Journal of Policy History (2024), **36**: 3, 281–307
doi:10.1017/S0898030623000301

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

ARTICLE

The Most Iniquitous Lobby: The Committee for Constitutional Government and the Shaping of American Politics, 1937–1955

Alex McPhee-Browne

Cambridge University
Email: amm256@cam.ac.uk

Abstract

This article examines the Committee for Constitutional Government, a conservative organization that spearheaded a novel form of mass-based mobilization and direct-mail propaganda to counter New Deal reforms from 1937 to the late 1950s. I argue that the members of the committee offered a supple and variegated response to New Deal liberalism, one with deep roots in the American past. Organizationally, the committee differed from other conservative groups of the period in the vastly greater reach of its propaganda, the small-donor financial base of its operations, and its extensive cultivation of a grassroots movement committed to right-wing reform. The committee was a critical political actor from 1937 to 1955, systematically shaping legislation and countering the trend toward social democracy in America. The ultimate result of its campaigns was to retard the growth of the administrative state and help formulate a cogent conservative critique of reformist liberalism.

Keywords: Conservatism; lobbying; antistatism; direct-mail; interest groups; Committee for Constitutional Government; New Deal liberalism

In early 1937, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, flush with success at the polls, began to contemplate a bold plan that would ensure the survival of his administration's programs into the future. In his first term the president had watched in dismay as piece by piece of the New Deal was invalidated by the conservative justices of the Supreme Court. On a single day in May 1935—"Black Monday"—the court ruled three times against the administration, gutting the National Industrial Recovery Act, the linchpin of the early New Deal. By 1937, Roosevelt had hit upon a scheme that would radically alter the shape of the court, all but ensuring that the core of his administration's programs would pass its threshold. The court-packing plan, as it became known, proposed to enlarge the number of justices to 15 by appointing a new judge for every justice over age 70 who declined to retire. With gigantic Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress, the president

was confident that he could pass the bill without undue opposition. He was mistaken. The plan engendered an unprecedented public outcry, as opponents assailed the president's reach for "dictatorial" powers. By the spring of 1937, Roosevelt's scheme was languishing in the Senate. For all the president's powers of persuasion, it would meet an ignoble end there in July.[1]

One of the spearheads of the assault on Roosevelt's plan was a new organization headed by the media magnate Frank Gannett. A shrewd newsman, Gannett had worked his way up from reporter to publisher of the third-largest chain of newspapers in the United States. Tall, with thick, jowly features, his compact body overflowing with energy, Gannett was a bitter critic of the New Deal and an adroit champion of conservatism. "I found Gannett a most astonishing person," the conservative columnist George Sokolsky wrote to Herbert Hoover in 1938, "anxious to lick the New Deal and willing not only to spend his own money, but to stick his chin out."[2] Gannett's organization, the National Committee to Uphold Constitutional Government (NCUCG), would become a clearinghouse for conservative activists and intellectuals from the late 1930s to the late 1950s.[3] It would pioneer the use of direct mail in political campaigns, advancing the conservative cause and waging battle against the liberal state with unusual efficacy. Transformed, in 1941, into the Committee for Constitutional Government (CCG), it became, under its secretary Edward A. Rumely's guidance, the most sophisticated conservative organization of the period, anticipating by decades the strategies and methods of the 1970s New Right.

This article charts the career of the committee and its leaders, arguing that they helped develop a new form of political activism on the right, marked by their efforts to mobilize mass opposition to New Deal liberalism outside of the formal political process. These efforts, unlike those of many conservative groups, were directed at rolling back the New Deal administrative state piece by piece. The committee functioned as a kind of social movement that helped galvanize a broad populace against New Deal reforms. But it was also a network, as sociologists understand the term, an interconnected body of individuals with "weak" but tangible ties, one that helped cohere members of a certain class, cultural, and social identity—upper-middle-class whites who feared the erosion of their position in the face of Roosevelt's reforms—into a distinct constituency.[4] The committee's program of mobilization recalled, in some respects, the nineteenth-century nativist movements and certain organizations of the 1920s and 1930s like the Liberty League and the Sentinels of the Republic, with a distinct twist.[5] Instead of organizing a political party, a secret society, or a primarily propaganda-based group, the members of the committee exerted pressure through mass-based campaigns of citizen activism together with private deal making and a continuous flood of direct-mail propaganda. Famous in its day for its frontal assault on the New Deal order, the committee transcended the customary divide between the "old" prewar and the "new" postwar conservatism, uniting an array of activists and intellectuals who helped channel the right's visceral hatred of Depression-era liberalism into a politically potent program.

The early stages of the committee, and certain of its later campaigns, have received attention from scholars, but there has been no systematic study of its

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898030623000301 Published online by Cambridge University Press

methods and influence.[6] Indeed, the committee—strangely enough, given its prominence—is conspicuously absent from most of the literature on the development of American conservatism.[7] Incorporating the committee into the scholarship on the American right complicates the standard picture of the conservatives of the 1930s and 1940s as aristocratic, hidebound reactionaries. Instead, as we shall see, the committee exemplified a different, even "populist," form of conservatism; its members were tactically and ideologically sophisticated exponents of a worldview with deep roots in the American past. In the twentieth century, the distinctive origins of the committee's ideology and approach can be found in the Progressive Party and in modern mass media. Strategically and organizationally, the committee differed from other conservative groups of the period in the vastly greater reach of its propaganda, the small-donor financial base of its operations, and its extensive cultivation of a grassroots movement committed to conservative reform. Derided on the left as a plutocratic front, the committee embodied its founders' inflexible belief in individual liberty, private property, and free-market capitalism. This philosophy, which would later find its consummation in Barry Goldwater's presidential run, was kept alive during the years of liberal political hegemony by an array of activists—a group led, I argue, by the members of the CCG. Employing sophisticated techniques gleaned from the world of advertising and a base of supporters in the hundreds of thousands, the CCG helped crystallize and make operative the conservative critique of the New Deal. Together with their allies, the leaders of the CCG attacked the New Deal from the vantage point of an earlier economic philosophy, determined to resist the trend toward social democracy in America by developing a novel form of conservative political praxis. The result was a hybrid organization—part think tank, political action committee, and propaganda hub—whose ideology and practices resonate to this day.[8]

How are we to understand the committee and its place in the literature on American conservatism? As I argue in this article, the members of the committee articulated an influential conservative critique of the New Deal state well before the purported birth of modern conservatism, under the aegis of William F. Buckley, Jr.'s *National Review*, in 1955. Scholars of the conservative movement have tended to focus on postwar developments, arguing that a coherent conservative movement and ideology emerged only in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This scholarship has tended to fail to take account of the cogent philosophy of many prewar conservatives—a philosophy that would in part animate post-1955 conservatism—that was offered by members of groups like the CCG.[9] The committee collaborated with a range of conservatives and libertarians from other organizations like the National Economic Council, the Christian Freedom Foundation, and the Foundation for Economic Education, forming a self-conscious movement that is largely absent from the scholarship. As the operative George Koether, who was associated with the CCG, summed up the attitude of these conservatives and libertarians in 1952,

> [W]e are, in effect, in a war—a war of ideas. We must plan our campaign in that war as carefully and as logically as a military commander plans his campaign. True, we are not fighting the whole war—and that is being

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898030623000301 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> fought by us along with other armies: The American Economic Foundation, the Foundation for Economic Education, Pro-America, etc. But even on our own front, we need battle planning, and dispatch of the proper troops to the areas for which they are appropriate.[10]

Scholars who have focused on conservatism during the 1930s and early 1940s have tended to study groups, such as the American Liberty League and the National Association of Manufacturers, that were primarily vehicles for business to attempt to influence politics, usually without success.[11] These groups mirrored some of the efforts of Rumely and his allies by mounting large-scale propaganda campaigns, saturating the country with anti-New Deal messages in a variety of forms. Yet a preoccupation with business elites as the driving force of the conservative movement ignores the ideological and mobilizing role played by groups like the CCG. The CCG, too, was marked above all, in its early stages at least, by a factor that eluded other conservative groups until the 1960s: its success. Scholars have studied an array of conservatives from 1930 to the 1950s, but by largely ignoring the CCG they have painted a picture of the two decades from 1930 as one of unremitting conservative defeat. By systematically identifying issues that galvanized voters, the CCG was able to help facilitate and coordinate lobbying and other measures that led to conservative victories from the late 1930s to the early 1950s. As I argue, the CCG was above all a grassroots organization, a group sustained by small donations and the efforts of local activists, in contrast to allied organizations on the right. The historical scholarship that exists on grassroots conservatism is wholly devoted to postwar groups and mostly focused on California and the South.[12] This literature has illustrated how small networks of conservatives, often working outside of formal institutional structures, shaped conservative politics in the postwar era. Although sources do not permit a truly bottom-up analysis of the CCG, it was clearly able to mobilize tens of thousands of individuals in its efforts to roll back New Deal and Fair Deal programs, decades before the activists analyzed in the existing scholarship.

This article engages, and interlinks, with a diverse literature on conservative media, grassroots mobilizations, and political messaging that has emerged during the last two decades. Although works such as Nicole Hemmer's *Messengers of the Right* have ably examined the evolution of conservative media after World War II and other scholars have begun charting the conservative media environment of the Depression decade, almost no works have covered the significant overlap between paramedia organizations like the committee and the ordinary partisan media exemplified by figures like Robert McCormick and William Randolph Hearst.[13] Although this article only tentatively outlines the function and dynamics of the relationship between conservative media and activist groups such as the CCG, it is clear that both sustained beneficial connections on a variety of levels. Conservative newspapers across the country syndicated the columns of members of the committee while printing the advertisements that Rumely and his allies believed were crucial in mobilizing the people against New and Fair Deal legislation. The careers of figures like Gannett or Rumely, which combined newspaper publishing and the quasimedia activities of the

committee, illustrate that the line between conservative media and conservative activists was a porous one indeed.

Although the sociological literature on grassroots right-wing mobilizations has focused mainly on far-right groups, work on conservative movements is a growing subfield.[14] Earlier accounts of right-wing movements highlighted factors such as ignorance, fear, psychopathology, and status anxiety as the root causes of rightist mobilizations. During the last four decades, though, among sociologists and historians, this view has shifted, based on evidence that those attracted to right-wing social movements are often perfectly "ordinary" individuals with stable careers, families, and homes.[15] This article provides further evidence to sustain this interpretation. The story of the committee is a prime example of a right-wing social mobilization enacted by otherwise well-adjusted and mostly middle-class citizens, those with secure ties to the community and a broadly conventional conception of political and social life.

Rumely, Gannett, and the other senior members of the committee were what sociologists call "movement" or "political" entrepreneurs, framing the group's messages, forging a collective identity, responding to external political opportunities, developing a repertoire of strategies and tactics, and serving as a source of charismatic authority for those mobilized by the committee's campaigns.[16] In part, the committee's successes were a result of its larger financial base and its leaders' political connections, attributes that sociologists have identified as crucial to the success of movement entrepreneurs.[17] In examining the CCG, this article illustrates how an elite group of organizers, propagandists, and donors helped shape a grassroots movement dedicated to right-wing reform. It suggests that social mobilizations, particularly on the right, can combine elite organizational forms with grassroots advocacy in a potent and durable form.

The committee was fundamentally an interest group, linking voters and donors with the political class and helping shape the direction of public policy.[18] Mediating between grassroots activists and individual politicians, the committee was part of the broader movement toward a "targeted style" in political messaging that followed the emergence of mass advertising and consumer culture. Mirroring the efforts of large corporations, the committee targeted individual "markets" of politically engaged citizens with propaganda tailored to their interests. In turn, this propaganda shaped the kind of messages that grassroots activists—encouraged by the committee—conveyed to their representatives. The committee thus functioned at once as powerful purveyor of a specific ideology and, as one scholar has written of other interest groups, as a "crucial" conduit "of the democratic will."[19] Interest groups had existed in America, in some form, since the founding. But beginning in the 1920s, the increased size, sophistication, and influence of new groups—which ballooned in number—marked a turning point.[20] By the 1930s, interest group politics had come of age.[21] And the sheer scale of the committee's propaganda and advocacy efforts made it one of the most powerful in America during its peak years between 1937 and 1950.

Advertising and the science and art of mass communication were the other dominant factors in determining the committee's campaigns. As early as the first decade of the century, the notion that advertising could be used to shape political

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898030623000301 Published online by Cambridge University Press

beliefs on a mass scale had begun to take hold among elites across the United States.[22] World War I accelerated this trend, and by the 1920s sophisticated political advertising was a crucial element of election campaigns.[23] Advertising played a powerful role in shaping how political messages were tailored and distributed, and interest groups swiftly acquired the knowledge and skills to effectively use advertising to cultivate support with their respective constituencies.[24] This approach to political persuasion eschewed, for the most part, partisan messaging in favor a broad-based appeal to the electorate as a whole. The committee, guided by Rumely, generally adopted this approach, employing the techniques of advertising and public relations established by leading figures of the industry like Bruce Barton, who was a supporter of the committee.[25] Although the CCG employed the "targeted style" of political messaging in certain circumstances, it also blanketed "leadership individuals" among the broader electorate with messages designed to advance its policy goals.[26] For the more committed, it offered book-length treatments that expounded the philosophy of the committee. But the organization's propaganda was mostly simple and direct, supplemented by images designed to incite loathing or approbation in its audience. Advertising and public relations, as such, helped condition how the committee's campaigns functioned; the group's market, though, was not consumer goods but political beliefs and legislative action.

On a frigid evening in early February 1937, Rumely met with a small group of men in his room at the Seymour Hotel in New York to discuss politics. Earlier that day, Roosevelt had announced the court-packing legislation and, alert to what they saw as the dangers of the bill, the group debated the possibility of a national campaign to defeat the president's proposal. After the meeting, Rumely called Gannett, who was holidaying in Miami. The publisher, equally perturbed, agreed to underwrite the initial efforts of a new organization tasked with combatting the bill. As Gannett wrote to a fellow newspaperman, "The President now dominates Congress. To have him also dominate the Supreme Court would give him complete control of the government. This means the end of our democracy and I am not exaggerating when I say this."[27] Gannett had been an early supporter of Roosevelt, but by the mid-1930s he had turned against the New Deal with a vengeance. He decried the president's efforts to tame and control the creative ferment of market capitalism. The great threat facing the country, he later maintained, was the extinction of free enterprise by an insidious state socialism.[28]

Within days of his conversation with Gannett, Rumely had issued a trial mailing to 35,000 individuals. The members of the committee were emboldened by the response: more than a third of those contacted indicated they would actively support an organization to defeat the court bill. Roosevelt had cast the plan as a measure to increase the efficiency of the court, complaining that the justices were unable to see many cases of consequence and unsubtly hinting that the advanced age of many members of court rendered their judgement questionable. But a bipartisan group of senators and congressmen viewed the measure as a naked attempt to dominate the court and a threat to the traditional tripartite federal division of powers, sentiments that Rumely and his allies amplified. The committee, too, played on public reverence for the court, with

polls showing that a small majority of the American people rejected the packing plan.[29] Roosevelt's message announcing the legislation, as one scholar has noted, "generated an intensity of response unmatched by any legislative controversy of this [twentieth] century."[30] And the members of the NCUCG were determined to capitalize on the controversy and kill the plan. By April, the committee had blanketed the "pivotal states"—those with senators who were leaning toward opposing Roosevelt's bill—with three and a half million letters, carrying speeches by an array of figures opposed to the plan. Typical of the literature distributed was a speech by Frederick H. Stinchfield, president of the American Bar Association, that attacked the court bill in ringing tones. "The proposal made by the President," Stinchfield declared, "will destroy the Supreme Court." Roosevelt, he argued, sought the power of an autocrat.[31]

In its efforts, the committee worked closely with allies in Congress and enlisted an array of prominent Americans as members. The objective was to present a broad front of Republicans and Democrats, middle-class farm leaders, and industrial magnates to avoid accusations of plutocratic self-seeking and partisanship. The committee organized local rallies across the country and aired nationwide broadcasts from prominent members such as James Truslow Adams, the eminent historian, and Dorothy Thompson, the celebrated journalist.[32] The leading intellectual light in this early phase of the committee's existence was the lawyer and pamphleteer Amos Pinchot. A former liberal, Pinchot had made his name as a tribune of the Progressive Party in the 1910s, an avowed opponent and conscientious student of the corrupting effect of money on politics. In these early years, Pinchot favored an active government but abjured socialism. He believed that competitive enterprise and popular government were the true guardians of the people's liberties. In 1910, he argued that the sole purpose of the state was the "furthering of the interests of the individual." By the mid-1930s, this nascent individualism had spurred him into open combat with the New Deal. Pinchot had voted for Roosevelt and written articles on his behalf, but he was disgusted by what he viewed as the president's blatant grab for power. The centralization of authority in Washington, he believed, was part and parcel of a conspiracy to control, in toto, the life of the people. The New Deal, he wrote to the president's close advisor Felix Frankfurter, heralded nothing but a return to the "old forms of unfreedom." Roosevelt, he believed, sought total control of every phase of economic life and all three branches of government. Tall, dapper, and handsome, with penetrating eyes and a generous moustache, Pinchot brought to the committee a keen, analytical mind and a flair for publicity. "If Congress passes this bill, or any bill like it," he wrote in his first open letter to Congress on the court bill, perhaps with the fate of Italy and Germany in his mind, "it will have taken a long and perhaps irrevocable step into dictatorship."[33]

By July 1937, the committee had issued some fifteen million pieces of literature and organized an army of volunteers 100,000 strong. "Volunteers are writing the literature of the National Committee to Uphold Constitutional Government. Volunteers are distributing it," Gannett wrote to a friend. "Democracy *is* beginning to work—perhaps too late. Let us hope not." It was not too late. In July, Gannett traveled to Washington to consult with a bipartisan coalition of senators who opposed the court bill. He learned that the fate of the bill rested on

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898030623000301 Published online by Cambridge University Press

12 undecided votes. Immediately, the committee issued 32,000 telegrams to influential citizens in the states with wavering senators, who flooded their representatives with letters opposing the bill. By the middle of the month, it became clear that Roosevelt did not have the votes to pass the plan. With scarcely a whimper, the measure was returned to committee, from which it would never emerge. In victory, the members of the NCUCG felt a kind of ecstasy. For Rumely, it was the "most effective and intensive public mobilization ever put forward during any legislative struggle." For Gannett, it was a "splendid moral awakening of our nation," a triumphant upsurge of popular sentiment.[34]

With the court battle won, the members of the committee contemplated the future of their organization. As early as April 1937, Pinchot had argued that whatever the result of the court fight, "we must go on with the fight against managed economy." Rumely envisioned the committee, in a letter to Gannett, as an "American Civil Liberties Union" for capitalism, a combined effort to forestall government regulation of business and uphold the rights of property. During the succeeding decades, Rumely's vision would hold sway to a notable extent. Under his direction, the committee would wage war on New Deal liberalism while defending free enterprise and economic liberty. "I think there can be no doubt that the fight to uphold constitutional government in America has just begun," Pinchot wrote to Rumely in September 1937. "What we have won is only the first battle of a long campaign; the main engagement is yet to come."[35]

In accounting for the victory in the court fight, Gannett ultimately credited Rumely's efforts. "You praise me for doing the job," he wrote to Pinchot. "He [Rumely] has been the mainspring and the driving force." Plump, sleek, and mild, Rumely liked nothing more than to entertain his audience with choice anecdotes taken from his time with "T. R."—the bear-like twenty-sixth president, and the symbol, for Rumely, as for so many others, of the Great Man of politics. Rumely's endless stories had the air of fantasy—how, one might wonder, had this young man worked his way into the confidence of the most powerful politician in the country? Yet they were true, in large part. For Rumely was possessed of a prodigious, almost indefatigable, energy, expressed in dizzying reams of correspondence and memoranda that poured forth from his desk. He had the mind of a polyglot, equally at home discoursing on the intricacies of steel production as on the machinations of the political elite. He had a child's fascination with technology, an obsession with the intricacies of the Machine Age. He was a shameless flatterer, an inveterate talker. He was, above all, the guiding force of the committee, the one who kept the wheels turning while others strutted in front of the cameras. And he was, in his own way, brilliant and not a little prescient. By transfiguring the techniques and textures of mass marketing into the political realm, by constructing a potent and profitable direct-mail empire, he was, in some ways, decades ahead of his contemporaries.[36]

Rumely's youth was defined by his exposure to the radical political currents that criss-crossed the Atlantic world in the early twentieth century. Born in 1882, in La Porte, Indiana, Rumely grew up in a prosperous household with devout German Catholic parents. At age 16 he attended Notre Dame University, before being expelled for his spirited advocacy of Henry George's single-tax philosophy. Drawn to George and other radical individualists such as Herbert Spencer,

Rumely pursued his education in Europe, where he completed degrees in medicine and sociology. During this period, Rumely wrote articles for American magazines on German social and political life. One of his efforts, on social welfare, caught the attention of Theodore Roosevelt, then in his first term in office, sparking a lively correspondence between the pair. On his return to the States, Rumely joined Roosevelt's Progressive Party, where he learned firsthand the new techniques of mass communication at the feet of the master. The young Rumely was an ardent Progressive, convinced that America must "develop and strengthen our national government so that it can regulate the activities of large corporations and hold them within proper bounds." In 1915, he purchased the *New York Evening Mail*, which he pledged to the Progressive cause, telling Roosevelt that he could use it as his personal mouthpiece. Under Rumely, the *Mail* initially advocated American neutrality in the conflict then engulfing the European continent. In 1918, Rumely was accused of having accepted Imperial German funds to purchase the *Mail.* The charge was apparently false, but amid the war hysteria that permeated American society it hardly mattered. He was tried and found guilty of trading with the enemy but pardoned by President Coolidge after spending a month in jail.[37] With the coming of the Depression, a new chapter in Rumely's life opened. By the mid-1930s, like a generation of progressives, Rumely, a former champion of reform, had turned violently against the New Deal. Incensed by Roosevelt's programs, Rumely derided the "authoritarian" efforts of the administration to regulate and control the creative energies of the people. Free-market capitalism, he maintained, was the indispensable engine of the American experiment. And the New Deal, he was convinced, threatened its very existence.[38]

Rumely's expertise, and his signature contribution to the committe, was in direct-mail marketing. He and his staff assiduously assembled vast lists of "leadership individuals"—the lawyers list alone ran to 150,000 names—including doctors, clergy, businessmen, politicians, academics, farm leaders, and an assortment of other groups. The libertarian author Rose Wilder Lane, after a meeting with Rumely in September 1946, reported that the committee had lists "of 3,000,000 names, classified and constantly kept 'live' in addition to its own membership list of some 200,000." The lists had a dual function: on one hand they were used to spread the committee's propaganda, on the other to raise funds. The combination of the lists allowed the committee to mail material in astronomical numbers.[39]

Unlike other conservative organizations, which raised their money by directly soliciting corporations and wealthy donors, some 90% of the committee's money came from individual donations, most of them small. Thus, the committee was a grassroots organization first and foremost, in a way that no other significant organization on the right could claim. In the 12 years from 1937 to 1949, 75,000 different individuals donated money to the committee. In 1948, for instance, 31% of the total money received in contributions came from donations of $10 or less, with contributions of $100 or more making up only 9% of the total. Rumely's strategy involved dramatizing an issue with a vast initial mailing, which allowed the committee to recoup its cost from thousands of small donations. His direct-mail operation was further advanced by a nationwide

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898030623000301 Published online by Cambridge University Press

membership that peaked in the mid-1940s at 200,000 and a large network of local organizers and local affiliates, such as the Texas Committee for Constitutional Government. In his approach, Rumely directly anticipated the direct-mail boom that would sweep the right in the mid-1960s.[40]

The precise effect of Rumely's direct-mail operation is difficult to gauge, but many opponents, as well as supporters, credited the committee as the most effective organization combatting the New Deal. The nature of direct-mail fundraising—rather than a steady trickle, money would mainly flow in when there was a decisive issue at stake—led, though, to persistent deficits. And as the decades rolled on, Rumely's fund-raising efforts came more and more to resemble those of other groups on the right. "[W]hat is really needed is recognition by the trustees that we have pushed reliance upon mail-order-secured income far beyond what any other organization has ever achieved," Rumely wrote, somewhat ruefully, in 1947, "and that the time has come when we must enlist, just as other organizations do, the personality, the prestige, and cooperation of individuals … from which more substantial support can be secured."[41]

In December 1939, Frank Gannett resigned from his position as chairman of the NCUCG to run, in a doomed effort, for the Republican nomination for president. Gannett's finances had been critical to the committee in its early days, but his resignation did little to check its expanding influence. Samuel B. Pettengill, a former Democratic congressman, was chosen as the new chairman. "This nation cannot go on half free and half slave, half collectivist and half free enterprise," Pettengill told the committee's supporters in an open letter announcing his chairmanship. "Before this Committee lies a task which may be the equivalent of the work done between 1787 and 1789 by the authors of the Federalist Papers," he wrote to a supporter. "We must resell America to Americans in the American home market."[42]

A native of South Bend, Indiana, first elected to Congress in 1930, Pettengill had begun his political career an avid supporter of Roosevelt, welcoming the flood of legislation that followed the new president's inauguration. By the middle of the decade, though, outraged by the growth of executive power, Pettengill's support for the president had evaporated. In its place bloomed a strident conservatism, a contempt for the multifarious New Deal state, and an unshakable faith in the virtues of free enterprise.[43] For Pettengill, who remained in Congress till 1938, Roosevelt's court-packing plan was the turning point in his political career. Hitherto, his opposition to the president had been piecemeal and muted, relegated to the occasional speech and private correspondence. Now, though, he was transformed into one of the nation's most unyielding opponents of the administration's plans. During the months the court-packing bill was under consideration he traveled the nation campaigning against the measure.[44] Pettengill's attacks on the president's plan caught the attention of Gannett, who was impressed by his intelligence and vigor. In 1938, Pettengill announced that he would not run again for Congress. In November of that year, he was hired by Gannett. Free from the constraints of reelection, Pettengill channeled his energies into his work for the committee.[45]

In 1938, Pettengill published *Jefferson the Forgotten Man*, a brisk synthesis of the philosophy that he would champion under the aegis of the committee. Studded

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898030623000301 Published online by Cambridge University Press

with quotes from the Founding Fathers, the bulk of the work comprised a comparison of the philosophy of Jefferson with the intellectual foundations of the New Deal.[46] For Pettengill, Jefferson was a social prophet without peer, the founding author of American liberty whose guiding philosophy animated the nation's republican form of government. Jefferson, Pettengill argued, had envisioned a strictly limited state, relegated to national defense and the protection of the rights of the individual. He had conceived of a decentralized government in which liberated individuals would be free to work out their own destiny. But the principles of Jefferson, Pettengill argued, had been cast aside by Roosevelt as if they were nothing. In its place, the president had sought to erect a "one-party super-state," a government that would enslave the people to the whims of the bureaucrat.[47]

In 1939, Rumely and Gannett, thrilled by Pettengill's efforts, convinced him to begin a syndicated newspaper column calculated to spread his gospel to a wider audience. A gifted polemicist, Pettengill used his column to celebrate what he called the "Lost Constituency," the "thrifty, frugal, sober, hardworking, self-respecting and God-fearing men and women" who had created America. These constituents believed in the bible and the US Constitution, he wrote in one column. "They believe in the free enterprise system where the workers get more than the shirkers." They were specimens, for Pettengill, of a large, middle-class bloc that must be aroused to combat the New Deal.[48]

In 1940 Pettengill published *Smoke-Screen*, a lucid catalogue of the New Deal measures that he argued were subtly transforming America into a "National Socialist" state. Couched in loose, fluid prose, Pettengill peppered his attacks on the New Deal with a barrage of statistics. The great danger facing the nation, he argued, was not outright dictatorship but a new and insidious form of "creeping collectivism." Free enterprise and constitutional government, he believed, were being sabotaged under the "smoke-screen" of humanitarianism. Greased by propaganda, calculated to foster fear in the future of capitalism, its proponents cloaked their totalitarian designs behind a veneer of good intentions. "[S]o silently has this Nazification of America gone on," he wrote, "that there are many good and patriotic people who think 'you are seeing things under the bed' if you tell them we are on the German road." This bureaucratic despotism, he argued, was slowly strangling the liberties of the people. Its triumph would mean the end of free enterprise and the death of constitutional government.[49]

The reaction to *Smoke-Screen* was nothing short of ecstatic. The book received laudatory reviews in an array of newspapers, and the CCG and Pettengill were inundated with letters from readers testifying to the work's power and broad appeal. "I have just finished reading *Smoke-Screen*," Bruce Barton wrote to Pettengill in early 1940. "It is by all odds the best and most concise treatise on the New Deal that I have ever seen." All of 480,000 copies of the book were sold in stores or distributed, with another 40,000 circulated by the broker E. F. Hutton, and the book became the highest selling nonfiction volume of 1940. So favorable was the reception that a number of newspapers serialized the book, in full, for their readers.[50]

The very success of Pettengill's work highlighted a broad and relatively untapped popular support for the philosophy of free-market conservatism.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898030623000301 Published online by Cambridge University Press

America's Future, which published Pettengill's tracts as well as a host of CCG literature, was the vehicle for much of Pettengill and the committee's efforts during these years. Founded in 1938 by Gannett and Rumely, by the mid-1940s America's Future had become an integral arm of the committee, distributing books, syndicating columns, and producing radio broadcasts. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the organization was headed by Robert L. Lund, a former president of the National Association of Manufacturers, and financed by a slew of prominent industrialists. A fund of $100,000 was initially raised, and in 1946 Pettengill began a radio broadcast attacking liberalism that was heard over 261 stations by 1948. In a single year, more than five million transcripts of Pettengill's radio addresses were distributed. "On the whole I feel greatly encouraged and am ready to carry the gospel within the limit of my ability," Pettengill wrote to one of the committee's financial backers, senator E. H. Moore (R-OK). "The people are ready to listen to our kind of fundamental Americanism."[51]

Although the committee was officially nonpartisan, most of its members were hardened Republicans. Few were more committed in their faith than the Rev. Norman Vincent Peale. A child of the Ohio backcountry, Peale's letters to allies could be cloying, even obsequious, but behind the veneer of eager bonhomie a shrewd and acute intellect nurtured grand ambitions. Later in life he would become one of America's most famous pastors, a confidant of presidents and senators, yet Peale's early life instilled in him a virulent Christian conservatism. "True concern for mankind," he wrote in 1944, "is marked by the effort to make man self-reliant and self-supporting, able to stand on his own feet. The best humanitarianism is to strengthen free enterprise society in which self-reliance may thrive." Peale had been a member of the committee since 1936. In 1940 he was made secretary of the organization, and in May 1942 Peale took over from Pettengill as chairman of the committee, rechristened the Committee for Constitutional Government.[52]

Under Peale's guidance, the war years saw little diminution in the activities of the committee. "Ours is a twofold job: *Win* the war abroad! *Save* freedom at home!" blared a full-page advertisement run in array of newspapers. "There are enemies in your midst. They have declared war against the political and economic system of our country. They are a minority, but they are *organized* and *at work.*"[53] Like many conservatives, the members of the committee regarded Roosevelt's programs, not Soviet or Nazi tyranny, as the most dangerous threat to the nation. The New Deal, ran one wartime piece of committee literature, was "leading us straight into the jaws of the Moloch of all-out Federal and anti-American control of our private interests." The committee sought to resist the attempt to use the war as an "excuse" for supplanting free enterprise with a planned economy. The members of the CCG eagerly collaborated with a conservative coalition in Congress who were intent on dismantling the most radical elements of the New Deal.[54]

In 1945, Peale stepped down as chairman of the CCG. His tenure at the CCG had been marked by the maturation of its approach. By the mid-1940s, the organization was raising upward of $650,000 a year and issuing a blizzard of propaganda. By 1946, the CCG had distributed 150 million pieces of literature since its

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898030623000301 Published online by Cambridge University Press

founding. This staggering total did not include items distributed under the congressional frank.[55] Peale's replacement was Willford I. King, a noted statistician and economist, whose affiliation with the CCG had begun in 1937. King possessed a vigorous and keen but narrow intellect, averse to abstract theorizing and the emotional entreaties of his allies. Buttressed by his own prodigious research, he bludgeoned his opponents with figures, charts, graphs, and tables. In King's vision, the laws of orthodox economics were God's laws and those of nature, and his religion was old-time laissez-faire in all its purity. "I am one of those," he wrote to an acquaintance, "who still believe in laissez-faire and private property. As I see it, therefore, the rich man is as much entitled as the poor man to any dollar which he may be able to accumulate." King venerated—and corresponded lengthily with—Irving Fisher, the celebrated Yale economist. But where even Fisher noted the "psychological factors" that "complicate our supply curves," King retreated, finally, into a world of purified statistics.[56]

King's roots lay in rural Nebraska, where he was born on a small farm on the western fringes of the state in 1880. Educated at the University of Wisconsin, King completed his graduate studies under the famed progressive economist Richard T. Ely. In 1915, King published a pioneering study of the distribution of wealth in the United States. From a vast swathe of data diligently mined, King concluded that three-fifths of the nation's property was owned by 2% of the population. This "gross inequality," he argued, could easily be remedied by law. For King, statistical analysis was the crowning glory of economic science, a cherished window onto the truth of the world. He sought, by way of prodigious statistical research, to "transform economic theory into economic law"—to unravel the axioms that governed the social world. In 1927, King joined the faculty of economics at New York University, a post he would occupy for 18 years. The department, dominated by conservatives, was a fitting home for the economist. King's political views during this period are difficult to judge, but with the coming of the Depression and the New Deal, any trace of his early progressivism had vanished. King railed against government interference in business, labeling the National Recovery Administration a "monstrosity" and advocating a sliding scale of wages that would reduce worker pay but, he claimed, help alleviate unemployment.[57]

King's philosophy was a natural fit for the CCG. "I agree most heartily that the primary problem facing us is how to restore freedom to America," he wrote to an acquaintance in 1943. "At present, we have an almost typical Fascist government." King's free-market conservatism, like that of some of his allies, sometimes shaded into outright social Darwinism. "[I]nefficient people have no innate right to be fed, clothed, housed, and supported in idleness by government," he told an acquaintance in 1948. "We need more eugenic and fewer dysgenic policies." Under his direction, the CCG would step up its lobbying of Congress, with King himself appearing dozens of times before House and Senate committee hearings.[58]

In *The Keys to Prosperity* (1948), King's magnum opus, he offered a dense and encyclopedic meditation on the basic drivers of national prosperity. The economy, he argued, was bounded by a series of natural laws that circumscribed the productive powers of the people. Citing Malthus, King insisted that prosperity

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898030623000301 Published online by Cambridge University Press

was a product of a low birth rate combined with the "inventive genius" of the entrepreneur. This genius found its expression in the feats of American enterprise, feats that had made America the envy of the world. The nation's early system of free enterprise stood in stark contrast to the pernicious "mercantilism" that had hitherto governed the industrial activities of the developed world. The American colonists, he argued, had rebelled against this philosophy of command and control, embracing a purist laissez-faire. Yet these economic freedoms, the sine qua non of the American experiment, had come to be taken for granted. Gradually, the liberties of the people had been sacrificed on the altar of state power. The New Deal, a "revolution" in all but name, was the apotheosis of America's embrace of the old systems of control. In its moment of crisis, the people had lost their devotion to liberty—they had forgotten the "wonders" of laissez-faire.[59]

The key to prosperity, King argued, rested on the accumulation of speculative capital made possible by the thrift and industry of the people. Capital savings had "revolutionized" the American economy, he argued, giving rise to an average standard of living that none but the favored few had heretofore enjoyed. This, combined with the free functioning of the competitive order, was the secret to America's extraordinary material abundance. The great threat to capital accumulation and economic progress, King argued, was the system of taxation that had been imposed under the Roosevelt administration. Taxation robbed the economy of its life source, resulting in the "creeping paralysis" of industry and the gradual erosion of the liberties of the people. It fueled the spending of the federal government, which further distorted the free functioning of the market order. Welfare spending, in particular, he argued, was "inherently pernicious," tending to undermine the habits of thrift and self-reliance essential to economic progress. Prefiguring the efforts of later conservatives, he advocated the privatization of social security and other welfare measures to reduce the burden of taxation on the wealthy and inoculate America from the virus of "socialism."[60]

As a work of popular economic theory, *The Keys to Prosperity* was a mixed bag. Bogged down by long, abstruse digressions on economic methodology, *Keys* was just as much likely to confuse as enlighten the layman. With help from Alfred P. Sloan of General Motors and other corporate tycoons, the CCG dutifully distributed tens of thousands of copies of the work. Their goal, ultimately unrealized, was to have *Keys* introduced nationwide as an introductory college textbook. An advertisement for the book drafted by the CCG even cast King's efforts as a "turning point" in economic science. But readers of the book would have been hard pressed to identify such a point. In the end, the complexity of the text and its heavy reliance on economic terminology and statistical modeling broadly limited its appeal. Yet King's passionate advocacy of laissez-faire found wide expression in his work for the committee.[61]

As 1946 dawned, the CCG was operating at a fever-pitch. This was a "year of decision," in Frank Gannett's phrase, the months in which it would be decided whether the "sanctity" of the individual would be surrendered. King's chairmanship of the CCG further elevated the organization's profile and stature. It was during this period that the committee opened a headquarters in the National Press Building in Washington, DC. Guided by Rumely's extensive contacts in

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898030623000301 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Congress, the committee began to lobby aggressively for a variety of legislation.[62] Its banner issue, which would occupy Rumely and his allies for the next two years, was the threat posed by what they dubbed "labor monopolies." The power of America's largest unions, the members of the committee believed, was fundamentally illegitimate. "In my opinion," King wrote to a friend, "collective bargaining, in general, is unjustifiable, and arbitration adds another iniquity to an entirely indefensible system." The principal theme of much of the work King produced during this period was the failure, in his view, of unions to increase the material prospects of the working class. Propagandists and politicians argued that the way to restore prosperity to labor was to force industry to pay higher wages. But the real benefactor of labor, King argued, was not unions but organized capital.[63]

The primary solution of the committee to the problem of organized labor was to advocate the breaking up of union "monopolies" using the Sherman Antitrust Act. Many members of the committee believed that full repeal—chiefly of the Wagner Act—was unlikely and that only antitrust action, now, could liberate the worker from the dictates of the labor boss. This slightly schizophrenic vision resolved itself in the latter months of 1946. Primed by its hardline supporters, the committee gradually embraced a maximalist vision of labor reform in which the federal government would withdraw entirely from the field of industrial relations. This position founds its most lucid expression in a sharp, compact broadside penned by the labor economist John W. Scoville in 1946. Formerly chief statistician at Chrysler, Scoville advanced a pugnacious conservatism, shorn of the moderating impulses of his allies. "Government," he declared in 1948, "is the enemy of mankind." Grizzled, hard-charging, and supremely self-assured, Scoville was a man of rigid conviction. His long experience in industry had bred in Scoville a vituperative loathing of unions, and before his death in 1949 he was one of the conservatives' point men on labor issues.[64]

In *Labor Monopolies–Or Freedom* (1946), published by the CCG, Scoville attacked the prevailing labor laws as a "form of partial slavery." Collective bargaining, he argued, was an "evil principle" that had spawned a monstrosity: the vast labor unions that had the power to control an entire industry and whose dominance would lead, in time, to outright tyranny. Labor monopolies, he argued, were the product of the Wagner Act, which had established the right of labor to bargain collectively. That law, he declared, was "monstrously unjust." It had enshrined the power of unions to bludgeon employers into submission, under the threat of mass strikes. The Wagner Act had created labor monopolies; for Scoville, though, the problem lay deeper. Unions, he believed, invariably stimulated "class warfare." They destroyed property and interfered with the civil rights of citizens. Most of all, they promoted the delusion that bargaining, not the free functioning of the market order, could secure prosperity. "When we examine all the effects of labor unions," Scoville wrote, "we must conclude that the country would be better off without them."[65] In late September 1946, the committee organized a meeting with a phalanx of corporate tycoons to promote the distribution of Scoville's work. Over cocktails, those present determined to push the distribution into the hundreds of thousands. By 1948, King believed that Scoville's work was equaled only by Keynes' *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898030623000301 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(1936) in its influence on government legislation. This was probably an exaggeration, but Scoville's text was broadly influential.[66]

In 1947, the committee mobilized for its most consequential fight of the late 1940s. It launched a vigorous campaign to aid passage of the Taft-Hartley Act, a measure designed to dramatically curb the power of unions. The wave of strikes that had paralyzed industry in 1946—the largest in the nation's history—had led to widespread calls for congressional action to limit the power of unions. In a Gallup poll conducted after the 1946 elections, some 66% of voters favored legislation to "control labor unions." The Republican landslide of 1946—and the election of a bevy of conservatives—had made the passing of legislation to suppress union power a tangible possibility. In the House, Representative Fred Hartley, Jr. of New Jersey spearheaded the assault on the prerogatives of organized labor while, in the Senate, conservative standard-bearer Robert A. Taft of Ohio stood poised to enact a sweeping law that would expunge many of the rights granted labor under the Wagner Act. Rumely and his allies had already prepared the ground for an all-out campaign for Taft-Hartley by distributing 400,000 copies of an antiunion speech given by senator E. H. Moore, a CCG trustee. In July 1946, the committee published an advertisement in hundreds of newspapers calling for Americans to "strike now!" to save the constitutional order from "labor-boss dictators." "Nothing this Committee has published since it came into being," the CCG's treasurer Sumner Gerard claimed in a subsequent article, "has met with such response. Before adjournment, members of Congress asked for more than 20,000 reprints for use in their districts." In response to the ad, the CCG received a flood of donations from donors small and large.[67]

In February 1947, King appeared before the Republican-led House Committee on Education and Labor to advocate repeal of the Wagner Act. And in early April, after months of testimony, the House Committee presented a bill to limit the power of unions. It was a conservative wish list but would face an uncertain fate in the Senate. The members of the CCG, who had been working closely with members of the House Committee, were delighted with their efforts. As King wrote to Hartley, head of the House Committee and lead author of the proposal, "If you succeed in getting enacted into law the legislation which you have framed, you will deserve to go down in history as one of the great benefactors of the Republic."[68]

On April 17, Hartley's bill passed the House with a decisive majority. On the same day, the action moved to the Senate, where Taft introduced a bill modeled on the House effort. It was swiftly passed with a large, veto-proof majority. The Senate and House met in conference in early May to deliberate on a compromise bill. After two weeks of wrangling, the House passed the conference bill with a thumping majority and the Senate prepared to vote. Much as they had done in the court fight, the CCG blanketed the states of senators who were wavering in their support of the bill. Casting the law as a "new Bill of Rights for the working man," they distributed some 4,000,000 pieces of literature under congressional frank and ran a full-page advertisement in hundreds of newspapers. "A free America cannot exist without *free labor*," declared the ad, "and industrial workers cannot be free so long as they are dominated by unscrupulous, self-seeking union

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898030623000301 Published online by Cambridge University Press

bosses.... [T]o ward off a possible veto, Senators, Congressmen, and the President must hear from you—the silent citizens—*now*!"[69]

The passage of Taft-Hartley in June—and the overriding of Truman's veto of the bill—was a major victory for the CCG and their allies in Congress. The law banned certain "unfair" labor practices such as wildcat strikes, mass picketing, and donations from unions to federal political campaigns. The legislation also allowed states to pass right-to-work laws that banned compulsory membership in a union shop. The law, taken as a whole, would ultimately help break the back of private unionism in America. "We have worked very closely with the House Labor Committee," Rumely gloated to an acquaintance. "In fact, they told us that the intellectual ammunition of controlling influence among the men who spear-headed for the Hartley Bill was the literature of the Committee." King, reflecting on the victory to a British acquaintance, noted that at last the proponents of free enterprise were making "headway." "Perhaps we are wrong, but we feel that our campaign was the major force leading to the enactment of the Taft-Hartley Act."[70]

The committee's other major campaign of the 1940s centered on an audacious plan to radically reduce federal taxation. In their fight, the members were led by a trustee of the CCG, the lawyer and industrialist Robert B. Dresser. A native of Rhode Island and a seasoned political pugilist, Dresser was a crusading free-market conservative. "Government unlimited," he declared in 1953, "is at once the most diabolical, the most treacherous and the most uncontrollable force known to man."[71] Dresser's pet issue, which amounted to a consuming obsession, was the effort to drastically reduce the federal income tax. Since 1939, he had been engaged in measures to pass a constitutional amendment that would limit income, inheritance, and gift taxes to a maximum of 25%. For Dresser, taxation struck at the root of individual freedom and the rights of property. The progressive income tax, he argued, was inimical to the liberties of the people. "[U]nless our policy of taxation is changed," he maintained in 1943, "the system of society under which this country has prospered and grown great will come to an end."[72] In May 1943, at a meeting in New York, Dresser expounded his proposal before the trustees of the CCG. A year earlier, to the consternation of the industrial elite, Roosevelt's administration had introduced a raft of new taxes to finance the extensive military investment required for victory in the war. Congress, too, had raised tax rates, reduced exemptions, and introduced new protocols to collect income tax from the majority of American workers and businesses—all nigh-unprecedented moves to raise revenue.[73] Determined to resist these measures, business groups began lobbying for lower taxes, a strategy they had honed in the fight against the New Deal and would pursue in various guises for the remainder of the century. Alert to the shifting tide of opinion, the members of the CCG signed onto Dresser's campaign. Fueled by donations from E. H. Moore and the financier E. F. Hutton, the CCG distributed Dresser's material to 600,000 "leadership individuals" across the nation, and by the late 1940s it had made passage of the amendment its number one goal.[74]

The CCG's argument for a drastic reduction in taxes took two different forms. In the first, high taxes were attacked for subverting the incentive to produce and save, undermining the formation of capital that was the driving force of national

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898030623000301 Published online by Cambridge University Press

prosperity. Much as the former United States Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon had contended in the 1920s, this argument held that tax cuts would so stimulate private enterprise as to result in an *increase* in tax revenues. The second argument advanced by the CCG invoked the American Revolution and the Founding Fathers' rejection of King George. "In history," Sumner Gerard wrote, "freedom was established by wresting from the King, the executive in charge of government, control of the purse." On these terms, resisting "arbitrary" taxation was as American as apple pie.[75]

Dresser's proposal was in an important respect utopian—not the least because it required a constitutional amendment, an almost prohibitive barrier. He believed his plan would permanently alter the structure of American government, routing, in one stroke, the forces of social democracy. The amendment, he wrote, was fashioned to deprive the government of the power, through "unsound and confiscatory taxation," to destroy American capitalism. For the CCG, too, Dresser's amendment would function, above all, as a permanent restraint against the use of the taxing power to transform America into a collectivist state. But tax relief, if it came, would primarily benefit the wealthy. Rumely decried an earlier Democratic proposal to reduce middle-class taxes as "vote buying." For the members of the CCG, only reforms that reduced the taxes on the richest Americans were worth pursuing.[76]

In February of 1944, Dresser's amendment passed in New Jersey, the sixteenth state to ratify his proposal. The campaign was now halfway to its goal of calling a constitutional convention. In an open letter, Sumner Gerard called on the CCG's supporters to individually lobby their state legislators and governors to pass the amendment. But with the new publicity aroused by the CCG's mass mailings, opposition to the amendment crystalized in Congress. Representative Wright Patman (D-TX), a hardened foe of the CCG, denounced Dresser's proposal on the floor of Congress as a "millionaire's amendment." "We must defeat this foul thing, this millionaire's amendment, if we are to survive as a nation."[77]

By 1952, twenty-five states had passed Dresser's amendment. As the measure began to draw greater scrutiny from the national press, influential organizations signed on to the CCG's crusade. By 1953, the National Association of Manufacturers, the American Bar Association, the American Legion, and the US Chamber of Commerce had all endorsed the movement to limit taxation by constitutional amendment and 29 states had passed the amendment. Dresser, in a letter to Rumely, confided that the campaign, at last, had "reached a point where there is a reasonable prospect, I think, that the goal may be achieved."[78] As the struggle progressed, though, Dresser began to have serious doubts about the prospect of a constitutional convention. "[T]here isn't a soul that I know that wants a convention," he told a Texas audience in 1953, "for the simple reason that there is probably no way of limiting the agenda of such a convention. It might rewrite the entire Constitution of the United States." A wily operator, Dresser hoped to use the pressure of the state campaign to force Congress to propose the amendment, thereby avoiding the chaos of a convention. In January 1953, Congress obliged, with a bill for a constitutional amendment modeled on Dresser's proposal, sponsored by the conservative congressman Chauncey

W. Reed (R-IL) and senator Everett Dirksen (R-IL), a CCG ally. Dresser believed that it might pass, but the bill floundered in committee.[79]

Although aided by other activist groups on the right, the struggle in the states pressed ahead, and in the end Dresser's proposal fell two states shy of the mark required to call a convention. However, the campaign was not without significance. In the fight, the members of the CCG had pioneered the kind of antitax rhetoric that would later come to predominate on the right, placing resistance to taxes at the heart of antistatist conservatism. In defeat, too, there was a silver lining. A more modest tax bill advanced by congressman Harold Knutson (R-MN), which slashed rates across the board, was passed in 1948 with the CCG's support. Knutson, a close ally of the CCG and chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, even quoted a statement by the CCG—calling, in strident tones, for lower taxes—on the floor of the House as the bill was sustained over Truman's veto.[80]

Like their allies on the right, the reelection of Truman in 1948 came as a blow for the members of the CCG. King decried Republican nominee Thomas Dewey's attempt to make peace with the New Deal to "out-Truman Truman." In a series of memos, Rumely similarly lamented Dewey's "me, too" campaign, his "carbon copy" of the New Deal program. "He did not formulate the cause of economic freedom or constitutional government and thereby threw away for the second time the great educational opportunity of giving the Republican Party a banner to hold for the future." Reflecting on the results, Rumely voiced a common argument that would become an idée fixe on the conservative right. "Many of the American conservatives are in the Democratic party and in the Republican party where they have no spokesman," he wrote. "They are now, in all probability, the strongest majority—if the cause of economic freedom could be projected, a substantial majority could be rallied to that banner." It was an insidious "apathy" on the part of the voters, he argued, that had ultimately sealed Dewey's fate. As congressman Ralph Gwinn (R-NY) wrote to King, the people had no "choice" between two New Deal candidates in the election. "The people have been deprived of the facts and the choice. They must have a chance to choose freedom."[81] Yet Truman's victory also presented the CCG with an opportunity, as Rumely was quick to note. As the president pressed for more "socialistic" legislation, the CCG could rally the support of the nation's businessmen for a campaign to uphold American free enterprise. "We may fail in defeating bills that will be introduced in the new Congress," Rumely wrote to a prominent supporter, "but we will be able to knock out some of their worst features. But, even more important, we will be able to give the country such education on the harmfulness of these socialistic measures as it has never had before."[82]

Key to the CCG's assault on Truman's legislative agenda was a new publication, *Spotlight for the Nation*, which it launched in January 1951. Containing one article twice a week, *Spotlight* alternated between pieces on present issues and lofty paeans to free enterprise, hosting a number of conservative and libertarian luminaries such as Frank Chodorov, George S. Benson, John T. Flynn, and Garet Garrett.[83] *Spotlight* was well received. By late 1952, the service had 46,000 paying subscribers and individual articles from the publication were run in dozens of newspapers. *Spotlight*, a CCG flyer declared, was the spearhead of an effort to

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898030623000301 Published online by Cambridge University Press

reverse a "20-year tide of socialism in the U.S.," and the publication was backed by a number of wealthy industrialists, including the du Pont brothers. The paper, which carried articles by various congressmen, also offered the CCG another vehicle to influence politics. Fully half of its first 12 issues were inserted into the *Congressional Record* by friendly members of Congress.[84] By the early 1950s, then, the CCG had solidified its place as the largest and most organizationally sophisticated champion of free-market conservatism. It consistently outraised competing conservative groups such as the Foundation for Economic Education and the National Economic Council. Its literature reached an audience of millions. And at the decade's beginning, only one lobbying group—the National Association of Manufacturers—was spending more than the CCG.[85]

Rumely's faith in the power of political propaganda never wavered. In 1953, he advanced the idea of converting the Republican party into a vehicle for conservatism through a mass campaign of systematic educational work. "The Republican party is much like a jellyfish without a skeleton," he wrote perceptively. "Any adventurer who can get publicity can gather up delegates and usurp control because the precinct men are not educated as to the principles the party should endorse and stand for."[86] Ridiculing the prospects of a conservative third party, Rumely believed, presciently, that the ultimate triumph of his philosophy lay through the GOP. Rumely would not live to see the fruition of his political ideology in the Reagan revolution of the 1980s. By the early 1950s, conservatism of the CCG variety had little purchase with a public that had overwhelming affirmed New Deal social programs and moderate Republicanism at the polls. By 1955, with the emergence of William F. Buckley's *National Review* and the early mobilizing of conservatives in places like southern California, appetite for a new, muscular conservatism began to grow.[87] The CCG, however, mostly had little influence on these proceedings and would not be remembered by the Young Turks who would ascend to leadership of the nation in 1980. Samuel Pettengill had one theory to explain the fading importance of the CCG. "The point I am getting at," he wrote to King in 1951, "is whether right or wrong, the conservative free enterprisers have become discredited because they made so many prophecies that did not stand up." The CCG "simply cried 'wolf, wolf' too often."[88] Indeed, the content of the CCG's mailings in 1950s had not changed much from the material they were issuing in the late 1930s. During the mid-1950s, Rumely's slapdash handling of the organization's funds came under severe internal criticism and the CCG was from that point forward saddled with debt.[89] To make matters worse, during the same period reliable sources of funding for the CCG began to dry up. Several of the key industrial leaders who had funded the organization in its salad days passed away, and their heirs were no longer interested in maintaining a broad-based organization to combat social democracy, particularly with a Republican in the White House. Attempts to raise money from grassroots supporters similarly floundered, in part because the "social" legislation that had been the bread and butter of the CCG's mobilizing campaigns was no longer being passed.

Primarily focused on domestic matters, the CCG only rarely engaged with foreign policy, resulting in its relative silence on major issues such as the Korean War, the "loss" of China, and the encroaching Soviet threat. Insofar as the leaders

of the CCG discussed these issues, it was to reproach the government for spending so much money—and hiring so many bureaucrats—in its struggle to contain communism. Such sentiments were a sign of the organization's age as well as its increasing irrelevance. The CCG struggled on throughout the late 1950s, but by the early 1960s, as its leaders resigned or passed away, it had become an organizational shell, an almost-forgotten relic of past combat with the New Deal. However, the significance of the CCG's various campaigns should not be underestimated. They provided a brake on the most radical elements of the New and Fair Deals, systematically helping to undermine the development of social democracy in America. It was an uneven legacy, but as Rumely noted at the end of his life, in early 1964, the CCG had done an effective, and often underappreciated, job for conservatism in America. Democracy, it turned out, had not failed them; socialism in America had not come to pass. And Rumely rightly believed that the efforts of his organization were in part responsible for this fact, responsible for the salvaging and reconstituting of a particularly American brand of conservatism, one whose day in the spotlight would soon come.

Notes

[1] Marian McKenna, *Franklin Roosevelt and the Great Constitutional War: The Court-Packing Crisis of 1937* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), chap. 8–9; "Court Proposal Sharply Criticized by Leading Members of Bar Here," *New York Times*, February 7, 1937, 1.

[2] Samuel T. Williamson, *Imprint of a Publisher* (New York: Robert M. McBride, 1948), esp. v, 85–177; Sokolsky to Hoover, July 7, 1938, box 62, George E. Sokolsky Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University.

[3] I have used NCUCG to refer to the National Committee to Uphold Constitutional Government, CCG to refer to its later name as the Committee for Constitutional Government, and simply "committee" to refer developments that include either or both.

[4] See, among an abundant literature, Charles Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks: Theories, Concepts, and Findings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), esp. chap. 3.

[5] On the Liberty League, see George Wolfskill, *The Revolt of the Conservatives: A History of the American Liberty League, 1934-1940* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962); Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen's Crusade against the New Deal* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009), 10–29; Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *The Big Myth: How American Business Taught Us to Loathe Government and Love the Free Market* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2023), chap. 3. On the Sentinels of the Republic, see Allan J. Lichtman, *White Protestant Nation: The Rise of the American Conservative Movement* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2008), 18–19, 72–73; Julia Bowes, "'Every Citizen a Sentinel! Every Home a Sentry Box!' The Sentinels of the Republic and the Gendered Origins of Free-Market Conservatism," *Modern American History* 2, no. 3 (2019): 269–97.

[6] Richard Polenberg's "The National Committee to Uphold Constitutional Government, 1937-1941," *Journal of American History* 52, no. 3 (December 1965): 582–98, surveys the committee's struggle against Roosevelt's court reforms but concludes its analysis in 1941 and draws from incomplete archival material. Isaac William Martin's *Rich People's Movements: Grassroots Campaigns to Untax the One Percent* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), chap. 4, analyzes the committee's campaign to reduce the income tax. Lichtman, *White Protestant Nation*, 94, 121, briefly discusses the committee and Rumely's direct-mail efforts. An older thesis, Joanne Dunnebecke, "The Crusade for Individual Liberty: The Committee for Constitutional Government, 1937–1958," (MA thesis, University of Wyoming, 1987), ably charts the evolution of certain aspects of the committee but does not offer an account of its broader significance, its effect on public policy, or its connection to the wider political right and is grounded in incomplete sources.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898030623000301 Published online by Cambridge University Press

[7] The literature is now vast, but see among others George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, rev. ed. (1976; repr.,Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Jonathan M. Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Donald Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Joseph E. Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New right: Race and the Southern Origins of modern Conservatism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); Gregory Schneider, *The Conservative Century: From Reaction to Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009); Patrick Allitt, *The Conservatives: Ideas & Personalities throughout American History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009); Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*; Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011); Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Kathryn S. Olmsted, *Right out of California: The 1930s and the Big Business Roots of Modern Conservatism* (New York: New Press, 2015); Nicole Hemmer, *Messengers of the Right: Conservative Media and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); John S. Huntington, *Far-Right Vanguard: The Radical Roots of Modern Conservatism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021).

[8] Williamson, *Imprint*, v.

[9] See, for instance, Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement*; Critchlow, *Conservative Ascendancy*; Schneider, *Conservative Century.* Scholars have challenged but hardly overturned this narrative. It is present, with caveats, in more recent literature such as Hemmer, *Messengers of the Right*, and Huntington, *Far-Right Vanguard*, as well as other accounts such as Jeffrey Hart, *Making of the American Conservative Mind: National Review and Its Times* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2007).

[10] Koether to Howard E. Kershner, January 18, 1952, box 10, Howard E. Kershner Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon.

[11] See note 4 above and Richard S. Tedlow, "The National Association of Manufacturers and Public Relations During the New Deal," *Business History Review* 50, no. 1 (Spring 1976): 25–45; Elizabeth A. Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Charlie Whitham, *Corporate Conservatives Go to War: How the National Association of Manufacturers Planned to Restore American Free Enterprise, 1939-1948* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

[12] See, among others, McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*; Kruse, *White Flight*; Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*; Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism.* A partial exception is Olmsted, *Right out of California*, but she does not discuss right-wing grassroots movements per se. Bowes notes that the Sentinels of the Republic failed to take fire as a grassroots organization, in "'Every Citizen a Sentinel!'" 273.

[13] Hemmer, *Messengers of the Right.* On conservative media in the 1930s, the scholarship is fairly limited, but see for instance Gary Dean Best, *The Critical Press and the New Deal: The Press versus Presidential Power, 1933-1938* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993); Sam Lebovic, "When the 'Mainstream Media' Was Conservative: Media Criticism in the Age of Reform," in *Media Nation: The Political History of News in Modern America*, ed. Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), esp. 68–73.

[14] See, among others, Clarence Y. H. Lo, "Countermovements and Conservative Movements in the Contemporary US," *Annual Review of Sociology* 8 (1982): 107–34; Anthony S. Chen, "The Party of Lincoln and the Politics of State Fair Employment Practices Legislation in the North, 1945-1964," *American Journal of Sociology* 112, no. 6 (2007): 1713–74; Isaac William Martin, "Redistributing toward the Rich: Strategic Policy Crafting in the Campaign to Repeal the Sixteenth Amendment, 1938–1958," *American Journal of Sociology* 116, no. 1 (July, 2010): 1–52; Kathleen M. Blee and Kimberly A. Creasap, "Conservative and Right-Wing Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 36 (2010): 269–86.

[15] Blee and Creasap, "Conservative and Right-Wing Movements," 271. The most probing critique of the earlier paradigm by a historian is Leo P. Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Far Right from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983). See, also, Alex

McPhee-Browne, "Reimagining the Far Right," *Reviews in American History* 51, no. 3 (September 2023): 295–311.

[16] Blee and Creasap, "Conservative and Right-Wing Movements," 271; Diego Muro, "Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Social Movements," in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements*, ed. Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 188–89.

[17] Francesca Polletta and Beth Gharrity Gardner, "Narrative and Social Movements," in *Oxford Handbook of Social Movements*, 539; Bert Klandermans and Nonna Mayer, "Right-Wing Extremism as a Social Movement," in *Extreme Right Activists in Europe: Through the Magnifying Glass*, ed. Bert Klandermans and Nonna Mayer (London: Routledge, 2006), 10.

[18] The standard definition of interest groups remains that of Jeffrey M. Berry: "An interest group is an organized body of individuals who share some goals and who try to influence public policy." Berry, *The Interest Group Society*, 2nd ed. (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1989), 4. For the prehistory of the rise of interest groups, see Elisabeth S. Clemens, *The People's Lobby: Organizational Innovation and the Rise of Interest Group Politics in the United States, 1890–1925* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Christopher M. Loomis, "The Politics of Uncertainty: Lobbyists and Propaganda in Early Twentieth-Century America," *Journal of Policy History* 21, no. 2 (2009): 187–213.

[19] Brian Balogh, "'Mirrors of Desires:' Interest Groups, Elections, and the Targeted Style in Twentieth-Century America," in *The Democratic Experiment: New Directions in American Political History*, ed. Meg Jacobs, William J. Novak, and Julian Zelizer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 222–49, quote at 222.

[20] Balogh, "'Mirrors of Desires,'" 229; Clemens, *The People's Lobby*, 314–17.

[21] Loomis, "Politics of Uncertainty," 202; Daniel J. Tichenor and Richard A. Harris, "Organized Interests and American Political Development," *Political Science Quarterly* 117, no. 4 (2003): esp. 590.

[22] Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 5–6.

[23] Lynda Lee Kaid, "Political Advertising in the United States," in *The Sage Handbook of Political Advertising*, ed. Lynda Lee Kaid and Christina Holtz-Bacha (London: Sage, 2006), 37.

[24] Balogh, "'Mirrors of Desires,'" 228.

[25] On Barton, see Richard M. Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew: Bruce Barton and the Making of Modern America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005).

[26] "Targeted style" from Balogh, "'Mirrors of Desires.'"

[27] Edward A. Rumely, "Court-Packing," n.d., 1–2, box 79, Edward A. Rumely mss., Lilly Library, Indiana University Bloomington (hereafter EARB); Williamson, *Imprint*, 243–44; Gannett to Josephus M. Daniels, May 5, 1937, box 1, Frank E. Gannett Papers, Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University (hereafter FEG).

[28] Gannett to Henry H. Stebbins, Jr., November 13, 1936, box 1, FEG; Gannett, open letter, September 6, 1944, box 3, FEG.

[29] Rumely to Emmet Scott Rumely, February 19, 1937, box 41, EARB; Rumely, "Court-Packing," 4–5; William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Supreme Court Reborn: The Constitutional Revolution in the Age of Roosevelt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 145.

[30] Leuchtenburg, 134.

[31] Rumely, "Court-Packing," 4–5; "Contributor's Report: NCUCG," n.d., May 1938, box 1, FEG; Polenberg, "National Committee," 585–86; Gannett to Douglas Johnson, April 30, 1937, box 51, Amos Pinchot Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (hereafter AP); Frederick H. Stinchfield, *Why Lawyers Would Save Our Supreme Court* (New York: NCUGC, 1937), 1–3.

[32] "Court Plan Foes Get Senate Lead; Fight Here Gains," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), February 17, 1937, 1; Rumely, memorandum, February 6, 1937, box 41, EARB; Glen Hancock to Pinchot, March 2, 1937, box 51, AP; Gannett to V. C. Dwyer, September 29, 1937, box 1, FEG; *Needed Now—Capacity for Leadership, Courage to Lead* (New York: CCG, 1944), 4.

[33] Helene Maxwell Hooker, "Introduction," in Amos R. E. Pinchot, *History of the Progressive Party, 1912-1916* (New York: New York University Press, 1958), 17–49, 60–61, 81–85, quotations at 82; Pinchot to Frankfurter, July 15, 1935, box 56, EARB; Pinchot to Allard H. Gasque, February 20, 1937, and Pinchot to Members of Congress, February 13, 1937, box 51, AP. Pinchot's letter was widely circulated by the NCUCG and reproduced in full by the *New York Herald Tribune* and a range of other newspapers; 15,000

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898030623000301 Published online by Cambridge University Press

copies were also distributed in the South by an enthusiastic businessman. "Amos Pinchot Says Roosevelt Would Rule U.S.," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 15, 1937, 5; J. E. Edgerton to Pinchot, telegram, February 18, 1937, b. 51, AP. Other examples include, "A Noted Liberal and the President's Plans," *The Arizona Daily Star*, February 17, 1937, 8; "Court Trick Is Too Much for Pinchot," *Hartford Courant*, February 15, 1937, 10; "Hostility to Court Plan Grows," *The Oshkosh Northwestern*, February 16, 1937, 6.

[34] Henry L. Stoddard, open letter, April 29, 1939, box 42, EARB; Gannett to William T. Evjue, March 15, 1937, box 51, AP, emphasis in original; Rumely, "Court-packing," 16; Polenberg, "National Committee," 587; "Report to all financial supporters by Frank E. Gannett," n.d. (c. April 1938), box 56, EARB.

[35] Pinchot to Gannett, April 21, 1937, box 51, AP; Rumely to Gannett, February 27, 1939, box 42, EARB; Pinchot to Rumely, September 21, 1937, box 53, AP.

[36] Gannett to Pinchot, May 10, 1937, box 52, AP; Rumely to William Bowyer, April 27, 1951, box 45, EARB; Rumely to Pinchot, December 9, 1938, box 42, EARB; Gannett to Pinchot, May 10, 1937, box 52, AP.

[37] Rumely, "Autobiography," chap. 4–11, 21–24, box 79, EARB; Richard Gwyn Davies, "Edward A. Rumely: Hoosier Publicist," *Indiana University Bookman*, no. 13 (January 1979): 2–62, quote at 24; Martin, *Rich People's Movements*, 90–93; Rumely to Sumner Gerard, May 1, 1955, box 46, EARB.

[38] Rumely to Gannett, February 4, 1940, box 3, Edward A. Rumely Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon (hereafter EARO); Rumely to Gannett, memorandum, March 25, 1939, box 2, FEG; Rumely, open letter, n.d. (c. June 1953), Post Presidential Subject Files, box 124, Herbert Hoover Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library (hereafter HH); Rumely to Arthur Rosenbaum, February 2, 1942, box 44, EARB. On the "old progressives" attitudes, usually negative, toward the New Deal, see Otis L. Graham, Jr., *An Encore for Reform: The Old Progressives and the New Deal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

[39] Rumely to Trustees, July 7, 1950, box 45, EARB; Rumely to Sumner Gerard, memorandm, January 30, 1948, box 21, Willford I. King Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon (hereafter WIK); Lane to Isaac Don Levine, September 22, 1946, box 133, Isaac Don Levine papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University; Rumely to Milton Eisenhower, September 9, 1952, box 2, Brice P. Disque Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon; Willford I. King to Harry L. Bullis, February 25, 1948, box 21, WIK. As Dennis Johnson argues in his study of political consultants, the "direct mail pioneers" were "Richard A. Viguerie ... [who] launched his own direct-marketing firm, American Target Advertising in 1965. Viguerie learned the direct-mail trade from the innovative Marvin Liebman (1923–1997), who created his own firm in 1957 and amassed some 50,000 names of conservative contributors." Dennis W. Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 191–92. Rumely and the committee's efforts, of course, predated this and were considerably larger in scope. See, also, Takahito Moriyama, *Empire of Direct Mail: How Conservative Marketing Persuaded Voters and Transformed the Grassroots* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2022), esp. chap. 2, which argues similarly that political direct mail emerged in the mid-1950s and early 1960s and does not detail the Rumely and the CCG's extensive efforts.

[40] "Must Fight Dangerous Minority Pressure Groups with Grassroots Crusade of Citizen Army," n.d. (1949), box 84, WIK; CCG, "1948 Annual Report," box 88, WIK; "Number of Contributors in Recent Years," n.d. (1950), box 88, WIK; "This Year's Most Important Book," n.d. (1949), box 17, John T. Flynn Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon (hereafter JTF); Peale, open letter, n.d. (1944), Ser. IB, box 14, Norman Vincent Peale Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University (hereafter NVP); Sumner Gerard to Friend and Supporter, n.d. (May 1947), box 17, WIK; CCG, "1946 Financial Report," box 84, WIK; Rumely to E. H. Moore, November 19, 1943, box 2, Samuel B. Pettengill Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon (hereafter SBP).

[41] Dunnebecke, "Crusade for Individual Liberty," 72–74; Rumely to Trustees and Field Men, memorandum, August 28, 1946, box 14, WIK; King to Dorothy Pope, March 21, 1947, box 16, WIK; King to Executive Committee, June 23, 1950, box 33, WIK; Rumely to King, memorandum, June 25, 1950, box 33, WIK; Rumely, memorandum, June 25, 1950, box 33, WIK; Rumely to King and Sumner Gerard,

memorandum, May 27, 1947, box 88, WIK; Harvey C. Fruehauf to Albert H. Heller, Jr., July 15, 1947, box 11, Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota Records, Minnesota Historical Society.

[42] Pettengill to Supporters, January 8, 1940, box 14, SBP; Pettengill to Fred Rogers Fairchild, November 23, 1940, box 7, Fred Rogers Fairchild Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University (hereafter FRF).

[43] Samuel B. Pettengill, *My Story*, ed. Helen M. Pettengill (Lebanon, NH: Whitman Press, 1979), 194–97.

[44] Pettengill, *My Story*, 197, 208.

[45] Rumely to Pettengill, November 9, 1938, box 1, SBP; Rumely to Gannett, November 3, 1939, box 3, EARO.

[46] Cf. Nicholas Murray Butler, *Is Thomas Jefferson the Forgotten Man?* (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1935).

[47] Samuel B. Pettengill, *Jefferson the Forgotten Man* (New York: America's Future, 1938), 112.

[48] Rumely to Pettengill, November 9, 1938, box 1, SBP; Samuel B. Pettengill, "The Third Crisis Is at Hand," *Muncie Evening Press*, March 17, 1939, 4.

[49] Samuel B. Pettengill, *Smoke-Screen* (New York: America's Future, 1940), 11, 54–56, 82, 57–58, 89, 56–57. Pettengill's argument anticipated, in a less elevated key, the central contention of the enormously influential *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) by the Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek.

[50] Pettengill, *My Story*, 236; Gerald Cosgrove, "The Reading Lamp," *The South Bend Tribune*, April 28, 1940, 16; W. A. Freeman to Pettengill, June 3, 1940, Post Presidential Individual Correspondence, box 197, HH; Barton to Pettengill, April 22, 1940, box 27, SBP; "Books and Their Authors," *Daily Press* (Newport, VA), November 11, 1940, 4; "Study in American Politics," *The Billings Gazette*, September 17, 1944, 4; Rumely to Pettengill, December 6, 1948, box 11, SBP; Hutton to Pettengill, October 1, 1943, box 2, SBP; "Visitor Pettengill Views World Scene Gloomily," *Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 1941, 12; "'Smoke Screen' Items Quoted," *The Semi-Weekly Spokesman-Review*, October 10, 1940, 9; "Tribune to Run 'Smoke Screen,'" *The South Bend Tribune*, October 11, 1940, 28; "'Smoke Screen' To Be Printed," *Wilkes-Barre Record*, October 12, 1940, 5.

[51] "What Is America's Future, Inc. and What Does It Do?" n.d. (1950), box 1, James W. Clise Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon (hereafter JWC); Robert L. Lund to John T. Flynn, June 30, 1950, box 196, J. Howard Pew Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Department, Hagley Museum and Library (hereafter JHP); Sumner Gerard to Earl Kribben, October 9, 1947, box 11, SBP; Rumely to Gannett, September 27, 1946, box 19, WIK; Pettengill to Moore, January 31, 1944, box 11, SBP.

[52] Norman Vincent Peale, "Think Things through!" *The Enid Events*, April 28, 1944, 5; "Report on the Rumely Enterprises, Installment II," *Democracy's Battle* 8, no.5–6 (March 1950): 2. On Peale, the best account is Carol V. R. George, *God's Salesman: Norman Vincent Peale and the Power of Positive Thinking* (1993; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[53] "The Most Powerful Symbol in the World—the Mark on a Free Man's Ballot," *The Post-Crescent* (Appleton, WI), October 5, 1942, 9, emphasis in original.

[54] *Needed Now*, 22, 43; *Growth of Stateism* (New York: CCG, 1944), 1.

[55] "CCG: 1946 Financial Report," n.d. (1947), box 84, WIK.

[56] "A Report on the Rumely Enterprises, Installment I," *Democracy's Battle* 8, nos. 3–4 (February 1950): 4; Memorandum, Rumely to "Trustees," January 12, 1946, box 12, WIK; King to Peale, January 23, 1943, box 8, WIK; King to Fred Perkins, May 19, 1945, box 10, WIK; Fisher to King, December 10, 1945, box 11, WIK.

[57] Biographical typescript, n.d., box 4, WIK; King to Wint Smith, June 10, 1948, box 23, WIK; Willford I. King, *The Wealth and Income of the People of the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1915), 82, quote at 103; Willford I. King, review of *The Triumph of Mediocrity in Business* by Horace Secrist, *Journal of Political Economy* 42, no. 3 (June 1934): 398; "King Assails NRA as a 'Monstrosity,'" *New York Times*, January 4, 1934, 8; "Economist Offers Constant Job Plan," *New York Times*, June 24, 1938, 20.

[58] King to Robert A. Young, November 14, 1943, box 8, WIK; King to Earnest A. Hooton, February 20, 1948, box 21, WIK.

[59] E. F. Hutton to J. Howard Pew, December 24, 1943, box 3, JHP; Willford I. King, *The Keys to Prosperity* (New York: Constitution and Free Enterprise Foundation, 1948), 10, 27, 17, 22–23, 23.

[60] King, *The Keys to Prosperity*, 80–83, 186, 201, 215.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898030623000301 Published online by Cambridge University Press

[61] Sumner Gerard to Sloan, June 19, 1948, and Gannett to King, June 7, 1948, box 23, WIK; Rumely to Glen Hancock, memorandum, January 13, 1948, box 21, WIK; Rumely to Hancock, May 3, 1948, box 22, WIK; Earl Harding to Fellow American, 1948, box 11, JCRC; "Nation-Wide Introduction of *The Keys to Prosperity*," n.d. (June 1948), box 23, WIK.

[62] Frank E. Gannett, *1946—Year of Decision* (New York: Committee for Constitutional Government, 1946), 1; CCG, "1948 Annual Report," and CCG, "1949 Annual Report," box 84, WIK; CCG, "1950 Annual Report," box 88, WIK; King to Emma L. Buettell, June 8, 1948, box 23, WIK.

[63] "Must Fight Dangerous Minority Pressure Groups with Grassroots Crusade of Citizen Army," n.d. (1949), box 84, WIK; King to John A. Ritchie, July 5, 1947, box 17, WIK; Willford I. King, *Raising the Workingman's Scale of Living* (New York: CCG, 1945), 1, 5. One and a half million copies of this pamphlet were distributed, and the piece was reproduced, in part, by the *Chicago Tribune* and *The Saturday Evening Post*. Memorandum, Rumely to Trustees, January 12, 1946, box 12, WIK; memorandum, Rumely, September 7, 1945, box 10, WIK.

[64] "Greater Auto Output Seen," *Detroit Free Press*, December 30, 1930, 1; "John Scoville Dies on Trip to Florida," *Detroit Free Press*, January 4, 1949, 5; Scoville to King, May 13, 1948, box 22, WIK.

[65] John Scoville, *Labor Monopolies–Or Freedom* (New York: CCG, 1946), 7, 21, 143, 71, 80–81.

[66] Rumely to John W. Scoville, September 25, 1946, and Rumely to Trustees, September 25, 1946, box 19, WIK; Willford I. King to Scoville, September 27, 1946, box 19, WIK; King to Whiting Williams, April 26, 1948, box 22, WIK.

[67] R. Alton Lee, *Truman and Taft-Hartley: A Question of Mandate* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966), 52; Rumely to Rose Wilder Lane, September 13, 1946, box 19, WIK; CCG, "1946 Financial Report," box 84, WIK; "Americans! Strike Now! Save Your Government from Labor-Boss Dictators," *Montana Standard*, July 15, 1946, 7; Sumner Gerard, "Shall the Public Be Damned?" *Manufacturers Record*, September 1946, clipping, box 84, WIK.

[68] King to Hartley, April 11, 1947, box 17, WIK.

[69] Lee, *Truman and Taft-Hartley*, 67–78; Memorandum, Rumely to King, Pettengill, and Sumner Gerard, July 12, 1947, box 17, WIK; "Members of Labor Unions," n.d., box 7, FRF; Day, "Lobby Group's," 24; "Americans! Speak Up Now for the Workingman's Bill of Rights," *Wall Street Journal*, April 30, 1947, 5, emphasis in original.

[70] Michael Bowen, *The Roots of Modern Conservatism: Dewey, Taft, and the Battle for the Soul of the Republican Party* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 49–50; Lee, *Truman and Taft-Hartley*, 52, 61–62, 75–77; Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 114–22; Rumely to E. P. Simmons, August 22, 1947, and King to Cecil Palmer, May 20, 1947, box 17, WIK.

[71] Quoted in Ralph E. Ellsworth and Sarah M. Harris, *The American Right Wing: A Report to the Fund for the Republic* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs, 1962), 11.

[72] Robert B. Dresser, *Brief in Support of Proposed Constitutional Amendment Limiting the Power of Congress to Impose Taxes on Incomes, Inheritances and Gifts to a Maximum Rate of 25%* (New York: CCG, 1943), 2, box 236, Edwin W. Kemmerer Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University.

[73] Martin, *Rich People's Movements*, 90.

[74] Rumely to King, May 26, 1947, box 17, WIK; Memorandum, Rumely to T. Coleman Andrews, January 5, 1957, box 3, T. Coleman Andrews Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon.

[75] Dresser explicitly mentions Mellon as a guiding influence in Robert B. Dresser, "Heavy Tax Drains Productive Plant, Precludes Growth," *The Daily Oklahoman*, September 23, 1951, 29. On Mellon's efforts, see Robert R. Keller, "Supply-Side Economic Policies during the Coolidge-Mellon Era," *Journal of Economic Issues* 16, no. 3 (September 1982): 773–90.

[76] Dresser, *Brief in Support of Proposed Constitutional Amendment*, 6; King to Joseph S. Kimmel, April 1, 1947, box 16, WIK; *Needed Now*, 20; Memorandum, Rumely to Trustees, December 27, 1945, box 11, WIK.

[77] Martin, *Rich People's Movements*, 100–1; Russell L. Caplan, *Constitutional Brinksmanship: Amending the Constitution by National Convention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 69; Gerard, open letter, December 29, 1947, box 20, WIK; 82 Cong. Rec., A24881 (1951).

[78] Godfrey N. Nelson, "Ceiling is Sought for Federal Taxes," *New York Times*, October 3, 1943, S7; Robert B. Dresser, speech delivered at the Texas State Hotel, Houston, TX, May 14, 1953, 2–3, box 46, EARB; Dresser to Rumely, July 1, 1952, Acc. 22, box 100, Irénée du Pont Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Department, Hagley Museum and Library (hereafter IDP).

[79] Dresser, speech delivered at the Texas State Hotel, 5; Robert B. Dresser, "To Citizens Everywhere," *Dixon Evening Telegraph*, May 14, 1953, 19; Martin, *Rich People's Movements*, 105; Robert B. Dresser, "The Case for Tax Relief," *Freeman*, September 1954, 86–88.

[80] Martin, "Redistributing toward the Rich," 20; Dennis S. Ippolito, *Deficits, Debt, and the New Politics of Tax Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 52–56; King to Rumely, July 2, 1947, reproduced in *Hearings Before the House Select Committee on Lobbying Activities, Part Five*, 295–96; Samuel B. Pettengill, "Inside Your Congress," *The Morning Call* (Allentown, PA), August 7, 1947, 12.

[81] Willford I. King, *What the Election Did Not Prove* (New York: CCG, 1948), 4–5; Memorandum, Rumely to E. F. McDonald, Jr., November 3, 1948; Memorandum, Rumely to Pettengill, November 3, 1948; Memorandum, Rumely to Sumner Gerard, November 5, 1948; and Gwinn to King, November 10, 1948, box 25, WIK.

[82] Rumely to Harvey C. Fruehauf, November 6, 1948, box 25, WIK.

[83] "CCG: *Spotlight for the Nation*," n.d. (c. 1950), box 84, WIK.

[84] "Keep Yourself and Your Associates Informed," n.d. (c. 1954), box 196, JHP; Sumner Gerard to Irénée du Pont, April 22, 1953, and Pierre S. du Pont to Irénée du Pont, April 15, 1953, Acc. 22, box 100, IDP; Rumely to J. Howard Pew, October 22, 1952, box 33, JHP.

[85] Molly C. Michelmore, *Tax and Spend: The Welfare State, Tax Politics, and the Limits of American Liberalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 33.

[86] Rumely, open letter, November 3, 1953, box 46, EARB.

[87] On Buckley and *National Review*, the literature is vast, but see Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement*; John B. Judis, *William F. Buckley, Jr.: Patron Saint of the Conservatives* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988); Schoenwald, *Time for Choosing*, chap. 2; Carl T. Bogus, *Buckley: William F. Buckley Jr. and the Rise of American Conservatism* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011). On California conservatives, see McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*; Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (2001; repr., New York: Nation Books, 2009); Olmsted, *Right Out of California.*

[88] Pettengill to King, June 20, 1951, box 14, SBP.

[89] Dunnebecke, "Crusade for Individual Liberty," 163–64. Robert Dresser and another trustee, O. A. Taylor, resigned over Rumely's handling of the CCG's finances.

Cite this article: McPhee-Browne, Alex (2024). "The Most Iniquitous Lobby: The Committee for Constitutional Government and the Shaping of American Politics, 1937–1955." *Journal of Policy History* **36** (3): 281–307, doi:10.1017/S0898030623000301