

William Tyler - Countries Far Away

- Good evening everyone, wherever you are listening from and whatever the time is with you, you are more than welcome. I'm sat in my study here on the south coast of England in the town of Worthing with the Channel just over my shoulder over there. And it's five o'clock here and it's been a grim and grey day, but I have gone out on the beach and had a walk before starting this talk this evening. It's five o'clock and thus it's my time to begin. And the story for today is called "Two Countries Far Away," and the two countries are Hungary and Czechoslovakia between the two world wars of the 20th century.

I called it "Two Countries Far Away" simply because the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain described Czechoslovakia in those terms at the time of Munich in 1938. Neville Chamberlain said how horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks here because of a quarrel in a far away country between people of whom we know nothing. It's one of the most awful things a British prime minister has ever said in history. "How are the mighty fallen and the weapons of war perished," so said King David in the book of Solomon.

And that quotation, "how are the mighty fallen and the weapons of war perished" is particularly apt as the introduction this afternoon because it relates, I think, almost perfectly to the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian empire at the end of the First World War in 1918. Defeat in the war led the young Emperor Charles, who was just 32 years of age and had only come to the throne two years before, after the death of the Emperor Franz Joseph in 1916. It led to Charles withdrawing from the political scene. He never actually abdicated. He was very careful in his letter to make it clear that he had not abdicated, he was withdrawing.

But of course we know that it was in fact the end of an empire of the Habsburgs that began right back as a hereditary emperorship from the year 1440. The empire in its form in 1918 dated only from 1867 when the empire was divided between Austria and Hungary for administrative purposes. The Czech part of the Austro-Hungarian empire was partly controlled by Austria and partly controlled by Hungary, although many of the Czechs themselves thought that they should make a third division within the empire. A federation of three: Austria, the Czech lands, and Hungary. But that wasn't so.

Of course, had the empire continued after 1918, almost certainly that federal state would've come into being and would've been supported by the emperor as well as by politicians in the Czech lands. In truth, when the empire collapsed at the end of the first World War in October, 1918, it was well past its sell by date. It was held together who knows how. It was a house of cards just waiting for a puff of wind to blow it all away. And the puff of wind occurred in June, 1914 in the Austrian territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated by a Serbian terrorist group.

From that point, June 1914, Austria-Hungary itself crashed into war, and with it, the whole of

Europe went to war and the past disappeared in central Europe. An age ended when the war ended. In October, 1918, a new central Europe was emerging. The old Austro-Hungarian empire fractured into various parts, leaving a rump Austria, Austria as we know it today, a rump Hungary, as we know it today, and incidentally, Hungary has never forgiven Western allies for the loss of its imperial territory. Indeed, from personal experience, Hungary is the only European country I've ever visited in which if you are British, you feel sort of something over your shoulder every time.

The Hungarians have never forgiven Britain or France for what happened to their country as they saw it, the half of the Austria-Hungarian empire which was Hungary. So let me begin then with Hungary this afternoon. Hungary found itself wrapped by revolution and war for two years after the end of the war from 1918 through to 1921. Now, the first government that was formed by a Hungarian aristocrat in August, 1918 followed the so-called Aster or Chrysanthemum Revolution, because the revolutionaries put the aster flower in their hats.

This government was democratic and it established the Hungarian People's Republic. It demanded and achieved, of course, independence from the Austrian part. But this first stab at post-war democracy ended very quickly. In November, 1918, followed in, sorry, in March, 1919, it collapsed, having formed officially in November, 1918. It collapsed in March, 1919 because of a Marxist coup d'etat led by a Jew called Bela Kun, K-U-N, was a Magyarization of the word, or the surname, Cohen, and a Hungarian Soviet republic replaced the fledgling democracy.

So democracy in Hungary had lasted a mere matter of months before a Marxist state succeeded it. But this Marxist state, it was itself short-lived and collapsed in August. The very start of August, 1919. Why? Because it was at war with Romania. Why was it war with Romania? Because there were Hungarians living in Romania. And Hungary wanted to restore Romania into Hungary as it had been prior to 1914. But they weren't getting anywhere. They were not getting anywhere. And the Hungarians had linked up with the authoritarian right to defeat the authoritarian left. And this embryonic Marxist republic collapsed, and in its place came a right wing authoritarian government.

And that government initiated a reign of terror called The White Terror. And it's estimated that 6,000 people were summarily executed without trial, and 75,000 people were placed in prison. Jews were especially sought out for this retribution of The White Terror. A hundred thousand people fled Hungary, including many members of the middle class Jewish entrepreneurial and professional community. The new regime was led by an admiral, Admiral Horthy. He proclaimed a kingdom to get rid of the republic.

He proclaimed a kingdom and proclaimed himself regent, but he never invited the Emperor Charles to return, and when Charles attempted to return and entered Hungary, he was given short ship and had to flee and was taken away by the British to the island of Madeira, where two years later he died in the little village of Monte above Madeira's capital of Funchal, and I'm sure

lots of you have done that, either in the sledges that take you up to Monte or in the great railway that takes you up. So we happen onto an extraordinary thing, an admiral, but then, hang on a moment, Hungary post-war had no navy.

Well, it didn't even have any access to the sea! And he proclaims himself a regent, but won't allow the king, the emperor, to come into Hungary. There's probably an apocryphal story told in America in 1941. Hungary declared War on America in 1941, and FDR asked whether it was a kingdom or a republic, and his aid replied, "a kingdom, Mr. President." FDR said, "what's the king's name?" "Oh, it doesn't have a king." "Then who runs the kingdom?" "A regent," he was told, "by the name of Admiral Horthy." "An admiral?"

Then said, FDR, "they must have a very powerful navy." "Well, actually it has no navy," he was told. "Moreover, it doesn't even have access to the sea. Wars are often fought on religious reasons." And FDR said, "well, what's the name religion in Hungary?" And he said, "well, it's actually Catholic, Mr. President, but Admiral Horthy isn't. He's Protestant." So FDR said, "well, why did he declare war on America? Is it because of territorial claims?" "Oh, no, Hungary's territorial claims, Mr. President, are against Romania." "So why didn't Hungary declare war on Romania?" "Well, actually, Mr. President, Hungary and Romania are allies." So FDR said, "look, stop. Let me get this straight.

Hungary is a kingdom run by a regent who's an admiral without a navy, and it's allied with Romania against which it has territorial claims, but it's declared war on us against which it doesn't." "Absolutely right, Mr. President." Well, that apocryphal story nevertheless underlines the oddity of Hungary in these interwar years. Horthy remained regent from 1922 to 1944. The great question of course that arises with Horthy is what were his own political beliefs? Well, some call him a fascist, an anti-Semite. Others say, "no, no, no. He's just an old traditionalist, an old aristocrat from the old Austro-Hungarian empire who actually attempted to save Jewish lives during the war." Today, Horthy is used by the extreme right, the Jobbik party in Hungary, as a hero to push this version of Hungarian history.

The problem for Hungary was, as I said before, that it was cut down in size and it resented it. And it resented it because it lost over two thirds of the territory that Hungary ruled during the imperial days. And it also, as in the case of Romania, had lost lots of ethnic Hungarians. It had also lost access to the sea, important in terms of trade, of course. It had lost whole areas, rich in natural resources. And this wound festered. It festered to such an extent that Hitler was able to use it and dangle before the Hungarians in 1938, '39, the possibility of gaining land back if they supported Hitler. And that's one of the reasons, only one, but one of the major reasons why Hungary entered the Second World War allied to Germany.

I've mentioned in the case of Horthy, the arguments about anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism in Hungary was an ancient presence. And the Marxist Jew Bela Kun merely fueled the Hungarian right against Judaism, and the phrase "Christian nationalist" began to be used. "Well," you say, "that's passably interesting, the phrase." Well, it's important, because today within the European

Union, Hungary is rejecting immigration over into its borders, particularly, of course, from Muslims. And they're using, again this phrase, "Christian nationalist" used in the interwar years against Jews now used against Islam.

And it means that today, Hungary has a difficult relationship with the EU, or perhaps I should say the EU has a difficult relationship with Hungary. In 1920, an anti-Jewish law was passed dealing with what the Hungarians called the Jewish problem. Now, this was largely to placate the right in Hungary, but in practise, the law was not rigidly enforced. However, the depression of the 1930s leads to greater antisemitism, and again, leads to further legislation in 1938. And now Hungary is definitely moving towards a fascist right.

Jews are barred from some professions and indeed are restricted in terms of the buying and selling of land. This mirrors the situation developing from 1933 in Germany. Hungary moved increasingly during the 1930s to the right and into the orbit of Nazi Germany. And the key player in this was not Horthy, but a prime minister who was of German descent called Gombos, G-O-M-B-O-S. He was a far right politician who gained power at the time of the great economic collapse of the 1930s. He was definitely fascist, he was an admirer of Mussolini, and he was the first foreign leader to actually visit Hitler in Germany.

Horthy had appointed him, believing that he could be the puppet master, but in fact, Gombos was the puppet master and Horthy, the puppet. Think Hindenburg and Hitler in Germany is much the same story. Economically, Gombos's government had some success in the 1930s. He had become Prime Minister in 1936 and remained, sorry, in 1932, and it remained so for four years, from 1932 to 1936. During this period, industrialization took off, because after all, before 1914, Hungary was very backward in terms of even the Austria-Hungarian empire, let alone Western Europe.

Gombos died in 1936. In 1938, at the time of the Munich crisis, or alternatively, if you like, the Czechoslovak crisis, Hitler dangled before Horthy the possibility of reclaiming those parts of Czechoslovakia, which had been prior to 1914 part of Austria-Hungarian empire. By 1938, Hungary had its own homegrown fascist party called the Green Arrow, which had been formed three years prior, in 1935. Now, the second reason that Horthy linked himself to Hitler was that he felt that Hungary was threatened by the increasing prospect of European war, not only by Germany, but by Russia.

And for the right wing, I'm not using the word fascist for Horthy, but right-wing, proto-fascist Horthy, the idea that you could be linked with red Soviet Russia was unthinkable. Thus he was pushed towards Hitler, but you need a very long spoon to suck with the devil. And Horthy had no long spoon. Horthy had no way of controlling the situation. And so Hungary enters World War II on Germany's side, 1941. In 1944, as the Red Army is pushing southwards through central Europe and Hungary is threatened, Germany occupied Hungary as the Red Army approaches and Horthy is ordered to sack his prime minister and appoint a German Nazi nominee.

The new government goes wholeheartedly fascist and enthusiastically embraces the Holocaust, sending thousands of Jews to Auschwitz. Horthy wrote a letter to the Prime Minister, "Dear Prime Minister, I was aware that the government in the given force situation has to take many steps that I do not consider correct, and for which I cannot take responsibility. Among these matters is the handling of the Jewish question in a manner that does not correspond to the Hungarian mentality, Hungarian conditions, and for that matter, Hungarian interests.

It is clear to everyone that what among these were done by Germans or by the insistence of Germans, was not in my power to prevent. So in these matters, I was forced into passivity. As such, I was not informed in advance, or I'm not fully informed now. However, I've heard recently that in many cases in inhumane and brutality, we Hungarians, exceeded the Germans." Now you must make your own judgement about whether Horthy is indeed guilty or not. He was not tried by the Allies as a war criminal. Indeed, he had been removed from office by the Germans in October, 1944. In other words, shortly after that letter was written. He was removed because he was attempting, through his son, to open up negotiations with the Russians.

He was removed, and for the last part of the Second War, there's no question but that Hungary is entirely fascist with a puppet prime minister controlled by Nazi Germany. Horthy himself was sent off to Germany, in fact, into Bavaria. And it was there that he was liberated by the Americans, taken prisoner, but not tried at Nuremberg. He was meant to give evidence at Nuremberg, he never gave evidence in person, but in paper. He then returned to Bavaria a free man. And finally with his family in 1950, settled in Salazar's Portugal.

And there he died in 1957. Just one odd fact, he had very little money when he was in exile for those seven years in Portugal. And he was financed by Hungarian aristocrats, you'd expect that, but he was also funded by Jewish Hungarians. And his daughter-in-law has written about that. So Horthy is an extraordinary character. Could anyone have done better? Could Hungary have found its way to a pure democracy that it only had for a few months? Well, it might have done, but equally it might have been a second Marxist state after Russia. It avoided both those things, but it ended up a mere client state of Nazi Germany.

The interesting question of course, as I try to indicate as I've gone through, is that although communism has now ended, and we've had 30 years of the non-communist state in Hungary, Hungary has done exactly what it did after the Second War and has moved significantly to the right, so far to the right, that some of us doubt whether it fulfils the rules of the European Union to remain a democratic member of the EU. And that is a debate that the EU is having about Hungary and about Poland at the moment. But of course, being British, we will no longer be able to have a say on whether Hungary should remain or not remain a member of the EU. But as long as it remains, it stains the European Union.

It stains it with its disregard for the rule of law. It's disregard for European rules and regulations and indeed, tolerance, if you like, or moral obligation towards those seeking asylum. Now, the second country is Czechoslovakia, and that story is a different one. And that's what makes it

interesting, because in 1914, both Hungary and Czechoslovakia were part of the same Austro-Hungarian empire. It's very difficult to get a concept now of the Austro-Hungarian empire. It was a personal empire. It depended upon the person of the emperor. It was so disparate. It was out of time, to be honest, in 1914, as a relic of pre-1789. It really, by all logic, shouldn't have existed, but it did. It is a strange story. And is the Austro-Hungarian empire entirely now forgotten? Well, no. Well, no.

I mentioned that the Emperor Charles died in Madeira in the village of Monte. If you go to Monte today and you go into the church, Catholic church, there is his tomb in a side aisle. Nothing unusual, you'll say in that. But when I went to see it, I was staggered. It is covered in Hungarian flags and Hungarian messages. Not one single Austrian flag or Austrian message, but Hungarian. Wow. And I've got on my shelf behind me, I can stretch behind me, a figure of the Emperor Franz Joseph bought by me about 10 years ago in Hungary.

Hungary seems, still to some extent, in love with the past. So what about the Czech Republic? Let's have a look at that. The Czech territory under the empire was divided, as I said, at the beginning between the Austrian half and the Hungarian half. And there was a movement before 1914, as I also said earlier, for the Czech lands to form a third division after those two. And that would, I'm sure, would've taken place had there been no World War II or if Emperor Charles had managed to hold onto his throne and lands in 1918. But it wasn't to do that.

The two great founders of the country of Czechoslovakia, Tomas Masaryk and Benes used the war, 1914-18 war, to adjust their position. No longer were they asking for the empire to be a federal state. Now, they were arguing for the independent country of Czechoslovakia. They could see that the consequence of this war, that there was no way that this empire could survive the war. And so from 1914 onwards, they begin to think in terms of a post-war independent Czechoslovakia. Now, Czechoslovakia is not what you might describe as a logical country. Hungary was perfectly logical.

The bulk of the population were Hungarian, the vast bulk. It also gave credence to its trauma over losing ethnic Hungarians to the countries around it. Czechoslovakia, well, post-Communism, has divided into two, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. And so you have both Czechs and Slovaks in this republic that created after 1918 called Czechoslovakia. And these two were pushed together. They had, in many respects, little in common. The Czech lands were the most economically industrially developed in the whole of the Austria-Hungarian Empire. The Slovak lands were, well, just like Hungary.

They were backward. Agriculturally backward. Strip farming, little industry. But the two were put together, because they're Slavic people. That was the argument. Well, this is a difficult marriage between Czechs and Slovaks. The Czechs dominated this new republic. And actually, in addition to there being Czechs and Slovaks, were five other distinct nationalities. This is not a logical country. It's a creation out of a collapsed empire. So it's not surprising to me, and I don't think to many people that post-Communism, the country should have divided into two, between

the Czech part and the Slovak part. It was divided by religion. Czechoslovakia was largely Protestant, where Slovakia was largely overwhelmingly Catholic.

One of the people that helped Masaryk was an Englishman, called Seton-Watson, Hyphenated, Seton-Watson. He was an enthusiast for Czechs, Slovaks, and indeed for small minority ethnic groups seeking post-war to find some independence from larger groups. Much what Woodrow Wilson, the American president, had been arguing at Versailles. And Seton-Watson found work for his friend, Tomas Masaryk, who fled to England during the war to escape arrest by the Imperial authorities because of his political views, which were now for an independent Czechoslovakia.

And Masaryk and Seton-Watson began a weekly periodical in England in 1916 called The New Europe. And it put the case for Czechoslovakia and other small groups of people for independent states post the war. Seton-Watson attended the Peace conference in Paris after the war, he's an extraordinary figure. He's a writer, he's a journalist, and he's a political dabbler, if you like. He's there, almost everybody seems to me, went to Versailles, whether they were invited or not, and started politicking around the edges.

Well, Seton-Watson was doing that and Masaryk, and they were extraordinarily successful, but they would not, I think, have been successful, if before Versailles, in May, 1918, Woodrow Wilson hadn't changed his position. Woodrow Wilson, you remember, wrote "The 14 Points," which he took from America to Paris, only to be met by the French Prime Minister, Georges Clemenceau who also said, "Who is this man who has 14 commandments? Moses only had 10." Wilson was the academic from Princeton that neither the very political and very anti-German Clemenceau really couldn't understand nor the British political devious operator Lloyd George.

But there was compromise in the air. There had to be. And although both France and Britain feared the American position about empires, because of course they had vast overseas empires themselves, they nevertheless agreed to the carving up of the Austria-Hungarian empire after the war. But before the war ended, a provisional Czech government had been established in September of 1918, by which time Masaryk was not in England, but in Washington. And from Washington, he issued, how very American, a Republican Declaration of Independence. And he issued it as the Empire collapsed in October, 1918.

And so a Czech government was formed before the Allies met at Versailles, but they knew of Wilson's change of policy, and a Republican Declaration of Independence issued from the States is guaranteed to get American backing. It said that this revolution in Czechoslovakia was a revolution without a shot being fired and without a single day. France nearly caused mayhem by having offered territory in advance to Hungary, which was Czech.

That had to be smoothed over. Always trust the French to stir things up at the last minute. Masaryk and Benes between them had achieved a remarkable success. For no one had ever

thought of a country called Czechoslovakia. It was purely a political construct. Moreover, this country survived for 20 years until the Nazis in 1938. But as I've said, it had this fundamental flaw between the Czech part and the Slovak part. Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister of the First World War, just before the Second World War, said something very interesting. And well, it's often said he was a bit gaga by then, but this is certainly not gaga.

This is really a rather important statement. This is Lloyd George then just before the outbreak of war in 1939. Lloyd George, I'm reading from a book called "Czechoslovakia" by Mary Heimann. "Lloyd George, faced with the very war the peace conference had so earnestly hoped to prevent," that is Munich and Versailles beforehand, "could not disguise his bitterness. The Czechs he wrote were specially favoured by the Allies since they'd rendered considerable service in the Allied cause by starting a rot in the Austrian army."

That is by declaring independence in the September of 1918, before the whole thing crashed in Austria-Hungary the following month. "The Allies caused by starting the rot in the Austria army, which hastened that process of disintegration, that destroyed its value as a fighting machine, the result, said Lloyd George, was the recognition of the polyglot, an incoherent state of Czechoslovakia, and the incorporation in that state of hundreds of thousands of protesting Magyars, Hungarians, and some millions of angry Germans."

And that was to prove the fatal flaw. In 1938, were the Germans. In what, in the 1930s, the part of Czechoslovakia called the Sudetenland. But before that, in those interwar decades, the story of Czechoslovakia is one of enormous success. It became the 10th country in the international table of industrial countries. It was the 10th most industrialised country in the world by the time that World War II came. Pilsner beer, Barter shoes, Skoda cars, glass from Prague, textiles, a flourishing Czech film industry, modern architecture to rival anything in the world, and writers of international importance such as the novel, "The Good Soldier Svejk."

And a little bit more I will read, if I may, from the book that I quoted from just now. And this quotation goes like this, "The Czech-Slovak Republic was worthy to take its place between France and Britain as one of the democratic and morally advanced countries of the modern world." Unlike Hungary, Czechoslovakia had made it into the modern world, to be compared to the democracies of France, to be compared to the democracy of England, of Britain.

And not to be compared to the rise of fascism in Hungary or fascism in Italy, fascism in Spain, fascism in Portugal, or Marxism in the USSR. Czechoslovakia is an enormous success story. And yet at Munich, Britain and France washed their hands and gave Hitler the green light to invade the Sudetenland, "a country far away of which we know little." A disgraceful statement by Neville Chamberlain. Wow. By the time of Munich, Masaryk was dead. He was an old man. He died at the age of 87. Benes succeeded him, and Benes tried hard to keep the Sudetenland within Czechoslovakia. Well, how?

Well, he offered, it sort of ramped up in various negotiations, but what in the end he landed by

doing was give it almost full autonomy within what we might describe as a federal Czechoslovakia. But of course in Sudetenland, Germans didn't want that, and certainly Berlin didn't want that. And although Hitler had said all the things that Chamberlain wanted to hear, Hitler was given the green light, and German troops enter the Sudetenland.

Subsequently, the whole of Czechoslovakia. And France and Britain stand aside. It is the climax of the policy of appeasement. And that word has, I don't know how tight to put that, that word appeasement has followed us ever since. And we're always worried in the West by a government that might be an appeasing government. So obsessed are we to avoid appeasement that sometimes we've entered into wars in which a little more negotiation might have helped. Appeasement has been let into the system, but it was a dreadful moment of a lack of moral fibre in Paris and in London. So the tragedy for Czechoslovakia began in 1938 and continued to the end, to the fall of Communism. And after that, as we know, the Velvet Revolution split the Czech Republic from Slovakia.

And both are members of the European Union. Last year, the Economist Intelligence Unit rated both countries flawed democracy in its international democracy index, a flawed democracy is defined as a nation where elections are fair and free and basic civil liberties are honoured, but may have issues, e.g. media freedom, infringement and minor aggression of political opposition and critics. These nations have significant thoughts in other democratic aspects, including underdeveloped political culture, low levels of participation in politics, and issues in the functioning of governance. Oh dear. What would Tomas Masaryk and Benes have thought? What would Masaryk have thought if he was alive today that all that they had striven for and achieved in those interwar years?

Yes, well, the Czech Republic and Slovakia are members of the European Union, but are they as democratic as Britain and France and Germany? And the answer is no, they're not. A Hungarian author called Sandor Marai wrote a novel called "Embers," and it's really about the collapse of the Austria-Hungarian Empire. He was born in 1900 in what is now Slovakia, and he died in 1989 in San Diego. And this novel "Embers" is translated into English. And in it a character says this, "'my homeland,' says the guests, 'no longer exists. My homeland was Poland, Vienna, this house, the barracks in the city, Galician Chopin. What's left? Whatever mysterious substance held it all together, no longer works. Everything's come apart.'"

And so as I end, this is me, so it's not clever, but it's just something that I wanted to say as I draw it to a close. The question then and now is how will the story of the breakup of the Austria-Hungarian Empire eventually end? Poland and Hungary, Poland, of course, parts of that were within the empire. Poland and Hungary have moved to a populous right and are in dispute with the European Union over fundamentals of democracy. The Czech Republic and Slovakia have moved a long way from the country that Thomas Masaryk was president of. The beast of fascism is stirring in the heart of Democratic Europe. In Germany, the alternative for Germany party has quietly gained public support and now forms the main opposition party in the Bundestag.

And what of Britain? Britain who washed its hands of Czechoslovakia is again in the process of washing its hands of Europe and returning to a more isolationist position, mirroring that, of course, of the United States. So those of you who are not in Europe, Europe is increasingly at a crossroads. The European Union is at a crossroads. They're already called within the EU to split West East, although the logical split in the EU is actually North South.

And then it's got cope with Britain not being part of the EU. And Britain has to accept the fact that it will no longer be the voice of America within the EU and within Europe, and indeed the British voice will be more silenced than before. The American option is the deal through France. Well, good luck with that. So Europe is definitely at a crossroads. How will it eventually play out? I don't know, but I intend to live to be 242 in order to find out. I'll stop there.

- [Host] Thank you. Thanks very much, William, for that riveting presentation. There are questions. Can you see them?

- Let me see if I can pull it down. I've not got, I've got some comments. Oh yes.

Q&A and Comments:

A: Is the Ottoman Empire also out of time like the Austria-Hungarian Empire?

Q: That is a very good question. It's a good question, because Turkey has made moves in recent years to what it calls the wider Turkey population. And Turkey is, Turkey is a very large country still unlike Austria, but Turkey is trying to pull in the Turkic groups of Central Asia into a grouping of Turkic nations, in which case it will play a, could play a major role in the future. Why? Because it straddles into Europe, so it's the bridge between Europe and the Middle East, but it's also the bridge between Russia and the Middle East.

Turkey, and Turkey is itself a problem, in terms of its quote unquote "democracy." And it's gone a long way from Ataturk's vision at the end of the Second World War. I think your question, whoever asked the question, I think it's a really good question, because it links the two and you are quite right. They can be linked logically. Should I see if I got something else?

- [Host] Yes, there are other questions. Will you read-

Q: Why was Horthy financed by the Hungarian Jews?

A: I think the answer is because the Hungarian Jews were opposed to the Marxist regime and did not see Horthy, as sometimes he's been portrayed, as an anti-Semite. They wouldn't have supported him. They saw him as someone who tried to keep the Holocaust out of Hungary. I said it is a very difficult question, because Hungarians themselves are divided by Horthy and now Jobbik, this extreme right wing party, is using Horthy again. They're putting up statues and

thus creating in the minds of the rest of Europe the idea that Horthy was this extremist.

It's not, I really don't think that's so. I see Horthy as an old-fashioned aristocrat, totally unable to deal with the rise of fascism in the same way that Hindenburg was an old-fashioned aristocrat unable to deal. Should I see if I can take some more issues that people are sending? I dunno. Have I got any more?

- [Host] William, let me just hand over to Judy. Judy, can you see the questions?

- [Judy] Yes.

Q: Oh, I've got one here. I've always understood that Chamberlain didn't have a choice but to agree the appeasement 'cause he knew how unprepared Britain was for war.

A: Ah, well, you are asking the wrong person to defend Chamberlain because I'm a huge fan of Churchill. No, it's no excuse at all. Churchill was warning against Nazi Germany as early as 1933. So were many other people. You can say that in 1938 by buying a year, Britain was more prepared. But the answer is Britain should have been more prepared prior to 1938 and his policy of appeasement. Let me just say, a month after Churchill took office and Chamberlain is a member of Churchill's cabinet, Chamberlain and the foreign Secretary Halifax are arguing against Churchill in terms of what should happen.

They were arguing that Churchill should open negotiations with Mussolini so that Mussolini would be an intermediary between Britain and Germany and prevent the war continuing. It was a moment of real crisis. And Churchill had to adjourn the meeting because he had another meeting. The meeting had begun at four o'clock in the House of Commons, in the Prime Minister's room. He adjourned it at six o'clock, because he was due to meet the full members of his government, all the ministers, not just cabinet ministers. And he went in and he said, "I expect each one of you to lay down their life in the blood. I expect each one of you to lay in your blood." And he had a huge round of support and applause from the junior ministers, conservative, labour, and liberal.

And he was so buoyed up that he went back and he faced Chamberlain and Halifax down and we got through this extraordinary worried moment. I have no, or very little sympathy for Chamberlain. So many people will disagree with that. And whoever asks the question may well disagree. And you are perfectly open to disagree, but you'll never convince me. Churchill was right from 1933. Moreover, ordinary people thought he was right. Let me get another little thing.

Q: See if I've got, where am I? Can you tell us more?

A: No, I can't really say much more about the relationship with the leadership in Hungary and with Hitler.

The truth of the matter is that I guess were you asking about Hitler? Were you asked about Hungary or you asking about Czechoslovakia? I can't see. Somebody else's popped. I think you asked him about Czechoslovakia, sorry.

Q: And somebody else said, what was the percentage of Germans in Czechoslovakia?

A: The point is that the German population in Czechoslovakia is concentrated in the Sudetenland. And they had decided that they, under their leadership, that they were going to deal with Hitler. So the relationship is a close one between the Germans in the Sudetenland and Hitler by 1938. And when Hitler's troops invade Czechoslovakia, they are greeted flowers and cheering and all the rest. It's just like the entry of Nazi troops to Vienna or the Anschluss. So this is not Czechoslovakia the whole, it's Sudetenland, and there is this massive German community.

And it's, again, back to this point that Czechoslovakia was not a logical country. It really wasn't going to function. Of course, prior to 1914, there were lots of Germans all over, not least of course in German Austria, which is German. So it shouldn't have been established, it shouldn't have worked. It was established and under Masaryk and Benes it was extraordinarily successful. But in the long term it was never, ever going to hold together.

Q: Let me see if I got another, Had Benes gone to war, could he have succeeded?

A: No, no. Benes's whole policy was to find an ally. If he'd had an ally that would come to Hungary's aid, that is to say Britain or France, well forget that in 1940, or even Russia in '41, he was even prepared to think of that. But Russia had its own ideas of what was going to happen. And it didn't include fighting for Hungary. And Britain and France were in no position. Exactly the same position as we had been in in 1939 with Poland. We were unable. We simply didn't have the power to do it.

The only country that would've had the power to do it as an ally would've been America. But America doesn't enter the war until effectively 1942. So there's no way that Benes could have gone to war. Have I got any more? Let me have a look, see where I am.

Q: Is there a book I can recommend?

A: Yes, I can recommend a very good book about Hungary. It's called "Cross Currents." "Cross Currents." And it's written by a man called Merkin, M-E-R-K-I-N, "Cross Currents" by Merkin. I'll put it on my blog. So I'll put it on later tonight or tomorrow morning. And then you can look at it. "Cross Currents" by Merkin. On Czechoslovakia, this is a long history. It's the history of the whole of Czechoslovakia, but it's the best book I know for explaining the period we've been looking at.

And that book is simply called "Czechoslovakia" and it's by a lady called Mary Heimann.

"Czechoslovakia" by Mary Heimann. I will put that on. If you excuse me just one moment, if you are interested, if you are interested in the current situation of the rise of the populist right or the alternative right, or even of neo-fascism, then the book to read is this extraordinary book by Anne Applebaum, "Twilight of Democracy."

Now, if you are listening in the States, it's the same book, but for reasons I don't understand, it has a different title in the States, but it doesn't matter. You can find it. It's by Anne Applebaum. And she is absolutely, I think this little book, is an absolute must for anybody concerned about the way liberal democracy is under attack in Europe, in Britain, and in America, of course. And this book is the very best. And that's three books. I'll put them all on my blog and you can read them, then you can send me an email saying, "I didn't like the book you recommended. I think it's rubbish." But I think those three are the ones I would seriously recommend.

Q: [Judy] William, one of the questions is how does the EU handle the rise of the right across Europe?

A: It's not handling it, is a short answer. And it's allowed, it's been a question of appeasement again. It's not wanted to face the issue. Now it's got major problems over the collapse of the rule of law in Poland and in Hungary. It's also got the rise of the far right in Germany. I mean, the alt-right is, to all intents and purposes, fascist, and it's the major opposition party in the Bundestag. Now, doesn't that make you. It makes me. And so it's failed. Now, from a British point of view and from a northern European point of view, the Dutch, the Scandinavians, without Britain being in the EU, there is no voice loud enough for liberal democracy.

The Germans are, have their own internal problems about it. And the French, well, the French always ploughed their own furrow. So that's nothing new. But that's one of the reasons why some of us who voted to remain in the EU in Britain are so worried not just about economics, but about the political situation. But you could say in answer to that, when Britain was a member of the EU, it didn't seek to resolve any of these questions.

Although in truth, when we had the negotiation, which broke down over immigration with Cameron, Prime Minister Cameron, dealing with EU shortly before we had the referendum, Cameron's solution was a very British compromise and sensible solution, and the EU rejected it, and they were wrong to reject it. If it had not been rejected, I don't think we'd have been in the position we're now in with Hungary. But Britain's voice had always been muted within Europe. And it was never clear voice. But no, I think there's real problems with EU dealing with the far right, or if you don't like the phrase far right, the populist right. And so, I mean, the Americans listening to this know exactly the problem.

And we, in Britain, many of us feel that we ourselves are in the position of a populist government. Not quite Trumpian, but nevertheless moving along that spectrum. And there is a need to defend liberal democracy. And that's what really what Anne Applebaum is writing about in her book, "Twilight of Democracy." Sorry, I better stop.

- [Host] William, can you take one?

- Yes, I'm happy to take questions I'm happy to stay here til midnight, but I guess you probably don't, so I'll take another question. Yeah.

Q: [Host] So the future of NATO in the face of rising European nationalism.

A: This is a fascinating question. It's fascinating from a number of aspects. One, with Trump gone does not mean that Biden will necessarily be entirely pro-NATO. America's interests have always been looking towards the Pacific rather than the Atlantic. And it's likely to be doing that now in terms of its military hardware. Looking at China, Russia. One American view is that Europe should look after itself. America's paid long enough and we've got other problems. And if you can't cope the Russians on your own, bad luck. Now, I don't think that will mean that America will withdraw, but I think it will mean that America will be less anxious to put large sums of money in and get involved.

Now, Britain, of course, remains a member of NATO. In fact, Britain is very important to NATO. The present government has said we're going to have the largest Navy in Europe. I'm not sure quite what that's meant to be for, but that's what we've been told. The problem with NATO is that Germany, since the Second World War, has been less than keen on developing a solid military base. I was talking only a few years ago to a senior British officer who'd been working alongside the Germans. And I said to him, "well, is it true that the German Air Force is in such a parlour state? He said, "well, of course it is. Yes, we all know that." He said, "what you should really be worried about is the German army is in a parlour state, and Germany is in no way in a position to be a major force." Now, the French and the Germans have talked about a European army, a European force, and Britain would not be part of that. This is an EU force.

Now, if such a force was created, it would have to be paid for by the Germans. I cannot see them being keen on that. The plus from Britain's point of view is we have treaty arrangements with France, nothing to do with the European Union. Those treaty arrangements remain. We have solid military treaties with France and France and Britain together are the most powerful of the European military nations. Britain and France together are unlikely to be able to mount. So what are we going to talk about mounting?

What is NATO facing? NATO is facing the possibility of Putin doing what he's done in the Ukraine and in East Ukraine and Crimea and attempting to do it, for example, in the Baltic states or attempting to do it even in Poland at border incursions. And is Britain and France capable of holding the line? Well, they might be. And would America come in? Yes, it would have to, but could it do it quickly enough? The Baltic states, we won't go into the geography, but Russia could be in the Baltic states within about 12 hours. And there will be nothing to stop them basically. So that's a problem.

And if you say, "well, you are overimagining the Russian threat." Earlier, end of last week, this

weekend, the Russian sent a major naval flotilla into the channel, and it's passed on by NATO allies. It's passed on, I think, by Norway to us. And Britain has been monitoring the progress of this flotilla. It's the largest flotilla that Russia has sent into the channel. So that's a problem. So NATO is a problem. And it still depends upon America. It depends on Biden. Hello?

- [Host] William?

- Am I lost?

- Yes, hi.

- [Host] Yeah, so I'm sorry. We are going to have to stop now. I'm sorry to have to end your incredible presentation and there's so many very interesting questions. I wish if we could continue, but I need to.

- I know, I know.

- [Judy] Yeah, I have another meeting in five minutes. I just wanted to say thank you very, very much for an outstanding presentation. So many interesting questions.

- They were very interesting.

- [Judy] Thank you very, very much. We will chat offline. Thank you to everybody for joining us today. Thank you.

- Bye bye. Bye-bye, all. Bye-bye. Bye-bye.