

IX. Public and Voluntary Efforts

The popular discussion of controls versus voluntary action has tended to obscure a very basic issue. This issue is what middle ground between the freedoms we enjoy in normal peacetime and the unlimited compulsions of a State Economy will maximize our strength for the task ahead. To assume that there is no middle ground would be to acknowledge that we can contest Stalin's aggressive designs effectively only by aping all of his methods. That would also assume that in peacetime there are many differences between our kind of economy and political institutions and those of the Soviets, but that in a hot or cold war there are no differences. The whole history of our achievements in war no less than in peace belies these naive assumptions.

If by voluntary action we mean that each individual or group or industry or labor union go its own way, with only vague perception of a common national purpose, then manifestly we cannot afford this degree of voluntary action in these perilous times. No rational person will deny that in these times we must do more by central authority, and less by free and scattered decisions, than in normal peacetime.

But the exercise of authority in a democracy does not involve the abandonment of reason and persuasion. It does not involve abatement of the constant effort to obtain the understanding and consent without which laws can neither be enacted nor made effective, and without which Executive action cannot achieve full results. It does not involve surrender of the strength and inspiration to be derived from participation in the making of decisions, and not merely in carrying them out. All these things are more true of the economic phases of mobilization than of any other phases, because the economic phases—as was said at the beginning of this report—must be executed by all the people throughout the country, and not only by a few people in seats of authority.

It may be helpful, at a time when the choice to some seems an oversimplified decision between compulsion and freedom, to identify a few of the areas where voluntary efforts should be in the main stream of economic mobilization.

(1) The vast production effort, which supports the whole economic mobilization, is preponderantly in the hands of businessmen, workers, and farmers. The Government may provide them with some targets, subject them to some controls, and encourage them with some stimuli. But the Government alone cannot spark their initiative, maintain their morale, nor kindle their ingenuity. These are attributes which lie in these groups, and which can be maximized only if these groups are not wrenched too severely from their customary methods and relationships. We must adapt the American economic system to the new purposes of a defense program; but we cannot afford to junk the system.

(2) The establishment of major targets or goals in a defense emergency is primarily a Government responsibility. There is no other possible location for this responsibility, and it must be exercised. But the development of these targets or goals should not be undertaken solely by public officials. They should receive help in the formulation of these targets by those who will be called upon to achieve most of them. The goals must be crystallized at the top; but they should not be handed down from the top.

(3) The development of systematic policy to guide the imposition of controls is necessary to prevent these controls from bogging down in irrational or conflicting purposes. The question of whether these policies are enforced by authority or left to voluntary action is secondary. The first question is *how* these policies are formulated. Decisions must be made by the Government, not by bodies representing economic groups. But in formulating policies, there should be the fullest possible consultation with representatives of those who not only will be affected by them, but who also will have to carry out many of them and support all of them.

Care must be exercised not to swing between extremes from day to day, asserting one day that everything will be accomplished by voluntary cooperation, and asserting the next day that it is too late for anything but compulsion. Under the American system, a constant blending of authority and freedom, of uniformity and flexibility, is essential to the best results. A defense emergency requires more ability and patience—which should not be confused with slowness—to achieve this blend. And the ratios of these ingredients change in times of stress. But if we ever lose the desire or ability to achieve this blend, we shall have lost the greatest single asset in our total strength as a nation.

X. High Points for Immediate Action

No matter how large the resources of the nation, it cannot do all of everything at the same time. It is forced to make choices between the things it values more and the things it values less. In a national emergency, the relative order of our needs is more clearly apparent. But there are limitations upon the application of policy to achieve these objectives, no less than limitations upon resources. Even an all-out effort does not mean applying all policies at once in helter-skelter fashion. Policies must be fitted into some scheme of their relative importance, and deployed in some systematic relationship. Some policies are more important than others. Some policies cannot be effectively imposed