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Norman Thomas Collection

1946-1958

1 box (0.25 linear foot)

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An ardent Socialist and pacifist, Norman Thomas ran six times as a democratic socialist candidate for president of the United States. Born in 1884 in Marion, Ohio, the son of a Presbyterian minister, Thomas became a leading voice of the non-Communist left, taking up the causes of civil rights, peace, and social justice.

Thomas's memoir traces the major events of his life from his boyhood and education at Bucknell and Princeton, to his experiences during both world wars, and from his acceptance of Socialism to his reflections on religion. The collection also includes copies of two later essays by Thomas on religion and Socialism.

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Background on Norman Thomas

A leading voice of the non-Communist left in the United States during the middle years of the twentieth century, Norman Thomas was a six-time Democratic Socialist candidate for president of the United States. Raised in Marion, Ohio, as the son of a Presbyterian minister, Thomas entered Bucknell College in the fall of 1901, but transferred to Princeton after a year, where he graduated magna cum laude in 1905.

Already a full-fledged progressive in spirit, Thomas was engaged in settlement work for a brief period after graduating from Princeton and before entering Union Theological Seminary to pursue the minister. Receiving his ordination as a Presbyterian minister in 1911, he was soon settled in an Italian-American parish in East Harlem, New York City, where he became known as an eloquent advocate of the Social Gospel. More problematically from a public perspective, he also emerged as an outspoken pacifist, opposed to U.S. entry into the First World War. This unpopular stance in a war-hungry nation cost him his pulpit, but his pacifism and antimilitarism drew him increasingly into alignment with the Socialist Party of America.

Thomas' first foray into politics came in 1917, when he supported the campaign of Democratic Socialist Morris Hillquit for Mayor of New York. Between 1924 and 1929, he made five unsuccessful runs for municipal or state office in New York, and he made six runs for the presidency between 1928 and 1948.

Consistent with his pacifism, Thomas opposed U.S. entry into the Second World War, although when the Socialist Party split over participation in the war in 1942, he reluctantly sided with the pro-interventionists, fearing the possibilities of a fascist victory. He was, however, among the more prominent opponents of the internment of Americans of Japanese descent and never entirely abandoned his fundamental pacifist principles. During the oppression of the McCarthy era, Thomas similarly remained resolute in his Socialism. From his position as a Christian Socialist, he rejected the leftward pull of Communism, but nevertheless spoke out in support of the unpopular position of civil liberties for American Communists, just as he supported racial equality and civil rights, and later opposed the Vietnam War.

Thomas died on Dec, 19, 1968, barely a month after his 84th birthday.

Scope of collection

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Inventory

Thomas, Norman: Memoir

1946

Foreword

1946

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I. Boyhood

1946

Box 1: 2

II. Bucknell and Princeton

1946

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III. Early years in New York

1946

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IV. From war to Socialism

1946

Box 1: 5

V. Socialist campaigner

1946

Box 1: 6

VI. Some battles for justice

1946

Box 1: 7

VII. The Socialist split

1946

Box 1: 8

VIII. The storm gathers

1946

Box 1: 9

IX. The war -- and after

1946

Box 1: 10

X. Second thoughts on Socialism

1946

Box 1: 11

Thomas, Norman: Christmas season

1958

Box 1: 12

Thomas, Norman: Reflections on religion

1955

Box 1: 13

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Acquired from M&S Rare Books, May 2006 (2006-072).

Processing Information

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Language:

English

Copyright and Use (More information)

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Search terms

Subjects

Pacifists--United States
Socialism--United States
World War, 1939-1945

Genres and formats

Autobiographies (Literary works)

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Communism and Socialism
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