

# A Turning Point in History

Arnold J. Toynbee

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germany/1939-01-01/turning-point-  
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Underlinings are by the transcriber. In *An Essay on Metaphysics* (Oxford, 1940), Collingwood quotes the passage underlined below on page 17 in saying, “It was in 1775 that ‘the principle of nationality first asserted itself in the modern world as a dynamic political force’.” I discussed Toynbee’s article and Collingwood’s use of it in a blog article, “What It Takes,” originally published May 26, 2018.

David Pierce  
polytropy.com  
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THAT the public events of September 1938 have been momentous is already a commonplace. They may mark a turning point not only in British history but in world history too. By the same token, our recent experiences have been so overwhelming that it is still very difficult to see them steadily and whole. One who looks at the new international situation from a British standpoint must first ask whether the line taken by Great Britain in 1938 marks a serious departure from the traditional line of British foreign policy.

The policy of Great Britain in the past towards Europe has been, like that of the United States, to confine her intervention in Continental affairs to the minimum compatible with her own national interests as she sees them. The practical application of this fundamentally identical policy is, of course, governed by each country's particular geographical situation. The minimum to which the United States can safely reduce her intervention in Europe cannot be even approximated by an island that is separated from the Continent by the mere breadth of the Channel rather than by the Atlantic. This difference has always compelled British isolationism to stop far short of American isolationism in practice. If British isolation from the Continent has been relatively incomplete in the past, this difference between Great Britain's and America's respective situations is accentuated at the present time, when the Channel is no longer, while the Atlantic still is, an effective barrier against air attack.

In the past, what was the typical Continental situation in which the British Government and people felt themselves constrained to play a part in Continental affairs? The policy of Great Britain towards Louis XIV, Napoleon and William II seems to show that she has generally taken active steps, sooner or later, to join in resisting the domination of Europe by a sin-

gle Power when there has seemed to be a serious probability that this Power would use its Continental predominance in order to threaten the independence of the British Isles and the security of British interests overseas. This qualification of the main statement is important, because there have been cases in which Great Britain has tolerated the Continental predominance of some Power that has manifestly harbored no designs against Great Britain herself. For an example we need look no further than to the British attitude towards the Continental predominance of France between November 1918 and September 1938. Though Great Britain largely disapproved of French policy during this period, and made some perhaps rather feeble efforts to modify it, she never thought, during those years, of attempting to depose France from her postwar position. Another case, which comes nearer home to the present issue, is the attitude of Great Britain towards the advancement of Germany under the leadership of Bismarck. Great Britain took no decisive steps to prevent the rise of Prussia to dominance in Germany in 1864-1871; indeed, British policy in regard to Denmark in 1864 displays a curiously close resemblance to the policy pursued in regard to Czechoslovakia in 1938.

Now that the postwar French domination on the Continent has been brought to an end by the eventual resurgence of Germany, the question arises whether it has been replaced by a German domination; whether this German domination, if established, will prove to be different in character from the French; and finally whether, supposing that it does differ in character from the foregoing French régime, the new German domination will turn out to be of the kind against which Great Britain has always taken a stand in the past.

This is perhaps the fundamental question raised by what Great Britain did—or refrained from doing—in September. In

coming to terms with Hitler at Munich, Great Britain and France went a long way, and maybe the whole way, towards giving him a free hand in Central and Eastern Europe—at least up to the western threshold of the Soviet Union. What can the German Führer make, and what will he wish to make, of this new opportunity? Will he be able now to establish a secure and lasting German predominance over that great tract of Europe that lies between the western frontier of the Soviet Union and the eastern frontier of France? If he does succeed in constructing a *Mittel-Europa* on a basis of German ascendancy, will he be tempted to use this large extension of German power as a means of making that power felt still further afield? And if he did one day use *Mittel-Europa* as a “jumping-off ground,” in which direction would he move, and how far would he aspire to go? Would he march eastwards overland into the Ukraine? Or would he seek to gain a reëntry into that overseas world from which Germany was expelled as a result of the war of 1914–18 and the ensuing peace settlement? In the latter event, would he confine his ambitions within the limits of the colonial possessions of the West European Powers, or would he try to extend his overseas operations to Latin America?

These questions may have been at issue not only in the September crisis; they may also be involved in British (and no doubt also in Russian and American) policy now, on the morrow of the Munich Agreement, and in the future. The difficulty is that the momentous decisions which had, and have, to be taken in the light of these questions could not, and cannot, wait until the questions can be answered with any certainty. At present there are a number of possible alternative answers to each of them; and only the future course of events will reveal which answer hits the mark. This extreme uncertainty still clouds even the immediate question which the Munich Agree-

ment raises—the question, that is, of Germany's prospects in Central and Eastern Europe.

Can Germany now succeed in bringing her neighbors in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe into a relationship with her in which they will minister to her power and serve her ends? In taking up this question at the present early stage, a British observer can do little more than set out the pros and cons.

The following points would seem to tell in Germany's favor.

First, within the circle of those European states whose populations come up to the highest standard of efficiency (as measured by education, technical ability and material equipment), Greater Germany, with now nearly 80 million inhabitants, musters almost double the population of the next most populous European Power, and almost as large a population as Great Britain and France added together.

Secondly, Germany, in combination with her Italian partner in the Berlin-Rome Axis, now insulates France and Great Britain from everything on the Continent that lies east of the eastern frontiers of the Reich and Italy. In wartime the Axis Powers would be able to cut Anglo-French communications with Eastern Europe and Russia, not only overland, but also by sea via the Baltic (certainly) and via the Mediterranean (probably).

Thirdly, in the insulated area between the eastern frontiers of the two Axis Powers and the western frontier of the Soviet Union, there are today a dozen small, young and weak states, extending from Finland to Greece, which will henceforward have a hard struggle if they are to avoid the fate of falling under Germany's ascendancy strategically, politically and economically.

In her relations with these neighbors Germany now has so great a predominance of both military and economic power

that she might be able to place them in a position in which their only chance of either security or prosperity would lie in coöperation with Germany on Germany's terms. As some of these nations have historic quarrels with one another, and as some of these quarrels have been perpetuated and embittered by the Peace Settlement of 1919, Germany might not find it difficult to play off her East European neighbors against one another: Czechoslovakia against Hungary, Hungary against Rumania, the Ukrainians against Poland, and perhaps even Jugoslavia against Italy. The minority situation in Italy and Poland today is not unlike that in Czechoslovakia before September. In each country there is both a German minority and one or more non-German minorities of a nationality which Germany might induce to make common cause with her: *i.e.* the Jugoslavs in Italy and the Ukrainians in Poland. This policy of setting her neighbors against one another could be pursued by Germany by way of support for the principle of national self-determination; and by liberating subject minorities she could weaken her stronger neighbors, while by respecting ethnic unities, as she seems now to be doing in Czechoslovakia, she would avoid driving any of these nationalities to complete despair and irreconcilable opposition to German ascendancy. If it is thus possible, as it seems to be, for Germany to gain most of her ends in Eastern Europe without ceasing to show substantial respect for national unity and autonomy, it would seem that she could in this way avoid arousing serious opposition.

Germany might also be able to find a common cause between herself and some of her East European neighbors in anti-Semitism, which is rife in Poland, Hungary and Rumania as well as in Germany, and which now shows signs of breaking out in Czechoslovakia too. Another common interest to

which she might successfully appeal in addressing herself to the people now in power in the East European countries is their desire for security from subversive movements from below. As the leader of an anti-Comintern front, Germany could present herself as the guarantor of the existing social and political order. In dealing with Italy and Poland, which would be the most restive of her associates, she might appeal to their common desire for colonial expansion. In order to consolidate her influence and control over Eastern Europe, Germany would no doubt make full use of the new technical facilities for propaganda and repression (*e.g.* the press, the cinema, the radio, the control over means of communication and discussion) which she is already using with such effect inside the Reich. In view of the dreadful nature of modern warfare at close range, together with the disparity of strength between Germany and even the strongest of her southern and eastern neighbors, these would be extremely reluctant to push to the point of armed conflict with Germany any resistance, either individual or collective, which they might attempt to make to the establishment of her ascendancy over them.

So much for the points in Germany's favor. But we can also see a number of obstacles to the establishment of German domination over Eastern Europe.

To begin with, Germany's present superiority in numbers is being diminished by the higher rate at which the population is increasing in the countries to the east. Her economic and social preponderance is in a similar way being reduced by the rapidity with which these same countries have, since the war, been developing their social and economic life. It may next be questioned whether Germany would in fact be able to exercise any effective military and economic control over the activities of these countries without seriously inter-

fering in their internal affairs. Again, all the countries in this area are united, notwithstanding their quarrels with one another, in their common dislike and fear of Germany; and the mutual antagonisms between them make it possible that Germany, instead of being able to play off each against the others and remain friends with all, will unavoidably antagonize and drive into the opposite camp some rival country whenever she shows any favors to any particular member of this group (*e.g.*, it would be difficult for Germany to gratify simultaneously both Hungary and Czechoslovakia or both Hungary and Rumania). Moreover, owing to the rapid progress of the East European nations towards political maturity, together with the general accentuation of nationalism throughout the world, the strength of national feeling in Eastern Europe has perhaps already risen to a pitch at which these nations will insist upon enjoying a real independence and will refuse to be content with a mere existence upon sufferance under the shadow of Germany. Magyars, Slavs and Italians have struggled hard against German domination in the past, and the taste of self-government which they have had in recent times is likely to make them more than ever unwilling to acquiesce in foreign domination. The demoniac force of the ideal of nationality has been illustrated by the resurgence of Germany since the war. Presumably the same force would produce proportionate effects in similar circumstances in adjacent parts of Europe. And even if Germany were to succeed in bringing these neighboring countries into some kind of German system, there is the possibility that within this circle a counter-group headed by Italy and Poland would form itself with the object of keeping Germany's predominance within limits.

As for the people in power in these countries, whom Germany might try to bind to herself by playing upon the pre-



carioussness of their position, these might be overthrown by popular upheavals. In both Poland and Jugoslavia the pro-German policy of the existing régimes is known to be one of the several causes of their unpopularity. Supposing that the resentment against German domination in Central and Eastern Europe did grow to such a serious extent that these countries came to think of Germany, first and foremost, as a menace to their liberties, their attitude towards the Soviet Union might change correspondingly. From having seemed a menace she might come to be thought of as a rallying point and even looked to as a savior. The Soviet Union once played this rôle towards Turkey when Turkey was at issue with the Allied and Associated Powers in 1920–22, and this though Turkey never had any inclination towards Communism.

As for the bait of colonies, the desire for colonial expansion is weak or non-existent in Central Europe (outside Italy and possibly Poland) and would have to be fanned into life by propaganda; and experience within Germany has thrown doubt upon the extent to which the technical propaganda resources of the totalitarian state can be either unlimited or permanent in their effects. Last but not least, it is questionable whether the German national temperament and political tradition (as seen in “Prussianism” as well as National Socialism) would be compatible with the establishment of German predominance in Central and Eastern Europe by the use of a minimum of force and a maximum of persuasion. Many of the arguments advanced in favor of German ability to control this area assume that Germany will in all cases be tactful and moderate; past history makes it very doubtful whether this condition can be fulfilled.

In estimating Germany’s prospects in *Mittel-Europa*, we must also inquire into the solidity of the Berlin-Rome Axis.

Manifestly Germany could not climb into the saddle in *Mittel-Europa* if the Axis were to give way beneath her feet. Italy today is in the unhappy position of being the weakest of the Great Powers in a world in which all Great Powers are on the verge of entering on an unlimited competition in rearmament. Will Italy's increasing relative weakness bind her more tightly than ever to her masterful German ally? Or will it drive her into some desperate effort to break loose, as a nominally equal partnership threatens to turn into a relationship rather resembling the present unequal relationship between Germany and Poland, or perhaps even that between Germany and the "new" Czechoslovakia?

It will be seen that, in trying to estimate Germany's prospect of establishing her ascendancy over Central, Eastern and Southern Europe, we are groping in the realm of conjecture. At the present stage we can see some of the factors that tell respectively for Germany and against her, without being able to cast up the balance. In a situation of extreme uncertainty and obvious danger, it would, however, be imprudent for a country in the exposed position in which Great Britain finds herself today to shrink from reckoning with the more unpleasant and unfavorable of the alternative possibilities. Suppose, then, that Germany were to succeed, after all, in shaping to her purpose all that lies between France and Russia, Italy included, how would the two West European Powers, Great Britain and France, stand in face of the new Central European Leviathan? A German-built and German-directed *Mittel-Europa*, in which more than 200,000,000 efficient people of the white race would be organized under a single command for common purposes, would be a Power of the order of politico-economic magnitude of the United States today and of the Soviet Union tomorrow (should no disaster overtake the

Soviets in the meantime). In this new constellation of forces in Europe, what would be the outlook if there were a continuance of the present competition in armaments? We may hope to avert this calamity, but we cannot afford to ignore it. In an unlimited armaments competition between Great Powers, we have assumed that Italy would be outdistanced by all her three present peers in Europe. Would the same fate overtake Britain and France if they measured their strength against Germany's? Or would they be able to hold their own, at any rate in combination?

As far as concerns passive defense measures against aërial attack, time would seem to be on the West European Powers' side for two reasons: in the first place because the September crisis admittedly caught both of them unprepared, and secondly because, in organizing passive defense, there is such a thing as a minimum absolute standard of safety which is conditioned by the size and distribution of population, and the size and location of cities, ports and factories, without regard to the strength of the offensive armaments of other Powers. Unless and until this minimum standard has been attained, there is an excessive risk in the pursuit of an active policy. A prospective adversary could not, of course, count on this risk working as a prohibitive deterrent.

In September, after all, both the British and the French nation were willing in certain circumstances to go to war with Germany. There was a period of some days during which we believed that those circumstances were going to present themselves; war stared us in the face. Yet the inadequacy of our passive defenses did not drive us into dropping the "almost" out of our declared policy of "peace at almost any price." At the same time there can be no doubt that, if a similar crisis were to confront us at some future date after our passive defenses

had been completed, we should be in a far better posture than than in September 1938 for dealing with the situation on its political and moral merits.

When we pass from the question of passive defense to that of active resistance, the prospects are much harder to assess; for active military strength is essentially competitive and relative; and a comparison between German and Anglo-French resources in this field is obscured by a number of unknown quantities. Our inquiry here almost reduces itself to a string of open questions. Are the metropolitan resources for the manufacture of armaments in Great Britain and France greater than those of Germany and Italy? Are the resources for the manufacture of armaments upon which Great Britain can draw overseas greater than those upon which Germany can draw in *Mittel-Europa*? It may be assumed that at present seapower helps Great Britain and hinders Germany in drawing resources from overseas. How far, however, has seapower been reduced by the development of aërial warfare? How far and how soon (if at all) could Germany, provided that she succeeded in dominating Europe, outbuild the British Navy while still retaining her predominance in the air and on land? Are the psychological factors favorable or adverse to Great Britain? Is a bigger return likely to be obtained from a system of regimentation or from one of voluntary service, assuming that both are developed to their fullest capacity? The question must also be asked how far Britain is prepared to go in the direction of regimentation if voluntary service should prove, on trial, to be incapable of competing with totalitarian methods.

Again, is Germany already approaching the point where she will be utilizing to the maximum her material and financial resources? And is she approaching the point where she will have made the fullest possible call upon the enthusiasm and

the nervous energy of her people? Has Hitler, in securing satisfaction for German grievances, proportionately diminished the German people's willingness to go to war, or has he on the contrary increased his own prestige and given his people confidence for the pursuit of an aggressive policy? Is the division of opinion in Great Britain over the past and future conduct of foreign affairs likely to be as great a source of weakness as the latent opposition inside Germany and Italy to totalitarian methods of government?

Here again, we have run into a fog in which we cannot yet see beyond our noses. But, taking together the two major problems of Germany's prospects of predominance in Central and Southeastern Europe and the Western Powers' prospects of holding their own against her in the arms race, we can perhaps say that, in acquiescing in the Munich settlement, France and Britain avoided an immediate evil of appalling magnitude, for Europe as well as for themselves, at the price of accepting some very serious risks—which may or may not materialize in a future which is at present almost impenetrably veiled.

This raises the question of the reasons which made the peoples, as well as the Governments, of Great Britain and France, feel that the Munich terms represented the lesser of the two evils between which we had to choose.

The first and strongest reason was one which weighed with almost every man and woman in Great Britain and France during the crisis; and by implication this universal reason must be a simple one. While we had made up our minds to go to war if Herr Hitler insisted on imposing upon Czechoslovakia, by means of a military invasion, terms entirely dictated by Herr Hitler himself, there was perhaps no evil, short of that, which, to the minds of most of us, seemed greater than the evil of another European War under unprecedented moral and

material conditions. The prospect of having one's wife and children, as well as oneself, massacred under one's own roof was one which the European householder had not had to look in the face since he had seen the last of the raids of the Vikings and the Magyars. In September 1938 that experience was nearly 1,000 years back in the past. "As safe as houses!" "The Englishman's house is his castle!" These proverbial phrases have an odd ring today.<sup>1</sup>

But the personal jeopardy to life, limb and property was not the most appalling of the features which the prospect of a European war revealed. The individual, after all, has—or at any rate thinks, beforehand, that he has—a sporting chance of surviving even the most intensive aërial bombardment. The intolerable feature in the prospect was a disaster that was, not a private probability, but a public certainty. This certainty was that, if war did come, the things that we mean by "England," "France" and "Europe" would be destroyed beyond the possibility of restoration—not just the landscape and the buildings and the inhabitants, which could all, no doubt, at least theoretically, be replaced, but the invisible things of the spirit which are the essence of a community and a civilization. It has always been true that the spiritual ravages of war are more deadly than its material destructiveness. And when war is keyed up—as it has been keyed up now—to a "totalitarian" pitch, it is the prospect of a "totalitarian" spiritual devastation

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<sup>1</sup>An American or Canadian reader who wants to visualize to himself the meaning of air warfare between highly efficient Powers in densely populated countries at point-blank range, can assist his imagination by the simple device of plotting out, on a piece of tracing paper, a war-map of Western Europe, and then super-imposing this on a peace-map, drawn to the same scale, of the northeastern United States and the adjoining parts of Canada.

that makes it morally almost impossible for civilized men and women to opt for war if there is any other alternative at all open to them. An acute personal realization of this prospect, in many millions of French and English souls, is the simple psychological explanation of the historical fact that, on their return home from Munich, Mr. Chamberlain and M. Daladier were welcomed by the general public with the same enthusiasm as were Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini. At the moment of sudden relief there was even something like a European union of hearts, direct between people and people. The most striking outward manifestation of this astonishing psychological event was the German public's enthusiastic reception of the British Prime Minister.

The moral impasse with which the British and French peoples were confronted when they had to face the prospect of war with Germany in September 1938 comes to light in the question of the peace settlement. The peace settlement is the acid test of a war, since it is for the sake of achieving certain terms of peace that any war is fought; and, *ex hypothesi*, these terms must be of such supreme value and importance in the eyes of the belligerent as to make him feel that even a war is not too high a price to pay for obtaining them. This is eminently true if he is the citizen of a democratic state. For, in a democracy, the government can hardly venture to go to war unless it feels sure, in advance, that the people will be whole-heartedly behind it. Suppose then that in this autumn of 1938 war had broken out between Great Britain, France, the Little Entente and the Soviet Union on the one side and Germany (with or without allies) on the other side; and suppose, further, that Germany had been defeated again, as completely as she was defeated in 1918; what would have been, this time, the Allied and Associated Powers' peace terms?

Should we, once again, have taken “national self-determination” for our watchword? In that case, we should have had, at the end of a victorious war, to impose on our ally Czechoslovakia, as her reward, that very cession of territories inhabited by alien minorities that is being imposed on her now, without a war, as her penalty for having had her frontiers drawn in the peace settlement of Paris on lines which were seriously at variance with the fundamental principle on which that imperfect peace settlement was professedly based. Or should we have maintained the *status quo*? But that would have meant getting the worst of both worlds. For *ex hypothesi* and *status quo*, as had been shown by nearly twenty years’ experience of its working, neither squared with the principle of nationality nor on the other hand made Germany too weak to demand, at the sword’s point, as she was actually demanding in September 1938, an application of the principle for her own benefit. As a matter of fact, it can be predicted almost with certainty that our peace terms would have been quite different from either of the two alternatives just suggested. For the character of peace terms is determined, as one knows, by the character of the antecedent war; and the European war of 1938 would have been dreadful beyond precedent and even beyond imagination. In all belligerent countries, almost everyone who was not a combatant would have become a refugee, and the refugees would have suffered the heavier casualties. In all countries the survivors’ minds would have been rapidly reduced to one single fixed idea on the subject of peace terms: “If we win, then this time we must make it forever utterly impossible for the enemy to inflict this torment on us again.” In this mood the victors would have imposed a Carthaginian peace. But of course we should have shuddered at the thought of such a peace settlement if we had contemplated it in advance before



the bombing had begun. Short of contemplating anything of the kind, many of us who were acquainted with the national-ity map of Czechoslovakia and with the political and economic situation in the German-inhabited districts of that state were feeling an acute moral discomfort at the notion of fighting for the balance of power in defiance of the principle of nationality. These facts, of course, were not a matter of common knowl- edge among the general public; but they were verified by Lord Runciman, and we know that the French as well as the British Government was strongly influenced by the Runciman Report in concluding that the minorities problem in Czechoslovakia could not now be settled by any solution less radical than that of secession.

The principle of nationality—which first asserted itself in the modern world as a dynamic political force in 1775—has been steadily remaking the political map of the Old World, as well as the New World, ever since. In the nineteenth century it brought a Belgium, a Germany and an Italy into existence. In the War of 1914–18 it broke up four great multi-national empires in Eastern Europe. This wave has had, and still has, such an impetus that any statesmen or states that manage to ride it can be almost certain of being carried by it to triumph. It carried the Allied and Associated Powers to triumph in 1918; it has carried Germany to triumph in 1938. But how is it that, after twenty years, Herr Hitler has been able to steal President Wilson’s thunder? The answer is that, in spite of our having made the Armistice of November 1918 on the basis of the Fourteen Points, in the ensuing peace settlement we applied the principle of nationality for the benefit of every nation in Central and Eastern Europe with the exception of the three ex-enemy nations: the Germans, the Magyars and the Bulgars. It is for the sake of getting that one-sided peace settlement rec-

tified, by an application of the nationality principle for their own benefit too, that the Germans have accepted Hitler's leadership, or submitted to his tyranny, whichever way you prefer to put it. And by whichever name you do call Hitler, you cannot deny that he has fulfilled his mandate, however he may have acquired it, by "delivering the goods."

National unification is in fact being achieved in Central and Eastern Europe today by nations that, for the past twenty years, have been balked of it. This year ten million German ex-subjects of the defunct Hapsburg Monarchy have been incorporated into the German national state. Several hundred thousand Magyars, who were wrongfully detached from Hungary in 1921, are being restored to their mother country. Even the Ukrainians—who are the largest still wholly submerged nation in Europe—have at last secured homerule in that tiny corner of their vast patrimony that is known as "Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia." These are all measures that ought to have been taken—and would have been taken, if our professed principles had been applied impartially—by "the Big Four" at Paris in 1919. Are we wholly to regret that a different "Big Four" have applied them belatedly in 1938 at Munich? In itself this surely cannot be a matter for regret; for nationality is commonly regarded as being a good principle as far as it goes. What we have to regret—and that most bitterly—is our failure to do justice all round at Paris in 1919; our subsequent failure to make good our sins of omission belatedly at any time within a subsequent period of nearly twenty years' grace; and, last and worst, the fact that, when we have at length acquiesced in justice being done in this particular respect at the fifty-ninth minute of the eleventh hour, our acquiescence wears the appearance of a capitulation, under an immediate threat of war, to a Nazi dictatorship.

An honest application of the principle of nationality was in any case bound to make Germany the strongest Power in Europe for simple reasons that have been mentioned already. The Germans themselves are by far the most numerous nation in Europe, and they are flanked on the east by a bevy of nations which are conspicuously small and weak. For these two reasons in combination, a political map of Europe redrawn in accordance with the principle of nationality was bound to produce a *Mittel-Europa* under German hegemony. Part of the price of our sins of omission since the Armistice of 1918 is that, instead of a democratic Germany entering into Germany's national heritage in 1920, this heritage has fallen to a Nazi Germany in 1938. Today Germany is the predominant Power in Central and Eastern Europe, as sooner or later, seemingly, she was bound to be; but it is the tragedy of Europe, and of the whole world, that this now dominant Germany is not the Germany of Weimar but the Germany of Nuremberg. For, when the principle of nationality is applied under a fanatical totalitarian régime, it ceases to be even approximately coincident with the more rational and more humane principle of self-determination. The measure of the difference is given by the number of non-Nazi German refugees for whom life in the Sudetenland has become impossible since September.

If a dominant Nazi Germany is the positive retribution for our sins, the negative retribution is the perhaps mortal sickness of the League of Nations. It is at first sight a paradoxical fact that a moment which sees the League to all appearance *in articulo mortis* should be the very moment that has also seen the practical realization, at long last, of two League principles which hitherto, unhappily, have been virtually dead letters. One of these principles is impartial justice for all. Well, we have got the principle of nationality

in Central Europe applied to both sides equally at last, but the bitter irony is that nothing but the starkest power politics has availed to bring us to this, in itself desirable, result. The second League principle which has now at last secured application is that of "peaceful change." This autumn, populations amounting in the aggregate to as much as the total population of Ireland or Switzerland, and to more than the total population of Denmark or Norway, have been transferred from Czechoslovakian sovereignty to German, Hungarian and Polish sovereignty without war. Though, of course, this has not been achieved without an extreme threat of war, it is nevertheless an unprecedented event; and it would be hard to say that it is not good. And yet the League seems to be dying of it. She is like a mother dying in childbirth because the birth is so long overdue.

Another ironical fact about the fate of the League is that the Japanese, Italian and German hands that have struck the deadly blows share the blood-guiltiness with French, British and American hands which have been professedly friendly. During the postwar years these American, British and French hands held, between them, the destinies of the world in suspense. The three Western democratic Great Powers were then in a position to make the League's fortune if they chose. And what did they do? America abandoned the League in her infancy; France compromised the League by implicating her in a mischievous and futile system of anti-German power politics; while England—knowing that she ought both to guarantee France and to restrain her, yet not venturing to do either, and wishing that she might follow America into isolation, yet again not venturing to do that—has completed the discomfiture of the League by blowing alternately hot and cold, but almost always cold at the critical moments.

The worst of it is that the League is heir to the whole of our heritage of international coöperation; so that, if the League did die now, this heritage would be in mortal danger of perishing with her. It is true that the League is, in her most obvious aspect, an embodiment of President Wilson's ideas, and that these ideas—at any rate in the form impressed upon them by the President's personal stamp—cannot lay claim to antiquity. But there are other aspects of the League which also catch a historian's eye. For instance, the League might be described alternatively as an instrument for "putting into commission" a rudimentary, but nevertheless genuine, *Pax Britannica*, based partly on naval power and partly on money power, which Great Britain maintained unaided, out of her own national resources, during the hundred years ending in 1914. This *Pax Britannica*, in its turn, was a very imperfect and belated substitute for a mediæval *Respublica Christiana* which was founded in the eleventh century by Pope Gregory VII and which went to pieces between the death of Pope Innocent III and the outbreak of the Reformation.

Today, perhaps more than at any other moment of history since our Western civilization emerged out of the Dark Ages, there is a crying need for some kind of world order. But, if it is not to be a house built on the sands, this world order which we so urgently require must have some moral foundation. And what moral bond still holds between the armed, and ever more heavily arming, Great Powers of 1938? Common Christianity? Why, four of the Great Powers of the day—namely, Germany, Italy, Japan and the Soviet Union—are avowedly dedicated to the worship of Leviathan, which is the most dangerous, as well as the most perverse, of the forms that idolatry can take. And the rest of us, if we are frank, will be constrained to confess that we honor our nominal Christianity more in the breach

than in the observance. True religion may and will in the end win the hearts of mankind; but a work of conversion that must start almost from zero and that has the whole world for its field will necessarily take a proportionate length of time for its consummation. The establishment of some kind of world order is so urgent a need in an age of Leviathan-worship and of bombing planes that mankind can hardly wait to see this need satisfied, as it might be ideally satisfied in the course of time, by the gradual triumph of Christianity.

The conversion of the modern world is therefore more likely to take place—like the conversion of the Ancient World some two thousand years back—within the framework of a provisional secular world order that will previously have been imposed by force, at the hands of some great pagan military Power. As the history of the *Pax Romana* testifies, a world order of such pagan origin is unsatisfactory and ephemeral; but for a desperately urgent necessity people will pay a heavy price. In Europe, at any rate, it seems not impossible that men and women, rather than see Europe perish, will now feel inclined to accept peace—as the Czechs have accepted it this autumn—in the form of a far-reaching submission to the harsh and brutal dictatorship that weighs, like a leaden cope, on the gigantic body of Germany.

There is one final string of questions which an Englishman today can hardly refrain from asking. In this crisis of human history, of which his own country has just felt the full force, what part are the non-European English-speaking peoples going to play? Is it true that a New World has been called into existence to redress the balance of the Old? Are the overseas countries now going to step into the breach and try to take a hand in building up our coming world order, in the hope of being able to give it, after all, something of their—and our—own

democratic impress? Or are they going to recoil still further than at present into an isolation which can hardly avail to insulate them in the long run from that rising Power in the Old World with which France and Great Britain, as well as Czechoslovakia, have already had to reckon? If a Greater Germany were eventually to make it her drill-sergeant's mission to put the world in Prussian order by imposing on us all her *Pax Hitleriana*, what line would North America then take? Would she then seek, in Mr. Chamberlain's way, to come to terms with the Nazi Power, or would she take Mr. Churchill's line of bidding Nazidom defiance? And if she, in her turn, found herself at grips with Greater Germany, what then would be North America's attitude towards Great Britain? Would she think of British sea-power as an asset to be preserved? Or of the British Empire as an entanglement to be avoided? These are burning questions for an English writer to ask and for American and Canadian readers to answer.