

SPEECH BY MR. HERBERT MORRISON, HOME SECRETARY AND MINISTER
OF HOME SECURITY, AT THE OPENING OF THE CIVIL DEFENCE
ARTISTS EXHIBITION IN THE EAST END OF LONDON AT 3 p.m.
TODAY (MONDAY), 27th APRIL, 1942.

This, as you may know, is the fifth exhibition by the Civil Defence Artists. If you have not seen the previous exhibitions - and that is your misfortune - you will have heard of them.

You will remember those first months of the war during which the Civil Defence Services were watching and waiting for the enemy air attacks which did not come. But they knew, as the whole country - except the wishful thinkers - knew, that they were only postponed. It was not just a time of passive waiting. It was a time of hard training and careful preparation.

When the Luftwaffe did come over, the jobs of the Civil Defence Services were none the less active and defiant because they were defensive. Their task was to save their country and their people, and their battle honours have been won as truly as those of the fighting services. This exhibition will show you why that is true.

Regimental standards tell you of past battles in which their regiments have seen service, sometimes for centuries - "Talavera", "Balacava", "Ondurman" - and, in years to come they will record the place names of this War. The London Civil Defence Services, if they had their battle standards, would inscribe famous names on them, too - such as Poplar, Holborn, Shoreditch, Bermondsey, and, outside London, Coventry, Bristol, Clydebank, Hull, with too many more to be mentioned.

This is the first time a Civil Defence Artists' Exhibition has been held in an area picked because it was one of the great scenes of air-raid attack and defence. I can think of no district in which this exhibition could be opened more fittingly. Stepney, Whitechapel, Aldgate, Hackney, bear their losses and their wounds with justifiable pride in records that are second to none, and that is equally true of every East End district you could name.

Since the raids, the Civil Defence Services have not been resting on their laurels. Their role has been watching and waiting, but neither they, nor we, are content with that. Their constant concern has been to keep up to date, in tests and exercises which have kept them in readiness for air invasion if it comes again.

We all know too the lively anxiety that Civil Defence workers have shown to be allowed to take their full share in the war in spite of the present lull. It is a profound satisfaction to me to have been able to set so many of them free for entry into the industrial pattern of the nation's life, so that they can forge the weapons of attack as well as defend our civil life.

The artists have contributed their share in telling the story of war as it comes to civilians, and all of us, laymen and experts alike, have praise for the way in which they have done it. Throughout these days of stress and strain, they had two standards in their minds - historical truth, and that standard of beauty which art has endeavoured to maintain through all the ages. You will not find artists admitting it in words, but their work tells us so. It is a great thing that that standard should be upheld at the present time. The odds against it are heavy in wartime. To keep our minds and our spirits free and above the oppression of war, however deeply and vigorously we may be engaged in it, is no small contribution to victory. And sometimes, bless them, our Civil Defence artists have demonstrated a fine British sense of humour in the midst of misfortune.

The daily job of our Civil Defence artists was to save home and beauty. And in their spare time they devoted themselves to creating beauty afresh. That is a great deal in a world where the objectives of an enemy who bears the mark of the beast are murder, destruction and pillage. Hitler sends home, as if they were merchandise, works of art which he seizes in his subject countries. But he knows he cannot expect to find already at home any but the products of Nazi standards - what he is pleased to call culture. You will agree with me that we do not see around us here any particular evidence of slave culture.

To come to this exhibition is a refreshment, a way of, reinforcing faith in victory. It is a gift to us from the artists, and I have to admit that I envy them. Occasionally I've wondered what might have happened if I tried to emulate them instead of merely envying them. But if I had, I suspect I'd still be envying them.

I congratulate every contributor to this exhibition, and express my real pleasure in being here. I thank the artists, and the Organising Committee, and also the visiting public whose presence today and on later days is, and will be, so very welcome.

I declare this exhibition open.

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MINISTRY OF HOME SECURITY