

## TOPICS OF THE DAY

### TOTAL WAR: THE END OF ISOLATIONISM: THE ROYAL COMMISSION REPORT.

TOTAL WAR has now come upon us in all its terrible fury. Long-awaited, much dreaded, it has outranged in fierce intensity all our worst anticipations. *Der Blitzkrieg* has proved to be a driving fury, carried along with relentless energy and directed by superb skill and audacity. Now we know what we must face, and measure ourselves against. It is nothing less than the disciplined and organized might of a great people, dedicated to the sole cause of *Deutschland über alles*. They are being impelled by the twin sentiments of revenge and pride—revenge for the cherished indignity of a military defeat, and pride in the summons of a racial destiny to rule the world.

The totalitarian idea of war has displayed itself in the thoroughness of its organization and equipment. It is very clear that, in strange alliance with the ethics of the gangster, the German leaders have devoted themselves to a complete mastery of the new military strategy and tactics that are made possible by the development of mechanical transport in the air and on the land. The dynamic philosophy of the state, which they profess, has translated itself into practical effect through a magnificent direction of power, combined with speed. Here is something terrifying in its might and potency—all the apparatus of modern life on a totalitarian scale, used for a malign and sinister purpose—propaganda, mass production, mechanical power, destructive weapons all united for an even more audacious totalitarianism—the mastery of mankind.

This totalitarianism extends to the whole of life, and has introduced ethical standards which alas! are not novel, but now take on new forms of expression. Treachery has become a department of government. Every nation maintains an intelligence service, of which the members can be described by the opprobrious epithet of "spy". But there is a chasm of moral distinction between the employment of agents in the hazardous occupation of discovering and reporting information about the enemies of their country, and the despatch of armies disguised as tourists, commercial travellers and merchant sailors into neighboring and neutral territories to provide a spearhead for wanton and unprovoked attack. The Nazis have placed

their Fifth Column in the advance guard. The swift attacks on Norway, Holland and Belgium depended for their paralyzing effect on the presence of traitors systematically instructed and trained to play their shameful part. There seems reason to fear that the same sinister factors operated in France, and doubtless they are at work nearer home. War is not conducted according to the etiquette of polite society, but total war turns loyalty into an excuse for any crime.

It is very evident that the succession of military disasters that have come upon the allies was the result of a complete failure to imagine the task they were required to undertake. There was a certain pathos in the reported confession of the French High Command, that all the classical concepts of war had been superseded—a pathos that turned into a tragedy. Only Mr. Churchill seems to have been alert to the gigantic dimensions of the struggle. The decision to match totalitarianism with totalitarianism was taken only when the enemy was thundering at the gate and France was at the point of being overwhelmed. The fruits of this political ineptitude are bitter indeed. We pray they may not be fatal.

Now that the island of Great Britain has become a besieged fortress, we must reckon up our assets as well as our debits. On the credit side we write the spirit of Dunkirk. Whatever happened in France, there is no evidence to show that there was any breakdown in the morale of the British army. They fought as they have often done before, with a pluck that turned defeat into a victory. The British Army has a way of beginning its wars with rearguard actions. Disaster is our traditional opening gambit. Totalitarian statecraft cannot produce similar virtues. It has been able to evoke a fanatical loyalty, and, after all these dreadful experiences, only the counsels of folly would suggest any contempt for the capacity and strength of our enemies. Nevertheless, the British people, whose weakness in audacious action has been revealed in all its naked poverty, have remained incorrigible individualists. They have continued to display a spirit of humorous good-nature that can take the heaviest punishment with superb courage. Their Waterloos have been won not only on the playing-fields of Eton but on village greens and mean football grounds in shabby industrial towns. To this spirit must now be harnessed the fullest apparatus of war. Moral energies must now engage themselves with the herculean tasks of preparation and supply. Time is still on our side, but only if we can secure a long enough lease of it, and if we know how to employ it. Meantime, the

British people must be ready for a very dreadful experience of continual attack, in which the principal attention must be concentrated on the immediate struggle. Nevertheless, we must already anticipate the tide of battle flowing in the opposite direction. The flood of destruction that has engulfed the continental armies may recede as swiftly as it rose, and for that strategic moment we must be ready. For victory will come only through a defeat of the enemies that have risen up against us.

The new totalitarian organization of society for war has now spread to Canada. Enough time has been wasted already to preclude any prolonged discussion of our Canadian lethargy in warlike participation. It would be possible to consume a good deal of political energy in awarding mutual blame on the exclusive folly of the authorities in Great Britain and the complacent lack of pressure from the side of Canada. We claim to be a self-governing Dominion. While there should be full co-operation between Great Britain and Canada, the war is as much ours as Britain's. Must we wait, colonial-wise, to fulfil only the rôle we are asked to occupy? The time has come for Canadian initiation of effort comparable to our claims of independence. Here, as yet in happy security from immediate attack, our share in the great conflict can rapidly increase so that we may enter with vital effect on the course of events. We are the oldest, the greatest, and the nearest to the scene of conflict among the Dominions. The people of this country are ardent in their desire to do something that will wear the appearance of relation to war. A wise government will utilize these loyal offers of service to the full.

If we may dare to look ahead, the rôle that Canada must now play in the world of nations has leaped ahead into a new importance. Whatever the result of this war, Europe will be exhausted physically, morally and spiritually. Here in the West we may be fortunate enough to escape the worst rigours of armed conflict. Upon North America, and especially upon Canada, will descend inevitably a new responsibility of human leadership. We have spirit and energy, and the immense asset of hope. Our gravest drawback is the wretched and miserable character of our politics. All intelligent and responsible people deplore it and wish to have done with it, but nobody has enough courage to rise up and break it once and for all. Probably we require parties, but we do not need party-machines that run not for the good of the country but for personal benefit of the manipulators. We have been assured that this wretched and

detestable apparatus of government is out of commission for the duration of the war. This is a splendid hour at which to smash it, and banish it forever from our political life. Otherwise, let it be said with all due warning—in the new world that is being shaped by the heat and smoke of these grave events, worse things shall befall us. We have to choose between a cleansed and revived democracy and a permanent totalitarianism of the Right or of the Left. From which miserable choice, may we be mercifully delivered by repentant hearts!

---

**T**HE END OF ISOLATIONISM is the major effect of the war on the United States of America. Like all ill-founded theories of existence, it has been smashed by facts. In certain quarters the doctrine dies hard, and even now many remain unconvinced by the terrible logic of tragic events. But the nation as a whole, with its President as leader, has awakened from its dogmatic slumber, and a fever of armed preparation inflames its uneasy life. For all of which, in this tremendous hour we may say, without exposing ourselves to accusations of impiety, thank God!

Like all human attitudes, the American doctrine of isolationism was inspired by very diverse motives. The origin of institutions has a strange way of perpetuating itself in their subsequent history. The United States began their national career in a revolt against European folly and oppression. They have always been convinced that they were engaged in building a new and better way of life. One has only to listen to the manner in which their public men refer to American ideals to realize how deeply they are persuaded of the distinctive character that animates the people of the United States. At times, this attitude has induced both vanity and selfishness, but in this respect they are not by any means singular among the nations of mankind. We have all indulged in that kind of bombastic foolishness. When we contemplate the European *melée* in its latest and most dreadful developments, who can blame them for an ardent desire to keep out of the unholy mess?

At the same time, the United States had one very potent form of entangling alliance from which they did not wish to keep free. They wanted to trade with Europe. The American people are peculiarly sensitive to economic facts. Their distinctive vigour runs especially to trade and commerce. They have a country of enormous wealth, to the exploitation of which they have brought immense energy and organizing ability.

Nevertheless, in the larger aspects of their national economy there has been a fatal and curiously unsuspected contradiction. They wanted to produce and sell to the world, and yet to remain politically, and, so far as imports are concerned, even economically apart. High tariff barriers were erected, but of late years they have become prison bars for a nation of unemployed men and impoverished farmers. Economically and politically, they have been endeavoring to perform the frequently attempted and never successful feat of consuming their cake and at the same time possessing it. All that has come to a time of judgment—as indeed it ought.

Unfortunately, isolationism, which has been the sentimental political indulgence of the American people, has had most tragic effects on the general life of western civilization. At this time of day, there is little to gain from rueful shakings of the head over reflections on what might have been. Nevertheless, the refusal of the United States of America to lend their powerful aid to the construction of a new international polity after the Conference of Versailles has been the starting-point of many calamities. It cannot now be said with complete assurance that if they had adhered to the Covenant of the League of Nations, advocated by their own President, the world would have been very different to-day; but it is very plain that their withdrawal left the new structure terribly mutilated and weak. The mingled contempt and fear, depicting itself as disillusionment with European degeneracy, that inspired the rejection of the Covenant has now returned with vengeance on the head of the American people. They wanted to keep America out of Europe, but now their problem is how to keep Europe out of America.

The terrible success that has attended the Nazi drive in Europe has suddenly revealed the United States to themselves as a vulnerable people. When the Italians joined in the conflict, the last veils fell from their eyes. They began to realize that freedom and democracy were not peculiar achievements of the American genius. Rather these moral and political attitudes were cultivated fruits that had their original roots elsewhere. The deepest lesson of these recent experiences is the essential unity of civilization, especially in a world so unified as ours. As President Roosevelt told his people with such clarity and point—oceans have shrunk, and distances are measured by flying time. Moreover, the prospective foe is the enemy of mankind, inflamed with lust for conquest that is insatiable. Well may the United States of America arm.

From whatever motive, at the time of writing, happily the United States have not declared war. Happily, also, their neutrality is very nominal. If they were a less powerful nation and nearer the scene of conflict, the American President and some of his foreign ambassadors have said enough to provoke and almost justify a declaration of war. "Naming no names", until he came to the ignominious Italian Duce, Mr. Roosevelt has not concealed his prejudices or sympathies. He has spoken with a boldness that has carried his utterances far beyond the bounds of political prudence. If he were as careful in seeking for the popular favour as his opponents represent, he could have trimmed his sails much more closely to the currents of public opinion. Now, the British people can get what they so sorely need, and what the Americans can so abundantly provide—munitions, guns, and above all, airplanes. An American declaration of war would be a positive hindrance. It would deflect the energies of the people to their own war effort. As things stand, they can become an auxiliary arsenal behind the frontiers of a nominal neutrality. What better help could we desire?

---

**T**HE ROYAL COMMISSION REPORT on Dominion-Provincial Relations, after many vicissitudes, has at last appeared. The expedition of faith and hope that was sent forth to discover a new Canada has had a hard time in its wanderings to and fro across the Dominion. Its major loss was sustained in the inability of its chairman to continue his leadership. In more than one province an attitude of non-co-operative hostility was encountered. Under these circumstances, the Commissioners have earned the special gratitude of the Dominion for the immense devotion they have displayed in their thoroughgoing enquiry, and in the statesmanlike character of the Report they have produced.

The Commission has maintained its reputation for ill-fortune in the hour at which its Report was given to the world. What ought to have been a notable event in our national history was dwarfed into relative insignificance by the mid-May struggle that was proceeding in Europe. Headlines announcing the German drive in northern France crushed the text of the Report into the back pages of the press. Our political leaders are so preoccupied with the immediate urgency of the war that they will find time hardly to do more than observe the existence of the series of brightly-bound volumes that attest

the prodigious undertaking of the Commissioners and their assistants. Serious study of the findings and recommendations must be postponed to a calmer, more normal time, although it will be an act of major folly to put the volumes completely out of sight on some convenient shelf.

The Commission was appointed because of a general conviction that the historic apparatus of Confederation had grave need of revision. As its members proceeded across Canada, a cloud of gloom travelled with them and settled down on successive Legislative Chambers. Province after province protested bankruptcy, when it made any protest at all. A period of world-wide economic depression had left particular marks of injury on Canadian life. We were reminded that we are mainly a nation of primary producers who live by export trade. The farmer on the land, the fisherman on the sea, the lumberman in the forest and the miner in the bowels of the earth had all felt the incidence of depressed prices and shrinking markets. In the urban centres, vast numbers of unemployed men and their families were living on public relief and charity. In the agricultural West, a series of drought-stricken years had added their natural calamity to the general condition of ill-fortune. Provincial and municipal treasuries were confronted with the insupportable problem of trying to meet extraordinary demands upon their resources in a time when many of the taxpayers were themselves either the recipients of public relief or else crushed by an inability to meet their private debts. World-wide economic nationalism was choking the breath out of a country whose life-blood was international trade. New doctrines of social rights and duties were agitating the public mind, so that local authorities were forced into a policy of large-scale borrowing to meet the demands made upon them. All this record of ruin fell upon the heads of the Commissioners in full torrent as they pursued their enquiries. The most doleful predictions of our Canadian future filled the air.

Now, in a calmer mood, that would have been even more tranquil but for the European disturbance, we can review the history, present estate and future expectation of our Canadian life. The Commission retreated to Ottawa and, with an army of investigators, made their survey. The first reflection that comes to mind on reading the Report is one not of dismay, but of solid satisfaction. The Fathers of Confederation were neither deluded optimists nor bungling politicians who made the best of a bad job. The framework of the *British North America Act* stands, not like the laws of the Medes and Persians which

cannot change, but as a flexible apparatus of government, capable of amendment to meet the emergent needs of a vigorous and vital nation. The vision that inspired the labours of our founders has been more than fulfilled. They saw a Canadian nation arising, with component parts neither separated into isolated units nor resolved into a undifferentiated whole, and that nation has come to be. The best proof of its lively growth is the fact that it has now outgrown its swaddling clothes.

The Canadian achievement has been truly remarkable. Following the British tradition of tolerance, no attempt has been made to cudgel minorities with diversity of race, religion and language into a conformity with the predominant opinion. The Maritime Provinces have been allowed to pursue their familiar tranquil life, and to exert a much more profound influence on Canadian development than their numerical population would suggest. Quebec remains solidly Catholic and French, and yet indisputably Canadian. Ontario has become immensely prosperous in industry, agriculture and mining. Vast new territories in the West have opened up, developing into new provinces and providing a home for millions of people. Across the Rockies, British Columbia has become an El Dorado for the products of fruit, lumber, fish and metals. Immense and varied problems have presented themselves for solution—problems of transportation, population, education and government. Railways have been thrown across the continent. Great cities have appeared. A tradition and system of local and provincial government has been created. Political controversies have emerged, and within a democratic system of party government have been threshed out to their conclusion. And, above all, Canada has become a free, independent nation, with sovereign rights and powers within a great Commonwealth of Empire. Confederation has been an overwhelming success, and the fruits of its promise and achievements are the surest ground of hope that, in its next phase, we shall go on to greater things.

The unity of Canada as a nation is the basis of the Royal Commission's recommendations. The solutions that are proposed for our various problems are national solutions. Federal government is based on compromise, and in such arrangements there are almost inevitable weaknesses. The strength of the central authority tends to rest on the appeasement of minorities. Under such conditions, the genius of the statesman develops into clever political manipulation, rather than into robust and fearless leadership. This is true in a special degree of Canada. Our very existence as a nation is a defiance of geography. Our



immense territories are separated by wilderness, lake and mountain. Language and religion divide us. It is very remarkable that we have achieved such a degree of nationhood that such a Report is possible. There is sound reason to hope that we have passed beyond the stage of federal weakness into a new era of federated strength. And for the tasks that now summon us to fulfil the promise of this new dawn in Canadian history, we shall require a new type of leadership. The architects and builders of this new Canada must be more statesmen than politicians.

At the same time, the federal structure remains intact. Provincial governments are required to maintain their distinctive functions and services. But they shall do so on a new basis and, we trust, in a new spirit. In the past, the Dominion authority has not been so much the centralizing symbol of our national unity as a convenient method of getting money for provincial policies and projects. Now, the principle proposed is that of provincial trusteeship for the local administration and management of what are, in the last resort, concerns of the Canadian people as a whole. This fundamental change finds expression particularly in the vital matter of taxation and finance. An attempt is made to regard the Canadian economy as a unified whole. Provincial governments are to maintain the services of education, roads, health and relief of old age and poverty, with the notable exception of the evils arising out of unemployment. But they are not to grapple with these duties as best they can on their own resources, until they turn in defeated desperation to the Dominion government. The strong are to help the weak, and the poor are to be enriched by the wealthy. The Canadian people are asked to stand together as one nation.

The extent to which these proposals can be carried through at the present time is very doubtful. In less preoccupied times, they would make a first claim on the study of our political leaders. It is being suggested that the inevitable strain that must now fall on our financial system gives a new urgency to the adoption of the Commission's Report. Here, we are told, is the very structure we require for the immense tasks of this tremendous time in our history. Whether such counsels prevail or not, it is very clear that in such scanty leisure as must now be granted to our hardly driven statesmen, they must take opportunity to master both the letter and spirit of this Report.

J. S. T.