

## CIVIL LIBERTIES IN WARTIME

(Continued from previous page)

been wiser to adopt a procedure through the Courts rather than through Departmental action in the case of the Communist *Daily Worker* and I think the original banning of artists by the BBC was a foolish blunder. But compare this record, not merely with any country now at war, but even with any country still neutral, and I suggest to you that it stands out as a remarkable tribute to the depths of the belief in Britain, both in the Government and in the people, in the ordered processes of constitutional freedom.

### Comparison with Dictatorships

Above all, the comparison with the Dictator countries, with their mass concentration camps, with the agents of the Gestapo in every street, with all political parties coerced, with the Trade Unions and the Co-operative Movement destroyed, gives Britain a supremacy in devotion to freedom which is unchallengeable. I want especially to draw your attention to the way in which Parliament functions in war time. The BBC decision about the People's Convention is in one sense a pretty trifling matter, and in another sense it is of the utmost significance.

A member of the House of Commons is dissatisfied with the decision. He protests on the floor of the House. Dissatisfied with the Minister's reply, he appeals beyond him to the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister remedies his grievance. "Easy," some of you may say, but think what a different Germany or Italy it would be if Goebbels or Goering or Hitler could be cross-examined across the floor of the Reichstag by a private member. Measure the implication of the fact that every week hundreds of private citizens write to their M.P.'s to complain of this and that; that the whole of the vast machinery of the State is moved into action to investigate their complaint; that the ability of Ministers to satisfy the House that justice is being done is one of the two or three supreme facts by which their reputation stands or falls. In a sense the greatness of the Parliamentary system seems to me more evident in its handling of the grievances of the ordinary citizen than in its passage of some great measure in dramatic circumstances.

### Freedom has Not been Lost

When we embarked upon this grave conflict there were many who predicted that total war would prove incompatible with the essentials of civil freedom. They viewed with alarm and indignation the extensive powers the Government assumed. They warned us that we were in danger of losing our liberty. Well, I have put before you the facts of the situation as they stand to-day. I think they prove that the invasion of all essential freedoms has been very small indeed. That is the case for two main reasons. First, because it is the traditional habit of a British Government to respect the great lessons of our Constitutional history, and second, because it is the happy characteristic of public opinion here to watch the Government carefully to see that this respect is maintained. We went into this war a free people. With victory, we shall emerge from it in no degree less free. To conduct the war in that spirit will, I hope, give the principles of freedom a new status among the nations.

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