



Peace and disarmament is within our grasp

THE GREATEST TRAGEDY of the Second World War is that it was necessary to fight it.

By 1939, there was no way to stop the Nazi enslavement of Europe without going to war against Germany.

Wait. Pause. Go back over those two paragraphs. While a good case can be made for the argument there, there is still one short phrase screaming out a message, a message still consistently missed by those who think about the horror of that war.

The phrase is "By 1939".

The phrase points out the real tragedy of the 20 century. The tragedy is that while humanity has grown to near-adulthood in the material sense, mentally, morally, spiritually we have not yet left junior high school.

You remember junior high school. The place where things were most often settled with the fists.

Hitler should never have gotten to 1939. Hitler should have remained what he originally was: a moderately talented artist from a small town in Austria. Instead, Hitler got where he did because, in a very real sense, he was the ultimate expression of what this century has been all about.

By 1939, this century had to accept him as one of its own.

Did it have to be this way? Well, for one thing a good argument can be made that everything that has happened in history has done so because it *had* to happen. But let's play a little game of "what if". In the true spirit of Remembrance, perhaps we can learn something from our terrible mistakes.

Entering this century, western civilization had built up a structure that seemed stable, enduring, progressive, and morally strong. There were wars, but controlled wars for the most part, "necessary" wars. The moral basis of society would keep them from

going too far.

Despite this complacency, some saw the writing on the wall. The increasing power of weapons of destruction, along with the growing greed of governments and businesses, might easily let war get out of hand.

The Socialist International, for one, saw the danger. Its members saw no reason to fight for governments and businesses that were opposed to them, so they declared in 1912 that the working classes of Europe would not respond to any call to the colours in a general European war.

In 1914 the Socialists of Germany, who controlled the lower house of parliament, actually had the power to block funding for the war that erupted that summer.

They didn't. Like the rest of the International, like the people of the western world in general, they became swept up in the great wave of nationalism and went to war with a will.

What if they gave a war and nobody came? They all came. 13 million of them stayed.

The First World War tore the heart out of western civilization. The moral code that had seemed carved in stone was gone. The winners and the losers, each grasping for something to replace it, clutched hold of the same straw: military force.

On the Allied side, military force seemed the thing that had saved them from German domination. Only the maintenance of that force would keep them secure.

On the German side, military force seemed to have been inadequate. Therefore, the only way to be secure was to create a new force, more powerful than the one before.

The Treaty of Versailles disarmed Germany. This was supposed to be preliminary to general European disarmament. With the attitudes of the two sides

given above, what chance did disarmament have? Germany was physically disarmed, but both sides were mentally armed to the teeth.

Government and business, who are the only beneficiaries of military force were, needless to say, pleased as punch by the situation. They actively encouraged it.

When the Nazis came along, the western world, so long fearful of Germany, adopted a curious isolationist stance. Disarmament of Germany hadn't brought disarmament to Europe, but the rearmament of Germany brought a new European arms race. The former Allied states tried to keep the peace through the theory of deterrence. Sound familiar?

What if they gave a war and nobody came?

The problem with deterrence, as the world saw in 1939, is that there's always some nut somewhere crazy enough to go to war, even if it inevitably means his own destruction.

Anyone with any objectivity could see in 1939 that Hitler couldn't win the war; the German admirals considered the war lost as soon as Britain entered, on Sept. 3. But Hitler went ahead. So much for deterrence.

Nazism could have been beaten much sooner, and with no loss of life, if the western world had gone after it, rather than isolating itself from it. First, the Germans could have been treated a lot better in the first place, rather than letting them starve on the streets in the 1920's. But even after the Nazis came to power, a strong international condemnation of their government, backed by economic sanctions, could have stopped their buildup of strength and given the German people a chance to correct their tragic

mistake.

Instead, the leaders of the western world went along with Nazism. Many, including Canada's prime minister Mackenzie King, openly expressed admiration for the Nazi system. At least, they said, Hitler was providing a buffer against the threat of communism.

Does anyone see a parallel to what's going on today in regard to South Africa?

J.S. Woodsworth, first leader of the CCF, forerunner to the NDP, was the only member of Parliament to vote against Canada going to war in 1939. Although appalled by Nazism, he said as a pacifist he could not vote for war under any circumstances. He went on to point out how the moral failure of the western leadership had led to the crisis of 1939. He predicted a war that would last five or six years. Other MPs laughed at him.

Six years later the war ended. Nearly everything had changed in those six years. Now the U.S. and the USSR were the dominant world powers, and the US had atomic weapons. The USSR developed its own in a few years.

One thing that hadn't changed was the theory of deterrence. Despite the theory's failure in 1939, the world was willing to stake its fate on the theory once again.

Einstein said nuclear weapons had changed everything but the way we think. Humanity now had the power to completely destroy itself, yet we were still thinking like we had nothing more dangerous to face than sticks and stones.

And, as Derek Rasmussen and Ken Burke point out in this supplement, our governments and businesses are actively encouraging us to think like this.

We have only one way to break free of the threat of nuclear and "conventional" war. We have to break free of our mental reliance

on military force.

This is not going to be easy, especially for the male half of society which has been raised to use force. Our governments and businesses will fight against this change of mind-set tooth and nail, because they have everything to lose by it.

But it's going to have to happen. Before we can disarm physically, we must disarm mentally.

Many will say this is impossible. Humanity, they will say, has always used force, and you can't change human nature.

In response to this argument, let's present an example.

Until about 200 years ago there was an institution just as firmly entrenched in western society as warfare was then, or is now. That institution was slavery, specifically the enslavement of blacks.

All the same arguments were used in defense of slavery as are now used in defence of war. "Slavery has existed since the beginning of time," they said. "God is on our side," they said. "You can't change human nature."

But in a period of only a century all those arguments were defeated, and institutionalized black slavery ceased to exist. Most blacks still didn't have it very good, but at least they were no longer physically in chains.

Today we look back at slavery and wonder how good, decent people could ever have accepted it. The answer is that we simply don't think the way they did. We were able to change our "human nature."

Today we look forward to the future, and some of us can see a future without war. It is there, but it will take an enormous effort of will to reach out and grasp it. Our ancestors of the past two centuries showed us how we can do it.

Follow their example. Think peace.