

**Living the Great Illusion: Sir Norman Angell, 1872–1967.** By Martin Ceadel. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. xvi+438. \$99.00.

Norman Angell is remembered today for two reasons—first, as the author of *The Great Illusion*, the enormously influential 1910 best seller (still in print today) that sought to demonstrate how economic interdependence was undercutting the case for and likely benefits of war, and, second, for several decades of assiduous work in internationalist causes, activism that won him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1934. Anyone studying interwar British politics or delving into the organs of left-leaning opinion formation in this period will bump into Angell at many turns. Yet, until 2009, no complete biography of the man had been written, and, as Martin Ceadel points out, Angell's own autobiography was incomplete, misleading, and on key issues simply wrong, its errors then replicated in later biographical sketches or academic accounts.

Ceadel's comprehensive new biography of Angell sets the record straight, providing the authoritative account of Angell's experiences, commitments, and writings over his near-century-long life. *Living the Great Illusion* is an extraordinarily painstaking piece of work. Ceadel has tracked his quarry from his birth, in 1872, into a large middle-class and middlebrow Lincolnshire family, through his dozen years spent as a homesteader and then a journalist in California, to Paris for a prewar decade of work as a jobbing journalist, and then through some sixty-plus years as a thinker and campaigner in the internationalist cause. Appropriately, Ceadel pays special attention, first, to the combination of interest, ambition, and opportunity that led Angell—then in Paris—to write the 1909 pamphlet that later became *The Great Illusion* and to the impact its astonishing success had on Angell's life and on the emergence of liberal internationalism alike; second, to Angell's response to the outbreak and course of the Great War and to the effects of that cataclysm on his politics, activism, and thought; and, third, to his

#### 894 Book Reviews

slow recognition of the nature of the Nazi menace and his transformation in the 1930s into an outspoken critic of appeasement. These more detailed excursions are, however, embedded in a cradle-to-grave narrative covering every aspect of Angell's life. The biographical subject's fifty-two transatlantic journeys, forty-some books, hundreds of political meetings, dozen or more residences, handful of affairs, complicated finances, and single, unhappy, marriage are all duly logged by his indefatigable biographer over some four hundred tightly printed pages.

This forensic approach throws some interesting patterns into relief. Influential work by Daniel Rodgers and others has drawn attention to the transatlantic flow of reforming ideas and policies in the decades before the Great War; Ceadel's account, however, reveals just how important American wealth and connections could be to the making of literary and political reputations. It is not surprising that American businessmen and philanthropists found Angell's arguments about the pacific propensities of economic interdependence attractive; rather, what does give pause is the level of financial support with which these interested parties backed up their enthusiasm. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, for example, invested some \$36,000 (equivalent to about \$839,000 in today's dollars) in cheap foreign editions of *The Great Illusion*, sending two thousand copies of the German translation to "selected university professors" in 1913 (114, 127). Even when such intense foundation interest waned, Angell could look to book sales and lucrative lecture fees in the United States to restore him to financial health; he also spent a good portion of the years of the Second World War ensconced in an apartment in New York near Columbia University. The extent to which liberal internationalism was an Anglo-American creation comes out strongly in this book.

Yet this detailed empiricism also has some costs. One is simply literary. Because Ceadel has gone to such trouble to track his elusive prey across countries and continents and to ferret out every essay—no matter how ephemeral—that he wrote, the book reads at times like an amplified diary. Take, as an example, the opening of one entirely representative paragraph:

On the day after this first parliamentary intervention, 26 July 1929, the Commons adjourned for a three-month recess, during which, after holidaying on Northey, Angell spent some time in Geneva, where he addressed the Inter-Parliamentary Union on the utility of defining aggression as the refusal to refer disputes to a third party. He then went to France for conferences in Paris and at Honfleur. He also published an early criticism of the anti-French line that Snowden adopted at an intergovernmental meeting on reparations at The Hague in August, fearing it might 'reawaken the jingoism which has been so happily quiescent for some years.' (276)

In the remainder of this one paragraph, Ceadel details Angell's arrangements to join the journalists accompanying Ramsay MacDonald across the Atlantic for an Anglo-American summit, lists whom he met and talked to on board ship, explains his journalistic arrangements and pay, and reminds us that Herbert Hoover, whom MacDonald was traveling to meet, had been Angell's dinner companion in 1910 and again in 1916. By the next paragraph, Angell is back in London.

Now, I don't mean to complain overmuch of this detail, for any historian working on interwar politics will likely find intensely useful nuggets of information in this book—indeed, it may be more as a reference work on interwar internationalism than as a biography that the book will be read. I do regret, however, that Ceadel never reverses the optic to ask not what Angell did and wrote but, rather, what his reception and career can tell us about the political culture of Edwardian and interwar Britain. The fact that Ceadel spends much time exposing the repetitiveness and analytical inadequacies of much of Angell's writing makes this question of his popularity and standing

*Book Reviews* 895

even more perplexing. We get a good sense of Angell's ideas and commitments from this book but never quite learn why they resonated so strongly. One might hazard a guess, however, that their impact had relatively little to do with their intellectual adequacy (the standard by which Ceadel judges them) and more to do with the way they spoke to the hopes, illusions, and even interests of that generation of left-leaning but well-placed internationalists with which Angell—a more complex and socially awkward figure—so strongly identified.

SUSAN PEDERSEN

*Columbia University*