

HOOVER and the BONUS ARMY

*(an excerpt from a longer article by
President Herbert Hoover)*

Probably the greatest tactic of all used against me was the distortion of the story of the Bonus March on Washington in July, 1932, when about 11,000 supposed veterans congregated to urge Congress to pay a deferred war bonus in cash instead of over a period of years.

The Democratic leaders did not organize the Bonus March nor conduct the ensuing riots. But the Democratic organization seized on this incident with great avidity. Almost every Democratic speaker in the 1932 campaign implied that I had murdered veterans on the streets of Washington.

The story was kept alive for 20 years. I therefore deal with it at greater length than otherwise warranted. As abundantly proved later on, the march was largely organized and promoted by the Communists, and included a large number of hoodlums and ex-convicts bent on raising a public disturbance. They were frequently addressed by Democratic congressmen seeking to inflame them against me for my opposition to the bonus legislation, and were given financial support by some publishers of the sensational press.

When it was evident that no legislation would be passed by Congress, I asked the chairmen of the Congressional committees to appropriate funds for tickets home for the legitimate veterans. This was done, and some 6,000 availed themselves of it, leaving about 5,000. Through government agencies we obtained the names of upwards of 2,000 of those remaining, and found that less than one third of these had ever served in the Army and that over 900 of this sampling were ex-convicts and Communists.

Some old buildings on Pennsylvania Avenue had been occupied by some marchers. These buildings stood in the way of construction work going on (as an aid to District employment). On July 28th Treasury officials, through the police, requested some 50 marchers to move to other quarters, whereupon more than 1,000 other bonus marchers converged from their camps outside the city armed with clubs. They made an organized attack on the police. In the melee, Police Commissioner Glassford failed to organize his men. Several were surrounded by the mob and beaten up. Two of them, beaten to the ground, fired to protect their lives and killed two marchers. Many policemen were injured.

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The District commissioners, at Glassford's urging, appealed to me. They declared that they could not preserve order in the capital, that the police were greatly outnumbered, and were being overwhelmed. With the same right of call on me as municipalities have on the governor of any state, they asked military assistance to restore order. At my direction to Secretary of War Hurley, he directed General Douglas MacArthur to take charge. He in turn placed Major (now General) Dwight Eisenhower in immediate command. The situation was cleaned up without the firing of a shot or injury to a single person.

Certain of my orders to the Secretary of War, however, were not carried out. Those orders limited action to seeing to it that the disturbing factions returned to their camps outside the business district. I did not wish them driven from their camps, as I proposed that next day we would surround the camps and determine more accurately the Communists and ex-convicts among the campers. Our military officers, however, having them on the move, pushed them outside the District.

General MacArthur issued his own statement, saying in part:

"That mob . . . was a bad-looking mob. It was animated by the essence of revolution. The gentleness, the consideration with which they had been treated had been mistaken for weakness and they had come to the conclusion, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that they were about to take over in some arbitrary way either the direct control of the government or else to control it by indirect methods . . . I think it can be safely said that (the President) had not only reached the end of an extraordinary patience but that he had gone to the very limit in his desire to avoid friction and trouble before he used force.

". . . I have released in my day more than one community which had been held in the grip of a foreign enemy . . . I have never seen, even in those days, such expression of gratitude as I heard from the crowds today. At least a dozen people told me, especially in the Negro section, that a regular system of tribute was being levied on them by this insurrectionist group; a reign of terror was being started which may have led to a system of Caponeism, and I believe later to insurgency and insurrection."

General Glassford later published a series of articles stating flatly that he had opposed calling out the troops and that he could have handled the situation. The Attorney General took sworn statements from the District commissioners proving that Glassford had implored them that troops be called for.

A large part of the veterans believe to this day that men who served their country in war were shot down in the streets of Washington by the Regular Army at my or-

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ders—yet not a shot was fired or a person injured after the federal government took charge.

And it was I who, as President, provided more for veterans in need than any other President in previous history. And the Roosevelt administration took a large part of it away from them. The following are figures on World War veterans' or dead veterans' dependents regularly receiving either pensions or disability allowances from the federal government. They speak for themselves: Hoover administration: 1930, 376,500; 1931, 628,600; 1932, 840,300; and 1933, 853,800. Roosevelt administration: 1934, 462,900; 1935, 473,500; and 1936, 479,000. The 370,000 veterans forced off the rolls had been there because they were both sick and needy.

Communist Complicity Proved

That the Bonus March was to a considerable degree Communist-organized and managed has become clear beyond a doubt over the years both through investigation some years later by Congressional committees and by the disclosures of repentant Communist leaders who participated in it. Sixteen years later, one of them, Benjamin Gitlow, published a full account in which he gave the details of organization of these "marchers" and of their direction in Washington by a Russian Communist agent operating from a safe hotel room.

Still later an even more ample account of Communist leadership in the march was given by a reformed Communist, John T. Pace. Pace also stated that during the 1932 campaign he was assigned by the Communists to stump the country, attacking us.

Despite repeated refutations, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt as late as July, 1949, repeated the Bonus March lie in McCall's Magazine of that date. When former Secretary of War Hurley demonstrated in the November issue that it was a lie, she made no apology.

Another below-the-belt misrepresentation during the 1932 campaign which was hard to take with urbanity was Roosevelt's referring to my administration's neglect of humane services.

It was, of course, good politics to pound incessantly into the ears of millions of radio listeners, by direct statement and innuendo, the total heartlessness of one's opponent.

In the main, Roosevelt's method was one of implication—by advocating such measures as child-care services, extension of public health measures, slum clearance, abolition of child labor, etc., as new discoveries, then pouring on his "Hoover did nothing" refrain, to make us out as hideous monsters.

It was difficult to answer by factual recitation of my years of efforts in children's

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welfare, housing, slum clearance and other activities.

It would be possible to recite many such misrepresentations by the opposition. The net result of this contributed to my defeat. Many honest men must have believed the charges unreservedly. Defeat would no doubt have taken place anyway. But it might have taken place without such defilement of American life.

The whole Democratic performance was far below the level of any previous campaign in modern times, certainly below the character of the 1928 campaign with Governor Smith.

Secretary Mills, who was a New Yorker, in a memorandum to me just before the 1932 campaign, declared that in contrast to 1928, where Smith and I both practiced morals, this campaign would have no such decency. He warned: "We are faced with a phalanx of lies and misrepresentation."

