

Speech by the Netherlands Prime Minister,
H.E. Prof. Dr. P.S. GERBRANDY,
at the War Commentary Meeting in the Guildhall on February 12, 1942

THE EAST AND THE WEST - ONE WAR

On May 14, 1940, nearly two years ago, the Netherlands Government came to London, not in search of a hiding place, but of a base from which to continue the struggle against the Nazi conqueror.

For in three other continents lies that part of the Kingdom which contains seventy-two of the total Netherlands population of eighty million, most of whom are in the East Indies. The government of these territories had to be continued.

The Government brought with it the Navy, only partly damaged.

The Government disposed of over two million tons of merchant shipping, and you will have some idea of the important part played by our merchant fleet when I tell you that in 1941 it brought two and a half million tons of foodstuffs, raw materials and oils to this country alone, and carried one million tons of exports from the United Kingdom.

Our gold was brought to safety. The contribution of the vast resources of those parts of the Netherlands in Asia, America and Australia was assured.

But one thing above all the Government brought with them, the crucial factor in warfare: the spirit they shared with the population left behind in Holland, the determination never to give in in the struggle for truth and justice.

In Europe we had lost, there we were defeated, at least as far as the Army was concerned. Nevertheless, even in the overrun part of the Netherlands, the struggle is going on. For we are involved in no ordinary war such as the world has known before.

After what is Hitler striving?

For Hitler, every nation, every institution of a nation, every individual, every family, school and church, every organisation of workers, all the products of brain and hands, all the learning capitalised in books and universities, are used for one purpose: power and plenty for the German people. No; power and plenty for a small set of persons who have broken with all the rules of honesty and equity which after centuries of struggle have been established in your country and mine. Man with all his gifts of heart, head and hands - merely a means to one end, the megalomania of Hitler.

Hitler's ambition is in direct opposition to Christianity. Christianity has taught the nations of Europe one thing which has been the foundation of that treasure which we call freedom.

Christianity has taught us that men have not the right and, ultimately, not the power to make or break humanity, neither individuals nor society. Men and their institutions are not means to a self-chosen end. You have no right to make or break human life. You are obliged to leave a man a man, to understand what family and personality mean. You have to leave the church the church: you are not allowed to use her for political ends. You must allow the university its place as a seeker after truth, you are not allowed to harness it to the vehicle of the state. Because in the hundreds of institutions in the Christian states of Europe this golden thread is woven through the life of the nations, there has been freedom.

At the same time Hitler, who sets himself up to make and break life, in a certain sense needs a grain of freedom. Man is not clay in the potter's hands. Hitler can only achieve his ambition if, and in so far as, he gets some assistance from the exploited. "Go through Holland", he said to Seyss-Inquart, the so-called Gauleiter of the Netherlands, "with felt slippers". He meant: try to win over the Netherlands. Of course, this means that, if Seyss-Inquart does not succeed, the screw is tightened.

Under this regime, beneath whose surface the fire of interior strife smoulders, my people have to live and, in a certain sense, to obey. How do they do this?

They do it through their intrepid resistance, their solidarity, and their characteristic sense of humour which the Germans will never be able to understand. It is this sense of humour which relieves and makes tolerable the continual strain that naturally results from hostile relations with the Germans.

Whenever Germans entered a cafe, the Dutch immediately rose to go away. An order was issued that they had to stay at least a quarter of an hour after a German entered. As a result, as soon as a German comes in, the Dutch very obviously take out their watches and put them on the table.

The so-called commissar of the labour organisations, a notorious Nazi, was to speak at a big meeting in Amsterdam. When he stepped on to the platform, two men in the audience began to cry "Hurrah for Woudenberg." The whole audience took up the cry and, since the police did not know whether to interfere, the meeting was completely disorganised.

Instances of Dutch resistance do not always present such a lighthearted picture. Soon after the occupation of Holland, a secret society of child saboteurs was discovered. These children, on account of their age, were not executed, but a large number of adults have already paid with their lives for their spirit of resistance after so-called trial behind locked doors. Five simple farmers were condemned to death for helping R.A.F. pilots. The penalty of death can be imposed on those who even cheer R.A.F. prisoners. The prisons and concentration camps are overflowing.

Perhaps the best way to express the spirit of resistance of my people is to say that it is the same spirit which, long ago, during the struggle for liberation from Spain, inspired the inhabitants of Leyden. Their position was almost desperate. The rescuers, the Beggars, could not approach the town, for the wind held back the water from their boats. The famine was alarming. When it was at its height, a deputation from the starving population went to Burgomaster Pieter Adriaanszoon van der Werf to demand the surrender of the town. The Burgomaster appeared on the steps of the Town Hall and said to the starving women: "I cannot give you food, but take my left arm and eat it, and with it the left arms of all your fighting husbands, and we shall continue fighting with our right arms."

The starving women stole away. Leyden was relieved.

William the Silent, the great hero of freedom, offered Leyden as a reward the choice between ten years' exemption from taxes or a university. Leyden chose - would you have done the same? - the university. That university has for three and a half centuries been a torch of truth.

I can well imagine that you are saying to yourselves, "we had expected this man to talk about the progress of the war, and so far he has only spoken about the internal struggle in Holland."

That is true, but this long introduction is essential as a back-ground if I am to show you the difference between the war in the West, in Europe, and the war in the Far East.

In principle, the fight in Europe - I am speaking of Hitler's attempt to keep the European nations down - has been won. The spirit of the Netherlands nation - and it is always the spirit and not the sword that determines the outcome of battles - has proved to be stronger than the German spirit. Moreover, the invasion may, after all, be a flood that leaves behind it a fertile sediment. The nation as a whole, in spite of a few Quislings and weaklings, may emerge purer, stronger, more united. For the nation is an adult nation.

/ A grown

A grown man thrown into a concentration camp - you all know examples - can even there remain spiritually free. A child kept away from home for more than a short time may be destroyed in mind and body.

The Dutch East Indies are not yet grown up. Politically speaking, they are a part of the Kingdom in process of development. Here we touch on the meeting between East and West, on the historical vocation of the European peoples to help bring about political maturity.

The war with Japan has come upon the Dutch East Indies in a period of the highest significance in colonial history. The Dutch East Indies are, according to the first article of our constitution, a part of the Netherlands Kingdom on the same footing as the Netherlands in Europe. Yet this Kingdom in Asia (as we call it) is governed by the Netherlands in Europe, not as a possession, but as part of the Kingdom needing the leadership of a highly developed state. This leadership was interpreted in 1903 in the famous Royal Address to the United Chambers as "a moral vocation".

The fulfilment of this vocation has, during the reign of Queen Wilhelmina, been creating a unique system of government, which has been described by a famous Dutch author as a "synthesis of cultures". Our native population mean the same thing when they say they want to settle their own affairs on the same level as the Dutch under the sovereignty of Queen Wilhelmina.

The number of those Javanese, Malaysians, Soudanese, etc (we speak of them collectively as Indonesians), who feel themselves Dutch subjects and who strongly want to remain Dutch subjects, is steadily increasing. They feel deeply that the Dutch are their compatriots.

Now you will understand that in the Pacific War there is something different at stake than in the European War. To win the war in Europe is to win the peace. To win the war in the Far East is to win the peace only if we win soon enough.

Our Eastern peoples are for the greater part still subject to racial instincts, to inferiority complexes in which all sorts of suspicions are easily aroused. "Asia for the Asiatics" is the Japanese slogan which may easily destroy the carefully constructed basis of our cultural synthesis. The lower classes are easily misled by false promises of much property without taxation. The upper classes, instructed and educated by Western teachers, are standing with one foot in occidental culture and one in oriental, belonging fully to neither. They feel themselves suspended in space between two different civilisations. Therefore, though a lengthy Japanese occupation of important parts of the Pacific territories might not necessarily turn the final victory of the Western Powers into virtual defeat, it will at least prove a formidable obstacle to a real peace in the Far East.

Japanese injuries and insults to the white population - and these are already being perpetrated by the detestable Asiatic Huns - will irreparably damage white prestige, unless severely punished within a short time. Never before the Russian defeat of 1905 had Asiatics imagined that a Western nation could be hurt, let alone defeated.

A temporary loss of the Indies, not of a part but of the whole, including Java with its forty-eight million inhabitants, means also the loss of the barrier between the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean. This means a second battle of the Atlantic, the battle of the Indian Ocean menacing important communications with South Africa and India. Look at your map, and you will see this.

The loss of the Indies as a barrier would be even greater than their loss as a storehouse of raw materials, even though the Indies and Malaya provide, for instance, 76 per cent of the world's rubber and more than 40 per cent of the world's tin.

The temporary loss of materials is serious, but has been foreseen and would not in itself lengthen the war. The loss of the strategical barrier would undoubtedly prolong our sufferings. Thus the war in the East and the War in the West are one. A battle of the Indian Ocean might appear different from the battle of the Atlantic, but it would demand the same kind of effort and strategical measures.

The War in the West and the War in the East are one. The Japanese are the Germans of Asia. Hitler has moulded his nation into a state structure that puts the German family at the mercy of an unscrupulous gang. The Japanese state structure has, for a long time, been built on the refined exploitation of the great majority of the Japanese people, especially of the little farmers and their family life, by an unscrupulous group who control the means of production and divert them to their terrific war machine.

What the domination of this unscrupulous group would mean for our threatened, peaceful, loyal Indonesians, the Japanese reign in Manchuria shows.

Shall we be able to prevent the European and the Asiatic group of slave-drivers from cutting down the tree of life in Europe and America, and from destroying the development of the historical meeting of East and West?

There is a line of thought which answers this question in the positive, but what I should like to call "making up a balance". This means counting the number of men, industrial output, potential shipping, measuring the strength of both sides, and assuring you that 1943 will tip this balance in our favour.

I do not in the least belittle the magnificent Allied war effort. But my confidence in Allied victory and Allied peace are, in the last instance, not founded on such calculations.

Many wars have been won by what appeared the weaker nation. That is what history tells you. If the balance theory held true, the Netherlands would not now have been the Netherlands. Three and a half centuries ago we were weak and Spain was formidably strong in men and in equipment, but Spain was defeated and the victorious Netherlands became for some time the steersman at the helm of the world.

When nearly two years ago France lay prostrate and her leaders, convinced of Germany's victory, chose the shameful path of compromise, your Prime Minister, in that hour of weakness, proclaimed that the British would never give in. They would continue the war even if these islands had to be abandoned.

In this proclamation he expressed the deepest feelings of your nation and mine. At once we understood the call coming from the mysterious depths of history - history which may not be determined by men, which can only be understood by men.

Look at what is at stake in Europe, your Christian traditions of centuries, and now we add, "look at what is at stake in Asia, your moral vocation, the meeting of East and West".

I do not say that we are strong and therefore ~~are~~ winning the war. On the contrary. We have to win the war and, therefore, ~~we~~ must make ourselves strong. Therefore, we build factories, 'planes and ships; therefore we train our men; therefore we strike and beat and kill, we destroy oil wells, refineries, factories, storhouses, the work of years.

We all know the present in this gigantic struggle. We do not know the future of the coming months. But we know the final outcome. For we have understood the call, masterly interpreted by Winston Churchill.

Only if this conviction, the understanding of this call, fills our hearts and minds, only if we really obey this call of history night and day, have we the right to proclaim. We, who are winning this war, shall win the peace.