

# TOPICS OF THE DAY

THE CORONATION: STRIKES: EIRE: SPAIN.

THE CORONATION OF KING GEORGE VI, and of his gracious consort, QUEEN ELIZABETH was something more than a domestic occasion in our British family-life. The magnificent spectacles and solemn ceremonies constituted an event of world-wide interest, if not of universal importance. For us, who own the British name, and, unashamedly, take pride in the heritage that goes with it, the final act in our King's accession awakened sentiments of sincere loyalty: but, the wide dimensions of the Empire could not measure the stream of affectionate interest that flowed out to surround the royal couple on their great day. London became the centre of the world. By the wizardry of Radio, innumerable multitudes were able to share, almost spiritually, in the sacred ritual of the great Abbey, where all the pride of our Empire was gathered to witness the dedication of the world's most exalted monarch to the service of God in the service of a people. This may well mark "an event in modern history."

Lord Macaulay began his Essay on Hallam's Constitutional History with the words:

History, at least in its state of ideal perfection, is a compound of poetry and philosophy. It impresses general truths on the mind by a vivid representation of particular characters and events.

Politics, in the higher Aristotelian sense of term, has become a major philosophical question of our time. The public intelligence of every age must engage itself with emergent problems, grave or trivial, of permanent policy or transient crisis, and these demand the exercise of political virtues and social wisdom. But, behind the ebb and flow of parties and programmes, there are anterior questions, which are concerned with the very nature of political association. In this region we encounter such prior questions as the rights and duties of the State in relation to its citizens, and, conversely, their relation to the State, as the extent and limits of government with reference to individual liberty, and our Constitutional apparatus for the practical expression of these ultimate attitudes. These are all living issues in the modern world. We believe, impenitently, (although, we trust, humbly) that the British way of dealing with these basal issues displays a wisdom that can be shared with the

peoples of the earth. Our political habits have been developed over a period long enough to put them beyond the stage of experiment and over such an immense territorial extent and wide diversity of condition, that they have been fully tested in their application. This British way can hardly be designated a theory of the state, for it has been directed by intuition rather than by self-conscious policy. The Coronation supplied that element of "poetry, which impressed its general truth on the mind by a vivid representation" and brought the secret springs of our political genius into all the colour and emotion of pageantry, ritual and symbol.

If we are to give a name to the spirit that animates the British polity, the nearest we can get to it is in the word "*liberty*". It would be pharisaical to claim that we have any prescriptive title to that noblest of human aspirations. If liberty is our creed, there have been times when we sinned, miserably and fatally, against our faith. There are many pages in British history that we may well wish had never needed to be written. Such a confession proclaims nothing more or less than the fact that we are the children of wrath, even as others. Nevertheless, the law of sufficient reason compels us to recognise that we can only account for that gathering of half the earth's pride and glory within the venerable fane of Westminster because, in these little islands off the European coasts, there has dwelt a people, who have made the love of liberty a practical maxim of political life. Moreover, that same love has begotten a family of like-minded nations and created a mighty world-Empire. Is there any political witness more relevant to the necessities of our present time?

The spirit of liberty is an elemental attitude to life that eludes precise definition. It is not an "ideology", and those who cultivate the worship of that modern idol of the market-place have no place for it in their scheme of existence. Such ceremonies as the coronation reduce our political transcendentalists, who imagine that humanity can be harassed into conformity with a theory of the State, to a condition of exasperation and bewilderment. For the growth of liberty is not a hothouse plant. Its roots go down into the soil of the past, and its sturdy limbs and spreading branches have grown strong because, like the oaks of England, they have endured the heat and cold of seasons past recall. Its vital sap is the deep unfathomable power of a long tradition. Yet, history has many examples of a great heritage turning, at last, to rottenness and decay. The British people have been fortunate in the circumstance that they have been continually under necessity to

revitalise their political way of life through its application to new situations in every corner of the earth. And yet, the British Empire has been a leisurely, almost fortuitous expansion. The maturing processes of time have brought it to its present condition. It is no over-night growth on the horizon of world-history, cultivated to gratify the upstart ambition of some dynamic personality. Even now, our Imperial life presents no appearance of unbroken tranquillity—it never has, and as long as we keep alive, it never will. And, yet the Empire holds together, without the hint of dissolution, bound by the most tenuous, and yet most powerful of ties—a common sentiment of liberty and loyalty.

The King, in his royal person, is the only visible embodiment of our British spirit. No other symbol could more adequately express its intangible and mystic quality. This man, who does nothing, yet does all. He initiates no policies, makes no laws, leads no armies; yet, in his office, he is the security of liberty for the humblest subject. Because he alone has no political opinion to offer, every man has the right to express and propagate an opinion of his own; because he sits on the throne, the most impotent of presidents, governments come and go, but the state lives on; because he has a hereditary claim to his office, democracy flourishes at its best. The huzzahs of the multitude that thundered in his ears on the coronation day were the very antithesis of those stiffened salutes, given by citizens of less happy realms, where the arm shoots out because men fear the cudgel of the uniformed bully who represents the dominant political party, or because the sneaking eye of the political informer may note their sins of omission. In the modern world, such a spectacle is worthy of a cheer from the most sophisticated observer of the human scene.

The vision of the prophet comes, perhaps too easily, at times of fervid exaltation. And yet, faith and hope require to be brought into strong determination by emotions that cannot be self-aroused, but which need the powerful stimulus of a spectacular display. With the departure of the captains and the kings, surely something of more than momentary value may well remain with us in our Imperial life. By methods, wise and foolish, we have contrived to bring into a marvellous unity of reconciliation the interests and aspirations of many diverse races and kingdoms. If the British peoples can hold together to demonstrate even the possibility of such a federation of the world to a sceptical age, our example may have a moderating influence on the clash of forces that menaces the peace and happiness of mankind. If such be our engagement with destiny, our citizens will require an unusual degree of political

responsibility. In this respect, they will lack nothing in the spirit of their dedication from the bearing and example of their King and Queen.

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**S**TRIKES have developed into a world-wide epidemic of industrial trouble. The contagion has spread everywhere, and has assumed many forms. Waiters in Paris, 'prentice-boys in the Clyde-side shipyards, automobile workers in Oshawa, school-children in Czecho-Slovakia, miners and construction-workers in Nova Scotia have all been infected by the bacillus. Even the coronation crowds in London were exposed to the irritating inconveniences caused by a withdrawal of the omnibus system through the strike policy of the operators. Everywhere, with the significant exceptions of Italy and Germany, labor has entered into a new realisation of its power. Either we have to deal with a widely-conceived policy of industrial action on an international front, or, we have to recognise what amounts to the same thing in the development of a new psychological atmosphere dispersed over many lands, in virtue of which working people are united in the demand for improvement of their condition.

Students of economic history offer us the consolation that strikes are, generally, an accompaniment of the return to an era of economic prosperity. When there are a hundred candidates for your job at the work-gates, you endure many things before you walk out, or, in the modern manner, sit down in a fight for more favourable conditions. On the other hand, when orders are tumbling into the office, prices are rising, workmen are in demand and employers are in a more genial temper, there are obvious strategic advantages in pressing for new terms of labor through the threat of an organised strike. It is not a pleasant picture, and when we reflect that it portrays a great and vital area of our social existence, nobody can contemplate the situation without considerable anxiety. The communist assures us that these struggles between capital and labor only reveal the unremitting state of class-war that is inherent in our evil economic system. Be that as it may, the suggestion seems to be that, under present conditions, the Biblical view, which represents toil as a curse rather than a blessing, has more to say for itself than the sentimentalists who devote themselves to rhapsodies about the enjoyments of creative work. And yet, if the covenant of grace has any effect on our mundane condition, the industrial scene ought to present more engaging aspects than one of an incessant civil war. Normally, friction is a wasteful form of heat. Weapons of attack, whose force consists in their

powers of irritation, leave bitterness and suspicion behind, even when the battle is over and wounds are healed. At the present time, when we are moving slowly out of the economic doldrums, a useful contribution might be made towards a better social life, if all parties concerned resolutely faced the issues involved and took counsel together for devising some saner method of composing industrial disputes.

In a period of economic strain, the incidence of suffering falls most heavily on the industrial workers. Employers have their own difficult burdens of anxiety and responsibility. They have to meet losses, and, sometimes, their entire business may disappear before their eyes. Often enough, diminished wages and short-time work are the only conditions on which they are able to offer any employment at all. Capitalists have as little interest as workers in idle factories and unremunerative transactions. Nevertheless, when we get down to questions of real suffering, the employer has the advantage all the time. He knows nothing of the terrible privations that accompany prolonged unemployment or the desperate struggle to keep up the most elementary decencies of life on a weekly wage that is cut in half. It is entirely understandable that, with the emergence of better times, the workman should become aware of a new urge to organise himself along with his mates to secure increased wages and more agreeable conditions of labor. Most enlightened employers recognise the justice of the workers' claim, and indeed, take steps to meet it. When the only method open to secure this recognition for the worker is the crude weapon of the strike, from every point of view, the result is deplorable.

Rates of wages and conditions of work have not been the only issues in recent strikes. These more practical questions have tended to recede before the principle that is involved in complete liberty of labor organisation. On this North American continent, under the vigorous leadership of Mr. John L. Lewis, an aggressive campaign is being waged with the objective of combining all the workers of particular industries into great and powerful unions. The battle-line of this new labor drive has extended itself across the international border into Canada. During the month of April, a strike of workers in the automobile industry at Oshawa raised the question as to whether Canadian workers should become involved in this new policy. It is very evident that a most determined effort is being made to build up a strong united labor organisation of industrial workers on a continent-wide scale. The prospect is not being welcomed by employers. The more masterful are opposed to any united organisation of the workers. Others, who realise

the value and justice of collective bargaining, prefer either the old craft unions, or unions that simply combine the employees of one factory or individual company. On the other hand, we have to realise that if the programme of trades unionism associated with the name of Mr. Lewis translates itself into action, something more far-reaching than a new industrial situation will have been created. New political possibilities begin to appear on the horizon of our North American life.

Industrial peace would be more assured and social progress thereby advanced, if the principle embodied in a recent statute of the Nova Scotia legislature, were accepted with complete cordiality. The day is long past when workers can be denied the right of organisation that employers have long accepted for themselves. Nobody has ever questioned the liberty of employers to unite in federations, cartels, commercial unions, manufacturers' associations to fix prices and wages, to protect their industrial interests and to make representations to governments. There are times when the operations of these capitalist unions have been oppressive and tyrannical, but, on the whole, they have suited the purpose for which they exist. The financial magnate who specialises in mergers is the counterpart of the aggressive trade union official. Political bosses are no more desirable whether they appear from the side of capital or labor. Employers and employees are men of like passions, and our hope is in a general level of common sense that can only function when suspicion and fear vanish before the kind of mutual respect that develops with sitting round a conference table. The intelligent working man is quite capable of dealing with the communist conspirator and the unbalanced hot-head, when he appears within his own ranks. The brandishing of the big stick by either capital or labor only excites animosity and takes us nowhere. As in the wilder kind of warfare that obtains between nations, so in the struggles that embitter industry, all parties might now resolve heartily on an agreement to build up an organisation of conciliation and conference for the peace and better ordering of our common life.

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**E**IRE is the new name by which, it is proposed, we shall know the future Ireland. Lovers of the Emerald Isle, and her people, will hope that what we have called Ireland by any other name will keep its sweetness. The pronunciation of the new title, like the constitution it symbolises, seems somewhat vague and undetermined. The all-important sound is, of course, the vowel of the opening syllable. A studious examination of various more or less authorita-

tive deliverances on the subject suggest that we shall approximate, as nearly a foreigner may hope, to the exact shade of tone required if we keep in mind the affectionate way in which native-born Irishmen, whose accent has remained uncorrupted by the clipped speech of the Saxon, enunciate the first vowel in the more familiar name of Ireland. The new name has provoked an inevitable amusement among writers, who continue to treat Irish affairs as a species of comic opera. But surely, among the many miseries that have been heaped on this ancient land, she shall not be denied liberty to select her own name. Eire has more to commend it than such modern monstrosities as Czecho-slovakia and Transjordanian, and, if the Irish people are determined upon setting up a Republic, at least we can congratulate them on having selected a name that is incapable of being barbarously reduced to such abbreviations as U. S. S. R. or even U. S. A.

Ireland not only proposes to give herself a new name (or, as the more ardent patriots would protest, to revert to an ancient one that has been lost with so much more of former glory), but also a new constitution. President de Valera has never concealed his Republican aspirations. Now, he has become persuaded that the time is ripe for the Irish people to adopt his party's programme as their permanent political constitution. He cannot be accused of any undue haste in his procedure. If any accusations are to be made, they are to the effect that he has exposed his country to the enervating influences of a vague political drift. Even now, the President has not adopted the familiar rebel tactics of surprise by issuing a sudden proclamation. The Constitution has been prepared only in draft form, and, following the recent Russian example, it has to be submitted to a popular plebiscite before final acceptance. It has been suggested that this new phase in Mr. de Valera's policies is an astute move in electioneering propaganda, whereby he hopes to atone for the past disappointments by a parade of new promises. Nevertheless, if he means at all what he has always professed as his political faith, we cannot object if he now proposes to give his intentions their proper fulfilment.

The Constitution, like the reputed Celtic temperament, which, presumably it expresses in political form, is a curious mingling of opposite traits. At its best, the Irish character combines a mystical quality of idealistic aspiration with a liveliness of wit and an urbanity of manner that has made the old land a school of saints and orators. At lower levels, the Celt is apt to defeat the practical ends of life by fanatical adherence to causes that are still-born. The Irishman has the reputation for enjoying a fight, although few

can strike a blow in better temper, and, of course, he has a genius for politics, not always of the highest order. All these elements reflect themselves in the proposed Constitution. The old, old dream of Ireland, a nation, one and undivided in territory as in spirit, is kept alive in the hope of "the integration of the national territory" which "consists of the whole of Ireland, its islands and its territorial seas". For the sake alike of the past and of the future, it is well that these words should stand, if only as an aspiration, in any constitution that pretends to express the mind of the Irish people. But, the realisation of that hope is plainly impossible on the basis of the proposed arrangement. History is too stubborn a record to be treated as if its events had never happened. The British connection cannot be bowed out by the adroit, but rather futile method of ignoring its existence. The British monarchy is treated by the method *de silentio*, and Mr. de Valera ought to know that thereby he permanently excludes not only the determined imperial loyalists of the six counties, but many other good Irishmen as well. The Irish difficulties will never be resolved apart from the question of religion. The new Constitution, while guaranteeing liberty of faith, virtually establishes the Roman Catholic Church. That ancient Church has as fair a claim to be considered the Church of the Irish people as the presbyterian Church of Scotland to be regarded as the Church of the Scottish people. But, the situations are very dissimilar. When we consider that religious differences have been one of the main causes of Irish separation, only the wildest imagination can foresee a re-united Ireland of the basis of a religious establishment.

The main detail of the Constitution which has attracted criticism, is the position of the President. He is to be elected by popular vote for a period of seven years. There is also to be a Premier or *taioseach*, who presumably will be executive head of the government in power. Suppose, as may readily happen, the policies of the President and the Premier are opposed to each other. The popular mind may change within a period of seven years and the result might easily be a situation even more complicated and difficult than that which arises in the clash between executive and legislature in the United States of America, for, in this case, the executive branch of the state might find itself in a condition of complete internal deadlock. Should such a crisis arise, the President would be a virtual dictator, for he can only be removed by popular vote at the expiry of his term of office. Is Mr. de Valera aspiring to such a dictatorship? He may, reasonably enough, expect to be elected as first President under the new Constitution. Should that happen,



he will have a clear field for at least seven years, and in the political uncertainties of this modern world, that is a longer lease of authority than most statesmen would either expect or be granted.

Carlyle used to thunder against the inanity of attempting to amend our evil state by the devising of a constitution. We gravely fear that the long-deferred day of Irish reconciliation will not be brought nearer by Mr. de Valera's scheme of government. Ireland is a land of many sorrows, bravely, almost gaily endured. At this time of day, we ought to be healing rather than re-opening old sores. The English reputation for good government has much to live down in the record of its dealing with "the other Island". It is altogether deplorable that the post-war settlement, after all the years of outrage and bloodshed that preceded it, was not given a fair opportunity to function. The Irish people attained so much of what they had fought for, that they might, with patience, faith and hope, have waited for the rest of their dream to come true. Nobler inspirations, than a pre-occupation with their own bitter memories, might have guided them into a new way of peace. Their old blood-brothers and neighbours in Scotland might have taught them that a union of crowns and parliaments with the English people not only wipes out the myth of any inherent Anglo-Saxon superiority, but brings a new unity of spirit to the nation that links its destiny with the other. Or, if the Irish nation insisted on maintaining her political separation, she might have looked to Canada or South Africa, where differences of race and religion as deep as Ireland ever knew, are marvellously composed within the freedom of the British Commonwealth. For Ireland, the day of settlement has yet to dawn, and our regret is that this new Constitution will not hasten its coming.

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SPAIN seems to be no nearer a happy issue out of all her distresses. The Civil War continues to drag its slow length along, and it has now become almost an effort to maintain a flagging interest in the day-to-day events of the struggle. Madrid and Bilbao are a most unconscionable time a'dying. Something of the Latin temper seems to have communicated itself to the campaign, which appears to alternate between sudden outbursts of unrestrained fury and lapses into long-drawn spanish Siestas. Correspondents tell us that in large areas outside the battle-zones, life moves along with its old tranquillity, and in Madrid itself, a good-humoured population makes jokes about taking the metro to the front-line trenches. While those of us who can only observe the conflict from the columns of the press must continue to deplore the tragedy that has over-

whelmed the Spanish people, it now seems that our graver and more self-interested fears are not likely to be realised. In the meantime, at least, there is every prospect that the war-area will not be extended beyond Spain.

The furies of a civil war are at once wilder and more confined than the violence of an international conflict. Any kind of war means that reason has given way to passion, and might becomes the arbiter of right. In civil strife, the direction of hostilities falls into the hands of small groups, responsible to nothing and nobody but their own hot heads. Fanaticism gives a justification to any kind of violence, and partisan hatreds turn the wholesale extermination of enemies into a moral virtue. On the other hand, a civil war is more desultory in its operations. Internal disorganisation makes it impossible to bring about that concentration of a people's entire resources in man-power and munitions, which modern military authorities calculate to be the war-potential of a nation. In Spain, on both sides of the belligerent forces, we have had massacres, outrages, arson, trial at the cross-roads, followed by summary executions—all the familiar violence of the *sansculotte* and the blackshirt. But there have been no great battles, on the terrific modern scale, such as were waged around Ypres or Verdun. We have had no engagements of armies and army-corps with battle-lines stretched across the entire face of a country.

For a time, there were apprehensions lest the Spanish conflict might be the spark that would set all Europe ablaze. Both parties have their groups of supporters abroad. General Franco has been represented as waging a holy war, in which defenders of the faith are lining the barricades against militant godlessness. For communist opinion, the struggle is the final stage of the inevitable class-war that must issue in the setting up of a Soviet regime in another European country. More detached opinion sees in the Spanish appeal to arms a new phase in an age-long struggle between tradition and novelty, between the privileged and the oppressed, between tyranny and liberty. For such observers, the Spanish scene is a dramatic representation of the forces that are struggling for mastery in the modern world, so that the unhappy people of the martyr country are suffering vicariously for us all in an issue that sooner or later will extend itself across Europe, if not over the whole of mankind.

Fears that the Spanish terror might spread beyond the Pyrenees and along the Mediterranean sea-board have been aggravated by the active intervention of foreign powers. There is not the slightest doubt that, at least, with the tacit consent of their governments,

Italian and German forces have been active on Franco's side. The participating units have not been mere irregular groups or foreign legions, recruited by voluntary enlistment. These interventions have been responsible for some of the most dastardly outrages in the course of the hostilities. The bombardment of Almeria was a horrible act of vengeance, particularly unjustifiable when we consider that the German warship *Deutschland*, for the attack on which the reprisals were supposed to be undertaken, was stationed completely outside of her neutrality patrol zone. It is more difficult to apportion direct blame for the dreadful assault from the air on the ancient Basque city of Guernica, but there is no question about the fact that the planes which carried through this crime against humanity were of German origin. We are also informed that the resistance of the government forces would have broken down long ago, apart from the very active help given by the Russians. While there is no reason to believe that France has departed from the position of strict neutrality, the international border has been crossed by groups of French leftists, who have been eager to strike a blow on the government side.

The history of foreign intervention in civil wars is not very encouraging to those who believe it possible thereby to influence the final result. Memories of the last great civil conflict in Russia are still fresh enough to furnish admonitions on the point. Despite the interferences of foreign meddlers, the issue of the conflict will be decided, in the last resort, by the Spanish people themselves. All the omens are against the development of a general European melee. There has been a studious avoidance of action that would extend the area of trouble, a fact of which both Germans and Italians have taken an impudent advantage. Our experiences in dealing with these blusterers in respect of the non-intervention agreement have not increased our respect for trustworthiness of governments that are presided over by scowling dictators. These political opportunists are making the most of the knowledge that public opinion in Great Britain would not tolerate the dispatch of a gunboat or a corporal's guard to support either side in the Spanish war. Nevertheless, British re-armament is already having its moderating effect on European affairs. While it may be difficult to avoid a certain exasperation with the duplicity of the totalitarian powers on the question of non-intervention, patience is having its reward. The self-assertive nations are beginning to realise that there are definite limits to their political impertinence.

The interposition of a united British people in Spanish affairs is almost unthinkable, but the Empire cannot be indifferent to the

issues of the struggle. The establishment of a pro-Italian regime in Spain would mean a new access by the Fascists to much-needed metals and minerals; it would also bring about a new Mediterranean situation. The dream of an Italian extension of influence over the ancient Roman world would be nearer to realisation. Gibraltar would be encircled. The great Moslem zone of North Africa, already stirred by the untimely employment of the Moors on the side of Franco, would become more accessible to anti-British propaganda. On the other hand, a victory for Communism would probably mean the confiscation of large British properties in the Spanish mines, and the effect on the growing radicalism of France would be incalculable. Whatever happens in Spain, the world will never be the same again. Meantime, every humanitarian mind will look eagerly for the day of settlement and peace.

J. S. T.