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I. INTRODUCTION.

We have passed through a very disturbed year, perhaps the most unsettled of all the years since the War. But it has also been a year rich in the results of our labours. There is no more suitable moment than this Christmas Eve with its happy associations to proclaim with satisfaction that we have worked hard in 1936, that we have a right to a tranquil Christmastide, and to state how we intend to go on in the New Year.

II. STORM-TOSSED EUROPE.

When we entered upon the present year conditions prevailed that we might well call—*Europe in storm and revolution*. For six years a grave and worldwide economic and financial crisis had raged, and we had brought with us from the preceding year the great tension that had sprung from the war in Abyssinia and from the economic sanctions against Italy. From the very outset of 1936 Germany, after strengthening her régime at home, proceeded in her preparations for throw-

ing off all that remained of the restraints of the Treaty of Versailles, and on the 7th of March took the step of re-occupying the Rhineland and of denouncing the Treaty of Locarno. That moment, moreover, was the most critical moment of the year 1936, for a European war might indeed have broken out. The authoritative régimes in Europe thus strengthened their positions, demonstrated their power and readiness for action, and emphasized the success in their case of their political ideology and doctrine.

Meanwhile the rest of Europe was passing through serious social and moral convulsions. The Spring elections in France changed the existing post-War Government constellation and brought social questions to the forefront there. Shortly afterwards social and political conditions in Spain became critical, led to grave revolutionary disturbances and finally to a civil war which has developed into a serious international conflict. It is certain that on Spanish territory all the political disputes and all the social and ideological struggles that fill the whole of Europe to-day are being fought out. The authoritative régimes see in the events in Spain a danger for themselves, the Communist régime and Communist parties see in them a menace of the opposite character.

In view of the happenings in Spain all Europe has vividly felt that the consequences of the Great War have been starkly revolutionary from the

social angle, that the crisis of the years 1929 to 1936 has intensified these revolutionary tendencies, that these tendencies have created a distinct Europe in which three strong political, social and moral ideologies and doctrines stand face to face on hostile footing—the Authoritative or so-called Fascist, the Communist, and the Democratic. The whole struggle of ideas in present-day Europe falls into these three camps.

To these ideological conflicts and diplomatic moves the year has added other events: revolution in China and conflicts with Japan in the Far East, disputes in Central Europe, Austro-German and German-Lithuanian conflicts, disputes about Danzig, lively and tense discussions in Geneva, numerous diplomatic demarchés, journeys and conferences—all of which strained public opinion and the Press in all countries to the utmost limits and evoked *fears of war and panic*. This uncertain international situation had a natural consequence: straightway there was a reflex in the internal situation of every country, in the form of multifarious grievances, a revival of all still unsettled disputes, and the putting forward of every possible demand by all the different parties, classes and nationalities.

III. OUR EFFORTS FOR INTERNATIONAL AND INTERNAL PEACE.

What have we ourselves done in this situation?

This great international trial has above all been of advantage to us in that it made us well aware of all the dangers threatening us without and of all the grievances that trouble us at home. We have seen what is the real strength of the League of Nations, we have seen when, where and how it can help or fail to help, and without abandoning its idea or the hope of strengthening it in the future, we have taken steps with still greater endeavour to substitute other forces for it where the League itself cannot help. We went again in spirit through the list of all the existing guarantees of security for our State—alliance with France, our participation in the Little Entente, and our pact of mutual aid with the Soviet Union, our friendly relations with England and the Balkan Entente, and we carefully estimated what all that means for us, and considered where and in what manner these ties could be still further improved or strengthened.

The strengthening of our bond with France, the manifest intensification of England's interest in Central Europe, and especially the definitive assurance of firm Anglo-French collaboration in Europe, the change in the relations between France and Poland, the new Little Entente ne-

gotiations in the Summer of this year at Bratislava and again in Geneva, the meeting of the Heads of the Little Entente States at Bucharest in June last, and the visit of His Majesty King Carol to Czechoslovakia on the Republic's national holiday and Independence Day, coupled with all the negotiations connected with that visit—all these events made it clear to us what in fact are our obligations towards other countries and what their obligations towards us, where our weak points are and where we are strong and secure, and what we should have to do if some fresh conflict arose in Europe. And we have prepared ourselves for every eventuality.

In following events in Spain we said to ourselves that there will be no outbreak of war in Europe on their account, that it is possible in any event to isolate that conflict. We said further that the fears spread throughout Europe that France was entering upon a period of grave convulsions and internal dissension that would weaken her were exaggerated, and that our firm belief in the strength, solidity and political maturity of France would not disappoint us. We said again that international events had convinced British public opinion that England must stand well prepared for future developments and could not remain isolated upon her own island. We saw, however, that Italy too has to-day an interest in tranquility in Europe, in good understanding with

England and France, and that she cannot desire great armed conflicts in Europe. We told ourselves that Germany likewise has her own special and very weighty cares, that her offers of agreement made last March are to be taken seriously into consideration, and an endeavour made to come to an understanding.

Finally we have particularly emphasized the fact that we cannot allow, nor can we believe, that the situation of Europe is such that it threatens to become either, as some say, "Fascized", or as others say, "Bolshevized". In our view both assertions are exaggerated; they express the ardent wishes of the one side or the exaggerated fears of the other. *The real truth was, and—as events have shown—is absolutely different.*

Europe will not be either Fascized or Bolshevized. The authoritative regimes issued from the conditions, difficulties and ills of individual countries, and peculiar to them alone. Communist regimes are the particular feature of the republics of the Soviet Union. It would be folly to desire to transplant these two ideologies and doctrines to countries where conditions, the structure of society and ideological and moral forces do not support them. That would indeed bring about the most annihilating wars, and such wars would in truth be madness.

The balance of power in 1936 has not, however, permitted a European war to be provoked for

other reasons—for example, on account of Abyssinia, the occupation of the Rhineland, or on account of Spain. We, therefore, did not believe either in an ideological war or in rumours of a Russo-German, or Russo-Japanese war; we did not believe the reports of an attack upon Austria, upon Lithuania or upon Czechoslovakia—in brief, we regarded the situation with seriousness, it is true, but with calm, firmness and confidence, at the same time preparing industriously for our own defence.

For this reason I so unequivocally declared in my speech at Liberec in August last that I did not believe matters would come to a war, that I desired our people not to believe that Germany wished to attack Czechoslovakia. I declared on the contrary my belief in the possibility of agreement between Germany, the countries of Western Europe and other countries, and my conviction that we too, while preserving our existing ties and not deviating from the policy we had hitherto pursued, could arrive at agreement with Germany. *I am of the same opinion to-day as when I made my Liberec speech; I believe it is possible to preserve peace in Europe, I decline to concede that war is inevitable, and in this spirit we shall do all we can to avoid war in the year 1937. I believe that we shall avoid it.*

IV. THE TASKS OF EUROPEAN AND WORLD DEMOCRACY.

The democracies of Europe and of the world have in these circumstances a great mission of peace. These democracies certainly realize the causes which gave rise to authoritative and to Communist regimes in the individual countries, they will contribute towards preventing these regimes coming into direct collision, and will help to secure that the one camp does not feel menaced by the other. This will also assuredly be the aim of all international activities, treaties and negotiations on the part of the democratic States. This also implies respect for and tolerance of those regimes in order to enable them to develop quietly to new forms that will make it possible for them to arrive at mutual harmony, to draw closer to one another, and to collaborate particularly with the democracies.

That, of course, means that the democracies themselves must possess a big fund of inner resilience of their own, firmness and faith in their own regime, firmness of ideas, moral firmness, but also social, political and economic solidity to enable them at all times to resist all extreme influence whether from the Left or the Right, to enable them consistently and effectively to resist all penetration of alien ideology into their own views and democratic principles. That implies

balance, tolerance, class, party, religious and moral discipline. It means that the democracies must not divide up into two camps, a Left and a Right, and combat one another mercilessly to the point of annihilation; it means that the political parties must comprehend the significance of to-day's grave era, must have a sense for compromise, for democratic collaboration, for discipline and for a synthesis embracing the State in its entirety.

Finally it means that in the present perturbed and revolutionally inclined age democracy must possess for its own protection material strength of its own, that is, *its own great military force*, well prepared and competent to defend it within and without. It must also have the capacity to demonstrate, should the conflicts that menace us actually arise, that the European democracies are competent to decide the conflicts in their own favour. They must not threaten others but they must themselves be prepared for every eventuality.

Throughout 1936 Czechoslovak democracy has striven to fulfil this duty—its own and a European duty. In the first place it has seen to its own army. It has provided it with the essential financial means, it has given the officers' corps what is its due, it has given the army technical equipment and training, it has extended the footing of the army, it has brought the artillery and the air force up-to-date, it has carried out motorization, and fortified the frontiers, it has bestowed

above all on the rank and file and upon the officers its affection and its confidence, and has thus created throughout the whole State a spirit of quiet strength, courage and conscious optimism. Looked at *from this angle our democracy is strong and firm, calm, fearless and courageous*, and at the decisive moment our army would do its duty, as few other European armies, to the very last consequences.

Czechoslovak democracy has striven throughout the whole of the year to overcome the economic crisis. In this it has been greatly successful, successful to an extent scarcely anticipated. Unemployment is much lower than a year ago, work has to-day been resumed even in branches which have felt the crisis most severely. The general standard of living has again shown advance at least quantitatively among the main classes of the population; life is better among us than in many other European countries. The Budget is in equilibrium, the revenues are rising, numbers of burdensome financial restrictions are being removed.

Czechoslovak democracy has likewise achieved success in endeavours to solve the most serious internal political problems, especially in discussion and in ideological analysis of the relations between Czechs and Germans, in moral *rapprochement* between them, and in the practical solution of nationality questions. It can be said that we have

entered upon a new era of effective collaboration among the nationalities of our State, particularly Czech-German collaboration.

In the affairs of Slovakia and of Carpathian Ruthenia new and extensive progress has been achieved. Dr. Hodža, the Prime Minister, himself a Slovak, devotes attention to Slovak matters. During my tour of Slovakia I saw how Slovakia is prospering in the cultural, political and economic spheres, how Slovakia values its freedom, the freedom which the Republic guarantees it, and how it grasps its tasks and its duties. Alongside the cultural advance made in past years emphasis may be laid upon the development of industry, the construction of roads and railways, the growth of towns and spas, and the extent of public works generally. The special problem of a balance between the West and the East of the Republic is being solved planwise and consistently. In the same way attention is being devoted to Carpathian Ruthenia, not forgetting at the same time its problems that centre round political autonomy.

In its orientation of ideas, the whole Republic has I believe, in making a comparison between what is happening here and what is happening in other countries, realized what a tremendous guaranty of the prosperous development of our State is to be seen in our political, social and economic régime. An authoritative régime would mean upheaval for us within and would not strengthen

us without; Communist tendencies would react gravely upon our well-balanced internal structure and would provide the surrounding countries with a pretext for violent acts against us in the manner in which we see this happening in Spain. Our spirit, our social structure, our historical tradition can be met solely by the steady, quiet, and gradual development that is proceeding to-day, a process in which we are labouring intensely in the spirit of social and national justice to adjust our internal troubles, and to shun the two extremes of Right and Left. *There will thus be no change of any kind in our régime from this angle even in the future.*

This tradition asks from us steady and intensive effort, steady progress, the energetic creation of new and better conditions; it asks that we shall consciously and consistently adopt a positive, practical attitude towards each problem of our daily life, without passion, in a spirit of discipline towards nation and State, and in a spirit of individual striving for perfection.

Such is the way, in my view, that all democracies should proceed if they are to hold their own in the present critical epoch and to constitute a new order of intensive, creative effort in the political and social spheres. *They must not be afraid, they must not live in a state of panic and psychosis, of the fear of war or internal convulsion.* A strong democracy in the perturbed

Europe of to-day—this means faith in our good mission, this means an indefatigable, ardent and sustained effort to overcome self and all party and class passions, and every day in collaboration with all our fellows to achieve something positive and improving for one's country and for society; *this means being prepared to defend ourselves and our State with dignity, firmness and inflexibility and, if need be, by the sword*; this means the courage and candour to say to oneself and to others that life to-day, despite all its pains and troubles, is worthy of being lived, for it gives us more opportunities than ever before to do good and to create a new world.

V. CONCLUSION.

Our democracy can thus be more dynamic than any other régime whatsoever. I know that not everything about it is perfect, and that there are still many social, political and nationality ills, with here and there actual distress and want. But it is a democracy that is fired with the passionate longing to remedy all in the process of time. It is a democracy which is conscious that it stands in Central Europe like a lighthouse high on a cliff with the waves crashing on it on all sides—a democracy that has to-day in Europe the great symbolical and practical mission to keep the flag of freedom, peace and toleration flying here in

Central Europe, the flag of good will and of faith in political and social progress, the flag of faith in a stronger and morally better mankind.

I believe that in the coming year our democracy will double the work it has accomplished this, and that our State by its new efforts will steel itself within and without. This will be another big step towards European peace.

Thus will our democracy with its labours really bring peace to all men of good will, and peace to all our fellow-citizens. To proclaim at Christmas-tide peace to all people of good will in the spirit of Christ—this means work for a better future and a struggle for peace both external and internal.

Thus then, peace to you, citizens of Czechoslovakia, peace to you all, people of good will!