

---

# Hold Fast to Real Patriotism!

by Robert M. LaFollette

An editorial in *LaFollette's Magazine* [Madison, WI], v. 8, no. 5 (May 1916), pg. 2.

The sober, non-jingo people of this republic will generally agree that we would only be justified in engaging in war when necessary to defend substantial and indisputable rights, preserve our liberty, or repel invasion. Wars of conquest or aggression may accord with a policy of imperialism, but they have no place in the fulfillment of the destiny of a democracy.

We have a republican form of government. Our liberty is not threatened by a foreign foe. In crucial times in our nation's history, the American people have not failed. The Revolutionary War was fought by volunteers. It did not take long for the enlisted men of the Civil War to become veterans.

Lack of readiness is not our peril. Our immediate danger lies in the possibility that we may be swept from our moorings by the tide of sentiment that, under the guise of patriotism, is actually based on commercial greed.

Frederic C. Howe in his very able work *Why War?* points out that foreign loans and investments have been the prime cause of war for the past 30 years. When capital has exploited its home country, when its profits have become so great as to depress interest rates, then it goes abroad for investment into countries whose resources have not yet been exploited, where the demand for capital is strongest and interest rates are very high.

The weaker nations, the smaller countries, the unexplored and unexploited countries, offer the most tempting opportunities and the largest

profits.

But in such countries the governments are weak, investments insecure; hence capital has invented the new doctrine that the "flag follows business" and that the country must defend the financial interests of its citizens abroad. This is capital's new test of "patriotism." This doctrine, which originated in England and spread over Europe, was adopted as a policy in this country under the last two Republican administrations when the sordid influence of "dollar diplomacy" ruled in the State Department. It has involved us in trouble in Haiti. It has discredited us in Guatemala. It is back of the demands for intervention in Mexico. It is a prostitution of patriotism that would tax the people of a nation hundreds of millions of dollars and send our soldiers to sacrifice their lives for the purpose of insuring exorbitant profits for speculators in foreign investments and foreign loans.

Are not the same impelling motives back of the money power today?

When great loans and investments and munition profits are dependent on the outcome of the European war, it is not inevitable that the Morgan interests, in combination with the munition traders, will employ every agency at their command to create war scares and build sentiment for a big Army and a big Navy which will extend their markets and protect their loans and investments?

It is likewise inevitable that these powerful

forces should decry all propositions for peace and seek to undermine the substance and pervert the spirit of our neutrality.

When so much of the world has gone war mad the first patriotic duty of this nation is to preserve our impartiality; hold fast to our friendships. Our neutrality is a contribution of tremendous value to the world's future. If we pass through this crisis without becoming embroiled, without exhausting our vitality and resources, we shall have rendered a great and lasting service. We shall have demonstrated that national security is not dependent on military superiority, that the European system of rival armaments for preserving peace is a delusion. We shall have made it clear to all mankind that imperialism is a menace and that democracy stands for peace.

And above all, let us maintain a true standard of patriotism.

Let us protest against the cowardly doctrine of capital that it is the office of government to guarantee the investments of individuals or syndicates in foreign countries!

Let us insist that the Army and Navy under our flag shall not be degraded to the mean service of doing police duty for financial speculators who would rob and despoil the weaker nations of the world.

*Robert M. LaFollette.*

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

*Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2007. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.*