

George Orwell - Future Of A Ruined Germany

1945

As the advance into Germany continues and more and more of the devastation wrought by the Allied bombing planes is laid bare, there are three comments that almost every observer finds himself making. The first is: 'The people at home have no conception of this.' The second is, 'It's a miracle that they've gone on fighting.' And the third is, 'Just think of the work of building this all up again!'

It is quite true that the scale of the Allied blitzing of Germany is even now not realised in this country, and its share in the breaking-down of German resistance is probably much underrated. It is difficult to give actuality to reports of air warfare and the man in the street can be forgiven if he imagines that what we have done to Germany over the past four years is merely the same kind of thing they did to us in 1940.

But this error, which must be even commoner in the United States, has in it a potential danger, and the many protests against indiscriminate bombing which have been uttered by pacifists and humanitarians have merely confused the issue.

Bombing is not especially inhumane. War itself is inhumane and the bombing plane, which is used to paralyse industry and transport, is a relatively civilised weapon. 'Normal' or 'legitimate' warfare is just as destructive of inanimate objects and enormously so of human lives.

Moreover, a bomb kills a casual cross-section of the population, whereas the men killed in battle are exactly the ones that the community can least afford to lose. The people of Britain have never felt easy about the bombing of civilians and no doubt they will be ready enough to pity the Germans as soon as they have definitely defeated them; but what they still have not grasped - thanks to their own comparative immunity - is the frightful destructiveness of modern war and the long period of impoverishment that now lies ahead of the world as a whole.

To walk through the ruined cities of Germany is to feel an actual doubt about the continuity of civilisation. For one has to remember that it is not only Germany that has been blitzed. The same desolation extends, at any rate in considerable patches, all the way from Brussels to Stalingrad. And where there has been ground fighting, the destruction is even more thorough. In the 300 miles or so between the Marne and the Rhine there is not such a thing as a bridge or a viaduct that has not been blown up.

Even in England we are aware that we need three million houses, and that the chances of getting them within measurable time seem rather slender. But how many houses will Germany need, or Poland or the USSR, or Italy? When one thinks of the stupendous task of rebuilding hundreds of European cities, one realises that a long period must elapse before even the standards of living of 1939 can be re-established.

We do not yet know the full extent of the damage that has been done to Germany but judging from the areas that have been overrun hitherto, it is difficult to believe in the power of the Germans to pay any kind of reparations, either in goods or in labour. Simply to re-house the German people, to set the shattered factories working, and to keep German agriculture from collapsing after the foreign workers have been liberated, will use up all the labour that the Germans are likely to dispose of.

If, as is planned, millions of them are to be deported for reconstruction work, the recovery of

Germany itself will be all the slower. After the last war, the impossibility of obtaining substantial money reparations was finally grasped, but it was less generally realised that the impoverishment of any one country reacts unfavourably on the world as a whole. It would be no advantage to turn Germany into a kind of rural slum.

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