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THE STUDENT IN THE POST-MUNICH WORLD



BY JOSEPH P. LASH

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Announcement

FOURTH ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE AMERICAN STUDENT UNION

Theme:

KEEP DEMOCRACY WORKING BY KEEPING IT MOVING FORWARD

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The Munich "Peace" Is Not the Peace the Peoples Wanted

By JOSEPH P. LASH

National Secretary, American Student Union

*"They are ringing bells today, but they will be wringing
their hands tomorrow."*

On September 30, alighting after his flight from Munich, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain declared: "I believe it is peace for our time." On October 6, closing the historic debate on the Pact in Parliament, the Prime Minister qualified his optimism: "I hope that the members will not be disposed to read into those words—used in moments of some emotion—more than they were intended to convey."

"I believe it is peace for our time," and on October 9 at Saarbruecken in a truculent speech Adolf Hitler announced the strengthening and extension of his western fortifications. He told England to mind its own business and brazenly informed the English people that the election to power of a Duff Cooper, an Eden, or a Churchill would be construed as an unfriendly act.

"I believe it is peace for our time," and within a week additional troops were pouring into a Palestine whose troubles were increasing because of Nazi encouragement.

"I believe it is peace for our time," and October 10, Premier Stoyadinovich of Jugoslavia, in the moment when opposition parties favoring friendship with the democracies were suffering embarrassment from Munich, dissolved Parliament to get a popular mandate for more extensive cooperation with Germany and Italy.

"... peace for our time," and by October 10 it was clear that the price of forestalling further military occupation of martyred Czechoslovakia included giving access to German armies for war in eastern Europe.

"... peace for our time," and within the month Japan took Mr. Chamberlain's pacifism at face value and marched into Canton. British trade and investment not only in the Yangtse area but in southeastern China will now continue only upon Japanese sufferance.

"... peace for our time," and by the weekend of October 15 every nation had announced vastly increased armaments expenditures. Germany hinted at permanent air superiority, English statesmen spoke of conscription, and Maginot lines were being planned for every frontier.

"I believe it is peace for our time," and irony of ironies within the week the moving finger of aggression began to point to British colonies.

"I believe it is peace for our time," and Mr. Chamberlain prepared to impose his kind of "peace" upon Republican Spain by blockade and starvation.

If the Versailles Pact helped conjure up Hitler and the nightmarish era through which we are living, what demons of fury, strife and dictatorship have not been released by the Munich Pact which marks English and French reconciliation not only to the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, but to the seizure of Austria, of Ethiopia and every aggression undertaken by fascism in the last decade? Yet those who loudly condoned Hitler because of the injustices of Versailles become strangely complacent before the Munich "peace."

The Munich Pact marked no settlement of reason, of justice, of mercy. No basis was laid for international amity and well-being. Trade has not commenced to flow more freely, only the blood of German democrats and Jews in the Sudetenland. Munitions factories are not being dismantled. The post-Munich world is not a world of reconciliation and Christian brotherhood. Instead the struggle only now begins for the Roumanian oil fields. Instead the struggle only now begins to reduce the Balkans to German vassals. And are there not many other German minorities to be used, when Hitler is ready, as the Trojan horses of aggression — Eupen-Malmedy, Schleswig-Holstein,

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Alsace-Lorraine, Luxembourg, German Switzerland, German Tyrol, Poland? The Greater Germany that is Nazi gospel still has not been achieved. Nor has Mussolini abandoned his dream of a new Roman Empire with the Mediterranean as an Italian lake.

Or the Munich Pact may become, as its sponsors hope, a revival of the Holy Alliance to snuff out democracy in Europe, starting with Spain, to police the continent against its revival, and ultimately to launch an attack upon the U.S.S.R. The Munich Pact may be any of these things but it is not peace nor the hope of peace for the peoples of the world.

Did Munich Save Peace?

Was the Munich Pact necessary then, if only to gain respite from war? In every instance of aggression from Japan's seizure of Manchuria, through Italian invasion of Ethiopia, fascist intervention in Spain, Nazi seizure of Austria, and now the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, the abettors of aggression within the democracies have prevented resistance with the cry, "resistance means war." And they have promised us that concession and appeasement would bring peace. And in every instance international tension instead has increased, the aggressors have been strengthened and emboldened, and each successive incident has proven merely a prelude to further ultimatums.

Would Hitler have gone to war over Czechoslovakia? In an astute analysis of the British White Paper, Walter Lippmann has pointed out:

"The disclosure of the fact that Lord Runciman accepted annexation before Hitler demanded it is the crucial fact in the whole situation. That was why, without risking a general European war, Hitler could demand annexation and back up his demand with a threat of invasion. . . . Hitler could threaten war safely because he could always retreat to a position which gives him peaceably more than he started to ask and all that he ultimately wanted. And

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by threatening war, and frightening the people of the world out of their wits, Hitler made it psychologically possible for Mr. Chamberlain and M. Daladier to surrender what they never could have surrendered in cold blood. By threatening a war that he knew he would not have to fight, Hitler made the peaceable surrender of Czechoslovakia seem to the peoples of the world like the triumph of the diplomacy of peace."

Secure in his knowledge that Tory concern was chiefly with how to put over the betrayal of Czechoslovakia, Hitler could squash any moderating elements among the German ruling group. That there were such was made clear by Hitler himself in his Saarbruecken speech when he declared that "Among us, too, there were weak characters," weak characters, we may construe as those who were opposed to adventurism. All newspaper correspondents commented upon the lack of enthusiasm in the German public for the war that seemed to them in the offing. And from Italy the *Herald-Tribune* correspondent reported:

"For one of the most striking features of that black week was the tremendous longing of all sections of the Italian public for a peaceful solution. Coupled with that was their freely expressed antipathy to the German alliance reinforced often by an intense hatred of Chancellor Adolf Hitler, whom they regard as willing to risk a world war rather than abate his expansionist aims."

Hitler would have backed down before the united resistance of the western democracies, the Soviet Union, and the condemnation of the civilized world. *Both peace and Czechoslovakia could have been saved.* And not only did the Munich Pact betray peace and Czechoslovakia, but it gave back Germany to Hitler and Italy to Mussolini. This was summed up by Winston Churchill in his broadcast of October 16th:

"I hold to the opinion, expressed some months ago, that if, in April, May or June, Great Britain, France and Russia had jointly declared that they would act together upon Nazi Germany if Herr Hitler committed an act of unprovoked aggression against

this small State, and if they had told Poland, Yugoslavia and Rumania what they meant to do in good time and had invited them to join the combination of peace-defending powers—in that case I hold that the German dictator would have been confronted with such a formidable array that he would have been deterred from his purpose.

This also would have been an opportunity for all peace-loving and moderate forces in Germany, together with the heads of the German Army, to make a great effort to re-establish something like sane and civilized conditions in their own country."

Why Did the Tories Sell Out?

Deals with dictators, prejudicing the stability of peace and democracy, represent no new policy upon the part of British and French reaction. In 1935 the Hoare-Laval plan was negotiated with Ethiopia as the sacrifice. When popular pressure prevented its execution, the English Tory government sabotaged the vital oil sanction rather than see Mussolini defeated. Mussolini's defeat by a semi-colonial nation would have been an example to the millions of black people in the English empire. Moreover it would have spelt the end of Mussolini, whom the English Tories have always regarded as a vital ramp against socialism.

Italian invasion of Spain in 1936 again confronted English and French reaction with a conflict between the interests of their nations, which would be impaired by Italian domination of Spain, and the interests of their class. Italian spokesmen have openly declared their intervention in Spain to be part of their drive to convert the Mediterranean into an Italian lake: "It is time to understand that the Spanish campaign is an extension of the Ethiopian campaign." (General Berlotti, Feb., 1938) The victory of Franco would give France a third border to defend in addition to imperiling her communications with Africa. Nevertheless, British Toryism and French reaction have connived through non-intervention to assure the victory of

Franco. In this way they hope to forestall the enlargement of democracy that a victory of Republican Spain would entail, and the encouragement such a victory would give to the popular forces throughout the world.

The same issues have been involved in the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. The New York *Post's* Washington correspondent reported on September 23rd:

"The President shares the opinion of liberal observers generally that Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain has been motivated, consciously or unconsciously, by class loyalty as much or more than by concern for the welfare of all the English people."

In the debates in France following the Munich betrayal, an uproar was caused by the revelation of a telegram from Hitler to Flandin, former Premier and leader of the appeasement forces in France during the crisis. In this telegram Hitler thanked Flandin for his efforts toward "complete collaboration between France and Germany." Rather than see fascism weakened, Chamberlain, Flandin and their allies sacrificed a country which typified liberal, capitalist democracy. Cooperation with Hitler in aggression was more to their taste than cooperation with the USSR in defense of international law and morality.

Did Collective Security Fail?

The Munich Pact represents a future plot as well as a past betrayal. It portends a plot against the people of Spain and against the people of China upon whom it is desired to impose a Munich "peace." Like the Holy Alliance of Metternich's time, it is a plan against western democracy. But to achieve this is it necessary to sow defeatism and confusion among the peoples of the world? This campaign of defeatism involves convincing the peoples of the world that collective struggle for peace and democracy was an illusory and self-defeating ideal.

In his speech defending the Munich pact before Parliament, Chamberlain makes the point:

"If we are going to war, broadly a war of democracies against totalitarian states, not only must we arm ourselves to the teeth, but clearly we must make military alliance with any other power whom we can get to work with us. . . . That is what some honorable members call collective security. . . . It appears to me to contain all the things the party opposite used to denounce in entangling alliance and balance-of-power pacts."

Mind you, not the Munich Pact nor the betrayal of Spain represent power politics, but the collective system to defend peace! Chamberlain, who does not bother to consult Parliament until after the deed, who negotiates secretly with Hitler and Mussolini, protests against "power politics" and entangling alliances! It is not concern for open and frank diplomacy, however, that animates Mr. Chamberlain, but a desire to sow utter despair and confusion among the people. Only in that way can the full implications of the Munich Pact be brought to fruition.

Shall the people who cherish peace and their democratic rights succumb to the counsels of despair given us by the betrayers of peace? Has the struggle to stop the fascist drive toward war through collective security been demonstrated as illusory? Has collective security failed? We must first say that the turn events took at Munich must constitute a profound mystery to those who declared that collective security was the new shibboleth of the reactionaries to mobilize the masses of people in defense of imperialism. For Munich showed that reaction feared the application of collective security and was prepared to go to any length to prevent the mobilization of an international anti-fascist front. Reaction managed to prevent a collective stand against Hitler. But no more than the defeat of a social security measure in Congress proves that measure invalid, has collective security been proven invalid.

When progressives are defeated in Congress in their struggle

for a wages and hours bill, they begin again to build a more extensive and firmer unity among the people. They work for a Congress more responsive to the needs of the people. They do not declare that the objective of a wages and hours bill has been proven invalid.

We must say the same today about the struggle to establish a collective peace system. The end has not been proven undesirable. If anything the collective defense of peace and democracy today is more imperative than ever before. The victories of fascism have so strengthened it that only the most imposing array of united power can halt further aggression. In France, England and the United States, larger sections of the population than ever before have been awakened to the true nature of fascism and the peril that hovers over the whole world because of the Munich betrayal. More widely than ever before it is realized that the condition for the successful struggle to save peace is the overthrow of the 5th column Tory elements within the democracies who betray their countries and peace at every turn.

The Munich Pact dictates the character of the renewed movement to halt the fascist drive toward world domination. The masses of people must unite to take control of foreign policy out of the hands of the Chamberlains and Daladiers. Only in that way can we rally the forces of democracy against the Munich Holy Alliance and save western civilization from a winter of reaction and wars.

The Role of the U. S.

In this struggle the people of the United States and, through them, the government must play a decisive role. Could one talk of American isolation in the recent crisis when 120 million Americans had their ears glued to loud speakers during the entire course of the crisis? The wide acclaim that greeted President Roosevelt's intervention indicates how unanimously the people of the U. S. realized that the outbreak of a war in

Europe would not make it easier to keep America out of war. As events sped rapidly to a climax, millions of Americans began to ask themselves why American foreign policy had not previously been brought into play to halt aggression and the breakdown of international law. "A stitch in time saves nine," declared the common people, who now realized that had American foreign policy been a force for peace yesterday, America would not be in such great peril of war today.

The Gallup poll reports that 60 per cent of the American people believe that the Munich Pact will result in a greater possibility of war. 78 per cent of them are opposed to further concessions to Germany, such as colonies. Throughout America, as a result of the Munich betrayal, there is a deep sense of anxiety and a deep hatred for fascism which has been heightened by Nazi outrages against Catholics. The reign of international lawlessness inaugurated by the Munich betrayal already is vitally affecting the U. S. in the plans for an unprecedented outlay for armaments.

The answer to fascist aggression and fascist threat to peace must be given by our foreign policy. The latter is our first line of defense. Only when foreign policy fails to defend peace and international law must a nation fall back on armaments. And it is an indictment of our whole past foreign policy of isolation that today the United States considers it necessary to jack its armaments up to the sky.

Our isolationist friends, the sum and substance of whose program has been fighting for disarmament and echoing Chamberlain's slogan that collective security is "power politics" now judge the present circumstances as propitious for a renewed struggle for disarmament. Yet their very policy of opposing international action to stop aggression has helped bring about the present frenzied armaments race. Those who were responsible for Munich by preventing cooperative action of the democracies to stop aggression are likewise responsible for the present armaments race.

In a world that has been imperilled by fascist aggression, our first line of defense must be a foreign policy which makes a distinction between aggressor and victim, a foreign policy that is the ally of the popular forces throughout the world that are struggling for peace and democracy. As the popular revolt against Munich acquires momentum in England and France, it will be strengthened if there is a parallel movement among the American people to align American foreign policy with that of the international forces for peace and democracy.

That must be the aim of the American people. Specifically this means that the American people demand that the forthcoming session of Congress modify the neutrality laws so that they will distinguish between victim and aggressor, denying our resources to the latter and aiding the former.

No Munich "Peace" for Spain

More immediate and more urgent is the need to defeat the moves of the "betrayal axis" to impose a Munich "peace" on Spain. The withdrawal of 10,000 Italian troops from Spain, is camouflage designed to aid Chamberlain and Daladier in another sell out, since over 50,000 Italians remain. The withdrawal of the Italian troops is a prelude to a Chamberlain move to grant Franco belligerent rights so that with the aid of Italian warships he can blockade Loyalist ports. The withdrawal of Italian troops is a prelude to closing down the French frontier to shipments of food and clothing.

The morale in Franco's territory has sunk so low that unless the "betrayal axis" can put through another "peace" maneuver, the fascists will be defeated. And the defeat of Franco would spell the defeat of Munich. The American people can prevent this betrayal of Spain by compelling the Administration to lift the embargo. This is to the interests of the United States, for one of the consequences of Munich will be increased fascist penetration in Latin America. The channel of dispersion will be

Franco, since Latin America is bound by many racial, cultural and economic ties to Spain. Those who are concerned with keeping the western hemisphere free from aggression and fascist turmoil must help defeat a new betrayal of the Spanish people. The victory of Loyalist Spain will be worth more in keeping fascism and Nazism out of North and South America than a score of monster battleships. There are people in the State Department who want the United States to go along with the "betrayal axis" in its sinister move against Spain. The people of the United States who cherish democratic institutions must defeat them.

First on the agenda of every person of goodwill who wishes to repair the damage of Munich is: NO MUNICH "PEACE" FOR SPAIN.

The United States must cease being the ally of Japanese aggression, as it is today by supplying 54 per cent of Japan's war materials. American foreign policy must be directed toward obtaining a quarantine of Japan. In light of the events around Changkufeng, which demonstrated that Japan was having enough trouble with China without taking on another opponent, it is absurd to say that embargoing Japan would have any other effect than shortening the war in the Orient.

Coupled with this demand for governmental action, the people must rally more widely than ever before to provide humanitarian aid to Spain. Students of America must give the fullest cooperation to the International Student Competition for Aid to Spain. They must give the fullest support to the Far Eastern Student Service Fund.

Italy, Germany and Japan are plotting in Central and South America, hoping to convert the Latin American countries into fascist bases to be used as a rearguard threat to the democracies. The United States must extend and strengthen its Good Neighbor policy, but it must become a Good Neighbor of the peoples of Latin America not the bulwark of the reactionary and fascist-minded dictators who dominate in many areas.

Peace must and can only be organized internationally. As Secretary Hull declared on August 16th:

"Each day's developments make more and more clear the fact that our own situation is profoundly affected by what happens elsewhere in the world.

"Whatever may be our own wishes we cannot, when there is trouble elsewhere, expect to remain unaffected. When destruction, impoverishment and starvation afflict other areas, we cannot, no matter how hard we try, escape impairment of our own economic well-being.

"When freedom is destroyed over increasing areas elsewhere our ideals of individual liberty, our most cherished political and social institutions are jeopardized . . . the longer this drift continues the greater becomes the danger that the whole world may be sucked into a maelstrom of unregulated and savage economic, political and military competition and conflict."

Recognizing the indivisibility of peace, Secretary Hull called for adherence to the basic principles of international law, economic reconstruction, limitation and progressive reduction of armaments, respect for treaties, abstention from the use of force in pursuit of national policies, abstention from interference in the internal affairs of other nations, and international cooperation to implement this program.

Had the United States followed such a program in the crisis over Czechoslovakia, peace and Czechoslovakia could have both been saved. Had the United States lived up to this program, we might have been spared the present armaments race.

Were the United States to follow such a program at the present moment we would be aiding Czechoslovakia solve the problem of refugees.

Were the United States to follow such a program, we would lift the embargo on Spain, which violates long standing treaties with that country.

Were the United States to follow such a program, we would embargo Japan, which has violated treaties, laws and the integrity of China and whose moves prejudice the future possibilities of peace in the Pacific.

Had American foreign policy been actively consistent with these principles, there could have been no Munich betrayal. Unless the student who inhabits the post-Munich world rallies his government to the active prosecution of these principles in the future, the Munich betrayal will not have been the last.

"In the name of my Government and the people of Spain, I want to express to you my most profound gratitude for the constant, enthusiastic, and efficient labor done by the American Student Union to help those who fight in Spain with heroism, in order to defend the ideals of liberty and justice."

FERNANDO DE LOS RIOS
Spanish Ambassador

October 1, 1938

"Because of the pressure of work I was not able to express to you earlier our sincere thanks for the effective work which the American Student Union has undertaken on behalf of the Czechoslovak cause in making known the truth among its members."

JULIUS BRABEC
Consul General

October 4, 1938