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# DEMOCRACY MARCHES

## Controlling Freedom To Preserve It

A BBC Broadcast to America by DAVID LOW

WE are now well into the New Year, and we have got over that period when oracles and experts look back on the events of the past 12 months, and link them up and give their balance-sheets for the year. It has been easy for them to make a sensational page of history out of what has happened, but no one of them has been game to forecast the future (except Hitler, of course), who has said definitely that he is going to win the war this year—but then he said that last year, too, so he hardly counts. The characteristic of this war is that its events are usually surprising and unexpected; and the only safe prophecy, perhaps, is that mistakes will be made by all parties concerned.

In normal living, everyone finds it necessary to look ahead a bit, to see a jump or two ahead of the daily round, and that is often difficult enough. But since this war began, it has been the job of the people on this island, on peril of their lives, to be several jumps ahead of something of which they had little definite knowledge and no real experience at all. We had to cope with the unknown and unpredictable. In the first place, all we knew about what was likely to happen was from the newspapers and the newsreels about China, Abyssinia, and Spain; just as those in the United States and overseas to-day get our war at second-hand from newspapers and newsreels.

## Learning in a Hard School

We had to learn. So did our Government. Considering that there was no time to build the deep shelters we wanted, the little steel "Andersons" and the narrow brick tunnels seemed a good idea. But none of us expected that we might have to sleep in them. After all, during daytime raids, all you need is a place to bob in and out of when it gets too hot. But night raids made it necessary to alter deep-rooted habits. Sleeping in shelters took a bit of arrangement. "Andersons," being designed apparently to fit square people, called for fortitude and self-sacrifice in a long person; on the other hand, the narrow benches that the surface tunnels started with were grand for long persons, but agony for a square person. As for the big public basement shelters and underground railway stations, at first they always reminded me of going to bed on a football field while the game was in progress.

But the night-shelter problem is in hand now. To some extent, indeed, it is solving itself. I'm told that 80 per cent of our household population now sleeps in its bed—though in street clothes rather than pyjamas perhaps—and gets a good night's rest. It is remarkable what a human being can get used to. Many of us get our best sleep when the

night is all bombs and gunfire. We now expect to be raided at night, you see, and when noise is normal, it is the quiet nights that are unusual and restless. "It was so quiet last night you could hear a bomb drop," one says.

## Mistakes at First

Yes, we bumped our noses in the blackout, we used the wrong sandbags, which split in the weather, and turned windy days into sandstorms, we flashed over-bright torches when we shouldn't, we kicked over our fire buckets. These are the petty private mistakes of inexperience. Public mistakes, too, mistakes of principle and of administration, errors financial, economic and political, mineral and vegetable; yes, even vegetable—we forgot to sow enough onion-seed.

In the hard school of trial and error we, individually and collectively, civilian and public servant, at home and on the job, have had to educate ourselves pretty quickly in many things. On the whole, I think the inhabitants of this island can now pass their examinations. There is no need for me to sing the praises of the A.R.P. services, for their quality is already appreciated throughout the world. The huge evacuation and billeting operations now work without people tripping over each other too much. Public welfare services generally are running more smoothly. And I suppose there are few homes to-day in which at least one member of the household could not make you a Molotov cocktail or bandage your broken leg if necessary; or even put you through a bit of drill with broomsticks or give you a bit of stirrup-pump practice.

## It's Always Something

But as an Australian philosopher once said, "In this world if it's not one thing it's another: it's never nothin'." The Axis in their air attacks on this country have changed their tactics four times. The big idea just now seems to be to burn us out; and the Home Secretary, to meet the new fire-bomb situation, finds it necessary to make further drastic organisation, involving more compulsion, of all citizens.

Now compulsion is foreign to our tradition, and we hate it; but if it is a choice between organising ourselves for our safety as a democracy against a war-like despot and being organised after conquest by that same despot, there isn't much doubt or argument about the answer. It's one thing to face and adjust oneself to uncomfortable facts in the material world. It's another to face and adjust oneself to horrific truths in the spiritual.

As we all know, it is one of the cleverest tactics in this war of wits of Hitler's to make his so-called "enemy" defeat himself before the battle starts, by confusing his judgment about the issues involved, and by creating a chaos of controversy, getting him spiritually tied in knots with paradox and contradictions.

## Many Wings of the Turkey

It is characteristic of men, unfortunately, as this expert in human weakness knows, that in weaker movements they



DAVID LOW

"... We had to learn"

can usually find arguments for escaping unpleasant issues. Now our people in this respect are no different from others. Our society might easily have dissipated its strength; it might easily have broken up into as many wings as a boarding-house turkey: Right wings earnestly proving that since Hitler rounded up Communists, he must be going to make a Capitalist paradise; Left wings proving that since he has all his capitalists in a strait-jacket and his buying material from the Soviet Union, he must be out to create a Communist paradise; both deaf to the candid announcement from Hitler himself that he is out to make a German paradise only, and to hell with everybody else. We have also had Intellectual wings, excusing themselves from action in defence of Liberty, telling themselves in soothing phrases that after all maybe it wasn't perfect Liberty, anyway, and, even if it were, the responsibilities of social independence lie so heavily on the individual as almost to constitute a kind of servitude from which liberation is only to be gained by yielding oneself up body and soul. To say nothing of so-called Pacifist wings straining to persuade themselves that true peace is best secured by offering no resistance to the destroyers of peace—and pacifists. Dear, dear. Like other peoples we have had these wings. We have, in our time, had the whole bird. In actual fact we did argue ourselves out of facing the facts for longer than was healthy for us. The misfortune of our unhappy allies was in one way our good fortune. The example before our eyes of our friends dissipating their strength in this way and reaping hideous consequences, made it impossible for us to avoid facing stark realities when it became perfectly clear that we were next on Hitler's little list.

## Democracy is Adaptable

Americans are proud of their democracy, and I suspect that some of them think that ours, British, is only a very imperfect article. I agree, but then I don't believe either of us has got democracy, but only the makings of it. Democracy, like other things in this world, is never fixed, except in its essentials—one of which is, to my mind, the right (Continued on next page)