

politics



Also in This Issue:

Wilhelm Reich's Sexual Theories
by Ethel Goldwater

Bolshevism and Stalinism
by Paul Mattick

The Animoid Idea
by Norman Matson

March-April, 1947

50c

Henry Wallace

by Dwight Macdonald

*Thou wouldst be great,
Are not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it: what thou wouldst highly,
That thou wouldst holily; wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou'dst have, great Glamis,
That which cries, 'Thus thou must do, if thou have it',
And that which rather thou dost fear to do
Than wishest should be undone.*

—MACBETH, Act 1, Scene 5.

*I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on the other.*

—Same, Scene 7.

HENRY Agard Wallace is an ardent tennis-player. His form is said to be atrocious—it is rumored that he uses two hands on backhand shots—but he makes up for awkwardness by energy, trying for everything and wearing his opponent down by sheer persistence. It is probably a canard that he once confessed to humanitarian compunctions about hitting the ball too hard. But the story is authentic that, after a hard-fought set, Wallace remarked to his defeated opponent: "I suppose it's not very Christian of me, but I *do* like to win."* The scruples, the clumsiness, the persistence, and the ambition are all characteristic of one of the most complex personalities in public life.

In other things beside tennis, Henry Wallace also likes to win. His old associate, Rexford Tugwell, once exclaimed, with a note of awe: "My God, that man's ambitious!" Since Tugwell himself was not precisely lacking in that quality, the tribute is all the more impressive. Henry Wallace has come far since the day in 1932 that Roosevelt plucked him from

* These are his words as recalled by the opponent, one of Wallace's old associates. Throughout this article, references to printed sources are given either in the text or in the numbered "References" at the end. When material is not so identified, it is either because it seemed unnecessary (matters of common knowledge, newspaper reports in which the date is given, etc.) or else because, as here, it was obtained by interviews with persons having first-hand knowledge of the events.

obscurity to make him his Secretary of Agriculture. The seven years in Agriculture, which made him a national figure as planner, prophet and pamphleteer, were followed by the Vice-Presidency (1940-1944), a post in which his passionate rhetoric made him the Woodrow Wilson of World War II. The climax came at the Democratic 1944 convention, where Wallace—playing, as it turned out, for the highest stakes of all: the Presidency itself—was narrowly defeated by Truman for the vice-presidential nomination. There followed two rather blank years as Secretary of Commerce; then last fall his forced resignation from the cabinet as the result of his Madison Square Garden speech; and now the editorship of *The New Republic*, a position that affords more scope for vanity than for ambition.

The end-result, to an ambitious man like Wallace, must be disappointing. At the present writing, Wallace commands about as much "grass-roots" following among the nation's farmers as Bruce Bliven. His wartime rhetoric, perhaps fortunately for him, is now forgotten. His overtures to the business community while Secretary of Commerce produced no discernible effects. The labor movement seems to have cooled towards him: two years ago, he was a keynote speaker at the CIO convention, but last fall he was not invited, his place being filled by General Eisenhower. Even the liberals appear to be deserting him: the Progressive Citizens of America, organized around Wallace last fall, depends mostly on Hollywood for "names", while the bulk of more substantial liberal leaders—Eleanor Roosevelt, Ickes, Henderson, Bowles, Wyatt, to name a few—support the rival Americans for Democratic Action. The reason for the liberals' defection from the man they considered their national leader a short year ago is, of course, Wallace's pro-Russian stand in foreign policy and his involvement with the Communists in domestic politics. This issue alone divides ADA from PCA; the former bars Communists from membership, the latter does not; the former is critical of Soviet policy, the latter is not—as in the recent full-page newspaper ad, signed by Wallace, which made many justified criticisms of Truman's proposed Greek-Turkish loan but contained not a sentence about the Russian expansionist policy to which the loan is a reaction. The "Russian turn" Wallace has executed in the last few years is also the reason the CIO top leadership has lost its enthusiasm for him.

It would seem, in short, as though Wallace had gotten him-

self into a political dead-end. As the antagonism between American and Russian imperialism increases—if, indeed, it can grow any sharper than it is now—the retreat from Moscow now going on in liberal-labor circles will become ever more precipitate. Yet Wallace is committed to a pro-Russian policy; he will squirm, he will evade and compromise, but it is hard to see how even his genius for obfuscation can extricate him. Once more, he may say with Macbeth:

*They have tied me to a stake: I cannot fly,
But bear-like I must fight the course.*

This is a sad conclusion to a career which not so long ago seemed full of promise. Especially since the Russian Turn appeared to be so promising a political move when Wallace first embraced it during the war. The present interest of Wallace's career and personality lies in what it reveals about the nature of that movement, now also somewhat faded, known as the New Deal, and about the nature of the American liberal-labor movement which for years looked to Henry Wallace as its No. 1 political leader.

I. The Wallace Myth

THERE is perhaps no public figure whom both his admirers and his enemies understand so little as Henry Wallace. This is because he is a split personality, an extraordinary combination of idealism and opportunism, moral fervor and *realpolitik*, bold challenge and timid evasion, and of any one of a dozen other antimonies which exist side by side within his personality. If one looks at Henry Wallace from the standpoint of what he says, one sees him as compounded of the first parts of the above contradictions: principled, sincere, morally courageous, etc. But if one looks at what he does (and also examines the obligatto, so to speak, of contradictory sub-statements that always accompany any major statement) then one sees him as compact of the second parts. Americans have been conditioned to think of words as acts—by advertising, by the demagogy of "left" and "right" alike, by the impossibility of getting behind a politician's words, in this large-scale society, without more trouble than most people can or will take. Hence it has been Wallace's words that both friends and enemies have paid most attention to, with confusing results.*

What is the Wallace Myth? As we follow his career, we shall examine it in detail. Here let us attempt a summary confrontation of image and reality.

FICTION #1: *That Wallace is a man of notable integrity.*

FACT: Even on the modest scale required of politicians, he rates low. For example:

(a) In addressing the Congress of American-Soviet Friendship on November 8, 1942, Wallace quoted De Tocqueville as follows: "There are at the present time two great nations of the world which seem to tend toward the same end, although they start from different points. I allude to the Russians and the Americans. [The one has for its principal means of action Liberty; the other, Servitude.] Their starting point is different and their course is not the same, yet each of them seems to be marked by the will of heaven to sway the destinies of half the globe." The sentence in brackets was omitted by Wallace.

* I have tried to read everything of significance by and about Wallace that has appeared in print. It is remarkable how even writers who have no political sympathy with Wallace have taken him at his own valuation. The first thoroughly hostile article about Wallace appeared only lately: Frank Kent's *The Wallace Legend*, Saturday Evening Post, Dec. 7, 1946.

To Our Readers

Beginning with this issue, POLITICS will be published every other month instead of monthly. Each issue will normally be 48 pages, instead of 32 as hitherto. Present subscriptions will be extended in the proportion of one of the new bi-monthly issues for each one and a half of the old issues due.

VOLUME 4, No. 2 (Whole No. 36) MARCH-APRIL, 1947
Business Managers: Nancy Macdonald, Anna Matson.
Editor: Dwight Macdonald

POLITICS is published bi-monthly at 45 Astor Place, New York 3, N. Y., by Politics Publishing Co. Telephone: GRamercy 3-1512.

Subscription: \$3 for one year, \$5 for two years. Add 30c a year for Canada, 50c a year for all other foreign countries. Single copy: 50c.

Copyright April, 1947, by Politics Publishing Co. Entered as second-class matter March 16, 1944, at the post office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879.