

generally for capital works involving long term outlay. Obsolescence of plant and labor on the scale to which we have begun to accustom ourselves in the last decade were not provided for in the Victorian industrial outlook. Who, for instance, foresaw the onslaught of the internal combustion engine and road transport upon the railway systems of the world? Who foresaw the sudden destruction of the earning power of large coal mining valleys in South Wales, or who foresaw the conversion of prosperous regions of the North-East coast into derelict areas almost over-night? With the possibility continually present of some new invention which will throw on the scrap-heap the whole of factory buildings and plant, all the accumulated experience and skill engaged in an industry, it is not want of enterprise alone but foresight and caution, that may be fully justified, which prevent capital from flowing freely into channels which on a short view promise to be prosperous.

Suppose, for example (I do not wish this to be taken as prophecy), the conveyance of electrical power by wireless were proved to be not only theoretically but commercially possible, what would be the effect on the capital which we, as a nation, wisely, as we thought, have sunk in nation-wide electricity schemes? What would happen to the industry making the power cables, or what would happen to copper-mining? When we let our minds dwell on this aspect of modern life we are tempted to endorse the well-known observation of a Bishop who said it would be a good thing for the world if science took a twenty year holiday from invention.

What are we to put in the place of laissez-faire? We look abroad and we see in Italy and in Russia two very different political systems actively engaged in attempting to rebuild their national life on new foundations. They are diametrically opposed in many important respects, but Fascism and Bolshevism are agreed on two points: they both pay scant respect to the claims of political and personal freedom, and they both insist on the need for conscious co-operative production and political planning in their economic activities. If we are abundantly right, as we believe we are, in believing on the contrary that freedom is a supreme human value without which life is worthless, have we any sound reason for denying their other assertion that conscious cooperative production and forward planning are essentials for the reconstruction of twentieth century life?

A year ago planning was a new and startling idea in this country. Today it has become a cliché and is correspondingly devoid of content for the mass of us. But I think it is still true to say that rooted as we are in the British tradition of personal and political freedom, the average man and woman among us instinctively distrusts the idea of conscious co-operative planning, and we tremble for our cherished privileges and liberties when it is suggested to us that we have something we can learn from Italy and from Russia.

What I wish to put before you is the view that conscious co-operative planning is not only a desirable means of progress, but an unavoidable necessity if we are to save the economic structure of modern civilization from disaster, and that the immediate task to which we should all bend our energies is consistent with freedom, and freedom with planning. The task of steering the wise course between tyrannous compulsion and anarchic individualism is not an easy one. The community does already intervene actively in the life of the individual in very many ways, whether as the State or as the Local Authority, or merely to assist groups to do collectively for the community what as individuals they could not do in isolation.