

Chapter 11

The Reluctant World Power

DURING the early and middle nineteen-thirties there were occasional grim reminders from overseas that the world contained warlike nations bent on conquest. But at first these seemed hardly more than offstage noises during the drama of the Great Depression. When the Japanese invaded Manchuria in 1931, when Mussolini's Fascist Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935, when Hitler entered the Rhineland in 1936 and gave manifest signs of an inclination to push farther, American disapproval was intense but the great majority of us felt that it wasn't up to us to do anything about such foreign depredations. For the country was in an overwhelmingly isolationist mood, convinced that it could live in safety and satisfaction behind a wall of neutrality, regardless of what was going on in the rest of the world.

This was a belief at which individual men and women had arrived by a great variety of routes. There were, to begin with, the natural-born distrusters of all things foreign. Their logic appealed to many people of Irish descent (who bore England no love) and of German descent (who dreaded another conflict with Germany) and likewise to numerous Midwesterners and Great Plainsmen who suspected Easterners generally of an undue susceptibility to the blandishments of European diplomats in striped pants. There were also men and women who had suffered deeply from the Depression and who, attributing their troubles to the greed of financiers and big business-

men, proceeded naturally to the belief that it was the sly maneuvers of "international bankers" and "merchants of death" that sucked nations into war. There were also the Communists and their dupes, whom the party line of the moment directed to join in the hue and cry against Wall Street and the munitions makers. There were men and women who so deeply distrusted Franklin D. Roosevelt that they suspected him of trying to drag the country into war in order to fasten his hold upon it the more securely. Still others conscientiously believed that, with a Depression on its hands, the United States had enough to cope with at home without venturing into foreign expeditions, and that the best contribution that America could make to democracy and freedom was to demonstrate that these ideals could be realized within its own borders.

Finally there were those men and women who, as members of the disenchanted younger generation after World War I, had become (to borrow Lloyd Morris's phrase) "truculently cynical" about that war. These youngsters of the previous decade were now coming into their middle years, and many of them, now solid and influential citizens, had settled into the conviction that America's entry into World War I had been the great tragic blunder of their parents' generation. When in the mid-thirties a Senate Committee headed by Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota exposed the huge profits made by some American corporations during that war, and succeeded in conveying the impression that the Morgans and du Ponts and their like had got us involved in it, many members of these various groups felt that their worst suspicions had been confirmed. The "revisionist" view of World War I was becoming the orthodox view.

Thus it happened that when in January, 1937, the Gallup pollsters asked the question, "Do you think it was a mistake for the United States to enter the World War?" no less than 70 per cent of those who expressed an opinion answered "Yes"; and that when, in the fall of 1935, they asked whether Congress should get the approval of the people in a national vote before declaring war, as many as 75 per cent said "Yes." It is doubtful, of course, whether many of those who gave this answer realized how long it would take to organize a

national referendum (imagine our waiting for one after Pearl Harbor!); yet the answer was significant as revealing the prevailing view that peaceable people got inveigled into wars by villains and fools in their own land.

During the years 1935, 1936, and 1937 Congress expressed this isolationist mood by passing three successive Neutrality Acts aimed at preventing the United States from selling arms or munitions to any warring powers. President Roosevelt and the State Department didn't like these acts—felt that they were unrealistic, tied America's hands, and negated its influence and its rights abroad—but public opinion was too strong to counter. And when in October, 1937, Roosevelt made a speech in which he said that aggressors must be "quarantined," the uproar of protest was deafening.

Already, however, events were marching at an accelerating and ominous pace, and the offstage noises bore overtones of increasing menace. By 1937 Hitler and Mussolini were both actively aiding the dictator Franco in the Spanish Civil War. In that same year the Japanese attacked China. In March, 1938, Hitler occupied Austria. In the fall of that year, at the Munich conference, he browbeat England and France into consenting to his partial occupation of Czechoslovakia. The next spring he brazenly occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia, and Mussolini invaded Albania. In the late summer of 1939 Hitler made an alliance with Stalin and then attacked Poland; this time England and France could stand aside no longer, and World War II was under way. By the next summer—the summer of 1940—the horrified American people had seen Finland attacked by Russia, Denmark and Norway overrun by Hitler, and the Low Countries and even France unbelievably smashed; only Britain now stood between Hitler and the total conquest of Europe, and Britain's ability to endure hung in the balance.

This dismaying sequence of events—plus Roosevelt's increasingly persuasive efforts to awaken his countrymen to the full meaning of Hitler's onrush—shocked the American people into a gradual but decisive change of conviction as to the ability of the United States to

live by itself and to itself. One by one the apparent moral certainties of the mid-thirties—such as the notion that wars are fomented by munitions makers—were engulfed by the news from abroad. With each portentous event American opinion shifted; sometimes the shift was so rapid that one could trace its progress in successive Gallup polls. For instance, in March, 1939, 52 per cent of those polled thought that if war broke out in Europe we should sell Britain and France airplanes and other war materials; the very next month—after Hitler's total occupation of Czechoslovakia—the percentage had gone up from 52 to 66. Naturally, then, when war did break out in the autumn of 1939 the Neutrality Act was amended to permit the cash sale of munitions. Yet still the majority of Americans, despite the nightmare change that they were witnessing across the seas, remained stubbornly reluctant to commit themselves; their neutralism died hard. It was not until France fell and Britain stood alone, confronting the prospect of "blood, toil, tears, and sweat," that their sense of the implacable necessities of the new situation began really to overcome their suspicion that somebody must be putting something over on them.

When France collapsed in June, 1940, the United States was beginning to step up its defense production very sharply. On the desperate need of the country to arm itself almost everybody could unite. Within a few weeks thereafter, Roosevelt was offering guns and over-age destroyers to Britain. By the early autumn of 1940, the American draft law was going into operation. Yet in that very season the two Presidential candidates—Roosevelt, breaking precedent by running for a third term, and Wendell Willkie, the last-minute choice of the Republicans—though they agreed upon aid to Europe, were both insisting that they opposed taking the United States into war. The orators of the "Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies," and of "Fight for Freedom," were vehemently opposed by the equally positive orators of "America First." During the following year, as Hitler desolated British cities with bombs, overran the Balkans, and invaded Russia, and as the Japanese began to threaten the subjugation of the Far East, opinion swung by de-

grees toward more and more direct intervention; the Lend-Lease Act went through Congress with a strong majority, American war-ships began convoying American supplies part way to England, and the United States found itself in a virtual state of undeclared war with Germany. Yet as the month of December, 1941, arrived, the country was still sharply divided emotionally.

At that moment a very large number of Americans, perhaps a majority, believed that Hitler must imperatively be defeated, even at the risk of complete American involvement. A small minority were in favor of plunging in with all we had. But a considerably larger minority regarded Roosevelt's warlike gestures with a vehement distrust. Only a handful of this latter group regarded Hitler or the Japanese imperialists with any favor; the prevailing feeling among them was simply that, despite our loathing for aggression, we must not go to war to stop it unless or until it immediately threatened the Western Hemisphere.

Then, on December 7, 1941, came the stroke which ended all doubts.

It came, ironically, not from Hitler's Germany, but from Japan. The attack on Pearl Harbor was a challenge that could not be denied. And it was promptly followed by the astonishingly obliging action of Hitler and Mussolini in declaring war on the United States, and thus relinquishing whatever hope they might have cherished that a lingering disagreement about Europe would keep America divided. The die was cast. Suddenly we were a people united in our intent to prosecute World War II to victory against the aggressors both in Asia and in Europe.

Reluctantly—like a man walking backward—we had been pushed by events into a recognition of the fact that we were not a lone nation secure on our own continent, but a world power which must live up to the opportunities and responsibilities inherent in that fact. We resented the idea. We felt we would much prefer to look after ourselves by ourselves; and we continued to feel so. But we had no choice.

II

During World War I there had been a lively crusading spirit—and there had also been considerable opposition to the war. This time there was no opposition. During the whole three years and eight months that the United States fought, there was no antiwar faction, no organized pacifist element, no objection to huge appropriations, no noticeable opposition to the draft. Yet there was also a minimum of crusading spirit. For the popular disillusionment over World War I and the controversy over involvement in World War II had left their marks.

A generation of men and women who had heard again and again how men could be seduced by war slogans and martial parades were inevitably skeptical in their inner minds. This new war was astonishingly like that of 1917-1918, in Europe at least; and despite the obvious differences and the hard logic of circumstance, something remained in the subconscious of millions of people to rise and accuse them whenever they heard a patriotic peroration. They didn't want to be victims of "hysteria." They felt uncomfortable about flag waving. They preferred to be matter-of-fact about the job ahead. Morale officers reported an astonishing indifference to instruction on American war aims; the chief war aim in most soldiers' minds appeared to be to get back home, by vanquishing the enemy if there was no quicker way; and the strongest force making for valor and endurance was apparently pride in one's outfit and loyalty to one's buddies. Few bands played, few trumpets blew, there were no parades, and people who became demonstrative about America's war ideals sensed a coolness in the air about them.

Furthermore, the emotional misgivings of those who had been anti-interventionist—and of some of those who had been merely reluctant—remained to condition them: to make them move skeptically, grudgingly, and with strenuous opposition to specific war policies that called for drastic government controls and sharp civilian sacrifices. These people were unstintingly loyal, and went to battle—or saw their brothers and sons go—without reservation; yet they re-

mained emotionally on guard—distrustful of Britain, suspicious of our high command's disposition to put the war in Europe ahead of the war in the Pacific, and derisive over our civilian officials in Washington, who looked to some of them like another crop of Brain Trusters using the war as an excuse for getting former professors to interfere with American business.

And the Depression, too, had left its scars. People who for years had felt that fate was against them and that the next turn of its wheel might plunge them into full disaster felt that their whole future had become a huge and ominous question mark. Sure, they would fight—but where would they come out afterward? What positive thing was there that they could look forward to with genuine hope, once the enemy had been smashed? They didn't know. Talk about war aims sounded hollow to them. They would do their job, but without positive hope. And meanwhile some of them would nourish a shrewd distrust of anybody who looked like a big tycoon; it was a safe rule to follow that the boss was out to feather his own nest. It may have been a sign of the nearness of the Great Depression that the average GI felt more active resentment for his own general, who lived comfortably in the house on the hill with a shower and plenty of cocktails, than for the enemy that confronted him.

Yet, with isolated exceptions, the armed forces of the United States fought magnificently. It is very doubtful if they could have done so if in their inner beings they had deeply questioned the validity of the cause for which they were fighting. By and large, the civilian population of the United States likewise met adequately the major challenges of total war, and of them too the same thing can be said: they too fully believed in the justice of America's mission, however distrustful they might be of rhetoric about it. And even when things went worst, neither the military nor the civilians ever doubted the eventual coming of victory, however dubious they might be that it would insure a harmonious and comfortable peace. The American people were their nation's—and freedom's—disillusioned and deadpan defenders.

III

It is not for this chronicle to rehearse the military story of World War II, from the first agonizing days when the Japanese held most of the Pacific, and our troops were being smashed at Bataan, and German submarines were sinking ships in a smear of oil off Cape Hatteras, to the stunning success of D-Day, the sweep across France, the setback of the Bulge, the push into Germany, and—following a series of island-hopping Pacific victories—the dropping of the atomic bomb on Japan and the surrender of August, 1945. The generals, diplomats, military historians, and autobiographers have rung the changes on this great story again and again, describing and debating each strategic decision and each tactical move; correspondents and novelists and playwrights have taken us through the swamps of Guadalcanal and the hedgerows of Normandy, and onto the beaches of Tarawa and Salerno, and through the long nights of Pacific patrolling, and into the sky battles over Germany. Less adequately told—and yet of continuing significance to us today—is the staggering story of American production during those anxious years.

The miseries of the Great Depression had obscured a striking fact: that under the spur of necessity American industry had gained sharply in efficiency during the nineteen-thirties. The figures are revealing. According to the best estimates of which economists are capable, output per man hour had increased during the decade 1900-1910 by 12 per cent; during the decade 1910-1920, by only $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent; during the brash decade 1920-1930, by an impressive 21 per cent. During the Depression decade of 1930-1940—when many plants were shut down or working part time, and there was intense pressure for efficiency and economy—it had increased by an amazing 41 per cent. But always, in most industries, the brakes had been on, as it were. They must not overproduce. Now, with the coming of the war emergency, the brakes were removed.

For the military planners at Washington had conceived their plans on a truly majestic scale. By the end of the war the United States had a total of over twelve million men in service, as against less than five

million in World War I. The devisers of the effort had resolved that these forces of ours would be the best armed, best equipped, best supplied, and most comfortably circumstanced in history—which they were. And we had to supply not only our own forces, but others too. The result, in terms of output and of cost, was astronomical.

By the end of 1943 we were spending money at *five times* the peak rate of World War I. During the nineteen-thirties, critics of the New Deal had become apoplectic over annual federal budgets of seven or eight or nine billions, which they felt were carrying the United States toward bankruptcy; during the fiscal year 1942 we spent, by contrast, over 34 billions; during 1943, 79 billions; during 1944, 95 billions; during 1945, 98 billions; during 1946, 60 billions. For the last four of these years, in fact, our *annual* expenditures were greater than the total national debt which had been a matter of such grave concern during the Depression. That national debt had risen from 19 billions in Hoover's last year in office to 40 billions in 1939—and here was the government, only a few years later, spending up to 98 billions *per year*, and thus piling the national debt up to 269 billions by 1946! These colossal sums made anything in the previous history of the United States look like small change.

And how was the ambitious and expensive job of military production accomplished? By paying little attention to costs, and asking producers—as in World War I—to concentrate on volume and speed. "How many can you make, and how fast?"

The American manufacturer responded to the challenge with zest. For it appealed to that peculiar enthusiasm for record breaking which seems to blossom in the air of a land where radio listeners to ball games are informed by record-conscious broadcasters that so-and-so's triple with the bases full is the first triple made in the first game of a World Series since 1927, and where schoolboy runners dream dreams of being the first man in history to achieve a four-minute mile.

New plants were built, and built fast. The entire automobile industry was diverted from the manufacture of passenger cars into the production of tanks, trucks, weapons. All manner of new products and devices were assigned to American plants to produce

in a hurry—ranging from synthetic rubber to radar, from landing ships to proximity fuses, from atabrine and penicillin and DDT to the Manhattan project for the atomic bomb. Always the call from Washington was for speed, speed, speed, and for quantity.

The result: in the year 1945 the gross product of goods and services in the United States came to \$215 billions—well over twice the dollar total of 1939, which had been \$91 billions. Even when one makes allowance for the wartime rise in prices, one finds that the product of 1945 was more than two-thirds bigger than that of 1939. American industry had achieved probably the most extraordinary increase in production that had ever been accomplished in five years in all economic history.

IV

What happened to the national standard of living when the federal government poured into the national economy war orders by the billions, and then by the tens of billions, and then by the scores of billions? Roaring prosperity. During the nineteen-thirties the New Dealers had been conscientiously trying to "prime the pump" by government expenditures of a few billions a year; what they had done with a teaspoon was now being done with a ladle.

By 1943 the last appreciable unemployment—except of people transferring from job to job, or waiting for a promised opening to materialize—had been soaked up. By 1944 the signs of prosperity were everywhere. It was hard to get a hotel room in any city. Restaurants in which it had always been easy to find a table for lunch were now crammed by a few minutes after twelve. Sales of fur coats and jewelry—many of them for cash across the counter—were jumping. Luxury goods for which there had long been a dwindling market were suddenly in demand: the proprietor of a music store reported that he was selling every grand piano, new or renovated, that he could lay his hands on. And visitors to New England mill towns which had been depression-ridden since long before the nineteen-thirties were noting newly painted houses, fences in fresh repair.

This gush of prosperity was a strange phenomenon to witness in a

nation supposedly stripped down for the supreme effort of war—a nation in which airplane spotters sat under the stars of a cold winter's night to listen for an improbable enemy; in which air-raid wardens put on their armbands for practice blackouts, and waited endlessly for the dreadful moment when the word would go out, "Signal 50 received, post your wardens"; in which first-aiders took lessons in triangular bandages and talked sagely about pressure points; in which women went stockingless because they were running out of nylons, and cigarettes, butter, sugar, and coffee were in short supply, and beefsteak became the rarest of treats, and draft boards puzzled over the latest changes in the regulations from Washington, and the ubiquity of soldiers and sailors in uniform was a constant reminder of everybody's obligation to make sacrifices for the common safety. The government was doing what it could to reduce spending and thus slow down inflation—through price ceilings, rationing of scarce and essential goods, wage freezing, excess-profits taxes, and record-high personal income taxes—and with some success. Yet the prosperity was there, paradoxically overflowing. And after the long drought of the nineteen-thirties there was something undeniably welcome about it.

Who was getting the money?

Generally speaking, the stockholders of the biggest corporations were not getting very much of it. These corporations were in many cases getting huge war orders, and thus consolidating their important positions in the national economy; but excess-profits taxes, along with managerial caution over the uncertainties of the future, and with the recollection of the embarrassing scandals of 1918 war profits, combined to keep their dividend payments at modest rates. The stock market languished. Big capital, as such, was having no heyday.

Some smaller companies which had barely been able to keep alive during the Depression and now were receiving big war orders were making extraordinary money—subject both to taxes and to renegotiation of their contracts. There were also numerous small concerns, in the textile business for example, that got no war orders but profited

hugely—again before taxes. But other businesses were in definite trouble. Tourist camps and roadside taverns and automobile dealers, for example, suffered because of gas rationing, and there were many manufacturers and dealers who were hard hit by shortages of materials, could not shift into war production, and went deep into the red. But what was more interesting than the sort of concerns which were getting the money was the sort of individual people who were getting it.

The rich were getting some of it, but those of them who were honest were keeping very little because of high income taxes. Most of the extravagant spending which was manifest in so many places was the result either of tax dodging or of the lavish use of company expense accounts. "It's all on the government" was the theme song of many a sumptuous party. Although the war was making a few legitimate millionaires—mainly among oil men who by reason of "depletion allowances" did not feel the full weight of federal taxes—in general the rich *and* honest did not gain much.

People outside the war industries whose salaries or wages were frozen by the War Labor Board were not gaining at all, though some of them were helped by "reclassification of jobs" or by "merit increases," with or without quotation marks. People who were dependent on dividends and interest likewise were seldom among the gainers; indeed in many cases inflation brought a real deterioration in their circumstances.

The principal beneficiaries, generally speaking, were farmers; engineers, technicians, and specialists of various sorts whose knowledge and ability were especially valuable to the war effort in one way or another; and skilled workers in war industries—or unskilled workers capable of learning a skilled trade and stepping into the skilled group.

The farmers were in clover; and it was about time. For they had long been faced with adversity after adversity. During the nineteen-twenties few of them had had seats on the prosperity band wagon; a boom in the price of farm land after World War I had overextended many of them, the failure of numerous rural banks had been disastrous to these and to others, and the prices they had got had seemed

perpetually inadequate. During the Depression these prices had dropped to ruinous depths; and just as recovery was setting in, a series of droughts and dust storms had desolated whole areas of the Great Plains, sending miserable "Okies" on the desperate trek to California, where at least there was a faint hope of something better. But now prices were good, the demand for farm products was overwhelming, the weather was favorable, their methods were vastly improved, and by 1943 their total purchasing power was almost double what it had been at the end of the nineteen-thirties.

The engineers, technicians, and workers in the war plants benefited by an interesting circumstance. Since at the beginning of the war emergency there had still been millions of unemployed men and women, there had been no need for an official allocation of manpower; the war industries could absorb large numbers of workers from other occupations without crippling the economy. And they lured them largely by offering high pay. A young chemist would find himself sought out by a chemical concern at a salary he hadn't expected to earn for many a year. Mrs. Smith's waitress would leave for a job in an electrical plant that would bring her \$50 a week with evenings free. A soda jerker would double his income by walking down the street to the factory that was going to make parts for tanks. And a salesgirl at a department-store stocking counter would fetch up in an airplane plant at two or three times her store pay.

Later, it is true, workers in essential industries were "frozen" in their jobs and the rulings of the War Labor Board tended to keep their pay within bounds; but the essential fact remained that these war workers became, as a group, the chief beneficiaries of the new prosperity. Look at the figures for workers in manufacturing industries. Between 1939 and 1945 their average weekly earnings went up by 86 per cent. Meanwhile their cost of living went up by an estimated 29 per cent—but even so they were far better off than in 1939. They had experienced a sharp and welcome gain in "real wages."

By and large, what the war boom did, then—with numerous exceptions—was to give a lift to people with low incomes.

We shall come back to that fact in a later chapter. It was a very important fact for the future of America.

V

During these war years there was an imposing growth in the size, authority, and complexity of the federal government, superimposed upon the growth that had already taken place under the New Deal.

At this point a word of amplification is necessary. This growth was nothing wholly new. Both the federal government and the state and local governments had been growing almost continuously even in earlier years (subject only to the principle that in wartime it is the federal government which swells while the others do not). During the years 1915-1930, for example, the cost of running the federal government had jumped by 352 per cent; and, although military and veterans' expenditures accounted for much of the increase, even the civil administrative costs had gone up by 237 per cent. As for the state governments, the cost of running them had leaped upward even during the time when the parsimonious Calvin Coolidge was holding federal outlays more or less in check; how could it help doing this when even the most conservative citizens wanted new state highways and bigger and better schools? This trend toward growth was the unavoidable result of the increasing interdependence of people in a society that is becoming ever more urbanized and more complex: anybody who has lived for any stretch of time in a rising suburb, and has seen its governmental budget swell as its population grows, will recognize the phenomenon.

But the New Deal did accelerate this trend, sharply; and the war of 1941-1945 gave it a much stronger push. In 1930, when Hoover was in the White House and the Depression was still young, there had been some $\frac{6}{10}$ of a million federal civil employees. By 1940, when the New Deal had done its utmost and the war boom was just beginning, the number had risen from $\frac{6}{10}$ of a million to a little over a million. By 1945, when the war was ending, it had shot up to more than $3\frac{1}{2}$ million.

And in the years following World War II, did it shrink back again

to only a little over a million? It did not. It shrank back only part way—just as after World War I it had shrunk back only part way. In 1949, some four years after the war, and before the Korean crisis, there were still over 2 million federal civil employees.

For the failure of the roster to contract more sharply one may blame, if one wishes, the Fair Deal Administration, so anxious to be a modified carbon copy of the expansive New Deal Administration; or one may blame the inherent tendency of bureaucrats to hang onto office at all cost. In any case a major cause was our prolonged tension with Soviet Russia. Yet another cause, in all probability, was our still increasing interdependence.

I remember a talk I once had with a number of men who were deeply interested in conservation. They included a public-spirited but very conservative ex-banker. When he said that to achieve some end—I think it was the protection of watersheds—a new federal law was needed, I asked whether interstate compacts wouldn't serve, suggesting that I preferred to see such things managed if possible without conferring new authority on Washington. The ex-banker explained to me patiently that only federal action would do the trick. On the growth of federal power in general I am sure my friend would have been sulphurous. But in this field he recognized the inexorable principle that as our lives become more closely interlocked, we must needs depend more and more on federal legislation, federal regulation, federal funds.

Diligently as public-spirited bodies like the Hoover Commission, apprehensive over the groaning weight of taxes, may work for efficiency and economy in administration, and earnestly as others may strive to limit government action to fields in which it will not stifle individual enterprise and personal freedom, there seems to be little prospect of a real shrinkage. Big government appears to be with us to stay.

VI

The year 1945 was a year of great events. As it opened, the German counteroffensive of the Bulge in the snowy Ardennes was being

turned back, while at the other end of the world General MacArthur's troops were storming through the Philippines. In March, American troops seized intact a bridge across the Rhine at Remagen, and the way was opened for an offensive across Germany. In April, when this offensive had just reached the Elbe, Franklin D. Roosevelt—who had proved himself a masterly war leader, well fitted to work in cordial partnership with the incomparable Churchill—died, exhausted by his long labors toward victory; and the massive burdens of the Presidency of the United States fell upon the shoulders of the inexperienced and unassuming Vice-President, Harry S. Truman. Later in the same month there began, at San Francisco, the international conference which set up the United Nations organization. By early May, Mussolini was dead, Hitler was dead, and Germany had surrendered. In July, the first atomic bomb explosion took place in New Mexico. In August, the bomb was used on two Japanese cities, and Japan surrendered—just after Stalin, like a football coach sending a senior into a game during the last minute of play to get his letter, had belatedly moved his troops against the Japanese. V-J Day brought wild rejoicing. Now for an era of peace!

As soon as possible we began bringing our troops home in response to a vociferous public demand. Whereupon we encountered two surprises.

The first was a happy one. There was no postwar depression such as innumerable people had expected. On the contrary, the new prosperity went right on, with the public spending money at such a pace that, with the relaxation of federal controls, there began a progressive inflation more severe than the wartime one. (From 1940 to 1945 the rise in the cost of living for moderate-income families had been 28.4 per cent; from 1945 to 1949 it was 31.7 per cent—with prices still going up.) A series of strikes brought a series of federal mediations, which usually gave labor at least a part of what it had asked for; and these wage increases were followed by price increases to absorb them—with, sometimes, a margin to spare. We saw a first round of wage increases, a second round, a third round—and then we lost track of the number. The rising cost of almost

everything bore down heavily upon some businesses, and upon individuals with fixed incomes, but as to the continuing actuality of prosperity there could be no doubt whatever. With government expenditures continuing at a high level, the economic question of the day was not whether America could absorb all it could produce, but whether it could produce all it wanted to absorb.

The other surprise was deeply disturbing. With Hitlerism dead and done with, and with Japan docile under MacArthur's imperial rule, we no sooner started to relax than it was borne in upon us, with increasing ominousness, that Soviet Russia in her turn was bent upon world conquest. Not only must we keep large occupation forces both in the Far East and in Europe; we must also prop up exhausted Britain with a loan, come to the aid of Greece and Turkey under the Truman Doctrine, launch the Marshall Plan to the tune of billions a year for aid to the non-Communist governments and peoples of Western Europe; run for months a hazardous airlift to Berlin to prevent the Soviets from starving that city into submission; forge an Atlantic Pact to protect Western Europe, and contribute heavily to its defense; and, in 1950, hold off a Communist attack upon South Korea—meanwhile confronting, at every session of every council, assembly, and commission of the new United Nations organization, an unrelenting barrage of obstruction and vilification from the Soviet representatives.

So our dreams of victorious relaxation ended almost as soon as they began. The draft had to be continued. The military establishment had to be built up again—at a cost which unhappily prolonged inflation. We found ourselves the uneasy proprietors of a big atomic-power industry, government controlled (how strange to American experience!) and supersecret. We made intermittently successful efforts at bi-partisan management of our foreign policy, but under the strain of our bewildering responsibilities there were constant political frictions and recriminations over the blunders or alleged blunders that had given communism the initiative in so many parts of the earth. We discovered that the American Communists had infiltrated

into the management of many labor unions, many supposedly liberal public-service organizations, and some government departments; and so intense had the anti-Soviet feeling become that this discovery led—as we shall see in another chapter of this book—to the besmirching, often on the flimsiest or falsest of evidence, of the reputations of many estimable citizens. But on the other hand, our very distrust of the Soviets led to the passage, by large majorities, of measure after measure for the relief, upbuilding, and defense of Europe. In our deep anxiety we were carrying through a policy of aid which—however it might be resented by people in Europe who knew well that we had never suffered as they did, and whatever the final outcome of it might be—was generous and statesmanlike.

As the international tension mounted again, still another surprise became manifest. Real isolationism had virtually disappeared.

What had happened, paradoxically, was that most of those Americans who had formerly been isolationist, or would have been isolationist had the international skies been clearer, had become interventionists in a special area, the Far East. When they looked across the Atlantic Ocean, they looked with the old eyes of skepticism, voting against appropriations for Britain, paring down appropriations for the Continent. But when they looked across the Pacific Ocean, their mood was not skeptical, but full of faith in Chiang Kai-shek, whom they wanted to support fully; and they were angry at American officials, not because these officials had been too lavish in aid to a foreign government, but because they had been too lukewarm and too niggardly. Some of the critics even pushed their attack upon these officials to the point where it was implied that anyone who was not a wholehearted interventionist in Asia was suspect of Communist sympathies—an implication which they would hardly have accepted if it had been applied to full support of, let us say, the Marshall Plan.

What did this all add up to? To the fact that we had interventionists-in-Europe and interventionists-in-Asia, but few true isolationists any more—at least for the time being. However acrid the disputes

over foreign policy, there was general agreement that the United States faced an inescapable assignment as chief guardian and financial helper and adviser of the non-Communist world.

That was a development which the American of 1935, had he been able to foresee it, would have regarded with complete incredulity.

Because it was so new, it was a development for which we ourselves were unprepared. The United States was gravely lacking in experts who knew China, Korea, Indo-China, Iran, Egypt, and other lands where crisis loomed; we had to begin hurriedly training them. Foreign-policy problems were new and strange to most of us. By nature we resented having to engage in government propaganda abroad. Emotionally we were unready for the commanding role that had been thrust upon us; for our inherited instincts—and most of our acquired instincts—told us that where we belonged was in the United States, looking after our own affairs. More than ever, we were the reluctant world power.