

BENES, A DEMOCRATIC EPOCH

EDOUARD BENES, President of Czechoslovakia until Hitler forced him into retirement by the dismemberment of his country, was considered the ablest statesman of post-war Europe. Quite recently he accepted the invitation of the University of Chicago to serve as one of its professors. Speaking of the decision arrived at in Munich by Germany, Italy, France, and England, by which parts of Czechoslovakia were given to Germany, Benes said that if France and Great Britain had given him reasonable notice that they were not prepared to fight to preserve the original Czech frontiers, he could have made a much better agreement with Germany than Chamberlain and Daladier got for Czechoslovakia at Munich.

Dr. Benes had always believed that the existence of a strong and independent Czechoslovakia was vital for French and British security, because it meant that if there were a war Germany would have to fight on two fronts instead of one, and therefore would be unable to concentrate an overwhelming force on its western front in order to crush France before Bri-

tain's vast but unorganized strength could be mobilized.

It is a fact that Germany, during the years of the Hitler regime, frequently invited Czechoslovakia to make terms with Germany. Dr. Benes's refusal was based on his dislike of National Socialism, his deep admiration for the two western democracies, and his faith in France's pledged word.

In spite of all that Dr. Goebels and his propaganda machine have said to the contrary, Benes did not and does not dislike the Germans. What he did dislike, and no doubt still does, is German militarism.

His opposition to Hitlerist Germany was ideological, not racial. He is, and always has been, a democrat. He underestimated the effect of German pressure upon France and Great Britain.

Benes has a mastery of several languages, including English and French, as well as German and Italian. He has an emphatic way of talking, punctuating his points with a determined wave of the hand. He is a confirmed "dodder," and spends his time while he is listening drawing lines on a half sheet of pa-

per and converting them gradually into a maze of geometric figures. When he is talking statistics, he jots each set of numbers down underneath his "doodles."

The room in the Hradcin Castle in which Benes worked while he was President was simply furnished with practically nothing in it except a desk, a few chairs, and some lovely oil paintings. Benes's desk was near a window, from which he could, by a half turn of his head, look out to the ancient city of Prague.

It is difficult for anyone who knows him to picture Dr. Benes in his present position of enforced abstention from active participation in world affairs. Though he is still below the middle fifties, he has been in the forefront for 24 years without a break. As Secretary General of the National Council of the Czech Lands, he helped Masaryk put Czechoslovakia on the map during the World War. Benes was the first foreign minister of his country, and held that post from the end of the war until he became president in succession to Masaryk.

It is ironical to recall that during the peace negotiations Benes was against claiming the wide frontiers which ultimately helped bring about the Munich pact, that in the postwar period

he played a leading part in bringing Germany back into the comity of nations. He was one of those who helped bring Germany into the League.

Benes could have co-operated with the Germany of Stresemann. He could not co-operate with the Germany of Hitler, though he could have established correct relations with it if France, and to a lesser degree England, had not encouraged him to oppose it. Some day, perhaps, Germany will come back to the democratic fold, but until then it looks as though one of the world's great democrats, Benes, will have to stay in the wings.

Dr. Benes has made his own way in the world since he was about 15. Having done well at his village school at Kozlany, he was sent to Prague to live with his eldest brother, Wenceslas, in order to complete his secondary education. Being of an independent turn of mind, he found he could earn money by helping his fellow students in their studies and doing odd jobs for the teachers. His brother at that time ran a couple of shorthand magazines and Eduard helped him produce them. Benes makes his notes for his speeches in shorthand.

An indispensable part of the school curriculum was the daily singing of the Austrian nation-

al anthem. Edouard Benes always opened his mouth as wide as anybody during this ritual, but he made no sound unless one of the teachers came inconveniently near. His distaste for the Hapsburgs grew steadily and was second only to his distrust of pan-Germanism and German militarism. His student days in Paris and Dijon coincided with the incident when the Kaiser insisted on the dismissal of the French Foreign Minister, Delcassé, which aroused indignation among Benes's French friends, most of whom were of the Left. The pro-French and pro-democratic policy which ultimately brought about his retirement and the neutralization of Czechoslovakia really dates from this period.

Edouard Benes, in his student

days, was a keen footballer, but sport aspirations were cut short by an injury which led to his escaping military service. This indirectly opened the way for his war-time collaboration with President Masaryk which culminated in the establishment of an independent Czechoslovakia. When war broke out, Benes and Masaryk were university professors in Prague. They started a secret society known as the Maffia, whose members formed the nucleus of the first Czechoslovak government when the war ended. Both Masaryk and Benes, however, had to flee the country and they carried on their joint campaign for liberty during the greater part of the war from London and Paris.—*Godfrey Lias in The Christian Science Monitor.*

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No Change

Mrs. Smith: How is your cold?

Mrs. Brown: Very stubborn.

Mrs. Smith: And your husband?

Mrs. Brown: About the same.

—*Children's Play Mate Magazine.*

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Very True

"If the Dean doesn't take back what he said to me this morning, I am going to leave college."

"What did he say?"

"He told me to leave college."—*Jester.*