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Appendix K

Entry for 1999'*Footnotes to History:The Manning Clark History Prize*' (short essay-open)
(Essay competition, (1999) run by *The Canberra Times*)

AUSTRALIA and OUR VIOLENT CENTURY: TIME TO LEARN

Looking back to WWI and the near-catastrophic effect that Germany's submarine warfare had on its outcome,¹³ the terms of the *Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935* may seem altogether bizarre. Why *did* Britain, having during WW1 gone so close to disaster from Germany's submarine warfare, then go on to 'authorise' Hitler's Germany to rebuild its navy, including its submarines?³ We may see it now for what it was, another step towards WWII, Churchill's "unnecessary war"³ – the war that was to condemn so many young Australians - yet it created no great stir at the time. A better understanding may come from putting that decision in context.

The international tensions which had led to the First World War grew out of unbridled commercial and colonial competition between the established and emergent Empires of the 19th Century. ^{4, 5, 6, 12, 16} Although we now see the basic issues as competition for world resources and markets, at the time, both sides stressed having both right and God 'on their side'.^{5, 6, 16} Notwithstanding such endorsement, by the end of WWI the devastating effects of the advanced highly-efficient killing machines of the day were so horrifying that the people of Europe (and beyond) were determined that such a calamity must *never* again be allowed to happen.^{8, 17}

Yet the victors' Versailles Treaty insisted that just one side, Germany, must bear *total* responsibility for the war. Not only did the Allied leaders fail to admit their own contributions to the war's origins, but their severe sanctions/reparations caused enormous German suffering and long-term bitterness. However, there was a positive side to Versailles which, had it been honoured, could have prevented another catastrophe. Both the Versailles Treaty and the League of Nations Covenant stipulated not only that Germany disarm to basic defence levels, but that to guarantee international security, *all* nations must do likewise.^{1, 11} Only those arms essential to a nation's *defence* would be permitted, a progressive 'build-down' to be monitored by the League. Of course, as Britain's Lord Robert Cecil realised, such an agreement required the support of a '*Treaty of Mutual Assistance*' (1924) that would assure states that if they were attacked, all others would come to their aid.¹ However Britain refused to sign either that Treaty or the 1925 Geneva Protocol which was to outlaw war, arbitrate disputes and institute the arms limitation conference.¹ But without a guarantee of mutual assistance, France was unwilling to move on arms limitation.¹

Other interests too weighed against these agreements. Despite the lessons of the war,

the leaders of the industrial nations were still obsessed with expanding their external trade, a 'natural' part of which was arms exports.^{10,15} Publicly all had agreed to the League's China Arms Embargo of 1919, designed to protect the people of that strife-torn country from further suffering. But Italy had negotiated a 'reservation' which excluded shipments 'already contracted' and the other arms trading countries used that 'exclusion' to continue their trade.¹⁰ So passed the '20s, the major powers, those best able to set the example and assure others' compliance, failing their clear responsibility. Only Germany, constrained by the Armistice Commission, remained disarmed and (aware of others' behaviour) all the more resentful.

The first test for the major powers in the new decade (the world by then in The Great Depression) was Japan's 1931 invasion of Manchuria. Unfortunately, although the 'Great Powers' 'condemned' the aggression, they failed to take the necessary collective action required by the League Covenant. And making things even worse, while the West decried Japan's brutal invasion, the arms manufacturers of Britain, France, the USA, Czechoslovakia and other countries were supplying the aggressor with arms.¹⁰ For Japan that was more than material support, it was encouragement to emulate the West and extend *its* control throughout Asia, a region it already saw as its 'back yard'.

Despite this setback, in February 1932, very strong international public advocacy had finally brought about the '*First World Disarmament Conference*'.¹¹ It was supported by some quite outstanding individuals, including Britain's Lord Cecil, France's Briand, Germany's Stresemann, and Norway's Nansen. Just as surely it was opposed by other powerful individuals - and interests. It received at best half-hearted support from the most powerful European governments. The major powers were far too concerned with 'security', as they saw it, such as the need to bolster far-flung Empires through air power. The Conference was allowed to drag on inconclusively until January 1933 by which time Hitler, just come to power, intervened - '*justice*' demanded Germany be allowed to rearm!!^{10,11}

For those opposed to arms limitation, that was a good outcome, an opportunity to sell arms *and* see Germany rebuilt as a bulwark against Russia. Many powerful figures in Britain were enthusiastic. In his 1933 address, Lord Riverdale, Sheffield steel magnate said: "*Will the Germans go to war again? I don't think there is any doubt about it, and the curious thing about it is that I am almost persuaded that some day we shall have to let the Germans arm or we shall have to arm them. With the Russians armed to the teeth and the tremendous menace in the East, Germany is always going to be a plum waiting for the Russians to take. One of the greatest menaces to peace in Europe today is the unarmed condition of Germany*".^{10,14} Lloyd George and many others held similar views.^{2,10} Arms traders made the most of the new opportunities, among them De Havilland which supplied the emerging German air force with training aircraft.¹⁰

Accordingly, no surprise the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935 'authorising' the rebuilding of submarines - a decision condemned by Churchill.³ And similarly over the following years, Hitler, who had always stressed he wanted *lebensraum* only in *Eastern*

Europe, was encouraged by both trade and diplomatic 'signals from successive British governments, - until it was too late to prevent another tragic and even more destructive war.^{3,7}

Finally, it will be of interest to Australians that it was none other than Lord Riverdale who so 'ably' represented Britain in negotiating the terms of the *Empire Air Training Scheme* which, ignoring the defence of Australia, "surrendered"*** thousands of our young men (and those of the other Dominions) to the RAF, so many to be lost while area-bombing Germany's cities and seeking out its submarines across the Atlantic Ocean.⁹

*term used by Prime Minister Menzies who, having approved that policy, was writing to S.M.Bruce, Australia's war-time representative in London. (AA:CRS A5954, box 2360)⁹

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(see also **Essay 8A(b) i & ii**)