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While devoting himself to his multilateral clearing plan with missionary zeal, Fritz also found time in Eydon to develop his political thinking. The seeds sown by Kurt Naumann at Prees Heath grew rapidly and Fritz nurtured them carefully. A year after his internment he had written to David Astor from his Eydon cottage.

My intense interest in socialism is, as you know, a new departure ... For years I have been studying economics without paying much attention to politics. Now I realize two things: (1) that economics without politics is almost meaningless, because certain tacit assumptions regarding the social and political structure are always present, and (2) that most of my economic results, independently arrived at, appear to be more easily compatible with socialism than with any other political ‘ism’. I say ‘appear to be’ because I am as yet far from having formed a final opinion. What my final opinion will be I don’t know, but I am pretty sure that my nature does not allow me to embrace wholeheartedly as ‘final’ any political creed or system, any ‘ism’ or any panacea.

It was the second point that excited him so much about his ‘discovery’ of socialism: a discovery he had made through the logic of his purely economic thinking. He felt as exhilarated as an explorer discovering new continents, a feeling he described early in 1942 to Sir Richard Acland, a socialist writer of the day:

I don’t know if my case is a normal one or an unusual one. I am an economist, thoroughbred, so to say, in the tradition of liberal or classical economics. But in spite of this theoretical breeding I have seen a good deal of the practical working of our economic system on the Continent, in Britain, Canada and the United States. These experiences have led to a development of my economic views, so that a short while ago, without ever having read a single book of Socialist (or Common Ownership) literature, I had arrived at views which I now find compatible with and exceedingly close to those held by the progressives of the ‘left’. They may smile at me for having discovered America for myself after so many had already successfully made the journey. But, at least I have got there on my own little ship, under the steam of my own efforts, and I now know the way there perhaps better than those who got across on one of those luxury liners of ossified doctrine.

Having ‘discovered America’, Fritz set about immersing himself in socialist literature. He read what he could on and by Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. Lenin he found ‘more exciting and illuminating than anything I know’. He joined the socialist book club, he even enrolled Werner von Simson although some months later he coldly asked Werner to terminate his membership because he had not shown the same enthusiasm for Marx as Fritz himself felt. Fritz was scathing about von Simson’s caution. In his eyes no serious student of world affairs could afford to disregard Marx: Marx was of supreme importance, as important as Keynes in an understanding of contemporary society, economics and politics. In a series of letters to von Simson at the beginning of 1942 he put his cards on the table:

Of course, I am impressed by his (Marx’s) arguments ... But it does not mean that I agree with all he says or with anything he says. Amongst other things I am impressed by the fact that so many people are impressed. But there is a difference between being impressed and being convinced. In fact, if you
want to know, I am also convinced – at the moment – that a great deal of Marxism is true.

Marx has looked the facts in the face. That is why I have studied him, learned from him and have even recommended him to others. His conclusions and generalizations have in some cases proved wrong and in surprisingly many cases proved right. He has left an indelible mark upon the thoughts of the world and, therefore should not be ignored by present day students.

Fritz’s new political interests crystallized his aims as an economist. Economics he now saw as a means to an end. The end was generally given from outside the sphere of economics by political, philosophical or religious considerations, or by plain common sense. The economist was the specialist to procure the means. Nevertheless, he had his responsibilities too:

Specialists are experts on means. Every specialist should also be able to step outside his special field and consider the end … The end and purpose of economics for me is the physical and spiritual well-being of men, women and children …

Theoretically – I am interested in anybody and everybody’s well-being.

Practically – I have to limit my aspirations to what is possible – What is possible?

The answer he suggested was to ensure a level of optimum consumption necessary for physical and spiritual well-being. The rich were above this optimum level, the poor below it, which led him to conclude, ‘I am, therefore, interested only in the poor.’

‘… man en masse is determined by material factors of his environment. Do not wait for the spiritual revolution. Change the environment.’

His position was summed up perfectly by words he often quoted from Bertold Brecht, a phrase extremely popular in the Germany of Fritz’s youth: ‘Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral.’ (First comes the belly, and only then morality.)

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Having discovered that he was a socialist, Fritz did not try to hide the fact from his audiences. His message was often clearly identifiable with the 'left'. In a set of lecture notes he spelt out his whole world view:

- As a socialist – not in love with capitalism
- As a businessman – impressed by the achievements of large scale industry – ‘semi-monopolies’
- – impressed by the waste and inefficiency in highly competitive small scale enterprise
- – impressed by the value of ‘planning’ and by the (short term) blindness of the unorganized market.

- As an economist – interested in economists not making fools of themselves with the ‘practical man’. They have a lot to contribute.

- As a student of politics – interested in left wing intellectuals and Trade Unionists understanding one another.

He came down firmly on the side of state planning, large-scale state monopolies, mass production and standardization. The size of state monopolies, he believed, ensured that money could be raised for research and technical progress; they would not be hampered by the profit motive of the private sector, and there would be less risk that employees would be exploited under the watchful eye of the public.

There were chinks in this socialist armoury however. Russia, as far as he was concerned, was not a land flowing with milk and honey as many European Marxists believed. Fritz saw that Marx was the kind of giant thinker after whose presence the world could never be quite the same and from whom there was a great deal to be learnt, but he was too much of an independent thinker himself to accept everything Marx said without question. He was aware that inherent in Marxism was a certain loss of personal freedom and he had not left the restrictions of Germany to embrace them in another form.

Marxist economics posed a challenging question however, one in which he was already intensely interested: how could
freedom and planning be combined? His papers on international trading arrangements had this thought at their core as the title 'Free Access to Trade' implied. The freedom of nations to trade with whom they wished had to be safeguarded in a free world and yet he saw that the freedom of strong nations to do so jeopardized the freedom of weaker nations. The element of planning which controlled the anarchy of total freedom lay in the central clearing 'bank' which he had proposed. When it came to internal economic policy Fritz was in favour of greater intervention than the clearing idea implied in international trade. His analysis of the German economy was that a top-heavy capital goods industry had concentrated power in the hands of a few capitalists who had not acted in the interests of the consumer. In a paper of the early 1940s on 'The Need for Planning', he wrote: 'Industry exists, in theory, to meet the needs of consumers, but in practice public policy treats consumers as existing in order to provide profit for industry.' Only state planning, Fritz maintained, could correct this imbalance.

Immersed in socialist literature, Fritz was given great hope that Marxism would provide the answer to the German catastrophe. He wrote to Werner von Simson in February 1942:

I think we are entering a period of very great social changes on the Continent. Those of us who contemplate a return to Germany after the war should study these changes with the greatest of attention. The drift on the Continent, in my opinion, is towards socialism, or to be more precise, towards a social structure in which the material and spiritual needs of those classes which have not themselves hitherto occupied ruling classes will assert themselves.

These needs have been very clearly formulated in the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and other writers of the 'left'. They should be studied. The breakdown of the Nazi régime will let loose violent revolutionary forces in Germany. The strongest political force - internally - will, in my opinion, be represented by German and foreign factory workers. Whether their attempt to overthrow not only the Nazis but the whole of the present day ruling class in Germany will be successful or not will depend largely on Russia and the Allies. In my opinion it is necessary that the revolution should be complete. It is my intention to offer my services to the revolutionary workers as soon as the opportunity serves, because I believe that they will need in their great task, and be appreciative of the loyal co-operation of members of the intelligentsia. In fact I believe that the ultimate outcome of the revolution and the shape of the new Germany will very largely depend upon whether or not such support will be forthcoming in sufficient strength.

The creed of revolutionary socialism is, as far as I can see, compatible with the interests of the outside world. It is anti-imperialistic and anti-chauvinist; it aims at the full utilization of science and its further development; its preoccupation is with the welfare of the masses. Its creed (unless I deceive myself) had been my creed before I ever touched upon socialist literature. The question of whether it is right or wrong to work for a revolution has lost its significance for German socialism. The revolution will come almost automatically as a result of defeat. There can no longer be a question of reformism, etc. The task will be to make a completely new start. The risks are grave and the opportunity tremendous. I, for one shall not be a passive spectator.

Fritz's hope of a Marxist revolution cleansing Germany did not last long. Gradually it became clear that although a new Germany would be raised from the ashes of the old it would not be from ashes created by an internal workers' movement to topple the Nazis. It would take the combined forces of the Allies to remove the scourge of the Nazis and it would be their responsibility to mould the new society in Germany. This became a fresh avenue of thought and hope for Fritz. The Allies would have the chance to create something new, something better, just as he had hoped when he had written to Muschi out of Prees Heath: 'Europe, a new Europe coming from England.'

He saw the future in Germany combining everything he held dear: a combination of Western politics and Eastern economics. From the West, particularly England, came the noble political ideals of liberty, freedom of speech, human rights and a decent government which respected the individual. From the
East, by which he meant Russia, Germany could learn to plan in order to prevent the chaos which economic freedom had brought in the past.

Western politics and Eastern economics meant democratic freedom within a planned economy to ensure that the consumer was not treated as the source of profit for a controlling elite. It was a different kind of revolution from the one Fritz had envisaged at first but it was a revolution and one in which Fritz still wished to participate.

As Fritz wrestled with these important world issues he had no doubt in his own ability to make a useful contribution to their solution. As far as he could see there were very few people around who really had this ability to look at the problems correctly and draw the conclusions necessary to overcome them. Throughout his education and self-education he had been handed answers that experience in the world showed him just did not work. He believed that his knowledge and his experience, combined with his powerful intellect, enabled him to discern what was useful in the different systems offered, such as that of Marx and that of Keynes, and devise his own.

This extraordinary belief in himself, combined with the dissatisfaction he felt at the inability of others to recognize the chaos around them, let alone make sense of it, drove him on relentlessly. It had kept him going despite the frustrations of his work for Schicht and the failure of B.T.L. It kept him up late at night at Eydon where he often felt lonely and isolated. He believed that he possessed resources necessary to find the key to mastering the problems that he saw. He was unemotional and refused to moralize. The powerful ray of intellectual truth had to penetrate each problem to its core, discarding irrelevancies and irrational beliefs and putting in their place only logic and facts.

This scientific approach had its problems in his personal life. Muschi was the antithesis of his ideal of a clear thinker. She did not so much think as feel. She could not understand most of what Fritz told her but she knew that it was brilliant. Had he told her that black was white and white was black she would have had no option but to accept. She had no basis on which to question him. She only had her instincts to go by, she could only follow the dictates of her heart and as her heart belonged to him, he possessed her whole personality. Yet her feelings of intellectual inadequacy made her feel generally inadequate at times and doubt her worth as his wife. As he bombarded her with ideas and challenged the structure of her own beliefs she had a struggle to keep a grip on her own identity. Her role appeared to her to be that of a provider of comfort and support to Fritz so that he could carry out his great work with as little hindrance as possible, and she did it with as much devotion and commitment as she gave to securing the happiness of her children. It was her reason for living.

In Eydon she found her reward in a new opportunity to talk about the things that interested Fritz. Their relative isolation from the outside world meant that he talked a great deal to Muschi about his world of ideas and she felt that she shared his life in a new way, was more fully a partner to him. She was very happy despite the hardships that they encountered. She wrote in a letter eventually destined for her parents (probably via Eric Petersen in Brazil):

Our life here often seems quite unreal. It encompasses so much that is wonderful. Fritz is a real farm labourer during the day and his work embraces everything one can think of. He has really got into the job and I have rarely seen him so fulfilled by a job as this one. He has never been so healthy. Apart from the occasional Sunday, we live in complete isolation and can pursue our interest fully. Fritz has always wanted it this way and I never had any idea how much the insight and knowledge of his books and ideas that I have gained by our close life together would enrich me and fill me with joy.

The joy of intellectual discovery through Fritz was derived primarily through the closeness of their relationship at this time. Thrust together in a hostile world Muschi felt more secure in their relationship than at any other time. Although many of the ideas on which Fritz was working were disturbing to her, she could maintain her inner equilibrium by her complete absorption in him and his life. Some aspects of his work were, of course, a delight to her. His work for peace in the sphere of economics, his growing interest in the plight of the
underprivileged and in justice and equality which his study of Marx had shown him, were all causes which she could understand with her heart even if her mind did not completely grasp all the ins and outs of the matter. But the other side of his newly found political convictions were not so easy for her to digest or accept. His Marxist apprenticeship had driven him to another extreme, that of a passionate atheist. He had never shared her conventional but real enough Christian beliefs. He had poked fun at religion and made irreverent jokes, but he had not tried to destroy her faith. He had after all read Albert Schweitzer with more than a passing interest, although he preferred to read philosophers such as Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. But with the outbreak of war and all that followed, his position changed. The irreverent and even sneering atheist turned into a non-believer of passionate convictions. Religion to Fritz became more than just mumbo jumbo, it was a body of belief that a man of his intellect could not possibly accept. There was, he wrote to Werner von Simson, 'overwhelming evidence that there are more intelligent and knowledgable people amongst non-Christians (of the last fifty or a hundred years) than among strict believers.' Intelligence and Christianity were clearly incompatible.

As the starting point for his complete rejection of religion was the scientific and logical thought which had flowered in the last hundred years. He did not have to look far for evidence which showed him that the rigorous application of logic and science left Christianity trailing in the mud. He did not spare Muschi in trying to convince her of the foolishness of her beliefs. She wrote of it sadly to her uncle, Gustav Sieveking: 'Sometimes it is not easy to follow his long explanations, and sometimes I am very depressed when I have to revise my old familiar opinions.'

Unfortunately Fritz, with his brilliant, questioning intellect, had failed to investigate with his usual thoroughness the source of those qualities in Muschi which he had described as saintly or even angelic. He had failed to grasp that the strength and loving nature he had come to admire had its roots in the 'old familiar opinions' which he was trying to destroy. He did not see that because they had become so close in Eydon, he had become her strength and her inner life more than ever; it was no longer her own strength that sustained her but his optimism and his conviction that the war against Hitler was right and that their place was in England. He saw that religion, and in particular Christianity, was full of statements that could never be scientifically proved. Only facts could ascertain truth, not speculation. He believed that he was truly seeking the truth and what was accepted as truth in religion was merely sentiment, morality, faith or some vague assertions of good and evil. Such beliefs, in his opinion, could not belong to a serious search for truth; he could not accept the existence of any absolutes. There could not be absolute good or absolute evil but only an answer to the question, good for whom, evil for whom?

His vehement rejection of religion, particularly established Western Christian religion, was two-sided. First of all, he believed, it could not stand up to any scientific examination. 'Science is the organized attempt of mankind to discover how things work as a causal system,' he quoted to Werner von Simson, adding:

Since everything has a cause, the realm of science is everything... I further hold that it is unworthy of thinking men to succumb to their horror vacui in the field of knowledge and understanding and to give answers to unsolved problems 'by act of faith' merely because they should like to have an answer. The smallest item of observational knowledge appeals more to my aesthetic, yes, also to my moral sense than the most glorious superstructure built by statements unsupported by or in contradiction with facts.

Fritz believed that morality was an historical product which, as any other human law, could be altered if it became inconvenient or no longer appropriate for the society in which it had evolved. He further held that as man was the product of his inherited character and environment he could not be held responsible for his behaviour and one could not hate him for what he did. Religion, with its concepts of heavenly reward or the punishment of hell, was therefore irrelevant as a motivating force.

Although Fritz rejected any concept of absolute morality he
also rejected Christianity because of what he believed to be its failure to provide a sound moral lead. He considered Christian morality not only to be ambiguous and full of contradictions, but to be anti-life, encouraging brutal revenge, war and a concern for the individual at the expense of society as a whole. He did not mince his words when expounding his objections to Werner von Simson, who was vainly trying to persuade Fritz that without some kind of moral code society could not rise above the mess it was in. Fritz wrote:

My criticism of Christianity...is not merely that its doctrines include the most terrible and savage superstitions of a barbarous age, (the whole doctrine of Atonement, the slaying of a God, the eating of a God . . .), but that as a moral code, it is totally insufficient, self-contradictory, and out of date . . . You can read anything out of the Bible and into it. And that, in my opinion, condemns it as a moral code.

Nor could he see how his own work fitted into a Christian concept of what was worth doing. As far as he could see the Christian was supposed to be concerned with his own world and that of his neighbour. He, Fritz, had a far wider term of reference: his work was for the good of society as a whole. Again he wrote to Werner von Simson:

Now I am a person who tries to establish harmony within himself, so that my right hand knows what my left is doing. My own religion (or lack of religion), has a place for my endeavours to improve the well-being of the world. When I am bothering my head about questions of international exchange, or the trade cycle, or unemployment, or about the relation between the birth rate and poverty, my philosophy tells me that I am doing right. Can you give me any saying of Jesus, or any explicit statement in the whole of the New Testament which would encourage me to go on with my work . . . 'Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's' . . . Yes . . . but what I am rendering to mankind is more than that, it is my very best. Why should I do that, rather than go out and help my neighbour if I were a Christian . . . Give me rather one or two quotations which would encourage me to go on caring for the troubles of mankind. I left Christianity because I could not find them, and I could not believe that it would be for the higher glory of God, if economics, politics, justice, if our whole social structure fell to pieces, because those who could have helped to hold it together found it more important to save their own souls.

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Christianity, Fritz maintained, urged one to 'Help the poor and the sick.' But something quite different was needed: namely, to 'Fight disease and poverty.' This Fritz argued in a letter to David Astor was 'the morals of the future', not an outworn creed which left the 'field of religion making free to the Hitlers, Mussolinis, Mr Eddys, Buchmans, astrologers, spiritualists, and a host of other cranks.'

Fritz's vehemence against 'morals and sentiment' was partly fanned by his attitude to Nazi Germany and the war. Many people considered the war to be a kind of twentieth-century crusade - the fight of good over evil, Christianity and morality against Nazism. Fritz completely rejected this view. He discussed it with David Astor who suggested that 'only an individually held moral code makes people proof against Nazism and other forms of political gangsterism.' This Fritz accepted but he added:

I cannot possibly agree with the implied identification of Christianity and morality . . . In fact, wherever I look I seem to find that the men who combine high morality with constructive and progressive ideas, men of thought and men of action . . . are almost invariably 'free thinkers' . . . Christianity is a spent force . . . take Julian Huxley, Bertrand Russell, Shaw, Wells, Lord Moseley, Sir J.G. Frazer - to name only a few Englishmen; take practically every leading scientist, Einstein, Heisenberg, Levy, even Jeans or Eddington - everywhere you find the same picture. Nietzsche is merely the greatest synthesis of it all . . .

Christianity, in the minds of all the majority of people in all important countries, stands for 'vested interests', for the 'old order' and 'against the new order' or the 'free order'. Those who call this war a Christian crusade are not only voicing a minority opinion of proved falsehood; they are committing a political blunder. This war is more than just
another Christian crusade. We are aiming higher in our peace aims than just the re-establishment of the Christian concept of man.

What Fritz was advocating was not an amoral society, or even a society without religion, but a society which had a new set of beliefs based on scientific rationalism, humanitarian behaviour, justice, and compassion. The fundamental question to be asked when framing a new morality was, "Where does one want mankind to be led?" Fritz thought he knew. In his correspondence with von Simson he said, "My own answer is derived from a perusal of the facts ascertained about human evolution. Man has raised himself above the level of the Ape, he can raise himself further to a level as yet beyond our imagination. That is my "Faith".

Fritz’s ‘faith’ was basically faith in himself, faith in his own intellect, faith in his own ability to raise himself above the ape and beyond. His beliefs, he thought, should benefit the thinking section of mankind although he admitted that the rest of mankind might need something a little more precise. He wrote:

I personally, should feel that the ‘religion of humanity’ can give these non-thinkers far more valuable and truthful assurances, viz. that every good man considers it his sacred duty to fight poverty and disease wherever he can, relentlessly, determinedly, without the thought of personal gain; that he will devote his best energies to improving the social and political system, to render justice more complete, security of life and limb more perfect.

Fritz referred to himself as the ‘anti-metaphysician par excellence’ adding in parenthesis, ‘(at least in aspiration)’. Clarity of mind and close adherence to facts was, he felt, the only way forward to reform and enlightenment. His friends and acquaintances were left in no doubt about his stand. Whilst Fritz was at Eydon, David Astor and Werner von Simson were the principal recipients of his dissertations on his personal and political philosophy, largely by letter. Once in Oxford he lectured his colleagues and friends there. For a while he shared a flat with a colleague, Kurt Mandelbaum, with whom he dis-

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cussed philosophical questions late into the night. Fritz’s views were very much in line with the current Oxford philosophy: scientific, rationalistic, atheistic. Mandelbaum dared suggest that such a view was not entirely satisfactory; people concerned with metaphysics, raised some very interesting questions. Fritz dismissed the suggestion. ‘Kurt, you are an obscurantist,’ he said.

While he argued with his friends, the force of his views had penetrated Muschi and, as he rooted out what Christianity she had, a vacuum was left which was filled with himself. While they were together this did not affect their happiness, but as soon as they were apart Muschi was left without inner resources to strengthen her. The winter of 1941–2 heralded such an unhappy change in their lives. The new phase began with news that they had been dreading since the outbreak of war. On December 9th, 1941 a letter reached them saying that Ernst, Fritz’s younger brother, had been killed in action on the Russian front, shortly before his eighteenth birthday. It was a bitter blow. Ernst, so greatly loved, so talented, so full of promise, had sacrificed his life fighting for a terrible cause. The blow was all the more bitter because Ernst had volunteered for the army, full of patriotic fervour. Fritz’s grief was deep and long-lived.

‘We had always hoped that fate would spare this young person, so full of hope,’ Muschi wrote to her Uncle Gustav, ‘and now it appears that he is the first to go. Fritz tries to bear it quietly. The most beloved young person has been taken away from him and those who knew him know how deeply those who loved him will mourn.’

Then early in the new year came the second blow – although this was for Muschi alone. Fritz was offered the job at the Oxford Institute of Statistics. Muschi, glad for him, was herself faced with the prospect of being alone in Eydon while he led a bachelor existence in Oxford. As he left in March 1942 she discovered that her life-support system had been taken away.