

Anthony C. Troncone, PhD. **Hamilton Fish Sr. and the Politics of American Nationalism**

Professor Troncone's entire dissertation merits reading to have an in-depth understanding of HF III. Troncone does more editorializing in his writing than did Dr. Hanks. These chapters are particularly useful. The notes do NOT summarize each chapter.

Chapter 4 Spartanburg and **Chapter 5 Maggots of Pacifism** cover Fish's experiences with the 369th in training and in France with the Harlem Hellfighters. His consistent anti-war position started here and continued throughout his career.

Chapter 7 Halukka includes Fish's work with Zionists and Jewish organizations over the decades.

Chapter 9 The Fish Committee. There are three chapters about Fish's congressional committee looking into communism in 1930; this is the first and the most useful. Fish was ambitious in 1929 and looking for a cause to make his name and lead to a greater national role. He was known as a liberal Republican but the "Old Guard" in the GOP did not like him.

"Excited by the publicity he thought could be generated by heading such a probe, Fish may very well have concluded that could play a prominent role in what might be the political equivalent of Theodore Roosevelt's charge up San Juan Hill. But as was so often the case, Fish's aspirations proved larger than his abilities. His knowledge of Russia and communism was limited. Abrasive, he often antagonized those he needed to advance his career, even those in his own party. In addition, he had little sense of the enormous amount of organizational work needed to attain national office and all too often he confused scattered publicity with that effort. So, time and again, his minor victories did not lead to the successes he coveted. Unlike the Rough Rider, whose recklessness was moderated by the office of president, Fish had few institutional checks to restrain his behavior. This character flaw allowed him to take the first step into what turned out to be a political minefield." (P. 128)

After the release of his committee report he was attacked by many. *"But he seemed not to have understood that he had moved out of the political mainstream. Divorcing himself from a serious, reasoned discussion of political issues, Fish instead made demagogic appeals to the voting public. He became a prisoner of populist rhetoric and a slave to public opinion. He had entered the world of political demagoguery and would never leave it." (P. 179)*

Chapter 13 Any Power discusses the split between FDR and HF III in the early 30s. FDR's ownership of the New Deal and the Democrats' political dominance left little room for an ambitious Republican congressman. His work on communism gave him a horror of Stalin and the atrocities in the Soviet Union and blinded him in many ways to Hitler's global ambitions.

"[In late 1938] Fish spoke before a small group of German-Americans at Madison Square Garden during a German Day rally. His appearance there turned out to be a major blunder as it provided his growing number of political opponents with ammunition that they later used against him. Fish sat serenely on the podium as the band played the German national anthem and the Nazi's Horst Wessel, which prompted about a third of the audience to raise its arms in the Nazi salute. Fish seemed indifferent to this, nor did he take exception to the swastika decorating the hall. To be sure, the number of Nazis in attendance had declined appreciably from the previous year. [His speech praised German-Americans who had fought in World War I].In January, Fish had spoken at Carnegie Hall on behalf of the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League and in early 1939 cooperated with Jewish groups and the American Civil Liberties Union in sponsoring legislation banning the formation of Nazi-organized military organizations, clubs, and associations." (P. 296)

"During the 1930s Fish became, as Robert Divine has observed, one of the key figures of a "small but highly effective neutrality bloc in Congress... who developed the concept of legislating against war." But as Divine has also pointed out, Fish's attempt to create a sweeping legislative concept of neutrality was an illusory one. Absolute neutrality on the part of the United States had the potential of benefitting not the victims of aggression but the totalitarian powers." (P. 306)

Chapter 17 Wrong Side of the Wishbone covers the lead-in to the election of 1940. Also describes Fish's condemnation of Hitler over Kristallnacht and support for FDR removal of the U.S. ambassador. Pp. 309-312 describe his commitment to isolationism.

Chapter 19 The Great Poo-Bah covers Fish's trip to Europe in 1939, including his visit with Ribbentrop and his efforts to participate in discussions about Danzig. He also went to Berlin after Oslo to help lawyer Fanny Holtzmann with visas for German Jews (pp 325-327).

"On October 21 [1940].... Drew Pearson and Robert Allen claimed that [Fish] had rented a Manhattan apartment house, of which he was part owner, to Nazi officials. The columnists implied that because of the high rent on the building, Fish's anti-war activities were being financed by the Nazis. Fish waited until after the election to respond to Pearson and Allen. He labeled their article "damnably false" and accused them of being "political ghouls and character assassins." The fact of the matter was, he said, that rents on the building had been lowered throughout the 1930s because of economic conditions. He added that his father had rented the house in 1931 to the German Consul General, "long before the advent of Hitler in Germany." According to Fish, the house was jointly owned by family members; Henry Forster was in charge of rental arrangements. The German counsel who last had the house, Otto von Kiep, was executed after he returned to Germany in 1941 for being part of a plot to assassinate Hitler. (P. 350)

"Another attempt had been made during the campaign to link Fish to the Nazis. A pamphlet with a photograph of Fish and Bundist leader Fritz Kuhn together was widely distributed by the Non-Partisan Committee to Defeat Hamilton Fish in Fish's district. According to Fish, he had met Kuhn a few years earlier at a state constitutional convention during which Fish had sought to have

an amendment passed outlawing Communists and Nazi organizations. The Bund leader had attended to speak against the amendment and had managed to have his photo taken with Fish.” (P. 351) According to the Secret History of the BSC, the British, through the Fight for Freedom (FFF) Committee, arranged many such dirty tricks.

Chapter 22 Fish on the Hot Seat This chapter covers the franking scandal. Details investigations of Fish by the offices of Army Intelligence, Naval Intelligence, the FBI, the Treasury Department, and the Department of Justice. *“ Like other isolationists and perhaps more than most, Fish was targeted by the administration for political extinction.”* No illegal activity on Fish’s part was found.

“Adding to Fish's woes, the FFF claimed that in a telephone conversation with an FFF official, Fish said that "there's been too much Judaism going around anyway." On August 27, Fish angrily denied the FFF's account of the conversation, insisting that he told the caller that the charges were "false as hell" and amounted to nothing more than a "Damnable lie." It is inconceivable that Fish, as reckless as he was, would have taken complete leave of his senses and uttered such a statement to an organization he knew was extremely antagonistic to him.” [Unbeknownst to Fish or Troncone, the Fight for Freedom Committee was a group established by the British secret service.] (P. 391)

“The FFF's director, Gerald MacDonald, collaborated closely with Maloney and administration officials in building a case against Fish. On August 26, the FFF issued a press release alleging that Fish had allowed William Dudley Pelley, head of the pro-German and ultra nationalist Silver Shirts, the use of his congressional frank. According to the FFF, Pelley used Fish's frank to disseminate anti-Semitic literature. Fish was jolted by this. Though both were nationalists, Fish felt uncomfortable with The Silver Shirt's virulent anti-Semitism.” (P. 391) Note that this remained an allegation. There is no evidence of Fish sending out the Pelley pamphlet or the Protocols of the Elders of Zion with his frank.

“But apart from their collaboration in their anti-war crusade, Fish and Viereck did not enjoy a close relationship nor was it established that he knew Viereck was a paid German propagandist.” (P. 397)

“Assuming that Fish knew of Hill's activities, which were within the law, what was Fish guilty of in sanctioning them? However wrong his isolationist views were in the eyes of the interventionists, they mirrored those held by many of his constituents, as well as by a majority of Americans.” (P. 398)

Chapter 23 Fish on the Hook goes into the successful efforts to defeat Fish in the 1944 Congressional election.

Note: *Both the Hanks and Troncone dissertations refer to damaging accusations against Fish, usually published just prior to an election (1940, '42, and '44.) Neither author was aware of the covert British campaign targeted at achieving Fish's defeat at the polls and*

employing American columnists including Drew Pearson and Wendell Wilkie. See **British Security Coordination, West, ed.** and **Desperate Deception, Thomas Mahl**, in list of books on the library's Resource List, both published in 1998.