

Our Relationship with Europe (Delivered August 4, 1940)

Several weeks have passed since I received the honor of your invitation to speak in Chicago. At that time it was essential to create strong and immediate opposition to the trend toward war which was taking place in this country. The agitation for our entry in the war was increasing with alarming rapidity. Hysteria had mounted to the point where anti-parachute corps were being formed to defend American cities against air attacks from Europe. Greenland, with its Arctic climate, its mountainous terrain, and its ice-filled seas was called an easy stepping-stone for German bombing planes invading America. Cartoons showed the Atlantic Ocean reduced to the width of the English Channel. American safety was said to depend upon the success of European armies. Foreign propaganda was in full swing, and it seemed in many ways that we were approaching the greatest crisis in the history of our country.

But events move swiftly in this modern world, and the true character of a nation lies beneath such surface foam. When the danger of foreign war was fully realized by our people, the underlying tradition of American independence arose, and in recent weeks its voice has thundered through the weaker cries for war.

We have by no means escaped the foreign entanglements and favoritisms that Washington warned us against when he passed the guidance of our nation's destiny to the hands of future generations. We have participated deeply in the intrigues of Europe, and not always in an open "democratic" way. There are still interests in this country and abroad who will do their utmost to draw us into the war. Against these interests we must be continuously on guard. But American opinion is now definitely and overwhelmingly against our involvement. Both political parties have declared against our entry into the war. People are beginning to realize that the problems of Europe cannot be solved by the interference of America. We have at last started to build and to plan for the defense of our own continent. By these acts, our eyes are turned once more in the direction of security and peace, for if our own military forces are strong, no foreign nation can invade us, and, if we do not interfere with their affairs, none will *desire* to.

Since we have decided against entering the war in Europe, it is time for us to consider the relationship we will have with Europe after this war is over. It is only by using the utmost intelligence in establishing and maintaining this relationship that we can keep America out of war in the future.

I have a different outlook toward Europe than most people in America. In consequence, I am advised to speak guardedly on the subject of the war. I am told that one must not stand too strongly against the trend of the times, and that, to be effective, what one says must meet with general approval.

There is much to be said for this argument, yet, right or wrong, it is contrary to the values that I hold highest in life. I prefer to say what I believe, or not to speak at all. I would far rather have your respect for the sincerity of what I say, than attempt to win your applause by confining my discussion to popular concepts. Therefore, I speak to you today as I would speak to close friends rather than as one is supposed to address a large audience.

I do not offer my opinion as an expert, but rather as a citizen who is alarmed at the position our country has reached in this era of experts. As laymen we are often told that the solution of difficult problems should be left to the specialist. But since specialists differ in the solutions they recommend, they must at least allow us the privilege of choosing those we wish to follow. And in making this choice, it seems that we are back where we started and must form an opinion of our own.

I found conditions in Europe to be very different from our concept of them here in the United States. Anyone who takes the trouble to read through back issues of our newspapers cannot fail to realize what a false impression we had of the belligerent nations. We were told that Germany was ripe for revolution, that her rearmament was a bluff, that she lacked officers, that she flew her airplanes from one field to another so they would be counted again and again by foreign observers. We were informed that Russia had the most powerful air fleet in the world, that the French army was superior to any in Europe, that the British navy was more than a match for the German air force, that Germany lacked enough food, fuel, and raw material to wage war, that the Maginot Line was impregnable, that Italy would

never enter a war against England. Statements of this sort have issued forth in an endless stream from Europe, and anyone who questioned their accuracy was called a Nazi agent.

These examples show how greatly we have been misled about the military conditions in Europe. If one goes still farther back, he will find that we have also been misled about political conditions. It has seemed obvious to me for many years that the situation in Europe would have to change, either by agreement or by war. I hoped that we had reached a degree of civilization where change might come by agreement. Living in Europe made me fear that it would come only through war.

There is a proverb in China which says that "when the rich become too rich, and the poor too poor, something happens." This applies to nations as well as to men. When I saw the wealth of the British Empire, I felt that the rich had become too rich. When I saw the poverty of Central Europe, I felt that the poor had become too poor. That something would happen was blazoned even on the skies of Europe by mounting thousands of fighting aircraft.

From 1936 to 1939, as I traveled through European countries, I saw the phenomenal military strength of Germany growing like a giant at the side of an aged, and complacent England. France was awake to her danger, but far too occupied with personal ambitions, industrial troubles, and internal politics to make more than a feeble effort to rearm. In England there was organization without spirit. In France there was spirit without organization. In Germany there were both.

I realized that I was witnessing a clash between the heirs of another war. A generation had passed since the Treaty of Versailles. The sons of victory and the sons of defeat were about to meet on the battlefields of their fathers. As I traveled first among those who had won, and then among those who had lost, the words of a French philosopher kept running through my mind: "Man thrives on adversity."

The underlying issue was clear. It was not the support of "democracy," or the so-called democratic nations would have given more assistance to the struggling republic of post-war Germany. It was not a crusade for Christianity, or the Christian nations of the west would have carried their

battle flags to the confiscated churches of Russia. It was not the preservation of small and helpless nations, or sanctions would have been followed by troops in Abyssinia, and England would not have refused to cooperate with the United States in Manchuria. The issue was one of the oldest and best known among men. It concerned the division of territory and wealth between nations. It has caused conflict in Europe since European history began.

The longer I lived in Europe, the more I felt that no outside influence could solve the problems of European nations, or bring them lasting peace. They must work out their destiny, as we must work out ours. I am convinced that the better acquainted we in America become with the background of European conflicts, the less we will desire to take part in them. But here I would like to make this point clear: while I advocate the non-interference by America in the internal affairs of Europe, I believe it is of the utmost importance for us to cooperate with Europe in our relationships with the other peoples of the earth. It is only by cooperation that we can maintain the supremacy of our western civilization and the right of our commerce to proceed unmolested throughout the world. Neither they nor we are strong enough to police the earth against the opposition of the other.

In the past, we have dealt with a Europe dominated by England and France. In the future we may have to deal with a Europe dominated by Germany. But whether England or Germany wins this war, Western civilization will still depend upon two great centers, one in each hemisphere. With all the aids of modern science, neither of these centers is in a position to attack the other successfully as long as the defenses of both are reasonably strong. A war between us could easily last for generations, and bring all civilization tumbling down, as has happened more than once before. An agreement between us could maintain civilization and peace throughout the world as far into the future as we can see.

But we are often told that if Germany wins this war, cooperation will be impossible, and treaties no more than scraps of paper. I reply that cooperation is never impossible when there is sufficient gain on both sides, and that treaties are seldom torn apart when they do not cover a weak nation. I would be among the last to advocate depending upon treaties for our national safety. I believe

that we should rearm fully for the defense of America, and that we should never make the type of treaty that would lay us open to invasion if it were broken. But if we refuse to consider treaties with the dominant nation of Europe, regardless of who that may be, we remove all possibility of peace.

Nothing is to be gained by shouting names and pointing the finger of blame across the ocean. Our grandstand advice to England, and our criticism of her campaigns, have been neither wanted nor helpful. Our accusations of aggression and barbarism on the part of Germany, simply bring back echoes of hypocrisy and Versailles. Our hasty condemnation of a French government, struggling desperately to save a defeated nation from complete collapse, can do nothing but add to famine, hatred, and chaos.

If we desire to keep America out of war, we must take the lead in offering a plan for peace. That plan should be based upon the welfare of America. It should be backed by an impregnable system of defense. It should incorporate terms of mutual advantage. But it should not involve the internal affairs of Europe; they never were, and never will be, carried on according to our desires.

Let us offer Europe a plan for the progress and protection of the western civilization of which they and we each form a part. But whatever their reply may be, let us carry on the American destiny of which our forefathers dreamed as they cut their farm lands from the virgin forests. What would they think of the claim that our frontiers lie in Europe? Let us guard the independence that the soldiers of our Revolution won against overwhelming odds. What, I ask you, would those soldiers say if they could hear this nation, grown a hundred and thirty million strong, being told that only the British fleet protects us from invasion?

Our nation was born of courage and hardship. It grew on the fearless spirit of the pioneer. Now that it has become one of the greatest powers on earth, ours must not be the generation that kneels in fear of future hardships, or of invasion by a Europe already torn by war.

I do not believe we will ever accept a philosophy of calamity, weakness, and fear. I have faith in an American army, an American navy, an American air force and, most

important of all, the American character, which in normal times, lies quietly beneath the surface of this nation.

(Broadcast through the facilities of the Mutual Broadcasting System.)