

WELFARE
and PEACE

Sir
John Boyd Orr

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This pamphlet reproduces speeches delivered by Sir John Boyd Orr and Mr. G. D. H. Cole at a Conference on the theme of "The United Nations and the Future Peace," held under the auspices of the National Peace Council at the Conway Hall, London, in October, 1945. Sir John Orr spoke a few weeks before assuming the Director-Generalship of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation. As in the case of all these publications the Council is not necessarily committed to all the views expressed.

Sir JOHN BOYD ORR.

Why does one come a long distance—as I have done from Aberdeen—to a meeting of this kind? Here in this hall we have people from different walks of life and of different religious and political views; the one thing that unites us in this great peace movement, is our hatred of war and our love of peace. War has always been evil. War and pestilence have always gone together; war and spiritual deterioration go together. War lets loose the vilest passions in man.

But war is much worse nowadays than it used to be. War used to be localised; the great majority of mankind were not affected. To-day it is totally different; if a war breaks out, the whole world is at war, and now we do not speak of local wars, but of World War I and World War II, and, if there be a World War III, it will affect every family and every individual in the whole human race. And that is because the great advances of physical science, with the aeroplane, the wireless and so on, have made the world so small, and brought all the nations into such close contact with one another, that the world has become one unit; the world *is* one family.

We had illustrations of that in the inter-war period. In 1929 there was a slump on Wall Street. It was not limited to Wall Street and the United States, but became a world economic crisis. Years before that, a chemist working in Europe found a method of making synthetic dyes. That did not affect only the industries of Europe; a million people in India who had lived by growing indigo died of starvation because this thing had happened in Europe. To-day, anything which affects one part of the world affects the whole world. Any war which breaks out will be a war which will involve every family living in the world. The world is now so small that some kind of world government is essential. I used to think, three or four years ago, that as far as world government was concerned the alternatives were conquest or co-operation, and that one nation or one group of nations might conquer the world and set up a world government. Those are not the alternatives to-day; the alternatives to-day are world destruction or the co-operation of all nations in the building up of peace.

The atomic bomb will make the next war the end of our civilisation. If the United States and Britain and Canada have the secret now, Russia will have the secret within a short time, and China, too; within ten years there will be many nations who know how to make the atomic bomb and have the facilities for making it. The fundamental knowledge is available to everybody; all physicists throughout the world know it, and any nation which is willing to set aside the necessary funds and facilities can have the secret of the atomic bomb within a few years.

What will happen, then, if we have another war? Every large city in America or in this country could be blotted out within a few hours. If the nations are going to start dropping atomic bombs it will mean the end of civilisation; all that will be left will be a few remnants of the human race, living in caves. The alternative is clearly before us; co-operation or destruction.

The Advance of Science.

To come now to my main theme, which is Welfare as the basis of peace. To what kind of welfare can we look forward? The advance in biological science in the last few years has been so great that we can hardly conceive of it. Science has advanced more in the last thirty or forty years than in the previous two thousand. We know the advances of physical science, but the advance in biological and medical science is as great, though not so spectacular. Diseases which fifty, or even twenty, years ago were regarded as unavoidable we now know that we can eliminate. We know that no human being need suffer from tuberculosis; we can eliminate malaria, which has affected one-third of the human race; we have Penicillin, D.D.T., the new science of nutrition, the new science of psychology. We know that if we could apply this great new biological knowledge we should have a different race. Even in this country, where we are very advanced, we know that by the application of this knowledge we could in five years make environmental conditions such as to add ten years to the average expectation of life. In India, where the average expectation of life is only 27 years, we could, by applying the power that we have, raise it to 70 years. It is not impossible; New Zealand has done it. We can eliminate these diseases and we can enable people to grow to their full stature. Not only that, but we can have more beautiful people than we have been accustomed to in the past.

If biological science holds out these possibilities, have we the means of creating the conditions which will enable human beings to attain the physical and spiritual stature which we know that given the right conditions they can attain? Look what we can

do in time of war! We can turn out aircraft and engines of destruction of all kinds at tremendous speed. During war, a great many of the secrets of science which were locked up and not allowed to be used in case they made some of our plant obsolete, were let loose. Production was encouraged at full blast. In the United States, it has been stated officially that the power of production has been increased during the war by 100 per cent., and in Canada it is said to have been increased by 108 per cent. Australia, South Africa, Russia and other countries have all gone ahead. Our power of producing all the things that man wants is now almost inconceivable.

In addition to that, the range of materials available to us has been greatly extended. We used to be limited to coal, iron and steel; now we have new plastics and new alloys, and we can make almost anything we wish from materials which are widely distributed throughout the world, and do it with much less labour than before. The machine can turn out goods at a tremendous rate.

We hear talk of the world being poor. The world is indeed poor, but it is poor in spirit. We have now the means of creating almost inconceivable material wealth. There is talk of carrying through a housing scheme in this country in ten years. If we carried it out with the same vigour as we showed during the war, we could do it in half that time. There is at present a world shortage of food. In this country, possibly the most highly cultivated country in the world, apart from Holland and Denmark, we increased the production of food by 70 per cent. during the war. We can create the food and build the houses and make the furniture and provide the community centres and all the things that man needs to reach a very high standard of living, if we will to have them.

That is the kind of world we could have, as the alternative to the complete destruction of our civilisation. But it is very difficult to build a new world because, though you can introduce new scientific powers, it takes a long time to get people to change their ideas. People still think of war as inevitable because there has always been war. We cannot adjust ourselves to the new world. We have our own petty interests, our vested interests, our selfish aims which we have been brought up to regard as desirable, and we cannot expand and rise up into the clouds and look down and say, "Here are the great possibilities of the future," while many of our ablest men are grubbing away, thinking that the only end in life is to make money. They do not realise that complete destruction threatens them; they do not lift up their eyes and say, "Here is something on which we could employ all

our abilities, in building this great new world and in being the real leaders of the people.”

We are living in a disordered and a distracted world, and we have to find a means of unravelling the tangle. We have to begin somewhere, and I think that we should begin by putting first things first. We should first of all get our statesmen to realise that they must co-operate for their mutual benefit or engage in strife for their mutual destruction. If they are going to co-operate for mutual benefit, let us take something on which we can begin at once. What is the most urgent need to-day? Food and shelter are the basic necessities, and the world to-day is short of both. I believe that in the coming winter in Europe more people will die for lack of food and shelter than were killed in the whole five years of the war.

The Primary Needs.

We know what food is needed in the world to enable people to be healthy. Calculations have been made which show that the world would need to double the amount of the foods which are of value for health—milk, fruit, vegetables and eggs and so on. If the statesmen of the world, instead of wrangling over boundaries and spheres of influence, would realise that the aeroplane and the wireless take no account of them, if they would realise that spheres of influence mean lining up for the next war, and mean that they are planning for the third war, and the third war means mutual destruction, they might say: “Let us get together. We are the people who have been given the government of the nations. What should be the first duty of the government? It should be to provide the primary necessities of life for the people whom they govern.” Then, sitting round a table with that in view, they would say, “What does the world most urgently need? Food and shelter. Here is something on which we can all co-operate; this will bring benefit to us all.”

In the case of food, the agreement is already there. The nations met at Hot Springs in the U.S.A. in 1943. They examined the world food position, and they said, “Here is a great scarcity of food. Scarcity of food means disease and disability and premature death. We can produce the food, and this is how it ought to be done.” They agreed that all the United Nations should solemnly undertake the primary responsibility of seeing that the people they governed had sufficient food, and, what is more important, they recommended that all the nations should co-operate in a world scheme to bring freedom from want of food to all men in all lands; and they “signed on the dotted line.” Mr. Eden said in the House of Commons that the Government of this

country accepted these recommendations and would agree to carry them out so far as the United Kingdom is concerned. Some twenty or more nations, including Soviet Russia, agreed, too.

Why not let us start with this? If the nations will agree to co-operate and to pool their resources for this definite yet limited objective, what will happen? They will say to themselves, "Here is this tremendous tragedy in the world of people dying of famine and malnutrition. We know what to do; the recommendations have been made. Let us begin to work this out." Then, as they began to work out a definite, concrete scheme such as this for the benefit of humanity, their racial jealousies and imperialistic ambitions would fade into the background. They could quite well say, "Let us defer dealing with these questions of boundaries and the like until people are fed." What does it matter on which side of a boundary line a man lives if his children are dying of starvation? As a matter of fact, if every country carried out the scheme to which they all agreed, and if every family had a decent house and a decent environment, free from disease, and was guaranteed sufficient food, it would not matter on which side of a boundary it lived. Boundaries are preparations for war; the whole world is now within one boundary.

To my mind, the most important feature of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation is that it affords a means of bringing Governments together for a definite, understandable, concrete scheme and gives them something on which they can begin to co-operate; and, once they begin to co-operate in one field, it will be easier to extend co-operation to other fields.

Many of our economic difficulties would be helped to a solution. I know nothing about economics, but I suggest that if we set ourselves to produce the food that the people need, there will be no slump in agriculture, there will be no peasants selling the produce of their land for a price so low that they cannot live themselves; selling in a great world market, there will be world prosperity for agriculture. Instead of the mad policy of agreeing to reduce the production of wheat while millions of people are dying for lack of food, we shall see who can grow more wheat, for there will be a world market for all the wheat that is grown, and for all the bacon and the eggs and the other things that men need.

Moreover, you cannot expand agriculture without great industrial development. You will need literally millions of tractors and cultivators and implements of all kinds to get this great food scheme going. If you add to food on a health standard housing on a health standard, you will have the greatest industrial boom

that the world has ever seen; the wheels of industry will be kept turning and there will be no unemployment.

The point that I want to make is this: if the nations will rise to the moral and spiritual level of doing that which they know to be right, we shall have the nations coming together to co-operate on this matter; agriculture will flourish, trade will flourish, unemployment will be banished, and, best of all, we shall have a world with a vision of the great new civilisation which is possible.

But it is no use trying to build the new world from the top down, with political ideas of spheres of influence and so on. We have to build it from the bottom upwards, and provide first the primary necessities of life for the people who have never had them, and build from the slums of this country upwards. If we fix our eyes on what needs to be done for those who are in want, all the other things will come right. If we put first things first, the economic and political and financial tangle will be unravelled.

How are we going to get this going? In my opinion, the move for it has to come from the common people of the world. It has to come from people like ourselves. We must not only hope for it, but have such a dazzling hope that we cannot believe that it will not come true. The great thing needed in the world to-day is to get the common people to see that this new world is within their grasp, and to have such a fervent hope for it that they have something like the religious fervour of the early Christians. We must get them to see that this is what Jesus of Nazareth spoke of when He spoke of establishing the kingdom of heaven on earth. This thing can be done if we make the rulers see that it can be done and put the tremendous pressure of the common people of the world behind them.

A Common Interest.

We people of Britain are, I believe, of all the countries of the world the most sensible, with the toughest political constitution, and if any people can weather this storm, we will. But we want to bring all the people together. There is a World Trade Union Conference meeting in Paris, and my heart rejoiced when I saw these people from different countries coming together. The miners in France, in Germany, in Russia, in America and in this country think the same thoughts and suffer from the same difficulties and the same diseases; they have the same low standard of living and their interests are common. I think that we should get the miners of the world together. The doctors of the world think the same things; let us get them to meet in international conference. Let us get the scientists to meet. Let us get the common

people of the world of all the different grades to meet and realise that they are one human family, with common interests. The more we can bring together miners, doctors, school teachers and others on a world basis to see that they have a world job to do and that their interests are exactly the same, the sooner we shall get this great world movement pressing our statesmen on to begin to build a new world.

Let me finish with a word about the point that the Chairman* made—the necessity for hope and faith. The terrible danger is that people will despair, that they will say, “What does it matter? We shall all be blown up, anyway, and there is nothing that we can do about it,” and so they will fall into lethargy. The danger of that in war-time is not very great, because in war-time there is enthusiasm for winning the war, and people are willing to work twelve hours a day, seven days a week, keeping the machines going without a stop, so great is their enthusiasm for victory. But there is a danger of psychological depression after so great an effort. If we could regain the enthusiasm which we had in 1940 and 1941, when people were willing to make any sacrifice, and attach that enthusiasm to a far greater cause, the cause of world co-operation and world peace, beginning with a world food policy, we could be sure that the new world would be built. It rests not with the statesmen but with you and me.

* *The Rt. Hon. the Earl of Darnley.*