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They Don't Know London!

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361

at the local agencies, unpaid officials in the public service, most of them strange and inexperienced in the political byways, trembled every time their open support of legislation was branded as lobbying. The slum dweller himself was never vocal. The few people who did fight for housing were dismissed as star-gazers. Senator Wagner and Congressman McCormack have had to support the program almost single-handed. And against this un-

organized and unarticulate group there has always stood a well-formed and well-financed array of vested rights trained in political tactics. When the business index pointed upward and the time was ripe to overthrow the program, they had little difficulty in doing so.

Officials cannot be expected to fight for the program alone. There will have to be a public outcry if public housing is to be saved.

They Don't Know London!

BY ERIKA MANN

London, September 23

MY FLAT has been blown up, my typewriter smashed, and most of my manuscripts and notes burned; nevertheless, I will try to give a simple account of last night, when all this happened. By now most of my friends have had the same kind of experience, to say nothing of the people of London East, whose adventures have been more serious.

I was not there when parts of the ceiling came down and a fire started blazing in my room. Down in our cellar something particular happened. The windows, of course, were blown in and our whole little blackout setup crashed into the kitchen—boards, shutters, glass, and sand. Nobody was hurt. Our landlord, an elderly Englishman of great dignity, was the only one to get a bit excited, wondering whether his canary next door had survived. After a few minutes of mild confusion and uncertainty, the firemen arrived and saved the house from complete destruction. We could not, however, stay. There was still danger that the building would collapse; besides, little pieces of shrapnel kept coming in, as if with the wind, through the black holes that had been our windows.

We could not see a thing in the smoky darkness. I walked out into the street. The familiar spectacle of a sky torn by exploding shells was before me. The east was bathed in red flames as by the rising sun; I heard the whister concert we are already so accustomed to—the hollow boom of the anti-aircraft guns, rather consoling in its reproachful persistence, the hiss of falling bombs, followed, within a few seconds, by the shock and thunder of the explosion. Hardly a taxi can be found during night raids, so I decided to walk to a hotel twelve blocks away. More annoying than anything else is the humming of bombers over one's head—the impertinence of deadly bluebottles against which one is powerless. Once a bomb is released, one can do something about it: one can judge from its sound where it will explode and senselessly jump to the other side of the street, or throw oneself down, or do whatever some strange instinct commands.

But the roar of the motor-driven engines in the sky is threatening in a disquietingly vague manner. Besides, it is infuriating. Up above the clouds hide Field Marshal Goring's obedient heroes. Their risk, during these night raids, is almost nothing. True, they cannot aim properly since our gun barrage keeps them at a considerable height. But do they even wish to aim? Their goal is general destruction; London is big and something is bound to be destroyed whenever a bomb is dropped at random. The German High Command, by the way, for once basing its communiqué on a British statement, recently announced: "Most of our bombs have been dropped on the highly important industrial suburb of Randam, which has been virtually eradicated."

I walked over to the battlefield, inadequately equipped. Tin helmets are helpful against pieces of shrapnel but at present cannot be bought. The first hotel at which I inquired had been bombed. I went on and realized that I had been walking on glass for the past twenty minutes. The tiny noise produced by glass broken under one's feet is disagreeably distinct and will not be silenced by more violent sounds. The second hotel proved to be crowded. Two Dutch sailors and a woman who seemed to be Polish had just been given the last available rooms but preferred to sit on the staircase, talking to each other in strange, hoarse French. Nothing had happened here except that the bar had been smashed, liquor of all colors was streaming over the floor. I was told I could stay in the cellar till the "all clear." Since this, for almost three weeks, had simply stood for dawn, I chose instead to return to the battle and look for a way out of this particularly lively section of the city.

On my way I talked to many people—home guards, wardens, firemen, policemen, soldiers, and homeless wanderers like myself. No one seemed to be nervous or frightened. "Frankly, I do not like it," was the strongest statement of disapproval I heard. It was a young officer who said it, and he added that at first he hadn't minded at all, but now that he had had hardly any sleep for the

past fortnight, he was becoming slightly annoyed. When I finally arrived at a big hotel in the center of the city, blood was flowing down my leg and there was too much glass in my shoes for comfort.

It was one o'clock in the morning. The jazz band was playing in the basement. Dancing couples, occasionally shaken against each other by nearby explosions, seemed in the best of spirits. They were pleased because the noise of the band swallowed up some of the war din. For a while I stood there at the entrance to the ballroom, wondering: did I admire this unconcerned gaiety, or did I think it a bit silly and cynical? I decided that it was at least impressive.

Hotel guests who wish neither to dance away the danger nor to spend the night in the cellar have their mattresses and blankets taken out in the corridors, for some superstitious reason or other. It was an amazing scene, more like an overcrowded field hospital than a chic hotel. Total warfare has strange manifestations: never before has a city been so constantly exposed to nerve-racking assaults of this kind. Even Rotterdam with its seven-minutes-long disaster and its 20,000 dead, even Warsaw, or the cities of Loyalist Spain, did not have to endure the appalling regularity with which London is being bombed for ten hours every night. A few hours of sleep can always be found around dawn, but the rest and awakening are those of an invalid who, after a feverish night full of pains and incredible nightmares, has been given some soothing drug to quiet him. He is exhausted, though happy, and even in his kinder dreams he knows that the peace will not last—that the struggle against death is not over.

It has hardly begun, the struggle. Everybody here realizes this, but nobody—I sincerely believe *nobody*—dreams of capitulation. The reactions of the people are of many kinds, and what is called "morale" varies. But neither hysteria, nor fear, nor the slightest sign of panic can be found anywhere. I watched a man whose house had been bombed while he was away. He stood there before the ruins shaking his head and repeating, in the tone of some highly civilized person who for the first time discovers that bestiality exists among human beings, "But this is disgusting, perfectly disgusting!"

Nor—strange as this may sound—is hatred, passionate hatred, of the enemy encountered. Rather there prevails a kind of pity mingled with astonished contempt. Stories are being told about captured German pilots who break down completely when they gradually realize that they have been misled by their leaders; that London is not by any means on the verge of collapse but is still a living city with buses running, people working, laughing, and dancing; with food distribution and all the services functioning, and the children playing in the streets. "What can you expect?" the people say to one another, "those poor fools *don't know London!*"