

The Case for the New Party

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COURAGE AND KNOWLEDGE IN POLITICS.

(By C. E. M. JOAD).

A LAND FIT FOR HEROES TO LIVE IN.

You remember the phrase ? It was coined in the war by politicians wishing to assure the men in the trenches that they were fighting at least for something. They fought accordingly, and in due course they won. That was thirteen years ago, and the land seems much as usual ; so much so, that one cannot help wondering whether this was merely a cant phrase, devoid alike of meaning and purpose. In the mouths of the politicians who coined it, it may have been ; I cannot say. Yet in the minds of those who fought to make it true, it was at once an inspiration in the present and an ideal for the future. Those young Englishmen who volunteered in 1914 and 1915 were inspired by an idealism which was one of the few fine things the war produced ; they really wanted to build a new world, and they really believed that by beating the Germans they would lay its foundations. Had they not believed these things, they would have gone mad. They did their part, but somehow the new world failed to materialise : it seems, indeed, as far off as ever ; at times it has seemed even further. And reflecting on this failure, one is tempted to ask whether the agony and heroism of those terrible years were completely wasted, and whether, if they were, the waste was inevitable. Was it inevitable that the country should slip back so quickly into its old ways, even when its old ways suited it so badly, and, as the years go by, suit it worse, or was it after all possible that the bells of victory might have rung out the old world and rung in a new ?

THE RULE OF THE OLD.

I think that it was possible, but only on condition that we changed our rulers, not merely by substituting one government of old men for another, as we do at election times, but by choosing for our rulers the young and the virile instead of the old and the effete, and electing a government of men who would act instead of men who were content to talk.

The average age of the present cabinet is 63. This is a sobering thought. At an age at which we should never dream of employing men as engine-drivers, clerks or mechanics, we choose them as governors; at an age when we should never think of entrusting them with the management of kitchen, factory or workshop, we do not hesitate to entrust them with the management of the affairs of the nation. And the older they are, the better we like them; politics, indeed, is the one occupation in which a man is thought to grow more serviceable as he grows older. At sixty he is only a politician; at seventy he is "a ripe statesman." Is it any wonder that the national economy is in hopeless disorder, and that English trade and industry seem at times to be as senile as those who have allowed them to become so?

The rule of the old, always inadequate, is at the present moment disastrous. For the time is one of crisis, a crisis no less severe than that of 1914-1918, because being economic in character its onset is more gradual and its nature less generally understood. What the word "crisis" means is that, if something is not done and done quickly, English trade and industry will decline to a point at which we shall no longer be able to pay a living wage to our ever diminishing workers, or to maintain our ever growing unemployed. Then men will begin to starve. Need I stress the point that the call to action is urgent and immediate?

MEN WITHOUT COURAGE AND MEN WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE

At such a time, the rule of old and used-up men is disastrous in two respects. They have not the courage to

take the necessary action, and, had they the courage, they have not the knowledge to enable them to decide what action to take.

Of their failure in courage I will take two outstanding examples:

(1) **Rabbiting while England burns.** Everybody agrees that Parliament must be reformed. As at present constituted, it places a premium upon obstruction and a disability upon action. A cabinet composed of Caesars, each of whom was endowed with the energy of Napoleon and the vision of Lenin could not get through the present House of Commons one-tenth of the measures which an adequate treatment of the present crisis demands. Consider, for example, the Parliamentary situation one day last December. Public affairs were admittedly critical. Palestine was suspicious, India in a ferment, the national finances were going from bad to worse, and two and a quarter million Englishmen were unemployed. Yet Parliament spent a whole day discussing methods of rabbit-trapping!

While the caprices of private members take Government time, the Opposition consider it their duty to obstruct to the best of their ability and irrespective of merits whatever the Government proposes. This is all very well when things are going right, and all that Parliament has to do is to refrain from putting them wrong. But, when things are going wrong and continuous and decisive action is necessary, not only to put them right but to hold them right, it is calamitous. Yet nobody reforms Parliament, partly because the old men who have grown up and grown old in it cannot imagine anything different, partly because they have not the nerve for the job. They are too scared of a word—the word "dictatorship."

(2) **The Tariff Bogey.** Again it is agreed that something must be done to save England's trade. The position here is quite simple. The foreign countries, to whom we used to sell, now make for themselves many of the things we used

to sell them. Clearly, then, we must look for other customers. Again, the standard of living in these foreign countries is not so high as it is in England. Therefore they can produce goods more cheaply, and will tend to undersell us not only in foreign markets but in our own. Clearly, then, if our industry is to survive and the standard of living among our workpeople is to be maintained, our goods must be assured of a market in which foreign goods cannot undersell them.

A method of securing this end, without introducing the evils of a Conservative Tariff is described in the proposals for "Insulation" contained in Sir Oswald Mosley's "National Policy." That something of the kind must be done there is general agreement. Yet the old men are afraid to tackle the subject; they are scared of a bogey—the bogey of tariffs.

(3) **Men Afraid to Govern.** Instances could be multiplied indefinitely showing how the lack of nerve displayed by the old men results in the "do nothing" policy under which England is slowly declining. The 'Do nothing' policy means that we are to sit still and wait for better times, and that meanwhile the people are to make good by economies, what their rulers have lost by timidity.

Nor should what I have said be taken as a criticism of Labour. It is a criticism of the old men who compose the Labour Government, but I do not wish to suggest that the old men who lead the other parties are any better. One of the most humiliating things about English party politics at the moment is that it throws up men who are afraid to govern. Nobody believes that the men who form the present Cabinet are capable of coping with the problems that beset the nation. Yet, instead of turning them out the other two parties strain every nerve to keep them in. Why? Because they are afraid of tackling the problems themselves, and, convinced of their inability to do better, prefer that the odium of failing should be incurred by others.

We are asked in Church to pray God to assist the deliberations of our governors; yet contemplating the ignominy of the situation to which their lack of nerve and grit has brought us, one is inclined to add a further request that, while helping us not to despise them, God will help them not so to act that we cannot help it.

(4) **Pre-War Minds** Not less disastrous than their lack of courage is their lack of knowledge. I do not mean that they do not know things—some of them are quite learned men—but that they do not know the right things. Their minds were formed in the pre-war world—when the war came they were already ageing men uttering moral platitudes in the background while their youngers suffered in the trenches—and they cannot adapt their outlook to the post-war world. It is not easy to exaggerate the difference between the two worlds. In the nineteenth century world things on the whole went right provided they were let alone; in the twentieth they manifestly go wrong unless something is done about them. Hence it is not merely a question of pointing to the fact that the old men are blind or deaf to this or that; that they do not understand the revolution which science has made in industry, the importance of subsidising scientific research, the impossibility of restoring coal and cotton to their old pre-eminence. Their lack of understanding cuts deeper than that. What has happened in England these last twelve years is nothing short of a new industrial revolution, and, unless we are alert enough to realise this fact and courageous enough to control its consequences, they will be as immediately disastrous to the lives of the mass of Englishmen as was the first industrial revolution over a hundred years ago.

THE NEW PARTY.

It is in this conviction that The New Party has been formed. It is a Party which has come into being not to introduce Utopia but to prevent collapse. It is a Party of young men—the average age of the group of M.P.'s who startled the country by resigning from the Labour Party

last February is 33—and its policy is the “National Policy,” of Parliamentary Reform, of National Planning and the Control of Imports, with the main proposals of which most Englishmen are already acquainted. Those who are responsible for it believe that the people of England should not be asked to accept a lowering of the present standard of life, so long as a way out of the present crisis can be found. They believe that a way can be found, but they believe also that, if we are to find it, rapid and courageous action must be taken and taken at once. This does not mean that we should do things for the sake of doing them; on the contrary, the Mosley policy seeks by applying scientific method to public affairs to determine precisely what are the things that must be done.

THE NEED FOR EXPERIMENT.

Now the scientific spirit applied to action means two things. It means, first, that your approach to a problem is provisional and experimental. You don't pretend to know the answer to your problem in advance; you are prepared to try out in order to find out.

There has never been a time when men could know with certainty quite what the effect of a given policy would be; at the present moment the world is changing so rapidly that the mere pretence of such knowledge is absurd. Yet politicians continue to pretend, and supply the place of knowledge by converting other people's conjectures into dogmas. The dogmas quickly become sacred, and to question them sacrilege. Thus men go whole heart for Free Trade or whole hog for Protection; or they are pure Socialists or pure Industrialists. The dogmas once established are unalterable; sheltered behind them the old men have no need to think, no need to meet the challenge of changing circumstances and a new generation. Dogmas and principles form the bulwark behind which old men shelter themselves from the questioning of the young.

Now a scientific statesman would make no pretensions to omniscience. Regarding his policy as provisional and

adaptable to changing circumstances, he would not be afraid to change his mind as circumstances changed, and he would not be afraid to say so. A scientific statesman would say: “I am inclined to think that a tariff should be imposed on imported —s, and I think that a Commodity Board on the lines of the Dyestuffs' Licensing Committee* would be the best way of administering this tariff. I am not sure if this is right, but I am going to try it. If after two years I find the results unsatisfactory, I shall certainly modify, if not withdraw it altogether.”

It is nonsense to suppose that with the world changing as fast as it is we can know in advance the exact consequences of every economic move. The world, it is a commonplace, has become one economic unit. This means that whatever happens anywhere has reverberations everywhere. The discovery of oil springs in the Caucasus may throw British miners out of work, while a strike in a Japanese silk factory may render a single lady of independent means living in a Bournemouth boarding house unable to pay her bill. Yet admittedly economic moves must be made. Very well, then, let them be made by flexible minds and adaptable minds; above all by minds that are not too old or too timid to change as circumstances change.

THE NEED FOR CONTROL.

In the second place a scientific policy is a policy of control. The primary need of the moment is that our society should learn to control its destiny, and achieve that control before it destroys itself. If I were to sum up in a word the policy of The New Party, I should call it a policy of planned controls. It seeks, that is to say, to control the resources of the community so that they may be utilised in the best interests of the community.

*See Sir Oswald Mosley's “A National Policy,” p. 20.

(1) **The Control of Science.** It proposes, in the first place, to control the blind results of science itself. Science has forged for man's service a mighty weapon for use against the forces of nature ; but, like all weapons, it is two-edged. It may be used equally for man's weal or for his woe. For science, it is clear, does not change man's desires ; it merely makes it easier for him to realise the desires he already has. If these desires are dangerous to the welfare of the community, this added power of realisation only served to increase the danger.

(2) **The Control of Production.** Our age affords two striking illustrations of this truth. First, science has so increased our powers of destruction that we are in imminent danger of exterminating ourselves in time of war.

Secondly, it has so increased our powers of production that we are in imminent danger of starving ourselves through producing too much in times of peace. Herein lies the great paradox of our times, that men should go in want because there is too great plenty. I saw in Russia a cartoon which admirably illustrates this paradox of production run riot. Picture an English miner's home in the depths of winter. The room is bare, the children in rags, and in spite of the cold there is no fire. "Can't we have a fire, Mother?" says a little girl. "I'm cold." "No, dear." "Why not, Mother?" "Because there is no coal." "Why is there no coal?" "Because Daddy is out of work and there is no money to buy any." "Why is Daddy out of work?" "Because there is too much coal." I should like to point the moral by two reflections. First, that to reduce buying power is to aggravate the evil. The standard of consumption must be kept up, and, if possible, increased in order to absorb the results of increased production. Now we can only keep up the standard of consumption by maintaining the buying power of the people. Hence the old cry of economy, which means lower wages and a reduction in the standard of living, is a cry of madness as well as of despair.

Secondly, we must control productive processes in the public interest, and see that the application of science to industry, which, if properly managed, should increase man's wealth, and diminish his labour, does not, as it does at present, diminish wealth and abolish labour, thus leaving masses of our population no alternative to subsisting in idleness on state charity. It is precisely such a policy of scientific control which includes the control of science itself, that is advocated by the New Party.

(3) **The Control of Work.** Throughout its policy is inspired by the belief that, just as scientific invention has increased the means of the good life by enabling us to produce enough for all, so it should be the object of scientific statesmanship to ensure that those means are made available for all. But this can only be done by a policy of public control. We must, then, put an end to the anarchy of *laissez faire* in industry and insist that industry should be carried on as a public service. Proposals for this end are contained in The New Party's National Policy. In fact this policy is little more than a series of proposals for planning in the interests of the community the work which the different members of the community should perform. It asserts, first, as a matter of principle, that what the various members of a community do is not a matter of indifference to the rest, but must be subordinated to the common good ; secondly, as a matter of expediency, that only by public organisation and control of the community's resources can the nation be saved from disintegrating into a second-rate power. It does not, like the old Socialism, propose to supersede private enterprise ; it seeks to provide a framework of public control erected in the public interest, within which private enterprise shall operate.

This plea for public planning and public control is the guiding principle which runs through all the proposals of the Mosley policy. The Government is to assist scientific

research, on condition that it is allowed to utilise its results for the benefit of industry. The Government is to give financial assistance to struggling industries, provided that they will undertake a measure of rationalisation and submit to a measure of control. The Government is to determine what new industries shall be established and where they are to be established, in order that adequate housing facilities may be assured to the imported workers. The Government is to make advances to farmers, on condition that they employ up-to-date methods of modernised farming, control the purchase of food from abroad, thus assuring to the farmer a stable price level for his products, buy waste land and lease it to small holders, on condition that they engage upon the type of agricultural work which, in view of the nature of the locality, they can most successfully follow.

These are only a few of the methods by which the policy of public control would be made effective in action. Throughout the general principle is the same, that the State should assist industry on condition that in return industry will serve the State.

A WORD TO SOCIALISTS.

And here I want to say a word to those who were once Socialists but have dropped away, still more, perhaps, to those who are still Socialists yet have come to wonder what their Socialism means. There are, I think, a great many people among those who have come to maturity since the war, who, brought up in the Labour and Socialist movement, are experiencing a mood of bitter discouragement and disillusion. They have made Labour the Government, yet instead of introducing a new world the Government seems merely to have made a mess of the old one.

It is said that the Labour Government has no majority ; this is true, but can we really believe that men so old and

used could inaugurate a new social system, even if they had a majority ? Can we believe that they even want to ? It is said that the Government is the victim of a world situation, which it cannot control and for which it cannot be held responsible. This again is true ; but are we to think that the present Micawber-like policy of knuckling under to the situation and waiting for something to turn up, is the best that the will of man can devise ? Would it not be better to admit honestly that, so far as Utopian Socialism is concerned, the establishment of a new social system and the adoption of a new way of life, it must for the present remain Utopian ? The situation is such that our immediate thought must be not how to enter an economic paradise, but how to escape an economic hell. We must plan not to introduce the millennium but to avoid catastrophe.

So much having been said, I proceed to emphasise the fact that the policy of public control referred to in the last section constitutes a substantial instalment of most of what was practicable and desirable in the older Socialism. Inspired by the view that industry should be a public service, it proposes to cut the claws of predatory employers by subjecting their operations to a framework of public control. Denying the right of chaotic private enterprise to hold up civilisation, it insists that the public welfare is the first consideration alike of statesmanship and of industry. If that policy were adopted, no man's gain would be the community's loss. By guaranteeing to the employer a sure market for his goods, it would enable him to produce with a greater confidence. By increasing the purchasing power of the consumer, it would create a greater demand for goods and hence more work for those engaged in their production. To the policy of economy and exhortations to tighten our belts, it would oppose a policy of expansion and better living. These things are tangible goods. They are, moreover, such as Socialism purports to secure. The Labour Party talks of Socialism, yet does nothing to socialise. Its followers are disillusioned ; its fortunes are declining.

A WORD TO INTERNATIONALISTS.

I started this pamphlet with a remembrance of the war ; I conclude by returning to it. There are some who assert that this National Policy of Sir Oswald Mosley is likely to make for war. It is, they hold, a policy of economic nationalism which, if successful, will, by reason of its success, increase and not diminish the chances of international friction. If I thought that there was truth in this contention, I would do my utmost to oppose the Mosley policy ; for I think that deliberately to increase the chances of war is a crime against civilisation, the greatest which any man can commit. I believe, however, that the contention is false. It is economic anarchy which promotes war today, just as political anarchy promoted war in the past, and it is the policy of economic *laissez faire* (which is merely the polite name for economic anarchy) which is dangerous to peace.

This result comes about in the following way. The object of economic *laissez faire* is to enable employers to employ workers at low wages ; low paid workers cannot absorb the goods which they produce, and the employers are accordingly driven to look for markets elsewhere. The resultant scramble for overseas markets on the part of industrialists leads governments to undertake imperialist adventures which are a potent source of war. To cultivate the home market is to diminish the need to seek markets overseas, and so to diminish the chances of war. Supersede economic *laissez faire* by public control and your competitors at least know where they are and with whom they must deal. Just as the organisation of individual workers into unions and of small unions into large ones has reduced the number of disputes between workers and employers, just as the organisation of family into tribe and tribe into nation has reduced the number of disputes between peoples, so the substitution of bulk buying and selling for the buying and selling of multitudinous, private, competing firms should do much to diminish the chances of economic

disputes, and of wars springing from economic disputes. This is not to claim that the National Policy is sufficient in itself to avert war ; no policy which is purely or even primarily economic can do this. The New Party, however, is fully alive to the danger, and convinced of the necessity of utilising to the utmost the machinery for international co-operation set up by the League of Nations and similar bodies to avert it.

CONCLUSION.

I have commended to your approval the New Party's policy, because it is scientific, because it is courageous, because it is modern. It is not a policy of fatalism ; it does not, that is to say, advocate a passive idleness, which is content to leave things to take their course, in the hope that in the long run trade will improve and recovery ensue. It may be true that in the long run trade will improve, but before the long run arrives most of us may be dead. It is not a happy-go-lucky policy, trusting blindly in the willingness of Providence to help those who are too supine or too timid to help themselves. It is essentially a modern faith, rational and calculating, insisting that we can save ourselves here and now, if we take the thought and make the effort, and exhorting us to do so. Above all it is a policy of young men with the courage of young men, calling for a similar courage in those to whom they appeal. I have called it a rational policy ; yet it is also a policy of vision. Those who advocate it are dreamers in the sense that they dream of an England which will be a fit home for civilised men and women ; but they are not the dreamers who dream their lives : they are the dreamers who seek to live their dreams.

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