

the frontiers of old Bohemia, but undoubtedly the desire to give the new state a strong strategic frontier, even if this involved disregarding racial claims, was the decisive factor. An effort was made to protect minorities, not only by the general provision for appeal to the League of Nations, but by an understanding that a cantonal system similar to Switzerland's would be worked out.

The new state amply proved its right to exist. Under the leadership of one of the greatest Europeans of his time, Thomas Masaryk, it became the most prosperous and the most soundly democratic country in central or eastern Europe. It was not equally successful in dealing with its minorities problem. There is little doubt that the newly dominant Czech elements were stiff in their attitude, that, in Lord Runciman's words, there was lack of tact, petty intolerance, discrimination, postponement of fulfilment of promises. But at the same time it is clear that the minorities were immensely better treated than in other central or eastern states. It was not the internal situation but outside pressure that gave urgency and danger to the minority question in Czechoslovakia rather than in any of half a dozen other countries.

The outstanding factor in that outside situation was the rise of a rearmend and self-confident Germany. The events of last September merely registered the results of a shift in balance of power and strategic factors which had begun six or seven years before. The breakdown of the disarmament conference because of the unwillingness of the directing powers to concede Germany the moderate measure of rearmament she requested, opened the gates to a new armament race. Countries discontented with the *status quo*, controlled by aggressive leaders, animated by the old gospel of racial pride, expressed in new versions, led the way, first singly, then in conjunction.

The reliance on the first line of defence against this new array, the collective security provisions of article 16 of the covenant of the league, proved futile. The Manchuria, Chaco and Ethiopia incidents revealed the unwillingness of league members to have recourse to the armed force which was the necessary sanction for economic sanctions. France's second line of defence, her reliance on definite military alliances with powers to the east of Germany, was also weakened. The remilitarization of the Rhineland and the building of the Siegfried line to match the Maginot line brought stalemate on the Franco-German border, and made it difficult for France to aid her allies in the east by sending troops into Germany from the west. This second

line was weakened still further when internal conflicts and repeated purges in the Soviet Union made its strength an uncertain quantity for other than defensive purposes. The third line of defence the armed strength of France and of Britain themselves, remained impregnable so far as naval and military forces in the European area were concerned. The concentration, however, of the efforts of the totalitarian states on the new offensive weapons of the air largely balanced this superiority, if not in fact, at least in the immediate effect on the opinion of the peoples within range of indiscriminate bombing attacks. It also soon became apparent that European areas were not the only ones in which naval and military factors had to be taken into account.

Given this internal and external situation, the Czecho-Slovak crisis developed rapidly. It manifested itself in the sudden flaring up of peremptory demands for self-government from the Henlein party among the Sudeten Germans. Then came the first effort at mediation by the British government through Lord Runciman. It failed when it became clear that the issue was shifting from self-government within Czechoslovakia to union with Germany.

Then came the second mediation effort, Mr. Chamberlain's dramatic flight to Berchtesgaden on September 15. At Berchtesgaden Herr Hitler made it plain he would insist, at whatever cost, upon the right of the Sudeten Germans to join the Reich. Britain and France thereupon decided to bring pressure on the Czechs to agree for the sake of peace to hand over to Germany all border areas with more than fifty per cent German-speaking inhabitants. There followed, exactly a week later, Mr. Chamberlain's journey to Godesberg—the third effort at mediation. At Godesberg, to Mr. Chamberlain's amazement, Herr Hitler rejected as inadequate the offer to hand over the German-speaking border areas, and, on the ground that Czech promises could not be trusted, demanded that a border zone, which he marked out, should be evacuated and handed over to German occupation in seven days time, with plebiscites in other areas later.

For a week after this ultimatum, the week between Godesberg and Munich, war loomed up as a definite possibility. Czechoslovakia unconditionally rejected the new demands, France promised to observe her treaty obligations if Czechoslovakia were attacked, and the United Kingdom promised to come to the support of France, if consequently French forces became actively engaged in hostilities against Germany. There followed unprecedented discussions in public assemblies, in