

The Future of England



by **HAROLD J. LASKI**

NO ONE who analyzes the mood of England to-day can fail to note a prevailing temper of depression. The old certitude is gone; the easy confidence in permanent supremacy which distinguished the pre-war period has given place to an atmosphere of mingled alarm and disillusion. Ten years of economic depression have bitten deep into the mind of the nation; and there is a widespread fatalism about the outcome more alarming than a temper of energetic antagonism. Everyone admits that widespread institutional reconstruction is essential; but no one — at least among the acknowledged leaders — seems to possess either the courage or the ardor to embark upon it. Discontent with the present party system goes deep; and there is a growing tendency, especially among the younger generation, to challenge the competence of Parliamentary government to cope with the problems we confront.

It is not easy to be confident about the outcome. England has entered upon one of those periods of transition which are the testing time of nations. Her people are called to a revision of their essential ideas. Still in large part a curious mingling of aristocracy and plutocracy, they meet the challenge of a society seeking a democratic form. Provided with an economic system which, at least in formal outline, satisfies some of the main requirements of an international society, the war has projected them into a world of competing economic nationalisms which impairs the realization of the benefits their predecessors enjoyed from that system.

Having pursued with vigor the ideal of political liberty, they find its reconciliation with the ideal of economic equality a dark and dubious adventure. Having avoided, for at least a century, the problem of defining with

clarity the objective of the English state, they now find that piecemeal adjustment is no longer adequate to the scale of the issues before them. Having supported an immense population relative to their resources by the gains registered through predominance in the markets of the world, they find that population menaced by the deprivation of their former supremacy. Only America had surpassed the English standard of life; but no question is so overwhelming in its importance as the question of whether, granted the present numbers, anything like the present standard can over a long period be maintained.

TO UNDERSTAND the present position certain outstanding characteristics of the nineteenth century must be borne in mind. For the century before the war, England was governed by Whigs and Tories of the upper and middle classes. They did not seriously differ about the essential contours of life; and their authority was not, until at any rate 1906, seriously challenged. In the result they could afford to differ without serious prospect of conflict. Where concessions to the workers were desirable, as in the Factory Acts for example, the price could be paid without undue assault upon their power. For, until the verge of the war, English industrial supremacy was sufficiently secure to leave to the ruling classes the chance of living their wonted life without excessive strain upon their reserves.

Yet a careful observer could have seen in the pre-war period the first signs that the epoch of indubitable success was drawing to a close. The growth of the Labor Party meant the emergence of men who did not accept the philosophy of the older parties; to realize their ideals within the contours of the earlier system

was an obviously difficult adventure. The new trade-unionism which, in its modern emphatic form, dates from 1900 was no longer content to occupy itself with rates of wages and conditions of labor; it was clearly concerned with the creation of a constitutional system in industry to parallel the formal constitutionalism of politics. To capture the votes of an electorate increasingly proletarian in character the *laissez-faire* state was being transformed into a social service state; and the weapon of taxation was used to alter the balance between classes by offering the essential amenities of life to the poor at the expense of larger incomes. That is the real meaning of the insurance system, of old-age pensions, of wider educational opportunity.

The war merely accelerated a process already well advanced in 1914. It gave it, no doubt, immense impetus, not least by its consequence of universal suffrage; but it quickened the pace rather than changed the direction. What made the war important were the facts that England was definitely impoverished by its costs; that economic change, especially the revival of mercantilism, destroyed her previous access to markets upon which her prosperity had depended, notably in India and China; and that, confronted by a new world, England did not show that power of swift recuperation and adjustment to a new and changing technological situation out of which, alone, revival would have been possible. The war, moreover, made of her dominions virtually independent nations; and her former economic authority in her empire went by the board as a necessary consequence of their adult stature.

By 1924 the philosophy of Labor had become the necessary alternative to the philosophy of a Conservatism which, Free Trade apart, had absorbed the essence of nineteenth-century Liberal purposes. Their differences raised for the first time in modern history the question of the rights of property in an ultimate form. For Labor cannot realize its aims in England without a complete transvaluation of social values; its principle is the principle of equality in every sphere of life. Its method is the socialization of the main sources of economic power. Conservatism, standing by the ancient ways, sees for the first time a direct challenge to the citadel of its authority. Between such ideals, what are the chances of a permanent peace?

III

BUT ENGLAND's position is complicated by other than internal issues. As she lives by foreign trade, she is dependent upon peace. Boycott in India, civil war in China may mean for her the difference between prosperity and suffering. A Balkanized Europe, an America grimly entrenched behind its vast tariff walls, new states set on the illusory ideal of economic self-sufficiency, these mean to England either adaptation of her ways to a world she has never known since 1789, or an inability to maintain a population of the present size. Relative to all peoples save America, she is, of course, rich; and any serious effects from her position no one would expect to see in a decade. It is still true, as Adam Smith said, that there is a great deal of ruin in a nation.

Yet anyone who analyzes what England has done since 1919 to meet her problems may well take leave to doubt whether she has seriously confronted their essence. English industry suffers, above all, from three grave evils: antiquity and nepotism in its direction, a Lilliputian individualism in its structural units, a defective salesmanship in the marketing of its goods. In none of these things can it be said that adequate steps have been taken to remedy the defects. The old men and their relations are still the masters of enterprise. Cotton, coal, wool, iron and steel, every inquiry made reveals defects of structure which call urgently for rationalization; but the response to the need is pitifully small. English salesmanship the world over is still permeated by the attitude that foreign peoples should be grateful for the chance to buy English goods; the energy of the American, the patience of the German, the vigorous ingenuity of the Czech, these, curiously, it is unwilling to emulate. Yet without such emulation it cannot hope, after the catastrophic diversion of markets during the war, either to recover lost ground or to win new territory.

And, as in the economic field, so in the political field. A state in which Labor is the alternative government cannot maintain an institutional equilibrium so long as the second chamber is a reservoir of hereditary conservative peers who represent nothing but the interests of Conservatism; yet a reform of that body which the Prime Minister declared in 1911 to

"brook no delay" still waits its author twenty years later.

For nearly a generation it has been patent that Parliament is so overwhelmed as to have been transformed into a mere organ of registration for the cabinet; yet no one has the courage to embark on adequate institutional reconstruction. For even longer it has been a commonplace that the areas of local government are an indefensible chaos, and their relation to the central authority an intricate muddle rather than a coherent principle; yet vested interest and tradition block serious reform.

Everyone knows that no cabinet minister can hope seriously to deal with the mass of issues he is supposed to resolve; yet, outside the realm of political theorists, no one has indicated the means of remaking the Executive in terms of modern need. Constitution-making for industry, the proper consideration, for example, of the place of trade-unionism in the state, these are as problems met by the politicians with impatience. Yet it is clear enough that social progress is, to adapt a phrase of Sir Henry Maine's, secreted in the interstices of institutional procedure. Principles of life are of little value unless there are the channels through which they can flow to their appointed end. At present, adequate channels are wholly lacking.

And all this must be set in the background of a European atmosphere poisoned by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. However considerably we assess the achievements of the League, however warmly we agree that it is an urgent necessity, it can give to Europe, as it appears, neither security nor disarmament; it cannot, that is to say, give her protection against the onset of war. And the coming of new war would be fatal to Great Britain, since it would strain her resources beyond the breaking point and, by the ruin of her customers, prevent the maintenance of her export trade. Her whole life depends upon the certainty of peace. Yet whoever thinks of Poland and Russia, of Poland and Germany, of Italy and Yugoslavia, of the temper of France, to take only a few outstanding examples, would be bold indeed if he foretold peace as certain. And of war it can be fitly said that it would make European civilization a legend which men would seek to remember as the dream of a golden day.

IV

AN OBSERVER concerned with reality would, I believe, have to think of the future of England in terms of some such postulates as these. What, then, would be the deductions he would draw? No one but a Marxian Communist would venture upon certitude; and Marxian Communism is less a prognostic than an incantation. For while it is profoundly right in its insistence that a system of competing capitalist nationalisms leads inevitably to war, the new international structure of capitalism has, especially on its financial side, at least an equal interest in peace; and while that peace may easily fasten a new and grimmer feudalism upon Europe, it is at least doubtful whether the prospect of prolonged class conflict in Western Europe offers to even the proletariat an alternative for whose results it will be anxious.

In this context, the future of Great Britain seems to lie in one of two directions. In the years that lie ahead, there may be long periods of Conservative government, alternating with relatively brief periods of Socialist administration. In that event, the effective lines of policy will be defined by the interests of property. England will become a protectionist state, seeking to protect her home market at the expense of her export trade. Her manufacturers will retain a considerable measure of prosperity for a long period. Her farmers will be subsidized at national expense; and an effective and important change will take place in the present equilibrium between farming and industry.

A tariff will mean a slow but perceptible decline in the English standard of living, unless there is, either through birth control or emigration, a rapid decline in her population. Great transfers of population will be necessary, as from the mining districts and the textile towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire. Some cheapening of domestic production may take place through the development of electric power; but, on the whole, the cost of living will rise rapidly. Internal taxation will have to be low while these drastic internal changes are being made; and this will call a halt in the development of those social services which have characterized English evolution in the last twenty years.

As in all tariff countries, moreover, there will

be a lowering of the standard of political morality. Parties will fight for the support of interests in terms of the voting power they represent. There will be sporadic but continuous discontent, especially in those industries which have manufactured for export; and drastic curtailment of political liberty will be necessary in order to cope with its expression. In the atmosphere of Conservative predominance during the next thirty or forty years, I should not expect to see the historic English freedoms, of speech, of association, of the press, easily survive the difficulties they will encounter.

Nor do I think this atmosphere will be seriously mitigated by such temporary successes for a Socialist party as the swing of the pendulum may bring. For, in the first place, it is the historic character of a tariff that once it is put on, it is not easily removed in wholesale fashion. Those workers whose particular interests feel its benefit will not, like those of Birmingham to-day, be easily persuaded to its removal. A Socialist party, in these circumstances, is not likely to have a coherent fiscal policy because it will not be able to count upon an integrated body of supporters. Its activities will, therefore, be for the most part confined to attempts at using the weapon of taxation to meet the demands of the workers outside the fiscal sphere.

But here it will find itself gravely handicapped unless drastic institutional change has taken place. For Conservative predominance means an insurance against institutional change, since this endangers the interests of property. No Socialist party can attain its ends so long as there is an effective second chamber, for no effective second chamber can exist in the modern state that is not weighted in the interest of property.

Every big Socialist movement, in fact, will, in such an England, find itself obstructed by the character of the Constitution; and it will be unable to move rapidly forward until it has power enough to insist upon its thoroughgoing reform. To gain this power will not be easy, for it is the nature, once more, of a protectionist country to divide the solidarity of the workers by emphasizing the diversity of their economic interests. In this environment, a Socialism content with the ballot box will find it difficult to attain success on any large scale.

The probable result is easy to foresee. A party which cannot realize its central aims soon loses its power over its supporters. Its authority, like that of the Liberals in the present epoch, depends less on what it affirms than on the historic past of its leaders. Such a Socialist party would soon be confronted by a powerful Communist group which would bear the same relation to it as Labor has borne to Liberalism in the first two decades of this century. It could promise more. It could offer to ardent spirits prospects which had not to meet the challenge of responsibility. There would be a rapid shift in the temper of Left opinion in England from constitutionalism to revolution. This, in its turn, would be met by suppression; and the outcome of repression would, sooner or later, be class conflict on a serious scale.

And this evolution must, further, be read in the context of the European incidence of a Protectionist England. The abandonment by her of free trade at a time when a world market makes national tariff boundaries a world danger, would intensify that neo-mercantilism of the post-war world in which there so clearly lie the seeds of future wars. It would go further than any other single event since 1919 to multiply the danger that capitalism would re-assume its nationalist form and thus lead again to the catastrophe of 1914.

That is, as Lenin saw, the one great chance of Communism in Western Europe. For, in such a war, there would almost certainly be revolution in the defeated nations. During the period of their economic recuperation, the condition of trade in even the victorious countries would, as we have seen since 1919, be only less evil than in the vanquished. To expect social peace in such an atmosphere is impossible. Nothing is so likely to achieve the condition in which, as Marx foresaw, capitalism would become its own gravedigger. But its catastrophic burial would leave little standing in which those who care for the heritage of England might hope to find comfort.

V

THERE IS, however, an obvious alternative. It is not unlikely that within the next six months Mr. MacDonald will be defeated. A Conservative victory at the polls is a tolerable certainty; and Mr. Baldwin would then take office for the normal period of five years.

Prediction of the line he would follow is simple. A tariff system, the restriction of the social services, a much more nationalistic foreign policy, a greater emphasis upon England's naval needs, these have already been indicated to us as the corner stones of his philosophy. It is pretty clear that, in the present temper of England, such a policy would lead to the return to power of a Labor government with a majority at the ensuing general election. It is upon the effort then made that the future of England most largely depends.

There are two possibilities. Such a government would either follow a Socialistic policy or it would not. In the second event, the rapid disintegration of the Labor Party would follow. Its period of office would be the Kerensky period of the British Socialistic party. It would split into fragments; and the bolder and more energetic spirits would move over to the Communist Party. For them it would be demonstrated that within the ambit of Parliamentary government it is impossible to carry out a Socialist program. It would be clear that parliamentarism involves a progress so slow, a compromise so half-hearted, that men of stout temper could not endure its hesitations. Evolutionary Socialism, in that atmosphere, would perish in much the same way that liberalism has perished in our time. It would be made obvious to all men that no sharp cleavage of principle divided Socialism from Conservatism. There would develop a disgust with Parliamentary government in all who were dissatisfied with the historic social system of England. In the end, the depth of the division would lead to a revolutionary situation of which the occasion and the outcome are alike unpredictable.

But let us assume that a Socialist government with a majority embarks upon bold measures. It insists upon the socialization of the coal mines, the banks, and insurance. It deliberately uses the weapon of taxation to widen and deepen educational opportunity; and it raises, by the same means, the general level of the social services. By compulsory action, it insists upon the nationalization of those private industries of major import which are now cursed by the excessive individualism of their proprietors. It begins to tackle the whole business of constitutional reform. What would be the outcome for England of such an effort?

The more pessimistic deny its hope of success. Such a policy, they say, is asking the governing class of England to acquiesce in its own annihilation; there is no real instance in history of such acquiescence being peacefully accomplished. A Socialist effort of this kind would meet with such opposition from the House of Lords that its program would be wrecked; or, alternatively, the forces of capitalism would turn to Fascist methods and seek the overthrow of such a government. In that event, it is urged, civil war is certain; and the real task of a Socialist government is to prepare for what Trotsky has called the "heavy civil war" which is the inevitable result of such a program.

A variation of this view is widely held. The success of this policy, it is said, depends upon its completion with the good will of capitalism. England attained political democracy by spreading the change over a century; it was then easy to persuade her rulers of the inevitability of each step. So must it be with the progress to industrial democracy. If the stages are not crossed too rapidly, the evolution can be accomplished without conflict. But conditions of its success are, first, the maintenance of English exports, and, second, the ability to reduce the population of England within limits that can be supported at the present standard of living. This, in turn, depends upon a united and not a divided national effort. It means, therefore, fragmentary and not wholesale change. Granted this, the possibility of transforming England into a Socialist state can be confronted with some equanimity.

It is obvious enough that, at the moment, this latter view is the most widely held among contemporary English Socialists. They are impressed by the orderly habits of the average Englishman. They feel that to hasten slowly not only suits his character, but, also, persuades him to accept positions as natural which, at first sight, he tends to reject as the definition of wickedness. The history of most English reforms, it is said, has been the history of successful persuasion of this kind. Deliberately to court conflict by advancing on a wide front is, in England, simply to throw away the battle before it is fought. The forces of capitalism can be weakened only by attrition. Change on the Russian model is unsuited to the native tradition of the English people.

There is stout common sense in this view. Revolution is an art, and the conditions of its success are, as Lenin emphasized, singular and special. The machinery of government must have broken down. The cabinet must be unable to rely upon the loyalty of the armed forces of the Crown. There must be a strong revolutionary party ready to take advantage of the tactical moment; and there must be the inspired leader who can urge on that party to its goal.

Obviously enough, conditions such as these mainly arise in the aftermath of unsuccessful war; they are rarely the product of the piping times of peace. A Socialist government, moreover, which was compelled to fight the House of Lords on a bold program could be fairly certain of success. It would gain the support of the indifferent elector who is allied to neither side by the very character of the struggle. No government could hope for decisive victory whose effort was greatly in advance of public opinion; and it is therefore essential to Socialist success not to advance so rapidly that it loses sight of the public it is seeking to serve.

Broadly, at least, I agree with the substance of this interpretation. I doubt whether it emphasizes sufficiently the difficulties that will be encountered in winning the good will of the existing rulers. There is, I think, a vital difference between asking men to share political, as distinct from sharing economic power, as the history of the United States makes plainly manifest.

I think also that this view underestimates the difficulties to be encountered on the side of maintaining British foreign trade and, as a result, coping with the problem of population. The one involves drastic internal changes which must be rapidly made by the very nature of the problem, at least if the English standard of life is to be maintained; and much of the problem turns upon decisions made by foreign countries which England is not in a position vitally to affect. It could be done fairly simply if Europe or America went free trade; it will be vastly difficult if anything like the present tariff barriers continue.

And the solution of the population question, even granted, as we may now grant, government recognition of the principle of birth control, cannot be done quickly while the present

barriers against emigration persist in the new countries. English readjustment in these matters depends upon international arrangements which go much further than the modern nation-state is prepared to go. In the gamble with time, no one can be overhopeful that England will win.

VI

IN THE NEXT thirty years, therefore, one of two things will happen. If there is a European war, the present British system is unlikely to survive. Grant her victory, she yet could not maintain her present standard of life; that would mean revolutionary discontent, of which, as I think, the outcome would be a capitalist dictatorship. Of that, in its turn, the result would be a strong Communist party, and a social conflict with varying fortune spread over a generation. Grant her defeat, and there would, I think, be revolution with a development of the kind, and at the price of, the Russian model. Either involves the contemplation of tragedy, for in either, also, the hypothesis means the disappearance of the temper and quality of life which have been responsible for the peculiar English legacy to civilization.

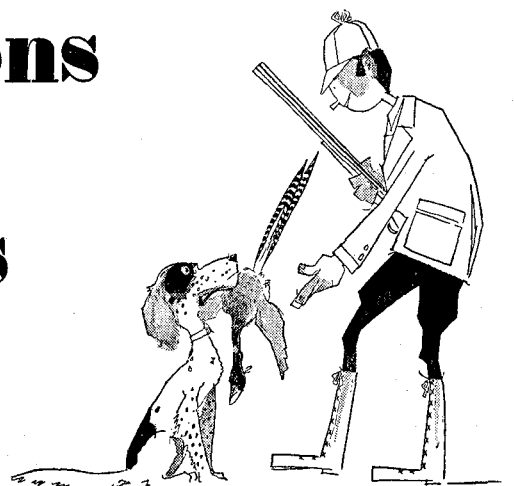
Let us assume, however, the prospect of peace in Europe. In that event it is, I believe, fairly certain that England will become a Socialist state. Her aristocracy will disappear. There will be a much greater degree of social equality. In the vital industries, private initiative will be replaced by collective enterprise. There will be few great fortunes; and the stimulus to effort will rarely be found in the profit-making motive. Men will be valued less for the property they represent than for the social function they are able to perform.

The ambit of the state will be far wider than now, and, on the material side, the individual will, at least for a considerable period, have less freedom of choice than he now possesses. For a considerable time, also, I believe it will be a poorer England; for many able men will find it difficult to adjust themselves to the motives of such an order, and it will be difficult to obtain their coöperation. But, in the end, I believe it will be an England happier and more creative, because the toil of its citizens will be sweetened by a profounder sense of justice in their gain.

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Fashions in Dogs



Drawings by the Author

by JOHN HELD, JR.

I THINK I ought to explain right at the start that this wasn't my idea — this business of writing on fashions in dogs. The Editor gave me the title and said he'd like to have a humorous paper and five drawings. Well, it seemed a good lead to me, so I began to work. The first few paragraphs, as I saw it, would be a sort of dogs-down-through-the-ages sketch, opening with the cave man, going on to Beowulf, and then touching several high lights in history. I'd been saving a fanciful bit about Cerberus for just such an occasion. After that there would be a brief summary — the dogs-of-all-nations theme — in which I would trace the evolution of the American dog. It looked like a cinch to me, and in a little while I had written this.

"The dog has been fashionable with *homo sapiens* since the days of the walk-up-cold-water-wave. I venture to say that not only did the cave sportsman have his hunting dog, but the cave home-girl had her small dog for coddling. It is a far reach from the day of the ancient dawn of mandom and dogkind to the present-day cave dweller in our penthouse era. As man has changed himself, so has he changed the dog, and has kept on and will keep on changing the dog to suit his fancy."

Then I stopped. After all, what did I — what does anyone — know about

stone age mutts? There probably weren't any dogs then, or if there were they called them dinosaurs. So I decided to eliminate the cosmic element and to write about something with which I was familiar. What follows, then, may not have historical perspective, but at least I know what I'm talking about.

The dog has been changed within the span of my, and your, memory. Breeds have become popular, only to disappear as the years went on. Why, I can't say — any more than I can say why high shoes and whalebone aren't worn nowadays. The fact remains that dogs which were popular in the dim, rosy past are now rare and scarce, good for a laugh but not in much demand as steady company. The pug dog, the Dalmatian or coach dog, the Newfoundland, the water spaniel, the English bulldog, the different kinds of poodles, the smooth-coated fox terrier, the dachshund — all these have been supplanted in popular fancy. In their places you see the cocker spaniel, several varieties of small terriers, the Scotty, the Sealingham, and the Cairn, the wire-haired fox terrier, the Pekingese, the griffon, the Pomeranian, the

Schnauzer-pinscher, the chow, the Kerry blue, the police dog, the airedale, the Boston bull terrier. Every dog has his day, and this is theirs.

Take the Dalmatian, for instance — that is, take one if

