UNITY for War and for Peace

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The United States finds itself at war. We did not go to war; war came to us. The United States also finds itself united — and more surprised at that development than the other. This unity is refreshing, and of first importance in giving an initial impetus to the war effort.

An examination of its origin and nature is of equal importance in order that unity may be preserved and strengthened. We have just learned the bitter lesson that sentimentalism about peace was the road to war, rather than a pathway to safety. Sentimentalism about unity would be equally disastrous; it would lead us into the struggle united, and bring us to the end of the war divided. Then, indeed, we would win the war abroad and lose the peace at home.

There are those who say that we should be grateful for this unity and cherish it, asking no questions. Analysis, discussion, criticism might destroy what we have just found. To that my response must be that if our new-found unity is so fragile that it will not survive examination, it will not stand the tensions and stresses of war.

I suggest we go back to an old thesis, wholly appropriate to this moment: "The question before the House is one of awful
moment to this country. For my part I consider it as nothing less than a question of freedom or slavery; and in proportion to the magnitude of the subject ought to be the freedom of debate. It is only in this way that we can hope to arrive at truth, and fulfill the great responsibility which we hold to God and our country. Should I keep back my opinions at such a time, through fear of giving offense, I should consider myself as guilty of treason toward my country . . . " Those were the words of Patrick Henry speaking in 1775.

They found a modern example in the British Parliament on May 8, 1940. Lloyd George rose, and facing Mr. Chamberlain, declared that the best service the Prime Minister could render his country would be to surrender the seals of office. In the fullest sense of the word, it was a terrible thing to say; but it was true, and it had to be said. The net effect was a great contribution to British unity.

DISCUSSION ESSENTIAL TO DEMOCRACY

War cannot bring an end to discussion, for if you accept that absurd postulate, you have abandoned the democratic process -- which is the control of government by public opinion. In a democracy political leadership is partly real and partly an optical illusion. Political spokesmen start currents of thought or action which evoke public response by way of support or opposition. On the other hand political leaders sense the drift of public thought and capitalize upon it constructively.

In a healthy state of public life it is impossible at any given moment to assess precisely how far leadership really comes from the President and how far, on the other hand, his official leadership is merely a reflection, a focused and brilliant reflection, of popular opinion.

Looking back upon our course in recent years one cannot escape the conviction that public life has not been in that healthy state. It seems obvious that the President himself has often felt he was not able to supply unquestioned leadership; that has been patent since the war broke out in 1939. It is equally obvious that public opinion did not furnish him a clear keynote.

The source of our present unity is thus perfectly clear. It is the consequence of external pressure. We did not have to resolve our confusions and make up our minds upon a consistent course of action. Our decisions were taken for us by the Japanese through an act which for treachery is equalled only by its stunning success.
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Even then the unity of the war was not fully admitted and Hitler and Mussolini retained the initiative in plotting the next steps in our course for us. It is clear, therefore, that both the military and the moral initiative still rest with the Axis; our unity is essentially defensive.

THREE ASPECTS OF DEFEATISM

I believe we shall recover the military initiative — that can be done on the quality of unity we now possess. If we are to achieve the moral initiative, by which alone the world can be reorganized for peace, a new quality of unity must be found. It must be a unity founded upon commonly accepted political and social premises which are positive rather than negative. When the external pressure is destroyed, only internal cohesion can preserve our unity.

If we are to identify that moral prerequisite to unity, we must look at those factors which lost us the moral initiative. The decay of unity — the disintegration of opinion and leadership — was occasioned by the interplay of three aspects of defeatism. The politicians (and in this respect they both followed and led the public) have been defeatist with regard to our economy. Business has been defeatist about our politics. Politics and business met on common ground in a defeatist attitude toward the fundamental moral presuppositions upon which our democracy has been built. Both abandoned the idea of an absolute standard of morals; both reduced conduct to an amorphous relativism, which is simply using elaborate words to describe moral confusion.

1. Political Leaders Defeatist

It is not necessary to prove to this audience that political leaders have been defeatist with regard to our economy. The entire stage manipulation of the hearings before the Temporary National Economic Committee constituted a complete demonstration. That inquiry had all the aspects of a post-mortem on the victim rather than a clinical diagnosis of ailments. Is it any wonder that when the autopsy was finished, the chairman of the committee, upon whose defeatist education hundreds of thousands of dollars had been spent, should introduce a bill to inter the corpse? Senator O'Mahoney called for legislation to tax machinery in order to give hand labor a kind of industrial “parity,” to penalize the machine and subsidize the hand — a proposal which makes the economic ideas of Mahatma Gandhi seem advanced by comparison.

Congressman Smith, whose bill to alter labor policy was recently adopted by the House, reminded the manufacturers here in
New York the other day that business was still in the "dog house." In the light of the ten billions spent on housing, that statement might justify us in regarding business as an important percentage of the underprivileged third who are ill-housed.

2. Business Defeatist on Politics

Before this audience it is not necessary to prove that business has been defeatist regarding politics. The only Wall Street laughter audible beyond its confines has come from cynical humor expressing that attitude. It has become a stock remark that "you can't expect to beat Santa Claus" in an election. It is not true: Santa Claus is a myth, and the elections have been won by no mythical figure! But it is defeatist in a much more real sense. It is surrender to the basic thesis of Karl Marx; it accepts the key philosophy of the classic enemy of capitalism. For it adopts his point of view — economic determinism; it admits by inference that a man always votes with his pocketbook instead of with his mind and heart. It concedes that greed is stronger than love, that avarice will always overpower sacrifice, that gold is more potent than good.

These concessions are no better for capitalism than for democracy. Once economic determinism is accepted as a valid explanation of action, you have conceded the arguments of the demagogues, the socialists, the communists about the plutocracy which they allege controlled the United States before 1929. Their contentions were not true; do not admit them even by inference.

In any event this defeatist idea has suddenly become an anachronism. We are at war. Nobody expects war to create wealth; it was no vote for Santa Claus when we went to war as a united people. Nobody expects a soldier to make money; yet we expect him to hazard his life. That ought to demonstrate the absurdity of economic determinism as the key to politics — or life. Of course money has always had some influence. But the plain facts of history stare us in the face: spiritual values, love of home and love of country, patriotism and faith in ideals (even mistaken ideals) have been both more dramatic and more powerful than economic interest.

You know, I do not need to argue it, that defeatism regarding our economic system is wrong. I assert that defeatism regarding our political order is equally wrong. Neither is perfect; neither is beyond repair.

3. Defeatist Attitude on Ethics

The third aspect of defeatism explains the other two — it is the
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loss of faith in fixed ethical standards. In every period of moral confusion the state gains in power. When the state becomes too powerful, the exercise of that power becomes an end in itself. Moral restraint disappears. It has gone to its logical extreme in the Axis: truth and falsehood are used alike to deceive; promises are made to be broken; negotiation for peace is a cloak for treacherous assault.

That is nothing new in the world. It has appeared again and again in history. Machiavelli developed the explicit blueprint of power politics at the beginning of the 16th century. He said, for example, "One prince (führer) of the present time, whom it is not well to name, never preaches anything else but peace and good faith, and to both he is most hostile, and either, if he had kept it, would have deprived him of reputation and kingdom many a time." If you accept the postulate that there is no absolute except power, Hitler is justified, also Mussolini and the Japanese jingoes. Unless there is a moral absolute the totalitarians are right. If Machiavelli was correct in asserting that after conquest succeeds "the means will always be considered honest," our nation was launched on the wrong basis.

Our recent defeatist attitude regarding any moral imperative is a reflection of weakening in the age-old struggle for freedom. The key to our democratic system is the absolute value of the individual. The rival totalitarian system sets the state at the center. You have never heard of state freedom, you have never heard of state morals. Freedom and morals are the exclusive possession of individuals. If you turn to the Scripture, you will not find it recorded that God created the state, much less that He created it in His own image; but in the very first chapter of Genesis you may read, "So God created Man in His own image, in the image of God created He him."

That idea runs like a golden thread through the Old Testament and the New — the godlike quality of man. Our fathers believed it implicitly; it is the keystone of our political arch. The first assertion of the Declaration of Independence is that men "are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights." The Bill of Rights, the sesquicentennial of which we have just celebrated, was the implied condition upon which the Constitution was adopted — and that Bill of Rights is the charter of freedom for the individual against the state.
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DEMOCRACY BASED ON THE SPIRITUAL

Democracy, I repeat, is based upon a moral absolute—not the relative worth, not the financial worth, not the economic potential, but the spiritual worth of the individual human being. Once that absolute is compromised into relativity, it disappears entirely. There is no middle ground; it is all or nothing. Once lost, the foundation is withdrawn from the economic structure in which you have an interest, as well as from the political structure within which alone that economic structure is possible.

Man cannot be protected, for mortality is the structure of his being; he is not to be pitied, for pity weakens rather than strengthens him; he cannot be secure, for he is secure only when he is dead. He should never be offered security; he should fight for freedom with all its hazards, political and moral, physical and financial.

The best evidence of defeatism was the loss of faith in the only moral being in the universe, the individual man. It shows in a thousand ways. It appears in fear of the machine, though the machine has brought the individual vast new resources. It is revealed in fear of want when plenty surpasses the imagination of a few decades ago, and famine, man's historical neighbor, is vanquished. It approaches the boundaries of hysteria in fear of insects (some little bug will find you!) which terrify us because we know a bit about them!—evidence of the little knowledge that is a dangerous thing. It passes the boundaries of sanity when men stand in fear of the good earth's bounty, damned with the epithet "surplus." So with one grand gesture of defeat man crept into the arms of the state and sought refuge in its power rather than his own courage. The program of the so-called social service state is based upon the assumption that life is no more than meat, nor the body than raiment. It represents sheer moral collapse.

DEFEATISM BEGAN WITH "PROTECTION"

Business was not blameless in this surrender to the state. It showed the way by calling for higher and higher tariffs. Unwilling to trust American energy, resourcefulness, skill, and all our other talents, "protection" was the cry. Anti-economics in behalf of business is a difficult concept; but the record is written so large that he who runs may read. Every competent economist denounced high tariffs; when at last the bitter fruits of tariff madness here were met with exchange control and bi-lateralism abroad, one sound economist remarked, "We have had academic freedom in
this country because no one has paid the slightest attention to us.” Business men who denounced the professors as the economic heretics of the New Deal forgot that for half a century the economic heretic was not in the classroom but in the counting house.

The farmer now has a fantastic subsidy from government—well over a billion dollars this year. The farmer, the characteristic individualist, has surrendered to crop control, and subsidy! He has yielded his independence for parity payments; but he learned it by watching a long-established and distinguished example. If he is to unlearn it, he will have to have company in the process.

Dependence upon the state has also deteriorated our social structure. If there had been a fundamental faith in the integrity of the American dream, an effort to stratify American society would never have been written into law by the Wagner Act. The Marxian dogma of class struggle, the very antithesis of our ideal, would never have been accepted as inevitable. No effort would have been made by the Congress of the United States to compact labor into a solid, an indivisible mass socially, politically, and morally, and to deliver the worker into the hands of his leader.

MUST HAVE FAITH IN INDIVIDUAL

By the method of erosion, each stage of which it would be difficult to identify, there has been a steady loss of faith in the individual. Indeed the phrase “rugged individualism” has been a phrase of mockery these many years. Will it be written in history that we had to wait for a Colin Kelly to fling himself against a floating fortress to remind us that we have underestimated the individual man? Only if we have a passionate and firm, a deep-rooted and abiding faith in the individual, is democracy credible. If Kelly can teach us that, he will not have died in vain.

The impairment of that faith explains why, in the course of the last ten years, men have come, in the careless self-revelation of speech, to contrast the “shortcomings” of democracy with the “strengths” of dictatorship. Even those who have complained that our characteristic American way is imperiled have been wont to assume that “of course a democracy cannot act with speed,” “of course a democracy cannot pursue a consistent policy,” “of course a democracy cannot summon the best leadership.” The worst aspect of these statements is the phrase “of course” because the words accept a premise which, if it is not contrary to fact, destroys the whole philosophy of our lives.
But it is contrary to fact. The speed of dictatorships has been the dastardly pace of treachery. The consistency of the dictatorships is conspicuous by its absence; quixotism in policy has been its hallmark. Democracy may not always summon the best leadership, but I would not exchange the leadership of any democracy for Hitler.

Nonetheless we have had ten years of defeatism. That loss of faith explains one great tragedy: while Communism was growing in strength even through bloody purges, while Fascism was maturing, and while Nazism was bullying the world, there was no eloquent word spoken for democracy. In France Briand was dead; worse than that his ideas were dead; Blum was chasing the end of the socialist rainbow. In Germany Stresemann was dead, and a fanatic was proclaiming black-hearted wrong to be justice and truth. Across the Channel, the Oxford Union voted in no circumstances to fight for its King and country, and Stanley Baldwin was wondering whether Britons would obey military orders. America was obsessed with a sense of failure. Most statements about democracy were so defensive in tone that they sounded more like indictments.

BASIC FAITH COMPROMISED

The shortcomings were not intrinsic in the democratic system; they were the weaknesses of democracy crippled by compromising its basic faith. A nation in which individuals had created the steamship, the airplane, the telegraph and cable, the telephone, the automobile, the modern technique of broadcasting, which had achieved the highest standard of living and the broadest scale of philanthropy in the world, lost faith in the ideal of individualism which made all that possible. It coasted downhill toward statism and governmental management of housing, finance, transportation, farming, education — and all the rest.

The doubts and the fears of the validity of our ideal at home led to a craven policy abroad. The adventures of freedom were exchanged for the false security of cowardice. Secretary Hull warned explicitly that the “embargo encourages a general state of war both in Europe and Asia,” and a former judge of the World Court called the Neutrality Act “a curious blend of homicidal and suicidal mania.” We would accept no moral obligation for peace anywhere but here. Let the world go to hell so long as we saved our own skins! In the unforgettable (and unforgivable) phrase of one Congressman, “Americans must be willing to forego the personal desire of seeing justice triumph.” Moral conceit could go no further.
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If there had been a genuine moral frontier, it would have been clear these twenty years that violence anywhere was as much a threat to our lives as disease anywhere. If the Rockefeller Institute had to fight disease the world around in our own interests, American political action should likewise have fought violence wherever it showed its head. We should have participated in every effort to block aggression, whether in Manchukuo, in Ethiopia, or elsewhere, knowing that the spread of violence is like the spread of a forest fire.

It is a spiritual tragedy that it took the violation of our material frontiers—not the frontiers of our ideals, not the frontiers of our hopes, not the frontiers of our faith, but our physical frontiers—to make us a united people. That is symbolic of the fact that our faith in the democratic way of life has not been strong enough.

Compromising our ideal has brought us disunity, class consciousness, economic strife, political bankruptcy, and finally war. Is there any road back? Defeatism is not yet dead, for "You can't reverse the trend" is the instant and all too common response. If you cannot, for what are we fighting? The drift to statism has run its full course in Germany and Italy and Japan; if it has made them too powerful to be beaten, we should stop fighting now and join their shabby new order. But if we are ready to sacrifice to overcome them, we should certainly repudiate their basic postulate. There can be no gain in physical victory coupled with spiritual defeat; that lesson we should have learned from the last war. As we overthrow the Axis, we must reject its philosophy.

BUSINESS CAN LEAD THE WAY

Let business lead the way by reviving its own faith in the individual. At a recent dinner an officer of a big corporation asserted that the day of individual enterprise in invention and discovery was gone, that we could look only to the great corporations for new products and new industrial and engineering developments. Such an attitude seemed to me not only unsound historically and analytically, but essentially defeatist. We agreed to put it up to the next man at the table without knowing his occupation. It transpired that he was the head of a business invented since the depression, developed by two men who did not have $500 between them, who by courage and resourcefulness put it on its feet as an important operating company.

It seemed to me tragic that a business man who thought he was defending our traditional system had unconsciously surrendered its
citadel. He had put an impersonal structure, in this instance the corporation, ahead of the individual. In that respect he was no better than those who substitute the state for the individual as the center of gravity.

Business must now seek out and exploit the successes of individuals. Let the public know what benefits have been derived from their achievements, what they have added to the comfort and convenience of mankind. There are thousands of such success stories that need to be told. If you believe in individual enterprise, tell about it—insistently.

Here is a second suggestion. Organize business from coast to coast to prepare a thousand new items for production when the war is over. I say a thousand; it may be many more. Dramatize the need of the world for novel and useful things; search out not only the obvious but the obscure invention, stimulate discovery, encourage and support research. Be ready to gamble on the new products when peace comes, supplying that initiative which has been surrendered to government. This program must be carried out in the face of discouragement, in the face of hostility, in the face of suspicion, in the face of everything that may be mobilized against it. Goodyear did not find it easy, nor Bell, nor Cyrus Field, nor Edison, nor the Wright brothers: their difficulties were different, but no less daunting.

Business will be judged at the end of the war by its capacity to absorb labor and keep down unemployment. New developments and old products better made in larger quantities at cheaper prices are the only method by which the test can be met. The greater the number of new products, the wider their range, the broader their appeal, the more readily the transition can be made.

UNSHACKLE BUSINESS; SIMPLIFY GOVERNMENT

Business may fairly demand—and demand now—that the shackles be struck from it for this purpose. Taxation must be heavy, but it should be fair. Punitive and hostile taxes ought to be repealed; you have a right to fight for that even during war. Regulation there must be, but regulation rather than political management, regulation motivated by faith in the essential soundness of the American system. Our productive record in the war demonstrates that soundness; insist it be accepted as a postulate to regulation. Demand that government take the load of non-essential, non-defense expenditure off the backs of individuals. Call for laws that make equity finance possible.
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Urge government to simplify its structure, shorten its proceedings, limit its regulations. Resist centralization with bitter determination. The war will be used as a device to extend it to our road system. The Federal Security Administration is seeking right now to take over state unemployment systems. Insist that the federal government demobilize some of its activities, giving up the attempt to plan all the farming from Washington. Go back to the faith of Thomas Jefferson who said, "If we can prevent the government from wasting the labors of the people on the pretense of caring for them, they must be happy."

This is the moment to read and re-read the tenth amendment to the Constitution. "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people." Right now the federal bureaucracy is dictating to my state how we shall operate our own civil service. That occurs at the very moment when the federal civil service covers the smallest percentage of federal employees in this century. The bureaucratic belief that citizens are not competent to exercise self-government in their own state lays the axe at the root of our federal system. It ought to be repudiated.

STATES MUST RESIST FEDERALIZATION TREND

Relief should be returned to the states. When boys are called to military service it is held that their local communities know most about them. Duty may be determined at home, but largess must come from Washington. That is a device to reduce local officials to a state of servility before the federal bureaucracy. It is obvious that the trick has worked all too well. Responsibility should be kept close to home.

Time and change have not altered the basic truth enunciated by Thomas Jefferson: "When all government . . . in little as in great things, shall be drawn to Washington as the center of all power, it will render powerless the checks provided of one government on another, and will become as venal and oppressive as the government from which we separated." Stir up your states to resist: "If the states look with apathy on this silent descent of their government into the gulf which is to swallow all, we have only to weep over the human character formed uncontrollable but by a rod of iron, and the blasphemers of man, as incapable of self-government, become his true historians."
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From every angle, at every opportunity, in season and out of season, exalt the individual. Democracy is simply the political aspect of an assertion of the supreme values in individual life. It is predicated upon the right to self-development, physical, mental, and spiritual. It assumes man's infinite worth, and the measureless riches that arise from the variety of his inventiveness. It is designed to implement his right to self-expression in vocation and avocation. It puts the greatest possible reliance upon self-discipline and the least possible dependence upon compulsion. If democracy is worth fighting on all the continents of the earth to defend, it is worth a struggle to protect it at home. That faith is the way to national unity; it is the path to peace.

ALL MEN ENTITLED TO BASIC FREEDOMS

What has this accent upon individualism to do with world peace? If the individual is the center of political gravity, there can be no chosen people, no favored nation, no elite class. Each individual is entitled to the same rights, such as the basic freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights, and the right to pursue happiness promised in the Declaration of Independence. These rights are not influenced or affected in any way by boundaries. They are the rights of man. They belong to all men — everywhere.

On no other political philosophy whatever is peace credible, even as a dream. For no principle save individualism breaks the hard shells of groups with rival and antithetical interests. Awareness of that fact, explicitly or implicitly, is the explanation of the historic zeal and enthusiasm of the American people for the rights of man around the world, for freedom — everywhere. So great an act of faith demands patience and persistence. Only if we never falter can we realize the "new order of the ages" promised in the inscription on the Great Seal of the United States. That is the only new order worth fighting for.