

Political Movements—Their Strength and Weakness

By FRANCIS NELSON

IT IS NOT FOR LACK of movements that peace drags her weary steps so slowly toward the dreamland of the idealists. Indeed, if movements in themselves could do anything to help her on her way, she would have reached her goal long ago. Richard Brinsley Sheridan once remarked that political and reform activities were in the nature of purgatives and good for the agitators. Few people, however, have the slightest idea of the vast number of organizations that are now at work in various directions, trying to solve the racial, national, international, and economic problems that afflict us. Neil MacNeil, in his excellent work, "An American Peace," informs us: "One year after our entry into the war more than 1000 organizations in the United States were planning for the post-war world. Some estimates ran as high as 1500."¹

At this time perhaps the movements have trebled in number. But for those who think that blueprint organizations can deal with the political difficulties arising from war I would advise reading Mr. MacNeil's profound study, which deals with the essentials of peace as no other work has attempted. It is the only one I have seen of all those produced during the strife that treats understandingly of the economic basis of freedom.

I

TO MY MIND there is a great difference between the work done by these organizations and that which was accomplished here and in England from the time of the American Revolution until the abolition of the Corn Laws. I should like to point out that the agitators of reform 170 years ago would have made little progress had they not gathered about them the most brilliant radical critics of government that any period can boast. Today our movements languish because the masses have not been told the reasons for them with the withering pungency that the pamphleteers aimed at the injustices and imbecilities of the politicians of their time.

I believe a movement destitute of a satirist or a poet cannot be effective, for it is like a knife without an edge. Think of what Charles Churchill was to Wilkes and the *North Briton!* Where today shall we find a Byron to give us our "Age of Bronze" or, indeed, a Shelley to pen for us such verses as "Men of England"?

¹ New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944, p. 2.

A Junius is required to strip our politicians naked to the gaze of their victims, but where shall we look for him? Surely our controversies lack spice and seasoning. Hence the insipid cant that is served us by the denizens of legislatures and the naïve leaders of our vainglorious movements.

What would happen today if another Voltaire were to appear in our midst and present us with a "Candide" up to date, or a "Micromegas"? This thought has come to me frequently of late, but I seem to get no farther with it because I am conscious that the author would not find a publisher. This is no age for such a critic. We seem to have lost all sense of the value of having our shortcomings placed vividly before us. We do not like to be disturbed in our smug condition.

Perhaps the reason for this is that during the past four wars it has been the fashion to hold the enemy up to scorn and gloat over *his* sins rather than our own. It was very different years ago. In Queen Anne's day England was well blessed to have Swift ready at all times to reveal the incompetence and roguery of politicians and to enlighten the people upon the cause of their miseries. Alas, there is no one now to write "A Tale of a Tub."² Strangely enough, many of the people against whom this barbed shaft of criticism was directed read it and did not hesitate to say that it was a witty exposition of the political, religious, and social defects of the time. The old Duchess of Marlborough enjoyed it thoroughly, although Swift so often took the Duke to task for his customary backsliding and thoroughly selfish aims.

Probably there is no one so familiar with the waywardness of the men of our time who is capable of giving us something akin in criticism to "The History of John Bull."³ Of this essay Sir Walter Scott wrote:

Among the pieces usually published in Swift's works, of which he is not the author, there is none which can bear comparison with the "History of John Bull." It is not only a satire original in its outline, but the exquisite simplicity, brevity, and solemnity of the narrative, is altogether inimitable. If our author's Tale of a Tub be considered as the prototype of John Bull, it may be allowed to contain a greater display of learning, but is certainly deficient in the unaffected and ludicrous simplicity of the latter satire.⁴

The times are out of joint, and nothing so convincing of this fact strikes one as the general apathy and indifference of all classes of society. Only very few people seem to be interested in a rule of conduct that would

² "The Works of Jonathan Swift," 2nd ed., Edinburgh, Archibald Constable and Co., 1824, Vol. X, pp. 3-214.

³ "The Works," Vol. VI, pp. 3-215.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

apply to government and to the subject also. Undoubtedly one of the reasons for this is that most of us are illiterate. The advertisers confess that their appeal must be made to the mentality of a child of eight. Indeed, one profound student makes a sweeping declaration:

A democracy of semantic illiterates, of persons unable to perceive the meaning of what they read, is unpleasant to contemplate. We are satisfied with a skill that the feeble-minded can master, confuse sound with sense, and believe that our population can really understand. There is no greater delusion. . . .⁵

No one seems to contrast the condition of today with that of Swift's time, when the great mass of the people had little or no schooling. Since the days of *The Freeman*⁶ many have asked me why the pamphleteer has disappeared from our midst and is now regarded as the ornithologist regards the great auk. What am I to reply? It is difficult enough to remind my friends that somehow the people have lost their sense of the fitness of things. In support of such a suggestion the plea is brought forward that the system of education is to blame. Then begins a game of futile recrimination in which the parents blame the teachers, and the teachers counter by heaping opprobrium upon the parents. Anyway, no one can deny that the apathy and indifference of the public exist and that there is no call today for a Voltaire or a Swift.

II

FEW REALIZE the importance of Paine and by what means he educated the common people of this country in the principles of government which enabled them finally to throw off the Hanoverian yoke. Both "Common Sense" and "The Crisis" were epoch-making pamphlets, and they reveal a knowledge of the affairs of humankind that is far beyond anything produced by our mentors today. Who will deny the charge that the criticism given to us during the past twenty years by our authors runs from one mild source into a shallow mold, and takes the same shape and form of the emasculated criticism of a so-called liberal politician whose opposition to the usual trend is couched in apologetics that are merciful and cause little self-examination?

We really ought to take stock of the sad fiscal position in which we grovel and learn whether we are bankrupt of sound political ideas such as

⁵ H. R. Husc, "The Illiteracy of the Literate," New York and London, D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 1933, p. 8.

⁶ A weekly paper edited by Francis Neilson and Albert Jay Nock, New York, 1920-24. For "The Story of *The Freeman*," by Francis Neilson, see AM. JOUR. ECON. SOCIO., Vol. 6, No. 1 (October, 1946), Special Supplement.

those which were common in the days after the Republic was firmly established as an example that other States should follow. It may be asked how it would have been possible in this country 170 years ago (and in England for more than one hundred years—extending through the last part of the eighteenth century beyond the middle of the nineteenth) to have wrought the wonders of reform which saved the people from servility. Only ruthless criticism of the evils of government could have brought about the extraordinary changes of that period.

Men were not afraid then. Indeed, they were willing to risk their necks in agitating for the removal of injustices which bore heavily upon their everyday existence. However, it cannot be said that the changes that were made as a consequence of all the agitations brought to them more than a modicum of their demands. Bureaucratic tyranny is of long life, and once a vested interest is set up, it is hard to shift. No one should know this better than the people who speak the English tongue; and, yet, strange to say, of all the reforms of which the authors were the most optimistic the greatest failure has been that of the education of the masses.

It is hard to refute the charge that the more schooling the children receive, the less they learn. One reason for the bewildering state of affairs wrought by wars, tariffs, and strikes is that the history that is taught in the schools today is utterly valueless so far as informing the student is concerned. He is told nothing about the struggles of his fathers who desired to make the world a safer and better place for posterity.

The lack of historical understanding can easily be demonstrated by asking a group of business men to state what they know about the reasons for the Revolutionary War. Questions have been put to leaders in the world of finance and industry about their knowledge of the author of "Common Sense"; what the objections were to the Stamp Act; and what Charles Fox's position was regarding the revolt in America. Such simple tests of historical awareness have been given to men who boast about their years spent at the great universities, without drawing from them intelligent replies.

How, then, is it to be expected that a change for the better in economic and political affairs can be brought about through the electorate? Speaking to a banker a few months ago about the fiscal position in this country and the dangers of inflation, I reminded him of what John Taylor said in 1794:

... A constitutional expulsion of a stock-jobbing paper interest, in every shape, out of the national legislature, can alone recover the lost principles

of a representative government, and save the nation from being owned—bought—and sold. . . .⁷

My friend appeared to be shocked at such an unpatriotic utterance, and when I remarked that Taylor was something of a prophet and his statement fitted the condition in which we found ourselves, he waved it aside as the utterance of a discontented politician. Then, in soothing tones, he told me not to worry, that this was a democracy now and things would work out all right in the end.

For more than fifty years I have been studying very closely the predictions of those intellectually lazy people who have faith in political democracy and who imagine that an apathetic electorate can do wonders in the way of saving a country from bankruptcy.

III

It is now nearly a century since the great political ferment arose in France and Germany. Perhaps Marx and Engels were already thinking of the Communist Manifesto, which was published in 1847. This year [1946] is the one hundredth anniversary of the repeal of the Corn Laws, but the act did not become operative until six years later. There were optimists then who believed that the proletarian storms would blow over and law, order, and reform would be re-established and all would go well.

In the German States and in France, also, much had to happen before order was restored. In England it was not so easy to inoculate the masses with the serum of revolt supplied by Marx and Engels in the Manifesto. Although there was a limited franchise, it had taken so long for the householders to obtain it that the people generally were opposed to another long and arduous campaign to be fought for a Utopia that seemed to them very far away. It is true that reference to the Manifesto was made only in articles and speeches, for the text itself was not read by the masses. However, there were critics who were not slow to point out the extraordinary confusion of thought in its pages. Perhaps one reason why it did not become so popular in England as it did in Germany and in France was that the final paragraphs made too many claims to be accepted by the hard-headed British. It is not difficult to imagine what an intelligent English proletarian would think of the following statements:

. . . The Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things.

⁷ "A Definition of Parties; or the Political Effects of the Paper System Considered," Philadelphia, 1794, Para. 15, quoted in Benjamin Fletcher Wright, Jr., "A Source Book of American Political Theory," New York, The Macmillan Company, 1929, p. 348.

. . . They labor everywhere for the union and agreement of the democratic parties of all countries.

The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

Working men of all countries, unite.⁸

Moreover, Cobden and Bright had won a great triumph for the people, and during that long campaign of the Anti-Corn Law League a process of economic education had been instilled in two generations, which stood them in good stead for long years afterwards and enabled them to withstand the appeals of Marx and Engels. Still, we have learned that the workers have been uniting here and there for the past century and have not yet lost their chains.

As the reform movements in England gained strength, the problems concerning the factory laws and trade unions increased. Societies seemed to spring up over night for the purpose of ameliorating this condition and that, demanding legislation for the betterment of the working classes. After Palmerston plunged the country into the Crimean War the agitation for the extension of the franchise once again became a burning question and added another powerful movement to the many which perplexed the government of the time. It was not long, however, before the old piratical imperialists set to work to extend their sinister operations in zones other than India and China. Both North and South Africa were ripe for "peaceful penetration."

With the extension of the orbits of the imperialists came the growth of expenditure upon armies and navies. Lands taken into the imperial maw had to be protected; also, the maritime trade routes required watchful navies. Notwithstanding the labors of Gladstone, Cobden, and Bright, who repeatedly warned the imperialists and those who clamored for greater expenditure upon the armed services, the jingoes rallied behind Disraeli who "finally turned from home affairs to kindle the enthusiasm of the country by the dazzling alternative of a *new* 'imperialism.'"⁹

When the bugles of war were blown the next time in Europe, Great Britain remained neutral. France and Prussia were left to fight it out between themselves. Three years before that war, there had been another

⁸ "Manifesto of the Communist Party," by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, authorized Eng. trans. by Frederick Engels, Chicago, Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1888, p. 58.

⁹ J. R. Green, "A Short History of the English People," New York, American Book Co., 1916, p. 372.

extension of the franchise, and in the period since the abolition of the Corn Laws, the well-being of the British people had risen by leaps and bounds. This is not to say that poverty was abolished by any means.

In this brief sketch of a few of the movements that have sprung up since the days of Wilkes and Paine, there will, of course, be many omissions, and perhaps some important problems will be overlooked. The great economic and political successes won, however, must be attributed largely to the indefatigable work of the pamphleteers and the statesmen who supported the claims of the reformers and were responsible for the legislation that eased the burdens of the poor.

There was no dearth of movements here and in Europe during the nineteenth century. All political parties indulged in agitation. The Tory, the Socialist (Christian and otherwise), the Communist, the Liberal, and the Radical groups fostered schemes enough to educate the masses of the world in all political creeds. But there arose a somewhat new movement, one that was glorified and draped in attractive patriotic garments, and it cast all other schemes into the shade. It was fathered by statesmen and prelates who gave it their blessing. Imperialism, under the guise of spreading Christianity, promised dazzling returns to the masses who were slow to realize that the cost of the movement would be paid for in blood and in the products of labor, which at that time were scarcely sufficient to enable them to keep their heads above the poverty line.

The advent of Neo-Imperialism marks the date when real economic reforms met their doom. Since then, we have had wars in nearly all parts of the world, with the result that the masses have been reduced to wage slavery. And, yet, we refuse to believe that political democracy is a delusion when it is not a wicked snare to catch the too trustful fellow with a vote.

The movements of this generation have wallowed in the trough of disillusionment, because they have been promoted by men who seldom reveal a knowledge of international affairs. An abject cowardice to face the issues in an impartial manner is most noticeable in their propaganda.

IV

ANOTHER MOVEMENT of which we hear very little in our history was taking shape in Europe in the middle of the nineteenth century, and perhaps to us today it has a far greater significance than that begun by the author of "Das Kapital." In Russia, Austria, Germany, and France not a few of the thinkers pondered the problem of the future of European States.

The ravages of the Napoleonic Wars had left their marks upon many cultured minds which sought some way out of the turmoil of the deep unrest which was increasing among the masses in the various countries. Goethe, the Czar Alexander I, Victor Hugo,¹⁰ Tolstoy, and many others conceived the idea that the only way to bring peace was for Europe to follow the example of the United States and seek a way out in a great confederation. How the notion that "Europe must be one" came to the minds of these great men who were not in touch with one another is a most extraordinary occurrence in political thought. At first it made little headway, but after a while Mikhail Bakunin took hold of the idea and incorporated it in the Anarchists' Manifesto. Then Nietzsche promulgated that gospel of peace, and it is worth while at this time for students to revert to his works and trace the development of his thought upon this profound subject.

V

ONE OF THE GREAT THINKERS who advocated a United States of Europe was Ernest Renan. I should advise those who are now connected with peace movements of the various orders to get a work published in 1945 by Émile Buré, entitled *Ernest Renan et L'Allemagne*.¹¹ M. Buré's introduction is a most unusual one, for it is written by a man who knew his Renan and not only describes the work of that great scholar but gives us a clear insight into his character as a human being.

The first essay, "La Guerre Franco-Allemande," was written for the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, September 15, 1870. It would be impossible to recommend to the people of our movements a better treatise on the European situation (as it was before the first and the second World Wars poisoned the whole European atmosphere) than this essay, written by a patriotic Frenchman—one of the most cultured European scholars of that day. In it Renan calls for an alliance between France, Germany, and England, but only as a basis for a European society. He then proceeds to examine the history of France and Germany, not from the point of view of a nationalist, but as a pronounced European. The argument that

¹⁰ A prophecy in autograph on the wall of the room in which Victor Hugo died, Place des Vosges, Paris, reads as follows:

I represent a party which does not yet
exist:
the party of revolution, civilization.
This party will make the twentieth century.
There will issue from it first
the United States of Europe, then
the United States of the World.

¹¹ New York, Brentano's, Inc.

he develops is maintained by exposing the faults on both sides with a candor that is startling in its exceptional courage. He leads up to a great climax when he voices the claim for a United States of Europe:

. . . Espérons que ce pouvoir, prenant des formes de plus en plus concrètes et régulières, amènera dans l'avenir un vrai congrès, périodique, si-non permanent, et sera le coeur d'Etats-Unis d'Europe liés entre eux par un pacte fédéral. . .¹²

Alas, politicians are not interested in reasonable ideals. They prefer armed frontiers, tariffs, passports, and all the impediments that keep the peoples apart. To a very great extent, many of them are the menials of the armed services—those services that have become the most sinister of all powerful vested interests.

Following the article, "La Guerre Franco-Allemande," is the letter that Renan wrote to David Strauss, who also was the author of a "Life of Jesus." In this remarkable document the great Hebrew scholar reminds his German colleague that Jesus, the founder of the kingdom of God, thought of a world above hate, jealousy, and pride—far removed from the sad times in which they lived. This letter is followed by another to Strauss.

But I would especially draw the attention of my readers to the lecture that Renan gave at the Sorbonne, March 11, 1882: "Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation?" This beautiful essay I earnestly recommend to all those in the movements here who are sincere in their desire to bring peace to Europe. I do not know anything on this subject that compares with it for grandeur of idea and essential history of a people's tradition. The author says:

Une nation est une âme, un principe spirituel. Deux choses qui, à vrai dire, n'en font qu'une, constituent cette âme, ce principe spirituel. L'une est dans le passé, l'autre dans le présent. L'une est la possession en commun d'un riche legs de souvenirs; l'autre est le consentement actuel, le désir de vivre ensemble, la volonté de continuer à faire valoir l'héritage qu'on a reçu indivis. L'homme, Messieurs, ne s'improvise pas. La nation, comme l'individu, est l'aboutissant d'un long passé d'efforts, de sacrifices et de dévouements. Le culte des ancêtres est de tous le plus légitime; les ancêtres nous ont faits ce que nous sommes. Un passé héroïque, des grands hommes, de la gloire (j'entends de la véritable), voilà le capital social sur lequel on assied une idée nationale. Avoir des gloires communes dans le passé, une volonté commune dans le présent; avoir fait de grandes choses ensemble, vouloir en faire encore, voilà les conditions essentielles pour être

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 74. (Let us hope that this force, given more and more concrete and regular form, will give birth in the future to a true congress, meeting periodically if not sitting in continuous session, and that it will be the heart of a United States of Europe, bound together by a Federal Constitution.)

un peuple. On aime en proportion des sacrifices qu'on a consentis, des maux qu'on a soufferts. . . .¹³

M. Buré has rendered a great service in collecting these essays and letters of Renan, and I for one wish to extend my gratitude to him.

VI

AND NOW WHAT HAS become of all the movements of the last century? Where should we look to find a Renan today? There are movements enough to discover a thinker of his caliber and courage if one were abroad. By way of contrast, just to show what these wars have done to the thinkers of the world, let us take another Frenchman and compare the sentiments of his declining years with those of the author of "The Life of Jesus."

From Switzerland there comes a book called *Souvenirs sur Henri Bergson*, by Professor I. Benrubi.¹⁴ It is in the form of an intimate diary, recording interviews that Benrubi had with Bergson in Paris and elsewhere. Those who have read "Creative Evolution"¹⁵ will find this a most attractive work, for in it Bergson deals with many of his critics and expounds over and over again the heart of his philosophy.

In this sketch, which only pretends to cover some of the movements of the past 170 years, it is impossible to take space to deal adequately with the hundred and one important questions and problems discussed by Bergson and his friend. My chief purpose is to show the amazing change of thought on international problems since the days of Renan. Benrubi records that the conversation turned upon the bellicose notions prevalent at that time in all of the great European countries. Bergson said that to him war was a mystery and that it subsisted in spite of the progress of civilization. He then added: "Je me demande même si la guerre n'est pas indispensable à

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 194. (A nation has a soul, a spiritual basis. Two things which, properly speaking, are only one, constitute that soul, that spiritual origin. The one is in the past, the other in the present. The one is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is the present bond, the desire to live together, the wish to continue to deserve the heritage which each has received individually. Man, gentlemen, does not develop suddenly, without preparation. The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long series of efforts, of sacrifices and of loyalties. The veneration of our forefathers is of all the most justifiable; our forefathers have made us what we are. An heroic tradition, some great men, certain fame (I understand the word in its true sense), these are the joint-stock upon which one establishes a national tradition. To have common glories in the past, a common desire in the present; to have done great things together, to be willing to do them again—these are the essential conditions for making a nation. One loves in proportion to the sacrifices that one has undergone, the hardships one has suffered. . . .)

¹⁴ Neuchâtel, Switzerland, and Paris, Éditions Delachaux and Niestlé, S.A., 1942.

¹⁵ Authorized trans. by Arthur Mitchell, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1911, 1926.

l'existence d'un peuple."¹⁶ Here is indicated a pessimism that one would never expect from the author of "The Two Sources of Morality and Religion."¹⁷ And, yet, he said: "Je crois au triomphe du bien."¹⁸

On another occasion Benrubi was astonished to hear Bergson say, in connection with the social question: "Je me demande si l'inégalité n'est pas une base nécessaire de la vie sociale."¹⁹

What a descent from the elevation of mind of the Bergson who gave us the paragraphs on Justice in "The Two Sources of Morality and Religion!"²⁰

VII

LET US NOW TAKE our bearings and try to discover for ourselves just where we are in this sea of turmoil and fog. Suppose we call to mind what happened to us about thirty years ago and reflect on that situation, striving to glean from it some light that can be thrown upon the present chaos just for contrast. What was done before and after World War I might in very truth indicate what should be considered deeply in these confounding difficulties.

Before America entered the War of 1914-18 there were peace societies in the principal towns of this country, and they were so strong in membership and so vigorous in their campaigns that I was assured by no less an authority than Jane Addams that they were solidly behind President Woodrow Wilson in his determination to keep the United States neutral. For five weeks before the fatal month of April, 1917, I spoke at many peace meetings and found the audiences eager to keep out of the war.

A week after Wilson committed the country to participation in the strife most of the peace societies changed quickly into patriotic agencies for prosecuting the carnage. Then movements were organized in churches, colleges, universities, and other civic institutions for the purpose of deciding what to do with the vanquished when the fighting ended and what terms of peace should be imposed on the enemy States. Not one movement that I remember succeeded in drafting a proposal that had the slightest chance of gaining a moment's consideration from either Lloyd George or Clemenceau. And when the battles terminated and the great men of the conquering nations met at Paris, our champion, Mr. Wilson,

¹⁶ "Souvenirs," p. 71. (I myself wonder if war is not indispensable to the existence of a people.)

¹⁷ Trans. by R. Ashley Audra and Cloudesley Brereton, London, Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1935.

¹⁸ "Souvenirs," p. 101. (I believe in the triumph of the good.)

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 61. (I wonder if inequality is not an indispensable principle of social life.)

²⁰ Pp. 54-64.

learned that he had been the willing cat's-paw of his Allies and confessed at St. Louis that it was a commercial war.²¹

Let us hear what John Maynard Keynes (the same Lord Keynes who, several times before he died, visited in this country to arrange the loan for Great Britain) had to say about World War I. He was the official representative of the British Treasury at the Paris Peace Conference up to June 7, 1919, and he also sat as deputy for the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the Supreme Economic Council. After he resigned, he published a book called "The Economic Consequences of the Peace," and in it he stated:

. . . Nations are real things, of whom you love one and feel for the rest indifference—or hatred. The glory of the nation you love is a desirable end,—but generally to be obtained at your neighbor's expense. The politics of power are inevitable, and there is nothing very new to learn about this war or the end it was fought for; England had destroyed, as in each preceding century, a trade rival; a mighty chapter had been closed in the secular struggle between the glories of Germany and of France. Prudence required some measure of lip service to the "ideals" of foolish Americans and hypocritical Englishmen; but it would be stupid to believe that there is much room in the world, as it really is, for such affairs as the League of Nations, or any sense in the principle of self-determination except as an ingenious formula for rearranging the balance of power in one's own interests.²²

Such was the humiliation of the peace groups of the War of 1914–18. By what strange method of estimation do the leaders of the movements of today determine they have more political wisdom than their forebears? Have we any reason to think that they are better informed than the men of 1919? Have any of them the slightest conception of the enormous problems that face them—problems which, in magnitude, far overshadow those dealt with by Keynes in his book? To give an idea of what they are, I shall quote Professor E. L. Woodward of Oxford University. In an article called "Seven Great Challenges to Peace," in *The New York Times Magazine* of June 16, 1946, he says:

What has happened since 1914? The first great war shook these habits everywhere; the second great war, which broke out partly as a result of the dislocation resulting from the first war, has broken the continuity of life,

²¹ "Why, my fellow-citizens, is there any man here, or any woman—let me say, is there any child here—who does not know that the seed of war in the modern world is industrial and commercial rivalry? . . . This war, in its inception, was a commercial and industrial war. It was not a political war." (September 5, 1919) At St. Paul in the same month of the same year Wilson said: "The German bankers and the German merchants and the German manufacturers did not want this war. They were making conquest of the world without it, and they knew it would spoil their plans."

²² New York, Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920, p. 33.

stultified the purpose of the average man, and left him in most of the European countries bewildered, *déraciné*, without standards, without pride and without respect. He cannot respect power because power has almost everywhere been misused. He cannot trust his own enterprise because so much of it has gone to waste. Add to these causes of demoralization the breakdown of the old respect for human life; remember that for one-third of the last thirty years millions of men have been specially trained in killing.

Can you expect that out of all this you will get the political life of Europe down to normal temperature or that universal suffrage will bring into office quiet men, steady, thrifty, law-abiding types? And yet, without a return to something which my generation still regards as normality, there can be no hope of recovery from the dislocation of Europe. You cannot build a stable society out of communities overstimulated by involuntary excitement.²³

The political life of Europe is torn to shreds, and those upon whom devolves the task of putting it together again are separated by interests that conflict in nearly every direction. The way the matter stands at present, agreement among the Allies is far to seek. Indeed, there is more bitter disagreement among them today than at any time since the Archduke was shot at Serajevo. Yet our slogans remain the same; the perorations to the speeches of the politicians and "leaders of thought" contain the same old tags; and the "one-worlders" who never yet have been able to govern a large town as a decent, habitable place imagine they are endowed with a genius for running the globe as a going concern for democracy on a level that no medieval saint thought possible for the circumscribed plot in which he had, day in and day out, to combat sin, succor the distressed, feed the hungry, and educate the ignorant.

VIII

WHAT IS THE TROUBLE with us all? It is this: we are afflicted with a suspicion that we dare not face the truth. Many remember the awful shocks we suffered last time when the diplomatic cupboards were opened and the ghastly specters of the chancelleries were revealed. The high moral value we had inconsiderately placed upon our motives and efforts fell with a crash. Thoughtful people were stunned.

Consciously or unconsciously we are afraid other specters of secret diplomacy will soon appear and make us tremble for our share in the work of destruction. A change of thought is slowly shaping. Questions taboo during the strife are now asked fearlessly by inquiring people. Even the newspapers, strangely enough, are already reflecting in editorials and articles the swing of mind of their readers. The buncombe days are coming to an end.

²³ P. 8.

"What is behind all this business of war?" one asks. Another, in a tone laden with doubt and anxiety, inquires, "Have we been tricked again?"

Had there been a Swift in our day we should have known something about the affair. A Charles Churchill would have braved the censor and told us what he knew about it. A statesman of the honor and dignity of Charles Fox or Earl Grey or Richard Brinsley Sheridan would never have humbled himself before such guides as we have elected to rule us in the democracies.

Our movements, therefore, suffer for the want of fearless men in the legislatures, in the press, and in the pulpit. Nowhere is there to be found a voice of sufficient reason and courage to expose the real purpose of these wars. Many there were after the last one and, indeed, during it, who did not fear the penalties; but that breed died out, and its loss is our handicap, our turmoil, our suffering, our dread of another brutal upheaval.

We must learn the truth, hideous as it is, of the system that has made these wars possible. But so long as we are the victims of the propaganda of one set of combatants or the other, we shall never get to the bottom of the question. There are scores of volumes in which the student can find all the evidence that is necessary for him to form a judgment. The literature on the causes of the last war is extant, and any library worthy of the name contains the volumes written by American investigators and some of the leading men of the principal European States.

It is remarkable that the inquirer has not to look far for the causes of World War II.²⁴ There are many works that deal with the situation up to the spring of 1939. Strangely enough, the man of today is in a better position to understand what took place here and in Europe for the twenty years before Hitler struck at Poland than the man in 1919 was regarding the political and diplomatic reasons for his war.

There is no excuse for shirking this question. Now that most people have got over the emotional strain of the conflict, they ought to be able to take hold of the problem and study it with calm determination to get the facts. There can be no peace unless this is done. No matter how many movements are actuated by good intentions, they are bound to fail unless their sponsors realize that never yet has peace crowned the efforts of those who imagined that merely good intentions were sufficient to make it a reality.

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²⁴ For a complete history of World War II, the reader is referred to my "Tragedy of Europe," 5 vols., Appleton, Wisconsin, C. C. Nelson Publishing Co., 1940-46. The work is in the form of a diary, with daily entries from September 1, 1939 until August 31, 1945.