# The PALIMPSEST

The 1907 Emmetsburg High School graduating class. Bruce Bliven is standing, second from the left.

## An Iowan in New York

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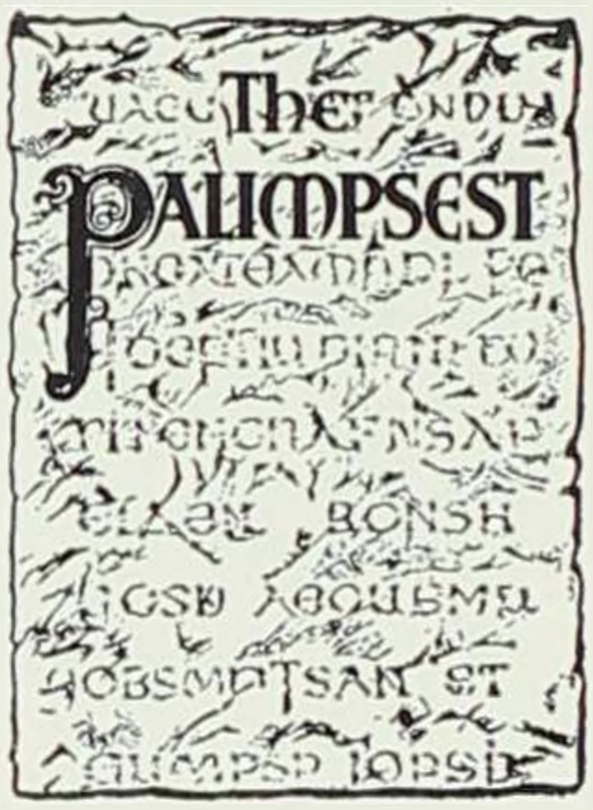


## *The Meaning of Palimpsest*

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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## *Illustrations*

Personal illustrations provided by the author. Except for the Hoover-Truman photograph, furnished by *The Cedar Rapids Gazette,* the remaining photos were supplied by the *Des Moines Register* photo library.

## *Author*

Born and reared in Emmetsburg, Bruce Bliven became one of the country's foremost editors prior to his retirement in 1953. He now makes his home in Stanford, Calif.

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# THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

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## Emmetsburg Years

Fifty years ago there was a popular saying, "You can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy." My whole life is an illustration of how true this is.

I was born and brought up in a small town in Iowa and during my sixty years as a practicing journalist I have traveled over much of the world. As it was my job to do, I have talked with kings, prime ministers, presidents, and hundreds of other famous men, in politics, the arts, and business. Yet never for a moment have I been, in my own eyes, anything other than what Hamlin Garland designates as *A Son of the Middle Border*. Not a day goes by that I don't see in myself some evidence of the culture in which I was nurtured.

This seems to me a matter for pride, rather than any other emotion. Fifty years ago Sinclair Lewis wrote a best-selling novel, *Main Street,* poking rather bitter fun at his own birthplace, only a few miles from my own. A few years later, Henry L. Mencken became editor of *The American Mercu-*

*ry,* and spread far and wide his contempt for the "booboisie" of the Middle West, an area he had never lived in and never wanted to. I knew these men; both were unstable characters in widely different ways, but between them, they caused the Eastern intelligentsia for a few years to scorn the culture of the prairies.

Yet their successors are singing a different tune today. The virtues of our broad heartland now appear better than they once did. We look back in a better light on people—most of whom worked hard, married for life, and brought up their children with a "decent respect for the opinions of mankind." My Iowa was one state in which every successive generation was better educated than the one that went before it, and grasped eagerly (as Sinclair Lewis's heroine in fact did) at any opportunity to share in the culture of the Old World and its reflection in the New.

I was born in 1889 in Emmetsburg, then a town of little more than 2,000 inhabitants in northwestern Iowa, thirty-two years after the terrible Spirit Lake Massacre, and about the same number of miles from its scene. Though my town was only about twenty years older than I was, I never heard of the massacre until I was twelve years old. Its pioneers had experienced terrible hardships, but all traces of them had been eliminated by the time I was growing up. Emmetsburg seemed to me to have been there forever—wide streets shaded by

big trees, Victorian houses set in broad lawns, ample porches with swings suspended by chains.

The massacre, which came to have a profound meaning for me, has been described by other writers in earlier issues of *The Palimpsest,* and needs only a bare summary here. It took place on March 8, 1857, not at Spirit Lake, but at West Okoboji, where Arnolds Park now stands. A wandering group of Sioux Indians surprised the settlers early one morning, killed forty of them, and dragged off three young women and a fourteen-year-old girl, Abbie Gardner. Two of the women were murdered; the third and the girl were ransomed separately and returned to civilization.

When I was twelve, I chanced to visit Arnolds Park, where the state had erected a monument on the site of the massacre. Abbie Gardner, now a widow and only in her mid-fifties, had returned to the scene. In a log cabin a few yards from the monument, she had set up a small shop and was selling—of all things—Indian souvenirs! I bought a tiny birchbark canoe; also a twenty-five cent pamphlet written by her and in which she told the story of the massacre.

I report this incident, unimportant to everyone but me, because of the impression it made. I suddenly discovered that my world, which seemed so safe and secure, was after all not far removed from violence and terror. I never forgot this lesson.

The finances of my family had been wiped out

by the depression of 1893, and we had to scramble for a living. When I was eighteen, I faced the prospect of having to work my way through college, if I could go at all. But then a prosperous cousin offered to help out, to the extent of $40 a month—a fortune!

It was almost instantly decided that I should go to Stanford. These were the days of the great migration of Iowans to California, and it was understood that my parents would follow as soon as possible. With great trepidation (I had never been away from home before), a few days after my eighteenth birthday I set out on the first long train journey of my life, a journey from which, in the truest sense, I would never return.

(This story is that of an Iowa boy with energy, imagination, courage, and confidence, a young man who through sheer personality and drive, reached the very pinnacle of success in his chosen field. He never shunned work, he always accepted responsibility, he never whined at adversity. He was a man whose dynamic career modern youth can study with profit and inspiration. The Editor)

# To California

The Santa Clara Valley seemed like Paradise in 1907. It extended along the shore of San Francisco Bay and beyond, with a range of low mountains to the east and another, parallel to it, between the Valley and the ocean. In the spring the whole area was a carpet of pink and white blossoms from the fruit orchards for which it was famous—prunes, apricots, cherries, and others. Like any Iowan, I marveled at the mild climate, where flowers bloomed the year around, and the winter was called the rainy season.

Today, of course, as is true of so many other places, the beautiful Valley has been half-ruined by overpopulation. Many of the orchards have been put to the bulldozer for subdivisions, air pollution is a menace, and the peaceful back roads are six-lane highways hopelessly clogged with traffic.

Stanford University was itself something of a backwater, with only about 1,800 students, and a faculty so small I could know most of the members by sight, and several very well. (Today the University has nearly 12,000 students, half of them doing postgraduate work, a faculty of proportionate size, some of them Nobel Prize winners, and

all the troubles that afflict universities everywhere.) But in my day it was essentially a small town, and my Emmetsburg training was valuable. I knew how to get along in a small town, which is itself something of an art, and one many city people never learn.

Two things stand out in my four years of college; the more important was that I met the girl I was to marry. I was a senior when she came to the University as a freshman; we promptly fell in love, and were engaged before I graduated. Since we spent most of our time that year getting to know each other, how we did any solid studying, I don't know—and I'm not sure we did.

The lesser matter was that I began serious work as a newspaperman. I felt I should earn some money to supplement the $40 a month from my cousin. Before I had been in college very long, I managed to land the job of campus correspondent for *The San Francisco Bulletin*.

In doing so, I was beginning to satisfy an ambition that went back some years. My mother had been the "town poet" of Emmetsburg, who wrote jingles for every public occasion. At the age of twelve or thirteen I was writing stories and essays; I won two competitions for children in national magazines and had the thrill of seeing my name in print. Single-handed, I started a high school paper; I not only wrote it all, but I solicited the advertising that helped keep it going for a few issues.

Spending a Christmas vacation in Des Moines with my sister, ten years older than I and now a married woman with two children, I forehandedly got a letter of introduction to the owner of *The Register* from an Emmetsburg friend of his, my maternal uncle, Edwin Ormsby. He assigned a copy boy to show me through the plant. I marveled to see the printers at work, the forms being made up, the big room redolent of printer's ink. I did not dream that I would spend the rest of my life with that smell in my nostrils.

*The San Francisco Bulletin,* when I got my job on it, was engaged under its crusading editor, Fremont Older, in one of the greatest fights against municipal corruption in American history. I was privileged to see some of that fight from inside the paper's editorial ranks, since I not only wrote news from the campus during the college year, but spent my summers working as a cub reporter.

San Francisco during those years was enormously corrupt. The boss of the city was a little lawyer, Abe Ruef; the mayor was his henchman, big, handsome Eugene Schmitz, who had been an orchestra leader in a local theater. The city had a Board of Supervisors of eighteen men, of whom seventeen were happy to accept their share of the loot extorted from businessmen by Ruef. The eighteenth for some inexplicable reason was honest and was regarded as a weird phenomenon by his fellows.

Fremont Older was the only important newspaperman in town who chafed under Ruef's reign of corruption, and who tried to stop it. It involved not only smalltime crooks, gamblers, keepers of houses of prostitution, and the like, but many of the elite of San Francisco society—owners of street railway lines, public utility companies, and many types of big business. The grafters had one simple scheme to stop Older—they tried to kill him. Gangsters were hired to do this, but several attempts misfired. In one attempt the corruptionists' men got him into a drawing room on an overnight train to Los Angeles, intending to shoot him and throw his body out a window when the train was on a trestle over a deep canyon; but his presence was discovered by accident and a sheriff's posse rescued him in the station at Santa Barbara.

During these years I was living in two worlds. At Stanford I was, like any other boy in his late teens or early twenties, trying to grow up and adjust to the adult world. On *The Bulletin,* I saw the ferocious struggle of the tall, bald-headed, mustachioed editor to clean up the city; like the whole staff, I worshiped him. He had a profound influence on my later life.

Before I was out of college, Older had won; the graft ring was smashed, the evil men turned out of office, one of them—Abe Ruef—sent to prison. At the same time the State of California was shaking itself free from domination by big corporations,

notably the Southern Pacific Railroad. One member of the San Francisco graft prosecution staff, Hiram Johnson, became governor and helped push through a notable series of reforms, copied all over the country. Later Johnson became a United States Senator from California.

With my sheepskin in my suitcase, I left my fiancée at Stanford, with three years more to go, and headed for Los Angeles, where most of my family were now living. This was like being back in Iowa again. Southern California, as I have suggested, was full of Middle Westerners, so omnipresent that only tiny remnants of the old Spanish culture remained.

Our annual Iowa picnic, usually held in a park in nearby Long Beach, used to attract a hundred thousand ex-Iowans. A map of the state was laid out in the park, with a pennant for each county in its proper geographical place. Friends and neighbors clustered around their own banner for a day-long party, with quantities of fried chicken, baked ham, sweet potatoes, apple pie, ice cream, and oceans of coffee. Other Middle Western states held similar annual celebrations.

I rejoined my family, and started out looking for a job, since my fiancée and I hoped to marry as soon as she was out of college. To anticipate a little, she came down at the end of her junior year to visit my family and me (those were the days of incessant chaperonage). As I was now working,

earning $25 a week, I suggested we get married and that she take her fourth year at the University of Southern California, where I had made a place for myself as a part-time member of the faculty, teaching English. We did this, and looking back, I am convinced that it was a happy decision. On the eve of our fifty-ninth wedding anniversary, I am still waiting for her to do something wrong (and she may be waiting for me to do something right).

I got my first job when I dropped in at the largest clothing department store in Los Angeles, Harris & Frank, to solicit an advertisement for the Stanford humor magazine, *The Chaparral,* of which I had been editor in my senior year. When one of the owners said their advertising man had just quit, I volunteered to prepare the ad myself on speculation. I did so, it was accepted, and the partner in the firm asked if I knew the advertising business. I felt this was no time for truthtelling and assured him I did. I was hired on the spot, to go to work in three days at $25 a week.

I went to the public library, drew out all the books there on advertising, read them day and night, and at the appointed time I went to work. It was two years later that I talked my fiancée into an immediate marriage; the firm gave me an extra day for a honeymoon, and raised me from $25 to $30 a week. After a year or so, when I began to get bored with advertising, I invented out of whole

cloth the idea of a Department of Journalism at the University, where, as I have said, I was already moonlighting part-time as a teacher. I sold the plan to the president and we opened in the fall. I was the only full-time teacher (at $2,000 a year), the other courses being taught by friends of mine on newspapers or in advertising.

With an incorrigible habit of holding three or four jobs at once, I had become Southern California correspondent for several trade magazines, chief of which was the hugely successful *Printers' Ink,* "the bible of advertising." As a delegate to a convention of advertising men I made my first visit to New York, and dropped in to meet face-to-face the editors for whom I had been working. Hardly had I returned to California before I got a letter asking me to come east as a member of the staff, at a fifty per cent increase in pay. I accepted, and my little family and I (our son, Bruce, Jr., was now about a year old) left for the terrifying prospect—to a young man only ten years out of Emmetsburg—of the Big City.

# The New Republic

Within a few weeks after I went to work on *Printers' Ink,* the United States entered the First World War. Having been rejected in the draft for bad eyesight, I spent most of the next two years acting as liaison man between the Government in Washington and the business community. I told industrial executives, through the pages of the magazine, what Washington felt they ought to be doing to aid the war effort.

But I wrote some articles on other subjects. One of them was an interview with the publisher of *The Globe,* an evening newspaper of modest circulation, the second oldest in New York. A few days later, the publisher called and invited me to become chief editorial writer for the paper—at double my salary. Since daily journalism had always been my first love, I was happy to accept.

My immediate task was to put together a staff of men for the expanded editorial department on which the paper had decided. I followed the general practice of those days, before union restrictions on hiring—I employed Stanford writers of my own generation. That I did pretty well is shown by the careers of these men after *The Globe* discontinued publication a few years later. Maxwell

Anderson, born in North Dakota, became a noted playwright, with thirty dramas to his credit, beginning with the famous *What Price Glory*. Robert L. Duffus rose to become associate editor of the *New York Times* and author of scores of books. William L. Chenery was editor, and then publisher, of *Collier's Weekly*. Frank Ernest Hill had a distinguished career in radio and as author of many books; he collaborated with Allan Nevins on the monumental biography of Henry Ford. Frank Taylor, a few years after me at Stanford, went on to become one of the country's most successful freelance writers.

One year after I went to *The Globe,* I was asked to become managing editor. I did not want to be an executive, I wanted to write; but I knew enough of the ways of the world to realize that you must not refuse a job that seems a promotion. I took the assignment and continued to write for the paper in my spare time, doing long signed articles instead of short unsigned ones.

From my point of view, *The Globe* was the best of the many daily papers in New York. We did not have the money for big, complicated investigations, but we printed all the news most people wanted to read. Our editorial page was the most consistently liberal in the city. The editor-in-chief, H. J. Wright, was sympathetic to our ideas, if not as vigorous in support of them as we were. For four years we had almost no pressure from the owner

of the paper, a recluse millionaire in a small town in Massachusetts, and none at all from anyone else. Only a newspaperman knows how rare such a situation is.

It was too good to last. The millionaire owner died and left his vast estate to his (male) secretary, including *The Globe*. Soon we began to get rumors that the new owner wanted to get rid of the paper. He was a timid man, influenced by his conservative financial advisers, who thought we were too liberal. I had made friends with Bernard M. Baruch, the famous Wall Street operator, who early in life retired from making money to become a trouble shooter for every president from Wilson to Kennedy. Baruch offered to lend me $2 million to buy the paper and keep it going. But the new owner broke a promise to me and sold it instead, on less advantageous terms, to Frank Munsey. Munsey was a clumsy lout of a man who had himself made a fortune in Wall Street (in United States Steel stock). He fancied himself as a newspaper publisher, a role for which he was incompetent; he bought something like fifteen newspapers and ran them all into the ground.

Luckily, I had somewhere else to go when the blow fell. Moonlighting as usual, I had begun writing some time earlier for *The New Republic*, the leading intellectual weekly in the country, founded nine years earlier, in 1914, by the very wealthy Mrs. Willard Straight, heir to much of

the fortune of her father, William C. Whitney. The first editor was Herbert Croly, a shy, dour man but an able writer on politics. Croly's book, *The Promise of American Life,* published in 1909, was a landmark in thinking about the art and business of politics.

My best friend in the magazine's office was not Croly, however, but another Midwesterner, Alvin Johnson. He came from Nebraska with the same cultural background as myself; the four or five other editors were all from New York or Boston (except one man from Ireland). Alvin and I sometimes felt like strangers in a strange land. But we were good for the magazine, which sought a national readership.

Just as *The Globe* was going under, I came over to serve as managing editor of *The New Republic.* My salary was several thousand less than it had been on *The Globe,* but higher than that of any other editor except Croly, who gave me the same remuneration as himself. Though I did not know it then, I was to spend the next thirty years at my new editorial desk, until a heart attack in 1953 forced me to give up office work and New York.

Not many Americans in those days could tell the difference between Liberals, Socialists, and Communists. We spent a lot of time answering the false charge that we belonged to one or the other of the two latter sects. When pressure got strong, over the years, I used to get help from a

somewhat surprising source—J. Edgar Hoover of the F.B.I. He knew the paper, knew we were the Liberals we said we were. On several occasions I had him write a letter certifying to our good faith. He was the idol of the Far Right and photographic copies of his letter produced a magical effect. While we were being harassed from one direction for being too radical, we were equally under fire for thirty years from the Far Left for being mere wishy-washy Liberals—a situation I have always viewed with satisfaction.

In 1928, when I had been on the paper five years, Herbert Croly was felled by a massive stroke. While he lingered on for two more years, I became acting editor at once, and when he died, the owner of the paper asked me to become editor-in-chief. I had grave doubts of my own ability to lead the most prestigious intellectual journal in the country; but there was no one else in sight. I accepted—on the eve of the most terrible two decades in history—the worst depression ever, the rise of Fascism in Italy and its extension in Germany, the horror of Stalinism in Russia, and another World War that would leave thirty million dead.

But the paper survived—and so did I.

Probably every elderly man looks back on his youth as brighter and better than it was; but in my case, I have the yellowing files to prove that in some matters my colleagues and I were ahead of

our time. We opposed war at a time when many people thought it ennobled the human spirit. We advocated complete equality for all races and religions, and for both sexes, when many people openly talked racial and religious prejudice, and the general assumption was that "it's a man's world." We warned about overpopulation and the degradation of our environment—though we did not dream how terribly serious these matters would become half a century later.

In the 1920's we participated in all the chief civil liberties cases. We fought for Sacco and Vanzetti, who certainly had not received a fair trial, and lost. We fought for Tom Mooney, of whose innocence there was photographic evidence, and finally won. We strongly opposed Fascism in Italy beginning in 1923 and in Germany beginning in 1933. We attacked Mussolini for his adventure in Ethiopia, and Franco for the rebellion against the legal government in Spain. I wish very much that we had been equally critical of what Stalin was doing in Russia, but that bloody-handed tyrant had the world's best censorship and the world's best propaganda machine. Few learned until many years later what he was doing.

In my own case, the Communists sniped at me for years except during short periods when the party line shifted. I angered them most, I assume, in March, 1938, when I published a signed article in *The New Republic* in the form of an open letter

to Stalin, criticizing him as severely as I could in the light of what we then knew. The Moscow treason trials were in progress, resulting in the slaughter of all the Old Bolsheviks who, in the dictator's paranoid imagination, might endanger his rule. Stalin had just issued a call for a conference of all the non-Fascist powers, to consider ways of dealing with the menace of the Axis. I pointed out that the Moscow trials were having a bad effect on world public opinion, which in turn could help or hinder such a conference as he had in mind.

He never answered my letter.

Much of the "testimony" which convicted the Old Bolsheviks, was assembled for Stalin by the head of the secret police, G. G. Yagoda. When he had done this work, Stalin had him arrested and shot; the testimony against him was created by N. Yezhov, who was in turn liquidated. The total number of victims runs into thousands; Trotsky made a profound observation when he said Stalin was like a man who tries to slake his thirst with salt water. The number of army officers executed alone is estimated as high as 20,000.

Why did all these innocent men testify in court that they were indeed traitors to the Revolution to which they had devoted their lives, and especially when they knew they were to be killed in any case? Elaborate explanations have been offered, some of them probably too elaborate. The method

was simple: every variety of torture was used, with the threat that if the victim did not play his part correctly in court it would be renewed when he was back in his cell. In addition, the families of all these poor wretches were held as hostages; the victims doubtless hoped that if they were co-operative, their wives and children might be spared. (Often they were not.) One or two men did in fact have the courage to say before they were killed that their confessions had been all lies.

Today, with Stalin long in his grave, one must be very blind indeed not to see that Soviet Russia, in its foreign policy, is acting just as imperialist Russia had done for centuries. The almost-faceless men in the Kremlin are holding their satellite states by plain military power, with Czechoslovakia in 1968 the most conspicuous example. No group of nations in the world would be more abhorrent to Lenin, if he were still alive, than the Arab countries, with which Moscow has cemented an alliance based on the most materialistic possible considerations—including making the Mediterranean almost a Russian lake, satisfying a dream of the Tsars for centuries.

In the dreadful depression of the 1930's, we tried to tell the truth about what was happening, when many magazines and newspapers were being Pollyannas.

Six months before Pearl Harbor, with heavy hearts, we recommended that the United States

should openly enter the Second World War, a war in which she was already doing so much to win for the Allies. We believed there was imminent danger Hitler would conquer the world, and that this would be more tragic than frank American participation in the conflict. If I had this decision to make over again I suppose I should probably go the same way, though far less confidently than in 1941. Every war, no matter how noble the sentiments with which it is entered, soon takes on a new, unpredictable, and terrible life of its own.

During the war, I was functioning on two levels. As an editor, I was doing what I could to help bring the conflict to a successful conclusion, and to work for the terms of a lasting peace. But I was also the father of a soldier fighting in France, in a division with heavy casualties, praying that he might survive the war. He did, with no physical injuries, or mental ones either, so far as his anxious parents could discern. A few years later he was married, and a few years later still we had a grandson.

With my lifelong compulsion to kill myself with overwork, I took on the job of New York correspondent for *The Manchester Guardian* in 1927, sending them a daily news article, on a rigid deadline, usually from 300 to 1,000 words in length. This was utter madness, since I was already working full time as managing editor (and soon to be editor) of *The New Republic*. But I was flattered

to be asked to join the newspaper which was generally admitted to be the best written in the English-speaking world. *The Manchester Guardian's* policies agreed almost entirely with my own views; and this contact opened doors for me on both sides of the Atlantic that would otherwise have been closed. I wrote 6,000 articles in twenty years, until the pressure of my other duties made it obvious that I should have to give up the connection.

Among the doors the *Guardian* opened for me were a few that I shall always remember. One was a chance to spend some hours with the greatest man I ever met, an outstanding hero of our times —Mahatma Gandhi. He had been let out of a British prison in India to attend the Imperial Conference in London, and knew he would be locked up again as soon as it was over. I talked to him in a big, bare, cold room, with no furniture. He was sitting on the floor with the little hand spinning wheel that he carried everywhere; he was wrapped in a huge white blanket from which his tiny dark head protruded comically. I proposed to sit down beside him, but he demurred, pointing out that I was not used to sitting on the floor and would soon be uncomfortable. He had a single straight chair brought in for me and I sat on it while we talked. What he said is of no importance today; what remains with me is the impression of a man of overwhelming sweetness of character and love for his fellowman. I left the room feeling

not only that here was a very great man, but also that I had made a friend.

I interviewed several British prime ministers, of whom two are worth mention. Anthony Eden was intelligent, amiable, but he seemed to me to lack the iron will needed to guide a great nation through stormy times. The second was a man whose iron will all the world recognizes—Winston Churchill. I opposed his views on some subjects (India, for one), but I had to recognize the power of the man who carried England through its darkest hour, and by doing so perhaps saved Western civilization.

I was one of several correspondents for British newspapers to talk to Churchill early one morning when he had just come off a ship and was sitting in a canvas chair on the pier. He was smoking his usual stage prop, a big, expensive cigar. He never smoked more than an inch or so of it. As usual, no one could read the thoughts behind his large, pale, impassive countenance. When one of us asked him a question, he would be silent so long we thought he had not heard it; then at last, with a preliminary rumble like a volcano preparing to erupt, out came an answer beautifully phrased, carefully couched in diplomatic words, and always courteous to his questioner. He would finish with a slight wave of his cigar, like an orchestra conductor signaling with his baton the end of one movement in a symphony.

# Stories to Remember

Every old newspaperman remembers a few special episodes from his past which may or may not be as interesting to others as they are to him. One of these, in my case, was an article I wrote in *The Globe* which was the instigating factor in the building of millions of dollars' worth of new five-story walk-up apartments in New York City.

As happens after all wars, we were in the midst of a severe housing shortage. People evicted from their apartments had nowhere to go. Some were being housed temporarily in armories and even in a few churches with compassionate pastors. Builders claimed that because of high taxes and costs of labor and materials they could not afford to erect new apartment houses except for the rich (for whom construction went on as usual).

I have always had a keen interest in urban and regional planning, and had made some friends in this field. One day I was having lunch with several of them, and among us we hammered out a possible solution to the problem; I promptly wrote a signed piece on the idea for *The Globe's* editorial page.

The real estate tax was at that time about three per cent of the actual value of the property. I sug-

gested that the state should exempt new apartment buildings of a specified character from taxation for a period of ten years, which would mean a subsidy of thirty per cent. I stipulated that such new buildings should be of good quality and should be rented at not more than a set price per month per room. The land would be taxed as usual, so that city and state revenues would not be reduced on what were then vacant lots.

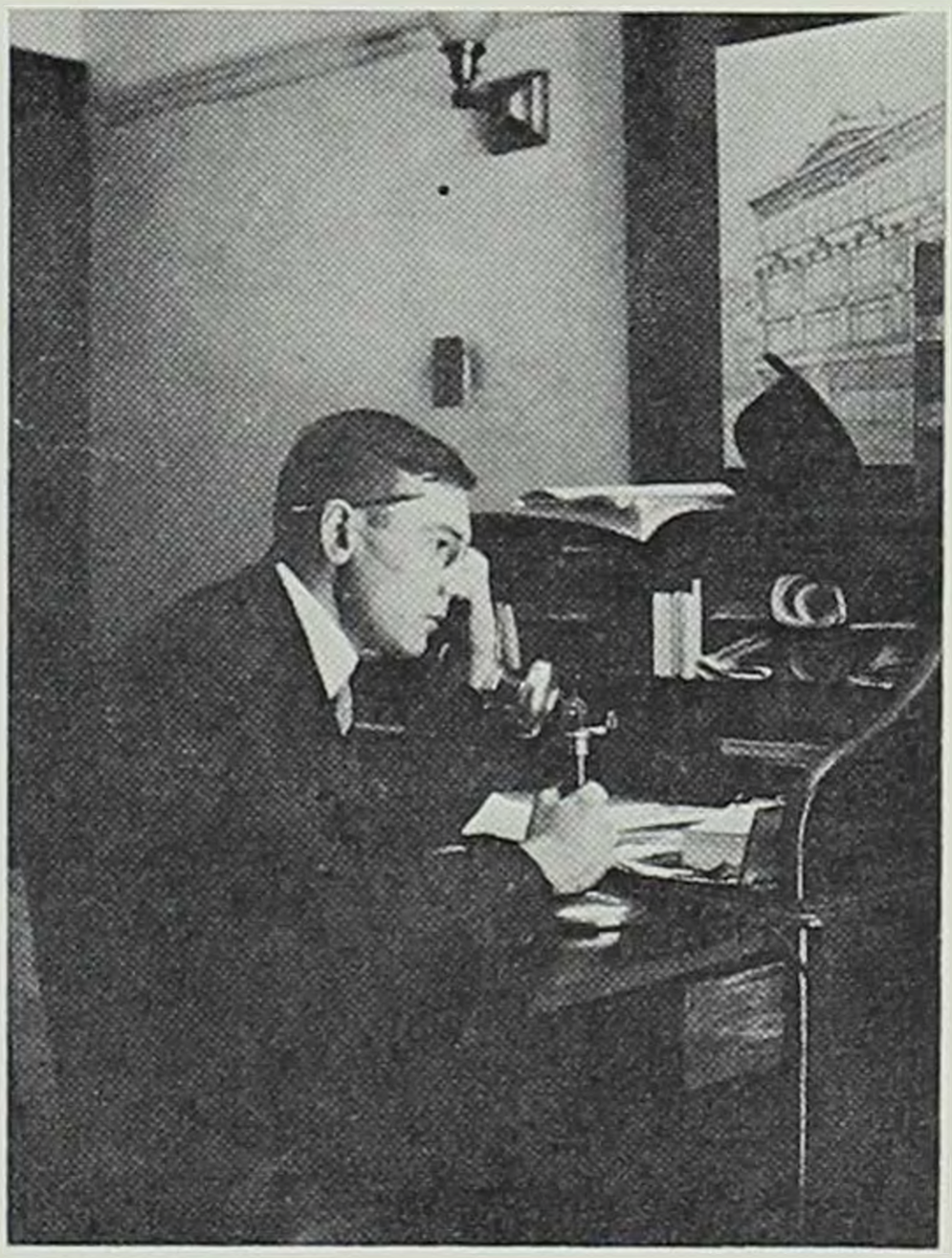
My article attracted a good deal of attention, but no immediate action. I therefore got an appointment with Governor Alfred E. Smith in Albany, and went up to see him. Smith had just begun the first of his four highly successful terms as New York's governor. A gravelly-voiced man who grew up in poverty in New York's slums, Smith had little formal education, spoke with a pronounced East Side accent, and was one of the ablest political leaders of his time.

As he sat behind his desk in the Governor's Mansion, I handed him a clipping of my article and, while he glanced over it, explained the idea in a few words. He asked me several abrasive questions, and then astonished me by saying, "If it's legal, I'll do it."

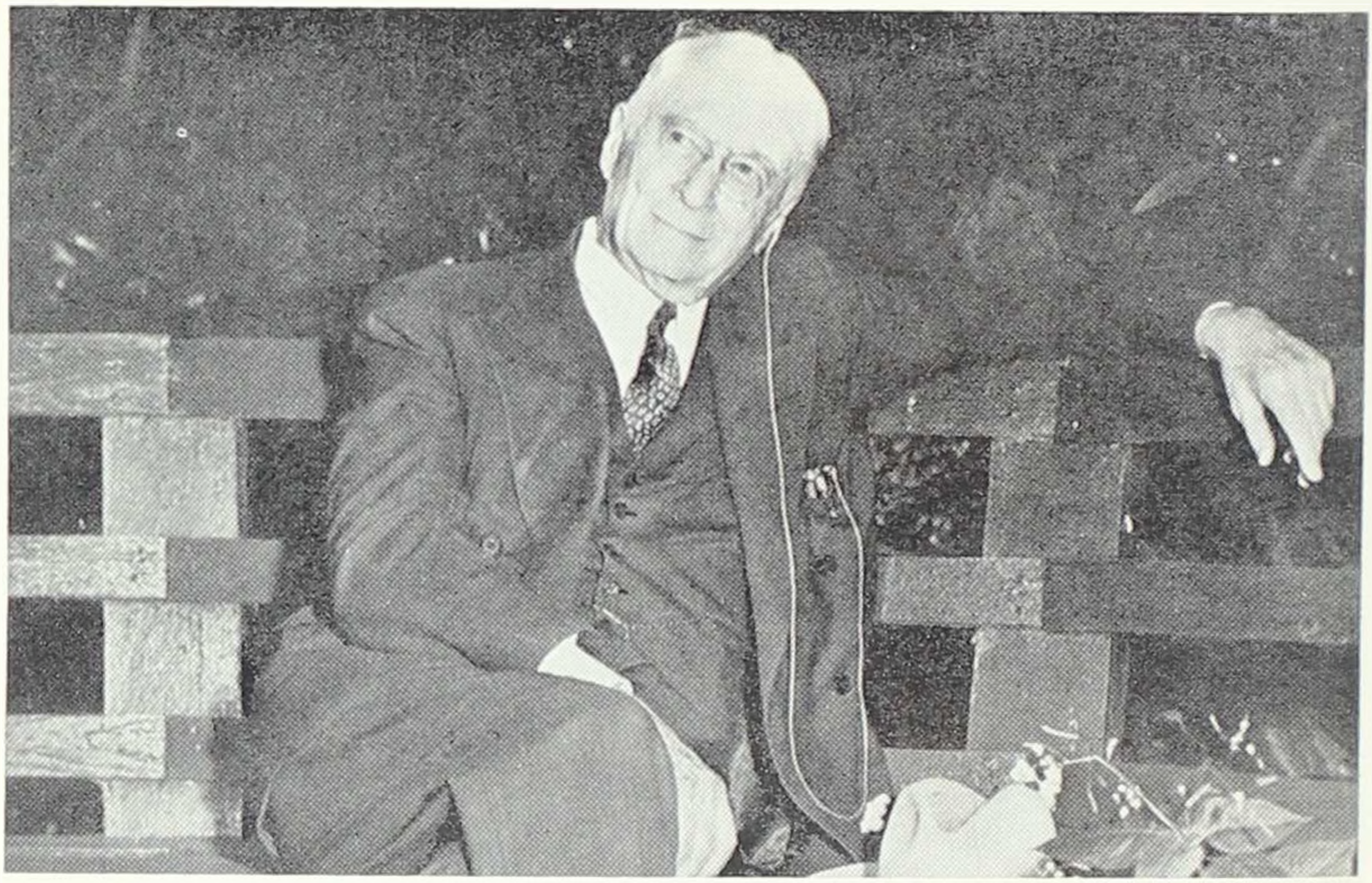
He picked up the telephone and got the state attorney general on the line. Clearly and succinctly, he outlined my scheme which he had grasped in every detail. In a few minutes he said thanks and turned to me.

Emmetsburg about the time the author left for Stanford.

Bliven wears the hat that members of the sophomore class at Stanford were required to wear.

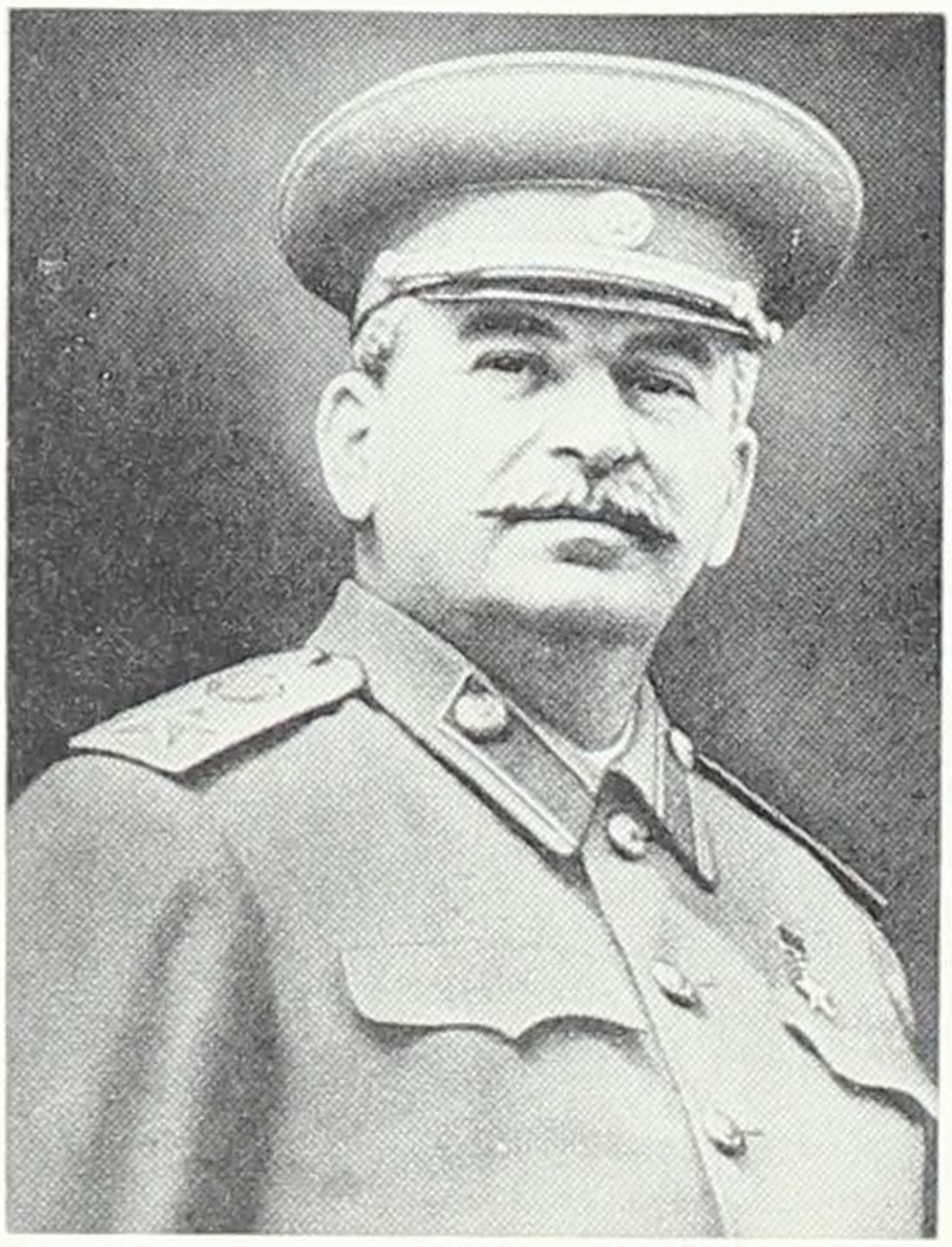


The overnight expert in advertising copy writing is pictured at his desk at Harris & Frank in Los Angeles.



*International News Photo*

Bernard M. Baruch, confidential advisor to presidents, had a passion for meeting people on park benches. He once offered to loan Bliven two million dollars to buy *The New York Globe* when it was about to go under.



*International News Photo*

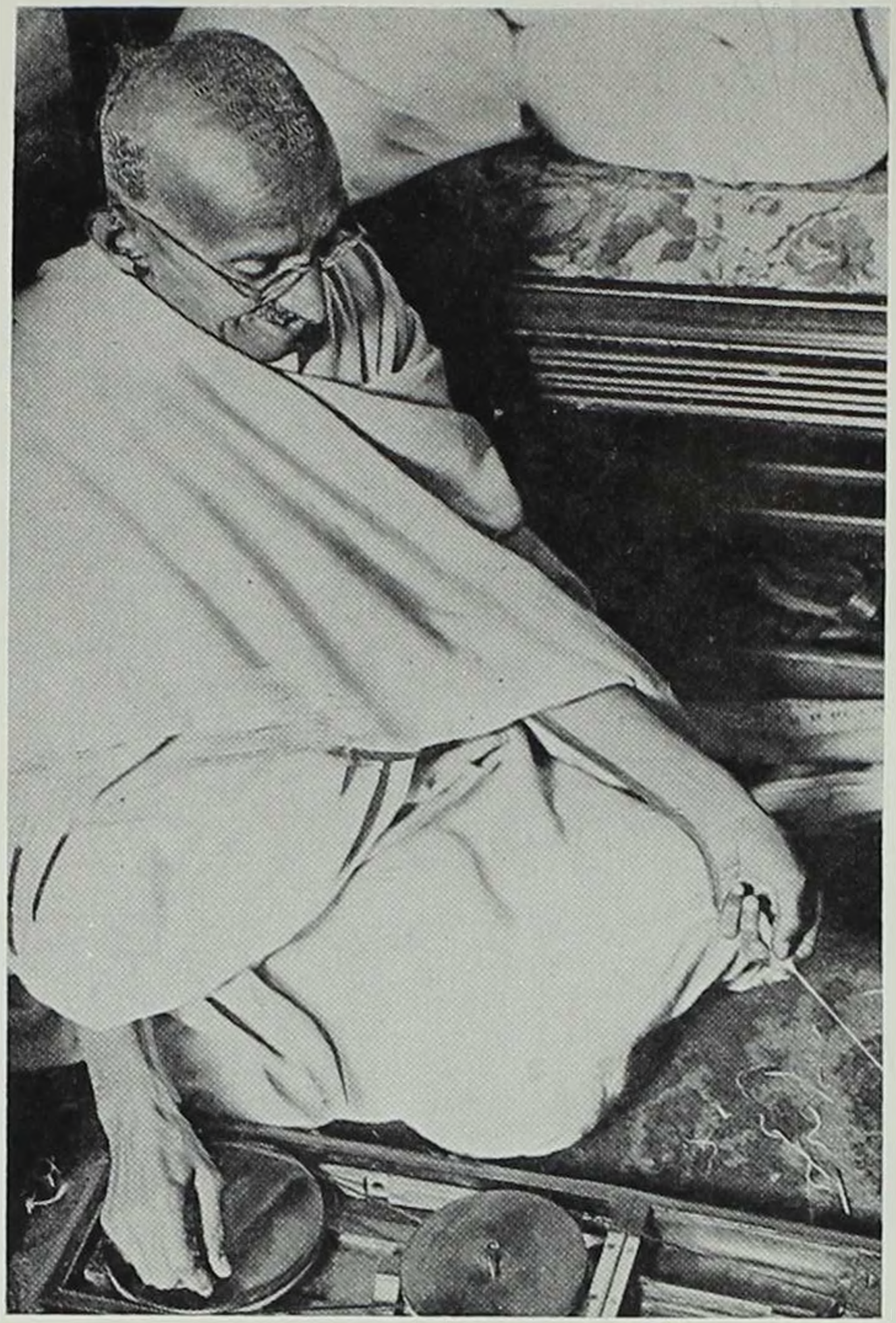
Josef Stalin—"that bloody-handed tyrant had the world's best censorship and the world's best propaganda machine."

*Associated Press Photo*

Winston Churchill "was smoking his usual stage prop, a big, expensive cigar. He never smoked more than an inch or so."

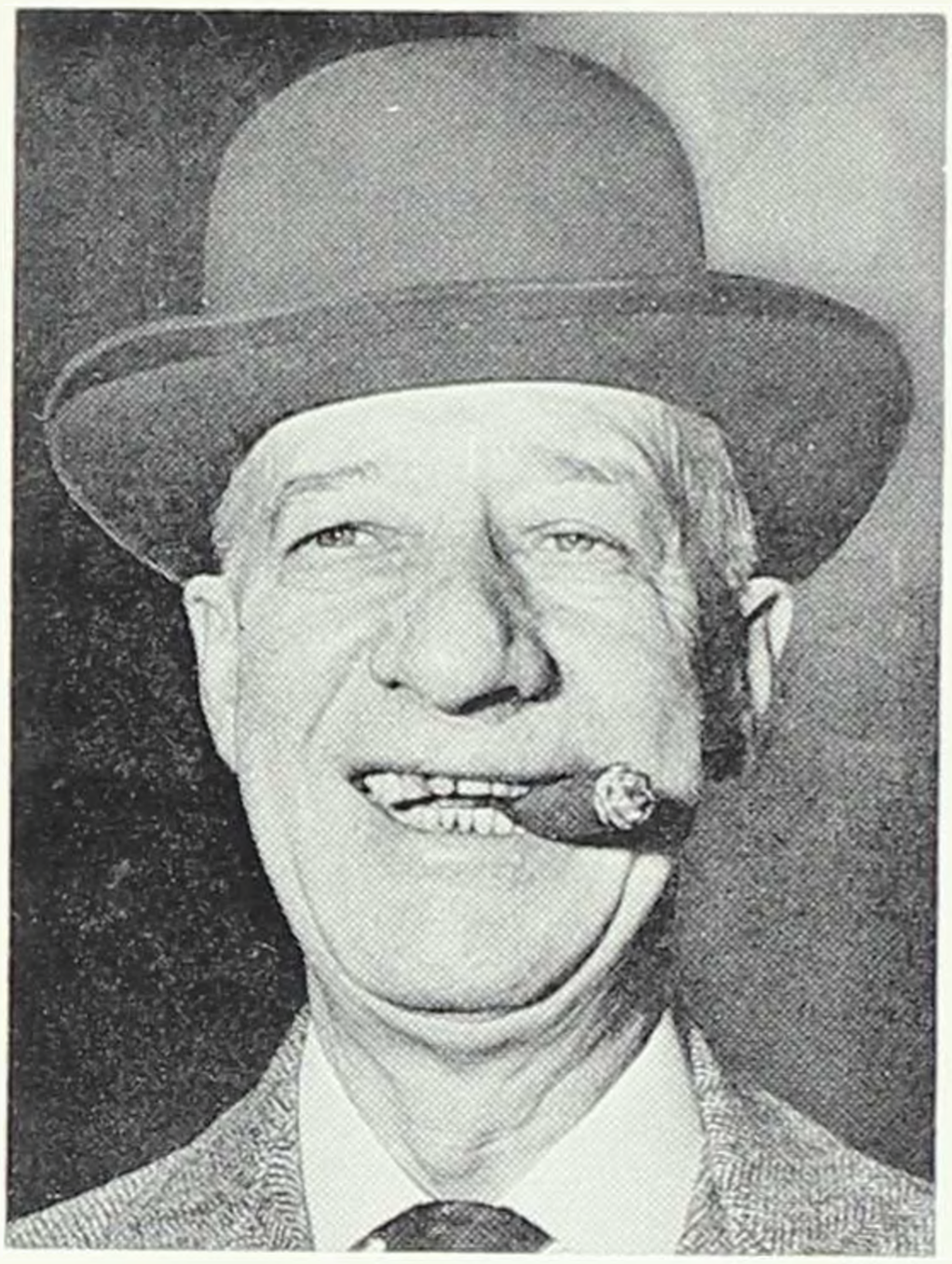

*Des Moines Register Photo*

In introducing Bliven to a Washington audience, Carrie Chapman Catt said she had dandled him as a baby on her knee in his parent's home.



*Wide World Photo*

"Mahatma Gandhi was sitting on the floor with the little hand spinning wheel that he carried everywhere; he was wrapped in a huge white blanket."



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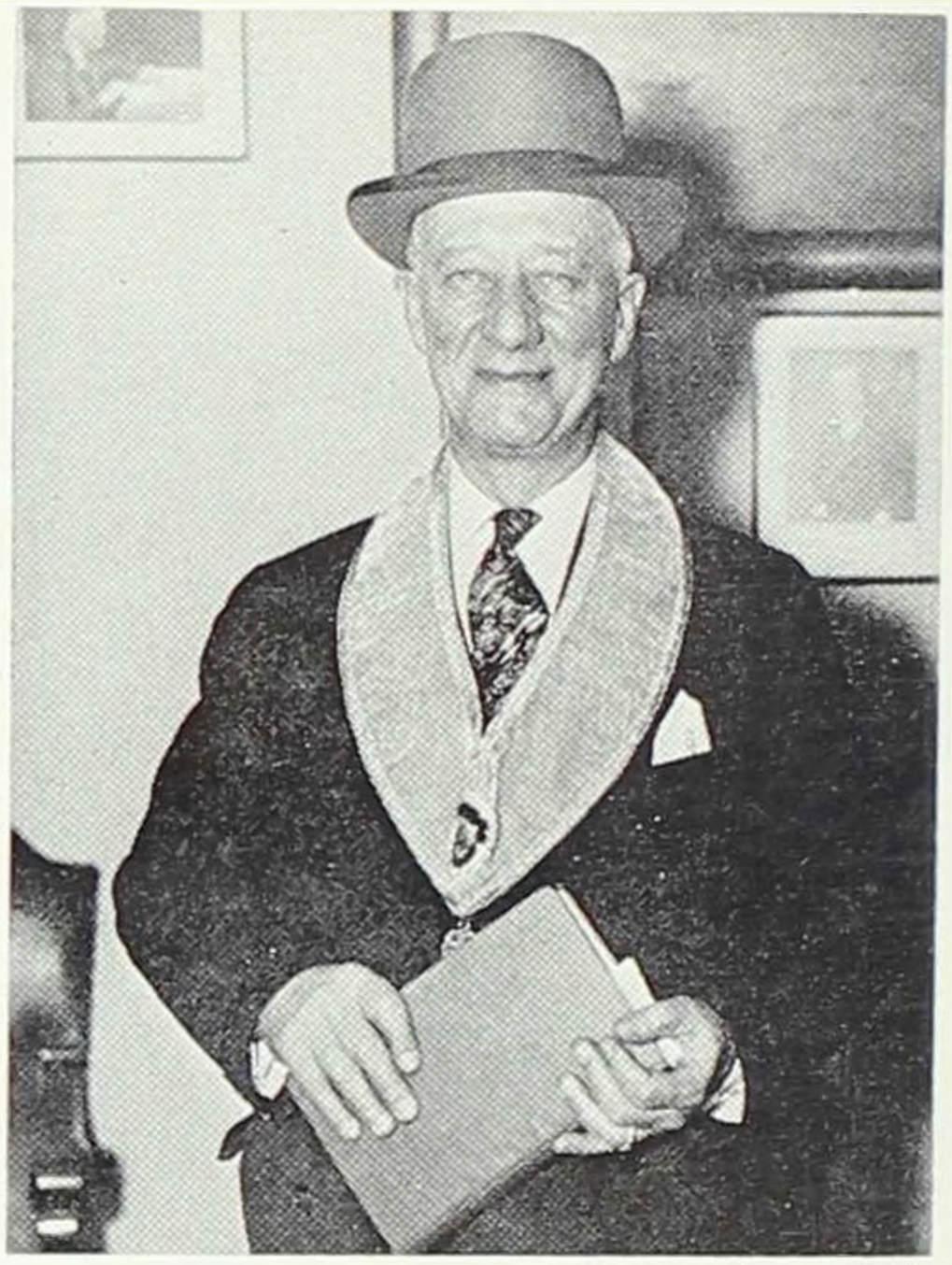
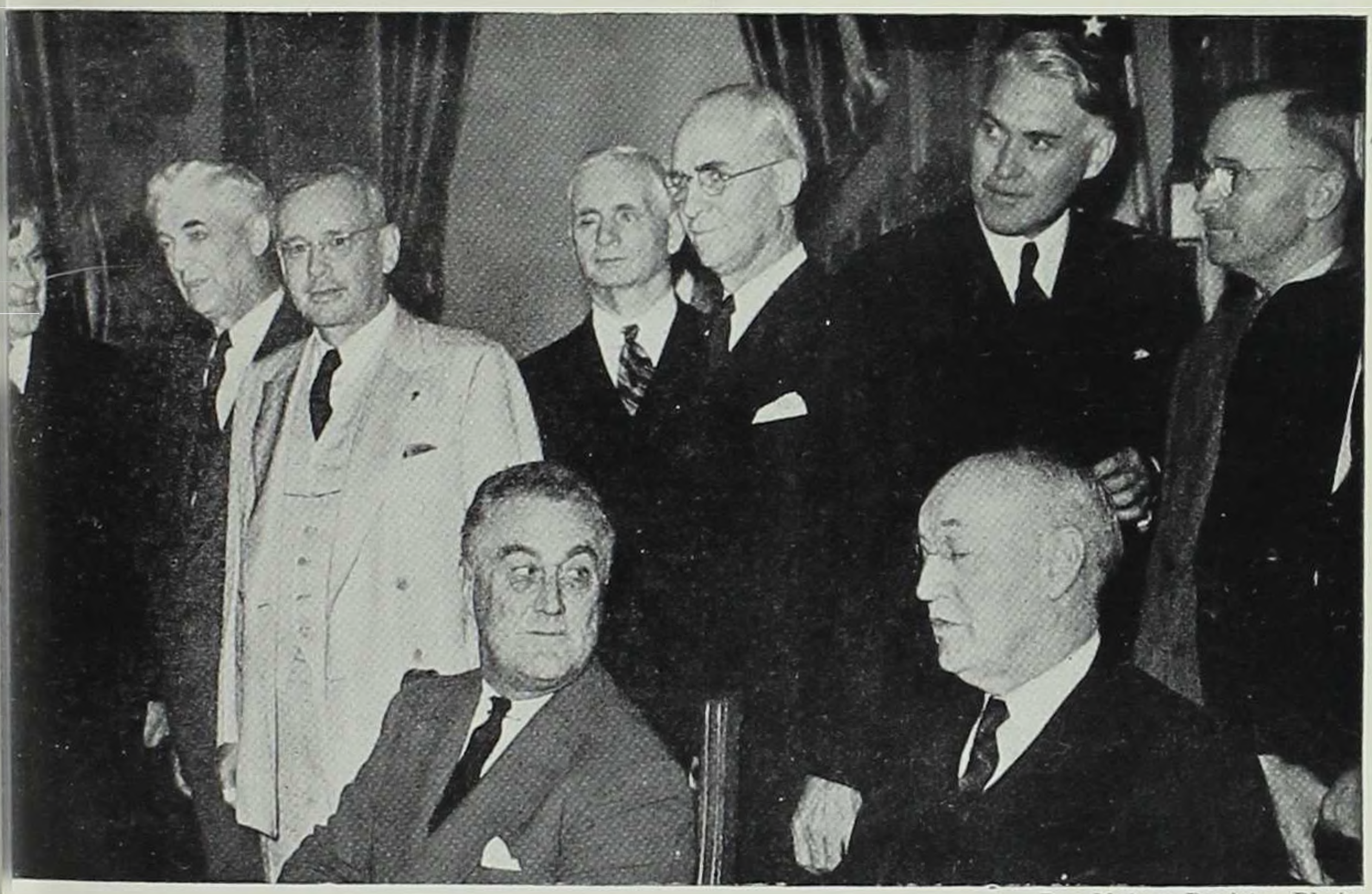


*Associated Press Photo*

"A gravelly-voiced man who grew up in poverty in New York's slum, Alfred E. Smith had little formal education, spoke with a pronounced East Side accent, and was one of the ablest political leaders of his time." At the right he wears the red and gold insignia of the Tammany Sachem.

*International News Photo*

"A favorite of mine, and of a great many other people, was Fiorella La Guardia," mayor of New York from 1933 to 1945. He had "a personality so vivid that he became the hero of a musical comedy on Broadway."

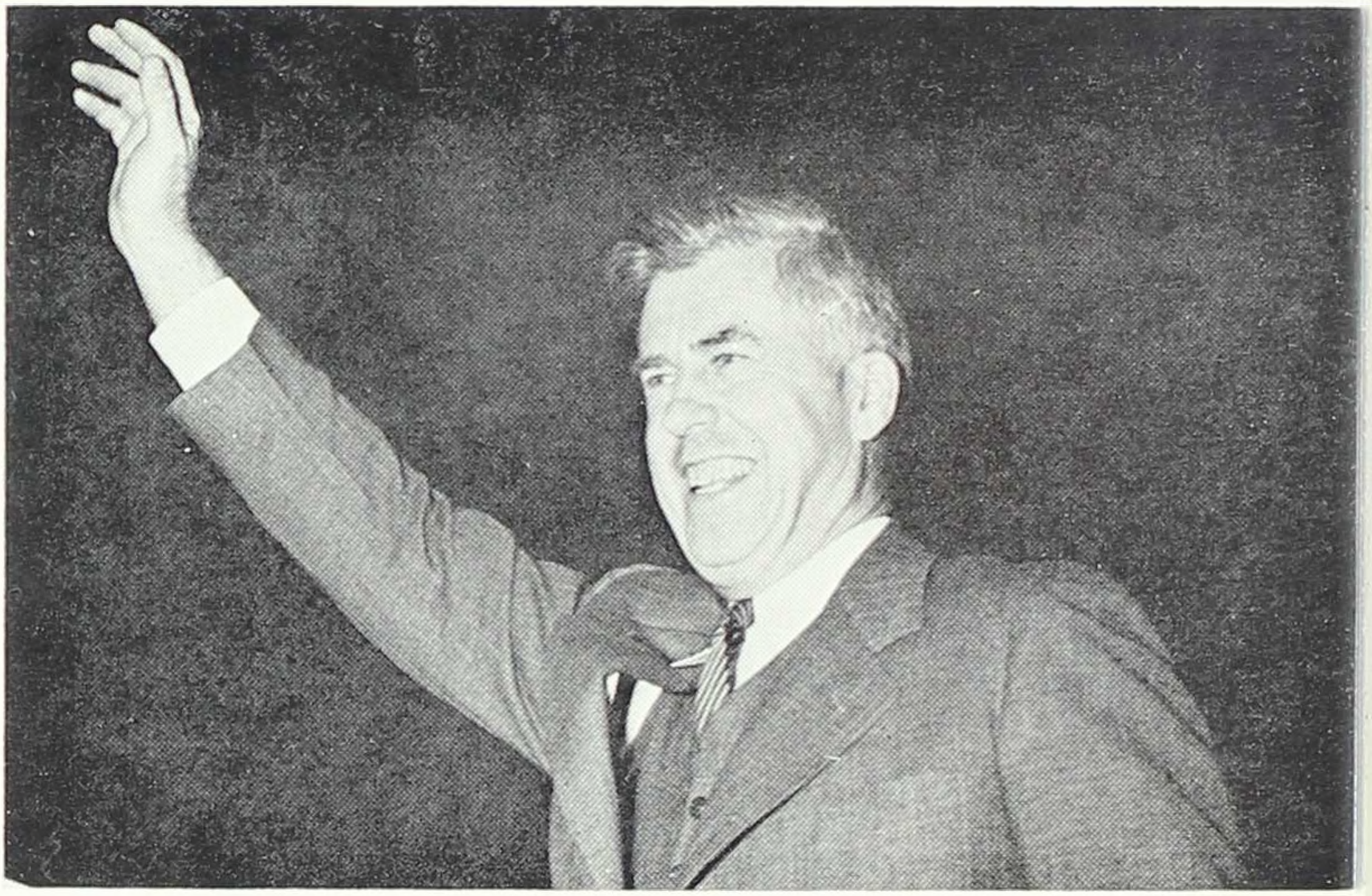


*Des Moines Register Photo*

Iowa Senator L. J. Dickinson, Alf Landon, Republican presidential candidate, President F. D. Roosevelt, Iowa Governor Clyde Herring. Man on the far right was not identified in 1936 but became president of the United States in 1945.

*Cedar Rapids Gazette Photo*

Hoover and Truman became fast friends after World War II. Both were principal speakers at the dedication of each other's Presidential Libraries. They meet informally before the dedication of the Hoover Presidential Library at West Branch on August 10, 1962.

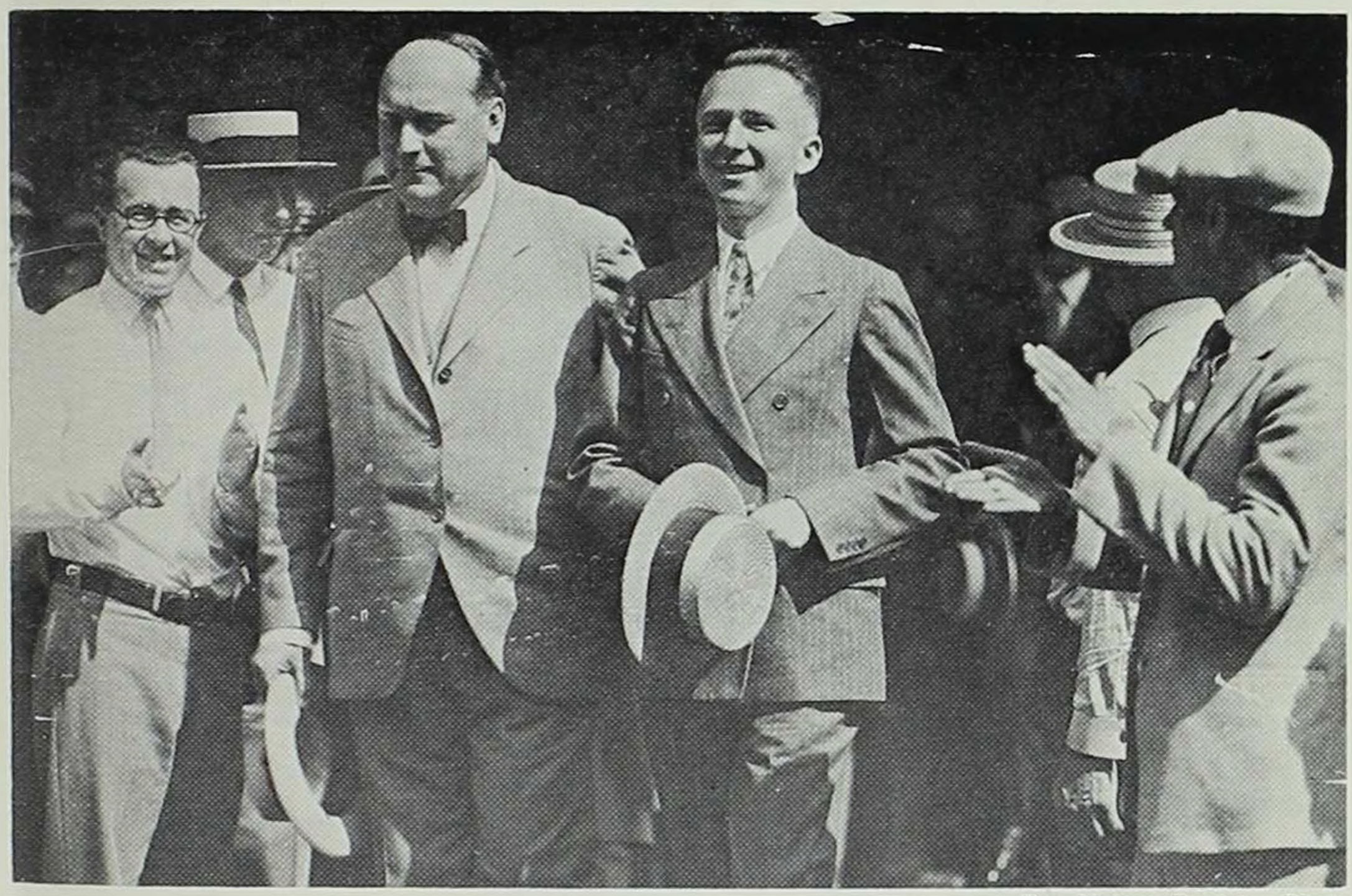


*Acme Photo*

Henry A. Wallace waves to a crowd at an outdoor rally, in Washington, D. C., where he threatened to form a third party if the Democratic administration persisted in its "anti-Russian course." His Third Party received "only about 1,100,000 votes."

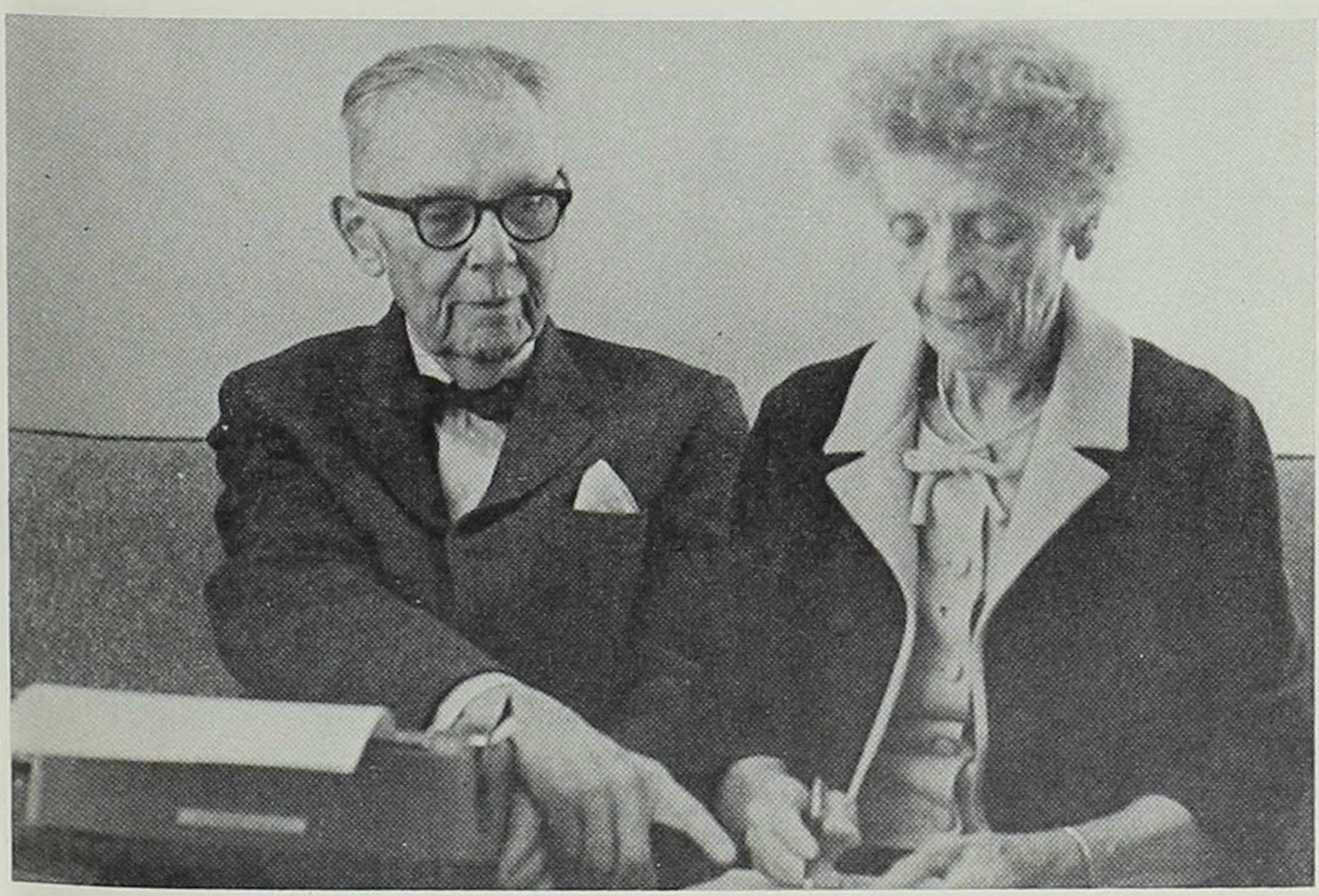
*Des Moines Register Photo*

William W. Waymack served on the Board of the Twentieth Century Fund with Bliven. He had served as editor of the *Des Moines Register* and was a member of the Atomic Energy Commission.



*Des Moines Register Photo*

Lieutenant Colonel Clarence Chamberlin, a resident of Denison, Iowa, flew the Atlantic in 1927. He is pictured here, right, in Des Moines on August 31, 1927, escorted by Governor John Hammill.



Bruce Bliven and his wife study a knotty problem as they work together on one of his recent manuscripts.

*International News Photo*

Jaunty in his nautical garb, Winston Churchill is pictured on a visit to the United States.

*Acme Photo*

Marshal Josef Stalin, left, President F. D. Roosevelt, center, and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, right, are pictured during the historic Teheran Conference.

"He says it's not unconstitutional, but will need some legislation," Smith told me. "I'll try to get it through." A few minutes later, I found myself out on the street, stunned by my success and the speed with which it had been accomplished.

Governor Smith was as good as his word. He summoned the legislature into special session, and bullied and persuaded it into passing the necessary law, framed in such a way that it applied almost exclusively to New York City, where the shortage was at its worst. The city immediately adopted a necessary supplementary ordinance, signed by Mayor John F. Hylan.

The results surprised everyone and astonished me. With this 30 per cent subsidy, speculative builders ran up a huge quantity of apartment houses in the Bronx, where there was plenty of vacant land. Their total value amounted to many millions of dollars. There followed a great Hegira from the terrible slums of the Lower East Side. But the slum dwellings thus vacated did not, of course, stand idle; these flats were filled by new European immigrants.

A favorite of mine, and of a great many other people, was Fiorello La Guardia, whom I knew from 1922 until his death in 1947, a personality so vivid that he became a hero of a musical comedy.

After serving as Mayor of New York for three terms, from 1933 to 1945, he retired from this strenuous office because of impaired health. He

did heroic work in cleaning up the raging corruption in the city government, put through a badly needed new city charter, began a program of slum clearance, and took important steps toward the beautification of the town.

Somehow the Mayor got it into his head that I was a storehouse of information about the political leanings of New York Liberals. Every few months I would get a call from the Mayor's secretary toward the end of the afternoon, asking if Fiorello could pick me up at my office and take me to the Tavern-on-the-Green in Central Park for a drink. These were lively occasions; the Mayor rode in an official limousine, with a police chauffeur at the wheel, a plain-clothes detective beside him, and a shotgun in a special rack on the back of the front seat. I felt ignorant about the intricacies of local politics, but I knew how to ask questions, when I had a chance to insert one into the Mayor's monologue. Perhaps he just wanted a listener outside the circle of his official family.

Another article of mine succeeded in getting a sadistic army officer sent to a Federal penitentiary —the only such achievement in my life.

Though the First World War ended on November 11, 1918, many months later there were still numbers of American soldiers in Europe. They had little to do and discipline was a problem. There were several military prisons to which transgressors were sent for varying terms.

Soon after I became managing editor of *The Globe,* two or three men, recently discharged from the army, came to see me with tales of shocking cruelty practiced at one of these prison camps, just outside Paris. The officer in charge, Major F. H. Smith, was so rough on the prisoners in his care that he was universally known as "Hard-boiled" Smith. Men were gravely punished for minor infractions of prison regulations, some were beaten, put on bread and water, or forced to stand at attention for hours. Some were pegged down, on their backs, on the grass, arms and legs spread-eagled, gazing up into the hot sun.

I checked the stories of these men against each other, got verification from a correspondent in Paris, and then wrote several articles telling the whole story. (I had been in newspaper work long enough to know that a series has far greater impact than the same material told all in one day.) I had the stories set into type and then took a set of proofs down to Washington, where I had obtained an appointment with Wilson's Secretary of War, Newton D. Baker.

Baker was an odd choice for the job. He was an avowed pacifist, so much so that he was actually investigated by Congress for this reason during his term in office.

I handed him proofs of my articles and explained the story while he skimmed them. Then I made a short speech. "Mr. Secretary," I said, "there are

many thousands of American boys still in Europe. Their parents will be greatly worried at the news of what's going on. If you will give me your word that you'll investigate and stop this kind of thing, I'll kill my series."

Baker drew himself up to his full height, which was, as I remember, about five feet six. "I'll make no bargain with you," he said, "which implies any wrongdoing on the part of the American Army."

For probably the only time in my life, I answered like a movie hero. "Very well, Mr. Secretary," I said. "The first article will appear tomorrow."

It did, too, and the series, which was syndicated to other leading papers, created a national sensation. It was reprinted in *The Congressional Record,* and there were indignant speeches in the House and Senate. Major Smith was promptly recalled from France, tried and sentenced to eighteen months in prison. But he had political influence in the higher reaches of the army, and after serving four months, he was quietly paroled.

The most dramatic single episode in my reporting career was probably when I told the story, for the first time in any American magazine, of the horrors of the Machado regime in Cuba. I had gone to that country to report the Sixth Pan-American Conference, at which all the countries of North, Central and South America were represented (except Canada).

The conference did not make any world shattering news. Long before it ended, I was spending my time on another and different story. Members of the underground opposition contacted me with the real story of what was happening in the island.

The president at that time was General Gerardo Machado y Morales, who had been elected as a Conservative in 1924 for a term of four years. He was as bloody-handed a dictator as the hemisphere had seen in a long time, suppressing all civil liberties and relentlessly rooting out every opponent—especially liberals, radicals and trade union leaders. My informants supplied me with solid testimony about what was happening and I wrote a series of articles in *The New Republic*.

I charged Machado with the murder of several editors of opposition newspapers and named them. I reported how freedom of speech, of the press, and of assembly had been halted. Several hundred opponents, some of whom I listed, had disappeared without a trace. My informants believed they had been taken to old Morro Castle, at the entrance to the harbor; it was known there were dungeons near the waterline, with chutes down which bodies could be slid into the bay, swarming with sharks.

Machado had the approval of American capitalists, owners of two-thirds of the island's productive wealth. The United States ambassador was a close personal friend, which made it harder

for protests from the United States to be heard. Under the Platt Amendment of 1901, the United States had the right to intervene in Cuba whenever it deemed this desirable, but Washington showed no signs of doing so in 1928.

As far as I know, I was the first journalist to tell the truth about Machado in any American periodical of general circulation. My articles got a lot of attention, but if they had any effect in Washington, I was not aware of it.

After five years, Machado's misdeeds finally caught up with him; he had aroused so much and such bitter opposition that he was forced to flee the country. He was succeeded by a couple of puppet presidents, but a new strong man soon emerged—Fulgencio Batista y Zaldivar, who repeated all Machado's acts of suppression.

# Some Famous People

Many elderly journalists are accused of being name-droppers. Sometimes the charge is true, but often it is partly or wholly false. If we are good at our job, it is our business to know a lot of very important people, and to be on such terms with them that they will tell us, on or off the record, what is going on. Often this results in a personal friendship; I shall mention a few of them.

By a meaningless accident, I met face-to-face every president of the United States from McKinley to Truman, inclusive, but with only two of them was my contact anything more than casual. When Franklin Roosevelt was trying to force his sweeping reforms through Congress, *The New Republic* worked hard reporting and explaining what he was trying to do and why we thought it was necessary. Most of his reforms had been debated in our pages, years before he took office, by a group of regular contributors of ours who afterward became the original members of his "Brain Trust."

I saw him in action in his famous press conferences in the Oval Room of the White House, joking with the reporters, expressing mock indignation that they did not know something they had

no possible way of knowing, cheerfully contradicting himself and then denying it. While on the whole we supported the New Deal, we constantly criticized his measures because we believed they did not go far enough—a position I still feel was correct. He sent me word privately to please continue the attacks; that they helped convince his critics on the right that he was not as liberal as they said.

The other president with whom I had close contact was Herbert Hoover. We had a double bond —coming from Iowa and being graduates from Stanford University. He was born in West Branch —where the Herbert Hoover Library now stands with his papers and other memorabilia. While it is true that he was sent to Oregon at the age of eight, he continued in an Iowa milieu, and I always felt that, like me, "he never left home."

In May, 1920, I wrote the first magazine article, as far as I know, suggesting Mr. Hoover for president. It appeared in *The Independent,* a mildly intellectual weekly that ceased publication many years ago. I proposed he should run on either the Republican or the Democratic ticket; mine was a nonpartisan nomination.

People today have forgotten that Hoover was then our chief national hero. He had kept the Belgians from starving. He was a Great Engineer in a time when people thought engineering principles would save the nation. During the war he had

been the highly successful Food Administrator; the Washington propaganda machine had worked hard to identifiy his personality with economy in this field. Millions of copies of a handsome four-color picture of him were distributed with "Food Will Win the War" imprinted on the bottom; housewives hung it in their kitchens and mooned over it as they poured extra fat into a tin can. I remember only Lindbergh and Eisenhower as objects of such widespread devotion.

Nobody knew whether Hoover was a Republican or a Democrat and nobody much cared; engineering was above partisanship. I believed then, and still do, that if he had kept still, the Republicans might have nominated him in fear that if they did not the Democrats would, and that this might well have happened. He could have beaten anybody then in sight.

Just after my article appeared, the bubble burst; Mr. Hoover announced that he was a Republican. The pressure was off; the G.O.P., knowing the Democrats could not choose him, happily selected a mediocrity from Marion, Ohio, Senator Warren G. Harding. Mr. Hoover, who could have swept the convention, received a few complimentary votes on the first ballot or two. After the election Harding named him Secretary of Commerce.

A year or so later I asked him why he had so suddenly announced that he was a Republican, repeating the argument made above. "I didn't

have any choice," he told me. "Some California friends had entered my name in the primary there as a Republican and I couldn't let them down."

In the autumn of 1921, a great international Conference on Naval Disarmament was held in Washington, attended by the five chief naval powers of the world—the United States, Great Britain, Japan, France, and Italy. I stayed in the capital for several months, reporting the Conference for *The Globe* and *The New Republic*. From time to time I dropped in on Mr. Hoover. He liked to spend quiet Sunday mornings in his office, accompanied sometimes by his special assistant, a bright young man from Boston named Christian Herter, who was to go on to service in Congress, as Governor of Massachusetts, and as Secretary of State for Eisenhower. Frank Taylor, then *The Globe's* Washington correspondent, and I would join them for a leisurely talk on aspects of the state of American public opinion.

On one occasion Mr. Hoover sought our advice on a problem. In the early 1920's, postwar Germany was in desperate financial and economic straits; France had taken huge quantities of her machinery in the guise of reparations; her credit for the purchase of goods abroad was at low ebb. Medical and other supplies were desperately short; new-born babies were being wrapped in paper because no linen or cotton cloth was available. People were starving.

Mr. Hoover told us the American Relief Commission, which he had headed, still had huge stocks of non-perishable foodstuffs in storage all over Europe. But feeling against the Germans was still very high in the United States; he wondered how the Americans would react if some of these supplies, not urgently needed elsewhere, were used to aid the Germans.

That one was easy. Frank and I pointed out that Americans were the most generous people on earth; that they did not make war on women and children; that they would applaud this action. I do not know how much we had to do with his decision, if anything, but soon thereafter Relief Commission food began to be distributed in Germany.

In later years, Mr. Hoover and I diverged widely in our political views. Either he became more conservative, or an innate conservatism that had not been realized earlier began to make its appearance. But we remained good personal friends in spite of our political differences. When he left office in 1933, after being overwhelmingly defeated by Franklin Roosevelt, he was highly unpopular with most people in the country. But as the years passed, much of this feeling died away.

For two years in the late 1940's he performed a fine public service as head of the United States Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government. It is to the credit of Harry Truman, then president, that he laid aside

political disagreements and called Herbert Hoover to head this commission. Many of his excellent recommendations have been carried out by Congress. Others are still waiting to be implemented.

For years, my best Iowa friend in Washington was Henry Agard Wallace, who was successively the third-generation editor of *Wallace's Farmer* in Des Moines, then Secretary of Agriculture for President Roosevelt, Vice President from 1941 to 1945, Secretary of Commerce under President Truman for a short time, and finally the nominal editor of *The New Republic* itself. Henry was a year older than I, and had graduated from Iowa State University at Ames a year before I got my degree at Stanford. We shared not only an Iowa background and a common interest in science, but many political ideas.

It seems to me probable that long after Henry's public career has been forgotten, he may be remembered for his brilliant work in corn genetics. He developed a new strain of hybrid corn that proved enormously successful, with greatly increased yield per acre, more sugar, less starch, and uniformity in size for machine handling. His corn sold all over the world, and at one time he had done more than any other individual to increase the food supply for hungry people everywhere. The last fifteen years of his life were devoted to a successful similar effort to improve poultry—with

better size, increased egg-laying capacity, and resistance to disease.

I used to see Henry Wallace on my frequent trips to Washington in the 1930's, when the Roosevelt Administration was wrestling with the problem of a heavy oversupply of agricultural products (in terms of salability, not, of course, in terms of human need). He would tell me what was going on, and I would report this in articles in *The New Republic*. Since we had a very heavy readership among editorial writers on daily newspapers all over the country, spreading this information was a useful service.

I remember traveling with Henry many miles across Iowa, from Des Moines, to a small town where he made a speech, and back again late at night. He talked of his philosophy of life; I could see that he was somewhat attracted by a form of mysticism which has always left me cold. But never did I see any evidence of the fantastic beliefs attributed to him by the late Westbrook Pegler, the syndicated newspaper columnist, whose smear campaign against Henry went on for many years.

We often talked of what he would do when he left public office. We gave him a standing invitation to write a good Iowa column for *The New Republic*. But, in 1946, he was summarily dismissed as Secretary of Commerce by President Truman. His idealistic view of world affairs had clashed head on with the plans of Secretary of

State James F. Byrnes. *The New Republic* was, at the moment, engaged in an effort to make itself a more popular magazine, with a much larger circulation. Under the inspiration of Michael Straight, son of the original founders of the paper, we conceived the idea of bringing in Henry as the nominal editor, to write a weekly signed column, and to represent the paper in public appearances, where his name and reputation would be of great value to us. He accepted and came to us at the end of 1946. My own title was changed to editorial director.

We worked easily and well with Henry; he took no part in the actual work of getting out the magazine, but wrote his weekly article faithfully. When, for any reason, he was unable to do so, one or the other of us "ghosted" it. Before long it became evident that Henry still had unsatisfied personal political ambitions. There began to be talk of a new third party, far to the left of the middle-of-the-road Democrats under Harry Truman. The new party finally came into being as the Progressive Party in the early summer of 1948.

It was obvious that an avowed candidate for president could not very well serve as even the nominal editor of an independent magazine whose policy was to criticize all men and institutions without fear or favor. Accordingly, we asked Henry to resign and he amiably did so. He and I continued to be good personal friends until his death.

While there were many honest liberals in the Progressive Party, it is also true that some of its important leaders were men on the Far Left, who either were members of the Communist Party or might as well have been. The Progressives polled only about 1,100,000 votes. With Henry at its head, the Party should have appealed to the dissatisfied farmers and workers of the Middle West. But most of its votes came from New York State, and a large proportion from New York City, the one place where the Far Left was strongest. Truman, whom *The New Republic* supported instead of its recent editor, got about twenty-four million votes. Thomas E. Dewey, the Republican candidate, got nearly twenty-two million. Even Strom Thurmond, the States' Rights candidate in the south, did better than the Progressives.

Henry, himself, of course, was never a Communist or a fellow-traveler. He did not know what was going on among his supporters. When North Korea invaded South Korea in 1950, he was indignant, as most good Americans were, and issued a statement saying so. Thereupon the Communists denounced him savagely, forgetting all the nice things they had said about him two years earlier.

Another well-known public figure who played quite a role in my life was Bernard M. Baruch, who, as I have said, made a large fortune in Wall Street very early. He spent the rest of his career

in public service, as confidential adviser to every president from Woodrow Wilson to John F. Kennedy. I have already reported that he once offered to lend me $2 million with which to buy *The New York Globe* when that paper was about to go under. We remained friends for forty years, until his death. He never offered me any stock market information. I should have thought it improper for him to do so, or for me to accept. Perhaps I was too punctilious!

Baruch had a passion for meeting people on park benches. I used to talk to him in Central Park in New York City near Cleopatra's Needle. He had a passion for peanuts, which his doctor had forbidden, and he used to share a surreptitious five-cent bag with me, sometimes casting an apprehensive eye over his shoulder for fear his medico might be approaching.

Since I have mentioned talking with kings, perhaps I should confess that I have talked with only two. (But there are not many around any more!) My two were King Edward VIII (after he had become the Duke of Windsor) and King Carol of Rumania. Both these monarchs lost their thrones on account of women—in Edward's case, because of his wish to marry the former Mrs. Wallis Simpson; for Carol, because of his long liaison with Madame Lupescu. Both these men seemed to be agreeable, average, human beings; but in both cases I was struck by the rigid train-

ing they had obviously undergone for kingship, how to deal with inquisitive reporters, and how to censor their own natural expressions of opinion.

Like every editor, I was asked to go on the boards of a good many organizations. I fought shy of most of these and I think, wisely. One that I did join, almost at its beginning, was the Foreign Policy Association, a nonpolitical, purely educational organization intended to help inform the American people about world affairs. It has performed a useful service, and is still going strong fifty years later. Of the many distinguished people who served on its Board the one I remember best (in the early days, when her husband was Governor of New York) is Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt. She was a controversial figure when her husband was in office and was disliked by many, but toward the end of her life she was almost universally admired for her unflagging, incredible energy, which she devoted to what she considered worthy causes.

One of the nasty jobs of the Trustees was going to millionaires and asking for money with which to keep the Association afloat. At our monthly Board meetings, the chairman would mention the name of a prospective donor and call for a volunteer to go see him. There would be a long, agonized pause, and then Mrs. Roosevelt would quietly say, "I will." She was usually successful, too.

Another organization on which I served for a third of a century was a foundation, the Twentieth Century Fund. Also going strong after fifty years, it began by making careful studies in the field of economics, and then publishing the results; today it has broadened its field of interest greatly, as well as its effectiveness.

The Fund, also, had many distinguished men on its Board over the years, people like Owen D. Young, head of General Electric, Attorney General Francis Biddle, David Lilienthal of the T.V.A. and the Atomic Energy Commission, and J. Robert Oppenheimer, the distinguished physicist, head of the group that brought the first atom bomb into being. One of those I remember best, and my friend for many years, was the late William W. Waymack, editor of *The Des Moines Register,* and a distinguished member of the Atomic Energy Commission during some of the most difficult times, in the late 1940's. For a long time he and I were the only Middle Westerners on the Board; as was the case when Alvin Johnson and I were surrounded by Easterners on *The New Republic,* we sometimes felt we spoke a different language from our colleagues.

We had another bond, in addition to our warm personal friendship. Bill and I were for years the only two people on the Board who had any training or experience in the art of mass communication. Our worthy colleagues, who tended to be

college professor types, showed an inclination to spend two or three hundred thousand dollars making a study of some critical national problem, and then publish it in a couple of fat volumes, destined to die unread on the shelves of a few libraries. Bill and I fought hard, and in the end successfully, to get information down to the grass-roots level. We had skilled popularizers engaged to produce inexpensive readable books summarizing the results; we had press releases prepared for newspapers and magazines; we even had a few films produced, for use in motion picture theaters and on television.

When Bill came to New York, we always had dinner together, and I renewed my strength, like Antaeus, by this contact, even at second hand, with my native soil. When I needed to know what was going on in Iowa and adjacent points, I pestered Bill, in Des Moines, with questions, and when I could—which was not very often—I would persuade him to write about what was happening for *The New Republic*.

I have lately been rereading some of his enormous correspondence (now in the files of the State Historical Society of Iowa Library), and have been impressed all over again with his great range of interest and his bright and shining spirit.

## Moonlighting

For about a quarter of a century I added to my other duties that of a professional public speaker. It fitted in beautifully with the work of an editor, because I got out into the country, found what people were thinking about, what they were doing, and sometimes had my own writing criticized to my face—a healthy experience. When some group could afford to pay, and were used to paying, I charged a fee, having learned that in these cases, anything that comes without charge is suspect. When a deserving group wanted me and had no money, I spoke free.

For many years I made an annual swing around the country; it was confined to two or three weeks because I could spare no more time. I spoke to all the Ivy League colleges, male and female (except Bryn Mawr). I lectured at most of the great state universities. Several times I talked to teachers' conventions, covering an entire state in three successive days. I spoke at the seventy-fifth birthday celebrations for Frank Lloyd Wright and John Dewey, finding them both just as alert and acerbic as they had been all their lives.

When Clarence Chamberlin, an Iowa boy, flew the Atlantic in 1927, the Iowa Society of New

York gave a dinner in his honor at which I was a speaker.

When I spoke to a mass meeting against war, in the national capital, I was introduced by Carrie Chapman Catt, a grand old leader of the peace movement, who told the audience she had been a guest in my parents' home in Emmetsburg, and had dandled me on her knee when I was a baby. Thus reassured, those present gave me a royal welcome.

When I spoke to a student convocation at the University of Iowa, the meeting was held out-of-doors, and I looked into a sea of upturned good Iowa faces that seemed to go on forever. I got introductions as a native when I spoke in Sioux City and to the annual convention of the Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs.

The day I was scheduled to speak at Iowa State University at Ames, Hitler chose to invade the Low Countries. I spent hours being interviewed on the college radio, or talking to various college groups about the situation.

Several times I went back to my home town and spoke (on those occasions without fee). Having just come back from a tour of all the chief countries of Europe, I talked once on world affairs to a high school assembly at nine a.m.; when I finished my set remarks, the principal canceled all classes for the rest of the morning while the young people asked me searching and knowledgeable

questions. Because of the radio, they were amazingly well informed, by the standards of my generation.

On another occasion I spoke about the profession of journalism; two Emmetsburg sisters in my audience were enough impressed so that when they finished at the University of Iowa they came to New York seeking careers in that field. One of them landed on the staff of *Time;* the other, proficient in mathematics, got a job on the Manhattan Project, working, though she did not know it, on the atom bomb.

I had reminded my audience that another Emmetsburg high school graduate had also gone to New York, and became one of the two editors of *The Ladies' Home Journal.* Beatrice Blackmar, some years younger than I, attended the University of Iowa, had a college romance with Bruce Gould. After graduation and marriage they came to New York to seek their fortune in the big city. As they tell in their joint autobiography, *An American Story,* together they edited *The Ladies' Home Journal* for twenty-seven years when it was at the peak of its influence.

On another occasion I came back to Emmetsburg, spoke to a paying audience, and helped raise money for the new hospital, which in turn named one of its rooms for my mother.

At the age of fifty, I at last felt able to take time to pursue a lifetime hobby of mine—writing about

science and technology for a lay audience. For many years, I had been fascinated by this field of knowledge, and was a voracious reader of books and magazine articles about it which were within a layman's grasp. In the more than thirty years since then, I have written two books in this field, and scores of magazine articles, discussing medicine, physiology, biology, chemistry, astronomy, atomic physics, and many other subjects.

Since my own education in these fields had been outrageously bad, I early developed the technique of interviewing the best authorities, and then submitting my manuscripts to them in advance of publication. On viruses, I consulted William M. Stanley, on atomic energy, E. O. Lawrence, Enrico Fermi, and Harold Urey. On the causes of cancer I talked to Payton Rous, on radiocarbon dating and photosynthesis I corresponded with Willard Libby and Melvin Calvin. Because of my techniques of submitting material in advance, I do not believe there is a serious error in any of the hundreds of thousands of words I have written in this field.

When I began, on the eve of World War II, popular writing about science was shockingly poor in this country. It consisted, nearly two decades before Sputnik, chiefly of speculation whether there is life on Mars, and reports on weight-reducing diets, some of them extremely harmful. Today there has been a tremendous improvement

in this field, thanks to the realization of the important role science plays in our lives, the general higher standard of literacy, more responsible newspapers, and other factors. One of these is the National Association of Science Writers, of which I am now one of the oldest living members. This group has worked wonders in developing professional standards among science writers, in alerting the nation's press to the importance of science, and in pushing scientists—and the medical profession in particular—toward a realization of the public's right to know. It has fought for a better understanding of the role of the popularizer, better treatment of him by scientfic organizations, and a better place for him in the press.

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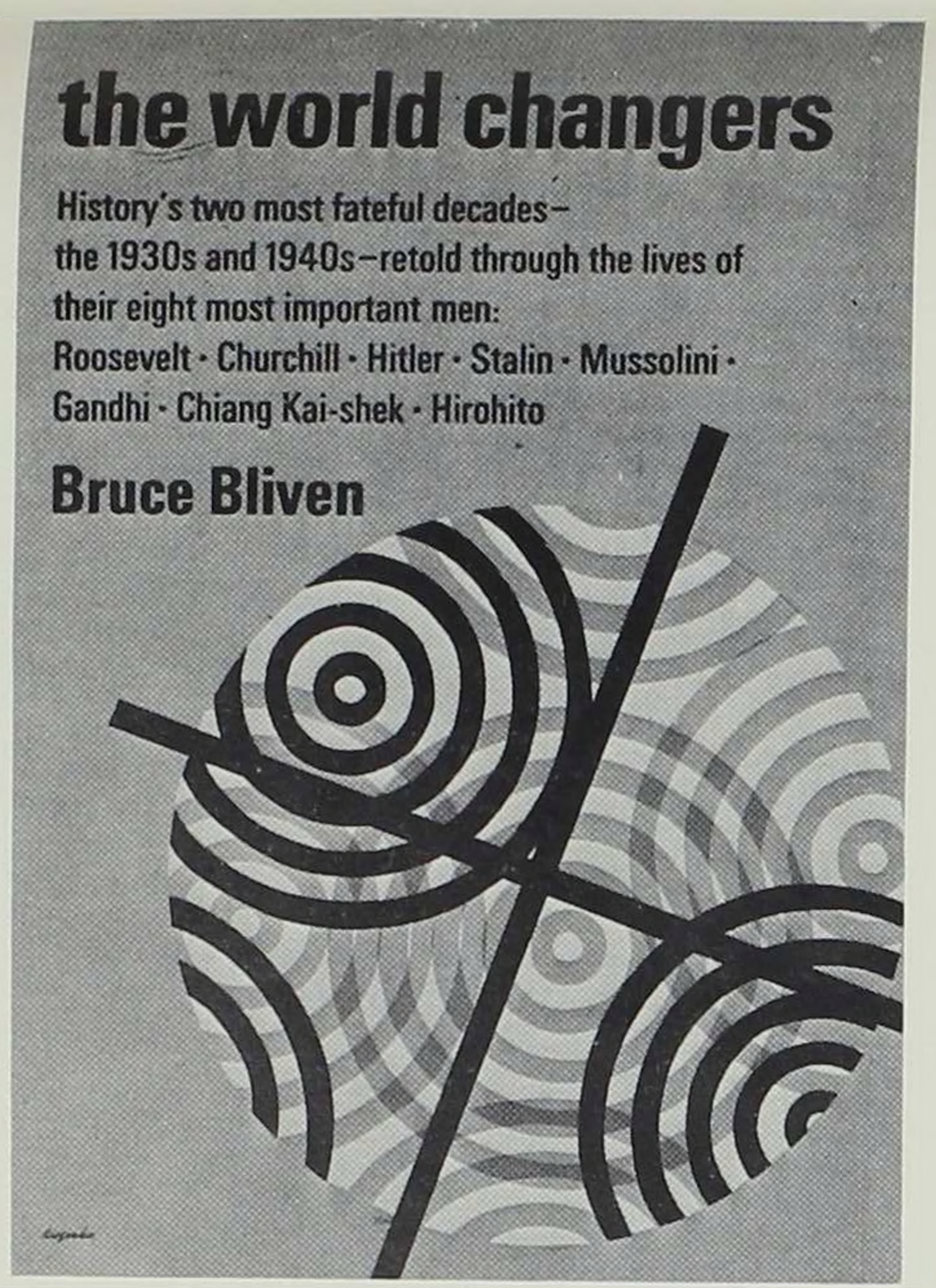
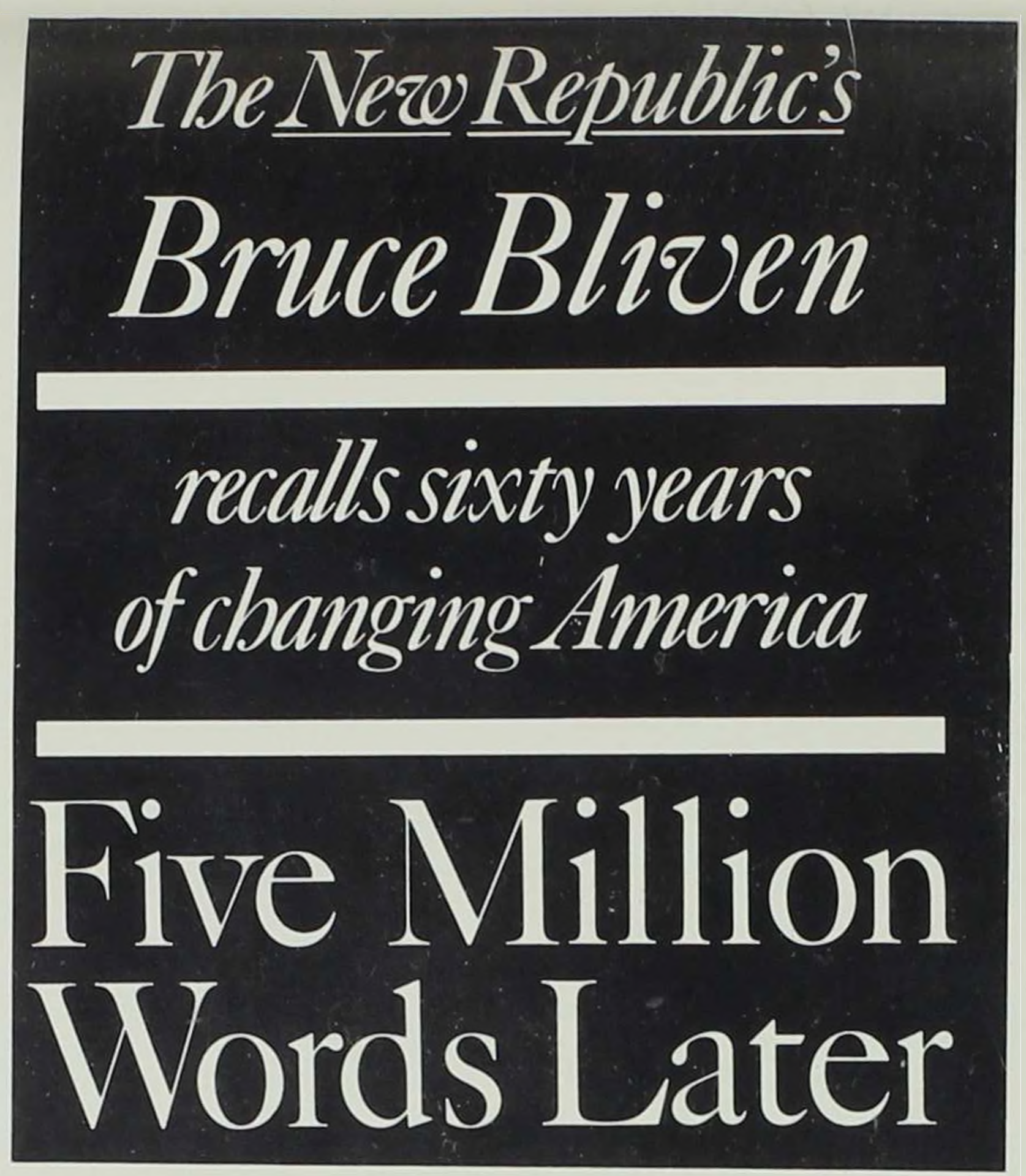
Although I left Emmetsburg sixty-four years ago, in all that time it is a rare week that passes without my dreaming of some spot in my native town, sometimes as it was then, sometimes as it is now.




Published in 1965 by The John Day Company, *The World Changers* features biographical sketches of eight of the world's most important men.




Bliven's autobiography, *Five Million Words,* was published in 1970. Much of the information contained in the first chapter appeared originally in the August, 1968, issue of *The Palimpsest.*


The Stanford contingent recruited by Bruce Bliven to work on *The New York Globe*. Left to right: (standing) Landon Robinson, Earl Hadley, Bliven, and Frank Taylor; (seated) Frank Ernest Hill, Robert L. Duffus, and Maxwell Anderson.