

THE CHALLENGE TO DEMOCRACY

Address

By

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Before the annual meeting of the
Missouri Farm Bureau Federation

Tuesday Afternoon, November 11, 1941

At

Hannibal, Missouri

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This is one occasion when the lot of the speaker is even worse than that of his audience - and I have enough sympathy with those who sit and listen through conventions to admit that such is not always, perhaps not often, the case.

This is Armistice Day. Twenty-three years ago today the guns over Europe fell silent, and the single word "Peace" electrified the world. Throughout the years that have passed by since then we have celebrated November 11 as the anniversary of peace. There is supreme irony in the fact that we have assembled once more for that anniversary celebration when there is no peace left in the world; when the armed forces of the Nations are locked at an Armageddon more grim and more terrible than anyone has heretofore been able to imagine.

That condition, and what it means and will mean to the United States, is in the forefront of the consciousness of everyone of you today. There is no chance for a speaker to evade it or quibble about it. He has to talk about war; he has to look toward the future through the spreading smoke of ruined homes and high explosive. I would much rather someone else had the job.

I cannot look at the world scene today without facing a flood of questions that press for answer. Why was the last war fought? What else besides ruin and a temporary false reprieve did it accomplish? What is the real meaning of the war today? Can it be ended on any basis that will avert from the next generation the horror that has engulfed this one? And as an undertone to all these, does mankind possess the political and social genius to master the mechanical monster his science has created?

We entered the last war to help turn back a power which, by the international standards we then accepted, had turned outlaw aggressor. But we know now

that outlaw aggression was not ended by the victory. We went in to help make the world safe for democracy, but today democracy is menaced as never before. We fought in the belief that we could help shape conditions that would tend to banish war, but hate and greed wrote the peace, and war is upon us again.

It cannot be that the last war didn't cost enough lives. Then the involved nations mobilized 65 million men and $8\frac{1}{2}$ million were killed. Total casualties, including killed, wounded and missing or prisoners, accounted for $37\frac{1}{2}$ million or over 57 per cent of those who bore arms. If the United States had suffered loss in life or total casualties in that conflict as high in proportion to our population as did France to hers, our loss in killed would have been 3,400,000 or 78 per cent of the total we then had under arms. Our casualties would have numbered over 15 million men. And in view of what is going on in Europe today it is, to me, grimly significant to recall that Russia led the allied nations, exceeding even France, in the number of men mobilized, the number killed, and in total casualties.

That was the kind of a conflict that closed 23 years ago today. I haven't brought these things up because I like the sound of the words, but because the United States has again taken sides in a world-wide war, and it is just as well to remind ourselves what kind of a business war is.

We felt sure of peace for nearly two decades after the last war. Near the close of the first ten-year span the United States took the lead in an international movement which resulted in 62 nations, including the present belligerents, solemnly renouncing war "as an instrument of national policy in their relations with one another". But before the second decade had ended the armies of aggression were once more on the march. And they caught the democracies flat-footed, their power unorganized.

My only purpose in throwing a flashlight back over the past is to force a recognition of the fact that as a nation and as individuals we have seriously misunderstood the world we lived in.

Up to a year ago we in the United States were certain of many things that weren't true. We lived in a make-believe world comforted by illusions we thought were realities. We thought, for example, that a nation which minded its own business and respected the rights of its neighbors would be left free to work out its destiny in its own sphere. Our actions proved that we considered peace among men the normal state of affairs. These made up the keystone of our thinking on international matters. That keystone has dissolved before the horror that swallowed the peace-loving Scandinavian democracies and the well-ordered life of the Low Countries; that has overwhelmed France, and swept over China, the Balkans, Greece and the Mediterranean and is now hammering away at the East.

A new rule in international affairs is being demonstrated today over three-quarters of the earth. It is the rule of military power in which nothing else counts. The demonstration hasn't ended yet. It is still spreading. There is no limit to its growth except restraint imposed by fear of greater power.

That ruthless threat has again drawn the United States into a world-wide war. Let me make it clear that I can no more answer questions as to how far our participation will go than you can. I cannot say dogmatically any more than you can whether our part in the war will continue as now, that is, to produce the arms and to see they reach their destinations in the hands of those who battle the Axis, or whether our part in it will become far greater. Forces wholly outside the United States may make or modify the answers anyone can give you today.

The question of what our national course should be in the months ahead

is complex and difficult even to discuss. On certain phases there is general agreement. Our national safety requires the maximum use of our productive power to turn out modern machines for air, sea, and land warfare at the swiftest possible rate. Machines, not men, are winning the battles of this war. We may differ as to when and where and to what purpose these machines shall be put to use; we can no longer differ in the judgment that our place in a war-mad world requires us to make them and to learn how to use them.

As a nation we have already committed ourselves on another step - arming and supplying England, China and, for all practical purposes, Russia. Nothing short of producing the maximum armament they can use, and in the least possible time, can meet our obligation here. Furthermore, I believe it has been perfectly clear to most of us that we would never stop with making these tanks and planes, guns and explosives, and be content to see them sent to the bottom of the sea, or piled up in our ports. Even though the debate still rages, I believe the nation has made up its mind to see that the goods are delivered. That this means extension of naval war is certain.

It is conceivable that we might go that far and no further in our involvement. The day when clean-cut declaration was a necessary prelude to war came to an end with Spain. It is conceivable that warships of the United States might fight it out with German U-boats or airplanes in keeping sea lanes open to England, without leading to formal all-out war. It is scarcely in keeping with our national temperament or history, however, that the involvement would go that far and no further. Step tends to follow step with the inevitability of fate. But before the procession takes on that inevitability, the grim responsibilities attendant upon our re-entry in European war should be comprehended and accepted.

To face the prospect that successive generations of American youth must join in wars separated by irresponsible periods of withdrawal and aloofness on our part offers a hopeless and purposeless future. There is less point that I would like to see in throwing this nation's weight into a struggle only to restore the status quo ante bellum in Europe when it was that condition which has produced one Hitler and in future would produce another.

Presumably there are alternatives. One of them, the reversal of our present course by withdrawal into isolation, I will discuss in a moment. The other, which is the course I believe should have been followed after the previous World War, requires that if and as we move toward more active participation in the present world conflict, we do so recognizing that we are assuming a perpetual responsibility, along with other nations, to work out a world order based on international justice and maintained by international cooperation.

Between these extremes lie every shade of intermediate opinion. It is easy to take and defend a position on emotional grounds - far easier than to reach a decision by reasoning or logic. The validity of our choice depends heavily on what Hitler intends now or will try to do in the future. If his Nazi ambition would be satisfied by the defeat of England and the reorganization of Europe and North Africa in a new order, our national future and our way of life at home might be insured by such a degree of armament as would compel his respect. Throughout its history the United States has existed in the world along with emperors, czars and dictators.

But on the other hand, if this is a world revolution whose instigators will not be stopped until the whole world is in their order unless a superior force

defeats them, then it clearly is necessary for the United States, historically committed to keep this hemisphere free from Europe's imperial ambitions, to choose an alignment that confronts Hitler with the maximum opposing force. Obviously that is impossible without the British Empire and the British Navy.

No problem more momentous has confronted our government in the history of the United States. It can judge Hitler's intentions and future course only by his words and by projecting the trend established by his campaigns up to date. Neither offers any real support to those who believe we are economically, politically, or, in a military sense immune on the Western Hemisphere.

We must recognize that our national course is never determined by one grand decision which steers us out of heavy storms into a harbor where all is security and light. On the contrary, it is a procession of relatively small decisions that commits us this way or that. And no easy path can possibly be found.

The central purpose of my talk here today is to express the conviction that the United States must have a foreign policy which is recognized and understood, and must make its conduct conform to that policy. I am unable to see that any standard of consistent purpose has governed our international behavior during my life-time. We have shuttled back and forth between desperate involvement and irresponsible detachment. That just doesn't make sense. It is not only the rest of the world that is puzzled; we have baffled and confused ourselves.

We might quite rationally have chosen a course of isolation and national self-sufficiency and, by paying the heavy price it would exact, hope for a time to avoid external wars. Or, having become involved as we were in 1917 and 1918, we might rationally recognize and assume our world responsibility as a great power

and insist that other nations work with us toward a just and safe world order. There is something to be said for either course. But there is no defense or explanation for the nation that tries to follow both of them, either alternately or at the same time. We cannot do both without disaster, without loss of respect abroad and of hope at home.

For many reasons, including the very practical one that, intending to keep out of external wars, we tend to get in them, I favor open-eyed recognition of our place as a world power and full acceptance of the responsibility that goes with it. If 1917, and again 1940 and 1941 teach us anything, it is that we cannot, or we will not, stay aloof from a conflict which engages the rest of the world. We were in the last war but out of the peace. An external force, driving to reorganize the world on principles and by practices that are hateful to us, has drawn us into the present conflict. We have again assumed vast responsibilities in a world-wide war. Only this time, I say, let's recognize the consequences and stay with it, doing our share to clean up the mess, so that the next generation will not have to take up arms, as our sons are doing today, in a deadly struggle not of their making. I choose this because I believe it is the course best lighted with hope for the future.

The dimensions of the world have shrunk. It is impossible for any nation to avoid the impact of the present struggle. The conditions that confront us are not to our liking and they are not of our choosing. We can only face them with the determination to back with national unity the leaders who bear the heavy burdens of responsibility. We can cement that unity with understanding, and if we are fortunate, we may profit from lessons which the past and present have spread plainly before us,

It is a mistake to oversimplify the challenge that confronts us. Defeat

of one dictator, or a set of dictators, won't end the job. It will merely mark its real beginning. We do not want to fight to restore once more the old order in Europe. We have had convincing proof that it can not work. I doubt if there is a man or woman in this audience who is willing to die to reestablish it. On the other hand, there are few who would hesitate to lay down their lives if they knew that by that sacrifice they were contributing substantially to a future that provided justice and peace.

Our greatest common mistake today is our failure to realize what is happening in the world. This isn't just a war in the sense of past wars. It is a world-wide revolution. It is a revolution, moreover, that feeds on the mistakes of democracies. Hitler has had strength back of him because of the economic failure of free, democratic governments to substitute plenty for scarcity through providing full employment for the manpower and resources of the world.

Hitlerism is hateful to every free man, but no truer word has been said than that you can't defeat it by force alone. We can only understand that if we see, clearly and finally, that we are in a world revolution and that the basic struggle is over its form and leadership. Anything short of that understanding has no more meaning than has the mad struggle of a quarter century ago as we look back upon it now.

We believe that democracies embodying the institutions of human freedom can guide that world revolution better than can dictatorships that deny freedom. But the challenge is breath-taking. In the long run future democratic leadership cannot meet it unless it performs better than it has done in the past. It cannot meet the challenge if it is content to rest on the efforts and the devices of the past which have produced the paradox of scarcity and want where the materials and the opportunity for abundance exist.

The President of the United States recognized the scope of the challenge and of the task ahead on last Thursday when he said:

"The defeat of Hitlerism is necessary so that there may be freedom; but this war like the last war, will produce nothing but destruction unless we prepare for the future now. ***** There must be no place in the post-war world for special privilege for either nations or individuals".

Most of you remember the Fourteen Points of Woodrow Wilson and the tragic gap between their ideal and the actualities of post-war performance. It is impossible not to think of that earlier sad experience in the light of this new long-range declaration of purpose by President Roosevelt. The vision it presents must command the approval and respect of any realist; but there will be doubts and differences as to the ability of the leaders of the peoples of the world to accomplish the end it declares.

These are the responsibilities that confront the democracies today. You may have wondered why I, who have talked to so many farm audiences on farm topics before this, have not spoken on such a theme today. It is because I believe this international crisis is more real, more vital, to you as citizens of the United States and of the world, than other questions of price relationship and adjustment I might have chosen.

The people of the United States must understand the implications of the world crisis and they must see clearly the consequences of our own behavior. Without that common, general understanding, leadership will be powerless to deal with the tremendous difficulties that are ahead. These are times when understanding

and vision are the only alternatives to discouragement, and I know of no better place to turn for clear perspective than to the men and women on the American farms. For this is the time for cooperation, not disunity, and farmers know what cooperation means; and it is the time when we need just the kind of optimistic courage that is bred out in the country.

The world isn't what we would like it to be. It isn't even as good as we thought it was. But the destiny that shapes our ends sees farther than we can. As long as the spark of freedom and dignity for individual man lives, there is hope that today's pain is but a phase in the evolution of a new and better world - one in which freedom of thought and the institutions of free men have survived.

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