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Habana, Cuba, May 31, 1940.

AIR MAIL.

Personal and Confidential.

My dear Friend:

I was asked to come home very recently for consultation for some days but during the short time that I was there I was kept so busy on various projects that I did not get to see any of my friends. I much regretted not having been able to call on you and Mrs. Frankfurter as there was so much that I would have liked to talk over with you. I left word with General Watson for the President that I was home for a few days but it was at the time that he was working on the defense estimates and I unfortunately did not get to see him while I was there, which I quite understood.

The catastrophic events in Europe which are taking a turn which even some of us who saw this situation more clearly than others, did not foresee in the sense that the French and Belgian resistance has not been what it could reasonably have been expected to be, are causing I am sure all of us the greatest and immediate concern. There have been I believe no unexpected developments so far as the countries attacked are concerned, but the extraordinary successes of the German armies in so short a time have made it necessary to envisage even the possibility and probability of a dictated peace. This confronts us with a situation which creates the greatest emergency in my opinion which our country has yet faced in its history and the necessity for resolute and immediate action on a wide front.

Although you had given so much thought to these problems and are so well informed, I am going to take the liberty of conveying some of my thoughts to you which are based on the possibility, and what even may be the probability, of a dictated peace by Germany

to

The Honorable  
Felix Frankfurter,  
Supreme Court of the United States,  
Washington, D.C.

to England and France. And what a peace it will be! I am sure that there are very few people in our own country outside of the President and a few others who realize what the nature of such a dictated peace would be. One has to have known the people who are at the head of the present German Government to realize what they are capable of and what their objectives are and the means which they are capable of using and intending to use to carry them through.

If it comes to a dictated peace we may be sure that a good part of Europe, in fact all of it, will be disarmed with the exception of Germany. Italy for the time being may enjoy a certain autonomy and not be completely disarmed, but she will be a servile instrument of Germany. A few of the smaller countries like Spain, et cetera, may be permitted to retain some arms because they would in any event be ineffective. With the military power of Europe therefore in the hands of Germany and the rest of the countries disarmed or virtually so, Germany will be in a position to enslave, and will enslave, Europe politically and industrially.

The production machinery of Europe will be under the control of Germany and the populations will be put to work, forging the chains which will insure their slavery and the arms to be used against us. This in some respects is one of the most disquieting features of a dictated peace, for even our industrial machinery geared to its highest pitch will be hard put to meet that situation. But we may have to meet it and might as well make the necessary decisions now.

We have to envisage in case of a dictated peace that Germany will make every effort to get as much of the European maritime fleets into her possession as possible. A good part of this will be out of her hands and beyond her control if we are prepared to take the necessary steps. This I think we must do without any reserves, for if the merchant fleets of England and France and Scandinavia fall into the hands of the Germans or are operated by puppet Governments, the slaves of Germany, the Eastern and Western seas on which we have so much depended for our safety become small lakes and the means are available to Germany

to



to transport considerable bodies of men and considerable quantities of war materials to strategic points on those vast stretches of the Western Hemisphere which we have to defend. I think therefore when it comes to the merchant fleets we must be prepared to take appropriate action.

So far as the naval strengths of Britain and France are concerned, what may be left in case of a dictated peace, there are in my opinion only two safe places for these fleets - at the bottom of the sea or in our hands. With these naval vessels in the hands of Germany and with the cooperation of Italy and Japan she will have a naval strength probably greatly superior to our own and one which we would have to have years to build up to, and you can be quite sure that we would never have the time to build up to it. With these naval vessels in the hands of Germany this ocean would become still narrower and that isolation which some of our friends have spoken of would be completely gone. We have to remember that it has always been a part of the German strategy that she had to prepare herself for victory on land and for the British and French fleets to fall into her power. We have to remember, too, that the mere presence of the British and French fleets in Canada or Australia would not be sufficient for wherever the British or French Governments might function the Germans could say: "You deliver these ships to us intact or we will shoot 50,000 Britishers and 50,000 Frenchmen," and she would be quite capable of doing it. They want those vessels or what will be left of them in case of a dictated peace and they want them because they have us in mind.

In case of a dictated peace we will have immediately all kinds of points of conflict with Germany on which we cannot give way or else we will be defeated before we can make any military effort. The Germans will insist on the possessions of the British, French and Dutch holdings in the Western Hemisphere. We cannot for a moment contemplate their getting a square inch of territory in this Hemisphere and that raises the enormous problem of the defense of this Hemisphere which is now ours whether we like it or not. I will revert to this later. Then there will be the question of the holdings of funds by various European countries in the United States which Germany will insist on

laying

laying hands on, and in my opinion we cannot permit this to be done for we would be giving the beast the further food on which to fatten it for the struggle against us. Then there will be the question of the indemnities which Germany will endeavor to exact from the defeated countries and you can be sure that she will use other means than the Allies used to exact the indemnity from Germany! This time, no matter what our feelings may be, we cannot for our safety and for the eventual liberation of these countries in Europe give any aid to England and France and others in the payment of such indemnities as we did to Germany at the end of the last war. A thousand and one problems, literally speaking, will arise in connection with trade, for Germany will endeavor to impose her barter system and we will have to stand firm, for if we give in it will mean immediately a complete change in our whole internal economic system and, directly and indirectly, contribute to the strengthening of the beast against us. I will not go into this further but these are a few of the problems which we would have to meet in the case of a dictated peace. There is no use in our having any illusions with regard to this. We have got to be prepared to take all kinds of action which we would otherwise take step by step, at once and resolutely. This is going to go against the grain of many of us but our people must be awakened to the real dangers before us so that there will be no difficulty on the part of the Government to take the necessary steps and decisions and carry them through.

We have before us the problems of the defense of the whole Western world. How much of it we can successfully defend with the means immediately available to us, is a question. This is one for military strategists but it is one which we must study immediately.

We must keep in mind that practically everyone of the American Republics is in a military sense not able to defend itself, at least by itself. The burden will fall on us. What, however, at the outset is even more important is that in some of these countries there may be a tendency to crawl on the band wagon of the victor even though it means slavery for their country. We have to reckon with the fact that the degree to which countries will resist depends largely upon the actions of Governments. We have seen this in Europe. It applies in some respects even more to these



two Western Continents. In some of these smaller countries particularly, selfish individuals in powerful places would be quite prepared to sell their fellow countrymen into slavery for selfish advantage. For this reason I think one of the first steps we have to take is to insure the moral armament of the Americas and in this we have to take the initiative.

A good many of these people in Government and among the masses in the other American Republics will be affected tremendously by the German successes and there will be this inevitable human tendency towards fear and to crawl on the victor's band wagon. We have to counteract this by energetic action on our part showing that we are determined on the defense of this Hemisphere and to this end we must make it clear that we are able to do so. The vigorous steps which we are taking in the program of defense under the President's leadership will have an impressive effect in the other Republics. We will have to do everything in our power to strengthen the backbone of the Governments and of the people in the American Republics.

I am one of those who are convinced that the military successes of Germany have been due as much to moral sabotage as to the superiority of German military equipment and force. I remember Goebbels saying to me once in 1933 that Germany would be able to impress its will on Europe "without firing a shot". He said that they would create internal discord wherever the need existed, that they would make friends in every country by using every weakness and mean characteristic in human nature, that they would instill fear, and that they would bring about cumulative effect by taking action against one country after the other. Even at that time Goebbels said that no common action need be expected against Germany as every country could be lulled into security and into the feeling that it would be immune while another was destroyed around it.

We are making under the President's leadership the real beginnings of that physical rearmament which is necessary on so tremendous a scale. It is not because we like it but because we are faced with a real necessity which will turn our country into what is practically an armed camp. We shall have to lend all our ingenuity and all our forces to the production of offensive and defensive instruments. We shall have to mobilize our whole industrial machinery in

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this task of defending every single thing to which we are attached, but what is more, and what the President has seen so clearly, is that we must mobilize our moral forces. This is saying a good deal and it means not only the prevention of moral sabotage and the putting down of defeatism in any one of the scores of ways that it can insidiously show itself, but it means that we may have to sacrifice some of our civil liberties temporarily in order to conserve them permanently. This is going to be one of the difficult questions at home for we have always been attached to certain ideas and it has been difficult for some of our people to understand that certain measures may be temporarily necessary in order to conserve them. I have often said to some of my friends at home that they are so liberal on this question of civil liberties that they are the worst enemies of civil liberty. After all, it is our way of living and what we call our democratic institutions which we wish to conserve. Certainly in a democracy the majority must prevail. In our country I think we can safely say that 98 percent and perhaps more of our people wish to conserve our way of living. This relatively small percentage which is left is the one concerning whose civil liberties some of our good friends become so excited. The effect of the efforts of these well meaning people, and some of them are well meaning, may be to destroy the civil liberties of the overwhelming majority and we cannot hesitate to restrict this small minority.

Some of my friends have often said to me that it is a sign of our strength that we can permit such free expression of opinion and violent attacks on our Government and our institutions. This may be so and I believe is so in normal times. What we have to recognize is that these are not normal times and that we shall have to act accordingly. I have seen the resistance of more than one country in Europe broken down because this insignificant minority was not restricted. Its action lent itself in one form or another to the eventual destruction of sovereignty and of all civil and political rights. We cannot permit this to happen in our own country and for this reason we must put into effect immediately and rigorously various controls over aliens. I have gone so far in the recommendations which I have made as to say that these controls must be exercised equally rigorously over certain native born and naturalized

Americans



Americans for they can be more dangerous even than aliens.

I am convinced that the overwhelming majority of our people are prepared to accept these controls and want them and that this holds true of all classes of people. We have got to take action with respect not only to aliens but of those naturalized and native born Americans who lend themselves to these societies of one form or another which serve as the spearheads for moral sabotage. When I was in the Department we had a list, carefully prepared by someone in the University of Pennsylvania, of some 600 anti-Semitic organizations of which I am sure most of the members were native or naturalized citizens. These societies were either rackets, existed on paper or were the spearheads of Communist organizations or foreign agents. A number of our peace societies are poorly concealed cloaks for Communist activities. A good many of the benevolent and burial societies and social organizations of aliens in the United States are being misused for improper purposes although the rank and file are simple and on the whole well meaning people. All these organizations I believe should be restricted immediately for there is no reason for their existence in an emergency such as that we are in when every citizen must be giving his full support to the Government and to the national defense. The time has come I think when there is no place whatever for the Communist Party and that it should be completely suppressed in our country. When I think that a man like Browder is permitted to speak in times like these when we know that he deliberately secured passports under a false name in order to travel in Russia and when we know that he and his kind really aim at the destruction of our Government even though they may cover their objectives with all sorts of cloaks, we are playing with fire and must expect to get burned. I go so far as to say that when a Government in a time like this permits a Communist Party to exist it is doing exactly the same thing that other Governments have done and whose sovereignty is gone. We are not so very different from anyone else in most ways.

I am therefore very much concerned with "Fifth Column" activities in our own country. I could write a book on what I have seen in other countries. Just as others have felt themselves immune and were

complacent



complacent with what was happening and what they knew to be happening in their midst, so we are inclined towards the same complacency. I am therefore of the opinion that just as important as our physical rearmament, which must be rapid, thorough and complete, is our moral rearmament which means putting down defeatism in any of the many insidious forms which it can take. After all, restricting our civil liberties will not mean a single restraint on the overwhelming majority of our people but merely mean restraints on those who would destroy all that we cherish. For that reason it is my very definite conviction that we must do many things which we would not under other circumstances do, and do them without hesitation.

The President's leadership continues to be splendid and what a precious gift it is to all of us! I have often felt that in many ways he would prefer not to have another term in the White House. This is merely an intuitive feeling that I have, and those of us who love and revere him would wish that he could be spared this further ordeal of four years in the overwhelmingly important position with its responsibilities that few realize. On the other hand, the circumstances seem to make it inevitable that he carry on. I know of no one who could hold our people together as he can. I have recently had ~~a man~~ write me who before could not use terms too revolting concerning the President, saying that they now believe that he is the only possible person to be in the White House during this crisis. How foolish some of our people have been in this senseless criticism of the President. They are beginning to want to crawl under his wing just as they did at the beginning of his first term. Some of us human beings are pretty poor specimens.

Tremendously important as this leadership of the President is, I am convinced that the time has come when a good many of the restraints which we have had with respect to our own people must fall away. Every day is important and it is imperative that our people realize in all its grimness the problem which is before us. I am convinced that the response of the country will be almost unanimous and that our safety lies in putting in confinement those who would sabotage our liberties. Whether it be in the ranks of labor

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or finance and industry where this defeatism shows itself or where an endeavor may be made to take advantage of the vast program on which we must embark, we must not hesitate to expose it and take the necessary steps. I need not tell you that among some of our financiers and industrialists there are some who have learned nothing from what has happened and who are secretly, and in some cases fairly openly, friendly to the Fascist Governments for they believe in this way they can conserve something peculiarly their own. I am reminded that in the last months of 1932 I used to tell Schacht, Thyssen, Otto Wolff and others that in bringing Hitler in they were destroying themselves. They laughed at me and said that they would be able to control this new movement and that it would save them from further progress of Social Democracy in Germany. We know where they are today. We know where others in other countries in high places who lent themselves to the Fifth Column are today. We have these people in our country and they are to be found not only among the industrialists and capitalists but among certain labor leaders. I feel that we have to be ruthless when it comes to these people.

Needless to say, I lay no claim to being a prophet but I am sure you know that since 1933 I have been pointing out the dangers of this Government in Germany. I gave it as my opinion years ago that practically every step which has since been taken by Germany would be taken and practically in the order that they have been taken. I did not need to be a prophet because all that was necessary was to report faithfully to my Government what these fanatic Nazis told me were their objectives. I was thought to be visionary and prejudiced by some. That the President and Mr. Hull and men like yourself have been right in foreseeing the course of events cannot give any personal satisfaction. I am sure that everyone who foresaw the course of events and was willing to act accordingly would much rather have been proved wrong. I am merely making this personal reference to myself because I think I may safely say that I have not given any bad advice to the President or to Secretary Hull in recent years and since we have had to deal with this beast that is loose in the world. I know that some of my views as to what we should do now seem as extreme to some as did some of the statements which I made before, but I am convinced that they are no more extreme than

were

were my views when I said that the Germans were bound on the absorption of Austria, the disintegration of Czechoslovakia, the destruction of Poland, hegemony over South-Eastern Europe and over Scandinavia and the Low Countries, as well as the reduction to impotence of England and France, and a preponderant position in the southern Western Hemisphere.

I think noone will accuse me of being in sympathy with totalitarian ideas or methods. It may be therefore that my considered opinion that we ought to take certain resolute and what may seem radical steps now in restricting the liberties of a few in order to safeguard the liberties of the overwhelming majority may have some value.

I will not speak of my work here where I am doing the best I can to see that Cuba gets a good Constitution and a quiet, orderly and decent election. It is no easy task and I am giving my best to it. Were it not that the defense of the Americas is so vital to us and that Cuba is in some respects a key country in this picture I would be very unhappy indeed in being here, for I feel that all of us in these days want to be in the front trenches. Perhaps for the time being I can give my best service here.

One of the greatest tragedies of course is that the Germans have put their all in this extraordinary effort which they are making and have so little in the way of material resources behind this extraordinary military effort. All this may mean little now, however, since the resistance has not greatly broken down before them. It is now problematical whether the Germans can be held sufficiently long for the lack of replacements of materials to become felt. Had the Belgians and the French held their lines as it was expected they would be I believe that the German advance would have broken down as theatrically as it has now so successfully developed. All this is theoretical for I feel that the lines cannot be held sufficiently long for the real weakness of the German economic machine to have its effect on the military effort, and of course Italy and Japan are poised like vultures to act at what they consider is for them the zero hour.



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I am sending you herewith a copy of a letter which I recently wrote to Pierrepont Moffat which you may have time to read and which goes a little more into detail on several points I have covered in this letter.

This is already much too long a letter and I must beg you to forgive me for imposing on you. I have not written recently anything for the President to express my views as I have not wished to bother him with any reading and I know how thoroughly informed he is. If, however, there are any points of this letter which you think might be interesting to him I would be glad to have you bring them to his attention.

I hope Stoessel is making an etching of you and understand that the ones he made of the President and of Secretary Hull are turning out very well.

My thoughts are often with you and my wife joins in every good wish to you and Mrs. Frankfurter.

Cordially and faithfully yours,

George S. Messersmith.

GSM/hp

Enclosure:  
Copy of letter dated  
May 29.