

The End of the Beginning

THE route of Rommel's army and the new and successful venture of American troops in Africa, is, according to Churchill, "not the end nor even the beginning of the end, but it is the end of the beginning." That is a succinct way of expressing the idea that the tide has turned. The United Nations have taken the initiative; Hitler is running about feverishly, bolstering his defenses against an invasion on the soft side of the continent. The Mediterranean is in the process of being "cleaned up" and becoming the center of a total strategy which promises victory for our cause in both European and African theatres of war.

Meanwhile word comes from reliable neutral sources that the morale of Germany is deteriorating and that it is quite inconceivable that the German people would endure another winter of war beyond this one. It seems to be fairly certain that once the prospect of victory is thoroughly dissipated they will find it increasingly difficult to maintain the resolution to continue a fruitless conflict.

All this does not mean that the end is in sight. It must be remembered that even if Germany should collapse before the close of 1943, we will not be finished with Japan in that time—though the collapse of Germany would make the final defeat of Japan a foregone conclusion. Recent developments do mean that this is the "end of the beginning." The end of that period of the war has come when we could only hope that the war would somehow or other issue in a victorious conclusion, but when we could not see how this end could be effected. It is also the end of the apprehensions that a stalemate, lasting for years and dissipating the last remnants of vitality in Europe, might develop. In that sense the victories in Africa fill us with new hope. We are not at the end of the tunnel. But we see glimpses of light shining through from the other end of the tunnel.

The successful expedition of a vast armada and the landing of thousands of troops, which required hundreds of participants to keep a secret, is a heartening revelation of the relation of technical-military to po-

litical aspects of war in a democracy. There is a certain peril to the democratic process in the technical decisions which must be taken in secret. It encourages the essentially undemocratic idea that the public must not criticize its leaders because the latter know what the general public does not know. Mr. Willkie was quite right in insisting that a democracy cannot afford to abdicate its decisions in favor of experts. On the other hand, recent developments prove the absolute necessity of keeping decisions of grand strategy secret. If this were not done, dictatorships would have an even greater advantage over democracies than they now possess.

The strategy which came to fruition in recent weeks was planned as early as last June. It required of our political leaders that they bear the impatience of the public patiently, that they accept criticisms in regard to the "second front" and their "appeasement" of Vichy with as much grace as possible without justifying themselves prematurely. It required furthermore that an administration, under criticism because the war was not going too well, should be willing to lose a congressional election without hastening its military plans for political reasons. It can hardly be denied that if the African venture had matured two weeks earlier, it would have saved the administration most, and probably all, of the losses it suffered in Congress.

We hope the Roosevelt haters will be generous enough to admit these obvious facts. We hope also that all who are of feint heart in regard to the prospects of preserving democracy under the exigencies of war will take courage from these developments.

The difficult business of preserving democracy against the inherently "totalitarian" tendencies of a total war is made more difficult if we do not make very nice discriminations between what is absolutely necessary by way of abridgement of the ordinary leisure of the democratic process and what is not necessary in the abridgement of essential democratic rights. In this connection it would be well for the

faint-hearted to study the history of our Civil War and to understand how frequently Lincoln was forced to make decisions on the very edge of his constitutional powers. A very wise man has observed that leaders of a democratic society in crisis are in the position of an engineer of a train. The engineer must make decisions in an emergency for which he cannot possibly gain the consent of all the passengers before the event. The real question is whether he is willing to submit the decision to the approval of all who have entrusted their lives to him, after they have had a chance to weigh the relevant facts which he faced in the emergency and to assess the consequences of his decision.

These discriminations are important not only because of the exigencies of the present war, but because the relation of democracy to leadership will become increasingly difficult in a technical age in which the hiatus between public knowledge and the skill of experts, who are in charge of the mechanics

of the social process, will tend to widen. Democracy can never afford to allow the experts to make final decisions of principle and policy. Once this is done we have a government of the "elite" rather than a government of the people. But a democracy must have the ability to choose leaders whom it can trust sufficiently to entrust with the application of its general principles and policies; and it must then be willing to trust them.

Judged by these standards, our democracy is still essentially unimpaired. But we dare not be complacent about those perils to democracy which arise from war-time hysteria and which express themselves in the denial of essential rights to any portion of our population, whether they be Negroes, or American citizens of Japanese ancestry, or critics of the war effort. We can be the more rigorous in the defense of these democratic rights if we do not demand the impossible of a democratic leadership in an emergency.

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