

Retrospect

Retrospect (last 2 pages)

In this postscript the author reflects on how he and the wider society have changed through the sixty-seven years since the last diary entry.

On re-reading my diaries, I realised that—in relation to the continuing violence, deprivations and dangers in the world—I have been as much on the edge as I was in my witnessing of the war. What I see now indicates a clearer, and ultimately irresolvable, personal moral dimension. I have continued to embrace life, while far away it is being extinguished; and to enjoy eating, in the knowledge of world hunger. I have continued to occupy a privileged position in the privileged society of Britain. My children and grandchildren have never known hunger or fear, and have received education and health care as beneficiaries of the post-war reforms which mitigated the injustices of the pre-war years. As a doctor I had been able to play a part in delivering these reforms, and I comforted myself—I now think excessively—that putting my energies into my professional work made up for my political disillusion and impotence.

I remain a socialist critic of capitalism, but a general weakening of socialist thinking has resulted from the revelations of the full horrors of the 'actually existing socialism' of Stalinism, the weakening of the Trade Unions as a result of our shrinking industrial base, consumerism, the direct assaults of Thatcher, the betrayals of Blair, and the bias of the media. Wartime adversity, and the memory of recent poverty, made rationing acceptable in Britain; and a shared sense of community supported the reforms of the immediate post-war years. But this has largely faded away.

Most ordinary citizens do still seek to live ordinary lives which include concern for each other and for the future but, all too easily, they are rendered passive or complacent by the systematic omissions

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and distortions of the media, and the distractions of the electronic equivalents of Rome's bread and circuses. Market forces promote greed while failing to meet many basic human needs, and in the developed world obesity has replaced malnutrition as a major health concern.

When the global casino of international finance capitalism lurches into one of its recurrent economic crises, which it is doing conspicuously as I write, explanations are offered as if these were natural phenomena like tsunamis, rather than the results of human action. Governments are not free to follow policies which conflict with the interests of international capital. In response to the crisis, social care is whittled away, but the banks are protected. Actually existing capitalism has much to answer for.

It is hard not to feel sadness and anger and fear for the future. What is to be done? The dangerously unstable and destructive system of post-industrial finance capitalism controls the world, even though it cannot control itself. Effective political opposition needs to recover its voice, and sustain a sense of what human society and human individuals might become; recognizing and challenging how human consciousness is shaped by the system, resisting each erosion of human values, and freeing ourselves from what Blake described as 'mind forg'd manacles'.