

First Lady Lou Henry Hoover Comments on her Husband's Career and Public Service, 1932

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The rest of the war story you know. When the people of Belgium and Northern France were abandoned between the millstones of Germany and France and England, he became the only discernible factors to prevent the deaths of thousands, — or millions, — of innocent people by starvation, with all the attendant horrors of illness, finally tragedies, wholesale rebellion against the occupying soldiery and the consequent rioting and slaughter. Once, not emotionally but with the cold analysis of the engineer, he took down his own family problem and examined it. It took not magic or research or intuition to see that if the war lasted long the fortune he had accumulated would be entirely gone. It was more evident that no one, with his mining and metallurgical knowledge or his genius for organization, had come forward on the side of the Allies for what might be called the supplied-for-ammunition department, and a fortune awaited him there to be measured only by his own conscience. But there was no question as to what he would do. It was only that he would not do it blindly. He thought it out first. And he did ask me if I approved, — but it was only a formal question. He knew the answer. (But I often wonder what he would have done if I had said I thought the adequate care of his wife and children were his first duty!)

For more than two and a half years he worked as few men have ever worked before, he suffered great physical hardships frequently, he was often in the war zone and subject to the dangers of bombardment and other war activities, and absolutely his only interest was the substance of the largest number of little human lives he knew of exposed to the more than imminent possibility of the greatest individual and family suffering ever threatened in the world. They were a people that he had not known intimately before, with her as a nation or as having intimate friends amongst them. He had no special, preconceived, admiration for them as a people. Their country was not one from which he would ever want an opportunity, peace come, professionally or for recouping his fortunes. He had always been singularly averse to consorting with people merely socially prominent (while, if he found them interesting, he did not mind if they were Earls or paupers), and so he had never been interested in possible forays into the fringes of society around the higher nobility and royalties. The fact that he might get royal recognition for his efforts meant just absolutely nothing to him. The only motive for all that boundless effort and sacrifice was his understanding of the plight of those hundreds of thousands of isolated families of little people who had absolutely no way of fending for themselves. (And yet they say he does not think of the little man!)

When he came into the war, the same was true. Primarily he wanted to win the war, — because only by the preservation of democracy could all the little men have their rights, — so his first thought was for victory. His recent experience determined that he should do his part in the domain of food. — a peculiarly strange field, to those who knew him well, for one who was also singularly fitted for the manufacture of ammunition and the providing of its constituent necessity of providing sufficient food for our own soldiers and our Allies, did he consider the effect the conservation would have upon the poorer class of our own people. His second thought was always practically for their adequate food

supply, and (spiritually) that their courage, spiritual participation in, and understanding of the situation should be maintained. That little man!

When the war was over, I feel free to say, his thought, his effort, what persuasive powers he had, were spent, more than those of any other man around those conference tables in Paris, on the ultimate effect their deliberate and decisions would have upon the great masses of population in the various countries. Even President Wilson thought and spoke more of the inherent rights of nations, than of peoples.

Of course during all those months of the Armistice, when he spent so much time and energy on the tangled peace matters, he was also working eight and ten hours every day taking care of the poor little men (and women and children) who were all but forgotten by nearly everyone else. The statesmen seemed to think that while they continued for months their bickering in Paris their various units of population back home would live on air and keep warm by patriotism, with all the machinery of commerce lying in ruins about them, and no one to build it up. He literally fed millions of the little people over there (this time of course arranging theoretical ways reconstructing their transportation, and helping in the thousand ways you can read about in the A.R.A.

And following the Armistice, when peace had come, and when his own affairs had reached a condition demanding his attention, President Wilson asked if he would remain in Europe after the rest of our delegation left, to help the adjustment of new conditions. We stayed at great sacrifices to himself and us, merely to assure the continuance of food and other supplied to the millions of those unknown "little men", and to help them get adjusted to their new economic conditions. (That he had no ulterior desires from the countries concerned, governments or rulers or reading citizens, is evidenced from the facts that he has refused all decorations and orders offered him- the one French one being a surprise- and that assiduously he has not cultivated any of the representatives here from the countries indebted to him, nor their visiting leading citizens, that he has never revisited any of those countries, nor made any effort to keep any "strings" out for future use. He has gone out of his way, at some effort, to keep from being in any position where anyone would have to acknowledge his benefactions. And always remember, of course, he nor any of us have ever received a penny in recompense, or even in remuneration for expenses incurred, for all those years of work during the war and after. (Except his two or three "dollar-a-year's", — and I never heard of his getting them! Or saw them!)

Those years of his life- and ours, — he have up to the cause of the little man, millions of him. And not only those years, but most of the kind of happiness, or pleasure, that had been his before. A certain definite, and very original, kind of joy of life was stamped out of him by those war years. Can you remember that as a fun-making, fun-enjoying person he completely changed? Not that he became altogether solemn and serious, not that a quaint whimsicality does not persist and is highly entertaining, — but the old sparkling spontaneity is now only occasionally glimpsed for below the surface.

Since the war, the cause of the little men has been almost as dominant in his life as during that period. During the first few years thereafter, he had to devote considerable time to the marshalling of the forces contributing to our own living. Enterprises had to be revamped or closed out. Others strengthened and built up. Certain investments had to be sold to the best advantage possible and the proceeds put into something more promising or more constructive. It took much time and more thought. But not by any means all at his command. He did many considerable bits of work for the man with fewer opportunities or privileges than himself. The ones that come to my mind first are the Unemployment and Labor Conference of which he was Chairman in 1920. They got our people back to work after the war more quickly than did any other country, and started now thought in regard to the

handling of labor problems in a nation, which if kept up would have tremendously minimized, and very likely prevented, the great unemployment of the present.

However, both Harding and Coolidge and their Labor Secretary were inclined to let anything ride that was not going very badly, and besides, none of them had ever handled labor to any considerable extent, so they did not provide for unemployment ahead. Labor in their administrations was little concern of the Secretary of Commerce, — although indirectly he had little to deal with it, and he did not hesitate to give his opinion regarding the handling of its problems. But he had many ideas for vital improvements in labor matters to begin after his inauguration. However the troubles came so much sooner than even he suspected, that he has not time to begin in that Department in his own administration at the point where he left off in 1920, before the cataclysm was upon us. But if you study back through these past three years, you will see that he has bent every possible effort to caring for the working man and his family. And usually this has had to do with helping keep Industry open. It is better that Industry keeps jobs for men, than that the Federal (or any other) government provides him and his family with food and warmth and hospitalization for nothing.

And the “little man” other than the “working man”? The so-called “white collar man”, and many others? I suppose by that term “little man” we mean one who is not out-standing, not individually indispensable to his calling, be it mine or factory or office or farm. One who works inconspicuously and more or less adequately in his post for a wage or salary or income sufficient to support his family,- to give them food, clothing, housing, education, hospitalization, amusement and all kindred necessities or small luxuries. But one who can not accomplish all that and afford much leisure time himself, nor provide all the luxuries he would wish for his family, nor all the necessities when illness or misfortune arrive. Nor is he assured of the permanence of even what he has, even if he is ready to work valiantly, at our present stage of economic development. And that is one of the things Daddy has had his eye on helping accomplish,- the assurance of work for the industries.

But look back through the past three years, and recognize that with factory laborer, famer, office clerk and others, it is the “small man” that the President has been ceaselessly working for.

His political opponents try to make party or individual capital out of the fact that the dollars are actually loaned to the bank, the railway, the farming co-operative, the big industry. But these must in turn distribute it to the “little man”. (And not only must they distribute it to him in wages and salaries or sales, but the actual ownership or most of them is very largely in the hands of “little men” now,- in the shape of stocks and bonds. For more little men than big ones go down in these days when a big enterprise fails. And with the banks, the depositors lose as well.)

I started this letter when I was licensed at much reading one morning of Democratic and “Progressive” effusions about the President’s having no thought for the little man, but bending al his energies towards saving the bloated plutocrat. The absolute injustice and downright lying of these statements infuriated me,- and there rushed through my mind a whirl-wind mind-movie of how all that he has been doing so endlessly and so outrageously has been for small individual, the millions of them.

I had to write to you about it! And I thought I was going into a lengthy exposition of all he has accomplished, with these able and tireless men about him, and has tried to accomplish, (remembering always the many of his efforts that have been frustrated through purely political motives in opposition,) for the farmer, the workingman, the clerk, the salesman, the homeowner, the bank depositor, the small stock and bond holder since being in the White House,- for the purpose of having the picture in logical sequence on paper for my own satisfaction. I began with a paragraph or two about the evidences of his earlier life tending to show the same inclinations, — and all my time has been absorbed before I reached the subject of my discourse!

Not things are piling upon me. I will not have time to finish this for days. But you can doubtless finish it in your own minds yourselves. If you can not, if there are steps in his progress, his accomplishment, that you have not happened to see, whose significance you have not happened to grasp, think them out for yourself and make his case clear for "the little man," in each instance, in your own mind.

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Certainly to be read at leisure!

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