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Priestley, J. B.

Out of the People, 1941

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OUT OF THE PEOPLE

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BEFORE midsummer of last year it had been fairly common talk in the United States as it had in the Fascist countries, that Britain was decadent, that the old lady was on her last legs. Some of us who visited America just before the war had often found ourselves arguing against this opinion, asserting that although the signs did seem to point that way the British people themselves had not been heard from lately, and that those people must not be confused flrth the small select mob of place-keeping politicians, bankers, industrialists, and senior civil servants, whose combined pathetic wire-pulling could be labelled "British Policy." But I doubt if we were believed. Yet the change of mind was brought about by the behaviour of the British people, and the tributes that followed that change of mind were for the British people. Here are three excellent specimens, the first being from the *New York Times*, after Dunkirk:

So long as the English tongue survives, the word Dunkirk will be spoken with reverence. For in that harbour, in such a hell as never blazed on earth before, at the end of a lost battle, the rags and blemishes that have hidden the soul of democracy fell away. There, beaten but unconquered, in shining splendour, she faced the enemy. They sent away the wounded first. Men died so that others could escape. It was not so simple a thing as courage, which the Nazis had in plenty. It was not so simple a thing as discipline, which can be ham-

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mered into men by a drill sergeant. It was not the result of careful planning, for there could have been little. It was the common man of the free countries, rising in all his glory out of mill, office, factory, mine, farm, and ship, applying to war the lessons learned when he went down the shaft to bring out trapped comrades, when he hurled the lifeboat through the surf, when he endured poverty and hard work for his children's sake.

This shining thing in the souls of free men Hitler cannot command, or attain, or conquer. He has crushed it, where he could, from German hearts.

It is the great tradition of democracy. It is the future. It is victory.

Later, after London and other cities here had taken their punishment, Walter Lippmann wrote in the *New York Herald-Tribune*:

For the first time since popular government came into being, a whole people has faced the full fury of a total war, and by sheer tenacity and conviction and courage withstood it. Their reward is that they have proved that modern society can be redeemed from the apathy, cynicism and materialism which were destroying it more surely than all the bombs that have fallen on English cities. Mankind owes the British an infinite debt, not only for holding the line so gallantly, but even more for giving back to men their lost faith in themselves. . . .

And another American writer, Lewis Mumford, found he had to write a preface for the forthcoming English edition of his book, *Faith For Living*, and this is how he concluded it:

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But as it happened, the first response to *Faith For Living* came from the British people. It came in the form of that cool courage, that resolute action, that high magnanimity and selflessness, that tough endurance of German terrorism, which during the last few months has given the world a spectacle of collective heroism it will never forget. No one could be more humbly aware than myself that the publication of *Faith For Living* in England is like carrying coals to Newcastle. You have proved your faith; and you have given an example of what free men throughout the world must demand of themselves, if any life worth living is to survive. No matter what further trials you may have to bear, you have already risen above the very possibility of defeat.

I could of course easily multiply by a hundred such tributes from overseas. The American Press has been studded with them for months. And it was not expecting to pay such tributes. That is why America was surprised—and astonished us by being surprised—when Britain did not throw in her hand last June. But then, instead of seeing another and even more humiliating collapse, America saw the British people wake up at last, thrust aside the shrinking wire-pullers, and put at their head a *man*, Churchill, who thundered so that the whole world might hear:

. . . • We shall defend our island whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender. . . .

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At last the British people heard a man speaking for them. They rubbed the sleep out of their eyes, and turned to their tasks, not even asking themselves what hell the Nazis might have devised for them; and so during the next months they saved a world that had almost begun to forget their existence.

The three tributes I have quoted, like a hundred others I might have quoted, are alike in praising "the common man" and "the British people." Nothing is said about superior persons, about Munich politicians, authorities on sound finance, leading industrialists, responsible and experienced officials. All these had been bowing before the curtain for some time, but without receiving much applause and, indeed, hearing not a few hisses. It was not until the nameless supers arrived to take the call that the audience rose and cheered.

In all the three tributes I have quoted it is suggested that the behaviour of the ordinary people not merely saved a situation but moved towards a larger redemption; the rags and blemishes that had hidden the soul of democracy fell away; these people have proved that our society can be redeemed from apathy, cynicism and materialism; an example has been given to the world of a faith for living. Not only the spirit but the very form was democratic. Dunkirk, as the *New York Times* rightly indicated, was one of those sudden democratic improvisations only possible among a people who have not lost all enterprise and character. (There will never be a Nazi Dunkirk.) It was the free creative spirit of a people taking charge of events. Again, what has demanded most admiration from outside observers during the air attacks upon us has been the work of the voluntary and rather hastily improvised A.R.P. and fire-fighting organisations, in

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which the people, with only a minimum of official assistance, band together to look after themselves. Official Britain has done more or less what was expected of it; a little better here, a little worse there. But unofficial Britain* has staggered the world. When the real test came, the people rose to meet it. At a time when it had been agreed upon by almost everybody in authority, political or purely intellectual, that nothing could come out of the people, everything came out of the people.

No genuine sacrifice—and I do not include under this heading any and every bit of bureaucratic nonsense—has been asked of the British people in vain. Indeed, they have demanded that more should be asked of them than has been asked, partly because the people are less reluctant to change the pre-war social and economic structure than the government is. They were ready, last summer, to work miracles. They are still ready, if appealed to sincerely and warmly and in a spirit of equity, and not merely nagged at by some harassed minister who has not the least notion what our total war strategy really is. They are willing to make sacrifices, to work miracles of sudden change, for three good reasons. The first is that they truly love their country, with a love that goes so deep and is so tangled in the roots of living that although they want always to act upon it, they do not want to talk about it. The second reason is that they thoroughly dislike the Nazis, and not merely because they see them as avowed enemies of their country but because these swaggering, cheating brutes stand for almost everything they detest: any average young Nazi, not keeping himself under close control, would at any time be thrown out of an English tap-room within twenty minutes of his entrance. There is among our folk a deep moral

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strain that has been outraged by Hitler and his gang. This feeling is always truly expressed by Churchill. And this is one of the things that the Nazi leaders, who are an astonishing mixture of acuteness and obtuseness, do not understand, partly because it comes from a deep-seated sense of a moral order that has to be stifled early in the life of a Nazi. Now we come to the third reason. It applies especially to the younger people, and if we are thinking of the future and not of the immediate present, it is the most important of the three.

It is that the people feel, obscurely for the most part, the need of many great changes. They want to have done with their pre-war life. When they said Good-bye to it, they meant Good-bye. It is this, just as much as it is their love of country and their profound detestation of the Nazis, that made them ready to clear the decks for a truly gigantic war effort. (As we shall see more clearly later, I am referring now to the people, to individuals here, there and everywhere, and not to members of "classes" who think of themselves first as members of "classes," nor to groups conscious of possessing powerful group interests. The distinction is significant.) What the people did not want, from the very moment war was declared, was an existence consisting half of present horrors and semi-sacrifices and petty annoyances, half of pre-war life, or, if you prefer it, a sort of *rationed* pre-war life with distant campaigns and bombings at home added as a makeweight. The failure to see this was perhaps the Chamberlain governments greatest psychological blunder, though as these nodding mandarins had deliberately kept their eyes closed for some time, it was probably too much to expect them, even when the tiger roared at the window,

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suddenly to open those eyes. Otherwise they might have noticed certain signs of impatience and uneasiness flickering across the faces of the people. For there was in many of the people—and, again, especially in the younger folk—a gnawing sense of frustration. They felt like musicians without instruments, painters without palettes and canvases. There was in them, stirring deep down, an urge to re-model and create. Most of them did not know how, when or where to begin. But there it was. And now here was total war. This must mean enormous changes. So the people were ready to welcome them, even though it meant husking off any number of comfortable old habits. The sacrifices might be many, but most of them would be on the surface of life, whereas, beneath that surface, there was something half-awakened that would not know sacrifice but fulfilment. Nobody thought all this out. But it was there all the time, colouring the talk in factories and homes, air raid posts and pubs.

Because he is an artist as well as an old political hand, Churchill never spoke in his early days as prime minister without sensing and voicing this mood of the people. He offered no prizes and rewards, but called for toil and sweat, blood and tears. And these are what the people, for the sake of their commonwealth but not for the sake of the F.B.I, and the banks and the Conservative Central Office, were ready and eager to offer him. But when Churchill was not on his feet but back again with his maps, the official mind took charge once more. The gulf between this official mind and the public mind was deep and wide. Thus, at a time, last summer, when the people were in a mood to tear down fortresses with their bare hands and exult at the sight of their bleeding fingers, when

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they asked to shout their defiance to the wondering world, what did the official mind produce for them? The answer is—and we do not know whether to laugh or to cry as we give it—the *Silent Column*. The wildest writer of satirical farces, a Rabelais of the bureaucracy, could not have bettered this invention. The army of beleaguered free men is there, ready to defend each crossroads to the death; and, to take charge, out totter Justice Shallow and Cousin Silence.

Great chances were missed last summer, and not only by the Nazis. The people waited for more and stronger calls. There arrived instead the German Air Force, which singled out the people for its most murderous attacks. We know what happened. We have seen and heard for ourselves, far more than could ever be compressed into the most generous American tribute. The growing legend of British decadence was shattered. No important or official personage did it. The people did it. If the world looks now with different eyes upon Britain, that is not because our rich men suddenly seem richer, our bank vaults more capacious, our crowns and coronets of a finer gold, our dividends more promising, our official patter smoother than ever, but because the people of Britain, taking most of the threat and burden on their patient shoulders, showed "that cool courage, that resolute action, that high magnanimity and selflessness" which Lewis Mumford notes in his preface. Now, as Whitman reminded us, "everything comes out of the people." Out of cool courage, resolute action, high magnanimity and selflessness, what cannot come? Just as nothing is too good for such people, so there is nothing so good it could not come out of them. And now we have arrived at the theme of this essay.

WHO are the people?

I have already answered this question in a brief parenthesis earlier. But it needs a longer and more considered reply. We are all the people so long as we are "willing to consider ourselves the people. There are persons—and hundreds of them have written me abusive letters during the last nine months—who immediately stiffen when you begin to praise the people or make demands on behalf of the people. They cry: "You are trying to turn the classes against each other." They still make this charge even when not a single word has been spoken about classes, forgetting that the idea of classes may have been only in their heads and not in the speaker's. Such persons are clearly not people. They make it obvious that they cannot be included among the people. But they have not been barred out, they have barred themselves out. Even while we are fighting for our lives—as they are the first to declare—in their view we are not fighting as people but as members of different classes. Secretly they must object to newspaper reporting, which, showing a right instinct, always refers to the victims of any catastrophe simply as "people"—*Seven people were killed, and between twenty and thirty people were injured*, and so forth—and they must be annoyed, and suspect revolutionary tendencies in the Press, because they do not read that one upper-class person was killed and three injured, two members of the middle-class were killed and eight injured, and the rest of the killed and injured belonged to the working classes.

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But the custom is, when reporting a catastrophe, to refer simply to "people." And after all this war is a catastrophe. Indeed, we have been living in one for some time now. We are, you might say, now in a train accident, a burning building, a shipwreck, a volcanic eruption, an earthquake, and are therefore fully entitled to think of ourselves and be described simply as "people." For what we have in common that is now threatened obviously dwarfs nearly to disappearing point our social differences.

If, however, you cannot or will not recognise this fact, if you persist in thinking of yourself primarily as a member of a class, then you are not one of the people. And you take the consequences. For example, you cannot be praised for your conduct so far in this war. The people can: we have already established that. But not the classes behaving as classes. On the whole the classes as such have behaved rather badly, being more concerned about their own particular rights and privileges than about the extent and force of our war effort. On the other hand, it is the people and not the classes who have so magnificently manned our air raid services. Go to the nearest A.R.P. post and you find there people, not members of classes. The bombs kill people, not classes. Nevertheless, they may blow classes clean away.

In the same way, if your mind is dominated by the interests of a small group, which must float no matter who sinks, then you cannot be reckoned among the people. You will indeed be lucky if you are not included among the enemies of the people. Inside this crust of yours, which incidentally prevents you from having a lot of fun, somewhere there is, of course, one of the people. If you were caught in a bad raid or a burning dance hall, the crust would soon crack and

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drop off, and then you would be just one of the people, as you would if you were landed in hospital, where they have a sensible habit of thinking simply in terms of sick people and not in terms of classes and group interests.

In all crises we all tend to be just people. And we are living in a crisis now. We shall still be living in a crisis after the war is over. It may last for years and years. It is a much worse crisis than ordinary thoughtless folk imagine but, on the other hand, I fancy it is not quite as bad as many intellectuals, giving themselves up to an orgy of grand gloomy generalising, would have us believe it is. We are not the hollow monsters we moderns, that peer and gibber out of these chronicles of decline and fall. Our chief trouble is not that we have gone completely rotten inside but that we have suddenly achieved too much power. The typical figure of our time is a fairly nice but rather tight youth who is negligently driving, down a road he does not know, an enormous fast car. There have always been men like Hitler, Goering and Goebbels, but up to now they have not had the German armoured divisions, bombing planes and broadcasting system to play with. Our responsibility lags behind our inventiveness, and our chief problem is—how to catch up. It is necessary to say so much in order to sustain our drooping and almost suicidal intellectuals. But as in this country for every single intellectual with an ivory tower there are a thousand unteachables with ivory heads, it is even more necessary to point out that the crisis is very real and may last a long time. Therefore we shall do well not to subdue the healthy instinct to become people. There are alternatives, as we shall see but they are unpleasant. And not one of them will bring back the year 1910. There is no nice cosy

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world waiting for us to return to it, as the nice cosy country houses used to wait for the return of the lean brown sahibs. This is the great English genteel illusion, which produces so many growls not only at Hitler and Mussolini but also at these subversive mischief-making fellows nearer home. It is not a question of hanging on a year or two until the pleasant days and the huntin' an' shootin' an' fishin' come back again. It is a question of reorganising our lives or finding ourselves in one hellish show after another, with some very grim hunting and shooting probably before us.

There are few men and women in this country who if they had to spend the night in a large air raid shelter would insist upon being regarded and treated as something different from and better than people. It would not occur to most of us to demand more than our share of safe space because our uncle was a baronet or our father-in-law held a controlling interest in five chemical works. We would, as they say, "muck in." Now the whole country is really one gigantic air raid shelter. And admittedly, if we are all to be people in it and nothing more nor less, there will have to be a good deal of "mucking in." If you are passionately attached to little superiorities and signs of privilege, then you will certainly feel a sense of loss; though, as we shall see later, you will really gain more than you have lost.

Yes, we are all the people so long as we are willing to consider ourselves the people. That is the only test. Nothing could be fairer or simpler. But does this really answer the question, Who are the people? It does if we *remember* that this "we" can never be taken abstractly, for "we" are always real human beings. The people are real human beings. If you prick them,

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they bleed. They have fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, sweethearts, wives, and children. They swing between fear and hope. They have strange dreams. They hunger for happiness. They all have names and faces. They are not some cross-section of abstract human stuff. They are in the round and alive. Everything comes out of them. And because they are real human beings, they can help and be helped, they can love and be loved.

3

THE people are not the masses. These are two different conceptions. Indeed, they are opposed. One rejects the other. When I say to myself "the people," I have a confused but lively vision of a hundred faces and a hundred voices, as if a picture by old Breughel had suddenly come to life. In short, I think of persons. But when I say to myself "the masses," I see at once a grey featureless horde, and hear nothing but a muttering and murmuring. I do not think of persons. The masses are not real human beings. They have been de-humanised. The supreme mystery does not flower in them as it does in us, who always feel ourselves separated from them. They are rough bundles of instincts and appetites. They are units of man-power. After using them: muscles and collecting their pennies, you can consider and gratify their immediate needs; but you cannot love them. They are not real persons.

It has been said more than once that this conception of the masses dominates our world, that the masters among us who gain their ends and achieve enormous power are those who understand about the masses. There is some truth in this. Hitler, the vindictive doss-house dreamer, thinks and acts always in terms of the masses and never for a moment in terms of the people. He is essentially a manipulator of the masses. This has been his strength but will prove his fatal weakness. The people always have roots, whereas the masses are rootless; moving almost like sleep-walkers everywhere, anywhere, in and out of their giant factories or mechanical places of amusement. So

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Hitler, thinking always of masses and not of people, uproots folk by the hundred thousand and moves them like pieces on a chessboard. This used to be thought tyranny's most bitter and unforgivable proof of power. It will be thought so still by real people. But it may be possible so to uproot, condition and dehumanise people that they do indeed turn into masses, half-way towards robots. They are easier then to drill and dragoon, to keep toiling at the bench, to cram into cattle trucks on their way to a battle they do not understand; but though they can be made to do, they cannot be made to care about what they do; there is a growing rot and hollowness inside; and then either such folk die of sheer inanition of the spirit, or they suddenly come to life again—and rebel.

We have been searching for years now for that division of the modern world that cuts the deepest. Once it was socialism against capitalism; then it was Fascism against Communism; lately it has been totalitarianism against democracy. A welcome change from these is the division between those who think in terms of the masses and those who think in terms of the people. I believe it cuts very deep indeed. It also explains why all manner of folk, not excluding so many of the communists, cannot help showing a certain sympathy with Hitler and his Nazis. The reason is that they share with Hitler and his Nazis this conception of the masses. They all see themselves separated from and standing out against this background of the grey, featureless horde. Persons not in their immediate circle are not real to them. (Nothing hustles you into crime quicker than this.) This is much more sinister than ordinary old-fashioned conservatism, which thinks in terms of classes. The aristocrat thinks that members of the lower orders are

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real enough but believes that a narrower way of life has been pre-ordained for them, that a birth certificate is a superior kind of passport, ration book and season ticket. The new conservatism, which is not really conserving anything but is aggressively on the make, has largely ceased to bother about classes but is already flirting with these newer *notions of* masters and the masses. If and when it really opposes Hitler, that is chiefly because it quarrels with that particular gang. (And may, of course, in some instances be genuinely revolted by the methods of these Munich beerhall toughs.) But it has gone a long way up the same road.

The Nazi mixture tells us a good deal about all these persons who cannot see the people but only the masses. *It* is a mixture of big business and mass production, of slick largescale advertising and showmanship, of militarism and government by fear. This brings together much that is characteristic of our modern world, which probably explains in part why we have been told—by some Americans who ought to be ashamed of themselves—that Nazism and its like are "on the wave of the future." Big business and mass production methods, unscrupulous large-scale advertising and showmanship, all backed by machine-guns and the political police, can produce some astonishing results. It is possible that already from some wide territories the people are vanishing and their place is being taken by the rootless and mindless masses.

Certainly, the opposing conception, that of the people, all with characters, minds and souls of their own, is recognised to be the enemy not only by Nazi and Fascist bosses and their quislings but also by all the men in the inner ring of this new conservatism. The newspaper that tries to make its readers more intelligent is replaced by the newspaper that flatters the idiocy

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of its readers. The smart boys of the advertising world are kept busy. The film is used as a drug. Whatever keeps the public mind alert and critical is frowned upon, and whatever lulls and stupefies it is encouraged. Attention is steered away from politics. Clever rebels are offered good contracts to be sensible. There are elaborate plans to make everybody more comfortable—*Why move from your arm-chair?* is the slogan—but never to make everybody more *alive*. I am not referring now to wartime but to the last ten years, during which this sinister conception of the masses has captured so many shrewd, unscrupulous and melancholy minds.

Nobody talks more about the masses than the communists. Many communists believe that if you take the masses and add communism, you will in the end produce people. (Others hate the people.) A prominent Left paper in New York is called *The New Masses*. But the best place in which to see these new masses, straight from the conditioning plant, is in Germany. If this is not what is meant, then the title should be changed to something that does not suggest the de-humanising process. But even the writers who contribute to *The New Masses* and all the speakers everywhere who talk about the masses do not really see themselves as members of the masses. We never belong to the masses. We are always distinct, separate and fairly far removed. Once any person has for us achieved a name, a face, a voice, a real individuality, then he or she is no longer merely one of the masses. You cannot fall in love with, marry, or give birth to one of the masses. You can employ or drill the masses; you can help to feed and entertain them; you can take their money and, at a pinch, give some of it back to them; but you cannot ever really know or love the masses, otherwise they would stop being masses and

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turn into people. And no artist of any kind ever believes in the masses. That is why wherever this conception of the masses dominates the scene, no matter how much public money may be spent on encouraging the arts, true art soon begins to wither. And more than art begins to wither, because there is less knowledge and less love.

You can still think of yourself as one of the people even though thousands have to carry out your orders. If this were impossible, then real democracy, as some foolishly imagine, would be impossible. But though the greatest of his time, and with immense power conferred upon him, Abraham Lincoln knew himself to be one of the people. His link with the people belonged to a higher order of reality than the difference in power or ability between himself and the rest of them. Unless that is understood, democracy cannot be understood. But when we say good-bye to democracy and the people and come to this idea of the masses, from whom we ourselves are always separated, the link having snapped, then if we rule we rule by fear. The threat of punishment, with a little occasional tickling, keeps the masses going. Something can be done, through showmanship and hocus-pocus, for everybody cannot be arrested and beaten up, but behind the processions and shows and radio speeches and grand awards of prizes is the rule of fear. Take your choice—a nice little medal or a beating with rubber truncheons. But though the medals often give out, the rubber truncheons will last. It is, in the end, fear that is doing the trick.

The masters of fear, whether they go round swaggering in Nazi uniforms or are dyspeptics pressing buttons in private offices, are of course themselves fearful. There is some constant terror moving them. All this hurried

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de-humanising, this hasty separating of oneself from the mass, this insistence that one's fellow-creatures are contemptible and base, this fatal snapping of the link, are the tactics of unhappy beings secretly hunted and haunted. Merely to begin thinking and acting in terms of the masses, instead of in terms of the people, is a kind of cornered rat's revenge. The very atmosphere such persons live in is heavy with suspicion and threats of vengeance. We are moving towards the padded end of the madhouse. Hitler screaming into the microphone while his drilled blackguards wait to applaud is merely the most obvious example. He seems to have been specially created to be an obvious example, a bad tendency enlarged to the monstrous. Nazism itself is a similar warning exaggeration, like a cautionary picture in a child's reading book. But to imagine that the whole evil things begins and ends there is the height of folly. It is all round us, sneering and snarling and plotting. Wherever the idea of the people has been rejected for this other idea of the masses, where the link with real persons has been broken and there is only a stony stare at the featureless and nameless hordes, the evil lives, and knowledge and love begin to fade.

4

IT IS true that most of the English who stiffen and stutter angrily when you appeal to them on behalf of the people, with whom they do not associate themselves, would reject at once this conception of masters and masses. They would refer you to the classes, pointing out that these still exist, and that we ought to see that the various classes in our complex society get along with each other. The answer to this is that even before the war this division into classes, which they innocently regard almost as part of some natural law, had lost nearly all political and economic (though not purely social) reality. Much of this class business is merely an ornamental cover. It bears much the same relation to the basic realities of modern life that fancy dress does to ordinary clothes. Thus, a rich man, by parting with some of his wealth, may receive a title, being made a member of some noble order of chivalry. But nobody believes that he really is a member of some noble order of chivalry and is now prepared to fulfil some strange medieval obligation. What is real in this transaction is the fact that he is rich, and the further fact that his political party need some of his money. Just as we have had *Hamlet* in modern dress, so much of this honouring and decorating and promoting is simply "Political Jobbery" in antique dress. The very people who uphold the division into classes are always the first to protest that it is not a division based on wealth, that all this fancy-work is not merely a screen between us and the plain fact that there are rich and poor. Yet I have just read

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a report, representing an inquiry conducted by an Advanced Tutorial Class during the winter of 1939-40, which after much careful research into all the differences between classes came to the conclusion that the fundamental difference, relegating all others to a poor secondary part, was one of wealth. The rest, gilding these inequalities, is hardly more than ornament and fancy-dress.

What gives a specious air of reality to this carnival parade is the fact that we still live nominally under the Crown. But if necessary the Crown could be preserved, as a symbol of executive power, while all the other remains of feudalism were swept away. The real aristocratic system went some time ago, and what we have had since is a plutocratic system pretending to be an aristocratic one, a dishonest and dangerous masquerade, worse than an open and unabashed plutocracy. It is worse because here we have the man with the strong acquisitive instinct not only grabbing the cash and the power that goes with it but also at the same time escaping criticism by taking advantage of the English weakness for tradition. The man who was notorious in some North-country industrial city for paying poor wages and driving hard bargains suddenly vanishes, and then up pops another good old English gentleman in Hampshire or Hereford, to sit under the Union Jack (as if he owned it) on Tory platforms and to put in his plea for "our good old English ways." But there has been worse to follow. The Nineteenth Century system, in which the new industrial rich were gradually promoted into being members of the born-to-rule class, has broken down. Since the last war, power has become more and more centralised. There came into existence an inner ring, in which big business and high finance and Tory politics over-

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lapped each other and formed a strong central network of vested interests. (See *Tory M.P.* for details of this overlapping.) This meant that the classes were losing their fundamental reality. They were now little more than a fa?ade. The real movement was towards a structure of masters and masses. Just as a modern picture theatre, designed to look like an Egyptian temple, is really an affair of steel girders and concrete, so this new English society, though it still talked about tradition and the classes, had a real if hidden structure of a very different kind. Thus it was even more of a fake than the old cotton-spinner-into-squire-and-laird society.

The air of sterility and decay that English public life had during the years before the war, encouraging the Fascists to believe that we were a decadent people, was largely due to the fact that too many of the English still thought in terms of classes. They were loitering in a *cul de sac*. They saw and thought and felt nothing new, so that nothing new came out of them. They lived in a world that did not want prophets and poets but only gossip-writers. Titles had a cash value. Trivialities were encouraged. There was no wickedness but only a vast suffocating silliness. Meanwhile, just round the corner from this dead end, the armed masses of the totalitarian states went tramping along their grim highroad, often with many an encouraging word and some fresh supplies from members of our own inner ring, who had no illusions about this lingering charade of the classes, and knew a highroad when they saw it. But cutting across this highroad, running away from the *cul de sac*, was the beginning of a great avenue, as yet unpaved and little more than a wide green track. Most people said that it did not exist. If there was anything there, then it was merely

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what remained of an old road. When the war came, it seemed as if there might be some vague sort of signpost pointing down that avenue. Then, in the light of exploding bombs and flares and fires, we read that signpost: *To the Real Democracy: the Peoples Way.*

The quick irritation, the sudden anger, of many persons here when they are asked to drop the masquerade of the classes, to make a fresh start simply as people, comes from a deep secret uneasiness that existed before the war and has not left them since. The fact is, that modern man is troubled by a kind of conscience that did not worry his great-grandparents. It is the social conscience. The effect is as if your inner health were bound to the health of your community. You cannot be happy long when you are surrounded by people who are obviously unhappy. This is something new for ordinary citizens—and not saints—to feel. There was a time when the sight of other people's unhappiness was supposed to add, by way of piquant contrast, to your own felicity, just as in classical times it was considered an agreeable spectacle to watch, safely from the shore, the amusing antics of sailors trying to escape from a doomed ship. This seems quite monstrous to most of us now. But the real difference between us and our forefathers is not so much in our ethics or even in our strictly personal sensitiveness, for our ancestors were often delicate-minded where we are now casual and almost brutal, but seems to lie in the fact that willy-nilly we are bound up with our community, as if we had developed mysterious nerve-ends outside ourselves, were like wireless receivers that had suddenly and greatly enlarged their range of reception.

This social conscience can be throttled, as it has been throttled by those who think in terms of the masses.

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Possibly in most of these persons there is some raging deep-seated conflict in which the voice of the social conscience, even if it was there, could not make itself heard. Alternatively—and this is the way to a reasonably happy fulfilment—you can listen to and be guided by this social conscience, using it almost like a compass to steer by. But these people of ours who show such quick irritation and are instantly unreasonable do not either murder or obey their social consciences. They listen uneasily to them one minute and the next minute are trying to stifle them. Many of them, it must be admitted, were like that before the war, but now, having seen terrible and wonderful things, have begun to listen steadily. Others, though far fewer, have let the war harden them, though rarely the actual war itself, the shared shelter, the bursting bombs, the raging fires, but only the idea of the war. (It is significant that practically all the most illiberal, ungenerous and abusive letters I have had have come from persons living comparatively comfortable lives in safe areas.) It may be that with these people the war has brought nothing but an added fear, with no compensating experiences, bringing the bitter total of fear to the level at which it hardens the heart and poisons the mind.

It was a grave weakness in our pre-war society that it had in it so many fairly influential persons, retired from this or pensioned off from that, whose circumstances were such that they could feel little urge to remodel and create, could hope for little, but were always being pricked and hounded by fear. The dividends might so easily dwindle; the pension might be cut down or lost altogether; every decent little domestic plan was threatened; the whole quietly genteel style of life, which may have been the result

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of much heroic self-sacrifice, was menaced; and the green little island, which had seemed a shining Avalon perhaps throughout years of deserts or jungles, was now seen to be bristling with mantraps and mines. And the fear of these folk, never leaving their minds untroubled for long, was expertly harvested at every election. Nothing was easier than to panic them at the right moment. It could easily be proved to them that the expenditure of a few millions a year on any social service would be ruinous, just as it has been easy to prove to them that we can now well afford to spend fourteen millions a day on our war effort. Add to these political and economic fears, strange social fears, to which the women of the group made an ample contribution, and you have a deep bog of strain and sterility and unhappiness. And all the time, most of them being at heart decent folk, there were these whisperings and hauntings of that new thing, the social conscience, which had to be silenced by much hasty and loud denouncing of this and that, peppered with legends about men who were unemployed because they didn't want work and women who preferred to live in vermin-ridden tenements. These people were nearly as sad a sight as the poor folk they so often slandered.

We may as well make up our minds about this, that unless we happen to be oddities, biological "sports," we cannot look at life as our grandfathers did. And not only because life has changed, but also because human beings have changed. There is no ignoring these links of sympathy with the community. We can no longer construct strictly private worlds of satisfaction, like diving bells. We can try, as the people do who deliberately murder their social consciences. **But such** people take the consequences. They have not

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recovered the freedom of their ancestors. They are haunted by their crime. Something fresh, good, imaginative, creative, dies in them. These stopped nerve-ends have their revenge. The Nazi is the type, hurrying into some hell of cheating and cruelty, sacrificing one good thing after another to achieve a power that withers the moment after it has arrived. He is there as a warning. At this moment we have to fight him in the skies above Britain, on all the neighbouring seas, on one front after another.. But we shall have to go on fighting him long after this war is over. He may have to be fought round every corner. He may have to be fought even in our own hearts and minds.

I am certain of this, that from now on, either we shall deliberately refuse to listen to that inner voice, cutting off a flow of sympathy and thereby narrowing our outlook and hardening our hearts, or we shall have to be guided by it, allowing it to order our lives. There will no longer be that half-way house, looking so comfortable from outside but so mysteriously uneasy once you are lodged in it. That voice is now far more urgent than it was. The war has made the difference. Many of the people suffered before the war, but their suffering since has been much greater. And remember what I quoted, from those American observers, at the beginning of this book. Not only had our people behaved magnificently, they declared, but by their behaviour had redeemed democracy and restored a faith for living. We must either reject or accept that redemption and faith. There is no mere patting them on the back. Either you deny or you affirm. It is this dilemma that is making some of our more comfortable folks so irritable, so easily angered now. They cannot find it in their hearts to deny, and

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yet they hate to accept and affirm. You can watch their minds squirming and wriggling, trying to find a way out. There is no way out.

Moreover, you have no right to use the real Britain to fight a war, and then announce you are doing it to preserve a quite different and much less real Britain. This is cheating. Not long ago, in a broadcast to the United States, I thanked the American author, Mrs. Alice Duer Miller, for her poem about England, "The White Cliffs," which has had an enormous success in the United States and may easily have done much for our cause over there. But after saying how grateful we all were to Mrs. Miller, I pointed out that the England described in her poem is not the England most of us know, is only a tiny part of the real England, and is that part of England and English life which has been described far too often. We read about—

A light blue carpet on the stair
And tall young footmen everywhere,
Tall young men with English faces
Standing rigidly in their places,
Rows and rows of them stiff and staid
In powder and breeches and bright gold braid. . . .

and of portraits of Generals and Admirals and Lord-Lieutenants of Shires, and then of "the family place in Devon," of Lady Jean and the panelled upper galleries, of a world of parties in Mayfair, Oxford and Cambridge, and of life in remote country houses. It is the England the films are so fond of showing us: the old Hall, the hunt breakfast, the hunt ball, the villagers touching their caps, all the old bag of tricks. But this, I pointed out, is not the England that is fighting this war. It could not fight it a couple of days. This is a

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war of machines and of the men who make and drive those machines. They do not manufacture fifteen-inch guns or Spitfires down at the old family place in Devon. And most of the young men who are manning those guns or flying those Spitfires have never seen an old family place in Devon, and would not know what to do if they suddenly found themselves surrounded by "tall young footmen everywhere." It is industrial England that is fighting this war, just as it was industrial England, those scores of gloomy towns half-buried in thick smoke, with their long dreary streets of little houses, that produced most of the wealth which enabled this other fancy little England to have its fun and games. I do not blame an American author in search of the quaint and picturesque for not pointing this out, for obviously this Christmas-card-film-studio England serves her turn better than the hard-working, manufacturing, coal-mining, textile-making, shipbuilding England. But there is no longer the shred of an excuse for any English persons to make this mistake. They must know by this time that the very core, the hard centre, of world resistance to the Nazis is found in this real England, this democratic industrial England, which never saw a row of footmen in its life and does not want to see one. What it does want to see is a reasonable chance of security and a healthy civilised existence. And, once and for all, an end of the stupid and dangerous notion that this England, which does the work, is only a sort of dirty annexe to some other and much more important England.

To sum up then. It is democratic industrial Britain that is fighting this war. The conventional view that there is an almost static Britain consisting of "classes" has lost touch with reality. Even before the war this

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facade of traditional classes covered a movement towards the centralising of power, chiefly into the hands of men who were already being influenced by the more modern and more sinister conception of "the masses." The war makes it imperative that this should be understood. One of the most dangerous illusions of the thoughtless is that even if we cannot come out of the war with the same social and economic structure we had when we entered the war, by some miracle this structure (presumably with every flaw and crack it had before) can be restored to us with the return of peace. Finally, whether we like it or not, our own happiness is bound up now with the fate of our community, because we have developed a social conscience. If we choose to ignore the promptings of this conscience—and the war makes this harder, demanding a very deliberate effort—then we are beginning to tread the same road as the very persons we are now lighting, with the same psychological results. But either we must stifle this inner voice or be guided by it. This means in effect that either we separate ourselves from the people and finally join their enemies, or, if under the stress and comradeship of war we have not already done so, we join the ranks of the people. And remember: *We are all the people so long as we are willing to consider ourselves the people.*

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WE ARE now within sight of democracy. Some people would like to have done with this word. They feel that it is associated with too much twaddle and humbug. But this objection seems to me to be outweighed by one great advantage that the word has, and that is that it is as a democracy that we were challenged and reviled by the Fascists and Nazis. And we were abused not because of our undoubted weaknesses but because of our good qualities. It was not what was wrong with our democracy but what was right with it that aroused the contempt or anger of these swaggering toughs. They hated our freedom of speech. It annoyed them to think we could still speak our minds and argue, and print more or less what we pleased. Our citizens may have been neither free nor equal, but the fact that there were at times suggestions of freedom and equality in the democratic countries infuriated these totalitarians. The tolerance and humour and easy public spirit of democracy were gall and wormwood to them. They announced that democracy was dead, then mobilised and let loose their forces of destruction, only to bring democracy to life. Therefore, let us keep this term, honoured as it is by the hate of Hitler and Mussolini.

There is another reason why we should retain it. Since this war began, all manner of official personages have told us over and over again that we are fighting for democracy. It is true that these personages have never given any sign of having any democratic convictions themselves, and we suspect many of them

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of having their tongues in their cheeks. But if it is democracy we want, then these personages cannot very well turn round and denounce us for insisting upon having what we are told by them we are fighting for. (I say they cannot, but actually some of them have already accomplished this feat.) So let it be democracy. Not, of course, as it is understood in Tory after-dinner oratory, but the thing itself. Undoubtedly we *are* fighting for it: at the worst to preserve what bit of it we-now possess; and at the best, to bring a real and vital democracy into existence.

For nearly twenty years we have been told, not by the professional politicians, who like to keep the old trademarks, but by our political theorists, that the term *democracy* has ceased to mean anything and that it was time we stopped using it. But now, it seems to me, it is one of the very few political terms that *do* mean anything. You can see a future for it. Unlike nearly every other familiar term, its content now seems much larger than it did two or three years ago. This is chiefly because now the people are coming to life, and this coming to life of the people means democracy. It is what the men who have spoken sincerely of democracy at any time have always had in their mind's eye, this vision of the awakening people. Without the people in this mood, there can be no real democracy.

One of the commonest illusions, always encouraged by interested parties, is that Britain has always steadily drawn nearer and nearer to the democratic ideal. There is a confusion in many minds between the ideal of democracy and the general scale of living. Because there has been a fairly universal rise in the scale of living, largely due to new cheap methods of mass production, it does not follow at all that we have

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come nearer and nearer to democracy (The **same rise** on the lowest levels may be seen in countries that **have** turned their backs on democracy.) In my view, the Britain of 1912 was more democratic than the Britain of 1932. And every succeeding year up to the outbreak of war saw us retreating farther and farther away from democracy. It was, of course, mainly the fault of the people themselves. Too few of them took a steady and critical interest in public affairs. Too many allowed themselves to be gulled by any nonsense, chiefly appearing in newspapers that could no longer be regarded as serious organs of opinion but were simply a mixture of propaganda sheets and comic turns. (It is typical of this period that the very newspaper that told its readers every day that there would be no war was at the same time making the most elaborate arrangements in secret to cope with war conditions.) It was possible to form an inner ring, centralising power, because public opinion was weak and uncritical. Let it be admitted, once and for all, that you cannot have democratic government long, cannot make a democracy function properly, if you have an apathetic and passive people. If I thought for a moment that the people were still in this mood, fighting the war only to get back to the drivel and dog-racing, willing to let any gang run the country for them, I would not be writing these pages. It is my conviction that, under the stress and challenge of war, **the** people have left their lethargy behind for good, which forms the basis of this essay.

The change is here, and is observed where it should be first observed, in the very atmosphere of the country. Nothing gives a better clue to the mood of a largely inarticulate people than their behaviour at those times when they are relaxed and most themselves, and

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that is why the reactions of audiences at popular entertainments should never be despised. For the past year I have noticed that these reactions have been sharply democratic. Blimps and diehards and "Old School Tie" enthusiasts are among the favourite targets of the more satirical comics. Mincing accents and haughty manners have been roared at. Anything that sets a distance between its owner and the people themselves has been drawing down their hearty derision. Everything that emphasizes the inequalities of our society is being either laughed at or denounced with some heat. Some of this is, of course, directly due to the pressure of war itself. If you are all in danger of being blown to bits, small social superiorities begin to look very foolish. Moreover, the war effort itself, though the sacrifices it demands are by no means equal, does tend to do a good deal of ironing out of fancy inequalities, and will clearly do much more very soon. Not that the war effort automatically makes us more democratic. On the contrary, unless we keep ourselves sharply aware and critical of what is happening, it may flatten out most of what remains of the class system only to land us into the deep bog of that masters-and-masses system which is much more up-to-date and even worse. That is why the people must insist upon maintaining an independent spirit, freely contributing to what they must consider *their* war; and that is why any repression of that spirit, especially on the part of ministers and officials who are not themselves reactionary but only harassed and impatient, may be so dangerous. But so far, most of the evidence—and I consider my experience as valuable as the next man's in helping me to assess that evidence—shows that the independent spirit is there, that long hours and short rations have not yet dulled the public

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mind, and that though official policies may be undemocratic, the atmosphere of the places in which those policies have to be carried out is democratic enough, and is being charged with the electricity of an awakening people.

I make no apology for these references to "atmosphere." It is the change in the atmosphere that must come first. Many people, who like to think of themselves as being hard-headed, do not understand this. They imagine that all this kind of talk is a waste of time, that what is wanted, right from the first, is a list of definite proposals for measures of reform. But such proposals and measures should come last, not first. Men have been tabulating them for years, making speeches about them, bombarding members of Parliament with them, circularising all public men with lists of them. Yet nothing has happened. Why? Because there was no political reality in these suggested reforms. There was no real force behind them. They existed in a mid-air of speculation. What was wrong was that there had been no change in the atmosphere. The public was thinking about something else. And the politicians knew that, and so did not care tuppence about these proposals, which were merely so many notions set down on paper by well-meaning but obscure persons. They did not represent fifty votes.

We often hear people cry: "Never mind all this writing and talking, get on and *do* something." The answer to that is, that at the stage at which most people in this country have arrived, writing for them and talking at them is the best kind of action. It is a change of ideas and mental attitudes they primarily need. Already, as I have said, the atmosphere is changing. But even within that changing atmosphere,

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many people cling, probably with despair, to familiar ideas and try to maintain customary attitudes. Others let go, but acquire no new ideas and attitudes, and consequently feel bewildered, frustrated, lost. And what all these stand in need of, at the moment, is not a tidy-minded reformer or a radical lawyer, but a sympathetic social philosopher. The background has to be thoroughly cleared. Why did the League of Nations fail so disastrously? There are two answers. The* first is, that in some things, matters of some importance demanding international co-operation, it did not fail, but did some excellent work. The second is, that when it came to its main task, the League failed because the background had never been sufficiently cleared. It could not be international in an atmosphere of nationalism. Almost all its delegates went with the object of defeating its primary purpose. They went to see what they could get and not what they could give. You cannot expect old-fashioned diplomats to defeat old-fashioned diplomacy. The League could succeed with international labour or hygienic problems because the men appointed to attend its sessions on these problems were genuinely international in their outlook. But nobody ought to have been foolish enough to imagine that Foreign Offices could be international in their outlook. If they were, they would not be called Foreign Offices.

All those people who press for the establishment of the machinery of reform before the atmosphere, the ideas and attitudes of people have been changed, should remember the League. Its machinery was complicated enough to satisfy the most exacting of such minds. No idle talk and nonsense there. It was the very pattern of all that these people ask to be achieved at once, a supreme example of getting on

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and doing something. But it was done far too early. The mistakes of Geneva were merely the reflections of the mistakes of London, Paris, Rome, Berlin, and all the other capitals. There were plenty of well-meaning people in all these cities, people who felt that the establishment of the League meant the beginning of a new international order. But it was not these people who went to Geneva, or even sent their own representatives there. They were being represented in the League of Nations Union but not in the League of Nations. Now if the spirit of the former had really dominated the public mind everywhere, then the League would have succeeded. But the machinery was brought into existence before there was time to change the atmosphere, the ideas and attitudes of the people and their representatives, with the result that the machinery was wrecked.

A further mistake is to suppose that changing the atmosphere and ideas and clearing the background are easy, whereas setting up the machinery of reform in the foreground is hard, tough, a man's job. The fact is, once the first has been thoroughly done, the second is easy. We are good with machinery. We have plenty of tidy legal minds. Carrying a measure of reform through both Houses until at last the law itself is changed, this can involve a long hard struggle, as some members of Parliament are very fond of pointing out to us. What these members forget is that from beginning to end of such a struggle there has probably been no change in the background, either in the House or outside it, no new ideas and attitudes, no sudden ferment in the public mind. Their experience dates from a time when the general tendency was *not to do anything*. That time has gone for ever. We have now arrived at a period when, whether you like it or not,

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something must be done. The question now is—In what direction shall we move?

But to answer that question properly, to set up the right machinery of reform in the foreground, we must first, I repeat, clear the background. We must decide, first, not how to get what we want, but what we want and why we want it. The man who cries "Never mind all this writing and talking, get on and *do something*" (so long as he is referring to something farther removed than our immediate war effort), must be asked to be patient, for there must of necessity be more writing and talking, in order that we can understand what it is we want and why we want it.

SOMETIMES in dealing with an apparently complicated subject it is necessary to be so simple as to risk being laughed at. This is the risk I propose to take now. I suggest that we make up our minds about two things, and that once we have made up our minds, we do not let go. There may be over-simplification, just as there is in a poster when it is compared with an elaborate drawing; but at a time when so many people are feeling bewildered, frustrated, lost, the sight of a poster or two may do more for them than the offer of any number of exquisitely detailed drawings.

The first poster must answer the question, What is Britain? This question is still being wrongly answered, and it is these wrong answers that make it difficult to clear the background, to change so many people's ideas and attitudes. Thus, there are still many people who see this country as a sum total of properties. It is, of course, an old-fashioned view, a relic indeed of feudalism, but it still exists. On this view, it follows that the only people really fit to govern are the people who own property (the old phrase "a stake in the country" tells the whole story), and the more property you own, the bigger your slice, then the more right you have to say how the country should be governed. On the other hand, if you own nothing, then you are here only on sufferance, almost as a kind of ghost. The millions who work in our industrial cities, and own nothing but a few sticks of furniture and a dinner pail, are here on sufferance, are ghosts who unfortunately must be fed and housed, but fortunately are also

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able to work and increase wealth. Not that it is held, by the people who still cling to this view, that the ordinary folk do in fact increase wealth. They think—and you can hear them express their thoughts even now—that these folk are lucky to be employed, to be allowed a small share of this wealth; and even to this day it is a familiar grumble that these folk, here on sufferance because they own nothing, nearly always tend to be *ungrateful*. Much has been done for them, by the real people, real because they do in fact own property, but they still remain ungrateful. You would imagine that they were so many surly immigrants.

It is true that this outrageous view does not receive wide publicity during this time of total war, when enormous sacrifices are being demanded of all these common folk. Clearly this is no time to remind them that this country is really an assemblage of properties that do not belong to them. Otherwise they might turn round and ask what it is they are being asked to fight for, why they should be called upon to toil and suffer. Also it is not a view held by any politician of consequence, or at least not in public. But there can be no doubt whatever that a great many supporters of these politicians, and of the Tory interest wherever it may be found, do still hold this view, and consistently act upon it. These are the people who could not see that Nazi Germany was a threat to Britain from the beginning, and so often did not hesitate to encourage the Nazis, because they did not feel that actual property was being threatened, so that the real Britain was not in any danger. When at last they realised that this actual Britain was in danger, they were ready to spend in its defence vast sums that would have seemed to them sheer delirium if they had been demanded before to end unemployment,

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bad housing, faulty educational and medical services, and the like. But now the real Britain, *their* Britain, was in danger.

The second wrong answer, which has more political force behind it, tells us that Britain is really a gigantic joint-stock company, a super-trading concern, which exists to show a financial profit. This is the view, I suspect, of most of the newer Conservative types, the politician who is also the business man, the Chamber of Commerce product, the Chamberlains and their kind. Let us export more than we import, let us earn more than we spend, let us show a favourable balance, and then the golden age begins anew. With this conception many of the Labour men do not quarrel, except that they demand a bit more profit-sharing and rather shorter hours of work. To these minds the great wizard is finance, notwithstanding the plain fact that it is a wizardry that refuses to work. What is supremely real and vital to them are figures, although the theory on which these figures are based may be nonsense. To them a statesman is somebody between a company promoter and a chartered accountant who happens to have an assured public manner. Of real insight into any national or international situation they have not a glimmer, as the last ten years have amply proved. Their trouble is that their values are all wrong. They are not fit to rule a country because they do not know what a country is nor how and why it should be governed. They are all sound and hard-headed, which really means that they take for granted values and theories that less sound and hard-headed persons know very well to be false. A mad corporal like Hitler, not merely because he has no scruples but also because he really thinks and acts for himself, can make rings round them. We can only hope that after we have

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found our way out of this hell, to which they helped to send us, we shall never see their like again.

There is a third answer, which we shall never hear given in public. It is that Britain is simply another territory in which there exist large docile masses, ready to work all day and be mechanically and profitably entertained each night, and also clever men with no illusions, Nazi leaders in mufti and with no saluting nonsense about them, who can soon find their places as masters of the masses. No, that answer will never be given in public. It will always be dressed up as something else, just as the men who could give it will always be dressed up as something else, but all the same it exists, snugly tucked away at the back of some bold modern minds, who know very well that most of what is said now on political platforms or in club smoke-rooms is twaddle. And unless we answer the question properly ourselves, although we may never hear this third answer, nevertheless it is the answer we shall get. In short, we shall go from bad to worse.

The right answer is simple enough. Britain is not a sum total of properties, is not a super-trading concern, is not merely another territory where the masses exist: Britain is the home of the British people. Yes, those people whose praises have lately gone round the world, they live in Britain. Before it is anything else, this country is their home. Whatever can be done to make it a better home for the people is right, and whatever makes it a worse one is wrong. It is, at the outset, as simple as that. If this country is our home, then first and foremost it must be regarded and treated as our home. So far as there is private ownership of property, then that ownership must be seen not as a source of privilege and power but as a trust. Nothing

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in this communal home should be sacrificed to making money that would not be sacrificed in an individual home. No man has the right to make a dirty mess of the place for his private gain. No man or group of men has the right to control whatever may be essential to the health and happiness of people in this home.

Too simple? Possibly. Nevertheless, on this basis you can make a beginning. At the same time you can clear out a great deal of old rubbish, all clinging round those older and false conceptions of the country; and you can free yourself for ever from the menace of that new and still more dangerous conception, which would regard Britain as territory occupied by so many millions of masses. Once you announce firmly "This is, first, our home" and make it plain that you speak as one of the people, not a member of this group or that gang, then you are beginning to clear the background. You can ask of any policy or measure: "Does this serve the best interests of the people?" It is a very rough-and-ready test, leading to much argument and demanding greater definition, but it *is* a test. Go through the last ten years of our political history, murmuring this test, and notice how one policy after another, one measure after another, disastrously fails to pass it.

There is another test, which all sensible and affectionate women apply to what is happening in their homes, that comes into operation when we consider this country the home of the people. We now ask: "Does this improve the quality of life here?" Although long hours of work at very low wages will certainly tend to keep the quality of life very low, it does not follow that all you have to do in order to heighten that quality is to work as little as possible for as much as you can possibly get. It has been one of the chief

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mistakes of Labour that, bound as it has been to Trades Unionism, it has thought more of hours and wages than it has of the quality of life. Every demand made by Labour might be granted and even then many of the people concerned would still be living a narrow and colourless existence, pent up in dingy streets, robbed of the country and yet not enjoying an urban civilisation. You do not begin living by finding yourself with more to spend on dope. What is needed is a gay, richer, nobler way of life. This is what all sensible and affectionate women instinctively feel about the life that goes on in their own homes. This is what we should all feel about the life that goes on in our great home, Britain.

When men offer to serve us, in some representative and governing capacity, we should take careful note of their personalities and interests, and ask ourselves if these are men who truly wish the people well and are concerned about a finer quality of life. Do they feel in their hearts that this whole wide country is their home and the home of the people? These tests may be very simple, but how many would pass them? Bench after bench in the House of Commons would be emptied. City Council chambers would begin to wear a vacant look. One public office after another would be without a holder. A host of new men would be needed. Do such men exist? I believe they do, and that the war is proving that they do, but a way would have to be cleared for them. For between us and the creation of a vital democracy there are certain obstacles, and the greatest of these obstacles exist in the minds of the people. This does not mean that they are not real. On the contrary, it means that they are very real indeed. And we cannot advance our argument without first examining these obstacles.

NEARLY all the familiar arguments against democracy are fallacious. Thus, you do not score a point against democracy by declaring, with perfect truth, that men are very different in character and ability. This is really a point in democracy's favour. It is in a democratic and roughly equalitarian society that these differences in character and ability are most easily observed and recognised, for the simple reason that in such a society there are no artificial divisions between men, giving them spurious appearances of being different in character and ability but actually flattening our real differences. It is obvious, for example, that an army that draws its officers only from a small class has not the same chance of recognising and making the best use of innate military talent that an army has when it recruits its officers from the whole people. One army has artificially limited its field of choice, and not for strictly military reasons, whereas the other one has no such limitation and can employ the best available talent. In the same way, a business firm that promotes to a directorship only men who were educated at expensive public schools is really declaring that a social background is more important than business ability. The narrower the source of power and the less chance there is of making good use of these differences in character and ability. A despot, as history often shows us, will promote men out of pure whim. A Hitler will keep round him, in positions of power, men whose only claim is that they did him a few good turns when he

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was nothing more than a minor beerhall orator. Amorous empresses have handed half their empires to the lovers who pleased them most. In aristocratic or oligarchic systems, men are given power just because they are the sons of their fathers or have made fortunate marriages. In a plutocracy, such as we have lately been, it is imagined that the possession of wealth, which may have been acquired through luck or low cunning, gives a man a special claim to be considered better at government than the less wealthy citizen. What is agreed in a true democracy is that men differ widely in character and ability and that being men and not cattle or horses, there is no knowing from where the best character and the best ability will spring.

Further, the removal of artificial divisions throws into relief these essential differences and makes them easier to recognise. Cut away the frills and furbelows and you begin to see men and women for what they are. Ordinary men and women, who are mostly born hero-worshippers, have not the least desire to pretend they are as good as the great ones, but these great ones must be truly great and not merely dressed for the part, trading on "the guinea stamp." This is not to say that the crowd, acting as a crowd, is always right. It is just as likely to be wrong. But so, except in some technical and expert matter, is the small select set, which has the further disadvantage that it can more easily lose almost all contact with reality, quietly go mad, than the crowd can. Again, men and women of strong character and very marked ability, though they may be autocratic in their own particular field, nearly always carry about with them a certain roughly democratic atmosphere. They do not need to stalk about on stilts. The persons who do need stilts, and

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therefore turn into the bitterest opponents of democracy, are those whose sense of their own dignity and importance is out of proportion to their character and ability, and who are therefore terrified that they may be asked to justify themselves. Even more deadly as enemies of democracy, the really dangerous men, are those who have enormous ambition but no easily recognisable talent, who feel they are much better than everybody in the neighbourhood, for whom they have a sharp contempt, but do not know how to prove their superiority in any established manner; and so they finally turn to intrigue, treachery, bullying and murder, in the true Nazi fashion, and always in the anti-democratic interest. These are the haters of popular laughter. Their careers are frequently their revenge.

It is not among those familiar old arguments that we shall find the real obstacles in the way of democracy. We must look for something new. These obstacles have been produced by our own time, all well within this century. We have watched them grow. It will be convenient to distinguish three of them, produced respectively by the decay of religious belief, by the recent organisation of authority, and by the development of modern large-scale industry.

The decay of religious belief is dangerous for democracy because it makes the individual man or woman seem less significant. If we have all immortal souls and are all the children of God, then we are all real people. We are members of one vast family. We may not work or play together, but probably we worship together. It is impossible to believe that men have immortal souls and at the same time see people as masses. Behind this conception of the masses is a complete disbelief in immortality, the soul, spirit,

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deity. And *murder* becomes *liquidation*^ so smooth **and** easy, slipping so quietly off the tongue. What is it but the obliteration of creatures without significance, without dignity, without any call upon our sympathy? The early democrats, in Britain, France, America, even when not religious men, were always insisting upon the fundamental dignity of the human being. For the last fifty years or so, this dignity has been most savagely dive-bombed, first by the physical sciences and- then more recently by psychology and psycho-analysis. First, faith was riddled by reason, and then reason itself was riddled by a kind, of super-reason, apparently only to be found among psycho-analysts. You were a fool, if you imagined yourself a rational man, to pray to God, then afterwards it turned out you were a fool even to imagine yourself a rational man.

The result has been that human life has appeared to be worth much less than it used to be. Somebody has recently pointed out that Macbeth's terrible speech about To-morrow and To-morrow has supplied titles to about a dozen contemporary novelists. No wonder. Many of them were writing about people who were drawing near to that last desperate mood of Macbeth's. It is not only that other people's lives seemed less important but that their own seemed less important. Apparently you were waiting your turn to be executed, for that is about all materialism has to offer. Any event in your life that seemed to have about it a significance more profound than the satisfaction of your appetites was merely leading you into childish illusion. The prophets and the poets and the great mad lovers were merely clinical cases. We could cure them now so that they would have a fair chance of becoming successful stockbrokers or salesmen. **The**

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results of this materialism were unexpected, for instead of behaving as cautiously as elderly physicians, carefully nibbling at the little slice of life that was all they had, people behaved with recklessness born of despair, and the world became far more violent than it had ever been before. There was plenty of physical courage about, but something of a slump in moral courage. The gunmen and the storm troopers arrived, to be astonishingly soon taken for granted.

A word of warning here. When I say that the decay of religious belief is one of the obstacles to democracy, I do not assert that the converse is true, that a religious revival would necessarily be friendly to democracy. It is true that a healthy society should have a religious basis, in the broadest sense of that term, but many of us feel that it is more than doubtful if any of the creeds of the existing Churches can be patched up to serve as that basis. I am not quarrelling with the man who declares that any new order must be Christian, so long as he does not propose to revive the Inquisition or to restore to clericalism all the privileges it so often misused. But I for one do not feel that packed churches and chapels, prayers at every hour, universal loud *Te Deums* and *Hallelujahs*, would necessarily lead us straight to a vital and creative democracy. They might make those of us who were enthusiastically converted simply indifferent to many of our present problems, but the fact remains that they would not solve most of those problems. And whether our condition would be better or worse is a question outside the scope of this essay.

Again, we must make a sharp distinction between this *decay* of religious belief and the militant crusading spirit of the freethinker. The latter is no longer a familiar type, and hardly belongs to the present era.

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Whether right or wrong in his conclusions, there was nothing decadent or defeatist about him. He was nearly always both an optimist and a fighter, and often as ardent and selfless in his attempts to deny God as the saints have been to affirm and praise Him. With men of this temper, who nearly always combined a passion for radical reform with their freethinking, a vital democracy was always possible, and they would have been among its most public-spirited citizens. But, they were crusaders, and the contemporary millions affected by the decay of religious belief are anything but crusaders. It is not that they have even sharply denied God. They are simply no longer interested in the subject. It is as if one part of their minds were to let. They no longer thought and felt at this depth. They had no relation to the larger meaning and purpose of things. They were here to-day and gone to-morrow. They could neither use faith as a crutch nor reason as a weapon.

"A man's a man for a' that" is a profoundly democratic statement, and really points to a fundamental dignity and significance in the human being. Take away this dignity, reduce this significance, and the statement begins to look like a bit of empty rhetoric. If a man in himself seems a poor thing, lost in a darkness from which the last gleam of divinity has vanished, then it is useless to indicate his essential manhood. The pitiful creature can have no rights. He is nothing until he is *made* into something. For power and glory must still come from somewhere. Therefore let them come from the State, the Party, the Leader. But the Leader is a man, the Party is a collection of men, and the State has been created by man, so why should they be raised above this miserable collapse of the individual man? For two reasons, I

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think, operating on two different levels. The first is that awe and worship and magic cannot be suddenly eliminated from the human outlook. If God vanishes, then a Hitler receives fantastic honours that could not have been paid to him in an earlier and saner age. The second reason is that the State, the Party, the Leader, are discovered to possess enormous power. God may or may not be able to reward or punish, but it is certain that these can, and the evidence is clear and unmistakable. You defy their authority at your peril—and for what? A mere dying whisper of an inner voice, which the learned professor down the road can explain away in ten minutes.

This brings us to the second obstacle, the organisation of authority in the modern world. Against bombing planes, tanks and armoured cars there is not much that the ordinary man can do. The time of the barricades has gone. Persons in power now can control huge areas and hostile millions of inhabitants with a comparatively small but swift striking force. A few bombing planes in the neighbourhood and a few armoured vehicles, bristling with machine-guns, to patrol the streets, will probably be sufficient to keep most cities quiet. Add to these a highly organised mobile police, making full use of wireless, and the chances of insurrection are very small. (Unless, of course, as may happen later in this war, insurrection is supported by another heavily armed authority.) Once the reins of centralised power are firmly grasped these days, rebellion becomes very difficult and dangerous indeed. It is true that these reins might easily be seized by another small group, familiar with the technique of modern authority, but it is unlikely that this small group will represent the ordinary folk.

We know how important propaganda is in this new

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world. It is conducted chiefly through the radio and the Press. Neither of these, under modern conditions, lends itself to hasty and popular improvisation. We have heard of these "freedom stations" in Germany and elsewhere, but it is obvious that their influence is very small. The persons who control the vast national networks of radio have enormous power. They can state their case and distort their opponents' case day after day, night after night. They can, with ease, colour and sway the minds of the listening millions. There can be no doubt that the development of broadcasting has made the task of the dictators much easier. It strengthens the hand of the man in power. A great democrat like Roosevelt may make full use of radio, addressing intimately all his people, but just because he is a democrat and must allow free speech to his opponents, he cannot use the radio with such devastating effect as an unscrupulous dictator like Hitler. Let us agree that under a firmly established democratic system, broadcasting, which properly handled can be a strong educative influence, might be a powerful ally of democracy. But unfortunately this means that first the democrats must be in power, and while they are trying to obtain that power, the radio can be used against them with terrible effect. Thus, before the war the B.B.C., because it maintained a more or less open forum, was democratic in its influence, but now" in war-time, when because of its speedy and ubiquitous news service, it is more important than ever, it is under the control of the Ministry of Information, which in its turn is controlled by the War Cabinet, with the result that the air is filled with explanations and defences of the Government's policies and is rarely used for criticism of those policies. Now that it is urgently necessary that both the spirit and forms of

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democracy should be preserved, broadcasting is no longer an ally.

As some of us know from personal experience, there is now more freedom of expression in the Press than on the air. But as the dictator countries have shown us, nothing is easier than to control the Press. Moreover, there are other kinds of control besides direct government control. To produce a modern national daily paper is a vast and expensive enterprise. You need a large organisation and a great deal of capital. The men who supply this capital and build up these organisations are more likely to be the enemies than the friends of democracy. They are themselves men who have tasted the sweets of power. (Before the dictators arrived on the world scene, perhaps the best examples of megalomania were to be found among wealthy newspaper proprietors.) Newspaper editors are fond of writing with passion about the freedom of the Press, but by this they mean only freedom from direct government control and not the indirect government control that can be exercised through their proprietors. Nothing is said to readers about forbidden topics and "black lists." Other indirect control can be exercised by the very wealthy advertisers, whose concerted action has been known to have changed the policy of a newspaper.

When I was a boy in a provincial city, we all read the local daily paper, and hardly thought of reading a paper published in London. We knew everybody connected with these local papers, and knew what they were up to. But now, although excellent provincial dailies still exist, the tendency is to read the national newspapers, which may be published simultaneously in two or three different centres. The people who read them do not know the people who write them; they

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have probably never heard the editor's name, and hardly give the distant mysterious proprietor a thought; they have no idea what is going on behind the scenes. At election times, or during any political crisis (of which Munich is a good example), these national newspapers can sway public opinion—if a mass of prejudice and fear is worth calling opinion—in the most unscrupulous and shocking fashion. And the success of this last-minute stampeding is one of the things that have made some thoughtful persons despair of democracy. What those persons forget is that these impudent campaigns are not themselves an essential part of democracy, and that their success does not necessarily point to a fatal flaw in democracy itself, but rather to one of the great obstacles that a true democracy will have to overcome.

Probably these newspaper campaigns would not be so successful if their readers were not tending to become less public-spirited and alert-minded, and this brings us to the third great obstacle, the development of modern large-scale industry. Now it is true that this industry has raised the scale of living for ordinary folk. What were once supreme luxuries, only possible to the wealthy, are now to be had by nearly everybody. Nor does this apply only to superficial things. Machines and mass production have brought cheap books to the student, have given him a good light to read them by, a comfortable chair to sit in, perhaps a quiet room of his own. They have made travel and a knowledge of the world far more accessible to the people. They have lightened the time-old toil of housewives. They have distributed innumerable little comforts and luxuries. They have narrowed the gap between the life of the wealthy and the life of the humble. It may seem that in many ways this modern

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large-scale industry has at last made a thoroughly democratic society possible. Yet actually it has created a very serious twofold obstacle to the establishment of a thoroughly democratic society.

In the first place, modern large-scale industry is generally so organised that real directive power is in comparatively few hands. When I first visited some typical mass production factories, I was astonished to find that these gigantic enterprises could be run by a tiny group of experts. These experts, the masters of the machines, understood exactly what was happening everywhere, for of course the whole elaborate system was their creation. They had worked on the blue-prints, had seen the machinery installed, had organised all the business of belts and conveyors. These fellows usually appeared to be having the time of their lives. But between them and the thousands of workpeople there was a very wide gulf. The workpeople were the servants of the machines. If a more ingenious machine should be contrived, eliminating some of the human attention, then a group of workers would vanish. In many of the large mass production factories these crowds of workers seem all more or less on the same level. There are hardly any overseers or foremen. Whole gigantic floors crowded with machines and workpeople, would seem to look after themselves, once the system has been properly set in motion. In the older factories that I remember, though they were uglier, noisier and less efficient, there were easy gradations of rank and plenty of human control, and not this sharp division between the few people who are the masters of the machines and the crowds of folk who are the servants of the machines.

I am not now considering and criticising the sympathies of the management in these modern

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factories. I am thinking only of the work itself. That sharp division between the masters and the servants of the machines has little to do with capitalism and exploitation. If the State ran the factory, that division would still be there. It has nothing to do with the prevailing economic system. The usual suggested reforms would not touch this difference. And it is easy to see why this development in industrial method should be reckoned a serious obstacle to a vital democracy. The dream of a more or less equal society seems to vanish at once in the atmosphere of these great modern factories. That division is too obvious. Here is a type of organisation far less democratic than even an army. I do not care how many games and comic operas all these employees play together in their canteens, sports grounds and club rooms, there is no getting rid of that fundamental distinction. Either you are one of the fortunate few who are outside the machine and capable of making changes in it, or you are one of the great mass of ordinary workpeople who are inside the machine, a part of it, a cog or lever. This difference is so great that you feel the two sets of people ought to belong to two different races. And though these workpeople may be much better off than their grandparents were in the old, comfortless, dirty mills, you cannot help feeling that they are really much farther from the controlling centre of things, far more distant from the heart and brain of the industry, than their grandparents were; and so they have in working hours a still narrower outlook. As I remarked in *English Journey*: "They (the workers in mass production factories) are not bullied or even nagged at; their very weaknesses are elaborately taken into account; their comfort is considered; but between the time when they 'clock in' and 'clock out' their

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central human dignity, which entitles them under our democratic system to a vote as good as anybody else's, has no real existence, except in that dream of life which occupies their minds as their fingers fly to do their one mysterious little task."

There you have it. But not all of it, for this is, I repeat, a twofold obstacle. Not only does the type of organisation itself seem undemocratic, but it is likely that its effect upon the workpeople themselves will make democracy harder to create. People so employed, year in and year out, are not likely to be independent, critical, public-spirited citizens, always ready to assert themselves. They are more likely to accept everything that is done for them, a bit more comfort here, a little more luxury and amusement there, and then to let it go at that. They are, in fact, in danger of being turned into "masses." Leading a robot-like existence for seven or eight hours a day clearly has its dangers. Their amusements and recreations soon seem almost as mechanised and standardised as their work. Hollywood and the cheap Press do not provide antidotes but only change the flavouring of the poison. Their very dreams come from another mass production factory.

Already we have noticed a certain disturbing passiveness. Even when feeling annoyed and frustrated, too many people now only ask why *something* isn't being done, why "*they*" don't make a change, why there isn't a leader. Even in this mood it does not occur to such people that there is anything they can do themselves and that they might begin with a bit of direct action. They are too used to being a cog or lever in a gigantic mysterious machine, whose workings they have never attempted to understand. The same passive quality creeps into their hours of recreation.

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They begin to prefer the form of entertainment that makes least demands on their energy and attention, so that film and radio are far more popular with them than the theatre or books. They begin to lose that eager but critical perception which is an essential part of real living. They lose even the desire to create. They are robbed of flavour and edge as characters. They go soft. Soon, all too soon, they are only so much wet clay in the hands of the dangerous men who-think of themselves as masters and of the people as mere masses. The tide has turned and is swiftly running away from any hope of a triumphant democracy.

These three obstacles, produced by the decay of religious belief, by the recent organisation of authority, by the development of modern large-scale industry, are indeed very formidable. The fact that they are so much a part of our own time, and have not been deliberately introduced into our history but have been brought in by the vast drift of things that is beyond our comprehension, only makes them more formidable. They were already, in the years before this war, sufficient to make many thinkers lose all hope of any future for democracy. The choice, we were told, was only between one totalitarian form or another, Moscow or Berlin. Those of us who never accepted this view were dismissed as sentimentalists. The war changed that. Yet the war has done nothing to make these three obstacles look any smaller. Certainly the decay of religious belief has been checked in some quarters. But more than that would be necessary to dispose of the obstacle. There would have to be a sudden and very widespread conversion to some religious belief, re-affirming everywhere the dignity and value of the human soul; and of that there are few signs. A

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handful of books demanding a Christian society, all written by men who were believers long before the war, proves nothing.

The other two obstacles even loom larger since the war. Governing authority is even more strongly centralised, and nowhere appears less ruthless and repressive. And we may be sure that modern large-scale industry, now turning, almost with a sigh of relief, to the production of such things as aircraft and munitions, will proceed along the same lines of development, and is even now immensely swelling the ranks of the machine servants. And nobody, inside the Government or out of it, seems to be in the least concerned that while our authorities are pushing new folk by the hundred thousand into the mass production factories, they are doing nothing whatever to see that these people have access to all possible antidotes to whatever may be poisonous in this kind of life. The aircraft and the guns these people produce may be turned against the Nazis, but in this new kind of life there may be the fatal seeds of Nazism itself. It would be absurd then to pretend that we have not these two obstacles before us now in war-time, for indeed they are more formidable than ever. Perhaps it is this grim fact, and not a feeling that the war itself may end in a stalemate, that gives so many thoughtful people a depressed and almost hopeless air. The roads that lie open they do not want to take, and the one they would like to take now looks to them permanently blocked. And clearly I for one do not agree with them, or this book would end here.

8

DURING the preceding section, while discussing the three obstacles, I was thinking far more in terms of the whole modern world than in terms of Britain alone. This is important because, as I shall presently show, Britain as usual cannot be considered typical of the modern world. But before concentrating on the differences between us and other peoples, we must first face a criticism that is now often brought against any suggested reforms that begin at home.

There are some people who feel so strongly that the whole world must now be regarded as an indivisible political and economic unit that they are impatient at the idea of any reform of Britain that does not at the same time reform the whole world. But this seems to me to turn our interdependence itself into an obstacle. We cannot begin everywhere at once, bringing two thousand million people immediately into line. We may agree, as I do, with Mr. H. G. Wells in believing that we should all demand certain world reforms. He has suggested three as a necessary minimum, and it would be difficult to improve upon them. First, international control of the air, so that in future no dictator with his own gigantic bombing force can blackmail the world. Secondly, international control of world resources, which must be removed from a private atmosphere of greed and squabbling and be dealt with in a disinterested scientific spirit. Thirdly, we should press for the universal acceptance of certain basic Rights of Man, on the lines of those laid down by Lord Sankey's Committee. I hope any reader who is

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meeting these three proposals for the first time will pause here to give them most earnest consideration.

But too many people, fixing their gaze upon national rivalries, make the mistake of not seeing that reform like charity begins at home. The evils of militant nationalism were fully demonstrated during the last war, and after the war it was felt everywhere that the world had had enough of them. Hence the League of Nations. Yet in spite of all that good will and earnest desire for improvement, the world went from bad to worse. Why? Because there was no radical change at home. Because little good could come out of Geneva if London, Paris, Rome, Berlin remained as they were. The palace of international co-operation and friendship was built without foundations. Of what use are international conferences and pacts if each delegate is representing a narrow national interest and nothing more? How can the people themselves gain if nobody from first to last is thinking about them?

This is the weakness, as some of us pointed out at the very first, of Federal Union. For it all depends on what you are going to federate. Nobody of intelligence and good will doubts for a moment that a genuine federation of peoples would bring a new and better world within sight. But first the peoples have to be released in order to federate. They have to be truly represented. Sectional interests have to be swept aside. There has to be some racket-busting. There has to be a revolutionary change in the very atmosphere in which even the preliminary negotiations are conducted. During the twenty years between wars all public affairs went round and round a vicious circle, into which the good will and earnest desire for improvement, generated by the tragedy of the last war, never entered at all.

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Therefore it is no use saying, as the school of thought so ably represented by Lord Davies seems to say, that you can clear up things abroad without first making radical changes at home. That has been tried already, and we know with what result. Only a little time ago, with this disastrous war roaring all round him, Lord Derby, in a well-reported and applauded public speech, announced that the competition for markets in the world would be fiercer than ever after this war, so that our young men must be preparing themselves. It is clear that the presence in any authority of a mind that has learned so little from all our disasters makes any talk of world reform without drastic reform at home so much idle chatter. So long as such unteachable minds have any power to represent us, we are obviously bound for ever to the wheel of senseless competition, slumps, bitter national rivalries, dreadful wars. It is perhaps understandable, though certainly not admirable, that no public man, seeing the bombs burst and the bodies dragged out of ruined homes, should have cried to the stricken people: "I have been terribly wrong. Forgive me." But to be so brazenly unteachable among the very ruins, to flaunt the very cause of disaster, this is indeed hard to forgive. If it is only age and habit, then let age and habit bury themselves in decent seclusion, leaving us to mend our tragic lives as best we can.

Let us then, while advocating a basic minimum of world reform, begin at home, if necessary in our own parish. If we cannot co-operate to any purpose in the nearest township, if we allow the people we know to be unrepresented and to feel frustrated, we have a poor chance of helping to settle the affairs of folk in Chile or Manchukuo. And I feel that many of these people who want to begin their reforms a long way from

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home, who do not mind a revolution in another hemisphere, are in their heart of hearts uneasy as to what might be expected of them here at home. Nevertheless it is at home that we must begin.

There is another reason why we in Britain shall do well to concentrate on Britain. Next to downright fear, the greatest ally of Hitler and his kind is despair. Indeed, one of the keenest analysts of Fascism, Peter Druecker, has told us that behind the wide acceptance of this evil doctrine in Central Europe (and probably elsewhere) is simply the complete despair of the people at finding any way out without resorting to this black magic. Such people found themselves faced with what Druecker calls "the new demons," economic depression, permanent unemployment, war, and though they were aware of the irrationality and inconsistency of Fascism, they submitted to it because they thought it might exorcise these demons. Once this is understood, it can readily be seen how faulty our propaganda is, idiotically assuming as it does that these Central Europeans are also seeing the world through the windows of the Carlton Club, and that they, like our conservative statesmen, will regard Fascism merely as a temporary outbreak of violence in an ordered world. - What has been forgotten by our half-hearted propagandists is this despair behind Fascism, a despair to which the Carlton Club can offer nothing.

What would cut away this prop of Fascism is renewed faith and hope. If it could be clearly shown that in one great country a way out, towards freedom and equality, had been discovered, then men everywhere would be hopeful again. Although pre-war Britain was admired by nobody—a fact our official propagandists would do well to bear in mind—Britain still

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retained some of her old prestige, and the conduct of the British people during the war has aroused wonder and admiration throughout the world. And if these were the people who found a way out, who began to banish the demons, who started to move towards and not away from freedom and equality, who proved that democracy was not ending but just beginning, then people everywhere would take heart and try to order their own affairs in the same fashion. And it is then that federation would begin to mean something, that the true foundations of international co-operation could be laid down, that a world order might be established. But start with these things, without making radical changes here at home, and you are merely writing your reforms in smoke in the sky.

Here a word about the war. It is true that we are fighting for our very lives. (And please notice that it is not the critics of our Government who forget this fact, but rather its ultra-loyal, thick-and-thin supporters, who are always dangerously near complacency.) We have to make a gigantic war effort. But this does not mean that no changes are possible, for obviously there have to be changes all the time, in order to make the effort possible. And what so far from first to last has weakened and hindered our war effort has not been the demand for a more truly democratic order here but that bull-headed conservatism which is so reluctant to make any changes. It is the professional patriots who go about shouting "There's a war on" who have done more than anybody else to hinder our war effort and to narrow most dangerously our official conception of the strategy of total war. Time after time we have made mistakes in one department after another, often seriously damaging our chances, simply because we insisted upon clinging

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to the pre-war structure of things, terrified of letting go and striking out afresh. It is this secret reluctance of narrow official minds on our side that has made the German appear, by contrast, what he never appeared to be before, namely, boldly enterprising and inventive. No doubt we are at a disadvantage because we are fighting men who are thoroughly unscrupulous and evil, and who can therefore use weapons we would disdain to use, but we are also at a disadvantage because these are men who can afford to judge every situation on its merits and are not secretly trying to preserve the lives they led back in August 1939. Some changes are clearly impossible while we are still at war, but many others, bringing us nearer to a true and vital democracy, would instantly enlarge and vitalise our war effort, turn us into far more dangerous antagonists, and shorten the war itself. So long as it can be proved that there would be popular support for certain immediate reforms, the war is the worst possible excuse for not bringing about those reforms.

We in Britain then can begin with Britain (and indeed could do nothing else, even if we wished to), and can do it with all the more confidence because if we begin to succeed we shall give men everywhere new faith and hope, thereby removing the despair that is one of the props of Fascism, and, while the war is with us, are more likely by these means to increase our total war effort and end the conflict. In times as grim as these, when men are tried hard, when a failure of the general will would prove disastrous, a government that hopes to succeed can only do so by going one way or the other, either by forcing the people (as Hitler does) or by trusting them. Anything between the two, any policy of mere nagging and worrying and pretending, is bound to fail. And the

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argument of this book is that not only can the people be trusted, but that out of them, and out of them alone, can come victory in war and the still greater victories of the peace. Moreover, the only alternative from now on to this real democracy is merely some other kind of Fascism, with different names and different uniforms and probably a different facade. It is about as sensible to imagine that we are fighting to restore something that was already far gone in decay before the war began as it would be to imagine we are fighting for George the Third.

We have seen that the three great obstacles in the way of democracy are no smaller, and indeed are probably much larger, since the war began. On the other hand, these three obstacles were discussed more in terms of the modern world in general than in terms of Britain alone, and I suggested that here Britain cannot be considered typical. Does this mean that for us these three obstacles are rather less formidable than they might be for many other peoples? The answer is that it does. And for this reason alone, though there are others (notably the conduct of the British people throughout the ordeal of the war), it is here in Britain that the genuine new European order can make a beginning. Afterwards, although the obstacles elsewhere might be greater, the sheer force of Britain's example, the lead given by a people whom even an enemy is reluctantly compelled to admire, would more than compensate for this disadvantage. But let us see now why these obstacles are less formidable to us here in Britain.

In the first place, the decay of religious belief has meant much less here than it has elsewhere. There has in fact been less decay. Moreover, what has been least affected here is precisely that part of religious belief

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with which we are chiefly concerned. For the English people, who have never in fact swung from fervent piety to blank despairing materialism, still let their judgments rest on religious values. They are indeed, in the broadest sense of the term, a religious people; It is this that has given them abroad the reputation of being hypocrites, for here even the most cynical government cannot take an action that demands popular approval without pretending that behind that action is a deep moral earnestness. A bare-faced cynicism, appealing to self-interest and shrugging away all other considerations, would be denounced by the people as an outrage. It is this that foreigners, who often note the cynical policy, cannot understand, and therefore assume that the whole nation is hypocritical. They over-rate the intelligent interest of the ordinary English, but at the same time under-rate their deep-seated morality. They do not understand that most of these people are not paying a sharp attention to politics, with one eye fixed on their self-interest, but are dreamily unconcerned, except when they are asked to join in some crusade or other. It is when the issue is so heightened that the crusade motive can be safely introduced that the English people come flocking. This has been realised by all our astutest politicians.

Because there has been no sudden fall from fervent piety and faith into blank despairing materialism, because the English people still unconsciously base their judgments on religious values, there has not been here that sharp decline in the importance of human life. The central human dignity of the individual is still recognised. The popular English eye for character still exists. People here are still seen as people and not as animated types and functions. It

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is this eye for character and the popular insistence upon moral judgments that make the out-and-out class war so impossible to organise in Britain. The point has been well made by Professor John Macmurray: "It is the religious character of the English values which explains the failure of Communist theory to make much impression upon the British working classes. They tend to judge religiously, that is to say, in terms of direct relation between man and man. . . . It is the fundamental importance of those personal or rather inter-personal values for the English which offers such a stubborn resistance to the effort to inculcate a theory, based upon purely economic interests, which ignores them. . . ." Notice that even the famous and typically English discussions as to who is and who is not "a gentleman" never refer to the amount of power possessed by a man but, only to his conduct. The landlady who describes you as "a perfect gentleman" is praising your conduct, your easy courtesy, your indifference to small over-charges, your nice behaviour as a guest.

It follows that such people still recognise the fundamental dignity and significance of the individual. The heartening mystery of the human soul still exists for them. There exists with it a whole vast world of conduct and judgment, the private world of direct relationships, into which the state does not enter. A man is a man whether the official authority has recognised him as such or not. He still exists in his own right. It is realised that he is important to himself. It is also realised, as it is not elsewhere, that individuality and character are more important than function. The official and the uniform and the badge of authority have never meant as much in English life as they have, for example, in Germany, where

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democracy has never yet come within sight. There has not been in Britain yet, just because of this popular survival of religious values, that miserable collapse of the individual man which we noted earlier. There is of course a movement in that direction, for we too are of the modern world, but it has been largely checked by the ordinary folk themselves, whose very indifference to ideas, coupled with their rich intuitive life, has helped them here. Thus it is in the workshop and the pub, where it is still felt that it means something to be a man, where the central human dignity is still recognised, that the way has been kept open for democracy.

This brings us to the second obstacle, the organisation of authority in the modern world. We saw earlier that the collapse of the individual, the feeling that the pitiful creature can have no rights, that he is nothing until he is made into something, meant in fact that all the emphasis would be thrown on the power and glory of the State, the Party, the Leader, whatever it is that exercises authority. But to people who still believe that the individual exists in his own right, that a man's a man, this power of the central authority is robbed of much of its magic. It has not, in fact, taken God's place. A whole world of conduct and values persists outside that official authority. This means that although that authority might be as strongly organised and centralised here as it is elsewhere, the effect could not possibly be the same. There are courts, those of popular and private opinion, where its writs do not run. Even if the power is that of Caesar, the fact remains that Caesar is not yet thought to be God.

Fortunately too for Britain the central authority has not suppressed various large and powerful

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associations that are the first to disappear in a totalitarian state. Among these of course are the trade unions. Although these are still suffering from the action taken against them after the General Strike, their power is still considerable. Some of us have always tended to deplore the direct political influence of trades unionism, on the ground that it is uncreative and really bolsters up the capitalistic system. The trade union official, after years of negotiation, is not easily transformed into a boldly constructive political leader. If he is a member of Parliament (and this type of representation seems as undemocratic as the Tory representation of vested interests), he is apt to regard himself as having "arrived," more or less like the Tory politician who finds himself in the House of Lords, and may do little more than obey routine orders. Most of us have, at some time or other condemned that political machine known as Transport House. But now I for one am glad that it still exists, simply because it is a powerful association, controlling its own Press, that lies outside the central authority.

Moreover, the existence of trades unionism does something to reduce the third obstacle, produced by the development of modern industry. The organisation of so many workpeople into powerful unions, capable of taking immediate action on their behalf, does mean that such workpeople, no matter how wide the gulf between them and the real executives, do not feel powerless and helpless, mere tiny cogs in a vast machine. There still exists a sphere in which they can to some extent assert themselves. They are not yet members of the "masses." They may find themselves dominated by the political machinery of Transport House, but at least this is another kind of machine, capable of resisting if necessary the power of the

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central authority. Another example of a strong association, which has its own Press, is the Co-operative Society, which might use its vast membership, elaborate organisation and considerable wealth in a more boldly creative fashion than it has done up to now. And then there are the various professional associations, some of which, notably the British Medical Association, could if necessary offer stout resistance to any unreasonable and tyrannical government demands, and might prove very useful allies to any democratic movement.

The fact that it is always one of the*first acts of a dictator to suppress or control such associations as these only proves how fortunate we are still to possess such associations. But indeed the part they play in English life is very important, and most outside observers, concentrating too much on our Parliamentary and Cabinet system, nearly always make the mistake of underestimating their influence. The network of them gives a certain democratic toughness to the fabric of English life that is not perceptible to the foreign theorist. They are, as we shall see later, capable of playing an even greater part in the new Britain. Even the average Tory, though he may dislike the trades unions, cannot help respecting these associations, which frequently cut right across all political parties. In a narrow sense, they are nearly always "non-political"; but in a wider sense, many of them can be considered political, for they are capable of influencing political action. Thus, to take an obvious and topical example, an association of medical practitioners might make a strong demand for a basic minimum standard of nutrition and housing, not as part of any political campaign but simply on the ground that doctors cannot maintain the health of

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a community when so many members of it fall below this minimum standard. What might be called "functional" demands of this kind, dictated by professional integrity, would be very difficult to resist by any government.

We have seen already that in the contemporary world the chief instruments of propaganda and persuasion are at the disposal of the central authority. This is true of Britain, where most of the Press and the war-time B.B.C., which can no longer make any pretence of being the open forum it once was, are merely government mouthpieces. Within certain limits, books and pamphlets [can be](#) critical of official policy, but the growing difficulties of production and distribution make this field narrower than it was. And unfortunately the shortage of paper, which could be used unscrupulously by the government as a form of censorship but so far, I think, has not been, makes it difficult for any existing periodical to achieve a larger circulation, and, what is even more serious, makes it quite impossible to produce a new periodical of any importance. [Again, war-time conditions put difficulties in the way of organising large meetings and conferences, although a number of these have taken place. Again, the play and the film, which in normal times might be used as democratic propaganda, have suffered badly from war-time restrictions. Thus, the war, while immensely increasing the power of the central authority, has also done much to take the sting out of the opposition.

But fortunately the network of associations, whether trade and professional or educational and cultural, remains with us. Their continued existence—and in spite of so many adverse conditions they are astonishingly alive—means that people can meet and freely

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exchange ideas and opinions. At these times they are all something more than servants of the machine. They are real citizens. They throw off any resemblance to the featureless folk of the "masses" and turn into real people. The true democratic spirit, which can only exist among real people, is born among them. But that is not all. It so happens that this war, whether those at present in authority like it or not, has to be fought as a citizens' war. There is no way out of that because in order to defend and protect this island, not only against possible invasion but also against all the disasters of aerial bombardment, it has been found necessary to bring into existence a new network of voluntary associations such as the Home Guard, the Observers' Corps, all the A.R.P. and fire-fighting services, and the like. Constantly shared responsibilities, dangers and discomforts have brought the people in these various services very close together and given them a new fellow feeling. There are millions of them meeting regularly, often with plenty of time on their hands and ample opportunity for discussion. This is something new in the life of Britain. And it is of enormous importance.

During the last war it was imagined that the creation of vast new armies, which fought overseas, would profoundly change our life after the war. All these men who had soldiered together, it was thought, would combine after the war. They did nothing of the kind, outside the usual regimental associations and the British Legion, and their combined influence was negligible. We are beginning to hear the same sort of optimistic talk about the service men in this war, but the result will be the same. There is a good reason for this. The man in the services is taken from home, put into uniform, sent away, usually in the company

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of men he did not know in civilian life. At the end of the war he is demobilised, and returns home, a solitary individual, feeling half a stranger, and only too anxious to pick up his civilian life where he dropped it. But the position of the men and women in the new civilian defensive services of this war is very different. They do their soldiering, for a kind of soldiering it is, near home and with their neighbours. They are not yanked into a strange distant life and then, at the end, pushed out of it again. They have not made a sharp break with their old life, which they do not see as something waiting to be picked up again, but have woven the new war-time responsibilities into the fabric of their old life, thereby creating something unique. They are a new type, what might be called the organised militant citizen. And the whole circumstances of their war-time life favour a sharply democratic outlook. Men and women with a gift of leadership now turn up in unexpected places. The new ordeals blast away the old shams. Britain, which in the years immediately before this war was rapidly losing such democratic virtues as it possessed, is now being bombed and burned into democracy.

We have seen then that although these obstacles in the way of democracy exist in Britain as they do elsewhere, certain distinctive features of our thought and society make these obstacles less formidable than they are in most other great countries. Moreover, the war has brought into existence, through the enormous organisation of civilian defence services, a new democratic factor of the utmost importance. To this we must add the fact that our elaborate network of trade, professional, educational and cultural associations shows no sign of being destroyed either by war-time restrictions or by the inertia of the people themselves.

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Here, you may say, are step-ladders that we can place against those obstacles. Does this mean that oil the other side the way is now clear? No, not entirely clear. There are still some traps and pitfalls and awkward patches of fog, in which it is easy to lose the way.

ONE of the worst patches of fog clings to our conception of politics. It is about time, if there is to be a real democracy in this country, that we tried to understand what we mean by "politics." Now, ever since I can remember people have been said to be "going in for" politics. This "going in for" politics never suggested any particular enlargement of the mind and its interests but only a certain definite direction given to a person's activities. Generally you "went in for" politics by joining one of the parties, making yourself useful at the local party headquarters, offering to speak at party meetings, and making yourself familiar with and rather voluble about the party programme and the party gossip. The next stage was to acquire a good platform manner, and after that a good electioneering manner and an easy way with the reporters, and perhaps after that a good committee manner. Finally, the budding politician, now a member, would acquire a good House of Commons manner. The rest might depend on ability, cunning and luck.

There has long been to my mind something very unimpressive about this political progress, just as there is something unimpressive about most of our contemporary political figures, who can rarely live up to the newspaper fuss about them. Most men of mark have a definite contribution of their own to make to their times, and as a rule it is not difficult to discover in them the rare qualities that have enabled them to make that contribution. But most of our politicians

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do not give the impression of possessing any unusual qualities. (There are of course some notable exceptions.) They exhibit neither breadth of knowledge nor depth of insight. There is not even any particular richness of character in them. Compared with the distinguished men of letters, artists, scientists, scholars, engineers that one has known, these men, looming so large in the public mind, mostly seem rather commonplace fellows. It will be said that I, a democrat, can hardly object to ordinary men representing ordinary men. I have no objection at all, but the point is, that these politicians are not ordinary men, although their abilities may be nothing out of the ordinary. What sets them apart from ordinary men is not their ability but their way of life. They have, you see, "gone in for" politics, and having succeeded, they have almost disappeared from ordinary life. What probably makes them seem, at close quarters, even more commonplace as figures than they really are is the mysterious remoteness of their way of life. They themselves are almost shockingly unimpressive, but their mode of living, their detachment, their mystery, are too impressive. And that is probably what is wrong with our politics.

Put it another way. What is wrong with our politics is that political life is thought of as a career. It should never be regarded as a career. In a few exceptional instances, with those rare minds who have a genius for statesmanship, it should be regarded as a vocation. For the rest it should be regarded as an ordinary civic duty. We are all living politics, whether we like it or not. Every hour we are making political statements, whether we are aware of the fact or not. We all adopt political attitudes, whether we know it or not. And a truly democratic state should consist

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of a few real statesmen and several million politically-minded citizens, and not of a thousand politicians and several million sheep. The fact that politics can be regarded as something apart from the ordinary citizen, therefore something to be "gone in for," proves that we have drifted away from the democratic idea.

The real statesman, for whom a political life in the widest sense is truly a vocation, the expression of his genius, will have insight, wisdom, a massive personality. Such men cannot be manufactured. Either they arrive on the scene or they do not. We can leave them out of our calculations. But when we descend a good many pegs to the cleverish, ambitious men who have made a career out of politics, we must begin to ask ourselves whether we really want them, whether they do not do more harm than good. After a time they can neither lead nor truly represent. They cannot lead because they lack the insight, wisdom, and massive personality of the born statesman. They cannot truly represent because they have cut themselves off from the ordinary life of the country and live behind a screen of party activity. These various "good manners," for the platform, the committee, the Press, the House, these men have spent so much time and trouble cultivating, are they really of much value to us, the electorate? A man may rise politically because he becomes a deft old hand at party management, but does that really, from our point of view, make him a better Secretary of that, Minister of this? Is he not being rewarded often at our expense? Is there not a kind of professional *game* of politics, which has its own mysterious rules and technique? And do not skill and success at this game lead to power in real politics, which are no game but an essential part of our lives?

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If the reader doubts this, then let the reader note carefully the present members of the government. We are now in the middle of a most desperate conflict, with the whole country, we are told, battling for its very life. Ordinary political rivalry has been suspended. The nation must be led by its best men, *no matter to what party they belong*. We are asked not to be critical, to be obedient and loyal, to follow our leaders. And all these men, it seems, are our leaders, the pick of the country. But *are* they the pick of the country? Are they not rather a selection, based on party considerations, made almost entirely from a poorish House of Commons, elected six years ago on issues that are dead? If we are not playing games now but are in grim earnest, as we are so often reminded^ then we have a right to know what search was made for the best men, what standards were adopted, what tests were made? If we are making a truly national effort, as we are told over and over again that we are,, then clearly this is a time when we should be governed by the men who have the most knowledge, energy and insight, and it does not follow that such men would want to find their way into Mr. Baldwin's House of Commons back in 1935. It may be objected that these new men may have had no political experience. But is political experience, in this narrow sense, what is now required? Is not this to confuse once more the old political game, which men "went in 'for," with real politics, which more than ever now are our very lives?

Yet another approach. Too much of our politics takes place in an uneasy mid-air of intrigue and bad rhetoric. Probably seventy-five per cent of it would be better brought down to earth to be dealt with sensibly by ordinary sensible people there. The

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remaining twenty-five per cent needs raising, by the mind and will of a true statesman, to a loftier and purer altitude, where there may be born that vision without which the people perish* Most of our political minds miss it either way, for they have neither vision and wisdom nor a sound common-sense notion of large-scale housekeeping. A great deal of political activity is best accomplished not by bad rhetoric, windy platitudes and an artful platform manner, but by the application of a little common-sense* It is indeed nothing but large-scale housekeeping, and there are hundreds of intelligent and energetic women who would make a better job of it than the average political party favourite, whose whole training, such as it is, has been in quite a different direction. What are needed now for nine so-called political jobs out of ten are persons who understand the needs of the people, have some power of organisation, can handle subordinates, and can express themselves clearly and forcibly. There are plenty of such persons, of both sexes, to be found these days, when these very qualifications are demanded of so many executives. The fact that they have not "gone in*for" politics probably only means that they have had time and opportunity to acquire these qualifications. And the people themselves, so far as all these minor political departments are concerned, only ask for good results, and will willingly waive the bad rhetoric, the windy platitudes, and the artful platform manner.

Statesmanship is of course a different matter. It demands great and unusual qualities of mind and character. It may make use of political experience but is not born of it. The statesman is not simply the leading politician, but really a man of another order. There should live in him something of the poet, the

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sage, the prophet. He should reflect and then act greatly. His chief concern should be something that hardly troubles the ordinary politician at all, namely, the quality of life lived by the people. He should comprehend the spiritual forces of his time. He must be a social philosopher in action. Therefore, the breadth and depth of his vision should far outrange all that is commonly known as politics and economics. He should be another Moses in the Wilderness. But the ordinary politician is in the Wilderness without being Moses. It is the wilderness of narrowly political intrigue, gossip, and hocus-pocus. He mistakes Westminster for the world. The quality of life lived by the people is the last thing that concerns him. In his perorations he will make more or less effective use of phrases like "the ideals of democracy," "the freedom and happiness of the people," "the good life," but so far as he knows anything about them, he is more likely to prove an enemy than a friend to all those things of the spirit that might enchant and inspire the people. In all the battles that some of us have fought for those things, we have hardly ever yet found an ally among politicians, many of whom seem to pride themselves on a narrow ignorance. No statesmanship will ever flower out of such a thin and stony soil.

Politics as a career, politics in the uneasy mid-air of bad rhetoric, intrigue and back-slapping, has been the curse of the old false democracy. If there is to be a new democracy, based on the fellowship of the people, then there will have to be a new conception of politics. Political activity must no longer be regarded as a cosy game played behind a screen by some mysterious professionals who have long "gone in for" it. Where it is not a vocation, and only after long service and in a

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few exceptional instances can it be thought of as a vocation, it should be considered an ordinary civic duty, more or less as the civilian defence duties are considered now in war-time. We must put an end, as indeed we are frequently having to do now, to the bad tendency to convert into "political issues" questions that are not really political at all, problems that are best taken clean away from the political platform, to be quietly considered by a few representative citizens assisted by an expert or two. Many of our typical problems are simply problems of effective organisation, and they will not be solved by plunging them into a thick and heated atmosphere of rhetoric, prejudice and passion. Unfortunately, the careerist politician is all too often only at home in this atmosphere, and is apt to feel dwindled and half-naked if he leaves it for the cooler atmosphere of quiet disinterested inquiry. Thus he may have his career at our expense. He and his kind should be replaced by a few real statesmen at the top, persons of genuine insight and vision, by experts of a scientific temper, and by representative citizens, who do not imagine they are doing more than their ordinary duty.

It is generally agreed that during the twenty years between wars the British people began to take less and less interest in politics, with the result that politics began to take less and less interest in them. There was indeed a vicious circle, for as politics became more remote and mysterious so the public cared less about it, and because the public cared less, then politics became still more remote and mysterious, and more and more of the people turned away, and so it went on. The very strange events of 1931, which finally resulted in MacDonald and Baldwin forming a so-called National Government, were about as plain to the

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British people as the choice of a Dalai Lama in Tibet. This National Government fairly encouraged the people, especially the large middle class composed of persons who were neither members of trades unions nor belonged to federations of employers, not to bother their heads with public affairs but to do a bit of gardening and turn on the wireless. "Leave it to us," they said, and sometimes of an evening, after the trowel and fork had been put away, instead of Henry Hall's band their several voices came through on the air, proclaiming "On and on and up and up" or "Safety First" or "Peace in our time." If in any of these innocent bungalows you ventured to suggest that all was not well, that "light thickens and the crow wings home to the rooky wood," you were asked if you thought you knew better than MacDonald and Baldwin and Chamberlain, you the cranky amateur as against the smooth authoritative professionals. And now there are broken glass and bomb splinters from Dusseldorf in those gardens, and there crackles on the wireless the sound of a world in flames.

I cannot believe, and I have much evidence to support me, that ever again will these good folk announce blandly that they care nothing about politics. Never again will they believe that public affairs are none of their business. They have been taught, with bitter thoroughness, that public affairs are people's lives. They are now politically-minded, to the astonishment and dismay of many public men, as they have never been before. They no longer believe in the false security of the suburb. They have seen their bungalows ringed with fire, and have felt the evil invader shaking the very ground. They know now that all the neat little plans they once made for their children's future may be nothing but idle dreams, that

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we have now to find our own way through the future years like hacking a road through a jungle. All this these householders and good citizens have learned, and among the Home Guard or at the air raid post or down in the shelter they have now spent many an hour eagerly and earnestly talking about these things. These were the men and women to whom I broadcast every Sunday night for more than half a year, and I know what their thoughts are for they wrote to me by the thousand to tell me of them. And in this gigantic swing-over from indifference to eager and close attention to political affairs, in these innumerable discussions between men and women of a great civilian army, in the determination that never again shall there be this idle drifting into disaster, the new democracy has been born.

But it cannot grow into the giant it should be unless we realise there can be no turning back and bolstering up the old half-hearted system. This new political consciousness cannot be expressed by a vote given every few years to one of two or three candidates who do not themselves mean anything except to their distant party organisers. Nor do I mean by this that we need electoral reform, though of course we do. The affair goes deeper than that. All these people must not merely, from now on, take a good look at politics but must be themselves *in* politics. If that is not possible, then real democracy is not possible. But of course it is possible. Moreover, it is really the only way out for most of the people. It must be urged not for the sake of any new political system but for the sake of the people themselves. Being awake at last, they must not go to sleep again. If they should slip back once more into the passive mood, they may lose their very souls, for if nothing positively good comes out of this

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war, then, no return to pre-war conditions being possible, something positively evil will come.

Here let me be personal. I am by profession, training and temperament, a man of letters and of the Theatre, and as nothing suffers more during a period of disorder and reconstruction than literature and the Theatre, I more than most men should want to see us all comfortably settled in a new order. Yet if I were offered some magic formula that would instantly and effortlessly solve all our major problems and successfully rebuild our economic and social structure in a flash, I think I would refuse its help. The reason is that I do not want to see the people's lives arranged for them—already there has been far too much of that—but what I do want is to see the people re-creating their own society. The creative effort itself is an essential part of the new life. It is more important that people should be making that effort than that everything should be settled, ordered, comfortable, secure, prosperous. It is, as we have seen already, one of the grave weaknesses of the modern industrial system that it reduces so many people to being nothing more than tiny cogs in a vast mysterious machine. From that may easily come a deep inward decay. People doing robot work are liable to become robots. There falls across all this ingenious activity the terrible shadow of "the masses." We have rejected that conception, are fighting the system that glories in it. We must then, in this country that we have seen as the home of the people, insist that the people are as active and assertive as they are in their own homes, that the new society is not something measured and fitted together for them, but is in great part their own creation. It is here that the feeling of frustration must find release. This is the only way to the real democracy,

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and, I repeat, for most of the people it is the only way out.

But it must be remembered that the politics in which nearly all the people (for there will always be a few who cannot help holding themselves aloof) must take part will differ greatly from the politics that a small minority used to "go in for." Its character will change simply because many will now find themselves *in* it instead of a few going *in for* it. Actually, many of the activities that public-spirited defence workers have been engaged in recently, settling local feeding, billeting, health and fire-fighting problems, belong to the new politics. Many of these organising jobs for the local community are types and patterns of the various pieces of work to be done for reconstruction. In any event, even though the work itself may be very different, exactly the same sensible and communal spirit will be necessary. There will of course inevitably be clashes of opinion. Probably very soon two parties will emerge* for there will always be impatient minds and cautious minds, lovers and haters of change, enemies and friends of tradition; and actually there is much to be said for a two-party system. But this should emerge naturally, growing out of widespread political activity, not distorting every problem before anybody has taken a good look at it, nor turning people into mere cup-final spectators of a professional political game. And the fact that the war has compelled so many people to think hard in terms of their local communal problems, even though those problems may have been created by the war and no longer exist after the war, means that political education on a large scale has begun, and begun in the proper place—at home. And thousands who at one time would have scorned the thought of being politicians may now,

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under this new dispensation, discover that they have turned into political thinkers and doers without noticing the transformation.

It is this gigantic transformation, with all that it implies, that makes the public stammerings and bleatings of reactionary politicians of the old familiar type so pathetic. What gives their utterances so feeble and ineffectual an air, so that we spend fifteen minutes listening to them saying nothing very badly, is a growing conviction they cannot escape that things really are not what they were. They will not trust the people; they dare not force the people; and they have now neither time nor opportunity properly to hoodwink the people. Strange things are happening that they cannot understand. The audience has changed. The old gags that were always good for a round of applause now fall dead from their lips. They keep shouting words like "loyalty" and "tradition" and "heritage," clean overlooking the fact that to youngsters who have grown up in a widening and darkening chaos all such terms mean nothing. They send out secret appeals, hoping for a continued support of that sound conservative statesmanship which looks to most people now like nothing so much as a bomb crater containing a charred bit of red carpet and fragments of gilt chairs. Every public speech they make is a declaration of bankruptcy. And the people, the very people who a few years ago would swallow anything, somehow know, and do not listen, or grin or shrug their shoulders. And so these political performers cannot help feeling like actors who have gone on mouthing and gesticulating long after the play was done, and people have wandered in from the street to see what is the matter. And that indeed is what they are. Their old political comedy is ended.

SOME of our friends, seem to lose themselves in a little patch of fog when they clamp together democracy and the state. Apparently they want at one and the same time a great deal more democracy and a great deal more of the state. Before we decide whether that is possible, we must take care not to confuse the community with the state. They are not at all the same thing. The community consists of living persons, and without it we should merely be so many Robinson Crusoes. Some of us would go so far as to declare that the community is something more than the sum total of the people in it. A community might have a sort of mind or soul of its own, which would explain the strange sudden flowering of genius in ancient Athens, medieval Florence, Elizabethan London. We owe most of our life to the community, and it repays tenfold everything we give it. Again, a person becomes still more of a person by living intimately in and with a community. That is why democracy, which insists upon the individual worth of persons, has never denied but has always affirmed the value of the community.

Now nearly all the hocus-pocus of Fascism, some of which it took over from official Prussian philosophy, is bent on persuading its* victims that the state is the community. We have seen how the trick works. Hitler, we will say, has a complex or phobia about Jews. Having arrived at a position of supreme power, like some mad Oriental despot, he decides that none of his subjects shall intermarry with the Jews, just as

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he might have decided that all bald-headed men should go about on all-fours every alternate Thursday. This monstrous decision is now, by all manner of verbal and quasi-legal flummery, translated into an expression of the will of the state, which is not shown as an organisation for compelling Germans to obey Hitler and his friends, but is said to be a gigantic, mystical super-person in whom all good Germans have their being. First it is proved that you owe everything to the state, without which you are nothing at all, and at the same time it is proved that the dictator himself, by some mystical identification, is really the state. Thus any gangster who moves in and manages to control the army and the secret police is given the sanction of divine authority, and his smiling approval is as necessary to your well-being as sun and air and water. This is impudent cheating on a really magnificent scale.

No matter how much common ownership you think desirable or how much collective action we should take, no matter how many schemes of electoral reform you have in mind to make representation more just and flexible, it seems to me essential that you must not allow yourself to confuse the state, which is one organisation among many and can never be anything else, and the community, which is unique and a living society. It is as dangerous as mistaking a machine for a person. Some enthusiastic reformers write and talk as if just round the corner there was waiting for us a magic state, quite unlike any state that has ever existed. It is as if they believed that the average policeman could suddenly be transformed into an exquisite, wise and gracious hostess. We shall be well advised to take a very sceptical view of these rosy visions of the state of the future. The state is an

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organisation, an instrument, a machine, and will always have the limitations of such things. No matter how it is reformed, it will always tend to be slow, cumbersome, rigid in its workings. Even if it began to recruit the most brilliant and swiftly creative minds, it would still contrive to take the edge off them. All this seems to me inevitable, and any talk of the coming of a fairy-tale state is a mere waste of time. Moreover, by making artful use of this confusion of the state and the community, reactionaries may find it easier to create here some form of Fascism.

The state can never be the perfect expression, in political and economic action, of the community. It will always be necessarily rough-and-ready, and lag behind. It will, in short, behave like the vast cumbersome machine it is. But of course a democratic community can make good use of this machine. It should be regarded neither as something sacred nor as something fundamentally hostile but as the general boss organisation among other organisations. And it should take charge of these organisations when they become so big and important and urgently necessary to the public well-being that they cannot be left to private ownership and control, just as armed forces cannot be left to private control. Again, any enterprise that feels justified in demanding a subsidy from public funds, or that has to be constantly controlled by the authorities, should be taken over by the state. If the state is the organisation of the community in terms of power, which it is, then it should have complete control of power, as it has had for a long time in the obvious case of power by way of armed forces. But it is still possible for individuals to wield economic power so great that they are like commanders of private armies, and it is obvious that the state must

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be able to control them, otherwise they may be able to control the state, which is of course what such individuals often have done. Whatever it may masquerade as, this is really racketeering and brigandage, and the state exists to abolish all such crimes against the community. It is of the essence of democracy that no one person should have enormous power, and clearly this applies to economic as well as political power. To control one and not the other is now seen to be a mockery. ("In America to-day," as a wit over there recently observed, "the rich want liberty and the poor want ham and eggs.") No man, or group of men, has any more right to make hay of two thousand other men's economic life (and social life and personal life), for greed or a whim, than he or his group has to enlist a band of toughs and beat up the neighbourhood. The state exists to restrain such antics.

If capital is still to be regarded as a source of power, then the state Treasury should be the only big capitalist in the community, just as the state generals and admirals are the only generals and admirals in the community. The state alone should *make* money. Everybody else should earn it, and this money should be spending money, giving its possessor power over beefsteaks and bottles of wine, books and theatre seats, but not over large numbers of his or her fellow citizens. Only the state should deal in money, regarding it as a super-commodity. All banking, financing, money-creating, money-lending, should be a state monopoly, just as the employment of drilled and armed men had to become a state monopoly, in order to put an end to the exercise of arbitrary private power. Little progress will be made until this is done, chiefly because private finance must necessarily think of enterprises in terms of immediate profits, whereas enterprises may be of

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enormous benefit to the community and yet not be able to show any such profit. Not long ago, a farmer was showing me a hill-top that he had cleared and ploughed up, under the County Agricultural Committee's scheme. "Ah, we ought to ha' done this long ago," he observed wistfully, "only o' course we couldn't afford it." Now at the time he said they could not afford this clearing and ploughing, the country had a great surplus of goods, another surplus of labour (which is unemployment), and of course this surplus of land. Everything necessary was there except the prospect of immediate profit that was the only incentive of private finance. Therefore nothing could be done; the goods went unsold and unused; the unemployed remained idle and only half-alive on the dole; and the land was still a waste. And after the war we shall be asked to return to this idiocy.

It is this terrible restriction, this almost fatal tight-lacing of our economic body, that makes the "profit motive" so dangerous, and not, as it is so often suggested, the not unnatural desire of men for a handsome recompense. There is surely some confusion here. Do we in fact feel that we are being cheated and that there is roguery about when we pay what seems to us a reasonable price for an article and yet know that a good profit has been made out of it? Are not the denouncers of the "profit motive" usually as anxious as the next man for their share of any profits out of their own enterprises? Is all this indignation quite sincere and honest? There is of course a great deal of lying and cheating for profits, but what is wrong there is the lying and cheating. And what often excuses the lying and cheating is the false notion that there is a business morality, which a man may profess and yet be considered an honest citizen, that is on a

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much lower level than private morality. No, what is so wrong and dangerous about the "profit motive" is not the individual taking his profits but the whole short-sighted and narrow-fisted scheme that demands for every enterprise this private capital that is only interested in immediate profits. Behind this again is a wrong conception of what money is, of why we work at all, and of the very nature of society.

It is equally wrong and disastrous, as I suggested earlier, to regard the whole country as a kind of vast trading concern, which should show a handsome profit balance at the end of the financial year. This leads to the idiotic world-wide competition to show the largest difference between imports and exports, and makes the cornering of some distant market so vitally urgent that it is worth the risk of war. The only profit a country can show lies in the improved quality of life lived by its people.. A country may be getting richer on paper and poorer in its actual life. The question is not what are we collectively making, but what kind of life are we living. What is the use of having a hundred towns coining money under their pall of smoke, if everybody hates working and living in them? And some people forget that you do not get rid of false values simply by substituting state ownership for private enterprise, even though some injustices might disappear on the way. The collective Gradgrind might be just as bad as the individual Mr. Gradgrind, and indeed might be even worse if there was no possible appeal for justice against the collective tyrant. If the police have an interest in seeing that we do not quit the treadmill, we may easily be worse off then ever.

Too many people who ask for socialism pure and simple assume a corresponding change in atmosphere

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and values, just as they imagine that a new race of officials, eager, ardent, flexible, creative, will mysteriously appear from nowhere. These are dangerous illusions. A bull-headed charge into collectivism, without a change of atmosphere and values, might find us soon with a complete masters-and-masses system not much better than that of Nazi Germany. It is for this reason, and not out of any particular* tenderness for private enterprise and ownership (though I do believe that except for gigantic essential producing, the state should furnish the power rather than attempt the actual production), that what I ask for here is vital democracy and not socialism, for it is by clinging to this conception of a vital democracy, of a community of real people working out its own salvation, making fellowship the basis and the good of the people the test, that we shall change the atmosphere and values. We must not let envy convince us that a redistribution of the swag will do the trick. It is not a question of reshuffling and having a fresh deal, but rather of changing the game itself. And one way of changing the game is to realise sharply that what matter are persons and not institution, organisations, and mechanisms, and that the emphasis must always be on the living community.

The state may be the big boss organisation, but it must not be allowed to be more than that. It must not swallow all other associations. We have already seen that the network of these associations gives English life rather more democratic toughness than an outsider would imagine it had from an examination of our electoral and Parliamentary systems. A foreign observer who had spent all his time during the last ten years in Westminster would conclude that we are a plutocracy of a peculiarly detestable, humbugging

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kind. Nor would he be far wrong. But a closer acquaintance with English life in all its variety would compel him to modify this conclusion, because he would discover that we have more democratic tendencies than he imagined, and that this is partly due to the continued existence of all these associations, which have something of an independent life of their own. Some of them may have Royal Charters and the like, but they do not flourish by permission of the state, draw no nourishment that way, and cut across the ordinary political divisions. Some of them, indeed, even cut across frontiers, and reach out towards a truly international character. A world network of them, sustaining and inspiring all manner of economic, scientific and cultural activities, would soon make a new international order an accomplished fact. And this is another reason why the state must not be allowed to drain the life out of these associations.

Let us take a single problem that is known to be bristling with difficulties, and see if we can work it out in terms of this new democracy. For example, the future of the Press. I doubt if many of us want a government-owned or even a government-controlled Press, for it would inevitably tend to be dull, official, unenterprising, and subservient. A true democracy demands a critical liveliness. On the other hand, most of us are dissatisfied with a Press largely controlled by small groups of wealthy men, who ask for complete freedom to express their own whims and prejudices, who are in no way bound to publish the truth, who are not even subject to the same sound regulations that prevent shopkeepers from selling margarine as butter. This is obviously not good enough, and among its bitterest opponents are many journalists themselves, who frequently find themselves compelled to write and

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publish what they know to be false and harmful to the public mind. What then is the way out? Are we condemned to have either the *Daily Screamer* or the *Official Gazetted*? A reasonable solution, as I see it, would be to allow private enterprise in newspaper publishing, so that there could be the necessary variety of appeal and point of view, but at the same time to establish a Board of Control for the Press. This Board would consist of half a dozen to a dozen members, who would do nothing else during their term of office and whose salaries would be paid out of contributions by the Press*. Half of them would be appointed by the official unions of journalists. The other half would be appointed by the community, not acting through the state but, let us say, through the vice-chancellors of the universities. And this Board would have the power to censor, reprimand and if necessary prosecute, and could effectively control the Press, compelling it to keep decent faith with the public, without the heavy, cumbersome and suspicious machinery of state control being frequently brought into action.

Wherever originality, enterprise, variety and flexibility are essential, as they are in the production of luxury goods, in some forms of higher education, in recreational and cultural activities, the less the state has to say about the matter, the better it will be for us all. It is absurd to imagine that by a few reforms we can change the character of this huge power-machine. Nor is it reasonable to suppose that elected men and officials, probably chosen because they are honest, safe, dependable and patient with dull routine, will suddenly develop quite different characteristics. Let the state supply the power, as it will supply the water, electric light or heavy transport, necessary

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to keep all such activities going at full speed, but not undertake to direct them itself. (But this, of course, would be an immense step forward, for at present the state often tends to put obstacles in the way of such activities.) All this may appear so obvious as to be commonplace, and yet already we are running wildly on the wrong lines. For example, you do not want originality, variety and flexibility, the unofficial, ardent, artistic temperament, in running trains, and yet we still have not state ownership of the railways. On the other hand, you do want originality, variety and flexibility, and anything but the timid, dull, safe official mind, in something like broadcasting, and yet broadcasting is now controlled by a state department and has long had a muffling and damping Civil Service atmosphere. Let the state know its place.

Finally, we do not check the growing feeling of frustration or arrest the inward decay that may have already touched some of our own people, by offering them work, doles and comforts churned out and distributed by a vast mysterious engine of state government. If this could be proved the most efficient method of achieving security, I would still wish to reject it. Too high a price can be paid for security. Even the poor do not want the ham and eggs of slavery. Government must never seem something so remote that ordinary men and women cannot imagine themselves taking any part in it. They must be continually taking part in it, not by voting every year or so to give some stranger a seat in Parliament, but by means of a highly developed system of associations and representative bodies, regional, trade, professional, cultural. Politics must no longer be like professional football, in which a few men play while a hundred thousand others look on. It must be more

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like village cricket, where there are more on the field than round it. If the people make a hash of it, then let them, for at least it will be their own hash. If they can beat the record of the last thirty years, namely, two ferocious great wars with a calamitous slump between them, they will have to try very hard to ruin themselves. But it is my opinion that not only will they not ruin themselves but that, using this way out, we may yet see miracles of social and political construction. Such miracles, however, cannot come out of the machinery of the state, no matter how powerful and elaborate it may become, but only from the living community itself, out of the people.

II

THERE are two reasons why we may expect great achievements from the people. The first is to be found in those quotations from America with which I began, those tributes to the magnificent conduct of our people, which had, they declared, redeemed modern democratic society and had provided the world with an example of a faith for living. We need not go over that ground again. All the argument is there in the first section of this book. It is the second reason that concerns us here. The ordeal of the bombing has revealed and, as it were, released certain fine qualities. Now all these and other qualities, together with a vast store of physical, mental and spiritual energy, can also be revealed and released by a vital democratic system. This has happened before, when a class has newly come into power, and it is now time for it to happen again, but on a much bigger scale. It will be on a much bigger scale because this time it is not an affair of one class being promoted to power but of the whole class system breaking down, leaving the people free. And I have already explained that we are all the people so long as we are willing to consider ourselves the people, so long, in fact, as we do not think of ourselves primarily as members of a class, so long as we put the community before any sectional interests.

The collapse of the barriers and disappearance of all the ramifications of the class system will act like the blowing up of a dam. The release of energy will be

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terrific. We shall feel like a man throwing off a strait-jacket. It will be as if we had escaped at last from the suffocating routine and etiquette of some Chinese emperor's court. As I observed earlier, for some years now, so far as the chief political and economic realities are concerned, this class system, with its feudal masquerade and antics, has been little more than a facade, a cover for something more sinister than itself; but nevertheless its social significance, and the political and economic by-products of that significance, can hardly be exaggerated. It is this system, outliving its usefulness, that has lately given our life here its air of decadence and decay. The Fascists, who shrewdly observed that our ruling class no longer knew how to rule, were not entirely wrong about us, though they did not understand the people, not having come much into contact with them. But they noticed the hint of decay, the sleepiness, the refusal to face facts, the unwillingness to make drastic changes. What led the Fascists astray was that their conclusions were too thorough, for they thought in terms of a continental people. Afterwards they underestimated the deeply hidden reserves of endurance and patience, courage and goodwill, that our people possessed. And the same people possess deep reservoirs of creative energy that are as yet untapped. The refusal to release that energy is largely unconscious. Some of it is released to meet immediate threats of danger, as we well know, but the familiar appeals, the cheap slogans, the poor twitterings of the Ministry of Information, mostly leave those depths unstirred. Nothing has convinced them yet, deep down below, that this is their war, if only because they are so used to little or nothing being theirs, too thoroughly accustomed to watching small groups of persons behave as if they

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owned the place. Once the right conviction sinks down, once they know that this country now and for ever is before anything else *their home*, once it is made plain that Hitler and his Nazis stand between them and great possible achievements, that full release will come. The people will tear into action.

From the first hour of this war the government should have cried: "The old life is finished. We've landed on a new one. Burn your boats!" Instead of that we were positively encouraged to cling to values, privileges and customs that had begun to make most of us yawn and droop years ago, and that now were an obvious hindrance to the war effort. But the unreachable conservative mind would have none of that. There was complacent talk about "preserving our way of life," by speakers who overlooked the fact that most of their hearers did not think very highly of their way of life and had been wondering for some time how to change it. For it was not until the bombs fell and the people stood up undaunted that the world began to admire Britain again. What had there been to admire about us before that? Pleasant manners and an easy good temper, and what remained, after greed and stupidity had done their worst, of a beautiful island. It was a nice place to be rich and rather silly in, but few outsiders envied us our ordinary life, which seemed to them ugly and complacent and dreary, shocking in its inequalities, too often bound up with trivialities, an attempt to live without passion and gaiety, without art and philosophy, even without real politics. I say that this is what it looked like to the outsider, and with some reason; but we are a deceptive people, not easily understood, and we know there were colour and fire somewhere beneath that drab surface. Notice how,

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once in the stress of war, all the poetry of action, the epic touches, belong to us.

Surely one reason why the twenty years between wars now seem a tragic farce, even here at home, is that during this period we did not change our values but merely cheapened them. It will be remembered as the era of nightclub-haunting princes and gossip-writing peers. The masquerade still went on, though now the costumes were tattered and the masks rotting. It was neither aristocratic nor democratic, but the period of an uneasy posturing plutocracy. In the country, except among the bewildered and half-ruined farmers and their dwindling band of labourers, there was still all the old boredom and pretence and snobbery without end. There were seaside and inland resorts filled with yawning and baffled folk "of independent means," who all felt that if they had a little more money they would know what to do with themselves. There were districts where the whole community was cancerous with unemployment, under-nourishment and despair. There were the hundred and one industrial towns that had not even yet tried to achieve a decent urban civilisation, chiefly because the one social ideal still was the life of the country gentleman. There was monstrous London, growing and growing, draining away the vitality of the provincial cities and yet achieving little itself but mere growth. Meanwhile the last traces were vanishing of that older Britain whose hazy loveliness was recorded by Turner and Constable, Girtin and Cotman, whose wealth of character enriched the pages of Fielding and Sterne, Scott and Dickens, whose love and pain and ecstasy were made immortal by her lyric poets. Among these vanishing traces, which gave a special savour to this island life, were quaint customs and twists and quirks

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of local thought and feeling, quiet forgotten corners and immemorial traditions. It was nothing of this that the conservatives succeeded in conserving, but only the secret of how to make and keep money and retain power. This older Britain had to go, but what took its place had no like value, no new salt and savour to equal the old; and no visitor to Britain, seeing the ruined cotton mills and rotting shipyards of the North, the jerry-built bungalows and gimcrack factories of the South, exclaimed in wonder, as men had done once, at the virility, splendour and potent magic of our island life. How much was there here worth preserving?

There were of course little schemes of reform, some patching here and tinkering there, but there was no heart, no fiery purpose, in these pitiful attempts. The nation's mind was elsewhere, withdrawn, more than half asleep, charmed and lulled by politicians with a good bedside manner. Now and again a whiff of the hell broth being stirred abroad reached the people, so that they moved uneasily and perhaps sat up, only to be lulled again by nearly all the organised forces of persuasion. The rest is recent history, bringing results already described at some length. Can we doubt then that there is much, a whole flood of creative energy, now ready to be released? If this is not true, then we must believe that we are indeed a decadent and effete people. But we have already disproved this charge, and that is why I began this book by emphasizing its triumphant disproof. Moreover, when at the beginning of the war I made a tour of the country, reporting my impressions of the war effort, the most important discovery I made, a discovery confirmed by other observers (notably by several Americans, such as Negley Farson), was that most of the real work was

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being done by youngish technical men of the so-called middle-classes, men rarely given final authority, and men already feeling restless and dissatisfied because they were hampered by the incompetence, pedantry, lack of drive of the superior persons from whom they were often compelled to take orders. It was as if energy and virtue had been drained away from one strata to reappear, but waiting to be tapped, in another. And all that has happened since has only confirmed this view. Thus, we are not merely guessing hopefully if we declare that the freeing of the people from what remains of a decayed system, old barriers and entanglements, will release a vast store of creative energy.

And that is only a beginning. For once there is an unmistakable change of atmosphere and shift of values, once we burn the old boats, once we have openly agreed that now we are all the people, moving forward in fellowship to reconstruct this home of ours and our way of living, two mighty obstacles will be swept away. The first is fear: the fear of losing one's hard-won bit of security; the fear of not obtaining advantages for our children; the fear of going down instead of up in the social scale; the fear of our worst neighbours' opinion; the fear of to-morrow. It is these fears, gnawing like rats through half the night, that paralyse men's generous impulses and creative energy, that chill the mind and harden the heart, that turn thought inward instead of outward, and so often, though not as yet much with us, lead to violence, hate and cruelty. And if this plague were lifted, we should hardly know ourselves, the air would seem so light, our hearts and minds so free. The second mighty obstacle that would be removed, though not so swiftly perhaps, is concerned not with the itamobilisation but

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with the misdirection of effort and energy. For too many men and women who are above the ordinary in ability are now encouraged, by false values, to aim at the wrong target. They try for direct power, imagining that its exercise will bring them happiness, and when they find, like some drug addict, that it does not, they try for more and more power, hoping that mere increase will work the enchantment. This will-o'-the-wisp power-seeking goes on everywhere, among all manner of folk, from Westminster and the City to the poorest lodging house, and the waste and misery it brings cannot be measured. And it is of course a bad substitute for the pure joy of creation, which is the target all these power-seeking people have missed. This joy is understood by everybody, for man is essentially a creative being, and so it is imperative that we achieve a social system that offers the maximum opportunity for creatioji. It is far more important to do that than to produce a smoothly efficient social machine that distributes benefits to a passive-minded, uncreative mob. One of our unemployed in a distressed area might actually be faring no worse, so far as food and shelter are concerned, than many a young poet or artist in his garret, but what made the unemployed man so listless and grey-faced were his dwindling self-respect and feeling of hopelessness. He was condemned to be not himself; his talents were rusting. Better to be ourselves, our talents shining, for ever eagerly looking forward, in a frugal and rough-and-ready community, where a bit of luxury is a birthday treat, than to wither in a society that abounds in luxury but knows little of freedom and the innocent happiness of creation.

That is why democracy, real democracy and not a

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plutocratic fake, a society in which real people cooperate to provide for themselves and not one in which mindless masses are provided for, is the only way out. And do not forget that it has never yet been tried. The totalitarian states were not founded on its trial and rejection, but in their impatience and despair merely turned their backs on what needed patience, hope and faith in common men. To many persons, who daily bombard us with their pronouncements, we must be converted and baptised before we can take this way out. The new society, in short, must have a Christian basis. But if this means, as it generally appears to mean, that it is not enough to be a man or woman of good will, determined that all that is best in our civilisation must be preserved and agreed that mankind has now an opportunity, and perhaps the last opportunity it may have for some time, of immensely strengthening, widening, deepening that civilisation, anxious to co-operate selflessly and courageously, but that in addition some existing Church must be joined and all its dogma enthusiastically accepted, I for one cannot agree. And for two reasons. First, because the Churches have all proved themselves to be as faulty as the societies in which they have been established. Secondly, because men and women with whom most of us would gladly co-operate in building up a new society differ widely in their religious beliefs, and to force them into conformity would be the very worst start the new society could make. If, on the other hand, what is meant is that the fundamental values of the new society must be spiritual and therefore religious values, then I for one heartily agree. I believe that what is essentially wrong with the masters-and-masses system in all its forms, from a cynical plutocracy to Nazism, is that it is rooted in a contempt for human individu-

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ality, in a disbelief in any possible development of the human personality, in a denial of any moral order in the universe, in a black despair of the life of the spirit. What indeed gives it a peculiar venom in its worst phases is that it becomes then a kind of revenge for spiritual exile, turning into something satanic. All the typical leaders of any Fascist gang can be found arguing in Milton's Hell.

A last word. Democracy must have leadership, as courageous, heartening, inspiring, when confronted with the great tasks of peace as that of Winston Churchill has been to us during the hard-pressed moments of war. We shall need, as I observed earlier, those men of insight, wisdom and massive personality whom I have called the true statesmen. But democracy must beware of the prevailing mood, which has already ruined some nations, that says nothing can be accomplished until we all begin to play Follow-My-Leader. We want no megalomaniac dreamers, no paranoids with their stars of destiny, no avatars of Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, no romantic tragedians who use Europe as their repertory theatre. It is the Leader with a capital "L" who must be avoided. If as free men and women freely co-operating we cannot plan and then lay down the foundations of our new society, then our cause is lost indeed. But it is of course the whole argument of this book that we can, and that no other kind of action will give us the society we want. Forceful and wise leadership will come; already there are signs that the ordeal of total war is revealing its presence, for already we hear, and especially in badly bombed areas, of new men; but when it comes it will come, like so much else of supreme value, out of the people. Years ago, in his start-

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ling vision of a new world, Whitman said it for us:

Everything comes out of the people, everyday people, the people as you find them and leave them; people, people, just people!

APPENDIX

As I pointed out at some length in the fifth section of this book, I strongly disagree with the view, all too common among many progressives, that you can begin with a list of suggested reforms. This seems to me like beginning to build without first clearing the ground and digging the foundations. There must be first a change of values and atmosphere. *Why?* must be answered before *How?* I have just received a copy of a new book in which the author gives us two hundred and fifty pages of suggested departments, ministries, boards and guilds, as if we had already passed a unanimous resolution that the whole structure of our society should be re-planned and that he should be called upon to re-plan it for us. It is such earnest but ineffectual blue-printing of Utopia that attracts the derisive notice of cynical old political hands, and often tends to do more harm than good. Nor must it be forgotten that as a people we are not fond of change for the sake of change, and indeed actually dislike scrapping old things, even government departments, and starting afresh. Though it is true that we must move, you may be sure that most of our people will ask themselves-how they can get what they want with the minimum and not the maximum of change. If we can take what already exists but give it a new development, then so much the better.

Nor do I agree, except in some special cases of reform, that *How?* is far more difficult to answer than *Why?* Let me repeat what I said earlier: "A further mistake is to suppose that changing the atmosphere and ideas and clearing the background are easy, whereas setting up the machinery of reform in the foreground is hard, tough, a man's job. The fact is, once the first has been thoroughly done, the second is easy. We are good with machinery. We have plenty of tidy legal minds. . . ." I do not say that this

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would apply to all times, but it applies to ours. It applies to ours because we have arrived at a time of revolution (this war is really a revolution) when many political and economic ideas, still widely accepted by the conventional or thoughtless, no longer have any reality behind them. They have stopped working. Thus, to take an obvious example, we were told several years ago by many of our orthodox economists that Nazi Germany would soon be bankrupt and begin to disintegrate. But by creating a vast quantity of paper money, spending it hugely on public works (chiefly of course armaments), and at the same time fixing wages and prices and using political pressure to barter surpluses for raw materials, Nazi Germany, whose contempt of orthodoxy may be admired though not the ferocious coercion that has accompanied it, has not only carried on but achieved a stupendous war effort. Therefore it is essential at such a time as this that we must overhaul our stock of political and economic ideas and come to some common agreement about our social philosophy before reforming this, that and the other. A reformed House of Commons, for example, still filled with men whose political and economic ideas do not work, would leave us where it found us. Even a frank admission, on the part of our present political leaders, that *some* disinterested research is needed because many of the old assumptions are no longer valid, would be a genuine step forward.

Again, during these last twelve months, the post has brought me hundreds and hundreds of books, pamphlets, memos and formidably long letters all advocating various serious of post-war reforms. These prove, if nothing else, that a great many people are trying to think constructively. The war has clearly stimulated this type of thinking, if only as a kind of escape from its immediate pressure, a fact that our present leaders are foolish to ignore. There are many groups of earnest and disinterested men and women, of which our own *1941 Committee* is an excellent example, that regularly meet and discuss, pass resolutions,

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draft and publish memos and pamphlets, and hold conferences. Their existence is proof enough that we shall not lack constructive ideas and schemes of reform. Yet in spite of all this activity, there is obviously something sadly missing, for though so many essential parts are assembled, the wheels do not go round. Too much of this genuinely constructive thinking and the sensible co-operation that often goes with it has a wan academic look. The ordinary man or woman cannot help feeling, glumly or cynically, that little or nothing will come of it. The chief reason for this is that what is lacking is the emotional force, the compulsive drive, of a general idea, the existence of which is too often taken for granted by eager reformers. It is in an attempt at least to sketch that idea, to generate a little of that emotional force, that I have written this book.

It is the book itself, which tries to explain *why* so much must be done, that is important, and therefore I have relegated my tentative proposals as to *what* should be done to this appendix. What the reader thinks of these proposals does not affect my main argument. If this is accepted, then the reader and I can somehow find time and place to decide together what is best to be done. In what follows, but not elsewhere in this book, I owe much to my colleagues on the 1941 *Committee* and also to some of my correspondents, but of course the responsibility for what is suggested here is entirely mine.

A. WHAT CAN BE DONE NOW?

First, totally reject the notion that sharp criticism and a demand for more equitable and efficient measures are somehow "defeatist" or likely to hinder our war effort. The really dangerous people are the complacent, the lazy-minded, and those who would rather allow the national effort to be obstructed than make genuinely democratic changes in our social and economic system. The last thing the people of my way of thinking would propose would be anything likely to hamper our war effort, for we have too

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much at stake. We never went to Nuremberg and said that the Nazi leaders were not bad fellows when you came to know them.

What we should aim at is the maximum war effort and at the same time the maximum equity. The more thoroughly democratic we are, the better our chance of an early victory, if only because we can make the best use of our native ability, ask more confidently for further sacrifices from the people, release fresh stores of energy and enthusiasm. Also by removing the last traces of plutocratic government, we torpedo Goebbels' propaganda, which has concentrated more and more on our being plutocratic and the "enemy of the European masses." When we have done this, we should organise a real propaganda department, cutting out the present muddle and overlapping, parsimony and inexpert personnel, to let the world know what we have done.

Too many people are still living idle and extravagantly comfortable lives, taking up more space and man-power service than the country can afford to allow them. On the other hand, other people are still living well below a reasonable national standard. This can be evened up. All essential supplies should be properly rationed to give everybody a basic standard, and no more than that. There should be a severe cut in current consumption, and a strict import policy, concentrating on the most essential goods and least bulky cargoes. No matter who is winning the Battle of the Atlantic, we should behave as if we were being besieged. And this should be driven into people's heads, in place of the usual encouragement to complacency. There should be a national wages policy, giving equal wages for equal work everywhere, and putting an end to absurd inequalities. There should be family allowances, and a further modification of income tax for families. Also, adequate compensation to people who have lost their livelihood through the war, but such compensation to be conditional on the receivers being willing to undertake war work. There should be a thorough survey of all

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housing accommodation, with particular attention to country mansions and the like, and all property not being fully used should be requisitioned at once by the Ministry of Health, as hostels for evacuated women and young children, billets for war workers, temporary homes for the bombed-out and homeless, and as rest places for war workers suffering from overwork and strain. A fair proportion of hotel and other accommodation in resorts and safe areas, now chiefly occupied by self-evacuated persons who are doing no war work, should be reserved as temporary rest homes.

The man-power policy should be carefully based on a total war strategy. We do not strengthen our striking forces by taking men out of factories, if it is equipment rather than numbers we need. And we weaken our position by leaving agriculture dangerously undermanned. There should be central and long-term planning of the whole food production programme, with no useful land of any kind left uncultivated. With this should go a national diet policy. Most of our people have long been wasteful and unenterprising in the kitchen, and now we must learn to be both frugal and experimental in our diet. This will do us more good than harm.

The people are ready to make sacrifices for the war effort, but they cannot be expected to toil and suffer in order that small groups, already over-privileged, should consolidate their positions and even enlarge their powers. Big Business backed by the state is not democracy but Fascism. Therefore, such essential services as banking, transport, fuel, power, should be taken over by the community as soon as possible. There must also be a full technical pooling both of war and unessential industries, under complete government control. In order that losses from bombing should be cut to the minimum, stocks should not be allowed to accumulate in danger areas but must be dispersed, with the government assisting and controlling the distributive trades.

If we are fighting for democracy, we must not constantly

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behave as if we were not. This weakens our case and **loses** us friends. Also, it is cheating. The more truly democratic we are, the closer will be our relation with **the** people of the Dominions. We shall gain more than we shall lose by pursuing a generous policy with India, and indeed with all our colonial possessions. We should be represented abroad by men who suggest that they have a democracy behind them. It ought to be obvious now, even to our Foreign Office, that Hitler's real enemies and therefore our potential allies are the people everywhere, and not the quislings whom we vainly try to influence. Appointments at home should be on genuine merit, without reference to political parties, wealth and social position. New men of ability should be discovered and given responsibility. We badly need fresh personalities. The Civil Service should be compelled to change many of its methods, and an example should be made of those men who clearly care more about departmental etiquette than about our war effort. The Ministry of Information should be reorganised, placed under the direction of a more enthusiastic and progressive-minded Minister, then given complete control of all propaganda, which is at present divided between three or four different departments and is a sad muddle. Reasonable public criticism, even by men in the state service, should be welcomed and not discouraged and penalised, otherwise we are becoming like the thing we are fighting. The silencing of Parliament and the Press would hinder and not help our war effort. We need an intelligent and lively Opposition. That is the way a democracy works.

Finally, every reader should remember that we have a National government, and that therefore the Liberal and Labour points of view have as much right to be expressed as the Tory point of view. Even in 1935, for 10,488,626 votes given to the Conservative Party there were 10,209,505 votes given against it, so that the claim frequently made by Tories that they are overwhelmingly the popular party cannot be allowed. (And since 1935 they have probably

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lost a hundred supporters for every one they have gained.) The political truce is frequently interpreted by these gentlemen to mean that whereas they are at complete liberty to say what they like, the rest of us must be quiet or be accused of talking treasonable politics. This impudence has done our cause no good. The official view of this war still remains confused, negative, uninspiring. We *must* fight for a positive purpose. Even if we are fighting for survival, we have the right to ask "Survival as *what!*" for we cannot come out of the war as we went [into.it](#), cannot restore pre-war conditions, and so we might as well decide here arid now in what direction we are going. If we nail our democratic colours to the mast, most of Hitler's present propaganda is useless and he has to begin all over again. Meanwhile, the people everywhere will take heart. There will be less danger of any demand, out of sheer war weariness and lack of enthusiasm, for a patched-up peace. Hitler and his like are, symptoms of a diseased condition of the world, and we might as well try to cure that diseased condition. Once we take this line, and act with courage and imagination, we shall find that while we are winning the war we are also beginning to rebuild our society for the peace,

B. AFTER THE WAR.

It must be realised that, unless we use our brains and make proper plans, all the evils that followed the last war will return, immensely enlarged, after this one. For this war will increase the *tempo* of production even more than the last one did, and we have only to allow ourselves to be humbugged again by "sound orthodox finance" and those "well-trying Conservative principles" to find ourselves in a nightmare of unemployment, dwindling trade, poverty amid plenty. Already we are being warned about how poor we are going to be. We were told all that after the last war, when actually the world was richer, in all the essentials—skilled labour, cultivated land, raw materials—

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and the equipment of production—than it had ever been before. Who was it then who insisted that we were all so much poorer? The representatives of the financial system, which instead of being a kind of book-keeping and claim-adjusting process had turned into the super-industry, dominating all other industries, cramping all men's activities. Why has it not been generally realised that money is a servant and not our master? Why wasn't the financial system scrapped, like its contemporaries the wooden warship or the stage-coach? , Because too many influential persons, in a position to sway governments and control public opinion, were directly interested in keeping the rotten old thing going. And unless this supreme racket is smashed, we shall be plunged again into the same whirlpool of over-production, under-consumption, crazy competition, poverty and unemployment, revolution and war.

We must use money, and not let money use us. It might be as well, if only to clear the public mind of false notions, to adopt a new currency unit, which might be based on some agreed unit of electric power or physical energy. (One correspondent of mine suggests "an Erg-Dollar.") The supreme control, as I suggested earlier, should be in the hands of the community, working through some National Banking Corporation, which alone would create credits, for either private production or when necessary for public employment of surplus labour, and would of course take care to check the flow of new money to prevent inflation. If private investment is still considered desirable, it should be done only through this National Corporation, which would pay only low rates of interest and would of course demand no interest from the state itself. There would be no private dealing in money, no "manipulation of exchanges, no juggling with the money market.

All very large-scale and absolutely essential utilities and services should be taken over by the community. But the main bulk of production would not be a state affair, however, because private enterprise permits more experi-

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ment, flexibility, and efficiency. A rigid, planned state economy means dragooning the people. We do not want, as we have seen earlier, to have powerless masses in the grip of a gigantic machine. But production should not be a haphazard business, and should be largely governed by collective decisions, by means of a Market Research Board. There should also be central control of profits, dividends, wages, as well as some form of partnership for ail regular workers in an industry.

The country, as we saw earlier, should no longer be regarded as a vast trading concern, existing to show a profit. The old desperate business of trying to create a favourable balance of exports over imports should be sent to limbo. Actually imports are what we are in need of, and exports what we have a surplus of. Which brings us to the vexed question of surpluses. Now whatever may be right, one thing is certain and that is that the deliberate destruction of goods for lack of a profitable market or to keep up the price is wrong. It stands self-condemned, like the other abortion, permanent unemployment. One of my correspondents argues with some force that if surpluses cannot be sold at a profit, they must be sold at a loss or given away, to those who are most in need; but that production should continue at full blast so long as want is unsatisfied. This may seem startling, but the fact remains that the traditional system of the short-range profit motive and price mechanism is unable to cope with production at the new tempo, and leads directly to the "poverty amidst plenty" nightmare that is the father of most of our horrors. So my correspondent boldly takes the bull by the horns and declares that all surpluses must be made available; surpluses must be increased; sales at a loss should be encouraged; goods and services if not sold should be given away. This sounds ruinous at first, because we cannot help imagining how it would work with one or two concerns still against the background of the old system; but once we begin to clear the background and to remember that it would apply equally to all concerns, we

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see there is much to be said for this bold suggestion, which has not, however, been yet worked out in detail.

There is one major industry that stands apart from all others, demanding to be encouraged *for its own sake*. That is agriculture. Most of our own produce is better than any we can import, if only because it comes to us freshly out of our own soil. Moreover, for a great many people work on the land provides the most attractive way of life. Therefore we must not neglect the land again after this war, but must do even more to keep it fully cultivated. This will mean not only public control but also public ownership of the land, much of which can be let out in small holdings, with co-operative buying and selling. A good deal of war compensation can probably take the form of public assistance to prospective farmers and small-holders. And there will inevitably be a wide demand among young people for a country life, and many of our surpluses can be absorbed in assisting them to improve the conditions of that life. A prosperous farming community in its turn, for ever demanding improved conditions of living, would prove to be the manufacturer's best customer. It would also help to keep us a healthy democracy.

People engaged in agriculture would also be valuable in keeping together and sustaining those groups that lie between the individual and the nation or state. These groups are the family, the village or neighbourhood community, and the provincial or regional community. This natural grouping was beginning to disintegrate. (Its disappearance would probably coincide with the successful working of the masters-and-masses system.) These groups are in fact an essential part of the network of associations without which a true democracy cannot function. They are even more important than the trade and cultural associations. They give richness and depth to the life of the individual, and toughness and resilience to the fabric of society itself. It is partly the lack of them that makes the lives of so many vast modern urban

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populations seem flavourless, sapless, rootless, producing a constant feeling of boredom and vague discontent, which in its turn craves for its relief more and more barren excitement and empty pleasure-seeking. Therefore, the new society must be organised to give emphasis to this grouping. The local and regional communities will have their own politics. It is here, as I suggested earlier, that the ordinary man will find himself *in* politics. Finally, although it may be thought that this war, with its conscription, mobilisation of labour for mass-production factories, and large-scale evacuation, is only flattening out what little remains to us of this grouping, some war changes, especially the organisation of civilian defences and the regional emergency measures, have made us more conscious of our local and regional communities. It will be easier to develop on these lines after this war than it would have been before the war.

Parliament should be the apex of a pyramid of elected councils, and should not, as it tends to do now, drain away all the political life of the country. As it is constituted now, it has many grave faults: it is too big and unwieldy; its procedure is cluttered up with too much fancy "tradition"; it often has far too long a life, without any reference to public opinion; too many of its members do not genuinely represent their constituents but are in Westminster as the delegates of sectional interests. Much of the work now done in Parliament might be given with advantage to Regional Councils, with which Parliament would be linked. The electoral system should be made more flexible. Candidates should be personally known in their constituencies, and their elections should not be valid unless they have received a certain proportion of the total possible votes of the electorate. About a fifth of the members should be compelled to seek re-election every year, so that public opinion can be tested. More use too should be made of impartial surveys of public opinion. The House of Lords is an anachronism and should be abolished, a genuine Second Chamber, a Senate, taking

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its place. This Senate, made up of men of real distinction, should not have the same legislative power as the House of Commons, but in some matters, chiefly cultural, it should take the lead. So long as the majority of the people, here and in the Dominions, approve of it as a symbol of executive power, as they certainly do now, the Crown should be preserved, though much of its feudal flummery could be abolished.

There should be established—and we could do it now, and may have to do it soon—a basic minimum standard of living for every man, woman and child in the community. This applies to food, housing, clothing, health and education. The maintenance of this minimum standard should be the first charge upon the resources of the community, and while there are still people below it there should be nobody above it. This is absolutely essential. Inequalities above this standard do not matter very much, but inequalities that reach far below it, as they did before the war and still do, are intolerable. Their existence makes a full, creative, civilised life impossible. Those of us who may have escaped the shadow of destitution are haunted and made unhappy, because, as I pointed out early in this book, there is no escape now from the social conscience. Those of us who feel we are near destitution find our creative energy partly paralysed and immobilised by fear. And as I argued before, the community that removes this fear, once and for all, will find itself instantly rewarded. And we have all the necessary resources. If we can devote most of our communal energy, as we are doing now, to creating huge armaments for purely destructive purposes, and yet have a sufficiency of food, shelter, clothing, medical services, then in time of peace, when all our vast machinery can produce articles of use, we can with ease accomplish such a basic minimum standard.

Lastly, we should remember that we are not bees and ants, creatures that have sacrificed everything for an economic machine that is perfectly efficient and perfectly useless, but are children of the spirit, with minds, with

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souls. We are not here to multiply ourselves senselessly, but to increase knowledge, to create beauty, to experience love. Whatever helps us to do these things is right, and whatever stands in their way is wrong. We must not try to make our inner life, which is our real life, conform to the outer life, but must unhesitatingly reverse this process, making the life of the community the true expression of our real inner life. If the shoes cramp our feet and make it impossible to walk, then boldly scrap the shoes. Machines, monetary systems, economic usages, political institutions, legal codes, social customs, cultural traditions, these are all our servants and not our masters. Nothing matters but that the people, not a privileged few individuals but the people, should be freely functioning, zestful, unencumbered, thoroughly alive, and know something, as they pass through this strange haunted world, of truth, beauty and love.

For reasons already given in the main text, I have deliberately omitted any reference to imperial or international relations.

C. BUT WHAT CAN I DO?

First, put out of your head, once and for all, the dangerous and mind-destroying notion, which can fling you into the ranks of the featureless, rootless "masses," that because you live in a very large and elaborately organised community, events have mysteriously passed out of ordinary human control. Though it may sometimes seem like it, we are not the playthings of demons. The human will still works. If you cannot have your way, that may be because Hitler or somebody else is having his. Actually, we are chiefly suffering now from the fact that man has recently and immensely enlarged his powers. If man were as helpless as he used to be, against distance, disease, shrinking natural resources, etc., this war would be impossible. (And a good thing too! Yes, I know.) Our trouble is that we have not learned co-operation quickly enough. Thus, the airplane, which should have

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shrunk the whole world into one political unit, arrived just too soon, and so became an instrument of political blackmail and total war. But behind all this monstrous activity are the desires and dreams and fears of men, not very wildly different from ourselves. It is this all-too-common belief that events are now out of our control that gives enormous power to ambitious and wicked men who know this foolish view is wrong and so proceed to shape events. What we have to do is put all such anti-social fellows, gangsters and racketeers and brigands, where they can do no more damage, and then *take charge ourselves*. That is democracy beginning to work.

Secondly, we must not escape this trap only to fall into another, which is the result of over-simplifying our problems and then believing that there is one universal cure for all our ills. Thus, there is the impatient elderly man who will have nothing but Henry George's Land Tax, and there is the equally impatient younger man who will have nothing but Social Credit, and believes that if you do not agree with him, then you must have been bribed by the bankers. A great deal of valuable energy and good will is wasted in this fashion. We must accept the fact there is no comparatively simple remedy that just happens to have escaped nearly everybody's notice.

Thirdly, if we accept the truly democratic outlook, believing that it can save our society, then we must try to think and feel and behave like true democrats here and now. There is for each of us a little section of life that is within our own sphere of influence. One of the subtlest and most pervasive enemies of democracy is social atmosphere. (It has long been my view that here in Britain, for example, women unconsciously do much to bolster up a narrow and dangerous conservatism.) We can all start changing a bit of that social atmosphere, and war-time is the time to do it. That of course is only the beginning, but it is a very important first step. The next is resolutely to oppose all definitely anti-democratic moves and tendencies. (Do not accept the war as an excuse for them. So far they have

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proved a hindrance to our war effort.) A free expression of opinion, as long as it does not amount to downright treachery, is still necessary. The ordinary citizen must not imagine that he or she has no influence here. For example, some sections of the Press are no longer playing fair with their readers, but are beginning to omit awkward pieces of information or to present them with a deliberately false emphasis. The ordinary reader has a right to demand fair treatment and to tell the editor so. The Press is still sensitive to public opinion, but the outcry now will have to be much louder and more sustained than it used to be. All this applies too to the B.B.C., now controlled by persons who are more anxious to please their friends than to serve the British listening public. But it is doubtful even if these persons could withstand a loud popular demand, especially if it were supported by questions in the House of Commons. For it should not be forgotten that we still have members of Parliament. Your member was probably elected six years ago—unless he was popped in on a government ticket quite recently—and apparently he proposes to be your member for the next ten years or so. Find out then who he is, what he thinks, what he is doing. Make your own views known to him. Ask him to meet a representative group of you, to answer a few important questions. If he says he is too busy, with affairs not connected with his constituency, then suggest he might resign in favour of somebody who would not be too busy to do his duty as a member.

Finally, although we are nearly all in agreement that we do not want to start forming new political parties in war-time, that is no reason why we should not spend such leisure as is left to us meeting and discussing, forming groups that have a common aim, sometimes taking collective action, so that if necessary there could exist after the war the nucleus of a new democratic party, which may or may not ally itself with one of the old parties. Even if it is not necessary to launch a new party, all this activity will certainly not have been wasted for it can soon

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make its influence felt among the existing parties, which will find themselves compelled to think in terms of economic and political realities and to produce programmes that mean something. What Britain is like from now on depends on you and me, the British people. We can either float it triumphantly into a new life, or let it rot and sink. If we lean back, expecting everything to be done for us, it will probably rot and sink, ourselves with it. I for one can offer no magical formulas, except the enduring magic of our human imagination and will, which may indeed, when working selflessly, not be human at all but divine. From now on we may expect hard and bitter tasks, and many of us may die long before they are accomplished, but in such a struggle and progress, with decay and defeat, fear and cruelty, left behind at last, there is no death but an ever-widening prospect of life.

