The former Presidential candidate for the American Independent Party remarked to The New York Times that he spent his nights reading John T. Flynn. The minority reactionary candidate in the 1972 election was undoubtedly referring to tracts made famous by Flynn in the early 1950’s, from the million seller The Road Ahead, condensed by the Reader’s Digest, to the McCarthyite diatribe, The Lattimore Story.

But to judge John T. Flynn by his last and most unrepresentative writings is akin to evaluating the work of Wilhelm Reich by concentrating only on his development of the mystical Orgone Energy theory advanced during his last and most bizarre years. In Flynn’s case, it is a more serious distortion. To treat Flynn as a simple reactionary McCarthyite is to ignore the consistent anti-militarist and anti-imperialist strain always present in Flynn’s writings. Most important, it allows readers to avoid confronting the theme advanced by Flynn in his most important, representative and analytical work, As We Go Marching.

The John T. Flynn one will find in the pages of that work is not the man read today by members of the new Right-wing. Flynn started his career as an economist, as an author of a score of successful books, and as financial columnist for the liberal New Republic since 1933. Writing for them during the days of the New Deal, Flynn’s early admiration for Franklin Roosevelt turned to scorn, as he detected a drift towards corporatism at home and militarism and interventionism abroad.

In a short matter of time, Flynn became preoccupied with the growing drift of the Roosevelt administration towards an interventionist stance. As a result, Flynn became an active participant in the cause to keep the United
States out of war. He was to become leader of the militant New York branch of the America First Committee. This activity isolated Flynn from those he was once close to. At the time when interventionists were calling for defense of European democracy, Flynn was arguing that Germany and Italy threatened not England’s “democracy, but her empire. What they covet is not her soil, but her colonies, not her liberty but her markets.” It would be stupid, he asserted, “for Americans... to permit themselves to be drawn into a war to save England’s empire under the illusion that they are saving her democracy.”

During the last half of 1940, when liberal opinion began to shift towards intervention, New Republic editor Bruce Bliven dismissed Flynn as a columnist for his journal. As of November 1940, Flynn’s caustic anti-war comments had become too controversial to be admitted into the dialogue about America’s future. As Bliven and others supported entrance in a new war, Flynn continued to argue that the world war was one “between empires and about imperialism;” simply another “chapter in the long, age-old struggle of European empires about dividing up the world.” Flynn then made known his opposition to any and all Empires, including “American Empires.” Predicting new deals by the imperialist powers at the war’s end, Flynn stated back in January 1941 that “it is out of this abominable world of imperialism, the scramble for dominion, the fight for trade backed by armies and guns, that I want to keep this great peaceful democratic world of ours.”

Flynn was not to be successful in his effort to avoid intervention in a new imperial conflict. His effort to oppose intervention led instead to lonely political isolation from former associates. Writers like liberal Max Lerner went so far as to note that he had more sympathy with Henry Luce and his concept of an American Century than with anti-war liberals. “I prefer him infinitely,” wrote Lerner, “though our purposes are as far removed as the four corners of the winds, to men like... John Flynn.” Others began to condemn Flynn as pro-Fascist and an appeaser of Nazism. These calumnies only led Flynn to redouble his work to preserve an America that would remain non-imperial and that could maintain a prosperous economy without recourse to war.

It was the wartime experience, and the growth of decision-making in foreign policy by a small elite, that led Flynn to show concern about the erosion of the basis of popular government. A long opponent of fascism, Flynn first developed his line of argument about domestic fascist tendencies in 1943. The United States, he argued in a speech presented that year, was “little by little adopting first one and then another policy that is beginning to make us look more like a National Socialist government than a democracy.” Blaming fascism in Germany on the “old social democratic and republican govern-
ments that preceded” Hitler, Flynn argued that these regimes had “developed and cultivated all of the essential elements of Fascism.” These included corporatism; “The organization of the economic society as a planned economy under the supervision of the State”; a “Planned Consumption Economy”; “Militarism as an economic Weapon”; “Imperialism,” and finally “Dictatorship.”

All these characteristics, he claimed, had been developed in Italy and Germany by civilian leaders. The old German Weimar Republic had engaged in planned consumption, and had plunged Germany into debts on top of debts which caused ruinous inflation. They also developed cartelization of industry and government partnership in industry. Under Article 31 of their Constitution, the government had the power to initiate rule by emergency decree. When Hitler took “power all he had to do was to add … the old militarism and imperialism of the Empire” and to consolidate a new strong dictatorship. Flynn’s analysis bore striking resemblance to the explanations put forward by contemporary Marxists like R. Palme Dutt, author of *Fascism and Social Revolution*.

The essence of Fascism, Flynn argued, was not to be found in the ugly and obvious episodes of storm troopers and book burnings. It was in the commonplace elements which existed as well in the United States. In particular, Flynn saw the threat of strong central government and “a plan for blank-check” rule in the efforts of the National Resources Planning Board under Alvin Hansen, which sought to initiate national planning. With F.D.R.’s third term, Flynn warned, the New Deal was “forging the last link in the chain of American national socialism.”

At a time when American soldiers were fighting Hitler’s armies in Europe, an attack on President Roosevelt for harboring Fascist tendencies was not warmly received in the United States. Yet Flynn’s analysis was given some positive attention by individuals who were not part of the Right-wing Socialist Party chieftain Norman Thomas, for one, was highly impressed. “In the most effective possible fashion,” he wrote Flynn on August 31, 1943, “you have made a very strong case.” Thomas thought that Flynn had “dismissed some of the side-show features of fascism a little more summarily than I would.” He also disagreed with Flynn’s “negative” view that “the world drifts to fascism anyhow through processes which private capitalism has accepted to its own hurt.” Thomas, of course, saw “an alternative to fascism” but believed it could not “be a return to private capitalism that has steadily evolved toward the present situation.” Yet the Socialist leader informed Flynn that he had “quoted your definition of fascism in a footnote in my own book.”

Flynn was trying to warn Americans of a basic point—that the seeds of
fascism lay within the United States; and they could not be eradicated merely by winning the fight against Nazi armies abroad. Sensing the need to elaborate upon this theme, Flynn wrote what was to be his most important book. Until publication of this paperback volume, *As We Go Marching* has remained neglected and relatively unknown. Yet it was Flynn’s most informed and perceptive contribution to discussion about the nature of American society. Its purpose, he explained, was to define the meaning of fascism and “then to search for its elements in America.”

Flynn would find that few would understand his intention in writing it. Because he had opposed U.S. entrance into World War II, he was forever tainted with the label of “appeasement.” When he appeared to speak at the University of Illinois in Urbana in May 1944, thirty members of the faculty and student body protested against his appearance, “on the ground that he was anti-semitic, that he had trafficked with seditionists, was pro-fascist and that it was not good for the war effort to have him there.”

Despite the opposition Flynn faced from those apparently on the political Left, his arguments bore close resemblance to Marxist arguments about the nature of fascism. The contents of his book would give scant comfort to those on the Right—who themselves were so blinded by anti-Communism that they often acquiesced in fascist efforts of repression. Flynn, after all, was attempting to battle against the domestic seeds of fascism, which he feared were rapidly developing within his own native land.

It was Statist institutions solidified by the New Deal, he argued, that produced an American version of fascism—a “good” fascism rather than the “bad” kind all Americans detested in Nazi Germany. The elements of fascism had been planted in corporatist institutions such as the N.R.A. People liked the term “planning,” but New Deal planners thought “of a change in our form of society in which the government would insert itself into the structure of business, not merely as a policeman, but as partner, collaborator and banker.” The economy would be planned and coerced rather than free, “in which business would be brought together into great guilds or an immense corporative structure, combining the elements of self-rule and government supervision with a national economic policing system to enforce these decrees.”

These corporatist tendencies reached fruition with the New Deal. World War II further consolidated the new business collectivism, which was based upon “an economy supported by great streams of debt and an economy under complete control, with nearly all the planning agencies functioning with almost totalitarian power under a vast bureaucracy.” The New Deal also tried to extend this system into the realm of foreign affairs. Government
spending was most prolific for military systems. Neither Congress, business or labor found fault with spending for national defense. "Thus militarism," Flynn wrote, "is the one great glamour public-works project upon which a variety of elements in the community can be brought into agreement."

Militarism and war, however, were components of both fascism and imperialism. And both were clearly present within the United States. Flynn, unlike many pro-war liberals, held few illusions about the supposedly unique characteristics of American democracy. He was especially concerned about administration efforts to impose conscription under the guise of "civilian training." There were arguments on behalf of a big army, he wrote Senator Arthur Vandenberg on October 30, 1945, but nations always tried militarism, "supposing it would advance some special objective not necessarily connected with war, only to find that militarism in the end rides the countries. It sets in motion forces and pressures too powerful to be controlled."

Flynn presented Vandenberg with a copy of As We Go Marching, informing him that he "tried to depict the current of pressures and forces that slowly drew Italy and Germany along the road to Fascism." Flynn always felt, he explained, that America "occupied a unique position in the world." It was not only the one remaining non-imperialist nation, but it was "the only great power which did not use its strength for aggression." But now Flynn was growing "even more apprehensive that we may be lured along the road to imperialism—under the pious pretensions and false declarations as to our purposes." Flynn hoped that his letter would "lure" Vandenberg to read his "chapter on American Imperialism." Vandenberg, who was soon to become an arch interventionist and Republican architect of Cold War consensus, obviously learned little from Flynn's chapter—if he ever read it.

For those who did take the time, they found a scathing critique of American foreign policy. America, Flynn maintained, had become an Empire. Like any other Empire, it would not be exempt from the rules of imperial decline. Having gained its wartime goals, the large nations sought only preservation of the status quo. They appealed for support to well-meaning idealists who hoped to create a peaceful world. But their own goal was to build an order "in which they, all leagued together, will preserve a world which they have divided among themselves and in which the combined forces and might of the allied aggressors will hold for each what they have." Imperialism would be disguised under "phrases of benevolence and as a dream of world peace."

Thus, Flynn predicted, Americans "will do what other countries have done. We will keep alive the fears of our people of the aggressive ambitions of other countries and we will ourselves embark upon imperialistic enterprises of our
own.” There was no doubt that the germs of a vigorous imperialism are here among us . . . the moral germs. And if the economic problems of the nation should seem . . . to lead us off into some imperialist adventures, the moral support of such ventures will not be lacking.”

America, he noted, had “managed to acquire bases all over the world.” There was “no part of the world where trouble can break out where we do not have bases of some sort in which . . . we cannot claim our interests are menaced. Thus menaced there must remain when the war is over a continuing argument in the hands of the imperialists for a vast naval establishment and a huge army to attack anywhere or to resist an attack from all the enemies we shall be obliged to have. . . . We must have enemies,” Flynn added sarcastically, “they will become an economic necessity for us.”

Hence the ingredients for fascism were present at home. Public debt-supported autarchy had to be operated by a totalitarian government. America was moving in that direction. Centralized power was growing stronger as more of it became concentrated in the Executive branch of Government. “Despite many differences in the character, customs, laws, traditions, resources of the people of Italy, Germany and America,” Flynn wrote, “we have been drifting along identical courses and under the influence of the same essential forces.” Free enterprise and constitutional government had been eroded, and a new Statist capitalism had replaced it. Flynn warned that “the test of fascism is not one’s rage against the Italian and German war lords.”

The test is—how many of the essential principles of fascism do you accept and to what extent are you prepared to apply those fascist ideas to American social and economic life? When you can put your finger on the men or groups that urge for America the debt-supported state, the autarchical corporative state, the state bent on the socialization of investment and the bureaucratic government of industry and society, the establishment of the institution of militarism . . . and the institution of imperialism under which it proposes to regulate and rule the world . . . and proposes to alter the forms of our government to approach . . . absolute government—then you will know you have located the authentic fascist.

The American fascist was an individual who believed in “marshalling great armies and navies at crushing costs to support the industry of war and preparation for war which will become our greatest industry,” all conducted under “a powerfully centralized government in which the executive will hold in effect all the powers with Congress reduced to the role of a debating society.”
Flynn's prototype American fascist was not a thug in brownshirt or SS uniform; it was the American statesman who sought to erode the people's power in Congress and to concentrate undue authority in the hands of the President. Flynn warned against militarism and imperialism; yet his cry for constitutional government was to become purely a rallying cry for the Right-wing in American life. Liberals then defended the tradition of Presidential power, which was conceived as the repository of all virtue in political life.

As Flynn surveyed the emerging post-war world, he concluded that his worst fears had come to pass. His concern about autocratic Presidential power being exercised against Congress, and his fear that imperial germs would develop to escape domestic economic problems, colored his response to Harry S. Truman's Korean intervention. While liberals were beating the interventionist drums, and arguing that a strong stand would defeat communism in Asia and advance democracy at the same time, Flynn was pointing out that war production was producing what the President "calls great prosperity." It was not, Flynn argued on June 18, 1950, a "natural prosperity." Given a choice between risking war or facing "the danger of a frightful economic collapse in this country," Flynn assumed that American political leaders would choose war, which was "politically safe." Economic collapse would ruin those responsible; while war would cause the populace to "rally around" those who caused it.

As to Truman's assertion that the Korean War was a "police action," Flynn asserted boldly that "the first casualty of war is Truth," and that a myth had been perpetrated to gain a legal excuse to justify Truman's refusal to go before Congress and ask for a declaration of war. He had no right to send in American troops, Flynn argued on July 16, because "in the Korean case, we were not attacked."

Viewing the conflict as a "civil war," Flynn warned Americans against being influenced by "warriors infatuated with war." He asked, at a time when all most Americans heard was propaganda advocating defeat of Communist aggression via military victory, "what can possibly be gained from victory?" And he urged that Americans find a way to "disentangle ourselves from these grim and tragic necessities." Unlike the liberals who supported the Truman intervention, Flynn called the depiction of the war as a United Nations action nothing but a "pathetic comic opera." Trying to give an American war a UN cover was a "supine sham." And Flynn worried that "hotheads" would try to use Korea "as a jumping off place into a wider and longer struggle somewhere else."

That place turned out to be Indo-china. And it was in early 1951 that
Flynn first warned that "ahead of us lie more Koreas. We could be at war in Indo-China," he stressed. If the U.S. won or lost, "the price would be appalling." In the context of increasing United States imperial penetration of Asia, John T. Flynn cogently and calmly applied the logic of *As We Go Marching* to post-war developments.

American leaders, he stated on September 15, 1953, were "borrowing from Fascism." That doctrine's popularity among liberal intellectuals was not unique. Flynn listed the many notables who once had been admirers of Benito Mussolini. He included in his list former Columbia University President Nicholas Murray Butler, Congressman Sol Bloom, diplomat Richard Washburn Child and financier Thomas W. Lamont. Fascism was popular because it promised jobs and security through the technique of spending large amounts of money, to be raised by taxes and government borrowing. The money was then to be spent on arms production.

Mussolini, Flynn continued, had initiated "a kind of statism in which the government should be responsible for the material welfare of the people." Flynn would have called it socialism, but he noted that Mussolini called it fascism because that "didn't have a bad name." Yet the only new industry that kept Italy prosperous was "militarism and war." By 1937 Mussolini was spending 37 billion lire on the armed forces. Now Americans, Flynn noted, were emulating Mussolini. Since 1939 America had been floating on government military spending. The lesson to be learned was that in Italy such a path led only to war.

In June of 1954, Flynn accused the Eisenhower administration of "seriously thinking of leading the United States into another war with Asia." Eisenhower was contemplating such a course, Flynn thought, because he faced "the same trap that President Roosevelt" faced in 1939. In times of economic depression, only war saved the nation from unemployment. Since 1941, Flynn sadly reported, America had "been living on the big business of war."

Without a new war to maintain prosperity, the 1950's business boom would collapse. Eisenhower had been unable to find any substitute "for war to keep fifteen or sixteen millions employed." The national debt was up to 274 billion dollars, and the government was spending two billion per month on munitions production. Without a new war, that business would drop. War spending could not be stepped up "if you don't have a war." It was a fact, Flynn insisted, that "war has become the basis of the prosperity of the United States." The domestic cost was the "slavery of militarism for millions of young men," increased debts piled upon debts, high wages and prices, and continuing spiraling inflation.
It was the expression of such views that soon showed Flynn that he was not to be a welcome member in the ranks of the new Right-wing. On October 22, 1956, William F. Buckley Jr. rejected an undated article submitted to *The National Review* by Flynn. In the piece, Flynn had repeated his fondest arguments. Militarism, he wrote, was a “job-making boondoggle.” Its purpose was not to defend, but was to bolster “the economic system with jobs for soldiers and jobs and profits in the munitions plants.” Presenting figures for military spending between 1939 and 1954, Flynn argued that there was no “authentic ‘center’ with a socialist sector and a capitalist sector on either side” of the economy. There existed only the “racket” of military spending “with the soldier-politician in the middle—unaware of the hell-broth of war, taxes and debt.” Flynn protested that the administration was spending $66 billion per year, most going for defense and only a “small fraction” spent on “the legitimate functions of government. The biggest item is on so-called ‘national security.’”

Flynn’s piece was rejected by Buckley on the grounds that its author did not understand the nature of the Soviet military threat—just as Bliven and the 1930 liberals had rejected his arguments because he did not perceive the supposed nature of the Nazi military threat to America’s security. In both cases, Flynn remained true to the analysis put forth most clearly in *As We Go Marching*. The threat was not abroad; it was internal. It was not Soviet Communism that menaced America—it was the Statism at home and the growth of domestic fascist trends, all based upon dependency on war production for attainment of domestic prosperity.

Hence John T. Flynn ended his public career isolated from both the New Right and the Old Left. Liberals and the Left, he thought, had long ago deserted anti-imperialism on behalf of an effort to build a liberal American Empire. Now, in the name of conservatism, a new American Right was propagating globalism and perpetual intervention abroad. Removed from all sides of the Cold War consensus, John T. Flynn continued to point out—to the few who would listen—that the real threat was the militarism and fascism within ourselves. Those who now read *As We Go Marching* will have the opportunity to confront for themselves his most forceful exposition of this theme.

August, 1973
Author's Note

This book is divided into three parts. One is about Italy, another about Germany, a third about the United States. But actually the book from beginning to end is about the United States. It has to do with the direction in which America has been drifting and in which she now moves with accelerated pace under the drive of war. When the war ends, in what direction will she go? Toward socialism or fascism? Or into some heroic struggle to reinstate the capitalist society? What socialism is, is fairly well understood. But this is not true of fascism. And we cannot have an intelligent answer to this question unless we know precisely what fascism is.

This book is about fascism in America. The fascism of Italy and Germany is examined because that is the only way in which we can decide what fascism is. Having examined it in Italy and Germany, not to tell again the oft-told story of Hitler and Mussolini but to isolate the essential ingredients of fascism, we will be in a position to put our own society under the glass to determine whether any or all of those essential ingredients are here.

Books about Mussolini and Hitler are countless. Mostly they deal with the foreign aggressions of these men and the brutalities with which they maintain their regimes at home. Those offering a sober analysis of the whole structure of the societies they have built are not nearly so numerous. I have, I believe, examined patiently all or nearly all of these volumes. I have treated them as the testimony of
witnesses and I have sought to study, to sift, and to arrange these testimonies in order to make the picture as clear as possible, so that the reader may himself apply the tests to his own or any other country to identify there the fascist state or partisan.

The European war may end quickly. But we must not make the mistake of supposing that because Mussolini has been unhorsed or that when Hitler is finally destroyed this will mark the end of fascism or national socialism in Italy or Germany. Fascism, as we shall see, is nothing else than an expansion of forces and techniques in government which have been developing in Europe for decades. It is something we shall have to fight for many years to come—long after the war is over—here as everywhere. We are not fighting fascism when we fight anti-Semitism. They are quite different evils though they may be found together. We probably shall see men set about the impossible task of purging fascism of its ugly features, cleaning it up, offering us a polite, religious, democratic fascism. It is a hopeless task. But we cannot have intelligent opinions about the problem today or in the future unless we know first what fascism is. The first objective of this book, therefore, is to define it and then to search for its elements in America.

JOHN T. FLYNN

Bayside, L. I.
October 19, 1943