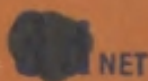


**DYNAMIC
DEMOCRACY**

FRANCIS WILLIAMS

**MACMILLAN
WAR PAMPHLETS**

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DYNAMIC DEMOCRACY

Labour During the War

By

FRANCIS WILLIAMS

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Mr. Williams is well qualified to write about the part played by the Trades Unions in the war. He has been Editor of the *Daily Herald*, and has for many years been associated with the Labour movement. Though he touches upon the activities

of the Parliamentary Labour Party since September 1939, his main subject is Trade Unionism in wartime. The determination of the Trades Unions to co-operate in our war effort, their attitude towards Industrial conscription, the increasingly realised importance of their status, the contribution they can make to post-war reconstruction—these are some of the questions Mr. Williams deals with. This pamphlet persuasively supports his conviction that, so far from curtailing or suspending our practice of democracy, the war has strengthened and expanded it.

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DYNAMIC DEMOCRACY

Most people in Britain, before the war, agreed that it would inevitably bring with it a temporary suspension of much of the machinery of democracy. Democracy, we said, cannot be expected to function fully in a total war. We must be prepared to accept a suspension of the practice of democracy in order to fight efficiently for the principles of democracy.

We were, in fact, most of us although not all of us, so prepared. We were ready to see a great many of what one may term the practical instruments of democracy put on the shelf in order that we might the better generate the efficiency needed to beat Nazism. What I think few of us expected was that so far from there being a suspension of democracy during the war, we should see it expanding, developing and gaining new strength and doing so precisely because it proved itself the most efficient instrument for mobilising national power. But that is what has happened. It has happened especially in the important sector of community affairs with which this pamphlet is particularly concerned: the relationship between the State and the organised working-class movement.

The Three-legged Stool

All political systems are like three-legged stools, if one of the legs is weak the balance of the whole is upset. They depend for their stability first upon an agreed political philosophy, a common conception, that is, of the kind of ends society should try to secure, second upon a practical system of government and third upon a habit of mind among their adherents. And although an agreed and intelligible political philosophy is of the first importance, for everything flows from that, the practical working success of a political system depends even more upon the kind of machinery of government which it develops as the instrument of its

philosophy and upon the kind of community attitude it develops among its members.

The war has, I believe, already brought in Britain a deepened understanding of the philosophy of democracy. There is much accumulating evidence that this is so.

But what I am concerned with here is the bread and butter of democracy. How it works. What kind of instruments it has evolved for the practical application of its philosophy and how these instruments have been affected by war.

The essence of democracy in action is government by agreement and co-operation. The forms of democracy may change and indeed must change to meet altered situations and new circumstances. That does not matter so long as the new forms are an effective expression of what is cardinal in democracy. Two things are cardinal. The first is the recognition by the State of the importance of ordinary men and women and the acknowledgement by those who rule that their authority springs solely from the will of the people and can be determined by the will of the people, that they govern not as the masters of the community but as its servants and that the State itself is justified only as an instrument of service and ceases to be justified if it becomes an instrument of coercion. The second is the recognition by ordinary men and women that the State is not something apart from themselves but an expression of their communal will, that they are a part of it and that its effectiveness as an instrument of democracy depends upon their service to it and their participation in it.

A Test of Democracy

It will not, I think, be denied on the evidence of all the dictatorships that one of the primary tests by which the democracy of a country can be judged is the relationship between the Government and the free associations of workers which we call the trades unions. Wherever totalitarianism exists, whether it be in Germany or Italy or Spain or Russia, there the free association of workers in independent trades unions is not allowed lest such free association should set up a counter authority to that of the State. There were many who feared, and some perhaps who hoped, that the war would mean a curtailment of the freedom and authority of the trades unions in Britain and that the rights which organised workers had secured over many years would be among the first of the democratic achievements to be put into cold storage. But the reverse has been the case. The trades unions have secured a new authority during the war and have done so not in opposition to the State but in partnership with it. Their importance as instruments of democracy has been recognised as never before and they have acquired a partnership status in matters of economic and industrial policy which they did not formerly possess. And that, I suggest, is a very important extension of democracy.

I must here make it clear that I am not stating that the war has brought a rapid advance towards socialism which is the political objective of the trades union movement and of its

political partner the Labour Party—or even towards greater social equality. That is an arguable matter. I myself believe, and it is only fair that I should make my bias in this matter clear to the reader, that a full realisation of the principles of democracy is only possible in a socialist society and I should like to see a more rapid advance towards such a society during the war than there is yet much sign of although I think there has been some.

But this belief of mine, with which you may violently disagree, does not affect the strict issue with which I am dealing; that there has been during the war an immense development in the status and authority of the trades union movement in Britain and that this development is a notable example of democratic growth in war quite irrespective of the purposes for which the trades unions do or do not use their new authority.

Labour and the War

This extension of the authority and democratic usefulness of the trades union movement has largely run concurrently with, and has in part been due to, the co-operation of its political partner, the Labour Party, in the Government, but we shall best appreciate its full significance if we look back upon the relationship of Labour and the trades unions to the war effort from the beginning.

There was never of course any doubt as to Labour and trades union support for the war. Both the political and industrial sides of the British workers' movement had been utterly opposed to Nazism and Fascism from their beginnings. They had consistently been against Appeasement, holding that such a policy merely strengthened the dictatorships and incited them to new demands and fresh aggressions. Although much of the early tradition of political labour had been pacifist in its inspiration and much of the Labour movement's strength had come to it from its opposition to war policies, it cast aside the hesitations inherited with that tradition and prepared to work for a full mobilisation of the national war strength in face of the rise of the Nazi creed whose international menace it had been among the first to recognise.

But it was not, when war was declared, prepared to support the Government in all its policies. Immediately after the outbreak of war Mr. Chamberlain sent for Arthur Greenwood, the acting leader of the Labour Party in the House of Commons, and asked whether he and other Labour leaders would join the Cabinet. Mr. Greenwood said no, and his decision was unanimously confirmed by the Parliamentary Party. He said no, as he told me when we met for a talk on the situation that same evening, for two reasons. One was that he did not feel, and his Parliamentary colleagues did not feel, that they had sufficient confidence in the Chamberlain Government in view of its past record for them to co-operate in it. And the other was that they did not feel that political co-operation at that stage was the most effective way in which they could help on the war effort.

They felt that the most valuable work they could do at that time was from outside as informed and responsible critics.

But even at that time they did not envisage themselves remaining as independent critics throughout the war. Their decision was largely based on the conviction that the Chamberlain Government was incapable, by its nature, of being transformed into a vigorous and efficient war administration and would soon collapse, giving way to a stronger Government within which effective co-operation would be more possible. Until that collapse, their own best work could be done from outside. But they foresaw, and were, even at that early stage, perfectly prepared for, co-operation in a more representative Government later.

Critical Co-operation

One of the first things the Parliamentary Labour Party did during those early days of war was to charge each of its Front Bench leaders with the job of devoting himself to a particular aspect of the war situation and of keeping closely in touch with the Minister concerned with it. Around these leaders there were grouped members with expert knowledge of the subject.

In adopting this new but essentially democratic method of 'critical co-operation' the political side of the Labour movement used political instruments to do much the same kind of thing as the trades unions were doing industrially.

The trades unions, like their political partner, were critical and suspicious of the Government but solidly behind the war. They were anxious to co-operate to the fullest possible extent in mobilising the national strength. Anxious is indeed in this connection too weak a word. They were *determined* to co-operate. They set themselves to sweep away any obstacle placed in the way of co-operation. At first a number of obstacles were placed in the way—or were perhaps not so much deliberately placed there as allowed to accumulate simply because the Government then in power had not accustomed itself to the idea that the Trades Union Movement could become an even more forceful instrument of democratic efficiency in war than in peace. The trades unions determined to break down that attitude.

Underlying the determination of the trades unions to obtain complete recognition of their right to co-operation on a basis of equal partnership in all matters affecting the industrial mobilisation of the nation for war, there have been three main principles.

The first is the conviction that the purpose of the trades unions in a modern society should be much bigger than the negotiation of wages and conditions of labour or the employment of the strike weapon to secure such ends when other methods have failed. Although the securing of reasonable wages and conditions must always remain a basic purpose of their existence, the trades unions have seen their function as greater than this. They have been concerned to help forward social and economic reconstruction, to analyse economic and industrial situations in order to avoid unnecessary dislocation, and to use their experience, their

knowledge and their power to plan an orderly advance to a more stable world.

Secondly, they have been concerned to establish their status, and that of their common organisation the Trades Union Congress, as an integral part of the national community.

And, finally, they have been concerned to use their power to safeguard individual freedom and voluntary systems of organisation.

Planning and Policy Making

As the trades unions have increased in power so have they grown in vision. Because of this the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, which has little defined jurisdiction over its member unions and might have become simply a loose kind of liaison organisation for settling differences between them, has become increasingly a planning and policy-making organisation which has taken the widest possible view of its functions and has established skilled research departments to assist it. It has been helped enormously in this growth by the good fortune of having in its General Secretary, Sir Walter Citrine, an industrial statesman and administrator of the first rank, whose influence on its development has been immense.

It was natural, therefore, that the trades unions should face the problems of war in no narrow spirit and that, having recognised from the beginning the menace of Nazism, they should be determined that the co-operation they offered in the national war effort should be co-operation in fields very much wider than those concerned with working conditions alone.

It is important, too, to recognise that although the trades union movement is politically affiliated to the Labour Party, because that party best represents in the political field the kind of social and economic ideals which inspire it, and because it is well aware that the fundamental changes in society which it desires can only, in a democratic society—and it is unshakably democratic—be achieved by parliamentary means, it has never been prepared to regard itself as simply an industrial appendage of political socialism. It has become steadily more conscious of the fact that the trades unions, although they are a part, and a very fundamental part, of the whole Labour movement, are also independent organisations having a status and place of their own in democratic society.

The Status of the Unions

It has been jealous of that status for two reasons. First because the leaders of the trades union movement have been well aware that on many matters of vital concern to their members and to the whole body of workers and their families

represented by these members they could speak to a non-Labour Government with much more effectiveness and authority as industrial leaders than as members of a rival political party. And, secondly, because they have been very conscious that the need for an effective and powerful trades union movement would not cease even with the return of a Labour Government to power, and that even under socialism the necessity of independent trades union organisation would remain. They have not been prepared to accept the view that the trades unions are to be regarded merely as a kind of by-product of a system of private capitalism brought into existence to safeguard wage-earners against a capitalist exploitation which will pass with the transition from private capitalism to socialism. They believe that the method of collective bargaining which they have developed with such power and success will be hardly less necessary than at present when the employer of labour is the socialist State or socialised public corporations set up by the State. Moreover they hold strongly that, over and above their defensive purposes, the trades unions have a very definite constructive contribution to make to the development of a juster, more stable and more efficient economic system, and that their contribution can only be fully made if they remain independent and free. They are not prepared to accept, even in a socialist society with whose Government they are in agreement, the kind of status possessed by the controlled trades unions of Soviet Russia. They believe that an independent trades union organisation is an essential element of any truly democratic society, and that the stronger that organisation is and the higher its status the more firmly founded democracy will be.

They have, therefore, throughout the war been very jealous of that status—not out of any narrow concern with prestige—but because an increase in the status of the trades union movement and a wider recognition of the importance of its place in the community organisation of the State has seemed to them essential both to the safeguarding of democracy during war and to the securing of the largest practicable co-operation from the great body of workers.

A Democratic Example

Finally, the trades unions have been very conscious of their importance as a bulwark of freedom. They have seen how in every instance dictatorships have sought to destroy independent trades unions as the most powerful defenders of the ordinary man and woman against oppression and serfdom, and they have been determined that the inevitable, and indeed essential, relaxation of some trades union regulations to meet wartime conditions shall not weaken the essential structure and strength of the trades union movement. They have felt, in the words of Ernest Bevin in January 1939, that "We have to be extremely careful that in establishing an organisation to resist tyranny we do not lose our liberty."

They have, moreover, been conscious from the first of the fact that, not only in their aspirations but in their practical workings, they set an example of democracy in operation which has an application to far wider circles than their own.

This point of view was well expressed by the then President of the trades union Congress, Mr. J. Hallsworth, at the Annual Congress held in September 1939, immediately after the declaration of war, when he said: "I am convinced that the warring world in which we live will find its salvation only in the practice of this same trades union principle of co-operation in free association to maintain an international system of justice, order and law. It is the essence of democracy."

These, then, are the principles which the trades unions have kept in mind in the methods and policies they have initiated or endorsed in their collaboration in the national war effort—a collaboration inspired and energised by their overwhelming belief in democracy and their certain knowledge that the defeat of Nazi Germany is necessary if democracy is to survive. How have these principles been applied in the practical collaboration which has been achieved?

Demand for Partnership

The story begins before the war, in December 1938, when voluntary recruitment on a large scale was launched for the armed forces and the Civil Defence services. It was then announced that the Ministry of Labour had already done most of the preliminary work of classifying reserved occupations—occupations that is, so important to the national effort that men working in them must not volunteer

for other service—although the Government spokesman, Sir John Anderson, went on to promise that in settling the final details of reserved occupations representatives of employers and work people would be consulted. But that was not enough for the trades unions. They wanted a more responsible partnership than that. Speaking on their behalf Arthur Greenwood declared emphatically in the House of Commons that they could not be content with such a belated and condescending recognition of their existence. "I say," he declared, "that where industrial service is concerned no steps should even be contemplated, let alone taken, without the full co-operation of the trades unions. The trades unions are now an integral part of the structure of modern industry. You cannot do without them."

The insistence, even at this early stage, upon their right to co-operate as an 'integral part of the structure of modern industry' provides the key to the trades unions' attitude during the war.

In May 1939 a special conference of trades union executives was called to consider the whole question of co-operation with the Government in rearmament. The conference met at a bad moment politically, for the trades unions had been deeply disturbed by the Government's decision to introduce military conscription despite what they regarded as a binding pledge to them by Mr. Chamberlain that no such step would be taken without further consultation with them if they were ready, as they were, to support a voluntary recruiting campaign.

I well remember the atmosphere in which that conference met. Many trades union leaders were angry at what they regarded as a breach of faith. There appeared to be a strong group led by one powerful trades union in favour of refusing all further collaboration. That was not, however, the attitude of the majority of the T.U.C. General Council. It put forward detailed proposals for the organisation of labour in wartime which had been drawn up after the General Council had met the Minister of Labour to discuss the question of labour supply and the regulation of wages and conditions. These proposals envisaged not a withdrawal of collaboration but an extension of it and included the setting up of National Committees for each industry. These Committees, they proposed, should be informed by the Government of its needs and should then take upon themselves the responsibility of evolving the best system of utilising available labour and of setting up machinery for the transference of labour where necessary. The General Council proposed further the appointment of a tri-party advisory committee made up of equal numbers of trades unionists, employers, and Civil Service representatives of the Government to co-ordinate the work of the National Committees.

As the speeches from the platform and from the floor of the hall proceeded it became increasingly clear that, despite the strong feeling against the Conscription Bill, a feeling later expressed in a formal resolution of protest, and despite the opposition of one powerful group on political grounds, the immense majority of those present were convinced that the General Council was right and that there must be more collaboration, not less. But they were equally convinced, as

the General Council itself was, that there must be safeguards which would ensure that such sacrifices as their members were called upon to make as a part of that collaboration should not be used to increase profits. They therefore at the same time called for measures to control prices, limit profits and conscript wealth.

Months of Delay

Although the proposals for National Industrial Committees and for a Central Advisory Committee were forwarded to the Minister of Labour, Mr. Ernest Brown, he did nothing with them until October, several weeks after the war had begun.

During the months immediately preceding the war the trades unions tried again and again to reach terms of whole-hearted co-operation with the Government. They were, for the most part, snubbed. So much so, indeed, that George Gibson, President of the T.U.C. for 1940-1941, has declared: "I do not hesitate to say that when the history of this period comes to be written people will stand amazed at the incompetence—and worse—of some of the Ministers with whom the trades union movement was called upon to deal."

To recall that state of affairs now, when it has been ended, is not to hold a useless inquest into the past. It is to show that the advance to a new conception of the place of the organised Labour movement in a democratic society was not easy.

Even when a meeting with the Minister of Labour was at last held in October 1939 it was clear that the desire of the trades unions to collaborate was not fully matched by the Government.

During the early months of war, indeed, the trades unions felt again and again that they were being deliberately prevented from taking the place to which they felt their experience entitled them. Their bitterness on this account was expressed by Ernest Bevin, the present Minister of Labour, speaking as General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, the largest trades union in the world. "It must be appreciated," he said, "that in their heart of hearts the powers that be are anti-trades union.... The Ministers and Departments have treated Labour with absolute contempt. Yet without the great trades union movement the Forces cannot be supplied with munitions nor the country with food.... We do not desire to be invited to serve on any committee or body as an act of patronage. We represent probably the most vital factor in the State; without our people this war cannot be won nor the life of the country be carried on. The assumption that the only brains in the country are in the heads of the Federation of British Industries and Big Business is one that has got to be corrected."

Finally trades unions decided to force the issue. The General Council of the T.U.C. requested an interview with the Prime Minister, Mr. Chamberlain.

At that interview they demanded, through their General Secretary, Sir Walter Citrine, that the trades union movement

should have full participation in the machinery of war supplies and that there should be full trades union representation on all committees of the Ministry of Supply. They asked further for representation on all local, regional and national food committees and fuel committees. Mr. Chamberlain, with, in this matter, a wider vision than many of his Ministers, agreed. He accepted absolutely, at the interview, the necessity for trades union co-operation and the right of the trades unions to be treated on the same footing as employers' organisations in consultations with Ministers. He gave his word that a 'directive' should immediately be sent to all Ministries to that effect and particularly to the Ministry of Supply. Subsequently there were further discussions with the Prime Minister and the Minister of Supply and a Central Advisory Committee to that Ministry was set up consisting of equal representatives of trades unions and employers.

The trades unions had won their point at last.

The Change of Government

But it was not until the fall of the Chamberlain Government in May 1940 and the formation of a new Government under Mr. Winston Churchill with Labour and Liberal support that they entered into their true inheritance and achieved the full partnership in the nation's war effort that they had from the first so ardently desired. Naturally the appointment of Ernest Bevin, one of the most forceful critics of the previous Government's failure to use the abilities and

experience of the trades unions, brought a rapid change in attitude and the appointment of Herbert Morrison to the Ministry of Supply hardly less so.

Yet it will have become clear already in this brief record that there had been no holding back by the trades unions before, no refusal to do all that it was possible for them to do until such time as they had "their own men in the Government." The change that came with the new Government was not wrought by any basic alteration in the attitude of the trades unions, for they had been ready from the first to co-operate if they should be allowed. It was due to the fact that those now in charge of the mobilisation of the country's industrial resources were anxious for that co-operation, knew and understood the trades union movement, because they were members of it, and shared its appreciation of the value of organised labour as a great and durable weapon of democracy.

Mr. Bevin in his own person symbolised the thought which the trades unions had devoted to the problems of industrial mobilisation and the speed with which its leaders could act. He assumed office at 2.30 p.m. on May 15th. At 11 o'clock the following morning he presented the War Cabinet with his proposals. They included a new Emergency Powers (Defence) Bill to give the Government power by Order in Council to require persons "to place themselves, their services and their property at the Government's disposal." Immediately the Bill was passed Orders in Council were made vesting the control and use of all labour in the Minister of Labour. At the same time the Minister of Supply acquired

power to take over control of any undertaking required for war production.

An "Industrial Cabinet"

Having obtained these comprehensive and even potentially dictatorial powers the new Minister of Labour showed that he was determined to use them democratically. He invited the General Council of the T.U.C. and the Executive Council of the Employers' Confederation to form a Consultative Committee which was to be, in effect, a kind of industrial cabinet with himself as chairman to consider all steps necessary to mobilise labour and resources "to secure the protection of the country and an Allied victory."

Labour Supply Committees were set up all over the country to deal with problems of local labour supply and factory capacity. These committees consisted of an officer of the Ministry, a representative of the trades unions and a representative of the employers. They were in turn linked with area organisations created by the Ministry of Supply, the chairman or vice-chairman of these organisations being in each case a trades unionist. Thus the whole problem of preventing wastage of skilled labour and of planning a rapid advance in production was brought under a planned direction in which the trades unions were at last given their proper place as equal partners. The movement of workers within essential industries was restricted and indiscriminate competition by factories for labour supply prevented. But the

problem was not simply one of making the best use of available labour. It was also necessary to increase the available supply of skilled or semi-skilled labour.

Government training schemes were expanded, again with the assistance of the unions which willingly suspended their normal restrictions upon the entry of men into their trades in order to prevent overcrowding. Employers were asked to increase very rapidly the facilities for training in their factories. The Minister had power to compel them to do so, but he preferred to try voluntary means first.

At the same time those principles of international democracy which have always inspired the trades unions were given new form in the establishment of an international labour force to mobilise the skilled workers of Allied and other friendly people of foreign nationality in Britain. To assist in this work an Advisory Committee which included trades union representatives from foreign countries was appointed.

Thus at last the power of the organised trades union movement was mobilised and the democratic machinery it had built up over long years was developed and expanded for the national purposes.

A Remarkable Result

This recognition by the new Government of the status of the trades union movement and of its integral place in the

economic structure of the nation represents, I suggest, a notable advance in practical democracy during war. It had an immediate and remarkable result. The right to strike—the right, that is, to employ the sanction of withholding their labour if all other ways of securing an improvement in conditions or the redressing of grievances have failed—has always, and correctly, been regarded as one of the most basic and essential of all the rights of a free trades union movement. It is this right, legally endorsed only after long and bitter struggle, that has distinguished the free trades unions of a democracy from the controlled trades unions of a totalitarian State.

This right the British trades unions now voluntarily agreed to suspend for the duration of the war. It was not taken away from them by the State. It was set aside by the trades unions themselves as part of their contribution to the effort of war. Immediately after his appointment as Minister of Labour Ernest Bevin asked the Joint Consultative Committee of trades unions and employers, which he had established as a kind of industrial cabinet, to consider methods of preventing the danger that essential war supplies might be held up by industrial disputes. In June 1940 the Committee recommended that "in the period of national emergency there should be no stoppage of work owing to trade disputes." To implement this recommendation it advised that existing negotiating machinery in the various trades and industries should continue, but that any disputes not settled through this normal negotiating machinery should be referred to arbitration, and that the arbitration decision should be binding on all parties and no strike or lock-out should be allowed. Where arbitration machinery did not already exist in

an industry, and was not provided for, it was recommended that the dispute should be referred to a National Arbitration Tribunal appointed by the Minister. This recommendation was acted upon.

In this action there is to be found one of the most significant examples of the fact that it is possible to change or set aside some of the practical instruments of democracy to meet new conditions without affecting what is essential in democracy. The trades unions were convinced that the status they had secured in their relationship with the new Government was of such a character as to assure them of fair and just treatment in all matters affecting wages and conditions. They were, therefore, prepared for the time being to resign a right which had in other circumstances been regarded as basic to their free existence and for which they had fought in the past with all their power.

They were prepared to do so mainly, of course, because they felt it to be desirable as part of the effort of winning the war, upon which all their energies are set, but also because they felt that their status and their power to influence the course of events had been so greatly accepted and their democratic function so recognised that to do so was not in such circumstances to weaken their position. "Previous Governments had," in Ernest Bevin's words, "regarded the unions as having a limited function and seldom considered them as more than deputations." But with the new Government a change came. This Government, to quote Bevin again, "brought the unions into a measure of participation which has altered the whole course of the war effort—indeed of our national history." I believe this to be

true in more senses than the manifest one that but for the stimulus to war production which this participation made possible our future to-day might be very dark indeed. I believe that the enhanced stature which the trades unions have acquired during this period represents a permanent development of the machinery of practical democracy which will have far-reaching consequences in the future.

The Question of Compulsion

It would be foolish to pretend, of course, that the close collaboration between the Government and the trades unions which took place after May 1940 solved all the problems of completely mobilising Britain's industrial resources.

The size of this problem led to considerable criticism by some economic authorities of Ernest Bevin's unwillingness to abandon the voluntary principle in recruiting and training labour for the war industries. It was, moreover, argued that the size of the labour problem was such, the need to transfer labour from one kind of work to another was on so vast a scale, and the training requirements were so great, that the thing simply could not be done without recourse to full-blooded industrial conscription.

Behind what was legitimate in this criticism lay fears of a serious wastage of industrial and labour resources through lack of effective organisation of man-power and materials. These fears were largely met by two decisions taken early in

1941. The first was the setting up of two executives, a Production Executive under the chairmanship of the Minister of Labour and an Import Executive under the chairmanship of the Minister of Supply. The Production Executive has the task of allocating resources of materials, plant and labour to secure the most efficient satisfaction of urgent war needs. The Import Executive has the same sort of task in relation to imports. The second decision was the establishment of an industrial register on the basis of which men and women in non-essential occupations or unoccupied could be mobilised for war work. This mobilisation is now proceeding. At the same time it was announced that in vital industries employers would not be allowed to dismiss workers, or employees to leave their work, without permission from a representative of the Minister of Labour and that there would be power to replace inefficient managements. Alongside this there went the further decision to revise and comb through the previous list of reserved occupations so as to ensure that only men definitely needed for essential national work were withheld from military service. Although the new powers given to the Minister of Labour were far-reaching, Mr. Bevin made it plain that they were primarily to be regarded as "sanctions in the background" and not as evidence of an intention to introduce large scale industrial conscription. It is significant, moreover, of the new relationship to which I have drawn attention that the proposals for mobilising industrial man- and woman-power and for revising the reserved lists were made in consultation with the General Council of the T.U.C. and the Employers' Confederation. Not dictatorship but leadership—and leadership reinforced constantly by consultation and co-operation—remains the guiding principle in industrial mobilisation. In their dislike of a wholesale

setting aside of existing industrial agreements and their suspicion of industrial conscription, the trades unions believe that they are fighting not only the battle of their present members but of the soldiers who will return to industry when the war is over and who look to the trades unions to maintain the rights and preserve the status of the organised workers while they are away, since those rights and that status will be of immense importance in ensuring a better state of society for them to return to.

A Permanent Advance

So far I have dealt mainly in this pamphlet with the development of industrial labour. The co-operation of Labour men and women with Conservatives and Liberals in the Government, vast though its consequences have been upon Britain's war effort, is a wartime measure and will end after the war is over; not only because fundamental differences in political, social and economic outlook lie between them, but also because the existence of two strong parties each capable of forming a Government is essential to the effective operation of political democracy. But the new hand which the British democratic system has grown in accepting the trades union movement as an integral part of the economic life of the community, with a partnership status in all matters of industrial policy, will remain.

Political Democracy Shows its Strength

Yet on the political side, too, British democracy has manifested an aliveness, and a capacity for change and adaptability while maintaining its essential purpose, which has great significance. It has demonstrated, particularly, what is of a most stalwart importance in war and hardly less important in peace, that although there are great differences between the British political parties—differences that the habits of debate and mutual criticism that democracy encourages and upon which it thrives throw into strong relief in normal times—there is also a strong agreement between them which is, in a sense, even more fundamental than their differences, vital though those are. It is their agreement that democracy is a good thing and that they will co-operate to make it work.

This agreement manifested itself at the beginning of the war, paradoxically enough, in a measure which to very many people seemed evidence of the very suspension of democracy during the war which they had feared. I mean the electoral truce whereby not only was it agreed, as was inevitable, that the life of the existing House of Commons should be extended because a General Election, with the temporary suspension of Government that it would involve, was impossible during war, but also that there should be no by-election contests between the major parties during the war.

The Labour Party was criticised by many of its members and supporters for agreeing to such a truce with a Government which did not, and could not, command its full

confidence. The critics held that the truce would take from the political Labour movement its power to exert pressure upon the Government and would mean, in practice, a weak subservience to a Government maintained in power by a swollen majority secured long before in quite different circumstances and for a policy which it had not, in fact, during most of its lifetime followed.

This was not the view held by the leaders of the Labour Party themselves. They held that the essential national unity which it was necessary to preserve during war could only be impaired by electoral fights on normal lines; that any change in the balance of parliamentary power secured by such contests would in any event be so small as to be of little practical importance; and that the movement of population, because of the war, the calling up of large numbers of men and the transfer of others from one district to another, would, in any event, make the old register of electors so out of date in most constituencies that bye-election results could not be truly representative or democratic. They believed further, and correctly as it turned out, that it was altogether wrong to assume that in the circumstances of war the political Labour Party condemned itself to impotence by such an electoral truce. On the contrary, they believed that Labour would be able to exercise very great influence in Parliament as the spokesman of a public opinion which had supported the declaration of war but had no great confidence in the Chamberlain Government and which was prepared to continue its support of that Government only so long as its conduct of the war was efficient. They were, in other words, prepared to suspend one of the normal instruments of practical democracy because they believed that other

methods of democracy more potent in the special circumstances of war would be open to them. Much of the criticism of the electoral truce was in any event based on the misapprehension that it involved a political truce. It did nothing of the kind. On the contrary, the Labour Party in Parliament conducted throughout the early months of war an opposition more effective than perhaps ever before, and during that time the Government was compelled to seek powers from Parliament as frequently as in normal times. The fact that parliamentary democracy was in full operation and that the stature and status of the Opposition had not been diminished by the electoral truce was demonstrated finally when the Labour Party, convinced that the Government's conduct of the war was no longer efficient, forced a Division after the Norwegian failure, and by so doing took the effective initiative in bringing about a change of Government.

Social Reform During War

Since then the story of the political Labour movement is in the main one of creative and powerful participation in the Government plus the continuation of effective and forceful criticism from those of its members not in the Government. With that participation in Government I have not space in this pamphlet to deal at any length. Yet it is worth pointing out that not only is the record of this Government one of great energy in mobilising Britain's resources for war and in beating off the Nazi attack, but also of a democratic advance

in many other directions which would have been notable in times of peace and is remarkable in a time of war.

The Unemployment Insurance Scheme has been extended, the benefits raised and the number of workers covered by the scheme greatly expanded. Allowances to disabled workers under the Workmen's Compensation Act have been substantially increased. The Household Means Test, imposed in the economy scare of 1931 and long felt by the unemployed and the organised working-class movement to be unjust and inequitable, has been abolished. Agricultural workers have for the first time in their history been given a legally enforceable minimum wage which compares satisfactorily with wages in other industries. Allowances to the dependants and families of men in the Services have been increased and so have war pensions and allowances. New measures to safeguard the safety, health and welfare of factory workers have been adopted and the establishment of an industrial medical service has been begun. In the schools the provision of free milk and meals for children has been widely extended. Cheap milk has been made available to every expectant and nursing mother and to every child under five in the land, irrespective of family income.

Thus, and in many other ways which there is not here space to describe in detail, has social legislation been improved and reformed since the new Government was formed.

Moreover the co-operation of the leaders of the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Parties in a War Government has by no means brought to an end that

informed and pungent criticism by an organised Opposition which is essential to the efficient operation of parliamentary democracy. This Opposition has been active, constructive, intelligent and knowledgeable. It has forced important amendments of policy. It has become a powerful instrument of public opinion. And it has given the ordinary member, the back bencher, a new status and influence.

What of the Future?

What of the future? Despite the democratic advances that have already been achieved—and they are significant—it would be idle to pretend that anything more than a beginning has been made in the securing of that greater economic and social equality which is the aim of the Labour movement and which it has defined in its political programme. By joining the Churchill Government the Labour leaders did not, of course, secure the right to demand in return for their support the complete adoption of the Labour Party's programme. No such claim is made or could constitutionally be made. But, since they are in that Government, and the trades unions are associating with that Government, as representatives of the millions of workers without whose efforts victory would be impossible, they are entitled to see that such changes are accepted as will give the common people of Britain an assurance that the victory, when it is achieved, will be a victory for the great principles of democracy and not merely for the status quo of September 1939. Such an assurance is

not merely an objective of the struggle but a weapon of the fighting.

The leaders of Labour both on the political and industrial side have made it clear in many speeches that they share this conception of their purpose and responsibility. C. R. Attlee, Arthur Greenwood, Ernest Bevin, Herbert Morrison, Hugh Dalton, A. V. Alexander, Walter Citrine and many others have all expressed the common determination to build out of the wreckage of this war a genuine new democratic order.

For the moment they are concerned primarily with the problem of making victory certain. But they remain, in Bevin's words, "determined to shape the new order on the principles Labour has always struggled to express."

How far it will be possible to do that within the framework of the War Government remains to be seen. The pressure of war itself will bring great changes. The shape of British society, already altering, will be altered much more before the war is ended. The problems of victory, hardly less great than those of the present, may require, for a time at least, the maintenance of the same kind of broad national unity as that forged to meet the challenge of war and may evoke no less a response from men and parties willing to seek a common agreement on what is most essential when agreement is democracy's need.

Yet it is unlikely, nor would it be desirable, that a Coalition Government, essential for the purposes of war, will remain long in existence after the immediate problems of victory are settled. It is natural, and desirable, that there should then be a

return to the former party system, for the differences of long term outlook between the parties remain profound, and the expression of those differences is essential to the health of democracy. The struggle for democratic socialism will then be resumed by political and industrial labour with renewed force.

But what the experiences of the war, both on the political and industrial sides, have so far done is to give a fairly solid assurance that the common determination of all parties in Britain to maintain and develop the democratic system is such that British democracy should weather whatever crises and whatever disagreements the post-war period may bring. They give, too, the assurance that the practical, working democratic system in existence in Britain at the end of the war will not be the attenuated thing that many feared when the war began, but a lusty and sturdy growth capable of adapting itself to whatever the needs of the future may demand.

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[The end of *Dynamic Democracy* by Francis Williams]