

For your information.

March 27, 1942.

To: Archibald MacLeish

From: Alan Barth

EDITORIAL OPINION  
ON THE WAR:  
LULL BEFORE THE STORM

Interlude

This year's Spring fever is a compound of hope, apprehension and unrest. For months past, the country's editorial pages have forecast this Spring as a time of testing, as a climax of the war in which the whole future of the world will be determined. And now, suddenly, somewhat frighteningly, the fateful season is at hand.

The newspapers are filled with speculation as to the direction which events will take in the weeks and months ahead. How largely they acknowledge that initiative still rests in enemy hands is pathetically attested by the focus of attention upon what Germany will do next. The editorial writers are bracing themselves for a fresh explosion of Nazi fury in Russia, in the Middle East, in North Africa, even, perhaps, once more against the British Island. The most hopeful feature of this outlook is a conviction that this Spring holds the last chance for a Nazi triumph.

Continued and synchronous offensive action by Japan is anticipated. The prevailing belief is that the Japanese will now concentrate their efforts on India. But the ex-isolationists have visions of a fresh assault upon Hawaii; the New York Daily News and Washington Times-Herald continue to put at the head of their editorial pages, "Make Hawaii Impregnable." Some commentators expect the Japanese, in addition, to thrust at Russia's eastern maritime provinces -- perhaps because, in this contingency, they glimpse a roseate hope for American bombing raids on Tokyo from Siberian bases.

The variety of speculation about Axis plans is a tribute to those who plant enemy propaganda. As the St. Louis Post-Dispatch observes, "Ajax and Atlas must sigh with relief these days as they contemplate the program of Spring activity worked out for Hitler and Mein Intuition by American news commentators, foreign observers and reliable sources from Ankara to New Delhi."

Editorial ardor for a United Nations offensive this Spring has abated in some measure; the difficulties have become more real. Nevertheless there is general insistence that everything possible be done to send supplies to MacArthur. With growing vigor commentators suggest the opening of a new front in Europe as the one effective means of supporting Russia and perhaps crushing Hitler now.

On the whole, the press gives a sense of taut expectancy. It has treated the week's events, particularly announcement of the Navy's raids on Wake and Marcus Islands, with due fanfare. But there has been no genuinely dramatic news to compare with the preceding week's transfer of General MacArthur. Editorial eyes are on the horizon. The interlude is one of anxious waiting.

### Nerves

Waiting has produced an acute nervousness. And this nervousness may account, in part, for an unprecedented wave of dissatisfaction and impatience with the Government.

It seems no overstatement to declare at this juncture that the President is in danger of losing an essential part of the warm confidence with which most American newspapers have supported his conduct of the war. For there is an uneasy belief that he is fumbling. And this belief is not confined by any means to his enemies; it is shared, to some degree, by those who have consistently been in full sympathy with his foreign policy.

The President's enemies, to be sure, have sought to capitalize on the difficulties confronting him and in doing so have wrapped themselves in a mantle of martyrdom. Their constant, plaintive wail is that the Government considers criticism as tantamount to treason.

Much of the criticism from supporters of the Administration's foreign policy, it is true, is directed at Labor and at the social gains of the New Deal -- at the principle of the 40-hour week in particular. But despite the synthetic character of many of these complaints there is a sense that the President's leadership has lacked toughness and firmness.

There is an angry feeling among editorial writers of every political coloration that the Government is coddling and cajoling the American people. Dorothy Thompson gives acidulous expression to this feeling in discussing a series of pamphlets prepared by the War Department for mothers, wives and sweethearts of soldiers. "It seems, reading them," she says, "that the American Army is some sort of Ye Olde Summer Camp for the spoiled and blase children of doting mothers. The purpose of the pamphlets, of course, is to convince mammas that their darlings are having the time of their lives in the Army .... God forbid that there should be any indication that the American soldier is going to face and risk death -- risk death for America, for freemen everywhere, for the salvation and security of generations yet unborn."

Newspapers everywhere express a deep conviction that Americans now understand the meaning of this war, are terribly in earnest about winning it and no longer need to be enticed, wheedled or

otherwise gentled into shouldering their share of the burden. The editorial cry is that the public cannot reasonably be expected both to lead and to follow; it needs and demands direction from those it has chosen for leadership. If the press can be taken as a barometer in this sphere, the American people are ready, and indeed, eager for marching orders. They want their Government to be tough, determined and, above all, forthright. They don't want the war to be "sold" to them, as though they were children obliged to take a disagreeable medicine. They have enlisted voluntarily and want command, not conciliation or comfort, from their Government.

The dominant theme of the press today is that the President has failed to assume authority as Commander-in-Chief of the United States on the home front.