

A. J. P. Taylor and the Causes of World War II

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IT IS A privilege and pleasure to be invited to appraise the epoch-making book of Professor A. J. P. Taylor on *The Origins of the Second World War*¹ for the readers of a magazine made up mainly of earnest members of the younger generation who are seeking to understand the novel and complicated world into which maturity has cast their lot. No field of study could be more useful in promoting such aspirations for rational orientation than that of history. Unless we know how we got here, we are bound to be confused as to how to deal with the present or to plan for the future.

Those who are now coming to maturity are greatly handicapped in regard to historical information and realism as compared to my own generation. The 1920's and early 1930's were an era of iconoclasm and debunking, well symbolized by Mencken and Nathan and the *American Mercury*, the writings of Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Scott Fitzgerald, and the like. It was difficult in those days to maintain an intellectual blackout anywhere, even in the realm of historical writing. My first ardent attack on any form of his-

torical blackout appeared in the first number of the *Mercury* at Mencken's suggestion, even insistence.

The iconoclastic trend in history took the form of what has come to be known as "Revisionism," which was devoted to wiping out the vestiges of the wartime propaganda of the previous decade. It got its name because it was hoped that the facts this movement revealed relative to the causes of the first World War would lead to the revision of the notorious Treaty of Versailles. Had this been done, there would have been no second World War, although there might have been a militant lineup of Western Europe against Soviet Russia.

The generation which was born or has been educated since 1936 or thereabouts is, historically speaking, a lost generation—a group of youthful Rip van Winkles. By 1937, the majority of American liberal intellectuals were adopting the internationalist ideology of the Popular Front and "collective security," which Litvinov had so successfully propagated at Geneva. Nearly all liberals, and a surprising number of conservatives, jumped on the interventionist and anti-German bandwagon then being chartered and steered by President Roosevelt and Harry Hopkins. The great majority of American historians belonged to the liberal camp and became ardent interventionists.

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¹ New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1962, 296 pp. \$4.50.

From this time onward, most history teaching and writing in this country, in dealing with recent world events, increasingly took on the form of a fanciful, and in part unconsciously malicious fairy-tale. It presented the pattern of the late 1930's and the 1940's as a planetary crusading arena in which a triumvirate of St. Georges—Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin—were bravely united in a holy war to slay the Nazi dragon. Even before the latter had shot himself in a Berlin bunker, Roosevelt and Churchill had begun to suspect that their erstwhile Soviet fellow crusader for freedom, justice and peace was more of a menace to utopia than the Nazi "madman." In due time, even his successor was revealed to be a threat to the Free World, although he had snatched Stalin from the Kremlin display window and buried him like any ordinary mortal.

In the 1920's, the evidence of the mistakes which the United States had made in its first crusade in Europe under the leadership of Woodrow Wilson were frankly brought forth and displayed before the American educational world and reading public. Not so with the far greater blunders of our second global crusade. The disagreeable facts were consigned to the Orwellian "memory hole," and the few books which sought to present the salutary truth were either ignored or viciously derided. The generation which grew up during this ill-fated crusading era has been thoroughly brainwashed in regard to the historical basis of world affairs and the role of the United States therein. It has passed little if any beyond the intellectual and informational confines of President Roosevelt's colorful but misleading "Day of Infamy" rhetoric.

It has long since been observed that historical truth is the first casualty of a war. American historiography was sadly ailing before September, 1939, and was mortally ill by Pearl Harbor, in December, 1941. The great majority of historians ardently supported intervention in the European maelstrom. A surprisingly large group accepted posts involved in the war effort and propa-

ganda, a number of them of much prominence and responsibility. Hence, they had a powerful vested interest in preserving and defending the dragon-killing legend.

Most historians were ardently inflamed by the emotions engendered by the wartime propaganda. Many of them, no doubt, were honestly convinced of the soundness of this interventionist and crusading propagandism. Those few who had kept their heads and really knew the score were wise enough to keep their counsel to themselves in order to hold their posts and have some assurance of promotion. Whatever the reasons for the debacle, it is certain that historical standards and products at all affected by recent world events declined to a lower level, so far as integrity and objectivity are concerned, than at any period since the close of the Counter-Reformation. For anything comparable in this country one would have to look back to the political tracts of the period of the Civil War and Reconstruction.

In the 1920's there was a strong reaction against the military obsession for intervention in foreign quarrels. For more than a decade a trend towards peace, isolation and anti-militarism ensued. Historical writing and teaching rather generally adjusted to this climate of intellectual opinion. Revisionism sprang up and, by and large, had won the battle against the bitter-enders of the previous decade before the end of the 1920's. Leading revisionist historians, such as Sidney Bradshaw Fay and Charles Callan Tansill, were lavishly praised by members of their craft. The journalistic culmination of revisionist spirit and lore, Walter Millis' *Road to War*, became one of the outstanding best sellers of the 1930's.

THERE WAS NO such cooling-off period or escape from militant emotions after V-J Day in 1945. Along with the perpetuation of propaganda in the guise of history came a powerful effort to prevent those who had some real regard for historical truth from getting their facts

and thoughts before the American public. This project has come to be known as the "Historical Blackout." It involved a comprehensive effort since the outbreak of the second World War to suppress the truth relative to the causes and merits of the great conflict that began in 1939 and the manner in which the United States entered it. This has consisted in ignoring or suppressing facts that ran counter to the wartime propaganda when writing books on these subjects, and in suppressing, ignoring or seeking to discredit those books which have taken account of such facts.

It has often been asserted that this historical blackout is today a sinister and deliberate plot to obstruct the truth and degrade history. This is undoubtedly the truth with respect to the program and activities of some minority groups and ideological organizations which have a special vested interest in perpetuating the wartime mythology. But, for the most part, it is more the unconscious product of nearly three decades of indoctrination that grew out of interventionist and wartime propaganda. Even most professional historians who began their teaching career after 1937 have automatically come to accept as truth the distortions of pre-war and wartime interventionism. The current blackout is more an automatic reaction to brainwashing than a perverse conspiracy. But this does not make it any less difficult to resist or overcome.

This situation following the second World War is, thus, a complete reversal of what happened after the first World War when Revisionism carried the day in the historical forum in less than a decade after the Armistice of November 11, 1918. Even some of the outstanding leaders of Revisionism after the first World War, such as Sidney B. Fay and William L. Langer, recanted their Revisionism, succumbed to the historical blackout, and gave warm support to the dragon-slaying fantasy. In only about a year and a half after the Armistice of 1918 Fay had blasted for all time the myth of the unique guilt of a Hohenzolern gorilla, as the Kaiser had been portrayed during the conflict. Within a dec-

ade after the close of the War a veritable library of revisionist books had been produced on responsibility for the calamity of 1914.

Despite the fact that the documentary material to support Revisionism after the second World War is more profuse, cogent and convincing than after 1918, as of 1962 not a single volume by an American scholar devoted exclusively to the causes of the second World War has been published in the United States—some twenty-three years after the outbreak of the War and seventeen years after its close.

To be sure one book related to the field was published, *Back Door to War*, by Charles Callan Tansill, now dean of diplomatic historians. It has about as much material on responsibility for 1939 as Professor Taylor's book, is more thoroughly documented, and arrives at much the same conclusions as Taylor. But the Tansill book was designed primarily to indicate by impressive documentation how, as Clare Boothe Luce had expressed it, President Roosevelt had lied the United States into war from 1937 to 1941. Hence, there was much more interest in the antecedents of Pearl Harbor than in the responsibility for the European War in 1939, and Tansill's extensive and valuable material on the latter was generally ignored. There have been a number of important and distinguished books by American writers which have supplemented Tansill's account of American entry into the second World War but for the most part they have been ignored or smeared, and the dragon-slaying fiction still remains almost immaculate and impregnable.

Professor Tansill's book, *America Goes to War*, which was published in 1938, and is far and away the best account of American entry into war in 1917, was declared by Dr. Henry Steele Commager to be "the most valuable contribution to the history of the pre-war years in our literature and one of the most notable achievements of historical scholarship of this generation." His *Back Door to War* is an equally learned, scholarly and erudite account of our entry into the second World War, but ortho-

dox historians have been inclined to dismiss it as merely superficial counter-propaganda. Even Charles Austin Beard, dean of American historians and political scientists, was ruthlessly smeared for presuming to protect Clio's chastity.

Although several impressive books by informed experts, including Tansill, have detailed the facts about the Pearl Harbor disaster and scandal, Professor Foster Rhea Dulles, writing in the most formidable historical series recently launched in the United States and co-edited by Professor Commager, declared that "there is no evidence to support such charges."

Publishers who might wish to make available the truth about the second World War are intimidated by the more powerful Book Clubs, which are without exception dominated by those supporting the historical blackout. The most influential advisory service, which has great weight in recommending book purchases by public libraries and book stores, makes a specialty of deriding and discouraging the purchase of revisionist books. The fable of the dragon-killers remains almost inviolate, so far as the general public is concerned.

William Henry Chamberlin's *America's Second Crusade*, the only substantial but popular account of our entry into the second World War, was highly comparable to Millis' *Road to War* on 1917. But, whereas Millis' book sold a quarter of a million copies, a year after the Chamberlin book was published there was still not one copy listed in the New York Public Library or in any of its many branches. It need not be alleged that all those who operate book clubs and book services deliberately aim to pervert or frustrate historical truth relative to world affairs. They are presumably supporters of truth in theory. They just do not know what it is. They are emotionally congenial to the wartime legends and most historians they know seem to agree with them. Both have been brainwashed for a generation.

The essence of what has preceded is that the generation which has gained its historical knowledge and perspectives since the late 1930's has been deprived,

cheated and handicapped by the distortion and suppression of historical facts relative to world affairs. This is especially unfortunate because of the transcendent role of world relations and policies in the everyday life, interests, decisions and destiny of the American citizen of today. This handicap is true even if a person has been a history major in college. Indeed, it is likely that he will have been more victimized by historical errors as a result of more copious and intensive indoctrination with historical fiction than one who has specialized in literature, art or music.

The importance of Professor Taylor's highly controversial volume lies in the prospect that it will prove unusually potent in blasting through the historical blackout. Through a fortunate combination of circumstances, the book has shaken up Britain more than any other historical work in the field of world affairs since the writings of E. D. Morel just about forty years ago. It may be hoped that the American edition can do as well in producing a flash of light which will penetrate the historical blackout of nearly a generation's duration.

For the generation represented by most of the readers of this article, the great value of the Taylor book is that it can be the logical starting-point for them in recovering the all-important lost pages of history, out of which they have been cheated by brainwashing and the historical blackout. Those who are stimulated to continue the process will find most useful J. J. Martin's *Liberal Opinion and World Politics, 1931-1941* (Devin-Adair); C. C. Tansill's *Back Door to War* (Regnery); G. N. Crocker's *Roosevelt's Road to Russia* (Regnery); W. H. Chamberlin's *Beyond Containment* (Regnery); and John Lukacs' *A History of the Cold War* (Doubleday). These carry the story consecutively from the Hoover Administration to that of Kennedy.

HAVING THUS presented at some length the background and setting of Professor Taylor's book, we may now consider the nature and significance of

the book itself. First and foremost, it is the first book to be published in any language which is exclusively devoted to the task of debunking the dragon-slaying travesty which has colored and distorted historical perspective for nearly a quarter of a century.

It is probable that no living historian could be more appropriate as an effective and convincing author of such a book. In the first place, he is an English scholar. Due to Rhodes scholarships and other allied items which promote Anglophilism in the United States, there is a special aura attaching to English historians, their scholarship and their implied words of wisdom. This gives Taylor and his book special prestige in this country. Then, he is easily the best known and most popular of contemporary British historians. Further, he is the author of a number of substantial historical works dealing with contemporary history and diplomatic relations, most of them devoted in part at least to recent German history. In other words, he is a specialist in the field covered by his book under review here, which is not the case with such bitter critics as A. L. Rowse and Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, the former a specialist in Tudor history and poetry and the latter in Stuart ecclesiastical history and, also, poetry.

In all of his previous books, Taylor has invariably shown a rather strong antipathy to German politics and leaders. Hence, he could not logically be suspected of any pro-German sympathies or any desire to clear Hitler or any other German politician of political errors or public crimes which could be supported by reliable documentation. Finally, he has been closely associated with British left-wing activities, the Labor Party, disarmament, and other attitudes and policies which make it quite impossible for him to be imagined as having any sympathy with totalitarianism of any sort, least of all with that of National Socialist Germany in the 1930's. Clement Attlee and the Laborites were, if anything, more vehement in their hatred of Hitler and so-called appeasement than the Tories who were in power in Britain in 1938-1939.

Hence, it would be difficult to conceive of any historian who could give greater assurance that his criticisms of the dragon-slaying hypothesis are no more than those which historical accuracy and reliable documentation makes necessary. They are a product of historical integrity and professional courage, probably more of the latter than has been displayed by any other historian of our generation. It is interesting to note that since his book on the causes of the second World War has appeared, a number of critical reviewers have accused Taylor of being a publicity-seeking vendor of sensationalism who must not be taken seriously as a historian. But these same critics were actually the very ones who had previously lauded his profound scholarship when his books reflected a strong hostility to Germany and its policies.

While indicating Professor Taylor's attitude towards Germany, and especially the Germany of the 1930's and Hitler, it may be well to make clear my own approach to such matters. As a lifelong exponent of freedom of thought and political action, and a veteran critic of any racial theory of history, it will be a little difficult to hang any pro-Hitler label on me. Further, I probably lost more in the way of prestige, influence and contacts in Germany than any other American intellectual as a result of the rise of Hitler and National Socialism, surely far more than any other historian. William L. Shirer and Dorothy Thompson were catapulted into fame and fortune by the ascendancy of the Nazis and should have been exceedingly grateful for the emergence of Hitler.

My contention is that there are enough valid reasons for repudiating the social system represented by National Socialism without resorting to the most extensive, lurid and indefensible body of lies and distortions which have ever degraded so-called historical science and have caused Clio to bed down with the Gadarenes for a quarter of a century. My extensive revisionist labors in the 1920's and early 1930's were designed to encourage the revision of the Treaty of Versailles and prevent the rise and ascendancy of Hitler or anybody like him.

AFTER THESE preliminary observations, which are indispensable for judging the importance and validity of Professor Taylor's work, we can now get down to the outstanding facts and conclusions which are expressed in the book.

The vital core of the volume is the contention that Hitler did not wish a war, either local, European, or world, from March, 1933, right down into September, 1939. His only fundamental aim in foreign policy was to revise the unfair and unjust Treaty of Versailles, and to do this by peaceful methods.

This is a most remarkable and unusual contention, however well defended in the book. Hitherto, even those who have sympathized heartily with the justice and need of revising the Versailles Treaty have, nevertheless, usually maintained that, even if Hitler's revisionist program was justified in its general objectives, he carried it out in a reprehensibly brusque, provocative and challenging manner, gladly or casually risking war in each and every move he made to achieve the revision of the Versailles system. In other words, even if his goal were justifiable, his methods of seeking to obtain it were unpardonably violent, deceitful and inciting.

Professor Taylor repudiates and refutes this interpretation as thoroughly as he does the charge that Hitler wished to provoke war at any time. He holds that Hitler was unusually cautious and unprovocative in every outstanding step he took to undermine Versailles. He let others create situations favorable to achieving his ends and then exploited them in a non-bellucose manner.

One thing is certain, even if one takes a most hostile attitude towards Hitler and Professor Taylor's thesis. This is that the Allies had some thirteen years in which to revise the Treaty of Versailles in a voluntary and peaceful manner. But they did nothing about it, although one of the main ostensible functions of the League of Nations was stated to be carrying forward a peaceable revision of Versailles. Professor Sidney B. Fay had proved by 1920 that the war-guilt clause of the Treaty of Versailles, proclaiming that Germany and her allies were solely

responsible for the first World War, had no valid historical foundation whatever.

Professor Fay and the rest of us revisionists of the 1920's hoped that the facts we brought forth had completely undermined the war-guilt clause, and would lead to the revision of the Treaty in political fact. But they did not, and the failure to do so accounts for the rise of Hitler and all the many results for good or evil which ensued.

After he came into power, Hitler waited patiently for some years for the Allies to make some practical move to revise the Versailles system before he occupied the Rhineland on March 7, 1936. Even on the heels of this action he publicly proposed on March 31, 1936, what Francis Neilson has called "the most comprehensive non-aggression pact ever to be drawn up." But the Allies made no cooperative response whatever; they totally ignored it.

In the meantime, Hitler had barely attained power when, on May 17, 1933, he proposed the most sweeping disarmament plan set forth by any country between the two World Wars, but neither Britain nor France took any formal notice whatever of it. Even after he had introduced conscription in March, 1935, in response to the expansion of military conscription in France, Hitler declared that "the German Government is ready to take an active part in all efforts which may lead to a practical limitation of armaments." This proposal received no more response from Britain, France or the United States than that of May, 1933. Hence, if Hitler was to revise Versailles at all, it had become completely evident by March, 1936, that it must be by unilateral action.

We may now consider what Professor Taylor concludes about the moves whereby Hitler accomplished all of his revisionist program except for the settlement with Poland, the failure of which, due to British support of Polish intransigence, brought on the European war in September, 1939. In doing so, we should always keep in mind Taylor's fundamental assumption about Hitler, to the effect that he was not a fanatical and bellucose psychopath—a veritable madman intent upon war—but a shrewd and rational

statesman, notably in his handling of foreign affairs.

It will hardly be necessary for any sane person to emphasize the fact that Professor Taylor does not seek to present Hitler as any combination of Little Lord Fauntleroy, George Washington at the cherry tree, Clara Barton and Jane Addams. He could be devious, shrewd, inconsistent, self-contradictory, cruel and brutal, although he did balk at saturation bombing of civilians until he was compelled to do so in retaliation. The main point here is that, unlike Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin, he did not wish to have a war break out in 1939.

Professor Taylor takes up in order the main items and acts which have been exploited for decades by Hitler's critics and orthodox historians to demonstrate Hitler's combined depravity and belligerence.

The occupation of the Rhineland in March, 1936, was long overdue. It should have been returned to Germany years before Hitler took over power. His forceful occupation was pure bluff. Even a strong protest from France and Britain would probably have restrained him, and an order of mobilization by France would have produced an ignominious retreat. Moreover, the act had no serious results and at least a few advantages for Britain and France.

Historians bent on maintaining Hitler's responsibility for the second World War and his grandiose plans for world conquest have based their indictment mainly on the Hossbach Memorandum, a record made of a meeting at the German Chancellery on November 5, 1937, by a German general staff liaison officer by the name of Hossbach. It was attended by Hitler, Goering, the chief army and navy officers, and the Foreign Minister.

What took place was a general consideration of the European situation, past, present, and future, and of possible German policies in relation to existing and potential developments—the type of discussion that was common, even routine, in the higher counsels of any great state. Those who were present gave little serious attention to what was said after the conference broke up, and a majority of

them were out of office or command before the summer of 1939. The memorandum had been lost sight of until the Allies dug it up about a decade later and sprang it maliciously as a surprise on Goering at the Nuremberg Trial.

Taylor dismisses the Hossbach Memorandum with deserved contempt: "Hitler, it is claimed, decided on war and planned it in detail on 5 November, 1937. Yet the Hossbach Memorandum contains no plans of the kind . . . Hitler did not make plans for world conquest or for anything else . . . [His speculations] bear hardly any relation to the actual outbreak of war in 1939."

Although the public at large knew little about the Hossbach Memorandum, world opinion was well aware of the occupation of Austria on March 12, 1938, the so-called *Anschluss* or union of Germany and Austria. The circumstances were quite different from what Hitler had planned and wished, and were forced on him by the stupidity and duplicity of Schuschnigg. Hitler had planned to take over control gradually by infiltration and political operations from within Austria. He was annoyed by being compelled to make a show of force and was humiliated by the spectacle that his ill-prepared army made in marching into Vienna.

The *Anschluss* itself had been recommended by most fair-minded and realistic observers of the post-war situation, and it was greeted with enthusiasm by the majority of the people of Austria. But for the short-sighted opposition of Britain and France it would have been accomplished during the era of the Weimar Republic and might have helped to bolster the fortunes of both the Weimar regime and Austria, even to the point of saving both from National Socialism.

FEW EPISODES or events in the history of civilized mankind have been more vehemently attacked and viciously pilloried than the Munich Conference of September 29-30, 1938. It has been depicted and denounced as a veritable incarnation of the cowardly betrayal of all principle and public ethics in inter-

national dealings. It gave rise to the most widely used political smear term of the present generation—"appeasement"—which is actually the procedure whereby most normal diplomacy had been carried on for centuries, namely, by rational and peaceful negotiations. Munich has also been especially portrayed as the most ignominious and irresponsible defeat Britain ever met in her entire diplomatic experience and the main cause of the second World War. Professor Taylor, on the contrary, finds that Munich "was a triumph for all that was best and most enlightened in British life."

That Munich did not work out as had been hoped at the time was due more to British action and policy on the heels of Munich than to any deeds of Hitler. Chamberlain did not, and perhaps could not, stand up effectively against the myopic and bitter criticisms of Munich by both the British Conservatives and Laborites. Halifax was already in the process of betraying the peace efforts at Munich and taking over the leadership of the war party in the cabinet. Churchill proclaimed that Germany was getting too strong to be tolerated and must be smashed, if necessary by force of arms. Duff Cooper contended that the balance of power on the Continent of Europe must be preserved at all costs. Taylor fails to mention the fact that Clement Attlee also attacked Munich with as great vehemence and bitterness as any Conservative.

Instead of defending his Munich policy on the high level of statecraft and public morality to which Taylor has ascribed his motives, Chamberlain, in the face of criticism by the British war party, fell back on the lame and dishonest excuse that Britain surrendered at Munich because it had been too weak to fight rather than negotiate; hence, it now had to re-arm speedily and thoroughly. "In this way, Chamberlain did more than anybody else to destroy the case for his own policy."

The usual explanation that Munich failed to preserve peace because Hitler violated his pledge not to make further territorial demands in Europe after the Sudetenland transfer cannot be main-

tained on a factual basis. He actually made this pledge at a *Sportpalast* speech in Berlin on September 26, 1938, three days before Munich. Hitler made no demand for Czechoslovakian territory after the Munich Conference and the cession of the Sudetenland, and his demands for the return of the German city of Danzig, on which Poland had no valid claims, and for the railroad and motor road across the Corridor, could hardly be regarded as any literal, or even moral, violation of this pledge. Czechoslovakia inevitably fell apart in the natural course of the political disintegration which had been set in motion by the return of the Sudeten territory to Germany. Taylor emphasizes this fact at length.

Of all the silly and preposterous allegations made against Hitler, surely the outstanding was that his occupation of Prague proved his determination on world conquest. Although Chamberlain, Halifax, and the British war party made this charge to beguile the British public, they knew better than to base their case in diplomatic channels on this travesty. Rather, in collusion with the Rumanian minister in London, they concocted a transparent fraud, immediately repudiated by the Rumanian Foreign Minister, charging that Hitler had just made demands on Rumania which threatened her sovereignty and forecast an attempt at wholesale penetration of the Balkans.

Aside from inadequate emphasis on the extent and manner in which Lord Halifax and Sir Howard Kennard, the British ambassador at Warsaw, encouraged Poland not to negotiate a peaceful settlement with Hitler in August, 1939, Professor Taylor's account of the German-Polish crisis of October, 1938, to September, 1939, accords with his general thesis that Hitler did not want war. He makes it clear that Hitler wished a permanent and peaceful settlement with Poland rather than war.

THE TERMS Hitler suggested to Poland, beginning on October 24, 1938, were extremely reasonable—indeed, the most moderate of any in his whole revisionist

procedure from 1933 to 1939 and were far less drastic than many British leaders had suggested between the two World Wars. Even Churchill, at about the very time Hitler came to power, had declared in the House of Commons on April 13, 1933, that the question of the Polish Corridor was a leading issue that had to be adjusted if European peace were to be preserved.

Hitler only asked for the return of Danzig and a railroad and motor road across the Corridor. Indeed, he proposed much more in return than he requested; he offered to guarantee the Polish boundaries as settled at Versailles after the first World War, something the Weimar Republic would never even remotely consider. Britain has been invariably presented in the traditional story of 1939 as the moral custodian of Europe, even willing to risk war to protect the integrity of Poland, which Hitler was seeking to gobble up. The facts are precisely the reverse.

There is conclusive evidence that the Polish leaders believed that Hitler's terms of 1938-1939 were sincere, and were not merely the first step in a sinister program to absorb Poland later on by military force or political intrigue. But Josef Beck, the Polish Foreign Minister, refused to accept Hitler's generous terms, and on March 26, 1939, broke off negotiations with Germany. They were never again resumed down to the time war broke out on September 1, 1939.

The stubborn refusal of Poland even to negotiate with Germany during the crisis of August, 1939, is fully revealed by Taylor, although he does not bring out the extent to which Beck was encouraged in this intransigence by Halifax and Kennard, especially the latter. Taylor does, however, make it crystal clear that the Poles were far more willing to envisage war than was Hitler. Right down to the final crisis Hitler had hoped for peaceful revision. Even during the last hours of peace he only increased his demands to include a plebiscite in the northern tip of the Corridor. It would have taken a year of peaceful negotiations to complete the arrangements under this plan, and the important Polish port of

Gdynia was explicitly excluded from the proposed plebiscite area.

Those who refuse to be convinced by Taylor's demonstration that Hitler's operations in revising the Treaty of Versailles prove that he did not desire to provoke war, fall back on the allegation that his whole economic policy had been to gear German industry to warlike plans, that he had spent enormous sums of money to create a great military machine, sufficient for and ready to start a war of world conquest, and that he had converted Germany into a great military camp.

Taylor refutes all this very effectively. Hitler had not spent more money for armament, relatively, than either France or Britain, and he was in no way prepared for even a European war, to say nothing of a war of world conquest. He was only ready for a short *Blitzkrieg* of a couple of months, such as he waged in Poland. Out of a hundred divisions he put into war in Poland, only three were mechanized and not one completely motorized. The combined military forces of Britain and France were far more than equal to those of Germany in 1939.

The final line of defense of those who reject the facts of both diplomatic history and economic history from 1933 to 1939 is that the real proof of Hitler's plan to conquer the world is to be found in his *Mein Kampf*, written in 1924, and his alleged "Second Book," putatively composed in 1928, not in what he actually did from 1933 to 1939. This implies that Hitler was the only prominent public figure in 1939 who had never changed his mind over the years despite revolutionary alterations in surrounding circumstances. Yet, these same critics of both Hitler and sound history have been the very ones who have contended for three decades that if there was one invariable characteristic of Hitler it was his explosive nature, his undependability, his instability, vacillation and fickleness, and his general irresponsibility. They cannot very well have it both ways.

Mein Kampf furnishes little or no clue as to what was going on in Hitler's mind in 1939, any more than Churchill's violent attacks on Russia in 1918-1920 provide a

true reflection of his attitude towards Russia at the Teheran or Yalta Conferences, or his assurance to the House of Commons after his return from Yalta that he knew of no country which honored its public promises with greater fidelity than Soviet Russia. The *Mein Kampf* subterfuge is like seeking the motives and policies of President Roosevelt on the eve of Pearl Harbor in his isolationist and pacifist speeches during the campaign of 1936—only five years earlier.

In his final conclusion as to the coming of war in September, 1939, Professor Taylor rejects the verdict which has been accepted for more than two decades, namely, that it was the inevitable product of a long premeditated and wicked plot on the part of a maniacal Nazi dictator.

He contends, to the contrary, that it was a calamitous mistake, not premeditated by either side, and was primarily the product of diplomatic and political blunders on both sides: "This is a story without heroes; and perhaps even without any villains . . . The war of 1939, far from being welcome, was less wanted by nearly everybody than almost any war in history . . . The war of 1939, far from being premeditated, was a mistake, the result on both sides of diplomatic blunders . . . Such were the origins of the second World War, or rather the war between the three Western Powers over the settlement of Versailles; a war which had been implicit since the moment the first war ended."

PROFESSOR TAYLOR is quite correct in stating that, in so far as the general public were concerned, the second World War was one of the most unwanted wars in history, but it was not unwanted by Halifax, Kennard, and the British war party in the summer of 1939. Chamberlain was rather wavering and schizoid on the matter, but in the end he joined with Halifax and Kennard and stood out against Sir Nevile Henderson, the British ambassador at Berlin, who resolutely opposed the war to the last moment.

As Foreign Secretary, Halifax was the responsible leader of the war group. He had taken over control of British foreign

policy within a week after the Munich Conference. He carried through the war program in a ruthless and undeviating manner and with consummate skill, craftiness, duplicity, and determination, from mid-October, 1938, to the sending of the final ultimatum to Germany on September 3, 1939. If there was any "villain" in 1939 it was Lord Halifax, far more so than Churchill. The latter had little to do with British diplomacy at the time, and actually did not know much about what was going on at the end of August when Halifax was craftily, skillfully, and relentlessly piloting England and Europe into war.

While affecting a personal piety almost akin to that of Thomas a Kempis, Halifax planned, engineered and gratuitously let loose on the world the most cruel and devastating war in history, the ultimate result of which may be the extermination of the human race, with no more justification than the perpetuation of an obsolete British political tradition—the balance of power on the European continent—which had been fashioned in the sixteenth century by Cardinal Wolsey.

As to the motives of the group which backed up Halifax, they were both varied and numerous. Some were chronic German haters. Others were alarmed by Germany's economic recovery and the methods whereby this had been accomplished. Some may have honestly feared that Hitler did have a program of extensive military conquest, although surely none of them believed that this would be directed against Britain. Some, like Churchill, believed that they could improve their political status in the event of war. Laborites and other Leftwing groups hated conservative totalitarianism.

Certainly, the British blank check to Poland, either when made in March or when confirmed on August 25th, was a hypocritical fraud which did not offer any honest guarantee or comprehensive protection to Poland, and was not intended to do so. It was purely a provocative war stratagem. It merely encouraged Poland to stand firm against reasonable German demands and thus make inevitable a war against Germany. It was Hitler who offered the genuine guarantee to Poland.

When, in the autumn of 1939, Russia brazenly occupied eastern Poland, the question was raised in the House of Commons as to whether the British guarantee of Poland covered aggression against her by Russia. Richard A. (Rab) Butler, who answered for the government, had to admit that it did not. It was only a guarantee against Germany, which at the outset did not contemplate annexing any Polish territory. Rather, Germany offered to guarantee the Versailles boundaries of Poland.

It is well established that no responsible leaders in Germany, France, or Italy wished war in 1939. President Roosevelt apparently desired to have the European war break out as soon as possible, pressed Chamberlain to go ahead, and encouraged Polish arrogance and stubbornness. But Roosevelt was in no position to exert any directly decisive influence on European decisions in 1939, and Halifax did not need any encouragement from Roosevelt.

It is unlikely, however, that Britain would have dared to adopt the policy she did in 1939 in regard to Poland and Germany if Roosevelt had not already promised British leaders, notably through Anthony Eden and George VI, all possible American aid in the event of war and had agreed to make every conceivable effort to bring the United States into war on the side of Britain if one broke out. This is well brought out in the so-called "Kent Documents," the nearly two thousand secret messages that were exchanged between Roosevelt and Churchill in American code and embodied, as Churchill had admitted, most of the vital Anglo-American diplomatic commitments and arrangements, beginning even before Churchill became Prime Minister.

To summarize realistically the matter of war responsibility in 1939, one may quite safely say that Professor Taylor is entirely correct in holding that the broad general responsibility, running over two decades, was divided among all the parties and was the outcome of blunders by all of them.

In regard to the direct and immediate responsibility for the outbreak of hostilities in September, 1939, the blame for

the German-Polish War was divided between Poland, Britain and Germany, with the so-called guilt ranking in this order.

The primary and direct responsibility for the European War, which grew into the second World War, was almost solely that of Great Britain and the British war group, made up of both Conservatives and Laborites. If Britain had not gratuitously given Poland a blank check, which was not needed in the slightest to assure British security, Poland might have risked a war with Germany. Nevertheless, even in this case there would still have been no justification for British intervention in such a war or for the provocation of a European war.

This sole immediate British responsibility for the outbreak of the European War in September, 1939, stands out in contrast to the direct responsibility for starting a European war in August, 1914, which was divided between Russia, France and Serbia, in the order given. If Alexander Izvolksi, the Russian ambassador to France in 1914, was more responsible than any other individual for war in 1914, so was Lord Halifax more to be blamed than any other person for the coming of war in 1939.

ALREADY THERE has arisen a line of criticism designed to discredit the significance of Professor Taylor's book, even granting its accuracy as to the general responsibility for war in 1939. It is held that, although Hitler and the Nazis may not have started the war in 1939, or even wished to start it, the brutal outrages of which they were guilty after the war got started proved them such degenerate gangsters that Halifax and his associates were justified in resorting to any degree of plotting and duplicity required to produce a war to smash and annihilate them, and that President Roosevelt performed a great moral service in "lying the United States into the war" to make it certain that this salutary and needed act of extermination would be accomplished.

Any such argument is even more fallacious and deplorable than the *ex post facto* jurisprudence on which the Nurem-

berg Trials were founded. Further, there is no reason whatever to believe that the brutal wartime actions which have been alleged against Germany would have taken place if peace had been preserved. Finally, as Milton Mayer, Victor Gollancz, and others, have already suggested, it seems likely that the whole question of the wartime crimes of Germany will ultimately be submitted to as drastic a type of revisionism as the conventional views about the responsibility for the second World War have been subjected to by Taylor. Many thousands were executed after war-crime trials in Germany and Iron Curtain countries—trials which are still going on today—and far over 100,000 were executed or massacred in France and Italy during the "Liberation."

Two great wrongs do not make a right but even a casual survey of Allied atrocities, which does not even include those in the Asiatic area, aside from the atom bombings, makes it amply clear that there is no validity to the argument that the second World War simply had to be waged to rid the world of a totally unique gang of German scoundrels—unique both as to moral depravity and deeds of brutal violence.

Hitler's evil deeds have been told and retold, beginning long before 1939. After the Cold War started, the Western World began to learn something about the monstrous and nefarious doings of Stalin—that "man of massive outstanding personality, and deep and cool wisdom," as Churchill described him—which far exceeded those of Hitler. But we have heard little of the horrors which were due to the acts and policies of Churchill and Roosevelt, as, for example, the saturation bombing of civilians, the incendiary bombings of German cities such as Hamburg and of Tokyo, the bombing and destruction of the beautiful city of Dresden which had no military significance whatever and in which more lives were lost than in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the atom bombings of the Japanese cities (planned by Roosevelt), the expulsion of about fifteen million Germans from their former homes and the death of four to six millions in the process as a result of massacre, starvation and

exposure, the brutalities practised on German SS prisoners of war, the cruel and barbarous treatment of Germany from 1945 to 1948, and the return of around five million Russian refugees in Germany to Stalin to be butchered or enslaved. The greatest horror that could be fairly traced to their doings is still held in reserve for us—the nuclear extermination of mankind.

In short, there is no unique or special case against Nazi barbarism and horrors unless one assumes that it is far more wicked to exterminate Jews than to massacre Gentiles. While this latter value judgment appears to have become rather generally accepted in the Western world since 1945, I am personally still quaint enough to hold it to be reprehensible to massacre either Jews or Gentiles.

Professor Taylor, logically and wisely, deals only slightly and incidentally with the domestic policy of Nazi Germany, although he does hint correctly several times that this probably did more to produce the war than Hitler's foreign policy. Of all of Hitler's domestic policies, the one which brought upon him the greatest opprobrium and hatred and the one which played the most important public role in encouraging war on Germany, was his treatment of the German Jews, a piece of folly which I have condemned for nearly thirty years in numerous articles, books and lectures. Indeed, the famous American Rabbi, Stephen S. Wise, reprinted a series of articles I wrote for the Scripps-Howard newspapers criticizing Hitler's anti-Semitism and distributed tens of thousands of copies.

There could, however, be no greater paradox in history than a war in behalf of Poland on the basis of the Jewish issue. There were in Poland, in 1933, six times as many Jews as in Germany, and they were surely treated as badly as were the German Jews under Hitler. Moreover, by 1939, Hitler's anti-Jewish program had moderated and more than half the German Jews had left Germany, usually with many of their possessions, whereas the Polish Jewish population had declined relatively slightly and their treatment had not improved to any notable extent.

In the 1930's, when I was actively engaged in journalism, I received much praise from Jewish readers for my columns and editorials criticizing Hitler's treatment of the Jews, but this was interspersed with frequent and insistent suggestions that I should not overlook the far more extensive plight of the Jews in Poland. Several of my more responsible correspondents charged that the Polish government was laying plans to exterminate the Polish Jews as communist revolutionaries. This was several years before it is alleged that Hitler even planned any extermination project. Nor should Russia be overlooked. Writing in October, 1938, Walter Duranty observed that "Stalin has shot more Jews in two years of purges than were ever killed in Germany."

IT IS WORTHWHILE here to indicate briefly the significance of the book by Professor Taylor for citizens of the United States. So far as revisionist scholarship is concerned, this is greatly strengthened and its basic contentions are confirmed. It will now be easier to treat the causes of the second World War realistically and honestly without being accused of mental defect or moral depravity.

The awe and reverence with which English historians are customarily regarded by the American historical guild will make it the more difficult and embarrassing for the latter to laugh off Professor Taylor's confirmation of the basic tenets of American revisionist historical scholarship. The frenetic reviews of the American edition have already revealed their schizoid reaction—a sort of intellectual "twist" dance.

The Taylor book underlines the accuracy of American anti-interventionism which had been supported by revisionist historical writings in this country. The interventionists based their policy on the fantastic assumption, actually voiced by such able historians as Samuel Flagg Bemis, top commentators like Walter Lippmann, and superb journalists of the type of Walter Millis, that the United States was in mortal danger of infiltration and attack by Nazi Germany. Pro-

fessor Taylor's book further emphasizes the grotesque fallacy of this contention. Hitler did not even wish to attack England or France, to say nothing of proceeding westward across the Atlantic. Nor was it necessary for the United States to enter the war to protect Britain or France. Hitler sought peace after the Polish War and again after the fall of France, and Dunkirk.

In the light of the facts brought forward by Professor Taylor, which are not at all new to American revisionist historians and had previously been well stated by Tansill, Beard, and others, President Roosevelt's allegation that Hitler planned to invade the United States by way of Dakar, Rio de Janeiro and Panama—his notorious timetable for the Nazi occupation of Iowa—is shown to be as fantastic and untenable as his statement that he was "surprised" by the Japanese attack in December, 1941.

Professor Taylor's book should serve as a warning that a third world war will not be prevented by an avalanche of stale Germanophobia, or by merely mouthing arrogant platitudes and benign homilies about the virtues and superiorities of democracy and the "Free World." These semantic gestures must be supplemented and implemented by all the wisdom, precaution, foresight and statecraft that can be drawn from the disastrous experience with two world wars and their ominous aftermaths. Failing this, we shall not have another opportunity.

We are not likely to succeed so long as we resolutely reject searching self-examination but continue to seek a scapegoat on whom we may lay the blame for all international tragedies. The effort to make a scapegoat out of the Kaiser and Germany after the first World War produced the Versailles Treaty and, in time, the second World War. The same process was continued on a more fantastic scale after the second World War, and it has already led us to the brink of nuclear war several times. Professor Taylor has made clear the folly in seeking to make Hitler's foreign policy the cause of all the miseries and anguish of the world since 1939—or even 1933.

We can get no valid comfort from the illusion that nuclear warfare will be withheld in the third World War, as poison gas was in the second. As F. J. P. Veale pointed out so well in his *Advance to Barbarism*, the Nuremberg Trials took care of that. These showed that the rule in the future will be that defeated leaders, military and civilian, will be executed. Hence, no leader in wartime will spare any available and effective horrors which may avert defeat. Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery got this point when he stated in Paris in June, 1948: "The Nuremberg Trials have made the waging of unsuccessful war a crime: the generals on the defeated side are tried and then hanged." He should have added chiefs of state, prime ministers, foreign ministers, and even secretaries of welfare.

While it is easy to demonstrate that the second World War and American entry into it constituted the outstanding public calamity in human history, and perhaps the last—surely, the next to the last—of such magnitude, the question is always asked as to what *should* have been done.

There is no space here to write a treatise on world history or to combine prophesy with hindsight. But a reasonable answer can be suggested.

Britain should not have started the second World War. The British leaders knew that Hitler was no threat to them. Next to assuring German strength, he was mainly interested in bolstering the British Empire. Even after Dunkirk he offered to put the German *Wehrmacht* and *Luftwaffe* at the service of Britain if she would make peace.

Germany and Russia had made a pact in August, 1939, and both were interested in turning east and south. If they remained friendly they could have developed and civilized these great untamed areas. If they quarrelled and fought, they would thereby have reduced the two great totalitarian systems to impotence through military attrition. Once the war started and Germany had invaded Russia, the United States should have remained aloof and allowed these totalitarian rivals to bleed themselves white and thereby end their menace to the Western World.

The wisdom of such procedure was recognized by public leaders in both major political parties, such as ex-President Herbert Hoover, Senator Robert A. Taft, and Senator Harry S. Truman. Communism would not now dominate a vast portion of the planet or have over a billion adherents. Nor would we be faced with a war of nuclear extermination. Well.

But the combined power of Roosevelt's lust for the glamor of a war presidency, the communist line about "collective security," so successfully propounded by Litvinov at Geneva and adopted by American liberals as the ideological basis of their interventionism, and Churchill's gargantuan vanity and vast enjoyment of his prestige as wartime leader, was far too great to be overcome by either factual information or political logic. The dolorous results of the folly of American intervention and Roosevelt's concessions to Stalinite Communism dominate the material in every daily newspaper and every political journal of our time.

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