

March 12, 1936

[Remarks to Committee - "People's Mandate To End War"]

FDR Speech File

INFORMAL EXTEMPORANEOUS REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE COMMITTEE REPRESENTING THE
"PEOPLE'S MANDATE TO END WAR"
EXECUTIVE OFFICERS OF THE WHITE HOUSE
March 12, 1936, 11:00 A.M.

(The Chairman introduced the members of the Committee to the President and expressed to the President the appreciation of the Committee for his courtesy in seeing them. He also expressed the appreciation of his organization for the work being done by the President in promoting the Pan-American Conferences and told the President of the very favorable reaction throughout the country.)

I am glad to know about that because I was wondering whether our own country is as conscious of it as other countries in Central and South America which are particularly appreciative of it.

(The Chairman of the Committee expressed to the President his thought that the entire country was conscious of the good work being done and that they further hoped that the United States would be sympathetic with the policy being sponsored by their organization which was to stop the construction of armaments immediately and thereafter go on with the machinery for peace, such as disarmament conferences, etc.)

I am very, very sympathetic, of course from a personal point of view although, of course, we always have to be practical.

Examples are important and that is what we are trying to do, to set an example. The difficulty is to

get the example known in every part of the world. About a year ago I considered making a radio appeal to the people of Europe. I, fortunately, talk French and German, I talked it when I was a small boy, and I conceived the idea of a short address of perhaps fifteen minutes, first in English on a radio world hook-up and then in French and then in German. I could not do it in Italian and I could not do it in Czecho or Russian or other languages, but those three would have been fairly effective and would have covered a great many homes.

We even went so far as to get the radio stations in Europe that have very, very high power and could send all over Europe. Then we discovered, we discovered what President Wilson discovered when he attempted to appeal to the peoples over the heads of their rulers, we discovered that while in England they have radios in a great many homes, in France they only have on a per capita basis about one percent of the radios we have got. We discovered in Italy that they have practically no radios in their homes and we discovered that in Germany, while they have a good many radios, they can only listen in through a single station twenty-five miles from them and could not get any reception from high-powered stations. That is by Government decree.

So, we are up against that problem - we cannot get information to most of the people.

I can give you a good example: somebody here went over there in the late summer of 1934. She went to stay with a Professor in Germany and she found the Professor's house, the whole top story, being rebuilt. She asked whether he was putting on an additional story and he said, "No, we are taking advantage of the Fuehrer's magnificent offer. We won't have to pay taxes this year if we make the top story of our houses fireproof and proof against bombs and also put a bomb proof in the cellar." She said, "What for? It is hundreds of miles from the French frontier."

He said, "The Fuehrer has said that every house must be made bomb proof against airplanes, that they are doing it in France. And they are doing it in England, too." Then the German Professor went on to say, "Furthermore, we are told, and the information we have is correct, that in the United States, in every seaport city, the Government is making homes flame proof and bomb proof."

Of course that is not true but the German people believe it.

Of course, the chief thing we are up against, as you know, is the problem of the living up to ~~of~~ the

written compact, in other words the treaties. That is the thing we have to concentrate on more than anything else. This has to be off the record, of course. Suppose some nation comes to us and asks us to make a treaty. Now what is the use of making a treaty if they break it tomorrow if they find it convenient to do so. Now, that is the state of the world in the Far East and in Europe today. The result is that all we can do is work with the people who respect their written word.

However, I am not worried about our foreign affairs, not the least bit. At present, all we can do is show by example.

On the armament question, it is a perfectly simple thing. We worked toward disarmament and they said, "We will not arm unless the other fellow makes it necessary for us to do so."

We are way behind. The army has only eight hundred planes, England has twenty-five hundred, France four thousand, Germany is working up to five thousand and Russia has six thousand.

(Somebody in the audience asked, "Do you think Europe feels it would be to to their interest to attack us?")

That is a problem we have to think about. Are we going to stand for European nations coming in and attacking

independent countries on this hemisphere in order to get raw materials. We cannot permit that. We have had one hundred years of opinion on that.

In South America, for example, there has been in the past twenty-five years a tremendous increase in the democratic form of government. They are having an election in Panama. Twenty or twenty-five years ago that election would have been decided in a junta meeting in the city of Panama. We know that. Today, what happens? You have four candidates in Panama that are stumping the country. Isn't that grand? They are going before the electors of Panama and are stumping the country, showing themselves. You cannot guaranty the kind of election you have here but, on the whole, it will be an expression of popular choice. And they are going back to the democratic ideal of Central and South America. It has been a grand advance. That is why, if the world is to continue in the democratic form of government, we have to encourage democracy.

On coast defense, I had a very delightful chat the other day with a gentleman who came in and said that perhaps we ought to go back to the idea of coast defenses. I told him a story. The story is well worth while and well worth remembering because it shows a type of thinking.

In 1898 we got into the Spanish War. That was in April. About the first of May, there appeared in all our papers, under great, big headlines, a story from the French side of Spain to the effect that news had come from Spain that Spanish cruisers had left Spain to bombard the American coast, that there were four cruisers. They were the cruisers which were afterwards destroyed in the Battle of Santiago. But the story was that they had started for the American coast.

Well, the Secretary of the Navy was waited upon by the Congressional delegation from the state of Maine. They said, "Here is this dispatch and it mentions Portland, Maine as the point of attack. And here is all of the American navy down in the West Indies. You have to give us some ironclads." So Secretary Long said, "I haven't got any ironclads. They are down around Cuba."

"Well," they said, "You must protect Portland, Maine and all the good people of Portland, Maine. We must have ironclads in Portland, Maine." And Secretary Long said, "I think I will go back to my office and see what I can do."

So, he called up the Philadelphia navy yard where there were a number of Civil War merchanters made of iron, each one carrying two, fifteen inch guns that would throw a great, round ball almost a mile. However,

they were ironclads. He had them pulled off the mud flat and painted and then he had them pulled by a tug up to the mouth of the harbor of Portland and anchored them there. Everybody was perfectly assured and happy and the men, women and children who had been drawing their bank deposits and going up country went back to Portland.

Q Did the Spanish warships ever come?

THE PRESIDENT: If they had come, they would have anchored a little more than a mile from the ironclads and would have shelled Portland, Maine. But there was the population, perfectly satisfied because the ironclads were anchored at the mouth of the harbor.

Members of the Committee then spoke to the President on behalf of the group in the Organization represented by them. They pointed out that laboring people in the Bethlehem and U. S. Steel plant were members of their Organization, also people in the ship-building plant. A member representing the Churches spoke at some length. The President again pointed out the necessity of working toward living up to agreements. One member, who said she represented sixty thousand business and professional women, pointed out the economic loss occasioned by the construction of arms, to which the President replied:)

They have to be paid for in the long run. Along that line, probably most of the European nations today would be in serious trouble, economically, if it were not

for the fact that they are employed on armaments. There is no one unemployed in Italy, they are in the munitions factories. There is no one unemployed in Germany, they are all working on war orders. Eventually, of course, they will have to pay.

(The Chairman of the Committee again thanked the President and the Committee left the President's office.)