

SELECTIONS FROM BRITISH WAR SPEECHES 1939-1940



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H.M. THE KING

On the evening of September 3, 1939, the King broadcast as follows from Buckingham Palace:—

In this grave hour, perhaps the most fateful in our history, I send to every household of my peoples, both at home and overseas, this message, spoken with the same depth of feeling for each one of you as if I were able to cross your threshold and speak to you myself.

For the second time in the lives of most of us we are at war. Over and over again we have tried to find a peaceful way out of the differences between ourselves and those who are now our enemies. But it has been in vain. We have been forced into a conflict. For we are called, with our Allies, to meet the challenge of a principle which, if it were to prevail, would be fatal to any civilized order in the world.

It is the principle which permits a State, in the selfish pursuit of power, to disregard its treaties and its solemn pledges; which sanctions the use of force, or threat of force, against the sovereignty and independence of other States. Such a principle, stripped of all disguise, is surely the mere primitive doctrine that might is right; and if this principle were established throughout the world, the freedom of our own country and of the whole British Commonwealth of

Nations would be in danger. But far more than this—the peoples of the world would be kept in the bondage of fear, and all hopes of settled peace and of the security of justice and liberty among nations would be ended.

This is the ultimate issue which confronts us. For the sake of all that we ourselves hold dear, and of the world's order and peace, it is unthinkable that we should refuse to meet the challenge.

It is to this high purpose that I now call my people at home and my peoples across the Seas, who will make our cause their own. I ask them to stand calm, firm, and united in this time of trial. The task will be hard. There may be dark days ahead, and war can no longer be confined to the battlefield. But we can only do the right as we see the right, and reverently commit our cause to God. If one and all we keep resolutely faithful to it, ready for whatever service or sacrifice it may demand, then, with God's help, we shall prevail.

May He bless and keep us all.

MR. NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN

Previously, at 11.15 a.m. on the same day, the Prime Minister, the Right Hon. Neville Chamberlain, M.P., had informed the British people that they were at war with Germany. Mr. Chamberlain said:—

I AM speaking to you from the Cabinet Room at 10 Downing Street.

This morning the British Ambassador in Berlin handed the German Government a final Note stating that, unless we heard from them by 11 o'clock that they were prepared at once to withdraw their troops from Poland, a state of war would exist between us.

I have to tell you now that no such undertaking has been received, and that consequently this country is at war with Germany.

You can imagine what a bitter blow it is to me that all my long struggle to win peace has failed. Yet I cannot believe that there is anything more or anything different that I could have done and that would have been more successful.

Up to the very last it would have been quite possible to have arranged a peaceful and honourable settlement between Germany and Poland, but Hitler would not have it. He had evidently made up his mind to attack Poland whatever happened, and although he now says he put forward reasonable proposals which were rejected by the Poles, that is not a true statement.

The proposals were never shown to the Poles, nor to us, and, though they were announced in a German broadcast on Thursday night, Hitler did not wait to hear comments on them, but ordered his troops to cross the Polish frontier. His action shows convincingly that there is no chance of expecting that this man will ever give up his practice of using force to gain his will. He can only be stopped by force.

We and France are to-day, in fulfilment of our obligations, going to the aid of Poland, who is so bravely resisting this wicked and unprovoked attack on her people. We have a clear conscience. We have done all that any country could do to establish peace. The situation in which no word given by Germany's ruler could be trusted and no people or country could feel themselves safe has become intolerable. And now that we have resolved to finish it, I know that you will all play your part with calmness and courage.

At such a moment as this the assurances of support that we have received from the Empire are a source of profound encouragement to us.

When I have finished speaking certain detailed announcements will be made on behalf of the Government. Give these your closest attention. The Government have made plans under which it will be possible to carry on the work of the nation in the days of stress and strain that may be ahead. But these plans need your help.

You may be taking your part in the fighting services or as a volunteer in one of the branches of Civil Defence. If so, you will report for duty in accordance with the instructions you have received. You may be engaged in work essential to the prosecution of war. for the maintenance of the life of the people—in factories, in transport, in public utility concerns, or in the supply of other necessaries of life. If so, it is of vital importance that you should carry on with your jobs.

Now may God bless you all. May He defend the right. It is the evil things that we shall be fighting against—brute force, bad faith, injustice, oppression, and persecution—and against them I am certain that the right will prevail.

LORD HALIFAX

On November 7, 1939, Lord Halifax, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, broadcast on Britain's purpose in the struggle:—

We are fighting in defence of freedom; we are fighting for peace; we are meeting a challenge to our own security and that of others; we are defending the rights of all nations to live their own lives. We are fighting against the substitution of brute force for law as

the arbiter between nations, against the violation of the sanctity of treaties and disregard for the pledged word. We have learned that there can be no opportunity for Europe to cultivate the arts of peace until Germany is brought to realize that recurrent acts of aggression will not be tolerated.

It must accordingly be our resolve not only to protect the future from the repetition of the same injuries that German aggression has inflicted on Europe in these last few years, but also so far as we can to repair the damage successively wrought by Germany upon her weaker neighbours. And that purpose must be the stronger as it is reinforced by knowledge of the cruel persecution of causes and persons at the hands of ruthless men in Germany.

In general it is no business of one nation to interfere with the internal administration of another, and history has plenty of examples of the futility of such attempts. The British are particularly reluctant to interfere in other people's business, provided always that other people do not seek to interfere in theirs. But when the challenge in the sphere of international relations is sharpened, as to-day in Germany, by the denial to men and women of elementary human rights, that challenge is at once extended to something instinctive and profound in the universal conscience of mankind.

We are therefore fighting to maintain the rule of law and the quality of mercy in dealings between man

and man and in the great society of civilized States. We foresaw indeed that the time might well come when we should have to fight for these saving graces of our earthly commonwealth. . . .

So let us keep our freedom: but let us use it to the greater strengthening of our purpose. And we must always remember that our enemies will not be slow to make the most of anything that they can represent as evidence of divided purpose and weakening resolution. It is our duty here, just as much as it is the duty of the men on active service, to stand united, firm, unshakable in mind and heart. On this will certainly depend our power to meet the challenge in the present struggle, and when that is over, to answer the call to work worthily for the future of mankind.

H.M. THE QUEEN

On Armistice Day, November 11, 1939, the Queen broadcast a message of hope and encouragement, particularly to the women of the British Empire:—

THE last time that I broadcast a message was at Halifax, Nova Scotia, when I said a few words of farewell to all the women and children who had welcomed the King and myself so kindly during our visits to Canada and the United States of America.

The world was then at peace; and for seven happy weeks we had moved in an atmosphere of such goodwill and human kindliness that the very idea of strife and bloodshed seemed impossible. The recollection of it still warms my heart and gives me courage.

I speak to-day in circumstances sadly different. For twenty years we have kept this Day of Remembrance as one consecrated to the memory of past and neverto-be-forgotten sacrifice, and now the peace which that sacrifice made possible has been broken, and once again we have been forced into war. ¹

I know that you would wish me to voice, in the name of the women of the British Empire, our deep and abiding sympathy with those on whom the first cruel and shattering blows have fallen—the women of Poland. Nor do we forget the gallant womanhood of France, who are called on to share with us again the hardships and sorrows of war.

War has at all times called for the fortitude of women. Even in other days, when it was an affair of the fighting forces only, wives and mothers at home suffered constant anxiety for their dear ones, and too often the misery of bereavement. Their lot was all the harder because they felt that they could do so little beyond heartening, through their own courage and devotion, the men at the front.

Now this is all changed, for we no less than men have real and vital work to do. To us also is given