

TOPICS OF THE DAY

THE RUSSIAN ENIGMA: THE JAPANESE VICTORIES: THE
PLEBISCITE: MR. CHURCHILL.

THE RUSSIAN ENIGMA will solve itself during the next few months. With the coming of spring, a battle of vast dimensions and furious character must inevitably be joined by the armies of the German Reich and the Soviet Republics. The struggle will be apocalyptic in the sense that it will reveal the striking power alike of the Nazis and the Communists by the only ultimate test—trial by combat. We have seen the German armies roll up to the gates of Moscow and Leningrad, and there brought to a halt by the aroused will of the Russian people. That in itself has been a heartening achievement, for let it be confessed that only once has it happened before, when a year previously the British people by a similar act of resolute determination defeated the German *blitzkrieg* in its assault on London. The Russians have gone further: they have begun to push the enemy back, but never sufficiently far to turn the retreat into a rout. The Germans have never worried too much about mere loss of territory, but it is a portent of hope that at the end of a bleak and discouraging winter, the Russians have the offensive in their hands. Nevertheless, our allies suffered grievous losses in trained man-power and productive capacity during the autumn battles of last year, and the Germans have not been exposed to anything like a similar disability. The Nazis must have immense forces in men and materials at their disposal. Wherever they hurl their strength, the Russian ability to resist and counter-attack is of critical importance.

The Russian achievement has been a rallying point for our courage in the midst of disappointments and defeats. This access of strength has been the more welcome because it has come from a quarter so unexpected. A veil of mystery has hung over the land of the Soviets since the great Revolution, and the rulers of the Kremlin have done little to tear aside the curtain. Selected visitors were admitted from time to time, and many of them attempted to satisfy our curiosity by recounting their experiences and impressions. The diverse character of their reports did not help the unprejudiced reader to reach any well-founded convictions about the Russian achievement: for the very good reason, we suspect, that permanent achievements had not as yet been attained. For great sections of opinion, the Communist was, and

remains even now, the bogey-man of the world. The sinister pact between Russia and Germany in August, 1939, seemed to confirm our worst suspicions. The unprovoked attack on Finland cast deeper shadows on the picture. Then came the summer of 1941, when we found ourselves compelled to embrace the strangest of allies, and we have hardly as yet recovered from our astonishment at the new turn of events. However, Germany's foes are our friends and, as the events of the third year of the war begin to reach a new tempo of fury, the Russians, who once gave every appearance of being in active cooperation with our enemies, have become our saviours.

1942 will be a fateful year for the war, and all that is at stake in the struggle. During its first months, we have been, by turns, cast down and uplifted, but with considerable emphasis on the mood of depression. Lurking behind our admiration for the Russian achievements there has been the whisper of doubt in our minds—"Will they be able to keep it up?"—"How far is the German retreat directed by reasons of strategy?" We await the spring with trembling hearts. Nevertheless, there is solid ground for hope. The Russians can and will fight. The soldiers of the Red Army are not dumb, driven cattle, cowed into submissive obedience by the discipline of terror, administered at the hands of ruthless commissars. The divisions that fought before Moscow were not held in the battle-line by emotions of craven fear. Moreover, the courage of the soldiers has been matched by the skill and ability of their leaders. The Russians have fought the German panzer divisions to a stand-still, and then have compelled them into retreat. It is further evident the morale of the Soviet armies has an effective counter-part in the devotion of workmen and peasants behind the line. The Communist system has passed through a crucial test to which its people have responded by a resolute will to rally for its defence. Therefore we may conclude that, whether we like it or not, the Russian régime is no shoddy political structure ready to fall apart when subjected to external pressure of the most violent kind. Rather, it is well-organized and efficient; it commands the passionate loyalty of its subjects. Our Russian allies are not a nation of pitiable wretches, compelled into ignorant submission by the lash of the political knout. And let us further recollect, for our encouragement, the vastness alike of their population and of their resources. Nevertheless, the Russians cannot stand alone. Therefore, much depends upon the help we can give them and the lines of communication along which our assistance can be carried.

Great battles on the eastern European front will be points of engagement for which the all-important bases lie far off in Britain and America. The supply routes run across hazardous stretches of water, and almost equally difficult ranges of mountains. The courage and ability of the Russian armies can be defeated far away from the steppe country. There appears to be a clear recognition of this fact by the British and American leaders. But what Mr. Churchill and Mr. Roosevelt realize so vividly may be difficult to make effective among their own people. The Russian battle-field is not the only theatre of war in which they have a vital interest—not by any means. The British and the Americans are heavily engaged elsewhere, and without any heartening sense of victorious resistance to the enemy. On the contrary, they have suffered defeat upon defeat. There may be an immense pressure of public opinion, difficult to resist because so cogent in its arguments, to the effect that the first duty of any country is to supply the material of war to its own fighting men. We now begin to see the necessity for large conceptions of the war strategy, and for tremendous productive effort in those lands where the manufacture of munitions and arms is still possible. Our task in the factories is to increase the volume of war-material for our own battle-lines, and at the same time to keep a steady flow of equipment for Russia. Not less important, and certainly not less difficult, is our responsibility for carrying the supplies to the Russian ports. Already the Battle of the Atlantic has reached a new intensity of struggle. We may expect new developments that will add to its desperate character.

The present need for Russia's help turns speculation about her war-aims into an academic exercise. With ourselves, she proclaims an undying quarrel with Hitler and all his works. That is good enough to get along with for the present, but what of the future? Has the Communist Party, which it has been so difficult to distinguish from the government of Russia, abandoned its missionary aims? Will a victorious Russia attempt to dominate Europe? World-wide Communism is still represented by a small, but very active, propagandist group. At present, they are carrying on a persistent agitation, which couples a plea for a united front with a demand for the release of what are called "anti-fascists" who have been interned since the early months of the war. The Russians have promised us victory against Hitler this very year. That is a consummation devoutly to be wished, and we must lend every support to its realization. However,

even now, we must get ready not to withstand social and economic change that must inevitably come, but to avoid the Communist method of achieving it, which is by revolution. And that method may gain considerable prestige by a spectacular Russian victory.

THE JAPANESE VICTORIES have provided the most spectacular series of events in a war that has not lacked surprises. When France crumpled up before the German onslaught in 1940, we thought that the abysmal depths of disaster had been touched. After a summer of foreboding, the awaited blow fell on London, and Britain survived, bruised but victorious. Who, in those darkest hours, would have ventured to prophesy the fall of Singapore, the coming of an Asiatic foe to the very gates of India, and the threat of invasion to Australia? These chastening experiences have gained in effect by the speed with which they have come upon us. The gravity of the war has increased with its geographical expansion, and, as far as it is possible to judge, the realized hope of our final victory is also much deferred.

The incredible dash of the Japanese onward sweep has been greatly helped both by our ill-fortune and by our neglect. Beginning with the disaster of Pearl Harbour, followed by the loss of a first-class British battleship and the fall of Hong-Kong, events moved on with overwhelming rapidity to the catastrophe of Singapore. The enemy were presented with what must have been for them an almost unbelievable choice of campaign routes—west to Burma and India, or south to Australia. Even the most optimistic of strategic time schedules could not have provided for such dazzling success. We had the vilest of ill-luck, but when all possible weight is given to the fortuitous factor that must enter into all war-like operations, the major element in the reverses must be attributed to our own lack of fore-sight. It is very evident that we failed almost completely to forecast the belligerent intentions of the Japanese people, and then, to make matters worse, we underestimated both their strength and their capacity. In equal measure, American and British people have revealed an astonishing failure to think in realistic terms. The time has gone long since when indulgence in mutual recriminations can be a profitable exercise, but no American ought now to dare criticize the lack of preparation by British statesmen in face of the growing Nazi threats. If possible, leaders in the United States were even less aware of the imperialist

policies that were directing the Japanese military programme, which included the subjugation of the American continent.

And now, what next? We may be very sure that the Japanese are working in close cooperation with the Nazi strategy, although the men of Tokyo are not likely to be quite so abject in their surrender to German direction as the unfortunate Italians. The Japanese have their own dream of world-conquest, much older and more firmly cherished than the ambitions of the Teutons. Indeed, the world itself is not wide enough to provide sufficient room for the Axis partners to sweep on the full circuit of their imagined orbits. Driven on by an appetite for power and possession that has been fed by delayed gratification, the Japanese may strike for the dazzling prizes of Australasia. They may surrender to the age-long lure of India's wealth, that has continued to attract the aims of world-conquerors since history began. Thus they will unite the satisfaction of their own ambitions with a fulfilment of the Nazi plans by sitting astride almost half the equatorial surface of the earth. Or, they may decide to help Hitler in his inevitable Russian campaign by an onslaught at the eastern extremity of the Soviet territories. Or, yet again, they may summon up all their courage, and make for our own North American shores, which are, without doubt, for them an ultimate destination.

Time and resources are on our side, only if we can use them. It seems incredible that the Japanese should ever be able to stand up effectively against the mobilized might of the United States of America. By every calculation, the day of reckoning ought to come. We can be defeated only by a lack of resolution and the adding of future foolishness to former complacency. But the necessary effort in production, training of men, and the dispatch of forces, must be maintained with a growing intensity. The road to victory will be long and hard. Many months must pass before we can recover the strategic positions that have gone from our hands, one after the other, in bewildering succession. We must strike the enemy whenever the opportunity presents itself, and we must create occasions of offence. Already, during the present conflict, it has been established that a battle line has to be maintained on the psychological front. It becomes difficult to keep the requisite fervor of application while victory is delayed. War-weariness is an insidious disease, and in the United States it has a large territory on which to spread itself. A great effort lies ahead of us, but a free people will now have an opportunity

of displaying to the world that it yields nothing in effective will to our tyrant-driven enemies.

The turn of events in the Orient provokes many reflections, even in minds that have scanty leisure from pre-occupation with current events. A long-delayed challenge has been offered to the white régime in the East. Taking the long view of history, we may well conclude that the present clash was inevitable. The expansion of the European peoples over the world during a period of four and a half centuries has been a great epoch in the history of mankind. They turned west to the Americas. There, in the north, they have established new home-lands, and have developed a highly-organized civilization. In the south, the Latin races have been more lethargic and vast areas of fabulous resources remain to be exploited. The Europeans have invaded Asia, and by military conquest or industrial expansion, often by a combination of both, have dominated the coloured races. The same story can be told of Africa. In Australasia, they have made a white man's country. The characteristic energy of the European peoples has united itself with great industrial power, and everywhere they have gone as a master-race. It is easy to see that, when this war is ended, we shall also have reached the conclusion of a dazzling age. In this setting, we have no place for the Japanese bid for power. Already the question of Indian independence has reached an acute stage, and its settlement will be greatly accelerated by the new turn of events. There can be no return, anywhere, to the old order. But we have no interest, and if possible the native peoples of Asia must have even greater hesitations, in exchanging the regime of the white races for that of the Japanese. If we have chastised them with whips, their fellow-Asiatics will chastise them with scorpions. In the East, as everywhere, we must begin to think of a new world-order. The age of conquest is over; the time has come for inter-racial co-operation. The world has become one, and it is large enough for us all. A mere reconstruction of Europe is not enough. There must be a New Deal for all mankind. But, first, we must defeat the powers that plan the future in very different terms, for they are the enemies of civilization. The ugly alliance of Germans and Japanese is the most immediate danger to the liberty of all mankind.

THE PLEBISCITE is a most unfortunate appearance in the Canadian political firmament. Until the popular vote is taken, we must pass through a period of acute controversy,

and this domestic wrangle will occupy public attention during a period when our country is heavily engaged in great battles that must break shortly into terrible fury. This circumstance will not help to mollify the temper of the contending groups, although it may help to bring much-needed light into regions where we have only heat and smoke. Now that the plebiscite has been decided upon, every loyal Canadian must wish in his heart to get it over and out of the way, so that we can proceed with the only serious matter worth discussing—how to win the war.

The only defence of the government's policy is that it had become unavoidable. There was an alternative—a general election. A vote of the people had to be taken either on the question of the government's continuance in office or on that of releasing the government from its pledges about compelling men to take overseas service. We may lament this necessity, but the government did not create it. The causes lie far back in Canadian history, both remote and recent.

The government contends that it found itself impaled on the horns of a political dilemma—most disturbing and weakening experience for an administration engaged in a war that ought to claim its undivided attention. Mr. Mackenzie King's cogent reply to his critics is that, at the outbreak of war, the preservation of Canadian unity was a paramount necessity, and indeed that the same necessity continues. To achieve this end, he had to make certain commitments on the question of conscription to a considerable section of the Canadian people—to wit, the French-speaking population. We must recollect how tense after the outbreak of war, was the feeling in that area of Canadian opinion, how M. Duplessis actually precipitated a provincial election in Quebec on this very question, how under the leadership of M. Lapointe the dissenting movement was heavily defeated, but how insistent was M. Lapointe that he could carry his people only on a non-conscription programme. We must further recollect that at the general election of 1940, when Mr. King appealed to the country for a vote of confidence, which he won very handsomely, no opposing party ventured to put national conscription on its platform. These facts may be lamentable, but they are stubborn realities. Now, there has arisen from other sections of Canada an insistent clamour that conscription is a national necessity. Moreover, it would appear that the government itself has decided that release from the "no-conscription" pledges, which it gave in the interest of national unity, has become a necessity for the fulness of a complete war-effort. But it cannot withdraw these

pledges without destroying the confidence that placed it in power. The plebiscite is its method of escape from the resultant dilemma.

The plebiscite is a somewhat dubious appearance in our apparatus of government. Dr. Gallup, with his self-styled Canadian Institute of Public Opinion, would evidently like to turn his continuous nibbling at the popular mind into a method of political consultation—but, as has been asked, "Who is this Gallup that he should rule over us?" Incessant polling may have the same enervating effect on political health as a morbid pre-occupation with medical examinations on physical vitality. There are better ways of keeping fit than to be forever taking one's pulse or temperature. The wiser procedure is to have a periodic check-up, and then to forget about illness unless serious symptoms make their appearance. In any case, this Gallup interference should be closely watched in our political procedure. With a quasi-authority, based on methods to which presumably only the "Gallup-ers" have access, the pretentious Institute presumes to tell the public mind what it is going to think—and, by subtle processes of suggestion, the same mind is influenced in the direction of what it ought to think. Such is not our traditional procedure in this country. Under the constitution, we believe in a government of His Majesty the King, responsible to a parliament elected by the people. By the method of the plebiscite, the government secured consent of parliament to consult the people, not on the general question of popular confidence in the administration, but on a particular question of policy, entirely negative in its character—namely, to relieve the government of a pledge, which was a plank of the platform on which it asked to be elected. If the people vote in the affirmative, the government is committed to nothing (as Mr. King has been very careful to say): if they vote in the negative, the same administration can contend that the original policy was one of wisdom. And, the same government remains in power. This is not a very defensible arrangement.

The rebutting dilemma over against that on which the government professes to be impaled can be stated thus. The plebiscite itself will not solve the problem which made the plebiscite necessary. The process of consulting the electorate will create as much dissension as harmony. If the country is so deeply divided on the conscription issue that the government dare not enact compulsory service beyond Canada without formal release from its pledge, voting will not bridge the gulf.

Indeed, in the heated atmosphere of public discussion, the rival determinations are likely to become more stubbornly fixed. If the government expects a reply in the affirmative to its question, and surely otherwise it would not have proposed the referendum, then the plebiscite is unnecessary. If the response is in the negative, the problem of national unity remains unsolved, and a mere vote will not appease those who clamour for conscription.

This is no time for logic-chopping about political dilemmas. Generally, when an argument reaches that stage, it is a clear indication that we should move further back to examine the terms of the disputation. Surely the government of Canada is in a position (none better) to decide whether this country ought to resolve upon the extension of the present compulsory system so as to dispatch troops beyond the political boundaries of the Dominion. Even that kind of question is a strange vestigial remnant of an out-moded isolationist mentality. The government should have presented its policy to parliament and accepted the decision. If there had been some crossing of the floor, what would that have mattered? If there had been a re-alignment of party allegiance, what would that have mattered? There is only one party today that matters—the war party. We are not fighting for the survival of the existing line of cleavage in Canadian politics. If the government had been defeated, it should have gone to the country, and the same forces that were expected to give an affirmative response to the plebiscite would have sent Mr. King back to Ottawa as Prime Minister. The demand of the hour is for boldness alike in policy and in action.

The government has decided otherwise. We have the plebiscite on our hands. We will all be happier when we have got rid of it by telling the government to renounce not only its pledges, but also the mind that gave them birth. The same voice will issue the same instruction to all parties—for all were equally involved in trying to appease the no-conscription enthusiasts. But the government must also accept an affirmative vote as a positive demand for an even fuller war-effort, with no inhibitions.

MR. CHURCHILL has been compelled to face the first serious challenge to his undisputed authority since he took office as Prime Minister. He himself would not have chosen any other tribunal before which to stand trial. The heated debates of the House of Commons have established that Great Britain remains a free parliamentary democracy, in which no figure, however

popular and respected, can escape criticism and censure. Parliament has been confirmed in its supremacy over all its members, even the most exalted, and has proved its ability to compel the ablest of Prime Ministers to yield before its authority. At a time when the suggestion is being made in many quarters that the constraints of total war have silenced the voice of opposition, press and parliament have united to confirm our faith that public discussion is not only an effective instrument of criticism, but it actually achieves results.

The attack on Mr. Churchill created astonishment and dismay in many hearts on this side of the Atlantic. He had just returned home after great personal triumphs. His speech at Washington had been hailed as the greatest ever delivered in a chamber where oratory is still prized as a fine art; whereas, in Ottawa, the whole parliament of Canada had been invited to assemble not in formal session, but as a united gathering to do him honor. Not only his manner of speech, but his whole bearing among us had confirmed the popular spell that had been woven around his reputation. His jaunty air, his confident manner, with its rare blend of courage and audacity, his histrionic touches, his cigar, his obvious delight in the public esteem with which he was greeted, all combined to elevate our depressed spirits. In the United States, he outshone the President himself, and, among ourselves, no Canadian name could be mentioned alongside that of the British Prime Minister.

The demand made by the House of Commons on Mr. Churchill was two-fold. The first may be bluntly stated—he must now prove his ability to do something more than make speeches. The second followed from the first—he must get rid of certain Cabinet ministers and re-organize his conduct of the war. At the outset, it was made plain that the personal prestige of the Prime Minister was undiminished: there was no alternative leader in sight. But such confidence did not extend to his colleagues, some of them in offices of vital importance. One critical member stated the position very succinctly when he said they were all for Mr. Churchill, but all against his government. When the Prime Minister, with characteristic loyalty to his friends, proposed personally to accept any criticism that might be directed towards the war effort, the House grew impatient, and the press joined the chorus of revolt. It was suggested that Mr. Churchill might be developing into a public danger, that the enchantment of his oratory must be broken, and, in any case, that he must re-create his Cabinet. For the first time, the name of a

substitute for Mr. Churchill himself was openly proposed. Mr. Churchill, being no fool, yielded to the popular clamour, and regained the loyalty he must have if he is to maintain his position. But his prestige has been shaken, and it is doubtful if he will ever reach again the same undisputed place in the confidence of the British people.

Even if Mr. Churchill had been supplanted, or if his star has now fallen into a decline, the whole world of free men would continue to owe him an unspeakable debt. To the British people in an hour of gravest peril he brought them the one gift they required, without which indeed they would have perished—the example of undismayed courage. During the dark days of May and June in 1940, not only his matchless voice but his resolute action became the expression of a great nation's will to do or die. When invasion threatened, and the German airplanes dropped fire and destruction from the skies on the cities and towns of Great Britain, the very appearance of Mr. Churchill in the public streets brought a new access of hope to homeless multitudes. It may be that now we need a fresher and more constructive mind to unite a similar courage with a broader conception of the war, (although it is by no means established that we can find a more effective substitute), but we shall be guilty of the basest ingratitude if ever we forget the man who, more than any other, saved our cause.

Mr. Churchill had to wait long years before the people of Britain were willing to entrust him with the chief office under the crown. If there had been no war, he would never have been Prime Minister. Nobody could ever doubt his dazzling gifts or his superb abilities displayed in so many fields of action. It was his capacity to make wise judgments that was always in question. He was unique, brilliant, audacious, never afraid of maintaining an unpopular cause or of criticizing views to which he was opposed. He could write and speak with unrivalled power, but, what had he ever done in the fields of public action? His devotion to England was beyond question, but could he discern the signs of the times? Above all, was he a leader? The very apparent defects that provoked hesitations in time of peace made him the man above all others in time of war. It was to the jaunty, cocksure Winston, who had been through youthful escapades as a war correspondent in South Africa, who as Home Secretary had accompanied a posse of London police to hunt down East-end criminals, who, as First Lord of the Admiralty

had mobilized the Royal Navy in August, 1914, and then had accompanied a naval brigade to Antwerp, who proposed the expedition to the Dardanelles and then led a battalion in the battles of the Somme, who opposed the extension of Home Rule to India, who crossed and re-crossed the floor of the House of Commons until he ended up as an independent Conservative, who first proclaimed the growing danger of German re-armament, to Winston, soldier, politician, author, artist, bricklayer that Britain turned to find both a leader and a voice, and did not turn in vain. One prediction is certain, that whoever may succeed Mr. Churchill, nobody will ever take his place.

J. S. T.
