

Attack

Siegfried Sassoon, *The Old Huntsman*, 1918

At dawn the ridge emerges massed and dun
In the wild purple of the glow'ring sun,
Smouldering through spouts of drifting smoke that shroud
The menacing scarred slope; and, one by one,
Tanks creep and topple forward to the wire.
The barrage roars and lifts. Then, clumsily bowed
With bombs and guns and shovels and battle-gear,
Men jostle and climb to meet the bristling fire.
Lines of grey, muttering faces, masked with fear,
They leave their trenches, going over the top,
While time ticks blank and busy on their wrists,
And hope, with furtive eyes and grappling fists,
Flounders in mud. O Jesus, make it stop!

The Parable of the Old Man and the Young

Wilfrid Owen, *Poems* (1918, 1920)

So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,
And took the fire with him, and a knife.
And as they sojourned both of them together,
Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,
But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,
And builded parapets and trenches there,
And stretched forth the knife to slay his son.
When lo! an angel called him out of heaven,
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,
Neither do anything to him. Behold,
A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns;
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.
But the old man would not so, but slew his son,
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

Recalling War

Robert Graves, *Poems about War* (1938)

Entrance and exit wounds are silvered clean,
The track aches only when the rain reminds.
The one-legged man forgets his leg of wood,
The one-armed man his jointed wooden arm.
The blinded man sees with his ears and hands
As much or more than once with both his eyes.
Their war was fought these twenty years ago
And now assumes the nature-look of time,
As when the morning traveler turns and views
His wild night-stumbling carved into a hill.

What, then, was war? No mere discord of flags
But an infection of the common sky
That sagged ominously upon the earth
Even when the season was the airiest May.
Down pressed the sky, and we, oppressed, thrust out
Boastful tongue, clenched fist and valiant yard.

Natural infirmities were out of mode,
For Death was young again; patron alone
Of healthy dying, premature fate-spasm.

Fear made fine bed-fellows. Sick with delight
At life's discovered transitoriness,
Our youth became all-flesh and waived the mind.
Never was such antiqueness of romance,
Such tasty honey oozing from the heart.
And old importances came swimming back –
Wine, meat, log-fired, a roof over the head,
A weapon at the thigh, surgeons at call.
Even there was a use again for God –
A word of rage in lack of meat, wine, fire,
In ache of wounds beyond all surgeoning.

War was return of earth to ugly earth,
War was foundering of sublimities,
Extinction of each happy art and faith
By which the world has still kept head in air,
Protesting logic or protesting love,
Until the unendurable moment struck –
The inward scream, the duty to run mad.

And we recall the merry ways of guns –
Nibbling the walls of factory and church
Like a child, piecrust; felling groves of trees
Like a child, dandelions with a switch.
Machine-guns rattle toy-like from a hill,
Down in a row the brave tin-soldiers fall:
A sight to be recalled in elder days
When learnedly the future we devote
To yet more boastful visions of despair.

Neville Chamberlain to his sister (March 1938) [Past Speaks, p.361] "As a matter of fact, the plan of the 'Grand Alliance,' as Winston calls it, had occurred to me long before he mentioned it.... I talked about it to Halifax, and we submitted it to the chiefs of the staff and the F.O. experts.... You have only to look at the map to see that nothing that France or we could do could possibly save Czechoslovakia from being overrun by the Germans, if they wanted to do it."

Chamberlain, speech in Parliament (July 1938) [Past Speaks, p.365] "If only we could find some peaceful solution of this Czechoslovakian question, I should myself feel that the way was open again for a further effort for a general appeasement.... We have already demonstrated the possibility of the complete agreement between a democratic and a totalitarian state [the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935], and I do not myself see why that experience should not be repeated."

Chamberlain, radio speech (27 Sept. 1938) [Past Speaks, p. 369] "How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas-masks here because of a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing. It seems still more impossible that a quarrel which has already been settled in principle should be the subject of war."

Chamberlain, on returning to Britain after meeting with Hitler at Munich (Sept. 1938), about Czechoslovakia, and signing the four-power Munich Agreement, and the Anglo-German Declaration: "Even the descriptions of the papers give no idea of the scenes in the streets as I drove from Heston to the Palace. They were lined from one end to the other with people of every class, shouting themselves hoarse, leaping on the running board, banging on the windows, and thrusting their hands into the car to be shaken. The scenes culminated in Downing Street, when I spoke to the multitudes below from the same window, I believe, as that from which Dizzy announced peace with honour 60 years ago."

Chamberlain, speech in Parliament (3 Oct. 1938): "Before giving a verdict upon this arrangement [the agreement with Hitler regarding Czechoslovakia], we should do well to avoid describing it as a personal or a national triumph for anyone. The real triumph is that it has shown that representatives of four great Powers can find it possible to agree on a way of carrying out a difficult and delicate operation by discussion instead of by force of arms, and thereby they have averted a catastrophe which would have ended civilisation as we have known it. The relief that our escape from this great peril of war has, I think, everywhere been mingled in this country with a profound feeling

of sympathy--[Hon. Members: 'Shame.'] I have nothing to be ashamed of. Let those who have, hang their heads.

"Ever since I assumed my present office my main purpose has been to work for the pacification of Europe, for the removal of those suspicions and those animosities which have so long poisoned the air. The path which leads to appeasement is long and bristles with obstacles. The question of Czechoslovakia is the latest and perhaps the most dangerous. Now that we have got past it, I feel that it may be possible to make further progress along the road to sanity...."

Winston Churchill's first address to Commons as P.M. (13 May 1940): "I would say to the House, as I said to those who have joined this Government: 'I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat.'

"We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and of suffering. You ask, what is our policy? I will say: It is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: It is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival."

Churchill after the successful evacuation of Dunkirk (4 June 1940): "Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous States have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender...."

Churchill, speech in Parliament (18 June 1940) [Past Speaks, pp. 378] "For all of us at this time, whatever our sphere, our station, our occupation, our duties, it will be a help to remember the famous lines:

He nothing common did, or mean,
Upon that memorable scene....

What General Weygand called the 'Battle of France' is over. I expect that the battle of Britain is about to beginHitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war. If we can stand up to him all Europe may be free, and the life of the world may move forward into broad, sunlit uplands; but if we fail then the whole world, including the United States, and all the we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new dark age made more sinister, and perhaps more prolonged, by the lights of a perverted science. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duty and so bear ourselves that if the British Commonwealth and Empire lasts for a thousand years men will still say, 'This was their finest hour.'"

from the (Sir William) Beveridge Report (1942): "Any proposals for the future, while they should use to the full the experience gathered in the past, should not be restricted by consideration of sectional interests established in the obtaining of that experience. Now, when the war is abolishing landmarks of every kind is the opportunity for using experience in a clear field. A revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolutions, not for patching...."

"This Report takes abolition of want after this war as its aim. It includes as its main method compulsory social insurance, with national assistance and voluntary insurance as subsidiary methods. It assumes allowances for dependent children, as part of its background. The plan assumes also establishment of comprehensive health and rehabilitation services and maintenance of employment, that is to say avoidance of mass unemployment, as necessary conditions of success in social insurance."

from Labour Party election manifesto (1945): *Let Us Face the Future: A Declaration of Labour Policy for the Consideration of the Nation*

Victory in War must be followed by a Prosperous Peace

Victory is assured for us and our allies in the European war. The war in the East goes the same way. The British Labour Party is firmly resolved that Japanese barbarism shall be defeated just as decisively as Nazi aggression and tyranny. The people will have won both struggles. The gallant men and women in the Fighting Services, in the Merchant Navy, Home Guard and Civil Defence, in the factories and in the bombed areas - they deserve and must be assured a happier future than faced so many of them after the last war. Labour regards their welfare as a sacred trust.

So far as Britain's contribution is concerned, this war will have been won by its people, not by any one man or set of men, though strong and greatly valued leadership has been given to the high resolve of the people in the present struggle. And in this leadership the Labour Ministers have taken their full share of burdens and responsibilities. The record of the Labour Ministers has been one of hard tasks well done since that fateful day in May, 1940, when the initiative of Labour in Parliament brought about the fall of the Chamberlain Government and the formation of the new War Government which has led the country to victory.

The people made tremendous efforts to win the last war also. But when they had won it they lacked a lively interest

in the social and economic problems of peace, and accepted the election promises of the leaders of the anti-Labour parties at their face value. So the "hard-faced men who had done well out of the war" were able to get the kind of peace that suited themselves. The people lost that peace. And when we say "peace" we mean not only the Treaty, but the social and economic policy which followed the fighting.

In the years that followed, the "hard-faced men" and their political friends kept control of the Government. They controlled the banks, the mines, the big industries, largely the press and the cinema. They controlled the means by which the people got their living. They controlled the ways by which most of the people learned about the world outside. This happened in all the big industrialised countries....

The Labour Party is a Socialist Party, and proud of it. Its ultimate purpose at home is the establishment of the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain - free, democratic, efficient, progressive, public-spirited, its material resources organised in the service of the British people.

But Socialism cannot come overnight, as the product of a week-end revolution. The members of the Labour Party, like the British people, are practical-minded men and women.

There are basic industries ripe and over-ripe for public ownership and management in the direct service of the nation. There are many smaller businesses rendering good service which can be left to go on with their useful work.

There are big industries not yet ripe for public ownership which must nevertheless be required by constructive supervision to further the nation's needs and not to prejudice national interests by restrictive anti-social monopoly or cartel agreements - caring for their own capital structures and profits at the cost of a lower standard of living for all."

"Annus Mirabilis"

Philip Larkin, *High Windows* (1967)

Sexual intercourse began
In nineteen sixty-three
(which was rather late for me) -
Between the end of the Chatterley ban
And the Beatles' first LP.

Up to then there'd only been
A sort of bargaining,
A wrangle for the ring,
A shame that started at sixteen
And spread to everything.

Then all at once the quarrel sank:
Everyone felt the same,
And every life became
A brilliant breaking of the bank,
A quite unlosable game.

So life was never better than
In nineteen sixty-three
(Though just too late for me) -
Between the end of the Chatterley ban
And the Beatles' first LP.

'Things started happening'

Horace Ove: In 1964 London had changed a lot. The whole feel of that kind of freedom had started to take place. England before that was very conservative. When I arrived in '60 it still felt like after the war: it was very grey and people wore black and they wore grey and they were very formal and even the guy digging up the street would be wearing a suit, everybody ... There was a heavy cloud over it. When I came back in '64 something had started to happen in everything - in the arts, in music - there was more money, the working class had more money, there were more working-class heroes, things started to take place and the politics started to change: things started happening.

Mick Farren: I think the idea of changing the world had started almost immediately after the assassination of John F. Kennedy. The protest movement had become weird by then. The Times They Are a-Changing had come and gone.

We were now Inside the Gates of Eden. My thoughts were always more of running amok. I never really believed in the ideologies. I think I actually believed in constant revolution and still do. Fuck all this shit. It didn't bother me none. It was all sorts of self-sustaining things. The CND geezers had become Marxists and they were so fucking incompetent they wouldn't be able to run a bunfight. Chairman Mao was not amongst them. I think the British revolutionary gene pool was probably wiped out somewhere outside of Barcelona. That was how we ended up with Harold [Wilson] basically - he was one of the ones who didn't go to Spain and felt ashamed about it. I don't know who the politicians were but they weren't at the Albert Hall watching Bob Dylan. I didn't see Tariq Ali up there.

—from Jonathan Green, *Days in the Life: Voices from the English Underground, 1961-1971* (1988, 1998)