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## ECONOMICS

## —AND FAITH

**T**HE ultimate solutions for the human problem are not to be found in economics. If this is a truism, it is one worth underlining. For as the economic and social analysts delve ever deeper in their investigations, and as the post-war crisis continues obstinately to defy the treatment prescribed, it becomes increasingly clear that the root causes of our troubles are not economic at all, and that some vital force, some essential constituent, is missing from the remedies proposed. Three years after the war "the broad sunlit uplands" appear almost as distant as ever, the "golden age" has a distinctly brassy tinge, and "the new order," which was to be the prize of victory, seems, in not a few respects, to be inferior to the old.

Many people seem to have a sublime faith in what economics can accomplish. The truth of the matter is that the contributions of economics, concerned as they are with one branch only of human activity—and that, not the most important—have only a limited validity. This does not mean that economics is of little moment. But it does mean that it can at best provide only one part of the prescription for the cure of human ills, and that, in the absence of the other necessary elements, the economic remedies must fail to accomplish their purpose.



## A SPIRITUAL CRISIS

The core of our discontents today does not lie in economics or in our inability to find economic solutions; it lies in the higher realm of the spirit and morals. The post-war crisis is in truth not fundamentally an economic and industrial crisis at all; it is something far more profound and infinitely more serious. It is a spiritual crisis. It does not arise primarily from a lack of knowledge or of resources to sustain human life at an adequate standard of material comfort and well-being; it arises primarily from an apparent incapacity to live life properly and nobly. It does not concern so much provision for man's bodily needs as provision of sustenance for his soul. It is not a matter so much of livelihood as of life itself.

## CYNICISM — THE PREVAILING CURSE

The prevailing curse of the aftermath of this war, as of the last, is cynicism. From the cynicism which was born of the 1914-1918 conflict we have never wholly recovered. It accounted in no small part for the long succession of failures in the 'twenties and 'thirties and for the final drift and collapse into the second World War. This in turn has given cynicism a second lease of life and it will now assuredly lead us into a third disastrous conflict unless we eradicate it from our national outlook.

Cynicism is the mark of a people who have lost their faith and confidence and self-reliance. And such a people will readily sell its soul to the State or rush into the arms of a dictator because it no longer cares to carry its own load of responsibility. "In Walter Lippman's tremendous metaphor: 'It welcomes manacles to prevent its hands shaking.'"<sup>\*</sup> It is no coincidence that the growth in our times of an almost pathetic dependence on the capacity of the State has been accompanied by a decline of faith in the competence and worth of the individual person. At the centre of this development lies the idea that the State is able to do for the individual what the individual can no longer be trusted to do for himself.

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<sup>\*</sup> Quoted from John Buchan's "Memory-Hold-The-Door."

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## CRISIS OF FAITH

At first blush it seems easy to excuse cynicism. It is the child of disillusionment, and that there is ample cause for disillusionment at the present time no one will deny. But it is an ugly, negative, destructive, corroding force; it not only achieves nothing of itself, it renders achievement impossible; it undermines will-power, energy, replaces the positive "do" with the negative "don't"; it builds distrust and suspicion between man and man and between nation and nation; it undermines standards of morality and conduct, destroys the everyday decencies and courtesies and good manners. This is a bad-mannered and discourteous age because it is a cynical age, and it is a cynical age because there is no deep-rooted faith and belief in the purpose of life itself. The post-war crisis is a crisis not of economics, but of faith.

## THE DESIRE TO WORK

The post-war years have witnessed the achievement of full employment, and there are fairly good reasons for believing that economic science has shown us the way that high employment can be maintained. But having gained the goal of work for all, we seem no longer to possess any firm belief in the dignity of work itself. In winning at long last the battle for the right to work, have we lost, in the process, the desire to work? We have made great social strides in the direction of better provision of the aged, the sick, the incapacitated, the weaker members of the social organism. But in our personal relationships do we any longer respect the aged or the weak? Men rush into trams and buses ahead of women, youths and girls retain their seats in crowded trains and leave old people standing; the least cared-for member of society is the housewife and mother. These are things which our fathers and grandfathers, for all their supposed lack of a social conscience, would not have countenanced.

### "THE LITTLE THINGS"

The ordinary every-day courtesies, the minor chivalries, are in danger of vanishing. It is the little things that count, and the decay of manners, the disregard for the common decencies, are the symptoms of deep-seated and dangerous disease, the disease of a society which is in peril of losing its belief in things and people, its faith in its own destiny. For if human life has no real purpose, if it is after all an aimless, meaningless, accidental experience, if, in other words, the big things, or what we thought were the big things, have turned out to be of no account, why worry about the little things? A society that cherishes the smaller matters, that respects good manners, courtesy, the little kindnesses, is a society in which there is still faith and belief and for which there is still hope. Such a society is spiritually healthy, youthful, enthusiastic, purposeful, constructive. But a society which has lost regard for the little things, which has become disillusioned and cynical and old, which has no firm philosophy of living, is a society from which death is not far away.

### TO MAKE THE ECONOMIC SOLUTIONS WORK

We need a recovery of faith to make the economic solutions work. The industrial mechanism will not operate, or will not operate efficiently, without a spiritual driving force. The industrial expert has given us his proposals for the improvement of relationships between employers and workers—profit-sharing, co-partnership, streamlined arbitration, improved factory and welfare amenities—but the results disappoint. It is not that the solutions proposed are wrong. Within their own restricted sphere they are right. But they do not go to the root of the trouble. The root of the trouble is the suspicion between man and man, not merely between worker and employer, but between worker and worker and employer and employer, indeed, not merely between man and man, but

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between man and himself. The industrial expert has in truth no solution for the problem of industrial peace in a society corroded and distorted by cynicism. Such a society needs a spiritual not an industrial doctor. When spiritual health has been restored that will be the time to call in the industrial doctors, and their remedies may then have a chance of achieving their purpose.

## THE DIGNITY OF WORK

The economist may have shown us the way to full employment. At anyrate, we have full employment now, but our experience of it suggests that it is one thing to provide work for all and quite another thing to ensure that all work. For work is more than attendance at a job for a specified number of hours a day. Work is something which should call for the best that it is in man to give, his best in energy, in resource, in responsibility and service. But how many, whether salaried worker or wage-earner, whether employer or employee, are putting forth their best today—now that any employer who produces some useful commodity or provides some useful service is assured of a market, and now that any employee can have a job for the asking. Is there today any real pride in work for work's sake, or has it just become a burdensome nuisance to be reluctantly endured in order to obtain the necessities of life? It is primarily a wrong view of life, a false sense of values, a moral failing, that is causing full employment to break down at the vital points.

## "TO SUCCEED IN LIFE YOU MUST BELIEVE IN LIFE"

A great contemporary Scotch philosopher, Macneile Dixon, said that "To succeed in life you must believe in life." Here is the essence of the thing. Today many of us are uncertain whether we believe in life or not. The thought whether life was worthwhile, whether it was worth living, and living well,



probably never entered the heads of most of the great men who stand out on the peaks of history. The monumental figure of Gladstone is an example. Gladstone never questioned life. He never lost faith in the high purpose and destiny of man. Cynicism had no part in his mental and moral make-up. He went boldly, courageously forward, and he dominated the English, and indeed the world scene, in the latter half of the 19th century, not only and not mainly because he was a great politician, but rather because he was a transcendent spiritual force. The world of many modern intellectuals is at the other end of the universe from the world of Gladstone. The philosophy of Gladstone may be too straight-forward, too ruggedly simple and ingenuous for the needs of the complex sophisticated atomic age. But at least it is certain that the problems of this age will never be solved without something of the outlook and moral courage and rectitude which this great statesman brought to bear on the problems of living.

When we recapture our faith in living, when we replace cynicism and pessimism and destructive suspicion about man and his place in the scheme of things with faith and optimism and constructive trust, then, and only then, will we really emerge from the economic chaos and ruin wrought by the two world wars. Until that time comes the purely economic remedies will continue to have a very limited effect. With faith we can move mountains; without it we are doomed to move from post-war crisis to crisis, from disappointment to disappointment, from despair to deepening despair.

### SOUND AT THE CORE

But when all this is said, there is as yet no reason to doubt that at the heart and core the British race remains fundamentally sound. There is no cause yet for pessimism or hopelessness. What has been said in this article has been said more in the nature of warning than of condemnation.\* The people

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\*And it is said in no self-righteous or sanctimonious spirit, for in this matter we are all tarred with the one brush.

who won the Battle for Britain in 1940, and the people of their blood and heritage, have not changed their fundamental character in the small space of eight years. The task of leadership is not to instil greatness into the people, for greatness already resides there; the task of leadership is to bring that greatness forth. This leadership, in Australia at anyrate, we at present seem to lack.

The prophets of the new atomic age have not yet made their appearance. But that they will appear, all our history gives strong reason to hope. And the great task of the new leadership will be to elevate the moral tone of the nation, to place the economic and industrial problems in the setting of a spiritual background, to raise the whole level of the nation's thought and life on to a higher plane. Its appeal will be to the finer instincts of the people—not to the baser instincts, as is the custom of present-day politics. It will set a standard and create an atmosphere in which the solutions proposed by the scientist and the expert will have some chance of working effectively.

### "YOU KNOW IT IS NOT!"

In a striking speech to the Royal Agricultural Society, Mr. R. S. Maynard put this matter into true perspective:

"A Parliament composed entirely of wise and careful men would content itself in the main with providing spiritual leadership and a free and safe world for men to work and prosper in. Those of my own age will recall how strong and fresh was the leadership of our early Federation days. There was a fine rapture in being an Australian in those days. There was a spiritual force in our national life. I fear that we have temporarily lost that vision of greatness.

"What is the guiding principle of our national life today? Is it that we shall be a first-rate people? Is it that we shall achieve excellence in everything we do?

"You know it is not!"

