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## THE WAR—AND AFTER

People still write to me to say that we are at war because we like war. This is not true. Apart from some young Nazi hotheads and officers hoping for quick promotion, nobody now likes and wants war. The Nazis based their whole technique on this fact. In a really belligerent world they could never have brought off their remarkable series of *coups*. The trick was to threaten war in a world ready to pay almost any price for peace. The Nazis did not want war but the spoils of it. Collecting those spoils was rapidly becoming the national industry of the Third Reich.

Other people, who applauded Leftish writers like myself when we said that Britain should make a stand against the Nazis, now revile us as warmongers because we believe in the stand that Britain is now making. Why? Can you disintegrate the Gestapo by passing a few resolutions in Hampstead? We passed thousands of resolutions, spoke eloquently of peace and goodwill, but the dark stain spread over the map of Central Europe, the Gestapo moved in, and the refugees came thick and fast. Bernard Shaw says it is all right now, because his friend Stalin has everything under control. Well, Stalin may have made special arrangements to see that Shaw comes to no harm, but the rest of us in Western Europe do not feel quite so sure of our fate, especially those of us who do not share Shaw's curious admiration for dictators.

Then we have those people who say that we have no right to defy the employers of the Gestapo and the owners of the concentration camps because the British Empire is not an earthly paradise. Look at the Kaffirs in Johannesburg! What about India? I have long been in favour of transforming the British Empire into something nearer what it pretends to be, but I believe we shall have a better

chance of doing that when the Nazis are no longer screaming menaces and cracking whips at our heels. In fact, we shall have a better chance of doing anything worth doing. On the other hand, if they stay at our heels, we shall be lucky to get off with our lives.

There has been a great deal of confused talk and writing about war aims. It should be understood that a general settlement of the world cannot possibly be part of our war aims, if only because all the powers not at war must have their say in the world's affairs. What Britain and France have to do is to put an end to that intolerable state of things in which, every six months, Goebbels transfers his atrocity stories to another neighbouring country and Hitler proceeds to mobilise again. It is no use our all becoming entangled in elaborate quarrels about the ultimate world order with the Nazis still round the corner. In my opinion it is quite impossible to do anything with a world that may be dominated at any moment by the Nazis. But then I do not take my view of these people from their own propaganda (the poor victims of Versailles who only ask for a sporting chance) but from Rauschning and others who are acquainted with dynamic-revolutionary technique.

On the other hand, it would be stupid not to entertain some idea of a possible new world order. Nor do I agree with the pessimists, who point out that here we are with another war on our hands and nobody ever learns anything. The atmosphere of this war is so different from the last, which at first was like a long hysterical Bank Holiday, that it seems to me humanity has learnt a great deal. We are nearly all ripe for a change in international affairs. Notice the ordinary folk, especially the younger ones, everywhere. With them the natural drift of their tastes and feelings has been away from nationalism and towards internationalism. They have to be hectored and dragooned into nationalism. Left to themselves, with aviation, sport, films, dances, fashions and the like, and they are cosmopolitan and international. Curiously enough, the only exception is perhaps to be found in Soviet Russia.

Federal Union is being widely discussed as a form the new world order might take. It is a fruitful idea, but at the moment I think it is being rushed a bit too much. Thus, before Britain takes its place in a federation of democracies, it would do no harm if Britain became a good deal more truly democratic than it is at present. For years now it has been sliding back from rather than achieving a true democracy. The Right Wing has made too many gains during this decade of the Thirties. That slow invisible revolution, upon which we used to pride ourselves, seems to me to have been checked. That is why the atmosphere here has begun to seem so stuffy and infertile. For my part I would hesitate to saddle any federation with the Britain we have now. The political, financial and social engine badly needs overhauling. It is a pity some of our Left friends, instead of giving themselves a headache wondering what attitude Stalin will ask them to adopt next, do not demand that we should see this democracy for which we are supposed to be fighting.

The new peace will not be much better than the old one, however, if we allow ourselves to be represented everywhere by foreign office experts. These gentlemen tend either to follow tradition, which is precisely what we do not want, or become the mouthpieces of narrow economic interests. If you desire to turn out a brand-new article, obviously it is no use setting the same old machinery to work. I am old enough to remember that, in spite of silly catch-cries, there was plenty of good will about, twenty years ago, but it was never adequately represented. The old machinery was started again. Geneva became the most cynical city in Europe.

Is it significant that here at last is a war that has not an obvious economic motive? For I do not believe that we are fighting because some imperial traders want to keep their mines and plantations, capitalists wish to protect their investments, and merchants hope for bigger markets when their rivals are defeated. And I am wondering if Peter Druecker is right when he declares that we have come to

the end of the long era of Economic Man. What happens if we drop the idea that man is primarily a producer and consumer? Nobody can complain that man lacks inventive-ness in the sphere of production, and this war, like the last, is certainly going to stimulate his ingenuity and productive power. We can take that for granted. But I am wondering if, once you have raised the lowest scale of living, which is something we have not properly tried to do yet in Britain, you could not move forward then on a non-economic theory of human life. The Nazis have had a wild shot at it, but unfortunately their very undistinguished minds have been dominated by basement gangster values.

What do human beings want most? The answer appears to be, Security and Freedom. Security comes first, for if you do not know when your children will have their next meal, you are not interested in the refinements of political theory. (This fact is apt to be overlooked by the democracies.) On the other hand, the point at which the demand for security changes into the desire for freedom is soon reached. (This fact is overlooked by the totalitarian states.) Security-at-the-expense-of-freedom only seems to apply with most people to elementary needs and does not apply to radio sets, cars, tiled bathrooms, antique furniture, collections of etchings, and the like. Freedom, by which I do not mean anything transcendental but the absence of the censor, the informer, propaganda-at-all-costs, forced labour, and the whole dreadful paraphernalia of the police state, comes long before these things are reached, at least among the healthy-minded. It seems nothing while you have it. But it seems everything when you have lost it. Ask the nearest refugee.

It may be, however, that there is something in the modern world, no matter whether it accepts capitalist democracy, communism, Nazism, Fascism, that is bent on rapidly reducing the number of the healthy-minded, is addling the wits of man, is making it harder and harder to be easy, merry, affectionate and wise. It may be that all this fuss about machinery does some damage to the

imagination, that life in our huge idiotic cities poisons the psyche, that too many people secretly regard their own activities with contempt, that we are creating an atmosphere, in peace as well as in war, in which the spirit cannot flower freely, that our inability to answer the major questions of life and our frequent pretence that therefore they do not still exist are producing profound and terrible conflicts. Perhaps where we need it most, we have no Maginot Line.

## HERBERT READ

# AT THE MOMENT OF WRITING

I give my contribution to this discussion a temporizing title because the forces engaged in the war change front so completely from time to time that only a mind as agile as a communist's can meet each phase with a ready "analysis". At the moment of writing the Empire and France seem strongly united and comparatively consistent in their attitude. They are no doubt embarrassed by their commitments to Poland and Czechoslovakia, now represented by shadow governments of exiles; and there are mutterings of discontent in India, South Africa and to some slight extent on the Home Front. But I think we have to admit that bored as most of us are with the war, there is no considerable opposition to its continuance. The general state of opinion in France and Great Britain might best be described as *fatalistic*.

On the other side, at the moment of writing, Germany is isolated. The understanding with Russia does not seem to amount to more than a non-intervention agreement: Russia will do nothing to help the capitalist governments of Great Britain and France; but she is equally determined to avoid fighting on the side of the anomalous government of Germany. Like most of us, Russia is waiting for something to happen inside Germany.

In a military sense, the war is a deadlock, and it is difficult to see how it can "loosen up" in any decisive way. As a result of this deadlock the most considerable struggle is going on in non-military spheres—namely, in economics, diplomacy and propaganda.

Whether in due course we can exhaust Germany economically is a question which I cannot answer. It would seem