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Robert K. LaFollette and American Foreign Affairs

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AND AMERICAN FOREIGN AFFAIRS
by
Madelynne Kottman Chandler

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INTRODUCTION

Robert M. LaFollette was one of the leaders of the progressive movement from 1900 until his death in 1925. He built a progressive machine in Wisconsin which had control of the Republican party in that state for most of this period. His program of legislation and reform in Wisconsin became a pattern for other states. He was a leading spokesman in the United States Senate for progressive Senators. He worked with the Wilson administration and the Democrats on domestic reform measures. He supported a major part of Wilson's foreign policy through 1916.

Senator LaFollette led a group of Senators who opposed the armed ship bill in March 1917. He opposed the declaration of war against Germany both in a speech and in his vote. This action brought him denunciation and ridicule. Action was taken to remove him from the Senate for statements made in a speech criticizing the financing of the war.

Many have brought forward reasons to explain his action in opposing the war and the subsequent treaty. LaFollette has been called an isolationist and a pacifist. It has been said that he was pro-German and that he was anti-British. Some have stated that his opposition to the war was based on a fear that American entry would end the progressive movement.
This thesis departs from LaFollette's general political beliefs, to concern itself with his position and action concerning World War I and the Versailles Treaty and other issues of foreign policy. Some insight can, perhaps, be gained as to what convictions motivated him in the area of foreign affairs. Why would a man in public office risk censure in overwhelming proportions as he did? Why was he so vigorously opposed to the World War? Was he consistently opposed to war? What position did he take on questions involving international relations when immediate conflict was not involved? Did his position on domestic issues influence his views on foreign affairs? The answers to these questions may aid in understanding his position on American entry into the World War and American participation in the world system set up by the Versailles Treaty.

Study has been concentrated on foreign policy debates and votes in the Congressional Record and foreign policy statements in LaFollette's Magazine for the years following the war. Accounts and newspaper articles concerning the campaign of 1924 were also important. Insights into his beliefs were also found in his autobiography and in the biography of LaFollette's life by his wife and daughter.
CHAPTER I

LA FOLLETTE AS A PROGRESSIVE

Following the Civil War, the United States had been subjected to swift changes through the rapid industrialization and urbanization of the country. Successive waves of concern over corruption in public life, inequalities of wealth and opportunity, agrarian discontent, and labor unrest had permeated the thoughts of many people. Many feared for the future of a democratic society under these conditions. The reaction to these problems and the programs suggested as remedies grew into what is generally known as the progressive movement.

While the progressive movement was never unified and there was disagreement among progressives over the programs to be adopted, a majority of them did agree that some changes must be made. One commonly held opinion among progressives was that special and corrupt influences in government must be ended. Another common feature of the progressive program was the interest in mechanical changes in the structure of government to allow for more democratic control. The progressive conviction that governmental functions must be increased and governmental powers used
to relieve the social and economic problems of the nation was extremely important. 1

LaFollette was most certainly a supporter of each of these progressive goals. He supported corrupt-practices legislation both in Wisconsin and in the Senate. He opposed legislation which he believed to give special privileges to financiers and big business. 2 He agreed that favors to private industries might have been acceptable in the developmental period of the nation, but he believed that the time for it had passed as these industries were fully developed. He charged that the interests:

Instead of wanting less government help when they grew strong, demanded more. It was easier to grow rich by gifts from the government than by efficient service and honest effort. 3

LaFollette was very much opposed to secrecy in government proceedings because he believed that secrecy allowed for greater influence by special interests. He attempted to obtain roll call votes whenever possible.

1 Arthur Mann (ed.), The Progressive Era: Liberal Renaissance or Liberal Failure? (New York, 1963), 1-5.


because he was convinced that it was important for the people to know where their representatives stood. He also opposed the secret proceedings of Congressional Committees and executive sessions of the Senate, when dealing with public business. LaFollette conceded some need for secrecy in Senate discussion of foreign affairs but was convinced that even in these matters there were times "...where public interest would demand open sessions and full publicity even when treaties with foreign nations are under consideration."

LaFollette strongly supported programs designed to make it easier for the people to control their own government. He favored the primary election, the direct election of Senators, women's suffrage, and the abolition of the electoral college. In 1924, he also advocated the election of Federal judges for terms no longer than ten years. He asked for a constitutional amendment to permit Congress to enact legislation over judicial vetoes.

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4Belle Case LaFollette and Fola LaFollette, Robert M. LaFollette (New York, 1953), I, 218.
5Ibid., 473.
6LaFollette, Autobiography, 129.
In the introduction to his autobiography in 1911, LaFollette described his work as "the struggle for more representative government." The announcement of his Presidential candidacy in 1924 stated that he had been called upon to accept "the leadership in a national political campaign to wrestle the American government from the predatory interests which now control it." The platform for his campaign said, "The great issue before the American people today is the control of government and industry by private monopoly.

LaFollette's conviction that the fullest democracy and participation of the people in their government was necessary and desirable was at the core of his work. His belief that democracy was in danger in the United States was equally important.

LaFollette's entire philosophy was based on a strong belief in popular sovereignty. His faith rested on the proposition that if presented with the facts, the people would make wise decisions. He considered LaFollette's

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8LaFollette, Autobiography, ix.
9July 4, 1924 announcement of LaFollette's Presidential candidacy, Robert M. LaFollette, LaFollette's Magazine, XVI, 96-100, July 1924.
10Porter and Johnson, National Party Platforms, 252.
Magazine essential to the cause as a method of presenting issues to the public. He used it as an educational tool. He also used the Chautauqua platform to bring his message to the people. LaFollette believed in thoroughly presenting one or two issues to the public and seeing them through, before moving on to other issues. Therefore he attempted to limit the number of topics he discussed to prevent confusion.

The Senator believed that the fight for democracy and for more representative government was going to be very difficult because the monied interests already had partial control of the government. He feared the powerful weapons which the "interests" had to use with the people. The arsenal of the interests included the use of secret proceedings in government, a favorable press, and the ability to confuse the main issue by bringing in other issues to scatter interest and opinion.

LaFollette perceived a conspiracy of the monied interests behind many issues. He believed that through their control of the government, they were able to make money at the expense of the American people.

12 Ibid., 510-511.
13 LaFollette, Autobiography, 103.
LaFollette continued his battle against the same old enemies in his 1924 campaign. His program and his speeches were tailored to fight them and to reduce the influence of money over government. He believed his independent battle to be a necessity because of "the failure of the two old parties to purge themselves of the influences which have caused their administrations repeatedly to betray the American people."  

LaFollette's 1924 campaign platform places the responsibility for the problems of the farmer, laborer, and consumer on the monied interests. He decried the loss of civil liberties during and after the war and placed the blame for it on that same monopolistic control of the political and economic life of the nation. His platform promised to destroy that power.  

There was much disagreement among progressives over the methods to be used in solving the economic and social problems brought about by industrialization and consolidation. There was disagreement over how to deal with America's great and growing industrial complex.

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15July 4, 1924 announcement of LaFollette's Presidential candidacy. LaFollette's Magazine, XVI, 99-100, July 1924.
16Porter and Johnson, Party Platforms, 252-255.
LaFollette definitely believed in the use of legislation to solve social and economic problems. At the state level his support for the idea of regulatory commissions and his use of university experts are examples of this. As early as 1911, he saw future regulatory uses for the income tax as well as supporting it as a more equitable method of raising revenue. He supported conservation measures throughout his life. He supported legislation favorable to labor.

LaFollette differed with Theodore Roosevelt, Herbert Croly, and many other progressives over the future of American industrial capacity. While the one group saw no evil in business consolidation in itself, LaFollette did. While the one group supported government regulation of consolidated business, LaFollette argued for the enforcement of the Sherman Act as well. LaFollette was still attacking monopoly in 1924. Richard Hofstadter called LaFollette's position on economics "an effort to restore, maintain and

18LaFollette, Autobiography, 53.
19Hofstadter, Age of Reform, 283; Mann, (ed.), Progressive Era, 89.
regulate competition rather than to regulate monopoly."  
Hofstadter pointed out that this was also the position of Louis Brandeis, Woodrow Wilson, and William Jennings Bryan.  
George E. Mowry explained LaFollette's position in this manner, "Like the Gracchi of Rome, he was ready to use new political power to return the state to its ancient rural, democratic free-holding ways."  

LaFollette was more willing to use the power of the government for social goals than were some other progressives. While many have criticized his 1924 platform as outdated because he still advocated the break-up of monopoly, other parts of his program were very progressive. The sections of his platform calling for the public ownership of water power, the recognition of collective bargaining, and a child-labor law went much further than many other progressives would have been willing to go. Hofstadter wrote that parts of LaFollette's platform "went somewhat farther than characteristic pre-war Progressivism."  

Many writers have noted the resemblance which the progressive movement bore to a moral crusade. When people

22Ibid.  
believe that theirs is the only position clothed in moral-
ity, they are likely to be harsh in their judgment of those
holding other opinions. This makes compromise difficult
and quarrels bitter. LaFollette quarreled with many other
progressives during his life. He often saw only the worst
of motives behind the opinions of his opponents. He quar­
reled with Roosevelt, with Wilson, with Albert Cummins, and
with Irvine Lenroot, his Wisconsin colleague. 25

The Senator was also somewhat reluctant to compromise.
He held the conviction that "...no bread is better than
half a loaf..." 26 He defended this stand in his autobi­
ography in 1911 when he wrote:

Half a loaf, as a rule, dulls the appetite, and
destroys the keenness of interest in obtaining the
whole loaf. A halfway measure never fairly tests
the principle and may utterly discredit it. It
is certain to weaken, disappoint, and dissipate
public interest. 27

LaFollette has often been considered rigid because of this
attitude. However, it was something that he believed and
practiced.

The progressives have been criticized because their
moral fervor led them to pass the prohibition amendment,
because of their militant nationalism, and for their

25 B.C. LaFollette and F. LaFollette, Robert M.
LaFollette, I, 427, 451, 569; II, 859, 958, 1058.
27 Ibid., 166.
belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority. LaFollette differed from many other progressives in these matters. He was a strong supporter of women's suffrage and his wife and oldest daughter were active suffragettes. He spoke out against the Klan in 1924. His wife, with his approval had been actively opposed to racial segregation in government offices during the Wilson administration. LaFollette had urged that a place be made for Louis Brandeis in Wilson's cabinet and later supported the appointment of Brandeis to the Supreme Court.28 He differed from many other agrarian progressives because he was not a "dry" and was a "free-thinker" in matters of religion. LaFollette was not a militant nationalist. George Mowry wrote of a common progressive distrust of materialism and emphasis on "romantic nationalism" but said that this attitude was "almost completely absent in the thinking of such Midwesterners as Robert LaFollette and George W. Norris."29

The beliefs and convictions of LaFollette as a progressive became evident in the stands which the Senator took in foreign affairs. When he opposed "dollar diplomacy" and imperialism, he was opposing the influence of

29Mowry, Era of Theodore Roosevelt, 97.
the special interests. In 1924, LaFollette accused his old
enemies not only of threatening American democracy, but
threatening the peace and stability of the entire world. He
accused them of exploiting the American people through finan-
cial control of the political and economic life of the United
States. He charged that this surplus profit was used to ex-
plot the resources and people of the rest of the world. 30

The struggle of the people to control their own gov-
ernment extended into the realm of foreign affairs from the
viewpoint of LaFollette. For this reason, he opposed secret
diplomacy. 31 He feared war because of the way in which it
consumed the whole interest and energy of the people. 32 He
feared that war would be used as a tool by the financial in-
terests to gain further control of the government. He feared
the way in which foreign affairs could be used to silence
reformers and radicals. 33

Mowry wrote that "LaFollette desired a small America
both internally and externally." 34 LaFollette appeared to

30 July 4, 1924 announcement of LaFollette's Presi-
dential candidacy. XVI, 99-100.
31 New York Times, October 7, 1924; New York Times,
October 11, 1924.
33 B.C. LaFollette and F. LaFollette, Robert M.
LaFollette, I, 502-503; II, 829-30; Robert M. LaFollette,
"The Vote on the Lloyd George Government," LaFollette's
Magazine, XIV, 170, November 1922.
34 Mowry, Era of Theodore Roosevelt, 294.
believe that the United States could serve the world best by example, but only if that example was liberal. When he returned from Europe in 1923, the Senator wrote that all Americans should be thankful for "3000 miles of Atlantic Ocean", for "the Union", and also:

For the American tradition of democracy, which however far we may have driven from it in practice still stands as a beacon to all to light our way back to the right road.35

During the debate over the labor provisions of the Versailles Treaty, LaFollette said:

...believing finally, that America's best gift to the world and most effective aid to the cause of labor throughout the world would be the example of the perfection of our own democracy, unhampered and unrestrained by outside influences; believing this Sir, these things, I shall move to strike out the labor articles of this treaty.36

This belief in the uniqueness of the United States also influenced his opposition to American entry into the World War. The distrust of things European and the correspondent belief in the purity of American ideals, showed through when he wrote that he looked upon Europe "as cursed with a contagious,...deadly plague, whose spread threatens to


36Congressional Record, 66th Congress, 1st session, LVIII, 7677, October 29, 1919.
devastate the civilized world."37 He wrote also that Europe
should be regarded exactly as if she really were stricken
with the "Black Death."38
CHAPTER II

LA FOLLETTE AS A GERMANOPHILE

The charge was made many times that LaFollette opposed the war because he was pro-German. The charge was also made that he was actively seeking the German-American vote or that he was thinking of his German constituents in Wisconsin.\(^1\)

While it is true that Wisconsin had a large German element, LaFollette's primary ethnic support had normally come from the Scandinavian-Americans. This was due to his birth and childhood in a Norwegian settlement. He could speak the Norwegian language and he had many friends and early supporters among this group. His congressional district had a large Scandinavian population.\(^2\)

He did not have a solid bloc of German support in Wisconsin. The German element was split in party loyalties and a large portion were Democrats. Milwaukee, with its large German population, had elected the first Socialist representative to Congress. Organized groups of Germans

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\(^2\)Ibid., 78, 139; B.C. LaFollette and F. LaFollette, Robert M. LaFollette, I, 11; R.M. LaFollette, Autobiography, 4.
had not supported LaFollette until after he had opposed the
war. There was no immediate political reason to oppose the
declaration of war to gain German support as he had just
been re-elected to another Senate term in 1916. In that
campaign he had been opposed by a German-American running
on a preparedness platform. LaFollette advocated neu­
trality in 1916 as he had been since the war began. It
must also be remembered that Wilson ran on the slogan,
"He kept us out of war." The 1916 election results and the
petitions and letters which LaFollette received also con­
vinced him that the majority of Americans desired peace.

However, if he were thinking in terms of political
gain, it would appear from the abuse heaped upon him by
former supporters and foes alike, that it would have been
wiser not to have acted as he did. The reaction to his
opposition to the armed ship bill should have been enough
warning. He could not have expected his career to be
aided by accusations of treason or by comparisons with
Benedict Arnold. He was accused of taking orders from the

3 Sayre, "Political Methods," 139, 218; Clifton James
Child, The German-Americans in Politics; 1914-1917
(Madison, 1939), 151-2.

4 E.C. LaFollette and F. LaFollette, Robert M.
LaFollette, I, 581-2.

5 Ibid., 585; Arthur S. Link, Woodrow Wilson and the
Kaiser and was described as a pervert. This could not have helped any man in public life.

And this was only the beginning. Before the war was over old friends and supporters had dropped him. The faculty of the University of Wisconsin had protested his stand, which hurt him deeply. Economic pressures were applied as contracts were cancelled and loans were called in.

LaFollette supported measures to insure American neutrality before the entry of the United States into the war. He offered a resolution early in 1915 calling for a conference of neutral nations and eventual establishment of an organization to settle international disputes. He urged that Americans should be warned by the government that sailing on belligerent ships was to be at their own risk and no different from the risk taken by remaining in a belligerent country. There is no evidence that he was accused of courting the Mexican-American vote though during this period he was equally as interested and worked very hard to keep the United States from war with Mexico.

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6 B.C. LaFollette and F. LaFollette, Robert M. LaFollette, I, 629.
7 Ibid., II, 828, 842-3, 888
8 Congressional Record, 63rd Cong., 3rd sess., LII, 3230, February 8, 1915.
9 B.C. LaFollette and F. LaFollette, Robert M. LaFollette, I, 496, 553, 566.
In his speech opposing the declaration of war, he condemned the notion of a war to bring democracy to Europe while allied with hereditary monarchies. He praised the German achievements in the field of social welfare and industrial legislation when compared to conditions in some of the Allied countries. During the war he wrote of these things to his friend Dante Pierce, who was the editor of the Wisconsin Farmer. He wrote of his revulsion for all forms of autocracy. La Follette wrote that it was part of the "topsy turvy times" when those who "stood for the rule of autocracy and the destruction of the people's right...are the loudest declaimers for democracy...in some other country."

He discussed the German-Americans in his speech of April 4, 1917. He praised the contributions of Americans of German background. He described them as having "a record of courage, loyalty, honesty, and high ideals second to no people."  

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10Congressional Record, 65th Cong., Special sess., LV, 223-4, April 4, 1917.


12Congressional Record, 65th Cong., Special sess., LV, 223-4, April 4, 1917.
He stated that in 1914 American relations with Germany were friendly. He did not mention that there had been friction concerning German influence and sea power in the Caribbean and the Pacific during the past three decades. He did not discuss the commercial rivalry that had also become a factor in strained relations. There had been talk of war with Germany during the Samoan dispute.

The Senator cited the history of American relations with the belligerents since 1914 and concluded that the United States had not been truly neutral. His stated opinion was that if the United States had not given in to all British demands, their actions would have caused loss of life also. He cited cases from international law to demonstrate that a neutral must "exact the same conduct from both warring nations."

He concluded by urging two alternatives to war which the United States could follow. The first was to enforce strict rules of international law on the high seas for both sides. The other was to withdraw all commerce and supplies from both, which would force the belligerents to recognize American rights.

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13Ibid.
15Congressional Record, 65th Cong., Special sess., LV, 223-4, April 4, 1917.
16Ibid.
These opinions were considered pro-German by his colleagues and by the press which was by this time very hostile to Germany and sympathetic to the Allies. Also it seemed that Senator LaFollette, by attempting so hard to keep the United States from war, overlooked the very actions by Germany which had so inflamed opinion in the United States against her. No mention was made of the German actions against Belgian neutrality or of the German destructiveness and repression in occupied Belgium. These actions had gone far to prejudice Americans against Germany. LaFollette only discussed technical issues such as who had first laid mines. The attempt to sway opinion by technical and legal arguments when people were calling the Kaiser "the Beast of Berlin" tended only to mark LaFollette as pro-German to his contemporaries. During times when opinion is inflamed, a type of "either/or" thinking persisted. When he did not condemn certain actions, others concluded that he approved them. 17

In his alternatives, he exposed himself to the charge that he was not being realistic. The first alternative would have continued to embroil the United States in sinkings and difficulties with both sides and would probably still have brought war. The second would have been of

17Bailey, Diplomatic History, 614.
great advantage to the Central Powers and might have brought them victory. The United States would probably not have allowed this as the government was by then sympathetic to the Allied cause.

LaFollette did not think the war was caused by Germany alone, but by militarism, imperialism, and by economic causes in all the belligerent countries. He feared American involvement in European affairs would be permanent if the United States entered the struggle on either side.

He took an interest in what Ramsey MacDonald and other anti-war people in England were doing. He was also interested when he heard of the release of Karl Liebnecht from a German prison. He believed that ordinary people everywhere did not really want war. He believed the military class to be responsible for Germany's troubles and reported with relish to his family at the end of the war that "the Junkers may all be swept aside."

He supported Wilson's "peace without victory" speech and began early to work for a declaration of American war.

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18 Congressional Record, 65th Cong., Special sess., LV, 223-234, April 4, 1917; Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 1st sess., LXI, 7681, October 18, 1921.

19 B.C. LaFollette and P. LaFollette, Robert M. LaFollette, I, 649.

20 Ibid., II, 755-57, 897.
aims. He was convinced that only an early declaration of war aims could secure an effective peace. He believed an educational campaign would be necessary to acquaint the people with the problems involved. He was concerned very early over the possible harmful items that might appear in secret treaties between the Allies. He believed that American influence for a just peace must be used early while the Allies needed American support to win. He introduced a resolution which called for a statement of Allied peace terms in August 1917. He hoped that the public announcement of just peace terms would weaken the German militarists with their own people. But many people marked this as another indication that LaFollette was pro-German. 21

LaFollette supported the Fourteen Points, with some reservations concerning territorial changes, as a base for a just peace settlement. 22

He believed that a ban on compulsory military training in Germany should be one of the terms of the peace treaty. He also urged that Germany should be required by the treaty to adopt a popular referendum on declarations of war, except when invaded. Even though he despised the old system in Germany, when revolution came he feared the chaos which he believed might follow. 23

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21 Ibid., 749-756.
22 Ibid., 840.
23 Ibid., 904-906.
After the war, LaFollette definitely believed that the Germans were wronged. A number of things disturbed him. The first was the American refusal to extend food relief to the people of the Central Powers. Another was the maintenance of the blockade during the peace conference. He was convinced that the terms of the armistice and the promises of the Fourteen Points had been betrayed by the harsh terms of the Versailles Treaty. He considered the reparations system too severe. This appeared unfair to him as he believed that the war was not caused by the aggression of any one country but rather by the European system. He believed in the peacefulness and innocence of the ordinary German citizen and considered it barbarous to prolong the conditions of privation in that country. The Senator believed it was unwise to keep the average German in want and to hold back the economic recovery of Germany by punitive reparations. He argued that these policies would sow the seeds of revenge and future wars. He wrote:

"Until that infamous compact and its sister treaties have been completely wiped out and replaced by enlightened understandings among the European nations, there will be no peace upon the Continent or in the world, and all the conferences, councils, and world courts will not prevent or seriously retard the new world war that is now rapidly developing from the seeds of malice, hatred and revenge that were sown at Versailles."

After Germany adopted the Weimar Republic, the Senator supported measures which he believed would allow that government to survive. He spoke and wrote of the terrible conditions in Germany caused by the war and the actions of the Allies. He warned of the forces in Germany waiting to take over the wreckage of the Republic if it should fail. He did not foresee the horrible spectre of Nazi dictatorship but he did realize that the fall of the Republic would have unpleasant results. He wrote about conditions in Europe and warned:

Between the upper and nether millstones of imperialistic and communistic dictatorships—between the fascists and bolsheviks of the different countries—the institutions of democracy are being ground to dust. Germany is now being rent asunder by civil strife, in which Monarchists and Communists are simultaneously striving to tear down the republic and erect in its place a dictatorship, resting not on the will of the people but on force and arms. 25

LaFollette attempted to obtain some kind of relief to prevent the starvation of the German people. When he could not get Congress to act, he used space in his magazine to aid private relief groups to raise funds. 26 He again discussed conditions in Europe:


The crisis which is at hand is too awful to contemplate. It menaces more than Germany. Hunger is the firebrand of revolution. There is no time for protracted debate. The case calls for immediate relief. Delay means the possible overthrow of governments, dissolution, chaos, civil war, and hell let loose in Europe.\(^27\)

In another article he wrote with some understanding of the situation in Europe:

The people forgetting that their ultimate safety and happiness lies only in themselves are ready to trust their fortunes to any adventurer or would-be Napoleon who offers by force to rid them of the dire conditions that are irritating and oppressing them.\(^28\)

The French occupation of the Ruhr disturbed him as it did many other Americans. LaFollette did not comment during the Senate discussion where the speakers appeared to dwell on the more lurid aspects of the French occupation. But in his magazine he placed the responsibility on Poincare and the industrialists of the French Comite des Forges. Again he wrote of the dangers of the growing hatred in Europe. He condemned French policy in Germany and in all Europe. These French policies, he said, meant "either degradation or a war more terrible than that from which the world has just emerged."\(^29\) He believed that the League had become a tool of French imperialism by its inaction.

\(^{27}\)Ibid.


\(^{29}\)Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 3rd sess., LXIII, 180ff., November 27, 1922.
The Senator believed that the United States had potent economic weapons at her disposal and advocated their use. Under the heading "Duty of the United States", he argued that the United States should end the lenient policy on debts as long as France followed imperialistic policies. He reasoned that the fall of the franc would follow and the French people would act to end the policies of revenge. He wrote, "We can by that withdrawal, aid in the restoration of peace and sanity to all the world." But LaFollette voted against proposals to guarantee the territorial integrity of Germany or even to use American influence to prevent invasion of that country when such amendments were proposed during the Senate discussion of the separate peace treaty with Germany.

During the Senator's campaign for the Presidency in 1924, he delivered two major speeches which outlined his proposals for an American foreign policy and touched briefly on foreign affairs in other speeches. There may be something of significance in that one of the major speeches was given in Cincinnati, Ohio which had a large

31 Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 1st sess., LXI, 7112-3, October 17, 1921.
32 McKay, Progressive Movement, 158-9.
German-American population. In this speech, he gave a blueprint for his foreign policy in the event of his election. Germany was not mentioned. He reiterated his stand that no one nation should bear the guilt for World War I. He enumerated the causes of the war in this way:

It was a war which had its birth in secret diplomacy, in national fears kept alive by military castes, and most of all by private munitions-makers and a capitalistic press in all the Great Powers.\(^3\)

The denial of German war guilt was made again in Rochester, New York on October 6, 1924.\(^4\) LaFollette had opposed the inclusion of any statement of war guilt in the treaty of peace with Germany.\(^5\)

Senator LaFollette appeared to be much more sympathetic to Germany and to the German people than many other Americans. He demonstrated his sympathy by his statements and unceasing efforts to obtain relief for Germany, both for immediate problems as well as to soften the Versailles Treaty. His attitude may have come from contact in Wisconsin with German-Americans and admiration for their abilities. Much of his sympathy for the Germans probably resulted from his humanitarianism.

\(^3\)New York Times, October 11, 1924.
\(^4\)New York Times, October 7, 1924.
\(^5\)Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 1st sess., LXI, 7177, October 17, 1921.
Pro-German sympathies do not appear to have been the primary cause for LaFollette's opposition to the war. He certainly was not sympathetic to the German Empire or the German military system. Other factors, such as his belief that all war and the hysteria which accompanies war were dangerous to democracy, his anti-imperialism, and his distaste for the British Empire were probably more important influences. After war came he supported fifty-five of the 60 war measures before Congress. He proposed a bill providing for extra pay for members of the armed forces sent overseas. 36

Fola LaFollette wrote this of her father's opposition to the war:

Its origin must be sought in the little town of Primrose, Wisconsin, where he grew up among hard-working pioneer folk from many different lands. To them or their ancestors, as to his own, America had meant escape from the very burdens he was convinced war would bring to the United States. 37

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36 B.C. LaFollette and F. LaFollette, Robert M. LaFollette, II, 731-748.

37 Ibid., I, 657.
CHAPTER III

LAFOLETTE AS AN ANGLOPHOSE

A dislike and distrust of Great Britain and all her works was a part of the agrarian tradition. To the agrarian, the British international banker was the same as the Eastern "money power" that stood in the way of agrarian programs for their own relief. The Midwestern progressives owed much to the agrarian traditions of Jefferson, Jackson, Greenbackers, Grangers, and Populists. Robert M. LaFollette was not an exception.

"England would tolerate no commercial rivalry. Germany would not submit to isolation." This was the cause of the World War, in the words of LaFollette in 1917. In 1924 he called it a war "born of the greed of financiers..."

Again in 1924, he blamed the doctrine that "...the flag follows the investor..." as the cause of the World

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2 Congressional Record, 65th Cong., Special sess., LV, 234, April 4, 1917.

3 New York Times, October 7, 1924.
War, the Boer War, and conflicts in the Middle East. This whole program was "conceived in the British Foreign Office 70 years ago." He charged that these interests aimed through the Versailles Treaty "to cement forever the strangehold of the power of gold on the defenseless people of the earth." 4

He warned of this alliance of American and British financial interests in 1921 while discussing the subject of British influence on the Shipping Board. He said:

"It is quite apparent that there is a partnership here, a deal between the masters of the shipping of Great Britain and the masters of the railroads and finance of this country...fostering further the control of the shipping and transportation in the financial powers of this country and Great Britain in combination..." 5

LaFollette opposed the cancellation or reduction of Allied debts to the United States government. He wrote that such action would only serve to continue that "network of intrigue and community of interest which runs between our international financiers and those of Europe." 6

Senator LaFollette also accused the British of attempts to use the United States for their own ends. He

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1New York Times, October 11, 1924.

5Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 1st sess., LXI, p. 877, August 1, 1921.

charged that the British were scheming against American interests. While the British would naturally have looked to the protection of their own interests first and these interests might conflict at times with those of the United States, LaFollette appeared to be suspicious of an actual British conspiracy against American interests. In his opposition to the Versailles Treaty, an entire speech was delivered on the subject of the United States "playing footman to Great Britain." 7

He condemned Britain's selfish intrigue and argued that this was behind the plan to give the United States a League mandate over Armenia. Armenia was an area in the Near East, part of which was in Russia and part in the Ottoman Empire. The Armenian people had suffered under Turkish rule. During the war the Turks had begun a program of deportation of Armenians to Lebanon and Syria. Some massacres had occurred. The Armenians were a Christian minority in an overwhelmingly Moslem area. Many Americans felt great sympathy for the Armenians.

Secret treaties had divided the Ottoman Empire among the Allies with Tsarist Russia to receive Armenia. When the Bolsheviks came to power, they made the treaties public and the Allies didn't want the Bolsheviks on their

7 Congressional Record, 66th Cong., 1st sess., LVIII, 8431, November 13, 1919.
door-step in the Near East. Armenia was declared an independent area under the Treaty of Sevres signed with the Sultan. It was believed that Armenia needed protection and guidance for a time and the American mandate was suggested. The Americans did not accept and the Turkish Nationalists under Mustapha Kemal reoccupied part of the territory. The Bolsheviks occupied another part and further treaties made the division permanent. LaFollette opposed the acceptance of the mandate. He perceived in it a British plan to obtain American troops to guard the British-owned railroad in Iraq from the Russians by making Armenia a buffer zone between Soviet Russia and British holdings. 9

Another time in the debate over the Versailles Treaty, he accused Wilson of having surrendered control of the high seas to Great Britain. While he complained that Wilson gave too much to the British in the treaty, he said of the British Foreign Office:

It was this force which built up in the United States by subtle propaganda, hatred of Germany—

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9 Congressional Record, 66th Cong., 1st sess., LVIII, 8726, November 18, 1919.
and now wants our support for a treaty giving a ruthless and pitiless peace. ¹⁰

LaFollette demonstrated a mistrust of British policies and intentions in his opposition to the war itself. He charged that the United States had never been neutral, and that England had acted against international law and had repudiated the Declaration of London by the extent of her blockade. LaFollette maintained that Americans would have suffered loss of life at England's hands as well as Germany's except that the United States had always given in to English demands. He warned that if the United States entered the war she would become an accomplice of England in the starvation of the German People. Then he asked, "What further demands will the British make?" ¹¹

LaFollette appeared to believe that the British were sabotaging American maritime capabilities through British influence on the Shipping Board. He charged that British ship-owners, through British directors in American shipping companies, were working to ruin American shipping. He also accused them of opposing the Seamen's Act of 1915 and of hostility to labor. ¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., 8728.
¹¹ Congressional Record, 65th Cong., Special sess., LV, 223-234, April 4, 1917.
¹² Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 1st sess., LXI, 4664-77, August 1, 1921.
LaFollette wrote that British perfidy and the schemes of J.P. Morgan were behind the interest adjustment on the British debt to the United States. LaFollette found it strange that Britain had gained so much from the Versailles Treaty in the way of commercial advantages but could not pay the interest on her debt to the United States. Her decency appeared even more questionable to LaFollette as he wrote that she charged five per cent on British loans to Australia while Britain pleaded that three and one-half percent was the very most that she herself could pay the United States. LaFollette surmised further as he wrote:

Doubtless a substantial part of the advances to Australia were made out of funds advanced by the United States out of the proceeds of the Liberty Loans. If so, the British government is in the delightful position of making a profit of one and one half per cent on the transaction.13

An old American tradition existed of "twisting the lion's tail" for political purposes. This old tactic was used by many Senators to defeat the Versailles Treaty.14 The argument that the British Empire, through its self-governing dominions, would have six votes to the United States' one vote was perhaps only a subterfuge. But many words were expended on that issue. Sometimes it was difficult to judge what the true motives were in objections to

14 Bailey, Diplomatic History, 668.
the treaty. Senator LaFollette probably used this technique in part. However, LaFollette held genuine beliefs that were very basic to him which influenced his dislike and his attacks on British institutions and policies.

Democracy and popular sovereignty were very important ideals to LaFollette. The perfection of these two ideals were the goal of his life's work. He ridiculed the notion that the purpose of the war was to protect democracy, with this statement:

...the President proposes alliance with Great Britain, which however liberty-loving her people, is a hereditary monarchy, with a hereditary ruler, with a hereditary House of Lords, with a hereditary landed system, with a limited and restricted suffrage for one class and a multiplied suffrage power for another, and with grinding industrial conditions for all wage workers.  

The United States also had a tradition of sympathy for any blow against established authority around the world. Even though little was done in the concrete way of aid, enthusiastic verbal encouragement was given to such events. The common attitude was one of distrust of monarchs and what they represented.  

Towns and counties dot the country with such names as Kossuth and Bolivar because of this

15*Congressional Record, 65th Cong., Special sess., LV, 226, April 4, 1917.*

16*Billington, "Origins of Middle-Western Isolationism," LX, 44; Bailey, Diplomatic History, 178-9.*
attitude. One writer has aptly called this sentiment, "aggressive republicanism." LaFollette shared this opposition to monarchy. When news of the March Russian Revolution reached the United States he wrote, "What is happening in Russia today brings joy to every lover of democracy and freedom." 17

This point of view was very evident in a speech given by the Senator when he introduced a resolution calling for recognition of the Republic of Ireland. 18 He extolled the virtues of the traditional policy of the United States which had been to recognize de facto governments. He traced the history of this policy from its beginnings. Then he asked whether the United States was to continue its policy of "extending the friendly American hand to every small nation yearning and fighting for freedom and independence?" 20 Or, asked the Senator, was the United States going to ally herself with the "most imperialistic nation on earth to destroy liberty and depoil the weak and defenseless?" 21

17 Ibid., 189.
18 B.C. LaFollette and P. LaFollette, Robert M. LaFollette, I, 640.
19 Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 1st sess., LXI, 76, April 12, 1921.
20 Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 1st sess., LXI, 592-605, April 25, 1921.
21 Ibid.
To do such a thing, LaFollette exclaimed, would be "as treason to every American tradition." Again he went back to earlier times and talked of the welcome given Kossuth and other visiting revolutionaries. He said:

Those were the days when Americans knew the value of their own freedom, and were ready to give something more than expressions of sympathy to those who were struggling for freedom in other lands.

A very strong anti-imperialistic viewpoint was a definite factor in his objection to any policy which tended to support a world-wide status quo. Many Midwestern progressives shared this viewpoint. Many of them, including LaFollette, believed that the great power and influence of the United States should be used to encourage self-government. They believed that such movements in colonial areas should be encouraged. Much progressive opposition to the Versailles Treaty occurred because some Senators were convinced that the Treaty and the League would commit the United States to oppose such movements. As the greatest empire in the world Great Britain would naturally be considered the enemy of these nationalistic and anti-colonial movements.

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22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
LaFollette denounced League supervision of the arms traffic. His denunciation charged that the manner in which it was organized would merely enable Great Britain to keep arms from her rebellious colonies, with American help.25 He said that the Allied governments were aware that the League was merely a way to bind the United States "to defend the possessions and dominions which the imperialistic governments of the League claim for themselves as a result of the war."26 The League had been established he said, because the imperialists were afraid of the people's reaction to the Versailles Treaty. Therefore they had established the League to "stand guard over the swag."27

In another speech on the League, LaFollette compared the League to the Holy Alliance and charged that it "will be used for the suppression of nationalities and the prosecution of oppressive warfare."28

To those who looked upon Britain as the world's great colonizer, he answered that that day was past, "Britain no

25Congressional Record, 66th Cong., 1st sess., LVIII, 7669, October 29, 1919.
26Congressional Record, 66th Cong., 1st sess., LVIII, 8432, November 13, 1919.
27Ibid., 8433.
28Congressional Record, 66th Cong., 1st sess., LVIII, 8727, November 18, 1919.
longer colonizes but exploits." With some truth he argued that "Wherever the British flag flies over a subject people today, revolution is brewing." 

Senator LaFollette opposed the Four-Power Treaty of 1922. The agreements concerned with the Pacific area were extremely distasteful to him. He said, "It is the final act in the great imperialistic drama of exploitation which began with the bombing of Alexandria by the British fleet at the behest of the British bankers 50 years ago." 

He looked upon this treaty as an imperialistic alliance to control the natural resources of the world and put the lid on the nationalistic aspirations of colonial peoples, especially in Asia. It was not a treaty for peace he said, but an "international banker's treaty for profit."

After chiding his old antagonists, the financiers, he went into the records of the treaty members. He found their records wanting. Great Britain again appeared as the greatest wrong-doer. But Japan was also criticized for

29 Ibid., 8727.
30 Ibid.
32 Ibid., 50.
her imperialism in Asia. He asked his readers to look at
England's record and wrote:

Remember the history of Great Britain in Persia,
in Egypt and India. Recall her ruthless prosecution
of the Boer War. Recall the atrocities committed in
Ireland for seven long centuries, which finally
aroused the civilized world in protest.33

LaFollette often provided space in his magazine for
Indian and Irish writers to protest British rule in their
homelands. Some of these articles were rather sensational.
An example was an article which accused the British of the
use of the opium traffic to aid in their control in India.34
The Senator saw fit to repeat this charge himself.35 But
he also published articles written by persons whom he con-
sidered progressive forces within England.36

He was interested in the fortunes of the British Labor
Party. To LaFollette, the Labor party was "the progressive

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33Ibid., 49-50.
35Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 2nd sess., LXIII, 4711, March 22, 1922.
36B.C. LaFollette, "Seeing Europe with Senator
LaFollette," LaFollette's Magazine, XV, 152, October 1923;
W.B. Cossette, "British Labor Liberal Land Policy,"
LaFollette's Magazine, XV, 94, May 1923; W.B. Cossette,
"Origins of the British Labor Party," LaFollette's
Magazine, XVI, 73, April 1924; W.B. Cossette, "Labor
Budget in England," LaFollette's Magazine, XVI, 110, July
1924; Lady Barlow, "England Sees Poiny in Versailles
Many progressives were of the opinion that American influence should be used to encourage reform and anti-colonial elements around the world. LaFollette was acquainted with some members of the British Labor party during the war years. He talked with members of the Labor party when he visited England. He had an interview with J.M. Keynes. He spent an afternoon at Labor Party headquarters and suggested some method of regular communication between progressive groups in both countries.

LaFollette was also interested in English cooperative societies. He visited the various departments of the English society and was convinced of the value of the cooperative movement. He thought cooperatives might be very useful in solving problems in the United States. He wrote:

I see in this movement an opportunity for great good for the common man and a means of escape from the operation of the monopolies and combinations which are slowly but surely throttling the economic life of America.

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38 Williams, "Legend of Isolationism," XVIII, 11.
39 B.C. LaFollette and F. LaFollette, Robert M. LaFollette, II, 750, 934.
40 Ibid., 1076.
41 Ibid., 1078, 1085.
He congratulated the Labor Party on their election gains and for the formation of the first Labor Cabinet.

He wrote:

Under a reactionary government, Great Britain has committed her share of aggressions against weaker peoples and pursued a foreign policy which inevitably leads to war. American friends of the British Labor party will look with hope to its leaders not only for domestic policies which will free the British masses from present oppression but also for a foreign policy devoted to the ends of peace.42

Senator LaFollette demonstrated a definite Anglophobia. This seems to have been partially a result of old traditions of the West and Middle-west in the United States. This tradition fostered the opinion that Great Britain as a hereditary monarchy opposed the spread of republicanism. Another tradition made Great Britain the defender of hard money. This view placed British capitalists in league with the American financial and business leaders. As an anti-imperialist, LaFollette also found fault with Great Britain as the foremost imperial power. Another American tradition was the habit of linking foreign powers to programs which American politicians opposed. Great Britain was probably the power used most often in this way. LaFollette was probably aware of this political technique.

Anti-British traditions and prejudices probably influenced LaFollette greatly as he formed opinions on

foreign affairs. As a strong supporter of self-government, he believed British colonial power to be the foremost opponent of progress in this direction. He distrusted financial power and London was still the center of world banking during most of his life. British participation in the rather cynical secret treaties between the Allies only helped to strengthen his bias. But while he disliked Britain as a world power, he admired British reformers. LaFollette's progressive viewpoint as well as actual bias operated to influence him against policies which he believed would favor the British Empire.

LaFollette's dislike for the British Empire apparently made it difficult for him to understand the sympathy which many Americans felt for the Allies in the World War. This dislike also influenced him to concentrate on the betrayal of the Fourteen Points by the Versailles Treaty and made it difficult for him to see the idealism behind the League of Nations.
CHAPTER IV

LAFOLETTE AS A PACIFIST AND ISOLATIONIST

War was the very antithesis of democracy to Robert LaFollette. Healthy democratic government was his goal and he believed that war made conditions nearly impossible for its achievement. Because of these convictions, he was willing to go far to prevent war.

LaFollette believed that foreign policy could be used by the enemies of representative government and reform to divert attention from these most important issues. He was convinced that if the United States entered the World War the progressive cause would be crippled for years to come. Fola LaFollette described her father's sorrow after he heard the President's war message:

Above all he feared what war and involvement in these ancient European conflicts would do to our own struggle to solve the problems we confronted at home in perfecting and preserving our own democratic form of government. 1

The economic interpretation of history was a strong factor in progressive opposition to war. At the beginning of the World War it was difficult for most progressives to see any benefit to be gained by American entry. Arthur Link wrote that in the beginning Wilson believed the efforts

to promote preparedness were caused by "some lobby stirring up artificial alarm." The economic interpretation of history had led most progressives to believe that wars were brought about by munitions-makers, bankers, and industrialists anxious to make a big profit. LaFollette never dropped this interpretation of the World War. He could never accept it as a war to defend democracy. George W. Norris and others who voted against the declaration of war also held the belief that the causes of the war were economic.

LaFollette believed that he had seen immediate proof of the threat which the increased interest in foreign affairs brought to progressivism. LaFollette was the sponsor of a bill to regulate the conditions of safety and labor in the shipping industry. The seamen's bill was under consideration when the European war began. Enemies of the bill argued that the high labor standards of the bill would result in international complications and that the safety provisions would delay the building of an American Merchant Marine.

He opposed the President's request to arm merchant ships in 1917, not only because he believed it would lead

2Link, Wilson and the Progressive Era, 177-8.
3B.C. LaFollette and F. LaFollette, Robert M. LaFollette, I, 503, 534.
to war, but also because he feared democracy would be permanently harmed by putting the power to make war in the hands of the President alone. He believed that the action would most certainly take the power to declare war out of the hands of Congress. He feared that a type of authoritarianism would result from the wartime plea to support the President in everything. He feared Congress would lose its independence.4

The exercise of minority rights was important to democracy also and he saw it as the duty of the minority in Congress to speak out.5 He challenged the idea that the war was one to defend democracy. As he spoke in opposition to the war, he asked, "Are the people in this country being so well represented that we need to go abroad to give other people the control of their governments?"6

LaFollette was convinced that several factors made war the enemy of democracy. These factors were evident in 1918 when LaFollette enumerated the reasons for his hatred of war. He did this in a letter to Justice James C. Kerwin of the Wisconsin Supreme Court. He wrote that war:

...warps men's judgment, distorts the true standards of patriotism, breeds distrust and suspicion among

4Ibid., 604, 639, 644.
5 Ibid., 664-5.
6Congressional Record, 65th Cong., Special sess., LV, 228, April 4, 1917.
neighbors; inflames passions, encourages violence, develops abuse of power, tyrannizes over men and women even in purely social relations of life, and terrifies whole communities into the most abject surrender of every right which is the heritage of free government.

He considered the Espionage Act "the worst legislative crime of the war." This law was later used against him after his speech on September 19, 1917 in St. Paul, Minnesota. LaFollette defended free speech. He believed that without free speech, wise decisions could not be made. He believed it necessary to have free discussion to determine just what public opinion was on the important issues of war and peace. Speaking of the freedom of speech, of assembly, and of press and petition he said, "Any man who seeks to set a limit upon those rights, whether in war or peace, aims a blow at the most vital part of our Government." Following the war he made appeals in his magazine for the release from custody of those imprisoned during the war or after for political offenses. One of his editorials read:

No foreign propaganda will ever inflict one tenth of the harm to our government that has been

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7 Quoted in B.C. LaFollette and P. LaFollette, Robert M. LaFollette, II, 630.
8 Ibid., 732.
9 Ibid., 733.
10 Congressional Record, 65th Cong., 1st sess., IV, 7878, October 6, 1917.
inflicted by our own officials in persecuting our own citizens for exercising the right of free speech.\textsuperscript{11}

Immediately following the war, in a letter to his friend, Justice Brandeis, he wrote of the realization of his fears that American entry into the war would be harmful to democracy. He wrote:

Democracy in America has been trampled underfoot, submerged, forgotten. Her enemies have multiplied their wealth and power appallingly. She has thousands of Morgans against her now.\textsuperscript{12}

After the war the Senator continued to complain of the way in which he believed foreign policy issues were used to turn attention away from domestic affairs. During debate over the United States' separate peace treaty with Germany, he argued that in two elections the people had demanded that attention be turned to domestic affairs, that the people's interest had been slighted, and conditions had grown which "menace the stability of American democracy."\textsuperscript{13} He believed the issue of the World Court was another attempt to turn the minds of the farmer and the worker from their problems to the problems of Europe. He wrote that the bankers and the two old parties wanted the people to forget "the chaos

\textsuperscript{11}R.M. LaFollette, \textit{LaFollette's Magazine}, XVI, 1, January 1924.

\textsuperscript{12}B.C. LaFollette and F. LaFollette, \textit{Robert M. LaFollette}, II, 911.

\textsuperscript{13}Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 1st sess., LXI 7681, October 28, 1921.
of graft, special privilege, and official incompetence with which we are now afflicted."14

He warned the people of the use of this tactic and its results during the 1924 campaign. He accused the old parties of evading the issue of domestic evils and said, "They seek to divert attention of the voter in this election from the domestic issues to conditions abroad."15

He assured his audience on October 10, 1924, in a speech on foreign policy, that he would attempt to follow a policy designed to remove the causes of war. He promised that the purpose of his foreign policy would be to "release it's (the world's) workers for the production of wealth and for its enjoyment unpoisoned by fear."16

He opposed the financing of the war through loans and bond drives and worked for a program to put war costs on a pay-as-you-go basis. He and other progressives had been successful in 1916 in passing an income tax which put a greater tax burden on the wealthy. This tax program was to pay for the preparedness program. He hoped that the war

16New York Times, October 11, 1924.
could be paid for by a tax on excess profits but failed to get much support for his ideas. 17

The Senator believed that war aims should be decided upon early and a campaign begun immediately to acquaint the people with them in order to have a basis for a "just and responsible peace." 18 He argued that an immediate renunciation of the Allied secret treaties would weaken the war party in Germany and perhaps shorten the war. 19

LaFollette's opposition to war was also based on the death, destruction, and waste which accompany war itself. He disliked what he believed to be the sacrifice of American youth. 20 He spoke of the "poor being called upon to rot in the trenches." 21 In the debate over naval appropriations in 1921, he gave graphic descriptions of the horrors of war while he discussed the scientific research into chemical and biological warfare. He spoke of war as "apalling", he spoke of the "destruction of human life",

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18 B.C. LaFollette and P. LaFollette, Robert M. LaFollette, II, 749.
19 Ibid., 756.
20 Ibid., I, 649.
21 Congressional Record, 65th Cong., Special sess., LV, 226, April 14, 1917.
"the annihilation of moral and spiritual forces and of every form of life itself." He predicted that another war would be a "death grapple between the races."22

Militarism was also a serious danger to democracy from LaFollette's viewpoint and he feared the growth of militarism in wartime.23 He blamed "military castes" for fomenting the World War.24 He compared the Navy League to the German groups who had pressed for a naval build-up, and said that it had been the "militarists which had brought Germany to ruin."25

Compulsory military service was completely alien to democracy in his opinion. He believed it to be a violation of the constitutional rights of Americans. He opposed the 1917 Conscription Act and offered an amendment calling for a volunteer army. He advocated an advisory referendum on that subject. He believed that repeal of the draft law was necessary. Fola LaFollette wrote that her father was

24 New York Times, October 11, 1924.
convinced "that a democracy ought never to enter a war it could not prosecute by volunteers." 26

Many progressives feared that a system of universal military training might be adopted. Mrs. LaFollette was a member of The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom who were very opposed to any form of militarism. Many articles and reports from this group were published in LaFollette's Magazine. Mrs. LaFollette wrote many articles on this subject. 27 An article written by Senator James A. Reed of Missouri warned of an attempt to wipe out the National Guard and replace it with a regular army. 28 The 1922 Wisconsin State Progressive Republican Platform contained a pledge to opposed universal military training. 29

LaFollette called for an investigation into reports of a naval officer disciplined for conferring with a committee of enlisted men. The Senator argued that such a conference was in accord with democratic principles. 30

27 Home and Education Section. Belle Case LaFollette, LaFollette's Magazine, XIV; XV; XVI.
30 Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 1st sess., LXI, (S.J.R. 97), 3179, June 24, 1921.
also advocated a reduction in rank and allowance for officers connected in any way with suppliers to the military services, as he feared the increased military expenditures resulting from this connection. 31

The Senator believed that large military expenditures often tended to provoke war, to aid imperialism or munitions manufacturers, and were not used for defense. He did not blame professional military people primarily for such large expenditures but rather the armament makers and Congress itself. In 1911, he wrote that most waste spending in naval affairs was due to Congressmen from districts with port facilities and naval yards. 32 He believed an important naval station should be built at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba but said, "We have no Senator from Guantanamo and so we have no harbor there." 33

LaFollette was convinced that his old enemies, the financiers and monopolists, were the real force behind large military expenditures. They would profit not only by the direct profits to be made from the sales but also

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31 Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 1st sess., LXI, 1683, May 23, 1921.


from the use of a big navy in an active imperialism. In the 1921 debate over naval appropriations, he charged that the only possible benefit from the building of more battleships would go to "armor manufacturers and to the great financial interests." He went on to discuss the "naval armor ring." He stated that the three big steel concerns had made all but seven per cent (LaFollette's figure) of the armor plate for big ships. He said, "Instead of being in their palatial offices, getting, in peacetime fourteen per cent and in war times forty-fifty percent, they ought to be in the penitentiary wearing stripes." This is very colorful language but LaFollette appeared to sincerely believe that these people were robbing the public and pressing an armament race.

There are some rather interesting aspects to his views on the subject of disarmament and militarism. Perhaps it would have been expected that a person with LaFollette's record would have supported the Four-Power Treaty. This treaty was presented as an attempt to end the naval race. But LaFollette did not support the treaty. He saw a real sentiment for disarmament on the part of some persons

35 Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 1st sess., LXI, 2177, May 16, 1921.
36 Ibid., 2183.
37 Ibid., 2185.
behind the calling of the Washington Conference, but believed that what came out of it was merely another alliance. He believed the treaty guaranteed the status quo in the Pacific area against the interests of colonial peoples.38

Another notable feature was the interest which the Senator took in the development of submarines and air power. He advocated the build-up of these two weapons rather than the completion of more battleships. He was especially interested in air power. He proposed the creation of a Chief of a Bureau of Aeronautics and asked that this official be an active flying officer.39 He quoted from a British naval authority as he advocated more air power and submarines for defense and argued that battleships would be less useful in any future war. Strangely, the Senator appeared to believe that airplanes would only be defensive weapons.40

LaFollette offered six reservations to the Versailles Treaty. Two of these dealt with militarism and disarmament. Both advocated withdrawal of the United States from the League if certain specifications were not met by other


40Ibid., 2179-81.
members. One of these gave all members one year to abolish conscription. Another of LaFollette's reservations required arms reduction by a particular formula each year. The United States was to withdraw from the League in any year in which the formula was not met. 41

Webster's dictionary defines a pacifist as "one who opposes war." 42 If this definition is accepted as complete, Senator LaFollette was a pacifist. He was very definitely opposed to American entry into World War I and voted against the declaration of war against Germany. 43 He also went on record against the declaration of war against Austria-Hungary, the only Senator who did so. However, he did state that he would not have done so if the resolution had included a statement that the United States would not be bound by, or a party to, any of the secret agreements of the Allies regarding the territory of Austria-Hungary. 44 He also opposed the use of American troops in Russia. 45 The resolution authorizing Wilson's

41 Congressional Record, 66th Cong., 1st sess., LVIII, 8192-3, November 10, 1919.
42 Webster's Approved Dictionary (Cleveland, 1941), 700.
43 B.C. LaFollette and P. LaFollette, Robert M. LaFollette, I, 666.
44 Ibid., II, 821.
action in Vera Cruz also received a negative vote from the Senator. He did support the punitive expedition against Pancho Villa but he also presented a resolution which assured the Mexicans of the limited nature of that expedition. The resolution was approved unanimously.

La Follette also had a high regard for the idea of international arbitration. He said of Bryan, "His framing of the peace treaties and getting them signed was, to my mind, one of the greatest pieces of work that has been accomplished by any secretary of state." He was referring to the thirty arbitration treaties negotiated by Bryan in 1913 and 1914. The "La Follette Peace Resolution" of 1915 called for an international tribunal to settle disputes. Eventually he seemed to lose faith in such agreements under the world conditions, and his real interest became the removal of what he believed were the causes of war.

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46 Ibid., I, 496.
47 Ibid., 561.
48 Ibid., 543.
50 Congressional Record, 63rd Cong., 3rd sess., LII, 3230, February 8, 1915.
51 New York Times, October 7, 1924.
But the Senator did not oppose war under all circumstances and if that is what pacifism is understood to mean, he was not a pacifist. He did not share the viewpoint of those in the Oxford Movement in Britain in the 1930's. He said that he was "not an advocate of peace at any price." He was interested in the national defense as was shown by the interest which he took in air power. He did not oppose the punitive expedition against Pancho Villa as Villa had entered and carried out his actions on American territory. Even his project for a referendum on war, which he pressed from April of 1916 until his death, excluded cases where actual invasion had taken place from the referendum procedure.

Oswald Garrison Villard, who professed to be a pacifist, said of LaFollette after his death:

He was opposed to war but he was not a pacifist—he could not see that he who compromises with this and refuses to break with it at all times, under all conditions, merely helps to continue it, and helps it more than does the outright advocate of war.

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52 *New York Times*, October 11, 1924.
53 Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 1st sess., LXI, 1636, 2177-9, 2181, May 23, 1921.
56 Oswald Garrison Villard, *Fighting Years* (New York, 1939), 505.
The Senator was clearly much less willing than most to resort to war and appeared willing to approve it only as a last resort. However, he was not opposed to war in self defense. Once war took place he did not oppose the fighting of it. His son Philip LaFollette enlisted in the army, not wanting a "slacker job" in the war which his father opposed. He did this with his father's approval. 57

Collective security is the name given to the concept that peace can be maintained by concerted action of nations, against any aggressor nation. 58 This was the idea behind the League of Nations. Woodrow Wilson believed the League would keep the peace. Foster Rhea Dulles wrote that Wilson believed the machinery for adjusting the peace was essential. He quotes Wilson's explanation:

Settlement may be temporary, but the actions of the nations in the interests of peace and justice must be permanent. We can set up permanent processes. We may not be able to set up permanent decisions. 59

Goldman also states that Wilson defended the League and treaty on the grounds that the League would take care of any difficulties created by the treaty. 60

58 Bailey, Diplomatic History, 912.
60 Goldman, Rendezvous with Destiny, 203.
The LaFollette resolution of February 8, 1915 called for a conference of neutrals to work toward a joint offer of mediation. The resolution went further as it also proposed that the conference make rules on neutral rights, the limitation of armaments, the nationalization of the manufacture of munitions, and the export of war supplies. The resolution also called for the establishment of an international tribunal and plans for a federation of nations to guard over the peace of the world. At this time he said that the American position could not be one of "selfish indifference." Later he said in a speech, "We can no longer avoid our responsibility." This would make it appear contradictory that LaFollette voted against the acceptance of the Versailles Treaty and the League of Nations. But here was the principle against taking "half a loaf" in operation. He saw the League as nothing new but instead "an alliance among the victorious governments, following a great war, by which their conquered enemies may be kept in subjugation and exploited to the uttermost." Senator LaFollette's position was that a lasting peace had to be just. He wrote to his wife, "There can be no permanent

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61 Congressional Record, 63rd Cong., 3rd sess., LII, 3230, February 8, 1915.

62 B.C. LaFollette and P. LaFollette, Robert M. LaFollette, II, 970.
peace based on wrong and no League can be formed strong enough to maintain such a peace.63 The liberal opposition to the treaty and the League seemed to be basically this position, that many treaty provisions were likely to cause war and unrest.64 This also points out the difference between this viewpoint and that of Wilson. Where Wilson believed the machinery to be essential, LaFollette believed the machinery worthless or worse unless the settlement it was to enforce was sound.

Two other major attempts were made to come to some kind of international agreement on collective security in the immediate post-war years. Both met with the disapproval of LaFollette. He opposed the Four-Power Treaty because it required the United States to "respect" the possessions of the British and the Japanese in the Pacific. LaFollette argued that the treaty would encourage imperialism.65 The World Court, he charged, was of no use until the Treaty of Versailles was "obliterated" and "malice and revenge" were ended. Until then the United States would only be underwriting the whole shabby business. He also believed that

63 Ibid., 954.
64 Goldman, Rendezvous with Destiny, 204-205.
any workable system should be genuinely that; a world system including all nations. He believed that Germany and Russia had to be included because their cooperation was necessary to prevent war. He disapproved anything which he thought smacked of another alliance directed against those not in it.

The tradition of a policy of isolation, or perhaps rather a tradition of freedom of action was also an important factor in the positions taken by LaFollette. In 1917 he argued that if the United States cooperated with the Allies, Americans would be endorsing the actions of the Allies whether they approved or not. LaFollette often used the argument that it was better to remain aloof from nations whose policies do not agree with your own. His speeches on the Versailles Treaty pointed out the unsavory things to which the United States would become a party if the treaty was ratified. This also was his argument against the Four-Power Treaty. He argued against American adherence to the World Court and wrote, "We have already set

66R.M. LaFollette, "The World Court," XV, 68.

67Congressional Record, 65th Cong., Special sess., LV, 223-34, April 4, 1917.

68Congressional Record, 66th Cong., 1st sess., LVIII, 7674-6, October 29, 1919; 8719, 8722, 8750, November 13, 1919; 84,31-2, November 13, 1919; 67th Cong., 2nd sess., LXII, 4714-21, March 12, 1922.
Europe a good example by refusing to ratify the Treaty of Versailles.69

Another notion was that if the United States were not allied with the disreputable dealings of other powers she could accomplish a great deal by good example. This was also considered to be a tradition and one well suited to a nation claiming to be democratic. During the discussion over ratification of the 1921 treaty with Germany, he called for a return to America's "traditional" policy of "freedom from the intrigue and imperialism of European diplomacy."70 As he advocated moral influence to secure a relaxation from the harsh terms of the Versailles Treaty for Germany, he wrote:

In doing so we should be returning to the traditional American policy of using our moral influence to promote peace and the development of democratic institutions.71

The progressive program had placed the purification of American democracy first, not only to serve Americans, but to serve the whole world by the example.72 He summarized these attitudes when he said:

69 R.M. LaFollette, "The World Court," XV, 68.
70 Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 1st sess., LXI, 7681, October 18, 1921.
We can only serve the world and our own people while we are free to pursue our own ideals and our own ambitions in an effort to uphold freedom and democracy and the rights of the common man.\footnote{Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 2nd sess., LXII, 4719, March 22, 1922.}
CHAPTER V
LAFOLETTE AS AN ANTI-IMPERIALIST

Imperialism is that policy whereby a strong nation seeks to extend its domain or its control over foreign territory. Even though some progressives believed that the United States should pursue an imperialistic policy, many did not. Senator LaFollette considered imperialism wrong and believed it to be a cause of most of the major problems in international affairs.

He believed imperialism to be a major harbinger of wars. He believed that imperialism was the basic cause behind the World War. He had concluded that the race for the resources of Africa and Asia and greed over concessions from weaker nations had brought war. He was convinced that the war was a quarrel among the imperialists of Europe. Worst of all, he feared the United States was becoming an imperialistic power. This was contrary to the progressive interpretation of American traditions and ideals. He believed that the Versailles Treaty was an imperialistic tool to maintain the Allies' control over the natural resources of the world.

The Senator warned of the dangers to peace that came from imperialism. He spoke of imperialism "with its
inevitable train of disastrous wars."\(^1\) Again he criticized imperialism and said that the doctrine that "the flag follows the investor" was responsible for "almost every war of the last generation."\(^2\) In the same speech he branded the mandate system of the League of Nations as an attempt by imperialists to "sanctify and make permanent a redistribution of the spoils of the world..."\(^3\) At the time the United States entered the World War, he believed imperialism had led to the war. He traced the history of the various crises over Morocco as an example.\(^4\) He stated his beliefs again in 1924 when he wrote:

...nothing so surely leads to foreign complications and to war as our present policy of placing the diplomatic resources of our government behind the claims of concession hunting capitalists.\(^5\)

It could be concluded from LaFollette's arguments that imperialism led to wars in two ways and to two types of wars. One type was the large war between two sets of imperialists quarreling over the spoils. The other was the small war or intervention caused by the military forces of the imperialist

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\(^2\)New York Times, October 11, 1924.

\(^3\)Ibid.

\(^4\)Congressional Record, 65th Cong., Special sess., LV, 229, April 4, 1917.

power going into a small country to guard the holdings of foreigners. The Senator described this in a speech that opposed certain provisions of a tax bill which he thought allowed capital to escape taxation. Investors were lured by the chance of extremely high profits, he said, into countries which are "undeveloped, unsettled, and usually without a stable government." But, he argued, the conditions which made profits high also made for risk, especially to the people of the country (United States) who must furnish the men and ships to give protection to the investments. Then he surmised that if no trouble had occurred in that way it came eventually because:

...the conflict of interests between the great exploiting countries whose capitalists have sought the same field of exploitation is certain to breed war.

The Senator also believed there was a link between monopolists and imperialists. "Financial imperialism is the inevitable product of the control of government by the private monopoly system," he said. When he spoke in support of Philippine independence, he charged:

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6 Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 1st sess., LXI, 6549, September 29, 1921.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 New York Times, October 31, 1924.
The recent discovery of oil in the Philippines has certainly added no impetus to the movement for independence. Greedy American monopolists who have no concern for the welfare of our own people can hardly be expected to show consideration for the liberties of another race...

Later he promised, "When the American people regain control of their own government, Philippine independence will be granted." The connection between monopoly and imperialism was pointed out again in the Senator's announcement of his Presidential candidacy:

The ill-gotten surplus capital acquired by exploiting the resources and the people of our country begets the imperialism which hunts down and exploits the natural resources and the people of foreign countries, erects huge armaments for the protection of its investments, breeds international strife in the markets of the world and inevitably leads to war.

LaFollette believed that imperialism was an enemy of democracy and was morally wrong. To him and to many others imperialism practiced by a country who had fought a war against a colonial power for her own independence, was the abandonment of American tradition. He believed it was morally wrong to forsake the ideals of the Declaration of

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11 Ibid.
12 July 4, 1924 announcement of LaFollette's Presidential candidacy. LaFollette's Magazine, XVI, 98, July 1924.
Independence. LaFollette quoted Lincoln on slavery and applied the argument to imperialism. "Familiarize yourself with bondage and you prepare your own limbs to wear chains. Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves."

The Senator used this quote in a criticism of a letter, written by President Coolidge to the speaker of the Philippine House of Representatives, explaining why immediate independence was not favored. LaFollette, who favored immediate independence, denounced the letter and the notion that the Filipinos were not ready for independence. He said the letter was "remarkable in its denial of the basic principles on which our own government rests."

The immorality of the portions of the Versailles Treaty dealing with Shantung would "blacken" the United States if she affirmed that agreement, argued LaFollette. He was convinced the whole thing was both wrong and illegal. He argued that "...we don't own China, so we can't be part of its conveyance. It is theft." He maintained Germany never belonged there in the first place and the whole thing was based on force. He argued that American refusal to be a party to the Shantung agreement would have

14 Ibid.
15 Congressional Record, 66th Cong., 1st sess., LVIII, 7011-7012, October 16, 1919.
"moral power." LaFollette believed that if the United States joined in the exploitation of the world's resources through imperialism, she would lose the respect, the faith, and the regard with which other countries had looked at her in the past. He pleaded that the United States should keep her record clean "so we may stand as a living example of the happiness and prosperity that is possible under a genuine democracy."

LaFollette urged that self-government and democracy be encouraged around the world. Two of his six reservations to the Versailles Treaty dealt with colonialism. The first stated that the right of revolution must not be denied to "subject" peoples and named the examples of India, Ireland, Egypt, and Korea. The other provided for the withdrawal of the United States from the League of Nations any time when the natural resources of a colonial area were exploited without the consent of the people.

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16 Ibid.
18 R.M. LaFollette, "The World Court," XV, 68.
19 Congressional Record, 66th Cong., 1st sess., LVIII, 8192-3, November 10, 1919.
"Born of greed and tyranny, imperialism is the deadliest enemy of self-government." LaFollette believed this and also that imperialists were men who were not devoted to democracy and were enemies of it at home. The enemies of Philippine independence and Irish independence were described as being of the same type. Men who have controlled the Irish policy of England, he said, were those who "could not stamp out liberty in England itself..." but were able through the foreign office to rule by the use of force in the Empire.

LaFollette opposed interventions that attempted to impose democracy as well as those that attempted to prevent it. The Senator opposed the presence of American troops in Russia. He urged that the United

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20 Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 1st sess., LXI, 592-605, April 25, 1921.
21 Ibid., R.M. LaFollette, "Coolidge versus Lincoln," XVI, 52.
22 Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 1st sess., LXI, 592-605, April 25, 1921.
24 Bailey, Diplomatic History, 603.
States recognize the Soviet government as a de facto government. He wrote of his opposition to the Soviet form of government and maintained that if he were a citizen of Russia he would resist it. But he didn't believe that the American government should intervene. He wrote, "I believe in democracy but would not attempt to force a democracy on any nation except by light of example."  

LaFollette's opposition to the intervention in the affairs of another country was even more apparent in the case of the revolt against Mexico's President Obregon in 1923. The United States government had recognized the Obregon government. When a military revolt took place the Mexican government asked for arms including airplanes, which the Coolidge administration quickly granted.  

LaFollette was concerned about this aid to the Mexican government and wrote:

The principle involved is wholly wicked, and will set a precedent upon which great abuses are bound to occur....The people of Mexico have the right

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27 Howard F. Cline, The United States and Mexico (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), 208.
to choose their own government without outside interference. 28

This position was all the more interesting as the Senator, in the same editorial, had wished the Mexican government success in crushing the revolt. LaFollette had called the revolt a "reactionary movement." He wrote of Obregon, "He has given his country its first and only taste of real liberty and democracy." 29

In the campaign of 1924, LaFollette gave as much attention to the subject of American imperialism as any other issue in foreign affairs. The core of his opposition to imperialism had been present for a long time. As progressives believed strongly in democratic government, it would seem consistent that they would oppose imperialism. But this was not always true. William Leuchtenburg argues that the progressives supported most imperialistic moves. However, most examples that he discusses in an article on progressivism and imperialism do not appear to apply to Robert LaFollette. 30

28 Editorial by R.M. LaFollette, LaFollette's Magazine, XVI, 1, January 1924.
29 Ibid.
The Senator's reasons for opposing imperialistic ventures may have enlarged as time passed. During his three terms in the House of Representatives, from 1884 to 1890, it appears that the corruption and lobbying involved and the dangers of intervention prompted his opposition. He explained that he fought the Nicaraguan Canal bill because he realized that the bill would give privileges to special interests. The interests, he wrote, had offered one hundred thousand dollars to the national committee of each party if the bill passed. 31 A treaty with Honduras was opposed because special interests were to be favored by a United States government guarantee of private loans to that Central American nation. 32

At the time of American acquisition of the Canal Zone, LaFollette was the Governor of Wisconsin and not directly involved in this issue. Later he demonstrated some dissatisfaction over the American record there. William Leuchtenburg cites LaFollette's opposition to the repeal of the Canal toll exemptions as evidence of support for imperialism. 33 However, a good deal of the objection to

31 R.M. LaFollette, Autobiography, 35.
32 Ibid., 129.
33 Leuchtenburg, "Progressivism and Imperialism," XXXIX, 488.
repeal was based on Anti-British sentiment. The move for repeal was begun to end British complaints that the exemption of American shipping from the tolls was a violation of the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty. This could explain LaFollette's position as he was certainly not friendly to British interests. LaFollette later voted affirmatively on amendments to give Columbia free use of the canal and railroad. He did not participate in debate on the Columbian Treaty in 1921 but his votes were recorded. There was some disagreement over how the money should be paid to Columbia and whether an apology should be included. Some Senators believed that the United States had acted with less than honor in obtaining the zone and during the Panamanian revolt. LaFollette voted negatively on an amendment presented by Senator Borah to the effect that no admission of guilt should be inferred or admitted. On the final vote on the entire treaty, LaFollette also gave a negative vote. This was probably because some Senators believed that the whole thing was being pushed

34Bailey, Diplomatic History, 601.
35Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 1st sess., LXI, 423, April 1921.
36Ibid.
37Ibid.
at that late date to gain oil concessions from Columbia. LaFollette later described the treaty as "the bare-faced consummation of the Columbian Treaty in exchange for oil concessions...".

LaFollette had developed a keen dislike for "dollar diplomacy". He deplored what he considered the use of the state department and the military by private interests. He introduced an amendment to the naval appropriations bill of 1921 which provided that no ship to be built with the appropriations involved should be used to collect private debts or to force a change in government, constitution, or laws of a foreign country. The amendment did not become part of the bill. He charged that naval preparedness was not needed for defense but rather in the Caribbean to "make good the shaky investments of the great bankers and oil magnates." In the 1924 campaign, he accused the government of copying the British Empire and using the marines as "bill collectors."

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38 Bailey, Diplomatic History, 546.
40 Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 1st sess., LXI, 1921.
41 R.M. LaFollette, "How the President and Congress Are Spending Your Money," XV, 1.
42 New York Times, October 31, 1924.
The story of LaFollette's effort to prevent the United States from intervention or war with Mexico during the difficult years of the Mexican Revolution was an interesting one. Very early in 1913, Wilson clearly stated that his foreign policy would not include "dollar diplomacy" in Latin America. LaFollette supported this change in American policy.

As the Mexican Revolution became more violent it presented many challenges to the Wilson administration. Wilson announced a policy of "watchful waiting" and nonintervention in Mexico. Americans were warned to leave Mexico or remain at their own risk. Wilson's policy included non-recognition of the Huerta regime. This was not in keeping with the principle of the recognition of de facto governments. However, it could be argued that conditions were such that there was in reality no de facto government although many European nations had recognized Huerta. LaFollette praised Wilson's speech before Congress and said that Wilson had "contributed a state document to history that will assuredly prove a beacon toward world peace."
Then came the Tampico incident and Wilson ordered the seizure of Vera Cruz by naval forces. At the time of the actual seizure of Vera Cruz, the resolution approving the use of force was being debated in the Senate. Four Americans were killed and twenty wounded at Vera Cruz. LaFollette believed that under those circumstances the resolution would pass, but he attempted to secure the passage of an amendment limiting the use of armed forces to the immediate pacification and stating the American intention not to exercise sovereignty in any portion of Mexico. This was defeated and LaFollette voted against the resolution. Afterward he stated that the world must be made to realize that the country was united behind the President. He argued that it should be announced that the armed forces would be removed "at the earliest possible moment consistent with national honor." In a letter to his wife, he wrote of his hopes that war could be avoided and his fear that it would not be. He wrote that war with Mexico would be a "disgrace and crime."

The Senator continued to support Wilson's Mexican policy. Then came the Villa raid over the border into

47 Ibid., 496-7; See also Robert E. Quirk, An Affair of Honor, Woodrow Wilson and the Occupation of Vera Cruz (University of Kentucky Press, 1962).
48 B.C. LaFollette and P. LaFollette, Robert M. LaFollette, I, 497.
Columbus, New Mexico. LaFollette had been concerned even before this incident by the agitation of those who wanted to intervene. He feared that war would result if the Pershing expedition ran into heavy fighting. LaFollette had a conference with Wilson and the following day introduced a resolution in the Senate approving the use of force. But the resolution also stated that the expedition was only to punish the raiders. The resolution stated that the expedition was not to impair the sovereignty of Mexico, or interfere in the domestic affairs of Mexico. The resolution passed unanimously.49

The Mexican situation continued to interest Senator LaFollette. He conferred with others about ways to prevent war with Mexico. He had many talks with Lincoln Steffens who had interviewed Mexican leaders.50 He continued to oppose any further intervention and stated his belief that any investor in a foreign country must accept the laws of that country concerning such investments. He spoke of what he was convinced American policy should be in Latin America:

...let us here and now resolve and declare that we will never permit the armed forces of the

49 Ibid., 550-61; Congressional Record, 64th Cong., 1st sess., LIII, 4274, March 17, 1916.
50 B. C. LaFollette and P. LaFollette, Robert M. LaFollette, I, 567.
United States to be used to despoil our sister republics of their property, interfere with their right to govern themselves according to their own standards, or violate their sovereignty—as sacred to them as American sovereignty is to us.  

In 1921 there was difficulty with Mexico again, and LaFollette expressed his hope that war could be avoided. He asked that Congress be consulted before force was used. An article, written by Senator Ladd condemning the influence of the "interests" in Mexico and urging the recognition of the Obregon government, appeared in his magazine. LaFollette expressed his own approval of the Obregon government. During the 1924 campaign he pledged that if he was elected, the United States would not "menace Mexican integrity." One of the two wreaths placed beside LaFollette's casket in 1925 was the one sent by President Calles of Mexico as a tribute to LaFollette's efforts to preserve peace between the United States and Mexico.

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51 Congressional Record, 64th Cong., 1st sess., LIII, 11344-5, July 20, 1916.  
52 Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 1st sess., LXI, 3555, July 26, 1921.  
54 New York Times, October 11, 1924.  
The progressive belief that the American mission was to be an example of democracy and self-government to the rest of the world, is clearly evident in LaFollette's opposition to imperialism. Anti-imperialism was also based on a reliance on an economic interpretation of history. Imperialism was believed to benefit only the capitalist and to bring war and misery to all others. LaFollette expressed these sentiments against imperialism very movingly in 1919, when he said:

I do not covet for this country a position in the world which history has shown would make us the object of endless jealousies and hatreds, involve us in perpetual war, and lead to the extinction of our domestic liberty...we can not, without sacrificing this Republic, maintain dominion for ourselves.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{56}Congressional Record, 66th Cong., 1st sess., LVIII, 8727-8, November 1919.
CHAPTER VI

FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN THE CAMPAIGN OF 1924

The theme of the Progressive campaign of 1924 was the restoration of the control of government to the people. Those who supported LaFollette hoped to begin a return to reform and progressivism in domestic affairs. The most important issue of the times as LaFollette put it was "the control of government and industry by private monopoly." Foreign affairs were not a primary issue and LaFollette's position in foreign affairs revolved around this basic theme.

The Conference for Progressive Political Action which met at Cleveland in July 1924 was composed of four major organized groups. These were a Wisconsin-LaFollette group, the Non-Partisan League farm group, the Railroad Brotherhoods, and the Socialists. There was some disagreement within the progressive group over the issue of American membership in the League of Nations. While many Easterners supported American membership in the League, most Midwesterners did not. The League was not mentioned by name in the platform. There were other dissensions among

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1 Porter and Johnson, Party Platforms, 252.
2 Nye, Midwestern Progressive Politics, 334.
3 McKay, Progressive Movement, 146.
these groups, especially over whether or not a third party should be formed.

The Convention was united in support of LaFollette who was selected as their candidate before organization was complete. The platform was written after his selection. LaFollette outlined his requirements for a platform in his acceptance speech and the CPPA Platform was built around these requirements. LaFollette ran on two platforms, his own and the CPPA Platform, which were nearly identical. They were especially alike on the subject of international relations.

The Progressives were interested in the adoption of their program and the growth of their movement. At best, they hoped only to gain a balance of power or support for the formation of a new party. They were able to speak more freely than a regular party that expected to win. Also there were no local issues or slates of state and local offices to concern them. Therefore, LaFollette was quite free to express his own opinions on issues. He did have some supporters, such as Oswald Garrison Villard, who urged

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4 Ibid., 119.
5 Ibid., 121.
6 Porter and Johnson, Party Platforms, 252-8.
7 McKay, Progressive Movement, 133.
him to speak out more on foreign affairs. He had some
German-American and Irish-American support. He continued
to express ideas favorable to their interests but they were
ideas which he had expressed before. The support given him
by these two groups may have been based on what he had al-
ready said and done.

The purpose of the 1924 campaign was to spread the pro-
gressive idea and to keep it alive. The ultimate goal was
to obtain the diffusion of political and economic power. A
part of the purpose was certainly to awaken the social con-
sciousness of the United States. There was a strong amount
of humanitarianism involved as well as a sense of the his-
torical mission of the United States. The ideals and aims
of the movement showed strongly in the general and specific
proposals for a progressive foreign policy.

As democracy was their ideal and the return of power
to the people was their goal, much of the program in for-
eign affairs called for a closer control by the people over
the foreign policy of the nation. Also under the progres-
sive program the State Department was to work for the benefit

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8Ibid., 146; Villard, Fighting Years, 505.
9McKay, Progressive Movement, 216.
10Ibid., 110-112.
of the whole people and not just for the large financial interests as the progressives believed it was doing. The LaFollette Platform charged that representatives of monopoly controlled the three branches of government. The platform also stated that the people knew that these "servile agents" directed American foreign policy in "the interests of predatory wealth, and make wars and conscript the sons of the common people to fight them." 11

LaFollette's platform went on to propose what should be done about the ills which the Progressives believed were in need of correction and to allow the restoration of popular sovereignty. The Progressives wanted to give the people "the final decision of all great questions of national policy." 12 In foreign affairs, this referred to a proposed amendment to the Constitution providing for a popular referendum before a declaration of war except in cases of invasion. 13 A similar pledge appeared in the CPPA Platform adopted in Cleveland. 14

The proposals of LaFollette's Platform for a foreign policy were based on the desire for peace and consisted of

11 Porter and Johnson, Party Platforms, 252.
12 Ibid., 254.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., 257.
methods which LaFollette believed would insure it. Imperialism was denounced and an "active" foreign policy was promised. LaFollette's foreign policy was to:

...bring about a revision of the Versailles Treaty in accordance with the terms of the armistice, and to promote firm treaty agreements with all nations to outlaw wars, abolish conscription, drastically reduce land, air and naval armaments and guarantee public referendums on peace and war.  

The CPPA Platform contained identical pledges on foreign affairs except that the CPPA Platform also called for "common international action to effect the economic recovery of the world from the effects of the world war." LaFollette's platform did not have this plank but he was cognizant of economic problems in Europe, particularly in Germany.

Both of the major party platforms also supported disarmament. The Democrats, like the Progressives, called for a referendum on declarations of war. The Democrats also called for a referendum on the issue of American entry into the League of Nations. The Republicans opposed the repudiation of war debts as had LaFollette in the section of his platform dealing with taxation.

Neither of the major parties mentioned conscription, revision of the Versailles Treaty, or plans for treaties to outlaw war. LaFollette's platform did not mention Latin

15 Ibid., 254.
16 Ibid., 257.
America although his speeches did. The Republicans pointed with pride to better relation with Mexico, and hoped for a series of Pan-American treaties to stabilize the hemisphere. The Democrats were ambiguous on this subject.

The Democratic Platform had three more topics which the other two did not have. The Democrats supported immediate Philippine independence. While LaFollette's platform did not mention this, his position favoring independence was stated again during the campaign. The Democrats also called for the United States to take over the Armenian mandate. LaFollette had opposed this. The Democrats called for Asian exclusion. LaFollette had not voted on the issue of oriental exclusion as he was ill when the immigration bill was before the Senate. He did not appear to be too concerned over this issue but was opposed to the exclusion of political refugees in the 1916 law.

Compared with the Republican and Democratic platforms of 1924, LaFollette's platform and that of the CPPA appeared to be more concerned with the prevention of war and militarism than were the others. The two platforms on which

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17 Ibid., 243 ff., 259ff.
18 Congressional Record, 68th Cong., 1st sess., LXV, 6315-6649, April 15-18, 1924.
LaFollette ran were also more opposed to imperialism although the Democrats advocated Philippine independence and criticized some oil concessions.

In addition to these statements in the two platforms, Senator LaFollette delivered two major campaign speeches on foreign affairs and touched upon the subject at other times. In these addresses he elaborated upon what he believed to be wrong in the present American policy and made more specific proposals for a progressive foreign policy.

Three main topics were discussed in these speeches. The first was the need for a more democratic control of foreign policy. This was probably the most important and the keystone of his ideas, as it was to make his other programs possible. The other two topics were the causes and prevention of war, and the plea for an immediate end to American imperialism.

On the subject of a democratic control over foreign policy, he pleaded for a vigorous voice from Congress in Foreign policy so that the President and the State Department would not involve the United States in situations where war became unavoidable. In the same speech at Rochester, New York, he asked for an end to secret diplomacy. He asked for a divorce of the State Department from
"Standard Oil and the international financiers." He repeated his program for a referendum on war. 20

At Cincinnati, in one of his major speeches on international relations, he repeated his support for a referendum on war. 21 The major portion of this speech dealt with the subject of war, its causes, and the programs which LaFollette believed should be adopted to prevent war. The address also outlined the foreign policy which he pledged to follow if he was elected. All but one of these proposals dealt directly with the elimination of the causes of war. The first of these was open diplomacy and democratic control. 22

The second point was a pledge to end the profit in war. A definite part of LaFollette's ideas on this subject for years was the belief that the government should manufacture all munitions. Another portion of this proposal was his opposition to foreign loans and the third was the high tax on excess war profits which he had supported during World War I. 23

LaFollette's third point was that the nation should "pay-as-you-go" in wartime and not leave a war debt for future

20 New York Times, October 7, 1924.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
generations. This related to his desire for high taxes during the war and his opposition to bond drives and loans.

The fourth topic was imperialism which he regarded as the primary cause of wars. He pledged that the integrity of Mexico would be respected, and that there would be American withdrawal from Central America. He pledged that no coercion would be used against China and the United States would take no part in the "dismemberment" of that nation.24

A pledge to grant Philippine independence was the fifth point. He had long supported this and considered American presence there wrong not only for the Filipinos but for the United States as well. This was consistent with his opposition to imperialism.25

The sixth point pledged a referendum on war, the reduction of armaments, and an end to conscription. Also in the same speech he pledged cooperation with all other nations in an attempt to persuade all countries to adopt these anti-militaristic programs. These proposals embodied most of the LaFollette reservations to the Versailles Treaty.26

24Ibid.
The doctrine "that the flag follows the investor" was condemned in the seventh point of his address. This type of imperialism was blamed for "every war of the last generation." Imperialism, he charged, had "destroyed the liberties of the greater part of the world." He denounced the mandate system of the Versailles Treaty as imperialism. He urged an end to imperialism everywhere. 27

The second major speech dealing with foreign affairs was delivered in a Brooklyn ice rink just a week before election day. He attacked imperialism and the two old parties for the way in which they had fostered it. He attacked the "private monopoly system and the power of Wall Street" in American foreign policy. He charged that "gold and oil rule the world." He attacked the State Department and said that it was "administered in the interests of oil." "Standard Oil was the State Department in the Middle East," he charged. He discussed imperialism in Central America and stated that, "Haiti and Santo Domingo were forced to accept American loans after the Marines had gained possession of their government." He deplored the "money power". He said, "American gold holds a mortgage on Central America", and he charged that soon the mortgage would be held on France and Germany. 28

27 New York Times, October 11, 1924.
He was followed by other speakers who also attacked Imperialism in speeches supporting Irish independence and attacking the “Black and Tans.”

One more speech was given on international relations. This was delivered in Boston on October 30, 1924 and the subject was imperialism again. United States policy in Central America was attacked again. He deplored “using the marines as collectors.” LaFollette concluded that the control of government by “private monopoly” would inevitably result in “financial imperialism.”

The Progressive position on foreign affairs in the 1924 campaign was consistent with their domestic policies. Both were based on the belief that concentrated economic power had obtained control of the government and that the result was bad. They were convinced that this control must be brought to an end and returned to the people. The Vice-Presidential candidate, Burton K. Wheeler, had refused to support Davis who was his party’s candidate. Before he joined with LaFollette he said, “I can not support any candidate representing the house of Morgan.”

31 McKay, Progressive Movement, 134.
Perhaps this statement could be enlarged to say that LaFollette and his supporters could not support a foreign policy which they believed represented the house of Morgan and what that represented to them, and for which they blamed the problems which the country faced in international affairs.

LaFollette's domestic positions which called for democratic control, the greater participation of the people in government, and an end to corruption and special privilege, were evident in his positions on foreign affairs in the 1924 campaign.
CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSIONS

Robert M. LaFollette's positions on foreign policy were shaped overwhelmingly by his views on domestic issues and by his experiences in that arena. Russel B. Nye wrote of LaFollette, his "main political aim was to restore the fullest democratic control of government to the people."¹ Holmes Alexander, a writer rather more critical of LaFollette, wrote that he was "obsessed by the fear and the conviction that American democracy was being corrupted by institutions" and "He had a psychotic fixation to the effect that wealth and success rather than the common man and humanitarianism would rule the land."²

Before the war, it appeared that LaFollette opposed certain issues in foreign affairs because they favored special domestic interests as when he opposed some American policies in Central America. Later imperialism itself became one of his main targets of attack, but again this seemed to come because of his beliefs in democratic government. Any American action which appeared to weaken

¹Nye, Midwestern Progressive Politics, 196.
²Alexander, Famous Five, 208.
self-government in other nations was believed to be a threat to democracy at home.

LaFollette opposed war consistently. He was as anxious to prevent war with Mexico as he was with Germany. He was not attacked for his position on Mexico as he was for his position on World War I. While attacks on his character and motives hurt him, he was used to them and expected them. Attacks from former friends hurt more than those from people who had always opposed him. But concern for the future of the progressive movement, his opposition to all war, and his belief that the people gained nothing from war were probably foremost in his mind. An interesting statement by Senator William J. Stone, a Missouri Democrat who also spoke and voted against the declaration of war, seems to point out some of the motives of LaFollette as well. He said his vote:

...was not because this war will cost billions, which these fools think will cost only millions; it's not even because of the loss of American lives although I would not sacrifice one American boy for all the European belligerents. I won't vote for this war because if we go into it, we will never again have this same old Republic.

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3B.C. LaFollette and F. LaFollette, Robert M. LaFollette, I, 645-68.
4Ibid., 654.
LaFollette's opposition to war was based to a great degree on his fear that war would end reform and weaken democracy at home. These fears appeared to have been justified by events during and after the war. Many of his speeches and articles show bitterness. He became more and more bitter as he saw free speech under attack, conscription put into use, the greater profits of businessmen, a halt to domestic reform, and what he considered a betrayal of the Fourteen Points. The terrible personal attacks on him even by old friends, also must have had some effect on him. He had supported Wilson in many domestic issues and had also supported him in the election of 1916. During the debate on the Versailles Treaty, his bitterness was evident in his attacks on Wilson. He said that Wilson was a "typical case of atavistic reversion", and spoke of "the peculiarly sinuous workings of that mind" and concluded:

I can not conceive of a normal man under normal conditions, who being duly regardful of his responsibility, could bring himself to set his hand and seal to the indefensible provisions of this treaty.  

As his bitterness and distrust were expressed against Wilson, his attacks never let up on those whom he had always

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5 Congressional Record, 66th Cong., 1st sess., LVIII, 8003, November 5, 1919.
6 Ibid., 8009.
regarded as the enemies of democracy. At times he appeared to be guilty of a priori reasoning in his attacks on his enemies, especially the financial and business interests at home and the British in foreign relations. His failure to ascribe unselfish or honorable motives to anything he opposed or anyone who opposed him and a tendency to sense conspiracies behind them, tended to weaken his own credibility at times. The inability to sense Wilson's own reluctance to go to war and his reasons for some of the compromises made in Paris, or the failure to fathom any humanitarian motives behind the mandate system, or to recognize real patriotism behind supporters of the Liberty Bond drives are some examples.

The fact that he did have prejudices in matters of international relations was recognized by those who were sympathetic to him and his work. Allen Nevins wrote in the forward to the 1960 edition of LaFollette's Autobiography, "He was not without prejudice in foreign affairs, and failed to do justice to the constructive aspects of colonial regimes." 7

Oswald Garrison Villard, who had supported LaFollette in 1924, said of him, "His range of vision was too narrowly

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limited by domestic issues, he was too long ignorant of Europe and Europe's experience.\(^8\)

Wallace Sayre stated that LaFollette's disappointment with Wilson brought his opposition to the League when he might have "consistently supported it."\(^9\) In this instance, however, LaFollette had other views which made it perhaps equally consistent that he oppose it. These reasons included his belief that the treaty was too harsh with Germany, that it gave too much to Great Britain, and that it was too imperialistic.

If LaFollette was prejudiced against certain groups and the policies they supported, he also had assumptions which led him to give support and trust to other groups and issues. These attitudes and assumptions often placed him in a position where he could be accused of being naive.

Most of LaFollette's prejudices and assumptions came from progressivism. There were certain beliefs which, while not held by all progressives, were common to many of them. A belief in the progress and improvement of mankind and a reliance on environmentalism were behind many progressive programs. Opinions and assumptions based on an economic interpretation of history played an important part in

\(^8\) Villard, Fighting Years, 505.

their thinking. The concern with morality, common to many progressives, caused them to see issues in black and white. They tended to assume that things were either good or evil. John Morton Blum wrote of the progressives:

...accustomed as they were to attribute all evil at home to the greedy corporations, they assigned to those familiar devils, allegedly engaged in a ruthless rivalry for markets and profits, the full responsibility for militarism, colonialism, and war.10

Progressives with an agrarian background also tended to identify Great Britain with the economic powers at home. Many of them also held an idealized view of the frontier background, and did not seem to realize the link American civilization had with Western civilization as a whole. When he wrote of the insurgents of 1908, George Mowry said they were "extremely parochial in their outlook."11

The relationships between progressive habits of thought and many of their opinions in foreign affairs was stated very well by Arthur Link. He wrote that the progressives had two major assumptions which influenced their actions in foreign affairs. One of these was the belief in "America's unique mission" to offer herself as an example

10 John Morton Blum, Woodrow Wilson and the Politics of Morality (Boston, 1956), 85.
11 Mowry, Era of Theodore Roosevelt, 244.
of "democracy triumphant over social and economic injustice." The second assumption was that "wars were mainly economic in causation." These two assumptions "led straight to disarmament, an international system based on compulsory arbitration, and an unequivocal repudiation of war." ¹²

These prejudices, assumptions, and conclusions were descriptive of LaFollette. He appeared to believe that the common people throughout the world were less warlike, more liberal, less swayed by promises of glory and selfish motives than were statesmen, diplomats, and rich men. He always believed the people were behind him or would be if given the facts. At times he seemed to hold that belief common in some leftist circles in Europe, that the working people of each country consciously had a greater bond between them than the bond of national loyalties. Even Mrs. LaFollette could not find the faith in the people that the Senator had. She wrote:

Bob and I never quite agreed as to how much the back-home influence could be depended on. When I would suggest that he overestimated the interest of the rank and file, he would say "if they understood" they would make themselves heard.¹³

Perhaps these same assumptions were partially responsible for his apparent belief that left-wing governments would

¹³B.C. LaFollette and F. LaFollette, Robert M. LaFollette, I, 139.
be less imperialistic, less warlike, and more willing to cooperate with other nations. He also seemed to have great faith in the ability of colonial peoples to govern themselves.

Although LaFollette never became President and never was a controlling force in our foreign policy, his views on the subject had a considerable effect later. He was the leader of the Senate progressives and anti-war forces for many years. His views on international relations were shared by many others. During the 1930's, after LaFollette's death, many of his ideas on the causes of World War I became more generally accepted. The report of the Nye Committee supported LaFollette's theories on the economic causes of the war and his warnings about the default on the Allied war debts had come true. The neutrality legislation incorporated his policies for the prevention of war. The 1937 law prohibited shipment of arms, ammunition, and loans to belligerents, and put a mandatory ban on travel on belligerent vessels. Wartime trade in non-military items was to be "cash and carry." Foster Rhea Dulles comments that the Congressional policies of the 1930's "appeared to many observers designed to keep the United States out of a war that had been fought twenty years earlier."

Both Goldman and Dulles contend that the belief in the economic causes of World War I and the way in which the fear of imperialism was tied to attempts at collective security by such men as LaFollette, held the United States back from the attempt to find collective security in the late 1930's. Franklin D. Roosevelt was also hampered in his attempts to hold back the spread of Fascism through some type of collective security because of the progressive-isolationist support for the New Deal by such men as George Norris and Robert LaFollette, Jr. 15

After World War II began these policies of the progressive-isolationist bloc were regarded as mistakes and there was a swing to the opposite extreme. Goldman writes, "the liberal economic interpretation of diplomacy and war was done."16 Goldman quoted Charles A. Beard who said, "so now it's all morals and no economics."17 This, perhaps, was as wrong as the theory that it was all economics. World War I did have roots in militarism in Europe, in the colonial scramble in Africa and Asia. World War II definitely was a moral conflict, colonial problems, imperialism, and a

15 Ibid., 175-6; Goldman, Rendezvous with Destiny, 293.
16 Ibid., 296.
17 Ibid.
contest for raw materials had contributed to the cause of the Pacific conflict. In Europe, the harsh terms of Versailles and the world-wide depression contributed to the rise of dictatorship in Germany as LaFollette had feared.
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