

ZCZC

*AUS*WEE*

ON THE DRY SIDE 422

Appeasement does not work

John Hyde

"The blood shed on the European continent in the course of the last three hundred years bears no proportion to the national result of the events.... Germany has solemnly recognised and guaranteed France her frontiers.... Without taking the past into account Germany has concluded a non-aggression pact with Poland.... We shall adhere to it unconditionally.... Germany neither intends nor wishes to interfere in the internal affairs of Austria, to annex Austria, or to conclude an Anschluss.... Whoever lights the torch of war in Europe can wish for nothing but chaos."

These honeyed words were spoken by Adolf Hitler during the evening of May 21, 1935. This is what the "London Times" had to say about them: "It is to be hoped that the speech will be taken everywhere as a sincere and well-considered utterance meaning precisely what it says." The "Times" did not know that, during the morning of the same day, Hitler had promulgated the secret "Reich Defence Law", reorganising the German armed forces and appointing Schacht to organise a war economy.

Less than a year later, March 7, 1936, he launched his first military adventure, operation *Schulung*. A mere three German battalions 'occupied' the German Rhineland, which was, under the terms of the Versailles Treaty, a demilitarised zone.

Again Hitler promised peace: "We have no territorial demands in Europe.... Germany will never break the peace!" And the world, most notably France and Britain, did nothing. The League of Nations was, at the time, too preoccupied with its much-publicised but ineffectual sanctions intended to stop Italy's aggression in Abyssinia.

Peace diplomacy in the 1930s has many lessons for those who will heed them, today. We might recall how Belgium, faced

with German troops on its Eastern border, withdrew from the Locarno pact---a serious loss for Western defence.

And we might with profit recall how Britain sought to appease Nazi Germany. In May 1937, Chamberlain replaced Baldwin as Prime Minister in Britain. Hitler was pleased; he now had a foreign affairs expert to deal with. Chamberlain soon visited him at Berchtesgaden.

Nine days before that meeting Baron von Weizaecker, of the German Foreign Office, wrote Hitler a secret memo. In part it read: "From England we want colonies and freedom of action in the East.... The British need for tranquillity is great. It would be profitable to find out what England would be willing to pay for such tranquillity." A German memorandum of the Chamberlain/Hitler meeting reveals that Chamberlain was prepared to pay with some concessions regarding colonies and Eastern Europe.

As for Hitler's promised tranquillity: a minute of about the same time quotes him as saying to his senior generals: "The history of all ages---the Roman Empire and the British Empire---had proved that expansion could be carried out by breaking down resistance and taking risks; setbacks were inevitable. There had never ... been spaces without a master, and there were none today; the attacker always comes up against a possessor."

On November 5, 1937, Hitler outlined his plans for war to his Chiefs of Staff and Foreign Office heads. Three of these---Blomberg, Fritsch and Neurath---voiced opposition. None survived in office for three months! (Dictators cannot tolerate opposition.)

The Anschluss of Austria followed in March 1938, even though Austria's independence was guaranteed by the League of Nations. This aroused criticism which, in turn, prompted Herr Hitler to say, "Not as tyrants have we come but as liberators"---so says every tyrant!

Without firing a shot, Hitler had acquired 7 million subjects and a considerable strategic advantage. The Anschluss prompted Neville Chamberlain to say, "The hard fact is that nothing could have arrested what has actually happened unless this country and other countries were prepared to use force." Instead of advocating the necessary force, however, he stated publicly that Britain would not come to Czechoslovakia's aid, thereby, if there was any doubt left, sealing that nation's fate.

The Munich Conference at which the British, French and Italians, handed Sudeten Czechoslovakia to Germany soon followed. It was after that meeting, that Mr Chamberlain made his famous (fatuous) "Peace in our time" promise.

The rest of what had been Czechoslovakia was soon gobbled up and then it was Poland's turn. At last Britain and France reacted. World War II killed a total of 15 million combatants

on both sides whereas Hitler alone simply murdered some 17 million Jews, Gypsies, Poles, Ukrainians etc. (Despots usually kill more of their own or conquered peoples than they kill armed opponents.)

How much better would it have been to have stopped Hitler when he entered the Rhinelands, or Austria or even Czechoslovakia? The lesson is surely that it is possible to truck only with people whose word we can trust; others must be resisted.

War is indeed dreadful. It should be avoided, but not at all costs. I have, of course, chosen events to demonstrate that the price of buying off a tyrant who can be stopped will be high---I can, however, think of none that could carry the opposite message. Hussein is every bit as bad as Hitler. (Hitler was at least squeamish about murdering people with his own hands---not so Hussein.) Hussein is now in a stronger position than Hitler was at the time he sent troops into the Rhinelands, but not yet as strong as Hitler was when he invaded Poland. He can be stopped: therefore, he should be stopped.

Those few Peacenicks camped in the desert are brave, and therefore probably honourable people, but their opinion that lives can be saved by turning the other cheek to people like Saddam Hussein is dangerously wrong. If they were to convince the democratic nations that appeasement was the way to peace, they would, in fact, have created the conditions for World War III. Stopping Saddam Hussein after he had gained control of the entire Persian Gulf and armed himself with nuclear weapons, and when small nations feared to offer him offence, would have become as difficult as stopping Hitler ultimately proved to be.

I have no similar respect for those who, from the safety of Australia, gloat over the loss of Allied aircraft and sound so disappointed when they must report that people actually in the Gulf region are not suffering from the vapours.

John Hyde is Executive Director of the Australian Institute for Public Policy

NNNN