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The 1944 Senatorial Election: The Defeat of Gerald P. Nye

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THE 1944 SENATORIAL ELECTION: THE DEFEAT OF GERALD P. NYE

by

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B.A. in History, St. John's University 1964

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of the

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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This thesis submitted by Daniel F. Rylance in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the University of North Dakota is hereby approved by the Committee under whom the work has been done.

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PREFACE

The purpose of this study is to examine critically and to interpret the reasons for Senator Gerald P. Nye's unsuccessful bid for a fourth term to the United States Senate in 1944. To the older living generation, the world of Gerald Nye is a contemporary one. But the year 1944 which marked the termination of Senator Nye's political career only marked the second year of life for the author of this paper.

History has been written and rewritten numerous times. Yet, facts and instances in themselves cannot change. It is only the interpretation of set occurrences that brings about a degree of variation. And so, because of the era, the conditions, the circumstances, and the influences upon the author's life, history, indeed, the very happenings and occurrences of the past, seem distinct and dissimilar in every interpretation. The author strongly believes "that historical interpretation will always be shaped by the prejudices, biases, needs of the individual and these in turn will depend on the age in which he lives. Hence history has to be rewritten by each generation."¹

¹Charlotte Watkins Smith, Carl Becker: On History and the Climate of Opinion (Ithaca.: Cornell University Press, 1956), p. 85.

The writer is deeply indebted to Dr. D. Jerome Tweton for having suggested the topic of this paper, and also for serving as critic and chief advisor. A tribute should be paid to Professor Glenn H. Smith who being of a little older vintage than the writer was able to recapture the years of the 1940's in a better perspective. The writer wishes to thank Dr. James F. Herndon of the Political Science Department for his helpful suggestions. I wish to thank Miss Margaret Rose of the State Historical Library in Bismarck for procuring the innumerable newspapers needed to recapture the climate and mood surrounding the 1944 election. Also, Mrs. Eugene Rose, whose accurate typing in the face of a quick deadline helped immensely. And last but never least, the author's wife whose inspiration made this work possible.

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ABSTRACT

The problem involved in this thesis is to investigate the causes for Senator Nye's defeat in the 1944 Senatorial election. The particular problem involved here is that isolationism has been commonly interpreted as the decisive reason for his defeat. This, however, is a singular interpretation of history largely stemming from the national scene while ignoring developments on the local level.

The procedure then was to investigate the opinion of Senator Nye from the state level. This included research in personalities and public episodes concurrent with Nye's year in the Senate. It also included a careful analysis of the North Dakota newspapers regarding the 1944 Senatorial election.

The results of the studies made on the state level largely remove isolationism as the major cause for Senator Nye's defeat. Instead, we find such issues as the discontent of North Dakotans with Nye's record in Congress, the domestic problems of the Senator which caused resentment in North Dakota, the tremendous campaign waged by Governor Moses who defeated Nye. The personage of William Langer always looming in the shadow attempted at every opportunity to defeat his old political foe, Senator Nye.

In conclusion, Nye's defeat resulted from a multiple set of historical causes rather than the singular issue of isolationism. This study has not totally discredited isolationism as an issue but merely has excluded a singular interpretation of history in preference to multiple interpretations.

INTRODUCTION

The dictionary defines isolationism as a desire to take no part in international alliances, leagues, and treaties. As the student of history reads this simple definition it is quite apparent that isolationism is part and parcel of the American tradition. Isolationism has a long tenure in its role in American life; notwithstanding the partisans or opponents of this philosophy it remains a vital development in our history.

The history of isolationism offers an almost recurring explanation of its causation. This recurrence of isolationism does not totally advocate a cyclical interpretation of history; but, isolationism and its opposite seem to appear and disappear throughout the various phases of development in the United States. The American Founding Fathers warned us to avoid alliances with other countries. Yet, ironically enough, our very independence was hastened and largely achieved through just such alliances.

The common theme of isolationism continues up to the twentieth century. Mellowing during the jingoism of early twentieth century development, articulating with the decline of liberalism and the repudiation of America's entry into the League of Nations, isolationism has made its many faces known to two centuries of Americans.

The role of the United States in World War II, the Truman

Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and the containment policy of the cold war period seemed to forecast the death of isolationism. For all practical purposes, the countries of Europe, Asia, and the Americas were no longer small self-enclosed worlds, but merely members of a larger interdependent world community. The advent of the atomic age terminated any form of isolationism Americans had experienced in the past or would experience in the future.

Yet, historical development is not always so simply defined. Perhaps it is ironical, even paradoxical that Senator William Fulbright in 1943 was advocating post-war collaboration while now he is a leading critic of America's arrogance of power. Surprisingly enough, then, the Vietnam Debates of the 1960's are arousing in American minds another recurrence of isolationism. This is certainly not the same isolationism of anti-World War II, but a novel, different isolationism. It is different, because the situations and circumstances are new and unique. Nevertheless, some Americans once again are questioning the wisdom of participating in the problems of other parts of the world. They are wondering whether it is possible to build the Great Society at home and at the same time insure a democratic form of government for each new emerging nation.

This paper is concerned with the repudiation of the anti-World War II type of isolationism. It is specifically geared to investigate the popular conception that with America's entry into World War II isolationism was denounced. This perhaps is seen most clearly in the Congressional advocates of isolationism who were defeated during the period of the Second World War. Such an articulate

spokesman for isolationism was Gerald P. Nye, Senator from North Dakota. Nye was defeated in seeking his fourth term to the United States Senate in 1944. Since other leading isolationists also met their political death in that election year, writers and historians alike have generally interpreted their defeat to mean a denial of isolationism.

The singular explanation of historical causality offers a neat, attractive and simple means of explaining historical phenomena. Since the United States did enter World War II, and since the major opponents of our entry into the conflict were defeated at the polls, it is logical to deduce that their defeat came about as a result of their stand on isolationism.

Yet, the reinterpretation of the past lends itself to more than a single thread of historical causation. This can be demonstrated in trying to find the reasons why Gerald P. Nye was defeated for the United States Senate in 1944. This is not to say that isolationism was irrelevant but merely to exclude singular interpretations of history.

CHAPTER I

The purpose of this chapter is to give a reasonable understanding of isolationism. It is not meant to be a complete study on the problem of isolationism but rather to give a brief history of its place in American history, to discuss examples of its causation, and to cite evidence of its heaviest strength. This is done so that we may have a better understanding of the personality of Gerald P. Nye.

Isolationism was the basic form of United States foreign policy from 1789 to 1900. According to Selig Adler, "the American Revolution was itself an act of isolation, for it cut the umbilical cord with the mother country."¹ Yet, all too often the admonitions of an older generation are taken as absolute rules allowing no room for interpretation. "In time," said Adlai E. Stevenson, "men forgot that the first President's light was a candle and his transportation a horse."²

The statements of the Founding Fathers led to one of the most potent misconceptions in American history. This misconception was based "on certain statements taken out of context by several of the founders of our Republic and not upon their actions."³ Coupled

¹Selig Adler, The Isolationist Impulse: Its Twentieth Century Reaction (London: Abelard-Schuman Limited, 1957), p. 10.

²Ibid., p. 11.

³Bernard Fensterwald, Jr., "The Anatomy of American 'Isolationism' and Expansion," Journal of Conflict Resolution, II (June, 1958), p. 114.

with this statement was the haunting legacy of the Monroe Doctrine. The policy of the Monroe Doctrine might best be described as an attempt to isolate the United States from Europe and at the same time articulate a strong desire to have nothing to do with the problems of Europe. The protagonists of isolationism argued that this policy had kept us out of European wars from the time of Monroe to Wilson. The reality of the historical situation, however, would tend to contradict that view. Americans could enjoy isolated security only when the powers in Europe were balanced.⁴ In other words throughout the nineteenth century in Europe the fact that no one country ruled supreme was the reality of historical situation. This was the case rather than an American foreign policy stemming from Washington's Farewell Address or the Monroe Doctrine.

Isolationism remained throughout most of the nineteenth century as a doctrine of self preservation. The United States was separated by a vast ocean from the affairs of Europe. Consequently, little danger existed that the United States would intervene in the affairs of Europe or that Europe would intervene in our affairs in the nineteenth century. To be sure there were a few touchy incidents, but for the main, the period from 1815 to 1914 was one of relative peace in Europe and substantial growth in America.

Some Americans were looking back at the nineteenth century believing that the Western Hemisphere was untouchable. They maintained that this had been accomplished as a result of geography and brilliant American diplomacy. In fact, the basis of our security vested in a European balance of power. This misunderstanding became

⁴Ibid., p. 116

one of the basic isolationist fallacies of the twentieth century. Although the Founding Fathers thoroughly understood the bases upon which American security rested, the succeeding generations of Americans lost sight of them.⁵

Isolation from Europe, the cornerstone of American foreign policy up to 1900, was not the same as the policy directed toward our neighbors in South America or in the Far East. The advent of the Spanish American War and its termination in the Treaty of Paris of 1899 made a revolutionary change in our traditional foreign policy inevitable. The acquisition of the Philippines cast our line of defense into the vicinity of China and Japan. What reasons can be given for this apparent dichotomy of American attitudes toward Europe and Asia?

According to Bernard Fensterwald there are three main explanations of the dichotomy: emotional factors, tradition, and idealism. First, America felt inferior to Europe and no such feeling existed in connection with the peoples of Latin America and Asia. Second, the Founding Fathers never mentioned intervention or association with Latin America and Asia. Therefore, our interest in these areas did not contradict American ideology or tradition. Third, and last, our intervention in the south and far east was always covered with a veneer of idealism. This idealism directed itself against the "ism" enemies (i.e., mercantilism, imperialism).⁶

⁵Ibid., p. 115.

⁶Ibid., p. 113.

Yet even with this real dichotomy between Europe, on the one hand, and Latin America and the Far East, on the other hand, the basic policy of isolationism still had not been severely tested. As long as the world was policed by a British fleet, as long as Englishmen grew richer and Americans prospered increasingly, there was still no need for a change in our basic policy.

The First World War terminated nineteenth century isolationism. Whereas nineteenth century isolationism was mainly a doctrine of self-preservation, isolationism after World War I did not stem solely from the same cause. Thus after the war a segment of the population articulated a more powerful type of isolationism. Thus isolationism was no longer a doctrine of self-preservation but rather a firm desire to stay out of any war. Thus the great American debate on foreign policy began in earnest with the advent of the war in 1914.

It was the challenge of Germany that almost succeeded in destroying the old European status quo, and that changed the thinking of many Americans, particularly on the policy of isolationism.⁷ Yet, when all was said and done, Americans returned to normalcy after World War I. And "as far as international affairs were concerned, normalcy meant 'isolationism'. It was our normal or traditional foreign policy; it was tried and true."⁸

Certainly, however, if for no other reason that the uniqueness of the historical situation, isolationism in the twentieth

⁷DeConde, p. 7.

⁸Fensterwald, p. 121.

century was to differ from isolationism in the nineteenth century. According to Alexander DeConde "the isolationist theology of the nineteenth century was relatively simple when compared with that of the twentieth century."⁹ If nineteenth century isolationism was the basic foreign policy, twentieth century isolationism would only be one of several viewpoints influencing foreign policy. Moreover, between the first and second world wars many condemned isolationism as something un-American or unpatriotic. In reality, "Americans had made an about face. What had formerly been almost a touchstone of patriotism was now actually disloyalty."¹⁰

Bernard Fensterwald stated that "both the dislike and distrust of the great powers of Europe was increased as a result of the war and subsequent peace."¹¹ He also said that World War I had failed to convince the bulk of Americans that our isolationism was anachronistic. It had just the opposite effect.

The new isolationist, as the old, still insisted the old world was the source of our problems. Until the presidency of Harry S. Truman, Americans refused to put our weight into any peacetime balance of power. The new isolationist still believed "that non-entanglement best serves the long run interests of national security, business opportunities, and the universal triumph of liberty and democracy."¹² Americans had been tricked

⁹Alexander DeConde, Isolation and Security (Durham: Duke University, 1957), p. 6.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 5.

¹¹Fensterwald, p. 122.

¹²Adler, p. 29.

by the fallacy of invincibility. Americans continued "to believe in the inevitability of America's continued success, forever. They did not seem to comprehend the extent to which geography and luck contributed to their success."¹³ In essence, the new isolationists voiced a strong determination to stay out of foreign wars, while at the same time refusing to enter into alliances.

The real hey-day of twentieth century isolationism came in the late 1930's. The swathing begun by the Nye Committee investigation in 1935 under Senator Nye's chairmanship demonstrated to some Americans that the First World War had been caused as a result of munition-makers and British propagandists. According to Adler, "it is a safe guess that only those inured to cruel and unusual punishment read it in its raw form; the rest absorbed the message after it had been predigested and garnished."¹⁴

The Nye Committee's investigation was influential in the passage of a series of neutrality laws in the mid 1930's. So effectively had "Nye and his associates worked that by April 1937 some 70 per cent of the American people believed entry in the First World War had been an error."¹⁵ Since participation in the First World War was a mistake, isolationists reasoned the traditional policy of isolationism served America's self interest best. Because isolation was the basic foreign policy of the United States during

¹³Fensterwald, pp. 116-117.

¹⁴Adler, p. 257.

¹⁵Elwyn B. Robinson, "History of North Dakota." unpublished manuscript, Chapter XX, p. 2.

the nineteenth century and no conflicts with Europe ensued, isolationists reasoned that this policy should be continued.

The not-so-rapid turn of events in Europe and the Far East in the late 1930's drove home all too well to the American people the possibility of becoming involved in another world conflict. Yet Americans had no real experience in international cooperation. The neutrality acts "instead of preserving our rights as a neutral, repudiated them, wholesale and in advance."¹⁶ The Second World War shattered the earlier pattern of isolation which had reached its peak in the 1930's.

The old stalwarts of isolationism continued until the very day of the attack on Pearl Harbor to voice their disdain of participation in the affairs of Europe. The greatest orator and speaker of the group, Senator Nye, cast aside all fear of a Hitlerite Europe and said "the only emergency in this country is the one conjured up by those who want to send our boys to Europe."¹⁷

The elections during World War II seemingly dealt a severe blow to the isolationist of the 1930's. Senator George Norris who had served in the Senate since 1913 met defeat at the polls in 1942. The 1944 elections saw several strong advocates of isolationism taste defeat including Representative Hamilton Fish of New York and Stephen Day of Illinois. But the biggest losses centered around the defeat of Senator Bennett Champ Clark of Missouri and Senator Gerald P. Nye

¹⁶Fensterwald, p. 124.

¹⁷William Langer and S. Everett Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation (New York: Harper and Row, 1952), p. 682.

of North Dakota. A more astute politician, Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg of Michigan, made a dramatic about face and secured his re-election to the United States Senate in 1946. Vandenberg wrote privately on February 2, 1940:

We still want all the isolation we can get . . . But probably the best we can hope from now on is 'insulation' rather than isolation. I should say that an 'insulationist' is one who wants to preserve all of the isolation which modern circumstances will permit.¹⁸

The nature of isolationism is so complex that historians, sociologists, and political scientists have offered many and varied interpretations of its character. Generally, they all hold that the geographic basis of twentieth century isolationism was the Middle West.¹⁹ The Middle West, coupled with ethnic and economic factors, helps us to understand why Gerald Nye acquired his isolationist tendencies.

One study on isolationism centers its argument around congressional voting records. Yet, voting records of Middle West Congressmen do not prove conclusively that isolationism and the Middle West were synonymous. On the contrary, the beginnings of the twentieth century saw the Middle West playing a leading role in ratifying our basic change in foreign policy. The great change of

¹⁸ Arthur H. Vandenberg, Jr. (ed.). The Private Papers of Senator Vandenberg. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1952), pp. 3-4.

¹⁹ The Middle West is composed of the East North Central and West North Central States. Including: Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas. See Ray Billington, "The Origins of Middle Western Isolationism," Political Science Quarterly, LX (March, 1945), p. 44.

1899-1900 was mainly a partisan decision. According to William G. Carleton "in general Republicans lined up in favor of the new world policy, Democrats in opposition. The Middle West was heavily Republican and in this matter naturally lined up with the Republican party."²⁰

The support given by the Middle West for expansion westward was a function of its own experience. For example, "it was the Middle West, more than any other section, which had spearheaded the expansion of the country to the Pacific."²¹ Yet, this same section insisted that Europe's fate was no concern of hers, and that she should seek peace and security by isolating herself from the rest of the globe.²² It should be no surprise that this section sought to protect its newly plowed treasures by advocating isolationism.

Scholars began equating isolationism and the Middle West at the close of World War I. William G. Carleton took a sampling of the voting record against American entry into World War I. He found that 36 of the 40 'no' votes cast in the House of Representatives came from the Middle West. He was quite cautious to conclude, however, that "in April of 1912 an overwhelming majority of the people of the United States and the Middle West favored war, but the majority for

²⁰William G. Carleton, "Isolationism and the Middle West," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXIII (December, 1946), p. 379.

²¹Ibid., pp. 379-380.

²²Ray Billington, "The Origins of Middle Western Isolationism," Political Science Quarterly, LX (March, 1945), p. 45.

war was somewhat less in the Middle West than in the rest of the country."²³

The presidential election of 1920 saw as its major issue the League of Nations. This election illustrated no divergent sectional lines. Only in the 1930's did the United States return "to its old isolationist mood and to a policy of American Continentalism. As the 1930's wore on, this tendency increased."²⁴

The most striking correlation between isolationism and the Middle West came in the crucial years of 1939 to 1941. Carleton is quick to point out that even in this period the tendency has been to draw too many parallels. Instead, Carleton sees much of the answer as Republican opposition to the foreign policy of the Roosevelt administration rather than solely isolationism.²⁵

There are strong arguments in favor of the parallels drawn between isolationism and the Middle West. For instance, "by 1900 more than half the male voters of every western state but Ohio, Kansas and Indiana were either foreign born or the children of parents born abroad."²⁶ Marcus Hanson, characterizes the immigrant as being conservative.²⁷ But this does not prove that isolationism and conservatism were synonymous.

²³Carleton, p. 381.

²⁴Ibid., p. 382.

²⁵Ibid., p. 385.

²⁶Billington, p. 52.

²⁷Marcus Hanson, The Immigrant in American History (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), pp. 77-96.

The two major ethnic groups of the Middle West came from Germany and Scandinavia. The voting of the Germans could fundamentally be attributed to a natural pro-German attitude. The Scandinavians, on the other hand, were taught by their Lutheran pastors to hate war.²⁸ Besides, all immigrants had left the old world to come to a new land. They were quick to throw off the shawl of European colors. Above all, they sought free land and peace. This could hardly be accomplished by participation in the wars of the old world that they had not so long ago left. Essentially:

These prejudices and attitudes, bolstered by the sense of security which stemmed from the section's geographic position and economic self sufficiency, help to explain middle western isolationism. More conservative than the rest of the nation, the West clung to nineteenth century traditions after other regions had recognized the inevitability of a New World role for the twentieth century United States.²⁹

The dissection of isolationism was, however, to go much further. Instead of leaving the Middle West as the incubator of isolationism other writers sought to classify individual states as being more isolationist than others. Samuel Lubell said that the heavy concentration of Russian-Germans has "been a major factor in keeping it [North Dakota] the most isolationist state in the Union."³⁰

North Dakota did exhibit many characteristics of isolationism. It was in the Middle West. It did have a heavy concentration of foreign born citizens. It was essentially agrarian

²⁸Billington, p. 53.

²⁹Ibid., p. 64.

³⁰Samuel Lubell, The Future of American Politics (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), pp. 146-147.

in nature and outlook. Its religious background was Lutheran and Roman Catholic. These characteristics singularly did not prove the existence of isolationism. But as individual writers investigated North Dakota, they found that each separate characteristic contributed to the whole - North Dakota isolationism.

The two strongest arguments centered around ethnic groups and agrarian mentality. Lubell's thesis introduced two factors. The existence of pro-German and anti-British ethnic prejudices and the exploiting of these prejudices by an opposition party. North Dakota was a prime target for both points. On the one hand, she did have a heavy concentration of German-Russians. On the other hand, although the Nonpartisan League was not a party, its greatest successes in agrarian North Dakota resulted from acting on these prejudices.³¹

Selig Adler mentions the Nonpartisan League in North Dakota, exploiting the war issues for its own advantages in his book The Isolationist Impulse: Its Twentieth Century Reaction. He points out that Gerald P. Nye served his political apprenticeship in this framework. However, it should be mentioned that Nye came to North Dakota in 1916 when he was then 24 years old. Therefore, all of his background should not be confined to the prairie state of North Dakota.

Certainly, North Dakota is not a self-sufficient state. Moreover, the agrarian radicalism which was primarily articulated by the Nonpartisan League was living proof of its economic liabilities.

³¹Ibid., p. 133.

North Dakota was to serve as a laboratory for research in radicalism as well as isolationism.

Benton Wilcox in an article entitled "The Historical Definition of Northwestern Radicalism" inquired into the existential nature of Middle West radicalism. He concluded that the real basis of this radicalism was to be found "in the economic revolution which transformed agriculture from a self-sufficing enterprise into a commercial, highly specialized capitalistic form of business enterprise."³² Wilcox's eulogy depicts the western radicals in anything but a harsh light.

The examples herein discussed are enough to reveal the essential character of radicalism. They are sufficient to depict the western radicals, not as simply ignorant frontiersmen or innate radicals finally brought to bay by the disappearance of free land; nor as debt crazed farmers quixotically tilling at windmills; but as ordinary business men, slightly over individualistic perhaps, seeking to correct injustices in the marketing and credit systems, trying to cut down fixed charges which threatened to devour their margin of profit, and endeavoring to build up the wealth of the community of which they were citizens.³³

George A. Lundberg, a sociologist, used several different counties of North Dakota in a study entitled, "The Demographic and Economic Basis of Political Radicalism and Conservatism." He concluded that the radical counties in North Dakota were located in the western part, and the conservative counties in the eastern part of the state. Also, the density of population was from two to four times larger in the conservative counties. With respect to nativity, the

³²Benton H. Wilcox, "An Historical Definition of Northwestern Radicalism," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXI (December, 1939), p. 379.

³³Ibid., p. 394.

presence of foreign born was the most consistently recurring fact to be noticed in the radical counties.³⁴ Another study said "the urge to radicalism, a disappearing margin of profits, lacked the driving power in the Red River Valley which it had in the less favorably situated areas."³⁵

Some astute studies of the North Dakota scene have come from those living within the state itself. One such thesis states that North Dakota "isolationism has its roots in economic and psychological conditions always characteristic of the frontier, in the political ideologies of certain portions of the population, and in a general attachment to the cause of liberalism."³⁶ One thing becomes evident: North Dakotans suggest that to attribute isolationist attitudes to the presence of Germans in the North Dakota population is a mistake."³⁷

There are several reasons for such conclusions. If the farmers retained such strong ethnic loyalties to Germany how can this be explained by the overwhelming enthusiasm in support of the war? North Dakotans did more than their part; "they bought \$398 millions

³⁴George A. Lundberg, "The Demographic and Economic Basis of Political Radicalism and Conservatism," American Journal of Sociology, XXXII (March, 1927), p. 728.

³⁵Wilcox, p. 393.

³⁶Robert Poole Wilkins, "Midwestern Isolationism: A Re-examination," North Dakota Quarterly, XXV, (May, 1956), p. 69.

³⁷Robert Poole Wilkins, "The Nonpartisan League and Upper Midwest Isolationism," Agricultural History, XXXIX (April, 1965), p. 109.

of government bonds, an extraordinary record; 58,509 men and 1570 women entered the armed forces."³⁸

To put it still another way, North Dakota has high areas of German-Russian concentration, but perhaps the areas with a high concentration of this ethnic group were to be found in "the areas where farm foreclosures were most frequent, where income was lowest, and where discontent was greatest."³⁹

The total picture of North Dakota from 1914 to the 1950's reveals further evidences against the thesis offered by Lubell. An analysis of the 1916 presidential election in North Dakota reveals just such evidence.

The outcome of the election, therefore, was determined not by pro-German feeling, but by a strong anti-war attitude based on a conviction that Eastern interests were conspiring to put the nation in an unnecessary and unjustifiable war.⁴⁰

To further discredit the theory that ethnic roots were the cornerstone of North Dakota isolationism, the post World War II years revealed still another inconsistency that the resurgence of isolationism brought with it. According to Robert Poole Wilkins "the same expressions of distrust of business and the military, the same attempts to establish conscription of wealth as the period of the wars with Germany recurred in the 1950's."⁴¹ Only this time the resurgence was

³⁸Robinson, Chapter XX, p. 1.

³⁹Raymond C. Jorgenson, "The Response to Group Frustration: The Agrarian Basis of Isolationism" (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Political Science, University of North Dakota, 1964), p. 96.

⁴⁰Wilkins, "Midwestern Isolationism: A Re-examination," pp. 71-72.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 74.

directed not toward Germany but toward the Soviet Union and the emerging communist state of China.

National writers have maintained the 1944 elections dealt a mortal blow to the old isolationism. Even a North Dakota historian has maintained that "when the state sent Moses to the Senate in place of Nye in 1944 it at last repudiated isolationism."⁴² But how can one accurately say North Dakota had repudiated isolationism when it continued sending men like William Langer, William Lemke, and Usher Burdick to represent it in Congress. Even Senator Milton Young, the most international of the North Dakota Congressional Representatives called for evacuation of American Troops from Korea in 1951.⁴³

In 1914 North Dakota was the least urbanized of the forty eight states. Selig Adler has called North Dakota "a living fossil surviving into the second half of the twentieth century with foreign policy attitudes characteristic of and suitable to the early years of the century."⁴⁴

It is significant that one does not find a Congressional Representative from North Dakota in the heat of the current debates on foreign policy. Perhaps the states representatives have overcome

⁴²Robinson, Chapter XX, p. 1.

⁴³Wilkins, "The Nonpartisan League and Upper Midwest Isolationism." p. 106.

⁴⁴Comment at foreign policy session at American Historical Association meeting, St. Louis, December 28, 1956. Cited by Robert Poole Wilkins, "The Non-Ethnic Roots of North Dakota Isolationism" Nebraska History, XLIV (September, 1963), p. 221.

the cultural lag that is attributed to the state.

Certain ideas emerge as one studies the political life of Senator Nye. First, the writings on isolationism from the national viewpoint do little historical justice to the uniqueness of the North Dakota situation. Second, the legacy of isolationism in North Dakota can hardly be considered terminated with the defeat of Senator Nye in 1944. So, despite the interpretation one chooses regarding isolationism and North Dakota and whatever traits of isolationism one can pin on the shoulders of Gerald Nye, there must be other historical causes that led to his defeat in 1944 aside from the repudiation of isolationism.

CHAPTER II

Gerald Prentice Nye was born in Hortonville, Wisconsin on December 19, 1892. He was the son of Irwin R. Nye, the crusading editor of country weeklies in the state and one of the original La-Follette men, and of Phoebe Ella (Prentice) Nye.¹ He was the first of four children and was the nephew of the famous American humorist, Bill Nye.²

Gerald Nye was reared in an agricultural state, Wisconsin, during the Populist-Progressive era. During his adolescent years he learned the trade of his newspaper father. Nye commented years later on these formative years saying that his graduation from high school was a "result of perseverance, dire perseverance of a father and mother."³ Nye depicted his early ambitions and goals:

Endowed thus to go to the University of Wisconsin, yet without the means of doing so, I launched upon the family calling of country newspapering, and resolved for two years to conduct a weekly newspaper and raise the amount of money that would be required to go to the University. At the end of those two years of newspaper publishing, I forgot now just how many dollars further from the University I was than at the

¹Maxine Block (ed.), Current Biography: Who's News and Why 1941 (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1941), p. 619.

²"North Dakota Registers Disgust," Literary Digest, XC (July 17, 1926), p. 5.

³Gerhard Ordean Ness, "Gerald Prentice Nye: An Illustrative Analysis of Persuasive Technique" (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Speech, University of Wisconsin, 1947), p. 5.

beginning of that two years, . . . Had I gone to the University, . . . I should have studied dentistry. That was my ambition.⁴

In July 1911, Gerald P. Nye assumed the editorial responsibilities for the Weekly Review in Hortonville. It was the beginning of a fifteen-year career as a newspaperman in Wisconsin, Iowa, and North Dakota.⁵ The paper soon ran into financial difficulties and ceased publication on October 8, 1914. The main reason given for Nye's first business failure was lavish spending. The money was spent on himself, his family, and a new power press for the paper.⁶

This first financial failure did not terminate Nye's journalism career. Less from perseverance and more from the practical necessities of his economic situation, Nye continued in newspaper work, moving to Iowa in 1915 where he became the chief editor and manager of the Creston Daily Plain Dealer. With a more impressive format, better news coverage, and adequate advertising, the Plain Dealer exhibited many higher qualities of workmanship than the Weekly Review.⁷

In Creston, Iowa, Nye met his future wife, Anna Margaret Munch, a nurse from St. Louis, Missouri. Nye remained with the Plain Dealer less than a year. After another short job as

⁴Ibid., For further biographical information as told by Gerald P. Nye see "Address at the Meeting of the American Society of International Law." Proceedings, 1935, pp. 171-172.

⁵Wayne S. Cole, Senator Gerald P. Nye and American Foreign Relations (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1962), p. 9.

⁶Ibid., p. 20.

⁷Ibid., p. 21.

circulation manager for part of southern Iowa for the Des Moines Register and Leader, Nye left for North Dakota in May, 1916. In July he married Miss Munch in the home of his parents in Bayfield, Wisconsin.⁸ The marriage which lasted nearly twenty-four years produced three children, Marjorie, Robert, and James.

The town of Fryburg, North Dakota, must have seemed anything but encouraging to the new Mrs. Nye. Situated on the western part of the state known as the Slope, the area was best known for its regular lack of rainfall and poor soil. However, this town served as the headquarters for Nye's weekly newspaper, The Pioneer, "the only privately owned journal in the United States to support the rising Nonpartisan League."⁹

Nye's years at Fryburg were colorful ones. Probably every county in North Dakota has had at sometime in its history a fight for the county seat. Billings County was no exception. Nye participated with all the vigor of a newspaperman whose paper would benefit or decline depending upon the outcome. It was a struggle between the towns of Medora and Fryburg. The former, voiced the opinions of the cattlemen, the latter represented the interests of the farmers.¹⁰ Nye, of course, ranked with the latter. In 1919 the Pioneer and the Medora Billings County Herald merged. The paper became known as the Billings County Pioneer. Nye continued as

⁸Ibid., p. 29.

⁹Ness, p. 6.

¹⁰Cole, p. 27.

manager and editor.

The editorial policy of the Pioneer during the years 1916 to 1919 added color to Nye's early career. Nye supported the democratic candidate, Wilson, for president in 1916. Like most local newspapermen in North Dakota he supported Wilson's foreign policy before America's entry into World War I. After America's entry, Nye called for everyone to support the war effort. He also attacked Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin for being "unpatriotic and dangerous."¹¹ A later enemy of Senator Nye used his attack on LaFollette to illustrate what he considered the many sided faces of Nye's political mirror:

He was the Senator Nye who, after bending every effort of his paper to brand Old Bob and Gronna as cowards, slackers and traitors in 1918, dared to weep crocodile tears at the grave of the same Bob LaFollette after Nye had become a professional lecturer for peace, and to declare that the grand old man he crucified in print was "the greatest inspiration of my life."¹²

Involved in the county seat fight, World War I, and his home front activities, Nye gave little coverage to the Nonpartisan League. It was not until June 1919 when a special referendum sought approval of the Nonpartisan industrial program that Nye gave some support to the League. Nye with a tone of thought characteristic of a person living in an economic dependent state wrote "the time has come for the people of North Dakota to sign a declaration of industrial independence. It is time that they developed North Dakota instead of

¹¹Ibid., p. 28.

¹²John M. Holzworth, The Fighting Governor: The Story of William Langer and the State of North Dakota (Chicago: The Pointer Press, 1938), p. 51.

allowing the twin cities to skim the cream off our agricultural and industrial resources."¹³ The industrial program of the League included a Bank of North Dakota, a state mill and elevator, a home building association, a hail insurance system, and a Workmen's Compensation Bureau. All except the last two were to be under an Industrial Commission. The other two were under the Commissioner of Insurance and the Commissioner of Agriculture and Labor.¹⁴

On June 5, 1917, Nye registered for the draft. And in December of the same year answered a questionnaire in which he sought a draft deferment on three separate classifications. He sought exemption in class 4-A, 4-D, and 5-A: the first, a man whose wife or children are mainly dependent on his labor for support; the second, the sole head of a necessary industrial enterprise; and last, an officer of the United States government. (Notary Public) He was granted such a deferment on class 4-A and as such was not inducted into the military service.¹⁵

Wayne Cole maintains that "probably no one in Billings County was more active in home front activities" than Gerald P. Nye.¹⁶ While at Fryburg, Nye was county food administrator and "headed a couple of Liberty Loan drives but heard himself called "traitor" more than once. And he did a little name calling himself.¹⁷ Moreover,

¹³The Fryburg Pioneer, May 23, 1919. Cited in Cole, p. 31.

¹⁴Robert L. Morlan, Political Prairie Fire (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), pp. 246-251.

¹⁵The Leader, June 8, 1944.

¹⁶Cole, p. 29.

¹⁷Current Biography 1941, p. 619.

Nye certainly had a valid reason for a deferrment from military duty. Nye was not a native North Dakotan who could rely on family friends to support his wife and baby while he fought in the war, nor was he a farmer who could rent his land or have someone else farm it in his absence. Nye was indeed the sole breadwinner of his family.

In 1919, Nye accepted the editorial management of the Griggs-County Sentinel Courier, at Cooperstown, North Dakota. The location at Cooperstown took Nye away from the more arid western part of the state. Thus, Nye by becoming editor of a newspaper whose geographic center was on the western rim of the rich Red River Valley had secured for himself and family a more permanent base and a better means of livelihood. Nye had supported the Nonpartisan League while at Fryburg, but it was not until he moved to Cooperstown that he became a true supporter of Nonpartisan politics. The Griggs County Sentinel Courier "became one of the leading Nonpartisan newspapers in the state, and its aggressive young editor acquired growing power in the Nonpartisan politics."¹⁸ The six years Nye spent in Cooperstown were not all healthy ones. In 1922, Nye suffered from bronchitis and influenza and in July of that year went to Minneapolis for a mastoid operation. While there, his dental care was provided for by Dr. Henrik Shipstad, a Minneapolis dentist.¹⁹ With this, an acquaintance began that resulted in a friendship which later proved to be beneficial to both men.

Nye was mentioned briefly as a possible candidate for United

¹⁸Cole, p. 33.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 34.

States representative from the Second Congressional District in the fall of 1923. But it was not, however, until February 1924 that Nye received recognition. His name was placed in nomination at the Non-partisan League convention, but the nomination went to John C. Sherman. During this gestation period of Nye's political career, he wrote "I do not look with scorn upon the honest politician who goes after honors in which he hopes to serve an honest purpose in a statesmanlike way."²⁰ Nye had forewarned in ambiguous terminology what might well be his future role in politics if given the opportunity.

The League's candidate John Sherman was defeated by Thomas Hall in the June primary. Later the League endorsed LaFollette for President and Burton K. Wheeler as his running mate. Nye was chosen by the Nonpartisan League to run against Thomas Hall for the Second Congressional seat in the Independent column along side LaFollette.²¹

In the general election held on November 4, 1924, Nye lost to Hall by a vote of 31,212 to 27,996.²² Nye fought a good campaign and it was no disgrace to lose to a veteran of North Dakota politics.²³

²⁰Nye to George Heinze, September 24, 1923, Nye Papers, cited in Cole, p. 35.

²¹Ibid., p. 37.

²²North Dakota, Secretary of State, Compilation of State and National Election Returns, 1914-1954, 1924 General Election, Hereafter cited as Election Returns.

²³Hall had served continuously as a state officer since 1914. In office before the League began, he served as a League candidate and again after breaking with the League until 1932 without suffering a defeat. See footnote 96, p. 385 of Edward Blackorby's "Prairie Rebel: The Public Career of William Lemke," Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of North Dakota, 1958.

Nye's first venture into politics had ended in failure. But another seemingly small appointment would soon reap a far richer political harvest than anything envisaged by Gerald P. Nye.

The Nonpartisan League had always stressed a daily newspaper and the necessity of keeping it alive. Its newspaper, the Courier-News, however, soon ran into serious financial problems. Rumors circulated that the paper was for sale. The reason was given that the owners, Townley, Lemke, and Wood, were behind the sale in order to avoid its capture by conservative creditors.²⁴

Whatever the reasons behind the Courier-News controversy, the paper ceased publication on April 18, 1923. Immediately after the sale, a weekly paper known as the Progressive began publications. The paper capitalized on distrust of Lemke which resulted from the sale of the Courier-News. It also cried treason, maintaining that Lemke had pledged that the League would be informed before any sale was terminated.²⁵

In the meantime, the League tried to compensate for the loss of Courier-News by printing a small weekly, the Non-Partisan, at Bismarck. Its editor was John Bloom, a former Devils Lake newspaper man.²⁶ The death of Bloom in 1925 brought Nye to the very core of Nonpartisan activity.

Gerald Nye wrote William Lemke seeking assistance in securing the editorship of the Non-Partisan. Speaking of the editorship,

²⁴Edward Blackorby, "Prairie Rebel: The Public Career of William Lemke," pp. 372-373.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 374-375.

²⁶Ibid., p. 385.

Nye wrote "I am anxious to ascertain if it is possible to find someone for the job who would be satisfactory to all those men within the movement, who like yourself, have given much to the cause."²⁷ Nye went on to say that he would appreciate a frank letter from Lemke on the subject. Nye also indirectly mentioned that he knew the inside story revolving around the sale of the Courier-News.²⁸

Probably with Lemke's backing, Nye secured the editorship of the Non-Partisan. Nye continued to publish the Sentinel Courier, travelling to Bismarck on the week-ends to publish the four page weekly for the League.²⁹ Edward Blackorby, William Lemke's biographer, maintains that the sale of the Courier-News and Nye's acquisition of the editorship of the League paper, and Nye's close contact with Governor Arthur Sorlie spelled doom for Lemke's chances to secure the Senate seat vacated by the unexpected death of Senator Ladd.

At best, these episodes seen in the context of later historical developments might have been instrumental in lessening the chances of Lemke securing Ladd's senate seat. But no one living at the time, especially Lemke, could have fully understood their significance. The sale of the League paper was hardly the biggest scandal in the history of the Nonpartisan League. Furthermore, Lemke could hardly be held responsible for lessening his chances to a Senate seat not then vacated by helping an obscure, small town newspaperman find

²⁷Gerald P. Nye to William Lemke, February 18, 1925, William Lemke Papers, Orin G. Libby Collection, University of North Dakota Library, Grand Forks, North Dakota. Hereafter cited as Lemke papers.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Blackorby, p. 386.

more means of support and a little more prestige in the League which Lemke largely controlled anyway.

No one could have foreseen the death of Senator Ladd in May of 1925. Even with his death, and the knowledge that someone must be appointed in his place, Nye could hardly have considered himself a serious contender for the vacant senatorial seat. Nye, however, with his strong showing in the Second District Congressional race in 1924 and his editorship of the League paper, did have a political base. Nye utilized this base by writing to Governor Sorlie urging him to appoint a person with the following qualifications:

A man who knows North Dakota and has a deep appreciation of her economic needs; a man with the spunk needed to overcome the salving of political and social leader; a man of determination and fight, . . . a man who will stand with his political party in every act that helps to make it the 'party of the people' but who will never acknowledge his party as his master.³⁰

The appointment of a successor to Senator Ladd was not a simple task. There were several rather complicated factors involved. And the whole controversy still is shrouded in the mystery of multiple interpretations. First, if the governor was to appoint a successor, would the appointment violate the 17th amendment to the United States constitution?³¹ Second, what would be the decision of the officers of the Nonpartisan League in regard to an appointment? And third, would

³⁰Nye to A. G. Sorlie, June 23, 1925, Nye Papers, cited in Cole, p. 38.

³¹17th Amendment provided for the direct election of senators. If a vacancy occurred the executive of the state could only make a temporary appointment if the legislature specifically gave him the power to do so. See article XVII U. S. Constitution.

the governor utilize the opportunity to enhance his own political future?

Generally, before the passage of the 17th amendment in 1913, "all state legislatures had enacted legislation permitting governors to fill senatorial vacancies by appointment."³² Most constitutional lawyers agreed that the 17th amendment nullified the right of any governor to make appointments to fulfill a vacancy in the senate unless the state legislatures implicitly granted the power. On the basis of this interpretation "one man had been refused admittance to the senate until the governor appointing him called a special session of the legislature to grant him the appointive power."³³ The North Dakota legislature had made no such provision.

What prompted the Nonpartisan League leaders to grant Governor Sorlie the decision concerning the vacancy in the Senate? The leaders of the League based their decision on two factors. First, according to Blackorby, Lemke received word from Senator Lynn Frazier, "that there was no possibility that any man the governor would appoint could be seated unless a special session of the North Dakota legislature was expressly to grant the governor the appointing power."³⁴ Second, they secretly hoped that Governor Sorlie would give way to his political ambitions and resign as governor and

³²Edward Blackorby, "Political Factional Strife in North Dakota from 1920 to 1932" (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of History, University of North Dakota, 1938), p. 86.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Blackorby, "Prairie Rebel: The Public Career of William Lemke," p. 387.

appoint himself to the senate.³⁵ Thus the League would succeed in getting rid of Governor Sorlie by granting him a worthless appointment to the senate.³⁶

In November of 1925, Sorlie announced his decision. He did not announce that he would take Senator Ladd's seat in the senate (as the Nonpartisan League had hoped) but instead that there would be a special election held in June, 1926 at the same time as the regular June primary election, to elect a replacement for Senator Ladd. Sorlie did not mention anything about the possibility of an interim appointee who would hold the position until the special election. The shortness of time, for the most part ruled out the possibility of such an appointment.

Yet, pressure was soon brought upon the Governor to make that interim appointment regardless of the shortness of time. Nye was one of those who urged Sorlie to appoint a progressive. Sorlie was also informed that failure to make an appointment would jeopardize his standing with the League. Sorlie informed Judge F. S. Graham, Charles Talbott of the Farmer's Union, and Nye to come to his office on the morning of November 14, 1925. To everyone's surprise and Nye's in particular, Governor Sorlie appointed Gerald Nye

³⁵Several accounts maintain Governor Sorlie was quite ambitious. See Cole, pp. 38-39; Edward Blackorby's "Political Factional Strife in North Dakota from 1920-1932," unpublished Master's thesis, University of North Dakota, 1938, p. 88; also J. L. Sayre, "Gerald P. Nye: "Essentially Negative," edited by J. T. Salter, Public Men in and out of Office, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1946, p. 120.

³⁶Blackorby, "Prairie Rebel: The Public Career of William Lemke," p. 387.

to fill the office of Senator from North Dakota until the special election in June, 1926.³⁷

Even with this political fortune, Nye's future was anything but settled. The question of whether he would be accepted by the Senate remained unanswered. Furthermore, Governor Sorlie, by appointing a relatively unknown political personage, probably had the June special election in mind for himself.³⁸ Nye had insisted earlier that it really did not matter whether the Senate admitted him or not. The main thing was that the publicity gained would almost insure his success in the 1926 election.³⁹ One thing was certain: the bigger the publicity, the better the chances for Gerald P. Nye.

Nye's credentials were presented to the Senate in December 1925, and were then referred to the committee on Privileges and Elections.⁴⁰ On January 4, 1926 Senator Goff, presented the Senate with a resolution which "resolved, that Gerald P. Nye is not entitled to a seat in the Senate of the United States as a Senator from the state of North Dakota."⁴¹ From January 4 until January 12, 1926 a bitter battle raged in the Senate over the seating of Gerald Nye.

The controversy revolved around the fact that the

³⁷Cole, pp. 39-40.

³⁸"More Trouble for the Senate," Literary Digest, LXXXVII (December 5, 1925), 13.

³⁹Cole, p. 39.

⁴⁰U. S. Congressional Record, 69th Cong., 1st Sess., 1926, LXXII, Part 1, 376.

⁴¹Ibid., Part 2, 1408.

legislature in North Dakota did not empower the executive to make the Senate appointment. Nye's lawyer maintained that a United States Senator was a state official and as such could be appointed by the governor without a special act of the state legislature.⁴²

Nye was to receive help in his fight from several quarters. D. H. McArthur of North Dakota who had been secretary to Representative Baer and Senator Ladd did much negotiating with Southern Democrats to support Nye.⁴³ Senator Norris of Nebraska spoke on his behalf arguing "we are not trying a criminal: we are not dealing with technical, hair splitting legal objective, we ought, as I shall try to show, to consider the question in the broadest kind of light."⁴⁴

The debate concerned more than the constitutionality of the appointive power of the governor. Nye had run in the Independent column with LaFollette in 1924. Thus, many Republicans considered him a left wing supporter of LaFollette. Nye could expect little support from Republican supporters of the administration. Yet, there were many insurgent Republicans who often flouted the administration and sided with the Democrats. It was just this combination that seated Nye in the United States Senate.⁴⁵

Gerald P. Nye was sworn in on January 12, 1926. The vote

⁴² Ibid., 1633-1634.

⁴³ Blackorby, "Prairie Rebel: The Public Career of William Lenke," p. 372.

⁴⁴ U. S. Congressional Record, 69th Cong., 1st Sess., 1926, LXVII, Part 2, 1814.

⁴⁵ Blackorby, "Political Factional Strife in North Dakota from 1920 to 1932," p. 89.

was 41 to 39 with 15 not voting.⁴⁶ A further analysis of the vote reveals that 14 Republicans, 26 Democrats and 1 Farmer Laborite voted to seat Nye, while 31 Republicans and 8 Democrats voted against him. Some Democratic senators said they voted for him because "they believed that to keep him out of the Senate would deprive North Dakota of the constitutional guaranty of equal representation in that body with the other states."⁴⁷ Second, "they believed that a Senator is a state officer, and that Nye's appointment was legal."⁴⁸

Nye had but little time to make a name for himself in the Senate before facing the North Dakota voters in June, 1926. Luckily, because of the controversy over his seating in the Senate, his name was already well known throughout the country. National magazines added to his popularity with such complimentary remarks as "the Senate has let many lions in. It has kept many out . . . It kept Nye, of North Dakota out, and after investigating, took him in for good."⁴⁹

Senator Nye was immediately given committee assignments to the following committees: Interoceanic Canals, Claims, Territories, and Insular Possessions, and Immigration.⁵⁰ Nye was quick to support

⁴⁶U. S. Congressional Record, 69th Cong., 1st Sess., 1926, LXVII, Part 2, 1893.

⁴⁷"The Seating of Senator Nye," Literary Digest. LXXXVIII (January 30, 1926), 12.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹"The Lion in the Lobby," Literary Digest, CXLV (February 2, 1927), 149.

⁵⁰U. S. Congressional Record, 69th Cong., 1st Sess., LXVII, Part 5, 4601.

the farmer. On May 22, 1926 he spoke out in support of Senate Bill 575 which sought to amend the Interstate Commerce Act. Nye said North Dakota would benefit from the enactment of this long and short haul bill.

For years we out in that Northwest country have been, we feel, discriminated against by the railroads and by those who had in their hands the making of freight rates. Long have we battled against the odds, placed against us in an economic way by virtue of unfair freight rates. Our battles have won returns, but not all the returns that are wanted, and which in fairness ought to be granted.⁵¹

Nye also spoke out against the Mellon Tax reduction bill, a plan that was supposed to lessen the tax burdens of all Americans including the farmer. Nye said the bill only provided "great reductions in taxes to those who can best afford to pay taxes and causes the masses of the people to pay a great proportion of the whole tax to be collected."⁵² In defense of the Nonpartisan League, Nye said many people have blackened "the names of States which have dared to depart from the beaten path blazed by privilege."⁵³ This was followed by a long speech extolling the programs of the League.⁵⁴

With the special election around the corner Nye struck out against the Congress for failing to help the farmer. Instead of helping the farmer, the Congress, according to Nye placed newer burdens upon the backs of the people, the farmer included.⁵⁵ Nye knew farm

⁵¹Ibid., Part 6, 5997.

⁵²Ibid., Part 9, 9926.

⁵³Ibid., Part 6, 5998.

⁵⁴Ibid., 5999.

⁵⁵Ibid., Part 9, 9926.

legislation would be a key issue in the June election and immediately told his newly acquired colleagues in Congress how he would answer the people back home.

When we get back to our home states we will be asked just what it is that makes possible such a record as the one this Congress has written. I shall say to those who inquire of me on this score that it is a matter of leadership in political affairs. I will say it is caused by blind partisanship.⁵⁶

The publicity acquired in the seating of Nye and the popularity of his speeches in the Senate paid dividends for Nye. In June "Nye won both the special election for the short term and the Republican nomination for the regular term by margins of more than 20,000 votes over his opponent."⁵⁷

In the November general election Nye polled 107,921 votes. The combined total of his other four opponents was only 47,485. Moreover, the "bishop" of the Nonpartisan League, William Lemke, ran a poor fifth receiving only 4,977 votes.⁵⁸ Lemke's biographer best describes this ironic turn of events:

Lemke, . . . now received a total of 4,977 votes for United States Senator against Nye, the stripling newspaper editor, who, but a little over a year before had been petitioning for Lemke's assistance to obtain the part-time job of editing a struggling weekly for the League. The weeks of controversy about his being seated had made Nye's name a household word in the nation and in North Dakota where he polled 107,921 votes to outstrip Lemke by more than twenty to one.⁵⁹

⁵⁶Ibid., 9927.

⁵⁷Cole, p. 46

⁵⁸Election Returns, 1926 Election.

⁵⁹Blackorby, "Prairie Rebel: The Public Career of William Lemke," p. 394.

Gerald P. Nye, now a full fledged senator, had a full six year term ahead of him. Now it was up to Nye to further his political star which had so far shined brightly. Because he achieved his political fortune so rapidly Nye was never fully aware of the tremendous success that he had attained. He would remain throughout his political career much like the petty gambler who upon raking in a big pot awakes the next morning to find himself little changed from before. Nye would never be fully aware of his spectacular rise of the Senate as compared with a political personage who had to toil to attain that high office. Nye's success was almost instantaneous. Nye the Senator had little time to grow a political personality. Nye the Senator was to remain a reckless spender, a whimsical individual and a provincial North Dakota man.



SENATOR GERALD P. NYE AS HE APPEARED IN 1926.

CHAPTER III

Senator Nye, in his first full term as United States Senator strongly supported agricultural policies in accord with his agrarian background. In particular, he supported the McNary-Haugen bill. Nye reflected the old Populist tradition by distrusting eastern interests. Because of his distrust, he opposed the McFadden bank bill and the Federal Reserve system.

The original McNary-Haugen plan was designed to produce a fair exchange value for farm products. This would be achieved by segregating the exportable surplus so that the domestic market would not be governed by world prices.

On February 10, 1927 Senator Nye spoke at length in support of the McNary-Haugen bill. Nye pointed out that the agricultural bill was quite revolutionary in character and that so were the changes affecting the agriculture since World War I. Nye listed five conditions which confronted the farmer during this period: 1,300 per cent increase of farm bankruptcies; one-half buying power for the farmer; increased indebtedness in the farm population; tremendous loss in the value of farm property; and a large depreciated value of livestock.¹

Nye maintained that the farmer ought not to take care of his own surplus. The farmer had lost confidence in cooperative enterprises. Nye deduced that the "Equity Co-operative Exchange was

¹U. S., Congressional Record, 69th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1927, LXVIII, Part 2, 1926-1927.

boycotted and sabotaged to death."² Nye also stated that the McNary-Haugen bill "would largely restore to the farm people of the Northwest a measure of confidence in government and in cooperation."³ Coolidge, however, denounced the McNary-Haugen bill as unconstitutional special interest legislation.

The McNary-Haugen bill was introduced again in the first session of the 70th Congress. Again Senator Nye supported the measure and argued against those who said it was only natural for land values to fall following the war. Nye said "in my own state of North Dakota land values were not enhanced during the war period by one single, solitary penny. They were not inflated out there as they were in some other states."⁴

Showing little originality in introducing better farm bills, he was content with remarking about those introduced by his colleagues. Wayne Cole maintains that Nye never considered the McNary-Haugen bill "a panacea that would solve all the farmers' problems."⁵ Yet Nye by his vigorous support of the McNary-Haugen bill demonstrated his strong agrarian interests.

In April of 1929 President Hoover called a special session of Congress to provide farm relief. The proposed legislation was similar to the McNary-Haugen bill except that it provided for direct subsidies

²Ibid., Part 3, 3407.

³Ibid.

⁴U. S. Congressional Record, 70th Cong., 1st Sess., 1928, LXIX, Part 2, 1369-1370.

⁵Cole, p. 47.

to the farmer. Although Nye had reservations about the bill, he finally voted for it because he thought that its passage was better than having no bill. The Agricultural Marketing Act was put into effect on June 15, 1929.

Interestingly, as early as 1926, Nye seemed to sense some type of economic crash was forthcoming. On one occasion in the Senate he contrasted the huge amount of farm failures and the relatively few that occurred in industry saying:

The present prosperity may be all right for some interests in this country, but it is all-fired hard on the farmers. Such prosperity may continue for a time; it can continue so long as there is blood left to squeeze out of the farmer; but the supply is not inexhaustible. Indeed, the flow grows less and less daily. Sooner or later this prosperity bubble will burst-- it is bound to burst.⁶

Nye's support of the McNary-Haugen bill was overshadowed by his strong opposition to the McFadden bank bill. Nye was one of five senators who voted not to limit debate on the bill.⁷ Moreover, he maintained that he would "prefer to see the farm bill, the McNary-Haugen bill, defeated than to see this banking bill enacted into law."⁸ The real purpose of the bill, Nye insisted, was the extending of the life of the Federal Reserve system for fifty years. In addition this extension was being attempted six years in advance of the expiration of the charter under which the Federal Reserve was then operating. Senator Nye was against the Federal Reserve System because it had

⁶U. S., Congressional Record, 69th Cong., 1st Sess., 1926, LXVIII, Part 8, 9926.

⁷Ibid., 2nd Sess., 1927, LXVIII, Part 2, 1926-1927.

⁸Ibid., 3830.

encouraged Liberty Loan bonds. The farmers purchased these bonds but at maturity they received only 80, 83, or 85 cents on the dollar. Nye said "the story of that deflation program and more particularly that Liberty Loan bond steal is the most shameful tale in all American History."⁹ He went on to say "this deflation program is responsible for the present plight of American agriculture than any other contributory factor."¹⁰

Senator Nye's interests soon centered around a Senate investigation. And although Nye had only been appointed to the Senate Committee on Public Lands and Surveys in 1926, he became chairman of this committee in December of 1927. Nye was appointed because every other ranking Republican on the committee was already chairman of other, more important committees. Besides, this committee's fame was based on its investigation of the Teapot Dome scandal. This investigation had lasted for four years and could hardly be expected to continue much longer. Yet, this still did not hinder the young Senator who immediately began to search for a new scandal and perhaps publicity for himself.

The committee under Nye's direction centered its investigation around the Continental Trading Company. This concern was alleged to have been set up to bilk the stockholders of Standard Oil of Indiana and Sinclair Oil Company for the benefit of a few high officials.¹¹

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., Part 2, 1927.

¹¹Ness, p. 11.

The persons exposed included Harry F. Sinclair, Andrew Mellon, and members of the Republican National Committee. Perhaps, the involvement of prominent men offers another explanation of why other Republican senators did not want the job of committee chairman. While Nye was chairman of the committee, however, the chief investigator was Senator Thomas J. Walsh of Montana. Nye learned a great deal from this experienced questioner. The investigation forced a revision of a government lease of a \$100,000,000 oil field and the recovery of more than \$7,000,000 in taxes and penalties.¹² Nye's inquiry had more than paid for its expenses; he had performed a questionable job for some of his Republican cohorts, and his name came before the public.

It was not long before Nye again returned to his role as a Senate investigator. In 1930, chiefly through the influence of Senator Norris, a bipartisan Senatorial Committee was established to investigate the campaign expenditures of that year. Nye was picked to replace Senator Hiram Johnson on the committee on April 14.¹³ Four other senators served with him on this bipartisan committee, but Nye played the principal role.¹⁴ The hearings were conducted in Colorado, Delaware, Illinois, Kentucky, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Virginia. Political skulduggery of a minor character was revealed in six states.¹⁵

¹²Ibid., p. 12.

¹³U. S., Congressional Record, 71st Cong., 2nd Sess., 1930, LXXII, Part 7, 6998.

¹⁴Cole, p. 51.

¹⁵Ness, p. 13.

The Illinois investigation received the most national attention. Irregularities which concerned the campaign expenditures of Mrs. Ruth Hanna McCormick were found. Mrs. McCormick became indignant over the investigation and proceeded to probe into Nye's background and activities.¹⁶ She declared that she did not enjoy having her private affairs pried into by the Nye Committee in a highhanded manner; therefore she decided to give Nye a taste of his own medicine.¹⁷ Mrs. McCormick's investigation revealed nothing to discredit the character of Senator Nye. The Committee, on the other hand, probably was partially responsible for Mrs. McCormick's defeat in the general election.

Although the Illinois investigation received the most publicity, the Nebraska investigation was the most effectively handled. This investigation was a personal matter as far as Senator Nye was concerned. Senator Norris' opponents tried to block his renomination in the Republican primary by letting a small town grocery clerk by the name of George W. Norris file for the Republican nomination. The divided votes would allow a third man to win the nomination. The controversy reached a climax when the young grocer's name was not put on the ballot because he had supposedly filed too late. When the investigation succeeded in making the "interests" and the ultra-conservative in Nebraska breathe a little harder, Nye received satisfaction in knowing that his was a job well done and one worth doing.

¹⁶Cole, p. 51.

¹⁷Sayre, p. 132.

As a result of the committee's findings of unethical election procedures, Nye introduced a Corrupt Practices Bill that might have improved the conduct of elections if it had been passed. The failure of the bill perhaps indicated that Senator Nye was a better investigator than legislator. Dr. J. L. Sayre, professor of Political Science at the University of North Dakota, stated that Nye's primary reason for failing in his effort to have the corrupt practice bill passed was that there were more pressing matters awaiting his attention.¹⁸ According to Cole, Nye was "less effective in accomplishing legislative goals than in revealing and publicizing events."¹⁹

Senator Nye, then, in his first full term as United States Senator had fit into the pattern of a rural Senator representing the agrarian interests of his state. Nye also had gained a considerable amount of experience as a Senate investigator as well as a considerable amount of publicity. He was now to face his North Dakota constituents in an attempt at re-election to the United States Senate.

In 1932 election in North Dakota saw Nye easily defeat his opponent George F. Schafer in the primary. In the general election Nye received 172,796 votes and carried every county in the state, humiliating his opponent P. W. Lanier, a Fargo democrat.²⁰ Nye carried the

¹⁸Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁹Cole, p. 51

²⁰Election Returns, 1932 General Election. It is interesting to note that fourteen years later Lanier's son, fresh from combat duty, would again carry the family colors against Nye. Nye would then be attempting to regain his lost senate seat.

entire Nonpartisan ticket and only the 178,350 votes gained by Franklin Roosevelt in the same election has ever polled more votes in North Dakota. Nye's smashing victory certainly indicated strong popularity. One writer, Edward Blackorby, maintains that many small town businessmen voted for Nye because of the following speech:

The necessary use of automobiles and the expansion of the state's highway system are bringing about a complete revolution in the social and economic structure of the state which will eventually result in the elimination of hundreds of small towns as trading centers . . . In time the state's business will be conducted by fourteen or fifteen towns . . . which will absorb the smaller communities.²¹

With this landslide victory Nye must have felt secure as he returned to Washington.

According to Nye, Roosevelt's New Deal legislation did not cope sufficiently well with the depression. Although he voted for the A.A.A., it appears that he made no statements concerning the bill. Nye also voted for the National Recovery Administration but soon began to criticize its results. Nye, voicing the agrarian disdain for eastern interests, which he now believed were in control of the N.R.A., stated:

One wonders today at the real purpose which was behind N.R.A. and its formation. One wonders if it is all true that people with a new thought with an advanced thought, were really creating the national recovery program, or, instead was N.R.A. the mere creature and guiding destinies of America's economic structure so successfully leading up to the days of the new deal.²²

Nye's suspicions grew stronger when he introduced Senate Resolution 175

²¹"What Shafer says about Farmers and Small-towns." A Pamphlet, 1932, cited in Edward Blackorby's "Political Factional Strife in North Dakota from 1920 to 1932," p. 112.

²²U. S. Congressional Record, 73rd Cong., 2nd Sess., 1934, LXXVIII, Part 9, 9235.

requesting immediate information on the N.R.A. This request demanded such items as the number of people employed, information on their past business connections, and a list of all industrial codes.²³ Nye's changes against the N.R.A. and those of Senator Borah's led to much criticism of their position.

Nye and Borah bleed for the rights of the "little men," but fail to make clear just whom they mean. It should be made abundantly clear the "little men" for whom they burn is the fellow who objects to paying his employees a minimum of \$12 for a fifty-four hour week, and the "rights" which they restore to him are those of working them longer and paying them less! Let these two champions of the common people explain that!²⁴

Yet, Nye's objection to what he considered a monopoly of the N.R.A. by eastern interests in no way demonstrated a complete incompatibility with the President and his New Deal Program. For all the criticisms of Nye the magazine Progressive listed Nye as one of only eight senators who had voted in 1933 for the "public interest on all of ten key issues regarding labor, tax, veterans and farm matter."²⁵ While Nye was involved in debating New Deal programs on the national scene, matters closer to home soon drew his attention. William Langer had won the governorship in 1932, and was the only Republican governor elected that year. His administration sought to aid the depressed farmers and his measures brought popularity within the state as well as criticism from the federal government. Langer, while governor,

²³Ibid., Part 2, 1992.

²⁴Paul Y. Anderson, "Chiselers at Work and Play," Nation, CXXXVIII, (February 7, 1934), 154.

²⁵Progressive, IV (September 2, 1933), 2., cited in Cole, p. 56.

required the solicitation of money from the federal administrators in state agencies to contribute to the Nonpartisan paper, the Leader.

This information reached the office of the Secretary of Interior, Harold Ickes. Blackorby maintains that it probably was Nye who conveyed the information to Ickes about Langer's solicitation.²⁶ Wayne Cole, on the other hand, says that Nye was called into Ickes' office and told what Langer had been doing.²⁷

Regardless of the source, the information procured resulted in the removal of Langer's authority to administer federal relief in North Dakota. Harry L. Hopkins, Civil Works Administrator, relieved Langer of his authority on March 1, 1934.

Nye reacted to the Langer incident by stating before the Senate, "let the axe fall where it will, even though it shall involve indictment and trial of one rewarded by election to so high an office as that of Governor of the State."²⁸ The affair sparked a personal and political feud between Nye and Langer that would dominate North Dakota politics during the next dozen years.²⁹

It is possible that Nye in 1934 thought that Langer would be a possible political opponent in the 1938 election. But more than likely Nye's main objective centered around public disassociation of himself

²⁶Blackorby, "Prairie Rebel: The Public Career of William Lemke," p. 467.

²⁷Cole, p. 57.

²⁸U. S., Congressional Record, 73rd Cong., 2nd Sess., 1934, LXXVIII, Part 4, 3497-3498.

²⁹Cole, p. 57.

from any connection with the episode.

When Langer was removed from office by the North Dakota Supreme Court on July 18, 1934, for having been convicted of a felony in a federal court, Nye supported Thomas H. Moodie, the Democrat, against Mrs. Langer for the governorship. Moodie won the election. This incident, coupled with the previous one, would seem to indicate that Nye had a more planned scheme against William Langer. Yet, the author of this study maintains that Nye's overpowering victory in the 1932 election influenced Nye's dogmatic assertions. Rather than having a future thought of possibly being defeated in 1938 by William Langer, Nye felt secure in his position. Of course, these incidents look dubious in regard to Nye's intentions in 1938, but in 1934 Nye ruled supreme.

The attention of Nye, however, soon returned to his role as Senator. The political record of Nye's first eight years in Congress represented nothing exceptional but he had certainly been well portrayed as a man representing the interests of the farmers. Nye's minimal experience gained as a senatorial investigator culminated in the munitions investigation proceedings for 1934 to 1936.

Isolationism at the close of World War I returned as a strong ideological force in American history. The failure of Wilson at Versailles had turned American idealism into disgust and reconfirmed the belief that America's traditional isolation is the best foreign policy. The munitions investigation was hardly a restrained inquiry. It was rather a ruthless investigation to prove the old progressive thesis that wars are always primarily economic in origin. The investigation

both exaggerated the influence of financiers and greatly distorted the actual causes for America's entry into World War I.

Although previously Nye had exerted little effort in discussing foreign affairs, his philosophy was there nevertheless. In 1926 Nye voted against United States participation in the World Court. He thought it was too early to make such a decision because the people simply did not have all the facts.³⁰ In the same speech, Nye discussed his own views of foreign policy saying "I am praying for the day to come when the laws of and agreements between people will be as clearly written as the Ten Commandments."³¹ Nye concluded his speech by quoting Washington's Farewell Address with that famous misinterpreted statement "tis our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world."³² Nye saw the issues of foreign affairs through the telescope of the Ten Commandments and Washington's Farewell Address. In 1934, Nye introduced two bills in Congress dealing with foreign affairs: Senate Resolution 179 which called for an investigation into the activities of Dealers in Arms of Munitions and Senate Bill 104 to amend Section 8; Article 1 of the Constitution so that a plebiscite of the people would be required before a declaration of war could be made.³³

On April 8, 1934, Nye spoke at length about the publication of

³⁰U. S., Congressional Record, 69th Cong., 1st Sess., 1926, LXVII, Part 3, 2643.

³¹Ibid., 2644.

³²Ibid.,

³³Cole, pp. 67-68.

a book entitled On Merchants of Death. Nye remarked:

There has just come from the press a most interesting publication, revealing the antics of our American munitions manufacturers during the World War, and at other times . . . I wish to invite the attention of every member of the Senate to this book which is deserving of their reading. It is a remarkable work, one about which a great deal is going to be heard.³⁴

The Munitions Investigation is a study in itself. Before the movement had actually begun many organizations and individuals clamored for an investigation. Wayne Cole, credits Dorothy Detzer, executive secretary of the Woman's International League for Peace and Freedom, for really getting the proposal rolling. Her efforts reached only the responsive ears of Senators Norris and LaFollette. It was Norris who finally suggested the name of Nye as a possible chairman for such an investigation.³⁵

Senator Harrison of Missouri was interested in getting a certain revenue bill passed, but Senators Vanderberg of Michigan and Nye of North Dakota were filibustering on this proposed amendment to the revenue bill. So to ameliorate the passage of his revenue bill Senator Harrison proposed that the seemingly insignificant Nye-Vanderberg munitions investigation resolution should be adopted immediately. This was accomplished on April 12, 1934 and the committee had its legality.³⁶

A biographer of Cordell Hull wrote "there was practically no munitions industry in the country except the manufacture of ammunition

³⁴U. S., Congressional Record, 73rd Cong., 2nd Sess., 1934, LXXVIII, Part 6, 6474.

³⁵Cole, pp. 67-68.

³⁶U. S., Congressional Record, 73rd Cong., 2nd Sess., 1934, LXXVIII, Part 6, 6472-6488.

for small arms, shotguns, target rifles, etc. But Mr. Nye had read Merchant of Death and had decided to annihilate them."³⁷

Nye proceeded to assemble his staff. He chose Stephen Raushenbush, an experienced investigator, as his secretary. From the Agricultural Adjustment Administration he borrowed Alger Hiss, a bright Harvard Law School graduate and a former secretary to Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes. These two men in turn chose about 60 other investigators, clerks, and assistants.³⁸

Public hearings before the Nye committee began on Tuesday, September 4, 1934, in the Senate Office Building. One of the high points of the September hearings was the appearance of members of the DuPont family. Yet, perhaps the greatest episode of the entire investigation was the face to face meeting of J. P. Morgan and Senator Nye. For Senator Nye, a small town newspaperman, to tell J. P. Morgan, in the eyes of the world, that he was partially responsible for World War I must have been quite a scene. The Nye Committee heard its last witness on February 20, 1936.³⁹

The influence of the Munition Investigation both on the personality of Nye and on the nation as a whole was significant. Senator Nye became known to his enemies as "Heresay" and to his friends as "Gerald the Giant Killer."⁴⁰ One writer labeled Nye as the Wat Tyler of the

³⁷Harold B. Hinton, Cordell Hull: A Biography (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Doron & Co., 1942), p. 265.

³⁸Beverly Smith, "Voice from the Bleachers," American Magazine CXIX (May, 1935), 118.

³⁹Cole, pp. 73-79.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 47.

prairies."⁴¹ Moreover, by the termination of the investigation, the world knew Gerald P. Nye and North Dakotans relished the thought of at last receiving recognition. The influence of the Nye Committee influenced the passage of the Neutrality Acts of the mid 1930's. This time Nye had not only made success in the hearing room but also as a legislator. Speaking in behalf of the neutrality legislation he said:

I am determined to write a neutrality policy that means business . . . I am determined to make this country stick by it. When the record is completed, history will show that America entered the World War in 1914. We were in the war as soon as our commerce took us to foreign ports. All the commerce in Kingdom Come is not worth the repetition of our experience in the World War.⁴²

As a result of his work, Nye received the Cardinal Newman Award for distinguished contributions toward peace. The citation referred to the North Dakotan "as a refreshing example of a public servant who penetrates beyond current shibboleths and party labels and brings before the eyes of the great masses of our citizens the hidden factors which make for war and menace the peace of the world."⁴³

Nye, whose first entrance into the Senate, had brought such characterizations as "a naive country editor from North Dakota wearing bulbous yellow shoes and an Old Oaken Bucket hair cut"⁴⁴ quickly changed his appearance. He became one of the best dressed men in the Senate. Although not active in Washington social life, Nye enjoyed

⁴¹Francis Brown, "The Crusading Mr. Nye," Current History, XLI, (February, 1935), 521.

⁴²"Neutrality Battle Intensified," Literary Digest, CXXI (January 4, 1936), 5.

⁴³New York Times, January 15, 1936, p. 8.

⁴⁴Current Biography 1941, pp. 618-619.

watching the Washington Senators play baseball. He lived modestly with his wife and three children in the suburbs of Washington.⁴⁵ He soon acquired many of the traits usually reserved to more socially orientated persons. Nye became a good golfer, played bridge, and smoked heavily. Nye, however, considered himself an expert in only one sport--fishing. He often went bass fishing in Wisconsin and in Lake of the Woods.⁴⁶

The period between the termination of the Munitions Investigation and the 1938 election in North Dakota marked the apex of Nye's popularity. Yet, the 1938 senatorial election witnessed a bitter political struggle between himself and William Langer.

Too much popularity on the national scene and little interest in the people who elected him aptly described the most important issue of the 1938 election for Nye. Many believed that Senator Nye had received the endorsement of the N.P.L. and then developed an independent attitude. One North Dakotan wrote to a national magazine, the Nation, on May 7, 1938 saying:

Many of us out here in the sticks have reached the conclusion that Nye is for Nye first, last, and always. He is a fluent talker, but it has been said that men of few words usually do the straightest thinking, and we believe this holds true in Nye's case. His thinking has become erratic and far out of line with the thoughts of the common people of North Dakota.⁴⁷

In the Nonpartisan League paper, The Leader, the Langer picture of Senator Nye was presented to the people of North Dakota in early

⁴⁵Ness, p. 27.

⁴⁶Smith, p. 116.

⁴⁷I. C. Freundberg, "A Dakotan on Senator Nye," Nation, CXLVI (May 7, 1938), 543.

1938. In a long article on May 26, 1938 entitled "Political Accident Made Nye Senator," The Leader did a full bias biographical study on Senator Nye. The paper warned of forthcoming articles saying "How Republican Nye again rode into office on the Roosevelt bandwagon in 1932 and other highlights in the Senator's career will be discussed further in subsequent issues of The Leader."⁴⁸

A recent seminar paper dealing with the 1938 election mentioned the three leading points hammered home by The Leader in its criticism of Nye: his dress, in particular his diamond studded garters; his endorsement of Lucky Strike cigarettes, and the \$500.00 to \$1,000.00 fees he collected for out-of-state speaking engagements.⁴⁹ Yet, the author of this same paper concludes that "taken as a whole there was little, if indeed any, vicious mud-slinging or personal defamations; either during the primary or the November campaigning."⁵⁰

Other newspapers of the state for some time had been criticizing Nye for his apparent lack of concern with the welfare of the North Dakota people. A Wahpeton paper remarked:

Through the years Senator Nye has given very good service but it is increasingly difficult to understand why he has given so much attention to matters which do not vitally concern North Dakota and so much attention to disarmament and other controversial subjects which at best are not so vital as a fair price for what North Dakota has to sell.⁵¹

⁴⁸The Leader, May 26, 1938.

⁴⁹John Fuller, "A Study in Political Hypocrisy: The 1938 North Dakota Election" (unpublished Seminar Paper, Department of History, University of North Dakota, 1966), p. 42.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 57.

⁵¹Richland County Farmer's Globe, January 7, 1938.

The Leader on June 2, 1938 printed a copy of a telegram written from

Langer to Nye:

Press reports last night state that you were deserting Congress for the balance of session to open your campaign in North Dakota despite the fact that much vital legislation remains to be acted upon in this session . . . However, I believe that the welfare of the people should have first consideration and I hereby offer to cancel all my speaking engagements and withdraw from the campaign until Congress adjourns if you will agree to remain in Washington and fight for the enactment of the relief bill and continue to do your duty there."⁵²

Nye, of course, refused the offer and proceeded to North Dakota to begin his campaign. The image of Langer as a benefactor of the people of North Dakota had been projected against the popular Nye as unconcerned with his own state. Langer's strength had largely grown out of the strong political machine which he had built up in 1937 and 1938 during his second term as Governor.⁵³ Yet, Langer in his rise to the Governorship had created a few enemies. Nye sought to organize all those opposed to Langer and make Langerism the chief issue of his campaign.

The coalition against Langer brought together Nye, Lemke, and Senator Lynn Frazier. They drew to their support "the conservatives who had once been Independents and who now felt less antagonistic to the three old-time Leaguers."⁵⁴ To further the chances of a Nye victory they also joined hands with the Democrats in a political deal.

⁵²The Leader, June 2, 1938.

⁵³Blackorby, "Prairie Rebel: The Public Career of William Lemke," p. 537.

⁵⁴Blackorby, "Prairie Rebel: The Public Career of William Lemke," p. 539.

In this maneuver the Democrats would vote for Nye in return for support of their candidate, John Moses, for Governor. Some investigations of this political deal exhibited a further condition. Both Adam J. Schweitzer who wrote on "John Moses and the New Deal in North Dakota" and William Blackorby maintain that the Democratic candidate for Senator, Jess J. Nygaard, intentionally did not campaign vigorously. Moreover, Blackorby concludes that had Nygaard campaigned more extensively, Nye's election would have been jeopardized. Wayne Cole, however, states that Nygaard campaigned aggressively on a program endorsing President Roosevelt and the New Deal.⁵⁵ The fact that Nygaard received less than 20,000 votes is probably easier explained by the tremendous popularity of his two opponents rather than trying to connect him with a political agreement.

Nye defeated Langer in June of 1938 by 5,000 votes. Langer in turn ran as an independent in the fall election, and Nye again defeated him by a vote of 131,907 to 112,007 with Nygaard polling 19,244 votes.⁵⁶

The Leader showed signs of objectivity in assessing Langer's defeat when it surmised, "as in the primary it was in the cities and towns of the state that Nye piled up his largest majorities. Precincts in the city of Fargo, alone, gave him an estimated majority of close to 5,000 votes over the governor."⁵⁷ Nye again tasted victory. Ironically it was the eastern part of the state which had elected him. The farmers

⁵⁵Cole, p. 147.

⁵⁶Election Returns, 1938 Election.

⁵⁷The Leader, November 10, 1938.

had largely accepted the dictum of Langer's campaign message and had voted against Nye. Nye returned to the Senate in 1938 but only by a narrow margin. Moreover, there was no assurance in the future that his newly won friends would vote for him again. This in itself should have been fair warning to Nye. Yet, Nye could interpret his victory another way. By defeating Langer in 1938, Nye returned to Washington secure in his belief that his number one political antagonist had been eliminated. The election of Langer to the Senate in 1940 reassured Nye of no longer having to face him in any future contests. Regardless of the narrow margin that elected Nye in 1938, Nye probably believed his popularity had been at least partially restored. Moreover, Nye could search the political horizon far and wide in North Dakota and not come up with any credible opponent.

1940 found Nye's personal matters reaching a climax with a divorce and a second marriage. The news of Mrs. Nye's planned divorce became public on February 27, 1940. Senator Nye on hearing of the announcement said it was "no surprise" to learn that his wife had filed for a divorce.⁵⁸ The leading newspaper of North Dakota, the Fargo Forum commented, "the announcement by Mrs. Nye came as no surprise as the divorce has been rumored in newspapers and the estrangement of the couple has been known to their friends for months."⁵⁹

On March 13, in a five minute court proceeding in Fargo, Mrs. Nye received her divorce on the grounds of mental cruelty. Neither

⁵⁸ New York Times, February 27, 1940, p. 13.

⁵⁹ Fargo Forum, February 27, 1940.

of the Nyes were in court. Mrs. Nye requested that the entire record of the proceedings be sealed. Her request was granted by District Judge M. K. Englert. Except for the fact that Nye would be permitted to see his children and that neither party would re-marry within sixty days of the granting of the divorce, nothing else became public.⁶⁰

On December 14, 1940, Nye married Miss Marguerite Johnson in her home town of Iowa Falls, Iowa. Miss Johnson was a graduate of Iowa State College and had taught for several years in Iowa and Illinois. They had met by accident a few years before when Nye helped her change a tire on her car. The new Mrs. Nye, blonde and attractive, was some fifteen years younger than her husband who was then forty-seven.⁶¹

The divorce and subsequent marriage had been handled quite meticulously and without much publicity. Yet, everyone who wanted to be aware of the situation knew about both incidents. Many conservative North Dakota people surely were shocked by the conduct of their senior senator. If it was not an old Populist idea, it was certainly an old League notion that the city is a source of evil and temptation. A. C. Townley, the father of the Nonpartisan League, most aptly illustrates this rural mentality in speaking to Senator Burton K. Wheeler of Montana:

Don't tell me about these honest farmers. I elected the governor and the state officers and the members of the state legislature in North Dakota. But big interests came here with their whiskey and their women and took

⁶⁰New York Times, March 14, 1940.

⁶¹Cole, p. 175.

them away from me like Grant took Richmond. I had to build a corral around them to keep the booze and whores away from those fellows. Some of them acted as if they'd never been off the farm before.⁶²

It was again in 1940 that the old Langer - Nye feud broke.

After Langer had defeated Frazier in 1940, the feud started when Langer ran into difficulty being accepted into the Senate. But although Nye did not publically attempt to thwart the seating of Langer he did this privately. Lemke's biographer, Blackorby, maintains that Lemke really believed if Nye had thrown his full influence into the fight, Langer probably would not have been seated. Moreover, Lemke, although, understanding Nye's position (one of propriety and custom), sincerely believed that Nye made a major miscalculation for his own safety in the next election by not fighting the seating of Langer more vigorously.⁶³

This is somewhat a different interpretation than one given by Robert Horne in his study entitled "The Controversy over the Seating of William Langer: 1940-1942." Horne maintains that Nye probably did not openly fight the seating because it might have antagonized thousands of Republicans who had voted for Langer in the previous election.⁶⁴ Whatever the reasoning behind Nye's effort to stop Langer, he now found as his colleague in the Senate his most bitter political enemy.

The advent of the war in Europe brought Nye into the popular

⁶²Burton K. Wheeler, Yankee From the West (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1962), p. 172.

⁶³Blackorby, "Prairie Rebel: The Public Career of William Lemke," p. 589.

⁶⁴Robert M. Horne, "The Controversy over the Seating of William Langer: 1940-1942" (unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of History, University of North Dakota, 1964), p. 179.

eye again as a spokesman for the America First Committee. Begun in June 1940, the America First group sought to prevent any participation by the United States in European and Asiatic conflicts. The platform was anti-lease, anti-convoying, anti-draft extension and anti-preparedness.⁶⁵ Its policy fit well into Senator Nye's beliefs and he became one of its leading spokesmen.

According to Wayne Cole, his his book America First, a Gallup Poll taken in the fall of 1941 illustrated the popularity of groups trying to keep the United States out of war. The poll showed 16 percent of American voters would have supported a hypothetical "keep-out-of-war party." The America First Committee, however, did not want to form a third party.⁶⁶

From the day Hitler invaded Poland until the attack on Pearl Harbor the most discussed controversy centered between the isolationists and the interventionists. By becoming the leading speaker for the America First Organization Nye really became involved in the center of the debate. The very day of the attack upon Pearl Harbor, Nye was making a speech for the isolationists.⁶⁷ With Americans now officially in the war, the isolationists could do nothing but support the war effort while maintaining that if Americans had only listened to their ideas we could have averted war. From the time of Pearl Harbor to his

⁶⁵Ness, p. 40.

⁶⁶Wayne S. Cole, America First: The Battle Against Intervention 1940-1941 (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1953), p. 187.

⁶⁷Cole, Senator Gerald P. Nye and American Foreign Relations, p. 197. Any future citings of Cole will be from this work.

defeat in 1944 Nye was the victim of continuing attacks upon his isolationist stand. Nye took this in stride and his role in Congress during the war years illustrated somewhat of a retreat from his former stand. At the same time he supported the war effort as any loyal American would do. Nye, in particular, altered his image in his support of the Connally Resolution. This resolution passed in its final form in the United States Senate on November 5, 1943. The resolution which is rather ambiguous in terminology is as follows:

I. Resolved, that the war against all our enemies be waged until complete victory is achieved.

II. That the United States cooperate with its comrades in arms in securing a just and honorable peace.

III. That the United States, acting through its constitutional processes, join with free and sovereign nations in the establishment and maintenance of international authority with power to prevent aggression and to preserve the peace of the world

IV. That the Senate recognize the necessity of these being established at the earliest practicable date a general international organization, based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all peace-loving states, and open to membership by all such states, large and small, for the maintenance of international peace and security.

V. That, pursuant to the Constitution of the United States, any treaty made to effect the purpose of this resolution on behalf of the Government of the United States with any other nation or any association of nations shall be made only by and with the advice and consent of the Senate of the United States, provided two thirds of the Senators present concur.⁶⁸

Much debate proceeded the passage of the resolution. Nye voted for it; Langer did not. Nye said he voted for it because it was a commitment

⁶⁸U. S., Congressional Record, 78th Cong., 1st Sess., 1943, LXXXIX, Part 7, 9222.

that in no way jeopardized the right of America to make a later choice on the form of international machinery.⁶⁹ Langer voted against the Connally Resolution because it was an inopportune time to do so. Langer believed the time was inopportune because the Moscow conference of Foreign Ministers had hardly time to be discussed.⁷⁰

The Washington Post said the Connally Resolution was nothing more than "a Maypole around which isolationists and internationalists alike can dance in fraternal abandon before the gaze of the world virtually interested in knowing where we stand."⁷¹ Senator Eastland, of Mississippi raised a question in regard to Nye voting for the resolution:

Is it fair for the able Senator from North Dakota . . . to go before his constituents in North Dakota and say I do not agree to all these things, because I voted for the Connally Resolution, meaning by that he has not changed his views about what some of us please to call isolationism.⁷²

Nye mentioned the Connally Resolution in his campaign. But a continual bitter attack to smear Nye out-publicized any connection between Nye and the Connally Resolution. Moreover, the political foes opposing Nye in his fourth term for the United States Senate were quickly fathering impetus to unseat the senior senator. The 1944 primary and general election proved to be one of the lowliest in a state that was known "as a paradise for those who like their politics

⁶⁹Ibid., 9083.

⁷⁰Ibid., 9203.

⁷¹Ibid., 8934.

⁷²Ibid., 8740.

wild, woolly, and bounding with fizzy whizz-bangs which explode in bursts of pretty red fire."⁷³

⁷³Malcolm B. Ronald, "The Dakota Twins," Atlantic Monthly, CLVII (September, 1936), 361.

CHAPTER 4

From the bombing of Pearl Harbor until the June primary in 1944 many controversial issues confronted Nye. His second marriage forced him to create a new life for himself. His image as a member of the America First Committee and as an advocate of isolationism continued to provide criticism. Once the war commenced, various individual groups and organizations were accused and investigated to distinguish the traitors from the patriots. Inevitably, Nye's name and image were discussed and questioned. But Nye, ignoring the suspicions and doubts surrounding his person, retired to his home in Washington. He retreated from national affairs and the affairs of North Dakota. Complacency and apathy correctly characterize Nye's role in the Senate following America's entry into the war.

The marriage of Senator Nye to Miss Marguerite Johnson in 1940 offered to the now middle aged man the opportunity for a new life. Although he was required to pay money to his first wife and three children, the speeches given by Nye in support of the America First Committee gave him an opportunity to insure his financial security. Nye's second wife guided him to membership in the Lutheran church, and both enjoyed the happiness of the children born to them in their marriage.¹

In the early 1940's Nye built a comfortable home in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Although the house was an impressive structure, it hardly

¹Cole, p. 202



Nye's House in Chevy Chase, Maryland

was the spectacular mansion that the 1944 campaign propagandists claimed it to be. A picture of the house with the caption "This is the House that Talk Built" was circulated in North Dakota.² The house, estimated to have cost \$50,000, became one of the personal issues used extensively in the campaigns for the June primary and the subsequent general election.

During the war years Nye had defended his participation in the America First Committee and continued to reiterate the principles of the organization. Nye listed the seven principles of the Committee in the Congressional Record:

1. Our first duty is to keep America out of foreign wars. Our entry would only destroy democracy, not save it.
2. We must build a defense for our shores so strong that no foreign power or combination of powers can invade our country, by sea, air, or land.
3. Not by acts of war abroad but by persevering and extending democracy at home can we aid democracy and freedom to other lands.
4. In 1917 we sent our American ships into the war game and this led us to war. In 1941 we must keep our naval convoys and merchant vessels on this side of the Atlantic.
5. Humanitarian aid is the duty of a strong, free country at peace with proper safe guards for the distribution of supplies. We should feed and clothe the suffering and needy people of the occupied countries.
6. We advocate an official advisory vote by the people of the United States on the question of war or peace, so that when Congress decides the question, as the Constitution provides, it may know the opinion of the people on this gravest of all issues.
7. The Constitution of the United States vests the sole power to declare war in Congress. Until Congress has exercised that power it is not only the privilege but the duty

²The Leader, June 23, 1944.

of every citizen to express to his Representatives his views on the question of peace or war--in order that this grave issue may be decided in accordance with the will of the people and the best traditions of American democracy.³

Nye clearly defined his interpretation of the term isolation when he said "I have no particular dislike for the term 'isolationist' when I can use honest description of what I know so-called isolationists to be and stand for."⁴ Senator Nye said his definition was the same as that issued by Franklin D. Roosevelt speaking at Chautauqua on August 14, 1936. The President at that time declared that "we are not isolationists except insofar as we seek to isolate ourselves completely from war."⁵ Nye's rather objective and candid definition of his meaning of isolationism was not accepted by the majority of patriotic Americans while the continued accusations against Nye's isolationism began to gain momentum and publicity.

Although Nye generally remained passive to the anti-isolationist publicity in regard to himself, he did speak defensively on a few occasions. In May, 1943 Nye spoke at the America First meeting in the Mural Room of Chicago's Hotel Morrison. Time called his speech "Revival: New Isolationism." It reported on the talk given by Nye saying: "Each time Gerald Nye belittled the United Nations strategy, post-war planning, Roosevelt, Wilkie, Churchill, Stalin, or Chiang Kai-Shek, the catcalls and clapping rocked the chandeliers, quivering against the black and jade glass murals."⁶

³U. S. Congressional Record, 78th Cong., 1st Sess., 1943, Part 7, 9085.

⁴Ibid., 9086.

⁵Ibid.

⁶"Revival: New Isolationism," Time, May 31, 1943, p. 21.

Ironically, Nye voted for the Connally Resolution in November, 1943. The New Republic reported that the Connally Resolution would quickly pass and suggested further measures should be taken to rid the Senate of its isolationist Senators. The article stated:

What is needed now is strong leadership from the President and the Secretary of State in favor of more concrete proposals so that an informal public opinion may push the isolationist Senators further back. They must be prevented from pouring their favor into an Anglo-American imperialism after the war.⁷

The most damaging portrayal of Nye during the 1940's attempted to associate Nye as being an advocate of foreign propaganda. A federal grand jury in Washington investigated foreign agents in the United States from 1941 through 1944. This investigation provided an excellent opportunity to discredit the non-interventionists. Nye's name was degraded for supporting Ralph Townsend, a former American Foreign Service officer and writer. Nye claimed Townsend was a sincere American in 1942 but the federal grand jury believed he was a foreign agent.⁸ Nye's name was associated with another man of dubious national loyalty in the Washington Post when Drew Pearson charged that Nye actively aided in the appeal of one George Sylvester Viereck, who was then being convicted of sedition.⁹

In February, 1943, O. John Ruge became special assistant to Attorney General Francis Biddle. Ruge assumed responsibility for the

⁷"De-Isolationizing the Senate," New Republic, November 1, 1943, p. 608.

⁸Cole, p. 209.

⁹Ibid., p. 210.

sedition case. He attempted to write a report distinguishing between sincere isolationists from foreign agents. Nye's name did not appear on the list of foreign agents, but his name appeared on a second list which included sympathizers and abettors of the foreign agents.

Viereck purchased and distributed 95,000 copies of reprints for the Congressional Record in Nye's name. Viereck also used speeches written by Congressman Usher L. Burdick.¹⁰

Five days before the North Dakota primary election on June 27, 1944, Nye's name was again publicized in connection with the sedition trial. By this time a rather wide circulation of the book entitled Under Cover had reached many readers.¹¹ The author, John Roy Carlson, attempted to connect the name of Nye with pro-Nazi views and anti-semitism. Carlson remarked:

His admiration for Dennis, and the probable influence of Dennis' American Nazi views on Senator Nye's own utterances on the floor of the United States Senate worried me. His anti-semitic remarks about the Jewish crowd which he uttered during the first minute of our interview frightened me.¹²

Carlson also criticized Nye for initiating a probe of the movie industries. Carlson maintained that "tens of thousands of copies of Nye's speeches on behalf of appeasement, defeatism, obstructionism, and the Steuben Society were sent out under his frank at the cost of the American taxpayers" as a result of Nye's attempt to investigate the movie industry.¹³

¹⁰Ibid., p. 211.

¹¹Fuller, p. 57.

¹²John Ray Carlson, Under Cover (New York: E. B. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1943), p. 494.

¹³Ibid., p. 281.

Time, on August 23, reviewed Carlson's book. The article said the book "is a believable account of real viciousness, relieved by fragments of pure absurdity."¹⁴ Gerald Movius, personal secretary to Senator Nye, remarked in a letter to the editor of The Leader on the credibility of the book Under Cover:

I would like to mention that I have read it five times line for line and I am thoroughly familiar with it or ought to be. I am familiar to the degree at least that when the book is analyzed the sole charge against Senator Nye is that he knew a man who knew a man who knows several people under indictment for subversive activities.¹⁵

The Leader, controlled by Langer, attempted to connect Nye with fascism as a result of the publication of Carlson's book:

If this doesn't shock you out of your complacency nothing will. We have plenty of good Americans to vote for in this election without voting for Fascist Nye. Our boys fighting for our freedom in the Pacific, in Europe and in Africa will be mighty disappointed if we do not clean our Fascist element from our government. Lets do our part and give our boys a free America to come back to.¹⁶

National observers believed that Nye, as an isolationist, would be defeated in the fall election. Less reputable critics degraded the name of Nye to mean anything from being a Nazi spy to a Fascist leader, and were quickly predicting the outcome of the June primary.

Time, in an article on June 19, 1944, discussed the approaching primary election in North Dakota. This national publication said that Congress' foremost isolationist, Gerald P. Nye, was to face the hardest primary fight of his career on June 27.¹⁷ The article contended that

¹⁴"Portrait," Time, August 23, 1943, p. 97.

¹⁵The Leader, February 17, 1944.

¹⁶Ibid., February 24, 1944.

¹⁷"18-Year-Nye's Primary Fight," Time, June 19, 1944, p. 20.

the plans for Nye's defeat were "being instigated by Nye's bitter foe, Slippery William Langer. Langer, by defeating Nye, would inherit three possessions: 1) control of two seats in the United States Senate; 2) all of North Dakota's federal patronage; 3) overlordship of Bismarck's 19 story state capitol."¹⁸

The article, however, suggested that the dismal choice offered between Nye's isolationism and Langer's shady political machine might result in many more votes for the third candidate, Lynn U. Stambaugh. Time concluded that Washington observers still believed in the Nye talent for self preservation.¹⁹

Nation, in an article entitled "Nye a Lost Leader," on June 24, 1944, predicted the defeat of Nye.²⁰ This article maintained that the Nonpartisan League, which had first sponsored Gerald P. Nye, was now against him. The League had grown more conservative and many of the younger members had turned from it to the Farmer's Union and the Co-operative Movement.²¹ Moreover, the article stated that all these groups "are now united in their opposition to Nye and in their support of Usher L. Burdick, one of the state's two representatives."²² Cole also maintained that Nye's crusade in support of the Hatch amendment to include farm labor costs in determining parity prices greatly angered

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰"Nye a Lost Leader," Nation, June 24, 1944, pp. 830-831.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., p. 831.

the Farmers Union in North Dakota.²³

An assessment of Nye on the national scene indicated that isolationism was the sole issue for the 1944 senatorial campaign. Yet, national writers, often superficial in their analysis of politics on the local level, were not aware of the situation in North Dakota. Isolationism was mentioned in the 1944 senatorial campaign in North Dakota, but hardly as an issue. The national observers who attempted to project the 1944 election committed a common fault by placing too much emphasis on a singular historical phenomenon, isolationism.

In 1938 as in 1944 the Nonpartisan League failed to endorse Senator Nye as its candidate for the Senate. Instead, they chose Usher L. Burdick for their standard bearer. Thus Nye was forced to run again in the Independent Republican column. Nye and Burdick were joined by a third aspirant, Lynn Stambaugh, former National Commander of the American Legion. While the Republicans were faced with three men for whom they could vote, the only democratic candidate was three-time North Dakota Governor, John Moses.

Usher L. Burdick, a graduate of Mayville State Normal School in 1900, was a native of North Dakota and a veteran political figure. After graduating from the University of Minnesota in law, Burdick settled in Munich, North Dakota. There he was elected to the state legislature, and in 1908 he became the Speaker of the House at the age of 29.

In 1934 Burdick was elected to the United States House of Representatives, a position he held until he decided to run against Nye for the Senate in 1944. Burdick added strength to his candidacy by having

²³Cole, p. 203.

the support of William Langer. Time characterized Burdick as a pre-Pearl Harbor isolationist who had changed his mind. Time added that Burdick was "a colorless radio speaker, lacking the verve and rabble-rousing fire of either opponent Nye or Boss Langer."²⁴ The article suggested that Burdick's real strength rested with small groups of farmers "when he rips off his coat and speaks in unvarnished and unrehearsed language."²⁵

Lynn Stambaugh's political background presented a direct contrast to Burdick's long tenure in political office. Stambaugh graduated in law from the University of North Dakota in 1913 and practiced in Hazen, North Dakota, until the First World War. He served for 22 months and was then commissioned a second lieutenant. Upon his return to North Dakota he moved his law practice to Fargo where he became president of the Fargo Chamber of Commerce in 1939. A succession of American Legion offices culminated in his election as National Commander in 1941--a post he held for one year.²⁶

Stemming from his role as Commander of the American Legion Stambaugh had a good record in international matters. But in domestic policies, he was considered reactionary because he was anti-labor. Stambaugh also had extensive financial support from the businessmen of Fargo, Grand Forks, and North Dakota as a whole. Since he was a conservative, more than likely he would steal votes from Nye rather than from Burdick.²⁷

The Democratic candidate, Governor John Moses, a native of Norway, had a long tenure of political service to his state. A 1914 graduate of

²⁴"18 Year-Nye Primary Fight," Time, June 19, 1944, p. 20.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Mandan Daily Pioneer, March 10, 1944.

²⁷Schweitzer, pp. 134-135.

the University of North Dakota, Moses later graduated from the same school in law. He practiced his profession at Hope and Hebron until he permanently settled at Hazen in 1917. Moses served for ten years as states attorney for Mercer County and then became Deputy Grand Master of Masons in North Dakota. His first attempt at politics on the state level came in 1934 when he was the unsuccessful Democratic candidate for Attorney General. In 1938, Moses became the first Democratic governor since John Burke was elected in 1908. Moses was the second youngest governor in the history of the state.

Moses made public his decision not to seek a fourth term as governor in the Governor's message to the Legislative Assembly in 1943. According to Adam Schweitzer, Moses intended to retire after his third term as governor and in 1946 challenge Langer for his Senatorial seat.²⁸ During the latter part of 1943 and early 1944, however, Moses and officials in the Democratic party discussed plans which would eventually lead to Moses' entrance into the 1944 senatorial race.

Early in 1944 Moses proposed a plan to David Kelly, who had served as a liaison for the National Democratic Party. On January 15, 1944, Moses wrote Kelly saying:

Nye is in worse shape than I thought he was. I am afraid if Burdick gets the nomination he will beat him in a two way race, and I am also afraid that if a real Republican like Morris, gets a chance to run against Nye in a two way race, Nye would lose to him in the primary. In a three way race Nye's chances would be better but so would Burdicks, if Burdick is the League candidate.²⁹

²⁸ Ibid., p. 136.

²⁹ John Moses to Mr. D. G. Kelly, January 15, 1944, John Moses Papers, Orin G. Libby Collection, University of North Dakota Library, Grand Forks, North Dakota. Hereafter cited as Moses Papers.

The remainder of the letter is clothed in political double talk. Moses wrote "in no way am I a candidate and I certainly am not seeking the office."³⁰ In the next paragraph however, Moses wrote "if I am going to be a candidate the financial end of it will have to very definitely be laid on the line before I do a blessed thing."³¹ He believed a "campaign against Nye is going to be a damn tough, disagreeable and dirty campaign."³² But Moses concluded that he believed victory could be accomplished, adding that "this year is the best chance the Democratic Party has ever had to elect a United States Senator in North Dakota."³³

On the same day Governor Moses wrote to one of his political friends saying "the matter of my personal candidacy is one that at least should not go further than the discussion stage at this time. I want to be very sure before I consider anything that the people of North Dakota want me."³⁴ On March 10, 1944 Moses again wrote Kelly that "there will be no announcement from me one way or the other until after both political conventions, and probably the legislative session is over."³⁵ Moses told Kelly "we are not going to be able to reach people as I was able to reach them in 1934, in 1936, and to a large extent in 1938. The days of the big rallies are gone."³⁶

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., p. 2.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., p. 3.

³⁴John Moses to Mrs. G. E. Harriman, January 15, 1944. Moses Papers.

³⁵John Moses to Mr. D. G. Kelly, March 10, 1944. Moses Papers.

³⁶Ibid.

Moses then instructed Kelly to obtain three items for the campaign: plenty of radio publicity, money for organization work, and money for a printed publicity campaign.³⁷ Following these requests came Moses' essential issue for the campaign:

And here, I would take the Nye record; I wouldn't want a book. I wouldn't want a pamphlet, I would want a leaflet, not more than six or eight pages, enough so that it looks like something written in such a way that it is readable, would catch the attention of the reader immediately, long enough so that he will get something out of it, short enough so that he read it all.

Nye's record--or lack of record--that is the thing we'll have to go to town on and that is the thing that should be stressed and that is the thing that should be publicized, through a constant system of mailing, running over the entire length of the campaign. So much each week and no more.³⁸

Moses calculated that he would need \$35,000.00 to \$50,000.00 of outside contributions for his campaign.³⁹

In the same letter Moses stated that his demands would have to be completed before he entered into the race.

1. Get the Governor to be a candidate, that is Washington's job, and I think you know what the future implications of that request would be. I don't want the situation to develop in such a way that the candidate is going to be just another candidate after the election.
2. Get the money on the line.
3. Get definite assurance that Nye's record, in the Senate and on the platform and otherwise will be made completely available, and, better yet, get us assurance of an able pen to handle the Nye record from time to time.⁴⁰

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

Moses said that if the foregoing arrangements were satisfactorily made he would want the Nye record completed immediately.⁴¹ Moses told Kelly, "I want the whole damn, black record of his and I want it documented and I want it interlarded and I want it spiced and I want its face lifted."⁴² Moses' campaign strategy was not to release anything "until these fellows get through cutting each other's throats in the primary. But then we must be ready to shoot."⁴³ Moses also made it quite clear that he had no personal desires to go to Washington when he stated, "I hate and detest the damn place of Washington. I don't like it and I don't care who knows it."⁴⁴

These silent arrangements between Moses and the National Democratic Party were drawn up before the June primary. The innovator and the man who decided the arrangements was Moses, not Kelly or other members of the Democratic party. Moses knew the political situation in North Dakota better than outsiders and he should be given credit for running the campaign. Once Moses realized the outcome of the 1944 primary he launched his campaign. The strong demands made by Moses, the candid analysis of the political situation, and the firm belief that the election could be won resulted in a very strong Democratic campaign.

The political ideas of Burdick differed little from those of Nye in regard to isolationism. Burdick shared the same conviction as Nye in regard to the causes of World War I and the neutrality legis-

⁴¹Ibid., p. 3.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁴Ibid.

lation which followed.⁴⁵ Therefore, the issue of isolationism as a topic of debate between these two individuals was unlikely.

Burdick decided not to introduce isolationism as an issue because it lacked appeal. Also Burdick's supporters did not stress isolationism because Burdick, himself, fit the isolationist mold almost as well as Nye. The fact that Burdick did not develop isolationism as an issue did not withdraw the issue from the primary election. Representing Stambaugh, Representative Arthur C. Johnson of Cass County said, "the incumbent voted against every measure to make America ready for the war we are in, each vote an insult to North Dakota mothers and fathers with sons about to enter the service, each vote a stab in the back to the sons themselves."⁴⁶

M. M. Oppegaard, editor of the Grand Forks Herald, wrote a letter to the editor of the Leader. In this letter Oppegaard stated that until Pearl Harbor the majority of the people in North Dakota agreed with Nye's stand on isolationism. But Oppegaard also contended "that when Nye knew war was inevitable he should have turned statesman long enough to support every effort related to the war that might have been then or later proven of value to the United States."⁴⁷ Oppegaard insinuated that Nye would remain an isolationist after the war. Mr. Oppegaard felt with the majority of North Dakotans that any form of international cooperation would be less dangerous than a recurrence of

⁴⁵ Earl J. Brekke, "Usher L. Burdick and Midwest Isolationism: A Study in Foreign Policy" (unpublished Master's thesis, Grand Forks, North Dakota: Department of History, University of North Dakota, 1964.

⁴⁶ Dickinson Press, June 22, 1944.

⁴⁷ The Leader, February 17, 1944.

isolationism. Cooperation would be less dangerous because it would not invite aggression.⁴⁸

The Dickinson Press, however, did not agree with M. M. Oppegaard's statements and strongly defended Nye's foreign policy. The Press implied that Nye's guilt stemmed from trying to keep his country out of war by trying to retain neutrality laws.⁴⁹ In an interview, Nye gave his most liberal views in regard to foreign policy. These views were given to thwart the campaign charges that he would be a liability in a post-war legislative body.

1. I am for maintaining our army and navy, in such strength that it will be equal to any combination of our forces that might be moved against us and for maintaining the strength just as long as there remains military strength at the call of other nations.
2. I am for international cooperation in checking aggressors and for preventing wars providing that cooperation does not jeopardize our own sovereignty.
3. I am registered by vote in favor of the Connally Resolution which has been adopted by the Senate.
4. I very much like and am in favor of the resolution adopted at Mackinac Island by the Republican Post War Advisory Council on September 7, 1943.⁵⁰

In the June primary, then, the isolationist issue barely received notice. The Fargo Forum said "isolationism seemingly is not cutting as much of a figure in the campaign as one might have supposed."⁵¹ This

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Dickinson Press, June 7, 1944.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Fargo Forum, June 11, 1944.

paper also maintained that the only mention of isolationism came from Lynn Stambaugh. His attack on this issue was directed, in part, towards both Burdick and Nye.⁵²

According to John Paulson's article in the Fargo Forum, Burdick's supporters made other appeals in the campaign. They attacked Nye for three reasons; he voted for the pay-as-you-go income tax plan; he voted for the recent federal income tax increase; and, he voted to eliminate the \$25,000 ceiling that President Roosevelt proposed on salaries.⁵³

The campaign's real issue centered around personal attacks on Burdick, Stambaugh, and Nye. Moses' name barely received mention in these debasing attacks. The issue of Langerism was forcibly stressed by the Nye advocates as was the Senatorial seniority of Nye.

The Leader reported on June 8, 1944 that a huge slush fund has been raised on Nye's behalf. The report maintained that "thousands of dollars are being raised by big business in the campaign to renominate Gerald P. Nye to the United States Senate."⁵⁴

In March 1944, Nye said that Eastern interests were trying to have him defeated so that G.O.P. Senator Styles Bridges of New Hampshire could become chairman of the Appropriations Committee if the Republicans gained control of the Senate.⁵⁵ Supporters of Nye argued that the smear campaign directed against Nye carried little truth. They asked whether

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid. Also Williston Daily Herald, June 22, 1944.

⁵⁴The Leader, March 23, 1944.

⁵⁵Ibid., June 8, 1944.

Senator Nye had become a scoundrel over night. Was he a traitor because he earnestly fought for what he thought was right?⁵⁶

Another local editor speaking about the charges leveled at Nye by the syndicated news columnist Drew Pearson remarked:

I don't pretend to know whether Pearson is a liar or not. Or whether you drew a knife on the Senate floor; I read Dick Tracy too and don't believe a word of it. I do believe that Pearson got a bum steer once in awhile even as you did (speaking of Nye) when you accused us of printing Pearson's column. So sorry.⁵⁷

The Mandan Pioneer stated Nye had been the victim of a deliberate smear campaign "or at least the intended victim is beyond question in the attack which has been made on him. There has been little or no record either for the truth or his political decency."⁵⁸

Regardless of the support given to Nye in order to alleviate the charges leveled at him, the slander campaign continued at a vociferous pace. The Leader, in an article on June 8, 1944, belittled Nye for not serving in the First World War because of an exemption based on his position as Notary Public and on his position as head of an industrial enterprise.⁵⁹ The truth was that Nye was really deferred because he was the sole supporter of his family. This point was not brought out until the close of the article.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ashley Tribune, June 16, 1944. This paper combined with the Wishek News during the war.

⁵⁷ Pierce County Tribune, June 22, 1944.

⁵⁸ Mandan Daily Pioneer, June 23, 1944.

⁵⁹ The Leader, June 8, 1944.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

A circular letter was also passed out to all school teachers in the state of North Dakota. The circular urged the defeat of Senator Nye. It reported that Nye had voted against House Resolution 1676 which provided Federal Aid to schools. The article concluded:

See your relatives and friends. The election may be close. By your efforts, help eliminate a Senator who voted to eliminate us. Get in and pitch. If you won't be home at election time, send for an absent voters ballot, but vote to repudiate our enemy. Yours for decent pay for teachers.⁶¹

Perhaps of the most defaming remarks made in the 1944 campaign were by P. W. Lanier Jr. In a letter entitled "A letter from a North Dakota Marine in the South Pacific," he stated:

As I wrote, Dad, I feel that anyone who would support Nye for the sake of political purposes or organization is the same man who would desert a buddy to the Japs in these jungles to save his own miserable life. I cannot help but consider that every man who casts a vote for Nye is being callously traitorous to men I have seen die, and I may add--die willingly.⁶²

The Nye forces continued to raise the issue of Langerism. Senator Nye's backers considered Langerism the primary issue of the campaign. Showing its regular disdain for Bill Langer the Minot Daily News wrote, "a statement that Mr. Langer is in the state for other than political reasons is not accepted. Mr. Langer is more interested in the 1944 June primary than in any election in years."⁶³

Because of the Langerism issue the Mandan Daily Pioneer decided

⁶¹A letter found in the Langer Papers, n.d., Orin G. Libby Collection, University of North Dakota Library, Grand Forks, North Dakota. Hereafter cited as Langer Papers.

⁶²Taken from the campaign paper entitled "North Dakota Citizen's News," May 13, 1944, Langer Papers.

⁶³Minot Daily News, June 14, 1944.

to support Nye. Their reason for supporting Nye was that he was his own man, whereas a vote for Burdick, was a vote for Langer. The article concluded "everyone knows that Langer is running the Nonpartisan League and Burdick is a subservant to him."⁶⁴

The Minot paper continued to voice the opinion that Langerism was the key issue in the election. The paper said Senator Nye would be very proud of all the opposition and that "when William Langer takes off his coat and opposes a candidate with all of his manly vigor"⁶⁵ it's worth a very close check.

Senator Nye, himself, injected the issue of Langerism into the election on several occasions. He told the people of Napoleon, North Dakota on June 21, that Senator Langer and another man in Washington had offered \$10,000 to a North Dakota veteran of the last war if this particular veteran would consent to become a candidate in a three-way fight.⁶⁶ Nye reiterated this same charge to a group in Hillsboro when he accused the junior senator "of trying to manipulate the election so that there would be three candidates running on the Republican ticket, thus, splitting the vote and allowing Langer's choice to win."⁶⁷

The reliability of Nye's charge against Langer lost some of its validity when it is considered that Langer was publicly supporting Burdick. The animosity between Langer and Nye certainly did not completely discount the possibility that Langer was injecting a third candidate.

⁶⁴Mandan Daily Pioneer, June 23, 1944.

⁶⁵Minot Daily News, June 21, 1944.

⁶⁶Napoleon Homestead, June 23, 1944.

⁶⁷Hillsboro Banner, June 23, 1944.

Perhaps Langer, by supporting one candidate publicly and another privately, thought two opponents had a better chance of defeating Nye than one opponent. Langer's main interest in the election was the defeat of Senator Nye, regardless of the method.

Senator Nye's leading campaign issue centered on the subject of seniority. In this particular issue Nye received the support of his colleagues in the Senate as well as people living within the state. One paper reported that if Senator Nye was re-elected and the Republican national ticket won he would then be able to hand out some "juice plums."⁶⁸

Endorsement for Senator Nye came from Senator Harland J. Bushfield, South Dakota; Senator Shipstead of Minnesota; Senator Overton, Louisiana; Senator Burton Wheeler of Montana; Senator Hugo Butler, Nebraska; Senator Robert A. Taft, Ohio; and Senator Arthur Vandenberg, Michigan. Vandenberg's message was perhaps the best written:⁶⁹

Senator Nye is senior to all but ten men in the Senate. Need I repeat that he has just turned fifty years of age. North Dakota has kept him at his post during this apprenticeship and then into years of mature service. I respectfully suggest that it wouldn't make sense for North Dakota to abandon this prestige and power at the very moment when it approaches its zenith. Nye is the ranking Republican on the Public Lands Committee which means infinitely much to you. He is on the all important agricultural Committee and on the Great Foreign Relations Committee. Such assignments are only earned by years of service. There is no other way. You can find no replacement for Nye.⁷⁰

Robert W. Sauer, chairman of the National Reclamation Association, also spoke on the issue of seniority. Speaking about the Appropriations

⁶⁸Richland Farmers County Globe, April 7, 1944.

⁶⁹Dickinson Press, June 24, 1944.

⁷⁰Devils Lake Daily Journal, June 7, 1944.

Committee Sauer said "if Senator Nye is not returned to the Senate, the position of chairman would go to an Easterner and there would be much less chance that our Western interest would be recognized."⁷¹

Some North Dakota newspapers stressed the importance of seniority. Many felt that the voters should vote for him because of his seniority. One editor stated that "Senator Nye ought to be re-elected if for no other reason than that his re-election would give North Dakota the chairmanship of the most powerful congressional committee there is--the Senate Committee on Appropriations."⁷² Another, in discussing Nye's long tenure in the Senate, asked "are we going to bench the best hitter on our baseball team just because he knocks a foul ball?"⁷³ The Minot Daily News wrote on June 24, 1944:

North Dakota is getting ready for the first time in the history of the state to call upon the federal government for a considerable amount of money for the great river development project. And at the same time there are groups of North Dakotans who have the single ambition at the primary election to defeat Senator Nye. The same senator who happens to be their anchor ranking Republican member of the Senate Appropriations Committee. It just doesn't make sense!⁷⁴

Thus, personal defamations, Langerism, and seniority were the only real issues of the campaign. Moreover, none of these really were strong, concrete, political issues. The whole June primary revolved around personalities rather than political issues.

Senator Nye received a total of 38,191 votes to 37,219 for Lynn

⁷¹Williston Daily Herald, June 18, 1944.

⁷²Dickinson Press, June 7, 1944.

⁷³Ashley Tribune, June 16, 1944.

⁷⁴Minot Daily News, June 24, 1944.

Stambaugh, and 35,687 for Usher L. Burdick in the June primary.⁷⁵ Nye received less than 34 per cent of the votes cast in the Republican primary and carried only 21 of the state's 53 counties. Stambaugh, only 972 votes behind Nye, carried the populous Red River Valley counties. According to Cole, Burdick placed third only because of the severe rain in the northwestern part of the state which was his stronghold.⁷⁶

The historian is forced to ask several questions concerning the result of the June Primary. First, did Burdick lose the primary because of the severe rain? Second, what accounted for Stambaugh's surprising show of strength? And third, what was Nye's reaction to his relative lack of strength?

The Leader describes the primary in these words: "lack of boats not votes beats the League ticket."⁷⁷ According to this article the whole western third of the state received from 3.5 to 5.5 inches of rain in a thirty-six hour period before and during election day. This rain "made country roads virtually impassable and kept thousands of League farmers and their families from going to the polls."⁷⁸ A McKenzie County paper said a quiet primary was held due to the heavy rains.⁷⁹ Another county reported rains, lack of interest, and shortage of help accounted for about five hundred less votes cast in the 1944 primary than in 1942 primary.⁸⁰ Further examples included: Bottineau county

⁷⁶Cole, p. 215.

⁷⁷The Leader, July 6, 1944.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹McKenzie County Farmer, July 6, 1944.

⁸⁰Bowman County Pioneer, June 29, 1944.

cast 1,745 fewer votes than in 1940 primary, McHenry county cast 1,815 fewer votes than in 1940, and Burke County recorded 1,076 fewer votes than in 1940.⁸¹ Divide County where the rain was heaviest reported the smallest vote in the history of the state with the exception of the Presidential primary of 1916 when a snow storm prevented many precincts from opening.⁸² Rain was a contributing factor to the defeat of Burdick. ⁸³ As early as May 21, 1944, the Fargo Forum hinted at the answer for Stambaugh's surprising strength. It stated "that a lot of Democrats are going into the Republican primary for the particular purpose of voting against Senator Nye."⁸³ Governor Moses concurred in this analysis, declaring "our Democrats simply can't resist the fight that is going on over in the Republican picture, and this year they jumped the fence in droves, some voting for Burdick as the candidate most likely to defeat Mr. Nye, and the majority voting for Stambaugh as I understand it."⁸⁴ Moses believed that Stambaugh waged an excellent campaign.⁸⁵ Moses firmly believed that the large number of Independents and Republicans who voted for Stambaugh in the primary would throw their support to him in the fall election.⁸⁶ Stambaugh's surprising strength in the primary

⁸¹ The Leader, July 6, 1944.

⁸² Divide County Journal, June 30, 1944.

⁸³ Fargo Forum, May 21, 1944. E. Folk, August 10, 1944, Moses Papers.

⁸⁴ John Moses to Senator Joseph C. O'Mahoney, July 1, 1944, Moses Papers.

⁸⁵ Ibid. John Moses to Mr. Robert M. Smoot, July 11, 1944, Moses Papers.

⁸⁶ Ibid. John Moses to Senator Joseph C. O'Mahoney, August 22, 1944. Moses Papers.

worried Moses. First, Moses feared his entry into the fall election as an Independent "would muddy water to the extent that he would take more votes from me than he would from Nye."⁸⁷ Yet, Moses was quite positive that Stambaugh would need 85,000 votes to win in the fall election and said quite emphatically that "it just can't be done."⁸⁸ At the same time Moses thought that Nye might lose some of his primary votes to Stambaugh if Stambaugh ran in the fall election. Moses rationalized that Nye would increase his vote in the fall in the German-Russian counties if Burdick were not in the race.⁸⁹

Moses continually worried about the possibilities of this three-way race in November. He contended that in a two-way race with Nye he would be able to draw large segments of the Nonpartisan League because of its strong disdain for Nye. But with the possibilities of Stambaugh's entrance into the race, Moses believed many of these votes would not go to Stambaugh. Moses said that Stambaugh "will draw more from me than he will from Nye, and his entry into the campaign serves to strengthen Nye's chances rather than mine, but Stambaugh himself cannot win."⁹⁰

Immediately after the primary, John Moses voiced concern over the future plans of Lynn Stambaugh:

I was in Fargo yesterday; the town is swirling with rumors and reports as to what Stambaugh is going to do. Some of his more rabid supporters are talking of Stambaugh

⁸⁷John Moses to Mr. Henry E. Polk, August 10, 1944, Moses Papers.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰John Moses to Senator Joseph C. O'Mahoney, August 22, 1944. Moses Papers.

as an independent candidate. It is reported that Senator Langer went to Fargo last night in an effort to sell the idea to Stambaugh, promising his support. Langer is very anxious to defeat Nye. Langer's support for Stambaugh, however, if it is open, is going to do him a great deal more harm than good. . . I am confident about the outcome, provided I will be in the position to conduct the sort of campaign that will reach the voters. We can't reach them by public meetings, any distances are too great to conduct a town-to-town campaign.⁹¹

Nye's rather narrow victory in the primary should have greatly concerned him and it probably did. Nye was quoted in Chicago as saying that "as for my own successes in the face of the serious combination brought against me I can but speak my thanks to those friends who stood by so loyally as they did and thank North Dakota for their favor."⁹² Nye was further questioned on what he meant by serious combinations organized against him. He mentioned the Langer machine, the New Deal, the C.I.O., the Communists, and the American Legion whose sympathies were with their former National Commander, Lynn Stambaugh.⁹³

There is no doubt that Stambaugh hurt Nye in the primary. In 1938 Nye won 9 of the 10 populous counties in the state, six of which were in the Eastern part of the state. He also won the Fargo vote by a 2-1 majority over Langer. Cass and Grand Forks counties gave him an edge of 6,010 votes.⁹⁴ In the 1944 primary, however, Nye lost Cass County by 2,611 votes and Grand Forks County by 2,170 votes to Stambaugh. For Nye, this was a complete turnabout from the 1938 general

⁹¹ John Moses to Senator C. O'Mahoney, July 1, 1944, Moses Papers.

⁹² Bismarck Tribune, June 30, 1944.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Fuller, p. 95.

election of a little over 10,000 votes. One must remember that in 1938 Nye's opponent was Langer who did not have the vote of the Eastern part of the state. Burdick received 2,443 votes from Cass County and 1,047 votes from Grand Forks County which, at least in part, might have gone to Nye in a two-way race.⁹⁵

Nye's victory in the primary, however, was anything but encouraging for victory in the fall. Speaking of Nye, Time magazine put it this way:

He still has a fight ahead. Next November he faces the state's popular third time Governor: tall, stooped John Moses. And some 60,000 Republicans, roughly two-thirds of all the states G.O.P. primary voters have testified at the polls last week that they are anti-Nye.⁹⁶

Besides, the termination of the primary campaign inaugurated the secret, well-planned campaign of Moses and the Democratic party. The possibility that Stambaugh might run in the general election would complicate both Nye's and Moses' chances for success. The 1944 general election indicated a very interesting race with the candidates being: an incumbent senator with a definite lack of strength; a popular Democratic governor attempting to become the first Democratic senator elected from North Dakota; and a possible novice political figure running on a puzzling amount of strength. Nye, on September 12, 1944, reiterated the charges made in the primary that Bill Langer had made an offer to have a Mr. DeWitt run against Nye in a three-way race in the primary election. Nye told the story to his Senate colleagues and insinuated that this same offer had now been made to Lynn Stambaugh for the general election. Nye suggested that Langer would support Stambaugh as an Independent in the fall

⁹⁵ Election Returns, 1944 Election.

⁹⁶ "Trouble for Gerald" Time, October 16, 1944.

election.⁹⁷

Senator Langer immediately replied to the charges made by Senator Nye saying in part:

I want to take this opportunity now to say that I resent the implication that is cast upon the candidacy of Lynn Stambaugh, who is a candidate at the present time for the office of United States Senator on the Independent ticket. May I say, Mr. President, that I did not support Mr. Stambaugh in the primary. I supported Usher L. Burdick, one of the two Representatives in Congress from my state.⁹⁸

Langer, however, did not clearly state that he was not supporting Lynn Stambaugh. Schweitzer, however, mentioned that "Langer labored mightily to induce Stambaugh to enter the general election by holding out to him and his followers large and glittering promises of the support of the Nonpartisan League."⁹⁹

The fears of both Nye and Moses were substantiated on September 12, 1944 when Stambaugh announced his intention to run for election to the United States Senate in the fall election.¹⁰⁰ Stambaugh gave his reasons for entering the race "as a result of meeting citizens from every part of the state who insisted that he become a candidate."¹⁰¹ Stambaugh said he was encouraged to run because "many persons who did not vote for me in the primaries, because they thought I could not win, have decided to give me their support this fall."¹⁰² At the same time Stambaugh challenged

⁹⁷U. S. Congressional Record, 78th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1944, XC, Part 6, 7669.

⁹⁸Ibid., 7675-7676.

⁹⁹Schweitzer, p. 143.

¹⁰⁰Radio Talk over KDLR Devils Lake, North Dakota, September 12, 1944, Langer Papers.

¹⁰¹Kulm Messenger, September 21, 1944.

¹⁰²Barnes County News, September 21, 1944.

Nye's accusation that Langer was behind his candidacy and called for a debate on the following 2 questions:

1. Assuming that the DeWitt incident actually occurred in the manner described by the testimony given the Senate Committee is there any connection between that incident and Lynn Stambaugh?
2. Is such a connection disclosed either by the testimony given the committee or by any other factors whatsoever.¹⁰³

The reaction of the state press to the episode largely condemned Nye's charge. The Richland County Farmers Globe suggested that perhaps Nye was in a panic because of reports of the voting trend for the coming election.¹⁰⁴ The paper's main objection was that it showed bad taste.

True or false, taking the matter to the floor of the Senate at this time, appears to be extremely bad taste and very few right thinking people will let it influence their opinion of the man the story is circulated to injure, Lynn Stambaugh.¹⁰⁵

The Bismarck Capitol remarked that the state press did not react enthusiastically at all to the Nye accusations made on the floor of the United States Senate and commented:

Senator Nye hitting out at Stambaugh over Senator Langer's shoulder tries to make it appear that Langer offered one hundred and ten thousand dollars to a man to be a candidate in the June Primary. I very much regret the Senator, whose political skirts are none too clean and who lives in one of the most pretentious estates in Washington, should launch this particular kind of campaign.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ KDLD, Radio Speech, September 12, 1944, Langer Papers; Also Mandan Daily Pioneer, September 26, 1944.

¹⁰⁴ Richland County Farmers Globe, September 19, 1944; also Killdeer Herald, September 28, 1944.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Bismarck Capitol, September 19, 1944.

Nye's supporters, however, gave a different twist to the incident. Nye's hometown paper, the Griggs County Sentinel Courier commented that "Attempt is now being made between leaders of the Langer and Stambaugh forces to fuse their voting strength behind the candidacy of Lynn Stambaugh for the United States Senate."¹⁰⁷

The Minot Daily News was much more vehement about the incident when it editorialized:

Mr. Stambaugh has been pictured by his Fargo supporters as a man of high ideals, a man who would not compromise a principle. But his choice of nestling in bed with the Langer-Vogel machine in the hope of gathering a few votes by one of the rankest political figures in the history of North Dakota serves to complicate the situation.¹⁰⁸

This particular accusation by Nye and its insinuations placed the topic of Langerism strongly in the campaign as an important issue for Nye. Langer actively took part in the fall campaign and received severe criticisms for it from Nye's supporters.

His talks are directed against the record of Senator Nye, but the mystery in the matter is, who is Langer campaigning for? One thing is for certain: a much larger percentage of the state's voting population is made aware year after year of Langer's inconsistency and double dealing and his campaign activity carries less and less weight as the years pass by.¹⁰⁹

The Minot Daily News supported Nye in the general election as it did in the primary. It did this by repeating the same old slogan, "Whether we like it or not it is a fact that seniority means everything in Washington."¹¹⁰ Lemke supported Nye on the issue of seniority by

¹⁰⁷ Griggs County Sentinel Courier, October 26, 1944.

¹⁰⁸ Minot Daily News, November 2, 1944.

¹⁰⁹ Griggs County Sentinel Courier, October 17, 1944.

¹¹⁰ Minot Daily News, November 6, 1944.

declaring "I want to urge with all my power that people of North Dakota do not make the mistake of rejecting the senior senator for it would take years and years to build anyone else up to the position of seniority and power now enjoyed by Nye."¹¹¹ Lemke also lauded Nye's record in Congress, commenting Nye "has been a hundred percent on matters affecting farm legislation."¹¹²

Moses launched his campaign intending to convey to the people of North Dakota that he had been a good governor. In a memorandum on a proposed address Moses wrote what he wanted to convey to the people of North Dakota. In this paper Moses mentioned several items reflecting the good points in his years as governor. Moses pointed out that he had restored the poor financial condition of the state to a sound financial basis. He reported that the re-organization of the State Mill and Elevator had been accomplished by replacing Langer's man, Tudor Owen, with a man of business experience. After Moses had fired two of the members of the Board of Administration the Board functioned smoothly and efficiently. He restored the State Insane Asylum as well as the higher educational institutions to a firm financial status. In addition to these accomplishments, Moses pointed out that he had reinstated the members of the Agricultural College and revamped both the Highway department and the Game and Fish Department.¹¹³

In essence, Moses told North Dakotans that he had been a good governor and that he would make a good Senator.¹¹⁴ Moses wrote, "the

¹¹¹Griggs County Sentinel Courier, October 12, 1944.

¹¹²Ibid.

¹¹³Memorandum on proposed address, September 5, 1944, Moses Papers.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

people know John Moses as Governor. He will be the same John Moses as Senator."¹¹⁵ He also said that he was: "all out for winning the war; all out for winning the peace, a fair and a just peace. Not an imperialistic peace . . . The folly of 1918, isolationism at home, appeasement abroad must cease."¹¹⁶

Moses' campaign pamphlet stated, that his greatest single achievement had been the restoration of the people's confidence in their state government by restoring honesty and integrity to state institutions, and eliminating scandals in North Dakota Government. Moses said he wanted to go to the Senate to help shape the course of peace for the years to come.¹¹⁷

The pamphlet next discussed the senatorial career of Nye. Moses stated first of all "I pledge myself if elected senator, not to become a professional speaker."¹¹⁸ In the article Nye was not charged with being unpatriotic or fascist, but he was accused of indirectly aiding their movements. The article answered the seniority question by asking, "What has Mr. Nye done for North Dakota in the last 18 years to justify our people showing these high hopes now?"¹¹⁹ The article claimed Nye was behind the times by making a speech against war after thousands of our men had died at Pearl Harbor.¹²⁰ The article concluded its attack on

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷Campaign Pamphlet, Moses Papers.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Ibid.

Nye by saying:

As the young man from the prairies invaded the salons of the rich by reason of his position and greatly increased income due to his lucrative speaking engagements, he lost control of the people of North Dakota. He became interested in them only at election time.¹²¹

Moses' platform supported an organization for world peace, fair treatment of vanquished nations, reduction of federal taxes, better labor relations, continuation of A.A.A., Soil Conservation, and development of North Dakota resources.¹²² In short, Moses said he would be an "on the job" senator. Moses said very little about Stambaugh, merely passing him off as a nice man who was hardly qualified for the job.¹²³

Moses, in preparation for a rather strenuous fall campaign, went to Rochester for a routine physical check-up. The examination revealed the necessity for an immediate operation and prolonged x-ray treatments. The operation, which took place on September 12, 1944, removed Moses from the remainder of the fall campaign.¹²⁴ The campaign fight continued between Nye and Stambaugh. Moses remarked "I hope Mr. Nye and Mr. Stambaugh will continue their rather disgusting scrap about non-essentials."¹²⁵

Nye's supporters commented about Moses' illness and started a whispering campaign saying "I understand that you are a friend of the Governor and his supporters, but it is well known that the Governor will

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid.

¹²⁴Schweitzer, p. 146.

¹²⁵John Moses to Dr. Claude D. Handerson, October 14, 1944, Moses Papers.

never live to take his seat in Washington even if he is elected."¹²⁶

Moses wrote "as to my physical condition, of course, I am weak, as anyone would be who has just undergone a major operation."¹²⁷ He also commented at length a few days before election day on rumors of his condition.

The doctors tell me that I am completely cured. I feel good, eat well, and sleep well. My strength is not quite up to par but I'm getting that back steadily and while I suppose it will disappoint Mr. Nye and his friends, I guess I'll keep on living for a few more years yet. Those slimy cattle have spread the reports of my death and funeral within six days, all over North Dakota.¹²⁸

Summing up, one newspaper commented: "Cry baby Nye and Stambaugh staged a regular dog and cat fight, . . . While Governor John Moses merely gave a couple of radio talks and kept his campaign on the high level in keeping with the office he sought."¹²⁹

As during the primary, the key issues for discussion for the general election were personalities. The fall campaign centered on personal attacks tossed back and forth between Nye and Stambaugh. Moses, recuperating in a Rochester hospital, merely rested on his record as a good governor.

The Mandan Daily Pioneer predicted a close election, commenting that the race for the Senate "will be the closest, the most interesting, and the most unpredictable."¹³⁰ Although the race was interesting, it

¹²⁷ John Moses to Mr. Harold P. Monson, October 18, 1944. Moses Papers.

¹²⁸ John Moses to Mr. D. B. O'Connor, November 2, 1944, Moses Papers.

¹²⁹ Columbus Reporter, November 16, 1944.

¹³⁰ Mandan Daily Pioneer, November 1, 1944.

was hardly close. Moses received a total of 95,102 votes. The three time Senator, Gerald Nye, received 69,530 votes. Stambaugh, the Independent, received 44,596 votes.¹³¹

This analysis of the voting in the twelve largest cities illustrates the urban vote in the ballots cast:

	Moses	Nye	Stambaugh
Bismarck	2,666	2,110	959
Devils Lake	900	432	663
Dickinson	860	687	341
Fargo	6,156	3,147	4,385
Grafton	727	345	251
Grand Forks	4,331	1,616	1,797
Jamestown	1,640	872	640
Mandan	1,144	618	493
Minot	3,110	2,051	1,015
Valley City	921	922	576
Wahepton	717	423	478
Williston	1,361	554	247
	24,533	13,877	11,945 ¹³²

The cities, which had re-elected Nye in 1938, now gave a little over half of their votes to Moses while splitting the other half between Nye and Stambaugh. Stambaugh definitely hurt Nye in the Eastern cities. If one adds the total number of votes received by Nye and Stambaugh and subtracts them from the number of votes secured by Moses,

¹³¹Election Returns, 1944 General Election.

¹³²The Leader, November 23, 1944.

Nye could possibly have won the election. Furthermore, the well organized campaign of Moses lessened any chance Nye had for re-election. There is no doubt that Stambaugh's presence in the election accounts for the landslide victory achieved by Moses, but it does not account for Nye's defeat.

On November 8, 1944 Nye conceded to Moses saying:

The state has been good to me in giving me much honor for nineteen years. I have been made, however, to know the face of high organized propaganda of late. What was once the popular effort on my part to keep our country out of war since the war started has been made to appear something more than a mistake.¹³³

Nye later told his Senate colleagues in his farewell address:

Regrets, well, not more than any man is bound to feel who has been defeated in a political campaign in which the vital and true issues were not permitted, a campaign in which the people were not permitted a freedom of unprejudiced choice, a campaign in which the cards had been stacked that I was without a chance to win.¹³⁴

Schweitzer, commenting on the outcome of the election observed "that Moses was the beneficiary of the rift in the Republican ranks. It was generally agreed that he was elected on the basis of his record as governor."¹³⁵ The Bottineau Courant remarked "we should have said enough to realize that John Moses would have been elected Senator. You know Republicans have spent the last years telling us what a fine fellow Governor Moses is."¹³⁶

¹³³Mandan Daily Pioneer, November 8, 1944.

¹³⁴U. S. Congressional Record, 78th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1944, XC, Part 7, 9683.

¹³⁵Schweitzer, p. 147.

¹³⁶Bottineau Courant, November 15, 1944.

The Valley City Times Record in a reprint from an article written by Drew Pearson gave a rather erroneous view of North Dakota politics. Pearson maintained that since Stambaugh had been a former law partner of Moses (he was for a short time early in both of their careers) and that they were good friends, Stambaugh had made a sacrifice in taking votes away from Nye so that Moses would win.¹³⁷

The Columbus Reporter offered a more suitable explanation:

The returns indicate that the political maneuvering of both Nye and Stambaugh as Cry baby Nye charges that the Communists were out to get him, that the New Deal was financing the Stambaugh campaign, and Stambaugh's switch-over to the League only served as a further incentive to the voters to leave them both at home and vote for Governor Moses.¹³⁸

Perhaps, the best overall description of the entire 1944 senatorial election came from the McKenzie County Farmer.

Personalities and not issues held the stage. The daily press with possibly one exception has for years educated the reader to talk politicians not politics.

1. Did you ever shake hands with Bill Langer? Yes, well then, you must have been a crook.
2. Did you ever attend the R.O.C. convention? Yes, well then, you must be absolutely pure and honest and efficient.
3. Did you ever speak decently of Gerald P. Nye? Yes, well then, you are surely a Nazi.
4. Did you know Usher Burdick? Yes, well then, you must be a Communist.
5. Are you for Stambaugh? Yes, well then, you must have heard about the \$100,000.

And more along the same lines. Let's hope for North Dakota's sake that the next campaign will be different.¹³⁹

¹³⁷Valley City Times Record, November 20, 1944.

¹³⁸Columbus Reporter, November 19, 1944.

¹³⁹McKenzie County Farmer, November 9, 1944.



Governor Moses as he appeared in 1944.



Lynn Stambaugh as he appeared in 1944.

CHAPTER 5

Both the predictions Nye had maintained during the campaign about Moses and Stambaugh were soon realized after the fall election. Senator Moses took the oath of office on January 3, 1945. Fifteen days later he again became a patient at a Rochester hospital and death came on March 3, 1945. On December 13, 1945, Senator Robert Wagner of New York nominated Lynn U. Stambaugh for a membership on the Export-Import Board. The nomination was confirmed by the Senate and the position offered Stambaugh a high salary and an influential standing in the government for at least five years.¹

Senator Nye was only 52 years old when he was defeated. And after his election failure, he was offered many positions in business. Gerald L. K. Smith urged Nye to make an extensive and lucrative speaking engagement to attack the "Internationalists and the Jews."² Rumors also circulated that Nye might return to the editorship of a newspaper in North Dakota. One rumor hinted that Nye might purchase the Bismarck Tribune.³ These, however, never materialized.

The death of Moses, however, presented a new possibility to

¹U. S. Congressional Record, 79th Cong., 1st Sess., 1945, XCI, Part 9, 11958.

²Cole, pp. 218-219.

³Nye to Milton Young, November 14, 1944, Nye Papers. Cited in Cole, p. 219.

Nye. Governor Fred G. Aandahl would have to appoint a successor until a special election could be held. Although Nye had run with Aandahl on the Republican ticket, Aandahl appointed Milton R. Young to the Senate. Ironically, Young had been Nye's campaign manager in 1944. Reacting to this, Nye commented "this is a hell of a way to run an election campaign for the United States Senate. The candidate is licked and his campaign manager gets the job."⁴

If Nye were going to pursue a future in politics, two alternatives faced him. He could run for the senate against his old foe William Langer in the 1946 primary, or he could run in the special election for the unexpired portion of Moses' term to be held on June 25, 1946. Nye decided on the latter course of action.

Nye's chances for winning the special election looked rather dim. Langer controlled most of the N.P.L. wing of the Republican Party. In addition, in March of 1946 Young won endorsement from the Republican state convention controlled by the R.O.C.⁵ Thus Nye again entered a North Dakota Senate race as an Independent Republican candidate. The Democratic candidate was P. W. Lanier, Jr., the young war veteran who has strongly denounced Nye in the 1944 campaign.

Although Wayne Cole maintains that he campaigned aggressively and extensively, Nye did not receive much coverage from the North Dakota press. Only Nye's hometown newspaper showed any signs of optimism. On June 13, 1946 the Griggs County Sentinel Courier wrote "Nye maintains a

⁴Undated, unidentified newspaper clippings of article by John O'Connell, datelined Washington, D. C., March 8, Nye Papers. Cited in Cole, p. 220.

⁵Cole, p. 220.

big poll lead."⁶ In his personal letters Nye expressed extreme optimism on his chances for victory, according to Cole.⁷ The election results, however, indicated a resounding defeat for Nye.

North Dakotans gave Milton Young 75,998 votes; P. W. Lanier, the Fargo Democrat, received 37,507 votes; and Nye trailed with only 20,848 votes.⁸ Nye carried no counties; his political career in North Dakota had come to an end.

What were the reasons for Senator Nye's defeat?

The first reason for the defeat of Senator Nye is that he was not "bringing home the bacon" to the people of North Dakota. While other North Dakota representatives such as Lenke and Frazier were introducing legislation to better the farmers economic plight, Nye was preoccupied with Senate investigations. Many North Dakotans must have believed that Nye was no longer interested in their welfare.

Nye's involvement with the munitions investigation focused his primary interest on foreign issues. Nye clung to the idea that wars were economic in origin and beneficial only to the people who controlled the money. There, he spent most of his energy on promoting the neutrality legislation and fighting measures that might have drawn us into war.

The 1938 election should have telegraphed a definite warning to Nye about his loss of popularity in North Dakota. Nye, however, returned to the Senate oblivious to the true political situation. From 1938 to 1944 Nye continually reiterated his worn out isolationist viewpoint and

⁶Griggs County Sentinel Courier, June 13, 1946.

⁷Cole, p. 221.

⁸Election Returns, 1946 Special Primary Election.

neglected his political homework.

Professor Sayre, formerly a Political Science professor at the University of North Dakota, aptly illustrates this point when he wrote:

In the last analysis, Nye is essentially negative in his approach to national affairs. His lack of a positive program is his real tragedy. If he had devoted himself to a cause that meant definite accomplishments, in short if he had been a creator as well as a critic, his fame would have been secure. In several ways Nye resembles John Randolph of Roanoke who was at the height of his fame more than a century ago as a sharp critic and brilliant speaker. He was not a constructive leader in Congress and so his real usefulness was soon over. The same can be said of Nye.⁹

A North Dakotan writing to Lemke in 1944 expressed the widening gap between Senator Nye and his state when he observed:

As for Nye, I have no sympathy--North Dakota people gave him his first job on a Golden Platter and rallied to the polls and elected him. He did not stay in this office in Washington, D. C. thinking of what he could do for his people in North Dakota. He had higher ambitions. Higher up he looked down New York state and all other states making speeches anxious to have the world know how brilliant he was and his sister states begging for his return to his office telling us what to do after he had 18 years pay for serving in the capacity of Senator. Why oh why did he not do something he could stand on to back him up? If he had he would not need help.¹⁰

While Burdick, Langer, and Lemke maintained their rustic appearances, Nye was portrayed as a slick city man, wearing silk garters, and smoking Lucky Strike cigarettes. To the average North Dakotan, Mr. Nye had become somewhat sissified!

A second reason for Nye's defeat concerned his domestic problems. Nye's divorce and subsequent re-marriage alienated many North Dakota voters. The author of this study asked several contemporaries

⁹Sayre, p. 146.

¹⁰Mr. Austin to William Lemke, November 13, 1944, Lemke Papers.

about the role of Nye's divorce on the outcome of the 1944 election. A common reply was "that Nye's morals defeated him. At that time, divorce was frowned upon by the majority of North Dakotans."¹¹ William Lemke hinted that the divorce played a key role in Nye's defeat when he wrote "I am informed that it was the women's vote that defeated him. They were misled because of the false and criminal literature that was sent out from P.A.C. and sanctioned by the other two candidates for the Senate."¹²

Thirdly, Nye was defeated because Moses had been able to analyze the political situation present in North Dakota and correlate a campaign relative to the existing conditions. Moses mentioned that the older forms of political campaigning such as rallies and extensive tours were no longer practicable in 1944. Therefore, he concentrated on distributing a small pamphlet to every doorstep in North Dakota. Nye had no such program and centered his campaign around rallies and newspaper advertisements. Rather than give a lot of credit to David Kelly and the National Democratic Party, it should be noted that Moses really directed his own campaign. He made the stipulations to the Democratic party, and it in return answered his demands. Moses' message was simple and direct: Senator Nye's record proved that he had done little for the people of North Dakota. This simple message to the people of North Dakota greatly contributed to the defeat of Nye.

William Langer's opposition to Nye was the fourth reason for

¹¹Mrs. Chester Sampson to Author, March 1, 1966.

¹²William Lemke to Mrs. Bertha Johnson, November 9, 1944, Lemke Papers.

Nye's defeat. Langer had built a strong political machine in his drive for political power. In 1938 Nye had to resort to a coalition with the Democrats to defeat Langer. In 1944 Langer planted the power of the N.P.L. behind Burdick in the primary and Stambaugh in the general election. Lemke stressed Langer's role in the defeat of Nye when he asserted that Nye was "crucified on the Langer altar of slander and assassination."¹³ Lemke also wrote to Milton Young: "I regret that Nye was defeated, but they had built up through politics and false propaganda a hatred toward him that was unknown in North Dakota, and there are so many gullible people who accept everything that is printed as true."¹⁴

The fifth reason for the defeat of Senator Nye was his stand on isolationism. Nye's pre-Pearl Harbor record and his firm continued stand on isolationism probably convinced some North Dakotans that an isolationist like Nye would be more harm than good when the war was over. This paper has already dealt with isolationism as an issue in the 1944 campaign. Of all the topics discussed by the press and politicians isolationism received less comment than either Langerism or Nye's seniority. In 1946 Milton Young said nothing about isolationism and really ignored Nye in his campaign.

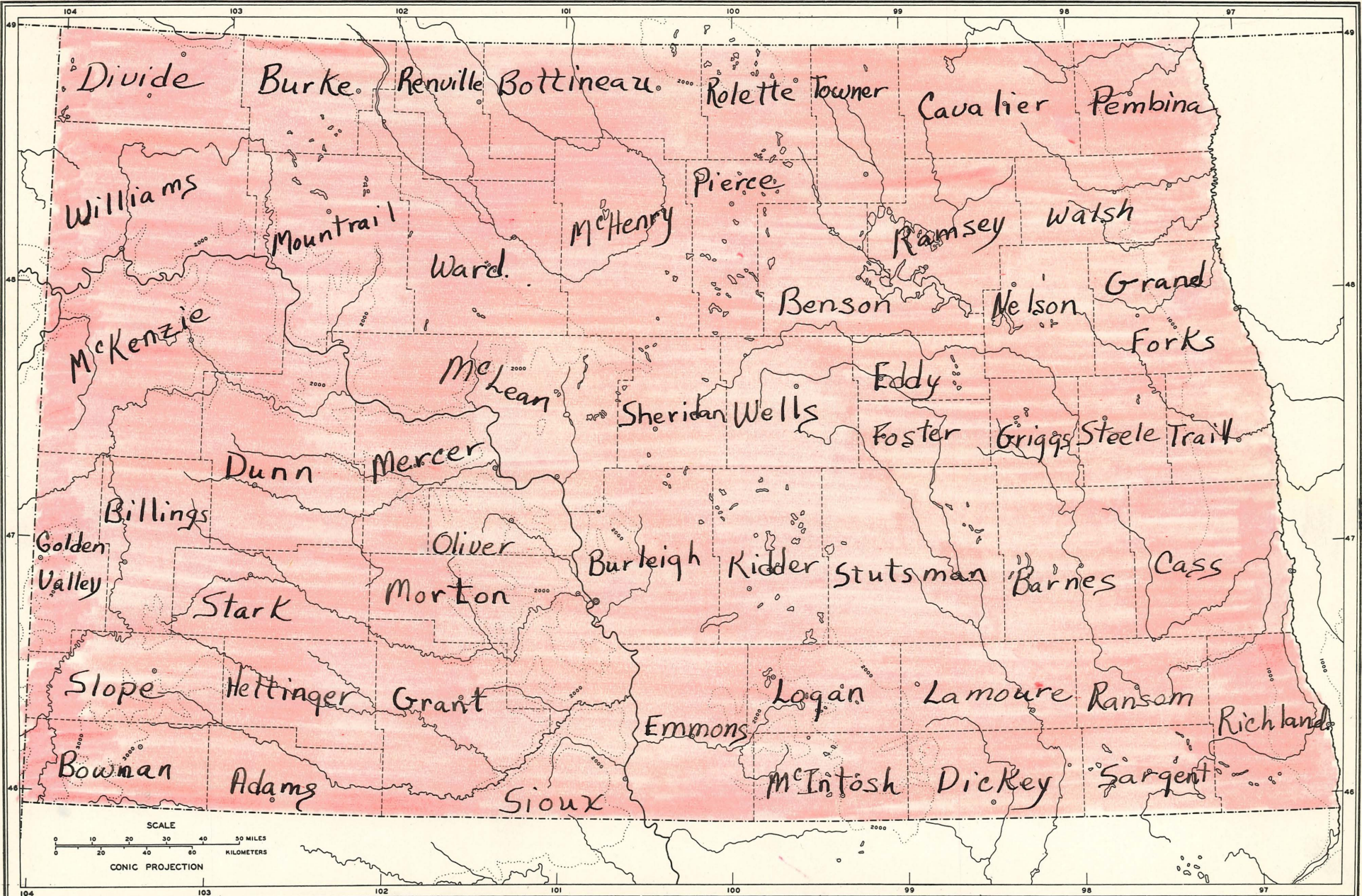
On the very same day in 1946 that North Dakotans elected Milton Young over isolationist Gerald P. Nye, they returned William Langer, whose vote against the United Nations clearly labeled him as an isolationist, perhaps even more so than Nye.

¹³William Lemke to George Miltonson, November 11, 1944, Lemke Papers.

¹⁴William Lemke to Milton Young, November 9, 1944, Lemke Papers.

The Dickinson Press commented before the election was over that "the rejecting of Nye and the possible victory of Langer, political observers said, showed that the issue to North Dakota voters was not clear-cut: isolationism-inter-nationalism despite identification of these two men with isolationist politics."¹⁵ North Dakotans had defeated a political personage, but had by no means repudiated isolationism.

¹⁵Dickinson Press, June 26, 1946.



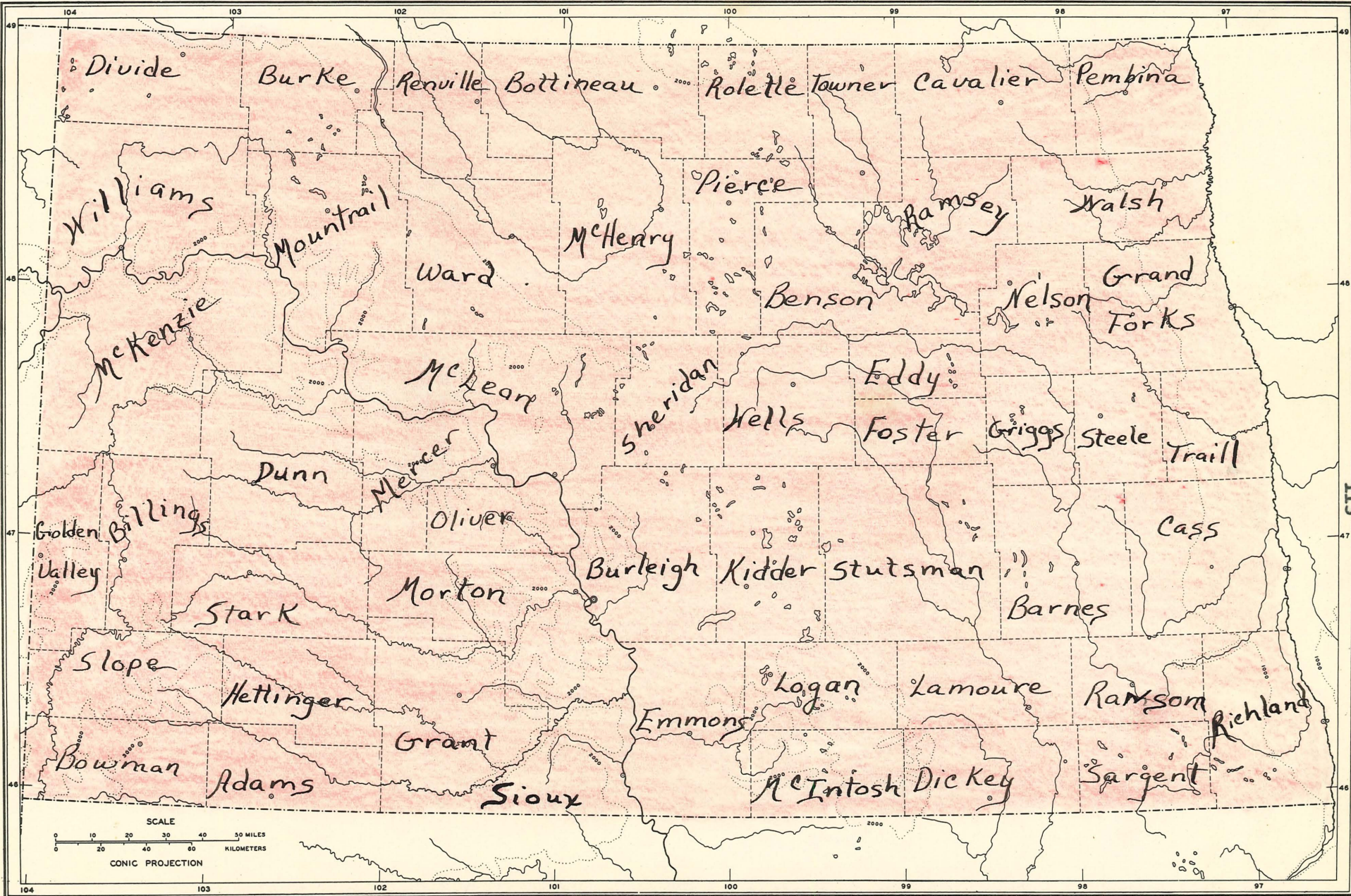
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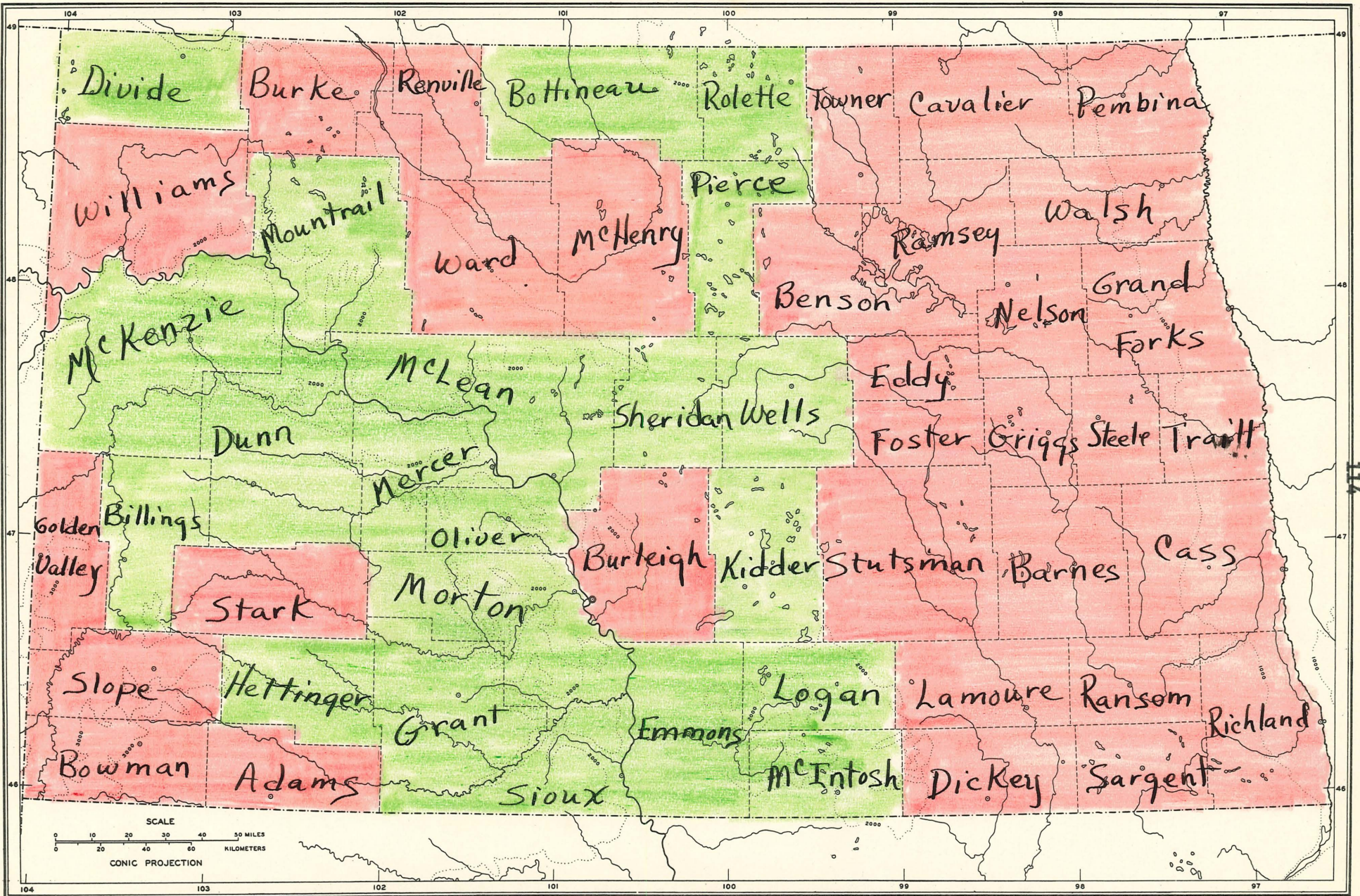
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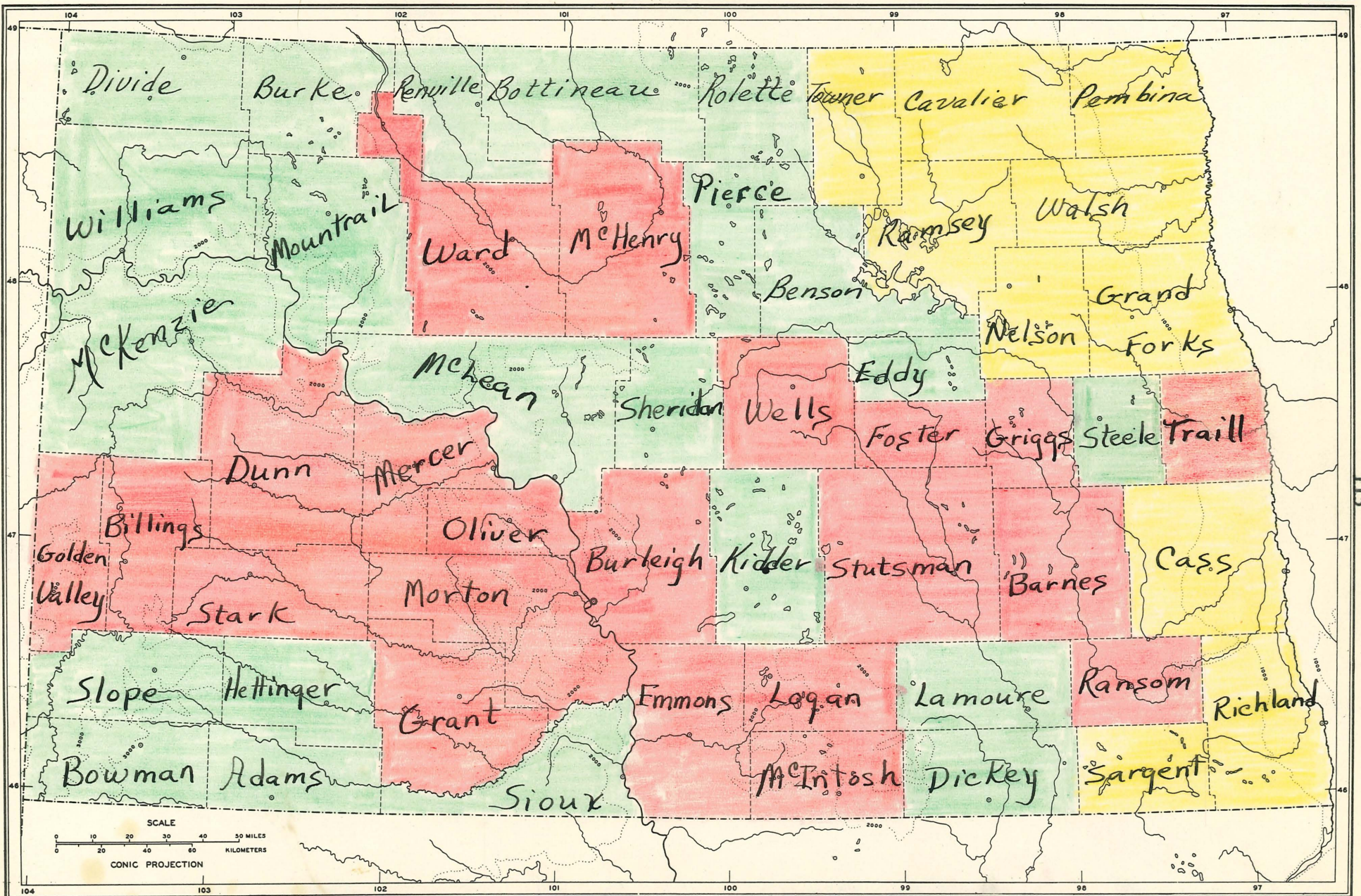
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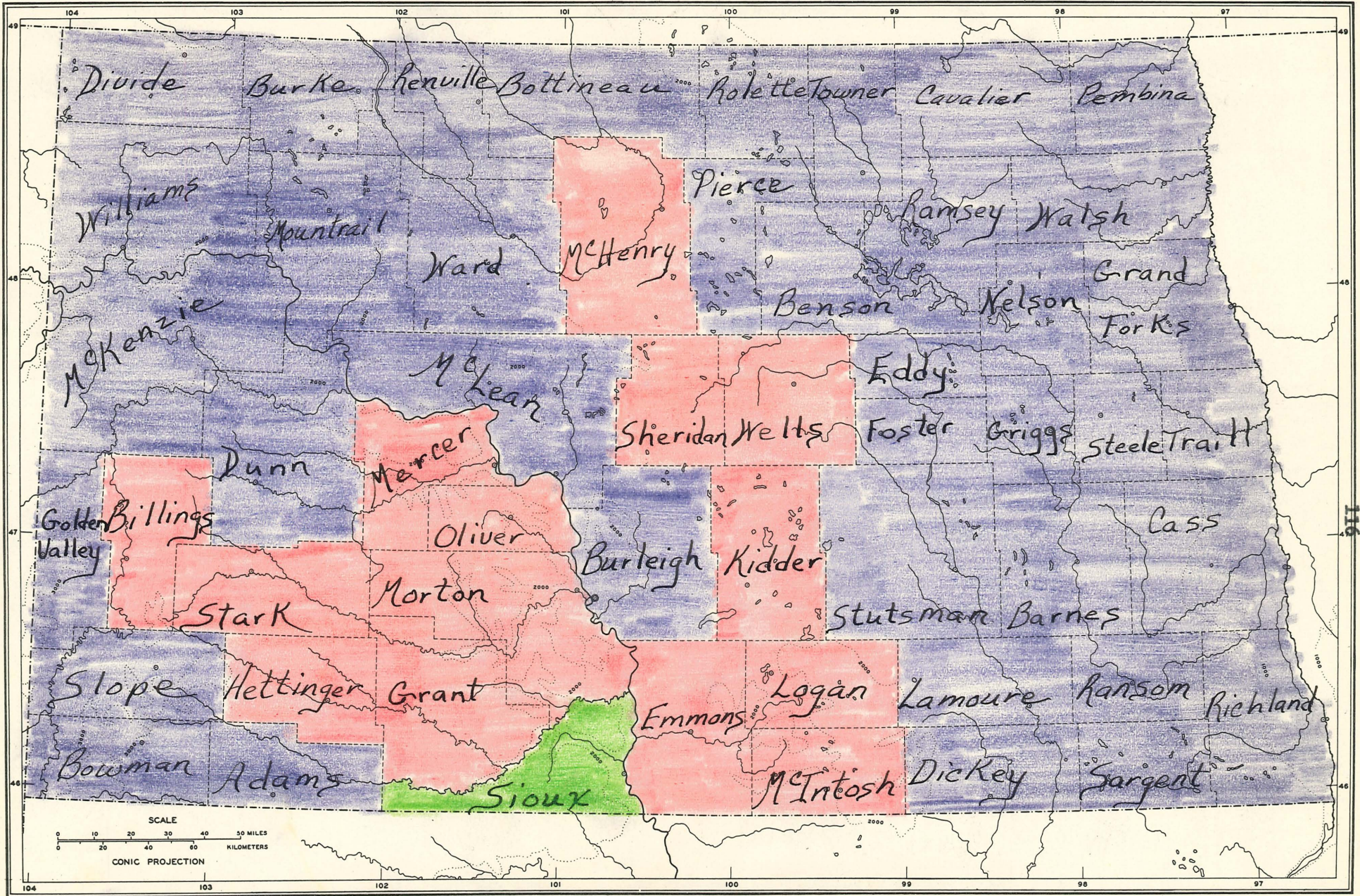
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