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THE BALKANS: Hitler Gets It

When Adolf Hitler wants something, he gets it by applying an identical series of pressures to individual men within parties, individual parties within nations, and individual nations within blocs. The first step is to make each unit distrust every other unit. Next he surrounds each with an iron circle of this hostility and suspicion. Then he gives each unit to understand that, in the final reckoning, it and it alone will be awarded the fruits of victory—provided it obeys his every command. Later still he tantalizes each with alternating spasms of worry because the others seem temporarily to be in favor, and then of delight because the others are being worried. Finally he moves in for the kill—and spares no single unit.

Last week he had reached the next-to-last stage in dealing with the Balkan nations. To get what he wanted—a solid Europe and a sure shield around his Achilles' heel, Salonika—he might have to wait for spring weather. But he had the Balkans convinced that the kill was imminent. Feb. 25, some whispered; March 1, others said; soon, all agreed.

Bulgaria, in the midst of terrible fear of being overrun by the Nazi Army, looked about and began to realize that it was already overrun. There were not many Germans in Bulgaria, probably not more than 5,000. But Bulgarians thought they saw them everywhere. They saw Germans in ski clothes leave Sofia hotels early every morning in automobiles. They saw Germans in civilian overcoats driving through the countryside by the truckload. They saw Germans shoring up bridges, building up the shoulders of highways, stocking airfields with gasoline.

The farming people—80% of Bulgaria's population are peace-loving, pro-Russian farmers—scarcely knew what to think. They heard that schools were being shut down for fear of epidemics: but no one was sick. It frightened them to learn that Joseph Stalin had notified Bulgaria he would do nothing to resist German penetration. When Premier Professor Bogdan Filoff, on the first anniversary of forming his Cabinet, filled the only important Cabinet post to their way of thinking (the Ministry of Agriculture) with a notorious pro-German, Dmitri Kuscheff, it bewildered them: had not shrewd Ivan Bagrian-off been eased out of the same job for the very reason that he was pro-German? They were secretly pleased but also disturbed to hear that an oil train destined for Germany had been totally wrecked just inside the Bulgarian border.

At week's end the people learned two sickening truths. The Government came right out and said that the Nazis intended to march their Army across the land to attack Greece—i.e., there was nothing to be done about it. And the British Minister to Bulgaria, George William Rendel, answered this with a curt announcement: "If the Germans occupy Bulgaria and make it a base against our ally, obviously we shall have to break off relations with Bulgaria and take whatever measures the situation requires"—i.e., Britain would make war on Bulgaria, and nothing could be done about that either.

Yugoslavia, confronted with the accomplished fact of Bulgaria's falling into the Nazi camp, found herself outflanked, and prepared to fall in too. By invitation Yugoslavia's Premier Dragisha Cvetko-vitch and Foreign Minister Dr. Aleksandar Cincar-Markovitch went to Adolf Hitler's mountain retreat for a three-hour conversation. If Herr Hitler ranted, he wasted his breath. Premier Cvetkovitch speaks no German; Hitler's Interpreter Dr. Paul Schmidt does not echo the Führer's screams. And Foreign Minister Cincar-Markovitch, who speaks fluent German, is known to be the most patient man in Yugoslavia. Herr Hitler said: Yugoslavia would be wise to join the Axis. The two men said: We shall tell Regent Prince Paul what you say. Herr Hitler said: I should like Yugoslavia's assurance that she will do nothing if Germany invades Bulgaria and attacks Greece; I might like permission to send troops across Yugoslav soil to Greece; when I have won the war, I might give Yugoslavia Salonika and Northern Albania. The two said: We shall tell Prince Paul. Then they went home and told Prince Paul.

Hungary and Rumania got tastes of

Britain's growing audacity. In London Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden invited Hungarian Minister Georges de Barcza to pay him a call. Mr. Eden suavely ticked off Hungary with "sympathetic understanding" of Hungary's embarrassing position—but he warned that if Britain wins the war Hungary will pay. By week's end the pre-war Rumanian-British friendship had run its course to overt enmity. After the rupture of diplomatic relations (TIME, Feb. 17) the British Board of Trade announced that all goods of Rumanian origin, destination or ownership henceforth would be considered enemy contraband.

Britain's friends, Greece and Turkey, remained Britain's friends—but this week Turkey and Bulgaria signed a non-aggression pact, indicating that Turkey's belligerence, if it came, would be entirely defensive. Greece, with no other friend than Britain, still showed no signs of acceding to reported German pressure for a separate Greek-Italian peace.

The big question, as ice began to break up on the Danube and spring to show its signs ahead of season, was whether, when spring really arrived, Great Britain and her little friends would be established in a major conflict with Germany on the Balkan front. If so, Germany had a long march to Suez and the Near East.

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