

To Those Who Know

ROME was a different civilization after Caesar crossed the Rubicon; what was before never came back. A few decades after Pericles and the Peloponnesian War, Athens, the center of the greatest culture of antiquity, was too decadent to repulse the Macedonian hordes.

Democracies have had various ways of committing suicide. Sometimes they just fold up before a ruthless adventurer, like Italy before Mussolini. Sometimes they use the existing constitutional method for the *hara-kiri*, as in the election which brought Hitler to the Chancellorship of Germany and ended the Weimar Republic.

In France, of course, the second Republic was wiped out by an invading army, but the evidence seems to point to an internal decadence which made invasion easy.

In fact, internal decadence seems to be the common denominator for all forms of national political suicide. The difficulty in evaluating the present by historical precedent lies in the failure of historical events to repeat themselves in a definite, recognizable form. It is also true that current incidents and passions becloud the essentials, which only historical perspective points up.

Can we say, with precision, that the passage of H.R. 1776 marks the decline of American democracy? And yet, history may prove it to be so.

The act, in spite of its supposed purpose to facilitate aid to England—which could have been effected in a specific law limited to that purpose—is an outright grant to the presidency of powers not contemplated in the democratic form of government. Its proponents advanced it as an emergency measure. And in the Senatorial debate the advocates of the "lease-lend" bill spoke openly of war with Germany and Japan.

That this measure is a step in the direction of war is hardly a conjecture. That the war will be a long and bitter one seems to be the military and political consensus. The cost in human lives and in property will be greater than that of any war in history. And what of human values? Of culture? Of political liberties?

A civilization once destroyed never comes back. It is dead forever. The civilization that seems to stem from a previous one, because the memory of some of its aspects are retained in isolated spots, is indeed a new one; for it has to dig out of its own experience and by its own experimentation the knowledge that in former times was

the common heritage. The recorded facts of the past must be re-learned and re-assimilated before they become the pattern of present life.

The current trend to self-destruction may stop short of that. Five years of war—some prognosticate ten—may not result in wiping out what we term the democratic way of life, with its attendant civilization.

Even so, will the world be the same as it was before? Can humanity regain the main road, without long years of travail, after wallowing in devastation for even five years? For, after such a struggle men begin to think differently, and at least a generation must pass before old values of human behavior can be restored. A generation taught to kill and destroy must wash the nightmare from its memory before it can master anew the arts of progress; and that takes time.

We do not temporarily suspend our way of life when we go to war. We abandon it utterly, and we must find a new way for any return. Sometimes the stoppage is brief, as in our participation in the first World War. Even so the America since 1918 is a different America.

It was not the war itself that brought on ten years of depression; yet the war undoubtedly aggravated this economic hell because of the burden of taxation it left us. Prohibition and its lawlessness were direct products of the war.

The 1920's brought a breakdown of moral values; when people learn that lives are cheap they can have little regard for ethical living. Growing bureaucracies and governmental regulation of the individual are the outcroppings of a poverty economy which was accelerated by the war.

What after this war? Only if by some miracle the people become aware of the truth that the primary cause of war is internal, that the monopoly economy which enables a few to live at the expense of the many is the source of wholesale murder and destruction, can a decent way of life emerge.

Democracy is done. If those who know the truth will face the opposition which a war-maddened world puts to all reason, will fearlessly teach that truth without prejudice or passion, something even better than the democracy we have known can result. It will be Freedom.

A mission not unlike that of the prophets of Israel has been given to those who know.