

Winning the Peace

By SIDNEY J. ABELSON

GEORGE WASHINGTON warned his fellow-Americans that it was prudent in time of peace to prepare for war. Today, an America which forsook the sage advice of its first President is hastily trying to make up for lost time. But Americans are not really worried about being able to fulfill the unsought for, yet inevitable task of re-arming—we know beyond a doubt that that task will be prosecuted to a successful conclusion.

Americans are worried not so much about the war problem as they are about the peace problem. It is easy enough to make a war; it seems impossible to make a lasting peace.

In a recent book entitled "The American Choice," Vice-President Wallace aptly summed up the present situation. He wrote: "As we move on these immediate problems of preparation (for defense), we must not lose sight of the problems of the peace to come. For a while, if we carry on a preparedness program considerably greater than the current one, we can put nearly everyone to work and in so doing relieve the pressure of many types of farm surplus. But when peace comes and men are no longer needed in the Army and Navy and in the production of airplanes and munitions, we shall face the same old problem of finding markets at home and abroad for our non-military farm and city goods. We must find ways to solve these problems while maintaining and deepening our democracy at home. In some ways these problems of peace will prove more difficult to solve than the problem of rearming to prevent war from coming to this hemisphere. A generation ago we organized efficiently for war. But we did not know how to organize the peace."

Those two closing sentences written by the Vice-President are worth noting. While our sleeves are rolled up as we work day and night to restore the fighting—and winning—power of the American people, we must not forget that all our strength, all our will to win, all our resolve to make the war serve high and noble purposes will be in vain if we do not find a way to organize the peace after the war is won.

John G. Winant, the new American Ambassador to Great Britain said in a recent talk, "We must be prepared to conquer the peace." And he continued, "Only by finding a common basis of world citizenship and by accepting far-reaching and progressive social changes can we hope to secure the economic and social security which will make any peace real and lasting.

Certainly all agree that the world (and let us not forget that America is a part of the world) will soon have to undergo a drastic revision in its economic structure if it is to survive. Those of us who believe in the dignity of

the individual realize that the theories of Freedom must be made into a practical reality, a reality expressed in economic security for all the people, if we are to be saved from Communist-Nazi barbarism or utter chaos.

Let us turn to Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler, the president of Columbia University, as another authority on the problem of peace. Dr. Butler is a veteran of many decades in the struggle for peace. As Director of the Carnegie Foundation for International Peace he saw, first-hand, numberless proposals designed to eliminate force as arbiter in international quarrels. With the vast resources of the Carnegie Endowment available it seems certain that no stone was left unturned in the search for a peace formula. But what has Dr. Butler to report after so many years of seeking peace? A few months ago he summed up our situation in a few words: "It is a tired world. It is a disappointed world." In the face of the facts, that is the best Dr. Butler can tell us. He sought for peace, he cried, peace, peace—but there is no peace.

Every person of good-will, every being whose soul has not been mortally scarred by the uncertainties and inequities of life today, must feel this fact keenly beyond power of expression: the world is a failure. This, then, is the reason for our deep concern about the peace.

In previous times, though there were many deep changes in social relationships, men did not depend so completely on what I might call all-out social ideologies; they did not place their full faith in rigid, self-conscious systems, such as Fascism, Naziism or Communism.

After the first World War, however, the economic way of life as people knew it, began to break down, and a new type, an ultra-modern form of tyrant forced himself on the scene. These tyrants carried gatling guns in one hand and would-be sociological treatises in the other. They were not, so they said, mere despots; but, on the contrary, they came to serve the people, to carry out the will of humankind and the mandates of historical development. To prove their points they quoted from learned works and replied to protests with an avalanche of distinctly non-academic propaganda—discreetly reinforced by the best instruments of physical persuasion ingenuity could devise and money could buy.

It now seems more than a little strange, yet people by the millions outside the dictator countries placed their hope for salvation in the arch-leaders of destruction—Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini. But that is all over, or nearly so.

These rigid "isms"—Communism, Fascism and Nazism—have sacrificed whatever hold they might have had on our sympathies. Where, then, shall we turn in our search for

a way of life? The American system, in certain fundamental respects, provides the only foundation upon which a prosperous and peaceful social structure can be built.

Nevertheless, there is something wrong, something seriously wrong with the American system—if this were not so, our nation, the most productive of any on earth, would not have to admit that one-third of its people are ill-clothed, ill-housed and ill-fed. If this were not so, we would not have suffered the frightful depression which even now would be deepening were it not for the war program.

We in the United States can take comfort—genuine comfort—in the reading of our Declaration of Independence, the preamble to our Constitution and the Constitution itself, yet we should not allow the existence of these documents—the greatest and most inspiring in all legislative history—to blind us to the truth: Though the logic and moral truth of our ideals have withstood attack for more than a century and a half, we are now drifting further away from those ideals instead of drawing closer to them.

The task before us today is to take what is good and sound in the American system and build on it. We must build by building, not by tearing the world apart and then hoping for the best. Lenin said, at the time when so-called War Communism was taking a terrible toll of human life in Russia, that “the present generation must plow itself under as fertilizer for the generation to come.” I believe that that is an evil doctrine. No proposal that does not promise *immediate* progress, progress for the people of today, is worth the attention of conscientious men and women.

Let me suggest a measuring rod by which to judge a social doctrine: “Does it offer to build a better life *now*? or does it tell me I must sacrifice my life and my children’s security in order to build an indefinite Utopia in the indefinite future? Does it take the good there is in the world as a starting point for building a better social structure? Or does it say that everything we have now is bad and must be destroyed before work can start on the new structure?” If you use these measuring rods you will not be misled by the destroyers and visionaries, who, being devoid of any understanding of faith in the realities of today, indulge in opium dreams of a figmentary future.

There are a number of really sound beliefs and traditions in America today. The sensible thing to do is to see what is good in our way of life, to review the basic American ideals and find out, if we can, how these ideals may be more fully realized. We must make our American faith in democracy and freedom a living reality, and not a statutory mockery.

If we were able to vitalize the American ideals we should do more than restore the prosperity of the United States—great as would be such an accomplishment; we should there-

by help the world to realize a tremendous advance in the ways of civilization.

“Ideologies” grow out of economic conditions. The evil “isms” of Communism, Fascism and Naziism are slightly divergent developments of a fundamental evil—poverty; a poverty which is based on the denial of a fundamental human right. This right is denied in America as well as in those countries which have been debauched by totalitarianism.

For many years this country was a beacon light to the rest of the world. Hundreds of millions of people looked to us not only for better automobiles and better industrial goods, but for better social ideals and a better social structure as well. Our depression served to disillusion these many millions at a critical moment. We failed humanity. When it most needed guidance in a sound way of life and looked to us for that guidance, we turned to it a picture of depression and unemployment as black as that of any in the nations considered far inferior to us in the ability to solve social and economic problems.

In spite of this failure, America is still the world leader—thanks to the soundness of its basic ideals. If we arrange our economic structure in such a way that those ideals are fully realized—as they can be—then America once more will become the hope of the world. Our achievement will provide an example for all the world to follow. Beginning with America, the world could experience an ever-widening “outbreak” of prosperity and peace—as it is now experiencing an ever-widening outbreak of poverty and war. There is still time to undo the evil works of dictators.

The first point to remember about America is that its social and political system is based upon doctrines of natural rights. “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Our whole social structure is an attempt to express in the dynamics of human life a recognized law of the Creator, that men, all men, are born with rights which no single man, group or government of men can legitimately take away from them.

The authors of the Declaration of Independence accepted no argument on this point. This, they said, was self-evident truth, truth not subject to challenge, truth which is quickly verified by our conscience.

It was this recognition of the rights of man which made America great. For Freedom is not only an abstract philosophical doctrine; it is a concrete condition of progress: without it, industry languishes and the spirit of man declines; with it, all the higher ambitions and aspirations of man flourish.

The spirit of the Declaration of Independence is still our guide, and still deserves to be our guide: We believe in

freedom of the individual; we believe in equality of opportunity; we believe in self-reliance; we believe in the right of each to seek his own destiny, economic and spiritual, in the way each sees fit.

In a large measure America has achieved its ideals. But that measure is not large enough; our achievement is now being challenged by ideologies from abroad and also, which is of more concern to us, by a serious fault in our own social and economic structure.

The founders of this country were far-seeing men; yet, in spite of all their genius, they permitted the continuance in America of two institutions which directly contradicted the very principles of the Declaration of Independence—two institutions which, in both ethics and economics, are totally incompatible with our ideals of freedom and equality of opportunity.

One of these institutions—chattel slavery—is now a thing of the past. The man who led our nation in the abolition of slavery also pointed out the necessity for abolishing that other institution which in his time threatened, and in our time continues to threaten the American ideals—an institution which is undermining our freedom and which has already destroyed equality of opportunity and self-reliance of the American people.

Abraham Lincoln said: "The land, the earth God gave to man for his home, sustenance, and support; and it should never be the possession of any man, corporation, society, or unfriendly government any more than the air or water, if as much. An individual, or company, or enterprise requiring land should hold no more than is required for their home and sustenance, and never more than they have in actual use in the prudent management of their legitimate business."

Speculation in land was the second freedom-destroying institution which our forefathers unwittingly retained in the new social order they established here.

In Abraham Lincoln's time it was easier than it is now to see how directly the speculative withholding of land from use affects the payroll of every man and in aggregate the economic welfare of the whole community. The effect of land speculation is no less direct today than it was when we were predominantly an agricultural nation; it only seems less direct.

The question of land speculation is an ethical as well as an economic one. Man has a moral, a God-given right to use the earth whenever he needs it for his sustenance; and this is a right which, in all morality, no individual or corporation can take away from him legitimately.

We do not stop to argue the point whether men are entitled to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," to freedom of religion, of the press, of speech and assembly;—we know they are; we know that without these rights and liberties economic life could not progress, without them, the

spirit of man must deteriorate and ultimately descend to a state of debasement.

Just as freedom in religion and in civil rights is essential to spiritual advancement; so freedom in the use of nature's resources is essential to progress in the economic sphere. But that freedom—freedom to use the earth when we need to use it—is denied to the great majority of us, thanks to the institution of speculation in land.

We have often heard it said that crime doesn't pay. That is a negative approach to a solution of society's ills. We must prove that virtue *does* pay. We must prove that freedom and democracy really *are* efficient—that they are worthwhile in terms of satisfying the economic desires of *all* the people.

But there can be no real economic freedom without freedom to use the earth—the only universal and perpetually available workshop. As Abraham Lincoln said, God gave the earth to man for his home, sustenance and support and therefore should never be monopolized, any more than air or water.

If we want to preserve democracy, if we are serious in our intention to extend and fortify American liberties we must restore equality of economic opportunity—and that means equality in the right to find employment in the great workshop of nature.

If we seriously mean to revitalize the American tradition of self-reliance we must make it possible for men to be self-reliant, to find employment according to their choice and to engage in economic enterprises according to their abilities and experience. And that can be accomplished only if we make land easily accessible for use in both city and country.

Land speculation is in effect a monopoly which curtails employment, lowers wages and the profits of non-monopolistic business, and restricts enterprise. A people shut off from the land become increasingly dependent for employment on a few monopolized industries and the government. There can be no real economic freedom, no real free enterprise system, if the land is not freely, that is, easily accessible.

Here is the great opportunity that presents itself now to America—after the war is won by the democracies, we can win the peace. We can solve the paradox of starvation in the midst of plenty, we can invigorate the traditions of liberty and indeed, extend and secure them for generations to come.

But all this can be done only by making freedom a complete and practical reality. And that is something that requires more than fine phrases. It calls for a new abolition—the abolition of the freedom-destroying speculation in land. It calls for the establishment of every man's right to use the earth on equal terms with every other man.