

A Chance for peace in 1940

In common histories of the Second World War typically is to be read: „In 1940, Great Britain remains the only nation fighting against Germany. German efforts to peace are rejected. Great Britain’s lonely, but courageous struggle has saved Europe or even the whole world from being conquered by Nazi Germany“. This war costed Europe 50 million lives, a high price for noble ideals!

Was there an other option than further war attacks, such as a peace conference with US participation? This would enable the democratic Allies to install the conditions for human rights in Europe, by the hand to disclose the Nazi crimes, i.e. the world of concentration camps and persecution. Under F. D. Roosevelt, the US were not willing to tolerate violence within a country or against other countries. They will not accept neither Japan’s expansionist drive nor that of the German Reich. For the German population, such a conference would result in a clear statement regarding human rights. To continue the war, however, signals „The home is at danger“ and generates on both sides the stand to defend it.

Pertinant Aspects

1. Germany is in an endangered position. As a middle-sized power it is strong enough to occupy countries such as Poland or France, but too weak to hold the territories against an empire in the long term. The British Empire including Great Britain, Canada, India, Australia and about one half of Africa is capable to take war any time, Germany not. Without peace the German government generates a high risk plan: They will rise to an imperial force too, by occupying parts of the Soviet Union in a victorious war. From 1940 onwards, the Soviet Union’s neutrality gets an increasing high price, when ever-new Soviet wishes and demands arrive in Berlin. Naturally: The Soviet Union is courted by Great Britain and the USA as a possible ally.
2. On request of Foreign Minister Lord Halifax, in June 1940 Swedish diplomats were asked to find out conditions for peace in Berlin. Prime Minister Churchill discovers it, forbades such contacts and impounds four Swedish destroyers. Sweden stop then its efforts.
3. Hitler makes his first offer of peace in the Reichstag speech on October 6th, 1939, the second at the same place in July 19th, 1940. Here, one hour later the BBC commentator Sefton Delmer answers in a German-language broadcast: „We will push this so-called peace offer back into your dirty mouth, Mr. Hitler!“
4. Hitler’s deputy Rudolf Hess flies in May 1941 on his own risk by airplane to Great Britain. It is to be assumed, he knows Hitlers plan. Hess wants to talk not only to Prime Minister Churchill, but also with other leading politicians: “The price for peace?” Hess will be arrested, effectively preventing such talks.
5. German TV, ca. 2008: „Mr. von Dohnanyi, in 1940/41 your father was in the resistance movement, how did you remember these years?“ Klaus von Dohnanyi has been First Mayor of Hamburg in the 1960ies, later on he served as Science Minister in the Willy Brandt government. „To the German resistance, the question was – would England agree to a peace with a Germany without Hitler, or will it continue the war with Hitler-Germany? We know the answer“.
6. The result of the war: 50 millions killed, Europe a continent in ruins. Was that worth it? In the TV drama „Into the Storm“(GB/USA 2009) Churchill 1945 visits a theatre show in London. He is recognized, the people cheer him as the Savior of Great Britain – in a war into which he led the country.

A new rating of History

Is this possible, anyway? Isn't our view of history shaped by decades of historians which know all the details? But things are often not so as the common historiography describes them:

In the Nuremberg Trial of 1946 versus the surviving members of the German government, a main prosecution consists in "conspiracy against peace", because of the raid against Poland in September 1939. At the Judge's bench sits too the delegate of the Soviet Union, which has also occupied Poland in September 1939. In the same Year they capture Finnish territory. In 1940, they occupy Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. No mention was made of this in Nuremberg.

Reevaluating history means not to perform a literary whitewash, but rather to find out the plain truth. For example at a visit of the theatre we see on the stage a house, a rivulet, a small bridge with handrail and so on. During the interval we pass by the side of the stage. We discover the house is just painted on cardboard, the bridge too, the rivulet is painted to the floor. Did all this has really changed? No. We have changed our point of view. The stage manager cleverly made sure we should see only what and how he wants us to perceive.

Churchill's Strategy

German politics throughout the nineteen-thirties is observed with suspicion by the victors of the First World War: Rearmament, occupation of the Rhineland, the annex of Austria, all this indicates a revision of the Versailles dictate, which actually is what Hitler aspires. Here Churchill enters the scenery in Britain. He is considered as the one, who opposes against Hitler.

Churchill is a convincing speaker and determined advocate of his opinions. He objects to the 1938 Munich Conference with the repossession of the Sudetenland. Due to his initiative, Britain concludes a pact of military help to Poland. Consequently, when the war Germany - Poland starts in September 1939, Britain and France respond with an ultimatum and then with the declaration of war against Germany. After German occupation of Poland in November 1939 and France's surrender in June 1940, a peace agreement between Germany and Britain might have been possible. But this is not Churchill's attempt. Churchill's strategy: No conferences, no dubious compromises! Rather, war and victory!

Sources of Power

Besides the Empire's almost unlimited resources, Britain is a leader in several important fields:

1. Britain's mighty fleet may deliver weapons and food to the British Isles and block to the same time imports to mainland Europe. Additionally, the navy will prevent any invasion by sea to the British Isles.
2. Around 1929, Britain starts building aircraft bombers. In case of conflict they may destroy the towns of an enemy, nightly, mostly invisible. So the enemy cannot prevent this. If, in a war against a country with 1000 towns, every night only one town will be destroyed, the enemy is defeated in less than three years.
3. The code breakers of Bletchley Park decipher secret orders and coded messages. This often decides on victory or defeat.
4. Radar technology makes visible resurfaced submarines, making them open to attacks. When the Germans later on use radar against bombers, dropped tinfoil streamers interfere.

Also, Churchill wants to move the US to enter the war. He is successful with this too.

Two matters hinder the intention of war and victory. On the one hand it is the “risk” of a peace conference; on the other the lack of war enthusiasm in Britain.

Attempts to Peace

On May 21st, 1940, before ending of the France campaign, Hitler talks to his chief marshals of the generous peace he intends to offer Britain: Former colonies to be returned to Germany, but no other demands. He has tried to withdraw unharmed the British expedition forces.

On May 30th, 1940, the Australian High Commissioner presents a memorandum to Churchill: US President Roosevelt should convene a peace conference. Churchill refuses. He claims that Germany will then confiscate the British fleet and will constitute a satellite government. Cabinet members oppose. Foreign Minister Lord Halifax calls via the London-based Swedish embassy: Suggesting a compromise with Germany provided reasonable conditions are met. Churchill gets its out on June 19th and forbids further contacts. Additionally, he secures four Swedish destroyers. Other peace suggestions he blocks too. For Churchill, cabinet members such as Chamberlain and Halifax are cowards, a number of leading members of Army and Navy command too. I think they do not deserve this judgment. It is one of History’s tragedies that these prominents were not able to assert themselves against Churchill.

Joseph Kennedy, father of the later US president John F. Kennedy, serves 1940 as US ambassador in London. He rather sympathizes with Germany. Joseph Kennedy favors peace in Europe (“War merely destroys capital”). He writes: “If the British people would believe, that there is a chance for peace at honorable terms – they will rebel against the government”.

In his Reichstag speech on July 19th, 1940, Hitler puts the second peace offer. Three days later, Foreign Minister Lord Halifax refuses in a BBC broadcast. He claims Hitler had not listed the peace conditions, the offer is without any substance. So Britain continues the war without the British people are aware of it.

Lack of War Enthusiasm

Shortly after his appointment as Prime Minister at May 10th, 1940, Churchill orders a strategic bombing of German arms factories. In these nighttime raids, the German towns as well as their citizens are bombed. The German aircraft attacks then at day British airports, later on also airplane factories, the “Air Battle on Britain”. But the nightly air raids against towns in the Ruhr area are only little reported by the London newspapers. From September 1940 onwards, London is attacked in reprisal. Now many demand revenge by a general bombing of German cities. The desire for peace disappears on both sides. Hitler “We will erase their cities from the land maps!” Churchill “We will see who has the bigger rubber”.

The 1940 Conference on Peace and Cooperation

Hitler likes to secure his results similar to the Munich Agreement in 1938. But Great Britain and the US have to organize a conference with another and better goal in mind. This means to safeguard the human rights within the countries, together with safety against invasion by another state. Both principles were not a matter of course in many states. Internal terror was practised by the winner in the previous civil war as in the Soviet Union and Germany, also in

Italy and Spain. Aggression against another state was common if possible, as the occupation of the South of Austria (Tyrol) by Italy after the end of war 1918. What most people were not aware, a defence of human rights and safeguarding against aggression protect the citizens for themselves, not only their opponents. An open glance on the world of concentration camps might have moved even Hitler to make concessions. But such a conference was blocked by Churchill.

Real Conferences

January 1943 Casablanca: Unconditional surrender, air raid with US bombing during daytime, RAF bombing further at night.

November 1943 Teheran: Split of Germany into parts, German eastern territories to be given to Poland, military invasion in France.

February 1945 Yalta: Erasing the German National Socialist Party, implantment of democracy, occupation of Germany by Allies.

July 1945 Potsdam: German Silesia given to Poland, expulsion of 12 million German people from Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Hungary, dissecting Germany into four occupation zones.

Great Britain after 1945

In 1945, Britain is victor over Germany, together with the USA and the Soviet Union. But Churchill's power ends. The US, led by President Truman, want both, Britain and Germany, as allies.

Soon, the British Empire dissolves: The coloured nations want freedom and independence, as has been propagated to them in the past. Canada and Australia, too, leave the Empire. They will not be pulled further into Britain's European wars.

In British movies today, all-powerful fantasies are wide-spread – from James Bond to Harry Potter. And nostalgia for a good old England of times past is strong as well, see the TV series "Upstairs, Downstairs" or "All Creatures Great and Small".

Great Britain further reserves against the cooperation in a common European Union.

Sources: David Irving "Churchill", Ian Kershaw "Fateful Choices", F.J.P. Veale "Advance to Barbarism". www.reichstagsprotokolle.de (Hitler's speeches of Oct. 6th, 1939 and July 19th, 1940).