

True & Sidel, London, Dec. 19, 1942

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## DECLARATIONS OF INDEPENDENCE

Testament to Democracy: Lord Wedgwood. *Hutchinson*. 8s. 6d.

IN THIS country and in these times profession of faith in democracy is common form, yet what the professors mean by their professions is frequently obscure. Lord Wedgwood is on this matter refreshingly explicit. "It is," he says, "my settled conviction that British parliamentary government is better than any other method of government, and better now than any other variety of democracy, and better now than it ever was in the past." With these bold words he begins his *Testament*, and, though a good deal of what follows may seem to qualify them, there is never a doubt of their sincerity. As a philosophic anarchist he hopes altruistically for a state of universal grace in which legislators will be needless, but until the single tax has been imposed, and the millennium has in due course followed, he is vastly proud of Westminster. When he finds a fault it is, as he believes, an incidental fault; when he remarks a danger it is, as he holds, a danger that can be avoided. Probably there never lived a more devoted lover of the House of Commons in which he served so long, and for the House of Lords, in which he has been accused of inciting to violence, he shows at least affection and esteem. There is no faint trace in his book of the weariness or disillusionment by which the average political veteran is assailed. And now, as when Campbell Bannerman was consul, he trusts the people. The people, be it added, responded always to his trust. Newcastle-under-Lyme did not care whether he wore the Liberal or Labour label; his constituents first and last supported him with full knowledge that he would continue to go his own way as an incorrigible free lance.

Fox held the party system to be the best security for liberty of the subject and wisdom in the rulers. The prospect of our M.P.s all thinking for themselves was more than that intellectual chap, Private Willis, could face with equanimity. Lord Wedgwood differs from both those eminent authorities. Until the Whig Revolution the Commons, as he knows, got on very well without regularly constituted parties, while their rigid regimentation is a growth of yesterday, and, in his opinion, an impertinence. The possibility

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that fewer Bills would be passed if there were more independence and less whipping may shock those whom he styles the "For-God's-sakers," but it is far from frightening him. "We should think of Parliament," he observes mildly, "as a reasoning machine for stopping laws being made by Government—that is by the bureaucrats." Already, he asserts, we have too many laws and regulations, not to mention the officials required for their administration and the gaols to accommodate their breakers. Also, the multiplication of Ministries, Ministers, Parliamentary Secretaries, and Parliamentary Private Secretaries is something he would have watched and checked. He may regard the separation of the American executive from Congress as extremely unfortunate but he does not want to see our House of Commons a rendezvous for place-men and their retainers.

Lord Wedgwood, it will be noticed, expresses sundry ideas running counter to what is supposed to be the spirit of the age. His care for freedom as in itself a good, his belief in the value of parliamentary institutions as brakes upon the powers that be, his insistence that civil servants should remain servants and in no case be permitted mastery, are signs of a radicalism that has officially been deemed defunct. Nothing would be easier than to dismiss him as an eccentric whose most furious fancy is a notion that he represents anybody except himself. Let it be granted that he has his fair share of quirks. His way of dragging Henry George into most discussions bespeaks a strong conviction but is exasperating to those who do not share it. His inconsistencies are patent. You can and must break down the colour bar, federate the nations, form a global commonwealth; but proportional representation would merge the personality of Newcastle-under-Lyme in the congeries of Arnold Bennett's Five Towns and is therefore impossible. Arabs may be called plunderers and murderers and the Irish castigated at every corner yet any criticism of Jew or Hindu is enough to brand you as Nazi or Blimp. None the less Lord Wedgwood is worth some serious attention. Now and then he rides away into the mists upon a hobby horse from his private stud and is best left to gallop and to halloo by himself; but rather more often than not there may

be a bigger field behind him than is visible or audible. His views are not those to which press and platform have accustomed us, and in consequence they do not coincide with those echoes that the man in the street, a noisy blatherer, is given to repeating. But the people of England, as Chesterton wrote, have never spoken yet. It may be that on a variety of important subjects Lord Wedgwood of Barlaston is among their rare authentic spokesmen.

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