

CURRENT MAGAZINES

FIFTH-COLUMN'S LAST DEVICES

RECONSTRUCTION, END AND MEANS—*The Round Table.*

THE HOPE FOR HUMANITY—Mr. F. S. Marvin, in the *Hibbert.*

ENDS AND MEANS OF A MORE CHRISTIAN STATE—Dr. H. S. Coffin, in the *Yale Review.*

WHAT WE ARE FIGHTING FOR—The Right Hon. Viscount Cecil, in the *Contemporary.*

IT is now well known that there are everywhere workers in the sinister cause we have learned to call "Fifth-Column." In some countries they are much more numerous or more artful than in others, but no country is free from them: none is without its groups sapping and mining within, under the shelter and through the institutions of the democracy to which they are so false. The names Quisling, Laval, Bonnet, Degrelle are but the most notorious. Many of us could add to the list. We could mention others whom we strongly suspect of at least such small-scale Fifth-Column action as lies within the limits of their ingenuity and their courage.

An extreme case reveals beyond dispute what is elsewhere masked by cunning moderation and excused by the charity which always allows "benefit of the doubt." Look at the France of 1939 and the first months of 1940. As Plato would have said, the story there written in the large letters which all can read is the same which elsewhere, written in small letters, one may easily mistake. Don't we recall the Paris propaganda of "defeatism," the campaign by French Communists to sabotage the work of munition factories as soon as the Nazi-Soviet bargain was announced, the eleventh hour effort of Georges Bonnet to repeat the shame of the Munich Agreement of 1938? At length, feeling sure of immunity under protection of the Nazi overlord, leader after leader of French opinion now not merely acknowledges but insists upon his own eminence of two years ago in the art of his country's betrayal! Outside France, in the other countries that have now fallen one by one under Nazi domination, there had been a like tale of effort to reduce spirit within, that the enemy without might have the better chance. By no means the least of these injuries have been wrought by men who intended no particular harm, but whose fatuous continuation

during war of the idle or mischievous chatter that is negligible in time of peace has had disastrous consequence. In every country of the British Commonwealth, from South Africa at one extreme, where it has been most virulent, to New Zealand at the other extreme, where it is so slight as almost to escape notice, there has been a like spectacle.

The tactics necessarily alter with trial, with time and changing circumstance. It is of comparatively little interest just now to review those which were applied in vain in the early period of the war. Isolationism, Defeatism, the stealthy propagation of stories that "things are far worse than we are allowed to know," the insistence (under disguise of a pseudo-charity) that "there is no real difference between the two sides; it is just a conflict of rival imperialisms"—this has been in general dropped, at least for a time, either because it has been found ineffectual or because it is thought too dangerous. But the Fifth-Column is still, here and there, with us and active.

What is its probable next move?

I

The debates at Washington on the Lend-Lease Bill suggest one line that is sure to be followed. Isolationists there urged that use be at once made of the immense influence of the United States to bring the warring countries together, and to achieve peace without further victory for either side. It was obvious that this could be done, if it could be done at all, only by leaving the Nazis in control of the countries they have overrun. That there will be no restoration of Czechoslovakia, of Poland, of "Occupied France," until the aggressor who has so outraged them has been brought low, is apparent to all. It follows that those who would stop at this stage the disablement of the aggressor are willing to see such victims remain as they are!

The pseudo-charitable reasoning by which this was supported in the Committee of the United States Senate will be heard again—it will even be advanced with keener insistence—when the time for discussing world reconstruction is reached. If and when there is decisive victory, the Fifth-Column voice will be raised in plea that victors should be magnanimous, and we shall meet with revival of the nonsense (now temporarily withdrawn from action) that in all wars, including that of 1914 and that of 1939, "all sides have been equally to blame." We have now for some time been spared the rhetorical foolishness about how Hitlerism was the product of an inhuman Versailles

Treaty, of refusal by Great Britain and France to carry out their disarmament pledge, and of an inconsiderate attitude by diplomatists in London and Paris to such generous German negotiators as Stresemann and Bruening. Having seen what happens to Poles and Czechs under German domination, few of us are any longer impressed by blame upon the Treaty-makers for their experiment of reversing the balance in a population necessarily mixed, making Czechs and Poles preponderate over Germans where for centuries Germans had preponderated over Czechs and Poles. Having taken the trouble to read the Treaty of Versailles itself, rather than accept the word (which they had found sadly unreliable) of its Left-Wing critics for what that Treaty contains, multitudes now realize that there was no contractual clause in pledge of "general disarmament" which Great Britain and France failed to carry out. And the glib assurance that it was the maltreatment of German Liberals which produced reaction to Hitlerism can no longer be urged with success on those whom this war has forced to look back upon the real record in Germany: a little patient examination of the facts has shown how it was not until the alleged maltreatment was long past, and concession after concession to German appeals had been granted, that Hitler became a real power with his countrymen.

It is not indeed through these considerations that Fifth-Column propaganda of such pretentious learning and still more pretentious charity has been for the time suspended. Our temporary escape from it is due to the fact that it has become too dangerous during war, as the fate of a few subversive organs has made plain. But the spirit of cynicism masquerading as charity in which it originated will express itself again as soon as the occasion seems safe: and what time can be so safe for reminding British people of their faults as a time of national pride in victory? I look for the Fifth-Column then in its best hortatory mood.

Even as its spokesmen now like to dwell upon the claim they have to be heard on the *method* of waging war, they will then claim an audience on the method of organizing peace. The party of General Hertzog in South Africa, which did its utmost to prevent the South African Union from participating in Britain's war effort at all, is vociferous in its demand, "now that the choice on the matter of principle has been made," to take its part in deciding how the principle shall be carried out. One does well, however, to suspect that the group which tried

in vain to obstruct a policy altogether will fall back, as to "a second best," upon reducing the policy's dimensions in practice. In a war, above all other activities, it is from those alone who are wholeheartedly with us on the purpose that we can afford to take advice on means. And when the time comes to organize the peace, no advisers could be less reliable than such as disbelieved from the beginning in what the national effort, through gigantic sacrifice, was devoted to achieve. It is reasonable to suppose that what they never wanted to accomplish at all, they will aim at reducing—once it has been accomplished in spite of them—to the narrowest scale.

We have, relatively, very few such Fifth-Columnists. But they will be vociferous, out of proportion to their number, when they have a chance.

II

Another, and a very different, risk is from those for whom Mrs. Lindbergh's recent book, *The Wave of the Future*, speaks. It is not a purely American movement, though—strangely enough—it is from an American quarter that its manifesto has come. One ought to add that from an American quarter has come also its most devastating criticism. When Miss Dorothy Thompson published her reply to *The Wave of the Future*, under title *An Open Letter to Anne Lindbergh*, one felt that a new chapter had been written in the great journalism of our Age.

Though it has discreetly ceased for the most part (not altogether) to write and speak as it feels, wrapping itself—as Anatole France said of his own pacifist temper twenty-seven years ago—"in a mantle of silence," there is everywhere a group in fundamental antagonism to democracy. We know a few persons in our own British countries who are, in all that is significant, of Nazi or Fascist mind. Like Mussolini, in the famous article he contributed to *Enciclopedia Italiana*, they still confide to one another, in their more candid moments, that they do not think it either possible or desirable to abolish war, that they regard internationalism and the so-called "international mind" as conceptions of maudlin sentimentality, and that it seems to them absurd to attempt a project of equal rights for individuals within the State or for States in their relationship to one another. Those who think and feel so are perfectly entitled to the same freedom both of conviction and of expression as is granted to enthusiasts for democracy. The more freely,

indeed, they declare themselves, the better; for their peril to the State lies far more in covert than in open exercise of their talent. What we are entitled, however, to ensure if we are in earnest with the cause for which blood and treasure are being so profusely sacrificed, is that any who hate—whether avowedly or in concealment—to see that cause victorious shall not be permitted to nullify in any important respect the consequences of the victory.

Is there still an element in any British country whose desire to "beat the Germans" is no more than national passion? An element with no real preference for "the British way of life" because it is democratic, but rather tolerating the democratic way of life because it happens to be British? An element which merely condescends to the maxims and slogans of our war effort (about justice and racial equality, about good faith and rights of small peoples) as to phrases through which the imperial spirit must work upon the populace? That Mrs. Lindbergh's *Wave of the Future* is without appeal to any British group, would be a very rash statement. We had such people, in the years just before this war: men who wrote and spoke about how much Hitler had done for Germany and Mussolini for Italy, in a spirit of comparative valuation by which most of us were shocked; men who dwelt upon the splendid chivalries of Hermann Goering, upon the glorious return of "discipline" for German and Italian youth, upon the impropriety of criticizing in Britain the internal management of a foreign country (that being "no business of ours"). Some of those who admonished their countrymen so are now in British concentration camps. Others, of the same cast of mind, not yet with them, venture occasional protest against their "freedom of speech" being thus suspended! That they are "patriots," in a debased sense of that word, is not in doubt. But their sort of patriotism, despite its warmth, dishonors their country. There will be need, when the time comes for reconstruction, to put resolutely aside the counsel of those whose share in the national effort had no accompaniment—still less a motive—in share of the national ideal.

This can be ensured only by strict, at times suspicious, scrutiny of the advisers who will crowd to the scene of the next Versailles. Scrutiny, in particular, of their antecedents.

We have proclaimed, many times, that this war is being fought to maintain a certain "way of life," marked by personal liberty, by racial justice, by good faith in international relationship: not for any mere British interest, but for these causes,

which are the concern of all mankind. It would be absurd to expect or hope that all who share the war effort have such sacred purpose in view: the purpose, however noble, with which fighting begins is necessarily soon forgotten by most of the combatants as it develops. Not merely when the cause is unjust, wrote Lecky, in one of his more sombre paragraphs, but even when it is most necessary and most righteous, does the battlefield involve complete suspension of great portions of the moral law:

“War is not, and never can be, a mere passionless discharge of a painful duty. It is in its essence, and it is a main condition of its success, to kindle into fierce exercise among great masses of men the destructive and combative passions—passions as fierce and malevolent as that with which the hound hunts the fox to its death, or the tiger springs upon its prey. Destruction is one of its chief ends. Deception is one of its chief means, and one of the great arts of skilful generalship is to deceive in order to destroy. Whatever other elements may mingle with and dignify war, this at least is never absent, and however reluctantly men may enter into war, however conscientiously they may endeavour to avoid it, they must know that when the scene of carnage has once opened, these things must be not only accepted and condoned, but stimulated, encouraged and applauded.”¹

Granted that all this is so, that of those participating in a struggle such as the present no small proportion are fighting with thought only of their own country's advantage (be that just or be it unjust), and that a still greater proportion very soon lose completely in the rage of battle the dim outline of higher motive with which they began! This seems to make it all the more urgent that the peace shall be planned only by those who, at least at the Peace Table, will have a single eye upon the cause which made the sacrifices of the war worth while.

Do we want to see British Fascists, of the sort that used to applaud Sir Oswald Mosley with such enthusiasm, as advisers of the nation about the Peace Settlement, even if—impelled by the narrowest of national prejudices and jealousies—they fought in the field for democratic Britain against the Axis? Do we desire advice about shaping the new Europe from such men as Lord Londonderry, author of *Germany and Ourselves*, if—once the fight began—they showed a British patriotism for which their previous writings supply no intelligible basis? Should we welcome suggestions on how the British “way of life” shall be kept safe in days to come, from British Communists

1. Lecky, W. E. H., *The Map of Life*, p. 87

whose cooperation for a British victory had no sounder motive than the acknowledgment that "at the moment at least, the menace of Axis capitalism is worse"?

The Peace must be determined by men representative of the real national purpose with which Britain fought the war. Beyond doubt others—of the most diverse purposes—will be clamorous for a chance to frustrate in execution what they could not refuse to promote in principle. Of these, the deliberately and cunningly anti-democratic are the most dangerous.

III

The Fifth-Column activity, however, against which—we may judge from some recent experiences—protection may yet be most requisite is of neither of the types above mentioned. It is of a third sort, which, as soon as the psychological moment for such a suggestion is held to have come, may urge compromise with the Axis as "a thing in itself undesirable, but the least of impending evils, tolerable lest there be complete chaos in Europe." In some such terms the bogey of "Communism" will no doubt be tried again. Anyone who in Britain thinks of compromise with the Axis (to counteract Communism, or for any other purpose whatever) keeps his thought at present to himself: it would meet with abrupt treatment from the British public. But will this wholesome abruptness be maintained when reconstruction has to be discussed? Or will Fifth-Column have a chance for its last effort at "the coming Versailles"?

That the only way to prevent wreckage of the most precious values in life is by committing their guardianship to an autocrat, is a delusion so naive, so much in conflict with what history tells us of autocrats, that it is hard to suppose this warning sincerely urged by some at least of the highly intelligent persons who from time to time lend it countenance. But that certain interests of their own—financial or social or political—which are remote indeed from "the most precious values in life," might be temporarily secured for these highly intelligent persons by maintenance of European dictatorship, and would be at once endangered if such dictatorship were to fall, is probable enough. One must not expect this motive to be disclosed in the conference. As Taper said to Tadpole in *Coningsby*, it would be "a raw time yet" for advancing a purpose to defend prerogative. What we must expect is the proposal of a compromise settlement, with apologetic plea that only thus can "Bolshevization of Europe" be prevented. It may well at the moment

escape notice that the plea is put forward by those whose alarm in the past has been stirred by economic crisis and insurrection labor much more than by any prospect of national humiliation.

Again one turns to the extreme case of France for warning. In the Paris of a few years back, among those to whom *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* had always been a hateful proletarian slogan, the stealthy whisper used to go round "Better submit to Mussolini, or even to Hitler, than to Leon Blum." More than to any other single cause, the collapse of France last summer was due to treachery of this sort. Nothing of the kind has availed to betray Britain, but it would be too much to take for granted that no similar influences can ever be found at work there. The consignment of certain Englishmen (and an occasional Scotsman) of high rank to concentration camp, on executive order, and with obstinate disregard of their friends' lament about the suspended *Habeas Corpus Act*, goes to show that Mr. Churchill's Cabinet is awake to this peril. Obviously, too, the class interest which needed such precautions of restraint during war will be emboldened to larger enterprizes for itself when peace settlement falls to be discussed, and the Government's *Special Powers Act* has been joyfully repealed. Then, in the flush of return to complete, uncensored debate, *The Daily Worker* and *The Week* may resume their familiar office of weakening the Englishman's faith in England. Side by side with indulgence to the "Left-Wing," the charitable British temper will approve of a fresh hearing for its rival extremist, and *The Black Shirt, Organ of British Fascists*, may come to our desks again. In such atmosphere of universal tolerance, the Fifth-Column anxious to spoil the democratic peace for the cause of re-established social ascendancy may come once more into action. A disturbing memory comes back, of that "message of cordial sympathy" sent by a group of sixty British M.P.'s to Signor Mussolini in 1938, through Colonel Cyril Roche—described as "a British resident in Rome who was a warm supporter of the Italian cause during the Abyssinian conflict."

To be forewarned in this matter is surely to be forearmed. Delusions, more or less innocent—however unintelligible—some years back, have no excuse whatever now. That Mussolini and Hitler were no anti-Communist champions at any time, but were subsidized from the familiar sources to destroy popular representative government, is plain. It will long stand among psychological mysteries that, for a period, persons otherwise rational believed the interests of the Christian Faith in Spain

to be a deep concern of the most blasphemous journalist in Europe. Also that the same group of persons thought the word of Adolf Hitler should continue to be accepted long after he had declared lying to be the very foundation of his policy, and had illustrated his method by example after example! But those who have seen such phenomena should at least now be awake to the risk of their recurrence, and should depend very little upon public capacity to resist again the like agencies of imposture.

It was the high temper of the British people, asserting itself in the summer and fall of 1939, that made Fifth-Column definitely suspend operations. The same temper must be kept high if these operations are not to be resumed. It has already gloriously abashed the enemy expectations. Unlike the sad case of France, there has been seen in Britain no Communist Labor engaged on sabotage of the munition works, and if Joachim von Ribbentrop inferred from his conversations (at "Cliveden" or elsewhere) that Britain would have her Lavals and her Georges Bonnets to reinforce him in the high places of her direction, he has now found out his mistake. That there will be no slackening until the triumph, the British spirit—aroused as it now has been—is our complete guarantee. But it is not too soon to look a little beyond the military triumph, and to forecast, by previous experience of the national temperament, how it may be secured against peril from some of its own best qualities.

Apparent generosity may be absence of mind. And a generous people may be exploited. Fifth-Column, elsewhere and previously in defeat, will have this last card. Let us make sure that it too will be played in vain.

H. L. S.