

I. BRITAIN AND WAR

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WHAT is the line of British policy? Here we come to the crux of the international position and one of the most important driving forces of the future war. The sudden outburst of concerted propaganda from all governmental and high strategic quarters in Britain for the urgent necessity of a rapid large-scale advance in armaments in every field—naval, army, and air—has startled opinion. The Conservative Conference in October unanimously carried a resolution that, in the words of the *Times*, 'if literally interpreted, enjoins an immediate measure of rearmament by this country.' Baldwin declared to this Conference: 'If Britain found herself on

some lower rating and some other country had higher figures, that country would have to come down and we would have to go up until equality was reached.'

The First Sea Lord, Admiral Chatfield, announced in October at the Cutlers' Feast at Sheffield (that is, before the assembled armament makers): 'The nation must take stock of its defense position and consider whether in its present naval expenditure it is maintaining a naval strength in accordance with its policy.'

Earl Beatty underlined this at the Navy League dinner: 'This country must never again bind itself to any such unsafe limit [the London Naval

Treaty] but must as before build the cruisers needed for the exceptional responsibilities we have on the seven seas.'

At the end of November came the government's announcement of the urgent necessity to increase the air force by at least ten squadrons and build upwards to the level of the strongest existing air force. This demand is also actively taken up and echoed and reinforced throughout the press. Did the government demand ten new squadrons? The press replies: let there be a hundred. On December 3, the *Observer* said: 'We require not another hundred machines but a thousand. We need one hundred squadrons—something more than double our existing strength. That is the new "irreducible minimum."' The principal leader of the opposition at the Geneva Conference to all proposals for the abolition of aerial warfare and air bombing was Britain.

At the same time Britain has given active support to the German claim for rearming. This has been the central thread of the Geneva 'Disarmament' Conference since its outset at the beginning of 1932, when we had occasion to write that the ultimate significance of the Conference would not be disarming but rearming, and, in particular, the rearming of Germany. This process, and the British moral and material support for it, has gone forward with great rapidity since the victory of Fascism in Germany. It was within a fortnight of Hitler's 'elections' in March and the full Fascist dictatorship that MacDonald and Simon hastened to Geneva to put forward the British plan for doubling the German army as a contribution to 'disarmament.' The inevitability of

German rearmament is taken for granted as a simple natural fact in the British press. J. L. Garvin, writing in the *Observer* on November 19, 1933, says: 'With or without agreement Germany will achieve within a few years—and assuredly sooner than most good persons elsewhere are willing to suppose—not only a concrete equality in arms but a superiority in some respects over any single neighbor.'

Baldwin, in the House of Commons on November 27, laid down three alternative outcomes of the Disarmament Conference. First, for all Powers to disarm to the German level.

Second, 'limitation of armaments at a point which excludes all offensive weapons. . . . In that event you have the heavily armed nations disarming to that point and you have Germany rearming to that point.'

Third, 'competition in armaments.' Only the third is, in his view, excluded: 'in no circumstances must that third alternative be reached.' The indication was clearly that the second is in practice intended: the rearming of Germany. And this would certainly be the total outcome of 'disarmament,' since the supposed parallel 'disarming to that point' of the 'heavily armed nations' would in practice be so hedged round with reservations and time clauses as to remain on paper. To such an outcome the present negotiations of Britain, France, and Germany are endeavoring to prepare the ground. At the same time British armament firms are pouring armaments into Germany. One-third of the world export of arms, according to the official League of Nations statistics, comes from Britain.

What, then, is the British aim? Why

this frenzied course to rearmament? Why this indefatigable pressing forward of the rearmament of Germany, the former rival and antagonist? Why this anxiety to grant to Fascist Germany what was refused to 'democratic' Germany? Against whom? Against France? Most certainly not. For there is at the same time the most manifest eagerness to maintain the closest relations with France, and not only that—but to press forward by every means Franco-German agreement, an aim to which German Fascism, in spite of all the demagogic anti-French propaganda that it utilized in its rise to power, shows considerable readiness to respond. Against the United States? The contradictions are certainly growing, but these do not occupy the centre of the picture at present: they are a slower, deeper growth, and, barring accidents, there is no readiness yet on either side for immediate conflict. Against whom, then? For rearmament is no game of toy soldiers. Rearmament is no game of juridical formulas on paper. Rearmament is for a purpose.

II

British policy, as always in the most critical moments of the preparation of the combinations for future war, endeavors to wrap up its operations in a veil of ambiguity and obscurity. Similarly, before 1914, up to the very moment of the declaration of war, there remained apparent uncertainty and hesitation of the impartial, undecided, would-be conciliatory on-looker with a complete obscurity as to the exact degree of obligations to the Entente—an obscurity which served to deceive not only the House of Commons and the majority of the

members of the Cabinet but also the German government.

'Up to the very outbreak of war,' said the original manifesto of the First Congress of the Communist International in 1919, 'British diplomacy stood by with vizard down in mysterious secrecy. The government of the City took care to conceal its intention to enter the war on the side of the Entente in order not to frighten off the Berlin government from going to war. For London wanted war: hence their action to make Berlin and Vienna build their hopes on English neutrality, while Paris and Petrograd were sure of England's intervention.' The whole purpose of the policy of 'encirclement' would have been defeated had it been made plain and open beforehand that an immeasurably superior network of war alliances had been built up around the intended victim until the actual moment of war became the moment for laying the cards on the table.

Despite the basic dissimilarities in the general situation, there is a certain analogy in the technique of British diplomacy in the whole post-war period. Once again, after the first direct attack of the wars of intervention had failed, there is a long, patient, and laborious pursuit of a policy of 'encirclement' to build up a superior alliance against the consciously seen main enemy—against the Soviet Union. Through the League of Nations, through Locarno, through the Four-Power Pact, through the wooing of Germany, in the border states, in the Near and Middle East, in relation to Japan, on all the fronts the attempt goes forward. And just as in the earlier period the Rapallo and Berlin Treaties, so to-day the journeyings of

Litvinov, the non-aggression treaties, the closer relations with France, with Turkey, with Italy, and with the United States represent the repeated triumphant breaking of the net by Soviet diplomacy. The contest goes ceaselessly forward.

But the victory of Fascism in Germany and aggressive preparations of Japan in the Far East bring this issue to-day to a new intensity. And just as in the pre-1914 period, the real aim of diplomacy, the consciousness of the main enemy was most sharply and directly expressed in the so-called 'popular' press, in the *Daily Mail* with its ceaseless anti-German campaigns, in the technical military press, while the language of diplomacy on top remained ambiguous, and veiled, and seemingly concerned with every issue save the main objective, so to-day the same picture reveals itself in the anti-Soviet campaign.

The foreign policy of the National Government is attacked by its critics for weakness, uncertainty, vacillation. At one moment Simon is accused of too great conciliation to Germany, at another of too great subservience to France. At one moment the National Government courts Germany and offends France; at another, the National Government courts France and offends Germany. Divisions of opinion are widely expressed in bourgeois quarters as to the policy to be followed. These divisions are reflected in parliament and are even reported as reflected in the Cabinet. In extreme forms; press campaigns are conducted, on the one side for a complete British-French military alliance, on the other side for the repudiation of Locarno and a policy of isolation. Thus the picture appears a picture of consider-

able uncertainty and confusion. Yet a closer examination will show that these varying strands represent in reality varying aspects of a basic identity of policy.

Ever since Versailles, British policy has, in fact, pursued very clearly marked and consistent aims, despite the fluctuations necessitated through changing circumstances: first, while maintaining the essential basis of Versailles, the alliance with France and the League, to weaken French predominance by assisting German restoration to power and by close relations with Italy; second, to draw Germany from the eastern to the western orientation; third, on this basis to build the bloc of western imperialism under British hegemony; fourth, to cooperate with Japan outside Europe; fifth, on this basis to build the bloc against the Soviet Union and against the United States; and sixth, to direct the main aim against the Soviet Union as the immediate principal enemy and to delay so far as possible the inevitable conflict with the United States.

The past decade and a half has seen the continuous development of this policy through all the vicissitudes of post-war diplomacy. It was manifest that the signing of the Locarno Treaties in 1925 marked at the time a big stage of advance in this policy toward the restoration of Germany in principle as an equal Power, the drawing of Germany under Stresemann from an eastern to a western orientation, the guaranteeing of peace on the western frontiers, and thus the building of the bloc of western imperialism against Communism.

This objective was clearly stated at the time. The famous indiscretion of

the Government Minister, Ormsby-Gore, may be recalled, who gave an 'explanation' of Locarno as 'the solidarity of Christian civilization to stem the most sinister growth that has arisen in European history' and went on: 'The struggle at Locarno, as I see it, was this: is Germany to regard her future as bound up with the fate of the great Western Powers, or is she going to work with Russia for the destruction of western civilization? . . . Locarno means that so far as the present government of Germany is concerned it is detached from Russia and throwing in its lot with the West.'

Nevertheless, Locarno failed in the full realization of its object, although marking an important stage forward. For Germany still held to the two-sided or 'reinsurance' policy and followed up Locarno with the Berlin Soviet-German Treaty renewing Rapallo in 1926. Britain at the time was tied up with the General Strike. When the General Strike had been successfully settled and Britain struck its blow against the Soviet Union in the beginning of 1927, it found itself isolated. Birkenhead's journey to Berlin for support met with no response. The Chinese Revolution concentrated British attention.

III

At the same time, from 1927 onward—Geneva Naval Conference breakdown—Anglo-American antagonism came sharply to the front. And in 1929 came the world economic crisis. The whole policy was delayed. Japanese aggression in the Far East brought again strong preparations for attack in the spring of 1932. But the opposition of the United States, the internal

economic difficulties of Britain, the Empire difficulties of Ottawa, and the Lausanne and debts complications, as well as the uncertain inner situation and rapid growth of the forces of the proletarian revolution in Germany, hindered the advance.

It is the victory of Fascism in Germany in 1933 that has brought to the front again the whole world counter-revolutionary offensive under British leadership. Here at last was the hope of smashing one of the principal obstacles in the path, the German revolutionary working-class movement, and securing in German Fascism an obedient tool, provided it could be turned from its anti-western threats and concentrated on the line of aggression in the East.

The British Government hastened immediately to the support of German Fascism. MacDonalld proceeded to Geneva in March to proclaim to the world that 'either Germany is given justice and freedom or Europe will risk destruction' and to put forward the British plan for doubling the German Army. Thence he passed on to Rome and with Mussolini evolved the Four-Power Pact, or most direct expression of the bloc of western imperialism for a single policy 'in all questions political and non-political, European and extra-European.' 'These were the four Powers,' explained MacDonalld to the press on March 21, 'which, if the worst were to come, would have to bear the brunt of the work.' In April followed the British rupture of trade relations with the Soviet Union. Within twenty-four hours of the British rupture followed the Japanese ultimatum to the Soviet Union over the Chinese Eastern Railway.

But a series of complications still arise in the path. The military concessions to Germany arouse the suspicions of France, which sees plainly the menace to Versailles and the close approach of revision and views with extreme distrust the Four-Power Pact. France accordingly countered the British moves by closer relations with the Soviet Union. In May—that is, at the same time as the British breach of trade relations—the French Foreign Minister spoke enthusiastically of the ‘renewal of French-Soviet friendship. . . . Without its being a revival of the former French-Russian alliance, it rendered a new service to the cause of peace . . . a great nation which would play its part in the world,’ while the semi-governmental press of the Left broke into flowery nonsense about ‘the two great democratic republics in Europe’ in opposition to Fascism. At the same time Germany on its side signed the renewal of the Berlin German-Soviet Treaty. Thus the Four-Power front was for the moment successfully broken by Soviet diplomacy, which proceeded to add the ring of non-aggression pacts with the border states, finally completed at the World Economic Conference. In this way the British attack was again isolated, and Britain was compelled to end the formal rupture in July at the World Economic Conference, though still delaying up to the present the renewal of a trade treaty. In September took place the visit of Herriot and of the Air Minister, Cot, to the Soviet Union.

Alongside of this, Anglo-American relations seriously worsened in 1933. The fiasco of the MacDonald-Roosevelt meeting in April was accompanied by the opening of the currency war of the pound and dollar. Britain sought

for a stabilization agreement at the World Economic Conference without success. After suffering the offensive of sterling depreciation for eighteen months, the United States, having now taken up the same weapon, was not going to relinquish it so rapidly, more especially as a measure of inflation was important for its internal policy. The series of Roosevelt messages vetoed each successive provisional agreement, and the World Economic Conference ended in the most resounding fiasco of all post-war conferences.

IV

The subsequent debt negotiations in the autumn also ended in failure. In the face of the sharpening Anglo-American antagonism and more especially of the Japanese aggression in the Far East, the United States also proceeded for the first time since the October Revolution to build up relations with the Soviet Union. The American approach for the resumption of relations was addressed to the Soviet Union in October and led to recognition in November. This was a significant transformation in international relations, although the calculations of American imperialism, both economic and political, were transparently obvious.

In this situation British policy was compelled to manoeuvre and to draw closer once again to France. The MacDonald ‘Disarmament’ plan of March was modified in a series of particulars to meet French objections, at the expense of Germany. But this immediately aroused German antagonism. Germany demonstratively quitted the League of Nations and the Disarmament Conference in October,

and the German press, which had previously spoken of Britain as the friend and ally, now poured out its anger against British 'desertion' and found comfort only in Lloyd George who continued to repeat the permanent basic British policy of the restoration of Germany in opposition to French hegemony.

British diplomacy was now faced with its most delicate task: to endeavor to draw France and Germany together in a single line, despite all the antagonisms. The whole of British efforts were exerted to secure direct French-German negotiations for an understanding. Despite the direct blow in the face represented by the German abandonment of the League, British expression continued conciliatory in the extreme to Fascist Germany.

Simon, in the House of Commons on November 24, applauded the 'very remarkable interview' of Hitler to de Brinon, proposing permanent Franco-German peace on a basis of recognition of the frontiers in the West and proclaimed the readiness to regard Germany as 'a partner.' In December, the French-German conversations went forward in a veil of secret diplomacy. Italy put in its demand for the 'radical reform' of the League of Nations in the direction represented by the Four-Power Pact. British diplomacy is obviously hopeful anew of the building of the bloc of western imperialism. The British chauvinist press—Rothermere—and the German official press—Rosenberg—equally express the basic aim of peace in the West and expansion in the East, that is, against the Soviet Union, even publishing in detail their proposals for the division of the lion's skin.

At the same time, Japanese aggression and expansion in the Far East receive no less striking 'sympathetic understanding' from British expression, despite the acute difficulties of extreme commercial competition at the present point, for in 1933 Japanese cotton-goods exports have for the first time outstripped the British.

The *Times*, on December 8, 1933, published a sympathetic article on 'Crowded Japan.' 'In the next ten years Japan must find work and food for nearly ten millions more people than she employs and feeds to-day.' The alternatives are seen as either social revolution or aggressive foreign expansion:—

'The cheap goods of the factories into which the surplus workers of the farms were drained have found markets abroad. If the process does not continue, how is Japan to avoid an explosion which will either destroy the social order at home or burst a way to expansion abroad?'

The writer concludes that Japan cannot reasonably be expected to refrain from foreign aggression: 'A poor, proud, heavily-armed nation can hardly be expected, as a Japanese writer has said, to "starve in saintly submission in its own back yard."' At the same time German-Japanese relations are drawn close, with exchanges of missions, German military aid to Japan, et cetera.

The dream of British imperialism and of the imperialist counter-revolution throughout the world for 1934 is manifest. The impossibility of the peaceful solution of the world economic crisis carries forward ever faster the advance to world war. The forces of development toward Fascism press forward in every capitalist country. In

the United States, the Roosevelt policy reveals more and more its militarist, anti-striking, lynching character. In Britain, the Unemployment Bill expresses the advance to new forms of intensified dictatorship. In Spain, the combined bourgeois reaction uses every means to strangle the revolution. In Germany, the violence of Fascism grows with the growth of discontent and the working-class opposition. The forces of counter-revolution throughout the world dream to solve the world crisis and turn the future world war into the channel of war against the Soviet Union by the direct attack of Japan in the East and

with the support of Germany and western imperialism from the West. Against the sharp menace of such a war we have to be prepared. The strength of the working-class front against Fascism and against imperialist war in every country is decisive for the future line of development. The culminating stages of the world economic crisis and the increasingly reckless policies of capitalism drive to a violent outcome. The fight of the international working class against Fascism and against imperialist war is faced with big issues in the coming year and with high revolutionary possibilities.