

# Czechoslovakia and World Peace

BY RICHARD GOODMAN

AT THE MOMENT of writing a disturbing and dangerous tendency has become manifest in the British capitalist press. It is also reflected to some extent in certain progressive and Labour circles who, although undoubtedly sincere and perfectly well-intentioned, should know better.

This attitude is summed up in the words of the Diplomatic Correspondent of the *Sunday Times* when he writes :—

While anxiety concerning the international situation still persists in London, it is true to say that apprehension concerning the immediate future has of late diminished.

There can be no doubt that this is what Mr. Chamberlain and his friends would have us believe. But facts speak differently. And the fact is that, behind all this whistling in the dark, behind the deliberately assumed optimism, the tension in Europe is once again increasing and may break at any moment to involve the world in a major conflagration. The only cause such false optimism can serve is the cause of those who, for their own class interests, wish to disarm the democratic movement of resistance to fascism and the fascist aggressors and to diminish the vigilance of the friends of peace.

No one, of course, will deny that this growing tension is of a new kind, that it is different from that which preceded the dramatic week-end of May 20 when world anti-fascism made it impossible for Hitler's twelve Reichswehr divisions to march into Czechoslovakia. It is, indeed, just because of that victory that the situation now developing is different, that the tension characterising the present period is deeper and less obvious than previously. And it is just because this is so that the need for vigilance, that the fight against all tendencies towards disarming the democratic movement is to-day more than ever urgent.

Let us, therefore, examine the position as it is at the moment.

It is now generally admitted—except in the British capitalist press—that the three factors mainly responsible for defeating the very obvious designs of the Third Reich on May 20 were :

- (1) The very prompt and extraordinarily efficient defence measures taken by the Czechoslovakian President, Dr. Benes, and the Czechoslovak General Staff ;
- (2) The unambiguous declaration issued from the Quai d'Orsay that France was ready to fulfil her obligations to Czechoslovakia ; and
- (3) The equally unambiguous information that reached Warsaw—and hence Berlin—that the Soviet Union would not tolerate a German,

or German-Polish attack on Czechoslovakia—information which completely disorganised the joint German-Polish plans for a co-ordinated action. (There is reason to believe that a *joint German-Polish* attack was contemplated. Polish divisions had certainly been moved up to the Czech frontier and, according to sources usually to be relied upon, those Polish divisions were to attack the Teschen district simultaneously with the German attack on Bohemia.)

What was the position of the Chamberlain Government? The amazing divergence between the reports in the British and French press and the actual facts was perhaps one of the most revealing aspects of the whole situation.

Immediately it was obvious that the Nazi plan had been frustrated, an overwhelming flood of propaganda was released to the effect that this had been mainly due to “vigorous British demarches” in Berlin, to the “perfect functioning of the Anglo-French Entente.”

Nothing could have been more removed from the truth—as certain sections of the French press obviously realised after a while.

According to the best sources, the British Ambassador began by expressing the “apprehension” of his Government at the extensive German troop movements up to the Czech border. He was told by von Ribbentrop that these were nothing extraordinary, that they were “seasonal, routine” movements, and he went away apparently satisfied when, to the entire world, it was patently obvious that the Reich Foreign Minister had told just another of his gilt-edged lies. Next morning he was back again with more expressions of “apprehension,” only to be told this time that the troop movements were “purely defensive” in view of the “provocative” activities of the Czechs. Finally, he paid his third visit to the Wilhelmstrasse and informed Ribbentrop of the British position—that Mr. Chamberlain was anxious for a “peaceful settlement,” that every influence would be used to bring about such a settlement, that if such a settlement were reached, Britain would be ready to open up negotiations for a “general settlement,” and finally that, with the French taking up the attitude they had done, there was a possibility of Britain being involved if it did come to war.

The fact of the matter was that the Chamberlain Government found itself in a very difficult position. It would not give a straightforward warning to Germany as the French had done because to do so would have destroyed the main basis for the longed-for Four-Power Western European Pact. But it could not, on the other hand, do nothing at all for that would have meant showing its hand too openly leading to serious complications at home. It had, therefore, to do just sufficient to save its face and not enough to upset Hitler, who had been stopped by other factors anyway. Hence the extraordinary press campaign that followed, given added substance by the tone of the German press which was mainly concerned with pressing to

advantage this weakness in the front of the democratic Powers. It was significant that when the true facts of the British position began to circulate, the German press changed its tune very abruptly and began paying "tributes" to Mr. Chamberlain. There is indeed reason to believe that another not unimportant motive behind the inspired press accounts of the "British stand" was the desire to see Hitler get off as lightly as possible from the very obvious defeat he had suffered.

Thus Britain was in fact the sole weak sector in the democratic front, and it was soon realised that, unless its attitude strengthened, the crisis that had been averted would certainly develop again. Actually, however, instead of hardening its attitude, Britain began at once actively to pursue a policy of assistance to Germany. That policy was and is one of attempting to isolate Czechoslovakia, while at the same time pressing the right wing Czech Agrarians inside the country to "open the front" to the Nazis, by capitulating to the Henleinist demands.

Let us now consider the position inside Czechoslovakia itself.

Immediately after its defeat of May 20 the Third Reich and its Henleinist agents in Czechoslovakia demanded the withdrawal of the defence troops that had been sent into the frontier areas.

It was obvious why this should have been their foremost demand. For

in the first place, their presence and, indeed, the general active preparedness of the Czechs ruled out the possibility of the Nazis delivering a surprise attack similar to that which took Austria ;

in the second place, it ruled out the possibility of an *effective*, surprise action by the Henleinists from within ; and

finally, by curtailing to some extent the Henlein terror in the Sudeten areas, it was bound to strengthen the democratic opposition in these areas and so prevent Henlein ensuring for himself the 100 per cent. vote which he had declared he would obtain.

The Czech Government very rightly refused to consider this demand and immediately British diplomacy swung into action. Accepting the German proposal that "neutral observers" should be sent into the Sudeten areas and that these would then render the presence of the defence troops "unnecessary," the British suggested to Prague that it might, after all, be better—in the interests of a "peaceful settlement" if the troops were withdrawn. Once again the proposal was rejected. Then, in spite of the objections of the British Minister—and, apparently, over his head—three more demands, categorical this time, were made for the withdrawal of the troops and the two British Military Attachés were sent off on a tour of Sudetenland, to act as "neutral observers."

Not content with this, the British conducted a simultaneous attack on the Nationalities Statutes in order to obtain more far reaching concessions for the Henleinists than the Czech Government was prepared to give on its own. This attack was conducted through the right wing Agrarians in the Government, and in particular the Minister

of the Interior, Czermy. Before the British started to intervene, the Statutes were, to all intents and purposes, complete in draft. The publication of this draft at that moment and its discussion in Parliament would have rallied round the Government a considerable number of non-Henlein Germans and had a very important effect on the elections still to take place.

Under pressure from the British, however, the Agrarians suddenly began to demand a revision of the draft and, so, effectively held up its publication. This was nothing more nor less than a provocation playing right into Henlein's hands. But that was not all. Under joint German and British pressure negotiations were opened with the Henlein representatives, and these negotiations were kept absolutely secret.

Finally—and very approximately at the same time as British pressure was brought to bear in Paris to obtain the isolation and effective gagging of the French Communists—there came the British-inspired threat to ban the Communist daily paper *Rude Pravo*.

Meanwhile, what of external developments?

Interest here centres on the military conversations between Poland and Rumania, on the internal position in Austria, and the developments in Hungary.

The importance of the Polish-Rumanian talks has to a very great extent been overlooked in this country, but their significance can be judged at once by the fact that they were very favourably received in Berlin.

The Polish paper, *Kurier Warszawski*, has indeed openly stated that Berlin had noted with satisfaction that the object of the talks was to prevent assistance being rendered to Czechoslovakia in the event of an attack by Germany.

It would, however, be premature to imagine that Rumania has finally been drawn into the block of the aggressors via these conversations with Poland, or, indeed, that the policy of Colonel Beck has finally triumphed in Poland itself. In the event of an actual outbreak of war, sudden changes very often occur. Nevertheless, the fact at the present moment is that the Polish-Rumanian conversations have certainly not strengthened the democratic peace front and that these conversations have received the blessing, not only of Berlin, but also of London.

What is the real aim of the Beck diplomacy? It is to create a new "axis" that will function in harmony with that of Berlin-Rome, a new "cordon sanitaire," if you like, whose fundamental purpose is to attempt to isolate the U.S.S.R. from the rest of Europe.

Hoping to attach to this "axis" the small States between the Baltic and Black Seas—Finland, Esthonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Rumania—Beck has emphasised that it will, of course, be essentially "neutral."

Such a "neutral" bloc would, it is obvious, be of the greatest advantage to the aggressive designs of German fascism.

In the first place it would detach the Baltic countries and Rumania

from the League of Nations and the collective security system, and so render them open to attack by the Third Reich or the Beck clique in Poland.

In the second place it would finally split up the Little Entente.

But there is another and more immediate significance. At the moment British influence in Rumania is strong, stronger perhaps than it has been for a considerable time, and certainly strong enough to prevent Rumania entering into negotiations with another power without, at least, the tacit agreement of London.

The fact is, indeed, that the Beck scheme in general and the Polish-Rumanian military talks in particular have the approval of the Chamberlain Government. That this is so is obvious if the matter is examined from another angle.

In its drive to weaken the collective organisation of peace, the British National Government has made considerable use of the conception of "neutrality" which is a necessary complement to the conception of "appeasement," to the conception of coming to an agreement with the aggressors.

The hand of the British Government has been obvious in the "neutralisation" of both Belgium and quite recently of Switzerland, while the proposal that Czechoslovakia should be neutralised has also been actively pushed by London.

Now, the conception of "neutrality" has been "justified" on the ground that the League of Nations and collective security have repeatedly failed. But the fact is that on every occasion upon which the League has failed, Britain, the most prominent advocate of the policy of "neutrality" for small countries, has been responsible. Nor is this accidental, for is it not the fundamental policy of the British ruling class to buy off the aggressors by means of concessions at the expense of just these small Powers?

Beck's proposal for a new "axis" is, therefore, completely in keeping with present British diplomacy and is, indeed, if not directly, then certainly indirectly inspired and approved of by the Chamberlain Government.

The significance of this development in the present situation is obvious.

Hitler, as we have already said, is now manœuvring for positions from which to push ahead once again with his aggressive designs, but neither he nor his friends in London are anxious for a war which could only result in a crushing defeat of fascism. Therefore he and his accomplices are aiming to isolate Czechoslovakia externally, while seeking to strengthen the Henleinist position within the Republic, in order ultimately to overrun it.

Before turning to discuss the developments in Austria and their relevance to the Nazi menace to Czechoslovakia, let us look, for a moment, at the position of Hungary.

There can be no doubt that the forcible occupation of Austria has led leading Hungarian revisionist circles to believe that the position so created is very favourable for a realisation of their demands.

Writing in the paper, *Pesti Napoli*, the former Prime Minister of Hungary, Count Bethlen, declares :—

At last the dictatorship of the Little Entente has been abolished and Hungary may realise its revisionist aspirations.

This makes it quite clear that, in his opinion, it is not Germany, but Czechoslovakia that is Hungary's main enemy, and, although the occupation of Austria has made it inevitable for Hungary to "adapt its foreign policy to that of its neighbour state," the adaption of that policy, according to Bethlen, is the sole guarantee of the safety of Hungary.

There can be no misreading of this declaration.

Simultaneously with this resurgence of Hungarian revisionism Nazi pressure inside the country is increasing. It is a well known fact that the abortive putsch last year was organised under the immediate leadership of the German Ambassador there, Mackensen. It is equally well known that Germany has provided the Hungarian fascist organisation move, through Mackensen, with 5,000 rifles and a large number of hand grenades, as well as subsidising other fascist groups.

Now, however, the position is becoming extremely critical. The population is openly terrorised by the fascist gangs of Count Festetich, Rainish and Major Szalasy. The programme of these groups—financed as they are from Berlin—is brazenly admitted to be the seizure of power, the complete subordination of the home and foreign policy of the country to the interests of the Third Reich, the tearing up of the Treaty of Trianon and the recreation of the pre-war Hungary. Nor has the recent Cabinet change—ostensibly directed against the Nazis—actually improved matters. On the contrary the programme of the new Premier Imredy indicates very clearly that, while accelerating the fascisation of the country, it is also preparing for the day when, it hopes, its revisionist ideals will be realised by force of arms.

Finally, therefore, one comes to the developments in Austria since the invasion.

Now it is obvious that Government circles here are using these developments in an attempt to create the impression that as Hitler is "preoccupied" with Austria, it is unlikely that he will make another move just at the moment.

No doubt there is a certain element of truth in this, but the important question is what is actually behind that "preoccupation."

Many observers had thought that the German Government would try to stage some kind of a demagogic show in Austria after the invasion—even at the expense of a great deal of money—in order to "win over" certain sections of the population.

Nothing of the kind, however, has been done. Instead, Berlin has

concentrated exclusively on the ruthless "colonisation" of the country as a war base against Czechoslovakia.

The exchange value of the old Austrian currency to the new German mark was fixed at a rate which involved approximately a 15 per cent. loss to the Austrians.

At the same time, while the Austrians were forbidden to raise prices, and an order against increased wages was issued, Nazi goods were sold to Austria at the prevailing high rates.

There followed, of course, heavy German purchases of Austrian goods—foodstuffs especially—at the cheap rates and the country was, in fact, looted.

Consequently food costs rose, quality deteriorated and supplies of previously available goods ran short. Simultaneously Austro-Nazis found themselves being eased out of the positions they had only recently eased themselves into—eased out "by the Prussians."

As a result a serious state of affairs has arisen, a state of affairs which suggests that in Vienna at least

a second June 30 seems to be in the air (Prague *Rote Fahne*).

There is good reason to believe, however, that something bigger than a June 30 is in prospect.

The position is as follows :—

The existing strategic communications between Vienna and Bavarian cities were constructed exclusively to serve the movement of men and material on lines reaching from Vienna to the Italian frontier on the south-west and the Russian frontier on the north-east, with the minimum of communication between Vienna and the German and Swiss borders.

This situation was in part responsible for the break downs which occurred during the German invasion of Austria in March. Then the roads were overloaded with mechanised military traffic and the breakdown of tanks caused a block which forced simultaneously advancing cavalry and infantry to make enormously long detours, while tanks and lorries stood blocked for miles on the main lines—an ideal target for attacking aircraft, if there had been attacking aircraft then.

Consequently plans have been completed for the construction of at least four additional east-west military road and rail lines between Vienna and Bavaria.

Now in the event of a German attack on Czechoslovakia, it is thought probable that the Czechs will not rely solely on defensive action on all fronts but, while holding the North Bohemia and Moravian defences, and falling back somewhat in north-west Bohemia, will launch an offensive from the Bratislava area.

Mechanised units from Bratislava could reach the industrial suburbs of Vienna in an hour or so, and there can be little doubt of the reception they would receive from the overwhelming majority of the population of those districts.



There is now a saying circulating in Central Europe that : " Vienna was the last town Hitler took and it will be the first he will lose."

With a completion of the German railway plan in Austria, the situation would however be quite different and Vienna, adequately linked with Munich and other Bavarian centres, would become a serious advance base for a German attack.

Hence, complementary with the building of the strategic lines, the military and Gestapo terror.

This military aspect of the situation also throws light on the Hungarian position. European military experts are of the opinion that the principal long-range aim of the German General Staff is to control the " strategic triangle," Vienna-Budapest-Prerov (Prerau).

Prerov, in the heart of Czechoslovakia, is the biggest railway junction in Central Europe and was the nerve centre of transport in the old Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Neither Vienna alone, nor Vienna plus Budapest would, it is estimated, be sufficient to make Mittel-Europa a base adequate for the decisive " war against the West."

Control of Prerov is necessary for the consolidation of Mittel-Europa and control of Prerov means, of course, control of the whole of Bohemia and Moravia.

It will be seen, therefore, that, contrary to the falsely assumed optimism which Mr. Chamberlain and his friends are now trying to hawk around, a new deterioration of the crucial situation in Central Europe is taking place. And it is obvious enough from all we have said that for this deterioration the Chamberlain Government is mainly responsible.



# Mexico on the March

BY IVOR MONTAGU

“ U.S.S.R. IS NOT MEXICO ”—when Litvinov spoke these famous words to a British Ambassador who was trying on out-of-place blustering, hectoring methods he had found useful elsewhere, he alluded to the contrast between a country which had rejected imperialism for ever and a country typically weakened and bled white by imperialism for generations. As though spurred by these words, as though invigorated by the example on the other side of the world, the Mexican people has embarked upon a struggle of its own for social amelioration, which, in its condition of subjection to foreign economic exploitation, has straightway become a conflict for national independence.

The fight is on. Immediately the lie factories of the opponents of Mexican independence pour out a torrent of propaganda to drown the issue.

What is the man-in-the-street's idea of a Mexican ? A thief, a bandit, idle, feckless, an assassin, a cowboy in sombrero with pistols in his boots and a dagger between the teeth. Revolution every fortnight by leaders who sell out as soon as they win, and, favourite sport between revolutions, shooting lonely English bank managers on ranches. This is the picture which has been dinned into the English and American publics by countless shockers, in print and celluloid, and in the only form in which Mexican items are allowed to be printed in the press. It is the old tactics of the Reichstag fire. Burn the Reichstag and prove the Communists are an element of disorder which must be suppressed. Keep Negroes in ignorance, poverty and disease and prove they are inferior because they lack education and die early in epidemics. Organise gangster murders and church attacks in Spain and prove the government incapable of preserving peace.

All the romantic (*sic*) “ colour ” of Mexico in the films and dispatches may be highly “ authentic ” but it lacks that little mention of the rôle of foreign capital (the same foreign capital that through its press lords and movie kings is painting the picture) in keeping the country poor by extracting vast fantastic profits from its enterprises, in organising the corruption of “ pushover ” progressive leaders ready to betray and the assassination of the stubborn ones, and in frustrating by promoting factionalism the national movements that represent the ceaseless aspiration of the Mexican people toward overthrowing the Spanish, French and now United States and British tyrants, who have successively exploited them. A terrific flood of this propaganda is on. The endeavour is, of course, to destroy sympathy for Mexico in British and United States democracies by conveying that the expropriation of the