

A.R.P. and a People's Government

BY J. B. S. HALDANE

EVEN THE MOST ardent supporters of the Government no longer pretend that the situation of Britain as regards air raids is completely satisfactory. Instead we are told that every effort is being made to remedy existing defects. Mr. Morrison is "going to it". We have only to trust him, and all will be well. His predecessors could not have been expected to foresee the results of the collapse of France. Hence the present situation. But it would be next door to treason to suggest that every possible effort was not being made.

I make two to four speeches a week on A.R.P., and as I am primarily interested in saving life, I occasionally have to defend some parts of the official policy. Thus I have to state my honest opinion that when built with mortar, as opposed to sand and lime, brick surface shelters afford more safety from bombs (if not from pneumonia) than jerry-built houses; and that it would probably be impossible to-day (though it was not impossible in September, 1938) to make underground bomb-proof shelters for almost all the inhabitants of London within a year.

But in return my audiences give me sufficient examples of how the official policy is actually carried out to make me perfectly clear that nine-tenths of the official propaganda is false. I speak of the shortage of cement, and I am shown concrete being used for private buildings in London and Newcastle, not even intended for munition production. I speak of the difficulty of making underground shelters, and I am shown an unused tunnel solidly lined with brick, considerably nearer to a South Wales factory than the brick shelter apparently intended for its unfortunate workers.

Let us examine the official excuses. We are told that daylight raids are a minor danger, and would have been a negligible one did not the Germans possess bases so close to Britain as to permit fighters to accompany their bombers and even drop bombs. This may be true, but it certainly does not apply to night raids. Liverpool is frequently raided. But Liverpool is as far from the nearest aerodrome in France as London from the nearest aerodrome in Germany. Thus if Holland, Belgium and France had never been invaded, London could be bombed as easily as Liverpool to-day. And a year ago British night bombers had flown safely over Berlin, so our authorities must have foreseen that German bombers would accomplish the far shorter flights necessary to reach British inland cities. And yet during the first year of the war Sir John Anderson's slogan was "I refuse to be hurried". And well did he carry out his principle.

To understand what has happened, we must go some way back. Logically we might well go back to 1914, when Carson, the Quisling of Ulster (or would it be more logical to say that Quisling was the Carson of Norway?) bought German arms for the purpose of civil war. Ever since then the British ruling class have allied themselves with German militarism to crush democracy

when it suited them. Mannerheim is the Carson of Finland, Franco the Carson of Spain, and Hitler was built up to do their will against the Soviet Union.

No wonder that Sir Samuel Hoare, who as Foreign Secretary had granted Hitler the right to build submarines, refused absolutely even to begin the construction of shelters for the British people. He did plan them for himself, it is true. "An impregnable battle headquarters" was the phrase which he used to describe the official funk-hole. But for you and me, a gas-proof room was the Government's idea of safety in 1938.

They had been told, of course, that the main danger in modern air war was the high explosive bomb, with the incendiary a good second. But the people who told them had mostly damned themselves by opposing the Japanese New Order in China, or even worse, assisting the cause of parliamentary government in Spain. Even a conservative M.P., Sandys, who had the impudence to go to Barcelona and see the possibilities of modern shelter technique with his own eyes, was threatened with prosecution when he tried to reveal the gross inadequacy of the defences of London.

Nevertheless the agitation for protection grew. It was impossible to visit Republican Spain without learning two things. First that if the British Government continued to violate international law in favour of Hitler and Mussolini the same men who were bombing Barcelona would soon be bombing Britain. And secondly, that if it was possible for the people of Spain, a poor country, to make bomb-proof shelters in war, it was vastly easier to construct them in peace-time in a rich country such as Britain.

I was one of many who pointed this out. In September, 1938, the Communist Party of Great Britain adopted a programme calling for bomb-proof shelters, and has demanded them consistently ever since. Some branches of the Labour Party put forward well-thought-out local demands. The Parliamentary Labour Party set up a committee on the subject, which held a number of meetings in 1938 and 1939. Its demands were less sweeping than those of the Communists, but included the provision of bomb-proof shelters in the specially dangerous areas such as the neighbourhood of docks. Mr. Herbert Morrison and I were both members of the committee. It is a striking fact that it has held no meetings since the outbreak of war. Long before Labour members joined the Government, the party machine had shut down such activities as this, which had they been pressed might have saved thousands of lives, but would, of course, have embarrassed Sir John Anderson.

At the time of the Munich crisis a number of trenches were hurriedly dug. The official design included straight sections up to 80 feet in length, calculated to cause the maximum possible casualties should a bomb burst in one of them. They helped to make people conscious of the need for protection. Had the Government started a serious programme of bomb-proof shelter construction at this time it would have been nearing completion in the more vulnerable areas such as Central London, Birmingham and Coventry, when war broke out and would be complete by now. This is proved by such facts as the following: The Finsbury scheme for large and deep shelters holding up to 7,000 people each was both rapid and practicable. A firm of contractors agreed to make one such shelter at a cost of £10. 10s. per head in less than six months. The total cost of such a scheme would have been about that of one month of the present war, and it would have greatly lessened the likelihood of a German victory.

We must therefore ask why no such programme was undertaken. Let us listen to Sir Alexander Rouse, an engineer who, after retiring from service under the Government of India, has been made chief technical adviser to the A.R.P. department of the Ministry of Home Security (so-called). On March 22, 1939, he said:

If we provide deep bomb-proof shelters for the whole nation so that people have complete protection they are going to go underground. They go underground and the war is won—but not by us. We cannot expect, as civilians, to have more protection than our soldiers and sailors.

This is an interesting reversal of former policy. On sinking transports, for example, soldiers and sailors had died in response to the order: "Women and children first to the boats". Incidentally, it shows that the present massacre of civilians is not only the policy of the German Government, but of the British Government. And it reveals the mixture of contempt and hatred with which our rulers regard the workers.

They believed that if shelters were provided, no one would go to work. Actually we know that this rarely happens. It can be argued that munition workers must inevitably take some risks. But the Government also deliberately planned to subject non-essential civilians of the working class to the same risks as soldiers and sailors.

Those who could afford it were officially urged to evacuate into the country, whilst the official evacuation schemes did not, and do not, cover more than a fraction of those civilians not engaged in essential war work. In other words, civilians not engaged on war work were deliberately exposed to bombing on a class basis. The heavy casualties in air raids, and the resulting slowing down of production, are the direct result of the hatred of our ruling class for the workers. It remains to be seen what will be their effect on the outcome of the war.

Mr. Chamberlain stated that he knew that we should not get 100 per cent production till the bombs fell. He apparently supposed that the workers whose homes had been bombed would redouble their efforts, even if they had no houses and no food. Of course, however, he did not make this statement before the bombs fell. Sir John Anderson was also cautious in his statements. While Sir Alexander Rouse was spilling the beans he stated:

The problem is a very complicated one. It has been continuously studied, and I am as anxious as anyone could possibly be to bring it to an early decision.

Sir Alexander Rouse was the principal expert consulted, and is still in office under Mr. Morrison. He is employed as a technical adviser; however his views on matters other than engineering must be very gratifying to Sir John, and may have reinforced the technical objections which he doubtless raised against the provision of bomb-proof shelters.

In 1938, then, the Government had a two-fold problem. First of all, how were they to head off the movement for the provision of adequate shelters? And secondly, how were they to turn the wide-spread anxiety concerning air raids to their own use? They solved both these political problems with great efficiency. The British Civil Service has a great tradition, going back to Dickens' Circumlocution Department and beyond, of delaying proposals uncongenial to the ruling class. This was utilised to the full. And the movement for shelters was directed into respectable channels.

The Air Raid Defence League might have been expected, from its name and constitution, to carry out such functions as the Navy League performs. If so, it would, for example, have questioned candidates at bye-elections, and thrown its weight against those who did not pledge themselves to its very modest programme of deep shelters for the "potential target areas", to be made at a cost of about £100,000,000. But it issued a number of beautifully printed pamphlets, and did not condescend to soil its hands with politics.

Meanwhile, Sir John Anderson appointed a "Conference" of eight members whose chairman was Lord Hailey, and which included Sir Frederick Marquis, now Lord Woolton. This conference reported in April, 1938, against bomb-proof or even strongly protected shelters, except for the employees in "vital industries of a highly specialised character". By a truly remarkable coincidence, Lord Hailey was also Chairman of the Air Raid Defence League, which, a month earlier, had demanded a far larger measure of protection. It is not surprising that the League did not press too strongly a policy to which its Chairman was opposed. I pointed out the ambiguity of Lord Hailey's position, and soon afterwards he resigned his post. But he had done his work. The League served to canalise the activities of a number of well-meaning people into directions which could not embarrass Sir John Anderson.

The report of the Hailey Conference is interesting reading today. Large shelters, which alone can be made bomb-proof at reasonable cost, were rejected on the ground that "it would be wrong to count on movements exceeding 300 yards by day or 150 yards by night." To-day Londoners travel for miles daily to reach shelter. Lord Woolton, who shares the responsibility for the error of judgment which has cost so many lives, but gave such valuable support to Sir John Anderson, is now entrusted with the even more vital task of watching over our food supply.

But if the Government was able to head off the movement for bomb-proof shelters, it could and did use the movement for Air Raid Defence for a concerted attack on democracy. In many cases the control of A.R.P. has been effectively taken out of the hands of local authorities, and placed in that of Chief Constables or other "safe" persons. Everywhere the local authorities have to deal not with the Ministry of Home Security, which is at least subject to Parliamentary criticism, but with the Regional Commissioners, who do not have to answer either parliamentary or local critics, and who have already gone some way to merit their title of the Twelve Dictators. And the capitalist press continually cries for more dictators to override the inefficient local authorities.

Actually the majority of such deep underground shelters as have been excavated or substantially improved in the last two years have been made by such local authorities as those of Ramsgate, Luton, and Easington, in the teeth of Government opposition. Doubtless some local authorities need gingering up. In a Merseyside town the Chairman of the Emergency Committee replied to my criticism of the dangerous and insanitary shelters for which he was responsible by a discourse on the dangers of inflation, which would become serious, he said, were more money spent on them. But I think that in four cases out of five the initiative has come from below, and the obstruction from above.

When war broke out, Sir John Anderson still refused to be hurried. I

choose one example out of many. I am Chairman of the A.R.P. Co-ordinating Committee, a body which has been in existence since April, 1938, and consists mainly of architects, engineers, doctors, teachers, and others with expert knowledge of technical matters connected with A.R.P. Up to the outbreak of war this body had worked for deep underground shelters almost everywhere. But when the war came we realised the urgency of the problem, and in November, 1939, we suggested to Sir John Anderson that surface shelters should, where possible, be so designed that they could later be so heavily protected as to be safe against direct hits from quarter-ton bombs, and relatively invulnerable by still heavier bombs.

It was not till June, 1940, that he admitted, in the House of Common, that his previous refusal to allow this type of shelter to rank for grant had been "based on an erroneous view". But meanwhile the harm had been done, and millions of people are compelled to use brick shelters which cannot be strengthened except at an exorbitant cost in labour and materials. The consequences of this policy are written in the blood of tens of thousands of British men, women and children.

The position to-day is as follows: Deep underground shelters are entirely feasible in a great many areas where there are outcrops of any but the hardest rocks: quarries, cliffs, or other suitable sites. There are tens of thousands of miners waiting to make them. Where the rock is soft or wet, a lining is needed. But this requires less bricks than do surface shelters holding the same number of people. In a few areas galleries could be built at the foot of mine tips or slag heaps, and later covered by shovelling slag or rock on top of them. These types would, however, only protect a fraction of the population. They could not be made in a hurry in most parts of London, except perhaps in and near Lewisham, where there is chalk near the surface. On the other hand, further tunnels could be dug out fairly rapidly from the London Tube Stations. The A.R.P. Co-ordinating Committee suggested this measure in August, 1938. Mr. Morrison is now asking the advice of experts on it, but refuses to be hurried.

For most of the vulnerable areas surface shelters could be built so as to be later made bomb-proof. In some cases the design of the A.R.P. Co-ordinating Committee, the so-called Haldane Shelter, might be suitable. Where many houses have been wrecked, and vast quantities of rubble are available, a design such as that proposed for Hackney, where the roof is largely protected by rubble, might be better. Meanwhile private shelters and suitable parts of steel frame buildings should be taken over. There is no space even to indicate the measures needed to deal with such problems as those of evacuation, rehousing, compensation, medical services, and many more.

Why, it may be asked, should we not trust Mr. Morrison to "Go to it"? The answer is two-fold. In the first place he has so far shown little signs of doing so. His first speech attributed the demand for deep shelters to mischievous political reasons. It is hard to attribute deep political motives to the tens of thousands of London mothers who vote for deep shelters with their feet every evening by taking their children to the tubes, or to ascribe such motives to the miners of Easington, who are not merely asking for them, but excavating them. And today bricks and mortar are being wasted by making brick shelters at the very foot of cliffs which could be rapidly tunnelled.

Secondly, even if Mr. Morrison were an enthusiastic advocate of every

measure of protection which has so far been suggested by experts, he would be unable to carry them out in his present position. He is surrounded by the civil servants and experts who were assembled to carry out the policy of Sir John Anderson. The previous quotation from Sir Alexander Rouse shows that their rejection of strong shelters was not merely based on technical, but on political grounds.

In other words, Anderson's delays were not due to incompetence, but were a deliberate part of the Chamberlain policy. Chamberlain has gone to his own place, as St. Peter said in a similar context, but the evil that he did lives after him, and many of the men whom he chose are still with us. On December 5, 1940, Captain Balfour, the Under-Secretary for Air, speaking on A.R.P., said that to-day no one was interested in moans or complaints. This statement, though perhaps slightly exaggerated, is a substantially correct account of the official A.R.P. policy. So long as Chamberlain's and Anderson's nominees are charged with our defence, and display no interest in criticism, we can hope for no real improvement.

A People's Government would tackle the matter on very different lines. Officials responsible for "erroneous views" which have cost thousands of lives would be sacked. The miners would be mobilised to make deep shelters where this is immediately possible. The principal bottle-neck in the supply of materials is at present the cement industry. This would be taken over by the State. At present it is controlled by Lord Wolmer, a director of one of the principal cement companies. In view of an impending libel action I can do no more than refer readers to the fourth report of the Select Committee on National Expenditure for an opinion on the evil character of such appointments as this.

The attitude of the Ministry of Home Security can be judged from the following fact. As a member of a recent deputation to this Ministry, I referred to the use of slag as a component of cement, and the possibility of increasing output by its use. The Civil Servant who was receiving the deputation stated that he had never heard of the process in question, and asked for information on it. It is, of course, well known to engineers.

Local authorities would be encouraged to show initiative, and would only be superseded in those rather rare cases where they have refused to exercise the moderate powers allotted to them. The worst offenders are certain county councils, whose delaying action could be short-circuited by allowing urban and rural district councils to make their own shelter schemes. The fullest use would be made of spontaneous popular bodies such as shelter committees. A number of temporary measures would be necessary, such as the ruthless commandeering of steel frame and concrete buildings in target areas not used for vital national purposes, and of a number of admittedly inadequate private shelters which are, however, far better than nothing.

Given the will, the problem could be solved fairly rapidly, as it was in many Spanish cities. But to-day the will is not there. Nor will it be there until a wholesale clearance has been made of the men who are responsible for the present ghastly situation, and are still continuing the policy which led up to it. Only a Government representing the People rather than vested interests can supply the necessary will.

The Attack on the Workers

BY HARRY ADAMS

(Chairman of the National Committee for the People's Convention)

I AM often asked why I support the People's Convention. The answer is that I am deeply concerned at the consistent attempts to weaken the organisations of the working-class and their standards of life. I have tried to set out below the issues as I see them.

The working class have reached a turning point. That much is clear from recent events. Wages policy is in the melting-pot. Signs of the approaching conflict have been visible for a long time. The issue has now been brought to a head by the flat rejection of the engineers' claim for an increase in wages. The claim was turned down, not because the industry cannot afford to pay, but on the grounds that it would not be in the national interest to increase wages at the present time. Moreover, in rejecting the claim, the spokesman for the engineering employers implied that their attitude was part of a new national policy towards wage applications.

What is new and dangerous is the rejection of the claim on the grounds that in the national interest employers were against any further wage increases. The reply of the employers was given on November 3rd. A few days later, *The Times* came forward with a declaration that a "national wage policy is becoming inevitable". The leading article goes on to say:

Industry requires guidance in the next step. If ability to pay is to be the measure of wage increases, then until the purchaser—that is to say, the Government—takes a firm stand, the war industries can demand what they like. So great is the issue that it should not be left to any body of employers, nor indeed to employers at all, to lay down the principles which should in war-time govern wage advances. . . . Leadership must come from elsewhere and the Ministry of Labour . . . should endeavour to supply what is lacking. (8.11.40.)

Since then a press campaign has developed around this theme. And here we should remember that last summer the Trades Union Congress and the British Employers' Confederation signed a declaration which said:

The machinery of negotiation existing in any trade or industry for dealing with questions concerning wages and conditions of employment shall continue to operate. Matters in dispute which cannot be settled by means of such machinery shall be referred to arbitration for a decision which shall be binding on all parties, and no strike or lock-out shall take place.

It will be recognised that the T.U.C. made big concessions, on the understanding that the normal methods of negotiation would go on as before, despite the fact that the unions had sacrificed the freedom to enforce their claim by striking.