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“Social and Anti-Social
Forces within the British
Empire”

By C. R. SWAN, Sydney.

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“Social and Anti-Social Forces within the British Empire”

By C. R. SWAN, Sydney.

I speak to this question as a lover of this, my country, and of Britain—if I criticise the policies of the past it is only because the right of criticism, and particularly of constructive criticism, is one of the fundamental principles of a democracy; I believe, too, that the best patriot is he who is not afraid to be frank and fearless, and I also believe that Britain and her dominions are capable, if they will, of giving a new lead to the world for a better and more enduring civilisation.

It is, however, very difficult to discuss this subject, because one finds it almost impossible to detach one's mind, if indeed one should, from the tragic spectacle which a world of war presents, and which, if it does not wholly destroy one's reasoning faculties, at least impairs judicial decisions and discussions. Prejudices, venom, and hatred are all stirred up and disseminated by present world conditions.

We are witnessing, either at first or second hand, a world not in death throes, but in birth throes—one of these vast far-reaching reactions to the condition of world injustices which breed it. We are witnessing a war, begun in this instance by bellicose political and international adventurers, who are remorseless and terrible in their self-dedication to the pursuit of power by any means, and to the regimentation of whole States and their peoples. We are witnessing the continuation of the same doctrines, and the same methods, which Frederick the Great pursued, and which successive German governments and their leaders have followed, with few exceptions, and with a malevolent persistence—with an ominous certainty—a war without regard to human values other than man-power and fought with a bloody ferocity, which, when one regards the civilized strata which are supposed to have been laid, is all the more paradoxical.

Search for the Cause of Wars.

Behind every effect is a cause, and it is for us to detach our minds sufficiently from this ominous spectacle, and to fix, if we can, on some of the causes of this dread transition stage, through which the human race is passing, because if future wars are to be avoided, or to become fewer—if the war mongers

are to be marked as pariahs by humanity—then we must discover the causes and eradicate them.

I believe, that whilst the German state has fired the first shot, having for years dedicated itself to war as a means to an end, the rulers of Germany are merely riding on a wave which had its genesis far back in world conditions, and particularly world economic conditions, and for those conditions many nations must accept responsibility. The Marquess of Lothian, late British Ambassador to the U.S.A., who left the Government with his fellow-Liberals in 1932, said:—

“The triumph of Hitler no doubt grew out of the despair which settled on central Europe in the long years of the war; defeat, inflation, and revolutionary propaganda, and which grew out of the unemployment and frustration which followed the absence of any real unity in Europe: the sudden restriction of immigration overseas, and the attempt to combine the collection of reparations and war-debts by the Allies with the imposition of unjust tariffs after the war. That was what gave Hitler his chance.”

Another English comment was:—

“The Ottawa Agreements erected round the British Commonwealth a Maginot Line bristling with an economic armament of tariffs and quotas; but unhappily, it was a Maginot Line which could not be circumvented, for it had no abrupt end, no Montmedy.”

To-day economic causes can, and do, create giant disorders, they move swiftly over all countries—none can escape—for man to-day the world over, is an economic unit, joined to what should be a world order, and joined no less to world disorders. To-day wars are not fought as of old for dynastic reasons—few races, that is educated peoples, would lift a finger, or kill another, to keep a King or Queen on the throne, except it be to repel at the same time a menace to a nation's freedom. The power of the purse resting with Parliaments now keeps Kings and Queens, and most other rulers, in their proper places as representatives of the nation—centre rallying points for their peoples. The ever restless brain of man—the resistless march of science—has made of the world but a small sphere. The ability to produce wealth in ever increasing quantities is a feature of our civilization; indeed it is because of that, that we have a modern civilisation, but it is equally obvious that the scientific way to distribute this wealth justly has not kept pace with the ability to produce it.

What Is Our Responsibility?

What is the British Empire's responsibility, if any, for this war? I fear it is a heavy one, for this dread war did not merely begin in September, 1939—its cancerous tentacles reach back to much earlier times, and the measure of the responsi-

bility of this great Empire must be judged by the power it took and exercised in the world, and of its vast influence in the counsels of the nations.

One of the most tragic facts in Europe's modern history is that Germany only came to nationhood 72 years ago, and then by the exercise of power achieved by successive wars, tragic, too, because their national life has been far too disproportionately influenced by Prussia—a war-like and combative people, hard and unrelenting in victory. She has had, unlike England, no long record of and respect for constitutional government, where changes are brought about by evolution, collaboration, and education. Germany's successes in war have been untempered by far too small an extent by these ameliorating influences. This is a fascinating by-path which I cannot pursue, as our concern to-day is the Empire's responsibility.

England is a constitutional entity—it has through long years established itself as the Mother of Parliaments; it has marched steadily, and for hundreds of years through stages of evolutionary government, even daring to behead one King, and banish another, in order to maintain the sequence of liberal ideas. Thus it came about that in the latter part of the Eighteenth Century, and after, when Europe was rent with disorders, and thrones were toppling everywhere, assisted by the revolutionary spirit of Napoleon's soldiers, England could look outward to the world—later the change in transport methods, the use of coal and iron, the machine age, found her ready, and the production by new methods of wealth, formerly undreamt of, meant ultimately the acquisition of great territories where these goods could be sold and raw materials obtained. First on the scene in the modern drama, she acquired great new spaces, some of which are now self-governing Dominions, and others Crown Colonies—for this was a colonial age. This, too, is a fascinating and colourful story, and in many ways England served the world well, very well, in these international forays for trade, profit and territory, remaining in power and furnishing skilled officers, and hardy settlers to develop the territories to which she had gone.

Whilst England, France, and Holland had been securing vast territories, the forthcoming nations, Italy, Germany, and later Japan, were securing themselves as national units—they found, as did Old Mother Hubbard, that when they came on the scene, avid for expansion, the cupboard was largely bare.

The land surface of the globe comprises 68 States, which cover 55 million square miles. Sixty States possess only one-third of the earth between them, the British Empire alone possessing one-quarter. The six empires of Britain, France, U.S.A., Belgium, Portugal and Holland have 23 million square

miles, and 770 million population. In March 1935 the Axis Powers, Japan, Germany, and Italy, had a total area of little more than 1½ million square miles, and 210 million population.

After the 1918 Great War.

The war of 1914-1918 at its conclusion found the world weakened and in disorder, particularly in Europe. France, England and U.S.A. were victors—perhaps only pyrrhic victors—Italy hanging on the outskirts of her dominant partners. Woodrow Wilson said that what Europe wanted above all was free trade to recover from its wounds, but he and the world were soon disillusioned. Before long U.S.A. withdrew from Europe, and European politics were largely dominated by France and England. The new German parliament, the Weimar Government, struggling to retain power on a liberal footing, received but scant help, and little practical sympathy from the dominant powers. One of the most tragic facts in that after-war period was the way in which new Governments in Germany, comprising largely the Trade Union movement, and the liberal forces which survived, were left to themselves. It was at this point that the high prestige of England—its long constitutional growth—its extensive experience in colonisation and government—its comparative freedom of trade—its knowledge of the wealth it had brought—its great former liberal traditions, and the cosmopolitan nature of its own populations—it was here, if anywhere or at any time, that she should have exercised power to restrict France to more democratic courses, and to help lift a stricken Europe to its feet, but there is the most abundant evidence to prove that England failed in this great new crisis of European civilization. It failed because it had not realised, or carried further, the promise of the earlier years; for it is unquestionable that great liberalizing forces were garnered and canalised by the reform laws of 1832—the rising tide of liberalism had abolished the corn-laws, widened and partly liberalised the electoral system—put a stop to chattel slavery, and ultimately, after long years, in 1905 swept the Liberal party into power with an enormous majority. Those forces which had held so much promise have died away because England had failed to make itself a real democracy; growing fabulously rich on its foreign trade, yet poverty grew apace, power passed from Parliament to vast vested interests outside it—landlordism was rampant and entrenched in the British Parliament. It still is, and it will repay to give a short resumé of the condition of British politics, and her influence as exercised in the period between the two great wars, for this will reveal how England had fallen from her once liberal ideals. For many years before 1918 England had practised a comparative free trade, and this had been of enormous assistance to her, not only in building up her national wealth, but in preserving and extending peaceful conditions.

wherever the beneficent influences of trade could reach. To-day wars are being fought for spheres of influence, for the possession, and the use of newly discovered metals and fluids which are indispensable for war, but under free trade what matters it who owns a country, for then the sphere of any nation's influence is the whole of the earth?

It is here, then, that we must look for one of the main reasons for the retrogression in European affairs, and to do that we must study for a few moments the Empire's share in bringing it about. Almost immediately, that is 33 days, after the last war concluded in 1918, England held a general election, now popularly known as the "hang the Kaiser" election; the rolls were old and inefficient, public opinion was excited and unreliable, the electoral system was then, as it is now, unjust, and totally unscientific. Lloyd George capitulated to the popular and ignorant demands put forward by sensational newspapers, and the most impossible promises were made to the electorate. The war was largely to be paid for by Germany, and, if possible, Austria—England was to be a home for heroes; a new order indeed was to operate almost immediately. The English Parliament, which was returned, was packed with profiteers, whose ideas of government were ignorant and ebullient, for the war had been fought on inflation as far as finance was concerned. Many of England's best public men were excluded from Parliament by this election, and they would have provided that fund of calm common-sense and justice, and understanding of economic law which England never needed so badly, and for want of which Europe was to relapse into a condition of economic torpor. It was in the spirit of this English election that Lloyd George and his retinue went to the Peace Conference—it was a dictated and not a negotiated peace.

The "Locust" Years.

The subsequent years reveal a melancholy story, and one which was anticipated by many eminent men at that time. The Coupon Election of 1922, specially held to exclude liberalism from Parliament, reduced the opposition bench to a mere shadow; the "Yes" men of Lloyd George ruled the British Parliament, but with Tory and Conservative ideas in full power. Russia struggling to achieve nationhood, after centuries of misgovernment and oppression, was held at arm's length, and indeed in 1919 was attacked in two campaigns by British money and troops in order to give effect to British conservative fears of Bolshevism. England for years gave way to a spy mania—no stories concerning Russia were too improbable for the British electorate, fed as it was by papers of sensationalism and subservience to the war profiteers who had bought them up, and who feared the new Russian ideas of finance and government. Instead of living up to the great

traditions of liberalism—and that was the only way to save Europe, and herself—England allowed herself to be tied to the cartwheel of France who was, after the last war, and as a victorious power chauvinistic and unrelenting, although such a course was in the highest degree unwise, seeing that 50% of her men between the age of 20 and 40 had been killed in the four years of war. The spinal column of the Conservative forces in England were the landlords, who exerting all their social prestige on a subservient Parliament, got rid of the Lloyd George Ministry, and then there was a melancholy succession of so-called national governments.

In 1931-32 England both went off the gold standard, and by a political trick departed from her free-trade traditions. These decisions ruptured the British Government, but Ramsay Macdonald was soon joined by sympathetic Conservatives. Very soon afterwards the Ottawa Conference was an intimation to the whole world that England, and her dominions, and her crown colonies, the owners and controllers of one-quarter of the world's surface and of its raw materials, intended to make of it, and them, a close preserve for British trade—it has been said that the road to Addis Ababa began at Ottawa. The nations of Europe now began to erect still higher tariff boundaries—the U.S.A. had already done so—the latter's gold reserves began to grow as international trade shrank in an alarming way. The disruption of the Austrian Empire and the formation of new States meant that hundreds of miles of new tariff barriers had been erected, and before very long Europe had returned to the middle ages in trade matters; international trade continued for years to shrink, and poverty and distress everywhere abounded. Economic nationalism, the refuge of vested interests, and particularly of landlord interests who thus shift the burden of taxation to the poorer classes, was rampant. Protection, the father and mother of corrupting influences in government, poisoned the stream of international co-operation. Standing armies, the natural corollary of tariffs, were rapidly increased in Europe, and the world was sliding down a slippery precipice to self-destruction. In every country hot-house and unstaple industries were commenced by government assistance, and as governments have no money of themselves, the excess cost of these industries is paid by consumers.

The Harvest.

The harvest which has been reaped since 1918 is both logical and just—it is the fruit of suspicion, of bitterness, of wrong economic measures, and of hatreds man-made—it is a history of golden opportunities neglected—above all, of an abysmal ignorance in the great body of the people of those simple principles which are the very foundation of a true democracy.

During the century which elapsed after the French Revolution, a general progress was made towards political and economic freedom. The privileges of the small minority who controlled the destinies of nations were gradually taken away, and the right of the citizen through democratic means to decide his own destiny was slowly established. In the economic sphere the mobility of labour and capital increased. Millions of emigrants from Europe flowed to America and Australasia, and were welcomed by them. A world-wide interchange of products and division of labour developed. The barriers to intercourse and commerce were lowered, and the transactions of a large part of the world were conducted by means of one medium of exchange.

The attempt to "insulate" the trade of one country against economic changes in others has made the fluctuations in each more violent and disastrous. Can any one doubt that if each State of the United States had practised the policy of regulation and isolation of its economy from its fellow States, the economic condition of each would have been far worse than it actually is? These considerations are elementary and fundamental, but they are so little regarded that they must be repeated again and again with the greatest emphasis if the way of escape is to be found.

In the last fifty years, and especially in the last twenty-five years, a halt has been called to this healthy development, and we have recently been moving with alarming speed in the opposite direction. The frontiers between nations have become more and more, not the boundaries between different local administrations, but barriers to the movement of people, to the transport of goods, and almost to the interchange of ideas. The concept of nationalism has been erected into a fetish, before which all that is most worthwhile in human life is being sacrificed.

What are the causes of this strange retrogression? Briefly they are two: failure to investigate and delimit the economic and social spheres of the individual and of the State, and the power of selfish interests to manipulate public opinion, to use the forms of Government for their own ends—tariffs and other special privileges.

Evil Effects of Protection.

Nothing in England's long history can compare with the baleful effects which followed her action in 1931-32, not only for herself, but for the world, for prior to this the world had generally acquiesced in her possession of these vast territories, because trade in them had been largely free. The "have-nots" did not possess gold to buy what they wanted, and the "haves" refused to take their goods in the vain imagination, so typical of protectionist ideas, that they could sell without buying.

The "have-nots" throughout the world began to argue that even the risk of war was preferable to that of starvation—Germany and Japan cried "we must export or die," and this was true, as it was true of many other countries, as no civilized States can be self-contained; cannibal islanders are self-contained, and that is why they remain cannibals.

True it is that Germany has spent an inordinate amount on armaments, but she could do this because, and only because, a world condition of affairs was created which enabled those Nazi political mountebanks, in their baleful attempt to achieve world power, to ride the rising tide of disillusion and despair. The treatment of the trade of Japan, another Axis power, by Australia, to say nothing of the rest of the world, provides a graphic instance of the folly of government interference, for there is a country of which only 16% can be cultivated, which has an enormous and growing population, and which at the time of the Australian and world-wide depression provided cheap goods for the rest of the world. Australia, at the behest of strong trade-interests in Australia and England, and in order to obtain advantages in the English market, placed heavy duties on Japanese goods, and in a very few years Japan decreased her purchases of our staple wool. As a direct result of after-war politics the Treaty with Japan, which had been of great value to us in the last war, was cancelled. The purchase by Japan of our excess quantity of wool in the depression period did as much to lift Australia out of the depression as any other single influence, and at the same time their cheap goods enabled us to ameliorate the effects of the depression in 1930 to 1933. The Military Party in Japan is now paramount, because world-conditions of trade played into their hands, and left the trading classes there mute and powerless.

The "Times" correspondent in Singapore, in a most revealing commentary, said a few days ago that the explosive force of the Japanese nation was impelled by both fanaticism and the frustration of economic repression. The "National Review" of December, 1941, has an acid comment on the Japanese question and this is very significant coming from a strong Conservative quarter:—

"As we have said, the Japanese newspapers do not help, any more than our own left-wingers, to calm down opinion in England and America. They are stimulated by all that German art and duplicity can invent to make them aggressive and provocative—and they are both.

It is to be regretted that the Prime Minister should have added his powerful voice to those who are shouting at Japan. This is not the way to get that country to state her case in such a way as we can listen to. Japan has a case which is better understood in Australia and New Zealand than in England or the U.S.A.

Japan's Case. Japan's case is that she has a growing population which is already far too large for her to feed. She can only avert the starvation of her people by colonising other countries or by trading with them. But she is debarred from both; her surplus population is excluded from Canada, the United States, the South American Republics, Australia and New Zealand, for none of these countries will accept them. And it is not only the Japanese people who are excluded. Japan is prepared to become a manufacturing country and to feed her people at home, as we do, by means of her foreign trade. But everywhere she finds the road to this object barred.

With this wall excluding them from Europe and America, the Japanese turned to Manchuria, which they conquered from the Chinese Republic with the willing help of the Manchurians, whose Emperor they restored to this province of his former Empire. Then, in the desperate need of Japan for the trade of China, the Japanese started the Sino-Japanese war, where things have not gone well with Japan and where their campaign has not led them to very much good. Their association with the Axis Powers followed—we have only ourselves to thank for this."

The very high taxation in England on legitimate business, made by Parliaments controlled by Conservative influences, and the exemption of land from just taxation, had made many of the great industries in England uneconomic, and they then became strong claimants for government assistance, for bounties, for protective duties, and as protection was extended the demand for it, and for easy money, became ever more insistent. I repeat: no single influence over hundreds of years has done so much to corrupt the British Parliament as the change over to a protective system after the last war. In the U.S.A. the same tariff evils exist; the British dominions, including Australia, are similarly afflicted, as are most other countries—all must learn and realise the principles of economic justice. Public men in all countries the world over have over and over again spoken in the strongest possible terms about the corrupt influences on Parliaments by tariffs. Desperate efforts were made by some of the smaller and more liberal States of Europe to loose the fetters which bound trade and commerce, and the reception their efforts received in England shows graphically how this once great free country had fallen from its high estate, and had disowned in a very few years many of its high traditions of freedom and liberalism. The electoral system of England unfortunately has contributed to this decline of true internationalism, and has excluded from Parliament liberal and independent thought.

Move for Freer World Trade Defeated.

Lovers of freedom are indebted to a writer in the English Contemporary Review, Deryck Abel, who in an article devoted to the economic causes of the war, has pointed out that the

Chatham House Conference in London sought to direct all Governments from the paths of autarchy and tariff warfare to those of freer trade and peace when it advocated the formation of unions for Free Trade or low tariffs. The practical model which the Conference chose was the Ouchy Convention of 18th July, 1932, between the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. The three Governments agreed, first, not to add to existing tariffs, and secondly, to reduce their tariffs against each other by 10% each year for five years till a low general level was attained. They agreed that the Treaty should be open to other States on the same terms. But the British Government, now Protectionist, led the way in demanding, in virtue of the most-favoured nation clause, the lower tariffs of the three countries, without itself offering corresponding reductions, and so the Treaty had to be abandoned.

Ever since Cobden negotiated the Anglo-French Commercial Treaty in 1860 with Napoleon III, Free Traders have rightly regarded the most-favoured-nation principle as the "sheet anchor" of Free Trade, and indeed as a most powerful influence upon the vast expansion of world commerce before 1914. It functioned so well that the reduction of a single duty would strike at privilege, monopoly and exclusiveness everywhere, serve to liberate the trade of all States with commercial treaties, and automatically lower the tariffs of all nations (save revenue tariffs).

But the new systems of discriminatory quotas, roundly condemned by the Chatham-House Conference, were themselves incompatible with the most-favoured-nation clause. Our protectionist Government, which had raised tariff barriers against the whole world, and had by its so-called Abnormal Importations Act and Import Duties Act already struck heavily at Holland and Belgium, invoked the most-favoured-nation clause in order to defeat the attempt by three smaller States to free commerce amongst themselves.

In 1937, after more gallant endeavours by the statesmen of the seven little democracies of North-Western Europe, and after conciliatory words and deeds by the French Minister of Commerce, the Governments of France and Britain invited the Prime Minister of Belgium, M. Van Zeeland, one of the delegates at the Chatham House Conference, to visit most of the capitals, and to draft a report on the subject of freer trade. His mission had the blessing of M. Leon Blum, and even of Dr. Schacht, and he performed his task admirably. The Japanese Foreign Office spokesman declared that Britain, the greatest of the colonial and trading nations, held the key. But our Government pretended that it had thrown away the key. Paying lip-service to the most-favoured-nation clause, Mr. Baldwin objected that a Free Trade entente would involve its modification. He also asserted that practical results would come only from bilateral agreements. The Anglo-American

Trade Agreement achieved a certain degree of success, but the vested interests behind the policy of Ottawa blocked the way to world peace. Mr. Neville Chamberlain, who had said that Free Trade was as dead as mutton, and who asserted that Britain would remain Protectionist even if all the world went Free Trade, never realised until after war broke out in 1939 that Free Trade and Peace were one and the same cause—it was then too late.

Freedom Through Terrorism.

We see before our eyes a Europe, an Asia, forced by arms exercised with terror to abandon national sovereignty. National boundaries are being swept away, but it may be reasonably assumed that ultimately a freer Europe, and a freer world, will emerge—a world which has learnt that national characteristics can exist within their own boundaries only if provision is made for economic freedom for themselves and for other countries. It is impossible for a truly civilized life to be led with trade in fetters, when the whole trend of civilization is developing man as an economic unit in an economic world. The fact that wars to-day are fought not by a few paid soldiers, but by whole nations, will surely hasten the time when humanity will devote more thought to the study of political science; the largest part of political economy is man himself, for he it is who suffers privations if laws are not scientific and just. It is a tragedy of immensity that England, loved homeland of our fathers, should have, after its long colourful history, its many noble struggles, and achievements, failed at the most critical crisis in European history. I firmly believe that a liberal lead from England at that time (1918-22) would have meant a liberal lead to the world, for Europe was war-weary and distracted. England, although she had made immense exertions, had an unravaged country, and was the only great power, other than U.S.A., capable of giving that lead to the world. Her special position as a great coloniser the world over, fitted her to take that lead. It was not enough to have had a great history, not enough to have acquired great wealth, to have developed education, to have possessed great territories, to practice a unique system of law and justice in the courts—England failed to carry to its logical conclusion, to a culminating point, the long and arduous struggles of the past. She failed above all to free the land of England, and thus to make free her people, millions of whom are sunk in man-made poverty; for only by securing the natural revenue of the country, the economic rent of land, could free trade have been preserved in its entirety, poverty largely banished, and friendship with the world maintained and extended. The selfishness of vested interests in England, the dominion countries, and in many other countries is almost incredible, as is their ignorance of the dire and certain results of their policies. It remains for the people

themselves to acquire a knowledge of political science, so that they may unlock the door leading to better and more just conditions. The assaults of the Axis Powers must and will be resisted to the utmost, because it is certain that in the victory of the Allies will lie the means of using an awakened public mind, fortified by long constitutional experience, to implement the extension of freedom both for themselves and for the world.

A New Vision Needed.

There is, however, no need for pessimism—there is in the human race an endemic quality of good, and it only requires that man should harmonize himself with natural laws to become emancipated from economic and moral slavery. We must strive for this because we must justify to ourselves the knowledge which has been placed in our hands by the varied genius of the reformers of the past.

When we think, if we can, of the vast solar system, with suns, and stars, and worlds, moving through aeons of time in majestic order, and contrast them with the most minute forms of life revealed by the microscope, yet fashioned with exquisite perfection of detail, we shall surely be inspired, as men created in the image of God, to make our community lives of such a pattern as will not be unworthy to fit into the mosaic of the majestic and logical order of nature.

I can do no better than conclude by quoting from one of the world's most lovable philosophers, James Russell Lowell:—

“Let us be of good cheer, however, remembering that the misfortunes hardest to bear are those which never come. The world has outlived much, and will outlive a great deal more, and men have contrived to be happy in it. It has shown the strength of its constitution in nothing more than in surviving the quack medicines it has tried. In the scales of the destinies brawn will never weigh so much as brain. Our healing is not in the storm or in the whirlwind, it is not in monarchies, or aristocracies, or democracies, but will be revealed by the still, small voice that speaks to the conscience and the heart, prompting us to a wider and wiser humanity.”

All the world's vast social problems can and must be solved by the application of social science.

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