

***"Peace is a woman's job..."***  
**Jeannette Rankin and  
Her Lifework**



Montana Historical Society

*Jeannette Rankin's 1940 campaign portrait.*

# American Foreign Policy: as a Pacifist

by Joan Hoff Wilson

Jeannette Rankin emerged from World War I believing that America could no longer isolate itself from international affairs because the world was becoming too interdependent. "We are living in the world," she repeatedly said in the 1920s. "We are no longer living in a community, state or nation . . . whatever happens in one part of the world affects every other part sooner or later to a greater or less extent." Five years before she joined the National Council for the Prevention of War (NCPW) as a lobbyist Rankin entirely agreed with its 1924 statement which proclaimed: "Isolation is a myth. . . . All nations are entangled now—financially, commercial [sic], and agriculturally." While she clearly did not subscribe to isolationism, this belief in international dependency did not turn her into an interventionist, nor into a supporter of Franklin D. Roosevelt's brand of internationalism. Instead, as a pacifist Rankin insisted that "it is not cooperation with the rest of the world that the American people object to. They object, and I believe rightly, to entering into an agreement with other nations which will bind them in advance to use our military or naval forces in coercing or punishing a nation which shall start a war in which we have no interest or at most a remote one."<sup>1</sup>

She dedicated her remaining life, personally and politically, to the pacifist cause. Increasingly she connected the causes of war with the structure of the American economic system. There was profit in war, Rankin told audiences, and the only way to prevent future wars was to disarm and retain only defensive forces to protect the nation itself from invasion. Moving to Georgia in the 1920s, where she lived in a cabin without modern conveniences, Rankin formed the Georgia Peace Society and involved it in Georgia and national politics. Many Georgians thought she was dangerous, that her opinions were treasonous, that she might be a communist. She was not deterred. When Congress considered neutrality legislation in the 1930s, Jeannette Rankin was there to testify, and when the war in Europe threatened to pull America into its maelstrom, she readily re-entered politics as a Representative from Montana. In Washington she voted her principles and always put the pacifist proposition before Congress. Even the shock and tragedy of Pearl Harbor in 1941 did not move her to vote for war, she voted no a second time. Criticized for her action, Rankin continued to press for disarmament in the post World War II era, but she seemed doomed to being the advocate of a losing cause. When she died in 1973, America was still at war in Vietnam and disarmament was little more than a hopeful vision. But the measure of Jeannette Rankin's life was not the failure of her mission to change American foreign policy, it was the example she set as a great crusader against war—a legacy, worth studying in this age of nuclear armaments.

The first segment of this essay on Jeannette Rankin's foreign policy attempted to track down the origins of her ideas about suffrage and pacifism, despite the absence of complete documentation. Her biography showed Rankin developing from a strong-willed, yet retiring University of Montana student who was unsure of her intellectual capabilities into an effective suffrage campaigner, progressive politician, and national peace lobbyist. Rankin's two votes against the First and Second World Wars confirmed her pacifism in the minds of most Americans but, in fact, her antiwar activities were much more sustained and systematic than the twenty-four years separating these Congressional ballots indicate.

Again, however, it is difficult to reconstruct all of Rankin's actions because she was such a poor record keeper. To understand the diversity of her efforts on behalf of peace, it is best to divide them into several categories: her life in Georgia; her views on communism, the League of Nations, World Court and the United Nations; her lifelong campaign for disarmament; her attempts to outlaw war; her sporadic recommendations for reform of American monetary and political systems; and finally, her support for neutrality or arms embargo legislation. Rankin, of course, did not compartmentalize her actions in this fashion, but these divisions provide convenient guides to the consistency of her pacifism from 1920 until her death in 1973. While the intensity with which she promoted peace through these various types of activities and attitudes varied over the years, her general commitment to a world without war did not. In that Jeannette Rankin was very consistent.

## Rankin in Georgia

Rankin never limited her pacifism to press statements or public appearances. In 1924, to bring her lifestyle in line with her ideals, she purchased land near Athens, Georgia. Ostensibly this 64-acre farm served as a winter vacation home, but in practice it became a symbol of her commitment to a simple, stoic life and the base from which she launched several peace education and peace action programs. Not surprisingly, Georgia also became the area of the country that most bitterly attacked her pacifism in the 1930s. For example, by 1934 the Atlanta American Legion Post had publicly labeled Rankin a communist and circulated throughout the state a book by Elizabeth Dilling, *The Red Network*, in which the Montanan was listed as one of 1300 leaders of organizations controlled by communists, radicals, pacifists, anarchists, Socialists, or wobblies. "The sum of my radicalism," Rankin asserted in answer to these attacks, "seems to be my opposi-

tion to war, to competitive armaments and to predatory interests."<sup>2</sup>

What had she done to arouse the ire of local patriots in Georgia? First, she chose to live unconventionally in a one-room house without electricity, running water or a telephone; a house she designed, built and later expanded. Second, she organized "Sunshine" Clubs for local boys and girls to teach them "peace habits." Third, she established a foreign policy study group for adults in Athens that became the nucleus of the Georgia Peace Society in 1928. One of this group's first priorities became the defeat of the perennial naval appropriation bills of Georgia Congressman Carl Vinson. But the last straw as far as local members of the American Legion were concerned came in 1934 when Brenau College, an exclusive female liberal arts institution in Gainesville, hinted that it wanted to establish a "Chair of Peace" for her.<sup>3</sup>

Although the entire controversy was more the product of publicity than an issue of substance, Rankin filed a libel suit to stop the personal assault upon her character. She also transformed the Georgia Peace Society into one of the first peace action groups in the country, directing the society during its most active years, 1935-1936, in an attempt to defeat Representative Vinson. Ironically, these efforts only served to consolidate support for military appropriations in the state of Georgia and allowed Rankin's enemies to vilify her name. Once the 1936 primary election was over, attacks on her and the peace society subsided. Subsequently she received a belated out-of-court settlement and public retraction of libelous statements by the Macon *Evening News*. Jeannette Rankin made both a private and public commitment to pacifism in Georgia before the Second World War, one that was sincere and energetic, but she did not succeed in changing rank and file opinion of her or the peace movement.<sup>4</sup>

Despite this less than enthusiastic response to pacifism, Rankin continued, for the next half century, to live a good portion of the year near Athens, Georgia. Although she voted in Montana, registered her car there, and rented Montana property

1. Jeannette Rankin, "Peace Through Political Action," 1925 and/or 1928-29 radio address, NCPW *Bulletin*, June 21, 1924, both in Folder X, Box 65, National Council for the Prevention of War Collection, Legislative Department, Jeannette Rankin Correspondence with Libby and Staff, 1929-1954, Swarthmore College Peace Collection [hereafter cited as NCPW: JR Correspondence]; Rankin, n.d. [1922?] untitled speech on the Permanent Court of International Justice and the outlawry of war, Folder 53, Box 3, Jeannette Rankin Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College [hereafter cited as Rankin Papers].

2. JR to H.J. Pearce, Sr., November 22, 1934, Rankin Folder, CDG-A, Box 130, Swarthmore College Peace Collection [SCPC] [quote]. Background material on her Georgia lifestyle and run-in with Atlanta American Legion can be found in Ted C. Harris, "Jeannette Rankin in Georgia," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 58 (Spring 1974), pp. 54-78 and Norma Smith, unpublished biography of Jeannette Rankin, Chapters 15 and 16.

3. Ted C. Harris, "Jeannette Rankin: Suffragist, First Woman Elected to Congress, and Pacifist" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Georgia, 1972), pp. 178-79, 221-55.

4. *Ibid.*: JR to Libby, November 22, 1934, Folder V, Box 68, W.G. Cornett to Harry F. Ward, November 4, 1935 in folder entitled, "Accusations of American Legion, Macon, Georgia and Resulting Libel Suit, 1935-36," Box 69, NCPW: JR Correspondence, SCPC.





Rankin at her Georgia house during the years she led the Georgia Peace Society.

that she owned, "home" was Georgia. In 1941, during her second term in Congress, her house burned down. After leaving Washington in 1943 at the age of 63 she returned to Georgia and moved into a three-room share cropper cabin located on thirty acres of land she had purchased some years before. She immediately set about remodeling the place; this time there was electricity and a telephone, but still no running water. From these somewhat more spacious and modern surroundings Rankin entertained guests and relatives and continued to cultivate an image of marginal living despite her obvious ability to travel at will and to afford such luxuries as a car, television, and tastefully expensive clothes. Her final experiment in house-building occurred in 1967 when, at the age of 87, she decided to design and build a home for elderly women. Intended to provide semi-communal living for retired women, the home was never completed, but the idea remains a testimony to her life-long interest in social welfare concerns.<sup>5</sup>

## Rankin and Communism

The charges leveled against her in Georgia accused Rankin of having communist beliefs. Did these charges have any substance? From the limited number of documents in her papers on this subject it is clear that she opposed Bolshevism during the Red Scare following World War I. As she prepared to attend the Second International Congress of Women for Permanent Peace in 1919, along with such prominent pacifists and social workers

as Jane Addams, Florence Kelley and Lillian Wald, the *New York Times* reported her saying: "I intend to place the problem of stopping the spread of Bolshevism before the Congress. . . ." Yet at no time did she consider communism a threat to the United States and even in those eastern European countries where communism appeared to be a threatening force she opposed the use of military intervention or blockades of any kind.<sup>6</sup>

There is no documentary evidence of any significant change in her attitude toward Communist Russia prior to World War II. Although she was a close friend and supporter of other aspects of Senator William E. Borah's foreign policy, it does not appear that she consistently advocated recognition of the Soviet Union in the 1920s or that she endorsed the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with the USSR in 1933. In fact, her view of communism in 1941 seems very similar to the one she held in 1920, namely, that the American people were "simply not enthused about saving the Red Menace."<sup>7</sup> As a pacifist, however, Rankin never succumbed to the extreme nationalist position that Hitler's fascism should be supported because it was anticommunist. At the same time, the summers that she spent in Europe from 1931 to 1937 convinced her of fascism's dangerous militaristic character. In 1935, for example, she wrote to Eleanor Roosevelt about the way Hitler's arms build-up

5. JR to Ann Denmler, October 11, 1943, JR to Blanche Watson, October 12, 1943, Folder 168, Box 9, Rankin Papers; Norma Smith, unpublished biography of JR, Chapters 19 and 20; Harris, "Jeannette Rankin," pp. 316-317.

6. *New York Times*, April 10, 1919.

7. *Great Falls Tribune*, July 12, 1941.

was being concealed from both the American and German peoples. In this same letter she urged the President's wife to use her influence to educate public opinion about *defensive* preparedness and Nazi military might. At no time before the end of 1937, however, did she believe even the most militaristic countries like Italy and Germany would "rush into a war in the immediate future."<sup>8</sup>

Despite her fear of German militarism, Rankin probably remained more hostile to communism than to fascism. As was the case with most Americans during the interwar years, there is no evidence that she understood the philosophical and economic differences between the two. And despite the persecution Rankin had experienced at the hands of the American Legion in Georgia, she was not above red-baiting. In her 1940 campaign for a second term in Congress she endorsed a widely distributed radio script that implied her opponent, Democrat Jerry O'Connell, was associated with the Communist Party.<sup>9</sup>

The only discernible softening of her attitude toward communism (outside of her opposition to American participation in the Korean War) came in 1962 during a tour of the Soviet Union when she asked communist party leaders to unilaterally disarm. "We can't do it," Rankin explained to the obviously surprised Russians, "because we're controlled by the army! But you control your army; therefore, you could do it." Nothing concrete came of this forthright suggestion, but in the course of this trip to the USSR Rankin's views on communism seemed to soften because of her favorable impression of Khrushchev, a Soviet peace conference that she attended, and the enhanced roles for women that she observed. She also had come to believe that

You can't shoot an ideology: the only way to control communism is to have a better system at home. We haven't taken care of our children. We haven't educated our people. We haven't done the things necessary to make a happy nation. We must work together to raise not only the general standards of living, for much of our crime comes from poverty, but also "the quality of the people—of their minds," for a free, intelligent, and sensitive people would not allow the toxic conditions in our society to continue.<sup>10</sup>

Like so many former Progressives who became critics of the Cold War, domestic reform was the key-stone not only of her battle against communism, but of her foreign policy views in general.

8. "Jeannette Rankin: Activist for World Peace, Women's Rights and Democratic Government," Suffrage Oral History Project, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1974 [hereafter cited as JR: UCB Oral History], p. 83; \*quote is from Harris "Jeannette Rankin," p. 267, based on material not now in the Rankin papers; Eleanor Roosevelt to JR, August 6, 1935, Folder 56, Box 3, Rankin Papers. In the summer of 1937 Rankin also interviewed the first lady and once again tried to influence the President through her. See: JR to Libby, June 28, 1937, Folder VI, Box 68, NCPW: JR Correspondence.

## Rankin and Domestic Reform

Throughout her long public career, Rankin proposed two types of domestic reform: one would have broadened the electoral process; the other would have created a special "profit removing" currency in time of war or other military crises. She associated both with specific foreign events. As early as 1917, for example, during World War I she had advocated proportional representation "as an indispensable instrument of a truly representative government" along with a "direct vote for president." Over the years her belief in the power of the electorate persisted and, if anything, gained in strength as she championed several methods of expanding electoral power. By 1930 she had abandoned her earlier idea about proportional representation in favor of multiple-member Congressional districts, and by the fall of 1952 was once again working on "a new method of selecting a president." Not until the late 1960s did she simultaneously advocate both multiple-member districts and a direct preferential vote for the presidency.<sup>11</sup>

Her attempts to broaden the electoral process had always been rooted in an abiding faith in the American people, a typically progressive belief in the democratic process and its relationship to foreign policy. On her ninetieth birthday her views remained the same:

... the President is much more important than he was at the time of the Revolution because today our international relations are just as important as our human relations, and the President has something to say about it. He should have the advice and consent not only of the Senate, but of all the people, and the people should have something direct to say about the selection of President... but we can't elect a President [directly] under present conditions and we don't get a representation of public opinion because the people haven't a choice. I think that making choices is one of the processes in advancement... You can't make progress without choice.<sup>12</sup>

Rankin's other major domestic reform stemmed from her dissatisfaction with certain aspects

9. One of the reasons why she underestimated the danger from fascism is that she viewed Hitler as no more than "another Kaiser." See: JR to Libby, September 20, 1939, Folder VII, Box 68, NCPW: JR Correspondence; Harris, "Jeannette Rankin," p. 283.

10. JR: UCB Oral History, p. 262 (first quote), pp. 263-8; John Harris Kirkley, "An Afternoon with Jeannette Rankin," in JR: UCB Oral History, p. 150.

11. New York *Tribune*, March 3, 1917; JR to Flora Belle Surles, January 15, 1938, Surles Papers, Schlesinger Library; JR to Grace Rankin Kinney, September 3, 1952, Folder 9, Box 1, Rankin and Kirkley material on multiple-member districts and preferential presidential vote, Folder 197, Box 12, all in Rankin Papers.

12. Rankin, 90th Birthday Address, Folder 182, Box 11, Rankin Papers.



of American capitalism. In particular, Senator Gerald Nye's investigation of the role played by the munitions industry in America's entrance into World War I confirmed her worst suspicions about the economic origins of modern warfare. His committee's findings, from 1934 to 1936, proved to her that commercial interests caused wars. Accordingly, in the 1930s she revived her World War I ideas about antiprofit legislation.

As early as 1933 she had testified before the House Foreign Affairs Committee that the American economic system inevitably produced wars because the "militaristic system forces an economic problem upon us. . . ." In 1934 several newspapers quoted her as saying that "we are walking in the direction of war and we can get a war anytime the munition makers and profit makers demand it. . . . If we do not crystallize public opinion we are going directly to war because the munition makers . . . must use up their stockpiles." She insisted that it was the right of the American people to have information about those "patriots who are willing to give the life of your son for their profit." At the beginning of 1935, when testifying before the House Committee on Military Affairs in favor of issuing temporary currency that would have value only while the country was at war, Rankin made one of her most famous statements against war. "You can no more win a war than you can win an earthquake," she told one committee member in the course of describing how her emergency currency idea would take the profit out of war-making.<sup>13</sup>

After World War II her economic argument became an attack on the military-industrial complex and its general relationship to the monetary system. "Many of the particular problems of women result from the materialistic values and 'crazy money system'" on which the country operated. "My first interest is to get rid of war," she said in 1972, "but we can't do that until we end military control of our economy and government. . . . Every time we have a war, the military establishment grows stronger. . . . To attack and break the control of the military-industrial complex, the people must first become aware that their interests are at stake and are unrequited by the status quo. Then they must organize their energies and pool their resources so that they become a match against the money and organization of the military."<sup>14</sup> Needless to say, Rankin never lived to see either of her major domestic reforms enacted.

## Rankin and Disarmament

Rankin's advocacy of world disarmament was also doomed to failure in her lifetime. During her first campaign for Congress she shocked many Montanans with her idea that the United States should have an army or navy only for self-protection, not for aggression. "No enemy," she reportedly said, "is going to take a fleet of ships up the Mississippi." She continued to insist, both before and after World War II, that the country need not fear a foreign invasion—never fully appreciating the significance of air and missile power in modern warfare.

Throughout the 1930s, Jeannette Rankin lobbied against all increases in military preparedness, particularly the annual naval expenditures proposed by Representative Carl Vinson from Georgia. She viewed the successful arms limitation conferences of 1921-1922 and 1930 as inadequate. Maintaining a strident pacifist position but realizing that people were not ready in the interwar years for complete disarmament, she proposed the less threatening idea of an American "shore defense." Nevertheless, anything short of total disarmament would not satisfy her. Later during the escalation of U.S. involvement in the Vietnamese war, she openly urged unilateral disarmament and withdrawal of American troops "even if the Reds take over," adding: "You don't do the right thing because of the consequences. If you are wise, you do it regardless of the consequences."<sup>15</sup>

"I'm for immediate, total and unilateral disarmament," she told one interviewer in 1970. Shortly before her death she continued to insist that "the quickest way to promote world peace is total unilateral disarmament and though immediate disarmament is not possible for economic reasons we could begin at once and set a reasonable timetable of, say, three to five years, for conversion of war industry to peacetime uses and the resulting shifts of job and labor." The fear of unilateral disarmament, she argued, was illusory because: 1) the United States was immune from ideological or cultural attack from communist nations; 2) the American economy would be strengthened if military production was curbed; 3) the country was immune to military takeover because "a foreign invader could not win a guerrilla war fighting us on our own soil" and because Russia or China would be deterred

13. U.S. House of Representatives, Foreign Affairs Committee, *Hearing on the Exportation of Arms or Munitions of War*, 72nd Congress, 2nd Session [Washington, 1933], pp. 21-23; newspaper quotes from Harris, "Jeannette Rankin," pp. 214-215; U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Military Affairs, *Hearing on Taking the Profit Out of War*, 74th Congress, 1st Session [Washington, 1935], pp. 307-312; Rankin, "Armistice Day radio address," November 11, 1936, Folder X, Box 65, NCPW.

14. Transcribed interview of JR by John Board, August 29, 1963, Folder 205, Box 12, Rankin Papers; Kirkley, "Afternoon with JR," JR:UCB Oral History, pp. 149, 151; Conversation with Belle Fligelman Winestine of Helena, Montana, February 28, 1977.

15. See radio addresses in Folder X, Box 65, NCPW, especially, "Disarmament Conference," December 2, 1929, no title, 1931 and April 10, 1937, "Between War and Peace," December 29, 1937, and no title, February 23, 1938; JR to Libby, July 22, 1936, Folder VI, Box 68; also see her testimony before House and Senate Committees against military appropriations in Folders VIII, IX, Box 65, all in NCPW; JR Correspondence; Harris, "Jeannette Rankin," pp. 104, 214-218; *Newsweek*, February 14, 1966, p. 12 (quote).

from making a direct nuclear attack "by public opinion and sentiment among their own peoples as well as within the larger community of nations."<sup>16</sup>

Rankin's commitment to disarmament naturally led her to support all attempts to outlaw war in the 1920s. The culmination of this movement was the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928, the agreement signed by world powers to outlaw war. In fact, American approval of this pact stimulated rather than satiated her pacifist activities in both Georgia and throughout the nation. It also strengthened her belief in the power of public opinion, and prompted her to continue advocating a number of constitutional amendments either for outlawing war, like the Frazier Amendment in 1935, or for national referenda to determine popular attitudes about foreign policy issues.<sup>17</sup>

One of the most controversial amendments she supported was the Ludlow Amendment of 1938. It would have required a national vote before the country could enter into war. As a representative of the NCPW, Rankin strenuously campaigned for this war referendum bill. Once in a radio address she asked why farmers were allowed to vote under New Deal AAA legislation on whether or not to kill piglets when parents could not "vote on whether they want their sons killed?"<sup>18</sup> Although the Ludlow bill died in a House committee, there was considerable popular support for it and Rankin never forgot Congress' failure to respond to what she considered legitimate public opinion.

In keeping with her belief in public opinion, she recommended to the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in 1920 that the Council of the League of Nations be elected by peoples of the member states instead of appointed by their respective governments. As a strong critic of the Treaty of Versailles, however, she remained only minimally tolerant of the League, especially after nothing came of her suggestions to make it more responsive to world public opinion.

By the early 1930s she consistently maintained that the sole usefulness of the League was as a "channel for communication between nations" that would hopefully increase international understanding. In Rankin's mind only drastic disarma-

ment by all nations could make the League of Nations effective. She had learned this lesson from the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931-1932 when the League had been unable to stop such a blatant act of aggression. Nonetheless, she reluctantly followed the NCPW's position and recommended American entrance into both the League of Nations and the World Court.<sup>19</sup>

With respect to the Court her views were more specific than usual. She thought it should have the "power to render decisions without the consent [of powerful nations]," but not the "power to enforce decisions." Her reasoning in this case was based on the example of the United States Supreme Court. It did not have the power to enforce its own rulings, yet they were followed "because of public opinion and a general respect for the law." Above all she did not want an international army created to enforce World Court decisions because "mere force would not be able to save a lawless people from themselves."<sup>20</sup>

Rankin harbored similar reservations about the collective security potential first of the League of Nations and later of the United Nations. She believed that the debates in both bodies were based on "an adversary process and, hence, [were] inimical to the very ends" being espoused. Moreover, her views about the economic origins of modern warfare led to the conclusion that the UN was "controlled by countries with great military interests and expenditures" and so the possibility of peaceful settlement of disputes was rendered even more unlikely than earlier under the League when large power control had been less evident.<sup>21</sup>

## Rankin and Neutrality

Rankin considered the neutrality or arms embargo legislation of the mid-1930s the greatest political victory for pacifism of the interwar years. From her point of view, therefore, the 1934-1936 Nye Committee investigation had done more than cast a shadow over the munitions industry; it had also created additional support for neutrality legislation. There were three schools of thought about such legislation. Internationalists, those who urged cooperative action among nations to prevent war, hoped that the incorporation of presidential discretion into neutrality laws would promote American participation with the League of Nations in support of collective security; nationalists, those who wanted the United States to steer clear of commitments to other nations, wanted laws with no presidential discretion that might allow U.S. involvement in foreign wars; and pacifists who saw the

16. Harris, "Jeannette Rankin," p. 311; Kirkley, "Afternoon with JR," JR: UCB Oral History, p. 150.

17. Insisting on a literal interpretation of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, Rankin advocated amending the Constitution and changing military policy to bring the U.S. in line with the true intent of this agreement. See: JR to Mary B. Orr, May 25, 1929, Rankin Folder, CDG-A, Box 130, SCPC; radio addresses in Folder X, Box 65, NCPW, especially those for September 13, 1929, December 2, 1929, no title, 1931, July 18, 1935, April 10, 1937, January 16, 1940. Her efforts on behalf of various constitutional amendments in the 1920s and 1930s were discussed in the first segment of this article.

18. JR to Surles, January 15, 1938, Surles Papers; Harris, "Jeannette Rankin," pp. 257-58; Ronald Schaffer, "Jeannette Rankin, Progressive-Isolationist" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1959), pp. 214-216; Rankin, radio address, April 10, 1937 (quote), Folder X, Box 65, NCPW.

19. Harris, "Jeannette Rankin," pp. 170, 208, 265; Schaffer, "Jeannette Rankin," pp. 167-68.

20. JR: UCB Oral History, pp. 97-99, 151; Schaffer, "Jeannette Rankin," pp. 224-25.

21. JR: UCB Oral History, pp. 150-51.





Rankin testifies before the House Naval Affairs Committee in 1939.

neutrality legislation primarily as a means to cripple the munitions industry and thus further the cause of peace.<sup>22</sup>

It is not entirely clear from existing documents whether Rankin actually understood the difference between a "discretionary" and "nondiscretionary" arms embargo. Many pacifists seemed either confused or short-sighted on this issue of granting the president power to use discretion in applying neutrality legislation. Without it, the first neutrality bills tied the president's hands and made the United States the silent partner of totalitarian powers because, as in the case of the Spanish Civil War, he could not aid the liberal forces.<sup>23</sup> In this sense nondiscretionary neutrality legislation was extremely nationalistic and contradicted many of Rankin's internationalist leanings.

Nonetheless, she and the NCPW were in complete agreement on this question. They both thought that "mandatory [that is, nondiscretionary] neutrality [legislation]" was a step "... in the process of passing from our futile 'freedom of seas' position to an ultimate collective system of justice and peace...." Neither Rankin nor the NCPW appeared to understand that in the long run the rigid application of an arms embargo, regardless of the countries or issues involved, would not help them obtain their goal of world peace through international cooperation. Instead, like so many other

sincere pacifists of the time, she even regretted that the original act of 1935 did not go further than it did to limit the president's powers of discretion. "It was," Rankin lamented on Armistice Day, 1936, "all that could be secured over the opposition of foreign interests and our own racketeers."<sup>24</sup>

## Rankin's Second Term

The way in which the United States entered World War II influenced many of Rankin's post-war foreign policy ideas. Pacifists of the 1930s feared that England wanted America to help preserve what remained of the British empire, and consequently many of them, including Rankin, opposed FDR's attempts to aid the English before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Rankin even questioned the possibility of a European war. She returned from Europe in the summer of 1937 convinced that despite the arms build-up in Italy and Germany there would be no war, "barring accidents," because both countries realized "there is nothing to be gained by bloodshed and destruction" and hopefully would "decide to cure their own economic troubles by friendly overtures rather than try to force their unwilling constituents into a much feared war."<sup>25</sup>

Her pacifism had blinded her to the dangerously deteriorating condition of European diplomatic relations. Therefore she denounced Roosevelt's famous "quarantine" speech of October 5, 1937, as an attempt to condition the American people to accept increased military appropriations and ultimately to participate in "a holy war ... by arousing fear of invasion." Such a war "would doubtless meet the favor of the munitions and shipbuilding companies and others because of its effect on the current depression," she wrote to Senator James Pope on October 27.<sup>26</sup>

After defeat of Ludlow's bill in Congress in January 1938, Rankin entered her last and most frantic stage of antiwar activity prior to American entrance into World War II. In quick succession she testified before Congressional committees against further naval appropriations, against rescission of the nondiscretionary portions of the neutrality legislation, against the occupation of Greenland and Iceland, against the suggested fortification of Guam, against Lend-Lease, against the use of convoy patrols to protect Lend-Lease goods, against the Atlantic Charter, and finally, against the extension of the draft. During this same three-year

22. Robert A. Divine, *The Illusion of Neutrality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), pp. 74-121.

23. *Ibid.*: Rankin, Armistice Day radio address, November 11, 1936, Folder X, Box 65, NCPW.

24. *Ibid.* [second quote from Armistice Day address]; *Peace Action*, May, 1935, p. 1, NCPW, SCPC (first quote).

25. "Quote from Harris, "Jeannette Rankin," p. 267 from material not now in Rankin's papers.

26. JR to Senator James P. Pope, October 27, 1937, Box 68, NCPW; JR Correspondence: Rankin, "Beware of Holy Wars," *World Outlook*, November, 1938.



period she attacked both President Roosevelt and Secretary of State Cordell Hull personally because of what she perceived to be their commitment to war as a resolution of international disputes.<sup>27</sup>

Frustrated by her lack of success on most of these issues and what she perceived to be lack of personal support for some of them on the part of the NCPW leadership, Rankin resigned from the organization in 1939 and decided to run for a second term in Congress as a Republican pacifist. Capitalizing on support from Senator Burton K. Wheeler, her influential family connections, the considerable peace sentiment in Montana, and the backing of labor and women she won against liberal Democrat Jerry J. O'Connell and in open opposition to a third term for Franklin Roosevelt.<sup>28</sup>

Back in Congress after a twenty-two year absence, Rankin found that many things had changed. Among other things, she was no longer the only national female legislator. There were five other women in the House and two in the Senate. Moreover, the tone and reputation of the peace movement had changed dramatically from what it had been before World War I. Instead of being part of a bipartisan Progressive Movement, it was now considered the bastion of reactionary Republicans, largely due to charges levied by New Deal internationalists against the activities of the America First Committee. Although she did not belong to this wealthy, noninterventionist organization, she did address some of its meetings and many of her friends contributed heavily to its treasury.

Ironically Rankin found herself convicted of conservatism, largely through guilt by association, at the very moment in her public career when she was forced to take stock of how far apart on socio-economic issues she had drifted from her brother Wellington since 1916. Although he supported her second bid for Congress, their views and lifestyles now differed widely. For example, he lived in obvious wealth in Montana as one of the largest land owners in the country, while she cultivated an image of semi-poverty in Georgia. He ignored instances of personal suffering during the depression, while she toyed with the radical cures proposed by Francis E. Townsend and Upton Sinclair. He became a Christian Scientist, while she continued to ridicule all religion. He was embarrassed by their sister Edna's involvement in the birth control movement, while she encouraged such activities. Clearly Wellington had lost his liberal credentials during the interwar years, while Jeannette's had become more and more radical.

Undaunted by such changes on the national scene or in her private life, Rankin began her second term by immediately trying to defeat the pending



THE WORLD'S WHIPPING BOY?  
The Evening Star, Washington, D.C., February 11, 1938.

Lend-Lease bill. Attacking Lend-Lease in the spring of 1941, she introduced one of her old and favorite ideas, the unlimited expenditures for a national defense perimeter extending "roughly from the Aleutian Islands to the Hawaiian Islands, then to the Panama Canal and then up to Maine and Labrador..." Failing in this she attempted to attach an amendment to the Lend-Lease bill stating that

Nothing in this act shall be construed to authorize or permit the President to order, transfer, exchange, lease, lend or employ any soldier, sailor, marine or aircraft pilot outside the territorial waters of the Western Hemisphere without specific authorization of the Congress of the United States.<sup>29</sup>

Insisting as never before that "people never make war; it is always governments," Rankin even re-drafted, but did not actually introduce on the floor of Congress, her concept of eliminating war profits by issuing emergency currency. She also proposed legislation against the draft and on November 18, 1941, introduced a resolution calling for a national advisory election on whether Americans wanted war. The attack on Pearl Harbor in December and the American declaration of war voided all her pending bills.<sup>30</sup>

Prior to Pearl Harbor her private letters indicate considerable optimism about preventing American entrance into the Second World War despite the passage of Lend-Lease and the proclamation of the Atlantic Charter. When military conscription was extended by only one vote at the

27. Rankin letters to family members, 1941, Folder 7, Box 1, Rankin Papers; Harris, "Jeannette Rankin," pp. 274-94; Schaffer, "Jeannette Rankin," pp. 231-46.

28. Smith, unpublished biography of Rankin, Chapter 17; Harris, "Jeannette Rankin," pp. 274-86.

29. Hollywood Citizen News, March 1, 1934, p. 1 (first quote); U.S. House of Representatives, 77th Congress, 1st Session, Congressional Record, Vol. 87 (Part One), p. 791.

30. Harris, "Jeannette Rankin," pp. 289, 294.

beginning of August 1941, she confidently predicted to her mother and sister Mary that "Congress will never vote for war." Following the announcement of the Atlantic Charter later in the month she wrote her sister Harriett: "We have all been very curious to know what happened when Frankie D. and Winnie met in the ocean. While the little boys were playing in the ocean, we almost ruined our President. It required the most terrific political pressure to extend the draft.... I am feeling greatly encouraged, although many of the peace people are still anxious regarding the situation."<sup>31</sup>

In this same letter she went on to say that the sentiment in Congress was quite different from what it had been in 1917 "because we have such a large, active peace group and we work together against the war measures. I am one who feels very certain that we not come into this war at all. However, there are some who say they think the President will manage to get us in even if only for a short time." Similarly, a few days earlier she had told Wellington that "some Republicans think Roosevelt's desire to control will cause him to work harder to precipitate a war." As late as November 15, 1941, she wrote to members of her family complaining about the loss of life which would result from the convoy system that Congress had approved by another close vote. Nonetheless she still believed that the "opposition is stronger than ever and that on sending an expeditionary force, we can defeat the President.... so it will be some time before the President will decide actually to create the incidents that will get us into war."<sup>32</sup>

Even after the Pearl Harbor attack of December 7, Rankin inexplicably thought there would be a lengthy debate in Congress over whether to go to war, as there had been in 1917. So she left that same day to speak in Detroit only to return when she heard that Roosevelt had called a special session of Congress for the next day. Once again, as in 1917, Wellington urged her to vote for war. She finally stopped accepting his calls. This time she voted no alone and amid much criticism. Right after the vote on December 8 she finally talked with Wellington and he told her what she had not wanted to hear earlier: "Montana is 110% against you." Two days later her brother's secretary, Helena Stellway, wrote to tell her not to worry about his attitude, saying "at first Mr. Rankin was quite disturbed, but not now at all. He [has] said many kind things about you and said your vote was the one thing you could do, and that you would be admired for it."<sup>33</sup>

Such belated and second-hand consolation was of little help to Rankin as she sat in her Morris chair

on the evening of her second historic antiwar vote—an act that made her the only member of Congress to oppose U.S. entrance into *both* World Wars. That fateful night of December 8 she simply made a gesture of despair with her hands and blurted out: "I have nothing left now except my integrity." Earlier that same day she had sent out an official explanation to her Congressional district. It read in part:

I felt there were not enough facts before us...to justify such hasty action.... I remembered the promise I had made during my campaign.... I was thinking of the pledges I had made to the mothers and fathers of Montana. While I believed...that the stories [about the attack on Pearl Harbor]...were probably true, still I believed that such a momentous vote, one which could mean peace or war for our country, should be based on more authentic evidence.... It may be right for us to enter the conflict with Japan, if so, it is my belief that all the facts...should be given to the Congress and the American people. So in casting my vote today, I voted my convictions and redeemed my campaign pledges.<sup>34</sup>

This statement was much less defensive than her 1917 one had been. Now Rankin made no attempt to justify her action in the name of public opinion, although as of the summer of 1941 ninety-five per cent of her mail from Montana constituents had been against going to war. At the time this was contrary to the national trend in public opinion. (Over fifty per cent of Americans polled in the spring and summer months consistently favored going to war against both Japan in the Pacific and Hitler in Europe.) It is possible that by December she realized that Germany's attack on the Soviet Union and Japan's seizures of French bases in Indochina in June and July dramatically transformed attitudes across the nation, even among Montanans, before the attack on Pearl Harbor. Rankin's attitude had not changed, however. On July 12 she insisted that "aid to Russia doesn't have the people's support" and she audibly hissed from the floor of the House when an appeal was made later in the fall for United States intervention when it looked as though the USSR could not withstand the German invasion. Despite Rankin's obdurance, by the beginning of December 1941, seventy per cent of Americans thought it was more important to aid England than to continue to keep out of the European theater. Likewise seventy per cent were willing to risk war with the Japanese

31. JR to family members, Folder 7, Box 1, Rankin Papers.

32. *Ibid.*

33. Smith, unpublished biography of Rankin, Chapter 18; Harris, "Jeannette Rankin," p. 294. For letters criticizing her second vote against war see: Folders 137-159, Boxes 8-9, Helena Stellway to JR, December 19, 1941, Folder 67, Box 4, all in Rankin Papers.

34. Harriet Yarrow to Patricia King, January 3, 1974 (recalling Yarrow's visit to Rankin on the evening of December 8, 1941), Yarrow Papers, Schlesinger Library; remarks by Judge Frances C. Elge at the Montana History Conference, Helena, Montana, November 5, 1977; form letter to constituents, December 7, 1941, Folder 70, Box 4, Rankin Papers.



rather than permit their unabated aggression in the Far East.<sup>35</sup>

From the start, therefore, the Congresswoman from Montana defended her solitary “no” vote on the grounds that “we did not need a declaration of war to defend ourselves and to protect the Philippines, Guam, Wake and other possessions and to fight, defensively and offensively, any enemy who had attacked us. We DID need a declaration of war to send men to die in Europe, Africa and the Far East.” Rankin also quoted a statement Winston Churchill had made to Parliament on January 28, 1942, after the United States had entered World War II. In it the Prime Minister made reference to his expectations after the Atlantic rendezvous with Roosevelt that the United States would enter the war in the Far East “even if not herself attacked ... and thus make final victory assured.” Most of her responses to inquiries about her vote also included an ambiguous statement about preparing to channel war production “to promote the joy of right living for all the people” once the fighting was over. As during World War I she felt that “if women can become emotionally involved in production, they are going to be better prepared to take their part in planning a society in which satisfying human needs must be the determining factor.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, she retained an abiding faith in women’s postwar role in determining a more equitable distribution of wealth.

The lasting historical significance of her second vote against war, like the first one, lies in the way she defended it. Allying herself with revisionist historians like Charles Beard, Charles C. Tansill, and Harry Elmer Barnes, Rankin immediately began to build a case against the administration’s “back door” approach to war.<sup>37</sup> With the aid of Ralph Baerman she wrote and inserted a detailed defense into the *Congressional Record* exactly one year after her unpopular antiwar vote. Realizing that she had no chance for re-election, she stated publicly what many Republicans privately suspected.

She accused British imperialists of conspiring to bring the United States into the Second World War by convincing Roosevelt to impose economic sanctions “of ever-increasing severity” upon Japan. Before the Atlantic Conference, Rankin pointed out, FDR had been reluctant to enforce the various

embargo provisions of the Neutrality Acts against Japan, but once he met with Churchill, the President no longer procrastinated. Although she never subscribed to the extreme revisionist view that Roosevelt knew in advance about the attack on Pearl Harbor, she did insist that “it [the attack] was anticipated by the administration.”<sup>38</sup>

Rankin concluded these remarks in the *Congressional Record* in 1942 by returning to her belief that domestic reform was essential for a successful foreign policy. “The American people are willing to struggle for the ‘four freedoms’ but we realize that we must retain them at home if we are going to give them to others.” Then she asked the question that is now so familiar to Americans in the wake of Vietnam and Watergate: “When are we going to get the full story...?”<sup>39</sup> As late as 1963 she still laid the blame for our entrance into World War II squarely on the British and American military establishment, saying:

The Second World War vote came with even more of a shock to me than the First World War because I had been living in Washington and I knew that the military and everyone said we were not prepared to go to war. I couldn’t see how they would deliberately go to war when they weren’t prepared. I knew the military in the United States and England had controlled the military in Japan for years, not actually, but by influence. And, the people in Japan had tried over and over again to get rid of their military dictatorship, but each time they got about ready to get rid of them, in would come England and America to support the militarists. I knew that the militarists in Japan wanted to go to war and the United States and England didn’t mind if they went to war.... That’s why when they said Japan had dropped bombs ... I couldn’t believe that it hadn’t been instigated.... For two years after the bombs were dropped, we did absolutely nothing in the Pacific. We didn’t send one gun or one boat to protect the Philippines. We did absolutely nothing. Japanese situation [sic] was created to force Congress to go to war with Germany. That was done to satisfy England’s desire for us to go to war in Europe.<sup>40</sup>

35. Great Falls Tribune, July 12, 1941; conversation with Judge Frances C. Elge of Billings, Montana, March 1, 1977. Public opinion polls cited in Merrill D. Peterson and Leonard W. Levy, eds., *Major Crises in American History: Documentary Problems, 1865-1953* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962), Vol. 2, pp. 448-49.

36. For standard replies by Rankin to those inquiring about her vote against World War II, see: Folders 72-165, Boxes 4-9, Rankin Papers, especially JR to Wilfred S. Ball, April 21, 1942, Folder 163 and JR to Rev. Harry Sutton, February 9, 1942, Folder 162.

37. Revisionist historians generally challenge official explanations about domestic or foreign events either by reinterpreting old data or by introducing recently uncovered facts. Rankin’s revisionist ideas about World War I were discussed in the first segment of this article. For proof of her familiarity with the writings of famous revisionist historians like Beard and Barnes, see: 1963 John Board interview with JR, p. 54, Folder 204, Box 12, Rankin Papers.

38. “Some Questions about Pearl Harbor.” *Congressional Record*, December 8, 1942, 77th Congress, 2nd Session, pp. 1-3.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

40. 1963 Board interview with JR, pp. 52-53.

41. JR to family members, 1942, Folder 7, Box 1, Rankin Papers; JR to Harriet Yarrow, September 25, 1943, Yarrow Papers; JR to Flora Belle Surles, September 5, 1942, Surles Papers.

## Her Post-War Views

By the time she recorded these words Jeannette Rankin had been out of the limelight for over two decades. During that time she completed her second term in Congress, alternately expressing boredom and discouragement with "this stupid war" that, in 1942 and 1943, seemed to be proceeding both badly and endlessly, according to her interpretation of Congressional opinion. In numerous letters to family, friends, and constituents Rankin lamented the suppression of antiwar criticism by the administration, the waste of life, especially in sea battles, and most important, the loss of social progress, justice, and democracy at home—all because of the "law of military necessity." In a typically progressive fashion she described war as "a breeder of hate and prejudice," adding: "I certainly feel sorry for the poor Jews, Negroes and colored people after this war."<sup>41</sup>

For a brief period she deluded herself with the hope that the female vote would defeat FDR in 1944 because women at home would see through the New Deal foreign policy more easily than those absentee voters away fighting the war. She also thought that women would respond to the revisionist idea that "we should clean our house at home before we accept responsibility for the rest of the world."<sup>42</sup> At one point in the fall of 1943 she wildly speculated that after "four or five more [such] devastating wars," women would

get control of industry and not be merely workers at the bottom, but will control, and there will be so few men to protest that maybe by that time women will be willing to assert their primitive instincts for the responsibility of the protection of the young, and do something about war.<sup>43</sup>

At those moments prior to the 1944 election, when she had to face the fact that American women had not protested the war effort to any great degree, Rankin fell back on her vicarious mentor Benjamin Kidd, whose book, *The Science of Power*, had been recently condensed into an article by a friend of hers. This condensation she recommended repeatedly to male and female correspondents in the summer of 1943 as the best theoretical means for mobilizing women against war. She remained convinced that Kidd's work was "the only thing in

this man-made world that indicates that women have anything to contribute to our social organization." Because he flattered women, she thought they could be enticed "to use their power in outlawing war." At least once she facetiously referred to this idea as "gunpowder versus face powder." Months before the election, however, she also expressed serious doubts about mobilizing a female antiwar vote.

I am still convinced that the women can prevent war if they put their minds on it. If the mothers cared as much for their sons as they do for their social position we would not have war. Alas, the parasitic life they have led has corrupted their emotional life.<sup>44</sup>

And, indeed, the masses of women failed to live up to Rankin's idealistic expectations in the 1944 election. Roosevelt's unprecedented fourth-term re-election made her even more pessimistic. "The Dictator's... election means a continuation of war and deaths," she wrote on November 30, 1944. "A little longer to wait for a saner attitude of the people. The 'little longer' may be 'too long' for me." In fact, she had already decided that "we have been in continuous war; that we have these armistices; that the wars never settle anything because it [sic] is a method which does not settle problems." She also did not have any faith in postwar peace conferences unless they were attended by people who sincerely wanted peace. Her standard list of appropriate peace delegates consisted of the unlikely trio of India's Mohandas Gandhi, Lazaro Cardenas, the President of Mexico, and American labor leader John L. Lewis. Obviously she did not think FDR and other well known heads of state would do anything at such conferences except plan another war.<sup>45</sup>

Increasingly India became her model for obtaining peace and neutrality in the world. As early as March 1942 she had read Jawaharlal Nehru's autobiography, *My India, My America*. Then she became a life-long admirer of Gandhi's passive resistance tactics and before the end of 1942 was convinced that India's freedom was as important as the general outcome of World War II.<sup>46</sup>

42. JR to family members, 1943-1944, Folder 7, Box 1, JR to Mrs. Kenneth Hayes, June 19, 1943 (quote), Folder 167, JR to Katherine Blake, August 14, 1943, JR to Arthur Cranston, August 17, 1943, Folder 168, Box 9, all in Rankin Papers. Rankin considered running again in 1944 but did not for three reasons: 1) the war was not over; 2) Wellington opposed her candidacy; and 3) FDR did not withdraw from the presidential race as she thought he would because of bad health. See: JR to Surles, n.d. [probably summer, 1944], Surles Papers; JR to Libby, October 11, 1943, May 5, June 2, 1944, NCPW; JR Correspondence; JR to Abbie Crawford, August 14, 1943, JR to Mary M. Wright and Ann Denmler, October 11, 1943, Folder 168, Box 9, Rankin Papers.

43. JR to Ernestine Evans, October 14, 1943, Folder 168, Box 9, Rankin Papers.

44. JR to Elmer E.S. Johnson, David Morgan, Mr. and Mrs. Kistner, and Mr. Porter Sargent, all written on June 11, 1943, JR to Mrs. Edward Bixler and Mrs. A.C. Avery, Sr., June 12, 1943 (first two quotes), Folder 167, JR to Rosalie Gardiner Jones, August 17, 1943 (gunpowder quote), Folder 168, JR to Katherine Blake, August 14, 1943 (last quote), Folder 168, all in Box 9, Rankin Papers.

45. JR to Yarrow, November 11, 30, 1944, Yarrow Papers (all quotes). Throughout the summer and fall of 1943 Rankin privately referred to Churchill and Roosevelt as "dictators" and to their peace conferences as "war conferences." See: JR to Mr. Gerald F. M. O'Grady, August 16, 1943, JR to Frances Sherrill and Arthur Cranston, August 17, 1943, Folder 168, JR to David Morgan, June 12, 1943, JR to Mrs. Edward Bixler, Mrs. Kenneth Hayes, Mr. Clifford J. Bernard, H.F. Tarlin, all June 12, 1943, Folder 167, JR to Rosalie Gardiner Jones, August 17, 1943, Folder 168, all in Rankin Papers.

46. JR to family, especially March 31, 1942, Folder 7, Box 1, Rankin Papers.



By the summer of 1943 she had elaborate plans for going to India and writing a work entitled, "India's Contributions to the Peace of the World." She even toyed with the idea of asking the Democratic administration to sponsor her trip in the interest of peace.<sup>47</sup>

In a letter to Ralph B. Baerman of the Institute for Christian Economic Action she detailed ideas that she would retain, but would never write extensively about, although she traveled to India over a half-dozen times between 1946 and 1971. The intervening years did not dampen the ardor Rankin initially expressed about both men and their country in 1942 and 1943 when, for the first time in her life, she felt like writing a "helpful" book.

My idea was to try . . . to use India to hang my ideas of a peace organization in the U.S. on. As I have worked on the idea I have thought out several chapters. . . . For instance, one on what war is, then one on war in an economy of scarcity and in an economy of plenty, and the effect of scarcity of money, etc. And then in simple, straightforward language discuss neutrality as practised in this war and the necessity for a crystallized public opinion to create a state of neutrality, and another chapter on the possibilities of defending America, and another on new education for a military establishment for defense only. Comparing Gandhi's organization with the possibility of organization in a country like the United States would make an interesting chapter on how to organize.<sup>48</sup>

Aside from supporting nationalism in India, her most strongly held foreign policy opinion during the course of World War II concerned China. In contrast to FDR, who took every occasion to insist that China was a major, stable ally, she correctly suspected that Chiang Kai-shek often played off the best interests of his own people to further his own. Rankin also firmly believed that the "Big Three" allied powers (England, America and the Soviet Union) should remove their troops from the Far East as soon as possible, because in the long run they would be "just as willing to sacrifice China as they are Japan and India—we must have Asia for the Asiatics."<sup>49</sup> Only then did she believe

that peace could come to that part of the world. Following the end of World War II, Rankin did not articulate clear positions in public or private on foreign policy events until Vietnam. There are only passing references in her papers, for example, to the Korean conflict and the Cuban missile crisis.

In the last half of the 1940s she did some ranching in Montana, cared for her mother, who died in 1947, remodeled a second spartan house in Georgia and, most important, began to travel extensively abroad to study pacifist methods in other countries. These travels began in 1945 with a short trip to Mexico and then a world tour in 1946 which took her to India for the first of seven visits. She returned in 1949, 1951, 1956, 1959-1960, 1962, and for a last time in 1970-1971. She also traveled to Africa and Indonesia in 1953, South America in 1956, Ireland, Russia, and Turkey in 1962, Mexico in 1965, and Czechoslovakia in 1969. "I traveled around the world," she laconically explained in a 1972 interview, "and stayed long enough to know how the Americans were dominating under-developed countries."<sup>50</sup>

Once the Vietnamese conflict escalated she gave serious consideration to the idea of running for the House again, telling a close Montana friend and former associate in 1968 that she "wanted to go back to Congress to vote against a third war."<sup>51</sup> Given her checkered voting record following World War II, one can only speculate about which party she would have chosen to affiliate had illness not prevented her from running once again for Congress at the age of 88.

Rankin's intense dislike of FDR's foreign policy led her to support the candidacy of General Douglas MacArthur in 1944 on the grounds that he would give new life to the peace movement by rallying all the antiwar forces in the country. She justified this choice to her former boss and NCPW associate Frederick Libby by saying: "The peace movement must become a war movement before we can direct progress." Dumbfounded, Libby replied that he emphatically disagreed with her "catastrophic theory of progress."<sup>52</sup> In 1952 she expressed the opinion that voters really had no choice. She wrote her family from India that year indicating that although she was intrigued by her brother's support of Dwight D. Eisenhower, she was glad that

50. JR: UCB Oral History, p. 12.

51. Conversation with Judge Frances C. Elge, March 1, 1977.

52. JR to Libby, May 5, 1944, Libby to JR, May 17, 1944, NCPW: JR Correspondence.

53. JR to family, Folder 9, Box 1, especially May 29, July 19, August 1, 18, 30, September 3, October 1, 17, 25, 1952, February 21, 1953 (first quote); Ed Sanders interview of Rankin (on tape), February 19, 1971, Reel 2, Box 12, all in Rankin Papers; Great Falls Tribune, October 5, 1959 [second quote]; JR to Yarrow, January 20, 1953, December 14, 1956, December 16, 1961, Yarrow Papers; JR to Surles, June 31, 1961, November 6, 1962, Surles Papers.

54. Quotes from Harris, "Jeannette Rankin," p. 324; Merv Griffin interview of Rankin (on tape), February 18, 1971 and Sanders interview, Reel 2, Box 12, Rankin Papers; Kirkley, "Afternoon with Rankin," in JR: UCB Oral History, p. 150.

47. JR to Harry P. Harrison and Mrs. K.K. Spriggs, June 11, 1943, Folder 167, Box 9, Rankin Papers.

48. JR to Ralph B. Baerman, June 11, 1943, Folder 167, Box 9, Rankin Papers. Although she did not write this book, her letters continue to contain many positive references to Gandhi's peace methods and to Nehru (whom she met in 1946). See: JR to Surles, January 1, 1947, Surles Papers; JR to Yarrow, January 20, 1953, Yarrow Papers; JR to family, 1952-53, especially May 29, June 1, October 1, 1952, Folder 9, Box 1, Rankin Papers; transcribed interview of JR by Hannah Josephson, JR: UCB Oral History, pp. 226-230.

49. JR to Yarrow, November 30, 1944 (quote), January 20, 1953, Yarrow Papers; JR to Libby, November 10, 1948, December 13, 1950, Folder VII, Box 68, NCPW: JR Correspondence; Great Falls Tribune, June 3, 1951; JR to Surles, June 6, 1961, November 6, 1962, Surles Papers; Harris, "Jeannette Rankin," pp. 311-26.



Rankin during the postwar years: above, speaking in India in 1949; above left, on her Montana ranch in 1952; below left, as she appeared in the late 1960s.

she was not home because she might express a grudge against Ike for being a military man and thus "spoil Wellington's pleasure." By 1956, however, she had changed her mind about Eisenhower because he had ended the Korean War and seemed to be committed to preventing future conflicts. Since "Nixon has been the closest to Eisenhower and therefore knows the most about avoiding war," she supported him in 1960, expressing vague, undefined suspicions about the "young" John F. Kennedy.<sup>53</sup>

Because Lyndon Johnson was so identified in Rankin's mind with FDR, she voted for Barry Goldwater in 1964. Again, for unstated reasons, she considered Johnson more militaristic than Goldwater, who she appeared to think could not possibly be as reactionary as he had been portrayed by the Democrats. No longer harboring any illusions about Richard Nixon's ability to control the

military-industrial complex, and still suspicious of the war-mongering history of the Democrats, she apparently voted for Nixon in 1968, but this is not confirmed. Her first choice had been Eugene McCarthy because "he is the only candidate who recognize[s] the influence of the military on our political situations." For some reason she believed that "the military [had] selected Humphrey as its candidate" and so she was left by this process of elimination with Nixon. When he did not immediately end the war in Vietnam, she accelerated her participation in antiwar demonstrations and by 1972 was a staunch supporter of the George McGovern campaign. By this time, however, Rankin privately insisted that there was no difference between the two major parties and that she had never voted for a presidential candidate of whom she had entirely approved since women won the suffrage in 1920—except for Norman Thomas!<sup>54</sup>



## Her Last Protest

Her final protest against war would not, therefore, be as a Congresswoman, but as an antiwar demonstrator. She had become a national symbol of the peace movement once again with the formation of the Jeannette Rankin Brigade in 1967. The years 1967-1973 were travel years for Rankin. In 1972 alone she crisscrossed the country several times, including once by car, in the company of John Kirkley, a young man who served as her traveling companion in these last years. One of the high points of all these personal appearances and television interviews came on January 15, 1968, when a coalition of 5,000 women under the banner of the Jeannette Rankin Brigade demonstrated against the war. Although the demonstration itself was peaceful, the Brigade later brought suit against the Capitol Police for not allowing them to march on to the Capitol grounds. In 1972 the Supreme Court ruled that the Brigade women indeed had been denied their First Amendment rights under an 1882 law forbidding all kinds of demonstrations on Capitol grounds. This decision now makes peaceful demonstrations possible in that area of Washington, D.C.<sup>55</sup>

It was a rather incongruous amalgamation of feminists, pacifists, hippies, rock bands, antiwar students and assorted radicals who coalesced around this tiny, old lady from Montana toward the end of her life. Never did she appear more happy or fulfilled, despite complaints from women friends of her age that she was being misled and exploited by a number of these various groups and individuals. She also revived her proposals for multiple-member Congressional districts and direct preferential election of Presidents. Rankin campaigned as vigorously for these domestic political reforms as she did for an end to war.<sup>56</sup>

Despite this public adulation by members of the peace and counter-cultural movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s (or perhaps because of it) Rankin privately expressed disillusionment with her life-long struggle for a world without war. "It's hard to push and push and push and never get anywhere," she told Norma Smith on April 10, 1971. In 1972 she privately noted that "The Peace movement just talks to itself." Moreover, she did not leave any money in her will to peace institutions or groups of any kind.<sup>57</sup> Publicly, she

never let these indications of private doubts surface, but they were there nonetheless.

And so her long career ended as it had begun amidst a flurry of travel, public appearances, and extravagant statements about immediate withdrawal of troops from Vietnam and unilateral disarmament by the United States. Jeannette Rankin's pacifism was anything but passive, static, or moderate. Yet it was also not very sophisticated, as she herself apparently realized toward the end. It was one thing to have kept on the go and to have captured the limelight several times in one's life. It was entirely another matter to effect change. Hence the meaning of Rankin's life and foreign policy was more symbolic than practical. One California junior college professor summed up her importance to him in this way in 1971:

Miss Rankin, I am much impressed by the fact that you have not lost sight of what really matters in life. You have never fallen prey to all of the nonsense which parades as truth. You are an idealist, an independent, a fighter—a woman of deep conviction, rare courage, and unquestionable honesty....

What delights me about you, Miss Rankin, is that unlike many others who are also concerned with improving and enhancing the quality of life, you are very much aware that there are no enchanted isles to take refuge on; that maybe man will destroy himself within the next few years with the bomb, but as long as there is life there is hope that he will avoid this possibility. You realize, as few others do, that man has a splendid future before him if he does not foolishly end it now. The main point, I would suggest, is that rather than resigning yourself to things as they are or lamenting the tragic condition of mankind, you are working for the kinds of social reforms which are needed if we are to revitalize our nation and its institutions. If mankind can be saved, it will be saved by people feeling and thinking and acting exactly as you are....

Miss Rankin, your determined efforts to end the war in Vietnam and bring peace to the world, have rekindled in so many of us, a profound sense of faith and hope; your

55. Untranscribed conversations between Kirkley and Rankin, April 5, May 19-24, 1972, Reel 3, Box 12; Jeannette Rankin Brigade material, Folder 198, Box 12, all in Rankin Papers.

56. January, 1977 conversation with Norma Smith; Shulamith Firestone, "The Jeannette Rankin Brigade: Woman Power?" *Notes From The First Year: 1968*; JR to editor of the *Athens Banner-Herald* and *Athens Daily News*, November 12, 1971, JR to House to Senate of Georgia, October, 1971, Kirkley and Rankin, "Case for Direct Preferential Vote for President," n.d. [probably 1972], Ralph Nader, "Jeannette Rankin—Pioneer Congresswoman," *The Capital Times*, September 11, 1972, all in JR: UCB Oral History, pp. 156-59, 163, 173.

57. Quotes are from Smith's unpublished biography of JR. Rankin once told an interviewer that the era in which she would have most liked to live would have been during the American Revolution. See: 1963 Board interview with JR, p. 60. While she refused to pay the tax on her telephone bill as a way of protesting the war she continued to hold stock in such companies that produced modern weapons of war as Boeing. See: financial folders 14, 15, Box 1, and 199, Box 12, Rankin Papers.

58. Jeffrey M. Elliot to JR, July 19, 1971, Folder 186, Box 11, Rankin Papers.

59. Elsie Boulding, *The Underside of History: A View of Women Through Time* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1976), p. 657. Rankin once used very similar terms in a radio address on December 2, 1929 saying: "Women are house keepers. Government is house keeping for the nation." Folder X, Box 65, NCPW.



Rankin addresses an antiwar rally in 1970.

work on behalf of a better world, one free from hunger, poverty, racism, illiteracy, disease, overpopulation, and war, has done wonders to help mobilize the great moral and spiritual resources of people everywhere. As a gallant warrior for peace and justice, a woman troubled by the tragic social ills which blight the mind and spirit of man, you give us reason to believe in the future of America. It is on your ways that nations should be built, on truth first and freedom always.<sup>58</sup>

This junior college professor was twenty-four in 1971; Rankin was ninety-two. Perhaps the difference in their ages is the key to her symbolic significance. She was a member of a generation of

women who, like Jane Addams, believed in a global society of peace at the turn of the century—one they conceived of “in terms of community and world housekeeping.”<sup>59</sup> There has probably never been such an influential generation of American female pacifists. In retrospect it is obvious that their humanitarian goals far exceeded their means for achieving them. Nonetheless, they remain a source of inspiration, hope, and even yearning because theirs was a time when peace was perhaps more a reality than it can ever be in an age of escalating nuclear arms.

Montanans can be justly proud of Jeannette Rankin's contribution to this impressive group of women reformers—she added a unique and important western combination of common sense and idealism. *AM*

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*This concludes Joan Hoff Wilson's study of Jeannette Rankin and American foreign policy. A Professor of History at Arizona State University and currently a Fellow of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., Wilson is a student of American foreign policy and feminism. Portions of this article were part of an address delivered by Prof. Wilson at the Montana History Conference in Helena, November 1977.*