

Before Europe's Storm

An Analysis of the International Crisis and the Imminence of World War

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WHAT is preparing in Europe this autumn? Will Germany go to war over Czechoslovakia? Do the feverish and loudly proclaimed Nazi military preparations during these coming weeks, with the mobilization of close on 1,500,000 men under arms, in addition to the conscripted half-million on special fortifications work, the concentration of troops on the borders of Czechoslovakia, and the proclamation of the Rhineland as a closed area mean that the die is cast for war? Do the panic movements of the financial speculators, the wholesale selling of securities at tumbling prices, and gold movements and hoarding in faraway hideouts indicate that the explosion of general war over Europe is to be expected in the immediate future? Or will the forces for peace still hold over this year?

These questions are being asked on all sides. In order to attempt to answer them, it is necessary to estimate a series of factors.

During the past three months the fascist powers have received an important series of setbacks.

The first was the crisis of May 21. Evidence now accumulates that Hitler had prepared for an armed entry into the Sudeten districts of Czechoslovakia, to follow and reproduce the armed seizure of Austria in March. Only at the very last moment the orders had to be countermanded.

It was not British opposition, as has since been implied both by British and by Nazi propaganda, which caused the setback. It was the lightning mobilization of the Czechoslovak defenses, combined with the firm and public declarations of France and the Soviet Union that they would stand by Czechoslovakia.

Lieutenant Commander Young, in his recent authoritative book, *Czechoslovakia: Keystone of Peace and Democracy*, has stated explicitly in an epilogue, dated May 28, 1938:

The crisis which arose during the weekend of May 21-23 should serve as a lesson—and a warning. The press of Britain, France, and Germany have done their utmost to create the impression that war was averted by tardy but firm action on the part of the French and British governments. *This is simply not true.*

War was averted because of the firm stand and

resolute action of the Czechoslovak government—which called the bluff of the fascist international. It was because their plans had been frustrated, not because of solicitude for Czechoslovakia, that the British Cabinet met hurriedly during that critical weekend.

British diplomacy only intervened in Berlin, not on behalf of Czechoslovakia, but when the facts were already plain, to give warning that the moment was not opportune, that France and the Soviet Union were determined to make a stand, with the consequence that Britain would be dragged in on the side of France, and that, therefore, it was necessary to postpone the coup, and first to carry on further undermining work both in France and Czechoslovakia. There followed the Halifax-Bonnet talks, alongside the royal visit, and the Runciman mission to Czechoslovakia to carry on the undermining work on behalf of Nazi Germany.

This was the first demonstration of the power of the peace front to check fascist aggression. But it was manifestly only a first round: the beginning, not the end, of the crisis over Czechoslovakia.

The second setback to the fascist powers has been over Spain.

When Chamberlain signed the Anglo-Italian agreement in April, the implicit expectation underlying it on both sides was that the war in Spain would be completed with a vic-

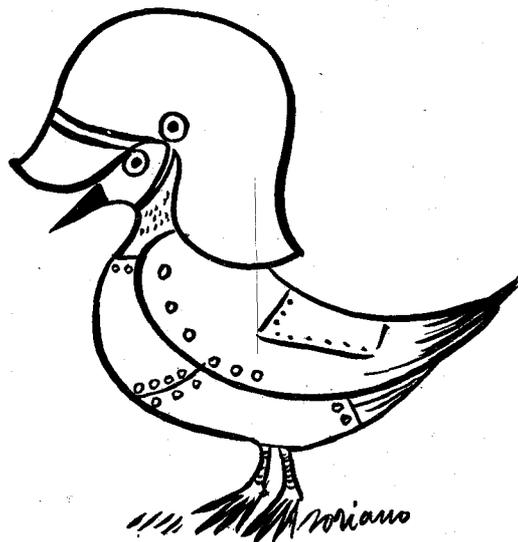
tory for fascism in the next few weeks. This was the undefined "settlement in Spain" which Chamberlain, when challenged in Parliament, refused to define, and which was made the condition for the coming into force of the agreement.

The rising strength and resistance and even successful offensive of Spanish democracy have thrown these plans into confusion. Chamberlain was compelled to use extraordinary means to force France to close the Pyrenean frontier, at the same time as Italy increased its supplies and bombing raids. Chamberlain has been compelled to connive at the bombing and sinking of British merchant ships engaged in ordinary peaceful trade, and in the murder of scores of British sailors, in the desperate hope by this means to establish not only an arms blockade but a food blockade of republican Spain and starve the people into surrender. All these means have not been able to weaken what the pro-fascist London *Times* has been compelled to describe in a recent editorial, with reluctant admiration and amazement, as the "indestructible spirit" of republican Spain. The food situation is a cruel one, and the outlook for the winter serious; hence the urgent importance of material aid, the reopening of the Pyrenean frontier and the protection of merchant ships. But the unity, the fighting spirit, and the level of organization has steadily risen on the side of Spanish democracy; and the battle of the Ebro has shown the first successful major offensive of the new people's army.

All this has prevented the coming into force of the Anglo-Italian agreement and held up the further plans. This has been the second blow to fascism—and to Chamberlain.

The third and biggest setback to fascism and victory for world peace has been the decisive check administered by the Soviet Union to Japan's offensive at Changkufeng.

There could be no greater mistake than to treat Japan's provocation at Changkufeng as a local incident originating from the commanders on the spot. The fact that the Japanese ambassador in Moscow, Shigemitsu, was already directly threatening military action



Soriano

on behalf of his government on the question in mid-July, a fortnight before the operations were launched, is sufficient proof of this.

Japan's invasion of Soviet territory at Changkufeng was a deliberate and carefully prepared testing by the fascist bloc of the strength and readiness of the Soviet Union; had there been the slightest weakness or hesitation in response, general war would have followed.

The origin of the Changkufeng offensive goes back to the transformation of the Japanese Cabinet in May of this year. At that time the Cabinet was reorganized, with the substitution of General Ugaki as Foreign Minister in place of the more cautious civilian diplomat Hirota, the appointment of General Itagaki, late commander of the Kwantung army (the hotbed of anti-Soviet intrigue and preparation) as War Minister, and with the inclusion of the notorious fire-eating anti-Soviet militarist, General Araki. This new Cabinet of the generals was not only a victory of the most extreme military-fascist elements; it was also a victory of the most open anti-Soviet elements, who stood for a temporarily closer approach to Britain on this basis.

General Ugaki's first policy speech in June declared for close relations with Britain, with virtual restoration of the Anglo-Japanese alliance. "We have had special relations with Great Britain in the past. Our friendship has been traditional. I shall do my best to restore those relations and even make them closer than before."

In the beginning of June Major Gen. F. S. G. Piggott, British military attaché in Tokyo, visited Shanghai, and, together with Major Gen. Telfer-Smollett, British commander in Shanghai, gave a ceremonial dinner of honor to General Hata, commander-in-chief of the Japanese troops in Central China. "The friendliest atmosphere prevailed at the dinner," declared the press reports, and toasts were drunk to Anglo-Japanese cooperation, while Japanese airplanes were bombing Chinese men, women, and children.

At the present moment, both before and since Changkufeng, Anglo-Japanese negotiations are in progress between General Ugaki and the British ambassador in Tokyo, Sir Robert Craigie.

Britain's policy in the Far East has consistently been to endeavor to divert Japan's offensive away from British interests in Central China towards North China, Mongolia, and the Soviet Union.

German pressure on Japan has been exercised in the same direction, for equally obvious interested reasons. It was only after the extreme weakness and military failure of Japan had been laid bare at Changkufeng that German pressure was exercised in the opposite direction for a speedy settlement.

The success of the Soviet Union's firm and unhesitating stand against Japan's aggression at Changkufeng constitutes a victory for world peace which will stand out as a landmark in the present period of world history.

Japan's invasion of Changkufeng was

planned and prepared as a major operation, with a powerful previous concentration of troops, artillery, tanks, and airplanes. Within ten days Japan was suing for peace on the terms originally laid down by the Soviet Union.

The far-reaching effects of this demonstration of the Soviet Union's strength, and of the possibility of checking fascist aggression by a firm stand, extend not only to Japan, but to all the fascist powers, and, not least, also to Britain. British press comment of all colors bears testimony to the profound influence of this experience on British opinion. It is not only the liberal London *News Chronicle* which commented, on August 12:

Japan has had a severe diplomatic setback. Ever since the Japanese first went into Manchukuo they have played the arrogant, untamed aggressor. Russia has taught them that there are limits to aggression. It is a lesson that other countries would do well to learn.

The leading City journal, the *Economist*, drew the lesson, on August 13, that "A lesson has been learned in Tokyo which may beneficially affect Europe as well as the Far East." Even the Cliveden Hitlerite organ, the *Times*, was compelled to admit that "the Russians have probably had the best of it on the whole," and that "whatever the final outcome of her tilting match with Russia, its immediate results can only be adverse for Japan." The Conservative, near-fascist press was compelled to recognize the same lesson:

The armistice in the Far East is an immense triumph for the Russians. It was the Japanese who began the dispute and started the fighting, and now they have had a setback. A very good thing too. (*Evening Standard*—Conservative Beaverbrook organ)

The terms of the armistice represent a climb down by Japan, since all the Soviet conditions of peace are fulfilled. . . . This setback to Japan is the first she has received since she began her conquest thirty years ago. (*Daily Mirror*—boulevard picture paper, Rothermere-owned)

The honors go to M. Litvinov, who looks like becoming the world's most permanent Foreign Minister. It is a long time since the Japanese army called off its dogs at the request of Japanese diplomacy. (*Evening News*—Right Conservative Rothermere organ)

Inevitably the comment forms itself for wide sections of British opinion, not only on the left but within the Conservative ranks, who have been deeply impressed by the demonstration of Soviet military strength and efficiency. What happens now to all the arguments of Chamberlain that no stand can be made against fascist aggression since any stand "would mean war"? One power has been able, by a firm stand, to bring a direct aggression to an immediate standstill. What could not be accomplished by a peace front of all the democratic powers, of Britain, France, and the Soviet Union, in cooperation with the United States?

If peace is saved this year, it will have been saved because of the Soviet stand at Changku-

feng. But it would be blind folly to ignore the still extreme urgency of the menace that hangs over Europe and the world.

While the setbacks of May 21 and August 10 have dealt a blow to the plans of the fascist powers, these setbacks cannot be final so long as there is no combined peace front of the democratic powers, and therefore in the immediate result only make more desperate the determination of the fascists to recover the lost ground and drive forward their offensive.

The large-scale Nazi military mobilization and preparations may not be planned for immediate war, so long as the combined opposition of France, the Soviet Union, and Czechoslovakia would still make this unfavorable. But they are undoubtedly planned, as the wide publicity accompanying them makes manifest, to create a situation to demoralize the opposition, to paralyze France as over Austria, to cow timid opinion in Britain into passivity, and to terrorize Czechoslovakia into submission.

The Nazi leaders have set their whole prestige on securing the capitulation of Czechoslovakia by this autumn.

It is here that the key significance of the Runciman mission as an integral part of the fascist war plans arises.

The Runciman mission follows the classic methods of the British ruling class.

A comparison may be drawn with the Samuel commission of 1925-26, which was used to break the front of the British miners and the rest of the British working class, when a direct attack had resulted in a setback. On "Red Friday," in 1925, the British ruling class found itself up against an apparently immovable obstacle when the contemplated strategic attack on the miners as the beginning of a general wage attack (the sequel to the return to the gold standard) was met by a united working-class front. Hastily the attack was withdrawn; a nine-month truce was arranged, with a subsidy to maintain wages. Then the undermining work began, at the same time as fighting preparations were raced forward. The Samuel commission was appointed to make an "impartial" recommendation. The strategy worked. When the struggle was resumed at the end of the nine months with the general strike, the previous united working-class front was split from the start on the basis of the Samuel commission's report, and the miners were left to fight alone and be defeated.

This little piece of history is worth remembering in connection with the Runciman mission, which so completely recalls the classic methods when they find themselves up against unexpectedly strong opposition. On May 21 Chamberlain and Hitler received a setback because of the unity of Czechoslovakia, France, and the Soviet Union; the attack had to be called off; the peace forces registered an initial victory. An armed truce follows, during which the methods of the "impartial" commission are brought into play, while the



Strength Through Joy

Painting by Harry Gottlieb (A. C. A. Gallery)

maximum military preparations are hastened forward. The object is transparent; and the welcome to the Runciman mission (forced by diplomatic threats on the unwilling Czechoslovak government) in the Nazi press has been too warm for discretion. The Runciman report is intended to provide the basis for splitting the ruling forces in Czechoslovakia, immobilizing France, compelling either surrender by Czechoslovakia in the name of an "agreed" solution, or, in the event of continued opposition, giving the pretext for Britain to refuse further "support" to Czechoslovakia and to endeavor to compel France to make a similar refusal.

By these means the way is intended to be cleared for Hitler without major war—yet.

Alongside the Runciman maneuver must be noted the extremely busy parallel diplomatic activities of Britain, Germany, Poland, and Japan.

The Polish Foreign Minister, Colonel Beck, has been touring the capitals of every country bordering the Soviet Union on the

west, and has paid a series of visits within the last few weeks to the three Baltic states and the three Scandinavian states. There is no secret that the attempt is to build up an anti-Soviet bloc on the west of the Soviet Union from the Arctic to the Black Sea.

The British First Lord of the Admiralty (Cabinet Minister for the Navy), the Hon. A. Duff-Cooper, has been cruising the Baltic in an Admiralty yacht, visiting Kiel and Danzig to confer with the Nazi and Polish war chiefs, and now passing on to the Scandinavian capitals. Under British inspiration the Copenhagen conference of the "Oslo Group" of the seven smaller states (Scandinavian states, Belgium, and Holland) last month proclaimed repudiation of League sanctions obligations in the name of "neutrality," i.e., the free path for fascism.

This is due to be followed at the League Assembly in September by the further British-led offensive against the basis of the League and sanctions obligations in the name of "revision of the Covenant."

Britain has been actively working to win

over Turkey, with a special £16,000,000 credit, including a £6,000,000 arms loan.

Japan has held at Istanbul a meeting of Japanese diplomatic and consular representatives in the Near and Middle East (Balkans, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq); and Turkey has found it necessary to send a note of protest to the Japanese government that this conference was in reality a conference of anti-Soviet preparation.

The rapid worsening of the economic situation is a factor which in its first effect is increasing the menace of the immediate situation, since it increases the haste and desperation of those states which are driving to war and of those sections of capitalism which see the way out in war.

This situation in Europe is especially affecting Germany and Britain. In Britain the slump, which has been developing for a year, begins to reach serious proportions and raises widespread anxiety and discussions of future policy. Despite the still steeply rising rearmament program, steel production this July was

40 percent below that of a year ago. While the arms industry prospers, the export trades and agricultural interests are hard hit, and the consumption industries begin to suffer. This gives an increasing weight to the influence of the arms profiteers in the relation of capitalist forces in Britain; and these, closely interlocked with the ruling international financial forces of the City, are the main capitalist elements behind Chamberlain. But just these forces drive forward the pro-fascist policy, which hastens the advance of war in Europe.

In Germany the steep fall of security values in the last few weeks, marking the sharpest decline since the beginning of the Nazi regime, is partly the reflection of panic selling in the face of political uncertainty and war expectations, but also undoubtedly reflects the instability and weakening of the economic situation and the accumulating difficulties of the regime.

While the ultimate effect of this, and of the consequent growing discontent, can finally, if war is held off, strengthen the forces of internal struggle against the fascist regime, the immediate effect is to increase the danger of desperate adventures in foreign policy involving the gamble of war.

The immediate future prospect is therefore an extremely critical one.

Hitler may not be directly calculating on major war this autumn; the risk for him is

still too great; and, as Litvinov pointed out in his speech at Leningrad in June, the fascist powers still want quick and easy successes against weak enemies. But he is creating a situation, by the large-scale Nazi mobilization and open threats to Czechoslovakia, which brings the risk of war close. The Nazi regime is staking everything on securing the effective capitulation of Czechoslovakia, in one form or another, this autumn; and to achieve this, they are entering on a formidable gamble.

It is evident that Hitler calculates, with the aid of British diplomatic support and influence within Czechoslovakia, to secure his aims with a close threat of war, but without major war, if possible, and thus to stage a new "victory" as over Austria, extend his domination in Europe by this means to a decisive point, and thus at last reach the conditions for the real major war.

In this situation everything turns, first and foremost, on the role of Britain, and second, on the internal situation in Czechoslovakia and France.

One word from Britain could transform the whole present threatening situation and end the danger.

If Britain were to declare definitely that it will take its stand with France and the Soviet Union in the defense of Czechoslovakia and of peace, all the Nazi threats would collapse and the immediate crisis would disappear.

But this word will never be willingly spoken by Chamberlain, who works consistently for alliance with Hitler and Mussolini and his ultimate aim of the reactionary Western European anti-Soviet pact.

Therein lies the sharpest danger of the present situation.

For this reason the greatest importance attaches to the internal situation in Britain.

Special importance attaches to the coming Trades Union Congress, all the more because at present there is no prospect of a Labor Party conference this year, unless a special decision is reached. Within the Trades Union Congress the Citrine policy, which in practice stands for collaboration with Chamberlain (supposedly in defense of democracy against fascism!) still dominates. But during the last period rising opposition has been openly expressed from the engineering unions, from the miners, and other powerful unions. The fight develops over the relation to the rearmament program, over foreign policy and Spain, and over international trade-union unity. The strength of this fight at the coming Trades Union Congress, September 5-10, will have a considerable bearing on the inner situation in Britain.

Immediately after the Trades Union Congress will follow the Communist Party Congress, which will have the most urgent responsibility of leadership in this situation.

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"And Mighty Poets in Their Misery Dead"

*A Poem for Moving Pictures**

Idolatry ends now. Elegy ends now. We cease to grieve
For those rare men, sweet Burns and Chatterton.
The wind drops its wailing tune. Comes pause—the wait.

Darlings of yesterday, fevered and neglected,
Later loved in avidity for fugitive glory . . . (Add
Also the others—Chopin sobbing in Mallorca, Beethoven
Deaf.) These were the peaks. We looked. On them we dwelt.

II

Pure prelude and dear sonata of gold spirit
Play on; but softly, softly. Or better, hush and rest.
The light of that white lamp that gravely sweeps
Night sky for airplanes turns elsewhere. And see:
The beam falls, the log-jam gives, the open hearth spurts white;
Ingot goes wild, the mine caves down, hawser parts;
Foam bursts on the deck. Cry, cry loud, one cry.
Then gulf of silence. Shroud of tomorrow's toil
Instantly drops, covers anonymous man, the worker, caught.

III

Now searchlight turn and we all eyes, with you;
Full glare on the corpse at home, clean and in state.
And silence glaze and freeze with your turbined light.

Insects and mites in this fan churn and eddy like snow,
While the tap drips, drips in the kitchen . . .

That gratitude

For toil expended in full love by the genius-strong
Makes common quiet here, and music waits,
Not uttered yet, vibration still unheard.

IV

Welders and diggers, puddlers of steel, millions
Strong, simple, disciplined,—the essential men:
Moulders, men who bend and heave, drivers of piles, span builders;
Mechanics, steady and daring, heroes without praise;
So many, we have never stopped to think how many, in the end
Lie ignored, quiet and stern, in their misery
Dead. Mighty millions in their misery dead.

V

Rest here, O Lamp. Fix this, so long ignored.
Flood-light illumine this man, cast up from a sea—
Do you hear the sea breathing? Will you at least listen?
Yes, the wine-dark sea, with its kiss, sigh, susurrous breath;
Sea of world workers, toilers from far twilight,
BURST ON THE LENSES OF A LOOKING WORLD.

GENEVIEVE TAGGARD.

*This poem was composed as a script for film. The words should accompany the pictures on the sound track. First should come the page showing Wordsworth's poem, "Resolution and Independence," from which the title line is taken. Then pictures of Burns and Chatterton, with music from Chopin and

Beethoven woven into the words of the poem. Part II suggests a sudden silence at the end of line 2, with nothing thereafter but the searchlight sweeping and the sounds suggested by log-jam, rush of gravel, and waves, which sounds mount to climax in part V.