

TOPICS OF THE DAY

THE ROYAL SEMI-JUBILEE: BRITAIN AND EUROPE: PROVINCIAL RIGHTS IN AUSTRALIA: THE END OF THE N.R.A.

KING George V has now been reigning over the British peoples for a period of twenty-five years. The celebrations of the royal semi-jubilee have provided unmistakable evidence of the sincere affection with which the King is regarded not only by ourselves, as his loyal subjects, but by the whole world. In London, as was most fitting, there were services of thanksgiving, processions, and great state functions, gathering themselves around the personal presence of the Sovereign and his Consort; but these more formal ceremonies provided only an official setting for more revealing and spontaneous opportunities of congratulation and rejoicing. The hilarity that carried London off its feet for a whole week, and the more restrained if not less real spirit of enjoyment which broke over the whole Empire, cannot be explained simply by the universal readiness of mankind to turn any occasion into an excuse for holiday-making, or by the desire to find temporary release from pre-occupation with the tensions of national and international life. The fact is that the King himself *in propria persona* is their only explanation.

Royal jubilees, even semi-jubilees, are not of frequent occurrence in the modern world. Within our own Empire we must go back to the penultimate years of the great Victoria's reign for similar celebrations. A return to these spacious days not only provokes a sense of historical contrast, but it also increases our appreciation of the King's personal triumph. When Queen Victoria celebrated her jubilees, pride of Empire and security of achievement were the dominant notes. Even Mr. Rudyard Kipling was moved to write his "Recessional" for rebuke and warning. No similar retrospect is possible on this present occasion. The period of King George's reign has been co-incident with a time, not only of outward change affecting the whole order of the world, but of change in political idea and action, such as can find no parallel in all history for swift and compressed alteration. No part of the world has been more heavily involved in these changes than the British Empire. Our prestige and position have cost us an immense price in the loss of many of our finest youth, in the accumulation of a vast and almost insupportable burden of public debt, and,

not least, in a protracted period of impoverishment and unemployment, with all its capacity to breed social disaffection. We live in a world in which change by revolution has come to be not only an accepted political creed, but a method of political action. During these twenty-five years, great and proud dynasties, in Europe and in Asia, have come to singularly undistinguished ends. Under these circumstances, the remarkable fact is that the tenure of the British throne is more secure to-day than it has ever been.

The position of the Sovereign in the British constitution is as necessary as it is indefinable. There is, indeed, a subtle sense in which he can say "*L'état, c'est moi*". Loyalty to his person, and nothing else, is the unwritten but powerful bond that keeps the Empire together. He is the repository of tradition, the symbol of unity, and at the same time, the condition of flexible readjustment in response to new circumstances. These factors constitute the security and continued existence of that unique political entity in which we have our citizenship. Governments come and go, alike in the Dominions and in the old land. New stars appear in the political heavens and shine with their brilliant, sometimes brief, radiance. Then comes the hour of their decline. But the throne remains, and something intangible yet very powerful continues with it.

It has been suggested that in a constitutional monarchy, such as ours, the king is simply a decorative figure-head, adding a little colour to drab democracy, like the cavalry, according to the subaltern's famous definition, keeping battles from becoming "a beastly, vulgar brawl". He does what he is told to do, and he does it very well, because—well "egad, he'd better"—because although it is an expensive institution, on the whole, it is a form of political insurance against violent change. The British line of kings and queens has had its own share of human frailty and excellence, but none of them has ever been content merely to be a person who orders the Great Seal to be affixed as a very exalted version of what is known in humbler walks of life as applying the rubber-stamp. Most of them have had a rather pronounced personal character, and King George is no exception. He is a king, not simply the chief magistrate of the state. There is a regal quality about his actions, subtle, indefinable, yet distinctive. It is the royal touch, very delicate, intensely personal, but in action, the authentic mark of a king.

During these twenty-five years, the British constitution has been severely tested in its capacity for modification, and thus for being the instrument of political freedom and not a pre-ordained

mould into which all development must be compressed. Very early in the reign of King George, he had to face complicated questions in connection with the veto rights of the House of Lords. Then came the Irish impasse, with threatenings of civil war. Next came the Great War itself, when national emergencies kept on raising issue after issue in the making and re-making of governments, the creation of new offices, and the delegation of enormous powers to individual ministers and officials. He was the first British monarch to hand seals of office to the members of a Socialist administration. Our own parliament told him first that Canada wanted no more titles, and then he was asked to begin conferring them again. At a fateful hour, with the king lay the momentous decision of calling for a National Government. He saw the Empire pass decisively into the loosely bound association of free peoples, which is its present condition. Before long, it is very probable that the great Empire within the Empire will take upon itself the tremendous responsibility of self-government. During these changes, King George has not only been a monarch of impeccable constitutionalism, but in making those vital personal decisions, not only in his wise acceptance of the demands of a new time, but in the temper of his acquiescence, he has been the very bulwark of our political peace. We can imagine what another kind of man might have been and might have done, and what might well have resulted. He might have handled his royal prerogative with a petulant submission to inevitable change, or have used the prestige of his high position for private and partisan ends; or, on the other hand, he might simply have made his possession of great wealth and his relative immunity from public criticism an opportunity for self-indulgence and indolence. The fact is that he has been and continues to be the world's first gentleman, not simply a curious survival in a world of rapid change, but a prophetic figure who embodies in his life and character the type of man who has been and always will continue to be the salt without which society will lose its savour. It is not too much to say that no man could have been what he has been without an unusual measure of self-discipline and self-control. When we consider the violence and brutality that have accompanied political changes in other parts of the world, we may be very thankful in no formal sense, but very realistically, that a man of his sense and responsibility has continued the monarchy among us. Probably he, more than any other, has saved us from the extravagances and horrors of political revolution.

DURING the past few months, there has been a considerable clearing of the European atmosphere. Inevitably, the process has been accompanied by periods of tempestuous weather, with threatenings of thunder, lightning and rain, and the generation of much heat. The electric storm has broken over us, and now visibility is distinctly better. The result is a real gain from almost every point of view. The atmosphere of secrecy and suspicion has been replaced by a condition in which we can face facts frankly and without evasion.

Germany has taken upon herself the momentous responsibility of declaring her full mind to the world. She has embarked upon a policy of complete re-armament. Conscription has been re-introduced. She has withdrawn her signature from the Versailles Treaty. However much we may deplore such action, it is well that the German policy should be announced without evasion to everybody concerned. Every intelligent observer of post-war Germany has known how deeply the Versailles Treaty has been resented, particularly the War Guilt clauses. Germany only signed under duress. The marching and counter-marching of storm-troops under the Hitler régime has been an excuse for military preparation that has deceived nobody. Although the facts were concealed from the public, the vast accumulation of materials for aerial warfare cannot have been a secret to the foreign offices of the world. For the present, the re-armament of Germany is the dominant fact in European affairs, and we may as well have all the cards upon the table, if we are to have an effective part in playing the game.

The decision of the German people makes a demand for a similar clear declaration of policy by the rest of the world. It is hardly possible to overstate the momentous character of the issue we have to face. Broadly speaking, we may note two lines of action to be followed. The first is that advocated by France. The wartime Alliance of France, Russia and Great Britain must be reconstituted. We might also hope for the considerable adherence of Czechoslovakia and Poland, possibly also Italy. The policy is perfectly clear and definite, and let it be said, so far as the French are concerned, entirely understandable. They believe, (and who can deny the validity of their case), that in 1914 they were the victims of an unprovoked attack by Germany. In defence of their soil and liberty, they brought themselves to the brink of disaster. Even now, more than sixteen years after the Armistice, the financial stability of France is gravely threatened. The French contend that they are still dealing with an unrepentant Germany, which

has shed nothing of imperialistic ambition in the process of becoming a Republic; that *der Fuhrer* is at least as dangerous as *der Kaiser*; and that the only safe policy for the civilized world is to draw an armed cordon around the beast, and then let it rage until it tires itself out. Already France has taken a first, measurable step in the execution of this plan by entering into a pact with Soviet Russia.

The second attitude is that represented, on the whole, by Great Britain. France is eager to get European politics back to the pre-1914 basis, and Britain is just as anxious to avoid any return to that international alignment. Ever since the close of the Great War, the persistent policy of the British people has been aimed at getting the bad boy of Europe, who had been soundly smacked and placed in the corner with face to the wall, out of that humiliating and unsatisfactory situation. The Locarno pacts, which marked the first steps in Germany's return to the concert of Europe, were made possible only by the sedulous labours of the British foreign minister. It was Britain who guided the German feet into the League of Nations. The British retort to German rearmament was the Stresa conference. Even now, in the very act of trebling her Air-Force, (which was itself the desperate resort of defeat in the policy of disarmament), Mr. Baldwin has been eager to reply to every gesture of conciliation on the part of Herr Hitler. Very remarkable speeches were made in the British House of Lords, where, at least, there is little necessity to indulge in oratory with the uncomfortable encumbrance of placing the tongue in the cheek, to the effect that Germany had justification for her rearmament, which should not be construed as a hostile act. Opposed to the narrow realism of France, which relies upon the somewhat unstable principle of the balance of power, there stands the idealistic aspiration of Great Britain, still advocating the policy of reliance upon the League of Nations and the method of reconciliation.

The greatest difficulty in the way of the British policy is the attitude of Germany in general and of Herr Hitler in particular. The calculated ruthlessness and sheer brutality of the brown-shirt régime is a very dreadful appearance in a country with a tradition in culture, music, poetry and philosophy such as Germany's. Has she not led the world in scholarly research and scientific achievement? Recently, not a few of her leaders have declared themselves unabashed pagans, and the wide-spread continued persecution of the Confessional Synod is an almost unbelievable attitude in the land of Martin Luther. The question that naturally leaps to the mind is; can we trust them, not so much for the present, but, say, ten

years hence, when their new military policies have matured into a reconstitution of the great fighting machine of 1914, only something more terrible and terrifying?

Meantime, perhaps we ought to understand the German mentality, even if we cannot sympathise with its outlook. We may be very sure that the German people are quite sincere when they say they do not want war. Who does? We also know that there is a considerable section of the German people who are as permanently and implacably opposed to war-like policies as anybody in the world. They are not in the ascendant at present, and we have done very little to help them to become effective in directing German affairs. Our entire attitude has helped to create the mood that produced Hitler. Germany was forcibly disarmed and kept humiliated, while France built forts along the frontier. Russia produced one of the most efficient fighting forces the world has ever known, and fear of Russia and the Communist régime is the real terror that dictates German policy. When Hitler established himself as Dictator, the only alternative to National Socialism was Communism. Probably it is still the only alternative. Communism means Russia. Can we blame the German people if they have refused to acquiesce in such a possibility, and if they have become alarmed at finding France an ally with Russia in the name of civilization?

The whole situation is complicated, and defies all attempt to keep the issues clear-cut and decisive. Our main question is, What should be the British attitude? There is a strong, dominant body of opinion among the British people which is completely opposed to any entanglement with the old method of continental alliances. Britain must not become a party in any attempt to create a new balance of power. In support of this attitude, the Dominions, whose voice is very rightly of considerable authority in the direction of the imperial mind, are probably even more resolute in their opposition to European entanglements. And who can doubt their practical wisdom in the matter?

The British Empire has a greater importance to-day in the control of international politics than at any previous time in its history. Strange as it may seem, the policy of devolution which has created the Empire into the present association of free peoples makes it an almost ideal instrument for the new methods of international conciliation that must prevail if civilization is to be preserved. The great world-questions are no longer confined to the European continent. Already, Japan has entered upon the scene with decisive effect. The United States of America refuses to

become a pawn in the little game so long played by the European powers. Great Britain is part of Europe, but she is also a member of a world-wide family, which grows in economic and political power every year. Very probably (let us hope it will not require another world-war finally to convince us) we shall realize before long that questions which airplanes, tanks and submarines cannot settle are capable of much more speedy and final adjudication by the *force majeure* of economic sanctions. Meantime, it cannot be doubted that Great Britain is pursuing a path that at once approves itself to the enlightened conscience as morally right and, therefore, in a world made for government by moral principles, must, both in the long run and in the short, make for peace. At present, nothing else matters.

THE State of Western Australia has raised quite recently a question in imperial relations, of much more than temporary or local interest. It is, in fact, the Australian version of what is for us "an auld sang". Old melodies, like proverbial old soldiers, never die, and, unlike the alleged habits of military veterans, they do not even "merely fade away". They keep on singing themselves into the hearts of the generations: indeed they become the very medium of tradition, if it is only the long entail of some ancient wrong.

The Commonwealth of Australia, like every other country of the Empire, has become economically ambitious, none the less so because her ambition is young. The Dominions, most properly, want to have a home of their own, with power of the keys, to open or keep locked at will. The development of a domestic economic policy has become the very centre of their national self-consciousness. But the troubles of establishing a home are many, especially when, as in most things human, we can never begin *de novo*. We never escape from the entanglements of history, and in the case of nation-building, history means the presence of tenants already in possession. These occupants must live in separate rooms. Their traditions, necessities, occupations and outlooks may be, and indeed often are, very different. From these arise many problems among us.

Economic independence, in the modern world, involves industrial development and tariff protection, at least in the first stages of expansion. A social consequence is the rapid growth of large cities, to which the mingled instincts of gregariousness and acquisitiveness attract far too many people. In what we call a

"Young Country" the opportunities of commercial and industrial growth are attractive to the economic pioneer. The sons and grandsons of the settlers who cut out the first farms become the business magnates of the booming times, during which patrician reputations begin to build themselves upon shrewd transactions in real estate. And so, another king arose, that knew not Joseph, even the king of big business. By a process, almost Marxian in the dialectic of its economic movement, political power becomes concentrated in the hands of urban interests. The tune is called, and the piper is duly paid.

These principles of colonial expansion have found a striking and notoriously exaggerated expression in the history of the Australian Commonwealth. This vast continental country has great areas calling for population, and, at the same time, a number of large cities, quite overgrown in relation to the general settlement of the country. Aggressive "labour" groups have dominated the political policies of the Commonwealth, and the pioneer inhabitants of the "back blocks" have been politically ineffective in their scattered and isolated homesteads. This condition is particularly true of the vast State of Western Australia. The frontier people of this great territory allege that they are so far out of sight of Canberra that they are completely out of mind. Costs of transport, the tariff impositions on imported goods, the pressure of federal taxation, and now the constriction of markets through the operation of trade agreements have brought strained relations within the Commonwealth, quite literally, to the breaking-point.

Western Australia has endeavoured to make its complaints heard in the Commonwealth parliament with the straight, unequivocal speech of the backwoodsman. Members have persisted in arguing their cause with that tenacity which comes from a sense of injustice, and they have been refused redress with that indifference which accompanies pride of majority and possession. The sense of grievance in Western Australia became so acute that its own parliament was persuaded that the only way out of the impasse was to ask for a dissolution of the federal tie. The Commonwealth of Australia was a creation of the British parliament, and to that parent-priest, who had at once begotten them, and then had blessed their union in the nuptial bond of federation, they now turned asking that the marriage be dissolved and that they be allowed to come back to the old home.

A petition was prepared by the parliament of Western Australia and presented to the British parliament, humbly praying that their State be released from union within the Commonwealth of Australia. Their position was that as it was by their own free consent that

they entered into the Australian federation, now that they wished to withdraw their adherence to what they regarded as an oppressive alliance, they should be allowed to go free. In short, they wanted Home Rule for Western Australia.

The constitutional questions raised by a petition of this sort are, quite obviously, of a difficult and complicated character. The entire trend of imperial policy has been towards the establishment of the Dominions within the Empire as free and self-governing countries, with all the rights and privileges of nation-hood. But was the Australian Commonwealth Act a final and irrevocable deed of imperial legislation? What a parliament has done, may it not undo? Does the British parliament, or for that matter the Privy Council in other than judicial causes, remain a final court of appeal within the Empire? To these difficult questions the British parliament has returned not so much a final as a hortatory answer. A joint-committee of both Houses has studied the issues involved. They do not pronounce upon the competence of the British parliament to pass an Act of Disunion, but they point out some obvious and relevant truths. It is highly undesirable that the British parliament should intervene in the domestic differences of a Dominion. The petition represented grievances, which may be quite genuine, but there are other parties whose voice must be heard. The Commonwealth as a whole, and the other Australian States as constituting it, have all points of view which must be considered. Where better could they be debated than on the soil of Australia itself, and by the Australian people? Was it likely that when the resources of reconciliation failed at home, the benevolent intervention of a mother-country was the way to succeed? Western Australia came asking for a divorce, and was told to go home and make the best of its differences.

It is to be hoped that the action of Western Australia will not be entirely fruitless. Fiscal policy has been a fateful rock for the ship of Empire. The power of the purse is a necessary symbol of national authority, but it requires great wisdom and discretion to wield it in accordance with the essential British ideals of unity and liberty. Empire relations are passing very much into bargaining on the basis of trade agreements and tariff concessions. Doubtless these intromissions give a realistic character to the sentiment of Empire, but in questions of friendship, the love of money is the root of all evil. To make friendly relations an occasion for hard bargaining is notoriously one of the surest ways to end partnerships of affection. The sore spots in the imperial framework, not only in the relations between the motherland and the Dominions, but within the Dominions, and within the island of Great Britain as

between England and Scotland, have an economic origin. The question of devolution has not been finally settled by the present decision, but only postponed to await a more fully matured wisdom.

IT seems that the Blue Eagle has had its neck drawn by the hand of a poulterer. This dealer in fowls has "done his part" so effectively in conjunction with the Supreme Court, that the fine bird of promise which was to carry our neighbours back to prosperity now lies with hardly a flap to its wings. Doubtless, it still may be offered up as another votive sacrifice on the altar of the Constitution, and the sacred music for the Service will be chanted by Senator Huey Long, Father Coughlin and Mr. Hearst, with Messrs. Andrew Mellon and Herbert Hoover standing afar off, wearing the appropriate expressions of relief on their faces. But, there may be other funerals before the account is finally closed.

A merchant was convicted on eighteen different counts for offences against the Poultry Code. This particular set of trade regulations, against which he trespassed in the course of his business, were part of the N.I.R.A., part of the Roosevelt Scheme for national recovery. It is not denied that the code in question was part of the law of the land, or that the poulterer had failed to observe its provisions. The appeal to the Supreme Court was on the competence of the law which enacted the Code. Obviously, the question at issue affected the mandatory character of the N.I.R.A.

The Supreme Court of the United States of America is an august tribunal, with a merited reputation for legal wisdom and just decision. In this particular case, the finding has been reached unanimously that on all counts the appeal against the N.I.R.A. must be upheld. The American Congress, in handing over powers to the President as representing the Executive, was acting strictly *ultra vires* and not in accordance with the Constitution. It is impossible to believe that the decision thus handed down, in view both of the unanimity with which it was reached and of the gravity of the issues involved, was other than in accordance with legal justice. The whole policy of industrial and economic recovery has become entangled with the Constitution of the United States of America, and, for the time being, that barrier to its operation is final and unsurmountable.

President Roosevelt came to his high office at a time of the gravest national crisis. The economic system of the country had broken down, and was on the verge of complete collapse. Among his first acts was the necessary closing of every bank in the country, to allow a terrified people an opportunity to get back their wind.

Whether we approve his policies or not, at least his programme was a bold and statesmanlike attempt to deal with an urgent and difficult situation. Really, he said to the capitalist system, "Reform, or be damned". He has provided us with the greatest attempt yet made to induce industry to set its own house in order. It is true that he wielded a fairly big stick over the industrial leaders; but his most potent weapon of reform was supplied by the psychological pressure of a fear that they had better accept, lest a worse thing might befall them. In any case, he was a very benevolent coercionist; for, if they did their part, he did his also in pouring forth monetary tributaries into the channels of industry.

The agreements reached on a semi-voluntary basis by groups of employers and trades unionists, along with the plans of the famous Brain Trust, have become the basis for what, in time, has been written into the law of the land by Congress, and made the basis of action by the President and his Executive. There can be no doubt that the country as a whole has been with the President. It would be strange if interferences of so sweeping a character in a land with such a tradition of *laissez-faire* liberty did not meet with protest and active opposition in many quarters. But, there is reason to believe that, even now, Roosevelt is the only national leader in sight.

The N.I.R.A. and other codes have compressed a great deal of social legislation into a small space of time. This gives the so-called reforms a very striking character; though, in many cases, the regulation of hours and conditions of labour was only making up a very long lee-way in the matter of social standards. But it has been decreed, no doubt rightly, that according to the American Constitution, these questions are matters for the separate states, and conjoint action by the Federal Government is an invasion of the holy of holies of "State-rights".

The crisis is serious for the United States of America. The President could resort to the tedious and difficult method of getting the Constitution altered to permit him to enforce his recovery programme. It is hardly likely that he will embark upon this very problematic course of action. On the other hand, if he abandons the N.R.A., he will plunge the whole country into economic chaos. The dilemma on which he is impaled is not one on which even the most sympathetic observers of his uncomfortable position are likely to be able to offer much helpful advice. We can hardly think that the resourcefulness of the American people will be defeated by their own political Constitution. The Constitution was made for America, and not America for the Constitution.