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C. E. SMITH

"Britain Speaks"

Talk given by J. B. Priestley, well known British author, on Sunday, July 7, 1940, from 11.15 to 11.30 p.m. E.S.T. This talk was a BBC Empire Transmission, rebroadcast over the National Network of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

It is a good thing these days to learn and discuss the very latest news, but it is an equally good thing to take stock of the general situation now and then, and as Sunday is the best day for sober reflection, I propose to use this Sunday to examine the whole problem of this world-wide conflict, and to try and decide for what we here are fighting.

Now I spent the first two or three months in this war travelling up and down this country for the press, looking at camps, airdromes, naval bases, munition and aircraft factories, and the like, and during those many weeks of travel I talked with thousands of people belonging to every walk of life, and especially with young army and naval and airforce officers and men, and the younger men in the factories. Two things struck me. First, the whole atmosphere was entirely different from that of the last war, which began almost as if it were part of some hysterical summer holiday, with a great deal of singing and shouting and flag-waving and rioting against foreigners and belligerent high jinks in the old-fashioned wartime manner. This war opened very soberly, with none of that noise and hysteria. The ordinary people were united and determined, but if they were not depressed, were not elated either, but were like people faced with an unpleasant but urgently necessary task. The second thing that struck me after talking to hundreds and hundreds of the younger men, was that all of them were asking themselves, and asking me, what kind of world would come out of this war. They were all ready to do everything demanded of them, were united in their determination to work and fight like blazes against Hitler, but they did not want to feel that at the end of it all they wouldn't find themselves back again in the kind of world that began this conflict.

Now here, I think, the Chamberlain Government missed a great opportunity. It is true that on every occasion, notably in some speeches by Lord Halifax, they announced their intentions of building a new European order. But on the whole they created the impression that their chief object was to remove Hitler and his Nazis from the scene, and then, so to speak, return to the state of things that existed before the Nazis came into power. But this would not do; and for one excellent reason, namely, that for the millions of people all over the world, that past, or let us say, the twenty years between the two Great Wars, simply were not good enough. They did not like those years at all, but had found them undermined by a growing insecurity both economic and political. They did not want that world any more, they wanted a changed world.

Now the Nazis were quick to notice this and put themselves forward, not in their home propaganda where they were still fervent nationalists, but in their propaganda abroad as the revolutionaries who were fighting against the static "pluto-democracies" as they called us, in order to change the world. And many people, even though they admired neither the Nazis themselves nor their methods, could not help being influenced by this adroit line of talk. It should have been countered right from the first by a declaration that the democracies were even more in favour of a changed world than the Nazis and the Fascists. I am certain this is true of the British people; it was true of the hundreds and hundreds of serious-minded young soldiers, sailors, airmen, managers and workers with whom I talked for so many hours all day and far into the night during those first months of the war. They regarded the Nazis as I have always regarded them myself, as the greatest obstacle to a new order and a general reform of world conditions.

Let us take what is a pretty fair parallel. You have a frontier town that is anxious to clean itself up, to have a decent civic government, to settle its problems of work, wages, housing, health, and so on. But in this town a formidable armed gang is operating, and this gang, clearly out for itself, is nevertheless quick to make use of any possible division among the citizens. It tells the rich that it will protect them against the envious poor. It tells the poor that it is working for them against the rich. Now it pretends to be for the employers against the employed, and now for the workers against their

masters, and all the time every real move it makes is against the best common interests of the town, and simply in its own interests. That is exactly the position of the Nazis in the contemporary world.

And here we may make further use of this parallel. A great deal of anti-democratic capital is now being made out of the fact, which nobody disputes, that totalitarian states organized for war are obviously more efficient in wartime, and please note that, than democratic states are. But what it's supposed to prove, the armed gang in the frontier town will also be more efficient for their purposes, which are blackmail, robbery, and murder, than the innocent citizens. But the object of human life is not to make war, but to give the fullest possible expression to the human body, mind, and soul. If the state is regarded simply as a military engine then clearly the cast iron dictatorship is best. But we refuse to regard the state simply as a military engine. It has other and nobler purposes, and for those purposes we believe the democratic system is still the best. Moreover, it can easily be proved that in peacetime these military dictatorships are not efficient at all. That is, they may be manufacturing plenty of guns and airplanes, but the bodily, mental, and spiritual health of their citizens is always seen to be declining. Moreover, they know that they are inefficient on a peacetime basis, and that is one reason why they have always tried to avoid a peacetime basis. They always try to create an atmosphere in which if war is not actually in being, it is at least round the corner.

The reason why the democracies have been so slow and so often out-manoeuvred is the same reason why the decent citizens of a frontier town would appear slow and would of course be found out-manoeuvred by the armed gang. They are trying desperately hard to get on to their ordinary decent lives, and do not want to spend their time swaggering around with pistols in their hands and bumping people off. And our fundamental opposition to the Nazis does not come from the fact their aims are to destroy the British Empire but from the fact that with these gangsters roaring around and holding everybody up it is simply impossible to go on with a sensible decent civic life at all. Until they're out of the way for good and all we can make no real progress.

President Roosevelt has done the world a great service by producing in his Independence Day speech a list of five freedoms that men must have. Freedom from fear and want, freedom of religion, information and expression. Their people have not got them, and no people anywhere will have them if the Nazis aren't stopped. That is why it is vitally important that people in the New World should not be lured into believing that this is just another European War. This is a most dangerous belief which is being encouraged by the Nazi propaganda machine to serve its own ends. This conflict is not just another European War. It isn't European. It isn't even just another war. Many cynics last September had a good time reminding us that the Great War of 1914-1918 was called the war to end war, the last war, and so on. And now here was another. But strictly speaking, the last war was the last war. This conflict, whatever its exact character may be belongs to quite a different series. It didn't break out because some nations quarrelled stupidly about some difference that might have been settled around a conference table. They had already tried the conference table method with the Nazis at Munich, and had seen it brutally and cynically disregarded. No further compromise was possible. They were simply determined to go on and on taking whatever they wanted and they had to be stopped or life would not long be worth living. A thousand volumes have not explained clearly yet why the last war broke out. You could explain this one on a postal card. The issue is plainer than the nose on Hitler's face, and it is no more a European issue than a world outbreak of cholera would be. I can prove that in one sentence. The Nazi organization is endeavouring to penetrate everywhere on the American continent. Why, for fun? The question answers itself. But though the fundamental issue, which is that the Nazis must be stopped or we

simply cannot get on with our lives is plain enough, that is not to say that all the side issues, all the political and economic and ideological complications are not elaborate enough. For it is the business of the Nazis to see that they are elaborate, in the hope of confusing opinion everywhere.

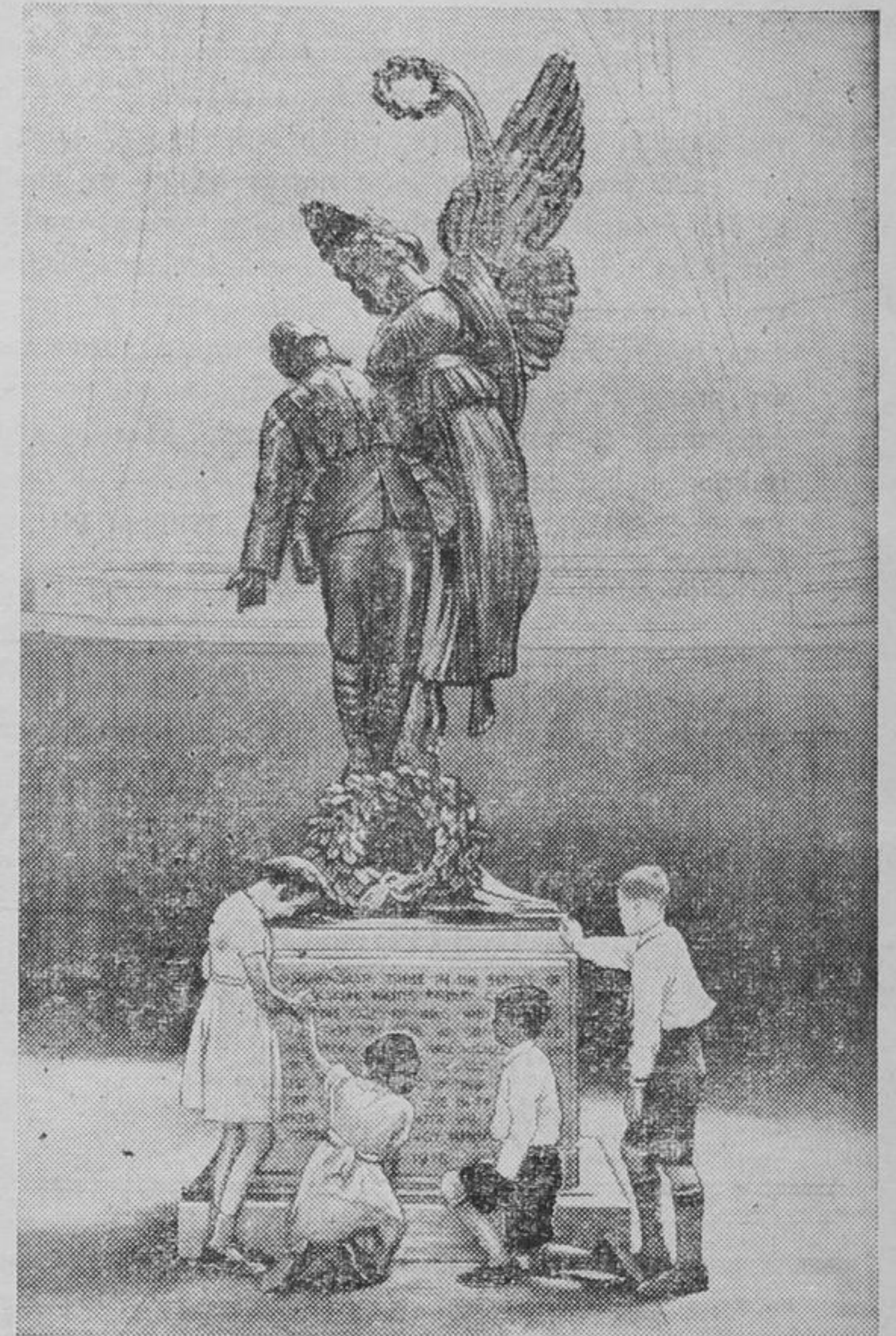
Let me explain the Nazi method. First it decides what party, what stream of opinion in any country is most firmly and decisively anti-Nazi. And then it tries to enlist as its supporters, active or passive — though passive supporters are most useful to the Nazis — the parties in those countries that are most against this main stream of opinion. And they are ready to work this trick all the better because, as I have pointed out before, they are ready to use pretence for anything, except, of course, a real imperial democracy. Look at France for example. Nobody doubts that there was not only inefficiency, but there was treachery. But where was this treachery? The Nazis are trying to make this question very difficult to answer clearly, so that now we find the French right blaming the left, and the left blaming the right, and there are mistrusting and suspicious looks all round. That is the device — to divide and conquer. So there you have the trick. Find the main stream of anti-Nazi opposition. Don't try to damn them, it takes too much time and trouble, but go to the other party, whatever it is, and try to induce it to sell out. Thus if you discover in any country that the very rich are trembling because they imagine they are going to lose their money bags, persuade them that their only chance of keeping them is to have Nazi protection. Find people who want power at all costs and promise them all the power they want; that is why the issue begins to look so complicated. Just because it is deliberately being complicated. Let us un-complicate it once and for all. Decent people everywhere, and this includes, I have no doubt, millions of Germans themselves, want to bring order and security, those five freedoms listed by President Roosevelt, into this miserable haunted world in which man's very inventiveness is being used against his better interests. If we could see those great changes coming, most of us would gladly give our last breath to welcome them. We don't want to

live, we don't want our children to live any longer in this vast mad-house.

But nothing can be done, not one single great change can be made, no noble world-sweeping reform brought into being until the menace of these power-crazed Germans is removed, and we can set to work in reasonable security. The ganglife of the civilized world.

must be broken before the town can be cleaned up. If it is not broken then we shall go from bad to worse. That is why I believe my country has arrived at the greatest hour of its destiny. It is now, in the words of a message that recently arrived from a South American state, "The hope of humanity and trustee of the world."

War Victims Safe in Canada



—Canadian Pacific Photo.

Innocent victims of a war in which their fathers are playing a noble part, these youthful evacuees from England arrived unaccompanied in Montreal after an uneventful journey by Canadian Pacific services. In Windsor Station, Montreal, the young Britons showed deep interest in the railway's War Memorial commemorating the death of Canadian Pacific soldiers of a generation ago—many of them fathers of the Canadian Pacific employes who are today bringing the youth of England safe by land and sea from the horrors of Hun air raids.

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