TOPICS OF THE DAY

THE ROUT OF THE ITALIANS: THE LEND-LEASE LAW: THE DOMINION-PROVINCIAL CONFERENCE: THE SURVIVAL OF DEMOCRACY.

THE ROUT OF THE ITALIANS has proved to be a most encouraging event for the allied arms. This remarkable military victory has had the effect at once of bringing a new access of confidence to the democratic cause and of unveiling the shoddy structure of the Fascist régime. The relation, or rather the lack of relation, between the casualty lists of the opposing forces left us not only bewildered but questioning. For a time, minds grown wary of propagandist deception kept on wondering when the real truth would be revealed. The mass surrender of the Italians and the insignificant numbers of killed and wounded among the Imperial forces raised nothing but dubiety about the veracity of our communiqués. Were facts being suppressed? Were our armies being led into an unsuspected trap? None of these suspicions has been confirmed: rather success has been added to success, with promise of more complete triumph ahead. Now, we know that our gallant armies have given us the first of our victories, with this added relish, that it is over the most contemptible of our enemies.

The brilliant achievement of our African armies has a wider inference than their immediate success. Convincing evidence has been provided that we have mastered the strategy and tactics required for the new warfare of swift movement. After the desolating experiences of the campaign in France, we needed such re-assurance and we needed it badly. Our recovery from the sense of numbed impotence that lingered on after the German *Blitzkrieg* has been made complete by the dash and élan of the mechanized columns that took fortress after fortress along the North African coast with a minimum of casualties. The operations were splendidly conceived, and carried through with superb skill. The co-ordination of arms that worked together on land, sea and in the air has had a further heartening effect. There has been a unity of purpose carried through into detailed operations. It is most probable that in later phases of the war the British forces will encounter much more formidable opposition than they met in North

Africa, but at least there is the assurance that we have equ ment and we know how to use it. The lessons of the Nor African campaign will certainly not be lost.

The gallant exploits of the Greeks in hurling the Itali invaders from their territories has formed an inspiring counte part on the other side of the Mediterranean sea. In conditio very unlike, but requiring similar pluck only differently applie the Fascist armies have been driven back across the frontie so impudently crossed. These stirring achievements have ha their own tonic effect. For the first time in this war, a stout hearted little nation has successfully withstood the wanto aggression of a greater power. The brave spirit of an ancien people has revived. Theirs was not the exciting experience of dashing along stretches of sandy coast and of circumventing by superb manoeuvre a demoralised army: rather, the Greeks had to toil in snow drifts over mountain passes, and by sheer force of arms with gun, rifle and bayonet to drive the foe from position to position until at last their land was free. The fury of the Greeks and the intrepidity of the Australians, with the massive might of the British Navy and the irresistible dash of the Royal Air Force, have all combined to give us a new heart of courage for a difficult future.

An appropriate vengeance has been visited more swiftly than we ever dared to hope upon the bombastic posturings of the ridiculous Mussolini. We cannot refrain from a recollection of his shameful entrance into the hostilities. Few events in all history were more inglorious. Il Duce chose the last expiring hours of French freedom as his destined hour, not so much to get into the fight as to prowl like a beast of prey around the battlefield. Seldom has the hand of retributive justice been stretched out so clearly to strike down an unprincipled rascal. And as we contemplate this summary punishment, it is difficult to refrain from bitter reflections on our past deference to his bullying. To appease this swaggering dictator, the civilized opinion of the world capitulated when he marched into Abyssinia. It is true that we had not then the same armed might to support our cause, but we now know that we greatly overestimated the capacity of the Italians to resist the mobilized will of the League of Nations. Our only satisfaction is to know that the Emperor of the Ethiopians has gone back to his invaded land, and a grave error at last has been reversed.

The ignoble defeat of the Fascist armies confirms our judgment that in the modern world tyranny works out its own doom. The Italians did not make a very brave showing in the campaigns of the last war. Indeed, for the British soldier, their curious exploits are still an occasion for contemptuous laughter. But we had been told that the Italian warrior had transformed his character by the ingenious method of changing the colour of his shirt. The discipline of an authoritarian régime had restored the broken morale of a country through its delivery from the enervating doctrines of liberty. The sweet delights of warfare had been dangled before the Italian eyes. A Latin facility in the passionate language of adulation had depicted the rapture of military conquest until the world half believed that the Roman legions had re-appeared upon the earth. The Ethiopian adventure and a share in the Spanish campaign had fed the myth of Italian might. But all that has come to its salutary end. The Fascists may have broken the spirit of their people and driven their finest patriots and scholars into exile or death, but they have not created a great nation. The Italians failed to fight in Africa for the same reason that they could not hold on in Greece: they were a nation without faith in themselves or in a cause. *Sic semper tyrannis.* The way of the Italians will in time become the way of the Germans. National Socialism will break down eventually even as Fascism has failed. These dictatorial systems of government have no lasting quality. The might of Germany will probably prove more intractable, because it has better stuff to work with, but in the end it will go down if we can only mass enough strength against it.

The Greeks have been almost too successful. We cannot penetrate the inscrutable bargainings of the Axis leaders, and therefore cannot answer the question why the Italians crossed into Greece. It seems apparent that Mussolini was expected to handle the invasion unaided, while Hitler was left free to devote his attention to Great Britain. The plan has failed, largely because the Greeks resisted with unexpected strength. Hitler has been forced to divert his attention to the Balkans, and thereby to open up a new and uncalculated theatre of war. The whole course of hostilities may be changed, and possibly neither to the liking nor to the advantage of the Nazi plans.

THE LEND-LEASE LAW is the familiar description of the momentous Act whereby the United States of America has run the Stars and Stripes to the masthead in the cause of freedom. But the great decision is much more than a gesture.

Describe it as we like, the passing of the law has amounted t a declaration of war. The American people, after prolonged debate, with the leadership of their great-hearted President, and by the deliberate processes of constitutional enactment, have signified their adherence to the group of nations determined to defeat Hitler and his friends. Moreover, this decision has taken the form of a contribution which is at once most necessary and one that the United States can best supply—munitions and materials of war. What support could the British people more ardently desire than that now assured to them? A vast arsenal in the world's greatest industrial country has been placed at their disposal at a distance remote, for the present, from the possibility of enemy attack, and in a land unhampered by the immediate necessity of raising a huge armed force. The strain of waiting stretched our patience and, at times, we grew weary of the prolonged debate, but the final result has been great gain—so great that it holds within it the assured promise of final victory.

We owe an unspeakable debt to the inspired courage of President Roosevelt. He has demonstrated to the world that it is possible to combine the principles of leadership and democracy. The American President has gone ahead bravely, without using the characteristic tactics of the politician, playing party against party, faction against faction, in the weak reconciliation of appeasement, and thereby allowing a small but active tail to wag an otiose good-natured dog. Nor has he waited for unanimity of consent. He has led public opinion without coercion, always a jump ahead with some new bold stroke, carrying the majority with him, and at the same time allowing the Opposition to say its say. The Congress and Senate debates have revealed a persistent and tenacious body of opinion in the United States set in its isolationist views and convinced that the President is wrong. A weaker man than Mr. Roosevelt would have tried to hold his place by deferring to these strongly expressed arguments. But, with his own mind made up, and seeing the way of duty in sharp outline, he has made the world of men as well as his own nation fully aware of his convictions, and the result has proved him to be the prophetic interpreter of his people's will. The world has need of his example at this time of ideological conflict.

Alongside the President, a place must be found for Mr. Wendell Willkie. The Republican candidate has contrived to accomplish in defeat what he could probably never have achieved in victory. The rival contestants for the Presidential office stand together as a splendid pair of men. Both have shown a magnanimity of spirit that is wholly admirable. The spectacle of a defeated candidate bearing a message from his successful competitor to the Prime Minister of Britain, and returning in haste to support publicly the policy of the man who won, is a new turn of events in American politics. Mr. Willkie's courageous act is a sure evidence of the seriousness with which his people now regard the world conflict. From the President's point of view, the support of his political rival was a great strategical gain, and his willingness to use his talents was a fresh example of Mr. Roosevelt's political good sense. He may not have the intellectual ability of the late Woodrow Wilson, who found himself in similar circumstances a quarter of a century ago, but he is a wiser man. It is not to be supposed that he has used Mr. Willkie in the baser sense in which that expression can be employed, for the very good reason that the strong-minded Mr. Willkie is not the kind of man that anybody can use. War is a particular form of the adversity that is reputed to make strange bed-fellows, but one has the shrewd suspicion that when the two erstwhile "champs" lay down together after their political fight, they found more matters of agreement than subjects of controversy.

The effect of their decision on the United States themselves will be second only to its influence on the course of the conflict in Europe. We have grown accustomed to talk about coming to the end of an era, but familiarity does not diminish the force of truth. The passing of the Lend-Lease Law may mark the third American Revolution. The first was the revolt led by George Washington, to whom the American people look back as father of the nation. The second was the Civil War, in which, around the massive figure of Abraham Lincoln, the question of national unity was finally decided. Now, we may be on the edge of a third momentous step, if indeed the forward movement has not already begun, and, once more, by the fearful ordeal of war. America has declared for individuality and for unity: now, she makes up her mind for international co-operation. It is in the light of this significant development that we must regard the fierce encounters of Committee, Congress and Senate. Traditional attitudes are not easily abandoned. More than three centuries of history poured its floods of controversy into the great debate. The diverse streams of inheritance that create the headwaters of American opinion may not always be apparent in the swirling floods of such political controversy, but they have remained strong and potent to direct the main current away from Europe. We have come to the end of ancient grievances, long cherished in isolation. The United States of America has passed beyond development into a great nation: she can now stand up without fear or prejudice in the commonwealth of free nations. This is indeed great gain. If we can dare to look beyond the war (and that is now possible with diminished anxiety), we can indulge new hope for international co-operation. At the end of the last conflict, the withdrawal of the United States from the League of Nations was the final blow to the new deal for the peoples of the world, with this added note of tragedy, that the scheme was proposed by the American President. It is too soon to discuss the precise plan that may appear when this war is ended, but let us hope that Mr. Roosevelt may be at hand in some capacity to represent and lead the mind of his nation.

The flow of war material across the Atlantic has begun, and will increase. Hitler will put forth the whole weight of his air force and navy to arrest and stop these much-needed supplies. There may be grievous and heart-breaking losses. But this is a fateful year in the war for both the opposing sides. We have no right to expect anything less than a terrible *crescendo* in the conflict. There is good reason to hope that the attacks of the enemy will be matched by our own ingenuity in defence. Upon our success in outwitting the German onslaught will depend our growth in power for offensive action. A great battle will be fought in the Atlantic ocean, and around the coasts of Britain, but, meantime, we are immensely stronger to take our share in that tremendous fight because of the Lend-Lease Law.

THE DOMINION-PROVINCIAL CONFERENCE was an ugly incident that most of us would like to forget. Indeed, as we look back upon its miserable events, we are driven to indulge an aspiration after the impossible—that it might be expunged from the record of our history. However regarded, it is a monumental example of political ineptitude from which nobody can extract any worthy satisfaction. The accusation of bungled management is bad enough: but its worst features were the evident irresponsibility and malevolence that could be introduced into the discussion of a grave question. The only wreckage that has drifted ashore from the short-lived storm consists of interrogation marks, which the perplexed onlooker wants to place against persons rather than policies. Mr. Hepburn has won a characteristic victory that can provoke little envy: but if he stole the show, it must be recollected that he was not its stage-manager. Divided counsels of provincial governments were to be expected, but we hardly looked for such astonishing weakness in the leadership of the Dominion administration.

As the hot blood of controversy subsides, it becomes even harder to accept the intransigence of the wilful men who wrecked the Conference. It ought to be recollected that the Report which the provincial representatives were summoned to discuss was no up-start proposal of political expediency. For years, most intelligent leaders of Canadian policy have been persuaded that there had to be a new deal between Dominion and provincial affairs. An overhaul of the Confederation compact was long overdue. In the delicate reconciliation of interests between the provinces as separate units, and between the provinces as a whole and the federal authority, practical questions of fiscal adjustment constitute the hard core of our political system, and bring the fine sentiment of co-operative nationhood into the region of working agreement. Canada is not the creation of economic bargaining, and if her existence were sustained by nothing finer than sentiments of material advantage, she would have perished long ago. In many ways, Canada is a sheer defiance of economic geography. But, for that very reason, any sense of fiscal inequality is a serious menace to our common wellbeing. When the Royal Commission of investigation was set up, both the manner of its constitution and the personnel comprising it were criticised; and, according to certain recent comments of a contemptuous character, that criticism has certainly not diminished. But no conceivable group of men could have been set a task of such dimensions without incurring the censure of those who are determined to seek and find faults. The collapse of the chairman, Mr. Justice Rowell, was a heavy blow, and the untimely death of his successor, Mr. Sirois, had hardly a less tragic force. But nobody can deny that the work was well done, that the Commissioners acted in good faith, and that the Report was a worthy document of the highest importance. It was a serious and well-considered study of a difficult problem, and it merited something better than whirling words and emotional negatives.

However, the chief complaint against those who broke up the Conference is concerned not so much with their attitude as with their manner. The foolish accusation that the parties who wanted the Conference were Confederation-wreckers may be dismissed as the histrionic exaggeration of a debating-chamber. But to dismiss it is also to brand it as unpardonable recklessness in public conduct. We must come to more serious and better-founded objections. To maintain that the present hour in our national history is not an opportune time to discuss a question of such vast complexity and difficulty is an attitude that is both understandable and defensible. Likewise to allege that the provinces who were pressing for the Conference stood to gain, and only wished to extricate themselves from a difficult position in their own internal affairs and therefore were interested parties, is a very proper argument. Similarly, to maintain that the Report is inadequate to solve the problems it examined is a perfectly reasonable position. But the question that must be asked is why did all the provincial premiers of Canada assemble with accompanying delegates, supported and surrounded with cohorts of experts and advisers, simply to hear three at least of the premiers maintain that under no circumstances would they enter into any discussion of the subject. In the name of economy, of both money and time, to put the matter on no higher level, would not a three-cent stamp affixed to an envelope containing a letter addressed to the Prime Minister, stating that in the view of the non-consenting parties a Conference was undesirable, have answered the purpose equally well? Nobody was compelled to attend the Conference, and a courteous refusal to participate could hardly have been misunderstood. We are therefore driven to inferences suggesting attitudes that are rather unworthy. Was the *non-possumus* position resolved upon not before but actually at Ottawa? Did the opponents of the Report begin to feed upon their mutual negatives in the Conference Chamber, and finding a sudden and unexpected strength in their united aversion to the Federal government, did they begin to move into more firmly entrenched instransigence than they had purposed when they left their provincial offices? If such is the explanation, it is no compliment to the statesmanlike qualities of certain provincial administrators.

Mr. Mackenzie King confessed to the Conference that he was persuaded to summon its meeting rather against his earlier judgment. Pressure must have come from within his Cabinet, and probably also from without, notably from the prairie provinces, pleading the urgency of the problem of Dominion-Provincial relations. Every allowance must be made for a harassed and pre-occupied national leader administering great affairs of state in a time of war. Nevertheless, he must have known the smouldering fires of opposition that were ready to burst out into flame and smoke when the Conference assembled. Surely counsels of prudence would have suggested that before so grave a question could be considered, the whole ground should have been explored, and at least some promise of success secured. Or, was the Prime Minister contented to summon the provinces, let them expose their divisions, and thus to cast aside the onus, admittedly a heavy one, of national leadership on the excuse of irreconcilable oppositions? Did the flare-up in the Conference Chamber take Mr. King as much by surprise as it did the better part of the Canadian people? If not, why, in the precious name of national unity, was the Conference ever called at all?

The unhappy Conference terminated in a fiasco so miserable and humiliating that any immediate prospect of re-opening discussions is foreclosed. What now? The problems remain, more acute than ever. Already the Dominion Government has announced to the provincial administration that its contribution to public relief must be withdrawn. The quickening of industry through the necessities of war has brought new income to certain provinces, but not to all. Out on the prairies, the provincial governments are facing a dark prospect. Their export markets have disappeared, and are not likely to re-open until the war is over. How are they to carry on the services, or education, of road maintenance, as well as public relief in municipalities with little or no income? The appeal has gone out for national unity, and for a strong concerted effort to meet a task of tremendous proportions. That supreme cause has not been advanced by the ignoble proceedings of the Dominion-Provincial Conference.

THE SURVIVAL OF DEMOCRACY has become the subject of frequent discussion and concern. Obviously the immediate condition for the continuance of liberty is a defeat of its enemies. But, in the scanty leisure of thought that is granted to our preoccupied minds, we are being compelled into a new consideration of the positive as well as the negative aspects of the democratic life. There is a widespread, but rather vague and unformulated belief, in some cases hardly more than a suspicion, that we have encountered a sea change in the tides of civilisation. It is seldom possible for the participant to form a true judgment of passing events: as Hegel reminds us in a familiar passage, wisdom comes only with retrospect. Nevertheless, it is the prerogative of human reason to stand detached from immediacy, to observe trends and to assess values. Already in the modern scene we can observe familiar streams of life, that for centuries have watered the territories of the western world, now running out into the sands of time. And the eye that is tutored by history and experience can see also in that same darkened landscape other new currents of social tendency beginning to gain strength with startling rapidity and threatening to carry away our accustomed shelters and dwelling-places as with a flood. In the midst of all this, can democracy survive?

Why should such questions arise, and with such foreboding of possible evil? In the first place, there is the stark fact of war—war made with such weapons of swift destruction as to give even to that incident shape of evil a new and dreadful terror. And war itself is revolution. War begins where reason has left off. One party or the other has despaired of change through talk and reconciliation, or, more frequently, has brought such civilized intercourse to an end, and has resorted to alteration through violence. For the other party, the alternative presented is to surrender or to fight, and in either choice, the method that must win is essentially violent in nature and revolutionary in effect. Therefore, whether we like it or not, we have a revolution on our hands. Fires are easier to start than to check. Violent methods suggest violent ends, and unless the high purpose for which we fight is kept consciously and constantly before the mind, with leadership that matches courage with sanity, the result may be victory, but in the process liberty itself may fade out of sight.

Modern war has entered upon unprecedented dimensions. New and terrible powers have come into human hands. We speak of *total war*, meaning thereby that, in a way hitherto unknown, entire nations clash with one another. The extremity of danger demands the complete organization of a people at war under the control and direction of government. In the democratic theory, policies and programmes must be submitted to popular discussion and through constitutional processes to be accepted or rejected. War cannot be waged on such terms. The form of democracy is narrowed to an intense sustained act of faith, whereby, believing in a supreme cause, and finding its expression in the emergence of inspired leaders, the people are content to be ruled rather than to rule. To-day most of us want nothing more than to be told how best we can serve, and then to obey. There is need, therefore, amidst the intensity of the war effort and even as a calculated element in its better efficiency, to make a place for constant witness to the fundamental processes of liberty, and to ensure that they shall be so kept alive that their resumption shall be ardently desired when the battle ends.

It was said before the war, and it is still being said, that the war has only brought to light the concealed problems of modern society. The same vast powers that have now been engaged for war-time effort had been accumulating in our time even before the war. They are mostly mechanical in their nature, displacing the human factor in industry as surely as the infantry man has disappeared from the modern battlefield. If we must organize for war-time production, we cannot evade the same demand in times of peace. Hence, the cry that was steadily rising for a planned economy during the last score of years is hardly likely to diminish when we face the enormous tasks of reconstruction. When that longed-for day dawns, there will be immense possibilities of terrible confusion. Vast capital expenditures are being made for the creation of vast equipment. Enormous industries have been created that are absorbing the armies of the unemployed. But it is unproductive employment in the sense that it does not minister to human wellbeing; rather the condition is not unlike the sudden need for such a stupendous increase of insurance premiums against the possible loss of the entire factory that the whole industry must turn to providing payment of the premiums. But when the danger is happily brought to an end, what then? We shall have need for some planning, but the regulation of life and democracy need not co-exist. Certain prophets of the future tell us that they are mutually exclusive—some with joy, and others with profound reluctance. There are enough modern instances to sustain the possibilities of their judgment. The maintenance of the democratic way of life along with a regulated economy will require new capacities of political leadership, whose resources must not be fed simply on a long-cherished entail of economic oppression, nor on the other hand, on a nostalgia for the *status quo ante bellum.*

New social creativeness will arise as much out of moral and spiritual convictions as out of political ingenuity in formulating constitutions and systems. Therein possibly lie as much as anywhere the deepest causes of our current disquiet. Democracy has been the creation of religion, and in particular of the Christian religion. Our enemies, who despise democracy and pour contempt on what they hold to be its essential weakness, have singled out Christianity for the *gravamen* of their spiritual attack. A way of life can be sustained only by convictions of faith. Such convictions must not only be intelligent persuasions of the mind: even more, they must be held with an emotional fervour that deepens into a fundamental reverence. There must be a point in life at which we say "Here I stand, or die." These are essential marks of a religious faith. But can faith feed on itself? Can man become the object of his own self-worship, individually or in the mass? In the last resort must we not have some reckoning with ultimate questions concerning the very nature, origin, government and destiny of this our common existence? And these are the very questions which by neglect or contempt have faded out of the average mind. Therefore we hail with more than ordinary interest the fact that, almost within sight of their shattered cathedrals, a group of Anglican clergy and laymen should have met to draw up a manifesto for the future, and to say what, in the name of the Christian religion, should be the new deal for the post-war world. But even they ought to be reminded that declarations on social ethics must be founded on revitalised religion whereby a new access of spiritual conviction can animate the modern mind.

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