



Washington.

DURING the first week of the new year there was widespread stock-taking of how things stand in relation to the total war. A month of actual combat has taught severe, and invaluable, lessons. But it took the President's harsh reminder that we are engaged in "a hard war, a long war, a bloody war, a costly war" to shatter the prevailing unconcern even among high-placed government officials. The inclination has been to accept news of American reverses at Guam and Wake Island, and the loss of Manila, with a shrug and the easy assurance that "once we get started, we'll show 'em!"

This initial complacency is wearing off, mostly as a result of the President's repeated warnings that the war is no lark and that lethargy and lack of vigilance endanger the outcome. Not that stupid underestimation of the seriousness of the task before us should give way to despair. But fortunately the wise-cracking cocksureness is being replaced by an understanding of the herculean job ahead and the realization that the sooner we get started, the better chance we have of success. President Roosevelt's speech, opening the second session of the 77th Congress, made no bones about it. Some of the most vociferous of the enthusiastic, cheering legislators were the appeasers; twenty or more representatives and at least six senators must have been secretly consumed by heartburning worry over the danger that many of them may well be named at the trial of Hamilton Fish's secretary, George Hill (or in the subsequent trial of George S. Wyler Viereck), for taking Nazi money—a scandal, if it is aired, equal to that of the Stavisky sensation in France, 1933. To this excited joint session of Congress, the President stressed the key question of the war—production. In his budget message the following day, he insisted on "a crushing superiority of equipment in any theater of the world war . . . Nothing short of the maximum will suffice."

IMMEDIATELY AFTER the President presented his demands for 60,000 planes and 45,000 tanks, the OPM promised that these schedules would be met. Industry pledged full cooperation. But to be brutally frank about it, promises and pledges are not good enough. Every person I've talked to in government and in the labor movement has asked, "How do they expect to do it? And when?"

The year-end inventory of the war effort shows that the most obvious lag has been in converting machinery to wartime production. The automobile industry, repository of over half the nation's machine tool equipment, has shifted less than nine percent of its total plant. Hardly a small manufacturer in all America has received a war contract or even a sub-contract (the latest OPM figures show that forty-four companies have been awarded 72.8 percent of all contracts granted up to a few weeks ago). In consequence, by far the greatest part of the productive system is not prepared to utilize its capacity for the war effort. What is more, although automobile factories are shutting down because of curtailment of peacetime production, this by no means implies that these units automatically proceed with conversion. Lamentably, even at this late date, blueprints (the first requisite in obtaining conversion) have not yet been drawn. Despite the pressing emergency, automobile manufacturers still plan to use January and perhaps a good part of February to fabricate 204,848 new cars for civilian use. Yet there is a scarcity of aluminum, steel, tin, copper, lead, almost every vital metal. The shortage of rubber is alarming—but to provide a tire for each wheel of the new cars (819,392 tires, to be exact, not including a spare) will consume over

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Small wonder the UAW-CIO challenged the automobile barons and the OPM in full page advertisements appearing in Washington and New York newspapers. The industry—and many syndicated columnists—objected violently to the union's charge that "Our war production is poorly allocated. It is on an insignificant scale, in inadequate quantities." The Automobile Manufacturers Association replied with name calling, protesting that labor wanted to take over the plants. The columnists indulged in a spree of Red-baiting, and added for good measure that the UAW was impeding unity.

For all the excited forensics, the fact remains that conversion has been more than slow—it has been almost negligible. And despite the noisy anger of management and its apologists, the UAW can prove its charges to the hilt. Even the automobile manufacturers don't make much of a case for their half-hearted contention that conversion is progressing. They excuse delay by passing the buck: they point out that the procurement divisions of the army and navy do not know their exact requirements and refuse detailed specifications or quantities desired. To an extent, this complaint is justified: the Senate's Truman committee reported that procurement is haphazard, inefficient.

The OPM for its part says it is helpless since it lacks power to award contracts—the prerogative of the procurement divisions. William Knudsen's partiality to a business-as-usual approach, his avid protection of the automobile manufacturers, or for that matter any other large corporation, against demands that might cut into "normal business needs," his refusal to insist on better performance by industry, have caused as many of present-day inadequacies as the vagueness of procurement officers. Perhaps it is too narrow an approach to place the full burden on Mr. Knudsen's hulking shoulders: better to blame "Knudsenism," that outlook of which the director of the OPM has been the most typical representative. And Knudsenism is best defined as an unwillingness to adapt industry to war needs. Not so long ago Knudsen himself pointed out that the automobile industry could never be converted. After the President's address to Congress, and with peacetime production on the way out, he was asked if he had changed his mind. "Of course," he said, "now that there is nothing else to do."

A FEW DAYS AGO several papers carried the story of the two grievance committee representatives of the Dodge local of the United Automobile Workers who came to Washington to tell the OPM about the mass lay-offs in Detroit. They wanted merely to talk to some OPM official. They could not get