

Civil Defence

DO OUR LEADERS SEEK OUR WELFARE?

MEN and women who have had some aim in life, and have tasted in some degree the fruits of achievement, look back over the past forty years and see constructive efforts checked and interrupted by two appalling episodes—the two world wars. Nor can one ignore the fact that the endeavour to live a useful, social, and fulfilled life was already before the second war increasingly being obstructed by near-war activities of a preparatory and defensive type. One cannot organise one's own life or plan constructive activities to improve the amenities of contemporary social living if the horizon is continually overcast by the possibility, the probability, of war.

Truisms, perhaps, but nevertheless one cannot hope to understand contemporary attitudes, the "mood of the masses", or whatever term is used to convey the prevailing mental and emotional climate, without taking account of the menace of war which has now become perpetual. More than any other factor it underlies the apathy, the frivolousness and indifference and shallowness which everyone senses with a feeling of emptiness and defeat. War itself often brings a certain elation, partly from the relief from expectation and the grappling with the real thing, but partly also from the hope that it will be "the last time". Now, with the treaties still unsigned, the armies of occupation not yet withdrawn, the recruiting for Civil Defence and underlines once more the old anxiety, the threat of another war.

the world want nothing so much as to live in peace.

But do we ever find our way or any other government ever making any sincere overtures to the people of another state? Does their policy ever seek the welfare of the people as a whole? The answer is, No. While the British Government sees the rulers of Czechoslovakia winding up all political opposition, the British government votes for this Czech government for a place on the Security Council of the United Nations. Governments have more in common with one another (even when there is apparent hostility) than they have with the peoples of the world.

Those who see not alternative form of society are driven to accept the inevitability of wars and the necessity of Civil Defence. Yet such an attitude

provides an outlook so black—that of endlessly reiterated "Wars-to-end-Wars"—that it is surely time to re-examine the whole problem. We believe that no respite is to be expected from governments. War for them is an instrument of policy, disagreeable enough in itself, no doubt, but one which they are not unwilling to use. The way forward lies with a recognition of the fundamental longing for peace in ordinary people, and a refusal to take up arms and so add to the futility and immorality of war. Antimilitarism based on the desire for mutual support between peoples of the world provides the possibility of a more rational approach to the problems. Faith in the mass of people is a stumbling block for many. But the alternative vista of civil defence and war is even more intolerable. Such consideration leads to mutual co-operation and a changed attitude to the relationship of the ruled to the ruling.

NUTS

A Great Venture Ruined by Politics

THE groundnuts scheme has for long been so shrouded in official secrecy on the one hand, and been the subject of purely political controversy on the other, that it has been almost impossible to form a clear insight of what it is all about. Recently, however, a certain amount of light has been shed on the dark places and some kind of estimate can be made. The general picture which emerges is one of a grandiose and imaginative conception whose carrying out is being deformed by the characteristic social forces of our time, centralised planning and administration and an eye to political advantage and prestige.

The idea of making huge tracts of unproductive bush land in Africa yield substantial crops of edible oil and by-products in the way of cattle feed and husk products is a striking and progressive one. It provides an experiment in increasing the world's food output, and also makes a beginning of the gigantic task of making productive the limitless acres of Africa. As such it deserves close study, and can be seen as part of a trend in which gigantic agricultural projects are undertaken not by private individuals or enterprises, but by governments. The attempts of the Russian Five Year Plans to extend agriculture into Siberia, or the huge task of soil conservation undertaken by the U.S. government in the Tennessee Valley scheme, provide examples. Such projects are prototypes of the government sponsored economic enterprises of the future, and the achievements and defects of such schemes can be attributed to the administrative procedures which seem natural to governments.

Public imagination (whatever that is) has been caught by the fantastic disparity between estimated costs and the actual costs, between the acreages of the target and of the achievement. It is apparent that the original Wakefield Report was itself based on quite insufficient research, and was accepted

(after only two months' scrutiny) by the government without adequate checking. The report estimated the cost of clearing at £3 17s. per acre; the recently published report of the Overseas Food Corporation gives the actual cost at £15 per acre but estimates made by outside observers on the spot reckon the cost in some districts as between £60 and 80 per acre.

The misjudgment appears to have been due to an underestimation of the difficulties and consequent use of unsuitable machinery, which in any case seems to have been tested only in England, and which was quickly broken up by the appalling roots of the African scrub. Haste must also have been responsible for the lack of provision of repair stations and spare parts. Why were such misjudgments committed? Our time has not been lacking in examples of projects planned down to the last detail before being put into execution, yet the O.F.C.'s report declares: "The decision to proceed immediately and in headlong manner on an improvised basis has been amply justified by the valuable experience gained, by the acquisition of heavy clearing equipment and other materials which would no longer have been available in later years, and by the establishment during this year of an organisation with the requisite specialist branches and with a knowledge of the type and scope of the problems to be encountered."

The Labour Government proceeded immediately and in a headlong manner on an improvised basis with the comprehensive health services scheme (and have encountered similar difficulties), so that it

EMPLOYERS FIND CO-OPERATION PAYS

IT really is faintly amusing to sit back and watch the bosses tumble over themselves in their efforts to be ever-so-democratic—now that they find it pays.

From factory after factory all over the country the glad news is pouring in that post-war equivalents of the war-time Joint Production Councils are being set up—bigger and better than ever. Hearty and heartening news of the workers rolling up their sleeves and getting down to it is being pushed in the press, while stories of the nasty few who are not impressed are being relegated to back pages.

Now co-operation is a fine thing. We have always thought that it is better for men to co-operate than to compete. We have always known that the capacity to get together was one which, if tapped, would prove an incentive in itself, as well as representing a considerable saving in energy.

We were not, of course, the only ones to realise it. Years ago, the employers in many industries saw that instead of indulging in cut-throat competition with each other, they were going to defend their interests better by associating to fix prices at a profitable level. Thus monopolies and price-rings came into being.

But that was co-operation within one class—solidarity among the bosses, at it were. The "new" ideas which are going to rake in the elusive dollars are extending that same principle to a management-worker relationship and, because co-operation is more sensible, are showing results.

What is the Motive?

What we are interested in, however, is the motive behind this embracing of a fine principle. Is it all being done for fine reasons or base? Is it a desire for the welfare of the worker which motivates

managements—or is the secret in the last paragraph—is the motive "to rake in the elusive dollars"?

Put like that, the reason is obvious. The purpose is purely and simply to increase output, and in the good old reformist way, the bosses are only too willing to make concessions and innovations which cost them nothing when it is proved to them that they not merely cost nothing but show a handsome profit.

One Leeds engineering firm, for instance, has increased its turnover from two million pounds in 1947 to six million in 1949, and has shown an 18 per cent. increase in production per man hour. And it has done this by setting up a works council through which the workers are told "why" certain decisions are taken by the management; by developing a sense of pride in their work among the workers and eliminating the feeling of insecurity by ensuring a constant pressure of orders; and by establishing an apprentice school where lads get a craft training before they go into the works. Simple, isn't it?

At this particular works, the workers pay is now 30 per cent. more than two years ago and prices of the finished goods (diesel electric generators) have been reduced by 25 per cent. But since production costs are down 10 per cent. and turnover is up by 200 per cent., we may take it that the shareholders are being well looked after, too.

Other factories are doing similar things, some doing more, and of much of them we can approve—the efforts to make workers "feel that they matter", for instance. It is our own view that workers do not realise just how much they do matter; do not realise that they are the important section of industry when it comes to production, and that the bench-workers and technicians between them could run the whole show.

Managements as a whole represent the shareholders, and their function is to see that profits are provided. We could well enough get on without that function, and since the whole point of the present democratisation of industry is to boost output since "Britain" needs dollars, we see it as merely a means to perpetuate capitalism at the (eventual, if not present) expense of the worker.

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PEASANTS SEIZE LAND IN SOUTHERN ITALY

Direct Action Forces Government to Move

LARGE numbers of peasants in Sicily and Southern Italy are squatting on uncultivated big estates. It is, for instance, reported that on the fifteenth of this month, 1,000 peasants headed by a mayor, marched singing to take over 10,250 acres of uncultivated land in Palermo province. The police did nothing to stop them.

The *Observer* (20/11/49) reports that this month's direct action has "forced the Government into speedier rhythm than its political prudence hitherto allowed. Special land distributions to peasants in Calabria have been promised by the Government without waiting for passage of the national reform, while in Sicily landlords are reduced to attempting to buy off invaders.

"The Sicilian regional Government has voted the earliest transference of some tens of thousands of hectares of big landowners' property to peasant families—without awaiting the passage of the land reform acts in the national and regional parliaments."

sponsored scheme. But before the problem can be tackled in a rational and co-operative way, it must be regarded by both Europeans and Africans alike as a joint enterprise for the purpose of increasing the natural wealth of the soil. Such an approach only becomes possible when it is untrammelled by all the political scheming and centralised direction which characterise the government-initiated projects of our age.

