

Parties, Politics and Peace

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RECENT events in Greece and elsewhere have shown us that victory alone is not enough to restore peace to Europe. The sufferings that the occupied countries have endured have weakened the whole tradition of civilized order and have accustomed men's minds to violence and lawlessness. Moreover social conflicts and ideological differences have been deliberately fostered by those tactics of disintegration which are the most diabolical weapons of totalitarian warfare. How is it possible to restore parliamentary democracy when any party struggle is apt to degenerate into a display of totalitarian thugery? And if we do not do so, how can we honor our pledges under the Atlantic Charter? This is our present dilemma, and in order to solve it we shall need more clear thinking as well as firm action.

In the first place, there is a certain confusion of public opinion with regard to the real nature of the war. Is it a struggle for world power between rival states or is it a conflict between two rival ideologies or political theories, named Democracy and Fascism? The answer is that this is not a true dilemma, since from the beginning it has been the policy of Hitler to use

the ideology of National Socialism as a weapon of power politics and consequently our resistance to his international aggression inevitably involves a resistance to his ideology and a defense of our own political ideals. It is impossible to fight this war as though it were a straightforward national conflict of the old style. It is essentially an ideological war, but since we are not a totalitarian state and consequently do not possess an official state-imposed uniform political doctrine, we are at a disadvantage as compared both with our Fascist enemies and our Communist allies. When, therefore, we say that we are fighting for democracy, we do not mean that we are fighting to impose a watertight system of political ideas on the rest of the world, but merely that we are defending our political and social freedom against the mass tyranny which is seeking to destroy it.

Now political freedom according to our tradition involves the existence of political parties. The party system, which has been evolved in Britain and America, is an elaborate and delicate mechanism which makes it possible to change the government without the necessity of revolution. It is like a balance that allows the weight of

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public opinion to determine the position of political power. A single party system, such as is characteristic of all the totalitarian states, removes one arm of the balance and essentially changes the nature of the mechanism. The single party is in fact no longer part of a balance; it is a sheer weight which concentrates the whole power of the state in one direction, so that public opinion does not influence the government, but is influenced and formed by it. The strength of such a system depends entirely on the efficiency of the ruling group and their servants. It has the strength and weakness of a despotism irrespective of the size of the dominant party. It can claim to be democratic, because it can, theoretically at any rate, force everybody and anybody into its ranks, but it can never be democratic in the same sense in which we in the West understand the term.

PSEUDO-DEMOCRATIC PARTY SYSTEMS

At the same time we must recognize that our conception of party is not the only one. Our conception involves of necessity a limited measure of cooperation between the parties and the recognition of a super-political basis of agreement and loyalty on which the State stands. But there is another type of party which is essentially non-cooperative and exclusive and which refuses to admit the right of other parties to exist. The victory of such a party is usually followed by

the proscription or "liquidation" of its opponents, so that every election becomes a potential civil war. This has been the tradition of the revolutionary parties in the past and in some cases, as with the French Jacobins, it produces a party dictatorship like that of the totalitarian states. But at other times this revolutionary tradition has been combined with the other Anglo-Saxon tradition of alternating parties, with surprising results, as we see in 19th century Spain, where Progressives and Moderates staged alternate *coups d'etat* and an eminent Liberal could dictate on his death-bed that he had no enemies to forgive since he had killed them all!

Hence it is clear that it is not enough to talk about Democracy and Fascism unless we define our meaning pretty clearly. If by Fascism we understand that particular form of mass tyranny which has arisen on the continent between the two wars, and if by Democracy we mean a constitutional regime of political and personal liberty, then it is correct to say that the defense of Democracy against Fascism is our essential war aim. But we must remember that there is an alternative sense to both these terms and that many people will not accept our definitions.

Thus many people today use the terms Fascism and Democracy as equivalent to what are known as The Right and The Left: so that any political ideas or social elements which

are regarded as conservative, or reactionary, or capitalist or monarchist are described as Fascist, while anything that is regarded as revolutionary or progressive or Socialist is spoken of as Democratic. The result of this division is to obliterate the distinction between constitutional and totalitarian parties, and to force every shade of political opinion into alliance with some extremist totalitarian party which inevitably tends to become the predominant partner. And this is no remote imaginary danger. It is a real situation which has been exploited again and again to the advantage of the totalitarian powers in the course of the present struggle. Wherever this division between Left and Right has been carried to its logical conclusion, it has led to the weakening or collapse of the society concerned; while the survival of Great Britain in 1940 was due above all to our rejection of this Left-Right ideology, and to the cooperation of all the constitutional parties in defense of their common national existence.

Where parties are incapable of doing this, parties cannot exist, and some form of authoritarian or totalitarian state is bound to take over control. Now it may be argued with some plausibility that this is what is happening in the world today, and that the Anglo-American system of constitutional liberty is incapable of surviving in a world of mechanized mass powers. But if so, this means

that democracy, as we have understood it, is finished, and that we have been fighting for a lost cause.

This is not a conclusion that we can readily accept, since our political system has stood up to the strain of total war more successfully than any of our critics expected. But the making of peace may prove an even more difficult test than war, since it brings Western democracy face to face not only with the problems of a Europe that has been disintegrated by years of Fascist exploitation, but also with the massive power of our Soviet allies which represents the most complete and far-reaching single party system in existence. It is clear that no stable peace can be reached unless it is possible to find some *modus vivendi* between Anglo-American Democracy and Russian Communism, and in order to do so it is not sufficient to gloss over their essential differences by an equivocal use of the term democracy. It is an immensely difficult task and one which demands exceptional qualities of statesmanship and moderation. But though it is difficult, it is not impossible, and since the peace of the world and the survival of civilization depend upon it, it is in the interests of both parties that it should be solved. That must be the basic aim of allied statesmanship and the more fully public opinion in the various countries realizes the true issues the better are the chances of reaching this goal.