

The Libya Debate

THE SECOND FRONT AND MR. CHURCHILL

*Speech of William Gallacher, Communist M.P.,
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One Penny

THE mover of this Motion (Sir J. Wardlaw-Milne) has for a considerable period displayed a certain calm and poise in this House, and he has given an impression of the Prime Minister, the most cunning which is sought to under-ack away the props beneath him.

Now that was struck in Libya was a at the poise of the for Kidderminster (Wardlaw-Milne). Away camouflage. In a unic here last week, myself to this House country, not as a an enemy of the er, determined to

use whatever forces he could to bring him down.

Whatever the merits or demerits of the Prime Minister may be, there is not a Member of this House, there is no one in the country but will readily agree that it would be a complete disaster if in place of the Prime Minister and the Government we had the hon. Member for Kidderminster and the tatterdemalion group that gather around him.

Hitler's Secret Friends

But it is not this group that is the danger. Behind this group, not of it, but watching it and encouraging it, ready at any moment to seize whatever opportunity may be forthcoming.

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MAIN

ing, are very dangerous and sinister forces. Yes, they have a long record in this country.

They were the open friends of Hitler before the war, and they are the hidden friends of Hitler today. They supported every development of Fascism in Germany and Italy. They supported Hitler and Mussolini in Spain. They encouraged and supported the rape of Austria and Czechoslovakia. They never cease; they are at it all the time.

Their Aims

What is the aim of this attack, not necessarily from those who are supporting this Motion? . . .

It is a political attack directed against the Prime Minister, because at a critical moment he stood forward as a great statesman, and linked the fate of this country with the fate of the people of the Soviet Union.

What has saved this country from annihilation? Is it not the magnificent resistance of the Red Army and the Soviet people? Who linked the fate of this country with the Soviet Union? . . . If there had been a weaker Prime Minister at that time, we could have been faced with an absolutely fatal situation.

Behind this campaign is the desire to prevent a second front in Europe, the only way of bringing this war to an early

end. Behind this campaign is an attempt to weaken our Alliance with the Soviet Union.

Have we not sinister forces in the country who are vicious towards the Prime Minister because of the strength he has given to the Alliance and who are also concerned in an attempt to prevent the flow of supplies going to the Soviet Union?

All these things are involved in what is going on here. It is this which is the meaning of the phrase—

“ . . . no confidence in the central direction of the war ”— because the question of the central direction of the war cannot be decided simply on the question of Libya. America has been mentioned, but we must mention also the Soviet Union.

The situation on other fronts is all part of the central direction of the war. You cannot talk about the disasters in Libya without discussing the developments on other fronts, and the part which has been played by the central direction in connection with the other fronts.

The disaster in Libya has been a serious setback, but we have certain people who seem to take an actual pleasure in it. They are ready to seize on it, not for the purpose of learning lessons, but for the purpose of carrying on a particularly undesirable political campaign.

In the fight against Fascism there have been disasters, one disaster after another, terrible defeats in Spain, in China. In the Soviet Union there have been great losses of territory and the sacrifice of the great Dnieper Dam.

All this has not been made into a business of somebody getting into a panic, and demanding that the Prime Minister of the Soviet Union should cease to be the Defence Minister.

Could there be anything more nonsensical?

The hon. Member for Kidderminster says that what we want is a strong man who will give his whole time and energy to the winning of the war. Where is the Prime Minister in that event? If such a man is to win the war, he must have control of everything. You do not need a Prime Minister apart from that. . . . It would mean that the Prime Minister would simply become a rubber stamp. I have never heard such nonsense.

Learn The Lessons

Defeats and disasters in the Soviet Union and China were not made the means of this sort of attack. Careful study was made of them to find out where the mistakes had been made, and how advantage could be taken of the lessons drawn from them.

If there is a weakness in the Government, it is a weakness in relation to the forces behind them on the other side of the House. If the Government had not capitulated to the 1922 Committee on fuel rationing; if members of the Government would not come and whisper to me, "We cannot lift the ban from the 'Daily Worker'; it would annoy the 1922 Committee; if the Labour Party Conference had not passed that resolution, we might have been able to lift the ban, but now the 1922 Committee would be up in arms and do all sorts of things"; if the Government would make a stand against the 1922 Committee, and against these sinister forces, it would be much better for the Government and for the country as a whole.

In this Debate we must use the opportunity to see that everything is done in this House and subsequently in the country to expose those who are trying by any means to disrupt the Alliance between this country and the Soviet Union and to prepare the way for a deal of some kind or other with Hitler.

The next few weeks will be very critical, and there will be need for the sharpest criticism; but not for political manoeuvring or intrigues. There will be need for the fullest information on what has taken place, and what is taking place. I am a trade unionist and a co-operator.

I have discussed questions affecting production, affecting the Government, affecting the war, with shop stewards in every part of the country; and I am prepared to stand here and speak for the shop stewards in general.

I say, in the name of the shop stewards throughout the country, that there is no lack of confidence in the Prime Minister. The same is true of the rank and file of the Army.

But—there seems to be a feeling here that nobody should mention the higher command of the Army—there is in the country, in the factories, and among the rank and file of the Army, a lack of confidence, not in the Prime Minister, but in the higher command of the Army.

Backward Methods

Is it because officers are incapable of understanding or of developing the arts of war? No, it is because of the backward methods, that have never been overcome, in the general military outlook and training in this country.

The other week I was watching some lads being trained. A big sergeant-major was shouting at them in the way I used to hear when I saw sergeant-majors being lampooned in the music halls. The men had to slope arms, and to stand with every bayonet in line.

A commissioned officer came

along and examined their boots and their buttons in front, and then examined them again at the rear. If anything was out of place, the man had to take two steps backwards and put it right. These lads were commandos.

A fortnight later I read about the commandos landing in France, and that a sergeant was there with his house slippers on. What would the sergeant-major have said about that?

This training had no relation to the work they would have to do. But when I speak of this to hon. Members I am told that this sort of thing is necessary in order to ensure discipline.

Discipline, however, is not the only quality that is wanted for modern warfare; what is wanted is initiative. Small groups are so often isolated, and have to fight by themselves.

We Have The Men

I was speaking last Wednesday to one of the lads in the Lobby. He said, "Cannot we get some of these young fellows from the Red Army to lead our Forces?" The hon. Member for Walsall (Sir G. Schuster) talks about getting someone from Canada to lead the Forces. I said to the lad in the Lobby, "No, that's wrong. We have any number of fine young lads in our own Army. That is where we have to get them."

We want young lads, with new ideas about methods of warfare. Take the case of Ted Willis and Mick Bennett (members of the Young Communist League). They are fine, strapping, go-ahead lads, keen, enthusiastic, with lots of initiative. They were thrown out of the Army, although their commanding officers gave them a character that would get them into the Kingdom of Heaven.

This sort of thing should stop. We ought to have learnt lessons from the Spanish war and from the tanks and anti-tank squadrons that were out there. We have to insist on the effective supply of dive bombers. Let us face the fact that in Libya we were obviously at certain disadvantages from the point of view of tanks and guns, but that was not the decisive thing.

British Tanks

There is the suggestion of the hon. Member for Kidderminster that we were sending obsolete tanks and guns to Libya. How dare he get up in this House and make such a suggestion? . .

There were certain disadvantages, but that did not explain why these tanks of ours got into a tank trap.

The fact remains that in the Soviet Union the same kind of tanks and guns are being used with the greatest effect.

I was speaking to one of the

officials who was over there, and he told me that he had never seen material put into use so rapidly or that was of such great value as the British tanks and British guns.

The Russians have paid tribute to the British tanks and the British guns that have been sent out there, and it was the same sort of stuff that was sent to Libya. So that, while there were certain disadvantages, they were not the decisive thing, which, in my opinion, is that in this country the higher command has never got to the stage where it has completely reorganised the old methods of military manoeuvre and training and there is great need for overhauling our military machine.

Have Confidence In The People

It is not a question of the rank and file of the Army. Recently the Prime Minister spoke on the radio about the glory of Russia, but Britain, too, has written a page of glory.

Our lads who swept the skies by day and night and our lads at sea in the Navy and the Merchant Service have created a page of glory which cannot be surpassed. Our lads who are in the Army are the same type as those who are in the Air Force or sailing in the Merchant Service.

They are the same type as the lads in the Chinese and Red Armies—brave, tough and tenacious—but it is necessary to have a complete overhaul and change of the whole character of our military training and leadership.

The Prime Minister should place less reliance on those behind him in the House and more in the people of the country. At the time of Dunkirk, it was said that the Prime Minister saved the morale of this country. I question that.

The people of this country have a long history, they can take the most terrific blows, and make the most rapid recovery. But I will say that at the time of Dunkirk the Prime Minister saved the Tory party.

It might have been better if he had torpedoed it, but he saved it; and it is a leading Tory Back-Bencher who now tries to stab him in the back.

I say to the Prime Minister—let him have the same confidence in the people of this country as the people of this country have shown in him. What a difference that would make!

Disunity Helps Hitler

Let us, in voting on this Motion, realise that Hitler and Goebbels and the Nazi gang have always made advances where there was division. Division is the greatest aid to the Nazis. They want division, and

they are watching for it incessantly.

Above all things, they want division between this country and the Soviet Union, and they want division within this country itself.

We have heard it whispered often that Russia may make a separate peace. But the treaty that was made the other week has exploded that attempt to make division between this country and the Soviet Union.

There is no more any question about the fact that the fate of the people of this country and the fate of the people of the Soviet Union are bound together with the fate of the Americans, the Chinese and the other United Nations, and that co-operation between this country and the Soviet Union is one of the essential factors for victory.

Need for Second Front

Libya does not lessen, but strengthens the need for a second front while Hitler is heavily engaged on the Eastern front against Russia.

There are some who say that if we had sent munitions here and there instead of sending them to Russia, we could have saved the Empire.

Those who say that are dangerous enemies of the people of this country.

They want to take attention away from this country and

from Europe. But nobody can question the correctness of the strategy of the Prime Minister.

To attempt to save the Empire and leave Europe to Hitler would mean that this country would be at the mercy of Hitler and Fascism.

If we can save Europe and free the peoples of Europe, this country will be free and safe.

Whatever happens in Libya, whatever happens in Egypt, whatever happens in the Caucasus, sooner or later the issue will have to be faced—capitulate or fight, here or on the Continent.

Whatever may be the sacrifices caused by making the second front on the Continent, they will be as nothing compared with the sacrifices there will be if we wait until the second front is set up in this country.

Libya has not done away with the need for a second front, or weakened the necessity for a second front in Europe.

While Hitler is heavily engaged in Russia, a second front in Europe would mean the greatest possible aid to those who are carrying on the struggle in Egypt.

One of the greatest weaknesses is the fact that our main Forces are not effectively engaged. Therefore, I want to ask the Prime Minister to take the people into the most complete

confidence, and to base his policy and his hopes upon the courage and determination of the people of the country.

If we can get that combination—a Prime Minister in whom the people have confidence, and who in return has confidence in the people—I am certain we shall be able to perform deeds which will parallel the British page of glory with the page of glory which has been written by the people of the Soviet Union and the people of China.

The Labour Party and Unity

I want to make an appeal to the Labour Members in the Government. They have a very great responsibility for bringing about the basic unity in this country which can provide national unity around the Government.

The Deputy-Prime Minister (Mr. Attlee) said at the Labour Party Conference at the Central Hall that there was a diverse number of nations grouped together. We had the extreme of Communism, he said, in Soviet Russia, and the extreme of individualism in America, with Britain somewhere in between.

He said we had found it necessary to sink our political differences and unite on a common platform to save civilisation.

There is the principle laid down by the Deputy-Prime Minister and the Leader of the Labour Party, and I ask him if he and his colleagues will apply it.

I make an appeal to them, they have a great duty and a great responsibility in the face of the terrible situation which confronts us for uniting and arous-

ing the people of this country. Let them take responsibility for that task. Let them cease to be afraid, and to march with us out among the masses of the people.

We can arouse the people to a fervour, to an enthusiasm and to a spirit of determination which will overcome every obstacle which can be placed against them.

