

PREPARED TO BE ACCUSED OF EXAGGERATION

Wickham Steed On "Lease And Lend" Act

(A talk from the BBC)

DURING the past three or four weeks I have said nothing of the Lease and Lend Bill because I felt it would be premature to give my own impressions until the great deed had actually been done.

But I look upon this act as the biggest thing that has happened in Anglo-American relations since the 13 North American colonies issued their Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. I am quite prepared to be accused of wild exaggeration on both sides of the Atlantic, but I do know something of Anglo-American history, and I am not unacquainted either with my own people or with the people of the United States. At the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, I was invited by Colonel House, who was then the friend and counsellor of President Wilson, to act as confidential adviser to the American Delegation upon matters relating to central and south-eastern Europe. Many of those matters bore directly on Anglo-American relations, and I was able to judge how delicate, most of all how strained, those relations had at times been during the last war and might again become. There was nothing approaching the reciprocal confidence and goodwill that have now rendered possible the passing into law of so momentous a measure as the "Lease and Lend" Bill.

What Caused the Change?

If only for this reason, I have been asking myself how and why this great change has come about. The answer is not and cannot be simple. A great many factors enter into it, yet speaking broadly and cutting out details, I think the true answer is that for the first time in Anglo-American history a considerable majority of the people of the United States have come to feel respect and even admiration for the English and the British, and to overcome the suspicion, the distrust, and the fear of British subtlety and astuteness that have in the past constantly coloured United States opinion in regard to England and the British Empire. This is my personal view. Yet I find some confirmation of it in a reasoned account of feeling in the North American Union that has been published in London by a citizen of the United States who holds the Chair of American History in Oxford University. The title of this account—"From Doubt to Trust"—is in itself significant. It explains that there has been a revolutionary change of feeling in the United States, and it gives four reasons why the change has occurred. The first reason is a conviction that the safety of the United States is dangerously menaced, that the British battle line is really the first American line of defence. The second reason is a belief that by throwing the weight of its armaments into the scale, the United States would not be

intervening in a mere contest for power, but would contribute to protect civilisation and the progress of mankind. The third reason is a faith that American armaments supplied on a huge scale would not be uselessly given, but would be used to achieve victory. The fourth reason is a realisation of the fact that Great Britain and her allies do not want armies to be sent overseas from the United States.

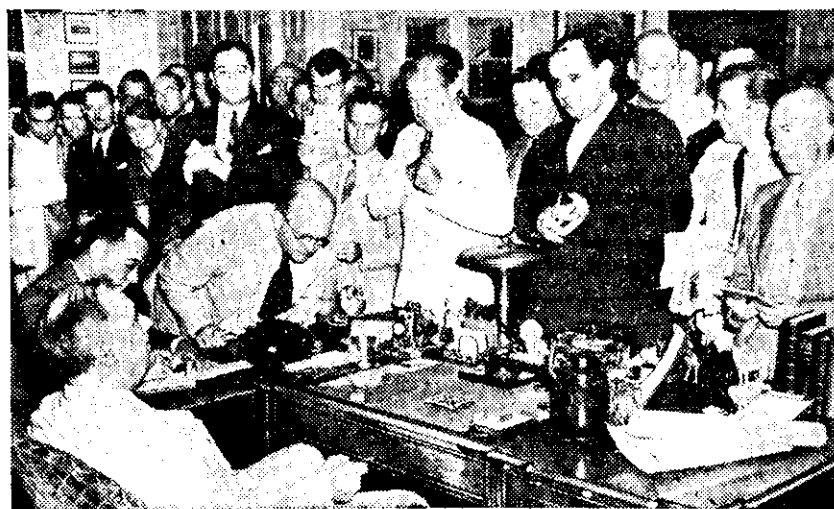
After France Collapsed

Ten months ago, this account goes on, there was no conviction on any of these points. Public opinion was confused and groping, but after the collapse of France, it became clear that only the British Navy stood between the United States and a real threat to the freedom of the Western Hemisphere, from German, Italian and Japanese forces.

Still the people of the United States were not persuaded that Great Britain alone could ward off his threat. It was not until the British Navy began to win victories and the Royal Air Force defeated Hitler's mass attacks in the Battle of Britain that opinion hardened in the direction of giving all possible help to the Allied cause. More recently, the British victories in North Africa, this American account goes on, have confirmed this opinion—which contributed heavily to the re-election of President Roosevelt, and influenced the views of racial isolationist groups who, in the past, were strongly opposed to commitments in Europe. In particular, there is today practically no opposition on the part of the Irish Americans, nor have the bulk of the German Americans sympathised with Hitler. The same is true of the most conspicuous United States citizens of Italian blood, while the German occupation of Denmark and Norway roused a fever of anger among the Scandinavian population of the north-western States of the American Union. Then there has been the fact that the British Labour Party and British Trade Union organisations wholeheartedly support the war, and that British Labour leaders hold important positions in the British Government. This fact has appealed to the eight million members of the two great branches of the American Labour organisations. Nor should it be forgotten that Mr. Wendell Willkie, the opponent of President Roosevelt in the Presidential election last November, has made, with a readiness and a warmth that swept away dissent, a magnificent contribution to national harmony in a world crisis. So it has come to pass, concludes our American authority, that President Roosevelt is now able to help in making sure that Great Britain shall win the war, and that Hitler shall lose it.

Cutting Out "Financial Nonsense"

My own information inclines me to believe that this account of the change in United States opinion is very near the truth. Yet I look rather beyond its



PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT holds a press conference at White House. It was at a dinner of the White House Correspondents' Association on March 15 that he made his momentous speech pledging full aid to Britain, Greece and China

reasoned conclusions in framing my own estimate of the outstanding importance of the "Lease and Lend" Act. The President has asked Congress for an immense appropriation amounting to not less than 7000,000,000 dollars, or 1750 million pounds sterling, to carry out the fixed policy, as he said, of this United States Government to make for the democracies every gun, 'plane and munition that we possibly can. This is a much bigger matter than the £500,000,000 loan to Britain which was proposed by the opponents of the "Lease and Lend" Bill in Congress. In President Roosevelt's own words, "It cuts out the financial nonsense." It applies the hosepipe principle, or in other words, it sets an unprecedented example in the conduct of international affairs at a critical moment. It pools the resources of the democracies in a struggle that transcends the quality of any financial transaction.

At a Crucial Moment

If this isn't a big thing, I don't know what a big thing is. The release of the huge volume of material aid to Britain is, of course, of the utmost value at a moment when the climax of the struggle seems to be fast approaching. Hitler's submarine campaign against British and Allied shipping has begun in earnest, as is proved by the relatively heavy losses in British and Allied tonnage that have been recently announced. Although they are only one-third of the tonnage falsely claimed by the enemy, they represent a level of loss that might become serious if it were long continued. I do not know, and I do not want to know official secrets, but I have a notion that our Admiralty may have something up its sleeve, and that its counter-strokes to Hitler's submarine campaign have not been and will not be by any means ineffectual. In the winter months, we have had a good many ups, now we have a down, but we have long since learned to take the downs in the same spirit as the ups. We know that we are dealing with dangerous and desperate enemies. We cannot and do not expect to win a fight without suffering and loss. We expect and intend only to win it at all costs, and win it we shall.

New Intrigues With France

This applies also to the new threat or intrigue that may be involved in the statement of Admiral Darlan, Marshal Petain's right-hand man in the Vichy Government of unoccupied France, that unless Britain relaxes her blockade of Germany to the extent of allowing food ships to pass freely into French ports, he will ask Marshal Petain for authority to have French food ships escorted by the French Navy. There can be no reasonable doubt that this threat is a result of German pressure on the Vichy Government. The only doubt is whether the threat has been made solely under compulsion, or whether it implies a certain readiness on the part of the Vichy Government to fall in with an obvious German intrigue, the object of the intrigue being to embroil unoccupied France and Great Britain. Steps will be taken to clear up this doubt and should it appear that Admiral Darlan's threat is in the nature of a pretext, not inspired by a comprehensive and straightforward desire to improve the food situation in France, I fancy that the threat would be faced without flinching. More than this, it does not seem opportune to say for the moment.

It is, however, opportune to draw attention to the growing success of our anti-aircraft defences, including our night fighters, against Hitler's air raids on London and other British cities. Dr. Goebbels said this week that as soon as there should be a few consecutive weeks of fine weather, the world will see what German aircraft can do. He did not say the world might also see what British aircraft can do, but since he spoke, the German people have had more than one occasion to get an inkling of what is in store for them.

So we will meet the big events that may come with a reasoned confidence, and without fear. We know there are grim days before us and hours that will be dark as well as hours that will be lighter. If any of them are darker than the hours through which we passed without quailing last June, and again in August and September, I, for one, shall be surprised.