

OUR HISTORY

Pamphlet 77

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APPEASEMENT



by Bill Moore

On May 8th Mr. Gorbachov, according to *The Times* 9.5.85, said in his speech on the 40th anniversary of VE Day that it was "massive political sclerosis" not to remember that Western capitalists had armed the Nazis and directed them at the East. It was the ultimate in political irresponsibility. "Time will never absolve the Western leaders of responsibility for a catastrophe that could have been averted had they not been blinded by hatred for socialism." Mr. Gorbachov called for vigilance against today's imperialists who, having failed to roll back Communism, were again pushing the world towards a precipice — "this time a nuclear one."

The following day *The Times* reported that "some Western diplomats said they had been appalled by Mr. Gorbachov's Kremlin speech". No one, however, has offered a detailed repudiation of the Russian charge. Not even a small leader in *The Times*. This pamphlet tells why.

APPEASEMENT

ON 12TH FEBRUARY 1983 MRS. THATCHER, speaking to the Young Conservatives' Conference, said:

"If in the thirties nuclear weapons had been invented and the Allies had been faced by Nazi SS20s and Backfire bombers, would it have been morally right to have handed to Hitler total control of the most terrible weapons which man has ever made? Would that not have been the one way to ensure that the 1000-year Reich became exactly that? Would not unilateralism have given to Hitler the world domination he sought?"

(Sunday Times, 13.2.83)

CND immediately protested:

"Mrs. Joan Ruddock, chairman of CND said that by linking Hitler's Germany to the Soviet Union, Mrs. Thatcher had implied CND's campaign for nuclear disarmament by Britain was a campaign of appeasement."

Since that date, the attack on unilateral disarmament as "appeasement" of the Soviet Union has become a standard Government argument.

Of all the brazen distortions, misrepresentations and downright lies that Mrs. Thatcher has been guilty of in the last four years, this is surely the most brazen. "Appeasement" has a specific history dating from the 1920s and a specific political meaning that is the very opposite of Thatcher's charge. On the contrary, the boot is on the other foot; the real appeasers have sat in No. 10 Downing Street for these last sixty-odd years, and the facts need to be told again for a generation that did not experience the devastating effects of pre-War appeasement on their own lives — which is what this pamphlet aims to do. Then we can assess the extent of Mrs. Thatcher's distortion.

But we need to note, before we leave her Conference speech, that Mrs. Thatcher got much nearer to the truth of the present international situation in a later passage which incautiously revealed her own inner conviction:

"She added that Japan had been attacked precisely because she had no nuclear weapons."

(Observer, 13.2.83)

This has no relation to historical fact or even to common sense. Japan was the one remaining enemy after the end of the war in Europe and was due to be attacked. The Russians, by agreement with the other Allies, were moving in. We now know that Japan was on the point of surrendering. The

Americans used the atom bomb, firstly, to forestall the ignominy of letting the Japanese surrender to the Russians, as the Germans had done a few months before in Europe, and secondly, to shock the Russians with a display of the potentialities of the new weapon. The bomb was entirely unnecessary for defeating the Japanese.

But what Mrs. Thatcher's remark does show is that she is aware that the USA would have no compunction now, any more than they had then, in using nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear enemy — which is what one has always suspected but it's useful to have it so to speak from the horse's mouth.

We aim in this pamphlet to answer four questions:

- * What is "appeasement", in the political sense in which it was used pre-war?
- * Who were — and who are still — the appeasers?
- * Who were — and who are now — the appeased?
- * Why were they then, why are they now, being appeased?

THE BACKGROUND

Sixty-eight years it has gone on, ever since the Russian Revolution of November 1917 shook the capitalist world to its foundations.

The new Russia was not just another rival Big Power. The capitalist system had seen plenty of these arise — notably USA and Germany in the nineteenth century, Japan in the twentieth — and the struggle between them was all part of the capitalist game. Victors came and victors went, but the system remained. What you lost on the swings today you could one day hope to regain on the roundabouts.

But the new Russia was a threat to the system itself. It was a breach of the world capitalist system; one sixth of the world's surface area removed from the possibility of capitalist exploitation. And while that was bad enough, it was not the most frightening problem. The war of 1914-18 had once more unleashed in virtually all countries the demands for social change, for an end to exploitation and poverty, for a new social system, that had been suppressed time after time in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, not only in the backward countries — Russia, China, India, Egypt and the like — but also in the Western industrialised countries. The war was a catalyst of revolution.

Only in one country was revolution successful — Russia — but it started the rot. It was an example to the common people everywhere that *it could be done* — the world system of class oppression *could* be got rid of.

“The whole of Europe is filled with the spirit of revolution. There is a deep sense not only of discontent but of anger and revolt among the workers against pre-war conditions. The whole existing order in its political, social and economic aspects is questioned by the masses of the population from one end of Europe to the other.”

(Lloyd George: secret memorandum of March 1919 to the four main powers: “Some considerations for the Peace Conference before they finally draft their terms”)

The rulers of every capitalist country were badly frightened. They have been frightened ever since. For sixty-seven years the threat of a new social order that would displace capitalism has hung over them, and has directly or indirectly guided their policies at home and abroad.

The years between the two World Wars and the years since 1945 have been filled with the struggles of rival imperialist powers for a greater share of the world’s resources, markets and exploitable bodies, struggles which have divided the powers in constant, bitter conflict. But above and beyond all these has been the over-riding effort that has united them — the effort to suppress, beat down, eliminate the world-wide movements for social change — movements whose inspiration now was undoubtedly Soviet Russia, seen *not* as a revolutionary army sweeping the world (except in the minds of the crazier Kremlinologists and as propaganda to bamboozle the unthinking) but as the great example to the common people that *it can be done*.

Divided in every other respect, the great capitalist Powers have been united in this one determination; to destroy the Soviet Union by any means whatever, thus demoralising movements of social revolution everywhere and preserving their old exploiting system.

This is the essential background.

THE FIRST STAGE: THE NINETEEN TWENTIES

The first stage of world counter-revolution began badly: intervention in Russia, carried out by British troops along with those of a dozen other countries, was defeated — militarily by the new Red Army and politically by the world-wide protest against intervention which culminated in this country in the Councils of Action in August 1920.

Since intervention had failed against Russia the obvious next step was to isolate her, to build a "cordon sanitaire" of counter-revolutionary Governments around her. For this purpose the Western Powers, especially Britain, France and the USA used every means to their hands: military occupation, economic pressure (especially the selective supply of food in a starving Europe) and diplomatic threats to overthrow left-wing regimes wherever they existed, to prevent the common people changing the social order, and to restore and prop up reactionary and counter-revolutionary groups, parties and governments.

"Food was practically the only basis on which the Governments of the newly created States could be maintained in power. Half of Europe had hovered on the brink of Bolshevism. If it had not been for the £137 million in relief credits granted to Central and Eastern Europe between 1919 and 1921 . . . Austria and probably several other countries would have gone the way of Russia . . . Two and a half years after the Armistice the back of Bolshevism had been broken largely by relief credits . . . The expenditure of £137 million was probably one of the best international investments from a financial and political point of view ever recorded in history."

(Sir William Goode, British Director of Relief in Central Europe, in his official report, 1921)

"The whole of American policy during the liquidation of the armistice was to contribute everything it could to prevent Europe from going Bolshevik . . ."

(Herbert Hoover, in charge of American relief in Europe)

The result was seen in the next decade or so as country after European country went down to counter-revolution; monarchist or military dictatorships as in Poland and the Balkans; clerical dictatorship as in Austria; Right Wing Peasant and Big Business rule in the Baltic States; semi-feudal landowner rule as in Hungary; Fascism in Italy.

THREE SPECIAL CASES

Three countries had a special importance in Britain's anti-Soviet strategy: Japan in the Far East, Italy in Southern Europe, Germany in the West. That these three happened to be the principal countries that had got little or nothing out of the 1914-18 war and were determined to correct this, was soon to present the key inter-war problem for the dominant imperialist powers — and particularly for Britain — but at this stage it was the need to strengthen their anti-communist, anti-Soviet role that was of foremost importance.

JAPAN

Japan was deliberately built up as a great power by the British.

Up to the end of the nineteenth century Britain's supremacy in the Far East has been unchallenged. The growing pressure then of rivals — the USA, Tzarist Russia and Germany especially — trying to muscle in on the wealth of the East, especially the inexhaustible wealth of China, caused Britain to look for a watch-dog that could be relied on to help look after Britain's interests.

Japan was ideal — economic wealth and power concentrated in the hands of a few great families, with the mass of the people subsisting at a level below that of the poorest European; a feudal-militarist government with the army and navy forming a state within the state; liberal and democratic institutions non-existent. Certainly no nonsense about dealing with revolutionaries.

By the Anglo-Japanese Agreement of 1894 Britain built, equipped and trained the Japanese navy. It was shortly followed by Japan's first war on China — “perks” for the watch-dog. The Anglo-Japanese Treaty of 1902 was soon followed by the successful war against Tzarist Russia, the conquest of Port Arthur and the seizure of South Manchuria. The 1905 Treaty included Japanese assistance for the maintenance of British power in India and the obligation of each to help the other in the event of war. Thus for the twenty years up to the First World War Japan advanced continuously under British protection.

During that war Japan again overran a large area of China, but at the end of it the USA, now immensely powerful as compared with Britain exhausted by four years of war, was able not only to force Japan to give up her latest conquests in China but also to force the annulment of the Anglo-Japanese Treaties.

Nevertheless, the shadow of the Russian Revolution, the development of the Chinese revolution in the '20s and the ever-present rivalry of the USA meant that though the letter of alliance had gone, the spirit was still there. As the Duke of York said at a dinner given for the departing Japanese Ambassador in 1925:

“ . . . the friendship between Britain and Japan was and remains the foundation upon which depends the peace of the Far East.”

(The Times, 1.7.25)

ITALY

In Italy the revolutionary wave after the war reached very great heights with widespread strike movement and the occupation of the factories, land seizure by the peasants and the like. But this revolutionary wave spent itself in a confusion of unorganised and unco-ordinated struggles, and instead of a decisive leadership and a unified aim there was a betrayal by the reformist leadership of the General Confederation of Labour whose Secretary afterwards said:

“. . . but after we had the honour of preventing a revolutionary catastrophe — Fascism arrived.”

(Quoted in Daily Herald, 12.4.28)

Fascism “arrived” all right — and Winston Churchill, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, gave it its accolade, on behalf of British Toryism, in a speech in Rome in January 1927:

“Italy has shown that there is a way of fighting the subversive forces which can rally the masses of the people, properly led, to value and wish to defend the honour and stability of civilised society. She has provided the necessary antidote to the Russian poison. Hereafter no great nation will be unprovided with an ultimate means of protection against the cancerous growth of Bolshevism.”

If he had been an Italian, he said, he would certainly have been whole-heartedly with Mussolini from start to finish — which in general was the opinion of all British Toryism.

And Mussolini’s oft-expressed dream of building a new Roman Empire was seen as something that could be dealt with when the occasion arose.

GERMANY

Lloyd George above all was quite clear from the beginning on the strategic importance of Germany as the key to defence against the spread of communism in the West. Soon after the Armistice he told the Allied Supreme Council:

“As long as order is maintained in Germany, a breakwater exists between the countries of the Allies and the waters of revolution beyond. But once that breakwater is swept away, I cannot speak for France and I tremble for my own country . . .”

But to transform Germany into a breakwater against revolution was by no means plain sailing. Not only the revolutionary outbreaks in Germany in the first four post-war years, but also the signing of the Rapallo Treaty in 1922 between the Weimar Republic and the Soviet Union (and continued in the Berlin Treaty of 1926), establishing relations of equality and friendship and trading relations on a most-favoured-nation principle — all seemed to underline the alternative in Lloyd George's warning: that Germany could go communist and throw in her lot with the Bolsheviks.

The Allies' answer was to "squeeze Germany till the pips squeak" — and squeezed the German people were. But it did not make them a spearhead against the Soviet Union. Time was needed. It became a question (after making sure of certain basics, such as preserving a core of the German army) of helping — or at least turning a carefully blind eye to — every reactionary organisation that showed promise of undermining the pacific Weimar Republic. From the beginning, counter-revolutionary paramilitary organisations had been encouraged: "Stahlhelm", "Einwohnerwehr", the Black Reichswehr, "Orgesch" — and Lord D'Abernon, British Ambassador in Berlin in these post-war years, had already written in his diary, November 1920:

"I consider the danger from the left far exceeds the danger from the right, and in the event of a new outbreak of communism in Germany, these organisations would powerfully serve the cause of order."

True enough — and never more so than in respect of the new organisations that soon emerged and soon overshadowed all others: Hitler's "SA" and "SS" troops. Though they all preached a war of revenge against the west, though they all carried the seeds of Fascism, the Western Powers saw only their usefulness against social revolution.

When Hitler finally achieved power in March 1933, nothing could have been more blatant than the British Government's recognition of the fundamental change in the international situation and the need for a new approach to Germany. The British Prime Minister, Ramsey MacDonald, whose Government already bore the main responsibility for wrecking the World Disarmament Conference, now in its death throes, rushed to Geneva to call for "justice for Germany" and to propose the doubling of the German army — and then on to Rome to draw up with Mussolini the project of a Four-Power Pact: Britain, France, Germany, Italy.

THE PRICE OF COUNTER-REVOLUTION

At this point we can fairly say that the stage for a new world war — already foreshadowed by events in the Far East (discussed later) was now firmly set.

Counter-revolution had been successful throughout the whole world outside Russia, but could be maintained only at a price. The price was to be the development of three countries who presented a very ticklish problem: all these countries, the “have-nots” as they were called, were determined to join the “haves”, to expand their territory, to win the colonies they’d been deprived of, to become Great Powers at least equal to Britain, the USA and France.

It was typical of British ruling-class arrogance that they were quite sure they could handle the problem — just as they are always sure they can bamboozle their employees. But in fact all these three countries were well aware of their advantageous position, were equally arrogant, and knew that at a pinch they could, within reason — and eventually beyond all reason save that of the fanatically class-conscious British ruling-class — name their price. And to start with there was no “failure to agree” on the price:

the price for Germany was the Soviet Union

the price for Japan was China and Soviet Siberia

the price for Italy was a slice of Africa.

THE GREAT SLUMP

What had made the need to eliminate the Soviet threat to world capitalism more urgent than ever was the catastrophic collapse of the capitalist boom of the late '20s and the start of the devastating world slump from the autumn of 1929 — for two reasons.

Firstly, although it was hushed up as well as possible for as long as possible, it soon became common knowledge that the one place in the whole world where there was no slump, no unemployment, no dole queues, no relief stations, no factories scrapped, no “rationalisation” to throw thousands more on the streets, no farmers paid *not* to grow corn, no coffee beans used to stoke railway trains, no oranges dumped in the sea, no food destroyed while millions starved — was the Soviet Union.

All of which added point to the second reason: that the ground-murmur of discontent, protest, demand for change took on a sharper note in all other countries where the bottom had fallen out of their lives, where destitution and starvation began to affect millions not only in the underdeveloped countries but in the industrialised countries too — and nowhere more seriously than in Germany, Italy and Japan. In Germany in particular the collapse was cataclysmic: world industrial production of means of production by 1932 was down 40% compared with 1928; in Germany it was down 50%.

It was a situation to encourage adventurist solutions, particularly the most adventurist of all: war.

SECOND STAGE: THE AGE OF APPEASEMENT

THE FAR EAST

The first move was made on 18th September 1931 when Japan attacked Mukden and other points on the South Manchurian railway and quickly overran a huge part of China, renaming it Manchukuo. The League of Nations promptly condemned Japan as the aggressor and refused to recognise "Manchukuo". Japan after defeating the Chinese in battle forced them to accept the Tangku armistice.

The other League members awaited the reaction of Britain, the only Great Power in the Far East apart from Japan and therefore clearly responsible for giving a lead. The mountain gave birth to a mouse; Britain congratulated China on signing the Tangku armistice!

The United States, not a member of the League and so not involved in the League's resolution, declared it would not recognise the fruits of Japanese aggression and intimated that they would be glad to see the British Government associate itself with this policy. On 11th January 1932 a Foreign Office press communique repudiated the USA declaration, explaining that the British Government had received assurances from the Japanese delegate at the League Council that Japan would respect the "Open Door" in Manchukuo — that is, the Japanese would look after British trade interests in the provinces they had overrun — so there was no need for sanctions against Japan.

In March, Sir John Simon, the Foreign Secretary, made the same point in the House of Commons, and in that month also succeeded in stopping the League Assembly adopting a resolution supporting the US line of non-recognition.

When the matter was discussed again in the Assembly in December 1932 the Japanese delegate Matsuoko said delightedly that Sir John's speech had done more in half an hour for the Japanese cause than he himself had been able to do in the last fortnight.

When the Foreign Affairs Committee of the French Chamber in February 1933 passed a unanimous resolution calling for an international embargo on arms to Japan, Sir John responded on 27th February with a speech in the Commons in which he again formally repudiated the Covenant of the League (which bound all signatories to come to the help of victims of aggression), declared that the British Government would not in any circumstances take action against Japan, and proclaimed an immediate embargo on the export of arms both to China, the victim of aggression, and to Japan the aggressor — an early example of the illegal as well as totally immoral device of "non-intervention" that was to cripple the Spanish Republican Government a few years later.

The League had set up an Arms Embargo Committee on which it was strongly (and correctly) argued that such an embargo on both the aggressor and his victim was incompatible with the League Covenant. Because of British opposition, the Committee failed to reach an agreed solution and within a matter of weeks the British embargo was quietly dropped. From now on Japan had a free hand in China.

The usual reasons given for the British "National" Government (elected a month after the Japanese aggression) not implementing the Covenant are twofold. Firstly, that the US would not go with us — a straightforward unblushing lie. On the contrary throughout the whole of 1932 Stimson, US Secretary of State, took the lead in arguing for an international embargo on Japan. Sir John successfully killed every effort at combined action.

Secondly, it was alleged that if action had been taken against Japan it would have meant war! Quite apart from the fact that it was inconceivable that Japan would take on the whole world including the United States (Lord Cecil, British delegate to the League during the early months of the crisis, called it "fantastic nonsense") it meant in effect the repudiation of collective security. You merely reprove the aggressor, so he knows he can go on aggressing with no danger of anything seriously being done to stop him.

The importance of this crisis is not confined to the Far Eastern situation — it set the tone for the rest of the Thirties. The collapse of the League due to the sabotage of the British Government started a new arms race rolling, gave Hitler encouragement to defy the disarmament provisions of the Versailles Treaty, set Mussolini preparing for an African adventure and ushered in the age of appeasement.

What are the special characteristics of appeasement, as fully illustrated in this Far East crisis?

First of all Mr. Matsuoko, Japan's delegate to the League until he withdrew in February 1933, revealed the core of appeasement, the basic reason, in his speech to the Assembly in December 1932:

“ . . . We find Sovietism in the heart of China. I approach that problem with a question: will it stay there, limited to the present area? Why has not that movement spread more rapidly? The answer is: There stands Japan. At least Soviet Russia respects Japan. Were Japan's position weakened, either by the League of Nations or by any other institutions or powers, you may be sure that Sovietism would reach the mouth of the Yangtse in no time . . . Would you prefer to weaken Japan, the only hope today in that appalling situation throughout Eastern Asia; or would you prefer to see Japan's position strengthened? That would give you a hope of re-establishing peace and order in the Far East.”

A second feature was made clear by Lord Lytton (author of the Lytton Report on the Chinese-Japanese Crisis) in a speech on 17th May 1934:

“ . . . the argument of the Foreign Secretary which has always been loudly cheered in the House of Commons is that though it would be dishonourable to attack a neighbour for the sake of national advantage, there is no obligation on us to come to the aid of a victim of aggression if national interests make it expedient to keep out of the quarrel . . . ”

Mr. Amery, former Colonial Minister, at that same Commons meeting when Sir John Simon formally repudiated the League Covenant, clarified this further. He asked:

“ . . . who is there among us to cast a first stone and to say that Japan ought not to have acted with the object of creating peace and order in Manchuria and defending herself against the continual aggression of vigorous Chinese nationalism (!)? Our whole policy in India, our whole policy in Egypt, stand condemned if we condemn Japan.”

And Sir John himself confirmed this viewpoint at a famous private press meeting in Geneva, in a speech leaked in Washington, in which he said that Japan needed to expand, that she was only doing for herself today what Great Britain had done in the past and that the trouble was that the Covenant did not allow for the dynamic forces of history such as those that had carried us into India and were carrying the Japanese into Manchuria.

We're all in the same club; new boys need encouragement especially when they will look after our interests.

But the third and most significant aspect of appeasement was very soon made evident in the Far East; Japan treated British interests as ruthlessly as it dealt with the Chinese people; the promises of looking after British interests were forgotten. Did this change the attitude of the British Government? Not a bit of it — to the end of the decade the British Government made no attempt to curb Japan's constant expansion into Chinese territory, openly encouraging further aggression especially from 1937. For as the Lytton Report insisted, and as subsequent events proved to the hilt, the chief object of the Japanese in occupying and developing Manchuria was to convert it into a vast military and air base — with strategic roads, railways and air bases and the development of coal and iron industries — all to facilitate further aggression against China and the Soviet Union.

So here was first revealed the whole *raison d'être* of appeasement — the reasoning can be put thus:

- a. The basic problem in the world is the revolutionary pressure from the peoples for a new social order, inspired by the Soviet Union which has proved it can be done.
- b. Any Government in trouble with such revolutionary rumblings must be helped.
- c. If aggressive war is the best way of silencing such rumblings, it must be condoned, and even helped. After all, it is normal capitalist practice.
- d. If the country attacked has dangerous revolutionary elements that need suppressing so much the better.
- e. Best of all is if the attack can be directed against the source of all the trouble: the Soviet Union.
- f. If such actions put our own national interests in danger, we must try to make a deal.
- g. Even if we fail to make a deal, we still go ahead because at all costs the capitalist system must be preserved. Class interests override all national interests.

ITALY

How did appeasement work out with regard to Italy?

The world slump had produced such appalling poverty and unemployment in Italy that some diversion was necessary to save the regime. Mussolini saw the solution of his problem in Abyssinia (Ethiopia).

He had had his eye on this country, the last remaining independent country in Africa, for at least ten years. Already possessing Eritrea and Italian Somaliland on either side of Abyssinia, he aimed at a conquest which would give him an "Italian East Africa" — the first step to his dream Roman Empire.

Taking advantage of an incident on the Eritrea/Abyssinia border, he began preparations for war in the middle of 1934, when he sent Marshal Badoglio with a military commission to Eritrea to investigate the prospects for a campaign. By the autumn of 1934 the despatch of Italian troops and war material to Eritrea had begun. In the last months of 1934 the flow of Italian troops and war material through the Suez Canal steadily grew. There was no doubt, as the Italian press claimed, that the British Government was well aware of what was going on.

In January 1935 Abyssinia raised the question of the danger of war at the League. The British Government responded by bringing the greatest pressure to bear on Abyssinia to enter into direct negotiations with Italy.

Then at the end of that month Mussolini, through his ambassador in London, invited the British Government "to consider specific agreements for a harmonious development of the Italian and British interests in Ethiopia" — i.e. to do a deal. The British Government made no direct reply but the *Morning Post* of 18th September 1935 quoted "authoritative sources" as admitting that the Government began to "consult the various British Colonial Administrations affected" in order to "examine the issues raised by the invitation". In short, the Government looked at what could be done to safeguard its own colonial interests while at the same time helping the potential aggressor to mug his intended victim.

In March Abyssinia appealed to the League again to put an end to the war danger. So little moved was the British Government that at the Stresa Conference in April, with France and Italy (designed ostensibly to condemn Germany's violation of the Versailles Treaty but really in the hope of building a new "entente" in Europe, for which the price would be a free hand for Mussolini in Abyssinia), Abyssinia was never even mentioned.

Abyssinia again on 15th April pleaded with the League Council to stop Italy's war preparations, but again the British Government led the other Powers in preventing the League doing its plain duty. Mussolini petulantly complained too that he was getting no satisfaction from Britain. The National Government was at this stage engaged in a masterly inactivity which called from Lloyd George the famous gibe: "Sir John Simon has sat on the fence so long that the iron has entered his soul."

At the May Council meeting, when the issue could no longer be kept off the agenda, the Government succeeded in winning agreement that two Abyssinians and two Italian "conciliators" should discuss the border incident — though everybody knew that the incident was only a pretext. Abyssinia's continued pleas that something be done to stop the war preparations were passed over in silence, and in fact until October, when Italian troops finally attacked Ethiopia, the British Government not only did nothing itself but effectively prevented anyone else doing anything to stop Mussolini.

Now that war had actually begun, what to do? The one thing the Government was determined not to do was to apply the Covenant. They were forced to condemn Italian aggression but, as in the case of Japan, refused anything effective.

Two steps could have stopped Mussolini: closing the Suez Canal to the passage of military supplies and personnel, and an embargo on oil supplies. In preference the Government in December 1935 endorsed the Hoare-Laval Pact* for a deal with Mussolini to partition Abyssinia, without even demanding that he first withdrew troops from Abyssinia. Why?

Mr. E.H. Carr, a high official in the Foreign Office at the time, wrote in the *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, January 1937, that the Hoare-Laval proposals were not put forward because the Government thought Italy would win but because "the British and French Governments, like almost everybody else, believed in December 1935 that Italy was in an embarrassing military situation; and the famous "plan" was designed to provide her with an honourable (!) and profitable way out." As Baron Aloisi, Italy's delegate to the League said (following Mr. Matsuoko) when explaining that defeat would mean the overthrow of the Fascist regime:

"You don't want Italy to go Red, do you?"

● *Sir Samuel Hoare was now the Foreign Secretary; Laval was the French Foreign Minister.*

GERMANY

The most blatant, the most outrageous and the most dangerous practices of appeasement, however, were reserved for Hitler Germany.

We have already noted the action of the British Prime Minister in 1935 in calling for a rearmament of Germany (in defiance of the Versailles Treaty). Though the League rejected it, Hitler immediately began to rearm.

When late in 1933, the French, the Poles and others attempted to bring this before the Council of the League, demanding boycott, blockage, or even sending in troops to stop Hitler, it was the British Government that blocked it. If it was a question of Nazi rearmament and a drift to war, as against the overthrow of the Nazi regime by the German people, the Tories had no hesitation in picking the former. As soon as Hitler was there in power, the attitude of our ruling class to the Treaty of Versailles changed. What had been essential to prevent a resurgence of German militarism became an unfair imposition:

"With regard to Germany either they were to have Communism or something else. Hitler had produced Hitlerism as they saw it today and of the two he thought it was preferable. Will the Germans go to war again? I don't think there is any doubt about it; and the curious thing is that I am almost persuaded that someday we shall have to let the Germans arm or we shall have to arm them . . . One of the greatest menaces to peace in Europe today is the unarmed condition of Germany . . ."

(Sir Arthur Balfour, Lord Riverdale
Sheffield Telegraph, 24.10.33)

"If we were to isolate Germany and therefore prove to the German people that Herr Hitler had failed them . . . eventually they will discard him and seek another God . . . There is only one, the anti-Christ of Communism."

(Sir Thomas Moore MP
Sunday Dispatch, 22.10.33)

". . . if the Powers succeeded in overthrowing Nazism in Germany, what would follow? Not a Conservative, Socialist or Liberal regime, but extreme Communism. Surely that could not be their objective."

(Lloyd George, speech at Barmouth, 22.9.33)

And when Germany walked out of the League in protest against criticisms of her rearmament, Britain within a matter of months, on 29th January 1934, was offering Germany very heavy rearmament on land though asking them to postpone any decision about air armaments — and

demanding nothing in the way of security commitments. Hitler's reply was to ask for even more land armaments and to insist on an air force. The response of Sir John Simon, Foreign Secretary, a few days later was to explain to the Commons that:

"... Germany's claim to equality of rights in the matter of armaments cannot be resisted and ought not to be resisted."

Despite French protests, Hitler on 16th April 1934 accepted the British plan of 29th January, except that he asked for 300,000 instead of 200,000 men and wanted an airforce immediately.

So far Hitler had not mentioned the navy. This omission was soon corrected by the British Government. After brief secret negotiations the Anglo-German Naval Agreement was signed in June 1935. By it, in violation of Versailles, Germany could build a navy 35% the size of Britain's, to be constructed at the rate of 100,000 tons a year, and submarines to the extent of 45% of the British, and might go up to 100%.

The Foreign Secretary, now Sir Samuel Hoare, claimed that the Government "took the only course that was open to them," and the First Lord of the Admiralty clarified this by stating that Germany had already started the programme and that ships were already on the stocks. "She didn't ask us" he said. What a confession of political bankruptcy!

The feelings of the other Powers were summed up by Robert Dell, permanent correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* at the League and one of that undaunted band of journalists who witnessed what was happening throughout the thirties and did their best to warn the British people:

"It is the almost universal opinion on the Continent that the aims of British policy are to strengthen Germany so as to counterbalance French and Russian influence, to avert German naval competition and German colonial ambitions by giving Hitler a free hand in Eastern Europe and to encourage German and Japanese aggressive designs against Soviet Russia. That is also the opinion of nearly all the Americans to whom I have spoken on the subject."

(Time and Tide, 13.7.35)

How right he was! Eight months later, in March 1936, against the protests of the French but with the approval of the British, Hitler re-occupied Rhineland.

WHO FINANCED HITLER?

This question is of particular importance.

“Without this country as a clearing house for payments and the ability to draw on credits . . . Germany could not have pursued her plans . . . Time and again Germany has defaulted on her obligations, public and private; but she has gone on buying wool, cotton, nickel, rubber and petrol until her requirements were fulfilled, and the financing has been done directly or indirectly through London . . . Is it not time this financing was checked?”

(Stock Exchange Gazette, 3.5.35)

It was not checked. Germany was able to build up her war industries because of the facilities wangled by Dr. Schacht, that master of unscrupulous finance, and endorsed by the Bank of England (i.e. by the British Government).

Within three months of occupying the Rhineland, Hitler was made free to test out his new arms in Spain.

SPAIN

In July 1936, the fascist elements in the Spanish army, among them General Franco, rebelled against the legally elected Republican Government. Within a few days, fascist Italy and Germany were pouring in arms and men to help the fascists. The Spanish Government tried to buy arms from France to defend itself, but after pressure from the British Government, this was refused. Instead the British and French Governments set up a “non-intervention” committee, imposing an arms embargo on *both* sides. Germany and Italy, though formally represented on this committee, continued to supply arms to the Spanish fascists. The Soviet Union, though initially represented on the committee withdrew from it on 23rd October 1936 and from then on the Spanish Government was enabled to buy arms, but only from the Soviet Union. Owing to the closure of the French frontier and the naval blockade imposed on republican Spain, these arms only reached their destination with difficulty and were never equal to those supplied to Franco by the fascist powers.

As a writer in the *Manchester Guardian* put it, 24th February 1936:

“The fear of Communism has produced a phenomenon new in English history . . . there is a large class of Englishmen who in their dread of Communism think that the success of Franco in Spain, of Mussolini in Italy and Hitler in Germany is so important that the fate of British power in the Mediterranean is a secondary matter.”

So with the help of the British and French Governments, and despite international solidarity with the Republic, including the organisation of the International Brigade, Franco won. The German and Italian armed forces had a useful spell of training for the Second World War and when that war finally came Britain no longer had undisputed control of the Mediterranean.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

In November 1937 Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, visited Berlin ostensibly for the purpose of attending a Hunting Exhibition opened by General Goering. Later the *Manchester Guardian* revealed that Hitler had put to him there a number of demands in respect of a European settlement. Among them was: Germany insisted on the re-organisation of Czechoslovakia on a cantonal system, with something like autonomy for the Sudeten Germans. (Four out of the five demands, incidentally, were carried out in the next two years on *British* initiative). The British Government took the lead in securing the "reorganisation" of Czechoslovakia. An ex-Minister, Lord Runciman, was sent to the Sudetenland, whose recommendation included not autonomy but its annexation to Germany. What is significant is that this recommendation was put forward by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chamberlain, before Hitler or any other Nazi or Sudeten spokesman had voiced it. It was made publicly by Hitler only *after* his first interview with Chamberlain.

Already encouraged by the Western Powers' acceptance of his annexation of Austria, without protest, Hitler now brought off his biggest coup: at Munich came the crowning betrayal of Czechoslovakia — a triumph for the all-out appeasers:

"The French and British Governments went so far in appeasement that when the Soviet Government offered to stand by Czechoslovakia if the latter resisted Hitler, even though she were let down by her ally France and by Great Britain, the Czechs were told by Mr. Chamberlain and M. Georges Bonnet, the French Foreign Secretary, that if they fought with the Soviet Union as their ally, France and Britain might not remain neutral and might supply Hitler with arms and munitions (i.e. become the arsenal of Fascism)."

(K. Zilliacus: "I Choose Peace"
Penguin, 1949, p.64)

With only one solitary voice in Parliament, that of the Communist MP Willy Gallacher, against it, Hitler was handed the Sudetenland, and six months later took all Czechoslovakia — together with 1,582 airplanes, 468 tanks, 43,876 machine guns, 1,090,000 rifles, 3 million shells and 1,000 million cartridges — some of which no doubt welcomed our own troops six months later.

The following month, Mussolini's troops occupied Albania — also without hindrance.

THE REPUDIATION OF COLLECTIVE SECURITY

Since 1945 it has always been argued by the appeasers, and by that section of the ruling class they represent, that Britain had to give in to Hitler because we were disarmed and pacifist opinion was so strong here. This is totally untrue.

Not only had Britain been rearming for years but the serious anti-war opposition was not pacifist at all. The opponents of appeasement — including the Labour Party and the Communist Party — advocated collective security through the League: sanctions against an aggressor and mutual assistance pacts (such as the one between France, Russia and Czechoslovakia, which the French betrayed at Munich) whereby if one were attacked the others would go to its aid. Such pacts were intended to deter, and could have deterred, any aggressor.

The decisive reason for the failure of collective security was that the British Government refused to join any mutual assistance pact in which the Soviet Union was involved. The last thing it wanted was an alliance with the country it considered the main enemy.

The Soviet Union was not the only country that put forward proposals aimed at preserving peace and thwarting aggression, but they did offer thirty-two plans in the years from 1934 (when they were finally accepted into the League) to 1939 — every one of which was rejected: attacked, poo-hooped, even totally ignored. Britain played, in Zilliacus's caustic phrase, "the part of a sort of inverted Micawber, waiting for something to turn down."

It culminated in the summer of 1939, when the USSR was striving to win a British-French-Soviet Treaty of mutual assistance against aggression, which, loyally carried out, would even at that late date have stopped Hitler. In contrast to Chamberlain's flights to meet Hitler at Berchtesgarden and Munich — a matter of a few hours' travel — a "negotiator" (Herbert Strang, a junior Foreign Office official with no authority to do anything but talk) was put on a slow boat to Leningrad, taking a fortnight to get there.

It was a mockery, a mere propaganda exercise.

When finally the Polish Government stated categorically that it would not allow Russian troops to cross Poland — an absolutely essential factor in any genuine collective security pact against Hitler — the Soviet Government considered they had no choice but to cover themselves by signing a non-aggression pact with Germany. To take such a step of course, after warning the world so often over the previous eight years of the inevitable consequences of Western appeasement of Hitler Fascism, and in fact putting their greatest efforts in those same years into trying, time after time — in face of the frigid refusal of the Western Powers — to build a genuine collective security barrier that really would have stopped Hitler and prevented the outbreak of the Second World War — to act thus was to shock the world.

And of course, while the pact did ensure to the Soviet Union nearly a further two years in which to build up the forces which eventually “tore the guts out of the German armies” (Churchill) it had also, inevitably, some very unhappy consequences. While it still kept 100 German divisions immobilised in the east (Hitler playing safe), it did allow the German armies to sweep through Western Europe in 1940 and even to threaten the invasion of Britain, without having the danger of a second front at their rear.

But what alternative was open to the Soviet Government? The plain refusal by the British and French (especially the British) Governments to agree to any pact of any kind with the Soviet Union, plus the lesson of Czechoslovakia only twelve months earlier, was a clear enough indication to the Soviet Union (if they needed it by now!) that they were the fall-guy designate. If neither France (which had a precise treaty of mutual aid with Czechoslovakia) or Britain were prepared in 1938 to come to the aid of Czechoslovakia, but rather hinted that they might have to help Germany against her if she insisted on accepting Soviet military aid, what were the chances of Russia — without any binding alliance of any kind at all (for what that was apparently worth) — being helped by Britain or France if she were attacked by Germany?

So who betrayed whom?

Naturally the Western Governments blamed the Russians for setting Hitler on them (they blamed Hitler too for biting the hands that had fed him so lavishly for so long); but in truth it was by their deeds over the previous two decades and precisely their refusal to accept any alliance against Hitler that included the Soviet Union, that these same Governments — and especially successive British Governments — in their blind hatred of the Soviet Union, laid the basis for the most devastating war in human history.

FORTY YEARS ON

Such was the record of the appeasers before the outbreak of the Second World War: a record which, more than any other blunders, weaknesses, strategies, schemes or other international jiggery-pokery, was responsible for the fact that there was a Second World War.

Appeasement backfired on the appeasers. It was the appeasers who were first hit. And by an irony that was appreciated least of all by those appeasers they were saved by the very people they set out to destroy, the people who "tore the guts out of the German Armies": the Soviet people.

That was forty-odd years ago; what is the position now, forty years on?

Today we live in a world very different from that of 1939. German Fascism, Italian Fascism, Japanese Fascism, Spanish Fascism have all gone, but their equivalent today is far more dangerous than they were then. Hitler only had 'conventional' weapons, terrible enough in all truth to scarify a fair stretch of the earth's surface — the USA alone has enough nuclear weapons to obliterate the whole world several times over.

Today's danger lies in the fact that fanatical hatred of the Soviet Union still continues, and so does the effort to smother what the Western Powers see as flowing directly from the example of the Soviet Union: the people's movements increasingly springing up all over the world demanding an end of exploitation, poverty, insecurity — demanding a new system of society. The same sort of people who were supporting White Russian counter-revolutionaries sixty-odd years ago and trying to outlaw the new Soviet regime, are today backing Reagan's support for the counter-revolutionaries in Latin America and Asia and elsewhere, and endorsing his drum-beating arrogance towards the Soviet Union.

So the consequences of this madness are also very different from what they were in 1939: we face the possibility of war waged with nuclear weapons, a war which could, within days, cause death and devastation on an unparalleled scale. The possible effects of such a conflict have been described by leading scientists: a nuclear winter. In the Communist Party pamphlet **WAR & PEACE: THE NUCLEAR EDITION**, John Cox says what this means: "The new information comes from a two-year study by scientists from the USA, USSR and many other countries and was made public in November, 1983 at an international conference held in Washington. Its conclusions were unanimous. In addition to the now well-known effects of individual nuclear explosions, their combined effect would create a pall of darkness that could reduce sunlight to only a few percent of normal. Within days, land temperatures would drop throughout the

Northern Hemisphere (assuming this is where most of the bombs exploded).

“Precise climatic effects cannot be predicted but, because the sea would remain relatively warm, hurricane force winds would be created. For Britain, blizzards from the southwest would bring heavy snow whilst, from other directions, dry winds would cause a further drop in temperature. In all probability, we would suffer a mixture of both.

“Plant growth would be halted and many animal species wiped out. The consequences would cascade through all food chains, eliminating many other living species. Moreover, by virtue of the temperature difference between the hemispheres, winds would carry dust and smoke southwards across the equator creating many of the same effects there also.”

The supreme need for humanity now is to prevent such a war. Britain needs peace and disarmament to safeguard its security. And no people has a greater interest in disarmament than the people who suffered most in the last war: the Soviet people. Whatever criticisms one may have of particular actions or reactions of the Soviet Union, the fact remains that they have made over one hundred proposals for disarmament, and especially nuclear disarmament, since the end of the war.

Time and again these proposals, like those before the war, have been rejected by the USA, Britain and the other Western Powers. Indeed, Reagan's real feelings have been shown, not by the soft talk in the run up to the presidential election but in his off-the-cuff “joke” about bombing the Russians in five minutes' time. And successive British governments, instead of adopting an independent course of seriously and sincerely following up every possibility of negotiation about peace, have lined up with the USA. Thatcher's government in particular has backed Reagan's aggressive policy to the hilt, to the point now of accepting Cruise and Trident missiles.

The opening of the Geneva talks in March was a vital first step, made possible by the worldwide pressure for peace which forced the US to respond to the Soviet proposal. But the danger is great. The US Star Wars project threatens the success of the talks and opens up the horrifying prospect of an arms race in space. While Thatcher, Howe and other West European leaders have made some criticism of the Strategic Defence Initiative, the Americans are going ahead. And Thatcher and Heseltine step up their attacks on the peace movement.

While claiming that the peace movement is appeasing the Soviet Union, Thatcher in practice appeases Reagan, just as Chamberlain appeased Hitler.

The consequences for Britain could be infinitely more disastrous than the earlier appeasement: all civilised life and the majority of our fellow men and women would be obliterated in a nuclear war.

An entirely different policy is needed.

A POLICY FOR PEACE

The leaders of the Labour Party, with some honourable exceptions, have since the war distinguished themselves by an appeasement of the USA in no way inferior to that of the Tory leaders. But among the rank and file there has developed over the last two decades or so a growing revolt against this policy which has culminated in support for unilateral disarmament. We welcome this development, which reflects the influence of the main peace movement and the campaigning activities it has organised and what is happening inside the ranks of an increasing number of Trade Unions and other labour organisations.

As a result of the mass pressure for peace, Labour's new Defence policy includes many of the key demands of the peace movement.

We welcome the growth of the campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in Britain and of powerful peace movements in Western Europe and in the USA; the declaration of Nuclear Free Zones by local authorities and the declaration of Nuclear Free Wales by the Welsh County Councils; the contribution made by the Churches, by European Nuclear Disarmament, by Scientists against Nuclear Arms and the Medical Campaign against Nuclear Weapons and other specialist disarmament groups — and we pay a special tribute to the magnificent example set by the Greenham Common Peace Women.

What is called for now is firm co-operation and joint action by all these growing forces, including the Communist Party which has a record second to none in the fight for peace, to step up the campaign to:

1. Get rid of Cruise and make sure we do not get Trident.
2. Close all nuclear and all US bases in Britain.
3. Support every move towards a nuclear freeze that will check the escalation of the US-led arms race and lay the basis for effective bilateral weapons reduction by the USA and the USSR.

4. End the war-mongering anti-Soviet stance of the Reagans and Thatchers and compel them to make positive proposals to the Soviet Union, or in turn make positive responses to Soviet proposals.
5. End for ever the appeasement of the USA by British governments.

THE HISTORY GROUP OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY, one of the specialist groups set up by the Communist Party in the late 1940's (and in continuous existence since then) seeks to develop discussion of the Marxist approach to history and to foster a critical and informed understanding of the past among all those active in the labour and democratic movements. While membership of the group itself is confined to members of the Communist Party and Young Communist League, it does publish suitable monographs as '*Our History*' pamphlets and articles for '*Our History Journal*' by non-members. The History Group thus makes an important contribution to the political knowledge and understanding of all active comrades.

Annual membership subscription is £7.00 waged, £3.00 unwaged, which includes any '*Our History*' pamphlet and any copies of '*Our History Journal*' issued during the year. Subscription for '*Our History*' alone and for '*Our History Journal*' alone (to both of which non-members can subscribe) is £4.00 for 4 issues and £3.00 for 4 issues respectively — or £6.50 for both.

All enquiries and subscriptions to be sent to the Secretary, or CP History Group, 16 St. John Street, London, EC1M 4AY, giving your name, address and telephone number (and if a CP member, the name of your Party Branch).

BILL MOORE is currently Chairman of the History Group. Unemployed after taking his degree in history, he took part in the Peace Ballot in early 1935, joined the Communist Party later the same year and was Secretary of the Sheffield Peace Council from 1935 to 1937. After three years in a Sheffield engineering factory, six years in the Army and a spell of teaching in a Secondary Modern School, he was for 24 years a full-time organiser for the Communist Party in Yorkshire.

He has written extensively on the history of the Sheffield labour movement: the beginnings of the Shop Stewards' Movement, the early anti-war movements up to 1921, the history of the General Strike in Sheffield. This year his history of Sheffield's role in the National Unemployed Workers' Movement's successful campaign against Part II of the 1934 Unemployment Insurance Act has just been published.

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