

J. B. PRIESTLEY

PROLOGUE TO PLANNING

THIS periodical is to publish during the next few months a series of articles by experts on planning for post-war reconstruction. It has been left to me, who am no expert, to introduce the series. The best way I can do this is to clear the ground a little for the advance of the more knowledgeable minds.

Some people cry, rather querulously, 'Why all this talk of planning? Get on with the war first.' Now I would agree with them if, as they sometimes appear to imagine, this talk of planning meant some slackening of our war effort, as if pilots refused to enter their machines and soldiers would not turn out for guard duty because they were all busy having a nice chat about post-war conditions. But of course it is not like that at all. Nobody is neglecting war duties to discuss planning. The better the world they see ahead of them, the more likely men are to fight hard for it. What ruins morale is a general feeling of dreariness and hopelessness. Nazi propaganda can have a roaring good time setting to work on any nation lost in cynicism, doubt, apathy. Create a faith in the future everywhere, and the war is half-won.

For my part I do not trust the man who promises to do everything for me after the war so long as nothing is changed or even discussed now. I suspect that once Hitler is out of the way and the danger to property is past, he will ask me not to talk nonsense about reconstruction, but to go and mind my own business. (If you are a writer, instead of being a banker or a brewer, it is not your business to meddle in politics.) The other day a correspondent sent me an appeal he had received from the chairman of his local Conservative Party Association, and I must say that several phrases in this appeal only confirmed my suspicion of this don't-bother-me-until-after-the-war attitude.

Whether the war ends very soon or lasts a horrible long time, it is equally important that we should be planning now. But for different reasons. If the war ends quite soon, with a sudden collapse of Hitler's crazy rickety empire of despair, then we are all left in mid-air, probably wondering how we came to be up

there. Without any plans for immediate reconstruction we shall find ourselves in a chaos. It will be necessary to improvise very rapidly merely to establish some kind of new peace time order. There is no doubt that the general mood of this country favours progressive and fairly thorough reform, a remodelling of the whole political, economic and social structure, and is suspicious of the diehards. But it is frightening to find oneself in mid-air above a chaos. Something must be done at once. Better anything than nothing. Thus if we are not careful we shall find ourselves back in August 1939, with the same old voices talking the same old drivel, all as it was before, except that now the government in power will have a good deal of unrepealed wartime legislation to help it quieten any real opposition.

On the other hand, if the war lasts as long as the Great War, and we have done no planning for reconstruction, then disaster will follow the peace, as it did last time, simply because nobody will be lively and up-and-doing but the crooks. The rest of us will be suffering from a profound mental and spiritual exhaustion. The 'hard-faced men' do not suffer in this fashion, the years of ruin and horror not having the same effect upon them. While the good folk are wearily searching for ink and paper for the blueprints of the new world, the gangs will have moved in again and will be posting sentries. Therefore the blueprints must already exist. And the people must be told that they already exist, that disinterested men and women have been at work on their behalf.

The people feel instinctively that the time has come when their affairs should be handled by disinterested persons, that is, by persons whose first care is the quality of life lived by the community, and not by men who want to acquire power in order to further the interests of a small group. The reason why some of us, who make no claim to have exceptional experience of or insight into public affairs, are read and listened to so eagerly and widely by the people is simply because the people feel that at least we are disinterested and not working any racket. We may be wise or we may be foolish, but at least, they feel, we are honestly on their side. The importance of this change in the public mind can hardly be exaggerated. And already it is beginning to bewilder and anger the diehards.

I am certain that the churchmen, scientists, technicians, educationists, thinkers invited by *Horizon* to produce their plans to win

the war and the peace will be, in this sense, disinterested persons, whose one desire is to stop this muddling and wallowing from one vast tragic farce to the next. They will, of course, make mistakes. Many of the problems of our time are genuinely complicated and so not to be solved by a few simple strokes. But it is a mistake to assume, as some pessimists do assume, that we have not the intelligence to solve them. There is, in fact, plenty of intelligence about. Unfortunately much of it is wrongly directed, having been acquired by the brigands and the pirates and the gangs. The failure, then, is one of good will? No, there is also plenty of good will about, as I think this war on the whole has proved. But much of this good will has little intelligence to direct. It cannot function in public affairs. What is urgently needed there is a combination of intelligence *and* good will.

This is chiefly to be found, in my experience, in the types of men and women mentioned above as future contributors to this series. That is why we must look to them for guidance. Not, you will observe, 'leadership'. I am rather suspicious of these cries for 'leadership', if only because I am disinclined by temperament either to lead or be led, preferring, as a genuine democrat should, to co-operate. People who cannot pull together to get something done but can only scream for a leader deserve all that comes to them, and we know what that is.

One final point. There are new men emerging, men who are not experts and whose names may be unknown to the general public, but men, usually youngish fellows, whose jobs as air-raid wardens, shelter marshals, and the like, have severely tested their characters and enormously enlarged their knowledge of the ordinary folk around who trust and admire them. I hope some of these new men will be asked to contribute to this series, for I doubt if any voices in this discussion of plans for reconstruction will be better worth hearing than theirs.

H. G. WELLS

FUNDAMENTAL REALITIES

It is impossible to discuss the outcome of the present war at all hopefully or usefully unless certain fundamental realities are continually borne in mind. The first of these is the complete change in the conditions of human life that has occurred since the beginning of the century. There has been an abolition of distance, so that events are now practically present and simultaneous throughout the planet, and such a release of material and human energy as to make the pre-existing control of human affairs by a patchwork of independent sovereign governments increasingly ineffective and dangerous in the face of large-scale profiteering private enterprise and terroristic gangsterism. Three broad necessities face man. He has to secure himself against a new sort of warfare that is rapidly destroying the moral and material fabric of his civilisation, he has to protect world resources from exhaustion by short-sighted exploitation for private profit, and he has to extend the protection of a common basic law to all mankind. The first necessity can be met only by the establishment of a federal world control of the air and its associated services and supplies; the second by a federal conservation of world resources, and the third by accepting such a statement as the Sankey Declaration of Human Rights as the fundamental law of the world. None of these things was even practicable fifty years ago. They are now imperative, if the present collapse of human affairs into disorder and degeneration without limit is to be arrested. No schemes and constructive forecasts can be taken seriously which do not fall within the requirements of this three-fold programme. The world has become one—and this is no metaphor, but a primary political fact. We can no longer parcel out human affairs and talk about the Future of *our* Empire or the Future of Britain except as a contributory part of the whole problem of mankind. We have to be continually on our guard against lapsing back into historical traditional ways of thinking in this respect. All existing political and administrative authority throughout the world is provisional, pending the development of