

## THE DILEMMA OF "A GOOD, VERY GOOD MAN"<sup>1</sup>: CAPPER AND NONINTERVENTIONISM, 1936-1941

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ARTHUR CAPPER, who served in the United States senate from 1919 to 1949, abhorred war, denouncing it as savage, brutal, and depraved. Reared by Quaker parents, he was an inveterate pacifist. His contemporaries recognized the senator, a member of the committee on foreign relations, as an important spokesman for the noninterventionist causes. Two factors enhanced his influence. As one of only a handful of Republican senators, he enjoyed the attention of the national media, and he effectively used his own publishing empire to disseminate his views to his largely rural readership. In 1936 *Capper's Farmer* had a monthly circulation of 1,078,000; *Capper's Weekly*, 411,000; and *Kansas Farmer* (fortnightly), 118,223. The senator also owned the

Title-page photo: Arthur Capper (1865-1951), Kansas publisher, governor, and U. S. senator from 1919 until he retired in 1949, was an important spokesman for the pacifist cause in the late 1930's and up to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December, 1941. He abhorred Nazi treatment of minorities, but hated war even more, and opposed American intervention in Europe's quarrels.

1. *New York Times*, August 6, 1936.

Topeka *Daily Capital* and radio station WIBW in Topeka. Even though his views were well-known, historians have generally overlooked his foreign policy pronouncements.<sup>2</sup>

Capper thought of himself as an internationalist, except in times of foreign wars. The basic premise of his foreign policy beliefs was his abhorrence of war, his pacifist predilection. With this as a foundation, Capper articulated a program that he hoped would keep America out of foreign wars. Like other noninterventionists, the senator didactically interpreted the foreign policy legacy of the early Presidents, particularly George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. He frequently referred to Washington's admonition to maintain friendship with all nations but entangling alliances with none and to Jefferson's embargo of trade with bel-

2. Capper Publications, Inc., *Publisher's Statements, 1925-1936* (Topeka, 1937); Homer E. Socolofsky, *Arthur Capper* (Lawrence, 1962); John E. Wiltz, *From Isolation to War, 1931-1941* (New York, 1968); Manfred Jonas, *Isolationism in America, 1935-1941* (Ithaca, N. Y., 1966); Robert A. Divine, *The Illusion of Neutrality* (Chicago, 1962).

ligerents. Arguing that the nation had gone astray during its flirtation with Wilsonian internationalism, Capper urged his fellow countrymen to retain the traditional unilateralism by observing good faith with all nations. America, the senator asserted, should adhere to a stringent program of neutrality, eschewing intervention in the affairs of other nations.

From the middle of the 1930's until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Capper held firmly to these beliefs; he only modified his tactics and positions on specific issues to meet the initiatives of the Roosevelt administration and events abroad. He concentrated his efforts on securing the enactment of his peace program, which he called the prices of peace. It included the nationalization of the munitions industry, small appropriations for the armed forces, an export embargo on arms and other implements of war, restrictions on profits combined with the conscription of wealth and industrial resources during war, and ratification of a constitutional amendment requiring a referendum before a congressional declaration of war. In a *Kansas Farmer* editorial he cautioned farmers that the exportation of agricultural commodities to belligerents could involve America in the strife. So he intimated that a total embargo on all exports might be necessary during wartime.<sup>3</sup>

During these years the noninterventionists sought the enactment of various legislative devices to prevent America from following the same steps that led to our involvement in World War I. Most of their attention centered on the neutrality legislation. Indeed, ever since the late 1920's Capper, as well as the nation as a whole, had been looking for more effective deterrents to war than the innocuous disarmament treaties and the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which outlawed war but contained no mechanism to enforce its provisions. In 1929 and 1932 the senator introduced a resolution proposing to give the President authority to embargo the export of arms and other articles for use in war to nations in violation of the pact. This resolution, a precursor of discretionary neutrality proposals, never reached the senate

floor, and the Kansas press evinced little sympathy for it.<sup>4</sup>

In 1934 the senate created the special committee to investigate the munitions industry, popularly named the Nye committee for its chairman, Republican Sen. Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota. The committee began work in 1935 on neutrality proposals at the behest of Pres. Franklin D. Roosevelt. The neutrality act of 1935 empowered the President to declare a state of war to exist whereupon an impartial, mandatory arms embargo would go into effect. It also prohibited American ships from carrying munitions either to belligerents or neutrals for transshipment to belligerents. The President would decide if and when to proclaim that Americans traveling on belligerent ships would do so at their own risk. The legislators had passed a bill designed to prevent those actions that had led to war in 1917. The next year congress extended the neutrality act with minor modifications until May 1, 1937. Most importantly, noninterventionists succeeded in winning adoption of a provision prohibiting loans to belligerents.<sup>5</sup>

The Kansas senator supported both of these measures although he considered them too weak. The laws contradicted his earlier discretionary resolutions. His shift to strict, mandatory neutrality resulted from many considerations. The deteriorating international situation—war had erupted or would soon break out in China, Ethiopia, and Spain—intensified his pacifist proclivities. His strong attachment to the Republican party made him wary of granting a Democratic President such discretionary authority. Kansans had little enthusiasm for his proposals, and editors in the state believed the neutrality acts would prevent America from fighting a foreign war. In December, 1935, the senator conducted a poll in which 95 percent of the sample disapproved of the United States selling war supplies to belligerents.<sup>6</sup>

With the support of his constituents, Capper promoted the cause of mandatory neutrality during his reelection campaign in 1936. The

4. Divine, *Illusion*, pp. 13-27; Mary R. Millsap, "Reaction to Neutrality Legislation of the 1930's as Expressed by Kansas Newspapers" (Master's thesis, Wichita State University, 1966), pp. 14-19.

5. Wayne S. Cole, *Senator Gerald P. Nye and American Foreign Relations* (Minneapolis, 1962), pp. 9-105; Divine, *Illusion*, pp. 110-117.

6. Topeka *Daily Capital*, August 21, 1935; Millsap, "Reaction to Neutrality," pp. 34-56; speech over WIBW, Topeka, and KMMJ, Clay Center, Neb., April 28, 1936, "Capper Papers."

3. Speech over Inter-City Broadcasting System, Washington, D.C., sponsored by the National Council for the Prevention of War, May 18, 1937, speeches over WIBW, Topeka, January 10, February 7, 21, 1937. "Arthur Capper Papers," Kansas State Historical Society (hereafter cited KSHS); *Capper's Farmer*, Topeka, February, 1937; *Kansas Farmer*, Topeka, January 2, 1937; *Capper's Weekly*, Topeka, February 13, May 29, 1937.

1936 neutrality act, he admonished, was not strong enough to curb the "merchants of death." Interpolating from the Nye committee reports, the senator described the munitions industry as a colossal racket: officers of such corporations had bribed public officials, had promoted war scares, had gained excessive profits by collusive bidding, and had flouted national priorities by forming cartels with foreign companies. He hoped that more stringent regulations would be incorporated in the next neutrality bill. It should include, he argued, federal control of the exportation of all essential war supplies, should cover all civil wars, should ban American ships from war zones, and should implement cash-and-carry restrictions on all trade with belligerents. His peace program demonstrated that he believed the "inevitable" European war would pose no threat to American security.<sup>7</sup> This argument proved to be the noninterventionists' most grievous misconception, because Europe dominated by Hitler posed serious problems for America.

Again in 1937 congress had to act on neutrality legislation. Many people feared that the exportation of trade goods to belligerents might propel the country into war. So the senate foreign relations committee adopted the cash-and-carry scheme of Bernard Baruch, which provided that belligerents could buy any American goods, except arms, but would have to pay cash and ship the goods in foreign vessels. The cash section went into effect when the President declared a state of war to exist; the carry portion, however, could be used at the President's discretion. Capper and other noninterventionists, led by Nye, opposed this grant of power. Failing to modify the bill, the Kansas senator still believed that the bill would shield America from the actions of belligerents in the next war and would restrain the administration. The United States, Capper reasoned, would be protected from the causes of World War I—trading with just one side of the belligerents, making loans, allowing ships and citizens to travel in war zones, and searching for war profits. The final act included a mandatory arms embargo, a prohibition of

loans to belligerents, a discretionary cash-and-carry provision, and bans on Americans traveling on belligerent vessels and the arming of American merchant ships. The abandonment of traditional neutral privileges did not trouble Capper who advocated the removal of business and military interests from war zones rather than risk war. Capper voted against the final bill because it gave the President too much latitude in applying the cash-and-carry title.<sup>8</sup>

The "barbarous" acts in wartorn Spain hardened Capper's resolve to save ordinary Americans from the universal suffering, hardships, destruction, and death that war portended. The senator chastized the administration for its refusal to invoke the neutrality act in the undeclared war between China and Japan, which had erupted in the summer of 1937. He urged the immediate withdrawal of American interests in China. Noninterventionists denounced the President's "Quarantine the Aggressor" speech of October, 1937. Only thinking aloud, Roosevelt mused about the advisability of uniting democracies in opposition to aggressor nations. This speech did not signal his shift to an interventionist policy. Replying to an inquiry from the *Philadelphia Record*, Capper cautioned that the United States could not remain at peace "if we yield to the demands of some well-meaning people who want us to punish aggressors. . . . We can exercise economic pressure but certainly ought not to attempt to curb aggressors by use of force." Undoubtedly, what he had in mind as economic pressure was the enforcement of the neutrality act.<sup>9</sup>

Using the adverse reaction to the President's speech, Capper introduced, on November 11, 1937, a joint resolution which called for a war referendum amendment. Such an amendment to the constitution would require a referendum before congress could declare war, except in case of invasion. This amendment was popularly known as the Ludlow amendment, named for Democratic Rep. Louis Ludlow of Indiana.

7. Charles M. Sheldon to Capper, February 17, 1936, speech WIBW and KMMJ, April 28, 1936, "Capper Papers"; *Capper's Farmer*, September 1936; *Wichita Eagle* (morning), October 26, 1936; Arthur Capper, "The United States Neutrality Policy," *Neus-Telegraph*, Atlantic, Iowa, December 31, 1936.

8. Divine, *Illusion*, pp. 162-199; Cole, *Nye*, pp. 105-118; Wayne S. Cole, "Senator Key Pittman and American Neutrality Policies, 1933-1940," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, v. 46 (March, 1960), pp. 644-662; *Topeka Daily Capital*, January 11, February 7, March 4, May 2, 1937; *Congressional Record*, March 3, 1937, pp. 1,784-1,786; speech WIBW, November 7, 1937, "Capper Papers."

9. Claude G. Bowers to Capper, September 29, 1937, "Capper Papers"; Dorothy Borg, "Notes on Roosevelt's 'Quarantine Speech,'" *Political Science Quarterly*, New York, v. 72 (September, 1957), pp. 405-433; *Philadelphia Record*, October 10, 1937 (reprinted in *New York Evening Post*, October 11, 1937).

A longtime advocate of letting the "people decide," Capper viewed such a referendum as part of the voters' inherent right to exercise their political sovereignty. Arthur Krock, writing in the *New York Times*, characterized Capper's resolution as the people's response to the "Quarantine the Aggressor" speech. This response, Krock asserted, meant that whatever sympathies Americans had for China, they did not want to become involved with Japan and that the people were suspicious of Great Britain and of Roosevelt and future chief executives. He labeled Capper and the other noninterventionists as "ostrich-isolationists and the peace-at-any-price pacifists," but acknowledged that they enjoyed the confidence of a majority of Americans. Indeed, the war referendum had the support of several pacifist organizations, including the Woman's International League for Peace and Freedom, the National Council for the Prevention of War, and the National Committee on the War Referendum.<sup>10</sup>

On December 12, 1937, Japanese aircraft attacked and sank the United States river gunboat *Panay*, which had been patrolling the Yangtze river in China. "I do not believe there are hardly any Americans who really hold that it is our destiny . . .," the Kansas senator predictably reacted, "to try to settle affairs in the Orient, nor that it is our duty to police the world. If we should start out on such a job, we simply engage in a series of wars, wars without end, such as the people of the Old World have had as far back as we can read history." Most Kansas newspapers concurred and supported a total American withdrawal from the Orient to avoid war. But the attack on the *Panay* provoked diverse reactions.<sup>11</sup>

Almost immediately, the war referendum forces used the incident to secure enough signatures on a discharge petition in order to remove the amendment from the house rules committee, where the administration had it bottled up. On January 10, 1938, Ludlow moved that his referendum proposal be

brought to the floor. The debate on the motion was brief but bitter; it was defeated 209 to 188. In fact, the proposal was never debated on the floor of congress. Capper complained to William Allen White that the *Panay* incident had hurt its chances of passage. His analysis was correct. Signing the discharge petition was an easy way for congressmen to satisfy their constituents. The proposal's inherent challenge to the administration assured its defeat. Furthermore, the incident split the noninterventionist bloc, illustrating again that opponents of the administration did not comprise a monolithic entity. Nationalists, like Republican Alf Landon, Frank Knox, and Henry Stimson, supported the administration. From this point on, the administration gained public backing as more and more Americans realized that strict neutrality only spurred on fascist powers. Capper and other noninterventionists would have to fight a rearguard action because their position became untenable for more Americans. But only the attack on Pearl Harbor would complete the transformation to an interventionist policy.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, Capper continued to sponsor war referendum resolutions. In 1937 he regarded it as a refinement of the democratic process, since the people "are just as well qualified to decide that question as the Congress itself. I believe moreover that the ones who are going to have to do the fighting, and take the punishment, are the logical ones to decide whether or not we are to go to war." In February, 1938, Capper and 11 other senators sponsored a referendum amendment, which never reached the senate floor. The amendment, he argued, would prevent the President from having a free hand to involve the country in a war. Many erstwhile supporters of the New Deal, including Capper, had become suspicious of the President after he had tried to centralize more power in the White House by "packing" the supreme court and reorganizing the executive branch.

Capper still had extensive publicity for his support of the amendment. On June 6, 1938, William Randolph Hearst, in an editorial carried by his newspaper chain, lauded it and singled out the Kansas senator as its major

10. Socolofsky, *Capper*, p. 131; Jonas, *Isolationism*, pp. 160-166; *Capper's Weekly*, December 11, 1937; *New York Times*, November 17, 18, 1937; speech sponsored by the National Council for the Prevention of War, November 30, 1937, "Capper Papers"; Richard Dean Burns and W. Addams Dixon, "Foreign Policy and the Democratic Myth: The Debate on the Ludlow Amendment," *Mid-America*, Chicago, v. 47 (October, 1965), pp. 288-306.

11. Speech WIBW, December 19, 1937, "Capper Papers"; Bruce L. Larson, "Kansas and the *Panay* Incident," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, v. 31 (Autumn, 1965), pp. 234-243; *The Kansan*, Concordia, December 30, 1937.

12. Jonas, *Isolationism*, pp. 162-163; Capper to William Allen White, January 18, 1938, "William Allen White Papers," Manuscript division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Donald R. McCoy, *Coming of Age* (Baltimore, 1973), pp. 294-297.

CONGRESS absolutely refused to consider at this time enactment of legislation desired by President Roosevelt which would have given him the power to intervene, or to promise intervention, in European disputes.

I think that is right. The United States cannot hope to police the world; certainly it cannot hope to settle the age old boundary disputes of Europe, even if that were desirable. Thru the Monroe Doctrine the United States has served notice on Europe that the United States does not propose to allow European nations to interfere in affairs of the Western Hemisphere. On what ground we can, at the same time, empower President Roosevelt to throw the resources and influence and ultimately the man power of the United States into European affairs I cannot see.

And the same applies to Asiatic affairs, altho our holding the Philippines leaves us in a more vulnerable position in the Orient. But we have no Philippines in Europe, and I say it would be very unwise, voluntarily, to go to Europe looking for trouble—we would be almost certain to find it.

Let us stay at home and try to solve our own problems; Heaven knows there are enough of these, and they are large enough to occupy our best minds and all our energies and time.

Very frankly, I do not trust the judgment of President Roosevelt when it comes to dealing with foreign affairs. He is too eager to take charge of things; too certain that he cannot make a mistake; too certain that the United States, under his direction, has a rendezvous with destiny somewhere in Europe. So I shall do what I can next session to limit, rather than extend, the powers of the President to formulate foreign policies, and especially to intervene or promise intervention in foreign affairs.

The *Kansas Farmer*, Topeka, July 29, 1939, printed this report by Capper on the refusal by congress to enact at that time legislation giving President Roosevelt the power to intervene in European disputes. In this and other public statements, Capper renounced F.D.R.'s notions of world leadership and sought to limit the President's power in foreign affairs.

proponent in the senate. Similarly, the press service of the National Council for the Prevention of War circulated his articles in support of the amendment. The senator doggedly reintroduced referendum resolutions in 1939 and 1941. In March and November, 1941, he and other senators joined the Keep America Out of War Congress, the National Council for the Prevention of War, the War Referendum Council, and the America First Committee in sponsoring an advisory referendum before congress could declare war. It remained in committee. A dejected Capper stated in November, 1941, "I demand a war referendum. But it will not be granted, because the Administration in control knows the people will vote

against war." At the most, the amendment would have prevented a small minority, such as the "Merchants of Death," from involving the country in a war; it would not have kept the United States from entering international affairs. After the *Panay* incident a majority of Americans realized the inadvisability of the amendment's passage, dooming it.<sup>13</sup>

The senator did not believe that a future European war would endanger American vital interests. But as relations among European nations deteriorated, Capper modified his continentalism, hoping to insulate the Western Hemisphere from the morass of entangling alliances. Undoubtedly, his increasing reliance on the Monroe Doctrine resulted from Alf Landon's trip, in December, 1938, to Lima, Peru, as vice-chairman of the United States delegation to the Conference of American States. Capper applauded this demonstration that "partisan politics end at the water's edge." From then on, the senator advocated welding the Americas into a working alliance to forestall further fascist intervention. He included within the limits of American national defense the entire Western Hemisphere and Hawaii.<sup>14</sup>

In spite of his unswerving adherence to noninterventionism, Capper vilified brutal treatment of minorities by fascist countries. Speaking before the American Jewish Congress on November 26, 1937, Capper advocated unification of all civilized people in order to protect democracy against hatred and oppression typified by the anti-Semitism of Germany, Poland, Danzig, and Rumania. Convinced that moral isolation would be a tremendous factor in preserving world peace, he considered it the duty of every American to denounce the persecution of minorities wherever it occurred. The plight of German refugee children, victims of the pogroms, especially distressed the senator. Although normally opposed to increased immigration, Capper actively fought for passage of the Wagner-Rogers bill of 1939, which would have allowed an

13. Speech WIBW, November 21, 1937, speech over WOL, New York, November 7, 1941, "Capper Papers"; *Congressional Record*, February 25, 1938, p. 2,410, March 27, 1941, p. 2,610; *Topeka Daily Capital*, February 27, 1938; *New York Evening Journal*, June 6, 1938; *Corunna (Mich.) News*, September 29, 1938; *Centreville (Mich.) Observer*, September 29, 1938; *News-Republican*, Boone, Iowa, October 29, 1938; Jonas, *Isolationism*, pp. 163-168; Wayne S. Cole, *America First: The Battle Against Intervention 1940-1941* (Madison, 1953), pp. 56-59.

14. Speeches WIBW, November 27, December 4, 18, 1938, "Capper Papers"; Capper to Alf Landon, January 21, 1939, "Alf Landon Papers," KSHS; Donald R. McCoy, *Landon of Kansas* (Lincoln, Neb., 1966), pp. 409-413.

additional 20,000 children into this country. It never became law. In 1941 Capper, a member of the National Advisory Committee of the United China Relief, participated in efforts to provide food for China and the small democracies of Europe. He also signed the Palestine Declaration and worked to establish Palestine as the national home for Jewish people. But no matter how distressed he was by persecution abroad, he did not believe that the United States should have gone to war to correct such barbarous conditions.<sup>15</sup>

In his state of the Union message of January, 1939, Roosevelt spoke of methods "short of war," including repeal of the arms embargo, to aid the democracies if war came to Europe. Though his basic aim was to bolster the efforts of France and England to resist the threat of German aggression, he carefully masked this objective behind the need to strengthen the armed forces to defend the Western Hemisphere. The President's proposal to repeal the embargo met with little success in congress. When the senate foreign relations committee met on July 11, 1939, to consider neutrality legislation, it shocked the administration by voting to postpone the issue until 1940.<sup>16</sup>

Pleased by the committee's action, Capper regarded the administration bill as an effort to get congress, in the name of neutrality, to empower the President to "commit un-neutral acts" in order to aid Britain and France and threaten Japan, Italy, and Germany. Since January Capper, whose constituents opposed any intervention in the European "mess," had intensified his support of the arms embargo. Speaking before the Maryland State Division of the Keep America Out of War Congress in Baltimore, the senator depicted the neutrality act as the epitome of America's impartiality; America, he proclaimed, should not grant "favours" to only one side and should not "attempt to balance the scales so that two nations of unequal strength will be made equal." He attempted to refute administration arguments

that the neutrality act was unneutral because it allowed aggressors to go unpunished. Likewise, in a speech carried over the National Broadcasting Company network on May 20, the senator urged the administration to renounce its notions of world leadership and asked his listeners not to be "bamboozled" by propaganda. After the postponement of the repeal bill, Capper informed the readers of the *Kansas Farmer* that Roosevelt should not be trusted because he intended to lead America to its "rendezvous with destiny."<sup>17</sup>

On September 1, 1939, the German invasion of Poland drastically changed world affairs. Roosevelt called for a special session of congress so that he could request repeal of the arms embargo. Capper declared that the United States could save civilization only by remaining at peace and pledged to support the President as long as he advocated neutrality. In an article in the Philadelphia *Inquirer*, the senator wrote that America must retain the embargo and remain strictly neutral. Intervention in the war, he warned, would result in a staggering loss of life and property, a dictatorship, a skyrocketing national debt, a postwar depression, and probably a continuation of the endless, futile wars in Europe.<sup>18</sup>

Addressing a joint session of congress on September 21, the President asked for repeal of the arms embargo so that America could return to its traditional neutral posture and stay out of the war. In its place he wanted to revive the cash-and-carry scheme, to keep American citizens and ships out of combat zones, and to forbid the extension of loans and credits to belligerents. Even though cash-and-carry restrictions were contrary to traditional neutral rights, Roosevelt never mentioned this fact nor his deep concern for the fortunes of England and France.<sup>19</sup>

Capper issued a statement challenging Roosevelt's alleged intention of working for peace; the senator did not believe selling war supplies to belligerents would keep America neutral. He promised to vote against repeal and all other measures lodging additional powers in the ex-

15. Speech before American Jewish Congress, Washington, D.C., November 26, 1937, speech WIBW, April 23, 1939, Pearl S. Buck to Capper, January 17, 1941, John Saari to Capper, March 19, 1941, Herbert Hoover to Capper, March 31, 1941, October 14, 1941, Capper to Farris S. Malouf, April 25, 1941, Capper to Stephen S. Wise, November 2, 1942, "Capper Papers"; William Allen White to Capper, February 24, 1939, Capper to White, February 28, 1939, "White Papers"; Capper to Alf Landon, April 17, 22, 1939, "Landon Papers"; Topeka *Daily Capital*, April 25, 1941, October 17, 1941; *Congressional Record*, March 17, 1941, p. 2,295, April 15, 1941, p. 3,099, June 2, 1941, p. 4,589, October 16, 1941, p. 7,929.

16. Divine, *Illusion*, pp. 229-285.

17. Capper to Alf Landon, February 9, 1939, "Landon Papers"; speeches over National Broadcasting Company network, April 28, May 20, 1939, speech in Baltimore, April 20, 1939, speech WIBW, July 16, 23, 1939, "Capper Papers"; Topeka *Daily Capital*, February 5, July 12, 1939; *Kansas Farmer*, July 29, 1939.

18. Speech WIBW, September 3, 1939, "Capper Papers"; Philadelphia *Inquirer*, September 3, 1939.

19. Divine, *Illusion*, pp. 296-297.

ecutive department. In late September several peace organizations and other antiadministration groups sponsored the "Arms Embargo Meeting," a forum against repeal that was broadcasted by the Columbia Broadcasting System. Without the arms embargo America, Capper argued, would follow the same course that led to intervention in World War I—first we would sell goods, then extend credits, then make loans, and finally send troops to insure the return of the money. The German invasion only confirmed his belief that European wars were inevitable and no place for Americans.<sup>20</sup>

More than a dozen senators, including Capper, met in the office of Republican Sen. Hiram Johnson to devise strategy to save the embargo, the "trade mark" of American neutrality. Nye announced that this senatorial "peace bloc" would make a "last ditch fight" against repeal. But administration supporters frustrated them by not allowing aid to Britain and France to become an issue in the debates. On October 18 Capper spoke in the senate for more than an hour, urging retention of the embargo. The only reason for repeal, he proclaimed, was to make America unneutral, and it would lead to war against the fascist countries. The cash-and-carry provision would allow merchants to be enticed again by the "sweet smell" of illusory war profits. He believed the European nations were fighting for the "same old reasons" that in no way jeopardized vital American interests. Nonetheless, the senate easily passed the administration bill. In essence, the new legislation made only two vital changes in the act. American exporters could ship arms, ammunition, and implements of war to belligerents, but all trade with warring nations would be conducted in foreign ships, with title to the cargoes passing out of American hands before the goods left port. Capper correctly analyzed the changed situation; he recognized that the noninterventionists could not overcome the President's influence, who Capper believed was "determined to give aid to Great Britain." As equally distressing, the senator noted that conservative Democrats had lined up with Roosevelt and predicted that they would continue to do so, even if he ran for a

third term.<sup>21</sup> War in Europe meant that the noninterventionists would continue to lose support as Americans realized the dangers of a fascist victory.

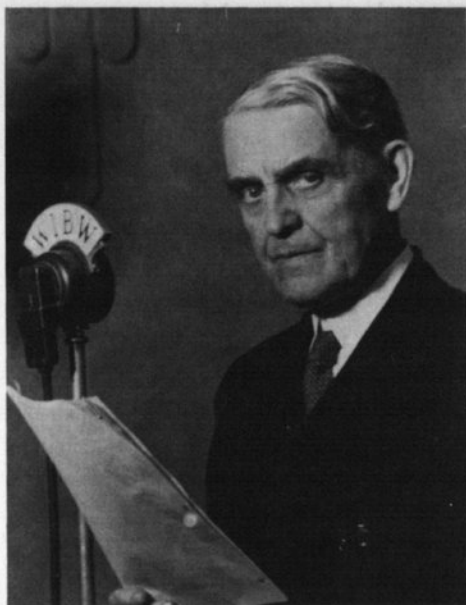
Since the mid-1930's the administration had requested increased appropriations for the military. Given his pacifist predilections, Capper opposed large army and navy spending. In 1937 he voted against the military appropriation bills, which totaled more than \$1.1 billion, because he feared the money would fuel an armaments race. The same year his support for the unsuccessful Frazier amendment to the army appropriation bill, which would have stopped the funding of compulsory military courses and training in civil schools and colleges, demonstrated his antipathy for the military. Convinced that defense appropriations of over a billion dollars were pernicious and wicked, he doubted whether any nation would attack America because of its insularity and economic self-sufficiency. In 1938 he participated in a semifilibuster, hoping to defeat the naval expansion bill, which envisioned the start of a two-ocean navy. The senator argued that the nation already had sufficient defense capability to defend simultaneously both coasts against invasions and to protect adequately Hawaii, Alaska, and Panama. This bill, he thought, would allow the executive to engage in "power diplomacy," would centralize more power in the White House, would create an artificial boom in the defense industries which would require more massive spending to avoid a crash, and would stimulate a worldwide arms race. In April, 1940, Capper was one of only four senators voting against another naval appropriation bill. But shortly thereafter, he began to modify his opposition to large defense bills.<sup>22</sup>

In the spring of 1940, the sitzkrieg abruptly ended in the unnerving German onslaught on western Europe. Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Holland, and finally France fell to the Ger-

21. *Topeka Daily Capital*, October 1, 7, 11, 19, 26, 28, November 4, 1939; Capper to Alf Landon, September 27, 1939, November 7, 1939, Landon to Capper, October 2, 1939, Clifton Stratton to Landon, February 18, 1941, "Landon Papers"; *New York Times*, October 11, 17, 22, 1939; Divine, *Illusion*, pp. 316-319, 324-325.

22. *Congressional Record*, March 22, 1937, pp. 2,548, 2,554, June 23, 1937, p. 6,220, April 28, 1938, pp. 5,906-5,909; speeches WIBW, March 28, May 9, June 13, 27, 1937, March 13, 20, 27, 1938, January 14, March 17, 1940, speech over Inter-City Broadcasting System, May 18, 1937, Gerald Nye to Capper, April 23, 1938, "Capper Papers"; *Capper's Weekly*, August 21, 1937; *Kansas Farmer*, April 24, 1937, March 12, 1938; *Topeka Daily Capital*, March 13, April 13, 29, May 3, 4, 1938, April 19, 1940; Larson, "Kansas and Panay," pp. 242-243.

20. *Topeka Daily Capital*, September 22, 1939; speech at Belasco Theater, Washington, D.C., September 29, 1939, "Capper Papers"; *New York Times*, September 30, 1939.



In addition to the attention given him by the national media, Senator Capper effectively used his own publishing and broadcasting empire to disseminate his views to his largely rural constituency. Most Kansans appreciated his dilemma in the noninterventionism issue and agreed with his belief that the United States could not police the world, and that this country was secure from foreign aggression.

mans. In early June Capper enunciated a new position on defense spending: "In the next few months we probably cannot go too far nor too fast" in modernizing the armed forces and shifting manufacturing interests to war production. He, nonetheless, still refused to consider the war as one involving American interests. By October congress had voted over \$17 billion for national defense and Capper supported these appropriations.<sup>23</sup>

The senator refused to support passage of a peacetime selective service bill. In a broadcast over the "American Forum of the Air" on June 30, 1940, he compared compulsory military training with the totalitarian methods of Hitler and Stalin and stated that the concept struck at the heart of personal liberty and freedom.

23. *Congressional Record*, June 4, 1940, p. 7461; *Topeka State Journal*, May 23, 1940; *Topeka Daily Capital*, May 17-18, 23, 1940; Warren F. Kimball, *The Most Unsettling Act, Lend-Lease, 1939-41* (Baltimore, 1969), pp. 42-46; William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal* (New York, 1963), p. 300.

Likewise, the next month he again spoke over national radio in opposition to the selective service bill. First he demanded its proponents to demonstrate the need for inducting a million draftees per year and then to prove that such a number could not be reached through voluntary methods. During the senate debate in August, Capper claimed that the bill was deleterious to democracy—it meant dictatorship and regimentation of the young. He objected to saddling upon America "the militaristic spirit, the militaristic caste, that will follow in the wake of military conscription of manpower in peacetime." In late August the senate passed the bill, with Capper in the minority.<sup>24</sup>

One week later, September 3, Roosevelt shocked the nation by trading 50 World War I destroyers for British bases in the Caribbean and leases on bases in Bermuda and Newfoundland. A stunned Capper accurately pointed out the inherent dilemma for noninterventionists: the air and naval bases were invaluable for the country's defense, but the deal was an act of war made by the President without consulting congress. Sympathetic with Britain's plight, Capper still classified the war as the "fruit of power politics." He did not view the war as endangering vital American interests and hoped that the people would make the welfare of America their highest objective.<sup>25</sup>

An article published in *The Progressive* set forth the senator's plan for an America at peace. His program, "Defend America First," accepted the necessity of a powerful military to preserve American institutions. Since total war would nullify democratic government, the senator claimed fighting to save European nations would surely mean the end of our self-government. Already the executive, Capper complained, evaded the law, "adopting various subterfuges" to circumvent congress. Instead of fighting, he advocated a rehabilitation of the fractured economic, social, and spiritual life in America. Four components comprised his program: avoidance of war; reconstruction of a balanced industrial and agricultural economy

24. Leuchtenburg, *Roosevelt*, pp. 307-308; speech over WOL, June 30, 1940, speech over NBC network, July 30, 1940, speeches WIBW, August 11, 18, September 1, 1940, "Capper Papers"; *Topeka Daily Capital*, August 20, 22, 24, 29, 1940; *Congressional Record*, August 19, 1940, pp. 10,474-10,478, August 27, 1940, pp. 10,975-10,982.

25. Speech WIBW, August 18, 1940, "Capper Papers"; *Topeka Daily Capital*, September 4, 1940; *Capper's Farmer*, October, 1940.



by utilizing idle manpower and capital to restore and conserve human resources and preserve democracy; "moral rearmament of the people to seek fulfillment through employment, education, and humanitarian progress"; and completion of an adequate hemispheric defense.<sup>26</sup> This was not a ploy to divert attention to domestic reform; Capper sincerely believed in and strove for equality and justice for all Americans.

After election to a third term Roosevelt articulated his next plan to aid the Allies; he proposed to lend armaments to Britain. During a December fireside chat, the President identified British survival with our national security and proclaimed that America should become the "great arsenal of democracy." In January, 1941, the administration had the lend-lease bill introduced. It vested sweeping powers in the President to procure any defense article for the government of any country whose defense the President deemed vital to the defense of the United States, to sell or lease or lend or otherwise dispose of any such defense article to any such government, and to repair or outfit any such defense article for any such government. The President would also have full authority to arrange terms, if any, with such governments.<sup>27</sup>

During the debate on the bill Capper received widespread publicity for his views. Turner Catledge of the *New York Times* quoted him as being "unalterably opposed" to the bill because it gave the President "unlimited dictatorial powers" and "'all out' control of our foreign relations." The senator charged that the bill was an unwarranted delegation of congressional power and an act of war since the President predicated American survival on Germany's defeat. On February 7 the senator delivered an antilend-lease speech over the Columbia Broadcasting System, which was reprinted in *Scribner's Commentator* and *Vital Speeches*. Praising the tradition of strict neutrality, he rebuked the administration for following a course paralleling our involvement in World War I: "the same sophistry, the same propaganda about our duty to civilization, the same intolerance and unneutral attitude that leads toward involvement." He favored sending only those supplies to Britain that would

not weaken American defense. Again Capper called for the rehabilitation of American society.<sup>28</sup>

The senator cooperated with other noninterventionists and participated in delaying tactics in the senate. On February 22 he spoke for 40 minutes against the lend-lease bill. He denounced it as a vast, undefined grant of power to the President; it would allow, he charged, the President to lead the country to war. The *Philadelphia News*, the *Washington News*, and the *Washington Times-Herald* used his description of the bill as a "fantastic, bombastic nightmare" for headlines in their news articles. And the Washington radio stations covered the speech. Even though he had considerable support for his position—Capper received 16,500 letters against the bill and 450 for it—congress sent the bill to the White House in March. Its passage was very discouraging for Capper. In a letter to Landon, he predicted that America would soon become involved in the war, probably within three months. The economic burden implicit in the act troubled him. But at least the President had not yet publicly sided with the all-out interventionists, and this gave Capper some small solace. The lend-lease act, Capper correctly analyzed, committed the United States to insuring the survival of the British Empire, pushing the nation to the verge of the European conflict. America would now furnish all-out nonbelligerent aid to Britain, and if an Axis victory seemed likely, the country would have to go to war to protect its investment.<sup>29</sup>

Capper continued to oppose Roosevelt's incremental steps inching America closer to war. On July 12 he introduced Democratic Sen. Burton K. Wheeler to an America First Committee rally at Salina. Capper execrated all programs aimed at sending Americans to fight along side of Russia and all executive prerogatives increasing the risk of involvement in war.

28. *New York Times*, January 15, 1941; speech over Columbia Broadcasting System network, February 7, 1941, "Capper Papers"; Arthur Capper, "Time to Think American," *Scribner's Commentator*, Concord, N. H., v. 9 (February, 1941), pp. 64-74; Arthur Capper, "Let Us Keep Out of Foreign Wars," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, New York, v. 7 (March 1, 1941), pp. 293-296. See *Commercial and Financial Chronicle*, New York, January 18, 1941; and *Philadelphia Record*, January 19, 1941.

29. *Topeka Daily Capital*, February 15, 23, 25, March 2, 7-9, 1941; *Congressional Record*, February 22, 1941, pp. 1271-1275; *Philadelphia News*, February 22, 1941; *New York Times*, February 23, 1941; *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 1941; Capper to Landon, March 12, 1941, "Landon Papers"; Capper to Milton Tabor, March 13, 1941, Capper to F. J. Hall, February 26, 1941, speech WIBW, March 23, 1941, "Capper Papers."

26. *The Progressive*, Madison, Wis., October 26, 1940, clipping in "Capper Papers"; *New York Enquirer*, December 16, 1940.

27. Kimball, *Lend-Lease*, pp. 132-153; James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom* (New York, 1970), pp. 27-29.

Referring to the President's order sending troops to occupy Iceland, he labeled it an example of Roosevelt's power to get the country into an "undeclared war through the back door." During this visit Capper divined that Kansas sentiment was still overwhelmingly against intervention in the war. But William Allen White found that while a majority of Kansans supported Roosevelt's leadership, Capper had substantial support for his position.<sup>30</sup>

In August Capper voted against extending the enlistment period of the men who had been drafted. The next month he characterized the "shoot on sight" policy as a declaration of war; it did mean undeclared naval warfare. He deplored this unilateral action by the President, but he announced that everyone must support it because there was no way to abrogate it. In late September the senator met with Gen. Robert Wood, acting chairman of the America First Committee, and pledged to fight any proposal that would emasculate the neutrality act. For the Hearst newspaper chain, he wrote that its revision would lead to inevitable clashes on the seas which would stir the people to demand war. He would not endorse getting into a war by the subterfuge of arming merchant ships and allowing American vessels to venture into war zones. The senate easily passed a bill embodying the President's wishes in November; the house grudgingly passed it, 212 to 194. The noninterventionists still had strong support.<sup>31</sup>

Capper steadfastly adhered to his continentalism, calling for the rehabilitation of America. Instead of going to war in order to assure the "Four Freedoms," he espoused a

program "which will guarantee to every man and woman a fair chance and an equal opportunity." The senator pleaded for the following: equal justice for all people; preservation of family-sized farms by securing agricultural parity; protection of small businessmen; and avoidance of war. He thought it would be "cowardly" to go to war in order to escape the domestic problems of the country. But he realized the seriousness of the deterioration in relations with Japan. He warned his constituents that war with Japan was close-at-hand.<sup>32</sup>

On December 7 Japanese military forces devastated Pearl Harbor. Capper hurriedly left Topeka for the nation's capital. Not returning in time to vote on the war resolution, he informed the senate that he would have voted for it. And he wrote the President that he and his constituents were fully united in their support of the administration.<sup>33</sup> Certainly the noninterventionists underestimated the fascist threat and, perhaps, slowed preparedness. The neutrality acts exemplified their specious belief that the nation could insulate itself from the international crises. After all, Roosevelt only decided upon an interventionist policy very late, and did not make the best use of his power to mold public opinion. Capper accurately pointed out the problems inherent in such circumstances—when the country had to decide between war and peace. He warned the nation of the dangers of a military-industrial complex, reminded the people of the horrors of war, and hoped to use our resources to improve the living conditions of all Americans. He prodded his fellow legislators to retain their responsibilities in the foreign policy decision-making process. So many of the noninterventionists' admonitions identified areas of concern, especially the burgeoning independence and power of the presidency, that are an innate part of modern America.

30. Topeka *Daily Capital*, July 13, 1941; R. Douglas Stuart to Capper (telegram), July 12, 1941; Capper to Mrs. Ellis A. Yost, July 25, 1941; Clyde Reed to Capper, July 22, 1941, "Capper Papers"; Emporia *Gazette*, as quoted in Kansas City (Mo.) *Times*, July 18, 1941.

31. *Congressional Record*, August 6, 1941, p. 6,816, November 7, 1941, pp. 8,674, 8,675, 8,677, 8,680; Topeka *Daily Capital*, August 6-8, 1941, September 12, 14, 28, 1941, October 1, 1941; speech WIBW, September 14, 1941; Capper to J. C. Nichols, October 21, 1941; Capper to John Eby, October 25, 1941, "Capper Papers"; Milwaukee *Sentinel*, October 20, 1941; Los Angeles *Examiner*, October 20, 1941.

32. San Francisco *Examiner*, December 1, 1941; speeches WIBW, November 23, 30, 1941, "Capper Papers."

33. *Congressional Record*, December 8, 1941, p. 9,539; Capper to Roosevelt, December 9, 1941; Roosevelt to Capper, December 11, 1941, "Capper Papers."