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THE COOPERATION OF THE FOUR GREAT POWERS IN CENTRAL EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

BY

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Must the cup of sorrow be quaffed to its dregs? Is it impossible for mankind to avoid the supreme sacrifice, the sacrifice of our civilization, which it took so many centuries to build up?

The Spanish problem is far from being settled. — We may think ourselves lucky that the non-intervention scheme — which the man in the street might be forgiven for calling a pitiful farce — has averted the worst.

And here again is the Far Eastern Problem, bringing its new surprises every day, surprises which seem to have more serious aspects than any of the political entanglements of post-war years. From Northern China trouble has spread to Shanghai, with all the international complications that have lately arisen there and may still arise. To-day comes the news of the air attack on the motor-car in which the British Ambassador was travelling from Nanking to Shanghai. Surely this terrible blunder was an unintentional act of war — but then there is no official war between Japan and China!

Is it not utterly absurd that "there is no war", that the Chinese and Japanese Ambassadors continue to reside in Tokio and Nanking, exchanging diplomatic notes and negotiating with a view to clearing up misunderstandings, while perhaps scores of men-of-war and probably several hundred thousand soldiers equipped with all the marvellous
(or infernal) machines for the destruction of life and civilization are engaged in deadly warfare?

And it is most probable that the agents of large and small firms engaged in the manufacture of war material in Europe and America are all the while busy selling their tools of destruction in Spain and in the Far East — if necessary arranging even for an appropriate credit or apparently favourable loans.

Something must be radically wrong if such a state of affairs is allowed to continue.

No sentimental preachings, no idealistic dreams can bring a cure, but all nations and all the members of our so-called white civilization are entitled to raise their voices and demand the cessation of all hypocritical and purely egoistic actions and useless diplomatic subterfuges. The world needs an honest readjustment of international problems; first a righting of real wrongs and only thereafter a talk of sanctions, of effective sanctions against the wrongdoer, for wrongdoer he surely is who has no genuine grievance to justify his taking individual action.

Most of the Central European countries are not directly concerned in the Far Eastern Problem; they are not directly interested in the civil war in Spain, nor was the Abyssinian controversy their concern; and yet they were dragged into the latter, and may to-morrow suffer by reason of the grave crisis which the Sino-Japanese conflict may create.

Therefore Hungary, and every Hungarian, must watch the future development of events with no little anxiety, the more so considering with what meagre success the grave international problems of the past 18 years have been handled in this not too happy world.

But let by-gones be by-gones. There are people who would fain draw a curtain over the past and who seem to believe in collective security as a panacea for all ills.
Happily the number of believers in this universal remedy has dwindled to a very few who profit by sins of commission. The peoples themselves, the hundred of millions of victors and defeated alike, were losers all, and if properly enlightened would surely realise that collective security is a pernicious slogan unless preceded by an honest readjustment of present conditions, of the conditions which caused the Abyssinian crisis, the Spanish danger and the Far Eastern menace as well as the many other political and economic entanglements and worries that are upsetting the world.

A new world war looms ahead! And what are the men who took part in the carnage of the last world war doing? Year after year they assemble more frequently and in greater numbers to take a solemn pledge to work against war; to work for co-operation among all the civilized nations on the basis of a full understanding of the rights and interests of each.

Is it too much to ask politicians to do the same? The League of Nations, the League of Nations Union, the Interparliamentary Conferences and other new organisations like the New Commonwealth are doing this already, is the usual rejoinder. Certainly. But just as certainly they are doing it most ineffectively. Ineffectively because not one of these organisations has as yet had the courage to tackle the essential, no one has dared to strike at the roots of the problem. In vain have statesmen and economic experts, such as General Smuts, John M. Keynes and many politicians in Westminster and even in both Houses of the French Parliament, raised from the very outset their warning voices against the blunders of Versailles, Trianon, St. Germain and Sèvres. These absurd Treaties of Peace (if not unilaterally repudiated) continue to be the creed of the most influential governments in the world, and that, in spite of the fact that in recent years more than one responsible statesman has admitted and professed that this world is not a static but dynamic one.
However, no deeds have ever followed these words. Why? For fear perhaps that action would be a graver danger to the maintenance of peace than the maintenance of the utterly intolerable conditions which now prevail.

The falsehood, the hypocrisy or the grossly biased and onesided information on which this belief was based, is borne out by the fact that instead of an improvement setting in, new troubles arise year by year. These troubles are almost always caused by genuine or alleged differences between nations, by the problems of raw materials, of a rapidly increasing population, or artificial trade restrictions and the like. Another cause is that hardly any of the noble and ethnical principles which were to be the foundation of the Peace Treaties have been universally adopted, that is to say made to apply to each and every nation. Last but not least, in spite of all professions and democratic creeds, secret diplomacy and strong central governments prevent the free will of the people from asserting itself. Some will claim that this accusation can only be levelled against the totalitarian states, Italy and Germany; others, with at least the same right, will consider Bolshevist Russia, who tries to impose her own system on the world, the guilty party, or even to a minor extent, for example, democratic Czecho-Slovakia who refuses autonomy to Ruthenia, although under treaty obligation to grant it.

Other reasons why the many well-meant endeavours to achieve a satisfactory settlement of the outstanding problems were bound to fail probably lie in the fact that too much was attempted. Far too often was the solution of a problem, otherwise ripe for settlement, postponed or torpedoed because influence proved stronger than the command of commonsense. The slogan of collective security prevented general settlements, the fear that an honest compromise in one instance might force an honest compromise upon others who cling to their illgotten gains, has prevented settlements in the past. And yet such settlements would not only have been a boon to those directly concerned, but would also have
been most useful in furthering the settlement of other universal problems.

Apart from the utter impossibility of co-ordinating, under these conditions, the diametrically opposed interests, the clumsiness of international conferences at which all and sundry are represented, is the evil that must be averted, if sound work is to be accomplished. The failure of the Disarmament and World Economic Conferences was no doubt partly due to the latter cause. At world conferences of that nature certain Great Powers may not disclose their ultimate aims, but leave the lesser Powers to do the talking for them. But if, as we see even in Geneva, the lesser Powers, if not acting for a Great Power, in spite of their equality in theory feel little of it in practice, then let the Great Powers assume full and open responsibility for the shaping of the future destiny of mankind.

At present certain hopeful signs are noticeable. The King of the Belgians has taken the initiative on economic lines, which may prove useful for the world at large, while the exchange of letters between the British Prime Minister and Signor Mussolini augurs well for the future development of Anglo-Italian relations. The friendship between these two countries which has for so long been one of the pillars of world peace, must be, and we feel sure is, a matter for rejoicing in Paris as well as in Berlin, in Vienna as well as in Budapest.

It would be difficult to find a single Austrian or Hungarian who would look askance at Anglo-Italian co-operation. These peoples of the Danube basin are on the most friendly terms with both Great Powers and it is no secret that they look forward with great hopes to an improvement in the relations between France and Italy too. If London and Paris can take the same view of the Mediterranean problem, then only one further step is needed to settle the Western European problem. Towards this settlement Belgium has already taken a bold initiative by looking for different, and
in her opinion better, guarantees of her security than Locarno afforded. An understanding in the West and on the Medi­terranean ought to and certainly can be achieved to-day, and then the close friendship between Italy and Germany may bridge the gulf between France and Germany.

What in 1932 was a failure, viz. the Four Power Pact, might then become the salvation of the world, because an Anglo-Italian understanding followed by a rapprochement between Paris and Rome must necessarily take into consideration the special interests — economic rather than political — of Italy and Germany in the Danubian Basin and thus help to solve the Central European problem, which is of such eminent importance for the peace of the world.

The co-operation of the four Great Powers in Central European affairs is much more likely to be assured if France recognises that an understanding with Germany is a far greater guaranteee of her security than a military alliance with Russia and that the Little Entente as a military and political factor is perhaps of even more doubtful value than the Soviet.

Yugoslavia is on friendly terms with Italy and Germany but abhors Bolshevism; Rumania looks to Poland for support against Russia, while Poland is separated from Czecho-Slovakia by several serious controversies.

Since the Little Entente cannot, even economically, be called the unit of identical aims it would like to be thought, the Great Powers of the West would seem justified in making a new attempt at reviving the 1932 plan in order to settle once for all that unresolved problem: Central Europe.

This done, they would have a free hand to settle other international problems too.

And they could settle all the European problems: London and Rome by virtue of the Three Powers Pact would have the support of Austria and Hungary, probably even of Yugoslavia, and the opposition of the other Little
Entente States might be overcome provided London and Paris would show themselves resolute. They could surely count also on the support of the whole civilised world because their action would have to be based on an honest application of the principles so often involved: equal rights and equal chances for all and the right of self-determination for all the races.