

*Extract from Speech by Viscount Halifax in the House of Lords,
December 5, 1939.*

* * * * *

The distinction that my right honourable friend the Prime Minister drew the other day between peace and war aims is, with all respect to Lord Ponsonby, generally admitted to be valid, and I think that what he said in that connexion has secured a very general approval. I was particularly glad that both Lord Crawford and my noble friend Lord Maugham reminded us of the impossibility of this country itself endeavouring to give great detail and precision to those subjects without adequate regard to what may be the feeling, and what may be even in some regards a different feeling, in some of the Dominions or among the Governments of our Allies. That is a consideration of which we must never for a moment lose sight. But I suggest, my lords, that, after all, the general purposes for which we have taken up arms are perfectly clear. They have been, as I think, defined as far as it is possible for the Government to define them, and I was particularly glad to notice that both the noble Lord who moved and the most reverend Primate shared that view. I really do not think there is any difference of opinion in any quarter now as to their general substance. It is quite possible, as the most reverend Primate said, that some may put the emphasis differently, and that, as circumstances change, that may from time to time lead to some variety of expression. But the fundamental purpose remains. When the noble Lord, Lord Ponsonby, told us, what is no doubt a self-evident truth, that this Government must some day give place to another, I was consoled by the reflection that, unless the noble Lord, Lord Ponsonby, himself be called upon to form a Government, I do not anticipate that there will be any substantial variation in the war aims of this country in the hands of any Government formed from any responsible quarter in this House.

Perhaps I may for the sake of clarity, however, repeat and summarise in the briefest possible fashion what our purposes appear to me to be. In doing so I shall be perhaps merely putting into different words what fell from my noble friend Lord Crawford in a speech to which the House listened with such evident enjoyment. We desire peoples who have been deprived of their independence to recover their liberties. We desire to redeem the peoples of Europe from this constant fear of German aggression, and we desire to safeguard our own freedom and security. It is quite true, in spite of the fact that it evoked a measure of criticism from the noble Lord, Lord Ponsonby, to say that we do not seek aggrandisement and we do not seek to redraw the map in our own interests, and still less—although I recognise what can be said about the increasing difficulty of maintaining this position in the hearts of our people as the war goes on—are we moved by any spirit of vengeance. On the contrary, if Germany is able to restore the confidence which she has destroyed, we aim at a settlement which will encourage her to take her rightful place in Europe, and we wish to create an international order in which all peoples, as we hope, secure under the reign of law, can determine their political and economic life free from the interference of their more powerful neighbours. To this end we would be willing to give our best, in full co-operation with other nations, including Germany, to the work of reconstruction, political and economic, for only so do we believe that the ordered international life of Europe can be preserved.

Now, my Lords, that general framework—and it has been said over and over again—will be found in the speeches of members of His Majesty's Opposition just as much as in speeches of those who speak for His Majesty's Government, and in the views expressed in statements made on behalf of the Dominions. It will be found in the declaration of M. Daladier and of French leaders of all parties, and I do not believe it would meet with dissent in any Allied quarter. These declarations in my judgment may fairly claim to represent what the terms of the motion describe as "the essential principles of a satisfactory and lasting peace." It may well be that the sacrifices that this war must be expected to impose may lead—and I most devoutly hope that they will lead—to an appreciation of those Christian values of which the most reverend Primate spoke, and lead all men to seek to give more practical application to them in the life of our people.