

VOLUME XXIV, NUMBER 4, FALL 2024

CLAREMONT

REVIEW OF BOOKS

A Journal of Political Thought and Statesmanship



Simon
Heffer:
**Conrad Black's
Strategic History**

Ian Ona
Johnson:
**Communism's
Past & Future**

Daniel J.
Mahoney:
**The New
Antisemitism**

David P.
Goldman:
**China Eats
Our Lunch**

Algis Valiunas:
**Victor Davis
Hanson's
Total War**

Edward
Feser:
**David
Hume**

Jean M.
Yarbrough:
**Jefferson's Fight
Against Slavery**

Arthur
Herman:
**Red Vice
President**

Spencer A.
Klavan:
**Marcus
Aurelius**

Theodore
Dalrymple;
Lane Scott:
Childhood's End

A Publication of the Claremont Institute

PRICE: \$9.95

IN CANADA: \$14.95

\$9.95US \$14.95CAN



0 74470 57768 3

Book Review by Arthur Herman

RED VEEP

The World That Wasn't: Henry Wallace and the Fate of the American Century, by Benn Steil.
Avid Reader Press, 704 pages, \$40 (cloth), \$25 (paper)



"The Third Party Convention Will Now Come to Order." Political cartoon by Jay Darling, published in The Des Moines Register, 1947, satirizing the third-party presidential campaign of Henry Wallace.

UNTIL RECENTLY, ONE ADVANTAGE OF America's two-party political system was that it protected—critics would say insulated—voters from radical policy swings. Democrat or Republican, a presidential candidate had to move toward the political center to win, with a more-or-less uncontroversial party platform to match. Candidates demanding disruptive, radical changes got pushed to the electoral margin as third-party also-rans.

Consider the classic case of the 1948 presidential election. Harry Truman and Thomas Dewey fought over the political center on key

issues, both foreign and domestic, while voters sent an overwhelming no to Strom Thurmond and the Dixiecrats on one side of the political spectrum, and to former vice president Henry Wallace and the Progressive Party on the other.

BENN STEIL, DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL economics at the Council on Foreign Relations and author of two very fine books, on the Marshall Plan and on the Bretton Woods Conference, calls his new biography of Wallace *The World That Wasn't*. It's a title that bears two different but

complementary meanings. The first refers to Wallace's almost extraterrestrial progressive vision of the world, a vision that was completely impervious to empirical reality, even in the tensest moments of the Cold War. The second refers to the world that would have existed if Wallace had somehow won election in 1948, or, even more crucially, if Wallace had still been vice president when Franklin Roosevelt died in office on April 12, 1945.

"With Henry Wallace in the White House," Steil writes, "there would have been no Truman Doctrine. No Marshall Plan. No NATO. No West Germany. No policy of con-



tainment”—which would have meant no limits on Communist expansion across East and Southeast Asia, including not only China but Japan. “All of these initiatives, foundational to what has been called ‘the American Century,’ Henry Wallace opposed.”

One can go further. With Henry Wallace in the White House, there would have been no effort to build an American hydrogen bomb, even as the Soviet Union pursued its own plan. A policy of nuclear deterrence based on ballistic missile capabilities would have made no sense; whatever atomic arsenal we had would have depended on strategic bombers, while the Russians pressed ahead with a missile and space program with virtually no competition. Any flag planted on the moon would have sported a hammer and sickle.

Fate—and the regulars in the Democratic Party—made sure we got Harry Truman instead. Although Truman and his team made serious mistakes during the early years of the Cold War, including in China, the fact remains that we live in a safer, freer world because one man became president in 1945, and another did not.

BORN IN AMERICA’S HEARTLAND, IN Iowa, in 1888, Wallace was the grandson of a Scots Irish Presbyterian preacher. His father served as secretary of agriculture under Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge. When Wallace’s youthful enthusiasm for the gospel of Christianity cooled, he preached the gospel of agricultural improvement. The vision took over his life. “In my early life I thought completely in terms of seeds, plants, and farming,” Wallace later admitted.

After World War I that obsession merged with his interest in New Deal progressivism, particularly the idea of price supports for American farmers. Wallace lost faith in the free market to sustain the American farmer’s lot and came to see the Soviet experiment in economic matters in a more positive light. “With all their mistakes,” he wrote in April 1930, “the people of Soviet Russia may yet stumble onto ideals which may be worth a lot to us here.” Wallace either didn’t know or didn’t care that the Soviet collectivist system had led to widespread famine until it was saved by American grain shipments courtesy of President Herbert Hoover, or that later it would lead to the great Ukrainian Famine. Throughout his political life Wallace was impervious to the glaring faults and atrocities committed under the Soviet system. Instead, the Communist leadership seemed to him attuned to the kind of enlightened leadership progressive government promised. As Steil explains Wallace’s view, “[o]nly experts devoted to their craft, and not corporate phi-

listines acting on greed, could ensure the attainment and just distribution of the fruits of human progress.” From that point on, Steil continues, Wallace “would adopt and sustain this belief undisturbed by a persistent dearth of evidence to support it.” Today it would be easy to see Wallace as a keen enthusiast of the Green New Deal.

Wallace brought his missionary zeal to his first significant appointment under the New Deal as head of the Agricultural Adjustment Agency (AAA). The AAA’s mission was to restore income parity for America’s beleaguered farmers—through government subsidies if necessary. Wallace surrounded himself with young men imbued with progressive ideals, who took a similarly positive view of the Soviet experiment as a model for transforming the American economy. What Wallace did not know was that many of these men were Soviet agents operating against their own country.

AT THEIR CENTER WAS 43-YEAR-OLD Harold Ware, an agricultural expert whose mother had been one of the founders of the American Communist Party (CPUSA). Ware had returned from an eight-year stint in the Soviet Union in 1930 with \$25,000 in Comintern cash to set up a secret Communist underground in Washington, later known to the FBI as the Ware Group.

Steil says little about Ware himself, which is odd since the secret cell that Ware set up in late 1933 would be part and parcel of Wallace’s life for the next 15 years. It began with eight members, all working for or connected with Wallace’s AAA, including John Abt, Henry Collins, Alger Hiss, Victor Perlo, Lee Pressman, Nathaniel Weyl, and Nathan Witt. By 1934 the group had swollen to some 75 members, divided into separate intelligence cells supervised by Ware on behalf of the CPUSA—which received its orders from Moscow.

After Ware was killed in an auto accident in 1935, leadership passed to an underground Communist operative named Whittaker Chambers. The circle of covert agents who worked under Chambers’s direction came to include the State Department’s Laurence Duggan and brothers Alger and Donald Hiss, Treasury’s Solomon Adler and Frank Coe, John Abt (who had gravitated over to the Justice Department), and Lauchlin Currie, who served in the White House. Although the circle eventually broke up when Chambers left the Communist Party and dropped from sight, its members remained devoted to secretly serving the interests of the Soviet Union. Over the next decade they and their comrades would resurface in various official

and semi-official positions, including in Wallace’s 1948 presidential campaign—working for the boss with whom they had started their government careers.

Wallace’s interests in the 1930s didn’t just center on the Soviet experiment or collective farming. Some of the most engaging parts of *The World That Wasn’t* concern Wallace’s fascination for the Russian exile, artist, and mystic Nicholas Roerich, who became seized with a visionary plan to draw together into a great spiritual kingdom the tens of millions of people living in Central Asia, whose king was eventually to battle and defeat all earthly evil.

Wallace’s bizarre enthusiasms alienated the Democratic Party establishment and even some fellow New Dealers, but his growing popularity with the party’s left wing and his unquestioned personal loyalty to FDR had convinced the president to make him secretary of agriculture in 1933 and then to offer him the vice presidency when Roosevelt ran for a third term in 1940.

TO SAY WALLACE WAS NOT A POPULAR choice would be a grotesque understatement. Delegates to the Democratic national convention in Chicago made it clear they preferred almost anyone else, and when Wallace’s name was formally entered as the nominee it was greeted with boos and jeers. But Roosevelt made it clear that if Wallace was not on the ticket he himself might not run. According to Steil, FDR loyalists confronted delegates with a choice: “Do you want a president or a vice president?” Even so, after Wallace’s nomination, Roosevelt aide Harry Hopkins wondered aloud if it wasn’t too late to ditch the former farmer from Iowa.

It was. Wallace threw himself into a campaign against Republican Wendell Willkie that set new standards for ugly insinuations and innuendo. Wallace denounced those who resisted supporting Britain in its war with Germany as “isolationists” and pro-Nazis, including liberal Willkie supporters like United Mine Workers president John L. Lewis. At first, Wallace’s Communist collaborators were hostile to his and Roosevelt’s pro-British policy—after all, Stalin and Hitler were allies under their 1939 Non-Aggression Pact. Hitler’s invasion of Russia in June 1941, however, brought them around to full-throated support for the president. Wallace reached out to embrace the Soviets after Pearl Harbor as not just American allies but also as guides to the future of humanity.

In November 1942, for example, Wallace made an impassioned “Tribute to Russia” at the Congress of American-Soviet Friendship in New York:



Russia and the United States have had a profound effect upon each other. Both are striving for the education, the productivity, and the enduring happiness of the common man. The new democracy, the democracy of the common man, includes not only the Bill of Rights, but also economic democracy, ethnic democracy, educational democracy, and democracy in the treatment of the sexes. The ferment in the world today is such that these various types of democracy must be woven together into a harmonious whole. Millions of Americans are now coming to see that if Pan America and the British Commonwealth are the warp of the new democracy, then the peoples of Russia and Asia may well become its woof.

WALLACE'S DESIRE TO LEARN MORE about the Russian version of this "new democracy" led him to the USSR and Siberia in 1944. His trip included a visit to the notorious forced labor camp at Kolyma above the Arctic Circle, where an estimated 130,000 prisoners died in Stalin's gold mines, as well as to the equally sinister camps at Magadan and Karaganda. Wallace's "see no evil" approach to the Soviet system ensured that the grim reality of Stalin's Gulag escaped him. When he and fellow Soviet booster Owen Lattimore arrived at Karaganda, they remarked at once on the "prospecting shafts" of the camp's coal mines but somehow never noticed the surrounding watch towers and armed barricades.

Steil describes Wallace's similarly oblivious visit to Magadan:

Wallace wrote glowingly of what he was shown: of the "all weather 350-mile highway" running north from the port of Magadan.... He was unaware that the "highway"—the graveled Kolyma Road—was built by prisoners, thousands of whom had died in the process, and that the road was used mainly to move them to other labor camps.

Even had he known, would Wallace have been outraged or, like many other American visitors sympathetic to the Soviet cause, would he have shrugged off the suffering as the inevitable cost of making a great collectivist nation? As left-wing journalist Stuart Chase blithely wrote, "A better economic order is worth a little bloodshed." Steil points out that slave labor in the Gulag was only an extreme extension of basic Stalinist economic policy. Wallace was willing to accept

that collectivization was a necessary hardship imposed on Russian agriculture by the need for *Sverkhindustrializatsiia*, or super-industrialization. Why not accept the labor camps as the next regrettable but necessary step?

Of course, Europe's industrialization under capitalism had come at great human cost and suffering, as had America's. Yet there is a great difference between suffering as a result of neglect and circumstance, and suffering imposed deliberately, without remorse or pity, from above. Likewise, it's easy—and tempting—to treat Wallace as a naïve idealist, or at worst as a "useful idiot." To his credit, Steil does not, although he handles his subject with sympathy—again, to his credit. But when a person can peer into the heart of darkness and see only light, he reveals something of his own dark heart.

BACK IN WASHINGTON, FDR'S DECLINING health triggered alarm bells throughout the Democratic establishment. Party leaders worried, not unreasonably, that a mercurial figure like Wallace might make

It was the closest the Soviet Union came to choosing an American president.

a tolerable vice president but would be an unmitigated disaster as president. Roosevelt seemed unwilling to replace Wallace outright, but he was at last persuaded to throw the vice president nomination open to the 1944 convention when it met again in Chicago.

In the most dramatic part of his book, Steil describes the battles and intrigues surrounding the choice of vice president for Roosevelt's fourth term. It boiled down to Missouri senator Harry Truman versus the ultra-progressive (and openly pro-Soviet) Wallace.

Of Truman, Steil writes,

He was a loyal New Dealer but no radical. A border state man, he was in the South, but not of it. He could win Dixie votes yet not lose Northern ones. Labor liked him. Black leaders liked him. Colleagues liked him. Nobody loved him, but that was not in the job specs.

In the end, it was Roosevelt's call to make. "Of course, everyone knows I am for Henry Wallace," FDR insisted publicly, just three

weeks before the convention. But privately he believed that if he died before finishing his fourth term, Wallace wouldn't be able to hold the party together—or the world, when the Axis was finally defeated. Roosevelt was also warned that Wallace could cost him up to 40% of the vote in key Democratic precincts. "For Roosevelt," writes Steil, "Wallace had been the right man in 1940; but the world had changed, and priorities had changed with it."

And so Wallace was pushed out. When FDR died the following spring, it was Truman who occupied the Oval Office, to the great disappointment of Wallace and his progressive allies, including the Soviets (although Truman did keep Wallace in his administration as secretary of commerce).

IT WAS A CRUCIAL MOMENT IN HISTORY, which is one reason Steil titles his chapter on the 1944 convention "History's Pivot." Over the next two years the war against the Axis gave way to growing tensions between the U.S. and the USSR. Communist insurgencies in Greece and Turkey prompted what became known as the Truman Doctrine, the first step toward containment as a U.S. policy. The Berlin blockade, and the Communist takeover in Eastern Europe, confirmed Winston Churchill's warning that an iron curtain had descended over the region.

Wallace's views of the USSR, however, remained unchanged. "As tensions flared with Moscow over Iran, Turkey, and East Asia in 1946—[Wallace] remained the only leading US official still committed to the Yalta deal on China," Steil writes. Wallace managed to wrangle promises from Chiang Kai-shek's government to allow the Soviets to advance Communist forces in China, a clear violation of the Sino-Soviet treaty. He also urged Truman to share America's atomic monopoly with the Soviets, warning against what he called a scientific "Maginot Line" that would give Americans a false sense of security. In fact, Wallace needn't have worried: Soviet agents at Los Alamos had already stolen many of the key secrets for making an atomic bomb.

Tensions between Truman and Wallace reached a climax on September 12, 1946, after Wallace gave a public speech entitled "The Way to Peace," fiercely denouncing the Truman policy toward the USSR. When he subsequently published a letter to Truman putting the blame for collapsing U.S.-Soviet relations squarely on America, Truman had had enough. "He wants us to disband our armed forces, give Russia our atomic secrets and trust a bunch of adventurers in the Kremlin Politburo who have no morals, personal or

2024 SPEECHWRITERS FELLOWS

Founded in 2017, the Claremont Institute Speechwriters Fellowship combines an education in the principles of the American Founding with a study of modern political speech craft. By supporting our Speechwriters Fellows, you're equipping them with the tools for a robust defense of the American Way of Life.



Jacob Bliss
Communications Director
Congressman Matt Gaetz



Micah Bock
Dep. Chief of Staff, Communications Dir.
Congressman Lance Gooden



Jack Buck
Press Assistant
Congressman Mark Green



Cole Carnick
Speechwriter
Senator Marsha Blackburn



Luke Grzywacz
Legislative Director
State Congressman Andrew Beeler



Michael Humeniuk
Professional Ghostwriter and Investigative Journalist



Angela Lingg
Press Secretary
Senator Jerry Moran



Sam Mangold-Lenett
Writer
Tucker Carlson Network



Johnny Rubin
Speechwriter
House Committee on Ways & Means



John Wilson
Legislative Counsel
Congressman Matt Gaetz



Kristen Zicarelli
Director of Production, Policy Analyst
Center for Homeland Security & Immigration, AFPI



Interested in supporting our programs?
Scan this QR code or visit claremont.org/donate.

2024 SHERIFFS FELLOWS

Founded in 2021, the Claremont Institute Sheriffs Fellowship offers training of unparalleled depth and excellence in American political thought and institutions. By supporting our Sheriffs Fellows, you can equip American Sheriffs across the nation with the tools and knowledge to defend our Constitution and protect the liberties that sustain the American Way of Life.



Al Auxier
Kendall County, TX



Marquis Cantu
Llano County, TX



Thaddeus C. Cleveland
Terrell County, TX



Mark Crider
Walla Walla County, WA



Damon Devereaux
Logan County, OK



Max Dorsey
Chester County, SC



Jeff Gahler
Harford County, MD



Richard Hickox
Churchill County, NV



George Smith
Bradford County, FL



Bob Songer
Klickitat County, AZ



Rick Staly
Flagler County, FL



Clinton Walters
Bradford County, PA



Chris West
Canadian County, OK



Interested in supporting our programs?

Scan this QR code or visit claremont.org/donate.

public,” Truman wrote in a memo to himself. “I don’t understand a ‘dreamer’ like that.”

On September 20, 1946, Truman asked for Wallace’s resignation. Wallace was stunned: as he later said, he was convinced his firing would hurt Democrats in the coming midterms (which, in fact, turned out to be a major GOP sweep).

Relegation to the political wilderness did nothing to dissuade Wallace from his pro-Soviet views. He would take them, and the staff who influenced the views, to the presidential campaign in 1948, when he accepted the nomination of the Progressive Party as the liberal alternative to Republicans and Democrats alike.

The Progressive Party that year consisted of a mélange of progressive intellectuals, labor union leaders, liberal “fellow travelers” sympathetic to the Communist Party, and outright Soviet agents. The party’s chairman, C.B. Baldwin, was a secret Communist; his deputy, John Abt, was a member of the Ware spy cell. The recording secretary, Lee Pressman, was another secret Communist; Wallace’s main speechwriter, Charles Kramer, was an NKVD operative.

IT WAS THE CLOSEST THE SOVIET UNION ever came to choosing an American president. And it was a sign of how out of touch Wallace’s campaign was with the mood of the country and events happening around the world—the Berlin airlift (which Wallace opposed), the fall of Czechoslovakia to the Communists (which he blamed on the Truman Administration), and the imminent Communist victory in China. Wallace won only 1,157,328 votes (2.4%) out of more than 48 million cast.

Steil reminds the reader of what might have happened if Wallace had won. He notes that a President Wallace would almost certainly have named Laurence Duggan as secretary of state and Harry Dexter White as secretary of the treasury. Both were Soviet agents; White

had even helped to engineer Mao Zedong’s victory in China.

We can push this *World That Wasn’t* scenario even further. Although the first revelations about Alger Hiss’s Communist past had already come out thanks to Whittaker Chambers’s testimony in 1948, Hiss, who had advised President Roosevelt at Yalta, was still a respected and influential figure (even Truman’s secretary of state Dean Acheson had risen to Hiss’s defense). Hiss would certainly have been an influential figure both at the State Department and at the White House in a Wallace Administration. It’s conceivable he would have been America’s very first national security advisor—a thought almost too frightening to contemplate.

Another figure who would have had a firm voice in a Wallace Administration is Robert Oppenheimer. Quite apart from the question of whether Oppenheimer had secret Communist sympathies or ties to those who did—one of the reasons he was ultimately deprived of his security clearance in 1954—Oppenheimer was a leading opponent of the hydrogen bomb, the development of which President Truman had officially endorsed in January 1950. It is inconceivable that Wallace would have made a similar endorsement. Oppenheimer’s opposition would have certainly carried the day, while the Soviet effort to build a thermonuclear weapon would have pressed ahead unhindered.

HISTORIANS LIKE TO PLAY “WHAT IF” because it gives them a chance to bring into focus those factors that caused things to happen, as opposed to those that didn’t. In Wallace’s case, we can say that the world that came so close to becoming real in 1944—had he remained FDR’s vice president—was fortunately an impossibility by 1948. As Steil notes, after Wallace’s crushing defeat even the Soviets realized he had no future in the Democratic Party or American politics, and their interest in him (and the

Progressive Party) quickly faded. They had their own problems to deal with—namely, a free world united to stop Stalin’s aggression and a nuclear arms race that would determine which superpower ultimately prevailed.

Eventually, Wallace came to see the error of his ways. Later he claimed it was the 1948 Soviet coup in Czechoslovakia that convinced him the Soviet Union’s motives were malign. He endorsed Dwight Eisenhower for president in 1952; he even became friends with the staunchly anti-Communist Richard Nixon.

Yet in the end, Wallace could not escape the conviction that for all his misreading of the Soviet Union and Communist subversion within his own inner circle, he had been more right than wrong. “Maybe I was ahead of my time,” he said to *New York Times* columnist Cabell Phillips in 1963, shortly before the former vice president’s death in November 1965. Steil sums up Wallace’s final view this way: “Maybe, he seemed to say, it was not that he had seen the truth too late, but that he had seen the opportunity for peace too early, before the establishment was capable of grasping it.”

To his credit, Phillips was deeply skeptical of Wallace’s non-*mea culpa*. But the Wallace story raises profound questions. What if a similar belief that one can see the future in a way that is “clearer than truth,” as Dean Acheson put it, allowed an idealist with a dazzling vision of China’s benign intentions to infiltrate the American political system? What checks exist today on such an idealist’s role as an agent of influence in the way Wallace became one for the Soviet Union, regardless of how innocent or unwitting?

Arthur Herman is a senior fellow of the Hudson Institute and the author of Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America’s Most Hated Senator (Free Press) and Freedom’s Forge: How American Business Produced Victory in World War II (Random House).

The CLAREMONT REVIEW OF BOOKS is a publication of the CLAREMONT INSTITUTE
FOR THE STUDY OF STATESMANSHIP AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY.

Subscribe to
the *Claremont Review of Books*

*“The Claremont Review of Books’s
unique synthesis of theory and political
reporting keeps America’s foundational
principles alive, while providing deeper
insight into the turbulence of our
present era than any Beltway-obsessed
publication can hope to achieve.”*

—Heather Mac Donald

Subscribe to the *CRB* today and save 25%
off the newstand price. A one-year
subscription is only \$19.95.

To begin receiving America’s premier
conservative book review, visit
claremontreviewofbooks.com
or call (909) 981 2200.

CLAREMONT
REVIEW OF BOOKS

P.O. Box 39,
Claremont, CA
91711

NON PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT NO. 504
UPLAND, CA