

May 24, 1940. Copy sent Mr. Geist. See under Geist

Habana, Cuba
May 24, 1940

pl.
Personal *+ C. G. Pfeiffer*

My dear Mr. Pfeiffer:

I have your letter of May 6, which I have read with interest, as well as the enclosure covering the remarks which you made at the National Council of American Importers' luncheon on May 25. As usual, what you said was very sound, very pertinent and very important. I need not tell you that we are going into very difficult times and that all which we believe in in the United States and which we wish to conserve and preserve is at stake. Just what all the steps are which our country will have to take it is yet impossible to foresee, but I am confident from my own experience and observations that we are faced with the greatest national emergency which our country has yet confronted. This means that there are many steps which we must take and must take resolutely. It means that we shall have to proceed more rapidly than we ordinarily would; it means that we must learn from the mistakes which others have made; it means that we must forget partisan politics and settle down to one thing, and that is, how to conserve our position. Whatever steps are necessary to conserve that position must be taken, even though it may mean the curtailment temporarily of some of our own civil liberties and freedom of action. If some of the other countries whose sovereignty is now gone or may disappear soon had taken the steps which they should have taken and which they knew they should take, things would not have come to this pass. Had England, for example, taken the steps which she should have taken in the past years, the practical dictatorship under

which she

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which she finds herself and which she has had voluntarily to set up, and the mobilization of public and private property, would not have been necessary. I hope that our own people will see the handwriting on the wall and that they will support those measures of government which are imperatively necessary if we are to safeguard permanently those things which we wish to conserve, including private property and capital. If we are willing to restrict some of our own civil rights for the time being we will be able to conserve them for the future. If we fritter away our energy in squabbles we will be doing just what the Nazis expected others to do and which they did do and what they are expecting us to do. I am one of those who believe that the success of the German forces has been due more to the effects of moral sabotage in the attacked countries than to the actual effectiveness of the weapons of war employed. This is something we must remember in our country and must see that wherever moral sabotage and defeatism raises its head, it will be dealt with ruthlessly.

It is useless for me to speak of these things to you, because you are so wise and understand these things so thoroughly. It is a great comfort to me to realize that there are men like you who do speak with authority and competence. This situation which Europe is facing now and which we have to face, is one in which machinery means more than masses of men. It is a situation in which a primary consideration is the maintenance of morale and the suppression of defeatism, for we have seen what the effects of boring from within can be in a country like France, which had, in some respects, the best organized military machine in Europe. I do hope that our people will be wise enough to read events and to interpret them in our public interest. One of the most disturbing things to me today is that some of our really competent people, such as those in the United States Chamber of Commerce, still are not able to interpret events properly in terms of our own public safety. They still talk about our keeping out of the war as

if it were

if it were possible for us to do this by merely willing it. I do not know of any country which wanted war except the present German Government, but we have seen what has happened. We may be strong and we seem to be faraway, but we are rapidly approaching the point where the combination against us, and which is forming, may be stronger than we are, and we may be reaching the point when the seas will be very much narrower than they are today. Some of our people do not realize how vulnerable we are with the other American Republics as weak as they are. How could Mexico, for example, or Brazil, resist the advance of a considerable number of German troops? What forces have we to prevent this? We have got to reckon with the fact that a great deal more shipping and perhaps even more naval strength may be available to Germany. We have to reckon with the fact that the production capacity of a good part of Europe may be at the command of Germany soon, and with these countries disarmed, the Germans will put the inhabitants to work in these plants forging the chains which will bind them the harder and producing instruments for further aggressions which they have in mind. Hitler has told us that this is total war and that he is to be taken at his word, and when he says total war, he means us, just as he means the rest. The British used to think that when he talked about total war he meant southeastern Europe, and went on complacently. They now know what he meant. Some of our own people are being just as complacent as the British, the French and others were.

I do not mean to write in any sense in an alarming way, but I do think we must face this situation realistically. We must put down defeatism and moral and material sabotage in our own country. We must take resolutely every single step which we believe is in the interest of the public safety. We must give up some of our civil liberties and may have to abandon temporarily some of our own freedom of action. We must put every ounce of strength into arming our country morally, spiritually and materially.

These questions overshadow all the others of a
constructive

constructive character which you and so many of our thoughtful people in the United States have been working on. When war is rampant, as it is today, and the very foundation of civilization is threatened, it is the preservation of our institutions which comes first. It is only when this scourge is out of the world that sound trading principles and normal intercourse between states and peoples can be resumed.

I was asked to come home for some days and have just returned here. I was kept busy in Washington night and day working on some matters, so that I saw none of my friends. I hope that you will get to know Raymond Geist, who is the Chief of the Division of Commercial Affairs in the Department of State. He is one of the finest characters I know and an extraordinarily capable person. You will find it very helpful to see him when you are in Washington and I know that he will be glad to see you. I miss very much the opportunities which we had from time to time to talk things over.

With all good wishes,

Cordially yours,

GEORGE S. MESSERSMITH

GSM/cd