

"The European situation" [the end]

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LECTURE BY Dr. G. P. GOOCH

ON

"THE EUROPEAN SITUATION"

WEDNESDAY, MAY 11th at "SWISS HOUSE."

(Continuation).

In conclusion I will say a few words about the West of Europe. I do not wish to speak about Spain, because whatever danger there was of the Spanish struggle, a bloody and cruel struggle, developing into a great European or world war, that danger is now over. All I will say is a few words about England and France. When you look about in Europe there is not one thing that stands out so clearly and dominates the scene like the Eiffel Tower dominates Paris, as the growth of German power, which is so tremendous. Hitler and his friends say that they did it all but the foundations were laid by the Weimar statesmen, but Hitler and his friends accelerated the process of rearmament and recovery of national strength. There is no doubt about that. How big is the German army to-day? Well, I suppose roughly three quarters of a million. How big is the German air force to-day? Certainly not less than 2,500, although many people think 3,000. We old fashioned English people we tell these things: we have 1,500. How do I know? because it was announced by the Government in Parliament that we have 1,500 and we say how many we are going to have in a year's time, 250 more. I know they have a lot more than we have. We also know how many men we have in our army.

With the fortifications going on in the Rhineland it comes to this, Germany's recovery of strength dominates the whole of the European situation, and if you see every week going by without war, it is again due to the Anglo-French consortium, the Anglo-French group. I do not at all feel sure that it is so although we are spending astronomical sums on the army, navy and air force. The Germans are doing the same. The idea that we are going to have an air force as big as Germany's seems to be Utopian. We shall remain far behind, however much we shall spend, so great is the result of Germany's tremendous and dramatic armed strength through the increase of territory and prestige by the absorption of Austria. It is reflected not only in the British rearmament programme but also in the gigantic attempts of France, reflected also in the ever closer relationship between England and France which is closer to-day than in 1925 when we made the first Locarno Pact, which was one-sided. England promised France to help her against a German attack but France made no promise. When Hitler tore up the Locarno Pact in March, 1936, two years ago, a new Locarno Pact was made. The old Locarno Pact consisted of England, France, Belgium, Germany and Italy.

The new Locarno Pact made after the re-occupation of the Rhine left only three of the original Powers. Germany put herself out of it by the march into the Rhineland and Italy had put herself out by the rape of Abyssinia, which left England, France and Belgium. We three made a new pact which was more of a mutual pact than the old Locarno Pact. In the old Pact England promised to go to the help of France but France did not promise to come to the help of England. This new Locarno Pact was different because it gave mutual guarantee of support against unprovoked attack. In the new Locarno Pact Belgium's position was different from the old one because in the new Locarno Pact under which we are a party, leaving England, France and Belgium, England and France are pledged to go to the aid of Belgium against a German attack but Belgium is not pledged to go to the help of England and France, a very strange relationship. But we English and French understand so fully the position of Belgium that we granted this concession ungrudgingly. The logical thing would have been to say, "If you cannot promise to help us, we cannot help you." But we fully understand and do not want Belgium to be drawn into war as long as she will defend herself if attacked.

An Anglo-French alliance is now not only an alliance in the sense of a mutual promise of support but an alliance in the sense that it is accompanied by military, naval and air arrangements between the experts of the two countries. M. Daladier and M. Bonnet came to London less than a month ago and new arrangements were made for mutual defence. Now, if France is suddenly attacked, which nobody expects, we are pledged to go to her aid. What is not clear is what we would do if Hitler attacks Czechoslovakia and France goes to the aid of her ally but in doing so finds herself at war with Ger-

many. Should we come in? The answer is that we are not bound to come in. You know what a lot of debates there have been as to whether or not we ought to promise to come to the aid of France if owing to her treaty with Czechoslovakia she finds herself unwillingly at war with Germany. Many people said "Yes," because if Hitler knows in advance he will not attack Czechoslovakia. Other people, whose views coincide with those of the Government, who after all take the responsibility for the policy in hand because they are the Government, say we cannot do it, to make an automatic commitment which will bring us into war. We will leave the decision in our own hands.

The Prime Minister did what no other Prime Minister would have done. He read out a long and carefully prepared declaration of British policy, dealing fully with the problem of Czechoslovakia and declared that we should not come in automatically but he gave a broad and definite hint to Berlin that if a war started, anyone in Europe might be drawn in. There was no saying how far it might extend. Now we stand in 1938 very much like in 1914. I expect you all know that nobody then felt sure whether we should come in or not unless Belgium was violated. Many people say, and you can neither prove nor disprove it, that that uncertainty of England was the reason why the War came. People will remember the terrible results from that uncertainty as to what we should have done in 1914 and now draw morals and want us to say in advance what we should do. The Government decided otherwise, and whatever you think of their decision, there are two very strong reasons for it. One what you might call a material reason. The general impression is that the armaments of England are so backward, so incomplete, that we are not fit to come into a great struggle at present. Therefore any help we could render France or Czechoslovakia would be so small that it would not be fair to commit ourselves. That is one reason. It is obvious that we could not send soldiers and it also obvious that we could not send any aeroplanes. We should need them all to defend London and other places. That is the first answer, namely that a promise of support would look alright on paper but would not mean anything in reality.

The second reason is of non-material character, a decision of public opinion not to give a definite pledge of intervention, an opinion which if found very prevalent if you move about in English circles. I meet a lot of people of different parties and ideologies and I find opinion deeply divided, so deeply that the Government beyond all doubt could not reckon on a united people behind it in another terrible life and death struggle. There are a lot of interventionists and a lot of isolationists and still a large number of people who have not made up their minds. The present situation in Europe is that England and France stand more closely together than ever before and there is nothing solid when you get beyond that. You do not know what would happen if France declared war against Germany, as she would have to do, in order to render help to Czechoslovakia and none of us feel sure what England would do if France did go to the help of Czechoslovakia and therefore the outlook is very uncertain. The only certainty is that if France or Belgium is attacked by Germany without provocation, we shall go in. Nobody expects that. If the attack is south and not west, nobody can tell what England would do, and some people are not quite sure what either France or Russia would do as to Czechoslovakia.

This concluded Dr. Gooch's address and a number of questions were asked. In reply to a query as to whether England would recognise the Abyssinian conquest Dr. Gooch said:

We are going to recognise it; it is part of the present Anglo-Italian rapprochement. Let me answer quite frankly and it is to me very regrettable that is a very great humiliation for my country. You know perfectly well Mr. Chamberlain's answer is that it is regrettable but the danger of these two Dictators in combination is so great, or was so great, that we must do everything we can to diminish the hostility at any rate of one, and if you cannot do anything in Berlin, and England cannot do anything there, the only other thing is to blunt the edge of the Rome Berlin axis by bringing to an end the Abyssinian

quarrel between England and Italy. We have done it and like so many things to balance the situation a great sacrifice of principle had to be made. Everybody knows this fact and it is beyond all doubt that the hostility between England and the Duce has for the time being not only diminished but many people think removed. Many would go so far as to say that if we did not make up our feud with Italy, Italy would inevitably be on the German side and it would leave England and France against Germany and Italy. Many people think that as a result of the Anglo-Italian rapprochement Italy would stand out and if that is so, that is very important. It may be so important that it may make all the difference whether Hitler will attack. If he could count on full military assistance he might have the temptation to do it but if he could no longer count on Italy's help, it may make all the difference as to his decision whether he will or will not attack Czechoslovakia.

When asked about Switzerland's position Dr. Gooch replied, "The general view over here is that the recent demarche of Switzerland was inevitable and wise and it is therefore not for us or for anybody to complain. Switzerland is a glorious little country but so small that I do not know of any English person who makes any complaint if Switzerland tries to limit its commitments. There is a terrible possibility of Switzerland being drawn in and I can only speak about my own country. I am afraid I must say rather callously that if Germany attacked Switzerland we should be very horrified but should not be able to do anything. Remember that Switzerland is a long way from the sea and as for sending soldiers if we cannot send them to Czechoslovakia, the same difficulty applies to Switzerland. As for sending aeroplanes we want every single aeroplane in and around London and most people say we have not enough for that. We are neither seriously fearing nor expecting Germany to attack Switzerland. I know all about frontier defences. I know about national laws in order to develop frontier defences; I know all about the inevitable great fear present in Switzerland and I know that if there was another war between France and Germany that the Basle frontier might be in danger. I am not going to dismiss this, but believe Switzerland would not be attacked on its own, but that it would be an incident in another Franco-German struggle and that Switzerland would be a victim just as Belgium was in 1914, not through an attack just by Germany against Switzerland but "in fact" just an incident. We agree perfectly that any danger which might at all arise would be by Germany trying to rush through the Basle corner, all the more so as it is my strong impression that if there is another war Germany would leave Belgium alone.

In conclusion Mr. Joss moved a hearty vote of thanks to Dr. Gooch to which the audience responded vociferously.

The End.

NOUVELLE SOCIETE HELVETIQUE
LECTURE.

A very interesting lecture was given by M. Gottfried Keller, on "The political Situation in Europe," on the occasion of the last monthly meeting of the above mentioned Society. Amongst the large audience were Monsieur Cl. Rezzonico, Counsellor of Legation, and Monsieur de Rham, Secretary of Legation.

Mr. A. F. Suter, President of the N.S.H., introduced the speaker to the audience.

Unfortunately, owing to the lack of space we are unable to publish the lecture in full, but will mention at least a few points of Mr. Keller's very instructive narrative. Referring to the last two agreements made by the Prime Minister, the speaker said:

"There is a Prime Minister here who, I think, has one great ambition: to bring about a new Western Pact and to come to terms with the dictator states. Gifted with a strong sense for realities, he steered clear from the famous policy of collective security and Mr. Eden had to go. Having thus covered the ground, he at once set out to open negotiations with Italy. The result is well known and there is no need to dwell on it. The Rome agreement of April 16th was indeed a landmark in the history of the relations between the two countries, for which the Mediterranean means so much. Though the agreement is not in force yet, the relations between this country and Italy have already considerably improved. Once the formal recognition of the Italian empire in Abyssinia has been given, the Duce is supposed to do everything in his power to bring about the withdrawal of the Italian volunteers from the Spanish battlefield. And, when a satisfactory number of volunteers have been withdrawn, both governments will declare the agreement as being in force.