THE OCCUPATION OF THE RHINELAND MARCH 7, 1936

A Thesis written in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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PREFACE

On March 7, 1936, three battalions of a yet relatively weak German Wehrmacht crossed the border into the demilitarized Rhineland. So fearful was the German General Staff of possible French military intervention, with which they knew they could not cope, the battalion commanders were under sealed orders to evacuate immediately in the face of any determined French stand. They occupied the towns of Dusseldorf, Cologne, Mainz, Coblenz, and Frankfurt amidst a tumultuous welcome from the German inhabitants who regarded them as the saviours of the new Germany.

Thus typically and efficiently did Hitler carry off the most spectacular, and in the light of our present hindsight, the most important of a series of breaches of international convention which form the tragic history of the prewar years. Nothing came of this violation. Hitler had started into high gear the drive that would in three years embroil Europe and the world in the horrors of the Second World War. How such an obvious violation of international agreements was carried out with no interference on the part of the

offended European powers, and how their misplaced faith in a peace without guarantees would lead to that war, is the theme of this thesis.

The Rhineland crisis was, in fact, a logical step in the sequence of events that took place in Europe after the signing of the Versailles Treaty bringing the Great War to a close.

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the help and encouragement given me in the preparation of this work by my wife, Mary Theresa Davis; Dr. John R. MacCormack, Head of the History Department at Saint Mary's University; Dr. Donald J. Weeren, Acting Dean of Education, Saint Mary's University; and John M. Forrest, History Department of St. Patrick's High School.

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THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES

The general slaughter which was World War I came to a thunderous close on November 11th., 1918. After four years of mass annihilation the guns were deafeningly silent. The "war to end all wars" had finally come to an end. Now came the peace. The meetings we commonly term the Treaty of Paris were the focal point for all the hopes and aspirations of men who had peace, a true and lasting peace, as their ultimate dream. It was a gathering of politicians, statesmen, and technical experts whose aim was to create a new and stable Europe out of the ruins of the old. Europe had entered a new and frightening age. The old regimes had crumbled away in the wake of the world catastrophe. The stability of the whole continent depended upon the outcome of this Peace of Paris.

The guiding spirit for the whole post-war peace movement, as far as the world public was concerned, was President Woodrow Wilson of the United States. For a world torn by the bitterness and seeming futility of the war years, the American President represented the only hope for future peace and harmony in Europe. However, Wilson more than met his match in David

Lloyd George of England and Georges Clemenceau of France. The idealism with which Wilson had captured the world through his Fourteen Points was seen to face the harsh realities of practical politics, and out of this clash would grow the Versailles Treaty - the most important of the treaties arranged in the Peace of Paris. The Versailles Treaty was signed in the Hall of Mirrors on June 28th., 1919.

Premier Clemenceau of France was, in reality, the most important figure at the peace conference, and he represented strongly and well the fundamental French desire for security from Germany. For thirty years France had felt herself the victim of Prussian militarism, but now she had her chance to eliminate the menace Germany presented. Hers was an understandable fear.

> Searching vainly, in a chaos of water-logged shell-holes, for a brick to indicate where a smiling village had previously stood, she would have been less or more than human if her thoughts had not concentrated on reparation for her injuries and permanent security against their repetition.[1]

Hence the French aim was to provide for a permanently weakened and chastened Germany. Clemenceau was of course opposed in many of his plans by Lloyd George who just as ably represented the British view that Germany must be allowed to regain her strength and vigor, at least in the economic sphere, to take her rightful place in the European family. Thus the

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[1] G.M. Gathorne-Hardy, A Short History of International Affairs 1920 - 1939 (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 28.

Versailles settlement would evolve from a mixture of American idealism (almost over-idealism), an unimaginably strong French fear of Germany and desire for security, and British commercial opportunism. It was a treaty founded on basic disagreements among the Big Three who differed so widely on their interpretations of what the treaty was meant to do.

American anti-monarchical feeling had resulted in the abdication of the Kaiser and the formulation b y the new German government of a constitution that was born in the midst of a crumbling empire - a constitution born of defeat and frustration. It theoretically gave Germany the most truly liberal form of government in all the Western world. However, it was a grafted constitution imposed on a country long associated with a highly centralized "leader" principle. Franz von Papen may well have been at least partially correct in his assumption that the American anti-monarchical policy helped to lay the groundwork in Germany for the Hitler regime.[1] E.H. Carr gives much the same idea in his "The Twenty Years' Crisis":

> When the theories of liberal democracy were transplanted, by a purely intellectual process, to a period and to countries whose stages of development and whose political needs were utterly different from those of Western Europe in the nineteenth century, sterility and disillusionment were the inevitable sequel.[2]

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[1] Franz von Papen, Memoirs (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1952), p. 6.

[2] Edward Hallett Carr, The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939 (London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1956), p. 27.

This, of course, is exactly what happened in the Germany of the twenties. She limped along on her Weimar constitution until stress and strain broke her and led the country to seek again the leader she longed for.

France viewed the Versailles Treaty as the ultimate instrument whereby she could carve out of Europe the security against a militant Germany with which she was understandably obsessed. This led to many a clash between Clemenceau and the other two members of the "Big Three". The French were unable to impose as severe conditions in the treaty as they wished, but did manage to salvage what they considered to be the minimum possible measure to guarantee this security, and that was to include in the treaty the sections applicable to the allied occupation of the Rhineland. The French had attempted to have this occupation made a permanent condition, but were forced to bow to combined American and British pressure to limit the occupation to fifteen years. France then insisted that the evacuation of the Rhineland would be tied to the rigid payment of war reparations by the German government.[1]

As finally agreed upon, however reluctantly on the part of France, the Versailles Treaty provided the permanent demilitarization of the Rhineland zone and its occupation by allied forces for fifteen years. Articles 42, 43, and 44 were those pertinent to the Rhineland settlement.

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[1] A.J.P. Taylor, The Origins of the Second World War (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1961), p. 27.

Article 42.
Germany is forbidden to maintain or construct any fortifications either on the left bank of the Rhine or on the right bank to the West of a line drawn 50 kilometres to the East of the Rhine.

Article 43.
In the area defined above the maintenance and the assembly of armed forces, either permanently or temporarily, and military manoeuvres of any kind, as well as the upkeep of all permanent works for mobilization, are in the same way forbidden.

Article 44.
In case Germany violates in any manner whatever the provisions of Articles 42 and 43, she shall be regarded as committing a hostile act against the powers signatory of the present Treaty and as calculated to disturb the peace of the world. [1]

The Treaty was not well received by the German delegation. They had taken no part in the formulation of it, and were dumbfounded at what they considered the severity of its measures. Armed opposition was considered if only to reduce the hardness of the terms, but the idea was abandoned on the advice of the German General Staff. Thus the new German government signed the treaty giving Alsace and Lorraine back to France as well as the temporary loss of sovereignty over the rich industrial Saar territory; she lost a number of relatively small frontier areas; her colonies were taken away and became League of Nations mandates; her proud though weary army was reduced to a force of 100,000 men; her fleet was surrendered and her naval building program carefully limited; part of her merchant fleet was handed over; and, the most crucial part of the whole treaty, she was to agree to pay the unspecified payments

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[1] Walter Consuelo Langsram, Documents and Readings in the History of Europe Since 1918 (Chicago: J.P. Lippincott Company, 1951), pp. 12-13.

imposed upon her by the Allies. These reparations payments would be made so prohibitively high in the mind of the eminent British Treasury representative J.M. Keynes, that he handed in his resignation from his official position.[1]

And so the peace treaty came into effect formally ending this "war to end all wars". It was a harsh treaty and, although perhaps just, it was certainly not prudent. It made the difficult task of reconciliation with the Germans more difficult than ever. The hope of the European continent lay with the German Social Democrats who were forced to sign the hated "diktat". Its leaders, Scheidemann, the first Chancellor, and Ebert, the first President of the new Republic, had consistently worked for just such a reconciliation since the proclamation of the new Republic on November 9, 1918.

> It was indeed a tragedy that the new democratic government had to bear the burden of the hated peace treaty; and that defeat and democracy were so closely associated in German minds.[2]

Given the strains of the twenties and the hardships of the thirties, it is not hard to see with hindsight that the "diktat" of Versailles killed the Weimar constitution almost from the start; it really only took thirteen years to gradually expire.

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[1]T.L. Jarman, The Rise and Fall of Nazi Germany (New York: New American Library of World Literature, Unc., 1961), p. 69.

Ibid. p. 73.

CHAPTER II

WEIMAR AND THE TWENTIES

The second decade of the twentieth century dawned on a world that was desperately desirous of peace - so desperate in fact that many lulled themselves into a contentment based on the apparent trappings of peace. A misguided pacificism born of the frustration and stupidity of the Great War guided the mind of the average man in the western democracies for the better part of the next two decades. The world had its peace treaty; Germany had seemingly discarded the arrogance and militarism of old when she discarded the Kaiser; commerce and industry were slowly beginning to pacify a war economy, and the world had its first real attempt to international control of the problems that had helped create the conditions leading to the wars of the past - the League of Nations.

The League of Nations had been one of the famous "Fourteen Points" propounded by Woodrow Wilson as the basis for peace talks to end the conflict with Germany. Indeed so dear was this cause to the President that in the heat of the Versailles deliberations he was forced to compromise on many of the other thirteen points to ensure the success of this most important of all, the creation of a League of Nations. It id one of the great ironies of history that the founding father

of the League should have had his dream destroyed by the failure of the American Senate to ratify the Covenant. Indeed the American electorate would vote into power a Republican administration in the ensuing election fought with this very matter as one of its chief issues. And so the United States sank into the isolationist period of the twenties - the roaring twenties of American folklore. Since Germany was excluded from membership in the League by Versailles, and the pariah, Russia, was more than ever the outcast, it meant that the League became a prop supporting the beliefs of the very nations who had created the settlement of 1919. Britain, France and Italy were the only major powers who were League members.[1]

For Germany, the twenties were for the most part a time of uncertainty and troubles. It began with the Thundrous blow received in April, 1921, when the German republic was handed the Allied reparations bill amounting to 132 billion gold marks or 33 billion dollars. This ridiculously high figure helped cripple the fledgling republic and gave added fuel and fire to the extremists of both right and left who constantly harassed the legitimate government and threatened its very existence with rebellions in various of the German states. The mark began the decline that would reach its terrible depth in 1923. At the same time the fanaticism of right wing nationalists and left wing communists led to the formation within both wings of armed squads spreading political beatings,

[1]David Thomson, Europe Since Napoleon (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), p. 603.

riots, and murders throughout the land. Indeed on June 24, 1922 came the assassination of the Jewish industrialist and Foreign Minister, Rathenau. There had been a still earlier attempt on the life of Philipp Scheidemann.

The year 1923 was to prove the most decisive in the history of the Weimar republic. It seemed for a time that the fragile structure must tumble down. As mentioned before, the mark had started its decline in 1921; even then it had dropped to 75 to the dollar, but by late 1923 the currency was actually valueless. T.L. Jarman gives the following table as indicative of this incredible devaluation:

1 dollar = 4 marks, at the 1914 rate
January 1922 : 1 dollar = 191 marks
January 1923 : 1 dollar = 17,972 marks
November1923 : 1 dollar = 4,200,000,000[1]

Feeling the economic pinch of the mark collapse, the government pleaded inability to meet the reparations payments. The result was that on January 9, 1923, when the reparations Commission set up by the peace treaty declared Germany to be in default of deliveries of coal and timber, Premier Poincare ordered French and token Belgium troops to occupy the very rich Ruhr.

> The industrial heart of Germany, which after the loss of Upper Silesia to Poland, furnished the Reich with four fifths of its coal and steel production, was cut off from the rest of the country.[2]

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[1]Jarman, op. cit., p. 87.

[2]William L. Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), p. 61.

This was a desperately severe blow to an already critical economy and tended to unite all German factions against the French. The Ruhr workers went on strike and were supported by the German government, which, under Chancellor Wilhelm Cuno, declared a policy of passive resistance. At the same time, "Separatist" movements in the Rhineland were being carefully nurtured by the French and Belgians.

That the Republic survived the year was due in no small part to General Hans von Seeckt, the brilliant creator of Germany's 100,000 man Wehrmacht, who would play for a year the role of saviour to the tottering government.[1]

On September 26, 1923, Gustav Stresemann, the Chancellor, ordered the ending of passive resistance in the Ruhr and the resumption of reparations payments. Contemplating the violent reactions to be expected from leftists and rightists over such apparently appeasive measures, Stresemann had had President Ebert place executive power in the hands of Gessler, the Minister of Defense, and von Seeckt, the Commander of the Army. Seeckt immediately put down the threat from the Right in Berlin, and from the Left in Saxony, Thuringia, Hamburg and the Ruhr.

Only Bavaria remained outside the control of the central government. Bavaria was the centre of much turbulence in

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[1]John W. Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics 1918-1945, (New York: MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1954), p. 102.

this early Republican period. It was Bavaria which had seen the short-lived Hoffmann Socialist government. It was in Bavaria that the German Workers' Party had been founded and introduced into its ranks on September 16, 1919, a young dispirited soldier named Adolf Hitler. By the middle of 1921, Hitler had gained personal control over the party. By the latter part of the same year he oversaw the formation of the first "Storm Troopers" whose job was to control the Communist agitators trying to break up the party meetings. By November, 1923, the party had become the National Socialist Party with the leading members Hitler, Hess, Goering, Rosenberg, and Roehm. By November too, the collapse of the mark and the occupation of the Ruhr had brought many new followers to the Nazi party. It had in fact grown beyond the confines of Bavaria and had become a national party.

The anti-Republican sentiments of the young and relatively unknown Nazi leader were now in the fall of 1923 to become entwined with the fortunes of the anti-Republican triumvirate ruling Bavaria: Kahr, the State Commissioner, General Otto von Lossow, commanding the Army in Bavaria, and Colonel Hans von Seisser, the head of the state police.[1]

Hitler had already joined in an extremist alliance of right-wing nationalist and military figures. The three mentioned above were the most important. But as time went on , Hitler began to have misgivings about his new associates. They were so

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[1]Shirer, op. cit., pp. 60-64

anti-Republic they were on their way to a complete secession of Bavaria from the Reich, a mystic term in Hitler's eyes, and to accomplish this were even willing to contemplate a return of the old Bavarian royal house. Hitler could never envisage a break from Germany, and to prevent such a possibility, he embarked on the adventure termed the "beer-hall Putsch," although the terminology is decidedly inaccurate.

> The Burgerbraü Keller was no mere beer-hall, such as the Nazis frequently used for their meetings, but a fashionable rendezvous lying on the outskirts of Munich beyond the River Isar. [1]

Kahr was to address some business organizations at the Burgerbräu Keller on November 8, and Hitler, fearful of the possibility of a secession announcement, decided he had to attempt his coup. The whole enterprise was a dismal failure. Even the prestige given to the move by the appearance of the senile General von Ludendorff was pitifully weak. On the morning of November 9, Hitler and the aged war hero led some three thousand followers to the heart of Munich. They came up against a strategically placed cordon of police, about one hundred strong, which fired on the advancing column killing about twenty, wounding many more, and dispersing the rest. Hitler fled and hid for two days after which he was captured and put on trial.

He used the courtroom as a wonderful propaganda sounding-board, and his eloquent pleas for National-Socialist principles were spread over Germany by the press and found many

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[1] Wheeler-Bennett, op. cit., p. 173.

sympathetic ears. On April 1, 1924, Hitler was pronounced guilty and sentenced to five years in jail. This term was later reduced due to national feelings to thirteen months, and, in fact, Hitler spent less than nine months in the famous Landsberg fortress prison. Here, in a relatively luxurious state considering the fact that he was serving a prison term for treason, Hitler dictated the work that would eventually become the most widely read book in all Germany, "Mein Kampf" - the political treatise containing all the bizarre elements of Nazi philosophy from love of war to hatred of world Jewry. The work was almost totally ignored in the western countries, and this is unfortunate for in it Hitler released the blueprint for his new Germany.

By 1924, Germany seemed well on her way to recovery. The Republic met its reparations payments by increased borrowing from America and there was a rise in economic prosperity and political stability. With the foreign policy of Gustav Stresemann, Germany seemed to be accepting her pla ce in Europe as seen by the old Allies. On April 16, 1924, Stresemann had the German Government accept the Dawes Plan. He had agreed by 1925 to Germany's entry into the League of Nations and had raised the hopes of all peaceful men in Europe when in the same year he was one of the chief architects in the formation of the Pact of Locarno which would truly ratify the Versailles settlement and end the dangers that lurked in fortified borders held by a forced peace . And yet, Stresemann was a German and felt the injustices of Versailles as strongly as anyone.

> Stresemann was as determined as the most extreme nationalist to get rid of the whole treaty lock, stock, and barrel: reparations, German disarmament, the occupation of the Rhineland, and the frontier with Poland. But he intended to do this by the persistent pressure of events, not by threats, still less by war. Where other Germans insisted that revision of the treaty was necessary for the revival of German power, Stresemann believed that the revival of German power would inevitably lead to revision of the treaty.[1]

So Germany needed time and peace; time to recuperate and strengthen herself - and time she could not have without peace. To get peace Stresemann knew he must have Germany accepted by the French and British and allay their fears. It was out of this belief there grew the acceptance of the Dawes Plan as well as Locarno and the League of Nations.

The Locarno Pact then was drawn up largely at the initiative of Stresemann as German Foreign Minister. The formative meetings were held at Locarno in Switzerland from October 5 to October 16. The treaties were signed on December 1, but would not come into force until September 14,1926 after Germany had entered the League of Nations. The Locarno Pact was meant to provide a means whereby at least an aggressor would be identified as such in Europe's most critical area the Rhineland. It was made possible by the conditions of the times. Both sides - Germany and France - happened to need it.

> The Ruhr invasion had brought little profit to France, and had left her perplexed as to the next step. Germany might one day be powerful again. Germany, on the other hand, still feared the military supremacy of France, and hankered after a guarantee. It was the psychological moment

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[1]Taylor, op. cit., p. 51.

> when French fear of Germany was about equally balanced by Germany's fear of France; and a treaty which had not been possible two years before, and would not have been possible five years later, was now welcome to both.[1]

Article 1 of the Locarno Pact bound the signatory powers to the maintenance of the boundaries in existence between Germany and Belgium, and Germany and France as fixed by the Treaty of Versailles, "and also the observance of the stipulations of Articles 42 and 43 of the said treaty concerning the demilitarized zone".[2]

In Article 2 Germany and Belgium, and Germany and France guaranteed that they would under no circumstances attack, invade, or war against each other, with the following proviso:

> The exercise of the right of legitimate defence, that is to say, resistance to a violation of the undertaking contained in the previous paragraph or to a flagrant breach of Articles 42 or 43 of the said Treaty of Versailles, if such breach constitutes an unprovoked act of aggression and by reason of the assembly of armed forces in the demilitarised zone immediate action is necessary.[3]

In Section 3 of Article 4, the Pact spelled out the duties of the signatories in the event of a violation of the agreement. If Article 2 of Locarne, or Articles 42 or 43 of Versailles were violated then all contracting parties were

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[1] Carr, op. cit., pp. 105-106.

[2] Langsram, op. cit., p. 216.

[3] Ibid.

to aid the offended power if the contracting party could satisfy itself that the violation constituted an unprovoked act of aggression. The Council of the League would immediately be informed of any alleged breach and the signatories would be bound to act in accordance with the Council recommendations, provided that the Locarno signers, other than the conflicting parties concur.[1]

Thus the Pact had so many qualifications that combined action of the signatory powers would be a fairly difficult act to achieve. Nevertheless, Europe had its agreement and would now breathe easier. The difficult questions of territorial disputes between the Germans and the French would now be judged on a mutually agreed contract basis with England and Italy as guarantor powers. The Italians were invited because Europe had rather an exaggerated notion of the potency of Italy in the twenties and thirties. England was asked because France insisted on basing its own security on the cooperation and active support of that island nation. The tragic part is that France had in effect totally abandoned any hope of independent policy in foreign affairs.

> The fact is that, after the end of the Ruhr experiment and after the signing of the Locarno pacts, the French never again would act alone; they had, indeed, lost a large part of their nerve, had caved in before English pressure, and thereafter followed closely behind a British lion whose roar was frequently not very loud.[2]

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[1] Ibid. p. 217.

[2] Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert, The Diplomats 1919-1939 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 82.

In Germany itself there was considerable opposition to the Locarno Pact. The Communists, Nationalists, and Nazis had all voted against its ratification, and there was a great deal of opposition to it among the German people. However, they need not have worried. In reality, the Locarno signers each wanted guarantees applicable to itself, but each was unwilling to guarantee another power in a critical situation.

Nonetheless, Locarno seemed to usher in a new age of peace and prosperity in Europe in general, and in Germany in particular. On September 8, 1926, Germany was formally admitted to the League of Nations and given a permanent seat on the Council. On January 31, 1927, the Inter-Allied Commission of Military Control came to an end in Germany, with the problems of German armament to be dealt with by the League from now on. On August 27 of the following year, the Kellogg-Briand Pact, or Pact of Paris as it is often called, was signed at Paris. It was a very optimistic document renouncing all aggressive war, but was also weakened by making no provision for sanctions.

> The year 1928 represented the high point of the Weimar Republic: the point of its maximum stability, its maximum success, its maximum hope.[1]

Then came the fateful stock market crash on Wall Street on October 24, 1929. The economic depression which grew out of the crash spiralled out from America and caused

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[1] George F. Kennan, Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960), p. 284.

the economic structure of every major power to quake. This, of course, was especially true of Germany because during the years of recovery from 1924 to 1929, it was American loans that had kept the German economy vibrant and had helped her to make good her reparations payments. With American lending cut off, German industry suffered a drastic curtailment in production. The result was the growth in the next few years of an un employment problem proportionately more severe than in any other major European country. The figures speak for themselves:

1,320,000 in 1929 (September)
3,000,000 in 1930 "
5,000,000 in 1932 " [1]

The terrible aspects of the depression affected great masses of the German people and led them to search for security and stability. Unfortunately, more and more of these desperate people grasped at National Socialism as the last straw. There was a general atmosphere of despair and despondency such as had not been so evident in Germany since the crisis of 1923.

> In 1923, money in Germany had lost its old majesty. Now, in 1930, work lost its value; three million men could no longer sell their labour and more millions expected to lose their jobs in the near future.[2]

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[1] Jarman, op. cit., p. 119.

[2] Konrad Heiden, Der Fuehrer (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1944), p. 346.

At the same time the industrial magnates of Germany were becoming more and more despised by the middle class Germans who lost their all in the economic convulsion. For centuries it was this class which had upheld the virtual sanctity of private property and conservative politics. Now they were to swing their votes to the jubilant Nazi Party. The years from 1924 to 1929 were poor years for the Nazis. The general prosperity and stability of the period was such that the extremist policies of National Socialism could not take root. Now the depression came as a godsend to the Party and the Republic flickered on the brink of extinction.

> In the months that followed that event, all of the ills that had plagued Germany in 1923 were revived, and in more virulent forms. Political extremism grew in direct proportion to economic misery, and the republic was menaced now by an invigorated Communist party on the one hand and, on the other, by a National Socialist movement which commanded mass support on a national scale.[1]

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[1] Gordon A. Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army 1640-1945 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 427.

CHAPTER III

GERMANY 1929 - 1933

The terrible world depression of 1929 gave Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists the ideal situation in which they could thrive most successfully. The misery and loss of faith of the masses made them very susceptible to the propaganda of the highly efficient Nazi political machine. After the lessons learned from the failure of the Bavarian putsch of 1923 and the lean years out of the political limelight from 1924 to 1929, Hitler had determined to attain power in the Reich by the strictly democratic means of being voted into power. Thus the propaganda machinery became a vitally important part in the plans of the party for political success. These plans were put into high gear in the early part of 1930 when the coalition led by the Social Democrats had undergone coalition difficulties.

> At the end of March 1930 Müller, the last Social Democratic Chancellor, who had presided over a coalition with the Catholic Centre, Democrats, and Peoples Party, had resigned because of disagreement among his supporters over contributions to the unemployment insurance fund.[1]

The new Chancellor, Heinrich Bruening, leader of the Catholic Centre Party was appointed to office by President Hindenburg on the advice of General Kurt von Schleicher, an intimate friend of the President's son, Major Oskar von

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[1] Jarman, op. cit., p. 122.

Hindenburg. Von Schleicher was one of the most interesting and cunning characters in the Reich at this crucial period. He was for three years the power behind the political manouverings so common to the dying Republic. He had already managed to have his old mentor, General Groener, made Minister of Defence through his association with President Hindenburg, and thus spoke with army backing when he suggested Bruening as Chancellor. Bruening had determined to save Germany from the economic slump which was feeding the fires of both the Nazis and the Communists. However, like Mueller before him, he was unable to count on any security of majority support in the unstable Reichstag. In July, the Reichstag voted against acceptance of his whole financial program. Bruening therefore had the President pass the legislation through an emergency decree - a power given the President by the constitution. The Reichstag countered with a demand to have the decree rescinded. The obvious disorder in the government - the virtual breakdown of the parliamentary system - gave the Nazi cause further hope, and violence and bloodshed increased in the streets. Clashes between armed hooligans of both the Nazi and Communist parties increased daily. Bruening was forced to ask Hindenburg to dissolve the House in July, 1930, with new elections slated for September 14. This was the great break Hitler had been waiting for. The Nazi party instituted an unprecedented drive for votes in an effort to gain control.

Hitler played upon the failings of the economic system and the hopelessness of the masses to promise them food and money, pride and power. The election results came as a surprising revelation to Hitler. He had expected some measure of success - at least enough to make the party heard in the Reichstag - but certainly nothing like the overwhelming flood of votes which ensued. The Nazis polled 6,409,600 votes, won 107 seats in the Reichstag, and climbed from the ninth and smallest parliamentary party to second largest.[1]

The other extremist element, the Communists, won 4,592, 000 votes, while the moderate middle class parties, excepting the Catholic Centre Party, lost votes. It was frighteningly clear that the elections Bruening had desired in order to secure a working majority in the Reichstag had resulted in a situation where the possibility of a majority poll in the House was more difficult even than before. The Nazis were, needless to say, elated at the prospects opening up to them. They were now a power to be reckoned with.

> The month of September 1930 marked a turning point in the road that was leading the Germans inexorably toward the Third Reich. The surprising success of the Nazi Party in the national elections convinced not only millions of ordinary people but many leaders in business and the Army that perhaps here was an upsurge that could not be stopped.[2]

The Nazi Party was helped on the path to victory by

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[1] Shirer, op. cit., pp. 136-138.

[2] Ibid., p. 141.

their greatest enemy, the Communist Party. It was fear of the revitalized and bellicose Communists that led the great financial concerns of the country to contribute to the Nazi political coffer. This extreme Right seemed to be the only power that could create some measure of balance against the extreme Left. The spectre of Communism had haunted European financiers since 1848 and any expedient seemed acceptable and indeed morally justifiable. As the election figures indicate, the little man, the petit bourgeoisie, was also in the throes of a loss of faith in the democratic principles represented by the intrigue-ridden government. It was increasingly evident too that the Wehrmacht was becoming reconciled to the possibility of a Nazi dominated government. While General Groener was well aware of the dangerous possibilities of the new political power, many of those supposedly under his control were accepting the new militaristic doctrine. This is particularly true of the younger members of the officer corps. Both the military and the financial circles undoubtedly felt that a measure of support for the new political star would ensure them some control over the policies of the party. Hitler was quite willing to let them think as they wished. He continued to cultivate the industrialists with promises of control of the chaotic conditions prevalent in the country and to interest the Wehrmacht with his grandiose military plans.[1]

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[1]Frederick L. Schuman, Europe on the Eve (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1939), pp. 5-7.

Meanwhile the Republic continued on its decrepit way. Chancellor Bruening worked as energetically as ever to sustain the government, but he was now confronted with two immense difficulties: the first was the increasing debility of the aging President von Hindenburg; the second was the round of intrigue which began to form an integral part of political life in Berlin. In no small way both of these problems revolved around the person of General Groener's right hand man, General Kurt von Schleicher. This master intriguer, mentioned already as responsible for Bruening's appointment as Chancellor, would unwittingly promote the Nazi cause to the point of actual control of the government by his influence with von Hindenburg and by his undermining of General Groener's anti-Nazism. He took upon himself the role of saviour of the country - not, it should be noted, of the Republic.

Chancellor Bruening was forced to rule the country by use of Presidential decree since stable support in the Reichstag was impossible. He now hit upon a plan that just might have saved the country from the fanatics, and that was the reestablishment of the Hohenzollerns in a new constitutional monarchy. The President would not hear of such ideas as devoted as he was to the old dream of a return of a strong monarchy under the old Emperor now in exile. In fact, Germany would not have accepted the monarchy under any circumstances. Hindenburg had at the same time insisted that he would not stand for reelection in the upcoming Presidential race. This

aspect of the disagreement constituted a vital crisis to the government. With Hindenburg out of the running Hitler might well have decided to run himself. This possibility was enough to sponsor feverish activity attempting to maintain the status quo. Hindenburg was eventually persuaded to remain in office if his term were extended, but such an extension would require the approval of the Reichstag. To get such approval Bruening would need Nazi votes, but in a meeting with the Chancellor, Hitler made it abundantly clear that support would not be forthcoming.[1]

Early in the following year Bruening continued in his efforts to secure support even proposing his own resignation as soon as the storm had been weathered. Ignoring Bruening, Hitler sought an alliance with the President himself, promising his support if Bruening were ousted. Hindenburg spurned Hitler and decided to run for office again even though he loathed the idea.

Against Hindenburg the Nazis set Adolf Hitler, while the Communists were represented by Thaelmann and the Nationalists by Duesterberg. The results were announced on March 13 and proved inconclusive with Hindenburg just failing to win the necessary absolute majority. The constitution of the German Republic demanded that the President receive an absolute majority on the first ballot.

Hindenburg	18,651,497	49.6%
Hitler	11,339,446	30.1%

[1]Jarman, op. cit., p. 125.

Thaelmann	4,983,341	13.2%
Duesterberg	2,557,729	6.8% [1]

This necessitated a new election on April 10. Hindenburg won his majority but the Nazis gained two million more votes from the Nationalists when Duesterberg withdrew. The old man was still President, however, and the Republic was still alive.

Schleicher, during these hectic days, had become more and more disillusioned about both Chancellor Bruening and Defence Minister Groener. He now decided he must himself move into control. The belligerent S.A., the political army of the Nazi Party, had been banned by Bruening and Groener because of the anarchy it sponsored in the streets. The wily Schleicher saw the ban as a lever to power. He allied his own vaulting ambitions with those of Hitler in return for a promise to call new Reichstag elections. His idea was to form a government with Nazi participation ruling by Presidential decree. He had already convinced Hindenburg of his ability to form a workable government with Hitler kept on the sidelines, as well as the necessity of just such a government. He first had General Groener removed from office through Nazi treachery in the Reichstag and then set to work to widen the gulf between the President and Chancellor which had started to form with Bruening's plan for the restoration of the monarchy. He succeeded admirably. On May 29, 1932, von Hindenburg asked for

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[1] Shirer, op. cit., p. 158.

Bruening's resignation, and on May 30 the Weimar Republic was dead. It would thrash its life out for eight more months, and have two more Chancellors, Franz von Papen and Kurt von Schleicher himself, but with the resignation of Chancellor Bruening, the possibility of a stable democratic Germany was finished. The one element of society that might have given some strength to the democracy, the Wehrmacht, had played the forbidden game of politics, and while they seemed to have won, in fact, they lost everything. They must carry their share of the blame for the advent of Adolf Hitler.

> In order to make clear the army's responsibility for Hitler's rise to power it will be enough, perhaps, to focus attention on two things: first, the spirited fight which Wilhelm Groener, Reichswehr Minister from 1928 to 1932, made against National Socialism, and the way in which he was repudiated by the army at the very moment when his policies promised to be successful; and, second, the cabinet-making activities of Kurt von Schleicher in the fateful year 1932.[1]

Bruening's successor was the superficial Franz von Papen who attempted to rule through the Hindenburg group and the extreme nationalists in the Reichstag. It was to be a government of the finest elements in Germany - experts above the din of politics. It came to be called the "barons'" cabinet stocked as it was with men of ultra conservative cut. Papen, prompted by Schleicher, called new elections for July 31 and lifted the ban on the S.A. The election results gave the Nazis almost fourteen million votes and made them the

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[1]Craig, op. cit., p. 428.

largest party in the Reichstag. In August Hitler met with Hindenburg and demanded a major voice in the new government. He was rebuffed by the President who still regarded him with ill-concealed contempt.[1] Hitler was determined now to embarass Papen, and again by Reichstag treachery - Goering having been elected President of that body - managed to have the government receive a vote of censure. As rough-house as the tactics used were, the Reichstag dissolved itself and set new elections for November 6. The results showed a sharp decrease in Nazi support and an increase in Communist votes.

Now it was time for Schleicher to continue his undercover wiles and rid himself of Papen. Using the army backing he had as Minister of Defence, Schleicher forced the old Field Marshal to accept Papen's resignation and appoint him Chancellor. At last the political manipulator was on top. However, in his struggle for control, Schleicher had trampled on so many people it was inevitable that he would himself be the subject of numerous conspiracies. He lasted just fifty-seven days. Hitler, Papen, and the Nationalists all sought to destroy Schleicher. Eventually Papen - working now in alliance with the Nazis - pressed Hindenburg so consistently that the President agreed to allow Hitler to take part in a government with Papen. On January 28, 1933, Schleicher unable to find a workable Reichstag majority and unable to obtain emergency powers from Hindenburg, handed in his resignation. Now it was Papen's turn to complete his arrangements with the

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[1]Winston S. Churchill, The Gathering Storm (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1949), p. 65.

President.

> Hindenburg turned again to Papen, who sought to bring Nazis and Nationalists together. At this final moment there was still the possibility for Hitler that Schleicher, with the army behind him, might intervene. But nothing happened, and Papen succeeded in his negotiations by agreeing to serve as vice-chancellor under Hitler.[1]

On January 30, 1933, Adolf Hitler, former Austrian corporal in the Bavarian army, met with Field Marshal von Hindenburg, President of Germany, and was appointed Chancellor. A new day had dawned on Germany and the world.

One further thing might be added about Hitler's assumption of power. The Nazis would later refer to a glorious "seizure of power" on Hitler's part; in reality, it was done in a totally legal and constitutional way. A.J.P. Taylor sums up the reasons for it quite succinctly in the following:

> Whatever ingenious speculators, liberals or Marxists, might say, Hitler was not made Chancellor because he would help the German capitalists to destroy the trade unions, nor because he would give the German generals a great army, still less a great war. He was appointed because he and his Nationalist allies could provide a majority in the Reichstag, and thus end the anomalous four years of government by presidential decree.[2]

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[1]Jarman, op. cit., p. 131.

[2]Taylor, op. cit., p. 68.

CHAPTER IV

HITLER IN POWER

Hitler had become the Chancellor of Germany through entirely legitimate means, and the Nazi revolution, which was to change Germany and the world, came about only after this assumption to power. The first Hitler government was in fact a coalition of the Nazis and the Nationalists. Papen was Vice-Chancellor as well as Reich Commissioner for Prussia, and as a leading Nationalist felt that the Nazi group could be modified and kept in close check. Indeed, the cabinet contained only two Nazis other than Hitler - Goering, who was Minister without portfolio as well as Minister of the Interior for Prussia, and Frick, who was Minister of the Interior.[1]

However, the first thing the Nazis attempted to do was to institute new elections to consolidate and strengthen their position. Goering's job at this stage was to coax money from the business group to finance the elections. The major opposition to the Nazi takeover came from the very large Communist party. It was because of this the Nazis clumsily executed the Reichstag fire and placed the blame for it on Communist subversiveness. In the hysteria of the moment Hitler was able to suspend some of the Weimar constitutional clauses

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[1]Jarman, op. cit., pp. 133-134.

guaranteeing personal liberty and jail many of his Communist opponents.[1]

The results of the election of March 5, 1933, gave the Nazis an increased vote of five and a half millions; however, even with their Nationalist Party allies, they commanded only a bare majority of the 647 member Reichstag. In spite of this, on March 23, Hitler proposed his Enabling Act which would give the government power to make laws without the benefit of the Reichstag for four years. It handed over to the new Cabinet almost dictatorial powers. There were 441 votes in favour of the Act and 90 against it. Only the Social Democrats opposed it.[1] Thus Hitler won a vital victory in his efforts to dominate the entire apparatus of government.

> The Nazis had every reason to be delighted: with the passage of the Enabling Act, Hitler secured his independence, not only from the Reichstag but also from the President.[3]

The way was now clear for Hitler to seriously begin the Nazi revolution and one step followed the other with amazing rapidity. On May 2, the trade unions were abolished and the German Labour Front was formed to replace them. In June, Hitler's remaining political opponents, the Social Democratic Party was banned. By the early part of the following month the Democratic

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[1]Ibid, p. 136

[2]Shirer, op. cit., p. 196.

[3]Alan Bullock, Hitler A Study in Tyranny (London: Odhams Press Limited, 1955), p. 245.

Party, the People's Party and the Catholic Centre Party had all abolished themselves. The Nazis were now politically supreme and the ultimate step was taken on July 14, 1933 when the Government decreed the National Socialist German Worker's Party to be the only party in the Reich. Then between the fifth and sixteenth of March, all the federal states were brought under the control of the Party.[1]

On October 14, 1933, Hitler withdrew Germany from the League of Nations and simultaneously from the Disarmament Conference at Geneva dooming that incredibly slow-moving conference to a much swifter death.[2]

By early 1934, the Leftist elements in Hitler's party - those who had placed their major trust in the word "Socialist" in the party title - were becoming increasingly restive with the lack of socialistic drive in the party and the leader's courting of the big business interests who were filling the treasury of the Party. The S.A. were becoming far too independent under Roehm, even though the S.S. elite guard were led to follow Hitler by their leader, the relatively yet unknown Heinrich Himmler. Roehm and the S.A., in pushing for the "second revolution", had become a source of embarassment to Hitler in his reconciliation with the business and military elite and the end result was the so-called "Blood Purge" of June 30, 1934, in which the S.A. was quickly and efficiently

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[1]Jarman, op. cit., pp. 139-140.

[2]Schuman, op. cit., p. 46.

disposed of as a bloc to Hitler's ambitions and a threat to Hitler Nazism. Roehm, Gregor Strasser, and General Schleicher were among the thousands liquidated in the purge.[1]

In July of the same year occured an international incident which was to prove an embarassing and dangerous episode to the fledgling German Government. The Nazi party in Austria flushed with the success of the parent organization in Germany attempted an abortive "Putsch" in which they killed Chancellor Dolfuss. However the Minister of Justice, Doctor Schuschnigg took over the chancellorship thwarting the precipitate coup, and suppressed the rebellion. Italy was at this time vitally interested in Austria, her northern neighbour, and Mussolini had mobilized his troops on the Brenner and promised Italian support for Austrian independence. Hitler, frustrated and annoyed was unable to make a move other than to replace the German Minister in Vienna, Rieth, by von Papen with orders to carry on the Nazification of Austria by more subtle means.[2]

In August of 1934, President von Hindenburg died at the age of eighty-seven and Hitler was immediately decreed Fuehrer and Reich Chancellor. He was now absolute dictator and henceforth the armed forces were to swear their oath of allegiance to him. Hitler was now able to implement the ultimate Nazification of the German state with the Party now permeated

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[1] Shirer, op. cit., pp. 218-222.

[2] Churchill, op. cit., pp. 104-105

throughout the fibre of society.

On January 13, 1935, the Saarlanders were given the choices of rejoining the new Nationalist Socialist Germany, joining France, or retaining their independence under the League of Nations. Over 477,000 voted to return to Nazi Germany, only 46,000 voted for maintaining their "status quo", and a mere 2,000 to join France. Hitler regarded this result as a overwhelming support for his belligerent policies.[1]

The Soviet Union had, upon the invitation of thirty member countries, entered the League of Nations in September, 1934. Partly because of this, Germany had been brought into discussions of a general European settlement with particular emphasis on a Locarno-like pact for Eastern Europe. In February 1935, these proposals were represented to the German government by France and England, France's original reluctance having disappeared with Hitler's assurance that after the Saar return he had no further territorial claims on France.[2] Hitler had no interest whatever in an "Eastern Locarno". He still dreamed of detaching Britain from the Franco-Russian alliance and perhaps coming to some settlement with her. With this in mind, Hitler had further talks on the issue postponed.

On March 9 Hitler formally announced the official constitution of the Luftwaffe in outright contravention of the Versailles treaty. On March 16 he announced the proclamation

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[1] Jarman, op. cit., p. 193.

[2] Shirer, op. cit., p. 283.

on conscription and the creation of a thirty-six division army. On the same day, in expectation of Hitler's announcement, the French Government announced the extension of military service to two years. The result of these violations of the Versailles peace terms was the calling of a conference of France, Great B ritain, and Italy at Stresa. Their work resulted in the examination of the alleged breach of Versailles announced by the Council of the League of Nations on April 15.[1] The Stresa powers referred the problem to the Plenary Assembly, nineteen countries formally protested, and the whole issue died for lack of forceful actions.

> Hitler had gained the solid advantage of rearmament. How feeble were the pacts formed to safeguard the nations opposed to him time would show.[2]

In May 1935 came the signing of the Franco-Soviet Pact which was the one concrete measure taken by the European powers to combat Nazi belligerence. Hitler would later use the ratification of this Pact as the flimsy excuse he had for the reoccupation of the Rhineland. However, for the time being, he allayed the fears of the Western nations by his famous "peace" speech to the Reichstag on 21 May. The British listened especially carefully to this speech, in particular to his proposals to limit German naval strength to thirty-five percent of Britain's. The result was a series of diplomatic meetings between the two culminating in the Anglo-German Naval

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[1] Langsram, op. cit., pp. 236-237.

[2] Jarman, op. cit., p. 194

Agreement of June, 1935. This action by Britain destroyed completely the common front agreed upon by the Stresa Powers. France, which had not even been consulted, was horrified by the Naval Agreement as was Italy.

> England appeared in their eyes to have too readily swallowed a bait artfully dangled before her by the German dictator.[1]

Then there occured one of those international events that so benefit a non-participating country as to seem to have been contrived by it. Such was the case with the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935. The country gaining most by the invasion was Nazi Germany. Hitler, who had attracted such attention to himself and the nation he led, was now upstaged by the ebullient Mussolini just at the moment when a new focus for international wrath would leave Hitler free to plan his greatest coup of all - the reoccupation of the demilitarized Rhineland.

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[1] Gathorne-Hardy, op. cit., p. 402.

CHAPTER V

MARCH 7, 1936

The year 1936 opened on a hesitant and troubled Europe. The old year, 1935, had seen the already weakened peace terms of Versailles abrogated time and time again by the new master of the Third Reich and always without effective opposition on the part of the former allies. Hitler saw in the political milieu of 1936 the opportune moment to carry off the most startling escapade of his already hazardous career - the reoccupation of the Rhineland. This would sever from Germany the last tie binding her to the shame of Versailles.

> But the full sovereignty of Germany could not be restored while one stone of the structure of the Versailles Treaty remained upon another. Reparations had gone; disarmanent was ended; the relations with the League of Nations had been ruptured; there remained only that zone of the Rhineland whose demilitarization had been accepted by Germany under Articles 42 - 44 of the Peace Treaty and voluntarily confirmed by the Pact of Locarno.[1]

But such an act - not merely the repudiation of terms in a treaty as the various acts of 1935 had been, but involving the actual movement of German troops into a geographic arrangement made permanent by German acceptance -

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[1] Wheeler-Bennett, op. cit., p. 345.

would require precise timing. The demilitarized zone had become the minimum acceptable security check of French relations with Germany, and it seemed inconceivable to many knowledgeable people that France could allow such a German move to go unanswered. French political opinion through the years had made the demilitarized zone essential to her very existence. Yet Hitler saw in the times an opportunity to carry out such a plan with a very high probability of success. And what could have prompted such feelings about so drastic a measure ? Undoubtedly, the events of the preceding year, 1935, made him speculate on the move.

It had become increasingly clear that France, unquestionably the strongest land power in Europe, would be most unlikely to act without real support from Great Britain. And yet, France and Great Britain had entered into a period of severely strained relations particularly since the signing of the Anglo-German Naval Treaty of 1935. It seemed to France that Britain had thereby virtually agreed to give Germany a free hand in rearmament. At the same time the Ethiopian crisis had quite drastically altered the power alignment of the European powers in the new year. British public opinion had generally lined up against the Italians, and British statesmen had formed the most vociferous anti-Italian voice at the League of Nations. France was, on the other hand, quite willing to concede Abyssinia to Italy if it meant the preservation of a somewhat united European front against the threat

of Germany to the peace of Europe. Indeed, had this not been the very purpose of the Stresa Front ? Now Italy, one of the very important Stresa partners, had obviously changed her formerly strong anti-Nazi stand. French statesmen found the new situation very difficult to reconcile with what they had considered an adequate if not ideal situation in regard to Germany.

> De toutes manières, la politique étrangère se trouve en ce début de 1936 au seuil d'un monde entièrement nouveau. Les amis de 1935 deviendront-ils les ennemis de l'année commençante, ou, inversement, les adversaires de l'année écoulée seront-ils désormais des Alliés ?[1]

It was because of the events of 1935 that the eventual formation of a Rome-Berlin Axis would be possible. So Italy was successfully isolated, and France found it hard to forgive Great Britain the loss of a southern ally still thought to be militarily potent. Hitler saw too that public opinion in both countries was so strongly pacifist that any severe counter-measures taken against him that might provoke war would be most unlikely. Thus everything appeared as ideal as possible for the reoccupation and Hitler determined to set the already prepared apparatus into motion. He disguised his aggressive manoeuvering as strictly defensive measures on Germany's part. He proposed to excuse his actions on the grounds that the Treaty of Mutual Assistance signed by France and the Soviet Union on May 2, 1935, was totally incompatible with the spirit of the

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[1] France, Ministere des Affaires Etrangeres, Documents diplomatiques francais, 1932-1939, 2e serie, I (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1963), 11. (Hereafter the initials DDF will be used for the French documents)

Locarno Pact of 1925. He thus would argue that Germany was now free to disregard the restrictions of the Locarno agreement. In reality, as George F. Kennan notes in his "Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin," when Pierre Laval succeeded Louis Barthou as Minister of Foreign Affairs, France's approach was decidedly less belligerent in the face of Facism. The Franco-Soviet Pact was watered down until it became almost impotent.[1]

Hitler was well aware of the limitations of the Franco-Soviet Pact but was determined to use it as his own weapon. The Treaty had been signed in May of 1935. Since that time, the German government and press had undertaken a systematic campaign the aim of which was to focus public attention on the Rhineland issue. The writing was on the wall and many diplomats were conscious of the impending move, and yet so vital was their search for peace they constantly verged on the acceptance of the idea that their good will might alter the future moves and aims of the Nazi dictator. Hitler lost no time in preparing for his adventure. On the very day that the French and Russian delegates attached their signatures to the Mutual Assistance Treaty, General von Blomberg had issued the first directives to the heads of the three armed services to prepare plans for operation "Schulung" - the reoccupation of the Rhineland. Total secrecy was henceforth to be the order of the day.[2]

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[1]Kennan, op. cit., p. 303.

[2]Shirer, op. cit., p. 291.

For a time Hitler was concerned by the fact that French ratification of the Pact was a bit doubtful. Indeed the Pact was the subject of much debate in the Chamber over the period of February 9 to 27, 1936, due to the diligent fight of the rightist deputies and press. Nonetheless, on February 27, the Pact was ratified by the French Chamber by 353 votes to 164. Hitler had his cause now and just eight days later would use it to send the Wehrmacht into the demilitarized zone. It was an act that might have provoked war. Hitler was aware of this - but war was an instrument of Nazi policy and such a fear could not and did not deter him.[1]

The diplomats of the European powers were themselves aware of the explosive possibilities of the future. François-Poncet, French ambassador in Berlin, had become increasingly pessimistic over the incompatibility of the peaceful overtures of the Reich government and the nationalistic hysteria promoted by the press. As he wrote on the second of January:

> Cet esprit militaire, méthodiquement cultivé, de pair avec un orgueil national exalté au paroxysme, sera-t-il, à la longue, compatible avec la volonté de paix que ne cesse d'affirmer l'Allemagne hitlérienne ? C'est là que réside tout le mystère du IIIe Reich.[2]

The mystery was, of course, the normal procedure in Nazi Germany - the profession of peaceful aims accompanying the preparations for military actions. This duality in German statements made definitive assessment of the situation extremely

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[1] Jarman, op. cit., p. 197.

[2] DDF, 2e serie, I, 9.

difficult. On January 14, François-Poncet notified Paris of a meeting he had had the preceding day with von Bulow, the German Secretary of State, in which he had been assured that Germany would never present France with a "fait accompli", and that the German Government had no intention of violating any clause of the Locarno Pact.[1] Yet the French Government issued an intelligence report on January 15 in which they stated that the French military attaché in Berne had received information from the Swiss government that they had information indicating that Germany would occupy the Rhineland on the thirtieth of January. The War Office indicated in this report that even if this information were not completely correct, they anticipated just such an action sometime in the year.[2] On the very next day the French ambassador in Berlin reported on the actual integration of the German police force in the Rhineland - the "Landespolizei" - into the Wehrmacht and pointed out that such an action indicated the fact that Germany was no respecter of the Locarno agreement.[3]

However the month went on its way rather uneventfully. Then toward the end of January, George V, King of England, died. The state funeral for the deceased monarch was a time of frantic activity in the world of the diplomats. The chief statesmen of almost all the European powers were convened in London for the

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[1]Ibid. 72-73.
[2]Ibid. 90.
[3]Ibid. 105.

funeral services and used the time to confer among themselves. Baron von Neurath, Foreign Minister of the Third Reich, particularly held the greatest interest for the other European statesmen. Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in the British cabinet, interviewed von Neurath on January 27 and was assured that Germany would respect the terms of Locarno. Neurath did add a qualification which, in the light of later events, would loom dangerously large, and this was that his government only wished that the other powers would also observe the treaty in spirit as well as in the letter.[1] At the same time, the new French Foreign Minister, M. Flandin, was able to hold conversations with Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Eden in an attempt to ascertain the attitude of the British government in the case of a future violation of the Locarno Pact by Germany. It was of importance to France to get this information since she was determined to push through the Franco-Soviet Pact. Naturally, the British assured Flandin that any breach of Locarno would be viewed as of the utmost gravity by His Majesty's Government. The French party assumed a strong measure of support from the British, when actually the answer was couched in the vagueness of diplomatic generalities. Because of the strongly pacifist public opinion in the country, the British leaders were unable to give what Flandin so obviously wanted - a clear cut promise of military support in the event of any German violation. Nonetheless, Flandin felt a measure of support and sympathy in the British reaction.[2]

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[1]Anthony Eden, Facing the Dictators (London: Cassell & Company Ltd., 1962), p. 332.

[2]Churchill, op. cit., pp. 193-194.

On the same day, January 27, the French government issued a secret note on the possible repercussions by Germany of the successful ratification of the Franco-Soviet Pact. The origin and destination of this important Note have been lost, but it does show clearly that the French anticipated Germany's movements accurately. The concluding paragraph of the Note sums up the whole thing:

> - de la part de l'Allemagne, un redoublement de la contre le pacte de Locarno et peut-être même la dénonciation de cet accord accompagnée de la réoccupation immédiate de la Rhénanie.[1]

The days went by and the European powers waited and watched to see what the next move of the Germans would be. On March 3, the French ambassador in Berlin sent a telegram to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in which he reported on an interview with Hitler just the day before. He noted the peculiar manner Hitler exhibited during the course of the interview:

> Non pas que le Führer ait été violent ou désagréable; mais je l'ai trouvé nerveux, décontenancé, réticent, usant avec une sorte d'impatience, et à travers un flux de paroles, d'arguments médiocres. Visiblement, ma visite le dérangeait, l'ennuyait, l'embarrassait.[2]

Today of course we can easily understand Hitler's embarassment. On the day before the interview with François-Poncet, who was recognized in Berlin as the most knowledgeable of the foreign ambassadors, Hitler had made his final and irrevocable decision to continue with his plan to occupy the zone.

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[1] DDF, 2e serie, I, 154.

[2] Ibid. 381-382.

In the same telegram, the French ambassador notes the sequential order of Hitler's diplomatic bombshells and the probable move in 1936. He wrote the following:

> L'Allemagne aime à se fixer, pour chaque année qui commence, une tâche définie. 1935 devait être l'année du retour au service militaire obligatoire. De la même manière 1936 doit être l'année de l'abolition, ou de l'atténuation, de la clause qui démilitarise la rive gauche du Rhin. Il serait complètement vain, à cet égard, la moindre illusion.[1]

On March 2, General von Blomberg had issued the final and formal orders to the army regarding the move into the Rhineland. It was to be carried out with the utmost secrecy and swiftness in order to completely surprise the rest of Europe. The General Staff greatly feared the military consequences such a rash move would evoke in France and England, and for the possible effects French intervention would entail for the still weak Wehrmacht, which would not reach a ready state until 1943. Hitler chose to ignore the advice of the army leaders. However, Blomberg did reserve the right to decide himself what measures were to be taken by the German forces if they were met by force. The countermeasures were brief and to the point: an immediate withdrawal and retreat back over the Rhine. It would truly be a desperate gamble and Hitler knew the possible consequences if the French chose to act. In his "Hitler A Study in Tyranny," Alan Bullock gives a telling admission from Hitler after the invasion:

> The forty-eight hours after the march into the Rhineland were the most nerve-racking in my life. If the French had then marched into the Rhineland,

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[1]Ibid. 388.

> we would have had to withdraw with our tails between our legs, for the military resources at our disposal would have been wholly inadequate for even a moderate resistance.[1]

At dawn on March 7, 1936, a small token German force crossed the Rhine bridges and entered the demilitarized zone and occupied the cities of Düsseldorf, Cologne, Mainz, Coblenz, and Frankfurt. With one shattering stroke, Hitler had repudiated the Locarno Agreements and violated the provisions of Articles 42 and 43 of the Treaty of Versailles. Shortly after 10 o'clock on that fateful morning, von Neurath, the Foreign Minister, had summoned the ambassadors of France, Great Britain, and Italy to the Wilhelmstrasse and presented them with the German memorandum on the occupation of the Rhineland and the denunciation of Locarno coupled with Hitler's new proposals for peace which would attain his "unchangeable longing" for a real pacification of Europe. The French ambassador denounced the German move with vehemence and tried to ascertain what Germany intended for her new territory.

> Le baron von Neurath m'a répondu que l'Allemagne se proposait seulement d'envoy dans la zone rhénane, à titre de symbole, des petits détachements et qu'elle n'avait pas l'intention d'y établir de fortes garnisons.[2]

Although von Neurath may well have believed in the veracity of his answer, it was certainly erroneous. Hitler had already begun to work on garrison establishments in the zone.

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[1] Bullock, op. cit., p. 320.

[2] DDF, 2e serie, I, 411.

About noon hour, Hitler addressed a specially convoked and jubilant Reichstag denouncing once again Versailles and the Communist threat. He announced the entry of German troops into the Rhineland and justified this action by reference to the Franco-Soviet Pact which he claimed certainly was directed against the Reich. This Pact invalidated the Locarno Treaty and released Germany from any obligations she had in respect to that treaty. He then stated his peace proposals contained in the memorandum to the Locarno powers. These peace proposals included 25 year non-aggression pacts between Germany, France, and Belgium; inclusion of Great Britain and Italy as guarantors; negotiation of an air pact to prevent aggression; offers of non-aggression to all neighbour states; and, finally, Germany's readiness to reenter the League of Nations.[1]

It was a carefully arranged statement which Hitler read to the German Reichstag on the morning of his most potentially dangerous adventure. Internationally it had a profound effect. Internally it tended to mollify the "doves" because it presented a plan for a new and permanent peace for Europe. Schacht, von Neurath, and various generals in the Wehrmacht were becoming increasingly skeptical with Hitler's foreign policy but now his peaceful aims were spelled out clearly for all to see. At the same time, the "hawks" - in particular

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[1]Stephen Heald (ed.), Documents on International Affairs 1936 (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p.2.

Goering, Goebbels, and Himmler, were filled with nationalistic pride at having reconquered a part of the German Reich from the hated French. Francois-Poncet sent a despatch to Foreign Minister Flandin on that same fateful day indicating this internal effect of the speech.

> Le mémorandum que m'a remis, ce matin, M. von Neurath et le discours dont l'a accompagné, le Führer en le présentant au Reichstag montrent qu'ayant à choisir entre la thèse des partisans de la violence et celle des avocats de la modération, M. Hitler a adopté simultanément les deux attitudes, avec l'espoir de faire accepter l'une par l'autre. Pour répondre aux sollicitations des modérés, il a offert de nouveaux pactes de non-aggression, un pacte aérien, le retour à la S.D.N. Pour satisfaire les exaltés, il a dénoncé Locarno et crée un fait accompli, appuyé par l'envoi en zone rhénane de troupes régulières.[1]

Externally, the speech would undoubtedly have much the same type of effect. It would surely enrage the French who would lose so much of the security with which they were obsessed. On the other hand, the peace proposals would just as surely receive a favourable reception in the pacifist British soul. The lack of action on the part of the British in the Ethiopian crisis had led Hitler to believe he had little reason to fear other than vocal condemnation from Great Britain. And the French, who stood to lose so much in the Rhineland, would hardly act without strong British support. Unfortunately, French military policy had been completely sterilized in a totally defensive attitude.

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[1] DDF, 2e serie, I, 416.

> Our organization, the nature of our armaments, the very spirit of our national defence, tempted to inaction an administration which had all too much tendency that way and prevented us from marching. Because we were ready to hold only our frontier and had imposed on ourselves a self-denying ordinance against crossing it in any case, there was no riposte to be expected from France. The Fuhrer was sure of this.[1]

The reoccupation plans had required the strictest kind of secrecy if it was truly to be a fait accompli. To ensure such secrecy the amazing Dr. Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda, was willing to go to almost any length. In fact, on the eve of the entry of the German batallions into the Rhineland, he had invited the editors of the major German newspapers to attend a very important press meeting in the Ministry of Propaganda. They were kept at the Ministry for a time and then bundled aboard an airplane for a flight that would occupy them until Hitler had sprung his surprise on the world. Hitler was full of praise for the successful way in which Goebbels had carried out his task.[2]

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[1]Charles de Gaulle, The Call to Honor 1940-1942 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955), p. 23.

[2]Heinrich Hoffmann, Hitler Was My Friend (London: Burke Publishing Company Ltd., 1955), pp. 83-84.

CHAPTER VI

THE OCCUPATION AND AFTER

The news of the Rhineland reoccupation was received with profound shock in the chancelleries of the European capitals. France was the major loser in the move and agitation aroused by the troop movement was most evident in Paris. The French ministry met on March 7 in a state of feverish excitement. Four ministers, including Premier Sarraut and Foreign Minister Flandin, were for the immediate entry of French troops into the Rhineland to force the evacuation of the German troops. The other ministers were, however, much more cautious. It was decided to seek the advice of the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Gamelin.

Gamelin was more administrator than soldier and was determined not to be forced into a position where he could be blamed for any decision taken by the government. He assured the government that his forces were quite capable of carrying out any task imposed on them, but also indicated the necessity of general mobilization in the face of any military engagement. Mobilization would, of course, mean the spending of far greater sums on the army than at the present. He also indicated that with Germany's massive manpower and industrial might behind her, that if war resulted from French action, France could not

go it alone; she must be assured of at least British and Belgian support. And since the Locarno Treaty authorized France to act alone only in the face of flagrant aggression, would it not be essential to have British and Belgian recognition of the German reoccupation as flagrant aggression? If France were to enter the Rhineland immediately and alone, she could conceivably be herself labelled the aggressor by the Locarno powers as well as by the League Council.[1]

With mobilization meaning increased expenditures, with the franc in a very unhealthy state, and with a general election fast approaching, the politicians abandoned the possibility of general mobilization and extended their efforts to the political action to be taken. Italy, Poland, and Belgium were all for their own reasons relatively lukewarm to the thought of military intervention. That left only the British upon whom the French must depend.[2]

On March 8 at 6:15 p.m., the French Foreign Minister officially notified the Secretary-general of the League of Nations of the German violation of both the Versailles Treaty and the Locarno Pact and urgently requested an immediate meeting of the League Council to establish the fact of violation. The Belgian government sent its notification at the same time.

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[1]Schuman, op. cit., pp. 216-217.

[2]Taylor, op. cit., pp. 98-100.

This was in line with the procedure laid down at Locarno. It was then the responsibility of the Council to advise the signatory powers of Locarno that they were bound to give military support to the violated power.

On the same day the French Consul General in Cologne, M. Dobler, sent a confidential dispatch to Flandin advising him of stepped-up activity in the Rhineland. He suggested that French resistance should be immediate and firm and gave three reasons for his suggestion: firstly, the Rhineland population was still quite frightened by the suddeness of the Hitler move; secondly, the German economy was vulnerable just now; and, thirdly, the German army was just not ready to meet any strong resistance.[1] True or not, the decision to meet the threat through British participation had already been decided upon, and Dobler's suggestion could not alter that fact.

The British government, needlessly fearful of any precipitate French action, pleaded with the French to hold off any unilateral action until both their governments had had time to consider the German move and decide on some suitable concerted move. The major response found in Britain was to pass the whole matter over to the League of Nations.

Meanwhile, on the ninth of March, news came to Paris of the North American reaction to the Rhineland situation.

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[1] DDF, 2e serie, I, 442-443.

From Canada, M. Brugère, French Minister to Ottawa, indicated that the Canadian official point of view was one of detached non-participation; Canada was not a signatory to Locarno, and Great Britain had signed with the attached proviso that the Dominions were to be excluded. On March 8, the French overseas radio service had mistakenly spoken of the British Empire as a Locarno signatory. Canada was quick to point out this error, and Brugere conveyed this objection home along with his observations that the Canadian papers generally were upset over the reoccupation as they viewed it as representing a danger to all treaties. He noted too that the papers considered that the peace proposals introduced by Hitler deserved serious consideration.[1] Much the same was true of the United States. M. de Laboulaye, the French ambassador, reported the general feeling in America to be one of disinterest in European squabbles while at the same time showing mild interest in the stated peace proposals.[2]

The French ambassador in Berlin also sent a dispatch to Flandin on the ninth of March in which he gave a succinct summary of Hitler's past denunciations of international undertakings and a remarkable prognosis of his next major maneouver. He summed up the events leading up to March 7 - breaches of trust and bad faith exhibited by the Reich government - giving

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[1]Ibid. 455-456.

[2]Ibid. 456-457.

a sequential account of Hitler's three major coups - leaving the League on October 14, 1933; proclaiming the new military law on March 16, 1935; and the Rhineland on March 7, 1936. Hitler's plans for the New Germany indicated to François-Poncet that he had already decided to extend his dominion both higher and further than William II. The ambassador closed off his dispatch with his opinion that in line with the logical order of Hitler's moves, one could safely predict that Austria would be the next primary object in the Nazi plans.[1]

However, the most important thing to happen on the ninth of March was the speech made by Anthony Eden in the House of Commons. He reviewed the communication he had received from the German ambassador, von Hoesch, with emphasis on the peace proposals which formed the second part of the communication. He informed the House of the French and Belgian notes to the League Secretary and emphasized that the Council of the League was the proper body to discuss the situation. He concluded with the following statement:

> There is, I am thankful to say, no reason to suppose that the present German action implies a threat of hostilities.[2]

Eden was expressing what was undoubtedly the opinion of the British Government and, in fact, the British people;

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[1]Ibid. 463.

[2]Stephen Heald (ed.), Documents on International Affairs 1936 (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), pp. 52-53.

nonetheless, the speech could hardly be taken by France as anything less than a damaging blow to any possible future action of the combined powers. It was well received in Germany since the statement that the Rhine occupation did not constitute an act of aggression was taken by the Germans to mean that England would not support sanctions against Germany if such action was proposed at Geneva.[1] To France the speech would represent the first sign of a spreading divergence of thought between the two nations over the measures to be taken in dealing with the Locarno violation. The French had concluded that in the light of a pacifist Europe economic sanctions would be the only answer to the German threat. They thought too that the internal economic situation in Germany would surely make her quite vulnerable to sanctions.

In his memoirs, Eden indicates that the official stand taken by the Foreign Office was the only one possible at the time in view of the powerful force of public opinion.

> There was not one man in a thousand in the country at that time prepared to take physical action with France against a German reoccupation of the Rhineland. Many went further than this and thought it was unreasonable that Germany should not be allowed to do as she wished in her own territory, nearly twenty years after the end of the war.[2]

Much this same line of thought is given in Iaian MacLeod's biography of Neville Chamberlain. In the book the author gives the following statement on the Rhineland by Hugh

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[1] DDF, 2e serie, I, 475-476.

[2] Eden, op. cit., p. 338.

Dalton, spokesman for the Opposition in the House of Commons:

> It is only right to say bluntly and frankly that public opinion in this country would not support, and certainly the Labour Party would not support, the taking of military sanctions or even economic sanctions against Germany at this time . . . Public opinion here does, I think, draw a clear distinction between the action of Signor Mussolini in resorting to aggressive war and waging it beyond his frontiers and the actions, up-to-date at any rate, of Herr Hitler which, much as we may regard them as reprehensible, have taken place within the frontiers of the German Reich.[1]

It was more and more evident in Berlin that Hitler would almost surely get away unscathed with his daring exploit. Britain had taken the position which Hitler had predicted and France was becoming more and more isolated in her stand. Not that the reoccupation had been carried out without grave concern on the part of the Germans; the General Staff had become very worried over the first reports on the French and British reactions. Their ambassador in London had cabled that the chances of British intervention were at least 50:50 and von Blomberg had begged Hitler to withdraw the troops which had already entered the Rhineland. For a moment Hitler seemed ready to agree; however, convinced of his own perceptiveness in foreign affairs, he ignored the warnings of the military men. General Beck, the Chief of Staff, tried later to get Hitler to at least make a formal undertaking not to build fortifications in the zone.[2] By this time, Hitler had lost faith in the ability of the military to participate successfully in affairs of state and, indeed, he would from this critical moment put very small

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[1]Iaian MacLeod, Neville Chamberlain (New York: Atheneum, 1962), p. 162.

[2]Craig, op. cit., p. 487.

stock in the opinions of his generals.

Meanwhile it had been decided to hold the League meetings in London rather than Geneva, and this was welcome news in Germany since it was regarded as further evidence of the gulf existing between the French and the British. Hitler could take justifiable satisfaction in the turns events were taking. The British seemed inclined to accept Hitler's new propositions almost at face value; the Belgians seemed to be moving more and more to the British point of view; the Italians were now naturally uninterested in the Locarno agreement; and so France, Germany's one questionable factor, seemed quite isolated in her apparently adamant stand.[1] Naturally, the Germans were getting more and more confident as each day passed amidst the torrent of words - only words.

The Locarno Powers, excepting Germany, had met in Paris on the tenth of March to discuss the Rhineland situation. After a great deal of rather useless talk, they adjourned the meetings until the twelfth of March at a resumed convention to be held in London. On March 11, Pierre Étienne Flandin flew to London to beg the British Government to support France in any military confrontation in the Rhineland. He begged for a simultaneous general mobilization in both countries and brought with him the evidence of assured support from the nations of the French System. The British were moved by this French plea -

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[1] DDF, 2e serie, I, 511.

it is said Baldwin had tears in his eyes - but confessed that they had no military forces with which to cooperate in any joint undertaking in the Rhineland, and, even more to the point, they admitted that British public opinion would never allow it.[1]

Flandin knew his time had been wasted. British pacifism had destroyed any hope of a confrontation in the Rhineland. Flandin had to accept the British refusal reluctantly but with little argument - there was little else he could do. An independent action by France was not even to be thought of since this would probably alienate the two countries more than ever; certainly the British would regard it as a breach of trust, and General Gamelin had already indicated that France needed British support. France then must wait for her confrontation and allow the gap with Britain to narrow. In the meantime she must maintain herself behind the defensive Maginot Line. Thus British pacifism combined with French indecision together weakened the anti-German stand even before the Council of the League had met. It is in fact the opinion of the British historian, Gathorne-Hardy, that Great Britain herself must carry the primary responsibility for the inactivity of the two nations.[2]

On March 12, the Locarno Powers unanimously decreed that Germany's reoccupation of the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland had in fact constituted a clear violation of Articles 42 and 43 of the Treaty of Versailles as well as of Locarno. They then referred the matter to the Council of the League for decision. On March 13, the Council unanimously adopted a re-

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[1]Taylor, op. cit., p. 100.

[2]Gathorne-Hardy, op. cit., p. 422.

port drafted by M. van Zeeland of Belgium containing the following conclusions:

> first, the unanimous recognition of the violation by Germany of her freely accepted Treaty obligations; secondly; the unanimous agreement between the delegations that the present crisis must not become a step on the road to war; and, thirdly, that the question of the British contribution towards the security of the Western Powers should be considered.[1]

Hitler carried on with his usual sense of some preordained rightness in the face of the meetings of his enemies. He would recall the event years later in the midst of the terrible conflict of the Second World War. A collection of Hitler's informal conversations carefully transcribed by the faithful Martin Bormann was published some time ago. It contains the following interesting note:

> What would have happened on the 13th March 1936, if anybody other than myself had been at the head of the Reich? Anyone you care to mention would have lost his nerve. I was obliged to lie, and what saved us was my unshakeable obstinacy and my amazing aplomb. I threatened, unless the situation eased in twenty-four hours, to send six extra divisions into the Rhineland. The fact was, I only had four brigades.[2]

Hitler need not have congratulated himself quite so heartily; as we have seen, the two nations - France and Great Britain - were putting up no real resistance to the move.

By the fourteenth of March, the French consuls in the Rhineland were reporting to the Foreign Ministry that the

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[1]Heald, op. cit., p. 4.

[2]Hitler's Table Talk 1941-1944 (London: Werdenfeld and Nicholson, 1953), pp. 258-259.

original enthusiasm with which the inhabitants had greeted the German troops was wearing thin and being replaced by a certain fear and uncertainty regarding the initiation of talks at the League Council in London. François-Poncet was at the same time cabling the information that the invitation sent to Germany to send representatives to the Council meeting of the League was being interpreted by the Wilhelmstrasse as evidence of a willingness on the part of the Council members to negotiate the whole Rhineland issue.[1]

Finally, on March 14 in St. James's Palace in London, the Council of the League of Nations met in the Ninety-first Extraordinary Session with the Australian delegate, the Rt. Hon. Stanley Bruce, presiding. M. Flandin opened the session with a beautifully articulate speech in which he indicated clearly and forcefully the insincerity of the German use of the ratification of the Franco-Soviet Pact to occupy the Rhineland, and ended with a plea to the Council to act in accordance with the terms of Locarno i.e. to notify the Locarno Powers of a breach of the agreement enabling them to discharge their obligations of assistance. Flandin was seconded in his appeal by van Zeeland of Belgium who reiterated the intention of the Belgian Government to stand by its committments and take its part in any international collective action. The Council then adjourned for the week-end and reconvened on Monday, March 16.

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[1] DDF, 2e serie, I, 555.

In the meantime, Baron von Neurath had cabled to the League the decision of the Reich Government to participate in the Council discussions providing she were placed on a totally equal footing with the other powers and was assured that they were quite prepared to fully discuss the German proposals.[1]

The Council agreed in time to the condition of full equality demanded by Germany but could not assure the German Government that her second condition would be honoured. Baron von Neurath then informed the Council that Germany would attend the meetings in the person of Joachim von Ribbentrop, Hitler's own Ambassador-at-Large. At the same time, the Germans had decided to attempt to alienate the French and British by appealing to the well-known pacifism of the British. Thus they telegraphed to London their sincerest hope that the British would do everything in their power to see that the German proposals would be brought up before the meeting. Eden assured the Germans that everything possible was being done and would be done in the future to give due consideration to these proposals, but that it was impossible at that time to be any more explicit.[2]

Meanwhile there had arrived at Paris a secret dispatch from their ambassador to the Vatican which gives a fair insight into the attitude of the Holy Father towards the German move. On March 16, M. Charles-Roux, the French ambassador, had been

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[1]Heald, op. cit., p. 88.

[2]Ibid., p. 90.

received in audience by the Pope. Their talk soon naturally turned to the international situation, and the ambassador quotes the Pope as having said:

> Si vous aviez tout de suite fait avancer 200.000 hommes dans la zone réoccupée par les Allemands, vous auriez, m'a dit le Saint-Père, rendu un immense service à tout le monde.[1]

Peculiar as it seems, this firmness indicated by the French note from the Vatican would be most faithfully adhered to in London by the Soviet Government. During March 17 and 18, the Council debated the Franco-Belgian draft resolution calling for the Council's pronouncement of Germany as violator of both Versailles and Locarno, and to call to action the other powers. As spokesman for the U.S.S.R., M. Litvinov gave a very strong, remarkably frank, and pregnant speech in which he emphasized dramatically the willingness, indeed the desire, of the Soviet Union to back the Locarno obligations with all the power at the command of his government.[2] This would prove to be the most forthright speech made during the entire period of the Council discussions.

The Italian delegate, Signor Grandi, in a somewhat caustic speech, stated that his government would stand by its obligations to Locarno as a guarantor, but could not be expected to carry out measures which would be incompatible with her own position of having sanctions imposed upon her. It was a speech

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[1] DDF, 2e serie, I, 574.

[2] Heald, op. cit., p. 97.

that must have given the Italians no small measure of revengeful satisfaction.

The representative from Chile, Don Augustin Edwards, speaking for a state that was not a signatory to the violated treaties, made the suggestion that the whole matter should be referred to the Permanent Court of International Justice at the Hague for a legal interpretation before the Council made any firm decision. The suggestion was not well received, although the French would later make much the same proposal themselves to the Germans.[1]

Meanwhile in Paris there had been received a further communication from Brugère in Ottawa, giving his view of the causes for the unconcerned attitude of the Canadians over the Rhineland.

> Je l'attribue, pour ma part, au fait que le Canada, ne faisant pas partie du traité de Locarno, ne veut pas être entraîné malgré lui dans une complication internationale découlant de ce traité. Il y a aussi des facteurs d'un caractère plus permanent, la crainte d'avoir à répondre à un appel de concours de Londres, la contagion américaine qui fait que l'on a tendance à se désintéresser un peu ici de l'Europe et enfin le peu de satisfaction que l'application des sanctions a donné dans le conflit italo-éthiopien.[2]

In the morning session of the Council on March 19, von Ribbentrop, the German representative mad a lengthy speech in which he stated once again the German case in regard to the Franco-Soviet Pact as itself a violation of Locarno and summarized

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[1]Ibid.

[2]DDF, 2e serie, I, 607.

the numerous proposals Hitler had made since coming to power in 1933 toward the limitation of arms and the maintainence of general peace.[1]

The vote on the Franco-Belgian resolution was taken in the afternoon session. Thirteen votes were cast in favour of the resolution; Germany's was the one negative vote; while Chile abstained from the vote because of her belief in the Hague referral which she had brought before the Council the day before. The German delegation was quite upset by the vote and Ribbentrop lodged a formal protest against the vote on the peculiar grounds that it was France which had broken the Treaty of Locarno.[2]

The French would try once again to end the dispute by referring the question of the Franco-Soviet Pact as a violation of Locarno to the Permanent Court of International Justice. The Germans simply ignored the whole proposal. As François-Poncet would write a little later Hitler could well ignore the theoretical censure of the League of Nations:

> Il a observé les réactions de l'opinion brittanique, les dissensions franco-anglaises, les réserves de l'Italie, l'attitude ambigue de la Pologne et des Etats neutres.[3]

And so Adolf Hitler successfully bided his time and saw his Rhineland coup successfully capped by others blindness.

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[1]Heald, op. cit., p. 108.

[2]Ibid., p. 120.

[3]DDF, 2e serie, I, 659.

London would later send a Memorandum to Berlin setting up a new basis for peace talks for the continent, but Hitler would reject them and resort to his old game of issuing a series of counter-proposals. He had won everything; German guns were now on the very borders of France; his own popularity had shot sky high - the papers hailed him as "The Liberator" - as would be shown in the elections of March 29; he gained virtually undisputed control over the Generals who thought to control him by this display of his obvious superiority in the handling of foreign affairs; and, finally, it proved to Hitler that Britain and France would be quite willing to allow the rash moves of the future to go by unimpeded provided they were backed by the possibility of violence - and with his rapidly improving military forces, Hitler would be quite capable of providing such a threat.

As for Britain and France - they had lost far more than they possibly imagined. A new day had dawned in Europe and they would dearly pay for their hesitancy in the Rhineland. Perhaps David Thomson summed their position up as well as can be done when he wrote:

> March, 1936, was perhaps the last moment when a second world war might have been avoided.[1]

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[1]Thomson, op. cit., p. 694.

CHAPTER VII

PERIODICAL REACTION IN THE ENGLISH SPEAKING WORLD

A look at a sampling of some rather typical periodical literature in the English-speaking world of 1936 cannot but leave one with a feeling of frustration regarding their approach to the Rhineland reoccupation. Regardless of the political leaning of the editorial board, each periodical seems to show the same almost academic dismay at Hitler's actions while venting most of their righteous fury upon Mussolini's adventure in Abyssinia. This was, of course, precisely what the Germans had counted upon, and with each day that passed without action from the Western partners, Hitler's action became more and more a successful "fait accompli."

In some ways it does not seem too odd that this "flagrant violation" of the Versailles Treaty should have been accepted by the British and French. It was, after all, only one more in the series of violations of Versailles that Germany had already been successful in perpetrating. Indeed, the Anglo- German Naval Agreement of 1935 had practically given British acceptance to any military violations of the treaty. So while virtually all the editorial writers were loud in their condemnation of this breach of diplomatic etiquette, there seems to be very little firmness in their arguments. If one adds to this the

fact that a good many Englishmen felt pangs of guilt about the basic injustice of the treaty imposed on the Germans at the end of the First World War, it is easy to see why those who tried to use the violation of Versailles as a major part of their attack on German aggressiveness were hard put to make it meaningful.

The fact that the reoccupation was a violation of the Locarno arrangements had somewhat more weight with the British public. Locarno was, after all, a freely negotiated pact agreed to by the post-war German government and guaranteed the Western borders laid down at Versailles. Hitler, himself, had promised German respect of Locarno as late as 1935. Britain and Italy were the "guarantor" powers of Locarno, and in 1936 this tended to neutralize the effectiveness of implementing the policies laid down for the guarantors of 1925. The crisis over Abyssinia had placed Britain and Italy on opposite sides of the fence and their strained relations made cooperation over the Rhineland almost impossible. Nonetheless there is evidence that there was some recognition in British circles of the repercussions of the reoccupation on the French. On March 27, the "Spectator" carried the following:

> The demilitarisation of the Rhineland imposed on Germany in 1919, endorsed by Dr. Stresemann in 1925, and accepted by Herr Hitler in 1935, had for its purpose the military protection of France. Since March 7th that protection is gone. German troops are in the Rhineland, and in possession of the Rhine bridges, and German armies could mobilise at their convenience with the Rhine at their backs. All that has been done in plain breach of the Treaty of Locarno, a

> breach which has had for consequences a formal protest by the Locarno Powers and a plain demonstration of the fact that no one will lift a finger to reverse the "fait accompli" which has robbed France (and Belgium) of the protection accorded her in 1919 in default of various forms of fuller protection which she was denied.[1]

However, a more common view in British circles of the crisis was that the Germans were merely sending their own soldiers into territory that everybody recognized as German anyway. William Harbutt Dawson, in an article entitled "Hitler's Challenge," wrote the following:

> Of course, he has sadly transgressed the proprieties; yet was it, on the whole, so egregious a sin to have marched German soldiers from one part of their own country to another, from which they have been excluded by foreign dictation for seventeen years, that we must belabour him with more stodgy sermons on the duty of being docile and good-mannered?[2]

In the same article, Dawson suggests that Great Britain would not have put up with a similar situation for seventeen days much less seventeen years. He even states that Hitler's actions were quite in accordance with what would be a typically British reaction to foreign pressure.[3]

In much the same vein is the following excerpt taken from the same leading article of "The Spectator" for March 27, as quoted above:

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[1] The Spectator, "Germany and France," Vol. 156, No. 5,622, March 27, 1936, p. 564.

[2] The Nineteenth Century and After, William Harbutt Dawson, "Hitler's Challenge," Vol. 119, No. DCCX, April 1936, p. 402.

[3] Ibid., p. 405.

> It is not to be suggested that anyone should lift a finger to reverse the "fait accompli." That could only be done by war, and the reoccupation of German territory by German troops is no cause for war.[1]

From the preceding quotation and the others quoted above, one can see just how strong the "back yard" argument really was. In one, France's position is given in forceful and sympathetic tones; in the other, the fact is quite clearly stated that Germany's actions, the very cause of the apparently understood French anguish, could not be considered a vital enough point to result in any direct military confrontation on the part of either England or France. This dismaying duality of the English mind is, moreover, sadly discernable in a good many more aspects of the Rhineland as seen through the periodicals.

It seemed an obvious fact - to some at least - that Hitler's action had the effect of driving a wedge between the British and French governments. Thus, Great Britain, obsessed as it seemed over Abyssinia, would be willing to tolerate a German success in the Rhineland in the hope that this acquiescence might prompt Hitler to act in accord with Britain's desire to contain Italian aggression. On the other hand, France was quite willing to make concessions to Italy to gain her support against the German invasion of the Rhineland. The result of this was a tendency to neutralize the effectiveness of any

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[1]Ibid.

cooperative effort on the part of the two democracies. "The Spectator" in a truthful vein summed up the French position in this way:

> France, compelled to acquiesce in Herr Hitler's "coup," is accusing us with some bitterness of encouraging Germany to bargain about a document - the Locarno Powers' memorandum - which was meant to represent the irreducible minimum of those Powers' demand.[1]

Perhaps the strongest comment on the Hitler-Mussolini squeeze on Britain and France comes from an editorial entitled "The Return to Anarchy," in "The New Statesman and Nation" of March 28. The editorial writer claimed that England and France were being played one against the other - each being used by his favourite dictator, while both, at the same time, were still forced to pay lip service to the ideal of collective security which was still firmly imbedded in public opinion. A proposal was then put forth which would effectively counteract these attempts to destroy any possible concerted effort by the two countries. But even here one can recognize the acceptance of the Rhineland reoccupation as a "fait accompli," and the over-riding importance to Britain of Ethiopia.

> The only right policy would still be to make an attempt to revive the collective system. Great Britain would have to make her position unambiguous; we could insist on full consideration of any proposals for peaceful change - including colonial and marketing revision - which Germany could advance, but we should have to satisfy France with an all-European treaty of mutual assistance, with or without Germany in the League. The French would then have to agree to an

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[1] The Spectator, ibid.

> oil and shipping embargo being added to the existing sanctions against Italy and to maintain sanctions until the country has been compelled to conclude peace on terms consistent with the Covenant.[1]

There is also obvious in the contemporary periodical literature an inclination to look upon the German entry into the Rhineland as either a purely Franco-German question with English participation as peripheral, or even as an inevitable result of shortsighted French foreign policy which was always threatening to box in British foreign policy. Typical of this reaction is the remarkable pro-German article by William Harbutt Dawson in the periodical, "The Nineteenth Century and After." In this article, "Hitler's Challenge," he stated that Great Britain's attachment to France had proved "both politically and morally, a great and harmful entanglement."[2] Indeed, he went so far as to suggest:

> Let us be as friendly to France as the claims of other nations to our consideration will possibly allow us, yet remembering always that there is only one European country on which Great Britain can at all times and in all circumstances rely - it is Great Britain.[3]

He concluded his article by referring to the reoccupation as an "irregularity" - which must certainly be the mildest description available of this military violation - and pleading for an honest appraisal of the "positive proposals" which Herr

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[1]The New Statesman and Nation, "The Return to Anarchy," Vol. XI No. 266 (New Series), March 28, 1936, p. 484.

[2]The Nineteenth Century and After, op. cit., p. 412.

[3]Ibid., p. 413.

Hitler had attached to his March 7 pronouncement.[1]

Dawson's approach was not a singular one in the British periodicals. "The Economist" of March 28, in the leading article "Plain Speaking," echoed the same basic refrain.

> England cannot be expected to base its own foreign policy on the cries of the French to guarantee her borders. Rather it is England's duty to remain strictly loyal to the League principles of collective security.[2]

The "Economist" editor did not explain just how British policy could be true to the League and collective security and, at the same time, not guarantee French borders since the border areas involved in the Rhineland crisis were delineated in agreements duly recorded with the League.

The Canadian periodical, "The Canadian Forum," came out in April with much the same reflection regarding French culpability for the Rhineland difficulties:

> France has only herself to blame in the present situation. Not only has she herself torn up Versailles by steadily rearming in time of peace, but by refusing to demilitarize any part of her border provinces she has left herself nothing to bargain with now.[3]

However, there were those in Britain who saw the French position in quite another light and were aware of the fact that Great Britain, in her attempt to act out her chosen role as med-

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[1]Ibid., p. 414.

[2]The Economist, "Plain Speaking," Vol. CXXII, No. 4830, March 28, 1936, p. 692.

[3]The Canadian Forum, "The Watch on The Rhine," Vol. XVI No. 183, April 1936, p. 3.

iator between France and Germany, had in fact let herself in for the legitimate complaint that she had let France down.

> But the bridge between Germany and France is very far from being built yet, and the position of this country as bridge-builder is singularly difficult, for there is undeniably some substance in the French contention that when we sign a treaty of guarantee with her, our primary role must be that of guarantor, not of honest broker.[1]

Indeed, there was some appreciation of the French position regarding the Rhineland by those who saw it as a question affecting the security of the whole continent. As "The National Review" stated:

> The reason why people speak loosely of the Franco-German question is because France is the only country since the war which has realized the common danger and which has endeavoured to organize European opinion to resist the attack upon the independence of the countries round Germany.[2]

Hitler used the ratification of the Franco-Soviet Pact as his prime excuse for his move into the Rhineland, declaring the pact to be clearly contrary to the spirit of Locarno and directed dolely against Germany. The possibility that Hitler might do just that had been brought up in the British press but had been just as quickly dealt with as almost an impossible action. The British Left, in particular, was deluded by its own dedication to pacifism into assuming that such behaviour was too dangerous and irrational even for the German leader to

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[1]The Spectator, "News of The Week," Vol. 156, No. 5,621, March 20, 1936, p. 497.

[2]The National Review, "Germany v. Europe," Vol. 106, No. 636, Feb. 1936, p. 10.

contemplate. In an editorial on February 15, "The New Statesman and Nation," dealing with the German opposition to the imminent ratification of the Franco-Soviet pact, said the following:

> There is talk in some quarters of the Germans replying to the ratification of the pact by a seizure of the demilitarised Rhineland. But we do not believe that they will plunge into such a rash adventure.[1]

The same publication, issued on the very day that the German troops were on the march in the Rhineland, carried an article from their Paris correspondent, Alexander Werth, on Hitler's reaction to ratification of the pact. It had been written on March 4, when the possibility of "a rash adventure" by Hitler was very much more real. Werth blasted the French Right for their opposition to the pact, and summed up rather neatly just what a newly fortified Rhineland would mean to France and what she could expect from Britain.

> Once Germany has built fortifications on the Rhine she will be practically immune against French or League reprisals of a military order, and will be able to go ahead in the East with the maximum of impunity. The French, though less concerned about troops in the Rhineland (for, in case of war, these could be brought in, anyway, at a moment's notice), are taking the question of fortifications very seriously; and they are also expecting Britain to take it seriously.[2]

One week after the invasion of the Rhineland, the same publication carried an editorial in which the writer, in a most convincing manner, showed that the Rhineland adventure was what

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[1]The New Statesman and Nation, "The Franco-Soviet Pact," Vol. XI, No. 260 (New Series), February 15, 1936, p. 213.

[2]Ibid., "The Soviet Pact and Hitler," Alexander Werth, Vol. XI, No. 263 (New Series), March 7, 1936, p. 334.

had become by that time a stock answer to alleviate internal discontent over an ardous domestic financial state precipitated by Hitler's own three years of massive military budgeting. He also indicated clearly in his editorial that France had been negotiating with the British government over an automatic guarantee of a demilitarized Rhineland in return for French support of an oil embargo on Italy. He showed that if the premature invasion of the Rhineland had not come when it did, and had these Anglo-French negotiations been successfully completed, Great Britain might have been treaty bound to back France to the very limits. As the British government had, in fact, done nothing, he concluded his article with a withering attack on British complacency in the crisis and its lack of understanding and approval of France's righteous stand.[1]

When one compares these three excerpts from the same periodical - one written three weeks before the invasion; one written just three days before it; and the last written just one week after the event - one can see in murky form the changes of temperment affecting a good portion of the British Left. The first is a purely objective and intellectual (perhaps too intellectual) appraisal of the situation with the rational conclusion that any intemperate action on Hitler's part was highly unlikely. The second was more in keeping with the general atmosphere of anxiety in the dawning days of March, and seems much more pregnant with the terrible alternatives that may be

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[1]Ibid., "The Rhineland," Vol. XI, No. 264 (New Series), March 14, 1936, p. 372.

imposed upon the British by Hitler's action. The last, while fiery in its attack on the lack of British support for France, seems, nonetheless, somehow more relaxed now that the crisis had been passed, and much more at ease in the more academic role of critic.

One periodical, "The Contemporary Review," carried an article in May of 1936 in which Sisley Huddleston, the author, gave a concise view of just how diversified French public opinion was over the Franco-Soviet Pact and the resultant crisis in the Rhineland. The French Nationalists, the more militaristic element, regarded the Pact both as a military liability - due to the questionable status of the Russian forces - and as a socially dangerous affiliation in linking up capitalistic France with Bolshevik Russia. On the other hand, the French Left, including the relatively large French Communist Party, were delighted with the agreement. They looked upon the great size of the Russian military establishment as an effective bulwark against German advances, and were united with the Russians in their zeal against the dictatorships of the Right. With Hitler's Rhineland answer to the Franco-Soviet Pact, France's fears were greater for Russia's safety than for her own.

The old demilitarized Rhineland would have enabled France to carry out its duties to Russia by invading Germany. The new remilitarized Rhineland "contained" France not only from her ally,

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[1]The Contemporary Review, "France Faces Germany," Sisley Huddleston, Vol. CXLIX, No. 180, May 1936, pp. 522-530.

Russia, but from Czechoslovakia and the Danube States as well. Then, at the close of this perceptive view of the whole situation for France, the author concludes with this typical piece of British advice:

> It is surely better not to anticipate as inevitable a German aggression either in the East or the West. It is surely better to seize every chance of removing Germany's legitimate greivances and of entering into negotiations which may avert the war which many people in diplomatic circles now predict for the end of 1937 or the early part of 1938.[1]

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[1]Ibid., p. 530.

CHAPTER VIII

FURTHER PERIODICAL REACTION

The British reaction to the Rhineland crisis can be at least partially understood in the light of the immense fear held by the British conservative mind towards anything resembling communism, the bugbear of the capitalist world. This paranoic fear enabled the conservative to lump under one "Red" label all those whose policies were not in keeping with his own - the pacifists and socialists of all shades - all who supposedly paid homage before the same dreaded political philosophy.

Typical of this attitude was an editorial in "The National Review", in February, 1936, hammering against the pacifists and Reds who were helping to destroy England. It stated that at the close of the Great War, Britain stood paramount in the world:

> We know what happened then. From the dark and comfortable corners where they had hidden themselves, the men who had hampered every national effort, the revolutionaries, the cowards and the cranks, came out, and profiting by our national war-weariness obliterated our defences and undermined our Imperial and International influence.[1]

"The National Review" was anything but alone in its

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[1] The National Review, "Episodes of the Month," Vol. 106, No. 636, February 1936, pp. 167-168.

condemnation of the Reds. "The Quarterly Review," in its July and October edition, carried an article by E. Altham which was an excellent example of just how deeply ingrained was the fear of the communist menace. Indeed, it excused the Rome and Berlin dictators on the grounds of their very militant stand against the communists.

> However much we may dislike Nazi or Fascist dictators, we must recognize that their regime is a bulwark against that of the communist: the alternative to a Hitler and a Mussolini might well have been a Red Germany and a Red Italy.[1]

That this feeling of fear of the communization of Germany, Italy, and of all Europe, was immensely widespread - though perhaps ill-defined by some who only half-conciously adhered to it - was made quite clear by Wickham Steed in the "Contemporary Review" for August, 1936. He attempted to show clearly the rationalization of the British Right in their tacit - and sometimes explicit - approval of the dictators.

> Behind the various influences that are seeking to turn British policy in favour of Germany lies an issue of which the public is hardly aware. It is whether this country is or is not to take sides against Soviet Russia. Behind this issue, again, lies fear of Bolshevist propaganda and almost equal fear of "Socialism" in Great Britain. Those who harbour these fears look upon Hitler, as they once looked upon Mussolini, as the paladin of private property, "capital," and all the rest, against Communism and revolution. They whisper that the downfall of Nazism in Germany or of Fascism in Italy would entail the "Bolshevisation" of these two countries and presently of Europe. Weighing dimly in their minds the dangers of a European war (from which, they hope,

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[1]The Quarterly Review, "Imperial Defence and the International Situation," E. Altham, Vol. 267, No. 3, July and October, 1936, p.6.

> this country might hold aloof) and the terrors of the "Red peril," they secretly prefer the danger of war.[1]

There is also evidence in the periodicals of 1936 a sickness in British foreign policy - a terrible tendency to see all things as the British would ideally have them be. Naturally, this lack of realism led to several setbacks in British policy, and the press was loud in condemning this national indecisiveness. "The Economist" of March 14, for example, in a leading article called "Peace on the Razor's Edge," showed quite convincingly that Britain was in the midst of one of those critical situations in which her response would be the key factor in determining whether the future would hold a new and genuine European reconciliation or a frightening European war. It stated with great clarity that Germany's repudiation of Locarno could not be justified by anything used by them thus far as justification. The alternative was inevitable:

> Accordingly, if we decide that a reversal of the "fait accompli" in the Rhineland is an indispensable condition which we cannot afford to waive, then we must be ready to face a grave risk of war in the immediate future.[2]

This is a strong, forceful and realistic stand, but it is very carefully introduced by the very conditional "if." That "if" seems to imply that the magazine, like the British Government, was quite uncertain about the true importance of this issue;

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[1]The Contemporary Review, "Lost Bearings," Wickham Steed, Vol. CXLX, No. 183, August 1936, p. 137.

[2]The Economist, "Peace on the Razor's Edge," Vol. CXXII, No. 4829, March 14, 1936, p. 572.

indeed, like the government, the periodical too comes up with the argument that Britain can hardly "make war on Germany if she rejects an ultimatum to evacuate territory which is, after all, her own."[1]

Finally, the article suggested that Britain had to be realistic and not try to compare Hitler's march into the Rhineland with Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia - that the two were not at all alike and had to be dealt with in entirely separate ways. This is , of course, precisely the attitude adopted by the British in the Rhineland crisis and shows an almost incredible inability to see that while both actions of the dictators were unlike in many superficialities, they were very much alike in the critical similarity that they both represented contempt of any concept of international rule of law.

Other periodicals were far less passive in at least some of their reports on the Rhineland. George Glasgow wrote a bitter and cutting account of the lack of strength in British foreign policy in an essay, "Herr Hitler Takes a Turn," in the April issue of "The Contemporary Review." He was very strong in his denunciation of the German move recognizing it as a major step on the road to European anarchy if left unchecked, and even more critical of his own government in letting down their French partners in refusing to check the German advance

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[1]Ibid.

and repel it.[1] In a later edition of the same periodical, Mr. Glasgow continued his attack on g overnmental and public apathy:

> It is true that the British Government's commitment under the Covenant of the League of Nations would by itself, if strictly carried out, provide all the commitment desired by the French and Russian diplomacy. But it is a well-known fact that in present circumstances the Covenant of the League of Nations cannot be regarded by the potential victims of aggression as a reliable safeguard. What then is the true explanation of British reluctance to take the firm stand demanded by France and Russia? There are two main reasons for it: (1) that the anti-German combination was successful in the field of battle in 1918, when Japan, Italy and the United States of America were partners to it; yet the military victory of 1918 has not eliminated the German problem in 1936; and (2) that no British Government could make a commitment about Central or Eastern Europe and survive the storm of public disapproval that would thereby be aroused.[2]

An editorial, "British Opinion and British Policy," in the March 21 edition of "The New Statesman and Nation," carried very much the same sort of information conveyed by Mr. Glasgow. The editorial pointed out the generally indecisive quality of British diplomacy and indicated that this was remarkably dangerous for Britain and Europe in regard to the remilitarized zone. It proposed that firm agreement should be placed behind the French to show Hitler that he could not, in fact, bully the other powers of Europe. The editorial warned that any other action undertaken by the British could only lead to a temporary truce by which only militant Nazism could benefit.[3]

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[1] The Contemporary Review, "Herr Hitler Takes a Turn," George Glasgow, Vol. CXLIX, No. 179, April 1936, pp. 485-496.

[2] Ibid., "Foreign Affairs," George Glasgow, Vol CXLIX, No. 180, May 1936, p. 624.

[3] The New Statesman and Nation, "British Opinion and British Policy," Vol. XI, No. 265 (New Series), March 21, 1936, pp. 444-445.

While Canadian periodicals took little real interest in the Rhineland issue - like the British they were much more concerned with Ethiopia - one periodical, "The Canadian Forum," carried the following succinct evaluation of the British Government:

> History cannot but mark down the last five years of British administration as one of the darkest, weakest and most dishonorable and most cowardly epochs in a century.[1]

John Gunther gave a remarkably clear appraisal of the European situation in an article, "The Rhineland Crisis," in the American periodical, "The Nation:"

> The bulk of Hitler's success may be seen from a consideration of its amazing details. He has the Rhineland. He has gone a goodish way toward the insertion of a wedge between British public opinion and France. He has food for another internal victory and for a possible easing of domestic tension. He has increased his prestige in Austria, Poland, and smaller countries. Why has all this happened? Largely, it appears, because British public opinion, grossly misled by so-called liberal newspapers, has permitted the pro-German faction of the British Cabinet to stifle the voices of those who thought Britain ought to stand by its Locarno signature and come to French aid.[2]

Gunther then suggested three important results of the lack of positive policy by the British - results that would be critical for the whole continent. First was the near irreperable blow given to the collective security system when once again, aggression, not law, was the decisive factor. As a result of

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[1] The Canadian Forum, Vol. XVI, No. 187, August 1936, p. 3.

[2] The Nation, "The Rhineland Crisis," John Gunther, Vol. CXLII, No. 3691, April 1, 1936, p. 407.

Hitler's action, Locarno was now meaningless and the League weakened. Second, Mussolini would be the biggest immediate winner in the affair. France, seething with disappointment over the lack of effective measures in the Rhineland by the British, could hardly be expected to support British oil sanctions against Italy. Third, Hitler had gained a relatively safe position in the West and could now afford to direct his activities to the East.[1]

However, foreign policy is, in general, often a matter of mirroring what is conceived of as a consensus of public opinion. As Elizabeth Wiskemann wrote:

> Among politically minded people it is true to say that the general reaction was to regard the remilitarisation of Western Germany as perhaps natural and inevitable, but to regard the eagerness of British public opinion to accept Hitler's self-styled pacifism as catastrophically naive.[2]

It is tremendously interesting to note the periodical reaction to the peace proposals which Hitler had attached to the official pronouncement of the entry of the German troops into the Rhineland. It was a very careful attaching of a "sweetener" to what was a very sour violation of international agreement. Hitler understood very well that a conscience soother, like the peace proposals, would make their aggression a much easier thing for British statesmen in particular to accept.

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[1]Ibid., p. 408.

[2]The Contemporary Review, "Between France and Germany," Elizabeth Wiskemann, Vol. CXLIX, No. 181, June 1936, p. 679.

He knew that France would remain immobile without British support, and he knew well the current British tendency to grasp anxiously at anything that appeared to make peace in Europe a reality.

In the same "Peace on the Razor's Edge" quoted earlier in this chapter, the peace proposals are dealt with in a typically rational, and perhaps selfish, British way. At first they are regarded as representing a paradox. In themselves an ideal basis for peace, nonetheless, that basis implied a mutual belief in the sincerity of the contracting parties. Hitler's action of March 7 made confidence in the fidelity of his statements somewhat difficult to attain.[1] However, after looking over the whole European situation carefully, the same article suggests that Hitler might withdraw the troops of his "symbolic occupation," in exchange for an understanding that they would return upon the completion of a new European settlement to be based on his peace proposals - assuming those peace proposals to be legitimate.[2]

The Berlin correspondent for "The Economist" had much more realistically summed up the situation in his dispatch of March 11:

Treaties, it follows, will be broken if their breach brings

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[1]The Economist, op. cit., p. 571.

[2]Ibid., p. 572.

> nothing worse than odium, and will be observed if their breach means unsuccessful war.[1]

Berlin correspondent or not, "The Economist" continued to look at the German overtures with some enthusiasm. When Herr von Ribbentrop brought back Hitler's answer to the first major British inquiry, the editorial response was to regard it as a promise of a new era of peace:

> The document reads on the whole like the offer of a man who is bent, not upon leading his people along the path of military adventure and aggression and domination, but upon doing his part, with the other statesmen of Europe, to bring about the kind of settlement that Europe needs and that the overwhelming majority of Europeans desire.[2]

It continues with a reiteration of the idea that Europeans must act upon the proposals put forth by Hitler.

> We have to take a risk if we take Herr Hitler at his word. But without taking this risk - whatever it may amount to - there is no possible way of testing whether Herr Hitler is sincere or not.[3]

Finally, it concludes with the following insanely eloquent plea for a sane hearing of the Nazi proposals:

> The door is open; our feet are on the threshold; and any European statesmen or publicist who tried to drag us backwards and slam the door in our faces would be committing an unpardonable crime against her own people, as well as against the whole of our common European society.[4]

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[1]Ibid., "Overseas Correspondence," Vol. CXXII, No. 4829, March 14, 1936, p. 584.

[2]Ibid., Vol. CXXIII, No. 4832, April 4, 1936, p. 1.

[3]Ibid., p. 2.

[4]Ibid.

After the British had addressed their famous "Questionnaire" to the German Government putting forth questions of utmost importance to all the Europeans (questions which had not been clarified by previous communications between the two powers), and after von Ribbentrop had brought back Hitler's answer - new peace plans with no further fortification built on the Rhine by either side; the expression of Hitler's dislike of the newly impending English-French-Belgian military conversations; and the offer of new non-aggression pacts with all Western Europe - "The Economist," and a good many other British periodicals, continued to believe in Hitler's sincerity.[1]

William Harbutt Dawson's "Hitler's Challenge," liberally quoted in the last chapter, is such an outstanding example of what representatives of the Right were putting out, and it provides such a fine insight into their thinking on the peace proposals, that further reference to the article would be quite illuminating.

Dawson regarded the proposals as the "positive" side of Hitler's overtures. Indeed, he made Hitler out to be the very model of the perfect statesman of the day. He stated:

> Here he shows constructive ability of the highest order. What he has done is to offer new and vital ideas for outworn formulas, practical measures for unworkable makeshifts, guarantees of peace and protection all round on conditions

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[1]Ibid., p. 13.

as free from privilege as from bias and humiliation.[1]

He then proceeded to list off these grand proposals made by Hitler with comments as to how they could usher in the new era and stated:

> If this grandiose project is of Hitler's own conception, he is both a big and a bold man. Already he has saved Germany from confusion and collapse; what if he should be proved to have saved Europe from the same fate?[2]

"The Spectator" was more realistic in its appraisal of the Rhineland situation in its March 13 edition. It suggested that France, Belgium, and Russia were quite prepared to answer the Locarno violation by military activities certain to bring on war - though it is known now that this belief in the firmness of these countries was misplaced - and that it was the duty of British statesmen to make the entire situation perfectly clear to the Germans. This could only be done by Britain's showing Germany that she stood on the side of France, and by refusing the temptation of a weak diplomatic condemnation of Germany's Rhineland actions.[3]

In the same edition of the same periodical, in a fiery

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[1] The Nineteenth Century and After, "Hitler's Challenge," William Harbutt Dawson, Vol. 119, No. DCCX, April 1936, p. 405.

[2] Ibid., p. 406.

[3] The Spectator, "News of The Week," Vol. 156, No. 5,620, March 13, 1936, p. 453.

editorial, Hitler's peace proposals were literally torn to shreds. It showed that the major points in his peace plan were virtually impossible for the other European powers to accept on the basis of Germany's proven faithlessness, and were, in fact, most obviously violated in spirit and in letter by the Germans themselves. It ended on this note:

> In one sense the last word is with Herr Hitler. If he is ready to give honest effect to his proposals he will make European reconstruction and recovery possible. If not he will have so united a Europe against him that though there may be anxious and uneasy peace there is unlikely to be open war.[1]

In the very next week's edition the battle continued with the editorial, "Does Germany Mean Peace?" Here there is a repetition of the British stand that if Germany really meant peace she would have to show Europe evidence of her good faith. This could best be initiated by a submission of the Franco-Soviet Pact (Germany's reason for the move into the Rhineland) to the Hague tribunal to check the validity of the German charge that it violated Locarno. This submission would undoubtedly take place anyway, with or without Germany's consent, but her adherence to the verdict of the court would "throw valuable light on her good faith."[2] This same editorial then came to an end with a display of semantic elasticity that, in many ways, seems rather typical of much of British reaction to the real possibility of

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[1]Ibid., "The German Challenge," Vol. 156, No. 5,620, March 13, 1936, p. 457.

[2]Ibid., "Does Germany Mean Peace?" Vol. 156, No. 5,621, March 20, 1936, p. 500.

armed intervention to back up a just cause. It mentioned the impossibility of sanctions against Germany and followed with this cloudy conclusion which seems to weaken the strength of the earlier statements:

> And this country could not join in military measures where there has been no such action by Germany as would in itself endanger peace, though for that very reason it is the more necessary to make it clear that Germany's violation in no way relieves the other signatories of their obligations to one another.[1]

"The Nation" gave a pointed insight into the lack of substance in Hitler's proposals when it noted his bellicose references to the Soviet Union and his inadvertent omission of Austria and Czechoslovakia from the countries with which he claimed readiness to conclude non-aggression pacts. This surely gave the lie to his professed pacific ambitions.[2] It ended with a frightening and prophetic look at the future:

> The Fuhrer may believe that he is sincere in declaring that he would rather spend money for workers' houses than for shells, but the world notes only his facility in creating international incidents when they are needed to bolster his prestige at home. It also notes with unconcealed anxiety that with the remilitarization of the Rhineland Hitler has exhausted the possibilities for international histrionics which do not affect the integrity of neighbouring states. Unless the League powers take drastic action, we may assume that the next step will involve Memel, Austria, or the Soviet Ukraine.[3]

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[1]Ibid., p. 501.

[2]The Nation, "Will Europe Call Hitler's Bluff?" Vol. CXLII, No. 3690, March 25, 1936, p. 368.

[3]Ibid.

Finally, the editorial indicates that the League has only three possible weapons it can use: sanctions, a preventive war, or a resurrection of the pre-war system of alliances. Since sanctions would be unworkable, and a preventive war unlikely due to the hesitancy of the British, the setting up of a new alliance system seemed to be the most likely alternative and would, of course, lead to further damaging of the concept of international cooperation.[1]

Perhaps as telling as anything of the general approach of the British periodical reaction was a satirical political cartoon in "Punch," on March 18. It showed a militant goose waddling along with a swastika armband and accoutred with all the trappings of warfare. Under the cartoon was the following verse:

> Goosey Goosey Gander,
> Wither Dost Thou Wander?
> Only Through The Rhineland -
> Pray Excuse My Blunder.[2]

Unfortunately, Western Europe did accept the blunder and Hitler was successful in the most desperate gamble of his early career. The way was paved to World War Two.

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[1]Ibid., pp. 368-369.

[2]Punch, Vol. CXC, No. 121, March 18, 1936, p. 323.

CHAPTER IX

A BRIEF REVIEW

The reoccupation of the demilitarized Rhineland was undoubtedly a turning point in the contemporary history of Europe. With the hindsight of thirty-one years, it seems obvious that if this high-risk adventure of Hitler's had been frustrated, the whole machinery of Nazi control over Germany might easily have fallen. Hitler had proved that his understanding of the French and British mind and temper had been complete in the past and felt certain his Rhineland exploit could be carried out with no real interference. It depended upon a combination of boldness and guile, and Hitler had become a master of both. Since his ascension to power in 1933, he had consistently violated international agreements by acting with speed and coupling his wrongdoing with empty gestures of peace and future fidelity. These empty gestures were the straws at which many in the West were only too willing to grasp.

Two outstanding factors in the Western powers contributed to the ease with which Hitler reoccupied the Rhineland. One was the almost overwhelming desire for peace among the vast majority of the people in both France and Britain. After the ravages of the Great War, this preoccupation with peace is

certainly an understandable one. The intellectuals, in particular, were determined to maintain the peace of Europe - and hence, of the world - at any cost. The terrible fallacy, however, lay in their attempt to approach rationally and logically a philosophy of power that was by its very nature irrational and anti-intellectual. The proponents of international peace were certainly well-meaning, and just as certainly misguided in that they were unable to justify the necessity of force to combat the growing threat of Nazism. There are times when a lesser evil may be the only instrument able to prevent a far greater evil.

The concept of using force to overcome the ideology of force was naturally repugnant to the believers in a peaceful world. Hitler was very much aware of this and was able to carry out his program until his war machine had become the most effective fighting force in the world. By that time even the most loyal of the lovers of peace had to face a real war of gigantic proportions. Military measures by France alone in the midst of the Rhineland issue would have made it impossible for Hitler to continue as Fuhrer of the Reich and may have possibly prevented the war of 1939-1945.

The other major factor benefiting Hitler's dreams in Europe at this time was the great strength of what is commonly called the "Big Red Scare." The extreme Right were outright pro-Fascists in that they saw in a militantly anti-Communist Germany the survival of their free enterprise system of economics. Ger-

many was the bulwark against which the dangerous doctrines of Communist heresy would be dashed and destroyed. While not as firmly committed to the idea of the necessity of a saviour Germany, the less extreme branches of the Right were, nonetheless, comforted by the security Germany provided. They could hardly be expected to act with any firmness when Hitler marched into "Germany's own back yard."

France and Britain - the leading European nations against Nazism - were theoretically firmly committed to the policy of collective security implicit in their membership in and leadership of the League of Nations. In reality, however, the idea of really using League machinery to prevent acts by any party contrary to the peace and well-being of the world was quite beyond their faith in the League. While theoretically bound to League principles, both countries, in fact, acted in accordance with what they thought was enlightened self-interest. As a result, the League had long since become an empty shell of a forgotten dream. The two countries had pursued courses of action that had led to a growing mistrust and a degree of bitterness between them. France had been refused firm promises of support from both Great Britain and the United States against possible future German aggression as far back as 1919. She then attempted to establish relations with the other non-German European states to quarantine Germany within a French system. This policy would lead her later to look upon Fascist Italy as

a nation to be carefully cultivated as a potential check against Nazi moves to the south.

The Ethiopian crisis was thus looked upon by Britain and France in distinctly different lights. The British, who had assumed somewhat the policy of isolationism after the Great War, were now deeply committed to verbal battle against Mussolini's African ambitions. The French, forced by circumstances to depend most heavily upon Great Britain for security, saw the suddenly involved British leaving her insular stand just in time to wreck the foundations of diplomatic friendship being constructed by the French and Italians. The fact that Mussolini was able to complete his conquest of Ethiopia in spite of the grumblings of the British lion added salt to an already open and festering wound. In addition, the conclusion of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement in 1935 - to which the French were given no access - made the French aware of the limitations which could be imposed at any time on their dependence on their partner.

The French, for their part, were obviously paralyzed by their devotion to the need for security, so much so that they were completely unable to react to Hitler's Rhineland move - the most serious threat to their security yet carried out by the Germans. France, with an army vastly superior in numbers to the Germans, remained stagnant although it is pretty well known today that the entry of French troops would have resulted in an immediate withdrawal. Instead, the French travelled

the road to London to seek backing, and finding none, they allowed Hitler to bask in the glory of his most dangerous and critical success.

Given the inundating pacifism of the intellectual Left, the militant anti-Communism of the Right, the ineffectiveness of collective security as exercised by the League of Nations, the policy differences between the French and British, the isolationist tendency of the British political mind, the preoccupation of the French with security backing, and Hitler's awareness of all these weaknesses, the results of March 7, 1936 could hardly have been different.

Press reaction to the crisis tends to support the view that there was somewhat of an inevitability to the lack of action on the part of France and England. The more conservative papers regarded the whole thing as a purely internal German question. The very thought of using force to evict German troops from German soil was preposterous. The more radical periodicals were loud in their condemnation of the German move, but were unable or unwilling to suggest policies that would have had a chance of success in rectifying this wrong. Handing the problem over to the League which had already shown its inability to deal effectively with those who broke the peace was hardly a solution; it merely salved the consciences of those who felt some answer to the threat had to be devised.

Hitler had guaged the non-German European mind correctly.

Breaking an international covenant and threatening the security of all Europe - for threatening the security of France would mean just that - would not bring the might and power of his enemies upon him. To make the lack of response sweeter he even coated his bitter pill with the sugar of a new peace plan which the other powers grasped at avidly.

This refusal to face the facts of aggressive German actions and act accordingly guaranteed the success of Hitler's move. It also gave the Nazis the time they needed to consolidate their power in the Reich and to prepare their war machine for the next steps in the Fuhrer's plans. By the time the rest of Europe was ready to face the reality of the situation - that glorified militarism placed the survival of democracy in Europe in jeopardy - the price to be paid for their laxity on March 7, 1936, would be six long and bloody years of warfare.

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