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THE RIGHTS OF MAN

By

HAROLD J. LASKI

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THE RIGHTS OF MAN

I

For something like a century and a half it has been the central purpose of Western civilisation to find the secret of combining individual freedom with social order. The fulfilment of that purpose has been achieved in different ways, and in different degrees; there has been one method in France and another in Great Britain. But it is an aim the fulfilment of which has been generally and increasingly desired wherever there has been respect for human personality.

Because this is the case, during the last century and a half men have striven consistently to limit all privilege, whether it was built upon birth or creed or race. They have battled to impose upon governments the duty to avoid arbitrary action, to rule in terms of law and not in terms of discretion. They have claimed the right for ordinary people to choose the governments by which they will be ruled. That is why, after long struggles, free and equal suffrage has been established. That is why, also, the common man has been given the opportunity, at stated intervals, to change the persons by whom he has been governed, if he so desires. Before the war of 1914, it was widely regarded as one of the supreme triumphs of civilisation that government should be based upon free discussion and that minority opinion should have the right to win political power by persuasion.

The Independence of Justice

Parallel with his growing fulfilment was the recognition that each member of the community had a right to citizenship in the fullest sense of the term. He was entitled to voice his grievances; he could organise, with his fellow-citizens, to obtain redress for them. He was not to be penalised for doing so unless the manner of his protest threatened social peace. To secure him in these liberties, civilised States developed, with an increasing sense of its importance, the great principle inherent in the English writ of habeas corpus. It is the principle that no man should legally suffer penalties unless it could be shown by evidence before independent judges that he had broken a specific law. This principle was felt to be the very essence of individual freedom; and it was because it was so regarded that the most careful steps have been taken, in every democratic State, to safeguard the independence of the judges. Neither king nor prime minister, neither parliament nor civil servant, could interfere with the judge's performance of his task. Here was the secret which prevented the development of tyranny in our rulers.

Constitutional Government

The right to help in the choice of those by whom he was to be governed; the right, at stated intervals, to refuse the re-appointment to office of those who operated the power of the State; these were of the essence of that constitutional government which, as England discovered in the seventeenth century, made change compatible with peace. From England, in the eighteenth century, the doctrine spread to America and the Continent of Europe; after 1789, its acceptance became the ambition of every State which recognised that necessary social adaptation could not otherwise be peacefully achieved, and to make those rights effective, it was increasingly realised that constitutional government could not be maintained unless there were (i) freedom of expression and (ii) freedom of association. For if men are penalised when they speak and organise freely, that utterance and organisation are alone likely which please those who sit in the seats of power; and sooner or later, they will suppress all whose speech and action they find inconvenient. History confirmed the experience that the narrower the numbers of those to whom the rights of man were conceded, the smaller would be the number of those to whom a share in the benefits of social organisation was possible. It is not accident that the wider the area of citizens to which a government has been compelled to appeal, the wider has been both the extent and intensity of its response to their wants.

There is nothing mysterious in these principles. They were wrested, after infinite effort and profound suffering, from a society in which the claims of the many were sacrificed to the privileges of the few. No doubt their realisation has been both slow and incomplete. Yet it is difficult to compare the results of their operation in States which have adopted them with the results in States from which they have been absent without a profound sense of the importance they have had for the dignity and happiness of the common man. For it is out of them that the workers have been able to build their trade unions and the co-operative movement. It is out of them, also, that political parties, like the Labour Party in Britain, which, a hundred years ago, would pretty certainly have been denied a legal existence, have now become not merely an element in the national life, but the vital alternative to the government in power. Out of them, too, has come the inestimable benefit of religious toleration; no State which lives by these principles seeks to discriminate against the private faith a man may choose to hold, or his right, if he so desire, to have no faith at all. And it is out of them, further, that, above all in the last forty years, the negative State has been transformed into the positive State.

A Century Ago

That phrase deserves some annotation, not least in a British context. The citizen of this country who was born after 1906 can hardly realise the rights he enjoys compared with those at the disposal of his predecessor who was born during the Napoleonic wars. There was no national educational system a century ago; if a primitive factory legislation existed, until 1844, there was no means of its effective enforcement. There were no workmen's compensation, no trade boards, no serious local self-government, no public health services of any kind. What industrial conditions were like can be read in the grim pages of Dickens' *Hard Times*, or the remorseless analysis of Engels' *Condition of the English Working Class of 1844*. Trade unions were still illegal; and even after the repeal of the Combination Acts in 1825, their status was at the mercy of a prejudiced bench. Public libraries were a vague dream in a few scattered minds. Unemployment and health insurance were undreamed of: neither locally nor centrally did a competent civil service exist. Typhus and cholera still raged in the great towns. The enfranchisement of the masses was dreaded by an aristocracy which controlled at least a third of the seats in the House of Commons and was the major part of every cabinet. Newspapers were few, and so expensive that even those who could read could hardly afford them unless their situation was comparatively comfortable. The standard of living was, at best, one-quarter of what it is to-day. Maternity and child welfare were unknown. The "condition of England" question did not, until the time of Robert Owen and the Chartist movement, make any serious impact upon the mind of that generation. The notion that a working man had the right to state his case in the House of Commons would have been regarded as an outrage by even the most advanced members of the leading political parties of the day.

The Popular Will

The change from a negative to a positive State is the history, slow, it is true, but sure, of the deliberate use of the power of the State to mitigate the consequences of social inequality. It was a change which came piece by piece; but what is significant in its coming was the fact that it was always a response made by the political party in power to the demands of the working-class voter to share in the gain as well as in the toil of living. He wanted to see his needs translated into terms of statute; and because he exercised an increasingly active political power, he had the right to compel that response. But that right would have been meaningless unless he could call for the support of an active body of citizens, able to say what they wanted, accustomed to organise, and capable of protecting their power to convince others that they were entitled to secure the satisfaction of their claims. The condition, in a word, of social progress was the increasing acceptance of the rights of man, the recognition that these inhered in him as a citizen regardless of class or creed or race. The rights of man meant, and were understood increasingly to mean, that the popular will, and only the popular will, was the effective source of power.

The Tyrant's Will

It is not necessary to deny the inadequate fulfilment of all that this development has made possible to recognise that upon the conception it embodies the whole fulfilment of personality depends. For once the conception is denied that it is the obligation of all governments to respect these rights, that their claim to obedience rests upon that respect, it follows at once that citizens are transformed from persons with the right to be consulted, with the opportunity, therefore, of influence, into persons with no prospect of influence and no function save the duty passively to accept the orders that are issued to them by government.

There is no place then in the State for consent; power is bound to rest upon naked coercion. All criticism becomes proof of ill-will; all opposition is transformed into conspiracy. The only means, in such an atmosphere, that the government can have of knowing the mind of its citizens is by espionage; and dependence upon such means involves, that it may retain its power, the suppression of all whom it is unable to coerce into active support. The symbols of its regime then become the secret police and the concentration camp. It is driven to coerce because it no longer feels able to persuade.

Having, therefore, made intolerance its central principle of action, it can no longer treat human beings as ends; they become, inevitably, mere instruments of purposes upon which it has decided. They have no right to share in the making of those purposes; they are deprived of the opportunity to speak their minds about them. All that is demanded of them is the mentality of slaves; and every aspect of intellectual life is rigorously co-ordinated to produce that mentality. Order and obedience become the highest good; freedom is decried as an evil thing. The atmosphere, as always happens under dictatorship, breeds arrogance and cruelty in those who rule, servility and hypocrisy in those who obey. And because, as again always happens under a dictatorship, some compensation must be offered to a people for its slavery, conquest abroad is attempted to draw the mind of its subjects away from their misery and servitude at home. Over two thousand years ago, Aristotle, analysing the experience of that ancient world he knew so profoundly, remarked that the end of dictatorship is war. The tyrant cannot afford the luxury of peace; he requires the drama of external conflict to build his victims into that desperate unity which would otherwise be destroyed in civil war at home.

II

The Nazi System

This prologue is the background in which it is necessary to set the proper perspective of the Nazi system. The explanation of Hitler's rise to power is not a simple one. Partly, it was due to the frustrated nationalism which hungered for revenge after defeat in the War of 1914. Partly, also, it was the outcome of the grave economic crisis which previous German governments were unable to solve. Partly, again, it was due to the fact that constitutional government, which, in a full sense, was new in Germany, was associated with defeat and economic crisis; it paid the penalty for sins for which it had little responsibility save the lack of will to repress conspirators. Division among its friends, a propaganda of consistent lying, the formation of private armies condoned by high officials and financed by organised reaction, the use of violence against men too proud (or too weak) to retort in kind, even though they had the legal right and duty to repress it, the general misery of a population psychologically weary of endless political conflict resulting always in weak government, all these played their part. Something is due to mean intrigue, not a little to the faithless betrayal of his high office by President Hindenburg. The outcome of these complexities was the admission of Hitler to the Chancellorship of the German Reich in January 1933. The outcome of his accession to power was not merely the destruction of the rights of man. The outcome was the establishment of a regime which denies all validity to the conception of human rights. Its maker boasts openly that his only purpose is the predominance of the German State in Europe, and that everything must be sacrificed to securing that predominance.

The Nazi Method

The results are stark indeed. Let us set out in detail what has been done to this end and the methods by which it has been achieved.

1. No opposition to the government is permitted. All organisations, therefore, the principles of which are opposed to those of the government are destroyed; all organisations the members of which express, as individuals, doubts of, or hostility to, the methods of the regime are persecuted. There is, therefore, only one political party, the Nazi Party; all others, without exception, have been suppressed. The government and the Nazi Party are now identical. There are no longer elections to the legislature. Local self-government, in the British sense, has disappeared; in its stead, its destinies are entrusted to officials appointed by, and responsible to, the Nazis. From time to time a plebiscite approving Hitler's policies has been taken. The fact that ninety-eight to ninety-nine per cent. of the population has voted, and that all but a handful of them have voted in his favour, is ample proof that the voting is unfree when it is remembered that, in the last free elections to the legislature, he did not obtain, as in a free election he has never obtained, a majority there. The legislature still meets occasionally to hear a pronouncement from him. But it is immediately dismissed, and that without the right of discussion, even though its members have been hand-picked by the Nazi Party.

Labour

2. All the trade unions have been abolished. Workers are organised into a "Labour Front", the main officials of which are appointed by the Nazi Party. There is no right to strike, and all industrial differences are settled by the officials of the Labour Front, that is, by the government. It is obviously a consequence of this that there has been a serious decline in wages and that the hours of labour have been considerably lengthened since the Nazis came to power.

3. As the trade unions have gone, so also the co-operative movement has been destroyed as a free form of control by organised consumers. Its connection with similar democratic movements abroad has been sufficient to make it suspect to a party which will tolerate no criticism of its will.

Religion

4. Organised religion has been fiercely attacked by the government wherever it has failed to accept the aims of Nazism. Those who sought, in the Protestant churches, to render to Cæsar what was due to Cæsar and to God the things that are God's, have been cut off from financial support, forbidden to preach, to use the property of the Church, or to publish their opinions; in extreme cases of protest, they have been sent, like the famous Pastor Niemöller, to concentration camps. A pagan religion, under the patronage of Rosenberg, the "philosopher" of Nazism, has been encouraged. The Roman Catholic Church, despite a concordat between Hitler and the Holy See, has been even more severely treated. Its courageous refusal to accept the monstrous racial theories of the Nazis has led to what is called the "White" war against priests and nuns. Scandalous trials have been staged against them for currency violations and moral turpitude; and hundreds have been sent to prison and concentration camps. The leaders of the Nazi Party are openly contemptuous of Christianity, partly because its insistence on the universality of the rights of man is inconsistent with Nazi racial theory, and partly, no doubt, because they greatly covet the immense property of the Churches as a fund through which to cope with their financial difficulties.

Freedom of Thought

5. There is no longer any freedom of opinion in the German Reich. All newspapers, periodicals, books, plays, music, art, the wireless and the films are under the censorship of the notorious Dr. Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda. Nothing can be published which is not approved by his Department, and the "line" to be taken by publications is indicated to their authors. No one, either, may be a journalist unless he is a member of the journalists' organisation, admission to which depends upon the Ministry's approval. Broadly speaking, therefore, the German people has no access to any information save what the Ministry of Propaganda approves. It is a serious offence to listen to foreign broadcasts. Much of the socialist and democratic literature of the past is now inaccessible to readers except by permission. Famous German writers of Jewish origin, like Heine, may no longer be quoted; and important works of

modern scientists, like those, for instance, of Freud and Einstein, are officially banned, either because they are by Jews, or because their tendency is disapproved by the government.

Education

6. All forms of education have been strictly subordinated to Nazi purposes. Thousands of "unsound" teachers, i.e., teachers who were suspected of a lack of sympathy with Nazism, have been dismissed. The curriculum has been transformed so that the glorification of war and Nazi racial theories are now an essential element in it. From the earliest period, children are indoctrinated with the worship of Hitler. They are even encouraged to report at school any criticisms of the regime they may hear at home. The purpose is to produce a well-regimented mass obedient to the discipline imposed from above. In the Universities, hundreds of the most eminent professors have been compelled to resign, and their places, only too often, have been taken by incompetent party hacks. Lists have even been compiled of names students may not cite in their doctoral theses; many of these—those, for instance, of Spinoza and Karl Marx—are recognised outside Nazi Germany as among the supreme names in our intellectual heritage. The German student, in short, is being made the prisoner of a narrow and imposed tradition, conformity with which is the condition of a successful career. It is not, therefore, remarkable that careful observers report a decline in the standards of all German Universities, even in the more technical subjects like medicine and the physical sciences.

Justice

7. It is the frank claim of Hitler that the law is simply the embodiment of his supreme will. In the service of this definition, the older independence of the courts has gone; gone, also, is the notion of fixed legal rules. "Law is what is useful to the German nation." In accordance with this view, all judicial officers not willing to act in this spirit have been removed from the Bench, and their places taken by party-members. Trials need no longer be held in public. Punishments are immensely more severe. It is even dangerous to defend those whom the government has decided to find guilty; the defender of Thälmann, the Communist leader, for example, was a distinguished ex-naval officer who, after 1918, took up the study of the law. For attempting to take the defence of his client with the proper seriousness, he was sent to a concentration camp, whence he escaped abroad. It is possible to be held for long periods without trial. It is possible to be accused of one offence and to be convicted, not on that ground, but because the court holds that the accused's attitude is incompatible with the well-being of the State. In the People's Court, a revolutionary tribunal with the right to inflict the highest penalties, two of the three members are chosen from amongst the Nazi Party "because of their special knowledge of the defence against subversive activities, or because they are most intimately connected with the political trends of the nation". It is as though, in Britain, leading members of the Conservative Party were to judge their opponents in political cases when a Conservative government was in office, and leading members of the Labour Party to do the same for their opponents when the Labour Party was in office. Obviously, under such circumstances, a fair trial is impossible. And this impossibility is made even greater when the law orders punishment for such vague offences as acts "deemed in conflict with the healthy sentiment of the people" even when no specific statute has been violated. Law, under the Nazis, is degraded to the position of a mere instrument of a political party.

Terror

8. But there is not merely the tragedy of this degradation of the law. The Nazi Party rules by terror, and its weapons are the secret police and the concentration camp. The activities of the former are endless. Its real business is to prevent the growth of criticism and opposition in Germany. It opens private correspondence; it taps private telephones; it installs dictaphones in private houses, even, it is alleged, in the embassies of foreign Powers; it organises espionage through hired and voluntary informers; it uses *agents-provocateurs*; it even organises the kidnapping of enemies of the regime living abroad. It has the power of detention without trial, and literally scores of thousands of its victims, some, no doubt, guilty, but the overwhelming majority innocent of any offence, have been sent to concentration camps. There, as we know

from incontrovertible evidence, terrorism is the normal order of the day. Men are beaten, tortured, starved, subjected to indescribable humiliations, often for no other offence than being a Jew, or having had "liberal" or socialist convictions. At least hundreds have died as the result of their treatment in these camps, many have committed suicide; many have been driven insane. Outright murder by the camp guards—often concealed under the fiction of "shot whilst trying to escape"—has not been infrequent.

The purpose of the system is to terrorise the masses into obedience; and the worst features of it have been employed against supporters of the regime whose loyalty has been for some reason suspected, not less than against its opponents. Jews and Communists have perhaps suffered most. But perhaps the most striking example of the Brown Terror was the infamous night of June 30, 1934, when Hitler and Göring were directly responsible, under hideous circumstances, for the assassination of some thousands of their own supporters, including some of the best-known members of the party, for alleged conspiracy. No proofs of that conspiracy have ever been produced; and Hitler's only justification for what was, in fact, simply a brutal mass-murder was that on that June night he represented "the supreme embodiment of justice".

The Leader and the Race

9. Underlying these methods are two conceptions, neither of which can be termed intelligible to a British citizen. The first is the conception of the Führer (leader) as the incarnation, almost the Divine incarnation, of the German people, through whom its mission is to be fulfilled. The second, closely related to the first, is the conception of the German people as the embodiment of the highest racial values, the true State-builders, the essential pioneers in science and culture, the great creators of eternal works of art. The German race is the noblest of all races; its purity must be safeguarded at all costs. It is entitled to dominate all others; by so doing it gives to the world a higher culture than any inferior race can do. To preserve its purity, the German State is entitled to control all Germans who live under other States; it is thus the fulfilment of a racial obligation to bring Austria, Memel, Danzig and the Sudetenland under the power of Germany. That, also, is why German minorities living abroad, as in the South Tyrol and the Baltic States, must be repatriated to Germany; why, again, those Germans who continue to live abroad, as, for example, in the United States of America, owe their first allegiance to the German race, and, hence to the German State which is its political expression.

To preserve "racial" purity, marriage between Germans, and certain "inferior" races is forbidden; and compulsory sterilisation may be imposed on persons in whom hereditary disease may injure the purity of the "race". Physicians are compelled by law to notify all such diseases to the health authorities. It is reliably asserted that over half-a-million persons have been sterilised on these grounds; and the code of domestic relations and of inheritance has been harshly revolutionised in the name of a supposed "racial science" that is adjudged worthless by every competent biologist in every country outside the Nazi realm. The whole conception is simply a fantastic notion of Hitler's, picked up by him from writers whose authority he was quite incompetent to judge, and imposed on the German people by him only because the law is simply his will and there is no one to say him nay.

The Jews

10. The most tragic aspect of this "racialism" is the results it has had upon the position of the Jews. Anti-Semitism is one of Hitler's cardinal beliefs, and he attributes all the ills of civilisation to the Jews. As soon as he came into power, their wholesale persecution began. They were rapidly eliminated from all public offices. They were denied the right to practise in any of the main professions. They could not write for the Press or act in the theatre. They were excluded from the Universities beyond one and one-half per cent. of the total student-body. They had to sit on special benches in the elementary schools. Marriage or sex-relations between Jews and Germans was made a crime. They were deprived of all civic rights. They cannot be members of the Labour Front. They are excluded from many towns, and from many areas and public buildings in other towns. Thousands of them have been sent to concentration-camps, for no offence but being born a Jew. Thousands more have been compelled to sell their businesses to non-Jewish Germans with heavy loss. Thousands, again (it is probable that the number is more than 150,000) have been driven into exile, often with the loss of

everything they possess. The synagogues have been desecrated. Pogroms have been frequent. Enormous fines have been imposed on the Jewish community in Germany.

The extreme agony of the persecution was reached on January 1, 1939, when an ordinance prohibited any Jew from the ownership or operation of any retail or wholesale business, or from the occupation of an independent artisan; and all Jewish children were compelled to attend special Jewish schools. Almost all avenues of employment, in fact, are now closed to the Jew, and the choice before him is that of emigration or starvation. The organ, indeed, of the Hitler guard, wrote of these measures that the day had now come when impoverished Jewry "would sink into criminality and could be wiped out by fire and sword". Yet when Hitler came to power in January 1933, the whole Jewish community of Germany represented only half a million citizens in a nation of over seventy millions.

Nothing like these infamies has been known in Europe since the worst excesses of the Middle Ages. They have been condemned by public opinion all over the world. Great public figures, the Pope, the President of the United States, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, have given expression to their horror at these brutalities; President Roosevelt, in November 1938, withdrew the American Ambassador from Berlin as a protest against them.

As a campaign, it has been based upon accusations again and again refuted, and no longer accepted by any rational mind. Its explanation lies, probably, in three realms. In part, it is the outcome of the pathological psychology of Hitler himself; the depth of this is evident from his discussion of, indeed obsession with, the Jewish problem. In part, it is the result of the need, inherent in any dictatorship built upon terror, to have an enemy to whom all wrong can be attributed, and against whom victories may be continually announced. In part, further, the persecution of the Jews has provided opportunities for satisfying Hitler's followers with the posts, in the professions and businesses, the Jews formerly occupied. But the whole world has realised how evil a thing it is to revive, as the considered practice of a government, barbaric intolerance from which, for centuries, humanity has been striving to rid itself. To accustom a nation to accept persecution as part of its way of life is to sap its moral foundations. The men who were trained and encouraged to destroy the Jews are the men who have gone on, by a natural sequence, to impose revolting cruelties on Czechs and Poles. Persecution becomes a habit which grows by what it feeds on.

The State is All

11. Underlying all the strategy of the Nazi system there lies one central principle of the first importance: a complete contempt for the common man. The underlying assumption of the Nazi regime is the unimportance of the individual. In countless speeches and writings, Hitler and his chief followers have emphasised this view. The masses are made only to be led. They are plastic material to be moulded by the leader into any shape he pleases. They are not fit to exercise power; that is the business of a specially chosen governing class alone fit to preside over the destinies of the State. They are convinced that there is no limit to the degree in which the people can be deceived; its natural role is submission. In itself, it is ignorant and anarchic, and incapable of great actions save as it is dominated by the leader's will. Left to itself, the people is pacifist and materialist; it becomes capable of greatness only as the leader subdues it to purposes he only can understand.

The Hitler Government, therefore, rejects all the democratic and liberal notions of Western civilisation. The individual has no rights, but only duties. He is not an end in himself, but the means to another end which the leader defines. His duty, therefore, is simply to obey the will of the State as that is shaped by the leader. It is treason to question it, it is a betrayal of the folk-spirit in which alone he can find his meaning. He must not criticise the findings of that spirit; to do so is to weaken it by a rationalism which, because it doubts, jeopardises the unity of the nation. To maintain that unity, to keep it ever more strong, is the highest task of the State. Beside it, the happiness of the ordinary man is nothing; his little purposes must give way to that supreme purpose.

It is upon this basis that the whole legislation and organisation of Nazi society has been built. Man is educated for the State; he lives and works for the State; woman, in her turn, is an instrument to breed children for the State. And in return, the individual can comfort himself with the knowledge that, as the State grows ever more strong, it becomes the dominating factor in the life of the world. What it wants, it takes. Whatever it wants, it is justified in taking since it is the organised expression of the people that is called to rule the world. To fulfil that mission everything is justified. The

goodness of a treaty, the rightness of a war, the validity of domestic legislation, all these depend upon the single test of whether they lead to the fulfilment of the national mission. The leader is his people; his will is its law. Where he goes, it must follow, and he is always right. The only test of his actions is their success. He has the right to do whatever he has the power to achieve. His only sin is weakness.

III

The Western Ideal

No one can compare the way of life this outlook embodies with that of the civilisation to which we are accustomed in Britain without recognising at once that it is incompatible with all the major things we value. The last hundred years, at least, of our history have been the record of a continuous and persistent effort to break down the barriers of privilege in the interest of ordinary men and women; the seven years of the Nazi regime are the history of a deliberate and conscious effort to build up a new privileged class whose will alone is to count in the direction of the State. We have sought increasingly to realise equality before the law; the Nazi regime is a denial that this is legitimate. We have attempted to protect the individual in his civic capacity by insisting that his experience must be taken account of, that he may freely report it, that he may organise to make it effective; the Nazi philosophy starts by an insistence on the worthlessness of individual experience. We have given independence to our judges because there is no government we are prepared to trust to be at once prosecutor and judge in its own cause; the Nazis have made the judge the creature of the State and, even beyond that, have given the police an authority over citizens which may make thought itself a dangerous adventure. We have insisted that no government is fit to rule unless, at stated intervals, it has to justify its policy to those from whom it has derived its power; the Nazi scheme confers permanent authority upon Hitler and his followers without any right in the people to judge of its results. Religious toleration, racial equality, the right of each nation-state to live its life in its own way, these principles we have sought increasingly to make the basis of our national and international policy; all of them are denied by those who now shape the destinies of the Nazi State.

Greece and Christianity

In a broad way, the path which, until the advent of the Nazis to power in Germany, Western civilisation as a whole was seeking to follow was one which resulted from the impact on our lives of the philosophies of Greece and Christianity. Its keynote was the discovery of the infinite worth of the individual human being, the insistence that the justification of social institutions lay in their power to evoke that worth and to give it the increasing chance of fulfilment. Democracy and toleration were born of nearly three thousand years' growing confidence in the validity of this ideal. It was a confidence, be it added, increasingly proven in human experience. We found that men excluded from a share in power were excluded, also, from the benefits of power. We found that all governments which were free from popular control inevitably tended to degenerate. We found that the rule of one, or of a few, bred arrogance and cruelty in those who exercised power, and servility and brutishness in those who were its subjects. We found that, in every society, the more numerous the citizens who shared in the active life of the State, the more responsive did it prove to the wants they felt. We found, perhaps above all, that the more profoundly we could build the policy of the State upon the free consent of its citizens, the greater was the moral self-respect they displayed. We could not regard the State as something different from its citizens. It found its fulfilment in their fulfilment, its success was their successes. Its power lay in the happiness they achieved through its operations.

This is the central tradition of Western civilisation. For all its imperfections in realisation, it is the tradition to the fulfilment of which, in increasing measure, all modern history has contributed. It is, let it be noted, a tradition which all political parties have shared in common. Conservative and Socialist, Liberal and even Communist, Christian and Jew and Agnostic, may have differed about its realisation in method or in pace; about the validity of the large ends it has in view they have hardly differed at all. To make the common man the master of his own destiny; to recognise in democratic freedom the atmosphere in which that mastery can alone be attained; to insist that the attainment of democratic freedom

means the admission of rights in the citizen which the State denies at its peril; these have been the accepted commonplaces of Western civilisation. However often they have been denied, in the long run they have always triumphed over their denial; and whenever they have been denied, the abuse of authority for ends incapable of national justification has always been the consequence. Those who have sought to resist their affirmation have seemed, as Edmund Burke once said, to resist the eternal principle of human dignity.

It is against this central tradition of Western civilisation that Nazism is in revolt. It seeks power for the sake of power. It is hostile to freedom, hostile to rights, hostile to the vital postulate of the infinite worth of human beings. What it cannot convince, it is prepared to coerce; what it cannot take by duplicity, as in the case of Prague, it is prepared to take by violence, as in the case of Warsaw. Because it refuses to admit the validity of any experience of which its leaders do not approve, it will persecute and destroy as it hacks its way to power. There is nothing new in Nazism; an old tyranny wears only a new mask. It is uglier than past tyrannies because it is better organised, more cruel because it is more efficient. But it raises an ancient question once again, even if more sharply and more poignantly than in any previous time.

The Evil Challenge

It is the question of whether the masses are to be free men with rights, or slaves without rights, who live therefore at the behest of others. Mankind has faced that challenge before; and answered it triumphantly. No doubt in the form in which it is made to-day it is more brutal and more menacing than any since the Reformation; rarely in the past have those who sought to subdue the world to their despotism boasted of the ugly methods by which they propose to fulfil their purpose. But it is natural that this should be the case. To put a whole people in chains, as the Nazis have put the German people in chains, has struck with horror all those who still cherish the traditions of our essential inheritance. To seek to make the whole world a prison of which the Nazi leaders are the jailers could only be accomplished by men to whom that tradition has ceased to have meaning. They are driven by the logic of their attitude to refuse to men those rights for which they have fought for over two thousand years. For those rights are incompatible with their power; they are intended to be the safeguards against their manner of its exercise. The Nazi leaders represent that ultimate corruption of the human spirit which pervades and infects every government which denies its responsibility to ordinary men. Like the Satan of Milton's great epic they have identified good with evil. In battling against the ends they seek to realise we are fighting to restore the authority of procedures upon which the whole quality of civilised life has been found to depend.

One final word may be said in defending, as in this war we are defending, the concept of the rights of man against the claims of naked power; we defend a cause as high as there is in the record of mankind. It will not be an easy victory; and its accomplishment on any showing, will be attended with grave risks. The vital task before us is not merely to win; even more, it is to win by the method of freedom. The way to vindicate our rights against the challenge they have encountered is to make them everywhere more ample and more profound. The way to attack the principle of despotism is to make the principle of our democratic faith more living that its hold upon the common man may be more profound. There is, on the experience of history, an active strength in the free consent of democratic peoples which has an endurance beyond the power of any tyranny to rival. The source of that strength is in the faith of the common man that those who govern him respect his rights and search for their enlargement in terms of his demands. Where faith can evoke that loyalty, a people can meet its challenge with confidence. It has those qualities of magnanimity and wisdom upon its side against which the "evil things" have never, in the long run, been able to prevail.

MACMILLAN
WAR PAMPHLETS

1. LET THERE BE LIBERTY

A. P. HERBERT

2. WAR WITH HONOUR

A. A. MILNE

3. NORDIC TWILIGHT

E. M. FORSTER

4. THE CROOKED CROSS

THE DEAN OF CHICHESTER

5. NAZI AND NAZARENE

RONALD KNOX

6. WHEN I REMEMBER...

J. R. CLYNES

7. FOR CIVILIZATION

C. E. M. JOAD

8. THE RIGHTS OF MAN

HAROLD J. LASKI

[End of *The Rights of Man* by Harold Laski]