

War Prophecy

Nov 1940

FUTURE IN EUROPE

(Notes by Dr. Alan Gregg on his recent trip in Europe)

Before making some general comments on the certainties, the probabilities and the possibilities of the future in Europe, two points deserve emphasis. The first is that the present war presents oppositions not merely at the geographical borders of the countries involved but also lines of fracture between economic groups in each country, and other lines of cleavage between age groups - those who were in the last war and those who were not - those who think back and those whose lives are ahead. The tension between opposed economic groups will be less apparent or candid but more bitter and obstinate than between the age groups.

The second point is that with so complicated a series of lines of fracture and of opposing forces it is wise to expect surprises even if one cannot anticipate what they will be. Immensely increasing the uncertainties of the future are the several but interrelated courses to be followed by Russia and the neutral countries. Nonetheless it would be worse than inane to ignore the future. The clearest procedure would be to attempt to describe, and in this order, the certainties, the probabilities and the possibilities of the future in Europe.

Certain. It is certain that this war will prove to be a cruel and disastrous futility, certainly economically and perhaps biologically. Economically the war, by so long as it continues, will begin the ruin of the middle classes in England and either impoverish all the institutions they support or result in transferring them to an impoverished government. All

business requiring fresh capital will also be affected. Not to speak of the rich, who will be surely less numerous, the upper, middle and lower middle class in England will descend to lows they have not known for generations. Similar, but perhaps not so rapid, changes will take place in France. As Adam Smith remarked, "Sir, there is a great deal of ruin in a country", i.e., an unexpected endurance. The termination of hostilities will not be the end of social change, but almost the beginning of it.

Biologically war kills the fittest, the conscientious, the loyal, more commonly than their opposites, and removes such heritage and example from the human stock. Further it reduces the birth rate and limits the growth and future vigor of war nourished children. The present French government's strategy recognizes these values and pivots upon the conservation of French soldiers' lives. It could, however, be made more reckless by men like Mandel and General George in place of Daladier and General Gamelin, or in England by Churchill and Eden in place of Chamberlain.

As to economic and political liberties it is unnecessary to predict their disappearance for they have gone: you can talk about when they might reappear if it pleases you. In France and England the squabbling politicians are now in the air; the real decisions are taken by very few men in real control. The masses expect security and protection in exchange for liberty; the classes don't like to lose their liberty because they have no alternative unless it be between carrying the poor or joining them. That explains their attitude to this war, their fear lest it be futile, and their grim emphasis therefore upon this being a war "for liberty". The more grim for being tardy. Meanwhile liberty which has been taken away from the governed in Germany by

the Nazis deliberately over a period of eight years, is attacked by a galloping consumption among the Allies for all that they have not yet abandoned the form and redundant personnel of democratic government. It will be a long convalescence because liberty is the price of modern war, not its dividend. Even if many active and mobile Europeans emigrate after the war, life will be cruelly hard for those who stay. The master medical problem over most of Europe will be malnutrition, the chief political preoccupation public welfare. Universities will languish but some will not cease, and opportunities for men of great potential ability but inadequate resources to obtain advanced training will be few and desperately sought after and sacrificed for.

Now as to probabilities. It seems likely that in France there will be (but not soon) political disturbances of a serious character due to unwillingness to pay for a war whose nature and significance the people cannot understand unless they are attacked more tangibly. Where the English of the middle class seem to have already said sombre good-bye to their personal fortunes in order through taxation to maintain their government, the French seem more reluctant to be taxed and more likely to discredit their government but salvage their personal fortunes or at least postpone the reckoning that will have to come eventually. The French are reported to be spending a thousand million francs a day and 400 days is said to be the length of their rope. But no one can say what lengthening of the rope economically the alliance with Britain may bring. As a measure of obligatory economy in both countries, many institutions now private or local will probably be reorganized with a large measure of unification, less overhead expense and more centralized, governmental control. As a reward for giving up their

independence and autonomy these institutions (e.g. hospitals) will demand protection, security and support. And the central authority in return for the aid demanded will insist upon control. And then we shall see the usual result: new leaders of highly centralized organizations neglecting the importance of the sentiments of their subjects and ignoring local peculiarities. Much restlessness and tension will ensue, frustration, recrimination and pessimism. This applies to educational institutions, hospitals and public welfare organizations. It would possibly be counterbalanced by the economy and eventual efficiency of centralization. But it will be a time of immense extension of Social Medicine in any case unless the war ends in 1940.

First among possibilities should be noted the possibility that the Allies will not win the war, since Germany wins if it is not decisively beaten. There is more than a chance that failing a decisive victory Western Europe will fight and starve and disintegrate for a generation. On the other hand it is my personal guess that the war will, as a military struggle terminate in 1941 or possibly 1942, and that an Anglo-French alliance will continue a semi-military control of Germany for several years thereafter. The present type of war has obviously created a formidable amount of vindictive distrust of Germans -- not of Nazis merely. It is a hatred that has not spent itself in action, since it is civilian as much as military, and virtually unanimous. And it is therefore more important to foresee the "post war" social conditions and the nature of the "peace" than to prophesy the name of the "winner" or the time the formal fighting stops. How long the war lasts is a question whose significance is mainly in the number of surprises a long war affords and the extent of exhaustion it imposes upon both sides.

No doubt time will show these comments to have many errors of commission and still more of omission. It is likely that many of the surprises of the future will be in connection with Russia or the neutral states and the courses they will follow. But this record derives from a visit to France and England, not to Russia, Scandinavia, the Balkans, and Italy - or Japan.

I might add that it seems to me that Europeans cleave to their ideologies and especially to the ideal of nationalism as a feverish patient insists that a gangrenous leg be not amputated. Of course you know of men who insisted on keeping their legs and got well. But you have heard such stories only because they lived. Those who should have given up a leg in time - as Europe should give up its present set of ideas about property and nationalism and sovereignty - are wilfully dead.

And how long can the United States assume that its own values in such matters are beyond the reach of criticism, and isolated from the effects of European change? By so much as space is reduced by modern inventions we are all in the same world. The contrast between Europe and North America during the next years simply must concern us if we are not to deserve Macaulay's description of "a class ignorant of its own interests and considerate of nothing else".

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