

How British elites thwarted the German Resistance

by Katharine Kanter

The Unnecessary War

by Patricia Meehan

Sinclair-Stevenson Editions, London, 1992

441 pages, hardbound, £18.99

A Good German: Adam von Trott zu Solz

by Giles McDonogh

Quartet Books, London, 1989

358 pages, hardbound, £17.95

To make your way through the thicket of dates, facts, and names and get the message behind these two rather guarded books, replace the word "Czechoslovakia" with "Bosnia" and the date 1938-39 with 1991-92. I had originally planned to write up Mr. McDonogh's book in 1990, when *EIR* received it for review, but was rudely interrupted by the Gulf war. When Miss Meehan's book appeared, in the midst of the Balkans war, it struck me that taken together, they shed a coarse crude light on the real aims England is now pursuing there.

Both of these English historians have seen batches of recently released Foreign Office and government papers, and, though hobbled by the Official Secrets Act, the lack of a U.S.-style Freedom of Information Act, and extremely vexatious rules governing the release of official documents, they have pieced together the story of British foreign policy

between 1936-46, in more detail than was previously possible. Both met with a number of the relevant individuals who are still alive and wished to speak.

Miss Meehan, formerly a producer and archivist for the BBC, coolly allows the Foreign Office to hang itself with its own rope, by presenting year by year, document by document, the evidence of a Foreign Office plot to start a war on the European continent, and wipe out all opposition to Hitler. Mr. McDonogh, who is the food correspondent, believe it or not, for the *Financial Times*—I have noticed over the years that food writers are invariably better informed than most people, perhaps it is the leisurely meals—arrives at similar conclusions through his biographical study of how von Trott was betrayed by his closest friends in England, where he went to school. His tribute to von Trott, a brilliant intellectual and official of the German Foreign Ministry, who was executed in July 1944 owing to his part in the Stauffenberg bomb plot to kill Hitler, is impetuous, even passionate. The subject deserves it.

With respect to the authenticity of her sources, Miss Meehan has left but little to chance; nonetheless, the appearance of *The Unnecessary War* touched off a hostile explosion in the British press, more so than McDonogh's work. The reason is simple. Though never stated in so many words, Miss Meehan pushes relentlessly forward the thesis that the Foreign Office elite were not just "bumbling upper class incompetents," but rather acted with malice aforethought, as they ignored, lied about, and suppressed information on Hitler and the Resistance: There *had* to be a war with Germany in which Germany would be destroyed.

Such a welter of evidence is adduced here, so many quotes

from internal memoranda of high British officials that make Serbia's Milosevic and Seselj look like babes in diapers, that I can only pass on here a few of the more salient examples.

Czechoslovakia

In March 1938, the British Chiefs of Staff produced a report, at the request of the prime minister, Sir Neville Chamberlain, "On the Military Implications of German Aggression against Czechoslovakia." It read in part: "We conclude, that no pressure that we and our possible allies can bring to bear, either by sea, on land, or in the air, could prevent Germany from invading and over-running Bohemia and from inflicting a decisive defeat on the Czechoslovakian Army."

Replace the word "Germany," with "Serbia," and you've got the current litter of upper-class British military "experts" warning the world against "the Balkans quagmire," the "impossibility" of stopping Milosevic.

One week before this report was submitted, or "commissioned" by Chamberlain, as Miss Meehan says, the cabinet had heard a completely different report from Major General Spears, who had just returned from Czechoslovakia. "Morale of the army first class. Czechs can mobilize a million trained men. Supplies of all kinds sufficient to resist for five months."

According to reports given by the German chief of staff, General Halder, to Allied intelligence officers after the war, the Germans in 1938 had 22 divisions on the eastern front against 35 Czech divisions, and only five or six divisions in the West. But Richard Cresswell, of the Foreign Office Central Department, contended, against all evidence, that the Czechs "have only 24 regular divisions, while Germany can put 70 divisions into the field within a few days, and will be able to mobilize at least 120 divisions in a far shorter time than it will take the Czechs to get going."

Sir Robert Vansittart, who had been Permanent Head of the Foreign Office until he was denounced as a Cassandra and thrown out in 1937, attempted to press upon the government, among other sources, intelligence reports on Czechoslovakia from two leading British intelligence operatives in Germany: Prof. Philip Conwell-Evans, a close friend of Ribbentrop, and Group Capt. Malcolm Christie, who had personal access to Goering, *inter alia*.

Conwell-Evans wrote to his Foreign Office contacts in 1938: "From first-hand knowledge I can state that the German chancellor has decided to complete the plan of last September which was frustrated by the intervention of Mr. Chamberlain, namely the complete incorporation within the Reich of Bohemia and part of Moravia. Hitler will [take the Slovak pretext] to intervene by military force, and will end by wiping out Czechoslovakia as an independent state." This report was corroborated in every particular by one of Captain Christie, based on German General Staff sources.

The reaction of Sir Alexander Cadogan, the new Permanent Head of the Foreign Office was: "Our sources of information have lately become so prolific (and blood-curdling)

that I am beginning to regard them all with a degree of suspicion." Three weeks later he wrote: "The head of MI-5 came to raise my hair with tales of Germany going into Czechoslovakia in the next 48 hours. . . . *This can wait.*"

In 1938, Karl Goerdeler traveled again to London and met with Vansittart, demanding that the British government make a very clear declaration on Czechoslovakia. Lord Halifax wrote to Chamberlain that he was passing on Goerdeler's remarks "because Van [Vansittart] begged me to do so," but that it was not important enough to "deflect us from any conclusions that we may reach on the main issues."

On the very eve of the German invasion of Czechoslovakia, Cadogan noted: "Question is one of saving our faces. This can be done with least loss of prestige after the event, by registering disgust."

Poland

On Aug. 22, 1939, as Ribbentrop was on his way to Moscow to sign the Nazi-Soviet pact, Hitler called a conference at Obersalzberg, where he laid out the battle plan against Poland, the details of the projected Gleiwitz radio station provocation in upper Silesia, and the coming ethnic cleansing of the Poles. Admiral Canaris, the disaffected head of the Abwehr, was there, heard and saw all, and left to write it down. These notes he caused to make their way through American channels to the U.S. embassy; there the chargé refused the document because it would "dynamite" Roosevelt's "peace" overtures to Hitler. The document was then handed to the British chargé in Berlin, from whence it was rushed to London. This is what Sir Alexander Cadogan, head of the Foreign Office, had to say: "I mentioned it at lunch. Sir Nevile Henderson [the pro-appeasement British ambassador to Berlin, in London for a conference—ed.] had a copy. I am not sure whether he showed it to the prime minister or the secretary of state or not."

To wit: *One week before the invasion of Poland*, the British government had received from an unimpeachable source, the entire plan. As Miss Meehan comments: "If the western press had splashed all over its front pages on 26th August 1939, the revelation of the planned Silesian masquerade, it is arguable that events would have been paralyzed. . . . 1st September was the last possible date for launching an attack in eastern Europe."

Christie and Conwell-Evans wrote a book together after the war, entitled *None so Blind*. Although it was privately printed in only 100 copies, not one of those copies ever reached the public until around 1970. Most of Christie's private papers have simply vanished, though after his death they were *all* supposed to have been bequeathed to Churchill College, Cambridge. Wherever could they have gone?

The case of Vansittart

A new light is thrown by Miss Meehan's research on Sir Robert Vansittart, who, if her presentation of the facts is

correct, would appear to be the most remarkable Englishman of the century. Although he literally went mad, berserk, during the war (he wrote a racist attack on Germany called "The Black Record," which became so notorious that the phrase Vansittartism was coined), he was, before the war, the only member of the British establishment whose views on Germany and the continent were statesmanlike, rather than sadistic and puerile. It was he who attempted to press upon the cabinet, reports taken from his first-hand meetings with leading Resistance men like Goerdeler, von Kleist and the Kordt brothers.

In July 1937, Vansittart received the famous Langnahmverein Report (Association of Heavy Industries in the Rhineland and Westphalia) from Karl Goerdeler, a close friend who had been the mayor of Leipzig, and who, in the event of a coup against Hitler, was to become chancellor. The document had come out of a discussion between General von Fritsch, the anti-Nazi who was then German chief of staff, and Goerdeler. One of its aims, was to persuade Hitler that Germany was too weak to wage wars of aggression. It was, at the same time, a precise evaluation of what Germany's in-depth war-fighting capabilities were in terms of economics. The gist of the report, wrote Vansittart, was, first, that the country was being put on a war footing, so appeasement was futile; second, that Nazi Germany had an Achilles' heel: the economy, which could be exploited by Great Britain to strengthen the internal German political opposition, and lead to Hitler's downfall.

Vansittart's precis of the Langnahmverein report was printed for the cabinet. It appears in his own papers, with "Suppressed by Eden"—Antony Eden, then foreign secretary—written across it.

On von Kleist's perilous trip to London on Aug. 19, 1938, Chamberlain wrote to then-Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax: "I take it that Kleist is violently anti-Hitler and is extremely anxious to stir up his friends in Germany to make an attempt at its overthrow. He reminds me of the Jacobites at the Court of France in King William's time, and I think we must discount a good deal of what he said."

On Aug. 7, 1938, Vansittart wrote a memorandum to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, attaching intelligence reports which, he said, called for "the gravest and most urgent attention. Only the strongest and clearest action on our part can prevent the catastrophe." An emergency cabinet meeting should be called, making it known to the world that the subject was Czechoslovakia, or Parliament should be recalled. It was, he said, July 1914. Then, as now, catastrophe could have been avoided by diplomatic action by Great Britain. "If we leave Berlin under any further illusion where we shall stand in a European war, there *will* be a European war."

But by December 1937, Vansittart had no more clout: He had been kicked upstairs as "Chief Diplomatic Advisor to the Government." Of this, Chamberlain wrote in 1937: "After

all the months that Baldwin wasted in futile attempts to push Van out of the Foreign Office, it is amusing to record that I have done it in three days. . . . I suspect that in Rome and Berlin, rejoicings will be loud and deep."

On the Christian resistance

One of Miss Meehan's most damning finds is a memorandum from Richard H.S. Crossman, head of the German Section of the Political Warfare Executive of the Foreign Office. Commenting on the conflict between the Gestapo and the Catholic and Protestant clergy, he wrote: "It is in our interests to intensify it. We should do everything possible to report fully [on BBC] the Christian opposition in Germany and Europe, and thereby to promote violent attempts by the Gestapo to crush it."

Crossman, who was at Oxford University with Adam von Trott, turns up frequently in Mr. McDonogh's opus. In 1942, Crossman wrote an extraordinarily evil little memorandum for the Foreign Office, stabbing his former friend in the back, which led a high official in the Foreign Office, Geoffrey Harrison, to write about von Trott's efforts to gain support in England for the German opposition: "I understand that Sir Stafford Cripps suggested that Miss Wiskemann [a British liaison agent in Switzerland] should be told to 'cool off' von Trott on the grounds that he is too valuable. In fact I do not think it is in our interest to do so since his value to us as a 'martyr' is likely to exceed his value to us in postwar Germany."

Bear in mind, that these people are talking about a man who had been a scholar at Oxford, active against Hitler since 1932, known personally as a friend and as a resistance leader to some of the most powerful and influential figures in England!

When von Trott was executed for his part in the Stauffenberg bomb plot, his old friend at Oxford, Maurice Bowra, to whom he had opened much of his political views and underground activities, wrote: "That's one Nazi who was hanged!"

The most unequivocal statement of British aims, however, Miss Meehan leaves to John Wheeler-Bennett, then attached to the Foreign Office Political Intelligence Department, whom both she and Mr. McDonogh expose as a bald-faced liar, lying about his contacts to von Trott before the war, lying about his contacts to the Resistance, lying about the nature of the Resistance itself. Following the execution of the July 20, 1944 plotters, Wheeler-Bennett wrote an internal memorandum: "We are better off than if the plot of July 20th had succeeded and Hitler had been assassinated. By the failure of the plot we have been spared the embarrassments, both at home and in the United States, which might have resulted from such a move, and moreover, the present purge is presumably removing from the scene numerous individuals which might have caused us difficulty, not only had the plot

succeeded, but also after the defeat of a Nazi Germany. . . .

"The Gestapo and the SS have done us an appreciable service in removing a selection of those who would undoubtedly have posed as 'good' Germans after the war. It is to our advantage therefore, that the purge should continue, since the killing of Germans by Germans will save us from future embarrassments of many kinds."

Serious, hard work has gone into both these books, and I can only hope that they will shortly be translated and published in both French and German. The only weakness in Miss Meehan's work is her tireless, but very tiresome, attempt to make out Ernst von Weizsäcker, father of the present, ultra-liberal Anglophile German President, as some sort of latter-day saint, the very soul of the German Resistance. I have been led to believe that such an interpretation of von Weizsäcker's life is over the top, and Miss Meehan, for once, is long on rhetoric but short on hard facts to persuade us otherwise.

All that said and done, a regret remains about people like von Trott or von Moltke, who, due to their aristocratic background, were blind to the fact that it was their refined, "sensitive" upper class friends in England, the very people to whom they flew for aid, who pushed the "liquidate" button the moment von Trott et al. walked out of the room. Von Trott might have been wise to heed the Chinese revolutionist Lin Tsiu Sen, whom he met in Berne in 1942. Lin said: "I told him the German opposition was much too passive. Revolutionaries must keep the initiative and strike at the enemy, even when it means self-sacrifice. If you can't kill Hitler, then kill Goering. If you can't kill Goering, kill Ribbentrop. If you can't kill Ribbentrop, kill any general in the street. But Trott said, 'Germans don't kill their leaders.'"

Thirty years of Maoist despotism

by Mary Burdman

The New Emperors, Mao and Deng: A Dual Biography

by Harrison E. Salisbury
Little, Brown and Co., New York, 1992
544 pages, hardbound, \$24.95

One elderly member of the Russian intelligentsia remarked recently that, as well as he knew the horrors wreaked by

Adolf Hitler's Nazi state, he often had to remind westerners that Hitler, monster that he was, was only in power a little over a decade. Could they imagine what 30 years of Josef Stalin had done to Russia and Russians?

We must ask the same question about 30 years of Mao Zedong in China.

The book by Harrison Salisbury, long-standing *New York Times* commentator on the Soviet Union, assembles an enormous amount of material, including many personal interviews of Chinese, which are certainly of value. But despite the detail, including a reckoning of the Great Leap Forward, which killed 30-40 million Chinese, and the Cultural Revolution, Salisbury's "human interest" journalistic style and emphasis on the personal lives of Mao Zedong and his ultimate successor, Deng Xiaoping, only touches the surface of the damage that these two have done to the culture and society of China, a nation with thousands of years of history. At the end of his book, which, oddly, is written as if Deng had already died before it was published, he cannot even speculate on what will now happen in China.

Salisbury presents a damning portrait of Mao Zedong and of the inner workings of the Communist Party itself during his rule, based on interviews with Mao's surviving private secretary Li Rui and others. Mao was as degenerate as any despot in this century. He spent much of his life after the Communists took over Beijing secluded and indulging his obsessions with re-reading the most heinous aspects of China's long history. Mao was addicted to sleeping pills, and demanded the services of a vast "harem" of young women under the delusion that this would prolong his life. His closest collaborator in unleashing the Cultural Revolution, Lin Biao, was a morphine addict. Yet while poring over the hundreds of books in the ancient records of China's rulers, the *Annals of Twenty-four Dynasties*, Mao ordered the brutal political upheavals which murdered many tens of millions of peasants, destroyed China's intelligentsia, and repeatedly wrecked its economy.

Soft on Deng

However, Salisbury is far too kind to the pragmatic Deng Xiaoping. Deng rose to power as a leader of Maoism: spreading "support" for the Communist revolution by leading peasants to mass murder their better-off neighbors and steal their land, and thus become collaborators who would be unable to break with the communists. These methods are the basis of the Communists' hold on power. Although there were attempts, especially after the Great Leap Forward fiasco, to move Mao aside, they all failed. Unlike Nikita Khrushchov, who "de-Stalinized" Russia, Deng never purged the many perpetrators of the Cultural Revolution, except for the show trial of Madame Mao and her "Gang of Four." Deng has not "de-Maoized" China. This made the 1989 massacre at Tiananmen inevitable.