

6/10/40

THE CONGRESSIONAL FRONT
By Congressman Everett M. Dirksen
16th District

THE TRUE SPIRIT OF CONGRESS.

Forget for a moment the observations contained in editorials, comments, news columns, magazines, and pamphlets and permit a Member of Congress to frankly and candidly appraise the true spirit of Congress in these vexing and troublesome times. The spirit and temper of Congress can be obtained only thru constant contact on the floor, in the cloakrooms and in the offices in those undisturbed moments when members are most revealing in spirit and intimate in fellowship. Each day it considers bills relating to the domestic welfare of the country. Behind each bill is painstaking work, masses of testimony, plodding effort. Congress is working now precisely as it has worked before. It is resolved to provide for the national defense. Behind each bill is a vast volume of work. Behind each bill on national defense is a sustained effort to find out what we need for defense and to provide it as economically and expeditiously as possible. There is no emotionalism about all this. These tasks call for clear, conclusive and sober thinking. Congress reads the daily press accounts of the war. There is discussion and expression of opinion. There is speculation about the future. There is comment on Executive action relating to assistance to the allied powers. There is a disposition to assist. There is a conviction that we must do those things which according to the best authority are reasonably necessary to insure the security of this hemisphere. Over all, there is a quiet and determined unanimity to keep this country out of war. It is not dramatized. It is not exploited. It is not vocal. It is a deep, steady, and determined conviction that we can best serve the world and democracy and our own nation by keeping out of war. A passing incident speaks eloquently on this point. An influential Democratic member was queried as to how many votes might be gotten for a war resolution. His cryptic reply was, "Not one."

NATIONAL DEFENSE IN A NUTSHELL.

For the fiscal government year which began on July 1, 1939 and ended June 30, 1940, the Congress had appropriated about 742 million for the Army and 778 million for the Navy. This seemed a staggering amount as compared with other years. But in the late summer, Hitler began to march. The first thing Congress did on returning to the Capitol in January of this year was to make immediately available another 120 million for the Army and 146 million for the Navy. Then began the task of preparing an Army and Navy appropriation bill for the year which was to begin on July 1st, 1940 and run to June 30, 1941. For the Army, the House provided 777 million, for the Navy 966 million. The bills were sent to the Senate. Hitler moved to Norway. The President then delivered a personal message to Congress asking an additional 896 million in direct funds plus authority to enter into contracts for future ~~xxx~~ delivery of materials in the sum of 286 million. Hitler moved thru Flanders and on Paris. On May 31st the President made additional recommendations to Congress regarding expenditures for national defense and asked for 963 million more in direct funds and authority to make contracts in the amount of 318 million. Then came General Marshall the Chief of Staff and suggested the need of increasing the strength of the Army by 95,000 men. Congress agreed to the request and added 322 million to the appropriation. As the score stands for the year which will begin on July 1, 1940 and end June 30, 1941, there will be available to the Army and Navy, the sum of 4,090 million dollars in direct funds with extra authority to make contracts for the acquisition of supplies, materials, and other essentials in the sum of 825 million. There has thus been allotted to national defense for the fiscal year 1941 a grand total of 4,915 million dollars. Defense goes forward.

BANK OF ALL THE AMERICAS.

In the near future the Senate of the U. S. will be called upon to ratify a treaty with South American countries under which it is proposed to establish an Inter-American Bank, Congress would then be asked to approve a charter for this bank. If this is done, there will be established a bank for all the American Republics, the stock of which can be

held only by governments on this hemisphere, and the functions of which are to help stimulate and expedite trade and the stabilization of exchange rates between the countries on this hemisphere. If and when this is done, it will mark the fruition of an effort which began 50 years ago for the creation of such a bank. As early as April of 1890, 14 countries on this hemisphere met and adopted a resolution favoring such a bank. Benjamin Harrison was the President of the U.S. and sent the resolution to Congress for action. Nothing was done. It was again undertaken in 1902: Nothing was done. Now, in 1940, after 50 years of study and effort, it appears that such an international bank for the Americas is about to become a reality. How slowly an idea seems to move?

THE COURSE OF EMPIRE.

Lying off the coast of West Africa are the Cape Verde Islands. There has been talk that they would make an ideal air base in any contemplated assault on South America. These islands belong to Portugal. Portugal as you will note from a map is like a piece of territory imbedded in one corner of Spain. Ordinarily, we think of Portugal as a nation of minor importance. Yet Portugal is today the third largest empire in existence. The very word "empire" brings to mind the ancient Roman Empire or the modern British Empire. We forget the Dutch and Portuguese empires. Portugal itself is smaller in area than the state of Maine with a population less than that of New York. Yet the Portuguese empire embraces an area of 800,000 square miles. It affords one of the ironies of history. In 1494, the Pope divided the world into two parts and gave to Spain the western half and to Portugal the eastern half. For many centuries, it appeared that Spain got the lion's share of territory by this division and received those areas which were rich in resources. More than 450 years later, what do we find? Spain is but a humble, decimated, and devastated country. The empire of Portugal is still intact and she is at peace.

WAR STIMULATES DESTRUCTIVE INVENTION.

One of the odd results of war is that it stimulates invention of new devices to destroy. Can it be that as inventive minds drink in the accounts of a modern battle, such minds at once begin to think in terms of speedier and more effective methods for destroying cities, armies, people, nations. Yet, with every war, the patent office records indicate that there comes an increase in applications for letters-patent on devices to destroy. Some are practical and some are fantastic. It was the Revolutionary War and the presence of the British fleet in our ports which stimulated the invention of the first submarine. It was actually built in 1776 and used. It was a one-man affair and so constructed as to permit the operator to submerge near a vessel for the purpose of boring a hole in the hull of a ship and then setting off a blast of explosive. The British Admiral spoiled it all by having the hulls of their naval vessels sheathed in copper and the augur would not bore thru this protective covering. Believe it or not but a patent was actually issued to a man for harnessing four eagles to a basket to serve as a sort of air ship. And in 1862, a patent was issued for a combination gun and plow. The farmer could be plowing in the field and when danger came, could immediately unhitch the horses and convert the plow into a small cannon. This impulse to devise instrumentalities of destruction is a singular product of war stimulus.

GET OUT THE GLOBES, MAPS AND GEOGRAPHIES.

How long has it been since you've studied a map of the world or looked at a globe or dusted off the old school geography to see what is happening to the world. Civilization seems to be in a stage of transition and it is an excellent time to get a better understanding of our physical and geographical relationship with the rest of the world. Did you know for instance that Brazil is larger than the U.S. by 248,739 square miles? Did you know that it is further from New York to Buenos Aires than it is from New York to Moscow? We hear a good deal today about the defense of this hemisphere? Did you know that such a task embraces the defense of 15,000,000 square miles of territory, 22 nations, 200,000,000 people and that it includes 13,500 miles of coastline exclusive of Canada? Did you know that in addition to the large German and Italian populations in South American countries that there are 500,000 Japanese in Brazil and 50,000 in Peru. These are but some of the problems which arise as the map of the world is being recast. Once more we must go back to geography. It is of more than academic interest because there is now pending before Congress, bills to acquire foreign holdings in the Carribean and to expand the Monroe Doctrine by making it impossible for foreign nations to acquire territory on this hemisphere by transfer from other countries.