

**PROGRESSIVE UTOPIAS AND COLLECTIVIST
NIGHTMARES:
*PHILIP DRU - ADMINISTRATOR***

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One person's Utopia can often be another's idea of hell, and this dichotomy is nowhere more evident than in the case of Philip Dru - Administrator, a novel published by Edward Mandell House in 1912. Philip Dru is a Utopian account of the rise of a super-efficient, corporate, authoritarian state in America during the 1920s. The book neatly encapsulates the visions of many contemporary Progressives, but its greatest importance lies in its use by those who hated (and still hate) House and all he stood for. Though it is nothing like as well known as 1984 or Brave New World, there are many, particularly on the far right, for whom Philip Dru epitomizes social and intellectual dangers just as starkly as those other classics. Indeed, Philip Dru is commonly cited in rightist, Patriot and conspiracy-oriented literature as a diabolical blueprint for a kind of dictatorship in America, a One-World dictatorship of sinister financiers: in this view, it is nothing less than House's Mein Kampf. One current edition (from a John Birch-related imprint) terms Philip Dru "the most influential political tract of the twentieth century." In fact, the book remains in print because it is so regularly reprinted by Patriots and Birchers, who regard it as a singularly frank statement of what they are fighting, from the time of FDR through later Democratic presidents like Carter and Clinton. In fact, I first came across Philip Dru when I received a free copy in the mail from Birchers seeking to alert educators to the evils they were fighting. Not surprisingly, the book is a lively presence on the Internet, with many sites dedicated to discussion of how far its clandestine goals have been achieved to date. I will both discuss the ideas and the context of Philip Dru as a Utopian novel, but also describe the ornate mythology which has grown up around it over the past ninety years.

It was scarcely unusual for House to have used a Utopian format to sketch his ideas. By the early twentieth century, there was a powerful tradition of using futuristic fantasies to explore radical political ideas and alternative political visions. Largely inspired by Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward, the years between 1890 and 1910 witnessed a rich flowering of futuristic, utopian and apocalyptic books. These years witnessed the publication of William Morris' News From Nowhere, Ignatius Donnelly's Caesar's Column, Jack London's Iron Heel, M. P. Shiel's Lord of the Sea, R. H. Benson's Lord of the World and many others - naturally including Chesterton's The Napoleon of Notting Hill (1904). Even as popular a fantasy work as Robert Chambers' The King in Yellow (1895) begins in a near-future New York under the military rule of an aristocratic caste, apparently following a civil war between the classes. What is different about Philip Dru, as the Birchers and Patriots rightly point out, is that House was actually in a position to implement some of his social engineering ideas. House himself was a key aide to president Woodrow Wilson, and a critical supporter of such controversial institutions as the League of Nations and the Federal Reserve Banking system. A history of the reception of Philip Dru is thus a capsule history of far Right political thought in this country. Just as some political movements are inspired by Utopian visions - Communism being the obvious example - this is one case in which a substantial strand of American political thought has been deeply inspired by the need to prevent the implementation of someone else's Utopia. Whatever the book's intrinsic literary values, its political importance means that it deserves to be rescued from the obscurity into which it has fallen among mainstream readers.

Philip Dru

It is unlikely that a modern reader would pick up Philip Dru solely for its ideas or its virtues as fiction: frankly, it is anything but a good novel, suffering as it does from most of the sins of sentimentality, flowery writing and wooden characterization which beset so much of the fiction of this period. Its value is chiefly that of a document of its times, and an effective statement of the social and political vision of the Progressive era. Progressivism emerged as a response to the desperate social conditions of America at the height of its industrialization, the age of mass immigration and ever-increasing polarization between rich and poor. One major feature of the movement was the exposure of the abuses that required attention, in accounts of slum conditions like Jacob Riis's How the Other Half Lives (1890), Stephen Crane's Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, or W T Stead's If Christ Came to Chicago (1893). The full flowering of exposé journalism came with the first decade of the new century. What Theodore Roosevelt called "Muckraking" was exemplified by work like Lincoln Steffens' analyses of pervasive municipal corruption, in the articles eventually collected as The Shame of the Cities (1904), by Ida Tarbell's dissection of the Standard Oil monopoly, and the work of Ray Stannard Baker. Upton Sinclair's novel The Jungle mobilized public anger against the horrors of the meat-packing industry.

By the 1890s, only the sheltered or optimistic could believe that American society in the new century would not require some kind of dramatic transformation, though there was no consensus about what that new direction might take. A spate of futurological works explored possible American destinies, ranging from benevolent elitism to utopian socialism, but a disturbing number posited extreme violence between rich and poor, culminating in apocalyptic collapse. While the Progressives were genuinely concerned about the horrors and injustices they witnessed around them, there was also a clear sense that social reform in the present might be the only means of averting turmoil or even civil war in another decade or two. On the other side of the abyss, a golden world might be waiting - as portrayed in The Napoleon of Notting Hill - but nevertheless, that abyss had first to be confronted, and survived. A sense of impending menace and revolutionary crisis helps explain the Progressive attachment to administrative solutions which entrusted powers to skilled experts at the expense of democratic participation. Mass democracy was fundamentally distrusted, and an efficient military model was infinitely to be preferred to flawed participation.

Progressive reform usually tended to be top-down, and often ventured into forms of social engineering. These approaches are evident from Philip Dru, which like so many of its literary predecessors, begins with an America on the verge of civil war, permitting House to explain how the country can be rebuilt from its present Year Zero. The 1919 edition of the book bears the epigraph, "This book is dedicated to the unhappy many, who have lived and died lacking opportunity because, in the starting, the world-wide social structure was wrongly begun." The problems were evident: by his imagined date of 1920, "Wealth had grown so strong that the few were about to strangle the many, and among the great masses of the people, there was sullen and rebellious discontent" (1). That was a Progressive cliché, as was the notion that "Nowhere in the world is wealth more defiant, and monopoly more insistent than in this mighty republic." Even so, for House, and for his fictional voice, Philip Dru, there are signs of hope. The US builds on the inheritance tentatively explored by revolutionary France, which had first raised the hope of human democracy, and there was the dream that "it is here that the next great battle for human emancipation will be fought and won." A dark age would lead to a golden age, the difference from France being that in this instance, there would not be lacking "one of the governing class who was big enough and humane enough to lend a guiding and a friendly hand" to the insurrectionists. Dru, modestly, proposes himself for this vacuum.

Leaving the army, Dru becomes a social worker, journalist and writer -the three characteristic trades by which the real-life Progressive activists earned their bread. His opportunity for greatness comes when a plot is exposed to secure the absolute dominance of the US government by a clique of plutocrats led by Wall Street financier John Thor and corrupt Senator Selwyn, and their puppet, President Rockland. The country is once more brought to the verge of revolution and civil war. Dru organizes a paramilitary resistance movement to retake the government into the hands of the people, until some four hundred thousand irregulars are under the control of "General Dru", ready for a great battle of Elma, a "holocaust" which places the fate of the nation in his victorious hands.

Dru now becomes "Administrator of the Republic", in other words, a benevolent Progressive Dictator: it is, to say the least, a protofascist vision. His system of government is lovingly described. He rules through a Council of Twelve, one of whom governed each of the nine departments into which the country is divided, with three more filling special functions as required. This oligarchic principle carries throughout the government. In the courts, for instance, "five great lawyers" are summoned for "the task of defining the powers of all courts, both state and federal. They were not only to remodel court procedure, but to eliminate such courts as were unnecessary." The board also drew up provisions regulating every aspect of lawyers' practice. Laws are reformed, land titles simplified, divorce law regularized, and so on. Dru's goal was "to have the judiciary a most efficient bureau of the people." This passage is typical of the whole second half of the book, in which House is clearly describing how he would restructure American society, were he given the powers of Administrator. As Maxwell Bloomfield writes, "In fact, real democratic empowerment of any kind seems secondary to Dru's overriding interest in scientific social planning."

Each chapter describing Dru's rule focuses on this "what I would do" aspect of the imagined government, and the reforms are generally dry and detailed, most noteworthy for the dictatorial and technocratic way in which they are carried out. Taxes are reformed by an advisory board of five experts, who work on the basis that all existing laws are eliminated, so that the country can start from scratch. The proposed system is a classic reformist model, including the heavily progressive income tax advocated by political reformers and socialists in the first years of the century. The railroad problem is addressed by a general control of public utilities; speculation in stocks and futures is prohibited; and the nation acquired universal suffrage, incorporating women as well as Blacks. Once again, the step is taken from the top down, specifically when "Administrator Dru decided to give [Woman Suffrage] to the nation" (177). This is an unashamed dictatorship: "Under my personal direction, I am having prepared an old-age pension law and also a laborers' insurance law, covering loss in cases of illness, incapacity and death" (182). The various reforms are codified in a wholly new constitution, which superficially follows the familiar pattern, though with many imports from the English model: all federal legislation originates in the House, and the Senate looks more like the House of Lords. Senators are elected for life, and there is only one from each state. Real power is in the hands of an Executive, who chooses a Cabinet, while a President who is elected for ten years, has only formal and ceremonial duties (191-95).

In external policy too, Dru's wise rule in the 1930s establishes a peaceful new world order, which for instance includes the annexation of Canada in exchange for a joint Anglo-American regime of "peace and commercial freedom." Japan and Germany are also won over, with promises of shared exploitation of the colonial lands. Mexico and the Central American republics have to be suppressed by force of arms, as Dru personally leads his armies in the great victory of La Tuna, though he generously forbears from annexing these lands. "Thus Dru had formulated an put into motion an international policy which if

adhered to in good faith would bring about the comity of nations, a lasting and beneficent peace, and the acceptance of the principles of the brotherhood of man” (224). With so much achieved, Dru and his wife quite literally sail off into the sunset, as he accepts the “effacement” proper to any great leader who has established a golden age for his people.

The World of Colonel House

It should be apparent from this sparse summary that Philip Dru is nothing like a great Utopian novel. It exhibits none of the intellectual daring of a Brave New World, none of the imaginative playing with hypothetical technologies that often make the utopias of science fiction exciting. House is not terribly interested in gender relations, race relations, or new social structures, none of which arouse anything like the passion stirred in his breast by topics like burial reform and new patterns of land title. Reading the book sometimes feels like being cornered at a grim party by an elderly enthusiast who wants to tell you precisely how he would solve the problems of the world, were he given the chance.

What makes Philip Dru different from other wish-lists is that House had the opportunity to realize some of his dreams, and he may have done just that. Who exactly was Colonel House? (George and George 1964; Seymour 1926-28; Smith 1918). Born in Texas in 1858, House spent many years as the chief political advisor to a number of governors in that state, and became a power in the Democratic Party. He moved to New York city in 1910 in pursuit of a wider political world, and the following year, he met Woodrow Wilson. While working on Philip Dru, he was struggling to secure Wilson’s nomination for the US presidency. When Wilson entered the White House in 1913, House became his close friend and adviser, perhaps eminence grise, and Wilson wrote gratefully that “Mr. House is my second personality. He is my independent self. His thoughts and mine are one.” Wilson was also said to be a particular fan of Dru: his Secretary of the Interior, Franklin Lane, wrote ominously that “All that book has said should come about... The President comes to Philip Dru in the end” (quoted in House 1998: iv).

Through 1913 and 1914 House traveled widely to promote friendship with England and Germany - the sort of policy described in the novel. By 1918, Wilson asked House to draft a Covenant of a League of Nations, and he represented Wilson in the interallied conferences responding to Germany's request for peace negotiations. He served as chief deputy at the Paris Peace Conference, and represented Wilson in the peace negotiations of early 1919. He largely retired from politics soon afterwards, though resumed some activity when Franklin Roosevelt was elected president in 1932. He died in 1938.

So much is official record, but House has also been associated, rightly or wrongly, with a number of policies which have gained enormous notoriety for many on the American Right. The indictment is lengthy, and startling. For conservatives, House helped Wilson provoke American involvement in world war one, and tried to engineer a League of Nations which would have eroded American sovereignty. Worse, he was linked to the great events of 1913, which taken together, allegedly destroyed the American republic. This was after all the year in which constitutional amendments permitted both the direct election of US Senators and an income tax, both policies which in reality predated Wilson’s administration: the sixteenth amendment (income tax) was proposed in 1909, though not ratified until early 1913, while the seventeenth (direct elections) was proposed in 1912, and ratified the following year. Nevertheless, both amendments were passed under Wilson’s regime. Wilson, together with his supposed puppet master House, were clearly responsible for the most controversial single measure of this year, namely the creation of a central banking system

under a Federal Reserve Board: this move was correctly seen by its critics as marking a radical transformation of the relationship between business and government

For critics then and since, these three actions together created a vastly more powerful central government in the United States, violated principles of state sovereignty, and introduced radical ideas of direct democracy and state socialism. These changes placed the economic power of the country in the hands of powerful Wall Street bankers, particularly J. P. Morgan. An elaborate mythology developed about how the bankers would use their new powers. In this view, American involvement in the European war was directly provoked by Morgan in order to protect his European loans. Soon, a still more pernicious notion would enter the theory, namely that the bankers had actively conspired to provoke and finance the Russian revolution, in order to subject that nation to a state socialism which merely masked their power. In all these manipulations, Colonel House appeared to be central, and for any who cared to read it, Philip Dru described his plans in advance. In this view, House in 1912 was formulating his plans, and only waiting for a marionette to implement them: Wilson was no more than the tool.

The Mythology of Philip Dru

Since the 1920s, Philip Dru has occupied a central role in conspiracy theories, though several distinctive strands of that tradition can be observed. (Melley 2000; Fenster 1999; Bennett 1995; Johnson 1983). Three currents in particular can be identified, namely the conservative opposition to the New Deal; the anti-semitic tradition; and the mystical school. In the first group, Philip Dru appealed to those writers who saw FDR's constitutional revolution as a kind of Jacobin socialism enacted from above, with the excuse of averting a revolution, and it was scarcely surprising that conservatives thought back to House's critics of the previous decade. John T. Flynn led the rightist critics who saw FDR as an imitator of Mussolini's Fascism, a resemblance made plausible by the corporatist language and thought so common in New Deal circles. One prominent FDR critic was journalist Westbrook Pegler, who commented that "During all these years since 1911 or 1912, the government of this great Republic has been corrupted and transformed into fascism which that man [House] invented long before Mussolini was heard of outside his native village." Pegler saw Roosevelt, Hitler and Mussolini as equally disciples of House (quoted by W. N. Grigg in House 1998: viii).

Once again, Philip Dru is seen as a plan, which did indeed prefigure many aspects of the New Deal regime: "Administrator Roosevelt" had as little time for legal niceties as his fictional counterpart, and happily ruled by executive order and presidential fiat. Also, specific New Deal reforms harked back to Philip Dru, which is not surprisingly given FDR's reliance on traditional Progressive nostrums. However, conspiracy theorists could point to continuities such as a graduated income tax, unemployment compensation, old-age pensions (Social Security), and labor's right to representations on the boards of corporations. In 1937, as FDR sought to "pack" the Supreme Court, critics could point knowingly to the passages in Philip Dru in which the dictator sees the gerrymandering of the courts as vital step in his revolution from above. But overall, the chief significance of Dru is not so much in any one point, as in the fundamental idea of progressive dictatorship, a model which on occasion Roosevelt fitted all too well.

However, a much more strident school of thought blamed House as the tool of a larger conspiracy which ultimately represented the money power but the Jewish financial elite. Just as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion purported to expose the machinations of the Zionist elite from within, so Philip Dru expounded their constitutional views. Central to

this scheme was the notion of the New York bankers who supposedly financed Lenin, names such as Paul Warburg, Jacob Schiff, and Kuhn, Loeb and Co, who were also integral to Morgan's Federal Reserve system. Little imagination was needed to realize that other than Morgan, these were chiefly Jewish names. In the rightist mythology of the time, it was apparent that a Jewish conspiracy variously used the masks of capitalism and communism as needed in order to overthrow and enslave the Christian world, beginning with Russia as proving ground. This idea was developed by Nazi propagandist (and German agent) George Sylvester Viereck, and in various forms it still remains a potent legend on the American far right. Viereck wrote that "The Schiffs, the Warburgs, the Kahns, the Rockefellers and the Morgans put their faith in House" (quoted in Allen 49). In the 1930s, it was beliefs about the Jewish bankers financing communism which led to the increasing anti-semitism of Father Charles Coughlin, and which radicalized him to the point of leading a mass populist movement against the Roosevelt regime.

A third variant of this schema sees the conspiratorial elite as neither Jews nor bureaucrats, but as members of a secret society which have struggled for centuries to achieve world domination, a group usually identified with the Illuminati. Once again, the multifaceted Colonel House played his role here, since he was a founder of the CFR, Council for Foreign Relations (1921), which in conspiratorial interpretations serves as the public face of Illuminist conspiracy, the organ through which bankers and Rockefellers rule the world. Though there is a vast literature on this theorizing, suffice it to say here that the CFR has since the 1930s been at the heart of virtually every conservative nightmare about one-worldism, state socialism, and the erosion of American sovereignty.

Commonly, conspiracies theories also target British imperialism as part of this scheme, a tendency which has its roots in mid-nineteenth century political paranoia. In the American context, the chief British villain was the imperialist Cecil Rhodes. One recent "global governance tutorial" (on the web at <http://www.sovereignty.net/p/gov/ggtut.htm>), traces the great conspiracy to a British plot orchestrated by Rhodes in the 1890s. A representative of this group was Alfred Milner, who saw the League of Nations as a means to buttress the decaying power of the British empire:

The precise connections between Milner's Secret Society and Colonel Edward Mandell House remain obscure. It was House, however, who first presented the idea of the League to the world in a novel entitled Philip Dru: Administrator. The story is a recitation of socialist thinking enacted by Dru, whose purpose was "to pursue Socialism as dreamed of by Karl Marx," and who, in the story, replaced Constitutional government with "omnicompetent" government in which "the property and lives of all were now in the keeping of one man, the Administrator." Dru created a "League of Nations," in the novel, that closely resembled the real League of Nations a few years later.... It was House who drafted Wilson's famous "Fourteen Points," and it was House who actually created the League of Nations. As Wilson's chief advisor, House had occasion and purpose to be in London frequently, and to count among his closest friends... the likes of Paul Warburg, J.P. Morgan, John D. Rockefeller, John W. Davis, and others who had direct interest in the creation of the Federal Reserve System, and great interest in The League of Nations.

Since the late 1950s, the John Birch Society has been the main exponent of House-related demonology, and the very substantial influence enjoyed by this group in the 1960s made Philip Dru a familiar villain to anyone who came into contact with Bircher or ultra-

conservative publications. One text emanating from the John Birch society, The Insiders, epitomizes House's role thus (http://www.john.birch.org/books/insiders/part_1.htm):

The CFR's founder, Edward Mandell House, had been the chief adviser of President Woodrow Wilson. House was not only Wilson's most prominent aide, he actually dominated the President. Woodrow Wilson referred to House as "my alter ego" (my other self), and it is totally accurate to say that House, not Wilson, was the most powerful individual in our nation during the Wilson Administration, from 1913 until 1921. Unfortunately for America, it is also true that Edward Mandell House was a Marxist whose goal was to socialize the United States. ... The House plan called for the United States to give up its sovereignty to the League of Nations at the close of World War I. But when the U.S. Senate refused to ratify America's entry into the League, Edward Mandell House's drive toward world government was slowed down. Disappointed, but not beaten, House and his friends then formed the Council on Foreign Relations, whose purpose right from its inception was to destroy the freedom and independence of the United States and lead our nation into a world government — if not through the League of Nations, then through another world organization that would be started after another world war. The control of that world government, of course, was to be in the hands of House and like-minded individuals.

The highpoint of Bircher propaganda was the book None Dare Call It Conspiracy, published in 1971 by Gary Allen, and distributed gratis as a recruiting tool: there were soon some five million copies in print. Indicative of the book's approach, the cover juxtaposes several symbols which to the unenlightened appear completely at odds, but which the informed reader comes to realize are part of one overarching conspiracy. These symbols include the hammer and sickle of communism, the eye in the pyramid of the Illuminati, the clenched fist of student radicalism, and the Citibank logo, all clustered around the one-world sign of the United Nations. To understand how these disparate tokens are related, we must realize the critical events of the second decade of the century, in all of which House played a pivotal role. As the book tells us, "The Insiders' sheepdog who controlled Wilson and guided the program through Congress was the mysterious 'Colonel' Edward Mandell House, the British educated son of a representative of England's financial interests in the American South... House authored a book, Philip Dru - Administrator, in which he wrote of establishing 'Socialism as dreamed by Karl Marx.'" (49: see Quigley 1966 for the source of many of Allen's views)

The story continues through modern Patriot rhetoric, which gained new vigor when in 1991, President Bush spoke of the New World Order, arousing renewed fears that House's plan was nearing completion. (Bush himself served as CFR director from 1977 to 1979). One highlight of the anti-Dru literature must be the work of televangelist Pat Robertson, who ran for president in 1988, and who inspired the Christian Coalition of the 1990s. He rehashes the familiar Bircher-Viereck indictment in his book The New World Order, a bestseller which carries the blurb, "A reality you cannot afford to ignore." This tract depicts recent world crises as signs of manipulation by sinister clandestine forces, international financiers linked to "New Age" religion, and ultimately of secret societies like the Freemasons and the Bavarian Illuminati: "A single thread runs from the White House to the State Department to the Council on Foreign Relations to the Trilateral Commission to secret societies to extreme New Agers. There must be a new world order." In order to

substantiate claims of machinations by bankers like “the Schiffs, the Warburgs, the Kahns, the Rockefellers, the Morgans”, Robertson cites as his source a book by the discredited Nazi theorist George Sylvester Viereck. Though Robertson seems to have been genuinely surprised by charges of anti-semitism, his use of such tainted sources resulted in a public controversy in 1994-95.

And needless to say, Philip Dru has its place in Robertson’s jeremiad. He writes, “In this remarkable book, published in 1912, the Colonel bared his soul. Imagine, if you can, the foreign affairs adviser to president Wilson planning a Marxist or socialist economic system as a replacement for monarchy. Beyond state socialism, House wanted a one-world government, a one world economy under an Anglo Saxon financial oligarchy, and a world dictator served by a council of twelve faithful men... Clearly the United Nations was just one small part of House’s grand design.” Robertson’s account shows that he has not read the book himself, and is relying on secondary accounts, but even so, it is fascinating to see the Dru legend continuing to evolve: in Robertson’s evangelical perspective, Dru the administrator is merging into an Antichrist figure, served by twelve anti-apostles, so that it is no mere metaphor to speak of House’s one-world system as diabolical. House’s Utopia has become the sketch for an anti-Christian world order, an image which, whether Robertson knows it or not, is based on a millennium of anti-semitic agitation. (Cohn 1996)

It is a striking tribute to the book’s impact and influence that its effects have been so diverse, so multifaceted. Moreover, for all its literary sins, Philip Dru stands as one of the very few Utopias which have had a real and lasting impact. In 1988, presidential candidate Pat Robertson even made a campaign promise that he would include no member of the CFR in his administration. We may recall Dan Quayle fulminating against fictional character Murphy Brown, but really, when was the last time that a candidate for American political office actually ran against a Utopian novel?

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