

Isolating Isolationism?

WHEN WORDS ARE USED to insinuate purpose rather than to convey ideas the lexicographer becomes a propagandist, and the dictionary is purely polemical. If the modern tendency toward the perversion of language into an instrument of suasion continues, writers will be forced to annotate their words with definitions, or to tell their readers in what dictionary the desired definitions can be found.

The present use of "isolationism" is illustrative of the tendency. The word seems definitely to mean the habit of keeping clear of one's neighbors; having no intercourse with them, socially or commercially. If one were to kick a neighbor in the shins, and were kicked back, the isolationist relationship would not be altered by this physical contact. Not until normal exchanges in ideas and goods were restored could the isolationism be considered terminated.

But that is not how the word is being used in our newspapers, most of which are trying to editorialize us into war. Those of us who see no sense in war, but who do see sense in carrying on commercial relations with the nations the newspapers want us to fight, are isolationists; and the scribes are putting a sort of scurrilous twist to its meaning.

Any one who disbelieves in embargoes, or in tariffs against "aggressor" nations, or in any other impediment to world contacts is an isolationist. By that use of the word the advocate of protectionism would, of course, be the most international-minded person, while the free trader would be the isolationist par excellence.

However, if you do not believe that war or war measures make for internationalism, do not squirm if you are called an isolationist. Stalin calls himself the apostle of democracy, Hitler speaks of his ideology as freedom, and New Dealers term their collectivistic program liberal. Given the proper dictionary, you can readily prove black is white.

