

## GERMANY: SHALL WE MAKE THE SAME MISTAKE AGAIN?

H. N. FIELDHOUSE

SINCE September last, the British Commonwealth has been waging its second Anglo-German War and, since September last, it has been busy losing sight of the fact. It has been losing sight, that is to say, of the fact that what we are waging is a war against Germany, and not a crusade against Evil.

Why are we at war? We are at war for the reason for which we have always become involved in a major European war, for the reason, namely, that there has once more risen, in Europe, a Power so formidable and of such expansive appetite that we fear that if it should succeed in dominating the Continent, it would go on to attack us in our island independence, and in our position and possessions in the overseas world.

While that, at bottom, is the reason for which we are at war, it is not the reason which we choose to emphasise. We put our emphasis, not upon the fact that we are fighting for our own independence and position, but upon the claim that we are fighting for liberty in general, or for justice and for civilization. Lord Halifax has been almost alone in admitting that what we are doing is "meeting a challenge to our own security", and even he proceeded to couple this frank statement with the claim that we are fighting in defence of freedom and of peace. "The challenge in the sphere of international relations," he said, "is sharpened to-day in Germany by the denial to men and women of elementary human rights. . . 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."

Now, no one will deny that, among the impulses which have united the British peoples in the prosecution of this war, there must be reckoned a genuine attachment to what Lord Halifax has called the quality of mercy in dealings between man and man. The English nation can rarely be united in matters of foreign policy except upon an issue which appeals to its moral sense, and, in this case, there can be no doubt but that our liberal and humanitarian sympathies have been genuinely stirred both by the nature of the Nazi régime inside Germany

and by its treatment of its neighbours in Europe. In considering why we are at war, however, it is important to distinguish between the quite generous and disinterested impulses which may sometimes move the sympathies of a people, and the deep and permanent reasons of state which lead the responsible government of that people to embark on war. The English-speaking peoples, in particular, are not infrequently swept by waves of quite passionate and genuine humanitarian feeling on behalf of some small people whom they believe to be the victim of an international wrong; but the expression of that feeling has usually stopped short of war. In our own lifetime, large sections of the British peoples have sympathised strongly with the sufferings of the Armenians at the hands of the Turks, of the Abyssinians at the hands of the Italians, of the Chinese at the hands of the Japs, and of the Finns at the hands of Russia; but the responsible governments of the British Commonwealth have not, *on that account*, gone to war with Turkey, with Italy, with Japan or with Russia.

If anyone really believes that we are at war with Germany because the Nazi régime is a denial of human rights, let him consider one fact. The present régime in Germany does, indeed, ride roughly over human rights, but, with all its harshness, it is, after all, the mildest of tyrannies compared with its neighbour in Russia. If we say that human rights are denied to men and women in Germany, what shall we say of Russia? Yet no one, so far as I know, has proposed that we should, *for that reason*, declare war on Russia. Murderous as the Russian régime has always been, we have been content to regret it, and to regard it as being the Russians' own affair; and even when, by invading Finland, the Russians have shown that it is not merely their own affair, we still have not declared war.

While it is perfectly true, therefore, that British humanitarian sympathies have been outraged by the character of the Nazi régime, it is not for that reason that we are at war. When those sympathies are outraged by events in Russia or Abyssinia or China, we do not push them to the point of war. It is only when they are outraged by Germany, that we carry them to that final length. It is true that we are fighting for freedom, but only because freedom is threatened by a particular Power, by a formidable and expansive Germany. We may, as Mr. Chamberlain has told us, be fighting against evil things; but it is only against such of those things as are embodied in the modern power of Germany, and while we may be fighting to maintain

the rule of law and the quality of mercy, it is only because that rule and that quality are endangered from a particular quarter, from the quarter of Berlin. In short, it is not Germany's wickedness which has driven us to take up arms against her. It is the combination of her wickedness with her strength.

Lord Halifax has declared that "we are defending the rights of all nations to live their own lives", and it is perfectly true that our traditional sympathy for the small nation as against the bully has been genuinely stirred by the spectacle of Germany's treatment of Austria, of Czechoslovakia and of Poland; but we shall admit, if we are honest, that if we have carried that sympathy to the point of war, it is because, for ourselves and for the French, the existence of certain small nations on the continent is a necessary counter-balance to the military expansiveness of Germany and Russia. When every allowance has been made for the perfectly genuine liberal and humanitarian feelings of our people, we are *at war*, in the last analysis, because we believe that modern Germany cannot carry corn, that she cannot be trusted not to abuse victory, and that, having destroyed her Czechoslovakias and her Polands, she means ultimately to go on and destroy us.

Now the failure to be honest with ourselves as to why we are at war is more than a matter of our moral or intellectual integrity. It is already gravely affecting the current discussion of our "war aims". For having more than half persuaded ourselves that we are not so much waging a war with a particular secular rival, as conducting a crusade against the Powers of Darkness in general, it is natural to go on, in discussing what kind of peace we shall make, to think and to write as though our business will be, not to make peace with a particular Power, but to lay the foundations of a new order for the world in general. In losing sight of the fact that the war is primarily concerned with Germany, we are already losing sight of the fact that the peace will have to be primarily concerned with Germany.

This is a matter of which it seems impossible to exaggerate the importance, for it will surely be agreed that there is only one thing which could possibly justify the fighting of a second great war within a quarter of a century, and that is that, this time, victory should be made to yield the fruits which we expect from it; and it can be prophesied with certainty that we shall not gather these fruits if, for the second time, we ignore the specifically German character of the problem of war and peace in our time. It is too much to hope that we shall think

clearly about the kind of peace which we shall make, if we have not thought clearly about why—and with whom—we are at war.

Why was it that the fruits of victory in 1918 were never garnered? Fundamentally, it was because we were ignorant of the very nature of the victory which we had won, and ignorant, therefore, of the nature of the opportunity which victory had opened up to us.

The victory of 1918 was not an Apocalypse, a final and universal defeat of the forces of Evil in the world. It was a limited and specific victory, a victory of certain political forces over other political forces; a victory of the Allied and Associated Powers over Germany of the Hohenzollerns. It was, therefore, a victory which registered one particular defeat and opened up one particular opportunity. It registered the defeat of German military power, and it offered us the opportunity of removing the danger to international peace which came from that power. Had we understood that opportunity and concentrated upon it, we should, probably, not now be struggling to secure it for the second time. Unfortunately, we only half understood it, and we failed entirely to concentrate upon it.

We declined to be content with anything so modest as the task of laying the bogey of German militarism for half a century, or with anything so limited as the solution of one great problem at one time. We behaved as though what we had defeated was not the secular ambition of a particular European Power, but the forces of Evil in the world in general, and as though what our victory had opened up to us was not the limited possibility of eliminating one particular threat to world peace, but the possibility of laying the foundations of peace universal. We forgot Germany and concentrated upon the building of the League of Nations, with the result that Germany was left free to plan the League's destruction and ours. Our victory, if we had used it wisely, had put us in a position, at the most, to do one thing; to settle the problem which is represented for European peace by the existence since 1870 of a united and powerful Germany. It had done nothing whatever to advance, or for that matter to retard, the solution of the problem of war and peace in this world in general. Merely because the German itch to dominate had been defeated, was no reason to assume that ambition and aggression were now gone from the hearts of men in general; from the hearts, for example, of the men who should direct the policies of Russia or Italy or Japan. Yet that was the assumption which we made. We set our-

selves, through the League, to solve the problem of peace and war in the world as a whole and in the world at all times, and, in fixing our eyes upon these wide horizons, we neglected the opportunity of doing the one thing which our victory had made it possible to do; the opportunity of making such arrangements as should secure that the peace should not again in our time be broken by Germany.

When historians come to write the history of our century, they will probably dismiss the years 1919-1933 in the shortest of paragraphs. For the central fact in the European situation as it stood in those years was that Germany could be temporarily ignored as a Great Power. By that fact alone, the European system as it existed in those 14 years stood condemned as being entirely artificial. For in any real and lasting balance of power in Europe, Germany must be a very important factor indeed, and, if for no other reason than her size and her strategic position astride the centre of the continent, no arrangement which leaves her out of account can be expected to be permanent.

Unfortunately, it is a besetting English habit to judge other countries by the outward appearance of their form of government, and, the Germany of 1918 having thrown over the Kaiser as a scape-goat, millions of Anglo-Saxons were quick to conclude that because Germany was now labelled republican, parliamentary and democratic, there really had occurred some change in the German mind, and that a Germany so labelled must necessarily be conciliatory and pacific. On the morrow of the war, there were few people in the English-speaking world who did not assume either that, because Germany had been weakened, she would remain permanently submissive, or that, because Germany was now to outward appearance a parliamentary republic, she would remain permanently peaceful. In either case, it was taken for granted that the most formidable Power in Europe now shared our ideals. This was our fundamental mistake, and from it every other error of judgment and policy has proceeded.

It will probably be agreed that the first condition of a successful foreign policy is that it shall decide what its main aim will be, and shall subordinate all other considerations to that aim. Once it was pretended, however, that the central problem of Germany was not there, policy could become a game of make-believe in which the most incompatible aims could be pursued at one and the same time. For each of the three broad policies which our public opinion was encouraged to accept in the years

1918-38—a peace treaty based upon the idea of self determination, subsequent disarmament, and reliance upon Collective Security as organized under the League of Nations—had much to be said for it in itself. The trouble was that those policies were incompatible one with another, and that our people were never told clearly and bluntly what each of them involved.

In the first place, a peace treaty based on self-determination was incompatible with Allied disarmament. What did such a treaty mean? It meant the destruction of the German-Magyar ascendancy in Central and Eastern Europe, and the setting up, on the ruins of that ascendancy, of a resurrected Poland a new Czecho-Slovakia and Yugo-Slavia, and an enlarged Rumania. It meant, in other words, a peace so distasteful to Germany that she was certain to attack it as soon as she should have recovered herself. In order to defeat Germany, and so make the drawing of these new frontiers possible, it had been necessary to create what was virtually a world coalition, and it should have been obvious that to uphold those frontiers, when Germany should have recovered, would require something like the same overwhelming combination as alone had sufficed to set them up. The continental opponents of Germany could never, by their own efforts, have imposed the Versailles frontiers on Germany. The setting up of those frontiers was made possible only because the two great non-European powers, the British Commonwealth and the United States, threw their weight into the anti-German scale; and to imagine that those two Powers could intervene on the continent to defeat Germany, set up frontiers in Germany's despite, and then withdraw into disarmament and isolation and expect Germany to respect those frontiers, when she had regained her strength, was always the plainest folly.

In the same way, the policy of joining a League of Nations pledged to provide Collective Security was intelligible in itself, but it, again, was incompatible with American isolationism and British disarmament. It should always have been obvious that if the League's purposes should be challenged by a Great Power—and they were almost certain to be challenged by a recovered Germany—those purposes would prevail only if they were backed by superior force. In other words, membership of a League pledged to resist aggression implied, not disarmament, but the retention by the League Powers of a superiority in arms.

In the same way, only the fact that they were blind to the danger from Germany could explain why our League of Nations supporters found it possible to preach crusades which were certain to drive other Powers into Germany's arms. We have suggested that the paramount problem of our generation is the problem created by the unrivalled power and appetite of Germany. To solve that problem, as the history of Europe since 1870 has shown, will require all the sagacity and all the tenacity of which we are capable, and it was towards the solution of that problem that our diplomacy should have been directed after 1918. The League and its activities, on the other hand, represented a perpetual distraction from that problem, since our obligations under the Covenant repeatedly compelled us to take our eyes off Berlin and to turn them elsewhere.

There is no need to question the sincerity or the good intentions of those of our fellows who supported the League, but the plain fact remains that the policies which they have advocated since 1918 have played straight into Germany's hands. Thus, when some of us pleaded, in 1935, that we should think twice before we outlawed Italy, it was not because we were indifferent to Italy's offence, but because it was only too apparent that the major threat to the peace of Europe came not from the dictatorship that sits at Rome, but from that which sits at Berlin, and that the chief result of becoming involved in a quarrel with Italy in the name of the League would be to push Italy into Hitler's arms, and to strengthen not the League but Germany. For twenty years, some of us have pleaded that, sooner rather than later, every other issue in international affairs would have to be subordinated to the question of deciding what should be done with Germany when she should recover. The activities of the League, it is fair to say, represented one unfortunate red herring after another drawn across the trail of that crucial question.

We come back, then, to the point from which we started. All the contradictions of the last twenty years; the assumption that the U. S. and the Commonwealth could defeat Germany, erect frontiers in Europe upon that defeat, and then disarm and expect Germany to respect those frontiers; the assumption that we could join a League to provide Collective Defence against aggression everywhere, and simultaneously throw away the arms with which aggression must be met; the assumption that we could check German aggression, yet simultaneously pursue League policies against Italy and Japan which would drive

them to abet Germany; all these contradictions sprang from the extraordinary blindness of our population as to the strength and intentions of Germany. We could never have indulged in one of those contradictions but for the assumption which was everywhere made, that the most formidable Power in Europe would henceforth acquiesce in our pacific and liberal aims.

Now for anyone who has reflected upon this paramount importance of Germany and upon the errors which we have made in the last twenty years in dealing with Germany, it is impossible to read the current discussion of our war aims without the gravest disquiet. It is impossible not to feel that we are preparing to repeat, with almost literal faithfulness, every major blunder of 1918-39.

We are preparing, firstly, to repeat the closely connected mistakes about the peace and about disarmament. We are going, we are told, to restore a Poland, a Czechoslovakia and even, possibly, a separate Austria. That is to say, we are going once more to set up frontiers in which it is highly unlikely that Germany—to say nothing of Russia—will ever, in our time, willingly acquiesce. We are going to make a peace settlement in Eastern and Central Europe which will run directly counter to the cherished intentions of the two Great Powers in that area. So be it. We understand, then, do we, that if we do this thing—if for the second time we set up these frontiers—we shall have to stand guard over them? We understand, do we, that having set up a states-system on the Danube and the Vistula in despite of Russia and Germany, we may have to maintain it in despite of Russia and Germany? Unfortunately, we understand nothing of the sort. For the same people who are assuring us that we must restore Poland and Czechoslovakia are also assuring us that the great consequence of our victory is once more to be disarmament. In other words, we are to run the gamut of 1919-39 again. Once more we are to get Germany down; once more, in the name of self-determination, we are to re-draw the frontiers of Central Europe on the basis of Germany's defeat; and once more, in the name of post-war idealism, we are to plunge into disarmament and leave the way clear for Germany to undo our work so soon as she shall feel strong enough to do so.

It is true, of course, that our advocates of disarmament assume that Germany (and Russia?) will also be disarmed. How do you disarm Germany? How do you keep Germany disarmed? How do you keep any Great Power disarmed for any considerable period of time? Not only do we lack the means to do it;

one suspects that we shall lack the will to do it. We were supposed to disarm Germany after 1918. Not only did we not disarm her; so long as her government was labelled "republican", we entered into a conspiracy of silence to pretend that she was disarmed when both we and the French knew well that she was not.

Moreover, we are not only preparing once more to ignore the close connection between the kind of peace which we shall make and the degree to which disarmament will be a possibility after we have made it; we are also preparing to ignore the fact that our diplomacy cannot solve more than one great problem at one time. We are preparing, that is to say, to repeat the mistake about the League. We have said that it will require all the sagacity of which Europe is capable if we are to solve the German problem in our time. A considerable section of our intelligentsia, however, are not addressing themselves to the solution of the German problem. They have no time to devote to anything so limited. They are assuming that once Hitler and some half-dozen of his associates are removed, the German problem will solve itself, and they are passing on once more to the problems of the world at large. At the moment, they are busy with the construction of federal unions, a federal union of the world, or of Europe, or of the democracies, according to their individual tastes in amalgamation; and the one thing common to all their discussions of federal union is the tacit agreement to say nothing about Germany. Is Germany to be in their federation? On what grounds is it assumed that she will share the federal ideals? Or is she to be outside that federation? If so, how do they propose to deal with her probable hostility?

The truth would seem to be that, if we are preparing to repeat the mistakes about the peace, about disarmament and about the League, it is precisely because we are preparing also to repeat the crucial mistake about Germany. All the plans for restoring Poland and Czechoslovakia, all the hopes for universal disarmament, all the schemes for world peace and federal union are based—as the similar hopes of 1919 were based—upon one of two assumptions: the assumption either that, when this war is over, there will appear a Germany which will share our liberal ideals, or, that if Germany remains unregenerate, it will be possible to ignore her.

On what grounds can we assume that the end of the war will see the emergence of a Germany liberal and pacific? Those

who believe that such a Germany will emerge assume that there are, in Germany, forces of liberalism which would be willing to join hands with us if only they were not being held down by a wicked government. Whether there are such forces in Germany is not a matter upon which it would be wise to dogmatize; but what is certain is that, if there are such forces, they have never, in modern times, been politically effective. Since 1866, the German people have acclaimed and followed one militaristic leader after another, have gloried in military victory and have only temporarily abandoned their militarism when it has led them to defeat. Modern Germany has been liberal only when she has been badly frightened, and she has shed her liberalism as soon as she has recovered her nerve.

It would be more than rash, therefore, to assume that, after the war, we shall be dealing with a Germany which will share our international ideals. Is there any more reason to assume that if Germany does not share those ideals, we shall be able to proceed with our own pursuit of them as though Germany could be ignored? Even should we win this war, there will still be, after the war as before it, some seventy-five millions of this able and ambitious race in the centre of Europe. Can anyone pretend that what they do, and what is done about them, is not the single over-riding problem of our time?

What can be done about them? We have already seen what the "progressive" elements of our intelligentsia propose to do. They assume that we are not fighting Germany, but only Hitler; they propose, therefore, once Hitler is gone, another peace by self-determination, another disarmament, another experiment in internationalism under the name of federation. What do these things mean in practice? They mean that Germany can fight on, stubbornly and ruthlessly—as she fought from 1914 to 1918—until she is beaten; and that when she is beaten, she can escape the consequences of defeat by getting rid of Hitler and putting forward some puppet government of ineffective liberals to do the unpopular business of surrendering to the Allies and making peace. They mean that once they have been thus reassured by the apparition of a German government labelled "social-democratic", the Allies will disarm and will devote their energies, not to seeing to it that Germany keeps the terms of peace, but to building a world federation. They mean that when Germany finds that she has thus nothing to fear either from our arms or from our diplomacy, she will be free once more to throw off the mask, to reject her liberals and

to follow whatever military mascot is ready to persuade her again that the Prussian way is best. We might just as well say now to Germany:—"It is of no consequence whether you win or lose the war, since we are already arranging that, for the second time, you shall win the peace."

If this is what the war aims of our "progressives" mean, what is the alternative? The alternative is to realize that the enemy is not Hitler but the armed power of Germany, and that the choice in Europe to-day is not between German domination and the beatitudes of world federation, but between German domination and Anglo-French predominance.

What does the bridling of Germany's military power involve? It involves, firstly, the retention by Britain and France of full equality with Germany in arms. Secondly and even more important, it means that for a very long time after the war is over, our diplomacy will have to subordinate every other issue to this crucial one of our relations with Germany. For national strength is not merely a matter of armaments. No single state in Europe can cope with Germany in that respect, and the checking of German aggression is as much a matter of retaining allies as of retaining arms. There will have to be no crusades against other minor offenders against international morality; no Manchurias and Abyssinias to divide the anti-German forces and drive potential friends into Germany's arms.

It will probably be protested at this point:—"Is the rest of Europe, then, to have to defend itself recurrently against German aggression?" Apparently, unfortunately, yes. In the twentieth century of Christian civilization, we cannot destroy Germany as Rome destroyed Carthage, and short of destroying her, our victory, however complete, must be shorn of finality. It is Germany which is attacking and we who are on the defensive, and it is Germany, therefore, who will decide whether, and when, there shall be war or peace. We may succeed in defeating the Pan-Germans now as we defeated them twenty-five years ago; but, if they persist in their plans and in their ill-will towards us, we cannot escape a recurrent conflict with them whenever they shall feel strong enough to force it on us again.

To many in this country this will seem like a hard saying, for our population is still being lulled with illusions of perpetual peace. They are being told that this is Hitler's war, with the implication that when Hitler is gone, there will be no more war with Germany. They are being asked to support schemes for federal union which propose to secure that there will be no

more war with anybody. They are being encouraged to believe that once this war is over, we shall be able to relax, to disarm and to take our ease.

The signs are already multiplying, in short, that even if we win this war, our victory will not be followed up. If Pan-Germanism is not, in fifteen or twenty years time, to drag Europe into war again, we shall need to give it our unremitting attention. Yet many of our "progressives" are preparing once more to attend to everything but Germany. They design another peace by self-determination, which means a peace to fill Central Europe with states so small as to be a standing invitation to German aggression. They intend another disarmament, which means positively tempting Germany to aggression. Instead of realizing that, in this imperfect world, we can grapple with only one problem at one time; instead of a sanguine, pragmatic and opportunist policy concentrating upon the problem of Germany, they are again fixing their eyes upon the remote horizon of schemes for federation which leave Germany out of account.

Official optimism notwithstanding, therefore, it is useless to disguise the fact that our French friends as a whole, and many Englishmen with them, are already gravely disturbed by these widespread signs of a desire to escape from reality. We have seen that the great mistake made by the English-speaking world since 1918 was to have imagined that the ideals which triumphed in that year would henceforth prevail of their own sweetness and light. In actual fact, the victory of liberalism over militarism in 1918 had been won only by a colossal effort on the part of the victors, and when the liberal ideals had been embodied in the peace treaty and the League of Nations, it should have been clear that those ideals could be sustained only if they were provided with persistent and continuous backing. As it was, the combination which alone had sufficed to defeat militarism broke up on the morrow of victory. The United States withdrew into isolation, and steadily declined to accept any responsibility for the support of the League or of the frontiers which it had helped to impose on Europe; and the British Commonwealth proceeded to talk pacifism and practise disarmament.

It is obvious, already, that on the morrow of this war there will be a strong tendency to repeat that experience; a strong tendency—born of a natural revulsion against war—to withdraw from Europe, to disarm, and to delude ourselves into believing that our late enemy will now share our ideals, and that those ideals can, therefore, be left to look after themselves.

Unless that tendency is thoroughly understood and resisted, it will mean, that for the second time we shall have mocked the sacrifice of our fighting men and, for the second time, shall have lost the peace. It is useless for us to beat Germany, disarm Germany, exact guarantees from Germany and set up frontiers in spite of Germany, unless we, and those who come after us, are prepared to maintain what we have done. It is useless to use arms and diplomacy to beat off this second German attack, unless we realize that both arms and diplomacy will be needed to forestall a third.

These lessons apply equally to the Commonwealth and to the United States. For the past three hundred years Britain has intervened on the continent only intermittently. About once in a hundred years, she has joined a European coalition to resist the ambition of some overweening Power, and has then withdrawn. Under modern conditions, as we have seen since 1918, such a policy makes the worst of both worlds. It involves us in the sacrifices of a great war, and it prevents us from reaping the fruits of our sacrifice. Similarly with the United States. Many Englishmen and Canadians are apparently looking—wistfully or with exasperation, according to their temperament—towards the United States for help; but there are many thoughtful people in England who feel that it were probably better for Europe that the U. S. should not intervene at all than she should intervene spasmodically. In 1917 she intervened, and so made the Allied victory artificially and temporarily overwhelming. Then she withdrew, and disclaimed all responsibility for upholding her handiwork. Both she and the Commonwealth owe it to Europe not to repeat that deception. Better a stalemate on the continent than a victory made possible only by an American intervention which will not be followed up. Better no Poland and no Czechoslovakia than a Poland and a Czechoslovakia made possible only by American intervention and then abandoned by America to destruction in ten or fifteen years time. Better frontiers which, whatever their demerits, at least correspond to the realities of power in Europe, than another set of frontiers and another League, made possible by Commonwealth and American arms, and then left by the Commonwealth and America to their fate. Both Commonwealth and United States owe it to Europe to intervene there consistently, or not at all.

Unpleasant as the prospect may be, then, we have to face the fact that, if the fruits of our sacrifice are ever to be gathered,

our efforts in diplomacy and arms cannot cease with the coming of peace. If they do so cease, peace will not be peace at all, but only a breathing-space before the Third Anglo-German war.

Another peace which will leave Germany brooding on revenge? Another disarmament, even in face of Germany's brooding? Another assumption that because Germany has been beaten, she will be in love with our ideals? Another pretence that we can build a peaceful international order without Germany and in spite of Germany? Must we make the same mistakes again?