

(October 24th, 1938)

"Britain's Bid for Peace"

By MR. FLOYD S. CHALMERS.

Editor, The Financial Post

I ask you to turn your minds back to one month ago today, to Saturday, September 24. That was the day, you will remember, when Prime Minister Chamberlain returned from Godesberg—empty-handed. He had gone there to cross the t's and dot the i's of a settlement that all the parties had agreed upon, a settlement that had been accepted even by the unhappy and reluctant Czechs. It was a hard, cruel settlement but one that was essentially just and one that was very necessary. Mr. Chamberlain returned from Godesberg disappointed. Herr Hitler had increased his price.

At that moment the democratic world found itself facing what it had so long dreaded—a clash with the dictatorships of Central Europe; a clash not merely with a nation but with a rival ideology. It must have seemed to Mr. Chamberlain that all his resourceful, patient and untiring work during seven months of negotiations to save the peace of Europe had gone for naught.

Hitler's Mood of Ecstasy.—We can read between the lines of what Chamberlain said on his return and we have other sources of information to tell us what happened. When he went to Godesberg Mr. Chamberlain found Der Fuehrer impatient and irritable; inflamed with a passionate hatred for Dr. Benes whom he regarded as the agent of Bolshevism. To understand the mind of Hitler let us consider the months through which he had been living, the last 7 or 8 months before September. Consider the feverish mobilization that had been going on of all the resources of the nation. Recall the succession of bloodless victories

gained by the National Socialist regime. Recall the triumphal processions such as the remarkable demonstrations that I was privileged to witness at Nuremberg. Hitler had all but achieved the Grosser Deutschland of his dreams. All he had to do to achieve it was to bring these 3,200,000 Sudeten Germans into the Reich plus a handful of Germans on other borders. He had been for months the object of the almost religious adulation of his great tribal state. Could any man think rationally and clearly in the mood of ecstasy that such a sequence of events must have created in him?

Mr. Chamberlain during that meeting at Godesberg must have been perplexed to know what really were the objectives of Hitler. Was it no longer a question of getting justice for the Sudetens? Did Hitler have in mind complete destruction of the Czechoslovakian state? Was it his intention to remove from the borders a country which he believed to be dominated by the Bolsheviks of Russia? Was it his desire to remake the map of Europe and break those iron bonds of encirclement, resulting from the Versailles peace? Was this the beginning of a drive by Hitler toward the southeast, down the Danube into the Ukraine? A great many of us have opinions as to Hitler's objectives. I am quite certain Chamberlain himself was perplexed to know exactly what was the truth. Undoubtedly different men around Hitler had different objectives. Some of them sought one of these objectives; some of them sought others. What did Hitler himself on that day really desire? I think it is quite possible Der Fuehrer, torn with indecision, did not know what his immediate or more remote objectives were.

I have had some opportunity to read dispatches and correspondence bearing on the situation and that is my opinion; that Hitler at that moment really did not know exactly what he wanted. Here was a man who had given to Germany, to that Leviathan state, a strength such as Germany had never known. He had "planned it that way." His dreams had worked out as they had not worked out in the United States for Roosevelt, when Roosevelt planned another type of state. Hitler's further dreams could be fulfilled only at the cost of a challenge to the whole world.

It was no longer simply a case of making a mass appeal to the loyalty of 70 or 80 million trusting, obedient children.

Chamberlain's Dilemma.—Now, Mr. Chamberlain has not told us the whole story of that interview at Godesberg. I am not suggesting he has concealed anything. But obviously it always remains for history to record the whole story of what happens on occasions such as that. I have good reason to believe that during the interview Mr. Chamberlain decided that Hitler not only held a pistol pointed at the democratic world but that he had practically decided to pull the trigger. That must have been for the Prime Minister of Great Britain the most tragic moment of the whole crisis. For months and months he had worked for the appeasement of Europe by negotiation, by conciliation and by concessions. He had been criticized on all sides. He had been dubbed an amateur diplomat. He had been criticized as the inexperienced receiver and manager of Britain's bankrupt foreign policy. He had been villified as pro-Nazi, as the tool of the mythical "Cliveden set." His policy had been referred to as a policy of "peace at any price" as though peace had no value. Yet defying all precedents and conventions he tried to introduce into Europe the rule of justice and the policy of peaceful change. He sought to introduce into European politics the idea that there should be justice for Germany as much as for the countries who were on the other side in the last war.

Mr. Chamberlain has revealed to us why he first went to see Der Fuehrer at Berchtesgaden. It was because he was afraid Hitler did not know the real feelings of the democratic world. He must further have known that Hitler was surrounded by a group of men, some of a rather sinister type and some of a reckless type, who were shielding him from any knowledge of what the outside world really believed and was ready to do.

Mr. Chamberlain, at Berchtesgaden, had achieved, at great cost, what he believed to be a peaceful settlement of the issues. Then when he returned to Godesberg he was flouted by Hitler, by the leader of the only nation of the world really ready for war.

Sunny Day and "Blackout" Night.—I recall that Saturday morning. I was in Geneva. It was a peaceful sunny

day. I had gone to bed the night before thinking that the war was on. I had as my authority for that belief the Soviet Commissar of Foreign Affairs of Russia who told me the war had already started. (I shall never believe a Communist again.) I went over to the League Palace and dropped in on two or three committee sessions. One was discussing what decrease there should be in the acreage planted to opium. Another was discussing rural life and rehabilitation in Central Europe; a third the settlement of stateless persons released from prisons. Such subjects were being discussed at the League while Europe was on the verge of war. I do not say that in a cynical way. It is tragic. The earnest statesmen of the democratic nations were striving to keep the League alive in the hope that some day it might be reconstituted as the guardian of the peace of the world. But in the shop windows opaque materials were being sold for the "blackout" that had been called for the next Tuesday night. The dread certainty of war was the only topic of discussion in the sanctuary of peace.

Things looked dark that day. But at that time something was happening in this world, something that had not happened since the dictatorships came to power, since they rose to their present position of might. The democracies began to realize, just as Chamberlain himself had realized for the first time, that this Sudeten issue was no mere localized issue but that the democracies faced the supreme test of survival. There were hundreds of voices to express that view. There was the voice of President Roosevelt, whose messages, particularly his second, were magnificent. There was the voice of Eamon De Valera himself whose telegram praying for the success of Chamberlain's efforts was one of the inspiring episodes of the whole crisis. There were messages from the Dominions—including expressions of public opinion in Canada. Hitler had been told very definitely that the Dominions would not be with Great Britain in the crisis.

We have seen the magnificent manner in which the British people went about preparations for what they feared might be the worst.

Democracy Shows Its Spirit.—We had seen nothing like that in the world since the dictatorships arose to power.

The democracies had drifted through years of indecision. Their very faith in freedom had led them into disunity and internal social conflict. Their policies had been wavering and uncertain, just as uncertain as the policies of the dictatorships had been purposeful and decisive. It seemed as though the democracies were bereft of any strength and ready to pay any price to avoid war. Well, we learned one month ago that the democracies were ready to pay the price of war if necessary to achieve security for the freedom that they believed in. The democratic peoples of the world decided that the era of blackmail must end, even if it meant war. They called a halt to brute aggression—and they won.

That was a determining point in history. It was the determining point in this crisis. I think it was the determining point of post-war history. It was the moment when democracy decided to save itself. I think it may turn out to be the point where the world turned on to the road that will lead to peace in Europe.

What Hitler Banked On.—In the recent crisis, when he levelled a loaded pistol at the heart of democracy, Hitler banked on two things.

First, the horror of war in all the democratic states.

Second, the unreadiness of the democracies.

It has been demonstrated that the democracies will fight if necessary to preserve their freedom and their ideals.

No dictator can, in the future, bank upon the unwillingness of the democracies to go to war. They will go to war if the cause is just.

And they will not be again caught napping and unready.

Germany at Peak of Strength.— Let us consider the situation. At that moment Hitler stood on the very pinnacle of his power. The German nation was completely mobilized. All the man-power, the material resources, the very spirit of the nation, had been gathered for this supreme test. The Siegfried line was manned with a half million men. Another 250,000 workers were putting the finishing touches on the fortifications. On the Czech border were another half million men. All classes that could be called up for service were in uniform and their terms had been extended. There were submarines actually covering the Atlantic trade routes. The German air force was poised to

strike. The whole German nation was ready to follow Hitler wherever he ordered them. They were not happy about it but they were prepared to be obedient. Hitler had only to speak the word and the whole world would have been plunged into war.

The democracies were much less ready. In fact they were appallingly unready. Mr. Chamberlain came back from Godesberg and he said, in effect, "Let us get ready but don't ask me to take any part in the preparations. I am going to save my strength and use every precious moment that remains to save the peace—if I can—but get ready."

Democracies Get Ready.—I was privileged to witness the preparations in Paris and London. It was a magnificent demonstration of the real strength and spirit of the British people and of the French. In France I saw reservists rushing to the colors. Pictures were being removed from the Louvre. In the shops you could buy anything at your own price. Streets were darkened. General Gamelin hurried to Paris to confer with the British army chiefs. The city was being evacuated as though it was their desire to reduce the population to 500,000.

London presented a similar spectacle. You have all seen the photographs of London, of the trenches dug in Hyde Park, of the emergency food supplies, of the anti-aircraft guns, of the people rushing to the A.R.P. depots to get gas masks, of women joining the territorial army. England was getting ready. The navy was mobilized. Nothing was forgotten. Here is a little story. One of the big oil companies had 17 boats ready to go to Germany, due to arrive on October 1. Over that week end, the captains were getting news of the crisis. Simultaneously every one of the 17 boats developed "engine trouble." The engineers of the boats were unable to find what was the trouble until after the crisis was over.

A Localized War?—What would have happened in Europe had war broken out, it is very difficult to say. The Germans were quite convinced that the trouble would be localized: that it was simply a question of defeating the Czechs. Undoubtedly they could have defeated the Czechs in a localized war. I talked to one prominent Czech in Geneva who said, "We are going to fight and we are going

to lose. It will cost us 50,000 men but it will cost the Germans 250,000 and there is not a Czech who would not lay down his life to kill five Germans."

There is just a chance that the war might have been localized. If you look at a map and ask yourself how France and Russia and England could have got to the Czech border you will see that there was a possibility that Hitler might have been able to localize this war. He could have tried to present the democratic countries with a "fait accompli" and ask "how about an armistice?" Russia was at all times an uncertain quantity. She fished in troubled waters.

I question, however, if this war could have been localized. Once you unleash the hounds of war you cannot call them back by blowing a horn. Germany would have lost a larger war. Did Hitler realize that? I do not think so. But Mussolini did. And it was the opinion of representative German businessmen with whom I talked that if this war ever got beyond the Czech border it would mean economic and military suicide for their country. Nevertheless it was a test that no wise man in the democratic nations wanted to face at that time and that all honest men hope we shall never have to face.

Hitler vs. Chamberlain.—That was the situation a month ago today. Out of that moment of crisis came a brilliant victory for a great statesman—Neville Chamberlain. It was not merely a personal victory, although the issue of war and peace rested between two men, Hitler and Chamberlain, and in that struggle Chamberlain won. The victory was not a personal victory but a victory for the forces of peace in the democratic nations. It was the democratic nations finally demonstrating their willingness to fight for what they believed in that ended the crisis.

Now we have peace. It may be "peace for our time" but nevertheless it is peace. In my opinion it is a peace that is much greater than an armed truce. It is a peace that may permit the removal of many causes of war. That is why I say that Godesberg was a turning point in post-war history.

The world was 60 minutes from war but war did not come.

For years we have been saying that Europe was a powder box. Someone might some day light a match. Well, Herr Hitler did light the match. But Mr. Chamberlain blew it out.

Balance Sheet of the Crisis.—Now comes the reckoning. I do not say it can be the final reckoning. It is much too soon for us to try finally to balance the books of this crisis. I should like, however, to suggest a few items to set down on the opposite sides of the balance sheet.

In the first place we must all admit that Germany gained greatly in this settlement. It was inevitable that she should. Germany actually got more than Hitler thought possible, or that he had even sought three months before. Germany gained in a strategic sense. The way was opened for economic penetration of the Danube. Germany strengthened her alliances in the east. I have no time to discuss all the implications of this. But I wonder if we should really fear a revival of trade in South Eastern Europe under the economic leadership of Germany, any more than the rest of the world should have feared the revival of trade among the British dominions under the Ottawa agreements. Under German leadership the standard of living can be raised in the south eastern countries of Europe and that will allay social discontent. Anything is a victory for peace that removes the social and economic causes of war. And in weighing Germany's new alliances in the East we should not forget that the Slav and Teuton nations have never been natural allies.

Of course Germany gained something. Everyone wins in peace just as everyone loses in war.

But Look at Our Gains.—I ask you, in weighing Germany's gains, not to overlook the positive gains that the democratic nations themselves have made. There is in all democratic countries (and I find it in Canada), much anxiety and unhappiness about this settlement. There is a certain amount of "bad conscience" in the feeling as though we had let down a little democracy. I do not share that view. Czechoslovakia would have been the Flanders Fields of the war. We have now given the Czechs a chance to work out a peaceful destiny as a neutral state such as Switzerland and Holland.

It is felt in some places that we bowed to the force and the menace of dictatorship. I do not share that view either. It seems to me to bear no relation to the facts. If Germany was ever to achieve by force of arms the domination of Europe she had her chance at that moment. She was not strong enough to go through with it. It was Germany that finally backed down. It was Hitler who released the pressure on the trigger.

Some other things we have gained. We have settled a long standing issue, 900 years old, and settled it without a shot being fired.

We have had revealed to us nakedly the limits of German strength. The policy of Germany is *Wehrwirtschaft*—a policy of total, permanent mobilization of all the resources of the nation, in man power, material strength, and spiritual unity. Germany was ready to strike. Germany is always ready to strike. Germany could step in and win a "smash-and-grab" war. But Germany has little reserve strength. Any nation mobilized as she is at present mobilized cannot have any reserve strength. Despite the boasts of Goering, Germany was unable to sustain a long war.

Frail Rome-Berlin Axis.—The third gain is that we have learned how frail is the Rome-Berlin axis. Mussolini was during the crisis the most panicky man in Europe. He faced certain social revolution. He faced certain defeat in the Mediterranean. He was only too ready to listen to the wise counsels of the King of Italy and the Vatican. He was as delighted as a school boy that Wednesday morning when Lord Perth called Count Ciano on the telephone and said that Chamberlain wanted him to telephone Hitler to call a conference and save the peace. Mussolini had been telling the British for the past two weeks that while he was making a great many speeches—8 in 7 days—he did not want war. He had had to make these speeches because Hitler was his friend and ally. It is indeed something for us to know just how artificial, how weak a thing that Berlin-Rome axis is.

We have learned another thing: that the German people themselves share our own hatred and fear of war. They are willing to follow their leaders and it is most unfortunate that those leaders are men whose policies seem to be in-

evitably leading that nation to war. But look at this: for five years the German people have been subjected to ceaseless propaganda, by wireless, in the films, in public speeches and in the newspapers to the effect that war is a magnificent thing, that it ennobles a people and dignifies a nation. For five years now the German people have worshipped at the shrine of blood. Well, they smelled blood and they did not like it.

Wedge is Driven.—At Nuremberg I heard Hitler make speeches in which Bolshevism and the Democracies were linked together. He jeered at the freedom-loving peoples. He spoke of the decadent democracies. But at Munich, when the settlement was achieved, the heartiest cheers were reserved for the head of one of those "decadent democracies."

These cheers were genuine and heartfelt. Just as the people of the democratic countries hailed the Prime Minister as the man who had saved the peace, the German people too hailed him as their deliverer from the horror of war.

I heard Dr. Dietrich, Reich press chief, telling how public opinion was created in Germany. What he said, in effect, was this: "We tell you what to believe and that is what the nation thinks." For a few days after Munich the German people had the opportunity to voice an opinion of their own and one of the ways open to them was to burst into cheers for Chamberlain.

One of the most significant things that has come out of the crisis is the fact that the seeds of suspicion of the Nazi leadership have been sown in Germany. The soil is not unfertile. I heard a great deal of criticism of what was going on. In a secret ballot Hitler himself would get 90% of the votes but in a party vote the National Socialist Party would not get materially more votes than it got in 1932 when it polled between 46 and 49 per cent.

The point of a wedge has been driven between the leaders and the people of Germany.

As a result of this crisis, the German people have gained an uneasy suspicion that their leaders may be carrying them forward to a suicidal war. This must in time lead to some moderation of Hitler's programme. His assurances that he had no further territorial ambitions in Europe may be in

part based upon a recognition of the fact that there are limits to the privations the German people will suffer to achieve the domination of Europe that is part of his semi-mystic programme.

Germans Not Happy.—The crisis revealed that the German people are not in complete unity with the National Socialist party. In my many conversations with people of all walks of life in Germany I found scores of them willing and anxious to unburden themselves about the increasing restraints upon their liberty and the continual decline in their standard of living. They still have the greatest respect for Hitler personally as the man who has united the nation, promoted full employment among the people and given the nation a soul. But the respect of the people for the party itself is not so keen. The party is increasingly the target of quiet criticism, never of course openly expressed.

It has been demonstrated that the forces of order—the moral armaments of the world—are indeed strong and a powerful force for peace. Today the democratic peoples of the world have a leader, a new Pitt in the person of Chamberlain. In the words of General Smuts, "Great Britain has once more assumed the moral leadership of Europe."

Mr. Chamberlain's Advantages.—As the spiritual field-marshal of the new army of moral forces, now arrayed on the side of peace in Europe, Mr. Chamberlain has many advantages.

He is patient, untiring, generous and realistic. He has a sense of human values, which is so rare in diplomacy.

Not the least important of his advantages is the fact that he is as willing to be just and honest with a potential enemy as he is to battle that enemy to the last ditch if need arises.

And equally important is the very genuine admiration of Herr Hitler for Mr. Chamberlain. This is perhaps a fragment of the deeply-rooted respect that the German people have for England.

In England too there is a warm feeling of kinship with the German people, a feeling that has not been killed even by the hatred of all freedom-loving people for the brutalities and excesses of Nazi dictatorship.

Unfortunately in foreign affairs the people of one country cannot deal directly with the people of another. They must carry on negotiations through their leaders. We have seen how difficult it is to get a message through to the people of Germany. But we have begun to do it.

The Nazi regime is still firmly entrenched in Germany. Barring an accident to Hitler himself there is no reason to expect any early change in leadership and control in that country.

Nevertheless the events of these last few weeks have had their effect in Germany.

Our Greatest Gain: Time.—Finally if all these gains prove illusory we have gained time. And time is important for two reasons. It gives us time to repair the gaps in the defences of the democratic states. The British people have learned where those gaps are. The British people have learned too that London will be the front line trench of the next war, and that they must be prepared to fight on two fronts, the home front as well as the battlefield. The totalitarian war of the future is one that will be fought by the whole nation. Preparation involves the whole nation. Every individual man and woman must make a contribution. The British people have learned that. A disciplined spirit was shown by the British people during the crisis. England is determined to harness that spirit for her greater strength. She is seeking to achieve by organization and volunteer effort what Germany has been able to achieve only by regimentation and compulsion. Some scheme of National Defence and possibly a higher level of taxation are certain to come out of this crisis in Britain. Britain is willing to pay such a price. She realizes that she has to work and fight harder and has to endure greater sacrifices if she is to hold her place in the world. In the last 250 years there has been conscription in Britain for only four years. In Europe conscription is something that goes on year after year in war and peace. Of course England has never had even in war any form of compulsory national service other than military service. Great Britain has made up her mind that she is willing to pay the price for freedom. She is now determined to achieve a greater organization

of the state than it has ever before seen in times of peace. Everyone will be given a job to do and taught how to do it. There is a willingness on the part of all the people to find a way to serve the state. England hopes to accomplish by voluntary work, by patriotism and national spirit, the discipline and organization that have been achieved in Germany, Russia and Italy only by compulsion and force.

England will not again be caught napping. She is determined now to prove she is no decadent democracy; determined to be strong enough not merely to fight a war but to remove the causes of war.

Now for Peaceful Change.—And time is of value because it permits of peaceful change and the settlement of outstanding disputes, particularly economic issues. I would not say that settlement of the problems of Europe is going to be easy. But we have come through the greatest crisis of this post-war period and we have come through it without war. We have learned what infinite patience and the will-to-peace will do when accompanied by a desire to achieve essential justice. We have learned a new technique for settlement of disputes.

It is of importance that Hitler has a great personal admiration for Chamberlain. I hope we can follow up the advantages of this very genuine regard that Hitler has for Chamberlain and that the German people have for the English people. I hope that we can follow it up by achieving peaceful settlement of outstanding issues between the two nations.

We cannot be certain of enduring peace in Europe so long as the National Socialist dictatorship exists in Germany. It would be better for the democratic world if there were no Herr Hitler. But that does not give the democratic nations the right to change the government of Germany, which is what is implied in the oft-repeated declaration that we ought to finish off the dictators once and for all.

Responsibility for Hitlerism.—We should consider the degree of our own responsibility for the Nazi dictatorship. Why did the German people jettison the infant Weimar Republic and throw such a great, generous, farseeing statesman as Dr. Heinrich Bruening to the wolves? They did

it in a period of disillusionment and despondency, which was in no small measure engendered by the post-war policy of the democratic countries to rub the raw sores of German defeat and keep that nation down.

Herr Hitler is the herald and shield of a nation in revolt against what it regarded as an unfair deal.

Hitlerism rests upon a foundation of discontent. The way to destroy Hitlerism is to contribute to the removal of the causes that brought Hitlerism into being. When a regime thrives on grievances and those grievances—where they are just—are one by one removed, the regime either has to modify its programme or it is itself in peril.

There are too many people who want to finish off the dictatorships now. I do not share the view that we ought to go to war and clean up the dictators now to avoid another war later. What sane person is willing to start a war that must create a thousand causes for future wars?

Is Hitler to be Trusted?—Some people say you cannot trust Hitler. Let us be realistic. It might have been better for us if, five years ago, we had explored the limits of his sincerity when he offered to accept an army limitation of 300,000 men, a pact forbidding the use of gas in war, an air-force one third the size of that of France. We flouted Hitler just as we flouted Dr. Bruening. Today there are many who would be happy if we had only Dr. Bruening to deal with in Germany. The policy of Mr. Chamberlain is to take Herr Hitler at his word and hold him to his word, exploring with him every inch of common ground between the totalitarian states and the democracies. This is a most realistic policy and the only one that can lead us through to ultimate peace. If Mr. Chamberlain a month ago had shared the view that war was inevitable we would have been at war now. Our Canadian troops would already have been on the Atlantic ocean.

One of the most dangerous forces in the democracies is the widespread feeling that you cannot avoid a war, that you might as well make up your mind to fight. Any war that is postponed is a war that may never be fought. In my opinion we may be able to avoid war. I am convinced we are nearer to peace than six months ago.

Let us not forget the gains we have achieved out of this anguishing post-war crisis. Let us not forget the significance of the marshalling of public opinion in the freedom-loving world. It was these forces of public opinion that enabled Britain's Prime Minister to pluck peace out of the clouds of war. Let us not forget the significance of the fact that the turning point came that moment just one month ago when Hitler drove the spurs in too deeply and the whole of the civilized world arose and cried, "You must not do this terrible thing."

The world has gained much from this crisis. I think we shall be able to look back upon it as a milestone on the road to peace.