

# Universities and Conversion to Total War

By DONALD M. NELSON

*Following are excerpts from an article by Donald M. Nelson, chairman of the War Production Board, published in the Harvard Alumni Bulletin. Because of the article's obvious national significance, permission to reprint it has been extended to other magazines.*

OF THE PART played by our universities directly in war efforts, there can be no question. In past wars, as in the present war, university men have participated fully and effectively in the military forces and in the research work and the innumerable services required to keep the front lines at high levels of effectiveness. But in this war, in a manner and in a degree never before paralleled, there is need for university help and backing in bringing about total preparedness for war and its impacts upon our whole way of life. This war is, I believe, our first experience of what is known as total war, in which every man, woman, and child must prepare himself to take his full responsibility and to discharge it effectively. x x x

For some months we have been issuing orders limiting and shutting off the production of industries manufacturing familiar civilian goods—refrigerators, washing machines, automobiles, toasters, and scores of other things. By the end of May of this year, virtually all consumers' durable goods industries—the industries which have so largely contributed to the high American standard of living—will be closed down by these orders. But these measures only clear the way for conversion; they do no more than make possible the production of goods of war. To this step must be added the positive use of the resources so released. And this use, at the necessary high level of efficiency, becomes possible only by the ingenuity and imagination, by the determination, and by the skill, of the men and women who man the plants. Conversion is a matter of the mind and of the heart. The real conversion we must have is the conversion of men and of their ideas.

At this time in our history, we hear from many citizens the plea, "Tell us what to do." I think I understand that plea and sympathize with it. But I should like to examine the other side of the coin and to enter the plea that every citizen should reconsider and reappraise his duties and his opportunities. Particularly, I wish to advance a plea that each individual demonstrate his capacity for maintaining and strengthening his own individuality, his own personality, in the face of the great pressures tending to submerge him. x x x

As I see it, the first responsibility which rests upon the individual citizen is to under-

stand for himself what we are fighting for and to understand what is involved in winning or losing this war. Individual prejudices—racial, religious, economic, political—are manifestations of individuality which can be tolerated, if not enjoyed, in peace. These times impose upon each individual the unwelcome task of ridding himself of the prejudices which bar or hamper understanding. They demand that we shelve our jealousies and our suspicions and learn to be men of good will.

The second responsibility upon the individual citizen is the use of judgment in the exercise of rights and privileges. Ideally, the willingness of the citizens to restrain themselves in the exercise of individual rights and privileges should consistently obviate the need for government to impose formal restraints.

The third responsibility of the citizen in these days "which try mens' souls" is to develop the willingness and the ability to discard cherished habits of thought. I truly believe that our victory in this war depends on the speed and enthusiasm with which all of us can get a new mental attitude in regard to our problems—a new mental attitude which can come only through discarding ruthlessly many cherished habits of thought and replacing them with new ones. x x x

We have already found it necessary to issue many orders and directives to govern the conduct of industry and the public. We shall undoubtedly find it necessary to issue many more—to present common standards of conduct for the guidance of all concerned. But Robert Louis Stevenson, I believe, in one of his essays commented on the importance to the speaker of the "ready and prepared listener." A receptive mental attitude on the part of the recipient of orders and directives is far more than half the battle. x x x

In securing, on the part of citizens, the receptive attitude which comes from changed mental habits and routines, educational institutions like Harvard University, and the graduates of such institutions throughout the nation, have a major role to play. The influence of graduates as writers, professional men, and businessmen, and the influence of the universities themselves through their faculties can be thrown either in the direction of changed patterns of thought or in the other direction. The cumulative effects cannot be overestimated.

I hope and expect that the influence of the University and its graduates will be thrown in the first direction, not only because of the service to the nation directly, but also because the group is typical of

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those whose readjustments in ways of living are likely to be most severe. Those readjustments, with one mental attitude, can be accepted with little pain and no loss of personal satisfactions; with a different mental attitude, they can result in great pain and ineffectiveness on the part of the individual and also in the spreading of discontent among his associates. x x x

All students of our country's history know that advances in material standards, in social standards, in educational standards, have come about by a long series of developments, following not an even, steady rise but a course marked by alternating progression and regression. The magnitude and the predatory nature of the calamitous struggle in which we are now engaged are such that all these standards, as measured by objective data, may be lowered for the time being—perhaps for a considerable time to come. But if we have fewer material goods to consume, if we have fewer hours for the social amenities, if we have fewer years in which to acquire our formal education, we still have, within each one of us, the unconquerable and inalienable power to nurture our individual capacities for righteousness of thought and feeling. To guide us in ways of finding satisfactions from responsible exercise of individual freedom of personality is one of the great and continuing functions of our American universities—of their students, their faculties, and their graduates. Of two things I am confident: that our universities will perform that function; and that as a result, the blight which has fallen upon so much of Europe will never reach our shores.

Finally, I have a profound conviction that for the individual the deepest source of satisfaction is the knowledge that one is really putting first things first. That is the basic priority in human affairs. Let us so conduct ourselves that we shall at least have these satisfactions to compensate us for what we face.

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### Perpetual Calendar

Although he is concentrating his attention now on his duties as a lieutenant in the U. S. Naval Reserve, stationed in Honolulu, Willard E. Edwards, '29eng, is doing what he can to keep alive his campaign for world adoption of the Perpetual Calendar that he devised.

"I've had good comments from all over the world, and I sincerely feel it will receive international consideration one of these days," Lieutenant Edwards writes *Sooner Magazine*.

The Perpetual Calendar, designed to replace the irregularities and confusion of the present one, contains four equal quarters, with the first month of each quarter always starting on Monday, the second month on Wednesday, and the third month on Friday. To get in 365 days, New Year's Day would be an international holiday, considered apart from any month or week.

The first two months of each quarter have 30 days and the third months have 31 days. Each of the 12 months has exactly 26 working days. Holidays would always come on the same week days.

Lieutenant Edwards suggests the day following Sunday, December 31, 1944, as the first appropriate date for the introduction of the Perpetual Calendar.

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