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British Policy in Europe

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In some ways this is a very unsuitable occasion for the subject of my address because we are in a very critical period when our thoughts are more concerned with what may happen within the next few hours than with a calm, historical analysis of the policy and events which have led up to the present position. When an earthquake is possible at any moment men cannot be expected to take much interest in a scientific treatise on the geological conditions that have created the possibility. At the time when I received an invitation to address this great club, there was much controversy in the air about British policy, and—as I believed—much misunderstanding, so that I looked upon this invitation as giving me an opportunity to say a few things which might help towards a better understanding. Now, therefore that I am here and you have done me the honor of coming to listen to me, I feel that the best thing which I can do is to adhere fairly closely to my original intention, and I think that perhaps even when we are close to the crisis of the last few days, although a good deal has happened since then to clarify the purpose of Mr. C's policy, there is some advantage in making an attempt to stand back and view our position as a whole, in order to see the various parts in their proper significance and proportion.

I want, therefore, to start by reviewing briefly those things which illustrate the purpose and character of England since 1918.

Speaking broadly, we settled down after war with profound determination never to have another, and concentrating our thoughts on dealing with our social problems—with the task of rebuilding a decent existence in peace for its citizens.

You are just as familiar as we are with the difficulties of this task. On the economic side there have been two main aspects of the problem: first, the special difficulties arising from the dislocations caused by the war; and, secondly, the difficulty—which is the essential inherent difficulty in all countries today—of securing a distribution of purchasing power sufficient to balance the immense increase in productive power which modern technical developments have created.

I need not dwell on these at length, and will only remind you that *we* had to deal with dislocations, which if any prophet had foretold them before the war, would have been regarded as involving ruin for our whole economy. Yet we adjusted ourselves to these difficulties. Our industries developed new outlets and in 1937 we had attained an era of prosperity and a general standard of living which, measured by all the known tests—public health, real wages, standards of consumption, savings of the poorest classes, house building and housing standards,—was higher than the country had ever known. We had, it is true, a heavy burden of unemployment, specially marked in certain distressed areas, but the system of unemployment relief had prevented anything like destitution, and even in the most distressed areas public health records were not unsatisfactory. During this period a great amount of social legislation was undertaken, and we advanced steadily in the broadening of democracy. So far as the relations between labor and capital were concerned, there had not been a serious strike since 1926, and while there are of course discontented elements, and many evils which still require remedy, it is fair to say that we were solving our own social problems in our traditional way of quiet evolution and compromise, and moving at least more rapidly than at any other era since the Industrial Revolution towards a fairer distribution of the world's good things and a broader basis of democracy.

This period was one, too, of notable constructive development within the British commonwealth. I need only remind you of such great steps as the Statute of Westminster of 1926 which, as you know, converted Empire into free association, to the settlement of the Irish question, and

lastly to the stupendous constitutional plan in India whereby a nation of three hundred and fifty millions, which in all the ages of its history had lived under despotic government, has been placed in the way to become an equal member of the British commonwealth under a system of representative democracy.

I have reminded you of these main features of British policy since the war because it is these events and developments representing as they do a striving towards an advance in freedom and in civilization which have been our essential preoccupation during that period. We wanted never to hear of war again; we wanted to get on with our social tasks, and with the evolution of democracy at home and within the Empire, while, both because we believe in peace and also because we needed all our resources for our social programme, we had given a lead to the world in disarmament. And now suddenly there is being brought home to the consciousness of our people that, while we have been getting on with these tasks, forces have been marshalled outside which threaten to destroy our way of life and put our own homes in peril. With the deepest disgust the British people have in these last months woken up to the situation, to the possibility, that they may once more have to face the folly and miseries of war, and that at the moment they are only too ill-prepared for it.

How has that come about? Are we to blame for it?

These questions bring me after my attempt to sketch briefly the course of our domestic policy, to the other side of the picture—Foreign Policy. As one of our Ministers remarked in the House of Commons the other day, "Foreign Policy would be all very well if it wasn't for the foreigners". There is a truth underlying that light remark in the sense that, if our foreign policy goes wrong, it is not necessarily entirely our own fault. But wherever the fault lies it is necessary to deal with facts as they are today. Let me try to trace how those facts have come about.

As I have said, we settled down after the war with the profound conviction that we would never have war again, nor any truck with the old methods of diplomacy and alli-

ances which had led to the war of 1914. We looked for safety, firstly, to disarmament which the Peace Treaty had imposed upon Germany and which we intended to impose in a large measure upon ourselves, and secondly to the League of Nations with its covenant of collective security which we interpreted as meaning that all the nations (to include as it was hoped at a later stage Germany) would agree to pounce upon any single nation which attempted to get what it wanted by war. We said to ourselves two things: first, "this collective strength means that we none of us need individually waste great sums in armaments", and secondly, "so far as we do keep ourselves armed we will use our arms only for preserving the rule of law among nations, *never* for the sake of our own aggrandizement". The idea was, and still is, a fine one, but in the League of Nations as an embodiment of this idea there have been fatal flaws. To be effective, the idea of a covenant among the nations to maintain a system of international order must satisfy two conditions, first, the covenant must be universal, and secondly, the system of international order to be maintained must be a system of justice. The League has fallen short of fulfilling either. It has been used as an instrument not so much to maintain the sanctity of treaties as such but rather the sanctity of the particular Treaty of Versailles; and it has never been universal, partly because at no time have all the great Powers belonged to it, and partly because some of those who did at first belong were in their hearts untrue to its principles, in the sense that when they themselves wanted something which they felt strong enough to take by force, they never intended to forego their sovereign power and submit to the ruling of the League. If the League is not universal, if it is merely one group of countries ranged against another group of equal or greater power, then it is not the instrument to enforce a system of law and order the enforcement of which is justified and possible because it is universally accepted, but on the contrary an instrument to impose on one group of nations ideas which another group thinks right; and in that case it becomes, if we face realities, nothing more than an alliance of the old type in a particularly dangerous new disguise. To state this is not to abandon the ideal of the League of Nations, but merely to face the realities of the League as it actually exists today. It is these realities which our Prime Minister has been facing in the last months, and it is because some sections of the British public have not yet fully faced them that we have had a conflict of views at home which has been confusing to everybody and on which I am trying to throw some light on what I have to say to-day.

To appreciate the position more clearly, one must consider the course of events in which the tragic failure of the League ideal has been worked out. That has to be traced in relation to Germany, Italy and Japan.

The German case is, of course, the central dominating problem. The story begins with the Treaty of Versailles. That, as we all now recognize, put impossible financial burdens on Germany and imposed restrictions inconsistent with the self-respect of a great nation. Those on the British side who shared the responsibility for it explain that it was impossible in the state of feeling which then existed to get agreement with the French on any other basis, but that they always contemplated a progressive modification of the terms through the machinery of the League. Certain modifications, particularly as regards financial reparations, were indeed made, but again owing to the fears of the French who wished to keep Germany with drawn teeth, these modifications did not go far or fast enough. We all know what happened. Germany became convinced that she could not get what she wanted unless she made herself strong enough to be respected as a war power, and those that preached this doctrine obtained complete control of the nation. Whether with other treatment things would have gone differently is an issue on which there can never be certainty, but at any rate it is a charge which may be brought against France and England as her partner that by their conduct they helped to create the conditions that have enabled Hitler to rise to power. We all know the terrific national effort which he has organized, concentrated on creating war strength. We all know that with this power behind him Hitler has thrown off all the restrictions of the Peace Treaty and, as his two big coups, reoccupied the demilitarized frontier zone on the west and forcibly joined Austria to Germany. As an attempt to give a logical interpretation

of the reaction of moderate British opinion to these developments, I would describe that roughly in the following way. English opinion never got really excited about the reoccupation of the demilitarized Rhineland zone, because it felt that that was a fundamentally justifiable act for a self-respecting nation. Again, English opinion was not shocked at the *idea* of Austria being united with Germany, because it felt that two nations so closely akin might decide this issue for themselves and that on economic grounds there was strong justification for a union. But English opinion was profoundly shocked at the way in which the annexation was accomplished and at the accounts which it has received of the brutality meted out to the Anti Nazi and Jewish people in Austria and of the arrogant conduct of the young Nazis. This at last produced a general awakening to the real significance of German rearmament and to the menacing situation in Europe. Even those who, as I have indicated, may have felt that, up to this point, a certain justice had underlain Hitler's objectives, have felt since then that the limits of reasonably justifiable aspirations have been almost reached and are asking themselves "What is he going to do next?" He has created a vast impetus behind him as a result of his success. Where is this impetus going to carry him? Can he stop it even if he wishes to stop it? Will he attempt to go on to extend his domination over Eastern Europe and the Balkan countries, giving access to the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, and then when he has thus solved the problem of supplies of food and other materials necessary for a long war, will he want to extend into a world empire and turn on us either with impossible demands or a direct attack?

Where can we look for the answers to these questions—"What does Germany want to do" and "What has she the power to do?" For answering the first, one may study events and speeches from day to day—particularly in the last few days. But current reports and speeches are often misleading and there is a better and surer method available. Hitler has given us his creed and his programme with complete clarity in his book—"Mein Kampf", which is still universally distributed and read in Germany. In his book Hitler has laid down that his primary purpose is to unite all the

elements of the German nation in Europe, and then to gain greater territory for national expansion. The territory required for this purpose, he says, must be in Europe and cannot, "be in some such place as in the Cameroons". It is very important to remember this, because there are some outside critics today who suggest that we might stop Hitler's aggressive plans in Eastern Europe by offering to hand back colonies to Germany. Hitler himself had made it quite clear that this would be useless. In his book he goes on to say that France will be the enemy of German expansion and that therefore France must be annihilated This annihilation he says must be "looked upon solely as a means of gaining finally the possibility of an expansion of our people."

As to war, he says that Pacifism may be quite a good idea—"*after* the highest type of man has conquered the world in such measure as to make him its exclusive master. Therefore first fight, and then *perhaps*—Pacifism".

The idealization of war is being taught in the schools to-day, and in the new textbook for the Hitler youth it is written, "Death on the battlefield should be regarded as a longed-for conclusion of life".

The whole nation is being systematically trained in these ideas, with no chance of reading anything else, and no knowledge of what is happening in other countries except through versions of news edited to suit the teaching and the views of the Dictator.

That indicates what Germany is aiming at today,—and I turn to the next question "What is her power to achieve these aims?" The answer to that is that she has been carrying out a coordinated effort in preparation for war for which there is no parallel in the history of the world. The whole of the economic forces of the country are controlled by the Government and are being directed to war as the primary objective. We can measure the scale of this effort by comparing it with what is being done elsewhere. We in England, for example, have recently set ourselves to the task of rearmament on a scale which many think staggering. Our programme announced last year was for an expenditure of seven and a half billion dollars over five years, and we are told now that this amount is to be exceeded.

But with this one must compare Germany's estimated expenditure of twelve and a half billion dollars from 1933 to 1937. Again, while for 1938 our estimated expenditure is one and three quarter billion dollars, Germany's is about four and half billions,—or taking air force expenditure alone Germany's is put at twelve hundred million to our five hundred.

The German air force is the dominating instrument at present, for most well-informed observers seem to agree that her army, though it is immense in numbers, is not yet really ready for a war with Great Powers, nor for living through a long war of such a kind. Germany's next purpose, if one looks to Hitler's book for an interpretation, must be to extend her influence over Eastern Europe so as to increase her power and supplies of raw materials, and in her hopes of carrying out this policy without interference she has been relying, first on the present internal weakness of France, and, secondly, on her belief that we shall not dare to take the risk of a knockout blow through air raids on London and our main industrial centres. Important sections of the public in England have felt that we must stop Germany's expansion before it goes too far—some on the ground that as members of the League we ought to preserve the independence of the smaller European states, others on the ground that in our own interests we must stop her before she gets too strong. These two grounds have been a good deal confused in the public mind and the confusion had the curious result of bringing both the left wing idealists and the right wing Jingoes together in urging the Government to say clearly to Hitler that if he does certain things, such as interfering with the independence of Czechoslovakia we will fight. But such a provocative challenge might have precipitated an immediate war. Moreover, an unconditional promise of this kind might have encouraged the Czechs to behave unreasonably and would have given them the power to land us in war by their decision. We must always remember that there is a real problem of the German minority in that country for which Germany may fairly ask a reasonable solution.

Mr. Chamberlain kept his head. He takes war too seriously to be swayed by those who believe in a prophylactic

war—a war now to save a possible war in the future. He has refused to give other countries a blank check on the British nation; he has made clear what our definite obligations to France and Belgium are and said that we will use our influence to work for a just, but peaceable solution of the problem of the German minority in Czechoslovakia, but he has made it also clear that unreasonable aggression on Germany's part may force us in. We are fortunate in having a Prime Minister like Mr. Chamberlain who combines strength with the power to keep his head. But the situation is a difficult and dangerous one. We have no desire to interefere in Europe, but France has more definite commitments. If France gets involved, we may be unable to keep out. Behind this all, the one thing to remember is that the greatest danger to peace is that Germany might be led to gamble on our being unwilling to risk a knock-out blow and to do things which we could not tolerate. I want to be clear about this. I do not believe for a moment that she could knock us out by air raids on London, however disastrous they might be. But she might be foolish enough to think so, or to think that we were afraid of it, and thus a general war, involving us all in chaos, might come. If one takes this view, then although we must be at all times ready to respond to reasonable approaches from Germany, we must also recognize that nothing would be worse than to follow a policy of concessions to her which are not based on any moral justification, and which could only be construed as weakness.

Having given this picture of Germany, let me turn to the other factors in the situation which have confronted our present Prime Minister since he assumed office last summer. As regards Italy, he found acute tension supported by a growing feeling among the Italian people that the British were their enemies in every field. The events of the preceding years, which had led up to this position are well-known. Italy had threatened Abyssinia, and Abyssinia had appealed for the protection of the League. The League condemned Italy's action but no agreement could be reached among the members to take extreme measures to stop it. So far as the British Government were concerned, we said throughout that we would respect our obligations under the

League and would take any action to which the other members agreed. In fact, we did much more than any others and suffered much more; for we honestly applied economic sanctions to the extent agreed upon, and thereby lost very valuable trade with Italy—especially in coal—which we badly needed and which we are not likely to recover. But the truth was that the League countries could only have stopped Italy's aggression on Abyssinia if they had been prepared to take steps which would inevitably have forced Italy to go to war. None of the other members of the League was ready to face that, and no British Government could have felt justified in asking England to carry the burden alone. That was the hard reality, and what we had to face thereafter were the results, which were that we had driven Mussolini into the arms of Hitler and that it was against the English people as the leaders of the attempt to restrain Italy that Italian hostility was concentrated.

One may turn from the case of Italy to that of Japan—as to which I need only to point out that here, too, we have another illustration of the failure of the League principle to make itself effective because it lacks universal support. Japan, like Germany and Italy, is outside the League because she has been a country fundamentally dissatisfied with her position in the world, and determined to use the power of arms to improve it. In this case also, the League enthusiasts have urged action which could only have led Britain into war with Japan, and that too would have been a war which we should have been left to wage without support from the other members of the League.

Lastly, there is the case of Spain, where again the idealists would have us intervene in a way which must inevitably have precipitated a European war, and where we have steadfastly refused to take part in the internal dissensions of another country, but used our whole power to keep these dissensions localized, and to save Europe from a general war.

I have mentioned all these cases partly in order to bring out the vast responsibilities which we should have to carry if we took it upon ourselves to act as some urge us to act—like a sort of head policeman for the world, and partly in

order to give a rough idea of the position to which our present Prime Minister, Mr. Chamberlain, succeeded last summer.

Mr. Chamberlain is a realist and one of the most straight thinking men in public life today. He faced up to realities and saw three main things.

In the first place he saw the world gradually getting divided into two camps, ranged in opposition to each other—the League countries on one side—Germany, Italy and Japan, together with such satellites as they could collect, on the other. He saw in this not only the great immediate danger that any small incident might precipitate a general war, but also beyond this he saw that with every month that passed, if nothing were done, the position would become more fixed and unalterable, and that nothing would be more fatal than this to the future of the League itself, and to the hopes of restoring a system of peaceful discussion for solving international differences.

Mr. Chamberlain saw a second thing very clearly—that the extreme League enthusiasts had created excessive expectations of British intervention as a guardian of their interests. He determined to lead no one astray and that Britain's word should not be given for anything which could not be fulfilled in deeds.

Lastly he saw that the lag created by our attempts at disarmament was not being caught up fast enough, and that, merely to make ourselves safe against aggression and strong enough to fulfill our direct responsibilities, a greater effort is necessary by the British nation.

These three points give the key to our present policy. Let us take the first one—the attempt to prevent the division into hostile camps becoming permanent. Mr. Chamberlain determined to make one more effort at frank discussions with Germany and Italy. He made personal approaches to both countries—and it is worth remembering that this was well known at the time and that no voice of criticism was raised against it. Yet when conversations with Italy looked like leading to practical results a storm of criticism arose from certain quarters. I am not going to weary you with details about the Anglo-Italian agreement. I only want to

put certain broad points to you. First, I would ask you to interpret it against the background which I have already given you. Secondly, I would ask you to regard it, not as a bargain made with Mussolini, but rather as an attempt to recreate an atmosphere of friendship between the British and Italian peoples. Mr. Chamberlain has been under no illusions. What he has done is not to be condemned as a failure, if it proves that after all we have not secured an ally ranged firmly on our side against further German aggression. It must be tested rather by the atmosphere that has been created between two peoples, and by the fact, already achieved, that it has prevented the Italian people passing unalterably into the hostile camp.

Turning to my second point, one may say that Mr. Chamberlain has faced up to the illusion under which a great part of the British public has been living as to what the League can do and the value of this so-called "collective security". The plain facts are that the idea of collective security has broken down because so many of the Great Powers are outside the League and because none of the League countries is made to pledge itself unconditionally to fight in a common cause. For us indeed collective security would mean nothing but an obligation to fight for the weak countries of the League whenever their interests are effected, without any compensating benefit of reliable support on their side. No British Government could commit its peoples to the horrors of war for the sake of others' quarrels in this way. Such an obligation would only be justified if we were so strong that merely by saying that we would fight we could achieve our object without war. The hard facts are that we are not strong enough for that. Mr. Chamberlain has done service to the world in making clear what obligations we can undertake. Some of our critics at home accuse him on account of this of having betrayed the League idea. But it is the facts that have done this, and it is essential to remember that there has been no change in British policy in this respect.

There is another line of thought about recent British policy on which it is important to clear up misunderstandings. It seems to be thought that somehow or other it represents a change of attitude towards democracy. To

those who know Mr. Chamberlain there could not be a more astonishing misrepresentation. Any differences which we in England may have had about foreign policy have not in the remotest sense represented a conflict between the upholders of democracy and the supporters of Fascism. Let me quote some of Mr Chamberlain's own words on this point. In one of the debates of the last few weeks he said:

"I have no bias in favor of Nazism, Fascism, or Bolshevism because all of them seem to me to be inconsistent with what is all important to me, because it is the root of my political creed, and that is individual liberty. . . . I believe in liberty of thought, speech and action. Without that there can be no true Democracy. . . . For the preservation of Democracy, which means the preservation of our liberty, I would fight and I believe the people of this country would fight."

Those are surely not the words of one who has lost faith in Democracy. It is indeed important to have clear thinking on the question as to what the leaders of democratic countries should do in defence of their faith. There are some people who seem to hold the view that they should endeavor to impose their faith on other countries or at least that they should live in hostility with Totalitarian states because such States have adopted a non-democratic system. But surely such an attitude would be suicidal to democracy, not merely because it would almost inevitably lead to general war, but also because in itself it involves an absolute contradiction of democratic ideals which are based on a still more fundamental principle—the principle of self-determination. The best service which the British countries can render to Democracy today is to preserve it among themselves. If they attempt more they may well betray the cause.

There is one other statement of Mr. Chamberlain's which I would like to quote to you. In his speech of March 24th, which is the standard text now of British policy, after emphasizing the fundamental aim of British policy as peace, he went on to say that that did not mean that nothing would make us fight. We are bound by certain treaty obligations which we should fulfill, and there are certain vital interests for which if menaced we should fight—the defence of our territory and the communications which are vital to our

national existence. He went on: "There are other cases too in which we might fight, if we were sure that either we must fight or else abandon once and for all the hope of averting the destruction of those things which we hold most dear—our liberty and the right to live our lives according to the standards which our national traditions and our national character have prescribed for us".

These words reveal how we regard our task. What are we going to do about it?

The first thing in which all parties are agreed is that we must make ourselves stronger so that our voice may be heard speaking in the only language which those who threaten our way of life understand—words backed by military strength. We want no weapons of aggression but we must be strong enough to make no one dare attempt a knockout blow at our vital centers through air raids, and strong enough to protect our vital channels of supply.

But we are also anxious to try satisfying any legitimate grievance of the aggressive powers. Is it possible to do anything in this direction? Ought we to make our position clearer?

There is still much talk of the economic causes of war. But we must face realities. To think that any international economic arrangements would alter the course of German policy today is, I fear, a complete illusion. Fundamentally perhaps it may be true to say that Germany has an economic objective in the sense that she desires to secure good conditions for the people. But if she believed in the peaceful methods of international trade, the way is open to her today. It is nonsense to say that any nation willing to trade has not got access to adequate supplies of raw materials. But—and herein lies the essence of the whole matter—if one relies on international trade one places one's country's life in the hands of another country. That is what a country like Germany is not willing to do; and the hard reality behind the present position is this—that the unsatisfied totalitarian state of today—that is to say the state which has before it a program of expansion and aggression—dare not allow itself to become too dependent on foreign trade, for in that case it would also be dependent on the political action of foreign states. What Germany wants to

secure is supplies of raw materials from countries under her own domination and to which her access cannot be interrupted during the time of war. In the meanwhile she is limiting her trade with other countries to a minimum and devoting a great part of her energies to war preparation. This is one of the main things which has restricted international trade, and to this extent it is true to say that war policy is increasing economic difficulties rather than that economic difficulties are operating as causes of war.

But a recognition of these facts does not necessarily mean that we should not continue to strive for economic appeasement. With Germany, the case may be indeed very difficult, but with Italy there may be better chances. What we need to do as regards every country is to increase its vested interest in peace.

Let us attempt this but even if that fails let us remember another still more important aspect of economic policy. The countries that are now thinking in terms of self-sufficiency for war are a minority, and there are still countries, which include the vast majority of the world's population, which believe in peace and are prepared to trust each other in international trade. It is surely of vital importance that these countries should get together so as to demonstrate by results that their's is a better way of life and offers more to their citizens. If the countries of the world which believe in peace and individual liberty are to hold their own against the dictator states—and that means not only "holding their own" in the sense of resisting attack in war—then they must be able to demonstrate to the world that they can produce a better life for their people. That takes me into a field of thought which there is no time to explore today; but I do believe it to be an important field and that here rather than anywhere else lie the real grounds on which one could advocate closer cooperation between the members of the British Commonwealth and the other democratic countries of the world.

Finally, I will say this. Do not take too seriously the reports which you read of differences of opinion in England, but remember that we live under a system of party government and that the opposition is bound to oppose. We are united in the fundamental purpose of working for

the welfare of individuals within our territories, and in the areas for which we are responsible to preserve and broaden among all races the principles of liberty, justice and democracy. We find ourselves now brought into the possibility of conflict with other states whose whole effort is concentrated on an increase of national power. Fervently as we hate the folly of weighing resources on weapons of destruction, we dare not be weak enough to tempt attack. Our great practical problem is to match the coordinated war effort of the Totalitarian States without abandoning the normal methods of peaceful enterprise and the liberty of individuals. The guiding purpose of our policy is to preserve peace, because no man can dare to foretell that the principles of democracy—in which you and we believe—could survive another world war.