

Electioneering Once More

'Some Form of Gestapo'

BBC, London, 4 June 1945

THE END OF THE WAR IN EUROPE soon brought with it the end of Churchill's great wartime administration. The Labour Party were not prepared to continue in the Coalition until Japan had been defeated and so, on 23 May, Churchill formally resigned, and was at once invited to form a caretaker government. Parliament was dissolved on 15 June, the General Election was held on 5 July, ten days later both Churchill and Attlee flew to Potsdam, and the results were declared on 26 July.

During the course of the campaign, Churchill gave four broadcasts as Conservative Party leader. Of these, his first was made memorable by its vicious and deplorable attack on the Labour Party. Clementine Churchill vainly begged him to delete the 'Gestapo' passage, and *The Times* also regretted his 'uncomfortably abrupt' transition from national leader to partisan demagogue. Sir Charles Wilson, Churchill's doctor, thought it showed that his illustrious patient had once again lost his touch, 'and so he falls back on vituperation.'

Although Attlee gave a very effective reply on the following evening, it is not at all clear that this notorious broadcast profoundly influenced the outcome of the election. Indeed, some Conservatives actually approved of it. But it greatly damaged Churchill's reputation for generosity and magnanimity, was a disquieting reminder of his well-known lack of judgement, and did not bode well for what were to be his years as Opposition leader.

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I AM SORRY TO HAVE LOST so many good friends who served with me in the five years' Coalition. It was impossible to go on in a state of 'electionitis' all through the summer and autumn. This election will last quite long enough for all who are concerned in it, and I expect many of the general public will be sick and tired of it before we get to polling day.

My sincere hope was that we could have held together until the war against Japan was finished. On the other hand, there was a high duty to consult the people after all these years. I could only be relieved of that duty by the full agreement of the three parties, further fortified, perhaps, by a kind of official Gallup Poll, which I am sure would have resulted in an overwhelming request that we should go on to the end and finish the job. That would have enabled me to say at once, 'There will be no election for a year', or words to that effect.

I know that many of my Labour colleagues would have been glad to carry on. On the other hand, the Socialist Party as a whole had been for some time eager to set out upon the political warpath, and when large numbers of people feel like that it is not good for their health to deny them the fight they want. We will therefore give it to them to the best of our ability.

Party, my friends, has always played a great part in our affairs. Party ties have been considered honourable bonds, and on one could doubt that when the German war was over and the immediate danger to this country, which had led to the Coalition, had ceased, conflicting loyalties would arise. Our Socialist and Liberal friends felt themselves forced, therefore, to put party before country. They have departed, and we have been left to carry the nation's burden.

I have therefore formed, exactly as I said I would two years ago, another form of National Government, resting no longer on

the agreement of the three official party machines, but on the Conservative Party, together with all the men of good will of any party or no party who have been ready to give their services. I claim the support of all throughout the country who sincerely put the nation first in their thoughts. This is a National Government. I shall stand myself as a Conservative and National candidate. Others may choose to call themselves National or National Liberal, and those who give us their support should vote National rather than Party on polling day.

Why do I claim the right to call this Government National? First of all, because those who have left us have left us on party grounds alone. Secondly, because the Conservative Party, which has for many years been the strongest party in this country, has been willing to abandon party feeling to such an extent that more than one-third of the members of Cabinet rank in this new Government are not members of the Conservative Party. Many of these very able men, without whose aid we could not have got through the war, would prefer not to call themselves Conservative in a party sense. They prefer to call themselves National. And many Conservatives who might have looked forward to high office have accepted cheerfully the interruption of their political careers in order to aid the nation in its time of trouble.

Particularly do I regret the conduct of the Liberal Party. Between us and the orthodox Socialists there is a great doctrinal gulf, which yawns and gapes. Of this continental conception of human society called Socialism, or in its more violent form Communism, I shall say more later. There is no such gulf between the Conservative and National Government I have formed and the Liberals. There is scarcely a Liberal sentiment which animated the great Liberal leaders of the past which we do not inherit and defend. Above all, there is our championship of freedom at home and abroad. All the guiding principles of the British Constitution are proclaimed and enforced by us in their highest degree.

When could any Liberal Party in the past have been offered a political programme of social reform so massive, so warm, so adventurous as that which is contained in our Four Years' Plan?

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Indeed, I feel that Mr Gladstone would have recoiled from a great deal of it. He would have thought it was going too far. But we still have a Rosebery and a Lloyd George to carry forward the flags of their fathers.

Why, then, should the Liberal Party spurn us? Why then should they leave the fighting line? Why could not they, at any rate, stay with us till we have beaten down the cruel domination of Japan and until we have set on foot some tolerable way of life for agonized Europe? I am sorry to tell you that they have yielded to the tactical temptation, natural to politicians, to acquire more seats in the House of Commons, if they can, at all costs. It is also obvious that the more equally the two large parties can be brought together at the polls, the greater will be the Liberal bargaining power. That is, no doubt, why all the criticisms of the Sinclair-Beveridge Liberals, who have been very active against us, are directed upon us. It is us they abuse.

I am sorry, indeed, to see such a line developed by men and women who are my friends, by a party many of whose ideals I cherish and will always strive to achieve or guard to the best of my strength. I do not wonder at all that a very large part of the Liberal Party have chosen the national course and still remain in office with us, bearing the heavy burden.

But I appeal to Liberals in all parts of the land, and I call upon them to search their hearts as to whether their differences with a British Government which will put through the Four Years' Plan, a Government which is animated by the love of freedom, which is vowed to that harmonious medium of justice and generosity so befitting to the conqueror, has not more claim on their ancestral loyalties than has a Socialist Party administration, whose principles are the absolute denial of traditional Liberalism. Let them think it out carefully in the light of the speeches of the famous Liberal leaders of the past. Let them think it out carefully in the warmth which may come to the weary Liberal combatant when he sees his ideas increasingly accepted by enlightened peoples and victorious nations.

My friends, I must tell you that a Socialist policy is abhorrent to the British ideas of freedom. Although it is now put forward in

the main by people who have a good grounding in the Liberalism and Radicalism of the early part of this century, there can be no doubt that Socialism is inseparably interwoven with Totalitarianism and the abject worship of the State. It is not alone that property, in all its forms, is struck at, but that liberty, in all its forms, is challenged by the fundamental conceptions of Socialism.

Look how even today they hunger for controls of every kind, as if these were delectable foods instead of wartime inflictions and monstrosities. There is to be one State to which all are to be obedient in every act of their lives. This State is to be the arch-employer, the arch-planner, the arch-administrator and ruler, and the arch-caucus-boss.

How is an ordinary citizen or subject of the King to stand up against this formidable machine, which, once it is in power, will prescribe for every one of them where they are to work; what they are to work at; where they may go and what they may say; what views they are to hold and within what limits they may express them; where their wives are to go to queue up for the State ration; and what education their children are to receive to mould their views of human liberty and conduct in the future?

A Socialist State once thoroughly completed in all its details and its aspects – and that is what I am speaking of – could not afford to suffer opposition. Here in old England, in Great Britain, of which old England forms no inconspicuous part, in this glorious Island, the cradle and citadel of free democracy throughout the world, we do not like to be regimented and ordered about and have every action of our lives prescribed for us. In fact we punish criminals by sending them to Wormwood Scrubs and Dartmoor, where they get full employment, and whatever board and lodging is appointed by the Home Secretary.

Socialism is, in its essence, an attack not only upon British enterprise, but upon the right of the ordinary man or woman to breathe freely without having a harsh, clumsy, tyrannical hand clapped across their mouths and nostrils. A Free Parliament – look at that – a Free Parliament is odious to the Socialist doctrinaire. Have we not heard Mr Herbert Morrison descant upon his plans to curtail Parliamentary procedure and pass laws

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simply by resolutions of broad principle in the House of Commons, afterwards to be left by Parliament to the executive and to the bureaucrats to elaborate and enforce by departmental regulations? As for Sir Stafford Cripps on 'Parliament in the Socialist State', I have not time to read you what he said, but perhaps it will meet the public eye during the election campaign.

But I will go farther. I declare to you, from the bottom of my heart, that no Socialist system can be established without a political police. Many of those who are advocating Socialism or voting Socialist today will be horrified at this idea. That is because they are short-sighted, that is because they do not see where their theories are leading them.

No Socialist Government conducting the entire life and industry of the country could afford to allow free, sharp, or violently worded expressions of public discontent. They would have to fall back on some form of Gestapo, no doubt very humanely directed in the first instance. And this would nip opinion in the bud; it would stop criticism as it reared its head, and it would gather all the power to the supreme party and the party leaders, rising like stately pinnacles above their vast bureaucracies of Civil servants, no longer servants and on longer civil. And where would the ordinary simple folk – the common people, as they like to call them in America – where would they be, once this mighty organism had got them in its grip?

I stand for the sovereign freedom of the individual within the laws which freely elected Parliaments have freely passed. I stand for the rights of the ordinary man to say what he thinks of the Government of the day, however powerful, and to turn them out, neck and crop, if he thinks he can better his temper or his home thereby, and if he can persuade enough others to vote with him.

But, you will say, look at what has been done in the war. Have not many of those evils which you have depicted been the constant companions of our daily life? It is quite true that the horrors of war do not end with the fighting-line. They spread far away to the base and the homeland, and everywhere people give up their rights and liberties for the common cause. But this is because the life of their country is in mortal peril, or for the sake

of the cause of freedom in some other land. They give them freely as a sacrifice. It is quite true that the conditions of Socialism play a great part in wartime. We all submit to being ordered about to save our country. But when the war is over and the imminent danger to our existence is removed, we cast off these shackles and burdens which we imposed upon ourselves in times of dire and mortal peril, and quit the gloomy caverns of war and march out into the breezy fields, where the sun is shining and where all may walk joyfully in its warm and golden rays.

Our present opponents or assailants would be, I am sure, knowing many of them, shocked to see where they are going, and where they are trying to lead us. So they adopt temporary expedients. They say, let us just nationalize anything we can get hold of according to the size of our majority and get the Bank of England into the hands of trustworthy Socialist politicians, and we will go ahead and see what happens next. Indeed you would see what happens next.

But let me tell you that once a Socialist Government begins monkeying with the credit of Britain and trying, without regard to facts, figures or confidence, to manipulate it to Socialist requirements, there is no man or woman in this country who has, by thrift or toil, accumulated a nest-egg, however small, who will not run the risk of seeing it shrivel before their eyes.

Mr Greenwood said two years ago – and I rebuked him for it then – ‘Pounds, shillings and pence are meaningless symbols.’ All this ‘meaningless symbol’ talk is very dangerous, and would enable a Socialist Government which had got control of the Bank of England to issue notes that would destroy the value of any scrap of savings or nest-egg that anyone had accumulated in this country.

The new National Government stands decisively for the maintenance of the purchasing power of the pound sterling, and we would rather place upon all classes, rich and poor alike, the heaviest burden of taxation they can bear than slide into the delirium of inflation.

I warn you that if you vote for me and those who are acting with me, we give no guarantee of lush and easy times ahead. On

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the other hand, you need not expect pounds, shillings and pence to become a 'meaningless symbol'. On the contrary, our resolve will be that what has been earned by sweat, toil and skill or saved by self-denial shall command the power to buy the products of peace at an equal value in sweat, toil and skill. We will also take good care against unfair rake-offs and monopolies, and we will protect the common man by law against them by controlling monopolies whose operations are any restraint on trade or oppressive to the smaller producer or distributor.

My friends, I have been forced into a discussion between the Socialist and individualist theories of life and government. That is because for the first time the challenge has been made, in all formality, 'Socialism versus the rest'. But now I must come back to the job which stands in front of us. What have we got to do? What have we got to do now?

We have to bring home the soldiers who have borne the brunt of the war, and make sure, by every scrap of strength and brains we possess, that they find waiting for them food, homes and work. The Demobilization Scheme has been drawn up with all the advantages of seeing what mistakes were made last time. Mr Bevin has worked out a scheme which aims at being fair and square between one soldier and another, besides avoiding undue complications. But what a terrific business he has left us to carry through!

And then you have to add to it that out of this demobilizing army has got to be formed at the same time a new army to go out and finish off, at the side of our American brothers, the Japanese tyrants at the other side of the world. Here is a tremendous task.

And then come along 'serious people who say that we have got to get our mills going to provide new clothes and articles of all kinds for home and for our export trade. And what about our food, of which we grow only about two-thirds, even under war-time pressure? We have got anyhow to buy food and raw materials oversea, and how are we going to pay for these? We gave our foreign investments largely to the common cause. We sold every asset we could lay hands on in that year, that memorable, grim year, when we stood alone against the might of

Hitler, with Mussolini at his tail. We gave all and we have given all to the prosecution of this war, and we have reached one of the great victorious halting-posts.

Then we have our Four-Year Plan, with all its hopes and benefits, and with all the patient work that it means to pass it into law and bring it into action. All these are definite, practical, gigantic tasks. They will take every scrap of strength, good management and, above all, good comradeship that we can possibly screw out of ourselves.

What a mad thing it would be to slash across this whole great business of resettlement and reorganization with these inflaming controversies of Socialistic agitation! How foolish to plunge us into the bitter political and party fighting which must accompany the attempt to impose a vast revolutionary change on the whole daily life and structure of Britain! Surely at least we can wait till another Election? The world is not coming to an end in the next few weeks or years. The progress of free discussion can show whose fears or whose hopes are well founded. Can we not get Europe settled up, and Britain settled down? Before we plunge out on this hateful internal struggle, let us concentrate on practical and immediate action, and make sure that in gazing at the stars we do not fail in our duty to our fellow-mortals.

On with the forward march! Leave these Socialist dreamers to their Utopias or their nightmares. Let us be content to do the heavy job that is right on top of us. And let us make sure that the cottage home to which the warrior will return is blessed with modest but solid prosperity, well fenced and guarded against misfortune, and that Britons remain free to plan their lives for themselves and for those they love.