

# TANKS INTO TRACTORS

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THE ASSOCIATION FOR WORLD PEACE has set up a small committee of experts presided over by The Rt. Hon. Harold Wilson, P.C., M.P., to make a more detailed study of the problems of the war on poverty. This committee hopes to produce and interim report for publication in the early autumn.

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**This is a plea for turning the arms race into a race for the conquest of world poverty. It proposes that a percentage of the money now being spent on rearmament should be diverted into more fruitful channels — for two reasons : because the alleviation of human misery throughout the world is imperative in its own right, and because some such scheme as that proposed seems the most hopeful road, in conditions of today, to world peace.**

## I. THE FACTS

“ Please inform the Prime Minister that . . . food must be sent . . . without delay. . . . The mortality amongst women, children and sick is most grave, and sickness due to hunger is spreading. The attitude of the population is becoming one of despair, and the people feel that an end by bullets is preferable to death by starvation.”

THIS IS THE TEXT of the telegram which General Plumer sent to the British Government from Cologne in March 1919. The facts behind the telegram are well known: the health of the British troops was in danger because they could not be prevented from giving their rations to the starving people around them. This, indeed, is the normal reaction of ordinary people when they see starvation before their eyes. They do not give what they can comfortably afford; they give to the point of self-sacrifice.

The trouble about the world today is that we do not see the starvation with our eyes. We, one quarter of the human family who live in privileged comfortable countries, do not see the other three quarters where the lives of men, women and children are dominated by poverty, squalor, hunger, disease, starvation, illiteracy and premature death.

How can the comfortable comprehend the poverty of the poor? In the words of Stringfellow Barr, “ if you are born coloured [as are over two thirds of all mankind] the chances are overwhelming that you will be chronically sick all your life—from malaria, or intestinal parasites, or tuberculosis, or maybe even leprosy. . . . You have about a two-to-one chance of suffering malnutrition . . . you have a reasonably good chance of suffering famine—

to the point where you will be glad to eat the bark off a tree—but this chance is extremely hard to calculate. You have only a one-in-four chance of learning to read. . . . You are most likely to live in a mud hut, with a dirt floor and no chimney, its roof thatched with straw.”<sup>(1)</sup>

These words correctly represent what could be expressed at greater length in cold statistical tables showing the infantile mortality rate, the expectancy of life, the illiteracy rate, the incidence of disease, the intake of calories and proteins for the greater part of mankind.

These statistics, for example, would show that one half of the deaths in China are caused directly or indirectly by malnutrition; that in New Guinea eight out of ten of the children die before reaching the age of puberty because they are born of parents crippled already by malnutrition; that in Cuba the energy intake of the average family of five persons is about sufficient for one human being in normal health.

Left to itself the situation is not improving. The gap between the rich and poor is widening. And Lord Boyd Orr, in agreement with many other experts, has warned us in unmistakable terms that on the basis of all our present trends the relation between world food supply and world population is moving steadily and indeed dramatically against us.

Of course it may be argued that all this is nothing new. Men and women have lived in poverty and died of hunger since the world began. Indeed they have. But what is new is that today, for the first time, the starving millions know that they do not need to starve. Today there are people in the world who have the resources and the knowledge to attack the poverty of the world. Is there any serious chance that this attack will now be made?

<sup>(1)</sup> *Let's Join the Human Race*, Stringfellow Barr, University of Chicago Press, Chicago. Staples Press, 2/-.

## II. CAN IT BE DONE?

IT DEPENDS FIRST UPON A CHANGE OF MIND. When we read of world poverty, what do we think of it? What do we feel? Are we deeply moved; or have we become hardened to the miseries of others?

Being human we are naturally more affected by a disaster on our own doorstep than by an equal disaster at the other end of the earth. But here we are not dealing with equal disasters. We have to balance *our* possible inconvenience against *their* inevitable misery. Are we prepared to make the attack upon world poverty our number one priority in the same sort of way as the defeat of Nazism was our number one priority in 1939-45?

We must realise, too, that we face here not a problem of world engineering but first a problem of human relations. It will be useless to pour out our machinery and our materials if we cannot drop our innate sense of superiority and treat the hungry people as our brothers. We must assure them of our love and respect before we offer them our technology.

And we should be sure about the basic reasons for our actions. Later we shall show in how many ways we ourselves shall ultimately gain if the attack on world poverty is made. But we are unlikely to succeed or even to start on the task if we are always calculating in terms of possible cost and gain to ourselves. Regardless of our own advantage, accepting wholeheartedly the prospect of material sacrifice, we should understand that the basic reason for attacking world poverty is that it is the right thing to do in the name of God and man.

Can it be done? Are the necessary resources available? Let us frankly face the facts. Let us realise at once that the war on poverty will bring disastrous defeats as well as victories. The road is an arduous road of trial and of error. We make no attempt to minimise the difficulties which confront us. Some of these are well known. The whole

world has not one tithe of the technicians that are needed. But as for war we train gunners and submariners with furious intensity, so with the same intensity the world must train the men we need.

A co-operative drive for education in the under-developed countries themselves is also a prime necessity, for "even in the case of relatively simply agricultural improvements . . . it is necessary to have a basic minimum level of education and literacy amongst the actual producers."<sup>(1)</sup>

If the men are available, have we or could we have the land, machinery and materials? The best opinion seems to be that we could.

"The fundamental truth can no longer be concealed from mankind: the world has at its disposal enough resources to provide an adequate diet for everybody, everywhere."<sup>(2)</sup>

"The scientific evidence leads to the view that the world has enough resources for its food supply, provided modern methods are used generally for systems of sustained production."<sup>(3)</sup> "The belief that economic development must inevitably be dissipated in population growth causes pessimism in some quarters. We do not share this view. . . . The problem is difficult but it is not insoluble."<sup>(4)</sup>

Can we put any figure upon the value of the resources which might have to be deployed in the campaign? The authors of the UNO Report quoted above have published a table, acknowledging that it is based on several

<sup>(1)</sup> UNO Report, *Measures for the Economic Development of Under-Developed Countries*, pages 29 and 45.

<sup>(2)</sup> Dr. Josué de Castro (Director Nutritional Laboratory, University of Brazil) in *Geography of Hunger*, to be published shortly by Gollancz.

<sup>(3)</sup> Dr. Charles Kellogg (Director of Soil Survey in U.S. Department of Agriculture) in *Need We Go Hungry?* UNESCO pamphlet published by Bureau of Current Affairs, page 44.

“hazardous guesses” and offering it only that we may see the rough order of magnitude of what is involved. For the 1,500 million people living in Latin America, Africa, Indonesia, and all Asia outside Japan and U.S.S.R., they estimate that an investment of some £6,786m. per year would be required for a 2% annual increase in living standards. Towards this these people today save from their own resources some £1,786m. leaving some £5,000m. to be found from outside. This is only the sum required for agricultural development and industrialisation, and excludes the very large sums for “social overheads”; but innumerable reasons would prevent the campaign from starting in its first year at anything like the level of £5,000m.; and if it were fearlessly pushed forward it is reasonable to hope that larger savings would fairly soon come forward from within the under-developed countries themselves.

So what does £5,000m. amount to? The national income of Western Europe, Australasia, the United States and Canada is some £125,000m. today. Can we spare so small a fraction of our wealth for the attack on world poverty? Or don't we care?

### III. THE PLAN

IF THE WORLD'S resources are to be mobilised, someone has to give the lead. We believe that there is here a real opportunity for Britain, by a courageous initiative, to regain the moral leadership of mankind. We therefore propose that the British government, in co-operation with the Commonwealth, should invite the powers to attend an international conference. The first purpose of this conference should be to agree, in principle, that the participating nations should divert a substantial part (say 5%) of their national income, and should make the

equivalent resources and materials available for a world-wide attack on the poverty, illiteracy, disease and suffering of mankind.

This is, of course, no new proposal. For decades it has stirred the imagination of individuals and of small groups. It showed itself in President Truman's Fourth Point; its principle has been accepted by the British government; the Colombo Conference drew up a partial plan which suggests what could be done. The vital need is for someone with the authority of government to put forward the proposal as a programme for immediate world action to be carried out on a scale sufficient to make a real impact on the problem.

Nowhere could this lead be more appropriately given than at the next UNO Conference; and it should there be given in wholehearted challenging terms openly inviting the co-operation of the whole world.

How could such a proposal be worked out in detail?

We start from the organisation of the work “at the grass roots” where the problems can be seen as real problems relatively free from the distorting influence of the political distrusts of the world.

Here the supreme task is to associate the people themselves with the work that is to be done, drawing the proposals themselves as far as possible directly from the people concerned.

For the control of a related group of schemes in any one area—say the Congo Valley or the Gobi desert—we can draw to a considerable extent upon the work and experience of the Tennessee Valley Authority. T.V.A. was initiated less than three months after President Roosevelt came to power. It was a vast and enlightened scheme of flood control, land reclamation, power production, agriculture and afforestation with all the attendant housing projects, social and educational services. A major engineering job greater than that involved in the Panama Canal revolutionised the lives of those who lived in the vast and hitherto poor area of the Tennessee Valley, and

within a few years a great industrial and commercial success had been achieved.<sup>(1)</sup>

In each continent and sub-continent many schemes on about the scale of the T.V.A. would need to be launched. These would have to be co-ordinated by a series of Regional Development Authorities for appropriate areas; and in constituting these, it would be vital to realise from the start that history and geography now give special interest in South America to the U.S.A., in Africa to Britain and France, and in China to the U.S.S.R.

These Regional Authorities would need to win the co-operation of the people in their areas for an immense educational campaign; they would have to undertake the most vigorous measures for training technicians. Under their direction research into all the basic problems of world development would have to be increased a hundredfold. Geophysical surveys would have to be undertaken in many areas whose potentialities are still largely unknown.

It would not be appropriate for the Development Authorities to impose political change upon any country within their areas; but it must be clear that their very existence, and the publicity given to their activities would stir a welcome political ferment, for, as is said by the authors of the UNO Report from which we have already quoted, "there are a number of under-developed countries where concentration of economic and political power in the hands of a small class whose main interest is in the preservation of their own wealth and privilege, rules out the prospect of much economic development until a social revolution has affected a shift in the distribution of income and power."<sup>(2)</sup>

This brings us to the problem of constituting an International Development Authority to co-ordinate the whole of the world campaign against world poverty. This is by far the hardest part of the problem. If it could be resolved,

<sup>(1)</sup> See Julian Huxley, "T.V.A."

<sup>(2)</sup> Op. Cit., page 15.

detailed solutions to subordinate problems could be expected without undue optimism.

It is as well frankly to face the fact that no solution to this central problem could be found in the present atmosphere of world politics. It is, however, a prime purpose of our proposal that it might *change* the atmosphere of world politics. The world attack on world poverty is perhaps the only conception big enough to stand any chance of breaking through the present atmosphere of suspicion. If it were fearlessly put forward with complete refusal to contemplate the possibility of defeat, it could steadily gather behind it an immense weight of world public opinion; and if at first great powers approached each other partly out of fear of being otherwise isolated from this world opinion, it would at least be an improvement on a situation in which they do not approach each other at all.

It would be essential to propose a constitution for the International Development Authority which would give it a chance of being accepted by West and East alike; and, without wishing to perpetuate the veto, it would be right to start with the firm resolve that unanimity should be achieved on the first appointment of the Authority's principle officers and committees. These should be drawn, not from politicians and statesmen, but from experts whom the world can trust; the World Health Organisation, UNESCO, and the list of Nobel Prize Winners can supply ample men of this calibre.

It is argued by many in our own country and perhaps by more in the U.S.A. that Soviet philosophy makes genuine co-operation impossible and that there is nothing the U.S.S.R. could do to show a genuine desire for partnership. Nothing? We suggest that it would not be nothing if the leaders of the U.S.S.R. participated in setting up an International Development Authority and in launching the attack on world poverty and simultaneously initiated a propaganda campaign to their own people explaining how these steps had completely trans-

formed the world situation, turning hostility and suspicion into the good hope of co-operation and friendship. The Western governments could respond by vigorously answering any of their prominent citizens who continued to attack the U.S.S.R.

If the plan developed, it would inevitably involve a substantial measure of progressive disarmament by the Powers. We believe that our proposal offers, indeed, the only feasible means of approaching disarmament; since the necessary allocations of materials could not be made nor the finance provided without automatically involving disarmament by the participating nations.

In the course of their attack on world poverty, the governments and the peoples of the world would inevitably find themselves having to solve—and having to set up world organisation for solving—all sorts of problems which are now left to chance or handled separately by the sovereign governments of separate states. In fact, the attack on world poverty, if seriously undertaken, will drive the world relentlessly towards world government. We are not dismayed by this prospect which, we believe, will win for our proposal the eager support of many of the most far-sighted citizens of the world.

We must add something more to avoid possible misunderstanding in our own country. In the best possible circumstances, the plan which we recommend would not be a plan for easing Britain's own material problems in the 1950s. In ten or twenty years, if the plan achieved all its highest hopes, the rising prosperity of a peaceful world might indeed be reflected in increased total consumption even in privileged lands. But this could hardly happen in the early years. We are today committed to spend more on arms in 1952 than in 1951; materially, therefore, we shall next year face more austerity and greater need for fair shares than we do today. Our proposal in effect would be that we should *transfer* part of our arms expenditure and devote it to the attack on world poverty; this would not mean that it would become available for our own con-

sumption; it would mean that we should spend it on goods which would be given to peoples poorer than ourselves.

We are bound to face the possibility that despite all our hopes and resolute endeavours the U.S.S.R. may refuse to join in. In such an event the plan should nevertheless go forward. If we cannot all co-operate to attack the poverty of all the world, as many as possible should co-operate to attack as much of the world's poverty as possible.

By refusing to co-operate the Soviet leaders would in effect proclaim their belief that without their help the whole plan would fail, and that from its failure they would be left to collect a total world victory. The ultimate hope of world peace, world co-operation and world government would then depend upon our proving in action that they were mistaken about us.

This would be an extremely arduous undertaking. It would mean that we should have to embark upon the attack on world poverty while at the same time continuing to sustain the cost of military preparedness. The participating countries would be faced with difficult decisions about the relation between resources spent on arms and resources devoted to the campaign against the poverty of the world. In our view a substantial shift from the former to the latter purpose would be prudent even today. Before our proposals reach the level of action on a world scale, the Atlantic Powers should be considerably stronger than they are today, and the argument in favour of the transfer of resources from the one purpose to the other would be correspondingly more powerful. But there is no escape from the fact that the total cost and burden, and the necessary social disciplines and restraints imposed upon the privileged countries would be incomparably greater than if the attack on poverty were on a world-wide basis from the start.

In the end all would depend upon whether the whole people of western industrialised nations could be inspired

with a dedicated sense of high purpose rightly calling for common effort and common sacrifice. We are sure that if the issue were presented to the world in this form the challenge should be accepted in the firm belief that success could be won.

The present western policy of arming without positive world purpose offers to mankind, in the end, no hope at all. The alternative which we recommend—though more exacting in the early years—would at least offer hope. It would offer the hope of ultimately proving to the leaders of the Kremlin that they could not succeed with their plan for total world victory won by piecemeal social and economic disintegration of a world racked by poverty and ignorance, a hope therefore of a genuine world agreement in the end.

In accepting it we should win for ourselves at once a cause which could at least be understood by millions whose poverty and illiteracy make it hard for them to understand what we mean when we talk about liberty and justice.

#### IV. IS IT WORTH TRYING?

As we ask this question we seem to see in our mind's eye the "practical" men, the diplomats and foreign office spokesmen of all lands. We see them standing in their serried ranks saying: "It can't be done. It couldn't happen. The Americans, the Russians, would never agree. We should be more cautious. We mustn't offend people. It's out of the question. It's not worth trying."

In answer we ask the practical men what alternative they offer for getting us out of the mad-house?

What is actually happening in the world today? Of every thousand people living, it is safe to say that 999 want to live their lives in peace, and yet within a few years of the end of two wars to end war and rid the world of fear,

we find fear dominating the homes and hearts and lives of humble people everywhere.

More and more we are directed to purely negative purposes. We do things not for positive or creative purpose, but to prevent or forestall some other action by someone else.

Nationalism rises and is accentuated not in forms which preserve a healthy and fruitful diversity amongst peoples, but in forms which more and more cut people off from each other and separate the world into watertight compartments.

Science and unlimited resources of human skill are prostituted to the arts of destruction with weapons whose horror we can hardly bear to contemplate.

We have even reached the point at which many distinguished economists are almost as terrified by the prospect of a successful disarmament conference as they are by the continuance of the arms race: for they see in disarmament the prospect of total disruption in the western world in a tidal wave of unemployment, bankruptcy and trade stagnation.

The whole world is hell-bent on insanity and destruction, so that it is useless for the practical men and trained diplomats to tell us that our proposal is not worth trying. We know perfectly well that it may not succeed. But what other proposal looks as if it had even a chance of success?

At many times in the world's history men have had to choose between different courses. At times the choices have been hard, with some considerations pointing one way and some another. But if today we summarise the vital problems which confront mankind, the fears of the hydrogen bomb which Professor Einstein has said could lead to the annihilation of humanity; the task of finding a means of ending the Cold War, commencing disarmament, and at the same time dealing with the resultant problem of over-production; the menace of world food shortage and soil erosion; the justifiably rising tide of nationalism in dependant territories; the need for harnessing science to



politics, building a positive democracy and removing international suspicions and fears fed on hatreds bred by wars; and last but by no means least, the necessity of recreating an ethic which can lift men from the morass of despair in which they are now engulfed; we find for the first time in history that the demands of each and every problem force us along the one common road which we commend.

On the first day on which the conference was proposed with all the authority of the British Commonwealth, we believe that a new thrill of hope would spread to every continent. If the first conference could begin to achieve its objective, hope and purpose would begin to replace fear and antagonism all over the world. Men would begin working for a common purpose—a purpose worthy of all the immense discoveries of the last 200 years. The twentieth century would for the first time begin to fulfil its true destiny. Ideological differences, although they would still persist, would seem relatively less important in comparison with the practical work to be done; and once the work got under way we believe that the public opinion of the world would in the end be strong enough to overcome the opposition of any group of leaders which tried to frustrate it for the sake of their own power.

The change of atmosphere would be felt in the lives of tens of millions of ordinary people. Indeed one of the most evil consequences of the present world atmosphere is that a whole generation of young men and women are growing up, charged with idealism and filled with a desire to serve their fellow men, and yet frustrated by the feeling that effort and sacrifice are hardly worth while in a world directed towards such insanities as ours. Once the world were seriously launched upon the battle against the poverty of man, we believe that all the finest feelings of the rising generation could be roused and canalised to support and sustain this single constructive world purpose.