

Herbert Hoover: The Great War and Its Aftermath, 1914-23, edited with an introduction by Lawrence E. Gelfand. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1979. pp. xii, 242. Photographs, maps, notes, index. \$17.95.

This collection of eight articles focuses on the early years of Herbert Hoover's public career, 1914 to 1923. It is the first volume of a projected four volume series consisting of revised papers which were first delivered in 1974 as part of the centennial commemoration of Hoover's birth. The volume reviewed here, as will the succeeding volumes, forms part of a new wave of historiography on Hoover and the Republican ascendancy published since the opening of the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library to the public in 1966.

Lawrence Gelfand's introduction to this volume provides a useful overview of the historical controversies surrounding the "Hoover era" and deftly explains how the articles in this collection contribute to a more sophisticated understanding of Hoover and the turbulent years 1918 through 1923. Collectively the articles demonstrate that Hoover was eminently qualified to direct the Food Administration and to function as a key advisor to Woodrow Wilson on political, diplomatic, and economic matters. Still, despite agreement on Hoover's prominence, power, and expertise, it is difficult to present a neatly packaged synthesis on the meaning and direction of his public service from 1917 to 1923.

The two articles on Hoover's leadership of the Food Administration by Witold Sworakowski and Robert Cuff illustrate how widely historians may diverge in their appraisals of Hoover. Sworakowski, in an exceptionally weak effort, lauds Hoover's approach to "Launching the Food Administration." Uncritical of his sources and unaware or disdainful of attacks on the Food Administration's performance, Sworakowski merely echoes the friendly assessments made by "official" histories of Hoover and the Food Administration. Little, if anything, that is original comes from this article. Cuff, however, while acknowledging successes and innovations, questions whether Hoover and the Food Administration actually merit unqualified encomiums. By focusing on the important theme of voluntarism and war organization, Cuff finds that the Food Administration fell short of achieving "planning without bureaucracy; regulation without coercion; cooperation without dictation." Instead, the beguiling ideal of voluntarism disguised widespread conflicts of interest in the administration of food programs and masked the use of "repressive regulations" to bring unpatriotic "slackers" into line. Voluntarism, then, while possessing

Book Reviews

"symbolic value," often gave way to compulsion in carrying out Food Administration programs; and, as Cuff speculates, if voluntarism proved lacking in World War I, historians may benefit by questioning its importance to national planning in later periods.

Articles by Royal Schmidt, Eugene Trani, Murray Rothbard, Robert Van Meter, and Carl Parrini assess Hoover's considerable influence on the conduct and form of American foreign relations from 1918 to 1925. Schmidt recounts Hoover's "Reflections on the Versailles Treaty" in an attempt to uncover the "serious sins of omission [and] hasty compromise[s]" made at the Paris Peace Conference. Readers familiar with the standard literature available on the Peace Conference will not be startled by this compilation of Wilsonian transgressions. Even less satisfying is Schmidt's obtuse argument linking the Versailles Treaty with World War II which suffers mortally from an ahistorical approach by unreliable "evidence" drawn from Hoover's memoirs.

Eugene Trani is more successful in placing Hoover within the context of Wilsonian diplomacy. Hoover gradually assumed a large share of the responsibility for directing America's response to the Russian revolution. Disparaging military intervention, Hoover hoped to use "food diplomacy" as a means of undercutting bolshevik power in Russia while, at the same time, achieving support for liberal, "middle class" government. Trani credits Hoover with "insight" on the bolshevik question, but claims that his "belief that full stomachs would eliminate bolshevism" was "naive." To Murray Rothbard, however, American self-interest, not naiveté, explains Hoover's food diplomacy. Rothbard argues that Hoover cunningly fused the American farmer's need for export markets with the vision of Wilsonian liberal-capitalist foreign policy. In doing so, Rothbard provides a suggestive case study demonstrating how Wilsonian economic diplomacy attempted to overcome both the need for economic reform at home and revolutionary nationalism abroad.

While not as critical of Hoover as Rothbard, Robert Van Meter and Carl Parrini also stress Hoover's contributions to Wilsonian foreign policy. In addition to emphasizing his devotion to the goals of obtaining expanded postwar markets for the United States, ending statist intervention in the international economy, and promoting stable international economic growth, both authors see Hoover as the key figure in the transition from Wilsonianism to the Republican ascendancy. Van Meter examines the issue of German recovery to demonstrate how Hoover intended to achieve these goals by "organizing" American capital to promote international economic reform. Still, German recovery stalled and the international economy plunged

THE ANNALS OF IOWA

into depression. Parrini contends that Hoover's campaign for international economic reform failed because of his misplaced faith in the ability of corporate capitalists to behave in a "socially responsible manner." Such a contention ignores fundamental weaknesses in the interwar international economy, but it does point out the importance ascribed to corporate capitalists by those charged with responsibility for foreign policy making during this period.

Unfortunately, since it was the first important test in Hoover's public career, this volume does not include an article on the Commission for Relief in Belgium. But despite this omission, the scope and importance of Hoover's wartime and early postwar activities comes through clearly. How, then, do we evaluate Herbert Hoover's early public years? Robert Himmelberg attempts to answer this question by examining contemporary editorial opinion in newspapers and magazines. "Hoover's Public Image, 1919-1920" was that of an anti-bolshevik, liberal progressive, conservative, "heroic administrator," and "indispensable man" all rolled into one. He symbolized and epitomized a new type of leadership, rising out of the Progressive period and World War I, which sought to place American traditions and principles within the context of an interdependent world order dominated by corporate capitalism. His appeal to "voluntarism" and "individualism" reflected a commitment to long-standing, if mythical, American beliefs. But as Cuff, Van Meter and Parrini note, his allegiance to such traditional beliefs was overshadowed by a stronger devotion to the type of rationality, stability, and growth promised by corporate capitalism and elitist control. If this description has a familiar ring to it, readers may benefit by perusing the articles in this collection for insights into both the early years of Hoover's public career and the leadership of today.

Scott R. Hall
University of Iowa
Iowa City, IA

Collecting Political Americana, by Edmund B. Sullivan. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1980. pp. viii, 224. Photographs, appendices, bibliography, index. \$15.95.

This book is a feast for the connoisseur of political Americana, a helpful reference work for the historian, and a delight for the general reader. Sullivan, curator of the University of Hartford's DeWitt Col-

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.