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Bombed Areas and Land Speculators — Coventry as an Example — How the German Republic was Undermined — “The Times” on the New Social Order — Food Prices and Farm Rents

## THE GREAT ILLUSION—NOW

By W. R. Lester, M.A.

MORE THAN thirty years have passed since Norman Angell wrote his widely read and much discussed classic *The Great Illusion*, the purpose of which was to expose the false thinking which, if persisted in, must inevitably result in war. *The Great Illusion* is now followed by *The Great Illusion—Now*, written very shortly before the outbreak of hostilities at present playing havoc with all we mean by civilized society and, as the title suggests, a sequel to the earlier work, amplifying its reasoning and vindicating its conclusions in the light of subsequent events.

The main thesis this new work seeks to develop and prove is that so long as it is popularly believed that nations must expand their borders or starve for want of their fair share of the world's wealth, so long can those nations with ease be persuaded to fight to the death: “not for money, not for wealth, not for profit, not because war pays, but for justice, the profoundest of all human rights—the right of life itself.” Sentiments such as this, easily appealed to in justification of war, are the sentiments to which, in this new work, Sir Norman Angell would administer the *coup de grace*, for to secure justice and improved conditions of life, wars of expansion necessarily follow so soon as such belief is translated into action. Its eradication is therefore a necessary prior condition if wars of this kind are ever to cease, and if argument and demonstration can accomplish this task he brilliantly succeeds.

None the less, there has been widespread misunderstanding or misrepresentation of his earlier work which he now sets himself to correct. The notion has got about that his aim was to prove war to be now impossible. Instead of demonstrating that so long as present beliefs remain wars are certain, he is thought by his critics to have tried to prove the very opposite. In the face of such inversion he complains, with excusable bitterness, that he failed, it would seem, despite all the clarity with which he is credited, to make clear the first thing of all—what the book was about and what its purpose. Whence this failure? May we suggest that it is because in his argument he overlooked, and continues in his new work to overlook, a consideration which must be reckoned with if a full and convincing statement is to be made?

With this in mind and concurring as we do with the

demonstration otherwise set forth so clearly in *The Great Illusion—Now*, we may be allowed an objection if it is pretended that the final word is there offered. Nowhere are we told why peoples come to harbour beliefs so demonstrably false. In his work Sir Norman deals exclusively with nations each acting as one body of thought, and each having its corporate interest in so acting, overlooking the most vital consideration that nations themselves are composed of individuals whose interests and views differ. He has much to say of the “Have” and the “Have Not” nations: of those starved and of those surfeited. He dwells on the evil consequences of the maldistribution of wealth and of opportunity as between nations, but has nothing to say of the evil consequences of the maldistribution of wealth and opportunity as between the individuals who compose the nations. And yet nations are but groups of individuals and their actions are determined by the views or opinions of those individuals. These groups called nations have no rights or duties other than the rights or duties of those who compose them, so that underlying issues cut clean across national divisions. It would therefore be well if, in attempting to disclose the ultimate causes of wars of expansion we think less of nations and more of those ordinary men and women who compose them.

The thoughts and opinions of individuals ruling their actions depend on the conditions in which they live. It is these conditions that determine whether the ordinary man is contented or discontented, happy or miserable, aggressive or peace-loving. He thinks and acts in one way if prosperous and in enjoyment of his rights, and in another way if these rights are denied to him and this is true whatever his nationality. Applying this to the subject-matter of Sir Norman Angell's book, if the ordinary man finds himself cribbed, cabined, confined and reduced to fight for the mere chance to earn his daily bread he will readily, in his discontent, come to the conclusion that lack of opportunity is due to over-population or lack of “Lebensraum,” and that the remedy is for his nation to expand into the territory of its neighbour—by force of arms if necessary. Deeply absorbed as he is with the struggle for subsistence, he has no time to probe more deeply and discover that his distress comes from unjust

laws and institutions within his own nation, and can be removed only by getting rid of them.

That is, in greater or less degree, the situation of to-day, whether in Germany, Italy or elsewhere, and it is a situation which has its roots in the poverty and discontent of the individual men whose views determine the action of nations. In all countries are men forbidden free access to natural resources; in all countries are land values the object of speculation; in all countries does public revenue flow into private pockets, and in all countries does taxation penalize production. Thus in all countries are found want, insecurity and discontent, and the cry for national expansion follows inevitably. This cry will go up so long as men suffer from unjust distribution of wealth and whether or not it is shown that national expansion fails in its purpose. For this reason if it is sought to disclose the source of those fallacies which Sir Norman attacks we think his purview should be less centred on nations and more on the individuals who compose them.

That the matter is not to be settled by thinking exclusively in terms of nations is from time to time recognized by Sir Norman himself as when he tells the story of the English beggar, p. 185, the bitter irony of which is very much to the point and shows how near he comes to the fact that underlies all: that vast numbers of one people are landless and propertyless wherever the King's writ may run. But it comes just as a flash, and then the spotlight is turned away from this disease in society.

Again, the importance of the individual in this matter is recognized when he writes: "The fight for ideals can no longer take the form of fight between nations, because the lines of division on moral questions are within the nations themselves and intersect political frontiers. The moral and spiritual struggles of the modern world go on between citizens of the same state in unconscious intellectual co-operation with corresponding groups in other states, not between the public powers of rival states."

This is a truth which should have been fully developed in the course of the demonstration, but is only casually referred to in passing. Sir Norman sees that the lines of division "on moral questions" are "within the nations themselves." Is it not just as important, if not more so, to recognize that the lines of division in matters of material prosperity are also "within the nations themselves and intersect political frontiers"? Working along these lines, Sir Norman's argument would have been greatly reinforced, and the misunderstanding of which he complains never have arisen.

We cannot take leave of this book without recognition of its very masterly vindication of free trade and free migration which forms an important part of the demonstration that wars of aggression are worthless to the common man. Notice especially should be taken of page 161, as showing Sir Norman's grasp of the free trade philosophy: how he deals with the very popular conception of war as a "struggle for bread" and the notion that that struggle is the fundamental cause of war. There is pleasant sarcasm running through it all. Were it for this part of the book alone it should be carefully studied by every student of sane national relationships.

(Sir Norman Angell's *The Great Illusion*—Now is published, price 6d., No. S.18, by the Penguin Books, Ltd., Harmondsworth, Middlesex.)

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## TO CHECK LAND SPECULATION

A COMMITTEE has been set up by Lord Reith, Minister of Works and Buildings, to consider means of stabilizing the value of land required for re-development with a view to checking speculation in land.

In the House of Commons, on 29th January, Mr N. A. Beechman (Nat. Lib., St. Ives) asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Works and Buildings (Mr E. G. Hicks) whether he was aware that land speculators were buying up sites in bombed areas with a view to re-selling after the war to Local Authorities who would need the land for social development?

Mr Hicks said that Lord Reith had set up a Committee to make an expert examination of the subject of compensation, and had asked the Committee to advise as a matter of urgency on the particular question to which the hon. member referred.

The terms of reference would be: "To make an objective analysis of the subject of compensation and the recovery of betterment in respect of public control of the use of land. To advise as a matter of urgency what steps should be taken, now or before the end of the war, to prevent the work of reconstruction thereafter being prejudiced."

In this connection the Committee would be asked to consider: (a) The possible means of stabilizing the value of land required for re-development; and (b) any extension or modification of the powers to enable such land to be acquired by the public on an equitable basis, and to examine the merits and demerits of methods considered, and advise what alterations of the existing law would be necessary to enable them to be adopted. The Committee would consist of Mr Justice Uthwatt (Chairman), Mr F. R. Evershed, Mr Gerald Eve, Mr James Barr, and Mr James Wylie. Lord Reith felt that it would be clear from the latter part of the terms of reference that the Government did not intend that reconstruction after the war should be hampered or prejudiced by speculative transactions and any other such individual operations.

Mr Harvey (Ind., English Universities)—Will the Minister see that land speculation will be prevented in the meantime? Mr Loftus (U., Lowestoft)—Would my hon. friend consider making a statement now that any land required by the Government or Local Authority after the war will not be purchased at a value in excess of the pre-war value? There was no reply.

Mr Arthur Greenwood, Minister without portfolio, answering questions on the same subject, said that the intention of the Government in appointing the Committee was to enable a policy to be formed to take action early to prevent land speculation. He did not think the Committee would sit in public.

In the House of Lords, Lord Reith (Minister of Works and Buildings) made a statement similar to that made in the House of Commons on reconstruction, and in reply to questions gave the assurance that the appointment of the Committee would not prejudice discussion on policy in due course.

Mr Justice Uthwatt, who is chairman of the Committee, began his duties as a Chancery Judge a week ago. He was formerly Junior Counsel on the Chancery side for the Treasury and the Board of Trade. Mr F. R. Evershed, K.C., is chairman of the Central Price Regulation Committee set up to check profiteering; Mr Gerald Eve is a former president of the Chartered Surveyors' Institution, and member of the Ministry of Health's Advisory Committee on Town and Country Planning; Mr James Barr is vice-president of the Chartered Surveyors' Institute; and Mr James Wylie is a barrister.