

8. Supporting Germany's Rearmament & the Steady Slide to WWII

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A. Supporting Germany's Rearmament

(a) Introduction – Churchill's protests ignored

The failure to institute universal arms limitation which led to the ultimate breakdown of the *First World Disarmament Conference 1932-1933*, together with the rise of Hitler, was to make the rearmament of Germany a certainty. And tragically it was not only Hitler and his Nazi supporters who wanted Germany's rearmament, but many influential figures in Britain and elsewhere, as we shall shortly see. One prominent exception, however, was Winston Churchill who, from the early 1930s never ceased to warn his Conservative colleagues and others of the danger, the inevitable consequence of war if Germany, especially under Hitler, was allowed to rearm. He likewise warned of the dangers of encouraging Hitler by acceding to his demands on other nations. In documenting examples of this kind of activity by the British government and prominent figures, I will be quoting from Churchill's "*The Gathering Storm*" his account of the origins of WWII (WC4i), as well as from his "*Arms and the Covenant*" (WC3) and other important sources.

It is only fair to point out, however, that while Churchill consistently warned of the inevitable result of Germany's rearmament, stressing that war could easily have been

avoided had certain international actions been taken, he was ever *opposed to universal arms limitation*. And although he was fully aware of the looming catastrophe if civilisation continued to go on developing and stockpiling more and more powerful weapons of mass destruction (WC4i, 35-9; see Appendix I), as a confirmed Imperialist he was determined to maintain the Empire's freedom to use all weapons 'considered necessary.' Thus while Churchill saw an important role for the League of Nations in limiting the arms of certain *other* nations, he did not want it to be an instrument guaranteeing a 'level playing field' in international affairs.(see Speech of May 1932 re. Sir John Simons "*Qualitative Disarmament*", WC3, 21) However, regarding German rearmament, he (though not himself in government) was simply far more realistic than the ever-so-wishful-thinking British Cabinet of the day who naively believed it must work to their advantage.

In recounting the military resurgence of Germany under Hitler throughout the 1930s, we shall see whether Britain, having failed to honour its post-WWI pledge for the *universal* limitation of arms would, in defiance of Versailles and the League Covenant, simply turn a blind eye to German rearmament or whether, even more sinisterly, time-dishonoured Old Diplomacy practices would be used to *promote* that rearmament. After all, it was not as if the character of Hitler, by then in full control of a Nazi Germany, was unknown, for his extremely brutal anti-democratic activities had been well documented during the '20s and 30s, i.e., both before and after his seizure of dictatorial power in 1933.(e.g., WC4i, 49-53; LH, 6-9) Moreover, Hitler's ultimate aim, that a rearmed Germany *must* obtain more 'liebensraum' (living room) by military expansion eastwards, towards and including the USSR, had been common knowledge ever since his Mein Kampf testimony.(AH,v2, Ch.14, pp.586-609, esp. p.598;

Further, as made clear in 'Mein Kampf', Hitler was highly critical of Germany's pre-WWI foreign policy. While he supported Germany's right to have expanded industrially and commercially, he saw its 19th Century attempts to develop overseas colonies in competition with the established Imperial Powers, Britain, France and Russia as inevitably leading to disaster: - war and its own downfall. Instead, Germany "*..should have renounced colonies and sea power - and spared English industry our competition.*" But one has to ask, was open peaceful competition with England ever possible? Hitler's answer: "*We should have known that that could result only in war.*"(AH, 129-131) In applying that bitter lesson to Germany's post-WWI situation, Hitler stated that Germany's only realistic future, its only salvation, *must* lie in coming to an understanding with England on expanding its land borders, but entirely *within Europe*, by extending *Eastwards* into Russia. And since post-war Russia was a Communist state and since the British government shared his extreme hatred and fear of its economic system, he believed his solution would be acceptable to Britain and the West generally.

And for many Conservatives and even some Liberals, concerned ever since the Russian Revolution that the idea, the 'virus', of Communism might spread through Western Europe, a rearmed Germany under Hitler had enormous appeal as a key instrument for 'throttling' communism at its supposed source, the USSR. Indeed, all the more so following the onset of the Great Depression, that profound economic collapse

with its mass unemployment and suffering. And given Hitler's passionate anti-communism (well evidenced both from Mein Kampf and his political record) it might, have seemed to them certain that Britain could count him on 'their' side. Any doubts that this was the situation driving the push to promote German rearmament should be dispelled by the following.

(b) British-Assisted Rearmament Under Hitler - The Record

As well documented by Churchill in the House of Commons in July and November, 1934, German rearmament was by then well and truly advanced. German air power, growing far faster than that of Britain, was already two thirds its strength and at current rates would exceed Britain's by 1936.(WC3, 155, 169; WC4i, 99-105) Although on advice from Air Minister, Lord Londonderry, these assertions were denied by Stanley Baldwin, yet in March 1935 when Foreign Secretary Eden visited Berlin, Hitler informed him that Germany had already gained parity.(WC4i,108) In the House debate which followed, (notwithstanding Air Minister Londonderry's continued denials) this reality was admitted both by Prime Minister MacDonald and Baldwin. And the stark reality was that German air strength forged ahead of Britain's through the rest of the 1930s and, according to Churchill, was twice that of Britain by the outbreak of WWII.(WC4i, 114-6)

Now let us look at the background to such rapid progress in Germany's rearmament. Even as early as 1932 when the German delegates to the World Disarmament Conference demanded the removal of all bars to Germany's rearmament, the *London Times* was promoting a "timely redress of inequality" in arms.(WC4i, 66) Indeed, throughout the 1930s under Geoffrey Dawson's editorship the *London Times* quite notoriously gave constant support not only to German rearmament but to Hitler's foreign policy moves in general (c.f.,*The History of the Times*). Moreover a number of prominent industrialists were motivated to actively assist that process. As early as 1933, by which time Hitler had clearly displayed his truly evil ways and intentions, Sir Arthur Balfour** Chairman of Sheffield's Capital Steelworks, was telling a meeting of his sales managers:

"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 unarmed in the middle is always going to be a plum waiting for the Russians to take. One of the greatest menaces to peace in Europe to-day is the totally unarmed condition of Germany". (Sheffield Daily Telegraph, October 24, 1933; N-B1, 125). Indeed, it was the sort of thinking which fits with Britain's WWI Prime Minister, Lloyd George's statement to the House the following year: "...in a very short time, perhaps in a year, perhaps in two, the conservative elements in this country will be looking to Germany as the bulwark against Communism in Europe.....Do not let us be in a hurry to condemn Germany. We shall be welcoming Germany as our friend." (Commons, Nov,28, 1934, Hansard V.295, 919-20; see also Lloyd George's 1936 meeting with Hitler, see 8B(d). below).

Perhaps not surprising then that many industrialists were happy to take commercial advantage of the 'favourable' political climate of the times. Indeed, by April 1934, Armstrong Siddeley was selling Germany its aircraft engines (N-B1,195) and, as revealed in a double-page advertisement in *The Aeroplane* of July 1934, the De Havilland Aircraft Company was already selling its military training planes to Germany, Japan and 8 other nations, their advertisement proclaiming,

TIGER MOTH
For Naval and Military
Flying Training
supplied to
THE BRITISH ROYAL AIR FORCE
and the Governments of
China Japan Persia Poland
Spain Portugal and Germany

Now lest it be thought that the above examples of encouragement and assistance to German rearmament were simply the responses of particular individuals, in 1935 two highly significant decisions were made at governmental level. While one provided de facto recognition of Germany's 'right' to rearm, the other positively encouraged it.

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****Footnote:** A mere five years later, the same Sir Arthur Balfour, by then Lord Riverdale, was to head Britain's delegation to the Ottawa meeting that negotiated with the Australian and other Dominion governments the *'Empire Air Training Scheme'* (EATS) the organisation which, from 1939 and throughout WWII recruited tens of thousands of young Dominions' airmen for training and air operations over Europe and the Atlantic.(see John McCarthy, *A Last Call of Empire: Britain and the Empire Air Training Scheme* (JMcC); and below in Essay 9, *World War II and Australia*, at 9E(c) & 9F(a-f)). (end footnote)

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(i) The Stresa Conference (1935)

In March 1935 Germany launched two significant military initiatives, (a) an official constitution for its new Air Force and (b) a declaration that henceforth its army would be based on Compulsory National Service. Of course both moves contravened the Versailles treaty "*..upon which the League of Nations was founded.*"(WC4i,117) Indeed, as Churchill emphasised, "*...the formal establishment of conscription in Germany on March 16, 1935, marked the fundamental challenge to Versailles.*" (WC4i,128) And the further German Law of May 21, 1935, placed the newly defined 'Wehrmacht' under the permanent control of Hitler. The regimentation of German youth was the prime task of the new arrangements.(WC4i,128-9) A critical aspect was the setting up of the Hitler Youth organisation. Its role was to inculcate in children from their earliest years the 'ideals' of militarism with a view to ensuring their total and enthusiastic participation in military action when the time came. That great tragedy,

which was to emerge all too soon for these unaware innocents, has been tellingly recounted in a very moving TV series, *'Hitler's Children'* shown by SBS in 2000.

The international response to both initiatives was a conference of the former wartime Allies, Britain, France and Italy, under League of Nations' auspices at Stresa. Britain was represented by MacDonald and Foreign Secretary Sir John Simon. MM Flandin and Laval were there for France and Mussolini and Suvich for Italy. The alleged purpose of the Conference was to challenge Germany's moves. However, as Churchill put it, "*But the British representatives made it clear at the outset that they would not consider the possibility of sanctions in the event of treaty-violation. This naturally confined the Conference to the region of words.*" (WC4i, 119)

Consequently, all that finally eventuated was a bland 'Resolution' indicating "...*complete agreement in opposing, by all practicable means, any unilateral repudiation of treaties which may endanger the peace of Europe, and will act in close and cordial collaboration for this purpose.*"(WC4i,120) Subsequently, through both its Council and Assembly, the League formally protested at Germany's treaty breach, but as no major powers were willing to act, neither sanctions nor other enforcement occurred. And, of course, that amounted to the acceptance of German rearmament, its *de facto* recognition.

(ii) The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935

In view of the brutal excesses already committed by the Nazis against their own people (Christians, Jews, Socialists, Gypsies, Communists, indeed all opposed to Nazism - and even the mentally afflicted) most in Britain, as elsewhere, considered the negative outcome of Stresa more than enough encouragement to Hitler's rearmament. But for Britain's Conservative-dominated 'National' government, that was not so. In June, 1935, as Churchill put it, "*...a most surprising act was committed by the British Government.*" That 'act' was at the instigation of its Cabinet, which included the Admiralty's First Lord, Eyres Monsell. It followed on secret 'conversations' between the British and German Admiralties which had been in process *over the previous two years*, - that is from the time Hitler first came to power! The outcome of these negotiations was a purely *bilateral* arrangement termed '*The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935*'.(WC4i, 123-8)

As background to what was involved, we need remember that the Versailles Treaty, which aimed at preventing any future *offensive* activity, placed severe limits on the size of the German navy, allowing but six armoured ships of 10,000 tons, 6 light cruisers (6,000 tons) and, understandably, *absolutely no submarines*. Along with Germany and Britain, the war-time Allies, US, France, Italy Japan and other powers were all parties to that Versailles Treaty. In addition, the US and Japan had always been central to previous Naval Conference agreements. But not one of these former Allies were involved or even consulted over this new bilateral agreement. It was simply announced after the event!

In essence what this Anglo-German Naval Agreement confirmed was that, in ships, the

German navy should not exceed one third that of the British. Further, as Churchill explained, they then "...proceeded to concede to Germany the right to build U-boats, explicitly denied to her in the Peace Treaty. Germany might build 60 per cent of the British submarine strength, and if she decided that the circumstances were exceptional, she might build to 100 per cent."(WC4i, 124) So under the Agreement terms Germany could build 5 capital ships, 2 aircraft carriers, 21 cruisers, and 64 destroyers. And this meant "...no practical limitation or restraint of any kind upon Germany's naval expansion", so that "In U-boats alone did they build to the full paper limits allowed. As soon as they were able to pass the 60 per cent limit they invoked the provision allowing them to build to 100 per cent, and fifty seven were actually constructed when the war began." The agreement was roundly condemned by Churchill in the House at the time (WC4i, 124-6) - but, as we have seen, this delusional British cabinet was quite determined that it must have *its* way.

Indeed, as Churchill related, British Ministers, indulging in what I will describe as 'new-speak', made great play of the supposed "*peaceful purposes*" of the Agreement as "*a step towards disarmament*", further claiming that through cooperation with Germany, the submarine could be abolished! But as Churchill commented, "*Considering that the condition attached to it was that all other countries should agree at the same time, and that it was well known there was not the slightest chance of other countries agreeing, this was a very safe offer for the Germans to make. This also applied to the German agreement to restrict the use of submarines so as to strip submarine warfare against commerce of inhumanity. Who could suppose that the Germans, possessing a great fleet of U-boats and watching their women and children being starved by a British blockade, would abstain from the fullest use of that arm. I described this view as 'the acme of gullibility'*".(WC4i, 126)

Here we should recall the costs of German submarine warfare during WWI. Then, as during WWII, not only were there vast losses of ships, crews and the passengers of many many nations but, likewise, Germany's submarine blockade of Britain's vital imports went close to throttling that country's very survival.

Moreover, as Churchill pointed out, "*Far from being a step towards disarmament, the agreement,would inevitably have provoked a world-wide development of new war-ship building.*"(WC4i,126-8) A further aspect of the agreement was even more serious. Churchill put it this way: "*It was also at this moment a great diplomatic advantage to Hitler to divide the Allies, to have one of them ready to condone breaches of the Treaty of Versailles, and to invest the regaining of full freedom to rearm with the sanction of agreement with Britain.*" And as he went on to say, "*The effect of the announcement was another blow to the League of Nations.*"(WC4i, 125) The French were upset both at the non-consultation and the prospect of German U-boats. Mussolini "*...was encouraged by what seemed the cynical and selfish attitude of Great Britain to press on with his plans against Abyssinia.*" (WC4i, 125) And in condemning the move in the House, Churchill made the further highly significant point that "*But worst of all is the effect upon our position at the other end of the world, in China and the Far East. What a windfall this has been to Japan. Observe what the consequences are.The British Fleet, when this*

programme is completed, will be largely anchored in the North Sea.the whole position in the Far East has been altered, to the detriment of the United States and Great Britain and to the detriment of China.". (WC4i, 127)

How true, how very true! It was indeed 'a great windfall to Japan', a great encouragement to its military onslaught against China and anywhere else as it might choose (and shortly did) without fear of any effective British response, as all too soon we in Australia were to learn to our utter surprise*, dismay and sorrow. Finally, like so many other 'arrangements' and 'understandings' the British government had with Hitler, it was to greatly encourage both Hitler and Mussolini in their evil ambitions, an encouragement that was to disastrously 'blow-back' not only on the British people themselves, but on those of the Dominions and so many millions of others across the world - in the onset and costs of the Second World War. (* I say 'surprise' because, most unfortunately, almost all Australians (like so many others across the world) were so utterly ignorant of all this important background and hence completely vulnerable. Today, in contrast, if we want to be informed it is good to know that there is just so much more information 'out there', much of it on the web once you know where and how to look, given the near-miraculous capacities of google!)

B. And the Steady Slide to WWII

(a) Italy, Abyssinia, Britain and the League

Now, even at the time of the Stresa Conference it was known that Italy was preparing to invade and colonise Abyssinia. Like Germany, a late starter in the 'Colonial stakes', Italy had relatively few foreign 'possessions'. In an earlier intrusion 40 years earlier it had suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the 'natives'. So as Mussolini saw it, Italy's 'national greatness' depended not only on building an Empire like those of others, but on 'avenging Adowa', the site of their earlier defeat. Looking back on this situation from 1948, Churchill was clearly ambivalent. Thus, in recognising the ideals of the League he could write: "*Mussolini's designs upon Abyssinia were unsuited to the ethics of the twentieth century. They belonged to those dark ages when white men felt themselves entitled to conquer yellow, brown, black or red men, and subjugate them by their superior strength and weapons.*" Indeed such behaviour was "*obsolete and reprehensible*". "*Moreover Abyssinia was a member of the League of Nations.*" (By a curious twist of fate it was Italy in 1923 that had strongly supported that membership whereas Britain had opposed it.)(WC4i, 148,-9)

So when on October 4th, 1935, Italy invaded Abyssinia (as anticipated) the case for the Powers to support the League in opposing it was clear cut. And as Churchill wrote: "*There was no doubt that the attack by one member of the League of Nations upon another at this juncture, if not resented, would be finally destructive of the League as a factor for welding together the forces which could alone control the might of resurgent Germany and the awful Hitler menace.*"(WC4i, 149) But see the intruding ambivalence, the qualified response, Churchill's term 'resented' rather than 'opposed'. Why the weakened approach?

Of course a basic problem for Britain, like any Empire power, was that their case against Italy would necessarily be extremely weak, - *unless* they were prepared to give independence to their own colonial peoples! This was not mentioned by Churchill. Instead he stressed another very real problem, namely, that in opposing Italy's ambitions for Empire, she might be 'driven into Hitler's arms'. But failing to propose any effective response to that threat, he went on to conclude "*There seemed in all the circumstances, no obligation upon Britain to take the lead herself.*" Clearly, as an avowed 'Empire man', Churchill (like the British government) was in a fix, for as he stated: "*Half measures were useless for the League, and pernicious for Britain if she assumed its leadership.*"(WC4i,150) Of course, if Britain took no strong stand, that would necessarily result in 'half-measures' by the League. And this could only mean that Mussolini would 'win', that the League would be judged to have failed, and that ultimately everybody (not just the Abyssinians) would lose.

This is not the place to do more than outline what transpired over Italy's invasion of Abyssinia. After some pretence at opposition, including what Churchill described as 'sham' sanctions - designed not to be effective or even offend - Britain and France gave in. The sequence of events is well described in Chapter X of Churchill's account of events leading to WWII.(WC4i, 148) In short, with no effective opposition, Italian aggression against Abyssinia triumphed, Mussolini moved closer to Hitler, Hitler was encouraged, and the Japanese militarists were further heartened that no Great Power was prepared to challenge their unilateral military aggressions. And everyone at the top was more than happy to transfer the blame for what was obviously the failure of the Great Powers themselves onto the League of Nations. But at least in concluding his chapter Churchill was prepared to call a spade a spade in recording the undermining role played by 'His Majesty's Government' in the affair when he wrote: "*They had led the League of Nations into an utter fiasco, most damaging if not fatally injurious to its effective life as an institution.*" (WC4i,168)

How true, and in today's world, how relevant to the plight of the United Nations which (with consistent help from sections of the media, many governments, and a not well enough informed public) is repeatedly charged with 'ineffectiveness' or even abject failure. In viewing the current situation, we should learn from the false myths developed around these alleged 'failures' of the League of Nations, especially the myth that not only the Abyssinian war, but *all* such aggressions of the 1930s (leading up to and including World War II) were brought about by 'the Dictators unprovoked aggressions', - aided by 'the failure of the League of Nations' to effectively counter them; - that always it was 'the failure of the League', with *never* a mention of the failure of the major Powers to provide the League with that 'Big Power' support that was absolutely *essential* for its peace-keeping functions! The real history, as we have it from Lord Robert Cecil, Philip Noel-Baker, Winston Churchill, military historian, Captain Basil Lidell Hart (RC; N-B1; N-B2; WC4i; LH) and as outlined here, makes very clear the true source of the failure. (*vide infra*)

(b)The Public's Response to Flawed British Policy: The Peace Ballot of 1935

As is often said, World War I left the peoples of Europe with a profound dread and hatred of war and a determination that a recurrence must be prevented at all costs. It is frequently implied, however, that such peace-loving people were not actively involved, that they were essentially passive in the matter. Certainly that is how many Western governments wanted them to be, - and so treated them. Similar to pre-1914, all the great inter-governmental decisions of the post-war period - (so many contrary to their commitments under Versailles and the League Covenant), e.g., to oppose self-determination and universal arms limitation; to support German rearmament; to avoid serious challenge to Japan and Italy when those countries invaded other League nations, - were taken without reference to the wishes of the public at large, even though there were many citizen, veteran, and other NGOs vitally concerned and active on these issues. And obviously these decisions were taken with no sense of responsibility to the official 'international community', their own League of Nations. Indeed, like the United Nations today, on all *key* issues that organisation was cynically side-lined,

In Britain the government liked to hide the real reasons for its narrowly self-serving decisions. As Lord Cecil put it "*When urged to take really effective action, Ministers constantly alleged that the country would not support them in a more vigorous League policy. It was to remove this last impression that the ballot was started.*" (RC,171; 205-6) Contrary to government assertions the public at large, while indeed truly peace-loving, were much alarmed not only at the unchecked Japanese invasion of Manchuria, the emergence of German conscription, Germany's rearmament, and Italy's threatened invasion of Abyssinia, but with all the war-threatening events - including their own government's role in accepting and even promoting such developments. Along with many others, Lord Cecil wanted to demonstrate that popular League backing to the British government in the hope that more realistic policies would result. Based on the text of the Covenant of the League, the ballot's questions were designed to elicit the public's support (or otherwise) for Britain's membership of the League, for internationally-agreed general arms reductions, and for a League-authorized military force to resist aggression.

Indeed, the ballot was a very ambitious project. Led by Cecil, it involved the cooperative action of 39 British NGOs, including the League of Nations Union (c.f., our UNAA) coordinated through a 'National Ballot Committee'. District committees in all 600 parliamentary constituencies were set up to organise public meetings and discussion groups. As Noel-Baker described, in excess of 100,000 Pounds - in those days a lot of money - was collected in shillings and half crowns to finance the work. Over 500,000 volunteers distributed ballot papers to every household throughout Britain, later returning to gather the responses, with local committees of leading citizens doing the counts. Once the final results were in, they were presented at a public meeting in the Albert Hall by Cecil, with the Archbishop of Canterbury in the chair.(N-B2,138-141) On its own terms, the Ballot was a huge success, with over 11 million people responding. (cf, WC4i,152)

Details of these responses were as follows:-

Question	'Yes'	'No'	Total	%total 'yes'
Question 1. "Should Great Britain remain a member of the League of Nations?"	10,642,500	337,064	11,087,660	*97.0
Question 2. "Are You in favour of an all-round reduction of armaments by international agreement?"	10,058,526	815,565	11,087,660	* 92.5
Question 3. "Are you in favour of the all-round abolition of national military and naval aircraft by international agreement?"	9,157,145	1,614,159	11,087,660	*85.0
Question 4. "Should the manufacture and sale of armaments for private profit be prohibited by international agreement?"	10,002,849	740,354	11,087,660	* 93.1
Question 5. "Do you consider that, if a nation insists on attacking another, the other nations should combine to stop it by				
(a) economic and non-military measures?	9,627,606	740,354		94.1
(b) if necessary, military measures?"	8,506,777	2,262,261		74.2

(* the disparity between the total answers sent in and the total of the yes/no votes is due to some 'doubtfuls' as well as some abstentions on each question.)

As Noel-Baker reported, "The votes cast in favour of the League and World Disarmament were more than the largest number that had ever put a Party Political Government in power." "The Peace Ballot proved beyond a doubt that the British people understood the policy of World Disarmament and the collective security of the League. It proved that Hankey and the hawks had betrayed the wishes of the British people when they destroyed Cecil's Treaty of Mutual Assistance, the Geneva Protocol, the Coolidge Conference, and the Disarmament Conference of 1932. It proved that the British people wanted to fulfil the legal obligations of the Covenant which they had signed" Thus, the vote for stopping Mussolini by League-directed armed force (i.e., had sanctions had been properly applied, yet failed) was 74.2%, three to one in favour, so there was no doubt the British government would have had popular support for sticking

to its supposed 'principles'.(N-B2, 140-1) Indeed, affirming this, Churchill commented, "*The Peace Ballot seemed at first to be misunderstood by Ministers....It was regarded in many quarters as a part of the Pacifist campaign. On the contrary, Clause 5 affirmed a positive and courageous policy which could at this time have been followed with an overwhelming measure of national support. Lord Cecil and other leaders of the League of Nations were, as this clause declared, and as events showed, willing and indeed resolved, to go to war in righteous cause, provided that all necessary action was taken under the auspices of the League of Nations.*" (WC4i,152)

(c) 1936, Hitler's Reoccupation and Remilitarisation of the Rhineland

As we saw, Churchill had been ambivalent about British support for strong League opposition to the Italian assault on Abyssinia. However he was adamant that such opposition should apply to Hitler's reoccupation and remilitarisation of the Rhineland - which occurred on March 7, 1936. In view of the overwhelming Peace Ballot result, Churchill was convinced that the remilitarisation, - by which the emergent and now rapidly rearming Germany was defying both the Versailles Treaty (Articles 42, 43, 44) and the later (freely-entered-into) Locarno Treaty, - would be resisted by the British people (along with others) *provided* it was through a properly constituted League-authorized challenge. Hitler had earlier successfully repulsed attempts to firm up an 'Eastern Locarno' Treaty that, with the cooperation of the USSR and France, might have guaranteed the borders of Czechoslovakia, Poland and other Eastern European states.(WC4i, 169-71)

Hitler's tactic was to emphasise that, as '*the bulwark against Bolshevism*', Germany was utterly opposed to *any* cooperation of the West with Russia. A Franco-Soviet Pact had been signed in May 1935, but had yet to be ratified. And Hitler made clear that if a Franco-German rapprochement was to proceed, such ratification must *not* occur.(WC4i, 171) However, on February 27, 1936, France had gone ahead and ratified. So on March 7, ahead of his reoccupation, Hitler grandly proposed a 25-year pact: - for demilitarisation on both sides of the Rhine, for limiting the size of air forces, and for a 'non-aggression pact' with both Eastern and Western neighbours.(WC4i, 172) Then, a mere 2 hours later he announced his intention to reoccupy the Rhineland - 'as a purely symbolic gesture'. But it was more than symbolic, it was real, and in contravening the Locarno Treaty, he was undermining Germany's undertaking to guarantee the existing frontiers of Germany with both Belgium and France. France appealed to its 'allies' and to the League. It also considered mobilisation, but first wanted firm assurance of British support in the event of conflict. It was not that overt conflict would be necessary, however, for as Churchill wrote "*If the French Government had mobilised the French Army, with nearly a hundred divisions,..... Hitler would have been compelled by his own General Staff to withdraw, and a check would have been given to his pretensions which might well have proved fatal to his rule.*" (WC4i, 175)

In the event, the British government continued on its steady course of so-called appeasement, (i.e., of going along with Hitler's cherished plans for Germany's expanding militarisation) and, in Churchill's words, the French "*...did not meet with any*

*encouragement to resist the German aggression...". Accordingly, "The British Cabinet, seeking the line of least resistance, felt that the easiest way out was to press France into another appeal to the League of Nations." (WC4i,174), while the London Times and other papers "...expressed their belief in the sincerity of Hitler's offers of a non-aggression pact." (WC4i, 176) Of course without firm British backing, 'appealing to the League of Nations' was only a ruse, for without such backing no firm stand would be taken. In the event, the parliament did not debate the Rhineland issue until March 26. In the interval, the Council of the League, meeting in London, accepted Germany's case against the Franco-Soviet Pact for submission to the Hague Court on condition that Germany not *increase* its troops in the Rhineland pending further negotiations! (WC4i, 182) This Germany rejected. With only lukewarm Cabinet support, British Foreign Secretary, Eden, instituted 'staff conversations' between Britain, France and Belgium to facilitate possible action under the Locarno Treaty. But as events turned out these 'conversations' were "...the only Allied reply to Hitler's breach of the Treaty and solid gain of the Rhineland." (WC4i,183)*

As to the realities, however, in his speech to the House on April 6, Churchill could see that *"The creation of a line of forts opposite to the French frontier will enable the German troops to be economised on that line, and will enable the main forces to swing around through Belgium and Holland.... Then look East. There the consequences of the Rhineland fortification may be more immediate.....The moment those fortifications are completed,.....the whole aspect of Middle Europe is changed. The Baltic States, Poland and Czechoslovakia, with which must be associated Yugoslavia, Roumania, Austria, and some other countries, are all affected very decisively the moment that this great work of construction has been completed."* And, beginning with Austria, so it turned out to be, - notwithstanding that Hitler in his Reichstag speech of May 21, 1936, had declared that *"Germany neither intends nor wishes to interfere in the internal affairs of Austria, to annex Austria, or to conclude an Anschluss."* (WC4i, 184-5)

Despite that clear undertaking, Hitler ordered the German General Staff to prepare for Austria's eventual occupation, - which occurred in March 1938. Meanwhile, however, in July 1936 there began a civil war in Spain. On this issue, while the Great Powers adopted a policy of 'non-intervention', Germany and Italy actively supported General Franco's Fascist side and Russia (less actively) the Spanish Republican government side. Hitler, aided by his Anti-Commintern partner, Japan, strongly promoted the view that the Fascist cause, being strongly anti-communist, deserved the support of *all* Western powers. In the event, the major powers, Britain, France, and the United States, made no effort to involve the League of Nations as arbiter.(WC4i, 192-3) Thus, by simply standing aside they, in effect, allowed the Fascist forces to prevail over those of the elected Spanish Republican government.

(d) Understanding Appeasement: What Drove British Policy

To better understand the motivation behind the British governments' policy of so-called 'appeasement', in fact their 'accommodation' to and often frank encouragement of Germany's rearmament and foreign policy aims under Hitler, we need to go back to the

early post-WWI scene. In Russia, decades of oppression capped by the terrible sufferings endured during the Great War, had culminated in the revolution of 1917 and, as related above, capitulation to Germany. Fighting on the Eastern front stopped, allowing Germany to transfer many divisions to the Western Front and for a while the possibility of a German victory seemed all too real. With all combatants close to exhaustion, it was a close call, but when the United States took sides in 1917 and entered the battle lines in force in mid 1918, the balance tipped in favour of the Allies. Only then was it possible for the European 'victors' finally to proudly proclaim not only that Germany had 'started the war' but that it, with its allies, had 'lost' it.

However, as we have seen, since all sides (other than the USA and Japan) had suffered such extreme human carnage and vast material wastage, the greater reality was that *all* had lost, - millions of families bereaved, millions maimed in body and mind, *all* survivors exhausted, all prime combatant countries' economies ruined.(WC5, 30-31) Understandably, then, there was a very widespread dissatisfaction with the old ways of doing things which led most people not only to seek, but to *expect* genuine reforms. That brought great fear in high places - fear of any disturbance to the old ways, the 'old order', fear that revolution (which had already occurred in Russia and was all too close in Germany) might, like a virus, infect other Western Powers - even France and Britain! This fear, already very strong at the war's end, was further aggravated by the failure to deal with the old social and economic inequalities, especially when these led to total collapse of the market economies, to the Great Depression with its massive unemployment and hardship in the midst of plenty. And the societal response to these greatly worsened conditions simply heightened the fears of the overly privileged to the point of obsession.

In the early days after World War I and Russia's revolution, the most urgent concern was for the German situation. Might not the defeated, suffering, demoralised Germans opt for a more egalitarian, a 'socialist' solution to their predicament? For Lloyd George, who had been Britain's Prime Minister for most of the war and was its chief representative at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, that concern overshadowed *all* others. We see this in his '*Fontainebleu Memorandum*' presented to Peace Conference delegates. In this he *seemed* at first to recognise that the defeated nations must not be saddled with inequalities and injustices which would only make for a further World War - perhaps 'a mere 30 years on'. All sounded pure wisdom, the sort of common sense that could guarantee the security of one's own country along with that of others. However, the motivation behind Lloyd George's Conference message was anything but pure. For soon we learn "*But there is a consideration in favour of long-sighted peace which influences me even more than the desire to leave no causes justifying a fresh outbreak 30 years hence.There is a deep sense not only of discontent, but of anger and revolt amongst the workmen against pre-war conditions. The whole existing order is questioned by the mass of the population from one end of Europe to the other.*" (*Fontainebleu Memorandum* fully quoted by Martin Gilbert in MG3, 189-196)

In particular he was concerned that such conditions in the defeated Germany could, following the Russian example, make it 'go Bolshevik'. And even more alarming, that

Britain and France could go the same way. So his prime worry, his overriding concern (which persisted throughout the 1920s and '30s) was not the avoidance of conditions certain to lead to a 'fresh outbreak', a future European war, but the threat to his concept of the 'long-sighted peace', the long-revered 'traditional arrangements' for the creation and (mal)distribution of wealth, both nationally and internationally.(AS)

Thus, while in his *Memorandum*, Lloyd George wrote that "...we will open to her (i.e., Germany) the raw materials and markets of the world on equal terms with ourselves, and will do everything possible to enable the German peoples to get upon their legs again. We cannot both cripple her and expect her to pay." (MG3,189) he at the same time had no plans to carry out the moves essential for that pacific future. Obviously these would have included: (i) the sharing of responsibility for the war's origin, (ii) limiting German reparations to invasion-caused material damage, (iii) accepting German exports as Reparations payments, (iv) implementing *universal* arms limitation; (v) honouring the pledges for the self-determination of peoples; and (vi) instituting fair dealing in economic affairs both at home and abroad.(see 7A, B, C, above) But in the event, these were either absent or severely constrained by the over-riding urge to maintain the 'Old Order' as it was before the war.

That of course meant upholding the 'normal' divide between rich and poor, both nationally and internationally (including the application of the Versailles' Treaty's 'guilt', 'economic' and 'Reparations' Clauses on Germany) and thwarting all moves towards overcoming Britain's entrenched poverty, what Churchill referred to as "*the social problem*"(WC6) let alone instituting any degree of 'communism', 'socialism' or 'egalitarianism'. Indeed, it was to mean perpetuating all sorts of inequalities and injustices which all too soon were to lead to the Great Depression and then a *Second* World War, not 30 but a mere 20 years after the First. And since the principal concern of the powerful voices within Britain was the avoidance of risk to any significant redistribution of wealth, that concern was translated into policies designed to block such trends, including their absurd support of German rearmament under Hitler - one known to be a fervent anti-communist and, moreover, one known to have territorial designs on Eastern Europe and Soviet Russia, the communist USSR. (AHii, i.e., Volii, Ch.xiv; WC4i, 200-1)

It could be no great surprise then that when in September 1936, Lloyd George had the opportunity to meet with German Chancellor Hitler at Berchtesgaden, he took full advantage. Although no transcript exists, we have the detailed account recorded by his sympathetic secretarial assistant, T.P.Conwell-Evans, quoted in full by Martin Gilbert.(MG3,197-211). That Hitler also regarded it as an important meeting is indicated by the fact that his Ambassador to Britain, Joachim von Ribbentrop, was present. What both parties sought was not only to promote "...*the well-being of the two countries, but also to preserve Western civilisation itself.*" (MG3,198) And as further discussion showed, saving the Depression-ravaged European states, including their own, from communism/socialism, indeed any form of 'collectivism', was their mutual prime concern. 'Bolshevism', as Hitler termed the threat, "*At the moment,was more dangerous as a disintegrating forcethan as a military power....*", citing the case of

Spain which " *...illustrated the sort of danger which threatened Europe.*", going on to proclaim, "*If the Left succeeded in Spain it would not be a victory of the Spanish Government but of anarchic Sovietism.a victory for barbarism. It might spread to France and Czecho-SlovakiaGermany would be an island in a sea of Bolshevism.*" Whereupon, Lloyd George interposed, "*So would England.*" (MG3, 203) Clearly, it was not about any military threat from Russia, but all about the much-feared spread of ideas, 'the virus' of communism, socialism or similar.

Although there was complete agreement on the nature of the prime threat to the European states including their own, approaches to the solution differed somewhat. Hitler's aim was clearly for "*...a three power agreement between France, Great Britain and Germany...*" , these powers "*...to reach a common defensive position (abwehr stellung)...*", the example of the recent *Anglo-German Naval Agreement* (1935) being but a first step. Hitler went on to rail against the existing alliances between France and Russia, and Czechoslovakia and Russia, seeing them as threatening to (rather than defensive against) Germany. Lloyd George appeared to agree with that indicating, "*With regard to the French Government, the Franco-Russian Treaty presented a very serious difficulty.*" Accordingly he advocated a renewed Locarno Conference, "*...solely to secure the status quo in Western Europe. ...Eastern European matters could be raised later at another Conference.*" (!)

Obviously Hitler's desire, long made clear through his 'Mein Kampf', was to be given a 'free hand' in Eastern Europe to carry out his 'liebensraum', (i.e., living room) policy for German expansion. Knowing that, Lloyd George would readily understand Hitler's further statement "*...that the Baltic states were by their size and geographic position far too weak.*"* and that "*Czecho-Slovakia was a positive danger on account of her alliance with Soviet Russia.*"(MG3, 202) Yet Lloyd George made no effort to caution Hitler regarding these very well known Eastern European ambitions. (*Simply amazing , isn't it, how often obviously *weak* countries can be such a *threat* to the strong!)

At the end of their final meeting together (they having met over two days) both men indulged in much altogether sickening laudatory waffle. As Conwell-Evans approvingly noted, "*One seemed to be witnessing a symbolic act of reconciliation between the two peoples. Everybody listened intensely and it was a moving experience.*" And, having been presented with "*....a signed photograph of the Chancellor in a silver frame*", Lloyd George, shaking hands, warmly thanked the Fuehrer. Hitler then went out of his way to praise Lloyd George as Britain's victorious war-time leader, going on to point out, however, that "*If he, himself, instead of being one of those eight million private German soldiers liable to be shot at any time even by black troops, had been in the position of a statesman, he thought he might have prevented Germany's downfall.*" And as Conwell-Evans went on "*Mr Lloyd George replied that he was deeply touched by what the Fuhrer had said to him personally and he was particularly proud to have heard it from the greatest German of the age.*" (MG3, 209)

How strange, how very bizarre to be so fawning, so 'understanding' when, in that very year of 1936, Hitler had placed all police forces under S.S. Chief, Himmler (through

whose leadership Germany's concentration camps were spreading their injustice, their horror); when, following the August Berlin Olympic Games, Lloyd George had seen for himself the workings of Dachau; when already the announced theme of the September Nazi Party Congress was the launching of a '*crusade*' against '*the world danger of Bolshevism*', Germany to be the world centre for '*Fascists and conservatives everywhere*' to fight "*Bolshevism, Socialism and the Jews*"; when from the early fruits of this crusade came the November agreement between Germany and Japan, and the sending of German (along with Italian) airplanes, pilots, munitions, and 10,000 troops to ensure the success of Franco's revolution against his own lawfully-elected Republican government.(MG2, 108-9)

Also revealing the intentions of the players of the day is Churchill's account of his meeting 'one day in 1937' with Germany's 'very popular' Ambassador to Britain, Herr von Ribbentrop, during which an extremely frank proposal was made. There was of course no verbatim report of the meeting but, as Churchill put it, "*The gist of his statement..*" included proposals, "*...in order to make the full case for an Anglo-German entente or even alliance.*" In Churchill's paraphrasing of Ribbentrop, "*What was required was that Britain should give Germany a free hand in the East of Europe. She must have her Lebensraum, or living space, for her increasing population. Therefore Poland and the Danzig Corridor must be absorbed. White Russia and the Ukraine were indispensable to the future life of the German Reich of some seventy million souls. Nothing less would suffice. All that was asked of the British Commonwealth and Europe was not to interfere.*" To which Churchill responded, "*...I said at once that I was sure the British Government would not agree to give Germany a free hand in Eastern Europe. It was true we were on bad terms with Soviet Russia and that we hated Communism as much as Hitler did, but he might be sure that even if France were safeguarded great Britain would never disinterest herself in the fortunes of the Continent to the extent which would enable Germany to gain the domination of Central and Eastern Europe.*" Churchill then directly quotes Ribbentrop as responding: "*In that case, war is inevitable. There is no way out. The Fuehrer is resolved. Nothing will stop him and nothing will stop us.*" (WC4i, 200-1)

As became clearer and clearer, the British government was extremely anti-communist, anti-Russian, and more than happy to see other nations like Germany, Italy and Spain strongly so inclined as well. However, as Churchill (not in government) could appreciate, *ultimately* British interests *would* balk at having Poland and other Eastern European states simply absorbed into a Greater Germany. For not only would that mean an immediate loss for particular British interests, but by its consequent gain in industrial strength, Germany would become a far more serious industrial and commercial competitor. Even so, wanting to remain on the same batting side, that position did not alter the British government's attempts to 'accommodate' what they saw as 'all reasonable demands', that is - until the Eleventh Hour, at which time the penny dropped - but by then it was too late!

In May 1937, Neville Chamberlain replaced Stanley Baldwin as Britain's Prime Minister, Anthony Eden remaining as Foreign Minister. As had other government

leaders, Chamberlain made great efforts 'to reach an understanding' with Hitler and Mussolini, always by the direct bilateral approach, circumventing the League of Nations, even the cooperation of other powers. Not only would Chamberlain not consider Russia's request for a united multinational defensive approach to Hitler's ambitions to expand Germany's borders, he was even averse to cooperation with France and, as we shall see, the United States.

(e) 1937-8, Roosevelt Offers America's Help

Despite Chamberlain's 'efforts' (or, more to the point, aggravated by them!) the European situation failed to improve during the year of 1937. Indeed, by its end, it was the United States' view that that deterioration was such as to require urgent attention, for while Chamberlain remained optimistic about the prospects, Franklin Roosevelt was anything but! Deeply anxious, Roosevelt indicated his desire to call a meeting of 'certain governments', - though before approaching France, Germany and Italy, he wanted first the British government's agreement. The President's cable, conveyed to the Foreign Office on January 12, 1938, sought a reply by the 17th. As Eden was abroad, Chamberlain dealt with it himself. Indicating that he wished to explain his own efforts towards accommodation with Germany and Italy, especially the latter, he responded "*His Majesty's Government would be prepared, for their part, if possible with the authority of the League of Nations, to recognise de jure the Italian occupation of Abyssinia, if they found that the Italian Government on their side were ready to give evidence of their desire to contribute to the restoration of confidence and friendly relations.*" (!) He went on to ask the President to consider whether his (Roosevelt's) own proposal might not cut across the British efforts - and might it not be 'wiser' to postpone the American plan? As one can imagine, the President was, to say the least, disappointed and while agreeing to postpone such a meeting, Roosevelt expressed grave concern at British intentions to 'recognise' Italy's conquest of Abyssinia. (WC4i, 229)

Of course, in effect, that conquest had already been recognised by Britain through the manner of its half-hearted objections and 'not-to-offend' weak sanctions. So Mussolini had no real interest in Chamberlain's initiative - which even included a British proposal that Italy withdraw 5 army divisions from Spain! (WC4i, 230) Mussolini fully realised that Chamberlain had nothing to trade in exchange. And for that negative result, Chamberlain had insightlessly discarded the US President's offer to mediate a genuine European settlement, one that could have cautioned the Dictators against their headlong rush towards another world conflagration. As Churchill put it "*..no event could have been more likely to stave off, or even prevent, war than the arrival of the United States in the circle of European hates and fears.....No one can measure in retrospect its effect upon the course of events in Austria and later Munich. the loss of the last frail chance to save the world.....The lack of all sense of proportion, and even of self preservation,is appalling. One cannot today even reconstruct the state of mind which would render such gestures possible.*" (WC4i, 229) Sadly, it is only fair to point out here that not only this decision but the long series of similar ones were taken not by any one leader in isolation, but by the British Cabinet which remained nigh 100% solidly behind their Prime Minister.

In the case of the Roosevelt proposal and its sequel there was, however, one important exception to the Cabinet's general agreement. On February 20, 1938, Foreign Secretary, Eden, who was not so wishful thinking as the rest, resigned in protest. But Chamberlain's response was to appoint in Eden's stead, Lord Halifax, another Hitler devotee. Having learned of Eden's loss, Churchill spent an anguished sleepless night. (WC4i, 231)

(f) 1938, Austria Engulfed

As German archives have since revealed, Hitler had long planned to occupy Austria ('Case Otto'). At the time, however, both his diplomats and General Staff, believing Germany not strong enough, that the attempt could easily be successfully challenged by the French army (especially if backed by Britain), were alarmed at this prospect. But as Churchill put it, Hitler "*...was flushed with his successes, first in rearmament, second in conscription, third in the Rhineland, fourth by the accession of Mussolini's Italy.*" (WC4i, 233) So Hitler dismissed first Blomberg, then Fritsch, - himself assuming supreme command of Germany's armed forces. Since by then Germany was protected from the French at its western border by the highly fortified Siegfried Line, the acquisition of Austria would open the door to Czechoslovakia and the rest of eastern and south-eastern Europe. Moreover, based on his recent encounters with the governments of Britain and France, Hitler was confident Austria could be incorporated without a war.

On February 12, 1938, Hitler summoned the Austrian Chancellor, von Schuschnigg, to Berchtesgaden. Directly quoting from Schnuschnigg's records, Churchill describes how Hitler threatened Austria with retributive carnage, "*another Spain*", if the Chancellor failed to agree. Schuschnigg, admitting Austria's inability to prevent invasion, offered to stop building further frontier defence works, at the same time warning that other nations would fight to stop a German take-over. However Hitler quickly pointed out that "*England will not lift a finger for Austria.....And France? Well, two years ago when we marched into the Rhineland with a handful of battalions - at that moment I risked a great deal. If France had marched then we should have been forced to withdraw.....But for France it is now too late!*" (WC4i, 235)

Schnuschnigg was then presented with an ultimatum. "*The terms were not open to discussion. They included the appointment of the Austrian Nazi Seyss-Inquart as Minister of Security in the Austrian Cabinet, a general amnesty for all Austrian Nazis under detention, and the official incorporation of the Austrian Nazi Party in the Government-sponsored Fatherland Front.*" (WC4i, 236) He had three days to accept - or else! When Schuschnigg addressed his parliament on February 24, while he 'welcomed the settlement' with Germany, he stressed that Austria would never go beyond its specific terms. And to demonstrate popular support for that position, he announced a plebiscite for March 13. However, on March 11 Germany mobilised, closed the frontier and demanded cancellation of the plebiscite within the hour.(WC4i,240) Although in conversation with Seyss-Inquart, Schnuschnigg agreed, Goering then demanded Schuschnigg's resignation, Seyss-Inquart to replace him as

Chancellor - and within 2 hours - or invasion would follow. No support from Italy could be expected, so Schuschnigg handed his resignation to Austria's President, Miklas. Hitler ordered Austria's occupation later on the same day and on the night of March 12 it began, though not without a hitch, most of the German tanks breaking down on the road from Linz. However, the official 'celebrations' and parade went ahead the next day in Vienna where Hitler proclaimed Austria's annexation to the German Reich.(WC4i, 242-3)

In his March 14 speech to the House, Churchill sounded the alarms, pointing to the obvious threat to Czechoslovakia (with its industry, including the Skoda Arms Works) as well as to the other countries of the 'Little Entente' (Roumania - with its oil - and Yugoslavia, with its minerals). On March 18 the Russian response was to propose a League conference to discuss appropriate international measures to counter the German threat to peace.(WC4i, 245) But, as Churchill commented, "*This met with little warmth in Paris and London*", notwithstanding that Churchill too had been "*...urging the prospects of a Franco-British-Russian alliance as the only hope of checking the Nazi onrush.*" But Chamberlain rejected all such proposals. And on March 24, his statement to the House read: "*His Majesty's Government are of the opinion that the indirect but none the less inevitable consequence of such action as is proposed by the Soviet Government would be to aggravate the tendency towards the establishment of exclusive groups of nations, which must in the view of His Majesty's Government be inimical to the prospects of European peace.*" (!) Of course Churchill disagreed, believing that only a *collective* firm stand under the League of Nations Covenant could have prevented ultimate catastrophe, another European war.(WC4i, 247)

(g) And Czechoslovakia Betrayed

Based on Hitler's *Mein Kampf* as well as recent developments, there seemed no doubt that Hitler's next 'target' would be the acquisition of Czechoslovakia. Yet to complicate the issue was the fact that in the post-WWI parceling-out of lands and their peoples, the Sudetenland was transferred from Germany to the newly-created Czechoslovakia. Since this territorial rim enclosed by Czechoslovakia's western border contained some 10 million Sudeten Germans, many politicians and others in Britain and France could see the case for Germany's claim to reincorporate that territory and its people - should those people wish it. But in April 1938, the Nazi party of the Sudetenland, led by Henlein, made demands only for the autonomy of its domestic affairs - the central government to retain control of foreign affairs, border control etc. And for its part, the Czech government was willing to negotiate details to effect such a solution.

When Hitler began military preparations on its border, Czechoslovakia responded on May 20 by partial mobilisation. Notwithstanding that, Hitler felt confident in his military approach not only because of the British and French acceptance of Germany's incorporation of Austria, but because of the recently-concluded Anglo-Italian agreement of April 16, "*.....giving Italy in effect a free hand in Abyssinia and Spain in return for the imponderable value of Italian goodwill in Central Europe.*" (WC4i, 253) Giving some idea of where the priorities lay in certain quarters on that Abyssinian 'settlement', Eden was to comment "*I am afraid that the moment we are choosing for its recognition will*

not benefit our authority among the many millions of the King's coloured subjects." That aside, as Churchill himself wrote, *"The declarations of British and French statesmen were of course studied in Berlin. The intention of these Western Powers to persuade the Czechs to be reasonable in the interests of European peace was noted with satisfaction."* (WC4i, 255)

Not too surprising then that when Hitler's Chiefs of Staff, pointing to the enormous preponderance of Allied strength (France with 100 divisions, Czechoslovakia with 35) - counselled restraint, Hitler confidently reassured them of immunity from French and British intervention. So the crisis continued to build. On June 12, 1938, M. Daladier (who had succeeded MM Blum as France's Premier) renewed his country's 1924 Locarno pledge to come to Czechoslovakia's aid if invaded. It should be added here that under the existing Soviet-Czech Pact, Russia was also bound to come to Czechoslovakia's aid, - providing only that France had already done so.(WC4i, 274)

On June 18, Hitler issued a final directive for an attack on Czechoslovakia, at the same time reassuring his Chiefs of Staff, through General Keitel, that such would proceed *"...only if I am firmly convinced, as in the case of the demilitarised zone and the entry into Austria, that France will not march and that therefore England will not intervene."* (WC4i,260 - quoting Nuremberg documents) On July 26 Chamberlain announced Lord Runciman's mission to Prague to encourage a compromise agreement between Henlein's Sudetens and the Czech government - but within a fortnight those negotiations had broken down, the crisis becoming even sharper. Churchill's response was to personally approach Foreign Secretary Halifax with an urgent proposal aimed at deterring Hitler and thus preventing war. Specifically, this August 31 proposal was for a 'Joint Note' from the governments of Britain, France and Russia to Germany indicating their concern at Germany's military preparations and stating that invasion of Czechoslovakia would raise 'capital issues' for all three powers. Also that such a note be formally shown to President Roosevelt in the hope that he too would warn Hitler that invasion would mean world war.(WC4i, 262)

As Churchill explained, there was no doubt that Russia would willingly have cooperated, the Soviet Ambassador having made that plain during their meeting on September 2. Indeed in accord with its mutual treaty commitments, Foreign Minister Litvinov made very clear that in the event of invasion, provided France acted on its direct obligations to Czechoslovakia, Russia too would honour its pledge to those two countries. In that regard Litvinov favoured working through the Council of the League of Nations under Article 11, which provided for joint action whenever war threatened. He was also very much in support of the idea of a joint declaration to include Britain, France and Russia, believing that the United States would give its moral support. But Lord Halifax's response on September 5 was 'guarded'. He did not think action under Article 11 would be 'helpful', though he would *"..keep it in his mind"*.(WC4i, 266)

On September 10, M.Bonnet, France's Foreign Minister put to Sir Eric Phipps, Britain's Ambassador in Paris, the following question *"Tomorrow Hitler may attack Czechoslovakia. If he does France will mobilise at once. She will turn to you, saying,*

'We march: do you march with us? ' What will be the answer of Great Britain?' The British Cabinet's answer, through Lord Halifax, came on the 12th. It read:

"I naturally recognise of what importance it would be to the French Government to have a plain answer to such a question. But as you pointed out to Bonnet, the question itself, though plain in form, cannot be dissociated from the circumstances in which it might be posed, which are necessarily at this stage completely hypothetical."

"Moreover, in this matter it is impossible for His Majesty's Government to have regard only to their own position, inasmuch as in any decision they may reach or action they may take they would, in fact, be committing the Dominions. Their Governments would quite certainly be unwilling to have their position in any way decided for them in advance of the actual circumstances, of which they would desire themselves to judge."

"So far therefore as I am in a position to give any answer at this stage to M.Bonnet's question, it would have to be that while His Majesty's Government would never allow the security of France to be threatened, they are unable to make precise statements of the character of their future action, or the time at which it would be taken, in circumstances that they cannot at present foresee." And as if that obfuscatory diplomatic 'new speak' (including the fiction that Dominions' opinions then – or ever - came into the equation) was not enough, when the British government was further asked what British assistance might France expect if its own security was threatened, Bonnet's record showed "...two divisions, not motorised, and 150 aeroplanes during the first six months of the war." (WC4i, 266-7)

On September 14, the Czech negotiations with Henlein were terminated and on the 15th he fled to Germany. Daladier proposed to Chamberlain a joint French-British direct approach to Hitler. Instead, Chamberlain promptly cabled Hitler, proposing to visit, informing his cabinet the next day. Hitler agreed and, heading for Berchtesgaden, Chamberlain flew to Munich on September 15. The Czechs, who had agreed to autonomy for the Germans of the Sudetenland, where with the departure of Henlein stability had returned, were astounded. After all, they knew that a peaceful bargain between the Sudeten Germans and the central government was the last thing Hitler wanted and they clearly saw Chamberlain's visit as encouraging the Sudetens to claim union with Germany - which, under instructions from Berlin, the Sudeten Nazi party did.

Until that time the issue of annexation had not been raised either by Henlein or the German government. Notwithstanding that, Hitler had resolved on and prepared for invasion. And sensing its imminence, both Chamberlain and Lord Runciman (his negotiator with the Czechs) were convinced that only the cession of the Sudeten areas could prevent it.(WC4i, 270) Chamberlain returned to London on September 17, Daladier and Bonnet coming to see him the following day. Together they resolved to meet Hitler's demands and to that end drafted a joint proposal to the Czech government recommending outright cession. *"They added, however, that the British Government, with France and with Russia, who they had not consulted, should guarantee the new frontiers of the mutilated Czechoslovakia."*(WC4i, 271) None of this involved

consultation with the Czechs and the proposals for the immediate cession to Germany of all areas containing more than 50% German inhabitants were simply presented to the Czech government on September 19th.

Churchill's statement, issued September 21, included: "*The partition of Czechoslovakia under pressure from England and France amounts to the complete surrender of the Western Democracies to the Nazi threat of force. Such a collapse will bring peace and security neither to England nor to France.The mere neutralisation of Czechoslovakiawill threaten the Western Front....will open up for the triumphant Nazis the road to the Black Sea. It is not Czechoslovakia alone which is menaced, but also the freedom and democracy of all nations.*" At the League of Nations Assembly, Russia's Foreign Minister, Litvinov, repeated his country's determination to stick by its alliance commitment to Czechoslovakia, - providing France stood by its commitment. But, as Churchill commented, "*Anyhow, the Soviet offer was in effect ignored. They were not brought into the scale against Hitler, and were treated with an indifference - not to say disdain - which left a mark in Stalin's mind. Events took their course as if Soviet Russia did not exist. For this we afterwards paid dearly.*" (WC4i, 273-4)

What followed was the resignation of the Czech government, its replacement by a military administration and, on September 22, Chamberlain's second visit to Hitler, this time at the Rhineland's Godesberg. At this stage the Czechs were mobilising their 1.5 million-strong army. Much to Chamberlain's consternation at this second meeting he was faced with an Ultimatum. The Czechs must concede the Sudetenland by September 28, or Germany would invade. On September 24 Chamberlain returned to London where his government, along with that of France contemplated active resistance. Indeed, it was jointly agreed to reject Hitler's ultimatum and France immediately partially mobilised. On the 25th, speaking at Berlin's Sports Palace, Hitler reiterated his ultimatum, but went on to proclaim that "*This is the last territorial claim I have to make in Europe.*" Churchill on the 26th, again in stark contrast to Chamberlain, urged a joint declaration from Britain, France and Russia to directly challenge a German invasion. Assisted by the Foreign Office and approved by Lord Halifax, a communique was drafted and issued. Fully supported by several prominent Conservatives, including Lord Lloyd and Lord Robert Cecil, all agreed on the essentiality of 'getting Russia in' and thus exhibiting a 'united front', by then the only way to avoid war. (WC4i, 277-8)

(h) German General Staff Attempts Hitler's Overthrow

Indeed, as repeatedly illustrated in "*The Gathering Storm*", such a united front against Hitler could well have led also to his internal overthrow, along with that of the Nazi Party, and in that event would almost certainly have prevented World War II. That is because the German General Staff, for long fearful that 'that madman Hitler' could lead their country into another catastrophic war with Germany's defeat and humiliation, were actively looking to Britain and France to demonstrate *their* firm opposition to Hitler's plans for military expansion through Europe. However, as a necessary prerequisite, strong expression of such opposition from the West was needed to gain full support among Germany's military establishment for the overthrow of their Nazi leaders.

It has to be stressed that this was no mere splinter movement. As earlier indicated (8B (c) (f)) from the time of the re-occupation of the Rhineland through to the take-over of Austria there were, within Germany's highest military strata, very real concerns for their country's future security. Hitler's plans, including a detailed timetable for the total incorporation of Czechoslovakia, had been presented to his military hierarchy in July 1938. According to Hitler, who had proclaimed himself Head of State, it was their 'sacred duty' to implement those plans - and nearly all were greatly concerned at the likely ultimate disaster for Germany. Included were the most senior men of all, Admiral Canaris, Chief of Military Intelligence (the Abwehr) General Beck, Chief of the Army General Staff, and General Halder, later to be his successor.(WC4i, 279; IC, 51-8)

As Admiral Canaris, who was known to be well read in history, said, "*England must lend us a sea anchor if we are to ride out this storm.*" General Beck agreed (IC, 55). In May 1938, on the grounds of Germany's weak Western defences and the vastly superior size of the French army, twice that of Germany, its army initially succeeded in vetoing all activity aimed at destabilising Czechoslovakia. Warned off, Hitler was extremely frustrated and angry.(IC, 57) However, at the end of July he instructed General Brauchitsch (Army Commander in Chief) to mobilise for the Czech invasion, with September 28 as 'zero day'. As General Beck noted in his diary, "*I am convinced that Britain will decide to enter the war with France if Germany forces the Czech issue.*" Beck wanted Brauchitsch to continue to stand firm against Hitler's plans, but by early August felt he was wavering. So both Beck and Canaris sought to obtain expressions of British determination to resist Hitler's plans to 'absorb' Czechoslovakia. To that end they sent their confrere, Kleist, to England on a secret mission, - to get from the British government, if possible, "*An open pledge to assist Czechoslovakia in the event of war.*" (IC, 62) It should be noted here that this source, Ian Colvin, was the Berlin correspondent for the *News Chronicle* during the 1930s, a person clearly valued by Winston Churchill as reliable on the views of the German military and naval hierarchy.(see WC4i, 74)

If successful that mission would of course have greatly strengthened Beck's prospects of gaining unanimity among his generals. Meeting with Lord Lloyd, Kleist revealed Hitler's plan, its timetable, the great reluctance of the generals and the waverings of Brauchitsch. He then pleaded for a positive stand by Britain's government (together with those of France and Russia) to make an open declaration that would single out Hitler as the sole 'guilty party'. His hope was that if Hitler, in spite of such a declaration, persisted in his plan, the generals would arrest him and "*..make an end of the Nazi regime.*" (IC, 65) In the event, although Kleist was able to put his case to Winston Churchill and the Foreign Office's Robert Vansittart, he was unable to gain access to *any* member of Cabinet.(IC, 65-6) Kleist returned to Germany on August 24. The British government released a public communique referring to "*..the serious nature of reports from Central Europe*" but the only letter Kleist could obtain for Canaris and Beck was one from Churchill warning that if force was used over Czechoslovakia, sooner or later a war would occur which would utterly defeat Germany. Since Churchill was not then in government, that fell far short of the critically-needed official declaration

from the British government itself.(IC, 66-7)

Earlier, in mid July General Beck, who had long made known his fears for Germany's future, had directly confronted Hitler with his concerns. With the imminence of the attack on Czechoslovakia, he wanted assurance against such military adventures. Hitler's response was that the army was the instrument of the State and that he, as Head of State, must be obeyed. Beck thereupon resigned and General Halder was appointed his successor. But Beck was "*..universally trusted and respected by the Army Staff*", including General Halder and at the highest levels a plot was then developed to topple Hitler. Churchill quotes from the later account given by Halder that his intent was "*...to immunise Germany from this madman*". And as Halder's testimony goes on, "*At this time the prospects of war filled the great majority of the German people with horror. We did not intend to kill the Nazi leaders - merely to arrest them, establish a military government, and issue a proclamation to the people that we had taken this action only because we were convinced they were being led to certain disaster.*" (WC4i, 280) As outlined by Churchill, it was an elaborate and very detailed plan involving most of the 'top brass'. Indeed, it was arranged to take place at 8pm on September 14 when Hitler was to be in Berlin. But when at 4pm that day Halder learned that Chamberlain was on his way to Berchtesgaden, and it thus appeared certain that Britain would continue compliant to Hitler's aims, the plan was put on hold.(WC4i, 281) After all, if Hitler could have his way just for the asking, how could the generals justify toppling their own government, their own civil power?

Then on September 26, at the height of the crisis, Hitler's principal generals (having been refused an audience with him) instead submitted a 'memorial', a memorandum warning him of the prospect of disastrous consequences in the event of a European war - a message strongly reinforced by Admiral Raeder, Chief of the German Admiralty. Since this warning coincided with the news that the British fleet was mobilising, Hitler finally wavered. What would he do? Indicating that ultimate decisions were in the balance, official radio and news agencies simply announced that Germany's mobilisation was 'not proceeding'.(WC4i, 281-2)

(i) Chamberlain's Final Assistance - To Catastrophe

But Hitler's ultimate decision was made easy when on the evening of the 27th, Chamberlain, broadcasting to the English nation referred to "*...a quarrel in a faraway country between peoples of whom we know nothing...*", going on to offer a third visit to reach the much desired 'accommodation' with Germany. No mention of any intention to involve the League of Nations or even to consult let alone negotiate with the Czechs. Hitler thus immediately knew all was clear ahead. His letter to Chamberlain offered a guarantee on the 'new' frontiers of Czechoslovakia and assurances about a new plebiscite. Chamberlain thereupon agreed to visit the Chancellor to discuss the transfer of Czech territory. The upshot was the infamous meeting of September 29, 1938 in Munich between Chamberlain, Daladier, Mussolini and Hitler which in all essentials agreed to the terms of the Godesberg ultimatum. The Sudetenland was to be handed over completely within 10 days. Russia was not consulted; nor were the Czechs who

were simply handed the decision arrived at by the 'Big Four'.(WC4i, 283-4)

At Chamberlain's request, a 'private talk' with Hitler was granted. A public declaration drafted by Chamberlain and co-signed by Hitler clearly reveals the outcome as well as the deferential nature of their relationship. It read:

"We the German Fuehrer and Chancellor, and the British Prime Minister, have had a further meeting to-day, and are agreed in recognising that the question of Anglo-German relations is of the first importance for the two countries and for Europe.

We regard the agreement signed last night, and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, as symbolic of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again.

We are resolved that the method of consultation shall be the method adopted to deal with any other questions that may concern our two countries, and we are determined to continue our efforts to remove possible sources of difference, and thus to contribute to assure the peace of Europe." (WC4i, 285)

On Chamberlain's return to England, that notorious '*peace for our time*' declaration was the piece of paper he triumphantly waved to the crowd at Heston airport. This clear political success by Hitler had two ultimately disastrous consequences for all concerned. Firstly, it left Hitler feeling utterly confident that he could continue indefinitely to pursue his long-recognised territorial ambitions with the full cooperation of Britain and France. And secondly, the apparent demonstration that Hitler could continue to advance his plans for territorial expansion without any risk of war, totally undermined the German General Staff's determination to topple him along with the rest of the Nazi leadership. Without allies, the Czechs acceded to the British-German agreement. Their President, Benes, resigned, fleeing to England. Following the German success, Poland and Hungary also made territorial claims, plums soon granted by Germany. In England there was much disagreement - even among the Conservatives. First Lord of the Admiralty, Duff Cooper, resigned. After some reconsideration of the prospects of '*peace for our time*', steps were taken to speed up rearmament but according to Churchill, apart from aircraft, Germany's arms programme continued to outstrip by far that of Britain, the year's much vaunted '*extra year's breathing space*' giving much greater advantage to Germany than to Britain.(WC4i, 301-4) In any event, Chamberlain continued to believe in the great value of his personal contacts with the dictators.

But by late January 1939 Hitler was putting diplomatic pressure on Poland to give up its northern territories along the Baltic (including Danzig and its '*Corridor*') as far as the Lithuanian port city of Memel. The world did not have long to wait before Hitler again '*defended*' his country against another starkly weaker neighbour. In the meantime, however, Chamberlain and his cabinet ministers were well satisfied. Through the early months of 1939, (reminiscent of the summer of 1914*) "*A wave of perverse optimism had swept across the British scenethe Ministers and newspapers identified with the Munich Agreement did not lose faith in the policy into which they had drawn the nation.*" Indeed, on March 10 Britain's Home Secretary spoke of the government's hopes for a

"Five Years' Peace Plan" to usher in a new "Golden Age", one to include a commercial treaty with Germany.(WC4i, 307; *WC1i, 178-9)

Yet already by March 4, having cast aside all promises of 'no more territorial claims', German troops had occupied Prague and subjugated the rest of the Czechoslovak Republic, Hitler declaring the whole country a German 'protectorate'. ('protectorate', 'Mandate', wonderful cover terms these!). Although clearly upset by this turn of events, Chamberlain initially accepted the *fait accompli*. However, as revealed in his Birmingham speech just two days later, his attitude had by then altered markedly. His illusions ultimately shattered, Chamberlain accused Hitler of gross breach of faith, going on to openly question whether Czechoslovakia was but another move on Germany's road to 'world domination'. What had been strikingly obvious to others for years, coming now from Chamberlain was a total surprise - a complete turnaround. Accordingly, at the end of March, Chamberlain announced Britain's intention to "*..lend the Polish Government all support in their power*" should Germany threaten Poland's independence - at the same time adding that France stood "*in the same position*" and (later) that "*The Dominions have been kept fully informed.*" ! (WC4i, 310)

(j) Churchill's Summing Up

Commenting on this extraordinary about-face, Churchill wrote "*Look back and see what we had successively accepted and thrown away: a Germany rearmed in violation of a solemn treaty; air superiority or even air parity cast away; the Rhineland forcibly occupied and the Siegfried Line built or building; the Berlin-Rome Axis established; Austria devoured and digested by the Reich; Czechoslovakia deserted and ruined by the Munich Pact, its fortress line in German hands, its mighty arsenal of Skoda henceforward making munitions for the German armies; President Roosevelt's effort to stabilise or bring to a head the European situation by the intervention of the United States waved aside with one hand and Soviet Russia's undoubted willingness to join the Western Powers and go all lengths to save Czechoslovakia ignored on the other; the services of thirty five Czech divisions against the still unripened German army cast away, when great Britain could herself supply only two to strengthen the front in France; all gone with the wind.History may be scoured and ransacked to find a parallel to this sudden and complete reversal of five or six years' policy of easy-going placatory appeasement, and its transformation almost overnight into a readiness to accept an obviously imminent war on far worse conditions and on the greatest scale.which must surely lead to the slaughter of tens of millions of people.*" (WC4i, 310-2)

Notwithstanding objections by Poland, Roumania and the Baltic States to Russian protection (of which their governments were deeply suspicious) there was only one measure left which could have held Hitler back from further conquests in Eastern Europe. As Churchill indicated, that was to accept the idea of a 'Grand Alliance', as earlier proposed by Russia and endorsed by himself and many others, including Lords Cecil and Lloyd, but rejected by the British government. To encourage its reconsideration, the Russian government had on March 19 proposed a Six-Power Conference. However, despite the gravity of the situation, Chamberlain refused to agree,

instead freely offering 'guarantees' to Greece and Roumania and an alliance with Turkey - that is, in addition to his government's 'guarantee' to Poland (the position of which in Eastern Europe ensured that, if invoked, effective help could *not* be given). On April 7, Italian forces occupied Albania - in preparation for later operations against Greece and Yugoslavia. And already by then Hitler had issued a secret directive to his Chief of Staff, Keitel, for the invasion of Poland on September 1. (WC4i, 313-4; 322)

Addressing the Reichstag on April 28 Hitler 'denounced' the German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact of 1934, giving as his reason Britain's recent action, the Anglo-Polish Guarantee.(WC4i,323) He also took time to 'denounce' the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935. Very strange since all the benefits had gone to Hitler: - the 'kudos', its demonstration of dissent among the former allies of WWI, and Britain's open encouragement to German rearmament - but no doubt he was piqued over Chamberlain's totally unexpected turnaround. As pointed out by Churchill, the 'guarantees' to be given Poland and Roumania could have real significance only within the context of a general agreement that included Russia. On April 16, Russia again offered to join with Britain and France to create a 'united front' to operate in the event of further German aggression. However, as Churchill explained, "*Poland, Roumania, Finland and the Baltic States did not know whether it was German aggression or Russian rescue that they dreaded more. It was this hideous choice that paralysed British and French policy. There can however be no doubt, even in the after-light, that Britain and France should have accepted the Russian offer, proclaimed the Triple Alliance, and left the method by which it could be made effective in case of war to be adjusted between the allies engaged against a common foe. It would not be easy in a Grand Alliance, such as might have been developed, for one ally to enter the territory of another unless invited.The alliance of Britain, France and Russia would have struck deep alarm into the heart of Germany in 1939, and no one can prove that war might not even then have been averted.*"(WC4i, 325) And as further pointed out, for Hitler to have ignored the implications of such an alliance, would have meant war on two fronts; and that was not only contrary to his own counsel, but would immediately have put him in conflict with his senior generals who more than likely would have brought his life, along with his insane military plans, to an abrupt end.(WC4i,326)

At that very late stage, other than setting up the proposed united front, no possible avenue of escape from a European war existed. Even so it was with half-heartedness that discussions between the British Ambassador in Moscow and Russia's Foreign Minister, Litvinov, had begun on April 16. By May 4 Churchill was expressing impatience at the failure to reach agreement. Instead there had been "*....a long silence while half measures and judicious compromises were being prepared. This delay was fatal to Litvinov. His last attempt to bring matters to a clear-cut decision with the Western Powers was deemed to have failed. A wholly different foreign policy was required for the safety of Russia, and a new exponent must be found.*" (WC4i, 327) In fact, on May 3 Litvinov (being a Jew and clearly no friend of Nazism) had been replaced by M.Molotov whose task at this late stage was to develop a stop-gap 'arrangement' involving a 'non-aggression agreement' with Germany. As Churchill saw the logic of it, "*The Soviet Government were convinced by Munich and much else that neither Britain*

nor France would fight till they were attacked, and would not be much good then. The gathering storm was about to break. Russia must look after herself." (WC4i, 328-9)

(k) Ultimate Opposition to Joint Action - then War

On May 8 the British government finally replied to the Russian note of April 16 with "counter-proposals". As Chamberlain explained, his government had undertaken new obligations in Eastern Europe which, "on account of various difficulties", would not involve the direct participation of the Soviet Government - going on to say that the USSR should *independently* make similar guarantees to countries seeking its assistance in the event of aggression.(WC4i, 332) On May 19 the situation was debated in the House of Commons. Some, including Churchill, Eden, Attlee, Sinclair and Lloyd George, stressed the absolute essentiality of joint action with Russia on equal terms if there was to be any hope of averting war.(WC4i, 333-7) But Chamberlain's stand remained unchanged and as Churchill commented, "This seemed to show the same lack of proportion as we have seen in the rebuff of the Roosevelt proposals a year before." (WC4i, 335) And as he pointed out to the House in May 1939, "If you are ready to be an ally of Russia in time of war,.....if you are ready to join hands with Russia in the defence of Poland, which you have guaranteed, and of Roumania, why should you shrink from becoming the ally of Russia now, when you may by that very fact prevent the breaking out of war?" (WC4i, 336)

But it was all to no avail. In his May 23 meeting with his Chiefs of Staff, Hitler's response was to feel invincible, supremely confident. He was, as paraphrased "...in a state of patriotic fervour, shared by two other nations - Italy and Japan.Poland will always be on the side of our adversaries.Danzig is not the subject of the dispute at all. It is a question of expanding our living space in the EastThere will be war. Our task is to isolate Poland. The success of the isolation will be decisive." (from Minutes of May 23 meeting, see *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, p.15; WC4i, 338-9). As Churchill reflected "While the ranks of the Axis closed for military preparation, the vital link of the Western Powers with Russia had perished." On May 30, to make quite certain that situation remained permanent, the German Foreign Office informed its ambassador in Moscow "Contrary to the policy previously planned, we have now decided to undertake definite negotiations with the Soviet Union." (WC4i, 339) And at this stage, in reviewing both the early and more recent attempts to attain a united stand with Britain and France against the continued German territorial expansion, Russia's new Foreign Minister, Molotov, could only conclude that negotiations had finally come to nothing. Hence the inevitability that Russia would have to come up with some other option to safeguard its security or, more to the point, postpone the day of a direct attack by Germany - for there was no doubting that that day was not far distant.(WC4i, 339-40)

Throughout June the situation over Poland continued grave. Anthony Eden volunteered to represent Britain in a last ditch attempt to come to an effective arrangement with Russia. Declining that offer, Chamberlain sent instead a Mr Strang, a none-too-prominent Foreign Office official. Understandably this and other half measures extending through the first two weeks of August simply confirmed the Soviet

government's view that Britain was not the least serious about forming a united front.(WC4i, 347-8) By mid August Russia saw no alternative but to proceed towards a 'deal' with Germany, Stalin announcing this intention on August 19. After negotiations with Ribbentrop, agreement on a "*Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact*" that involved the partitioning Poland was declared on August 23.

Summing up on this outcome, Churchill writes: "*It is a question whether Hitler or Stalin loathed it most. Both were aware that it could only be a temporary expedient. The antagonisms between the two empires and systems were mortal. Stalin no doubt felt that Hitler would be a less deadly foe to Russia after a year of war with the Western Powers. Hitler followed his method of 'one at a time'. The fact that such an agreement could be made marks the culminating failure of British and French foreign policy and diplomacy over several years.*" And as he further pointed out, Russia desperately needed more time to assemble its forces from all corners of its far-flung territories to meet the inevitable attack, going on to say that "*If their policy was cold-blooded, it was also at the moment realistic in a high degree.*" (WC4i,351)

So the Pact was agreed with "*...much jubilation and many toasts around the table.*" (WC4i, 352) The response of the British government was to take more seriously the need to mobilise, beginning with its home 'protective armour' of anti-aircraft defences, etc. And, even though it must have been clear to all that Britain totally lacked the military means to block a German invasion of Poland, Chamberlain wrote to Hitler stressing that despite the recent Soviet-German Agreement, Britain would 'stand by its obligation to that country'.

Hitler, after asserting his 'unparalleled magnanimity' towards Poland on the issue of Germany's claim to Danzig (Gdansk) and its Corridor, his in-character reply went on to state that Britain's guarantee to Poland "*...could only be interpreted in that country as an encouragement henceforward to unloose, under cover of such a charter, a wave of appalling terrorism against the million and a half German inhabitants living in Poland.*"(Nuremberg Docs. Pt. II, p 158; WC4i, 354). On August 25, Britain proclaimed a formal treaty with Poland, "*..confirming the guarantees already given*". Hitler proceeded with his plan for 'Fall Weiss' (Case White) the invasion of Poland, set for September 1 at 04.45. The invasion went ahead as planned and Britain 'declared war' on Germany on September 3.

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