

CURRENT MAGAZINES

ORGANIZING THE REACTIONARIES

Federal Union—Editorial, in the *Nineteenth Century*.

International Utopias—Mr. Z. Chafee, in *The American Scholar*.

On Getting Back to Greatness—Sir Ernest Benn, in the *National Review*.

THE forces of reaction are beginning to move. It will not be a formidable, or indeed a serious, move if the British and the American public are apprized of it in time. One of these days it may be expected that President Roosevelt or Mr. Churchill will devote a few sentences, of the scorn which each can exercise with such deadly effect, to the men who are trying to block the policy known as that of the *Atlantic Charter*. For the present, the authors of that great pledge proceed on the principle of the Spanish proverb, that if you stop to throw a stone at every cur barking at your heels, you will be long getting to the end of your journey. But it goes to help the ultimate discomfiture of reaction if its initial stages, however insignificant, are exposed at once to the light of publicity.

I propose here to set forth a few examples of the all-too-familiar type that have made their appearance.

I.

Six weeks ago, a manifesto appeared in the London press, bearing the signatures of twenty-seven men, for promotion of what they called "the Individualist Movement". The despatch to the *New York Herald-Tribune Bureau*, which told of this, described the men as "leading British thinkers", and while only a very few of the names seem to justify such description, in other than a loose and over-courteous sense, it is undeniable that a substantial number of the signatories are persons of note and influence. Dr. W. R. Inge is among them, and Mr. St. John Ervine, and Sir Ernest Benn. Professor C. K. Allen comes with the prestige of academic law, and Mr. Collin Brooks, editor of *Truth*, brings the flavor of a journal whose name an earlier editor made famous. In the despatch, Major Leonard Cripps is singled out as worthy of attention, on the twofold ground that he is a ship-owner and that he is the brother of Sir Stafford Cripps: but as Sir Stafford is certainly of opinions the very reverse of those urged here by Major Leonard, one is left guessing at the suggestiveness of his presence in the group. For the rest, one notices the names of Lord Leverhulme (head of *Lever*

Brothers), of Lord Teviot (the well-known banker), of Lord Perry (chairman of the *Ford Motor Company of England*). What common impulse, or interest, can have brought together, at this time, for an appeal of their own to the public, these twenty-seven "leading British thinkers"? One feature, as the list is scanned, is sure to suggest itself. They are the sort of men, otherwise so different, whom one expects to have a common concern for "stability". Some of them because, like the young man in the evangelical report, they are embarrassed by the consciousness of their great possessions; others because, without being of that class themselves, they have in the past shown frequent anxiety lest anyone with great possessions should suffer menace from proletariat discontent.

On this occasion they have been roused to protest against the inroads of State interference with personal rights. Executive authority in England has, in their view, been invading to a calamitous extent the judicial and legislative functions. They call for re-assertion and re-vindication of the responsibility of parliament:

There must be a lopping-off of the ever-spreading tentacles of bureaucracy, and severe restraint on the processes by which Westminster has been yielding its constitutional powers to Whitehall.

The twenty-seven extol those ancient constitutional principles under which Englishmen used to be sure of equal consideration whether they were private individuals or officials, and under which justice used to be administered by courts of law, not by some secret tribunal.

This takes one's breath away. That Dr. W. R. Inge, for example, the "gloomy dean" of many a diatribe in the past against the democratic usages of his country, should have developed this sudden zeal for representative government, makes one ask—What then is it, so much worse than the popular institutions he used to despise, from which he now invokes those institutions to protect him? One of his jests in the past, while fresh from his American tour, was that he could not speak his whole mind to his American friends when they so lauded democracy: "It is bad manners," he reflected, "to mock other people at their devotions." What, then, has created in himself this so surprising devotional spirit? Once more is Saul among the prophets! What has Whitehall been doing, or does Whitehall seem likely to do, that he should supplicate

even Westminster to ward it off? And why have those three great commercial magnates of the peerage, who supply over ten per cent of the body of "leading thinkers", been suddenly affected in the same surprising manner?

Another of the signatories was, about the same time, brought in a different reference to public notice. In a recent issue of the great illustrated London weekly called *Picture Post* appeared the photographs, side by side, of "three men who hate planning for a better world". One of them was Sir Ernest Benn, who has joined in the *Individualist Movement*. Sir Ernest is author of the book entitled *This Soft Age*; he has been particularly known for his bitter denunciation of doles, quotas, cheap money, and State interference of any kind with the opportunities of private business. An opulent gentleman, whose contentment with the system under which he has prospered is quite intelligible to those for whom the consequences of the system have been very different! Second in the trio is the Bishop of Gloucester, familiar to us by his malodorous names for those whose thought is of a better world: sometimes he calls them "idealists", next "luddists", occasionally—using an awkward new term of his own, whose disparaging odor is unmistakable—"progressists". His Lordship of Gloucester, in the days of unemployment, used to reflect in sombre mood upon three causes which, he said, had led to it: one was government extravagance, a second was artificial raising of wages, a third was unemployment insurance. But perhaps most notable of all, from a prelate, was his warning of five years ago that the National Socialist Movement should be studied by Englishmen in the "more sympathetic" accounts of it we get from such writers as Dr. Fabricius. Those who turned to Dr. Fabricius discovered to their horror that this exponent of the National Socialist Movement spoke of Adolf Hitler as having in extraordinary degree fulfilled the will of God! So, with the Blood Bath, the anti-Jewish pogrom, the coercion of the German Church especially in mind, some English churchmen felt like asking the Bishop of Gloucester which part of the critique on National Socialism by Dr. Fabricius he thought specially valuable. The third objector to plans for a better world in the *Picture Post* issue is Sir Percy Bates, chairman of the *Cunard Company*: for him the old way of doing things is good enough; what chiefly alarms Sir Percy is the occasional thought that State trading may continue after the war to handicap private enterprise, and the vials of his disgust are poured on those

who let their minds run on any such fundamental post-war policy.

Upon this it is sufficient to observe that "Comment is superfluous."

II

For many years a principal source of alarm to the economic group of which these men are typical was the influence of Soviet Russia. Just now the chief peril from their resumption of vociferous activity is the effect they may produce in making our Russian ally suspicious and distrustful of Britain. Mr. Wendell Willkie's reports from Moscow show a disposition there that every patriot in our Commonwealth must wish to abate. Controversy on the project called "Second Front" will be inflamed by every quotable outburst from some well-known Englishman against the principles of government to which Russia is passionately devoted. One might have thought that some glaring previous examples would have been enough at this hour to restrain even the most unruly tongue or pen.

There was the British Cabinet Minister (he is now, fortunately, no longer in the Cabinet) who expressed his hope of equal destruction for Germans and Russians. Periodically one has been alarmed by a headline in the press announcing a new epigram on Communism from the lips of Lady Astor. As these lines are written, the hostess of "Cliveden" fame has been entertaining her public with a contrast between the Russian Communist and the British Communist, much to the advantage of the former. No doubt she intended this to make amends for what she had said a few weeks before, complimenting the United States at Russia's expense for disinterested zeal in the cause of justice. But the effort at amends is so tactless that it may well aggravate rather than reduce the earlier irritation, for the Communist—more perhaps than any other political group—is enraged by an enemy attempt to create racial antagonism within its ranks. And who can estimate how much harm was done in those critical summer months of 1939 through the pamphlet calling itself *Memorandum of Information*, sent out by the "Imperial Policy Group" in England? In issue after issue it urged abandonment of the plan for an anti-Hitler front that would unite Russia in joint action with Britain and France, because Poland—so said the sagacious *Memorandum*—would rather submit to the Nazis than be rescued by the Soviet Union. At the same decisive hour, the same advice was being pressed

upon the Foreign Relations Committee of the French Senate—by Pierre Laval! How the Poles must now reflect upon the account given of them by these "leading thinkers"—English and French—is a painful thought. It must remain, too, in the memory of Josef Stalin, not without influence there. What folly—or worse than folly—is this, to stimulate again just now the conflict of Capitalist with Socialist which the Nazis used so effectively against us at Moscow in August, 1939, and which the Roosevelt-Churchill diplomacy has gone so far to extinguish!

The *Nineteenth Century* Editor pours scorn on Mr. Clarence Streit's scheme called "Federal union", of whose essence the satirist knows so little as to call it a plan of "universal federation", proceeding on the assumption that "when all the nations of the earth are federated in one union, then universal peace will be established". Mr. Streit, as every critic who has taken the trouble to read his book before commenting upon it must be well aware, assumed nothing of the kind, nor did he launch any such plan as is here ascribed to him. It is a *selective*, not a universal, federation of peoples that he has in mind: no one could have laid more emphasis on that essential contrast of national ideologies which the coming settlement must recognize. What he urges is a union limited to the democracies which have tried and proved one another's reliability: these he would so bind together that they may preserve in peace the values they will have rescued in war. But when faced by a threat to "Property", whose name—as Anatole France once remarked—arouses in certain men "a quasi-religious feeling like that which the moon is said to inspire in dogs", our editorial propagandist seems to have been too much distraught for concern to be accurate.

Sir Ernest Benn took up the tale in a recent issue of *The National Review*. For him also it is imperative that England should "get back to greatness". "We were the bankers of the world", he reflects, ruefully, "and nothing but Socialism can prevent us from resuming something like our old position". That, of course, for Sir Ernest Benn, ends the case for Socialism. One recalls President Roosevelt's epigram about men who, when the choice is between humanity and dollars, always incline to the latter. "There was a time", Sir Ernest laments, "when all the trade of the world that mattered was done through London, and millions of transactions with which we had no concern paid tribute to us". What a fortunate time: the critic is eager to have it back with all speed, and is very impatient

with "idealists" who threaten to delay its return. Don't name a better social order to him! "All the talk of a higher standard of living", he observes (quoting with approval a piquant phrase from Sir Alfred Hopkinson), will turn out "mere flapdoodle". Dark periods of England's economic past do not trouble Sir Ernest Benn's memory. He thinks her past finer than her present, and far finer than her future—in the hands of these monstrous idealists—would be. His article made me think of a correspondent of William James, who found religious books unintelligible—with their "sentimental twaddle about repentance." "If we are in search", said James, "for a broken and a contrite spirit, plainly we need not turn to this brother".

Time has been when such writing and speaking as I have quoted called for no more than light bantering comment, because the men still apparently hopeful of holding back the tide of social justice belonged so obviously to an order that was vanishing. Mr. Hoover's book, *The Challenge to Liberty*, was thus the object of little more than a satiric jest from the men engaged on America's New Deal. It had historic suggestiveness, making one realize that even yet in America there are here and there industrial magnates with a spirit like that of Coketown immortalized by Dickens in *Hard Times*:

Whenever a Coketowner felt he was ill-used—that is to say, whenever he was not left entirely alone, and it was proposed to hold him accountable for the consequences of any of his acts—he was sure to come out with the awful menace that he would sooner "pitch the property into the Atlantic". This had terrified the Home Secretary within an inch of his life, on several occasions. However, the Coketowners were so patriotic, after all, that they never had pitched their property into the Atlantic yet; but, on the contrary, had been kind enough to take mighty good care of it.

But the situation in which light banter is adequate comment has passed just now into a situation that calls for very plain speech. Soviet Russia, fretful under delays in the matter of the Second Front, wants to know whether it is in truth military necessity that has held the enterprize back, or whether the spirit of British Imperialism, on which Ribbentrop dwelt as fundamentally anti-Communist, has been clogging the wheels. Every newspaper or magazine article such as those I have cited, reproclaiming the spirit of the past, repudiating the *Atlantic Charter*, and mocking "Federal Union", thus misrepresents to her grave disadvantage—perhaps to her grave peril—the spirit of Britain.

Truth about this cannot be stated too quickly or too widely in every organ of our press.

* * *

The essence of that intrigue conducted by von Ribbentrop in Moscow was its warning to Mr. Stalin against a British "Imperialism" which designed to make Soviet Russia its tool. One can well imagine how the Nazi envoy recalled the events of 1920, how he pointed out that a principal foreign promoter of Russian counter-revolution had been none other than Mr. Churchill, and how he would insist that there had been no change except one of method at the British Foreign Office. That the Kremlin was considerably impressed by this argument, in August 1939, we have much sad reason to know. And now, when the scene had become so different, when a genuine "New Deal" in Russo-British relations was far advanced, when the rough edges alike of Mr. Churchill's Imperialism and of Mr. Stalin's Communism had been smoothed away under the pressure of a common tragedy, when each was acknowledging to the other a mood of the past which had been ill-informed and hence less than fair—see with what damage coarse hands in British journalism threaten the new structure of cooperation! Organs of the London press, by no means inconsiderable in their influence, publish article after article sure to convey to Russian readers that the original distrust of British national designs was well founded, and that the supposed New Deal is just further British strategy of deception. How von Ribbentrop must exult in such a passage as the following from a *Nineteenth Century* editorial (coming after an outburst in the now familiar *Nineteenth Century* manner about Adolf Hitler as "the greatest military and political genius of our generation"):

One thing must be said for National Socialist doctrine. Its essential purpose was the greatness of Germany. An evil greatness, it is true, a greatness incompatible with the well-being of all nations, the German nation included. But greatness, national greatness all the same. The essence of the doctrines that threaten to prevail, if they do not prevail even now, in our own country is not the greatness of England and the Empire, but the end of that greatness. Germans are dying so that Germany may be master of the tangible world—Englishmen are being asked to die so that the glory of England and of the Empire may be submerged in the intangible world of dim abstraction and so perish forever. Germans are fighting to win the war and the peace. Englishmen are being asked to fight so that they may win the

war but lose the peace. Our popular doctrinaires—there is, alas, no doubt as to their popularity—would have us fight, but fight in vain.

So in this respect, according to an editorial in the *Nineteenth Century*, not merely the German method but the German ideal is superior to ours!

III.

On this matter the voice of the Dominions should be prompt, clear and emphatic. For Canadians, the *Atlantic Charter* is neither platitudinous nor visionary. It is the very expression, too long overdue, of the world purpose that keeps our imperial patriotism aglow. Not Britain alone, but Britain with that character, can lead the Commonwealth in sacrifice "without limit and without stint". If, during a few shameful years between the two World Wars, it was possible to argue that "Isolationism" was gaining ground in Canada, a principal reason was this—that purposes of a kind very different from those in the *Atlantic Charter*, purposes of the narrow commercialized nationalism which writers of the type of Sir Ernest Benn seem to recommend, were masquerading in influential British quarters under the name "Imperialism". In the United States, under some of the present President's predecessors, a like debasing of the American ideal had been propounded in principle and even occasionally translated into practice. There too, as a natural and not wholly discreditable consequence, pacifism gained ground. Against the peril of this drift, President Roosevelt and Mr. Churchill took time, amid pressing cares, for a conference to issue an authoritative statement. What they sent out, from somewhere in the North Atlantic, was not (as so often pretended by those who wish to evade it) a "wordy" document, or truistic, or ambiguous. The qualities of clarity, of significant speech, of conciseness, for which both the men who collaborated upon it are famous, were here conspicuously shown. Is it not notable that having declared the *Atlantic Charter* mere innocuous rhetoric, its assailants proceed to devote to it a viciousness of abuse from which the innocuous is usually exempt?

We understand only too well why it is displeasing in certain circles: why its clauses about no annexations of territory, about equal accessibility of raw material, about a fuller social justice to men of all nations, have been read by some Englishmen as well as by some Americans with such impatience. One recalls Mr. Harold Begbie's memorable phrase about the personnel of

the House of Commons elected in 1919: "hard-faced men who looked as if they had done very well out of the War". Thanks to better methods of finance, which in turn were no doubt inspired by that painful earlier experience, this war is not one out of which any group will be able similarly to congratulate themselves on having "done very well". But the hard-faced may be expected again, with their blue-print for maintenance if not for augmentation of their own economic advantage, at the next Conference Table, and through numerous spokesmen they are making their first move, cautiously, by attack on the *Atlantic Charter*. In this they are not tactically mistaken: it is indeed quite an obstacle to their "ideology". As such it was designed, by the far-seeing men who drafted it.

One sees the danger of the sort of writing and speaking in which these self-appointed champions of the Empire indulge when one remembers what happened in June, 1941. There is now little remaining mystery about the motive of the Nazi attack upon Soviet Russia, launched a few weeks after Rudolf Hess ("straight", as Mr. Churchill said, "from Hitler's table") had flown across the North Sea, to make contact with elements in Britain which Ribbentrop had represented to him as anti-Communist far more intensely than they were British. Ribbentrop had indeed grossly misrepresented them: he had done those Englishmen far less than justice in supposing them to be of a like breed with Josef Beck of Poland or Georges Bonnet of France. In respect of British patriotism, their hearts were better than their heads—as they might easily be, for their heads must have been very dull indeed as they permitted themselves a looseness of expression which the wishful thinking of Ribbentrop interpreted so. Did they not realize the peril of that tense time in the London of 1937 and 1938? It is easier to believe that they did not, when one observes how even now, in the midst of war—and *such* war—Englishmen, whose patriotism no one doubts, will write in great magazines with such stupid disregard of the damage they may do to a very precious alliance of their country.

The crafty propagandism of the enemy has been quick to emphasize every sign that Russo-British cooperation can last for but a short time, that the bedfellows whom misfortune has here brought together are bitterly antagonistic, and that there is reason to doubt whether each of them would not rather lose the war than win it at the cost of permanent deference to the other. Just the same old method of division which was so

successful at Moscow in the summer of 1939! Is it too much to hope that, warned by that experience, we shall not let it succeed again? At the moment, the effort of Nazi publicists in the press and on the radio is to convince Russia that Britain's delay in opening a Second Front is due less to want of power than to want of will. It would be idle to pretend that this scheme of propagandist corruption has been altogether fruitless. That Mr. Stalin understands and appreciates the real grounds, in military necessity, for delay regarding a Second Front, we may feel sure, whatever be the character of his cryptic communiqués to the press. But it is likewise urgent that the Russian people should have doubt cleared from their minds about the British and American disposition towards them; that they should feel confident of the will of their Allies to help by any method—Second Front, bombing of German cities, or whatever it may be—judged by the experts to be strategically soundest.

To establish this atmosphere of mutual confidence, making the Anglo-Russian alliance lately signed for the coming peace as well as for the present warfare a reality for the two peoples as well as for the two governments, is a tremendous duty of those who have access to the public ear. It is being splendidly faced by at least two great Englishmen—the Archbishop of Canterbury and Sir Stafford Cripps. The thrilling words of their appeal for a new international and a new social order, at the Albert Hall demonstration of a few weeks ago, may well have stirred Russian readers no less than English listeners. They spoke not just strategically, but—everyone knew—from their hearts, and from the real heart of England. At the same time, as strategy, it was perfect.

Leaders of what I have called "reaction" have long hated the ways of Sir Stafford Cripps: now they hate, and periodically revile, the ways of the Archbishop of Canterbury. But it is refreshing to observe that they at least realize the way the tide is running. Speaking of "our popular doctrinaires"—that is, of the men at work for a fairer social and international order—the *Nineteenth Century* editorial observes "There is, alas, no doubt as to their popularity". It is the one sentence in the articles I have been reviewing that I should like to see reproduced for the Russian people in *Pravda* and *Izvestia*.

H. L. S.