

THE WORLD AFTER THE WAR — *New Zealand Opinions On*

Professor Laski's Talk

"HAVE THEY
GONE FAR
ENOUGH . . . ?"

—Archbishop
West-Watson



PROFESSOR LASKI'S talk upon the change which is coming over England as a result of the war is of the greatest interest. In it he treats the subject of the regeneration of Britain only from the economic angle, but on this aspect of the matter he can speak with authority.

He makes it plain that England has never really applied democracy more than partially. Having achieved political democracy, she has rested on her oars and failed to work out the meaning of democracy for social and economic relationship. She has taught her citizens the importance of personal liberty and trained them to independence, but has never really inspired them to use their liberty to help one another instead of just helping themselves. They have regretted poverty and unemployment, but have thought that they were "just too bad" and more or less inevitable. And they were very slow to accept "social service" measures, partly as an intrusion on their private affairs and partly because they feared that they would encourage people to lean on the State instead of on their own enterprise. "Licking stamps for Lloyd George" was at first very unpopular.

Slow to Change

The English are slow to change, but they have changed considerably. Now the question is whether they have moved far enough to abandon old and crusted prejudices and to set themselves heartily to a real experiment in community living. If they do, they may be able to work out a system which will preserve a reasonable independence in family life, a reasonable control of private property, and a reasonable scope for private enterprise. Unless the old idea in regard to money or property that "it's my own, I can do what I like with it" gives way to the conviction that money and property are held by the individual, not absolutely, but in relation to his own needs and the good of his neighbour, it would appear that some form of totalitarianism is inevitable.

In regard to social distinctions and cleavages, it is hard for those not born in England to realise how many grades there are even within the main classes, and what discouragements the "climber" has to meet with at every stage! The result is that there is apt to be more interest in keeping others down than in helping them up. Here again, nothing but a tragedy like the present seems to rouse the nation to the realisation that a man's service to the community may bear no relation at all to his acquired or inherited "privileges." If England is to be reborn and so united as to resist alien doctrines, there must be a revolution not only in regard to property but

We printed the week before last a talk by Professor Harold Laski on the importance of keeping alive the present mood for social reconstruction. Professor Laski warned us of the dangers of a relapse into our old bad ways and emphasised the part the Dominions can play in preventing this. Here are some comments by the Primate of New Zealand, his Grace, Archbishop West-Watson, and by Professor F. L. W. Wood, Wellington.

also in regard to privilege, and a determination that privileges must correspond to community value. It is no gain to the community that some of its ablest citizens should have to spend half their lives in reaching the point where other citizens started. It is a definite loss.

The Vision May Fade

The danger is, as Professor Laski realises, that England's present mood may change and that the vision may fade as it did after the last war. But there is this to be said, that we entered upon this war without any of the illusions of 1914 and that experience has taught us that victory may be more demoralising than defeat. All who love England will hope that the terrible ordeal which rich and poor, privileged and unprivileged, are enduring with such sublime heroism may lead to a revaluation of the true function of money and privilege not by compulsion but by common consent.

A Challenge to New Zealand

Professor Laski's hope that the Dominions may show the way to a solution of England's problems calls us in New Zealand to do some self-examination. We have indeed had a wonderful opportunity for building up a community life free of the historical prejudices and prepossessions of the old country. But instead of putting New Zealand first we have allowed the interests of this or that party to occupy the foreground of our thinking. Are we really so bankrupt of spirit and of ideas that the individual license of capitalism and the individual repression of state-socialism are the only alternatives which we can propose to Britain? Is it too late for us to seek some new and better community life and to show that wealth and privilege can and should be held relatively to the public good and to the service rendered by those who possess them; to show also that the individual can be trusted to play his part as a citizen without needing to be restricted and restrained in every department of life?

The world is not shut up to the alternatives of the irresponsible individual and the irresponsible State. Somebody must show that the responsible State and the responsible individual are compatible and complementary and essential to human happiness.



"A FIGHTING
FAITH FOR
DEMOCRACY"

—Professor
F. L. W. Wood

ONE of the most encouraging things in these days of strain and anxiety is the trickle of evidence, of which Laski's article is part, that a new spirit is being built up in war-torn Britain—a spirit even more powerful than that of 1914-1918. For the first time for centuries England itself is being ravaged, and the new-born horror of totalitarian warfare, which spares no privilege or prejudice, has taught a bitter lesson in the basic equality of men. From equality of suffering there has risen again that sense of brotherhood and common determination to root out the causes of disaster, which has been man's strength throughout the ages. In telling us that this spirit is strong, and that it has seized firmly upon a concrete programme of progress, Laski gives ground for hope.

Yet it is equally important to heed his warning. He says that a great social revolution is transforming British democracy before our eyes into something more vital and humane, which will no longer tolerate the tragedy of mass unemployment or the obstruction of the general good by private privilege, but he suggests that this revolution will only go forward and fulfil its boundless promise if we, the mass of the people, are sufficiently determined.

What History Teaches

Past history, if we will only learn from it, shows well enough that the mere existence now of the will to carry out a great constructive programme is no guarantee that in the utter weariness and unspeakable relief of peace men may not forget the urgency of action. If only for this reason, the Dominions should listen to his challenge that the overseas British countries have a vital part to play here as on the battlefield. As in 1914, their willing loyalty to Britain gives them the right to speak. Then they asked that they should be



PROFESSOR HAROLD LASKI
"He gives ground for hope"

given a share in foreign policy. Now with equal right they could ask to share in the deciding of that social policy which we are told Britain is framing not only for herself but for those enslaved peoples by whose help alone continental Europe can be freed again.

A Bridge of Sympathy

The British Dominions, indeed, grew up without that social hierarchy whose tough tradition in England survived the Great War and the Great Depression, at last to fall a prey, says Professor Laski, to the bombs of Hitler. They have long been familiar with that equalitarian ideal which England has in practice adopted overnight without fully realising its implications, and which she might in post-war reaction even try to abandon. Above all, so long as they are privileged to live in relative safety, they should be able to view the world with more detachment than can those who are the victims of daily bombing. Is it not conceivable, for example, that their very detachment might help them to re-build a bridge of sympathy with the continent, and more particularly with the stricken people of France—the ancient bridge-head between England and Europe? Who are better fitted than they to help build up for democracy a fighting faith and firm promise for the future which can defeat the enthusiasm of our enemy, and convince our conquered friends that Britain fights not for herself, but for a faith that all can share?

Beware of Post-War Hate

Wars are not won by weapons alone, though without weapons the boldest must fail. Would it be fanciful to suggest that Britain needs from us now not only material support, but support for the constructive ideas which are often the fruit of crisis? In the past it has often been remarked that those furthest from the firing line are most consumed by hate and least able to contribute to a peace which shall be free of the passions of war. Surely this need not be a universal rule. It would be tragic if Britain were left to hold the front line not only in the military sense, but in the ideological warfare which underlies it all.