

# Letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Memoranda

Charles Ives

(1938)

NOTE FROM ARUN: PLEASE BE FORWARDED THAT IVES USES THE LANGUAGE OF HIS TIME, WHICH WAS SEXIST. AND HE WAS UNIVERSALLY SEXIST: HE SPOKE OF “OLD WOMEN OF BOTH SEXES” WHEN DISPARAGING CONSERVATIVES.

### *Editor's Note*

In 1935, Rep. Louis Ludlow, of Indiana, introduced a resolution in the form of a constitutional amendment limiting the authority of Congress to declare war.<sup>1</sup> It was proposed that except in the case of invasion war could be declared only after a majority vote in a nationwide referendum. The resolution was not immediately accepted, and it was reintroduced several times between 1935 and 1938. After its reintroduction in 1937, a national poll indicated that 73 per cent of the people were in favor of a referendum of that type. Passage of the resolution was considered likely when it came before the second session of the 75th Congress in January, 1938.

Ives, of course, was all in favor of the Ludlow Resolution, as it was precisely the sort of procedure for finding the true feeling of the people that he had advocated approximately twenty years earlier. So he assembled some of his writings from the World War I period and sent them with letters to President Roosevelt and other high government officials. On the date of Ives' letter (Jan. 6, 1938), President Roosevelt wrote to Speaker William B. Bankhead, saying, “Such an amendment to the Constitution as that proposed would cripple any President in his conduct of our foreign relations, and it would encourage other nations to believe that they could violate American rights with impunity.” The House returned the resolution to committee.

(Editor's notes are given as numbered footnotes, Ives' notes are given as symbols.)

January 6, 1938.

My dear Mr. Roosevelt: —

I am taking the liberty of writing you to say that it seems to me that the Ludlow Bill should be discussed and then passed. It will bring before the people matters not among the most difficult for them to think about and act wisely upon. The successful and eventual working out of the plan, at least as to its fundamentals, to a great extent, depends obviously upon its not being misunderstood by other nations and upon their cooperation.

This understanding and cooperation probably will take time to develop but because they probably lie more or less dormant today may not be a good reason why this bill should not be passed. The writer believes that the American people are courageous enough to be willing to make a start in this great matter. Perhaps the people, before the bill is passed, should be given a chance in prior referendum, to say whether they want to take this responsibility or not (see Section 3, Page 2, of enclosed suggested amendment). However, in the present instance, this may cause delay and so not be advisable.

Whether this War Referendum Bill is passed or not, it seems to the writer that if a way could be found (which would receive a fair and right under-

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<sup>1</sup>Ludlow's plan is explained in his book, *Hell or Heaven* (Boston, 1937).

standing) so that the government of this country could ask the governments of all countries, if they will also put the matter of war before all the people, one of the greatest moves onward and for the good of humanity would begin.

In view of the condition in which the world finds itself today, it would seem that now is the time for all existing governments to think, or at least to start to think, of possible and practical ways which would not be readily misunderstood, (there must be ways within the realm of human possibilities) which will bring the people of the world together — in a “man-to-man” way — something greater than a “government-to-government” way — and let all the people stand up and say what they think about “WAR.”

The difficulties of working out the move suggested above, for many reasons — diplomatical, economical, political, even constitutional — may seem to many overwhelming, insurmountable and hopelessly impossible — but I don’t like to think a move of this kind is impossible just because it has never been tried.

The enclosed memoranda and a copy of a suggested amendment made by the writer some years ago, you may be willing to look over.

With best wishes, I am  
Sincerely yours,  
CHARLES E. IVES.

#### MEMORANDA

Of all the departments of human life and its fundamental activities, the one that has been the slowest to develop and the weakest in showing progress is social evolution, especially as to the relations between nations. A fundamental reason for nationalism was fear, and it still is, not in quite the dull form it was once, say, in the days of the feudal barons, Indian tribes, etc. People grouped themselves together to protect themselves from other groups. Today, except in a very few lands (in fact, the ex-

ception is almost negligible), neighboring towns or neighboring families do not dig moats around themselves and try to settle the bargains and problems of common life by the axe. A few soft-headed, thick-skinned political parties may try to get “theirs” this way, but nowadays most people in most countries live without chronic fear of their neighbors and are now strong enough to settle their differences with their brains, instead of the coward’s way of beating around the bush with a gun.<sup>2</sup> But generally speaking, governments have not grown out of the baby age of social evolution.<sup>3</sup> They, that is the politicians in control of them, can get more limelight, publicity, vainglory, so-called fame and like appeals to the vanities — and probably more money — by singing the same old platitudes (“bunk” is a better translation); and the defenseless, inarticulate millions are so used to it that they (too many of them, at least) accept it. And so, outside of the personal work and problems of their own lives and activities, they give more of their spare thought and time than is necessary to the easy unessentials, which include, among others, the radio sap, the movie mush, the tabloid lolly pop, etc., because these wares are easier to eat, easier to sell, and easier to make money out of than the products of a stronger manhood. But give these millions a fair chance to get their teeth into stronger food, and then, in the opinion of the writer, it will not be many generations before all these various political groups throughout the world — with their medieval stuff well organized, fancy labels, and strutting leaders — will be recognized as being as useless to humanity as a policeman in Heaven. And what will do this, and where is its foundation? The respect for, and the use more and more, of the innate something that the Creator has put into the minds and hearts of men. And thus men, and so mankind, will soon begin to feed on their own food, and they will handle it well and grow strong on it, and the emasculated commercialized “candy” will gradually become a nausea to the majority. There

<sup>2</sup>A note on the back of the page reads: If cowards fly over & drop bombs on your children, — get up & kill the cowards — that’s not declaring war, — you just enter the war to kill a skunk for the good of humanity — that’s a very different thing than starting war to get more money or land, as a “hog” tries to get “his” in the pigsty.

<sup>3</sup>The following passage, “They, that is the . . .” to “Eventually, the working out . . .” was omitted in the material sent to President Roosevelt.

are signs of this transition.

Eventually, the working out of the great and serious fundamental problems of life between men and between nations will be put in their natural battlefields: the minds, hearts, and souls of all men in this world — Humanity. “But,” Rollo<sup>4</sup> says, “how can this be done?” And somebody may say to Rollo, “By trying every fair and open way the human mind can try, and not by saying it cannot be done — and not by lolling back and letting this group and that group, and this leader and that leader, or this party and that party, or some political manoeuverer or some other self-seeking partialist, have the whole say — not by the conventional ineffective ways, platitudes, dogmas, headlines, and half-truths which confuse all issues and all ideals. Millions of people can be interested sincerely and seriously in their own great problems — but this will not be done by saying it can’t be done, and then leaning on the hitchin’ post through Eternity.”

Most Americans, at least the majority of them, still have enough independence of thought and action to work out their own way of progress to better things. And it won’t be by imitating or by swallowing down whole any pet formula of Europe, Asia, or Africa. That the processes will have some things in common with those of men in other parts of the world is quite probable. But they will not be taken “hook, line, and sinker” from any “ism” of any other country. They will grow from the soil and the mind of the people making them.

## II

Suppose the governments of all nations in the world should ask today the following questions of all citizens: what do you think the people’s answers would be? In the final analysis, the writer believes the answer would be: “No more war in the world.”

Citizens: Ask your governments to ask you these questions:

Do you, citizens of all countries and lands in this world, want to have the say, directly and forever, as to whether there shall be war\* or no war when for any reason, or at any time, your government — that is, those in control of the government — would desire or believe it necessary for your country to declare war on any other country or other nation?

Do you demand that before war is declared you be given completely, truthfully, the reasons and premises which have to do with the situation, [in order] that you may know all that there is to know about the causes<sup>5</sup> of this contention — not the evidence rigged up by some political party, nor by the politicians in control of the government, nor by half-truths in newspaper headlines or other lines — but the truth, as far as it is within human power to present it — the truth that can be obtained from every source and from every side, in all countries affected in any particular controversy, situation or dispute. In a word, do you want to sit in judgment and have the say?

Do you believe that the cause of war has much, if anything, to do with the will of the people?

Do you think that any nation declaring war first in any dispute has done so because the people, after knowing all the truth underlying the presumed rea-

<sup>4</sup>A character appearing frequently in the margins of Ives’ manuscripts, who was the personification of the conservative. After a particularly unconventional passage, Ives would jot a note to the effect that “Rollo” would never like it.

\*The word “war” in the above intends to refer to a premeditated and official declaration of war against any other nation or nations that have made no official declaration of war, and does not refer to matters of invasions or attacks upon a country’s citizens or territories made deliberately by another government — in general, offenses which require immediate action. Though it may lead to war, and in some cases it is quite right that defensive action should lead to war, if a coward flies over and drops a bomb on a sleeping child’s head, the only thing for a man to do is to rise up and get that dehumanized pigeon whether it brings us to war, hell, or Heaven.

<sup>5</sup>The following note is written in pencil on the back of the first page of Section II, MS. 2: I mean, by cause, the real beginning — not after babies have been bombed to death by cowards starting the war. If war must be made — the people shall start — after knowing all all all there is to [know]. They will rise like men — as though to say — “People rise & be men” do it yourself — will you run around & [illegible] — -don’t let the political liliptions do it — it’s for you to say & do — not Hitler, Roosevelt, Stalin — Hitler etc. etc. — Rise & tell them to “Shut up” — or they will soon [last three words illegible].

sons for war, have demanded that war be declared?

Of the millions of men (mostly young men), how many of all that were killed in any war knew all the premises of the contention between the nations involved, and then gave their direct consent to war and their readiness to be killed?

Of the millions that have been in active service of nations declaring war first, how many had any say as to whether there should be war or not?

The perennial answer of not all but of too many of those in charge of the governments and armies is: "It can't be done. People must trust us to know the best there is to do. How could the people decide? It takes political experience, technical knowledge of diplomatic matters. The average man is incapable of handling these difficult problems, etc., etc., etc."

These old ladies may be wrong.

There has been no war (at least for a good many years) when the main, underlying reasons could not, if presented, have been understood by all the people, except possibly the nice village idiots. However, in past ages the process of getting all the premises before all the people, if it had ever been attempted, would have been a slow, difficult, if not impossible, job. But today the means of communication which science has helped us out with would make the job less difficult.

And some of the "male old ladies" ask: "Do you think that no nation, or group of states or of nations, ever entered a war with a just reason?" "Yes, [we answer] but only as a defense after another nation had declared war. For instance, France and England, after Belgium had been dishonored. Yet the German people had practically nothing to do with starting the war. A few politicians, as usual, maneuvered the whole thing, and incidentally took a good many years to do it. The German people had for years been fed half truths, as usual, and were trained to fall for them, and for that matter, so were the people of all countries. The same can be said about the row in the Balkan States that gave Wilhelm a kind of an excuse for starting his war. A few princes, parties, etc. — not the people."

Then the Rollos ask: "How about the war against slavery in the United States in 1860? Did not the North have just cause for entering the war?" "Yes,

[we answer] but what started the war? The people of the South? No. A few politicians and slave owners in power in the South, helped by the newspapers. The people were not consulted."

The following is an incident in this connection which is of interest.

In July, 1913, Mrs. Ives, her father, and I went to Gettysburg for the 50th Anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg. One evening while walking down a road, on each side of which the Southern and Northern soldiers were camped and holding forth reminiscences, there was one old Southern soldier sitting in a group of veterans, talking somewhat as follows:

"Now I have had plenty of time to think about this war during the last fifty years. I have lived back in the mountains, and have had plenty of time to think, and I have come to the conclusion that it was a rich man's war. Down where I came from, and in other towns in the South, only a comparatively few owned slaves — the more money a man had, the more slaves he had — and those of this minority group did not want to have their property taken from them, so they practically started the war by secession. The rest of us people did not own slaves and had nothing to say about it. We were just handed out bunk by the newspapers, and by the politicians — that the Northerners were coming down to kill us and our families, and we had better join in to protect ourselves — a lot of hot-air speeches, parades, brass bands, etc. — and thus we got it in the neck. IT WAS A RICH MAN'S WAR."

All the other old Southern soldiers around him seemed to rather agree with him as far as we could hear.

In reviewing the national and political history of most countries, a distinction has to be made — a distinction difficult to make, but there is a distinction — between "war" in a broad sense (a somewhat premeditated movement organized officially to some extent, and between groups in a country or between countries) and an uprising of a local character, relatively sudden and unpremeditated, of the people in a community against some injustice, indignities, which brought hardship, suffering, and unbearable living conditions. But today most people are realizing more and more that there are stronger and

more effective ways of righting wrongs than the old-fashioned Wat Tyler way.<sup>6</sup> And in most of the world those days of wholesale intolerance are over. War between nations is the one perfectly stupid thing that still hangs over the world. The great majority of all people realize that. They look upon it as a weak symptom of suspicion, fear, and so, too much of physical cowardice. It is but the way of the medieval half-wit. It settles nothing and never will settle anything except the bottom of the graveyard. And when the day comes when those men now doing the bossing in all governments will see what the people see, and feel what the people feel — war between nations will stop.

Who makes war? The People?

NO, THE POLITICIANS.

### III

If you want to find the best way to make things worse in the above matters (Foreign Relations), take the advice of any well-known authority on international law; or if you want to be reasonably sure what the right ways may be, ask any old experienced authority on international relations, any old master

on treaty-making, put down exactly the opposite to what the expert's advice is, and you may be somewhere near right.

Some of the things that cause bad feeling and suspicion between nations are the result of the old, and today unnecessary, habits — tariffs, custom duties, etc., and treaties between a few nations and not between all the nations. Some day there will be a universal treaty for all, and then no treaties will be necessary.

Who gets it in the neck? The Politicians?

NO, THE PEOPLE.

Who has the whole say in all countries? The People?

NO, THE POLITICIANS.

In what country in the world do the people rule?

NO COUNTRY.

What country in the world is bossed by a few politicians?

ALL COUNTRIES.

But some "MORNING GLORIOUS" (not tomorrow) these answers will be "right-about-facing" and the Tread up the Mountain, resounding around the World, will bring a New Horizon to All.

## A Peoples World Nation

(Note not sent to FDR)

### *Editor's Note*

One of Ives' most persistent ideas, from the beginning of World War I in 1914 onwards, was that the people of the world (not the politicians) should unite to form a "People's World Nation." A large folder in the Collection contains manuscript material ranging from approximately 1914 up into the period of World War II. Newspaper and magazine clippings saved by Ives (often with notes written in the margins) show that he followed eagerly any development that supported his general idea. He was, of course, passionately in favor of the League of Nations, and he had the good fortune to live long enough to see the formation of the United Nations.

**T**HE first great move for the people of this world to make now is to build a People's World

Union or World Nation (or call it the United States of the World), under whose constitution each country will be free to live its own native life, and the people free to work out for themselves their own problems in a fair, open-minded "will-of-the-people way" — not a way bossed by the pet slant of some old boss. No country shall try by force to capture another country — no more sneak-thieving by medieval-minded dictators. No country shall join another country unless it shall be by the open, fair, and direct will of the people of all countries concerned. No country shall force or try to force on another country any economic [or] political plan, system or "ism." Each country will work out its

<sup>6</sup>Leader in the English peasant revolt of 1381, who gained concessions from Richard II by violence. The concessions were revoked by Parliament a year later.

own natural ways from the soil up to better things, and after careful thought, [to] the will of the people — processes that will come in a gradual growth, perhaps several generations, and not by any sudden, underhanded, dark-age bossy gouge of any one group. All the people shall be given openly the facts, premises, and truths having to do with the fundamental problems of life in a direct will-of-the-people way; and “where there’s a will, there’s a way.” Also, other kinds of unnatural barriers which have caused some bad feeling and suspicion between nations will be removed or lowered, [such] as the old unnecessary habits: tariffs, custom duties, etc., treaties between a few nations and not between all nations. Under the People’s World Nation there will be a universal treaty for all, and private treaties, as such, will have no part.

Under the People’s World Nation there shall be in place of national armies throughout the world, A People’s World Nation Army Police Force. Its principal duty will be to stop all criminal acts of any country, especially that [act] of sneak-thieving its way into another country. Fundamentally, its work will be analogous to that of the usual town and city police in most countries today — who get the horse thieves — and the People’s World Nation Police will just as efficiently get worse thieves than that, such as these cowardly bombing baby killers, and of course the lesser criminals who break the “People’s Law.” But there is one thing in their work which the People’s World Nation Army Police shall not do under any conditions — forever and ever — in any way whatsoever — and that is to use aeroplane bombs. Anyone who does shall be stoned to death — not buried in graves but in swill piles — and any man who ever says that bombing is right will be beaten on the jaw until the doorbell to Hell rings them in!

Now there is one thing for Americans in these United States to get up and do if we are MEN with the strength and courage of most of our forefathers, and that is to do a bigger job than one which just has to do with our own national defense; to help defend Humanity from having to live or die in a world too much disgraced by medieval slavery, dark-age bossing by “half-wit” slave-making bosses, a world of animal-like suspicion, also disgraced by too much

pragmatism, greed, and thievery — thievery between countries enslaving the minds and souls as well as the bodies of mankind. A People’s World Nation in which every honest country will be free to live its own native life with the help of its World Army Police will bring the greatest hope of the world today to its realization; a world where men can stand up as men and friends, and “do unto others as they would be done by,” not just exist as cowardly suspicious enemies, slaves of dictators — a world in which the people will have more to say and the boss politicians less, and the dictators nothing to say, except perhaps to some of their slaves in hell. And some morning glorious (but not quite tomorrow) the trend up the mountain resounding around the world will bring a new and radiant horizon to all.

One summer morning nearly thirty years ago, there probably came to millions of people a thought, as it came to one man who remembers the clear, but sudden, picture of [in] humanity forced on the world, as when the first news of the Kaiser’s hog-march through Belgium was read on that early morning train. The same thought must have come to all Americans in one form or another. Before this there had been a general feeling that the world was now stronger and above these little medieval fusses — that the world now had grown to strong manhood and that sneak-thieving through Belgium was hardly more possible than if Connecticut had hog-marched through Rhode Island to get more fish. So now the one big thing for the people in the world today is to make a man’s world and not a sneak-thieving, sissy, molly-coddle, suspicious world to live in and die in. And the writer is morally certain that millions and millions of people — yes, the great majority of people in our universal planet — feel and believe that the one hope of the world today is for all people to stand up as strong and honest men, “to do unto others as they would be done by” and get together as friends and not as suspicious cowards, and then work and build a People’s World Union (Nation), where every honest man and every honest country has a fair chance to work out their own problems in their own way and live their own natural life — a life that God Almighty will be proud of.