

EDITORIAL OPINION OF THE
LA CROSSE TRIBUNE AND LEADER PRESS
PRIOR TO U. S. ENTRY INTO WORLD WAR TWO

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by
Darryle D. Erickson

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Candidate: Darryle D. Erickson

I recommend acceptance of this seminar paper to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of this candidate's requirements for the degree Master of Science in History - Social Science. The candidate has completed her oral seminar report.

July 30, 1971 Bernard R. Bailey
Date Seminar Paper Advisor

This seminar paper is approved for Graduate College:

James H. Erickson July 30, 1971
Date Dean, Graduate College

ABSTRACT

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by
Darryle Erickson

Adolph Hitler, Chancellor of Germany, spent the years 1933-1939 preparing his nation for war. He spent the years 1939-1945 in war; in the process he caused millions of deaths and destroyed much of European society. In addition, in defeat he gave the Russians an unparalleled opportunity to dominate Europe and Asia.

The purpose of this study is to determine editorial opinion on the coming of World War II as expressed in the area newspaper. The paper examined was the La Crosse Tribune and Leader Press, edited by R. L. Bangsberg, with Sunday editorials by M. R. Byers, from October, 1933 to December, 1941.

A reading of this newspaper reveals several tendencies clearly. The editorials leaned toward a policy of strict isolation from the beginning of Germany's rearmament, through the Anschluss, the Munich Conference, the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the attack on Poland, the Soviet Union's invasion of Finland, and the conquest of Denmark and Norway. On the occasion of Hitler's invasion and conquest of the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxemburg, the editorials softened the voice of isolation as rumblings for preparedness for war began to appear in

them. The battles of France and Britain brought an awareness of the possibility that the United States might enter the war. The editorial voice urged and approved the war preparation: the selection of a war cabinet, the destroyer-base exchange, the passage of the first peacetime draft law, President Roosevelt's Four Freedom's speech and the Lend-Lease Act.

As Hitler won more victories America moved closer to the brink of war in 1941. After Germany's conquest of Greece and Yugoslavia, the signing of the Russo-Japanese Neutrality Treaty, the freeze on Axis funds, the attack on Russia, and the Atlantic meeting of President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill, the editorials fully recognized that the United States was on the verge of complete participation in the war and gave approval.

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CHAPTER I

ISOLATION

Rearmament of Germany

The guns of World War I fell silent on November 11, 1918. In the months that followed the victorious powers--England, France, Italy, and the United States, wrote the Versailles Peace Treaty and presented it for signature to Germany. The treaty provided for a League of Nations intended to sustain peace in the world. Another requisite for peace was disarmament of all nations. Unfortunately the League lacked the power to enforce major decisions and suffered a blow when the United States refused to join. In addition the world's nations did not follow disarmament uniformly. In 1933 Hitler became dictator of Germany. This nation, suffering from economic depression and hating the Versailles Treaty, was willing to accept a leader who promised satisfaction for her hates and hopes. Hitler's plan came in three installments: first, the union under Hitler of all Germans scattered over Europe; second, the conquest of a German "living space" encompassing most of Europe; third, world domination. Hitler's plan was well conceived because the peace-oriented nations of the world could not or would not endanger their continued peace by taking a determined stand against Hitler's demands.¹

¹U.S., Department of War, Bureau of Public Relations, The Background of Our War, From Lectures Prepared by the Orientation Department (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1941), pp. 6-10.

On October 14, 1933, Germany struck a blow at the Versailles Treaty by quitting the League of Nations after being denied arms equality with France. Commenting on Germany's actions the Tribune stated: "We should haul off on the sidelines and let the Europeans work out their own problems since it is none of our business."²

On March 16, 1935, Hitler declared to the world that Germany was free of the Versailles Treaty by creating the Luftwaffe, repudiating all treaty limitations on armaments, and establishing universal military service. The editor admitted that this news was alarming and disturbing, but held that certainly Hitler's intention to rearm Germany was not supported by direct thought of war. Since the world had been preparing for war, not peace, in direct violation of the Versailles Treaty, Germany should not be expected to sit idly by and accept the position of a dependent nation. Because of the failure of the League of Nations to provide European harmony and disarmament, the prospect of a reasonable security for the continent and a reasonable status of national existence for Germany had to be in a balance of military power.³ In an editorial titled "Does Not Mean War", he stated that Hitler's announcement paved the way for the organization of a more permanent and equal peace than the world had seen since the writing of the Versailles Treaty.⁴

The editor outlined proposals for overhauling legislation concerning neutrality in case of war outside our borders. The United

²Editorial in La Crosse Tribune and Leader Press, October 16, 1933. (Hereafter cited as Editorial in Tribune with the appropriate date.)

³Ibid., March 19, 1935.

⁴Ibid., March 20, 1935.

States should adopt legislation announcing that upon outbreak of war, Americans traveling outside the country would do so at their own risk. Also, American shipments of war materials going to belligerents would have no protection from the United States, whether in American, neutral or belligerent vessels. America should not create an international incident over Germany's rearmament, for " . . . in war a policy of complete isolation must be ours, and that nothing we do shall make us a party to whatever conflict may be forced upon Europe because of continental nationalistic ambitions, fears or resentments."⁶

A year later, March 7, 1936, Hitler ordered his troops into the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland, whose status had been guaranteed by the Treaty of Versailles and the Locarno Pact.⁷ When the Locarno Pact was signed in 1925, it had been hailed as the inauguration of a new era of peace and good will. Representatives of Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and Poland met and for the first time since World War I, Germany received treatment as a friendly nation. The treaty set up a neutral zone in the Rhineland, an area covering Belgian, French, and German soil.⁸ When Hitler's troops entered the Rhineland, there was no reaction from the Locarno powers. The Tribune found no fault with Germany's actions and blamed France for forcing Hitler's hand saying that France always insisted on "holding Germany in chains" and was obstinate in her refusal to be reasonable.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., March 25, 1935.

⁷Louis L. Snyder, The War--A Concise History 1939-45 (New York: Julian Messner, Inc., 1960), p. 41. (Hereafter cited as Snyder with the appropriate page.)

⁸Ibid.

It was the French who were responsible for the rise of Hitler and the destruction of the German republic by giving him all the argument he needed to persuade the German people that they "must have an iron fist to break their way out."⁹

Anschluss--the Fall of Austria

Hitler, in 1938, achieved his long-time aim of uniting Austria and Germany. In the process he took a giant step toward World War II. Almost immediately upon assuming power in 1933, Hitler began to encourage the Austrian Nazis to attack the regime of Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss. In March 1933, Dollfuss, a Christian Democrat, dissolved the Parliament, hoping to strengthen his party and stop the Nazis. In July, 1934, the Austrian Nazis, in partnership with their German brethren, struck in an attempted coup d'etat. Dollfuss was assassinated, but his successor was Kurt von Schuschnigg, who was also a Christian Socialist. From then until 1938, Schuschnigg tried to keep Austria independent, but in March, 1938, after an ultimatum from Hitler, the Austrian government resigned. On March 11, German troops entered the country and made it a part of the German Reich.¹⁰ Regarding the Anschluss, the paper urged American isolation and reminded citizens of the terrible cost, in both money and lives, of World War I.¹¹ The editor praised Secretary of State Cordell Hull's statement that America would not invite trouble by attempting to police world powers where the interests of her people were not involved, nor would America attempt to "rescue Europe from itself."¹²

⁹Editorial in Tribune, March 11, 1936.

¹⁰Snyder, pp. 40-44.

¹¹Editorial in Tribune, March 14, 1938.

¹²Ibid., March 18, 1938.

Munich and the Dismemberment of Czechoslovakia

In 1919 the victors of World War I created the Republic of Czechoslovakia out of the three former provinces of Bohemia, Moravia, and Austrian Silesia, plus the two former Hungarian provinces of Slovakia, and Ruthenia. German speaking residents formed the majority of inhabitants in the Sudetenland, former Bohemia. In 1933, Nazi Germany began a propaganda campaign designed to show the horrible condition of the oppressed Sudeten Germans. In September, 1938, Hitler demanded that the Sudeten territory be included at once in the German Reich or there would be general war. The Czechoslovak cabinet resigned, creating a deadlock in negotiations.¹³ The editor showed sympathy for the Czechs, but urged a policy of attending strictly to American affairs by saying: "We have enough to do with our own troubles without shouldering any of those century-old muddles which have had Europe in the blood-bath every generation for thousands of years."¹⁴

At this point Mussolini, the Italian dictator, proposed a four-power conference, including no Czechs, to discuss the deadlock. The Munich Conference, attended by Hitler, Mussolini, Chamberlain of Great Britain, and Deladier of France met September 29. At the conference the powers agreed that Czechoslovakia should give in to Hitler's demands. " . . . Thus, Czechoslovakia was sold down the river by the powers that had created her and had been expected to protect her."¹⁵ The Tribune saw this as the price that had to be paid in order to avert a catastrophe, saying that the victor nations of the world had created Hitler by making

¹³Snyder, pp. 53-56.

¹⁴Editorial in Tribune, September 25, 1938.

¹⁵Snyder, pp. 56-57.

it clear that only through force could Germany get relief and cautioning nations to remember this as a lesson "in how not to behave after a victory."¹⁶

The Nazi-Soviet Pact

The event that jolted the world into the realization that time had run out was the signature on August 23, 1939, of a nonaggression pact between Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia. The bargain was astonishing because for years there had been a war of ideologies between the hostile totalitarian states. The dictators entered the partnership for mutual benefits and each intended to maintain the pact only as long as it was to his special benefit. The bargain freed Hitler in the East and made it possible for him to launch his war.¹⁷ With this pact, the Tribune recognized that tension was at the breaking point, with Europe on the brink of war, and stated a noncompromising position: "We must stay out."¹⁸

The Beginnings of War--the Attack on Poland

Following the Nazi attack on Poland, September 1, 1939, the Tribune did everything possible to convince readers that neutrality had to be maintained at any cost in the months ahead. The main danger to America seemed to be the virtual unanimity of public opinion against Hitler and the Nazis. The editor warned of the dangers of letting sympathies for the allies lead us into war writing that what was most needed by Americans with war begun was a firm resolve not to become a

¹⁶Editorial in Tribune, September 30, 1938.

¹⁷Snyder, pp. 58-59.

¹⁸Editorial in Tribune, August 27, 1939.

participant in "Europe's folly".¹⁹

When the British ship Athenia was sunk by the Germans on September 4, with more than 300 Americans aboard the paper held its position. Regarding the incident the editor wrote that the Americans aboard should have known better than to linger in Europe after tangled affairs called for their leaving sooner.²⁰

The Tribune used various reminders of the past World War to maintain continuance of our neutrality. On Armistice Day the editorial recounted the horrors of World War I inviting readers to take a tour through the nearest veteran's hospital to inquire what the broken inmates think of war. The editorial closed: "why start now to build another monument to another unknown soldier?"²¹ Readers were reminded of other problems of war. The paper pointed out that in all war-afflicted countries the cost of living was beginning to scramble upward, but no wage increases were in sight to compensate.²² In an editorial entitled "War Drives Out Liberties", the Tribune warned: "No nation, not the most democratic among them, can escape martial discipline when war strikes, and that's a point for all Americans to remember."²³

On Thanksgiving Day the editor, reflecting thankfulness America was not at war, cautioned:

We made a mistake once before; we don't want to make it again. We want to be free to be left to do the things we were meant to do-- to build, not destroy. We want to give our children a world that is not charred and stained with needless blood. We are thankful

¹⁹Ibid., September 1, 1939.

²⁰Ibid., September 4, 1939.

²¹Ibid., November 11, 1939.

²²Ibid., September 8, 1939.

²³Ibid., November 13, 1939.

for having been given a chance to rebuild an earth we nearly tore apart some twenty-five years ago. We think it's big enough for everyone to live peacefully.²⁴

The editor found fault with President Roosevelt when he asked Congress to revise the 1937 neutrality legislation. That proclamation had placed an immediate embargo on shipping of arms and munitions to all belligerents. Congress responded on November 4, 1939, with a repeal of the arms embargo and an authorization for "cash-and-carry" export of arms and munitions to belligerents.²⁵ The Tribune protested passage of the bill stating:

. . . we are embarked finally on Mr. Roosevelt's policy of "ham-stringing aggressors" by measures short of war but more than words. . . . It is going to take much discretion and a deal of luck, even with "cash and carry", to keep out of this war. Mr. Roosevelt has what he wants, and the responsibility for keeping this nation out of trouble is now directly and solely up to him.²⁶

The Soviet Union Invades Finland

On November 30, 1939, the Soviet Union invaded their tiny neighbor, Finland. The Tribune viewed the invasion as "cold-blooded aggression which has absolutely no standing in the court of world justice."²⁷ The paper now came out strongly in favor of the allies involvement in the war saying:

The invasion of Finland--the massacring of thousands of Finns by Stalin, makes it more plain what Britain and France are fighting against in the war as cunning, ruthless, murderous a pair of criminals as ever menaced the world--Hitler and Stalin.²⁸

Even though the sympathies of the paper were clearly with Finland,

²⁴Ibid., November 23, 1939

²⁵Snyder, p. 179.

²⁶Editorial in Tribune, November 5, 1939.

²⁷Ibid., December 1, 1939.

²⁸Ibid., December 1, 1939.

Americans were advised to stay out of the problem and hang on more tightly than ever in an editorial titled "Holding On To Our Hats":

. . . there is nothing we can do about it. We must keep telling ourselves that over and over again. We cannot help now by going over there with a contingent of troops and a grim but virtuous purpose. Later, perhaps, when the whirlpool becomes less turbulent, and when the nations of Europe quit fighting we can lend our offices in cooperating for a genuine peace, less neurotic than the one we helped engineer twenty years ago²⁹

On the local scene, the editor endorsed La Crosse citizens giving aid to the Finnish Relief Fund. Regarding this aid, the paper editorialized: ". . . it appears that La Crosse still has an opportunity to assist and feel with the rest of the nation that the need is great and that further contributions will be welcome to help swell the fund."³⁰ A different attitude was taken concerning official governmental aid to Finland. The Tribune took a cautionary view toward this aid stating that certainly American aid to Finland would strike a sympathetic chord in this country, but it should not be overlooked that by taking sides in a war in which the United States had no vital interest America would be taking a step toward the European conflict. The editorial closed: "Isn't it enough to permit Finland access to our munitions on the same basis as the allies?"³¹

When the Soviet Union and Finland signed a peace treaty March 12, 1940, making Finland virtually a dependency of Moscow, the editor expressed sympathy for Finland. The Tribune considered the peace an honorable one, for Finland "made a magnificent fight to the utmost of her ability."³² In discussing the conclusion of the Finnish war the

²⁹Ibid., December 4, 1939.

³⁰Ibid., January 12, 1940.

³¹Ibid., January 14, 1940.

³²Ibid., March 13, 1940.

editor found fault with the allies: "Britain and France missed an opportunity of great strategic importance by not intervening on Finland's side, and thus opening up a new war front which could be used against not only Russia but Germany."³³

The Conquest of Denmark and Norway

On April 9, 1940, war engulfed Norway and Denmark as Germany, striking with characteristic swiftness, invaded both countries. The paper found this plunge of Scandinavia into the war shocking, but commented: "Because of increased dangers, this is the moment when Americans should safeguard their neutrality if ever they did."³⁴ Two days later the Tribune told its readers:

As war approaches a showdown, neither the United States nor other remaining neutrals can expect any consideration from either side. We may as well begin to prepare ourselves mentally for that. The development of a "northern front" means that the long-simmering European war may break forth at last in full fury. Maintaining American neutrality will be harder than ever. We shall need every ounce of patience, calm, and level-headedness we can muster to keep the United States out of a spreading war that seems so likely to ruin every country which is sucked into its deadly whirlpool.³⁵

The Tribune praised mid-western America for not becoming enraged to the point of war fever saying: "Solid mid-America; angered as it is by the Nazi invasion, is still for neutrality."³⁶

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., April 9, 1940.

³⁵ Ibid., April 11, 1940.

³⁶ Ibid., April 28, 1940

CHAPTER II

PREPAREDNESS SHORT OF WAR

Invasion and Conquest of the Netherlands Belgium and Luxemburg

The spring invasion of the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg prompted the editor to take a stand in support of war preparation. Two days after the invasion, he commented: "The way war is spreading in Europe indicates that our neutrality is not as safe as it once looked. Psychologically we are closer than ever to war . . . "¹ He went on to criticize President Roosevelt for constantly turning the spotlight on the possibility of American involvement and yet doing nothing to step up national defenses. If the New Deal could muster any administrative ability at all, it was advised to "start turning actual steel into actual guns and doubling airplane production."²

The Battle of France

The German army crossed the French frontier May 12, and entered an undefended Paris on June 14. On June 22, the two countries signed an armistice. Adding to this quick succession of events, on June 10, Mussolini declared war on Great Britain and France prompting the editor to state: "No doubt can now linger in the mind of any American as to

¹Ibid., May 12, 1940.

²Ibid.

what side not only our sympathies lie, but where our forthcoming assistance will go."³

Even though American sympathies were clearly with the allies the Tribune emphasized that the United States was not ready to go to war, saying that the United States fleet was ineffective because it was in the Pacific, and the army was negligible. America had no arms, tanks or mechanized units to send to Europe. The need was to arm, strengthen relations with neighbors and seize and fortify every strategic outpost that might be useful to an invader. It was necessary for the United States to pour out billions for defense not to fight Hitler overseas, but to protect America at home.⁴

Along with emphasizing the necessity to stay out of war, the editor strongly urged a build-up of American defenses: "So rapidly is the war moving to a great climax that the most herculean efforts are called for in this nation's preparation for defense. Not a day, not an hour, is to be lost."⁵ A few days later he stated: " . . . In the meantime we must arm, arm, arm. . . . Our democratic system will fail unless we are determined to protect it and are prepared to do so."⁶ On June 19 he declared:

Amid all uncertainties, one thing is quite clear: we must without delay build military defenses of all kinds on a scale we never thought possible. In a world which speaks only the language of force and violence, we must learn that language and speak it with authority.⁷

³Ibid., June 11, 1940

⁴Ibid., June 15, 1940.

⁵Ibid., June 13, 1940.

⁶Ibid., June 15, 1940

⁷Ibid., June 19, 1940.

Britain Stands Alone

The Tribune chose not to make much comment on the battle of Britain and the blitzkrieg of London. But what was said pointed to the fact that Britain could hold out and would not fall:

There seems to be little doubt that both loss of life and destruction of property have been of grave proportions. But this much is known: the British are fighting back with a ferocity which is intensified by every terroristic Nazi raid, a ferocity which augurs ill to invaders.⁸

Regarding the blitzkrieg it was stated that although London was the heart of the empire, defense of the isles could be maintained even if a large part of the metropolis was in ruins, providing that an air force adequate to protect vital industries could be preserved.⁹ On September 22, the editor stated: "Hitler is not convinced that Britain has softened up enough to attack."¹⁰ By the end of the month he showed his confidence that a fall invasion threat had passed by reporting: ". . . . Probably the invasion of England can be set aside for this year increasing effectiveness of the RAF has probably scotched it."¹¹

The Pact of Berlin

On September 28, the German-Italian-Japanese Tripartite Pact was signed in which the three countries agreed to respect each others sovereignty and territorial integrity. The editor viewed this as the most important event of World War II to date expressing: ". . . . The pact is openly aimed at the United States, and is designed to overawe this country and to force us to sit by while the dictators carry

⁸Ibid., September 5, 1940.

⁹Ibid., September 10, 1940.

¹⁰Ibid., September 22, 1940.

¹¹Ibid., September 19, 1940.

out their program of dismemberment of the British and French empires."¹² He considered the pact a gesture containing a certain amount of bluff saying that if the Germans "can't get across twenty miles of English Channel despite overwhelming air superiority, they can't cross 3,000 miles of the Atlantic."¹³ Of the three countries involved, only Japan had a fleet on the open sea and was not already exhausted from previous fighting, so "if we have to fight it will be with Japan alone."¹⁴ The pact was regarded as a mistake and readers were told it would probably backfire:

What the pact will likely accomplish is destruction of the isolationist sentiment and it has been strong in the United States. The Berlin alliance practically forced us into the arms of Britain. We can no longer maintain a semblance of neutrality when the dictators' side in the second World War has practically delivered an ultimatum¹⁵

Official U. S. Reaction

War Cabinet

In June, 1940, President Roosevelt replaced isolationist Secretary of War, Harry H. Woodring, with Henry L. Stimson. He also appointed Frank Knox as Secretary of the Navy. The two new appointees were considered strong interventionists and internationalists. According to the editor these choices clearly showed that the United States was much closer to war than the public had been allowed to learn. He wrote: "Mr. Roosevelt has evidently decided that war and preparation for war are the only things that matter for the rest of his adminis-

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

tration."¹⁶

Destroyer-Base Exchange

On September 3, 1940, President Roosevelt notified Congress of an agreement between the United States and Great Britain under which America obtained a ninety-nine year lease of naval and air bases in Newfoundland, Bermuda, the Bahamas, Jamaica, St. Lucia, Trinidad, Antigua, and British Guiana. In exchange Britain received fifty four-stacked, flush-decked, over-age destroyers. The President's move was invaluable to British defense in the Battle of the Atlantic as well as an important action in the re-enforcement of American defense.¹⁷ The next day the Tribune endorsed this exchange saying that as far as neutrality was concerned, America might as well "scrap the word" since she had chosen sides in the conflict long ago. One more demonstration of it, while helping the country to more adequate defenses, would not make any difference in the long run.¹⁸

Draft Law

On August 27, 1940, Congress authorized induction of the National Guard into Federal service, and initial units were called out a few days later. Then came conscription. On September 16, 1940, our nation's first peace time draft law, the Selective Service Training and Service Act was approved by Congress. The law called for the registration of all men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-six, and for the training over a one-year period of 1,200,000 troops and 800,000

¹⁶ Ibid., June 23, 1940.

¹⁷ Snyder, p. 184.

¹⁸ Editorial in Tribune, September 4, 1940.

reserves.¹⁹ As to the actual passage of the draft law, the editor had no comment to make, but months earlier on June 17, he expressed his opinion:

Americans are so nimble minded that they can jump in a few weeks from an isolationist policy which frowned on any increase in national defense to contemplation of some form of compulsory military service for young men in the United States
 . . . the fact that it is being discussed at all is significant of the change that has taken place in American habits of thinking.²⁰

A week after Congress passed the draft law the paper reported that so many young men were volunteering, it might not be necessary to draft men to fill the first contingent of conscripts.²¹ By March of the following year the editor found the situation changing when he wrote that young men were failing to volunteer for the draft and deferments were being requested on a large scale. He reminded the public that the draft law was not set up by local draft boards, but rather was formulated by the federal government. The volunteer problem prompted this commentary:

. . . Twenty-two years ago the cream of this nation's manhood volunteered and was drafted for service that meant front line participation the moment they could be trained and made ready for the conflict. With chins up, they went to the colors.

Today the nation is at peace. But to preserve peace, we must be ready to defend our right to it, and that means preparedness with men . . .²²

Beyond that he took the view that Hitler had forced preparation for war upon America "both with trained men, and with an arsenal of modern weapons." "The only course left for the United States is to train her

¹⁹Snyder, pp. 184-85.

²⁰Editorial in Tribune, June 17, 1940.

²¹Ibid., June 28, 1940.

²²Ibid., March 11, 1941.

young men thoroughly and to equip them completely"²³ By June of 1941 the Tribune was actively campaigning for recruits because of the imperativeness of manning new ships with trained sailors saying: "The navy is our first line of defense. Every post must be fully and ably manned."²⁴

Four Freedoms Speech

From September 1939 to the end of 1940, the United States had been supplying Great Britain with American guns, tanks, planes, amunitions and explosives, but war consumed them almost as rapidly as they reached the fronts. In addition, the British saw their financial reserves approaching the vanishing point. In this precarious situation President Roosevelt, in his state of the union message to Congress on January 6, 1941, enunciated the famous "Four Freedoms"--freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. The speech, by implication, damned Hitler and the whole Axis ideology, and was unmistakably geared to the tone of greater aid to the allies.²⁵ The editor found no fault with the speech the next day:

President Roosevelt gave a vigorous speech that further removed doubt as to the direction we are moving. To the dictators, it was in the vein of "take it or leave it--you can't bluff us." It covered territory as wide as the world, for its agenda calls for giving the whole world the kind of life we enjoy in this country--and that's a big order.²⁶

A few days later President Roosevelt submitted his budget message to congress, asking for huge defense allotments. The editor indicated agreement with the request writing: ". . . The important thing

²³ Ibid., March 18, 1940.

²⁴ Ibid., June 2, 1941.

²⁵ Snyder, p. 187.

²⁶ Editorial in Tribune, January 7, 1941.

is that it be put to the best and most effective use to speed a program, the necessity of which is universally conceded, with the least possible waste in spite of the greatest possible haste."²⁷

He criticized local industry for not receiving defense contracts in proportion to their ability to produce, because they had not gone after their fair share, urging more recruiting effort in an editorial on January 23:

. . . War contracts, as a general thing, are not found in the morning's mail. Some ground work has to be laid to obtain them, and this is where La Crosse has failed so far. A little more aggressiveness on our part doubtless would go a long way to insure full use of facilities here to expedite the defense program and give local industry an equitable share in it. We suggest that aggressiveness.²⁸

Lend-Lease Act

On January 10, 1941, President Roosevelt introduced his Lend-Lease bill to Congress. For two months Congress hotly debated the bill. Gradually, the point of view prevailed that Roosevelt was right: The United States must balance its own defense against the cash value of weapons and supplies for the allies. The result was passage of the Lend-Lease Act in March. The law empowered the President to manufacture, sell, lend, transfer, lease or exchange any war material to the government of any country whose defense the President deemed vital for the defense of the United States. The President was given complete discretion, even to the extent of not requiring any repayment. A few weeks later Congress authorized an initial appropriation of \$7,000,000,000 for Lend Lease.²⁹ The Tribune praised the passage of

²⁷Ibid., January 9, 1941.

²⁸Ibid., January 23, 1941.

²⁹Snyder, p. 187.

Lend-Lease: ". . . The interests of this nation lie in doing all we can to check the spread of international gangsterism, and we seem to be pretty well united in the belief that it can best be done while the fight is still over there, increasingly difficult should it come here." The part of Lend-Lease with which the editor found fault was that granting near-dictatorial powers to the president in the name of saving America from Nazi aggression:

. . . aid to Britain could be provided without turning over congress in favor of one-man government, with the authority to do as he chooses. True, the executive's powers are limited to two years, but by that time we may have been eased into a philosophy through which recovery of congressional authority may be forever impossible.³⁰

A few days later in an editorial titled "We Must Start To Pay", he urged the assessment of new and higher taxes to meet the \$700,000,000 Lend-Lease appropriation:

. . . Realism in financing is as much a prime necessity as realism of the threat of which aggressor nations provoke to the free people of the world. We cannot go on burying our heads in the sands of mounting debt.

The issues of financing and debt are here, and they must be met while the fabric of our way of life is still intact--like it or no.³¹

³⁰ Editorial in Tribune, May 10, 1941.

³¹ Ibid., May 14, 1941.

CHAPTER III

ON THE BRINK OF WAR

Conquest of Greece and Yugoslavia

On April 6, 1941, Hitler ordered German legions to smash Greece and Yugoslavia. This action was a necessary preliminary to Hitler before attacking the Soviet Union, as he wanted assurance that no hostile power would endanger him from the Balkans.¹ On April 10 the editor urged that aid be sent to the two conquered countries: "Let's go Washington. Get factories moving to furnish war goods to Greece and Yugoslavia."² The Tribune was now prepared to accept the fact that the hope of the allies was with America. The paper expressed:

The hope of the conquered peoples, rises in the policy to which the administration has committed the United States by Lease-Lend and contemporary measures aimed at seeing world democracies through.

More and more the weight of that participation is developing and more and more are we becoming the cynosure of all eyes abroad--as the arsenal, and the granary, too, of democracy.³

The editor clearly indicated an attitude toward intervention by closing an editorial titled "Uncle Sam Moves Closer to War": ". . . we are several steps closer to the actual participation in a shooting war. How long we remain out of it is anybody's guess. The best of

¹Snyder, p. 153.

²Editorial in Tribune, April 10, 1941.

³Ibid., April 9, 1941.

observers think it won't be long."⁴ There could be no doubt that he had permanently abandoned isolation when an editorial entitled "U. S. Prepares for Firm Action" appeared April 27:

. . . As chief executive, Mr. Roosevelt is now starting to move openly toward war, instead of sidling and backing in that direction. If he is right that war is inevitable and necessary for our safety, this firm policy is the only possible one.⁵

Russo-Japanese Neutrality Treaty

Russia and Japan signed a neutrality treaty on April 11, 1941. Russia promised not to jump on Japan's back if she became the object of hostility with a third power. This action prompted the editor to comment in an editorial titled "U. S. Faces Fatal Decision Soon": "All out aid to Britain short of war isn't enough"⁶ Beyond that he wrote that the pact meant that Japan felt more safety in moving aggressively in the south, primarily against Britain, secondarily against the United States. Another result of the pact could be the long expected clash between Japan and the United States. It could be among the possible illusions of Japan that America should be ordered out of the Asiatic sphere, including the Philippines. He closed: "When Japan gets around to enforcing that idea the clash will come."⁷

Freeze on Axis Funds

On June 14 President Roosevelt closed the twenty-four German consular offices in the United States and ordered their staffs to return home. In addition, he ordered the freezing of all Italian and German

⁴Ibid., April 13, 1941.

⁵Ibid., April 27, 1941.

⁶Ibid., April 11, 1941.

⁷Ibid., April 22, 1941.

assets deposited in the United States. The Tribune viewed these actions with unquestionable approval:

. . . The action is justified by growing hostility on the part of the Axis powers towards this country. The nation does well to take this independent stand all along the line, when propaganda and all manner of subversive activity besets the American scene.⁸

In an editorial entitled "Opening Stages of Undeclared War", the editor recapitulated recent happenings concluding:

. . . Things cannot go along in this fashion. But each country continues to wait out the other; neither we nor the Germans wish to take the decisive step. Meanwhile we are certainly in the stages of what amounts to undeclared war⁹

Operation Barbarossa

On June 22, 1941, without warning, the Nazi war machine crossed the border and attacked Russia. The paper welcomed the attack, known as operation Barbarossa, for it offered a breathing spell for Britain, and it placed the strained relations between America and Germany in the background for the time being. The editor emphasized the opportunity America had to move with greater speed in behalf of Britain--and in the long view, in behalf of the United States. He concluded: "Were there not precedent for Hitler's success in this Russian instance, the world might relax and shout as it did temporarily, upon hearing that two powerful menaces to the American way of life were at each other's throat. . . ."¹⁰ The Tribune wrote urging that America send aid to the Soviet Union:

Aid to Russia need not, and must not inspire any illusions about faith and friendship of the comrades. We realize if they win this crisis, they'll be back undercover boring from within.

⁸Ibid., June 17, 1941.

⁹Ibid., June 22, 1941.

¹⁰Ibid., June 23, 1941.

But they're fighting our fight at the moment and far be it from us to have any scruples about the political shade of a people who do that. The least we can do is give them what we can spare, because right now they're going our way. The policies of Churchill and Roosevelt are truly realistic. By no stretch of the imagination are they making love to the Bolsheviks. They're merely postponing their differences until the vital crisis is adjusted.¹¹

The fourth of July editorial could be interpreted as an invitation for America to join the war. The paper wrote:

. . . we turn naturally to the memory of the day when the American colonies declared their independence of Great Britain and became an independent nation

They weren't all heroes then, those founding fathers who plunked for independence on July 4, 1776. . .

They weren't giants, they were just people like us, with their personal problems, likes, and dislikes. But in the end they faced their crisis and they saw it through. When the time came, they decided, and having decided, they allowed neither domestic dissidents nor foreign enemies to stop them.

That is one thing to remember about the forebears whose Declaration of Independence we celebrate today. They wanted a world in which they could breathe the air freely. They went out and got it.¹²

The Atlantic Charter

On August 9, President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill met secretly in Argentia Bay, Newfoundland. The two leaders drew up a declaration of the principles on which the war was being waged. The declaration came to be known as the Atlantic Charter, and was not an alliance, nor was it binding; it merely stated the ideal toward which the two democracies intended to strive.¹³ The editor considered the Atlantic Charter a worthwhile pledge that should make Germany think of the consequences.¹⁴ In an editorial August 17 he pointed out that

¹¹Ibid., June 25, 1941.

¹²Ibid., July 4, 1941.

¹³Snyder, pp. 188-89.

¹⁴Editorial in Tribune, August 15, 1941.

the pledge was chiefly notable for its advertisement of Anglo-American solidarity against Hitler:

. . . England and the United States have gone over the heads of the Axis to their own and the other people of Europe, and have promised them enduring peace and a settlement without revenge in a disarmed world.

Already Europe is seething from end to end with hatred and discontent against the Nazi conquerors. The Anglo-American statement hits hard at a psychological moment. For it smashes the Nazi thesis that there is no hope of resistance and that it is better all around to submit and goose-step into the German "new order".¹⁵

The United States was on the verge of complete participation in the war.¹⁶

The Tribune passed from isolationism to interventionism as a result of the gradual recognition of the changing world situation. When Hitler began his war preparation and made his first conquests, the editor repeatedly emphasized that America should remain isolated from the developing European conflict. By the time Germany moved against France and Britain, increasing numbers of Americans foresaw the possibility of involvement in the conflict. The editor approved of the preparations for war which the United States government began making. The Tribune reflected the official thinking and action of the United States government for the most part and mirrored the reluctance of the American people to go to war until no alternative course was apparent.

¹⁵Ibid., August 17, 1941.

¹⁶Snyder, p. 191.

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