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# Four Men from Iowa

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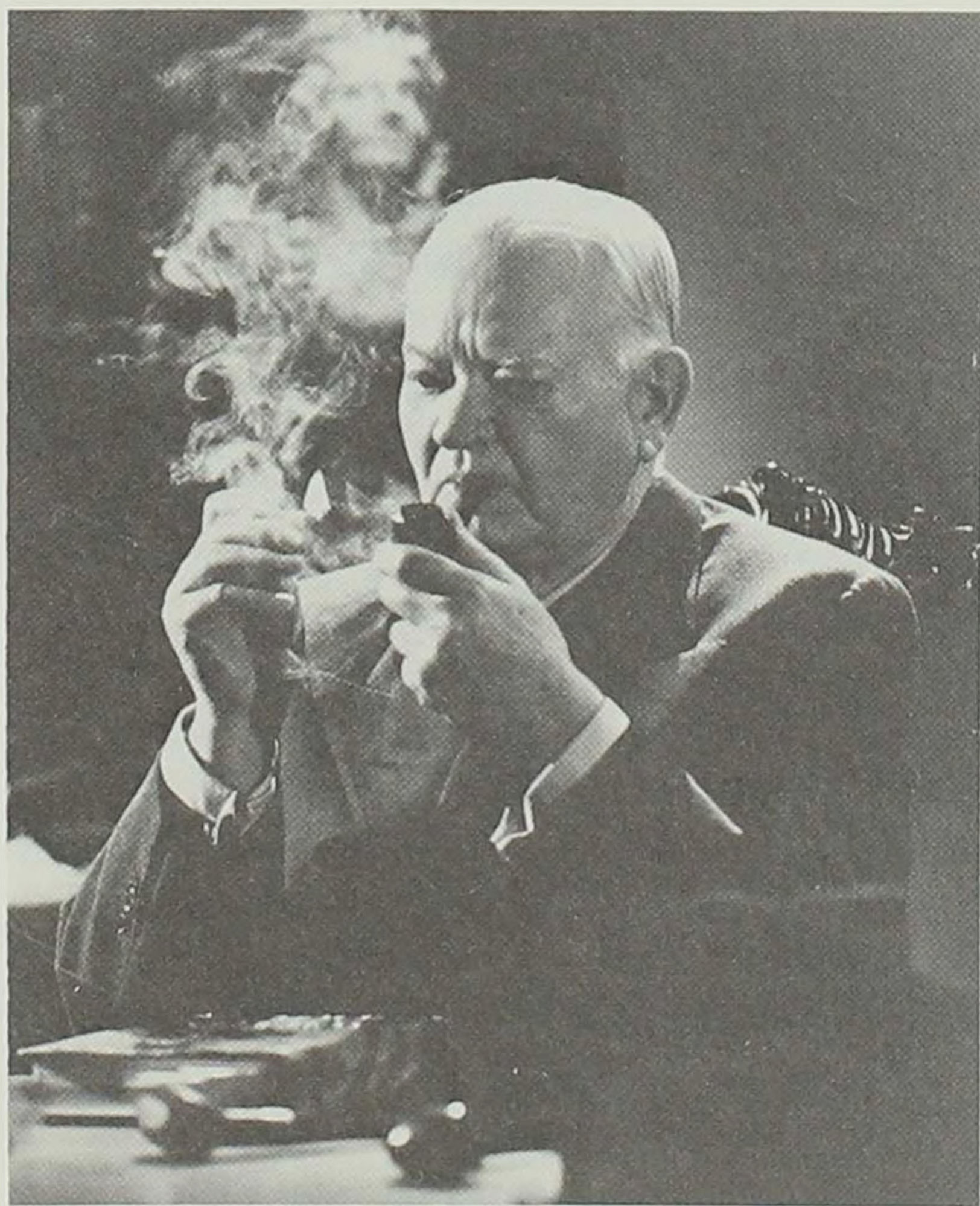
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Although the careers of our four Iowans were interlocked in significant ways, there were some curious connections, trivial or coincidental. For instance, Wallace's mystical propensities led him into some unusual associations, one of which was with Nicholas Roerich, a Russian guru of sorts who was also at one time an enthusiasm of Lewis's daughter Kathryn. When Wallace and Hopkins appeared to be in the running for the presidential nomination in 1940, the man most effective in promoting Wallace—Paul Appleby—was the Grinnell graduate who had taken the Montana newspaper job that Hopkins turned down. As agriculture secretaries the Wallaces, father and son, must have noted their extraordinarily bad experiences with the commerce secretariat: Henry C. was thoroughly frustrated by Hoover, and Henry A. attributed much of his rejection as FDR's vice-president to Hopkins' influence, although Hopkins denied this. Wallace himself had small reason to remember with pleasure his own term as secretary of commerce.

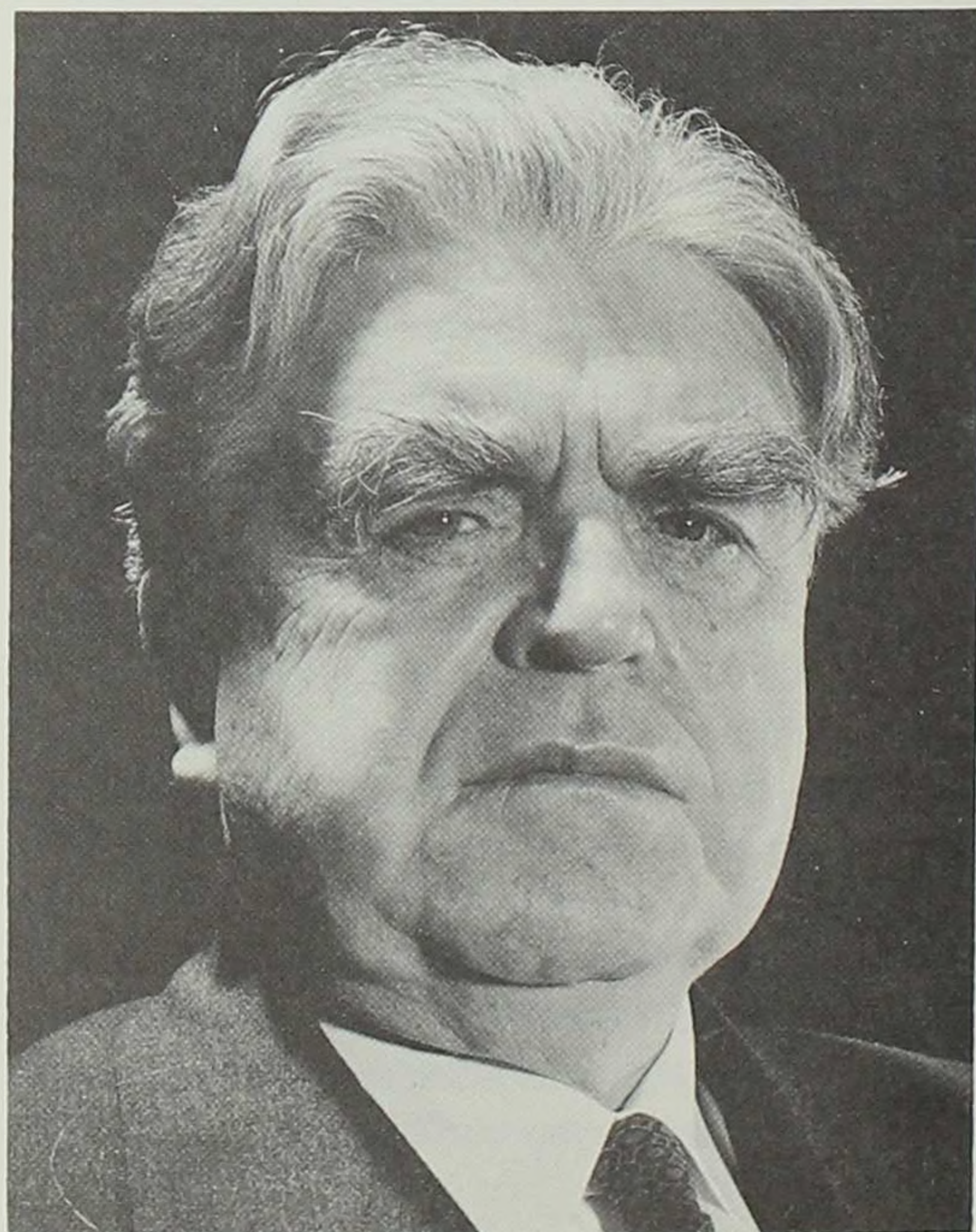


Herbert Hoover in 1961 (Joshua Wiener photo; courtesy Herbert Hoover Presidential Library)

## Four Mer

Other episodes of collision or cooperation between the four were more important than these. There was the clash between Lewis and Hopkins over Lewis's demand for government help in organizing WPA workers; Hopkins' refusal was another reason for Lewis's swing from the New Deal back to Hoover. And there was Truman's combining the talents of Hoover and Wallace to avert world famine after World War II.

The four Iowans offer contrasts in personality and temperament, but also likenesses. Hoover and Lewis were people who had to be first in any enterprise. Hoover insisted on running all other departments while he was secretary of commerce, and Lewis never hesitated to speak for all of labor, whether he was in or out of the AFL or CIO at the time. And after reaching the top, neither could ever really comprehend any later rejection by his constituents. Personal ambition boiled in the breasts of Wallace and Hopkins, too, but they could let it simmer,

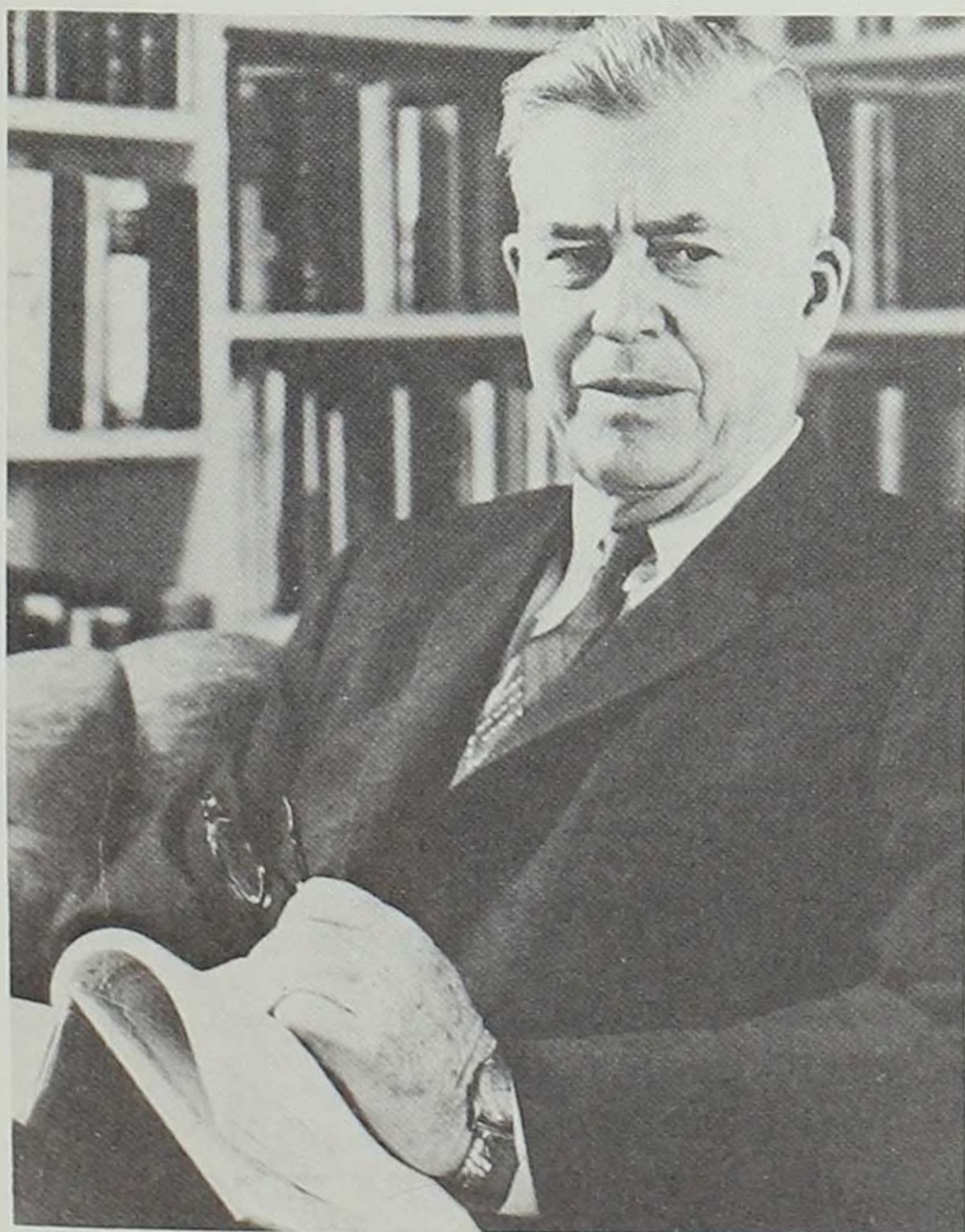


John L. Lewis in the 1950s (Bettmann Archive)

operating very well as members of a team. (Working under FDR, they doubtless had small choice.) Hoover, Wallace, and Hopkins were all workaholics; Lewis was not, though he worked hard and always gave his union members to understand that in their interests he toiled around the clock and then some. The unlikely pair of Hoover and Wallace were successful businessmen. Lewis was a failure as a businessman, and Hopkins never essayed the role. Had Hopkins tried or Lewis persisted, however, it is hard to imagine anything but success for both. All were educated men, three college-educated and one, Lewis, impressively self-educated, and all made intelligent use of their learning. All had come under strong religious influences which, however, were reflected variously. Three were helpfully influenced by wives from Iowa, Hopkins being the exception. Three—Hoover, Wallace, and Hopkins—made considerable use of fellow Iowans as lieutenants in Washington. Hopkins,

in fact, drew so many from his alma mater that Grinnell contributed more New Deal administrators than any other small liberal arts college in the country.

But at the last, as Freidel and others have come to point out in recent years, the four Iowans had more in common than their considerable political and philosophical differences would suggest—more, surely, than they themselves believed. Wallace and Hopkins scorned “Hooverism” but built upon foundations the Great Engineer had laid. Lewis ended up detesting the New Deal, but the gains he achieved for labor would have been impossible without Wallace, Hopkins, and the rest of the New Dealers. All, in an era when their countrymen badly needed succor, provided it abundantly. That they perceived the need so clearly and went so skillfully to the root of the matter would seem to owe much to their birth and upbringing in the state called by Paul de Kruif the land “laid down by God and the glacier for the particular purpose of growing maize.” □



Henry A. Wallace (courtesy University of Iowa Library)



Harry Hopkins (WPA photograph in the National Archives)