

Who is ...

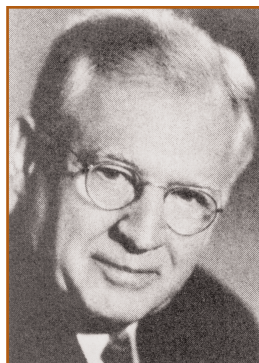
John T. Flynn

BY JUSTIN RAIMONDO

John T. Flynn—journalist, author, and master polemicist of the Old Right—is highly unusual. He started out as a liberal columnist for that flagship of American liberalism, the *New Republic*, and wound up on the Right, denouncing “creeping socialism.” What is unusual about Flynn is that instead of being seduced by the New Deal and the Popular Front into supporting the war, Flynn was led by his thoroughgoing antiwar stance to challenge the developing state-worship of modern liberalism.

John T. Flynn was born in 1882, in Bladensburg, Maryland, where he grew up in a devoutly Roman Catholic family. He studied law at Georgetown University but soon switched to journalism. After a long struggle, he finally found a position in 1920 with the *New York Globe*, where he specialized in financial analysis. He also wrote a series of books: *Graft in Business*, *Men of Wealth*, and a very fair biography of John D. Rockefeller, entitled *God’s Gold*.

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When Roosevelt was swept into office, Flynn welcomed him, sharing the hope that the new president would get the country moving again. Flynn supported the Democratic party platform of 1932, which called for an end to the extravagant spending of the Republicans, a balanced budget, and the abolition of many government bureaus and commissions.

But Flynn was soon disillusioned. In fact, the New Deal that Roosevelt sold to the American people in 1932 bore absolutely no resemblance to the one he immediately imposed on an unsuspecting nation. During the first 100 days of his administration, Roosevelt racked up a deficit larger than the

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one it took Hoover two years to produce. Worse, from Flynn's viewpoint, was the blizzard of new government agencies the president created, agencies that sought to regulate every aspect of economic life, and the billions in borrowed money that financed them.

He used his column in the *New Republic* to attack the president, and in 1940 came out with a short book, *Country Squire in the White House*, in which he excoriated Roosevelt for betraying the trust of the people who had elected him. Flynn was particularly horrified by the National Recovery Administration (NRA), which he denounced as "one of the most amazing spectacles of our times," that "represented probably the gravest attack upon the whole principle of the democratic society in our political history."

With prices, wages, hours, and production quotas set by trade associations, and an industry-wide code set up to regulate every aspect of commerce, competition would be eliminated and business would ensure for itself a secure and profitable niche in the new corporatist order. This was all

couched in the language of liberalism, Flynn said, but it was championed primarily by the Chamber of Commerce and other business groups. Flynn saw himself as the defender of true liberalism, which had been betrayed by That Man in the White House.

Flynn predicted that Roosevelt's spending on vast domestic programs could not continue, for he would run out of useful peacetime projects. The Supreme Court may have declared the NRA unconstitutional, but there were other ways to militarize the economy—such as actually going to war. Roosevelt would pursue military adventure abroad to take the people's minds off their troubles at home—troubles that were not getting any better, and that the New Deal was only making worse.

Flynn's final and definitive shift from left to right was completed with the writing of his greatest work, *As We Go Marching*. In this work Flynn stepped back and tried to see the trends he had been fighting—militarism, centralism, leader worship—as the interlocking components of a system.

The growth of a huge bureaucratic apparatus, the partnership of government and business, social welfare schemes, huge public debts, and the need to resolve economic problems by creating a permanent war economy—all of these phenomena had become dominant first in Italy, then in Germany, and then in the U.S. under the New Deal. The theme of the book is that while the U.S. was fighting fascism in Europe, the seeds of that doctrine had already been planted at home; the war itself would accelerate their growth.

Throughout the 1950s Flynn sounded the alarm about the growing scope of U.S. intervention in Indochina. It was, he

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thought, only a matter of time before “the United States may have to make a decision as to whether or not it will get into another Asiatic war,” probably in Vietnam, he said on January 15, 1952. To be put in the position of defending French imperialism from the Communist-led Vietnam would be an unmitigated disaster for the United States.

Flynn ended his public career in 1960, at the age of seventy-nine; his health was failing and he retired from journalism. He died in 1964, as William F. Buckley and his followers were eradicating the last remnants of the Old Right, and his work was largely forgotten. That he died isolated from the Right as well as the Left, his books neglected, his legacy largely unknown, is due to the fact that the history of any conflict, both military and ideological, is written by the victors.

Flynn’s essential insight—that the threat to America is not to be found in any foreign capitol, but in Washington, D.C.—takes on new immediacy today. His analysis of the structure of the welfare-warfare state as a system based on centralized government control of the economy and a permanent war economy is vital to understanding where we are today, how we got there—and how we can get out. ■



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