

● PSF Great Britain: Joseph Kennedy July 1939-1940

JFK Kennedy

file  
personal



MEMBER OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

London, July 20, 1939

Dear Mr. President,

I think you are up to date on everything I know about the international situation, but I thought you would be interested to get my observations on the political situation in England.

My own belief is that the Chamberlain Government, coming down the last stages of a hectic career, is having some difficulty with their representatives, but not nearly enough to challenge their leadership. The attempt to put Churchill in the Cabinet, supported by the Opposition Conservatives in Chamberlain's own Party backed by some of the prominent newspapers, reached a high about last Sunday and has been rather going down hill. The demand is very much like the demand there is in the United States: when there is dissatisfaction if anybody brings out any kind of an idea backed by a newspaper campaign, it receives considerable impetus, but, unless it is very sound, falls of its own weight.

I talked to Eden about this. Of course he feels that the Government should have been broadened a long time ago. By that he means representatives of Labor, representatives of the anti-Chamberlain group in his own Party, and representatives of the Liberal Party. But Chamberlain's idea always has been that the difficulties for which he would want an All Party Cabinet would be for international reasons and, since the program he is carrying out is practically the one that they have all wanted, if he broadened it at this time he would merely make his internal policies the subject of continual football playing.

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The President,  
The White House.

I talked to Lord Baldwin about what he thought of the political situation and he felt strongly that, after all, Chamberlain was responsible to the Country and that if Churchill were admitted to the Government, he would, being entirely different from Chamberlain, so irritate Chamberlain that it might mean a very serious situation and result in a very bad mess.

Today I talked with Chamberlain about it. He told me he is unwilling to admit Churchill, because he does not believe in the first place that he could deliver nearly one-tenth as much as people think he could; he has developed into a fine two-handed drinker and his judgment has never been proven to be good. Chamberlain is also convinced that if Churchill had been in the Cabinet, England would have been at war before this.

There is one issue, however, that is giving Chamberlain a good deal of concern, and that is a demand throughout the Country for an increase in old-age pensions and up to the minute he has not been willing to do anything on this because of the increased cost. He told me today that he was giving it very careful consideration and thought he would probably have to do something in order that the Party would not run the risk of being licked on an issue that the world would not at all understand.

I would think that, on the basis of the present situation and their willingness to patch up their fences before they go to a national election, which may be in October, assuming there are no international difficulties, the Conservative Party under Chamberlain would win quite easily.

I thought you would be interested in getting this brief survey of the political situation.

With my warmest regards, I am,

Sincerely yours,

*Joe*

Original of this memo  
in Bullitt folder-

PSF: Kennedy

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IN FILE  
OUTSIDE

*Not sent*

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

July 28, 1939.

MEMORANDUM FOR

AMBASSADOR BULLITT  
AMBASSADOR KENNEDY

I have been asked if there is any objection to private purchasing agencies being set up in this country by certain European powers, in order to centralize purchases of various kinds which they may wish to make over here. It seems to me that we should remember that these nations and the United States are at peace with the world, and that there can be no objection to the setting up of such purchasing agencies provided (a) their operations do not violate the Johnson Act, and (b) that in the event they become involved in war, their operations will not violate Section #1 of the Neutrality Law, commonly referred to as the Embargo Clause.

F. D. R.

THE WHITE HOUSE

CONFIDENTIAL

Honorable Joseph P. Kennedy,  
American Embassy,  
London,  
England.

BY POUCH

PSF: Kennedy -  
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Memo from the President  
To Ambassadors Bullitt and Kennedy  
July 28, 1939

In re-if any objection to private purchasing agencies being set up in this country by certain European powers in order to centralize purchases of various kinds which they may wish to make over here etc.

See: Bullitt folder-Drawer 1--1939 (Foreign File)

August 5, 1939.

Dear Joe:-

I think you are absolutely right in what you say in yours of July twentieth. The big question is what can we best do to keep our financial position strong for, as you say, at least one more year. We have cut down greatly on WPA and a number of other things, but the silly Congress gave me three hundred million more than I wanted for farm subsidies and now has eliminated a lending program (for which we would have got approximately 100% return) and will try to add a PWA spending program of which 45% will come out of the Treasury and never be paid back. All somewhat confusing, isn't it?

At least we can say that our financial position is stronger than that of most other countries. We should keep it so.

I hope you are having a good holiday and that the storm will not break.

As ever yours,

Honorable Joseph P. Kennedy,  
American Embassy,  
London,  
England.

DEPARTMENT OF THE  
TREASURY  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

London, July 20, 1939

Dear Mr. President,

I am leaving tomorrow for a holiday and before I go, I would like to write you about what I regard as the makings of the worst economic condition the world has ever seen. As you know, I have been constantly bearish for the last two or three years and I see nothing tonight that makes me change my opinion, but, on the contrary, I feel more pessimistic than ever.

I will start off by saying that I know of few cases in history where a complete collapse of agricultural prices has not been the beginning of a terrific depression. We are now faced with the possibility of the world's worst agricultural prices. Coupled with that are the facts that -

1. The German financial situation is only kept sound by the strength of the political government;
2. France is spending approximately 50% of its national income on unproductive items;
3. England today will have to go out and borrow five hundred million pounds between now and the end of the year - a fact which will really try their financial resources severely;
4. All the so-called allies of Great Britain are asking for prohibitive sums to be loaned them in order that they may keep their economy going to be of service to Great Britain in the event of trouble with Germany;
5. The Japanese financial picture is a frightfully bad one;

The President,  
The White House.

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6. The Chinese financial picture is only kept alive with the help of the United States and Great Britain; and

7. The Spaniards and Italians certainly do not present very bright financial pictures.

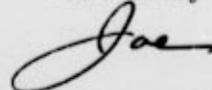
Now, as I say, considering all these problems on top of a frightful agricultural picture, it seems to me that there is only one position that the United States should hold and insist upon to the limit of their power and that is - that at least for one year they keep themselves financially strong. You will say, "Of course, that's obvious" and I say it is obvious, but the position of the United States in any catastrophe that is bound to take place over here will become that much more important if their own financial picture is relatively strong and by that I mean that the time has gone by when agitation should be made for changes in the tax laws, changes in the Securities Act, changes in the Social Security Act, balanced budgets, etc., etc. What I do think is most necessary is that every piece of legislation -- farm subsidies, WPA works -- all should be looked at with the idea of conserving our financial position at least for one more year. I feel like the fellow who has one thousand dollars in his pocket with a great many demands on him from his relations, his friends, business requirements, and all that sort of thing, but sees everything around him going to hell, and says, "No matter what happens, I can help all these people if I can weather this storm and hold on to my thousand dollars.

The financial picture, as I view it, in the United States is not a happy one. The city and state financing are, to me, going to be the cracks in the cement sooner or later and, while it is most presumptuous on my part to write you this, because I am sure there is nothing new or that you haven't thought of, nevertheless I feel that, seeing this picture as I do and realizing the financial mess it is going to be in soon, I want to add this thought to your own - that the difficulties of the United States will be proportionately less as their financial position is proportionately strong.

Please forgive me if I am writing about something that is none of my business, but I feel it most strongly.

With warmest regards, I am,

Sincerely yours,



file  
personal

PSF: Kennedy

Cannes, 9th August 1939

Cannes.

Dear Mr. President,

Your letter made me happy - not only what you said but the whole tone of it. By now you will have received my last wire despatch and my two letters. They constitute my latest thoughts, with any degree of accuracy, on the present situation. But, in the mood of your letter, I should like to add some personal observations and comments.

The chief thing I have noticed in the South of France, on the part of caddies, waiters and residents, is a very strong anti-semitic feeling. Beyond that, and a general sense of wary waiting for almost anything to happen, I can contribute nothing to an understanding of the inter-national state of affairs.

As I told you when I was home, over here one feels out of touch with conditions at home, and reading these rotten reports by columnists anyone "with a temperament like mine" feels very unhappy. I am sure you know that no job in the United States Government appeals to me in the slightest degree except as it affords an opportunity to work for you. I have said repeatedly that in the two important positions I held in the United States I never received one word of dictation or even suggestion as to the policy I should adopt, and that it is only working under such conditions that I could be at all happy.

I realize that certain friends of mine have occasionally put me in very embarrassing positions. At such times I have felt it silly to be in a place where I could not straighten matters out with my boss at a minute's notice.

About my position in England my only thought

was to wonder whether my experience and knowledge were not being completely wasted. After all, I recognize that in this day and age an Ambassador may be hardly more than a glorified errand boy.

I do get a bit discouraged for, although I have worked harder and longer hours in this job than on any job I ever held, it seems that three quarters of my efforts are wasted because of the terrific number of things to be done which seem to have no close connection with the real job at hand.

Of this one thing, though, you may be sure. Regardless of any personal inconvenience, as long as I am of any assistance to you, I shall remain for whatever time you like.

I had a talk with Steve when he was in London and I dare say he told you what I said.

When I was a youngster, my father taught me two principles: gratitude and loyalty. About the first, he told me that I should never let any act of kindness go by without in some way returning it. Because, he said, 90 % of people seem to forget favors and kindnesses done them. Of the second principle, he said, no matter how you may fail in ability you can make it up by being unfailingly loyal to your friends.

I have tried to live up to those two principles and, to you personally, I owe a debt on both counts.

That I have carried out your assignments to me in a way that merited your approval pleases me no end.

Have a good holiday, and remember that whatever you want to do, I always "stay put".

Again my warm appreciation for your  
letter and your thoughts, and many thanks from  
the entire Kennedy family.

*Sincerely  
Joe*

Hon. Franklin D. Roosevelt  
White House  
Washington D.C.

PSF: Kennedy

Aug 24, 1939

Memo to President  
From John W. Hanes-Acting Sec of Treasury

Attaches message from Kennedy --London  
In re-British decision to let the sterling  
depreciate as the drain upon their gold  
resources has been proceeding at an  
alarming rate.

See-Hanes-Treasury folder-Drawer 1-1939

St. Rita, Kennedy

London, September 10, 1939

Personal and  
Confidential

file →

Dear Mr. President,

Since the war is a week old, I would like to give you a few of my impressions as to what is taking place here.

First of all, the high Government officials are depressed beyond words that it has become necessary for the United States to revert to its old Neutrality Law. They contend, at least for the time being, that all they want to do is to buy equipment already on order or whatever other equipment they may need, for which they are willing to pay cash and carry away. They feel as they did when the new Neutrality Bill was licked - that America has talked a lot about her sympathies, but, when called on for action, have only given assistance to Britain's enemy. All of this, of course, you know and I merely reiterate it because I suppose one of my jobs is to let you know what the people in power here are saying. However, this hasn't yet reached the stage of bitterness because the war hasn't yet been fought on this front. And such anti-Americanism as exists is carefully concealed.

There is no question that the war is going to be conducted with eyes constantly on the United States. Unless the war comes to a standstill and it is a stalemate between the Germans and the French on the Maginot and Siegfried Lines, the English are going to think of every way of maintaining favorable public opinion in the United States, figuring that sooner or later they can obtain real help from America. I talked with Commander Critchley, who was General Critchley in the last war, and who is now in charge of all training of the Royal Air Force, and he is thoroughly convinced that, since the Siegfried Line is at least ten times stronger than any German line was during

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The President,

The White House.

the last war and the Maginot Line even a greater number of times stronger than any French line was during the last war, the fight will be in the air and it will not be decisive for either side, even though he admits that the German air force is probably better than the British. However, no one really knows what the effect of air bombardment will be. The British admit that within three days after the outbreak of war, the Germans had not only done great damage to Poland's communications, but had destroyed all aircraft producing centers and many aerodromes. To my mind it is a very open question as to what will be the effect on this country of air bombardment, coupled with submarine warfare.

There is another part of informed opinion that feels if Russia kept out as an ally of Germany, England and France could lick Germany, and that some way will be found to get at Germany through one of the neutral States. Of course, when you mention this to anybody in official quarters, they hold up their hands in horror, but if Russia indicated support of Germany, Italy might then decide it was the stronger side and might well kick up herself. Then England might just dig in for protection instead of even contemplating some way of getting at Germany. There is no question that the active forces, particularly in the army and air forces, were anxious to take a shot at Italy, and the Admiralty would be also if they had better control of the submarine warfare carried on by Germany, which might be notably aided in the Mediterranean by the large Italian submarine fleet.

As it stands so far, outside of the rush at the American Embassy and the mad desire of the Americans to get home, the most noticeable thing in London is the blackout, and the service in the high-class hotels is probably a little worse, but beyond that there is no real indication of a war.

The place where the real works are going on is in the economic and financial departments. There the best brains in England have been concentrated. Every means which can be used to gain the main objective is being considered. At the moment there is a lot of hasty improvisation, but they have executive powers and the man-power. There is no question that Mr. Hull's Trade Agreements program is completely out of the window.

England

England is as much a totalitarian country tonight from an economic and trade point of view as any other country in Europe -- all that is needed is time to perfect the organization. All trade will be directly or indirectly controlled by the Government and I expect in due course to see a great deal of it conducted by barter or compensation arrangements. The British have a line on every country in the world from which they can get the supplies they need and the Government controls the shipping to transport them. They have in many cases predominant resources of commodities in the Empire which they can virtually take over and use for bargaining to get other goods they need. They have already taken over the surplus wool supplies in Australia, for example. It seems to me that we should make a careful survey of the supplies of raw materials of which we have a surplus and study our competitive position vis-à-vis other producers with whom England may make compensation or special agreements. In making this survey we should also keep in mind the agreements England may make with our principal markets for these goods. We should also consider the importance that the British Fleet and the ships they can charter will have on world trade and their ability to buy and sell goods if certain provisions of our Neutrality Bill make it difficult for our ships to function.

I think that we will have to exercise the greatest caution in any piece of legislation that we pass so its far-reaching ramifications may not result in doing our own economic situation untold harm. As long as we are out of war and the possibility is still present that we might ever come in, England will be as considerate as she can not to upset us too much. Because, of course, she wants to drag us in. And my own impression is that if by any chance she should succeed, the burden will be placed more completely on our shoulders by 100% than it was in 1917.

Incidentally, we must remember that England and France have approximately four and a half billion dollars worth of gold and that, if we are willing to accept this gold, we are left with practically the whole world's supply and there won't be the slightest incentive in the world for these countries to resume trading with gold as a standard. It strikes me that we should let them spend their gold last and we should first take over all other assets, particularly those in the United States, against the supplies which they must purchase from us.

This

This all adds up into one suggestion: That we should be on our guard to protect our own interests. In the economic and financial field the best possible brains should be concentrated on the problems which the European war is bound to raise. I remember Schwab saying in 1915, after a conference in Washington between the representatives of labor and industry, that labor always seemed to be able to put it over industry's representatives. I asked him why, and he said, "Joe, because that's their problem 365 days of the year." That's the way I feel about the economic and financial picture here. It is their problem now twenty-four hours a day and we have got to think, and think most intelligently, to be able to maintain the right kind of trade and to maintain the strength of our financial system.

With warmest personal regards, I am,

Sincerely yours,

*Joe Kennedy*

PSF: Kennedy

London, September 30, 1939

Dear Mr. President,

Although such officials as Vansittart anticipated that the signing of the Russian-German Agreement meant, as I reported in my telegrams of the time, the fourth division of Poland, nevertheless, when the event took place, it created a great shock here. But the facility with which the Anglo-Saxon can play power politics while talking in terms of philanthropy is triumphing. Whereas at the beginning of the war the protection of the independence and preservation of the territorial integrity of Poland was headlined as the immediate cause of the war and the reason for attempting to overthrow Hitler, now the restoration of Poland - certainly Russian Poland - is being pushed gently but very firmly into obscurity.

Of course, the real fact is that England is fighting for her possessions and place in the sun, just as she has in the past. I got out The Times' editorial

The President,

The White House

of

of August 5, 1914 and compared it with the one on September 4, 1939, and they are practically identical, except for the substitution of the word "Nazi" for "Junker". Regardless of the God-awful behavior of the Nazis, surely the fact is that the English people are not fighting Hitler - they are fighting the German people, just as they fought them twenty-five years ago, because forty-five million Britons controlling the greatest far-flung maritime empire in the world and eighty million Germans dominating continental Europe haven't learned to live together peacefully.

I personally am convinced that, win, lose or draw, England never will be the England that she was and no one can help her to be. Technicological changes, like the invention of the airplane and the increase in industrial power of other countries, have conspired with the decline in English ability and forcefulness to push her well past the peak and down to another level.

There are signs of decay, if not decadence, here, both in men and institutions. For example, no one in power over the past dozen years has really told the English people where they stand politically, economically and financially - and they are reaping the result of that now. Furthermore, the Parliamentary machine is not operating to throw up real, able leaders. Many people  
doubt,

doubt, and I share those doubts, whether the Chamberlain Government can survive a single serious reverse, and who is to replace the Prime Minister? Possibly Halifax, possibly Churchill. But for all Halifax's mystical, Christian character and Churchill's prophecies in respect to Germany, I can't imagine them adequately leading the people out of the valley of the shadow of death. And after that, who is there? It is the question that all the English are asking themselves and the answer seems to be that there is no adequate person within the Parliamentary ranks. And therefore it would not be surprising if the maelstrom of war had to cast up extra-Parliamentary leaders.

I am afraid that I can't conceive the results that this war will bring as running counter to the evolutionary process. England passed her peak as a world power some years ago and has been steadily on the decline. War, regardless of the outcome, will merely hasten the process. And even the concomitant changes which the war will bring to all the world, such as the breakdown of the international mechanism of trading and the substitution of barter and other state control arrangements, were really started when Russia began to operate in this  
wise

wise a couple of decades ago and have been the development of the future ever since. ~~Myself I want to live~~

Nor do I think this war is a holy war, despite the fact that most of the people I see here sincerely believe that it is and they talk in public and in private equally sincerely about the awfulness of force in international affairs and how it must be forever done away with, as if force hadn't always been the underlying basis in most all international dealings of any vital, life and death importance, and as if any means had been found for peacefully settling vital, life and death international disputes. I regret it, but I can't honestly believe that such will not still be the case long after Hitler's "body lies amouldering in the grave." I sometimes feel that, living as we do in a sparsely inhabited country with great natural resources and no natural enemies, we attach too much importance to, say, the Alabama Claims settlement as a precedent in international procedure. Enlightened nations, particularly those where the pressure for existence isn't all powerful, can emulate the behavior of more civilized individuals. But where there are two hungry dogs to eat a bone sufficient for one, arbitration doesn't decide the issue.

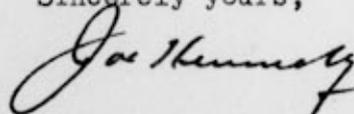
In

In this connection, let me say two things about democracy - the only form of government I want to live under: First, that the so-called democracies of Europe have conducted themselves in such a way as to make autocracy flourish. By forcing democracy upon the conquered nations after the last war, they aligned democracy and the status quo together. By resisting change, they ensured that all the forces within those countries making for change should of necessity take on an anti-democratic character. Just as the force making for change after the Treaty of Vienna had to take on an anti-autocratic, i.e., democratic character. Since the dynamic always triumphs over the static, Fascism and Communism were left to move ahead. And moving ahead they are! Secondly, democracy as we now conceive it in the United States will not exist in France and England after the war, regardless of which side wins or loses. In fact, it hardly does now. France is ruled by a dictatorship which has just this week made illegal one of the largest Parliamentary parties, and England, which has always had a concentration of power in the so-called governing class, will certainly not be a democracy in our sense of the word, in the post-war world to come.

All this and more leads me to believe that we should curb our sentiments and sentimentality and look to our own vital interests. It may not be convenient for us to face a world without a strong British Empire. But whatever we do or don't do, we shall have to face it. Neither we nor any other Power can re-create what has disappeared, and the leadership of the English-speaking world will, willy-nilly, be ours. Certainly it is going to be a hard, difficult and dangerous world in which to live, and the United States will only be able to thrive in it by pulling itself together as a nation and being ready and prepared to protect its own vital interests. These, to my mind, lie in the Western Hemisphere.

With my warmest personal regards,

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Joe Kennedy". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name "Joe Kennedy".

PSF: Kennedy

London, September 30, 1939

Dear Mr. President,

Referring to my cable to you and your answer regarding the possibility of peace proposals, I feel nevertheless that I should write you as I see this picture at the minute. I also ask you to read this in conjunction with my cable of September 30th, telling of my interview with Montagu Norman. As you remember, this interview was bitterly bearish and with most of it I am in complete accord.

Russia and Germany have today served notice of their intentions. In talking to John Simon last night, he said two things had struck them very forcibly: (1) The ability of the Russians to mobilize and move their large army, because up to now they had rather been under the impression that the Russians could not do very much outside of their own country; (2) The very conclusive proof that the Prime Minister's attitude in delaying making

The President,

The White House.

making a deal with Russia that involved the independence of the small Baltic States was a worthwhile one, because Russia had proven by its move into Poland and its mighty claw over Rumania that that is just the kind of tactics they intended to adopt towards the Baltic States, given half a chance. However, Simon said, having double-crossed everybody, they will probably turn around and start all over again, so it is not known just exactly what form a new tie-up with Germany might take. He thinks they will know better when the Turkish delegation returns from Moscow.

As to the Italian situation, he says it is very definitely to Britain's advantage to keep Italy at peace. In the first place, it permits free movement of ships in the Mediterranean; it gives them much less to worry about with regard to Malta, Gibraltar and Spain; it permits the French to move their troops freely from Algiers without danger of submarining; it makes it unnecessary to move troops up from India and it makes Egypt and Palestine much more comfortable by being a long way from the scene of action. So it is much to their advantage to keep Italy out of the trouble. Simon added, "Of course, if they go in with Germany, we are prepared to move at a  
immediate problem, however, which there does not  
minute's

minute's notice", but it was very apparent from listening to him that this is one spot they hope to keep peaceful.

As to the German situation on the Western Front, he is still of the opinion that Germany may definitely move through Belgium and Holland, or, what is much more serious, the present peace offer. I asked him, as I asked Halifax, "Just what are you fighting for now? You can't restore Poland to the Poles, can you?" He said, "No, not all of it." I said, "Well, then, that will be a failure; you can't talk about aggression and permit Russia to retain half of Poland and have its claw over the Balkan States as well as the Baltic States" and he said, "Possibly not." I told him that as to the removal of Hitler, people from Germany in the last few days had told me that if Hitler goes, chaos will result and Germany might, in the absence of food and the possibility of a desperate economic outlook, very well go communistic and be a menace to Europe, because, after all, beating them isn't going to solve the problem of eighty million people who have no economic resources and nothing very much to look forward to; that the cost to England and France will be so great that it will reduce them to a mere shell of their present selves. Simon said he agreed and so does the Prime Minister that that is the long-distance outlook. He said they had an immediate problem, however, which there does not seem to

be

be any way of sidestepping; if they were to advocate any type of peace, they would be yelled down by their own people, who are determined to go on.

Now there is no question in my mind that the British can see no way they can give up the struggle even though they are more and more confused in their own minds just what they are fighting for and what they will attain even if they win.

The topside people don't relish the possibility of the Russian submarines, of which there are a very considerable number, joining the German submarine fleet, and they don't like the prospect of Russian flyers and Russian airplanes going up with the German, with the possibility always that Italy might hop in feeling Germany looked like a winner. Topside people don't like leaning on the Turks, who, Simon told me, were continually blackmailing England for financial and economic assistance. There is also a prevalent idea amongst a number of English newspaper men, who feel that the French may decide that they don't like the looks of things and ask themselves, what are we fighting for, the echo will answer, "the British," and they'll say, "no more for us." Montagu Norman, in speaking of the French, felt this would probably not happen, because the French always acted much better when things got tough.

On

On the other hand, many important people are saying, what has England and France to look forward to? The defeat of Germany; O.K; that will take some time and England and France will go bust, as well as lose millions of lives, and then what do they propose to do with eighty million Germans who have a communist neighbor - Russia?

Well, you say, I know all that, so what? I answer that by saying, we all keep repeating in the United States that we don't want any part of this mess. Well, we certainly won't want any part of it if we think clearly of what happens even if the Allies win and the problems that will have to be met in the arrangement of Europe and also the bills that will have to be met to keep the beaten countries functioning. And we are all vitally concerned in what happens to the United States if the fight goes to a finish and the Allies are beaten. The prospect of our best customer beaten and finished as a Power and the attendant difficulty of arranging our place in the world with Powers who know we hate them.

Some people are saying here, the United States will get all this business from the Allies and of course they want the war to go on. I answer that by pointing out the temporary fillip we get to our own economic structure is only a pleasant interlude before chaos that is to follow if this war goes on.

Well

“Well then, America says, we demand an end to this aggression and this complete disregard of international law.” Mind you, they speak of something that is happening in Europe and in the same breath say, of course, you over there settle it, we don't want any part in it. And I don't disagree with this point of view entirely, but, if this is the case, that by continuing a hopeless struggle means the complete collapse of everything we hope and live for, then it seems to me that perhaps another thought should be given to the whole problem by the American people. I have yet to talk to any military or naval expert of any nationality this week who thinks that, with the present and prospective set-up of England and France on one side and Germany and Russia and their potential allies on the other, England has a Chinaman's chance.

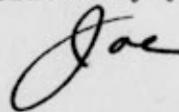
So you ask, what do you suggest I do? I answer, at the minute do nothing but consider two things: How you can point out to the American people just what the position of England and France is and what their possibilities are to achieve the aims we all hoped they would attain and by pointing out that, since we do not intend to get in the war, we must be considerate of our friends who are in it. Secondly, I would start thinking how you can help save face for the Allies and yet at the same time

time be the factor in getting the position of the United States a topside one as a result of your intervention.

England and France can't quit whether they would like to or not and I am convinced, because I live here, that England will go down fighting. Unfortunately, I am one who does not believe that is going to do the slightest bit of good in this case.

The whole problem needs a master mind and that soon if you don't want the world's greatest calamity to fall on our friends and subsequently on us. Please don't think I am unduly pessimistic. I'm not, but I feel as your friend on the job I must urge you to give this your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Joe".

EMBASSY OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

London, September 30, 1939.

Dear Mr. President:

I have been a witness to the swift evacuation of England's schoolchildren, and its long term implications may, in my opinion, do much to reshape the population distribution and social structure of this old country.

During the two days preceding Great Britain's entry into the war, and the two succeeding days, over three-quarters of a million schoolchildren with their teachers, nearly half a million mothers and children under five, 11,000 expectant mothers, 5,000 blind adults and about 1,000 cripples were moved from London and thirty-four other densely populated vulnerable areas and scattered over the length and breadth of England, Scotland and Wales.

The plan was based on the possibility of a "blitzkrieg" breaking loose from the air without warning and was designed to take care of a maximum of three million people. Actually only a million and a half were moved, the remainder being away, making their own arrangements, or being unwilling to go. Incidentally, had the "blitzkrieg" come at this time, I would have had a terrific job in getting 10,000 Americans to places of safety since the British transport authorities had informed me that the evacuation of women and children would have priority over all other demands.

The objectives of the scheme, which had been in preparation since the crisis of September 1938, were (1) dispersal, to save as many lives as possible without disturbing essential work, (2) the preservation of the morale of the civilian population, enabling the country to develop its maximum war capacity at the outset by removing from the minds of workers fear as to what was happening to their children, (3) the assurance of

continued/

The President,  
The White House,  
Washington.

continued care and education for the children despite disorganization and (4) insulation of the children from the psychological shocks of air bombardment.

The movement was carried through without a single casualty and with a minimum of mistakes and inconvenience. The ECONOMIST hails it as "the first triumph of the war". Practically every individual evacuated is housed in a private home. Every effort has been made to keep families together, to house neighbors in the same communities and to fit individuals into suitable environments wherever possible. Special arrangements were made for groups of blind, crippled and mentally defective children.

In general, the Ministry of Health did a magnificent job of planning and execution, but they had, of course, several headaches. Eastside and Westside were suddenly brought into too close contact. Many children had never been off pavements, many were dirty and some had a liberal supply of insect life. (The B.B.C. has seized the occasion for a nation-wide drive against head-lice). The evacuees were billeted in the homes of middle-class shopkeepers, county families and clean self-respecting rural artisans.

Of course, following English traditions, the inevitable collisions received an airing in the press. The subject of vermin was discussed pro and con in many letters to editors, not only in the provincial press but in the London TIMES. But the children, especially the younger ones, have shown great adaptability and have responded quickly to soap and kindness. The receiving communities have given ample evidence of their desire to do something for the country and to share their own greater measure of safety with those less fortunately placed.

The worst problems have arisen with the mothers who were evacuated with young children. There are lurid tales of some of these spending mornings in bed with a packet of cigarettes and a newspaper and the rest of the day at the nearest pub. Perhaps evacuation appealed most to the less domesticated mothers and these have found the greatest difficulty in fitting into the new households. It is not surprising that there has been a steady flow back to the cities of perhaps 30 per cent of the mothers evacuated, despite continued public appeals that they stay where they are. What is more surprising is that so many have remained and appear to be settling down to country life, if not

with/

with enthusiasm at least with a resigned determination to put up with a lack of sidewalks, movies and street cars.

The schools in the evacuation areas are closed and the teachers are for the most part with the children in the country. The local schools in reception areas are frequently working two shifts, a morning one for the local children and an afternoon one for the visitors. While there will inevitably be disorganization of formal education, the children are learning a lot they would never get from books. The Government recognizes that evacuated mothers cannot remain away from home indefinitely and nursery schools for all children over six months are being set up as rapidly as possible. As fast as these are opened the mothers are advised to return home. Special clinics have been started and extensive arrangements made for medical care of the children by local doctors.

Of course inevitable adjustments will come only slowly and of their own accord. Evacuation has meant the artificial severance of family and trade ties. These migrants must be placed on as nearly a self-supporting economic footing as possible. The Government is spending a million pounds a week, and yet the Government allowance of 10s.6d. a week for full board and lodging if there is only one individual and 8s.6d. if there are more than one, is proving inadequate. Country families are dipping into their own pockets to make the youngsters more comfortable, happy and healthy.

The contemplated course of development in the next several months will be towards (1) increased allowances for certain classes of billeted refugees, (2) official canteens, possibly even official markets, (3) greater requisitioning of public buildings to ease the strain on overcrowded private dwellings and (4) the erection of about fifty national camps to replace the more overcrowded billets. There is an urgent need also for an immediate overhaul of the rural and small town drainage systems, water supplies and medical services in some reception areas.

There is in all this, however, the potentiality of a broad new social order. The policy of population dispersal forced upon the authorities by the air raid danger offers some hope of permanently gathering the population into a larger number of smaller communities and eliminating the great congested urban centers of

London/

London and the Midlands cities which were created by a series of industrial revolutions. There will be also an opportunity of organizing these communities so that industry and agriculture will better supplement each other.

If the war lasts any length of time a new social solvent will have been assimilated into country life. The health of the under-privileged classes of children will be immeasurably improved while the inhabitants of the smaller towns and villages will have had their horizons widened. As Geoffrey Crowther, editor of the *ECONOMIST*, said: "The springboards of a healthy and national decentralisation and recasting of our social structure may even now be being fashioned by the threat of German bombers."

With warmest regards,

Faithfully yours,

*Joe Kennedy*

PSF: Kennedy

London, October 2, 1939.

My dear Mr. President:

I have just sent Miss Perkins a description of the dislocation caused in the employment situation here as a result of the swing-over from a peace to a war time economy. I thought it might interest you and am therefore enclosing a copy in memorandum form but somewhat abbreviated to save your time.

With warmest regards,

Faithfully yours,

*Joe Kennedy*

The President,  
The White House,  
Washington, D.C.

Memorandum.

October 2, 1939.

The Employment Situation in Britain Resulting  
from the Swing-over from a Peace to a War  
Economy.

Though there have been no German bombers over London, as yet, the mere threat of their presence has already resulted in severe economic casualties on the British employment front. White collar clerical workers and retail sales personnel (known here are the "Black Coated Brigade") together with the employees of the amusement and service trades have been discharged by the thousand since September 3rd in consequence of air raid precautions, air raid fears and gasoline rationing.

The net result has been to disarrange completely the customary pattern of retail trade, to bring the amusement industry to an almost complete halt and to curtail very heavily the intake of the service trades. On the other hand, there has been no call for a rush of recruits for the Services and even the defence and armament trades, since they have been working at pressure for many months already, have yet made no extensive further demand for hands. The result is a grave short-term problem of labor dislocation.

Hundreds of neighborhood shops have had their turnover out 75 to 90 per cent. Gordon Selfridge Jr. tells me that as a result of evacuation and the decline in public buying, the business of the London department stores has fallen about 50 per cent in volume. Bond Street on weekdays now looks like Wall Street on Sundays and many of the luxury shops have just folded up for the duration of the war. The "City" is a pale shadow of its former self. If the brokerage boys in New York think they are having a tough time, one glance at a "City" office here would make them realize that, by comparison, they were in clover.

The initial closing of urban cinemas and theatres left nearly all their employees without jobs and their recent restricted re-opening within limited hours has, of course, only partially restored the "status quo ante".

The impact of evacuation upon the restaurant, hotel, laundry, hairdressing and similar service trades dependent

upon/

upon an urban clientele has, also, added heavily to the unemployment mortality.

According to the FINANCIAL NEWS, firms have transferred their offices to the country, leaving behind up to three-quarters of their staff unemployed. This situation, together with the drastic decline in all luxury industries, has suddenly thrown upon the market a horde of office workers.

Finally, gasoline rationing has dealt a body blow to the garage and filling station trades. One estimate is that 70 per cent of the workers in these callings are now superfluous. Furthermore petrol rationing has meant the discharge of a large number of the delivery personnel of all distribution organizations and even motor transport concerns have been forced to cut down with only a 75 per cent allowance of their normal gasoline needs.

Women have been the main sufferers. According to the Ministry of Labour, the net statistical effect of these conditions up to September 11th only, was an increase of about 60 per cent (175,000) in the number of women on the unemployment register since the same date a month ago, and the situation has deteriorated further since the first fortnight of last month. The same statistical returns showed 76,000 less men unemployed as a result of defence orders accruing to the engineering, shipbuilding and steel trades. These figures for males, however, cover only manual workers and the clerical help whose incomes are not above £250 per year. Unemployment is, now, rife in the ranks of the better-paid male clerical, sales, supervisory and managerial groups, with the result that the middle-class have been heavily hit during the past month. This is shown by the rush for full-time work at around £3 per week as Air Raid Wardens, Auxiliary Firemen, St. John's Ambulance Workers, etc., by individuals who would normally never consider such pay or occupations.

The extent of this dislocation of employment was not sufficiently anticipated by officials here who, at first, were inclined to pass over the problem as a necessary war re-adjustment which would soon be solved.

The intervening period, however, has been one of great  
hardship/

hardship for most of the people affected. Their fixed obligations remain and their essential expenses have increased, while the labor market, as yet, shows little sign of being prepared to re-absorb them into war industries.

Their plight, in fact, has become sufficiently a public question to require the Government, through a radio address of Sam Hoare, to request that employers refrain from panic dismissals until they know with greater certainty how the situation will affect them.

With thousands of small business men and many large establishments struggling - during this transition period - to meet merely current overhead charges, my hunch is that this plea won't carry very far.

I hear that Ernest Brown, Minister of Labour, has now ordered a private survey of this situation with the intent of trying to formulate a rapid plan to tide these people over until their services are needed in war time work. The original intention of Brown and Lord Rushcliffe, Chairman of the Unemployment Assistance Board, had been that these temporarily unemployed people should receive some limited help with their food and rent. I gather that local officials of the U.A.B. have been pretty bureaucratic in interpreting the regulations and the scheme has fallen rather flat with the result that the private survey now underway is being made.

The ECONOMIST considers that a "far reaching labour plan (is needed) to tide over the current transition with the minimum of loss and misery, and to set the new model war economy smoothly in motion at the earliest date". It hits the nail on the head but it's easier said than done.

The action to be taken will probably be along the lines of instructing the Unemployment Assistance Board to take a more generous view of unemployed families' requirements with possibly a broadcast by the Minister of Labour emphasising the present situation as "only temporary" and stating that staff dismissals which are not absolutely necessary are against the national interest during the present transition period. Some of the Press have advocated a temporary subsidy for these

people/

people. The very heavy demands on the Treasury lead me to doubt that any such action will be taken unless the expected absorption of these individuals into the war time economy lasts much longer than anyone here now anticipates.

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P.S.

Evacuation has, of course, produced a crop of stories relating to the reactions of the slum dwellers to country life. I've been too busy to garner many, but here are a couple which are reputed to be authentic.

One of the developments of evacuation has been the difficulty in getting the East End Londoner used to the quiet of the country village. One Cockney mother turned up at the local billeting officer's headquarters with her child and announced: "I'm goin' back to Lunnon. Them there Germans will at least make some noise with their bloody bombs. I fair get the creeps with the bloomin' quiet out 'ere. I'd rather take a chance with the 'Uns droppin' them h'eggs than feel like a corpse already in the dead quiet out 'ere".

One little boy sent to a village in Surrey was asked by his hostess to go into the garden and pick some flowers for the table. Half an hour later she found him in the garden looking furtively about, but no flowers had been picked. She asked him why he hadn't done what he was told. The reply was: "I'm waitin' for that there copper on the corner to move along so as I don't get pinched".

A little girl of ten billeted on a well-to-do county family was given a lovely bed-room to herself and shared the attention of the family nurse.

When bedtime came the first evening, the nurse showed her the bed-room and left her to undress. Returning half an hour later, she found the light out but no one in the bed and the room apparently deserted. A thorough search, however, revealed the child half asleep under the bed.

After pulling her out, the nurse naturally inquired what had frightened her so badly that she had to hide there. "I'm not frightened", said the little girl, "Our room is very small so Mamma and Papa sleep on the bed and I always sleep underneath."

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TELEGRAM

The White House  
Washington

*file  
personal.*

*Kennedy  
1*

18wuab Cable 33

London Oct. 9, 1939.

LC., THE PRESIDENT:

Your dear remembrance was brightest spot in day which Roses presence here would have made perfect. Deep thanks and affectionate regards to you both.

Joe Kennedy

file  
personal  
1

Kennedy

294 PONDFIELD ROAD  
BRONXVILLE, NEW YORK

October 10-1939

Dear Mr. President:

I want to thank you  
most sincerely for the telegram  
of congratulations which you sent  
to Joe and me on our twenty-fifth  
anniversary -

All the children send their  
love to you and to Mrs. Roosevelt.  
We shall remember always that  
you made it possible for us to  
enjoy a year of the rarest opportunities

Very sincerely,  
Rose Kennedy

NORTH OCEAN BOULEVARD  
PALM BEACH, FLORIDA

file  
personal  
of Kennedy

Dear Mr. President:

I want to thank you  
and Mrs. Roosevelt for the very  
lovely flowers which you both  
sent to me during my convalescence

in Boston. They made my room  
very gay, and they helped to  
make me feel wonderfully well.

I am leaving here Sunday and  
I expect to go to England very soon.

My best wishes to you and Mrs. Roosevelt

Yours respectfully,  
Rose Kennedy

file  
personal

Kennedy -

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

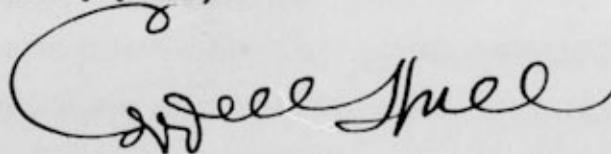
October 21, 1939

My dear Mr. President:

In accordance with my letter of October 7, 1939, with which you concurred, a telegraphic instruction was sent to the Embassy at London to approach the British Government concerning the quantity and price of Australasian wool which it intends to release to the United States.

I enclose for your information the substance of the reply which has now been received from the Embassy.

Faithfully yours,



Enclosure:  
Paraphrase of telegram  
from London

The President,  
The White House.

**Department of State**

BUREAU  
DIVISION

**TA**

ENCLOSURE

TO

Letter drafted **10/19/39**

ADDRESSED TO

**The President**

London

October 17, 1939

Secretary of State,  
Washington.

The directorate in the Ministry of Supply for raw materials states that the development of its plans has not yet reached the point at which a definite statement can be made as to the price and quantity of wool which may be made available to the United States but in a week or ten days it hopes to be able to indicate its attitude.

However, the official interviewed stated informally that he thought we might remain assured that the British authorities anticipated meeting our requirements for the wool in question and that the British policy would not be to "sting" us.

I was given the opportunity to intimate that naturally we hoped that the price policy of the British on the sales would be consistent with the policies adopted in connection with purchasing imported products, and that in their policies with respect to wool there might be certain aspects which before being put into operation it might be to our mutual interest to communicate to us.

KENNEDY

PSF: Kennedy  
18

October 30, 1939.

Dear Joe:-

Those letters of yours are extraordinarily interesting and I am particularly thrilled by your vivid account of the children evacuated from city to country. Apparently the British did an amazingly good job in the face of a difficult physical and social problem. The whole procedure, with the discovery of unsanitary conditions among the children from the slums and unsanitary conditions in drainage systems, water supplies and medical services in the small towns, makes me think back to the belief I began to hold a quarter of a century ago. The big cities of the world are too big and here in this country, because more and more people recognize that fact, there is a growing demand for decentralization. As I see it, a certain decrease in manufacturing efficiency because of decentralization will be more than offset by the reduction in cost of utilities and cost of government. In New York City, as you know, every time we add a half million people to the population we have to build a new subway, a new sewage disposal plant, and a new water supply.

I do not think people in England should worry about Germany going Communist in the Russian manner. They might blow up and have chaos for a while but the German upbringing for centuries, their insistence on independence of family life, and the right to hold property in a small way, would not, in my judgment, permit

the Russian form of brutality for any length of time.

Also, while the World War did not bring forth strong leadership in Great Britain, this war may do so, because I am inclined to think the British public has more humility than before and is slowly but surely getting rid of the "muddle through" attitude of the past.

We over here, in spite of the great strides toward national unity during the past six years, still have much to learn of the "relativity" of world geography and the rapid annihilation of distance and purely local economies.

I was amused and delighted to hear you say over the telephone that it is actually boring in London now that you have got rid of most of the returning Americans. Here in Washington the White House is very quiet --- and though business continues an increase, which I regard as wholesome because it is slow, there is a general feeling of sitting quiet and waiting to see what the morrow will bring forth.

Here is one from Ambassador Daniels: "Suppose you had two cows. The Socialist would take one and let you keep one. The Nazi would let you keep both cows but would take all the milk. The Communist would take both cows."

My best to you,

As ever yours,

Hon. Joseph P. Kennedy,  
American Embassy,  
London,  
England.