

Europe Between Wars?

By

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"The obscure epoch is today"

—R. L. STEVENSON

NEW YORK

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1934

EUROPE BETWEEN WARS?

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Set up and printed.
Published July, 1934.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY THE STRATFORD PRESS, INC., NEW YORK

To
JAMES BYRNE

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I

Interim

"The internationalist is a bastard in blood and a eunuch in intellect. . . . The sword will come into its own again, and the pen, after fourteen years of exaggerated prestige, will be put in its place."

—PROF. EWALD BANSE:

"Germany, Prepare for War!" (1933).

GENERAL TASKER H. BLISS used to tell of an evening during the war when he was sitting late in the War Department with Secretary Baker. It was the night when the first American convoy of troops was reaching the submarine zone, and in their anxiety neither of them could go home to sleep. "General," asked Mr. Baker, "how long do you suppose this war will last?" After hesitating a time, General Bliss replied: "By the analogy of other great wars, I should say thirty or forty years. There may be a pause, an armed truce, while both sides lick their wounds and collect their forces. Maybe some of the contestants will meanwhile disappear; perhaps some will even change sides. But then the war will go on again, until one side or the other is obliterated as a fighting force, or until civiliza-

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tion ends in a chaotic breakdown." Looking back at that evening, after the war was over, General Bliss liked to think that he had been wrong because the League of Nations had come in as a new factor to limit the ferocious forces at the command alike of victor and vanquished.

What would he say today? His historical insight would force him to appraise the situation realistically. He would see that after a decade of uncertain peace, with snatches of sun at Locarno, or when the Pact of Paris was signed, or when the reparation negotiations took a turn toward moderation and good sense, the European landscape became uniformly black. Over the factories and farms which men had been working to restore, the economic crisis now relentlessly spread its pall. The war had not yet been paid for. The Credit Anstalt failure in Vienna in May 1931 was the final signal for the whole string of financial blocks to fall. Europe definitely abandoned its first chastened mood and its tentative efforts at economic coöperation. It plunged into a period when every state sought simply to live from moment to moment, and by each convulsive struggle to protect its trade and currency provoked retaliatory measures from its neighbors and drew the noose more tightly about its own neck. Political kept pace with economic disintegration. Lausanne came too late; what would have saved Bruening only whetted von

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Schleicher's appetite; and it was Hitler, at last, who ate the full meal.

As their misery increased, people everywhere began to doubt their experts, their wise men. The call was for a *deus ex machina*. Was there no super-man able to arrange that millions should not go workless and starve in a world where vast resources still lay unexploited? They did not stop to argue whether any man's action could replace the relentless operation of economic forces, whether anyone could predict in their infinite detail the human reactions to a given set of circumstances. They saw that laissez-faire had failed to give them bread and work. They demanded that the government, which in wartime had assumed jurisdiction in every department of life, now look after them in times which many of them found just as hard.

Here was the chance for anyone with a ready-made economic panacea, and for anyone who was not restrained by knowledge or candor from promising to solve every political and international question provided only he could shake off the stupid harness of democracy. The two appeals went hand in hand, one strengthening the other. Thus in Germany two human desires which had been consistently thwarted by the economic hardships of defeat and inflation—the "will to work" and the "will to be happy"—simultaneously nourished and were nourished by the Hitler political

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gospel we now know so well—the “will to believe,” the “will to be strong,” the “will to follow,” the “will to be honored.” And today all the embryo fascist movements in Europe (“Iron Guards” in Rumania, “National Radicals” in Czechoslovakia, “Solidarité Française” and “Croix de Feu” in France, “Mosleyites” in England) base their appeal on two main slogans. One is: “clean up politics; make government efficient; break the strangle hold of interest; find work for all.” The other is: “end international humbug; save national rights sacrificed by the old-line politicians.”

Two great groups in particular have responded to these slogans: the war generation who had never been able to settle down to jobs and who felt that the fruits of their sacrifice were being betrayed or frittered away; and the youths still coming out of school into a disorganized and workless world. The appeal was particularly effective in the case of the middle class. These, despite their post-war monetary and economic disasters, were still to some extent a propertied class; hence they favored a development which would save a position threatened on the one hand by communism and on the other by plutocracy; and being politically minded they acted quickly and vigorously.

Germany's almost mystical acceptance of Hitler and the *Führerprinzip* carried the stream of European events into still another phase. Now not

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merely were coöperative attempts to secure economic recovery abandoned in favor of each state's endeavor to keep afloat by pushing its neighbors down—what Spengler calls the “struggle on the keel of the overturned boat.” Now all nations began to see that the social degredation and increased nationalistic feeling produced by the economic struggle was in danger of leading to direct physical encounters, that is to say, to war. And they saw that the danger was magnified by the militaristic character of the new authoritarian régimes.

War there really has been even in Europe, though it has not been called that. War in disguise was waged by Nazi Germany against Austria all through the summer and fall of 1933 and into the early days of March 1934. It was the same sort of undeclared war, defying definitions of aggressor and skirting round provisions of peace pacts, which had baffled jurists and statesmen in Manchuria a year earlier. Japan sent armies and warships to “police” Manchuria and “temporarily” to protect Japanese interests there. Berlin used the radio, money, secret agents, smuggled arms and every sort of threat and cajolery to undermine the existing Austrian régime and force Austria into union with the Third Reich. In each case the things done were described as measures short of war. But in the aggregate they amounted to war. If China and Austria had been the military equals of Japan and

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Germany they would certainly have called it war and would have retaliated in kind.

Europe's realization that this critical phase had arrived turned the conference for the reduction of armaments into a conference to delay or limit German rearmament. The manœuvres of militarists now superseded the manœuvres of statesmen. The conference has not been able to attain even its new and modified objectives, nor, naturally, has it succeeded in diminishing the fear of war or the eventual danger of it. A new armaments race has begun—or, reverting to the early theory of General Bliss, the old armaments race has been resumed after a truce of exhaustion. Europe knows that whatever the military machine which Germany may “legally” construct, and entirely apart from whatever armaments she secretly acquires, she is already building up in the mind and heart of every young German a belief in war as the only way to wipe clean the German shield of the disgrace of Versailles and regain the fatherland's lost inheritance.

War might be soon or late. It might be soon, if the more radical Nazi chieftains get control and hazard everything on some sudden success abroad either in order to distract attention from economic troubles piling up at home or simply because their lack of psychological equipment blinds them to the risk. It might be soon, too, in the event that Ger-

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many's neighbors are tempted into dealing with her now while they can instead of waiting for her to deal with them when she can. It might be postponed until the new generation of German youth—brash and idealistic and stuffed with lies—have been matured and hardened to face any ordeal. When that time arrives, it is hard to imagine those who quietly cherish the Potsdam tradition holding back from an effort to vindicate the old Imperial Army's methods and to achieve at last the old Empire's aims. Then again, provided foreign opposition does not quietly collapse, there would be war.

Alternatively, do we see any likelihood that a group of the nations which cling to a belief in orderly processes will make up their minds to sacrifice some part of their freedom of individual action in order to act together to suppress all wars, "aggressive," "preventive," or "unofficial"? Will they find a new way to implement that new collective will? Or will they improve and then really use the instruments already in existence? To secure time for this recruitment of forces, as well as to save their essential institutions, they would meanwhile have to make rapid progress with the renovation of their own political systems. They would have to nullify the autocrat's appeal by achieving the increased governmental efficiency which he promises, but at less expense. They would have to make eco-

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conomic freedom as much the goal of democracy as political freedom has traditionally been.

This is not the place to discuss the immense difficulty of establishing any system of collective security, or to weigh programs of economic democracy. But those still seem the only antidotes to war and dictatorship.

II

The Struggle in Germany

*Storm, storm, storm!
Sound the bells from tower to tower;
Call the men, the young, the old;
Call the sleepers from their rooms;
Call the girls down the stairs;
Call the mothers from their cradles.
The air shall roar and yell;
Raving, raving thunder of revenge!
Call the dead from the vaults!
Germany awake!*

—Sample song from Nazi schoolbook
(Finkenscher: "Aufbruch der Nation")
officially adopted in March 1933 by the
Bavarian Ministry of Education.

IN EVERY European foreign office anxious eyes have watched Germany again planting her feet on the road which William II, von Tirpitz, von Bernhardt and others once surveyed and prepared, and along which in 1914 they actually set out—the road lead to the hegemony of Europe. Every word, every action, is examined as a possible sign, a possible step, in what is believed to be a conscious effort to transfer the continent's center of gravity eastward across the Rhine, this being the preliminary to Germany's taking what she wants, without war if no-

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body opposes, with war if any nation is so wrong-headed and presumptuous as to block the way.

Following Bismarck's policy of concentrating on one objective at a time, Chancellor Hitler on January 26, 1934, signed a ten-year treaty of non-aggression with Poland, and about the same time began attempting to mollify an aroused English public opinion by sounding a more accommodating note in the armament discussions. In his talks with Captain Eden, as in those with visiting correspondents, the word "peace" was always on his tongue. But actions in Germany belied his talk. There was revealed a rise of 220,000,000 marks in the 1934-35 Defense Ministry budget, bringing the total to 894,323,200 marks (\$357,600,000);¹ separate Air Ministry estimates rose another 130,000,000 marks, to a total of about 210,000,000 marks (\$83,600,000); Paris found that aerodromes were being constructed in the demilitarized zone; London received unimpeachable information of the wholesale manufacture of new bombing planes capable of crossing the

¹ The figure for the Defense Ministry does not include the expenses of the Storm Troops or the Labor Camps, for which the appropriations are 250,000,000 marks, or of the Reich police, for which 190,000,000 marks are appropriated. In the *Army, Navy and Air Force Gazette* (London, May 3, 1934) an attempt is made to isolate the various expenditures of a military character provided for in different sections of the Reich budget. The total reached is "at least 1,700,000,000 marks," which is further extended, by adding sums allotted to military purposes in the budgets of the individual German states, to "close on 2,000,000,000 marks."

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Channel in a few minutes; Krupps appropriated 24,000,000 marks for improvement of plant and took on an additional 7,000 workers.

The fact remains that Hitler professed a more moderate policy, and as nothing in Nazi Germany happens by chance this development may be taken as designed to serve a definite purpose. He had come to realize the risk of a premature conflict. Doubtless, too, he saw the need for postponing as many international difficulties as possible in view of the tense domestic situation resulting from the church disturbance and the steady deterioration of Germany's export trade. In the writer's opinion, his pacific statements had a purpose quite in accord with the general conception of propaganda and mass psychology exposed in "Mein Kampf;" namely, to assume that the average human being is an imbecile, and that if an untruth is repeated sufficiently often it finally will be accepted even in the face of contrary fact. The untruth in this case is that Germany is not planning to make war; the fact is that Germany is arming steadily and preparing her youth spiritually and physically for war, and that she plans to make war in case war is necessary in order for her to achieve her ends. But before we attempt to describe Hitler's program in the foreign field we must refer to several factors in the domestic situation which condition the speed at which the program can be put into effect.

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2

The Nazis do not believe in abstract justice, and act on the conception that might gives right. Yet, curiously enough, two specific checks which they have experienced since they acquired power in Germany have come from an obstacle the existence of which they denied but which proved nevertheless to have very solid properties—the stone wall of conscience and moral judgment.

Important sections of the German people have become tense and restive because of the fight which the Nazis are making on the churches. They have attempted to introduce the “leadership” principle into the Evangelical Church, to enforce the “Aryan rule” in the administration of sacraments, and to substitute Norse mythology for the Bible. In so doing, they have split the clergy into two great groups, the “neo-pagans,” and those who maintain the right to practice Christianity following the tenets and traditions of their Church and in accordance with the dictates of their own conscience. The name of Dr. Niemoeller, and of other courageous leaders of the resistance to Nazification, will hold an honorable place in the annals of German Protestantism.

Simultaneously the Nazis have attempted to take away from the Catholic Church the education and training of the Catholic youth, and to intro-