

Then and Now.

In February 1939 and in the months before it, Europe was filled with fear. The future was uncertain. Mothers worried for their children. Fathers feared they would be forced into danger.

The poorest of us, those with little to lose but their lives, were often filled with an ignorant bravado, stirred easily by the beat of the drum of the War ahead us, believing, unconditionally, that we had right on our side.

Those we would oppose were also induced to believe. Theirs was a bigger dream, based on clearly attainable goals and a righting of old wrongs. It was a dream of self-interest born of obedience and fervent devotion to their Führer and his acolytes.

Many on both sides believed that whatever might happen to the next man, the next family, that catastrophe would not strike at them. Somehow they would pass through the valley of death and hurt unscathed. Most would not heed the history of the Great War of 1914-18, the war of their parents and grandparents.

Perhaps WW2 was inevitable. Perhaps many of us, those who would lose most, did not see this coming. Perhaps Our Leaders were only as good as we deserved. Perhaps we had not learned that they could not be trusted, that their interests and ours did not run on parallel tracks.

Elsewhere in those same months, in other lands across an ocean, others watched Europe closely. As they watched, they waited, reluctant to join the conflicts of others. As they waited, they saw opportunity.

Very soon these 'allies' would mobilise their vast capital and labour, investing for sure-fire profits to be extracted from our impending destruction. The early swifter ones were soon joined by the many. The bandwagon of the cynical self-interested energetically fashioned ploughshares into spears. Very little, it would transpire, was a true gift. Those first elderly ships and armaments were provided on a Lend-Lease basis. Even later, when our 'friends' were bombed onto our side by the forces of the Rising Sun, their aid was paid for by ramping up our debt. Very little was a true gift. Did I say that before? As history has shown, this pact was crafted from its inception to cripple Britain financially in post-war years, when these New Emperors would rise to claim their due, to stride across Europe with their Marshall Plan.

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And if we had been them, if we had been the ones wearing two-tone dancing shoes, driving huge automobiles, feeling safe and secure 'over there' in that other 'island' fortress, would we have acted any differently?

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Now, in February 2016, and in the months that roiled through like a river in flood before it, Europe is again filled with fear and turmoil. As it always is, the future is uncertain. Mothers worry for their children and grandchildren. Parents and grandparents fear that their families will be forced into danger, that they will suffer loss.

Today, even the poorest amongst us have more to lose. Every street is lined with cars. Every home presumes at least one large screen TV piping multiple channels of sales pap and propaganda into our homes. It is easy, normal, for most of us to 'switch on and switch off', to find something diverting, something to let us 'make believe' that what is happening 'over there' in Europe and the Middle East and... is not of *our making* and is, therefore, not something we can change. Perhaps, secretly, we mostly believe that 'those people' have brought it upon themselves.

Today, those of us now in retirement, those who us have profited greatly during a long period when these 'small wars' have never ceased, often forget we have been greatly blessed. We the baby boomers, have never been made to go to war. We have never been invaded, bombed, starved.

Daily, as we watch 15-second video clips of foreign skies filled with screaming missiles and rubble cities destroyed by British-made armaments, we quickly tune out. We have been acclimatised to destruction. We are waiting for the weather forecast. If the images become too painful to watch, we turn back to our iPads or switch to something more pleasant that we recorded earlier, knowing we can get the weather on tap, 24/7 from the internet.

Why in the face of starving children and abject poverty, we do not act to eliminate this injustice when we are told, even by our Governments, that it would cost us so little?

Who, then, actually stands to lose from peace?

Ah!

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It must be us. That is what we are expected to believe, the unstated rhetoric behind the news. Unless you are UKIP: then you shout it through a loudhailer.

Now we are the very people who find ourselves 'over there', watching, waiting and fearing. And while we wait, in suspended animation, the death and suffering goes on, and on, and on.

Moving amongst us, the ones now 'over there' on the safe side, exist the cynical and corrupt who see only opportunity. Not all are 'foreigners', with us but not of us, using us a convenient tax-efficient place to live. Some have been with us generations. Some are titled, with their grasping hands on firmly gripping the levers of power.

Drugs. People trafficking. Cheap labour. Prostitution. Armaments sales. Regime change. Power and empire. Those poised to sneak out bad news and bury it in a multi-death bomb crater.

Think of an issue which fits and it is probably happening. Turmoil is a very convenient weapon in the media wars being waged to subdue us.

From time to time, but only with due pomp and in the right setting, our Industry Leaders and our Military Hierarchy combine to tell us that our armaments inventors and manufactures are twinkling jewels crowning remnant manufacturing base, underpinning many thousands of jobs.

On occasion, TV editors are aghast to discover that such weaponry is often sold 'under-the-counter', frequently by Swiss-based intermediaries, to both sides or the many sides of those we see killing each other, on screen, in our homes. Suitably packaged, with a sprinkling of high-tech devices and whizz-bangs, this can make entertaining television. But 'not too much please', mutter the politicians.

How can we learn that the destructive waste of these small wars and the impotent waste of preparing for a nuclear war to end all wars, can never, ever, make our world safer world for us or our children?

This is my view. Much of this vast spend, worldwide, by 'good' and 'bad' alike, is a crazy squandering of resources. I would rather build a small hospital in Syria than blow one up with a high-tech smart bomb which might cost the same as a replacement

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hospital. Indeed, I would rather buy the weapon and bury it in my garden, hide it, so that it could never be used.

On occasion, when this brutal reality does get through our personal defences we allow it to be mushed away in the wash or other media banalities.

Trump for President! It's entertainment!

Boris for PM! It's entertainment!

These two dangerous buffoons are both on the other side of that spinning coin which will reveal our future when it lands.

Watch what happens if Donald wins! Who will rejoice the most and gear up?

Yip -the US Military Industrial Complex!

And will Boris get on his bike to kow-tow to him?

You betcha, baby!

If is this 'revelation' and the vagaries of TIIPⁱ are thrust at us by pamphleteers in our high street, we side-step, or accept it warily with a shrug and later crush it into a litter bin, unread.

Of course we will always need brave, well trained and well-equipped men and women of action to defend us.

Of course we must always resist the dictators, demagogues and psychopaths who spring up like weeds and choke their people.

Of course whoever we chose on our side will be less than we hope for.

Of course we must be realistic, we must have armed forces.

But surely, please, we must not cynically accept that what we are already doing '*is the best that can be hoped for*'?

Surely we can do better than next to nothing? Surely!

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Let us each start with ourselves.

Let us each, individually, rage against the machine, but not just by sniping empty irony at each other by email or Facebook.

As we hurtle forward into 2016 and the breakneck years of change to come, how can we learn to make our politicians better people, better leaders? How can we make ourselves better people that we might get better politicians?

Us? As we go about our day to day lives, I suggest we strive first to be hopefully. We must encourage both ourselves and those we influence. We must strive together to become better people, prepared to resist evil and ignorance of the facts, insofar as we can unearth them. Meanwhile, by investing our time, resources and energies we must learn how best to counter the media myths that would dumb us back down into inaction.

Them? Ah, those honest few, those politicians who live by convictions long held, the few that dare to speak reason and who are mocked for their naivety. How can we strengthen them? How can we find more of them?

How? Before we vote, let us ask and ask and ask again.

Let us look each one in the eye and judge them before we vote.

I'll encourage you, you'll encourage me.

Going forward we must all make sure we always vote: every time, no excuses.

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Finally, we must ensure, if we can, that our children vote and that in further future our grandchildren also learn the duty of casting their votes.

This is our personal burden, our duty.

ⁱ Read here and swallow a few Imodium tablets.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/what-is-ttip-and-six-reasons-why-the-answer-should-scare-you-9779688.html>