PRESS COVERAGE OF FATHER CHARLES E. COUGHLIN AND THE UNION PARTY BY FOUR METROPOLITAN DAILY NEWSPAPERS DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN OF 1936: A STUDY

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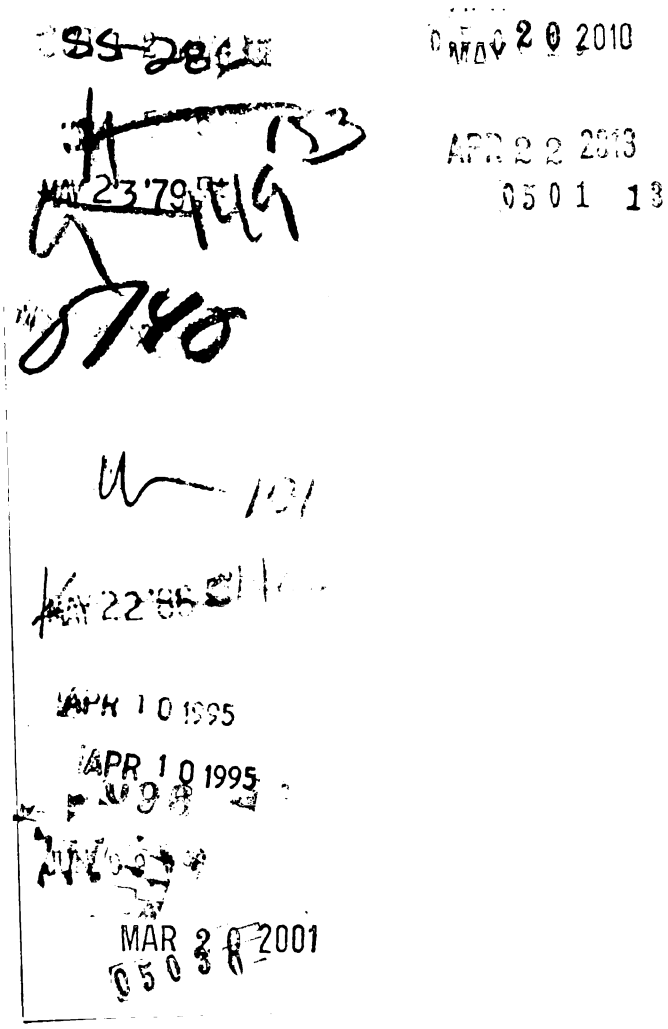
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ABSTRACT

PRESS COVERAGE OF FATHER CHARLES E. COUGHLIN AND THE UNION PARTY BY FOUR METROPOLITAN DAILY NEWSPAPERS DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN OF 1936: A STUDY

by Charles C. Ragains

This study is the result of the writer's interest in the Reverend Father Charles E. Coughlin, a Roman Catholic priest who was pastor of a parish in Royal Oak, Michigan, and whose oratory attracted national attention and considerable controversy; in the political and social ferment in the United States during the 1930's; and in the American press. The questions that motivated the study were: How did the nation's newspapers react to Coughlin, who is regarded as one of the foremost demagogues in American history, at the height of his career? Did the press significantly affect the priest's influence and power one way or the other? How did newspapers interpret Coughlin and his actions to their readers?

Because of the length of Coughlin's public career (nearly sixteen years) it has been necessary to select a salient event or period on which to concentrate.

The period selected is the presidential election campaign of 1936. This span of approximately five and one-half months was chosen for several reasons. First, it was a high point in Coughlin's popularity and public exposure. Second, his role as co-creator, spokesman, and campaigner for the Union Party marked Coughlin's highest and most active level of participation in national affairs. Third, the 1936 campaign was a time of considerable press coverage, editorial comment, and journalistic punditry.

It has also been necessary to select a limited number of newspapers for the study. The newspapers selected are the three major Detroit daily newspapers in 1936--the Free Press, the Times (now defunct), and the News--and the New York Times. The three Detroit newspapers were chosen because of their geographical proximity to Coughlin's home parish in Royal Oak and their accessability to the writer. The three papers also provided a variety of editorial viewpoints. The New York Times was chosen as a control paper because of its geographical location and its reputation for thoroughness and fairness.

The study itself has three major divisions: the introduction, the examination of the campaign, and the writer's conclusions. The introduction summarizes Coughlin's life and career prior to the 1936 campaign.

The campaign is studied in chronological order beginning in mid-June. The campaign has been broken down into three sections: June-July, August-September, and October-November. The divisions are intended to aid continuity by emphasizing the chronological development of the campaign.

The study found that the press, as represented by the three Detroit newspapers and the New York Times, did not have a profound effect on either the Union Party's showing in 1936 or the election in general. Although the four papers were either critical or indifferent to Coughlin and the Union movement, the party's failure was more the result of internal weaknesses and the combined appeal of Roosevelt and recovery. Although the priest did not have the support of the press, he still had large audiences both for his radio speeches and personal appearances. The opposition of the press was in part negated by the popularity and pervasiveness of radio and the fact that Coughlin aimed his messages at the masses most affected by the depression. The study's final conclusion is that despite warnings by the press and explanations to the public, demagogues and rabble-rousers will emerge during periods of turmoil and discontent.

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By

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Director of Thesis

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INTRODUCTION

On Sunday, October 3, 1926, the Reverend Father Charles E. Coughlin, a thirty-four-year-old Catholic priest from Royal Oak, Michigan, conducted a radio program, "Golden Hour of the Little Flower," over station WJR in Detroit.[1] The program, which was aimed primarily at children but which included some comments on social, political, and economic affairs, drew a response of eight letters.[2]

This rather inauspicious broadcast was the beginning of a spectacular and controversial public career that spanned fifteen years. During that period, Coughlin's name became literally a household word, first in Michigan, and later throughout the United States. The hundreds of radio broadcasts he conducted helped to make him a major figure of the 1930's. Stepping outside the realm of religion, Coughlin became involved in national politics, economics, social reform, and foreign policy of the

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[1]Charles J. Tull, Father Coughlin and the New Deal (Syracuse, N. Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1965), p. 3.

[2]Pamela Krueger, "Fr. Coughlin," Detroit News Pictorial Magazine, June 5, 1966, p. 19.

United States. His actions and words became front page news. His name was linked with some of the leading figures of the era: President Franklin D. Roosevelt, United States Senator Huey Long, Dr. Francis Townsend, James A. Farley, and Alfred E. Smith, former governor of New York and onetime Democratic presidential nominee. The Royal Oak priest became synonymous with the growing influence and popularity of radio and modern history books refer to him as "the radio priest." In one way or another, Father Coughlin affected millions of Americans. Some hailed him as a savior of the depressed and downtrodden; others denounced him as a demagogue. He was loved and hated, feared and followed. Above all, he was a dominant force and figure in the Great Depression era of American history.

Father Coughlin's background and personal history prior to 1926 was, like his initial radio speech, unexceptional. Born in 1891 in Hamilton, Ontario, Charles Edward Coughlin was the only child of Thomas and Amelia Coughlin.[3] He was educated at St. Mary's School in Hamilton, and at St. Michael's College of the University of Toronto. After he was graduated from St. Michael's in 1911, Coughlin was attracted to several career fields:

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[3]Ruth Mugglebee, Father Coughlin of the Shrine of the Little Flower (Boston: L. C. Page & Company, 1933), pp. 2, 4.

athletics, politics, religion, and law.[4] He chose the priesthood and was ordained in 1916.[5]

During his early years as a priest, Coughlin assisted at parishes in Detroit, Kalamazoo, and North Branch, Michigan. On February 26, 1923, he was formally incardinated into the diocese of Detroit by Bishop Michael Gallagher, and three years later was assigned to Royal Oak, a small community north of Detroit.[6]

In an interview in the Detroit News forty years later, Coughlin recalled the Royal Oak of 1926: "I came to a bigoted community of winding dirt roads and mosquito-infested air. There were no sewers. The land was poor. But it was the land I wanted."[7]

Coughlin's church in Royal Oak was the newly dedicated Shrine of the Little Flower. The parish had only twenty-five Catholic families and was beset by financial problems. The Ku Klux Klan, a famous hate group opposed to Negroes, Roman Catholics, and Jews, was active in Royal Oak at that time and added to Coughlin's difficulties by burning a cross on the lawn of his church.[8]

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[4] Detroit News, Dec. 16, 1962.

[5] Tull, p. 2.

[6] Louis B. Ward, Father Charles E. Coughlin (Detroit: Tower Publications, Inc., 1933), p. 16.

[7] Krueger, p. 17.

[8] Tull, p. 3.

The need for stronger financial support and the hostility of the Ku Klux Klan were the major factors in Coughlin's turning to radio. Some critics of the priest, however, imply that personal ambition and a massive ego motivated Coughlin to begin broadcasting.[9]

The first 156 broadcasts were heard only over station WJR.[10] Coughlin continued to seek financial support for his parish, but he began to comment more and more on social conditions. He devoted many programs to praising and promoting the social reforms contained in the papal encyclicals of Leo XIII and Pius XI.[11]

In the fall of 1929, two more stations, WMAQ in Chicago and WLW in Cincinnati, began carrying Coughlin's Sunday afternoon talks. By the next fall, the priest's popularity had increased to the point that the Columbia Broadcasting System was carrying his addresses over a hook-up of eighteen affiliated stations. It was estimated that forty million people listened to the sermons that were broadcast weekly from October to April.[12]

On September 3, 1929, the New York Stock Exchange reached its peak as the Dow-Jones average climbed to a

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Ward, p. 28.

[11] Detroit News, Nov. 28, 1936.

[12] Mugglebee, pp. 179, 202-203.

record high. After reaching its peak, the stock market declined steadily until it crashed catastrophically in late October, 1929. The crash not only caused the United States economy to flounder, it also wiped out dozens of personal fortunes.[13] Unemployment spread until it ranged from eight and a half million to seventeen million, depending on a variety of calculations.[14]

With the greatly enlarged audience, Coughlin turned to new subject areas for his radio sermons. In January, 1930, he delivered a series of anti-communist broadcasts. Later that year, as the American depression worsened, Coughlin again emphasized Pope Leo's encyclical, Rerum novarum, the tract that considers social justice in an increasingly industrialized world. He also commented on the nation's economic condition and discussed labor, unemployment, capitalism, and private ownership.[15]

The radio priest's popularity continued to increase as the depression grew more severe. An organization known as the Radio League of the Little Flower

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[13] New York Times, September-December, 1929, passim.

[14] U.S., Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945; a Supplement to the Statistical Abstract of the United States, A 117, A 118, p. 12, J30, p. 180 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1949).

[15] Tull, pp. 4-6.

was formed to help meet broadcast and postal expenses. Membership was a dollar a year. Response to the league's formation was overwhelming as indicated by the fact that between July, 1933, and February, 1935, the League cashed more than 65,000 money orders worth $404,145 at the Royal Oak Post Office.[16]

Father Coughlin's radio career first began to stir controversy in 1931. Because it was receiving complaints about Coughlin's inflammatory talks, CBS attempted to tone down a scheduled speech on the economic provisions of the Treaty of Versailles. Coughlin responded with a broadcast about the attempted censorship, and his listeners flooded CBS stations with a wave of mail supporting the priest.[17]

Hoping to avoid further controversy and embarrassment, CBS dropped Coughlin in April, 1931, from its broadcast schedule by introducing a new format for its religious programming. The priest sought to affiliate with the National Broadcasting Company, but was turned down. Coughlin then organized his own radio network, which eventually grew from eleven to twenty-six stations from Maine to Colorado.[18]

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[16] Ibid., p. 41.

[17] Ibid., p. 7.

[18] Ibid., pp. 7-8.

Coughlin began his 1931-32 broadcast season by attacking the Eighteenth Amendment and encouraging repeal of the prohibition of beverage alcohol. In November, 1931, he entered the political arena by criticizing President Hoover and his "prosperity is just around the corner" philosophy. The Reconstruction Finance Corporation and the Federal Farm Loan Bank were specific objects of Coughlin's verbal attacks. The priest favored more direct approaches to ending the depression. The winter of 1931-32 also marked the beginning of the priest's denunciation of international bankers, a group that became one of Coughlin's favorite targets.[19]

His dissatisfaction with Hoover led Coughlin to be an early supporter of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Democratic governor of New York. In the spring of 1931 he wrote Roosevelt, volunteering his services and support. The Roosevelt papers record that the priest wrote numerous letters to Roosevelt in 1931 and 1932 and that he also visited the governor several times. In the fall of 1932 (an election year) Coughlin continued to broadcast stinging denunciations of the Hoover administration.[20]

After Roosevelt's election victory in November, 1932, Coughlin wrote and telephoned the White House often.

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[19] Ibid., pp. 10, 12.

[20] Tull, pp. 14-17.

Although there is no evidence to show he had official approval, Coughlin regarded himself as a spokesman and defender of the administration. In the spring of 1933, after telling his audience that he spoke at the request of Secretary of the Treasury William Woodin, and Marvin McIntyre, President Roosevelt's appointments secretary, Coughlin broadcast an attack of the Detroit banking community. Singled out for criticism was E. D. Stair, of the Detroit Bankers' Committee and publisher of the Detroit Free Press.[21]

Coughlin charged that the city's banks were in danger of closing because the bankers had "approved fraudulent loans to themselves" during the stock market in 1929. He also accused the bankers of forming holding companies "to escape liability as bank stockholders under the law." Coughlin charged that $63,000,000 had been withdrawn from the First National Bank of Detroit because of "inside" information shortly before President Roosevelt declared a bank holiday in March, 1933.[22]

Stair and the Free Press, which had often been critical of Coughlin, reacted swiftly and in an expected manner. Stair threatened to sue Coughlin for slander, and a Free Press editorial branded the priest a

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[21] New York Times, March 28, 1933.

[22] Tull, pp. 24-25.

"demagogue" and an "ecclesiastical [U.S. Senator] Huey Long [Louisiana Democrat]." The editorial also accused the Archdiocese of Detroit of being one of the biggest debtors of the First National Bank, implying that this was a major factor in the bank's financial problems.[23]

Stair also sent a telegram to Roosevelt demanding an investigation of the situation, and the Free Press prompted an examination of Coughlin's income tax returns and stockholdings. These attempts to embarrass Coughlin were unsuccessful as the investigation produced nothing significant.[24]

Although Coughlin did not agree with some of the New Deal principles and programs, particularly the National Industrial Recovery Act and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, he remained an ardent supporter of Roosevelt.[25] He devoted several of his broadcasts to defending the President and stressing the catch phrase, "Roosevelt or ruin."[26]

It is difficult to assess Coughlin's relationship to or role in the New Deal. Many of his statements support the theory that he considered himself a spokesman

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[23]Detroit Free Press, March 27, 1933.

[24]Tull, pp. 27, 29, 30.

[25]Ibid., p. 38.

[26]New York Times, Nov. 6, 1933.

and defender of Roosevelt's administration. There is little, if any, evidence, however, that he had official sanction in these statements. Roosevelt, recognizing Coughlin's great influence on the masses, apparently welcomed the support of the popular radio priest, but he did not publicly encourage or acknowledge him.

In his biography of Roosevelt, Rexford Tugwell quotes the President as saying in reference to Coughlin, Huey Long and others: "We must tame these fellows and make them useful to us."[27] Charles Tull, a biographer of Coughlin's part in the New Deal, quotes Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, the President's wife, as saying that her husband "disliked and distrusted" Father Coughlin.[28]

Regardless of his personal feelings, Roosevelt had good reason to respect Coughlin's popularity and influence. The priest's radio audience at this time was estimated at thirty million people, and 106 clerks and four personal secretaries were needed to handle his mail. This popularity was the result of many factors. The country's deepening economic depression, Coughlin's eloquent but simplistic and naive economic theories, and

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[27]Rexford Guy Tugwell, The Democrat Roosevelt (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957), p. 350.

[28]Tull, p. 22

the popular attraction of radio all contributed to the priest's fame and influence.[29]

During his radio series of 1932-33 and 1933-34 Coughlin concentrated on economics, believing that monetary problems were the "root of the depression." He attacked international bankers, demanded the revaluation of the gold ounce and controlled inflation, argued for regulation of the stock market, advocated silver coinage and symmetalism, suggested scrapping the Federal Reserve System, supported a new economy--"state capitalism,"--and presented a program for distribution of production and credit.[30]

Coughlin's proposals regarding economic and monetary policies had various degrees of merit. His espousal of symmetalism, for example, was denounced by James P. Warburg, a Wall Street financier and adviser to Roosevelt, who claimed it was impractical.[31] Several of the priest's proposals, however, including silver coinage and devaluation of the dollar, were carried out by the Roosevelt administration. Coughlin's campaigns for these measures may have been at least partly responsible for their enactment.[32]

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[29] Ibid., pp. 20-21.

[30] Ibid., pp. 33-35, 37, 41, 50-52, passim.

[31] Ibid., p. 50.

[32] Ibid., p. 57.

For the most part, however, Coughlin's economic theories and proposals were regarded as naive and oversimplified. Although bankers had to accept part of the blame for the stock market crash and depression, they were not as guilty and immoral as Coughlin portrayed them. Nor were devaluation of the dollar and the coinage of silver the panaceas he pictured them to be.

Despite his widespread popularity and burgeoning listening audience, Coughlin did not escape public criticism. Many prominent Catholics disapproved of his theories and techniques and regarded him as a demagogue. One of the first to speak out was William Cardinal O'Connell of Boston who took exception to some of Coughlin's remarks about the wealthy.[33] Late in 1933, Monsignor Thomas G. Carroll, chancellor of the New York Archdiocese, spoke out against Coughlin for his bitterly denouncing Al Smith. Also critical of Coughlin during this period was Monsignor John L. Belford of Brooklyn who called the Detroit priest an "infernal nuisance" and a "public enemy."[34]

Father Coughlin continued to praise and support Roosevelt during the spring of 1934, but the first discordant episode between the priest and the administration

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[33] Detroit News, Nov. 15, 1936.

[34] New York Times, Nov. 29-30, 1933.

occured in April. The cleavage came as a result of Secretary of the Treasury Robert Morgenthau's disclosure of the names of all persons and groups who had large silver investments. The move was designed to block silver legislation and was approved by President Roosevelt. Coughlin's Radio League of the Little Flower was included on the list of leading investors. The priest denied holding any silver investments personally, and blasted Morgenthau in a statement to newsmen. The incident was the first in a series of events that led to a split between Roosevelt and Coughlin.[35]

It took some time for the breach to become noticeable. Both the President and the priest were reluctant to make the break final; Roosevelt did not want Coughlin openly opposing him and Coughlin still felt some loyalty to the man he had praised so lavishly.[36]

Throughout 1934 Coughlin became more and more openly critical of the New Deal, but he also castigated the Republicans and the two-party system. Inspired by the large amounts of mail he received, he decided to organize a political lobby based on his concepts of social justice. Thus, on November 11, he announced formation of the National Union for Social Justice.

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[35] Ibid., April 29, 1934.

[36] Tull, p. 60.

Membership in the organization was "open to persons of all faiths who believed in the rightful necessity of social justice in the economic life of the United States." The priest emphasized that the union was to be a "lobby of the people" and not a third party.[37]

Coughlin announced a sixteen-point platform for the union. The points covered private ownership, public resources, banking, labor unions, and taxation, but were vague and lacking in specifics. The platform was characterized as "a mixture of midwestern agrarian reforms and the papal encyclicals of Pius XI and Leo XIII."[38]

During the winter of 1934-1935 Coughlin continued to promote the new organization and explain its objectives. Included in his radio talks were condemnations of capitalism and indications that he favored a planned economy. He had both praise and criticism for President Roosevelt; praise for the President's public works program and criticism for his proposal that the United States join the World Court.[39]

His opposition to United States membership in the World Court brought Coughlin into the mainstream of foreign affairs and policy. On a special National

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[37] Ibid., pp. 60-61.

[38] Ibid., pp. 62-63.

[39] Ibid., pp. 67, 73, 74-75.

Broadcasting Company program, January 28, 1935, that presented both sides of the issue, he spoke out against the court. The speech produced a large anti-court reaction and listeners flooded Senators with telegrams. Congress did not pass the court treaty and Coughlin, along with the Hearst press, was credited with influencing the decision.[40]

As his social justice campaign progressed, Coughlin became more vitriolic in his criticism of Roosevelt. In one broadcast he charged the administration with having both communist tendencies and being the "tool of capitalism." Later he again accused the New Deal of being "bent on communistic revolution" and he called Roosevelt a dictator.[41]

As Father Coughlin became increasingly more involved in politics, more public figures spoke out against him. Between March, 1935, and February, 1936, for example, he clashed in print or over the air with General Hugh Johnson, former administrator of the NRA, (whom he called a "chocolate soldier," "a political corpse," and "a cracked gramophone record");[42] George Cardinal Mundelein of Chicago; U.S. Representative John O'Connor

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[40] Ibid., p. 76.

[41] Ibid., pp. 80, 122-123.

[42] Detroit News, March 12, 1935.

of New York; and James Roland Angell, president of Yale University.[43]

Formation of the National Union for Social Justice had produced speculation about a possible third party. Coughlin's name was frequently linked with that of Senator Huey Long, and the possibility of a coalition between the two was discussed by journalists and pundits.[44]

The priest opened his 1935-1936 radio season with verbal attacks on the Roosevelt administration, and a warning that the "hunting season for members of Congress is on." He warned that his slogan, "Roosevelt or ruin," might have to be changed to "Roosevelt and ruin."[45] The final break with Roosevelt and the New Deal came on November 17, 1935, when Coughlin announced that the tenets of the Roosevelt administration and social justice were "unalterably opposed."[46]

The NUSJ encountered many problems in its first months of existence: membership in most areas was far below expectations; many members, particularly Jews, atheists, and agnostics, objected to having to recite Coughlin's social justice pledge because it referred to

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[43]Tull, pp. 105, 108, 111.

[44]Ibid., pp. 86-88.

[45]New York Times, Nov. 4, 1935.

[46]Ibid., Nov. 18, 1935.

Jesus Christ; and the union was financially dependent on the Radio League of the Little Flower.[47]

Despite its internal weaknesses, the National Union for Social Justice was well enough organized and unified to endorse congressional candidates in several state primary elections in the spring of 1936. Endorsements went to candidates who supposedly upheld and supported the principles of the union's platform. The Pennsylvania primary was the first in which the NUSJ endorsed candidates and twelve of the twenty-four endorsed were winners.[48]

Impressed with its showing in Pennsylvania, the NUSJ entered candidates in eighteen districts of the Ohio primary. The candidates made a surprisingly strong showing, winning in thirteen of the eighteen districts entered. Not surprisingly, Social Justice, the Coughlin-controlled weekly newspaper of the NUSJ, hailed the National Union's primary showings as "victories" and a "smashing success." Even less partisan newspapers credited the NUSJ with considerable political strength.[49]

No doubt pleased and inspired by his organization's primary success, Coughlin began to imply that a

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[47]Tull, pp. 114-115.

[48]Ibid., pp. 116-117.

[49]Ibid., pp. 118-119.

third political party was in the offing. For several months it had been rumored that the Royal Oak priest planned to merge with Dr. Francis E. Townsend, a Long Beach, California physician, whose pension plan had gained him a large following, and the Reverend Gerald L. K. Smith, onetime pastor of the Disciples of Christ Church of Shreveport, Louisiana, who had succeeded the assassinated Huey Long as head of the Share-the-Wealth groups.[50]

Townsend's plan called for a government allowance of $200 a month to every citizen sixty years of age and older. The pension, which was to be financed by a sales tax, was to be spent within thirty days, thus theoretically stimulating an economy-boosting spending wave. The Share-the-Wealth program was equally utopian in concept. It called for

> Every family to be furnished by the government a homestead allowance, free of debt, of not less than one-third the average family wealth of the country, which means, at the lowest, that every family shall have the reasonable comforts of life up to a value of from $5,000 to $6,000 . . . The raising of revenue for the support of this program to come from the reduction of swollen fortunes from the top.[51]

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[50] Ibid., pp. 121-122.

[51] Frederick Lewis Allen, Since Yesterday (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1940), pp. 151-152.

In mid-June of 1936, shortly after Father Coughlin denied being involved in a third party movement, Gerald L. K. Smith announced that an alliance had been formed from his Share-the-Wealthers, Coughlinites, followers of Dr. Townsend, and backers of U.S. Representative William Lemke of North Dakota.[52]

On June 19, Father Coughlin opened a special summer radio broadcast season. Although some observers thought that Smith's premature announcement might have left Coughlin unprepared, the priest announced he was supporting Lemke for President on a Union party ticket. Although the priest made the endorsement without consulting the NUSJ, Smith, or Townsend, the National Union seconded Coughlin's selection at its national convention in August, and Smith and Townsend also elected to support Lemke.[53]

Lemke, a Republican, was a respectable if not flamboyant candidate. Before being elected to Congress in 1932, he had been a lawyer, an unsuccessful land speculator, an attorney general of North Dakota, and an unsuccessful candidate for governor of that state. Because of his consistent support of farm legislation, he was considered popular in the midwest farm belt. Not

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[52]New York Times, June 17, 1936.

[53]Tull, pp. 124, 129-130.

particularly personable or attractive, Lemke had to depend on Coughlin's charisma in his bid for the presidency.[54]

As his running mate, Lemke chose Thomas O'Brien, a relatively unknown Massachusetts politician. The vice-presidential candidate had served as district attorney of Boston and as a legal consultant for a railroad union. Neither he nor Lemke exhibited much confidence in their bid for executive office as both also ran for Congress in 1936, Lemke on the Republican ticket.[55]

The new Union party's platform was largely a reproduction of the original sixteen points of the National Union for Social Justice. It included Coughlin's plan for a central bank, a provision for a guaranteed annual wage, and the recall of interest-bearing bonds. The platform was vague and contained no specific programs or plans. Like the party itself, the Union platform was dominated by Coughlin and his political philosophy. The programs of Smith and Townsend were only vaguely and indirectly referred to in the platform.[56]

Before the press's reaction to the Union party is examined, the relationship of Father Coughlin and the

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[54] Ibid., pp. 127-128.

[55] Ibid., p. 128.

[56] Ibid., p. 132.

American press should be put into clearer perspective. Because it would be infeasible to thoroughly chart Coughlin's press relations from 1926 to 1936, the writer has selected several significant events and periods in the priest's public career by which to gauge the attitudes of the four subject newspapers toward Coughlin prior to the election campaign of 1936.

As noted above, Father Coughlin and the Detroit Free Press were frequently bitter critics of each other. The feud reached its peak in March, 1933, after Coughlin broadcast an attack on the Detroit banking community and E. D. Stair, a member of the Detroit Bankers' Committee and publisher of the Free Press. In addition to denouncing Detroit's bankers, the priest called the Free Press "a rabid partisan paper" and "a paper that was wedded to the past . . . a paper religiously opposed to the New Deal." He charged it with "cheap insinuation" and "editorial wrench-slinging," and labeled it "the little old lady of Fort Street."[57]

The newspaper responded by attacking Coughlin for eight consecutive days in its news columns and on its editorial page. On March 27, in an editorial entitled, "Coughlin the Demagog," the Free Press accused

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[57]Ward, pp. 184-186.

the priest of "slander," "flamboyant demagoguery," and "radio bombast."[58]

News stories and editorials on succeeding days purported to expose Coughlin's dealings in the stock market, called his charges against the banks "utterly false," and referred to him as an "immigrant firebrand." The Free Press also claimed to be

> swamped with letters, telegrams, and phone calls . . . by its friends, offering support and encouragement because of the vicious attacks made upon it by a man, who through an accident of position, has loomed larger in the national political picture than his size would warrant.[59]

Although the Free Press labeled the Detroit Times one of Coughlin's "chief advisers,"[60] the Times was not as obvious and outspoken about its opinions of Coughlin as Stair's newspaper. During the 1933 vendetta between the Free Press and the priest, the Times, a member of the Hearst newspaper chain, did not comment editorially. In more subtle ways, however, the Times exhibited a pro-Coughlin bias. On March 28, for example, the Times front page banner proclaimed, "Father Coughlin Aids Probe," in reference to the federal investigation of Detroit banks.[61] Two days later the Times began a series

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[58] Detroit Free Press, March 27, 1933.

[59] Ibid., March 28-30, 1933.

[60] Ward, p. 257.

[61] Detroit Times, March 28, 1933.

of articles on the Detroit banking situation entitled, "Vanishing Millions." The first installment referred to "two giant bank holding companies which sought to dominate the financial system of an entire state."[62]

After Coughlin answered the editorial blasts of the Free Press on Sunday, April 2, 1933, the Times gave the broadcast elaborate coverage. In addition to a front page headline, "Coughlin Gives Final Proof," there were headlines on pages two and three that read, "Shrine Packed to Doors to Hear Father Coughlin" and "Overflow Crowds Hear Priest Through Amplifiers." The coverage also included pictures of Coughlin, his audience, and the Shrine.[63]

When Father Coughlin and General Johnson exchanged bitter criticism in 1935, the Times again subtly showed some pro-Coughlin slanting. The Times coverage of Johnson's attack on Coughlin was carried on the second page, but an article on Senator Huey Long's defense of the priest was run on the front page.[64] When Coughlin later denounced Johnson, however, it was reported on the front page. Johnson's response to the speech was reported on the fifteenth page.[65]

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[62] Ibid., March 30, 1933.

[63] Ibid., April 3, 1933.

[64] Ibid., March 5, 1935.

[65] Ibid., March 12, 1935.

The Detroit News, Detroit's third major newspaper of the Coughlin era, displayed the most neutrality and objectivity in reporting the activities of the priest. During the bank controversy of 1933, the News covered the many sides of the issue, reporting both Coughlin's speeches and Stair's replies. Editorially, the News pleaded for a settlement of the city's banking problems, but was cautious about endorsing a specific plan. An editorial on March 27, said, "The News has not necessarily taken a position in support or criticism of either . . . plan."[66]

When Secretary Morgenthau revealed in 1934 that the Radio League of the Little Flower was a leading investor in silver, the News was again editorially neutral. It desired a resolution of the silver question, but did not want to prematurely accuse anyone. "Proofs are required before presuming that the silver forces are acting from worse than political motives. Certainly, sincere conviction activates numbers of the men active in the silver leadership," observed a News editorial, which concluded by calling for a "searching inquiry."[67]

The News also did not take sides during the feud between Coughlin and Johnson. Its editorial comment on

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[66]Detroit News, March 27, 1933.

[67]Ibid., April 28, 1934.

the affair was mildly critical of both men: " . . . the erstwhile NRA leader is never happier than when playing with his vitriolic vocabulary. We feel, however, that he takes too seriously the influence of these two men [Coughlin and Long]."[68]

The New York Times in 1933 was generally critical of Father Coughlin in its editorials. In an editorial entitled, "Debate Free for All," the Times defended the rights of free speech and loyal opposition. Referring to Coughlin, the editorial concluded, "Let the stormy eloquence roll on like thunder. After it will come again the still small voice of reason."[69]

On March 6, 1935, the Times published an editorial that mildly praised General Hugh Johnson, former head of the NRA, for publicly denouncing Coughlin. Although it admitted Johnson was "far from being a perfect example of freedom," the editorial commended his speaking out against the "moral terrorism set up by Huey Long and Father Coughlin." It also referred to Long and Coughlin as "would-be political tyrants."[70]

Not all of the Times comments about Coughlin were negative, however. A month before the "Debate Free

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[68] Ibid., April 6, 1935.

[69] New York Times, Nov. 29, 1933.

[70] Ibid., March 6, 1935.

for All" editorial appeared, the New York Times Magazine carried an article that was favorable to the priest. Impressed with his personal popularity and magnetism, the article concluded that Coughlin was sincere in his humanitarian efforts.[71]

The Times also acknowledged the impressive showing of Coughlin's National Union for Social Justice in the Ohio primaries. Its front page article on the primary elections reported that

> The strength of the National Union for Social Justice was one of the big surprises of the state-wide primary. Democratic and Republican leaders had an inkling that the organization's influence would be felt in the primary, but never suspected its actual strength.[72]

The American press greeted the announcement of a third party with a generally non-commital attitude. Most newspapers agreed that the Coughlin-Townsend-Smith-Lemke coalition would probably be a definite threat to the Democrats; others seemed to believe Lemke would draw votes away from Alfred Landon, the Republican candidate. The majority of newspapers and magazines, however, took a "wait-and-see" outlook toward the new party.[73]

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[71]Tull, pp. 48-49.

[72]New York Times, May 14, 1936.

[73]Tull, pp. 131-132.

THE CAMPAIGN

June-July

The announcement of the Union party's formation was not the first major news event of the 1936 campaign, for the Republicans held their national convention in early June. The Detroit News, the Detroit Free Press, the Detroit Times, and the New York Times all commented editorially on the convention and the GOP's presidential candidate, Governor Alfred Landon of Kansas.

The Free Press and the Detroit Times, both outspoken critics of the Roosevelt administration, were early supporters of the Republican ticket and praised it in editorials. A Free Press editorial said the Republicans were prepared "to present a truly solid American front as they begin their organized finish fight against the New Deal and its iniquities."[1] A Detroit Times editorial, in denouncing the "un-American character of the New Deal," referred to Landon and his running mate, Colonel Frank Knox, as a "ticket of great strength and appeal."[2] The anti-Roosevelt tone of the

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[1] Detroit Free Press, June 13, 1936.

[2] Detroit Times, June 15, 1936.

Detroit Times's campaign editorials was further established in another editorial which called the President, "a threat against Constitutional bulwarks," and objected to the "complicated machinery of New Deal regimentation and the verbal and actual chicanery of double-dealers."[3]

The Detroit News and the New York Times appeared neutral and reserved in their editorial statements about the Republican ticket. Both had mild praise for Landon, although the Times pointed out some shortcomings in his candidacy. The editors noted in an editorial on June 12 that the Kansas governor's bid for the nomination was "well conceived" and "conducted with dignity and shrewdness." The same editorial, however, also pointed out that Landon's "political training" was "briefer" and political background "less extensive" than most presidential candidates.[4]

During the week following the Republican convention all four newspapers carried stories about Father Coughlin and the possibility of a third party entering the campaign. The priest hinted that a third party was being formed and that he would probably endorse it. Although he did not reveal who the new party's candidate

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[3]Ibid., June 16, 1936.

[4]New York Times, June 12, 1936.

would be, Coughlin said that in a three-party race, Landon would finish third.[5]

The Free Press, the News, and the New York Times all commented on a third party's future before the formation of the Union party was officially announced. A Free Press editorial called Dr. Townsend and the Reverend Gerald L. K. Smith "creatures of the depression," and accused them of fooling their followers with false remedies.[6]

On June 18 the News made the third party threat its lead story on the front page. Under the eight-column banner, "Democrats Fear Third Party Threat," a story by Jay G. Hayden of the News's Washington bureau reported that Republicans were hopeful that a third party would enter the race, but he concluded,

> Few people here believe that the third party now proposed could win any considerable number of electoral votes. It is held to be possible, however, that it might carry North Dakota and Louisiana, and that its effect probably would be so to divide the Roosevelt vote as to throw a number of states to the Republicans.[7]

In its June 18 edition the New York Times reported the reactions of various leaders and officials in Washington to a third party. The newspaper said that

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[5]Detroit News, June 17, 1936.

[6]Detroit Free Press, June 14, 1936.

[7]Detroit News, June 18, 1936.

"radicals" and spokesmen for splinter movements regarded the proposed Coughlin-Townsend-Smith-Lemke coalition as "badly timed." The Times also reported that the elements of the proposed new party were seen as "too divergent" for a successful movement.[8]

The four newspapers reacted in various ways to the official announcement of the Union party's formation. The Detroit Times carried the news in an International News Service story on the seventh page of its June 20 edition. The story by an INS Washington correspondent said the Union party could have "a startling effect on the November election," and that both major parties were afraid Lemke would attract a large block of votes. Another INS story on the new party referred to Lemke as a "fighter used to defeat."[9] The Hearst paper made no editorial comment regarding the Union party.

In the Detroit Free Press, news of the third party's entrance into the campaign shared the front page with articles and pictures of Max Schmeling winning the heavyweight boxing title from Joe Louis. The Free Press carried Associated Press stories about the new party, its platform, and Coughlin's endorsement. These accounts were for the most part unbiased and straight-forward

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[8]New York Times, June 18, 1936.

[9]Detroit Times, June 20-21, 1936.

although they did point out that Lemke was running on an inflationist platform.[10] In an editorial on the third party, the Free Press noted that its supporters (Coughlin, Townsend, and Smith) had backed Roosevelt in 1932 and had helped to put him in office. The Free Press also took a dim view of the Union party's inflationist platform, commenting that nothing indicated inflation would be "less disastrous" in 1936 than at any other time.[11]

The Detroit News gave the Union party considerable coverage the week following its formation. Not only did the new party receive front page space, it also remained a major topic of news for several days. On June 20 the News made the United Press account of the new party's formation its lead story and also carried articles on Coughlin's endorsement, the party's platform, and short biographies of Lemke and O'Brien. The stories reported a number of judgments about the Union party: Lemke was called the "author of an inflationary farm mortgage bill"; Coughlin was referred to as "the direct inspirer of the new party"; organized labor was said to be "cool" to the new party; and the third party movement was expected to attract "smaller organizations advocating inflationary and other radical legislation."[12]

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[10] Detroit Free Press, June 20, 1936.

[11] Ibid., June 22, 1936.

[12] Detroit News, June 20, 1936.

On June 22 Jay G. Hayden of the News reported from Washington his assessment of the New Deal's reaction to the new party. He wrote that the administration was worrying about its opponents and detractors, including Coughlin and the Union party, stealing headlines. A News editorial said the third party injected an "interesting feature" into the campaign, and added that although Lemke did not have a chance of winning, his candidacy would affect the major parties. The editorial was quick to point out, however, that the News did not support Lemke or approve of his platform:

> The News has not the slightest sympathy with the currency planks of the Union party. Their adoption as national policy would mean the wildest form of inflation--the issue of currency with nothing behind it but the Government proclamation, "This is a Dollar."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> It is the road to ruin, not the path to prosperity on which Rep. Lemke and his cohorts would set the feet of the American people.[13]

The same editorial contained criticism of President Roosevelt. "Money is no easier to get than it was a decade ago," the News said. "The millenium has not arrived; President Roosevelt has failed to deliver it." The editorial also called Lemke's candidacy, "a hard blow to the Democratic hopes."[14]

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[13] Ibid., June 22, 1936.

[14] Ibid.

The News commented further on Father Coughlin and the Union party in editorials on June 23 and 27. In an editorial on opposition to Roosevelt, the News discussed the radio priest in matter-of-fact terms:

> Unquestionably Fr. Coughlin exerts a tremendous influence and his will made known through his radio addresses will be taken as an authoritative command by his National Union for Social Justice.[15]

The News also continued editorially to chide the new party: "No party can survive as the liberal party of the United States, if founded on the idea of inflation, which is, to put it mildly, the Union Party's chief stock in trade."[16]

The New York Times also gave the Union party considerable coverage in late June. In its June 20 edition the Times carried stories on Lemke's candidacy and Coughlin's endorsement speech, the full text of Coughlin's speech, and biographical sketches of Lemke and O'Brien. Included in the Times coverage were assessments of the new party. Although the Times referred to the inflationist platform as "radical in nature and remarkable for brevity," it conceded that many persons believed the coalition could endanger Roosevelt's re-election. The Times story on Coughlin's speech endorsing

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[15] Ibid., June 23, 1936.

[16] Ibid., June 27, 1936.

Lemke called the priest's influence on the National Union for Social Justice "overwhelming" and said the organization was "almost a personal instrument."[17]

On June 21 the front page of the Times carried a story by James A. Hagerty, the newspaper's chief political reporter, on the Democrats' reactions to the new party. Hagerty, who later served as President Eisenhower's press secretary, reported that the Democrats planned to appeal to voting elements that might support Lemke through speeches and modifications in their platform. Democratic leaders reportedly believed that Lemke, with the backing of Coughlin, Townsend, and Smith, could help Landon carry several states.[18]

Editorially, the Times was succinctly critical of the third party's platform and pessimistic about its future. One editorial said a third party movement was "inevitable" in 1936, but the newspaper did not approve of the Union party's radical monetary and financial planks. "It has written a class appeal to the discontented and unthinking," the Times commented. Although the Times believed that June was too early to assess the third party's role or strength, it pointed out that "the

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[17] New York Times, June 20, 1936.

[18] Ibid., June 21, 1936.

American electoral system offers many obstacles to the speedy launching of a third party."[19]

The New York Times continued to editorialize about the Union party's unpromising future on June 23. "It can probably be organized successfully in only a few of the states," said a Times editorial, noting that the new party's campaign "can hardly be well financed or sustained." The editorial concluded that the group hurt most by the new party probably would be Norman Thomas' Socialist party.[20]

In late June the Democratic National Convention dominated the news columns of the nation's newspapers. The convention also provoked substantial editorial comment. The Detroit Times carried anti-administration editorials and cartoons almost daily. The Times's strong opposition to Roosevelt and the New Deal was also reflected on its news pages. On June 22 an inside page displayed an eight-column banner that read, "Reds and Pinks at Convention Amaze Edwin C. Hill." Hill, the Times reporter at the convention in Philadelphia, referred to the "pale pink and real red who have crept into the Democratic nest." In his report Hill also commented

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., June 23, 1936.

that Coughlin had the Democrats worried, but labeled Lemke as a "radical."[21]

The Detroit Free Press also editorially attacked the Democrats during the convention. In an editorial, "The Great Betrayal," the Free Press called for a Republican victory in November.

> . . . the best hope for the rescue of the real Democratic Party, and its later rehabilitation, will be a success of the Republican Party, functioning as an All-American party, which will bring about the definite overthrow of Franklin D. Roosevelt and his personal political army.[22]

In its editorial review of Roosevelt's acceptance speech, the Free Press continued the anti-Roosevelt theme. After calling the convention "regimented circusing and ballyhoo," the editorial concluded,

> If the speech of acceptance is a promise of what the New Deal campaign is to be, it will become essentially an appeal to the ignoble passions, to prejudice, jealousy, greed, envy, and hatred.[23]

The Detroit News was editorially neutral throughout much of the 1936 campaign. It had praise and criticism for both major candidates. Although it chided the President on June 22, the News had lauded his "political acumen" in an editorial the previous day. In the same

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[21] Detroit Times, June 22, 1936.

[22] Detroit Free Press, June 26, 1936.

[23] Ibid., June 29, 1936.

editorial, however, the News had mild praise for Governor Landon.[24]

Like the other newspapers the New York Times devoted considerable space to the Democratic convention. Unlike the others, however, the Times was consistently favorable to Roosevelt and the Democrats in its editorials. In an editorial on Senator Alben Barkley's keynote speech at Philadelphia, The Times expressed the opinion that the Democrats' plans and policies were more specific and concrete than the Republicans'.[25] After Franklin Roosevelt received his party's renomination, a Times editorial writer wrote of the President: "He has amazing vitality, great courage and a flair for the timing of his strokes . . . [He has] proven his qualities of leadership."[26]

In discussing the Democratic platform, policies, and candidates, the New York Times made several references to the new Union Party. An editorial about the Democratic Party on June 24 said,

> It has no intention . . . of matching the bid of the new "Union" party for extremist votes or of appealing for the support of those who would follow Father Coughlin down the primrose pathway toward inflation.[27]

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[24] Detroit News, June 21, 1936.

[25] New York Times, June 24, 1936.

[26] Ibid., June 27, 1936.

[27] Ibid., June 24, 1936.

In its coverage of a speech in which Lemke attacked the farm policies of the administration, the Times reported, "He offered no specific farm program, limiting himself to criticism of present trends."[28]

In early July, 1936, a severe drought and heat wave encompassed much of the nation and became front page news. Lemke and the Union party made little news during this period, but Father Coughlin made headlines several times. On July 11 the newspapers carried the news that the priest had broken politically with Frank Murphy, a long-time friend of Coughlin's and the Democratic candidate for governor of Michigan in 1936. Coughlin was not happy because Murphy had been handpicked by President Roosevelt to run for governor. Murphy dismissed the priest as a "silver-tongued pulpiteer."[29]

Coughlin also made news by predicting that Roosevelt would lose the election[30] and by calling Lemke "an even money bet" to carry Michigan.[31] A Gallup public opinion poll in mid-July supported the first prediction. The poll gave Landon a margin in electoral votes, but showed Roosevelt leading in the popular vote.[32]

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[28] Ibid., June 29, 1936.

[29] Detroit News, July 11, 1936.

[30] New York Times, July 11, 1936.

[31] Detroit Free Press, July 11, 1936.

[32] Detroit News, July 12, 1936.

During the first two weeks of July, Detroit's two anti-New Deal newspapers, the Times and the Free Press, continued to support Landon in their editorials. Malcolm Bingay, a Free Press columnist, blasted the "New Ordealers," and the Times consistently referred to the administration as the "Raw Deal." On July 2 a Times editorial charged the administration with "squandermania" and said, "A vote for Landon will be a vote for common honesty, rugged economy, and for a revival of faith in simple arithmetic."[33] A week later the Times assessed the two major candidates in strongly patriotic terms:

> Mr. Roosevelt is prone to ape the methods of certain rulers in Europe--Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin,--in his contempt of democratic self-government.
>
> Governor Landon, on the contrary, follows the methods of certain statesmen of America--Washington, Lincoln, Cleveland--in his respect for democratic self-government.[34]

Although the New York Times was pro-Roosevelt, it was not rabidly so. The editors made some favorable comments about Landon and some negative comments about the administration. An editorial on the cost of the New Deal concluded, "The chief problem in Washington today remains the task of balancing the national budget."[35]

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[33] Detroit Times, July 2, 1936.

[34] Ibid., July 9, 1936.

[35] New York Times, July 2, 1936.

The New York Times also continued to assess the prospects of the Union party. A Times editorial observed that the new party was being hurt by the lack of official endorsements by Dr. Townsend and the Reverend Gerald L. K. Smith and noted that valuable campaign time was passing. The newspaper also pointed out that because of election regulations, the Union party would have difficulty getting on the ballot in many states. The editorial concluded by emphasizing the "formidable task" of the new party and said that it would need whatever help it could get at the upcoming Townsend old-age pension convention.[36]

The Union party and the major figures identified with it--Coughlin, Townsend, Smith, and Lemke--returned to the front pages in mid-July. The occasion was the Townsendites' convention in Cleveland. Although the convention was expected to officially endorse Lemke, there were reports of a possible split among the delegates because of some pro-Roosevelt sentiments. The opening of the convention was the subject of an editorial in the New York Times, which referred to Coughlin, Townsend, Smith, and Lemke as "the captains of discontent" who believed wealth can be created "by waving a magic wand in Washington."[37]

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[36] Ibid., July 7, 1936.

[37] Ibid., July 15, 1936.

On July 15 the Detroit Times made its only editorial reference to Father Coughlin during the 1936 campaign. In another of its anti-Roosevelt editorials, the Times commented on Coughlin's prediction that the President would lose the election:

> The Rev. Charles E. Coughlin who has traveled widely in this country and who comes into contact with people in all walks of life, has unusual opportunities for gauging the trend of public opinion. There can be very little doubt in all thinking minds that what Father Coughlin here says is true.[38]

During the remainder of the campaign the Detroit Times did not refer to either Father Coughlin or the Union party on its editorial page.

The high point of the Townsendite convention, from a news standpoint, came on July 15 when Coughlin addressed the convention after he, Townsend, and Smith had agreed to work jointly for the candidacy of Lemke and the Union party. In what was probably the most publicized speech of his career, the priest removed his coat and clerical collar and bitterly denounced Roosevelt, calling him "the great liar and great betrayer" and "Franklin Doublecrossing Roosevelt."[39]

The newspapers were almost unanimously critical of Coughlin's vituperative address. The Detroit Times

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[38] Detroit Times, July 15, 1936.

[39] Detroit News, July 16, 1936.

was the most neutral, as it did not choose to comment editorially on the speech. In its news columns the Times carried reports of both Coughlin's remarks and the negative reactions to them.[40]

The other anti-Roosevelt newspaper in Detroit, the Free Press, expressed the opinion that Coughlin had gone too far in his speech. In his column, "The Great Game of Politics," Frank R. Kent, a syndicated national political writer for the Baltimore Sun, made the following observation about the Cleveland convention: "But even to one whose admiration of Mr. Roosevelt is completely restrained it was not a pleasant spectacle."[41]

Kent also made a remarkably accurate appraisal of the Union party coalition's future. "Movements such as these have a way of petering out," he wrote. "Men such as these do not always hold together. They are all prone to exaggerate their following and magnify their power." The next day, however, Kent said that the coalition would hurt Roosevelt.[42]

The Detroit News also voiced disapproval of the priest's vitriol. A News editorial said,

> In deference to the office, disapproval of the man who holds it customarily is couched in terms of criticism, not of abuse.

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[40]Detroit Times, July 16, 1936.

[41]Detroit Free Press, July 17, 1936.

[42]Ibid., July 18-19, 1936.

> It is not our place to apologize for Fr. Coughlin's choice of language. Nevertheless we register here our own regret that any resident of Michigan should have let anger over political issues so dull his appreciation of what is mere good taste in speaking of the President.[43]

David Lawrence, whose syndicated Washington political column appeared in the News, called Coughlin's terms "regrettable." Lawrence also wrote that he believed the third party was being "over-emphasized" and that its vote totals in November would be negligible.[44]

Of the four newspapers, the New York Times was most critical of Coughlin's speech and of the third party movement as a whole. The Times's news coverage referred to the Cleveland convention as a "love feast of the discontented," and an editorial included the phrases, "rip-roaring clerics," "crack-brained schemes," and "bitter prejudices." The editorial also labeled Coughlin's tactics "politically unwise" and said,

> Those wild words at Cleveland make it obvious that no logical process will impress those who utter or, without understanding, cheer them. But the reasonable American public will not miss the point.[45]

Coughlin's speech drew criticism from other areas besides the nation's press. In a speech in Baltimore, Colonel Samuel Harden Church, president of Carnegie

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[43] Detroit News, July 17, 1936.

[44] Ibid., July 17-18, 1936.

[45] New York Times, July 17, 1936.

Institute, rebuked Coughlin for his remarks.[46] At the Townsendite convention, the attack on Roosevelt created a short-lived insurrection that threatened to unseat Dr. Townsend. Most serious and newsworthy, however, was the reaction of Bishop Michael Gallagher, Coughlin's superior. Bishop Gallagher, who had always defended the priest's radio broadcasts and political activities, reprimanded Coughlin for using language that was a "little too strong," but he did not discipline him.[47]

Despite internal strife and some bad publicity, the Townsendite convention ended on a positive note for the Union party. The delegates voted to support Lemke after he endorsed Townsend's pension plan, and the alliance between Coughlin, Townsend, and Smith was cemented by speeches at the final session of the convention.[48]

On the last day of the convention, the New York Times published another anti-third-party editorial. The Times commented that people tend to look on third parties with amusement and that no third party ever won anything significant.[49]

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[46] Detroit Times, July 17, 1936.

[47] Detroit News, July 18, 1936.

[48] Ibid., July 20, 1936.

[49] New York Times, July 19, 1936.

A Free Press editorial assessed the Townsend movement as unrealistic and impractical. It said,

> The followers of Dr. Townsend are sincere people who are good citizens and good Americans and who love their country and its instituions . . .
> They simply have allowed themselves to be led into the belief that it is possible to reach a desired and desirable objective by promoting an economically impractical and impossible program.[50]

After the Townsendite convention the Union party movement again ceased to be front-page news. The aftermath of Father Coughlin's bitter anti-Roosevelt speech continued as a major topic of news. The Associated Press noted that the speech had made a "painful impression" at the Vatican, and all four newspapers reported the possibility of papal action being taken against Coughlin.

On July 23 Coughlin publicly apologized for the much-publicized speech, saying that his comments were made in the "heat of civic interest and in righteous anger." The apology was followed by a statement by Bishop Gallagher defending Coughlin's right to speak out on political issues.[51]

Coughlin's apology prompted an unusual editorial in the Detroit Free Press. The editorial writer not only reproached the priest, he also attacked President

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[50] Detroit Free Press, July 21, 1936.

[51] New York Times, July 24, 26, 1936.

Roosevelt for his alleged reaction to the speech. Regarding the apology itself, the editorial said, "It would have been more fitting, however, if he [Coughlin] had apologized to the American people and his church for such unseemly vehemence." The writer then inferred that the President had protested to the Vatican, remarking, "he has no more rights than the humblest citizen." The editorial also observed that President Hoover had "made no protest to Rome" when he was assailed by Coughlin.[52]

An editorial in the Detroit News on July 26 evaluated the strength of the five-week-old Union party. Commenting that denunciation was not enough, the editorial writer doubted that the third party would "attract more than a trifling fraction of the practical American electorate."[53]

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[52]Detroit Free Press, July 25, 1936.

[53]Detroit News, July 26, 1936.

August-September

In early August, 1936, news of the Spanish Civil War and the summer Olympic Games dominated American newspapers. The Union party made little news in the three major Detroit newspapers and the New York Times, and what news it generated usually was found in short stories on inside pages. Lemke made a speaking tour through the midwest and announced that the Union party's campaign would concentrate on doubtful states[1] in the hope of drawing enough votes so that the decision on who would be President would be made by the U.S. House of Representatives.[2]

Father Coughlin, however, continued to make more news than Lemke. The priest also made a speaking tour in early August, and Roosevelt, Landon, and the press were targets of his tirades. Coughlin called Roosevelt "a communist," Landon "a menace," and said he did not want or need newspaper support.[3]

Coughlin himself was both the target of criticism and the object of praise during this period. The Reverend Doctor Walter A. Maier, a Lutheran leader and scholar, denounced the priest as a "clerical demagog"

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[1] Detroit Times, Aug. 5, 1936.

[2] Detroit News, Aug. 2, 1936.

[3] New York Times, Aug. 2, 3, 1936.

and a "chamelon cleric,"[4] but Bishop Joseph Schrembs of Cleveland called Coughlin a "friend of democracy."[5]

An event that brought the Union party back into the news and also provoked editorial comment was the announcement that William (Big Bill) Thompson, former Republican mayor of Chicago, would be the Union party's gubernatorial candidate in Illinois. The Detroit News's reaction to Thompson's candidacy is indicated by the title of an editorial about him--"A Clown in Politics."[6] A New York Times editorial said of Thompson, "Poor Mr. Lemke has curious friends, some of them with queerer notions than his own."[7]

The Detroit Times and the Detroit Free Press continued to promote Landon's candidacy and attack the administration both editorially and in news columns. The Times referred to the "evertightening dictatorship of the New Deal" in an editorial and also ran a number of anti-administration headlines including, "Call For Help Sent Out by Roosevelt," "Rebel Democrats Bolt to Landon at Conference Here," and "Blame Red Influences for New Deal 'Botch.'"[8]

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[4]Detroit Free Press, Aug. 2, 1936.

[5]New York Times, Aug. 7, 1936.

[6]Detroit News, Aug. 10, 1936.

[7]New York Times, Aug. 7, 1936.

[8]Detroit Times, Aug. 5, 6, 7, 11, 1936, passim.

Free Press editorials praised Landon's "conception of public duty" and warned that if Roosevelt were re-elected, "there will be no end to the sort of thing we have been outlining ['taxes, visible and invisible']. It will get worse and worse, until the breaking point for even this rich country has been reached."[9] The Free Press also slanted some of its headlines; on August 13 these headlines appeared over a front page story, "Jim Farley Flouts Army Tradition to Fire War Orphan" and "Hero's Daughter to Be Turned Out."[10]

The Detroit News continued to be relatively neutral and non-commital toward the candidates in August. In an editorial, "The Campaign," the News did not endorse anyone, but appealed to "people [who] are thoroughly and thoughtfully aroused."[11]

The Gallup public opinion poll during the first week of August reported that President Roosevelt's popularity was rising and that "slight shifts might give the Democrats a landslide." An American Institute of Public Opinion poll, however, concluded that the Union party could clinch several vital states for Landon and the Republicans.[12]

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[9]Detroit Free Press, Aug. 10, 12, 1936.

[10]Ibid., Aug. 13, 1936.

[11]Detroit News, Aug. 9, 1936.

[12]Ibid.

The Union party movement again became a major news topic in mid-August when the National Union for Social Justice held its national convention in Cleveland. Like Dr. Townsend had a month earlier, Father Coughlin admitted before the convention began that some delegates might object to endorsing Lemke.[13] Shortly before the convention opened, a group of Catholic laymen in Boston announced the formation of an anti-Coughlin group.[14]

The Detroit Free Press gave the convention front page coverage, and its reporter in Cleveland had both unfavorable and favorable comments about Coughlin. In one paragraph the priest was referred to as a "militant leader" who used "wheedling cajolery or sharp invectives." In another he was described as an "extremely temperate [man] . . . [who] expounded calmly and dispassionately." The Free Press report also noted that President Roosevelt's presence in Cleveland failed to overshadow Coughlin and the convention.[15] Malcolm Bingay, a Free Press editor, in a signed column mildly admonished the President for "up-staging" Coughlin, but also called the priest a "roaring padre."[16]

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[13]Detroit News, Aug. 13, 1936.

[14]Detroit Free Press, Aug. 14, 1936.

[15]Ibid., Aug. 15, 1936.

[16]Ibid., Aug. 17, 1936.

On August 16 the Free Press published two interesting quotations attributed to Father Coughlin. The first was in answer to a charge that Coughlin was allied politically with William Randolph Hearst: "I am following nobody associated with William Randolph Hearst--not that I disparage that gentleman. . . ." The second statement concerned the Union party's election prospects: "I'll swing nine million votes to Lemke and O'Brien in November or I'll quit the radio forever. If I can't do that much I'm all washed up."[17]

Assessing the size of the NUSJ, a Free Press reporter wrote, "The NUSJ claims 1,600,000 active members and about four times that number who are passive."[18]

The Detroit Times's coverage of the convention consisted primarily of International News Service reports that were relatively unbiased. In the headlines used over the convention stories, the Times was slightly unfavorable to Coughlin one day and slightly favorable the next. On August 14 it carried the headline, "Throngs Shun Coughlin, Hail Roosevelt." The next day an eight-column banner headline proclaimed: "Fr. Coughlin Swings Convention to Indorse Lemke."[19]

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[17] Ibid., Aug. 16, 1936.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Detroit Times, Aug. 14, 15, 1936.

On August 15 the Times also published a story under Father Coughlin's by-line. The article concerned the booing given President Roosevelt's name at the convention. Coughlin commented that in some respects the booing was unfortunate, but he maintained that it was spontaneous and showed that the "rank-and-file voters want a change."[20]

The Detroit News also gave the convention extensive coverage. On August 17, the day after the convention ended, the News carried on its front page a story about Father Coughlin nearly collapsing at the rostrum during his final speech to the delegates. The story, which was published under an eight-column headline, "10-day Rest Ordered for Coughlin," reported that the priest was suffering from a combination of exhaustion and heat prostration.[21]

The NUSJ convention was the subject of two editorials in the News. The first concerned the endorsement of Lemke.

> And now the NUSJ has indorsed Rep. Lemke, who wants congress to issue some 36 billion dollars in paper with which to pay off the national debt; that is, it has indorsed Mr. Lemke, but not, specifically, this detail of his program, on which even Fr. Coughlin seems to gag.[22]

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[20] Ibid., Aug. 15, 1936.

[21] Detroit News, Aug. 17, 1936.

[22] Ibid., Aug. 18, 1936.

The second editorial further disparaged the Union party platform: "After that platform was enacted, there would not be much left to do--except to pick up the pieces and begin all over again."[23]

The New York Times made the NUSJ convention a front page news item and an editorial topic for nearly a week. The Times gave particularly thorough coverage to the convention's endorsement of Lemke. A story reported the vote as 8,152 to 1 in favor of endorsement with the lone dissenter being John O'Donnell of Pennsylvania. O'Donnell called the delegates "victims of mob psychology" who "humbly and ignorantly serve the purposes of the Liberty League and William Randolph Hearst." Not unexpectedly, Coughlin denied the charges.[24]

The Times also devoted two editorials to assessing the convention, the third party, and its presidential candidate. The Times termed Lemke's supporters and their philosophies a "strange mixture of political and economic notions . . . some founded on complete ignorance and willful misrepresentations." The Times did not, however, dismiss Lemke and his backers as a factor in the election. The editorial continued, "Their entrance into the Presidential campaign will have to be taken as a factor in

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[23] Ibid., Aug. 22, 1936.

[24] New York Times, Aug. 16, 1936.

all political calculations, but how large it will bulk, the most knowing cannot now foretell."[25]

The second editorial, entitled "Appeal to the Gullible," concerned Lemke's speech at the NUSJ convention. The address was inspired by "political bravado" and promised to do the impossible, said the Times. The editorial ended with some sober reflections on the third party and the role of government:

> Such an appeal as that made by the Presidential candidate of the third party sounds grotesque and even comic, but it has a serious side. It raises important questions. Has the magnifying of the functions of Government since 1929--inevitable under the circumstances--thrown great masses of our people into confusion of mind about what any Administration at Washington might do? Do they suppose there is such a thing as governmental magic? . . . wonder workers?
> . . . If large numbers of American citizens believe what Mr. Lemke says, they will believe anything.[26]

After the NUSJ convention the Union party again disappeared from the front pages of the newspapers. While Landon's campaigning and the activities of Roosevelt were on the front pages almost every day, Lemke's name appeared in the newspapers only occasionally and usually not on the front page. The Union party candidate was the subject of two editorials in the Detroit News, however. One referred to Lemke's "strange

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[25] Ibid., Aug. 17, 1936.

[26] Ibid., Aug. 18, 1936.

philosophy" and the other ridiculed his plan to provide 250,000 new lakes for the United States.[27]

The News also continued to give cautious praise to Landon. An editorial on August 22 said the Republican candidate "usually wins respect and admiration" and had an "interesting record politically."[28]

Despite his period of rest, silence, and recuperation following the NUSJ convention, Father Coughlin made news in late August. The Boston Advocate had accused Coughlin of anti-Semitism because of remarks he made at the NUSJ convention about the need for Jews to act more like Christians. Coughlin denied the charge in a brief statement.[29]

The Detroit Free Press and Detroit Times continued their attacks on the New Deal in late August. On August 30 the Free Press published an article that called the Democratic party the "greatest political machine ever created in the United States" and referred to "voters who have received direct payment from the Federal Treasury." The article was accompanied by these headlines: "Landon Opposed by Machine of 16,314,000 Paid Voters" and "New Deal Has Big Paid Army."[30]

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[27]Detroit News, Aug. 24, 25, 1936.

[28]Ibid., August 22, 1936.

[29]Detroit Free Press, Aug. 22, 28, 1936.

[30]Ibid., Aug. 30, 1936.

Although the Detroit Times consistently praised and supported Landon in its editorials, headlines, and editorial cartoons, it was critical of the Republican candidate for opposing loyalty oaths by teachers. A Times editorial termed Landon's position "a regrettable departure from the high plane of Americanism to which he has consistently adhered."[31]

The 1936 campaign officially began on Labor Day. While the two major parties made front page news with a number of speeches in early September, the Union party's publicity again revolved around Father Coughlin. A Vatican newspaper, Osservatore Romano, rebuked Coughlin for his attacks on the administration. The censure was followed by unconfirmed reports that Pope Pius XI had disciplined the Detroit priest.[32]

Bishop Gallagher, who returned to the United States from Rome on September 2, defended Coughlin and called the Vatican newspaper's rebuke "politics."[33] Both Gallagher and Coughlin denied that the Vatican had curbed the radio priest's political activities.[34]

On September 8 a Detroit News editorial said the newspaper had received a number of letters complaining

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[31]Detroit Times, Aug. 28, 1936.

[32]Detroit News, Sept. 2, 1936.

[33]Detroit Times, Sept. 3, 1936.

[34]New York Times, Sept. 7, 1936.

of the unfair treatment the News had given Lemke. The editorial defended the News's position on the third party, claiming, ". . . the Lemke Union Party undoubtedly forms the wildest program of inflation yet seriously proposed in America."[35] Three days later, a News editorial writer branded the Union party's programs "fallacious and dangerous."[36]

During September the two Detroit newspapers favorable to Landon, the Times and the Free Press, publicized a number of polls that showed the Republican candidate to be the probable winner in November. Included among these polls was that of the Literary Digest, a weekly news magazine, which showed Landon leading throughout the campaign. The Free Press regularly published the findings of the Literary Digest poll up to election day.

Although Coughlin, Lemke, Townsend, and Smith made numerous campaign speeches in September, the Union party received little mention in the newspapers. Most stories about it were brief and were buried on inside pages. One speech that drew some newspaper attention was an address by Coughlin in Brooklyn's Ebbetts Field on September 11. The New York Times reported the speech,

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[35]Detroit News, Sept. 8, 1936.

[36]Ibid., Sept. 11, 1936.

in which the priest lashed out at both Roosevelt and Landon, on its front page. The story noted that Coughlin's listeners only half-filled the stadium.[37]

The Union party's campaign received another setback in mid-September when Bishop Gallagher announced that the Union party was not backed by the Roman Catholic church (nor was any other party), and that he personally did not favor Lemke. The bishop also renounced the third party's monetary proposals as "dangerous."[38] The Detroit News editorially praised Gallagher, as well as both major parties, for opposing inflation.[39]

In late September the newspapers related the difficulties the Union party faced in getting on the ballot in several states. The new party's late entry into the race prevented it from being included on the ballot in some states that required that new parties be registered as much as six months before an election. In other states, the name Union party could not be used, and substitute names like, "The Third Party," "Independent party," and "Royal Oak party" were employed. The names of electors pledged to Lemke eventually appeared on the ballot in thirty-six states, but in only

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[37] New York Times, Sept. 12, 1936.

[38] Detroit Free Press, Sept. 14, 1936.

[39] Detroit News, Sept. 15, 1936.

thirty was the name Union party included. The candidate and the party did not appear on the ballot in a number of key states, including California, New York, and Louisiana.[40]

The Detroit News, which had been editorially critical of the new party throughout the summer, sympathized with its difficulty getting on the ballot in Michigan. A News editorial noted that it would be "unfair and unfortunate" if the Union party was excluded from the ballot because of technicalities. The editorial showed no sympathy or support for the Union party's platform, however. "We do not think their fallacious and dangerous monetary and banking program ought to receive many votes . . . Extremists and faddists who rise suddenly in American politics are better measured by the votes they get than by the noise they make," the newspaper said.[41]

Father Coughlin continued to create controversy and headlines in late September. At an NUSJ rally in Cincinnati he lashed out at the two major candidates, calling Roosevelt "anti-God" and Landon "old-fashioned." In his attack on the President, Coughlin also said that

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[40]Tull, pp. 167, 251-252.

[41]Detroit News, Sept. 25, 1936.

he favored the "use of bullets" if an "upstart dictator" made the ballot useless.[42]

The speech at Cincinnati provoked a quick response from the Most Reverend John T. McNichols, archbishop of Cincinnati, who rebuked Coughlin for using strong language and specious arguments. Coughlin answered the prelate's denunciation by saying, "I remember very well how they persecuted Mohammed."[43]

In addition to frequent criticism, Father Coughlin received threats on his life, and police began guarding him at public appearances.[44]

The Detroit News and Detroit Times published contradictory evaluations of the Union party during the last week of September. A News editorial discussed the new party's failure to win popular support and claimed it was because the country was better educated and more sophisticated regarding monetary matters.[45]

The Times carried a series of articles by John T. Lambert, "a Universal Service analyst on national politics," which pictured the Union party as controlling the "political fate" of Michigan. Lambert wrote that the

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[42] Ibid.

[43] Detroit Free Press, Sept. 26, 1936.

[44] Detroit News, Sept. 23, 1936.

[45] Ibid., Sept. 26, 1936.

new party could wield a "balance of power" and have a "very substantial effect" on the election.[46]

On their editorial pages the four newspapers continued to follow the patterns and themes they had established during the summer. The two highly partisan, anti-Roosevelt newspapers, the Free Press and the Detroit Times, maintained their support of Governor Landon while bitterly attacking the New Deal. On September 24 the Times accused Roosevelt of having the support of the Communists and charged, "The fact of such support is not disputed either by the Communists or President Roosevelt."[47]

A Free Press editorial of September 28 compared Landon's sincerity to Abraham Lincoln's. It also said, "The steadily increasing popularity of Gov. Landon is neither synthetic nor accidental."[48]

The Detroit News remained relatively fair and objective in its news pages, and editorially did not declare itself for or against either major party candidate. Its editorials were, however, generally favorable to Landon. One editorial said his "program includes

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[46] Detroit Times, Sept. 29, 1936.

[47] Ibid., Sept. 24, 1936.

[48] Detroit Free Press, Sept. 28, 1936.

approved, workable suggestions" and called his views "impartial and statesmanlike."[49]

Although the New York Times declared on October 1 that it was supporting President Roosevelt's re-election, it was not highly critical of Governor Landon. Some of its strongest editorial remarks against the Republican candidate concerned his farm policy: ". . . if put into effect, [it] will infallibly swell Federal appropriations and increase the deficits."[50]

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[49] Detroit News, Sept. 24, 1936.

[50] New York Times, Sept. 23, 1936.

October-November

As the 1936 campaign moved into its final month, the two major political parties continued to dominate the news in the three Detroit newspapers and the New York Times. The newspapers daily reported and editorialized on the campaigns of Roosevelt and Landon. Their coverage usually included numerous pictures and the complete texts of the candidates' major speeches. News reports on the Union party, however, were usually grouped with those concerning the other minor parties--Socialist, Communist, and Farmer-Laborer--and relegated to the inside pages of the papers.

On October 1 the New York Times and the Detroit Times each made some significant editorial comments. The New York Times announced that it was supporting the candidacy of President Roosevelt. The editorial said that the Times believed a second Roosevelt administration would be more conservative than the first and that it did not like the Republicans' foreign policy of aloofness and isolation. The newspaper also pointed out that the Times would endorse those views of Landon it felt were deserving.[1]

The Detroit Times carried a front-page editorial by its publisher-owner, William Randolph Hearst. Not

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[1]New York Times, Oct. 1, 1936.

surprisingly, the editorial was an attack on Roosevelt and his alleged connections with Communists. Hearst wrote,

> Mr. Roosevelt declares he is not a Communist, but the Communists say he is one.
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> The Communists ought to know. Every cow knows its own calf . . . How far is Mr. Roosevelt going to aid his fellow Communists?[2]

In early October the Detroit Times also began publishing the results of a Landon campaign song contest. The winners received cash awards from the Hearst syndicate.

Although it made no official endorsements or statements of its position, the Detroit News became increasingly more critical of President Roosevelt during October. An editorial entitled, "Roosevelt's Box Score," expressed the opinion that the administration's record "left much to be desired." Another editorial criticized the President for not speaking out on several monetary issues.[3]

The difficulties the Union party experienced getting on the ballot in Michigan were finally resolved during the first week of October. After trying unsuccessfully to be included on the Farmer-Laborer ticket,

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[2]Detroit Times, Oct. 1, 1936.

[3]Detroit News, Oct. 3, 15, 1936.

Lemke was entered under the vignette of the Third party.[4]

Lemke and his party were the targets of some rare public criticism by the Roosevelt administration in early October. Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes charged that the Union party was actually backing the Republicans in the campaign and that Coughlin was using Lemke as a "stooge."[5] (Ickes was probably expressing a personal opinion and not speaking for the entire Roosevelt administration.)

In early October, Father Coughlin drew another rebuke from a Catholic clergyman for his attacks on Roosevelt. Monsignor John Ryan, a professor of philosophy at Catholic University in Washington, D. C., called Coughlin's statements "ugly, cowardly, and flagrant calumnies" and his monetary proposals "90 per cent wrong."[6]

The Union party movement, which had begun in June with great enthusiasm and high hope, started to show signs of discouragement in October. Dr. Townsend advised his followers to vote for Landon in states where Lemke was not on the ballot,[7] and on October 8 Father

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[4]Detroit Times, Oct. 2, 1936.

[5]Detroit News, Oct. 10, 1936.

[6]New York Times, Oct. 9, 1936.

[7]Detroit Free Press, Oct. 9, 1936.

Coughlin told NUSJ members to accept the probability of an election defeat and to work for a successful movement in 1940.[8] Three weeks earlier in reference to the Union party the priest had said, "It is a banner which will likely be trailed in the dust of defeat."[9]

A Gallup public opinion poll released during the first week of October supported the pessimism of Townsend and Coughlin. The poll showed President Roosevelt gaining in popularity and votes, and indicated that he would win the election by a substantial margin.[10]

The Detroit Free Press also prognosticated about the election, but its method was considerably less scientific and sophisticated than the Gallup poll. In its daily feature, "Iffy the Dopester," the Free Press dismissed the "straw votes" of Gallup and other polls, and predicted that the "hay vote" would go to Landon. The only national poll the Free Press said it accepted was the one conducted and published by the Literary Digest.[11]

Both Landon and Roosevelt campaigned in Michigan in mid-October. The visits were followed by a number of partisan editorials in the Detroit papers. The Detroit

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[8] Detroit Times, Oct. 9, 1936.

[9] New York Times, Sept. 20, 1936.

[10] Detroit News, Oct. 4, 1936.

[11] Detroit Free Press, Oct. 4, 1936.

News editorials became more outspoken in their praise of Landon, referring to the "new and forward-moving character of his candidacy," and more frequent in their criticism of Roosevelt, claiming that his campaign position "does not accord with healthy continuance of a free competitive system."[12]

The Detroit Free Press and the Detroit Times continued to promote Landon and attack Roosevelt in their editorials. On October 18 the Free Press carried an endorsement of Landon by Alex Groesbeck, former governor of Michigan, on its front page. Later in the month the Free Press recommended that its readers vote straight Republican because a vote might be lost on a split ticket.[13] The Detroit Times editorials asked such rhetorical questions as, "Do you want a showman or a statesman?" and "Shall it be freedom or dictatorship?"[14]

Father Coughlin continued to receive mostly negative publicity as the campaign drew to a close. On October 16 John O'Donnell, the only delegate at the NUSJ convention who voted against endorsing Lemke, filed suit against Father Coughlin for "mismanagement [of NUSJ funds], unlawful conduct, bad faith, negligence, and

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[12]Detroit News, Oct. 16, 17, 1936.

[13]Detroit Free Press, Oct. 18, 29, 1936.

[14]Detroit Times, Oct. 26, 28, 1936.

breach of trust."[15] Although the suit was eventually dropped, the publicity it received did not help Coughlin's image.[16]

The day after the suit was filed, Coughlin was physically attacked at an NUSJ rally in Detroit. The attacker, a well known crank named Woody Hockaday, showered the speakers stand with feathers before being subdued and wrestled to the ground by Coughlin. The priest reportedly saved Hockaday's life by intervening with the angry crowd that seized the heckler.[17]

In the final days of October, the New York Times and the Detroit News commented editorially on the Union party's prospects in the election. The Times observed that the third party's campaign had "petered out" and that the party itself was not likely to receive more than a small number of votes. The editorial attributed the Union party's lack of success to its "dated ideology" that "monetary manipulation can create prosperity." The Times also said that the Union party's significance in the election might be as "nuisance value" in some areas.[18]

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[15] Detroit Free Press, Oct. 17, 1936.

[16] Tull, p. 159.

[17] Detroit News, Oct. 18, 1936.

[18] New York Times, Oct. 28, 1936.

Jay G. Hayden, head of the Detroit News Washington bureau, also noted that support of the Lemke ticket was dwindling. He saw the Union party playing a larger role however, in the election than the New York Times had given it. He wrote that Coughlin, Townsend, and Smith would still be factors in the campaign and that there might be some late shifts in the voting in favor of Lemke.[19]

Father Coughlin became involved in one last controversy before the campaign ended. In a speech at Cleveland, on his final campaign speaking tour, Coughlin attacked the New Deal's Works Progress Administration and called Roosevelt a "scab president."[20] Although Coughlin apologized for the remark, the Detroit News quoted Bishop Gallagher as saying Coughlin's political activities "would be curtailed after the election,"[21] and the New York Times reported that the bishop would not allow any priest in his archdiocese to participate actively in politics after the 1936 election.[22] Again, both Gallagher and Coughlin denied that restrictions would be placed on the radio priest.[23]

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[19]Detroit News, Oct. 29, 1936.

[20]New York Times, Oct. 27, 1936.

[21]Detroit News, Nov. 1, 1936.

[22]New York Times, Nov. 2, 1936.

[23]Ibid., Nov. 3, 1936.

On the two days before the election, November 1 and 2, the newspapers concluded their coverage of the campaign, tried to predict the election's outcome, and made their final editorial statements about the candidates.

The Detroit News made no final editorial statements or endorsements other than "get-out-and-vote" appeals. On November 1 the News published the final Gallup poll before the election. The poll predicted that Roosevelt would be re-elected and that Lemke would receive approximately 2.2 per cent of the total vote. The News also carried a short account of Lemke's concluding his campaign in North Dakota.[24]

Through its mythical "Iffy the Dopester," the Detroit Free Press again predicted a Landon victory. On the day before the election the Free Press made editorial comments in favor of Landon and against Roosevelt on almost every page. A front-page editorial asked, "Is it to be Dictator Roosevelt? Or is it to be President Landon?" On election day, however, the Free Press defended its position and claimed that it had attempted to be fair during the campaign: ". . . it [the Free Press] has been very much in earnest. It has felt that in a

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[24]Detroit News, Nov. 1, 2, 1936, passim.

very real way the fate of the United States is at stake . . . the Free Press has tried to be fair."[25]

Through a front-page statement by William Randolph Hearst, the Detroit Times also predicted that Landon would win. The Times carried its editorial support of Landon up to election day. On November 2 it published an editorial entitled, "Tomorrow: The American Way or the Road to Socialism."[26]

In its final pre-election assessments, the New York Times forecast a weak showing by the Union party. Duncan Aikman, a political reporter for the Times, wrote that the third party movement had suffered from "progressive disintegration."[27]

The election predictions of the New York Times and the Gallup poll were the most accurate; those of William Randolph Hearst, the Literary Digest, and "Iffy the Dopester" were embarrassingly incorrect. Roosevelt won re-election by polling some eleven million more votes than Landon and carrying every state except Maine and Vermont. The President received a record 523 of 531 electoral votes.[28] Lemke received less than a million

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[25]Detroit Free Press, Nov. 1, 2, 3, 1936, passim.

[26]Detroit Times, Nov. 1, 2, 1936.

[27]New York Times, Nov. 1, 1936.

[28]Detroit News, Nov. 4, 1936.

popular votes and no electoral votes. In addition, none of the Union party's candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives or the Senate was elected.[29]

Like most of the nation's newspapers, the three Detroit papers and the New York Times carried post-election editorials acknowledging the President's overwhelming triumph and appealing for nationwide support of the second Roosevelt administration. Even the Detroit Free Press and the Detroit Times, which had been so intensely opposed to the President, emphasized the need for a united populace. The Free Press predicted that the next four years would be difficult, pointed out that both the President and the people had responsibilities, and stressed the nation's need for "enlightened patriotism ," "unselfish honesty," and "determination." The Free Press also said, "In common with other good Americans this newspaper means to give patriotic support to Mr. Roosevelt."[30]

The Detroit Times, after pointing out that the Hearst newspapers had supported Roosevelt in 1932, said it was the entire nation's duty to accept the election verdict. The editorial remarked that Roosevelt was the President of all the people and not just a faction.

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[29]Tull, pp. 163, 170.

[30]Detroit Free Press, Nov. 4, 5, 1936.

Hearst made a front-page statement on November 5 and observed that the United States was still a democracy. Emphasizing the need for cooperation, he said the voters' decision should be accepted cheerfully.[31]

In their coverage of the election results, the newspapers reported the surprisingly poor showing of Lemke and the Union party. "In no place did the Union Party vote figure importantly, despite the hectic campaigning of Congressman Lemke and the assaults of Father Coughlin," said the Detroit Times.[32] The Free Press reported that Lemke ran "a poor third."[33] A New York Times headline proclaimed: "Union Party Vote Far Below Boasts." F. Raymond Daniell, a political writer and analyst for the New York Times, called Lemke the "candidate of the so-called 'lunatic fringe'" and said the Union party was a "negligible factor" that made "scarcely a dent" in the election. A Times editorial said the "utter rout of the forces of discontent . . . is the denouement of Father Coughlin's reckless, bitter and personally abusive campaign against the President."[34]

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[31] Detroit Times, Nov. 4, 5, 1936.

[32] Ibid., Nov. 4, 1936.

[33] Detroit Free Press, Nov. 5, 1936.

[34] New York Times, Nov. 4, 5, 1936.

Father Coughlin's reactions to the election were similar to those of the press. He told his followers to abide by the will of the people and admitted[35] that the Union party had absorbed a "thorough defeat."[36] Coughlin claimed that Roosevelt could be a dictator if he wanted and that the Republican party was dead.[37] The priest did not, however, pronounce last rites on the National Union for Social Justice. He said that he anticipated a comeback and a return to the "limelight" by the NUSJ.[38] Regarding his personal future, Coughlin said he planned to take a vacation and that for a time he would not discuss politics as a "matter of good taste."[39] On November 7, however, the priest announced that the National Union for Social Justice had been "discredited" by the election and that his radio career was over.[40]

In its analysis of the 1936 election the New York Times expressed some cogent explanation of the Union party's showing. Daniell wrote that there were two reasons for the crushing defeat: (1) Coughlin,

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[35] Detroit Times, Nov. 4, 1936.

[36] Detroit News, Nov. 4, 1936.

[37] Detroit Free Press, Nov. 5, 1936.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Detroit News, Nov. 4, 1936.

[40] Detroit Free Press, Nov. 8, 1936.

Townsend, and Smith overestimated their followings, and (2) the people who were so enthusiastic at the Townsend and NUSJ convention had become Democrats or Republicans again when they returned home. A Times editorial commented,

> If there is one point which emerges clearly from the election, it is that radicalism of the type represented by the Union party is played out: that Father Coughlin's once considerable influence is destroyed.[41]

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[41] New York Times, Nov. 4, 5, 1936.

Postscript

Father Coughlin did not fade from public view or earshot after the 1936 election. Social Justice, the newspaper of the National Union for Social Justice, continued to be published, and in January, 1937, Coughlin resumed his regular radio broadcasts. On January 20, however, the priest received a severe personal shock when his beloved superior and frequent defender, Bishop Gallagher, died. Gallagher's successor as archbishop, Edward Mooney, did not agree with many of Coughlin's theories and philosophies, and he clashed with the priest frequently.[1]

In the late 1930's and early 1940's Coughlin continued to speak and write on some of his favorite topics as he attacked President Roosevelt and inveighed against Communism. He also developed several new themes on which to concentrate. In 1938 he proposed that the United States' traditional political structure be replaced by a corporate state. Later that year Coughlin openly extolled anti-Semitism and blamed the Jews for many of the world's problem. The priest also promoted an extreme type of isolation that was regarded as anti-British and pro-German. Coughlin's radical viewpoints and theories prompted charges that he was a Nazi

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[1]Tull, pp. 179, 243.

sympathizer as well as a fascist. Despite the many accusations and rumors, no conclusive evidence ever linked Coughlin to the Nazi regime.[2]

Coughlin's radio career ended when he was forced to cancel his 1940-41 season because many of his regular stations did not renew his broadcasting contracts. The remainder of the priest's public career ended in the spring of 1942 after he assailed the American war effort. Archbishop Mooney ordered Coughlin "to cease all public pronouncements for the duration of the war under penalty of defrockment." The priest accepted the restriction, and Social Justice, which had been accused of sedition, ceased publication. The National Union for Social Justice officially disbanded two years later. Coughlin remained pastor of the Shrine of the Little Flower, however, until his retirement in 1966.[3]

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[2] Ibid., pp. 243-244.

[3] Ibid., pp. 226-227, 234-238, passim.

CONCLUSIONS

The 1936 campaign was one of the most embarrassing periods in the history of the American press. Not only did the Literary Digest suffer nationwide humiliation after its poll predicted a Landon victory, many newspapers had also supported the Republican candidate and had forecast a win for him. Franklin Roosevelt was re-elected despite the bitter attacks of the Hearst syndicate and staunch opposition from the largely conservative newspapers of the United States. The press's inability to promote a Landon victory and a Roosevelt defeat suggests that its antipathy or indifference toward the Union party was not a significant factor in that party's crushing defeat at the polls. The Union party received little support from the nation's press, either in news columns or on editorial pages, but it is doubtful that a favorable press could have helped the third party any more than it helped the Republicans and Landon.

The Union party's lack of success can be more accurately attributed to a number of internal weaknesses and two important external factors. Probably the greatest disadvantage the Union party faced was that it was a third party. As the New York Times pointed out in June, 1936,

the American electoral process presents numerous difficulties to third party movements.

Not only was the Union party a third party, but also it was a hastily formed, poorly organized third party. Because of its virtual "overnight" formation, the Union party faced a number of unexpected obstacles. Foremost among these were various state regulations that prevented the new party from appearing on the ballot in several states. Given little chance to assess its strengths and weaknesses, the party suffered from a poorly planned campaign. Valuable time was wasted through inaction during the summer months, and enough voters were not reached during the fall. Lemke, the presidential candidate, did most of his campaigning in the farm states, depending on Coughlin, Townsend, and Smith to win him votes in other areas. The efforts of the hastily-aligned triumvirate, however, were never effectively coordinated. Charles Tull writes that neither Townsend nor Smith was particularly enthusiastic about Lemke's candidacy, and that even Coughlin did not want the National Union for Social Justice to endorse the Union party, only Lemke and O'Brien.[1]

Another internal weakness was the party's lackluster candidates. Throughout the campaign Lemke

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[1]Tull, pp. 143, 163-164, passim.

received little attention or publicity, and was constantly overshadowed by Father Coughlin. In addition, Lemke had little to offer, either personally or politically, to voters outside the farm states. His candidacy was further weakened because the Union ticket was not reinforced by candidates for state and local offices.

The Union party also suffered from an outmoded and outdated political philosophy. Inflation, the outstanding feature of the party's platform, was a passé and "dated ideology."[2] With a phlegmatic presidential candidate and an out of favor platform, the Union movement had to depend heavily on the personal magnetism and influence of Father Coughlin. The priest's reliance on anti-Roosevelt invective, name-calling, and smear tactics, however, also hurt the party's cause by alienating potential supporters.

The two major causes for the nation's repudiation of the Union party were extrinsic to the party's structure, organization, and personalities. The two causes were Roosevelt and recovery. The President's great popularity in 1936 was the pre-eminent factor in the election. Combined with this popularity was the country's entrance into the first stages of economic recovery after the severe depression of the early 1930's.

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[2]New York Times, Oct. 28, 1936.

Roosevelt's overwhelming victory in 1936 is evidence that the electorate credited him with helping bring about recovery.

Although the nation's press did not have a perceptible effect on the outcome of the 1936 election, the campaign coverage and editorial positions of the Detroit Times and the Detroit Free Press deserve further examination. The Free Press's reaction to the Union party is particularly curious. After its bitter feud with Coughlin in 1933, the Free Press might have been expected to editorially assail the new party and Coughlin's role in it. Compared to its bitter criticisms of Roosevelt, however, the Free Press was unusually restrained in its comments on Coughlin and the Union movement. Other than expressing mild disapproval of the infamous "liar" speech at Cleveland, the Free Press was virtually neutral towards the Union party and Coughlin during the campaign.

The Detroit Times comments on the third party were also extremely limited. Compared to the other papers, the Times gave the campaign little coverage and made editorial statements about few topics. Because the Times carried baseball standings and race results on its front page, campaign news was usually distributed throughout the inside pages. The Times also frequently published only one or two editorials a day. Not once during the campaign did the Times editorialize about the Union party, and only once did it discuss Father Coughlin.

Why the Times and the Free Press remained practically silent regarding Father Coughlin and the third party can only be speculated about. Because of their intensely anti-Roosevelt views, it is probable that they regarded Coughlin as an influential but unofficial aid in their campaigns against the President. On the other hand, the two papers probably did not openly support the Union party because of the movement's uncertain future. Thus, no commitment either way must have seemed to the Times and the Free Press the best course to take concerning the Union party.

For a number of reasons, the campaign of 1936 and the parts played in it by Father Coughlin and the Union party are difficult to assess and make generalizations about. First, the period of time--the Depression Era--is unique in American history. The great economic and social upheavals that took place make significant comparisons to other periods difficult, if not impossible. The uniqueness of the time was to a large extent responsible for the emergence of such giant figures as Franklin Roosevelt and Father Coughlin. The popularity and prominence of Roosevelt, unequaled by any President before or since, also hinders effective theorizing. Coughlin was truly a product of the depression. Had the United States experienced economic and social normality during the 1930's, it is doubtful that the priest from

Royal Oak would have achieved national fame or widespread influence. But the Great Depression and an almost accidental contact with radio combined to make Coughlin a major figure of the 1930's.

It would be easy to dismiss Coughlin as an overrated or "once-in-a-lifetime" phenomenon. In some respects his power or influence was overrated, as indicated by the Union party's debacle at the polls in 1936. That the priest had a listening audience of millions of people for several years cannot be overlooked. Had any of a number of factors been changed in 1936, the priest's political power might have been seriously underrated. If economic recovery had not commenced by 1936 or had someone with less appeal and popularity than Roosevelt been in office, Coughlin and the Union party might have had a profound effect on the election.

The role of the nation's press in the phenomenon known as Coughlinism is also difficult to evaluate. For much of his public career, Coughlin exerted considerable impact although he was supported by very few newspapers and opposed by many. It would be easy to say that Coughlin rose to prominence despite the efforts of the press, but such a conclusion would ignore the fact that the priest employed radio, a more dynamic, immediate, and intimate communication medium. In addition, the emotional magnetism of Coughlin's messages attracted millions of Americans affected by the depression.

During the campaign of 1936 Coughlin drew large crowds despite press coverage that ranged in tone from hostile to indifferent. In his bailiwick of Greater Detroit, the priest attracted thousands of people to NUSJ rallies and speeches, although the Detroit News was editorially critical of him and his party, and the Detroit Times and Detroit Free Press neither supported nor opposed him. In some respects it is unfortunate that people followed and listened to Father Coughlin despite the press's warnings and criticisms. In other respects, however, it is perhaps fortunate that the people did not always accept and follow the blatant partisanship and slanted news presentations of papers like the Detroit Times and the Detroit Free Press.

Probably the most significant feature of the relationship between Father Coughlin, the press, and the American people is the affect it has had on events since 1942. From a journalistic standpoint it is perhaps unfortunate that the press has failed to prevent other demagogues from emerging. Although newspapers generally denounced the radio priest and warned of the dangers of demagoguery, Coughlinism of the 1930's was followed by McCarthyism in the 1950's. Thus, it would seem that in periods of discontent and social stress demagogues will appear on the political scene regardless of an antagonistic press.

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