

The Arsenal of Democracy – David Gray

Many people are still unaware that in 2022 the United States put into law the Ukraine Lend Lease Act. The Ukraine Democracy Defense Lend-Lease Act of 2022 was an act of the United States Congress that facilitated the supply of materiel to the Ukrainian government in a manner similar to the World War II Lend-Lease Act, in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

“This bill temporarily waives certain requirements related to the President's authority to lend or lease defense articles if the defense articles are intended for Ukraine's government or the governments of other Eastern European countries affected by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

An agreement to lend or lease defense articles under this bill shall not be subject to certain requirements and provisions that typically apply to such lend-lease agreements, including a requirement that generally prohibits a loan or lease period from exceeding five years.”



We know that the, Neutral, U.S. created the Lend Lease Act in 1941 to facilitate the supply of war materials to Britain. This was signed into being by President Roosevelt (*left*), and evolved over the following years to become ‘Reciprocal Aid’ and then ‘Mutual Aid’, whereby each country put into the ‘Pool’ what they were able to provide and the ‘lease’ part of the agreement became void. As we can see, the original version of Lend Lease is still going on today in Ukraine.

When it came into law on March 11th 1941, the Lend and Lease Act allowed the U.S. to “...Promote the defence of the United States”,

which became “...the policy of making this country an arsenal for the Democracies, and seeks to carry out President Roosevelt’s pledge to send to these countries in ever-increasing numbers, ships, aeroplanes tanks and guns.” The President was empowered “when he deems it in the interest of national defence” to “manufacture in arsenals, factories, and shipyards under American jurisdiction, or otherwise procure any defence article for the government of any country whose defence the President deems vital to the defence of the United States.” It enabled him to “transfer, exchange, lease, lend, or otherwise dispose of, to any such government any defence article...To test, inspect, prove, repair, fit out, recondition or otherwise to place in good working order any defence article for any such government.”

This meant for example that the British battle-cruiser HMS RENOWN, could be repaired in Brooklyn Navy Yard if the President considered it in the interest of American national defence to do so. Moreover, any of the American military, naval or air bases could fit out or repair weapons of countries whose defence is deemed vital to the defence of the U.S.A. This was the crux of the whole Act. The United States, a Neutral, pacifist country, was able to commit whole-heartedly to giving Britain and other countries all of this military support, on the basis that President Roosevelt deemed it necessary for the defence of the U.S.A. Roosevelt (and Churchill), believed that once Hitler had dealt with Europe, he would come for America and this was a real possibility.

“Now a new era of United States history begins,” wrote Robert Waithman, ‘News Chronicle’ New York Correspondent, “for the Bill empowers President Roosevelt to send to Britain and her allies war

supplies made by American workmen in American factories, and *owned and paid for by the Government of the United States*. The Bill means that what Britain will receive from America in future will be directly sent, not by United States manufacturers, but by the United States Government, and that the funds to build these arms will be provided, not by the British taxpayers, but by the American taxpayers.”

For two months the Bill was fiercely fought in congress. Some opposed it because of their personal hostility to the President, others because they shrank from giving him such unprecedented powers. The Pacifists were against it, and the Communists, a section of the Irish Americans and the American Nazis. Then there was the great body of isolationists who urged that America should not again become entangled in a European quarrel; why should the sons of American mothers die on foreign battlefields? they demanded. At least it was not difficult to understand their attitude.

Yet if the opposition was vociferous, the support forthcoming for the Bill was nothing less than amazing. Minor amendments were accepted but did not alter the validity of the Bill. In the House of Representatives the debate began on February 3rd 1941, and five days later the Bill was passed by 260 votes to 165. It then went to the Senate who began their debate on February 13th. The discussion was prolonged because the Senate was where the isolationists were most strong. Scores of amendments were proposed in attempts to talk the Bill out of time.

On March 6th Senator George, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, made an eloquent appeal that pettifogging argument and narrow quibbling should be thrust aside. “If we are realists,” he said, “we should know that every hour and every moment wasted here counts in the Battle for Britain. We profess that her survival is in our own national interests.” Then, turning on the Isolationists leaders who for weeks had carried on a filibuster – the American term to describe the method adopted by a minority to delay legislation indefinitely, and so prevent it being voted on – Senator George thundered, “The collapse of the British Empire would mean chaos in this world.” Stirred by his words, the Senators decided to hold a night session, and on March 8th the Bill, with some minor amendments, was passed by 60 votes to 31.

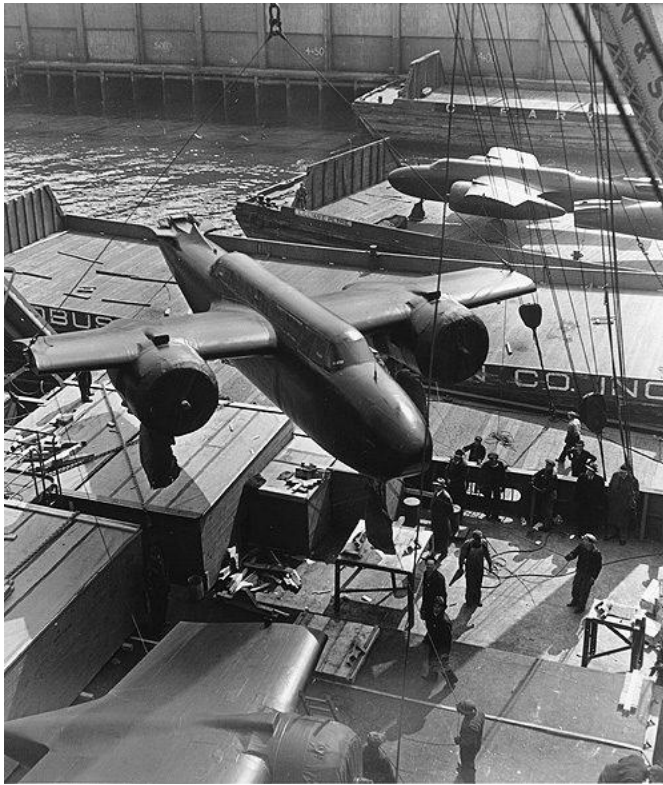
When it came back to the House of Representatives on March 11th, it was finally passed by 317 votes to 71, after a debate of only two hours. A few minutes later a copy was rushed to resident Roosevelt at the White House, and only 15 minutes after it had left the Capitol his signature made it law.



Less than a quarter of an hour after signing the President met reporters and declared, “Immediately after I signed the Bill, authorities of the Army and Navy considered a list of United States Army and Navy war material, and approved it being sent overseas [one of the amendments was that the President must not dispose of any defense articles without first consulting the U.S. Army Chief of Staff and the U.S. Chief of Naval Operations]. Part goes to Britain and part to Greece.”

A few hours afterwards President Roosevelt sent Congress a request for the House to vote seven thousand million dollars, (£1,750,000,000 at 1941 conversion rates), “to carry out the fixed policy of this Government, to make for the Democracies every gun, ‘plane, and munition that we possibly can.” He would go on to ask for much more as the war progressed.

Winston Churchill, in his Mansion House speech on November 11th 1941, described the United States Lease Lend legislation as “the most unsordid act in the whole of recorded history.” [Unsordid: An act that is honourable and free from any wrongdoing].



There is no doubt that this Bill, and those that followed it, saved the civilised world from the Nazis. Without this, Britain would have been overrun as she was broke and could not afford to buy any more arms. Churchill went on to say in his speech, “This time last year we did not know where to turn for a dollar for American exchange. We had been able by the severest measures to gather and send to America about £500,000,000 sterling, but the end of our financial resources was in sight – nay, had been actually reached.”

There can be no doubt that Britain had nowhere else to turn, and America kept us in the war. That’s only half of the story though. Britain also gave war materials and services to the Americans when it was easier to source them from Britain than manufacture and ship them from the U.S.

Britain’s Response

In March 1943, Lord Halifax, the British Ambassador to the United States, abandoning his usual diplomatic approach, gave the American people a host of facts and figures showing the extent of Britain’s co-operation with the United States in the war effort. Many details about the beneficial effects of the Reverse Lend-Lease arrangements were made public for the first time.

He revealed that the American M4 Sherman tank was a joint Anglo-American enterprise. The American ‘Liberty’ ship was built from “basically British designs.” Henry Kaiser was enabled, by the expenditure of British funds in the United States in the days before Pearl Harbour, to embark on his shipbuilding career.

“Perhaps in our zeal to withhold information from the enemy,” he wrote in the magazine ‘The American’ under the heading “You’ve got the British Wrong.” “We have withheld too much from ourselves. Two years before the United States was plunged into the war the British Government was pouring millions of cash dollars into American industry. The total thus spent since September 1939, has been about £800,000,000. Most of this considerable sum went for purchases, but fully £50,000,000 was spent outright to expand factories and build new ones.

In the aircraft industry six famous American corporations received bulk aid costing £22,250,000, but this is only a drop in the bucket. Britain’s expenditure with the American aircraft industry totals £437,250,000.



Let us consider tanks. The United Nations today [1943] have the finest tank in the world, the 28-ton General Sherman *left*. It is the custom in both armies to think of this tank as an American product, and so in one sense it is, but in the other it is a joint Anglo-American enterprise. The forerunner of the General Sherman was the General Lee [M3].” After describing the failure of the British Mark VI [Vickers-Armstrong Light Tank], against the Germans and the discovery that the General Lee had the faults and

weaknesses of the Mark VI, he said, “There was no time to build an entirely new tank. British and American engineers sat down together with our men who had been in France, and made changes.

Out of this surge of effort came the first General Grant, which proved adequate to hold the Germans in North Africa in 1940. But it was still not good enough. In the ensuing weeks nationalities were forgotten – Americans, Englishmen, Canadians and Scotsmen worked side by side designing, testing. American money and British money went over the same counters. Out of this came the new General Sherman.”

A few months later, on 10th August 1943, it was reported in “The Times,” that the American State Department had disclosed that Britain was to settle a £1,400,000 compensation bill incurred by the United States at their new Lend-Lease bases in Newfoundland and British colonies in the Western Hemisphere.

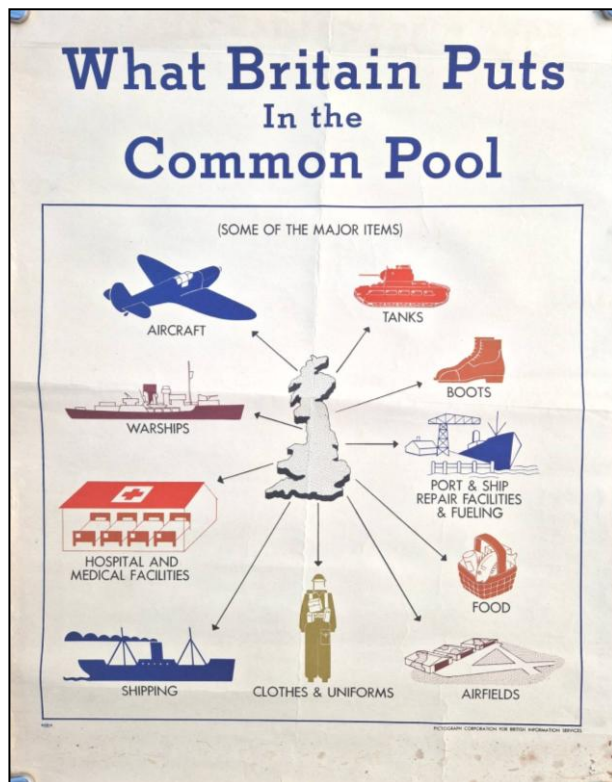


When the bases were leased for 99 years in return for the transfer of 50 old American destroyers (*left*), it was agreed that the United States should compensate private owners whose property was taken over. It was also arranged that the local Governments would reimburse the owners, the British Government would reimburse the local Governments and the United States would pay the cost to Britain.

The Department’s announcement stated, “The British Government has now generously offered to meet, under reciprocal aid, all claims for compensation due to owners of private property in the territories concerned – Newfoundland, Bermuda, Bahamas, Jamaica, Antigua, St. Lucia, Trinidad and British Guiana. The property has been valued by United States appraisers at approximately £1,400,000. The total cost to the British Government may be considerably in excess of this amount, since in addition to the actual value of private property involved, it will also include in many cases [the] moving and resettlement awards to compensate land owners, legal fees and in some cases bonuses which were paid to induce owners to vacate immediately properties urgently needed by the [American] Government in order to speed the construction of bases.”

And the 50 destroyers that America sent to Britain? They were obsolete ex-WWI ships, totally unsuited to modern warfare. They had been laid up since 1918 and were in such terrible condition, that when preparations were being made to send them to Britain, they had to be completely refitted before they could be used. It is true to say these ships made practically no contribution to Britain's war effort and the deal was a complete disaster from Britain's point of view. The best use that was ever achieved with one of these ships was when it was renamed HMS Campbeltown, filled with explosives, and used to ram and blow up the lock gates at St. Nazaire, France, in March 1942.

I recently bought the WWII poster *below*, from a dealer in America. It shows quite clearly the different ways that this country provided Mutual Aid to America through the Lend Lease Program. Bear in mind this was only our contribution to the United States. Britain sent materials to other countries as can be seen in another article on this website called '**Lend Lease from Britain to Russia**'.



At the end of June 1944 Britain had sold overseas assets to the value of £1,065 million and incurred liabilities abroad amounting to over £2,300 million. The total of Britain's Mutual Aid exceeded £1,000 million.

From the outbreak of the war up to the Lend Lease Act, before running out of money, Britain had already spent £1,500 million in the U.S on supplies of various sorts. In Britain, about 56 million square feet of covered storage, work shop space, hangars and general accommodation had been provided for the US War Department, together with petrol and munitions depots, garages, and some 33 million square feet of open storage for the US Army. Hospitals to the extent of nearly 100,000 beds had been specially built, or turned over, and all stores such as furniture, bedding, crockery and cooking utensils were provided.

By the end of 1944, 133 airfields, with their depots, headquarters and ancillary accommodation, had been provided for the USAAF. US Forces in the UK received almost 6,800,000 ships' tons of supplies and equipment in the two years ended 30th June 1944.

31 per cent of all supplies and equipment required by the US Army in the European theatre of operations between 1st June 1942, and 30th June 1944, was supplied by Britain as aid.

Spark plugs for certain US aircraft were wholly provided from UK production. Altogether 558,500 had been requisitioned up to 30th June 1944, while in addition 600,000 plugs had been shipped to the US.

US forces in Britain were provided with many other types of supplies, including bombs, shells, ammunition, anti-tank equipment, 2,104 aircraft (of which 500 were Horsa gliders), with an additional 570 aero-engines, 137,000 jettison fuel tanks, 50,000 pieces of armour plate for aircraft, 29,000 aero tyres, 22,000 aero tubes. 7,087,802 jerricans were delivered during the first six months of 1944.

The equipment and tools of a complete anti-aircraft gun barrel factory, and, for example, shell-producing plants, were sent from Britain to the US as reciprocal aid. Britain sent, free of charge, machine tools, anti-aircraft guns, ammunition, Rolls-Royce engines and thousands of barrage balloons.

Britain supplied the US with her newest inventions such as radio locators, astrographs and jet propulsion aero engines. Bailey Bridges were, provided for US forces as reciprocal aid, and the design made available so that the bridge could be manufactured in the US for use in other theatres of operations.

Rockets based on a British design were being used by US forces against the Japanese in the Pacific. Britain supplied the basic design for the American 'Liberty' ship. Many thousands of charts, in addition to regular supplies of charts to Washington, were provided to US warships and establishments concerned in invasion operations.



Other items of aid from Britain to the US ranged from the full use of the world's two greatest liners, the Queen Mary (*left*), and Queen Elizabeth, to carry American troops across the ocean, to the provision of 16 million boxes of matches for the US Army; 14,120,000 rounds of ammunition and 587,000 smoke and other chemical warfare generators; 33,340,000 lb of nails and 11,000 telegraph poles; 200 mobile wharf cranes and 180 miles of new railway track to 37,250,000 cakes of soap and 7,800,000 lb of salt.

Quantities of radio equipment were provided, including the total requirements of both the US 8th and 15th Air Forces for one secret type of set, in the first six months of 1944. Transportation of US Army stores and personnel during the six months ended 30th June 1944 required 650,000 wagons and 9,225 special trains. Nineteen ambulance trains and sixteen mobile workshops and breakdown trains were put at the disposal of the US forces. In addition, hundreds of thousands of tons of US stores were transported by road and canal.

For the invasion, extensive underground headquarters were constructed with an intricate system of communication for controlling shipping and small craft. In addition to the specially constructed landing craft bases, maintenance bases and embarkation facilities, items handed over to the US forces included 2 complete floating docks, 2,100 pontoon units, about 200 cranes, 12 coasters and 30 lighters, 3 hospital carriers and 2 train ferry steamers adapted for use in damaged ports. For three months the entire output of Britain's sheet steel rolling industry was devoted to the waterproofing of many hundreds of US wading tanks, as well as trucks and other mechanised equipment. The most critical single project undertaken by the UK as reciprocal aid was the production in Britain of virtually all the artificial harbour equipment used on the beaches of France, (Mulberry).

Britain could not keep detailed accounts of all the aid given to America, it was distributed from many locations at the time of need and recording every item was not a priority. However, estimations of the value of aid furnished to the US forces in Britain up to 30th June 1944 were, goods and services £343,632,000 and capital facilities £167,600,000. Food and raw materials exported to the US by Britain up to that date totalled £13,613,000 and other supplies exported or transferred to the US

totalled £25,135,000. Aid afforded to the US forces on British Colonies and in overseas theatres of war amounted to £54,750,000. Grand total of these figures is £604,730,000.

Below, a few photographs from my own collection showing war materials waiting for shipping to Britain from America.

