

# NEW PHASE OF THE WAR?

## "An Almost Uniform Series Of Set-Backs And Disappointments For The Dictators"

(A Talk broadcast from the BBC on November 16  
by H. WICKHAM STEED)

WHATEVER may have been thought of the first eight months of the war nobody can reasonably complain that the last six months have been dull. In May and June, Holland, Belgium and France went down before Hitler one after another, and the only big break in what Mr. Winston Churchill called "this cataract of disaster" was what he also called "the miracle of Dunkirk." Then in the late summer and early autumn, we had the thrilling days of the battle of Britain in which German raiders were brought down by hundreds in a cataract of loss and defeat. Meanwhile our bombers and our navy wrecked Hitler's preparations to invade us, while other bombers carried war into the enemy's country, and did devastating work over Hamburg, Bremen, Berlin, Essen and other centres of German war activity. These latter operations were in the nature of a defensive offensive, rather than an offensive proper, but what happened in the past week or ten days is different. A new phase of the war seems to have begun. A phase in which, for the present at any rate, the enemy appears to be on the defensive against a run of very bad luck.

### Effect on Neutrals

This change strikes me as important. Wars are not won by armed strength

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alone. They are also won in part by moral strength, and by the conviction of neutrals or non-belligerents that one side or the other is bound to come out on top. When the battle of Britain began, most of the neutrals and non-belligerents believed that the British Commonwealth and its Allies would go under, that they couldn't withstand the Nazi-Fascist onslaught. By the beginning of October this belief had been shaken. Now, unless I'm much mistaken, it has given place to a growing conviction that the British Commonwealth and its Allies cannot be beaten and are likely to win.

Little though I like to draw up catalogues, I think the list of episodes in the past ten days is worthy of attention. It records an almost uniform series of set-backs and disappointments for Hitler and Mussolini. First came the re-election of President Roosevelt for a third term. This dashed the hope of the Dictators that there would be a period of confusion and uncertainty in the United States while executive power was being transferred from one President, and one great party, to another. Next in importance for the German people was the disturbance by British bombers of the arrangements for Hitler's annual beer cellar oration at Munich. This was more than a picturesque or a merry incident. It showed the German people, and others, that the omnipotent and invincible Fuhrer cannot now do as he likes, even in his own country. He may hit back savagely at us, as his raiders hit at Coventry on Thursday night, but he cannot cripple or break our spirit, nor could he or Mussolini check the British bombers, which made things hot for the Italians at Naples, Bari, Brindisi, Valona and Durazzo, and for the Germans at the Krupp Works at Essen, at Danzig, and elsewhere. Worse still was the total defeat of a picked division of the best Italian troops by the gallant Greeks, and the cutting up of several Italian battalions on other parts of the Albanian front. It was seen that for the moment at any rate, the Greeks had foiled a very dangerous Italian strategic plan, besides routing not merely Mussolini's Fascist Militia, but his famous Alpine troops and sharpshooters.

### Earthquake in Rumania

But it was whispered these temporary Greek successes would count for little when Hitler's big army in Rumania should march through the Balkans, and draw upon the Rumanian oil for their tanks, mechanised divisions and aircraft. The whispers died down as the rumblings of a great earthquake in Rumania began to reverberate through Europe. In the Balkans people remembered that Hitler had often claimed Providence to be his ally, much as the former German Emperor, William the Second, used to do. And they wondered whether Providence really stands behind the Rome-Berlin Axis. While they were wondering, the British Fleet Air-Arm cleared

up a mystery of a different sort; the mystery of the Italian Battle Fleet, and of its whereabouts.

### "A Glorious Episode"

Ever since the British forces landed at Crete more than a fortnight ago, I've been waiting for news from Taranto, the great Italian naval har-

bour inside the heel of the Italian Peninsula. Naples might be important as an Italian Naval Base but Taranto was twice as important. The first news came in an Italian communique, which announced that an Italian warship had been damaged by British aircraft at Taranto. Then 48 hours later came the British announcement, based on photographic proof, that our Fleet Air-Arm, in one daring swoop, had put out of action half of Mussolini's battle fleet of six battleships, besides crippling two cruisers and two auxiliary ships. The Prime Minister might well call this mighty deed a glorious episode.

For Mussolini's skulking monsters it was anything but glorious; just about as glorious, in fact, as the feat of the Italian aircraft which tried to bomb London last Sunday. Thirteen of them were shot down by our airmen in as many minutes without the loss of a single British machine. The others turned tail and fled.

### Omens for the Italians

The Italians, who are a superstitious people, may well see an omen in the crippling of one of their finest modern battleships of the Littorio class. The name "Littorio" is a Fascist invention. It is derived from the Italian form of the Latin word "Lictor," the name born by the Roman officers whose functions were to bear a bundle or fasces of rods, with an axe in the middle, before the Magistrates. The rods were for beating, and the axe for beheading condemned culprits. The name "Fascist" is taken from this fasces, or bundle of rods. As the adjective "Littorio" is from the Lictors who bore and used them, Mussolini made the word "Littorio" the symbol of a whole Fascist system of rod and axe, of terror and killing, and now one of his great battleships of the Littorio class, a class that has never yet dared to exchange a shot even with a British cruiser, lies crippled and half submerged in Taranto harbour, as a symbol of the approaching end of Fascism itself.

### Lesson Will Not be Lost

For the British and allied cause it is more than a symbol. It alters in our favour the whole naval balance of power in the Mediterranean and affects it elsewhere. At the moment when our naval strength is most heavily taxed, the Fleet Air-Arm has given it relief so great that



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the situation has been turned to our advantage. And now the Royal Air Force has followed up the first attack. Upon the French at Vichy and in North Africa the lesson will not be lost. Nor will Spaniards at Tangier be blind to its significance. Germany will learn of it with gnashing of teeth, for Hitler was reckoning upon the Italian Navy in his plans to break British sea power, and to destroy our sea-borne supplies.

### Noble Story of the Sea

Before very long I trust the Atlantic raider, sent out to prey upon our convoys, will have joined the Graf Spee at the bottom of the sea. But whether it be caught soon or late, it has added another chapter of imperishable fame to the annals of the British Navy. As did Captain Kennedy of the merchant cruiser Rawalpindi a year ago, Captain Fogarty Fegin of the merchant cruiser Jervis Bay, faced unflinchingly overwhelming odds and certain death by courting battle with a powerful German warship, and by his gallantry, Captain Fogarty Fegin, his officers and ship's company, saved all but a few of the 38 vessels in the convoy they were escorting. His men, most of whom belonged to the Merchant Service, fought like veterans, and so impressed with their courage was the captain of a Swedish freighter, that he, too, braved German gunfire and returned to the scene of action in order to rescue survivors. It is a noble story of the sea.

Alongside of such deeds, the confabulations in Berlin between the Soviet Prime Minister, M. Molotov, and Hitler, Goering, Hesse and Ribbentrop, appear very prosaic. What they may mean or portend we do not know, and where some basis of positive knowledge is lacking, guesswork is idle. But the one thing certain is that Hitler needs something to show to his people, something too that will help to offset the serious damage German industries have suffered from British bombers. Hence perhaps the summoning of German industrialists to meet Molotov. Hitherto the Russians have driven a pretty hard bargain for the help they have given to Germany.

### In Occupied Territories

Nowhere will the Russo-German negotiations have been more eagerly  
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