



WATCH ON THE POTOMAC by BRUCE MINTON

THAT SHIPPING "SURPLUS"

Washington.

CERTAIN commercial interests have recently turned highly optimistic in their appraisal of the war. So optimistic, in fact, that they picture hostilities as all over but the shouting, and grandly conclude that now is the time to resume normal business procedures. Two weeks ago in this column I discussed the agitation by special groups, helped along considerably by a false and misleading article in the *Saturday Evening Post*, to reconvert industry to the production of civilian goods on the assumption that the United Nations are oversupplied with tanks, guns, shells, and planes. Such dangerously erroneous propaganda has made sufficient inroads to cause Gen. Brehon B. Somervell, chief of the Army Service Forces, and Charles E. Wilson, vice-chairman of the War Production Board, to tour the country in an effort to spike these rumors. Both men warn in the sharpest terms that failure to fulfill and improve production schedules will prolong the war, needlessly cost the lives of young Americans in uniform, and seriously impair the nation's economy. Recently the rumor has taken a new form—a barrage has been let loose to the effect that the United States now possesses a surplus of ships, and that now is the time to resume ordinary commercial traffic.

This campaign of falsehood is spread by two sources: a group of ship-owners eager for super-profits have convinced themselves that the war can get along without them and their ships; more subtle, and far more menacing, the America First and defeatist crowd see a chance to exploit the good news from the battlefronts to delay the war in the hope of calling the whole thing off before the enemy is smashed. With the help of a section of the press, malicious gossip is spread of ships leaving American ports empty, of vessels lying idle, of the inability of production lines working at capacity to supply sufficient materiel to fill the shipping space at the Army's disposal.

I asked the War Department's Transportation Corps and the War Shipping Administration for their appraisal of this so-called "surplus of shipping." Both gave identical answers—the rumors are utterly false. If such mistaken ideas gain credence they can harm the war effort. Rather than too much shipping, there still exists a serious shortage. It is true that great advances have been made in shipbuilding and in the war against the submarine. Losses at sea

have dropped, which means that more supplies get through to their destination, and transportation difficulties are eased. But this also allows the armed forces to increase and intensify their blows against the enemy. There can never be too much armaments, too many planes, too great striking power until the enemy is demolished once and for all. Every additional weapon brought into action reduces the cost of victory in blood and lives.

MORE than that, Army spokesmen pointed out that success on the battlefield does not diminish the strain on shipping. Indeed, the reverse is true. Each acre of territory recovered by the United Nations puts an additional strain on shipping facilities—men and material must be replaced, civilian populations must be fed, medical aid and sanitation must be provided, communications must be rebuilt, minimum aid must be offered stricken communities. In addition the Army does not view the war as in the bag. "The greatest efforts lie ahead," a colonel remarked. "We have the task of invading Europe, as the President has stressed. Think of the manpower such an operation requires, and think of the equipment, the food, the medical supplies, the technical materials required by a huge invading force. The job is not only to transport men and arms to the landing point. That is only the beginning. Every day, every hour, supplies must pour in to keep these men going. Think of the task ahead of preventing famine as our armies occupy a Europe looted and gutted by the Axis war machine. Think of what the collapse of Italy alone can mean in terms of transportation. To talk of a 'surplus of ships' is nothing short of insane. Not only haven't we enough ships, but even the end of the war will not end our transportation problems."

He continued: "Yes, ships sometimes are seen in harbor, and rumor mongers immediately spread the lie that these vessels are lying idle. In all probability, they are awaiting a convoy. Yes, ships have at times in the past left American harbors incompletely loaded, though such instances are very rare. Even so, it is better to get what supplies are available across the ocean than to hold ships for a later convoy because there has been some hitch in the delivery of materiel to the dock. Any idea of resumption of commercial shipping is downright impossible. Besides, the subs may be

less effective these days, but if they manage to hit a big convoy, then any imaginary 'surplus' just won't exist any longer."

The Army emphasizes the need for more ships. It turns thumbs down on any suggestion of resumption of coastwise traffic or ordinary trade practices. But a section of the press goes on spreading the impression that a surplus exists. Lewis W. Douglas, deputy war shipping administrator, told his staff and the public early last month: "We cannot afford to stop swimming just because we are at last able to hold our heads above water. . . . I cannot emphasize too strongly the accepted fact that there never will be enough ships to meet all requirements in this unlimited and unpredictable war, and we cannot afford the slightest relaxation of the program, in any of its phases."

The agitation over shipping is calculated not so much to win ships away from the Army—though there is always the outside hope of accomplishing this—but to strengthen the impression that the war is over and to push the program of immediate reconversion of industry to civilian production. Even if the campaign to chisel in on the shipping pool comes to nothing, the over-all agitation to win other production concessions, as proposed by the *Saturday Evening Post*, is enhanced. Moreover, certain dollar-a-year men in the Office of Economic Warfare have been inclined, for reasons of "diplomacy," to issue licenses for trade abroad that wasted shipping space on cargoes not crucial to the war effort. Drew Pearson recently pointed out that shipments of gold-mining machinery have been permitted to South Africa and to South America. The War Shipping Administration stoutly denies that this ever occurred, but the denials were less than convincing. Even more, the question arises: Could not ships now used to transport increased supplies of coffee, bananas, sugar, and similar items be better employed in hauling materials of greater strategic value to the war effort? Every ship not engaged in supplying the armed forces, or helping to increase their striking power, slows up the offensive just so much.

THE agitation for resumption of commercial shipping points up one serious weakness of the War Shipping Administration. Failure to organize management-labor committees, aside from all other implications, offers a loophole to management



groups anxious to exert one-sided pressure on the WSA. Admiral Land, in his pose as an old sea dog, has indulged his medieval attitudes toward labor by refusing to discuss labor participation on policy bodies, or to allow the unions to help make the most effective use of shipping. He has turned a deaf ear to the CIO maritime unions' proposals for a planned approach to shipping problems. Certainly, no group in American life has more thoroughly and more

effectively plunged into the war effort than the National Maritime Union in the East, and the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union in the West. Admiral Land, however, still pushes labor to one side, a serious mistake which is costly to the nation. He does not thereby strengthen the defenses against the appeasement, business-as-usual campaign for reconversion. It is not enough for Admiral Land to snort that he will take care of things for

himself. If this reconversion clamor could be laughed off so easily, there would be no need for General Somervell and Charles E. Wilson touring the country to combat it. Admiral Land's contempt for union cooperation results in the paradox of trying to fight a total war with less than total mobilization. The net effect is to encourage those who now talk of too much shipping, and who want to call off the war before victory is achieved.



THE WEEK IN LONDON by CLAUDE COCKBURN

CHANGING THE TIME TABLE

London (by wireless).

HOPE and belief is general here that a far-reaching decision is now in the making to speed up the timetable for a final knockout of Germany. The nation is in a mood of supreme—sometimes exaggerated—confidence. Analyzing this mood, which arises from the Russian victories, Mussolini's downfall, and the advance in Sicily, you get two distinct and pretty clearly marked psychological results. Both are important.

First is the realization that one, perhaps, the greatest turning point of the war is here. Consequently comes a new realization that victory over Germany is actually possible this year if the old schedules are brought up to date in view of developments which couldn't have been foreseen at Casablanca or after the fall of Tunis.

The other reaction is an assumption that the war is virtually won. There is almost a holiday mood—a mood which is underlined by the fact that this is really the traditional holiday period in Britain, particularly in the North, where whole towns are virtually "evacuated" for a fortnight or so. It's against this background and these reactions, with all shades in between that, for example, uneasiness here regarding the possibilities of some kind of "deal" with undesirable elements in Italy has to be seen. Exaggerated attention to fears and rumors of a new Darlanism are in part products of easy over-confidence regarding the military situation. And of course the fact that Darlanism, which was represented as a military expediency, was in fact more political than military and was neither politically nor militarily expedient, gives real ground for vigilance.

If there was considerable parliamentary support for the critics of the Anglo-American policy toward Badoglio, it was principally on account of the record of Anglo-American policy in North Africa, though

there were, of course, those who were merely anxious to make mischief. What didn't come out in Parliament the other day was the feeling of the majority of thinking British people that the real question isn't one of profound inquiry into the moral and political character of this or that personality, but simply how best can Italy be not only knocked out of the war, but organized with small resources into the war on the Allied side. Real, monstrous Darlanism could ensue if political considerations—whether regarding royalty or big business—were to interfere with, or delay the acceptance by, the Western Allies of the fullest cooperation with elements in Italy capable of taking control—capable also of stirring up the predominant war weariness in the country into positive anti-Nazi action. That's what is needed.

This was, after all, the real failure in

North Africa. It is understandable that people who had nothing to do with hair-splitting squabbles regarding policy in Italy should be at least exceedingly vigilant in this matter. It is particularly important, since it seems likely that the Anglo-American governments underestimated the strength and potential authority of broad councils of action formed in North Italy before Mussolini's fall. This coalition, embracing Catholics, Communists, liberals, and even oppositional fascists, has as a present objective the establishment of a constituent assembly, qualified to set up a provisional government.

It must be emphasized that a damaging uneasiness, even a certain cynicism, regarding the Italian policy of Anglo-Americans is very much increased by the seemingly endless delay of the recognition of the French Committee of National Liberation as a provisional French government.

I myself have seen extraordinary development in the French Committee and an extraordinary capacity of the Committee to move forward toward real unity, always under the supreme authority of united committee resistance, working and fighting illegally in Paris. It would be disastrous if mysterious personal squabbles conducted against, for instance, General de Gaulle, in certain Anglo-American quarters, and trivial personal antipathies of some Allied leaders toward de Gaulle, should produce further paralysis in the organization of French resources under the leadership of the French National Committee. It is, by all reasonable standards, really in touch with the French people, and is at least as much a provisional government as any other recognized Allied but exiled government. The French committee is after all the only one of these Allied authorities which is operating on its own territory once more.

