

"We must show the Germans we have a better plan for them and the world than Hitler has"—
says



Professor G. V. Portus.

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Did you ever notice that Hitler began to get the willing support of the rank and file in Germany precisely when he began to solve the problem of unemployment?

The world conditions of 1920 threw up Mussolini, and these conditions, repeated and intensified 10 years later, threw up Hitler.

And now Hitler has to be stopped at all cost.

There were no Fascists or Nazis in 1914 but there was a world war.

And when a generation of human beings finds itself embroiled in world war twice in a lifetime (as this generation has found itself) it can no longer pretend that this fact has nothing to do with its social and economic outfit.

The root of much of our disinclination to look calmly and critically at our social institutions is fear. Fear for the old allegiances, fear for the old creeds, fear for the old groups.

They are the things we know—nations, creeds, economic systems, political institutions.

In them we have so far found security and to ask us to criticise them with a view, possibly, to discarding them is like a dreadful invitation to get out into the wilderness.

We don't like admitting that we are afraid, so we wrap up our refusal to examine the foundations of our beliefs and habits in fine phrases about the necessity for a 100 per cent. war effort.

Freedom and Liberty

We are constantly being told, with fervour and vagueness, that we are fighting for freedom or for democracy.

The words "freedom" and "liberty" by themselves mean nothing. We want to know what we are to be free from; what we are to be at liberty to do.

Enthusiastic democrats make great play with the slogan "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity." But a society in which men were free to do as they liked would be a society in which the strong would

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oppress the weak, and there would be an end of equality, social and economic.

On the other hand, every step in the direction of promoting more equality in a society means that there will be a progressive interference with existing liberties. This is the substance of the complaint that many people make about Russia.

Obviously liberty and equality are irreconcilable rights. We have to compromise between them. So much liberty at the expense of equality; and so much equality at the expense of liberty.

I suggest we should soft-pedal a bit on these vague generalities about freedom, and should rather talk about the specific freedoms which seem to be threatened by the dark philosophy of Fascism.

The Right to Livelihood

Suppose that eight years ago, in 1933, the year that Hitler came to power, you had met a married man who was on the dole in Australia. And suppose you had solemnly told him that he possessed

these specific rights under the law, and many more besides, and that therefore he should be proud to be living in a country where men had such rights guaranteed to them.

It is probable he would have answered sorrowfully, "Perhaps you're right Mister, but I don't seem to have the right to earn a living."

Remember that three out of every ten wage-earners in Australia were unemployed then.

You may say to me, "Oh, but that was in the middle of the big depression. Why go raking that up?"

I rake it up because depressions are normal recurring phenomena in the present economic order. During the 19th century they came round every 10 years or so as regularly as birthdays. And if we are to have a New Social Order in which, to quote Mr. Churchill, "wealth should not prey upon commonwealth," then one of the things we should be doing now is setting to work to inquire

whether these dreadful alternations of boom and depression cannot be ironed out of the course of trade, and unemployment relieved.

"Within Our Grasp"

The steps we should have to take to ensure the greater equality of opportunity to obtain work may have the effect of curtailing some of our cherished freedom. But even that might not be a national disaster.

If it meant that at the same time we should have done something to remove the causes of war, it would be a God-send, not a disaster.

The quickest way for us to win this war would be to win the German people away from National Socialism, and many of them hate it. But to do this we must show them that we have a better plan for them and the world than Hitler has.

The key to the future New Order is within our grasp if we choose to take it. And what a destiny for Australia if hers were the hand that turned the key!

LIONEL CURTIS HAS A PLAN

"DECISION" by Lionel Curtis.
Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1941.

MR. CURTIS speaks to us from the past, but with a vision of hope for the future. He was bred in the spacious days of 19th century certainties, and an evangelical faith in freedom and truth has sustained him through half a century of world chaos. Though expressing due humility in face of an obscure future he is calmly certain that humanity, far from submitting indefinitely to tyranny, will ultimately recognise Hitlerism as punishment for its own sins and so be driven back to principles familiar to Mr. Gladstone. This does not mean, however, that Mr. Curtis would wish a victorious Britain merely to restore the pre-war system; that stands self-condemned by the colossal disasters of 1914 and 1939 which were its fruit. Statesmanship must learn bitter lessons from past failure, and release the world from the weary round of disappointed idealism and world war; yet freedom must live.

This is a formidable problem, and Curtis puts pen to paper because he is convinced that he knows the solution. He finds it in the right interpretation of British history, and expounds it here with characteristic and prophetic zeal. Curtis has never been a diplomat skilled in reducing conflicting opinions to anæmic formulæ equally powerless for good and for evil. We British, he says, can only lead the world (as we should) if "we drop our inveterate habit of shutting our eyes to basic truths, and cease to regard their explicit statement as an indiscretion." He himself, indeed, has never shirked such indiscretions, with the result that brisk controversies have raged round his head, to the great clarification of British political thinking. This pamphlet, therefore, like *The Problem of the Commonwealth*, which was published about this stage in the last war, is a brilliant statement of a

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Book Review
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point of view about issues which are squarely faced; it is not a blue-print for the future, which will command immediate assent.

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THE world is at war, writes Mr. Curtis, largely because it puts its faith in inorganic political systems; that is, systems based on compacts between sovereign states, such as the League of Nations. He draws a convincing lesson too from our relations with France. In February, 1940, these were so close that, said Mr. Chamberlain, "the two governments think and act as one." Yet with military defeat the alliance crumbled overnight, and Mr. Churchill's brilliant offer of organic union came too late. By organic union, Curtis means the existence of a common government, elected directly by all the peoples concerned, and with full power to carry out the primary work of protecting the people's security. Even in the British Commonwealth, says Mr. Curtis, such organic unity has not been achieved, for in spite of "a smoke-screen from British as well as Dominion ministers," the vital decisions on war and peace have still been made by Britain alone. This lack of Dominion association with foreign policy and defence expenditure (which he oddly regards as being borne by Britain alone) is in Curtis's view a major reason why war fell upon us in 1939.

THE moral is clear. The British Commonwealth, should carry one step further its demonstration to the world of co-operation between free peoples. Each member state should retain full control over social and economic policy, thus preserving freedom. But there should be set up an international government, with powers strictly confined to "security and matters which are quite inseparable therefrom," but with power to levy the necessary funds from the states. If the British peoples embarked on such a scheme, other states would rapidly join on the same terms, and the result would be a concentration of power so formidable that peace would be secured.

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SUCH is the plan. It raises difficulties enough. Many will question Curtis's belief that the mere relief from the threat of war will remedy economic tensions, and so make it unnecessary for the central government to have any control over economic policy. Again, though he chastises the Dominions' ingrained habit of seeking leadership in Britain, he may not see as clearly as we do the ingrained habit in some Englishmen of assuming that leadership must eternally rest in their hands; and his airy dismissal of Dominion fear that their policies might be merely out-voted in the joint assembly is surely not justified by experience. Nevertheless, he sets forth solid arguments which critics must weigh before rejecting. The pamphlet might, in fact, be regarded as a classic statement of a view widely held both in Britain and here: that in rebuilding our world we should seek the minimum change which will produce the desired result, on the ground that man is a fundamentally conservative animal who will promptly reject a theoretically perfect scheme — until he has been convinced beyond a shadow of doubt that the only alternative is Hitlerism. If Mr. Curtis can convert British (and Dominion) conservatism to the modest programme here set out, it will not be the least of his many services to humanity.