Tomorrow

al-Balagh, 1 March 1945

There is no doubt that these sessions the British House of Commons has been holding since Tuesday are a magnificent display of democratic life, one Great Britain can genuinely take pride in, and one the British people can rightly see as vindicating every effort they expended, every hardship they endured, and every sacrifice they made throughout this war. It is no small thing for a Prime Minister to stand and set out matters of war and policy with such candour, not merely before the House of Commons, but before the entire world. Nor is it a small thing for British members of Parliament to stand and criticize their own government's conduct of policy and war with a candour, a rigour, and a freedom exceeding even the Prime Minister's own manner in setting out those very matters of policy and war.

All of this is of real consequence — the very substance from which the glory of democracy in general, and the glory of British democracy in particular, is made. Guarding it is well worth the tremendous price democracy pays, the price Great Britain herself pays, for it is precisely this that makes life worthy of human dignity, worthy of what individuals and communities in civilized nations aspire to — a rising toward high ideals, and a drawing near to progress and perfection.

There is no doubt this splendid freedom is bound to stir, in the hearts of civilized people, feelings of admiration and esteem, along with other feelings reflecting a genuine eagerness to see this freedom become something universal, enjoyed by all civilized peoples exactly as the British enjoy it, savoured by all civilized peoples exactly as the British savour it. But there is equally no doubt that a considerable distance still separates the civilized peoples of the world from this British freedom to state and defend one's own opinion. It is enough to note that Great Britain, for all the sacrifice she has made in this war, for all the horrors of war she has met, for all the catastrophes of war she has faced, has never once been prevented, by any of it, from enjoying this magnificent political freedom — while there exist, in the world, nations that have borne nothing like the share of war's horrors the English have borne, faced nothing like the share of war's catastrophes the English have faced, and yet enjoy nothing like the share of freedom of opinion the English enjoy.

I have already said that Mr. Churchill and his fellow British MPs were not merely speaking to one another, but were speaking to the whole world, laying before the whole of civilized humanity the political course Great Britain followed at the Crimea Conference. Some approved of it entirely, some were entirely indignant at it, and others took a middle path, approving of certain things and objecting to others. It seems most likely the debate will end this evening in the House of Commons with a declaration of confidence in the British government, and approval of its political conduct at this conference.

Mr. Churchill has won this confidence in situations where he never reached quite the level of candour in setting out political problems that he reached this time; for the British value the war and its necessities, value the tremendous efforts their Prime Minister has made in managing the war's affairs and steering his country out of its difficulties, and know he is the man who must see this war through to its end. Confidence in him, these days, is one of the necessities of war, as far as the British are concerned. But what is already certain is that the British people themselves are not wholly satisfied with their own government's foreign policy. They accept it, and support it, because their own interest during the war compels this acceptance and support, and because turning away from this course would expose their interests to danger — but that is one thing, and genuine satisfaction with this foreign policy is quite another.

Nothing proves this more clearly than the fact that a group of British MPs, including some from the Prime Minister's own party, utterly reject the British government's position on the Polish problem. They took this rejection to real, forceful lengths, proposing an amendment to the motion of confidence Mr. Churchill had put before the House, asking the House to declare its regret that the British government had failed to honour its pledge to Poland to protect the whole of Polish territory and guarantee her independence intact. Had this amendment been accepted, it would have placed the British government's position in real jeopardy; for this very reason it was not accepted, being rejected by an overwhelming majority of MPs. It seems likely those who put it forward knew perfectly well it would not be accepted, but wanted to make their own view clear and explicit, and to lodge, in expressing that view, a certain reproach against the government — for having failed to keep its promises to Poland on the one hand, and for having yielded before its Russian ally on the other.

If this is the state of affairs within the British House of Commons itself, and if Mr. Churchill was speaking not to the British alone, but to the whole world, then it is only natural that his speech should be received differently by world opinion at large: some receiving it with approval, others with criticism, and others still with a great deal of reserve and caution.

The Crimea Conference organized the affairs of the war in a manner the world still remains entirely ignorant of, and will learn only gradually, as the plan laid down is carried out. It organized political affairs in a manner the world knows something of, but appears to remain largely ignorant of a great deal more, despite this candid, clear speech Mr. Churchill delivered in the House of Commons. The clearest proof of this is that Mr. Roosevelt, President of the United States, told journalists himself that the Crimea Conference concluded secret agreements, which will be revealed once their revelation becomes appropriate. There are, then, things not yet known about what the three who met at Yalta actually agreed upon. And even the matters that have become known, of what this conference decided, have not met with the approval of all the liberated nations.

The Polish question is either perfectly clear or thoroughly obscure — and there is nothing strange in that at all. The Polish government resident in London rejects what the conference decided concerning her; the Polish government resident within Poland accepts it; the Poles scattered across the outside world are themselves sharply divided over it; and the Polish people themselves have not yet spoken their own word, so their own opinion remains unknown. Nothing is clear except the will of the three Allies who met in the Crimea. Stranger still, the British government has not yet withdrawn recognition from the Polish government resident in London, and will continue to recognize it until such time as the provisional Polish government the three decided to establish actually comes into being — and God alone knows when that government will be established.

France's own indignation was perfectly clear last week, and it is certain that whatever Mr. Churchill declared in his speech concerning France — gracious as it was — was never going to ease that indignation on its own. But this indignation has, without doubt, begun to ease, because the Allies have taken positive steps of real value toward satisfying France. The United States has signed with France an economic agreement of the greatest significance, enabling her to strengthen her

army and revive French industry within a short time, under the Lend-Lease Act; and Great Britain, for her part, invited the French Foreign Minister to London, and explained to him the decisions of the Crimea Conference, and set out for him Great Britain's own intentions toward France, and her own eagerness to strengthen Anglo-French cooperation.

Mr. Churchill declared that Great Britain acknowledges France's own privileged standing in the eastern Mediterranean, and that she has made, and will continue to make, efforts to mend matters between France on the one hand and Syria and Lebanon on the other. It seems most likely the long-anticipated alliance between France and Britain will be concluded soon. All of this means that the two Anglo-Saxon powers are eager to satisfy France, and are taking decisive steps toward that satisfaction, so as to achieve a real balance between themselves and Russia in their own relations with the French people.

As for the countries of the Near East, Mr. Churchill spoke of them to the House of Commons in terms not without matter for real thought and reflection: he welcomes the entry of its states into the United Nations, credits Egypt with the assistance she has given the Allies, hopes Turkey will attain the international standing she deserves, reproaches Turkey for having delayed joining the United Nations, affirms the recognition already given to the independence of Syria and Lebanon, affirms his own eagerness to narrow the distance between these two states and France, but declares plainly that he will attempt to solve the Near East's own problems only after the war has ended. How much easier matters would be, if only the Near East's problems were solved before the peace conference itself convened.

There is no doubt whatsoever that the greatest good would lie in the Near Eastern states going to the peace conference content and at ease, confident, feeling neither fear nor anxiety, thinking of nothing but contributing whatever modest yet fruitful effort they can toward building the new world, and toward organizing the peace and guaranteeing security in these Arab lands, whose geographical, political, and economic importance grows greater with each passing day.

There is a vast difference between these Eastern states going to the conference to defend their own existence and their own independence, only afterward taking part in organizing the affairs of the new world, and these same states going to the conference already secure in their own

personal existence and their own genuine independence, free to devote themselves entirely to taking part in organizing the general affairs of peace. The latter would far better drive them to act with strength, candour, honesty, and sincerity. But they will, as things stand, go now wary and anxious, questioning every single step for what effect it might have on their own fate and future. It is understood that the peace conference is meant to decide the fate of defeated nations, not victorious ones. Whatever the case, the states of the Arab East have never, on any day, been so thoroughly tested as they are being tested now. The very least that can be asked of them, from this point on, is that they remain vigilant, determined to settle their own fate in a manner befitting their own rights and dignity on the one hand, and to take part, honestly and sincerely, in building the new world that is meant to fill the earth with justice, after it has been filled with injustice, on the other.