

The Family Heritage Series

A weekly discussion of Americanist truths and traditions for those "heirs of all the ages" who will have to preserve that most important inheritance of all — freedom.
Produced by the Movement To Restore Decency.



Volume II

Lesson Ninety-Three

The Wilson Years

LESSON IDEA

To show how Edward House manipulated Woodrow Wilson, how Wilson used his presidential powers to lead the nation toward socialism and internationalism, and how the United States was drawn into World War I.

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WOODROW WILSON, Democrat candidate for President of the United States, is "a perfect jack-rabbit of politics," wrote William Randolph Hearst; "[he is] perched upon his little hillock of expediency, with ears erect and nostrils distended, keenly alert to every scent or sound and ready to run and double in any direction."

Hearst was right. In the New Jersey gubernatorial race Wilson had cultivated the favor of the state's political bosses, used their corrupt organization, then viciously turned on it, and destroyed it. In the midst of the campaign he somersaulted intellectually from pseudo conservatism to progressivism to gain votes. In his pursuit of the Democrat nomination for president he took every opportunity that presented itself to heap praise on the progressive leader, William Jennings Bryan — a man whom he had formerly vilified. In his entire political career, he remained committed to only one idea — that Woodrow Wilson was a great leader, destined to "do immortal work." Such an egotist was easy prey for the subtle and sophisticated political manipulator, Edward Mandell House.

House understood Wilson's weaknesses, and how

each of them could be used to his advantage, even before he met the New Jersey Democrat. Their first meeting in New York City, November 24, 1911, only confirmed House's analysis. "We had a perfectly bully time," he wrote his brother-in-law. "[Wilson] is not the biggest man I have ever met, but he is one of the pleasantest and I would rather play with him than any prospective candidate I have seen."

The reasons why House was seeking a candidate to manipulate, or "play with" as he phrased it, are probably best expressed in the political novel he wrote anonymously during the winter of 1911-12, after meeting Wilson. *Philip Dru, Administrator* is the title of House's novel; and in it, Dru, the fearless, daring hero, sweeps aside constitutional government to make sweeping reforms by executive decree and become the dictator of the United States. He talks of establishing "socialism as dreamed of by Karl Marx." House sent copies of *Philip Dru, Administrator* to most all of his political friends, neglecting to mention that he had written it and commenting to one correspondent that Dru was everything House would like to be.

It may never have occurred to Wilson that the first two legislative acts Congress passed at his insistence were two of Philip Dru's major recommendations — the tariff bill that removed the protection given to American producers, and the Federal Reserve Act, which created a central banking system. Henry Cabot Lodge, Sr., a conservative leader in the Senate, pinpointed the significance and

majority rule and show how easily demagogues could control the majority in a democracy by the exercise of their oratorical skill.]

Both Congress and the public would have been shocked to learn that Wilson, the forceful leader who always knew exactly what was wrong with the country and exactly what should be done about it, lacked self-confidence. House, of course, was aware of this contradiction. When Wilson asked for suggestions on drafts of speeches, House said: "I nearly always praise at first in order to strengthen the President's confidence in himself which, strangely enough, is often lacking . . ."

House also knew from his study of Wilson's career that all the President's friends shared one characteristic: They had to be, or pretend to be, uncritical admirers of Wilson and of everything he did. Those who made the mistake of disagreeing on any matter of importance were instantly dismissed. Those who failed to supply the required amount of flattery and praise were quietly forgotten.

For psychological reasons best known to his Creator, the man who bullied Congress and charmed voters accepted as his friends only those people who constantly fed his ego and assured him of their love and affection. As Mrs. Edith Gittings Reid, one of his correspondents, noted: "A person, to obtain his intimacy, had to say very definitely, 'I like you,' or 'I love you.'" House never forgot this requirement, even when he was writing Wilson from some European palace to discuss world wars, thrones, kingdoms, and international politics. His letters repeatedly ended on an affectionate note such as: "My faith in you is as great as my love for you — more than that I cannot say," or "I think of you every day."

FROM 1914 ON, House spent a great deal of time in Europe and concentrated almost exclusively on foreign affairs. He was there, as far as Wilson was concerned, to protect America's shipping interests from being trampled underfoot in the war that erupted following the assassination of the heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The conflict was a complex European quarrel between the Triple Entente (Britain, France, and Russia) and the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria, and Italy). America had no reason to become involved on either side: No national interest of the United States was

jeopardized; the same nations had been warring among themselves over boundaries and "rights" for centuries, always managing in the end to negotiate their differences. Public opinion supported the traditional American policy of neutrality established by George Washington, who had said: "The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is, in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible . . . Europe has a set of primary interests which to us have none or a very remote relation."

But House did not agree. He wanted the United States involved in the war, to provide an excuse for her involvement in the peace settlement that would follow, and in the world government that was being designed, allegedly to "keep the peace." Why would House want the United States to be part of a world government? What would he personally gain? [*Discuss the power potential of a world government, as opposed to a national government. Which is greater?*]

To achieve his goal, House had to convince Wilson that America should become involved in European affairs, either as a military ally of Britain, France, and Russia, or as a mediator of a negotiated peace. He began his campaign, as usual, with flattery — this time directed toward the President's desire to "do immortal work." "The world expects you to play the big part in this tragedy," he wrote, "and so indeed you will, for God has given you the power to see things as they are." Other letters echoed the same theme: "A great opportunity is yours, my friend — the greatest, perhaps, that has ever come to any man." "You have before you the biggest opportunity for service that was ever given to man, and I hope you will not risk failure." "You are the bravest, wisest leader, the gentlest and most gallant gentleman and the truest friend in all the world."

Reinforcing House's campaign of words was the emotion-charged torpedoing of the *Lusitania*. House was in England when the British liner was sunk by a German submarine off the southwest coast of Ireland on May 7, 1915. Since the *Lusitania* was carrying nearly 2000 passengers, it was commonly believed she was unarmed and that her attackers were therefore inhumane. More than 100 Americans had died in the tragedy, and House's immediate reaction was to predict that the United States would enter the war within a month; Wilson would be forced to declare war because of public opinion.

the danger of the Federal Reserve Act when he said: "The bill as it stands seems to me to open the way to a vast inflation of the currency . . . I do not like to think that any law can be passed which will make it possible to submerge the gold standard in a flood of irredeemable paper currency."

Inflation, as House well knew, is as deadly to a nation as a malignant cancer is to an individual; and in its advanced stages, worthless paper money can create enough economic chaos to trigger street riots, the overthrow of constitutional government, and a demand for dictatorship. Which may explain why the President's advisor took such an active interest in the wording of the Federal Reserve Act, its progress through Congress, and the appointment of its first administrators.

House did not, of course, expect inflation via a central banking system to undermine the government of the United States as rapidly as it had in his story of Philip Dru, but he did realize that would be the long-range effect of this major legislative act.

Do you understand the causes of inflation? Can you envision the chaos that will result if it continues to snowball? [*During this discussion, examine the paper currency you have. Is it redeemable in gold or silver — that is, is it a certificate for a precious metal held on deposit by a bank? Or is it merely a Federal Reserve note? What is the difference?*]

HOUSE ALSO was delighted that Wilson instinctively bullied Congress. He encouraged the President to be dictatorial. If the Chief Executive exceeded his constitutional function of putting laws into operation and began to usurp the Congressional function of initiating legislation, he would become more powerful and more of a monarch while Congress would become less powerful and more of a rubber stamp. For House's purposes, manipulating one monarch would be far easier than trying to control more than five hundred members of Congress.

Wilson began his legislative assault April 7, 1913, a month after his inauguration. He shattered a century-old precedent by personally appearing before Congress to argue for the abolition of protective tariffs. The following day he confidently announced to the press that Congress would do as he asked. To ensure the victory he himself had predicted, he created a special Senate subcommittee to

investigate lobbyists who opposed the tariff reforms. He had a special telephone installed in the White House so that he could "remind" any Senator at any time of "his duty to his country" — and of the political consequences that would befall anyone who "forgot."

He made unprecedented use of the party caucus to command unwavering support from every Democrat. He used praise, promises, special favors, ridicule, and threats. And he kept Congress in session through two uncomfortable summers until everyone, whether Republican or Democrat, was weary of the marathon and ready to do the President's bidding. A *New York Times* editorial of August 15, 1913, publicly stated what many Congressmen and Senators were privately saying: "President Cleveland said he had a Congress on his hands, but this Congress has a President on its back, driving it pitilessly . . . Never were Congressmen driven so, not even in the days of the 'big stick' [*of Teddy Roosevelt*]."

FEW, IF ANY, members of Congress had any illusions about the idealism and objectivity of Woodrow Wilson after one year under his whip. They knew him as a dictatorial politician. But, unfortunately, the voters perceived a far different image. The master orator had convinced his public that he was a combined prophet, scholar, gentleman, and statesman. To some, he seemed to have the added virtue of being "fatherly." He had achieved this godlike status by the skilled use of symbolism, catch phrases, pleasing combinations of sounds, and emotionalism. "God," "progress," "the breath of fresh air," and "forces of righteousness" were always on Wilson's side, and whatever he was promoting was always "right" and "good" for mankind; the nation, under his leadership, was always "awakening to a sense of neglected ideals and neglected duties" and was usually "on the threshold of a new age." Wilson was always "beginning a great work." In the opinion of Charles E. Merriam, political scientist, Wilson was "extraordinarily gifted with hypnotic power of expression." Others have charged that he was simply a skillful demagogue. What is your opinion? [*Discuss the meaning of demagogue and how it is related to democracy. Point out the dangers of a democracy with its*

