

# The Revival of Violence

By Oliver E. Benson

**P**OLITICAL violence takes form in revolution or war, and the national state system assumes the use of war as one of its principal tools. This may be a matter of regret, but it is hard fact that every government, from time immemorial has possessed the authority of resort to arms to defend what it deems its vital national interests.

From the political viewpoint, then, death and devastation are merely the incidentals of war. Its primary object is in serving as an adjunct to diplomacy. When vital diplomatic objectives of two national states clash, we have a "crisis" in which someone must back down or fight. If the stakes are important enough, and the sides evenly balanced enough, there will be a war. In other words, a diplomatic crisis leads to war if (a) both sides consider the matter so important that compromise is impossible, and (b) if each side feels it has a reasonable chance of winning.

Back in the optimistic 1920's there was a balmy interlude in world politics which led to a tendency among statesmen and scholars alike to feel that everything was going to be peaceful and lovely for a long time to come. The Briand-Kellogg pact for the renunciation of war was signed. France evacuated her last regiments from the Rhineland long before Versailles provided. The treaty of Locarno still seemed to guarantee security to Western Europe, as the Little Entente safeguarded the *status quo* of Eastern Europe.

But with the early years of the decade now staggering to a close there came a series of stunning blows for those who believed in an orderly and peaceful world political system. The Japanese conquest of Manchuria, from 1931-33, was the first indication of the revival of violence. Hitler's rise to power in Germany, in 1933, was the beginning of an attack of political jitters from which Europe has shown no sign whatever of recovering. In 1934 Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss was murdered by Nazi plotters in Vienna in an abortive attempt to bring about Anschluss. In 1935 Hitler denounced the disarmament clauses of the treaty of Versailles. In 1936 he reoccupied the Rhineland. In September of 1935 came the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, leading to an unsuccessful effort by the League of Nations to stop it by economic sanctions. Sanctions were lifted in the summer of 1936, just in time to clear the headlines for the Spanish Civil war. In 1937 Japan began the second major stage of her conquest of China.

In March 1938 came Germany's annexation of Austria, postponed from 1934. In September, 1938 came Munich and the

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first partition of Czechoslovakia. In March, 1939 came the second partition of Czechoslovakia, and the reincorporation of Memel in the Reich. In April Italy took over the kingdom of Albania, and Hitler formulated his demands for Danzig and the Polish Corridor, which led at long last to the general European conflict that had been so long threatening.

Eduard Benes has said "there are periods of human evolution when revolution or war becomes inevitable and even justified." At some point during the years and months that preceded September 3, 1939, the statesmen in command of the destinies of Germany, Poland, Britain, and France, with help from Rome and Moscow, made up their minds that they were living in one of these periods.

**G**ERMANY did not want war. She did want something to be had only by tactics dangerous to peace. Her goals were important enough to her rulers to drive them to select the violent alternative when the showdown came. Those goals—Pan-Germanism and dominance in European power politics—could be achieved only by recovery of Danzig and by elimination of Poland as a potential enemy. This program was not reconcilable with a peaceful Europe. The tragedy is that Hitler, knowing the risk, felt the stakes were worth it.

Poland's role as the unfortunate victim, partitioned within three weeks between her two formidable neighbors, should not blind us to her obvious blunders, of which the most fatal was her refusal to consent to the Anglo-Russian alliance by granting the Soviet army access to her territory. While this refusal is understandable in terms of Poland's historic fear of Russia, and her Government's logical fear of Bolshevism, it is now clear that she had nothing to lose by giving such permission.

France suffered an irreparable defeat at Munich, despite the efforts her ministers made at the time to gloss over the fact. Her fatal error may be placed as early as the German occupation of the Rhineland in 1936. With hindsight it is easy to point out that firmness then would have stopped Hitler once and for all. It was less obvious at the time. Failure of French armament to keep pace with the German, failure of French diplomacy to maintain the League of Nations as a bastion of the *status quo*,

her earlier relentless measures to keep Germany weak, were all strategic mistakes for which France had to pay a tragic price.

Britain made most of her errors prior to the immediate event. Her leaders seemed at one time to cherish the illusion that a more powerful Germany, even under Hitler, would act in a salutary way to counter French hegemony in Europe and restore the Balance. At a later stage the statesmen of Downing Street seem to have believed until too late that a young Nazi state would curb the Soviet menace.

When the hour of decision came the venerable machinery of the Balance, though creaking and slow from disuse, functioned essentially as it always had. Germany in control of Poland would soon control Europe from the Baltic to the Aegean. And Britain was convinced that Germany, successful in the east, would inevitably turn to the west. Britain's appeasement policy must be credited with imbuing Germany with confidence that if she expanded slowly, Britain would find no objection. But after Hitler's occupation of Prague in March, 1939, the British position was firm against any further aggression. Chamberlain could truthfully say that he had not been guilty of the indecision which marked British policy in 1914.

Amidst the reality of war, we always witness attempts to analyze the outcome. A certain significance attaches to the fact that, whereas during the war of 1914, most utopian internationalism was concerned with a League to Enforce Peace, a League for the Outlawry of War, a League of Nations, on the other hand the dreamers of our own time are thinking and writing in terms of nothing less than federal union of sovereign states. Clarence Streit in his *Union Now*, Eduard Benes in his *Democracy Today and Tomorrow*, and others, appeal for a world federation which would take away from the sovereign state its power to declare war.

The time may indeed be coming when a choice will confront the world. As the national state system is more and more menaced by totalitarian movements, either Fascist or Communist, that choice may well become one between buckling under to some new Caesar, or entering into some system of federation as is being advocated by such publicists as Benes and Streit.

In our time the Ship of State has become a streamlined Leviathan; we cannot continue forever to man her with officers and crew who navigate as though they were in command of a sailboat or a birchbark canoe.