town papers, dependent largely on the wire services for such news, apparently kept the story on the front page, though it often lacked in-depth coverage. In a very real sense, the Lend-Lease hearings were another of those so-called Great Debates over foreign policy which have periodically occurred in America during the twentieth century.25


23 Mundt interview, April 29, 1967. Interview with the Hon. Frances P. Bolton, member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee from 1941 to the present (Washington, D.C., March 16, 1967). Mrs. Bolton told the amusing story that when she first entered Congress in 1941 and was appointed to the Foreign Affairs Committee, she asked the Republican leadership why they had put her on it. The reply was that she was one of the few willing to serve who had a home large enough for entertaining. Social obligations were apparently considered more important than any other of the committee's "duties."


25 The Chicago Tribune, the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the New York Herald-Tribune all consistently placed the lead story on the hearings on their front page. My tentative conclusion regarding the attitude of small-town papers is largely based on an interesting study of the Lend-Lease debate as covered by the Ann Arbor (Michigan) News. See Phillip M. Barber, "The Lend-Lease Act and Public Opinion" (Honors thesis, University of Michigan, 1963), app. entitled "A Report... or How to Read Eighty-Eight Newspapers Without Drawing a Breath." Mr. Barber was kind enough to give me that appendix. The nature, short- and long-term effect, and general public reaction to this Great Debate cry out to be studied.
As was the established custom with Congressional hearings of any importance, a plethora of witnesses, pro and con, qualified and fraudulent, informative and polemical, were paraded before the committee. The Administration witnesses, Morgenthau, Hull, Stimson, Knox, and Knudsen, were all of importance in that they presented the Administration arguments for the bill. Many of the others who testified were called as being men of knowledge and experience in matters of foreign policy. William Bullitt, Joseph Kennedy, Norman Thomas, and even Charles Lindbergh, were all leading experts and spokesmen for certain important points of view. Other witnesses were called either for their antiquarian value, such as Amos Pinchot, the old Progressive and titular head of the American Defense Society, or because they exercised substantial influence over a large number of potential voters, such as William Green of the American Federation of Labor or Gerald L. K. Smith, the quasi-Fascist leader of the Committee of One Million.

Committee Chairman Bloom was flooded by requests for the privilege of testifying as well as suggestions as to whom the committee should ask to appear. Most submitted their request in businesslike and rational terms. The Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies wrote that it had hoped the bill would pass rapidly, obviating the need for them to state their position, but since the Foreign Affairs Committee had decided to hear a large number of witnesses, they too would like enough time to present a brief statement. Philosopher-historian Will Durant offered his testimony as a "nonpartisan" student of history. Requests from those opposed to the bill tended, not surprisingly, to be couched in excited and emotional tones. They invariably gave the bill an insulting or critical label, and reference was usually made to the need to save America from the same sort of mistake she had made in World War I. Occasionally a request took a belligerent tone, such as the letter and telegram from Gerald Smith demanding that he have an opportunity to speak—or rather lecture—to the committee. Smith, an avowed anti-Semite and admirer of Hitler,

26 These requests are in the files of the U.S., House of Representatives, 77th Congress, Committee on Foreign Affairs, “file on H.R. 1776” (Congressional Records Section, National Archives, Washington, D. C.) Permission to use these records is routinely granted by the Clerk of the House upon application via a member of the House of Representatives. These records are hereafter referred to as HFAC, “file on H.R. 1776.” Copies of some of these requests are available in a small collection of Sol Bloom’s papers owned by the Sol Bloom Elementary School, PS #84, in New York City, New York. I am indebted to the principal of that school, Mr. Milton Forrest, for permitting me to see and copy many of these documents, and to Mr. Boyd Crawford of the House Foreign Affairs Committee for leading me to that collection. The bulk of the Sol Bloom papers, deposited in the New York Public Library, provided no useful information on the Lend-Lease hearings or on Bloom as Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Such collections as that in Sol Bloom Elementary School are very common for committee chairmen who held office before the passage of the Executive Reorganization Act of 1949. Since then, committee correspondence has been classified as committee property instead of the personal property of the chairman and thus has been kept in the committee files.
slurringly addressed the Chairman as “Solomon Bloom” and threateningly warned that if he were denied the chance to speak, he would be “forced” to report to his two million followers (he was chairman of the Committee of One Million) that their appeals had been ignored. He claimed to have a petition opposing the bill which had two million signatures and suggested that Bloom contact House Minority Leader Joe Martin or Senator Vandenberg, both of whom would vouch for his group’s “stability and integrity.” In the same tone he cautioned that any mid-western congressman could attest to their strength.27

Smith’s concern was probably a result of press reports of a heated exchange between Bloom and the senior Republican on the committee, Hamilton Fish. In accordance with Administration strategy, Bloom wanted each side to have its day in court28 and indicated to Fish that as the leading Republican he could unofficially contact persons he wished to have testify. Fish, instead of following the usual formalities of submitting a list and having the official invitations go out in the name of the chairman, attempted to act as a sort of minority chairman and issued invitations himself. Whether he misunderstood Bloom’s intentions or was attempting to put the Democrats at a disadvantage is not clear, but Bloom’s reaction was swift and very plain. In a shouting match heard by reporters and spectators, Bloom loudly ruled that witnesses would be invited only by the committee, and he further protested Fish’s asking people to speak on “the President’s dictator bill.” Fish stomped out of the committee room yelling, “You never were the committee and you never will be,” and for a short time the minority members of the committee met in another room. Fish finally sent an emissary to Bloom and capitulated for the day, but the dispute surfaced again a few days later. On January 24, the committee met in executive session and again Bloom complained about Fish calling witnesses without going through the chairman. General Marshall had written Fish, with a copy of the letter sent to Bloom, stating he preferred not to come as a minority witness as Fish had requested since he would be testifying in his capacity as a member of the Administration. Admiral Stark and Army Air Force Chief of Staff General George Brett agreed. Bloom told Fish that the military leaders had been told to ignore Fish’s request. Marshall had also asked to be heard in executive session, and after reconvening in open session, the committee voted for executive session when the military chiefs testified. Fish and some of the others protested that the public had a right to hear these men—obviously


hoping they would state that Germany was no threat to America—but in a party-line vote, the committee overruled them.29

The opposition to Lend-Lease immediately found themselves at a severe disadvantage. The classic problem was recognized at the time by New York Times reporter Turner Catledge, when he noted that in matters of military affairs and national security, the Administration maintains a virtual monopoly on meaningful and useful information.30 Able to publish only what will help their case, while suppressing or at least delaying public knowledge of those facts that seem to go against them, government officials have the benefit of what some would call the “power of positive thinking,” or at least action.

Catledge also pointed out that the conservative coalition, in existence since Roosevelt’s abortive attempt to “pack” the Supreme Court, did not function in the area of foreign policy. As many historians and pollsters have pointed out, the South supported the aid to Britain with greater enthusiasm than any other section of the country. The day before the Lend-Lease Bill was introduced, the American Institute of Public Opinion published a poll that showed that of those asked, 91 per cent in the South supported changing the Johnson Act so as to permit loans to Britain. The next highest figure was 60 per cent in the Northeast, while the other areas all showed figures below 50 per cent. Ever since the fall of France, the South had consistently led all the other sections in supporting the Administration’s foreign policy, and its domestic quarrels with Roosevelt had little effect on that stance. In the final votes on the Lend-Lease Bill, only two Southerners voted against the act.31

29The quotations from the argument between Fish and Bloom are as quoted in the New York Times, Jan. 17, 1941. The other data on the dispute are from ibid., Jan. 15, 1941; Crawford interview, Oct. 31, 1966; U. S., House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, “Minutes, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 1940-1946” (Committee files, Rayburn Building, Washington, D. C.), Jan. 24, 1941, pp. 70-72. (Hereafter cited as HFAC, “Minutes.”) I am indebted to the Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Dr. Thomas Morgan of Pennsylvania, and the staff Administrator, Mr. Boyd Crawford, for giving me access to the “Minutes” and other materials in the committee files which pertained to Lend-Lease. See also New York Herald-Tribune, Jan. 25, 1941. Bloom’s dislike for Fish was of an earlier vintage. Not only did Bloom despise him for his Roosevelt-baiting, but he had also been forced to deal with Fish’s obstructionist tactics before in committee matters. The story is told on Capitol Hill about the time one of the Democratic leaders—later a Speaker of the House—got so annoyed at Fish that he bluntly labelled him a “shit-ass.” Sol Bloom, who thoroughly abhorred profanity and refused even to listen to an off-color joke, applauded.


31Ibid.; the AIPO poll is from Alfred O. Hero, Jr., The Southerner and World Affairs (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), pp. 97, 101. See also Wayne S. Cole, “America First and the South, 1940-1941,” Journal of Southern History, XXII (Feb., 1956), 36-47; and Alexander DeConde, “The South and Isolationism,” ibid., XXIV (Aug., 1958), 332-46, both of whom come to the same general conclusions as Hero. The two Southerners were Representative Hugh Peterson of Georgia and Senator Robert Reynolds of North Carolina. Representative B. C. Reece of Tennessee also voted against the bill, but he was hardly a typical Southerner in that he was from a traditionally Republican district in that border state. The same was true of Ross Rizley of Oklahoma and John Robsion of Kentucky.
The Administration campaign during the Congressional hearings revolved around two seemingly contradictory approaches. The leadership was generally agreed that mass public support could be gained only by a full debate, even though it was clear from the outset that they had the votes to push the bill through anytime they chose. Even the Times of London flatly stated shortly before the hearings commenced that passage of the bill was assured, and late in January, Roosevelt wrote Harry Hopkins that the Lend-Lease Bill should pass somewhere between February 20 and March 1. The question was not would it pass but could it be the means of achieving a consensus.

At the same time that the Administration was trying to achieve a long-term strategic goal, it was forced by tactical considerations to keep the actual subject matter of the debate as narrow as possible. One foreign observer, Jan Ciechanowski, the Ambassador from the Polish government-in-exile, recognized the problem that Roosevelt faced when he noted that the opponents of Lend-Lease were trying to maneuver the Administration into a general, open statement of policy—what the French call mouvements de mauvaise humeur. Roosevelt was apparently convinced that one step at a time was sufficient—and Lend-Lease was the pending step. Interventionists like Grenville Clark complained that the President was misleading the American public by implying that being an "arsenal of democracy" would be enough. But true to form, Roosevelt preferred to move with great caution and only when he was virtually sure of getting the response he wanted. The President had proved consistently reluctant to discuss long-range policy in any but the vaguest and broadest terms even with his Cabinet and advisers. The idea of public dialogue with his opponents was simply unthinkable. Nor is that as undemocratic a position as it may seem. A "loyal opposition" is an ideal rarely if ever found in American history, and, as with most political debates, the truth in foreign policy usually lies somewhere between the two extremes.

A quick glance at the newspapers of the day clearly indicates which witnesses commanded the most official and public attention. Secretaries Hull, Morgenthau, Stimson, and Knox, and to a lesser degree William Knudsen, presented the Administration position, while the opposition case was put forth by former Ambassador Kennedy, Charles Lindbergh, Norman Thomas, and General Robert Wood of the America First Committee. Additionally, those opposed to the bill forcefully expressed themselves through the various members of the Foreign Affairs and Foreign Relations Committees. Senators Robert


33Jan Ciechanowski, Defeat in Victory, pp. 16-17; Clark to Stimson, Jan. 10, 1941, Stimson Papers.
LaFollette, Jr., Gerald Nye, and Arthur Vandenberg, and Representatives Hamilton Fish, George Tinkham, John Vorys, and Karl Mundt—all Republicans (save LaFollette, who was a Progressive)—carried the burden for the anti-Lend-Lease coalition.

The nature of the debate was essentially the same in both houses of Congress. In the positive sense, the Administration concentrated on one major issue—national security. Its other arguments either stemmed from that basic position or were merely responses to opposition attacks.

The major elements of the Administration’s strategy for the hearings became evident at the very start. As planned, Secretary of State Hull led off with a lengthy survey of the historical and diplomatic background to the world crisis, with a strong emphasis on the aggressive and calculated nature of German and Japanese actions. Although the opposition made no attempt during the hearings to defend the actions of either Germany or Japan, Hull’s strong statements established from the start just who the villains were. After briefly citing the Tripartite Pact as proof of Axis complicity, he attempted to undermine the basic foundation of the isolationist’s position. Noting that many believed Nazi Germany posed no threat to the United States, he argued that without British seapower, the Atlantic Ocean offered little security for the Western Hemisphere. Hull warned that the Germans were attempting to subvert American nations—a reference to Nazi fifth-column efforts in Latin America—and presented British survival as an element of hemisphere defense. His only mention of the bill itself was a brief reference to the need for speed in enacting a bill that would best enable America to provide for its own defense. Fittingly, it was Hull who read into the record a statement that justified the act in terms of international law. He asserted that Germany and Italy were international law-breakers who had violated their legal obligations. Bluntly he noted that international law and neutrality had provided precious little protection for Belgium, Holland, Norway, and Denmark, leaving only the law of self-protection as the practical course for the United States to adopt. Known as a staunch defender of the rule of law in international relations, Hull’s statement was calculated to take the wind from the sails of those who maintained America had a legal obligation to remain truly neutral.

The basic approach of the Administration was clear. The Axis powers were defined as “outlaw” nations, acting in concert. British seapower served as an essential element of the defense of America and the Western Hemisphere, particularly in view of Nazi infiltration of Latin America. Thus, legally justified in terms of self-defense, the

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34 The legislative history of the bill, that is, committee action, amendments, and the like, were different in each house. That is discussed below in Chap. VII.
Lend-Lease Bill should be passed as quickly as possible.35 Secretary Stimson succinctly summarized the Administration’s public position during his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee:

We are really seeking to purchase her aid in our defense. We are buying—not lending. We are buying our own security while we prepare . . . . We are buying the protection which is accorded us by the continuance of the British sea power in the North Atlantic while our own main fleet is busy protecting us in the Pacific . . . . In our own interest—and purely in our own interest—it is good national policy to preserve today a hard-fighting Britain, a Britain which has not been ground down by hard bargains sapping its resources.36

The proof that British and American security were linked rested mainly with the argument that Britain’s survival was militarily necessary for American defense against Hitler. This of course necessitated proving that Germany posed an active threat to the United States. No one seriously disputed the idea that Germany had been aggressive throughout the 1930’s, but the opposition refused to admit that Hitler’s victories in Europe made it necessary for America to wage economic warfare against Germany. The bill’s supporters, particularly Hull, Knox, and Stimson, continually harped on the theme that British seapower made the Atlantic Ocean a barrier to invasion, and Senator Tom Connally, elaborating on that approach, commented that without command of the sea it would become an express highway for attack on the Western Hemisphere.37 Fittingly, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox presented the major arguments along this line. In his statements to both Congressional committees as well as in numerous public speeches he emphasized the historical importance of British seapower in making the Monroe Doctrine meaningful, and he warned that in spite of the development of a strong American Navy, it could not defend two oceans simultaneously. In almost every speech that Knox made during the first three months of 1941 he gave American estimates of the comparative combat strength of the Axis and American navies, should the British fleet be destroyed.38 The statistics were not encouraging. As of January 1, 1941, the Axis powers were superior in every phase of combat naval strength: 20 to 15 in battleships, 75 to 37 in cruisers, 271 to 159 in destroyers, and 284 to 105 in submarines.39 The initial opposition answer to that argument claimed

35HFAC, Hearings, pp. 2-10.
36SFRC, Hearings, p. 87.
37Ibid., p. 242.
38The opposition never seriously challenged the Administration assumption that Britain would not surrender her fleet to Germany.
39HFAC, Hearings, p. 159. The estimate combined the German, Italian, and Japanese navies. Copies of many of the speeches Knox made during this period, all of which followed this same approach, can be found in the Knox Papers, box 4, “speech file.”
that such scare tactics were invalid since any German attack on America would have to come over 3,000 miles of ocean, which would pose enormous logistical problems. They went on to point out that the Japanese Navy was hardly in a position to combine with the Germans in an attack on the United States, and then, in a typical "one American can lick any ten Indians" approach, claimed that American ships were better equipped and better manned anyway. Harold Ickes colorfully summed up this approach when he noted in his diary that they seemed to think like little boys—that the United States could take on the whole world singlehandedly.\textsuperscript{40}

The demand of the opposition that the supporters of the bill demonstrate just where Germany posed any real threat to American security was answered by heading "South of the Border." The refrain began slowly. Hull briefly alluded to German infiltration of Latin America and warned that control of the seas was a prerequisite to controlling such subversion. Stimson presented the problem as one of keeping the war out of America rather than America out of war, but it was Frank Knox who most emphatically warned that Germany's threat to the United States was via Latin America. He bluntly predicted that should we "lose the power to control even a part of those seas, inevitably the wars of Europe and Asia will be transferred to the Americas." In his secret testimony before the Senate committee, Hull was even more explicit. Each of the bill's supporters on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in a seemingly planned maneuver, brought up the subject of German penetration of Latin America, and Hull invariably seized the opening to warn that if Hitler gained control of the Atlantic, then within a few months he would have puppet governments and military bases established in South America. The spectre of Nazi infiltration was not limited to the military and political sphere. Occasional references were also made by pro-Lend-Lease forces to the need of Latin America to maintain its trade with Europe. Both Hull and Knox warned that should Hitler dominate England, then the South American nations would be forced to trade with Germany. In short, the Administration openly presented Germany as a meaningful threat to that most sacred and unchallengeable of traditional American foreign policies, the Monroe Doctrine.\textsuperscript{41}

Though historians today question the extent of the Nazi penetration in Latin America, the American government was apparently honestly fearful of a German attack from that direction. Army Air Corps intelligence had incorrectly assessed Axis air strength as 4,100

\textsuperscript{40}SFRC, \textit{Hearings}, pp. 231-33; Ickes, \textit{The Lowering Clouds}, pp. 421-22.

planes, over and above their European requirements, capable of making the relatively short flight (1,600 nautical miles) from Africa to Natal, Brazil. Thus the military planners believed Germany had the capability of attacking Latin America. General Marshall, as early as October, 1940, asserted that as long as the British fleet remained intact, the Western Hemisphere was in little danger, but should that fleet be eliminated, "the situation would become radically changed."42 The opposition to Lend-Lease was generally forced to concede the major part of this argument since it had to rely on the honesty of Administration witnesses who claimed to have classified knowledge of such Nazi infiltration. Men like Robert Wood, acting chairman of the America First Committee, settled merely for the position that they did not believe Germany would ever find it in her national interest to attack the United States, largely because of the distance involved, and ignored the problem of subversion in South America. The opposition made a brief, feeble attempt to show that the Lend-Lease Bill would violate the Declaration of Panama, a Pan-American agreement prohibiting, among other things, the outfitting of belligerent ships in the neutral Western Hemisphere countries, but that line of reasoning quickly petered out when Hull flatly asserted that the entire general American policy regarding defense of the Western Hemisphere had met with a largely favorable reaction in Latin America, though the Secretary was forced to admit that the United States government had not consulted with those countries about such a unilateral change in their agreements. German propagandists made some tentative moves in the same direction, but nothing came of it because of the general support for the bill in Latin America.43

Two additional approaches were used by the Administration to buttress its claim that British and American security were inextricably intertwined. The aggressive nature of German foreign policy was stressed, and the image of being surrounded by totalitarian powers was regularly invoked. Senator Tom Connally put it plainly when he rhetorically asked Hull: "Is there any possibility of our mollifying Mr. Hitler by pussy-footing a little more than we are or by avoiding a policy of violation of neutrality?" He answered his own question in the negative, and Hull, of course, agreed. During the same meeting of


43SFRC, Hearings, p. 343; HFAC, Hearings, p. 36. Some of the Latin American republics, such as Costa Rica, went so far as to pass resolutions favoring the passage of the Lend-Lease Bill. See State Dept., 740.0011 EW, 1939/9048. German reaction is reported in Morris (Berlin) to Hull, Feb. 3, 1941, ibid., 740.0011 EW, 1939/8092.
the Senate committee, Connally gave Hull the opportunity to discuss the Tripartite Pact, and the Secretary of State labelled it as being aimed at the United States, though he was honest enough to admit it was not the closest sort of co-operation. Still, it was an essential part of the Administration’s “we need the British Navy” argument, for the American Navy was tied down in the Pacific by the Japanese. Senator Claude Pepper of Florida, an ardent interventionist, declared that America did not at present have the power to withstand a totalitarian challenge from both oceans, and Knox and other Administration witnesses stressed the fact that building the necessary two-ocean navy would take at least four to five years.44 Apparently the testimony of the three major military witnesses, Generals Marshall and Brett and Admiral Stark, bore out the Administration case, for nothing to the contrary was ever leaked to the press from those executive sessions. One of the historians who worked on the United States Army’s official history of World War II commented that “the period of 1939-41 is not fully understandable unless one is aware of the part which a military witness played at that time in the decisions of a friendly and trusting Congress.”45 That position is borne out by the dispute that arose between Fish and Chairman Bloom over whether the military men should testify as opposition witnesses and in open session. Clearly, Fish and the opposition placed great stock in the honesty of the military leaders and believed their honesty would result in testimony unfavorable to the Administration position.

Traditional American concern with international law, plus a strong desire publicly to brand Axis actions as illegal as well as dangerous, made the proponents of Lend-Lease eager to find some sort of legal grounds for such an obvious violation of neutrality. From the very outset of the campaign, the opposition had hit at the Lend-Lease Bill as an act of belligerency. Senator Burton Wheeler, in the same speech in which he spoke of the “New Deal’s triple A foreign policy,” claimed that “never before has the Congress of the United States been asked by any President to violate international law.” The Administration position was put into its briefest form by Democratic Senator James Murray who, unlike his fellow Montanan, Burt Wheeler, supported the bill. During Hull’s executive session testimony before the Foreign Relations Committee, Murray asked simply if there had been a breakdown of international law, thus justifying the application of the doctrine of self-defense. Hull, of course, answered that such was the case.46 Secretary Stimson went beyond a mere reference to self-defense and managed to dig up a statement by the International Law

45 Watson, Chief of Staff, p. 8.
Association which not only branded the Axis as law-breakers but also justified such legislation as the Lend-Lease Act. The key provision of the International Law Association’s interpretation of the Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact made that very clear:

In the event of a violation of the pact by a resort to armed force or war by one signatory state against another, the other states may, without thereby committing a breach of the pact or of any rule of international law do all or any of the following things . . . . Decline to observe toward the State violating the pact the duties prescribed by international law, apart from the pact, for a neutral in relation to a belligerent.47

For many who sincerely were worried about the international legality of the Lend-Lease Bill, Stimson’s answer quieted their fears. Those who were primarily concerned with defeating the bill consistently labelled it a violation of international law but did not further pursue the question with any Administration witnesses.

The opposition attack on the Lend-Lease Bill during the Congressional hearings centered around two major themes: the powers granted the President made him a virtual dictator and the bill would, and probably was designed to, get America into the war. The bill’s supporters countered the first of these in a variety of ways. They carefully avoided any detailed discussion of the provisions of the proposed legislation, letting the language of the bill speak for itself. They characterized the world situation as one of extreme and unprecedented danger which required broad executive powers, at the same time referring to similar actions by previous Presidents, and they pleaded with the nation and Congress to put its trust in the man they had elected. Their defense against the claim that Lend-Lease was a “war bill” was the same as that which the Administration had followed with every measure passed since the revision of the Neutrality legislation in November, 1939.

Led by Hamilton Fish, the opposition in the House Foreign Affairs Committee concentrated heavily on the dictator charge. Fish began his questioning of Cordell Hull by saying he assumed the Secretary realized that the Lend-Lease Bill “vests the control of power in the hands of one man and takes away the constitutional power from the Congress.” Hull replied by suggesting that Fish talk to the author of the bill, Henry Morgenthau, since he was there only to discuss the international situation. Opposition witnesses such as Hanford MacNider, ex-commander of the American Legion, asserted that “this legislation under the guise of aid to democracy abroad, destroys our

democratic processes at home," and Representative Bartel Jonkman (R.-Mich.) introduced a statement by the world-renowned international lawyer, John Bassett Moore, which followed the same line:

There can be no doubt that under the guise of certain phraseology the pending bill assumes to transfer the warmaking power from the Congress in its constitutional capacity to the Executive. This is evident upon its face. . . . It is evident that the tide of totalitarianism in government which has swept over many other lands has not only reached our shores, but has gone far to destroy constitutional barriers which, once broken down, are not likely to be restored.48

Writing some twenty years after the Lend-Lease debate, Joseph W. Martin, Jr., of Massachusetts, then House Minority Leader, repeated his original assertion that the Lend-Lease Bill was designed to perpetuate the dominance of the Democratic Party. Although Martin voted for the bill's final passage, he did so out of a desire to promote national unity, though at the time he believed that it upset the proper balance between the legislative and executive branches and threatened the two-party system.49

Such attacks on President Roosevelt were nothing new, and were clearly designed to appeal to those opponents of the bill whose main objections were ad hominen. As he wrote to Stimson after the Secretary had testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: "It was indeed timely that you reminded the Committee members that the national interest would not be served by fettering a power which has existed untrammeled for one hundred and fifty years."50

At one point, obviously annoyed by the implication that the Lend-Lease Bill was designed to trick Congress into giving him power that could be used with reckless abandon, Roosevelt resorted to ridicule to sabotage the opposition's arguments. During his press conference held on January 17, a reporter asked why the President objected to some sort of limitation on his power to transfer elements of the United States Navy under the provisions of the bill, and Roosevelt facetiously replied, "I suppose they better put in standing on my head, too, and a

50Roosevelt to Stimson, Feb. 4, 1941, Stimson Papers. Roosevelt was fully aware of the accusations that abounded concerning his desire to be a militaristic dictator. In an amusing letter to Mackenzie King, the President suggested that the Prime Minister design a white naval uniform to be worn on formal occasions in lieu of the uncomfortable formal attire government leaders had to wear. He mused that he might even try his hand at that for himself, since he was Commander in Chief, but feared that was one precedent he dared not break. It was fortunate that such idle thoughts did not become public, for the vehemence of Roosevelt's opponents brings to mind what happened to President John Adams in a similar situation. Adams had idly wondered whether the President ought to be addressed as "your Majesty" and was forever branded a monarchist. For Roosevelt's letter, see Roosevelt to King, Jan. 18, 1939, Roosevelt Papers, PSF, Gt. Britain, King and Queen, 1938-40.
lot of other things.” Not surprisingly, the phrase received substantial attention in the press, and the general reaction was exactly what the President had aimed at, for the papers generally considered the accusation an insult to Roosevelt’s integrity. Roosevelt was also taken with the remark and repeated it frequently. A few weeks later, when asked what would be the first thing he would do after the Lend-Lease Bill became law, the President laughingly answered: “Go out in the middle of Pennsylvania Avenue and stand on my head; because that is not yet prohibited!”

Secretary Stimson, faced with similar questions during the hearings, responded with an appeal to simple common sense. When Representative Hamilton Fish incorrectly told Stimson that Morgenthau had first denied and then admitted that the Lend-Lease Bill gave the President the power to give away the entire Navy, Stimson stated that he had not come to discuss “fantastic interpretations” of the bill. When Senator LaFollette suggested that the bill permitted Roosevelt to buy the entire British war production and then lend it back to them, Stimson sarcastically answered that such an idea had “never entered my less-intelligent head” and added that he could not imagine any court allowing such an interpretation to stand.

Outside the Congress others picked up the same refrain and let their Congressmen know about it. The Rev. Charles Coughlin, the Roman Catholic priest who spearheaded much of the virulent anti-Roosevelt activity in the country, pictured the bill as a plot designed to destroy private property and business. His magazine, Social Justice, stated that the legislation was not aimed at aiding England but was “concerned, however, with scuttling the last vestige of democracy in the world—American democracy.” Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn was warned by a Baptist minister in Texas that dictatorship was the purpose of such a bill, and Representative Frances Bolton (R.-Ohio), who opposed the bill, exchanged numerous letters with constituents in which they commiserated with each other about the “unlimited authority” that the bill would give the President. Similar letters were read into the record of the committee hearings.

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52 HFAC, Hearings, p. 93; SFRC, Hearings, p. 114.

53 Social Justice, Feb. 3, 1941, as quoted in Charles J. Tull, Father Coughlin and the New Deal (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1965), pp. 227-28. Rayburn wrote few letters and saved copies of even less. His papers at the Sam Rayburn Library in Bonham, Texas, are sparse and virtually non-existent for this period. His research assistant, D. B. Hardeman, has a small collection of Rayburn papers for this period, and I am indebted to him for permitting me to use them. The letter mentioned was dated Jan. 27, 1941, and there are others of a similar vein. Mrs. Bolton, a member of Congress until 1968, was kind enough to permit me to examine her constituent correspondence file on H.R. 1776. The letters referred to above were all dated between January and March, 1941. SFRC, Hearings, pp. 259-61, contains additional letters. Letter dated Feb. 1, 1941, Rayburn Papers (Hardeman Collection).
Rayburn's reply to his disgruntled constituent typified one Administration approach to these attacks. The Speaker noted that the powers granted to the President under Lend-Lease were little compared to those he already had as Commander in Chief of the armed forces and further commented that Roosevelt had never betrayed his trust. In a speech delivered on February 9, Rayburn publicly took the same position.

There has been a great deal of talk about the extraordinary powers which the Lease-Lend Bill confers on the President. The powers are extraordinary because the emergency which they are designed to meet is extraordinary. As the President has said, "The Nation's hands must not be tied when the Nation's life is in danger."

Not surprisingly, the opponents of Lend-Lease were unwilling to place any trust whatsoever in Franklin Roosevelt, in spite of the pleas of men like Rayburn. Their personal hostility to the President showed through time and again in such exchanges as this one between Morgenthau and Congressman George Tinkham. After Tinkham said that the proposed bill contained no guarantee that American interests would be protected, the following exchange ensued:

Mr. Morgenthau: "I am speaking for myself and am more than willing to leave it to the President of the United States to make the best bargain possible."

Mr. Tinkham: "I am very sorry to say that I have not the same confidence in the President that you have."

Mr. Morgenthau: "That possibly, if you do not mind my saying, is why you are in the minority."

Mr. Tinkham: "In the majority do you count all the British as well as some of the Americans?" 

The references made by the bill's proponents to historical examples of broad assumptions of power by the President usually came in casual and brief comments. For example, Hull told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the existing situation was as grave as the one Lincoln faced at the outbreak of the Civil War and would have to be handled just as authoritatively. Although no witness ever gave an organized presentation tracing the historical justifications for exercising such powers, the Treasury Department prepared a list of such precedents and forwarded it to Chairman Sol Bloom of the House.

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54 Letter dated Feb. 1, 1941, Rayburn Papers, (Hardeman Collection); typewritten copy of speech made by the Hon. Sam Rayburn, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Feb. 9, 1941, entitled "Defend America Now," supplied through the courtesy of the Sam Rayburn Library, Bonham, Texas; the exchange between Morgenthau and Tinkham is in HFAC, Hearings, p. 65.

Foreign Affairs Committee. The memorandum emphasized that there was insufficient understanding of the powers the President possessed as Commander in Chief of the armed forces. It cited the opinion of Supreme Court Justice George Sutherland in the Curtiss-Wright case as the legal authority for granting the President a broad degree of discretion in conducting foreign affairs and followed with a long list of occasions when various Presidents had done just that. Historians might not have been impressed with the references, but the members of Congress were rarely historians. Jefferson's purchasing of the Louisiana Territory, Lincoln's blockade proclamation, Monroe's enunciation of the Monroe Doctrine, and Wilson's policy in Mexico were all cited. Each case was accompanied by quotations from the opposition of the day, all predicting a dictatorship and other horrible consequences stemming from the President's unconstitutional assumption of power.56 The reference to the Curtiss-Wright case, which also cropped up in some of the public testimony, was repeated in the report made by the majority of the Foreign Affairs Committee when it forwarded the bill to the floor of the House. Mr. Justice Sutherland's decision was a strong point in the defense of the Lend-Lease Bill, for its language was clear and unequivocal. Sutherland summed up the essence of his position when he wrote:

It is quite apparent that if, in the maintenance of our international relations, embarrassment—perhaps serious embarrassment—is to be avoided and success for our aims achieved, congressional legislation, which is to be made effective through the negotiation and inquiry within the international field, must often accord to the President a degree of discretion and freedom from statutory restriction which would not be admissible were domestic affairs alone involved.57

The key part of the Administration's handling of the dictator charge was to avoid the issue. Not only did the witnesses stay away from any point-by-point refutation of the accusation, but even the reports of the majority on the two Congressional committees that dealt with the bill failed to come to grips with it. The House Foreign

56Memo entitled “The President's Powers under H.R. 1776 and some Prior Instances of Presidential Power,” HFAC, “file on H.R. 1776.” The document is not dated, but the forwarding letter indicates it was written sometime in January, 1941. A similar document titled “re: Charge that H. R. 1776 vests broader authority in the President than had ever before been vested in that officer” is in Treasury Dept. files, “Lend-Lease Bill.” The document is not dated.

The Congressional Debate

Affairs Committee touched on the problem only briefly in the Majority Report by stating that the bill was "wholly consistent with our Constitution." The Senate Majority Report merely claimed that "our national defense is provided . . . with a wholly desirable and constitutional adaptability to rapidly changing and unpredictable world conditions." In addition, the Senate report strongly referred to the various limitations on Presidential power which the bill contained, particularly the clauses requiring consultation with the military chiefs before transferring any defense articles not specifically made for transfer under the Lend-Lease Act.59

The Republicans, and those few Democrats who also opposed the bill, remained unconvinced. The House Minority Report used the strongest language, stating that the "power requested is too much to give any man at a time when the country is at peace." The report went on to assert that the "bill gives the President unlimited, unprecedented, and unpredictable powers" and warned that "we cannot repeal war; we cannot repeal bankruptcy; and we cannot repeal dictatorship." The Senate minority was only slightly less harsh. In the conclusion of the report it dismissed the claim of the Administration that the bill was designed either to aid Britain or defend America and instead claimed that a realistic reading showed that the legislation would grant the President dictatorial powers to take the country into war.60

One minor aspect of the broad charge that the bill created an executive dictatorship was the accusation that the "revolving fund" established by the legislation violated the constitutional provision against appropriating funds for the military beyond a two-year period. The revolving fund permitted any money paid to the United States under the Lend-Lease Act to be used until June 30, 1946, to buy defense articles. Stimson, in his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, submitted a list of eleven previous laws that had created similar funds, and the Senate Majority Report on the bill stated that the constitution was concerned with the maintenance of a large standing army, not the purchase of defense articles.61

The opposition’s denunciation of the bill as a measure that would get America into the war showed up at the outset of the debate and

became the keystone of their attack in the Senate. The basic Administration argument on this question was neatly synthesized by an exchange between Cordell Hull and Senator Theodore Green of Rhode Island during Hull’s executive testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Green asked if it would be fair to say the Administration position was “that the passage of this bill is less likely to lead to war than its non-passage.” After some hemming and hawing, Hull replied: “That has been our position all the while.” The opening statements of all the Administration witnesses placed little if any emphasis on Lend-Lease as a means of avoiding war, instead concentrating on presenting British survival as necessary to American defense, but the repeated attacks of the opposition forced the bill’s supporters to defend the act as a measure designed to keep America out of war. Stimson, probably the most interventionist of all Roosevelt’s Cabinet members, parried the war question by claiming that Hitler, not Lend-Lease, would get the United States into the war.

Justice Felix Frankfurter’s ingenuously worded title for the bill, “An Act Further to Promote the Defense of the United States,” indicated at the outset just what approach the Administration would adopt. Its argument entailed more than just saying that the security of Great Britain was essential to the national defense of the United States. The main point was the assertion that the Lend-Lease Act was the last hope of enabling Britain and her Allies to win without the aid of American manpower. When Senator Claude Pepper asked Hull if the bill were not designed to stop Hitler without sending over American boys, that is, if it were not the cheapest means of defending the country, Hull agreed, and commented that we hoped to avoid having to make a decision on sending troops to Europe. Of the eighteen pro-Lend-Lease congressmen quoted by Charles Beard in his study of this part of the debate, only five failed to warn their listeners specifically that the Lend-Lease Bill was no guarantee that America would be able to keep out of the war, though each did emphasize that it was probably the nation’s last chance of avoiding active participation in the conflict.

Norman Thomas, the leader of the Socialist Party of America, presented the opposition’s points most clearly in his testimony before the

62 It should be noted at the start of any examination of this aspect of the debate that Charles A. Beard in his study President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War, pp. 44-68, has extracted from the Congressional Record statements by forty Representatives and Senators on the question of the Lend-Lease Bill as a “war bill.” The quotations are accurate and not taken out of context and represent an excellent presentation of both sides of this argument.

63 Hull, “Executive Testimony,” pp. 125-26. Stimson’s approach was planned before he testified. See memo from McCloy to Stimson, “for cross examination,” dated Jan. 29-30, 1941, Stimson Papers. McCloy’s memo posed the expected questions, and in this case the answer appears in the margin in Stimson’s handwriting.

64 Hull, “Executive Testimony,” pp. 106-10; Beard, President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War, pp. 44-55.
House Foreign Affairs Committee. He surmised that President Roosevelt could have only one of two purposes in proposing such legislation: either to take an enormous gamble that the limited war the bill guaranteed would not spread or to take the country into war gradually, knowing the public would not stand for an outright declaration of war.\footnote{HFAC, Hearings, p. 320.}

Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio hit at the most vulnerable part of the Administration position during an exchange with Senator Alben Barkley on the floor of the Senate. Shortly after Barkley, the Majority Leader, had made an impassioned speech defending the Lend-Lease Bill, Taft obtained the floor and proceeded to compliment Barkley on the force of his arguments. In fact, Taft sarcastically noted, "every argument he made might have been just as forceful on a resolution to declare war on Germany," and the Ohio Republican wondered why Barkley, if he believed what he had just said, did not ask for just such a war declaration. Barkley weakly replied that a declaration of war was not necessary in order to achieve the purpose of the Lend-Lease Act, and he also surmised that a declaration of war against Germany would probably not be as effective as the legislation being considered. Taft quickly realized Barkley's dilemma and proceeded to take advantage of it. He asked the Majority Leader if he thought an American declaration of war would be of no help to England. Barkley could not admit that, for to do so would be a virtual confession that American preparedness was so poor that the nation would not dare lend or lease military goods. He vaguely answered that he would cross that bridge when necessary and, in spite of further goading by Taft, would say nothing more. Again the pro-Lend-Lease forces had made it clear that they would not be drawn into any meaningful discussions of the long-term implications of the proposed legislation. Although Senator Taft's questioning was the most insistent on this point, the idea appeared repeatedly inside and outside Congress, and the Administration's answer was always basically the same. Congressman Hamilton Fish asked Stimson: "Is it not rather cowardly of us, if England is fighting our battle, not to go into the war?" The Secretary replied, "I am not going to pursue this line of argument. We are not concerned with it in this bill." Hull testified that a declaration of war would defeat the whole purpose of the Lend-Lease Bill, which was to delay our entry until we were prepared to withstand any attack—not meaning that America should then unilaterally declare war, but "then we can look anybody in the face."\footnote{CR, 77th Cong., 1st sess., LXXXVII, pt. 1, Feb. 17, 1941, pp. 1039-40; HFAC, Hearings, p. 102; Hull, "Executive Testimony," p. 23. Taft's papers are deposited in the Library of Congress but are closed to scholars.}
The Administration forces won an amusing verbal victory on this question during the testimony of one of the minor opposition witnesses, Hanford MacNider. MacNider had claimed the Lend-Lease Bill was tantamount to a declaration of war, and Congressman Pete Jarman of Alabama noted that Congress alone had the power to declare war. Jarman then went on to point out that if the bill surely meant war and was still passed by the Congress, then Congress had effectively exercised its Constitutional function.67

As the opposition attack on the bill as a “war measure” mounted, the Administration took a diplomatic step to back up the image of Lend-Lease as the last hope of keeping America out of war. Presidential Adviser Harry Hopkins, in Great Britain on a fact-finding mission for Roosevelt, assisted Churchill in writing a speech, much of which was clearly aimed at warding off American fears that the Lend-Lease Act was a prelude to sending their troops overseas. The Prime Minister delivered the address over the radio on February 9, 1941, and after speaking optimistically of British military actions in North Africa, closed with a promise:

Here is the answer I will give President Roosevelt: Put your confidence in us. Give us your faith and your blessing, and, under Providence, all will be well.

We shall not fail or falter; and we shall not weaken or tire. Neither the sudden shock of battle, nor the long-drawn trials of vigilance and exertion will wear us down. Give us the tools, and we will finish the job.68

The feeling of frustration experienced by the opposition because of the Administration’s tactic of keeping the discussion as narrow as possible was emotionally expressed by the aging Senator Hiram Johnson of California. The old Progressive, during his questioning of Treasury Secretary Morgenthau, made a brief but vigorous speech in which he claimed that the only issue at stake was whether or not Hitler was the threat some people made him out to be. He complimented Virginia’s Senator Carter Glass for being the only one honest enough to openly support a declaration of war, and he pleaded:

Do not get off on a tangent, like we are going to do with the bill here, that some of us believe will make a dictatorship in this country and that others believe begins a totalitarian government in this country. Let us not monkey with the subject and let us not dally with it, but let us go to bat at once as to whether we want war or whether we do not want war.69

His statement was unsophisticated and overly simplistic, but it contained a certain rugged honesty about it. He fully recognized that

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69SFRC, Hearings, p. 73.
Congress no longer accepted the premises that had resulted in the passage of the famous piece of isolationist legislation which bore his name, but he wanted to go down fighting.

Clearly the most successful tactic was the deliberate refusal of the Administration leaders to co-operate with opposition attempts to turn the Lend-Lease hearings into a broad debate on over-all foreign policy. One of the more obvious examples of this strategy was the question of convoying. The issue had come up upon numerous occasions during White House meetings, usually at the prompting of Henry Stimson. The Secretary of War asked the same question that the opponents of Lend-Lease later posed: How would the war materials Britain needed be delivered in the face of an increasingly effective German submarine blockade? In spite of such pleadings, Roosevelt had steadfastly refused to make any public or private decision on the matter. At his press conference of January 21, the President flatly denied that he had ever considered providing escorts for British convoys, yet the very next day he privately admitted to Stimson that he had been thinking about the possibility of convoying and a diplomatic break with the Axis. That same evening Stimson gave Roosevelt a “sombre paper” that summarized the over-all situation in the light of the Lend-Lease Bill. The memorandum, which had been read and approved by Knox, Marshall, and Stark, assumed that Germany planned to invade England during the summer of 1941 but belittled the amount of aid which Lend-Lease could actually provide before that time. The paper emphasized that initially the bill would act primarily as an important morale boost for the British and warned that the utmost speed in getting it passed and implemented was necessary if the aid were to become effective by 1942. It ended with a strong recommendation that American warships convoy supplies to Britain. Stimson wrote in his diary that night that “it was altogether a very interesting, indeed almost thrilling evening. So I came back very well satisfied with what had happened.” Considering Stimson’s ardent support for convoying, only a favorable decision by Roosevelt on that matter could have left the normally pessimistic Secretary of War so enthused.70

Even without Roosevelt’s decision on convoying, if there were one, the two military secretaries, Stimson and Knox, faced a personal dilemma during their testimony before the Congressional committees. Both were quite convinced that convoying was necessary if Lend-Lease was to be effective, yet to admit that fact might well defeat the Lend-Lease Act itself. Their solution involved a classic case of misdi-

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rection. When Senator Robert LaFollette asked Stimson if he interpreted the Lend-Lease Bill as giving the President the authority to convoy the goods transferred under the act, Stimson replied that he did not think so, but he went on to point out that the question did not matter since "as Commander-in-Chief I think he already had that power." Although the leadership ultimately accepted an amendment that stated that nothing in the bill could be considered authorization for convoying, the Administration never retreated from the position that the President had the Constitutional power to order such escorting without the approval of Congress. The Majority Report of the House Foreign Affairs Committee stated that the amendment was included only to avoid any doubt on the issue and noted that even without the amendment it believed that the bill did not in any way enlarge the authority of the Navy to convoy shipping. The opponents of Lend-Lease carried this argument to the very end of the debate. They seized upon the statements of the Administration that the President already had the power to authorize convoying and accused the bill's supporters of amending the bill merely for the purpose of confusing the issue. As Senator Guy Gillette of Iowa claimed on the floor of the Senate: "The American people . . . know that the use of vessels as convoys either for British or American ships would inevitably result in a state of war." Secretary Knox admitted as much during his testimony at the Congressional hearings, but the Administration still managed to avoid any discussion of the real question—would it order the convoying of the ships bringing Lend-Lease goods to Britain? 71

Ironically, one of the Administration's key witnesses, Cordell Hull, provided the opposition with a troublesome means of attacking the attempt to limit carefully the range of discussion. After Hull finished his opening statement on the first day of hearings in the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Congressman Luther Johnson innocuously inquired whether Hull believed the proposed bill was "absolutely necessary for the defense of the United States?" Hull could not bring himself to give such a blanket approval and opaquely commented that he had "been very unwilling to be driven" to that conclusion. He further qualified his position by flatly stating that the Lend-Lease Bill had been prepared in the Treasury Department and that Morgenthau would discuss the actual provisions of the legislation. George Tinkham, the isolationist Republican from Massachusetts, seized upon Hull's apparent admission of ignorance about the provisions of the bill and feigned shock that the "premier" of the Cabinet had not been consulted on such a critical measure. Hull tried to parry the attack by

claiming he had been consulted on the foreign policy aspects of the legislation, but the damage was done.\textsuperscript{72}

By indirectly violating the Administration’s strategy, Hull put Morgenthau in a very uncomfortable position.\textsuperscript{73} Not only did the Administration wish to avoid any discussion of the long-term implications of the bill, but Morgenthau himself was suspect in the eyes of many Congressmen as being overly sympathetic to the British, as well as being anti-German because he was a Jew. Worst of all, to pin authorship on one member of the government would defeat at the start any hope of fragmenting the opposition assault by means of restricting each Administration witness to his narrow area of official competence. In addition, the Treasury Department was worried that the Congress might find out that the British had actually helped to draft the bill, and all agreed that public knowledge of that fact would hurt its chances.\textsuperscript{74}

When Morgenthau appeared before the Foreign Affairs Committee he attempted to anticipate the problem by stating that he assumed the committee was primarily interested in information on the state of British finances, but that did little good. Hamilton Fish straightforwardly asked Morgenthau if he had authored the bill, and the Secretary proceeded to give a description of the drafting process which was somewhat misleading. Although he left out only the names of Purvis and Phillips when he listed those who had been consulted, the over-all impression was that the original draft had been the work of the legislative drafting commission of the House. When Fish asked if the Treasury had initiated the bill, Morgenthau gave the technical truth by denying it. The bill had actually been initiated by the President, but in the more honest sense of the word the Treasury had certainly been the initiator. Under further questioning by Fish, Morgenthau implied that the bill had originated with President Roosevelt and Speaker Sam Rayburn.\textsuperscript{75}

The same problem arose again during the Senate hearings. During executive testimony Hull had again described the Treasury Department as the principal author of the bill and had admitted he had not studied it for language or non-diplomatic matters. Morgenthau attempted to forestall any questions by stating he had come to testify only on financial matters, but Senators Robert LaFollette and Hiram

\textsuperscript{72}HFAC, Hearings, pp. 8, 19.

\textsuperscript{73}The anger in the Treasury Department over Hull’s actions must have been quite intense, for Edward Foley, then the General Counsel in that department, when he was interviewed twenty-five years later, still recalled vividly that Hull had gone against policy and instructions. Foley interview, Nov. 3, 1966.

\textsuperscript{74}Harry White brought this up when Morgenthau instructed him to work with Purvis and Phillips during the initial drafting stages. Morgenthau Diary, Jan. 3, 1941, 344:256-57.

\textsuperscript{75}HFAC, Hearings, pp. 51, 57-58.
Johnson were not to be put off so easily. Morgenthau finally characterized the legislation as "a product of many brains" but stated he supported it in its entirety.76

Although the Administration was less than frank in its handling of this question, it was hardly of the essence. Senator Barkley hit at the heart of the question when he told the Foreign Relations Committee: "I wish merely to state that regardless of who wrote the bill, whether it was written by a taxicab driver or the Attorney General of the United States, the language speaks for itself. It is plain enough for anybody to understand, it seems to me, regardless of who had anything to do with the writing of the bill."77 The opposition continually claimed during this argument that its only purpose was to find out who it could question about the specific provisions in the bill, yet anytime a specific question about the meaning of a section of the proposed legislation came up, they received a straight, if strictly limited answer from one or another of the government’s witnesses. Representative Karl Mundt could complain that the Lend-Lease Bill had been secretly written and "placed before us, like a baby in a basket on our doorstep,"78 but the fact remained that the Administration publicly supported it.

The examples of the Administration’s indirection and evasion in answering broad and speculative questions are innumerable. Many times the questions were loaded, such as when Representative Frances Bolton asked Hull if he thought the present crisis justified giving the President virtual totalitarian powers. Hull replied by merely expressing the hope that nothing would delay the passage of the bill. When a frustrated George Tinkham accused Hull of being evasive, the Secretary replied that he appreciated the compliment. Stimson summed up the over-all approach of the Administration witnesses when he wrote in his diary that he had been able to prevent Senator LaFollette from "going into the irrelevant matters of my own opinions."79

The most meaningful refutation of the attacks made on Great Britain’s motives and honesty came through the testimony of Treasury Secretary Morgenthau. The statistics that he presented were enormously persuasive, and the fact that Britain had authorized their release was far more convincing of British candor than any verbal

76Hull, "Executive Testimony,” pp. 73-78, 158. SFRC, Hearings, pp. 33-36. Charles Beard, Roosevelt and the Coming of the War, pp. 24-30, discusses the authorship question and strongly implies that the Administration’s purpose was to hide the true purpose of the bill, which he claims was to get the United States into the war.

77SFRC, Hearings, p. 58. Senator Guy Gillette facetiously commented that although Barkley had accepted the role of foster-father of the bill, there had apparently been some promiscuity on the maternal side. Barkley retorted that even so, it was still legitimate. Ibid., p. 60.


79HFAC, Hearings, pp. 46-47; Stimson Diary, Jan. 29, 1941.
argument. The only possible way to attack that presentation was either to prove that Britain had given the American government false figures or to call Henry Morgenthau a liar when he stated that those statistics corresponded with Treasury Department estimates. They found it impossible to do the former and were unwilling to resort to the latter. Morgenthau’s consistent honesty with the Congress, such as exhibited in his refusal to violate the spirit of the Johnson Debt-Default Act, had won for him a grudging respect even among the isolationists. It was within the rules to accuse Franklin Roosevelt of virtually anything, but the Cabinet was usually treated with courtesy and trust. The figures Morgenthau submitted were extensive, but boiled down to their essentials, they showed that Britain would run up a dollar deficit, over and above estimated dollar receipts, of $1,464,000,000 by January 1, 1942. His questioners attempted to prove that the British Empire, particularly Canada, was not contributing its fair share, but Morgenthau easily fielded those questions. When he finished it was clear that even if the opposition’s complaints about the Empire’s dollar balances were correct, those dollars were not sufficient to meet the deficit anyway. Morgenthau anticipated one of the opposition’s potential arguments when he introduced a table comparing the tax burden of Americans and the British. In every case they were substantially higher on the British side of the ledger. For a married couple with two children, earning ten thousand dollars per year, the English paid $3,451 in income taxes while their American counterparts paid only $440. British corporation taxes were at a rate of $24\frac{1}{2}$ per cent compared to the American corporate tax rate of 24 per cent. Most impressive of all to the layman was the fact that the British paid a tax on alcoholic beverages which was over five times that paid in the United States.81

Morgenthau’s response to honest questions regarding the British financial situation was invariably straightforward and informative. Senator Arthur Vandenberg made a lengthy effort to get the Secretary to admit that Britain had substantial assets available to her that she had not made use of, but Morgenthau had a reasonable answer for each question. Senator Nye also attempted to undermine the figures that the British had submitted, but Morgenthau invariably defended those statistics and was able to explain some minor differences between them and some official American estimates of British assets. Since the opposition later adopted the plan of loaning money to Britain as a tactical maneuver, it is difficult to assess the success of

80 The principal exception to this rule of courtesy was Representative George Tinkham of Massachusetts, who was repeatedly rude and insulting during the hearings, particularly toward Cordell Hull; see HPAC, Hearings, pp. 17-31.

Morgenthau’s testimony, but it is probable that the opposition’s failure to make any meaningful dents in that testimony contributed to their decision to attempt to modify instead of defeat the Lend-Lease Bill. At any rate, the minority reports of both committees supported the concept of aiding Britain by some means other than the Lend-Lease Act. 82

In spite of Henry Morgenthau’s highly effective testimony regarding the sorry state of British finances, a large and vocal minority remained convinced that Great Britain had fooled the American government and was about to take the United States for a free ride, just as they supposedly had in World War I. Obviously, the old shadow of unpaid war debts hung over the entire debate, yet ironically, those who proposed a loan to England instead of the Lend-Lease “giveaway” were the very ones who had been most concerned over the World War I war debts. As other historians have pointed out, Anglophobia had long been the mainstay of a portion of isolationist sentiment in America, and this was no exception. 83

This sentiment manifested itself in various forms. Senator Robert Taft, in a speech before the New York State Bar Association, claimed that the bill would “make Uncle Sam the best and biggest Santa Claus the world has ever seen.” Representative Frances Bolton wrote one of her constituents that the United States was being asked to do more for Britain than her Dominions were doing. Senators Burton Wheeler and Gerald Nye announced they would introduce a resolution calling on the President to determine the war aims and secret treaties of the belligerents, and Senator D. W. Clark of Idaho asserted that England was not fighting for democracy but for “gold, trade, commerce and the maintenance of their ruling classes.” With the exception of refuting factual error, the Administration merely accentuated the positive aspects of its proposal and ignored the anti-British attacks that regularly occurred. 84

The opposition eventually supported an amendment to the Lend-Lease Bill calling for a loan of two billion dollars to Great Britain, but

82 Morgenthau’s testimony is in HFAC, Hearings, pp. 51-83, and SFRC, Hearings, pp. 9-76, 80-83. The British financial statistics that Morgenthau made available to the committees are printed in each hearing. Vandenberg’s questioning is in ibid., pp. 16-27, and Nye’s is in ibid., pp. 39-52. No mention of unused British assets is made in either of the two minority reports. The Senate Minority Report on H.R. 1776 endorsed aid to Britain in a negative fashion by merely saying Lend-Lease was unnecessary since the United States was already aiding Britain to the utmost of its ability; see p. 6. The House Minority Report on H.R. 1776 began with the statement that “we are for all aid to Britain short of war.” See p. 13.


such a move hardly demonstrates any real desire on the part of the isolationists to aid England. Many of the amendment’s supporters had earlier made statements so critical of Great Britain that it was apparent that, forced to choose the lesser of two evils, they supported a loan only in hopes of defeating the Lend-Lease Bill. Senator Bennett Clark of Missouri, during his questioning of Undersecretary of the Treasury Daniel Bell, attempted to point out that it would be foolish to pass a bill that had no financial limits, particularly in view of Britain’s failure to pay her World War I debts. Yet he had no qualms about supporting a move to give Britain a loan.

The intense distrust of British motives and methods, born of the experience of World War I and older strains of Anglophobia rooted in the Populist Revolt, showed through in the testimony time after time. Former Wisconsin Governor Philip F. LaFollette, the brother of Senator Robert LaFollette, stated bluntly that the purpose of the Lend-Lease Act was “to guarantee to Britain an overwhelming victory, regardless of the consequences of war for the people of the United States.” Senator Nye read some passages from the journals and letters of a British politician during World War I which showed the British leaders to have been highly materialistic and primarily concerned with power politics rather than ideals. He asked the witness then testifying, Henry Morgenthau, whether he thought current British leadership had a higher purpose. Morgenthau refused to comment, but Nye’s inference was unmistakable. Yet Nye and LaFollette both supported the loan amendment.

The Lend-Lease debate brought to the surface all the old shibboleths about Europe and Great Britain: imperialism was a bad as fascism; European power politics were un-American; trickery was to be expected of the corrupt British bankers and munitions-makers; Britain had been the enemy since 1776; and so on. Representative Martin Sweeney, a professional Irishman from Cleveland, Ohio, summed it all up when, shortly after the Lend-Lease Act passed, he sarcastically proposed a new battle hymn sung to the tune of “God Bless America.”

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85 Manfred Jonas, “Pro-Axis Sentiment and American Isolationism,” The Historian, XXIX, no. 2 (Feb., 1967), 236, all too casually makes that assumption. He admits that the motives of some of those supporting the amendment are suspect but still concludes that anti-British attitudes were not a key aspect of isolationism. The hearings and floor debates over the Lend-Lease Bill do not bear him out.

86 SFRC, Hearings, pp. 76-80. On Jan. 23, 1941, the New York Times commented that it appeared the Republicans had changed their strategy of trying to defeat the Lend-Lease Bill and instead were trying to substitute loans or grants for the broad extension of Presidential powers.

87 SFRC, Hearings, pp. 50-52, 263.
God save America from British rule:
Stand beside her and guide her
From the schemers who would make of her a fool.
From Lexington to Yorktown,
From blood-stained Valley Forge,
God save America
From a king named George.88

Although the pro-Lend-Lease forces made no serious attempt to cut off debate, one of their constant themes was the need for speed in passing the bill. The Administration and certain members of the military were thoroughly convinced that the real crisis in Europe would come within sixty to ninety days.89 Although Stimson and others publicly and privately admitted that Lend-Lease’s main contribution during 1941 would be to British morale rather than war materials, all emphasized that morale was as critical a factor as any other. Henry Morgenthau even went so far as to assert that if the Lend-Lease Bill did not pass, “there is nothing for Great Britain to do but stop fighting.”90

Those members of the opposition who conceded that aid to Britain was necessary also usually admitted that speed was essential. Although heated arguments arose whenever the committee chairman attempted to speed up the debate, most Congressmen accepted the idea that if aid were to help the British, it had to arrive quickly. Representative Hamilton Fish, in a letter to the New York Times, presented the one significant attack on the Administration’s request for speed. He cited Stimson and Knox as his authority for saying aid to Britain under Lend-Lease would not reach Britain until 1942 and then concluded that the only way the United States could provide meaningful assistance during the so-called sixty- to ninety-day crisis was to give away part of the Navy. Since Roosevelt had said he would not do that, the only possible purpose of such a sweeping grant of powers was the acquisition of power itself.91

The last major Administration argument in favor of the Lend-Lease Bill was the assertion that it would assist in organizing the defense industry in the United States. This argument was primarily advanced


89Stimson and Knox referred to this sixty- to ninety-day crisis numerous times. For example see HFAC, Hearings, p. 151; SFRC, Hearings, p. 201.


91Letter from Hamilton Fish to the editor, New York Times, Jan. 31, 1941. See HFAC, Hearings, pp. 116-18, for an example of attempts to speed up the debate.
by Secretary of War Stimson. Before both the Senate and House committees, Stimson gave the same pitch: the Lend-Lease Bill would eliminate the chaos that had characterized the manufacture of war goods in the United States for the preceding two years. This would be done in three ways. First, virtually all ordering would be done by the United States government, regardless of the ultimate destination. Second, such unified ordering would result in the standardization of weapons among the Allies, which would increase over-all efficiency. Third, the distribution of goods under the Lend-Lease plan would be done by those persons primarily interested in the security of the United States.92

The opposition attempted to create a dispute on this issue in February, when Senator Burton Wheeler released to the press some statistics regarding American air strength which had probably been presented in executive session testimony by Generals Marshall and Brett. Stimson's subordinates said the figures were accurate but advised against getting into any open argument with Wheeler. In an earlier radio speech, Wheeler had claimed that five-sixths of America's aircraft output was going to Great Britain. The Senator's violation of executive testimony security prompted Roosevelt to comment that Wheeler's disclosures must have been most interesting and satisfactory to Hitler. With that exception, the Administration generally refused to answer Wheeler's attacks, and the issue died out.93

The main challenge by the opposition to the argument that the Lend-Lease Bill would aid the American preparedness program came in the form of an attack on the President's potential power to transfer elements of the United States Navy under the bill's provisions. Roosevelt had originally treated such ideas as ridiculous, but the Administration's persistent refusal to accept an amendment to that effect convinced many that it might not be so ridiculous after all. This fear was accentuated by the testimony of Wendell Willkie before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in which he suggested that the British should be given five to ten destroyers per month. That particular piece of testimony had repercussions within the Administration, for Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox had previously stated to the same committee that he opposed any further transfers of American naval

92HFAC, Hearings, pp. 87-89. SFRC, Hearings, pp. 85-86. A memo entitled "Possible Questions Which May Arise from Hoover's Letter of January 15, 1951 [sic], prepared by John McCloy and Arthur Palmer, annotated by Henry L. Stimson, dated Jan. 16, 1941, Stimson Papers, lists some examples ranging from barriers to the exchange of airplanes to the law that limited the transfer of dental sets to one per person.

vessels. There is some evidence that Willkie made his suggestion on the basis of talks with President Roosevelt, though the day after Willkie testified, Knox and Roosevelt met at the White House and when the Secretary of the Navy emerged he stated he still held his original views. Although the opposition did not succeed in attaching to the bill an amendment prohibiting such transfers, a substantial number of Congressmen voted for such an amendment while still ardently supporting the Lend-Lease Bill itself.

The opposition made one other attempt to attack the proposed grant of powers which the leadership completely ignored in the public debate. Led by Representative George Tinkham and Senator Robert Reynolds, they proposed amendments to the Lend-Lease Bill which would have listed those nations that could receive such aid. In each case the purpose of the amendment was to prevent any Lend-Lease from going to the Soviet Union. Fears were expressed by some that the removal of the "moral embargo" on trade with the Soviet Union, which had occurred during the Lend-Lease hearings, was a first step toward appeasing "homicidal, communistic" Russia. Although many of those who supported such a campaign were honestly distrustful of the Soviets, it appears that in this case the overwhelming majority of those who supported it did so primarily in hopes of defeating or at least somehow limiting the powers granted the President in the Lend-Lease Bill.

The Administration, which knew of German plans to invade Russia and thus suspected that the day might come when aiding Russia would be in the national interest, refused to discuss the issue in terms of aiding any specific nation except Great Britain and contented itself with the evasive and misleading comment that no one knew where Hitler would attack next, therefore the utmost flexibility was required in the Lend-Lease Act. This tactic was apparently most successful, for in July, 1941, *Fortune* magazine stated that during the Lend-Lease debates the influence of the Russian question had been negligible.

One offshoot of the isolationist approach was presented during the Lend-Lease hearings by Charles A. Lindbergh. Made famous by his solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean in 1927, Lindbergh had remained in the public eye because of his expertise in aviation and the tragedy

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95 Rep. G. Tinkham in the CR, 77th Cong., 1st sess., LXXXVII, pt. 1, Jan. 29, 1941, p. 383. Raymond H. Dawson, *The Decision to Aid Russia, 1941: Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1959), p. 40, presents a persuasive case for this point of view. He found that only five of those who supported the amendments proposed by Tinkham and Reynolds actually were true supporters of the Lend-Lease Bill.

96 Dawson, *The Decision to Aid Russia*, pp. 31-32, 41.
of the kidnapping-murder of his child. His visits to Germany in the late 1930's, which had received great publicity from both German and American sources, left with him the strong impression that Hitler's Germany was destined to conquer Europe. During his testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee one member asked Lindbergh which side he hoped would win, and Lindbergh answered "neither." To Lindbergh the question was meaningless since he believed that there was no way to prevent a German victory.97 Lindbergh's primary argument was that America should concentrate on building her air power so as to insure that no other nation would dare attack her, although in his opening statements before each committee he claimed that geography provided both Europe and the Western Hemisphere with natural and impregnable defenses. In his words: "Personally, I do not believe it is possible for either America or Europe to invade the other successfully by air, or even by a combination of air, land, and sea, unless an internal collapse precedes invasion." He consistently denied that he hoped for a German victory in Europe, but he flatly stated that Germany would remain the dominant power in Europe and that America had to co-operate with any nation that controlled Europe. It is impossible to tell whether he advocated such a policy out of a desire to work with the Germans, whom he greatly admired, or out of a belief that the United States had no choice, but either way the result was the same.98

Although the crowds that attended Lindbergh's testimony were the largest and most vocal of the hearings, his appeals for a negotiated peace did not strike a responsive chord with either Congress or the public. Generally the Administration answered his arguments indirectly. Its indictment of Germany as an aggressive threat to the United States and its claim that England could win with American aid both struck at the core of Lindbergh's case. Lend-Lease supporters in the House were content to let Lindbergh disappear from the spotlight as soon as possible. He underwent a lengthy interrogation in the Foreign Relations Committee from Senators Barkley and Connally, but both of them seemed primarily interested in getting Lindbergh to state his views as clearly and unequivocally as possible. Only Senator Claude Pepper actually attempted directly to attack Lindbergh's testimony. Pepper hit hard at Hitler's failure to live up to his bargain at Munich and questioned the wisdom of trying to negotiate with such a man. He repeatedly got Lindbergh to oppose flatly any sort of aid to Britain and in doing so managed to isolate Lindbergh from the major-

97New York Times, Jan. 24, 1941. The report noted that Lindbergh’s answer was drowned out by boos and catcalls from his supporters, who considered the question unfair and loaded.
98HFAC, Hearings, pp. 373, 385.
ity of the general public as well as to line him up against the opposition tactic that some kind of aid to Britain was necessary.99

Lindbergh was not the only witness whose approach differed from the usual tack taken by the bill’s opponents. Although ex-Ambassador to Great Britain100 Joseph P. Kennedy was called as an opposition witness, it is difficult to tell from his testimony whether he hurt or helped the passage of the Lend-Lease Bill. Kennedy was obviously torn between a sincere dislike of the powers granted the executive under the bill and his faith in Roosevelt’s patriotism and honesty, which he publicly defended during the hearings. Like Lindbergh, Kennedy was pessimistic about Britain’s chances for survival, but he believed that democracy could still be saved if America stayed out of war. He hated Hitler and all naziism stood for, which made selling out England unthinkable, yet he believed it was too late to aid Britain effectively and feared that the Lend-Lease Bill could be misused in a dictatorial fashion. The final result was an extremely confused and often self-contradictory presentation during the Congressional hearings. Kennedy refused either to condemn or support the Lend-Lease Bill but instead repeatedly stated that Britain had to be aided as quickly and efficiently as possible. Yet during the same testimony he expressed the fear that America might be drawn into a war for which she was not prepared. He admitted he was opposed to some portions of the bill which gave extensive powers to the executive but regularly praised Franklin Roosevelt’s ability, honesty, and motives. He flatly refused to suggest any amendments or endorse those proposed by the opposition. Roosevelt had expected Kennedy to launch a vigorous public campaign against the Lend-Lease Bill, but the ex-Ambassador’s inability to develop a comprehensive and coherent anti-Lend-Lease platform eliminated that problem.101

The effect on public opinion of the debates over the Lend-Lease Bill, and vice versa, is worth a complete study all its own, although some obvious comments can be made. Between January 22 and March 7, 1941, eighteen polls were taken on the question of approval or disapproval, and every one found at least 50 per cent favoring the passage of the bill. Usually the percentage was 55 per cent or higher. The final poll, on March 7, recorded those in favor at 61 per cent with only 23 per cent firmly opposed, which indicates the success of the

100Kennedy had handed in his resignation, in accordance with protocol, on the day after Roosevelt was re-elected but made it clear that he meant it. His resignation was announced early in December, 1940. See Whalen, The Founding Father, p. 331.
Administration’s tactics. Apparently on instructions from Roosevelt, the White House office staff compiled almost daily memorandums summarizing the totals of pros and cons in correspondence received on the bill. Although the letters, telegrams, and cards that were opposed generally exceeded those favoring the bill by about two to one, such a ratio actually indicated general support for the legislation since politicians agree that the negative side of an issue is the one that engenders constituent response. This was particularly true since Lend-Lease appeared certain to pass Congress. The Treasury Department forwarded a summary of editorial opinion to the President which concluded that a majority of newspapers approved of the bill and most of those who opposed were quite temperate. It claimed that public opinion had favored the bill from the start and that there had been a sharp swing in support of the bill after the House and Senate hearings began.  

The two pressure groups most influential in foreign affairs, the America First Committee and the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, both carried out extensive campaigns to put forth their views. America First concentrated on convincing the public that a strong United States had nothing to fear from Germany and adopted the Lindbergh position that intervention would only prolong the war in Europe. As Wayne Cole points out in his study of the group, its efforts appear to have been wasted. In the East-Central part of the country, where America First was strongest, support for the Lend-Lease Bill increased from 39 per cent in mid-February to 50 per cent by March 1, 1941.  

The Committee to Defend America (the White Committee) spent large amounts of money and energy in an attempt to explain and justify the bill. Basically, it adopted the same positions as the Administration did in the Congressional debates. It is impossible to determine the effect of their work, but it is worth noting that in Chicago, where America First was powerful, the Committee to Defend America was most active. That unit mailed over 100,000 letters and handed out 30,000 handbills at industrial plants. As mentioned above, in the East-Central part of the United States, centered around Chicago, support for the Lend-Lease Bill steadily increased.

102 Cantrill, *Public Opinion*, pp. 409-10. The summaries of White House mail are in Roosevelt Papers, OF 4193-Misc., box 4; “Summary of Editorial Opinion,” was compiled by Alan Barth and forwarded to Roosevelt by Morgenthau on Feb. 10, 1941, *ibid.,* OF 4193, Lend-Lease Agreement, 1940-43, box 1-2.

103 Cole, *America First*, pp. 49-50. Senator D. Worth Clark of Idaho inserted into the *Congressional Record* a document prepared by the America First Committee entitled “A Factual Analysis of H.R. 1776.” The basic conclusion of the Committee was that the bill gave the President dictatorial powers over both foreign affairs and the domestic economy. See *CR*, 77th Cong., 1st sess., LXXXVII, pt. 10, pp. A900-02.

Evidence on the attitude of the other pressure groups regarding the Lend-Lease Bill is sparse. The business community seems generally to have supported the legislation, while the Communist Party opposed the bill both openly and through its front organizations. Various other organizations, such as the No Foreign War Committee, the German-American National Alliance, the Peace Mobilization Committee, and the German-American Bund, all opposed the bill violently, but their influence is suspect—though it has not been adequately studied. These and similar groups received direct as well as indirect support from the German government via its diplomatic representatives.

The battle over the Lend-Lease Act can generally be characterized as a partisan one, although party lines were crossed, particularly in the Senate. The fact that Wendell Willkie testified for the bill did not eliminate it as a partisan issue. Willkie was read out of his party by many of the Republican leaders, and as a defeated candidate he commanded very little loyalty within the party anyway. Historians commonly lump the opposition to Lend-Lease under the term isolationism, but that is hardly an adequate description. Certainly the major elements of traditional isolationism were present in some arguments. The opposition continually spoke in terms of the Monroe Doctrine and the impregnability of the Western Hemisphere. Anglophobia, usually expressed in terms of distrust and grudging admiration, continually cropped up, while overshadowing every argument was the passionate desire to stay out of war. Though this was all the stock-in-trade of isolationism, others used the same rhetoric without the same goal. Pacifists, who believed in international co-operation in a world without war, condemned Lend-Lease as designed to get America into war, yet they did not believe in isolating America from Europe. Many others, typified by Charles Lindbergh, believed that aiding Britain would not stop a German victory and would instead prevent the United States from building up her defenses. The major opposition argument that Lend-Lease added to Roosevelt’s dictatorial assumption of power was connected to isolationism only by virtue of a common enemy, not by any philosophical kinship. It provided the main common denominator for such diverse people as Senator Nye, a classic agrarian isolationist, and the respected international lawyer, John Bassett Moore.

Those opposed to the bill used two main tactical approaches. First and foremost, they claimed that the Lend-Lease Act would involve the

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105 Stromberg, The Journal of Economic History, XIII, 73. The Communist line is epitomized by the American Youth Congress; see Lash, Eleanor Roosevelt, p. 231.

106 Thomsen to the Foreign Ministry, Feb. 9, 1941, DGFP, XII, no. 34, pp. 60-62. I have found no evidence of British financial support for pressure groups such as occurred prior to American entry into World War I.
United States in the war. The arguments given for avoiding such involvement differed but agreed that entry into the European War would not be in America's long-term interests. The second major opposition argument was in the form of a criticism of the dictatorial powers the bill bestowed upon the President. Although much of this argument was *ad hominem* and the product of those who opposed any proposal made by Franklin Roosevelt regardless of its merit, many were sincerely concerned about the entire momentum of the New Deal and believed the Lend-Lease Bill epitomized the expansion of executive power which they opposed. A third opposition argument revolved around the possibility of applying Lend-Lease to the Soviet Union, but the Administration forces carefully avoided biting at that hook, and its over-all effect proved negligible.

The Roosevelt Administration was not thoroughly honest and candid in its presentation of the Lend-Lease Bill. That raises a question which is yet to be answered: Does the democratic system, as Americans know it, require total disclosure by the party in power of all the pros and cons—including predictions of possible results—or is that the job of the opposition? Certainly all of the predictable, probable, and possible consequences of the Lend-Lease Act were presented in a most forceful fashion to the public by the opposition, and that same public chose to reject those arguments. Granted, the Administration had the enormous advantage of a base of power and the initiative, but that advantage was accentuated by the failure of the opposition to develop any sort of reasonable alternative to Lend-Lease. Most Americans worked from the basic assumption that they wanted to aid England without incurring another troublesome war debts problem, so the suggestion that the United States loan the British money fell on deaf ears. Wary of getting into war and worried about the accusations of a dictatorship, the public and its representatives, after weeks of intensive debate, gave their support to their President.