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West Coast Perspective

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I have reverted to old habits formed in Europe and have been visiting factories. During the month of February, traveling north from Los Angeles to San Francisco and Seattle with side trips to smaller towns nearby, I went through several of America's most important munition plants. What I saw was encouraging. I saw finished products moving quickly toward completion; when transported to the scene of battle, they should appreciably influence the outcome.

Production rose 70 percent in a single recent month at large plant that manufacture what is probably the most effective modern weapon of war. Since then the output has jumped still higher. Pearl Harbor accelerated the assembly lines. The workmen know from the daily military communique that what they do today and every day soon makes a difference at the fighting front.

I asked a sales girl whether she bought books, and when she said yes, I asked her whether she had contributed any books to the libraries of the armed forces. She replied, "No, I never felt like doing it. But last week my brother went into the Army and I'm going to send some books to his camp." As more and more relatives and friends join the army, navy, and air force, and as more American combat units enter the actual arena of conflict, civilians generally and workmen in particular will get into the spirit of the war and intensify their war effort." There is no use scolding a nation for "complacency." The average mortal just does not know how not to be complacent. Every individual should be told exactly what to do.

Key managers in unrelated and widely separated munitions enterprises made one response when I asked what was their chief complaint. "Paper," they said. Factories, I was told, are required to answer innumerable questionnaires from government offices. Washington demands information, then the state asks similar data, then the region wants more facts, then another department in Washington wires for statistics that have already been sent to its neighbor around the corner, and so on endlessly. At one plant I was shown a large administrative building in the process of construction. "That," said the director, "will house a few hundred people who will wrestle with the red tape." I had no way of learning whether this often-repeated grumble is justified. If it is, one of President Roosevelt's urgent jobs is to coordinate the work of federal and local quizzers.

Raw materials are plentiful in the crucial munitions units. Steel scrap is wanting here and there because so much of it was sent to Japan. But this is not a serious bottleneck. Experts told me that production was quickly acquiring rhythm.

Knotty labor problems exist. The population of some small towns has been doubled as a result of war work, and the housing difficulties are great. I was present in two factories when the shift changed, and to see those thousands of men rush to their cars or buses and then stand still for long periods until traffic was unsnarled made me realize that next spring's battles may be affected by the fact that most American munitions workers must take two hours to get to and from work.

Soldiers and many well-to-do anti-labor civilians say, "If the fighting man risks his life for \$21 a month, why should the workingman be receiving \$40 and \$50 a week?" The workingman says, "If the boss is making millions and being exposed as a profiteer by a Congressional committee, why shouldn't I get a decent wage?" "If I didn't take double pay for holidays," a welder said to me at a shipyard, "the money would go to the company's stockholders. It wouldn't go to MacArthur's boys." During a war equality in facing death cries for equality of civilian effort and sacrifice.

The government has still no policy with respect to the drafting of munitions workers. Men just graduating from the apprentice stage to experienced production are sent by draft boards to the training camps. Of course, if every defense job became a reserved occupation, some men would seek war work so as to evade military service. This

would be have to engage the intelligence and vigilance of the authorities who choose the selectees. But factory managers declare that the first requirement of efficiency is a stable labor force. The labor turnover is considerable; bad housing, scarcity of women, and voluntary enlistment awell the ebb and flow. Confusion is intensified by steeply increased production and by changes in models introduced on the basis of experienced gained in oversea battles.

In general, the West Coast is more conscious of the war than the rest of the country. It hears more facts and rumors about Pearl Harbor. It witnesses the country going into action. It is also more jittery. Rich folks are leaving San Francisco, Seattle, and other places for the safety of inland Arizona and Nevada. Most people I have encountered this month in California, Oregon, and Washington believe that they will be severely bombed by Japanese airplanes. This stimulates a demand that America keep its weapons at home to protect its own shores. It also intensifies the man-hunt on Japanese-born and American-born Japanese, who, it is alleged, might try to capture cities, shipyards, and plants during raids. I talked to women who were honestly afraid the Japanese truck growers would poison their vegetables.

In Seattle I saw a girls' school going on an excursion, and sailing Japanese children were walking hand-in-hand and arm-in-arm with American children. Teachers and superintendents in liberal Pasadena and Seattle told me that the Japanese students were often brilliant and always loyal. Numerous housewives told me they trust their Japanese servants. The public is not showing hate or spite. But the reactionary press and politicians are endeavoring, under the cover of war-time flag-waving patriotism, to do what they always wanted to do in peace time: get rid of the Japanese, harness labor, and frighten the liberals. In many places one discovers beautiful souls, progressive minds--people eager and anxious to set the world right. They are especially worried about who will make the peace and what kind of peace it will be. But these liberals, though numerous, are neither vocal nor organized. It hurts them to see clowns in Congress and in editorial offices behave as though they thought they could win the war by attacking Mrs. Roosevelt and sending Japanese children out to Colorado, which doesn't want them; but pain, even in a heart which is in the right place, is not a force in politics. Cheap demagogues are having a field day.

I suppose the majority of West Coast citizens lack the knowledge and perspective to keep themselves from falling into a slough of defeatism when the news from the battle area is black. They cannot be blamed for taking the fall of Singapore hard. They ought to have more guidance from the nation's capital. They ought to be told that the fall of France was a far greater calamity than the fall of Singapore; yet almost two years have passed since Hitler defeated France, and he is much farther from victory now than he was then. Hitler has conquered Poland, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, France, Yugoslavia, and Greece, but he has not won the war. In like manner Japan's triumphs in the Pacific do not spell victory. American convoys laden with valuable weapons have reached Australia and New Zealand. More will follow. Four-motor Boeing flying fortresses have been reported bombing the Japanese. Many more will follow. America is getting into the war. Factories are busy. No one will win or lose this war in the next few months.

Hitler's failure to invade England demonstrated the inadequacy of his air force. Hitler's inability to cut the lifeline between England and America demonstrated the inadequacy of his sea power. Hitler's reverses in Russia prove he is not always invincible on land. There is more to war than the actual occupation of territory. The Allies won the war in 1918 before a single Allied soldier had set foot on German soil and when the German army still stood on conquered foreign territory. Easy optimism is very dangerous. Defeatism born of shortsightedness is also harmful. Out here a lot of "experts" had predicted that we could "knock the Japanese out of the Pacific in three weeks." When citizens discover that we cannot, they swing from the extreme of frivolous conceit to the extreme of profound dejection. The truth is that we are not as weak as events since Pearl Harbor have indicated. We shall, to judge by what I have seen recently, soon be stronger.