

# 'Access to land' a root cause of war



THROUGHOUT the ages, people have pondered on the causes of war. Many bizarre explanations have been given: the caprice of deities; the ineradicable nature of man; the peculiar wickedness of some particular individual or society; and a great cluster of different economic theories.

The more closely the historian looks at the run-up to any particular war of the past, the more difficult he finds it to identify any single cause.

Indeed, what do we mean by "causes of war"?

Consider the war which is vivid in the memory of many, and in the tradition of everybody in our own society – the Second World War. What "caused" it?

- The act of Germany in crossing the Polish frontier on 1 September 1939?

- The fact that Britain and France had both executed treaties obliging them to go to war in Poland's defence?

- The fact that the Nazis organised the German state as a vehicle for war during the 1930s?

- The attitude of governments of the Democracies towards other acts of international illegality during the same decade?

- The decision of President Hindenburg to appoint Hitler Chancellor of Germany in 1933?

- The economic dislocation deriving from the Great Depression which began in 1929?

- The Peace Treaties after the 1914-18 war?

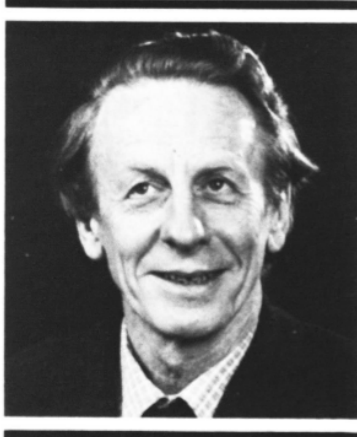
- The works of writers like Nietzsche, which stirred the atavistic romanticism of the Nazis?

- The pernicious economic doctrines of List?

- The contributions of Thyssen and other industrialists to the funds of the Nazi Party?

All of those factors, and many more, played a part in the genesis of the Second World War, in the sense that if they hadn't happened, it is difficult to see how the war could have broken out at the time and in the manner that it did.

Michael Howard is one of the greatest living authorities on modern wars, and when he writes a book entitled *The Causes of Wars*, this



● The Second World War caused the deaths of millions: but what caused the war?

● ROY DOUGLAS (pictured above), in this article, argues that there is no simple answer. Dr. Douglas, a lecturer at the University of Surrey, England, is the author of a number of authoritative books on the war.

● On p. 64, PAUL KNIGHT contends that the war was inevitable, once Hitler secured the reigns of power: his philosophy dictated a strategy of territorial aggrandisement.

work necessarily commands the attention of any serious enquirer.

Unfortunately, the book turns out to be a collection of essays by Professor Howard, only one of which is spot on the title, although most of them are to a greater or less extent relevant to the theme. Thus we do not receive what would be really invaluable – an in-depth study of a transcendently important question by this perspicacious, lucid, and honest man.

**'People assumed that because fascism was so evil it had to be met head on'**

Instead we receive a lot of bits, every one of them well worth reading, and liable to spark off plenty of ideas in the reader's mind, but without a consistent theme running through them.

On second thoughts, perhaps there is a theme.

As the "blurb" at the beginning declares, "all of (the essays) carry the hallmark of Professor Howard's mind, a refusal to accept comfortable simplicities in a field where, if one does not understand the complexities, one understands nothing".

This is a very important message indeed.

Another message which runs through the book is stated by the author at the end of his Introduction: "Those who do not change their minds in the course of a decade have probably stopped thinking altogether". Michael Howard has the very rare capacity to pronounce those exceedingly difficult words, "I was wrong".

THE TROUBLE with simplistic explanations and simplistic answers is that they are not just academically faulty, but they often lead to behaviour which is profoundly counter-productive.

During the 1930s, many people rightly identified "fascism" as an evil and dangerous thing which it was necessary to combat by one means or another.

Unfortunately, they often went off to assume that because fascism was so evil and dangerous, the only way of fighting it was by meeting it head-on. Thus they missed the chance of driving wedges between Hitler, Mussolini and the Japanese militarists which might well have averted war altogether, or greatly reduced the scale of suffering in the war.

What many people wanted was a *Weltanschauung* which would enable them to identify goodies and baddies at a glance; and the real world just isn't like that.

As a result, a quite unnecessary coalition of enemies emerged; people whose ideologies were not really very similar to each other at all, and whose interests were often profoundly at variance. Forty or fifty million people died; and then, in the aftermath, the world was shocked to discover that the "Big Three" alliance was as artificial as the coalition of its enemies, and fell apart even before the fighting had stopped.

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● From p.63

People in Britain were amazed to find that the benevolent "Uncle Joe" of their dreams was really one of the most formidable monsters in history, who quietly swallowed up half Europe, and came very close indeed to swallowing the remainder; while the British Empire, which had seemed to be developing towards a genuine world-wide partnership of free peoples, fell to pieces because Britain had overstrained her economic resources in fighting the war.

That's the kind of thing that happens when people take a simplistic view of complex matters.



ONE USEFUL message which the historian has for the non-historian – about the causes of war – is that in most of them, there has been an enormous element of misunderstanding on both sides. The upshot has seldom corresponded with the wishes or anticipations of either side, even when that side has achieved a total victory.

Wars become possible when lots of people on both sides persuade themselves to believe what their common-sense tells them is false: that it is worth sustaining infinite inconvenience and danger oneself, and inflicting infinite suffering on others, in order to sustain some vaguely-stated objective – political, religious or economic – which not one man in a thousand can explain.

We are all very shocked when some maniac with a bomb blows up

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**'Major decisions about war are usually taken on little more than somebody's hunch'**

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innocent people at the behest of the IRA or in some other abstruse cause; but is that maniac one whit more lunatic than most of the war heroes whom we applaud?

One place where I really would take issue with Professor Howard is

where he declared that "wars begin with conscious and reasoned decisions based on the calculation, made by both parties, that they can achieve more by going to war than by remaining at peace".

*When wars come, it isn't just that people miscalculate, but that they deliberately omit from the equation some of the most important factors.*

That is just what is worrying about the present state of the world.

Everybody who bothers to think is fully aware that a war-like exchange between the modern Super-Powers would produce destruction and suffering on an unimaginable scale, and perhaps extinguish the human race itself. Even if these terrible forecasts proved wrong, nothing remotely like the political and economic system favoured by any of the belligerents would survive the ordeal.

Everybody is equally aware that none of the major powers has "ambitions" which are in any sense vital to its own survival. What is frightening is not that somebody will make a miscalculation, but that people won't calculate at all.

To the best of my knowledge, none of the major belligerents of World War Two invited their own military, economic and diplomatic experts to make a dispassionate joint forecast of what would happen from start to finish if they went to war, and I much doubt whether any major government has invited its experts to engage in a similar exercise in the present situation.

All experience suggests that secondary decisions are often taken with great care and foresight, but the primary decisions are usually taken on little more than somebody's hunch.

YET IT is important – and here again we are reminded of the original stricture of Professor Howard – to avoid permitting our pre-occupation with the apocalyptic character of modern warfare to dispose us towards simplistic "solutions", gut reactions, if you like, which are not really solutions at all.

We are all worried, and rightly worried, about nuclear weapons. This concern can easily lead to disastrous panic reactions, such as to be so pre-occupied with this one danger that we pay inadequate attention to other developments of warfare techniques which may prove no less terrible.

Another panic reaction is to assume that we can somehow contract out of the nuclear age. This is impossible. Even if all governments could be persuaded to dispose of all

their nuclear weapons (which might not even be physically possible), the cat is out of the bag.

**There are today literally thousands of people who possess enough knowledge of atomic physics to be able, granted the resources, to "re-invent" nuclear weapons.**

If war occurred, it would simply be a race to get in the first, and decisive, nuclear blow.

The danger is not nuclear war, but any war. People who concentrate their attention on the abolition of nuclear weapons may be performing a profound disservice to their own cause, because their hearers are likely to assume – wrongly – that this abolition would make the world perceptibly safer than it is.

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**'First lesson of the inter-war years: if goods cannot cross frontiers, armies will'**

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SO WHAT do we do about it? Do we just conclude that there are no solutions, and hope that politicians and soldiers will behave a lot more rationally in the future than they have behaved in the past? I don't think so.

We return to the point mentioned at the beginning: the long and convoluted chain of events which has led to past wars. If one link is struck from that chain, the chain is broken. There is no way of stopping a potential Hitler being born. Still less is there much chance of stopping some neurotic poet *manqué* from writing well-phrased nonsense.



What may be possible, is to strike at economic factors which appear to have played a large and essential part in the genesis of both the Second and the First World Wars: restrictions to international trade and to access to land.

*I have never found out who first said "if goods cannot cross international frontiers, armies will" – but it is one of the most cogent statements to emerge from the inter-war years.*

● Turn to p.66

● From p.65

If we cut through all the rhetoric and rot which accompanied the various challenges to international order during the inter-war period, one thing is very clear. A great many ordinary people sought in one way or another to break across existing economic barriers.

● Landless Japanese peasants, whose cottage industry of silk weaving was wrecked by the Depression, wanted to start a new life in Manchuria.

● Impoverished Italians hoped in some way to benefit from trading or settling in Abyssinia.

● Many Austrians and Sudeteners thought that by becoming incorporated in the German Reich, they would be able to buy and sell goods more easily than they could in two tiny, landlocked, tariff-ridden, states of Central Europe.

The militarists and dictators who proposed their own perilous "solutions" had plenty of willing hearers. What was the clamour for *Lebensraum* but a crude statement of land-hunger? Why did people wish to trample down national frontiers, save that those national frontiers were economic barriers as well?

If these problems existed in the 1930s, are they not similar to problems which threaten the world today? Are there not still landless and starving peasants in Asia, Africa and Latin America? Are the existing trade barriers one whit less dangerous than those of the past?

The most complex, the more technological, the more densely-populated the world becomes, the more important and urgent it becomes that these problems should be solved. As so often happens, we return to the old and familiar problems of land and of international trade.

Are we in danger of falling into the very pitfall of which Professor Howard warned us: of creating another simplistic solution and then discovering later that the world does not fit this convenient model?

Yes, there is such a risk. Even if we identify one link in the chain which leads to war, it may not be enough to strike out that link. The most acute phase of inter-war economic misery had long passed when the 1939 war broke out. An economic solution of the Sudetenland problem might have been possible in 1930; it certainly wasn't possible in 1938.

Getting our economics right is a necessary prerequisite for an enduring peace; but it is not, of itself, a guarantee that peace will be preserved.

# CYPRUS

**WARFARE** is a double-edged sword for landowners.

For those who are driven off by a conquering army, the outcome is catastrophic: total loss of the life-giving resource.

For the victors who share out the spoils, new land becomes the basis of greater wealth.

But this profit-and-loss calculation based on the ebb and flow of power at the territorial boundary over-simplifies a far more complex response to the outcome of military conflict.

*The dislocation of population brings huge rewards for those who retain their land.*

For under the present system of taxation and property rights, refugees who are forced to migrate inwards to

By  
**FRED HARRISON**

safer territory have to pay for the security that they gain.

This demographic pressure is inevitably reflected in an accelerated increase in the value of land. Cyprus, the tortoise-shaped island at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, offers a dramatic illustration of these lessons.

**TURKISH** troops invaded Cyprus in 1974. They landed on the northern beaches, and 200,000 Greeks fled south.

In terms of the U.S. population, the number of displaced persons was equivalent to 83m people. The corresponding figure in the U.S.S.R. was 98m, in Britain 22m, and in France 20m.

By the time the truce was called, Turkey had staked a claim to 37% of Cyprus – the most productive, fertile third which accounted for 70% of the island's economic potential.



The Cypriot government received generous foreign aid, and began the arduous task of rebuilding the economy. Today, the *per capita* income of the 530,000 Greek Cypriots is U.S.\$5,000.

In the north, despite the rich resources, the *per capita* income of the Turkish population – supplemented by about 50,000 Turkish settlers from the mainland – lags at \$1,400.

These figures illustrate the extent of the boom in manufacturing and tourism since the invasion: what happened in the land market?

**WAR** brought the growth in land prices to a dead halt.

Before the invasion in July, 1974, prices were buoyant. As with all the other growing economies, the early years of the 1970s offered rich pickings for landowners.

Speculation was a social and economic problem.

Land needed for the tourist industry produced the highest returns, with rises between 15% and 20% (Table 1).

The invasion caused a slump in land values. People were running for their lives (22,000 emigrated to other countries), and they could not pack land in their bags.

The value of land that was suitable for the tourist industry dropped the most – by between 30% and 50%.

But once the new territorial borders had been set – a "green line" now

**Table 1**  
**Cyprus land values, 1970-1984**  
**Percentage changes**

	Agricultural land	Residential land	Tourist land
1970-73	8	15	20
<b>1974 invasion</b>	<b>-10</b>	<b>-30</b>	<b>-50</b>
1975-78	2	10	30
1979-80	10	20	150
1981-84	8	15	30