Henry Cantwell Wallace As Secretary of Agriculture, 1921-1924.


The Wallaces of Iowa have provided public leaders of their state and the nation for three generations. "Uncle Henry" Wallace was a prominent clergyman and publisher of a popular farm journal. His son, Henry C. Wallace, was briefly a faculty member of Iowa State College, continued his father's journalistic interests as editor of Wallaces' Farmer, and served as secretary of agriculture under President Warren G. Harding. In turn, his son, Henry Agard Wallace, continued the publication of the family magazine, helped to implement the New Deal as secretary of agriculture under Franklin D. Roosevelt, and served four years as vice president of the United States. All three Wallaces exhibited a strong streak of stubbornness, considerable leadership ability, and a continuing devotion to farming and to agricultural economics. Not the least able of the family, Henry C. Wallace faced an America in transition and American agriculture in deep crisis. This study of his relatively brief career in the presidential Cabinet adds a new dimension to present knowledge of the twenties.

Using a considerable variety of manuscript and printed sources, periodicals, and interviews, plus the standard secondary accounts, Donald L. Winters has produced a well written and informative book. Not intended as a full length biography, the study traces the family background and early life of the second generation Wallace but concentrates on the four years which he served as secretary of agriculture. Wallace fought successfully to prevent Secretary of the Interior Albert B. Fall from securing the transfer of the United States Forest Service to the Interior Department. He promoted the Packers and Stockyard Act and supported the passage of the farm credits law. He was a leader in the losing battle for the enactment of the McNary-Haagen Bill. Through much of his tenure Wallace carried on a continuing feud with Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover which dated back to the food administration during World War I. Though he, no doubt, would have retired from the Calvin Coolidge Cabinet at the end of his first term, Wallace's sudden death in October, 1924, cut short his career. His efforts to end the agricultural depression were unavailing, but any more comprehensive program of farm aid would not have been possible in the twenties.

Although Wallace had been an admirer of Theodore Roosevelt, he was not really a Progressive. As secretary his contacts with such leading western Progressives as Robert La Follette, George Norris, and William E. Borah were not close, and Winters leaves their relationship unclear. The volume could also have profited by the inclu-
sion of illustrations and a more comprehensive index. These, however, are merely minor criticisms of an excellent book. It is a welcome addition to the literature of the Harding era.

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The irreconcilables are often depicted as having been the victors in the Senate struggle over the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations in 1919 and 1920. In the sense that they achieved their goal of keeping the United States out of the League, they were victorious; but, as Ralph Stone clearly points out, they were not mere negativists nor motivated by only personal or political gain. Their reasons for opposing the treaty as harmful to the interests of the United States—or of mankind—were based on principle, although the principles were likely to be quite diverse when one considers the irreconcilables individually. Within the battalion of death were “conservatives and liberals, pacifists and militarists, imperialists and anti-imperialists, isolationists and internationalists . . . more a cross section of the nation than an ideologically homogeneous minority” (p. 178).

Early in the treaty fight the irreconcilables took the initiative and maintained it throughout most of the struggle, ever keeping their views before the Senate and the public and making most effective the influence they had. But there were, even at the end, only sixteen bitter enders. How could they have achieved their goal when they constituted only one sixth of the Senate? Stone sees, first, the importance of the talents of the irreconcilables themselves, among whom were “several of the outstanding senators of the twentieth century” (p. 2). Second, the political situation played into their hands. The Republicans in the 1918 election had won control of the Senate by the barest margin; the new majority leader, Henry Cabot Lodge, by virtue of his office if nothing else, was much concerned with party unity and was sensitive to pressure. Third, there was Democratic inflexibility. President Woodrow Wilson and most bitter enders desired a forthright vote on the treaty as written at Paris. Wilson, with encouragement from the irreconcilables, refused to change his goal; but the bitter enders, who recognized that they needed Lodge as much as he needed them, yielded to political necessity and, for the moment at