

# Atlantic Federal Union Movement Began in March 1939

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Before *Union Now* was published—the official publication date was March 2 in New York and March 9 in London—it already had reached the age of five, begging vainly for a publisher. The first manuscript draft of the book was written in the winter of 1933-34 in Geneva, where Clarence Streit had been *The New York Times* correspondent for the past five years, covering the work of the League of Nations. During them he had witnessed and reported their failure to deal effectively with the problems of the Depression and disarmament, and to check Japanese aggression in China. After Hitler came to power in Germany, Streit worked out his proposal for an Atlantic Federal Union as the only way to prevent World War II breaking out in a few years. The book, then entitled, *Thy Freedom*, to emphasize that it proposed union primarily for the sake of each individual's personal liberty, was first submitted for publication 25 years ago in April. When it was rejected by two leading New York publishers, the author withdrew it and re-studied and re-wrote the book. This resulted in a two-volume work, entitled, *For Man's Vast Future*, about half of it was devoted to a history of the American experiments in establishing new government to advance individual freedom from the colonial charters on through the Wilson League.

The manuscript was submitted in the Spring of 1935 and was rejected by various publishers. The author then withdrew it, studied the whole problem anew and re-wrote the book in the Winter of 1935-36. This continued through five Winters, when it had resulted in five manuscript editions and reduction of the book to one volume by the elimination of nearly all the American history. By the Summer of 1938 it had been rejected by all the leading publishers in New York and London to whom it had been submitted.

Meanwhile the author's studies of history and his daily reporting of world events had increasingly convinced him of the soundness and urgency of the book's philosophy and proposal. In those five years (1933-38), he had reported the continued failure of the League to halt Japan's conquest of China, Fascist Italy's conquest of Ethiopia, Nazi German's occupation of the Rhineland in flagrant violation of the Locarno Treaty and its annexation of Austria. The League's World Disarmament Conference had died a lingering death in those five years, as had the efforts for European Union which Briand had begun. Meanwhile unemployment remained high and world trade low, despite (or rather because of) all the nationalistic measures to improve them.

The author decided in July, 1938, that if the book did not find a publisher by August 15 of that year he would print it himself and give it to leaders around the Atlantic to get the proposal before

them. For he believed that World War II would begin in August or September, 1939, if the Atlantic democracies did not meanwhile begin to federate.

No publisher appearing, the work of printing the book in English began in a French village near Geneva. While it was going into type the Czech crisis broke. Within a few days of Munich the manuscript—still going from publisher to publisher—was accepted, almost simultaneously by Harper & Bros. in New York and Jonathan Cape in London. By that time the book—revised in galley proofs to bring home the lessons of the Czech crisis—was already in type. And so the author carried on his plan: he had 300 copies printed and gave them to leaders pending publication of the book in New York and London.

In the heat of the Czech crisis he changed the title to *Union Now*, to tell in two short words the gist of the proposal and its urgency.

Thanks to the ever-worsening world situation, the private edition, and such helpful readers of it as the late Lord Lothian, Lionel Curtis and Wickham Steed in Britain and Frank Aydelotte, Russell Davenport, Edwin L. James, Dorothy Thompson, and many others in the U.S., *Union Now* proved a remarkably rapid publishing success when it finally reached the public...with only 6 months left to prevent the war.

At the invitation of President Aydelotte of Swarthmore College, Streit made the first public statement of the book's proposal and philosophy in a series of three Cooper Foundation Lectures on the campus. The first was on Feb. 9, followed later that night by a 13-minute broadcast over the CBS national network arranged by Sterling Fisher and Helen Sioussat, and a column report next day in *The New York Times*. The resulting demand lead Harpers to release *Union Now* in the eastern cities a fortnight before the national publication date, March 2. It was thus already moving fast before it was officially born. March 2 was marked by another nation-wide broadcast of the idea by the author, this time over the Mutual System; like the previous one, it ended with an "invitation" to join in a "great adventure"—an invitation that met with wide response...and still stands.

More history was made on March 9—the publication date in London. That night *Union Now* was the subject of the first transatlantic radio debate ever held. It was over two great networks, the NBC in America and the BBC in Britain. It was sponsored by George V. Denny and his Town Meeting of the Air. Wickham Steed, former editor of the London *Times*, spoke from London and Streit in New York for Atlantic Union. The negative was upheld in New York by Dorothy Detzer and columnist George Sokolsky. (The latter recently gave his support to the case he long opposed.) The meeting was a tumultuous one, with many shouts, pro and con, from the New York audience.

Meanwhile a group in Washington, D.C. led by Melvin Ryder, now publisher of *Army Times* and other periodicals in the U.S. and Europe, and present chairman of Federal Union, Inc., set up the Union Press under the management of Thomas K. Streit, the author's younger brother. Late in March it brought out the first issue of the *Union Now Bulletin* an 8-page monthly. (Later called *Federal Union World*, it continued until 1946 when FREEDOM & UNION replaced it.) On

March 15 Hitler had knocked the bottom out of Munich by taking over Czechoslovakia, and the first *Bulletin's* editorial drove home the lesson.

Among the letters which the Feb. 9<sup>th</sup> broadcast brought the author was one written that very night by R. Frazier Potts, a young businessman in New York City. In it he wrote:

"Your notion of Union of the Atlantic Democracies is new to me, although your basic reasoning, offering some practical form of union and abandonment of the anachronism of national sovereignty as the next major step in world's progress is not. Your proposals are inspiring; your talk has left me in a fever of desire to share in an organized effort to bring about this union of which you have spoken. In what better cause could a man enlist today? Like you, I have spent many years in other countries and have come to detest the stupid fallacies, lack of vision and the inertia which rob us all so much that could easily be had...When you are in New York I want to talk to you about what is to be done."

A report by Mr. Potts in the April *Bulletin* on how this led to the organization in New York City on March 28 of the first committee to work for the plan is reproduced on page 12. Others who led in organizing this committee include Mrs. Mildred Riorden Blake, Mrs. Ethel Johnston Kelly, Mrs. Wilson Powell, William Blake, Tom Griessemer, William Huntington, Gano Lightfoot, Vernon Nash, Roy Potts, etc.

March also heard the first sermon preached on *Union Now*; it was by the late Rev. A. Powell Davies at the Community Church in Summit, N.J., and led soon to the formation of a local committee there. There had been inserted in each copy of *Union Now* a postcard which anyone who favored its plan and wished to work for it could sign and mail the author. Early in March he received one of these cards; it was signed by Col. J.W. Worthington, Fort George Mead. Thereafter, they arrived in increasing numbers every day, and led to other committees all over the U.S.A.

At the same time, Lionel Curtis, Lord Lothian and others had been sending advance copies of the English edition to their friends throughout the British Commonwealth —by air to the Union of South Africa and other places served by plane. Before March was out, the author was receiving enthusiastic letters not only from the British Isles and Europe, but from Cape Town, Calcutta, Tokyo, Australia—and soon committees were being started in places as distant as Buenos Aires and New Zealand.

The mounting correspondence and requests for talks led Streit to request and get a leave of absence from *The New York Times* for a few weeks, and then a year, and then to resign so he could continue to devote all his time to the "great adventure" as long as necessary. One March week saw him addressing on the 17<sup>th</sup> the Council on Foreign Relations in Des Moines, Iowa; appearing the 19<sup>th</sup> in New York on CBS "Peoples Platform" with his old friend and supporter, Dr. James T. Shotwell; speaking to another group the 20<sup>th</sup> in Washington, D.C.; and on the 22<sup>nd</sup> in New York addressing at lunch the League of Nations Association and at night at the banquet of a thousand members of the Security Dealers Association, sharing the platform with Justice William Douglas, then chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Thus did the movement for Atlantic Union begin 20 years ago, on the brink of World War II.