

Mutual Security
Speech

File
speeches

It has been the practice here for nearly everyone opposed to this legislation to arise, declare firmly that he supports the principle of Mutual Security, and then come forth with a list of specious arguments which, if true, make the entire principle meaningless. It's easy to carp about our allies; they don't vote in the coming election. It's easy to convince some people that a cut in aid funds will save money when we know in our hearts that, in the long run, it won't save a cent. It's easy to talk about waste and extravagance, because we know there will always be waste in any big operation. But what the opponents of this program have sternly refused to face is the issue of American security.

Throughout this debate, the main theme of the opponents has been to repeat over and over that the United States can't afford this program. They tell us that the American economy is teetering on the brink of collapse. They advise us to "keep America strong" and forget what happens to the rest of the world.

I have one question to ask these gentlemen. If we can't afford this program, what in the name of God can we afford?

Most of us agree that the survival of Western Europe is essential to our own survival. We know that our allies already have larger ground forces in uniform than we do, ready to stand by our sides if we help them get the weapons and supplies. We have heard our military experts tell us that a dollar spent for European defense buys from two to three times as much real protection as a dollar spent in this country!

What

What do the opponents of this bill mean? Do they mean that the United States can't afford security? Do they mean that survival has become too expensive for us? Do they mean that even the cheapest way to protect ourselves costs too much?

I can hear in my mind the sardonic laughter echoing through the Kremlin. They have always believed that the Western democracies are soft and decadent. They jeered at us during the war for our reluctance to sacrifice the lives of our boys. "Our people", they say, "are tough and can take it". "But the Americans love luxury too much. When the chips are down, they will cave in. Even with the highest standard of living in the world, they will not make the sacrifices necessary to defend themselves. They love their television, their automobiles and their nylon stockings too much to build up their defenses".

*Kremlin
Talk*
✓

I profoundly disagree with what the Soviet radio and newspapers say about us. Anybody who thinks we have gotten soft and are putting caviar before guns has another guess coming. And I think the Congress of the United States is going to prove that fact during the next few days.

If the Soviet Union launched an all-out war tomorrow, I haven't a shadow of a doubt that this Congress would vote every cent needed to defend this country. One hundred billion, two hundred billion, even five hundred billion, if necessary. We would sacrifice, pay higher taxes, sweat and bleed to protect our national survival. There is no doubt about this fact, and I hope the Soviet leaders will realize it.

✓

But

But is this the way we want to do it? Do we want to pinch pennies 'til war comes and then shoot the works? Or do we want to make the best possible effort to prevent war from coming, and to guarantee ourselves strong allies if it does come?

The horrible truth is that if the Soviet Union gained control of Western Europe, even the hundreds of billions we would spend then might prove worthless. With Western Europe, Russia would have four times the US manpower, not even counting China. Her industrial plant would be bigger than ours. She would have bases to strangle our shipping lines, and airfields with which to bomb American cities. We would face a long uphill fight for survival, and everything that we could do might not be enough.

If we are going to spend money to protect our security, I want to spend it before it's too late. I want to get the guns in the production lines and the armies on the field. If we do this soon enough, we have a good chance to save the billions that a war would cost us. And even if war comes, we will stand a far, far better chance of winning it with minimum loss of life and property. I believe American can afford to survive.

No one can deny that this program is expensive. No one can deny that it involves an economic strain that is felt throughout the country. But I most certainly deny the statements of the calamity howlers who suggest that our national economy is on the brink of collapse.

As Al Smith

As Al Smith used to say, let's look at the record:

We've heard a lot about the national debt. Back in 1932, our total governmental debt, ^{total} federal, state and local, ^{about} was about \$38 billion. Our national income that year was about \$39 billion. Today, after a severe depression, after the greatest war in history, and after shouldering the burdens of rearmament and post-war reconstruction, our governmental debt has risen to \$285 billion. But let's also remember that our national income this year will be around \$300 billion dollars. Thus, the relationship between debt and income has stayed fairly constant. Is this an indication that we are nearly bankrupt?

Let me illustrate what this production means on a comparative basis. If we could maintain our present levels of production and at the same time were able to hold our average consumption to the level of the average Italian family, we would have a large enough surplus to pay off the entire national debt in 18 months. Of course, I do not suggest that any such thing can be done in practice, or that it need be done. All I want to make clear is that those who are bemoaning the low state of the American economy are misleading the American people.

Our total output today is \$55 billion per year above the 1947 level. Even after foreign aid and huge domestic defense expenditures, the amount left for civilian consumption in 1951 was 8% above what it was in 1947. Does this mean we are going broke? Is this the sign of a dying economy? Does this indicate that we can't "afford" security?

US corporation profits have remained at a high level throughout the period of foreign aid and defense build-up. In spite of higher taxes, total corporate earnings during the foreign aid period have been \$78 billion dollars -- six times the amount spent on all foreign aid up to the end of last year. Total dividends paid by corporations have climbed steadily each year. Is this the mark of a country that is going bankrupt?

(X) Do you know that the amount we Americans spent, just last year alone, for liquor and tobacco is almost exactly equal to the total spent on economic aid and military assistance during the four years of the Marshall Plan? Do you know that the amount Americans have spent for tobacco alone since 1948 is nearly \$4 billion more than all foreign aid expenditures during this same period? I am not suggesting that anyone give up either liquor or tobacco. But I certainly believe that it's nonsense to say that a country which can afford such expenditures is at the end of its financial rope. I think a country like this can also afford security.

The opponents of this legislation have brought forth the hoary old chestnut that Russian strategy aims at forcing the United States to bankruptcy by excessive spending. To prove this fantastic theory, they are fond of quoting something that Lenin said back in the early 1920's.

Well, the Communist leadership has said a lot of different things at different times, most of them contradictory. I, for one, don't believe every statement I hear from a Russian dictator, whether living or dead.

or dead. I am more interested in their actions. And I want to ask you a question: Did Russia take Poland by driving Poland to bankruptcy? Did it launch a financial offensive against Greece? Did it take over Bulgaria and Rumania by forcing them to excessive spending? Did it drive Korea to bankruptcy? Or -- may I ask -- was there a Russian army around somewhere?

Gentlemen, we are facing a grave military threat. I do not deny -- I would be the last to deny -- that we must also keep our economy strong, and must help our allies keep their economies strong. We all know that Communism can seize a country by undermining its economy, and thereby paving the way for local Communists to seize control of the government, just as it can seize a country by military force. However, we need to view these issues in their true perspective.

As far as the United States is concerned, our economy is the most powerful on earth. Despite certain social injustices and hardships caused by inflation, the economic position of the average American citizen is near an all-time high. The domestic Communist Party and its fellow-travellers have little political influence, and this influence is declining day by day. The idea of Communism taking control of this country from the inside is absurd. Anyone who harps on such a fear is merely distracting attention from the real danger.

The real danger to American is the danger of creeping aggression --

the danger

the danger that Soviet imperialism will gradually take over one country after another -- one area after another -- until it is so powerful that even the full strength of the American economy will be insufficient to stand against it. The real danger is that our friends and allies, either through military weakness or economic distress, will be unable to offer effective resistance to the threat of Communism -- that they will crumble and fall before Soviet blows and that the United States will be left to stand alone against the most formidable military power that human civilization has ever known.

Together, we have the means to make the free world so strong that Russian propagandists will be laughed at and that a Russian armed attack would be suicidal. But we have to do it, and we have to do it now. We can't do it by sitting around talking about what an awful thing Communism is. We can't do it by declaiming from public platforms that America should "get tough" with Russia. Least of all can we do it by sending out propaganda pamphlets trying to pin the Communist label on decent, patriotic American citizens. We have to build some real strength -- in this country and in other parts of the world, and every day we try to stretch out this process of building strength, we are adding to the danger and adding to the cost.

Every dollar we cut from this program is just building up a bigger bill for future years.

An opponent of the foreign aid measure said earlier this week that this country and this Congress are now standing at a crossroad.

I agree

I agree with all my heart. The time has come to separate those who want to do something about Communism from those who just want to talk about it. The time has come to focus the spotlight of national attention on the men who have forgotten Teddy Roosevelt's advice to walk softly and carry a big stick -- these so-called anti-Communists who prefer to speak with the voice of a rusty foghorn and to whittle the big stick down to a toothpick. The time has come to stand up and be counted.

~~As for me, I do not trust either our military security or our economic stability to the "Socialists".~~ I prefer to take the advice, in this case, of a Republican candidate for the presidency who -- whatever his virtues or defects in other respects -- at least knows what he's talking about when he recently gave the Congress his views on this mutual defense program. I do not choose to gamble with the survival of my country.

May 27, 1952



Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright in this digital version belongs to the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, link to, or email content, however, for individual use.

To request permission for commercial or educational use, please contact the Minnesota Historical Society.



www.mnhs.org