

Outlook for 1937

A paralyzing blindness has obscured the menacing aspect of recent events, says the author, who sees a crisis looming

By R. Palme Dutt

AT the opening of 1937 the question of war and peace dominates the minds of all. Not suddenly, but by a continuous progression since 1931, we are advancing into general war. There is no longer an abrupt dividing line as in 1914. It is a new world situation; and its very newness is creating a paralysis of confusion just when there should be the sharpest clearness of action. War has now reached Europe. What began as war in the Far East in 1931-2 (we drew the deduction at the time that the first stage of the war crisis had opened, arising out of the world economic crisis, and would continuously extend, unless a stand were made by the peoples, until it involved Europe and the world), has now gone forward stage by stage, through the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship in Central Europe in 1933 and the consequent new rearmament race and destruction of treaties, through the first attempted foreign coup of fascism by Hitler in Austria in 1934, through the first open aggressive colonial war of fascism by Mussolini in Africa in 1935, until we have now reached by 1936 the reality of war in Europe, of direct aggressive war by the two leading European fascist powers against a major European state to overthrow its government. This war is still in a preliminary half-veiled form, corresponding to the new conditions and technique. German and Italian armies have landed in Spain. The bombardment of Shanghai in 1932 has been answered by the bombardment of Madrid in 1936. The German-Japanese pact, with Italian adhesion, openly expresses the war-challenge of fascism to the world. Japan drives forward its invasion of China, arousing the united resistance of the Chinese people. Nazi Germany dominates or terrorizes the smaller states of Europe, and turns its guns on Czechoslovakia. Yet there is still no effective mobilization of the popular forces for peace to meet this menace. Millions still ask whether war is coming, when war is all around us. Amid universal apprehension, there is still universal impotence and confusion. There is still speculation on the hypothesis of a repetition of 1914, instead of facing the realities of 1937. There are still dreams of passive isolation escaping the storm of fascism's war. On this basis fascism advances year by year and month by month. A palace crisis can distract the attention of a nation, while fascism lands its troops in a neighboring state. *This blindness to the conflagration at our doors is the paradox and peril of our time.*

It is only necessary to compare the situation at the beginning of 1936 with its close in



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order to recognize the accelerating pace of events. At the beginning of 1936 Laval still ruled in France. George V was king in England, and the Baldwin government had just emerged from the Hoare-Laval crisis by making a show of shedding Hoare. Spain was under Zamora and Reaction. Locarno was still in force. Italy had not yet entered on the poison-gas path to the conquest of Ethiopia. Japan was still participating in the London naval conference. The changes of the succeeding twelve months are so great that the picture of the beginning of 1936 is like the picture of a vanished world.

What has fascism's advance shown in 1936? Five cardinal events stand out. In March Germany occupied the Rhineland and tore up Locarno. In May Italy occupied Addis Ababa and proclaimed the conquest of Ethiopia. In July Germany and Italy began their armed aggression on Spain, at first with the supply of tanks, bombing aeroplanes, and pilots, while utilizing Africans, foreign mercenaries, and native reactionary officers for the fighting, then—as this proved insufficient against the united resistance of the Spanish people—by the direct dispatch of armies in December. In September the Nazi Nuremberg Congress pro-

claimed the war-crusade against Communism and Democracy; and Hitler's speech held out the prospect of rich spoils by the domination of the Ukraine, the Urals, and Siberia ("if we had at our disposal the incalculable wealth and stores of raw material of the Ural Mountains, the vast forests of Siberia and the unending fertile plains of the Ukraine to be exploited under National-Socialist leadership"—Hitler; "Germany has given the signal for the world struggle"—Goebbels). In November, following fifteen months' negotiations between the military staffs, the German-Japanese pact—ostensibly for joint action against "Communism" both "at home and abroad"—was signed.

Alongside these five major acts of aggression and proclamations of aggressive aims may be set the doubling of military service in Germany in August; the drawing over of Belgium, as shown in King Leopold's speech in October; the establishment of control over Austria by the German-Austrian agreement in July; and the increasing penetration of the Balkans, especially Yugoslavia and Rumania (with the driving out of Titulesco) to break the Little Entente and isolate Czechoslovakia, together with the establishment of the Nazi-inspired Metaxas dictatorship in Greece. Nazi-Fascist domination or increasing influence has thus been built up through an extending range of Continental Europe from Algeciras to Helsingfors and from Brussels to Athens.

WHAT HAS been Democracy's reply to this enlarging offensive of fascism? Hitler's armed occupation of the Rhineland and tearing up of Locarno was received with acquiescence; French proposals for counter-measures were overruled by Britain; and Britain has devoted its diplomatic endeavors for the rest of the year to replacing Locarno by an isolationist western-European treaty, as desired by Germany, which would exclude eastern Europe, and would in particular—it is important to note—exclude Czechoslovakia, previously guaranteed under the old Locarno group of treaties. Mussolini's conquest of Ethiopia in defiance of the League has been met by the retreat of the League and withdrawal of sanctions; although the British-French endeavor to ratify fascism's spoliation by hounding the Ethiopian delegates out of the League fell through against the opposition of the smaller states, led by the Soviet Union. The armed aggression of Hitler and Mussolini against Spain has been met by the brilliant British-French device (actually in origin British, but sponsored through France as catspaw) of "non-intervention," which—like the previous "equal" embargo on arms to Italy and Ethiopia that effectively disarmed the victim while his aggressor prepared—disarmed the Spanish democratic government and cut off support from the democratic states, while the fascist powers freely armed the fascist forces. Once again only the Soviet Union has made a stand on behalf of democracy, defense against aggression, and collective peace. This over the three main conflicts of the year has been offi-

cial democracy's sorry record of complete and continuous capitulation before each new aggression of fascism.

To complete the picture, the role of the United States of America should not be left out of account. At the Inter-American Conference at Buenos Aires, President Roosevelt spoke of the close connection of the menace of war with fascism even if he did not specifically name the enemy in so many words. He spoke of the necessity of strengthening democracy in order to strengthen peace, and of the menace of war arising from those states which had abandoned democratic processes, which "loudly proclaim that they require war as an instrument of their policy," and were building up their whole economy on the basis of colossal rearmament:

We know that nations guilty of these follies inevitably face the day either when their weapons of destruction must be used against their neighbors, or when an unsound economy, like a house of cards, will fall apart.

The reference to Japan in the first place, and to Nazi Germany in the second place (whose penetration and even colonial designs in South America begin to be feared by the United States), is clear. But the practical conclusion to be drawn is less clear. The American aim was stated by the chairman of the United States delegation, Cordell Hull, to be to "remove war from the Western Hemisphere." Once again, as with Britain, the hope that all may be well so long as the fascist expansion does not take place in "our" region.

CERTAINLY, there are big positive achievements on the side of the people's mobilization and fight against fascism's offensive in 1936, even though these have not yet transformed

the governmental policies in the democratic countries in western Europe and America. The People's Front in France swept the elections of May, placed the Blum government in power, forced through the dissolution of the fascist leagues (not yet by any means the end of the menace of fascism in France, but representing a heavy blow against fascism), and led the way to a torrential advance of working-class strength and organization, as well as the winning of social and economic demands on a wide front. The Franco-Soviet Pact has been ratified in 1936, and still stands against the combined assault of Hitler and Baldwin. In the sphere of foreign policy the record of the Blum government has failed the needs of the struggle, above all in relation to Spain; but the key to this weakness lies in the overwhelming reactionary pressure of the British National government. The People's Front in Spain swept the elections in February and placed a Left government in power; and although that Left government failed to take adequate measures against the fascists before the rising, as urged by the Communists in repeated warnings, it was thanks to the People's Front that Spain has been able to show the world for the first time how a united people can fight and defeat fascism, in a struggle whose scale and significance exceeds every previous struggle in Europe since 1917.

Above all, 1936 has shown in the new Soviet Constitution the realization of socialism in the largest and most powerful state in the world. Consequent on the disappearance of the exploiting classes and of the old class distinctions, proletarian democracy has necessarily advanced still further into the universal democracy of a socialist society, into what is essentially classless democracy or real democracy for all. This advance and strengthening



Leni Hernandez

William Hernandez

"Twenty thousand for fifty strikebreakers.
Oh well, easy come, easy go."



Louis Sarlin

of democracy on the basis of socialism has taken place at the very same time as the capitalist world is revealing, not only the open attack of fascism on the whole basis of democracy, but the increasing restriction of democratic rights even in those countries which still retain the democratic forms. The whole fight for democracy against fascism has thus taken on a deeper meaning in present conditions, and become, in unity with the fight for peace, the key expression of the present stage of social struggle. In the same way the role of the Soviet Union in the fight for peace becomes more and more clearly, to the widest sections in all countries, the role of world leadership in the whole fight for liberty and civilization against the assault of fascist barbarism. In the words of Stalin at the Soviet Congress:

What has been achieved in the U.S.S.R. is fully possible of achievement in other countries also. From this it follows that the international significance of the new constitution of the U.S.S.R. can hardly be exaggerated. Today, when the turbid wave of fascism is bespattering the socialist movement of the working class and besmirching the democratic strivings of the best people in the civilized world, the new constitution of the U.S.S.R. will be an indictment against fascism, declaring that socialism and democracy are invincible. The new constitution of the U.S.S.R. will serve as moral assistance and real support to all those who are today fighting fascist barbarism.

BUT IF we take stock of the world situation as a whole, we are compelled to recognize that it is in Britain throughout 1936 that we find the most serious weakness of the front against fascism in the democratic countries, and the consequent key to fascism's undoubted advance in 1936, despite the heroic struggle in Spain, the successes of the People's Front in France, and the triumphant strength of socialism in the Soviet Union. The National gov-

ernment in Britain has succeeded in carrying out and securing acceptance of a policy which, under cover of supposedly peaceful aims of "neutrality," "impartiality," "non-intervention," etc., has in fact protected each step of fascist aggression, while strangling democratic resistance. The National government has succeeded in carrying through this policy because of the absence of effective mobilization of opposition to the National government, because of the prevention so far of an inclusive united working-class front and popular front, because of the coöperation of the opposition leadership with the National government at critical points (non-intervention, rearmament, constitutional crisis), because, in short, of the policy summed up in the Edinburgh Labour Party Conference. This has exercised a decisive and menacing influence on the international situation.

It is no secret that the supposed Blum policy of "non-intervention" in Spain was in reality engineered by the National government and forced on Blum. As one of the best informed foreign correspondents, Robert Dell, wrote in the *New York Nation* on October 31:

After the visit of Léon Blum and Yvon Delbos to London in July, visitors to the Foreign Office were told: "We have never had to do with French Ministers so easy to deal with." . . . *It was during the visit to London that the British government proposed the policy of "non-intervention" in Spain—that is, the policy of intervention against the Spanish government.* Delbos was won over to it at once, but Blum was strongly opposed to it. Soon afterwards the British ambassador in Paris informed Blum that if Germany attacked France because the Spanish government obtained war material from France, the British government would not consider it an "unprovoked attack" within the meaning of the Treaty of Locarno and therefore would not go to the aid of France.

This has been subsequently confirmed by the publication of the official letter of De Los

Rios, Spanish representative at Geneva (now ambassador to the United States) on July 25, reporting to the Spanish government Blum's promise to dispatch war material; the authenticity of this has not been contested by the French Foreign Office. In fact, we may criticize Blum as much as we will for his weakness. But the real criminal in the betrayal of democracy and peace to the open fascist aggression in Spain is the British National government; and the heaviest responsibility in consequence rests on the labor movement in Britain, which accepted this policy for three fateful months (actually in the name of helping and backing Blum! what a height of hypocrisy!) and has since not fought against it.

IN THE SAME WAY, British policy in relation to Hitler, while consistently in public expression stressing the menace of Hitler's armaments and on this basis putting in the forefront the necessity of British rearmament, has no less consistently refused the line of general collective defense, which could alone check the menace of aggression, on the grounds that this would mean lining up with the democratic peace camp, in unity with the Soviet Union, against the reactionary camp, and that Britain must remain "neutral" from "both camps." Hence the reality of British policy concentrates increasingly on isolationist rearmament, western-European security, and the maintenance of the Empire, while rejecting collective peace. This was the significance of Eden's speech at Leamington in November defining British commitments, and immediately echoed by Delbos in the French Chamber. The significance of Eden's speech was not merely that he stressed British commitments as being confined to western Europe, the Empire, Egypt, and Iraq, but that he no less specifically (and this point was immediately taken up by the fascist press) excluded any commitments under the Covenant of the League and declared them to be optional. The Conservative press begins to warn Czechoslovakia to make the best terms it can with Hitler. This is the policy of "pseudo-neutrality" which opens the way to fascist war.

The German-Japanese treaty is the inevitable consequence of this British "neutral" policy of surrender to fascism. In fact the German-Japanese treaty—and herein is expressed the typical contradiction of the present British foreign policy—is far from pleasing to British official opinion. They see clearly enough that its point is not merely directed against the Soviet Union, but also against the extremely vulnerable British Empire. The *London Times*, which had already written of the reported triple alliance of Germany, Japan, and Italy as an alliance of "thieves" (thereby expressing the objections of the richest brigand to the fascist brigands' projects for the re-division of the spoils), affirmed that the German-Japanese treaty contains secret clauses directed against British interests in the Far East:

There are rumors, probably not without substance, that the agreement provides for the establishment of

German and Japanese spheres of economic—ultimately political—influence in the Dutch East Indies; a development which would certainly react upon our position at Hong Kong and Singapore. (November 26, 1936.)

Similarly, the *Economist* recently wrote of the reported Triple Alliance of Germany, Japan, and Italy:

This is one of the most significant events that has happened in the international arena since 1918. It may prove to be the nemesis for Anglo-French hesitation in the cause of collective security. It is obviously a piece of news which ought to be received with even greater concern in London than in Moscow.

The easier option for a Triple Alliance is not Russia, but the British Empire; for, unlike Russia, the British Empire lies strategically at the mercy of this particular combination. (November 21, 1936.)

The dominant Conservative policy of "security" by isolationist rearmament and leaving Hitler a "free hand in the East" is getting into heavy straits.

It will be seen that British Conservative foreign policy is increasingly torn with contradictions, and sharp conflicts of opposing sections and tendencies may be expected in the coming year. This situation offers unrivaled possibilities for a popular offensive for a positive peace policy in unity with the peace forces in France and other countries, and with the Soviet Union. Such an offensive, however, can be conducted only on the basis of implacable hostility against the National government and its policy of "pseudo-neutrality," which in fact assists the path of fascist aggression and war. Herein lies the crux of the issue of foreign policy in Britain. Underlying the policy of "pseudo-neutrality" is the *theory of the two blocs*. Behind this theory is hidden the real support of the drive toward fascism and war.

The theory of the two blocs presents a picture of British policy as a policy of "neutrality" and "peace," seeing the menace of the world being divided into two "doctrinal" or "ideological" blocs of fascism and communism, and seeking to prevent Britain being lined up with either.

As regards the attitude of His Majesty's government, they have explicitly deprecated any tendency to divide the world into conflicting camps, especially on ideological grounds. (Eden, in the House of Commons, November 30, 1936.)

The refusal of this country to be drawn into any conflict of so-called "ideologies" is absolute. It has become necessary to repeat this refusal as Mr. Eden has repeated it because there is a persistent demand that this country should declare itself in favor of one or other of the "ideologies" that afflict mankind. ("Principles of British Foreign Policy," Diplomatic Correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*, November 25, 1936.)

British foreign policy has been to prevent at all costs a line-up of fascist and anti-fascist States. (*Daily Herald*, November 26, 1936.)

Under this guise the real foreign policy of the National government is presented to popular opinion as a policy of peace.

Nor is this only a question of the direct propaganda of the National government, and



Litho cut by Sid Gotcliffe

of the official press from the *Times* to the *Daily Herald*. It receives additional support from pro-fascist and right-wing conservative isolationism on the one side, and from sections of abstract pacifism on the other. How abstract pacifism, with whatever original intentions, turns into a positively reactionary force of support for the National government's policy of so-called "neutrality" and for free play for the fascist war offensive, is abundantly illustrated from Bertrand Russell's recent book *Which Way to Peace?* Russell writes with at any rate a commendable explicitness which should open the eyes of many who may have been blind thus far to the real character of abstract pacifism:

The friend of peace in France should work against the Franco-Soviet alliance. The friend of peace in Great Britain should oppose commitments to Russia, and to France in so far as is possible without breach of faith. In America he should support the policy of neutrality. He should avoid the crusading spirit, as shown, for example, in relation to Abyssinia and Spain (p. 192).

The Germans would like to be let alone while they attack Russia. . . . Perhaps after a successful campaign against Russia, the Germans would feel satisfied and grow less warlike (p. 156).

No support for Ethiopia. No support for Spain. No unity with the Soviet Union. It will be seen that a single thread runs through all this policy of abstract pacifism. Absolute

pacifism has completed the circle and ended up on the side of fascism, the policy of absolute war.

The whole falsity of the theory of the two blocs is that it conceals and distorts the issue of peace or war into an issue of "two blocs." *But in fact there are not two blocs.* There is only one bloc—the war bloc of fascism. There is only one offensive—the offensive of fascism. This is the offensive of Germany, Italy, and Japan, together with Franco and their satellites in all countries. It is this offensive which, through the tacit support of leading reactionary sections in the foremost imperialist countries, has in successive forms constituted the war crisis since 1931 and now brings ever closer the menace of world war. Against this war menace it is necessary to combine the peoples of the world for peace. No such combination yet exists. If it did exist, the menace of war would be checked. There is here no question of a rival bloc, but of the defense of peace. The Franco-Soviet pact and the Czechoslovak-Soviet pact do not represent a rival bloc, because they are equally open to Germany to enter on the basis of the common maintenance of peace; and precisely this Nazi Germany refuses, thereby creating the division. For Britain then to take this division as an excuse for refusing to come out on the side of peace is not a policy of peace, but a policy of assisting fascist aggression and accelerating the advance of war.

WILL THE popular forces throughout the world combine in time to check the offensive of fascism and its headlong advance to war? Above all, will unity of the working class and of the popular forces in Britain be achieved in time to defeat the reactionary policy of the National government which in reality lies behind the advance of this offensive? These are the burning questions of the present moment, which are reaching their height in 1937. To present this issue as an abstract ultimate issue of "communism or fascism" is a trick of Reaction at the present moment to prevent the united mobilization of the popular forces. The present immediate issue over Europe, the issue that is being fought in Spain, is no ultimate issue of the future form of society or of final goals. These underlying social questions will have to be settled by the peoples in the future; the immediate issue is more elementary, and is the condition of further advance. Anyone with eyes in his head can see that in hard fact the actual concrete struggle which is going on today is a struggle for peace and democratic institutions against the offensive of fascism. Only the enemies of peace, the reactionaries and pro-fascists, seek to conceal this issue, which means the entire working population of every country in the capitalist world today.

ON THE success of mobilizing all the popular forces for this struggle depends the outcome of the next stage before us. In this present struggle all the future is contained. And it is this struggle that is likely to reach its decisive height in 1937.