

“Patriotism Does Not Mean Stupidity”: Student Antiwar Activism at UNC in the 1930s

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On January 13, 1932, an article in the *Daily Tar Heel* (DTH), the student newspaper at the University of North Carolina (UNC), proclaimed in no uncertain terms that “definite opposition to excessive armaments and militaristic policies is taking shape in the thoughts and public expressions of college and university students.”¹ The December 9, 1941, edition of the paper, the first published after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, noted that, as a result of “the most historic and momentous days in their lives, university students greeted the Congressional war resolution with whole-hearted, concerted support of the nation’s martial plunge.”² Neither report exaggerated. Between 1931 and 1940, UNC students actively participated in antiwar and (sometimes radical) isolationist activities. But by mid-1940, when most of Europe strained under Nazi occupation, support for American preparedness dominated the campus.

The isolationist movement at UNC roughly paralleled the national rise and fall of isolationism, a subject analyzed by historians such as Wayne S. Cole.³ The movement began among religious-minded students who combined a popular understanding of the causes of World War I with a Christian sensibility against killing. They added to their antiwar efforts the unquestioned assumption that student activism could affect national and international events, and they possessed an acute recognition that when war came, they would be doing the fighting.

1. *Daily Tar Heel*, January 13, 1932, hereinafter cited as DTH.

2. DTH, December 9, 1941.

3. The terminology describing those who feared or opposed the era’s militarism is often vague. In the 1930s, they generally employed one of two main arguments to explain why they did not believe the United States should enter another world war: 1) pacifism (no war is ever justified); and 2) isolationism or neutrality (war may be justified in the abstract or to defend national borders, but not the impending European war of the late 1930s). The latter perspective included positions from across the political spectrum, from those who held a conservative “Fortress America” sensibility (with little regard for decadent Old-War Europe) to a Leftist isolationism (all nationalistic wars are in fact capitalist-imperialist wars and of no genuine interest to the world brotherhood of workers). Moreover, writers of the time did not always distinguish between isolation, neutrality, pacifism, and antimilitarism. Much to our benefit, however, historian Wayne S. Cole has made these distinctions. See Wayne S. Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists, 1932-45* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

A flyer handed out at a mid-decade rally against militarism stated, “OLD MEN declare war; YOUNG MEN fight it.” Indeed, around 340 UNC graduates were killed in World War II.⁴ A critical moment in UNC’s antiwar story arrived in 1935 with the formation of a campus chapter of the American Student Union (ASU), the foremost—and Marxist-influenced—antiwar student organization. The ASU proved to be both a blessing and a curse for the university’s antiwar activists. While the organization boosted the visibility of antiwar sentiment on campus, its links to Communism undermined its acceptability among some students. The ASU’s radical ties also incited conservatives always ready to find fault with UNC’s vaunted liberalism. Growing opposition to the ASU’s extremism, combined with the realization that Nazi aggression indeed threatened the well-being of the United States, brought the movement to a sudden, swift end as the 1940s began.

An examination of UNC’s antiwar activism reveals four major conclusions. First, the story of UNC’s antiwar students—a group normally left out of studies of southern radicalism during this period—shows that controversial political activism was not confined to northeastern universities (or the University of Chicago) prior to World War II. Second, the rise and fall of the university’s antiwar efforts demonstrates that domestic activism and increasingly grave international developments were closely connected. Third, in contrast to the common perception that the United States remained rooted in its isolationism until the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, the collapse of the UNC antiwar movement a full year before the attack clearly indicates that preparedness had been accepted in some places. Finally, this episode in southern radicalism foreshadowed the predicament UNC administrators and student radicals would find themselves in after the war. University leaders defended campus antiwar activists’ right to speak out, but they also cooperated with the FBI’s investigation of possible radical or Communist activity within the movement.

At the beginning of the 1930s, few American college students took an active interest in politics. In 1931, British scholar Harold Laski visited UNC on a speaking tour, after which he queried in *Harper’s Magazine*, “Why Don’t Your Young Men Care?” The American college student, Laski complained, “talks of American politics as though they were the remote affairs of a distant planet.” It was not that students lacked knowledge of government or international relations, he maintained. Instead, they failed to see how these affairs pertained to their lives. For instance, the average college student “wants to know all he can discover about

4. Raleigh *News and Observer*, April 26, 1936. Nell Battle Lewis included her recollections of the 1935 rally in a column she wrote about the 1936 event. Also, a campus memorial lists the number of UNC graduates killed during war. See “From the Hill Online: In Memorial to Carolina’s War Dead,” UNC General Alumni Association, <http://alumni.unc.edu/article.aspx?SID=4871> (accessed August 10, 2007). Many thanks to Matthew Turi of the Manuscripts Department of Wilson Library at UNC for drawing my attention to this site and to the memorial.

fascism; but its possible impact upon a Europe now closely linked with America does not seem to him implicit with practical consequence.”⁵

As historians Robert Cohen and Eileen Eagan have argued, those first few American antiwar college students were religiously motivated pacifists who accepted a damning interpretation of World War I.⁶ Postwar exposés claimed that American foreign policy and munitions industry profiteering were closely connected during the war; as a result, students entering college in the early 1930s became deeply suspicious of militarism.⁷ These misgivings were prevalent at UNC, where even Laski was impressed by the inquisitive students he met during his visit.⁸ As one writer for the *DTH* explained in 1932, “the glamor of the World War period has faded . . . and the generation that fought the war is making way for youth.”⁹

Those UNC students who followed international affairs were most interested in the Japanese capture of mineral-rich Manchuria in northern China in 1931. The *DTH* predicted accurately that “such situations will arise time after time” because “Japan knows that the League [of Nations] does not have the power to enforce its edicts.”¹⁰ The student newspaper also portrayed Japan as a symbol of the militarism the writers feared was increasing everywhere. A January 13 editorial used Japan’s invasion of Manchuria as a means of revisiting the road that led to the Great War. The war, it argued, was caused by “commercial and economic and political issues, to a degree.” But above all, “it was caused by the fact that in Germany and France, in England and Japan great armies and navies had been slowly growing with astronomical potentialities . . . which had to be released into action.” Taking a dim view of American military leadership, the editorialist also noted that over the past decade the United States had expanded its defense

5. Harold Laski, “Why Don’t Your Young Men Care? The Political Indifference of the American Undergraduate,” *Harper’s Magazine* 163 (July 1931): 129, 133.

6. Eileen Eagan, *Class, Culture, and the Classroom: The Student Peace Movement of the 1930s* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 24-32; Robert Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young: Student Radicals and America’s First Mass Student Movement, 1929-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 81-86.

7. For example, a 1934 article in *Fortune* implicated American, English, and German munitions manufacturers in the outbreak of World War I. It reminded readers that “killing is their business,” adding, “Armaments are their stock in trade; governments are their customers.” The *Fortune* piece concluded that “the whole philosophy of most armament makers” was to “Keep Europe in a constant state of nerves.” See “Arms and the Men: Prominent German, English, and American Manufacturers,” *Fortune* (March 1934): 53, 120.

8. Writing on May 11, 1931, to his close friend Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., Laski reported that at UNC he found “a body of men who understand that ancient memories can be futile as well as precious and see the need for new thought and new energy.” See Mark De Wolfe Howe, ed., *Holmes-Laski Letters: The Correspondence of Mr. Justice Holmes and Harold J. Laski*, abridged by Alger Hiss (New York: Atheneum Press, 1963), 2:364.

9. *DTH*, January 13, 1932.

10. *DTH*, November 14, 1931.

expenditures, not as the “result of mass desire but [as] the result of the plans of a small group of admirals in Washington, men mentally unbalanced, self-centered, and afraid that they will lose their jobs unless they have battleships to keep in readiness for war.”¹¹

This perception of international events, common among isolationists in the early 1930s, formed the basis of a simplistic solution toward peace: if nations did not build up their militaries, then war could be avoided. Alongside this editorial, however, was one written by UNC student J. M. McNeil, who argued that it was already too late for that proposition to prevent conflict. The invasion of Manchuria, he asserted, “revealed the Japanese government as a group of freebooters and adventurers, who care nothing for treaty commitments, who recognize no law but that of their own will, who will pillage and plunder, destroy life and property.”¹² McNeil raised a concern that dogged UNC antiwar students more pressingly at the end of the 1930s: at what point did anti-militarism enable evil regimes to expand and terrorize?

In January 1932, a flurry of disarmament editorials helped call attention to the campus visit of Elbert Russell, dean of the Duke University Divinity School and an “outstanding leader in pacifism.”¹³ Russell, a Quaker, reviewed the circumstances that led to World War I, emphasizing the now-familiar theme that excessive defense spending caused war. Stressing another subject common among isolationists, he also argued that the United States could play a pivotal role in disarmament: “We are the great colossus of the world today. No nation is going to disarm as long as America refuses to. . . . I ask you to find any nation in history that was builded on the sword, that did not fall by the same weapon. And we are no exception.”¹⁴ In short, Russell maintained that if America disarmed, the world would follow suit.

UNC students continued to respond to exciting developments in the anti-militarism movement. Longtime pacifist Jane Addams, active in the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, wrote to university officials in 1932 and called upon “every church, temple, mosque, meeting-house, and school throughout the whole world [to] speak out with the clear sound of bells for joy that the disarmament conference is finally called.”¹⁵ UNC officials agreed to this request, and on February 2, they rang the Memorial Tower bells in solidarity with the ongoing World Disarmament Conference in Geneva, Switzerland.

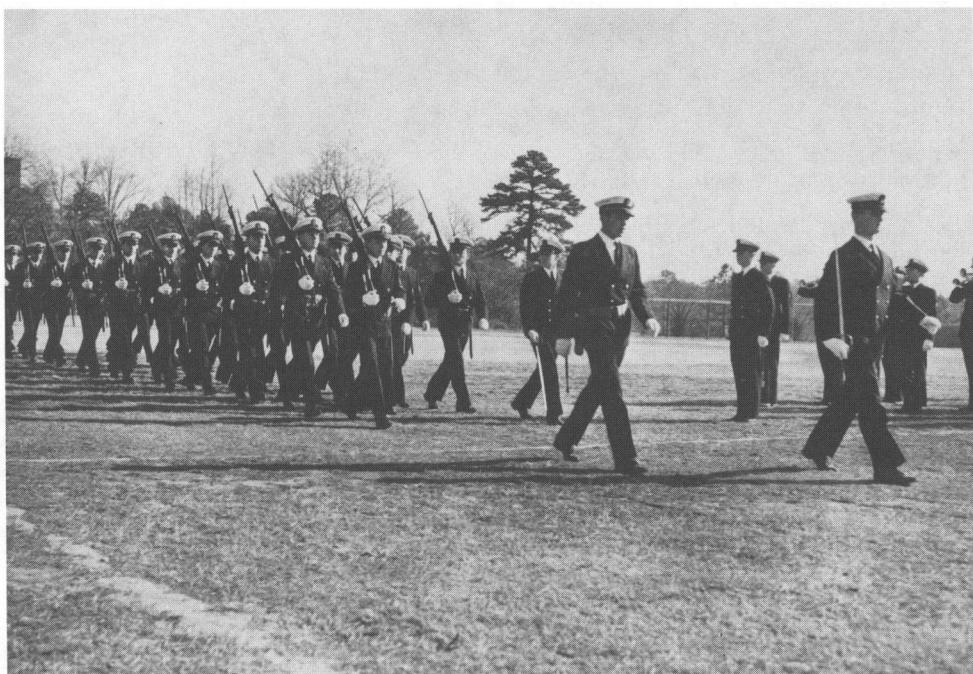
11. DTH, January 13, 1932.

12. Ibid.

13. DTH, January 14, 1932.

14. DTH, January 15, 1932. For the United States’ potential leadership as a nonmilitaristic example, see Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 7.

15. DTH, February 3, 1932. See also *New York Times*, February 2, 1932.



In the 1930s, students at colleges and universities across the country began to speak out in favor of disarmament and against the military and war. UNC's student newspaper, the *Daily Tar Heel*, reported enthusiastically about antiwar activism on other campuses, especially their opposition to compulsory ROTC classes. Photograph of UNC soldiers in uniform from the student yearbook, the *Yackety Yack*, 1942, p. 6, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Nationally, student interest in peace grew following the Student Congress Against War, held in Chicago in December 1932, and again with the inspiring news of the "Oxford Pledge" in February 1933, when students of the Oxford University Union voted they would "in no circumstances fight for King and Country."¹⁶

The *DTH* reported enthusiastically on antiwar activism on other campuses, especially when it involved opposition to compulsory ROTC classes, a frequent target of pacifist students.¹⁷ Perhaps unreasonably, UNC's activists saw great promise in this development. When students at Ohio State University faced expulsion for refusing to take military training courses, UNC journalists applauded them: "If it could be a universal student expression, this attitude among future citizens would undoubtedly do more than anything else to stem the tide of

16. Quoted in Eagan, *Class, Culture, and the Classroom*, 59. See also *New York Times*, December 29, 1932.

17. Clearly, the *DTH* did not speak for all UNC students. However, absent collections of students' letters, it remains the best source for student opinions at the time. While the editors and writers of the 1930s tended to be politically progressive, they openly published more conservative views and letters critical of the newspaper.

militarism.”¹⁸ A later editorial stated, “The growing anti-war sentiment in American colleges is not only gratifying but should time permit, it will probably culminate in some definite step toward world peace.” UNC, the author added, “has long been looked upon as a leader in liberal and constructive thinking, and there is no reason in the world why we as a student body should not lead the way.”¹⁹ Not all *DTH* writers were so optimistic. Another editorial lamented, “Russia, we are told, fears Japan; Japan, we are told, prepares for a rather vague ‘coming crisis’; the United States should build her navy up to treaty strength; England lacks sufficient air defense; France and Belgium spend millions in frontier protection; Germany continues to demand equality while France insists on security.”²⁰

Still, in the spring of 1934, student writer Phil Hammer rejoiced in the fact that UNC was “humming . . . with the voices of students crying for peace between nations and goodwill among men.”²¹ “The cannon-fodder is speaking straight now, straight from the shoulder.” Campus anti-militarist “gatherings” were not, Hammer insisted, “dominated by radical soap-box orators.” Rather, they were “stimulating ‘talks about war’—and conclusions . . . [that] result from a rational analysis of the question and what their efforts as a group and as individuals can do.”²² According to Hammer, more and more students began actively protesting militarism because of Japanese aggression in China, the Nye Commission hearings on the munitions industry, and a March 1934 article in *Fortune* that “brought forth an amazing exposé of the inner workings of the great international armament syndicates.” Looking back over the recently ended semester, Hammer wrote, “the spirit of pacifism waxed hot and students set about to make definite plans for the official expression of their ideas.”²³

April marked the first nationwide college student “strike” against war, an action in which an estimated fifteen thousand students, mainly on northeastern college campuses, walked out of classes to protest the rise of militarism.²⁴ Hammer observed this phenomenon taking shape on campuses across the country and proclaimed, “These are realistic attempts [at activism].” To support his point, he

18. *DTH*, January 9, 1934.

19. *DTH*, January 30, 1934.

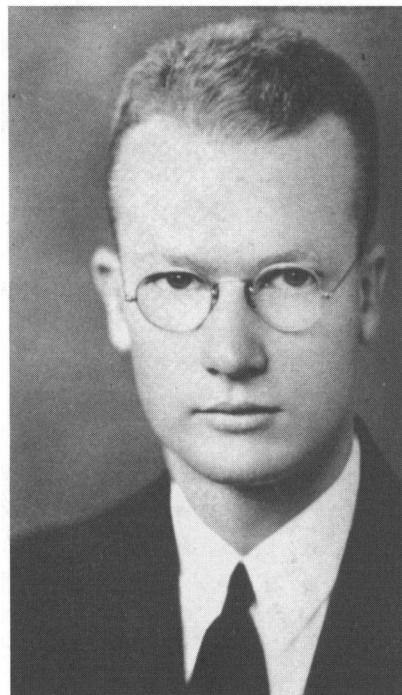
20. *DTH*, January 11, 1934.

21. Phil Hammer, “Campus Cannon Fodder Grows Militant, Discovered—A Youth Movement,” *Carolina Magazine*, May 6, 1934, 4-6. The *DTH* noted the formation of the Foreign Policy League in an April 12, 1934, editorial entitled, “Students in World Affairs.”

22. Hammer, “Campus Cannon Fodder,” 4-6.

23. Ibid. See “Arms and the Men.” In 1934, Sen. Gerald P. Nye started the work of the Special Committee on Investigation of the Munitions Industry, the findings of which led to the formation of the first Neutrality Act passed and signed into law in August 1935.

24. See *New York Times*, April 14, 1934.



In editorials for the *Daily Tar Heel*, Phil Hammer strongly endorsed the antiwar activities of UNC students and praised the first nationwide student strike against war, held in April 1934. Photograph of Hammer as *Daily Tar Heel* editor from the *Yackety Yack*, 1936, p. 174.

cited a petition circulated at over thirty American campuses and offering three main antiwar proposals: "(1) the immediate adherence by the United States to the covenant of the League of Nations, (2) the nationalization and international control of manufacture and sale of armaments, and (3) the severance of the United States' commercial relations with belligerent nations." These plans, Hammer argued, were "sane and intelligent approaches to a universal youth protest against war" and not merely "'shine' notes of feeble undergraduates."²⁵

Phil Hammer had detected an antiwar mood that was becoming increasingly visible on UNC's campus. By the 1934 fall semester, an annual pattern of demonstrations had developed: antiwar students held rallies coinciding with commemorations of Armistice Day in November and with the anniversary of the United States' entry into World War I in April. On November 9, 1934, around 150 students met on campus to kick off an antiwar conference. Elbert Russell of Duke spoke again, as did Joseph Fletcher, a minister from Raleigh who gave a fiery

25. Hammer, "Campus Cannon Fodder," 4-6. These points were also at the heart of the 1934 Johnson Act, which reflected a nationwide isolationist sentiment.

speech decrying the “munitions industry racket.”²⁶ Conference planners anticipated the direction the antiwar movement would soon take, and on the second night of the conference, featured speakers more openly affiliated with the Left. English professor E. E. Ericson, known on campus for his Socialist affiliations, and student Bill Levitt both delivered speeches.²⁷ Levitt in particular made his political perspective clear. He explained that “the radical student’s platform against armed conflicts called for action against imperialistic war, against R.O.T.C. in educational institutions, against fascism, and in support of the working class.”²⁸

Culminating this first phase of UNC’s antiwar activities, Senator Gerald P. Nye, one of the nation’s foremost isolationists, visited the university in February 1935. “Applause after applause” interrupted his “stirring address” as he hammered away at munitions profiteering. “The next war will not be a war to make the world safe for democracy,” he charged, “but a war rather to make the world safe for Du Pontcracy.”²⁹ Columnists for the *DTH* noted approvingly that as the “audience reluctantly filed out of Memorial hall, we heard such remarks as ‘You’ve just heard the future President’ and ‘I wish we had a hundred like him.’ ”³⁰

A number of perspectives combined to drive this first phase of UNC antiwar activity, lasting from approximately 1931 to 1935: a historical sense of World War I’s wastefulness and tragedy; a conspiracy theory whereby big business pressured the U.S. government into fighting the war; a view of the older generation as doddering and out of touch; and a general religious sensibility that killing was wrong. In the mid-1930s, the opposition to militarism took on a sharper and more ideological edge, as radical student groups became more involved. Propelled forward in 1935 by Germany’s plainly visible rearmament, Italy’s aggression, and the Fascist hatred of Marxism, radical students’ participation both popularized the movement and made it more controversial.

During the 1935 spring semester, the leftward shift of UNC’s antiwar activists grew more apparent in their speeches and literature. The January meeting of the International Student Committee Against War and Fascism in Brussels, Belgium, inspired colleges and universities to organize more campus strikes. Ten American students and UNC English professor Phillips Russell attended the gathering, but it

26. *DTH*, November 9, 1934.

27. *DTH*, November 10, 1934. The newspaper identified Levitt as a “member of the national executive committee of the national Student League,” an organization comprised largely of young student Communists and sympathizers.

28. *DTH*, November 10, 1934.

29. *DTH*, February 26, 1935. Du Pont was a major producer of explosives for the military during the 1920s and 1930s.

30. *DTH*, February 26, 1925.

was dominated by Marxist international students.³¹ Heeding the meeting's call to action, over forty colleges held local antiwar demonstrations.³² Phil Hammer organized UNC's part in a nationwide student "strike." Sounding a different note from previous commentary on antiwar efforts at UNC, one pre-strike editorial hoped that activists would avoid the "usual unthinking outcry against the horrors of war and the usual fevered declaration that no one should fight for anything at any time." This kind of antiwar emotionalism produced nothing positive, the writer argued. "What the colleges need, and Chapel Hill must get, is a sound, rational plan which will make war for Uncle Sam impossible."³³

Preparations for the April 12 "strike" reveal the antiwar movement's new focus on protesting the perceived capitalist causes of current-day militarism. For example, an "Anti-War Committee" that included representatives from the newly formed chapter of the Socialist-leaning Student League for Industrial Democracy (SLID) charged that the failure of capitalism was leading countries into another world war: "Unwilling to solve economic problems by sane economic adjustments, the governments threaten to conceal their incompetence in the domestic sphere by going in for 'strong foreign policy,' 'isolation,' [and] 'economic nationalism.' " Students and their contemporaries would "supinely serve as cannon fodder in an idiotic and wholly unnecessary war," the committee warned. The strike's purpose, therefore, was to join "in a great protest against war. . . . Students! Your influence should mean something. It is time for you to act."³⁴ The criticism of "economic nationalism" supported the antiwar Left's fierce opposition to Fascism, while the call for "sane economic adjustments" indicated the Anti-War Committee's belief that, in the midst of the Great Depression, capitalism should be overhauled.

In addition, an antiwar questionnaire prepared for distribution during the strike made it clear that campus Marxists were beginning to influence UNC's antiwar activities. To highlight the difference between a legitimate war against workers' oppression and wars among capitalist nations, question number ten asked, "Would you support the struggles of exploited peoples—Cubans, Mexicans, Filipinos, etc.—for freedom from domination of American imperialism?" Question number fourteen also revealed the influence of Marxist ideology: "Would you be in favor of a general strike upon the declaration of war if you believed that the workers in other countries were undertaking similar measures?"³⁵

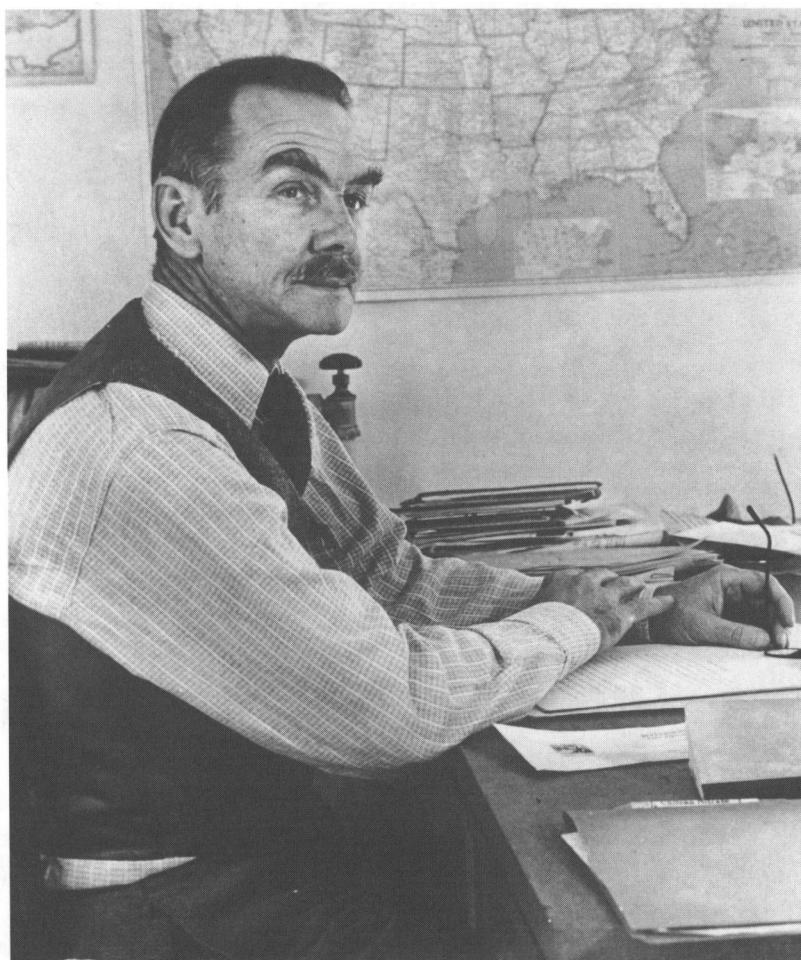
31. Eagan, *Class, Culture, and the Classroom*, 119.

32. DTH, April 9, 1935.

33. DTH, April 10, 1935.

34. Both statements are found in the article, "Today We Will Stand," DTH, April 12, 1935.

35. Ibid.



UNC English professor Phillips Russell, along with ten American students, attended the January 1935 meeting of the International Student Committee Against War and Fascism in Brussels, Belgium. On April 12, 1935, UNC participated in a nationwide antiwar strike. Russell, one of the featured speakers, decried the rise in militarism and the pointlessness of war. Photograph of Russell from the *Yackety Yack*, 1942, p. 11.

An enthusiastic “hand-clapping” crowd gave its approval to the antiwar speakers as the strike proceeded on the morning of April 12.³⁶ Students carried signs reading, “Starve the War-Hogs” and “Patriotism Does Not Mean Stupidity.”³⁷ Phillips Russell, student Dave Lewis, and Rev. Donald Stewart of Raleigh all inveighed against the rise in militarism, the pointlessness of war, and the shameful manipulation of emotions by national leaders. The *DTH* reported that the UNC event was an “orderly and well-conducted demonstration, the appeal for peace was

36. *DTH*, April 13, 1935.

37. *Raleigh News and Observer*, April 26, 1936.

well received, and, we believe, appreciated and digested. An emotional or hysterical demonstration has not half the effect of a quiet and sincere attempt to apply thought to the problem.”³⁸

Not everyone was impressed with the antiwar speakers. Alexander Johnson of Raleigh, who identified himself as “Major,” dismissed the students’ strike as an “impetuous expression of aversion against the horrors of war.” If and when the time came to answer the nation’s call to military duty, Johnson hoped that “the love of the country and loyalty of our youth will prove greater than fear of death and the natural aversion to the horrors of war.”³⁹ His letter then turned sharply to focus on the politics of the strike. Why, Johnson asked, was the protest aimed at both war *and* Fascism? “Why not against communism, that venomous corruption, that cancerous growth which germinated in the gutter and now seeks the destruction of civilization?” The answer, Johnson proclaimed, “is obvious. The Communistic finger in the pie is too apparent.”⁴⁰

The *DTH* responded to the above allegation in a tone defensive enough to suggest that Johnson’s letter had found its mark. An editorial stated emphatically that what “makes us mad is this: the major virtually called us cowards.” But in defending their manhood, the politics of the newspaper and its writers came out: “We promise the major that we are as brave as he or any other mercenary. . . . [W]e just can’t connect fighting for justice with fighting against men who happen to fly a different flag and speak a foreign language. And we have not seen that any modern, nationalistic war has been waged for the sake of justice.” The editorial then taunted Johnson by asserting, “Maybe you feel obliged to spend all your time beating a big bass drum and frightening harassed newsreaders with cries of ‘Communist! Communist!’ ”⁴¹

Still, Alexander Johnson had a point. Nationally, the SLID and the National Student League (NSL), Socialist- and Communist-oriented organizations respectively, began to dominate campus antiwar movements. In October 1935, the SLID and NSL then merged to form the American Student Union (ASU), the foremost antiwar organization. Even though the ASU included non-Marxist members for a time, Robert Cohen points out that from the beginning, the Left was “firmly in the saddle.”⁴² Locally, Marxist critiques of the international scene increasingly found their way into UNC’s antiwar statements. For example, against the backdrop of Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia, an October 20 editorial in the *DTH* warned students

38. *DTH*, April 13, 1935. An estimated sixty thousand students joined the strike, sparking violence on some college campuses. See *New York Times*, April 13, 1935.

39. *DTH*, April 17, 1935.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *DTH*, April 18, 1935.

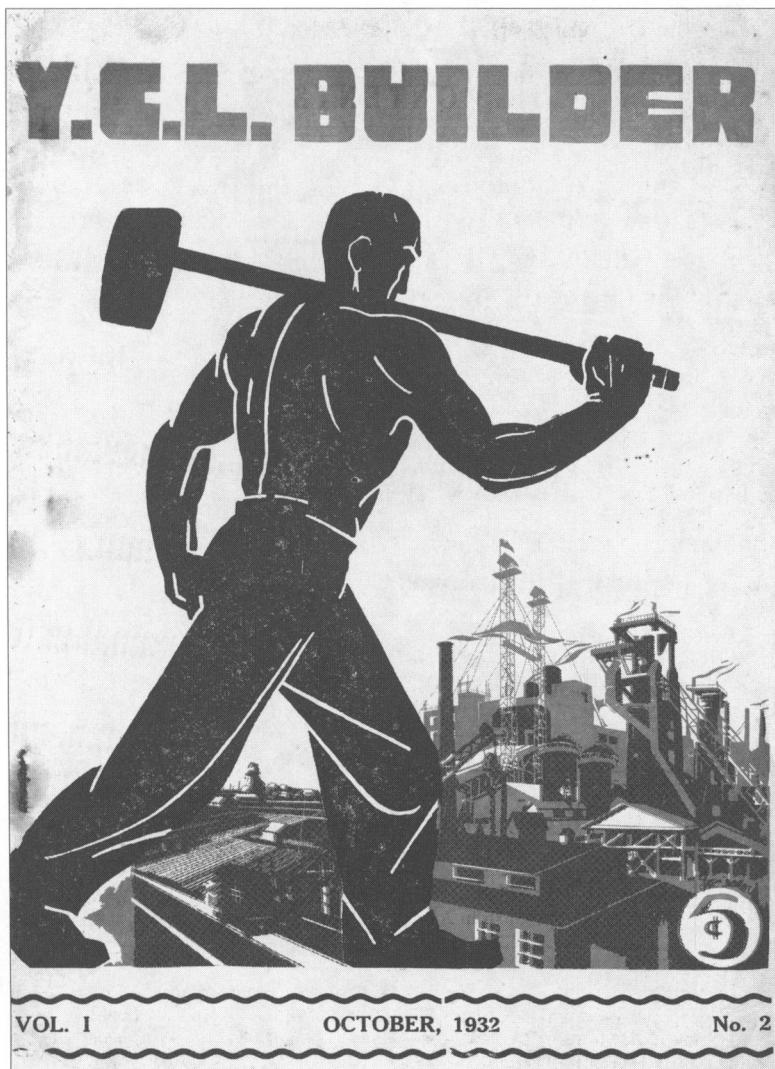
42. Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young*, 145.



Nationwide preparations for the April 12, 1935, "Strike Against War" reveal the antiwar movement's new focus on charging capitalism with leading countries into war. Handbill for the national student Strike Against War, April 12, 1935, from the University of California Archives, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.

"brought up on a diet of anti-militarism" that war was on the horizon. The cause of the current militaristic climate was "a decadent form of capitalism," and the student body needed to "realize that our standards of industrial civilization cannot be the epitome of social evolution if periodically there is to be an armed defense or promulgation of that type of culture."⁴³

43. DTH, October 20, 1935.



By 1935, Socialist and Communist-leaning organizations were dominating campus antiwar activities, including those at UNC, and the *Daily Tar Heel* frequently published Marxist critiques of international events. Cover of YCL (Young Communist League) *Builder*, October 1935, courtesy of Tamiment Library, New York University.

In October 1935, just months after Congress passed the first Neutrality Act banning the export of munitions to belligerent nations, UNC students took part in a gathering at Duke University of 115 YMCA and YWCA activists from nine North Carolina colleges. The conference aimed to organize a “state peace-emphasis program,” and it “urged the adoption of a Federal embargo on all exports, credits, and loans whatsoever to belligerents.” (A loophole in the 1935 Neutrality Act permitted this commercial and financial interaction, but the loophole was

eliminated by the 1936 act.) Participants supported the Nye-Kvale Bill to make ROTC noncompulsory at state universities. Lastly, in a modification of the 1933 Oxford Pledge, all 115 conference attendees “pledged themselves not to fight any war outside their borders.”⁴⁴

Shortly after the Duke conference, UNC’s YMCA chapter, along with its chapter of the National Student Federation (an umbrella organization of college student governments), organized the fall antiwar meeting. In anticipation of this event, the *DTH* ran an impassioned editorial summarizing the challenges facing the movement:

The raging cross fire on the Ethiopian front, the growing tide of emotional nationalism, army appropriations, navy appropriations, inconceivable growth of commerce to belligerents, the loud mouthings of the jingoist press, the blare of the military bands, the howling of the R.O.T.C. proponents, the talk, talk, talk of war—all this a part of the rational, objective twentieth century! Patriotism and loyalty! Protection of women and children! Fight! Fight! Fight!⁴⁵

The editorialist worried that the “constant hammering” of patriotic phrases would prevent the “realization of the economic basis of war.”⁴⁶

The antiwar strike took place on November 8 when, with classes dismissed for an hour, over seven hundred students filed into Memorial Hall. Despite the leadership of the more religiously motivated Y groups organizing the event, UNC graduate student and keynote speaker Bill Carter explained the world crisis of the mid-1930s in terms of the critique coming from the Left. The *DTH* reported that “After outlining the growth of imperialism and the expanding nature of the present economic system,” Carter offered sweeping solutions to avoiding war. “A demand for peace,” he proclaimed, “would involve a complete reorganization of our economic system—a planned economy much more far-reaching than the New Deal, an economy abolishing the profit motive. . . .” Carter then asked, “Are the students of America willing to take such a step to secure peace?”⁴⁷

When an ASU chapter formed at UNC that fall, some students criticized the organization’s Leftist origins. In 1938, for instance, student writer Allen Merrill noted that the local ASU chapter had “long been identified with ‘radicalism’ and tousle-haired exponents of Marxian philosophy.”⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the campus antiwar movement felt the ASU’s impact immediately, for the UNC chapter took

44. *DTH*, October 22, 1935; Mac Smith, “North Carolina Militates against War: Colleges Organize for Peace,” *Carolina Magazine* (October 1935): 25-27.

45. *DTH*, November 8, 1935.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *DTH*, November 9, 1935.

48. *DTH*, March 30, 1938. Though some students believed that ASU members from New York and New Jersey were responsible for the organization’s radicalism, there were prominent southerners in the ASU during these years: Junius Scales and Ruth Crowell were both native North Carolinians, while Lee Wiggins hailed from South Carolina.

control of the annual “strike” against war on April 22, 1936.⁴⁹ Rain forced a quick relocation from the steps of South Building to Memorial Hall, but the *DTH* estimated that a large crowd of seven hundred students and townspeople attended the event. Richard Whitten, the twenty-six-year-old president of Commonwealth College in Mena, Arkansas, a school noted for its Socialist origins, addressed the crowd.⁵⁰ He used the origins of World War I as his platform for attacking the militarism of the 1930s. Whitten argued that the “imperialistic competition of Great Britain and Germany” led to the first war. Currently, he feared that “the present administration of the United States was preparing for war and was accelerating the tendencies that would drag this country into conflict.”⁵¹

The Raleigh *News and Observer*'s Charles Parker reported that the rain spoiled a few protesters' placards and that the students bandaged up to look like the war wounded did not appear quite so tragic sitting in the hall as they did lying down by South Building. Parker also noted the audience's applause as Whitten hammered at “predatory wealth” and hissing as he criticized Roosevelt specifically.⁵² *News and Observer* columnist Nell Battle Lewis gave her support to the demonstration. “If college students of today are to be slaughtered in another war, at least it won't be without protest,” she wrote. Lewis saw the movement at Chapel Hill and on campuses nationwide as “the world's most healthful sign at present.” If “their elders” remained “insane on the subject of war,” she argued, the students may represent “the world's best hope.”⁵³

The American Left's critique of the international situation changed significantly in 1936, when Spanish Loyalist troops, including Communists, strongly resisted Fascist aggression. Apparently Fascism, not just capitalism, caused war. The Spanish Civil War also marked an important split between American Communists and Socialists. American Socialists continued to take a more isolationist view of the war, urging the United States to maintain its neutrality. Inspired by the bravery of their comrades in Spain, American Communists, including those in the American Student Union, urged the United States to support the Loyalists and mount an international effort of collective

49. *DTH*, November 14, 1935. Despite its influence among antiwar students, the ASU did not organize and run all campus peace rallies. Rather, the organization took pride in being “in the forefront of the campus peace activities.” See 1937 ASU pamphlet, folder 4, Junius Irving Scales Papers #4879, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This collection will hereinafter be cited as Scales Papers.

50. *DTH*, April 23, 1936.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Raleigh *News and Observer*, April 26, 1936.

53. *Ibid.*



In October 1935, the Student League for Industrial Democracy and the National Student League merged to form the American Student Union (ASU), which became the foremost antiwar organization in the country. When an ASU chapter formed at UNC later that fall, some students criticized the organization for its Marxist associations. This undated anti-ASU cartoon was published in the *Washington Times* and is reproduced courtesy of Robert Cohen. See "Student Activism in the 1930s" <http://newdeal.feri.org/students/index.htm>. For the image, see <http://newdeal.feri.org/students/images/rc10.jpg>.

security among all anti-Fascist nations.⁵⁴ In January 1937, with Roosevelt's approval (and later regret), Congress extended its arms embargo to include the Spanish insurrection.⁵⁵

With the crisis in Spain in the immediate background, the ASU continued to influence other antiwar groups. When the ASU called for a Carolina Peace Committee in March 1937, members of the YMCA and the League of Nations Association agreed to elect representatives to an "all-campus peace committee" that would be "sponsored" by the ASU.⁵⁶ The ASU thereby dominated the 1937 student strike. One of the keynote speakers was Arnold Williams, an English

54. Ellen Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 36; Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young*, 154-174; Eagan, *Class, Culture, and the Classroom*, 169-182.

55. David Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 398-400.

56. DTH, March 27, 1937.

instructor with a UNC doctorate who once described his politics as “17 miles to the left of Lenin.”⁵⁷ With the Spanish Civil War on his mind, Williams proclaimed, “War and fascism go together. You cannot separate the two.”⁵⁸ He offered some of the first evidence at UNC of the new collective security position (that all non-Fascist nations should band together to thwart Nazi Germany) urged by the Communist Party in the United States in 1937.⁵⁹ “You can not keep America out of war if war is in the world. . . . The only thing to do is to stop fascism wherever it starts,” Williams explained. The American policy of neutrality in Spain, he argued, in which “we treat the Spanish Loyalist government as we treat the fascist warlords is a farce.” Williams concluded, “The most effective thing the United States could do to bring peace to the world would be to support the Spanish Loyalist government and stop the fascists before they go any farther.”⁶⁰

The fact that Williams delivered his message during a “peace” gathering highlights the growing confusion within the antiwar community, as leaders in the Left shifted their political positions in the face of increasingly dire international events. In essence, Arnold Williams’s position was not antiwar at all. Like the American Communists, he urged the United States to permit arms sales to the Spanish Republican government. Communists, well-versed in the Nazis’ rabid hatred of Communism, spoke more accurately than most about the evil intentions of Hitler’s Germany. For a time, they successfully used outlets such as ASU-sponsored events to sound the alarm over the unraveling peace in Europe and to warn students of the gathering storm. As historian Robert Cohen explains, “Communist ASUers . . . pressed students to allow the crisis of the present . . . rather than the dogmas of the past to guide their outlook on United States foreign policy.”⁶¹

During the 1937-1938 academic year, UNC students continued to oppose the increasing possibility of war, even as members of older generations began abandoning isolationism. The November anniversary of the Armistice prompted the campus YMCA and YWCA chapters to write prominent American leaders and request suggestions for “two or three specific things American students can do to promote international peace.”⁶² The responses, published in the DTH, included some sobering assessments for antiwar students to consider. Bruce Hopper, an economics professor at Harvard and “an old soldier,” assured his

57. DTH, May 15, 1935.

58. DTH, April 23, 1937.

59. For the impact of the collective security position on the American Left, see Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young*, chapter 6.

60. DTH, April 23, 1937.

61. Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young*, 187.

62. DTH, November 11, 1937.

readers, "I am really devoted to peace." However, there was no denying that the times were becoming serious. He told students, "don't refuse to bear arms. That is negative and harms only your own government." Hopper also rejected isolationism as a relic of the past. "There is no room in this world . . . for an isolated great country," he explained.⁶³ UNC alumnus Jonathan Daniels, a journalist and son of *News and Observer* owner Josephus Daniels, added, "I can not help but feel a great deal of foolishness has been recently indulged in in the name of peace." The United States "can not secure peace by running from war," he declared. Herbert Agar, the Pulitzer Prize-winning editor of the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, admitted bluntly that the "first thing that occurs to me is to wonder whether it may not be a mistake to assume that American students can do anything at all to promote international peace."⁶⁴

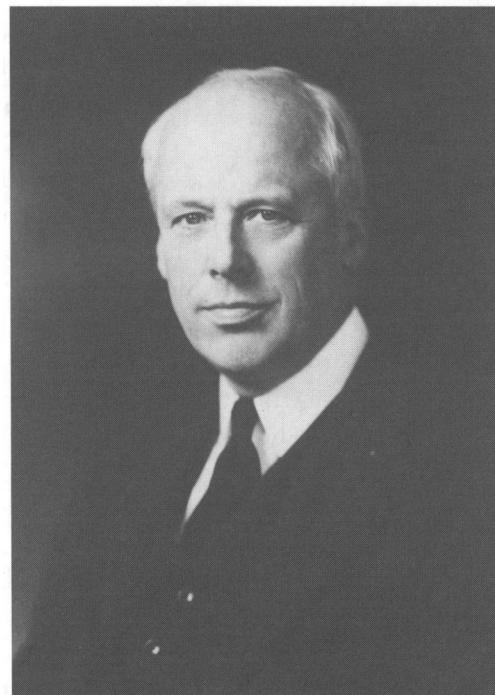
Prominent national and international figures continued to visit the campus, however—evidence that UNC students clearly retained their antiwar sentiments. These public appearances also indicate that UNC was a frequent destination for influential spokesmen from the Left, who ventured outside the Northeast to deliver antiwar speeches. Socialist leader Norman Thomas visited the campus in January 1938 under the auspices of the Carolina Political Union (CPU), a student-run political discussion group, and helped keep antiwar hopes high. Thomas told a crowd of two thousand at Memorial Hall, "The socialist program is to keep America out of war." As an American Socialist, Thomas believed that any war the United States urged would be at the behest of capitalist—and therefore reactionary—forces, and criticized Roosevelt for his inconsistent stance on neutrality. He suspected that, while proclaiming neutrality, Roosevelt placed American gunboats in harm's way during the Panay Incident (in which Japanese ships fired on American vessels in December 1937) in the hopes of sparking an event that would draw the United States into war.⁶⁵

The Communist position, competing with the Socialist perspective, received a hearing when Soviet ambassador Alexander Troyanovsky visited the campus in February. Unlike Norman Thomas, who desired to "keep America out of war," Troyanovsky assured the UNC crowd, "a great world war has already begun!"

63. DTH, November 10, 1937.

64. DTH, November 11, 1937. In the same article, Reinhold Niebuhr, Nicholas Murray Butler, and Charles Beard all held out more hope for peace. Beard argued that it was important to "combat the reiterated assertion that the United States cannot stay out of any major war in Europe" as well as the "fiction that the United States will automatically do good to suffering humanity by taking part in the wars of Europe and Asia." Both Butler and Neibuhr believed that elite warmongers were contributing to the rise of militarism and argued that it would be saner and far more effective to establish democratic alliances.

65. DTH, January 13, 1938. On the Carolina Political Union, see Charles J. Holden, "A Various Course and a Wide Meaning: Academic Freedom and the Carolina Political Union, 1936-1941," *North Carolina Historical Review* 76 (July 1999): 285-315.



In January 1938, in a visit sponsored by the Carolina Political Union (CPU), Socialist leader Norman Thomas spoke out against capitalism and criticized Roosevelt for his inconsistent stance on neutrality. Two thousand students packed into Memorial Hall to hear Thomas's antiwar speech. Photograph of Thomas from the Rare Book, Manuscripts, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

Speaking to another large audience at Memorial Hall and striking the anti-Fascist chord, Troyanovsky proclaimed that only a "union between the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union . . . will stop the wartime tactics of aggressor nations."⁶⁶ In March 1938, American Communist leader Earl Browder visited UNC and also advocated collective security by democratic nations. When asked if he considered the Soviet Union a democratic nation, Browder replied, "whether Russia is democratic or not, it is peace loving, and the other known democratic nations of the world need its cooperation."⁶⁷

The CPU and an organization calling itself the Venidas Group sponsored the April 1938 student strike. With the Spanish Civil War raging, the Nazi occupation of Austria completed in March, and the "Czech Crisis" now looming, the *DTH* expressed the urgency that many felt about international events. "What is needed are peace-lovers who love peace enough to do something about getting it," the column asserted, continuing, "The children of Barcelona aren't interested

66. *DTH*, February 9, 1938.

67. *DTH*, March 4, 1938.

in college debating societies.”⁶⁸ The invited speakers would provide “an intelligent examination” of the world situation. In all, UNC would “juggle actual policy details” and “employ its intelligence in the approach to the problem of ‘What Is America Going To Do?’ ”⁶⁹

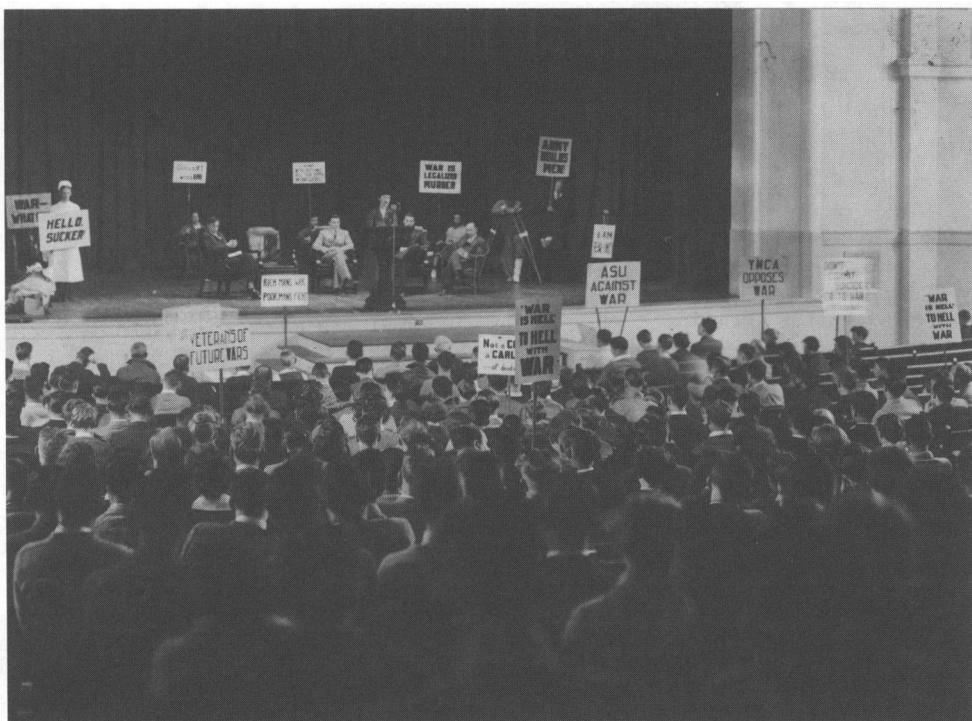
In conjunction with the speaker series, the CPU prepared a questionnaire to gauge campus sentiment about the war. In all, 974 people answered the ballot questions—940 students, and thirty-four faculty members and “visitors.” The results suggest that the student body was already further down the road to preparedness than activists perhaps cared to admit. Respondents supported the large naval appropriations bill currently before Congress and favored lowering tariff barriers as a means of helping those countries fighting Fascism. Antiwar activists must have been heartened, however, that the voters overwhelmingly disapproved of compulsory military training on campus. When asked the conditions under which they would fight, respondents answered as follows: 599 said they would serve if the continental United States were attacked; 35 would fight “in defense of American rights”; 157 would enter combat “in any war the government may declare”; and 111 would participate in “no war the government may declare.”⁷⁰

Despite the emergence through the ASU of more radical leadership in the UNC antiwar movement, students remained ambivalent over how to proceed. The September 29, 1938, announcement of the Chamberlain-Hitler agreement in Munich prompted a mass meeting that reflected students’ uncertainty. The group voted to send a telegram to Franklin Roosevelt on behalf of the UNC student body, pledging its support for “a peaceful solution to the problem of Germany and Czechoslovakia which threatens to involve the whole world in war.” This message mirrored Roosevelt’s public pronouncements hoping for peace but omitting conditions for achieving it. But answers to the nagging, yet critical problem of what exactly to do remained elusive, in the *Daily Tar Heel*’s analysis. The newspaper reported that many antiwar students supported Roosevelt’s goals, albeit in general terms: the meeting pledged its “support for the administration”; agreed that “America must take some kind of action”; and asserted that UNC “should do its part standing behind the government.” Furthermore, those in attendance agreed that “the meeting would not by any means attempt to solve the problem

68. DTH, April 9, 1938.

69. DTH, April 23, 1938.

70. DTH, April 28, 1938. An informal poll taken by the *Alumni Review* in May showed that seventy-six out of the 164 respondents from the senior class gave “emphatic refusals to fight outside the United States.” Another forty-six would “hold out until they were drafted,” while twenty-two “would volunteer for service.” Another question asked the students to choose between Communism and Fascism. Votes for Communism outnumbered Fascism eighty-three to fifty-four. See “Here’s What the Average Senior Wants and Thinks,” *Alumni Review* 26 (May 1938): 236.



The CPU and an organization called the Venidas Group sponsored the April 1938 student strike. The *Daily Tar Heel* asserted that the invited speakers would provide “an intelligent examination” of world events. This ca. late 1930s photograph from the North Carolina Collection shows speakers and students participating in an antiwar event at Memorial Hall.

but merely enable collective action to be taken.” The gathering did have one moment of clarity: UNC student John Busby’s “plea for isolationism” took shape as “a resolution condemning Roosevelt’s present policy.” Busby’s motion “drew the disfavor of the gathering.”⁷¹ The *DTH* also welcomed the comments of W. A. Olsen of the English department, who denounced the “nazi philosophy” as “brutal and primitive—a special form of madness.”⁷²

Busby’s resolution and Olsen’s speech again highlight the increasingly difficult questions surrounding the antiwar position: How exactly was a “peaceful solution” possible if Nazism was a “special form of madness” spreading across Europe via its military? And if isolationism meant not criticizing Roosevelt as Busby had, what would isolationists do as FDR swung more toward preparedness, as he was already doing by 1938?⁷³ Perhaps not surprisingly, a muddled antiwar movement started to

71. *DTH*, September 29, 1938.

72. *DTH*, September 29, 30, 1938.

73. It is not surprising that the students lacked clarity on this issue. Roosevelt himself had responded to the crisis by pronouncing one mixed message after another. In his memorandum to Hitler, Roosevelt

lose support as the international crisis continued to deepen in 1939: Austria was annexed, the Sudetenland was occupied, and the Czech portion of Czechoslovakia was threatened. An April 1939 *DTH* editorial expressed disappointment that the antiwar movement was losing momentum, noting that two campus polls showed that students believed the United States would be involved in the next war. The editorial proved prescient: “Peace organizations are gradually turning into preparedness organizations.”⁷⁴

UNC’s antiwar activists, briefly re-ignited by the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact and Germany’s invasion of Poland early in the 1939-1940 academic year, broke apart for good shortly thereafter.⁷⁵ In October, the ASU hosted a visit from Mike Ross of the North Carolina League for Progressive Democracy. A leaflet published by Ross’s organization accused the “forces of reaction” in the United States of “using the rumblings of war in Europe as the excuse for the redoubled attack upon all progressive social and labor legislation.”⁷⁶ At the national level of the ASU, Communist members suddenly stopped calling for collective security against Fascism and became vocal isolationists, reassured by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union’s pledge not to wage war against each other. In December 1939, the ASU severely discredited its reputation by officially voting to defend both the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the Soviet invasion of Finland. By manipulating the process of selecting delegates to the ASU’s annual convention, Communist members produced the policy positions they desired.⁷⁷ Then, in a surprising, apparently face-saving turn, UNC’s Lee Wiggins—whom one-time UNC student and Communist Party member Junius Scales described as “brilliant” yet “strongly anti-Communist”—was elected as a compromise choice for national ASU chairman.⁷⁸ The move did not work, and the *DTH* summarized college newspapers’ negative reaction to the ASU’s December vote in support of Soviet policies. The organization, it concluded, had “pulled a boner” by defending the Soviet invasion

went back and forth, urging peace while dropping cautious hints that the United States would not permanently remain on the sidelines. See *New York Times*, September 28, 1938.

74. *DTH*, April 18, 1939.

75. Junius Scales recalled that in the fall semester of 1939, the ASU was “flourishing.” Richard Nickson and Junius Scales, *Cause at Heart: A Former Communist Remembers* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 76.

76. *DTH*, October 26, 1939. Years later, Junius Scales recalled that by 1939, Communists in the campus chapter functioned as a “wheel within a wheel.” He remembered how the campus Communists openly discussed how best to wield influence within the organization. “It seemed to me,” Scales remembered, “that if the big wheel (the ASU) ran by faith, the little wheel (the effective leadership) ran by the grace of the Communists.” But when Scales tried to organize the campus Communists within the ASU after the Nazi-Soviet Pact, they feared they would be ostracized more than ever. Scales’s spectacularly unsuccessful advice was to trust Stalin and the Soviets. Nickson and Scales, *Cause at Heart*, 61.

77. Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young*, 294-297.

78. Nickson and Scales, *Cause at Heart*, 85.

of Finland.⁷⁹ At the end of March 1940, the *DTH* ran a follow-up article indicating that nationwide, only about half of all American college students had heard of the ASU. Approximately half of those aware of the ASU held an unfavorable view of the organization.⁸⁰

Even with the Nazis poised to storm their way through western Europe, the ASU produced one last flurry of antiwar activity as the school year ended. In early May, the ASU invited fiery labor leader Gardner Jackson to be a guest speaker. The *DTH* described Jackson, frequently in and out of favor with the Roosevelt administration, as a “left-wing representative of Labor’s Non-Partisan League.”⁸¹ Junius Scales, state director of the ASU at that time, introduced Jackson, and as he spoke, ASU members handed out “Incendiary pamphlets,” reported the *DTH*. Jackson attacked Roosevelt, accusing him of trying to “break down resistance to war,” especially among young people. He lauded labor leaders John L. Lewis and Sidney Hillman for their “honest determination to resist any possible entry into war.” “At this juncture,” noted the *DTH*, “several students walked out of the auditorium.”⁸²

Despite the deep Nazi penetration into Holland and Belgium and the imminent threat to France, plans for a big end-of-semester peace rally proceeded in late May. Twenty-five rally organizers from various campus organizations drew up a schedule of events that included performances of Irwin Shaw’s play *Bury the Dead* (in which World War I dead come back to see the pain left by the war), a new antiwar skit written by the ASU’s Lee Wiggins, and a song written just for the occasion, titled, “We Want You Over Here, Boys.”⁸³ At the May 23 rally, however, participants threatened to become unruly. As the session got under way in a crowded Memorial Hall, students opposed to the peace rally started stomping their feet and issuing “cat calls.” During the performance of Wiggins’s skit, some audience members threw eggs and fruit, prompting an angry UNC president, Frank Porter Graham, to take the stage. Graham “simply stared at the audience” and remained “silent, immobile.” The effect was electrifying, as spontaneous “[a]pplause reverberated throughout the auditorium.”⁸⁴ Graham’s move restored

79. *DTH*, January 24, 1940.

80. *DTH*, March 31, 1940.

81. Debates over whether Gardner Jackson was a Communist or under Communist influence persisted, even decades later. In 1994, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. tried to shield Jackson’s legacy from being tainted with the brush of Communist covert activity in the United States during the 1930s. He conceded, however, that Jackson’s “liberal sympathies were exploited by Lee Pressman, who was indeed a communist operative.” See “Gardner Jackson: An Exchange between Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and Stephen Koch,” *New Criterion* 12 (February 1994). [Http://newcriterion.com:81/archive/12/feb94/letters.htm](http://newcriterion.com:81/archive/12/feb94/letters.htm) (accessed July 25, 2007).

82. *DTH*, May 3, 1940.

83. *DTH*, May 23, 1940.

84. *DTH*, May 24, 1940; *Durham Morning Herald*, May 24, 1940.

calm, and the event proceeded without incident. As demonstrations at other colleges dwindled in size and enthusiasm, this event proved to be a last gasp for the peace movement.

People who equated isolationism with Communism in 1940 flooded President Graham's office with letters criticizing his support for the antiwar protesters.⁸⁵ Mindful of Graham's well-established reverence for academic freedom, Durham attorney James R. Patton Jr. carefully explained, "I yield to no one in my views towards tolerance but I feel that there is certainly a line of demarcation between freedom of speech and license; and that when the latter can be invoked under the guise of freedom of expression which is subversive of our most cherished ideals then I think it is time to check the reins on this misnamed term of freedom."⁸⁶ Meanwhile, Thomas Street objected to the ASU specifically: "When it comes to the question of the A.S.U., it has been proved beyond all doubt to those who will see, that it has a strong Communistic leaning if it is not actually controlled by the Communists."⁸⁷

A longtime advocate of academic freedom, Frank Graham defended the students' right to free speech. But he also publicly distanced himself from the isolationist ranks by joining the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, a group historian Wayne Cole describes as unhesitatingly interventionist.⁸⁸ UNC Press director William T. Couch went a step further in June 1940, sending President Roosevelt a telegram urging "the United States [to] declare war against Germany."⁸⁹

85. The *Durham Morning Herald* coverage shed a little more light on the Leftist views of the event's leaders. It described the opposition to the rally as stemming in part from "Dislike of an organization that actively supported the movement," a certain reference to the ASU. The report also noted that some of the speakers "contended that the war was one of imperialism again, with Germany seeking markets, raw materials, and colonies, and the Allies trying to maintain the status quo." *Durham Morning Herald*, May 24, 1940.

86. James R. Patton Jr. to Frank P. Graham, May 27, 1940, Consolidated University: Pacifist Movements and Preparedness Controversies, General folder, 1938-1940, Box 4, General Administration, Records of the Office of the President of the University of North Carolina (System): Frank Porter Graham Files, 1932-1949 #40007, University Archives, Wilson Library. This collection will hereinafter be cited as F. P. Graham, Presidents Records; this folder will hereinafter be cited as Pacifist Movements Controversies, general folder.

87. Thomas E. Street to Frank P. Graham, May 28, 1940, Charges of Communism: Dies Congressional Committee, Investigation of UNC, 1940 folder, Box 1, F. P. Graham, Presidents Records, hereinafter cited as Dies Congressional Committee folder. Street was not necessarily being conspiratorial. The ASU invited American Communist Party leader Earl Browder to address its annual convention in December 1939. In his speech, Browder accused England of hoping to defeat or convert the Nazi war effort in order to defeat the Soviet Union. See *New York Times*, December 28, 1939. Both Robert Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young*, and Eileen Eagan, *Class, Culture, and the Classroom*, argue that Communists were secretly manipulating activities within the ASU.

88. Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 12.

89. "University Faces Problems of Defense," *Alumni Review* 28 (midsummer 1940): 295.

Congressional efforts to outlaw Communist activity (led in part by North Carolina senator Robert Reynolds) and rumors that the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) was going to investigate UNC for Communist sympathies rattled some UNC administrators and added to the backdrop of local criticism. Economics professor C. P. Spruill Jr.'s letter to Dean R. B. House in the aftermath of the peace meeting reveals the careful line the university tried to walk before the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor.⁹⁰ At minimum, Spruill wanted to "raise the question whether the University should publicly state its . . . preparedness" for an impending war. If House felt that the university should respond to the peace meeting, Spruill suggested that UNC "continue to maintain an attitude of good will toward differences of opinion and expression." He offered the following reminder to the dean: "In this assertion of personal rights, however, it may be necessary to make the difficult distinction between conscientious objections and disloyal acts." Furthermore, Spruill wanted to publicize the fact that UNC administrators were actively seeking a role in the federal government's defense preparations.⁹¹

Apparently, Spruill was not the only person at UNC worried about the connection between the ASU and national radical forces. One dramatic case reveals how UNC compromised its legacy of academic freedom. The papers of Joseph Felmet, the campus ASU leader in its dwindling days in 1941, reveal that at least four sources, three unnamed, cooperated with an FBI investigation into the university's ASU chapter.⁹² Felmet's papers reveal that the FBI received access to his academic and personal UNC file, indicating that at least one informant worked for the university. The FBI also had access to Felmet's mail. Informant A noted that Felmet was "in regular receipt of radical material in his Post Office Box." The source stated, "I took the liberty of examining some of it, The American Student Union paper, itself . . . dated January 11 [1941] is interesting."⁹³

90. Graham's involvement with the Southern Conference on Human Welfare, a group that included some Communist activists, prompted congressman and HUAC chair Martin Dies's interest in possible Communist activity at UNC. See Tom Prudgen to Frank P. Graham, May 6, 1940, Dies Congressional Committee folder, Box 1, F. P. Graham, Presidents Records.

91. C. P. Spruill Jr. to R. B. House, May 30, 1940, Pacifist Movements Controversies, general folder, Box 4, F. P. Graham, Presidents Records.

92. Copies of FBI files #100-693, #100-445, and #100-419 refer to "Confidential Informant No. 66," "Confidential Informant, No. 50," "Informant A," and A. C. Pickard, clerk of the Chapel Hill Draft Board, as all supplying the FBI with information on Felmet and the ASU. See "FBI Files—Joseph Felmet Internal Security," 1941, Folder 10, Joseph Felmet Papers #4513, Southern Historical Collection. This collection will hereinafter be cited as Felmet Papers.

93. Copy of FBI File #100-693, Folder 10, Felmet Papers. On an untitled FBI file in Felmet's collection, one page reads simply, "INFORMANT A is [blacked out]." Handwritten below is "I think his surname is Clontz" and initialed "J. F. 4/25/87." The name Clontz also appears in the Scales Papers, where Scales scribbled, "Clontz: Private Detective after war—Divorce dirt. Around Charlotte." See Folder 1, Scales Papers.

Another informant revealed to the FBI that the ASU “meets approximately once a week” but that he or she only knew of four students involved in the group.⁹⁴ The FBI files include information suggesting that Felmet was “reported to be corresponding with Communist Front Organizations” but that “No specific evidence linking Subject with CPUSA developed.”⁹⁵

As indicated, the 1940 “peace rally” was the last gasp for UNC’s antiwar activists. Beginning in the fall semester of 1940, the peace movement disintegrated. Wayne S. Cole notes that from approximately October 1940 on, most Americans believed that “it was more important for the United States to aid Britain at the risk of war than it was to stay out of war.”⁹⁶ As the FBI files suggest, the ASU had lost members steadily, and the Nazi-Soviet Pact, along with the Soviet invasion of Finland, brought an end to the UNC chapter. Despite their suspicions about the organization, there is no evidence that either the Graham administration or the FBI hastened its decline. As Junius Scales recalls, in the organization’s last throes, Communist and anti-Communist ASU members “needled” one another “hatefully.” “Close friends drifted apart,” and “warmth and friendship gave way to rigid, unreasoning, partisanship.”⁹⁷ Lee Wiggins, who just months before had been elected national chairman of the American Student Union, promptly resigned in October 1940. As Wiggins explained, the group’s anti-Roosevelt views and its “branding the brave anti-fascist struggle of the British people as a purely imperialist war” were more than he could accept.⁹⁸ When the national ASU organization called on students to “walkout” in protest of increasing American militarization, so few UNC students participated that there was confusion over whether the campus ASU chapter was even involved.⁹⁹ The ASU’s plans to “rally student sentiment against the proposed ‘Lend-Lease’ bill” in

94. Copy of FBI File #100-419, “FBI Files—American Student Union,” Folder 13, Felmet Papers. In addition to Felmet, the FBI informant identified Moses Malkin, Hannah Lacob, and Charles Burton Farrell as ASU members.

95. Copy of FBI File #100-693, Folder 10, Felmet Papers. In the same file, the FBI notes, “In view of the fact that no specific evidence has been developed so far tending to link Subject with Communist Party, no further investigation is being conducted by this office at the present time and this case is being closed upon the authority of the Special Agent in Charge.”

96. Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 364-365.

97. Nickson and Scales, *Cause at Heart*, 85. Scales also notes that while non-Communist members of the ASU respected the efforts of the Communist students, the two groups were often at odds: “Hardly subtle in fighting for their positions, they [Communist students] had a propensity for presenting their arguments in the most doctrinaire and unappetizing forms. It seemed they threw down a point of view with some hostility, expecting hostility in return, and resented any compromise or modification aimed at making their proposal more palatable to non-Communists—even if offered by someone who generally supported their position” (p. 61).

98. DTH, October 2, 1940.

99. DTH, October 11, 12, 1940. One article in the student newspaper made fun of the poor turnout, indicating that the campus ASU chapter had dwindled to fewer than ten members, while another article congratulated the chapter for not participating in a protest that was not likely to succeed at UNC.

January 1941 consisted of little more than setting up a table and handing out literature and postcards people could use to contact Congress.¹⁰⁰

By mid-1940, Frank Graham and other UNC leaders had already committed the university to preparedness.¹⁰¹ A midsummer article in the *Alumni Review* predicted, “Airplane wings over Chapel Hill and undergraduate muscles will be doing their bit next fall as the University puts into line its own contributions to the national defense program.” Graham and the UNC board of trustees outlined plans for the school’s role in the upcoming preparations. They arrived at two main proposals: initiating a pilot training program and requiring physical training for all undergraduates (not just freshmen, as was the current requirement).¹⁰²

By the time school reconvened in the fall of 1941, the war had again changed dramatically. Going back on the pledges made in the Nazi-Soviet Pact, Hitler launched a massive invasion into the Soviet Union in June. UNC redoubled its efforts in preparedness by taking the lead in answering Roosevelt’s call for new “civilian morale” programs. The goal of these programs was to “build morale, or unity of purpose, based on common enlightenment, understanding and discussion of today’s critical problems—not on propaganda or suppression.”¹⁰³ The plan was designed to coordinate communication and information-sharing among institutions, libraries, and extension offices throughout the South. Dean R. B. House described the breadth of these preparedness efforts: “The University’s full facilities and experience . . . will be placed at the disposal” of morale committees.¹⁰⁴ A student editorial applauded these endeavors, deeming UNC “the foremost American university cooperating in national defense.” That writer also hoped that the university would produce “an American public awakened to what Hitler is trying to do.”¹⁰⁵ Even at this late hour, however, some students still opposed the university’s and Roosevelt’s plans for preparedness. UNC student Richard Eddy wrote to the *DTH* and described the civilian morale program as a “Hitlerian tool used to coerce the public to follow—without objection—the policy of the government.” Eddy also contended that Roosevelt “does not know

100. *DTH*, January 20, 1941.

101. R. B. House reflected on his World War I experiences as he helped UNC enter its preparedness stage. In June 1940, he wrote, “I was in the trenches in 1918 incompletely equipped as to arms, utensils, ammunitions [sic], machine gun oil, and basic training for myself, and this was after our country had observed modern warfare for three and one-half years. Hence, you can see that I am more interested in the non-dramatic aspects of national effectiveness [sic] than in those things which make the headlines in terms of arms as such, necessary though they are.” See R. B. House to G. Carlyle Cooke, June 28, 1940, GA/CU, “Special Committees: National Defense, 1940” folder, Box 27, Faculty Affairs, Records of the Office of Chancellor: Robert Burton House Series #40019, University Archives, Wilson Library.

102. “University Faces Problems of Defense,” 295.

103. *DTH*, November 25, 1941.

104. Ibid.

105. *DTH*, November 26, 1941.

the psychology of the American people" and that "against fifty percent of popular feeling, is leading America into the Second World War."¹⁰⁶ Despite Eddy's objections, the UNC student body overwhelmingly supported the morale program.

An October 1941 student poll revealed that UNC students supported extending Lend-Lease to the Soviet Union and repealing the Neutrality Acts but hesitated to declare war on Germany. The polls showed that students overwhelmingly believed that the United States should declare war should Japan attack "American possessions."¹⁰⁷ The Japanese, of course, attacked the United States territory of Hawaii on December 7, 1941. A UNC editorial summed up how American foreign policy had suddenly and unequivocally shifted toward full-fledged war: "It's Here—Let's Face It." UNC students now looked to "the future with a bit more sincerity, a bit more realism." "Some of the more serious-minded students," the editorial continued, "had realized what was coming, but the average Joe College was shocked. He was still living in a world where a date, a set of dances, a football game, were most important." But now that world had changed, and students had to "realize their importance in the world of tomorrow. . . . [T]here is no George to Do It but themselves."¹⁰⁸

The shock of the bombing of Pearl Harbor could not obscure the fact that many at UNC—both students and administrators—had moved solidly into the ranks of preparedness for American involvement in another world war. Despite the rapid decline of the antiwar movement at UNC by the late 1930s, isolationism and even radicalism were plainly visible on campus throughout the decade. Keenly attuned to international developments, UNC's antiwar radicals for a time contributed a more accurate picture of Fascism's threat to western democracies than non-Marxist isolationists could accept. But faced with a grim international context in which bloodthirsty regimes such as Nazi Germany took advantage of isolationist western democracies and with the controversial leadership of the radical ASU, the antiwar movement at UNC ended at least a full year before Pearl Harbor.

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106. DTH, November 27, 1941.

107. DTH, October 9, 1941.

108. DTH, December 9, 1941.