

WE SHALL NOBLY SAVE OR MEANLY LOSE

The Last Best Hope of Earth

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

A Philosophy for the War

By Harry Scherman

To B. K. S.

*"We shall nobly save or meanly lose the last
best hope of Earth."*—ABRAHAM LINCOLN
Second Annual Message to Congress, 1862

Copyright, 1941, 1942, by Reader's Digest, Inc., and Random House, Inc.
Printed in the U. S. A.

Gift of Mr. Donald Dubacine - 1949

I

THIS SECOND WORLD WAR is a clean turning-point in the destiny of the American people. More than that, the future of the race will be determined by its outcome. It seems to be as crucial a war as any that has occurred in all the turbulent history of mankind.

There are few thoughtful Americans who do not feel that this is so. But why is it so? Not many of us find it easy to answer that question with what could be called a total satisfaction. Well-worn words like "freedom" and "democracy," phrases like "preservation of our ways of life," have sparks of meaning, but they hardly provide the full illumination we all crave.

The reason for this fairly common mental

periodic world-wide war until the peoples of the Earth use their intelligence, in some way, to progress as much toward political unification as, quite plainly, they now have in their economic and cultural relationships.

With this key-conception as a background, the issue of the war becomes clear. It is one that could only be settled by a decisive war.

Is this more advanced political unification of human society to be imposed by armed force, or is it to be achieved by a meeting of minds?

Is it to be maintained "for a thousand years" as a military world-state, in a new planetary Pax Romana run from Berlin as a center, or by some means of peaceable and equitable collaboration among the diverse peoples of the Earth?

That is what the war is about, and this is the service being rendered to the human race by all those who are now fighting the Germans and their duped allies. For this final bedrock issue is what the outcome of the war will settle.

[6]

II

MOST OF US are only dimly aware—many of us not at all—of the *actuality* of this Earthwide economic unification of mankind. The fascinating details of its organization are not taught, as they should be, to children in the schools. Nor is there any daily experience common to many men which would make good this deficiency of the schoolmen. Specialization of occupation has become so refined in the modern world that only the most inquiring—until a great crisis makes us all more inquiring—come to any deep awareness of how all the human inhabitants of the Earth lean upon one another, delicately, like two billion playing cards.

There is a pertinent historic fact here which should be in all primers—and is probably in

[7]

none. Since 1750, about the beginning of the Age of Steam, the human population of the Earth has more than tripled. It was then about 660,000,000; it is now well over 2,100,000,000. This increase has not been an evolutionary phenomenon with biological causes. Prior to it, the scholars find, for long long centuries there was no such "definite population trend. Periods having an excess of births must have alternated with periods having an excess of deaths." Yet there was an evolution—it took place in the world's economic organization. Thus the true import of this great fact is plain: 1,500,000,000 more human beings *can now remain alive on the Earth's surface*, can support themselves by working for others who in turn work for them. This extraordinary tripling of human population in six short generations finds its final explanation in the speeded-up economic unification which took place during the same period.

Thus most of us are now alive—and most of us are kept alive—by this vast cooperative uni-

[8]

fied world society that has evolved. If it were conceived that tomorrow the infinite variety of goods that men produce *had to be confined* within the national boundaries where they are produced, tens of millions of men, women and children would swiftly die of starvation. Hundreds of millions more would be in the last extremes of destitution and misery.

Goods are the great travellers over the Earth's surface, far more than human beings. Little men can be conceived of, fancifully, as merely convoying the goods in their now well-settled streams. Endlessly these streams of goods criss-cross, as on Martian canals, with hardly an inhabited spot on the globe unvisited.

From our own boundaries, for example—taking merely the principal items—grains and other foods flow endlessly to feed numberless foreign mouths; tobacco products to solace hundreds of millions; moving pictures to amuse them; cotton to clothe them; oil to keep countless machines other than our own moving; and

[9]

—of greater value than anything—machines themselves in fascinating variety, the best in the world. While this is happening, as the largest station for incoming goods on the globe, other great streams of goods cross these outgoing ones; sugar, cocoa, coffee, bananas, spices, and a hundred other foreign-grown foods; rubber from the East Indies; tin from there, too, and from Bolivia; furs from Russia; timber and pulp from Canada; from all the seven seas, metals and minerals to keep our myriad industries whirring; silk from Japan and flax from Ireland; luxuries from Europe. This is also true of every other people.

Here, as raw material for reflection, is the roster of the principal exports of the different nations of the world. There are numerous other articles, of course; some of them—though their quantities be small—indispensable to keep industries going and men employed in other lands.

Australia	Food and wool
Austria	Timber and paper
Argentina	Cattle, hides and wheat
Belgium	Food, textiles, coal and machines
Brazil	Coffee and cotton
Canada	Grains, metals and minerals
Ceylon	Tea and rubber
Chile	Nitrates and copper
Colombia	Coffee and oil
Cuba	Sugar and tobacco
Czecho-Slovakia	Food, textiles, metal and machines
France	Textiles, metal and luxuries
Great Britain	Textiles, coal and machinery
Greece	Tobacco and raisins
Haiti	Coffee and sugar
Hungary	Wheat and livestock
India	Tea, nuts and jute
Holland	Manufactured products
Netherland Indies	Rubber and oil
Iceland	Food
Italy	Manufactured products
Japan	Silk and textiles
Mexico	Oil and rubber
Norway	Fish, paper and metals
Peru	Copper, oil and cotton
Philippines	Sugar and copra
Poland	Wood, fuel and base metals
Portugal	Food and wood
Rumania	Oil
Soviet Russia	Wheat, furs, wood, oil and metals
South Africa	Wool and gold
Spain	Oranges, cork and olive oil
Sweden	Paper, iron and machinery
Switzerland	Manufactured products
Turkey	Tobacco, cotton and raisins
Uruguay	Wool
Venezuela	Oil
Yugo-Slavia	Food, wood and metals

There is one immense fact here so simple that often some "experts" tend to become unconscious of it, like the air we breathe. This inconceivable variety and mass of goods are ceaselessly being produced within each nation *for others outside its borders*. Multitudes of men are so employed, and it is the needs of foreigners which keep them employed. Indeed, it is these needs which have actually called into being a large portion of the enterprises and occupations.

This, however, is less than half the story of interdependence. The livelihood of hundreds of millions of others is maintained, very often created, by the *incoming* products from other lands. It would be hard to find a common article of use in any advanced nation the price, quality or constitution of which does not in some measure, and often critically, rest upon products emanating from foreign sources. An immediate example that will occur to everyone is the automobile. It has transformed modern civilization

and particularly American life. What would have happened in this momentous economic development without rubber from the East Indies? Or, in other lands, without oil from the United States and a few other countries?

One can take all the boasted technological advances of the past half-century, and the same pointed question can be asked of some plant, some metal, some substance, some article of manufacture, some invention that has been used to enrich the entire earth and not a single people. The incontestable truth is that there is a clear *planetary indivisibility* of production and employment.

But the bonds among men go far deeper than goods. Culture too knows no frontiers, and never has. I do not refer to the arts—to music, painting, great literature. These graces of civilization bind men of all lands together in spirit. They are bound together more practically, one might say, by the ever-advancing knowledge of humankind, as represented particularly in its

science. Men of science have always been and still are the most natural and confirmed of internationalists. They work with one another over every frontier and shamelessly appropriate from one another whatever new knowledge any seeker, in any field, gains. There is no such trifling conception as plagiarism here.

Neither can the faith of men in one another be prisoned within national boundaries. A justified reliance upon economic promises—what economists dismally call the “debt-and-credit system”—is at the root of human civilization, the explanation of both its growth and its present intricate organization. Debt and credit have never, from the remotest past, recognized any frontier. They have flowed over all, tying men of one land to men of another. The ceaseless streams of goods now flowing between all nations are matched by something invisible—the confidence, *perpetually justified by performance*, of all the participants in one another. This closest of all economic relationships, debt and

credit, has built up and still maintains human society in its planetary economic indivisibility. It might almost be likened, in its unseen unifying effect, to the all-enveloping deep layer of air over the planet by which, physiologically, all human beings alike are kept alive. So the debt-and-credit system—knowing no frontier—keeps human society functioning and alive.

Mankind is still moving, and moving fast, on this road of world economic unification. Think how the airplane carrying freight will alone intensify it within the next twenty-five years! It has not been by chance that a single metal, gold, has come to be used by every nation to measure, directly or indirectly, the value of its paper money. And is it any wonder that those rhythmic business cycles which still have great elements of mystery to the most careful economists, are now Earthwide phenomena; that all the world prospers together, suffers together—and complains together—as they occur? Modern human society is an economic whole.

III

WHEN ITS ACTUALITY is once recognized, many blurred notions about the war fall into a more meaningful order. Its first value is to make clear the very nature of the war. Let us not be confused, as to the fundamentals, by the fact that an old-time frankly imperialistic war, originated by Japanese militarists in the Pacific, has now become fused into a larger world war, which in its military phases at least started later. The reason for that fusion is plain enough to everybody. The only hope of success—or, one might say, the only hope of averting ultimate separate defeat—compelled both the Germans and the Japanese to fuse their going wars.

The central war, the world war—to which the Japanese have perforce tied their littler war as

[16]

tail to a kite—was started by the Germans. To what end? The German political literature for decades, and the speeches of their present leaders for eight years, reiterate the purpose openly. The Germans propose to be, as a single people, in final control *for their prime benefit* of this economic world-union which human civilization has achieved.

One of their basic notions, Herr Rauschning revealed, is that the “technical means” for such planetary control by a single people now exist. By “technical means” they imply first, necessarily, the military subjugation of the entire globe.

Allied with this is another basic notion which so far has simply amused men and women of other lands—that the Germans are a “master race.” But in minds perverted enough to harbor this anthropological nonsense, who can be surprised that the line between a “master race” and *the* “master race” becomes non-existent? The notion becomes less amusing when one looks

[17]