

# CURRENT MAGAZINES

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## AN INTERNATIONAL COMMON FRONT

**On the Eve of the Imperial Conference:**—The Right Hon. L. C. S. Amery, in *Foreign Affairs*.

**The Central European Kaleidoscope:**—Mr. W. Walter Crotch, in the *National Review*.

**International Democracy:**—Mr. David Thomson, in the *Political Quarterly*.

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THREE months ago, in language meant to be impressive, the Nazi envoy to Rome invited the cooperation of Great Britain and France for an anti-Communist League. All other interests and projects were to be forgotten, in this united crusade by the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness! Despite the accompanying assurance that such Pact had no hostile purpose towards any particular country, an assurance which even the stolid Hitler spokesman must have found it hard to offer with a grave face, everyone knew that what was intended was to prepare for the pillaging of Russia. The defiance hurled back upon Berlin at next demonstration in the Red Square of Moscow was no doubt intensified by knowledge of the attitude promptly taken towards General Goering's appeal in Paris and in London. Mocking pleasantries must have been expected from French press and French political leaders: the bond with Soviet Russia was not to be nullified within a year of its formation by open insult of the ideals which Soviet Russia has set for herself. What was less clearly foreseen, at least by Nazi leaders, who in a forecast give their own cause the benefit of every conceivable doubt, was the British response, in such tones of frigid satire as are at Mr. Anthony Eden's constant command. In Berlin, the cables tell us, the speech of the British Foreign Secretary was felt to be "disappointing". Mr. Eden must be glad that, this time at least, he achieved just the effect at which he aimed.

Yet the more one reflects upon the movement of international affairs, the more one feels that a twofold division of some sort, combining the Powers with one type of "ideology" against the Powers with another type, is inevitable. In the language of cautious Foreign Offices it may still be deprecated. The construction of antagonistic national *blocs* is sometimes a grim necessity, but with such regrettable accompaniments that it continues to be

disavowed in name even by those who are in practice already engaged on it. Unmistakably certain Powers are now at every turn relying upon, consulting, cooperating with certain other Powers, in an association equally conspicuous on the two sides of "the Great Divide". But that issue is not the one General Goering has formulated. It is between the Powers that still stand for ideals of human brotherhood, peace, individual freedom, fidelity to the pledged word, equal rights for all men irrespective of racial descent or tradition, and the Powers which stand for the repudiation of all this—for contempt of all that we held so precious, and also so secure, in mankind's progress until in Blackshirt and Brownshirt eloquence we were bidden to blaspheme these central values of Christian civilization.

On this issue, not on that of Communism or anti-Communism, the rival *blocs* will be marshalled.

It is but a special example of this contrast that is seen in the interchange about rival political forms. The States that value and the States that abjure what we know as "parliamentary government" are grouped on that relatively minor principle, each finding its congenial associates. Insensibly, this common assumption on each side has often proved decisive over other considerations, cementing unions which from any other point of view would be a surprise, and creating antagonisms among those whom other interests would have brought together. In the international relations of Europe the last twelve months have shown a most remarkable renewal of cooperation between Great Britain and France, another between Germany and Italy: in each case the stress of challenge to a form of government cherished in common has brought together those whom temperamental antipathies and thought of material advantage had been driving further and further apart. But the contrast of political structure is symptomatic rather than causal. It is a much deeper division that we have to acknowledge and upon which we have to act.

## I

The division is, in the first instance, between those Powers upon whose word it is still reasonable to rely, and those other Powers that profess openly, almost as a boast, their indifference to any pledge which it is against the national advantage to fulfill. One recalls Italy's *Treaty of Arbitration and Friendship* with Abyssinia; Germany's signature of the Locarno Pact, with its clauses relative to the Rhineland; Japan's adherence not merely to the Covenant

of the League, but to the Nine-Power Treaty by which the Manchurian adventure should have been made impossible. Of the "explanations" furnished in each case, from Rome, Berlin, Tokio, one is driven to suppose that they were meant as definite avowal of contempt for good faith. Otherwise one should have to say of them what Flaubert said of belief in democracy—that here is the sort of thing which "shames the human mind".

Like the contrast between individuals whose credit at the bank is still intact and those whose credit at the bank is gone, countries differ as morally solvent and morally bankrupt. Quite irrelevant here is the argument of what American journalism calls a "debunking" article, to show how bad faith is universal in international politics. It is no more to the point to allege that "All countries break a treaty when it suits them" than to join in the slander of Thomas Hobbes upon his fellow-creatures—that none would be honest or generous if it were certain that one could be selfish and deceitful without being caught. A banker will continue treating different customers differently, in part at least on the ground of what he calls difference in *character*, quite unmoved by the proof in an "advanced" journal of social analysis that all men are fundamentally alike. Between nations a similar broad contrast has supplied, and continues to supply, similar ground for discrimination, however confident may be the "psychological" disclosure, by a Bertrand Russell or a Harry Elmer Barnes, that morally there is nothing to choose between them.

What has developed in this respect within the last few years is a cooperative frankness on this matter, seen in countries encouraging one another to explicit repudiation where there was formerly but furtive betrayal of good faith. Perhaps it is needful for Foreign Secretaries to take no official notice of this, and to continue explaining the break-down in negotiation with certain Powers as due to some circumstance not discreditable to anyone. But observers whose unofficial, and hence irresponsible, character permits them the privilege of truthfulness should no longer have recourse to such affectation. The reason why Pacts with Germany and Italy have no bearing on French or British rearmament is not that Germans and Italians cannot be brought to give such pledges: in truth they have attached their names in the past with a facility on which it is now horrible to reflect. What stands in the way is the belief, in Paris and in London, that no such pledge, however drawn, would be an effective safeguard against any project of Nazi or Fascist self-interest, and that the British or French premier who proposed to abate a single item of defence preparations on the strength of it would be regarded by his own countrymen as a simpleton.

Here is a most suggestive paragraph from an editorial of March 12 in *The Manchester Guardian*. It is concerned with the proceedings of the "Non-Intervention Committee":

If there are no unforeseen obstacles, the international naval cordon should now be definitely drawn around Spain on Saturday. Although owing to the opposition of the Fascist Powers there is no form of air control, it should henceforward be extremely difficult for any Power to smuggle munitions or men into Spain in defiance of its pledged word. But Signor Mussolini has made certain that, before he allowed the control to come into being, a large Italian Fascist army of between seventy and a hundred thousand men should be in Spain ready to help the rebels. Eight days after the Italian Government decreed that no more "volunteers" should go to Spain, 10,000 Italians landed there. On Saturday, according to reports from Gibraltar, yet another Italian shipload reached Cadiz.

Within a very few weeks after the appearance of these words in a *Manchester Guardian* editorial, the French Government was presenting formal complaint that Italy had again violated her pledge almost before the ink was dry on her signature. Do the records of international relationship contain anything else quite so tragi-comic as the paragraph in a recent *communiqué* about the section of Spanish coast-line which has been committed to Italian surveillance, that neither arms nor "volunteers" for the Civil War may there be imported?

## II

THE situation is not, as so many cynical observers assure us, "just what we have always known." This is not just the occasional breach of international good faith, for which shame-faced explanations and hollow evasions of evidence are quickly put forward, in token of the homage which must still be paid to a rule of honour. Nothing perhaps in the whole strange story is more surprising, or more deplorable, than the effort made thus to excuse what is now being done by a few Powers at the cost of such wholesale defamation. It is well known that British and French political reactionaries, driven furious by the success of progressive legislation at home, have taken heart of grace at the spectacle of better days for tyranny abroad; but it strains one's patience to watch them re-writing the record of their own countries with insertion of such slander as will make the Fascist adventure in Ethiopia seem no more than average in cruelty. What amazing references we have seen, for example, to Great Britain's war in

South Africa, from writers and speakers who but yesterday were of the straitest sect of British Imperialism, but who now search those annals of thirty-five years ago in such eager hope that they may find some incident no less horrible in British practice by which the burden of Italian guilt may be lightened! When the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of York speak in plain (and most restrained) English about what has been done by Fascist troops, the uneasy discontent of these critics is apparent, and we have learned to expect that their next editorials or speeches will have some subtle allusion to an ecclesiastic remote from the practical realities of his age. Constantly, too, we are reminded how human nature does not vary, either from time to time or from place to place: the sort of reflection, as Sir Henry Maine sagaciously observed, which is illustrated by our notorious habit of still using thumb-screws, still settling law disputes by "ordeal", still burning heretics at the stake for their opinions!

Nor is the sharpness of the contrast to be explained away by pseudo-charitable sophistries warning us to remember how much depends upon *the point of view*. It is curious that those who most emphasize such relativity when developing their plea for Italian or German ruthlessness exhibit an extraordinary recoil to objective standards when they come to discuss Russia, although it is by no means clear why Stalin and Molotov should not, equally with Mussolini and Hitler, enjoy whatever immunities a peculiar "point of view" can provide. This dispute has been reargued many times, ever since the Platonic Socrates contrived dialectical embarrassment for Glaucon and Adeimantus in the *Republic*: every time the reply has been in essence the same—that even the gayest sceptic about moral values is soon found to be invoking a moral order of his own. Notoriously the shrillest abusive note in the extremely self-conscious radical literature of our generation comes from those who have first demonstrated that no one is really to blame for anything, because all are mere playthings of the temperament they inherit and the influences by which they have been surrounded. Almost in one breath we are assured that the idea of "guilt" is a remnant of now discredited theology (shown by the new psychologists to be an illusion), and that the Treaty of Versailles was an altogether infamous document upon whose framers the guilt for later woes of Europe must sternly be laid! Mr. G. K. Chesterton once said that the more generous pieces of British social legislation had a final clause, expressed or implied, "This Act shall not apply to Ireland." In like manner, the philosophers of "point of view", having proclaimed a general amnesty for

national offenders against justice, astonish us by excluding from its range either Stalin's Central Committee or the "Big Four" at Versailles! What I am here urging is that if the universal rule is not to be revoked, some means must be found of including under it these particular cases; and that if we are sure they cannot be admitted on any terms, we must try to construct a new rule. In twenty-three centuries of debate we have reached in general the same conclusion, that certain nations—like certain individuals—are relatively honest, dependable, concerned to do justly in the transactions of life: others, individuals and nations, are the reverse. Not a very exciting outcome from so many centuries of reflection! In truth we have not needed that length of time to affirm it, but apparently we need still longer to exhaust the flippancies of denial.

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THERE is indeed much in the tangled scheme of world events to make lack of insight a plausible plea for postponement of action, but there is no obscurity about this "ideological" conflict. Here at least we cannot find refuge in what Mr. G. K. Chesterton once called "that most comfortable of possessions, a confused mind". If the Dictators have a virtue, or a quasi-virtue, it is that of definiteness in announcing that the last are henceforth to be first, and the first to be last, in the reconstruction of values they are about to impose upon the world. From time to time, as a sort of lapse into the old jargon of their non-Fascist and non-Nazi listeners, they may talk (in a world broadcast) about Germany having been "humiliated" and Italy having been "cheated" at Versailles, or about the Soviet régime as not merely democratic, but in truth "the first real enterprise in democracy that the world has known." In next breath, however, a Hitler, a Mussolini or a Stalin will show that these implied ideals—international equality, good faith, democracy—are, in the new view, obsolete. If they mentioned them, this was only to be effective with audiences not yet emancipated: as Montaigne would have put it, "speaking conformably to the prevalent insipience"! So, at least we know where we stand.

A few weeks ago the American ambassador to Paris spoke of those bonds by which "democratic" countries are united to one another, and—in a highly suggestive passage of the same address—observed that the ardent desire of the United States to preserve peace might be frustrated by "madmen in the world dragging her into war". The recent vast expansion of the American naval programme proves that pacifism "at any price" is not our neighbour's policy. Other countries too, of the democratic tradition,

are showing that they are now very much in earnest, by the only sign of earnestness which those creating the opposite kind of tradition respect or even understand. But will they act in conscious unison, or just simultaneously? What are the prospects for such an international "Common Front"?

Notoriously the associations of Powers are fitful, as Abdul Hamid so well understood when he contrived at will such discords, profitable to himself, in what was then facetiously named "The Concert of Europe". But if statesmen have not been stirred, or alarmed, by the experience of these last years into a mood very different from that upon which Abdul Hamid used to play, they must be past all learning. And we are not without hopeful indications that the case is by no means so bad as that.

### III

**W**HAT are the principles, or purposes, which bring countries together in the more lasting sorts of political association? Does the partnership which endures rest only, as we have heard of late from many voices, upon a community of material interest, so that when such interests cease to coincide, or mutually to require each other, the partnership is dissolved? Or is there a compelling motive in common concern for maintenance of a certain manner of life?

Within the last few weeks a memorial, said to have been signed by 13,000 Canadian students, prayed the Government of this country to affirm by positive enactment, what everyone knows to be in practice assured, that, in the event of a war between Great Britain and another Power, Canadians would not be "automatically" involved, but would enter such a conflict, if at all, only by decision of a Canadian parliament. The response of the Cabinet was to assure the petitioners that they had nothing to fear, and at the same time to deprecate the embodiment of even so apparently innocuous a recognition of the truth in a formal act of the Canadian legislature. Surely the reason is obvious. There are clear certainties which it is highly inexpedient to formulate. While no one feels any shadow of doubt that neither a Canadian soldier nor a Canadian dollar would be contributed to any war overseas without definite authorisation from the Canadian parliament, the proclamation of this just now in formal enactment would convey to the foreign world an altogether different meaning. It would be trumpeted abroad as clear proof of a vast change since 1914, of the break-up of the boasted British Commonwealth unity, of a completely novel

grouping of interests, in which—the sagacious German or Italian journalist would be sure to add—this last action by Canada, at the prompting of Canadian youth, is “just typical of the Dominions everywhere.” Is this the opportune moment to offer to a critical foreign world such plausible evidence that not only is an international common front the idlest dream, but that even the British Commonwealth front of the recent past has been dissolved?

Very various are the associations, economic, psychological, political, even theological, by which it has been held needful that nations or groups should be combined if they are to serve the same conception of life. No doubt the economists, the psychologists, the political scientists, will show successively, each from his own point of view, why Great Britain and France and the United States must, before long, in this respect collaborate. But while these speculative thinkers, *more suo*, are hesitating and debating, afflicted with an excessive number of “points of view” to which their hospitable minds have to do justice, there has come, also *more suo*, from a different quarter a ringing call, impatient of further argument and intolerant of further delay.

All Christendom surely, without distinction of race or creed, must have rejoiced at the issue, on March 14, of the Pastoral Letter from Pope Pius XI. It was an indictment of Hitlerism, some think too late, certainly not too soon, and one can readily understand on a little reflection why it was held back so long. Just three years had passed since the conclusion of the Concordat, which had at least the appearance of conceding to the Church under the Third Reich such facilities as would permit her to fulfil her sacred trust. Misgivings were indeed felt from the first, about possible ambiguity of phrase, and about the purpose with which phrases had been shaped so ambiguously. Still, it was reasonable to give the new Nazi Government the benefit of every doubt on a question of honor, and to run many a risk, as the Church had so often done in the past, “for the nobler hypothesis”. An arraignment for deception had much better be late than be premature.

But after three years of trial (and *such* trial) there was no longer room for misunderstanding, nor even excuse—much less reason—for further hesitating. So on March 14, from the Vatican, came the authentic protest, in the name of that Faith held by all Churches in common, against a State policy by which it was being denied, frustrated, mocked. Would it be possible, in brief compressed statement, more completely to repudiate what is vital to the Christian religion than by proclaiming the Nazi doctrine that one race (the so-called Nordic or Aryan) is entitled by Nature to keep



the rest in servile dependence, that the difference which really matters is not one of character but one of blood and soil, and that whatever furthers the interest of the German Reich, no matter what its other consequence, is thereby justified? The foundations of the Faith, says Pope Pius, are here being undermined: who can deny it? In Germany few attempt to deny it; in general people either glory in it or deplore it. When the Pastoral Letter goes on to complain that the Sign of the Cross is mocked with official Nazi approval, that the education of youth has been withdrawn from the Church in order to pervert youthful impulse to a militarism the Church could not endorse, and that with alternate blandishments and threats—the rewards of Government favor being set over against the alternative of a Concentration Camp—the faithful are each day assailed—is not every word of this corroborated by countless despatches for the last twelve months in the British, the American and the French press?

Here, at least, is a definite lead, by one who knows how to ignore and transcend national frontiers and limits for a Cause higher than one merely national. It is a reminder at once of possibilities that had been forgotten and of obligations that are imperative.

H. L. S.