

WHAT HAVE I TO GAIN?

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Now at this stage some of you will, I know, say with some bitterness—"We heard something like that in the last war. You don't catch us with any 'Homes for Heroes' stuff in this war. We are not falling for that one again." Now that reaction I can very well understand, and if what I now say to you rested upon the promises of politicians of any party, I should be very diffident about saying what I am now going to say. But I am not a member of any party. I am myself my own party, and I used to say in the days of peace that it was the only party in Britain which was not split from top to bottom. My assurance does not rest upon the promises of politicians, but on the entire set-up which the war is presenting to us. My assurance rests on three things, and I invite you to look at each of them closely.

The first is this. The last war was a soldiers' and sailors' war, which, apart from an occasional air raid on London, was fought overseas. It left the social life of Britain largely untouched. Now this war is a totalitarian war, in which there is no distinction between soldiers and civilians, men, women or children. Its impact on the life of Britain has already after only sixteen months of war been vastly greater than the impact of the whole of the four-and-a-half years of the last war. That is the first thing.

Hate and Lies—and Their Opposites

The second thing is this. The two basic principles of the thing which we fight—the evil of Nazism—are hate and lies. As regards the hate, that is universal; hatred of Jews; hatred of Communists, Liberals and Socialists; hatred of intellectuals; hatred of culture; hatred of non-Aryan races; hatred of the whole non-Germanic world. And as regards the second principle—lies—we have reached a stage where the Germans proclaim that to lie is not merely a pardonable lapse, but is a solemn national duty, if German interests are served thereby.

Hate and lies—these are the things we are fighting. Now, in the last resort, you can only overcome the two negative principles of hate and lies by opposing to them the positive corresponding opposite principles. And these are: truth and love.

Now the word "love" has, unhappily, a sentimental connotation, and so I will substitute for it the word "compassion." The literal meaning of the word is "feeling with" or "sympathy."

If we are to win this war, there must be an ever-increasing application of these two positive principles of truth and sympathy in our own national life. Along this road we must go. Indeed, if you think about it, you will see that already we have been forced some little distance along this road. In the improved standard of life of the agricultural labourer, in the de-casualising of labour at the docks announced the other day, in the much improved provision made for the dependants of those who are killed in the war, in the opening of countless thousands of homes to women and children from the bombed areas, in the flow of gifts of money and goods from America; in all these, and countless other things, you may see evidence of the way in which circumstances have compelled us to tread the road I have described.

No Party Approach

And, as the war goes on, this compulsion, under the growing stresses and strains of war, in the circumstances of common suffering and common danger must grow, and more and more we must tread this path to its conclusion. I do not think that we can ever, thereafter, go back to the unorganised position of pre-war days.

There is a third thing. In the last war, there was a great measure of national unity, although it was nothing like so great as the unity which marks us in this war. But at the end of the last war that unity was destroyed by the folly of the "Coupon Election." The approach to the problems of the transition from war to peace, after 1918, was not a National approach; it was a Party approach. Now it is plain that the problems of transition from war to peace at the end of this war will be vastly greater than they were at the end of the last war. It is plain that only concentrated national effort will solve those problems in a satisfactory, orderly fashion. Mr. Churchill in his aside in the House of Commons a week or so ago, made it clear that he and the Government realise this. He contemplates the continuance of National Government for a definite period after the war, and a national approach to the problems of the transition stage.

In these three things, much more than in the promises of any politicians, there is, I think, ground for reasonable hope that, when this war ends, we shall not slip back into the old ways, and that the principle of economic security will find its place in the world which we shall rebuild when war is done.

The Need for Fellowship

What is the third thing I hope for? When we have a world in which peace is assured, and when we have a guarantee of economic security, we shall not be satisfied. These things do not represent the whole of life; they are only a basis for life. When physical needs are satisfied, the mind becomes conscious of a whole world of emotional and aesthetic needs, without the satisfaction of which life is not life, but only existence. I take as an example of this, the conception of fellowship. It was William Morris, the poet, who said: "Fellowship is Heaven, and the lack of Fellowship is Hell." Now the truth is that class, economic and educational differences have roughly over-ridden this conception of fellowship as between man and man. I want a world where man may meet his fellow-men, not on the basis of the position he occupies, nor the size of his bank balance, nor the type of school he went to, but on the basis of his own inherent qualities of mind and spirit.

Can we hope to see this? Yes, I think we can. For, in the community of danger and sacrifice which this war imposes on all of us—in the fraternity of arms, in the comradeship of the Home Guard, in the fellowship of fire-fighting, in a hundred ways—artificial differences are being melted in the fires of war. We are beginning to think of each other for what we are worth as human beings, and not merely for what we have.

Peace, economic security, fellowship—these are the main elements of the Good Republic, the dream of which has haunted man's mind for centuries. It may be that only out of the crucible of such ordeals as we are now experiencing, the golden metal of these things could come.



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