

THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AND ENGLISH CHILDREN

by

Colonel the Rt. Hon. J.C. WEDGWOOD, D.S.O., M.P.

Parliament at War, or Children at Peace? Which should this be called, written in my shirt-sleeves, after doing four hours sentry-go on the torrid House of Commons Terrace, where good Americans have tea.

One dare hardly say so, but this excellent fossilised Parliament of ours is actually enjoying the war. Of course it is a very good war. I mean, we know we ought to have been in it long ago; and now that the Tories have come round to our point of view - no longer appeasing the tiger and thinking Mussolini such a fine chap, and making allowances for the Jap and all that sort of thing - well, now we are all united and friendly together. Men I couldn't abide the sight of turn up as Air Force gunners. I saw Shinwell being taught to shoulder arms in Westminster Hall by Commander Bower whose face he slapped not long ago for telling him to go to Jerusalem.

It is just like being on a desert island with some cannibals in the offing. Pretty risky; but we all have jobs to do that we never dreamt of doing before. We make a good many messes, and then start afresh.

Of course Parliament is quite different to Congress. We all live together here in a herd; instead of being penned off in separate suites of apartments with delectable secretaries, stenographers and progressive journalists chewing gum. (I have just seen "Mr. Smith goes to Washington" so I

know all about it.) All the Cabinet members here are part of the herd (only paid more), and we heckle them and try to extract sympathy from them, just like reporters do with the President or Mr. Cordell Hull. Only there is an unwritten law that nothing that we say to each other in the House must ever be published, unless we can extract it at Question time in public. The Cabinet member then winks at you and says "Come outside". "I had to give you that stuff," says he, "but the fact is----" and then you get the stuff that does you no good.

Now in Congress your Cabinet Members cannot be questioned at all, either in public or in private, because the glorious Constitution separated Legislature from Executive. I dare say that is all right, but it must be very dull. Senators will never enjoy a war as we do.

We have all picked up some sort of jobs. Some wear dark blue uniforms and walk about with sea-legs when they are not sitting at Dover (or Dunkirk). Some wear light blue and "sport wings", but are not all rear-gunners. Some are in the Army and don't like Mr. Chamberlain - nor the War Office - very much. I call all these "Kommissars", and they are very, very, useful. Others are Under-Secretaries of new Departments and specialise in shipping, or Air Raid precautions, or economy, or petrol. There must be at least seventy who are Parliamentary Private Secretaries (unpaid) to their pals in Office and go about whispering how wise their chiefs are, and hope to become Under-Secretaries themselves.

My job, a self-appointed one, is to give good advice

all round to anyone who will listen. That brings me to the real subject of this Essay. I advise the Prime Minister; generally by letter, or else through his Grand Vizier, Mr. Brendan Bracken, commonly known as "the Red Terror" - but only by reason of his hair.

When Churchill became Prime Minister (because I sang "Rule Britannia" at the right moment), I wrote as follows:

"My dear Winston, Do not get rattled by the Hun. Try Lincoln's dodge of having somebody to read to him something soothing. This is just to take your mind off what you can't help in Flanders; just a series of suggestions to show the Departments and the country how completely the new Government is different. Demand reports from the various Departments, within a week, on the following possibilities:

(a) Approach U.S.A. to get them to take and keep our useless mouths. They have still a useful conscience. At the worst the race would survive, without the children being educated as Nazis; at the best, our children are a pretty good advertisement

(b) Plans to carry on, if France goes out."

That, and a good deal more which shall not be enumerated, was written on May 10th.

Well, France has gone out. The island is now a besieged fortress, liable to a good many accidents, liable in any case to a shortage of food. At first the Prime Minister did not like it, did not like "scrounging" on American benevolence, did not like risk of panic. "A few, to the Dominions, for which we pay. Yes! But no flight."

There came a day when French roads were blocked with millions of refugees. Our roads might possibly some day look the same. America volunteered to take the children, unasked, with a generosity unmatched in all history. Europe looked to me like the Volkerwanderung of the fourth century - whole peoples flying before Attila and Alboin!

However, this evacuation was not running away; it was freeing the sword-arm. With women and children in safety, those left could fight without looking over the shoulder, without terror for their families. I sent away my little grandchildren. Six of them shall never become the Janissaries of the infidel.

The Government came round to the idea. Volunteers at least might wisely go. So many applied, over 400,000, that it seemed like panic again; and, even if we could find ships, how could we any longer find escort?

I think I should have allowed those who still wanted to go, to go without escort if the vessels were fast enough, or in the empty cargo-boats that go slow in convoy.

The sinking of the Anandora Star came at a bad moment. The children of those rich enough to pay the passage money, and lucky enough to have relations in America to keep them, went unescorted. But since the poorer parents applied in such numbers to go, and are now stopped from going, our Government does not care any longer to allow the rich to go and every obstacle is put in their way.

No one going to America may take more than £10, and £10 does not last long in New York; the parents must undertake never to send money, and all dollars are now at the disposal of the Government. So no security can be given. If this great and very creditable rescue of the young is to be made, both Governments must consult and modify their rules, I wish the immigration were going on now; a time may come when all may wish it. Then America will send ships; but it may be too late. I do not think the Nazis will land and defeat this people; but I wish to reduce the risks of defeat and to plan for all risks. If the worst comes we shall give you - you in the second line - both ships and fighting men; we would give you good young English stock too, to carry on the fight in years to come, if only you will care for them.

Writing for three weeks ahead is queer work in these days. By then Parliament may be in ashes, and you can print this as my cheerful obituary.

THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AND ENGLISH CHILDREN

by

Colonel the Rt. Hon. J.C. WEDGWOOD, D.S.O., M.P.

Parliament at War, or Children at Peace? Which should this be called, written in my shirt-sleeves, after doing four hours sentry-go on the torrid House of Commons Terrace, where good Americans have tea.

One dare hardly say so, but this excellent fossilised Parliament of ours is actually enjoying the war. Of course it is a very good war. I mean, we know we ought to have been in it long ago; and now that the Tories have come round to our point of view - no longer appeasing the tiger and thinking Mussolini such a fine chap, and making allowances for the Jap and all that sort of thing - well, now we are all united and friendly together. Men I couldn't abide the sight of turn up as Air Force gunners. I saw Shinwell being taught to shoulder arms in Westminster Hall by Commander Bower whose face he slapped not long ago for telling him to go to Jerusalem.

It is just like being on a desert island with some cannibals in the offing. Pretty risky; but we all have jobs to do that we never dreamt of doing before. We make a good many messes, and then start afresh.

Of course Parliament is quite different to Congress. We all live together here in a herd; instead of being penned off in separate suites of apartments with delectable secretaries, stenographers and progressive journalists chewing gum. (I have just seen "Mr. Smith goes to Washington" so I

know all about it.) All the Cabinet members here are part of the herd (only paid more), and we heckle them and try to extract sympathy from them, just like reporters do with the President or Mr. Cordell Hull. Only there is an unwritten law that nothing that we say to each other in the House must ever be published, unless we can extract it at Question time in public. The Cabinet member then winks at you and says "Come outside". "I had to give you that stuff," says he, "but the fact is---" and then you get the stuff that does you no good.

Now in Congress your Cabinet Members cannot be questioned at all, either in public or in private, because the glorious Constitution separated Legislature from Executive. I dare say that is all right, but it must be very dull. Senators will never enjoy a war as we do.

We have all picked up some sort of jobs. Some wear dark blue uniforms and walk about with sea-legs when they are not sitting at Dover (or Dunkirk). Some wear light blue and "sport wings", but are not all rear-gunners. Some are in the Army and don't like Mr. Chamberlain - nor the War Office - very much. I call all these "Kommissars", and they are very, very, useful. Others are Under-Secretaries of new Departments and specialise in shipping, or Air Raid precautions, or economy, or petrol. There must be at least seventy who are Parliamentary Private Secretaries (unpaid) to their pals in Office and go about whispering how wise their chiefs are, and hope to become Under-Secretaries themselves.

My job, a self-appointed one, is to give good advice

all round to anyone who will listen. That brings me to the real subject of this Essay. I advise the Prime Minister; generally by letter, or else through his Grand Vizier, Mr. Brendan Bracken, commonly known as "the Red Terror" - but only by reason of his hair.

When Churchill became Prime Minister (because I sang "Rule Britannia" at the right moment), I wrote as follows:

"My dear Winston, Do not get rattled by the Hun. Try Lincoln's dodge of having somebody to read to him something soothing. This is just to take your mind off what you can't help in Flanders; just a series of suggestions to show the Departments and the country how completely the new Government is different. Demand reports from the various Departments, within a week, on the following possibilities:

- (a) Approach U.S.A. to get them to take and keep our useless mouths. They have still a useful conscience. At the worst the race would survive, without the children being educated as Nazis; at the best, our children are a pretty good advertisement.
- (b) Plans to carry on, if France goes out."



That, and a good deal more which shall not be enumerated, was written on May 10th.

Well, France has gone out. The island is now a besieged fortress, liable to a good many accidents, liable in any case to a shortage of food. At first the Prime Minister did not like it, did not like "scrounging" on American benevolence, did not like risk of panic. "A few, to the Dominions, for which we pay. Yes! But no flight."

There came a day when French roads were blocked with millions of refugees. Our roads might possibly some day look the same. America volunteered to take the children, unasked, with a generosity unmatched in all history. Europe looked to me like the Volkerwanderung of the fourth century - whole peoples flying before Attila and Alboin!

However, this evacuation was not running away; it was freeing the sword-arm. With women and children in safety, those left could fight without looking over the shoulder, without terror for their families. I sent away my little grandchildren. Six of them shall never become the Janissaries of the infidel.

The Government came round to the idea. Volunteers at least might wisely go. So many applied, over 400,000, that it seemed like panic again; and, even if we could find ships, how could we any longer find escort?

I think I should have allowed those who still carried to go, to go without escort if the vessels were fast enough, or in the empty cargo-boats that go slow in convoy.

The sinking of the Anandora Star came at a bad moment. The children of those rich enough to pay the passage money, and lucky enough to have relations in America to keep them, went unescorted. But since the poorer parents applied in such numbers to go, and are now stopped from going, our Government does not care any longer to allow the rich to go and every obstacle is put in their way.

No one going to America may take more than £10, and £10 does not last long in New York; the parents must undertake never to send money, and all dollars are now at the disposal of the Government. So no security can be given. If this great and very creditable rescue of the young is to be made, both Governments must consult and modify their rules, I wish the immigration were going on now; a time may come when all may wish it. Then America will send ships; but it may be too late. I do not think the Nazis will land and defeat this people; but I wish to reduce the risks of defeat and to plan for all risks. If the worst comes we shall give you - you in the second line - both ships and fighting men; we would give you good young English stock too, to carry on the fight in years to come, if only you will care for them.

Writing for three weeks ahead is queer work in these days. By then Parliament may be in ashes, and you can print this as my cheeseful obituary.