



The Chamberlain- Hitler Deal



by Clement
Leibovitz

Foreword by Tony Benn

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This book is a work of scholarship of the highest order, dealing with a subject of the greatest importance, and written in a way that is easy to read and to understand, whilst being documented with meticulous care.

It is by far the best book yet published about the causes and origins of the second world war.

It throws a completely new and different light on what was happening in Western capitals as Hitler built up his armed forces for the war which broke out in 1939, and what comes out shows conclusively that those policies were policies not of appeasement but of active sympathy and support for Germany.

Dr. Leibovitz has delved deeply through a mass of letters, diaries and reports written by those most directly concerned and has traced the thread of a story that is still not understood by the general public, nor taken seriously by most of the academic world or contemporary political leaders.

We are now getting used to the publication of secret documents from the archives of the old Soviet Union and the revelations that receive the most attention are those which are designed to pour an unending stress of vilification on the communist regime and all its works.

But no comparable revelations are yet generally available that might throw an equally penetrating light on the activities of British ministers and diplomats as the Nazis and Fascists came to power in Germany and Italy.

The official account which we are all expected to accept is that, although Neville Chamberlain may have been a bit weak and rather slow to appreciate the full significance of the German military build-up, he was just a good and simple man of peace doing his best to avert war.

The truth is very different and this book brings it out in a way that is completely convincing, for it draws on all the sources to prove conclusively that there was a great deal of sympathy among the British establishment for what Hitler and Mussolini were doing.

Indeed the essence of the appeasement policy was to persuade Hitler to abandon any plans he might have for an attack on the Western Front and to give him a very broad hint — if not an outright assurance — that if he turned East he could have a free hand.

Seen in that light much of the responsibility for the war can be squarely placed upon the shoulders of the British government and those who survived that war ought to know how it came about.

The roots of the policy that was followed go back much further than 1932 or even further back than 1917 when the Russian Revolution occurred.

In an important passage in his book Dr. Leibovitz traces English history back to 1381 when the Peasants Revolt shook the King, through the English Revolution of 1649 which cost King Charles his throne and his head.

Since those events the ruling classes in Britain have always been alarmed at any sign of militancy by working people and this fear surfaced after the French Revolution and even more markedly after the overthrow of the Tsar in his winter palace in St. Petersburg.

Whatever the merits, or demerits, of the many years thereafter during which Communism was in power in Moscow, it is a plain and indisputable fact that the very existence of the USSR encouraged working people everywhere to throw off the shackles of colonial rule, and it inspired hopes in Britain too which were seen, at the top here, as being deeply threatening.

It is possible to argue — and I do — that the real anxieties in London were based, at root, on a fear, not of the Soviet generals but of the British people, who experiencing the deep slump in trade and industry could possibly have espoused socialism.

In that sense Hitler was seen as doing a very good job in destroying trade unionism, communism and socialism inside Germany and in constructing a military obstacle to any Soviet advance, and deserved discreet support.

Seen in that light it is clear that the Cold War itself did not start with the Berlin Airlift in 1948 but can be traced back to the war of intervention in 1920 when an army was sent to crush the revolution.

And it is also becoming clear from the documents now available that even before the second world war — during which the USSR, the USA, Britain and France were allies — had officially ended, the Atomic bombs were dropped on Japan as a warning to Moscow that the West had acquired a weapon of overwhelming power.

If this analysis is correct, and I believe that it is, then almost all the propaganda to which we in the West have been subjected over nearly fifty years is false.

That conclusion would indeed be the inevitable consequence of glasnost in respect to our own political archives, were the capitals of western Europe and America to be as open as they now are in Moscow.

It also becomes painfully apparent, that, in the minds of many of the key figures in this story, the last world war was regrettably fought with the wrong ally and against the wrong enemy — an argument used by Rudolf Hess in May 1941 when he flew to Scotland hoping to get this message across.

The implications of this argument are enormous for those who lived through this period, but they also have a special relevance to the situation that exists in Europe today when Communism has disappeared, Germany is reunited and dominant, and the attempts to build a federal and highly centralised Europe would entrench that German power far more successfully than Hitler would have dared to hope.

Yet that is not the real end of the story for it is no coincidence that the crisis of unemployment which has now hit western Europe and the United States is a product, at least in part, of the end of the cold war, in which the arms programmes kept capitalism going on a profitable basis, leaving it now without that prop.

The slump that has followed has re-created the fear and hopelessness that brought the fascists and nazis to power in the twenties and the thirties, and it may be that the recovery of a strong Germany and the parallel swing to the right that occurred in London and Washington in the eighties has also contributed to re-create the very conditions which Chamberlain hoped would develop.

However, the historical traditions of Socialism inside the western countries are slowly reasserting themselves. This reinforcement of socialist ideas may also have been strengthened by the return of the old-fashioned imperialism revealed in the Gulf War which has helped the non-aligned countries to an understanding of what the 'New World Order' is really about — namely the re-assertion of control by the rich industrial nations, amongst which Germany and Japan are two of the most powerful economically.

Dr. Leibovitz has therefore, in this book, done more than lay bare the evidence which helps us understand the past and has actually written a text that helps us to understand the present and the future.

For Germany does, indeed, now have a free hand in the East, Japan is the most influential country in the Far East, right-wing ideas are powerful again, and America and Britain may still have to pay a further price for the policies agreed at Munich and Berchtesgaden so many years ago.

But at least we have the benefit of this supreme work of scholarship to help us see that it does not happen again.

Tony Benn
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PREFACE

Nothing, except the trivial — dates at which events occurred — can be asserted with certainty. There are too many factors related to historical evidence that may affect the validity of conclusions. Too often, a politician states what is advisable, and not what reflects his policy. His statement may be influenced by what he wants to be found on record. Sometimes, he tries to avoid revealing unavowable objectives. In addition, negotiations and meetings are often conducted behind screens without leaving any written record. Commonly enough, the minutes of a meeting do not tell the whole story.

Diaries and memoirs are a rich source of information. Here also one must be prudent. Faulty memories, self-serving presentations, the tendency to exculpate oneself, inevitably colour the personal renderings of events. Letters to friends and relatives may be revealing but, even to a best friend or closest relative, a politician might present his actions as motivated by good intentions that cover ulterior motives.

Historians have to live with such difficulties. Their conclusions must weigh the evidence. They must go further and analyse the events, correlate them with others and present ‘the truth’ as they see it. According to the importance given to various pieces of evidence, historians may differ in their conclusions.

The most common difficulty is that of imposing on oneself the golden rule consisting in treating equally the political figures one respects and the political figures one dislikes. If facts about Churchill, for instance, are deemed insufficient to prove a given upsetting conclusion, then similar facts concerning Stalin should equally be deemed inconclusive. Evidently, when correlated with other facts concerning the two leaders, different conclusions may be admissible. Still, it is the correlation that should prove decisive, and not one’s personal preferences.

I endeavoured to adhere to that rule, and found it difficult to apply. Were I to say that I have treated even-handedly evidence about Churchill and Stalin, I would be making a subjective judgement. I therefore decided to mistrust all important evidence supporting my own conclusions. It is thus that, under close examination, some evidence that seemed at first to be very significant and had the sanction of other historians, turned out to be unreliable. It is up to the reader to decide the degree to which, in his view, I have been successful in the application of the golden rule.

While the openness of British society allows public criticism to be voiced, it does not ensure that only leaders devoted to democracy and peace

would be chosen as heads of the Government and members of the Cabinet. Yet British public opinion is committed to fairness, democracy and peace. This imposes limitations on a politician who is not devoted to these principles. The more his policies are unavowable the more he has to dress up his statements, and the justifications for his policies, with a 'façade' of respectability.

Speeches, letters, statements made by a politician might be part of the *façade*. He may be successful to the point of solidly establishing the myth of his respectability. Such a myth surrounds the personality of Chamberlain. Most of the historians and politicians who criticised his policies, did not question the nobility of his motives nor his attachment to peace and to the well-being of the people. One can, without creating any disquiet, doubt Chamberlain's political wisdom, his trust in the dictators, his neglect of the British defence requirements.

However, to question his motivations is an altogether different matter. I affirm that Chamberlain faced the option of either successfully preventing, and later resisting, Germany's policy of aggressive expansion, or allowing Germany to expand in Eastern Europe. Chamberlain was certain that Germany would end up making war against the Soviet Union. Motivated by anti-communism, he chose the second option though, in doing so, he was gambling with Britain's security. I affirm that this choice has been the object of a deal between Chamberlain and Hitler. To many people such a statement sounds cynical and sacrilegious.

These conclusions are not new but, till today, were of a speculative character though they corresponded to the conviction of such responsible people as Roosevelt, Harold Ickes, Sumner Welles, and that of numerous respected journalists who had close contacts with the governing circles of England. The strongest argument in favour of these conclusions was that the history of the period did not make sense unless it was assumed that Chamberlain did give Hitler a free hand in Eastern Europe. Further support is found in the fact that such a free hand was advocated by those leaders of the establishment whose expressed opinions were not restricted by governmental responsibilities.. Such was the conclusion arrived at, for instance, by the historians G. Salvemini and Frederick Schuman.

After the British Government released to the public most of the relevant documents covering the period of the thirties, it became possible, with the usual means of analysis familiar to all historians, to establish as a fact the deal made between Chamberlain and Hitler. It gave Hitler a free hand to pursue his aggressive ambitions in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, it can be established that the deal was not a sudden policy quirk but was the crowning of incessant efforts to encourage Japan and Germany 'to take their fill' of the Soviet Union.

Most historians, today, are reluctant to go that far. They remember how critical the establishment had been of such an interpretation when it still was just an interesting speculation. That interpretation having been discredited by

many reputable historians, it became difficult and hazardous to resuscitate it. The cold war had also its effect and increased the reluctance of many historians to accept an interpretation that would make of Britain as 'evil' an empire as the Soviet Union.

The historians' reluctance to prod further in the evidence supporting the existence of the Chamberlain-Hitler deal, may have been reinforced by the Soviet Union's attempts to establish the deal as a fact. It was felt that the Soviet Union was motivated by the need to exonerate itself — on account of the Stalin-Hitler deal — by stating that she had no choice in view of the British policy as exemplified by the Chamberlain-Hitler deal. However, the Soviet efforts did not rely on sufficient documentation and paralleled the Salvemini-Schuman thesis, though in a more dogmatic way. While these two historians were trying to explain the events by adopting what seemed to them the most plausible explanation, many Soviet publications sounded more as works of propaganda than of history research.

Historians may have felt that, had there been substance in the speculation of the Chamberlain-Hitler deal, the Soviet historians would have been able to do a better job. The trouble is that the Soviet historians have more readiness to accept the Chamberlain-Hitler deal as a fact and, therefore, are less demanding of the evidence. Similarly, an English public would demand much more convincing proof to accept the fact of the Chamberlain-Hitler Deal, than they would request to incriminate a Soviet politician of wrongful intentions and doings.

This is why the book, disregarding the chronological order, starts with establishing the deal as an irrefutable historical fact. In this way the analysis of the events and documents predating the deal can be put in the perspective of the firm knowledge of the real motivations of Chamberlain and the British Establishment. Some readers may still say: 'However true the fact of the deal seems to be, there must be some error somewhere'. Those readers should read the rest of the book. Having established in the first chapter the fact of the deal, I beg the readers to tolerate that, starting with Chapter 2, I take the Chamberlain-Hitler deal as an established event which throws light on the history of the period between the two world wars.

This book deals with events in Europe from 1917 to 1939. It is not a history of Europe for that period. It only considers such events, and such documents, that are relevant to its conclusions, whether supporting them or disproving them.

The book avoids speculations. The conclusions are based on facts and their analysis, and are, I hope, validly established. That is why it was not felt necessary to address all the cases to the contrary built by other historians. The question as to why so many of them failed to read the truth clearly written on the walls, is of great interest. A study should be made on this subject. It might reveal the relation between the social and political myths which, true or false, do influence the way historians select the evidence and give it their respective weights.

I should not be concerned, for instance, that Simon Newman, in “The British Guarantee to Poland”, asserts that Great Britain never intended to give Germany a free hand in Eastern Europe. The FACT — if the evidence I present is correct, and is correctly analysed — is that she DID. It is true, as Newman writes, that some British Cabinet members suggested to counteract the German influence in Central Europe by financial help to the countries of the region. This cannot stand in the way of the evidence presented in the present book. Besides, Chamberlain, at the time, was opposed to the idea and paid little attention to others’ opinions. In addition, there is no contradiction between giving to Hitler a free hand in Eastern Europe, while trying to retain whatever economic advantages to Britain.

Much criticism could be directed at this work. What matters, however, is the correctness of its conclusions. In this respect, no criticism can be of importance unless it relates directly to the partial and final conclusions of the first chapter, and can show that these conclusions do not necessarily derive from the evidence presented¹.

I took the liberty of stressing the importance of passages in quotations by printing them in *bold italics*. All other *non-bold italics* are either so in the original, or concern Latin or French expressions. Some readers may resent the intrusion of *bold-italics*, others may find it helpful.

Clement Leibovitz

¹ ¹ Though we assert that our conclusions necessarily derive from the analysed evidence, the conclusions would still have merit were it only recognised that I made a case for their truth, stronger than any made to the contrary.

CHAPTER I

The Chamberlain-Hitler Deal

The first world war had been long, murderous and costly. Its issue remained in doubt till the end, and, when at last the Allies were lucky enough to win, they had no doubt that, were an opportunity given to Germany to regain her military strength, she would launch another World War from which, in all likelihood, she would this time come out victorious.

The treaty of Brest-Litovsk, imposed by Germany on Russia in 1918, gave the world a foretaste of the severity with which Germany could treat a defeated country. Would the West in similar conditions have acted with more magnanimity? At the time, no one considered this question. Few were aware of the secret treaties dividing expected spoils between England, France, Italy and Russia. Not one of the Allies doubted that this German 'King-Kong' of military machines had to be kept in chains, and that the chains had better be checked constantly.

Germany was therefore compelled to accept conditions designed to drastically reduce her military power and her military production potential. The Rhineland was to be occupied by France before becoming a demilitarised zone devoid of fortifications. This would make it possible for France to easily occupy the Ruhr, were Germany to start rearming, or otherwise default on the Versailles Treaty which codified, among other things, the permanent state of military inferiority of Germany.

As an added precaution, an international organisation, the League Of Nations, was created to provide 'collective security' to restrain any aggressor by means of economic and military sanctions. The world seemed thus safe from aggression and, in particular, safe from Germany.

It was an illusion.

To the bewilderment of people who lived through those days, and that of many historians, the world did not remain safe for long. Japan was allowed to implement a policy of conquest in China. Italy was allowed to conquer Abyssinia. Germany and Italy were allowed to secure Franco's victory in Spain. And Germany, after being allowed to rearm, was allowed to remilitarise the Rhineland, to take a dangerous lead in military power and to annex Austria and the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia.

The legitimacy and advisability of each one of these actions had defenders. But why should any argument, whose validity was no greater at the time than in 1918, have suddenly carried more weight? Was the memory of the Allied leaders so short? Had they forgotten how close they had been to losing the war?

It seems paradoxical that while the defeated and prostrated Germany was considered a potential deadly danger, the Germany ruled by Hitler and rearming to the teeth induced much less fear within the British establishment.

Conciliatory approaches towards Germany were repeatedly made. While Britain's rearmament was not getting the priority required by the dangerous situation, Britain let Germany know, sometimes through regular channels and sometimes through unofficial ones, that she 'understood' Germany's claims. The fact that the satisfaction of each of these claims would result in the strategic and economic strengthening of Germany did not affect Britain's 'sympathetic' stand which could be sensed even in her official protests against Germany's acts of aggression.

It had always been Britain's policy to abstain from an alliance with the strongest continental power and prevent it from reaching a position of dominance over Europe. As a result of this policy, Britain, before World War I, reached her apogee of power and authority. After the war, she ruled over an empire enlarged with colonies taken from the defeated Germany and, for a while, got rid of a strong competitor in the world export market.

This traditional policy that had served Britain so well seemed, after the first world war, to be more necessary than ever. And still, Britain, in defiance of her long standing traditions, in defiance of the repeated warnings of capable politicians and expert civil servants, in spite of precise information on bellicose German tendencies — information which came from the British representatives in Germany — and exorbitant dreams of German expansion put in writing by Hitler for all to see, Britain endeavoured to make an alliance with Germany.

The bewilderment of many historians is best illustrated by a quotation commenting on the Munich agreement of 1938:

Munich remains a hideously incised political indictment for which, many years later, *there still does not exist a Rosetta Stone*. What did happen? Why did it happen? And, most baffling of all, how could it happen?... — these men are patently not vile. *But what are they if they are not vile? — that is the enigma.* They peer astutely from miles of film and Press photographs; they have offered us, not only their official papers but their diaries. Yet nothing jells. It is as if they were saying, 'That is all you know, and all you need to know'². (My emphasis throughout unless otherwise noted)

These men, "patently not vile", constantly expressed their dedication to peace. For peace they would sacrifice small nations. For peace they would sacrifice colonies — albeit mostly non-British ones. For peace they would accept almost anything, except "Germany's will to dominate the world". They would keep the freedom to decide what circumstances would be an

2 ² Ronald Blythe, "The Age of Illusion", Oxford University Press, 1983, pp. 227-8

indication of such a will. For peace they were ready to, and did, make a deal with Hitler.

The peace they were so anxious to achieve, was of a particular kind. Their peace would not be universal. It would be peace in the West. In their plans, there was no place for peace in the East or in the Far-East. Somehow this would not prevent them to think and state that thus, and thus alone there could be peace. The policy was called 'appeasement'. Appeasement was not for everyone. Only three countries were qualified to be appeased: Japan, Italy and Germany³.

An Early Case Of Appeasement

It is not known what Chamberlain's actions and initiatives at the time of the Munich agreement would have been, had England been as strong a military power as Germany. This missing knowledge might have indicated the measure in which his appeasement policy towards Germany was indeed due to an awareness of Britain's military weakness and to his dedication to peace.

However, there is on Chamberlain's record another case of appeasement in which, as at Munich, there also was a victim, an aggressor and the shadow of the Soviet Union in the background. At the time, the case did not make it to the newspapers. It was the object of debates in the British Cabinet and Foreign Office and centred around a suggested pact of non-aggression with Japan. The matter was kept confidential and would have been made public only if successful.

The reading of a number of documents dating from 1934 reveals Chamberlain's early⁴ interest in Foreign Affairs, as well as his strong influence over Sir John Simon, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

On September 1, 1934, Chamberlain addressed a personal and confidential letter to Sir John Simon⁵. It included the draft of a memorandum on relations with Japan in which Chamberlain exposed his views on the international situation⁶:

..I attach particular weight to your cool and analytical judgement.

...If you could bring off an agreement with Japan such as I have suggested, it would stamp your tenure of office with the special distinction that is attached to memorable historical events...

3 ³The Soviet Union had claims against Romania and Poland for boundary revisions. She, however, was not aggressively advancing them.

4 ⁴Chamberlain became Prime Minister in 1937, succeeding Baldwin. At the time, in 1934, he was Chancellor of the Exchequer

5 ⁵Sir John Simon was the Minister of Foreign Affairs

6 ⁶DBFP (Documents of British Foreign Policy), 2nd Series, vol. 13, doc. 14, p. 24

...I hope you may think sufficiently well of the idea to pursue it and that you will some day be remembered (*inter alia!*) as the author of the '*Simon-Hirota pact*'

The pact in question was to be one of non-aggression between England and Japan. The praise to Simon and the holding out of bright prospects may have been designed to sway him to Chamberlain's views. It surely indicates the great importance that Chamberlain attached to the proposition. The letter goes on:

As for the U.S.A. don't let us be browbeaten by her. She will never repay us for sacrificing our interests in order to conciliate her and if we maintain at once a bold and a frank attitude towards her I am not afraid of the result⁷.

There were, at the time, many points of friction between England and the U.S., one of them being the attitude towards Japan concerning the Manchurian crisis. However, few English politicians would have thought it wise to antagonise the U.S. unless absolutely necessary. This was one of many instances⁸ in which Chamberlain would reveal his unwillingness to take into consideration US suggestions or policies.

We now quote from the draft memorandum:

... I suggest that the paramount consideration in this matter to which everything else, home politics, economy, or desire for disarmament must be subjected is the safety, first of this country and then of the British Empire...

We note Chamberlain's priorities in 1934. Security came first, before 'home politics', economy or disarmament. He went on:

At this moment in the autumn of 1934 there is no immediate threat to our safety. But there is a universal feeling of apprehension about the future, whether it is a matter of 2, 3, 5 or 10 years, that such a threat may materialise and that the quarter from which it will come is Germany.

Chamberlain was decidedly not a naive person. Early enough he perceived the German threat and decided that meeting that threat should be Britain's first priority. He went on:

⁷ ⁷ Chamberlain can be firm when he wants to.

⁸ ⁸ It is known that Eden resigned from the Chamberlain cabinet because of the lack of enthusiasm with which Chamberlain responded to a US proposal concerning European security. We see that such an attitude on the part of Chamberlain dated from years before.

In a recent and extremely interesting survey of affairs and persons of that country Sir E. Phipps⁹ summed up his conclusions in a grave warning of the need for a strong, united and watchful Europe.

'That country' is Germany. Chamberlain seems to support the opinion of the British ambassador Sir E. Phipps. He knows exactly what must be done while there is still time: create a strong, united, watchful Europe.

However, in order to prevent Japan's hostility — while England would have to face the German threat — he now strikes a note of *appeasement*, in the direction of Japan:

...the Cabinet has already more than once expressed its concurrence with the idea that it is desirable to cultivate the most friendly relations with Japan

...It is true that various circumstances, such as the Japanese *action* in Manchukuo¹⁰, her defiant attitude towards the League of Nations and her aggressive export policy, have made her unpopular in Europe and have certainly not rendered it easier to introduce greater cordiality into our relations with her. Yet it is at least arguable that the Manchukuo *affair*, except insofar as it served to discredit the League, has not hitherto harmed us and, so long as the open door is maintained, *is actually likely to benefit British exporters*.

It is interesting to note how Chamberlain's language is coloured by his perception of British interests. There is a Japanese *action* in 'Manchukuo' as there also is a Manchukuo *affair*. As to *Japanese aggression* this is limited to her export policy. Chamberlain belittles the importance of Japanese aggression (action, affair), belittles its harmful aspect (discredit of the League), ignores the harm to the victims of aggression, and highlights the benefit to British exporters.

Chamberlain is not always revolted by the thought of war and aggression. To look forward to the improved situation for British interests resulting from Japanese aggression may be a mark of realism: it is not a mark of profound devotion to peace. Chamberlain goes on:

...Considerations of this kind had led me to the view that whatever difficulties and objections there may be in exploratory discussions with Japan just now *they are not so serious* as to outweigh the immense advantages which would accrue from a satisfactory outcome.

⁹ He was the British ambassador to Germany

¹⁰ Manchukuo is the name given by Japan to the Chinese territory of Manchuria. It also designated the puppet government imposed by Japan on that territory. The use of Manchukuo instead of Manchuria is in line with a policy of accepting the results of Japanese aggression.

This is a paradoxical position coming from a politician who so clearly perceives the German danger and the necessity of uniting Europe against a possible German aggression. Is it not setting a bad precedent to condone Japan's aggression? Does it not jeopardise the future reliance on the League of Nations when it is discredited? And, finally, is it not creating a deadly danger to the British Empire, to strengthen such an aggressive country as Japan — at a time when Japan is relatively much weaker than the constellation of USA, France and Great Britain? The year was 1934. Italy was not yet friendly to Germany, Japan and Germany were not yet bound by treaties and any one of them could be dealt with easily; even both of them could have been dealt with easily. Precisely at that time, instead of taking a stand against aggression wherever it may occur, Chamberlain is suggesting the following:

...we should endeavour to frame a Pact of Non-Aggression with Japan for a period say of ten years.

Chamberlain foresaw objections and answered them in advance:

...I have heard it suggested that whatever may have been the case in the past the Japanese are now in *so aggressive a mood* and so much under the influence of ambitious soldiers and sailors that they would not think of tying their hands by any agreement to keep the peace. This view seems to me to give insufficient weight to their *anxieties* about the Soviet Government, the only Power which really *menaces their present acquisitions or their future ambitions*. With Russia *on their flank* it seems to me that Japan would gladly see any *accession of security* in other directions.

This quote reveals the same *appeasement* spirit that will later be at work with respect to Germany. Consider, for instance, his reference to Japan's anxiety which, according to Chamberlain, should be given more weight. The anxiety is not due to Japan being threatened by the Soviet Union. Even Chamberlain does not say that. The threat, he says, is against their *present acquisitions* — the term sounds very legal; it suggests the payment of a fair price — and *against their future ambitions*.

When speaking of Japan's aggressions Chamberlain, as we saw, used the terms *action*, *affair* and *ambitions*. However when speaking of the Soviet Union with respect to Japan, Chamberlain uses the terms *threatens* and *menace*, though the only threat or menace he speaks of is that of standing in the way of a Japanese aggression — possibly by helping the victim. The expression 'Russia on their flank' suggests that Russia constitutes a danger of aggression against Japan herself, instead of being an obstacle to her expansion.

Chamberlain sympathised with Japan's anxiety concerning the Soviet threat to its ambitions. In other words, Chamberlain knew that Japan

intended to commit other *actions* and to become involved in other *affairs*. The Soviet Union stood in Japan's way and therefore, he suggested, British interest is to sign with Japan a pact of non-aggression. This is tantamount to giving Japan in the Far-East a free hand with respect to whatever is not a British possession.

A free hand? Is it an unwarranted conclusion? Chamberlain predicts that, in reaction to the proposed pact of non-aggression, Japan, 'with Russia at her flank', 'would gladly see any accession of security'.

w Such a pact would do away with the danger of British aggression against Japan. But does Japan fear British aggression? Evidently not. No such fear has been expressed in any quarter. Japan needs no pact to feel secure in this direction. She may resent the British military build-up in Singapore because it increases Britain's ability to threaten Japan's further expansion in Asia but not because it constitutes an actual threat to Japan itself. The fear is rather sensed by the British side, fear of a Japanese attack against British possessions.

w A pact that would ensure Britain's help — or at least neutrality — in case of an expected Russian attack against Japan, would evidently increase Japan's '*accession of security*'. But Chamberlain makes it clear that the Soviet Union is a threat to Japan's ambitions not to Japan itself. That shifts the 'burden' of aggression onto Japan rather than the Soviet Union. With no expected Soviet aggression against Japan, a sympathetic attitude by England in such an eventuality does not represent any *accession to security*.

w However, a non-aggression pact would be considered an encouragement to Japan's policy of expansion. It would be a free hand given to Japan for this purpose. Chamberlain shied away from such a name and preferred to baptise this free hand as 'accession of security'. This not only allowed him to avoid the blunt expression 'free hand' but seemed to legitimate Japan's future aggressions.

If there were any doubts about the meaning of the pact, it is resolved by the following lines:

...In considering the proposed action with regard to Japan I submit that if it is right in our interests we should not be frightened out of it by any fear of American objections, unless that objection be founded on ***really solid and reasonable grounds***. In the case of the proposed Pact of Non-Aggression ***the objection could not be merely to our agreeing not to settle differences by force.***

The cat is out of the bag!

Why should the United States object *merely* to Japan and Britain agreeing *not to settle their differences by force*? Does the United States

prefer they use force for the settlement of their differences? The question is so preposterous that it cannot be entertained seriously for a moment. However, Chamberlain is very serious. He understands that a pact of non-aggression with an aggressive Japan, means that *Great Britain* will not use force to interfere with *Japan's* plans of aggression. Note how Chamberlain belittles the objection — to what amounts to a free hand — by using the term *merely*. He is a master at disguise.

When Simon objected to Chamberlain's formulation of the free hand policy to Japan, Chamberlain became defensive. On September 10, 1934 he wrote to Simon¹¹:

No doubt she [Japan] would like a Free Hand in the Far East, so long as she respects British possessions there. But I did not suggest that we should give it to her... If you did not understand this my paper has been badly drafted and I must amend it...

Chamberlain's disclaimer is not convincing. His draft was quite detailed and clear.

Before leaving Chamberlain's memorandum let us note that he wrote:

Assuming that everything went 'according to plan' in our discussions first with Japan and then with the U.S.A., there would still remain to be considered our attitude towards European Powers and particularly France. Here I submit that the main point to be kept in mind is that *the fons et origo of all our European troubles and anxieties is Germany*. If this fact be constantly present to the consciousness of our negotiators they will not be too stiff with France or too insistent upon her discarding weapons which she may think essential to her safety.

Chamberlain's memo does not specify what are Japan's 'future ambitions'. We cannot suspect Chamberlain of approving them whatever they be. A pact of non-aggression could have an escape clause invalidating its application in case one of the two parties attacks a third one. But such a clause would prevent the pact from increasing Japan's 'access of security' with respect to her 'future ambitions'. Without such a clause Japan would secure England's non-interference whatever direction Japanese ambitions takes her — provided that she respects the territories belonging to the British Empire¹².

Unless Chamberlain knew what Japanese future ambitions consisted of, and unless he did not mind their realisation, it would not have been wise to

11 ¹¹ DBFP 2nd Series vol XIII, doc. 19, p. 40

12 ¹² In fact, no escape clause existed in the Anglo-Japanese treaty of 1902 which, not only gave a free hand to Japan, but obligated England to side with Japan in case the latter was in conflict with two other powers. In consequence, not only did England remain neutral after the Japanese surprise attack against Russia in 1904 but she prevented France from helping Russia since Britain would then have had to side with Japan.

give Japan a free hand. However those ambitions, apparently, did not trouble Chamberlain¹³.

Some quotations from a memorandum written by C.W. Orde, head of the Far Eastern Department, may help us find the meaning of Chamberlain's proposal. We may rely on the understanding of a public servant experienced in the use of diplomatic language and qualified to point at the implications of Chamberlain's draft. He writes¹⁴:

Since the German danger is primary[,] the effect of a pact on Russia is of the first importance. I believe it is agreed¹⁵ to be desirable that Russia should be sufficiently strong to be a potential check on Germany. If so, anything that will weaken Russia may presumably be taken as increasing the danger we have to fear from Germany. An Anglo-Japanese pact I suggest can hardly have any other effect.

Orde added:

A minor but perhaps not negligible consideration from the Russian aspect is the offence that any encouragement of Japan against Russia would cause to the Soviet Government and the worsening of our relations with them that would ensue...

If Japan is not afraid, but aggressively minded *a pact will surely bring nearer the day when she will attack Russia and then, after a pause..., proceed against the East Indies.*

Obviously, Orde was not blinded by anti-communism. Was Chamberlain? At this point it may still be too early to answer the question though Chamberlain's description of the Soviet Union being the cause of Japan's *anxiety* concerning her *acquisitions* and future *ambitions* may give credence to a positive answer. The pact, according to Orde, seems to be practically directed against the Soviet Union, but what about China? Orde goes on:

...I fear that we shall have a big price to pay in China unless we can show that in a pact with Japan we have protected China's

13 ¹³ "This advance in Japanese power was not disturbing to the British; Japan, similar in its island character to Britain, tended to be regarded as a stabilising force which might serve to prevent Soviet Communism from penetrating China.." ('The Troubled Giant' by F.S. Northedge, F. A. Praeger publishers, New York, p 274

14 ¹⁴ DBFP 2nd series vol XIII, doc. 15, p. 31

15 ¹⁵ Orde is entitled to say 'it is agreed'. The need for a Russian check against Germany was always pre-eminent in the minds of the British politicians. So much so that, as will be seen later, Balfour, after the March 1917 revolution in Russia — but before the November Bolshevik revolution — argued for Poland remaining under Russian control so as to ensure the cofrontality of Russia and Germany. Given Chamberlain's premises that, in view of the German threat, everything must be subordinated to Britain's safety, Orde's conclusions follow more logically than Chamberlain's

own interests. But how can this be done? After the tearing up of the Nine Power Treaty by Japan in defiance of world opinion ***would a new treaty protecting China against further aggression look like anything but mockery?***

Orde's memorandum scarcely had any influence on Chamberlain and Simon. They came out on the 16th of October with a common memorandum from which we quote¹⁶:

Our obligations under the Nine-Power Treaty, our trading interests in China, our right to the Open Door and ***our obligations under the Covenant rule out from the start any notion of purchasing a promise from Japan that she will leave us alone at the price of giving her a free hand.***

There is some hypocrisy in mentioning the League of Nation's Covenant as ruling out a free hand to Japan. The Covenant did not get proper support from England with respect to restraining Japan in its aggression against China. We already saw how Chamberlain belittled Japanese defiance of the League. Moreover, unless the free hand to Japan was very much in their mind, there was no reason for Chamberlain and Simon to bring out here that a free hand was ruled out.

To reject a free hand to Japan only on account of obligations and treaties displays a disregard of moral obligations. If it were not for the legal considerations, would then a free hand to Japan be acceptable? Were there no principles excluding the grant of a free hand out of hand?

The memorandum goes on:

As for China, the Nine-Power Treaty bound the contracting Powers... The story of Manchukuo shows how little Japan has observed these stipulations so far as regards the four Chinese provinces outside the Great Wall. ***That however is largely past history***, and the important thing, both for China and ourselves, is that Japanese aggression and penetration should not pass the Great Wall and invade or monopolise China proper.

Nobody mandated the authors to speak in the name of China and affirm on her behalf that the important thing is that Japan's aggression should not extend inside the China Wall, implying that the aggression outside the Walls is not that important. Great Britain would have resented a remark from anyone who dared to say that the important thing for Great Britain is that any aggression against the British Empire should not extend to England proper.

As to considering Japan's aggression on Manchuria as *past history* it is restricting too much the notion of *past*. The year is 1934 and the creation of Manchukuo by Japan over the territory of Manchuria was effected in 1932.

16 ¹⁶ DBFP 2nd series vol XIII, doc. 29, p. 61

On that basis, two or three years after an additional Japanese aggression against China, we could again speak of past history. Japan's disregard of the League's decisions would therefore also be past history. 'Past history' is an expression that can only be used by politicians who, when it comes to aggressions which do not impinge directly on their interest, lack sensitivity to moral considerations.

The memorandum by Chamberlain and Simon would be of no comfort to China, as the following quotation indicates:

While it would be difficult to frame the guarantee in such a way as not to amount to a recognition of Manchukuo and an *abandonment of the line hitherto taken by the League of Nations* in reference to it, an understanding which definitely calls a halt to Japanese penetration into China, contained in an instrument signed both by Japan and ourselves (we leave out for the moment the question whether the United States could not also be a party) would be of the greatest practical value to China and the British trade with China, as well as making a material contribution to peace in the Far East.

Such an undertaking was considered a mockery by Orde. Let us also note that Chamberlain and Simon are considering seriously an 'abandonment of the line hitherto taken by the League of Nations'. This contrasts with the regard they expressed earlier for the obligations under the League's Covenant.

What is also disturbing is the degree to which the authors are prepared to antagonise the United States. Chamberlain had underlined that Germany could soon become a serious source of trouble. This consideration motivated his proposed approach to Japan. However, Chamberlain also knew that without the help of Tsarist Russia, and that of the United States, the allies in World War I would have been defeated. Standing against Germany without these two countries would be an impossible task if Germany was allowed to rearm, and she was allowed. It must have been quite clear to any British political leader that worries about a German military revival should inspire a British desire to bring back the U.S. into play in the European political arena. Antagonising the U.S. could deepen its isolationist tendencies. The memo goes on to say:

As regards the United States, there can of course be no doubt that Anglo-Japanese approaches, designed to lead to a bilateral agreement between ourselves and Japan, are calculated, *unless most discreetly handled*, to arouse suspicion and resentment to a high degree

And, finally, the memo addresses the issue of the Soviet Union

As regards Soviet Russia, ***anything which makes Japan feel more secure tends to encourage her in an aggressive attitude towards Russia.. Japan's*** attitude in favour of a definite policy of Anglo-Japanese friendship is in part ***inspired by the desire to secure our benevolence*** in the event of Soviet-Japanese ***relations becoming extremely strained.***

Chamberlain is on record being perfectly aware of Japan's aggressive intentions towards the Soviet Union. However, instead of discouraging a potential aggressor, he considers ways allowing Britain to abstain from becoming an obstacle to Japan's aggressive designs and ensuring Britain's 'benevolence' towards a Japan attacking the Soviet Union. This he puts down in the following two convoluted sentences:

On the other hand, the fact that the relation of Japan and Russia to the League of Nations has now been reversed, Russia coming in and Japan going out, may mean, ***in the event of a Russo-Japanese war, an increased anxiety for ourselves as a member of the League.*** Therefore, the creation of especially friendly relations between ourselves and Japan ***would help to correct the balance and to maintain the neutral attitude which we should beyond question have to adopt.***

The memo explicitly expresses England's anxiety at having, as a member of the League, to side with the Soviet Union in case of a Japanese aggression against her. The way out is the creation of especially friendly relations with Japan, the expected aggressor, which would help England to maintain, 'beyond question', a neutral attitude — expected by Japan to be benevolent towards her.

The fact is that after giving a formal expression of respect to the League of Nation, Chamberlain and Simon do not hesitate to:

w propose an 'abandonment of the line hitherto taken by the League of Nations'

w propose a pact of non-aggression with Japan while acknowledging that it would encourage Japanese aggression against the Soviet Union, a proposal hardly in line with the Covenant of the League

w propose the maintenance of a neutral attitude in case of Japanese aggression against the Soviet Union, though the Covenant would recommend taking sides in applying sanctions against the aggressor¹⁷.

¹⁷ ¹⁷ Chamberlain and Simon were not the only leaders advocating a neutral attitude in case of a war between Japan and the Soviet Union. In 'Prelude to World War II' by G. Salvemini, p. 125 Churchill is quoted as saying on November 25th 1933: "British interests required us to keep out of the quarrel which had broken out in the Far East.. It was the interest of the whole world that law and order should be established *in the northern part of China*". The northern part is where

It is clear that Chamberlain and Simon are ready to pay lip service to the League while disregarding it completely in their scheme for a non-aggression treaty with Japan.

In the case of Japanese aggression against the Soviet Union, England is to maintain a neutral attitude *beyond question*. Why beyond question? Everything else is argued except this point, which is apparently beyond argument. This is even more remarkable, since Orde's memo is definitely against the proposed bilateral agreement, precisely because it would encourage Japanese aggression against the Soviet Union. In addition, the notes attached to the quoted documents reveal that Vansittart was equally against the bilateral agreement and supportive of Orde's memorandum. The matter was indeed being questioned, despite the self-confident assertion in the memo that it was beyond question.

The way the matter was presented had two evident advantages: On the one hand it was intimidating. If it is beyond question, one should not question it. Questioning would seem an impropriety; on the other hand, if it was beyond question, Chamberlain and Simon were relieved of the difficulty of defending their proposed neutrality.

It is important to notice the following:

w Chamberlain suggests a non-aggression pact with Japan. His memo is understood as recommending a free hand to Japan.

w Chamberlain takes exception to this interpretation and declares being against the policy of a free hand to Japan. He explains the misunderstanding by the 'bad drafting' of his memo.

w Together with Simon, Chamberlain presents a redrafted memo which says that international obligations rule out the granting of a free hand to Japan. Except for this statement — framed legalistically without any reference to morality, — the redrafted memo seems as 'badly drafted' as Chamberlain's previous one. In fact, though not in words, it still very clearly advocates a free hand to Japan.

Why should Chamberlain and Simon be so hesitant to give the proper and generally accepted name to the policy they recommend? The description of their policy fits in all details a policy of a free hand to an aggressive Japan against the Soviet Union. It also fits a policy of disregard of the League. Why then is it necessary for them to pay lip service to the League and to

Japan would have to clash with the Soviet Union. In the same vein, two years later, Sir Frank Clarke, President of the Legislative Council of Victoria (Australia) is quoted by Salvemini as saying: "We wish Japan well, while she confines her expansion westwards and northward, but not Southward.." (p. 125)

state explicitly the claim that a free hand to Japan is ‘ruled out’ by obligations?

Moreover, if they intend to recommend, though in disguise, a free hand to Japan, why should they remind the reader that this would mean breaking international pledges?

The reason is that as long as the words are not written and not pronounced, one can pretend they were not intended. International pledges can be forgotten as long as, on the face of lip service paid to them, one can claim they are at the centre of considerations.

When a policy is known to be either totally unpopular or at least very divisive, ‘realistic’ politicians advocating such a policy, find it convenient to proceed under a screen of evasive circumlocutions. Not giving the policy its true name becomes important.

Chamberlain’s suggestion for a non-aggression pact with Japan was presented as a measure that would allow the British government to concentrate her military might in Europe to face the greater German danger. The proposed Anglo-Japanese pact was never concluded and the German danger had to be faced without a formal appeasement of Japan. Though the matter was in the domain of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir John Simon, Chamberlain gave a lot of thought to the question.

In a letter dated May 12 1934 he wrote¹⁸:

...For the old aphorism ‘force is no remedy’ ... I would substitute ‘the fear of force is the only remedy’ ... and so ***I have practically taken charge now of the defence requirements of the country***

On December 12th 1934 he wrote about the naval conversations with Japan and America.¹⁹:

I wish I were in at the conversations but of course I have no status there and ***could only pull the strings. I hope the puppets will make the gestures I want***²⁰

And on March 23, 1935²¹:

As you will see ***I have become a sort of acting PM*** — only without the actual power of the PM. I have to say “Have you thought?” or “What would you say?” when it would be quicker to say “This is what you must do”.

18 ¹⁸ Keith Middlemas, ‘The Strategy of Appeasement’, Quadrangle Books, Chicago, 1972, p. 50

19 ¹⁹ Ibid p. 51

20 ²⁰ One of the ‘puppets’ is John Simon to whom he expressed his appreciation for his ‘cool analytical mind’

21 ²¹ Middlemas, op. cit., p. 51

Chamberlain was much respected by his ministerial colleagues but did not use his influence to advocate a firm policy toward Germany. He became in fact a steady supporter of a policy of appeasement towards Germany.

Later, it could be argued that Germany was too strong to be resisted and therefore appeasement was the only policy that would allow Great Britain to gain time. However, in 1934-5 Germany was far from having achieved a state of rearmament that would make her an actual danger; she was only a potential one. Thus, at that time, appeasement could not have been motivated by military weakness.

On March the 9th, 1935, Hitler announced that Germany possessed a military air force.

On March the 16th, 1935, Hitler proclaimed conscription laws and formally denounced Part V of the Versailles Treaty which dealt with restrictions on Germany's rearmament.

Germany was therefore in open breach of the Versailles Treaty. With the knowledge of Germany's ambitions for expansion, her unrestricted rearmament spelled a lethal danger to all of Europe. The military balance between the West and Germany was known to be still favourable to the West but would not remain so for long. Unless something was done soon, Germany would become a military power unbeatable by any European coalition.

Britain was opposed to any serious action against Germany. In order to calm France, Britain agreed to hold a meeting with Italy and France to consider adequate measures against Germany. The meeting was held in April 1935 at Stresa and reached insignificant results. It denounced Germany's unilateral action and maintained that Part V of the Versailles Treaty was still in full force. These were just words.

Two months later, the world was stunned by the announcement of the conclusion of an Anglo-German Naval Treaty allowing Germany to build her navy up to 35% the strength of the British navy²². This was a clear violation of the Versailles Treaty that Britain so recently pledged to uphold.

The significance of the Naval Treaty was that Britain, alone among the allies, was joining Germany in challenging the validity of the Versailles Treaty. In exchange for Germany's acceptance of modest Naval restrictions, Britain was implicitly recognising Germany's right to unlimited land rearmament. With Britain's help, the Versailles Treaty having become inapplicable, there was no other treaty, agreement or covenant to restrict Germany's land rearmament.

22 ²² The treaty allowed Germany a submarine force up to 50% that of Britain. Germany was authorised to increase her submarine force to 100% that of Britain if she felt the need for it. It is to be noted that Germany, not having to defend sea communication lines with an empire, could concentrate all her navy in the Baltic and become there the dominant navy power. It is also to be noted that the 35% represents a greater strength than the bare figure shows. The German navy was to be all made of new units more modern than the corresponding British units.

In concluding the Naval Treaty, Britain seemed to declare that she did not care what Germany would do on land as long as she did not become a threat at sea. If we add to this that the Locarno Treaty had established guarantees for the boundaries in the West without doing the same for the East, if we add to it the numerous occasions on which Britain specified the cases in which she would certainly go to war, and none included aggression against countries of Eastern Europe, Germany could legitimately conclude that Britain had given her an implicit free hand in Eastern Europe²³.

Though such was the understanding of many politicians and journalists of the day, the British Government was denying the validity of such sinister interpretations. We will see that when Hitler and Chamberlain tackled the subject, they did acknowledge the implicit meaning.

It is fascinating to compare on the one hand Chamberlain's statements demonstrating an acute awareness of Germany's aggressiveness and, on the other hand, his statements and Cabinet interventions against any practical measures that would put a definite check to that danger.

Diaries and Cabinet minutes reveal that the fear of communism, the fear that, in the case of Hitler's fall, communism would replace nazism, was greater than the fear of Hitler's Germany²⁴.

Either there must have occurred a shift in the Conservative grasp of the European situation or else there was no shift at all and the spectre of the German danger had been raised earlier only in order to convince the Cabinet and the British people of the need for appeasing Japan. The mood of the Conservative leadership was understood by Vansittart.

Vansittart's Warning

At King George V's request, Sir Robert Vansittart, Permanent Under-secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, sent a letter on November 7th 1935 to Lord Wigram, the King's secretary, putting on record his expert advice:

..Any attempt at giving Germany a free hand to annex other people's property in central or eastern Europe is both absolutely immoral and completely contrary to all the principles of the

23 ²³ In "How War Came", Heinemann, London, p. 22, Donald Cameron Watt writes: "For Hitler the subsequent Anglo-German Naval Agreement represented the concentration of German strength on dominion in Central and Eastern Europe and *an act of demonstrative dissociation by Britain from any resistance to these plans*. It was a voluntary sacrifice of any plans to challenge Britain on the world's oceans." It was, in short a division of spheres of influence. In a sentence just preceding that quote, Watt wrote about the treaty: "The British Cabinet accepted, *not realising* or even discussing the diplomatic consequences of their action in Europe". This is too much to take. The judgement is obviously subjective, and not warranted.

24 ²⁴ CAB 23/81 11/03/1936 : "The PM thought that at some stage it would be necessary to point out to the French that... they might succeed in crushing Germany with the aid of Russia, but it would probably result in Germany going Bolshevik" See also 'Diary and letters' by Harold Nicolson; entry of 12/3/1936 and Intervention of Lloyd George in the House of Commons on 28/11/34

League which form the backbone of the policy of this country. Any British Government that attempted to do such a deal would almost certainly be brought down in ignominy — and deservedly....

..Any suggestion that a British Government contemplated leaving, let alone inviting, Germany to satisfy her land hunger at Russia's expense would quite infallibly split this country from top to bottom, and split it just as deeply and disastrously as France is now split, though on rather different lines. This is an undoubted fact, whatever we may think of it, and I hope it will always be in the mind of our political folks²⁵.

Vansittart is warning 'any British Government'. The sentence is revealing. The idea of giving a free hand to Germany in the East, and possibly encouraging her to 'satisfy her land hunger' is not an idea in the mind of some esoteric politicians. It flourishes in governmental circles to such a degree that Vansittart is warning the King of the consequences.

The last sentence of the quote deserves a particular treatment. Let us focus our attention on its second half: "...and I hope it will always be in the mind of our political folks". It refers to the danger implicit in the granting of a free hand to Germany with respect to the Soviet Union. Vansittart thinks that it is not enough to be aware of the danger. He *hopes* that the awareness be *always* in the mind of our political folks.

Why always? Is just being aware not enough? One cannot avoid the conclusion that, in Vansittart's opinion, the tendency to give Germany a free hand has not only pervaded 'our political folks' but is also permanently on their mind. As to 'our political folks', it referred to those who count, those in control, those who belong to us, and precisely those who need always to be aware.

What Vansittart told the King was common wisdom. Predicting that a free hand to Germany against the Soviet Union would dangerously split British opinion was not that hard to do. It is precisely this split, the reluctance of public opinion to go along, which forced the British government to stop its military intervention in the Soviet Union in the early

25 ²⁵ Ian Colvin, 'Vansittart in Office', Victor Gollancz, London, 1965, p. 51. H. Nicolson has the following diary entry on April 28, 1936:

26 I lunched alone with Robert Vansittart at his house. Van was extremely pleasant and friendly. His view is that a German hegemony in Europe means the end of the British Empire and that we have no right to buy Germany off for a generation by offering her a free hand against the Slav countries. Once she had established herself in an unassailable position she will turn round upon us and we shall be too weak to resist.

27 The Free hand to Germany is a recurrent theme opposed by Vansittart. The matter was not being argued between Vansittart and Nicolson. Vansittart mentioned it because the idea was 'in the air'.

years after its creation²⁶. Chamberlain was well aware of that. Intervention and free hand were not to be alluded to in public.

Chamberlain and Simon are not the only English leaders using a special language to advocate a policy which cannot be avowed publicly. We find it convenient to give a name to this special language and we will call it 'knowese'. 'Knowese' is the ambivalent language whose true meaning can be understood by a class of people, the people 'in the know'. It is designed to convey to this class a precise non-popular meaning, while its plain English version remains publicly defensible as being innocent and moral²⁷.

We will later study the revealing case of N. Henderson, British ambassador to Germany, who after pages expressing his 'free hand' policy in a language that has all the appearances of high morality — a classical example of 'knowese' -, decides to be blunt and re-expresses his theme in plain language, thus providing a 'dictionary' allowing us to translate from 'knowese' to plain English. We will find out that the usage of knowese was quite pervasive among accountable politicians while politicians who, for different reasons, were temporarily without governmental responsibility, would not shy away from expressing the same opinion in plain English.

Free Hand And The Foreign Office

Chamberlain would not have preached a plain English version of appeasement unless it had large support from the ranks of the Conservative party and from the British people in general. However, the 'knowese' appeasement, the real policy behind that expressed in plain English, while obviously lacking popular support, could not be implemented unless here

28 ²⁶ Andrew Rothstein, 'The Soldiers' Strike of 1919', The Macmillan Press Limited, London, 1980, pp. 37-85

29 ²⁷ The Orwellian 'Double Speak' has a subliminal value. Calling a missile 'Peace Maker' does not suggest that the missile cannot possibly cause destruction and deaths. Describing the bombing of an enemy's country as 'surgical operation' does not suggest to anyone that the bombing will heal the people on which they will fall. However, the repetition of such Orwellian expressions has an anaesthetic property on the critical faculties.

30 'Knowese' is different. A knowese word or expression or form of speech conveys two truthful and different meanings. When Chamberlain and Henderson claim that they work for peace, they are saying the truth. However their claim is 'knowese' in so far as only the people 'in the know' are aware that by 'peace' Chamberlain and Henderson really mean 'peace in the West'. When the same two leaders speak of the need for a 'general settlement' with Germany, they express their true intentions. By not detailing the outlines of the 'general settlement' the people are allowed to think that the intention is to find some way for the redress of some just German demand, and for acceptable compromises in the economic sphere. Only the people in the know are aware that a 'general settlement' is a way to provide security to a France willing to renounce a Franco-Soviet mutual assistance treaty. Such a 'general settlement' would allow the West not to be involved by a German aggression against the Soviet Union.

31 In short 'double speak' is a soporific use of euphemisms. Knowese is a truthful language in a form which conveys two meanings, one for the masses, and a different one for a restricted class of knowledgeable people.

and there it had the enthusiastic support of influential people in the Foreign Office, in the Press, in the Parliament and in other institutions.

We may consider for instance a Foreign Office document which illustrates the thoughts prevailing in the department. It is written in plain English and gives the real meaning of various concepts, meaning never explained to the public.

'General settlement'. It is a concept that comes out over and over again in talks, speeches, letters and other documents. In plain English it means that there are problems to settle, the general character of which would derive either from the number of parties involved, or from the number of problems involved, or from both.

However, in most cases, the expression was used with respect to a 'general settlement' between England and Germany. The generality of the settlement had to be derived only from the multiplicity of the problems.

We then learn, for instance, that 'general settlement' is an agreement to be reached with Germany giving sufficient security to France to induce her to renounce (later, to denounce) her treaty with the Soviet Union, so that the West would not be involved in the defence of the Soviet Union should she be attacked by Germany.

We quote from a document, quite explicit on the subject, originating from a political figure who does not have the reputation of being an 'appeaser'²⁸:

1. Russia is really afraid that Germany, in combination with Poland, is planning to *expand in the East*.
2. She therefore wants to have her western frontiers defended against Germany and Poland, more especially in the event of a Russo-Japanese war.
3. The obvious power to do this is France, but France can only be induced to assume this new commitment if she can get something in return.
4. So long as France is frightened about her own security, she thinks a Russian guarantee would be of value to her, and will be prepared to pay for it by guaranteeing Russia's western frontier.
5. It is therefore to Russia's interest that France should not achieve by other means the security which she is looking for because if she does she will no longer require Russia's help, or at least will not be so ready to pay the price for it.

32 ²⁸ Memo by O. Sargent, February 7, 1935, DBFP 2nd Series, vol. XII, doc. 428, pp. 501-2. At the time, Sargent was Assistant Under Secretary in the Foreign Office. He would later become Permanent Under Secretary

6. *The proposed 'General Settlement' with Germany, and the proposed Air Agreement for Western Europe are both intended to afford France the security which she is looking for.*

7. They are both therefore objectionable to Russia and we must expect her to do her utmost to prevent either of them from materialising.

8. One of the weapons Russia will use for this purpose is the argument that if France does not come to the defence of Russia's western frontier, Russia will come to terms with Germany, and face Europe with an aggressive German-Russian Alliance.

9. I submit that this is bluff and ought to be challenged whenever possible.

10. If Russia really thought it so easy to bring about a Russo-German Entente she would not be so frightened about her western frontier as she is.

11. *If Germany and Poland had no plans for future penetration towards the East they would not be so opposed to the Eastern Pact in its July form as they are*²⁹.

12. Nazism has two fundamental principles. The fight against the Jews and ***the fight against Communism***. However much Hitler may compromise on other subjects he cannot compromise on these without destroying the *raison-d'être* of his system. For this reason a return of Germany to the policy of cooperation with Russia however much desired by the Reichswehr and the industrialists is possible only at the cost of overthrowing the Nazi regime and Hitler personally.

13. *Even so the need of expansion will force Germany towards the East as being the only field open to her, and as long as the Bolshevik regime exists in Russia it is impossible for this expansion to take merely the form of peaceful penetration.*

How to give France enough security? If France does not feel secure confronting the Germany of the day, how could she feel secure against a Germany reinforced by a victory over the Soviet Union? This remains a mystery to be solved by 'a general settlement'. And since a disengagement of the West from reciprocal obligations towards Russia³⁰ are to result from an

33 ²⁹ The Locarno agreements of 1925 guaranteed the security of the four western countries Britain, France, Germany and Italy. France had allies in Central and Eastern Europe whose security was vital for her. The suggested Eastern Pact was an attempt at complementing the Locarno Agreement by security measures for the East.

34 ³⁰ The Franco Soviet Pact of Mutual Assistance had been agreed upon on December 5th 1934 and would be signed on May 2nd of 1935.

understanding with Germany, we have to call it in plain English a negotiated 'free hand' given to Germany to attack the Soviet Union.

We see that the 'smell' of a 'free hand' to Germany in the East was in the air. But this does not mean that it was given explicitly. A 'general settlement' with Germany was deemed a preliminary necessity. The question remains to discover whether the free hand was ever discussed with Germany and then granted to her.

Since 'knowese' jargons are often the way for expressing what is being kept from the public, it becomes essential to discover the Anglo-German jargon for a free hand and to establish the legitimacy of its interpretation.

It is worthwhile to note that:

w Sargent's memo was written in 1935 at a time when the military balance between the West and Germany was still very much in favour of the West, though it was known that this would not remain so for long

w the memo displays the certitude that Germany is intending to expand at Russia's expense

w England, as a member of the League of Nations, was pledged to stand with the victim of aggression against the aggressor

w nevertheless Sargent recommends a solution that will give a free hand to Germany in the East.

We have noted Orde's and Vansittart's concerns that a policy of appeasement of Japan may deprive the Western countries of a Russian restraint over Germany. From this point of view, a free hand to Germany would be a major strategic blunder. Would the military stand for it?

The Opinion Of The Military

The Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) held meetings in early 1937 to review the international situation from the military point of view. Its findings were approved at a meeting attended by Neville Chamberlain. Let us quote important passages³¹.

*...With expansion eastward in her mind it is doubtful whether Germany has any real wish to enter into any treaty of mutual guarantees between the five Western Powers unless it is constructed in **such a form** as to leave her free to pursue a policy of expansion in Eastern and Central Europe, which, in conjunction with her antagonism to Communism, clearly **tends to lead Germany into conflict with the U.S.S.R.***

35 ³¹ DBFP 2nd Series vol. XVIII, pp. 965-987

CID and Chamberlain are therefore aware that Germany has expansion eastward in her mind and that there is little hope for a 'settlement' with Germany unless a free hand is given to her for expansion in Eastern and Central Europe which would *clearly* lead to war with the Soviet Union.

It is important to note that the derivation of a free hand from the "form" of an agreement rather than from its explicit content is here a CID concept. There are things gentlemen do not need to say; it is enough if the 'form' hints at them. Therefore, when 'delicate' matters are to be considered by historians, the form must get at least as much attention as the explicit content.

Under such conditions, were the West unwilling to give Germany a free hand in Eastern Europe, British statesmen negotiating with Germany would have had to be very careful to avoid any ambiguity in form or content that could be construed by Germany as granting a free hand. In fact, this could be a touchstone allowing the historian to conclude whether a free hand had been granted or not. Let us continue the quotation:

As a further consequence her relations with Czechoslovakia, which has a defensive arrangement with the Soviet Government, have become strained, and the suspicion has arisen that Germany's plans for expansion may take the form of an attempt to destroy Czechoslovakia, either by a process of disintegration or by direct attack.

In retrospect, the CID displayed a keen understanding of Germany's plans and an appreciable ability for correct prediction. What is especially noteworthy is that the CID is aware that the destruction of Czechoslovakia (by disintegration or by direct attack) is, for Germany, but a steppingstone towards further expansion eastward which, let us remember, would involve war against the Soviet Union. Here, there is not a word about a legitimate right of self-determination for the Sudeten people. Britain was not taken in by the German propaganda.

But how does this all fit with British interests? Let us quote more:

Strategically, the future of the United Kingdom, and with it the future of the British Empire, is closely linked with that of France. If Germany crushed France she would dominate all Western Europe and would gain power and position which would subsequently render the situation immensely difficult for the United Kingdom.

The last paragraph merits some attention. It indicates the vital importance of preventing a French defeat at the hand of Germany. The CID report proceeds:

British military interest in central Europe or eastern Europe *is only indirect*, but in whatever part of Europe war might start, there would be grave risk that it would spread to involve other powers.

If, for example, Germany were to develop an expansionist policy *Eastward*, she might, as matters now are, be opposed by both France and Russia under their Treaty obligations. Thus the war would have spread to Western Europe, and we might become involved....

Apart from these considerations, if war should break out in Central or Eastern Europe, *our policy must be dictated by our interests*. In any case, it would obviously be of the highest importance to prevent the extension of the war *to Western Europe*, where a vital British interest would be involved.

Although at the moment it is possible, though by no means certain, that Germany has renounced all intention of expansion westward, the French pacts with the USSR, Poland and Czechoslovakia *keep alive the danger* that, in the event of an act of aggression by Germany in Eastern or Central Europe, France may become involved on behalf of her Eastern allies, thus extending the war to Western Europe. The possibility of Germany achieving her aims at territorial expansion in Europe, as a result of *peaceful changes*, lies outside the scope of this report, but we are bound to say that we feel *considerable doubt as to this proving practicable*.

Let us note the following:

w Britain knows it is futile to negotiate a Western settlement with Germany, without a readiness to give her, in the appropriate form, a free hand in Eastern Europe which will lead Germany into conflict with the Soviet Union.

w British military interest in Central and Eastern Europe is only indirect and non-vital.

w The trouble is not so much a German war of expansion *Eastward* but the fact that French pacts with the Soviet Union and other Central and Eastern European countries 'keep alive the danger' of extending to Western Europe hostilities that should be kept confined to Eastern Europe where no vital British interest is affected.

This stand is in complete conformity with that of Sargent's memo discussed earlier.

The CID does not exclude the possibility that Germany may still have some tendency to expand westward. But, while seeing the danger, it prefers to ignore it, and to magnify the danger of French alliances. Without these alliances, Britain is safe. Germany then may expand in the East and make war on the Soviet Union without England's involvement. In plain English, that position, if advertised, would give a free hand to Germany to attack the Soviet Union in the East, starting with Czechoslovakia. Even without advertising, it represents a choice: that of not interfering with Germany's known ambitions provided the resulting German-Soviet conflict would be prevented from spreading to the West.

The report goes on to underline the aggressive nature of the German military machine, the great rate of increase in the airforce, the already dominant position of the German navy in the Baltic³² and that soon the German army would be more numerous, and much better armed, than in 1914. It nevertheless concludes that Germany is not yet ready for war.

This realisation of the German danger does not prevent the CID from singling out as dangerous the French reciprocal agreements with the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Poland³³.

The CID does not attempt to study the effect on the military balance that would result from a disintegration of Czechoslovakia and its effect on the military position of France, whose safety is deemed to be vital to Great Britain. No study is presented which considers the data on the increase of German population, the decrease in length of the overall German frontier lines, the loss of Czech defence fortifications and possibly the transfer of Czechoslovakia armaments and armament factories to Germany that would result from an incorporation of the Sudeten regions of Czechoslovakia, or all of Czechoslovakia, into the German Reich.

With the experience derived from the First World War, with the avowed recognition that Germany's ambitions could, after all, be directed against the West, only a powerful motivation, transcending the strictly security considerations, could have lead the CID to reach conclusions so totally at odds with Britain's vital interests.

For further clarification we quote the CID considerations concerning Japan:

Japan is aiming at hegemony in the East, just as Germany is in Europe...

36 ³²The Anglo-German Naval agreement (1935) allowed a German build-up of its Navy up to 35 percent of the strength of the British Navy. In view of British imperial commitments (particularly in the Far-East) and in view of the better aerial protection for the German Fleet (if only for distance considerations), the Naval agreement conferred to Germany a dominant naval position in the Baltic.

37 ³³Chamberlain's change of heart towards Germany in March 1939, must therefore have had other reasons than caring for Czechoslovakia and Poland.

In 1937, Japan's aggressive 'actions' and 'affairs' are not therefore 'past history'. The CID document goes on:

Japan's further expansion in Mongolia *will not bring her into direct conflict with us*; but penetration into Central and South China and her economic policy in the Western Pacific impinge directly on British interests...

Japanese military aggression is liable to force her into hostilities with the USSR.

...If the strength of the Soviet forces in the Far East is increased, Japan might be deterred from such further expansion in North-West China as might result in hostilities with the USSR. Consequently, there is the possibility of Japan turning towards expansion in a southern direction... From the military aspect, therefore, we warmly support the efforts of our diplomacy to adjust the differences between Japan and ourselves, to which such a change of direction of Japanese policy might give rise..

...In the Far East.. the Soviet position is stronger.. Consequently, in the event of war between the United Kingdom and Japan, *the assistance of the USSR might be of considerable value*

No objections against Japan expanding to the North and coming in conflict with the Soviet Union. CID draws the parallel between the aggressiveness of Japan in the East and that of Germany in Europe. It reaches similar conclusions. Aggression against the Soviet Union (in both cases) does not involve any British vital interest, though the Soviet Union could be of great help in case Japan expanding in the South China direction would embroil England in war.

The pattern is the same. In spite of the community of interests between the Soviet Union and Britain, despite the fact that England may need Russia's help to defeat Japan's aggression, the conclusion is reached that no vital interest is threatened by Japan going to war against the Soviet Union. The defeat of a potential ally is of no vital interest! Two countries facing the same aggressor are not supposed to be concerned for the security of each other!

Once more, only a powerful motivation, transcending strictly security considerations, could have lead the CID to reach conclusions so totally at odds with British vital interests.

The consistency of opinions between Chamberlain, Simon, Sargent and the CID is remarkable. It was not modified in any essential manner by changes in the situation brought about by the passage of time. The thinking is the same whether Germany is still very weak or growing stronger, whether appeasement is to be directed towards Japan or towards Germany. In both

cases there is the common thread of expecting an aggression against the Soviet Union and deciding to remain out of it 'beyond question', though questions of strategy and imperial interests abound.

In this respect it is worthwhile to consider a unique document. It is unique for having been written first in 'knowese', and then in plain English.

Bilingual Talk: 'Knowese' And Plain English

In a report³⁴ dated May 10th 1937, included in a letter to the Foreign Office dated July 20th 1937, Neville Henderson, the new British ambassador in Germany, exposed his views on the political situation. He started by enunciating the fundamental principles of British national policy:

A. The defence of Great Britain and the British Empire,
and

B. The maintenance of peace in Europe and throughout the
world

Taking it for granted that each country will look after its own interests first, the only remaining principle in Henderson's view is the maintenance of peace.

Peace is a recurring term with politicians. This was particularly true in the Thirties. The memory of World War I was still fresh and clouds announcing the next conflagration were gathering on the horizon. A politician had better be perceived as working for peace.

However, Henderson's letter was not written for the public. There were no votes to be gained, no public reputation to protect, no public support to be sought. It was a genuine expression of Henderson's commitment to peace.

In this same letter, Henderson suggests in plain English that Germany be given a free hand to use force against the Soviet Union. It means, of course, to make war against her. This does not look at all like a peaceful policy.

Henderson is not an uncharacteristic British diplomat. Before him, Lord D'Abernon, British ambassador to Germany in the twenties, had made similar suggestions. They are mentioned in his published diaries, symptomatically titled 'An Ambassador for Peace'. Once more, peace can be made compatible with the use of force against the Soviet Union.

Henderson was to replace Phipps in Germany. The latter displeased Prime Minister Baldwin by not being sympathetic enough to Germany's aspirations. Baldwin was advised to replace him by someone more like D'Abernon³⁵. Henderson, no doubt, fitted the bill in one important respect:

38 ³⁴ DBFP 2nd Series vol. XIX, p. 98

39 ³⁵ T. Jones, 'A Diary with Letters 1931-1950', Oxford University Press, London, 1954, p.208

his professed dedication to peace, and to a forceful liquidation of Bolshevism in the Soviet Union.

Henderson is convinced that England has no alternative but to follow a moral policy in the defence of peace. He goes on:

...we shall have to be inspired by our conceptions of moral principles...

..But the sum of the matter is this: our attitude towards German aspirations must be based in the end not on the Treaty of Versailles.. but.. on peace and peaceful evolution.

...if Great Britain's influence in Europe and on the side of peace is to be effective and justifiable, friendship with France must never be exclusive

..The above premise is indispensable in respect of a fifth but international and moral policy of Great Britain, namely:

E. Support of the ideals and vital principles of the League of Nations.

How can this stated concern for morality, peace and commitment to the League square with what Henderson writes next in his memorandum:

On the other hand, though Germany must be regarded as the most formidable menace of all at the present moment, there is no reason, provided she does not *ruthlessly* disregard the vital principles of the League of Nations or revert to a policy of naval and overseas rivalry or of a renewed *push to the West*, or deliberately threatens us by air, why — *restless and troublesome though she is bound to be* — she should perpetually constitute a danger of war *for us*.

Henderson's memo makes it clear that he does not mind a German 'push to the East' provided enough care is taken with 'form' that it could be said that the principles, though violated, were not 'ruthlessly' abused.

Henderson continues:

..Just as Great-Britain must be strong by sea and in the air so must Germany *in self-defence*³⁶ be so also in the air and by land.

40 ³⁶Henderson is perfectly aware of Germany's aggressive ambitions. Henderson goes so far as encouraging giving her a free hand in Eastern Europe. The expected German act of aggression would not be possible were Germany to be prevented from being strongly armed in the air and on land. In the latter part of the document, Henderson will 'go blunt'. Here, however, and though he is not addressing the general public, he feels necessary to qualify as *defensive* the German rearmament, in spite of all his own evidence to the contrary. Sometimes, it may be necessary to read a document between the lines. In the case of documents written by Henderson, this is not difficult.

Henderson adds:

..The obstacles to an Anglo-German understanding are, it is true, extraordinary formidable. Quite apart from Germany herself, the Nazi regime, her traditional mentality and character and her *inevitable urge* towards unity and *expansion*, it is not to the interest — for obvious reasons — either of *Italy*³⁷ or *Russia* to witness its consummation. And, though it is difficult not to feel convinced that it would be to her ultimate interest, it would be exceedingly hard to obtain the cooperation of France, who has her own ideas as to what is her own best national policy. Yet can we go forward without France?

It would seem therefore that the first objective must be to convince France that she must and can rely only on us to *guarantee her security as part of an understanding with Germany*.. *Even* so, France will be very reluctant on grounds of prestige and amour-propre, quite apart from security, to renounce her quasi-protectorships over Poland and the Little Entente, as well as the military obligations and guarantees of her alliance with Soviet Russia. Yet if she is not prepared to do so, it will be hopeless for Great Britain to attempt to reach an understanding based on French cooperation.

As we have seen, Orme Sargent, one of the clearest minds in the Foreign Office³⁸, was, nonetheless, of a similar opinion. Henderson goes on:

The alternative, however disagreeable and only as a last resort, would then be **a direct Anglo-German understanding based on French security and integrity but including some guarantee of neutrality in the event of a Russo-German conflict.**

Sounds familiar. This clearly is an advocacy for a free hand to Germany to attack Soviet Russia.

Henderson goes on:

And Germany herself? That Hitler himself and most Germans would prefer an alliance with Great Britain to any other is almost certainly true. Is, however, British friendship, tolerance or even *negative acquiescence* possible when the aims of German foreign policy are frankly stated? In other words is Germany prepared to pay a reasonable price and one which we can *honourably* accept for British friendship?

41 ³⁷ Henderson wrote his report before Germany's annexation of Austria, which was thought to be opposed by Italy.

42 ³⁸ See 'Obituaries from NEW YORK TIMES 1961-1970, October 24 1962.

At last Henderson is restraining British ‘tolerance’ and ‘negative acquiescence’ to what can be ‘honourably’ accepted by Great Britain. Henderson’s concept of what is honourable will appear soon. He goes on:

In his valedictory dispatch.. Sir Eric Phipps sums up the aims of Germany as follows:

1. The absorption of Austria and other Germanic peoples (e.g. the German fringe of Czechoslovakia).
2. Expansion in the East.
3. Recovery of Colonies.

In themselves none of these aims need injure purely British national interest...

Expansion in the East is an elastic term. If the national integrity and independence of her neighbours were safeguarded, His Majesty’s Government **would not be justified** in actively objecting to a political and economic predominance which the German armies and German industry and population will in any case ensure of their own volition.

The elastic term “expansion” has been replaced by a “political and economic predominance” not affecting the national integrity and the independence of the neighbours. An elastic term has been replaced by the mystery of transforming a political predominance over a foreign country into independence and national integrity.

Let us note that Henderson is not against opposing Germany’s predominance etc... he is only against ‘active’ opposition. If English public opinion requires an opposition to Germany’s expansion, then, by all means, let us oppose, *but not actively*.

We close with a last and most important quotation from Henderson’s memo:

So long as Germany loyally observes ..her present undertaking *to limit her fleet.. and is prepared to make an Air Pact with Great Britain, we can at least be confident that, whatever other ambitions she has, they are not directed against the British Empire... If Germany is blocked from any Western adventure.. have we the right to oppose German peaceful expansion and evolution in the East?..*

Surely our right course is to be prepared to submit, **provided we secure peace to the West**, without too great discomfort to the surge and swell of restless Pan-Germanism in Central and Eastern Europe. It is true that the idea of leaving a comparatively **free**

hand to Germany eastward will alarm and dissatisfy a section of public opinion....

To put it quite bluntly, Eastern Europe emphatically is neither definitely settled for all time *nor is it a vital British interest and the German is certainly more civilised than the Slav*, and in the end, if properly handled, also *less potentially dangerous to British interests* — One might even go so far as to assert that *it is not even just to endeavour to prevent Germany from completing her unity or from being prepared for war against the Slav provided her preparations are such as to reassure the British Empire that they are not simultaneously designed against it.*

It is to be noted that the *blunt* language contradicts totally the refined one. There is now, bluntly speaking, no talk of peaceful evolution, peaceful political domination (with due respect to territorial integrity and independence). Still there is a concern for morality, and it is in the name of morality (it is not JUST to oppose) that Henderson reveals the blunt version of the policy he is advocating.

Henderson's diplomatic talk is transparent enough. It could not be made public. Nothing of it transpires in his book 'Failure of a Mission' in which he describes the policies he recommended and how he failed in the mission of preserving peace. However, his blunt talk is as dangerous as the disclosure of a secret code to the enemy (in this case the public). Such blunt talk is normally taboo. Only the privileged should have access to the true meaning of "peace, peaceful evolution, independence, superior civilisation, peaceful expansion, general settlement, tolerance and negative acquiescence" etc.. etc.. In fact, by comparing Henderson's blunt talk to his non-blunt talk, it is possible to establish a translation table from 'knowese' to plain English.

What makes Henderson's memo important is that

it parallels to an appreciable measure the opinions expressed by Simon, Chamberlain, Sargent and the CID

it was written at the start of his mission as an ambassador. If his opinions had indicated that he was not fit to represent Great Britain, it would have been necessary to replace him before he caused too much damage; he was not replaced.

he could verify in a personal conversation with Chamberlain the identity of their views³⁹.

he voiced openly what many leaders, and particularly Chamberlain, were convinced of

43 ³⁹ N. Henderson, 'Failure of a Mission', G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1940, p. 7

w it is a good illustration of a jargon debunked by one who used it so well.

What Chamberlain Knew At Munich

He knew the nature of the Nazi regime (internal repression and external aggression). We saw that he was aware of reports from Ambassador Phipps that left no doubt as to the odiousness of the internal repression and the avowed aggressive plans of expansion. Eden circulated to the cabinet relevant extracts from ‘Mein Kampf’ to make sure that all cabinet members were aware of the readiness of the Nazis to perjure themselves and to justify anything that would help their aggressive plans.

He knew that the annexation of Austria had been accomplished as a result of threats⁴⁰.

The whole cabinet was also aware of the fact that Hitler had suppressed the communist movement in Germany, on all occasions expressed his aversion to communism and the Soviet Union and was stating that Nazi Germany was the bulwark against communism.

Here is a summary of that part of Chamberlain’s knowledge — from his attending the CID meetings (and other sources) — which is of relevance to his meetings with Hitler:

w Germany: A country with aggressive tendencies directed towards the East and possibly — but less likely — towards the West. Has many times violated solemn pledges⁴¹. Its military power is great and fast increasing. She is not willing to reach an understanding with England unless it is done in a form that gives her a free hand to the East. Professes an extreme anti-communism

w Czechoslovakia: A democracy in the best western traditions. Was created at the peace conference after World War I with the full support of England. Known to have a strong army, modern armament factories and excellent fortifications. Object of German aggressive designs as a first step to further expansion in the East.

w The Soviet Union: A country which is likely to be the target of a German aggression — possibly with Poland’s help — and of a Japanese aggression. Its treaty relations with France and Czechoslovakia are to be considered a source of danger for the West. In the case of a German move eastward, these treaties may cause the war to extend to the West.

44 ⁴⁰ The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan David Dilks editor, Cassell, London, 1971, p. 61, entry of 11/3/1938

45 Also, Keith Feiling, ‘The Life of Neville Chamberlain’, Macmillan, London, 1946, p. 341

46 ⁴¹ The remilitarization of the Rhineland (1936), for instance, was in violation of the Locarno Treaty freely signed by Germany in 1925, and recognized as such by Hitler

w General: A German expansion to the East cannot be the result of a peaceful evolution.

The Smoking Gun

From the minutes of a Cabinet meeting held on May 3 1939 we read:

The Prime Minister said that *the first time* the idea of a free hand in Eastern Europe had been mentioned was, he thought, at his interview with Herr Hitler at Berchtesgaden⁴².

In fact, the notion had been often mentioned before. The only possible interpretation is that it was the first time that *Hitler* had mentioned it to *him*, or vice-versa. Moreover, a ‘first time’ is very suggestive of the fact that it was not the only time. The free hand must have been mentioned between Chamberlain and Hitler on more than a single occasion.

Chamberlain and Hitler met only on three occasions at Berchtesgaden, Godesberg and Munich. Since it is possible to distinguish in the first meeting (precisely the one mentioned by Chamberlain) a distinct flavour of a free hand being discussed, it becomes clear that Berchtesgaden, as indicated by Chamberlain, is precisely the place where the free hand was first mentioned.

This is reinforced by the fact that ‘I think’ is a very common expression in Chamberlain’s style of speaking expressing a thoroughness for precision in the choice of words, with proper allowance to the fact that memory could play some trick.

Were it not for Chamberlain’s assertion that the free hand policy was indeed mentioned at Berchtesgaden it would have been impossible to assume it without risking being accused of exceeding the proper bounds of interpretation.

Now, we can, on the authority of Chamberlain himself, examine the Berchtesgaden discussion as mentioning the granting of a free hand (but not necessarily granting it). However, before dealing with what went on at the meeting, let us examine what were Chamberlain’s expectations. In a letter to his sister he writes on the 11th of September 1938:

There is another consideration... and that is the plan... if it came off, it would go *far beyond the present crisis*, and might prove the opportunity for bringing about *a complete change in the international situation*⁴³.

47 ⁴² CAB 23/99 0.122. The meeting was discussing Hitler’s denunciation of the Anglo-German Naval Treaty in April 1939 in response to the British guarantee to Poland. Inskip remarked that Hitler seemed to believe that Britain had given Germany a free hand in Eastern Europe. Chamberlain’s quote was in answer to Inskip.

48 ⁴³ Keith Feiling, *op. cit.*, p. 360

The ‘plan’ is explained to his sister in a letter dated the 19th of September 1938 which refers to his Berchtesgaden visit⁴⁴. The first letter was written before the visit while the second letter was written just after. The second letter mentions that it is a continuation of the first. It is written in an enthusiastic spirit and does not give any indication of the author being disappointed about the results of the meeting. He had great expectations, and the mood of the letter is that of a very satisfied person. What went on at this meeting must be considered with the understanding of Chamberlain’s great expectations of going ‘far beyond the present crisis’ and bringing about ‘a complete change of the international situation’.

There exist two documents recording what was said at that meeting. One was written by Chamberlain from memory and after the event⁴⁵. The other was the minutes of the meeting as recorded by Dr. Paul Schmidt, the German translator for Hitler. The two versions are very similar; they are both included in the DBFP (Documents of British Foreign Policy). Whenever they differ — and they do not differ on the essentials — Schmidt’s version is more likely to indicate what was said in the meeting, while Chamberlain’s version may clarify what he had in mind. We will mostly quote from Dr. Schmidt’s minutes that are likely to be more precise⁴⁶. According to him Chamberlain said at the very beginning of the meeting:

...He, Mr. Chamberlain, however, regarded the Fuhrer as a man who, from a strong feeling for the sufferings of his nation, had carried through the *renaissance* of the German nation with *extraordinary success*. He had *the greatest respect for this man*⁴⁷.

Let us proceed with Schmidt’s text:

He had come to Germany in order to seek by means of a frank exchange of views, the solution of the present difficulties. He

49 ⁴⁴ Ibid p. 363

50 ⁴⁵ DBFP 3rd series, vol 2, doc. 895, p. 338

51 ⁴⁶ Dr. Paul Schmidt had minuted a great number of meetings between German and English politicians. Nobody questions the reliability of his minutes and his translations. What adds to his respectability is the fact that he was a member of an anti-Nazi group.

52 ⁴⁷ This was not just introductory courtesy. The duke of Cobourg, a German descendant of Queen Victoria and an Eton schoolfellow of Eden and Chamberlain went to England in January 1936. His family ties and personal relations made him a popular figure. The knowledge that he was close to the German leaders increased the interest of English political personalities in holding conversations with him. He reported the discussions to the German authorities [DGFP January 1936, Doc. 531, p. 1061]. The whole report makes fascinating reading. Eden, for instance told the Duke that “Mussolini’s domestic policy was excellent, his foreign policy was bad.” Lord Monell “expressed regret that, tied as he was by the constitution of the State, he was not, as Germany was, in a position to clear the Communists out of the shipyards.” Chamberlain invited the duke to dinner. The duke reports as follows about their conversation: “Chaimberlain [sic] hates Russia. His son has studied in Germany and has heard Adolf Hitler speak in Munich. His accounts are so enthusiastic that Chaimberlain [sic] would very much like to see the Fuhrer himself one day.”

hoped.. that on the basis of this exchange of views.. he could then, with double confidence, ***work further for an Anglo-German rapprochement.***

Is this ‘rapprochement’ what Chamberlain had in mind when he wrote about ‘far beyond the present crisis’ and ‘a complete change in the international situation’? Let us refer to Chamberlain’s version:

...I thought we might perhaps usefully devote this afternoon to a clarification of each other’s point of view so that each might know exactly what the other had in his mind, ***leaving, perhaps, the Czechoslovakia problem till tomorrow.***

The Czechoslovakia problem threatens to develop into a world war. But it can be left till ‘tomorrow’ so that the afternoon be devoted to an exchange of views which would, according to Schmidt’s version, lead to an Anglo-German rapprochement. What ‘goes far beyond it’ must come first. This is very natural; if there was no ‘understanding’ there might have been no reason to sacrifice Czechoslovakia.

To better understand the meaning of the ‘rapprochement’ suggested by Chamberlain, it is worthwhile taking a short leave from the events at Berchtesgaden to refer to a letter written by Chamberlain to King George VI on September 13th 1938, two days before meeting Hitler⁴⁸.

...reports are daily received.. Many of these (and of such authority as to make it impossible to dismiss them as unworthy of attention) declare positively that Herr Hitler has made up his mind to attack Czecho-Slovakia ***and then to proceed further East.*** He is convinced that the operation can be effected so rapidly that it will be all over before France or Great Britain could move and that they will not then venture to try to upset a fait accompli.

On the other hand, Your Majesty’s representative in Berlin has steadily maintained that Herr Hitler has not yet made up his mind to violence. He means to have a solution ***soon — this month —*** and if that solution, which ***must be satisfactory to himself,*** can be obtained peacefully, well and good. If not, ***he is ready to march if he should so decide.***

At first sight it would seem there is very little difference between the two kinds of information. In the first case Hitler has made up his mind to attack Czechoslovakia (and then to proceed further East), while in the second case he would attack within two weeks if he is not ‘soon’ given peacefully what ‘must be satisfactory to himself’. Hitler not having ‘made up his mind to

53 ⁴⁸ J.W. Wheeler-Bennett, ‘King Georges VI’, The Macmillan Company of Canada, Toronto, 1958, p. 346

violence' would therefore mean, according to Chamberlain himself, that before having recourse to violence Hitler would give the West a chance of capitulation.

Even if we consider the first kind of information as more reliable, there could be no doubt that Hitler would willingly accept a peaceful solution 'satisfying to himself' i.e. a complete capitulation to his demands, were it offered to him. The real difference is that the first kind of information does not exercise any pressure in the direction of a capitulation to Hitler, while the other does.

To attach so much importance to such a subtle difference can only be interpreted in one way: capitulation to Hitler is essential. A German military invasion of Czechoslovakia would make British public opinion totally opposed to an Anglo-German rapprochement, while a capitulation disguised as a 'peaceful solution' could facilitate the public acceptance of such a rapprochement. Chamberlain goes on:

In these circumstances I have been considering the possibility of a sudden and dramatic step which might change the whole situation. The plan is that I should inform Herr Hitler that I propose at once to go over to Germany to see him.. I should hope to persuade him that he had an unequalled opportunity of raising his own prestige and fulfilling what he has so often declared to be his aim, namely the establishment of an *Anglo-German understanding* preceded by a settlement of the Czecho-Slovakian question.

The aim is the Anglo-German understanding. It has to be preceded by a settlement of the Czecho-Slovakian question. Chamberlain is not clear about the 'understanding' but he gives a hint:

After sketching out the prospect of Germany and England as *the two pillars of European peace and buttresses against communism*, I should suggest that the essential preliminary was the peaceful solution of our crisis.

Germany is now, according to Chamberlain, one of the two pillars of European peace. We should note that two is the exact number, not three to include France. France with a popular front in its recent past, is not reliable as a buttress against communism and is therefore not a pillar of European peace.

Chamberlain seems to repeat himself. He said before that an Anglo-German understanding is to be preceded by a settlement of the Czechoslovakia question. Now he affirms that the peaceful solution of 'our crisis' (Czechoslovakia obviously) is a preliminary to the prospect of Germany and England as the two pillars of European peace and buttresses against communism. The repetition makes it clear that what was called Anglo-German 'understanding' in the first version is now called 'a prospect

of Germany and England as the two pillars of European peace and buttresses against communism'. This gives a new meaning to 'understanding'

We should note that, only three paragraphs after Hitler is said (on very reliable authority) to have decided to attack Czechoslovakia *as a first step to proceed towards the East*, he is hailed as a "pillar of peace" and a "buttress against communism". This was also the view in February 1937 of the CID which was more specific in explaining that 'to the East' meant against the Soviet Union. This gives a new meaning to 'peace', and its 'pillars'.

What can be the peaceful solution Chamberlain has in mind? This can be seen from his knowledge that Hitler 'means to have a solution soon — this month — and that it must be 'satisfactory to himself' otherwise he would have recourse to violence.

How then can a 'peaceful solution' satisfactory to Hitler be reached? Chamberlain has the answer:

Since I assume that he will have declared that *he cannot wait* and that the solution must come *at once*. my proposal would be that he should agree that, after both sides had laid their case before Lord Runciman and thus demonstrated the points of difference, Lord Runciman should act as a *final arbitrator*. Of course I should not be able to guarantee that Dr. Benes would accept this solution, but *I would undertake to put all possible pressure on him* to do so.

To assume about Hitler that 'he cannot wait', that the solution must come 'at once' and that a peaceful solution 'must be satisfactory to himself' means that **THERE IS NO ROOM FOR ARBITRATION**.

Runciman's proposed arbitration is therefore an indecent comedy. The outcome is known in advance. It must be pleasing to Hitler and thus requires the imposition of pressure on Benes. Unless Chamberlain knew in advance the outcome of Runciman's arbitration, he could not have felt as confident as he was that the sole opposition to it would be that of Benes. The proposed arbitration is obviously a veil to mask the capitulation. This gives a new meaning to 'arbitration'.

Eden reports Chamberlain as saying (about the failure of the non-intervention policy to prevent intervention in the Spanish civil war) that what matters is the 'façade'. It is clear that, once more, concerning the Czechoslovakia problem, it is the façade that matters⁴⁹. The façade this time

54 ⁴⁹ Keith Feiling, op. cit., p. 299

55 The Following is quoted from 'The Last Lion' by William Manchester, , p. 421. "Writing his sister of the Duce's Albanian adventure, Chamberlain complained, not of Italian aggression, but of duplicity: 'What I hoped when I went away on Thursday was that Musso would so present his coup as to make it look an agreed arrangement & thus raise as little as possible questions of European significance'." Chamberlain gives a lot of importance to 'making things look'. He needs to be able to rely on a 'façade' to dupe the public.

is an indecent and fake arbitration followed by a so-called peaceful solution imposed on Czechoslovakia by 'all possible pressure'.

With the knowledge of Chamberlain's intentions and expectations, we can now go back to the Berchtesgaden meeting. According to Dr. Schmidt, during an exchange of opinions preceding the discussions of the Czechoslovakia problem Hitler told Chamberlain:

Germany had limited the strength of her fleet, of her own free will to a certain proportion of British naval power. The *precondition* for this agreement was, *of course*, the mutual determination *never again to make war* on the other contracting party. If, therefore, England were to continue to make it clear that in certain circumstances she would intervene against Germany, the precondition for the Naval agreement would cease to hold, and *it would be more honest for Germany to denounce the agreement*⁵⁰.

Never again to make war against a Germany determined to expand! It meant in short: Germany takes Austria and Britain does not intervene. Then Germany takes Sudetenland and Britain does not intervene. The process could continue with Germany taking whatever belongs to her sphere of influence and Britain not intervening. Otherwise — that is to say, unless Britain can now pledge never to make war against Germany — Hitler would denounce the pact. There would be no misunderstanding about the British sphere of influence. The regions of vital interest for her had been defined in a number of political speeches by Eden, Simon, Halifax and Chamberlain himself. It included France, the low countries, the British Empire, Egypt and Iraq (the latter two countries were formally independent and, in reality, English dependencies). It did not include Central or Eastern Europe.

Now, Chamberlain was in a difficult situation. On the one hand, he could deny that a relation existed between the Naval Treaty and the free hand implication of 'never again to make war'. Then, Hitler would denounce the Naval Treaty. On the other hand, Chamberlain could accept the obvious relation but, by doing so, he would transform the implicit free hand into an explicit one. Chamberlain, apparently, did not relish to be put in this uncomfortable position. He preferred to have his cake and eat it too. Twice he tried to Have Hitler accept that the relation between the Naval Treaty and the obligation not to make war between the signatories, though existing and reasonable, did not preclude the possibility of war between Britain and Germany. The first attempt was rather awkward, if not downright stupid.

On the British Prime Minister interpolating the question whether this denunciation would be contemplated by Germany before a conflict broke out *or at the outbreak itself*, the Fuhrer replied that, if England continued to recognise the possibility of

56 ⁵⁰ DBFP 3rd Series, vol. 2, doc. 896, p. 344

intervention against Germany, while Germany had herself concluded the Naval agreement with the intention of never again making war on England, a one-sided disadvantage for Germany must ensue; it would therefore be more sincere and more honest in such a case to terminate the treaty relationship.

Denunciation of a naval treaty in case of war 'at the outbreak itself', sounds ridiculous. Denouncing the treaty only makes sense if it is done in time of peace.

The subject is abandoned for a while and the discussion moves to the Czechoslovakia problem. However, Chamberlain seems to give great importance to the concept 'never again to go to war against each other'. He returns to the question:

With regards to the Fuhrer's remarks about the Anglo-German Naval agreement, the British Prime Minister observed that he could quite understand the German attitude up to a certain point. A very reasonable agreement had been made about naval strengths *in the belief that there could be no question of war between the two countries*. If conditions had now so altered that the possibility of a war must be taken into account, the basis of the naval agreement had, indeed, disappeared. Up to that point he could follow the Fuhrer, but he must add that no proper distinction was made on the German side between a threat and a warning. When two people are on the point of going into conflict with one another they must be perfectly clear in advance of the consequences of such a conflict. Britain had acted in this sense, and had made no threats but had only uttered a warning. It was now the business of the Fuhrer to make a decision on the basis of these facts which were known to him. No reproach could be made against England for giving this warning: on the contrary, she could have been criticised for failing to give it.

Chamberlain concedes the correctness of the relation made by Hitler between the Naval Treaty and 'there could be no question of war between the two countries'. At this point, he could have proceeded ahead and move for instance to the Czechoslovakian problem. Instead he goes on to keep alive the possibility of war in changed conditions.

The reader can hardly prevent himself from a feeling of unreality. It is as if things do not seem to be what they really are. On the one hand, Chamberlain did not come to Germany to deliver a warning. The letter he sent to the King reveals his real intentions, his desire to conclude an anti-communist alliance with Germany. Within such alliance there were no reason for Chamberlain to consider the possibility of war between "the two pillars of peace".

However, if we remember that, according to Chamberlain himself, they were discussing the matter of a free hand to be given to Germany, his attitude indicates a reluctance to let that free hand be as explicit as Hitler wanted it to

be. If Britain can reserve, in some circumstances her freedom of action with respect to Germany, the free hand stops to be that free and that explicit. If Chamberlain succeeds, he will be in position to credibly deny that the implicit free hand implied in the Naval Treaty, has been spelled out in his meeting with Hitler. In fact, it was already spelled out, but in a way which did not satisfy Hitler. It was as if Chamberlain had told him: "Yes, you have a free hand, but one never knows what complications can still occur". Hitler would not go for it.

..the Fuhrer declared that he must adhere to the fundamental view whereby the basis of this treaty was to be seen simply and solely in ***a kind of obligation⁵¹ of both parties in no circumstances*** to make war on one another. If therefore England showed from time to time that she must, nevertheless, in certain circumstances, reckon with a conflict against Germany, the logical basis of the Naval Agreement was done away with. While one party undertook a voluntary limitation of its naval strength, the other party left all possibilities open; and it was precisely at the moment when a warning was given that the disadvantage for the former party made itself felt⁵².

Now the free hand is totally spelled out. Not only is the Naval Treaty an indication of a hope, or a reasonable expectation, that there would be no war between Britain and Germany, but it has now become an "obligation on both parties ***in no circumstances*** to make war on one another". Hitler was forwarding to Chamberlain a *mise en demeure*: to immediately accept an obligation for both parties, in no circumstances to make war on one another, under pain of the abrogation of the Naval Treaty. This challenge, the blatant explicit request for a free hand, the nature of which was recognised by Chamberlain⁵³, had to be dealt with. It could either be rejected or explicitly accepted. To ignore it, would be an implicit acceptance which, nevertheless, would not satisfy Hitler

Chamberlain thanked the Fuhrer for the explanation. He did not take exception to what Hitler said nor did he give the requested undertaking. The whole matter was given serious attention during the meeting. It was not just a matter of niceties and empty diplomatic formula. It was full enough of

57 ⁵¹ Chamberlain was among the people who approved a CID document which stated that Germany would refuse any agreement with Britain, unless it is ***in such a form*** as to give her a free-hand in Eastern Europe where she is expected to collide with the Soviet Union. A ***kind of obligation never to go to war*** is a proper form for a request for a free-hand.

58 ⁵² Ibid, p. 346

59 ⁵³ We said earlier that Chamberlain, in a Cabinet meeting, has later stated that Hitler, at Berchtesgaden, mentioned the question of free hand. Thus the matter is no subject to doubt. Even without Chamberlain's statement in the Cabinet, we could have been certain that Hitler's language had been understood by Chamberlain as a free hand request. To suppose otherwise is to attribute to Chamberlain an incredible degree of stupidity, especially for a person on record for being well aware that a free hand request can be made by form, rather than by content, and is a prerequisite to any Anglo-German settlement.

meaning and consequence for Chamberlain to come back to the matter and put himself on record that changed circumstances might allow Britain to consider the possibility of war. This was at the first meeting between Chamberlain and Hitler. It was not made public though it was mentioned by Chamberlain to his Cabinet.

According to Chamberlain's own notes:

He then launched into a long speech.. all he wanted was Sudeten Germans. As regards the 'spearhead in his side' he would not feel safe unless the Sudeten Germans were incorporated in the Reich; he would not feel he had got rid of the danger until the abolition of the treaty between Russia and Czechoslovakia

I said: 'Supposing it were modified, so that Czechoslovakia *were no longer bound to go to the assistance of Russia if Russia was attacked*, and on the other hand Czechoslovakia was debarred from giving asylum to Russian forces in her aerodromes or elsewhere; *would that remove your difficulty?*'

Hitler referred to the Russo-Czechoslovakia treaty as a danger to Germany. In his reply Chamberlain is more candid and faced the real eventuality: an attack against Russia. Chamberlain understood him quite well. It would have been a loss of time to try to meet Hitler's non-existent defensive qualms. From the CID report approved by him, he knew that Germany wanted a free hand in this respect. He knew that an understanding with Germany is only possible if 'it is constructed in such a *form* as to leave her free to pursue a policy of expansion in Eastern and Central Europe, which, in conjunction with her antagonism to Communism, *clearly tends to lead Germany into conflict with the U.S.S.R*'. Chamberlain went straight to the point. By his answer, he demonstrated that, in his dictionary, Hitler's defensive language represented aggressive intentions towards Russia.

Here, Chamberlain had the opportunity of dissolving all doubts. However, on this very special occasion, the first face-to-face meeting between the two leaders, Chamberlain did not put Hitler on notice that an attack on the Soviet Union would mean serious trouble with Britain. On the contrary, though knowing that Germany wanted a free hand, faced with a transparent request for a free hand, he decided not only to give it but to entice Hitler in the Russian direction. If there were obstacles, he would eliminate them.

Chamberlain again met with Hitler at Godesberg on September 22 and on the 23rd. This last meeting ended in the early morning hours of the 24th. Kirkpatrick was present and took notes. He was acting as the translator⁵⁴ on

60 ⁵⁴ At the Berchtesgaden meeting there was no translator in the English team. After Ribentrop's discourteous refusal to give a copy of Schmidt's minutes to the English delegation, it was decided that, next time, the British would bring their own translator.

the English team while Dr. Paul Schmidt was the translator on the German team.

Chamberlain reported by telephone to Halifax that the first meeting on the 22nd had been most unsatisfactory. Kirkpatrick's notes show that the next meeting was no less discouraging. Hitler and Chamberlain argued about the nature of a memorandum and about a matter of fact: which of Germany and Czechoslovakia had first mobilised its army. Chamberlain was clearly frustrated to realise that on a matter on which he was very well informed he could be contradicted by Hitler.

Nevertheless his report, first at a meeting with a restricted number of Cabinet ministers, and then with the full Cabinet, sounds rather positive. On both occasions, he abstained from reporting a private meeting he had with Hitler just before taking leave from him. Kirkpatrick did not attend this meeting. Dr. Paul Schmidt, was the only witness. He described it as follows⁵⁵:

..at 2:00 in the morning Chamberlain and Hitler took leave from one another *in a completely friendly tone* after having had, with my assistance, an eye to eye conversation. During the meeting, with words that came from his heart, Hitler thanked Chamberlain for his efforts for peace. He remarked that the solution of the Sudeten question is the last big problem which remains to be treated. Hitler also spoke about a German-Anglo rapprochement and cooperation. It was clearly noticeable that it was important for him to have a good relation with the Englishman. He went back to his old tune: "Between us there should be no conflict", he said to Chamberlain, "*we will not stand in the way of your pursuit of your non-European interests and you may without harm let us have a free hand on the European continent in Central and South-East Europe*. Sometime we will have to solve the colonial question; but this has time, and war is not to be considered in this case". (my translation⁵⁶)

Hitler seemed to summarise the situation as he understood it. There were no 'ifs' in the described division of spheres of influence. It was not in the form of a proposal awaiting an answer. It looked as if he already had the answer, possibly in the clarification he made, and accepted by Chamberlain, of the meaning of the Naval Treaty or, possibly, in a part of the conversation not reported by Schmidt. He, justifiably, interpreted Chamberlain's readiness to ensure Czechoslovakia's neutrality, in case of an attack against Russia, as an encouragement in this direction. The acceptance of Hitler's interpretation

61 ⁵⁵ Dr. Paul Schmidt, 'Statist Auf Diplomatischer Buhne 1923-45', Athenaum-Verlag, Bonn, 1949, pp. 406-7

62 ⁵⁶ Here is the original German text of the italicized sentence: "wir werden Ihnen bei der Verfolgung Ihrer auereuropaischen Interessen nicht im Wege stehen, und Sie konnen uns ohne Schaden auf dem europaischen Festlande in Mittel- und Sudosteuropa freie Hand lassen."

of the meaning of the Naval Treaty must also have been understood by Hitler as a free hand.

In order to be fair to Chamberlain, within the measure in which facts can be stretched, we may suppose that Chamberlain did not then consider that he had given a free hand to Hitler. In such a case, Hitler's assertion that he will respect British extra-European interests and that he expects a free hand in Central and Eastern Europe must have come as a shock. Chamberlain is not the man who would have knowingly left Hitler with a false impression that the British interests were only extra-European. He was not a man who, knowingly, would have allowed Hitler to keep the false impression that, by remaining silent, Chamberlain had acquiesced to let Germany have a free hand.

Chamberlain, however, does not manifest any astonishment or opposition. He cannot ignore that Hitler's talk on spheres of influence parallels what went on at Berchtesgaden in a different form. At the time, he discussed the matter of the Naval Treaty from all possible angles. He did not let Hitler get away with any statement without challenging him, at the least disagreement. This was also what he did at these last meetings at Godesberg.

Schmidt's record shows that, just after this conversation, the mood became a particularly good one. Would this have been possible had Chamberlain opposed Hitler's expansion plan as just revealed to him by the mentioning of a free hand?

Let us stretch the fact to the limit. Let us say that at 2:00 in the morning, Chamberlain was in no mood to start again a conversation on a new theme. Let us suppose also that he failed to see the importance of challenging Hitler at this very moment, if only by stating that Britain could not agree to a division of spheres of influence.

However, even if Hitler was not summarising the situation, even if he was just requesting a free hand in Central and South Eastern Europe, this could not fail to reveal to Chamberlain — if he did not know it already — the extent of Hitler's ambitions. Chamberlain, however, came back to London with a rosy report to his Cabinet. The minutes of the Cabinet are revealing⁵⁷:

Did Hitler mean to go further? The Prime Minister was satisfied that Herr Hitler was speaking the truth when he said that he regarded this as a racial question. He thought he had established some degree of personal influence over Herr Hitler.. Herr Hitler had said that if we got this question out of the way without conflict, *it would be a turning point in Anglo-German relations. That to the Prime Minister, was the big thing of the present issue.* He was also satisfied that Herr Hitler would not go back on his word once he had given it.

63 ⁵⁷ Ian Colvin, 'The Chamberlain Cabinet', Victor Gollancz, 1971, p. 162

Chamberlain was told by Hitler the kind of turning point in Anglo-German relations he was expecting. Chamberlain says that 'this was the big thing of the present issue'. He does not warn his colleagues of Hitler's ambitions in Central and South-East Europe; he does not mention Hitler's 'request' for a free hand in these regions.

The matter did not end at the Godesberg meeting. It was again considered at Munich. Let us quote from the declaration issued by Chamberlain and Hitler at the end of a private meeting following the signing of the Munich agreement.

..We regard the agreement signed last night and the *Anglo-German Naval Agreement* as symbolic of the desire of our two peoples *never to go to war with one another again*⁵⁸.

This declaration is being made only fifteen days after the connection between the Naval treaty and 'never again going to war' had been debated in detail and understood as a request for a free hand. It is being made only nine days after Hitler mentioned, without being challenged by Chamberlain, that there would be no harm to Britain in letting Germany have a free hand in Central and Eastern Europe. This declaration had been prepared in advance by Chamberlain.

Strang⁵⁹, who wrote it down under Chamberlain's dictation, objected then to the mention of the Naval Treaty "which", said Strang, "was not a thing to be proud of"⁶⁰. But Chamberlain insisted that it be incorporated. We now know why. At Berchtesgaden, Chamberlain, while indicating his readiness to give Hitler a free hand with respect to the Soviet Union, hesitated and somewhat resisted giving it in the form suggested by Hitler. At Munich, no longer hesitant, Chamberlain, specifically handed over to Hitler the 'free hand' in the form he had withheld at Berchtesgaden. This time it was Chamberlain who took the initiative of explicitly associating 'never to go to war' with the Naval Treaty using precisely the very language which, in Berchtesgaden, could be described as 'free handing' (as acknowledged by him in May 1939). Faced with the choice of either having the Naval Treaty denounced or having its free hand meaning explicitly spelled-out, Chamberlain chose the latter.

Chamberlain, having approved the CID report, knew that Czechoslovakia would be a steppingstone towards expansion in the East and military conflict with the Soviet Union. He was at the Cabinet meeting on November 1937 when Halifax reported on his meeting with Hitler in Germany⁶¹:

64 ⁵⁸ DBFP, series 3, vol. 2, annex to doc. 1228, p. 640

65 ⁵⁹ At the time he was the head of the Foreign Office Central Department.

66 ⁶⁰ Lord Strang, 'Home and Abroad', Andre Deutsch, London, 1956, p. 147

67 ⁶¹ CAB 23/90, p. 165

..he would expect a beaver like persistence in pressing their aims in Eastern Europe but not in a form to give others cause — or probably occasion — to interfere..

To which the Prime Minister (Chamberlain) commented:

There would be nothing to prevent the Germans from continuing what Lord Halifax called their 'beaver-like' activity, but he would regard that as less harmful than (say) a military invasion of Austria.

This beaver-like activity was mentioned by Hitler himself when he said to Chamberlain at Berchtesgaden (Schmidt's version):

..The Fuhrer replied that Czechoslovakia would, in any case, *cease to exist after a time*; for, apart from the nationalities already referred to, the Slovaks were also trying with all their energy to detach themselves from that country.

We also noticed that Chamberlain was offering Hitler a modification of the Czechoslovakia alliances so that the latter country should not be under obligation to get involved in case of an aggression against the Soviet Union.

Whoever observed the conviction and enthusiasm with which Chamberlain was triumphantly raising, shaking and deploying the written after-Munich personal agreement with Hitler, cannot doubt that, in Chamberlain's mind, it had a tremendous value. Indeed for him it meant 'peace in our time'. We will see that in Chamberlain's dictionary 'peace' meant 'peace in the West'.

On October 12, 1938, in a conversation with Joseph Kennedy, the U.S. ambassador to Britain, just twelve day after Munich, Halifax recognises that Britain intends to 'let' Hitler have a free hand in Eastern and Central Europe. On November 1st, one month after Munich, Halifax spells out to Phipps, British ambassador to Paris, the extent of the free hand given to Germany as a result of the Munich Agreement. These documents will be dealt with in chapter 13.

MUNICH'S EPILOGUE

Soon after the Munich agreement, disappointing news reached the British government. They all corroborated the suspicion that, against all expectations, Hitler intended to start his main aggression in the direction of the West.

In order to ensure that Germany, in such a case, would have to fight on two fronts, Britain guaranteed Poland against a German aggression, rightly thinking that the guarantee would be reciprocal, and reciprocal it soon became. In response, Hitler denounced the Anglo-German Naval Treaty. He

said that the treaty was incompatible with Britain's intervention in Germany's sphere of influence.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF THE BOLSHEVIK THREAT

From the very start, the allies took an adverse attitude towards the Bolshevik revolution. A superficial look at the events would find this natural enough since the Bolsheviks signed a peace treaty with Germany. It apparently, meant the collapse of the Eastern front against Germany. There was however a more basic reason for the Allies' dislike of the Bolsheviks.

A concerted effort was made to discredit the regime. Official statements were issued containing accusations of a grave nature which would justify the stand of non-recognition towards that government, as well as military intervention for the dual purpose of answering the necessities of the war against Germany, and helping the Russian people to overthrow a regime it was supposed to hate.

What the people were asked to believe was one thing, and what the allied leaders knew to be true was something different. The accusations made against the Bolshevik leaders were at odds with the facts.

The Disintegration Of The Russian Army

A 'Committee to Collect Information on Russia' produced a report on February 25th, 1921, and presented it to Parliament by Command of His Majesty (Cmd. 1240). It was named the Lord Emmott Report. We quote from it⁶²:

...By the autumn of 1916 a large number of officers and the majority of the intelligentsia — patriotic, active and resolute — had been led to the conviction that a state of affairs had arisen which could not be allowed to go on. It has been said that, eighteen months before the revolution broke out discipline in the army had begun to be affected as a result of the disorganisation both at the front and in the rear and the enormous casualties sustained, and that revolution became a common subject of discussion among the officers in the messes of the Guard regiments.(p.13)

..It has been seen that discipline was undermined *before the revolution*, that the rank and file were weary of war, that the officers of the Russian army did not command as a whole the respect and confidence of their men, and that a gulf was thus created between them (ibid., p15).

68 ⁶² W.P. Coates and Zelda K. Coates, 'Armed intervention in Russia', Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, 1935. The book contains a wealth of reliable information otherwise available in widely dispersed sources.

At the time, the Bolshevik leaders were not yet popular and many of them were either in Siberia or out of the country. How could they be blamed for the inability of the Russian army to proceed with the war against Germany?

The report goes on to show that by the time of the March revolution, which was hailed by the Allies as representing the democratic will of the people, the Russian army, as a fighting machine, was already destroyed.

In short, the Western leaders were informed by their own qualified committee that the disintegration of the Russian army was not caused by the Bolsheviks. Though the report was written in 1921, the facts were well known to the Allied leaders even before the Bolshevik revolution. Bruce Lockhart wrote⁶³

I deprecated as sheer folly our militarist propaganda because it took no account of the war-weariness which had raised the Bolsheviks to the supreme power...

I think that in their hearts the Cabinet realised that Russia was out of the war for good, but with an obstinate lack of logic they refused to accept the implications of their secret beliefs. *Hate of the revolution and fear of its consequences in England were the dominant reactions of the Conservatives..*

According to Lockhart, it is the war weariness that raised the Bolsheviks to power. Lockhart is convinced that the Cabinet was aware of this. He knew the evidence, he knew it had been communicated to the Cabinet, and he knew it was convincing.

George F. Kennan, the American expert in Russian affairs and, at the end of WW II, the main theoretician of the 'containment' policy writes⁶⁴:

The sad fact is that by the spring of 1917 nothing the Allies might have done could have made Russia once more a serious factor in the war. The entire Russian economic and political system had by this time been overstrained by the military effort.

"By the spring of 1917", the Bolsheviks were not yet in power.

Nobody denied that the Bolsheviks had a majority in the elected Soviet Assembly. The accusation that the Bolsheviks were not representing the will of the Soviet people was based on the fact that they dissolved the Constituent Assembly which had been convoked before the Bolshevik revolution. It is therefore of interest to note that, on January 18, 1918, one day before its

69 ⁶³ Bruce Lockhart, "Memoirs of a British Agent", Putnam, London, 1932, p. 197. Bruce Lockhart was a 'British agent' in Russia. This title was given to him *in lieu of* Ambassador, in view of the policy of non-recognition of the Bolshevik Regime

70 ⁶⁴ Georges F. Kennan, "Russia and the West", Mentor books, New-York, 1961, p. 35

dissolution, the Constituent Assembly met in Petrograd (renamed later Leningrad) and issued a declaration from which we quote⁶⁵:

Expressing, in the name of Russia, its regret that the negotiations with Germany, which were started without a preliminary agreement with the Allied democracies, have assumed the character of negotiations for a separate peace, the Constituent Assembly in the name of the peoples of the Russian Democratic Federative Republic takes upon itself the further carrying on of negotiations with the countries warring with us, in order to work towards a general democratic peace, at the same time protecting the interest of Russia.

As Coates remarks, “had the Constituent Assembly been able to take over the Government of the country, it too would have continued negotiations with the Central Powers.” Therefore, whether we consider the Soviet Assembly or the Constituent Assembly as representative of the will of the Russian people the conclusion remains that, with respect to the peace negotiations with Germany, the Bolsheviks did represent the will of the Russian people.

Caring For Democracy In Russia

The British Establishment, as we shall see in chapter 4, did not relish democracy in Britain. It did not mind having as an ally Tsarist Russia, notorious for its autocratic and repressive regime.

In view of Britain’s rule over a large colonial empire, it seems quite hypocritical for her to pretend to care for democracy elsewhere. Britain, of course, always pretended to rule the empire in the interest of the colonial peoples which, it was claimed, had not yet reached a stage of development justifying self-rule and independence.

Rarely did an English leader express himself openly on Great Britain’s motivation for ruling its empire. The English Cabinet member (Home Office) Sir William Joynson-Hicks, who later became Viscount Brentford, was an exception. He said in a speech⁶⁶:

We did not conquer India for the benefit of the Indians. I know it is said at missionary meetings that we conquered it to raise the level of the Indians. That is cant. We conquered India as the outlet for the goods of Great Britain. We conquered India by the sword and by the sword we should hold it. (“Shame.”) Call shame if you like. I am stating the facts.. but I am not such an hypocrite as to say we hold India for the Indians. We hold it as the finest outlet for British goods in general, and for Lancashire cotton goods in particular.

71 ⁶⁵ Coates, Op. Cit., p. 49

72 ⁶⁶ Ronald Blythe, op. cit., p. 27

Such frankness from leaders of the Establishment was not very common. In the case of the military intervention in Russia, Britain found it convenient to state that she was motivated by principles of democracy and by her respect for the will of the Russian people.

In his book 'The Catastrophe' on page 315, A.F. Kerensky writes:

On the streets of Moscow pamphlets were being distributed entitled *Kornilov, the National Hero* (original italics). These pamphlets were printed at the expense of the British Military Mission and had been brought to Moscow from the British Embassy in Petrograd in the railway carriage of General Knox, British military attaché. Aladin.. this once famous politician.. became an extremely suspicious adventurer. This discredited man brought to General Kornilov a letter from Lord Milner British War Minister, *expressing his approval of a military dictatorship in Russia* and giving his blessing to the enterprise. This letter naturally served to encourage the conspirators greatly. Aladin himself, envoy of the British War Minister, was given first place next to Zavoiko in the entourage of General Kornilov.

There is no reason to doubt the veracity of Kerensky's accusations. He was strongly opposed to Bolshevism and had no interest in inventing a story against Britain. Moreover his accusations are corroborated by Commander H.G. Grenfell, British naval attaché to Russia who stated in a letter in 'The Manchester Guardian' on November 20, 1919:

The Corps Diplomatique, incapable of realising that the peasants and workmen, 95 per cent of the nation, had in fact more political weight than the remainder, the Allied Embassies, influenced, moreover, by their military attaches and military missions, then threw all their energies into backing Kornilov against the Provisional Government..⁶⁷

This, at a time at which the Provisional Government was recognised by the Allies and hailed as a democratic government representing the will of the Russian people.

President Wilson, too, did not care too much for democracy. On May 29⁶⁸, 1918:

He remarked that he would go as far as intervening *against the will of the Russian people* — knowing that it was eventually for their own good — providing that he thought the scheme had any practical chance of success.. We must watch the situation

73 ⁶⁷ Quoted from Coates, Op. Cit. p. 24

74 ⁶⁸ Robert J. Maddox, 'The Unknown War with Russia', Presidio Press, San Rafael, California, 1977, p. 41. The author quotes a letter from Sir William Wiseman, a confidential British Representative to the United States, reporting on a conversation with President Wilson.

carefully, and sympathetically, and be ready to move whenever the right time arrives.

Dr. S.E. Morrison, member of the US delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, resigned from his position and gave his reasons in a Press interview⁶⁹:

Russia can never be restored and reconstructed on a democratic basis by supporting a military dictator in Siberia. Moreover, I cannot be a party to the policy towards the Baltic States accepted by the Powers of supporting them as long as they were useful to fight the Bolsheviks, but as soon as the Bolshevik were crushed to hand them back to Russia with our good wishes

'The Times' correspondent cabled on November 24 1919⁷⁰:

Our chief danger lies in the ignorance of the masses and the failure of the Omsk Government to attract them.

The Omsk Government is that of Koltchak, recognised and enjoying the full military and economic support of the Allies in general, and of the British Government in particular. The failure of the Koltchak Government to attract the masses was no impediment to maintaining excellent relations with Britain. At the same time, the British Government was refusing to deal with the Bolshevik Government under the pretext that it was not representative of the Russian people.

General William S. Graves, the commander of the US troops in Siberia, stated⁷¹:

The Koltchak adherents.. could not have existed away from the railroads and.. at no time while I was in Siberia was there enough popular support behind Koltchak in Eastern Siberia for him, or the people supporting him, to have lasted one month if all Allied support had been removed

J.E. Hodgson from the Daily express wrote⁷²:

I have spoken with many Russians who sighed for the return of the old regime and who laughed at me for speaking of the illiterate lower classes in Russia as being their equals before the Lord. These officers placed their unfortunate compatriots upon a level with the negroes of our Empire

75 ⁶⁹ Coates, op. cit., p. 218

76 ⁷⁰ *ibid.*, Op. Cit., p. 232

77 ⁷¹ William S. Graves, 'America's Siberian Adventure', Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith, New York, 1931, p. 157

78 ⁷² Coates, Op. Cit., p. 281. He quotes from Hodgson book 'With Denikin's armies', p 186

The same author mentions in an earlier page (78) that:

It was repeatedly explained to me that the private soldier was composed of such common clay that he could be controlled only by brutalization. By clinging desperately to such ideas the class from which the officers were drawn proved its own inability to grasp and digest historical facts.

It is precisely this class that was supported by the Allies in their struggle to become again the masters of Russia. This, obviously, could not have been the will of the Russian people.

The Allies were not supporting the groups and leaders that had the Russian people's confidence. Were the Bolshevik enjoying more of that confidence? Were they more representative of the people's will?

On January 15, 1918, Sir G. Buchanan, the British Ambassador who had returned from Russia, stated in an interview with Reuters⁷³:

..As to the political situation, the main fact to realise is that *the Bolsheviks are without doubt masters of the situation in Northern Russia*, at any rate for the present.

Bolshevist doctrines are without doubt spreading throughout the whole of Russia, and they appeal very specially to those who have nothing to lose.

According to the Correspondent of the Associated Press in Tokyo⁷⁴ "Viscount Yasuya Uchida, former Ambassador at Washington, who on his return here from his post as Ambassador to Russia, expressed doubt as to the wisdom of entering Siberia at this time. His conviction was that Bolshevism today represented the thought of a great majority of the Russian people"

General Sir Hubert Gough, head of the British military expedition to the Baltic wrote in an article which appeared in the December issue of Oxford Review⁷⁵:

Without being actually Bolshevik in their political creed the Russian are determined to prevent the return to power of the old official classes, and *if forced to a choice*, which is what is actually happening at the moment, *they prefer the Bolshevik Government*.

Obviously, the British government was insensitive to the Russian people's preferences. It was supporting the alternative to Bolshevism: the return to power of the old official classes.

79 ⁷³ Coates, Op. Cit., p.45

80 ⁷⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 103-4

81 ⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p. 195

Commenting on the mutiny in the French army, Churchill wrote⁷⁶:

The foreign occupation offended the inhabitants: the Bolsheviks profited by their discontents. Their propaganda, incongruously patriotic and Communist, spread far and wide through the Ukraine.

The French troops were themselves affected by the Communist propaganda, and practically the whole of the fleet mutinied.

Churchill recognises that the Allied military intervention was perceived by the Russians as a foreign occupation and was resented as such. For the Russians, the Allies were invaders and not liberators. As to the Bolsheviks, their propaganda was successful. In other words, they represented the will of the people.

Did The Bolsheviks Have A German Connection?

According to Coates⁷⁷, Mr Raymond Robins, head of the American Red Cross Mission in Russia, gave evidence on March 8, 1919. He told the Senate Propaganda Investigating Committee that:

He did not believe that Lenin and Trotsky had subjected themselves to German influence.. he believed the people of Russia wanted Bolshevism and that the larger majority supported Lenin and Trotsky (TIMES, March 9, 1919)

Commandant Grenfell, British naval attaché to Russia 1912-1917, declared⁷⁸:

The legend of German co-operation with the Bolsheviks is, of course, but a myth invented by the Cadets to cover their own discomfiture, well knowing, too, how readily and easily it would be swallowed in the West (Manchester Guardian, November 11, 1919)

Mr. Bruce Lockhart, British Consul in Moscow in 1917 and Chief of the British Mission to the Soviet Government in 1918⁷⁹ stated:

I could not help realising instinctively that, behind its peace programme and its fanatical economic programme, there was an idealistic background to Bolshevism which lifted it far above the

82 ⁷⁶ Winston Churchill, 'The World Crisis', Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, vol 5, 1957, p. 169. The book was first printed in 1929 under the title 'The Aftermath'

83 ⁷⁷ Coates, Oper. Cit., p. 29

84 ⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 29

85 ⁷⁹ Bruce Lockhart, 'Memoirs of a British agent', Putnam, London, 1933, p. 288

designation of a mob movement led by German agents. For months I had lived cheek by jowl with men who worked eighteen hours a day and who were obviously inspired by the same spirit of self-sacrifice and abnegation of worldly pleasure which animated the Puritans and the early Jesuits.

The Western Leaders were informed by their own best sources that the Bolshevik leaders were not German agents.

Some of the information sent by Bruce Lockhart to his Government are mentioned in a letter he sent to Colonel Robins on May 5, 1918⁸⁰:

..Do let me, in support of my views of things here, put before you the following definite instances in which Trotsky has shown his willingness to work with the Allies:

- 1) He has invited Allied officers to co-operate in the reorganization of the New Army.
- 2) He invited us to send a commission of British Naval officers to save the Black Sea Fleet.
- 3) On every occasion when we have asked him for papers and assistance for our naval officers and our evacuation officers at Petrograd he has always given us exactly what we wanted.
- 4) He has given every facility so far for Allied Co-operation at Murmansk.
- 5) He has agreed to send the Czech Corps to Murmansk and Archangel.
- 6) Finally, he has to-day come to a full agreement with us regarding the Allied stores at Archangel whereby we shall be allowed to retain these stores which we require for ourselves. You will agree that *this does not look like the action of a pro-German agent.*

Recreating A Russian Eastern Front Against Germany?

We quote from a letter dated March 5, 1918 sent by Bruce Lockhart to his Government⁸¹:

..If ever the Allies have had a chance in Russia since the revolution, the Germans have given it to them by the exorbitant peace term they have imposed on Russia..

..If His Majesty's Government does not wish to see Germany paramount in Russia, then I would most earnestly *implore* you not to neglect this opportunity.

The Congress meets on March 12th. Empower me to inform Lenin that the question of Japanese intervention has been shelved, that we will persuade the Chinese to remove the *embargo on*

86 ⁸⁰ Coates, Oper. Cit., pp. 84-5

87 ⁸¹ *ibid.*, pp. 64-5

foodstuffs, that we are prepared to support the Bolsheviks in so far as they will oppose Germany and that we invite his suggestion as to the best way in which this help can be given. In return for this, there is every chance that war will be declared.. and that it will arouse a certain amount of enthusiasm..

General W. Graves mentions⁸² that a copy of a note from the Soviet Government, dated March 5, 1918, exists in the Congressional Record, June 29, 1919, p. 2336 from which the General quotes:

In case (a) the All-Russian congress of the Soviets will refuse to ratify the peace treaty with Germany, or (b) if the German Government, breaking the peace treaty, will renew the offensive in order to continue its robber's raid..

1. Can the Soviet Government rely on the support of the United States of North America, Great Britain, and France in its struggle against Germany?
2. What kind of support could be furnished in the nearest future, and on what conditions — military equipment, transportation supplies, living necessities?
3. What kind of support would be furnished particularly and especially by the United States?..

On March 9th, 1918, Mr. Francis, the U.S.A. Ambassador cabled his Government⁸³:

I cannot too strongly urge the folly of an invasion by the Japanese now. It is possible that the Congress at Moscow may ratify the peace, but if I receive assurance from you that the Japanese peril is baseless I am of the opinion that the Congress will reject this humiliating peace. The Soviet Government is the only power which is able to offer resistance to the German advance and consequently should be assisted if it is sincerely antagonistic to Germany. In any case the peace ratification only gives Russia a breathing spell as the terms thereof are fatal to Bolshevism as well as to the integrity of Russia.

Here was an opportunity to rebuild an Eastern front against Germany⁸⁴. This was a recognised impossibility just before the Bolshevik revolution. By proving their sincerity in the quest for peace, the Bolsheviks were in a

88 ⁸² W.S. Graves, op., cit., pp. 22-23

89 ⁸³ Coates, op. cit., pp. 67

90 ⁸⁴ George F. Kennan (op. cit., p. 61) affirms that Russia was not seriously considering rebuilding a front against Germany. The surest way to have known it was to accept Russia's offer, call its bluff, if such it was. Having rejected the offer, the allies have no leg to stand on when they plead the insincerity of the offer.

position enabling them to mobilise the Russian people against the harsh conditions offered by Germany. The news from Moscow indicated that the Bolsheviks had succeeded in recreating a patriotic fervour in the Russian people and that the approval or rejection of peace with Germany would depend largely on the attitude of the Allies toward the Soviet Government.

However the Allies did not encourage Russia to become once again member of the group of countries fighting Germany. Britain gave its consent to the Japanese invasion of Siberia. As to the United States, while expressing to the Soviet Congress its best wishes to the Russian people, it said that it was in no position to help.

Balfour⁸⁵, the British Foreign Secretary stated that he believed in the sincerity of the Bolshevik leaders in their intention to rebuild an army that would fight Germany. But he considered this to be impossible to achieve. Therefore Britain would not help Russia in this respect. At the same time, he repudiated any suggestion that the Japanese invasion of Siberia was motivated by selfish and dishonourable aims. As it turned out, the army formed by the Bolsheviks was able to overcome all attempts by the 'White' forces to destroy the Bolshevik regime in spite of the foreign military interventions aimed at helping the 'Whites' in their endeavour. The same efficient 'Red army' could have, if the Allies would have been ready to help, resumed the fight against Germany.

Before speaking at the Congress, Lenin had a conversation with Robins⁸⁶ asking him what he had heard from his government. Robins said that he heard nothing. Lenin told him then that he also heard nothing from Bruce Lockhart and that, under these conditions, he will speak for the ratification of the peace treaty with Germany

It is therefore clear that, on the one hand, the Bolsheviks were not responsible for the disintegration of the Russian front and that, on the other hand, the Allies did not jump at the opportunity of recreating it when the only power able to do so, the Bolsheviks, suggested it.

Recreating an Eastern Front against Germany was a convenient reason to advance for a military intervention in Russia, convenient but not real. The following quote should settle the matter, at least concerning US policy⁸⁷:

On February 19, 1918, William Phillips, Assistant Secretary of State, reported that the French had intimated to the Bolsheviks that they were ready to give assistance if the Bolsheviks would resist the German menace and defend Russia. The French government asked if the United States would give similar instructions to its ambassador in Petrograd. Below the note appears the following in pencil: "It is out of the question. Submitted to President who says the same thing."

91 ⁸⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 71

92 ⁸⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 73-4

93 ⁸⁷ Betty Miller Unterberger, 'America's Siberian Expedition, 1918-1920', Duke University Press, Durnham, N.C. 1956, p. 41, note 9

In fact, not only was the front not recreated but precious resources needed in the Western Front were diverted from the struggle against Germany to the struggle against the Bolsheviks.

Terror In Russia

From the Lord Emmott report already quoted⁸⁸:

The coup d'état of October 1917 as a result of which the Soviet Government was established, by the Bolshevik or Communist Party, was not immediately followed by the inauguration of a terrorist policy. Several Ministers of the former Provisional Government were, however, arrested and imprisoned under onerous conditions in the fortress of Saint Peter and Paul, but were subsequently released after a comparatively short term of confinement. On the other hand, several persons of military and political reputation were allowed to go their way without interference. The case of General Krasnov, who had commanded a detachment of Cossack cavalry in support of the Provisional Government against the Bolsheviks, is an example of this. He was set at liberty on giving his parole not to take part in the future in any operations against the Soviet Government. Later, however, he broke his parole and fought against the Bolsheviks in the armies of General Denikine and General Yudenich.

The report stated also that there was “no terror during the first six months of Bolshevik rule.”

Telegrams exchanged between Colonel Robins in Moscow and Mr. Francis in Vologda revealed that they knew of no organised opposition to the Soviet Government in Russia. The death of General Kornilov was considered “the final blow” for the organised internal force against the Soviet Government⁸⁹. The telegram commenting on the death of Kornilov was dated April 20, 1918. The civil war had ended and *this complete assertion of Soviet power was achieved without resorting to terror.*

Then Russia's former Allies started the military intervention directed against the established Soviet Power. It is only then that the Soviet Government started to resist that intervention. As to accusations of mistreatment of British residents in Archangel, it is interesting to quote from a letter by Douglas Young, the British Consul⁹⁰:

As regards British residents at Archangel, I can state with authority that, so far from being at any time molested, they were

94 ⁸⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 79-80

95 ⁸⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 78-79

96 ⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 91

accorded many privileges and exemptions to which they had no rights; and I am certain that if they could speak their minds they would complain bitterly, not of the Bolsheviks, but of the Allied diplomatic representatives, who themselves fled to safety to the cover of the Allied guns, leaving British men, women, and children to take their chance of emerging from the oncoming wave of intervention. We all lived for months under the dread of mob violence at German instigation, but I never at any time feared outrage by or with the sanction of the responsible Soviet authorities, so long as neutrality was observed; and I am glad of an opportunity of stating that I found the Soviet representatives at all times far more accessible and responsive to reasonable demands than the discourteous and overbearing officials who so often represented the Imperial Russian Government.

There were many terrorist acts committed by the Russian troops supported by the Allies. They were reported by official Allied sources. The Allied governments protested against them only in the measure in which they were proving embarrassing. The available documentation is too abundant. We shall only mention a few cases.

In his memoirs, General Wrangel recalls⁹¹:

We took three thousand prisoners and a large number of machine guns..

I ordered three hundred and seventy of the Bolsheviks to line up. They were all officers and non-commissioned officers, **and I had them shot on the spot**. Then I told the rest that they too deserved death, but that I had let those who had misled them take the responsibility for their treason, because I wanted to give them a chance to atone for their crime and prove their loyalty to their country.

Weapons were distributed to them immediately, and two weeks later they went to the fighting line.

Killing prisoners was an act of terrorism, recruiting an army under the threat of death is also a form of terrorism. It could not pay. The soldiers would often join the Bolshevik ranks on the first occasion.

The Manchester Guardian correspondent wrote in the July 13, 1920 issue concerning the question "How do the 'Whites' treat their prisoners"⁹²:

It was difficult to know what was done with prisoners thus taken. When questioned on the subject, the White officers always said: 'Oh, we kill all of them that are Communists.' Jews and commissaries stood no chance, of course, but it was somewhat

97 ⁹¹ 'The Memoirs of General Wrangel', Williams & Norgate Ltd, London, 1929, pp 58-59

98 ⁹² *ibid*, p.209

difficult to ascertain which of the others were Communists. The system generally followed was this. From among the prisoners a man who 'looked like a Bolshevik' was led aside, accused with great violence of being a notorious Communist, but afterwards promised that his life would be spared if he gave the names of all those among his companions whom he knew to belong to the Bolshevik party. This ingenious scheme, which was tried on more than one victim in each party of prisoners, generally resulted in a number of Red soldiers being executed

As to the second question "How did the 'Whites' behave towards the villagers?", the same correspondent writes:

Villages suspected of giving information to the enemy were sometimes burned and all the inhabitants killed. In one village the priest, together with his wife and son, were killed. In another village, which the Whites occupied for one night, a number of Reds, who had been hiding in a windmill attacked Koltchak's troops during the darkness and cleared them out of the village. Next day the Whites retook the village, burned it to the ground, and killed all the inhabitants, men, women and children.

General Graves write⁹³:

There were horrible murders committed, but they were not committed by the Bolsheviks as the world believes. I am well on the side of safety when I say that the anti-Bolsheviks killed one hundred people in Eastern Siberia, to everyone killed by the Bolsheviks.

The President of the United States wrote to Lansing, the Secretary of State, asking about General Gregori Semenov if "there is any legitimate way in which we can assist."⁹⁴ In another context, General Graves writes⁹⁵:

This is the same Semeonoff who in 1919, had robbed a New York company of a train load of furs, reported as being worth one-half a million dollars; this is the same Semeonoff who took three Americans, who had taken their discharge from the Army, and remained in Siberia, and brutally murdered them for no reason except that they were wearing the uniform of the American Army. This murder was after I left Siberia, but I was informed of this by Mr. John F. Stevens, and I sent a report of the same to the War Department. This is the same Semenov who later came to the United States through the port of Vancouver, B.C., and went direct to Washington and I know conferred with one American official, and I imagine he conferred with others.

99 ⁹³ Graves, Op. Cit., p108

100 ⁹⁴ Robert J. Maddox, op. cit., p. 40

101 ⁹⁵ Graves, op. cit., pp. 313-4

Colonel Morrow found, as he was coming out of Siberia, that the officer who had been sent to Siberia to report to Consul General Harris.. according to the officer's own statement, attached himself to Semeonoff headquarters. Colonel Morrow said to this officer, when he told him that he was with Semeonoff: "Do you know what a murderer he his? Do you know he has killed some of my men?" The officer replied: "***Semeonoff is the only thing standing between civilization and Bolshevism, and I do not intend to listen to anything against Semeonoff.***"

..As to the arrival of Semeonoff in the United States in 1922, I have reason for thinking his trip was not unexpected by the Immigration Officials of the United States, notwithstanding the fact that he had brutally murdered Americans

..While Colonel Morrow was in Chita, Semeonoff's headquarters, he saw an American Red Cross train, with the doors of the car open and Semeonoff's soldiers helping themselves to the Red Cross supplies..I sent the report to Dr. Teusler, requesting comment... He did not deny that this vile murderer of Russians and of American soldiers, whose actions have placed him beyond the pale of civilization, was being given American Red Cross supplies for the use of his troops, such supplies having been purchased with money contributed by the generous people of the United States.

Semeonoff is not the only vile character supported by the Allies. Their anti-communism was not motivated by their belief in terrorism being a way of life of Bolsheviks. They themselves did not mind a terrorist at all, provided he was anti-Bolshevik.

Recommending the withdrawal of the American expedition in Siberia, Secretary of State Lansing sent a memorandum to Wilson on December 29, 1919 where he mentioned that⁹⁶:

The armies of the Bolsheviki have advanced in Eastern Siberia, where they are reported to be acting with moderation. The people seem to prefer them to the officers of the Kolchak regime.

General Graves reported⁹⁷ that "ninety-eight percent of the people in Siberia are Bolsheviki" and that "they are working for peace and the good of the country and in my opinion they are trying to be fair and just to the people". Fair and just! Some terrorists!

102⁹⁶ Maddox, op. cit., p.126

103⁹⁷ Betty Miller Unterberger, p. 233, note 8.

The following extract of a pamphlet issued by Chief Rabbi in Great Britain, Dr. J.H. Hertz, and titled 'A Decade of Woe and Hope'⁹⁸ gives additional evidence on the 'White Terror':

Three million Jews of the Ukraine were handed out helpless and hopeless, to murder and dishonour.. Historians have for centuries dwelt on the tragedy and inhumanity of the expulsion of the 150,000 Jews of Spain. But throughout 1919 and 1920 we have had in the Ukraine not merely the expulsion of a similar number of human beings, but their extermination by the wild hordes of Denikin, Petlura, Grigoriev, Makhno and other bandits, raging like wild beasts amid the defenceless Jewries of South Russia. 'The massacres of the Jews in the Ukraine can find, for thoroughness and extent, no parallel except in the massacres of the Armenians' *is the verdict of Sir Horace Rumbold H.M. Minister at Warsaw*, in a report to the Foreign Office that was widely circulated at the time. Wholesale slaughter and violation, drownings and burnings and burials alive, became not merely commonplaces, but the order of the day. There were pogroms that lasted a week; and in several towns the diabolic torture and outrage and carnage were continued for a month. In many populous Jewish communities there were no Jewish survivors left to bury the dead, and thousands of Jewish wounded and killed were eaten by dogs; in others, the synagogues were turned into charnel houses by the pitiless butcher of those who sought refuge in them. If we add to the figures mentioned above, the number of the indirect victims who, in consequence of the robbery and destruction that accompanied these massacres, were swept away by famine, disease, exposure, and all manner of privations — the dread total will be very near half-a-million human beings.

Yet all this persecution, torture, slaughter, continued for nearly two years *without any protest by the civilized powers*, with hardly any notice in the English Press of this systematic extermination.

And still, in July 1919, General Briggs, Chief of the British Military Mission to General Denikin, declared to a representative of Reuter's agency⁹⁹:

On my return to England my attention was drawn to certain statements as to 'atrocities' and various form of outrage resulting from General Denikin's administration, and I am glad to take the earliest opportunity on my arrival in England to say that from the beginning to end they are utterly false and are prompted by German and Bolshevist propaganda.

104⁹⁸ Coates, Op. cit., pp. 288-9

105⁹⁹ *ibid*, p. 290

If this was true, why then was Churchill cabling to South Russia on September 18¹⁰⁰:

It is of the very highest consequence that General Denikin should not only do everything in his power to prevent massacres of the Jews in the liberated districts, but should issue a proclamation against Anti-Semitism.

Churchill must have been aware that something was going on. A proclamation against anti-Semitism would be important to Churchill in his defence of Denikin. It seemed however that the massacres did not stop. Churchill cabled Denikin¹⁰¹ on October 7, 1919, urging him “to redouble efforts to restrain Anti-Semitic feeling and to vindicate the honour of the Volunteer Army.”

In ‘The Slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919’, by E. Heifetz, p. 97 we can read¹⁰²:

An objective study of the investigations of the authorized agent of the relief committee of the Red Cross and the annals of the Jews in the Ukraine leads to the conclusion that the Soviet troops preserved the Jews from complete annihilation. Retirement of the Soviet troops signified for the territory left behind the beginning of a period of pogroms with all their horrors. On the other hand, the advance of the Soviet troops meant the liberation from a nightmare

Transportation Of The Czech Troops To France

A large number of Czech soldiers enrolled in the Austro-Hungarian army deserted during the war and became prisoners in Russia. In March 1917 a request was granted to them to organise a distinct Czecho-Slovak army which fought along the Russian army. On March 26, 1918 the Bolshevik Government agreed to transport the Czecho-Slovak army to Vladivostock from which the Allies would transport them to France. The Czech soldiers were to be disarmed. This was requested by Russia so that she could state that the Czech troops were transported through Russia as civilians.

This agreement, having been made after the German-Russian peace of Brest-Litovsk, represented an unfriendly gesture towards Germany and a friendly one towards the Allies. The Czecho-Slovaks agreed to surrender their arms except for ten rifles and one machine-gun per hundred soldiers, for protection against possible bandits attacks.

106¹⁰⁰ Op. cit. “World Crisis”, p. 265

107¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p. 265

108¹⁰² Coates, *op. cit.*, p. 291

In April 1918, Great Britain and Japan invaded Siberia and occupied Vladivostok. The Bolshevik Government would have then been justified in preventing the Czech army from reaching that city, and thus possibly reinforcing the invaders. Instead, the Bolshevik Government remained faithful to the agreement.

By May 31, 12,000 troops had been conveyed to Vladivostok and, though some of them had already reached the port fifty seven days before, the Allied Governments had provided no ships for their transport to the Western front.

The Czecho-Slovak army did not keep their side of the agreement. We quote from one of their officers relating to the 'Daily Telegraph'¹⁰³ (May 27th. 1919):

The order was anything but popular with our men. They succeeded in evading it to a large extent. They hid their rifles where they could, under the cars, and in partitions which they made inside the cars, where they stored any number of rifles, cartridges, and hand-grenades. The superfluous rifles and ammunition were then handed over to the Bolsheviks..

..Our soldiers did wonderful work, disguising themselves as Red Guards, mixing with the Bolsheviks, and finding out all about the emplacement of the base depots, the ammunition depots, and the provision canters. The information was afterwards of use to our commanders, who were thus able to occupy them when necessary.

Troops heading to Vladivostok, to be transported to France, are in no need to plan the future occupation of military positions in Siberia. Hiding arms was contravening the agreement with the Bolshevik Government.

It would take too much space to describe the circumstances in which the Czecho-Slovaks attacked Bolshevik barracks and occupied the Siberian town of Cheliabinsk and which induced the Bolshevik authorities to insist, more than ever, on the disarming, as agreed, of the Czecho-Slovak troops.

On June 4, 1918, the British, French, Italian and US diplomatic representatives in Russia informed the Bolshevik Government that they would consider the disarming of the Czecho-Slovak forces as an unfriendly act.

Bruce Lockhart blames the French for all these problems. There is, however, enough evidence to lay the blame on all the Allies. Bruce Lockhart writes¹⁰⁴:

Not unnaturally, the Germans protested violently against the presence, on what was now neutral Russia territory, of a large

109¹⁰³ *ibid.*, pp. 105-107

110¹⁰⁴ Bruce Lockhart, *Op. Cit.*, p272.

force, which was to be used against them. Nevertheless, I succeeded in securing Trotsky's good-will, and but for the folly of the French I am convinced that the Czechs would have been safely evacuated without incident. My task was not made easier by the last-minute requests of the British Government to use my influence to persuade Trotsky to divert the Czechs to Archangel. This too, at a time when General Poole was already in North Russia, advocating a policy of intervention, which was subsequently adopted and which never amounted to anything more than an armed intervention against Bolshevism.

The Allied responsibility is clearly shown in the following quote from the Czecho-Slovak National Council in New-York on July 27 1918¹⁰⁵:

The question, however, of staying in Russia, or getting out does not depend on the Czecho-Slovaks alone. That is something which must be decided by the Allies. The Czecho-Slovak Army is one of the Allied Armies, and it is as much under the orders of the Versailles War Council as the French or American Army. No doubt the Czecho-Slovak boys in Russia are anxious to avoid participation in a possible civil war in Russia, but they realize at the same time that by staying where they are they may be able to render far greater services, both to Russia and the Allied cause, than if they were transported to France. They are at the orders of the Supreme War Council of the Allies.

This proves that there was no obstacle to the evacuation of the Czecho-Slovak army except for the will of the Allies. If the main enemy were Germany, that army would have been more useful in France than at thousands of miles from the war front with Germany.

In defiance of the facts known to all the Allied leaders, the US issued a declaration on August 3, 1918¹⁰⁶ which stated:

As the Government of the United States sees the present circumstances, therefore, military action is admissible in Russia now only to render such protection and help as is possible to the Czecho-Slovaks against the armed Austrians and German prisoners who are attacking them, and to steady any efforts at self-government or self-defence in which the Russian themselves may be willing to accept assistance

Similar declarations were issued by France and Britain. The rumours of Austrian and German prisoners having been freed and armed in Siberia was an old one. It was investigated by W.L. Hicks, Captain of the British Mission

111¹⁰⁵ Coates, Op. Cit., p. 112

112¹⁰⁶ *ibid*, p.114. William S. Graves, op. cit., pp 7-8, mentions a text quite similar as part of the presidential instructions given to him as guidelines to his mission as head of the American expedition in Siberia.

in Moscow, and by William B. Webster, Captain and attaché to the American Red Cross Mission in Russia. The two officers reported that a very small numbers of these prisoners were allowed to join the Red Guard if they were vouched for by three responsible Russians as being Socialists of standing, if in addition, after six months they renounced their old allegiance and become citizens of Russia. The authorities guaranteed that their total number would not be more than 1500 in all Siberia. They would never be allowed to act independently and would always be under the control and command of Russian Socialists. We quote from the end of the report¹⁰⁷:

We can well say that we found all the Soviet authorities with whom we came in contact sincere and bright men, good leaders, thorough partisans of their party, and seeming in all cases to well represent the cause for which the Soviet Government stands. We feel therefore, that their assurances to us concerning the limitation in regard to the arming of prisoners is a statement upon which faith and confidence can be based. The Soviets have both the power and the inclination to carry out this guarantee.

We can but add, after seeing the armed prisoners and the type of men which they are, that we feel there is no danger to the Allied cause through them

While the US pretended to intervene in Siberia for the purpose of helping the Czecho-Slovak troops, she was part of a plot that had other motivations. We quote from ‘American Policy Towards Russia’ by Frederick L. Schuman¹⁰⁸:

The American Consul Grey, at Omsk, received a cipher message from the American Consulate at Samara, dated July 22, 1918, which transmitted a communication from Consul General Poole, in Moscow under date of June 18: “You may inform the Czechoslovak leaders, confidentially, that pending further notice the Allies will be glad, *from a political point of view*, to have them hold their present position. On the other hand they should not be hampered in meeting the military exigency of the situation. It is desirable, first of all, that they should secure the control of the Trans-Siberian Railway, and second, if this is assumed at the same time possible, (possibly) retain control over the territory which they now dominate. Inform the French representative that the French Consul General joins in these instructions!”

The necessity not to reveal the reasons for intervention lead sometimes to confusion in diplomatic ranks. General Graves writes¹⁰⁹ concerning our previous quotation from Frederick S. Schuman:

113¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 117-8

114¹⁰⁸ Graves, *op. cit.* p. 70. The author is quoting Frederik S. Schuman.

115¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, pp 70-71

The Mr. Poole referred to, is the same man who later had charge of the Russian affairs in the State Department in Washington. This shows that American Consul General Poole, in European Russia, without giving his authority, on June 18, 1918, was taking sides in the Russian conflict in Siberia, while on June 8, Consul General Harris, in Siberia, said that all United States Government representatives had specific instructions not to take sides in Russian affairs, and not to take sides in party strifes. Mr. Harris pursued this policy until July 2, when he stated that he received confirmation from the "Peking Legation" of the intention of the United States to engage in military intervention, which had for its object hostile action against the Soviets, *no matter what reasons were publicly stated.*

General Graves goes on to say that neither Poole nor Harris nor the Peking Legation represented the real US policy. This is hard to believe in view of the fact that Poole was chosen to become the head of the Department of Russian affairs. Graves himself is forced to conclude with throwing some blame on the US Government¹¹⁰:

I was in command of the United States troops sent to Siberia and, I must admit, I do not know what the United States was trying to accomplish by military intervention.

As has been clearly shown, *one must discard* the statements of the United States, in August 1918, that troops were being sent to rescue the Czechs from the German and Austrian prisoners, who were reported as having been released from prisons, and were organizing with the object of getting the military supplies at Vladivostok, taking the Trans-Siberian Railroads, and sending supplies to Germany. These reports were untrue. Major Drysdale, U.S. Army, from Peking, and Mr. Webster from Moscow, were sent to investigate and ascertain if these reports were true, and had reported they had no foundation in fact.

...The action of the State Department representatives in helping Kolchak, whose sole object was the destruction of the Soviets, justifies the conclusion that the United States was a party to the efforts to overthrow the Soviets, as Kolchak was unquestionably fighting them.

Edouard Benes, obviously an authority in whatever relates to the Czechoslovak troops mentions¹¹¹ that, on April 1, the British War Office suggested that Czech troops either occupy Siberia in the vicinity of Omsk, or else join Semenov's force in Trans-Baikal.

116¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, op. cit., pp. 354-6

117¹¹¹ Unterberger, op. cit., p. 54. The author is referring to Benes book 'My War Memoirs' (Boston 1928), p. 357

The hypocrisy of the whole argument is made evident by a reply to a note sent by William Phillips, Assistant Secretary of State, suggesting the retention of the Czech troops in the far-East where they may be needed to reinforce Russian opposition. Joseph E. Grew, active chief of the Western European division replied¹¹² in June 25 1918

Mr Miles and I agree that it would be highly desirable to have these Czecho-Slovak troops remain in Siberia, but to go on record as recommending it to the British Government *might prove embarrassing* in connection with our attitude toward Japanese intervention. Would it not be better to concur with the British in their plans for transporting them if and when it is found practicable to spare sufficient tonnage for Allied needs? Mr. Miles informs me that there are now about 16,000 Czecho-Slovak troops in Vladivostok, about 30,000 between Irkutsk and the sea, and another 30,000 to 50,000 in other parts of Russia. *It seems very improbable* that sufficient tonnage will be available to transport all or even a great part of this number in the near future

This is a clear indication that the United States hoped that no transportation would be available for removing the Czech troops from Vladivostok. It is therefore understandable that the United States would make no efforts to provide such transportation.

Unterberger mentions¹¹³ that:

In the spring of 1919 the American Military Intelligence prepared a report on the activities of the Czechs in Siberia from the materials which were then available to them. Although recognising the inadequacies of the material examined, the report concluded that the Czech claims of a treacherous attack by the Bolsheviks, German agents, and war prisoners were unfounded in fact; that the Czechs could have safely accomplished their original purpose to withdraw; and that the Czechs did not fully abide by their promise to surrender their arms and keep out of the Russian internal affairs. The report also indicated that the Czech diversion from their original purpose to withdraw was probably due to the interference of one of the Allied powers

Let us close with a quote by C.H. Smith who represented the U.S. Government on the "Inter-Allied Railway Committee" from a speech to the 'Foreign Policy Association' on March 4, 1922¹¹⁴:

In 1918 the Allied decided to aid Czechs — who, by the way, didn't need the aid and without which they extricated themselves.

118¹¹² *ibid*, p.56

119¹¹³ *ibid*, p. 59

120¹¹⁴ Coates, *op. cit.*, p. 119

The Allies then decided that since they were there they must aid somebody, so they decided to aid the Russians — who hadn't asked for aid.

As a result, the Inter-Allied Committee was formed — of which I had the good fortune or misfortune (I don't know which) to be a member

Military Intervention In Russia. Why?

Churchill was the most fervent advocate for military intervention in Russia. He knew that this meant invading Russia and intervening in its internal affairs. While other politicians were shy to recognise it, he, Churchill, did not mind expressing himself clearly¹¹⁵:

The fitful and fluid operation of the Russian armies found a counterpart in the policy, or want of policy, of the Allies. Where they at war with Soviet Russia? Certainly not; but they shot Soviet Russians at sight. They stood as invaders on Russian soil. They blockaded its ports, and sunk its battleships. They earnestly desired and schemed its downfall. But war — shocking! Interference — shame! It was, they repeated, a matter of indifference to them how Russia settled their own internal affairs.

The hypocrisy of the politicians who did not dare recognise publicly the real reasons of the military intervention is crudely exposed by Churchill in the preceding quote¹¹⁶. The motivation was ideological: to suppress the Soviet regime.

It had to be suppressed

w not because it was a terrorist regime, it was not.

w not because it was not representative of the will of the people, it was.

w not because it was a puppet in the hands of Germany, it was not.

w not because it endangered the safety of the Czecho-Slovak troops, it was not.

w not because it was disliked by the Western countries. A dislike against the Tsarist autocratic regime never motivated the Allies against it.

¹²¹¹¹⁵ Winston, S. Churchill, *Oper. Cit.*, pp. 243-244

¹²²¹¹⁶ Churchill was not criticizing the armed intervention in Russia. He was of the opinion that there was no need to be shy about it and not to call a spade a spade. He would have rather used the words 'invasion', 'war', blockaded etc.. Being proud of what he was advocating, he had no qualms using the proper words. In many other circumstances (Greece, 'defence of democracy') he later would be much less open.

It had to be suppressed because the Allies were afraid that it appealed, or could appeal more and more, to masses all over the world, including those in their own country

The Bolshevik revolution was proud of its Russian, French, German and British origin. The British establishment was avoiding reference to the British roots of the Bolshevik revolution. Bolshevism had to be represented as a foreign ideology, totally alien to the British spirit, way of life and aspirations.

Later, the establishment would find in the Stalinist regime of terror, in the foreign policy of Soviet Union and in the military power of that country material to justify an anti-communism of a national character. It is necessary to remember that, in its origin, the establishment's anticommunism was not national but 'blind' and disregarding the national interest. This blind anticommunism was the main political drive of Chamberlain's policy of appeasement.

In a short sentence, Lockhart summarised the British motivation for their intervention against the Bolsheviks in Russia. Though we quoted it before, it is a proper conclusion to this chapter:

Hate of the revolution and fear of its consequences in England were the dominant reactions of the Conservatives..

Bruce Lockhart was an insider to the British politics. There is no reason to doubt his conclusion, especially when evidence supports it so well.

CHAPTER III

HATING THE SOVIET UNION

The Communist revolution destroyed in the Soviet Union the power of the aristocracy and that of the capitalists. This was quite enough to engender the Western Governments' hate towards it. There were, however, idiosyncrasies, peculiar to the circumstances of the revolution, which sharpened the feelings of the Western establishment against it. The Tsarist family was killed without even a formal trial¹¹⁷. The liquidation of the properties of the nobility and the bourgeoisie, proceeded at an unusually fast rate. This could be explained by their support of foreign intervention and by their massive emigration.

In addition, the West was very displeased with the ways displayed by the Soviet leaders and government. The Soviet regime disclosed the secret treaties concluded by the Allies. These treaties specified how the expected war spoils would be divided between them. This was done in accordance with a principle unknown till then in diplomacy: the principle of open diplomacy or, in other words, a stand against secret treaties and agreements.

The disclosure of a secret is not a 'gentlemanly act'. The Western leaders could have no affinity for such a behaviour. They suspected that there was more to it than just the respect for a new principle. Was not the Bolshevik leaders' intent that of embarrassing the Western leaders and achieving an easy public relation success?

Open diplomacy is an appealing slogan. It certainly has its merits. It remains to see if it is always practical. Secret diplomacy is to be condemned when it aims at preventing the people most concerned from knowing measures affecting them. The Soviet Union did not always practice open diplomacy. Apart from the well know secret codicils which accompanied the Soviet-German non-aggression pact of 1939, a less publicised secret agreement was made with Germany, in the 1920's. It aimed at military co-operation between the two countries. This agreement allowed the Germany of the time to proceed with some rearmament, military training and prototype testing, away from French surveillance.

Another irritant was the tone of Soviet diplomatic communications. Its flavour can be appreciated from the following example¹¹⁸:

123¹¹⁷ The Tsar's mother, Marie Feodorovna, was a sister of Queen Alexandra of England. The ties between the British and Russian reigning families, contributed to the revulsion felt by the British Establishment towards the Bolsheviks.

124¹¹⁸ F.S. Northedge, *Oper. cit.*, p. 78. The full text of the letter can be found in "Soviet Russia and her Neighbors" by R. Page Arnot, Vanguard Press, New York, 1927, p. 143. The

In a curious effort to pull Wilson's leg, Chicherin proposed that the League of Nations should be based on the 'expropriation of the capitalists of all countries'. 'In your country,' he went on, 'banking and industry are in the hands of such a small group of capitalists that, as your personal friend, Colonel Robins, assured us, it would be enough to arrest twenty heads of capitalist cliques and to transfer to the masses the control by which, by characteristic capitalist methods, they have come to power, to destroy the principal source of new wars.'

John M. Thompson states¹¹⁹ that this kind of letter was an exception and that other communications were 'uniformly well written and conciliatory, with a conspicuous absence of revolutionary rudeness'. Nevertheless, even when few, such letters, associated with other unpalatable diplomatic manifestations, could not but increase the feeling that it was difficult to deal with the Bolshevik leaders.

Trotsky, after the Brest-Litovsk armistice, proclaimed 'to the toiling peoples of Europe, oppressed and bled white'¹²⁰:

We conceal from nobody that we do not consider the present capitalist governments capable of a democratic peace. ***Only the revolutionary struggle of the working masses against their governments can bring Europe near to such a Peace.*** Its full realization will be assured only by ***a victorious proletarian revolution in all capitalist countries..***

In the peace negotiations the Soviet power sets itself a dual task: in the first place, to secure the quickest possible cessation of the shameful and criminal slaughter which is destroying Europe, secondly, ***to help the working class of all countries by every means available to us to overthrow the domination of capital and to seize state power*** in the interests of a democratic peace and of a socialist transformation of Europe and of all mankind.

Such declarations did not endear the Soviet leaders to the Western governments. The first paragraph is provocative. The second promises interference in the internal affairs of the capitalist countries. Trotsky justified it by the special 'emergency situation': the need to stop 'the shameful and criminal slaughter'.

letter is a serious indictment of the U.S. policy of intervention in Russia and their support of the anti-government armed bands. The quoted passage is out of character with respect to the letter as a whole.

125¹¹⁹ John M. Thompson, 'Russia, Bolshevism, and the Versailles Peace, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1966, p.88

126¹²⁰ E.H. Carr, 'The Bolshevik Revolution', Penguin Books, 1983, New York, vol. 3, p. 41

Though the Soviet Union would later reach an agreement with other countries, including Britain, not to intervene in the internal affairs of the other, doubts remained as to the sincerity of the Soviet Union.

And then there was the Comintern, The Third Socialist International. It was unlike any other international organisation. A strict discipline reigned in its ranks and the member parties were bound to abide by, and publicly defend, the majority decisions. In it, furthermore, one member had in fact a dominating position. The Soviet Communist party had such a prestige that it was unlikely a Comintern majority would stand against it. Later the domination would become 'physical' in the sense that a number of representatives of illegal parties (illegal in their native countries) would be arrested and 'eliminated' by the Soviet authorities.

The Soviet Union's attitude was based on two premises. On the one hand it was believed that the world proletarian revolution was knocking at the door. We quote from the invitation to the first congress of the Communist international¹²¹:

The present period is that of the decomposition and collapse of the entire world capitalist system, and will be that of the collapse of European civilization in general *if capitalism, with its insurmountable contradictions, is not overthrown.*

It is interesting to note the general concern for the preservation of European civilisation. The capitalist West, and the communist Soviet Union, were each seeing the disappearance of the other's regime as a prerequisite for that preservation.

The Bolshevik also believed that their revolution would not last unless it was accompanied, or soon followed, by world revolution. A resolution drafted by Lenin and presented at the third congress of the Communist International states¹²²:

..international imperialism has proved unable to strangle Soviet Russia.. and has been obliged *for the time being* to grant her recognition or semi-recognition..

The result is a state of equilibrium which, although highly unstable and precarious, enables the Socialist Republic *to exist — not for long*, of course — within the capitalist encirclement.

The Comintern was to direct the world revolution including the Bolshevik one itself. It was thought that, to succeed, the Comintern had to be created in the image of the successful Russian Bolshevik Party.

127¹²¹ 'Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the first four congresses of the third International', Ink Links, London, 1980, p. 1

128¹²² 'Theses...', Oper. cit., p. 204

Since the Bolshevik revolution was the greatest achievement of the world proletariat, the main task of the Comintern had to be the defence of the Bolshevik revolution. That meant the defence of the Soviet Union itself. It therefore became difficult to distinguish the Comintern from an institution at the service of the Soviet foreign policy.

Soon the Comintern became irrelevant. With or without it, the communist parties, very willingly, were prepared to follow and defend all the sinuses of Soviet foreign policy. The West, nevertheless, went on attributing to it a sinister significance.

Another irritant in the Soviet behaviour, and that of communist parties in the West, was evident in much of their propaganda, and some of their statements. They were sometimes characterised by a rigidity of thought leading to the use of quotations from Marx, Engels, Lenin or Stalin instead of convincing arguments.

One sign of that poverty and rigidity of thought was the Soviet attitude towards religion. It is easy to tolerate the atheism of the communist party and of its leaders. It is understandable that the regime took measures against that fraction of the religious hierarchy that remained tied to the Tsarist regime. However, the major themes of social justice, equality of opportunities and Soviet power, are not incompatible with primitive Christianity. The Soviet regime could have, without deviating from its atheist stand, proclaimed that the communist regime and a purified Christian church, should be allies in the institution of a society which takes care of the underdogs and provides security for all, from cradle to grave. It was too much to expect from a dogmatic and unimaginative leadership whose paranoiac fear, later, saw a traitor in each dissenter.

Soviet Russia, soon to be named the Soviet Union, had two acknowledged redeeming features. After Stalin's victory over Trotsky, she stopped advocating a world revolution and adopted the policy of building socialism in a single country. Concurrently, the main international duty assigned to the workers all over the world was no longer to provoke a socialist revolution but to prevent their governments from plotting against the safety of the Soviet Union.

The second redeeming feature consisted in the fact that though the Soviet Union did not participate in the Versailles Peace negotiation, and though she was dissatisfied with a number of its decisions, she, nevertheless, did not aggressively press territorial claims. On the contrary, she was prepared to conclude agreements of good neighbourhood with all the countries lying along her borders.

Revolutions have their phases. The French revolution passed through different stages some of which were particularly violent. It is to be expected that, after a while, revolutions 'settle down'. Politicians often deem it unfair to condemn the violent aspects of a political change, ascribing them, when they want to do so, to uncontrollable events, and considering them as

transient effects. On August 5, 1937, Cordell Hull, the U.S. secretary of State told the German Ambassador¹²³:

The more intelligent and thinking people in this country looked upon these racial and religious occurrences more as a matter of *temporary abnormality* or the outcroppings of highly wrought up emotions, especially in view of the past history of the German people...

This was said four years after the advent of Nazism. During this period, Hitler had massacred in June 1934 a great number of troublesome companions, had left the League of Nations, had proceeded rearming, had militarily reoccupied the Rhineland, had proclaimed the anti-Semitic Nuremberg laws, had established a regime of terror, had made dominant a spirit of dedication to war. This was said less than three months after that Germany, in violation of all recognised international rules, bombed and completely destroyed the Spanish town of Guernica. It was known to Hull that Hitler advocated the belief in German racial superiority and in Germany's right to expand at the expense of her neighbours.

Austen Chamberlain, the then British Foreign Secretary, wrote about Mussolini in the same amicable spirit¹²⁴:

I believe him to be accused of crimes *in which he had no share*, and I suspect him to have *connived unwillingly* at other outrages *he would have prevented if he could*. But I am confident that he is a patriot and a sincere man; *I trust his word* when given..

It takes a saint to be so forgiving and so gullible, and Austen Chamberlain was neither a saint nor gullible.

There was no readiness, on the other hand, to grant Soviet leaders the benefit of the doubt because of special circumstances, for having been subjected to foreign military intervention etc.. etc.. Hatred of the Soviet Union and fear of its regime were too great.

However, it could have been expected that when an evident congruence of interest between the West and the Soviet Union would become apparent, it would then be possible to co-ordinate measures for the common interest. This would not require trusting the Soviet regime or the capitalist one. After all, self-interest is a recognised legitimate national motivation.

Such a congruence of national interests became more and more evident with the advent of Nazism in Germany in January 1933. The Nazi regime not only liquidated the German communist party but it manifested ambitions for expansion at the expense of the Soviet Union. It advertised a need for 'vital

129¹²³ M. Gilbert and R. Gott, 'The Appeasers', Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1963, p. 33. The Author quotes FRUS 1937, vol. II, p. 376

130¹²⁴ G. Salvemini, 'Prelude to World War II, Victor Gollancz, London, 1953, p. 72

space' and let it be known that this need would be fulfilled by the conquest of the Ukraine.

Though Britain played an essential role in allowing the rearmament of Germany, it soon became clear that Germany constituted a danger to the West. The policy followed by the Soviet Union in the years 1933-1938 only makes sense if we accept that she consistently worked for the creation of a front of 'peaceful' countries, countries with no agenda for expansion, to stand firmly opposed to aggression, and ready to use all means to stop it.

The Soviet Union's efforts were rejected and her motivations were questioned. This was done without giving her a chance to prove how sincere she was, or admitting her sincerity on the grounds of her own self-interest.

Hatred of the Soviet Union was so blind that it worked against the national interests of the Western countries. Captivated by the prospect of German's aggression against the Soviet Union, they chose to trust Hitler, though the evidence for his sincerity was far weaker than that available in the case of the Soviet Union

A non-Christian may hate the inquisition without hating Christianity. Likewise an opponent to communism could hate Stalinism, and other particular idiosyncrasies of the Soviet regime, without hating communism. The Western establishment hated communism in whatever form or shape. It intensely disliked the particular communist brand implemented by Stalin. There is, however, no communist brand that could find enough grace in their eyes to produce a feeling of opposition untainted with hate. Nazism and Fascism gained their admiration. It is therefore not the dictatorial aspect of Stalinism which offended the West. They could live with much worse, as long as it was not communist. A regime that could exist and develop without private ownership of the means of production was, in their eyes, indecent, immoral, and uncivilised. It was moreover, to them, as dangerous as an epidemic of the plague.

CHAPTER IV

THE FEAR OF COMMUNISM

The history of Britain is filled with popular riots, mutinies and radical movements. It is thus natural that the British ruling class should have a traditional fear of the 'mob', the common people. This fear goes back for centuries. Each time the 'mob' was on the move, the intensity of that fear would reach hysteric proportions. And, when the people were quiet, the fear remained, fed by past memories and by apocalyptic predictions. Each time a crisis would occur or be about to occur, the phantom of mob action would make its re-appearance and scare the establishment out of its wits.

When the common people take to the streets they are called a mob. In the eyes of the establishment 'mob' reflects the people's threatening aspect. If instead of a rough and disorderly crowd, it is a disciplined crowd the threat is perceived greater. It would still be reflected in the term mob.

Even when the demands are moderate the threat is felt to be great. For, as the crowd becomes aware of its power, what would prevent it from escalating its demands, and where will it stop?

Any political movement of protest contesting the authority of the king or the government would draw the hate and contempt of the governing class. There is, however, a difference between a Cromwell — who, though he decapitated a king, nevertheless was supported by a bourgeois parliament and had no program directed against the property owners — and a Tyler or Ball who could move the most common people, those with no property at all, against the land owners and the aristocracy. Later, similar men would rise from the ranks of the workers to advocate theories akin to socialism and communism, even before the publication of the Communist Manifesto.

A retrospective look at early 'mob' leaders' may explain the intensity of the Establishment's fears. John Ball, a fourteenth century preacher, went to jail for his seditious sermons. He once declared¹²⁵:

Good people, things will never go well in England *so long as goods be not in common*, and so long as there be villeins and gentlemen. By what right are they whom we call lords greater folk than we? On what grounds have they deserved it? Why do they hold us in serfage? If we all came of the same mother, of Adam and Eve, how can they say or prove that they are better than we, if it be not that they make us gain for them by our toil what they spend in their pride? They are closed in velvet and warm in their furs and their ermines, while we are covered with rags. They have wine and spices and fair bread; and we oat-cake

131¹²⁵ H. G. Wells, 'The Outline of History', Garden City Books, New York, 1961 (first published in 1920), vol 2, p. 593

and straw, the rain and the wind in the fields. And yet *it is of us and of our toil that these men hold their state.*

On another occasion he said:

When Adam delved and Eve span, *who was then the gentleman?*

A peasant revolt headed by Wat Tyler freed John Ball from jail. As to Wat Tyler himself, 'he was assassinated by the Mayor of London, in the presence of the young King Richard II (1381), and his movement collapsed'¹²⁶. The king's hatred and vengeance was a measure of his fear.

At a time at which communications were much slower than today, perturbations in any European country would, nevertheless, reverberate and impact on every other country. They would, in time, generate the feeling that nowhere can the property owners be really safe unless they act together in complete solidarity.

The Tyler revolt in England was preceded by the French *Jacqueries*. The Wycliffe's writings in England inspired the Hussite movement in Bohemia with its communistic tendency. For the establishment, the enemy was one wherever it raised its head. It is thus that all the European aristocracy united against the French revolution. The French nobility would, in the ranks of the enemy's armies, fight against the French republic. The republicans would say that the French nobility was betraying its country. The French aristocracy would say that the republicans were betraying God and civilisation.

The three headed Hydra of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity could not be destroyed. Restoration of monarchy in France proved to be illusory. The French revolution in 1848 was followed by similar movements of revolt all over Europe. A return to Bonapartism was followed in France by the short-lived Commune of Paris. This regime mainly supported by workers, by 'the mob', had no respect for privileges and property¹²⁷. It also considered working for a factory owner a kind of slavery¹²⁸.

With the help of French war prisoners, liberated from internment by the Germans for this very purpose, the Commune was brutally crushed. The well-to-do in all countries would be able to breathe freely again. But the call was close¹²⁹. Everyone remembered how the French ideas had previously shaken the whole of Europe. A victorious Commune in Paris, or anywhere

132¹²⁶ *ibid.*

133¹²⁷ The Paris Commune deliberately abstained from confiscating the gold reserves of the 'Banque de France'. It also left the deposits untouched. The threatened property was that of the factories.

134¹²⁸ This corresponded to the Socialist ideas prevalent among the Commune Leaders. In practice, the worker's liberation from exploitation was to be achieved through the transformation of the privately owned factories into production cooperatives.

135¹²⁹ There were no chances, at the time, for an European spread of the Commune. It was considered a bad seed which had to be destroyed before it rooted. The call was close in the sense that had it not so immediately been crushed, it would have certainly constituted a great threat in the future.

else, would certainly be followed by Communes elsewhere, and ultimately everywhere.

The Commune was beaten, but the spirit of rebellion within the common people, could not be extirpated. Socialist ideas continued to spread within the working class. The battle once more ignored frontiers. The German Marxist theories had currency all over Europe while Irish secret worker's societies spread in the United States. The 'rule of the mob' in any one European country, was a reason for scare in all other industrial countries.

The socialist movement did not start with Karl Marx. Along with the mild socialist ideas of Robert Owen, more class-oriented socialist writings appeared in England. In 1838 Bronterre O'Brien wrote¹³⁰:

The history of mankind shows that from the beginning of the world the rich of all countries have been in a permanent state of conspiracy to keep down the poor of all countries, and for this plain reason — because the poverty of the poor man is essential to the riches of the rich man.. The rich have never cared one straw for justice or humanity since the beginning of the world. We defy any historian to point out a single instance of the rich of any age or country having ever renounced their power from love or justice, or from mere appeals to their hearts and consciences. There is no such instances. Force, and force alone, has ever conquered them into humanity

For the Establishment this was threatening literature with a distinct flavour of internationalism. It seems to consider a conflict between all the rich people in all the world, and all the poor people in all the world, conflict that can be resolved, the author says, only by force. The struggle was international and would, more and more, become so. Though the threat was far from imminent, it could not be discounted that it would grow more serious.

The appearance of labour societies and labour parties, reinforced the establishment's doubts in the virtues of democracy and universal suffrage. It could end up in delivering the country into the hands of 'irresponsible leaders'.

The fear of universal suffrage was traditional. Cromwell's soldiers, who risked their lives for the victory they secured, asked for the right to vote. It was denied to them, and General Ireton, Cromwell's son-in-law, stated¹³¹ that "no person hath a right to an interest or share in the disposing of the affairs of the kingdom..that hath not a permanent fixed interest in this kingdom." He then added that "if you admit any man that hath a breath and being", a majority of the Commons might be elected who had no "local and

136¹³⁰ Dave Morgan, 'A Short History of the British People', VEB Verlag Enzyklopadie, Leipzig, 1986, p. 59

137¹³¹ E.P. Thompson, 'The Making of the English Working Class', Penguin books', England, pp. 24-5

permanent interest”. “**Why may not those men vote against all property?**”. Even Cromwell’s peers were afraid of the people!

E.P. Thomson mentions the case of “The moderate Yorkshire reformer, the Reverend Christofer Wyvill, as to whose devotion there can be no question,” and who “nevertheless believed that a reform on the principle of universal suffrage ‘could not be effected without a Civil War.’ ” The author quotes the reverend saying¹³² on the 16th of December 1797:

In times of warm political debate, the Right of Suffrage communicated to an **ignorant and ferocious Populace** would lend to tumult and confusion.. After a series of Elections disgraced by the most shameful corruption, or disturbed by the most furious commotion, **we expect** that the turbulence or venality of the English Populace would at last disgust the Nation so greatly, **that to get rid of the intolerable evils of a profligate Democracy, they would take refuge.. under the protection of Despotic Power**

This sounds like a futurist scenario for fascism. The reverend wrote in 1792¹³³:

If Mr. Paine should be able to rouse up the lower classes, their interference will probably be marked by wild work, and **all we now possess, whether in private property or public liberty, will be at the mercy of a lawless and furious rabble**

The reverend was expressing the opinion of the property owners of his time. Since then, and in spite of persecutions against the Chartists — one of whose demands was universal suffrage —, British society made great strides in the direction of democracy. The class of property owners, however, remained adverse to it¹³⁴. Churchill himself — who, when he thought it politically expedient, raised the banner of democracy — opposed universal suffrage.

His stand reflected his personal experience. He was Home Secretary at the time of the rail strike in 1911. On this occasion¹³⁵:

Without waiting for requests from the local authorities, Churchill mobilized fifty thousand troops supplied with twenty rounds of ammunition each, and dispatched them to all strategic points.

138¹³² *ibid.* p. 26

139¹³³ *ibid.* pp. 26-7

140¹³⁴ Samuel Baldwin, three times British Prime Minister in the twenties and the thirties, is on record for having said “I doubt if we can go on like this: we shall have to limit the franchise.” (Margaret George, ‘The Hollow Men’, Leslie Frewin Publishers, 1967, p. 66)

141¹³⁵ Robert Rhodes James, ‘Churchill: A Study in Failure’, The World Publishing Company, New York, 1970, pp. 42-43

..The important point was Churchill's instruction that the military commanders were to ignore the regulations that forbade the use of military unless it was specifically requested by the civil authority. This was a very serious abrogation of control by the Home Secretary, whose consequences could have been alarming.

To be ignorant of the law is bad enough, to know the law and ask military commanders to ignore it, betrays a contempt of the law, and the measure of his fear.

The General Strike in 1926 caused a real panic in the British Establishment¹³⁶:

Despite the massive weight of constitutional and extra-constitutional preparations — against workers' organisations ill-equipped except in their solidarity — the Conservative mind in 1926 was a study of apprehension and fear. By a decision of the courts the strike was declared illegal and the strike leaders outlawed; obediently, then, the strikers — the leaders and the bulk of the led — retreated from an 'unconstitutional' action and called off the general strike. Yet Prime Minister Baldwin, in a broadcast to the nation, sombrely pronounced the strike 'a challenge to Parliament and.. the road to anarchy and ruin'. 'Constitutional government', wrote Neville Chamberlain, '*is fighting for its life*; if we failed, *it would be the revolution, for the nominal leaders would be whirled away in an instant.*' Prominent members of official society panicked under the tension of the nine days of strike: the wife of Duff Cooper (Lady Diana Manners) 'could hear the tumbrels rolling *and heads sneezing into the baskets*'. And Duff Cooper — generally calm and judicious in comparison with his senior colleagues about relations with the democracy — is the source for this amazing exchange: 'Diana asked me this morning *how soon we could with honour leave the country*. I said *not till the massacres begin.*'

At a committee meeting set up to consider the means of using the Territorial Army on police duties Churchill¹³⁷:

..put everyone at their ease at once. 'I have done your job for four years, Jix, and yours for two, Worthy, so I had better unfold my plan.' Whereupon he propounded the eminently sensible idea of asking territorial battalions, particularly those in London, to volunteer *en bloc* as auxiliary police. They would be paid at military rates, and given a reasonable subsistence allowance in lieu of rations...Joynson-Hicks intervened to enquire where the money for this extra expenditure was to come from. The Home Office, he said, had no funds available. 'The Exchequer will pay,' retorted Churchill. 'If we start arguing about *petty details*, we will

142¹³⁶ Margaret George, Op. cit., p.46

143¹³⁷ The memoirs of General Ismay, Heinemann, London, 1960, p. 57

have a tired-out police force, a dissipated army and *bloody revolution*.’

The General Strike was peaceful and ended peacefully. But, in his fear, Churchill sensed in it the potential for a bloody revolution. Let us note that in such cases, getting money becomes a petty detail¹³⁸.

Early in the thirties the establishment panicked once more at the prospect of the great number of unemployed being radicalised. Churchill had his own ideas¹³⁹:

He denounced “the folly of all plans of marching off the unemployed in *gangs* and battalions to artificially fomented public works, and professing thereby to remedy unemployment,” and declared that: “There is indeed, a small proportion for whom *some disciplinary control in labour colonies might well be appropriate*, but the vast majority must look only to re-absorption in the normal or natural industries.” And what if “the normal or natural industries” were decaying and dying? Churchill’s remedy was “*for the sheep, compassion; for the goats, discipline*.”

Law breakers fall under the arm of the law. “Labour colonies” are not for them. They are for those workers who, while respecting the law, manifest the mentality of a “goat” instead of that of a “sheep”. The disciplinary labour colony considered for them by Churchill is nothing less than a concentration camp for ‘dangerous goats’.

With that kind of fear of the workers, that is to say of the main segment of the British population, it was to be expected that Churchill would not relish the universal suffrage. And indeed, in 1934, he expressed opinions against it¹⁴⁰. “He wished to give”:

extra votes to the millions of men and women, the heads of the households and fathers of families who are really bearing the burden and responsibility of our fortunes upon their shoulders, and are pushing and dragging our national barrow up the hill (*Listener*, January 17, 1934).

“On January 24, to the readers of the *Evening Standard*, he explained at greater length.. that”

..the proceedings of the House of Commons have sunk to the lowest ebb,

144¹³⁸ It was not so when the matter was rearming to face the German potential threat. Though the amounts of money involved in rearmament are vastly greater, the attitude should have been the same, if the priority were right. It is the attitude that counts. In the face of a the German expansion threat, money should have been a ‘petty matter’.

145¹³⁹ Robert Rhodes James, op. cit., pp. 330-331

146¹⁴⁰ *ibid*, pp. 331-2

“that there were no interest in Parliament, and that popular discontent might well result in the next election in a”:

majority of inexperienced and violent men

“with the result that”:

the responsible elements in the country will lose all control both of the House of Commons and the executive.

“The cure for this state of affairs was to retreat from universal suffrage”,

a universal suffrage electorate with a majority of women voters will have shown themselves incapable of preserving those forms of government under which our country has grown great and from which all the dignity and tolerance of our present life arise.

Churchill would even do without elections, which in his eyes, had little redeeming features. He stated in October 1932¹⁴¹:

Elections, even in the most educated democracies, are regarded as a misfortune and as a disturbance of social, moral and economic progress, even as a danger to international peace. Why at this moment should we force upon the untutored races of India that very system, the inconvenience of which are now felt even in the most highly developed nations, the United States, Germany, France, and in England itself?

The well-to-do feared the people at all times, in Cromwell’s times and in Churchill’s times.

The Bolshevik regime, when it came to be, was seen to embody the terrible nightmare of the ‘mob rule’. With Lenin, the spirit of past English, French and Czech ‘mob’ leaders became flesh, again. The reports from Russia were contradictory but most of the Western leaders were in no need of reports to be certain that the new ‘imposed’ regime was monstrous.

No report denied the belief that leaders there were ruling through mob power. And, when the mob rules in any country, it provokes within the members of the establishment, in all other countries, a kind of Pavlov-like reaction of distaste, frantic fear and irrational predisposition to believe the most ridiculous rumours¹⁴².

147¹⁴¹ *ibid*, p. 236

148¹⁴² D’Abernon, for instance, in the first volume of his memoirs, p. 317, mentions a message he attributes to Bela Kuhn, the leader of the Hungarian communist revolution. The message is said to contain the following sentence to Lenin: “I am proud to be your pupil, but in one thing I excel you, and that is bad faith.” As a joke it would be in poor taste. Reported as a fact, without of course any reference, testifies to D’Abernon’s blindness, ignorance and lack of any critical

For the establishment, It was enough to know that this mob rule was communistic, that it was against all privileges of birth, rank, position and fortune. These privileges, in the eyes of the well-to-do, were precisely the signs by which the most decent people, the most knowledgeable, those who best represented the progress of civilisation and its culture, could be distinguished. To hurt that group could only be a barbaric threat to Civilisation, be it called Western, European or Christian. There was no need for reliable reports to know what barbaric can be, and therefore is.

In a confidential memorandum, Lansing, the American Secretary of State, wrote¹⁴³ on October 26, 1918:

Its [Bolshevism's] appeal is to the unintelligent and brutish element of mankind to take from the intellectual and successful their rights and possessions and to reduce them to a state of slavery..

Bolshevism is the most hideous and monstrous thing that the human mind has ever conceived. It ... finds its adherents among the criminal, the depraved, and the mentally unfit ... yet this monster which seeks to devour civilized society and reduce mankind to the state of beasts is certainly *spreading westward* ... A Bolshevik Germany or Austria is too horrible to contemplate. It is worse, *far worse than a Prussianized Germany*, and would mean an ever greater menace to human liberty.

To consider the possibility of a Bolshevik Germany is an indication of the Allied belief that Bolshevik ideas could spread fast. This was written before the end of World War I, close enough to the end so that its horrible cost in human lives and sufferings could already be known. At the time, nobody in the Allied camp would acknowledge Allied responsibilities in the outbreak of the war. Nobody had the least doubt that the war had been caused by the Prussian militaristic spirit and by no other cause.

The war was not yet won and yet millions of lives had already been sacrificed to put an end to Prussianism. To prefer at that time, 'by far', a Prussianized Germany gives the extent of the additional cost in lives and sufferings the Allies were prepared to impose on the European people, if that would be what it takes to stop the ideological spread of Bolshevism.

The quote says more. German Prussianism was being combated because it threatened to militarily dominate Europe. To eliminate Prussianism was an explicit aim of the war against Germany. Russian Bolshevism was an ideological threat. The preference expressed in the quote was for a Prussian Germany with its concomitant military domination, rather than a successful

judgement, when it comes to communism ['Lord D'Abernon's Diary', Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1929]. Similarly, news items were published from 'serious sources' as to the nationalization of women in Russia [Thomas Johnston, Collins, London, 1952, p. 57]

149¹⁴³ John M. Thompson, op. cit., p. 15

spread of the Bolshevik ideology. Given the two alternatives, we are told what the choice would be. Chamberlain in the thirties believed he faced the same alternatives, and made the same choice.

At the time the memorandum was written, the Allies were supporting notorious brigands who were committing a large number of crimes against the Russian population. Lansing knew it. He knew however that the 'civilised world' had little choice. Whoever opposed Bolshevism had to be supported. Only thus could it be stopped, and destroyed. Brigands come and go and, whatever regime they install, it respects the rights of the 'intellectual and successful' and protects 'their rights and possessions'. One should hope that their regime, against all odds, may later become benevolent and, even democratic.

We saw that Lansing also knew the Bolsheviks were popular in Russia. He did not realise that his fear coupled, with his understanding of the Bolsheviks, meant that most of the population in the West, and particularly in Austria and Germany, were 'unintelligent, brutish elements, or criminal, depraved or mentally unfit'. With such a pessimistic understanding of the common people *anything* would be better than their direct rule as was the case with the Soviet system, at least in its early days.

With such a view there is a tendency to disbelieve any report describing the Bolsheviks in better terms and to prefer the reports which, no matter how suspect could be their sources, reinforce the prejudice associated with Bolshevism.

At the time, the name of Stalin was barely known; his terrorist regime was still to be instituted. Reliable official reports asserted the devotion of the Bolshevik leaders to their cause, the absence of terrorism and a dedication to the cause of the common people. All this was considered superficial when confronted with the fact that 'European', 'Western', 'Christian' civilisation was being destroyed. There could be no greater terrorism than to dispossess those privileged by destiny. There could be no greater terrorism than to appoint inexperienced common people as ministers, and to subject the cream of the population to their rule.

The Western leaders who, while in possession of reliable information originating from their own representatives on the spot, repeated the unfounded rumours, were not guilty of lying. They chose to believe those rumours which were more in tune with their fears and to discard any evidence to the contrary.

That is not to say that, when it came to combat communism the western leaders abstained from lying. Lying they did whenever it was necessary, either to prevent the Bolsheviks from being seen in a better light, or to ensure the pursuit of a policy which could not be avowed publicly¹⁴⁴. The following

¹⁴⁴ The young American diplomat William Bullitt, on a mission to Moscow, negotiated in early 1919 with the Bolsheviks peace proposals to end the foreign intervention in Russia. The Bolshevik were prepared to be agreeable, to a point, to Allied concerns. Lloyd George favoured the acceptance of these proposals which, in his view, were very important. However, faced with

rather long quote illustrates the difference between the reality and the 'impressions' which were allowed to dominate over the public opinion. Writing about the 'backstairs' contacts maintained with the Bolsheviks through Sadoul (French), Robins (American) and Lockhart (British), Kennan wrote¹⁴⁵:

They saw the Soviet leaders not as ogres or monsters of sorts, but as human beings, and in many ways impressive human beings at that. It was a startling experience for these men, after long immersion in the Western society of that day — where the accent was so extensively on individualism, on personal vanity, on social rivalry and snobbishness — to encounter men who had a burning social faith, and were relentless and incorruptible in the pursuit of it....

The Soviet leaders knew what they wanted; they worked day and night to carry it into effect; they gave no thought to themselves. They demanded discipline from others; they accepted it for themselves. In their seriousness of purpose, in the forthright simplicity of their behaviour, in their refusal to bother over nonessentials, in their contemptuous rejection of personal considerations to the needs of the movement, in their willingness to get their hand dirty in the interest of the cause in these manifestations of the early Bolshevik personality, a thousand outworn affectations and pretences of the era of the turn of the century seemed to go crushing to the ground. For those who saw this at first hand, the impression was unforgettable...

...Their firsthand knowledge could not fail to make them impatient of the stupid and prejudiced views about Russian Communism that were beginning to find currency in Western officialdom and respectable Western opinion. It fell largely to them to combat such silly and ineradicable legends as the belief that the Bolsheviks were paid German agents or that they had nationalized women.

Note that the three persons who were trying so hard, and so unsuccessfully, to let the truth be known, had been commanded by their government precisely to report the truth. But since the truth was not to the liking of the establishments it was not acted upon, and the 'officialdom' went on giving currency to the prejudiced views¹⁴⁶.

a House hostile to the Bolshevik to the extreme, he went so far as to deny his knowledge that the Bolshevik had made peace proposals. He even denied knowing anything about the Bullitt mission. Obviously, he was lying. [see John M. Thompson, op. cit. pp. 242-6]

151¹⁴⁵ George F. Kennan, Op. Cit., pp. 62-3

152¹⁴⁶ Officialdom went to the extent of faking the famous 'Zinoviev telegram'. Not all officials involved were guilty to the same degree. Some who suspected that the telegram was fake, were nevertheless happy to use it for the double purpose of strongly contributing to the

What matters here is the realisation that the fear of communism, in the years separating the two World Wars, was not related to the fear of the Russian state at the service of an aggressive military policy. It was related to the fear that the communist ideas could spread to all of Europe. It was the fear that communism could inspire a modern John Bull movement. It was the fear that whenever the inability of the government to resolve a crisis to the people's satisfaction could become apparent, the people might opt for a solution 'à la Bolshevik'. Moreover, a number of crises were looming on the horizon. Similar crises have proven dangerous in the past. They sometimes required the use of force to suppress what was considered to be a rebellion (some strikes for instance). Now that troops appeared to rebel on many occasions, one feared that the government might not be able to suppress such mutinies. This was what the fear of communism — communism as exemplified by the Bolshevik revolution — was all about.

We have seen in the previous chapter that the Allies placed their hate of Bolshevism above the need to reconstitute an Eastern Front against Germany. This cannot be explained by the distaste felt by the Allies towards Bolshevism. Germany was still the enemy against which the Allies had struggled three years and which, still, could conceivably win the war. Why then not to concentrate first on what it takes to win the war as surely and quickly as possible, even if it entails delaying the fight against Bolshevism?

It was however feared that Bolshevism, if not combated, could get a stable hold over Russia. If not eliminated now, the task could later become much more difficult if not impossible. Militarily and economically weak as it may then have been, a Bolshevik regime would be extremely dangerous as a model to be followed. The potential danger to the establishments, all over the world, was so great that it surpassed the threat of a German victory. A victory over Germany would not be worthwhile if it would be followed by the spread of Bolshevism. Now, before it be too late, was the time to 'strangle [it] at its birth'¹⁴⁷.

What greatly intensified the fear of Bolshevism was that, at the end of World War I, conditions in Europe were harsh. Unemployment and hunger were widespread. The disappearance of the German danger weakened national unity. The fighting spirit could not be sustained or revived. Soldiers, be they French, British, or Americans would rebel rather than fight Russia. The British soldiers riots at Folkstone in January 4, 1919 and the mutiny of an American company in March 1919 indicated that the allied armies were not reliable in the fight against Bolshevism in Russia. Could then the army

conservative electoral success, and for denigrating the Soviet Union. The reader is referred for some of the truth to Nigel West's book "M16", Granada Publishing, London, 1985, pp. 70-2 153¹⁴⁷. The expression is Churchill's. Referring to the thoughts that crossed his mind while on the plane to Moscow, he wrote: "I pondered on my mission to this sullen, sinister Bolshevik State I had once tried so hard to strangle at its birth...". Winston Churchill, 'The Hinge of Fate' (vol 4. of 'The Second World War'), Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1950, p. 475

and the police be relied upon to fight Bolshevism at home? J.M. Thompson writes¹⁴⁸:

The unreliability of troops to fight the Bolsheviks was complemented by labour unrest on the home front. In February 1919 strikes and riots in England reached such proportions that Lloyd George hastened back to London from the peace conference to deal with the situation¹⁴⁹.

and then¹⁵⁰:

Even before the armistice, the Western leaders were apprehensive. On October 30, 1918, Colonel House reported to President Wilson that in discussing the danger of Bolshevism with Clemenceau and Lloyd George, the latter “admitted it was possible to create such a state of affairs in England, and both agreed anything can happen in Italy.”

Thompson goes on¹⁵¹:

Although there was certainly no imminent danger of a Bolshevik revolution in America, even Wilson was troubled with what he interpreted as signs of future difficulty. On October 16, 1918, he told Sir William Wiseman, a confidential British representative in the United States: “The spirit of the Bolsheviks is lurking everywhere... There is grave unrest all over the world. There are symptoms of it in this country — symptoms that are apparent although not yet dangerous.”

Thompson, speaking of the western leaders at the Paris Peace conference summarises the situation¹⁵²:

Thus from the very beginning the peacemakers were affected by the spectre of Bolshevism. Consider it they must; deal with it they could. Western society was under fire. Revolution threatened Central Europe and even their own countries. The men at Paris believed that they had to bring order to Russia, maintain stability

154¹⁴⁸ *ibid* p.13. The author is quoting Lord Riddell, ‘An Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After, 1918-1923’, London, 1933, p. 21

155¹⁴⁹ This is Thompson’s inference and not that recorded by Lord Riddell in his diary. The latter mentioned that Lloyd George, in February 1919, returned from Paris to London. On the way, he referred to the situation in England. Lord Riddell noted: “He referred also to the labour situation in England, and gave me the idea that he viewed the future with grave apprehension.. His elder daughter spoke of bringing her baby to London. He objected and said there might be riots and that the child had better stay where she was.” See reference of preceding note.

156¹⁵⁰ *ibid*. p. 14. The author is quoting Charles Seymour, ed., ‘The intimate Papers of Colonel House’, (4 vols.; Boston, 1926-1928), iv, pp. 1118-9

157¹⁵¹ *ibid*, p.14. The author quotes from Notes on an Interview with the President by Sir William Wiseman, House Papers, Drawer 35.

158¹⁵² *ibid*, p. 20

in Germany and Austria-Hungary, and make a peace that would satisfy the aspirations of the masses. And all that had to be done quickly if they were to beat back chaos and anarchy.

In this last quotation, Thompson is using the language of the time, which does not differ too much from the language used during the 1920s and the 1930s. 'Revolution' is the communist revolution. To 'satisfy the aspirations of the masses' is in order, except in the measure in which the aspirations are pro-Bolshevism as was the case in Russia. To 'satisfy the aspirations of the masses' means also to take a position that, formally, answers the challenge of the peace principles lead down by the Bolsheviks¹⁵³.

To 'bring order in Russia' should read to use whatever means leading to the suppression of Bolshevism. To 'beat back chaos and anarchy' means to succeed in preventing the people, the 'mob', from taking to the streets any longer, preventing the people from impeding a military intervention in Russia, and thus reduce the danger of a Bolshevik revolution.

A number of Western leaders have recorded the scare felt by the Establishment at the time. The American statesman Sumner Welles remember that¹⁵⁴:

Postwar Europe was a desperately shaken community. The same strange contagion of panic which swept Europe at the close of the eighteen century again gripped the continent in the early twenties of this century. *Governments and the wealthier classes saw the spectre of Bolshevism in every sign of unrest, political or social.*

He also wrote in the same vein¹⁵⁵:

The revolutionary character emanating from Communist Russia had aroused a panic of hysteria throughout Western Europe and the New World

159¹⁵³ *ibid*, p. 17. The author writes:

160

161 Lenin had his own peace proposals, proclaiming objectives which had great popular appeal. From the moment the Bolshevik movement first came to the attention of the world, its peace program competed with that of the West for the support of peoples everywhere. In fact, this challenge, and particularly the declaration by the new Soviet government of a six-points peace program at the beginning of the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations in December 1917, was an important factor leading to the restatement of Allied war aims by both Wilson and Lloyd George in early 1918

162

163 The author refers to David Hunter Miller, 'My Diary at the Conference of Paris' (21 vols.); privately printed, New York, 1924-1928, vol 1, p. 370. Wilson's 'Fourteen Peace Points' address was delivered on January 8th, 1918.

164¹⁵⁴ Sumner Welles, 'The Time For Decision', Harpe & Brothers Publishers, New York, 1944, p. 312

165¹⁵⁵ *ibid*, p.11

Samuel Baldwin records¹⁵⁶ that “When the war ended we were in a new world.. class conscious and revolutionary it was.” ‘It was’, placed at the end of the sentence, could¹⁵⁷ give it a sense of solemnity as if the speaker is still shaken by what he remembers.

The story of the Allied military intervention, in Russia, as well as that of its support to groups of doubtful morality and policy, has been partially and summarily told in the previous chapter. The intervention failed for reasons which are no longer controversial though still worth mentioning:

w the soldiers in the Allied armies of intervention did not want to make war any longer. They revolted in many instances.

w the people at home were against intervention. It was feared that, in these conditions, intervention in Russia could bring Bolshevism at home¹⁵⁸.

w the ‘White’ armies, supported materially by the allies, and considered in the West as representing the will of the people against Bolshevism, were lead by Tsarist officers who were not hiding they wanted to restore the old Tsarist regime. The morale of these armies was low and their troops were deserting constantly to join the Red Army. It became evident that material support would not do. Direct military intervention was needed, and was no longer in the cards.

w the moral of the Red Army was high. Lloyd George stated in a memorandum that the Leninists¹⁵⁹:

..somehow or other they seemed to have managed to keep their hold upon the masses of the Russian people, and what is much more significant, they have succeeded in creating a large army which is apparently well directed and well disciplined — *it is the only army that believes that it has any cause to fight for*’.

w the possibility still existed to create an intervention army of volunteers and mercenaries. It was considered but the idea was rejected when the estimate of the cost proved to be prohibitive.

And so, Soviet Russia came out of the imposed civil war as a stable country. The Western world could have come to terms with its existence, but it did not.

166¹⁵⁶ Margaret George, op. cit., p. 28

167¹⁵⁷ The quote is too short. It cannot justify more than a conditional conclusion.

168¹⁵⁸ F.S. Northedge, op. cit., p. 77. The author reports Lloyd George saying at a meeting of the four Leaders of the Supreme Council, on 16 January 1919 that ‘if a military enterprise is started against the Bolsheviks that would make England Bolshevik and there would be a Soviet in London’

169¹⁵⁹ *ibid*, p.81

For some time the threat of Bolshevism was perceived imminent. For a short time a communist revolution installed a soviet regime in Hungary, and the scare in the West reached new peaks. Then Poland invaded the Ukraine with the hope that the new Soviet regime will not have the strength to resist. The Polish army was however stopped and forced to retreat to the gates of Warsaw. The fear in the West knew no bounds.

With the help of the West, in particular with a Western military leadership that included the General Weygand and the officer De Gaule (to become later the General De Gaule) the Soviet troops were forced to retreat and the Russo-Polish war, initiated by Poland, ended with some Ukrainian territory — East of the Curzon¹⁶⁰ line — in Polish hands.

Finally, the strong fears concerning Italy and Germany dissipated with the advent of Fascism and Nazism. A Bolshevik revolution was no longer imminent in these countries. But the danger was still great and would remain as long as a single country in the world had a communist regime.

The Establishment did not have to go far to substantiate its fears. One could not dismiss the possibility that the communists in France, Spain etc. would become strong enough to come to power. The United Front in these two countries was disliked by the British Establishment. Thus, Franco's revolt supported by Hitler and Mussolini, had the sympathy of most British conservatives¹⁶¹. Franco would prevent Spain from leaning to the left.

While British governmental circles were sympathising with Franco, considerations of the benefits of 'a strong government' in France would float around. In a letter to Mr. Eden, from Ambassador Sir E. Phipps in Berlin, on November 10, 1936, we can read¹⁶²:

..it seems by no means certain that a Fascist France need necessarily turn her back on us or throw in her lot with Frau Germania. But in any case it seems absolutely essential for us that (1) a strong Government, capable of restoring and preserving order, should soon emerge in France..

The French government was, at that time, the one brought to power by the Popular Front of Socialists, Radical-Socialists and Communists. The government itself did not include communist members. It is against the same kind of Popular Front in Spain that Franco revolted. To Ambassador Phipps' credit, it must be said that he was very outspoken against the Nazis. He did not stop warning Britain against the horrors of the Nazi regime and against its aggressive intentions. Nevertheless, when at the time at which the British establishment wholeheartedly supported Franco, to suggest the need of 'a strong government' in France to replace that of the Popular Front, while

170¹⁶⁰ Lord Curzon proposed a boundary line bearing his name, East of which all Polish people would be in minority, and West of which all Russian People would be in minority of the local region in which they lived. See George F. Kennan, op. cit., pp. 159-61

171¹⁶¹ See chapter 9

172¹⁶² DBFP, 2nd series, vol. 17, Doc. 365, p. 533

brushing off the danger a French Fascist regime would constitute, is a strong indication of the extent of the British Establishment's fear and the extent to which it would go to put an end to 'mob democracy'. Let us note that the 'disorders' that occurred under the French Popular Front were of the kind common in Britain itself. The difference was that, under the Popular Front government, many of the workers' demands were satisfied and there was a definite improvement in their working conditions.

Britain would not feel secure with a French Government that would have wrong priorities, such as defining Germany as the main threat. Britain considered at that time the necessity of doing 'anything' to topple such a French Government¹⁶³. Sir Orme Sargent, Assistant Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office wrote in a memorandum:

M. Paul-Boncour at the Quai d'Orsay is a disaster and an invitation to him would only strengthen his position, whereas it must be our sincere wish to see him out of office at the earliest possible moment. In fact, I should go so far as to say that *any thing we can do to weaken the present French Government and precipitate its fall would be in the British interest.*

One can only guess at the range of measures that would be considered by Britain to topple the French Government. There were enough political leaders in France who shared the British understanding on proper priorities. They were not at ease with a Foreign Affairs minister who, far from opposing the Soviet danger, aimed at facing the German threat in alliance with Russia. Such a man had to go. We will see that there is evidence of British influence resulting in Bonnet, the nefarious Bonnet, becoming the minister of Foreign Affairs. The fear of communism led to the need of an 'understanding' with Hitler's Germany. This would not be possible with Paul-Boncour at the Quai d'Orsay¹⁶⁴.

But what about the British Labour Party? Could any Conservative trust them? Today the question seems preposterous. The Labour Party has never been revolutionary. Nonetheless, what would occur if, after a sweeping electoral victory, and under the influence of its left wing, it would decide to peacefully implement the socialist principles? For the Conservatives, the question was not academic but very actual.

A two days' debate was held in the House of Lords on March 20, 1935 on a motion tabled by members of the Labour Party stating that capitalism is

173¹⁶³ Telford Taylor, 'Munich The Price of Peace', Doubleday & Co, New York, 1979, p. 580. Halifax, on the basis of this memorandum, approved Sir E. Phipps recommendation not to agree to Paul Boncour's visit to London.

174¹⁶⁴ It is a grave step to consider doing 'anything' provided it can help topple the government of a friendly country. The fact that such an option had been considered should give a measure of the British determination to implement a policy of 'general settlement' with Germany. This term 'general settlement', which in its vagueness seems nonetheless reasonable and inspired by a desire for peace and agreement, had a very specific meaning which will be analyzed later.

the source of most social ills and that the time had come to implement Socialism. During the debate, Labour members of the House of Lords defended the principles of socialism and explained their significance. The exposition was definitely Marxist in tendency. To the Conservatives, Socialism, as expounded by these Labourite Lords, looked very much similar to the Soviet brand of Socialism except for a commitment to abstain from the violent overthrow of the government, for a peaceful evolution and for limited compensations to the dispossessed. The tabled motion gives a taste of what the Conservative Lords were subjected to¹⁶⁵:

Lord Sanderson rose to move to resolve, That in view of the failure of the capitalist system adequately to utilise and organise natural resources and productive power, or to provide the necessary standard of life for vast numbers of the population, and believing that the cause of this failure lies in the private ownership and control of the means of production and distribution, this House declares that legislative effort should be directed to the gradual suppression of the capitalist system by an industrial and social order based on the public ownership and democratic control of the instruments of production and distribution.

In the presentation of his motion, Lord Sanderson said:

We believe that this capitalist system cannot be patched up, that it has broken down really beyond repair

The debate contributed to convince the Establishment that their rule was not safe. The only reassuring factors were the success of Fascism and Nazism in eliminating the threat of the communist and socialist parties. Sumner Welles, former Assistant Secretary of State and personal friend of Roosevelt, remembers that:¹⁶⁶

At first, however, the major powers, and in particular Great Britain, breathed a sigh of relief. From their standpoint Italy had become quiet and orderly. It was in hands that would ruthlessly root out all signs of Communism.

Business interests in every one of the democracies of Western Europe and of the New World welcomed Hitlerism as a barrier to the expansion of Communism. They saw in it an assurance that order and authority in Germany would safeguard big business interests there. Among the more reactionary elements of the Church, there was a paean praise..

175¹⁶⁵ House of Lords, The Parliamentary Debates, vol. 96, columns 177-178
176¹⁶⁶ Op. cit., pp. 28-29

In the case of Hitler, as in the case of Mussolini, the greedy, the Tories and the short-sighted heralded his rise to power with enthusiasm. I can remember one American Ambassador who publicly applauded Mussolini as the harbinger of a new era of glory, not only for the Italian people but for the rest of the civilized world as well.

The Italian and German example showed the British establishment what was to be done in the eventuality of the crystallisation of the threat. Thus, speaking about Mussolini, Austen Chamberlain stated¹⁶⁷ in November 1925:

It is not part of my business as Foreign Secretary to appreciate his action in the domestic policies of Italy, but *if I ever had to choose in my own country between anarchy and dictatorship, I expect I should be on the side of the dictator*

Thus, in Rome, in 1927, Churchill congratulated the Italians¹⁶⁸ on their:

triumphant struggle against the bestial appetites and passions of Leninism.. rendered a service to the whole world.

..Italy has shown that there is a way of fighting the subversive forces which can rally the masses of the people, properly led, to value and wish to defend the honour and stability of civilized society. She has provided the necessary antidote to the Russian poison. *Hereafter no great nation will go unprovided with an ultimate means of protection against the cancerous growth of Bolshevism.*

With no ambiguity, Churchill is stating that Fascism is the way to go *for all great nations* in case of the ideological spread of socialism or communism.

General elections were held in Britain on the 30th of May 1929. The Labour party got 287 seats against 261 to the Conservatives and 59 for the Liberals. The increase of Labour popularity did scare the well-to-do in Britain. And though the Labour Party proved to be innocuous, the possibility was there that Leadership contests might bring more combative elements at the top of the Party.

Whether to eliminate the socialist ideology at home, or to prevent the spread of Bolshevism in Europe, the British establishment was convinced that there was no alternative to the overthrow of the Soviet regime in Russia. This was why it turned to military intervention. Its failure did not eliminate its motivation. Since the means used to overthrow the Soviet regime turned

177¹⁶⁷ Gaetano Salvemini, op. cit., p. 72

178¹⁶⁸ Margaret George, op. cit., p.48. The author quote from F.L. Schuman, 'Soviet Politics at Home and Abroad'

out to be inadequate, it is only human that the European Establishment, in particular the British one, endeavoured to find other ways.

CHAPTER V

THE FEAR OF A WAR IN THE WEST

We have shown that a free hand was given by Chamberlain to Hitler with respect to the latter's ambitions towards the Soviet Union. This was the crowning of an amount of preparation work Britain had to do, over the preceding years, before Chamberlain could implement such a policy. Though done systematically, it was far from being straightforward.

While the preparation work had many of the attributes of a conspiracy, there was no 'conspiracy centre' planning the necessary steps for the implementation of a free hand policy. There was no need for a regular conspiracy. A large section of the establishment was openly advocating such a policy. The most influential of them, in clubs, private meetings and larger parties, were discussing and advocating appropriate measures for its implementation. As to those members of the government and of the Foreign Office who shared that view, they were careful to co-operate, without being explicit in their public statements.

As Vansittart's letter¹⁶⁹ to Lord Wigram shows, the matter was known to be very divisive of the public opinion. The political decisions which would facilitate the granting of the free hand were therefore taken under a variety of covers. The supporters 'in the know', knew the meaning of each step. Each in his particular position, contributed to the realisation of the free hand policy.

This effort, not being centrally co-ordinated, was subject to dissension as to the danger of the policy at particular times. In spite of unanimity in the relevant circles in favour of the free hand policy, there were disagreements on the *quid pro quo* that Britain should request from Germany, and on the estimate of the danger to the West resulting from German's rearmament and expansion. At times, when he could not trust the dissenters, Chamberlain acted behind the back of the government.

The idea 'was in the air' since the 'outbreak' of the Bolshevik revolution. It was at first rejected on grounds that to allow Germany to 're-establish order' in Russia, would transform Germany into the real victor of the World War¹⁷⁰:

As Clemenceau phrased it on June 2, 1919, in support of Polish claims, "if Germany were to colonize Russia, the war would be lost not won."

¹⁷⁹¹⁶⁹ See Chapter I

¹⁸⁰¹⁷⁰ John M. Thomson, *Op. cit.*, p. 377. The author quotes from Department of State, 'Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: Paris Peace Conference', 1919, vol vi, p. 143

Poland was ready to do the job. In September 1919 the matter was discussed by the allied leaders¹⁷¹:

..the Allied leaders discussed an offer by Paderewski to invade Russia and to capture Moscow with an army of five hundred thousand men — if the powers were prepared to pay for the whole venture at a cost of a million pounds a day.. Lloyd George and Polk doubted that the Allies were prepared to take on such a heavy financial commitment, while Clemenceau argued that a Polish invasion would simply rally all Russians to the Bolshevik cause

And then, there still was some hope that the Bolshevik regime could be suppressed by military help to the various groups in Russia opposed to the Bolshevik regime.

When the Bolshevik regime proved to be too much of a hard bone, the idea of unifying all Europe against Russia seemed to impose itself. But how could you unite a Germany dissatisfied with the Versailles Treaty, with a France terrified at the prospect of a German military revival? Besides, there were more urgent tasks facing the allies. Everywhere in Europe, radical movements were developing and, in some countries, threatened seriously to establish a Soviet regime. It was therefore necessary to do the following:

w First, Europe itself, exclusive of Russia, had to be stabilised against radicalism and against social unrest.

w Then a formula had to be found to the mutual satisfaction of Germany and France. It should be such as to allow Germany to rearm, and to provide the necessary guarantees to France against Germany. This formula would be the object of a 'general settlement'. 'Ideally', there would first be a general settlement and then Germany would rearm. Real life, however, rarely provides for ideal solutions.

w Something had to be done with respect to the League of Nations.

Here the situation was particularly difficult. The League of Nations was conceived in a spirit of collective security. As such it could play a role in providing the security needed by France. However, if its collective security nature was maintained, it would stand in the way of Germany's expansion to the East. It was also necessary to reckon with the strong popular opinion in support of a strong League of Nations.

181¹⁷¹ Ibid, p. 344

w It was necessary to take precautions to prevent the eventuality of Germany turning first against the West, and to be ready to face that eventuality in case the precautions proved to be ineffective.

w A delicate act of acrobatics had to be performed to balance the British Imperial interests in the Far East with the United States' susceptibilities and with the important contribution that Japan could provide in the struggle against the Soviet Union.

w As much as possible, and while implementing the other points of the agenda, the Soviet Union should be kept out of decision making processes.

It is not reasonable to argue that though the agenda has indeed been implemented, and while a free hand, as shown in the first chapter, has indeed been given to Germany, there may be no direct relation between that agenda and the grant of a free hand to Germany. According to this argument, each topic in this agenda was implemented as the result of the interplay of factors, at the time at which each decision was made. While the decisions made a free hand policy possible, they were not inspired by the desire of granting a free hand to Germany.

What is not reasonable in this argument is the fact that so many documents and diaries belie it. The agenda itself never existed as such. There was no need for it. It was enough that whenever decisions of international consequence were taken, they would be influenced, each at its proper time, by the consideration of facilitating the German policy of expansion to the East.

For many politicians, the free hand policy was not a bargaining chip. It did not need to be formally offered. It would be enough if Britain, with the knowledge of the extent of Germany's ambitions towards Eastern Europe, would make known her disinterest in the fate of that part of Europe. In such a case, the pretence could be made that no free hand had been given. The *façade* of respectability would be saved.

This *de-facto* agenda was predictable. What had not accurately been predicted was that Germany would play her role so crudely. This resulted in the British public becoming more and more opposed to an association with Germany. The 'logic of events'¹⁷² was such that the British Government could not steer the diplomatic course at will. The scare was great that, willy-nilly, the Western countries would be forced to take a strong stand against Germany's aggressions, stand which would lead to a war with a Germany they were allowing to rearm, and expand.

Losing such a war would be bad enough; however, winning it, it was feared, would not be much better. Special efforts were needed to prevent a

182¹⁷² This was the expression used by Chamberlain to warn Germany that Britain might be forced into a war caused by expansion in the East, even though Britain was determined not to extend guarantees to the countries in Central or Eastern Europe

war involving the West. To secure a 'peaceful' German expansion, it was necessary, on the one hand, to convince the British public of the legitimacy of Germany's claims. As an added precaution, it should be shown that no British interest was hurt in any particular German expansion.

With the advent of Fascism and Nazism the communist threat in Italy and Germany disappeared. Franco would take care of whatever threat may have been in Spain. In spite of fearful moments, the home front proved to be manageable, even during depression times. The Soviet Union herself was not perceived as being militarily aggressive. The fear of communism, in these conditions, should have played a relatively small role in the late thirties. The communist threat, in all appearances, was not imminent.

The 'logic of events' proved to be inexorable, and the establishment in the West was struck with a new scare. It was feared that the plans to keep the West out of a prospective conflict between Germany and Soviet Union would fail. It was even feared that a war could break out between Germany and the West in which the Soviet Union would not be involved.

The source of danger had two prongs. Its consideration was enough to create a feeling of paranoia in the conservative minds in Britain, and France.

On the one hand, they knew that the success of Bolshevism in Russia resulted from developments during World War I. The war catapulted the Bolshevik Party, which otherwise had been weak, into the largest political force in Revolutionary Russia.

The feeling prevailed, among the conservatives, that a European War, with western participation, would see the outbreak of a victorious European communist revolution. What reinforced that feeling was that not only did Russia become Bolshevik, but many other European countries barely escaped the same fate. England and France felt at home some of the tremors produced by the Russian quake.

On the other hand, besides the threat of revolution, a war between the Western countries and Germany raised the chance of their mutual exhaustion. It would leave them easy prey to a Soviet military imposition of communism.

With such a view, *avoiding war in the West* was imperative. Bending to the wish of the dictators was more due to just that consideration than to the fear of defeat at their hands.

We will illustrate, with quotations, the strength of the fear generated by the prospect of a social revolution brought about by western involvement in war.

On September 14, 1932, Thomas Jones records in his diary¹⁷³ that the Prime Minister Baldwin told him another war "will end western civilisation". The end of western civilisation was a common euphemism for a communist victory.

183¹⁷³ Thomas Jones, 'A diary with Letters', Oxford University Press, London, 1954, p. 56

The French journalist, Genevieve Tabouis, wrote¹⁷⁴ that in March 1936:

I met a big industrialist, a family friend. He told me: "Everything is better than war, since any war in Europe now would mean the end of our capitalist system, and then, where would we go?" (our translation).

That conversation was held just after Germany, in contravention of the Locarno pact, militarily reoccupied the Rhineland. It displays the typical feelings of the business circles in France.

Harold Nicolson, MP (National Labour), records in his diary on March 12, 1936, a few days after German reoccupation of the Rhineland¹⁷⁵:

The French are not letting us off.. The Covenant of the League has been violated. Locarno has been violated. We merely ask you to fulfil your obligations under these two treaties... Thus if we send an ultimatum to Germany, she ought in all reason to climb down. But then she will not climb down *and we shall have war*. Naturally we shall win and enter Berlin. But what is the good of that? *It would only mean communism in Germany and France..*

Nicolson's opinion was common among most conservative politicians including the Prime Minister Baldwin. The Cabinet minutes of the time record¹⁷⁶:

The Prime Minister thought at some stage it would be necessary to point out to the French that the action they propose would not result only in letting loose *another great war in Europe*. They might succeed in crushing Germany with the aid of Russia, but *it would probably result in Germany going Bolshevik..*

Robert Coulondre, French Ambassador to Moscow, mentions in his memoirs¹⁷⁷:

..when I went to Russia, I had not yet perceived the deep reason, the political reason for which it was essential, crucial, for France, to avoid war. It is only at the end of my stay in U.S.S.R that this reason appeared to me.. Here it is in a few words: in war, France had to lose in both eventualities. Vanquished, she was nazified; *victorious, she had, specially following the destruction of the German power, to sustain the crushing weight of the slavic world, armed with the communist flame-throwers... I must*

184¹⁷⁴ Genevieve Tabouis, 'Ils l'ont appelé Cassandre', Editions de la Maison de France, New York, 1942, p. 266

185¹⁷⁵ Harold Nicolson, 'Diaries and Letters 1930-1939', Atheneum, New York, 1968, pp. 249-250

186¹⁷⁶ CAB 23/81 p. 292

187¹⁷⁷ Robert Coulondre, 'De Staline à Hitler', Hachette, Paris, p.21

confess that when I went to Moscow my notions were more elementary. I thought that we had, up to the maximum, to work for peace consolidation for humanity reasons, of course in view of all the horrors, sufferings and ruins brought by war, but also specially for France, because, after the terrible haemorrhage sustained in 1914, one more bleeding could have for her the most fearful consequences.

Later, Coulondre was to become ambassador to Germany. The critical missions to Moscow and Berlin were given to him in view of the high regard in which he was held. Moving in the French highest diplomatic spheres, he came to know the intimate political thoughts of the French leaders. What he does not say, but was said by other well informed persons, is that most people in the French Establishment would have preferred defeat followed by nazism, rather than victory followed by communism. Coulondre gives an indication of this situation ¹⁷⁸:

National-Socialism presents itself, in Europe, as the champion of civilization against the forces of destruction of world revolution. Here is what will not facilitate the grouping of French opinion for the alliance with the Soviets

Coulondre thinks that the French public believes the Nazi claim that they are the protectors of civilisation against communism. With such a belief, standing up to Germany must have been very low in the schedule of priorities. Most of the French people, however, were not taken in by the nazi propaganda. The French opinion considered by Coulondre is most likely that of the ruling circles.

On May 1, 1938, the German Ambassador in France reported to the German Foreign Ministry¹⁷⁹:

Bonnet.. begged us most earnestly not to compel France.. to take up arms by reason of an act of violence in favour of the Sudeten Germans. Both France and.. Britain too.. would exert their utmost influence to induce the Prague Government to adopt an accommodating attitude up to the extreme bounds of possibility; for *he considered any arrangement better than world war*, in the event of which all Europe would perish, and *both victor and vanquished would fall victims to world communism*

The American Ambassador to France, in a personal letter to Roosevelt, on May the 20th 1938, expressed his fears of the consequences of an European war. He suggested to the President to¹⁸⁰:

188¹⁷⁸ Op. Cit., p. 42

189¹⁷⁹ DGFP, series D, vol 2, document 144, p. 254

190¹⁸⁰ Telford Taylor, Op. cit., pp. 4-5

Call to the White House the Ambassadors of England, France, Germany and Italy. Ask them to transmit to Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler and Mussolini your urgent invitation to send representatives at once to The Hague to attempt.. a peaceful settlement of the dispute Between Germany and Czechoslovakia.. You should also make a personal appeal.. referring to the fact.. that just as we are grateful for Shakespeare so are we grateful for Beethoven, that just as we are grateful for Moliere so are we grateful for Leonardo da Vinci..that we cannot stand by and watch the beginning of the end of European civilization without making one last effort to stop its destruction; that you are convinced that ***the only result of general European war today would be an Asiatic despotism established on fields of dead***

‘Asiatic despotism’ is another euphemism for communism. Unlike the Soviet Union, Italy had no treaties involving her in the Czechoslovakian problem. Nevertheless, Bullitt would extend an invitation to Italy, but not to the Soviet Union, to discuss the matter. When it came to describe how all European nations share a common civilisation, Bullitt gave instances from Britain, France, Germany and Italy; no instance from Russia. In the same letter, Bullitt recognised that the action he suggested would expose the President to being accused of ‘selling out a small nation’. He thought, however, that it might offer France an ‘escape’ from their ‘desperate moral dilemma and general European war would be avoided’. The fear that a war would result in ‘Asiatic despotism’¹⁸¹ must have been great indeed.

Weizsacker, German State Secretary minuted a conversation he had with Neville Henderson, the British Ambassador. He wrote to the German Foreign Minister¹⁸²:

..he came to me in order to deliver at once the letter enclosed herewith.. The Ambassador added.. it was.. intended.. as a personal and friendly appeal. Halifax considered the situation to be very grave, but earnestly hoped that we, the parties concerned, might be stronger than fate. We should not let it go out of hand, for ***the only ones to profit would be the communists.***

In his message to Ribbentrop, Halifax said¹⁸³:

..I would beg him [Ribbentrop] not to count on this country’s being able to stand aside if from any precipitate action there should start a European conflagration. ***Only those will benefit from such a catastrophe who wish to see the destruction of European civilization***

191¹⁸¹ Since Beethoven is German, Nazism can be overlooked. Likewise, Leonardo di Vinci shadows Mussolini’s Fascism. No such generosity is extended to Confucius, Lao Tse, not to mention such Russian great writers as Tolstoy and Turgenev.

192¹⁸² DGFP, series D, vol 2., document 189 p. 319

193¹⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 320

Comparing the last two quotations, we see that Halifax used the circumlocution “those who wish to see the destruction of civilisation”, instead of “communists” as used by Henderson, to deliver the same meaning. Halifax was underlining the common interests, that of “civilisation”, against communism. The horror of war was that it would end in the victory of communism.

Daladier’s language was not different¹⁸⁴:

Premier Daladier invited the German Ambassador to his home in order “to speak frankly as a French ex-serviceman to his German comrade” and to warn him that if Germany attacked Czechoslovakia “the French would have to fight if they did not wish to be dishonoured.”: The result, he declared, could be the “*utter destruction of European civilization*” and *the triumph of “Cossack and Mongol hordes.”*

On July 5, 1938, Dirksen, the German Ambassador in London, reported to the German Foreign ministry about the feelings of the British public towards war¹⁸⁵:

..the British public has become familiar with the thought of imminent war.. I have called attention to the fact that the only criticism levelled against the British Government by the public is that the measures [air armament increase and proposed introduction of general conscription at the outbreak of war] *do not go far enough...*

From circles close to him [Chamberlain], I know how clearly he realizes that *the social structure of Britain, even the conception of the British Empire, would not survive the chaos of even a victorious war.*

That Chamberlain, as Daladier, dreaded the social consequences of war, can be understood. What is surprising is that they were not careful to keep that worry within their own circle of leaders and prevent it to become so well known to the German leaders. They did not miss an occasion to let Germany know how they felt about these social consequences.

In August 1938, Sir Horace Wilson, used by Chamberlain as a personal representative in many particular missions, met Kordt, the German attaché in London. Kordt reported to the German Foreign Ministry¹⁸⁶:

Sir Horace [Wilson] ..asked me if the Fuhrer were prepared to regard such a solution of the Czechoslovak problem as the

194¹⁸⁴ Telford Taylor, Op. cit., pp. 392-393

195¹⁸⁵ DGFP, series D, vol 2, document No. 280, pp. 469, 472

196¹⁸⁶ DGFP, series D, vol 2, document No. 382, p. 608

beginning of further negotiations on a larger scale. The Fuhrer had used the simile.. that European culture rested on two pillars which must be linked by a powerful arch: ***Great Britain and Germany were in fact the two countries in which the greater order reigned and which were the best governed.*** Both were built up on the national principle, which had been designed by nature itself as the only working principle of human relationship. The reverse of this, Bolshevism, meant anarchy and barbarism. ***It would be the height of folly if these two leading white races were to exterminate each other in war. Bolshevism would be the only gainer thereby***

The source being German, there may be some question as to the extent to which the German views have coloured Kordt's memorandum¹⁸⁷. In this case, however, there is little doubt that Kordt's rendering of the conversation is faithful. The part about the European culture resting on two pillars, Germany and Great Britain would, as we have seen, be used by Chamberlain in a letter to his King. Other parts can be found, almost word for word, in 'The British Case' by Dolobran (see appendix). The racism evident in "the two leading white races" was common in the British ruling circles and was apparent in Neville Henderson's book 'Failure of a mission.' As to the saying that "Great Britain and Germany were in fact the two countries in which the greatest order reigned and which were the best governed", it speaks volumes. It means of course that Germany is better governed than France (which is not one of the pillars of European civilisation). The Nazi regime is more to the liking of the British leaders than the French democracy. Of course, the theme of the social consequences of war is also present.

With such a statement, we have to conclude that the English leaders felt they had so much in common with the German leaders that their disputes were 'within the civilised family'. The only real enemy was the Soviet Union, whether it was a guarantor of Czechoslovakia or not, whether it had an assistance treaty with France or not.

In the same document, Sir Horace Wilson was reported to have said he did not believe that Germany would use the South East of Europe against the British empire:

Wilson then turned to Germany's Southeastern policy.. He himself was not one of those who held the view that Germany wanted to organize Southeastern Europe and then to use its resources for the annihilation of the British Empire.

197¹⁸⁷ German views and interpretations are often at odds with those expressed in British documents. However the reports of facts and conversations has proven to be quite reliable. The German government needed to be well-informed an a lack of objectivity from a German diplomat when reporting the facts and substance of conversations could be dangerous to him.

On August 22, 1938 The German Ambassador in Moscow reports what the French Ambassador in that city, Coulondre, told him¹⁸⁸:

I hope from my heart that it does not come to a German-French conflict. You know as well as I do *for whom we are working if we get at loggerheads.*

A remarkable quote. Coulondre, the French representative to the Soviet Union, a country bound to France by an assistance treaty concluded for their mutual protection against Germany, did not work for improving the relations with the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union is ‘the devil’ whose name should not be pronounced. It can only be alluded to by “you know as well as I do *for whom*”. Germany and France should avoid quarrelling and rather recognise who their real common enemy is. Coulondre, in this way expresses France’s fear of communism, and her fear of war.

Genevieve Tabouis reports on a visit to George Bonnet, the French foreign minister on September 10, 1938¹⁸⁹:

I paid a visit to Bonnet which I will always remember. I saw this man, generally so master of himself, so calculating, who always knew how to compose his personage, a prey to a veritable panic fear.. I went straight to my objective.. stating that I will never support the cession of the Sudeten to Germany.. I was stupefied to see the extent to which my words had agitated George Bonnet. He stood up from his desk and, almost shaking, he told me nervously: “But my dear Genevieve, do you know what war is? War with its bombs?” Then, after throwing an anxious look towards the ceiling of his office, going to the window, he showed me the river Seine with his finger: “If there is a war, I will end up there!” “No, no, I answered astonished, you will end up as all of us, at worst crushed by a bomb. Why do you want the bottom of the Seine?” He answered with a very loud voice, at the paroxysm of irritability, “Yes, in the Seine, *because there would be a revolution and the fear would throw me there.*”

Genevieve Tabouis was a family friend of Bonnet. He revealed his fears not to Genevieve Tabouis the Journalist, but to Genevieve Tabouis, a member of his class, a dear friend of his wife.

On September the 11th Harold Nicolson recorded in his diary¹⁹⁰:

I have a late dinner with Oliver Stanley. His point of view, I suppose, is typical of the better type of Cabinet opinion. What the worst type of opinion may be passes my comprehension. Thus Oliver agrees that the conflict has really nothing to do with

198¹⁸⁸ DGFP, series D, vol 2, document No. 380, p. 602

199¹⁸⁹ Op. Cit., p. 342

200¹⁹⁰ Op. cit., p.359

Czechoslovakia, but is the final struggle between the principle of law and the principle of violence, and that the two protagonist in the struggle are Hitler and Chamberlain. He also agrees that if Germany were to make an attack on Czechoslovakia and if France were to be drawn in, it would be almost impossible for us to abstain. Yet his incidental remarks show me that at heart he is longing to get out of it. Thus he loses no opportunity of abusing the Czechs and of reviling Benes for being tricky and slippery. At the same time any reference to Russian assistance makes him wince, and at one moment he sighed deeply and said, "***You see.. whether we win or lose, it will be the end of everything we stand for.***" By "***we***" he means obviously the capitalist class.

This last quote is important. When the fear of the social consequence of the war is expressed to a German diplomat, a doubt can remain as to its sincerity. It is still possible to think that the British leaders thought they may thus influence Germany towards the avoidance of a war which could spread to the West. However, the same kind of talk between two friends, one an actual member of the British Cabinet and the other to become later a member of Churchill's administration, has an unequivocal significance. Oliver Stanley is talking freely to a friend. Speaking to Harold Nicolson, he has no reason to pretend being afraid of a social revolution. His fears are genuine and are the expression of a friend of Chamberlain and member of his Cabinet.

Inskip made similar statements¹⁹¹. Chamberlain is rumoured to have also spoken in the same vein¹⁹²:

When on 26 September, in the immediate prelude to Munich, General Gamelin gave him a more optimistic picture of Allied strength and they discussed the possibility of Hitler's overthrow, Chamberlain wanted to know: '***Who will guarantee that Germany will not become Bolshevistic afterwards?***' Of course no one could give such a pledge. Daladier took a similar line: '***The Cossacks will rule Europe.***'

On September 29 Chamberlain wrote to Hitler¹⁹³:

I cannot believe that you will take the responsibility of starting a world war, ***which may end civilization***, for the

201¹⁹¹ Telford Taylor, Op. cit., p. 750

202¹⁹² Paul Johnson, 'A History Of The Modern World', Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1984, p. 354. The author is referring to 'Hitler' by Joachim Fest without warning the reader that, in a footnote in the German edition, Fest states that he cannot guarantee the authenticity of the fact. Fest, nevertheless, believes the quote to be quite in character. To avoid confusion, Fest should have mentioned his reservations in the text itself, and not in a footnote at the end of the book, footnote which is missing in the English edition (New-York), and the existence of which may not have been suspected by Paul Johnson.

203¹⁹³ Keith Feiling, 'The Life of Neville Chamberlain', Macmillan, London, 1946, p. 372,

sake of few days delay in settling this long standing problem

By now we know that ‘the end of civilization’ is the result of ‘Bolshevization of Europe’. On October 2, 1938, Chamberlain stated his case to the Archbishop of Canterbury¹⁹⁴:

I am sure that some day the Czechs will see that what we did was to save them for a happier future. And I sincerely believe that we have at last opened the way to that general appeasement which alone *can save the world from chaos*.

Chamberlain came back from Munich with a deal. It would avoid war in the West and therefore save it from communism (chaos). His conscience is made easier by expressing unrealistic hopes about post-Munich Czechoslovakia.

Oliver Harvey, past secretary of Eden and, at the time, secretary of Halifax, wrote concerning a conversation with W. Strang about Munich. After giving reasons to justify Chamberlain’s policy, he ended up with ¹⁹⁵:

Finally, any war will bring vast and unknown social changes — win or lose — and no war is a solution — vide 1914.. Strang and I agree that the real opposition to re-arming comes from the rich classes in the Party who fear taxation and believe Nazis on the whole are more conservative than Communists and Socialists: *any war, whether we win or not, would destroy the rich idle classes* and so they are for *peace at any price*. P.M. is a man of iron will, obstinate unimaginative, with intense narrow vision, a man of pre-war outlook who sees no reason for drastic social changes. *Yet we are on the verge of a social revolution*.

There was however a difficulty. The public could not be told that the government motivation was the fear that war would bring about a communist revolution. It was therefore necessary that the Dictators be ‘helpful’. They would be told: “Please, do plunge in the pool of aggressions, but do not make waves, do it peacefully.” Aggressions could, for instance, take the mask of apparently legitimate reactions to emergency situations or, at least, avoid the display of violence. This would make it possible for the British leaders to avoid the involvement of their country.

A ‘peaceful aggression’ can only succeed if it is skilfully managed with full co-operation of the western leaders. It required some lengthy preparations of the public opinion. The help required from the dictators was that they be patient and abstain from moving at a speed inconsistent with the

204¹⁹⁴ *ibid*, p. 375

205¹⁹⁵ ‘The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey’, Collins, London, 1958, p. 222

needed preparations. The dictators, however, had no sympathy for the difficult position of the West. They were impatient.

The dreaded war, a war involving the West against Germany became a possibility. Every possible step, however humiliating, would be taken to prevent its outbreak. It was more than a matter of preventing the slaughter of millions. It was a case of avoiding a social revolution.

Germany had again been allowed to become a strong military power so that she could realise her ambitions in the East and, thereby, rid the world of communism. Now that the German military machine had escaped from its bottle and proved to be potentially dangerous to the West itself, the need to deflect it towards the East became that much more important.

This need rather than the suppression of communism became the preferred argument to justify a policy of servility towards the dictators. It is thus that the fear of war was mustered to serve a policy which did not deflect from being pointed against the Soviet Union. Here is what Jules Romains wrote in the *Saturday Evening Post* in November 1940¹⁹⁶:

But it would be unfair to let all the responsibility weigh on M. Laval. The English carry their share; first in general and inveterate fashion, through the lack of decision they've always shown, their perverse leaning toward spurious solutions which absolve them from acting or taking sudden risk. More precisely, **England was handicapped by her fear of Bolshevism**, and in England, specifically, three elements closely linked to one another — the venerable conservatives in the Parliament, the aristocracy, the City. When only one last fillip was needed to overthrow Mussolini, all these people said to themselves, with a spasm of fear: 'But then, what's going to happen? What will replace Fascism in Italy? Bolshevism almost certainly, or anarchy tending towards Bolshevism, which Russia will immediately exploit. And as Mussolini's fall will almost immediately provoke Hitler's, the same appalling regime will rise in Germany. And as we already hear things aren't going so well in Spain, where the government is letting the Reds get out of hand, it may be the end of everything, and we'd be the ones, we good conservatives, good aristocrats, good capitalists, to let all hell loose.' And they shrank back in terror. They didn't picture in the least the siege of England by the Nazis or the bombing of London. Venerable conservatives lack imagination.

Jules Romains was a French writer who had no political associations with the left. His knowledge need not have been obtained from secret sources. It was notorious and prevalent among the people who had any connection with the British establishment. These facts resounded within the walls of the House of Lords, within all 'respectable' clubs and, often enough in the semi-official newspaper's leaders.

206¹⁹⁶ D.N. Pritt, 'The Fall of the French Republic', Frederick Muller, London, 1941, p. 50

President Roosevelt had his own reliable sources of information which included, at least, the American ambassador in London¹⁹⁷. Harold Ickes, The U.S. Secretary for the Interior, wrote in his diary¹⁹⁸ on January 29 1939:

Lord Lothian came in to see the President a couple of years ago. It seems that they are old friends. At that time Lothian told the President that he thought there would be no difficulty in getting along with Hitler. "Hitler should be allowed his head in order to repair the crime of Versailles. At the proper time it would be easy enough to sit down with him and work out the European situation." Lothian has been in this country again recently, but he is talking out of the other side of his mouth. When the President reminded him of his views two years ago and twitted him about them, Lothian admitted that no one could talk to Hitler. He said to the President: "Britain has defended civilization for a thousand years. Now the spear is falling from her hand and it is put to you to take it and carry on."

The President told him very frankly that while he was willing to help all that he could, he would do nothing if Great Britain cringed like a coward. The President thinks that Great Britain is suffering from an inferiority complex. For the first time she is being outmanoeuvred at the council table. Her fleet is helpless and she has neglected to build enough airplanes. She has fooled herself with respect to Spain. ***The wealthy class in England is so afraid of communism, which has constituted no threat at all in England, that they have thrown themselves into the arms of Nazism and now they don't know which way to turn***

The date was January 29, 1939. Just a few weeks earlier Halifax had sent a panic cable to Roosevelt informing him that it seemed that Hitler, instead of marching East as it was believed, had decided to move West. This is of course enough for Lothian 'to talk out of the other side of his mouth'.

207¹⁹⁷ In 'How the War came', Donald Cameron Watt asserts that "*The Week*", a journal published by the communist Claud Cockburn was Roosevelt's main source of information concerning Chamberlain's policies and motivations. This is an easy way to discredit whatever opinions Roosevelt may have expressed on the British policies of the time. The fact is that Cockburn was often right and when what he was saying was, on occasion, believed by Roosevelt, this was not because it was printed in *The Week*, but because he had so many other sources of information. As a matter of fact Lothian, who later became British ambassador in Washington, had talks with Roosevelt which demonstrated a way of thinking that confirmed the worst 'rumours' printed in *The Week*. In addition, the mood and inclinations displayed by the British Establishment in their newspapers, weeklies and magazines largely justified Roosevelt's conclusions.

208¹⁹⁸ 'The Secret Diary of Harold Ickes', Simon And Shuster, New York, 1954, vol 3, p. 571

CHAPTER VI

THE EAST: FAIR GAME FOR GERMANY: THE BRITISH ESTABLISHMENT'S VIEW

The victory of the Allies, in World War I would have been impossible were it not for a number of favourable factors whose existence could not in the future be taken for granted. The United States played an important role in bringing fresh troops on the battlefield, thus increasing the aggregate military power of the Allies and strengthening their morale with the promise of inexhaustible military supplies. Russia also played an essential role by launching a great offensive against Germany at the start of the war, forcing Germany to divert important resources from the Western to the Eastern front. There is little doubt that otherwise, Germany's attempt to overpower the French army at the very start of the war would have been successful.

At the end of the war, these two favourable factors were already unreliable. The United States refused to sign the Versailles Treaty, refused to join the League of Nations and retreated into a policy of isolation. As to Russia, not only was her future foreign policy unknown, though suspected to be unpalatable, but the Allies were reluctant to recognise its Bolshevik regime and were unwilling to accept her in the concert of nations. She was held in 'quarantine' and could not be considered as an ally, even if she wanted to be one.

Japan and Italy soon exhibited tendencies for expansion. These tendencies while tolerated by the British establishment, had no public support. The British Government had to recourse to acrobatic acts of diplomacy to implement pro-Italian and pro-Japanese policies, while having to deny that such was the case.

Considerations of public opinion restricted the British government in this respect. It resulted in political confrontations with these two former Allies, confrontations the British establishment would have rather avoided, but could not. Soon it became evident that Japan and Italy could not, in case of need, be counted upon to implement a policy of military restraint against Germany. Events developed to the point that it became necessary to consider the possibility of these two countries siding with Germany in case of a conflagration. Compared with what was the case in 1914, any war with a rearmed Germany would put the Western countries in a desperate situation.

Militarism and the spirit of revenge were quite alive in Germany. Lord d'Abernon, British ambassador to Germany, acknowledges that¹⁹⁹:

209¹⁹⁹ 'Lord D'Abernon's Diary', Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1929, vol 1, p. 16

...it is clear that among the extreme Right, among the territorial aristocracy, and among the military caste there are influential groups who are in no way reconciled to the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

The extreme Right, the territorial aristocracy, the military cast and, forgotten by d'Abernon, the lords of industries, this amounts to the essential elements of the German establishment. D'Abernon, who so vehemently advocated a policy of co-operation and trust with Germany, did nevertheless recognise that there was a will for revenge among influential groups in Germany. Later, with the growth of Nazism, the will for revenge and for aggressive expansion could not be doubted.

Political reconciliation between the Allies and Germany presupposed the latter would become peaceful and contented with her boundaries. At that time, as we shall later see, such a Germany was not in the cards.

There remained essentially two alternatives for taking care of the potential German threat. One would be to prevent defeated Germany from rearming. That would have entailed taking the proper verification measures, provided by the Treaty of Versailles, to ensure the respect of that treaty which imposed severe limitations on German armament. It would have meant also imposing effective sanctions on Germany whenever she would be found contravening the treaty.

The other alternative would be to reach an understanding with Germany ensuring that German rearmament would be used against the East and not against the West. It is important to realise that this is the real bottom line. There is absolutely no third choice²⁰⁰. Naturally enough, the situation could not be reported so crudely. Principles of justice were invoked to justify treating Germany on a base of equality in armaments. It was said that it is not fair to impose, on as great a nation as Germany, verification measures and limitations not imposed on other countries. It was later said that England trusted the good intentions of Germany. It was also argued that only war could have prevented Germany from rearming and that the British people, after the first World War holocaust, was not prepared to go to war just to prevent Germany from rearming. So many dresses to cover the same policy.

Much more has been said much more will be said and still much more will always remain to be said. However, beneath everything said and to be said, there is once more the unavoidable naked truth, viz, there were no more

210²⁰⁰ Just after victory in 1918, a third choice, that of supporting the German sections of the populations and the German organizations devoted to peace, was totally excluded for reasons given in next chapter. This option soon became unavailable.

than two choices: either to prevent Germany's rearmament²⁰¹, or to make sure that it will be used only in the eastern direction.

The fact is that Germany was allowed to rearm without being subjected to verification. This is already an indication of the option the West chose, that of letting Germany reconstitute her military strength. She could then use it to implement her well-known ambitions for eastern expansion which had, ultimately, to result in a German-Soviet confrontation.

There are numerous scenarios allowing to implement such a policy without having to acknowledge it publicly: 'we have been surprised unprepared; now it is too late' is but one of the scenarios. 'Germany is aware that war solves no problem; we must trust they value peace as we value it ourselves' is another one. 'We must avoid war till we will be strong enough' is a third one which cannot deny the fact that the west chose not to be strong as well as it did choose to permit Germany to become stronger. There is no sense in going over all the scenarios. They cannot hide the bottom line.

Just on that base a historian could rest his case. He could declare that the evidence is overwhelming that the west, *somehow secure* that Germany's aggressions would be directed to the East, allowed Germany to rearm and reach a relative military strength much greater than it was in 1914.

However, the story is not complete without examining what could have made the West so secure in its belief that German military strength would be directed towards the East. The story is not complete without examining the steps taken to implement a policy which could not be avowed officially.

The story is riddled with instances of distrust between Neville Chamberlain and the Foreign Office, with instances of by-passing the Cabinet, the Cabinet policies, and with instances of diplomats disregarding their official instructions, acting more devotedly than recommended towards the appeasement of Germany. They were sometimes reprimanded but had the satisfaction of being supported by Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.

Meetings were held between a few trusted Cabinet members and advisers to Chamberlain, and German representatives to discuss far reaching policies. These discussions had to be shrouded in a thick veil of secrecy. The Cabinet itself was not informed and the policies discussed were not approved by them.

The one point of contention in these discussions was the doubt expressed by the German side concerning Chamberlain's ability to implement agreements which, being at odds with the stand of the Cabinet and with public opinion, had to be negotiated in such secrecy. On the Chamberlain side there were no doubts at all.

211²⁰¹ A third choice existed just after WW I. It consisted in supporting the German organizations and sections of the population devoted to peace. This option was never considered for reasons given in next chapter.

In order to be so confident, Chamberlain must have known that he had powerful backing, that of the establishment. It is thus important to analyse the establishment's prevailing tendencies.

The establishment, however, is not a regular club with well defined membership rules. It is not possible to poll all the members to figure out the opinion of the majority. Polling some of its members faces a difficulty. There are some dissenting voices in the establishment. Who is to say which voice was the most representative? How can the opinion of the establishment be gauged and stated?

One can rely on the fact that the more a person is considered by the establishment as representative, the more he is trusted, then the more he is likely to reach positions of prestige and pre-eminence. Many gifted and prestigious members of the establishment, Churchill among them, were kept away from leading functions when their opinions were at odds with that prevailing among the establishment. When, therefore, a well known member is continually covered with honours, and given positions of importance, missions and responsibilities, it may safely be assumed that he is quite in tune with the Establishment's frame of mind.

In this respect, Lord Lothian (Philip Kerr) has impressive credentials. Therefore we feel justified in giving importance to his statements. We will also quote the opinion of other important members of the establishment who, not surprisingly, were thinking alike

Lord Lothian (Philip Kerr) had been secretary to Lloyd George for five years. He played an important role in the formulation of the terms of the Versailles Peace Treaty. He was the first editor of "The Round Table" (1910), Secretary to the 'Rhodes trustees', under-secretary for India, a regular at the "Cliveden meetings", a friend of Smuts and of Dawson²⁰², a welcomed officious intermediary between German and English Leaders and, finally, the British ambassador to the United States in August 1939. By his nobility, wealth, culture, political experience and constant relation with the governmental leaders, as well as by his political opinions, he can be considered a trusted representative of the ruling establishment.

Lord Lothian was a passionate proponent of the policy of appeasement. He was given, at one time, an official position which entitled him to receive all the Cabinet minutes. Unceasingly he was making policy recommendations which more often than not were appreciated and taken into account. At a time at which the Baldwin Government was dissatisfied with the anti-nazi reports of their ambassador Phipps in Berlin, it was felt useful

212²⁰² George Geoffrey Dawson was the editor of *The times* during the period 1923-41. He was an intimate friend of Baldwin and had, more than most people, intimate relations with Chamberlain.

to have alternative officious contacts that would report differently concerning the German threat.

Not restricted by an official capacity, he could express himself more freely than the Cabinet members. His numerous political statements have no bearing on the diplomatic history of the time and can hardly be used as evidence concerning the Government's policies. They are, however, valid indications of the political inclinations of the Establishment, and help us realise how strong was the congruence of its views with those of the Government.

At the beginning of 1933 he stated that it would be very dangerous to allow substantial modifications to the territorial boundaries in Europe however, according to Butler²⁰³:

he stood on a slippery slope and the more Hitler claimed, the more he [Lothian] was ready to concede in the name of justice.

Likewise, he urged firmness against Japan and Italy when they started their course of aggression. Soon after, he discovered that the dictators had justifiable claims.

On May 2, 1935, speaking of Germany, he wrote to an American friend²⁰⁴:

Humanity is not ready to apply ideal solutions. If that is so, our problem is to find that place for Japan and Germany in the world to which they are reasonably entitled *because of their power and traditions* with the *minimum destruction of the liberty of other people* and without a world war.. Unless we are prepared to stand in the way of *her course in the East*, which this country certainly is not, the only real answer is that the *oceanic* democracies should be strong and prepare themselves to stand together to prevent the dictatorship from interfering with their own liberty and coming out into their own zone.

Lothian is suggesting to accept that East Europe be under the German sphere of influence, while the democracies would, by their strength, prevent Germany from interference in their zone. Qualifying the democracies as 'Oceanic' is an indication that their zone in Europe is limited, and concerns rather the British colonial empire and their interests in the Far-East.

Lothian does not clarify here if, in his opinion, the country lacks the will to stand in the way of Germany's course to the East, or if Britain is not

213²⁰³ J.R.M. Butler, 'Lord Lothian', Macmillan & Co, New York, 1960, p. 214
214²⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 209

militarily prepared for such a stand. He does so one year later on June 3, 1936, in a letter to Anthony Eden²⁰⁵:

The fundamental decision we have now to take is whether we are going to continue to recognize that the basis of any stable peace must be that *Germany must have the position in Europe and the world to which she is entitled* by her history, her civilization *and her power*, or whether we are going to support,, the policy of a group led by France and Russia which seeks to prevent her from obtaining those adjustments without which she will not have equality in the true sense of the word, by maintaining an *overwhelming* military alliance against her

British public opinion, with its traditional sagacity, feels that *Germany has not yet had justice*, though many people in high places do not recognize the strength of Germany's claims

Lothian is against the maintenance of an overwhelming military alliance against Germany. The matter of standing in the way of her 'course to the East' is therefore not, in his opinion, a matter of military preparedness. It is a matter of Germany's entitlements, and of justice being done.

Lothian advances what seems to be reasonable arguments, He asks for justice for Germany and for granting her equality. Nobody can take exception to justice and equality in the name of History and Civilisation. There, however, are additional factors to take into consideration. The Germany in question is a racist and dictatorial Germany with acknowledged aggressive tendencies for expansion. To be just with a Germany determined to use that justice to imperil the life of her neighbours, is a travesty of justice.

Lothian does not take into account the strategic worries of France, Russia and the smaller states of Central and Eastern Europe. This is not a sign of ignorance. He played a great role in formulating the texts of the Versailles Peace Treaty and, at the time, proved to be fully aware of the importance of protecting Europe from the potential danger of German military power. He did not then speak of justice for Germany.

Lothian is even ready to justify the dark side of Germany's interior policy. J.R.M. Butler²⁰⁶ speaking of Lothian states:

And he seriously held the curious view that Nazi brutality was 'largely the reflex of the external persecution to which Germans have been subjected since the war'. He became obsessed with the idea that Germany had been denied 'justice', and that until her

215²⁰⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 354-355

216²⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p. 206. The author quotes from a letter to Lady Cecil dated April 7, 1937

just claims were satisfied the Western powers had no right to complain of, though they might deplore, her one-sided actions

His obsession for justice is not apparent in his address on April 2, 1936 at Chatham House²⁰⁷:

Let us make it clear therefore that we would not go to war *simply to maintain the status quo or to prevent German predominance in Eastern Europe*. Let us free ourselves from the automatic sanctions of the Covenant and stand apart from the European Balance of power. A war against Germany, Italy and Japan together would mean the end of the British Empire.. Detachment is the only basis upon which we shall be able to find a common policy with the Dominions and move towards that informal naval cooperation with the United States — i.e. the United States in the Pacific and ourselves in the Atlantic — which is the best way of preventing the dictatorships establishing themselves on the oceanic highways and therefore the best security for free institutions over half the world.

That is a clear proposal for the division of the world into spheres of influence. To proclaim our detachment with regard to Germany's dominance over Eastern Europe is, in any language, the equivalent of a free hand being given to Germany with respect to that region. The justification is no longer justice, but the fear of loosing the empire. Once more he preaches the weakening of the League of Nations. He is against automatic sanctions against an aggressor. His recommended policy may be a way to keep Britain out of a conflict. It is certainly not a way to preserve peace.

Lothian's confusing language is evident in his address in June 1937. We quote from Butler²⁰⁸:

'..the first article of British policy should be to avoid at any cost becoming part of an anti-German alliance unless it is absolutely clear that she is organizing an alliance [sc. with Italy and Japan] not for justice but for attack and domination', In that case we should have to fight, but another war between two such alliances would go far to reduce Europe to anarchy. We ought therefore to make it clear that we were not committed to defend the existing frontiers of Eastern Europe..

There are therefore two eventualities to be considered. In the first case Germany, together with Italy and Japan may enter an alliance only for justice. At the time, Italy stood condemned by the League of Nations for her

217²⁰⁷ *ibid*, p. 214

218²⁰⁸ *ibid*, p. 219

invasion of Ethiopia. She stood also condemned by the world public opinion for having gassed a defenceless native population. That much for Italian justice.

Japan had been condemned by the League of Nations for her invasion of Manchuria and the creation of the puppet state Manchukuo. She still was aggressively extending into Chinese territory. So much for Japanese justice.

As to Germany's justice, it had been proclaimed in *Mein Kampf* for all to see: racist theories, necessity to expand to the East (Ukraine included) for the realisation of her *Lebensraum* — living space.

All of the above, in Lothian's opinion, did not yet constitute aggression or domination. What then would constitute it? The only possible answer is that only encroachment on Britain's sphere of influence would qualify for aggression or domination. Anything else, expansion in China, in Ethiopia, in Eastern Europe is no more than justice.

Words are clearly loosing their traditional meanings. When Lothian, for instance, affirms that he is convinced that Hitler wants peace while, at the same time, he, Lothian, insists that we should make it clear that we will definitely not go to war for the sake of Eastern Europe, he indicates that peace, like domination, refer only to the British sphere of influence. Hitler wants peace means that Hitler does not want to make war *with us*.

Butler, who in his biography of Lothian displayed his great sympathy for him, nevertheless writes²⁰⁹:

Lothian continued to insist, in opposition to the regular supporters of the League, that the collective security which it offered was delusive, at least where a great power was concerned, and he urged Mr. Baldwin, now Prime Minister, to strike out a new line. Our right policy as regards Europe was one of 'armed neutrality', in which the United States might perhaps join independently. He would not admit that *this meant giving Germany a free hand in the East*.

At one time Lothian would argue that Russia and France are overwhelmingly stronger than Germany. He urged to give Germany equality in armaments and the right to remilitarise the Rhineland. Not much later, he would defend an isolationist position on the grounds of the impossibility to resist Germany's military strength²¹⁰:

..Though it is impossible to say so in public.. there is today *no way* in which you can prevent rearmed totalitarian Germany from extending its influence Eastwards unless you are willing.. to face a war.. That course seems to me the course of madness because

219²⁰⁹ *ibid*, p. 216

220²¹⁰ *ibid*, p. 224

another world war will reduce the whole world to communism or fascism.

Two possible resulting regimes with the two possible endings of the war: victory or defeat. Defeat would mean fascism, since the victor would be Germany. Communism would therefore be, in Lothian's opinion, the result of victory over Germany. We have already quoted the Western leaders expressing similar opinions.

Lothian exposed his views in a long letter to Eden. He also sent a copy of that letter to Chamberlain. Neville Chamberlain replied by a personal and confidential letter parts of which are quoted by Butler who writes that²¹¹:

..Mr. Neville Chamberlain.. agreed with a great deal of what he [Lothian] had said..

In this letter, quoted in full by Butler²¹² and written on June 3, 1936, Lothian wrote:

..Fundamentally, the policy outlined above means a return by Great Britain, so far as her security is concerned, to her traditional attitude to Europe — that is non-commitment to either half of a regional European balance of power, save for a defensive guarantee in the West. How far is that consistent with support of the League of Nations? It is perfectly consistent with it ***provided we abandon the universal automatic commitment to take sanctions*** under Articles X and XVI of the Covenant.

Deprived of the ability to impose sanctions, the League would become a poor deterrent to aggression. Lothian goes on²¹³:

Under such a revised League system it is vital that we should refuse to form part of the European regional balance and (except for the defensive guarantee to France and Belgium) return to that detachment from automatic military commitment in Europe, which has been the secret of Empire security in the past, because it forces the European powers to preoccupy themselves with security in Europe ***while we have had a free hand elsewhere***

Lothian candidly admits the interest of England in a free hand 'elsewhere'. Will then Germany not have a free hand in Eastern Europe? That Lothian's stand is not motivated by the strength of Germany's military might is explicitly stated earlier in the letter. Lothian considered Germany as

221²¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 215

222²¹² *ibid.*, p. 354

223²¹³ *ibid.*, p. 355

much weaker than Italy and Russia. He knew however that this situation could not last. He adds:

..Europe will not come to terms peacefully with Germany and substitute a system of Balance for the attempt to maintain a system of preponderance against Germany and against revision until it knows that it cannot get us in on the anti-German side. Indeed, if it was sure that we could be dragged in, the anti-German group might precipitate war in the next few months
before Germany is fully rearmed

This was written a short time after Germany proceeded to militarily reoccupy the Rhineland. The Locarno Pact obligated Britain to assist France if she choose, as formally entitled, to consider a German infraction of the Treaty as an act of aggression to be resisted by force. Lothian is hinting to this possibility. He states that it is only British refusal to honour the pact that could prevent a military action by France, while Germany was not yet fully rearmed. At the time Baldwin, as we have seen, was afraid that a German defeat would result in the spread of communism in Germany. Lothian's stand was taken with the full knowledge of Germany's military weakness.

We finally quote a most revealing part of his letter:

..provided our ***complete disinterestment in Eastern Europe*** is combined with the Locarno guarantee against unprovoked aggression against the frontiers and soil of France and Belgium, the German General Staff, in the event of another European war, will probably reverse the Schlieffen plan and ***strike Eastwards first while remaining on the defensive in the West***. It may be difficult to keep out of another European war to its end, but there is all the difference between automatic commitment to go to war on one side when somebody else presses the button and ***a free hand***.

Lothian predicts a congruence of Anglo-German interests. Britain will follow a policy of 'complete disinterestment in Eastern Europe', while Germany will strike eastwards first, and remain on the defensive in the West. 'First' suggests a follow up. It indicates the possibility of a strike Westward to follow, in good time, the strike eastward. To stay on the defensive in the West is to give Germany the opportunity of facing one enemy at a time. Lothian does not analyse the wisdom of allowing Germany to fight on a single front. He does not consider the strategic situation that would result from a German victory in the East. He wants to keep a free hand for England giving her freedom not to automatically be involved in a war in the East. He does not say that a complete disinterest in Eastern Europe constitutes a free hand given to Germany.

Other prestigious members of the establishment were advocating similar policies. Keynes was one of the most influential people of his time. Correll Barnett wrote about him²¹⁴:

..it was not this rather technical economic chapters that so appealed to the British opinion, but Keynes' bitter attacks on the peace settlement as a whole and on those responsible for it; attacks written with all the *moral passion* of the non-conformist.

His 'moral passion' did not prevent him from writing²¹⁵:

It is in our interest to hasten the day when German agents and organisers will be in a position to set in train in every Russian village the impulses of ordinary economic motive

This, of course, amounted to suggest a free hand be given to Germany for attacking Russia and destroying the Bolshevik regime. Any doubt dissolves with the next quotation from Keynes²¹⁶:

When Germany has recovered her strength and pride, as in due time she will, many years must pass before she again cast her eyes Westward. *Germany's future now lies to the East*, and in that direction her hopes and ambitions, when they revive, will certainly turn

Keynes 'moral passion' made his heart bleed for the unjust way Germany was being treated. He, however, felt no moral pangs at the idea of Germany fulfilling her ambitions in the Eastward direction. He reassures the West that Germany's recovery of her pride and strength will, for a long time, not be directed toward the West.

Believing like Keynes that Germany will move towards the East, Lloyd George said in the House of Commons²¹⁷ on November 28, 1934:

In a very short time, perhaps in a year or two, the Conservative elements in this country will be looking to Germany as the bulwark against Communism in Europe. She is planted right in the centre of Europe, and if her defence breaks down against the communists — only two or three years ago a very distinguished German statesman said to me: 'I am not afraid of Nazism, but of Communism' — and if Germany is seized by the Communists,

224²¹⁴ Carroll Barnett, 'The Collapse of British Power', Methuen, London, 1972, p. 390

225²¹⁵ Eugene Mantoux, The Carthaginian peace, Oxford University Press, London, 1946, p. 177. The author quotes E.C.T. from Keynes p. 275

226²¹⁶ *ibid* p.178. The author quotes Keynes R.T. p. 186

227²¹⁷ HOC, 1934 vol. 295, cols. 905-22

Europe will follow... Do not let us be in a hurry to condemn Germany. We shall be welcoming Germany as our friend.

Lloyd George was not naive. He was well aware of the traditional German expansionist tendencies. At the time, the evil nature of the Nazi regime was well-known as was known Hitler's statements claiming 'Lebensraum' in the East. However, his anticommunism and anti-sovietism were also notorious.

When, on June 26, 1936, Austen Chamberlain spoke in the House of Common, he was no longer the British Secretary of State, position he held from 1924 to 1929. However, being an influential Conservative, his opinion was indicative of that of the ruling Establishment. He said²¹⁸ that Britain should fight in defence of France, Belgium and Holland. But "to say that we would fight only under these circumstances would licence war everywhere throughout the rest of the world. That was a thing which we had no right to do". Britain, according to Austen Chamberlain, should judge each case on its own merits.

As Salvemini remarks, this amounts to state that Britain should have the right to license or not a war, according to her own convenience. One can add that except, for the Western countries, mentioned by Austen Chamberlain and which should enjoy therefore an explicit British guarantee, an act of aggression has first to be cleared with Britain.

Austen Chamberlain would like England to proclaim that, when it comes to aggression, there are two classes of countries. The first class countries are 'taboo'. No country is authorised to attack them. The second class, while not considered 'fair game' for would-be-attackers, could be made the object of particular permits.

We will see in the next chapter that, eleven years earlier, when he was the Secretary of State, Austen Chamberlain proclaimed that it was exclusively in the power of Great Britain to prevent war. This did not prevent him from urging that British commitments be limited to the Western boundaries of Germany.

Mr L. Lawton wrote²¹⁹ in 1934:

Whereas formerly German statesman looked both to the East and to the West, *Hitler at present looks to the East only*... No one that studies the map of Eastern Europe can doubt that there are immense possibilities of a German-Polish compromise at the expense of others. The idea of *including Ukraine within the Western European system*, and moving Russia towards the East is certainly tempting.. *With Ukraine as part of a democratic*

228²¹⁸ Salvemini, Op. cit., p. 504.

229²¹⁹ Frederick Schuman, 'Europe in the Eve', A.A. Knopf, New York, 1942, p. 340

federated system there would, it is hoped, come into existence a grouping of states with which Great Britain could be on friendly terms. *The moment is long overdue for the creation of some such grouping in Eastern Europe*

This appeared in the Fortnightly Review. The language is that of the times. 'To look to' has here an unambiguous meaning given by the context. The context is not always so helpful, but the meaning is understood by those in the know. The suggestion of Ukraine being detached from Soviet Union as a result of a compromise between Poland and Germany, is not new. It would, of course, necessitate a rearmed and strong Germany. What is more original is the concept of the detached Ukraine becoming part of a 'democratic federated system'. This miracle was to come into being with the help of two dictatorships: Poland and Germany. Presumably, the 'democratic federated system' was to include these two dictatorships. Moreover, how much democracy is there in deciding the fate of Soviet Union and Ukraine without consulting them?

Democracy is a nice and respected word. To throw it in a sentence loaded with a spirit of aggression, may make the latter more 'palatable'.

Frederick Schuman²²⁰ mentions that:

Mr. L.S. Amery, former Colonial Minister, wrote in *The Forward View* (1935): "The first condition of European peace today is the frank acknowledgement that *Germany's armaments are now her own affairs and nobody else's*" (p.71). "The time has come for such a revision of the Covenant as will get rid of all those clauses (more particularly 16 and 17) which give an encouragement to the super-State theory of the League" (p. 272). "The doctrine of the inevitable contagion of war is, of course, pure nonsense" (p.283).. It would be of no concern of ours.. to prevent Japanese expansion in Eastern Siberia (p. 288).

Amery suggest that Germany be allowed to rearm with no external interference. Armed as she will then become she may invade some neighbours. However, since he also urges to rid the League of its teeth (the automatic help to the victim), there will therefore still be 'Peace in Europe'.

Once more words have special meanings. German expansion could be resisted by the victims. A war could result. This however is to be called 'peace', and European at that, provided nobody interferes with the victim's slaughter.

The writer of these words is not a confused politician but a very able and trusted member of the Establishment.

G. Ward. Price²²¹ wrote in 1938:

²³⁰²²⁰ *ibid*, pp. 340-1

The last time the Teuto-Slav conflict broke out, Britain and France were dragged into it. On that occasion Russia was backing Serbia against Austria. She is now backing Czechoslovakia against Germany. If this ancient feud flames up again, it would be well to deflect it into those regions where it can do least harm. ***Humanity and common sense alike suggest that the broad steppes of Little Russia are a more suitable locality*** than the densely populated centers of civilization in Western Europe.

Lawton summoned the help of Democracy to justify the detachment of Ukraine from the Soviet Union. Price is summoning ‘humanity’ for a similar aim.

On June 23, 1936, Stuart Russell, conservative M.P. opposed a League of Nations “all-embracing in its commitments”. He wanted to prevent Britain from having to apply sanctions against Germany in the name of the League²²²:

When these demands are made we shall either have to go into a first class war with Germany or we shall have to repudiate our contractual obligations. To repudiate such obligations would be a deplorable action. To go to war with Germany because war broke out ***in Eastern Europe*** would be sheer distaste to this country.. I say that in the immediate future the far-reaching commitments of the League of Nations must cease, and the automatically coercive clauses be expunged from the Covenant

To weaken the League of Nations is part of the *de-facto* agenda. Many arguments would be designed to justify it. Here Stuart Russell does not use gloves: the League of Nations is to be weakened so that Germany could expand in Eastern Europe without Britain being involved in stopping her.

Liddell Hart²²³ reports in his memoirs that Dill, who was then Director of Military Operations and Intelligence and who, in 1940, became Chief of the Imperial General Staff, paid him a visit in March 1935:

He clearly disliked the idea that we might be on the side of Russia, in a French-Italian-Russian Bloc against a Germano-Japanese bloc. ***Could we not let Germany expand Eastwards at Russia's expense?***

If she is not told that Britain intends to let her expand Eastwards, Germany, in her doubts could attack the West first. The benefit of the policy

231²²¹ G. Ward Price, ‘I know these Dictators’, p.173, Holt, New-York_

232²²² Salvemini, Op. cit., p. 505

233²²³ ‘The Memoirs of Captain Liddell Hart’, vol 1 p. 291.

would be lost. Such a policy could only achieve its aim if, somehow, it is communicated to Germany. It would then represent the granting to Germany of a free hand in the East. The conversation between Dill and Liddell Hart is very candid. Dill never expressed such opinions publicly. Other Establishment figures are less candid when their statements are liable to become public. Convoluted expressions become a must.

Liddell Hart, for instance reports how difficult it was in a given instance to get to the truth of the matter²²⁴:

At the beginning of November 1936 I wrote a leader on ‘The Army in War’ and was surprised to find.. that the editor had made very considerable alterations to it, while inserting fresh passages with a foreign policy bearing. One that particularly perturbed me was the sentence: ‘While taking vigorous measures for its own protection, it [Britain] will refuse until the last moment possible to quench the hope of a general peace settlement by giving its sanction and adherence to a system of antagonist blocs.’ The next sentence emphasised that under the Locarno Treaty Britain was committed only to resisting ‘unprovoked aggression in *Western Europe*’, and also suggested that even this might have to be modified.

It was not the first nor the last time that the editors of ‘The Times’ would intrude in Liddell Hart articles to the point of inserting text in his articles without prior authorisation. He did not like the resulting text and wrote to Barrington-Ward the next day²²⁵:

expressing my uneasiness about the implication of the insertion, saying: ‘It looked rather as if we were suggesting that Germany should have a free hand to do what she liked in the East — e.g. against Czechoslovakia. What is our policy on this undoubted possibility?’

Barrington-Ward wrote back:

“I have again looked at the leader on ‘The Army in war’ and I cannot think why it should have left you with any uneasiness. ‘The Times’ has most definitely set its face against the foolish, cynical and short-sighted idea that it is desirable or profitable to purchase a deal with Germany by giving her a free hand in the East”

234²²⁴ *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 130

235²²⁵ *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 131

Where Liddell Hart reads a free hand, Barrington-Ward sees that The Times 'has most definitely set its face' against such views. Liddell Hart is not quite convinced by Barrington-Ward's answer. He tried to get him to express an opinion on specific issues. He wrote again:

I am glad to hear 'The Times' attitude on the question of giving Germany a free hand in the East, but I would still like to know what is its policy as to the policy this country should adopt if Germany tries to use her influence there, especially against Czechoslovakia...

What I read in the leader was a predominant concern with security in the West to the comparative disregard of what might happen elsewhere, and the consequent possibility that others, especially the Germans, might read it still more definitely in this way.

Barrington-Ward's reply is ambiguous and convolute²²⁶:

The British policy, as the Times would like to see it at present, could be expressed in a doctrine of this kind. 'We will not be indifferent to aggression anywhere. Aggression in the Mediterranean or in Western Europe will immediately encounter determined military resistance. As to aggression elsewhere, we are not prepared to say in advance precisely what we will do but the aggressor can take it as certain that he will encounter our resistance *in some form*.' This is broadly how the gap left by the crash of Article XVI ought to be filled, I think. But it is, after all, *a negative though important fraction of a policy which must be positive if it is going to succeed as a whole...*

P.S. ... I should, perhaps, add that it seems to me *essential for Eastern Europe* to find its own equilibrium as far as possible *without interested disturbance from the West*. The point of our policy must not be to forbid new groupings or agreements in the East but to ensure, as far as we can, that the attempt is not made to accomplish them by war. *The safe and peaceful dissolution of the French 'system'* was, after all, the central hope of the original Locarno treaties

We saw in the first chapter that Britain, through Chamberlain, did later give Germany a free hand in the East. 'The Times' played an important role in support of Chamberlain's policies. It is therefore not surprising that Liddell Hart reads, in the editorial intrusion to his article, a policy of granting a free hand to Germany. What is of importance is to realise how much that

236²²⁶ *ibid*, vol. 2, p. 131

policy while being pursued was denied, and even denounced as cynical and short-sighted, by those who were playing an important role in its implementation. This denial and denouncing was essential to the success of the policy. When off-guard, Establishment people such as Dill, even in important governmental positions, do not hesitate to be candid.

The convoluted way suggesting a free hand be given to Germany, while denying that such is the intent, did not escape Lord Strabolgi's observation. On April 8, 1936, Lord Snell warned that the Labour Party would have no part in any agreement giving Germany a free hand to the East. After him Lord Strabolgi stated²²⁷:

I find a tendency in many influential quarters to clear the field, if I may express it, for a German attack on Russia. It is called by other names of course. "Limiting the risks of membership of the League of Nation" is one of the phrases used. "We must not entangle ourselves in the East at all and limit our commitment only to the West" is another. Lord Halifax.. said we must limit our commitment in the West, and that French obligations must not involve us in trouble in the East, our words to that effect.. We are bound also by the Covenant of the League of Nations.. to go to her assistance if she is attacked. I find suggestions in many quarters, from important people, to the effect that Russia must be left to her fate and Germany must perhaps be compensated in Europe in that way..

It is interesting to note that the Government, in its reply, did not deal with the matter of the free hand to Germany.

Harold Nicolson writes in his diary²²⁸ on July 16, 1936:

Foreign Affairs Committee. Winston argues from the premise, which everyone accepted, that our main duty is to defend the British Empire and the Rhine frontier. This in itself.. is a 'gigantic task'. What we have got to ask ourselves is whether that task would in the end be facilitated by *our telling Germany that she could take what she liked in the East*. Were we to say this, Germany, within the course of a single year, would become dominant from Hamburg to the Black Sea, and we should be faced by a confederacy such as had never been seen since Napoleon. The general impression left was that *the majority of the National Party* are at heart anti-League and anti-Russian and that what they would really like would be a form of agreement with Germany and possibly Italy by which we could purchase peace at the expense of the smaller states.

237²²⁷ The Parliamentary Debates, House of Lord, vol 100, col. 574
238²²⁸ Oper. cit., p.269

Telling Germany that she could take what she liked in the East meant, in short, giving Germany a free hand in the East. Churchill argued against that. It is clear that he tried to convince ‘the majority of the National Party’ that such a policy is against the national interest. The fact that he was kept away from the levers of power is an indication of his failure in this attempt.

L.R. Pratt writes²²⁹:

Writing in the first shadows of civil war and revolution in Spain, Hankey thought that Britain must detach itself from European entanglements and eschew Locarno-type treaties or alliances: ‘In the present state of Europe, with France and Spain menaced by Bolshevism, it is not inconceivable that before long *it might pay us to throw in our lot with Germany and Italy.*’

Hankey was Secretary of the Cabinet and of the Committee of Imperial Defence. Though not a formal member of the Cabinet, he was a man of influence whose views were respected and welcomed. In both Spain and France a Popular Front, in which the communists were a relatively small minority, was ruling. The governments were antiestablishment but still far from being communist. The French government, in particular, was very tame in its stand which consisted mainly in legislating improvements in the workers’ condition. Even that was too much for Hankey and he was seeing red to the point of ‘throwing in our lot’ with Germany and Italy.

Thomas Jones, a regular at Cliveden, a former secretary of Baldwin, and still a friend constantly consulted and in touch, mentions on April 15, 1936 in his diary²³⁰:

Last Wednesday (8th) I had lunch alone at the Carlton with Von Ribbentrop and went over the usual topics between us and Germany. He talks English very well and *I’m sure does not want war in the West.*

Tom Jones does not say that Germany wants peace. What prevented him from saying it was the knowledge that Germany restricted her will for peace to the West. That, however, does not worry him. What matters is that the West is safe, as far as Ribbentrop is concerned.

Tom Jones was a member of what was sometimes called ‘the Cliveden set’, a collection of influential members of the establishment sharing common views on foreign policies. These views were sympathetic to Germany. These views are clearly expressed in Tom Jones’ diary. They are

²²⁹L.B. Pratt, ‘East of Malta, West of Suez’, Cambridge University Press, 1975, p. 39

²³⁰Thomas Jones, ‘A diary with letters’, Oxford University Press, London 1954, p. 186

characterised by a distrust of France, a fear of being entangled in a war at the side of Russia, a desire for an ‘understanding’ with Germany, a desire for a policy of non-commitment in Eastern Europe, a distrust of the League of Nations and an expression of the need to prevent automatic involvement of the members against an eventual aggressor.

Since these views are quite similar to those of Lothian, who was a member of ‘the set’, we will not quote here Tom Jones any more. The interested reader will find his diaries worth reading. Cliveden has sometimes been considered the centre that plotted the appeasement policy of the British government. It is unlikely to be true and, in any case, the matter is not very relevant. It is certain that a community of views made the relations between the Cliveden set, the establishment and the government, friendly and trustful. It is equally certain that the views of the set were a faithful reflection of the views of the British leadership.

In the measure in which there was a plot and a conspiracy, it was not drawn in Cliveden but within a very restricted group around Chamberlain. This became necessary when attempts at reaching an ‘understanding’ with Germany strongly ran against public opinion and had therefore to be kept secret if they were to succeed. Any awareness, by the opposition, of such attempts could raise such an uproar as to possibly lead to the fall of the government. It was sometimes necessary to take special precautions when the extent of the appeasement was such that only the most virulent pro-German and anti-Soviet members of the establishment would be ready to support it. At such times, plotting, as we will see, was against the Cabinet itself.

Harold Nicolson wrote²³¹ on September 20, 1936:

The Channons.. think that we should let gallant Germany glut her fill of the red in the East and keep decadent France quiet while she does so. Otherwise we shall have not only reds in the West but bombs in London... Chips says that we have no right to criticize a form of government or thought in another country.

Channon was a conservative MP and a member of a coterie at the service of Chamberlain

The French Establishment was in dire straits. In France the Right was traditionally anti-German and much aware of the threat constituted by the German military. However, with the increase of strength of the Socialist and Communist Parties, its fear of social revolution became greater than that of German predominance.

241²³¹ Oper. cit., p. 273

Paul Reynaud was one of the rare men of the Right who put the national interest above the narrow views of his class. He was the French Prime Minister at the time of the German invasion. He wrote²³²:

On the Right wing, Coty, a perfume manufacturer who had turned himself into a politician, found in the profits of his business the means to found a paper with a wide circulation called *L'Ami du Peuple*. Under the title of 'France D'abord! Avec Hitler contre le bolchevism', he published, on December 13, 1934, an article in which he showed his indignation with those who preached the encirclement of Germany and an alliance with Russia. He called for an alliance with Italy. He branded 'the short-sighted politicians with their false ideas as a hateful and anti-French sect in the service of the financial-social International who were proclaiming that there existed in the Italy of Mussolini as well as in the Germany of Hitler, a warlike, formidable and so called menacing ill-will against France.

The influential Francois Coty must have been a good representative of the establishment to be given the position of French President to replace Rene Lebrun, when, in 1940, it became clear that France was about to ask Germany for an armistice.

Paul Reynaud, the ex-prime minister continues:

From 1936 many of the bourgeois, antagonised by factory disputes, and the five-day working week, did not ask themselves if these strange happenings were not the result of the monetary problem which they had sanctioned, but, seeing with reason a danger for France, embraced as a consequence dictatorial theories and became susceptible to the slogan of 'Rather Hitler than Stalin'. Nazism seemed to them the antidote of Communism.

Paul Reynaud, himself a leader of the 'bourgeoisie', is disgruntled by its betrayal of the French national interest. The slogan "Rather Hitler than Stalin" disguises the fact that Hitler was an external enemy while Stalin was just a pointer to the internal 'enemy': a French social revolution.

Robert Coulondre²³³ wrote in his memoirs:

[The Soviet Union] is too well informed to be unaware that there are many in Paris who would happily pay with the abandonment of the Soviet alliance for a rapprochement with Hitler, and that in London *a Fuhrer's crusade in USSR* is not looked at everywhere with disfavor.

242²³² Paul Reynaud, 'In the thick of the fight', Simon and Shuster, New-York, 1955, p. 34
243²³³ Oper. cit., p. 45

It is already clear that in giving a free hand to Germany, the British Government was not out of step with the Western European (i.e. British and French) Establishments.

CHAPTER VII

MILITARY CONSIDERATIONS

Strategic Dilemma

At the end of World War I, the strategic views of the allies were confused. Germany had been beaten by a concurrence of favourable factors which, as Churchill said, were unlikely to occur again within the next thousand years. With respect to Germany, the Allies could have chosen one of the three following strategies:

w solve definitively the political problems between Germany on the one hand, and Britain, France, Italy and Russia on the other hand, in a way satisfactory to all parties,

w maintain Germany in a state of military impotency,

w allow for a rearmed powerful Germany whose energies would be safely funnelled to the East.

Obviously, the first solution would have been the best. Was it, however realistic? Quite apart from the difficulty of accommodating very divergent interests, there were particular problems stemming from the Bolshevik revolution.

In Germany, some sectors of the population were interested in military revenge, dreaming of re-establishing Germany's military power and resuming a policy of aggressive expansion. Other sectors were interested in peace, in preventing the occurrence of another World War.

The problem was that the aggressive nationalistic sectors were precisely those interested in resisting 'Bolshevism', while the pacifist sectors were precisely those most likely to be influenced by the spreading communist ideas. To strike at the power of the Prussian gentry, at the German class of industrialists and bankers and at the military cast, in other words at the establishment, would be the surest way to destroy the nationalist tendencies and transform Germany into a country eager for peace and reconciliation. It would also have been the surest way to destroy the main German forces interested in resisting communism²³⁴. Vansittart writes²³⁵:

²³⁴ Gerhard L. Weinberg, in 'The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany', The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1970, vol 1, remarks on p. 9: "Certainly there was nothing to distinguish the German foreign service from what might be called the German Establishment, and all efforts to change that service during the Weimar period were largely frustrated". The

The.. Germans ..reemployed the servants of the old regime for lack of better.. The extreme left could only be put down by troops, which meant the Right.. Ebert had a Majority Socialist's horror of communism.. and order could only be maintained by an army hard to live with or without. A bargain was struck with gifted and crafted men like Groner and then Von Seeckt, Generals who cared nothing for the republic but much for the Reich, temporarily the same thing. So Socialism bought the support of militarism by conniving at rearmament and restoring on the sly the privileged position of the officer caste..

As much from their natural inclinations as from the will to resist revolutionary waves, the Allies deemed it essential to preserve the German social structures²³⁶. A real reconciliation between Germany and the Western powers became impossible. In his memoirs, D'Abernon, the British ambassador to Germany in the twenties, demonstrates his awareness of the revenge spirit dominating the higher strata of German society. He nevertheless thought the reconciliation possible on two accounts: on the one hand there should be no room for suspecting Germany of rearming clandestinely: the pacifist workers would not allow it, and would unmask it if it would occur²³⁷. This was an exercise in self-delusion²³⁸:

From 1923 to 1925 D'Abernon continued to assure himself and others that Germany had ceased to be a military danger. Yet such belief in Germany's faithful compliance with the disarmament provisions of the Versailles Treaty, a belief upon which successive British Governments rested their European policy, was the result not of mere ignorance, but *a positive effort of will*. For the members of the Inter-allied Commission of Control in Germany sent back to their governments constant reports of German evasions and of Germany's concealed military strength;

Establishment whose nationalism was well known remained in control. The same author notices on pp. 22-23: "...one would find it exceedingly difficult to match outside Germany the literature glorifying war that was typified by the works of Erns Junger and was applied to the postwar period by the members of the Free Corps." The Free Corp was tolerated for some time by the Allies in view of its active role against Communism in Germany. (See 'The Nemesis of Power' by J.W. Wheeler-Bennett, Macmillan, 1964)

245²³⁵ 'The Mist Procession, The autobiography of Lord Vansittart', Hutchinson, London, 1958, p. 266

246²³⁶ The Allies had options that could have modified the structure of the German establishment. They could have brought to justice, as war criminals, the Lords of the German industry. They could have taken, as reparations, factories belonging to the key industrialists. They could have struck a death blow to the German military cast by insisting on an immediate demobilization of all German forces, instead of postponing the demobilization of the German forces in Eastern Europe. They could have imposed a system of verifications, supported by severe sanctions in case of violations, to make sure that no shadow officer corp was kept.

247²³⁷ D'Abernon, Oper. Cit., vol. 1, p. 213

248²³⁸ Correli Barnett, Oper. cit., p. 323

reports quietly muffled because of their untimely and untactful nature.

On the other hand, according to D'Abernon, the need to unify Germany and the west in the struggle against communism was so great that it should overshadow all differences such as those traditionally existing between Germany and France. In his book, the ambassador makes a passionate plea to the West to trust Germany and to concentrate on the fight against communism.

Having made a choice which, indirectly, implied a Germany bent on revenge and aggression, the allies had to face the consequences. Germany would, probably, be saved from communism, — even that remained in question for some time —, but, she remained strongly nationalist. Something therefore had to be done to prevent her from becoming, again, a threat to the security of the West. *The Versailles Treaty took care of that.*

D'Abernon's dream, a Europe united in her fight against communism, remained that of the British establishment. It had first to wait for the disappearance of the communist threat in Germany itself. *Hitler took care of that.*

In order to materialise the dream of unity against communism, an 'understanding' had to be reached with Germany. This understanding, never spelled out publicly in detail, was considered by the British Establishment as a realistic objective. It would have to disregard the safety measures decided upon in the Treaty of Versailles. However, there was so much at stake, and such strong common interests between Germany and the West, that a solution must have been possible. *Neville Chamberlain took care of that* (see chapter 1).

Of course, Germany should have to be 'appeased'. It was hoped that Germany would play ball. What was asked from her was merely to facilitate the execution of the British policy by not resorting to open aggressions. With patience, and help from the West, she would get what would be her share in the 'understanding'.

This is not just one of the possible scenarios compatible with the known facts. It is what really occurred. It was clearly expressed by the British establishment. More revealing than anything else are the military considerations, as discussed in the British Cabinet. The military decisions taken in the complete knowledge of the German potential threat, and the systematic efforts made by the British Cabinet to prevent any measures that would result in checking the German increase in military power, prove, beyond a shadow of doubt, that such was the reality.

British Disinterest From The East

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the rivalries between the major European powers were such that a military conflagration could be

predicted. Each of these countries became involved in intense diplomatic preparations to ensure that, when necessary, it would have valuable allies.

The disparity in population between Germany and France made it clear that, without the assistance of Russia, France would be overwhelmed by a German attack. The East of Europe was, in that sense, of vital interest to France and, in consequence, to Britain too. The British policy of reaching an understanding with Russia lead to their 1907 Treaty²³⁹, and was in line with the strategic necessities of the time.

With the defeat of Germany, the importance for Britain of Eastern Europe did not recede. The war had demonstrated how difficult it was to be won and how militarily insecure would remain the allied position if Germany were to rearm again.

The German potential threat, and the importance of Eastern Europe, were, however, perceived differently before and after the Bolshevik revolution. On March 26, 1917, Balfour, British Foreign Secretary, reported to the Imperial War Cabinet²⁴⁰:

Personally, from a selfish western point of view, ***I would rather that Poland was autonomous under the Russians***, because if you made an absolutely independent Poland lying between Russia and the Central states, you cut off Russia altogether from the West. Russia ceases to be a factor in western policies, or almost ceases. ***She will be divided from Germany by the new Polish state*** and she will not be coterminous with any of the belligerent. ***And if Germany has designs on the future of France or the west, I think she will be protected by this new state from any action on the part of Russia*** and I am not at all sure that this is to the interest of Western civilization.

At the time of Tsarism no ally would have suggested the formation of a Poland totally independent from Russia. Now, after the fall of Tsarism, as a result of what the allies considered to be a democratic revolution, such an independent Poland became a possibility. Was it in the strategic interest of the allies? Balfour did not think so. He was not alone. Four days earlier Lord Hugh Cecil said in the Commons²⁴¹:

I do not suppose that the question before the Peace Conference will be any question of Home Rule for Poland — I do not suppose that this country will dictate to Russia what form of Home Rule is to be given to Poland and I am quite sure that

249²³⁹ The treaty was not an alliance. It helped establish good relations between the two countries

250²⁴⁰ F.S. Northedge, *Oper. Cit.*, p. 110. The author quotes from F.R.U.S., *The Lansing Papers*, II p. 19 et seq.

251²⁴¹ *ibid*, p. 109. The author quotes H.C. debates, 5s, col 2125. Lord Hugh Cecil, a personal friend of Churchill, was the brother of Lord Robert Cecil, a Cabinet minister in two of Baldwin's Cabinets.

Russia will not dictate to us what form of Home Rule should be given to Ireland.

The strategic realities were well understood. They required that Russia be able to help the West against a German policy of European domination. An independent Poland would be an obstacle. No considerations of self-determination would change that fact and would, at that date, get any attention.

Things changed after the Bolshevik revolution. The principle of self-determination became suddenly sacred. Strategic considerations, freely understood in the absence of ideological blinders, lost their importance. An independent Poland was now needed as a bulwark against communism.

It cannot be denied that an unfriendly Bolshevik Russia was a new factor which had to have its impact on western strategy. In 1917 the outlook for a, hopefully, defeated Germany was that of a militarily weakened country while the Communist threat loomed close, not through Russian military power, but as a result of the spread of Bolshevik ideas.

Strategies, however, need long range planning. A feeling for the long range German threat can be grasped from an imaginary speech which Churchill wished that Clemenceau would have made²⁴²:

Clemenceau said (to himself): 'I have got to think of the long safety of France. Not by our own exertions alone but by miracles we have been preserved. The greatest nations in the world have come to our aid and we are delivered out of the deadly peril. Never again can we hope for such aid. *A thousand years will not see such fortunate conjunctures for France.*'²⁴³

Such strategic considerations led Britain to concur in the decision to forbid the union between Austria and Germany as recorded in the Treaty of Versailles. The precise drawing of the boundaries of the new Czechoslovak state was done with full regard to strategic considerations and with the full agreement of the British delegation. The treaties between France and the countries of central and eastern Europe were strategically motivated. In all these respects, good strategy meant improving the military position of the front of countries opposed to aggression, and the aggressor was expected to be Germany.

252²⁴² The World crisis, Oper. Cit., pp. 7-8

253²⁴³ Correlli Barrett (Oper. cit., p308) says it well:

254 Thus the course of the Great War proved that Germany was more than a match for France and Great Britain together. It proved indeed that no purely *European* combination was capable of defeating her. Here was a formidable truth; here was the salient fact of which a peace settlement had to take note. For the single great problem which faced the victorious Allies in 1918, a problem beside which *nothing else really mattered*, was that of Germany's power.

Since the Soviet Union, at least for the time being, was out of the Eastern equation, there was that much more reason to replace this essential factor of restraint on Germany by a combination of Eastern States. This would have been in line with Balfour's and Lord Hugh's understanding in the pre-bolshevik era.

When in 1933 the advent of Hitler to power signalled the predominance in Germany of the most nationalistic tendencies, France, more than ever, had to look in the direction of Eastern Europe for a restraining second front to be imposed on Germany, in the eventuality of war with her. In this endeavour she, unexpectedly²⁴⁴, felt at odds with Great Britain.

Instead of encouraging France in thus increasing her security, Britain let it know that France's increased ties with the East were anathema. They were considered a liability. ***The British stand did not make sense unless taken in conjunction with a firm belief that Germany was to move Eastward exclusively.*** This view is explicitly spelled out in the previously quoted memo by O. Sargent in February 1935. It is also the view expounded in the report of the Committee of Imperial Defence approved in 1937 by the British Cabinet

During the thirties, Britain, more than once, let it be known publicly that she had no vital interests in eastern and central Europe. Whatever merits of such a stand, it clearly contradicted a reasonable strategic principle: the vital strategic interests of a vital British ally should be vital to Britain's strategy. On this account at least, central and eastern Europe should have been considered vital to Britain because they were strategically vital to France.

While the security of France was vital to Britain, the two countries differed as to the ways of ensuring it. In France's opinion her security depended on preventing the rearmament of Germany and forcing on Germany a war on two fronts in case she tries to move, whether to the West or to the East. It was understood in France that a Germany victorious in the East would soon attack the West. The liability implicit in the assistance to be given to Eastern and Central Europe, were Germany to move in that direction, was an acceptable price to be paid for the assistance from the East, were Germany to move to the West.

In Britain, the position was that the French security should be achieved through an 'understanding' with Germany. It was known and acknowledged that such an understanding would not be possible without granting Germany a free hand in the East. This, in the eyes of the British leaders was no objection.

A lack of interest in the East and centre of Europe must therefore be regarded as a major strategic stand which, together with all other military matters involved in relation to Germany, reflected definite political options. From an interest in the East, to the extent of opposing Poland's

²⁴⁴ The disinterest of Britain from the East was well-known at the time. It was not yet as known that Britain was also opposed to the establishment of ties between France and the East.

independence, Britain moved to disinterest reflected in statements to the effect that the East was of no vital importance to Britain. This corresponded to a readiness to tolerate a German expansion, if it were directed to the East, and against the Soviet Union in particular. As early as 1918, Lord Milner, British Secretary of War, was considering a negotiated peace with Germany in which “the gains of Germany on Russian soil” would compensate her for “colonial and other losses”. On the eve of the armistice Lord Milner was prepared “to object to Germany’s demobilisation on the grounds that Germany might have to serve as bulwark against Bolshevism.”²⁴⁵

Awareness Of The Meaning Of A Strong German Army

A strong army has two obvious possible functions: to defend the country against an aggressive enemy, or to attack other countries, in the pursuit of a policy of expansion. The fulfilment of treaty obligations comes under either of these two functions.

At the end of World War I, Germany had no need for a strong defence army. She had lost the war and reluctantly accepted the conditions imposed by the victors. No future additional victory over a peaceful and disarmed Germany could give the Western countries what they could not have obtained at the end of the War. Germany, therefore, was safe from aggression from the West.

It is true that Germany was subjected to military pressure to force on her the payment of reparations. This, however, resulted in friction between Britain and France, friction which made the use of such pressure less and less possible. Moreover, without having yet built an efficient defensive army, she obtained through the pact of Locarno a guarantee of her Western frontiers by France Italy and Britain. In the eventuality of an attack by France, for instance, Britain and Italy would be bound to give Germany military assistance.

Had she so chosen, she could have obtained similar guarantees for her Eastern Frontiers. True, Britain was against granting Germany a guarantee of her Eastern frontiers. This position was not motivated by Britain’s indifference to an attack against Germany coming from the East. No such attack was contemplated. It was however expected that Germany would use a reconstituted army to obtain the revision of her Eastern frontiers, and to realise her ambitions for further expansion. Nevertheless, an ‘Eastern Locarno’, not including Britain, was attempted, and rejected by Germany.

A Germany having come to terms with her frontiers had no need for a strong army. This was universally understood. Rearmament, secret or open, proved to be a heavy load on the German economy. It could only be justified

256²⁴⁵ John M. Thompson, *Oper. cit.*, p. 25. The author quotes from a letter from William H. Buckler, Attaché of the American embassy, London, to Colonel House, as well as Seymour’s ‘House Papers’.

by a will to aggressively use this army at the service of a policy of expansion.

This is common sense, and no political leader was ignorant of the fact that Germany's rearmament meant that she would have the means of implementing her policies by the force of arms. Cordell Hull, the United States Secretary of State, wrote in his memoirs²⁴⁶:

On March 16, 1935, Hitler announced the reinstatement of military conscription. Germany thereby tossed overboard the military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles. She announced that her army would embrace thirty-six divisions, or more than half a million men. *She was clearly preparing for conquest*

Cordell Hull saw no other use for Germany's rearmament than to prepare for conquest. This conclusion was necessarily that of all political leaders. While Cordell Hull expressed his conclusion on the sole basis of Germany's rearmament, the fact is that he reached it much earlier on the basis of information from U.S. representatives in Germany. That information was available to all the western leaders through similar sources. Cordell Hull wrote²⁴⁷:

All the reports from Germany that flowed to my desk pointed to the dangerous change that had taken place with the advent of Hitler. *There could be no shadow of doubt* that Germany was rearming, with all that such rearming meant in the way of political disturbance and, eventually, war.

In October 1933 the British Chiefs Of Staff wrote in their annual review²⁴⁸:

..we should like to put on record our opinion that Germany is not only starting to rearm, but that she will continue this process until within a few years hence she will again have to be reckoned as a formidable military power.

This quotation bears an air of solemnity. To ask to be put on record is an indication of the gravity of the situation. It indicates that dire consequences could result from the neglect of this information, consequences for which the Chiefs of Staff, having put their opinion on record, could not later be held responsible²⁴⁹.

257²⁴⁶ 'The Memoirs of Cordell Hull', Macmillan, New York, 1948, vol 2, p. 243

258²⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 235

259²⁴⁸ Correlli Barnett, 'The Collapse of British Power', Eyre Methuen, London, 1972, p. 344.

The author quotes from CAB 53/23, COS 310.

260²⁴⁹ The Chiefs of Staff wanted to have their cake and eat it too. They clearly indicated in the same report that Germany intended to use her renewed military force to impose a revision of her frontiers in the East. The West therefore, in this perspective, had not to face a German threat.

Britain was not taken by surprise. Years prior to Germany, again, becoming the formidable military power she had been in 1914, the English leaders were warned by their highest military authorities. As we already saw, it was universally understood that, with the United States and the Soviet Union out of contemplated possible coalitions, it would be impossible to stand against such a Germany. The situation justified the most extreme measures to prevent that eventuality.

Was it not for the Bolshevik revolution, the prospect of Germany's return to the status of a 'formidable military power' could have been dealt with unambiguously. However, with a Bolshevik regime reigning over Russia, the question interesting the West was: in what direction would Germany's aggressive policies be implemented? Germany could plan to move to the East. She could intend to move to the West. She could move in each of the two directions, one at a time.

Trusting Pre-Hitler Germany To Move Eastward Exclusively

We already saw that the British establishment — Keynes for instance — trusted that the Weimar Germany would exclusively 'look' to the East. Balfour considered the matter through the angle — in what direction? — and reached the conclusion that Germany would move Eastward²⁵⁰:

The case which the French present to us with regard to the Left Bank of the Rhine is very forcible, but very one-sided. They draw a lurid picture of future Franco-German relations. They assume that the German population will always far outnumber the French; that as soon as the first shock of defeat had passed away, Germany will organize herself for revenge; that all our attempts to limit armaments will be unsuccessful; that the League of Nations will be impotent; and, consequently, that the invasion of France, which was fully accomplished in 1870, and partially accomplished in the recent War, will be renewed with every prospect of success.

I do not wish to deny the importance of these prophesyings; but I desire to point out that, in the first place, if there is a renewal of German world politics, *it is towards the East rather than towards the West that her ambitions will probably be directed..* On the other hand, the collapse of Russia, and the substitution for it of a number of small and jealous States, will increase the

Nevertheless, by putting themselves on record for having predicted that Germany would again become a formidable military power, they might have considered themselves beyond reproach, were Germany, contrary to their predictions, to decide to move West.

261²⁵⁰ Blanche E. C. Dugdale, 'Arthur James Balfour', Greenwood Press Publishers, Westport, Connecticut, 1970 (first published By Hutchinson, London, 1936), p. 277

opportunities for German diplomatic intrigues, and diminish the resisting power of the anti-German forces in the East.

This document is remarkable. Written by the British Foreign Secretary, it reflects the official position of the government. In particular, it expresses the British expectation of the collapse of Russia and its division into many smaller states.

All the arguments intending to prove that France was one-sided in her desire to keep the Rhineland, have been proved to be wrong. It was not difficult, even at the time at which Balfour wrote his report, to see the weakness of Balfour arguments. He challenged France's contention that:

w “the German population will always far outnumber the French”. This French contention could not be challenged. There was no reason to believe that the population of Germany would start decreasing, relative to that of France. Even if it were, the process would take too long a time to affect the strategic factor constituted by the population advantage.

w “As soon as the first shock of defeat had passed away, Germany will organise herself for revenge.” Balfour was in a position to know that such was already the case. A few years later, the British Government would ‘muffle’ official reports proving that Germany was engaged in widespread violations of the armaments clauses of the Versailles Treaty.

w “That all our attempts to limit armaments will be unsuccessful” So it was, and Britain bears a large responsibility for that.

w “That the League of Nations will be impotent”. And so it was to be, thanks, in no small part, to Britain.

It is fascinating to notice that many of the points on which Balfour hoped that France would be wrong, turned out to be right as the result of Britain's active efforts.

France's reasons for fearing a German military revival were realistic. Even Britain's certitude, and expectation, that Germany's determination would be to move Eastward and not Westwards, turned out wrong²⁵¹.

Concerning the German danger, Balfour, in the remainder of the document, argues that, if ever Germany decides to dominate the world “it will no doubt tax all the statesmanship of the rest of the world to prevent a

262²⁵¹ It could be said that World War II started with Germany's attack against Poland, i.e. with a move to the East. In fact the move against Poland was a diversion to Germany's decision to move to the West. It is in the knowledge of that decision that Britain and France decided to make Poland part of the equation by granting her a guarantee. It was hoped that the guarantee, which started unilaterally, would become bilateral and thus impose a second front on a Germany determined to move West.

repetition of the calamities from which we have been suffering”. In such a case, argues Balfour, any French precautions such as the occupation of the Rhineland would be of no use. Implicit in Balfour’s report is that such precautions are the less necessary if Germany, instead of seeking world domination, would just move to the East. France should therefore renounce her insistence on the Rhineland as a guarantee against the German threat: the only guarantee is Germany’s move to the East. Associating Germany’s will to world domination with her move westwards, while dissociating such a will in conjunction with an eastward move will become a familiar theme with Neville Chamberlain.

Churchill himself trusted in 1925 that Germany’s ambition in the future would be towards the East “which apparently seemed to him quite acceptable.”²⁵²

D’Abernon who, on occasion, would vouch for Germany’s peaceful policies and intentions, was keen in reporting opinions in the German establishment advising a crusade against the Soviet Union. These opinions were expressed personally to him by such guests as General Hoffman²⁵³ and Dr. Simons²⁵⁴, the German Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1920. D’Abernon never reported having opposed or rebuked them. For Germany, to go East was considered respectable, tolerable, and even proper.

The strategic significance of a German move towards the West could not be obscured. It would have been impossible for any British Cabinet to declare itself indifferent to the fate of Belgium, France, etc. Any German aggression that, for instance, would bring the German air forces closer to the shores of England would be totally unacceptable to the British general public and, possibly, to most of the British establishment.

In one important respect, the situation was different concerning the strategic importance of a German move to the East. While its true significance was obvious to the military leaders and experts, there were some room for denying its vital strategic relevance to Britain without a loss of credibility in the eyes of a public kept uninformed and misinformed.

Trusting Hitler

Were Britain to suspect a German intention to move to the West, she would have prevented the German rearmament by all means available. Hitler was aware of the impossibility of rearming Germany without convincing the West that she intended to expand in the Eastern direction. Ludecke recalls that Hitler told him²⁵⁵:

²⁶³²⁵² Correlli Barnett, *Oper. Cit.*, pp. 329-330

²⁶⁴²⁵³ Lord D’Abernon’s Diary, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1929, vol 2, p. 178

²⁶⁵²⁵⁴ *ibid*, vol 1, p. 78. Dr. Simons argue that Germany, not Poland, was in reality the barrier against Bolshevism ‘and disorder’

²⁶⁶²⁵⁵ G.W. Ludecke, ‘I knew Hitler’, Jarrolds Publishers, London, 1938, p.422

The economic power of the Versailles States is so enormous that ***I can't risk antagonizing them at the very outset***. If I begin my regime with socialism, Paris, London, and New York will be alarmed, the capitalists will take fright and combine, and ***I'll be whipped before I know it***. A preventive war would ruin everything. No, I've got to play ball with capitalism and keep the Versailles Powers in line ***by holding aloft the bogey of Bolshevism — make them believe that a nazi Germany is the last bulwark against the Red flood***. That's the only way to come through the danger period, to get rid of Versailles and rearm. I can talk peace, but mean war.. And ***it will be easier to overthrow Moscow and take the Ukraine if the capitalists are on my side***. If the capitalists are forced to choose, believe me, ***they will prefer a greater Germany, even if it means the end of Moscow***, to an alliance of the two against themselves — for that would spell the finish of capitalism the world over. Never fear — faced by such an alternative, capitalism would rather have me than Stalin, and will accept my terms.

Hitler knew that unless he could convince the West that he intended to use Germany's army against Bolshevism there would be no possibility for a German rearmament. Consequently, he did his best to convince the West that, when it comes to fight communism, he could be relied upon. He destroyed the labour movement in Germany, put all socialist and communist activists in concentration camps, murdered a number of them, and did not miss an opportunity for publicly attacking communism and the Soviet Union. The West was the intended audience when, in a speech on September 3, 1933, he said²⁵⁶:

If a single people in Western Europe or Central Europe were to succumb to Bolshevism, this poison would spread farther and would destroy that which is today the oldest and fairest cultural treasure in the world. ***By taking upon herself this struggle against Bolshevism*** Germany is but fulfilling, as so often before in her history, a European mission.

Two days latter he repeated in a speech²⁵⁷:

In so far then as we devote ourselves to the care of our own blood.. we are at the same time doing our best to help to safeguard other peoples from diseases which spring from race to race, from people to people. If in West or Central Europe but ***one single people*** were to fall a victim of Bolshevism, this poison would continue its ravages, it would devastate the oldest, the fairest civilization which can to-day be found upon earth.

267²⁵⁶ 'The Speeches of Adolph Hitler', Oxford University Press, 1942, vol 2, pp. 667-8
268²⁵⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 480-1

Germany by taking upon itself this conflict does but fulfil, as so often before in her history, a truly European mission.

It seems that Hitler was the first to expound the theory of ‘the domino effect’. Germany having taken upon her shoulders the task of preventing further expansion of communism, it was natural for the British establishment to conclude that she could not perform her ‘European’ task without a modicum of rearmament. Furthermore, not only did Hitler specify in his book ‘Mein Kampf’ that Germany’s expansion would be directed to the East, but after rising to power, he clearly hinted that such was Germany’s necessity. In a speech on September 12, 1936, he said²⁵⁸:

If we had at our disposal the incalculable wealth and stores of raw material of the Ural mountains and the unending fertile plains of the Ukraine to be exploited under National Socialist leadership, then we would produce and our German people swim in plenty

‘If we had’ sounded speculative. It could be said that the implication was not necessarily an intended German occupation of the Ukraine. However, it so much reflected Hitler’s ambitions to expand in the East, as detailed in ‘Mein Kampf’, that it was taken as a positive indication of Germany’s intentions. Moreover, Hitler did not always speak in the conditional tense. In a long speech on September 14, 1937, much of it devoted against Bolshevism, Hitler, speaking of Communism, said²⁵⁹:

..there must be an immunization of the peoples against this poison while *the international carrier of the bacillus must itself be fought.*

In other words, besides the internal struggle against communism — what Hitler calls ‘immunization of the people’ — it is necessary to fight the Soviet Union itself. No wonder that a large portion of the western press was asserting that Germany was sure to attack Soviet Union with a view of acquiring the Ukraine. The speculation was not on the belief but on the date at which Hitler would make the move.

If the prevention of the Bolshevik expansion to a single European country justified some rearmament, fighting the ‘international carrier’ could explain the need for a much larger measure of military preparedness. In most of his conversations with British leaders and members of the establishment, Hitler was stressing Germany’s military needs as being justified for the defence against the Soviet Union²⁶⁰.

269²⁵⁸ *ibid* p. 929

270²⁵⁹ *ibid* p. 693

271²⁶⁰ Eden was an exception in letting the German officials know that, in his opinion, Germany’s fears of a Soviet Union attack were not credible.

As a result, Western leaders became divided into those who trusted Hitler, and those who did not trust him. Here it is necessary to redefine the meaning of ‘trusting’. Trusting Hitler does not mean at all believing that Hitler does not lie, or that his intentions are peaceful. It does not even mean believing that he is incapable of the most treacherous deceit. It just means that Hitler is trusted to be irredeemable in his opposition to communism and the Soviet Union, that he can be relied upon to expand to the East, that he can be relied upon not to attack the Western countries, at least not before having ‘finished’ with the Soviet Union. It was believed that Hitler was cunning and deceitful in every other respect. It was known that he would not recoil from any trick or device however dishonourable. He was only trusted to be sincerely extreme in his opposition to communism and the Soviet Union.

In the first chapter, we quoted a document written by Sargent in which he expressed his belief in the absolute impossibility for Hitler to ever come to terms with Russia. That gives a measure of trust in Hitler’s extreme anticommunism. Only in this sense was Hitler ever trusted by the West. Otherwise, Germany could be trusted to be, as Cordell Hull said, ‘clearly preparing for conquest’. As we have seen before, Chamberlain’s trust in Hitler was not different.

To trust Hitler in this sense, did not relieve the Western leaders from the need to be militarily prepared to face an aggressive Germany after, as was expected, her successful campaign against the Soviet Union. However, it was hoped that such a campaign would exhaust Germany’s military strength and would keep her busy in the ‘reorganisation’ of the Soviet Union, for long years to come. For the West, military preparations were a necessity. The scope of these preparations, however, were decided on the basis of trusting Hitler’s natural tendency to the East.

Eden wrote²⁶¹:

By November 1933 we knew that Hitler was starting to build military aircraft in quantity and that paramilitary organisations were being equipped and trained. *In a few years Nazi Germany would be an armed menace*

‘We’, here, is the British government. As early as November 1933, they knew the extent of German efforts at rearmament and the menace it would constitute. Eden went on²⁶²:

The annual report of the *Chiefs of Staff*, presented that autumn, suggested that the object of Germany’s rearmament was to make it possible for her to secure a revision of frontiers *in the East*, a political assessment not necessarily endorsed by the Foreign

272²⁶¹ Anthony Eden, ‘Facing the Dictators’, Cassell, London, 1962, p. 47-48
273²⁶² *ibid.*

Office and currently *not shared by me*. It was never my belief that Nazi ambitions were only Eastern.

The British Chiefs of Staff ‘trusted’ Hitler. They trusted that Hitler’s expansion aims were directed to the East. Eden added on the same page:

The Chiefs of Staff had no doubt that German rearmament would continue *whether a disarmament convention were signed or not*, and that Great Britain might very easily be called upon to implement her Locarno obligations within the next few years. Therefore, *a steady increase in the defence estimates would be necessary*.

The mention of the Locarno Treaty particularly refers to its stipulation that an attempt by Germany to remilitarise the Rhineland could be considered as a flagrant act of aggression committed against the other signatories and requiring their assistance to France if the latter intervened militarily to prevent such a remilitarisation. The Chiefs of Staff predicted that, within the next few years, such an attempt would be made. The call for an increase in defence estimates was not a serious one. It was not followed by appropriate action and, when the time came, Britain tried, and practically succeeded, to disengage herself from the Locarno obligations.

Eden added²⁶³:

On October 24, Hitler openly told Sir Eric Phipps that he sought ‘a certain expansion *in Eastern Europe*’, a threat which was also calculated to *reassure those who believed, wrongly in my opinion, that Hitler’s ambitions could be tolerated if diverted that way*. He asked for some submarines and demanded that the victors should not increase their armaments during the period of the proposed agreement.

This was alarming and menacing. ..The Americans and the Italians had been told much the same, yet the rather surprising consensus of opinion among the Ambassadors was that Hitler intended these mounting demands as the opening of serious negotiations.. His Majesty’s Government, though they did not like these moves, were sluggish in their reactions. I was disturbed by the slow motion in stating our position in Berlin. ..*Six weeks had passed since Hitler’s interview with Phipps and there had been no definite reply from us*

Hitler was heading a racial and military oriented regime. He openly spoke to the Ambassadors of England, France, Italy and the United States of Germany’s intentions to expand in the Eastern direction. He was not, here and then, put on notice that the civilised world would not stand for that.

274²⁶³ *ibid*, p. 48

Some members of the British Government believed, wrongly says Eden, that such ambitions could be tolerated. The expression of such ambitions is intended to be ‘reassuring’.

To express dismay at Hitler’s flagitious utterances does not need a delay of six weeks. To accept those utterances would be embarrassing. When Phipps met Hitler again on December 8, *he did not raise the matter of Germany’s expressed intentions to expand in the Eastern direction*. It can therefore, at least, be stated that Hitler was met with no discouragement to his talk of expansion towards the East.

Silences

Silences play an important role in diplomatic relations and deserve the following short diversion. Some ‘silence’ cases have been dealt with at length by historians. One such case is that of the British silence at Stressa (April 11, 1935) when Mussolini, whose aggressive intentions towards Ethiopia were notorious, qualified the word peace, by adding ‘in Europe’. At the time, Ramsay MacDonald, the British Prime Minister MacDonald and Simon, the British Foreign Secretary, remained silent. This silence was justifiably considered by Mussolini as an approval of his known expansionist policies in Africa.

Another case was that of an agreement between Germany and France in December 1938. In this agreement Germany, apparently was making all the concessions, renouncing her claims on the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. Germany justifiably expected to receive a *quid pro quo* for her renunciations. She even claimed that the *quid pro quo* had been spelled out orally between Bonnet and Ribbentrop and consisted in the French disinterest from Eastern Europe. The agreement itself, coming just after the dismembering of Czechoslovakia at Munich, was silent on that. The silence was indeed full of meaning²⁶⁴. Bonnet is disingenuous in trying to refute Ribbentrop’s

275²⁶⁴ There is an ambiguous paragraph in the agreement:

276 3. The two governments are decided, without prejudice [sous reserve] of their particular relations with Third Powers, to remain in contact over all questions of interest for two countries..

277 Bonnet maintains that ‘without prejudice to their special relations with third powers’ meant a recognition of the special relations between France and Poland. Ribbentrop, more credibly, answers that Great-Britain was meant for France and Italy for Germany. The agreement was signed on December 6, 1938. However, a footnote from DBFP, 3rd series, volume 3, document 407, p. 397 states:

278 Sir E. Phipps had written to the Secretary of State on December 5 that it was probable that Herr Von Ribbentrop would press for a modification of France’s eastern pacts, and that Mr. Bonnet had told him (Sir E. Phipps) that he wished to ‘loosen the ties that bind France to Russia and Poland’.

279 To ‘loosen the ties’ with Poland clearly meant that Bonnet did not consider making reservations as to special relations with Poland. In early December 1938, when it was still believed that Hitler would move to the East, then Poland did not matter much. When the news later confirmed that Hitler would start to go West, Poland became important as a second front and Bonnet had to deny that a free hand had ever been granted ‘in silence’, or otherwise.

assertion that a free hand in the East had orally been given to Germany by this agreement.

In the case we quoted from Eden, the silence of the West was as full of meaning. Hitler was even more justified than Mussolini later felt to be, to consider having received, if not a free hand, at least some understanding, some promise of tolerance for his ambitions. With Mussolini, the silence had concerned an indirect hint made by Mussolini to his known aggressive intentions against Ethiopia. With Hitler, however, it was not a matter of hinting, but of his *explicit* statement concerning expansion to the East.

No Countermeasures

The rebuilding of Germany's military power started immediately after the end of World War I. The British Cabinet was more worried of its effect on the public opinion than of its strategic consequences. Years later British Conservative leaders would complain that the public was not prepared to support a policy of opposing Germany's remilitarisation. The fact is that those same British leaders tried their utmost to prevent the public from becoming aware of the fact of Germany's remilitarisation as well as of the extent and nature of the threat it constituted. Vansittart wrote²⁶⁵:

I grew uneasy too with his D'Abernon. The Disarmament Commission, by now brazenly flouted, *was not allowed to say so. Its reports remained unpublished.* Germany had no more intention of abandoning war than of paying debts.. The militarists used the Republic for extortion under threat of collapse, and diddled the British Cabinet into sparing armaments factories in the hope that they would contribute to reparations. War-material was left wittingly undestroyed, and *the British People dozed unaware* that Articles 168 and 169 of the Treaty were dormant too. D'Abernon, the pioneer of appeasement.. proclaimed German honesty.. The French were less gullible when 'almost every document put up by the *Reichswehrministerium* was found, after we had checked its statements by "control" inspections, to be false'. Peace was the last thing to be promoted by the German army.

The British People dozed because vital information was withheld from them. Vansittart adds²⁶⁶:

Stresemann asked for evacuation of the Cologne sector and early withdrawal of the Control Commission. It reported that the Germans had never meant to disarm. *The Allies suppressed the reports.*

280²⁶⁵ 'The Mist Procession', Oper. Cit., p.276

281²⁶⁶ *ibid*, p.341

The Weimar republic had ambitions of expansion for Germany. It actively pursued a policy of avoiding, as much as possible, Germany's military disarmament as obligated to under the Versailles Treaty. Instead of denouncing such a policy, the allies were suppressing the evidence and spreading the word that Germany had become a peaceful democracy.

This attitude could no longer be maintained after Hitler's accession to power in January, 1933. No one could describe Hitler's Germany as being democratic. For a time, however, important member of the British establishment tried to spread the word that Hitler's intentions were peaceful. The British public soon learned enough about Hitler's handling of the opposition, about his racist theories and practice. It also learned about the way Hitler suppressed the popular organisations. In consequence, British public opinion was not prepared to believe that Hitler was a man of peace²⁶⁷. As late as 1935 "The proposals for publicity of violations also met with British opposition"²⁶⁸.

The military situation and the options available to face it, were already clear in Britain in 1933. On May 10, 1933, Brigadier A.C. Temperley, an English delegate at the Disarmament Conference, described them in a report which Cadogan, in a letter to Leper, considered 'of the utmost importance and interest'. Temperley started by underlining the extent and the gravity of Germany's violations of the treaty clauses restricting her rearmament. He then drew attention to the 'delirium of reawakened nationalism and of the most blatant and dangerous militarism'. He then wrote²⁶⁹:

What then is to be our attitude? Can we too go forward as if nothing has happened? Can we afford to ignore what is going on behind the scenes in Germany? ..there is little use in a Convention limiting effectives and material, if the preparations above indicated are to proceed unchecked, while the war-like spirit is being openly roused to a fever heat against the Poles as the first objective, with France as the ultimate enemy.

Temperley was confirming the reports received from all reliable sources as to the danger constituted by Germany's remilitarisation coupled with her aggressive spirit. In a different form, Temperley repeated his question as to 'our attitude': If it is dangerous to go forward with disarmament, what then is to be done? Temperley had an answer. He went on:

There appears to be one bold solution. France, the United States and ourselves should address a stern warning to Germany that there can be no disarmament, no equality of status and no relaxation of the Treaty of Versailles unless a complete reversion

282²⁶⁷ The British Ambassador to Germany, Neville Henderson, would later try to have the British press describe Hitler as 'an angel of peace'.

283²⁶⁸ 'Europe on the eve', *Oper. cit.*, p.53.

284²⁶⁹ DBFP, series 2, vol. 5, doc. 127, pp. 213-217

of present military preparations and tendencies takes place in Germany.

Temperley examined the possible consequences of such a line of action:

Admittedly this will provoke a crisis and the danger of war will be brought appreciably nearer. We should have to say that we shall insist upon the enforcement of the Treaty of Versailles, and in this insistence, with its hint of force in the background, presumably the United States would not join. But *Germany knows she cannot fight at present and we must call her bluff. She is powerless, before the French army and our fleet. Hitler, for all his bombast, must give way.*

Temperley went on to describe the expected consequences of not stopping Germany in time:

If such a step seems too forceful, the only alternative is to carry out some minimum measures of disarmament and to allow things to drift for another five years, by which time, unless there is a change of heart in Germany, *war seems inevitable*. German rearmament will by then be an accomplished fact and the material of the ex-Allies, which would take years and scores of millions of pounds to replace, may have been destroyed.

Temperley prediction of a war in five years time was close to the truth. The choice faced by Britain, according to Temperley, was not between war now and war later, but between the certainty of war in five years in adverse conditions, and the unlikely possibility of immediate war in conditions very unfavourable to Germany. Temperley explained:

Strong concerted action, however, as suggested above, should prove decisive, even though the threat of military pressure might have to be maintained for years, calling for fresh monetary sacrifices, until Germany is brought to her senses. But even this heavy responsibility should be accepted *rather than that we should allow all the sacrifices of the last war to be in vain* and the world to go down in economic ruin. *There is a mad dog abroad once more and we must resolutely combine either to ensure its destruction or at least its confinement* until the disease has run its course

It is sometimes claimed that we should not judge the action of the 'appeasement' leaders on the light of the knowledge provided to us by hindsight. The above quotations prove that the knowledge we now have about Germany's rearmament and aggressive plans was not lacking at the

time. However, though Temperley's memorandum was circulated to the Cabinet, it was circulated in the Cabinet, says Eden, "to no effect",²⁷⁰.

The sky that day may have been blue or cloudy. The weather may have been cold or warm. Those are facts that can be verified in some records. Some historian may casually mention these facts. However, that such ominous message as that of Temperley's should be read "to no effect" is a fact which should not be mentioned casually. "There is a mad dog abroad once more" is a precise warning full of a threatening meaning. It meant indeed that Germany, once more, is on her way to become a tremendous expansionist military power. Only fifteen years after a war that cost millions in lives, the contemplation of a repeat, with no assured victory, was expected to have a chilling effect and to provoke the strongest possible reaction. It was exceedingly important to ascertain: was it true that Germany was rapidly rearming? Was it true that once rearmed she could not be stopped in the absence of the favourable constellation of factors, which existed in 1914-1918? Is it true that Germany was animated by a martial spirit aimed at expansion?

Those questions were not asked *because there was no doubt as to the correct answer*. The one question that interested the Cabinet was: In what direction would Hitler move with his terrific military potential? As we saw, it was common in some circles to 'trust' Hitler to move to the East. It was impossible for a British Cabinet to read or listen to Timperley's warning 'to no effect' unless the Cabinet also belonged to those circles 'trusting' Hitler.

In the Foreign Office, Allen Leper thought it important to expose Germany's clandestine rearmament. He wrote a memorandum on May 29, 1933, in which he started by expressing regret at the mood of the House of Commons which excluded the hope for a British positive role concerning France's security. All that was needed was British reaffirmation, in view of some encouraging signs from the United States, of Article 16 of the Covenant in its most precise interpretation. Leper concluded that disarmament by all other powers (other than Germany), as proposed by Britain, was now ruled out. The British claim for excepting bombers from disarmament — actually for increasing its bombers force — 'for police purposes in outlying districts' was not helpful. In view of these considerations Leper wrote²⁷¹:

My suggestion is that we should at once take the French Government fully into our confidence in this matter.. If we have certain *secret* information that the Germans are rearming, it is a safe guess that the French have a great deal more.. What more proper occasion could be chosen than that at the Disarmament Conference, after Herr Nardolny has made one of his speeches in the best Hitlerian manner expounding Germany's peaceful

285²⁷⁰ Lord Vansittart, 'The Mist Procession', Hutchinson, London, 1958, p. 478
286²⁷¹ DBFP, series 2, vol 5, doc. 179, pp. 282-285

intentions, the British and French representatives should stand up one after another and declare that, much as they appreciate the sentiments which have been expressed, it is impossible for disarmament discussions to proceed when to their knowledge Germany is actually rearming.

The British ambassador to Germany, Rumbold, was sending alarming reports on the kind of leadership ruling Nazi Germany, on the clandestine rearmament and on the expansionist tendencies of the German Government. In fact, such was the nature of most of the reports the British Government was receiving from Germany from all possible sources.

We have already noticed that Eden was informing the Cabinet that there could be no doubts as to Germany's intensive clandestine rearmament. If so, then, why not follow Leper's advise and denounce it? There is no way to escape the conclusion that the Cabinet agreed with the Chiefs of Staff's annual report in 1933 which, while putting on record that Germany's military strength would soon again become formidable, opined that it would be used in the East direction.

It was evident that revisions of Germany's Eastern boundaries in her favour, would result in the strengthening of the German strategic position and would render her still more formidable. There was nothing attractive for Britain in this prospect. The only 'redeeming' feature of this development would be its leading, eventually, to a conflict with Soviet Union. It was considered that the Soviet regime would not survive such a conflict. It was hoped that Germany either would be exhausted by that conflict or, at least, would find herself quite busy exploiting her victory over the Soviet Union and reorganising that country to her advantage. Such opinions could not be expressed freely by the British leaders. However, as we have seen previously, they had common currency in the establishment and were reflected in Cabinet military policies.

There exist a number of declarations by British Cabinet members, belonging to the appeasing wing, made officially or recorded in their private letters to friends and relatives, to the effect that they were aware of the German military threat and intended to meet it by proper rearmament. While these declarations are sometimes taken as proof that those Cabinet members were not favouring a German expansion in the East, it must be admitted that facts tell more than declarations.

In the first chapter we already quoted Chamberlain saying in September 1934, that Britain's safety, and that of her empire, must be 'the paramount consideration.. to which everything else, home politics, economy, or desire for disarmament must be subjected..' He then added though, at the moment, there was no immediate threat to that safety, 'there is a universal feeling' that within 2, 3, 5 or 10 years 'such a threat may materialise and that the quarter from which it will come is Germany.

Chamberlain was expressing his fears of a future German threat in the context of his justification for the need to appease Japan. In the same spirit he earlier wrote on July 1, 1934²⁷²:

'we shall be more likely to deter Germany from mad-dogging if we have an air force which, in case of need could bomb the Rhur from Belgium'

However, in late 1936, he wrote²⁷³

if we were to follow Winston's advice and sacrifice our commerce to the manufacture of arms, we should inflict a certain injury on our trade from which it would take generations to recover, we should destroy the confidence which now happily exists, and we should cripple the revenue..

Safety, which is a 'paramount consideration' and to which everything else should be subjected ('home politics, economy, or desire for disarmament') seems now to take a second place behind the 'trade' necessities. It is hard to believe that the quotes of 1934, in the context of a policy towards Japan, and those of 1936 in conjunction with the importance of trade, originated from the same man.

Two years separated the statements. During this time the following had occurred:

- w Italy's conquest of Abyssinia in defiance of the League of Nations
- w Germany's reintroduction of compulsory military service, and announcement that she had reached parity with England in the air.
- w Germany's remilitarisation of the Rhineland
- w The civil war in Spain, heavily supported by Italy and Germany.
- w An accelerated rate of increase in Germany's military strength, particularly in the air.

If there were any essential changes in the political situation, they were evidently to the worse and necessitated in 1936 still more drastic measures of military preparedness... unless the belief in an eastern outlook from the part of Germany was also an essential element of the British strategy.

The matter becomes quite clear if we consider a declaration made on March 6, 1934 by the Premier of Belgium²⁷⁴ to the Belgium Senate:

287²⁷² Keith Feiling, 'The Life of Neville Chamberlain', Macmillan, 1946, p. 253

288²⁷³ Keith Feiling, *Oper. Cit.*, p. 314

It is certain that at least two of the Great Powers which have a permanent seat on the Council, Britain and Italy, will refuse to order an investigation. Under these conditions, Germany will refuse to permit it.. There remains the second means: a preventive war.. To prevent the rearmament of Germany there is no other means than immediate war. For myself, I refuse to throw my country into such an adventure

The investigations in question concerned Germany's violations of the clauses in the Versailles Treaty which imposed limitations on her armaments. The British opposition to investigating Germany's violations is not a matter of rumour reported by an obscure journalist. It is publicly announced as a certainty by the Belgium Prime Minister, a man directly involved in behind doors negotiations concerning the Allies' attitude on that question.

The British leaders knew that Germany was well on her way to becoming a 'formidable military power'. This knowledge had, however, not yet been made public by the British Cabinet. At a later date, the Cabinet would decide that it could not any longer abstain from a public statement on this subject. But, in 1934, it wished to be free from the pressure of public opinion. This would not have been possible if an official investigation was allowed to reveal the extent of the German rearmament.

It should be noted that, this time, the future of British trade was not at stake. In fact, with the good will of Belgium, France and Poland (reliable at the time), it would not have been hard to impose such an investigation as was then considered. It is reasonable to suspect that the British Cabinet felt the safety of the country was not threatened by Germany's rearmament. They thought, in agreement with the Chiefs of Staff, it would all be directed against the East.

Still, the matter was of great concern to two friendly countries, France and Belgium. Moreover, the consent to an investigation of German infractions, known to have occurred indeed, could not have jeopardised any British national interest. It did not make sense to still hope for a disarmament agreement while German rearmament was proceeding speedily, in contravention to treaties empowering the allies to prevent that precise occurrence. It was also understood that if Germany was not restrained in her rearmament, Britain would have to increase her own rearmament at costs that, as Chamberlain was saying, could hurt the economy of the country. Nonetheless, Britain was acting as if Germany's rearmament not only did not threaten her safety but was a positive development which should not be resisted.

In March 1934 the German military budget was published showing an increase from 78 millions marks to 210 for the air forces and from 344.9 to

289²⁷⁴ Frederick L. Schuman, 'Europe on the Eve', Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1942, p. 51. The author quoted from the daily 'Le Soir', March 7, 1934

574.5 for the land forces. On May 12, 1934, Chamberlain writes to his sister²⁷⁵ saying that he had practically taken charge of the defence requirements of the country.

These numbers are alarming, and France was alarmed. Not Britain. At the Commons Simon declared²⁷⁶:

I do not believe that we ought at this stage to go to Geneva and start a new initiative.

The same day²⁷⁷, at Geneva, Barthou and Litvinov agreed that the Disarmament Conference should now deal with measures to strengthen collective security. Simon did not concur:

A conference called for the purpose of disarmament could not be transformed into a conference for devising plans of security on the basis that no disarmament at all was possible.

Germany was becoming a formidable military power. She had just published a disquieting military budget. The disarmament conference had reached a dead end. Nonetheless, Simon was not interested in collective security. His only objection was of a formal nature. He gave more weight to a rule he had just pulled out of his hat than to the gravity of the situation. His attitude is negative. He does not, for instance, suggest to convoke a different conference for the sake of establishing collective security.

In 1934 Germany, if faced with the determined and organised will of some European countries bent on preventing her rearming, would have had to submit. Her rapidly increasing military power was still so weak that Italy, in July, would dare to send her army to the Brenner pass, as a warning to Germany. Germany was impressed and her coup against Austria was aborted.

No Real Opposition To Germany's Rearmament

The British leaders and establishment must have been pleased with the anticommunist, anti-socialist and anti trade-unionist measures taken by Hitler since the early days of his advent to power. However, the brutality of his methods left many, conservatives among them, uneasy. The thought that such a gang could control a formidable military power was not reassuring and the British leaders had, at first, ambiguous feelings. Hitler would eventually gain their 'trust'. The 'conversion' would take some time and the time would vary for every 'convert'.

290²⁷⁵ Quoted in the first Chapter

291²⁷⁶ Frederick. L. Schuman, Oper. Cit, p.51

292²⁷⁷ *ibid* pp. 51-2

In February 1934, the Defence Requirements Sub-Committee (DRC) of the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) noted that Japan was, at the moment, the most immediate threat. Germany, yet not fully armed, was less of an immediate threat: “In her case we have time, though not much time, to make defensive preparations.” The report added: ‘..we take Germany as the ultimate potential enemy against whom our “long range” policy must be directed’.²⁷⁸

A change must have occurred later in 1934 in British policies. On January 29, 1934, Britain suggested permanent and automatic supervision of disarmament. Correlli Barnett mentions that on March 19, 1934, at a Cabinet meeting²⁷⁹:

..both Macdonald, the Prime Minister, and Chamberlain, the Chancellor of Exchequer, were, the minutes record, inclined to look for *some alternative to take Germany as a firm enemy and arming against her*. The Cabinet finally concluded that if the Disarmament Conference did fail.. Germany would soon be a potential danger. In such circumstances the Cabinet must ‘without delay’ consider whether ‘*to join in arranging to provide further security* against a breach of peace or face very heavy further expenditure on rearmament.

The only alternatives, which were laid down very clearly, and from which the choice was to be made without delay, were either collective security, or ‘very heavy further expenditure on armaments’. They were predicated by the assumption that Germany was to be considered as the firm enemy. Eventually, the British government managed to avoid both alternatives. It opposed collective security, and very heavy expenditure on rearmament.

It is worthwhile noting that, in the opinion of the Cabinet, and even with Germany to be considered the enemy, very heavy spending was not the single solution. Collective security was considered adequate means to face the situation of a rearmed Germany. It was therefore considered possible to face the German threat without jeopardising the future of British trade. However, ‘trusting’ Hitler seemed a better alternative altogether.

Thus, by February 1935, Britain not only opposed an American plan for investigation of the violations of disarmament but she even disagreed with a proposal for publicity of the violations²⁸⁰. The public was not supposed to know who the violators were and what was the gravity of the violations.

Britain was acting as if she was opposed to any measures that would impair Germany’s rearmament. This policy was not explicit but in line with the opinions expressed by the British establishment. In the previous chapter, Lothian, Amery and Lloyd George were quoted defending Germany’s policy

293²⁷⁸ Correlli Barnett, *Oper. cit.*, p.345. The author quotes from CAB 53/23, COS 310

294²⁷⁹ *Oper. Cit.*, p. 396

295²⁸⁰ ‘Europe on the Eve’, *op. cit.* p. 53

of rearmament. The British Government could not express itself as freely. Their actions, however, spoke as loudly.

On July 30, 1934 Baldwin, speaking of Germany, declares in the House of Commons²⁸¹:

But we have little doubt that it is her intention — and we have always recognized that — that *the moment she feels free to rearm*, the air will be one of her principal considerations. Indeed *it stands to reason* that if Germany has that right, and *seizes that right*, to rearm, *she has every argument in her favour, from her defenceless position in the air*, to try to make herself secure.

The Prime Minister of Britain was justifying in advance the German measures for rearmament that he expect her to take. In the name of reason, right, and the need for security, Nazi Germany was thereby informed that England would not oppose her rearmament. Moreover, Germany was given a hint that rights are to be ‘seized’. All the arguments advanced by Baldwin concerning the air forces apply also to the land forces. Indeed, with the Rhineland demilitarised, and without a strong army, Germany was as ‘defenceless’ as without an air force.

On September 22, 1933, Lloyd George declared²⁸²:

If the powers succeed in overthrowing Nazism in Germany, what would follow? Not a Conservative, Socialist or Liberal regime, but extreme Communism. Surely that could not be their objective. A Communist Germany would be infinitely more formidable than a Communist Russia. The German would know how to run their Communism effectively

A year later, on November 28, 1934, at the House of Commons, Lloyd George made a similar statement²⁸³. The circumstances were different. Britain could no longer hide from public opinion the fact of Germany’s speedy rearmament in violation of her treaty obligations. The Government was unwilling to condemn Germany publicly. Lloyd George asked the Commons not to condemn Germany. He said that the English Conservatives in England would be looking to Germany as the bulwark against Communism. He predicted that England would be welcoming Germany as her friend. It was clear that in Lloyd George’s opinion, German rearmament was not a bad thing.

The British public, aware of the horrors committed under Hitler’s regime was not prepared to support such views. The Government did not express itself in such terms. Earlier we brought the exact quote of Lloyd George’s intervention as an example of the Establishment’s opinion. However, in this

296²⁸¹ Gaetano Salvemini, *Oper. Cit.*, p. 165

297²⁸² F.L. Schuman, *Op. cit.*, p. 340

298²⁸³ *ibid*

particular case, we can ascertain that the British government agreed totally with Lloyd George. In a note circulated to the Cabinet Committee on German rearmament, Simon, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs advocates the legalisation of the German rearmament. He says²⁸⁴

We ought, I think, to make much of the growth of British opinion in favour of this course. From this point of view, Mr. Lloyd George's speech the other night seemed to me extremely useful.

At that point, a note in the document explains that the speech in question is that made on November 28 at the House of Commons in which Lloyd George stressed the importance of Germany's future role as a bulwark against communism. Simon found it 'extremely useful' that what he could not say by himself in the Commons had been said by Lloyd George²⁸⁵.

With such an outlook with respect to Nazi Germany, it is no wonder that the British policy with regard to Germany's rearmament was ambiguous. On the one hand, Britain could not but be very worried at the rapid growth of the German air force. On the other hand, a strong Germany was needed as a bulwark against Communism. The solution would be not to neglect Britain's own air force program, while being very accommodating with Germany's rearmament.

Britain, being an island well protected by her strong navy against land forces, had to worry more about German air rearmament than about her land rearmament. If Britain could agree to, and justify Germany's air rearmament, she would have less reason to oppose her land rearmament. In fact, less than a year after Baldwin's declaration, Germany announced that she no longer was recognising any limitations imposed on her rearmament by the Versailles Treaty. It is doubtful that Germany would have dared to take such a step had it not been made clear to her, in more ways than one, that England would oppose any sanctions France and Belgium would otherwise have imposed on Germany.

At a Cabinet meeting on November 21, 1934, it was considered²⁸⁶:

...whether we ought to abandon *our policy of ignoring Germany's action in regarding to rearmament*. Our information was to the effect that the German authorities were afraid that the Versailles powers would jointly accuse Germany of violating the Treaty. *If such action were taken now, Hitler's prestige might be affected*; but with every month that passed, Germany was becoming stronger and therefore better able to disregard such complaints.

299²⁸⁴ DBFP, series 2, vol 12, doc. 235, p. 273

300²⁸⁵ It is an illustration of the fact that when a Government is supported by the Establishment, the opinions uninhibitedly expressed by the latter are a better indication of those of the Government than the Governmental statements which may be restrained by various considerations.

301²⁸⁶ Correlli Barnett, Oper. Cit., p.398. The author quotes from CAB 23/86, 41(34)1

It is here on record that it was Britain's policy to disregard Germany's actions — infractions — regarding rearmament. It is also on record that the Cabinet knew Germany feared a joint accusation by the allies. The Cabinet also knew that then was the time to affect Hitler's prestige; later might be too late.

As Correlli Barnett describes it in some detail²⁸⁷:

It was agreed to appoint a Cabinet Committee to consider a report on the evidence of German rearmament and recommend appropriate action — should we agree to legalize it, or if not, what?

The lucubrations of this committee turned entirely on the importance of securing agreement with Germany while she was still weak, rather than on taking advantage of this convenient condition by bold and assertive diplomacy.. there was constant anxiety as to what Germany might do or think in response to various courses of action that were mooted. ***The thought that the French might formally denounce Germany under the Treaty of Versailles filled Simon with horror.*** He said that they must impress on the French the point that 'the choice really lay between uncontrolled and controlled re-armament of Germany', a point which did little credit to his sense of realities. He also said that ***there could be no question of any concession to Germany over the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland..*** 'If the French Government should raise the point that Germany has, in fact, succeeded by a policy of blackmail, we should not perhaps dissent, but should ask France ***what are the alternatives..***' (CAB 23/86, CAB 27/52)

One obvious alternative was to join France in formally denouncing the violations to the Treaty of Versailles, threaten Germany with sanctions and, if necessary, force Germany to be more respectful of the treaties. A similar course would be opposed by Baldwin, less than two years later, on account that a weakening of the Nazi regime would result in the victory of communism in Germany. This is the real fearful alternative which is not mentioned by Simon. The only other option is to 'appease' Germany, and hope for the best.

On March 16, 1935, Germany re-established compulsory military service and on May 26, Neville Chamberlain wrote²⁸⁸:

..you ask what I thought of Hitler's speech. Well, frankly, I was intensely relieved. ***It has made my position much easier,*** for while I recognized, and indeed insisted on the necessity for such a recasting of our air programme as would show its truly

302²⁸⁷ *ibid*, the whole chapter 'covenants without swords' is relevant.

303²⁸⁸ Keith Feiling, 'The Life of Neville Chamberlain', Macmillan, 1946, London

formidable character.. I have been greatly alarmed at some of the proposals, which appeared to me *panicky and wasteful*.. It is clear that Hitler laid himself out to catch British public opinion and, if possible, to drive a wedge between us and France..All the same, the general effect is pacific, and to that extent good.

Chamberlain had already made up his mind not to accept ‘panicky and wasteful’ proposal for rearmament. All speeches Hitler made up to this time contained passionate professions of peace. Chamberlain was not taken in by them. We already saw that he expressed in 1934 his belief that Germany represented the main threat to peace, notwithstanding Hitler’s peace speeches. Now however, Chamberlain speaks differently. He believes that Hitler’s speech, on March 21, 1935, would help him because ‘the general effect is pacific’. There was nothing more pacific in this speech than in previous ones. The speech contained long passages against bolshevism and in defence of private property²⁸⁹:

Germany to-day is a National Socialist State. The ideas by which we are governed are diametrically opposed to those of Soviet Russia.. National Socialism is a doctrine which applies exclusively to the German people. Bolshevism lay emphasis on its international mission.

Having clarified the meaning of ‘National’ in ‘National-Socialism’, Hitler, in the same speech, went on to clarify that of ‘Socialism’:

We National Socialists see in private property a higher grade of human economic development which regulates the administration of rewards in proportion to the difference in achievement.. Bolshevism destroys not only private property but also private initiative..

This, and preceding speeches of Hitler, do not indicate antagonism to the West or a will to move West. ‘To this extent’ it confirms the ‘peaceful’ character of Hitler’s Germany. ‘To this extent’ it helps Chamberlain in his endeavour at moderating the British rearmament efforts.

Simon considered it out of the question to make any concession to Germany over the demilitarised zone of the Rhineland. He seemed thus to indicate the limit of what may be acceptable to Britain in her efforts to appease Germany. Legal rearmament.. yes. Remilitarisation of Rhineland.. out of the question.

However when it became known that Germany was about to remilitarise the Rhineland, the British Cabinet faced the question once asked by Sir John Simon: what are the alternatives to accepting Germany’s intended gross

304²⁸⁹ ‘The Speeches of Adolf Hitler’, edited by Norman H. Baynes, Oxford University Press, London, 1942, vol. 2, pp. 669-670

violation of the Treaty of Versailles and of the Locarno Pact? Once more no other acceptable alternative was found. And when Germany did remilitarise the Rhineland, Britain had recourse to strong pressure over France to prevent her from taking military measures against it.

The strategic importance of a demilitarised Rhineland was obvious to all European leaders. Simon himself implicitly expressed its importance. By stating that it was out of the question to make concessions to Germany on this matter, he was recognising that the West could not have a proper assertive strategy, once Germany would have reoccupied the Rhineland. Since he was, at the time, urging the legalisation of Germany's rearmament, it meant that, in his opinion, the reoccupation of the Rhineland was a graver threat to the security of the West than that constituted by Germany's rearmament.

There is an apparent contradiction in Simon's stand. If the remilitarisation of the Rhineland would have been for Germany a matter of national honour only, then Simon would have no justification for stating that concessions in that matter were out of the question. The demilitarised status of the Rhineland meant:

w that Germany's efforts at rearming could be stopped at any time by a French intervention. Germany therefore, before becoming militarily much stronger, could not be secure in her efforts at rearmament. If the German rearmament is of no threat, than the remilitarisation of the Rhineland is of no concern either. On the other hand, if the maintenance of the demilitarised zone is important then it means that it is important to keep a way of preventing Germany from rearming unduly. The usefulness of the demilitarised zone would disappear, once Germany has remilitarised to the point of not having to fear a French intervention. The future of Germany's rearmament and that of the demilitarised zone are tightly related. Simon seemed to ignore it.

w Obviously, Germany would not dare attack the West unless she felt sufficiently strong. In such a case, the demilitarisation of the Rhineland would be of little help to France. However, since France is no match to a rearmed Germany, France can only hope to prevent a German attack, or to resist it, if she has powerful allies in the East. Alliances, however, are reciprocal in nature. France cannot rely on powerful allies in the East if the countries in the East cannot reciprocally rely on France's assistance in case of need. In this sense, the demilitarisation of the Rhineland is vital to the French strategy. Once the Rhineland is remilitarised, Germany becomes relatively free to attack the East without fearing an attack from the West.

w Were Germany to abstain from remilitarising the Rhineland, her moves to the East would have had to be negotiated with the West. This is a situation

that would suit the views of Simon and would explain his statement that concessions in this respect were out of the question.

A remilitarisation of the Rhineland which would remain unopposed by France, would signal to the countries in Central and Eastern Europe that France had abdicated her role. Protecting those countries was essential for France if she wanted to prevent the eventuality of a Germany, victorious in the East, turning against her. It was essential for France to prevent the remilitarisation of the Rhineland, she knew the consequences of any dereliction in this respect, she had the power to turn this remilitarisation into a humiliating defeat for Hitler, but she lacked the will.. and Britain was there to pressure her into considering the other alternative to bending to Germany: delivering that country to communism. On March 11, 1936, four days after the remilitarisation of the Rhineland:

The Prime Minister thought at some time it would be necessary to point out to the French that the action they propose would not result only in letting loose another great war in Europe. They might succeed in crushing Germany with the aid of Russia, but it would probably result in Germany going Bolshevik. The Lord Privy seal said their reply would be that if they did not take action now there would only be a war under much adverse conditions in three years time. The French and Belgians sincerely believed that the Germans would not fight if they took action.. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs pointed out that at bottom the French were very pacifist. What they really apprehend is the outbreak of a serious war in three years time when Germany was rearmend. He shared their conviction as to the danger.. The Secretary of State for war pointed out that in three years time though we should have reconditioned at any rate to some extent our small force, yet by that time Germany would have hundred divisions and a powerful fleet. We should not relatively, therefore, be in a better position²⁹⁰

Chamberlain notes in his diary on March 12 1936²⁹¹:

..talked to Flandin, emphasising that public opinion here would not support us in sanctions of any kind. His view is that, if a firm front is maintained by France and England, Germany will yield without war. We cannot accept this as a reliable estimate of a mad dictator's reactions.

From the two last quotation, it is clear that the British leaders had an accurate understanding of the strategic situation. The estimate of three years time for Hitler to be ready to launch a war turned out to be accurate. The

305²⁹⁰ CAB 23/81 pp. 292, 293

306²⁹¹ Keith Feiling, 'The Life of Neville Chamberlain', Macmillan, 1946, London p. 279

expert advice was that Germany would then be in a much stronger relative position. Here was the time and place to put a stop for good to the military threat from Nazi Germany. It was not taken for fear that Germany would then go communist.

Chamberlain's argument is particularly weak and is easy to be turned around in favour of an immediate intervention for stopping Hitler. If, as Chamberlain stated, Hitler is indeed a mad dictator, the need is that much greater to stop him when he is still very vulnerable.

French Military Strategy

France was naturally more sensitive to the potential threat constituted by German's rearmament. The political leaders were more reluctant to reach an 'understanding' with Germany which would recognise Germany's right to rearm. However, as was the case in England, the higher strata of the Establishment 'trusted' Hitler in the sense already described.

Genevieve Tabouis reports similar tendencies in the French military circles²⁹²:

General] Weygand... was not that much unhappy at this event [the Reichstag fire]. His reasoning was as follows: "The Maginot Line.. will be completed at the end of 1934. It raises between us and Germany a barrier which cannot be crossed. Consequently the French position is good, *except concerning the internal situation*, always threatened by the socialist and communist forces." He was trusting the Fuhrer to combat communism. It would be an advantage because the threatening communism in Germany would allow the progress of communism in other parts of Europe, France among them.. [our translation]

In Weygand's opinion, Germany still was the only *military* threat. France, however was protected from Germany by the Maginot Line. This was a very definite departure from the traditional French strategy. Weygand is no longer interested in securing an Eastern Front in the case of a German aggression against France. In his strategic game, Hitler is an ally, to be kept somewhat at a distance. As to Central and Eastern Europe they are no concern for the French strategic plans.

This departure from traditional strategy is explicitly stated to be due to internal considerations viz, the strengthening of the socialists and the communists. Those considerations, and not the national interest of the country, dictated Weygand's military thinking. This remained true even in 1940 when, after replacing General Gamelin as the head of the French Army, he urged for an armistice with Germany, to prevent the communists from becoming the masters of Paris. It is also noticeable that, as so many

307²⁹² Oper. Cit., p.154

conservatives of his time, he ‘trusted’ Hitler, in the precise meaning of the term we defined earlier.

The Weygand strategy corresponded to a willingness to give Germany a free hand in her dealings with Eastern Europe. Such was not the political stand of many of the French Governments which followed, rather quickly, one after the other. Many political leaders in France, such as Herriot, Barthou, Paul-Boncour, worked for the establishment of a solid political front associating Eastern and Central Europe with France. Many treaties were signed for this purpose. However, the French military cast was not affected by changes in governments and policies. No strategic plans were drawn to permit France to be true to her treaties. Hiding beyond the Maginot Line was no way to forbid Germany a move in the Eastern direction.

France lost her security guarantees, one after the other. She was not allowed to retain the west bank of the Rhine on the basis that a US-British guarantee would suffice. That guarantee did not materialise. Germany started rearming, secretly first and then openly. France could not obtain the enforcing of the Versailles Treaty concerning Germany’s violations. And, finally, when the Locarno Treaty was signed, without any guarantees to the countries along Eastern Germany’s borders, France could console herself that she was given the right to intervene militarily in Germany, were the latter to remilitarise the Rhineland.

France could therefore march into the Rhineland and easily reach the heart of Germany in the case of an attack on her allies in the East, or, more simply, were Germany ‘flagrantly’ starting to remilitarise the Rhineland. There was some ambiguity as to the restraint put on France by the Locarno pact in her dealings with Germany in case of the latter’s expansion to the East. There was, however no ambiguity as to France’s rights of intervention in the second case, that of a flagrant remilitarisation of the Rhineland.

This right to intervene in Germany through the Rhineland, was considered the ‘centrepiece’ of France’s military strategy. However, at no moment, even when the remilitarisation of the Rhineland became known to be imminent, did the French military staff prepare any plans for the implementation of an intervention through the Rhineland. It seems unbelievable that the French military neglected that unique opportunity, that one guarantee, legally given to France at Locarno. On March 1936, the military informed the government of the time that, without a general mobilisation of the army, they could not intervene to prevent the remilitarisation of the Rhineland ***because no plans had been prepared for such an eventuality***. This is unbelievable, unless we recognise that the Weygand mentality was widespread in the military circles and that, independently of the government in power, the military was betting on a free hand to Hitler in the East.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS A BRITISH CONSERVATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Why A League

By the end of World War I, the great powers, Britain in particular, would have liked to resume business as usual, and diplomacy as usual. The times, however, were not usual times. A new regime had been installed in Russia and was challenging the established regimes in all countries of the world. The people in Europe, appalled by the extent of the war sacrifices, disturbed by revelations of secret treaties dividing the expected spoils of war, remembering the social problems existing prior to the war, and exacerbated by the war, were looking for radical changes. The people would certainly be vulnerable to leftist ideologies unless they could be convinced that, henceforward, business, diplomacy, and government policies would be geared to cope innovatively with the social problems. In particular, they expected their leaders to make sure that war would not only be outlawed in principle but that its unleashing would be made functionally impossible. The World War could then be remembered as 'the war to end all wars'. On September 9, 1919, President Wilson said in a speech delivered in Minneapolis²⁹³:

There is unrest all over the world.. There is not now a country in the world where the great mass of mankind is not aware of its rights and determined to have them at any cost, and the present ***universal unrest in the world***, which renders return to normal conditions impossible so long as it continues, will not stop until men are assured by some arrangement they can believe in that their rights will be protected and that they can go about the normal production of the necessities of life and begin to enjoy the extraordinary pleasures and privileges of life without the constant shadow of some cloud of terror over them, some threat of injustice, some tyranny of control..

The people will not stand for a restoration of the old system of balance of power which led them to catastrophe and bloodshed. They will not let it happen again and if their governments cannot work out something better, they will destroy their governments.

The League Of Nations, the League in short, came to life for multiple reasons. It was, for instance, the Western answer to the communist

308²⁹³ John M. Thompson, op. cit., p.387

international. Whereas the latter was supposed to unite the workers of all countries regardless of their different nationalities, the League would unite nations, each with all its classes, and protect their national existence.

The Bolsheviks were saying that unless a world revolution, setting up the rule of socialism all over the world, were to succeed, the rule of peace would be impossible to establish. The western democracies had a different answer²⁹⁴. The League would be the means and the apparatus to ensure that, henceforward, all quarrels between nations would be resolved peacefully. In case of aggression, the League would ensure that all the members would come to the assistance of the victim.

What Kind Of League?

World War I had started with events in Serbia. It did not take long to spread from there to the world. The world could therefore not remain indifferent to a conflict 'in a far away country'²⁹⁵ in the hope that it would remain circumscribed. The popular description of World War I 'the war to end all wars', was taken to mean just that: 'all wars', small or great, close-by or far-away.

Any local war had the potential of engulfing other countries and no country could be sure of remaining unaffected. The security of any country had been proved to depend on the security of every other country. Any country, big or small, should therefore be protected against aggression. This could be ensured by compulsory decisions obligating all countries to assist a victim of aggression against the country committing the act of aggression. No aggressor, however powerful, could measure up to the collective strength of the League members. Having to confront the united will of the League members, the would-be aggressor would not even dare to start the fight.

Alliances and defence treaties often involve commitments and obligations. However, those commitments are taken with respect to definite countries and are to become operative in circumstances well defined in advance, and against countries which, though perhaps not mentioned by name, are well specified in the minds and intentions of the signatories. Now, great powers were asked to sign a 'blank check' to assist whatever country against whatever aggression in whatever circumstances. The League was supposed to be strong and able to impose its collective will in defence of collective security. Smuts, before even the drafting of the League Covenant, wrote about the League in a pamphlet²⁹⁶:

309²⁹⁴ See 'Russia, Bolshevism and the Versailles Peace', *Oper. cit.*, pp. 314,385-387, for the League of Nations considered by the Allies as a tool to defeat bolshevism.

310²⁹⁵ Serbia is not closer to Britain than Czechoslovakia, the country described by N. Chamberlain in 1938 as 'far-away'

311²⁹⁶ George Scott, 'The Rise and Fall of the League of Nations', Macmillan, New York, 1974, pp.29-30

..It must become an ever visible, living, working organ of the policy of civilization. It must function so strongly in the ordinary peaceful intercourse of States that it becomes irresistible in their disputes; its peace activity must be the foundation and guarantee of its war power..

..I do not think that the League is likely to prove a success unless in the last resort the maintenance of the moratorium *is guaranteed by force. The obligation of the members of the League to use force for this purpose should therefore be absolute..*

The times were such that they induced a number of political leaders to think like Smuts and to express similar opinions. The concepts of ‘limited commitments’, ‘localised conflicts’, and non-coercive League decisions’, if publicly expressed, would have then sounded as profanities.

Peace, it was felt, could not last unless it was based on justice. Such was Curzon’s expressed opinion which got the immediate agreement of Lloyd George²⁹⁷.

Self-determination would be the criterion for adopting a solution based on justice. It was however recognised that this principle had limitations. Whenever it would not be applied, countries would happen to contain minorities within their borders. It was important to ensure that these minorities would be treated fairly.

Limitations on self-determination were later approved by the League of Nations. In dealing with a difference between Sweden and Finland with respect to the sovereignty over the Aaland islands, the League sent a commission to the Baltic and, as reported by F.P. Walters²⁹⁸:

..the Commissioners returned with their report; but when it came, the advice was clear and definite. They admitted that the desire of the Aalanders for union with Sweden was sincere and universal. But they accepted Finland’s claim to the possession of sovereignty over the Islands; and they urged that this must be the decisive consideration. A minority had the right to fair and just treatment *within the State*: but it could not be permitted to separate itself from the country of which it was a part, and incorporate itself within some other State simply because it desired to do so. Such a doctrine would lead to international anarchy. *Territorial separation was an extreme measure which could only be justified by grave and permanent denial of justice to the minority concerned.*²⁹⁹

312²⁹⁷ *ibid*, p.31,32

313²⁹⁸ F.P.Walter, ‘A History of the League of Nations’, Oxford University Press, London, 1960, pp. 104-5

314²⁹⁹ Britain and France would forget such consideration when pressuring Czechoslovakia into accepting the tearing away of the Sudeten region.

In all the Western countries press campaigns were launched to impress on the people that, with the existence of the League, humanity had vanquished the spirit of war. If social peace were to be kept, it was important to create a popular feeling that the immense war sacrifices had not been made in vain. On July 29, 1919, Samuel Hoare told the House of Commons³⁰⁰:

To me the League of Nations is not some visionary assembly of a new Jerusalem, but a practical body, sitting continuously, working upon concrete problems, and in direct touch not only with the Foreign Offices, but with public opinion in each country which is represented..

To me the League of Nations, both in its conception and its constitution, is an Anglo-Saxon creation and an Anglo-Saxon ideal

On January 16, 1920, Lord Curzon stated³⁰¹:

The League Of Nations.. is not a mere expression in platonic language of the necessity for international friendship and a good understanding. It provides the machinery by which practical effect may be given to these principles..

Should disputes unhappily arise, the disputants will find themselves in an assembly of *impartial and unbiased Councillors, whose sole aim will be to remove misunderstandings*

It is hard to believe that as experienced a politician as Lord Curzon could have expressed his trust in ‘the impartial and unbiased Councillors’ of the League. Could a representative at the League avoid being biased for his own country or for his country’s allies? Curzon was obviously guilty of the wishful thinking that was then common. On May 19, 1919, Nicolson wrote to his wife³⁰²:

If the League is to be of any value it must start from a new conception, and involve among its promoters and leaders a new habit of thought. Otherwise it will be no more than the continuation of the Conference — where each delegation subscribes its *own* point of view, and where unanimity can be secured only by a mutual surrender of the complete scheme. We, WE must lose all that, and think only of the League point of view, where Right is the ultimate sanction, and where

315³⁰⁰ Martin Gilbert, ‘Britain and Germany Between the Wars’, Barnes & Noble, New York,

p. 24.

316³⁰¹ *ibid.*, p. 25

317³⁰² *ibid.*, p. 23

compromise is a crime. So we must become anti-English where necessary, and, when necessary, pro-Italian. Thus when you find me becoming impatient of the Latins, you must snub me. It is rather a wrench for me — as I like the sturdy, unenlightened, unintellectual, muzzy, British way of looking at things. I fear the ‘Geneva temperament’ will be rather Hampstead Garden Suburb — but the thing may be tremendous..

Disarmament, Peace and Justice were three aims which would reinforce each other. In a world ruled by Peace and Justice there would be little need for extensive armaments. Reciprocally, the absence of armaments would reduce the temptation for aggression, were a particular country to be indifferent to Peace and Justice.

This simplistic outlook was soon shattered by a reality which refused to comply with the hopes of hundreds of millions of people in Europe and billions all over the world. It looked as if a sequence of misjudgements and mistakes lead to a situation in which the role of the League was gradually reduced to be replaced by traditional diplomacy concerned with the balance of power. This understanding of the failure of the League is as simplistic as the hopeful outlook that accompanied the creation of the League.

The League As A Reality

Britain herself would later prove how little trust she had in the impartiality of the League Councillors when she would, for instance, argue that the League had no right to deal with a difference between Britain and Egypt. Already before the time of Balfour’s quoted statement, some politicians were, in private, expressing their doubts. On November 29, 1919, Lord Esher wrote in a letter³⁰³:

A war to end all wars! Open diplomacy! No secret treaties! A League of Nations! Self-determination! What has happened to all those fine phrases that not one of them has been translated into the faintest semblance of actuality..

He then added cynically:

But why gibe or complain? We have — that is to say the comfortable survivors — absorbed every German colony, we have annexed northern Africa, we have realized Rhode’s mighty dream, we have created or are able to create a subject Arab Empire, we may yet become the overlords of the Holy (!) City.. The Archbishops and Bishops give Glory to God; and Lord Robert Cecil is only as one crying in the wilderness.

318³⁰³ *ibid.*, pp. 24-25

The League was doomed from its very start. Ostensibly based on the ideals of Peace and Justice it could only succeed if these ideals were shared by the great powers. W.M. Hughes, Prime Minister of Australia did not mince words at a meeting of the Imperial War Cabinet on November 26, 1918³⁰⁴:

..I will take the case which affects Australia with regards to this League of Nations. You have Japan and China, which are desirous that their people should be allowed to settle in Australia, which is a continent capable of holding 100 million people. There are at present only five million. We have no moral right at all to refuse any more than you have in regard to India. We have got Australia and we are going to hold it, and we say to the world in respect to this 100 million of people, "You shall not come in here," but we have no moral right to say anything of the sort. This is all right now, Great Britain's navy and the power of the Empire keep out the Japanese and the Chinese, but the League of Nations, as I interpret what is meant, would absolve these things, and moral right would become the only touchstone by which every claim would have to be met.. But whilst Australia had a leg to stand on she would fight..

The right of Great Britain to India might come up. What sort of right is it? It comes up before the League of Nations, and 200 million make their voice heard. They say, "What right have you now in India, since we have had this war for Liberty? We want to govern ourselves, not by the methods of Montagu, which is to come by degrees, but by a decision of the Council of Nations." You cannot agree to any League of Nations which might do anything of the sort

Hughes need not have worried. Indeed, Japan forwarded a proposal for adding a sentence to the draft of the Covenant. It stated³⁰⁵:

..that the Members of the League endorse the principle of the equality of nations and the just treatment of their nationals

The drafters of the Covenant, on the insistence of Britain and the United States, rejected the Japanese proposal. They knew that the United States, Australia and New Zealand had enacted laws restricting immigration from East Asia. They suspected that Japan intended to rely on the added sentence to raise the matter at the League of Nations. Justice is important, as long as it does not conflict with the 'vital interests' of a great power.

Each power was motivated by its national interest as perceived by its ruling circles. In normal conditions, people believe peace and justice to be in the national interest. When the ruling circles reflect directly the popular

319³⁰⁴ George Scott, *Op. cit.*, p. 27-29

320³⁰⁵ F.P. Walter, *op. cit.*, p63

interest, they implement policies compatible with the preservation of peace. When the ruling circles reflect the interest of narrower sections of the population, they implement policies at the service of these narrow interests. These policies may disregard the popular interest for peace. Campaigns of disinformation may succeed in convincing the general public that these narrow interests are also those of the general public.

It is not difficult to realise that the general public in Germany had a strong interest for peace. It is also easy to trace the narrower groups associated with dreams of expansion, and whose interests would be served by such an expansion, even at the price of war.

What is less common is to realise that such groups existed in Britain and in France and dominated the ruling circles in these two countries. How could it have been otherwise? The two countries were ruling vast colonial empires where self-determination was all but ignored, where justice was colonial justice, a particular blend biased in favour of the imperial country, and where peace was, on occasion, maintained by warlike measures such as air bombing. In fact one of the factors that prevented an agreement on the ban on bombers was Britain's opposition justified by her expressed need for bombers to police her empire³⁰⁶.

The dedication of an imperialistic country to the principle of self-determination is at best hypocritical. According to the political situation of the day and the concomitant strategic situation, Britain, for example, would be for or against a totally independent Poland. That is why when Britain and France chose to defend the right of the Sudeten people for self-determination, the historian has the right to doubt that this political stand was really motivated by a dedication to idealist principles.

From the point of view of the narrow interests of the British ruling circles, peace meant the absence of British involvement in war. Within this perspective, a German expansion to the East could be 'peaceful' if it was done in such a way as not to create too much of an outcry, if it therefore did not result in a strong demand by the public for British involvement³⁰⁷.

League And Security

The Leaders of the great powers knew they had a moral mandate to prevent the occurrence of a second World War. They knew from where the war clouds could be coming. Just one day after the signature of the Peace Treaty, Austen Chamberlain, on June 29, 1919, wrote to his sister³⁰⁸:

321³⁰⁶ Scott, op. cit., p.266

322 F. Schuman, op. cit., p.34

323 Eden, op. cit., pp. p.30,37

324 F.S. Nothedge, op. cit., p. 373

325³⁰⁷ See 1st chapter for a quote by Chamberlain concerning 'beaver-like' activities.

326³⁰⁸ Martin Gilbert, op. cit., p. 12

So Peace is signed at last..

Will the world have rest?..

Even the old Germany would not, I think, rashly challenge a new war *in the West*, but the chaos on their Eastern frontier, and their hatred and contempt of the Poles, must be a dangerous temptation..

But if Germany remains or becomes really democratic, they cannot repeat the folly of Frederick the Great and Bismarck and his latter followers. No democracy can or will make aggressive war its year-long study and business, though it may easily enough flare up in sudden passion. But think of Germany with its 60 or 70 millions of people and France with its dwindling 40! I shudder!

These passages are full of contradictions. Austen Chamberlain, while doubting that Germany would move in the western direction, is shuddering at the thought of the disproportion in population between France and Germany, an implicit recognition of potential trouble in the West. While considering the peaceful effect of democracy in Germany, he recognises that war could still, ‘easily enough’, flare up, in spite of democracy.

Such doubts concerning the future could not have been expressed in public. The allies, at the end of World War I, were omnipotent. They could have done what they wanted. They were expected to do whatever was necessary to ensure that there would never again be a world war capable of destroying the lives of tens of millions. They had the power, if this was their utmost and primordial concern, to make the world safe from war.

They were prepared to hang the German Kaiser³⁰⁹, if such a warning to would-be warmongers should be necessary. What was needed to prevent a second World War was well known. First, the roots of war should be destroyed. Mussolini, before becoming the hateful Italian dictator, wrote on April 6, 1915 what was common knowledge, and which pointed in a correct direction³¹⁰:

For the last hundred years, the German have been poisoned by a constant apology of the blond-haired race, the only one capable of creating and propagating Kultur in a decaying Europe.. Germany must be crushed.. The giant has created a monstrous machine — militarism — to insure its domination over all people. ***This machine must be smashed.*** What an historical day it will be when the factories of the pederast Krupp go up in flames that will illuminate all of Europe and purify Germany. In the name of the Belgian towns and cities which have been martyred.., Essen, city

327³⁰⁹ He escaped to Holland which refused to extradite him. See ‘The World Crisis’, Op. Cit., pp 150-151
328³¹⁰ Gaetano Salvemini, op. cit., p. 30

of guns and cannons, must be razed to the ground. Only then will the pillaging and murderous German re-acquire the right of citizenship in humanity

Krupp may not have been a pederast but he was part of an industrial caste, which together with the military caste, were committed to policies of aggression and expansion. To prevent a repeat of the World War, it would have been necessary to destroy the power of these two castes, and not the city of Essen. However, one could not deny that such castes existed in other countries, were there very powerful, and would oppose the precedent of depriving such castes of their power.

Such drastic measures were not advocated by the Allied leaders. Instead, as we have seen, they expressed their trust in the Collective Security afforded by the League of Nations

Germany had been vanquished. She nevertheless had the potential for a tremendous military power. It was known that many influential groups in Germany were not only dreaming of revenge but also of expanding Germany's borders beyond just the return to the *status quo ante* of 1914. This was the reason why the Peace Treaty of Versailles was made an integral part of the League³¹¹ so as to ensure that all members would have a stake in the respect of those articles of the Treaty which severely restricted German armaments, and which forbid Germany to fortify or, in any way, to remilitarise the Rhineland.

This last provision was of an essential nature. As long as it would be respected, the French army would have no difficulty reaching the heart of Germany, were the latter to contravene the stipulations of the treaties forbidding Germany to rearm beyond a given low limit. Otherwise, with a remilitarised Rhineland, any French intervention would be a major, costly and problematic operation. In addition, a fortified Rhineland would be an obstacle Germany could rely upon to stop France, while Germany would execute speedy military aggressions against France's eastern allies.

With time, a number of regional pacts and other kinds of treaties were made to ensure the security of its participants. It is thus that 'the Little Entente' came into being, followed by the Locarno treaty and by treaties between Czechoslovakia, France and the Soviet Union.

This raised the question as to the necessity of such measures paralleling the security role that the League was supposed to play. Indeed, were the League to send the unmistakable signal that wherever and whenever a grave difference would occur she would be there to mediate without delay; were she to let it be known, by unambiguous words and deeds, that, whenever and wherever an act of aggression would occur she would be there to take swift action against the aggressor, and in defence of the victim; were she to let it be known that, when it comes to security, no group of nations would get a first class treatment and no other group would find its security less of a

329³¹¹ F.P. Walter, *Oper. cit.*, p. 73

concern to the League, then, all those security pacts, be they bilateral, multilateral or regional, would be redundant. They would reflect an outdated mentality in which the security of any one country is the concern of only some other countries.

Business And Diplomacy As Usual

However, it soon became obvious that the signals sent by the League were not very encouraging. Even before the first League Assembly started its work, the Council of the league could not take too much pride in its results during the year 1920. F.P.Walter wrote³¹²:

The record of the Council's work seemed to its Members respectable both in quantity and quality. But to many other Members, and also to a wide section of public opinion within the Council States themselves, it appeared sadly inadequate. The Council had made no attempt to impose itself as the supreme guardian of peace and promoter of reconciliation. It had allowed the Polish-Russian war to take its course. It was no more than a spectator of the fighting in Armenia and of the still more dangerous situation which was developing in Anatolia. It had done little to relieve the bitter hatreds which still divided the victors and the vanquished of the world war. It had been entrusted by the Covenant with making plans for disarmament and with setting on foot the system of mandates; and on each of these great questions it had made no progress whatever. *The principal powers had for their own reasons preferred that nothing should be done: and the Council had acquiesced without a struggle.*

In the following years it became more and more evident that Britain, in particular, was not willing to accept the concept of a League as a tool against aggression, wherever it came from, whatever country it be directed against. The League, then, could not be the main protection for the security of nations. In this respect things went from bad to worse until nations, small ones in particular, were given to know that the League would provide them with no security at all.

This could have been predicted in 1921 when the League left to a Conference of Ambassadors the task of delineating the boundaries of Albania. In spite of numerous complaints against the exercise of pressure by the Yugoslavs, the League Assembly disinterested itself from the problem and waited for the Ambassadors to reach conclusions at a very leisurely pace³¹³:

330³¹² *ibid.*, pp. 111-112

331³¹³ *ibid.* p. 158

Not only during the war but, far less excusably, during the peace negotiations, the treatment of Albania was a picture of diplomacy in its worst and most cynical form

The Ambassadors, after deciding that Albania's frontiers would essentially be those of 1913, made an uncalled for statement³¹⁴:

which in effect granted to Italy the right to make herself responsible for protecting the territorial and economic independence of Albania. This act was clearly contrary to the obligations of their countries as Members of the League. Its value to Albania can be judged from the fact that from 1926 onward the Italian gradually acquired a complete control over her economic resources, until in 1939 they annexed the country by typical Fascist methods of treachery and violence³¹⁵.

The same powers who through their Ambassadors made shady deals concerning Albania could have had their will at the Assembly. A conference of Ambassadors was however a less public and less conspicuous place, and therefore a more convenient one. At no time were the Albanians consulted whether to fix the boundaries or concerning the final statement on Italian protection and responsibilities.

Worthy of notice is the fact that Lloyd George, on November 8, 1921 sent a telegram to the Secretary-General of the League demanding that the Council should be summoned to decide that, were Yugoslavia not to carry out her obligations under the Covenant, economic sanctions should be applied against her³¹⁶. As a result Yugoslavia accepted the Ambassadors' decisions and withdrew her troops from Albania. When dealing with a small nation, Britain, without prior negotiations, did not hesitate to brandish the threat of collective sanctions.

In 1923, a military commission was sent by the Conference of Ambassadors to fix the boundaries between Greece and Albania. Its five members, all Italians, were murdered on Greek territory. Mussolini reacted by presenting an ultimatum to the Greek Government with seven demands. Next day he sent an Italian fleet to bombard Corfu. This was followed by an Italian occupation of the Island. Salvemini wrote on this subject³¹⁷:

The consternation everywhere was great. The harsh language and the short time limit of the ultimatum, the bombardment of an ancient undefended castle, the killing of innocent persons, and the occupation of the Island, appeared to be out of all proportion to Italy's grievance over the murder. There was no evidence that the

332³¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 161

333³¹⁵ The author adds in a footnote: "Anyone who thinks these words too strong should refer to Ciano's diary for March and April 1939."

334³¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 160

335³¹⁷ Gaetano Salvemini, 'Prelude to World War II', Victor Gollancz, London, 1953, p. 47

Greek Government was connected with the crime. Last but not least, Article 15 of the Covenant.. stipulated: “Should any member of the League resort to war in disregard of the Covenant.. it shall *ipso facto* be deemed to have committed an act of war against all other members of the League.”

After recourse to behind the screen diplomacy, a request by Greece for the League’s intervention was diverted to the Conference of Ambassadors. It took decisions which, while not exactly approving the terms of the Italian ultimatum were paralleling it. In particular it approved the Italian request for an indemnity.

In spite of the fact that the Italian actions were deliberate and reprehensible and that they caused more victims than was the case in the murder of the military commission, in spite of the fact that Italy had just committed a flagrant act of military aggression, Greece was condemned while no official blame was laid on Italy.

We already saw that Mussolini and his Fascist regime were admired by the British Establishment, admiration expressed by the Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain himself. Just three months before these events took place, the King of England, on an official visit to Rome, conferred the order of the Bath on Mussolini³¹⁸:

congratulating the Italian people on having overcome its recent crisis “under the wise guidance of a strong statesman”

Principles and justice did not count. Helping fascism and Mussolini was more important than increasing the authority of the League.

The old methods of diplomacy were never relinquished by the great European powers. Even while matters would be discussed at Geneva, ostensibly in accordance with the principles of the Covenant, they would also be the object of private, and mostly secret, negotiations between the great powers with no regards to these principles.

To Each His Own

The League meant a different thing to different countries at different times. Small nations like Czechoslovakia and Romania would have liked to see in the League an effective and principled instrument for the defence of peace and the protection of any nation against aggression.

Britain and France perceived differently their need for the League. The British leaders, in the belief that a rearmed Germany would march to the East, choose to allow its rearmament; the League then became an obstacle. It was an obstacle to the rearmament itself and it was barring to Germany the way Eastward. Similarly, Britain had no objections to a Japanese expansion

336³¹⁸ *ibid*, p. 46

in the North of China. The expectation was that in the course of its expansion the Japanese would collide with the Soviet Union. Here also the League could be an obstacle.

The British leaders felt the need to clip the League's claws. They wanted to take away from the League the means of coercion against the aggressor. In view of the popularity of the League, this had to be done while paying lip service to its importance.

The French leaders had a different perception of the League. On the one hand they wanted it to be strong so as to afford the collective security needed to prevent Germany from taking an aggressive course. On the other hand, however, France did not mind weakening the League's effectiveness if this could help reduce the number of France's enemies and increase the number of her friends.

The effectiveness of the League would depend on its prestige which itself would depend on the precedents she would have established. A League standing without hesitation against aggression and for effective sanctions against the aggressor could become a factor to be reckoned with.

The unwillingness of the United States to join the League was a blow to its effectiveness and its prestige. Economic sanctions against an aggressor would not be feared as long as the U.S. markets were to remain open to him. To leave the League would be perfectly respectable in view of the U.S. precedent.

The League, nonetheless, was enthusiastically and unanimously supported by the general public in the West and by their allies in Western and Eastern Europe. It responded too well to the public's aspirations to make it possible for its opponents to be vocal. In spite of the U.S. stand it was universally believed that the League could play the role assigned to it, that of preventing, stopping or making war dangerous for any aggressor.

Preventing The League From Flying

A key role in that respect was played by Article 16 of the League's Covenant. It stipulated:

Should any Member of the League resort to war in disregard of its covenants under Articles 12, 13 or 15, it shall *ipso facto* be deemed to have committed an act of war against all other members of the League, which hereby, undertake immediately to subject it to the severance of all trade or financial relations, the prohibition of all intercourse between the nationals of the covenant-breaking State and the nationals of any other State, whether a member of the League or not...

The aggressor would be that state which would reject an unanimous recommendation of the League for the settlement of a dispute. If, however, the recommendation was not unanimous, a member of the League would be

allowed, after a period of three months, to declare war against another member without incurring the wrath of Article 16. This state of affairs was a gap in the collective security provided by the Covenant.

It was enough for a member unwilling to be committed to action by article 16, to vote against the recommendations of the League, preventing them from unanimity, and thus paralysing the League. An effort by the members to amend the League so as to close the gap failed through the opposition of the British government.

Article 16 warns ‘any Member of the League’ against resorting to war but does not afford protection against an aggression committed by a non-member. However, some hope remained in Article 10. It said:

The Members of the League undertake to respect and preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all Members of the League. In case of any such aggression or in case of any threat or danger of such aggression the Council shall advise upon the means by which this obligation shall be fulfilled.

Article 10 does not provide immediate and effective assistance to the victim of aggression. This was the declared reason why some countries, mainly France, were reluctant to agree to a program of disarmament. To overcome this difficulty the League Assembly adopted the ‘fourteenth resolution’ which is thus outlined by F.P. Walter³¹⁹:

..the whole Assembly, including the British delegation, accepted the general principles.. declaring in brief: first, that no scheme of armaments reduction could be successful unless it were general; secondly, that many governments could not seriously reduce their existing armaments unless the safety of their country were guaranteed; thirdly, that such a guarantee could be provided by a defensive Treaty of Mutual Guarantee, open to all, and ensuring that any signatory State should, if attacked, receive immediate and effective assistance from all other signatories in the same part of the world; fourthly, that since the object of the Treaty would be a general reduction of armaments, its guarantee should only come into play after such reduction had been carried out according to a general plan.

Many objections were raised against this resolution. It was reproached of lacking a definition of aggression. A victim of aggression might succumb before the League had time to decide if an aggression had been committed. The resolution was sent in 1923 to the various governments members of the League for consideration. The British reply, from Ramsay Macdonald, was devastating. F. P. Walker had this to say³²⁰:

337³¹⁹ F.P. Walter, *Oper. cit.*, p. 223
338³²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 227

It was said with truth that the very government which had proclaimed that its whole foreign policy would consist of strengthening the League, had now not only destroyed by a single gesture the result of all the efforts of three Assemblies and the Temporary Mixed Commission, but had done so in a tone which reflected the dislike of the older generation of officials for the institutions of Geneva and *by arguments which seemed intended to undermine the foundations of the Covenant itself.*

This did not prevent Mcdonald from saying later³²¹:

The League is the way to safety, we shall do all in our power to develop and strengthen it and to bring other governments to share our convictions

Mcdonald appointed Lord Parmoor as Minister in charge of League affairs. This, says F.P. Walter, was an unfortunate step³²²:

He was over seventy; he possessed no authority in Parliament or in the country; he was not even a member of the Labour party. Such an appointment was altogether inconsistent with the proclaimed intention of the new administration to make the League the main instrument of its foreign policy. And the officials of the Foreign Office, with few exceptions, continued to treat the work of the League as having no essential connection with the practical business of their profession.

Discussions on Disarmament clarified its relation with Arbitration and Security. There were therefore three elements to be considered together. Finally a document was produced, 'The Protocol of Geneva', which seemed to give its due to these three aspects. It provided for compulsory arbitration and obviated the 'gap' which allowed a country to go to war in the case of a non-unanimous decision of the Council. A divided Council would appoint arbitrators. The conflicting parties were bound to submit their case to the arbitrators and to accept their decision.

Concerning aggression, a simple definition was adopted. The aggressor would be that state which refused to accept the unanimous decision of the Council or, if there were no unanimity, refused to accept arbitration or refused to implement the decisions of arbitration. "The Council was authorised to receive special undertakings from Members of the League stating exactly what military, naval and air forces they would hold ready to bring into action immediately in support of the Covenant or the Protocol³²³." The protocol also contained provisions concerning disarmament.

339³²¹ *ibid.*, p. 264

340³²² *ibid.*, p. 265

341³²³ *ibid.*, p. 273

The protocol was the result of lengthy studies, discussions and considerations. A resolution was presented to the Assembly suggesting that the Protocol be considered by the different governments for signature. The resolution was adopted by an unanimous vote of forty-eight delegations.

France declared to be prepared to sign the Protocol. Nine other countries joined France. The British representative expressed their regret at not being able to affix their signature. F.P. Walters wrote³²⁴:

That Government [McDonald's] was not expected to be long lived; and there were many signs of dislike for the Protocol among the Conservative Party. Throughout the Assembly the most moderate Conservative organs had abandoned their usual tone of cautious encouragement of the League. They had joined in spreading a story that the Protocol would transfer control of the navy from the British government to the Council of the League. For a week or more this invention filled the columns of the press, without any steps being taken by the Foreign Office to deny it: and though it was eventually shown to be totally unfounded, it had created for the time being a definite condition of antagonism between London and Geneva.

Elections in Britain brought to power the Baldwin Government. This sealed the fate of the Protocol. The Protocol was rejected and a different route was followed instead, that of Locarno. F.P. Walters remarked³²⁵:

In 1925 the British Government shrank from any risk of having to fight for the security of Eastern Europe under conditions which ensured that, if fight it must, it would do so with all the League on its side and with the sentence of the Court or of the Council to prove that it was defending a just cause. In 1939, that same government pledged itself to fight, with only one ally, on no other condition than that Poland should consider it necessary to take arms. If it had been ready, in early years, to honour fully the obligations of League membership, would it have been driven to accept, too late, commitments more onerous and dangerous than were ever contemplated under the Covenant?

When facing the choice between power politics and support for the League, the League did not stand a chance. F.P. Walters wrote³²⁶:

Chamberlain [Austen] unchallenged representative of a power still rich, united, orderly, peace-loving, and impartial [?], could, in the Council and Assembly of the League, speak with unequalled authority..

342³²⁴ ibis, p. 276

343³²⁵ ibid, p. 285

344³²⁶ ibid pp. 339-3420

Chamberlain was throughout on the side of restriction. The League to him was a part of the diplomatic system, to be used or not according as convenience may dictate.. Even the pledges of Locarno seemed to him a heavy and dangerous burden.. and he was reluctant even to admit discussion of any question in the Council or Assembly if he saw the slightest risk of any legal or moral obligation arising for Britain. He refused to accept the compulsory arbitration of the Permanent Court.. He could think of naval disarmament as a matter interesting the great naval powers, totally unconnected with the general question of world peace. He rejected the idea that the League could be called upon to intervene in differences such as those between China and the Treaty powers. Even in Europe he discouraged attempts to bring disputes before the Council.. and .. preferred to deal with them through joint diplomatic action by Britain, France, Germany and Italy.

The significance of the Locarno pact has been discussed in a previous chapter. Its impact on the work of the League of Nations is clarified by F.P. Walters³²⁷:

If the meetings of the Locarno powers.. had been limited.. to the consideration of questions which concerned the participants alone, they would have been open to no objection. But in fact they were not so limited. They were used to discuss matters of general interest to the whole League, such as that of the relations between the Western powers and Russia. They were used for preliminary negotiations on questions which were on the agenda of the Council. They were even used, on occasion, for ***preventing the submission to the League of affairs which might embarrass one or another member of the group.*** The critics were not fully aware of these facts.. they would have been amazed to Hear Chamberlain assuring Stresemann that ***the unity of the Locarno powers was more important to him than all the resolutions of the League***

Such a behaviour was not designed to reinforce the feeling of unity and trust in the League. In 1927, the Netherlands proposed that the Assembly should consider anew the rejected Protocol to find out if an amended version could be acceptable. Britain and Italy objected, and the Assembly did not insist.

In the absence of the reliable protection the Protocol would have provided, thoughts were directed to other Locarno-like regional pacts to cover the security of Eastern Europe. These efforts “were met by the uncompromising negative of Britain, Germany and Italy.”³²⁸

345³²⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 341-342

346³²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 377

Germany proposed a 'General Convention to improve the Means of Preventing War'. It would bind the League members to implement whatever recommendations, such as troops withdrawal etc., the Council would make to reduce the danger of war. France approved the proposal. Britain, after resisting for some time, approved it too. The Assembly approved the treaty unanimously and recommended it to the League members for adoption. It was 'killed by procrastination'³²⁹.

Being Nice To The Great Powers

The League did energetically settle a difference between Greece and Bulgaria. It did, through the International Court of Justice, invalidate a custom unification between Germany and Austria in 1931. The crucial test, however, would be the League's position with respect to aggression by a strong power. In this respect, the first test occurred in 1931 with Japan's aggression against Manchuria.

At the time, all the eyes were turned towards the United States. While she could pretend having no interests in the European quarrels, she had traditionally expressed an interest in Asian affairs and, particularly in those of China. She vigorously requested the respect of the Open Door policy in relation to China and it was natural to expect her to set the trend of action in this region. It was also evident that no policy could be implemented in this region in opposition to the will of the United States.

At first the United States gave the impression that she was willing to co-operate with the League in the implementation of a policy to stop the Japanese aggression. It was even hoped that a success in the collaboration between the United States and the League could have resulted in the United States finally joining the League and strengthening it by her membership. Later Hull would claim that it was Britain's negative stand that prevented the adoption of a decisive action on the part of the League and discouraged the United States from co-operating any more with the League. There are good reasons to doubt the accuracy of Hull's version. The long following quotation of a memorandum sent by President Hoover to the Cabinet defined his policy with respect to Japan and China³³⁰:

The whole transaction is immoral. The offence against the comity of nations and the affront to the United States is outrageous

There is no doubts in Hoover's mind as to Japan's guilt. He continues:

But the Nine-Power Treaty and the Kellog Pact are solely moral instruments.. We are not parties to the League of Nations, the covenant of which has been violated.

³²⁹F.P. Walters, op. cit., pp. 381-382

³³⁰Sara R. Smith, 'The Manchurian Crisis', Columbia University Press, 1948, pp. 149-50

First, this is primarily a controversy between China and Japan. The U.S. has never set out to preserve peace among the other nations by force and so far as this part is concerned *we shall confine ourselves to friendly counsel*

It is doubtful that Hoover himself trusted that ‘friendly counsel’ would be of any consequence. It was expected that the severity with which he described the Japanese aggression and the fact that it was an ‘outrageous affront’ to the United States would result in some practical stand to stop the aggressor. There were, however, particular considerations that made Hoover decide otherwise. He went on writing:

..There is something on the side of Japan. Ours has been a long and deep-seated friendship with her and we should in friendship consider her side also. Suppose Japan had come out boldly and said:

“we can no longer endure these treaties and we must give notice that China has failed to establish the internal order these treaties contemplated. Half her area is Bolshevist and cooperating with Russia, the government of Manchuria is in the hands of a military adventurer who ignores the Chinese government, and China makes no effort to assert her will. That territory is in a state of anarchy that is intolerable. The whole living of our peoples depend upon expanding the sales of our manufactures in China and security of our raw materials from her. We are today almost economically prostrate because there is no order in China. Beyond this with Bolshevist Russia to the North and a possible Bolshevist China on our flank, our independence is in jeopardy. Either the signatories of the Nine-Power Pact must join with us to restore order in China or we must do it as an act of self-preservation. If you do not join we consider we cannot hold to an obligation around which the whole environment has changed.”

America certainly would not join in such a proposal *and we could not raise much objection..*

Japan’s action was seen by Hoover as a way to re-establish order in a country infected by Bolshevism. He would have no objection against that. He spoke about the friendship between United States and Japan forgetting that, not long before, when the Covenant of the League was being discussed, an amendment by Japan asking for the equality between nations had been repelled in order not to offend the United States.

Hoover ends up saying:

..we have a moral obligation to use every influence short of war to have the treaties upheld or terminated by mutual agreement. We should cooperate with the rest of the world, we should do so long

as that cooperation remains in the field of moral pressures. As the League of Nations has already taken up the subject we should cooperate with them in every field of negotiation and conciliation. But that is the limit. ***We will not go along on any of the sanctions, either economic or military, for these are roads to war.***

Hoover recognises that moral obligations are involved. He will therefore use influence and cooperate.. and do nothing much. The eyes of the world were turned towards the United States for a lead. Not only was she the greatest power in the region, but no economic sanctions could be effective without the U.S. participation. Once the U.S. decided not to use coercion, it was ruled out by every other nation.

State Secretary Stimson gave indications that he had been ready to take a more firm attitude against Japan. He seemed to have had views different from those of Hoover. His blaming Britain for having prevented the adoption of practical measures against Japan lacks credibility. Stimson could not ignore Hoover and implement policies so much at odds with those expounded by the president.

Britain was sympathetic to the Japanese position³³¹. Sir John Simon, the British Foreign Secretary, speaking at the League's Assembly, put such a defence of the Japanese case that the Japanese representative declared that his British friend³³²:

had said in half an hour, in a few well-chosen phrases, what he — the Japanese delegate — had been trying to say in his bad English for the last ten days.

We already saw that Neville Chamberlain and John Simon were prepared to give a free hand to Japan in the far-east, with the knowledge that it would encourage a Japanese aggression against the Soviet Union. We then saw that they realised how injurious to the League had been Japan's attitude. They paid lip service to the League; however, the policies they advocated were precisely the kind that would render the League incapable of playing its role in preventing aggressions by presenting a united resolve of countries determined to secure peace. On March 22, 1932, Austin Chamberlain stated in the House of Commons³³³:

349³³¹ Henry L. Stimson, in 'The Far Eastern Crisis', Harper & Brithers, New York, 1936, p. 177, wrote: "On..March 4th [1932], the press reported that in answer to questions in the British House of Commons an Under Secretary of the Foreign Office had indicated that it was doubtful whether the British Government would support a resolution as to non-recognition of Manchukuo, the Japanese puppet government of Manchuria]"

350³³² F. Schuman, Oper. cit., p. 32.

351³³³ Martin Gilbert, 'Britain and Germany Between the Wars', Barnes & Noble, New York, p. 27

I am no believer in the development of the League of Nations by force. The less we hear of the sanctions of the League the stronger its moral authority will be, and unless its moral authority be strong, whatever the sanctions are they will not prevent war.. Patience, consideration, conciliation, time, those are the weapons of the League, and its sanction is the moral condemnation of the world

Such a statement was of a nature to please Japan. Those weapons alluded to by Austen Chamberlain would not stop a would-be aggressor. Churchill himself was blinded by ideological considerations. On February 17, 1933, he said³³⁴:

Now I must say something to you which is very unfashionable. I am going to say one word of sympathy for Japan, not necessarily for her policy, but for her position and her national difficulties. *I do not think the League of Nations would be well advised to quarrel with Japan.* The League has a great work to do in Europe...

I hope we in England will try to understand a little the position of Japan, an *ancient State*, with the *highest sense of national honour and patriotism*, and with a *teeming population* and a *remarkable energy*. On the one side they see the dark menace of Soviet Russia. On the other the Chaos of China..

For Churchill, the ‘teeming population’ seems to justify Japan’s need for ‘Lebensraum’. As to ‘highest sense of honour and patriotism’ and ‘ancient state’, just like ‘teeming population’ those are some of the most important elements of Nazi demagoguery to justify Germany’s aggressive policy.

Japan, and not the Soviet Union, stood accused of having committed an act of aggression. One would not have guessed it by listening to Churchill. He had words of sympathy for Japan and arguments to justify her. The condemning language is reserved for ‘the dark menace of Russia’ and China’s chaos. Churchill hoped that Japan would restrict her aggression to the Northern part of China, those parts which border the Soviet Union. This was not to be and Churchill had to recant himself. On February 20, 1938, commenting on Eden’s resignation from the Cabinet, Churchill said³³⁵:

The Prime Minister and his colleagues have entered upon another and a new policy. The old policy was an effort to establish the rule of law in Europe, and build up through the League of Nations effective deterrents against the aggressor. It is the new policy to come to terms with the totalitarian Powers in the hope that by great and far-reaching acts of submission, not merely in sentiment and pride, but in material factors, peace may be preserved?

352³³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 27

353³³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 35

The other day Lord Halifax said that Europe was confused. The part of Europe which is confused is that part ruled by Parliamentary Governments. I know of no confusion on the side of the great Dictators. They know what they want, and no one can deny that up to the present at every step they are getting what they want. *The grave and largely irreparable injury to world security took place in the years 1932 to 1935*

On March first 1932, Japan, in defiance of the League and of the world's public opinion, created the puppet state of Manchukuo on the Chinese territory of Manchuria. Three weeks later, Austen Chamberlain, as we saw, spoke against the power of the League of Nations to impose sanctions. This is the year which, according to Churchill, marked the start of the period 1932-1935 of grave and irreparable injury to world security, which still according to Churchill, is to be based on collective security. It is this very injury that Churchill was approving in his quoted statement of 1933³³⁶.

N. Chamberlain, on July 26, 1934, wrote³³⁷:

I can find no polite words to express my opinion of the League of Nations Union³³⁸ .. *the kind of person which is really enthusiastic about the League is almost invariably a crank and a Liberal, and as such will always pursue the impracticable and obstruct all practical means of attaining the object in view.* But fortunately the majority of the nation does not agree with them..

Chamberlain knew that public opinion was for a strong League support. He did not dare say in public what he committed to a private letter. A year later, according to Leo Amery, he would still advocate a 'cynical' policy with respect to the League³³⁹:

His whole view, like Sam's, was that we were bound to try out the League of Nations (in which he does not himself believe very much) *for political reasons at home*, and there was no question of our going beyond the mildest of economic sanctions such as an

354³³⁶ In 1932, Nazism was not yet ruling Germany and, in that year, there was no notable event threatening world security except for the start of the League abdication in front of the Japanese aggression. In 1933, in the same speech in which he expressed his sympathy for Japan, Churchill, after requesting that the League take her hands off Japan, added: "The League has a great work to do in Europe". In 1938, Churchill was wiser and spoke of world security and not European security.

355³³⁷ Keith Middlemas, 'The Strategy of appeasement', Quadrangle Books, Chicago, 1972. p. 100. The quote bears the footnote No 88 which mentions that the text is taken from a letter from Chamberlain. However, in the text, Middlemas attributes the quote to the Prime Minister who, at the time, was Macdonald

356³³⁸ The League of Nations Union was a British organisation devoted to the defence of the League's Covenant and principles and to collective security through the League

357³³⁹ L.S. Amery, 'My Political Life', Hutchinson, London, 1955, p. 174

embargo on the purchase of Italian goods or the sale of munitions to Italy. When I pointed out that this, unless Mussolini was stopped, meant open failure in the eyes of the world, he tried to ride off with the hope that Mussolini might find these measures embarrassing and was getting into hopeless financial difficulties anyway. If things became too serious the French would run out first, and we could show that we had done our best³⁴⁰

Chamberlain was so aware of the public support to the League that, in the electoral campaign of 1935, he strongly paid lip service to the League³⁴¹:

..the choice before us is whether we shall make one last effort at Geneva for peace and security or whether by a cowardly surrender we shall break our promise and hold ourselves up to the shame of our children and their children's children

Amery commented:

After the frank cynicism of his talk to me only a few days before I thought the unctuous rectitude of this effort a bit thick

Just before the British general elections Hoare, on September 12, 1935, made a speech at the League Assembly. In order to appreciate the effect of that speech and its contrast with the British policy, as revealed by leaks to the press and by further developments, it is necessary to quote Hoare at length³⁴²:

British public opinion was solidly behind the League when it was founded.. They had seen the old system of alliances unable to prevent a world war.. After four years of devastation they were determined to do their utmost to prevent another such calamity falling not only on themselves, but upon the whole world. They were determined to throw the whole weight of their strength into the scales of international peace and international order..

It is, however, necessary when the League is in a time of real difficulty for the representative of the United Kingdom to state his view to make it as clear as he can, firstly, that His Majesty's Government and the British people maintain their support of the League and its ideals as the most effective way of ensuring peace,

358³⁴⁰ In a footnote, on the same page Amery writes: Ford Adam's Life of Lord Lloyd (p. 268) confirms Chamberlain's cynical attitude. His policy as outlined to Lloyd in August was to "first act so that no charge could be against the Government of deserting the League. France, however, would not apply sanctions, and *this would be Britain's chance* to refuse to act alone and embark on a big naval reconstruction effort."

359³⁴¹ Gilbert, op. cit., p. 34. Amery, op. cit., p.175.

360³⁴² The full text of the speech, from which we are quoting, can be found in DBFP, 2nd series, vol 14, Appendix 4, pp. 784-790

and, secondly, that this belief in the necessity for preserving the League is our sole interest in the present controversy.

The League is what its member states make it. If it succeeds, it is because its members have, in combination with each other, the will and the power to apply the principles of the Covenant. If it fails it is because its members lack either the will or the power to fulfil their obligations..

Collective security, by which is meant the organization of peace and the prevention of war by collective means.. means much more than what are commonly called sanctions. It means not merely article 16, but the whole Covenant. It assumes a scrupulous respect of all treaty obligations³⁴³.. Finally, to complete the system, there is the obligation to take collective action to bring war to an end in the event of any resort to war in disregard of the Covenant obligations.

..on behalf of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, I can say that.. they will be second to none in their intention to fulfil, within the measure of its capacity, the obligations which the Covenant lays upon them..

And we believe that backward nations are, without prejudice to their independence and integrity, entitled to expect that assistance will be afforded them by more advanced people..

But such changes will have to be made when they are really necessary and when the time is ripe and not before; they will have to come about by consent and not by dictation, by agreement and not by unilateral action, by peaceful means and not by war or threat of war..

It has been not only suggested that British national opinion, as well as the attitude of the United Kingdom Government, is animated by some lower motive than fidelity to the League, but also that even this fidelity to the League cannot be relied upon. ***It is unjust and misleading to hold and encourage such illusions.*** The attitude of His Majesty's Government has always been one of unswerving fidelity to the League and all that it stands for, and the case now before us is no exception, but, on the contrary, the continuance of that rule. The recent response of public opinion shows ***how completely the nation supports the Government in the full acceptance of the obligations of League membership,*** which is the off-proclaimed keynote of British policy.. In conformity with its precise and explicit obligations, the League stands, and my country stands with it, for collective maintenance

361³⁴³ On June 18, in disregard of the Versailles Treaty, Britain and Germany had signed a naval agreement.

of the Covenant in its entirety and in particular for steady and collective resistance to all acts of unprovoked aggression..

It is hard to believe that just the day before, Hoare had reached an agreement with Laval³⁴⁴ to avoid, if possible, provoking Mussolini into open hostility, and to apply ‘cautiously and in stages’ any collectively decided economic pressure against Italy. This secret agreement was based on the fact that according to a telegram received by Hoare from Perth “in their present mood both Mussolini and the Italian people are capable of committing suicide if this seems the only alternative to climbing down.” Consequently Laval and Hoare decided to follow a policy that would not put too much pressure on Italy³⁴⁵. This decision was not reflected at all in his speech to the League’s Assembly. Hoare had to take the coming British elections into account.

In convoluted arguments to justify this duplicity — at a one day interval — Hoare wrote³⁴⁶:

The general feeling, inside as well as outside the Foreign Office, was at the time painfully defeatist over the League and its future. “it is practically dead, and it is no good trying to revive it,” was the verdict of many of my most influential advisers. Whilst I clearly realised that I might be forced to accept this view, I wished to resist it until the last possible moment. There might still, I thought, be a chance of putting new life into its crippled body. I accordingly determined to make a revivalist appeal to the Assembly. At best, it might start a new chapter of the League recovery, at worst, it might deter Mussolini by a display of League fervour. If there was any element of bluff in it, *it was a moment when bluff was not only legitimate but inescapable*

Eden disputes Hoare’s explanation³⁴⁷:

..Hoare had shown Cranborne and myself the draft of his speech.. he was not prepared to consider any major changes arguing that the speech had been approved by his senior colleagues. Neville Chamberlain in particular had been through the text with him paragraph by paragraph. The Prime Minister had also read and endorsed it. *I remained puzzled* that Ministers should have supported such firm language, particularly *in view of their refusal* to allow me to give warning to Laval earlier of our intention to fulfil the Covenant. I could only suppose that, while Cranborne and I had been at Geneva, they had been brought up against the character of the obstacle which faced them and had decided to make a clean leap over it.. *Never for an instant was a*

362³⁴⁴ This predated what came to be known as the Hoare-Laval agreement of December 1935

363³⁴⁵ Lord Templewood, “Nine Troubled Years”, Collins, London, 1954, pp. 167-168

364³⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 166

365³⁴⁷ *Op. cit.*, p.261

hint dropped that the speech was intended to bluff Mussolini into surrender.

Eden adds in next page:

A characteristic reaction was that of M. Hymans.. He summed up the judgement of the men of international experience who heard the speech: 'The British have decided to stop Mussolini, even if that means using force.' To this day I consider that this was the only possible interpretation of the speech, if the words meant what they said. The effect of the pledge given was immediate and world-wide.

Far from reviving the League, the British hypocrisy, as revealed by the contrast between Hoare's speech and the leaked Hoare-Laval agreements, played a determinant role in destroying whatever trust there had been in the League at the time. As a result, the League could not but prove itself impotent.

Having contributed so much to the 'killing'³⁴⁸ of the League, the British leaders took the impotence they had caused as a justification to so modify the League that this impotence, instead of reflecting the lack of goodwill of some of its most powerful members, would become an integral part of the League's structure.

They would argue for a League which would not be qualified to impose sanctions on an aggressor. They wanted a League the decisions of which would not be compulsory on its members. They were saying that, otherwise, there would be risks of war, if not war itself. On June 10, 1936, N. Chamberlain told the 1900 Club³⁴⁹:

There are some people who do not desire to draw any conclusions at all. I see.. the President of the League of Nations Union.. urged.. to commence a campaign of pressure.. with the idea that, if we were to pursue the policy of sanctions, and even to intensify it, it is still possible to preserve the independence of Abyssinia. *That seems to me the very midsummer of madness.*.. Is it not apparent that the policy of sanctions involves, I do not say war, but a risk of war?.. is it not also apparent from what had happened that, in the presence of such risk, *nations cannot be relied upon to proceed to the last extremity unless their vital interests are threatened?* That being so, does it not suggest that it might be wise to explore the possibilities of *localising the danger spots of the world*.. by means of regional arrangements, which could be approved by the League, but which should be guaranteed only by those nations whose interests were vitally connected with those danger zones?

366³⁴⁸ 'Killing the League' is chapter's 7 title in Amery's book

367³⁴⁹ Keith Feiling, 'The Life of Neville Chamberlain', Macmillan, 1946, p. 296

The timing of Chamberlain's speech is important. On June 4, 1936, elections in France brought to power Leon Blum at the head of the French Popular Front. The new government was made of French Leaders who opposed the Laval policy of understanding with Fascist Italy. France would now have supported a British firm policy in support of the League decisions. The Scandinavian States and many other European states were at that time opposed to the lifting of sanctions. Chamberlain chose to 'torpedo' the sanctions just when the circumstances were favouring the chances of an increase in its scope, just when it was likely that an oil embargo would not have been opposed by France. One may suspect that the success of a Popular Front in France motivated Chamberlain to re-establish an anti-socialist balance by helping Fascist Italy.

Chamberlain does not explain how his suggestion of regional arrangements would have helped Abyssinia resist the Italian invasion. It is certainly true that nations 'would proceed to the last extremity' only if what they perceive to be their vital interests is threatened. But then, perceptions may differ. Just after the end of World War I, it was universally perceived that war anywhere was a threat to all nations everywhere. It was perceived that in order to prevent a repeat of World War I it was necessary to establish the strictest collective security affording collective assistance to a victim of aggression.

The change of perception was not universal. According to Eden³⁵⁰:

The Assembly met on October 9th [1935] under the presidency of Benes. He called upon those delegates who did not wish to accept the conclusions of the Council. There were only two, the representative of Austria and Hungary.. When the debate ended the next day, *fifty states had agreed with the conclusions of the Committee of Six to apply sanctions*.. The embargo on arms destined for Abyssinia was raised at last and imposed on Mussolini, to whom, however, it mattered little.

Eden adds two pages later:

To the Government at home.. it seemed that I was over-enthusiastic. A telephone message arrived from Hoare saying that we ought not to be the sole active influence and initiator at Geneva. Was it true that we were? I replied at once that we were not wearing the whole burden and called in evidence the unequivocal attitude of almost all of Europe and the Dominions, Holland, Belgium, the Little Entente, the Balkan Entente, the Iberian peninsula and Soviet Russia were all in line.

And two pages later:

368³⁵⁰ Op. cit., p. 279

At this stage it appeared that economic sanctions, if honestly applied by all the members of the League, would seriously affect Mussolini's ability to carry on his war. *The attitude of the United States, which took 12 per cent. of Italy's exports, was also encouraging.* Only war material had been included in the American embargo, but the President hinted that he might consider a wider definition of munitions of war, if and when the League did so.

During the thirties, the British government always took the lead in the policies of common concern to Britain and France. They concluded a naval agreement with Germany in which, without asking France, they fixed the ratios between the French and the German Navy. Simon's visit to Germany had been made without France's approval. France had often stated to Britain that her Foreign policy could be more in line with that of Britain if only the latter would agree to commit herself unequivocally to assist France in case of her involvement in a war with Germany. Eden mentions that³⁵¹:

On March 3, [1936] Flandin presented me with a document asking the British Government for an undertaking that they would fulfil their engagements under the Locarno Treaty, if necessary alone. He made the additional point that he could not now agree to an oil sanction until this assurance was received.

This was a reasonable demand. Under Locarno, were any of the signatories to commit an aggression against any of the Locarno countries, the remaining signatories were bound to assist the victim against the aggressor. Italy and Britain were therefore guarantors of France in case of a German attack. France now wanted to know what would occur in the case in which Italy, frustrated by the oil sanction would renege on her Locarno obligations. Would not Britain then say that, in such changed circumstances, her own obligations were no longer in existence?

Britain refused to give the requested assurance. While requesting the application of oil sanctions against Italy she was not prepared, especially if the Germans would remilitarise the Rhineland, to apply economic sanctions on Germany. France faced the choice of risking to loose the guaranty of two countries Britain and Italy, were she to support the oil sanctions, or to keep Italy in the Locarno Treaty, and thereby keep Britain too.

Britain had proved more than once that she rejected France's lead. She also knew that, by pressure or by caring more for France's security, she could easily secure that France would follow Britain's lead. In the case of the Abyssinian conflict, however, Britain decided to follow France's policy. Britain would exercise pressure upon Italy, only in the measure in which

369³⁵¹ Op. cit., p. 329

France would do it herself, and without responding to a legitimate French request concerning her security.

It was very inconvenient to let the public know that the British Government did not want the League to be the winning party in the confrontation with Italy. It was much easier to pretend that Britain could not possibly exercise pressure on France and could not do for the League more than France would do.

There are two aspects of British policy which throws a glaring light on its motivations: the Maffey Report, and the British embargo on arms. The Maffey Report³⁵² was issued on June 18, 1935, by an Inter-Departmental Committee on British interests in Ethiopia. It ends with a nine points summary of which points 2 and 3 are of special relevance:

(2) No such vital British interests is concerned in and round Ethiopia as would make it essential for His Majesty's Government to resist an Italian conquest of Ethiopia. While effective Italian control of Ethiopia would be of advantage in some ways.. Generally speaking, however, so far as local British interests are concerned, there is no balance of advantage in either direction i.e., if Ethiopia remains independent or if it is absorbed by Italy

(3) From the standpoint of Imperial defence, an independent Ethiopia would be preferable to an Italian Ethiopia, but the threat to British interests is a remote one, and depends on the unlikely event of a war with Italy.

What is the point of the creation of the Inter Departmental Committee and of its report? Either Italy can be prevented from 'absorbing' Ethiopia or she cannot. If she can be prevented, and if Britain, as she would claim at Geneva, is dedicated to the Covenant and to collective security, then Italy has to be prevented. It was a loss of time to study the consequences on British vital interests of an Italian conquest of Ethiopia, which would not occur if Italy is prevented. If Italy cannot be prevented, then no study would alter the situation.

The formation of the Committee only makes sense if Britain is not truly committed to the Covenant and to collective security. In that case all the options are open to her. If the British interest lies in Italy's failure to conquer Ethiopia, then Britain will support the League under the guise of a devotion to the League principles. On the other hand if Britain would like to save Italy from such humiliation, and if no local British interest is threatened by an Italian conquest of Ethiopia, Britain would find a way to prevent the League from being effective.

370³⁵² DBFP, 2nd series, vol 14, Appendix 2, pp. 743-777

It is to be noted that the formation of the Committee predates by months the agreements between Hoare and Laval and has no relation whatsoever to a French reluctance in implementing sanctions against Italy.

The second very revealing aspect of the British policy concerns her embargo on arms against both Italy and Ethiopia. In his memoirs, Eden clarifies the matter³⁵³:

I find it very difficult to continue to refuse export licences to Abyssinia for the following reasons:

- (i) We are pledged by treaty in the contrary sense. Our refusal is a *clean breach of treaty obligations*, assumed to meet precisely such an occasion as this.
- (ii) We have already supplied arms to Italy.
- (iii) It is surely difficult to justify — even were there no treaty — the refusal of arms to the victim of aggression

In a Foreign Office memorandum dated August 9, 1935, Cambells wrote³⁵⁴:

Even a simple raising of the embargo in favour of both countries would perhaps suffice to redress the balance to some extent in favour of Abyssinia.

Italy was producing her own arms and was little affected by the embargo. That measure, therefore, was discriminatory against the victim in favour of the aggressor. If Britain was so much in favour of peace and of deterrence to aggression, the least she could have done was to respect her treaty with Ethiopia which obligated Britain to sell arms to Ethiopia for her defence against aggression

This risk of war, they were saying³⁵⁵, was more than what Britain had the right to take. At the time, it was said, the British navy was unprepared and unable to face the Italian navy. This was not the opinion of Admiral Lord Cunningham. He wrote in his autobiography³⁵⁶:

..we were watching and attempting to assess the situation that was arising in Europe because of Mussolini obvious designs on Abyssinia and the completely futile contortions of the League of Nations in trying to persuade him to abandon the venture. To us

371³⁵³ Op. cit., pp. 289-290

372³⁵⁴ DBFP, 2nd series, vol. 14, Appendix III, p. t83

373³⁵⁵ See for instance DBFP, second series, vol. 14, document No. 477. p. 516. Hoare is saying: "militarily we are so totally unprepared either for meeting some mad-dog act or for involving ourselves in war."

374³⁵⁶ Viscount Cunningham of Hyndhope, 'A sailor's Odyssey', Dutton & Co., New York, 1951, p. 173

in the Mediterranean Fleet it seemed a very simple task to stop him. The mere closing of the Suez Canal to his transports which were then streaming through with troops and stores would effectually have cut off his armies concentrating in Eritrea and elsewhere.

It is true that such a drastic measure might have led to war with Italy; but *the Mediterranean Fleet was in a state of high morale and efficiency, and had no fear whatever of the result of an encounter with the Italian Navy*. The Regia Aeronautica was of course an unknown quantity; but we were not at all disposed to attach too much weight to its ability to affect the issue. As the war was to prove we were right.

While in public, over the years, the fear of war, and the love for peace was being stressed, in private, the story was different. The worry was not war *per se* but war on the same side as the Soviet Union. In his diary³⁵⁷, on July 27 1936, Tom Jones reports Baldwin saying to him:

I told Eden yesterday that *on no account*, French or other, must he bring us in to fight *on the side of the Russians*.

Apparently, Baldwin, did not mind war on the opposite side of Russia. Baldwin was alluding to the Spanish civil war. What mattered to him was the overwhelming consideration: not to have Britain fighting on the same side as Russia — on no account, that is to say, whatever, otherwise, may have been the rights and wrongs of the involved parties, whatever may have been the expressed will of the Spanish people.

This criterion, 'on no account' to end up in war on the same side as Russia, had nothing that restricts its meaning to Spanish case. It cannot but be taken as characterising Baldwin's view — and that of most conservatives — and Baldwin's political wisdom in other situations too. Baldwin expressed this criterion as if it was a matter of principle. Similarly, it was not war *per se* that was the trouble in 1935-1936; the trouble was war with the wrong enemy.

As we saw, Mussolini was reported as being in a desperate situation. He was much admired in Conservative circles and Britain would not want him to fall from power. This could not be avowed publicly. It was easier to speak of peace, fear of war and the weak state of the navy. People in contact with the Leaders would be able to understand 'the atmosphere' in which these leaders were making their moves. F.P. Walters, being a British citizen and Deputy Secretary-General of the League of Nations, had the opportunity of sensing this atmosphere. He wrote³⁵⁸:

375³⁵⁷ Thomas Jones, 'A Diary with letters', Oxford University Press, 1954, p. 231
376³⁵⁸ F.P. Walters, *op. cit.*, pp. 645-646

Throughout the Italo-Ethiopian conflict there was a certain lack of realism in their [League Members] attitude. It was true that, with a few exceptions, they had no malevolent feelings towards the Italian government; but it was also true that they were opposing its cherished ambition and that *either they as League Members or Italy as the Covenant-breaking State were bound sooner or later to admit a disastrous defeat*. This fact they preferred not to face. They hoped to stop Mussolini from getting what he wanted; but they did not wish to annoy him, to hurt him, to humiliate him, and *above all they did not wish to bring about his fall*.

The choice was made; the defeated party would be the League. In his speech of June 10, 1936 already quoted, Chamberlain also said³⁵⁹:

..Surely it is time that the nations who compose the League should review the situation and should decide so to limit the functions of the League in future that they may accord with its real powers

On June 18 1936, Simon stated³⁶⁰:

..I am not prepared to see a single ship sunk even in a successful naval battle in the cause of Abyssinian independence.

This is a far cry from Hoare's speech at Geneva and his passionate defence of the League and collective security. On June 20, Baldwin went farther³⁶¹:

We think it right to drop sanctions because we do not believe their continuance, even if all nations desire it, would serve a useful or effective purpose.. We have been abused by our political opponents; we have been mocked by them and by Mr. Lloyd George too. For what? Because we have scuttled? Because we have run away?.. Do these words mean anything unless they mean that we ran away from the Italian navy? Can they have any other meaning? In other words, that we have run away from war?.. If that fire is ever lighted again on the Continent, no man can tell where the heather will cease burning; and it is not a risk that I for one am going to take for my country so long as I have control in the Government.

Baldwin was ready to disregard the will of 'all nations' i.e. the will of the League. He recognised that Britain 'ran away' from war. He was not prepared to run the risk of war 'on the continent'. War in Africa was obviously a different matter. If such was the case, was he declaring open

377³⁵⁹ F. Schuman, op. cit., p. 232

378³⁶⁰ ibid, p.233

379³⁶¹ ibid

season for aggression against small nations? He was declaring that the League having lost Britain's support, was in no position to provide collective security to them.

One wonders at the kind of policy that could be conducted under the avowed terror of war and the absolute determination to avoid it. There was the danger that once terrorised by the fear of war, the people might not be ready for it when there would be no way to avoid it.

On June 27, 1936, three months after Germany's remilitarisation of the Rhineland in defiance of her Locarno undertakings, Chamberlain stated:³⁶²

There is only one sanction which today could have any effect at all on the course of things in Abyssinia, and that is force, and force means war. Mr Lloyd George himself told us in the House of Commons that, in his opinion, this country would never march to war in an Austrian quarrel. Does he suggest that we should do for Abyssinia what we would not do for Austria? Does he suggest that we should enter upon a war the end of which no man could see; that we should expose our people to *the risk of those horrors which so shocked us when they were applied to Abyssinia?*

This was a dangerous statement.

w The Austrian problem is not comparable to the Ethiopian one. In the case of Ethiopia, the world was witnessing a war of aggression. In the case of Austria, it was a matter of an imposed restriction by the victors to prevent the *Anschluss* even if this corresponded to the will of the Austrians. There was of course the possibility of an *Anschluss* imposed against the will of the Austrian people. Lloyd George was not considering the case of a war between Germany and Austria.

w Lloyd George not being a member of the Government, his opinion had no official status. However, when Chamberlain appears to rely on Lloyd George's opinion about Austria to justify a reluctance to assist Abyssinia, he is giving some official recognition to Lloyd George's opinion. Germany can deduce that the British Government would not use force to prevent the *Anschluss*.

w Finally, in the last quoted sentence, Chamberlain is referring to the use of gases against the Ethiopian population. If this was considered an argument against risking war, it meant that the more barbaric the dictators be in their means of aggression, the more assured they could be of British reluctance to use force against them.

380³⁶² *ibid* p. 234

The death diagnostic was given by Chamberlain on February 22, 1938³⁶³:

..If I am right, as I am confident I am, in saying that the League as constituted today is unable to provide collective security for anybody, then I say *we must try not to delude small weak nations into thinking that they will be protected by the League against aggression* — and acting accordingly when we know nothing of the kind can be expected.

The League was dead.

381³⁶³ Telford Taylor, Munich, the Price of Peace, Doubleday & Co., New York, 1979, p. 497

CHAPTER IX

THE SPANISH 'CIVIL' WAR

Introduction

World War II ended with the defeat of Nazi Germany. The first military battles between democratic and Nazi-Fascist forces started in 1936 in Spain with the 'Civil' war. These battles can, therefore, be described as the first battles of World War II.

Claude C. Bowers, the U.S. Ambassador in Spain at the time of the Civil War, wrote³⁶⁴ in 1953:

If we are to preserve the heritage of our fathers, we must be prepared to fight as the gallant loyalists of Spain fought and died, holding back with their bodies and their blood for two and a half years the flood of barbarism that swept over Europe until they succumbed to the *strange indifference* of democratic nations in whose defence they were valiantly fighting. *World War II began in Spain in 1936.*

At the time, the Western democracies were not on the side of democracy. In the measure in which they took side, it can be said that they insidiously took side with the Fascist forces. At the time, it was not yet known that these forces, instead of moving East would one day move West.

Even today, in the United States, the Right considers it a stain on the political past of an individual if he had once been a volunteer in Spain on the anti-fascist side. These individuals are called 'premature anti-fascists'. This designation indicates that the US Establishment was sympathising with fascism which won their approval up to the day fascism moved against the West. Only then was it respectable to be against the fascists, not because they were fascists but because they were moving West instead of East. Germany's intention to move West, was not yet suspected in 1936. To be against fascism in the period 1936-1938 was, according to the U.S. Right, the earmark of a communist or of a communist follower³⁶⁵.

In 1936, elections were held in Spain in circumstances very unfavourable to the left³⁶⁶. Many of its leaders were still in jail while most of

³⁸²³⁶⁴ Claude G. Bowers, 'My Mission to Spain', Simon and Schuster, New-York, 1954, p. vi
³⁸³³⁶⁵ Ibid, p. v, The author writes: 'I prefer to think that we shall not return to the shoddy days just before the war when it was popular in high circles to believe that to oppose communism one must follow the Fascist Line.'

³⁸⁴³⁶⁶ Ibid, p.182-192. Thirty thousand political prisoners were still in jail at the time of the elections which were held under a rightist government. The left had no funds. The 'Gold from

the press and all of the authorities, including the religious authorities were supportive of the right. The victory of the left was not overwhelming. However, in view of the odds that were stacked against the left, that victory was very significant. It indicated that impartial elections would have yielded a much larger margin of victory to the left. The left therefore won their victory fair and square.

The victory of the left was a peaceful revolution³⁶⁷. It put an end to a dictatorial rule of violence fear and oppression. In their joy the people took to the street demonstrating in support of their political agenda.

The political parties brought to power were relatively moderate. The communist party, a member of the United Front, had a small representation in the legislative chambers and, at first, no representative in the Cabinet³⁶⁸. Moreover, it seemed bent on demonstrating a sense of responsibility and an absence of extremism. Whether this was done on instructions from Moscow or not, the fact remains that there was no threat of extremism coming from the left political parties supporting the Popular Front.

The masses, long deprived of civil rights, land and labour rights, were less patient. They made their voices heard and they sounded very threatening to the propertied classes. Reforms were long overdue but, as usual, not on the agenda of the Establishment.

Had the right graciously accepted its electoral defeat, Spanish society could have evolved without violence from its feudal stage to a modern democratic society.

Many forces may have wanted to push the society more to the left relatively to the Western democracies. Many other forces would have disliked to go that far. It is not possible to say which of the tendencies would have had the final say since evolution in Spain was not allowed to follow a peaceful path. The right, fearful for its excessive privileges, refused to come to terms with its defeat. Being in control of the army and the navy it had recourse to a military revolt against which the new government seemed to be unable to oppose any resistance.

Moscow' was just a 'canard' (invented piece of news). Other impediments to the electoral campaign of the left are also described.

385³⁶⁷ *ibid*, p. 200:

386 All such incidents were carefully and systematically assembled day by day and published in the antidemocratic papers under a standing headline: 'Social Disorders in Spain'. The foreign press made the most of this. It was as though in the United States every fight, every killing, every robbery, every crime, every strike, no matter how insignificant, was noted and published on the front page of *The New York Times* daily under the standing caption, "Social Disorders in the United States". When nothing could be found, something was manufactured.

387 The author went on a trip to check on the stories of mob violence and found them either untrue or exceedingly exaggerated. see pp. 200-209. See also the whole of Chapter XV 'The Fascist Provocateurs'

388³⁶⁸ The Spanish Government was reconstructed in September and included two communist out of its thirteen members. The dominant representation was that of the Socialist party with six ministers.

When events are described in these terms, there can be no justification for giving support to the rightist rebels. Therefore, if an English politician disliked the Spanish mobs half as much as he disliked the English mobs, and if he wanted to justify taking the side of the rebels, he had to modify the terms of presentation. All the tricks used in 1917 to denigrate the behaviour of the Bolsheviks, all the invented tales of terror rape and murder, were resuscitated to be applied to the Spanish government. This was facilitated by the fact that, as in Russia, there existed in Spain a Communist party. It did not matter that the party was not in power, it did not matter that it acted within the legal system. It was a convenient target with convenient associations. F.S. Northedge remarks³⁶⁹:

..the kind of alarm which had been aroused in British Conservative circles by the Leninist revolution in Russia twenty years before now tended to be revived by the Spanish Government, even though the latter included neither Socialists nor Communists until the Franco revolt was well under way, and although the reforms it had announced since its assumption in office in February 1936 were of the mildest character.

An important part of the British press was supporting Franco and contributing to a campaign of disinformation. Liddell Hart wrote³⁷⁰:

..in *The Times* leaders they were fervently supporting the policy of non-intervention, even though it was proving a matter of **non-intervention with intervention — on the part of Hitler and Mussolini**. The leaders evaded or toned down this very obvious and ominous development. Similarly, they constantly emphasized the killings in Republican Spain more than those in the Francoist areas — **with bland disregard of the facts reported by the paper's own correspondents on the spot**.

A victory of the rebellious Franco forces would signify a spread of fascism or of regimes friendly to it. Fascist Italy and Germany were declared enemies of the Soviet Union; this was therefore enough to justify a Soviet stand against Franco and in favour of the Spanish legal government. The Soviet Union would have stood with any government threatened by fascist forces. It stood with the Czechoslovakian government in its squabbles with the Sudeten population and with Germany. If allowed to, the Soviet Union would have stood with the anti-communist Polish Government in similar circumstances. The Soviet stand was in line with international law and with diplomatic traditions. The Spanish Government not only was the legal Government of Spain universally recognised as such, but it was the result of elections held and supervised by a rightist Government.

389³⁶⁹ Oper. cit., p. 439

390³⁷⁰ 'The memoirs of Captain Liddell Hart', Cassell, London, vol. 2, p. 129

In Spain the Conservative elements opposed to reforms were in revolt against the will of the people clearly expressed in the electoral success of the republican forces. The battle was that between the people and those who were afraid to lose some of their excessive privileges. However, the supporters of Franco in the British establishment preferred to describe this battle in terms of Fascist and Soviet forces. In this way they could disregard the fact that Franco was in rebellion against the will of the Spanish people.

On January 4, 1937, alarmed at the extent of the Italian intervention in Spain, Eden, at a Cabinet meeting, proposed that the British navy should take an active role in preventing volunteers and arms from reaching Spain. He justified his proposal in terms of British interests and of strategic necessities which request the prevention of the success of the Axis forces. According to Telford Taylor Samuel Hoare disagreed³⁷¹:

Sir Samuel Hoare said that.. we appeared to be getting near a situation where, as a nation, we were trying to stop General Franco from winning. That was the desire of the Parliamentary Parties of the Left; but there were others, including perhaps some members of the Cabinet, who were very anxious that the Soviet should not win in Spain. It was very important to hold the scales fairly

Telford Taylor adds: “It speedily became apparent that Hoare was much closer than Eden to the temper of the Cabinet.” Samuel Hoare had no regard for the will of the Spanish people. He conveniently use the bogey of communism to justify his stand. He says it is “very important to hold the scales fairly”. This seemed to require that no serious effort, such as those proposed by Eden, be made to implement the non-intervention agreement. Since its strict implementation would “stop General Franco from winning” this, in Hoare’s opinion, would not be fair.

One of the themes defended by the British government and the Establishment was that an attempt at strict enforcement of non-intervention could lead to war with Italy and Germany. Liddell Hart writes³⁷²:

Geoffrey Dawson and Barrington-Ward — like most of the Cabinet, and even Eden at the time — harped on the risk that any action we might take to check German and Italian aid to Franco might involve us in a war with those powers. *I questioned that view*, pointing out that in this area *the strategic trump cards were in our hands*. Spain being enveloped by the sea, the German and Italian lines of supply and reinforcement to that area could easily be dominated by the combined British and French navies, while the range of aircraft was then too short for interference by the German and Italian air forces. So long as German and Italian intervention had not actually secured Franco’s victory, *our*

391³⁷¹ Telford Taylor, ‘Munich The Price of Peace’, p. 544. The author quotes CAB 23/87
392³⁷² Oper. cit., vol 2, pp. 129-130

strategic position in the western Mediterranean was too strong to encourage our opponents to fight on this ground.. it was ideal ground strategically to challenge the dictators' aggressive progress, and produce a sobering check — and the German archives captured in 1945 have shown that Hitler, on the same calculations, would not have ventured to risk a fight over Spain.

It is a matter of record that acts of terror were committed by both sides. It is also a matter of record that the Francoists (the rightist rebels) committed many more acts of terror, and of a much more revolting kind, than was the case with the left. In the case of the left, the authorities were trying to maintain legal order. The acts of terror they could not prevent, were committed in spite of the measures taken by the government. In the case of the rebels, the acts of terror were initiated by the authorities and executed under their control. Liddell-Hart had this to say in this respect³⁷³:

It also became clear that while appalling atrocities were taking place on both sides there was a very important difference between them. The massacres in the Republican area were carried out by frenzied mobs, which the Government could not control in the chaotic conditions *created by the generals' revolt*. But on the other side the massacres were being directed by the military leaders in pursuance of a deliberate policy of exterminating opponents and stifling resistance to their advance by establishing a reign of terror in the places they occupied. Where their initial coup was successful they promptly executed officers and officials who had tried to stay loyal to the Government. They also sought out and imprisoned people who were known or suspected to have voted for the 'popular front' in the last election, and a large number were shot. In many cases their corpses were laid out in market squares or along the roadside as a deterrent to any resistance.

In making my summary of the evidence I confined it to the reports of British press correspondents from papers that were not definitely favourable to the Republican cause. Moreover, these were borne out by what Francoist envoys gloatingly related at private meetings in London to which I was invited by ardent Francoist supporters, including Conservative Party ministers, who assumed that because of my military background I would naturally share their views.

By all accounts, the rightist military revolt should have succeeded speedily. The legal government had no forces to oppose against the Spanish regular army in revolt. It was saved by the heroism and initiative of the people and by superhuman efforts at organising the resistance against the rebels. To the astonishment of the world, it became evident that the rebellion

393³⁷³ *ibid.* pp. 128-129

was a failure and that the republic would survive, even stronger than it was. There had been a coup, and it had failed. In the Spanish navy, for instance, crews arrested their officers and sided with the legal government.

It is then that the nature of the rebellion changed. It obtained large and active support from Germany and Italy, and caused what came to be called the 'Spanish civil war'.

An European Political Microcosm

A study of the stands taken by the different European Governments in regard to the Spanish civil war, illustrates the nature of the policies of these governments and adds clarity to the European politics during the period between the two world wars. In short, the Spanish civil war presents the historians with a microcosm reflecting the realities of the politics of Europe.

Spain has no common boundaries with Germany or Italy. Spain was not, and could not, have been considered as part of a coalition directed against them. Germany and Italy could not pretend that they feared such an occurrence. At no time was a military alliance of any kind with any country or group of countries considered, or expected to be considered, in which Spain would be involved.

The official reason for the Germano-Italian intervention was that they wanted to prevent Spain from becoming communist. However, the success of such an intervention could have important strategical consequences in favour of Germany. A regime in Spain unfriendly to France, could force the latter to maintain larger defensive forces on the Spain frontiers. Spain could be an important source of raw materials which would become available to Germany, in peace time at least, on terms more favourable than cash. A Spain friendly to Germany could either grant her submarine bases in the Atlantic or tolerate such naval activities without active resistance. She also could be a threat to Gibraltar.

Germany's and Italy's interventions on the side of the rebellious forces were in violation of international law. According to the definition of aggression, as supported at the League by all nations except for Italy and Great Britain, and therefore not officially adopted, Germany's and Italy's actions could have been considered as constituting acts of aggression against the legitimate Spanish Government. In contrast, help, in men and material, to the Spanish government, would be in line with diplomatic traditions.

A superficial look at the situation in Spain, at the start of the Franco rebellion, offered the following picture:

w a democratic Spanish government battling a fascist supported rebellion.

w Fascist international forces (German and Italian) illegally intervening on the side of the rebellion.

w long range strategical considerations pleading for the support of the Spanish legal government by the Western democracies.

w geographical factors (the common frontier between Spain and France, the short distance between French ports and Spanish ports) making it much easier for the Western democracies to help the legal Spanish Government than it was for Germany and Italy to help the Francoists.

w a place, Spain, and a time, 1936, where the democracies could have foiled the fascist plans. The prestige accrued to the democracies, and that lost by the fascist states, could have contributed to the stabilisation of the situation in the whole of Europe.

w the Western countries promoting a policy of non-intervention which was a 'façade' to the continuous intervention of Germany and Italy

The fact that, in this militarily and politically ideal situation, when the vital interests of the democracies demanded it so strongly, the democracies, insidiously, helped the Francoist side instead of coming strongly on the side of the legal Spanish government, cannot be casually treated as just a mistake, just an indication of the love for peace of the Western leaders, just the effect of politically short-sighted Western leaders. This fact must be treated as fundamental. It is absolutely characteristic of political stands taken by the English Establishment on all European questions.

In a minute written by O. Sargent on the danger of a creation of rival ideological blocs in Europe we can read³⁷⁴:

Our natural instinct would no doubt be to try and remain neutral in this conflict between Fascism and Communism, for presumably to a parliamentary democracy both systems are almost equally abhorrent.

The conflict started in Spain between democratic forces having won an electoral victory and Rightist forces which, when in power, had implemented a dictatorial rule. The rightist forces could not regain power without the extensive help of Fascist forces. As a result of this Fascist intervention, the conflict became one between democracy and fascism. At no moment was communism on the order of the day. Moreover, from the point of view of international law, the conflict was between a legal government, universally recognised as such, entitled to receive help from other countries, and a rebellion movement illegally supported by the two foreign governments, Germany and Italy.

Only the fear of a people taking its fate in its own hands and taking arms in defence of its newly acquired democracy, could make Sargent describe the

394³⁷⁴ DBFP, series II, vol XVII, document 84, p. 90

situation as a conflict between Communism and Fascism. He was acting as if every armed popular movement is bound to end up communist.

Sargent even feared that the Popular Front in France could end up as a porter of communism. He added:

We ought to be able to strengthen the French Government in its efforts — or indeed bring pressure to bear to force it — to free itself from Communist domination, both domestic and Muscovite. ***Even though this might involve at a certain stage something like interference in the internal affairs of France***, surely it would be worth while running this risk?

..All these considerations seem to indicate the importance of (1) our ***preventing France by hook or by crook from 'going Bolshevik'*** under the influence of the Spanish civil war

This is a great deal of intervention in France, coming from someone promoting 'non-intervention' in Spain. In the same document Sargent writes:

As for Italy and Germany, it may be said that in both cases the chief incentive which they have to co-operate together is at present not so much a common fear of communism as a feeling that they two stand isolated in Europe. It lies within us to remove this feeling, especially in Rome where it is most keenly felt and feared.

Moreover, in so far as the fear of the spread of Communism is bringing Germany and Italy to co-operate, this fear is centred not so much on what is going to happen in Spain as on what is going to happen in France.

[All these considerations seem to indicate the importance of] (2) our freeing Italy from the feeling of isolation and vulnerability which the Abyssinian affair has left her with.

Italy had helped and was still helping Franco to rob the Spanish people of their electoral victory. Italy had already robbed the Abyssinian people of its freedom, had challenged the decisions of the United Nations and found itself isolated and vulnerable. Now, instead of exploiting her isolation and vulnerability to teach a lesson once and for all to all Fascist and would-be Fascist politicians, Sargent is suggesting 'freeing Italy' from these feelings.

This, in non-diplomatic words, would mean not to interfere with Italy's presence in Spain and not to be too strict with her intervention in Spain. Sargent, moreover, thought that the real danger is that France, under the Spanish influence could turn communist, a result to be avoided by hook or by crook. How then can Italy be blamed when she was trying, though more by crook than by hook, to prevent Spain from being communist?

The reality is that the British Establishment was equating democratic popular rule with communism, and did not mind stopping it with Fascism. Churchill had previously praised Fascism for having shown the great nations the way to stop communism, the way he would not, he said, in similar circumstances, hesitate to have recourse to. Liddell Hart said³⁷⁵

Strategically the danger is so obvious that it is difficult to understand the eagerness with which some of the most avowed patriotic sections of the British public have desired the rebels' success. *Class sentiment and property sense would seem to have blinded their strategic sense.*

Liddell-Hart was no Marxist and no left-wing politician. He had been at various times military adviser to Churchill, Lloyd George, Eden, and Hore Belisha. He was also the military correspondent of *The Times*. He is the author of over thirty books and publications on military questions and was a recognised authority in all problems of military strategy. He was looking at the Spanish civil war exclusively from the point of view of British strategic interests, and strategic interests are vital.

The Stand Taken By The Western Democracies

The British establishment and the British government wished the victory of Franco. Captain Liddell Hart mentioned in his memoirs³⁷⁶:

Whitehall circles were very largely pro-Franco, as I found — and that was particularly marked in the Admiralty. Even Churchill, who I thought would see the strategic dangers, was for a long time blinded by emotional prejudices, and only came round too late to avert the triumph of the dictators.

Vansittart wrote on September 1936 about a visit in August to Delbos, the French Foreign minister³⁷⁷:

I knew that M. Blum's chief profession and concern was collaboration with England; but M. Blum must remember as I had told him in Paris, that the British Government was upheld by *a very large Conservative majority, who were never prepared, and now probably less than ever, to make much sacrifice for red eyes.* The Russian aspect of Spain could not fail to make a difference in these sections of English feeling

395³⁷⁵ D.N. Pritt, 'Must the War Spread', Penguin Books, p. 13. I should find the original in Memoirs of Captain...

396³⁷⁶ Oper. cit., p. 130

397³⁷⁷ DBFP, second series, vol XVII, Appendix I, p. 773

The only ‘Russian aspect’ of Spain was the British establishment’s fear that any popular movement, in Spain or elsewhere, could in time move to the extreme left. On August 8th 1936 Harold Nicolson had the following entry in his diary³⁷⁸:

The Spanish situation is hell. Philip Noel-Baker writes to *The Times* pretending that the Madrid Government is one which should command the support of all democratic liberals. In fact, of course, *it is a mere Kerensky*³⁷⁹ *Government at the mercy of an armed proletariat.*

Nicolson was a moderate National-Labour Member of the House of Commons. He would later prove not to be blinded by anticommunism and would, like Churchill, oppose Chamberlain’s policy of ‘appeasement’. The majority of the Conservative party was much less liberal than Nicolson. Nevertheless, here was a liberal whose fear of the ‘armed proletariat’ in Spain reached such an extent that he could forget the reason for which the Spanish proletariat was being armed. The Spanish proletariat remained unarmed until the generals started their rebellion. The republic had been betrayed. It had then been saved by the sacrifices of the people who took arms, and did not spare their lives in defence of the government who won the recent elections.

If a ‘liberal’ Conservative could be so frightened of the Spanish armed people as to see in its government a precursor to a communist revolution, it is not difficult to realise what were the feelings of the more characteristic Conservative. Henry Channon, a future member of the Neville Chamberlain clique³⁸⁰, wrote in his diary³⁸¹ on July 27, 1936:

..Austen Chamberlain..made a really stupid speech in which he attacked Germany with unreasoning violence..

The situation in Spain.. is very serious. The army of the Right elements, revolted by the appalling Left government, have tried by a coup de main to seize power. For a few days, *we had hoped* they would win, though tonight it seems as if the Red Government, *alas*, will triumph

The Spanish Government is called ‘Red’, an adjective associated with the Russian revolution. It helps confuse the issues. Channon soon became

398³⁷⁸ Oper. cit., p. 270

399³⁷⁹ The last Russian government prior to the Bolshevik revolution.

400³⁸⁰ Neville Chamberlain did not need a clique. He enjoyed the respect of the Conservative Party and, after he came to power, that of a comfortable majority in the House of Commons. Channon, however, developed an inordinate admiration for Chamberlain. He not only claqued for him, but also belonged to a group of faithful doing ‘underground work’ to facilitate the implementation of Chamberlain’s policies

401³⁸¹ Oper. cit., p. 73

more optimistic. On March 8, 1937, the day his appointment as Parliamentary Private Secretary to Rab Butler was announced, he wrote in his diary³⁸²:

I am relieved that the FO is not so opposed to Franco as I had feared, and seem well aware of the tricks of Republican Spain.

Channon expresses the feelings of the establishment and those of the British Government. The British people, though, had a different stand. Channon writes in his diary³⁸³ on March 29:

Francó advances — victory is clearly his. He has been so misunderstood, so misrepresented in this country that *to champion him*, and I have done, *is dangerous from a Constituency point of view*

The Spanish Government was entitled to bring the matter of Germany's and Italy's support of Franco, to the attention of the League of Nations. However, as F.P. Walters mention³⁸⁴:

In their anxiety to avoid any open break with the Axis powers, Britain and France, persistently discouraged any suggestion that the war in Spain should be dealt with by the Council or the Assembly.

The official position of the British Government was that it would favour all possible measures intended to confine the conflict within Spain and prevent its extension to the rest of Europe. The British Government became therefore a proponent of the policy of 'non-intervention' purportedly to realise the stated aim.

The logic of non-intervention was that, if all the countries would agree to and respect that policy, there would be no grounds for confrontation between the European powers. In reality, this was just a mask, a 'façade'³⁸⁵. The British government — as the Cabinet minutes show — and the British establishment wished the victory of Franco. The general public in Britain supported the cause of the 'loyalist', i.e. the cause of the legal republican government of Spain. Moreover, the diplomatic traditions and international law requested the support of the recognised legal republican government. The British government therefore could not support openly the rebellion. Since support could only be to the Spanish democratic government, the closest the British government could come to support the rebellion was to

402³⁸² *ibid.*, p. 149

403³⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 153

404³⁸⁴ F.P. Walters, 'A history of the League of Nations', Oxford University Press, London, 1960, p. 721. The author was Deputy Secretary General of the League of Nations.

405³⁸⁵ Keith Feiling, *op. cit.* p.299

oppose supporting any side. In a memorandum dated December 14, 1936, Eden writes³⁸⁶:

The exact circumstances in which the Balearic Islands have become a focus of danger to British interests were not foreseen, indeed were hardly foreseeable. *What was anticipated in August* was the possibility that General Franco would make himself master of Spain *largely as a consequence of help received from Italy*, to whom he would thus in a sense have mortgaged the policy of his country

Here was a candid confession of what really was the British policy in August 1936 when Britain pressured³⁸⁷ France into the policy of non-intervention. This was done with the anticipation that Franco, with Italy's help, would become master of Spain. It is also a recognition that the Spanish people were against Franco. Heading the Spanish army, Franco would need no Italian help if an appreciable part of the Spanish population was behind him. Eden however knew that Franco's victory depended on Italy's help. Eden's assertion that the dangers to British interests 'were hardly foreseeable' is contradicted by the fact that Liddell Hart did not stop warning the British government against these dangers.

The hypocrisy of the non-intervention policy has been best described by F. Schuman³⁸⁸:

When gentlemen tell things which they know to be false to other gentlemen who believe them true, the result is deception. When the other gentlemen know that what they are told is false, the result, to outside observers, is hilarity. But when the first gentlemen also know that the other gentlemen know that what is said is false, the result is play acting. And when all the gentlemen exchange statements which all know to be false, the play becomes a farce. The farce becomes delectable indeed when all the gentlemen pretend to one another that all the falsehoods are true

A patent example of bad faith is given by Eden's intervention in the House of Commons³⁸⁹ on November 19, 1936. Concerning breaches of the non-intervention agreement he said:

406³⁸⁶ DBFP, series II, vol XVII, Document 471, p. 678

407³⁸⁷ This pressure is reflected in a number of official documents. In one of them — DBFP, series II, vol XVII, document 81 p. 87 -, a letter from Lloyd Thomas (Paris) to Sir A. Cadogan it is mentioned that the credit for the French decision of non-intervention may be due to a conversation between the British ambassador and the French Foreign minister. Other documents hint at pressure. Liddell Hart, op. cit. vol. 2 p. 128, positively asserts that Britain threatened France, on August 8, 1936, that in case she would not abstain from helping Republican Spain, England would not feel obligated by the Locarno Treaty to come to her assistance, were she to become involved in a war with Germany.

408³⁸⁸ Oper. cit., p. 283

409³⁸⁹ DBFP, series II, vol XVII, document 395, note 1, p. 578

So far as breaches are concerned, I wish to state categorically that I think there are other Governments more to blame than those of Germany or Italy

Major C.S. Napier from the War office wrote four days later to Roberts³⁹⁰:

You will see that our evidence does not bear out Mr. Eden's statement in the House of 19th of November.. I cannot help feeling afraid that this statement may be seized on by Germany and Italy to justify intervention, at least to their own nationals

Mr. Roberts made a minute of a conversation he had previously with Major Napier

whom he had told that he felt sure that Mr. Eden 'had in reality no doubts as to the flagrant manner in which both Germany and Italy had disregarded the Agreement'³⁹¹

Mr Collier, minuting on Major Napier's report, wrote³⁹² on November 24, 1936:

that he too had been surprised by Mr. Eden's statement, since the papers which he had seen seemed to establish 'not only that the Italian and German Governments had begun to ship arms to General Franco before they joined the Non-intervention Agreement.. but that, in the case of Italy at least, there was evidence that the Spanish revolt had originally been prepared' with Italian connivance if not instigation. He thought that the Soviet Government only began to supply arms when German and Italian non-observation of the Non-intervention Agreement became apparent

This must be seen in the context of statements made by Eden at a Cabinet meeting. Telford Taylor wrote³⁹³:

Eden was doing his best to suppress information about Axis transgression in Spain. On October 14 he told the Cabinet that "the Italians were breaking the rules in the Balearic Island," but that "the moment was particularly inopportune for raising the matter in the Non-Intervention Committee."

410³⁹⁰ *ibid*, document 406, p. 587

411³⁹¹ *ibid*, footnote 3

412³⁹² *ibid*, footnote 4, p. 590

413³⁹³ *Oper.*, *Cit.*, p. 543

Though it was anticipated that Franco would win with the help of Italy, and notwithstanding the fact stressed by Eden that Italy's actions in Spain threatened British interests:

Hoare let off.. by a recommendation "to get Italy out of the list of countries with which we had to reckon." His view won immediate approval from Chamberlain, MacDonald, Inskip, Halifax, and others; the Colonial Secretary (Ormsby-Gore) opined that there was "a feeling in the country that we were tied up too much with France and that *that had prevented us getting on terms with the dictator Powers.*" In conclusion the Cabinet agreed that the Foreign Office "should in the light of the discussion adopt a policy of improving relations with Italy."

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the friendly feelings towards Italy, expressed at the Cabinet meeting, were related to the satisfaction with Italy's help to Franco's forces. Such an Italy has to be crossed out of the list of potential enemies.

F.S. Northedge writes with deep insight³⁹⁴:

Moreover, above and beyond these reactions to the Spanish conflict in official British quarters, there was also the recognition that the traditional British attitude to civil wars, since at least the French Revolution in 1789, was that they were of no concern to Britain unless they were accompanied by a distinct threat to the balance of power and British security. Had it been assumed that Franco's protectors, Germany and Italy, were already Britain's potential enemies in a future war, this principle would have seemed to justify British intervention on the side of the Spanish Government

Italy was taken out of the list of potential enemies. As to Germany, while still considered a potential threat, it was hoped, as we saw, that she would expand to the East. The real potential enemy, in the eyes of the British establishment, was therefore the people of Spain.

Halifax described as follows the role of the Non-intervention Committee³⁹⁵:

The immediate practical value of the Committee was not great. I doubt whether a single man or gun less reached either side in the war as a result of its activities. What, however, it did was to keep such intervention as there was entirely non-official, to be denied or at least deprecated by the responsible spokesman of the nation concerned, so that there was neither need nor occasion for any action by Governments to support their nationals. After making every allowance for the unreality, make-believe, and discredit

414³⁹⁴ Oper. cit., pp. 439-440

415³⁹⁵ Telford Taylor p.541. The author quoted from Halifax: 'Fullness of the day' p.192

that came to attach to the Non-intervention Committee, I think this device for lowering the temperature caused by the Spanish fever justified itself.

Halifax found valuable a device by which denial of facts by violators of the Non Intervention Agreement, could be facilitated. He was however wide out of the mark when he said that Non-intervention policy did not influence the amount of help received by the battling sides in Spain. France, for one, could have sent a far larger amount of help to the Republicans. The Republican could have bought a large amount of armaments, was it not that they were prevented from doing so. Even orders placed in France before the civil war, in compliance with the policy of non-intervention, had not been honoured. On the other hand, the Italian intervention was as open as could be in support of its nationals who happened to be regular soldiers of the Italian army.

As decided by the British Cabinet with respect to the situation with Spain, efforts were made to improve relations with Italy. Eden mentions³⁹⁶ that on January 2, 1937:

I returned from Yorkshire to the Foreign Office to learn that further large contingents of Italian volunteers had just arrived in Spain. Since the Agreement had been signed two days before, it seemed only too likely that Mussolini had used our negotiations as a cover plan for his further intervention. To make matters worse the Nazi press was now mischief-making, seeking to interpret our Agreement *as an encouragement to Franco*.

The German opinion is not new. On November 21, 1936, Phipps, the British ambassador in Germany, reported to Eden that, talking to Neurath, he enquired if Germany's decision to recognise Franco implied that she would cease to participate in the London Non-intervention Committee. "His excellency replied that it would not, but he added smilingly that 'non-intervention' in Spain had for some time past been a farce".

Walters wrote³⁹⁷:

The general sentiment that non-intervention was little more than a farce had been deepened by Mussolini's formal declaration that he would not permit the existence of a Communist or near-Communist government on the shores of the Mediterranean. It was indeed no less obvious to the democratic governments than to the general public that he intended to maintain his intervention until Franco's victory was complete. *But it annoyed and disconcerted them to have it stated so plainly.*

416³⁹⁶ Oper. cit., p. 432

417³⁹⁷ Oper. cit., p.727

In view of the failure of the non-intervention policy, Spain requested from the League's Assembly to declare that Spain was the victim of Foreign Aggression, that the non-intervention plan had failed and be withdrawn and that the Spanish government be permitted to import all the arms it required. Walter wrote³⁹⁸:

..But the French and British, on whom so much depended, were compelled to face the facts, not only by those who supported the Spanish demand, but by Mussolini himself. On September 25th [1937], ..he declared that thousands of Italians were dying in Spain to save civilisation from the false gods of Geneva and of Moscow. There was little they could say in defence of a situation thus clearly defined

Britain and France accepted a resolution which, in substance, supported the Spanish contention. It requested the immediate and complete withdrawal of all combatants, or else the consideration of ceasing the policy of non-intervention. Only two states voted against the resolution: Albany and Portugal. Albany was careful not to displease Italy while Portugal was a fervent supporter of Franco.

The vote demonstrated that the policy of non-intervention was working for Franco against the legal Spanish government. Naturally, Italy wanted the policy to be continued.

In view of the lack of unanimity, the vote was not binding. However, thirty two nations having voted in its favour, it represented a great moral victory for the Spanish government. This victory had very little practical consequences. Walters wrote³⁹⁹:

Mussolini returned a contemptuous negative to the Franco-British proposal that the question of withdrawing foreign combatants from Spain should be immediately discussed between the three powers. Even the right-wing papers in France were beginning to resent his attitude. Eden, in a public speech on October 15th declared that his patience was almost exhausted. But the Duce had no misgivings as to what the British Government would do. In the previous July, Neville Chamberlain had succeeded Baldwin as Prime Minister; and he was an unshakeable adherent of the policy of co-operation with Italy. One of his first acts as Premier had been to write a personal letter to Mussolini expressing his admiration for the Duce's personality and his desire to collaborate with him in removing all misunderstandings between their two countries.. Under pressure from London the French also were induced to change their mind.. ***Grandi and Ribbentrop were allowed to reduce the meetings of the Non-Intervention Committee to an even more dreary farce than before***

418³⁹⁸ Oper. cit., p. 728

419³⁹⁹ Oper. cit., p. 729

The Stand Of The United States

With respect to the Spanish Civil War, the United States' establishment took a stand similar to that of Britain. It supported the policy of non-intervention and proclaimed an embargo on arms to Spain.

There, however, are essential differences between the embargo on arms proclaimed by the United States in relation with the war between Italy and Ethiopia, and the embargo proclaimed in relation to the Spanish Civil War. In both cases the measure was detrimental to the cause of democracy. However, in the case of the war between Italy and Ethiopia, it could be argued that the American administration was bound by the neutrality acts to take the blockade measures. Such was not the case concerning the Civil War in Spain. Robert Bendiner writes⁴⁰⁰:

The same type of "moral suasion" as was used in the Ethiopian affair was invoked to discourage war trade. It promised a fair degree of success until December, when a Mr. Robert Cuse applied to the State Department for a license to export, presumably to loyalist Spain, 411 airplanes engines.. The Department was obliged under the law to issue the license. The Loyalist government was overjoyed, but the Government of the United States scored the deal as unpatriotic. When the British Foreign Office made anxious inquiries concerning the shipment, the State Department announced that it had no recourse but regretted "the unfortunate non-compliance by an American citizen with this Government's strict non-intervention policy."

When these stern words appeared lost on the determined Mr. Cuse, the President went into action. In his message to the Congress on January 6, he asked that the Neutrality Act be amended at once "to cover specific points raised by the unfortunate civil strife in Spain." The resulting embargo, wrote Charles A. Beard, "was a violation of international law. It was a violation of a specific treaty with Spain. It was an insult to the Government of Madrid, which the Government of the United States recognized as *de facto* and *de jure*." Yet this was the policy worked out in detail by the one department which of all the agencies of the American Government most prides itself on legalism, which maintains always that it is guided solely by the well-established rules of international law.

Bendiner adds:

So great a stroke for peace and democracy deserved the kind of tributes it received. From General Franco came the accolade:

⁴⁰⁰ Robert Bendiner, 'The Riddle of the State Department', Farrart & Reinhart, New York, pp. 54-56

“President Roosevelt behaved in the manner of a true Gentleman.” His neutrality legislation, stopping export of war material to either side — the quick manner in which it was passed and carried into effect — is a gesture we nationalists will never forget⁴⁰¹

It did not take long for the U.S. administration (at least for the President) to realise how blind had been their policy with respect to the events in Spain. Harold Ickes⁴⁰², on January 29, 1939, wrote in his diary:

The President also brought up the question of the Spanish embargo. He very frankly stated, and this for the first time, *that the embargo had been a grave mistake..* The President said that we would never do such a thing again, but I am afraid that will not help us much. *He agreed that this embargo controverted old American principles and invalidated established international law.*

..Realistically, *neutrality in this instance was lining up with Franco, and lining up with Franco has meant the destruction of Democratic Spain*, in the trail of which may come the remaking of the map of Europe and *a very great threat to our own democratic institutions and our economic life.* The President said that the policy we should have adopted was to forbid the transportation of munitions of war in American bottoms. This could have been done and Loyalist Spain would still have been able to come to us for what she needed to fight for her life against Franco — to fight for her life and for the lives of some of the rest of us as well, as events will very likely prove.

Conclusion

Britain professed to be against an ideological stand in the case of the Spanish Civil War or in any other case. The reason for it is understandable. Britain was a democracy, and so was republican Spain. Franco was rebelling against a democracy in order to establish a Fascist regime similar to that of Italy. Since Italy and Germany, in line with their ideology, were supporting Franco, an ideological stand by Britain would have found her supporting the Spanish Loyalists.

The British Establishment, however, had never completely come to term with democracy. Strictly speaking, democracy does not go well with imperialism, and England was very reluctant to liquidate her colonial empire.

We saw that many of the British leaders had expressed their misgivings with English democracy. As to Spain, the British establishment looked at it as a battle between the haves and the haves-not. And so it was because the

421⁴⁰¹ The author mention it being reported in New York *American*, February 1, 1937

422⁴⁰² Oper. cit., vol 2, pp. 569-570

haves were against democracy while the haves-not, being much more numerous, were fullheartedly for democracy.

The British establishment wanted to avoid a stand resulting from the nation's democratic ideology. It therefore proclaimed that it would take distance from ideology. In fact it took a consistent ideological stand, that of the haves, of the aristocracy, the bankers, the industrialists who, most of them, were admirers of Fascism, and did not mind stating it.

The Soviet Union had a regime which brought the haves-not to power. Fascism and Nazism were means of preventing a similar occurrence in Italy and Germany. No wonder therefore that the Soviet Union stood against Fascism and Nazism her worst enemies.

In the case of Britain, the national interest required a stand against Fascism and with the democratic Republican Government. Such was the recognised stand of the general public. To take a stand against the national interest, the establishment had to qualify the national interest stand as 'ideological'.

With respect to the Spanish Civil War, there was in Britain an antagonism between the interests of the establishment and that of the nation. It is to the long lasting praise of Churchill that, in spite of his sympathies for Fascism and for Franco, he overcome his feeling and put the national interest above the narrower interests of the British establishment. Late in the game, after having supported Franco for too long a time, he changed his mind and recognised that the national interest of England would be better served with the defeat of Franco⁴⁰³.

In the case of the Soviet Union, there was not such split between the interests of the Soviet People and that of the establishment, i.e. the communist party leaders. Since the defeat of Trotsky, the Soviet Union positions in foreign policy were more national than ideological. The support to Spain was therefore not ideologically based but nationally based. At no point did the Soviet Union exert pressure on the Spanish Republican Government to have them move more to the left. The Spanish Communist party itself exhibited more of a national spirit than may have been expected from a purely ideological stand.

In its stand with respect to the Spanish Civil War, the British Establishment was not behaving differently than in the case of the problem of peace and war in Europe. The British establishment in the thirties was supportive of Germany's effort at rearming and expanding. This was done in the name of abstaining from ideological stands and in the name of justice for the vanquished, justice for a peaceful Germany and the requisite for lasting peace. All these considerations were gathered into the single term of 'appeasement' in order to reach an 'understanding'. The parallel with Spain is clear in that here too the public and the national interest requested standing against the dictators while the British establishment was doing the opposite.

423⁴⁰³ Liddell Hart, *op. cit.*, p. 130

Here too, the Soviet Union, more from its national interest than from an ideological standpoint, was active in its efforts to build a front against Nazism.

The parallel is not astonishing. The fate of Europe was being played in Spain. As matters turned out, when the battle finally became clearly one against Fascism and Nazism, the Franco forces were during World War II battling against the allies, the Soviet Union included, while those republican forces which took refuge in France and were interned there, volunteered for the ranks of the French army.

These later events made it clear where the national interests stood. It requested an alliance between the western democracies and the Soviet Union. Their combined power was hardly sufficient to overcome the terrible military machine of Germany. Those who stood either against the realisation of that alliance or in favour of the Fascist and Nazi regimes were doing it against the national interest of their countries, motivated as they were by much narrower interests. The Civil War in Spain had been a mirror of the clash of all interests, narrow and national, in Europe.

And finally, it is instructive to read a passage of Chamberlain's revision of a draft reply to be sent to Mr. Morgenthau U.S. Secretary of Finance⁴⁰⁴:

His Majesty's Government.. have no doubt whatever that the greatest single contribution which the United States could make at the present moment to the preservation of world peace would be the amendment of the existing neutrality legislation. Under this legislation an embargo would be imposed on the export from the United States of arms and munitions, irrespective of whether a country is an aggressor or a victim of aggression.

Did the British leaders fail to realise that this was a condemnation of their own policy of embargo on arms for Italy and Abyssinia? They did know that their embargo was 'irrespective of whether a country is an aggressor or a victim of aggression'. It can also be argued that the quoted paragraph is also a condemnation of the policy of non-intervention. Not only did it not differentiate between a legal government victim of the aggression of a rebellion supported by foreigners, but, on the contrary, it worked effectively to blockade the arm exports to the victim, while ignoring the intervention on the side of the aggression.

424⁴⁰⁴ DBFP, 2nd series, vol XVIII, enclosure to document 268, p.382

CHAPTER X

THE DIPLOMACY OF A FREE HAND. Part 1 (pre-Chamberlain)

Introduction

Giving a free hand to Germany to expand in the direction of Eastern Europe is a theme that recurs, in many forms, in recorded opinions of British responsible leaders (Prime Ministers and Foreign Affairs Secretaries), British army leaders, eminent members of the British establishment, members of the House of Lords. This free hand would eventually be given to Hitler by Chamberlain. However, the theme was on the agenda well before that. It explains many events which, otherwise, would have been considered unforgivable 'mistakes'.

For some of the British politicians, this theme seemed to have always been in the back of their mind. Only in the back, because it was often far from realisable, and life must go on even when a dream cannot be pursued.

When the free hand policy seemed impracticable, a multitude of factors competed for the determination of political issues. It is thus that, sometimes, decisions were made that seemed to contradict the free hand policy. Taken in isolation, these decisions could be considered as a proof that the free hand policy was never seriously followed. There is however a thread which associated many of such events with the general free hand policy even when they were compatible with obvious other interpretations.

There is no indication that the matter of a free hand to Germany had been openly discussed in a Cabinet meeting. On a number of occasions note had been taken of the opinions of military leaders that Germany was becoming dangerously strong, that she had set her mind on aggressive expansion and that the probable direction of her expansion would be the East, with a likelihood of war with the Soviet Union. On such occasions it was agreed that Britain should keep out of the way of Germany's expansion in the East. The recognised danger was that of the French obligations in the East. Efforts were recommended to neutralise these obligations.

Such a policy was that of a free hand by default. No explicit free hand to Germany, no encouragement to Germany in her moves towards the East, just a decision to keep out of it, and to press on France to be reasonable. Such was the smallest common denominator in the Cabinet. Those in the Cabinet who were ready to go further ahead and make a free hand deal with Germany could not discuss the matter in Cabinet meetings.

In the absence of the Cabinet passing an explicit policy in favour of a free hand, measures facilitating the free hand had to be advocated on a different basis. To tolerate German rearmament, for instance, would be in

line with a free hand policy; however it would be approved on the basis that the alternative would be to use force against Germany and that such a policy would had catastrophic consequences⁴⁰⁵.

The road leading to the grant of a free hand to Germany was tortuous. It was not followed by all British officials and those who followed it did not do so in the same way. They were following the French saying *faire feu de tout bois*. This means, in short, to make good usage of every circumstance. Weakening the League is good for a free hand. It will therefore be done whenever the circumstances allow it. Weakening the French ties with the East is good for a free hand. It will therefore be pursued under whatever reasons. Preventing the weakening of Hitler's position is good for a free hand policy. It will therefore continually be kept in mind. Cabinet members not privy to the free hand policy would contribute to it without being aware that they were doing just that.

And finally, when the stage will be reached for more explicit approaches to Germany, Chamberlain would pursue a personal policy, away from the Cabinet control and in consultation with a restricted number of confidants.

Politicians, often, do leave traces of their inner thoughts and motivations. They write letters and diaries, they confide to friends and, when they are Cabinet ministers, their words are recorded, though very scantily, in Cabinet minutes. Having regard to the general resulting picture, it becomes impossible to deny that the free hand that was given to Hitler at Munich was part of a long standing policy.

When it comes to Germany's expansion Eastward, many varieties of free hand must be considered. And since a free hand to Germany does not make sense unless Germany is armed and powerful, the relation between permitting Germany to become again a military power and her having a free hand in the East, must also be studied.

We have already seen that the most anticommunist elements in Germany were also the most nationalistic and the most committed to a policy of expansion. Whatever support was given to these elements for their anticommunism was necessarily, even if indirectly, a support for their will to rearm. The West could not have the one without the other.

According to one's political inclinations, the German rearmament could then be either a necessary evil or a blessing. It was evil for those politicians who suspected that Germany's aggressive spirit would not spare the West. It was also evil for a minority of politicians who felt strongly for peace and were opposed to a German policy of aggression, even if it were to be restricted to the East. It was a blessing for the politicians who were hoping that Germany's military power would bring about the destruction of the communist regime in Soviet Union.

⁴⁰⁵ Simon said that "if the French Government should raise the point that Germany has, in fact, succeeded by a policy of blackmail, we should not perhaps dissent, but we should ask France what are the alternatives." The matter discussed was that of Germany's rearmament in contravention of treaties. (Correlli Barnett, op. cit., p.398

What could be done with a Germany which, in order to be anticommunist was allowed to regain her military power? This was the ultimate question for which it was vital to find an adequate answer. It was clear that this kind of a dynamic country, headed by its kind of dynamic leaders, would not accept for long the status quo of the Versailles Peace Treaty. It was obvious to the West that such a Germany would seek some outlets for her energy, her patriotism and her will for expansion.

From time to time the hope was expressed that it would be possible, for some period, to ‘domesticate’ Germany by a ‘general settlement’ whereby she would receive some colonies, some economic help — in the form of economic zones of influence and access to raw material — and some revision of her Eastern frontiers, to be achieved by relatively peaceful ways. The term ‘general settlement’ was vague enough to suit the purposes of those British politicians who were willing to make very limited concessions to Germany, and the purposes of those who were prepared to give a free hand to Germany in Eastern Europe.

Predictably these attempts failed. Even as they were tried, the proponents of these policies knew that something more would have to be done. Now, since it was clear that the German leadership of the time would not accept that Germany be confined within her frontiers, the West had to choose one of the available alternatives.

Britain, in alliance with France, could decide to oppose a German policy of aggression in whatever direction. The disadvantage of such a policy was that, since Germany was allowed to rearm, it would imply a race in armaments. It would also necessitate the organisation of a system of collective security which, to have any chance of success, would have to include the Soviet Union. It would lead to a war which, if won, would do away with a nationalistic German leadership to be replaced by one unable to stem the expected social unrest.

Britain could restrict her commitments in Europe to the low countries and to France. Apparently such a policy would be that followed traditionally by all previous British governments. In fact it would be a totally new *political* policy under the disguise of a *strategical* policy belonging to the past.

It is true that Britain, traditionally, kept out of those European quarrels that did not directly affect her economic or strategic interests. However, Germany, as a great military and industrial power, was a relatively new phenomenon. She defeated the French army for the first time in 1870. Her industrial power and naval constructions worried Britain at the end of the century. At the time, it was believed that the aggregate military power of Britain, France and Russia, would be more than adequate to cope with the German military power.

This belief proved to be wrong and, by the end of World War I, the allies were terrified at the prospect of a German military revival. After World War I, the relative newness of the ‘German fact’ — the German potential to be

stronger than any combination of continental military powers — did not fit into traditional strategies of relative insulation from European problems, except for the concern over the security of the French northern coasts and that of the low countries.

The traditional British policy remained constant while its strategic expression varied with circumstances. Thus France, a traditional enemy of England, became Britain's ally in a traditional policy to keep the potentially most powerful European country, which was then Germany, away from the low countries. After World War I, the traditional British policy necessitated a non-traditional strategy consisting in making sure that Germany should remain militarily weak and be prevented from acquiring strength through territorial expansion in whatever direction. In this sense, a British disinterest in the East would constitute a clear departure from tradition⁴⁰⁶.

Baldwin has been described as a man motivated by his horror of war. This was a natural and common feeling after World War I had demonstrated how destructive such a war could be and suggested that next one would be worse. Here was therefore what seemed a plausible explanation for his weak positions, and those of other politicians of his time, relative to the dictators.

There is little doubts that Baldwin was a man of peace and was afraid of war. However, his single instruction to Eden was to avoid embarking Britain in a war 'on the same side with Russia'. Therefore his weakness for peace was not universal. On another occasion — that of the remilitarisation of the Rhineland — he would worry not so much about peace as about the danger of Communism in Germany if ever Hitler's Germany was defeated by France.

The pacifist mood of the people has also been cited as the reason for which the British politicians could not follow a firmer policy towards the dictators. However plausible this argument appears to be at a first look, it is not supported by the evidence. At election time, the Conservatives pretended to be staunch supporters of the League, while secretly plotting compromises with Mussolini. They knew that otherwise they would lose the elections. The news of the compromises leaked to the newspapers and forced the resignation of Sir Samuel Hoare, the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Many aspects of British so-called 'weak' policies had to be hidden from the British people who would not go along with them. The continuous efforts at eroding the efficacy of the League of Nations were not made in response to the British public opinion. Likewise, a strict British attitude to enforce controls on German rearmament would have met public approval.

Besides, if ever public opinion lagged in the realisation of the Nazi danger and the need to stand firm against it, a leadership willing to stop the dictators would have launched an educational campaign to get the Public's approval. And finally, too much of the real intentions of the British leaders

426⁴⁰⁶ After World War II Britain became a major participant of NATO with its extended commitments. When the prospective enemy was communist Russia there could be no disinterest from the east.

are apparent from their policies, from the British documents, from German documents, and from diaries to allow any doubt as to the cardinal role played by the hate and fear of the Soviet Union in their policy of weakness with respect to the dictators. The hatred of war and the mood of the British people are nothing more than convenient justifications.

The Locarno Agreements

Germany was rearming secretly. This was well-known to the allies. A spirit of expansion reigned in the German establishment and in the governmental circles. Stresemann himself, the German chancellor in the mid-twenties, was not a man who could be trusted to check the expansionist and aggressive tendencies of the German establishment⁴⁰⁷.

Austen Chamberlain had said in 1919 (see chapter VIII) that:

Even the Old Germany would not, I think, rashly challenge a new war in the West, but the chaos on their Eastern Frontiers, and their hatred and contempt of the Poles, must be a dangerous temptation

It is clear that, according to Austen Chamberlain, Eastern Europe was more in need for protection than Western Europe. Nonetheless, Austen Chamberlain adopted the plan presented to him by Stresemann and which provided for guarantees of the *status quo* concerning German's boundaries in the West. According to this plan Italy, Germany France and Britain would pledge to come to the assistance of any of them against any invader.

Eastern Europe would not enjoy the same security, Germany was stating that she could not recognise the status quo on her Eastern boundaries. She would, nevertheless, pledge not to use force against her Eastern neighbours. No measures were provided to assist the countries of Eastern Europe against Germany, were her present government, or a future one, to break that pledge. Agreements were signed providing for arbitration between Germany and her Eastern Neighbours. But there were no guarantees that the procedure would be followed, or that, if it were to be followed, Germany would respect the arbitration award.

For the West, treaties with precise obligations were provided. For the East, nothing like that. Such were the Agreements of Locarno.

These agreements could prevent France from helping her Eastern allies were they to be attacked by Germany. If, in consequence of her treaties with Poland or Czechoslovakia, she were to enter in the Rhineland or other part of Germany, without being herself attacked by Germany, England and Italy were bound to assist Germany in repelling what would then be a French

427⁴⁰⁷ Vansittart said about Stresemann: "...an ex-jingo annexationist.. the best available German. He knew and denied German rearmament.." ('The Mist procession', op. cit. p. 304)

aggression. Though British politicians would deny that this was the case, Britain refused to give official and treaty-like guarantees in this respect.

British politicians had argued, at the time and later, that Britain did not have the needed power to extend her commitments in all parts of the world. In addition to her imperial responsibilities she could guarantee no more than the Western countries. This was surely not Austen Chamberlain's way of thinking. At that same period, he said in the House of Commons on March 24, 1925 (the Year of Locarno)⁴⁰⁸:

The British Empire, detached from Europe by its Dominions, linked to Europe by these islands, can do what no other nation on the face of the earth can do, and from east and west alike there comes to me the cry that, after all, it is in the hands of the British Empire and if they will that there shall be no war there will be no war.

Chamberlain's perception of Britain's power may have been incorrect, but it is the Chamberlain who believed in it who refused to extend Britain's guarantee to Eastern Europe. Locarno's agreements, originally suggested by Germany, were in reality a triumph of British diplomacy. Its accomplishments were many:

w France could no longer intervene in Germany in disregard of Britain's opinion. The Locarno treaty could rightly be interpreted by Britain as obligating her in such a case to assist Germany against France..

w Without British consent, France could not assist her eastern allies, in case of a German aggression against them. Such an assistance could only be given by invading the demilitarised, and therefore indefensible, Rhineland. However, it was up to London to decide if the German aggression was cause enough to liberate Britain from her Locarno obligations to Germany against France.

w By the same token, Germany could hardly embark on an act of aggression in Eastern Europe while being so vulnerable in the demilitarised zone in the Rhineland, unless she was assured that Britain would neutralise France and threaten her with activating the Locarno agreements against her.

w Finally, the Locarno agreements constituted a wedge between Germany and the Soviet Union⁴⁰⁹.

428⁴⁰⁸ F.S. Northedge, *op. cit.*, p. 258

429⁴⁰⁹ Ormsby-Gore, Under-Secretary of State for the colonies stated at the time in a speech that 'the significance of Locarno was tremendous. It meant that, as far as Germany was concerned, it was detached from Russia and was throwing in its lot with the Western Powers.' (*ibid.* p. 269)

Chamberlain reported to the House of Common that Germany was reluctant to recognise the status quo in Eastern Europe because she hoped to have the eastern frontiers modified by peaceful agreement with her neighbours. Chamberlain expressed his trust in Germany's sincerity. In reality he had no such trust. He envisaged the possibility of Germany's using force for this modification of frontiers and wrote to Crowe⁴¹⁰ on February 16, 1925 that Britain was not to be called upon to defend the Polish Corridor, 'for which no British Government ever will and ever can risk the bones of a single grenadier'. How little did he know!

The Locarno agreements sealed the fate of Eastern Europe. Britain believed it was not reasonable to close all doors to Germany. If the Western direction was to be forbidden to Germany's expansion, it would be wise to leave open the possibility of expansion to the East. At a time at which official and non-official politicians were unanimous in predicting a German expansion in the Eastern direction, a guaranty explicitly restricted to the West meant in reality that 'Britain will not expose the life of a single grenadier' in defence of the East. It therefore meant, as far as Britain was concerned, that the East was fair game to Germany, unless British public opinion would have a different stand. F.S. Northedge writes⁴¹¹:

The Herriot Cabinet.. proceeded to recognize the Soviets on 28 October.. One of Chamberlain's first foreign journeys on becoming Foreign Secretary in November therefore took him to Paris to see Herriot to try to agree on common Anglo-French policies towards Russia. By consenting not to carry their relations with Russia further for the moment the French Government seemed at these talks to pay the price for a British guarantee of their frontier with Germany at Locarno.

Austen Chamberlain not only refused to extend guarantees to the countries of Eastern Europe but wanted to make sure that France would not get involved in the security of the region (which was an important reason for French relations with the Soviet Union.

But that was not all. Northedge proceeds:

On 10 May 1925 there appeared in the *New York World* a copy of an alleged British Foreign Office paper purporting to represent official British views on European security. A summary of the document had appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* four days previously. The sentence in the paper which was singled out as typifying British attitudes towards Locarno stated that it was 'in spite of Russia, perhaps even because of Russia, that a policy of security must be framed'. Chamberlain was questioned about the document in the House on 11 May and gave an answer which

430⁴¹⁰ Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, 'Baldwin, a Biography', Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1969, p. 356

431⁴¹¹ F.S. Northedge, op. cit., p. 313

could hardly be interpreted as other than an admission that it was genuine⁴¹²

Let us list the elements of the puzzle revealed by the *New York world*:

w Germany, according to declarations of so many British leaders, is 'looking' to the East.

w A Locarno agreement has been signed with tight provisions for security of Germany's Western boundaries and no comparable protection for the countries on her Eastern boundaries.

w It is revealed that it was 'in spite of Russia, perhaps even because of Russia, that a policy of security must be framed'

Security against a Russian aggression is not provided by professing a disinterest towards the East. If Locarno were to provide protection against a Russian aggression, it was precisely the states of Eastern Europe that would have been the object of the tightest guarantees.

The absence of such guarantees, when it is recognised that Locarno was edged against Russia, is a clear indication that no Russian military aggression was expected.

Since Locarno, in as much as it is related with Russia, insisted on the absence of tight security in the East, and since it was recognised that Germany was 'looking to the East', we must conclude that this absence of Eastern security was thought to, somehow, work against Russia. It was not yet a free hand to Germany. It nevertheless opened possibilities to Germany which would have to negotiate with the West each case of expansion in the East.

The British leaders believed in the ineluctability of Germany attacking the Soviet Union. They had no doubt that Germany would come out victorious. Not all British leaders relished the prospect of a Germano-Soviet war. Most of them, however, would find it very 'distasteful' to risk war for the sake of preventing Germany from attacking the hated Soviet Union. For them a disinterest in the East might keep Britain out of an involvement in defence of the Soviet Union.

Germany had no boundary with the Soviet Union. An attack against the Soviet Union could occur either in alliance with one of the buffer states between the two countries, Poland being the most likely candidate, or after the conquest of one of those states. In this latter respect Britain had to face two problems.

If the conquest of a small state would result from a direct German military intervention, and if that intervention would take weeks of battling,

432⁴¹² H.C. Deb 183 5s. Col 1455. The text of the debate leaves no reasonable doubt as to the authenticity of the document published in the *Chicago Tribune*.

the possibility existed that popular pressure on the British government might force it to assist the victim of aggression. The possibility also existed that the League would discuss the matter, and it could be difficult for Britain to remain among a minority refusing to take action.

Another difficulty would later result from France's commitments in Central and Eastern Europe. It was one thing to let Germany have her way in Eastern Europe, and a totally different thing to let France, through her commitments, face alone Germany's military power. Britain would not have liked to see France defeated by Germany.

Therefore, a policy of disinterest from Eastern and Central Europe would only be practical if three conditions were to be fulfilled. The first condition would be a weakening of the League, or still better, the complete discredit of the League. The second condition would be France's disengagement from her commitments in Eastern and Central Europe. Britain would work continuously to realise both of these conditions. The third condition was that the form of Germany's aggressive interventions in Europe should be such as not to create too much public pressure to assist the victim.

In as much as British disinterest in Eastern and Central Europe was officially stated in the House of Commons, in as much as it was made the object of public speeches by British Ministers, in as much as it was communicated to Germany on the occasion of visits by British officials — and by eminent members of the British establishment — it can be considered as allowing a free hand to Germany.

However, this free hand was not absolute. It was restricted to the use of methods that would not stir public opinion in Britain too much, or for too long. It left Britain the option of negotiating each case separately.

This, to the Germans was not satisfactory, though it was good news. Germany had little patience for the 'civilised' methods of conquest hinted at by Britain. It was good news because it indicated a likelihood that the British Government would not stir the British public opinion to demand assistance to the victims of aggression, and therefore would not be in a position to interfere seriously with Germany's aggressive plans.

The British leaders could claim that, with respect to a German aggression against the Soviet Union, their role was totally passive. On occasion they would even express the hope that such aggression would not occur. Even when they were caught saying that one should not fear Germany's military revival because it was directed against the East, and while they could obviously be reproached for having made a wrong forecast, they hoped they could not be accused of favouring a German aggression against Russia.

One could even go one step further. English leaders might have wished, just wished, the unleashing of a war between Germany and the Soviet Union, which would have resulted in the destruction of Communism, without being prepared to be on record as encouraging such a war in any way whatsoever.

But, in all those cases, the British politicians were treading too fine a line, and they crossed it more than once. As to the members of the British establishment, they were less restricted in their statements. Many of them, as we saw previously, crossed that thin line in bright light

The Allies had proven that they hated and feared the Soviet regime to the extent that they tried all that was in their power to destroy it. They ended their military intervention in Russia, only when it proved to be too costly and too dangerous, considering the public opposition. Public pressure, the need to trade, brought about the recognition of the regime and the establishment of diplomatic relations.

This did not mean that the allies came to term with the existence of the Soviet Union. She was being kept, as much as possible, at arms length from European affairs. However, with official recognition and established diplomatic relations, preparing or encouraging others to attack her had become politically 'indecent'. Any such policy could only be pursued behind thick screens.

After The Advent Of Nazism In Germany

Hitler was a contender for power in Germany well before January 1933, at which time he became Chancellor of the Reich. His policies were well-known. Doubt concerning the harshness of the measures he would take, once in power, disappeared shortly after the start of his reign. By October 1933, no politician could claim ignorance of the savagery of Hitler's methods, the extent of his ambitions and the propaganda aimed at preparing and exciting the German people for a war of expansion.

His rhetoric was directed mainly against Communism and the Soviet Union. He proved in practice to be a merciless enemy of the communists, socialists, trade-union militants and all labour organisations. No one could deny his anti-Semitism and the barbarity of the measures taken against the Jews.

It was also clear that Hitler's Germany aimed at becoming the tremendous military power that her industrial and human potential allowed.

It was not necessary to be a prophet to foresee the danger that would face the world if Germany, specially under Hitler, was allowed to realise her dream of rearming. Nonetheless, at this time⁴¹³:

Lord Allen of Hurtwood, a Labour peer, told a group of friends in 'All Souls' that he "would let Hitler have whatever he wants in Eastern Europe." Lothian argued that "we should be under no

433⁴¹³ 'The Appeasers', Op. cit., p. 35. The authors give as reference a letter by Conwell-Evans to Murray dated November 5, 1933, and one by Murray to Conwell-Evans, October 27, 1933.

pledge to go to war with Germany, if Germany attacked Russia or Czechoslovakia.”⁴¹⁴

William Manchester quotes from an article by Garvin, editor of *The observer*⁴¹⁵ writing:

before a “constructive peace” could be established, “a large part of Eastern Europe’ proper should be reconstructed under German Leadership.”

Such a “constructive peace” would obviously not bring peace to that large part of Eastern Europe. No one could expect Eastern Europe to peacefully accept a “reconstruction” under German, that is to say Nazi, leadership. And where does exist that large part of Eastern Europe in need of reconstruction? It is difficult not to realise that Garvin meant mainly that vast part of Eastern Europe which belonged to the Soviet Union.

The *Fortnightly Review* advocated in 1934 to allow Germany to detach Ukraine from the Soviet Union. It assured the readers that Hitler ‘looks’ to the East only⁴¹⁶.

Such opinions were first expressed at the end of World War I at a time at which the allies were intervening militarily in the Soviet Union and supporting whatever group opposed the Communist regime. It was a time at which the destiny of Europe seemed to be in the hands of the allies. They felt responsible for defining the political future of its constitutive nations.

However, soon enough, recognised boundaries were somehow established. The idea of unleashing Germany on the Soviet Union appeared to be impractical in view of the social trouble Germany itself was going through, and the danger which existed that the country would become communist.

All this changed in 1933. The dreams could gain some substance. The communist danger had definitively disappeared from Germany thanks to the Nazis. The possibilities were now countless. Naturally such opinions could not be expressed publicly by, say, members of the British Cabinet. But what they, as responsible members of the government and subject to the microscope examination by the opposition, could not do, the establishment could, freely. The establishment was accountable to itself only. It was free to say openly what the governing circles could only say *sotto voce*.

Stressa And The Anglo-German Naval Treaty

434⁴¹⁴ At the time, the military power of Germany was ridiculously small compared to that of France. No credence can therefore be given to Lothian’s argument in 1936, quoted in an earlier chapter, promoting the same policy with Germany but motivating it by Germany’s superior military power. This policy was therefore not advocated out of weakness.

435⁴¹⁵ W. Manchester ‘The Last Lion, Winston Spencer Churchill, Alone’, (1932-1940), Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1988, p. 104

436⁴¹⁶ See Chapter 6 for the relevant quote.

France did sign the Locarno Agreements but remained concerned over the security of the eastern countries. This concern increased with the advent of Hitler to power and she suggested to complement these Agreements with an 'Eastern Locarno' which would group the interested countries and powers in a pact which would close the gaps left open in the East in the Locarno Agreements.

Publicly, Britain did not oppose the French efforts. She, however, refused to join an Eastern Locarno and did not press on Germany the necessity of joining it, were it ever to come to fruition. France's efforts at making the East secure resulted in discussions with Russia and, eventually in the signing of a treaty of assistance.

Several members of the British Cabinet were displeased. Eden writes⁴¹⁷:

Barthou was pursuing the traditional policy of many French statesmen.. calling in the power of Russia to balance the growing threat of Germany. The fact that the Soviet military power was unproved and that he himself was a man of conservative opinions did not deter him. I think that his decision was justified.. but this policy was not popular with some of my colleagues, particularly the older ones.. *It had the effect of increasing their reservations about France and deepening their desire to come to terms to Germany*

'To come to terms with Germany' was not a precise expression. It had a meaning only if the German terms were known and were accepted. It was well known that the German terms included a free hand to the East. That much had been explicitly said by Hitler to the British Ambassador Phipps. Eden was most aware of the fact and should have clarified the meaning of 'coming to terms'.

This was precisely the time at which, as described in Chapter 7, Britain had to face the fact that her policy of ignoring Germany's rearmament in contravention of treaties could not be maintained. German infractions had become too numerous and too notorious. Public opinion in Britain could not understand the lack of any British statement on this issue. The Government therefore made mild parliamentary statements which were considered by Germany as legalising her rearmament.

The British Cabinet again discussed the situation in the light of the desirability of the return of Germany to the League and the reaching of a disarmament agreement with her. Correlli Barnett writes⁴¹⁸:

A week later [early December 1934] the Cabinet finally came to their decision as to what course of action to pursue over German rearmament. The opportunity should be seized to promote

437⁴¹⁷ Op. cit., p. 98

438⁴¹⁸ Op. cit., p.399

Germany's return to Geneva, together with her agreement to some limitation on her rearmament. The '**strongest possible pressure**' was to be brought to bear on the French not to obstruct these purposes.

Thus it was that the British answer to the most crucial single question of foreign policy to arise since 1918, the British decision at this point of strategic no-return, was weakly to surrender to the insolence of a past and potential enemy, and toughly to bully a past and potential ally.

Correlli Barnett did not give an explanation. He accepted the stated motivations advanced by the British Cabinet. The fact is that the British Cabinet's choice is incomprehensible to him; it is as if a person, sound of mind, had chosen dirt over gold. And indeed, unless it is known that a free hand to Germany was in the back of the minds of the most important members of the Cabinet, their decision does not make sense and, all that Barnett could say was that it was a perverse policy that went on unfolding.

How far would the British Cabinet go? It was clear that the day would soon come when Germany would try to remilitarise the Rhineland. At Locarno time, in order to satisfy France's request for security and obtain her agreement at restricting the frontier guaranties to the West, it was agreed that any violation by Germany of the demilitarised status of the Rhineland would be considered an act of aggression as grave as the invasion of French territory.

The remilitarisation by Germany of the Rhineland would necessitate a neutralisation or a rejection of the Locarno Agreements. England chose the first, Germany chose the second. Correlli Barnett writes⁴¹⁹:

On 14 January 1935 the Cabinet returned to this awkward topic. Simon, the Foreign Secretary, foresaw a time when Germany would no longer be willing to put up with the existence of the demilitarized zone — another example of the inverted way the British looked at such questions. Simon therefore thought that **there should be no statement to the French about our attitude to the zone**. He pointed out however that the zone was part of the Locarno Treaty and that 'in certain circumstances **we might be compelled to fight** for it..' The view of the Cabinet however was that '**the demilitarization of the Rhineland was not a vital British interest**'. It was a view utterly contrary to the Chief-of-Staff's opinion at the time when the Locarno Treaty was originally signed, a view reached now **without freshly consulting the present Chiefs of Staff**. It was also a view in flat contradiction to a speech by Baldwin in the House of Common on 30 July 1934.

439⁴¹⁹ Op. Cit., p. 400

A Cabinet view to the effect that ‘the demilitarisation of the Rhineland was not a vital British interest’ should not be mentioned casually. It is not enough to point to the fact that it was contrary to the opinion of the military authorities expressed ten years before, as if there was any need for authorities, military or not, to understand the enormous and fundamental importance of the demilitarised zone.

The demilitarisation of the Rhineland was Germany’s “Achilles’ heel”. It was universally recognised — and it is inconceivable that a single Cabinet minister was ignorant of the fact — that France would no longer be capable of assisting her Eastern allies against Germany, were the Rhineland to be remilitarised by Germany.

With the Rhineland demilitarised, any German expansion towards the East would have had to be negotiated with the West. With the Rhineland remilitarised Germany would become a free agent. She will later, and with impunity, annex Austria, dismember Czechoslovakia, while the West would argue that, with France reduced to a defensive military policy, there was no way to prevent Germany from imposing her will concerning Czechoslovakia. The arguments concerning French military impotency will be advanced by the very people who in January 1935 expressed the view that the state of demilitarisation of the Rhineland was of no vital interest to Britain.

From the military point of view, this evaluation was obviously wrong. However, to state that it was wrong misses the point. If it were a mistake, we should have to determine its cause. Was it due to ignorance? Of course not. The matter had been studied, discussed, exposed, argued countless times since the armistice in 1918. Was the remilitarisation unavoidable? This was not the point of contention. ‘Unavoidable’ and ‘not of vital interest to the British Empire’ are two different things.

There is no way to avoid the conclusion that the British Cabinet was aware of the full implications of the situation. Nevertheless, it expressed the view that the demilitarisation of the Rhineland was not a British vital interest because it considered that, keeping Germany vulnerable to a France intervention, and thus preventing Germany from expanding to the East, was not a British vital interest.

‘Britain may be compelled’ was a reminder of the fact that a remilitarisation of the Rhineland was considered by the Treaty of Locarno as being an act of aggression. Britain could then be asked by France to assist her in her self-defence by re-establishing by force the demilitarised status of the zone.

Were Germany to expand to the East without remilitarising the Rhineland, France could intervene at the theoretical risk of finding Britain, in accordance with the Locarno Agreement, siding with Germany in fighting France. Britain would have preferred that the German expansion proceeds without Rhineland’s remilitarisation. A German attack on an Eastern country would then leave Britain the sole arbitrator of the situation. In all likelihood

Germany would have had to clear with England the implementation of an expansionist policy.

By starting with remilitarisation of the Rhineland, Germany would get more freedom in her policy of expansion to the East. To accept that there was no vital interest for Britain in restricting that freedom was practically removing any obstacle to Germany's expansion to the East.

There was another aspect of the question that was of vital importance. If Germany, instead of directing her 'look' to Eastern Europe, were to attack the West, would the demilitarisation of the Rhineland still be of no British vital interest? The answer is almost trivial. With a remilitarised Rhineland, fortifications would allow Germany to concentrate her efforts against France and England without having to secure the Rhineland with large troops. Germany would have much greater flexibility in her military plans.

A belief in the lack of vital interests in the demilitarised status of the Rhineland represented a large measure of trust by Britain that Hitler's aggression plans were directed and restricted to the East.

We saw that the Cabinet decided they could no longer abstain from taking a public stand on the German rearmament. On March 4, 1935 a British white paper was issued on this matter. It drew attention to the fact that, if continued at the present rate, this rearmament would harm the sense of security of Germany's neighbours and 'may consequently produce a situation where peace will be in peril'. The paper also mentioned the spirit in which the youth and the population were being indoctrinated, adding to the feelings of insecurity generated by the rearmament.⁴²⁰

In a letter to *The Times*, Lord Lothian criticised the White Paper for reflecting a view that Germany was the sole cause of European unrest. Eden commented that 'His was unfortunately by no means an isolated opinion'. Lothian had never been an 'isolated opinion'; he was a member of the establishment and one of its best representatives.

On March 9, 1935, Germany announced the existence of a military air force (prohibited by the Versailles Treaty). On March 16, it announced the introduction of conscription and the formation of an army of thirty-six divisions, measures violating the Peace Treaty of Versailles.

Britain lodged 'a formal protest in stiff terms' against these measures 'but destroyed the effect of this by inquiring in its final paragraph whether the German Government still wished our visit to take place with the scope and purpose previously agreed'⁴²¹,

This visit had been decided upon before Germany took the blatant measures of rearmament. It had been decided in spite of France's opposition and without prior consultation with France or Italy. During this visit which occurred on March 25 and 26 1935 Hitler revealed that the German Air force had already reached parity with Britain. He also announced that he would be

440⁴²⁰ Eden, op. cit., p. 126

441⁴²¹ ibid, p. 129

prepared to sign a Naval treaty with England which would allow him to build a Navy up to 35% of the strength of the British Navy

Writing about the visit to Berlin, Eden wrote, casually⁴²²:

That evening I summed up in my diary that the total results of the visit were very disappointing. In a comment on Hitler's obsession with Russia, I wrote that I was strongly against letting Germany expand Eastward: 'Apart from its dishonesty, it would be our turn next.'

This quote deserves some attention. Eden previously reported that Hitler stated he would never attack Russia. However, Hitler stressed the Russian military danger. There is no indication that, on the occasion of Simon's and Eden's visit, he asked for a free hand in Russia.

Eden wrote the above quotation in his diary on the very last night of his visit to Berlin. The events and discussions were then as fresh in his mind as they ever could be. He put himself on record as being against the dishonesty of 'letting Germany expand Eastward'. In that quote he also made it clear that 'to expand Eastward' was related to an attack against Russia.

That 'profession of faith' concerning the dishonesty of allowing Germany to expand Eastward against Russia comes here out of the blue. Eden was no Don Quixote combating imaginary enemies. It is hard to believe he would have committed such an opinion to his diary that very day, unless he felt that, to give a free hand to Germany in the East, was a policy considered by a number of Cabinet members and, in particular, was on Simon's mind.

In April 11 to 14, 1935, a conference was held between Britain France and Italy to deal with Germany's infringements of the Versailles Treaty concerning rearmament. Ramsay MacDonald, Flandin and Mussolini⁴²³:

reaffirmed their support of Austria's independence and agreed that they would "oppose by all appropriate means any unilateral repudiation of treaties which may endanger the peace of Europe." A few days later, at Geneva, the Council of the League of Nations likewise condemned Germany's violation of the Versailles arms limitations.

Two months later, on June 18, 1935, Britain concluded a naval accord with Germany. This was in flagrant violation of the Versailles arms limitations. Britain had pledged at Stresa to "oppose by all appropriate means" such unilateral repudiation. This accord allowed Germany to build her navy up to 35% of that of Britain. The accord was still more generous in terms of submarines (45% of British submarine force and, if needed, 100%).

442⁴²² *ibid.*, p. 141

443⁴²³ Telford Taylor, 'Munich The Price of Peace', Doubleday & Co., New York, 1979, p. 123

It had been suggested, as a justification for the accord, that the British admiralty was much in favour of the accord⁴²⁴. However, its signing was a political act and it is the British Government and not the admiralty which bears the responsibility for its conclusion. The significance of the pact does not need particular retrospective knowledge. It was grasped well by contemporary politicians. In a report which was transmitted by the British Ambassador in Berlin, Sir E. Phipps, Captain Muirhead-Gould wrote down his impressions from a visit to Latvia and Lithuania. He noted a feeling of uneasiness in Latvia concerning the Anglo-German naval accord. He then wrote⁴²⁵

3. In Lithuania, however, the opposition to the agreement was uncompromising and universal. I was told 'that England had broken the Treaty of Versailles every bit as much as Germany, and in thus permitting Germany (and even encouraging her) to become Mistress of the Baltic England had delivered the unfortunate Baltic States to the mercy of an implacable foe...
(d) It seemed to be the general opinion in the Baltic States that England had lost her Naval Superiority in the North Sea, and that a German fleet of 35% of the strength of the British fleet, would, in fact, be considerably superior to the British Fleet in home waters.

In a report dated June 28, 1935, William Bullitt, the U.S. Ambassador in Moscow, writes⁴²⁶:

..Mr. Wheeler-Bennett, who for many years has been connected with the British Secret Service and has just visited several European capitals, said to me recently that he and all the British diplomats he has seen since the conclusion of the Anglo-German agreement, believe that henceforth Singapore will be totally useless.

In the same report Bullitt mentions Litvinov's opinion:

The most serious concern of the Soviet Government, however, is with regard to the effect on Japan of the Anglo-German naval agreement. The Russians point out that the construction of the new German fleet will make it necessary for England to retain the greater part of her naval forces in the North Sea, that she will

444⁴²⁴ Eva H. Haraszti, 'Treaty-Breakers or "Realpolitiker"', *The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of June 1935*, Harald Boldt Verlag, Boppard Am Rhein, p. 40. The author mentions a report of a 'well-informed' Hungarian diplomat to the effect that the accord was the result of the British admiralty position and that it was opposed by the Foreign Office.

445⁴²⁵ DBFP 2nd series, vol. 13, doc. 410., p. 520

446⁴²⁶ Eva H. Haraszti, op. cit., p. 149

have to diminish her forces in the Mediterranean, and that it will be absolutely impossible for her to send a fleet to Singapore.

France and Italy were angry. The naval accord negotiated behind their back so soon after Stresa appeared to be an act of treachery. In two telegrams both dated June 19, 1935, Sir G. Clerk, British Ambassador in Paris, reports the following⁴²⁷:

In their [French] eyes the situation is that one of parties to the Treaty of Versailles, by concluding a separate agreement with Germany on naval clauses, has placed the other parties in a position of having to adapt their building programme to an arrangement in the negotiations of which they had no voice.. M. Laval.. having only been brought round with some difficulty to collective policy of the Quai d'Orsay, is naturally prone to take exaggeratedly tragic view and he plainly feels he had been let down..

..[Press] Comment, whether from the Right or from the Left, is almost without exception hostile both to the principle and to the matter of the agreement..

..its conclusion.. amounts to an abrogation of the naval clauses of the Treaty of Versailles, has dealt a serious blow to the common front of Stresa, and is directly contrary to the undertakings entered into by the Franco-British declaration of February 3rd.

Considered as a limitation on naval armaments, the Accord had a doubtful value. Germany could now go ahead in a vast program of naval construction without being subject to any reproach. Many years would have to pass before she would reach the 35% limitation. There was no guarantee that she would then, in respect of the accord, stop her naval build-up.

However, even if the accord had advantages for the British Admiralty, there was no doubt that it affected two friendly countries, France and Italy, on two counts. It affected their naval strategies and their naval construction plans, and they were not consulted with regards to the political advisability of approving a blatant violation of the Versailles Treaty, still recognised as valid by Britain, France and Italy. That the accord was in direct contradiction with the results of the Stresa conference of April could only make the British conduct appear hypocritical.

For two reasons Britain did not consult France and Italy before the conclusion of the accord. The first, an obvious one, was that Britain knew that France or Italy would oppose the conclusion of such an accord. It was safer to present them with a 'fait accompli'.

There was a second reason on which a report by O. Sargent throws some light.

⁴²⁷ DBFP, op. cit., doc. No 353 and 355, pp. 436, 437

A Minute By O. Sargent

We quoted in the first chapter a memo by O. Sargent dated February 7, 1935, arguing in thirteen points the necessity to give security to France, through a general settlement with Germany, to prevent her from concluding a treaty of mutual assistance with the Soviet Union. The crux of the argument was that the Soviet Union was likely to be attacked by Germany, Poland and Japan and that France may be involved in the defence of Russia through her projected treaty of mutual assistance. Sargent stated that France was the victim of a Russian bluff. Russia threatened to make an agreement with Germany if France would not make an agreement with Russia. Sargent argued that an agreement between Germany and Russia was an absolute impossibility as long as Hitler was alive. He advocated letting Russia become the prey of the three aforementioned countries and to avoid involvement through arrangements with Germany.

At the time Sargent's minute was discussed, some differences of opinion appeared as to the possibility of a Russian-German agreement and whether a pact between Russia and France would constitute a danger for Britain. As a result, on February 21, Vansittart wrote a memo⁴²⁸ which was in line with Sargent's, except that it stressed the need for Russia also to feel secure. A secure Russia would be less troublesome. He therefore advocated some kind of Eastern Locarno as a substitute to a Franco-Russian agreement. He nevertheless concluded that if the Eastern Locarno would prove to be unrealizable, then Britain must accept the prospect of a Franco-Russian mutual assistance treaty.

On April 1, 1935, Sargent wrote a minute developing ideas similar to those which appeared in his memo of February 7. This time his conclusions were supported by Vansittart and by Simon, then member of Cabinet as Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Here are some quotes from this document⁴²⁹:

Events are shaping in such a way that it may well be that a Franco-Russian alliance directed against Germany may be inevitable. But there still are fortunately elements in France who are alive to its ulterior dangers and are therefore still opposed to it.

.. Even though legally it would be possible so to arrange matters that France's commitments under a Franco-Russian alliance would not bring into operation our commitments under Locarno, nevertheless .. I venture to think that the existence of a Franco-Russian alliance will make the British public and British Parliament far more chary of implementing our Locarno obligations than they are at present..

448⁴²⁸ DBFP, 2nd series, doc. No 484, p. 559

449⁴²⁹ DBFP, 2nd series, vol 12, doc. 678, p. 793

.. Since it is generally recognised that Germany in present circumstances at any rate ***does not intend to expand in the west but does intend to expand in the east***, it follows that it is France who undertakes the real risk of having to intervene to prevent this expansion in the east, whereas Russia undertakes in reality no risk at all of having to intervene to prevent Germany's expansion in the west.

Up to that point there is nothing much new in this minute with respect to the February memo. In Sargent's opinion Germany is bent on expanding in the East and, since Britain would not need Russia's help to protect the unthreatened west, she should not involve herself in Russia's defence.

Of course, hatred of the Soviet Union played a dominant role. If it was not for that, Sargent would be open to the possibility, however small, that Germany either would start with the West or would turn to the West after having finished with the East. It made sense to impose on Germany a struggle on two fronts instead of letting her attack each victim separately, one after the other.

There is more to it. Sargent goes on writing:

If by means of a Franco-Russian alliance we closed to Germany all means of expansion into the East, where she is less likely to come into conflict with British, or indeed any other, interests than elsewhere, we must be prepared for German pressure down the Danube to be increased proportionately.. Again, ***a German penetration down the Danube would be much more likely to be successful than a penetration into Russia and far more likely, if successful, to be damaging to vital British interests.***

For the above reasons I hope that, for France's sake as well as our own, ***we will at Stresa do all we can to prevent the conclusion of a direct Franco-Russian military alliance*** directed against Germany

These conclusions won universal support in the Foreign Office. They throw a light on the British role at Stresa. That conference was supposed to face the threat of German rearmament resulting from her official repudiation of the relevant clauses of the Treaty of Versailles. Britain's worry seemed not so much to restrain Germany, to build a front that would force Germany to think twice before committing an act of aggression; Britain's worry was more concentrated on preventing a Russo-French alliance. Germany's expansion should be channelled to the East instead of being directed to the Danube basin.

With this avowed resentment against France's policy towards the Soviet Union, Britain could not but be sensitive to hints repeatedly given by the

Germans as to the advantages of negotiations restricted to their two countries. In a telegram to Simon dated February 25, 1935 Phipps reports⁴³⁰

In private conversation with me last night the Chancellor's private secretary remarked how easy it would be for Great Britain and Germany to come to an agreement on all subjects. He added regretfully, however, that it seemed to be the policy of his Majesty's Government not to contemplate any separate arrangement. I replied that this was so for they felt peace and 'apaiseement' must be general.

It is quite possible that Chancellor, in the course of Berlin conversations, may approach you on these lines. There are of course many high placed persons in Nazi party, in the army and in official circles who strongly support the idea of an Anglo-German understanding.

On March 25, 1935 Simon and Eden visited Hitler. After the unilateral repudiation of the military clauses of the Versailles Treaty by Germany and after Britain's stiff protest on that account, it would have been expected that, in private with Hitler, the British visitors would do their best to impress on him the seriousness of the protest and the dangerous consequences of Germany's behaviour.

Moreover, it was publicly known that Britain, France and Italy would meet at Stresa to decide the measures they would take to face the new situation. This meeting could have had a restraining effect on Germany. Hitler did not yet know how strong the reaction would be at Stresa.

The least Simon could have done, would have been to leave Hitler in doubt. However, Simon did his best to leave Hitler in no doubt that Stresa would be a harmless conference. He told Hitler⁴³¹:

People in England had been very greatly disturbed by a series of acts on the part of Germany — he did not wish to discuss the question whether these acts were justified or not, but merely to report the fact

Simon added later:

There was only one point on which the Chancellor appeared to be under some misapprehension. He had spoken more than once as if the British people were unable to understand the motives which had led to the determined efforts on the part of Germany to rehabilitate herself in the moral spheres and in other spheres. He would say most definitely that if the Chancellor thought this, he was quite wrong. The British people understood quite well, and it

450⁴³⁰ *ibid.*, doc. 511, p. 582

451⁴³¹ *ibid.*, doc. 651, p.703

was because they did understand, that they were anxious to see whether they could find some basis of co-operation with Germany on a footing of real equality.

The full meaning of this quotation can be realised when it is noted that Hitler, a few moments earlier had explained that Germany's violations of the Versailles military clauses were the result of the need for moral rehabilitation. Simon's statement constituted an approval of Germany's violations, which he calls 'determined efforts on the part of Germany to rehabilitate herself in the moral sphere..'. After that, Hitler knew that Stresa would be of no consequence.

Simon was very accommodating on other topics. About a French note to Germany advocating an Eastern Locarno, 'Simon made it clear that he was not recommending any course of action about the French note, but merely asking for information'.

Simon did not challenge Hitler's claim that Germany did not commit any offence against Austria. All he had to say of importance was that:

His Majesty's Government would like to see such a policy pursued as would ensure the integrity and independence of Austria

His Majesty's Government does not think it essential, absolutely necessary for peace etc... A pious wish 'would like to see', is all that came out. What reinforces the feeling of Britain's weakness is that Simon, after this mild statement adds:

But his Majesty's Government could not treat Austria in the same way as a country like Belgium which lay at their doors. His Majesty's Government's only desire was to see that part of Europe settle down

There is no clearer diplomatic way to inform Hitler that Britain would not make a hullabaloo if Germany were to annex Austria. Hitler will remember that at the proper time.

A naval accord was discussed at the Berlin meeting. Simon underlined three times the fact that 'it would be understood, of course, that this proposal was made without prejudice to the validity of existing treaty provisions.' And Simon was a lawyer!

On May 2, 1935, the pact of mutual assistance between France and the Soviet Union was signed. On May 16, 1935, a similar pact was signed between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. England had failed in her efforts to keep the Soviet Union out of the European affairs. The British establishment was very angry.

Hitler made it still easier for Britain to sign the Naval accord. He made an important speech in May in which, while manifesting ardent desires for

peace and friendly relations with the west, he violently attacked communism and the Soviet Union. For good measure he even delivered a passionate defence of private property. One cannot but agree with such a man, and the agreement was signed.

We saw that the agreement was the subject of a long discussion between Chamberlain and Hitler at the Berchtesgaden meeting. Both agreed that it implied a belief that war would never occur between the two countries. Hitler made a statement to Simon that had a similar implication:

Herr Hitler said that his claim to 35 per cent. of the British fleet implied unequivocal recognition of British naval superiority. He emphasized the fact that he did not make this claim for a limited period of 2, 5 or 6 years. Any assurance which he gave with regard to it would be for ever.

It was universally understood that by the Anglo-German Naval Accord, Germany would become the dominating naval power in the Baltic. Britain was quite aware of the fact, but did not mind. A week before the signing of the accord, the Foreign Office asked the Admiralty questions related to the matter. The accord was signed before the Foreign Office had received an answer. That answer was sent to them July 12, 1935, it said⁴³²

I have laid before my Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty your letter of the 11th June, asking for the views of the Admiralty on the question whether vital British interests would be affected by a disregard by Germany -

- (1) Of Articles 195 and 196 of the Treaty of Versailles, forbidding the existence of fortifications on the Baltic coast and the refortification of the North Sea coasts and of East Prussia.. and
- (2) Of Article 115 forbidding the re-establishment of fortifications.. on the Islands of Heligoland and Dune.

My Lords assume that the circumstances in which we might become involved in war with Germany are most probably those arising out of our commitments under the Locarno Treaty, and the Air Pact, if the latter is concluded. It is, and presumably will continue to be, no part of our policy to enter into commitments in respect of Eastern European affairs.

At Locarno time, Austen declared that though Britain is not prepared to make commitments with respect to Eastern Europe, this should not be taken as meaning that Britain would not be prepared to intervene in the case of an aggression affecting that region. The Admiralty, however, understood what the words meant and was making the non-involvement of Britain in Eastern Europe part of British Strategy. It is also clear that Britain, while preparing

452⁴³² DBFP series 2, vol 13, doc. 411, p. 522

to violate, with Germany, the Versailles military clauses, had some second thoughts about the consequences of other violations. She is in a difficult position. Having become an accomplice of Germany's treaty violations, Britain can hardly argue the sanctity of treaties to prevent other violations.

The Admiralty went on:

On this assumption, My Lords consider that the only British interest which will be directly affected in the event of war by the situation in the Baltic will be the security of our trade in that area. ***This trade is not vital.*** In general, the additional security which would be afforded to German Naval Bases by the removal of the restrictions in Article 195 would increase the effectiveness of the German Naval forces and tend to limit our operations. Much the same considerations apply to Article 196, which forbids the increase of existing fortifications or the construction of new fortifications within 50 kilometres of the German coast or on German islands off the coast.

The increase in the effectiveness of the German Naval forces and the limitations on British operations did not prevent the Admiralty to reach the following conclusions:

- a) The possibility of protecting our trade in the Baltic will not be determined by the existence or otherwise of gun defences in the area covered by the articles.
- b) The possibility of our undertaking offensive operations in the Baltic would be circumscribed, since such operations could only be undertaken with an increased risk of loss that we might be unable to accept, or these operations would have to be limited in their scope.
- c) The strategical situation would be altered to our disadvantage, but it cannot be said that any vital interest would be directly affected.

Indirectly, the Admiralty recognised that the refortifications discussed would be threatening to Eastern Europe. It went on saying:

If Germany were to take action in the direction of re-establishing or strengthening her fortifications, it could only be with the intention of closing the entrance to the Baltic or, at any rate, of controlling it.

The control of the entrance to the Baltic and its possible closure would be of importance to the riparian states Sweden, Poland, Lithuania, Estonia Latvia, Finland and the Soviet Union. Apparently, the vital interests of these countries were no vital interest of Britain.

Lord Gladwyn (Jebb) of the Foreign Office, wrote in his memoirs⁴³³:

..the sensible thing would be for the four great European Powers⁴³⁴ to get together and try to agree on a common world policy. However, if the Germans were impossible.. then the next best thing would be to split Italy off from Germany by offering her certain concessions that might be negotiable; recognizing.. that, short of war, or the threat of war, Germany was not going to be deterred from re-occupying the Rhineland, absorbing Austria, and establishing some economic superiority over Czechoslovakia and South-East Europe generally; but recognizing also that, if she really went about establishing her '*Mittleuropa* outlet' by force of arms *she would be bound one day to seek further 'outlets' in the Ukraine*, in other words that she would eventually come up against the Soviet Union, in which case the West would do what it seemed in its best interests to do, having by that time accumulated heavy armaments, more especially in the air. The short-hand for this policy was 'the Stressa Front'. *The policy may appear to be immoral to some.*

I had more or less arrived at these conclusions before the re-occupation of the Rhineland in March 1936..

Lord Galdwyn was in tune with the thoughts prevailing in the Government circles. 'The West would do what it seemed in its best interests to do', wrote Galdwin without being more specific. He did not need to be. Britain was to keep quiet while Germany would absorb small nations and then attack the Soviet Union. In the meanwhile Britain would pursue a mainly defensive rearmament program (air force) to face the case of Germany, were she to 'look' Westward.

Galdwyn, well informed, and describing a policy he supported, summarised it by the designation 'Stressa Front'. While countries were advertising this conference as designed to oppose Germany's unrestricted rearmament, the British government were devising a totally different policy which was never avowed publicly.

The Remilitarisation Of The Rhineland

The Versailles Peace Treaty had imposed on Germany the demilitarisation of the Rhineland. Germany was forbidden to have military troops and to erect fortifications in that region. The Locarno Treaty freely negotiated with Germany, maintained the demilitarisation status of the Rhineland and stipulated that minor violations to that status should be

433⁴³³ 'The Memoirs of Lord Galdwyn', Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1972

434⁴³⁴ These four European powers were, in Lord Galdwyn's view, Britain, France, Germany and Italy. The Soviet Union was obviously disqualified, either for not being European, or not being a great power

reported to the League of Nations for appropriate action. However, a flagrant violation would be considered an act of aggression against which France would be entitled to take appropriate military measures without waiting for the case to be brought up to the League. Britain would then be obligated to assist France.

While criticising the Versailles Treaty imposed on a defeated Germany, Hitler publicly recognised that such was not the case with the Locarno accords. According to him, they had been freely negotiated with Germany. Hitler specifically pledged to respect the demilitarised status of the Rhineland.

The remilitarisation of the Rhineland, in March 1936, was a far-reaching event. The absence of a military response to force Germany to evacuate her troops from the Rhineland was an even greater event. The maintenance of the demilitarised Zone was for France a matter of life and death. The overpowering potential of the German military was not in question. Equally not in question was the fact that the demilitarised status of the Rhineland **WAS THE ONLY REMAINING GUARANTEE TO FRANCE**. It made it possible for her to intervene before Germany could rearm at will.

Not opposing the remilitarisation by force had an ominous meaning. If France did not intervene when the way to the heart of Germany was open, and she could do it with relative impunity, and when it was so vitally important to do it, then it was unlikely that she would intervene when the circumstances would be so much less favourable and when the independence of a small nation would be at stake.

Similarly, when Britain not only advertised her disinterest in Eastern Europe but exercised the utmost pressure to prevent a French military reaction to the remilitarisation of the Rhineland, then the small nations in Eastern Europe took notice that Britain had decided that Germany, and Germany alone, should be the power that counts in that region.

The remilitarisation of the Rhineland did not take France and Britain by surprise. They predicted that occurrence and discussed the measures to be taken to prevent it or to face it. There are too many relevant quotations demonstrating that, whether in the name of peace or in that of impotence, Britain pressed France into accepting the inevitable. Britain even suggested that the remilitarisation of the Rhineland be offered to Germany in return for a price. The price could be Germany's return to the League and her acceptance to given limits on her rearmament.

The real worries of the British Cabinet were expressed by Baldwin in a Cabinet meeting. As quoted in chapter 5, it was to the effect that, while it was quite possible for France, with Russian help⁴³⁵, to put an end to Germany's remilitarisation of the Rhineland, there was the risk that such an action would result in the Bolshevisation of Germany.

435⁴³⁵ France did not need Russia's help to overpower the German forces in the Rhineland. However, by mentioning Russia, Baldwin made the communist threat appear more concrete.

The most telling fact is that, had the resolve of France and Britain to stop Germany from remilitarisation of the Rhineland been made absolutely clear, there can be no shadow of a doubt that Hitler would not have considered the operation at that time. Of course, had Britain and France taken earlier the appropriate measures to denounce Germany's illegal rearmament as soon as it became evident, Germany would not have become such a military power.

What makes such remark relevant is the fact that the steps that allowed German to become a superior power, were predictable and were predicted by the British Cabinet. It stood aloof under the belief that the German military would be directed to the East. Larry Pratt quoting from Simon's diary and from his notes from the 11th to the 17th of April 1935 writes: "Hitler would go on rearming but he had no designs in the West; ..no front could or should try to restrain him. If Germany had to act, ***'it is surely better that she act in the East. That will at worst occupy her energies for a long time'*** ...". Pratt goes on quoting Simon⁴³⁶:

I greatly doubt whether the efficiency of the 'united front' is as great a controlling force on German policy as it might appear to be. Its value is not so much that it diverts and restricts Germany's present action as that ***it is our only security if Germany turns nasty***. But to use it in empty and futile protests (Geneva, Stresa) seems to me to *weaken* its utility.

These two quotes from the British Secretary of Foreign Affairs summarise the attitude and the motivations of the British Government. They deserve a close study. One striking feature is the incoherence: of the second quote:

w Nine months earlier, when the assassination of Dolfuss signalled that Germany was preparing a *coup* against Austria, Italy sent army divisions to the Brenner pass. She made it clear that she would intervene militarily in Austria against such an eventuality. Germany was impressed, and so was Neville Chamberlain who noted that such was the way to speak to Hitler.

w What Italy, alone, could do in July 1934, Simon implies that, nine months later, it cannot be done by Italy, France and Britain. He doubts the "efficiency of the 'united front' is as great a controlling force on Germany's policy".

w He admits that 'the united front' is 'our only security if Germany turns out nasty' sometimes in the future, that is to say when she will be much stronger then at the time.

456⁴³⁶ Op. cit., p. 20

Though the second quote from John seems incoherent, his policies make some sense in the light of the first quote. It is clear that Simon, while recognising the relative overwhelming military strength of 'the united front', had no interest 'controlling' Germany. He thought that if Germany 'acted' in the East it will 'at worst' occupy her for a long time. This means that Germany was expected to confront the Soviet Union; nothing else in the East could occupy Germany's energies for a long time.

Simon kept in mind that Germany could turn out 'nasty'. There was no nastiness in acting in the East and, in this case, no front should restrain Germany. However, half-heartedly, Simon was recording the possibility of Germany's turning nasty. The front that would be useful in such a case was about to be destroyed two months later by Britain's Naval Accord with Germany. The option for restraining Germany 'if she turns out nasty' was about to be turned into dust *by the predicted and unopposed remilitarisation of the Rhineland*⁴³⁷.

457⁴³⁷The Soviet Union, was expected to be defeated by Germany. Nobody knew how long the operation would last. What was certain was that were Germany to later turn nasty, a front which would not include the Soviet Union would not be able to restrain Germany.

CHAPTER XI

THE POLICY OF A FREE HAND. PART 2 (The Chamberlain Era up to Munich)

Centres Of Power In Foreign Affairs

Differences of political views have always existed between the members of the British Cabinet as well as among the many high officials of the Foreign Office. With the assumption of power by Hitler, these differences evolved into serious divergences. It soon became possible to distinguish definite political trends.

In his memoirs, Eden refers to the 'elder' members of the Cabinet as being pro-German, insensitive to Germany's speedy rearmament and motivated by their hate of the Soviet Union. The elders were not a majority in the Cabinet, however, they managed to control the Cabinet through their prestige and influence.

The Foreign Office was dominated by the personality and experience of such members as Vansittart, Sargent, Strang, Collier and others. They were all acutely attuned to the German danger but differed on how to face it. It was usual for them to discuss their differences and, more often than not, they ended up agreeing on common recommendations.

These recommendations, even when supported by Eden, had little effect. Eden was weak and did not stand his grounds. Paradoxically, when the Foreign Office seemed to have lost the internal battle, and Halifax became Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the voice of the Foreign Office would, sporadically, become more effective. Halifax being close to the Prime Minister, influence on him could have important consequences on Cabinet decisions.

At the time, there were many centres of power in foreign affairs. By deciding the stand the Prime Minister would take in a House debate, by issuing instructions — not always respected — as to the policy the Prime Minister would have to follow at decisive meetings and by issuing public expressions of policy, the Cabinet, subject to approval by Parliament, was supposed to be supreme. It had the last word on policy determination. However, since the Cabinet often had to express itself in convoluted ways, the Foreign Office had room for manoeuvre. It was the body issuing instructions to the ambassadors on a day to day basis. As such, the Foreign Office was also a Centre of power.

By-passing the Cabinet and the Foreign Office and, as we shall see, implementing a personal policy, the Prime Minister himself, together with

the people willing to play his game, represented a centre of power distinct from that of the Cabinet.

Faced with the question of ascertaining Britain's foreign policies in the thirties, and particularly under Chamberlain's premiership, the historian has to consider documents telling differing stories. What was the British foreign policy at the time? It all depended on which power centre had the upper hand, and this changed according to the state of the public opinion and the measure of its reflection on the mood of the House.

N. Henderson, the British ambassador in Germany, in agreement with Chamberlain, disregarded instructions from the Foreign Office which reflected Cabinet decisions⁴³⁸. Germany was supposed to take Henderson's statements at their face value, while at the same time, the German leaders knew that the professions of 'goodwill' by the British ambassador were never, in public, as strongly and openly expressed by the British leaders. Germany was aware of the ongoing struggle between the Foreign Office and the British Premier's circle⁴³⁹. In such conditions, Germany had her doubts concerning the Premier's ability to always deliver what the 'good will' expressions promised.

The Foreign Office instructions, even when not obeyed, had therefore important effects on how Germany perceived the English mood. Similarly, important members of the British establishment would meet Hitler in Germany and assure him of their sympathy with Germany's ambitions. Hitler, while conscious of the fact that such sympathies ran against the public opinion in Britain, would take note of the important fact that very influential British citizens were supporting his aggressive policy towards Eastern Europe.

British policy was made up of all these elements. The British establishment, the British conservative House, the Foreign Office, the Cabinet and the Premier shared certain common stands. They all hated the Soviet Union, though they were not all motivated by this hate to the same

458⁴³⁸ DBFP, series 2, vol 18, doc 455, Note 1. We can read there:

459 Professor T.P. Conwell-Evans states that Sir Neville later told him, when he visited him in Berlin, that he 'based his policy on instructions constantly received from 10, Downing Street and not on the views of the Permanent Head of the Foreign Office'

460The note adds that no evidence of this has been found in the Foreign Office or in Chamberlain's Private papers. No evidence was expected to be found in the FO since the idea was to by-pass it. The absence of evidence in Chamberlain's papers is no evidence against Professor Conwell-Evans. In view of Henderson's behaviour in Berlin, and in view of other precedents concerning Chamberlain's methods, Conwell-Evans evidence is very credible. In addition, 'instructions constantly received' by Henderson should be looked for, if not destroyed, in Henderson's papers.

461⁴³⁹ DBFP, series 2, vol 19, doc. 344, p. 569. On November 23, 1937, Henderson wrote to Sargent:

462 It is true that my personal position with German ministers is not in a sense adversely affected by the constant reports they receive from London to the effect that the Foreign Office disapprove of me

degree. They all wished to keep Britain out of involvement in Eastern Europe, but not all were prepared to give Hitler, a free hand in Eastern Europe. They were all reluctant to accept a situation in which Britain and Russia would be allies, but some would not hesitate to work for such an alliance if it was in Britain's best interests. They differed over their estimates of the German danger to the West and, consequently, over the needs for military preparedness. They also differed concerning the measure of encouragement, or discouragement, to be expressed to Germany as to her ambitions in the East.

Foreign Office Versus Cabinet

The Secretary for Foreign Affairs heads the Foreign Office and is also a member of the Cabinet. Speaking of the differences between Cabinet and Foreign Office, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs is here considered as a Cabinet member who, like any other Cabinet member, could be in tune or out of tune with the Foreign Office tendencies.

The Foreign Office was aware that a firm stand by Britain, implying her readiness to get involved to prevent aggression in Eastern as well as in Western Europe, would ensure peace over the continent. It would, of course have required that Britain collaborate with France in her efforts to prevent Germany's rearmament, and encourage France to enforce the demilitarisation of the Rhineland. Alternatively, it would have required an effort at rearmament commensurate with the readiness to get involved in the preservation of peace in Central and Eastern Europe.

The Foreign Office also knew of the very Conservative nature of the House, and of the 'elder' members of the Cabinet. They knew how strong was their blind anti-communism. They knew that there was no chance that such a house and such a Cabinet would implement a policy of collective security which would restrain a Germany so virulently anti-communist.

The Foreign Office, in vain, sounded the alarm concerning Germany's secret rearmament. When Germany's rearmament became threatening they again sounded the alarm for better military preparation. While there was still time and capability to chastise an aggressive Germany, they urged serious warnings be given that Britain would not allow an attempt against the independence of either Austria or Czechoslovakia. When it became doubtful that Germany could be threatened, they resigned themselves to advocate a policy of ambiguity as to what would be Britain's stand, with the knowledge that, at the time of decision, Britain would keep out of any serious involvement. On occasion they urged that a free hand be given to Germany in Eastern Europe against the Soviet Union but not in Central Europe where Britain had, they said, vital interests.

The 'elder' members of the Cabinet did not have to advocate a free hand to Germany. It was enough to steer Britain's policy on a course that would make it credible that Britain had no other choice. Once Germany was

deliberately allowed to cross with immunity the point of no return, the point at which she could not be stopped without war, British involvement would become more difficult. A free hand to Hitler could then be presented as being imposed by the circumstances. Even then it would not be described as a free hand but as a 'realistic policy' .

Preparations had been restricted by the Cabinet to the defence of the British Island, and were at a lower level than what was strictly necessary. In consequence, many of the advocates for collective security and for a strong stand against Germany would feel compelled to reject a British involvement in Central and Eastern Europe, for as long as it would take Britain to rearm. The role of diplomacy would then be that of 'gaining time' by using all the means that could delay either Germany's aggression or Britain's stand against it.

The Baldwin-Hitler Meeting That Never Was

In March 1936, Germany military reoccupied the Rhineland. The British leaders feared a strong French reaction which could result in the fall of the Nazi regime. Britain exerted strong pressure on France to prevent her from military action. The establishment position can be seen from a letter by Violet Markham to Thomas Jones⁴⁴⁰ dated March 22, 1936⁴⁴¹:

I am simply in despair about the European situation. Germany was, of course (as always), utterly wrong in method though right in fact. But she has flung us into the arms of France in a deplorable way; you have seen how the French are exulting over the military guarantees into which England has now entered. Flandin triumphed all along the line in London; was there ever anything more grotesque than the suggestion of the international force to police a Rhur zone? To me is an utter scandal that Italy, who is slaughtering Abyssinians at the moment, should sit in judgment on Germany for moving troops into her own country. Does this new agreement mean that if France gets embroiled with Germany we have to go and fight with Italy and Russia? But because of the Soviet Pact with France the whole Labour Party has swung over on to the French side and Russia is coming out on top in a most disgusting way

Violet Markham got the wrong impressions from the official communiqués. In fact Flandin failed totally to get Britain to stand up to her Locarno commitments (in spite of the official expression to the contrary). All he obtained was insignificant military consultations between the British and French staffs as a face saving measure. Britain, of course, protested against

463⁴⁴⁰ Thomas Jones was a personal friend of Baldwin. He was his confidant and adviser. They were meeting frequently.

464⁴⁴¹ Thomas Jones, 'A Diary With Letters 1931-1950', Oxford University Press, London, 1954, p. 183-184

Germany's military reoccupation of the Rhineland. It also sent an aggressive questionnaire asking Hitler if he was willing to commit himself to definite policies.

Violet Markham's letter may help to understand how it came about that a German act of unilateral repudiation of the Treaty of Locarno, accompanied with a military operation violating the French security, should result in a decrease of French popularity and an increase of German popularity in British Conservative circles. In a letter dated April 4, 1936, Thomas Jones writes⁴⁴²:

In two party meetings of back-benchers last week, the first, addressed by Austen and Winston, was on the whole pro-French; but two or three days later opinion had swung round to a majority of perhaps 5 to 4 for Germany. *Part of the opposition to France is influenced by the fear of our being drawn in on the side of Russia.*

In this atmosphere, the merits of the German side seemed convincing. Speaking of Ribbentrop, Thomas Jones says after meeting him on April 8, 1937⁴⁴³:

He talks English very well and *I'm sure* does not want war *in the West*

By implication, this meant that Ribbentrop might want war in the East. The situation, as seen by the British establishment, required an 'understanding' with Germany. In a letter dated May 3, 1937, Thomas Jones wrote from Cliveden⁴⁴⁴:

I have written today to the P.M. urging him again.. not to put Germany publicly in the dock and ply her with questions as if she were a criminal. There will be no conciliation possible with that method. *I wish Phipps were an ambassador of some weight and power.*

Phipps' was not blind to Germany's danger and was constantly reporting on Germany's aims and advanced state of rearmament. It was necessary, therefore, to denigrate him.

On May 16 T. Jones reports from Berlin on an interview with Ribbentrop⁴⁴⁵:

R. began his talk which lasted till lunchtime, with brief interruptions, by saying that he had sent for me in order to talk

465⁴⁴² *ibid.*, p. 185

466⁴⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 186

467⁴⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 193

468⁴⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 197

without reserve and *in a way he could not with Phipps* at the Embassy. He wished me to pass on to Mr. Baldwin what he said.. He said he knew what my position was in London and if I could agree to go to and fro between him and Mr. Baldwin in confidence, my visit might be of the greatest importance — as important as Joseph Chamberlain's. *'I want Mr. Baldwin to meet Hitler..* I put off Halifax until I could see you, to try this method first.

Ribbentrop wants to by-pass Phipps and the Foreign Office and T. Jones is more than willing. He will suggest to Baldwin to get rid of Phipps. The idea of a Baldwin-Hitler visit seemed to be to his liking and he will recommend it to Baldwin.

Tom Jones met Hitler on May 17, 1936 and told him⁴⁴⁶:

Shortly after Mr Baldwin returned victorious from the last election campaign to enter upon his third premiership he had told me that among the objects which he hoped to pursue were the following: *to launch the young King, to get alongside Germany,* and to hand over his party united and in good heart to his successor. The reference to Germany obviously pleased Hitler

Back from his visit to Hitler, Tom Jones was Baldwin's guest at Chequers for a few days. Baldwin having asked him what to do, he answered⁴⁴⁷:

2) If it is our policy *to get alongside Germany*, then the sooner Phipps is transferred elsewhere the better. He should be replaced by a man of D'Abernon or Willington type, unhampered by professional diplomatic tradition, able of course to speak German, and *to enter with sympathetic interest into Hitler's aspirations.*

3) Hitler believes in you, and believes that only you in this country can bring about the reorientation of England, France and Germany which he desires. He wants to meet you to tell you this face to face. This secret visit should be arranged without too much delay, and a communiqué issued shortly after saying it had taken place. The visit of Halifax or appointment of successor to Phipps should follow at once, the points of the new 'alliance' worked out and its relations with the League or the reconstructed League

6) We should not be compromised into undertaking to protect Austria from falling into the lap of Germany. We do not mean to fight for Austria any more than for Abyssinia. We are not going to impose sanctions against Germany under any formula of collective security. *Has this been made crystal clear to France?*

469⁴⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 200

470⁴⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 208

Already in 1936, Halifax was considered the proper man for a further visit to Hitler. Alliances are made against prospective enemies. Who could be that enemy which threatens Germany, Britain and France? Tom Jones is more explicit in a letter dated May 23 written at Chequers where he is Baldwin's guest⁴⁴⁸:

*We have to choose between Russia and Germany and choose soon, for if we do not do so, Germany and Italy will converge as, apart from Austria, they have no fundamental divergences. Hitler feels quite unequal to standing up alone to Russia and is disturbed by the way in which Russia and Czechoslovakia are concerting an air policy. He is therefore asking for **an alliance with us to form a bulwark against the spread of Communism. Our P.M. is not indisposed to attempt this** as a final effort before he resigns after the Coronation next year, to make way for Neville Chamberlain*

The projected meeting between Baldwin and Hitler was the object of further discussions between Britain and Germany. The place of the meeting had to be chosen. It would be neither Britain nor Germany though, at one time, a flight by Hitler to Chequers was considered. The time had to be studied. Germany was asked if it could wait till August.

On June 2, 1936, the subject was resumed between T. Jones and Ribbentrop⁴⁴⁹:

Lunch alone with von Ribbentrop at the Carlton. Reported what had transpired since my visit to Berlin with special reference to the proposed secret meeting of Hitler and S.B. Said S.B. has never flown and does not much like the sea. I assumed one could not expect Hitler to land in England any more than our P.M. in Germany. Von R. said he could arrange for Hitler to come quite close to our coast, two or three miles from Dover or Folkstone.. He agreed that to postpone the meeting until S.B. went on his holidays to Aix was undesirable, and if the attempt to secure S.B. failed the sooner Halifax met the Fuhrer the better

Soon the British fears increased, and the Conservative balance moved still more towards Germany. In June 1936, general elections in France brought to power the French Popular Front. The French Prime Minister was Leon Blum, a socialist. The communists, while not participating in the government, were part of the Popular Front coalition. The preparations for the Baldwin-Hitler meeting went on. On June 8, T. Jones wrote⁴⁵⁰:

471⁴⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 209

472⁴⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 215

473⁴⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 219

Saw Horace Wilson.. He had reported to S.B. my week-end adventures at Sandwich. S.B. replied that he had been thinking a lot at Wotton and Ford Manor and was in favour of meeting Hitler but was of the view that the meeting had better be quite open. This would be more in keeping with his own (S.B.) 'character'. He had since seen Eden and it was agreed between them that Eden should also think hard over the week-end. S.B. is willing to go to Berlin, accompanied by Eden. I warned H.W. that *the interviews must not get mixed up with the apparatus of the Foreign Office, as one of its objects was to escape it.*

On June 16, Eden informed T. Jones that he strongly objected to the proposed meeting 'and the matter was dropped'.

And so it was that, after Germany's remilitarisation of the Rhineland, and while protesting strongly against it and sending a stern questionnaire to Germany, Britain, behind France's back, was negotiating with her the possibility of an alliance against Russia which would follow a visit between Baldwin and Hitler or between Halifax and Hitler.

The scheme did not go through. Eden foiled it. The idea was resuscitated a year later. Halifax still was to be a main player but in more adverse conditions. The crisis over the remilitarisation of the Rhineland was over. Germany felt immune from a French retaliation and the balance of military preparedness had shifted. Germany, which still could be defeated, was already a military power to be reckoned with.

A year earlier Britain could think of an alliance with Germany. The fear of the Popular Front in France motivated the Conservative circles toward it. Now, in 1937, the situation had changed. Blum was no longer in power in France were the left threat seemed to be receding. The Spanish civil war was dividing the British public opinion and the barbaric destruction of Guernica by German bombers revolted British friends and enemies of Germany. An alliance was out of the question, though hatred of the Soviet Union remained a strong bond between the British and German Leaders.

Halifax had less cards to play with. He had to reckon with the German feeling that Britain was preventing her from realising her aspirations. In short, Britain was not giving her an unqualified free hand in Eastern Europe.

Chamberlain And The Foreign Office

Since 1931, and without interruption, Neville Chamberlain had been a Cabinet member. As the Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1931 to 1937 he bore an essential responsibility for budget allocations for the armed forces. To state in 1937 that, in view of the military weakness of Britain, the country could not take the strong stand, which should otherwise have been her policy, was a recognition of failure.

A failure which condemned the Foreign Policy of a country to impotency would, in most circumstances, cause the fall of the responsible

government. Nevertheless, this was never considered. The House did not express any condemnation.

After all, there was a group of Conservative members in the House, Churchill among them, who had, along with the Foreign Office, foretold the predicament in which the country would fall as a result both of its tolerant policy toward Germany, and the lack of military preparations. This group could have brought forward an alternative to the Chamberlain Cabinet. However, that state of unpreparedness which 'forced' Britain to 'reluctantly' abstain from involvement against aggression in the East, had been deliberately brought about by the Government, with the complicity of the House. It was based on the trust that Hitler 'would look' exclusively to the East.

Although this trust was expressed in reports and Cabinet meetings, it was never publicly alluded to by responsible officials. The people were told that Hitler wanted peace, that by redressing some of Versailles 'mistakes', by restoring Germany's honour and treating her as an equal (equal in the right to rearm) Germany would become as peaceful as Britain. This was said in the knowledge that it was absolutely false.

The Cabinet, through the Foreign Office, was flooded with accurate reports, from most reliable sources, describing the aggressive mood of the German people, deliberately created by the Nazi. They also described the horror of the regime, and brought indisputable proof — and it was not disputed in private — that Germany would proceed to aggressively expand to the East. This was done at a time at which Germany was still militarily very weak. She could have easily been stopped, without any British involvement. All Britain had to do was to abstain from discouraging France, or even Poland⁴⁵¹. Neville Chamberlain, more than anyone else in the Cabinet, was aware of the German danger. Nevertheless, more than anyone else he used his influence to prevent a rearmament policy geared at stopping Germany. This, in spite of the obvious fact that the price to pay for stopping Hitler would increase very fast with time, until it would be out of reach.

Even before he became Prime Minister, Chamberlain played an important role in Foreign Affairs. We saw the strong interest he took in problems related to the Far-East and how his proposal to Simon, and later

474⁴⁵¹ DBFP, series 2, vol. 6, doc. 59, p. 80. Phipps reports to Simon on a conversation with Count Dembinski.. a close friend of Polish Premier:

475 There was of course no danger of war but Hitlerism meant war in 20 years or later when Poland would not want it.. there were only two alternatives — to march or to negotiate. The time to march was now past. It was in April or earlier, and Poland had told France quite plainly that she would abide by alliance and invade Germany if France took the first step but France returned the compliment saying it was for Poland to move first.

476 France could not start such an operation without damaging her relations with Britain. However, she was prepared to 'help' Poland.

477See also Vansittart, *Op. cit.*, p. 536

their joint proposal, were based on concerns as to the political situation in Europe.

His influence on the Cabinet was great. He was consulted by Hoare and, for instance, reviewed, before delivery, the speech the latter made at Geneva in support of the League. He felt strong enough to intrude on Eden's domain and made the notorious speech of the 'midsummer madness' urging the discontinuance of League sanctions against Italy.

A new era of foreign policy, therefore, did not start with his appointment as Prime Minister. It was indeed the continuation of an old era, but with a different style in which Chamberlain's imprint was quite noticeable.

He quickly got rid of Vansittart by promoting him to a post from which the latter could exercise less influence on foreign affairs. Chamberlain bragged that, in this, he succeeded in three days doing what Baldwin could not accomplish in years. He put Eden in an impossible situation with respect to his relations with the Italian ambassador and forced him to resign. In his memoirs, Eden advanced other reasons for his resignation. The fact is that, in a very short time, Chamberlain removed the two people most critical of his policies.

A new British ambassador, Sir Neville Henderson had been appointed by Eden to Berlin. He proved to be a staunch supporter of Chamberlain's foreign policies and, as such, was much appreciated by Chamberlain.

Before taking office in Berlin, Henderson met Chamberlain who was Prime Minister designate and was to become Prime Minister two months later. Henderson expresses thus the identity of their views⁴⁵²:

..Mr. Chamberlain outlined to me his views on general policy toward Germany; and I think I may honestly say that *to the last and bitter end I followed the general line which he set me*, all the more easily and faithfully since it corresponded so closely with my private conception of the service which I could best render in Germany to my own country. I remember making but one reservation to Mr. Chamberlain, namely, that, *while doing my utmost to work as sympathetically as possible with the Nazis*, it was essential that British rearmament should be relentlessly pursued..

We detailed in Chapter I a report in which Henderson exposed his political thoughts. There can be little doubt that he conveyed them to Chamberlain and got his approval. In particular, he told Chamberlain of his intention to commit an indiscretion in the first days of taking office. We quote⁴⁵³:

478⁴⁵² Sir Neville Henderson, 'Failure of a Mission', Putnam's Sons, New York, 1940, pp. 7,8
479⁴⁵³ *ibid*, p. 8

Inasmuch as any **public attempt to co-operate with the nazi government** would constitute somewhat of an innovation, I remember also asking Mr. Chamberlain whether, as Prime Minister, he would object to my being.. slightly indiscreet on first arrival in Berlin. His reply was to the effect that a calculated indiscretion was sometimes a very useful form of diplomacy..

Consequently, on June 1, 1937, while delivering a speech in Berlin to the Anglo-German Association, he said⁴⁵⁴:

In England.. **far too many people have an entirely erroneous conception of what the National-Socialist regime really stands for.** Otherwise they would lay less stress on Nazi dictatorship and much more emphasis on **the great social experiment which is being tried out in this country.** Not only would they criticize less, but they might learn some useful lessons.

The British government, through its ambassador, let Germany know that, contrary to public opinion — “far too many people” — it does not so much mind the nazi dictatorship as it appreciates the ‘great social experiment’ from which it is willing to learn lessons.

Chamberlain came to power slightly more than a year after Germany’s remilitarisation of the Rhineland. At the time, under British pressure and for reasons of her own, France let slip the last opportunity to easily inflict a moral and military defeat on Germany. It was the fear that Hitlerism would not recover from such a defeat that motivated the British pressure on France (see in chapter 1 Baldwin’s statement at a Cabinet meeting).

Saving Hitlerism, and immensely increasing Hitler’s prestige, had consequences that were not welcome to everyone. One of them was that Germany, as soon as Hitler would have built adequate fortifications in the Rhineland, would be in a position to expand in the East with impunity. Her strategical and military position would be notably improved, and the door would open to further her military strengthening through expansion in the East.

There was still time ‘but not too much’⁴⁵⁵ was the opinion of many of those British politicians who were worried by the situation. Others were happy, they trusted that Germany would ‘look’ exclusively to the East.

Discovering Germany’s Ultimate Aims

During the last months of Baldwin’s premiership, and the first months of Chamberlain’s, much effort was dedicated to the problem of ascertaining what were the real and final aims of Germany. These speculations arose out

480⁴⁵⁴ DBFP, series 2, vol 18, doc. 568 p. 841

481⁴⁵⁵ This kind of warning was given by Vansittart in 1934. It was still true in 1937, with added urgency.

of repeated and ambiguous declarations by German leaders that Britain was the one country which, on every occasion, stood in the way of Germany's realisation of her aspirations. It was felt, in the Cabinet and at the Foreign Office, that such declarations had to be clarified. In particular, what were these German aspirations which, according to the German leaders, were opposed by Britain? Could it not be that there was a misunderstanding?⁴⁵⁶ Meetings were held and reports were written and it was decided that the question had to be answered by an authoritative member of the German Government.

Perusing these documents leaves the reader with a feeling of unreality. What could a declaration of aims, orally made at a meeting between political leaders, reveal more than the precise information already in the hands of the British government⁴⁵⁷? All sources were agreed that Germany wanted from Britain a free hand in the East. Here, for instance, is what Henderson wrote to Eden on July 5, 1937⁴⁵⁸:

..The aim of German policy is.. to induce Great-Britain to dissociate herself, not from France, but from the French system of alliances in Central and Eastern Europe. It is equally to detach France from that system or, alternatively, her Eastern allies from France. Nor do the Germans make any secret of their efforts and desires in this direction.. The colonial question is, in my opinion, in fact secondary for the moment, and will not become primary, except as a mean of pressure, *until the first objective of 'a free hand in the East' is attained* or unless there seems to be no prospect of attaining it.

..There is no doubt whatsoever that Germany would sign tomorrow almost any agreement or undertaking between the three Powers *which would be limited to the West*. And she would probably abide by it. Her reservations are in respect of Central and Eastern Europe where she feels that her future lies by means of the realization of aspirations which are in her opinion vital to her well-being, legitimate, and not in conflict with any direct British interest.

Britain, repeatedly, gave Germany assurances that she would not stand in the way of her aspirations in Central and Eastern Europe, provided that their realisation resulted from peaceful evolution, and not from the use of

482⁴⁵⁶ The British diplomatic correspondence on this issue was voluminous. See for instance DBFP, series 2, vol 18:

483doc. 399, p. 615; doc. 513, p. 779; doc. 538, p. 803; doc. 574, pp. 846-847; doc. 593, pp. 868-870

484See also DBFP, series 2, vol 19:

485doc. 41, p. 67; doc. 43, p. 75; doc. 52, pp. 93-97; doc. 92, p.174; doc. 112, p. 206; doc. 117, p. 229; doc. 160, pp. 275-289; doc. 238, pp. 386-389;

486⁴⁵⁷ See annex to this chapter

487⁴⁵⁸ DBFP, series 2, vol 19, doc. 16, p. 31

force. However, it was evident that the realisation of Germany's ambition could not result from a peaceful evolution. That much had been affirmed at a meeting in February 1937 of the Committee of Imperial Defence, the conclusions of which had been approved by the Cabinet. Literally, hundreds of quotes could be given reporting clearly and credibly on Germany's aims in Eastern Europe. They pointed out the obvious, that these aims could not be reached without violence.

The options were known, and limited in number. Either Germany was to be given a free hand in Eastern and Central Europe as a price for an 'understanding', or there would be no understanding with Germany. The last eventuality raised the spectrum of war between the West and Germany.

The situation was not new. All the pre-Chamberlain policies pointed to the fact that it had been decided to avoid war, and therefore to accept Hitler's expansion in the East. The implementation of such a policy was, however, difficult. In particular, there were two obstacles in the way of that policy: public opinion in Britain, and the French quest for security which led to her commitments in the East. In this respect, it is interesting to quote from a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy held on May 11, 1937⁴⁵⁹:

THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER [Chamberlain] thought that it would be a great mistake to discuss the colonial question on a purely hypothetical basis. He thought that we ought to take the line of declining to say whether we would, or would not, in certain circumstances contemplate concessions in this field. ...it would be much wiser not to attempt at the present stage to be too definite. We ought to endeavour to find out exactly how far Germany was prepared to meet our political desiderata. THE LORD CHANCELLOR [Lord Hailsham] agreed, but did not think that Germany had any intention of making a settlement of a kind which we could contemplate.

Thus was described, in a general and obscure way, the tendency for a deal with Germany: colonies to Germany versus Britain's 'political desiderata'. Britain's desiderata obviously consisted in what Germany would undertake NOT TO DO. It was the delineation of what Britain and Germany would tolerate from each other without becoming enemies.

The British leaders wanted to know the precise measure in which Germany, in the pursuit of her well known ambitions, was ready to comply with Britain's request that Germany constrain herself with methods acceptable to the British public. Only then could Britain be certain to avoid involvement.

The bargain offered to Germany, i.e. a free hand in Central and Eastern Europe on the condition of 'good behaviour', would not be attractive to Germany for long. It would soon be too late for this. With the

488⁴⁵⁹ DBFP, series 2, vol 18, doc. 485, pp. 736-740

remilitarisation of the Rhineland, Germany could now rearm with immunity. The day was close when she would be stronger than the combined Western countries. In the meantime, Central and Eastern Europe lay, so to say, in Germany's palm without any possible protection from the West. The only deterrent against Germany could be the fear of losing a world war. With time, this fear was diminishing since Germany's rearmament was increasing at a faster rate than that of Britain and France.

In a report by the Chief of Staff Subcommittee of the C.I.D. dated November 12, 1937, we read⁴⁶⁰:

We therefore conclude that, even if assured the cooperation of Italy, Germany would hesitate to embark, early in 1938, on hostilities against us.

..French mobilization in 1938 would enable her to put approximately the same number of divisions as Germany in the field, whereas, **by 1939, this will no longer be the case.** France must also consider that her fixed land defences are now relatively as strong as they are ever likely to be, and looking ahead she may foresee the danger of military encirclement by three dictator Powers

..If internal difficulties should force her [Germany's] leaders to consider war as the only alternative to loss of prestige, they might decide to gamble upon the effect of air attack. **The scale of her attack in 1938 would be lower than that of which she may be capable in 1939,** but, on the other hand, she may become aware of our deficiencies in modern bomber aircraft and the backward state of our air defence measures and the industry weakness of France.

The British Chief of Staffs thought that Germany's chances at war would be greater in 1939 than in 1938. Only the fear of a loss of prestige could make them 'gamble' on the possibilities of the effects of air attacks. These conclusions did not take into account the enormous military advantages that would accrue to Germany as a result of the annexation of Austria and the occupation of the Sudeten region of Czechoslovakia. The neutralisation of Czechoslovakia as a military power would, alone, constitute an important factor in the improvement of Germany's strategic position and military power. It would reinforce the Chiefs of Staff's argument that 1939 would be a better year for Germany to unleash war.

All incoming reports from Germany indicated that she believed that time worked for her⁴⁶¹. This belief was shared by the British military authorities.

489⁴⁶⁰ DBFP, series 2, vol 19, doc. 316, pp. 508, 510, 512

490⁴⁶¹ Hitler, while convinced that, for a few more years, time was on Germany's side, was, nevertheless, in a hurry. He feared that, with advancing age, he would not

Just waiting without resolving any problem was not therefore ‘gaining time’ but losing time. It was the Germans who were gaining time by diplomatic inaction.

The diplomatic records of the time (1937) show that, unlike the case in 1936, Germany manifested little interest, if any, at reaching an ‘understanding’ with Britain. A visit by Von Neurath to London, in response to a British invitation, was delayed by Germany a number of times until it was cancelled. When Halifax was invited to a hunting exhibition in Germany, it was Britain that started all the motions to obtain Hitler’s consent to meet him. Germany was not enthusiastic⁴⁶².

Since Central and Eastern Europe could not be defended by the Western Powers, Germany would soon have a free hand in these regions, whether it was given to her or not. What then could Britain offer Germany and what could be Germany’s contribution to the *quid pro quo*? The solution was to offer Germany colonies and a free hand NOW, even before she would become overwhelmingly powerful, in return for her commitment to exert her free hand in Central and Eastern Europe with restraint.

Giving colonies to Germany meant taking them away from some countries. Britain wanted to avoid any contribution. She devised many plans whereby the contributors would be Portugal, Belgium and France⁴⁶³.

Lothian visited Hitler on May 3, 1937. Britain warned Germany not to attach too much importance to what unofficial British visitors could say. The warning specified that this did not apply to Lothian who ‘was in a different category’⁴⁶⁴. The implication was that Lothian was more than just a private British citizen. In fact Lothian, who was distrusted by the Foreign Office, had excellent relations with Chamberlain whom he met before going to Germany and with whom he discussed his upcoming visit. In particular, Chamberlain asked him to try to find out the present status of Schacht⁴⁶⁵ in Germany (Schacht was the one German official that was most insistent on the importance of colonies for Germany).

A British summary of the discussion between Hitler and Lothian mentions that Hitler complained of the British reluctance to have Germany recover her colonies. We read from the summary⁴⁶⁶:

Lord Lothian in his reply stated that so far as colonies were concerned, the problem was admittedly a very difficult one. After such a lapse of time, the restoration of the colonies would amount to a major surgical operation, the consequences of which, for the

be able to lead as well. He was also afraid of being assassinated before realizing his dreams of a greater Germany

491⁴⁶² DBFP, series 2, vol 19, doc. 264, p. 433; doc. 283, p. 459; doc. 284, p.460; doc. 298, p. 476; doc. 310, p. 492

492⁴⁶³ DBFP, series 2, vol 18, doc. 473, p. 719. See also note 1

493⁴⁶⁴ DBFP, series 2, vol 18, doc. 480, p. 727

494⁴⁶⁵ Rumours had it that Schacht was no longer *persona grata* with Hitler

495⁴⁶⁶ *ibid*, enclosure 480, p. 729

Empire, might be very serious indeed. There might, he thought, be some adjustment in West Africa, but he could not hold out any prospect of revision on a substantial scale. At the same time *there was no reason why Germany should not extend her influence economically in Central and Eastern Europe*⁴⁶⁷. Surely the German Government could convince her Eastern neighbours that their nationality was not menaced by Germany. Nationality was the most potent thing in the world. Great Britain always recognized this, and the cohesion of the Empire was due to her recognition of the nationality of all the component parts of the Empire. Once Germany persuaded her neighbours that their national sovereignty was safe, they would not be afraid to enter into closer trade relations. In that way Germany would have at her disposal a trade area like that of the British Empire, and the raw material problem would cease to exist.

This seems innocent, but it was far from being so. Some essential components of the British Empire had to be militarily occupied to ensure obedience to the British policies. The parts which were relatively master of their destinies were those parts which had a very weak native population. There is no way of enforcing the membership of Central and Eastern Europe in a market dominated by Germany except by ensuring a German political domination over these countries. This political domination may have to be supported by military domination or the threat thereof. To make the matter clearer, Lothian immediately added:

There were only certain definite things for which the British Empire would have recourse to war. These were the defence of the Empire, the defence of the Low Countries or France against unprovoked aggression, the defence of British shipping. But the British people would not fight for the League or hazy ideas, or for Abyssinia or anything else that did not directly concern them.

Lothian knows that an offer of economic domination means nothing if Germany is not allowed to use force or, at least, to threaten the use of force. This is the reason why it was necessary to include in the argument a clear hint that the use of force would not lead to war with Britain.

Vansittart described Lothian as an amateur. Commenting on a suggestion to help Germany attain a position of economic domination in Central and Eastern Europe, Vansittart notes:

It means, to be quite precise, the conquest of Austria and Czechoslovakia & the reconquest of Danzig and Memel; followed by the reduction of the other states to the condition of satellites — military satellites — when required. This is a quite clear and

496⁴⁶⁷ While in tune with Chamberlain, this opinion was opposed by Halifax and by the Foreign Office who preferred helping Central Europe's resistance to Germany's economic infiltration.

comprehensible program, but it is quite incompatible with our interests. We fought the last war largely to prevent this..

If HMG fell in with all this, they wd be going dead against the democratic tide; and the effect on the USA wd be catastrophic. I doubt if we shd ever recover.

Vansittart thought that it would be easy to expose the weakness of Lothian's arguments and spoke of the necessity of destroying Lothian 'gently'. As a matter of fact it was Vansittart who was 'gently' destroyed.

In fact the deal offered by Lothian to Germany was unattractive. Hitler had realised that, by forcing France to react very mildly to the remilitarisation of the Rhineland, Britain had already virtually given Germany a free hand in Central and Eastern Europe. Britain had realised it too. So an understanding with Germany had to offer something more, colonies for instance.

In a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy on April 6, 1937, objections were raised as to the morality of letting natives be ruled by a Nazi regime. Chamberlain, on the contrary, thought it vital to give an indication that Britain was prepared to talk on colonies. He had no fear of mistreatment of the natives⁴⁶⁸:

THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER said that quite frankly he did not share the view that when Germany had possessed colonies she had maltreated and exploited the native population. He thought that in this matter German colonial administration had been unjustly maligned

The objections against letting the natives be ruled by Germany had nothing to do with the pre-war German record. It had everything to do with the way Nazi Germany was treating the Jews who, in Nazi views, were still superior to the blacks. Chamberlain would not stop at such details.

The British view was summarised by Halifax after his visit to Hitler⁴⁶⁹:

It seems to boil down to whether or not we should feel it possible or desirable to explore a colonial settlement *on broad lines* (highlighted in the original), with the idea, if such seemed feasible, of using it as a lever upon which to pursue a policy of real reassurance in Europe: *in other words, instead of trying to do a bargain on the line of getting him to drop colonies as a return for a free hand in Europe, to try for the more difficult but possible sounder bargain of a colonial settlement at the price of being a good European*

497⁴⁶⁸ DBFP, vol 18, doc. 379, p. 579

498⁴⁶⁹ DBFP, vol 19, doc. 336, p.548

Here Halifax appears to recognise that Britain's previous policy was that of giving a free hand to Germany in Central and Eastern Europe so that she would drop her claims on colonies. Now offering a free hand to Germany would no longer be such an interesting prospect to Germany. She was about to be in a position to do what she wanted in those parts of Europe. The deal now, which was much more difficult, was to get Germany to be a good European. This, all the evidence shows, meant that Germany would not 'look' to the West and would restrict herself to 'civilised' methods in the realisation of her ambitions in Europe.

Britain was most interested in avoiding involvement in Central and Eastern Europe. As explained earlier, this could be attained if France's commitments and the public opinion in Britain, could be neutralised. This was the aim of the British leaders and that of Chamberlain in particular. It, however could not be attained, except if Germany was proceeding in a way that would not be 'shocking'.

Between peaceful evolution and naked aggression, there was a spectrum of other possibilities. A combination of British ingenuity, and German patience would allow, within this spectrum, to find the proper way to satisfy the leaders of both countries. Henderson, in a letter dated November 12, 1937, wrote⁴⁷⁰:

The state of mind which the Nazi wish to produce in Austria is that a Nazi victory is inevitable in the long run and that those who support Dr. Schuschning are backing a losing horse. Germans feel that it is only a matter of time before *their beaver-like activities cause Dr. Schuschning's dam to crumble away*

Henderson's expression 'beaver-like activity' found favour in the eyes of Halifax and Chamberlain who adopted it and used it on occasion. Here was the solution which was thus expressed by Halifax at a Cabinet meeting discussing the results of Halifax's meeting with Hitler⁴⁷¹:

Nevertheless he [Halifax] would expect a beaver-like persistence in pressing their aims in Central Europe but *not in a form* to give others cause — or probably occasion — to interfere

Chamberlain agreed⁴⁷²:

..There would be nothing to prevent the Germans from continuing what Lord Halifax called their "beaver-like activities", but he would regard that as *less harmful* than (say) a military invasion of Austria

499⁴⁷⁰ DBFP, series 2, vol 19, doc. 315, p. 500

500⁴⁷¹ CAB 23/90 p. 166

501⁴⁷² CAB 23/90 p. 168

It is a matter of form. An invasion is a brutal operation destined to realise its aims in one step. A persistent beaver-like activity may have the same final result. However, since it consists of many smaller steps there may be no ‘probable occasion’ to interfere. Even if the last of the many steps is brutal, public opinion would have already expected it and would therefore accept it.

We will come back to Halifax’s visit to Hitler. What matters here is the realisation that the *quid pro quo* with Hitler had not for object to bar him access to Central and Eastern Europe but to ensure that it be done in a way which was politically less harmful than a military invasion.

The Foreign Office At Cross Purpose With Chamberlain’s Policy

In this situation, an effort to ascertain from the German leaders what their aims were, and to have them affirm they had converted to the principle of peaceful evolution, made so little sense that the question was naturally raised as to the real purpose of such efforts.

Recent history had revealed that a more respectable Germany had, in 1914, considered a written pledge to be ‘a scrap of paper’. What value could then be attached to the spoken word of a leader of a much less respectable Germany? Besides, were the ‘final aims of Germany’ to be beyond her present reach, would the leaders reveal their cards when it could lead to preventive measures by the other side which would make their aims unobtainable?

On many occasions Hitler had said that he recognised the Locarno agreements as having been signed by Germany freely. As such, and unlike the case of the imposed Versailles Treaty, he considered those agreements as legitimate and binding. This did not prevent him, on a shallow pretext, to denounce the agreement and remilitarise the Rhineland. Furthermore, this step was expected by Britain and France⁴⁷³.

It turned out that secret information from insiders in Germany, a knowledge of the nationalist and aggressive mood of the German leaders and the reading of ‘Mein Kampf’ were a greater help for accurately predicting Germany’s next steps than a pre-definition of these steps by the German leaders themselves. In fact, while wondering about German aims, the British leaders predicted exactly every step Hitler would take. They never considered the possibility that a given step would be the last. They knew, and they said it in meetings and reports, that Germany’s appetite was without bounds⁴⁷⁴.

Major Timperley⁴⁷⁵ had said it well: “There is a mad dog on the loose”, and you do not argue with a mad dog. The problem was that this mad dog was considered to be the bulwark of Germany, and of Europe, against

502⁴⁷³ On such occasions the British worry was how to restrain France.

503⁴⁷⁴ See annex to this chapter

504⁴⁷⁵ Previously quoted

communism. Since the German appetite was so well known, the efforts at getting it defined by the German leaders themselves must have had a different reason than the one advertised.

Under the cover of an endeavour to delineate these aims with precision, it was possible to achieve two aims. On the one hand, a case could be built for a qualified acceptance of these aims. Whatever expansion Germany could achieve 'peacefully' would be agreeable to Britain. The public opinion could be neutralised. On the other hand, an 'understanding' could be reached with Germany as to the regions where such 'peaceful' efforts would be out of the question.

On May 6, 1937, a report written on April 30, 1937 by St. Clair Gainer, the British Consul in Munich, was sent to the British Government. The importance of the report is that it revealed what Hitler had said just two days before to an impeccable source with whom he did not have to conceal his inner thoughts. I quote⁴⁷⁶:

..General von Reichenau.. dined with me yesterday at my house and.. after dinner I had a long discussion with him about current affairs.

General Reichenau said that *two days ago* when the Chancellor was at Munich he had the opportunity of hearing *from his own lips* particulars of his views and plans. The Chancellor told him that for the present he was content to do nothing. *Time was on Germany's side*. France was on the verge of collapse.. and he was counting upon that collapse *to smooth his path in Europe*. This would pave the way to revisions of the peace treaties in the East and the rectification of Germany's Eastern frontiers which Herr Hitler was determined to bring about by peaceful means, but if peaceful means should fail *he would not hesitate to apply force*. 'It is one thing to rearm but another to use armaments.' Germany had not only rearmed but was quite ready to use her armaments..

..He would at any time gladly make a regional Western pact but in no circumstances would that pact form part of 'collective security' arrangements embracing the East, nor would he allow any conditions as to disarmament to be introduced into the Western pact.

Vansittart minuted the following on the report:

Here we have again — for the nth time — most ample evidence of Germany's intention to expand at the expense of her neighbours, by force if necessary. That is a policy of violence and robbery.. What separates us is really a fundamental difference of conception, of morality. *And that is the real answer to all the*

505⁴⁷⁶ DBFP, vol. 18, doc 466, p. 709

weak stomachs who would like us to be immoral because they prefer to be blind.

Eden added to the Vansittart minute: "Most useful. Mr. Gainer should be thanked."

The needed information was, 'for the nth time', in the hand of the British Leaders. And when Vansittart was speaking of 'all the weak stomachs who would like us to be immoral' he obviously had in mind those political leaders with whom he differed most and who were headed by Chamberlain.

The options that were available to Britain, and the choice she made were explained in Eden's intervention at the first meeting of principal delegates to the Imperial Conference held on May 19, 1937⁴⁷⁷:

..In March, 1936, Germany denounced the Treaty of Locarno and reoccupied the Rhineland. ***This was a serious blow to France,*** and still more serious blow to Belgium. The position was an extremely critical one. There were many who urged that France should mobilize and call upon us to come to her help. Our relations with France at that time were by no means as close and cordial as they were now. There was considerable irritation in this country with France's attitude over the Abyssinian question. France had been in the past the principal upholder of the Covenant, and had France and Belgium taken forcible action against Germany, ***it was very likely that a grave divergence of view between France and Belgium on the one hand, and ourselves on the other might have made close collaboration impossible for many years to come, and might well have jeopardized the peace of Europe***⁴⁷⁸.

In his memoirs, Eden recounts how much France's endeavour at a mutual assistance treaty with the Soviet Union had, at the time, angered a number of British Cabinet members and made them more sympathetic to Germany. He does not say that, moreover, at a Cabinet meeting, Baldwin had stated that pressure must be exerted on France to let her understand that defeating Germany, over the problem of the Rhineland, would result in Germany becoming communist.

What is specially relevant here is the admission that Britain was aware that the remilitarisation of the Rhineland was 'a serious blow to France, and a still more serious blow to Belgium'. Nonetheless, the remilitarisation of the Rhineland had been considered previously by the British Chiefs of Staff as not affecting the British vital interests.

This clearly meant that when Britain had to weigh the importance of serious blows to her two closest allies versus the possibility of Hitler's fall,

⁵⁰⁶⁴⁷⁷ *ibid*, doc 510, p. 763

⁵⁰⁷⁴⁷⁸ The records show it was the hope of many British leaders, Chamberlain in particular, that a weak attitude of France with respect to the invasion of Abyssinia would allow Italy to get away with her aggression, while the blame could be placed on France

she was more concerned about the latter. On that scale should be measured the profession of interest in ‘peaceful’ evolution in Eastern Europe expressed later by Britain, while possessing the knowledge of Hitler’s aggressive intentions, and while stating in Cabinet meetings and documents the belief that no peaceful evolution in the East was at all possible⁴⁷⁹.

In spite of the above, Britain continued with the efforts to “find out Germany’s final aims”. If Germany’s known aims were not final, they were already bad enough to exclude a ‘moral’ settlement. The knowledge of the ‘final aims’ was superfluous. Only if Britain was prepared to negotiate on the base of these known German aims did it make sense to make sure that they were final or quasi-final.

An invitation extended to Von Neurath to visit London had been accepted and then postponed more than once by Germany. And then came the opportunity of conversations between Halifax and Hitler on the occasion of Halifax’s attendance at a Hunting Exhibition in Germany.

Halifax’s Visit To Hitler

Two records⁴⁸⁰ exist of the conversations that went on between Hitler and Halifax during the latter’s visit to Germany. One is a written account by Halifax⁴⁸¹ which was discussed by the Cabinet on November 24, 1937⁴⁸²

The minutes of the visit have been found by the Soviet Union in her zone of occupation in Germany. The authenticity of the document has not been challenged. The German document has been written by the interpreter Dr. Paul Schmidt and is more detailed than the version given by Halifax.

Schmidt’s version is reliable. It is reported that⁴⁸³:

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs [Eden] who had read not only the Lord President’s report *but also the notes of the German interpreter*, expressed great satisfaction with the way the Lord President [Halifax] had dealt with each point in his conversation with the Chancellor.

Halifax himself had to rely on Schmidt’s notes. From the summary of the Cabinet discussion on November 24 we read⁴⁸⁴:

..Herr Hitler himself, however, had suggested an advance towards disarmament by the possible abolition of bombing airplanes — *he*

508⁴⁷⁹ See annex to this chapter

509⁴⁸⁰ Actually three, two of them, very similar, in German.

510⁴⁸¹ DBFP, series 2, vol 19, doc. 336 p. 540

511⁴⁸² DBFP, series 2, vol 19, doc. 346 p. 571. The annex, p. 572 summarizes the discussion

512⁴⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 573

513⁴⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 574

had overlooked this point in his own note, but it was included in the interpreter's notes.

On December 7, 1937, Henderson wrote to Eden from Berlin⁴⁸⁵:

I recently asked Dr. Schmidt, *the very intelligent and excellent interpreter of the Hitler-Halifax conversation*, what impression he thought that Hitler had got from the meeting

..In reply to what points they regarded as progress, Schmidt said that first of all Hitler had been pleased by *Halifax's recognition that Nazi Germany had in fact constituted a bulwark against communism*

The British authorities did not object to Schmidt's version which was given to them. Moreover that version is more in the nature of minutes while Halifax's account is mixed with afterthoughts and what clearly appears to be some editing. In particular Schmidt's reference to Halifax's recognition of the German role as bulwark against communism comes out in a much more credible way in Schmidt's document than in Halifax's. In any case, since Schmidt's document has been considered reliable in the British Cabinet meeting, and after Henderson's testimony concerning Schmidt's work as an interpreter, we may rely on his version.

At the very beginning of the conversation Halifax set the tone⁴⁸⁶:

..The great services the Fuhrer had rendered in the rebuilding of Germany were fully and completely recognized, and if British public opinion was sometimes taking a critical attitude toward certain German problems, the reason might be in part that people in England *were not fully informed* of the motives and circumstances which underline certain German measures.

Halifax confirmed here Henderson's 'indiscretion'. He implied that he himself, unlike the British public opinion, understood the motives and circumstances which underlined the German measures that caused an outcry in all the world, and that he, Halifax, did not take a critical attitude. The trouble with British public opinion was that it remained ignorant of the facts.

Halifax mentioned the concern of the English Church and that of Labour Party circles who are critical of 'certain things' in Germany. He added however that the Government had a different attitude⁴⁸⁷:

In spite of these difficulties he (Lord Halifax) and other members of the British Government were fully aware that the Fuhrer had

514⁴⁸⁵ *ibid*, doc 374, p. 652

515⁴⁸⁶ 'Documents and Materials Relating to the Eve of the Second World War', Documentary Publications, North Carolina, 1978, vol. 1, p. 19

516⁴⁸⁷ *ibid*, pp 19-20

not only achieved a great deal inside Germany herself, but that, by destroying Communism in his country, he had barred its road to Western Europe, and that *Germany therefore could rightly be regarded as a bulwark of the West against Bolshevism.*

Hitler did destroy communism in Germany. He destroyed it not in a military battle against a foreign invader, but by the use of brutal police force against large sections of the German population. As in the case of Mussolini, the British leaders did not mind dictatorship and brutal rule, as long as it was used to suppress communism. Such was not the view of the British public opinion. What Halifax was here saying to Hitler, he could not repeat in public in the House of Lords.

The quote illustrates a siege mentality and a paranoia pervasive among the establishment. Halifax sounds as if there were barbaric hordes threatening the West. He is grateful to Hitler for having destroyed the internal danger in Germany and for having made her a bulwark of the West protecting it from invasion by these hordes. Hitler is primarily considered the saviour of the West and not the racist and ambitious politician bent on subjecting Europe to Germany's will of expansion. It is an Establishment view, not the British people's view.

Halifax stated that, following an understanding between Britain and Germany, France and Italy would have to be included. In this way European peace would be secured. Somehow, like in the case of the four-power treaty⁴⁸⁸, the Soviet Union was not needed for the maintenance of peace. This, in spite that the Soviet Union was already playing an important role in international affairs. She had concluded treaties with France and Czechoslovakia and was an active member of the League.

Hitler explained that a solution to the European problems can be achieved either by force or by resorting to higher reason. It is evident, he added, that in both cases the results have to be identical. In other words, he is asking Britain to let Germany have peacefully all that she could obtain in war by virtue of her superior military potential.

Halifax stressed the fact that Britain had been helpful and that Britons were realists. He reminded Hitler the number of times in which Britain's attitude was sympathetic, including the case of the remilitarisation of the Rhineland.. Britain, he said, was ready to contemplate adjustments to new conditions and correction of former mistakes. He added⁴⁸⁹:

England exerted her influence only in the direction of *preventing these changes from occurring.. by the free play of forces*, which in the long run, implies war. *He must once more stress, in the*

517⁴⁸⁸ A treaty between Britain, France, Italy and Germany proposed by Italy in October, 1932, for an European directorate of the four countries. It was signed on June 1933. The treaty was never ratified.

518⁴⁸⁹ 'Documents and Materials Relating to the Eve of the Second World War', Documentary Publications, North Carolina, 1978, vol. 1, p. 25

name of the British Government, that no possibility of changing the existing situation must be precluded, but that the changes must take place only on the basis of a reasonable arrangement. If both sides are agreed that the world is not static, then they must seek, on the basis of common ideals, to live up to this recognition in a way as to direct the available energies in mutual confidence toward a common goal.

There is here a sign of Chamberlain's personal diplomacy. Eden, the Foreign Secretary, was not in favour⁴⁹⁰ of informing Hitler that 'no possibility of change of the existing situation must be precluded'. Halifax made the statement in the name of the British Government. Not having been authorised to do it by Eden, he might have received the authorisation from Chamberlain.

The scope of Germany's ambition was well known to Halifax. Nevertheless nothing was to be precluded. Any change of the *status-quo* would have to be made at the expense of some other countries. If force is not to be used, how else can such countries be induced to yield to Germany? The British Cabinet would later answer the question, however, the example of Munich was to become a good illustration.

Hitler stressed that⁴⁹¹:

..he unfortunately had the impression that although the will was there to act in a reasonable way, there were big obstacles to reasonable solutions especially in democratic countries.. Necessary reasonable solutions were frustrated by the demagogic lines of the political parties.

..He believed that any proposal he made would at once be torpedoed and that any government that wanted to accept it would meet with big difficulties from the opposition.

This is the fundamental reason for which Hitler could not rely on a British grant to Germany of a free hand in Eastern Europe. The 'demagogic lines' of the political parties might force Britain to take a stand against Germany, notwithstanding the granting of the free hand.

Halifax was reassuring. After stressing that England would not change her form of Government 'so soon', he explained⁴⁹²:

That England concluded the naval agreement with Germany, in spite of the fact that much in it was objectionable from the party standpoint, was proof that the British Government also acted

519⁴⁹⁰ DBFP, series 2, vol 19, doc. 273, p. 447

520⁴⁹¹ 'Documents and Materials Relating to the Eve of the Second World War', Documentary Publications, North Carolina, 1978, vol. 1, p. 25

521⁴⁹² *ibid.*, p. 30

independently of the parties. It was certainly not the slave of demagogic party manoeuvres.

Britain would try again and again to put Hitler's mind at rest on this count, without success. Halifax then asked Hitler concerning the amendments to be made to the League's Covenant which would result in Germany returning to the League. He suggested that a modified League could settle 'the reasonable methods' alluded to by Hitler. He added⁴⁹³:

He therefore wanted to know the Fuhrer's attitude toward the League of Nations, as well as toward disarmament. All other questions could be characterized as relating to changes in the European order, changes that sooner or later would probably take place. To these questions belonged Danzig, Austria and Czechoslovakia. England was only interested that any alterations should be effected by peaceful evolution, so as to avoid methods which might cause far-reaching disturbances..

Conversations were held⁴⁹⁴ between France and Britain over Halifax's visit to Germany. The French party included Camille Chautemps, Prime Minister and Yvon Delbos Minister of Foreign Affairs. The British party included Chamberlain, Eden and Halifax. "Mr Chamberlain asked whether Delbos saw any way of preventing German expansion in Central Europe short of using force." He added that British public opinion would not allow the country to be entangled in a war on account of Czechoslovakia⁴⁹⁵ In these talks Chamberlain explicitly rejected the possibility of giving Germany a free hand in Central or Eastern Europe. He was speaking to French representatives.

522⁴⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 34

523⁴⁹⁴ DBFP, series 2, vol 19, doc. 354, p. 590. A note mentions that the document does not constitute an agreed record but was only the British view of what went on. The note adds that the French version is quite similar. Telford Taylor quotes from a French version and, at least in one paragraph, there are marked and important differences. While T. Taylors makes Chamberlain say: "it was desirable to seek an accord with Germany on central Europe no matter what her objectives were, even if she wished to absorb some of her neighbours, in the hope of deferring the execution of these projects until, in the long run, they might become impossible". In the British version, Chamberlain says: "we should have to proceed with the conversations with Germany on the basis of an understanding about Central Europe. Whatever Germany's ultimate object — and we might assume that this was to gain territory — our policy ought to be to make this more difficult, or even to postpone it until it might become unrealizable." Chamberlain comes out better in the English version. From the context, the English version is more credible. Chamberlain would not speak to the French leaders in the way described by T. Taylor

524⁴⁹⁵ Here also there are divergences with the French version as quoted by Telford Taylor. According to the latter, Chamberlain had said about Czechoslovakia that it was a far-away country with which Britain had nothing in common. If this version is true — as it probably is for this quote — Chamberlain ignored the British responsibility in creating the country as well as the fact that Czechoslovakia was the most democratic country of the region. Of all the regimes East of Germany, that in Czechoslovakia was the closest to the one in Britain

On the face of what occurred between Halifax and Hitler as well as at the subsequent Anglo-French conversation, the appearances do not support that a policy of a free hand was, at that stage, directing British decisions. The appearances may be deceiving. This is why we will consider a contemporary document which is relatively unimportant except that, in its case, the appearances could not deceive anyone.

In a letter, dated February 12, 1938, sent to Henderson, Eden gives him instructions as to what he should say to Hitler and to the German foreign minister. We quote⁴⁹⁶:

As regards to the colonial question, you might say that you had found a real disposition to study the question carefully.. The question.. was full of difficulties.. ***public opinion in this country was extremely sensitive on the subject..*** A solution.. might be found.. upon the idea of a new regime of colonial administration in a given area of Africa.. Treaties acceptable and applicable to all the Powers concerned on exactly equal terms. Each power, while solely concerned for the administration of its own territories, would be invited to subscribe to certain principles ***designed to promote the well being of all.. as well as stipulations for the welfare and progress of the natives.***

In appearance, Eden reveals his concern for the welfare and progress of the natives. In reality the opposite is true. Eden knows perfectly well what are the racial theories of Nazism and how badly the black people fared at the bottom of Hitler's list of races, as subhumans. He knew that, at the Berlin Olympics, Hitler had refused to shake hands with the U.S. black sportsman who won competitions. He knows that 'welfare and progress' are flexible terms subject to interpretation, that Germany cannot be trusted to respect her signature and that she will never accept that foreign organisations exert a control on the way she would implement her colonial obligation. Furthermore, her record on civil rights was so awful that there could be no doubt that she would exert no restraint with the native people.

Guaranteeing on paper the welfare and the progress of the natives is not proposed for their sake, but in consideration of the British public opinion which 'was extremely sensitive on this subject'. This document, which specifically mentions the need to promote the welfare and progress of the natives, proves the hypocrisy of the Government which would not hesitate to deliver the natives to a very sore fate, provided a piece of paper could allow the British Government to claim innocence.

Documents which specifically reject the possibility of a free hand to be given to Germany in Central and Eastern Europe do not, therefore, prove that it was indeed the intended policy. Once more, it is the context that can show the real policies and motivations.

525⁴⁹⁶ DBFP, series 2, vol 19, doc. 512, p. 890

It is helpful, therefore, to put Halifax's visit to Hitler in its time perspective.

w Twenty months earlier, in March 1936, Germany denounced the Locarno Agreement and sent troops into the Rhineland in violation of its status of demilitarised zone. At the time Britain exerted pressure on France to prevent her from restoring by force the demilitarised status of the Rhineland. Baldwin, in a Cabinet meeting, expressed the fear that such a French move could lead to the Bolshevisation of Germany.

It was clear to all political leaders in Europe that the British stand in this occasion indicated that Britain, not only would not intervene in the defence of Central and Eastern Europe, but would not mind much to see Germany expand in these directions. It is evident from Baldwin's statement in the Cabinet that the continuance of the Hitler regime in Germany was more important to him, and to his Cabinet, than the fate of Central and Eastern Europe. It is obvious that, were Britain to have thought it desirable that France be in a position to protect the smaller nations, in Central and Eastern Europe, from a German aggression, Britain would have supported a French move to have the demilitarisation of the Rhineland respected.

w The Stresa meeting was supposed to face Germany with a front of countries determined to have Germany respect her international obligations. This front was destroyed by the subsequent Anglo-German Naval Agreement which blatantly violated the clauses of the Versailles Peace Treaty. It was clear that Britain was not much interested in a powerful front to restrain Hitler. However, having followed policies which helped the resurgence of German military force, Britain let the world know that, as long as she retained a naval superiority she did not care about Eastern Europe.

w Short of restoring the *status quo ante*, Britain and France informed Germany they expected from her a move in the direction of consolidation of the peace in Europe. This move, it was suggested, could be a new Western Pact to replace Locarno, the return of Germany to the League and some agreement on disarmament. The ball was in Hitler's hands. Next move was expected to be his. Instead, Britain proceeded with arrangements for a Baldwin-Hitler meeting to discuss an alliance against Russia.

It was not made clear to Hitler that he was responsible for the present sense of insecurity in Europe. It was mutually recognised that the Press, in each country, should be requested to be less critical of the other country. It was also stressed that the Peace in Europe depended on a 'settlement' between Germany and England to which France and Italy would be later associated.

For a long time the stated policy of England was to favour the independence of Austria. Nonetheless, Halifax told Hitler that, as long as the *Anschluss* occurred by methods which did not disturb much the public opinion, England did not care for the fate of Austria (and that of Czechoslovakia).

w Nine months before Halifax's visit, the CID (Committee of Imperial Defence) was convened. Parts of its conclusions were quoted in Chapter 1. It put itself on record that no accord was possible with Germany unless it was in a form that gives Germany a free hand in Central and Eastern Europe, regions in which Britain had, it was said, no vital interests. It was also mentioned that it would be impossible for Germany to achieve her ambitions in this region by peaceful means.

With regard to a possible clash between Germany and the Soviet Union, the CID thought it was very likely and Germany's expected victory would not hurt British vital interests. The problem was not the German attack on the Soviet Union but the possibility of France's involvement due to her obligations under the Franco-Soviet pact.

Nothing had occurred during the last nine months justifying a modification to the CID conclusions which were approved by the Cabinet.

In particular, the CID stated that Germany's domination of Austria and Czechoslovakia would be the first steps in her expansion towards the East and towards a clash with the Soviet Union. Halifax let Hitler know that Britain was not against these first steps, provided that the methods used were not too disturbing.

w On July 20, 1937, only four months before Halifax's visit to Hitler, Henderson, the British ambassador to Berlin, reported⁴⁹⁷ to Eden a conversation he had had with Goering on Eden's instruction. Goering told him that Germany "had to be militarily strong and now that she had abandoned all idea of expansion in the West.. she had to look Eastward. The Slavs were her natural enemies.." He then criticised the idea of peaceful evolution and reminded Henderson that, in the case of the Rhineland Germany had to act on her own. This would be the same with Czechoslovakia. Goering then added:

Two months ago he had himself felt that there was only one course open to Germany, namely to make herself so overwhelmingly strong that she would be certain of victory if she had all the world against her again. Now he was prepared once again to hope in the possibility of that Anglo-German understanding..

526⁴⁹⁷ DBFP, 2nd series, vol 19, doc. 52, p. 93

Goering had specified the terms of a possible 'understanding' with Germany

w Also on July 20, Henderson sent to Sargent a memo stating his views on Germany. In it he urges Britain to accept Germany's dominance in Eastern and Central Europe and states that, in view of the superiority of the German civilisation over that of the Slavs, it would be unjust on the part of Britain to oppose German aggression against the Soviet Union. This document is the most blatant and brazen one advocating a free hand to Germany (we quoted largely from it in the first chapter).

w On November 12, 1937, one week before Halifax's meeting with Hitler, a report by the Chiefs of Staff Subcommittee of the C.I.D. was circulated. We quote from it the following⁴⁹⁸:

25. *Conclusion.* If, early in 1938, Germany was faced by a sudden emergency in which the possibility of going to war on her western frontier had seriously to be considered, her military position on land would be a factor tending to dissuade, whereas

her military position in the air and in relation to industry would be factors which might encourage her. Economically, however, she must seek a quick decision; and so long as she expects to meet the combined strength of France and Great Britain she must doubt whether her advantage in air power will be sufficient to promise a quick result. We therefore conclude that, even if assured of the co-operation of Italy, Germany would hesitate to embark, early in 1938, on hostilities against us.

At the time, British military authorities believed that, in a conflict against Germany, the military balance of power was still in favour of the West. The situation would become less favourable to the West after the annexation of Austria, with the correspondent increase in Germany's population, and with the elimination of Czechoslovakia's military power (and the correspondent improvement of Germany's strategical position). Could such a deterioration of the West's relative military power make no impact on Britain's vital interests? Reservations as to the manner in which these changes would occur do not prevent the harm inherent in these changes. Besides, these reservations were known to be unrealistic since the changes Germany intended to make could not take place without resorting to force or threatening to resort to force.

w At about the same time, on February 13, 1937, Strang sent a note⁴⁹⁹ to Halifax to which he annexed Henderson's report of July 20th. He adds his own comments. In particular he states:

527⁴⁹⁸ DBFP, series 2, vol. 19, doc. 316, p. 501

It would be unwise to assume too confidently that any considerable territorial change in Central and Eastern Europe.. could in fact be effected without resort to force, that is to say without war or threat of war by the stronger Power..

General settlements usually only follow wars; peace settlements.. have limited objectives.. dictated by the changing balance of forces. Germany is likely to use the existence of her military strength.. as a diplomatic instrument for the attainment, by peace if possible, of those aims.. ***There is, in fact, no stated limit to those aims***; and the principles upon which Germany's foreign policy would be based have been set out with brutal clarity in 'Mein Kampf'

A 'naive' politician, in possession of all these facts, would have come to the conclusion that every step should be taken to prevent Germany from unsettling the military balance of power. That was not what Halifax intended to do.

The Invasion And Annexation Of Austria

The Versailles Peace Treaty forbade the political unification of Germany and Austria. This had been done to reduce the manpower potential of Germany and, consequently, the number of divisions she could have on the field, were she to become, once more, rearmed and ready to go to war.

Though this had been the main reason for preventing the *Anschluss*, there were more reasons for preventing the unification of the two German nations. In particular, the *Anschluss* would allow Germany to obtain common frontiers with Italy, Yugoslavia and Hungary. In addition, by lengthening the Czechoslovakian boundary with Germany, it would make the defence of Czechoslovakia against a German aggression, that much more difficult. Moreover, Czechoslovakia did not fortify her frontier with Austria as much as the one she had with Germany. The *Anschluss* would therefore considerably increase Czechoslovakia's vulnerability.

For these reasons, Britain proclaimed several times that she had an essential interest in the maintenance of Austria's independence. Later she weakened her stand by saying that she would not approve a forced annexation of Austria by Germany against the will of the Austrians.

A new dimension was added to the Austrian problem after Hitler assumed power in January 1933. The Social-Democrat Party had a large following. In addition there was a notable Jewish population in Austria. Were Austria to be annexed by Germany, they would all suffer political or racial discrimination and oppression. There was no doubt that many of them would end in concentration camps or be summarily executed.

528⁴⁹⁹ *ibid*, doc. 319, p. 517

In 1918, when Germany was beaten and disarmed, when there was some hope that she would be ruled by a democratic Government, Britain considered it essential that Austria be independent. In 1937, when the Rhineland had been remilitarised by Germany, when her rearmament was proceeding at great speed and when she was ruled by an aggressive dictatorship, making no secret of her insatiable ambitions, Britain took the stand that Austria's independence was none of her vital concern.

This was a 'mistake', said people who would have decided otherwise, but a mistake it was not. It was a policy that corresponded to a change of perspective. It corresponded to the perception that in a world where a Popular Front could win in Spain and in France (though not for long in that country) and where a country, the Soviet Union, could maintain a socialist regime where the factories could run without being privately owned, a Germany 'looking to the East' was not to be considered the greatest enemy, especially if it was possible to reach with her a reasonable 'understanding'.

On June 1, 1937, Von Papen, German ambassador to Austria, reported to Hitler on a meeting he had with Henderson the newly appointed British ambassador to Germany. Papen wrote⁵⁰⁰:

..Sir Neville.. entirely agreed with the Fuhrer that the first and greatest danger to the existence of Europe was Bolshevism, and *all other viewpoints had to be subordinated to this view*

Henderson defended such views in reports he sent to the Foreign Office. He was not authorised to make such statements in public or to foreign diplomats. The Foreign Office often complained that Henderson was too loquacious and should learn to keep his opinions to himself.

In view, however, of the high regard Chamberlain had for him, and in view of the report by Conwell-Evans concerning Henderson's receiving direct instructions from Chamberlain, it is likely that whatever in his behaviour was not in the good graces of the Foreign Office, was well appreciated by Chamberlain. The Prime Minister rated Henderson's advice as more important than any other. It is true that Henderson was 'the man on the spot', but so had been Phipps and Rumbold whose advises were neglected.

Von Papen continued:

When.. I developed for the Ambassador the German-Austrian problem as we see it, he said he was convinced that England fully understood the historical need for solution of this question in the Reich-German sense.. When I told him further that the British Minister to Vienna took an entirely different stand.., he admitted that he was cognizant of these views of Sir Walford Selby. "But I am of an entirely different opinion and am convinced that *my view will prevail in London*, only you must not rush the solution

529⁵⁰⁰ DGFP, series D vol 1, doc 228. p.427

of this problem. It is a problem that concerns France rather than us and in which we must have time *in order to correct the French standpoint*” “But please,” continued the British Ambassador, “do not betray to my Vienna colleague that I entertain this opinion”

The behaviour of the British Ambassador was deplorable. The degree of confidence he had that his view will prevail in London is remarkable. He must have had sufficient backing in the highest quarters for disregarding the position of the Foreign Office.

Henderson should not have revealed to a German source the differences between Britain and France. Papen was entitled to reach some conclusions from such an attitude. He could have taken it as an indication that the official position of Britain did not weigh too much with Henderson. That Britain chose to appoint a man who could disregard the official British position, and who sympathised with Germany’s aspirations could have well meant that Germany had nothing to fear in aggressive pursuit of her ambitions. This was reinforced by Henderson’s underlining the prime importance of subordinating all viewpoints to the fact that Bolshevism is the greatest danger in Europe.

On January 26, 1938, Henderson reported on a conversation he had with Ribbentrop over lunch. He described the line which guided him⁵⁰¹:

Speaking generally, the line which I took throughout our conversation was the following: the biggest problem of the twentieth century was whether the British Empire and an *unstatic* Germany could live side by side without resorting to war. Personally I believed it, though difficult, to be possible *in view of the geographical positions of the two countries*. Yet though difficult, another war between us would, whatever its result, be absolutely disastrous — I could not imagine and would be unwilling to survive the defeat of the British Empire. At the same time *I would view with dismay another defeat of Germany which would merely serve the purposes of inferior races*.

The reference to the Geographical position of the two countries, Britain and an ‘unstatic’ Germany, sounds like giving a free hand to Germany to the East. Accepting the unstaticity of Germany and stating that geographical conditions make him believe in the possibility of living side by side without war, cannot have any other meaning.

Speaking of ‘inferior races’ in conjunction with dismay at the possibility of another German defeat, would mean literally, and superficially, that the German race is superior to the British and the French races. In reality it reflects Henderson’s racist belief in the superiority of the German and Anglo-Saxon races over the ‘inferior’ slave races. This derives from previous statements expressing a belief in the inferiority of the slave races and the fear

530⁵⁰¹ DBFP, series 2, vol 19, doc. 474, p. 821

that Europe will turn communist whoever would win a war between Germany and the West.

On December 1937, Eden told Ribbentrop in London of the conversations between France and Britain concerning the results of Halifax's visit to Hitler. Ribbentrop reports⁵⁰²:

He [Eden] had told the French that the question of Austria was of much greater interest to Italy than to England. Furthermore, people in England recognized that a closer connection between Germany and Austria would have to come about sometime. They wished, however, that a solution by force be avoided.

In June Henderson informed Papen that Austria was of interest to France rather than to Britain. Now Eden does better. He informs Ribbentrop that Austria is of "much greater interest" to Italy than to Britain and France.

This information is most important to Germany:

With Henderson's indiscretion in June, Germany had still to contend with France and, through her, possibly with England too. Now Germany was informed that she had to contend with Italy much more than with any other country. Eden passed this information though it was public knowledge that Italy's interest in Austria was, at the time, practically of no effect, specially in view of her excellent relations with Germany

To crown it all, Eden expressed his pious wish that force be avoided. This was not said as a warning. It was the weakest possible expression against the use of force by Germany.

The last act of the Austrian drama started to unfold on February 12, 1938, with the Austrian Chancellor's visit to Hitler. On February 19th 1938 Chamberlain wrote in his diary⁵⁰³:

..Schuschnigg the Austrian Chancellor was suddenly summoned to Berchtesgaden, where he was *outrageously bullied by Hitler* and faced with a series of demands to which he was obliged to yield, since on this occasion Mussolini gave him no support

However, on March 2, 1938, Chamberlain, speaking to the House, described the meeting between Hitler and Schuschnigg in these terms⁵⁰⁴:

..what happened was *merely* that two statesmen had agreed upon certain measures for the improvement of relations between their two countries.. It appears hardly likely to insist that just because

531⁵⁰² DGFP, series D, vol. 1, doc. 50, p. 90

532⁵⁰³ Feiling, Op. cit., p. 337

533⁵⁰⁴ W. Manchester, op. cit., p. 275

two statesmen have agreed on certain domestic changes in one of the two countries — *changes desirable in the interest of relations between them* — that one country renounced its independence in favour of the other

Austria and Germany are here not named, likewise, neither Hitler nor Schushnigg. In this way Chamberlain can give the illusion of a situation in which two equals are negotiating according to rules respected by both. He speaks of 'changes in one of the two countries'. This had less impact than when one knows that the country is small and happens to be threatened by a much more powerful one.. The facts would have been evident if he had named the countries. The matter is reduced to a problem of semantics. What if 'x' and 'y' want to improve their relations!

Halifax had said to Hitler that no change in Europe was precluded, provided it was brought about without recourse to disturbing methods. Now, by demoralising the small nations, by facing them with their isolation and helplessness, Chamberlain makes it that much easier for Nazi Germany to bring about changes 'by peaceful means'. Implied threats could be understood as leaving to the small nations no other alternative but to surrender 'peacefully'.

Chamberlain endorsed the point of view that the changes were desirable, while knowing so well, from so many sources, that they were outrageously imposed on Austria. There is no doubt that Chamberlain lied to the House.

On February 15, 1938, Cadogan, who was to replace Vansittart within a week, entered in his diary:

Was summoned early to F.O. as there was a flap about Austria. Personally, *I almost wish Germany would swallow Austria and get it over*. She is probably going to do so anyhow — anyhow we can't stop her. *What is all this fuss about*

On February 22, two days after Eden's resignation as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and while Austria 'bullied' by Germany was struggling for her independence, Chamberlain stated at the House of Commons⁵⁰⁵:

..If I am right, as I am confident I am, in saying that the League as constituted to-day is unable to provide collective security for anybody, then I say *we must not try to delude small weak nations, into thinking that they will be protected* by the League against aggression and acting accordingly, when we know that nothing of the kind can be expected

Chamberlain, while denying to the small and weak nations the hope of being protected by the League of Nations, did not offer them an alternative protection. The message was clear. To the small nations, Chamberlain was

534⁵⁰⁵ Debates of the House Of Common, February 1938, col. 227

saying that they better not resist Germany's demands. To Germany, Chamberlain was saying that she was safe, not only from Britain but from all the world, in the realisation of her ambitions. These messages would have been more significant had they really corresponded to the mood of the public opinion. In this respect Chamberlain would face his main difficulties⁵⁰⁶.

On February 25, 1938, Butler, a friend of Chamberlain and the new Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Foreign Office had a conversation with a German official at the Embassy who wrote a memorandum about it saying⁵⁰⁷:

2, He was furthermore at pains to state repeatedly that he hoped for a close and trusting cooperation with Germany. He would certainly do all he could to promote this goal.

Butler mentioned the existence of two groups in the Foreign office. There was, a new group free of French influence and a pro-French group about which he says:

3, ..But this group in the Foreign Office had never really made much headway, and the first real break in the French line had come with Sir Neville Henderson. It had been perfectly plain, however, to all intelligent observers that there would have to be a showdown between these two groups after Baldwin left, and the first indication of this had been the sidetracking of Sir Robert Vansittart.

Judging by the information volunteered by Butler, it would be hard to believe that France was actually Britain's main ally, and Germany the prospective enemy.

On March 3, 1938, Henderson met Hitler in the presence of Ribbentrop. The minutes of the conversation were conveyed to Henderson by Ribbentrop. We quote from it⁵⁰⁸:

..the British Ambassador stressed the confidential nature of the conversation. No information would be given the French, much less the Belgians, Portuguese, or Italians, concerning the subject of the discussion

..Without underestimating the difficulties to be overcome, the British Government did, however, believe that the *present*

535⁵⁰⁶ Halifax had said to Hitler that no change in Europe is precluded, provided it is made without recourse to disturbing methods. Chamberlain, by demoralizing the small nations, and by forcing them to face a state of isolation and helplessness, made it that much more likely that Nazi Germany would not be resisted. Germany's expansion could then be that much less brutal. Britain would therefore not expect a strong popular demand for intervention on the side of the victims.
536⁵⁰⁷ DGFP, series D vol 1, doc. 128, p. 223
537⁵⁰⁸ *ibid*, doc. 138, p 240

moment was propitious for such an attempt to improve mutual relations.

Britain contemplated pressuring Belgium, France and Portugal into giving colonies to Germany. It was essential that these three countries should remain in the dark until the completion of the deal. As to Italy, she may feel that, if so much is being made in favour of Germany, something should also be done for her.

That the 'present moment was propitious' sounds cynical. The present moment was that of the recent application of strong pressures on Austria, pressures incompatible with her independence.

The document goes on:

Lord Halifax had already admitted that changes in Europe could be considered quite possible, provided they were made in accordance with the above-mentioned higher reasons. The aim of the British proposal was *to collaborate in such a settlement based on reason*.

Britain, now, offers the collaboration to such a settlement based on reason. Reason, obviously dictates that since it is useless to count on the League, or on anything else, small nations should submit. Such higher reason was later displayed and demonstrated at Munich, a few months later.

The document continues saying that the British Ambassador started reading instructions from his government which he later presented in writing. These stated

In our view appeasement would be dependent, amongst other things, on the measures taken to inspire confidence in Austria and Czechoslovakia. His Majesty's Government at present cannot estimate the effect of the recent arrangement between Germany and Austria which must depend upon the manner in which the several understandings or arrangements made are implemented by the two parties to them. They are therefore at present doubtful as to the effects which these arrangements are likely to have on the situation in Central Europe and cannot conceal from themselves that recent events have aroused apprehension in many quarters which must inevitably render more difficult the negotiation of a general settlement⁵⁰⁹.

Appeasement obviously meant appeasement of Germany. Britain was careful not to condemn, or even mildly protest, the recent bullying of Austria. Britain just noted the apprehension in 'many quarters'. The trouble

538⁵⁰⁹ These instruction had first been issued by Eden. After his resignation, the text was modified to become milder. The text written by Eden mentioned the possibility that Germany's behaviour might be incompatible with Austria's independence. Compare documents 533, p. 908 and 599, p. 976, in DBFP, series 2, vol. 19.

is not that Germany's behaviour is reprehensible. The problem is that it will render more difficult the negotiation of a general settlement. It is an old refrain: go slowly, do not make waves, and everything will turn out as you want.

Hitler arrogantly answered that:

Germany would not tolerate any interference by third powers in the settlement of her relations with kindred countries or with countries having large German elements in their population.. In this attempt at a settlement Germany would have to declare most seriously that she was not willing to be influenced in any way by other parties in this settlement. It was impossible that freedom of nations and democratic rights should always be described as elements of the European order, but the very opposite be maintained when it came to improving the lot of the Germans in Austria.. and if England continued to resist German attempts to achieve a just and reasonable settlement, then the time would come when one would have to fight

..whoever proceeded by force against reason and justice would invite violence

Britain is here put on notice not to meddle in what is not her business. Hitler, responding to Henderson about a plebiscite in Austria, said that Germany demands to secure the legitimate interests of the Germans in Austria, and an end of oppression, by evolutionary means.

That Hitler should say he was against oppression and for evolutionary means should have made Henderson smile. The document goes on:

The British Ambassador pointed out that the present British Government had *considerable understanding of realities*. Chamberlain had himself *assumed the leadership of the people, instead of being lead by them*. He had shown great courage by *ruthlessly exposing international slogans, such as collective security and the like*. In history it was often most difficult to find two men who *not only wanted the same thing, but also intended to carry it out at the same time*. Therefore England was declaring her willingness to eliminate the difficulties and inquired of Germany whether she on her part was also prepared to do so

Never previously had a British Ambassador answered with such servility to an arrogant chief of state threatening his country with war. Hitler then warned Henderson that:

..he must emphasize very strongly that once Germans were fired upon in Austria or Czechoslovakia, the German Reich would intervene.. If internal explosions occurred in Austria or in Czechoslovakia, Germany would not remain neutral, but would act with lightning speed

This give the measure in which Hitler believed in peaceful evolution. Incidents in which Germans are shot at are easily created. Hitler added that the British Minister in Vienna complained against the pressure Germany ‘allegedly’ exerted upon Austria. The document goes on:

The British Ambassador pointed out that these statements by the ministers did not represent the opinion of the British Government and declared that he, Sir Neville Henderson, has himself often advocated the *Anschluss*⁵¹⁰

If the British Ambassador supports the *Anschluss*, and if the British Minister in Vienna is wrong when he protests against Germany’s pressure, the likelihood is indeed great that Britain would not cause too much trouble should Germany annex Austria.

Dr. Erich Kordt wrote a memorandum on a conversation he had with Sir Horace Wilson on March 10, 1938 from which we quote part of what Wilson said⁵¹¹:

The Prime Minister was being accused by circles associated with Eden and with leftist organizations as well as by the League of Nations Union of betraying democracy and of seeking an understanding with Fascism. He was even accused of seeking to introduce a dictatorial system into England. The Prime Minister would prevail over such attacks and persist in his policy of bringing about an understanding with Germany and Italy.. Some time ago the Fuhrer — in a conversation with Lord Lothian, he believed — *had compared England and Germany to two pillars upon which the European social order could rest. This comparison had particularly pleased the Prime Minister.* If this ideal was constantly kept in mind and one went at things in a generous spirit, it would be possible to overcome the lesser difficulties. After all, it was only a question of erecting an arch of cooperation upon these two pillars. Naturally, *one would have to proceed carefully*; and so long as the goal was kept firmly in mind, *it need not always be mentioned*

539⁵¹⁰ On reading this document, sent to him by Dr. Schmidt, Henderson wrote to Ribbentrop to ask for a correction. He said:

540 I never said that I had spoken here in favour of the *Anschluss*. What I did say was that I had sometimes expressed personal views which may not have been entirely in accordance with those of my Government

541 The German document was written by Dr. Schmidt from notes taken during the conversation. The disputed text conforms with what Henderson previously said to Von Papen. It is likely that Henderson does not want to be put on record as having expressed to Germany his support for the *Anschluss*. (DGFP, *ibid.*, doc 139, p. 249)

542⁵¹¹ DGFP, series D, vol. 1, doc. 148, p. 271-272

Imperial Britain and Nazi Germany are the two pillars of social order in Europe. This theme will be repeated by Chamberlain in a letter to his King in which he will say that Britain and Germany are the two pillars against communism. The two countries are expected to be the protectors of Europe. With such a view, it must be possible to accommodate Germany's ambitions. It must be noted that Wilson was aware that his opinions were not popular in Britain, thus the need to 'proceed carefully', and the advice 'it need not always be mentioned.' Not to mention a goal obviously does not preclude its existence. The document goes on:

We were expressly not being asked to give up our concern for Germany outside our borders. When we proceeded to the solution of questions of this kind, however, *it would be well* not "to upset other peoples" too much.. He hoped very much that we would succeed *as much as possible* vis-a-vis Czechoslovakia and Austria without the use of force. The prerequisite for this was, of course, that the other side also played "fair." When I interrupted to say that the plebiscite of the Austrian Government did not seem to me to be "fair," Sir Horace replied that in his opinion, too, this plan created difficulties

Britain is not very demanding. 'It would be well' is much weaker than 'it is essential' or 'Britain would not tolerate it otherwise'. Similarly 'as much as possible' indicates that there are acceptable cases in which matters just turned out to be impossible. The need to avoid the use of violence is conditioned to "fairness" by the other party. A plebiscite would not be fair and would therefore justify the use of violence.

With Britain so eager to build "an arch" on the two pillars of Germany and Britain, Hitler could have trusted reports telling him that Britain would not move if he annexed Austria.

The news of the last act of the Austrian tragedy reached Chamberlain and Halifax just after a luncheon they were having with Ribbentrop. Ribbentrop reported what occurred between them⁵¹²:

After today's luncheon with Prime Minister Chamberlain, he at first spoke to me in private, and very emphatically requested that I inform the Fuhrer of his most sincere wish for an understanding with Germany

When I was about to leave, several telegrams were transmitted to Chamberlain through Halifax.. The first one stated that Glaise-Horstnau had demanded that the Federal Chancellor postpone the plebiscite and hold it under different conditions at a later date. The second telegram stated that Schuschnig had called off the plebiscite, provided "that there was a guarantee that the Nazi would remain quiet". Thereupon Seyss-Inquart, by order of the

543⁵¹² *ibid*, doc 150, pp. 273-275

Fuhrer, had called on Schuschnigg and presented an ultimatum with a one hour time-limit demanding that Schuschnigg resign and that the Minister of the Interior succeed him.

Chamberlain and Halifax reacted differently to the news. Halifax said that the threat of force was intolerable. He wanted to discuss the possibility of postponing the plebiscite. Chamberlain interrupted him to say that this was not required since the second telegram mentioned only a cancellation. Obviously, Chamberlain did not want to advance a proposal contradicting a German stand. The Ribbentrop document goes on:

Lord Halifax said he considered exceedingly serious that Schuschnigg had been threatened with invasion. I replied that the telegrams which were read here did not say that at all. Chamberlain immediately admitted this. However, Lord Halifax expressed the opinion that the exertion of pressure implied such a threat. *Chamberlain again stated that personally he understood the situation.* British public opinion, however, would hardly accept a settlement of the question under pressure or in effect by force.. The form of our leave-taking was entirely amiable, and even Halifax was calm again⁵¹³

On March 14, 1938, Chamberlain made a long statement in the House of Commons describing the events which ended in the annexation of Austria by Germany. He underlined the fact that the annexation was the result of the use of violence by Germany.

Under-Secretary Butler stated in the House that Britain made strong representations to Germany including a request for the withdrawal of the German troops. The German Foreign Office was not aware of such representations. Kirckpatrick, of the British Embassy in Berlin, was convoked at the German Foreign Office to discuss the matter. He recognised the fact that the Embassy records do not show that such representation had been made to Berlin. Britain had indeed protested but not at all in the form mentioned by Butler in the Parliament⁵¹⁴. Apparently, there was an effort to conceal from the public, and therefore from the House, the weakness of the British protest.

On April 2, 1938 in a conversation with Henderson, Ribbentrop mentioned that Chamberlain stated in the House of Commons that the present moment did not appear favourable for negotiations with Germany.

544⁵¹³ The same day Chamberlain said privately to Ribbentrop: "once we had all got past this unpleasant affair and a reasonable solution had been found, it was to be hoped that we could begin working in earnest towards a German-British understanding". Contrarily to what Howard Roffman implies in 'Understanding the cold war' (p. 65-6), Ribbentrop reports that statement of Chamberlain as having been made *before* he received the two telegrams. It therefore would have a less cynical significance.

545⁵¹⁴ DGFP, *ibid*, doc. 392, p. 606

We quote Ribbentrop's report, on April 18, 1938, on Henderson's reply to him⁵¹⁵:

Sir Neville Henderson replied that it was, of course, necessary to reckon with public opinion and democracy in England

It seems that, were it not for the public opinion, Chamberlain would have been ready to negotiate immediately with Germany.

Woermann⁵¹⁶, in the presence of the German Embassy Counsellor Kordt, had a long conversation with British Under Secretary Butler concerning German-British relations. He reported to the German Foreign Ministry⁵¹⁷:

Mr Butler said that he knew from close association with Chamberlain and Lord Halifax that both, now as in the past, held fast to the idea of a real understanding with Germany and that *the events in Austria had not altered this in any way*.

Once more, any public demonstration to the contrary is just a *façade*. The document goes on:

He made himself the spokesman, as it were, of the younger generation in England — that is, a spokesman, as he said, of the intelligent, not the intellectual class.

Butler, apparently, had this in common with the Nazis: he despised intellectuals. The document goes on:

In contrast with the actual intellectuals, among whom there was now as in the past a strong antipathy to the authoritarian states, *the circle close to him fully understood that Germany had to pursue her national aims in her own way*. The German and the British peoples *were of the same blood* — which in itself meant a bond of unity. To the circle close to him it was inconceivable that Germany and England should meet again on the battlefield.

Butler then tried discreetly to direct the conversation to Czechoslovakia but immediately inserted the remark himself that we probably could not yet speak frankly about certain subjects. But immediately thereafter he said that England was aware that Germany would attain "her next goal". The manner in which this was done was, however, decisive for the reaction in England.

546⁵¹⁵ *ibid.*, doc. 400, p. 615

547⁵¹⁶ Woermann was in Hitler's close circle.

548⁵¹⁷ *ibid.*, doc. 750, pp 1092-1093

Butler and Woermann were speaking together like two accomplices. Butler said he knew that Germany will attain her next goal concerning Czechoslovakia. He therefore acknowledges in April, before the trouble with Czechoslovakia became very serious, that England would not stand in Germany's way.

Britain's only request was that Germany should use methods which take into account British public reaction. The fact that he knew that Germany cannot speak frankly about it reveals his deep knowledge of Germany's strategy. It consist of advancing a claim while affirming that it is the last. After attaining the aim, Germany's strategy is to remain quiet for some short time in order to digest the victory and prepare a new claim.

With this strategy, and at the time of Butler's conversation, it was a little too early 'to speak frankly'. Germany could mention the need of better treatment for the Sudeten in Czechoslovakia. The time for claiming the annexation of the Sudeten region would come in a couple of months. Butler understood Germany's attitude. He recognised as natural the lack of frankness as part of German diplomacy. The document goes on:

Mr, Butler, who, incidentally, knows Germany and speaks some German too, has always expressed his views on Germany frankly, even before he was appointed to his post by Chamberlain and Lord Halifax. His appointment as Parliamentary Under Secretary in the Foreign Office may therefore be regarded as a certain indication of the plans of the British Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary.

Butler had been appointed Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs before the Austrian events. His conversation proves how little the events affected his political viewpoint. It may be an indication that, similarly, Chamberlain and Halifax, were just waiting for the possibility of resuming negotiations with Germany, whenever the public opinion would have calmed down.

CHAPTER XII

THE POLICY OF A FREE HAND. PART 3 (Towards Munich)

The Stage

France had given a guarantee to Czechoslovakia against unprovoked aggression. When Germany loudly raised her claims concerning the Sudeten region of that country, it was feared that Germany might take some military action against Czechoslovakia. This could have led to France's involvement. Without the help of Britain, France, in a war with Germany, could be invaded and defeated.

Britain wanted neither to help France against Germany nor to have German troops on the northern shores of France. The options were few. Britain could have explored the possibilities for collective security to resist any German aggression. Another option would have been to help Germany realise her claims 'peacefully' by exerting pressure on both France and Czechoslovakia.

It has been argued that the option of collective security was not realistic since France and England were not able to stand against the German military power. As to the Soviet Union, her military power was questionable. The absence of common boundaries between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia or Germany had made her help still more questionable. In addition, it was believed that a communist regime should not be trusted. It would always act in its own interests⁵¹⁸.

It had been shown that the British General staff, in a report on the evolution of relative military strength, thought that the year 1939, rather than 1938, would be better for Germany to start a war. In 1938, the argument of the West's military weakness therefore did not hold much water. However, what is important is that the British military weakness, whether true or false, is irrelevant. *It cannot be expected that the same leaders who, with the full knowledge of the consequences, allowed Germany to rearm, to remilitarise the Rhineland and to annex Austria, would decide to resist a German aggression against Czechoslovakia.* What they did, had been done with the full knowledge that the day of reckoning would soon come in the precise form of a threat to Austria followed by one to Czechoslovakia.

Indeed, those leaders were on record as having expressed their certitude that Germany intended to expand to the East. They expressed their belief that this was not against British vital interests. They prevented France from ensuring her security by enforcing the demilitarisation of the Rhine. At the

549⁵¹⁸ In a letter to his sister Chamberlain advanced this reason to justify his distrust of the Soviet Union. The fact is that each country acts in its own interest. In this respect what matters is the existence, or non-existence, of common interests.

time, the records show, they had no doubts that, by doing so, they were preventing France from being able to help her allies in Central and Eastern Europe. They expressed their certitude that Germany was not interested in the West. Her interests and ambitions were in the East. If, therefore, a way could be found to make France disentangle herself from commitments in the East, Germany would cease to be a danger to the West.

The British leaders drew military policies geared at defending the British Isles. Intervention on the continent was excluded. They are on record as having said, so many times, in so many different ways, that all would be well if only Germany would proceed to the East in a way that would not shock British public opinion.

The crises over Austria and Czechoslovakia were predicted. Within the frame of British policy, the military unpreparedness of Britain was neither an oversight nor a mistake. The leaders, not interested in stopping Hitler in his drive Eastward, did not think it wise to spend on military preparation which they were, anyway, unwilling to use. They would later argue that Britain was weak. This was nothing more than a convenience to hide their deliberate policy of accepting Hitler's expansion.

In reality, they had hoped that Hitler would be more understanding. They thought that, once he would be guaranteed the realisation of his dreams, he would be prepared to be more patient. At times, the frustration of the British leaders was such that they wished they had been militarily strong enough to force Hitler to be more reasonable, i.e. to accept solutions that essentially would have given him what he wanted, while being more acceptable to the British people.

Nevertheless, the record also contain some 'heroic moments' in which it seemed that Chamberlain, during the Czechoslovakian crisis, was prepared to take a strong stand against Hitler, even at the risk of war.

Chamberlain did not always have complete freedom of action. The success of his policy depended on the possibility of window-dressing it so that it could be accepted by his colleagues, the House of Commons and public opinion. In this respect Hitler was not always helpful⁵¹⁹.

On two occasions, in May and September 1938, the British government did take a strong stand over the Czechoslovakian crisis. It is interesting to find out how and why this could have occurred.

550⁵¹⁹ 'Chips', Op. cit., pp. 177,185. Sir Henry Channon commonly called 'Chips' was an enthusiastic Chamberlain fan. On November 15, 1938 he entered in his diary: "The pogroms in Germany and the persecutions there have roused much indignation everywhere. I must say **Hitler never helps**, and always makes Chamberlain's task more difficult." On March 14, 1939, after reading from tape that Czechoslovakia had been invaded by Germany, he entered in his diary: "It looks as if he [Hitler] is going to break the Munich Agreement, and throw Chamberlain over.. It is just a year today since German troops entered and took poor languid, helpless, prostrate Austria. *Hitler is never helpful.*"

The Options, Their Handling

We saw that on February 15, 1938, Cadogan almost wished that Germany would swallow Austria and get it over with. On March 12, 1938, after the annexation of Austria, he entered in his diary:⁵²⁰

We are helpless as regards Austria — that is finished. we *may* be helpless as regards Czechoslovakia, etc. *That* is what I want to get considered. Must we have a death-struggle with Germany again? Or can we stand aside? Former does no one any good. Will latter be fatal? I'm inclined to think not. But I shall have to fight *Van, Sargent and all the forces of evil...*, So far we have done no wrong. [highlighted words in the original]

The fate of Czechoslovakia had to be considered before giving up Austria. Now Germany had a much better strategic position relative to that country. Czechoslovakia's boundaries with Austria were not nearly as well protected as her boundaries with Germany. It did not make sense to 'almost wish' the swallowing of Austria and then worry about Czechoslovakia.

Cadogan would have liked to avoid a 'death-struggle' with Germany. He conceded that, to avoid it now, could prove fatal, though he inclined to think otherwise. He knew the price that Britain would have to pay to avoid a clash with Germany. It was not just a matter of Czechoslovakia. Wisely, Cadogan followed 'Czechoslovakia' with 'etc'.

Cadogan was resolved to combat the forces of evil: Sargent, Vansittart, and the like of the Foreign Office. Those were the people who did not trust that Hitler would be content with expansion in the East.

Cadogan's diary entries have a special importance. He was the man chosen to replace Vansittart. He, like Chamberlain, was prepared to 'appease' Hitler to his heart content, as long as his appetite was confined to the East.

On March 12, following Germany's annexation of Austria, Chamberlain convened a Cabinet meeting⁵²¹:

"Here was a typical illustration of power politics", said Chamberlain. "*This made international appeasement much more difficult*". In spite of all, however, the Prime Minister felt that this thing had to come. Nothing short of an overwhelming display of force would have stopped it.. "*At any rate the question was now out of the way*.. It might be said with justice that we had been too late in taking up the conversations with Italy. The next

551⁵²⁰ David Dilks. 'The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan', p. 63

552⁵²¹ Ian Colvin, 'The Chamberlain Cabinet', Victor Gollancz, London, 1971, pp. 105-106

question was *how we were to prevent an occurrence of similar events in Czechoslovakia*".

Chamberlain seemed sorry at what occurred to Austria. Nevertheless it had been an obstacle now 'out of the way'. Out of what way? The context indicates that 'the way' is appeasement, and appeasement, it was said so many times earlier, would lead to a 'settlement' or an 'understanding'.

Chamberlain spoke of international appeasement. He obviously meant that when Germany, and possibly Italy, would be appeased, there would be international peace. This aim overruled any other consideration. Austria, if it unwillingly stood in his way, became an obstacle to be overcome.

Germany, instead of being appeased by Britain, had had recourse to a measure of self-appeasement. Chamberlain, the quote shows, knew that Czechoslovakia was next in line. He wanted to consider the means to prevent 'similar events in Czechoslovakia'.

This statement by Chamberlain is quite ambiguous. He just said that 'only an overwhelming display of force would have stopped' Germany from annexing Austria. Was this consideration absent with respect to Czechoslovakia? Or was Britain ready to do for Czechoslovakia what she could not do for Austria?

All depended on what one intended to achieve. To prevent 'similar events in Czechoslovakia' can be done in two fundamentally different ways. On the one hand overwhelming force can be mustered and displayed. This is quite unreasonable. If force is to be used, it does not make sense to first allow the enemy to gain such military advantages as an increase of manpower and a decisive strategical improvement as occurred with the annexation of Austria.

On the other hand, without the use of force against Germany, the events with respect to Czechoslovakia could still be prevented from being similar to those in the Austrian case. It requested of Britain and France that they act fast enough to appease Germany before she takes an additional measure of self-appeasement. There seems to be no other way to interpret the previous quote. In order to achieve this aim Chamberlain had to overcome three difficulties:

the main difficulty was the will of Czechoslovakia not to be swallowed without fighting. This would be dealt with by pressure, threats and false promises

another difficulty was the French treaty of mutual assistance with Czechoslovakia. In the case of Austria, the only protection of her independence had been a promise of consultations between France, Britain and Italy. Czechoslovakia was, from the point of view of Britain, a more dangerous case. A French involvement would, in the last resort, involve Britain herself. A Soviet-Czechoslovakian treaty caused no trouble to

Britain. On Czechoslovakia's request, it had been made dependent on the express condition that France would first come to Czechoslovakia's assistance. It would therefore be enough to prevent France from helping, or having to help, Czechoslovakia, to nullify the effect of the treaty with the Soviet Union. This would require the repeated use of pressure on France, sometimes taking the form of threats.

w the last difficulty was the greatest. Public opinion in England had to be handled very carefully. Had the intention of the government been that of resisting aggression, Chamberlain would have stressed the importance of resisting violence, the readiness of the British people to stand for morality, honour and justice, at whatever price.

However, Chamberlain's intention was to have the English people accept the abandoning of Czechoslovakia to Germany's appetite. In such a case, it was necessary to stress the horrors of war, to spread the fear of bombing and the use of gas, to underrate the importance of Czechoslovakia

It is revealing that, at the same Cabinet meeting⁵²²:

Mr Hore Belisha then came out with an unexpectedly strong demand for more rearmament, but Lord Halifax objected that 'the events of the last few days had not changed his own opinion *as to the German attitude towards Britain*. He did not think it could be claimed that a new situation had arisen.

There is no new situation because the German attitude towards Britain had not changed! This means that on the one hand, Halifax, the British Foreign Secretary, believed that Germany's ambitions were exclusively in the Eastern (and Central Europe) direction, and that he, Halifax, did not mind. There was no reason to change the British plans for rearmament. There was obviously no intention to put Britain in a position to display, together with her allies, an overwhelming military force.

On March 18, 1938, Sir Thomas Inskip, Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence, in a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee, stated about Czechoslovakia that he⁵²³:

could see no reason why we should take any steps to maintain such a unit into being

Once more, the obvious strategical importance of preventing Czechoslovakia to be 'maintained', could not have been unknown to Inskip. At the same meeting, Halifax was more explicit⁵²⁴

553⁵²² 'The Chamberlain Cabinet', Op. cit., p.107

554⁵²³ 'The Chamberlain Cabinet', Op. cit., p. 108

“The more closely we associate ourselves with France and Russia,” said Halifax, “the more we produce on German minds the impression that we are plotting to encircle Germany.” He did not accept “the assumption that *when Germany had secured the hegemony of Central Europe*, she would then pick a quarrel with ourselves..” Sir Samuel Hoare said that he would prefer a new commitment to France rather than one tied up in any way with Central Europe, but even that, objected Halifax, “might also involve us in war in the very near future when in certain respects, such as supply of A.A. guns, we were very unprepared”.

Halifax does not speak of the Sudeten problem only. He calmly envisages the German hegemony over Central Europe. He seems quite sure that it would soon occur but that Britain would be left in peace by Germany. One also wonders why, if, in Halifax’s opinion, Britain is so unprepared, did he oppose additional military expenses. The fact seems to be that Halifax did think Britain could muster the needed military force to stop Germany. Simply, this was not the option of his choice. He said it himself at the same meeting⁵²⁵:

Either we must mobilize all our friends and resources and go full out against Germany *or* we must remind France of what we have often told her in the past, namely that we are not prepared to add in any way to our existing commitments and that therefore she must not count on military assistance from us if she gets embroiled with Germany over Czechoslovakia, and that she would be well advised to use her influence in Prague in favour of an accommodation.

The options are clear. It is not impossible to stand up to Germany’s policy of expansion. It just is not the British policy. The policy of avoiding a commitment to Czechoslovakia, or even to France in relation to Czechoslovakia, was decided upon three days before the submission by the Chiefs of Staff of a report on “Military implications of German Aggression Against Czechoslovakia”.

The scope of the report was determined by the questions put by Chamberlain to the chiefs to face the following alternatives⁵²⁶:

(a) That this country should concert with France, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Rumania, Hungary, Turkey and Greece, or any of them, an undertaking to resist by force any attempt by Germany to impose a forcible solution of the Czechoslovakian problem.

555⁵²⁴ ‘The Chamberlain Cabinet’, Op. cit., p. 109

556⁵²⁵ ‘The Chamberlain Cabinet’, Op. cit., pp. 109-110

557⁵²⁶ Taylor Telford, Op. cit., pp. 629-630

(b) That this country should give an assurance to the French Government that, in the event of the French Government being compelled to fulfil their obligations to Czechoslovakia, consequent upon an act of aggression by Germany, the United Kingdom would at once lend its support to the French Government.

The assumption in both cases to be that Italy is at best neutral, and possibly hostile; that there is considerable risk of Japan being hostile; that the following are neutral: Russia, Poland, Belgium, Holland, Denmark; that the U.S.A. Neutrality Act is in operation at the outset; and that the arrangement in either case would begin to operate at once.

The assumption in the second case to be that at the outset the following are neutral: Rumania, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Turkey, Greece.

These frames of reference are revealing. We may note the following:

w The relations between Hungary and Czechoslovakia were at the time rather hostile. The likelihood of Hungary aligning herself with Czechoslovakia against Germany were nil.

w Russia was to be considered neutral in both cases. The fact that, if France assisted Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union was committed to assist Czechoslovakia — by virtue of its pact of mutual assistance with that country — was not considered. The Soviet Union, even as a speculative alternative, is eliminated as a possible ally while the absolutely impossible case of a Hungarian stand against Germany was to be considered. The absence of common boundaries between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia or Germany, is obviously not the reason since Turkey and Greece, both with no common boundaries with Czechoslovakia or Germany, have been introduced in the equation.

w Poland, a country more important than Hungary, was to be considered neutral. That country, after the remilitarisation of the Rhineland, reached the natural conclusion that it could not rely on the British and French will to stand up to Germany's expansionist dreams. Poland therefore was prepared to come to some understanding with Germany, even at the expense of Czechoslovakia. The possibility still existed that an unambiguous change of attitude of the West in favour of a firmer stand towards Germany, would bring back Poland to the Western side. This possibility was not to be explored. No approaches were made to ascertain what would be the attitude

of Poland in the new situation which would follow a permanent firm British attitude⁵²⁷

w The most important question was not asked at all. It was imperative to determine the measure in which the balance of power between the West and Germany, would be modified, were Germany to be allowed to conquer Czechoslovakia. Even if Britain were to reach the conclusion that a war in 1939 is preferable to one in 1938, she had to consider the possibility that Germany would impose a war at her own chosen time which may well be 1938. If Britain is already disadvantaged with Czechoslovakia on her side, how much more disadvantaged she would be with Czechoslovakia being annexed by Germany. This could be the factor which would make a German victory much more likely. Moreover, if this additional increase of Germany's military power is taken into account, it could be that 1939 with Czechoslovakia part of Germany, would not be a better year than 1938 with Czechoslovakia in the democratic camp.

Concerning the report of the Chiefs of Staff, Telford Taylor makes a pertinent comment⁵²⁸:

Given the history of interchanges between the Chiefs of Staff and the Cabinet ministers over the past several years, and the limits of the questions submitted by the Prime Minister, the conclusions in the report were virtually inevitable, and it is easy to see why Chamberlain and his colleagues felt no need to await the report before reaching their own conclusions. Year after year the Chiefs had pointed with alarm to the sorry state of British and the alarming growth of German arms, and year after year the Cabinet had replied by reducing their rearmament estimates. A few weeks earlier, on Chatfield's initiative, the Chiefs renewed their warnings against "business as usual," only to be rebuffed again by the Chamberlain-Simon-Inskip combination. Against this background, it was not to be expected that the Chiefs, suddenly confronted with the possibility of war against Germany, and perhaps Italy and Japan as well, would react with anything other than dismay and revulsion. They may, indeed, have feared that any note of optimism in their report would undercut their pending requests for increased military appropriations

The report affirmed that it was unlikely that Germany would succeed in piercing the French Maginot line of defence. In consequence, the report said, Germany may try to deliver a knockout blow against Britain by intensive air

558⁵²⁷ It was done later
559⁵²⁸ Op. cit., p. 632

bombing. It stated that Britain was not in a position to prevent Germany from throwing at least 400 tons of bombs daily for two months⁵²⁹.

The Cabinet concluded that, with such a gloomy report⁵³⁰, it was impossible for Britain to agree to any commitments related to the protection of Czechoslovakia against aggression.

Chamberlain would use the bombing scare in different ways according to his needs. When he wanted to restrict the military appropriations, he would put himself on record as not believing in the possibility of a bombing knockout against Britain. When the matter would be commitments to prevent a German aggression, it would then be time to underline Britain's vulnerability to air attacks. Moreover, a study of the German use of heavy bombing in Spain, against military and civilian objectives, demonstrated that the damages it could inflict were much less than were described in the Chiefs of Staff report.

On March 17, 1938, the Soviet Government proposed the holding of a conference to study the situation resulting from the annexation of Austria and means to resist further aggression. It said⁵³¹:

The Soviet Government.. is ready as before to participate in collective actions, which would be decided jointly with it and which would aim at checking the further development of aggression and at eliminating the increased danger of a new world massacre. It is prepared immediately to take up in the League of Nations or outside of it the discussion with other powers of the practical measures which the circumstances demand.

Here was an offer to organise a common front against aggression. It came at a moment at which Chamberlain was saying in his diary that the language of force is the only one Germany could understand. However the offer appeared suspicious to Chamberlain. On March 20 Chamberlain wrote⁵³²:

with Franco winning in Spain by the aid of German guns and Italian Planes, with a French Government in which one cannot have the slightest confidence and which I suspect to be in closish touch with our opposition, *with the Russians stealthy and*

560⁵²⁹ It will be shown in next chapter that Chamberlain had no fear of the effects of German bombing

561⁵³⁰ William Manchester, in 'The Last Lion; Winston Spencer Churchill 1932-1940' (Little Brown & Co., Boston, 1988) mentions in page 295 that important minority reports *had been suppressed*. The Cabinet could not know that Air Chief Marshall Sir Hugh Dowding presented a brighter and convincing picture of the British Air force. He headed the RAF Fighter Command and was to lead it during the Battle of Britain.

562⁵³¹ 'Britain and Germany between the Wars', Op. cit., pp. 132-133

563⁵³² Keith Feiling, Op. cit., pp. 347-348

*cunningly pulling all the strings behind the scenes*⁵³³ *to get us involved in war with Germany* (our Secret Service doesn't spend all its time looking out of the window), *and finally with a Germany flushed with triumph, and all too conscious of her power*, the prospect looked black indeed. In face of such problems, to be badgered and pressed *to come out and give a clear, decided, bold, and unmistakable lead*, show "ordinary courage", and all the rest of the twaddle, is calculated to vex the man who has to take the responsibility for the consequences.

This calls for some remarks and clarification:

w the mention of Franco's victories is cynical. The mention of the German guns and Italian airplanes testifies to Chamberlain's awareness of the total failure of the *Non Intervention Policy*. Had it not been for Britain's strong insistence, France could have supplied the loyalist Spanish government with the arms she had the internationally recognised right to acquire. The strategic position of the West in Spain was so much better than that of Italy and Germany that the West could have easily inflicting a biting defeat on the Fascist and Nazi policies. Now, contemplating the results of his actions, he pours tears over the situation in Spain. Chamberlain did not honestly present his case. He collected arguments according to convenience and not conviction.

w the British secret services, as well as those of other countries, were singularly incapable of obtaining reliable information from the Soviet Union. Had Chamberlain received positive information concerning Soviet plots to involve Britain in a war against Germany he would have certainly alluded to it in public. After all, the reciprocal accusation from the Soviet Union against Britain was almost a daily occurrence. It was also frequently mentioned in British newspapers of different tendencies. By referring to secret information he protects himself from having to argue the facts. The facts were that, regardless of the morality — or absence thereof — of the Soviet Policy, peace and resistance to Nazi aggression were both in the interest of the Soviet Union.

'Stealthy and cunningly' as the Russians were reported to be, they did not 'pull' any 'string behind the scenes' resulting in Germany's bullying of Austria. The only way the Soviet Union could get Britain involved in a war

564⁵³³ Halifax asked the British Embassy in Moscow to ask Litvinoff "that a hint to remain quiet should be conveyed to Czech communist party through the Comintern". Vereker, from the Embassy, replied on May 28, 1938, that such a request would be rejected 'out-off hand' as being improper. He then added that the French Ambassador in Moscow told him of his conviction that the Soviet Government have in fact sent such instructions to the *Czech communist party* 'whose attitude up to date seems to have been exemplary'. (DBFP, series 3, vol 1, doc 333, p. 391). If the Soviet Union was pulling strings, apparently it was not in the direction of creating trouble to Britain.

with Germany would be in using her influence and propaganda to make Britain stand against further German aggressions. This was done quite openly. The public and official Soviet proposal is an example. No doubt that the Soviet ambassador, in his many contacts with British personalities, was defending the Soviet view. Some of these contacts were with leaders of the opposition. Churchill was one of the people in contact with the Soviet ambassador. Germany and Italy had also similar contacts. Somehow these latter contacts were neither 'stealthy' nor 'cunning'.

What mattered was to know if agreeing to the Soviet proposal was in the interest of Great Britain or not. This question is side-tracked. By describing the resistance to Germany's further aggressions as the aim of 'stealthy and cunning' Soviet designs, Chamberlain is discrediting a proposal without considering its merits. He may then reject the proposal relying on weaker arguments than would otherwise be necessary.

With the Germans were flushed with triumph because Britain objected to any serious action that would have re-established the demilitarised status of the Rhineland. A policy of neglect for British rearmament, a policy of tolerance to a succession of German treaty violations, contributed to Germany's triumphs.

With agreeing to the Soviet proposal would have certainly been 'a clear, decided, bold and unmistakable lead'. Chamberlain chose to reject the Soviet proposal.

Chamberlain continues:

As a matter of fact, the plan of the "Grand Alliance", as Winston calls it, had occurred to me long before he mentioned it.. I talked about it to Halifax and we submitted to the chiefs of the Staff and the F.O. experts. It is a very attractive idea; indeed there is almost everything to be said for it until you come to examine its practicability. From that moment its attractiveness vanishes.

Chamberlain never seriously considered such an alliance. Later, faced with such a possibility, he said he would rather resign as Prime Minister than sign a treaty of mutual assistance with the Soviet Union⁵³⁴. Besides, he had a deep contempt for the Foreign Office and consistently disregarded their opinions, warnings and advice. On a number of occasions he did ask for the opinions of the Chiefs of Staff. He, however, often constrained their frames of reference in such a way as to force expected conclusions.

⁵³⁴ Ironside has this entry in his diary on July 1939, p. 78: Chamberlain said that it seemed impossible to come to an understanding with Russia. Did I think it was right? I told him that though it was much against the grain, it was the only thing we could do. Chamberlain ejaculated "The only thing we cannot do".

As recently as November 12, 1937, the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee of the C.I.D. produced a report 'on the comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of certain other nations as at January 1938'. We already saw that it concluded that, in terms relative to France and Britain, the year 1939 would be better for Germany than the year 1938. It also mentioned what the value of the Soviet Union could be:

a) *Assumptions* Germany and Italy hostile, and France and Belgium, in cooperation with us. Russia to be taken in alternatives, either a neutral or cooperating with us.

14. It is only if Poland is friendly and willing to co-operate that Russian intervention on behalf of France and England could quickly develop into a real menace for Germany

15.. The great number of Russian aircraft should prove a serious threat to Germany in the East in a war of long duration, as some means of exploiting them would no doubt be found in course of time.

The report made a number of reservations on the value of the Soviet Union as an ally. It warned that the Soviet's contribution was not expected to play a role until some time had elapsed. It also underlined the possibility that a Soviet involvement could draw Japan into the war. This was a dreaded eventuality.

The Chiefs of Staffs underlined that Germany had, in 1938, no land superiority over France, Her superiority was in the Air. They doubted that Germany believed it possible to win a war on the base of air superiority. Moreover, they added, when it comes to win a war by air, 'Germany must take into account possible action by Russian air forces.'

This tends to show that, according to the Chiefs of Staff, the prospect of a Russian action would have a serious restraining effect on Germany. On the whole the reports does not justify a pessimist attitude as to the value of a 'Grand-Alliance'.

Chamberlain goes on:

You have only to look at the map to see that nothing that France or we could do could possibly save Czechoslovakia from being overrun by the Germans, if they wanted to do it. The *Austrian frontier is practically open*; the *great Skoda munition works* are within easy bombing distance of the German aerodromes, the railways all pass through German territory, *Russia is 100 miles away*.

Chamberlain is evading the issue. He knows of course that, if it comes to war, in the last resort what matters for Czechoslovakia is whether the Allies would come out victorious. Britain and France were more impotent with

regard to Poland in 1939 than they were with regard to Czechoslovakia in 1938. In 1939, Chamberlain did not raise the same argument. He relied on the fate of Poland after the victory of the Allies.

Chamberlain demonstrated in this last quote that, for him, Czechoslovakia was not 'a far away country of which we know nothing'. He is aware that the annexation of Austria by Germany was a blow to the strategic position of Czechoslovakia. He knows the value of 'the great Skoda munitions'. He does not consider how much more the possession of these factories and laying hands on the Czechoslovakian airplanes and land armaments, would strengthen Germany. The 100 miles separating Russia from Czechoslovakia is written as if it was a great distance. It was not much for airplanes.

Chamberlain worries over Czechoslovakia's vulnerability to air bombing. In all fairness it should be compared to Germany's vulnerability. The German industrial Rhur was very vulnerable. Though, Germany had a superior air force, it must be considered that, at the start of hostilities, much of it would have been busy on the Czechoslovakian front. This would reduce, if not eliminate, the German margin of superiority on the Western front.

It was known that the occupation of Czechoslovakia — particularly the peaceful occupation — would be a strategic catastrophe for the allies. If, in March 1938, the allies were militarily at the mercy of Germany, this would be much more true after Germany would not only strengthen herself by the acquisition of the Czechoslovakian air forces, ammunition factories and land armaments, but would also have to face one powerful enemy less.

The reasoning of Chamberlain must be put in the perspective of previous decisions. The illegal strengthening of the German army, resulting from the British tolerance, was taken as an argument not to oppose its legalisation. This resulted in further strengthening which was the basis for arguing against preventing Germany's remilitarisation of the Rhineland. The resulting impotence of France to intervene against Germany was then good reason not to interfere with the *Anschluss*. In its turn the *Anschluss*, Chamberlain argued, made it unreasonable to intervene in favour of Czechoslovakia.

The decisions were taken with the knowledge of their consequences. The trust that Germany would look only Eastward, was the basis of the British policy expressed in private and in official secret reports .

Chamberlain concludes:

Therefore we could not help Czechoslovakia — she would simply be a pretext for going to war with Germany. That we could not think of unless we had a reasonable prospect of being able to beat her to her knees in a reasonable time, and of that I see no sign. I have therefore abandoned any idea of giving guarantees to Czechoslovakia, or the French in connection with her obligation to that country.

No British government would have been allowed by its citizens to stand aloof while France would be invaded by Germany. The absence of guarantee to France, in the eventuality of her coming to the assistance of Czechoslovakia against Germany was nothing more than exertion of pressure on France not to stand by her commitments to Czechoslovakia⁵³⁵.

On March 24, 1938, Halifax conveyed to the Soviet Ambassador in London the British rejection of the Soviet proposal⁵³⁶. On the same day, in a speech at the House of Commons, Chamberlain commented on the Soviet Proposal⁵³⁷:

It remains for His Majesty's Government to state their attitude in regard to the proposal made by the Government of the U.S.S.R., that an early conference should be held for the purpose of discussion with certain other Powers of the practical measures which, in their opinion the circumstances demand. His Majesty's Government would warmly welcome the assembly of any conference, at which it might be expected that all European nations would consent to be represented, and at which it might therefore be found possible to discuss matters in regard to which anxiety is at present felt. In present circumstances, however, they are obliged to recognise that no such expectation can be entertained, and the Soviet Government do not, in fact, appear to entertain it. Their proposal would appear to involve *less a consultation with a view to settlement than a concerting of action against an eventuality that has not yet arisen*. Its object would appear to be to negotiate such mutual undertakings in advance to resist aggression, as I have referred to, which for the reasons I have already given, His Majesty's Government for their part are unwilling to accept. Apart from this, His Majesty's Government are of opinion that the indirect, but nonetheless inevitable, consequence of such action as is proposed by the Soviet Government would be *to aggravate the tendency towards the establishment of exclusive groups of Nations*, which must, in the view of His Majesty's Government be inimical to the prospects of European Peace.

An aggression had already occurred and Austria, as an independent state, had disappeared. In the opinion of the British leaders there was a serious possibility that Czechoslovakia would be the next victim of a German aggression. This eventuality had indeed occurred, and occurred to such a level that it was the object of numerous reports and studies in the Foreign

566⁵³⁵ See Telford Taylor, Op. cit., pp. 636-637. We quote:
567

568As Halifax had put it to his colleagues on March 21, the vital thing was "to dissuade France from going to the aid of Czechoslovakia," and given that purpose any British commitment, no matter how conditional, would have been counterproductive

569⁵³⁶ DBFB, series 3, vol 1, doc. 116, p. 101

570⁵³⁷ Chamberlain, 'In Search of Peace', Putnam's Sons, New-York, 1939, p. 85

Office. Furthermore, Chamberlain, earlier in this same speech, referred lengthily to this eventuality and felt it necessary to define the British policy with respect to it:

In these circumstances the problem before Europe to which.. it is their [HMG's Government] most urgent duty to direct their attention, is how best to restore this shaken confidence, *how to maintain the rule of law, in international affairs..* Of these the one which is *necessarily most present in many minds is that which concerns the relations between the Government of Czechoslovakia and the German minority in that country..*

Accordingly, the Government have *given special consideration to this matter*, and in particular they have fully considered the question *whether the United Kingdom.. should*, as a further contribution towards preserving peace in Europe, now undertake *new and specific commitments* in Europe, and in particular such a commitment *in relation to Czechoslovakia*.

Two attitudes are described by Chamberlain and Halifax⁵³⁸. The first consist in organising concerted action against aggression. Germany is not expected to collaborate with that organisation and the Soviet Union cannot be blamed for suggesting a conference to which not all the European countries would participate.

The other attitude consisted in seeking 'friendly'⁵³⁹ discussions with the prospective aggressor in order to secure a settlement of the problems. However, in this case also, there are no serious intention to invite all the European powers to participate. As with the Locarno Agreements, the Four Powers Pact, and later the Munich Agreement, there were no intentions to invite Soviet participation. The 'tendency towards exclusive groups of nations' was that of the British Government. The group of nations proposed by the Soviet Union was exclusive only in that it was to be restricted to those countries willing to stand against a further aggression.

Moreover, everyone could guess the kind of friendly settlement which could be reached with a Germany, known to be only interested in a free hand in Eastern Europe. She was led by a Hitler who, as Chamberlain wrote, only understands the language of force.

On April 4, 1938, Chamberlain, in the House of Commons, referred to the Soviet proposal. He criticised the opposition for supporting it. He accused them of inconsistency for having always opposed pre-war alliances and, now, promoting an '*offensive* and defensive' alliance between the Soviet Union, France and Britain. He then added⁵⁴⁰:

571⁵³⁸ Halifax, in his letter to the Soviet Ambassador rejecting the Soviet proposal, used a language and arguments almost identical to those of Chamberlain

572⁵³⁹ The term 'friendly' was used by Halifax

573⁵⁴⁰ 'Britain and Germany Between the Two Wars', Op. cit., p. 133

..the policy of His Majesty's Government, as stated [two weeks ago] has won the general approval of the whole country; and not only this country, but I may say practically the whole world, *with the possible exception of Russia.*

Chamberlain had no justification to describe the Soviet proposal as involving an Alliance. The Soviets had just suggested a conference. Moreover, to hint that the Soviet suggested an offensive as well as defensive alliance is a blunt distortion of the Soviet proposal. 'Offensive' is an adjective more appropriately used in conjunction with an aggressor like Germany and not with a country suggesting concerted action to prevent aggression. Moreover, the context in which the Soviet Union was referred to by Chamberlain had an offending character⁵⁴¹. Chamberlain abused the opposition and then associated them with 'Russia'.

Finally, Chamberlain was misleading the House in saying that the whole world, except Russia, was approving his policy. The records of the time are full with exchanges of opinions between Britain and France in which France was critical of that policy. As an instance we are quoting a letter from Phipps, the British Ambassador in Paris, to Halifax, written on March 15, 1938⁵⁴²:

.. M. Paul-Boncour [French minister for Foreign Affairs] urged that His Majesty's Government should declare publicly that, if Germany attacked Czechoslovakia and France went to latter's assistance, Great Britain would stand by France,

France and Britain had also differences concerning the policy with respect to the situation in Spain. However, it was customary for the two countries not to publicise their differences.

Czechoslovakia was another country differing with Chamberlain's policy. Even the U.S. had serious reservations over the policy of appeasement as practised by Chamberlain. Eden mentions Chamberlain's refusal of a Roosevelt initiative as the main reason for his resignation. This was not revealed to the public. These differences emerged publicly when, in a speech, Roosevelt suggested a 'quarantine' against the countries committing aggression. This was quite in contrast with Chamberlain's appeasement policy.

Chamberlain was less than candid with the House of Commons. This was not an exceptional occurrence. It was necessary, for the sake of his policy, to reject the Soviet proposal which advocated collective security, the very opposite to Chamberlain's brand of appeasement. Public opinion might

574⁵⁴¹ This was noted by Sir Archibald Sinclair who, speaking next said: ..What a great blunder to refer like that to the great country of Russia, about which even 20 years ago Lord Balfour had the prevision to say 'You must never leave Russia out of account when you are considering the affairs of Europe.'

575⁵⁴² DBFP, series 3, vol 1, doc. 81, p. 50

have agreed with Chamberlain if he could make it appear that all the world was with him and that the Soviet proposal was so disreputable that nobody was ready to associate with it, except for the members of the British opposition. A 'white lie' can help.

Even members of his Cabinet did not all see eye to eye with him. Hore-Belisha, Minister of war, asked Liddell Hart to prepare for him notes he could use in the Cabinet meetings. Here is what Liddell Hart wrote on March 13, 1938⁵⁴³:

.. Europe is becoming less and *less a political problem, more and more a military problem*. Whatever we may say, we are blind if we cannot see that we are committed to the defence of Czechoslovakia — for the renewed assurances that France has just given are the measure of her realization that her military situation largely turns on the existence of a Czechoslovakian distraction to Germany's power of concentration in the West, and we can no longer risk separation from France

With the German absorption of Austria, the Berlin-Rome axis is militarily strengthened to a degree probably exceeding any political strain thereby incurred.. The defence of Czechoslovakia becomes much more difficult.

It is a very succinct and illustrative analysis which describes the situation in terms of the relative importance of the military aspect and the political aspect of the problem. It was clear that Germany was striving to obtain an overwhelming military superiority over Britain and France. All her main political moves in terms of treaty repudiations or territorial claims and acquisitions had an important military component.

British moves, apparently, were political attempts at restraining Germany. Now, if one believes, as the British leaders did, that Germany's appetite was great, that she only understood the language of force and that her ambitions increased with her strength, one had to formulate accordingly the country's policy.

Liddell Hart says that one must be blind not to see the necessity to defend Czechoslovakia against a German aggression. Chamberlain refused to commit Britain to the defence of Czechoslovakia in spite of the fact that he was far from blind to the military consequences of the fall of Czechoslovakia. We already mentioned his awareness of the military consequences of the fall of Austria. On that occasion he manifested a keen understanding of the value of the 'great' Skoda munitions factories.

The main difference between Chamberlain and Liddell Hart was that Liddell Hart did not trust that Hitler was 'looking' only Eastwards. He thought that Hitler, either would start with the West, or would end with the West. In both cases, the military aspect of the situation was of importance.

576⁵⁴³ Liddell Hart, Op. cit., vol 2, pp. 141-143

Chamberlain trusted that Hitler would move Eastwards and would find there sufficient action to satisfy him and keep him busy for decades. The main problem therefore was to endeavour not to get involved in a war with Germany. It necessitated political action to prevent France from becoming involved.

It also necessitated political moves to condition the prospective victims of Germany's aggressions. By political pressure and manoeuvres, by posturing (pretending to adopt moral principles that are irrelevant), it would be possible to induce Germany to accept the victim cooked, dressed, and served on a silver plate, instead of having to use naked violence. Naked violence was dangerous. It would excite the British public which might pressure the government into helping the victim.

With such a view, the military aspects of Germany's moves were less important. It would suffice for Britain to take some military precautions to face the unlikely eventuality of a sudden air attack on Britain. On land, Britain, protected by her navy, felt safe. In this vein, Cadogan entered in his diary on March 16⁵⁴⁴:

I toned down Sargent's picture and came down against a guarantee to Cz[echoslovakia]. I shall be called 'cowardly' but after days and nights of thinking, I have come to the conclusion that is the least bad. We *must* not precipitate a conflict now — we shall be smashed. It *may* not be better later, but anything may happen (I recognize the Micawber strain).. Rearm, above *all* in the air. That is the policy of the line of least resistance, which the Cabinet will probably take.

Cadogan's opinion about the relative military strength of Germany versus Britain, France and Czechoslovakia (and possibly the Soviet Union) was not, as told before, shared by the Chiefs of Staffs. Cadogan himself put the record straight in his diary entry of March 18, 1938⁵⁴⁵:

Discussion of the paper for F.P.C. with H., Van, Sargent, Malkin and Butler.. F.P.C. unanimous that *Czechoslovakia is not worth the bones of a single British Grenadier*⁵⁴⁶. *And they're quite right too!*

'H.' stands for Halifax, the British Foreign Secretary. The matter now is not the fear of German military power. The matter is the very revealing fact that Czechoslovakia was not worth a single British soldier. The 'great Skoda munitions factories' notwithstanding; the possible disappearance of an ally

577⁵⁴⁴ Dilks, Op. cit., p. 63

578⁵⁴⁵ 'The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan', Op. cit., p. 63

579⁵⁴⁶ Austen Chamberlain, at the time of the conclusion of the Locarno agreement, said that Poland was not worth the bones of a single British grenadier. Cadogan may not have meant to support the famous saying literally. It is however clear that he agreed to its spirit.

of some notable military strength notwithstanding; the increase of Germany's military power by her seizing the Czechoslovakian military airplanes and tanks etc.. notwithstanding, Czechoslovakia is not worth a single British soldier.

This quote does not reveal ignorance of the participants of the F.P.C. who 'unanimously' reached such a conclusion. It reveals an indifference to repeated aggression by Germany and to her becoming stronger and stronger and thereby, increasing her ability to commit further aggressions.

In view of the belief, commonly expressed by many British leaders, that Germany would only look Eastwards, such an indifference is somewhat understandable, though it reveals the weak morality of the British leaders. This must be hidden from the public. A statement by Oliver Stanley on March 18, 1938, makes it clear⁵⁴⁷:

Mr Oliver Stanley had stated his view that "80% of the House of Commons are opposed to new commitments but 100% favour our *giving the impression that we will stand resolutely to the Dictators*". Mr. Chamberlain replied that he did not disagree with this estimate

Oliver Harvey, the private secretary of the Minister of Foreign affairs, became, after Eden's resignation, Halifax's secretary. Through his direct and constant contacts with Halifax he could give us the remarks of an insider concerning Halifax's frame of mind at the time he took the office of Secretary for Foreign Affairs. On March 19, 1938, Harvey entered in his diary⁵⁴⁸:

Halifax told me he could quite understand Germany action in regard to Austria but did not regard it as likely that Germany meant to use this as a first step towards recreating a vast Empire in Central Europe and the Balkans (which is Van's idea).. There was in any case *no objection to Germany having economic hegemony in Central Europe*. What H. objected to was the *methods employed* and the fact that Germany did not realise the effect of such methods on us and world generally, or that, if she did, she did not care.

The expression 'economic hegemony' has often been criticised in the Foreign Office internal reports. Vansittart, Sargent, Strang and others rightly stressed that economic hegemony is the result of political hegemony and means that, at best, the dominated countries have become obedient satellites of the country exerting the 'economic hegemony'. They are no longer independent countries.

580⁵⁴⁷ 'The Chamberlain Cabinet', Op. cit., p. 110

581⁵⁴⁸ 'The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey', edited by John Harvey, Collins, London, 1970, pp. 121-122

Harvey goes on:

Halifax is terribly weak where resistance is required and *neither he nor the P.M. have such abhorrence of dictatorship as to overcome the innate mistrust of French democracy* and its supposed inefficiency. I am amazed that H. with all his High Church principles is not more shocked at Hitler's proceedings — but he is always trying to understand the Germans. He easily blinds himself to unpleasant facts and is ingenious and even Jesuitical in rounding awkward corners in his mind. “*My colleagues are dictator-minded*” as A.E. used to say, and it is true. Again, I gravely doubt their determination, without A.E. to drive them, to press on with the rearmament, staff talks, etc. Inskip has no drive whatever. The General Staff are defeatist especially Admiralty.

The crimes of Nazism and Fascism were well-known and it also was already known that the German Gestapo had extended to Austria its usual activities of racial and political oppression. Had Halifax felt revulsion to such actions and deeply regretted Britain's military weakness which, so it was argued, prevented her from protecting Austria's independence, it would have unmistakably marked his conversation with Harvey. Harvey's diary shows nothing of the sort. Halifax's only anger is expressed against Hitler's methods: they are embarrassing because of the effect they have on world opinion.

“My colleagues are dictator-minded” could have just been an exclamation from a frustrated Secretary of State differing with his colleagues as to the extent of the need to come to terms with the dictators. Harvey's diary tends to show that there was more to it. Harvey, who at the time believed Britain could not do more than what Chamberlain was prepared to do, was recording impressions resulting from chatting with Halifax, and not from a political difference.

Harvey, as Halifax, was against new British commitments. However, while he was feeling shame at Britain not being able to do what he thought was right, he was dismayed at the calm and ease with which Halifax was justifying the British policy. “And it is true”, represents Harvey's personal conclusion. It is more reliable coming from him than from Eden. The parallel between the distrust of the French democracy and the lack of abhorrence for the dictatorships is instructive.

In the House of Commons Chamberlain spoke of increasing Britain's rearmament. In fact, he, together with the other senior ministers, displayed little disposition for the military increases deemed necessary by Swinton, and Hore-Belisha⁵⁴⁹. Suggestions to increase expenditures on rearmament were either rejected or drowned by diverting them to “further study”.

582⁵⁴⁹ See in ‘The Chamberlain Cabinet’ (Op. cit.) chapter X ‘Haggling over Defence’

In meetings from March 12, 1938, till May 18, 1938 the British Cabinet considered the British Air Force inadequacies. Swinton's requests for adequate budgeting were refused while Warren Fisher, Permanent Under-secretary in the treasury tried to lay the blame on Swinton for the backwardness of Britain's preparations in the air.

On March 15, 1938, the Government was subjected to strong criticism of its program of rearmament. This criticism could have lead to a pressure build-up on the Government to increase the budget allocations to rearmament in general, and to the air forces in particular. The criticism was being voiced by the Labour opposition as well as by a number of Conservatives.

Had they wanted, the Government could have considered it a golden opportunity to agree and say: "Yes, there is a need for re-establishing a secure balance between our air forces and those of Germany"⁵⁵⁰. However, this cannot be done without additional taxes and other sacrifices. Give us the means and we will provide the ends." The government did exactly the opposite. They tried to calm down the concerns that were raised and denied the weakness of the British military.

Chamberlain stressed the importance of the strength of the economy in a military conflict⁵⁵¹ and that of other factors, besides that of the numbers of aircrafts. The debate revealed the number of promises broken by the Government concerning the time at which Britain would have achieved a necessary measure of rearmament.

On March 15, 1938, the Government went even further. Here are some quotes from a debate at the House of Commons⁵⁵² in which Lieutenant Colonel Muirhead was speaking in the name of the Government:

Mr. Garro Jones: If the hon. and gallant Member will allow me to interrupt him.. did I correctly understand him to say that for the front-line strength of aircraft, we were as good and as far advanced as any other country? ..

Lieut.-Colonel Muirhead: I hope the hon. Member is under no misapprehension on this point. What I said — and I think the House will bear me out — was that in this essential requirement — and I had been dealing with turrets — which illustrates so well that relative strengths are not merely a matter of counting what are apparently complete aircraft, there is every reason to believe that, on a conservative basis, we are as good as any other country, and probably better.

Mr. Churchill: In quality and quantity or both?

Lieut.-Colonel Muirhead:In quality and quantity

583⁵⁵⁰ A policy to stand up against Germany's aggressive expansion would also have required rearmament of the land forces to demonstrate a readiness to assist victims of aggression on the continent. Chamberlain was totally opposed to such measures.

584⁵⁵¹ 'Parliamentary Debates', 5th series, vol 332, cols. 1558-1560

585⁵⁵² 'Parliamentary Debates', 5th series, vol 333, col. 230

The Government was misleading the House. Pressed by questions from members of the House, it had to admit that the situation was much less cheerful. Chamberlain explained that quantity does not necessarily mean numbers and that better quality, even with lower numbers means a greater quantity. It was a pitiful performance and it was clear that something had to be done to calm the House.

In consequence, Chamberlain sacked Swanton, the Minister who tried to improve the British Air Force and was prevented from doing his utmost by the financial restrictions imposed by the Cabinet led by Chamberlain. Answering accusations repeatedly made against Swanton by Sir Warren Fisher, Permanent Under-Secretary in the Treasury, Sir Kingsley Wood, who succeeded Swanton as Air Minister defended him from being responsible for Britain's weakness in the air. He had written a report from which the true responsibilities appeared clearly⁵⁵³:

“At the beginning of the period of German rearmament our Secret Service opinion was necessarily scanty, but we were fortunate enough to secure in 1934 a copy of the plan on which the German Air Force was being rebuilt. All the information which has reached the Air Staff, Foreign Office or Secret Service has been correlated and placed periodically before the Cabinet and the Committee of Imperial Defence. The German had the advantage of setting the pace. It would have been provocative in 1933 to have laid down a policy giving Britain absolute supremacy in the air and would have given the Germans the incentive to even larger programmes. It was inevitable that the Air Ministry should produce a series of programmes comparable with that at which the Germans were aiming.”

In November, 1934, Kingsley Wood reminded the Prime Minister, *the Treasury had opposed acceleration of aircraft production*. By the summer of 1937, German intentions were abundantly clear, and in October 1937 a plan had been submitted by the Air Ministry to the Plans Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence, but *the Cabinet in December 1937 had “accepted the principle of financial limitations.. and rejection of the Air Ministry proposals..* Indeed on March 12th, the same day that the Cabinet instructed my predecessor to put forward new proposals, Lord Swinton received a letter suggesting a quota for the Air Ministry which may well have meant the establishment, for at any rate some considerable time, of a position of air inferiority as compared with Germany.” *The Kingsley Wood Memorandum thus laid the blame back at the Treasury door.*

There was to be some rearmament but to a lesser extent than was required, to face Germany and put a stop to her aggressions. Apparently the British Government had other worries.

586⁵⁵³ ‘The Chamberlain Cabinet’, Op. cit., p. 120

With the fall of the French Cabinet headed by Leon Blum, the British Government endeavoured to influence the French choice of a Foreign Minister. On April 11, 1938, Phipps reported to Halifax that his efforts at preventing Paul-Boncour from keeping his post of Foreign Minister, were successful⁵⁵⁴. Instead, Bonnet became the Foreign Minister in a Daladier Cabinet. Paul-Boncour would never have agreed to exert undue pressure on Czechoslovakia. He would never have reneged on the French pledges to defend Czechoslovakia against aggression.

Pressuring France And Czechoslovakia

Britain had her plans but she had to schedule her actions according to internal and external circumstances over which she did not have complete control. At a Cabinet meeting on April 27, 1938, according to Ian Colvin⁵⁵⁵:

Lord Halifax restated his policy of caution and his reasons for “thinking *the present moment not suitable for setting up a Danubian anti-German bloc*”⁵⁵⁶ as intended by France on the basis of taking up the exports of Central European countries. He proposed “to take the line in Berlin on future relations with Germany that *Britain was anxious to resume the interrupted negotiations, but that the present moment did not appear opportune.*”

The invasion of Austria had sent a shock wave of alarm through all Europe, and particularly through Czechoslovakia and the Danubian countries. Speculatively, Chamberlain had asked the Chiefs of Staff to consider Hungary and Roumania as possible allies to Britain, if it came to resist a German aggression against Czechoslovakia. This was the perfect moment to get the Danubian countries appreciate the need for self protection and for obtaining protection from Britain and France. However, if the policy was that of giving in, in relation to Czechoslovakia, and to endeavour to reach a settlement with Germany, then the moment was not suitable.

Resuming negotiations with Germany, so soon after the invasion of Austria, would not have been decent. British public opinion would have none of it. Besides, France had not yet been conditioned to accept such a policy. In spite of British anxiety for such negotiations, the moment was not opportune.

587⁵⁵⁴The matter is well documented by Telford Taylor, Op. cit., pp 580-581

588⁵⁵⁵‘The Chamberlain Cabinet’, Op. cit., p. 121

589⁵⁵⁶Simon Newman in “The British Guarantee to Poland” makes much of the suggestions made in the British Cabinet of economic help to the Central European countries, help that would enable them to resist the economic German domination.. He takes it as a proof that Britain did not give a free hand to Germany. This quotation shows that Newman’s conclusions are wrong..The policy that Newman alludes to as that of ‘silver bullets’ was implemented neither in April 1938, when Halifax opposed it, nor in June 1938 when Halifax supporting it was opposed by Chamberlain.

Conversations with the French Government had been scheduled for next day, April 28. A sense of urgency marked the meeting. The French Government had received news that Germany intended to settle the Czechoslovakian problem during summer 'at the latest'. Bonnet even feared that Germany might resort to force as early as May,

During the Anglo-French meeting the question of Staff conversation was discussed. Halifax made it clear that⁵⁵⁷:

such contacts between the two staffs should be clearly understood on both sides *not to give rise* in respect of either Government *to any political undertaking*, nor to any obligation regarding the organisation of national defence. His Majesty's Government would also wish it to be clearly understood that the contacts now proposed *will not give rise to any obligation regarding the employment of defence forces*.

With no political undertaking, no obligation for the organisation of the national defence and for the employment of defence forces, the staff conversations could just be a waste of time, except for France's and Britain's benefit from being able to let their respective public know that such conversations took place. France was put on notice that Britain had little enthusiasm for a policy of stopping Germany in respect to Czechoslovakia.

Britain imposed additional restrictions on the conversations:

Germany alone would be assumed to be the aggressor and the contacts would not envisage the extension of war to other powers, whether as potential enemies or as potential allies. His Majesty's Government, after the fullest consideration, did not consider that any political assumption going beyond this were either necessary or desirable at the present time.

This vitiated the conversations from the outset. The practical meaning of it was that no speculation would be allowed about Japan and Italy as potential enemies nor consideration given to the Soviet Union as potential ally. Britain's eagerness for good relations with Italy was enough to overcome the reasonable request from France that it was necessary to be prepared for reasonable eventualities.

Eliminating the Soviet Union from consideration as an ally could lead to undue pessimistic conclusions. This was the more unexpected since the Soviet Union had a pact of mutual assistance with Czechoslovakia.

To complete its scenario of bad will, Britain started to oppose naval conversation. As to land forces, Britain stated that she could only contribute two divisions not 'completely equipped with material regarded as essential for modern war' which 'might also be short in certain effectives'.

590⁵⁵⁷ DBFP, series 3, vol 1, doc 164, p. 199

Britain partially gave in when France reminded Britain that ‘in view of recent events in Spain’, France might need naval protection in the Atlantic. She would therefore have to reduce her naval forces in the Mediterranean sea⁵⁵⁸.

During the conversations, the French Prime Minister Daladier made a few important statements:

He did not believe that great nations could be put out of action by a sudden sharp attack. In modern war the power of the defensive remained extremely strong. This had been illustrated in the Spanish war.

So far as France was concerned he could state quite definitely that the French army was certainly in a condition in which it would confront the German army victoriously

It cannot be said that Daladier had been proved to be wrong. At the time of his statements, Czechoslovakia was still in the democratic camp and had not yet contributed in the strengthening of Germany. Moreover, the strength of the West relatively to that of Germany, was expected to deteriorate from 1938 to 1939.

Given the choice, and if war was unavoidable, and France could choose the time, then this time, France was saying to Britain, was now and not later. This opinion had to be given great weight, especially since France was in the front line and more likely to have to withstand the main German assault.

Chamberlain stated that:

our policy must.. aim at securing a respite to develop our defensive resources to such an extent that, even if the power of the offensive on the other side had meanwhile developed at an increased pace, we would then be able to regard it calmly and to resist an offensive victoriously.. At the present moment we were.. extremely vulnerable.

Chamberlain’s statement would have been more credible had he not repeatedly expressed satisfaction in Cabinet meetings and in the House of Common about the state of British rearmament, and constantly resisted a more vigorous program at British rearmament.

Speaking of Czechoslovakia, Chamberlain said that, after the events in Austria, the military situation of Czechoslovakia had been examined by the British Chiefs of Staff. and:

The result of that examination.. was to reveal what an extremely difficult military problem, if viewed from the purely military

591⁵⁵⁸ This was adequate proof that the Tory stand for Franco’s victory in Spain was against the national interests of both Britain and France.

angle, the defence of Czechoslovakia presented, and *the difficulty increased in proportion as Germany proceeded with the refortification of the Rhineland.*

Chamberlain arguing that refortification of the Rhineland was a reason not to assist Czechoslovakia reminds one the story of the patricide asking for mercy on the grounds that he was now an orphan. Chamberlain suggested that no encouragement be given to Germany to use force and that representations should be made to Prague stating that Czechoslovakia should do more in order to come to an understanding with the Sudeten population.

Daladier replied that Czechoslovakia is the country in Europe which best treats its minorities. He stated that pressure should rather be applied on Germany. The document reports on Daladier's statements:

In his view, the ambitions of Napoleon were far inferior to the present aims of the German Reich. one had only to consider recent events. First, there had been the occupation of the Rhineland. On this occasion France had taken no action⁵⁵⁹ .. Secondly, there had been the question of Austria. We had talked a great deal of the necessity of maintaining the independence of Austria, but nothing had been done.. the independence of Austria had been destroyed, and all we had done was to offer our condolences. To-day we are faced with the question of Czechoslovakia. To-morrow we might be faced with that of Roumania.

..war could be avoided if Great Britain and France made their determination quite clear to maintain the peace of Europe by respecting the liberties and the rights of independent peoples..

If, however, we were once again to capitulate when faced by another threat, we should then have prepared the way for the very war we wished to avoid.

Daladier then objected to Chamberlain's pessimist description of the military situation. He presented the situation of the Czechoslovakian army in a brighter perspective. He affirmed that a decided attitude of Britain and France could bring around them Roumania, Yugoslavia, and perhaps Poland.

Chamberlain denied that Germany had the views and ambitions mentioned by Daladier. He thought that 'we should indicate plainly to Dr. Benes the limits within which he could count upon us'. This was a British request that France be prepared to renege on her treaty with Czechoslovakia. He then added:

592⁵⁵⁹ Daladier was courteous enough not to remind Chamberlain that Britain exerted strong pressure on France to prevent her, on this occasion, from intervening against Germany. However, Daladier mentioned that if he had been in power at the time, he would have intervened.

Whatever the odds might be in favour of peace or war, it was not money but men with which we were gambling, and he could not lightly enter into a conflict which might mean such frightful results for innumerable families, men, women and children *of our own race*⁵⁶⁰

He could not take the gamble unless he was certain of victory. And he was not certain. Chamberlain was riding the heights of morality and humanism. However, it was clear that the fate of men women and children did not depend on preventing the war at that very moment, but on following the policy most likely to avoid war within a couple of years. If standing firm was a gamble, capitulating was no less of a gamble with no less frightful consequences for men, women and children, whether of 'our race' or not.

Finally, Chamberlain advanced an argument to which Daladier had no answer:

At this moment he was certain public opinion in Great Britain would not allow his Majesty's Government to take such a risk, and it was no use for this Government or indeed any other Government, to go beyond its public opinion with the possible effect of bringing destruction to brave people.

Chamberlain had agreed with Oliver Stanley that 80% of the House of Commons were opposed to commitments while 100% favoured giving the impression of firmness. This indicates that, contrary to Chamberlain's stated opinion, public opinion was prepared for a strong stand. In consequence, the 80% of the House who were against commitments, had to pretend to be tough against Germany's aggressions.

At one moment Daladier came with an impassioned plea which deserves to be quoted⁵⁶¹:

The problem was how to avoid war. ..if we submitted on every occasion before violent measures and the use of force, the only result would be to precipitate renewed violence and ensure further success for the use of forceful methods. ..Mr Daladier did not intend any bluff. German policy.. was one of bluff, or had certainly been so in the past. When Herr Hitler had ordered the reoccupation of the Rhineland, this policy had been opposed by the German Higher Command, who feared its possible consequences.. but Hitler had bluffed and had reoccupied the Rhineland. He had used this method and had succeeded. Was there any reason why he should cease to use such methods if we left him an open road and so ensured his success? ..We were at

⁵⁹³⁵⁶⁰ We earlier saw that, in his diary, Chamberlain expressed his sorrow at the sacrifices in Italian lives resulting from Mussolini's decision to conquer Abyssinia. It did not occur to him that the Abyssinians were suffering even more. He manifests in the present quote a similar racism

⁵⁹⁴⁵⁶¹ DBFP, Op. Cit. *ibid*, pp. 225-226

present still able to put obstacles in her path, but if we failed to do so now, we should then, in his view, make a European war inevitable in the near future, and he was afraid that we should certainly not win such war, for once Germany had at her disposal all the resources of Central and Eastern Europe, how could any effective military resistance be opposed to her? In such conditions the German Empire would be inevitably stronger than that of Napoleon.

.. He feared that time was not on our side but rather against us, if we allowed Germany to achieve a new success every month or every quarter, increasing her material strength and her political influence with every successful advance. If this continued, countries which were now hesitating would feel compelled to submit to the hegemony of Germany and then, as we had been warned in 'Mein Kampf', *Germany would turn West*.

Daladier's arguments were difficult to ignore. Halifax while recognising their strength repeated the statement as to the impossibility for Britain to assume any new commitment other than those specified earlier and which related to France and the low countries in the case of a non-provoked German aggression. It did not cover the case of France coming to the help of Czechoslovakia.

Bonnet made a last effort. He asked what would be the situation if Czechoslovakia, as a result of French pressure upon her, would make the most extensive gestures of compromise to the Sudeten population. would then Britain 'be prepared to affirm its solidarity with the French Government with a view to the maintenance of a settlement on the lines agreed upon with Dr. Benes?'. Halifax said the answer of the British Government was 'no'.

The meeting was a complete failure except for the fact that it resulted in France trailing the British Government in her policies towards Germany and European security. It went as Kingsley Wood wanted it to go. He had said at a Cabinet meeting, on the eve of the meeting with the French delegation⁵⁶²: "we must not drift back into the old position of consenting to all that France asks while refusing all German requests." The point was that German requests were aggressive while the French demands related to European security.. Chamberlain wrote on May 1st, 1938⁵⁶³: "... fortunately the papers have had no hint of *how near we came to a break* over Czechoslovakia."

One can only guess the feeling of despair experienced by the members of the French delegation when they realised, as they must have, that their choice was either to follow the capitulation policy of Britain, or to face Germany alone with irremediably damaged relations with Britain.

This April meeting between the French and British leaders, definitely conditioned the French into being merely followers of the British Policy. The

595⁵⁶² 'The Chamberlain Cabinet', Op. cit., p. 122

596⁵⁶³ Feiling, Op. cit., p. 353

British politicians would later say that the French leaders were hopeful that Britain would find for them a way out of their pledges to Czechoslovakia. This is literally true and objectively false. The French did their best, up to the edge of a break, to resist the British policy. Once they realised it would be futile, they became defeatist, ready and eager to disengage themselves from obligations that could involve them alone in a war against Germany. This had never been their first choice.

Ian Colvin makes the following interesting remark⁵⁶⁴:

It is noteworthy, however, that Mr. Chamberlain did not expose even partly to his Cabinet Colleagues the impassioned and strongly argued case that Mr. Daladier had put (for a Joint diplomacy), nor yet the views of M. Bonnet that the crisis was much closer than the British supposed,

First Heroic Moment

The third week of May, had witnessed numerous incidents in the Sudeten region. There were persistent rumours of a German coup. On May 19, 1938, information reached Britain concerning suspicious German troop movements. On May 21, Britain warned Germany that in case she would resort to force against Czechoslovakia, Britain could not guarantee that she would remain on the fence. This did not represent a change in the British policy. There was, however a change of emphasis.

The reminder that Britain could be involved in case of war was no longer an assertion of general character but has become associated with accusations that Germany was disturbing the political atmosphere with unjustified military measures. This was the first British heroic moment during the Czechoslovak crisis. On May 28 Chamberlain wrote:

I cannot doubt in my own mind (1) that the German Government made all preparations for a coup, (2) that in the end they decided, after getting our warnings, that the risks were too great.. But the incident shows how utterly untrustworthy and dishonest the German Government is..

The real significance of the British stand can be understood from Cadogan's diary. His entry on May 21, 1938 reads⁵⁶⁵:

News bad. H. arrived back from Oxford at 10.45. Had long talk with him. Decided we must *not* go to war!

Sent telegram to Berlin authorising warning to German Govt. —
for what that may be worth

⁵⁹⁷⁵⁶⁴ 'The Chamberlain Cabinet', Op. cit., p. 123

⁵⁹⁸⁵⁶⁵ 'The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan', Op. cit., p. 79

Britain is tough in appearance only. On May 22, 1938, Cadogan wrote⁵⁶⁶:

..Cabinet at 5.. H. got back about 6.30. Cabinet quite sensible, — **and anti-Czech!**.. What a week-end! But H. is very calm and firmly on the right line. So, I gather, are Cabinet.

No, it is not a mistake. The Cabinet is anti-Czech, not anti-German. The same day, on the 22nd, Halifax sent a most revealing telegram to Phipps, the British ambassador in Paris⁵⁶⁷:

1. It is of utmost importance that French Government **should not be under any illusion** as to attitude of His Majesty's Government, so far as it can be forecast at the moment, in the event of failure to bring about peaceful settlement in Czechoslovak question.
2. His Majesty's Government has given the most serious warning to Berlin, and these should have prospects of success in deterring German government from any extreme courses. **But it might be highly dangerous** if the French Government were to read more into these warnings than is justified by its terms.
3. His Majesty's Government would of course always honour their pledge to come to the assistance of France if she were the victim of unprovoked aggression by Germany. In that event they would be bound to employ all the forces at their command.
4. If, however, the French Government were to assume that His Majesty's Government would at once take joint military action with them to preserve Czechoslovakia against German aggression, **it is only fair to warn them** that our statements do not warrant any such assumption.
7. Please speak in above sense to French Minister for Foreign Affairs..

The French leaders were put by Britain in a very difficult position. On the one hand, Britain allowed the press and the news agencies to broadcast all over the world how tough had been the British stand. But, on the other hand, France was warned that it was all more bark than bite. Therefore France could not take the British stand too seriously. For this, she was, and had since been, the object of reproach.

On May 31, 1938, Britain became more brazen. Halifax sent to Phipps a telegram saying⁵⁶⁸:

1. I earnestly hope that the French Government will feel no less urgently than do His Majesty's Government the importance of

599⁵⁶⁶ *ibid*

600⁵⁶⁷ DBFP, series 3, vol 1, doc. 271, pp. 346-347

601⁵⁶⁸ DBFP, series 3, vol 1, doc. 355, p. 419

putting *the greatest possible pressure upon Dr. Benes* in person without delay..

2. In view of the special relation with which France stands towards Czechoslovakia, I would suggest that the French Government should carry the argument a step further and should warn Dr. Benes that if through any fault of his, the present opportunity to reach a settlement is missed, *the French Government would be driven to reconsider their own position vis a vis Czechoslovakia*

This was a barely veiled suggestion to France to prepare the grounds for a betrayal of Czechoslovakia. Britain is suggesting that Czechoslovakia be denied the control of her foreign policy. The moment she would consider that a French proposal is detrimental to her country, Czechoslovakia could then be 'at fault' in French eyes, and lose the protection of the French guarantee.

The attitude suggested to France by Britain constituted a clear violation of the Franco-Czechoslovakian treaty of mutual assistance against aggression. That treaty was not restricted by any additional obligation from Czechoslovakia with respect to her foreign policy. The implementation of such a suggestion would allow Britain to control Czech foreign policy. Britain had made France realise she could not count on British support in case of her involvement against Germany in support of Czechoslovakia. As a result, France, in her vulnerability, more than ever would be careful not to incur the displeasure of Britain. If she made all the 'right moves', Britain would not leave her alone to face Germany.

At a Cabinet meeting on May 25, 1938, Lord Halifax declared⁵⁶⁹:

If we had turned the first corner successfully, we should be getting ready for the second. The French obligation in Czechoslovakia dated from a time when Germany was disarmed. In present circumstances it was desirable, if possible, to obtain a release for the French from their obligations

According to Britain, the French obligation was valid when it was not needed — when Germany was disarmed. Now that Czechoslovakia needed it, the circumstances have therefore changed and France would be well advised to obtain a release from her obligations.

Halifax did not suggest how France could obtain such a release. It was inconceivable that Czechoslovakia would voluntarily release France from her commitments. Her life as an independent country seemed to depend on French's fulfilment of her obligations. Halifax's statement only makes sense if Halifax is considering a French unilateral disengagement from her obligations.

602⁵⁶⁹ 'The Chamberlain Cabinet', Op. cit., p.130

Britain first heroic moment of May 21, 1938, was short lived and, after all, not so heroic.

Runciman's Mission

Negotiations between the Sudeten nationalists and the Czechoslovak authorities were not progressing. Britain's exertion of pressure in favour of a peaceful solution was exclusively applied on Czechoslovakia. This pressure, however strong, was given the appearance of friendly advice of a general character. It underlined the urgency of the situation, the necessity of going to the limit of the concessions that Czechoslovakia could make, the importance of avoiding pretexts for German intervention, etc.. In June 1938 the British Government felt that this kind of pressure was not sufficient and that Britain would have to be much more specific, and pressing.

Such a stand, pressing for specific measures, could be dangerous. World public opinion would consider Britain as being committed to assist Czechoslovakia, were she to become the victim of aggression after having accepted British advice.

The Foreign Office had suggested the appointment of a British investigator. Halifax thought of a twist that would allow the suggestion to serve their purpose. At first this suggestion was communicated to Benes. Newton, the British Ambassador in Prague was instructed to tell Benes that if he would refuse the suggestion Britain would make public the proposal and the Czechoslovak rejection. This obviously is not the way friendly government are treated.

Benes was much upset and considered the British proposal incompatible with the independence of his country. Under added pressure from France, Benes, finally, accepted the proposal.

On July 25, 1938, Halifax informed Sir N. Henderson in Berlin⁵⁷⁰:

You will see from Prague telegrams.. that Czechoslovak Government accept idea that His Majesty's Government should nominate an investigator and mediator who would seek, acting independently of His Majesty's Government.. to elaborate proposals that may harmonize the views of Czechoslovak Government and Sudeten Party.

4. in view.. of the fact that *the Czechoslovak Government have now accepted the idea*, His Majesty's Government consider that the moment has come for giving effect to this proposal without further delay..

5. It will be less difficult for the Czechoslovak Government to collaborate on these lines *if it can be represented that initiative in proposal had been theirs — and that His Majesty's*

603⁵⁷⁰ DBFP, series 3, vol 2, doc 541, pp. 3-4

Government had acceded to it. His Majesty's Government would accordingly propose in any public announcement to present the matter in that light.

This is very hard medicine to be swallowed by the Czechoslovakian Government. Not only are they pressured to accept a proposal they dislike, but they have, in addition, to pretend having initiated that policy.

Moreover the pretence that the 'white lie' had been made for the Czechoslovak Government's convenience⁵⁷¹ is not only absurd but contradicted in fact by Britain's behaviour. The British Government used this 'white lie' at its own convenience. Chamberlain would mislead the House of Common and declare there that the initiative had been Czechoslovakian, while at the same time it tried to improve its pro-German reputation in Germany's eyes by revealing the origin of the proposal and by informing Germany the nature of the lie. On July 25, 1938, Henderson wrote to Halifax⁵⁷²:

I informed State Secretary confidentially of proposed appointment of mediator and expressed the hope that the German Government would co-operate by using their good offices with the Sudeten and by advocating patience and moderation to the press and elsewhere. ***I mentioned that public announcement would represent initiative as having come from Czechoslovakian Government*** and that you hope to be able to state that it was welcomed by all concerned i.e. including the German Government.

Who was lied to? It obviously was the British and the Czechoslovak public. Who could feel good about it? The British and German governments — who were in the know. Who was inconvenienced? Czechoslovakia, who was put in the position of having asked for a mediator she could not choose, nor disapprove its choice, and who would run the risk of universal condemnation, were she to feel obliged to reject the results of the mediation. In contrast Germany remained free to accept or reject the results of the mediation without reproach.

And so started the 'Runciman Mission', which, as shown in a letter by Chamberlain to his king⁵⁷³, was designed to exert pressure on Czechoslovakia to make her accept the exaggerated demands of Germany.

The Second Heroic Moment

604⁵⁷¹ Cadogan had earlier entered in his diary that the Cabinet was anti-Czech. The feelings of many of the British leaders are reflected by this quotation from Henderson's letter to Halifax on July 26, 1938: "I do not envy Lord Runciman the difficult and thankless job which he is undertaking. The Czechs are a pig-headed race and Benes not the least pig-headed among them." (DBFP, series 3, vol 2, doc. 551, p. 11)

605⁵⁷² DBFP, series 3, vol 2, doc. 544, p. 6

606⁵⁷³ See first chapter

The understanding that Britain's firm attitude had prevented Germany from implementing a coup in Czechoslovakia, affected differently some of the British leaders. Henderson repeatedly warned the Foreign Office and the British Government that a second '21st of May' would have disastrous effects. Halifax, on the contrary, thought the moment propitious for an economic British offensive in Central and South East Europe, to prevent the regions from falling under German domination. Telford Taylor writes⁵⁷⁴:

On June 1 he [Halifax] laid before the Foreign Policy Committee a memorandum on the danger that German economic domination of South Eastern Europe would ultimately drag those countries into war on Germany's side, urging a British economic and financial counteroffensive in those lands. For once, he and Chamberlain did not see eye to eye, and the Prime Minister sharply challenged both the assumption that "these vast areas would, in fact, pass under German domination," and that "it was possible for us to do something to prevent this happening"

Chamberlain did not agree. He was wondering whether the strengthening of the German economic life would not lead to a more peaceful Germany⁵⁷⁵. However, the news coming from various sources in Germany were indicative of unusual military preparations. Britain once more feared that a German aggression against Czechoslovakia may end up involving Britain in a resulting European war.

We saw in Chapter 1 how Chamberlain succeeded in forcing Czechoslovakia to give complete satisfaction to Germany's demands. We saw that it involved giving Germany a free hand in her dealings with Eastern Europe. It requested Czechoslovakia's capitulation to Germany's demands.

Czechoslovakia had, at first, rejected the proposal elaborated at Berchtesgaden between Chamberlain and Hitler. Its practical consequences were the transfer of the Sudeten territory to Germany. The results were

607⁵⁷⁴ Op. Cit., p. 656

608⁵⁷⁵ 'The Chamberlain Cabinet', op., cit., p. 132. See also Keith Middlemas, 'Diplomacy of Illusion', Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1972, p. 261. The author write:

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610 During the discussion, Chamberlain allowed himself to speculate whether, as Germany grew stronger and more stable, she might not become more peaceable. 'might not a great improvement in Germany's economic situation, result in her becoming quieter and less interested in political adventures?' Why then oppose her drive towards south-east Europe? The logical progression of such a view was to permit to ignore the claim for *lebensraum*, or to suggest that if Britain did intervene the result would be a struggle for mastery between the great powers of the West, followed by the eruption of Bolshevism in a defeated Germany. Just as Daladier feared 'the Cossack and Mongol hordes', so Chamberlain remembered the Communist disturbances in Germany in 1918.

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612 Middlemas does not give a reference for his last sentence.

understood to be devastating, economically and militarily, to Czechoslovakia. On September 20, 1938, Newton, the British Ambassador in Prague, wrote to Halifax⁵⁷⁶:

I have very good reason from an even better source to believe that .. reply handed to me by Minister for Foreign Affairs should not be regarded as final. A solution must however *be imposed* upon Government as without such pressure many of its members are too committed to be able to accept what they realise to be necessary.

If I can deliver a kind of *ultimatum to President Benes*, Wednesday, he and his Government will feel able to bow to *force majeure*. It might be to the effect that in view of His Majesty's Government the Czechoslovak Government must accept the proposals without reserve and without further delay failing which His Majesty's Government will take no further interest in the fate of country.

I understand that my French colleague is telegraphing to Paris in a similar sense.

Next day at 2:00 in the morning Benes was awoken to receive the Anglo-French ultimatum. The Czechoslovak Government protested but felt it had no other recourse but to submit. It is to be noted that Britain and France gave Czechoslovakia the assurance that what would remain from Czechoslovakia would benefit from the guarantee of both Britain and France against aggression. In his letter of acceptance, Benes underlined this point.

It is absurd to consider that Britain and France who, at the time, felt unable to protect Czechoslovakia, would come to the assistance of a Czechoslovakia much weakened by the destruction of her main system of defence. In fact Britain did its utmost to disengage herself from this guarantee by unilaterally deciding that it would become part of a guarantee by the four participants in Munich.

The stand taken by Britain was that, in the case of a German attack against the remainder of Czechoslovakia, Britain would be committed to assist Czechoslovakia only if France and Italy would agree to it. It was a preposterous stand totally different than the one implied in the proposal to Benes. The latter specifically mentioned that the new guarantee will offer to Czechoslovakia more security than she had before and which was based on treaties with France and the Soviet Union. It is clear that Britain was prepared to make false promises just to ensure she would obtain the surrender to the Franco-Britain ultimatum.

At Godesberg, Chamberlain brought to Hitler Czechoslovakia's surrender to his demands on the annexation of the Sudeten region. Hitler

613⁵⁷⁶ DBFP, series 3, vol 2, doc. 979, p. 425

answered that it was too late. The procedure envisaged at Berchtesgaden between the two leaders was now declared by Hitler to be too slow. Hitler also said that the demands against Czechoslovakia by other countries, such as Poland, had now to be satisfied.

Hitler had been very arrogant at Godesberg and, while Chamberlain was still in that city, popular feelings in Britain were running so high that it became impossible for the British leaders to ignore them. On September 23, 1938 Halifax sent a telegram to Chamberlain in Godesberg saying⁵⁷⁷:

It may help you if we gave you some indication of what seems a predominant public expression as expressed in press and elsewhere. While *mistrustful of our plan* but prepared perhaps to accept it *with reluctance* as alternative to war, great mass of public opinion seems to be hardening in sense of feeling that we have gone to limit of concession and that it is up to the Chancellor to make some contribution.. it seems to your colleagues of vital importance that *you should not leave without making it plain to Chancellor* if possible by *special interview* that, after great concessions made by Czechoslovak Government, for him to reject opportunity of peaceful solution in favour of one that *must involve war* would be an unpardonable crime against humanity.

Chamberlain had a special interview with Hitler. As we saw in chapter 1, Dr. Schmidt, the German interpreter, reported in his memoirs that the interview ended in a very good atmosphere and that the parting greetings included an assurance by Hitler to Chamberlain that the latter could, without damage, give a free hand to Germany in Eastern Europe in return for the freedom given to England outside of the continent.

Chamberlain did not contradict Hitler, and did not report that important conversation to the Cabinet. Back home, he had difficulty managing an unexpected opposition from Halifax and others. The time was not ripe to mention the free hand agreement with Hitler. On September 24, 1938, Cadogan entered in his diary⁵⁷⁸:

Hitler's memo now in. It's awful. A week ago when we moved (or were pushed) from 'autonomy' to cession, many of us found great difficulty in the idea of ceding people to Nazi Germany. We saved our conscience (at least I did) by stipulating it must be an 'orderly' cession — i.e. under international supervision, with safeguards for exchange of populations, compensation, &c. Now Hitler says he must march into the whole area *at once* (to keep order!) and the safeguards — and plebiscites! can be held *after!* This is throwing away every last safeguard that we had. P.M. is

614⁵⁷⁷ DBFP, series 3, vol. 2, doc. 1058, p. 490

615⁵⁷⁸ 'The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan', op. cit., pp. 103-104

transmitting this 'proposal' to Prague. Thank god he hasn't yet recommended it for acceptance.

The defeatist Cadogan is horrified by Hitler's memo. This should give a measure of the public feelings reported by Halifax to Chamberlain. Cadogan goes on:

Meeting of 'Inner Cabinet' at 3:30 and P.M. made his report to us. I was completely horrified — *he was quite calmly for total surrender*. More horrified still to find that *Hitler has evidently hypnotised him to a point*. Still more horrified to find P.M. has hypnotized H. who capitulates

At this point, Dirks, the editor of the Diaries inserts the following:

Chamberlain told the inner ring of ministers that he thought he has 'established some degree of *personal influence over Herr Hitler*' *who would not, he felt satisfied, go back on his word*. Later in the day the Prime Minister said in full Cabinet that he believed Hitler "extremely anxious to secure the friendship of Great Britain.. *it would be a great tragedy if we lost an opportunity of reaching an understanding with Germany.*" He thought he had now *established an influence over Herr Hitler* and that the latter trusted him and was willing to work with him.

Cadogan's entry and Dilk's insertion are astounding. The British minutes of the Godesberg meeting do not, in the least, justify Chamberlain's declarations to the 'Inner Ring' and the full Cabinet. Hitler had just broken his word at Godesberg by rejecting an agreement reached with Chamberlain only a week before. Chamberlain was then justified to say that, once more, demonstrably, Hitler's word could not be relied upon. Instead, Chamberlain affirmed that Hitler would not go back on his word.

There is no trace in the records of that personal influence Chamberlain, supposedly, had established over Hitler. On the contrary, the atmosphere was tense and the arguments took the form of quarrelling. The impression given by the record is that of a total incompatibility between the two leaders and of Chamberlain's evident disrespect for some doubtful German statements. On such occasions, Chamberlain did not hide his dismay.

On the face of what Chamberlain reported, of what Kirckpatrick⁵⁷⁹ reported as well as what the German translator reported, at no moment did the two leaders see eye to eye and no portion of the discussion can be described as indicating progress, an understanding, a 'rapprochement' or an affinity whatsoever.

616⁵⁷⁹ He was acting as the British translator. He later wrote a report on the Godesberg meeting

In view of Chamberlain's 'defeatist' tendencies, one could have understood a plea for a capitulation to Hitler's latest demands, based on a belief that the alternative would be catastrophic for Britain and the world.

Chamberlain however came back 'hypnotised by Hitler', trusting him and believing that there was an opportunity for an understanding with Germany. That Halifax could be 'hypnotised by Chamberlain' is no shocking matter. The two men had established working relations from which complete trust had developed. However, that Chamberlain, under the existing conditions, should have been 'hypnotised' by Hitler begs investigation.

However, everything that otherwise seems so senseless, does make sense if we consider the following:

w Chamberlain had a private meeting with Hitler attended only by Dr, Schmidt, the German interpreter. Kirkpatrick not only did not attend the meeting but does not even mention its occurrence.

w Dr. Schmidt reports that, at that meeting, the atmosphere was very good and that the two leaders parted in a very friendly mood.

w The last words of Hitler to Chamberlain were a reassurance to Britain that she will incur no damage by granting Germany a free hand in Eastern Europe. On the contrary, Britain would be at liberty to pursue her interests outside the European continent. Hitler's statement could have indicated either the sealing of an agreement, or a reminder of Germany's expectations, or a sudden and unexpected proposal.

w Chamberlain did not contest or contradict Hitler's crucial statement. He did neither say that this is not the British policy, nor even that he had to discuss the matter with his Cabinet. Chamberlain did not even report that statement to the Cabinet. In view of the extreme importance of the statement, and what it reveals about Hitler's ambitions for expansion, Chamberlain's secretiveness has to be analysed.

w Had Hitler's statement just been the expression of his expectations, it should have been enough to generate in Chamberlain the most profound distrust. The same is true had Hitler's statement be a reminder instead of a sudden expression. In both cases, Chamberlain's attitude is devious. Reporting his trust in Hitler would then be misleading the Cabinet about most vital matters. Saying that Hitler was prepared to work with him could find no justification in what went on between Chamberlain and Hitler as minuted by Kirkpatrick. It however corresponds to Schmidt's description of their private meeting which dealt with reciprocal free hands.

w Only if the statement represented the seal of an agreement, would Chamberlain be reluctant to reveal it to the Cabinet, especially after having

been warned by Halifax that the mood in the Cabinet was to reject Hitler's memo.

w Dr. Schmidt had proven to be a very reliable witness trusted by Western historians and by British leaders.

w Chamberlain, as shown in Chapter 1, did give Hitler a free hand in the East.

Chamberlain realised how high the feelings of public opinion, and even of the Cabinet, were running against Germany. He could not reveal that he had done exactly the opposite of what Halifax, in the name of their colleagues, asked him to do. Chamberlain was requested to have a special meeting with Hitler to warn him that Britain would go to war rather than accept the German memo. Instead, Chamberlain, at least, allowed Hitler to understand that Britain did not oppose giving Germany a free hand in the East. Not aware of the last meeting between Chamberlain and Hitler, Cadogan could not explain Chamberlain's behaviour except by describing him as 'hypnotised' by Hitler.

Halifax, influenced by Cadogan, changed his mind and stated at the Cabinet meeting on September 25, 1938 that he could not support the acceptance of Hitler's memo and did not agree to coerce Czechoslovakia any further. During the meeting, Chamberlain passed the following note to Halifax⁵⁸⁰:

Your complete change of view since I saw you last night is a horrible blow to me, but of course you must form your opinions for yourself.

It remain however to see what the French say.

If they say they will go in, therefore dragging us in, I do not think I could accept responsibility for the decision.

But I don't want to anticipate what has not yet arisen.

On September 26, on the authority of Halifax, the Foreign Office issued a press statement saying⁵⁸¹:

.. if, in spite of the efforts made by the British Prime Minister, a German attack is made upon Czechoslovakia, the immediate

617⁵⁸⁰ 'The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan', op. cit., p.105

618⁵⁸¹ Winston Churchill, 'The Gathering Storm', Houghton Mifflin, Kingsport Tennessee, 1948, p. 309. See also Telford Taylor, op. cit., p. 863

result must be that France will be bound to come to her assistance and *Great Britain and Russia*⁵⁸² *will certainly stand by France.*

This was Britain's second heroic moment. As we will see, Chamberlain, the preceding evening, had taken enough precautions to minimise the effect of any public tough stand the Cabinet could take.

Chamberlain, "to Halifax's surprise" was dismayed at the appearance of the communiqué⁵⁸³. In all appearances, he was a defeated man. Public opinion, Halifax, and much of the Cabinet, were abandoning his policy. He had an agreement with Hitler he could not reveal, and the turn of events threatened to evolve into a war between the West and Germany. He was contemplating resigning.

Five days later the situation would be totally reversed. He would come back triumphant from Munich, supported by an almost unanimous Cabinet and by the enthusiastic majority of the British population.

This fast turn around of the situation is a fascinating aspect of the history of that period. Few people could have, like Chamberlain, still considered the political battle winnable. He had, however, loyal followers who would cooperate with him. These included, among others, Henderson in Berlin, Phipps in Paris, Wilson, Simon, Hoare and Inskip in London.

The situation was extremely delicate. Action had to be taken on four fronts. Germany had to be restrained for a couple of days. Czechoslovakia had to be prevented from expressing opinions or taking actions that could be considered provocative by Germany. France had to be convinced that she should participate in an action which in one way or another would force Czechoslovakia to capitulate. Finally the British public opinion had to be dealt with, so as to accept the policy of capitulation.

The first front seemed the easiest to deal with. Little was asked from Hitler. He therefore agreed to abstain from taking military measures till the end of the month. A particular difficulty appeared later. Chamberlain, restrained by the conditions he faced back from Godesberg, had to manoeuvre carefully. Would Hitler interpret correctly the complicated steps Chamberlain might be obliged to take? Would he be patient and helpful? Would he understand that, even with appearances pointing to the contrary, the free hand deal was still on schedule?

The second front, that of Czechoslovakia, caused unexpected trouble. After an inordinate number of telegrams⁵⁸⁴ related to the demand made to Czechoslovakia not to proceed with an intended mobilisation, the country

619⁵⁸² The statement was made without prior consultation with Russia. At a time at which Czechoslovakia had been forced to submit to the Franco-British ultimatum, which implied the countries renunciation to the defensive alliance with Russia, at a time at which France, under British pressure, threatened Czechoslovakia to renege on her obligations, it is exceedingly remarkable how certain Halifax could be of Russia's stand in defence of Czechoslovakia.

620⁵⁸³ Telford Taylor, op. cit., p. 863, note at the end of the page.

621⁵⁸⁴ DBFP, series 3, vol 2, docs. 1022, 1023, 1027, 1031, 1035, 1044, 1047, 1049, 1059, 1062

received a ‘go ahead’ with the proviso that the mobilisation should be done without unnecessary publicity.

This proviso did not make much sense. It is not possible to secretly proceed with a mobilisation. Moreover, to attempt informing individually each mobilised citizen would take too much time. Using the press or a radio broadcast would make the matter as public as could be. However, it was necessary, and the Czechoslovak government did broadcast the mobilisation order by radio.

The broadcast mentioned that the mobilisation was proceeding “with knowledge, advice, and approval” of the French and British Governments. If the British intention was to appear to be tough and to let the mobilisation be a serious warning to Germany, Britain would have not objected to the Czechoslovak broadcast.

However, Halifax seems to have been distressed with the mention of Britain’s association with the mobilisation order. Halifax sent instructions to Henderson to ‘at once assure Her Hitler on behalf of Prime Minister and myself’ that the alleged broadcast did not correspond to the truth. Henderson was then given a description of the real British involvement in that matter. It was a peevish attempt to deny what could not be denied even according to Halifax’s version⁵⁸⁵.

The French Front (Part 1)

The French Front proved to be difficult. The French leaders were invited and arrived in London on the evening of September 25, 1938, for conversations on the situation resulting from Godesberg meeting. The minutes of the meeting are still very instructive and we are referring to them in some detail.

The meeting started with a presentation by Chamberlain summarising the Godesberg meeting. Daladier expressed the unanimous opposition of his Cabinet to aspects of the German memo. Chamberlain then tried ‘to clear up any doubts about Herr Hitler’s proposals.’ This practically amounted to a defence of the memo. Chamberlain, for instance said⁵⁸⁶:

As regards the first point raised by Daladier, the proposal made in the German memorandum was not to take these areas by force, but *only* to take over areas handed over by agreement. The German troops will *only* be admitted for the purpose of preserving law and order which the German Government maintained could not be done effectively in any other way.

Chamberlain, in Cabinet, had already said that keeping order in these areas by German troops was the best solution. He tried to convince Daladier

622⁵⁸⁵ DBFP, series 3, vol. 2, doc. 1090, p. 517

623⁵⁸⁶ DBFP, series 3, vol. 2, doc. 1093, pp. 520-535

that Germany would get out of contested regions if, after their occupation by Germany, a referendum would reveal a majority against their inclusion into Germany.

A long discussion ensued and Daladier, in particular, expressed his worries about the safety of the opponents to Nazism in the regions to be occupied by Germany. The memo would offer no guarantee to them. Here are some of the sentences from Daladier which gave the flavour of the conversation:

Were they [the democrats] to be left to the axe and the executioners of Herr Hitler?.. If these areas were occupied by the German troops, Czechoslovakia would be at Germany's mercy. The remaining Czech territory would be cut off from Slovakia and nothing could be done by the Czechs without the approval of the Germans controlling the exit and the entry through this bottleneck.. Herr Hitler's demand amounted to the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia and German domination of Europe

Once more, Chamberlain tried to defend the German proposals saying:

Here also there seemed to be some misunderstanding. The question of Czech or German democrats wishing to leave the ceded areas and of Germans wishing to leave the future Czechoslovak territory *was to be settled afterwards*. Herr Hitler's memorandum therefore *merely provided for the arrangements which it was suggested should be made in the first instance to preserve law and order*

This was followed by acrimonious exchanges as to what then France proposed to do, and what to do if Hitler rejects the original Anglo-French proposal based on the Berchtesgaden talks. Daladier affirmed that "in that case each of us would have to do his duty."

This crystal clear answer did not satisfy Chamberlain who once more explained that the memo represented Hitler's last word and that it had to be taken or left. In the last case Hitler would invade Czechoslovakia. "What the French attitude would be in such an event". The question was asked as if 'each of us would have to do his duty' did not answer it. This gave rise to the following exchange:

Daladier replied that Herr Hitler would then have brought about a situation in which aggression would have been provoked by him.

Mr. Chamberlain asked what then.

M. Daladier thought each of us would do what was incumbent upon him.

Mr. Chamberlain asked whether we were to understand from that that France would declare war on Germany.

M. Daladier said that the matter was very clear. The French Government had always said, and he had himself repeated three days ago, that, in the event of unprovoked aggression against Czechoslovakia, France would fulfil her obligations. It was because the news from Germany had been bad that he had asked 1,000,000 Frenchmen to go to the frontier. They had gone calmly and with dignity, conscious of the justice of their cause.

Chamberlain then enquired if Daladier had considered what would be next step. Did the French General Staff have some plan, if so, what. Since it would be impossible to give direct assistance to Czechoslovakia, Chamberlain presumed that France intended to carry on hostilities against Germany

Daladier was losing patience. He reminded Chamberlain that he had answered these kinds of questions months ago. At this point Simon started 'cross examining'⁵⁸⁷, Daladier:

When the French troops had been called up to do their duty, was that duty just to man the Maginot Line and remain there without any declaration of war, or was it the intention of the French Government to declare war and take active measures with their land forces?..

The second question he would like to put was to ask whether the head of the French Government could say if the use of the French Air force over German territory was contemplated. This would necessarily involve entering into active hostilities with Germany.

The French have a particular expression to describe statements of the obvious. It is called *La Palissade*. One known *La Palissade* stated about some personality that 'a quarter of an hour before his death he was still alive' or 'he would have lived longer if only he would have died next day'. Daladier was possibly tempted to ask Simon to stop with his *La Palissades*. Instead, he patiently explained that, of course, France would consider air attacks against Germany. He then anticipated objections from Simon by reminding the English leaders that air superiority was not enough to ensure the victory of the Franco rebel forces in Spain.

The reader of the document may be shocked to notice that after Daladier's explicit answer Simon could still say:

624⁵⁸⁷ The expression is that of Cadogan in his diary entry of September 25, 1938. Cadogan wrote: "J.S., was turned on in *his best manner*, to cross-examine French as to what they would do". 'his best manner' is obviously meant sarcastically.

Did the French Government contemplate using their air forces against Germany, which would involve a declaration of war and active hostilities? This would not be a purely defensive measure, such as manning the Maginot line, but would constitute an attack. He therefore wished to ask whether the French Government contemplated such a use of the air force against Germany.

This was pure repetition, but with a twist. Daladier was being told that the use of the air force would constitute an attacking measure and not a defensive one. There possibly was in it a reminder that Britain's commitment to France were restricted to her defence and not to assist her in offensive operations. To use the air force in offensive operations against Germany could mean for France to be deprived of Britain's assistance.

John Simon was treating Daladier as if the latter was a child unable to realise the consequences of his actions. Daladier exploded:

M. Daladier, replying to Sir John Simon, said he would consider it ridiculous to mobilize French land forces only to leave them under arms doing nothing in their fortifications. It would be equally ridiculous to do nothing in the air. He thought that, in spite of Herr Hitler's recent declarations, the German system of fortifications was much less solid than Herr Hitler had indicated. It would be several months before the Siegfried line would be really strong..

M. Daladier wished, however, to make it clear that he wished to speak more of the moral obligations of France than of war and strategy.. It should be remembered that only a week ago he had agreed.. to dismember a friendly country bound to France not only by treaties but by ties centuries old.. Like a barbarian, M. Daladier had been ready to cut up this country without even consulting her and handing over 3 1/2 millions of her population to Herr Hitler.. It had been hard, perhaps a little dishonouring.. This would not suffice for him [Hitler]. M. Daladier asked at what point we would be prepared to stop and how far we would go

Daladier went on saying that the opinions of the Czechs must also be taken into account, they were, he said, human beings. He ended stating:

There was one concession, however, he would never make, and that was that marked on the map, which had for its object the destruction of a country and Herr Hitler's domination of the world and of all that we valued most. France would never accept that, *come what might*

Simon tried to calm Daladier. He said that the British delegation shared his views "in every way". But then the question remained: what was to be

done.. would the decision be to fight Germany and, if so, by what means and methods.

It must have been nauseating for Daladier to hear Simon repeating the same questions again and again in spite of the clear declaration by Daladier that France intended to use her land and air forces offensively. Daladier suggested that France, Britain, and Czechoslovakia could implement the Anglo-French proposal leading to a retreat of German forces towards the new boundary, as decided by an international commission.

Chamberlain found the suggestion reasonable but not practical in view of the fact that Hitler “was determined to reach a solution at once”. He said that the situation which must be faced is that of a German invasion of Czechoslovakia following the rejection of the German memo. He then started to present a pessimistic picture of what could be expected:

With their usual thoroughness, the Germans had taken every step to effect a rapid conquest. He thought we might find this German advance taking place hour by hour at a much more rapid pace than we had contemplated. The Germans might be in Prague and advancing to the frontier they had already laid down for themselves very shortly.. One possible course would be for the French *to mobilize and await events*. But M. Daladier had indicated that the French Plan was to undertake offensive operations against the Siegfried Line with the object of crossing it and also to bomb German factories and military centres. He wished to speak quite frankly and say that the British Government had received *disturbing accounts of the condition of the French air force*.. He therefore felt he must ask what would happen if war had been declared *and a rain of bombs descended upon Paris*, upon French industrial districts, military centres and aerodromes? Could France defend herself, and was she in a position to make an effective reply? He would also like to ask what assurances France had received from Russia. The British Government for their part had received *very disturbing news about the probable Russian attitude*. And again, the tone of the French press to-day *did not sound very bellicose* and gave the impression that France was not prepared to be faced with the contingency of war in a very few days. *It would be poor consolation if, in fulfilment of all her obligations, France attempted to come to the assistance of her friend but found herself unable to keep up her resistance and collapsed*

This seemed to be an attempt at terrifying the French concerning the consequences of a declaration of war on Germany. Hardly veiled was the suggestion ‘to mobilize and await events’, which amounts to an incitement at not to be faithful to the Franco-Czechoslovakian treaty.

Daladier could take it no more. He passed to the offensive. He would put questions to Chamberlain, instead of answering his questions:

He was always hearing of difficulties. Did this mean that we did not wish to do anything? We were after all, giving Herr Hitler 3 1/2 million Sudeten Germans. He said that this was not enough and wanted everything else as well. Was the British Government ready to give in and to accept Herr Hitler's proposals? Were they ready to bring pressure to bear in Prague which would lead to the disappearance of Czechoslovakia or to her strangulation, which amounted to much the same thing?

Daladier then underlined the fact that it was not in certain newspapers that the real mood of the French people is to be found. One million Frenchman went to the barracks without hesitation. He then added:

We must face up to the facts and decide what we wanted. If Herr Hitler put forward certain demands must we agree to them? He would then be master of Europe and after Czechoslovakia would come Roumania and then Turkey. He might even turn to France and take Boulogne and Calais. He might even afterwards land in Ireland.. Must we always give way to Herr Hitler's ultimata? If we were agreed to do so *it was useless to have meetings and appear to discuss these questions*. He was ready to agree to certain measures of conciliation which were in accordance with moral sentiments, *but a moment came to call a halt* and that moment had in his opinion come. *The French Government had been unanimous on that point.*

Daladier then tackled the military aspect of the situation:

..Nevertheless, France was perfectly capable of mobilising an air force and attacking Germany. The question of Russia has also been raised.. He understood Russia had 5000 aeroplanes. At least 800 had been sent to Spain, and whenever they arrived they had always put the Italian and German planes out of action. The fronts of the Spanish war had recently been stabilized largely owing to the arrival of 300 Russian planes which had prevented German and Italian air action. Two hundred Russian planes had been sent to Czechoslovakia from Russia, flown by Czech pilots and ordered by the Czechoslovak Government. French observers had seen these planes and thought them good. He thought that Russian air production was roughly equivalent to that of Germany.

M. Daladier thought we were all too modest, and Great Britain as much as anyone. She did not talk of her navy, of the weapon of blockade of a war by sea.

Daladier ended with saying:

Mr Chamberlain had indicated that Herr Hitler had spoken his last word. Did the British Government intend to accept it? That was a

possible policy, but if it was to be accepted without discussion then at least we should send for a representative of the Czechoslovak Government and ask their opinion before sacrificing them.

Samuel Hoare intervened, He answered Daladier's arguments. The naval blockade would necessarily be very slow. Russia may have a large air force but was it certain what Russia would do⁵⁸⁸? In a very short time Czechoslovakia would be destroyed. Action of the United Kingdom would depend on the possibility of preventing Czechoslovakia being overrun by Germany.

This was equivalent to saying that Britain would remain on the fence. Though Daladier could credibly argue that the West would, in the end, defeat Germany, he could not say that the West was able to prevent Czechoslovakia from being overrun at the start of the war. The condition for British intervention could not be assured.

The lengthy discussion tended to show that Britain had made up her mind to accept Hitler's memo, and the related map. In such a case continuing the conversation would have been a loss of time. The minutes show that:

M. Daladier said he did not wish to enter too far in the technical discussions, but he would like to put three questions to the British Ministers:-

- (1) Did His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom accept Herr Hitler Plan?
- (2) Did His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom think of bringing pressure to bear on the Czechoslovak Government to accept Herr Hitler's plan when we knew that they would certainly not do so and would prefer to die rather than accept it?
- (3) Did His Majesty's Government think that France should do nothing?

Chamberlain answered Daladier's three questions. It was not for Britain to accept or reject Hitler's proposal. Czechoslovakia had to do that. Concerning pressure on Czechoslovakia, Britain had no means to compel her to accept the memo. Finally, for France to do or not something was for her alone to decide. These were not candid replies. The whole argumentation of the British delegation tended to show that there was no reasonable solution but to accept Hitler's memo. Britain knew that without her support, France would have no choice but to go along with the British recommendation. Exceedingly strong pressure had been exerted previously on Czechoslovakia.

625⁵⁸⁸ The Soviet determination to oppose Nazism and Fascism had been just mentioned by Daladier with respect to the Soviet stand in Spain. The Soviet Union could be considered at least as reliable as France herself. Eventually, France renegated on her treaty with Czechoslovakia, while the Soviet Union was not given the opportunity to disprove the doubts here expressed by Hoare.

This could be done again. Though, in principle, it was impossible to compel Czechoslovakia to accept recommendations, it later would be done.

In spite of the strong British pressure, Daladier remained firm in the conviction that Hitler's memo should be rejected. The ball was now with the British delegation. Had their pressure tactics succeeded, had they communicated to the French delegation a fear of 'the rain of bombs' falling over their heads, it would have then been possible to take a joint defeatist position without fearing the reaction of the British public opinion. With a 'stubborn' Daladier, this would not work. Chamberlain then suggested that Gamelin, the French Chief of Staffs, should come from Paris to join the French delegation.

With Daladier resisting the pressure, and in view of the mood of the Cabinet and the people, it was to be expected that Britain would have to take, at least for the *façade*, a tough stand. This could lead to misunderstandings with Germany. It was urgent to take precautionary measures. That evening, a message was sent to Henderson to be immediately communicated to Germany. It must have been quite late in the evening of September 25, because Weizsacker, to whom the message was communicated by phone, minuted it next day. From Weizsacker text, dated September 26, we read⁵⁸⁹:

The British Ambassador telephoned to me yesterday evening a request from the British Prime Minister that the Fuhrer should take no notice of any reports on the course of his present negotiations with the French and the Czechs *unless they came directly from himself*. Any press or other messages which might appear previously should be disregarded as pure guesswork.

This is an unprecedented step. A Prime Minister at odds with his Cabinet and with his people, requests from the head of Government of another State to disregard whatever news, communiqués etc.. from whatever sources, newspapers, Foreign Office declarations, Cabinet members declarations etc., unless they come directly from him!

It could be argued that in such a critical situation in which a false step could lead to war, it was essential to avoid the triggering effect of a false piece of news. If such was the British intention, they could have directed the attention of the German authorities, or of Hitler Himself, to the danger of rumours, and requested that no credence should be given to any British news unless confirmed by the Embassy.

This, however, would not be enough for Chamberlain. The Embassy would have to implement orders received from the Foreign Office reflecting the mood of the Cabinet. Chamberlain was confident that, given the time, he would overcome all opposition. In the meanwhile, he did not want Hitler to be affected by news, however reliable, reflecting what Chamberlain

626⁵⁸⁹ DGFP, series D, vol. 2, doc. 610, p. 936

considered a temporary situation. The Weissacker minutes make it clear that the matter was not the fear of false rumours. Weizsacker continues:

The Ambassador informed me further, not acting on instructions but from his own personal knowledge, that Chamberlain's position and policy were threatened by increasing difficulties⁵⁹⁰. It was therefore especially important at this time not to upset British policy by false moves.

The conversations between the French and British representatives resumed next day, September 26, 1938. The atmosphere was much better. Chamberlain summarised the situation in three sentences: The Czechoslovak Government was determined to resist. The French Government had said that, in such a case, they would fulfil their treaty obligations. Britain had said publicly more than once that she could not afford to see France overrun or defeated by Germany, and, therefore, would come to France's assistance if France were in danger.

This was quite different from what was said the previous evening. The British delegation, having tried its utmost to detach France from Czechoslovakia was now facing the realities of the situation. The meeting was adjourned after issuing the following communiqué:

A further meeting was held this morning between the French and British Ministers, at which a full accord was established on all points.

General Gamelin, who had been called over for special consultations, also called on the Prime Minister and subsequently had an interview with the Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence.

This communiqué, short as it was, conveyed an ominous meaning. It signified that Britain, at last, was considering the possibility of standing by France were she to assist Czechoslovakia to resist a German aggression. It was satisfactory to Halifax who issued, later in the day, the press release which clearly stated the implicit meaning of the communiqué. The opposition in Britain would, for a time, cause no problem, satisfied as it was by the new turn of events. Chamberlain's manoeuvres on the French front would have to be resumed very soon.

The German Front

⁶²⁷⁵⁹⁰ The 'increasing difficulties' were the Cabinet's opposition to Chamberlain's policies. This opposition was reflecting that of the people and its influence over the House of Commons. Chamberlain was conspiring with Germany behind the back of the Cabinet, of the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, the Foreign Office and the House of Commons.

On September 22, it was already clear to Chamberlain, and to the British Cabinet, that a peaceful solution to the Czechoslovakian crisis was not in view. The Germans' outrageous demand had their effect on British public opinion. This made it imperative for Chamberlain to avoid being perceived as approving the German latest proposals. A message from Halifax on September 23, as we saw, reported to Chamberlain the British public mood. In the early morning of the same day, Mr. Steward⁵⁹¹, the Prime Minister's Press Adviser, conveyed to Dr. Hesse, the German news representative of the D.N.B., the following information⁵⁹²:

Chamberlain's position has been made extremely difficult by latest events in Godesberg. Persons friendly to Germany, of whom Steward himself is one, are beginning to be afraid that the Prime Minister *will not be able to hold out in face of the revolt of public opinion* which is brewing in England..

Steward added that the atmosphere, which a week ago had been definitely favourable to German wishes, threatened to swing over to the opposite extreme as a result of German press propaganda..

From private statements by a friend of Halifax's it appears that the forgoing ideas correspond to the views of Government circles here

The change of mood in the British population was evident⁵⁹³ and Hesse did not need Steward's communication to that effect. In any case, there was nothing wrong in warning the Germans that their policy and propaganda was antagonising the British people.

It was, however, fundamentally wrong to inform the Germans that Chamberlain's position had become difficult and that he would not be able to hold in front of the public revolt. Germany is informed that Chamberlain is not partaking in the public anger and is on the German side. He is trying to hold against the British people but may not succeed. The opponent is no longer Germany but the British people. This kind of talk will, with time, become more frequent, and more indecent.

Though Steward presented the information in a personal capacity, his later interventions, sponsored by Chamberlain, made it likely that he was executing Chamberlain's instructions. He was, at least, doing what he thought Chamberlain would expect him to do.

628⁵⁹¹ After the Munich Agreement, Mr. Steward was to become the personal representative of Chamberlain, secretly accredited by him to the German leaders with the explicit function of bypassing the British Cabinet and the Foreign Office.

629⁵⁹² DGFP, series D, vol 2, doc. 579, p. 895

630⁵⁹³ Selzam, the acting Counsellor of the German Embassy in Britain, sent a report to his government. It was titled 'British People and German Propaganda'. It reported accurately on the anti-German mood that had developed in the last few days. [DGFP, series D, vol 2, doc. 589, p. 919.]

Chamberlain, if he was to go on with his policy of understanding with Germany, needed Germany's help. Germany had to change her image. A much more dignified stand would have been for Chamberlain to tell Hitler that British public opinion, rightly so, was indignant at Germany's bullying and that, unless it was modified, he would himself have to reconsider his policy of understanding with Germany.

The British Government was forced by Halifax and by British public opinion to reject the German memo and to declare it would come to France assistance, were she, in the case of German aggression, to stand by her obligations towards Czechoslovakia. Such a stand, together with the mention of Russia in the press communiqué on September 26, 1938, could lead Hitler to misunderstand Chamberlain's policy. Something had to be done urgently.

Britain had requested Czechoslovakia not to make public her rejection of Germany's proposal (ultimatum) at Godesberg. Somehow the news leaked. Together with the West's new tough attitude, this could convey to Hitler a message of finality. However, there was no finality in Chamberlain's toughness and this had to be conveyed to Germany. On September 26, 1938, the German Chargé d' Affaires, T. Kordt, sent the following 'very urgent' telegram to the German Foreign Ministry:

Prime Minister asked me to transmit the following *strictly confidential information*:

Reports to be expected in immediate future in British and foreign press on final Czech rejection of German memorandum *are not last word*. Chamberlain asks that statement on result of his action be awaited.

The immediate publication of the memorandum is, I learn in confidence, the work of the Czechoslovak Legation here. Downing Street is indignant at this arbitrary action.

Germany or Czechoslovakia had to give way if military action were to be avoided. Hitler was informed 'strictly confidentially' that work was done so that Czechoslovakia give way. It demonstrated a total absence of solidarity between Britain, on the one hand, and France and Czechoslovakia on the other hand. It had to be strictly confidential because it amounted to a betrayal of France and Czechoslovakia.

On September 26, it became evident that a tough public stand could not be avoided. It became necessary to explain the situation to Hitler. Chamberlain sent Wilson to convey two messages to Hitler. One message was a written one. Written in a friendly but firm style, it was entreating Hitler to renounce the use of force against Czechoslovakia, since he could get all he wanted by a peaceful, speedy and orderly solution. In the measure in which it explained the reasons for the Czechoslovak rejection, it constituted a defence of the Czechoslovak policy. There was no mention of a

British military involvement. However its possibility was unmistakably present in the urgency of the entreaty.

The second message was oral and was delivered before the written one and, essentially, constituted the conversation between Wilson and Hitler on September 26, 1938 in the evening. It was the sugar covering the bitter pill of the letter. The tough letter would become public while the soft talking would remain confidential for long years to come. Mr. I. Kirkpatrick was present and made the following notes⁵⁹⁴:

..Sir Horace Wilson then said that before asking the interpreter to read the further letter from the Prime Minister.. he would like to make a few observations *to explain the background and the situation in England which had called forth that letter*. The German memorandum had, as the Prime Minister anticipated at Godesberg, been published. Opinion in England had been profoundly shocked at its terms.

Herr Hitler interrupted to say that in that event it was no use talking any more.

Sir Horace Wilson asked Herr Hitler to listen to his remarks. When the Prime Minister spoke in his letter of the situation being extremely serious *he was referring also to the difficulties he was experiencing in England*

Wilson's mission is now very clear. There were two messages to be considered. One was the letter as written by Chamberlain and which could have been delivered by the British Ambassador Henderson — who was also present at the meeting. The other message is the same one but modified by Wilson's oral additions. No doubt, it would have been easy to incorporate the simple remarks made by Wilson in the letter itself. But then, it would no longer have been a tough letter. What is more, it would have revealed, in writing, the apologetic tone of Chamberlain, as well as his efforts at proving that, when he is tough, Chamberlain is only acting under duress imposed on him by the British people.

The letter, the raw and tough version, might become public. It shows Chamberlain implementing the common Franco-British decisions, and in tune with the mood of the British people. The oral message shows him working behind the back of his Cabinet and his French colleagues, and totally out of tune with British public opinion. A letter conveyed by the Ambassador would therefore not do. Only a letter transmitted by Wilson, his personal friend and adviser, and supplemented by oral explanations — resulting from special instructions given to him by Chamberlain⁵⁹⁵, could

631⁵⁹⁴ DBFP, series 3, vol 2, doc. 1118, pp. 554-557

632⁵⁹⁵ Chamberlain left the meeting with the French delegation to have a word with Wilson before his departure to Berlin

protect the Prime Minister's public reputation, while telling Hitler a different story.

Wilson continued:

After the Prime Minister had returned from Berchtesgaden he had believed that Herr Hitler and himself could reach agreement *on terms which would fully meet German wishes* and have the effect of incorporating the Sudetenland in the Reich. He had succeeded in bringing *his* colleagues, *the* French Government *and the* Czech Government *to his* way of thinking, because he had convinced them that Herr Hitler and himself had agreed upon a solution within the framework of peace. The country accepted Mr. Chamberlain's proposals because they trusted him to see that the solution would be on these lines.

Herr Hitler *interrupted to vociferate in staccato accents* that the problem must be solved *forthwith without any further delay*

Sir Horace Wilson continued that the Prime Minister fully appreciated, but the source of the difficulty lay in the manner in which it was proposed to proceed.

Here Herr Hitler made *gestures and exclamations of disgust and impatience*.

Sir Horace Wilson said that he must emphasize again that the Prime Minister fully appreciated Herr Hitler's feelings and his insistence on speed, but the fact was that it was the way in which the proposals were to be carried out which had shocked and roused British opinion.

Were we not told that the matters discussed were political and that the people 'conversing' were Wilson, a special envoy of the British Prime Minister, and Hitler, we could think that a butler (Wilson) was defending himself showing how good were his deeds and intentions, while the master (Hitler) was scolding him for not doing enough.

The list of good deeds were impressive: the P.M. had convinced his colleagues AND the French Government AND the Czech Government AND the British people to accept a solution fully meeting Germany's wishes. No mention of the Czechoslovakian wishes. It is twice emphasised that the P.M. 'fully appreciate' Hitler's feelings. And what does Wilson get in return? He gets vociferations in staccatos accents sounding like an ultimatum: "The problem must be solved forthwith, without any further delay". No pity for the P.M. who had to face unforeseen difficulties.

Never had a British representative been so humiliated, never had a British representative taken such a servile stand. The problem had been treated by Chamberlain and Wilson on a personal level. Chamberlain was presented as having been blameless, and relatively successful in the

accomplishment of a task which was described as having been excessively difficult. Did Chamberlain think that he therefore deserved to be rewarded with a modification of Hitler's position? Or did Chamberlain want to prove that he deserved the trust of Hitler and, if he could not deliver more, this was because nobody else could have done it?

The whole tone of Wilson's talk was apologetic and represented an endeavour at reducing the impact that the letter could make. It was also a call for sympathy with the P.M.'s difficulties. Kirkpatrick notes continue:

.. Sir Neville Henderson said that the British Government *would see to it* that the Czechs handed over the territory.

Her Hitler indicated by gesture dissent.

Sir Neville Henderson repeated that His Majesty's Government would see that the Czechs handed over the territory; *they were in a position to put adequate pressure on the Czech Government.* Moreover, *Herr Hitler surely trusted Mr. Chamberlain.*

Her Hitler retorted that *unfortunately Mr. Chamberlain might be out of office any day*

The last sentence gives the key to the ultimate failure of the free hand policy. Now and again the fear that, in a democracy, Chamberlain might be removed made Hitler doubt the value of an agreement which had to remain secret because it would not have been approved by the British public.

Hitler then suddenly moved the deadline for a Czechoslovak reply from October the first to September 28th. Wilson asked if the deadline would be midnight, to which Hitler replied it would be at 2 p.m. Hitler was becoming more and more arrogant. To Hitler's question if Britain had abandoned its role of intermediary, Wilson replied:

..it did not and that we still hoped to exercise a useful influence with the Czechs and we believed we could push through a quick agreement in accordance with the basic German requirements.

This was in direct contradiction with the news release from the Foreign Office issued earlier the same day. It was also in contradiction with the decisions reached at the meeting with the French delegation. It was done without the agreement of the Cabinet and in direct conflict with the Cabinet's mood.

Hitler and Wilson held a second meeting next day September 27, 1938. In the meantime Hitler had made a speech very abusive of Benes and the Czech people following which Chamberlain issued a press communiqué answering Hitler's doubts as to Czechoslovakia's sincerity in declaring that she would give back Sudeten territories as implicit in her acceptance of the

French-Anglo proposals on September 22. The communiqué, among other things, said⁵⁹⁶:

Speaking for the British Government we regard ourselves as morally responsible for seeing that the promises made are carried out fairly and fully and we are prepared to undertake that they shall be so carried out with all reasonable promptitude, *provided that the German Government will agree to the settlement of terms and conditions of transfer by discussion and not by force*

The French leaders took comfort from this public demonstration of British firmness. This position was 'modulated' by tone and special wording in Wilson's next meeting with Hitler.

There exist two versions of the meeting a German by Dr Schmidt and an English one by Kirkpatrick. In the essentials, they do not contradict each other. The German report is more complete and is more the work of a professional translator. Nevertheless, to avoid doubts concerning a possible misinterpretation of Wilson's sayings, the English version will be quoted here⁵⁹⁷. Wilson congratulated Hitler for the great popular response to his speech, and then said:

There was, however, one more thing to say and he would try to say it in the tone which the Prime Minister would have used had he been himself present. Many Englishmen thought with him (Sir Horace Wilson) that there were many things which ought to be discussed between England and Germany to the great advantage of both countries.. they included arrangements for improving the economic position all round. He himself and many other Englishmen would like to reach an agreement with Germany on these lines. *He had been struck, as also had many others in England*, by a speech in which Herr Hitler had said that he regarded *England and Germany as bulwarks against disruption, particularly from the East*. In the next few days the course of events might go one way or another and have a far-reaching effect on the future of Anglo-German relations generally.

Wilson underlined the importance of the tone with which he was to say those words. The tone, regretfully, has not been recorded, nor has it been described by Kirkpatrick. One can only speculate what parts of his speech did Wilson particularly wanted to stress or minimise its effect.

The fact remains that, at the time at which the press release from the Foreign Office mentions Russia as a country which will no doubt assist Czechoslovakia against a German aggression, Wilson, in Chamberlain's name mentions the common German-Anglo mission to stand against the

633⁵⁹⁶ DBFP, series 3, vol 2, doc. 1121, p. 559

634⁵⁹⁷ For the English version see DBFP, series 3, vol 2, doc. 1129, p. 564

635 For the German version see DGFP, series D, vol 2, doc. 634, p. 963

‘disruption from the East’, an unmistakable hint at a hostile attitude towards the Soviet Union.

It was a direct way to remind Hitler of the last private meeting between him and Chamberlain which ended in an excellent mood, on the theme of a free hand to be given to Hitler in Eastern Europe. In this context, Wilson speaking of events which might go ‘one way or another’ was implying more than the possibilities of war and peace.

Wilson was interrupted by Hitler just before delivering a warning:

Sir Horace Wilson continued by saying that, if the Germans attacked Czechoslovakia, the French, as they had told us and as Daladier has stated publicly, *would feel* that they should be obliged to fulfil their treaty obligations. If that meant that the forces of France became actively engaged in hostilities against Germany (Herr Hitler interjected ‘That means if France attacks, since I have no intention of attacking France), the British Government *would feel* obliged to support her.

At this point Hitler and Wilson differed on the meaning of Wilson’s warning. Wilson repeated part of his speech and Hitler repeated his interpretation and saying that he took note of the British position. Wilson was not satisfied. Kirkpatrick notes continue:

Sir Horace Wilson said that it was clear Herr Hitler had not understood his statement. He would repeat it once more slowly as *the wording was extremely important*. The situation was a follows: if Czechoslovakia accepted, well and good. If she refused and Germany attacked Czechoslovakia, France, as she informed us, *would feel* that *she must fulfil* her treaty obligations. (Herr Hitler interjected once more, ‘Which means that France must attack Germany’.)

Sir Horace Wilson continued by pointing out that he was using a *particular form of words* with care since it was the form employed by the French in their communication. The French Prime Minister *had not said that France would attack Germany*; he *merely* talked of their fulfilling their obligations. We *did not know exactly in what form* the French would decide to fulfil their obligations, but if in the fulfilment of these obligations France decided that her forces *must* become actively engaged, then *for reasons and grounds* which would be clear to Herr Hitler and to all students of the international situation, Great Britain *must be obliged* to support her.

Previously Wilson underlined the importance of the tone of his message. Now, twice he drew Hitler’s attention to the importance of the wording. To do justice to Wilson we must therefore pay special importance to the wording.

More than once Wilson complained that Hitler did not get his meaning. And even after this special wording by Wilson, the same bickering about the meaning of the message went on for some time. Hitler was trying to translate in blunt language what Wilson was saying in a convoluted way. The logical sequence of events: a German attack followed by a French involvement followed by Britain's support to France was understood differently by Hitler and Wilson.

What, in his own complicated way, Wilson was saying to Hitler was: Don't give importance to the meaning of the sentences. Concentrate on the WORDING. And indeed, the wording was peculiar.

"France would feel that she must fulfil her treaty obligations" seems to say the same thing as "France would fulfil her treaty obligations". Wilson was taking pains underlining an essential difference between the two wordings. He was suggesting that when someone feels he must do something, he does not thus pledge himself to do it. Wordings can do wonders.

Similarly, Wilson is raising the possibility that it could be possible for France to fulfil her treaty obligations without being military involved in offensive operations. A formal declaration of war, followed by a 'wait and see' situation, had been suggested already by Chamberlain to the French delegation in London. This would fit Wilson's wording. In such a case, Britain will not have to give her support to France, so the wording says.

There is a final paragraph in the German version reporting an exchange between Wilson and Hitler witnessed by Dr. Schmidt and not by Kirkpatrick:

Sir Horace Wilson apparently wished to continue the conversation, but the British Ambassador advised him against doing so. On his departure, while alone with the Fuhrer in the room, he said to him that a catastrophe must be avoided at all costs and he would still try to make the Czechs sensible. ("I will try to make those Czechos sensible.")⁵⁹⁸

The Fuhrer replied that he would welcome that, and further repeated emphatically once more that England could wish for no better friend than the Fuhrer..

"Mission accomplished" could say Wilson. Be it by tone of voice or wording of the verbal message, he made Hitler understand that the situation was not so grim. Chamberlain was still determined to deal with Germany as a partner in preventing the disorder coming from the East. As to the French fulfilment of her obligations, it could just be a formal procedure. Britain might then not be involved at all. Besides, Britain might still take care of the "Czechos"⁵⁹⁹

636⁵⁹⁸ This bracketed sentence is in English in the original German document. This is indicated in a note in the DGFP reference given previously

637⁵⁹⁹ "Czechos" sounds here like "Japs" was to sound later and like "boches" was sounding to the French. It was clearly an unfriendly appellation.

The same day, Hitler sent his reply to Chamberlain's written letter. After reiterating and defending his position, without giving in a single inch, he explained that Prague was distorting his proposals by pretending that, as a result of the German immediate occupation, the Czech population would be subject to oppression. He ended up saying:

In these circumstances, I must assume that the Government in Prague is only using a proposal for the occupation by Germans troop in order, by distorting the meaning and object of my proposal, to mobilize those forces in other countries, *in particular in England and France*, from which they hope to receive unreserved support for their aim, and thus achieve the possibility of a general warlike conflagration. *I must leave it to your judgement whether, in view of these facts, you consider that you should continue your effort*, for which I should like to take this opportunity of once more sincerely thanking you, to spoil such manoeuvres and bring the Government in Prague to reason at the very last hour.

This is proof that, contrary to the myth, Hitler was not frustrated by Chamberlain's effort. He went as far as his pride could go by suggesting to Chamberlain to continue his efforts. Once he left it to Chamberlain to decide if he should continue, it was virtually impossible for Chamberlain to stop his efforts.

Moreover the very thing Hitler is suggesting is that Chamberlain should continue to spoil what he calls the Prague manoeuvres. In fact Chamberlain was constantly doing his best to pressure France and Prague towards the acceptance of Hitler's memo.

This was fine as well as it went. The trouble is that France was not in the know. France had categorically rejected as absurd the suggestion that her fulfilment of her obligations should be restricted to a declaration of war, without any further military involvement against Germany. Nonetheless, Wilson has underlined, by special wording and, possibly, by tone of voice, this very 'absurd' eventuality. Somehow the French position had to be made compatible with that resulting from Wilson's wording and tone of voice.

The French Front (Part 2)

Consequently, Halifax, on Tuesday September 27, 1938, sent to Phipps in Paris a telegram from which we quote the following⁶⁰⁰:

638⁶⁰⁰ DBFP, series 3, vol 2, doc. 1143, pp 575-576. In the same telegram, Halifax affirms that Gamelin gave a pessimistic description of the resistance possibilities of the Czechoslovakian army. A note on p. 575 by the editors of vol 3, gives some information concerning Gamelin's talks with the P.M. and at a meeting presided by Inskip. The general impression is that Gamelin was not at all pessimistic. The Czechoslovakian army would hold out certainly for a few weeks, perhaps not for a few months. The note does not add that, obviously, it all depended on the

..If therefore our efforts for peace fail, and instead German troops enter Czechoslovakia on Thursday, as now seems probable, we may expect to be faced in a very short time with a *fait accompli*, so far as Czechoslovakia is concerned ***no declarations or actions of France or ourselves in the meantime can prevent this sudden and overwhelming result*** whatever might be the other justification for or ultimate issues of a world war waged to vindicate our conceptions of just treatment.

3. Although we have always recognized this probability, the latest information requires us ***to face the actual facts***. In this situation, having regard to the close identity of interests of our two countries, it is necessary that ***any action by France in discharge of her obligations and by ourselves in support of France should be closely concerted***, especially as regards measures which would be likely immediately and automatically to start a world war ***without unhappily having any effect in saving Czechoslovakia***.

The stress is put on the uselessness of efforts at saving Czechoslovakia. Concerted action regarding French discharge of her obligation means, at least, a tragic delay in French military intervention, which could quickly seal the fate of Czechoslovakia. It may mean also that Britain could use her right for concerted action to veto any serious military action. Halifax continues:

4. We should be glad to know that French Government agree that ***any action of an offensive character*** taken by either of us henceforward (***including declaration of war***, which is also important from point of view of United States, ***shall only be taken after previous consultation and agreement***).

The stage is set for the betrayal of Czechoslovakia in a way reminiscent of what would later be called ‘the phoney war’ except that, this time there would be no war, just a ‘phoney discharge of obligations’. Britain is asking that after the invasion of Czechoslovakia, France should neither declare war nor start any offensive operation. Moreover a very vague mention of the United States in relation with abstaining from a war declaration makes it likely that weeks may be wasted in this respect. The likelihood that the United States would recommend, or agree to bless, a declaration of war by France and Britain against Germany is not only small but is not expected to occur at lightning speed, and this at a time when speed is of the essence.

The likely situation is that concerting and waiting for the United States would provide Germany with sufficient time to complete the occupation of

extent of French intervention and the effectiveness of the Russian air force on which Gamelin counted and described in encouraging terms.

Czechoslovakia. It would then not make sense to intervene when it had not been done when Czechoslovak forces were still intact.

France agreed. The same day of September 27, 1938, Phipps sent from Paris the following telegram⁶⁰¹:

Minister for Foreign affairs tells me that the French Government are in entire agreement not to take any offensive measures without previous consultation with and agreement by us.

His excellency feels more and more that it behoves us both to be extremely prudent and *to count our probable and even possible enemies* before embarking on any offensive act whatsoever.

'His excellency' was Bonnet. Paul-Boncour would never have agreed to the British suggestion. However, Britain had succeeded in preventing Paul-Boncour becoming the Minister for Foreign Affairs at that critical time. It is thus that the British operations on the French Front ended successfully.

This exchange of telegrams between Britain and France was already a violation by France of her treaty obligations. Czechoslovakia, naturally was not informed of the new situation. One front still remained to be faced: the home front.

The Home Front

Information, from all sources concurred that within the days separating the two meetings between Hitler and Chamberlain, that of Berchtesgaden and that of Godesberg, and especially after the terms of Hitler's memo had been made public, a radical change had occurred in British public opinion. The British public who reluctantly agreed to the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia according to the Anglo-French formula, could not 'swallow' the German arrogance and their renegeing over their agreement with Chamberlain.

The public mood affected every British leader and particularly Cadogan and Halifax. It did not affect Chamberlain.

In order to prevent social disturbances, or even a social revolution, he did not mind being paternalistic and would also advocate some reforms. He felt contempt for the broad masses which he once described as⁶⁰²

an immense mass of *very ignorant* voters of both sexes whose intelligence is low and who have *no power of weighing evidence*.

639⁶⁰¹ DBFP, series 3, vol 2, doc. 1150, p. 582

640⁶⁰² Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, 'Baldwin, A Biography', Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1969, p. 257

He had an acute sense of drama and of the importance of timing. In September 19, 1938, after his return from Berchtesgaden and before his next meeting with Hitler at Berchtesgaden, he wrote to his elder sister⁶⁰³:

in my last letter I wondered what might happen before I wrote again, for I knew the hour must be near, if it was to come at all. Two things were essential, first that the plan should be tried **just when things looked blackest**, and second that it **should be a complete surprise**..

Chamberlain was not focusing on how to save peace. He was coldly calculating what to do, how to best play the drama in order to force his policies on the people.

With the German reassured that “the Czechos” could be made sensible, some respite was gained. With France agreeing not to start any action of an offensive nature without a previous agreement with Britain, there was no longer an imminent danger of war unless it was precipitated by the strength of the British public opinion.

The rules of the game, as understood by Chamberlain, requested that “things should look blackest”. It looked black enough but, somehow, the blackness was concentrated on the treacherous policy of Germany. There was a need to transfer “looking blackest” from Germany to the fate of the British people.

In order to condition the people to look at themselves in the blackest way, the Government ordered the distribution of gas masks and the digging of trenches. It could, and has been argued that these were elementary precautions justified by the gravity of the situation. This is certainly not true. Britain had no intention at all to go to war against Germany.

It was unthinkable that France would contravene her recent agreement with Britain which obligated France not to declare war and not to start any military operation of an offensive nature without British approval. The explanation surrounding the British request for such an agreement made it clear that Britain would rather not approve such measures. Bonnet had expressed some enthusiasm for the idea of being restrained by such an agreement. Moreover, a breach of the agreement by France would release Britain from commitments which, anyway, were of the weakest character. At worst, France, to save face, might go to the extent of declaring war on Germany, and then adopt the policy of ‘wait and see’ without actually waging war.

Digging trenches and distributing gas masks were the ‘wrong’ precautions. Lord Ismay wrote in his memoirs⁶⁰⁴:

641⁶⁰³ Keith Feiling, op. cit., p. 363

642⁶⁰⁴ ‘The Memoirs of General The Lord Ismay’, Heineman, London, 1960, p.91

The Cabinet, on hearing the Prime Minister's story, were in no mood to submit to Hitler's ultimatum. The hopes to which the first visit had given birth had been killed stone dead, and it seemed that we should be at war within a week.

I was extremely worried that *nothing had as yet been done* to call up *either* the territorial anti-aircraft units, which were responsible for the defence of London, *or* the fighter squadrons of the Auxiliary Air Force, which *might urgently be required at any moment*. While Mr. Chamberlain was still wrestling with Hitler at Godesberg, I voiced my uneasiness to my Minister, but *he felt that no immediate action was necessary*. The *next morning* there were headlines in the press that *trenches were being dug* in the parks for protection against air attacks. I immediately rang up Sir Thomas Inskip.. and suggested that there were not a minute to be lost. The digging of trenches in the Royal Parks would convince friends and foe alike that the Government thought that war was almost inevitable. London might be attacked at any moment. If this were to happen *before even the elementary defences which we possessed were in position*, I could see myself strung up on one lamp post, and my Minister on another.

The chronological order of events is important here.

w First, General Ismay learned about the gravity of the situation and the possibility of war within a week

w Then, he was amazed that nothing had been done for the air defence of London.

w He expressed his 'uneasiness' to Inskip who told him that no 'immediate action was necessary'

w Next morning instead of announcements of vital measures being taken for the air defence of London, he reads headlines in the newspapers of trench diggings in the parks. At that point, the authorities knew, at least from the previous warnings by Ismay, that what was needed was the calling up of the territorial anti-aircrafts units and the fighter squadrons of the Auxiliary Air Force. The measures taken were not those urgently required for the safety of the population. These diggings were going on while the vital measures were not implemented. These diggings and the masks' distribution, according to General Ismay, were dangerous for the safety of the London population.

w He considered the way the government faced the need to protect the public's safety, such a dereliction of duty, that it could possibly lead to him and Inskip being hanged on lamp posts.

Inskip was one of Chamberlain's strongest supporters. He had good reasons to think that the situation did not require the measures suggested by Ismay. But then, the measures the Government was taking were not in response to a perceived dangerous situation. It was part of the staging of an atmosphere of fear which could lead to a readiness to accept a provisory peaceful solution, however unjust, however humiliating, however dangerous.

In time of war, the morale of the population is of prime importance. The combative value of an army depends very much on its determination to fight for a cause it understands and which it feels is vital for the country. On the eve of war, it is the main duty of a Government to infuse in the population a spirit of enthusiasm and readiness to withstand sacrifices.

This is not what Chamberlain tried to do. On the evening of September 27, Chamberlain addressed a radio Broadcast to the British people in which he said⁶⁰⁵:

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.

The war is not presented as a fight against tyranny. A British citizen, about to become a soldier going to the front and leaving at home a family exposed to bombing and gas attack, needs to know something more than that what he is asked to do is 'horrible, fantastic, incredible'. He needs to know that it is not for the sake of a quarrel in 'a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing'.

This is not preparation for war, but for surrender. In this preparation, trenches and gas masks played their role. Preparation for war would have stressed the number of times Hitler has reneged his word and violated treaties. It would have stressed the horrors of the Nazi regime and what people in Czechoslovakia should expect under German occupation. It would have stressed the necessity of respecting international laws. It would have explained that more than just a quarrel was involved in Germany's ultimatum. It would have highlighted that Czechoslovakia had treated her German minority infinitely better than Germany treated its minority of Jews. It would have brought home that, in today's modern world, Czechoslovakia, at the centre of Europe, was a close-by country bound to Britain and France by her democratic regime, and to France by a treaty of mutual assistance against aggression.

After having alarmed the population with what is 'horrible, fantastic and incredible', Chamberlain leads them to hang their hopes on his further efforts. He added:

643⁶⁰⁵ Neville Chamberlain, 'In Search of Peace', Putnam's Son's, New-York, 1939, pp. 174-175

I shall not give up the hope of a peaceful solution, or abandon my efforts for peace, as long as any chance for peace remains. I would not hesitate to pay even a third visit to Germany if I thought it would do any good.

The alternatives given to the people for consideration were either a nonsensical war for no reasonable cause, or the success of the Prime Minister's efforts. Very naturally, the majority of the British people was led to wish the success of Chamberlain's efforts.

In Chamberlain's view, success and surrender were closely tied, and the British people had to be prepared for the surrender. Chamberlain therefore added:

However much we may sympathise with a *small* nation confronted by a *big and powerful* neighbour, we cannot in all circumstances undertake to involve the whole British Empire in war *simply on her account*. If we have to fight it must be on *larger issues than that*.

'Simply on her account' reveals that, for Chamberlain, the bullying of a small nation by a big and powerful neighbour, is too small an issue. Not mentioned is the known ambitions of Germany, explicitly expressed by their leaders in many occasions. Not mentioned is the crucial strategical importance of Czechoslovakia and the strengthening of Germany as a result of its domination over that country.

Many contemporary leaders and news people⁶⁰⁶, who proved to have had a keen understanding of the events of the time, suspected that, by ordering the digging of trenches and the distribution of gas masks, the British Government only intended to scare the population and prepare a mood to accept the surrender to Germany's wishes. In his autobiography the preface of which was written on October 2, 1938, Professor R.G. Collingwood wrote⁶⁰⁷:

To me, therefore, the betrayal of Czechoslovakia was only a third case of the same policy by which the 'National' government had betrayed Abyssinia and Spain; and I was less interested in the fact itself than in the methods by which it was accomplished; the

644⁶⁰⁶ The reader is urged to read in 'Days of our Years' by Pierre Van Passen, Chapter 9 titled "L'Infame" and, in particular, pages 484 and 485. [Garden City Publishing, New York, 1939]

645⁶⁰⁷ 'An Autobiography', R.G. Collingwood, Oxford University Press, 1939, pp. 165-166. Collingwood might have been right. William Manchester [op. cit., p. 349] points to the fact that the message from Hitler had been received three hours earlier. Manchester wrote:

646 The scene in Parliament later in the day was a piece of stage management..

At about noon Hitler's invitation had reached the German Embassy in London, where it was immediately decoded and dispatched to No. 10. Three hours passed.

647 Manchester describes in more details the elements of the staging. His analysis strongly support the view that staging had very likely occurred.

carefully engineered war-scare in the country at large, officially launched by the *simultaneous issue of gas-masks and the prime minister's emotional broadcast*, two days before his flight to Munich, and the carefully staged hysterical scene in parliament on the following night. These things were in the established traditions of Fascist dictatorial methods; except that whereas the Italian and German dictators sway mobs by appeal to the thirst for glory and national aggrandizement, the English prime minister did it by *playing on sheer stark terror*.

It could be that the 'hysterical scene in parliament' had not been staged. Except for this, Callingwood's statement cannot be disputed.

And it is thus that the British people were conditioned to welcome 'peace in our time'. As to the will of the Czechoslovak people and its government, it was irrelevant. So much so that, in a private session with Hitler, after the signature of the Munich agreement. Chamberlain took it for granted that Germany would invade Czechoslovakia in case the latter would reject the Agreement. Chamberlain only hoped that Germany would avoid bombing Prague since this would cause casualties among women and children. No doubt, should there have been a great number of such victims, Chamberlain would have been embarrassed.

It is to be noted that Czechoslovakia was not invited to Munich, that an agreement was extracted from her for a different solution than that arrived at Berchtesgaden, that she had not even been consulted concerning the new terms of the agreement and that she had not been given the freedom to accept or reject an agreement related to her dismemberment. On September 29, 1938, Newton, the British ambassador in Prague wrote in a telegram to Halifax

Incidentally I am not altogether clear that this has been in your mind when you instructed me to express the hope that Czechoslovak Government will not formulate objections to time-table '*before it is under discussion at Munich*'. In making my representations to Dr. Krofta I will omit these words lest he should take them to imply that it would be open to Czechoslovak Government to formulate objections *afterwards*

No comments are necessary.

The Russian Factor

Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union were bound by a treaty of mutual assistance against aggression. The treaty stated that the Soviet assistance would be given only after France would have implemented hers under the obligation of her own treaty of assistance with Czechoslovakia

This condition limited the Soviet commitments. It was widely believed that it had been included in the Czechoslovakian-Soviet treaty on the request

of the Soviet Union⁶⁰⁸. The truth is different. This restriction had been requested by Benes. Czechoslovakia did not want to 'run the risk' of ever finding herself exclusively helped by the Soviet Union. The anti-Soviet feelings were running high in the Czechoslovak establishment and, were it not for this restriction — implying that Soviet help would be forthcoming **after** French help had been secured — the pact would have been unacceptable to the ruling circles.

The Agrarian Party was the most powerful one in the country. Its leader was Beran who did not hide from Germany that he would welcome her help in the struggle against communism in Czechoslovakia⁶⁰⁹. In these circumstances it was very unlikely that, in the absence of a French involvement, Czechoslovakia would have accepted help from the Soviet Union, were that country ready to give it beyond her treaty obligations.

By her treaty with Czechoslovakia, and in consequence of the notorious antagonism existing between her and Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, was supposed to play an essential role in the Czechoslovakian crisis. Nevertheless, Britain never consulted her, and barely kept her informed of the steps she was taking to solve the Czechoslovakian crisis.

This was in line with Chamberlain's deep feelings against communism and the Soviet Union. The British opposition, and a number of Conservative leaders such as Churchill, were reproaching the Government for ignoring the Soviet Union. The Government had to demonstrate that this was not the case. Its position was that the reality of the situation was such that the Soviet factor had to play a rather weak role.

It was known that recent purges had decapitated the Soviet army of her leadership. So many generals and other officers had been tried and, in one way or another, relieved from their command, that questions could have justifiably been asked as to the effect of such a loss of experienced officers on the combative capabilities of the Soviet army. It was also felt that the army must have been demoralised by that action of the Soviet leadership.

Additional information in possession of France and Czechoslovakia, had not been made public. Benes, before the Soviet purges, had warned Daladier, the French Prime Minister, to be careful in its dealing with the Soviet army leaders. Information in possession of the Czechoslovak authorities proved that Soviet military leaders were, in contact with Germany, plotting against the Soviet government⁶¹⁰.

648⁶⁰⁸ It must be said that the Soviet Union had no objections to the inclusion of such a restriction. It was no less a protection for the Soviet Union as it was considered to be for Czechoslovakia.

649⁶⁰⁹ DGFP, series D, vol 2, doc. 62, p. 141 (February 27, 1938) and doc. 105, p. 195 (March 27, 1938)

650⁶¹⁰ Victor Alexandroff, 'Les jours de la trahison', Editions Denoel, Paris, 1975, p.194. According to the author, Benes, in 1937, communicated his information to Leon Blum's son in visit to Prague. It is to be noted that Tokhachevsky has since been posthumously rehabilitated by the Soviet Union.

In these circumstances, the purge in the Soviet army should have been considered by France and Czechoslovakia as good news. This would not diminish the reluctance of French and British leaders to deal with the Soviet Union.

The French military rejected an offer for airplanes (fighters) made by the Soviet Union. They even refused the plans of the design of a Soviet fighter model considered by the French experts to be superior to any model the French air force had. The reason was that to accept Soviet help would have been too humiliating for France⁶¹¹

Similarly, the British military refused a Soviet offer to deliver to them the plans for the construction of a tank which, according to British experts, was superior to any model Britain had produced or designed⁶¹².

While Chamberlain was still at Godesberg, Halifax, on September 23, 1938, sent a telegram to Butler in Geneva asking him to approach Litvinov to get him to answer some questions. In his telegram Halifax said to Butler⁶¹³:

It would be useful if you could obtain from Litvinov any precise indication of what action Soviet Government would take in event of Czechoslovakia being thus involved in war with Germany, and at what point they would be prepared to take it.

Next day Butler sent a telegram to Halifax⁶¹⁴:

Lord De La Warr and I saw M. Litvinov and M. Maisky after meeting of Sixth Committee.. During meeting of Committee M. Litvinov had made a speech.. which he had concluded with a statement about Czechoslovakia, saying that Soviet Government had received an enquiry from Czechoslovak Government asking whether they would fulfil their treaty obligations. He had replied that, *despite* what he described as *Franco-German-British ultimatum to Czechs*, if Herr Hitler decided on military action and French were to honour their obligations towards Czechoslovakia and fight, the Soviet Government would come to the aid of Czechoslovakia.

It is not customary for a country, party to a treaty, to ask another party of the treaty if it will fulfil its obligations. The loyalty of a country to its signature is not supposed to be questioned. However, the case of Czechoslovakia, at that stage of the crisis, was particular. She 'cracked' under exceedingly great pressure from France and Britain and accepted the Anglo-French solution for the crisis. She was to give away regions with a Sudeten majority and renounce her treaties with France and the Soviet Union. The latter, in consequence, was completely justified to consider itself

651⁶¹¹ Robert Coulondre, "De Staline à Hitler", Hachette, Paris, p. 126-7

652⁶¹² Liddell Hart, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 390

653⁶¹³ DBFP, series 3, vol. 2, doc. 1043, p. 480

654⁶¹⁴ DBFP, series 3, vol. 2, doc. 1071, pp. 487-498

released from any obligations towards Czechoslovakia, the more so, that the submission to the Anglo-French pressure was done without consultation with the Soviet Union.

The Soviet affirmation of readiness to stand by her obligations represented therefore an important element of the political situation. Butler went on:

At our interview we asked him whether he could develop further the above statement, and in particular at what point Soviet Government would be prepared to take action. He said he could say no more than that if French came to the assistance of the Czechs Russia would take action. We asked him whether he intended to raise the matter at the League, and, if so, whether he would wait to take action while the league was discussing the question. He said that they might desire to raise the matter in the League; *this would not alter the proposition that he had stated, namely, that Czechoslovak Soviet Pact would come into force.*

The Soviet Union had no common boundaries with either Germany or Czechoslovakia. It was known that Poland and Roumania would refuse to the Soviet army the right of passage. There were indications that Roumania would, unofficially, abstain from opposing the passage of Soviet aircrafts over her territory.

Therefore, and unless the Soviet Union was prepared to invade Roumania or Poland and be branded an aggressor, the only help the Soviet Union could give was in the air. This could be quite valuable.

There was, however, a way to circumvent the Polish and Roumania's reluctance to let the Soviet army cross their territory. Article 16 of the League's Covenant says:

3. The members of the League agree.. that they will take the necessary steps to afford passage through their territory to the forces of any of the Members of the League which are co-operating to protect the covenants of the League.

The recourse to the League could give to the Soviet Union a legal right to cross the territories of Poland or Roumania in case of a German aggression against Czechoslovakia, condemned as such by the League. Litvinov was quick to add that the treaty of mutual assistance between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union would come into force without waiting the results of the League's debate. This meant that, at least, assistance from the air would be immediately forthcoming. While land assistance might have to wait for League decisions. Butler added:

..he would like to suggest to us.. that a *meeting of the three Powers* mentioned, together with Roumania and any small Power who could be regarded as reliable, should take place away from

the atmosphere of Geneva, and preferably in Paris, and so show Germans that we mean business. He said that Geneva meetings never impressed the Germans. ***He would be ready then to discuss military and air questions***, upon which he was not posted, since he had been away from Russia for such a time..

He said he had one further statement which he himself had not made publicly which he would impart to us: Soviet Government had informed Polish Government that, in the event of Poland attacking Czechoslovakia in Teschen area, pact of non-aggression existing between Poland and Russia ***would automatically lapse and Russia would take action***.

It is not reasonable to take exception to Litvinov's statements⁶¹⁵. It cannot be said that his talk diminished in any measure the extent or the prospects of a Soviet intervention to assist Czechoslovakia in case of need. He suggested that the military aspects of the question be discussed in a meeting in Paris. This offer was not accepted. The warning to Poland was more than what France or Britain had done. Should Poland invade Czechoslovakia 'Russia would take action', and the problem of right of passage through Polish territory would be automatically resolved.

Chamberlain, in spite of Hitler's repeated treaty violations and his failure to keep his own word and promises, often asked that Hitler's word be taken at face value. In the case of the Soviet Union, in spite of a respectable record regarding international law, Chamberlain would not take her words at face value, would not even try to commit her publicly in the measure which would be found satisfactory to Britain. Had he tried and then failed, he would then had, at least, exposed the unreliability of the Soviet Union. As events developed, it was Britain and France who turned out to be the unreliable 'friends' of Czechoslovakia.

In the evening of September 30, 1938, M. Vavrecka, the Czech minister of propaganda, gave the reasons for which Czechoslovakia had not requested the help of the Soviet Union. He said in a broadcast⁶¹⁶:

We had to consider that it would take the Russian Army weeks to come to our aid — perhaps too late, for by that time millions of our men, women and children would have been slaughtered. It was even more important to consider that our war by the side of Soviet Russia would have been not only a fight against Germany but ***it would have been interpreted as a fight on the side of Bolshevism***. And then ***perhaps all of Europe would have been drawn into the war against us and Russia***.

655⁶¹⁵ Butler himself does take exception to Litvinov statements and found them totally unsatisfactory. Having rejected Litvinov's offer to meet in Paris for military discussion, Britain is not qualified to make 'un procès d'intention' to the Soviet Union. On the other hand, Boothby had on September 23, 1938 a conversation with Litvinov from which he gathered that "The Russians will give full support." [Harold Nicolson, op. cit., p. 365]

656⁶¹⁶ Northedege, op. cit., p. 535

Harold Ickes reports in his diary⁶¹⁷ on July 2, 1939:

Benes had been lecturing at the University of Chicago.. He was particularly explicit in saying that, at all times during the Czechoslovakian crisis, Russia was not only willing to carry out every obligation that it had entered into, it was willing to go further.

'To go further' can only mean that the Soviet Union was prepared to assist Czechoslovakia even if France abstained to do so. This is implicitly recognised by Vavrečka, Czechoslovak Minister of Information, in his Broadcast after Munich, in which he defended the Government position not to resist Germany with only Russia to assist Czechoslovakia.

Benes was credible. To recognise that the Soviet Union was prepared to assist his country, even without France, threw a heavy responsibility on his shoulders. Whether he had been right or wrong in rejecting the Soviet help, it would have been easier on him had he denied that the help was available.

The Soviet Union had suggested a meeting with Britain and France to discuss the practical military assistance that she would give Czechoslovakia. This offer was rejected. All the steps taken by the Soviet Union with respect to the Czechoslovak crisis were proper and in keeping with an intention to assist Czechoslovakia against a German aggression.

The Soviet Union who, in spite of unfavourable geographical conditions, alone helped the Spanish Republic against Franco and his Nazi and Fascist supporters, should not be accused of bluffing with respect to Czechoslovakia; especially that her supposed bluff had never been called off.

657⁶¹⁷ Op. cit., vol. 2, p. 675

CHAPTER XIII

THE POLICY OF A FREE HAND. PART 4 (From Munich to War)

The Post Munich Atmosphere

The British Government had made a colossal effort to instil the fear of war in the minds and hearts of the British people. With the signature of the Munich agreement, what at first seemed to matter most was that war had been avoided. The relief, almost universally felt, generated feelings of gratitude, trust and good will towards Chamberlain. The press played its role in covering up the grim realities of the situation, stressing instead the most optimistic picture and creating a Chamberlain-mania close to adoration.

The merit of Chamberlain had been great indeed. Just a few days before Munich, it seemed that British public opinion might force the government to go to war to put a stop to Germany's aggressions. This war, requested by the British public's attachment for justice and fairness, would have been most unwelcome to the British establishment and would have foiled their long standing hopes and policies to unite Europe against the Soviet Union. Now such policies could be put back on track.

However, as days passed by, people came out of their scare, started to look at the balance-sheet of Munich and realised they did not like its consequences. Having approved the Munich agreement the people could hardly protest against it. Astute observers, however, reached the conclusion that a repeat of the Munich agreement would no longer get support from the British people.

Two trends could be distinguished among the supporters of the Munich agreement. There were those who considered it a sad necessity, a shameful but unavoidable surrender. Such were the feelings of Cadogan, Ironside, Strang and many others. But there were also politicians who were overjoyed that the road to friendship with Germany had finally been cleared of obstacles, and who gave little thought to the sacrifices imposed on the Czechoslovak people. Chamberlain belonged to this latter group.

While Daladier did not hide from his entourage how ashamed he felt for having signed the Munich agreement, Chamberlain felt quite differently. Strang, who accompanied Chamberlain to Munich, recorded the following⁶¹⁸:

⁶¹⁸ Lord Strang, 'Home and Abroad', Andre Deutsch, London, 1956, pp. 146, 148

..the Munich Conference was a distressing event. ..What was disturbing was that, at an international conference, four Powers should have discussed and taken decisions upon the cession to one of them of vital territory belonging to a fifth State, without giving a hearing to the Government of that State. The decision, after it had been reached, was merely communicated at the dead of night to representatives of the government concerned by two of the participants in the conference, for immediate acceptance under brutal duress. ..Mr Chamberlain though his original proposal had been for a conference of the four powers *and* Czechoslovakia, ***did not seem afterwards to have been much disturbed by this.***

On his return to the hotel, as he sat down to lunch, the Prime Minister ***complacently patted his breast-pocket and said: "I've got it!"***

The quote reveals the great difference in attitude between Strang and Chamberlain. Strang was distressed, Chamberlain was happy with his achievements. Chamberlain, as it turned out, was optimist and confident in himself. He had no doubts he had now the situation well in hand and could pull the British people in whatever direction he chose. He knew that an essential element of his success in reversing the situation from Godesberg to Munich, was due to his personal and secret diplomacy. He would therefore have increased recourse to it.

On October 3, 1938 Lord Swinton, a trusted Conservative, told Chamberlain⁶¹⁹: "I will support you, Prime Minister, if you are quite sure in your mind that you have only been buying time for our rearmament." According to what Lord Swinton personally told Ian Colvin, Chamberlain drew from his pocket the Chamberlain-Hitler declaration, wave it in front of Swinton and said: "But don't you understand? I have brought back peace." Chamberlain, off guards, revealed that he had not been motivated by gaining time. It would be an insult to Chamberlain's intelligence to think that he believed Hitler would abstain from further aggression. His interventions in the Cabinet and in the discussions with the French colleagues show him quite aware of Germany's appetite. But, in Chamberlain's view, it would still be peace if Germany's expansion in the east would not lead to a war between Germany and the West.

All was well except that Germany would not 'play ball'. On October 9, less than two weeks after signing the friendship declaration with Chamberlain, Hitler made a speech at Saarbruecken saying⁶²⁰:

The statesmen who are opposed to us wish for peace.. but they govern in countries whose domestic organization makes it possible that at any time they may lose their position to make

659⁶¹⁹ Ian Colvin, 'Vansittart in Office', op. cit., p. 270
660⁶²⁰ 'The Gathering Storm', op. cit., pp. 328-329

way for others who are not anxious for peace. And those others are there. *It only needs that in England instead of Chamberlain, Mr. Duff Cooper or Mr. Eden or Mr. Churchill should come to power, and then we know quite well that it would be the aim of these men immediately to begin a new World War..*

I have, therefore, decided, as I announced in my speech at Nuremberg, to continue the construction of our fortifications in the West with increased energy

The British people was indignant at a foreign head of state's attempt to intervene in the internal affairs of their country. Hitler's speech increased their reluctance at tighter relations with Germany. Chamberlain had to seek ways at repairing the damage.

Plotting With Germany The Manipulation Of The British Public Opinion

On October 11, 1938, Dr. Fritz Hesse reported to Dirksen, who in turn reported to Weizsacker his superior in Berlin, a most important conversation he had with an 'agent' of Chamberlain. This agent was George F. Steward.

Hesse's report, if reliable, and Steward's statements to him, if done on Chamberlain's instructions, indicated that Chamberlain believed he was in cahoots with Hitler in the pursuit of an objective which had to be achieved against the will of the British people, the House of Commons, the British Foreign Office and the British Cabinet. The credibility of this report is therefore a matter of importance. It depends on the reliability of two persons: Dr. Hesse and George F. Steward.

Dr. Hesse was the representative of a German news agency as well as of the Ribbentrop office in London. It would have been highly dangerous for a man in his position to invent or distort important statements. He sent his report to Ribbentrop and the German Foreign Office through Dirksen, the German ambassador in London. He could reasonably have expected that such an important report as his, would be given great consideration in Germany. There the authorities might have ways to check its authenticity and validity. If Hesse had been playing a game, he must have known that it would be soon discovered. It can therefore safely be assumed that the most significant parts of the report had been written by Hesse with an effort for accuracy.

As to Steward, he was no newcomer. In 1938 he had already been, for nine years, a member of the Prime Minister's office at 10 Downing Street where he would remain till 1940. Had he been playing a game, he had to know. like Hesse, that it was also bound to be discovered.

It sometimes occurs that a person, in a private capacity, tries to play a bigger political role than is allowed by his official position. Such a person may exaggerate his own importance and the extent of his information. He

may even give advice with ambiguous hints that it came from 'higher' sources.

In a previous contact with Hesse, Steward had given such advice but mentioned that he was speaking in his own name and had no official authority. This time, however, he spoke as the authorised agent of Neville Chamberlain and he acted with such authority. The suggestion to by-pass the Foreign Office and the British ambassador in Berlin, for instance, is made with the assurance of a person making it in the name of the Prime Minister. Steward was too much of an experienced public servant, too close to Chamberlain to have assumed a role he was not authorised to play. What he was saying had great implications on the relations between Britain and Germany and, in particular, between Chamberlain and Hitler. As a game played by Steward, the latter must have known that soon he will not only be discovered but would have to pay a very high price for impersonating a 'confidential agent' of Chamberlain.

As a matter of fact his relation with Germany was indeed discovered. The following is reported by Dilks in 'The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan' (op. cit, p. 126):

On 28 November [1938] an officer of the Intelligence Service brought Cadogan material which seemed to show that someone at 10 Downing Street [the P.M. residence] was in contact with Ribbentrop through Fritz Hesse, press adviser to the German Embassy in London. Cadogan decided that he must speak to Halifax. "Don't want to," says the diary, "as **he's getting rather fed up**, and I don't want to give him reason for resigning. But we must stop this sort of thing." Sir Alexander, guessing that Halifax would tackle Chamberlain, felt that **if** the Prime Minister had not inspired the approach he should know of it; **if** he had, he should know the twist which Hesse had given it (for example, **saying to Ribbentrop that it proved Britain would give Germany everything she asked for in 1939**). Halifax talk to Chamberlain on the evening of 29 November. "He aghast (H. thinks genuinely)" Cadogan recorded that night, 'and want to follow it up, but H., on my prompting, said I *must* have 24 hours' notice before he does (to save our source).' The diary, although it contains several further references to this episode, does not round it off. A member of the Prime Minister's staff was eventually warned by Sir Horace Wilson against indiscreet talk. Cadogan noted that "**this will put a brake on them all.**"

This last comment indicated that Cadogan did not believe in the P.M.'s innocence. The "member of the Prime Minister's staff" was of course Steward. As to Horace Wilson who warned Steward against 'indiscreet talk', he would later speak with German representatives in a way similar to Steward's talk to Hesse. Moreover he then proposed to bring Chamberlain in person 'here and then' to confirm his (Wilson's) statements.

If Steward was playing a game, he was guilty of more than just ‘indiscreet talk’. What he was doing had legitimately raised the suspicion of the intelligence authorities. He could have been prosecuted as a spy. An official enquiry was in order, but was not made. All this strongly suggest that Steward was indeed acting under Chamberlain’s instruction.

We will see that the uncovering of Steward did not stop Chamberlain from using special channels, unknown to his Secretary of State, the Foreign Office and the British Cabinet. There are even reasons to believe that Steward himself continued, though more carefully to act as a go between, to provide special connections between Chamberlain and Ribbentrop. This adds credibility to Hesse’s report. Hesse’s document can therefore be considered a reliable account of his conversation with the ‘confidential agent of Chamberlain’. Hesse writes⁶²¹:

I had an interview with a *confidential agent of Neville Chamberlain*, the Prime Minister, who in the course of a lengthy conversation gave me among other things the following instructive information:

1. During the recent critical days the Prime Minister had actually made decisions *entirely alone with his two intimate advisers* and in the last decisions had *no longer asked the opinion of any member of the Cabinet, not even of Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary..* In the end the Prime Minister had *not received assistance or support of any kind from the Foreign Office*, which on the contrary had striven during the last 3 days to sabotage his plans and commit Great Britain to warlike action against Germany. *The final outcome was therefore due exclusively to Chamberlain*, who had however thereby *ignored the provisions of the British Constitution and customary Cabinet usage*

Chamberlain is no defender of democracy. Having taken cognition of Hitler’s fears — that he, Chamberlain is tied by the rules of a regime which might bring him down and replace him, for instance, by Eden — he promptly let Hitler know that he, Chamberlain, was the master of the situation, acting without the restraint of the Foreign Office, the Foreign Secretary, the Cabinet, the Constitution and Cabinet usage. In short, he was, in practice, the dictator of Britain⁶²². Hesse continued:

2. My informant expressly drew my attention to the fact that *an extremely bitter feeling against us prevailed in the whole of the Foreign Office*. He thought he could assure me that there they had sworn to be “revenged” on Germany and particularly on von

661⁶²¹ DGFP, series D, vol. 4, doc. 251 [enclosure 2], pp. 305-308

662⁶²² Later, he will let Hitler know that he, Chamberlain, is as much the ‘Führer of Britain’ as Hitler is the Führer of Germany. (This was done by Lord Kemble during his visit to Germany)

Ribbentrop. We should not allow ourselves to be deceived in this matter; in all future moves it was important that *all major questions should be dealt with direct, thus bypassing the Foreign Office and also Sir Neville Henderson*, since it had unfortunately become apparent that the latter was not completely reliable when forwarding communications. Furthermore, the Foreign Office would always be brought in by Henderson, and thus there was the risk of causing all kinds of obstruction and undesirable publicity.

The Munich policy had been approved by the House of Commons by a large majority. This constituted a mandate for Chamberlain to persevere with his policies. Were Chamberlain's intention to be no more than the improvement of relations with Germany along the Munich line, he did not have to be secretive about it. Differences with the Foreign Office could have been easily settled in the House of Commons with the support of the British people.

The fact is that there was a secret agreement between Hitler and Chamberlain. It had been made behind the back of the Foreign Office, of the Cabinet, of the Foreign Secretary, of the House of Commons and of the British people. Chamberlain had already acted alone⁶²³, and, by a colossal staging, succeeded in making the whole country adopt his view. It now seemed to him that he could repeat the feat and implement the remaining of his secret agenda.

As before, his success depended on secrecy. Again, he is found working against the will of all the elements of democracy of the British governing institutions (Cabinet, Foreign Office, House of Commons and the British people) in cahoots with his German friends. Had the facts of Steward's statements to Hesse, in the name of the Prime Minister, been known at the time, Chamberlain could have, justifiably, been accused of treason. Hesse continued:

3. The British people *were now beginning to reflect on the results of Munich. An extremely difficult situation has thus arisen*, in which we, on the German side had it in our power to influence British public opinion to a far greater extent than we

663⁶²³ Chamberlain was not literally acting alone. He was helped by a few close collaborators and a small coterie of faithful admirers. We quote from the diaries of Sir Henry Channon:

664 November 2, 1938, p. 175 .. The P.M., who is becoming dictatorial (fortunately he is always right)...

665 May 10, 1939, 198. All morning at the FO intriguing and arranging matters, and the hours passed in a confusion of secret telephone calls and conversations. The startling thing about my intrigues is that they always come off.

666 May 11, 1939, p. 198 .. More and more we are being ruled by a small group of thirty or forty people, including myself, for Alec Dunglass and I have woven a net around the P.M. whom we love and admire and want to protect from interfering, unimportant noodles. Both he and Halifax are oligarchic in mind and method.

667 At the time, Channon was Butler's Private Secretary. Butler was the Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

imagined. It was particularly important that *in these times* care should be taken to *avoid giving the impression* of German interference in British affairs. Above all, the informant thought, it would be wrong for us on the German side to take up the challenge of the Opposition and try conclusions with them. The opposition group comprising Eden, Churchill, Duff Cooper, Attlee, Sinclair, etc., would receive undesirable publicity from any German attack. A German attack on these personages would to a certain extent provide a sort of gratuitous advertisement for them.

What a confession! So, when the British people starts reflecting on Munich it results in an extremely difficult situation! It seems that the Munich Agreement was not such a good deal after all. Hesse went on:

4. On the other hand, if we wished to do something positive, it was especially important for us to emphasize *again and again* that *we trusted Chamberlain because he wanted peace* and for us to stress our wish to live in lasting friendship with the British people. As a matter of fact it was desirable for *propaganda to be put out* which would manifest the desire on the part of Germany for friendship between the British and the German peoples.

This is unprecedented in British history. Chamberlain who knew that, when the public starts to reflect, things become difficult for him, therefore asked Germany to emphasise ‘again and again’ that they trust Chamberlain for his love of peace. Why ‘again and again’? Simply because it is not true. Chamberlain is not working for peace, and if he were, this would not have constituted a reason endearing him to Hitler.

Secretly begging for public praise of a foreign head of state is not what is expected from a British Prime Minister. The suggested statement — to be made *again and again* — is in praise of Chamberlain and justifies his policy towards Germany. At a time when things became very difficult for Chamberlain, he had recourse to dubious ways more fitting a would-be-dictator. Hesse continued:

5. As far as the Czech question itself was concerned, it was important that, in order *to create a favourable impression in Britain*, we should avoid two things: “boasting and bullying⁶²⁴.” In particular it would make a fatal impression if we were to *threaten too much with our military strength*. The latter would be extremely dangerous for the efforts of all friends of peace and all friends of Germany in Britain. My informant emphasized here that the British decision in the Czech conflict, and Chamberlain’s attitude in particular, *had never been dictated by a consciousness of military weakness* but exclusively by the *religious* idea that

668⁶²⁴ ‘Bullying’ is in English in the original document

Germany must have justice and that the injustice of Versailles must be made good.

Steward knew that Nazi Germany would not stop threatening Europe with her military strength. He however argued that ‘too much’ of it would make an unfavourable impression. How much is too much is not said⁶²⁵. Steward denied that the British leaders, Chamberlain at least, were conscious of a military weakness. This was not an attempt at misinforming the German authorities. Even Chamberlain could not have believed that Germany’s estimate of the British military strength would be based on his word only. Whether he was right or wrong, Chamberlain did believe that Britain adopted the Munich policy by her free choice, and not because of her weakness.

Each person is entitled to his religion. World war II might have been avoided if Chamberlain and his friends had been motivated by a different religion as, for instance, the belief that Germany, with her Nazi regime, should not be allowed to extend its persecution over a single additional person, and should not be allowed to increase her relative military strength. Hesse continued:

6. The question whether we wished to continue further the policy initiated in the Anglo-German *friendship protocol* of Munich.. was regarded by the Prime Minister as being of the greatest importance. My informant maintained that the impression about this prevailing in London *was by no means unanimous*. If we wished to continue *to help the Prime Minister*, it was of the greatest importance that further declarations and speeches should be made, in which in particular the line “Never again war between Britain and Germany”⁶²⁶ should be followed, while at the same time we should however have to make similar declarations to France as well to avoid giving the impression that we were intending to separate Britain and France.

It is precisely because the support for Chamberlain’s policy towards Germany ‘was by no means unanimous’ that Chamberlain requested Germany’s help, which amounts to a request for an intervention in Britain’s internal affairs. Again Germany is requested to make declarations regarding peace with Britain; to improve the impression, she is also requested to make similar declarations to France. No need for peace declarations with Eastern Europe, even if only for a good impression. And now Hesse comes to the most revealing part of his report:

669⁶²⁵ Hesse was not likely to modify Steward’s main statement. It is, however possible that he added the words ‘too much’ to soften the impact of Steward’s recommendation not to threaten the use of military force. Still, it is as likely that the words were indeed pronounced by Steward. 670⁶²⁶ The ‘innocent’ formula which was understood by Chamberlain as meaning a free-hand to Germany in Eastern Europe.

8. My informant then drew attention to the importance of the armaments problem at some length and with special insistence. The informant thought that something would have to be done in this sphere in particular *in order to strengthen Chamberlain's position*. If Chamberlain had success in the disarmament question, *he would find an opportunity to go to the country for a general election*. By giving Chamberlain success in the disarmament question *we had it in our power* to stabilize or not to stabilize pro-German tendencies in Great Britain. To an objection that this was a difficult question, he replied that *it was important in this instance to make a moral impression*.

It is disheartening to find out that a vital issue concerning peace and security, an issue so close to the public's feelings, is here exploited "to strengthen Chamberlain's position". It is more disheartening to find that Chamberlain is trying to draw Germany to help him make his next colossal staging against the British people.

Chamberlain recognised that his grip on the British people was weakening. The pursuit of his agenda was in danger. Tricks had been useful in the past, a new one was obviously needed now. The idea was as follows: if 'a moral impression' can be made, that would be perceived as a hope for disarmament, this would be enough of a proof for the British people that Chamberlain's policy had been a success. Chamberlain could then win a landslide election, proclaim that the people had just expressed its approval for his policies. He would therefore be able to disregard the opposition and go ahead with his agenda.

The implementation of this trick crucially depended on Germany's collaboration. Hesse explained how difficult the problem was. This, in diplomatic language, meant that Germany did not have the least intention of disarming. For Steward, Chamberlain's representative, it was not objectionable since the important matter was not disarmament *per se*, but the 'moral impression'.

Britain Proposes To Germany A Military Alliance

Germany, however, was not helpful. Her behaviour made matters still more difficult for Chamberlain. R.W. Seton-Watson⁶²⁷ described how Britain and France, in implementing the Munich Agreement, allowed the imposition of tougher conditions than were requested by Germany in her Godesberg proposal. He gave a long list of infractions to the principle of self-determination, all in favour of Germany or Poland. This was done with the assent of the British and French representatives in the International Commission which was entrusted to draw the boundaries between Germany and Czechoslovakia.

671⁶²⁷ R.W. Seton-Watson, 'From Munich to Danzig', Methuen, London, 1939, pp. 116-121

Henderson was representing Britain on this Commission. He wrote⁶²⁸:

I decided.. *to pin the German down to a line of their own choosing*, which they would find it difficult afterward to modify again to their renewed advantage

Even after Munich, Britain was still helping Germany in getting more chunks of Czechoslovakia. Nonetheless, and in spite of the British compliance with the German demands, Germany went so far as to, altogether, dispense of the ‘services’ of the British Ambassador. Seton-Watson has this to say⁶²⁹:

Certainly the Czechs are entitled to claim that the Vienna Award was an ‘economic monstrosity’ of the first order: and we on our side are entitled to note the ignominious manner in which the British and French Governments submitted to their exclusion from Vienna, in direct defiance of the terms arranged at Munich.

It was widely felt that Germany was not true to ‘the spirit of Munich’. Not so, in the Chamberlain circle. Dirksen, the then German Ambassador in London, recorded⁶³⁰:

Nevertheless, leading British Cabinet Ministers were loath to let the links with Germany break during these weeks. In various speeches Chamberlain, Lord Simon, and Lord Templewood, amongst other, directly or indirectly requested Germany to produce *a program of her wishes* for negotiations; colonies, raw materials, disarmament, and limitations of sphere of interest were mentioned. *In a long interview during a week-end visit, Sir Samuel Hoare approached me with these ideas*

Dirksen gives more details in a report written on October 31, 1938⁶³¹:

Thanks to invitations for the last two week ends I have had the opportunity of having detailed exchanges of views with two members of the Cabinet — the Home Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, and the Minister of Transport, Burgin; these conversations were supplemented by conversations with other people in political life closely acquainted with the Prime Minister. I draw

672⁶²⁸ ‘Failure of a Mission’, op. cit., p. 175. Henderson added that he also found the German thesis more sound than that of the Czechoslovakia one. This is no cause of astonishment, Henderson had always been very sensitive to Germany’s arguments and ambitions. To find more reasonable a thesis based on statistics dating from 1910 (and falsified) fits with his servility to the Nazi leaders whom he treated as personal friends.

673⁶²⁹ Op. cit., p. 119

674⁶³⁰ Herbert Von Dirksen, ‘Moscow, Tokyo, London’, University of Oklahoma Press, 1952, p. 212

675⁶³¹ DGFP, series D, vol. 4, doc. 260, pp. 319-323

from this the following picture of the attitude of the British Government toward Germany.

Chamberlain has complete confidence in the Fuhrer. Now Chamberlain intends to take new steps shortly to bring about a settlement with Germany.. The Munich protocol had laid the foundation for a reshaping of Anglo-German relations. A lasting *rapprochement* between the two countries is regarded by Chamberlain and the British Cabinet as one of the chief aims of British foreign policy, because world peace can be secured in the most effective manner by this combination.

..From the mood prevailing in Government circles it can be expected that Chamberlain will shortly make proposals to the Fuhrer for a continuation of the policy initiated at Munich.

This was just an introduction describing the mood within the Prime Minister's circle. Dirksen continued:

For such talks, agreements on the armament question and the humanizing of war are to be regarded as those subjects which interest the British most..

The great difficulties facing German agreement to quantitative limitations are appreciated here⁶³². Britain therefore understands that all discussions on limiting air armaments will have to be carried out with Germany simultaneously keeping an eye on Soviet air power. At least, in answer to my statements regarding this, Sir Samuel Hoare let slip the observation that, after a further *rapprochement* between ***the four European great powers***, the acceptance of certain defence obligations, or even ***a guarantee by them against Soviet Russia, was conceivable in the event of an attack by Soviet Russia***⁶³³.

Guaranteeing Germany against an attack by the Soviet Union, when all expectations expressed in inner governmental circles were for a German attack against the Soviet Union, just meant that Britain was proposing to support Germany's ambitions against the Soviet Union. When Czechoslovakia was a prospective victim, no British guarantee was offered to her. Britain could not commit herself to the *status quo* in Eastern Europe. When, however, the prospective victim is the Soviet Union, Britain, suddenly is prepared to commit herself to help the aggressor.

Were, for instance, the Soviet Union to intervene militarily in defence of a victim of German aggression, it could be considered to be a case of

676⁶³² It is similar to what, according to Hesse, Steward told him as 'Chamberlain's confidential agent'

677⁶³³ Halifax was prepared to go a long way in order to 'appease' Germany. There is however no indication that he was told about the 'alliance' proposal. The British Cabinet was kept in the dark.

aggression against Germany. Such a scenario, we have seen, had been considered by Vavrečka, the Czech Minister for propaganda. It was also his declared reason for refusing to ask the Soviet Union for help when the French help was not forthcoming.

Another case considered in conversations between Britain and France, was a German intervention in Ukraine to support an 'independence movement' there. France gave Britain the assurance that in such a case France was not committed to assist the Soviet Union against Germany.

The British position on armaments reduction was well understood by Dirksen. After having read from Hesse that Britain was asking only for 'a moral impression' and after Hoare's stated how difficult the matter was, Dirksen could write in the same report:

This much can be regarded as *certain* concerning the general attitude of Chamberlain or of the British Cabinet: for the British Government a satisfactory solution of the armaments question, which would allow it in particular *to save face at home*, is the starting point for the negotiations *vis-a-vis the public*.

Wilson would later tell Germany that the topic of disarmament was only for public consumption. However, sufficient hints were given to Dirksen by various British responsible personalities to quench any doubt. He was certain.

Free Hand To Germany: More Than Just A Policy Of Weakness

Many British leaders supported the policy of a free hand to Germany in the belief that, in her state of weakness, Britain had no other viable option. They considered the free hand policy a temporary measure dictated by the necessity of avoiding war with Germany. They believed that once England would have rearmed properly, she could talk in a different language to Germany.

Other British leaders had no such reservations. The free hand was in their eyes the proper policy, whether Britain was weak or strong. As matters developed, it became evident that the latter outlook was the only possible view acceptable to Germany.

A free hand to Germany would be of no use to her were she to feel insecure on her western front. Germany would let it be known that a policy of a free hand to her would not be compatible with increasing the offensive military capability of the West. Therefore, only a free hand policy on the part of the West associated with friendship with Germany, could be accepted as a sign that she would not suddenly be confronted with a war on two fronts. The expected sign of friendship were to be practical measures taken to prevent the 'warmongers' such as Churchill from making their voice heard, and a modest British rearmament program restricted to defensive measures. Chamberlain was trying to oblige, but could not always deliver.

Joseph Kennedy was the U.S. Ambassador to Britain. On October 12, he sent a report to Cordell Hull on a conversation he had with Halifax⁶³⁴:

I spent an hour and a half with Halifax this afternoon drinking tea in front of his fireplace while he outlined to me what I think may be the future policy of His Majesty's Government.

The atmosphere of the conversation was particularly warm. It reflected the fact that Kennedy, through his constant encouragement of the policy of appeasement, had become a personal friend to the Chamberlain circle of politicians. Halifax could confide in Kennedy as a friend and as a representative of a friendly power. Kennedy went on:

First of all, *Halifax does not believe that Hitler wants to have a war with Great Britain* and he does not think there is any sense in Great Britain having a war with Hitler unless there is direct interference with England's Dominions. The future of England, as he sees it is to strengthen herself in the air, and "by the way France should do the same." so that nobody can get fresh with them from the air. Then after that to let Hitler go ahead and do what he likes in Central Europe. In other words, there is no question in Halifax's mind that reasonably soon Hitler will make a start for Danzig, with Polish concurrence, and then for Memel, with Lithuanian acquiescence, and even if he decides to go in Rumania *it is Halifax's idea that England should mind her own business*.. he sees the future of England lies in her maintaining her relations in the Mediterranean, keeping friendly relations with Portugal, he hopes Spain, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, Palestine..., plus England's connections in the Red sea, fostering the Dominion connections, and staying very friendly with the United States, and then, as far as every else is concerned, Hitler can do the best he can for himself.

Halifax's confidence to Kennedy is rich in implications:

w Halifax did not believe in Hitler's peaceful intentions concerning all of Europe. He was specific in mentioning that it was with Great Britain that Hitler did not want war.

w As long as Hitler did not encroach on Britain's sphere, there was no sense for Britain to make war against Germany. This meant that Hitler could do what he wanted in Eastern and Central Europe, and Britain would find no sense in opposing him. This was, by definition, a policy of free hand to Germany in Central and Eastern Europe.

678⁶³⁴ FRUS, Foreign Relations 1938, vol 1, pp. 85-86

w The rearmament policy of Great Britain should conform to this policy of a free hand to Germany. Britain and France should plan to become strong in the air so that Germany would not be able to be ‘fresh’ with them. No rearmament is considered of a nature which would prevent Germany, at a given future, to proceed with her ambition in Eastern Europe. England should mind her own business and not interfere with Germany’s business.

Since Halifax’s talk to Kennedy occurred so close after Munich, there can be no doubt that it was related to Halifax’s view of what Munich had been about.

On October 31, 1938, the very day Hoare offered Germany a British alliance against the Soviet Union, Chamberlain told the Cabinet⁶³⁵:

Our policy is one of appeasement. We must aim at establishing relations with the Dictator Powers which will *lead to a settlement in Europe and a sense of stability*. A good deal of *false emphasis* has been placed.. in the country and in the Press.. *on rearmament, as though one result of the Munich agreement has been that it will be necessary to add to our rearmament programmes.*

Chamberlain, in order to convince the Cabinet to agree on the Berchtesgaden proposals — and then on the Godesberg ones — underlined the fact that he trusted Hitler and his solemn declaration that the annexation of the Sudeten region was his last claim in Europe. Now, again, one month later, Chamberlain spoke of a need for a settlement with the dictator powers towards stability in Europe. Chamberlain must have suspected that there was more than the Sudeten in Germany’s appetite. Chamberlain’s views reflected his trust in that Germany would move exclusively to the East. They also were a response to Hitler’s verbal attack against the British rearmament on October 9, 1938.

Were it also true that Chamberlain’s surrender at Munich was reflecting British military weakness, Chamberlain would not have opposed the emphasis put on rearmament, whether in the country or in the Press. At the next Cabinet meeting, on November 7, 1938, Chamberlain, Inskip and Kingsley Wood were resisting suggestions for increased rearmament. In particular, Chamberlain expressed his opposition against any progress in the program for heavy bombers⁶³⁶. Ian Colvin reports about Chamberlain:

The Prime Minister now backed Sir John. He ‘thought that it was rather difficult to represent this part of our force (bomber strength) as in any way defensive..

679⁶³⁵ ‘The Chamberlain Cabinet’, op. cit., p. 173

680⁶³⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 173-175

Chamberlain was on record for stating that the best defence for Britain would consist in the deterrence of a strong bomber force. Now he had a difficulty of 'representation'. He does not mention the 'constituency' with respect to which this difficulty would appear. France, of course would not object. The British people had been told by Baldwin, long ago, that bombers would always go through and that the only defence would be the deterrence of retaliation.

In the meantime, new technical means had been developed to reduce the bomber threat, but they were not yet made public. There was therefore no problem in 'representing' to the British public the deterrent value of the bomber which still remained very real. The difficulties of 'representation' were with respect to Germany. It was essential for the success of the policy of appeasement to convince Germany that, while busy in the East, she had nothing to fear in the West.

On November 1, 1938 Halifax wrote to Phipps⁶³⁷:

The position, as I see it, is rather as follows: there can be no assured peace in Europe unless *genuine agreement* can be reached between Germany, Great Britain and France.

One of the chief difficulties of the past has been *the unreal position which France was occupying in Central and Eastern Europe*. She claimed great influence in the policies of the Central European States in virtue of her system of alliances, but owing to the *rising strength of Germany*, and *France's neglect of her own defence*, she could no longer count upon being able to make her claim effective.. With the conclusion of the *Munich agreement and the drastic change in French policy in Central Europe which that involves*, Franco-German relations should have a *fresh start*.

Henceforward we must count with German predominance in Central Europe. Incidentally I have always felt myself that, once Germany recovered her normal strength, this predominance was inevitable for obvious geographical and economical reasons.

In these conditions it seems to me that *Great Britain and France have to uphold their predominant position in Western Europe* by the maintenance of such armed strength as would render any attack upon them hazardous. They should also *firmly maintain their hold on the Mediterranean and the Near East*. They should also keep a *tight hold on their Colonial Empires* and maintain the closest ties with the United States of America

If we juxtapose the following statements:

681⁶³⁷ DBFP, series 3, vol. 3, doc. 285, p. 251-253

w a chief difficulty was the unreal position France occupied in Central Europe

w We must count with a German predominance in Central Europe.

w the Munich agreement involved a drastic change in French policy in Central Europe.

it all translates to one single indubitable fact: Britain and France have abandoned Central Europe to Germany's dominance. Germany can have a free hand there.

This free hand is not only recognised as a regrettable matter of fact. It becomes a matter of policy representing 'a fresh start for Franco-German relations' and is the conclusion built upon a premise stated at the beginning of the letter: "There can be no assured peace unless genuine agreement can be reached between Germany Great Britain and France". The free hand in Central Europe for Germany, thus described by Halifax, was his vision for the realisation of assured peace.

That it was a matter of division of spheres of influences was clarified by statements to the effect that:

w the west would hold to their predominance in Western Europe, the Mediterranean, the middle East, its colonial empires.

Halifax explained that the change in the situation of Central Europe resulted from the strengthening of Germany and France's neglect of her defence. This claim is less than candid. Germany's strengthening resulted from her numerous treaty violations and it was Britain that prevailed on France to prevent her from taking appropriate countermeasures that would have forced Germany to respect the treaties. Of all the measures that affected the relative balance between France and Germany the remilitarisation of the Rhineland was the most decisive. At the time, Baldwin expressed the opinion that intervention to re-establish the *status quo ante* could result in Germany becoming communist. Finally, Halifax does not say that Germany's expansion in Central and Eastern Europe had been predicted by Britain and discussed at a meeting of the Committee of Imperial defence, and had been found no threat to British vital interests. In this light we may judge the next statement by Halifax:

The greatest lesson of the crisis has been the ***unwisdom of basing a foreign policy on insufficient strength..*** It is one thing to allow German expansion in Central Europe, which in my mind ***is a normal and natural thing***, but we must be able to resist German expansion in Western Europe..

Halifax is contradicting himself. If German's expansion in Central Europe 'is a normal and natural thing' then there was no 'unwisdom' in Britain's policy which had allowed just that. Halifax then describes his outlook for the future:

The immediate future must necessarily be a time of more or less *painful readjustments to the new realities in Europe*. While my broad conclusion is that we shall see *Germany consolidate herself in Central Europe*, with Great Britain and France doing the same in Western Europe, the Mediterranean and overseas.. What is to be the role of Poland and the Soviet Union? If the Poland of Beck, as I take to be the case, can never ally herself with Soviet Russia, and if France, *having once burnt her fingers with Czechoslovakia*, releases her alliance with Poland the latter can presumably only fall more and more into the German orbit.

'Painful readjustments to the new realities of Europe' as well as 'Germany consolidating herself in Central Europe' must be understood in conjunction with the fact that German expansion in Central Europe is 'a natural and normal thing'

Chamberlain's refusal to guarantee the remainder of Czechoslovakia, except in conjunction with Germany, Italy and France, becomes understandable. Expansion and consolidation being normal for Germany, Britain should not make the commitment to have to defend Czechoslovakia against Germany. In practice, Germany could do the normal thing, which is to expand over the rest of Czechoslovakia without England incurring any reproach since France and Britain together would not constitute a majority of guarantors.

Halifax's statement revealed much more. Britain had no problem with Poland being turned into a German satellite. As to France, having once burned her fingers with Czechoslovakia, she was expected to relax her alliances. Halifax then considered the question of Russia:

There is the problem raised by the possible German expansion into the Ukraine. Subject only to the consideration that I should hope France would *protect herself — and us — from being entangled by Russia in war with Germany*, I would hesitate to advise the French Government to denounce the Franco-Soviet pact as the future is still far too uncertain!

This is a masterpiece of duplicity. Halifax was hoping that France could, in practice, make the Franco-Soviet pact work only in one way. Soviet Union would help France in case of need, while France, Halifax hopes, would disentangle herself from obligations in case the Soviet Union would need France's help. This means that in case of 'the possible German expansion in the Ukraine', Halifax expected there would be no restraining force from the

west to handicap Germany's military operations. Little consideration was given to the enormous increase of power that would accrue to Germany after becoming the master of the Ukraine, and the resulting mortal danger to France and to Britain. Naturally, much less consideration was given to the pain and sorrow that would be inflicted on the Soviet population by a German aggression against Ukraine.

While Chamberlain and Halifax seemed quite satisfied, some close collaborators felt ill at ease with the situation resulting from Munich. On November 7, 1938, Cadogan, the man Chamberlain brought to replace Vansittart, entered in his diary:

We are back in the old lawless Europe and have got to look out for ourselves. It is not always profitable to look too much at the mistakes of the past, but surely our great mistake has been to act too long on the belief that Versailles settlement could be maintained. And yet, if that really was our policy, *we ought to have reacted against the occupation of the Rhineland, when we could have done so effectively*. We did not and the policy is now out of date.

Cadogan spoke of mistakes of the past. Chamberlain did not see it that way. He was confident in the strength of Great Britain. Iain Macleod reports that, at a City luncheon party at the House of Common in mid December, 1938, Chamberlain said⁶³⁸:

They might take it that when the German statesmen — he would not say the German people — reflected on the possible consequences of a conflict, if it ever arose, they would think not only of our armaments but of our great financial resources which in a war of long duration, might well prove to be a deciding factor.

A leader who would have worried about the threat of the German military strength, would not have raised false hopes and a feeling of security with regard to the level of military preparedness. After such a statement, his audience would not approve great spending on armaments. However, Chamberlain had received information concerning Germany's ambitions, and he was optimist.

A secret discussion⁶³⁹ between British leaders had occurred in December 7, 1938, to examine the merits of a German proposal. Vansittart commented:

682⁶³⁸ Iain Macleod, 'Neville Chamberlain', Muller, London, 1961, p. 272

683⁶³⁹ 'Vansittart in Office', op. cit., pp 284-285. The author indicated that no trace has been found in the official documents of that proposal. He tends to believe that the proposal was received through Steward who helped Chamberlain by-pass the official channels.

684 Cadogan reports that on December 10 Gwatkin received a message from Gordeler indicating that a strong German military group was prepared to revolt against Hitler if only Britain would approve a given list of German demands. This list is so close to that indicated by

Not content of having dismembered Czechoslovakia, the Germans now wish to do the same to Poland and *wish us to connive officially at their ambition by double-crossing the Poles beforehand*. Such an attitude is impossible for any honourable nation to adopt, and the sooner it is dismissed, the better. The answer that may be made to this is that Germany will soon take the corridor anyhow. That is pure defeatism in the first place, and in the second place such a consummation is unnecessary if Poland will readjust her relations sensibly with Russia.. The Germans are so well aware of this that the Ribbentrop school is already bent on detaching the Ukraine from Russia and breaking up the present Russian regime from within. The German think they can overturn the Stalin State.. We would then have in Germany a regime that had installed in Russia a regime favourable to itself, and had completely paralysed Poland by annexing the corridor. If that is not a total domination of Europe, I don't know what is. *And we are apparently expected to be foolish enough not only to connive, but to consent to it in advance*.. In addition we are expected to make *substantial colonial concessions*. Besides colonies *we are also to give them a large loan*.

It is evident that Germany had finally made clear the extent of her ambitions. It is also clear that these ambitions, and Britain's expected connivance, had not been rejected off hand by the British leaders. Halifax, in his previously quoted letter to Phipps, had stated that Britain had to hold to the West while abandoning the East to Germany. Britain is now asked to also actively support Germany in the realisation of their plans in Eastern Europe.

Germany could not be expected to move Eastward without feeling her back secure, that is, without knowing the West's intentions. On November 24, 1938, the same day in which Chamberlain requested from France clarification as to her stand should Germany cause trouble in the Ukraine to the Soviet Union, Harold Nicolson entered the following in his diary⁶⁴⁰:

A meeting of the group at Ronnie Tree's house. Hopkinson is there and tells us the reasons for which he refused the Government whip. It seems that Chamberlain is trying to put all the blame for our disarmament on Thomas Inskip, and as Hopkins was Inskip's P.P.S. he is leaving him in order to defend him against attacks he will not counter himself.. The Government are really not telling the country the truth. He had seen Kingsley

Vansittart on December 7 that the question could be raised whether Vansittart was not referring to Gordeler's demands. In that case there might not have been a list of demands advanced by the legal German authorities. What is clear is that the German opposition wanted to appear as less demanding than the German Government — otherwise they could not hope for external help —. The net result is that the list, 'authoritative' or not, was known to represent the 'bottom line' of Germany's ambitions. However, the mention of Ribbentrop by Vansittart seems to indicate that the list of demands was that of the German government and not the clandestine opposition.

685⁶⁴⁰ Harold Nicolson, op. cit. pp. 380-1

Wood, and the latter had admitted quite frankly that we can do little without a Ministry of Supply, *but to appoint such a Minister would arouse the anger of Germany*. That is a dreadful confession.

This dreadful confession was reported by a man who had just been proposed the Government whip. This indicated how great was the Confidence of the Conservative party in him. This refusal to appoint a minister of supply is in line with Chamberlain's opposition to the production of heavy bombers. Germany was given to know that she was safe on her Western borders. The situation looked hopeful. Britain and France were convinced that Germany would move Eastward.

Bullitt, the U.S. Ambassador to Paris, had been in the confidence of the French leaders. They were so eager to develop the U.S. friendship that they would report to him all important events, even if secret, and would consult him about what Britain and France should do. On December 10, Ickes, the U.S. Secretary for the interior, wrote in his diary⁶⁴¹:

The most interesting part of Bullitt's talk that night, was our discussion of the foreign situation. Bill thinks that *it is now the policy of England and France to permit other nations to have their will of Russia*. He believes that Germany in due course will try to take the Ukraine, which is the richest wheat area of the Soviet Union. In the process Germany will extend herself to such a degree that she cannot stand the strain. She will break under in the end. Similarly Japan will conquer or attempt to conquer Siberia, and she in time will break under that strain. But, *by leaving Russia to her fate, England and France will be diverting the threat of Germany from their own lands*.

Had Bullitt been an opponent of the Munich policy, he might have been suspected of describing the British and the French intentions in darker colours than reality would warrant. However, Bullitt was an enthusiastic supporter of the policy Britain and France followed with respect to Czechoslovakia, and he supported without reservation the Munich agreement. He was of the opinion that anything would be better than a war with Germany that was bound to end up with the triumph of Communism. What he is saying therefore reflects his knowledge and not a grudge against a policy.

Bullitt was well informed. Ickes went on writing in his diary:

I do know that he [Bullitt] is in an unusually good position to know what is going on in the foreign chancelleries. He is probably in a better position than any of our representatives in other lands.

686⁶⁴¹ Op. cit., vol. 2, p. 519

We, therefore, can take it as a matter of fact that, a few days after discussing the German agenda for expansion, Britain and France had no intention to oppose it.

France Abandons Central And Eastern Europe

In France, plans were made for a Franco-German agreement similar to the Friendship declaration signed by Chamberlain and Hitler at Munich. The ‘Crystal night’ — the name later given to the pogrom of November 10 — caused some slight delay. However, the discussions resumed, and the agreement was signed on December 6, 1938.

On November 24, 1938, before signing the agreement with Germany, France invited the British leaders for conversations. She reported to the British on the Franco-German talks and the text of the Franco-German agreement scheduled to be signed later. Daladier explained that the assassination of Rath in Paris was ‘somewhat of a setback’ to the Franco-German negotiations for an agreement similar to that signed by Chamberlain and Hitler. Many would have thought that the setback would have been the barbaric pogroms organised by Germany against the Jews.

Daladier then took up the point of ‘Anglo-French Defence Measures’. At one point, Chamberlain said⁶⁴²:

The present attitude of Germany has brought before His Majesty’s Government the possibility of a quarrel between Great Britain and Germany rather than between France and Germany, and the first blow might well, therefore, be struck against Britain rather than France.

Though on this occasion, Chamberlain reminded Daladier of a previous French declaration that in such a case France would come immediately to Britain’s assistance, and though he welcomed a French offer to publicly repeat such an assurance, there is no indication that at this moment Chamberlain thought that a German attack against the West was likely. Later, he would consider such an eventuality more seriously.

Daladier complained that the two British Divisions to be sent to France to assist her in case of a German aggression were insufficient. He reminded Chamberlain that ‘recent events in Europe’ had strengthened the power of Germany on land as a result of a diminution of the importance of the Czechoslovakian forces. Chamberlain did not give in. He tried to justify Britain’s concentration on other defence problems. It is interesting to note what Chamberlain was thinking about the bombing threat:

687⁶⁴² DBFP, series 3, vol 3, doc. 325, pp. 285-311

Mr. Chamberlain said.. It was true you could terrify people by indiscriminate bombing, *but you could not win a war*. Moreover, in the particular case of Great Britain, the prevalence of mist and bad visibility, together with the existence of a force of efficient fighting machines, could *make it very difficult for enemy bombers to work effectively*.

This should settle definitively the question of Chamberlain's fear of a knockout German blow as a motivation for Munich. Chamberlain did not believe in its effectiveness⁶⁴³.

The conversation then moved to the guarantee of what remained of Czechoslovakia.

Lord Halifax said there was one further point: if and when the guarantee were to be given by the four Munich Powers, His Majesty's Government considered that their obligation should be drawn so as to make it a joint guarantee. The obligations should come into force in the case of unprovoked aggression with regard to which each signatory would judge for himself, *and the guarantee would only come into force as a result of a decision by three of the four powers*.

M. Bonnet complained that that reduced the value of the guarantee.

Mr. Chamberlain said that *it was too dangerous so to arrange the guarantee that it might happen that France and Great Britain would have to go to war because of action on the part of the two other guarantors*.

Chamberlain was ready to give a ridiculous guarantee, one that would not come into force if Czechoslovakia would be the victim of an aggression perpetrated by the only possible aggressor, namely, Germany. To Bonnet's remark that this was a new condition not mentioned before, Chamberlain replied that it had never been mentioned that the guarantee would be unconditional. and that nothing had been specified as to the conditions required to come into effect.

Bonnet reminded Chamberlain that the Locarno guarantees were joint AND individual but 'Chamberlain said that His Majesty's Government could not accept such a guarantee *in the case of Czechoslovakia*'. Daladier intervened:

M. Daladier complained that France was in a very difficult moral position. At Munich the French Government had accepted the

688⁶⁴³ An alternative reason would be that Chamberlain believed in the Bomber's effectiveness but, in order not to offend Germany, and in the belief that Germany would move to the East exclusively, opposed the production of bombers. Not being able to advance his true reasons, he might have found it easier to deny the bombers' effectiveness.

separation of the Sudeten population from Czechoslovakia.. To do so had not been easy for the French Government. Since that time events had moved more rapidly than had been foreseen, and the actual map of Czechoslovakia was a much more serious thing than the Godesberg map.. ***the Czechoslovaks.. had.. ceded very much more than had been agreed upon at Munich.*** If France were now to refuse to guarantee what remained of Czechoslovakia, her position would be still worse.

The practical consequence of Munich were worse than was indicated by the Godesberg memo and map. Godesberg's proposals had been rejected by Britain under pressure of the British public opinion. It had been Chamberlain's contention that Munich's agreement offered a much better deal to Czechoslovakia. It turned out not to be true. Daladier intervened once more:

It seemed to him that, if France were to accept His Majesty's Government proposal, she would be going back on the position which she had taken up at Munich. France had offered to guarantee the new frontier ***in order to make it easier for the Czechoslovak Government to accept the new frontier.*** he repeated that His Majesty's Government and the French Government had not imposed any conditions. Moreover, Italy and Germany had accepted to give individual guarantees.

Daladier underlined the fact that the previous French guarantee to Czechoslovakia was unconditional and it would be difficult morally to justify its replacement by a conditional guarantee, At this point Halifax made an interesting statement:

Lord Halifax said that it was also a practical question. He fully realised the justice of the French arguments, but there was perhaps some danger in establishing a position where a future Czechoslovak Government might look to France and Great Britain for support in pursuing a policy ***not entirely in conformity with German wishes.*** That would constitute a ***certain element of provocation to Germany;*** and France and Great Britain would be powerless to intervene.. ***The Czechoslovak army had diminished in importance and there was to be an important German road across Czechoslovak territory.*** It was difficult to see how, in the circumstances, France and Great Britain could implement their guarantee, and it would be humiliating for them not to be able to do so.

This is a repeat of Britain's previous attitude which consisted in pressing for an abdication to Germany, and then pressing for next abdication because the previous one had made it hard to reject the new one. Halifax was saying in fact that France and Britain were powerless. They should therefore give

only a sham guarantee, one that cannot practically come into force. It was also a recognition that Britain and France, being powerless, must resign themselves to accept to give Germany a free hand in Central Europe.

It is worthy to note that Halifax was condemning in advance any Czechoslovakian policy that would not be entirely in conformity with German wishes; it would be considered a provocation against Germany. In short, Czechoslovakia was to become a German vassal.

Previously Halifax had explained to Phipps that Poland had no choice but to become a satellite of Germany. The West, therefore, realistically according to Halifax, had to accept the fact that Germany had a free hand in Eastern Europe as well as in Central Europe. There is no indication that Britain was ready to put a stop to Germany's expansion in these two directions. There was no indication that Britain would accept Germany's annexations only if they were confined to territories with a German racial majority.

The Franco Russian relations were then discussed:

Mr. Chamberlain said that he would like to ask one or two questions about Franco-Polish and Franco-Russian relations. There had been indications that there might be in the minds of the German Government an idea that they could *begin the disruption of Russia by the encouragement of agitation for an independent Ukraine*. There was no question of the German Government taking military action. *It was more subtle than that*. But if there were any truth in these rumours *it would be unfortunate* if France should one day find herself entangled as a consequence of her relations with Russia. He asked whether the French Government had given consideration to this point.

Chamberlain contemplated with equanimity the prospect of Germany 'beginning the disruption of Russia,' provided France would succeed in not getting entangled. Chamberlain should not have worried so much. France, with Britain's help had succeeded in disentangling herself from an ironclad treaty of mutual assistance with Czechoslovakia. It would not be difficult to repeat the feat with respect to France's obligations under her treaty with the Soviet Union.

Such a position only made sense if Chamberlain trusted that Germany would be content 'to eat bear' and would not turn against the West. In the case of a conflict against Germany, the Soviet Union would be an indispensable ally⁶⁴⁴. A disrupted Soviet Union would not be able to improve the balance of forces against Germany. Chamberlain was gambling with the safety of the West.

689⁶⁴⁴ There were very different opinions as to the military value of the Soviet Union as an ally. It was considered likely that her value would be small at the start of the war but would increase with time. What is certain is that Britain and France, in a war with Germany, would need all the help they could get, from whatever direction it could come.

Bonnet confirmed that Germany's intention was to help create an independent Ukraine. This led Chamberlain to request some clarification. The Document goes on:

Mr. Chamberlain asked what the position would be if Russia were to ask France for assistance on the grounds that a separatist movement in Ukraine was provoked by Germany.

M. Bonnet explained that French obligations towards Russia only came into force if there were a direct attack by Germany on Russian territory.

Mr. Chamberlain said that he considered M. Bonnet's reply entirely satisfactory.

Here, therefore, was a way for Germany to intervene aggressively against the Soviet Union without France feeling obligated to assist her.

On December 6, 1938, France and Germany signed an agreement according to which Germany was renouncing her claims on the French provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. Talks followed the signature. While recognising that France, through these talks knew what was the German stand on the main political problems, Coulondre, the French ambassador in Germany, thought it useful to send home his own impression. On December 15, 1938, he wrote to Bonnet⁶⁴⁵:

The will for expansion in the East, as a matter of fact, seems to me as undeniable on the part of the Third Reich, as its [disposition to put aside]⁶⁴⁶ — at least for the present — any idea of conquest in the West; *the one is the corollary of the other*

'The one is the corollary of the other' is not a new discovery. Germany, with its military cast untouched by the victors of World War I, with the Krupps and their like still at the helm of the German economy, was known to be a revisionist state aiming at conquests. To ensure peace exclusively in the West, implied, as a 'corollary', to ensure German aggressive moves in the East. The Western leaders would never acknowledge this fact publicly. Coulondre, in an internal document attaches to this fact the same truth value as that of a geometrical deduction.

Coulondre continues:

690⁶⁴⁵ Frederick L. Schuman, 'Night over Europe', Alfred A. Knopf, New-York, 1941, p. 69
691⁶⁴⁶ The French original text uses the French word 'renunciation' instead of the bracketed expression. Since the English word 'renunciation' is the exact translation, it should have been used. It seems to me that 'renunciation' is stronger than 'disposition to put aside', and invites a stronger trust in the temporary will of Germany not to attack the West.

692

693 See 'Le Livre Jaune Français', document No 35, p. 45

The first half of Herr Hitler's program — the integration of the *Deutschtum* into the Reich — has been carried out...; now the hour of "*Lebensraum*" has come. The insistence with which it has been explained to me that Germany has no claims in the direction of France would have been enough to enlighten me.

Once more, Coulondre underlines the direct relation between Germany's peaceful intentions relatively to the West, with her aggressive intentions towards the East (which is implicit in '*Lebensraum*').

Coulondre went on:

To secure mastery over Central Europe by reducing Czechoslovakia and Hungary to a state of vassalage and then to create a Greater Ukraine under German control — this is what essentially appears to be the leading idea now accepted by the Nazi leaders, and doubtless by Herr Hitler himself.

..Among those who approach him [Hitler], a political operation is thought of which would repeat, on a larger scale, that of the Sudetens: propaganda in Poland, in Rumania and in Soviet Russia *in favour of Ukrainian independence*; support eventually given by diplomatic pressure and by the action of armed bands; *Ruthenia would be the focus of the movement*. Thus by a *curious turn of Fate*, Czechoslovakia, which had been established as a bulwark to stem the German drive, now serves the Reich as a battering-ram to demolish the gates of the East..

It is clear that the Western leaders were aware of the consequences of the improvement of their relations with Germany. They were aware, in particular, of the vital role that Czechoslovakia, under German hegemony, would play in Germany's plans for the conquest of Ukraine. It was not just 'a curious turn of Fate'.

Coulondre attaches a special importance to Ruthenia and, implicitly, to Germany's refusal, after Munich, to award Ruthenia to Hungary. Only thus could Germany use Ruthenia properly as 'the focus of the movement'. The fate of Ruthenia naturally attracted the interest of all European politicians. It would later play an important role in the modification of the policy of appeasement. What is clear is that France knew the price she was paying for improving her relations with Germany: she was abandoning Eastern Europe to Germany's grip.

Paul Reynaud reports Bonnet's impressions concerning the Agreement signed with Germany on December 6, 1938⁶⁴⁷:

694⁶⁴⁷ Paul Reynaud's book 'In the Thick of the Night' is not an integral translation of the French book titled 'La France A Sauvé L'Europe', Flammarion, Paris, 1947. The quoted passage is taken from page 575 of the French edition and is missing in the English version. The translation into English of that quote is ours.

Bonnet himself, *in an official note to all Ambassadors*, declared that the impression he had derived from those conversations was that the German policy was henceforwards oriented towards the struggle against Bolshevism. The Reich was revealing its will of expansion towards the East.

Paul Reynaud, at the time, was Minister of Finance. He is a serious source of information. Germany, at the risk of displeasing Italy who at the time was claiming Nice and Corsica from France, signed a friendship agreement with France. In that agreement, Germany declared having no territorial claims against France.

What did Germany get in return for waiving her claims on Alsace and Lorraine? A first clue to this question is offered by Bonnet who derived from the conversations with Ribbentrop: Germany can now fight Bolshevism and expand to the East. There was, therefore, an obvious conflict between friendship with Germany and being faithful to the mutual assistance treaty with the Soviet Union.

On December 5, Bonnet had informed Phipps of his intention to 'loosen the ties that bind France to Russia and Poland'⁶⁴⁸. This is the second clue to Germany's renunciation of her claims towards France. It indicated that France had adopted the British position consisting in 'holding to the West' and accepting the German domination over Central and Eastern Europe.

On December 13, 1938, a dispatch from Halifax to Phipps confirmed Halifax's awareness of this 'reorientation' of the French policy. Halifax wrote⁶⁴⁹:

The French Ambassador came to me to-day at his own request on his return from Paris. He said that he assumed that full information was in our possession on the talks between Herr von Ribbentrop and M. Bonnet.. On the whole *the conversation did not appear to amount to much*. Herr Von Ribbentrop had been.. vague. The general impression that he appeared to wish to give M. Bonnet was that there was no question between France and Germany, *provided France did not interfere with German plans*, which appeared to M. Bonnet to be *mainly concerned with possibilities in the East*.

Ribbentrop hinted clearly that France was expected to not interfere with German plans which, apparently, were concerned with 'possibilities' in the East. The fact that this, in the French Ambassador's opinion, 'did not amount to much' is in itself very revealing. It indicates that, at the time, France considered it normal to be put on notice by Germany to mind her own business and not to sniff into Germany's affairs and in particular not in Eastern Europe.

695⁶⁴⁸ DBFP, series 3, vol. 3, doc. 407, p. 397, note 1

696⁶⁴⁹ DBFP, series 3, vol. 3, doc. 427, p. 427

Ribbentrop would later accuse France that, by guaranteeing Poland she violated her promise of a free hand to Germany in Central and Eastern Europe⁶⁵⁰. The preceding letter by Halifax tends to prove that Ribbentrop's claim was right. Halifax continued:

5. N. Corbin went on to say that the French Government had information that some reinforcement of the German army was in progress in the direction of creating *eight new* divisions, *strengthening the reserves* and some reorganization of the Higher Command. The French Government took the view that these measures were designed to have certain *offensive advantage* but that they were again inspired rather by the *possible requirements of the situation in the East than elsewhere*.

Again, German rearmament is o.k. provided it is inspired by 'requirements in the East'.

Halifax did not ask 'what were the requirements in the East' that justified Germany's extensive military preparations. The answer would have 'not amounted to much'.

Clouds Over The Spirit Of Munich

On November 10, 1938, as a reaction to the assassination of a secretary of the German embassy by a young Polish Jew, the Nazis organised pogroms against the Jews in Germany. There were large destruction of property and loss of many lives. A large number of Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps. The German Government inflicted a collective fine of 1 billion marks (the equivalent of 420 millions of dollars) on the Jewish population.

The German Government issued a number of discriminative laws against the Jews. Among them was a law stipulating they had to forfeit insurance claims to the State, though they were obligated to repair the damage caused during the pogroms. This meant that the insurance companies were compelled to pay to the State the compensations that were due to the Jews. On November 16, 1938, Sir G. Ogilvie-Forbes, the British representative in Berlin, wrote in his report to Halifax:

I think that the murder of Herr von Rath by a German born Polish Jew has only accelerated the process of elimination of the Jews which has for long been planed. This project, had it proceeded according to schedule, was cruel enough, but the opportunity offered by Grynspan's criminal act has let loose forces of medieval barbarism.. In spite of statements to the contrary, *there*

697⁶⁵⁰ Dr Paul Schmidt, who was the German interpreter at the Bonnet-Ribbentrop meeting, confirms in his memoirs that Bonnet expressed to Ribbentrop France's disinterest in Eastern Europe [op. cit., p. 424].

can be no doubt that the deplorable excesses perpetrated on the 10th November *were instigated and organized by the Government*.. I did not meet a single German of whatever class who in varying measure does not, to say the least, disapprove of what has occurred. But I fear it does not follow that even the outspoken condemnation of professed National Socialists or of senior officers in the army, will have any influence over *the insensate gang in present control of Nazi Germany*.

Sir Ogilvie-Forbes was a supporter of Chamberlain policy. As an ambassador to Spain he did not hide in his reports his sympathies for Franco. He was however an honest man. In spite of his prejudice for the rebels, he was sensitive to the sufferings of the Spanish people. He was clearly shocked by the German behaviour and so were many Englishmen among those who dreamed of a 'settlement' with Germany. Chamberlain was not shocked.

On November 11, as reported in 'How war came'⁶⁵¹, the day following the night pogroms in Germany — which were immediately reported in the whole world — "Chamberlain was writing to his sister Hilda saying he was disturbed by the continued attacks upon Britain in the German Press, and 'the failure to make the slightest gesture of friendship'." While the whole world was raging at Germany's barbarism, Chamberlain was lamenting over the absence of 'a gesture of friendship' from Germany.

The British public opinion was inflamed against the Nazis. The anger caused by Hitler's speech against the British opposition and fed by Germany's bullying of Czechoslovakia, now, after the pogroms, became a wave of disgust, and determination not to allow Germany to get away with another Munich in the future. The events in Germany affected adversely Chamberlain's popularity, but the British establishment still did not see why it should stop trusting Hitler' moves would be directed exclusively Eastward.

On November 18, 1938, Oliver Harvey entered in his diary⁶⁵²:

I had a long talk with W. Strang today about Munich.. Finally any war will bring vast and unknown social changes — win or lose — and no war is a solution — vide 1914. *Therefore* play for time and avoid fighting at all costs except on a first-class vital British interest. On the other hand, while accepting this reasoning as tenable, W. Strang says the corollary is that we should at the same time re-arm as hard as possible, *and that is what the Government and the P.M. are not doing*. Strang and I agree that the real opposition to re-arming comes from the rich classes in the Party who fear taxation and *believe Nazis on the whole are more*

698⁶⁵¹ D.C. Watt, 'How War Came', Heinemann, London, 1989, p. 91. A similar lament on the absence of a friendly gesture by Hitler is recorded in Chamberlain's diary exactly one month later on December 11, 1938. This entry is of less dramatic significance having been made a month after the pogroms and not one day, as in the case of his letter to his sister [Keith Feiling, op. cit., p. 392]. Though, a month should not have been enough to erase the impression caused by the German pogroms.

699⁶⁵² 'The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey', op. cit., p. 222

conservative than the Communists and Socialists: any war, whether we win or not, would destroy the rich idle classes and so they are for peace at any price. P.M. is a man of iron will, obstinate unimaginative, with intense narrow vision, a man of prewar outlook who sees no reason for drastic social changes. *Yet we are on the verge of a social revolution.*

This is not a testimony of a Marxist left-winger. Both Strang and Harvey were close to the Cabinet, have reluctantly approved the Munich agreement (reluctantly because, though they disliked it, they were not sure a war with Germany would be won), both were afraid of ‘uncontrollable’ social changes and both wished that the changes could be rendered moderate by a Conservative policy recognising the need for some change. Munich has been caused by a fear of war — whether won or lost⁶⁵³. The free hand policy reflected that fear.

Sir Ogilvie-Forbes seems to have been among the first people to sound the alarm of a possible German attack directed to the West. On December 6, 1938, the day of the signature of the Franco-German Agreement, he sent from Berlin a report to Halifax. After quoting ‘Mein Kampf’ as supporting the view that Germany would look for living space at the expense of the Soviet Union, he adds⁶⁵⁴:

4. There is a school of thought here which believes that Herr Hitler will not risk a Russian adventure until he has made quite certain that his Western flank will not be attacked while he is operating in the east, and that consequently *his first task will be to liquidate France and England*, Before British rearmament is ready.

Soon, from various sources, there would be additional information confirming Germany’s trend to start her next move westwards. By early December, however, Ogilvie-Forbes’ message did not yet cause much disturbance.

A large number of reports and telegram exchanges dealt with the possibility of a German attack against the West. The question of the means for avoiding war with Germany were considered. It was hoped (Ogilvie-

700⁶⁵³ Such a view would explain a British decision to avoid war with Germany by giving her a free hand in Eastern and Central Europe. The free hand is then given by default, by a will not to be involved. This interpretation, while explaining Britain’s policy in 1938 with respect to Austria and Czechoslovakia, does not explain the British policy in the previous years, which consisted in preventing France from imposing on Germany the respect of the treaties, respect which would have resulted in a military vulnerable Germany. It does not explain for instance British tolerance to Germany’s remilitarization of the Rhineland. It does not explain Britain’s negligence of her rearmament on the face of reports specifying how fast Germany was rearming. The element lacking in Harvey’s and Strang’s testimony was the trust, hope and expectation that Hitler would move Eastward, invade the Soviet Union and help the world get rid of Communism.

701⁶⁵⁴ DBFP, series 3, vol 3, doc. 403, pp. 386-388

Forbes) that good relations with Goering could be helpful when accompanied by a resolve not to interfere with German plans in the East.

There were even some worries about the possible action of France, were Germany to attack Britain without attacking France. Sargent made enquiries about this eventuality and also asked an estimate of France's military situation. The reply came in the form of a report by the British military attaché in France⁶⁵⁵. His conclusions were that, as to the situation on January 4, 1939, the German defence in the West were now much stronger than they were in September 1938, just three months earlier. He thought that rescuing Poland would be a much more difficult task than it would have been to rescue Czechoslovakia in September. The French military affirmed that France would assist Britain if she was attacked by Germany since France committed herself to do so. The British military attaché added that this argument was weak since France did not, in fact, fight for Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless he tended to think that France would come to the assistance of Britain.

On December 15, 1938, Cadogan entered in his diary that Kirkpatrick, the First Secretary at the British Embassy in Berlin, brought news from a German friend that Hitler would bomb London in March⁶⁵⁶. According to Telford Taylor⁶⁵⁷:

Chamberlain took the report seriously enough to summon an emergency meeting of ministers and staff the following morning December 17. The Prime Minister declared that Hitler's "next move" was more likely to be Eastward, but thought it possible "that they had this plan so as to give us a knock *if we showed signs of interfering with Hitler's eastern ambitions.*"

Chamberlain was slow in seeing the light. He still trusted Hitler would go eastward. The inference of Chamberlain's statement is that it would be sufficient to show no sign of interference with Hitler's eastern ambition, for Britain to be safe. Chamberlain was motivated by the hope of building a new European social order, based on the collaboration between Britain and Germany. Ogilvie-Forbes, the British Chargé d'Affaires in Berlin, was reaching similar conclusions from the point of view of the British military weakness. On January 3, 1939, he wrote to Halifax⁶⁵⁸:

3. ..There is only one direction in which Herr Hitler with comparative ease could possess himself of many of the raw

702⁶⁵⁵ DBFP, series 3, vol. 3, doc. 522 and enclosure, p. 568-571

703⁶⁵⁶ 'The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan' op. cit., p. 130.

704 In his book 'The Inner Circle' [Macmillan, New-York, 1959, pp. 136-138], Kirkpatrick says that he writes he reported that Hitler wanted to be able, if he so wished, to make a surprise air attack against London. The plans were to be ready by January though the timing of the attack, if it would at all occur, had not been fixed.

705⁶⁵⁷ Op. cit., p. 943

706⁶⁵⁸ DBFP, series 3, vol 3, doc. 515, pp. 561-564

materials lacking to Germany, and that is in the East, and consequently the agricultural and mineral resources of the Ukraine and even of Roumanian territory are the subject of much talk. It is in that direction that Germany appears most likely to break out.

Ogilvie-Forbes had no doubt that Germany would soon resume her aggressive march. The opinion was that Ukraine would be the most likely target because it was an easy task. It was also reflecting the press obsessions with a German conquest of the Ukraine. It also corresponded with the hope that Germany would thus justify the trust of the West, and, in particular, of Britain who allowed her to become, again, a terrible military power. Ogilvie-Forbes continues:

4. *Unfortunately*, there are other considerations which compel an observer not to ignore the West.

Ogilvie-Forbes did not consider 'unfortunate' the expected conquest of the Ukraine by Germany. 'Unfortunate' is reserved to a German move towards the west. Such a tendency, in the not 'unfortunate' case, would allow Germany to face her victims, one at a time, and would therefore not provide more than a respite for the West. Then the West would have to face, lonely, a more powerful Germany. Ogilvie-Forbes gave no thought to collective security. He went on:

5. Such is the position and such is the danger. What, therefore, can be done *to avoid an European war*? If Hitler is determined to reach out for raw materials and to create a system of Central European vassal States in compensation for the lost German colonial empire, nothing can in practice stop him from demanding either complete surrender to his terms, as he has already done and will continue to do with Czechoslovakia, or taking forcible action. The *Pax Britannica* is no longer respected in Central Europe, and Great Britain can no more hope to be the policeman of Europe. Any intervention from our part in German relation with *the East of Europe* is already being, and will continue to be, hotly resented, and we are powerless forcibly to arrest German action. While, therefore, surrender or, alternatively, war, cannot, if Hitler so will it, be avoided, it should, indeed, be possible to keep Great Britain out of war (1) by facing the issue clearly and in good time that we cannot guarantee the *status quo* in Central Europe and Eastern Europe (2) by exerting all our efforts to cultivate and maintain good relations with Field-Marshal Goering and the moderate Nazis with a view to their exercising a restraining influence on the extremists, such as Ribbentrop, Goebbels and Himmler.

This was a remarkable statement. In it Ogilvie-Forbes gives his recipe for 'avoiding an European war'. And this recipe does not suggest opposition to aggression. It practically consist in not opposing war in Eastern Europe. This, once more, illustrates the fact that, in the thirties at least, the British politicians had, a restrictive meaning for the word 'peace'. It is peace, as long as Britain was not likely to be involved.

It is also remarkable that Ogilvie-Forbes suggest to keep good relations with the moderate Nazis as a way to prevent a German policy of aggression westwards. This slender hope for 'peace' is examined at length. The possibility of an alliance with the Soviet Union is not mentioned. As if it was, by principle, out of the question.

Trying To Save The Munich Spirit

Chamberlain was still hopeful. When an opportunity presented itself for special contact through another British 'agent' he did not hesitate.

In his diary entry of January 2nd, 1939, Oliver Harvey wrote⁶⁵⁹:

We heard tonight that that mountebank Montague Norman is off to Berlin.. as he is Schacht's grandson's godfather.. he does not intend to see anyone beyond the Reichsbank people.. he mentioned it to the P.M. and Neville Henderson, both of whom thought it a good thing. *No word of this has reached H[alifax, no attempt to ask his opinion either by Norman or by the P.M..* We only heard of it tonight by a side-wind from Germany itself, which came to Van.. Such a visit can only do harm — by encouraging *the pro-German proclivities of the City*, by making American and foreign opinion think we are doing another deal with Germany behind their backs — another example of *the P.M.'s pro-nazi tendencies* — and finally in Germany itself where it will be regarded as proof of our anxiety to run after Hitler

Oliver Harvey does not accuse every 'appeaser' of being pro-Nazi. His accusation is specific to Chamberlain to the exclusion, for instance, of Halifax. The quote shows that the tendency to develop 'direct' contact with German authorities, beyond the back of the Foreign Office, was not interrupted. There is, however, more to it. On January 4, 1939, Oliver Harvey returns to the topic:

On Tuesday Press came out.. with announcement of the visit as front-page news, it being added that he was going to follow-up Schacht's recent visit here and to discuss plan for helping German credit and imports in connection with Jewish expatriation. A.C. spoke to H. in Yorkshire about it and was authorized to write to Norman to say that he had not been consulted about the visit, but

707⁶⁵⁹ 'The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey', Op. cit., pp. 234-235

he hoped that in any conversation he (N.) might have he would be completely non-committal. This brought Norman down to F.O. in a rage, saying that *he was not going "for pleasure"* and that *he had talked it over with P.M. and Horace Wilson!* We thus see a further use of P.M.'s policy of working behind his Foreign Secretary's back and keeping a side-line out to the dictators.

Horace Wilson had warned Steward to be more discreet. It did not prevent himself from becoming directly involved, with Chamberlain, in behind the stage moves.

It is not known what was the topic of the talks between the P.M., Horald Wilson and Norman Montagu. It is fair to think that Chamberlain, faced with news from reliable sources pointing to a possible German aggression in the West, wanted to get a 'second opinion', either in order to justify an optimistic stand in the British Cabinet meetings, or in order to decide if a settlement with Germany was indeed out of question. He may have thought that any German tendency to start moving westwards had to be the result of a misunderstanding that could be resolved. If such was the case, he would be the man to do it, and would not hesitate to act, once more, behind the back of his colleagues.

Chamberlain, even when out of step with the Cabinet, was never out of step with main currents of the British Establishment. Its mood can fairly be assessed from a report dated January 4, 1939 sent by Dirksen, the German ambassador in London to the German Foreign Ministry. He started with 'The views of informed circles'. Dirksen wrote⁶⁶⁰:

(b) The press is following developments in Carpatho-Ukraine and in the Ukrainian areas of Poland with even greater interest. The newspapers have printed detailed reports on the efforts of Poland and Hungary to achieve a common frontier and on their intrigues in *Carpatho Ukraine*. Similarly, great attention has been given to events in Eastern Galicia, the move for autonomy by UNDO and the oppressive measures of the Polish Government.. The *Manchester Guardian*, on the editorial staff of which there are doubtless well-informed experts on Poland and the Ukraine, give particularly detailed reports on the Ukraine question.

Carpatho Ukraine, also called Ruthenia, is that part of Czechoslovakia claimed by Hungary and which, by Germany's decision, remained a part of Czechoslovakia after Munich. It was to become, according to Coulondre, the focus of agitation for Ukrainian independence. As Dirksen report's show, the British papers of the time recognised the significance of that region and of Germany's refusal to give it to Hungary. It was understood that, while formally a part of Czechoslovakia, Ruthenia, as the rest of the country, was in a state of vassalage to Germany. It is clear that, similarly to France, Britain

708⁶⁶⁰ DGFP, series D vol 4, doc. 287, pp. 364-367

was attaching a great significance to Germany's decision concerning that region. Dirksen went on:

Such reports and observations are always published in a more or less clear connection with alleged German plans for expansion. It is regarded here as fairly certain that Germany is playing with the idea of forming a Greater Ukrainian State and will sooner or later implement this aim.. It is always emphasized.. that such aims would of necessity bring Germany into conflict not only with the Soviet Union but also with Poland. The possibility of joint German-Polish action against the Soviet Union is hardly considered.

Germany's aggressive intentions against the Ukraine were considered 'fairly certain' by the British press that reflected the opinion of the British Establishment. The efforts at reaching an understanding with Germany were not made with the assumption that Germany only intended to redress the wrongs done to her by the Versailles Treaty. It was considered certain that Germany would eventually attack the Soviet Union, and it was precisely with that Germany, and with that understanding, that Chamberlain was moving heaven and earth to reach an agreement.

It was understood that Germany would first have to attack Poland. There was no negative reaction to this certainty. Dirksen went on:

(c) German-Polish relations are therefore studied with great interest in the press and political circles here and are frequently discussed. It can be observed that Poland does not enjoy any great sympathy in Britain at present. Poland's 'ambiguous' attitude towards her French ally during the last few years and in particular her policy during the Czech crisis have not been forgotten here, and it is noted without any feeling of sympathy that Germany will now present her with the bill for Teschen. At a chosen moment ***Germany will demand from Poland the return of Danzig, the Corridor, and perhaps other areas and will also cut off her Ukrainian territories. In doing so, she will use the demand for "the right of self-determination" with the same success as against Czechoslovakia..***

Dirksen is just reporting what appears to be, from a review of the press and his numerous contacts with 'informed circles', the mood and opinion of the Establishment. No one, even not Chamberlain⁶⁶¹, believed that the annexation of the Sudeten region would signal the end of Germany's aggressive expansion. What is more important, is that there were no expression of a will to oppose Germany's expansion or to put her on notice that Poland should be out of bounds for Germany. There was not the

709⁶⁶¹ We saw that, in Cabinet meetings, Chamberlain expressed the opinion that Germany's measures were directed at aggression in the East and that the West was expected not to interfere.

slightest indication that Britain would guarantee Poland or would make a fuss over Germany's occupation of Prague. Dirksen continued:

..(d) In all discussions on the situation of Poland and the Soviet Union there can be noted in the British press a fundamentally different attitude from that adopted toward the Czech question. Whereas in the latter question the British press from the start took the view that Britain could not disinterest herself in the fate of Czechoslovakia, such statements with respect to Poland and the Soviet Union are now entirely lacking..

At the time of the Czechoslovakian crisis, France had not yet disinterested herself from Eastern Europe. France's involvement could have involved Britain. That is why Czechoslovakia was at the time considered by the press a matter of importance to Britain. Now, the situation was totally different. France and Britain had accepted the German dominance over Eastern Europe. France was relaxing her ties with and obligations to that region. A German aggression Eastward was no longer a dangerous matter. Dirksen went on:

With regard to any further German plans directed against Poland and the Soviet Union, authoritative circles probably have no firmly defined views. It can be assumed that, in accordance with the basic trend of Chamberlain's policy, they will accept a German expansionist policy in eastern Europe. In this connection the Polish question recedes into the background as compared with the Ukrainian question. It is expected that the first move for a new order in eastern Europe will arise out of the Ukrainian question, which would be tackled by Germany and brought to a head. Those who know Russia express the opinion that a rising in the Russian Ukraine has never, since the Revolution, had so much chances of success as today, *provided that it receives support from outside*. Such support could only come from Germany.

There would have been no reason for the British press and the informed circle to give so much importance to the 'Ukrainian question', was it not the general belief, even certitude, that Germany's next move would occur soon and would be aimed at the Ukraine. Dirksen went on:

All depends, however, on the preparatory publicity for such action by Germany. If Germany takes precipitate action without adequately preparing European public opinion, does not show sufficient reasons, and proceeds by force, it is feared that this would be regarded by France as an unprovoked attack on the part of Germany, which would ultimately necessitate her intervention. Because of its inevitable repercussions, such a development would be undesirable to the British in the extreme.

If, on the other hand, a Ukrainian state were to come into being with German help, *even if this were of a military nature*, under the psychologically skilful slogan freely circulated by Germany: “Self-determination for the Ukrainians, liberation of the Ukraine from the domination of Bolshevist Jewry,” *this would be accepted by authoritative circles here and by British public opinion*, especially if consideration for British economic interests in the development of the new state were an added inducement for the British.

Dirksen’s report the German perception of the British public mood and that of the Establishment with respect to the expected German moves towards the East. He did not have to dig deep in the ground to uncover his information. It was there in the British press and in public speeches, for everyone to see and to hear. Therefore, this is not a German perception only. It is the universal perception of all those who lived through these days. The testimonial value of Dirksen’s report is therefore not diminished by its being German in origin. The British sources of the day reveal an identical view⁶⁶².

The expectation of a German move towards the Ukraine was still alive on January 5, 1939, when the French *Chargé d’Affaires* M. de Montbas wrote to Bonnet⁶⁶³:

German domination is weighing down Czecho-Slovakian more and more heavily. The conclusion of a customs and monetary union *to the profit of the Reich* might prove at the same time a most advantageous operation and *the first stage on the road to the Ukraine*.

De Montbas does say that the conclusion of the customs and monetary union is to the profit of the Reich. This could reasonably be considered sufficient justification. It is remarkable that a piece of news that, on the face of it, seems to be totally unrelated to German conquest plans of Ukraine, is interpreted by de Montbas as a possible first stage on the road to the Ukraine. It is as if de Montbas was so obsessed with the idea of a German soon-to-come invasion of Ukraine, that he was seeing its signs in the least indication. Such was the mood of the time.

After a period of ‘certitude’ of a German move against Ukraine it was not easy for those British politician favouring the policy of ‘appeasement’, and least of all for Chamberlain, to believe that Germany entertained aggressive intentions against the West. On January 10, 1939, on his way to Rome for a meeting with Mussolini, Chamberlain made a stop in Paris where he held conversations with the French leaders. Dilks wrote⁶⁶⁴:

710⁶⁶² In ‘Night over Europe’, op. cit., pp 55-77, Frederick L. Schuman gives interesting details on the anti-Soviet activities organized, with nazi support, in Ruthenia, and justifying the expectations that Germany was planning an aggression against the Soviet Union.

711⁶⁶³ ‘Night over Europe’, op. cit., p.95

712⁶⁶⁴ ‘The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan’, op. cit., p.135

The principal point of the conversation at the Quai d'Orsay was the French Ministers' insistence that they would and could cede not an inch to Italy. *Chamberlain asked whether the sudden change of Italian attitude towards France was connected with the project which Hitler was said to be nurturing for the Ukraine.* Bonnet answered that this might well be so: the object being to keep France occupied in the Mediterranean while Germany moved in the East.

De Montbas was not the only politician obsessed with the idea of a German invasion of Ukraine, and finding in every event a sign of its imminent occurrence. Chamberlain was now trying to interpret Italy's aggressive mood against France as an indication of Germany's intentions against the Soviet Union.

In Rome, Chamberlain asked Mussolini about Hitler's next move and whether it would be against the Ukraine or the West. He was told that Hitler's intentions were purely peaceful. Such an answer was to be expected from an ally of Hitler. This loyalty to Hitler somehow increased Chamberlain's esteem towards Mussolini.

During Chamberlain's stay in Rome, and within a week of his return to London, more evidence accumulated pointing to a German resolve to move Westwards. There were even indications that Germany may invade Holland, and, from there, threaten England with air bombing, while refraining from military attacks against France.

The British Air Attaché, Wing Commander Douglas Colyer reported on January 12, 1939, the opinion of the head of the French Head of the 2nd Bureau⁶⁶⁵ of the air army, Lieutenant Colonel de Vitrolles. He was of the opinion that a strong position should be taken against Germany to prevent her from acquiring the Ukraine. Colyer concluded with⁶⁶⁶:

He felt in the present year the last chance to check Germany in her career of European domination would arise. We should have all the cards in our hands, and he had no doubt of the result. *If we let Germany get away with the Ukraine it would be too late for us to do anything, but wait our turn for execution.*

Colyer himself suggested that a strong line taken by Great Britain and France could discourage Germany from pursuing her designs for the Ukraine. There is no indication that this report made any impression on Halifax. He had made it clear that only Germany's move towards the West could worry him.

Information that Hitler intended to move Westwards first was, almost daily, arriving in Britain. On January 17, 1939, Strang wrote a very alarming

713⁶⁶⁵ The second Bureau is the French military intelligence service.
714⁶⁶⁶ DBFP, series 3, vol. 3, doc. 536 and enclosure, pp. 583-585

report based on information from reliable sources concerning conversations held at Berchtesgaden between Hitler and Colonel Beck, the Polish leader. After saying that it was likely that Beck had made some agreements with Hitler, Strang writes⁶⁶⁷:

This story would also fit in with reports we have had of Hitler's intention to attack in the West this spring, and the signs that Germany intends to pick a quarrel with Holland point in the same direction. *Germany cannot conduct a war on two fronts in present circumstances*, and material conditions will make it *easier for her to operate in the West than in the East*. Furthermore, it is easier for Germany to secure her rear in the East during an operation in the West than to secure her rear in the West during an operation in the East. The attraction of Hungary and perhaps other States into the anti-Comintern Pact, and *the attraction of Poland into the German orbit* by promises in the colonial sphere, would give Germany an assurance of at least benevolent neutrality along her Eastern frontier.

In the last quote, we have underlined the three important elements of the report. The first element was the conviction that Germany cannot conduct a war on two fronts. This will dictate the main thrust of the British diplomatic strategy. It will concentrate on securing a 'second front' in the East to force a war on two fronts, were Germany to attack the Western countries.

The second element was the knowledge that it is easier for Germany to operate in the West than in the East. This knowledge had to be kept as secret as possible. Were it to be universally known, it would give the countries in the East, a sense of temporary security which might prevent them from contributing to the formation of a second front in the East.

The third element was the danger of Poland falling into the German orbit. Extraordinary measures would have to be taken to prevent this from occurring. Strang ended his report with the following paragraph:

There is also the possibility that Herr Hitler has now added a third obsession, namely an anti-British obsession, to the anti-Jewish and anti-Communist obsessions by which he is governed. *It would be ironic* if the chief result of Munich should be to arouse in Herr Hitler's mind the conviction that Great Britain is Germany's Enemy No. 1 and *the determination to finish with her*.

Munich was supposed to demonstrate to Hitler that Britain would not interfere with his plans. Strang found it ironic indeed that Chamberlain's efforts would lead to the opposite of its intended effects. There were, however good reasons for Hitler to distrust Britain and to give little considerations to the free hand given to him by Chamberlain.

715⁶⁶⁷ DBFP, series 3, vol. 3, doc. 541, p. 590

There were signs that the British public was having second thoughts about Munich and the work of the International Commission. Then, after the November pogroms, it became clear to Germany that an increasing cleavage was separating Chamberlain from the public opinion. This raised the important question as to the advisability for Germany, to rely on a secret agreement with a democratic leader. The leader in a democracy, being accountable to the parliament, an agreement with him can only be binding if it has the support of the parliament. Otherwise, the leader himself may find it convenient to deny the existence of the agreement or, more simply, he may be replaced by another leader opposed to the policy implied by the agreement.

The *Frankfurter Zeitung*, at about the end of October 1938, expressed these worries⁶⁶⁸ as follows:

The English and French must make it clear, beyond doubt, whether their Governments are capable of carrying out a policy of peaceful understanding and of settling the differences which exist between the two axes or whether “public opinion” will not allow this. We cannot enter into agreement with Chamberlain only to be suddenly confronted with a Churchill. We cannot afford to offer our hands to Daladier only to discover suddenly that a Mandel has taken his place.. As long as Churchill and Lloyd George are able to deliver provocative radio speeches across the ocean, even if their own Government disavows them, we cannot suppose that England’s public opinion is really ready for understanding.. All further progress must therefore be preceded by a final clarification within England and France.

The question of Chamberlain’s ability to pull with him the British public opinion was a constant subject of consideration in reports sent by the German Embassy in London to their superiors in Berlin. In general the Embassy’s opinion was oscillating. It underlined how sensitive the public opinion was in Britain to the methods used by Germany in the pursuit of her aims. Germany was not willing to adapt her methods to the feelings of the British public. Consequently, Germany concluded that Chamberlain would not be able ‘to deliver.’

Information arriving from Germany became so alarming that Britain thought that the U.S. Government should be notified of the situation. On January 24, 1938, Halifax wrote to Mallet in Washington. The text approved by Chamberlain said⁶⁶⁹:

3. As early as November there were indications which gradually became more definite that Hitler was planing a further adventure for the spring of 1939. At first it appeared — and this was

716⁶⁶⁸ ‘Europe on the Eve’, op. cit., 470
717⁶⁶⁹ DBFP, series 3, vol 4, doc. 5, p. 4-6

confirmed by persons in Hitler's entourage — that he was thinking of expansion in the East and in December the prospect of establishing an independent Ukraine under German vassalage was freely spoken of in Germany.

News in December that Hitler was thinking of expansion in the East had not been 'most disquieting' and not worthy a report to the President. Any objective observer interested in the national interests of Britain would have had to be very disquieted by the prospect of an aggressive Germany having at her disposition the resources of Ukraine. Only if the national interests came second to class interests, could politicians succumb to wishful thinking and gamble on the possibility that Hitler may be content with the acquisition of Ukraine. Halifax went on:

4. Since then reports indicate that Hitler, encouraged by Ribbentrop Himmler and others, is considering an attack on the Western Powers as a preliminary to subsequent action in the East. Some of these reports emanate from highly placed Germans of undoubted sincerity who are anxious *to prevent this crime*; others come from foreigners, hitherto Germanophile, who are in close touch with leading German personalities. They have received some confirmation in *the reassurance which Hitler appear to have given Beck* concerning his plans in the East, as well as in the support which Germany has recently given to Italy's claims against France.

It is clear that, by the end of January, it was Britain's opinion that Poland was facing no immediate danger of attack by Germany. The West was the only region in immediate danger. The knowledge that Hitler, while desiring to start with the West, would eventually turn towards the East, could have been enough of a motivation for uniting the Soviet Union and the West in a common effort to defeat the German policies of aggression. Together they could have defeated the German military machine, instead of allowing Germany to destroy her victims one at a time. The 'crime' to be prevented was that of a German move westwards. An expected German move eastward was never referred to as 'criminal'.

Halifax went on explaining that the period of danger would start at the end of February. He underlined once more the reliability of his sources and the fact that, in spite of their diversity, they all concurred in their conclusions. Finally he informed the President that, in his upcoming speech on January 28, Chamberlain might give a warning to Germany. He suggested that a public declaration by the President, prior to Chamberlain's speech, could be helpful. The President obliged.

At the Cabinet meeting⁶⁷⁰ on January 25, 1939, Halifax updated the members with the disturbing news. Chamberlain, while agreeing that "we

718⁶⁷⁰ 'The Chamberlain Cabinet', op. cit., pp. 179-182

might be dealing with a man whose actions were not rational”, added that “at the same time he was a long way from accepting all this information.”

Discussing the matter of a possible German invasion of Holland, he recognised that Britain “would have to intervene”. He, however, opposed the issuing of a declaration to that effect because “if we made an immediate statement to this effect we should enter into a binding commitment which, in certain circumstances, might prove embarrassing..”

At a later time he clarified that British would not intervene unless Holland resisted the German invasion. He did not consider the fact that the resolve of Holland to resist might depend on the issuance of a British declaration of commitment to the defence of Holland. This commitment could have mentioned that it would have entered into play only in case of active resistance by Holland to the envisaged invasion.

More surprising is the stand Chamberlain took in relation to France. He said that “a rather similar issue had arisen in regard to France.. France had undertaken to come to our assistance if we are attacked.. but.. France might be attacked from more than one quarter, whereas we were only liable to be attacked by Germany.. Obligations of mutual assistance in the event of attack could not therefore be equal.. He would deprecate any attempt to define the position more narrowly.”

Chamberlain avoided being specific. Did he mean that he was prepared to consider mutual assistance only in the case of an attack by Germany? In such a case the obligations would formally be equal. France could be considered as able to deal with a Spanish and an Italian aggression without being helped by Britain. This would be a very narrow view. On the one hand Italy had ambitions conflicting with British interests. She chose to stress the demands against France. The demands against Britain could surface later at an unpredictable moment. On the other hand, a conflict with Italy, for instance, may weaken France and reduce her ability to withstand an onslaught from Germany.

According to Ian Colvin, on February 2, 1939, the Cabinet considered the question of Belgium⁶⁷¹. Hore-Belsha reminding the Cabinet that it had not been his task to equip the army for a continental role, “he presented a paper that proposed to equip four divisions of the Regular army and two mobile divisions on the Continental scale and similarly to equip the Territorial divisions.” Ian Colvin adds:

Mr Chamberlain was plainly disconcerted. He described this as “a rather new conception”. The Secretary for War had described his proposals as “modest” but the total cost amounted to £81 m.

At a time at which an aggressive move by Germany towards the West is seriously considered, Chamberlain worried about the cost of a very modest

719⁶⁷¹ ‘The Chamberlain Cabinet’, op. cit., p. 183

proposal. He did encourage an increase in defence preparation, but not in the increased capability of intervening on the continent.

In short, Chamberlain while trusting that Germany would go East, agreed to take defensive precautions to face the case in which Germany would move Westwards. This eventuality being unlikely, in Chamberlain's view, he would not agree for expenses on this account. In the worse case, Britain would be able to defend herself.

Chamberlain's reluctance at committing Britain to Belgium and Holland and France indicated that, at that time, he was prepared to let Germany extend Westwards, provided Britain was well defended. In fact at the meeting of February 8, 1939⁶⁷²:

Mr. Chamberlain tended to the view that the Dutch would be more likely to resist an attack if they knew that the British were concerned for their survival, *but he still resisted the idea of an open declaration.*

The British Government had in the past committed itself to defend Belgium and Holland on the basis that their independence constituted a British vital interest. However, after Czechoslovakia had been betrayed, and after it became evident that Central Europe and Eastern Europe had been abandoned to Germany's good will, the 'low countries' could have their doubts with regards to the British resolve to respect her old commitments. Chamberlain would not reaffirm this resolve.

Chamberlain Warns Germany

Chamberlain made his speech as scheduled. He acknowledged the fact that his policies were widely criticised. He said⁶⁷³:

Lord Dudley has said something about the events of last September which culminated in the Munich agreement. A great deal of criticism, mostly, I think, in this country, has been directed against that agreement and against the action I took in attempting, by personal contact, to obtain a peaceful solution of a problem which very nearly involved the world in a catastrophe of the first magnitude.

The criticism has come from various quarters.. But there is one feature common to all the critics. *None of them carries the responsibilities that I do, and none of them has that full knowledge of all the circumstances which is only open to members of the Government.*

720⁶⁷² 'The Chamberlain Cabinet', p. 183

721⁶⁷³ 'In Search of Peace', op. cit., pp. 249-257

The implication of this last sentence is dangerous for democracy. Were this to be accepted as true, then the same argument could put the government, in all circumstances, above discussion and criticism. It is still more disturbing to hear that important aspects of the political situation had to be known only by the Cabinet, while they were of such nature that, had the opponents been given the knowledge, they might have become supporters of the Government policy.

What was the information the full knowledge of which could modify the understanding of the events of the time? Apparently there were no more than two possibilities:

w the knowledge of the free hand given to Hitler, or

w the knowledge of the British and French military weakness

The second possibility is not a serious one. Had the military situation been the factor that compelled the British leaders to accept the Munich Agreement, it would have been very easy to quench criticism. It would have been sufficient for Chamberlain to hold a private and confidential meeting with chosen leaders of the opposition, to reveal to them what could not have been revealed in public. Chamberlain knew, for instance, that the Labour leader Dalton, in opposition to the main stream of his party, was years long defending the need for British rearmament. Chamberlain knew that he could confide in him, and in others like him. Moreover, the relative weakness of Britain had been often exposed in the House of Commons by Churchill and others. Precise figures were given in such occasions.

The trouble was that even if he could have convinced anyone of the relative military inferiority of the West, Chamberlain would have been unable to answer the following question to the opposition's satisfaction: Had the relative military strength of the West improved as a result of Munich? In other terms, were Hitler to make war right now in early 1939, would his job be easier or more difficult as a result of Munich? Another troubling question would have been: Why did not Britain start military talks with the Soviet Union to find out in definite and specific terms what could have been the Soviet military contribution just before Munich? And finally, there was the embarrassing question as to whose responsibility was it that Britain was militarily weak?

As to the first possibility, that of a privileged knowledge of the free hand policy, its disclosure was obviously out of the question. Chamberlain's attitude was unworthy of a democratic leader. There was however a precedent to it when Baldwin, in order to avoid replying to relevant criticism could only tell that 'my lips are sealed' meaning, that in view of the national interest, he could not divulge what he knew. The tradition was followed by Chamberlain.

The warning to Hitler consisted in Chamberlain's affirmation that the military power of Britain was impressive and becoming more so with time. It stressed the navy constructions, the progress in the aircraft production and the anti-aircraft defence and the construction of shelters. He did not say a single word on bombers. The defensive capabilities of Britain were singled out at the exclusion of the offensive capabilities, though, bombers, for instance, could have been considered a strong deterrent. He also spoke of plans ready to be used, in case of need, for the evacuation of the population, starting with children. He ended saying:

To-day the air is filled of rumours and suspicions which ought not to be allowed to persist. For *peace could only be endangered by such a challenge as* envisaged by the President of the United States in his New Year message — namely, *a demand to dominate the world by force*. That would be a demand which, as the President indicated, and I myself have already declared, the democracies must inevitably resist. But *I cannot believe that any such challenge is intended..*

Moreover, I remain convinced that there are no differences, however serious, that cannot be solved without recourse to war, by consultation and negotiation, as was laid down in the declaration signed by Herr Hitler and myself at Munich..

Since the warning was directed at Germany, we must remember that Chamberlain, not far ago, had sent Wilson with a warning to Hitler that could have instead been delivered by Henderson, the British Ambassador in Berlin. What Wilson did on that occasion was to inform Hitler that more than the content of the message, it was the 'wording' that was of special importance.

Here also, in Chamberlain speech, the main meaning is in the wording. We have to remember that, as long as it was expected that Germany would move Eastward, no question was asked about Hitler's will at world domination. Therefore, not every aggressive move by Germany can be labelled as 'world domination'. Would an invasion of what remained of Czechoslovakia qualify as a step in world domination? Even after it did occur, Chamberlain could only ask the question and state that he did not yet know if it did.

Even now he is careful not to say that peace could be endangered by next German aggressive move. It all depended if there was ground to consider it to be a move towards world domination. The 'wording' is clear: "peace could *only* be endangered" by "a demand to dominate the world by force." Therefore if next aggression was just an aggression and not an attempt to dominate the world, this would not have threatened peace.

Chamberlain adds that he does not believe that such is Germany's intention and, to crown it all, he refers to the settlement of differences along the spirit of the declaration signed at Munich.

At the time, Chamberlain repeatedly told the public that Hitler promised that the Sudeten problem was the very last and that its solution would leave no other problem to resolve (except for the colonial problem which was neither urgent nor peace threatening). Nonetheless Chamberlain calmly said that he remained convinced that any difference, however serious could still be solved in the Munich spirit. He did not, on the occasion of this warning, remind Hitler of his promise.

With this special wording Chamberlain was saying the following to Hitler: "There are rumours that you intend to move to the West. This would be a direct challenge to our sphere of influence and I will not stand for it. Personally, I do not believe the rumours are true. In the measure I find them false, and in which, consequently, you would move without infringing on the British sphere of interests, I am prepared to offer you the same services that proved to be of such good avail to you at Munich. You can feel safe concerning your Western boundaries. As a proof of our peaceful intentions, we do not put any stress on bombers, we do not intend to create a Ministry of Supplies, and we do not intend to bring Churchill in the Cabinet".

It may well be that, through confidential contacts or otherwise, Germany got wind of the fact that her intention to start moving westwards had been discovered. The fact remains that on January 30, 1939, Hitler made a speech containing a peaceful statement as to his intentions. He said⁶⁷⁴:

Germany has no territorial claims on England and France except the return of her colonies.. For in what way, for instance, do the interests of Great Britain and Germany clash? I have stated often enough that there is no German, and above all no National Socialist, who even in his most secrets thoughts has the intention of causing the British Empire any kind of difficulties. From Great Britain, too, are heard the voices of men who think reasonably and calmly, expressing a similar attitude with regard to Germany. It would be a blessing for the whole world if mutual confidence and cooperation could be established between the two peoples. The same is true of our relations with France.

Hitler, however, in the same speech gave a warning to the west⁶⁷⁵:

In the future, we shall not tolerate the Western Powers attempting to interfere in certain matters which concern nobody except ourselves in order to hinder natural and reasonable solutions by their intervention.

There was no other way to interpret that warning except that Hitler was putting the West on notice that Eastern Europe is none of their business and that Germany would accept nothing less than a free hand in that region. This

⁶⁷⁴ DGFP, series D, vol 4, doc. 305, note 1, p. 397

⁶⁷⁵ The Earl of Birkenhead, 'Halifax', Hamish Hamilton, London, 1965, p. 430

did not disturb Chamberlain who, forgetting the recent predictions of a German move to the West, regained his optimism. Birkenhead wrote with respect to Hitler's warning⁶⁷⁶:

Nothing could have been clearer than that, but the Prime Minister *refused to place a sinister construction* upon the words: "I very definitely got the impression," he said, "that it was not the speech of a man who was preparing to throw Europe into another crisis. It seemed to me that there were many passages in the speech which indicated the necessity of peace for Germany..."

Chamberlain could not have missed the meaning of so obvious a warning. He did not give it a 'sinister construction' for the simple reason that he had no objection giving Germany a free hand. In addition he could find in this warning a justification for hoping that the East was Germany's direction of expansion. The West was therefore safe.

Had the British government intended not to tolerate a German expansion in territories inhabited by a non-German population, this would have been the moment to warn Germany that stopping aggression was the concern of all peace-loving countries. This was farthest away from the British Government intentions. Instead it acted as if it formally accepted the warning. On January 31, Dirksen reported to the German Foreign Ministry⁶⁷⁷:

3. Sir Frederick Leith Ross told me that in the views of Government circles here, *the Fuhrer's speech had laid the foundation* for the contemplated exchange of visits between the two Ministers of Economics and for a further active development of economic questions between Germany and Great Britain. They were, therefore, also prepared to have the invitation announced directly by the Government, in this case by the President of the Board of Trade, if this would facilitate the visit of the Reich Minister of Economics.

The speech that put Britain on notice to mind her own business and not to interfere with German plans in Eastern Europe was officially reported by Britain to Germany as having laid the foundations for better relations between the two countries, British loss of pride notwithstanding, .

On February 7, 1939, Halifax informed the U.S. Government⁶⁷⁸ that, in the opinion of the British Government, a German attack against either Holland or Switzerland would be considered as a German attempt to dominate the world. It is important to note that neither an attack against

724⁶⁷⁶ Op., cit., p. 430

725⁶⁷⁷ DGFP, series D, vol 4, doc. 305, p. 397

726⁶⁷⁸ DBFP, series 3, vol 4, doc. 87, p 83

Czechoslovakia nor an attack against Poland was, at that date, considered as a German attempt at world domination.

On February 18, 1939, Henderson sent from Berlin a report to Halifax which throws light on Germany's reluctance to accept Chamberlain's advances. He wrote⁶⁷⁹:

I called on Field-Marshal Goring this morning.. I said that I thought that he could have his rest without uneasiness as I did not believe in any immediate serious international trouble unless Italy made it.. Goring at once replied that he wished that he was as confident as I was. ***What guarantee had Germany that Mr. Chamberlain would remain in office and that he would not be succeeded by 'a Mr. Churchill or a Mr. Eden' Government?*** That was Germany's main preoccupation: we had not a settled Government like the Fuhrer's and nobody could be certain how long the present British Government would remain in power.

On February 19, 1939, Chamberlain sent a letter to Henderson. He wrote⁶⁸⁰:

..I have been much struck by the terms of the speech delivered by the Duke of Coburg.. It seems to come closer to ***that response for which I have been asking*** than anything I have seen yet. Of course it would have been worth more still if Hitler had made it himself but, if he approved it, it is good and I shall make some sympathetic allusion in the same sense when I speak at Blackburn on Wednesday.

You may think it worth while to mention, in the proper quarter, that I have noticed it.

Chamberlain was complaining in November that he had not received 'the slightest friendly gesture' from Hitler. He now recognised a gesture 'such as he had been asking'. This gesture is nothing more than a repeat by a German subaltern of a sentence already used by Hitler in a previous speech. Nevertheless Chamberlain seems to attach great importance to it. The remaining of his letter shows how elated and optimistic he has become in spite of the many warnings the Foreign Office was still receiving. He went on:

Things look as though ***Spain might clear up fairly soon***. After that the next thing will be to get the bridge between Paris and Rome in working order. After that we might begin to talk about disarmament.. If all went well we should have so improved the atmosphere that we might begin to think of colonial discussions.

727⁶⁷⁹ DBFP, series 3, vol 4, doc. 118, p. 121

728⁶⁸⁰ DBFP, series 3, vol. 4, p. 591

But people have got so frightened and 'het up' about them that *we should have to approach the subject with the greatest care.*

'Spain might clear up fairly soon'. Chamberlain thus describes the end of Democracy in Spain, as if it was a piece of good news. But then the conservatives had often expressed their sympathy and support for Franco. As to 'approach the subject with care', no other 'care' than secrecy and negotiations behind his colleagues back would be available to him.

On February 25, 1939, Henderson, acted on Chamberlain's hint, and wrote to Weizsacker on the subject of the speech of the Duke of Coburg. In return he received a confirmation that the attention of the Duke had been, before his speech, been drawn to Hitler's sentence.

Henderson asked Weizsacker that his letter, and any reply to it, be treated confidentially. At a meeting of a Society for Anglo-German friendship, any talk was hardly expected except nice talk and hope in relation with such a friendship. It was also very natural that the Duke of Coburg would repeat an appropriate sentence pronounced earlier by the Fuhrer.

All this is no more than common place. Taken at face value, it makes little sense that the matter had been the object of four letters. It makes much more sense if we remember that an agreement had been concluded between Chamberlain and Hitler behind the back of the British people, of the Foreign Office and of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Therefore, communications concerning developments in the pursuit of the common aim could not be explicit and could even not utilise the normal diplomatic channels.

At a time at which Chamberlain was in difficulty because of the pogroms in Germany against the Jews, at a time when rumours were reaching the Foreign Office concerning a possible German move towards the West, Chamberlain was awaiting anxiously a communication from Hitler which could only take the form of 'a sign'. He thought he had received such a sign in the form of the Duke of Corbug's speech, and this re-established his confidence in Hitler and his optimism.

On February 20, 1939, Ashton-Gwatkin went to Berlin for economic conversations. He suggested there that Germany should invite Harold Wilson for political discussions. Germany replied that he would be welcome after further clarification of the Anglo-German relations⁶⁸¹.

On February 24, 1939, Cadogan entered in his diaries⁶⁸²:

Found Hudson was going to have a broadcast message to German people put out on German broadcast! Stopped it. Quiet talk with H. for 1/4 hour before lunch. He thinks we've done enough in way of 'firm' speeches. Told him we certainly hven't done too much. If he likes to ease up and talk about weather and crops, I

729⁶⁸¹ DGFP, series D, vol 4, doc. 317, p. 410

730⁶⁸² 'The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan', op. cit., p. 151

shouldn't mind for a bit, but we should have to watch and see how things go.. Comparative lull — 2 nights this week I've had no box at home after dinner. But this doesn't necessarily mean a healthier atmosphere in Europe! Neville H. is completely bewitched by his German friends. Van, on the contrary, out-Cassandras Cassandra in a kind of spirit of pantomime. Must talk to H. about it. He ought either to rebuke Van or recall N.H. I don't know which is the sillier of the 2.. Van I think.

This shows the spectrum of differences in opinion still reigning in the Foreign Office. The most optimist of the lot was Neville Henderson. This is also an indication as to Chamberlain's state of mind. Dilks, the editor of Cadogan's diaries added:

Henderson, who had returned to Berlin on 13 February after four month's absence, reported to Cadogan his first impression: 'The Germans are not contemplating any immediate wild adventure and that their compass is pointing towards peace.' Simultaneously Chamberlain had become more optimistic about the prospects. 'He feels' wrote Joseph Kennedy after a long talk on 17 February, "that America's action [rearmament and a warning speech by Roosevelt to the Senate Military Affairs Committee] psychologically and Britain's tremendous amounts for defence have had a very definite effect on Germany and may do the trick.".. When the Prime Minister wrote in an even more hopeful sense to Henderson, Halifax immediately added a damping commentary..

By the end of February, the Foreign Office was receiving disturbing reports pointing to German military preparations for the occupation of Czechoslovakia⁶⁸³. Halifax was alarmed and communicated them to Washington. Chamberlain was not alarmed. The importance of such news depended on their relation to an ulterior German move Westwards. A believer in such a move would be distressed by a strategic strengthening of Germany following her occupation of Czechoslovakia.

Obviously, Chamberlain did not believe in such a move. We mentioned in Chapter 1 an entry by 'Chips' on March 7, 1939, to the effect that Chamberlain declared, at a diner in an exclusive club, that "he thinks the Russian danger receding, and the danger of a German War less everyday, as our rearmament expands."

The Russian military danger was, at the time, believed to be nil. The danger, if danger was, could therefore only increase. The real meaning of Chamberlain's statement was that he believed his agenda was 'on schedule'. The talk about Germany excluding war, meant that war in the west was unlikely. The reference to the receding Russian danger indicated that, as he expected, and as he repeatedly expressed his belief in it, Germany would

731⁶⁸³ 'The diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan', op. cit., p. 153

move against the Ukraine. The news of an impending German move against Czechoslovakia could not disturb him⁶⁸⁴.

On March 9, 1939 Henderson wrote a detailed report to Halifax advocating that a free hand be given to Germany in the East. He wrote⁶⁸⁵:

Moreover, taking the long view, Europe will never be stable and peaceful until Germany, is once more prosperous, and even her prosperity, in spite of her economic competition, is likely to benefit us materially in the end no less than Germany herself.. In spite of the risks involved, would not, therefore, the wiser course for His Majesty's Government be to consider how far they possibly can go to help Germany? — and better now when help might be appreciated than later.

Henderson is asking Britain to extend help to a Germany armed to the teeth and recognised as having dangerous tendencies. He owes his Government some explanation. He went on:

I am not blind to the fact that we cannot appreciably help Germany without considerable expense to ourselves, yet even so that expense will be cheaper than a perpetuation of the armament race, if the latter can thereby be avoided. I have little faith in the gratitude of nations, though I believe that Hitler is personally not lacking in that rare quality.

Up to this point, Henderson appears to consider if it would be possible 'to Bribe' Hitler out of a policy of rearmament, at an acceptable cost to Britain. Whether this can be achieved or not, the idea seems to have some merit, if only for its peaceful motivation. However, as we already know, Henderson has a restricted meaning for peace. He continued:

Nor am I oblivious to the fact that co-operation with Nazism will be unpopular with certain sections of British opinion. Moreover, I realize that such co-operation, quite apart from expense, *means acquiescing to a certain extent in Germany's aims in Central and South-Eastern Europe*. Admittedly, the objections to giving that considerable measure of assistance which can alone effectively remedy the difficulties in which Germany now finds herself have great political, technical and moral weight. Nevertheless, on balance and since the alternative would probably be worse, I believe that, provided always Germany shows any real inclination to meet us half-way, we would be well advised resolutely to face these risks.

732⁶⁸⁴ R. Butler, as the Government spokesman in the House of Commons, could not reply to the precise accusations supported by evidence that the Government knew quite well that Czechoslovakia was the target of a German imminent move and, nevertheless, Chamberlain issued some of his most optimistic prediction concerning the prospects for peace.

733⁶⁸⁵ DBFP, series 3, vol. 4, doc 195, pp. 210-216

Henderson does not suggest that Britain use the 'bait' of economic help to Germany as a leverage to stop Germany's expansion. On the contrary. He asserts that Britain has to 'acquiesce' 'to a certain measure' to Germany's aims of expansion in Central and Eastern Europe. Henderson then proceeds to define the German aims. After reminding Halifax that part of her aims had been achieved (Austria, Sudeten region) he continued:

It seems inevitable that in the course of time Memel and Danzig.. will be re-attached on the basis of self-determination to the Reich. The most that we can hope for is that this will happen without sabre-rattling and by means of constitutional forms of peaceful negotiation.

An example of peaceful negotiation has been given at Munich and consisted in a number of ultimatums delivered by the West to Czechoslovakia and by Germany to the West. Henderson went on:

There remains the heading of expansion in the east.. Hitler made it very clear in 'Mein Kampf' that 'Lebensraum' for Germany could be found in *expansion eastward*, and expansion eastward renders *a clash between Germany and Russia* some day or other highly probable. With a benevolent Britain on her flank, Germany can envisage such an eventuality with comparative equanimity. But she lives in dread of the reverse and of the war on two fronts.. *The best approach* to good relations with Germany is therefore of *avoidance of constant and vexatious interference* in matters in which British interests are not directly or vitally involved and the *prospect of British neutrality in the event of Germany being engaged in the east*.

..The 'Drang nach Osten' is a reality, and the 'Drang nach Westen' will only become so *if Germany finds all the venues to the east blocked* or if western opposition is such as to convince Hitler that he cannot go eastward without first having rendered innocuous.

The text itself is in no need of comment. It should, however, be stressed that, though such opinions were criticised by some individuals in the Foreign Office, Chamberlain never stopped to have a high consideration for Henderson's opinions. He constantly gave great weight to Henderson's advises.

CHAPTER XIV

THE POLICY OF A FREE HAND. PART 5 (From the occupation of Prague to war)

A Reversal Of Policy

On March 9, 1939, Bullitt, the US ambassador to Paris reported to the Secretary of State on the conversation he had over lunch with Daladier, the French Premier, and with the Polish ambassador in Paris⁶⁸⁶:

The Polish Ambassador pointed out that resistance to German advance in Central and Eastern Europe since Munich had been provided not by France and England, both of whom had been rather visibly *anxious to have Germany turn her hostile intentions towards Russia*, but on the contrary by Poland, Hungary and Rumania, all of which states knew that they had everything to lose by German domination.

What is remarkable about this statement by the Polish ambassador is that it was given in the presence of the French Premier and that the latter did not object. The Premier took it as a statement of fact rather than as an accusation. This statement of fact makes a direct relation between the absence of resistance on the part of Britain and France to Germany's advance in Central and Eastern Europe with a 'wish' to have Germany turn against Russia.

On the face of this statement, unchallenged by Daladier, it would have been expected that a German occupation of Prague six days later, would result in mild reactions from Britain and France. The opposite, however occurred. The reactions, though indeed mild at first, became much stronger and the world witnessed a complete change of attitude by the West in relation to Germany.

This reversal of policy had been interpreted as proving that Britain and France were not prepared to allow Germany to invade regions populated essentially by non Germans. Many of the documents quoted before demonstrate that this interpretation is incorrect. The West must have had a different reason for changing their mind.

An Optimistic Mood

734⁶⁸⁶ FRUS, Foreign Relations, 1939, vol I, pp. 29-31

On March 9, 1939, Chamberlain briefed a group of press correspondents. He was optimistic. He predicted an improvement in the relations between France and Italy and expressed his great expectations from a forthcoming visit to Germany by the Cabinet Minister Oliver Stanley. He even hoped that a disarmament conference might meet before the end of the year.

On March 10, 1939, Samuel Hoare made an address describing the prospects of a golden age that could result from the co-operation of five men in Europe — three dictators and the Prime Ministers of Britain and France⁶⁸⁷. He had been advised by Chamberlain to be cheerful in his talk.

A week later, two days after the German occupation of Prague, the mood would become pessimistic and Britain would start to move according to new policies that, eventually, would involve her in a war with Germany. This reversal of mood would tend to indicate that Britain was unaware of the German intention to occupy Prague and annex Czechoslovakia. The record, however, shows that this was not the case.

On March 9, 1939, Henderson wrote to Halifax stating that Hitler was in a peaceful disposition. This has been taken as the reason for Chamberlain's optimism. It was said that such a message might have reduced the impact of secret information indicating a German invasion of Czechoslovakia for March 15.

We have analysed Henderson's letter at the end of Chapter 13. We saw there that Henderson indicated that peace with Germany could be obtained only with a certain acquiescence of Hitler's aims in South-Eastern and Central Europe. He indicated that Britain, in order to have peace, should not block Germany's designs on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Such a letter could have been considered as optimistic only in the view of a Prime Minister ready to fulfil the conditions indicated by Henderson.

Henderson's letter, while differing in form from secret intelligence warnings as to the occupation of Czechoslovakia on March 15 (the warnings were that precise) did not differ in substance. On March 9, 1938, Chamberlain was optimistic while fully informed of the predicted upcoming events in Czechoslovakia⁶⁸⁸.

735⁶⁸⁷ According to F. Schuman, Hoare [Night over Europe, p. 91], 'three dictators' meant Hitler Mussolini and Franco.

736 Telford Taylor [Munich, p.256]. mentions only 'the leaders of Britain, France, Germany and Italy'.

737 Samuel Hoare [Nine troubled years, p. 328] claimed he talked about 'the four leading statesmen in Europe, Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler and Stalin. This is not credible. Hoare was not likely to have ignored Mussolini at a time at which Chamberlain was so careful at improving the relations with Italy. Likewise Franco would have been a more likely candidate for Hoare than Stalin to be mentioned among the people expected to work for the good of humanity.

738 Ian Colvin ['The Chamberlain Cabinet', mentions that Hoare spoke of four European Powers.

739 Leonard Mosley ['On Borrowed Time', p. 155] supports Hoare's view, except for adding Mussolini to the list. The Hoare's four men are five in Moseley's text.

740⁶⁸⁸ 'How war came', op. cit., p. 164

Cadogan mentions that the head of the British Secret Service informed him of the imminent German invasion of Czechoslovakia. Cadogan's diary entry on March 11, 1939, is instructive⁶⁸⁹:

Walked to F.O. with H. Press full of Slovak crisis. I said (a) it *appeared* to be settled — for the moment — (b) *for God's sake don't let's do anything about it...* Kell [head of M.I.5 until 1940] came to raise my hair with tales of Germany going into Czechoslovakia in next 48 hours. Maybe. Told H. but let him go off to Oxford. Warned P.M... Jebb rang up.. to say S.I.S. have some hair-raising tales of Czecho[slovakia] for the 14th. *It can wait.*

L. Mosley⁶⁹⁰ gives the text of the secret message from Germany, delivered to Cadogan by the head of the British Intelligence Service. The message is categorical and precise. Its first sentence is: "THE GERMAN ARMY WILL INVADE BOHEMIA AND MORAVIA AT SIX A.M. ON MARCH 15." The message continued with details about the military operation. L. Mosley commented:

In view of the stupefaction and indignation which the British Prime Minister was subsequently to display over the events of the next few days, the history of what happened to this message is worth noting.. Sir Alexander Cadogan.. seemed to show surprisingly little alarm.. As for Chamberlain, apparently it did not occur to him to summon the Cabinet for a briefing or to call in his service chiefs and discuss the situation with them.

On March 14, Chamberlain answering a question from Attlee in the House of Commons said⁶⁹¹:

I might remind him that the proposed guarantee is one against unprovoked aggressions on Czecho-Slovakia. No such aggression has *yet* taken place.

741 Sydney Aster, 'The Making of the Second World War', Simon and Shuster, New York, 1973, p. 21

742 'Soviet Peace Efforts on the Eve of World War II', Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, doc. 97, pp. 183-184. The document is a partial reproduction of FRUS, 'Diplomatic Papers', 1939, vol. 1, pp. 672-673. The document shows that, by March the 8th, the US was in possession of the minutes of a meeting held on the same day and in which Hitler announced the expected occupation of Czechoslovakia for March 15. The indications are that Britain and France received similar information. Interrogated about advanced information concerning the occupation of Prague, R. Butler, a Government spokesman, was not able to give reasonable reply to the evidence presented by the opposition in the Commons, on March 20, 1939, to the effect that this knowledge was widespread in government circles in Britain and France.

743⁶⁸⁹ 'The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan', op. cit., p. 155

744⁶⁹⁰ Leonard Mosley, 'On Borrowed Time', Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1969, p. 151

745⁶⁹¹ Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, vol. 345, col. 223

Chamberlain knew that Czechoslovakia was about to be invaded. German troop movements towards Czechoslovakia had been reported to him. The Foreign Office had preferred him to be silent about the guarantee⁶⁹². The attitude of Chamberlain and the Foreign Office was consistent with their stand that Britain should mind her own business and not interfere with Germany's actions in Central and Eastern Europe.

The same day March 14, 1939, Halifax sent to Henderson a message to be communicated to the German Government. In it he said⁶⁹³:

His Majesty's Government have *no desire to interfere unnecessarily in matters with which other Governments may be more directly concerned than this country*. They are, however, as the German Government will surely appreciate, deeply concerned for the success of all efforts to restore confidence and a relaxation of tension in Europe. This seems to them more particularly desirable at a moment when a start is being made with discussions on economic subjects to which, as His Majesty's Government believes, the German Government attach no less importance than they do themselves, and the fruitful development of which depends so directly upon general state of confidence.

From this point of view they would deplore any action in Central Europe which would cause a setback to the growth of this general confidence on which all improvement in the economic situation depends and to which such improvement might in its turn contribute.

Halifax was conceding to Germany that Britain had no desire to interfere in a matter which was more the concern of the German Government. So strong was Halifax's desire to respect the German special sphere of influence, that the justification of the letter was given not in terms of the concern for Czechoslovakia, but in terms of the fear of repercussions that may further impair economic co-operation. What mattered was the general atmosphere of confidence and not the independence of that country.

Also the same day, Henderson reporting to Halifax on a conversation with the German State Secretary said⁶⁹⁴:

I impressed upon the State Secretary on this account the *extreme importance of the form* in which Germany handled the situation. I also mentioned I hoped that nothing would be done *in a manner* to mar the effect of the visit of the President of the Board of Trade.

746⁶⁹² Sydney Aster, Op. cit., p. 23

747⁶⁹³ DBFP, series 3, vol. 4, doc. 247, p. 250

748⁶⁹⁴ DBFP, series 3, vol. 4, doc. 248, p. 250

This message was almost indecent. When the future of a friendly state was at stake, when it was expected that the heavy hand of the German Gestapo might soon impose its terror on whoever in Czechoslovakia militated for democracy and freedom, Henderson only worried for proper forms and manners so as not to affect a visit by a British official.

The same day March 14, 1939, Geist, the U.S. Chargé in Germany, wrote to the U.S. Secretary of State⁶⁹⁵:

The British Counsellor, *who returned from London today*, states that the British Foreign Office, is inclined to regard any move by the Germans in Czechoslovakia with calmness and will advise the British Government against assuming a threatening attitude when in fact it contemplates doing nothing. He stated in short that "*the British Government were reconciled to a possible extreme German action in Czechoslovakia*"..

Troop movements identified indicates Germany military action in force in which possibly 40 divisions will participate.

As of March 14, 1939, the British, while expecting the imminent invasion of Czechoslovakia, did not intend to react on it.

Still on March 14, 1939, Oliver Harvey entered the following in his diary⁶⁹⁶:

..Slovakia declared herself independent with German support.. reports that Germany is appointing two *Staathalters* for Prague and Bratislava, and troops move in tonight.

We had a meeting in H.'s room to discuss the position. It was agreed we must make no empty threats since we were not going to fight for Czechoslovakia *any more than for Danzig*, although we would fight for Switzerland, Belgium, Holland or Tunis.

At that time, two weeks before Britain gave to Poland a unilateral guarantee, there was no British intention to take a stand in favour of Poland. Finally to complete the events of that day it is not unfit to quote an entry in Channon's diary⁶⁹⁷:

..It looks as if he [Hitler] is going to break the Munich agreement, and throw Chamberlain over.. Hitler is never helpful.

A similar entry was made in November 15, 1938, concerning the German pogroms. Then too, Channon remarked that Hitler never helps. This

749⁶⁹⁵ FRUS, Foreign Relations, 1939, vol !, p. 38

750⁶⁹⁶ 'The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey', op. cit., pp. 261-262

751⁶⁹⁷ 'Chips' op. cit., p. 185

remark was made as if Hitler was a clumsy accomplice who did more harm than good. Next day, on March 15, 1939, Channon would write:

No balder, bolder departure from the written bond has ever been committed in history. The manner of it surpassed comprehension and *his callous desertion of the PM is stupefying*. I can never forgive him..

Channon was a member of a coterie executing daily mini-plots at the service of the Chamberlain policy. He was permeated with the feelings and opinions prevalent in the Chamberlain 'inner circle'. Hitler's "callous desertion of the Prime Minister" was a particular way of considering Germany's aggression against Czechoslovakia. and Hitler's disregard of the 'Munich spirit'. What was resented about Hitler was not the hardship he was causing the Czechoslovak people but his 'stupendous' betrayal of Chamberlain. The feeling existed that Chamberlain and Hitler belonged to the same brotherhood.

March 15 And 16 1939

On March 15, 1939, after the news on the German invasion of Czechoslovakia reached the four corners of the world, the British Cabinet held a meeting. Ian Colvin quoted from the minutes⁶⁹⁸:

Lord Halifax read out to the Cabinet.. the "agreement" signed by the Czechs, and the Prime Minister said that "the fundamental fact was that the State whose frontiers we had undertaken to guarantee against unprovoked aggression had now completely broken up".. "He thought it would be wise to take an early opportunity of saying that in the circumstances which had arisen, our guarantee had come to an end." He comforted himself with the observation that "our guarantee was not a guarantee against the exercise of moral pressure".. "German action had all been taken under the guise of agreement with the Czechoslovak Government. *The Germans were therefore in a position to give plausible answers.*"

The Czechoslovakian tragedy took a couple of weeks to unfold. The various elements of the crisis that culminated in the German invasion, had been daily published in the British press and had been the object of precise intelligence reports. At the time of the Cabinet meeting, no essential information was missing. Except for the future of Ruthenia, the picture of what had occurred was complete. Stating that the Germans were in a position to give plausible answers was not only a cynical observation, it was a

752⁶⁹⁸ 'The Chamberlain Cabinet', op. cit., p. 186

program of action. It represented a decision not to be too forthcoming in accusing Germany.

The Cabinet, in possession of the full facts, did not consider ending the policy of appeasement. It had drawn a line and said to Germany: till here and no further. But that line left all of Eastern and Central Europe to Germany (within the request of respecting forms and manners). There was now no intention of redrawing the line and putting it further East.

At the House of Commons, on the same day March 15, 1939⁶⁹⁹, Chamberlain made a mild statement. He gave a version of the events starting with March the 10th. This was exactly the German version which, as did Chamberlain, traced the triggering of the events to a measure taken by the Czechoslovak Government. Chamberlain knew that, before that date, reports had reached the Britain Government that Germany had decided to invade Czechoslovakia. Even if, before the invasion, he might have had doubts concerning the accuracy of the reports, he should not have ignored them now, and should not have presented a version somewhat more favourable to Germany.

Chamberlain then informed the House of a German communiqué and an order issued by Hitler, lingering on the details favourable to Germany. He then added that he had very little reason to doubt the accuracy of the general picture, if not all of its details.

He then said that he 'must deal with three matters which arise out of the circumstances'. The first of the three matters was the British guarantee to Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain reminded the House of a statement made on October 4, 1938 at the House of Commons by Inskip, a Cabinet member:

Until that had been done, technically the guarantee cannot be said to be in force. His Majesty's Government, however, feel under a moral obligation to Czechoslovakia to treat the guarantee *as being now in force*. In the event, therefore, of an act of unprovoked aggression against Czechoslovakia, His Majesty's Government would certainly feel bound to take all steps in their power to see that the integrity of Czechoslovakia is preserved.

After having thus recognised that the guarantee was in force, Chamberlain added:

In our opinion the situation has radically altered since the Slovak Diet declared the independence of Slovakia. The effect of this declaration put an end by *internal disruption* to the State whose frontiers we had proposed to guarantee.. and His Majesty's Government cannot accordingly hold themselves bound by this obligation.

753⁶⁹⁹ Parliamentary Debates, the House of Commons, vol. 345, cols. 435-440

Note that, according to Chamberlain, the change in the situation is not related to any German activity but results from the action of the Slovak Diet. The second matter was that of the financial assistance given to Czechoslovakia. It turned out that part of the credits given to that country were still under the control of the Bank of England, and the Bank had been requested, provisionally, to make no further payment.

The third matter was that of a scheduled visit to Germany by the President of the Board of Trade and the Secretary to the Department of Overseas Trade. Chamberlain informed the House that the Government thought the present moment inappropriate for such a visit. He did not suggest the interruption of ‘discussions which are now proceeding between the representatives of German and British industries. These discussions are still proceeding, and I believe are proceeding in a satisfactory manner’.

Chamberlain ignored so many other matters which deserved attention. What kind of protest, if at all, should the British Government make? Should the annexation of Czechoslovakia by Germany be recognised by Britain? Is there a need to accelerate the rate of British rearmament? Is there a need to provide protection — in the form of guarantees or otherwise — to other small countries in Central or Eastern Europe? Is there a need to form an alliance between all countries interested in preventing any further aggression? Is there a need to warn Germany that the British public opinion would be strongly and negatively affected were the political opponents of Germany in Czechoslovakia to be mistreated. These questions were actual, and, may be, had been answered by what Chamberlain said next. He first expressed regrets at the manner and methods by which Germany had brought about the latest changes. He stated that he did not regard the invasion as being in accord with the spirit of Munich⁷⁰⁰. He then made the following statement:

It is natural, therefore that I should bitterly regret what has now occurred. ***But do not let us on that account be deflected from our course.*** Let us remember that the desire of all the peoples of the world still remain concentrated on the hopes of peace and a return to the atmosphere of understanding and good will which has so often been disturbed. The aim of this Government is now, as it has always been, to promote that desire and to substitute the method of discussion for the method of force in the settlement of differences. Though we may have to suffer checks and disappointments, from time to time, the object that we have in mind is of too great significance to the happiness of mankind for us lightly to give it up or set it on one side.

754⁷⁰⁰ It was Halifax who brought Chamberlain’s attention to the necessity of mentioning that the invasion of Czechoslovakia was against the spirit of Munich, and was the first instance of incorporating a region which was not ethnically German. Chamberlain’s intention was to express no more than regret. He minimized the German aggression by saying that he “thought that the military occupation was symbolic, more than perhaps appeared on the surface”. [Sydney Aster, op. cit., pp 29-30]

Chamberlain was thus saying that there would be no change of policy and that the events of Czechoslovakia were one of those ‘disappointments’ that may still occur ‘from time to time’. He even went farther and said:

The State which under that settlement we hoped might begin a new and more stable career, *has become disintegrated*. The attempt to preserve a State containing Czechs, Slovaks, as well as minorities of other nationalities, *was liable to the same possibilities of change as was the constitution which was drafted when the State was originally framed under the Treaty of Versailles*. And *it has not survived*. That may or may not have been inevitable, and I have so often heard *charges of breach of faith bandied about which did not seem to me to be founded on sufficient premises*, that *I do not wish to associate myself* to-day with any charges of that character.

The reading of this statement is distressing even today. Knowing the extent of Chamberlain’s access to news and intelligence, it is disheartening to see the trouble Chamberlain was taking to absolve Germany instead of plainly stating that Czechoslovakia had been the victim of German manoeuvres and threats which ended with the occupation of the country. In addition, in one sentence, Chamberlain absolved Hitler from all past accusations of violations of treaties and solemn pledges.

Chamberlain had no anxiety with regards to the victims of Nazism. When he saw it fit to accept the German expansion, then the victims did not count. When he would choose later to oppose Germany’s further expansion, he would express his sympathies for the victim of Nazism. This expression of sympathy would, therefore, have a ring of insincerity.

John Simon intervened in defence of Henderson ‘our very competent Ambassador’. It is not possible, Simon said, to predict very sudden action by Germany. Simon, of course, abstained from informing the House of the early intelligence information available to Britain, and to Henderson, which the latter choose to ignore. He then said:

The central tragic thing I would put in a sentence which I observed in, I believe, one of the evening papers, and which was reported to be included in a proclamation or pronouncement of some sort by Herr Goebbels, to whom was attributed the statement issued in Berlin: “The State of Czechoslovakia has ceased to exist.” That is the central tragic thing. It does not require any very technical or precise advice from anybody else for the Prime Minister to make the point — that in that situation it was indeed impossible to suppose that a guarantee to maintain the State of Czechoslovakia could have any meaning at all.

Once an invaded state is declared by the invader as having ceased to exist, any previous guarantee to maintain the invaded State loses any

meaning. And that is all there is to it. In other words, the British guarantee, being liable to lose its meaning, is no guarantee. Simon added it was not in the interest of Britain to extend its commitments in Europe.

Still on March 15, Halifax wrote to Phipps briefing him on a conversation he had with the French ambassador. He wrote⁷⁰¹:

The ambassador then proceeded to make some obvious comments upon the recent action of the German Government, with which I concurred, adding that the one *compensating advantage* that I saw was that it had brought to a *natural end* the somewhat *embarrassing commitment of a guarantee* in which we and the French had both been involved.

Accordingly, murdering a man would be to bring about his 'natural' end! Of course, Halifax did not mean it this way, but one can almost hear the sigh of relief he gave at 'the compensating advantage' which put an end to British embarrassment.

On March 16, 1939, Archibald Sinclair asked Chamberlain in the Commons⁷⁰² whether the Government intended to lodge a protest against the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain replied that he could not answer the question without notice. This was a way of avoiding answering the same day. The following exchange then occurred:

Mr. Noel Baker: Will the Prime Minister represent to the German Government that any attempt to attack the lives or liberties of the leaders of the Czech people will intensify the indignation in this country at their aggression?

The Prime Minister: I think it wrong to assume that the German Government have any such intention.

Chamberlain acted as a most loyal friend of Nazi Germany who cannot accept the expression of a doubt regarding the good intentions of that country. He ignored the fact that, hours after the annexation of Austria, the opponents of Nazism were rounded and subjected to a regime of terror. He had to ignore the latest reports mentioning political arrests in Czechoslovakia. He had to ignore the record of the Nazi regime for more than six years of oppression and persecution.

Ruthenia

On March 17, 1939, Chamberlain took a more aggressive stand. In his speech at Birmingham he bitterly criticised Germany and asked whether the aggression committed against Czechoslovakia was the last or if it would be

755⁷⁰¹ DBFP, series 3, vol. 4, doc. 280, p. 273

756⁷⁰² Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, vol. 345, col. 613

followed by others. He expressed the fear that Germany might be seeking world domination.

Since Chamberlain, Halifax, the Foreign Office and the British Establishment were, as we saw, all prepared to accept Germany's expansion in Central and Eastern Europe, the new stand taken by Chamberlain requests consideration.

We can, from the start, disregard the argument that Chamberlain was distressed that Germany was now, for the first time, occupying a territory devoid of a German majority, devoid even of a German minority of appreciable size. Chamberlain's statements in Cabinet and other meetings, as well as Halifax's letters and reports, made it clear that they expected such events to occur, and did not intend to oppose the steps leading to it.

The brutality of Germany in the execution of the invasion had clearly disturbed Chamberlain and Halifax, if only because 'it does not help'⁷⁰³ the pursuit of the appeasement policy. However, the main details were already known at the time at which Chamberlain, in the Commons, said that the good intentions of Germany should not be doubted. Such a brutality was not new. It had been exerted against Dolfuss and Schushning in Austria. At the time, Chamberlain had also tried to represent the facts in a way less unfavourable to Germany.

There are indications that Halifax and the Foreign Office were aware that the British public opinion would revolt in the absence of a strong stand against Germany. They did press on Chamberlain that the country would become uncontrollable if he would maintain the stand he took on May 15 and 16. There can be no doubts that Chamberlain was at last convinced of the need for a salvage operation with respect to the public opinion.

There are also indications that Halifax, the Foreign Office and many backbenchers in the House have been influenced by the flow of reports indicating the possibility of a German move to the West. The aggressive tone of the German press and of some of Hitler's speeches had its effect on many conservative members of the House. It is in the perspective of the fear of such a German later move westward that the German brutality was, this time, judged.

And then there was the question of Ruthenia.

Ruthenia, which, before World War I, belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was that part of Czechoslovakia mostly inhabited by a population of Ukrainian origin. Ruthenians in Czechoslovakia numbered less than a million. Poland had a minority of over six millions Ukrainians and Ruthenians. Germany had no Ukrainian minority to speak of.

At Munich time, Poland occupied the territory of Teschen which had been a region of contention between her and Czechoslovakia. Hungary requested from Germany the permission to occupy Ruthenia. The permission was denied.

⁷⁵⁷⁷⁰³ The reference here is to Channon. He expressed the feeling of many.

Much speculation was raised at Munich time concerning Germany's refusal of a Ruthenian award to Hungary. Why should Germany oppose an Hungarian ambition, the realisation of which would cost Germany nothing? It was universally thought that Germany intended to use Ruthenia as a base of agitation for an independent Ukraine which would mainly include the Soviet Ukraine.

Poland was very adverse to such a project. She feared that any encouragement to Ukrainian nationalism may cause difficulties with her large Ukrainian minority. She therefore encouraged Hungary in her demand for Ruthenia. Poland wanted to have a common boundary with Hungary. This would be realised by awarding Ruthenia to Hungary. It would, at the same time, remove that region from direct German control and quench the activity of the Ruthenian nationalists

It was also evident that such an award would eliminate the common boundary between Czechoslovakia, now a vassal country of Germany, and Rumania. It would put an additional obstacle in Germany's path to the East.

Germany's opposition to the award was interpreted as a sure sign of her aggressive intentions towards Soviet Ukraine. It seemed to confirm a German will to move Eastward, and not Westwards.

In the previous chapter, Coulondre was quoted explaining, on December 15, 1938, that Germany's renunciation to go West, as exemplified by her agreements of Munich and of December 6, 1938, had, as a corollary, her expansion to the East. He then said that Germany's action in favour of independence in Ukraine would be focused on Ruthenia.

On the night of March 17, 1939, there could be no doubt that Germany had agreed to reverse her position on Ruthenia and had authorised Hungary to occupy that region. The significance of this step could not escape Chamberlain. Feiling⁷⁰⁴ was partly right when, commenting on a letter by Henderson dated March 2, 1938, he mentioned among the disturbing factors of the time:

...signs that Hitler was preparing to go back on his previous award; in lieu of which he would throw Ruthenia to Hungary, abandon the project of a Ukraine State, and seek larger compensation at the expense of Poland and Russia.

The disturbing feature was indeed that of throwing Ruthenia to Hungary and abandoning the project of an Ukraine State. The fear was not that Hitler would seek larger compensation at the expense of Poland and Russia. Nobody expected that Germany would seek or need larger expansion than that afforded by the Ukraine. It was however feared that abandoning the Ukraine, as would be indicated by the award of Ruthenia to Hungary, meant a change of direction from East to West in Germany's intended move. It is therefore interesting to establish the moment at which the British authorities

758⁷⁰⁴ Op. cit., p. 399

had reached the certitude that Ruthenia had been abandoned by Germany to Hungary.

The significance of a German disinterest in Ruthenia was universally understood. In a memo written on July 27, 1939, Schnurre, from the German Foreign Office in Berlin recorded a conversation he had with Astakhov, the Soviet Chargé d' Affaires. He wrote⁷⁰⁵:

After describing our commercial relations with the Baltic States, I confined myself to the statement that, in any case, no German-Russian clash of interests would result from all these questions. Moreover, *the solution of the Carpatho-Ukrainian question had shown that here we did not aim at anything there that would endanger Soviet interests.*

Carpatho-Ukraine is the alternative name given to Ruthenia by the Germans. The relation between Germany's disinterest in the region and the absence of aggressive intentions towards the Soviet Union is considered obvious by Germany, as it should be indeed.

On March 16, 1938, a session in the House of Commons for oral answers started at 2:45 in the afternoon. Answering a question by Attlee, Chamberlain said⁷⁰⁶:

As regards Ruthenia, I understand that the Ruthenian Premier broadcast a statement from Chust on the evening of 14th March, to the effect that steps had been taken to establish the independence of the province, that a provisional government had been formed and that the Ruthenian Diet would meet on 15th March. His Majesty's Minister in Budapest reported yesterday, however, that the Hungarian Government had addressed a further ultimatum to the Ruthenian Government which expired at eight o'clock last night, demanding that, in order to avoid bloodshed, their powers should be handed over to the officer commanding Hungarian troops in Ruthenia.

The situation in Ruthenia was still confused. There were no indications as to the acceptance or rejection of the Hungarian ultimatum. No news had arrived after expiration of the ultimatum. Chamberlain, in spite of intelligence reports to this effect, could not yet know with certitude if Ruthenia would be allowed by Germany to remain a formally independent state vassal to Germany, or would be awarded to Hungary.

In the first case it would have meant that the plans for a conquest of the Soviet Ukraine were on track and the West could feel safe for the moment. In the second case, it would have confirmed the flow of past news indicating a German move Westwards. It is established that at about three o'clock on

759⁷⁰⁵ DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 729, p. 1008

760⁷⁰⁶ Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, vol. 345, col. 613

March 16, 1939, Chamberlain was not yet sure of Ruthenia's fate. At the same time, the stand of the British Prime Minister, had been very soft.

At 15:30 the same day, the Foreign Office received a message from Budapest⁷⁰⁷ to the effect that the Hungarian Prime Minister announced in the Parliament that the Hungarian forces were proceeding to occupy Ruthenia. No word was given as to Germany's stand.

The next day, on March 17, 1939, at 19:30, a telegram from Budapest⁷⁰⁸ was received by Halifax informing him that the German ambassador to Hungary conveyed to the British ambassador Germany's disinterest in Ruthenia. This seems to have been the first indication received in Britain from an official source as to the German position concerning Ruthenia. The significance of the German occupation of Czechoslovakia was thus taking a sinister twist with respect to the West.

The same day on March 17, 1939, at 20:50, eighty minutes after receiving the above news, Halifax sent to Henderson a telegram in which he said⁷⁰⁹:

Please inform German Government that His Majesty's Government desires to make it plain to them that they cannot but regard the events of the past few days as a complete repudiation of the Munich Agreement and a denial of the spirit in which the negotiations of that agreement bound themselves to cooperate for a peaceful settlement.

His Majesty's Government must also take this occasion to protest against the changes effected in Czechoslovakia by German military action, which are in their view *devoid of any basis of legality*.

To appreciate the suddenness of the change in tone Britain was now using with Germany, it is interesting to quote a memo written by Weizsacker, the German Secretary of State, on March 17, 1939, on a visit made by Henderson to him, apparently before Henderson received the quoted letter from Halifax. Weizsacker wrote⁷¹⁰:

The British Ambassador took leave of me today before going to London tomorrow to report. He informed me of the feeling which was developing in London as a result of the present solution of the Czecho-Slovak question and he sounded me for arguments which he could give Chamberlain for use against the latter's political opposition at home⁷¹¹.

761⁷⁰⁷ DBFP, series 3, vol. 4, doc. 286, p. 277

762⁷⁰⁸ DBFP, series 3, vol. 4, doc. 305, p. 290

763⁷⁰⁹ DBFP, series 3, vol 4, doc. 308, p. 291

764⁷¹⁰ DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 16 pp. 16-17

765⁷¹¹ Next day, Weizsacker added a supplement to his memo to the effect that Henderson affirmed that there was no direct British interest in Czecho-Slovakia His anxieties were for the

Henderson did not yet feel that the bond uniting Hitler and Chamberlain in their common aim had been completely destroyed.

On the night of March 17, after Chamberlain had cognition of the German position over Ruthenia, he abandoned his soft stand and delivered his now famous Birmingham speech. There are strong indications that only in the last minute did Chamberlain decide to take the new stand. He did not have time to rewrite a speech he had prepared earlier⁷¹². He had, the day before, long discussions with Halifax who was in possession of the latest news and was aware of the mood prevalent in the Commons and in the country. On March 17 Harold Nicolson entered the following in his diary⁷¹³:

The feeling in the lobbies is that Chamberlain will either have to go or completely reverse his policy. Unless in his speech tonight he admits that he was wrong, they feel that resignation is the only alternative. All the tadpoles are beginning to swim into the other camp.. .The idea is that Halifax should become Prime Minister and Eden Leader of the House.

Leonard Mosley⁷¹⁴ describes the discussion Chamberlain had with Wilson and which resulted in the tearing of the speech they had prepared together. It mentioned that Wilson, with his spies in the Parliament, had sensed the spirit of revolt against Chamberlain and the tendency to replace him as Prime Minister,

Wilson, in all likelihood, might have told Chamberlain that he had just learned that Germany had awarded Ruthenia to Hungary. It is a fact that the modified, and more aggressive, speech of Chamberlain, was delivered just after it became certain that Germany had expressed her disinterest in Ruthenia in favour of Hungary.

This could be a coincidence. Astute observers had realised before the 17th that Germany was disinterested in the matter of Ruthenia. It may well be that, faced with the prevailing mood of revolt in the conservative ranks, and forced to modify his stand, Chamberlain was ready to find additional justification for his reversal of policy. It would be hard for him to admit that he had to submit to the mood of the House. It would have been easier to accept that the flow of news indicating a possible German move to the West were, after all, reliable. He may have felt betrayed by Hitler who proved to have little regard for the difficulties his ruthless methods were creating for

future. What now happened cannot be labelled "self-determination" We were on the road to territorial expansion of power. After the elimination of Czecho-Slovakia everyone was asking "What next?" Henderson expressed his fear that the Anglo-German relations may evolve away from an understanding and end up in a collision if the policy represented by Chamberlain were not adhered to.

766⁷¹² 'The Life of Neville Chamberlain', op. cit., p. 400

767⁷¹³ Harold Nicolson, op. cit., p. 393

768⁷¹⁴ op. cit., pp. 180-181

Chamberlain. Hitler, therefore was no longer reliable. Could he be relied upon to go East, exclusively? Probably not.

In such a case, he could take the position that he, Chamberlain, had been right all the time. Germany should be appeased, as long as she was not seeking to dominate the world. Now for the first time, he could say, the occupation of a non-German country raised such suspicions. He was once more back on the high grounds of morality. Only the few, knowledgeable of his Cabinet statements, could tell how misleading this stand was.

Crossing The Rubicon

On March 17, 1939, the reversal of policy was very restricted. It consisted mainly in denouncing the German invasion of Czechoslovakia and defending the past policy of Munich. Not a word was said in favour of collective security. Chamberlain explicitly rejected the extension of British commitments in Europe. Two weeks later, on March 31, Britain granted Poland a unilateral guarantee against any German aggressive move which Poland would feel obligated to resist. This guarantee was not only a complete change in the British foreign policy but appeared to have been granted suddenly and, according to the military experts, recklessly.

On March 15, Chamberlain still intended to go on with his policy of reaching an 'understanding' with Germany. Earlier, confronted with intelligence information warning of a German move against the West, he opined that those were emergency plans made by Hitler in case Britain would interfere with Germany's expansion in the East.

If this view was correct, and Chamberlain would never concede he was wrong, and now that Germany invaded Czechoslovakia, Britain had to choose one of two options.

To be safe, Britain could abstain from interfering with this latest aggression, except for a formal mild protest for internal consumption. That is what Chamberlain endeavoured to do on March 15. However, he was forced to modify his stand under the risk of a revolt in the commons that could have led to his replacement as Prime Minister, possibly, as the result of Ruthenia being awarded to Hungary.

Having been obliged to 'interfere' in Germany's plans in the East, Chamberlain knew that, his credibility with Germany was lost. He could no longer assume for the Germans the role of a leader master of the situation and able to impose his own policies of 'appeasement'. The demonstration had been made to Germany that the British public opinion could get out of hand. Germany could therefore no longer move to the East relying on an acquiescing West. An attack against the West as predicted by the British intelligence, became more likely, even in Chamberlain's views.

The invasion of Czechoslovakia did not signal to Chamberlain Germany's will for world domination. The radical alteration of the situation and the reorientation of Germany's strategy resulted more from the fact that,

in spite of his good intentions for Germany, Chamberlain could not prevent his first tough step on March 17 from gathering momentum.

It was impossible for Britain not to take now all military precautions and not to speedily proceed with rearmament. Furthermore, once the likelihood of a conflict in the West was accepted, any German move to the East acquired an important strategic significance with respect to an eventual conflict in the West. It became essential for Britain and France to develop a front of resistance to Germany's expansion in whatever direction. This front would, increasingly, take the form of collective security.

Each defensive move from the West would strengthen Germany's resolve to move aggressively Westward. It would also produce the normal series of accusations and counter-accusations between Germany and the Western countries, constantly worsening the atmosphere and justifying an increase in defence measures, on the diplomatic as well as on the military front.

While still hoping that he might put back on track the British policy for an understanding with Germany, Chamberlain was aware that his hold on the situation had become precarious. Even if he could re-establish his personal influence, it was liable to disappear again, were Germany to recourse once more to force or commit an act repulsive to the British public opinion. He therefore had to follow two parallel tracks of policy. On the one hand he had to face the real possibility of a conflict with Germany, while still trying to reach an agreement with her.

Chamberlain knew that Germany was doubting his ability 'to deliver'. He thought that Germany had prepared plans for a 'knockout' blow against Britain and France, as a precaution against a possible interference from Britain in her plans of expansion Eastward. In his view, it was necessary to make Britain immune against such a blow by developing her defence capabilities. However, in order to complement the policy of 'appeasement' which included a free hand to Germany in the East, it was necessary to give Germany a sense of security with regards to Britain's intentions towards her.

It was essential for the success of Chamberlain's policy that he succeed in fulfilling two requirements. He had to prevent Britain from developing the capability for intervening in Europe, and he had to be sufficiently in control of British public opinion so as to prevent a great outcry each time Germany achieved one of her aims eastward.

Germany understood. She thought that by forcing the dismembering of Czechoslovakia by a decision of the Slovak Diet for independence and by extolling the signature of the Czechoslovak president on a document asking the Reich protection over Czechoslovakia, she had given Chamberlain the means he needed to do his job: plausible explanations for the invasion. Chamberlain understood it that way and, indeed, qualified Germany's version as plausible.

Chamberlain was willing and tried to be understanding with respect to Germany in his interventions in the House of Commons on March 15 and 16.

He had, however to abandon this stand but could not do it without producing a snowball effect.

Germany was about to lose patience with Chamberlain concerning his ability to remain in control. The events of Czechoslovakia had been a test, and Chamberlain, in Germany's eyes, had failed the test poorly. The German reaction to that failure, would make it harder on Chamberlain to take any corrective measure. And so each action of Germany would produce a reaction from Britain which, in turn, would lead Germany to proceed with earlier plans prepared for such an eventuality.

It so turned out that Chamberlain, having taken a tougher stand on March 17, 1939, had crossed the Rubicon. While, under the new circumstances he agreed to speed up the British defence and modify the British outlook on the strategic value of the East, and he would, in time, even accept British military involvement on the continent, he did not lose the hope of reaching again a secret agreement with Germany. This time, he would base his renewed endeavour on the British military power as a deterrent, and continue to resist pressure to offer cabinet seats to irreducible opponents of 'appeasement'⁷¹⁵ such as Churchill and Eden.

An examination of the military situation convinced the British politicians of the importance, in case of conflict, to impose on Germany a war on two fronts. Ian Colvin, describing a Cabinet meeting on March 18, 1939, wrote⁷¹⁶:

They agreed on the importance in a war of compelling Germany to fight on two fronts;.. Mr Hore-Belisha favoured "frank and open alliances" with Poland and Russia and "steps vastly to increase our military strength".. "Germany had just seized in Czechoslovakia the complete equipment of 38 infantry and 8 mobile divisions".

The Prime Minister "thought that *Poland was very likely to be the key of the situation*.. Our communication to Poland should probably go further than to other countries.."

Mr Walter Elliot thought it "most important to get in touch with Russia".. "*On the whole an attack in the West was more likely than an attack in the East.*"

The Prime Minister referred to the draft declaration before the Cabinet as "aimed at avoiding specific commitments".. "the real issue was that if Germany showed signs that she intended to proceed with her march for world domination, *we must take steps to stop her by attacking her on two fronts.*"

⁷⁶⁹⁷¹⁵ Eden was a proponent of appeasement. He differed from Chamberlain in his lack of trust in 'the dictators'. He did not trust that Germany would exclusively 'look' eastward. In Germany, he was considered to be a main opponent to Chamberlain's policy of appeasement.

⁷⁷⁰⁷¹⁶ 'The Chamberlain Cabinet', p. 189

At the time, it was thought that the danger spot was Roumania. Nevertheless, Poland was to be 'the key' to the situation.

A guarantee to Poland would be the means by which a second front would be created. On the one hand it was expected that Poland would reciprocate the unilateral British guarantee. In this way the real aim, a guarantee of Britain by Poland would be achieved, and that would ensure the opening of a second front in case of conflict. On the other hand, it was likely that, as a result of the challenge to Germany constituted by the British guarantee, Germany's next move might be against Poland instead of being against Britain.

Slowly Progressing Towards Collective Security

The first indications of a change in British Policy occurred on March 17. In his night speech in Birmingham, Chamberlain raised doubts concerning the possibility of trusting the German leaders. He raised the question as to whether the invasion of Czechoslovakia was part of a German endeavour at world domination. He did not answer it.

A second indication can be found in the strong wording used in the British protest Halifax sent on March 17 to Henderson, for delivery to the German Government⁷¹⁷. A better indication is given on March 17, 1939, by Halifax's candid letter to Lindsay, the British Ambassador to the U.S. In it, Halifax is explaining the reasons for possible upcoming changes in the British Foreign Policy. Halifax wrote⁷¹⁸:

For many years a conflict had been proceeding between two conceptions. *One* had been that which based itself upon the view taken by many people that the best way to avoid trouble was to rally all the forces of order and peace and announce in advance a joint decision to resist any violation of either. This conception had expressed itself in different forms; up to a point in the Covenant, more precisely, I suppose, in the Geneva Protocol, and generally in the various suggestions made from time to time for some organization for what was loosely termed collective security. *The other* conception was that of seeking to avoid trouble by the avoidance of commitments, and by the attempt to keep out of any possible conflict *unless the country concerned was itself the object of attack*. The judgement at which anybody arrived as between these two alternatives naturally depended very greatly upon the estimate he formed upon the probabilities or otherwise of his own country being the object of direct attack. *If he rated the probabilities in the case of his own country low*, the

771⁷¹⁷ DBFP, series 3, vol. 4, doc. 308, p. 291. The protest was sent at 8:50 p.m., two hours exactly after Halifax received confirmation from the British Ambassador in Budapest of German disinterest in Ruthenia in favour of Hungary.

772⁷¹⁸ DBFP, series 3, vol. 4, doc. 394, pp. 364-366

inclination naturally would be to prefer that low estimate of probability of direct attack to the chances of embroilment in other people's quarrels. ***If, on the other hand, the chances of direct attack loomed more large***, the advantages of general co-operation required to be more carefully weighted. ***I had little doubt that recent events would have the result of leading many people to examine afresh the latter method of seeking to gain security.***

Halifax is describing the choice between the two policies, that of 'no commitment' and that of 'collective security', as having a single motivation: the estimate of a direct attack against Britain. There is no moral consideration in this motivation, no particular desire of working for peace. The only thing that matters is to keep out of embroilment in "other's people quarrels".

Applied on Britain's particular situation in the thirties, it translates into the following: Britain's estimate of a direct attack against her by Germany was low. Germany was more likely to direct her aggressive moves toward the East of Europe, and end up conquering Ukraine. The West being safe, Britain should endeavour to keep out of Germany's way. It is the estimate of a low probability of the German threat to Britain, and not her state of military weakness, which was at the root of the policy of no commitments in the East. To work for peace was identified with keeping Britain out of war. This would have been easier if Germany's move were facilitated so as to take the appearance of necessary and justified moves. In such a case the British opinion would have no difficulty approving a policy of non-involvement⁷¹⁹.

According to Halifax's understanding of what determined Britain's policy, she would have still kept out of the way of Germany in the latter's moves against Czechoslovakia and Poland. The only factor, according to Halifax, which could reverse the British policy, would be a change in the estimate of the probability of a German direct attack against her.

⁷¹⁹ Halifax's statement is simplistic. It is easier to keep a country out of war when all countries are safe from war, rather than when an aggressor is given a free hand in a large part of the world. To keep Britain out of war in a troubled world was therefore a dangerous gamble. Would the gamble fail, and Britain could possibly lose her Empire and fall under German domination.

⁷¹⁴ What made the gamble still more dangerous is that while, according to Halifax, a low estimate of the German threat to Britain resulted in a policy of no commitments, and while a high estimate of that threat would lead to a policy of collective security, one important consideration was totally lacking. The estimate of the German threat could have changed within a single hour from low to high. On the other hand, the building of a system of collective security might take months or even years. It even may have been impeded by the distrust generated by the previous policy of no commitments. This latter policy was therefore representing a greater gamble than would at first appear. Halifax does not explain why Britain should have gambled with its life when it was possible 'to play it safe'. He does not indicate the role played by the fear of communism as a main motivation for the policy of appeasement.

⁷¹⁵ Moreover, a low estimate for a German aggression against the West resulted in condoning Germany's expansion in the East. Each such expansion improved the strategic military balance between Germany and the West to Germany's advantage. The gamble was becoming increasingly more dangerous.

Halifax stated that such a revision of policy was likely. This indicated that the process for such a revision of the German threat of a direct attack against Britain had started. The fact that Britain had come to terms with the German expansion in the East indicated that the invasion of Czechoslovakia was, by itself, no reason for Britain to modify her policy. In fact, Chamberlain had anticipated this invasion and, when it occurred, reacted very mildly. He even clearly stated his firm intention to continue his policy of appeasement.

However, by March 17, the situation had changed. That meant that the German danger must have acquired a new aspect within the two days separating the 15th from the 17th. That new aspect, be it the implications of German disinterest from Ruthenia, or be it that of the change in mood of the British population⁷²⁰, forced Britain to be more concerned with Germany's future moves, even if directed Eastward.

A move by Germany Eastward, as a prelude to her move Westward, would now constitute a danger against Britain. The absence of such a move would even be more dangerous. Germany would be a greater threat if she could attack the West without having to defend an Eastern front. Halifax wrote to Phipps (Paris) on March 20, 1939⁷²¹:

1. In spite of doubts as to the accuracy of reports of German ultimatum to Roumania, recent German absorption of Czechoslovakia show clearly that German Government are resolved to go beyond their hitherto avowed aim of consolidation of German race. They have now extended their conquest to another nation and *if this should prove to be* part of a definite policy of domination there is no state in Europe which is not directly or ultimately threatened.

Halifax was not yet sure that the invasion of Czechoslovakia was part of a German policy to challenge the Western sphere of influence (world domination). His hesitation as to Germany's real intentions explains the persistence in later attempts at ascertaining from Germany if it was still possible to put back on track the appeasement policy. Halifax continued:

776⁷²⁰ It was thought that Germany in her expansion Eastward requested security in the West. Germany would leave the West 'in peace' only if the West were to give no reason to Germany to fear a western involvement in Germany's expansion Eastward. The proof of Western good behaviour was expected to be given by an absence of 'offensive' rearmament and a reasonable control of the West public opinion. A failure to check the British public opinion raised for Germany the threat of a change in the British Government that could topple Chamberlain. Germany might be tempted to preventively 'act' against the West, even before the fall of the Chamberlain Cabinet. This would be the more likely since Chamberlain, in an effort to remain in the good grace of the public opinion, might be forced to exhibit a more aggressive stand with regard to Germany.

777⁷²¹ DBFP, series 3, vol. 4, doc. 446, p. 400

2. In the circumstances thus created it seems to His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom to be desirable to proceed without delay to the organisation of mutual support on the part of all those who realise the necessity of protecting international society from further violation of fundamental laws on which it rests.

Britain was starting to think in terms of collective security. It was not yet Churchill's idea of a 'grand alliance', ridiculed by Chamberlain a year earlier. For the moment all that Britain would suggest was a declaration by Britain, France Poland and the Soviet Union that in the case of a threat to the independence of any European State these four countries 'hereby undertake immediately to consult together as to what steps should be taken to offer joint resistance to any such action'.

Though the proposed declaration was still quite weak⁷²², it signalled a noticeable departure from past British stands.

The Unilateral Guarantee To Poland

On March 17, Ivone Kirkpatrick wrote⁷²³:

The knowledge we possess of Herr Hitler's character and our experience of his methods makes it humanly certain that the present coup will be followed by a brief or very brief lull during which *the optimists* will tell us that Hitler has renounced his evil ways and that in consequence we have nothing to fear. It is during this period that public opinion, whom the Government have to consider, are difficult to move. Consequently if action to meet the German menace is to be taken a move should be made *whilst the public are still under the influence of the latest coup*.

Accordingly there is no time to lose.

Kirkpatrick was mistaken on more than one count. In the past, the optimists had been represented inside the Cabinet as well as outside. These previous optimists now had doubts that Hitler would first go East. While not renouncing such hope there was a recognised urgency among them to face the eventuality of a sudden German move Westwards. The British people was ready for a tough policy against aggression, the ex-optimists were not prepared to resume their 'appeasement' policy without launching an all-round effort at improving the strategic situation of the West. Indeed, there was no time to lose, not because the fear of a softening of the public opinion,

778⁷²² The declaration was at first much weaker. It did not threaten the prospective aggressor with anything more than 'consultations' between the signatories, The declaration was toughened to meet French objections.

779⁷²³ Simon Newman, 'March 1939: The British Guarantee to Poland', Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1976, p. 106

but because of the fear of being unprepared with regard of a possible German surprise move to the West.

Poland, at that point, became the focus of British attention. Before examining the new British policy towards Poland we should take note of an event which characterise the British stand towards Poland before the occupation of Prague. Anita Prazmowska wrote⁷²⁴:

On 1 December 1938 Chodacki reported the rapid deterioration of relations between the Polish and German communities in the city [Danzig]. On 9 December Strang informed Raczynski, the Polish Ambassador in London, of Halifax's intention to seek the withdrawal of League protection from the city by 16 January. On Beck's request the League postponed its decision. Thus the Poles saw Britain as trying to rid herself of an embarrassing commitment not because they, the British, thought it unnecessary, but primarily because developments in the Free City seemed to forecast a major international crisis. Furthermore, Polish politicians feared that the sole reason why Britain appeared to be trying to distance herself from the Danzig issue was because she felt that it was getting in the way of general settlement of Germany. It was suspected that Polish interests were being sacrificed in the name of Britain's European policy

The main lines of the new British policy with respect to Poland, can be discerned in the discussion on March 21, 1939, between a French delegation comprised of Bonnet, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, and his private secretary, with, on the British side, Halifax and Strang⁷²⁵.

Lord Halifax said that he had received the Polish Ambassador that morning and had told him of the approach that was being made in Paris, Warsaw and Moscow. To illustrate the point of view of His Majesty's Government he had told the Ambassador that *if Mr. Beck were to say to him*: 'You invite us to side with you in the event of a German aggression. What have you to say about Danzig?' he would reply that if Poland and Germany were to come to a direct agreement about Danzig, so much the better; but if there should develop out of the Danzig question any threat to the independence of Poland, then, in his opinion, and, he thought, in that of His Majesty's Government, His Majesty's Government would have to treat it as a grave question which was of concern to all.

Halifax was asking Poland to side with the West in case of a German aggression. The threatened quarter, he considered, was the West and not Poland. Halifax went to the extent of offering a bait to Poland. Though

780⁷²⁴ Anita Prazmowska, 'Britain Poland and the Eastern front, 1939'. Cambridge University Press, London, 1987, p. 35

781⁷²⁵ DBFP, series 3, vol. 4, doc. 458, pp. 422-427

Danzig was a city with a mainly German population, Britain, concerning Danzig, would stand with Poland, provided Poland would stand with the West. Halifax added:

His Majesty's Government thought that it was now a question of checking German aggression, whether against France or Great Britain, or Holland, or Switzerland, or Roumania, or Poland, or Yougoslavia, or whoever it might be. They saw no escape from this.

Besides countries bordering Germany, others such as Roumania and Britain, with no boundaries with her, were also mentioned. The Soviet Union was not mentioned among the possible victims which had to be protected against a German aggression. It could be argued that Germany could hardly attack the Soviet Union without attacking Poland or Roumania. This argument is incorrect. Germany could attack the Soviet Union with the co-operation of one of these two countries. Halifax himself would, a few months later, tell his French colleagues that Britain would be reluctant to guarantee the Soviet Union in precisely such an eventuality. The document proceeds:

Lord Halifax then asked M. Bonnet whether the French Government saw the situation in much the same way as this.

M. Bonnet replied that in general they did. One thing, however, *was capital*. It *was absolutely essential* to get Poland in. Russian help would only be effective if Poland were collaborating. If Poland collaborated, Russia could give very great assistance; if not, Russia could give much less. *The strongest pressure* must therefore be brought to bear upon Poland.

France was more vulnerable than Britain to a German attack. She was therefore less reluctant to rely on a possible Russian help and considered it very important. Halifax did not see it useful to argue the matter right then:

Lord Halifax said that he was entirely of M. Bonnet's opinion. Did not M. Bonnet think that if Great Britain and France took the view that in their own interest it was essential to stop German aggression, wherever it might start, Poland might also be brought to think that *it would not be to her interest to see Great Britain and France greatly weakened? If they were greatly weakened*, Poland would then be defenceless against Germany.

The scenario envisaged by Halifax, and which he proposed to present to the Polish leaders, was that of an aggression against the West weakening them. It is still clear that, as of March 21, the danger spot was still the Western front. Poland was to be attracted to the West side to avoid the prospect of a defeated west leaving Poland in an awkward situation.

Such an argument would not be sufficient to convince Poland. More had to be done. The document added:

Lord Halifax said that he would have thought, though the question required careful consideration, that if France and Great Britain were prepared to take a very firm line, *even without the certainty of Polish support at the outset*, this very fact would be likely to bring Poland in.

Here was the justification for a unilateral guarantee of Poland. The motivation was the West's fear of a German attack against them. Poland would be needed to create an Eastern front.

On March 22, 1939, Leger briefed Campbell (Paris) about the French stand concerning the German occupation of Memel⁷²⁶. We quote Campbell:

..it was incumbent upon us to concern ourselves in the first place with matters which definitely affected that balance and, therefore, our vital interests. He did not consider that Memel fell into this category. Its possession by Germany *would not materially increase her strength or her capacity to wage war against France and Great Britain*. It was because Roumania could supply Germany with the means of carrying on such a war (means which she at present lacked), that it was necessary to protect that country.

It is not the desire to prevent small nations from becoming victims of Nazism which would motivate Britain and France to protect them. What mattered were strategic considerations with respect to Germany's capacity of waging war in the West. This factor now so important was of no consideration for Britain as long as she trusted that Germany would 'look' Eastward.

On March 24 Halifax reported to Kennard (Warsaw) a conversation he had with the Polish Ambassador. Poland requested a confidential agreement between her and Britain for a common reaction against a German attack on Poland. Halifax enquired on the reciprocal nature of such a 'gentleman agreement'. The indication by the Polish ambassador that such might be the case, was not satisfactory.

On March 28, Halifax sent to Sir R. Lindsay, the British Ambassador in the U.S. a message to be delivered to the U.S. President. He said⁷²⁷:

3. It is important to Germany to avoid a war on two fronts, and her recent behaviour has stiffened the attitude at any rate of Poland and created strong apprehension in other countries in Central and Eastern Europe. It is Germany's purpose gradually to neutralize these countries, to deprive them of their power to

782⁷²⁶ DBFP, series 3, vol. 4, doc. 493, p. 468

783⁷²⁷ DBFP, series 3, vol. 4, doc. 549, pp. 526-528

resist, and to incorporate them in the German economic system. When this has been done, *the way will have been prepared for an attack on the Western European powers.*

In October 1938, Halifax was telling Kennedy, the U.S. Ambassador in London that Britain should mind her own business even if Germany decides to move into Roumania. In November 1938, Halifax wrote to Phipps (Paris) that Central and Eastern Europe should be Germany's domain while the West should hold on the Mediterranean and the Middle-East.

On March 28, 1939, the situation was much different. The free hand given to Germany had been retracted when Germany decided to put in cold storage her move against Ukraine. That meant that the West was to be Germany's next aim. There was no indication in Halifax's message to Lindsay of a specific, imminent German threat against Poland, nor of a British moral motivation for the defence of small countries against aggression. Halifax reveals the two main British concerns: the first is that by getting rid of pressure in the East, Germany would have cleared the way for advancing Westward. The second concern is the necessity of having an Eastern front, since it was recognised by Britain that Germany could not make war on two fronts

A meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy was held on March 27, 1939. We quote from the minutes as given by Ian Colvin⁷²⁸:

Chamberlain.. proceeded to enlarge on the importance of Roumania strategically both for her oil and as shielding the flank of Poland herself. He adumbrated a mutual arrangement between Britain and France, Poland and Roumania which would offer reciprocal aid if Hitler attacked *anywhere in the West*. Roumania was needed *because* "control of that country by Germany would go far to neutralize an effective naval blockade.. Poland was vital in the scheme, *because* the weak point of Germany was her present inability to conduct war on two fronts, and unless Poland was with us, Germany would be able to avoid this contingency."

Chamberlain made it clear that Roumania and Poland were to be two pawns in the plans for the defence of the West. There is no indication that otherwise, were these two countries solely to be threatened, Britain would have, for the sake of helping a victim, involved herself in any defence plans.

There were differences of opinion as to the inclusion of the Soviet Union in the defence schemes. Chamberlain underlined the fact that, apart from the Roumanian and Polish reluctance, Italy, Spain and Portugal would then be against us. The decision was therefore taken to prefer Poland over the Soviet Union. Ian Colvin remarked⁷²⁹:

784⁷²⁸ 'The Chamberlain Cabinet', pp. 192-193

785⁷²⁹ 'The Chamberlain Cabinet', p. 193

Thus once more an irrevocable step was being taken after an unrecorded Sunday meeting, at which the critical argument had been whether to build upon Russia, or upon the assortment of states that lay between her and Germany. Once more the decision had been taken by very few minds, had been presented to the Foreign Policy Committee as an adopted plan, and would be told to the Cabinet when finalized.

On March 18, 1939, the Chiefs of Staff gave their opinion on the military situation⁷³⁰. They agreed that Germany's control of Roumania would give her immunity against an economic blockade. They said that it would be impossible to prevent Germany from going South East and reach the Mediterranean. The only hope would be to attack Germany on the West. This would fail unless Germany was engaged in two fronts.

The Chiefs of staff then considered three different contingencies. The Eastern front against Germany could be constituted by either the Soviet Union and Poland, or by both. Only in the latter case would there be a chance of success, and a possible deterrence action, by issuing an ultimatum to Germany warning her against intervening in Roumania.

A single country in the East would not constitute enough of a deterrent. However, if a choice had to be made between having the Soviet Union as an ally, without Poland or, alternatively, to have Poland as an ally, without the Soviet Union, the General Staff said that with the Soviet Union as an ally the prospects would be better.

The Chiefs of Staff gave no indication that the military situation had improved relatively to what it was in September 1938. The worst case would be a conflict restricted to the West. The second worst would be a conflict without an alliance with the Soviet Union.

On March 27, 1939, at a meeting of the Cabinet Foreign Policy Committee, Chamberlain expressed his readiness to give Poland an unilateral guarantee. Simon Newman quotes the minutes⁷³¹:

Chamberlain thought that the British scheme would appeal to Poland in her own interests. There were, however, doubts as to whether Poland would in fact agree to all conditions attached to the British offer of support, and in particular to the two conditions that Poland must help 'if Great Britain or France were attacked by Germany, or if they went to war with Germany to resist German aggression anywhere in Western Europe or Yugoslavia. Therefore said Chamberlain, 'if Poland declined to enter a commitment of this kind then nevertheless we should be prepared to give her the unilateral assurance as regards the Eastern Front seeing that our object [is] to check Germany's attempt at world domination'

Halifax commented:

786⁷³⁰ Simon Newman, op. cit., pp. 119-120

787⁷³¹ Simon Newman, op. cit., pp. 151-154

..there was probably no way in which France and ourselves could prevent Poland and Romania from being overrun. We were faced with the dilemma of doing nothing, or entering into a devastating war. If we did nothing this in itself would mean a great accession to Germany's strength and a great loss to ourselves of sympathy and support in the United States, in the Balkan countries, and in other parts of the world. In those circumstances if we had to choose between two great evils he favoured our going to war.

Britain would not be so candid in conversations with Poland. On March 28, 1939, the Chiefs of Staff were asked to report on the military implication of a guarantee to Roumania and Poland assuming a neutral, but friendly, attitude of the Soviet Union. The Chiefs of Staff, while confirming that 'the existence of an Eastern front for Germany depended on Poland being in the war, issued a warning⁷³²

*We are not in a position to assess the deterrent effect of such a Pact upon Germany, but an important military implication is that if such a pact were to encourage an intransigent attitude on the part of Poland and Rumania it would thereby **tend to precipitate a European war before our forces are in any prepared for it, and such a war might be started by aggression against Danzig alone.***

On March 29, 1939 Beck was reported⁷³³ as being still 'on the fence' free to side with the West, or to remain benevolently neutral towards Germany. It was the French opinion that Beck intended to ask for a British guarantee in the certitude that it would be refused to him. This would allow him to side with Germany.

Poland, if she was to reach an agreement with Germany was sure to lose Danzig in the bargain. A deal with Britain that would not include a guarantee to Danzig would give Poland no additional advantage. It was clear that unless the British guarantee included Danzig Poland would slip to the German side. However, a guarantee to Poland, with the inclusion of Danzig, was sure to unlatch war with Germany.

The proposal for a unilateral guarantee to Poland was discussed at a Cabinet meeting on March 30, 1939. Halifax listed seven objections that could be raised against the proposal:

w No reciprocity

w risk of upsetting the prospects of direct agreement between Germany and Poland

788⁷³² Simon Newman, op. cit., p. 155

789⁷³³ Simon Newman, op. cit., pp 171-173

w the guarantee would be very provocative to Germany

w Roumania was left out

w the information concerning an imminent attack against Poland was meagre

w it could upset Franco-Italian negotiations under way,

w It could upset the Franco-British approaches decided upon the day before and aimed at guaranteeing a Polish-Roumanian pact instead.

During the meeting, it was recognised that the guarantee could not prevent Poland from being overrun. Doubts were raised as to the wisdom of including Danzig in the guarantee. Chamberlain was worrying, else Poland could edge towards Germany. According to the minutes Chamberlain was⁷³⁴:

uneasy at the fact that our Ambassador in Warsaw could obtain no information as to the progress of the negotiations between Germany and Poland. One possible, but very distasteful, explanation of this was that Polish negotiators were, in fact, giving way to Germany...

Chatfield then produced a memorandum he had just received from the Chiefs of Staff pointing to the fact that there was no evidence of a German preparation for an attack against Poland. They added that a guarantee to Poland should be reciprocal and should exclude Danzig. The absence of reciprocity could lead to war without an Eastern front. The Chiefs of Staff said that the rumours of an attack while not being substantiated by German military preparations may have had the purpose of making Poland more amenable to an agreement over Danzig.

The discussions showed that Britain was interested in preventing such an agreement. It was clear that the guarantee would not reduce the risk of war. Without it, there could be a Polish-German understanding over Danzig. With the guarantee, and its acknowledged provocative character, Poland would make no concession on Danzig and Germany would be bound to react. War would be the consequence.

Newman made here the following remark. I quote⁷³⁵:

It is significant that their chosen method was designed to result in somebody else's war first. For the British were still conscious of their weakness. As Halifax told his Private Secretary a few days

790⁷³⁴ As reported by Simon Newman, op. cit., p. 194

791⁷³⁵ Simon Newman, op. cit., pp. 196-197

later, he 'wanted to gain time because every month gave us 600 more airplanes' What better way to gain time, given that war was considered inevitable, than to direct the German military machine against the poles?

It was considered unwise to wait for confirmation of the rumours of German preparations against Poland because there was 'little, if any, sign of the concentration of German troops against the Polish frontier' and the information 'did not support the theory that Germany was contemplating an immediate military *coup de main*'.⁷³⁶

A suggestion that the guarantee be against 'unprovoked aggression' was rejected by Chamberlain. He thought that in view of the German insidious methods, Poland, in self-defence might have recourse to a 'technical' act of provocation. It was clear that the guarantee had to be such as to satisfy the most reluctant Pole into accepting it.

In short, the guarantee given to Poland was not a panic measure taken on the heel of news or rumours of a German coup against her.

w The matter was discussed for almost two weeks.

w Its disadvantages were considered from all possible angles.

w It was known that only by launching a serious attack on the Western front could the West come to the assistance of Poland, were she to be invaded by Germany. However, Britain and France had no intention to launch such an offensive, and did not launch it when the time for it was due.

w It was known that Poland could not resist the German invasion for longer than a couple of months.

w It was known that the guarantee was provocative to Germany and would therefore unleash war.

w It was also clear that the war would now start with Poland and not in the West.

w Britain and France were motivated by the fear of an attack to the West. It was deemed necessary, so they said in their records, to impose a second front on Germany.

w It was feared that, unless the unilateral guarantee was given to Poland, that country would settle her differences with Germany.

792⁷³⁶ Simon Newman, op. cit., p. 198

On August 22, 1939, Hitler explained to the Commanders in Chief his decision to attack Poland⁷³⁷:

It was clear to me that a conflict with Poland had to come sooner or later. I had already made this decision in the spring, but I thought that I would first turn against the West in a few years, and only after that against the East. But the sequence of these things cannot be fixed. Nor should one close one's eyes to threatening situations. I wanted first of all to establish a tolerable relationship with Poland in order to fight first against the West. But this plan, which appeared to me, could not be executed, as fundamental points had changed. It became clear to me that, in the event of a conflict with the West, Poland would attack us.

If he thought it useful, Hitler would not have hesitated to lie to his generals. On this occasion, however, his whole address was in line with the facts. Having recognised that he intended to attack the West first and the East afterwards, Hitler, when speaking to his generals, did not need the justification of a, supposedly, provocative Polish policy. All he needed was to prove that the odds were now with him more than they could later be. The reasons he gave for, unexpectedly, starting with Poland, seemed to correspond to reality. In short, it was the British guarantee to Poland which convinced Hitler to start with that country.

An interesting question must be raised here. Many factors militated against granting a guarantee to Poland. Poland was a dictatorship oppressing its minorities. Danzig was a German city and Hitler's claim with respect to the city and the Polish Corridor were among the most justifiable he had. Poland had sent an ultimatum to Czechoslovakia in September 1938 claiming the region of Teschen at a time at which Czechoslovakia, pressured by Germany, Britain and France, was not in a position to reject it. Poland had lately been suspected of 'standing on the fence' with some leaning towards Germany. In short, Poland had lost the sympathy of the West, and her case was not strong.

The only serious reason mentioned in the British Cabinet for guaranteeing Poland was the fact, considered well-established, that Germany could not manage a war on two fronts. It was therefore imperative to prevent Poland from siding with Germany. The guarantee to Poland, and its expected reciprocal nature, were to ensure an Eastern front.

Up to this point the argument makes a lot of sense. However, Britain and France acted in such a way that, in fact, Germany had to deal with a single front during her invasion of Poland. Then, during her attack against the West, Germany, once more had to deal with a single front. This was the result of a deliberate decision by Britain and France not to be true to their

793⁷³⁷ DGFP, series D, vol. 7, doc. 192, pp 200-204

pledge to come to the assistance of Poland with all their power. All they did was to declare war and then, to sit and wait.

This could have been predicted by the people in the know. Henderson had informed Germany that the West would take only defensive measures in the Western front. A report indicated that Hoare⁷³⁸, before a Cabinet meeting, might already have said that, by declaring war to Germany, Britain would have fulfilled her guarantee and that, therefore, there was no need that this declaration be followed by military operations.

These facts seem to indicate that the real motivation of the guarantee was not to ensure a second front but only to direct the German military machine against Poland which would be abandoned to her hopeless fate. This is an indubitable fact. What remains to be established are the reasons for abandoning Poland to her fate. These reasons must have been considered at the time at which the guarantee was given. There are two possible explanations, and no sufficient documentation to choose between them. It is possible that a guarantee to Poland was expected to realise the following objectives:

- w It would give Britain and France a couple of additional months for increasing their state of military preparedness.

- w It would give additional time to diplomacy to restore the policy of understanding with a relatively satiated Germany. This could be done under the slogan that Poland having disappeared as an independent state, the guarantee stopped to make any sense. This policy could be helped by an expected peace gesture by Germany, after the success of her invasion of Poland.

There is another possible expectation for the grant of a guarantee to Poland:

- w It would divert the German first move from West to East.

- w It would bring Germany and the Soviet Union face to face along some new boundary.

- w Germany and the Soviet Union were likely to quarrel over the spoils, and the expected German move towards the Soviet Ukraine may follow the subjection of Poland.

794⁷³⁸ DGFP, series D, vol. 7, Doc. 405, p. 401. A report by a German agent, 'Lukus', dated August 28, 1939. Lukus does not say what is his source of information. One cannot therefore say how reliable it is. We already saw that in a meeting between a French and a British Delegation, with the participation of Chamberlain and Daladier, Chamberlain and Simon suggested the possibility of a declaration of war against Germany without a start of military operations. In such a case, France would have formally stood up to her treaty obligations with Czechoslovakia.

Whichever of the two explanations was the correct one, it is clear that the argument, advanced in Cabinet meetings, for the need to impose on Germany a war on two fronts was not the correct one. Hitler's suspicion was correct. He said to his generals on August 22⁷³⁹:

Poland wanted a loan from England for her rearmament. England, however, only granted credits in order to make sure that Poland buys in England, although England cannot make deliveries. This suggests that England does not really want to support Poland.

The facts reported by Hitler were accurate. Not only did Britain not help Poland when she was invaded, but Britain raised objections after objections in her negotiations for a loan to Poland. When finally the loan was given, it was too late. No deliveries were made on account of that loan.

On April 2, Chamberlain wrote a letter to his sister Hilda, revealing much of his thought. Commenting on Ian Colvin's "news" of a possible German attack against Poland, he thought⁷⁴⁰:

..that Hitler had everything ready for a swoop on Poland which he planned to split up between annexation and protectorate. This would be followed by the absorption of Lithuania and then other states would be an easy prey. After that would come *the possibility of a Russo-German alliance and finally the British Empire, the ultimate goal, would fall helplessly into the German maw.*

Chamberlain added that, fearing that Poland might surrender to a German ultimatum, the decision for a unilateral guarantee was taken 'then and there'. Chamberlain confirmed that the imminent danger was not that of a German invasion of Poland, but that of a settlement between Germany and Poland.

It is very revealing that Chamberlain, who always rejected an alliance between Germany and the Soviet Union as impossible, was now considering such an eventuality. The invasion of Czechoslovakia could not have been, by itself, an indication for the possibility of such a change in Germany's policy. Nothing, except for the German disinterest from Ruthenia and its relevance to Germany's renouncement of her Ukrainian dreams, could have induced Chamberlain to so drastically alter his understanding of Germany's goals. This letter is a circumstantial evidence that Ruthenia played an essential role in determining Chamberlain's tough stand against Germany.

Soon, however, either to counter the necessity of 'bringing Russia in' — to prevent her from joining Germany —, or as a result of contacts through

795⁷³⁹ DGFP, series D, vol. 7, doc. 192, p.203

796⁷⁴⁰ Roy Douglas, '1939 A Retrospect Forty Years After', Macmillan, London, 1983, p. 93

‘personal agents’, Chamberlain would revert to his stand that an understanding between Soviet Union and Germany is totally impossible.

On April 4, 1939, during Beck’s visit to London, Halifax sounded him about Poland reciprocating to Britain the guarantee she had just received. He hammered the point repeatedly, and Beck, as expected, obliged⁷⁴¹. However, he refused to commit himself to the defence of Roumania.

On April 6, 1939, Halifax wrote to Kennard, the British Ambassador to Warsaw, saying⁷⁴²:

Count Raczynski [the Polish Ambassador] hoped that we would do what we could to make the press realize that the cure for the international problem in Eastern Europe was not to be found in immediate negotiations between Germany and Poland. His excellency was assured that part 2 of the Prime Minister’s declaration contained indeed no reservation, and it was not the intention of His Majesty’s Government *to force, or even to urge*, the Polish Government to enter into negotiations with the German Government if they did not think this necessary or opportune.

One should compare how gently the dictatorial Government of Poland was treated as compared with the harsh treatment reserved for democratic Czechoslovakia. It is also evident that Britain did not feel aggravated by the eventuality of a worsening of the German-Polish relations resulting from a rigid Polish attitude. At a time when Britain was fearing an attack in the West, trouble in the East did not cause Britain any distress.

On April 5, Liddell Hart made the following ‘note for history’⁷⁴³:

On March 22, the Prime Minister suddenly got the wind up and wanted to know what defence there was available against a sudden air attack on London. He was painfully surprised to hear that in order to provide any he would have to proclaim a state of emergency, as required for the calling out of the Territorial A.A. forces. In default of this, Regular A.A. were hurriedly brought up to London with their guns, providing a cover of 78 guns. A week later they were allowed to return to their home station — but there was no cover available when, on Friday, the Prime Minister announced the guarantee to Poland — which Hitler took as a challenge. In the afternoon of April 4 the Admiralty issued orders to man the A.A. defence of the fleet, but nothing was done to provide cover for London!

The British Government must have felt very safe from Munich time, six months earlier, to that day of April 5, to have so much neglected London’s air defence. Had the vulnerability of the British Capital to air attack played a

797⁷⁴¹ DBFP, series 3, vol. 5, doc. 1, p. 3

798⁷⁴² DBFP, 3rd series, vol. 5, doc. 18, p. 52

799⁷⁴³ Liddell Hart, Op. cit., vol 2, pp. 220-221

role in the British attitude at Munich, one could have expected that more would have been done to correct past negligence.

A comment by Liddell Hart is fit to close this sections. We quote⁷⁴⁴:

Since World War II, when the practical absurdity of the Polish guarantee has come to be better appreciated than it was at the time, it is commonly excused, or justified, by the argument that it marked the point at which the British Government declared: 'We were blind, but now we see.' I have too many recollections, and records, of discussions during this period to be able to accept the view that this sudden change of policy was due to a sudden awakening to the danger or to the moral issues. In Government circles I had long listened to calculated arguments for allowing Germany to expand eastward, for evading our obligations under the League Covenant and for having other countries to bear the brunt of an early stand against aggression.

Chamberlain Still Hopes For A General Settlement With Germany

On March 31, 1939, Kordt of the German Embassy in London wrote to the German Foreign Ministry concerning the British unilateral guarantee to Poland⁷⁴⁵:

4) The News Department of the Foreign Office has *repeatedly and urgently* requested Baron Hahn, diplomatic correspondent of the DNB, to point out to authoritative quarters that Chamberlain's statement in no way represented a preliminary step towards a policy of encirclement. The Prime Minister and the British Government *attached importance to this fact being established*.

This was just a preliminary step to be followed by bolder ones. Chamberlain could have stated in his speech at the House of Commons what he took pain to communicate to the German Government. Apparently, he did not want to let it be known publicly that he still wanted to 'spare' Germany the whole impact of the new British policy. The use of such a roundabout way could only, once more, convince Germany that Chamberlain's policy of friendship with Germany was divorced from his people and, therefore, had little chance of success.

In his memoirs, Lord Butler describes how Chamberlain felt when told, on April 7, 1939, that a weak nation had fallen victim of aggression. He wrote⁷⁴⁶:

On the Good Friday of 1939, which Mussolini chose for the invasion of Albania, I hurried up from the country and at once

800⁷⁴⁴ Op. cit., p. 221

801⁷⁴⁵ DGFP, series D, vol 6, doc. 137, pp 172-173

802⁷⁴⁶ Lord Butler, 'The Art of the Possible', Hamish Hamilton, London, 1971, p. 79

called at No. 10 for instructions.. Neville seemed irritated at my intrusion and surprised that I was perturbed, He said, 'I feel sure Mussolini has not decided to go against us.' When I started to talk about the general threat to the Balkans, he dismissed me with the words, 'Don't be silly. Go home to bed'.

Mussolini could be aggressive at will, provided, in Chamberlain's estimate, he would not be likely to turn against Britain. Chamberlain was even more cynical when he wrote to his sister⁷⁴⁷:

What I had hoped when I went away on Thursday was that Mussolini *would so present* his coup *as to make it look* like an agreed arrangement & thus raising as little as possible questions of European significance.

The manners and forms are what counts. Chamberlain would have liked that Mussolini, for the façade⁷⁴⁸, give him a 'plausible justification' to his action. Then it would be all right. He did not realise that the days of 'plausible justification' were gone and that he failed to make good use of the 'plausible justification' given to him by Hitler for the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

In April 23-26, a Roumanian delegation composed of Gafencu, the Roumanian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Tilsea, the Roumanian Minister in London, had conversations in London with the British officials Halifax, Cadogan, Ingram and Strang. The conversation covered the whole spectrum of European affairs. Gafencu reported on conversations he held in different countries in Europe.

Gafencu reported that Hitler was very angry with Britain for preventing Germany from developing economically and politically. Hitler said to him he did not mind going to war against Britain if that was what Britain wants. In that case Russia would be the only winner. The British minutes report⁷⁴⁹:

Lord Halifax said he hoped that Mr. Gafencu would give him a clear indication, if Herr Hitler had done so, of what exactly Herr Hitler thought His Majesty's Government were doing that was wrong.

The answer was not new. Gafencu explained that Hitler wanted to leave the world to Britain and keep Europe to Germany. Chamberlain joined the next session of discussion. Gafencu resumed his report on his talks with Hitler and said:

803⁷⁴⁷ 'The Last Lion, op. cit., p. 421. William Manchester quoted from Chamberlain's papers
804⁷⁴⁸ Chamberlain had once told Eden that, concerning the policy of non-intervention in Spain, what counted was 'the façade'.
805⁷⁴⁹ DBFP, series 3, vol. 5, doc. 278, p. 303

..Her Hitler also said that he had nothing to say against an Anglo-French guarantee to Roumania; but he had added that, if this were linked up with Russia, the position would be changed. In Herr Hitler's view, Great Britain, France and Germany, whatever their differences, had a common interest in saving Europe. The Soviet Union was a danger, not only to Germany but to Europe as a whole.

One might have thought that by now, Chamberlain would have been immune to Hitler's raising the Russian bogey. That was not the case and Chamberlain swallowed the bait. The document mentions that:

The Prime Minister said he gathered therefore that Herr Hitler's dislike and fear of Russia had not diminished⁷⁵⁰.

If such indeed was the case, it meant for Chamberlain either that Germany would not try to come to an arrangement with the Soviet Union, or that there were still possibilities for Britain to reach some 'understanding' with Germany.

On April 27 Norton⁷⁵¹, of the British Embassy in Warsaw, was complaining to Strang that the telegrams from Berlin 'produce the impression that our Embassy are falling for the Nazi propaganda stuff that Poland is the menace to peace.' Though Henderson⁷⁵² was absent from Berlin, the German Embassy in Berlin still had close connections with Chamberlain.

Norton reminded Strang that incidents are irrelevant since Germany would create incidents whenever she wanted. He told Strang that 'The Poles will never let anyone send a Runciman'.

No 'Runciman mission' was planned. Matters could not yet move so fast. An informal contact with the German authorities was made by Drummond-Wolf on May 14, 1939. He suggested that Britain was willing to help Germany extend her economic activities in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. He also suggested that Britain was prepared to make a loan to Germany to help her solve her foreign currency problems. He needed to know how large the loan should be.

The British industrialists informed their German colleagues that they were prepared to resume their conversations with them in June. Germany considered these approaches with contempt. On May 15, 1939, Weizsacker wrote in a memo concerning a visit by Henderson⁷⁵³:

806⁷⁵⁰ After Germany allowed Hungary to take Ruthenia (called by the Germans Carpatho-Ukraine), Chamberlain could have doubts concerning Hitler's intentions with respects to his previous designs over Ukraine. He now seems to be reassured.

807⁷⁵¹ DBFP, series 3, vol. 5, doc 301, pp. 352-353

808⁷⁵² Henderson had been recalled to London. He was back to Berlin on April 25, 1939

809⁷⁵³ DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 385, p. 503

Henderson said that unfortunately public opinion in Britain had become progressively worse during his period of service in Berlin, and was now even ready to enter a European war for the Poles, of whom Henderson had nothing favourable to say.. ***This war, added Henderson, would be conducted defensively by the Western Powers.*** Of course each side would drop quite a few bombs on each other's house, but the British were convinced that final victory would not rest with Germany and Italy as the Axis Powers had the shorter wind.

I listened to Henderson quietly and replied *inter alia* that he need not be surprised if ***the British guarantee of Poland was not taken very seriously in Germany***, when the British Empire had considered it necessary to have itself guaranteed by the Republic of Poland!

Henderson's gratuitous information to Weizsacker proved to be correct. The West indeed remained in a defensive posture while Germany was devouring Poland. Germany must have received this information early from other sources besides Henderson. Was it sheer stupidity which lead Henderson to reveal to Germany an exceedingly important information on the West's war strategy? Was it a way to say to Germany that, even in war, the British friendly feelings towards Germany would prevent the West from launching offensive action? Was it a way to say to Germany that a) she was safe on the West front while dealing with Poland. Therefore Germany should start with Poland? b) that Britain would only formally respect her pledges towards Poland. Britain might declare war on Germany, but the absence of action could result in a later reconciliation based on a *modus vivendi* or even a 'general settlement'?

The evidence is disturbing. Adam Von Trott, a former Rhodes Scholar was sent by Germany to England on a fact finding mission. His visit lasted from the 1st to the 8th of June. Together with Halifax, Inskip and Lothian and other British political leaders, he was invited at Cliveden for the weekend. Von Trott consigned in a memorandum his impressions and the description of his conversations with British leaders. We quote⁷⁵⁴:

Lord Halifax, indeed admitted that among the British people also there prevailed a definite emotional readiness for war but they would fight only if "forced to do so by Germany". Although they were ready to make the utmost sacrifices and would not shrink from a necessary war, nevertheless they were, even now, prepared to take any really reasonable peaceful way out.

Halifax, as reported, spoke in a dignified way. He however added:

810⁷⁵⁴ DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 497, pp. 674-685

After the Munich Conference, he had seen the way open for a new *consolidation of Powers*, in which Germany would have the preponderance in Central and South East Europe, a “not too unfriendly Spain and Italy” *would leave unthreatened British positions in the Mediterranean and the Middle East*, and with pacification in the Far East also becoming possible.

A division of the world into spheres of influence is here unmistakable. That is what Munich, according to Halifax, was about. We saw that Halifax, in a letter to Phipps, said something similar. He even considered the need of keeping out of the way in case of a German intervention in Soviet Ukraine. Such opinions, when expressed in Anglo-German meetings, were always wrapped in diplomatic language allowing a person to later pretend he meant something else, something that would not harm him if made public. Halifax here was more candid.

Lord Astor remarked that:

By the occupation of Prague, Germany had deprived her friends in Britain of the weapon which would have enabled them to support us. The British people *unfortunately* regarded Prague as a first step to further conquests of a similar nature.

Lord Astor expressed a feeling commonly found among the Conservatives. It is ‘unfortunate’ but a fact of life that the mood of the people does not allow German friends such as Astor, and other such Conservatives, to pursue the appeasement policy. Von Trott continued:

..Lord Lothian.. admitted that, within certain limits, the use of force and self-help had represented the only, and therefore legitimate, means for the Germans. The Western Powers had not succeeded in evolving from the post-war state of affairs and order which really conceded to Germany her vital rights. Germany had only been able to assert herself by unilateral action; that this way out was inevitable for the German leaders could not be denied. In his personal opinion, this also held good for the military occupation and disarming of Czecho-Slovakia as being an unavoidable necessity for Germany in the long run. Thus far he was prepared to follow the German argument.

This opinion of Lothian is important because of Lothian’s closeness to Chamberlain. Lothian had already been appointed British Ambassador to Washington, post he would occupy in August. Henderson, another close associate of Chamberlain, had already informed the German Foreign Office that Lothian should be taken seriously as being of a totally different kind of person from those who were meeting with German leaders without having any representative character. Von Trotts continued:

..Lothian again reverted to the European situation which.. was inevitably drifting towards war.. He asked me *on no account to mention him* as the originator of the idea that he was now about to unfold to me. In view of his mission to the United States and the present atmosphere there, L[othian] obviously *wants to avoid the suspicion that he has not yet been converted from his ideas of reconciliation with Germany*.. In the circle of Astor, Halifax, Chamberlain, etc., he exercise very strong influence.. so that, in spite of Lothian's request for secrecy, the idea he communicated to me must naturally be included in this report as being of political importance.

This made it clear that some appeasers were incorrigible. In public they had to appear 'converted'. However, in private and with German Friends, they would revert to their old self. Lothian's suggested that Germany, having assured the strategic control of Czechoslovakia, could afford to give her national independence, on condition of her disarmament and co-operation with Germany. Then, once more the spheres of influence could be delineated. Von Trott, reporting Lothian's suggestion wrote:

..such an action would, in his view, have a revolutionary effect on British Public opinion, and consequently on the freedom of action of the British Government and on world opinion in general.. On this basis he thought that the gradual *elimination of all moral and material differences* still existing between Germany and Britain was possible.

Economically the German living space would naturally have to extend far beyond the present limits. But, if recognition of the national identity of the small Czech people, surrounded by Germany, could actually be made an indisputable and demonstrable reality, it would seemingly guarantee in European politics the possibility of reconciling the expansion of German power with the continued existence of the individuality of other nations.

The moral difference between Germany and Britain seemed, to Lothian not to be so great. It all depended on an illusory independence given to Czechoslovakia. This would not prevent Czechoslovakia from being forced to cooperate to the extent of muzzling the press and implementing the nazist racial laws.

To extend 'far beyond the present limits' of the German economic living space, cannot, obviously be done without expanding her political 'living space'. How can you force a country to be within the German economic living space without coercion. If the coercion is only economic, it restricts the choices. A country at the economic mercy of Germany could not but submit to the German political will. Besides, the distances in Europe are

small except when the Soviet Union is included. To extend ‘far beyond the present limits’ can only be done at the expense of the Soviet Union.

Lothian was only concerned with stage dressing, so as to give ‘more freedom’ to the British leaders. Lothian added:

Any further British distrust of, and obstruction to, German economic expansion in the South East would then of course have to stop. If Germany *led*, but did not dominate, Central Europe, the Western European nations could feel reassured about their political independence.

Lothian’s language is imprecise. What is to *led* and not dominate? Where is the fine dividing line? It seemed that, here too, the façade counted most. On March 15, Chamberlain had stated that Germany had plausible justifications for her invasion of Czechoslovakia. Eventually, that plausibility was found deficient. More had to be done with forms and manners and window dressing. If political domination can take the form of ‘leading’ instead of ‘dominating’ then Britain would go along. Von Trott added:

From the conversations at Clivedon [sic] I gathered that, important though Lord Lothian’s voice is in influencing the Cabinet, Chamberlain still has the decisive say, in spite of criticism of a certain obstinacy and narrowmindedness of his. It was thus fortunate that I was also able to have a conversation with the Prime Minister himself on Wednesday (June 8). *The Astors have access to him at any time* so that the meeting came about quite naturally.

Von Trott’s mission was considered of such an importance that his contacts with the British Foreign Minister and such other British leaders were deemed insufficient. The British Prime Minister had to be produced in person. In today’s language, the Astor had a ‘red line’ connecting them to Chamberlain. Von Trott described his conversation with Chamberlain:

I repeated what I had told Lord Halifax, especially about the “guarantee” of Poland and the bitterness towards Britain which this step had created among the German people.

He said, and here I quote: “Do you believe that I entered into these obligations gladly? Herr Hitler forces me to do it.” We had forced Britain on the defensive by the occupation of Czechia, and now *the British people regarded every concession as a capitulation to an aggressor, caused by weakness.*

It is the mood of the people, and not the conviction of the Prime Minister, which prevents further concessions to be made to Germany. Von Trott continued:

Mr. Chamberlain said — he spoke in great excitement at this point — that the British people too were “passionately stirred” [in English in the original German text] and that they would fight if another independent nation were “destroyed”. He had tried again and again after Munich to prevent the development of such a crisis. But his efforts had been rejected by Germany. He was not personally embittered by German statements against Britain, but they did make it impossible for him to make new suggestions for ways to arrive at an understanding.

Basically he still desired a peaceful settlement with Germany. From the day he had taken up office he had stood for the view that the European problem could only be solved on the line Berlin-London. As opposed to his present measures, this is approximately how he expressed himself, were an emergency aid, ***the compatibility of which with a German-British settlement he tried constantly to keep in mind.*** ..at Prague Germany had gone over to the “destruction” of other nations and that thereby all Germany’s neighbours were forced into a kind of self-defence psychosis. If Germany could restore confidence in this respect ***he would again be able*** to advocate a policy of coming to meet us half-way.

Chamberlain was still prepared to pursue his ‘appeasement’ business. However the onus of improving the atmosphere lied on Germany. His suggestion was similar to Lothian’s. Von Trott asked what if Germany were to demonstrate that she treated other people’s national identity more effectively than her own, would then Britain meet her halfway? Von Trott wrote:

Mr Chamberlain replied that he personally tended to regard such proof as practically impossible, but that, if furnished, it would have to be taken very seriously in Britain, and would also restore to the British Cabinet a public platform for [their policy towards] Germany. Popular distrust of Germany’s policy.. was for the time being insurmountable, but once this had been removed ***he would again be able to advocate concessions.***

Chamberlain would have been wiser to remind his interlocutor that the manner in which Germany treated her own minorities of Jews, and Gypsies could not be accepted as a standard of comparison. Von Trott described what occurred after that:

Thereafter I was able to engage Lord Dunglass, a private secretary to Mr. Chamberlain, in conversation. During it he promised to influence Oliver Stanley, the President of the Board of Trade, in the sense of my statements noted above, with the result that, on the day after the speeches by Halifax and Chamberlain, Stanley also spoke in Parliament in favour of a

more practically accommodating attitude towards Germany. I enclose as an annex a memorandum, handed to me by the brother of Lord Dunglass influenced by my conversation with Halifax in Cliveden. *It is at any rate interesting that such positive views are to be found in the immediate entourage of the Prime Minister.*

The situation as Von Trott found it in Britain appeared to still offer some promise for resuming the appeasement policy. While such was the situation in the Prime Minister immediate entourage, Von Trott could have wondered on the influence of opposite views in Britain. Chamberlain put him at ease. Von Trott writes:

I had the impression that a really generous solution in the future would occur less readily to Chamberlain than to Halifax or Lothian, but once visualized and clarified, he would defend it with courage and tenacity against any possible opposition. He stated to me that the small group of Conservatives who are rebelling against him — Eden, Churchill, Duff Cooper — could be completely ignored, and that because of his large majority *he need not pay any great attention to the opposition.*

The way was therefore open for an understanding. Von Trott continued:

The Fuhrer's clear-sighted refusal of any halfhearted understanding with Britain has now, in view of a threatened total conflict, caused a far more *genuine revival of the desire for a total understanding* as the only alternative to war.

Von Trott was much encouraged by a memo handed to him by the brother of Lord Dunglass. The memorandum dated June 3, 1939, is here quoted in full⁷⁵⁵:

The democracies say: We will not make any concession until you put away your pistols!

The dictators reply: We will not put away our pistols until you make concessions!

The democracies, remembering Czecho-Slovakia and Albania, say: How can we know whether you will put away your pistols after we have made concessions?

The dictators, remembering the Versailles Treaty and France's broken promise, reply: How can we know whether you will make concessions after we have put away our pistols!

811⁷⁵⁵ DGFP, series D, vol. 6, Enclosure to doc. 497, p. 685

The result is an *impasse*. Consequently, the democracies and dictators are sitting back and waiting for a sign. The dictators dissatisfied and therefore impatient, are waiting for concessions to be granted. The democracies, satiated and therefore content, are waiting for the pistols to be put away.

Here is the vital point:

The democracies are making the pistols an issue. That is wrong. The pistols are of secondary importance. The dictators, however, are making the concessions an issue. That is right. The concessions or their non-existence, are the reason for the pistols. — There can be no agreement on the question of the pistols. Pistols speak only to pistols and their language is war. Therefore drop the pistols.

But there is already agreement that concessions will be made one day -

Let today be that day!

In short, the writer of the memo was saying that Britain, France and Germany should all drop the pistols, while Britain and France should make concessions to Germany. While the day for dropping the pistols is not specified, the day for concessions was the today of that day.

Not every past appeaser would identify his own views with that of the memo. The memo represented views widespread among the Conservatives, but rarely expressed in public. Though there is no indication that this memo had been reviewed by Lord Dunglass, this can be taken as likely.

On June 13, 1939, Weizsacker wrote a memo concerning a conversation with Henderson. Weizsacker explained that the conversation which started with Henderson expressing his personal views, ended speaking in his official capacity. Weizsacker wrote⁷⁵⁶:

British policy I said, was diametrically opposed to Henderson's own thesis, which he had already repeatedly stated in public: "England wants the sea for herself, the continent of Europe can be left to Germany". Instead of this, the fact was that Britain was now undertaking greater and greater commitments on the continent...

Henderson reacted very sensitively to this remark. There could be no question whatever of such will to war. He deplored certain Labour influences; he did not in any way defend the Anglo-Polish Agreement and said that no Runciman would be sent to Warsaw.

812⁷⁵⁶ DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 521, pp 718-719

From here on, Henderson, obviously acting on instructions, spoke of London's willingness to negotiate with Berlin. Halifax obviously had in mind that the present state of tension could and must be ended by means of discussions.

Henderson mentioned disarmament, revival of economic relations and colonies as possible subjects for discussion. Weizsacker added:

I made no comments on these remarks except to say that something similar had already been brought to my knowledge *from London through different channels*, but that I could do nothing from such *unsubstantial remarks*.

In view of known precedents, these 'different channels' can be suspected to be among the direct and indirect connections Chamberlain was maintaining with Berlin to by-pass the Foreign Office. Henderson also must have taken note that Weizsacker complained that the offers for discussion lacked specificity.

Henderson had no scruples in venting personal opinions which contradicted the official policy of his Government. After the invasion of Prague, he had been recalled to London. There he had to be treated for cancer. A new Ambassador to Berlin could therefore have been appointed without the matter being given a political interpretation.

Henderson had been associated with the policy of appeasement. In this respect his opinions, as we showed it, were extreme. More than once he had disobeyed explicit instructions which, in his view, were not going enough in the direction of appeasement.

Nevertheless, when an opportunity presented itself to put him 'naturally' away from his post, it was not taken. The message was clear: Britain did not want in her embassy in Berlin an opponent of appeasement. Similar reasons prevented the introduction in the Cabinet of people who had predicted the failure of the appeasement policy.

On June 27, 1939, The German State Secretary wrote a memorandum concerning a conversation he had with Henderson. He wrote⁷⁵⁷:

The Ambassador asked me again.. whether the conclusion of the British talks in Moscow might not be beneficial for the initiation of German-British talks.

Using similar arguments to those used last time I told the Ambassador that the opposite was the case. British foreign policy would be completely incomprehensible to me unless I regarded it as emanating from domestic policy.

813⁷⁵⁷ DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 572, pp. 797-798

Henderson emphatically agreed with this and said he wished that the Labour Party were at the helm and not the Conservatives, for in reality *Chamberlain was now obliged to pursue Labour's foreign policy and also to bear the odium for its setbacks.*

The Ambassador's efforts to keep contacts with us were unmistakable.. As he left he offered his services for anything he could do towards a resumption of talks. He said *it was absolutely wrong to believe that Chamberlain had left the path of peace.*

Henderson was confirming once more that there were limitations to Chamberlain's ability to follow the 'path of peace', and that he could be forced to implement, against his will, the policy of the Labour Party. Nothing could have more convinced Germany that an understanding with Britain would be unsafe. The talk showed that Chamberlain had not yet renounced 'appeasement'. Chamberlain's became tough, not out of conviction, but compelled by the mood of the country. 'Knowledgeable circles' had informed Germany that Chamberlain had the intention to leave opposition trends to run their course and, at an appropriate time, reverse to his policy of friendship with Germany. This could not be perceived by Germany as a reliable asset.

Reports coming from Germany to Britain were underlining the fact that, in spite of Chamberlain's intentions to resume friendly relations with Germany, the confrontation policy was continuing. Chamberlain had lost the initiative. In one of these reports dated June 29, 1939, it was written⁷⁵⁸:

It can be said with a fair amount of certainty, that Chamberlain himself, and the inner, deciding group of the Cabinet, are definitely working to prevent the outbreak of war, and would prefer a compromise over Danzig and the Corridor, which might be acceptable to their people, to any belligerent action. The six month of propaganda: "No more appeasement", rises to outbursts of rage as soon as the Government so much as show a sign of giving way.

..I do believe, however, in common with competent political observers who are resident here or who have come over temporarily from the Reich, that Britain today is not prepared to agree to the German conditions for an understanding, and that she would rather risk war than give way to German pressure.

On July 2, 1939, Welczeck, the German Ambassador to Paris reported to the German Foreign Office a conversation he had with Bonnet, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs. Welczeck wrote⁷⁵⁹:

814⁷⁵⁸ DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 630, pp 875-878
815⁷⁵⁹ DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 603, pp. 828-829

..When I interjected that there could be no question of domination, least of all as regards France, Bonnet answered that *the policy of a free hand* in the spheres of interest of any country *could not go so far* as to bring part of a neighbouring country under any form of subjection *manu militari*; for this the dwelling house of Europe, in which the peoples lived together *confined within so narrow a space*, was too small.

Bonnet recognised that a free hand had been given to Germany. He was now qualifying the free hand according to regional densities of population. In Europe ‘within so narrow a space’, the free hand has to be applied without military violence. Such a restriction apparently does not apply to the Soviet Union which is not confined to a very narrow space. Bonnet’s statement was as explicit as the traditional diplomatic language would permit. In such a language the statement was not ambiguous.

In another report dated July 10, 1939, Dirksen, the German Ambassador to Britain wrote⁷⁶⁰:

The decisive difference between Britain’s mood in the autumn of 1938 and now is, that then the broad masses of the people did not want to fight and were passive, while now they have taken the initiative from the Government and drive the Cabinet on.

This was hardly reassuring, though Dirksen ended with the following cheerful words:

Within the Cabinet, and in a small but influential group of politicians, efforts are being made to replace the negative policy of an encirclement by a constructive policy towards Germany. Though there are strong forces at work to stifle this very tender plant — among which may be numbered the press campaign of last weekend — nevertheless Chamberlain’s personality gives a certain guarantee that British policy will not be delivered into the hands of unscrupulous adventurers.

The optimistic ending sounded more as wishful-thinking than as the reality of the situation as described by Dirksen himself. Nonetheless this ‘small but influential group’ was not idle.

On July 14, 1939. Weizsacker wrote a memorandum concerning a conversation with Henderson. He wrote⁷⁶¹:

Henderson.. ended his remarks by expressing his confidence in the Fuhrer’s political genius for the timely and bloodless solution of difficulties and conflicts.

816⁷⁶⁰ DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 645, pp. 891-893
817⁷⁶¹ DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 671, p. 922

The actual object of the Ambassador's visit was as follows:

intention of speaking to us about a kind of press truce. It was very inconvenient that a fresh and understandable press battle should have flared up through Commander King-Hall's inflammatory letters, which Henderson himself most severely criticized. Nonetheless he wanted to ask my opinion as to whether it would be possible to enter into a kind of press truce with us, perhaps from the beginning of August when the British Parliament went into recess..

As the Ambassador let it be understood that he was not putting forward his suggestion without the approval of his Government, I would like to give him an answer at a later opportunity.

It seemed that Chamberlain had great plans for the period of parliamentary recess. In view of the gravity of the situation, many members of the House suggested that the House should not take its recess. Chamberlain insisted that the recess be observed. So much was that matter essential to him that he declared that he would consider a vote on this question as a matter of confidence in him.

Muzzling the House was only one part of his plans. He now wanted to also muzzle the press. It would be difficult to obtain the co-operation of the British Press unless he could obtain from Germany that they lower their level of criticism against Britain. Would the German press stop to be aggressive, Chamberlain could use his influence to convince his friends in the press business to allow him the necessary respite to make a last effort for peace.

He could then confront Germany with the two options available to him in preparation of autumn elections. The two slogans of 'preparation for war against aggression' and 'general peaceful settlement with Germany' were equally possible for a successful campaign. It was up to Germany to decide which choice Chamberlain would make in the absence of parliamentary control and press criticism. This is confirmed by a memo written by Weizsacker on July 17, 1939, concerning a conversation with Henderson. Weizsacker mentions that⁷⁶²:

On the subject of a press truce when the British Parliament goes into recess, Henderson said that it would be useful also to have a truce in speeches, declarations etc., etc. In a word, his wish was that *in the next few weeks the point of view of foreign policy should take precedence over that of British home policy..*

Another noteworthy point in this conversation was that Henderson said he had urged London finally to come to a conclusion with the Russians one way or another. He is of

818⁷⁶² DGFP, series D, vol 6, doc. 682, p. 933

opinion that *these negotiations are disturbing matters between Berlin and London.*

During the days July 18-20, 1939, conversations were held between the German official Dr. Wohlat⁷⁶³, attending a whaling convention in London, and the British Leaders Horace Wilson, Joseph Ball and Hudson. The German and English records of the conversations diverge widely in content, and contradict each other in many essentials. The significance of the conversations thus depend on which records are trusted to be true.

Sydney Aster⁷⁶⁴, for instance has chosen to believe the versions presented by Hudson and Wilson. This allowed him to title the Chapter dealing with the matter: 'Appeasement Cremated'. Had Aster trusted more the German versions, he would have possibly titled the same Chapter: 'Appeasement alive and running amok'.

There are, however, good reasons for trusting the German versions rather than the British ones. Chamberlain and his close political associate knew that the mood of the Foreign office, of the House of Commons and of the country was dead set against resuming the policy of appeasement. Such a policy had therefore to be pursued in great secrecy.

We already saw that Chamberlain, through a confidential agent, had established contacts with Ribbentrop, by-passing the Foreign Office and the British Ambassador. Cadogan had received information on these contacts through the British Intelligence. Contacts through special channels did not stop. On May 3, 1939, Cadogan entered in his diary⁷⁶⁵:

Went to see H.J. W. [Wilson] about a telephone intercept, which looks as if No. 10 were talking 'appeasement' again. He put up all sorts of denials, to which I don't pay much attention. But it is a good thing to show we have our eye on *them*.

Cadogan did not trust Wilson. He did not trust 'them'. Cadogan would not have been alerted by the Intelligence Service, were there not such evidence available which allowed him not to 'pay much attention' to 'all sorts of denials' put up by Wilson. Wilson, in Cadogan's opinion, would lie to cover up his 'underground' work. On June 29, 1939, Cadogan entered the following⁷⁶⁶ in his diary:

I have all the moves to consider — and Horace W. to manoeuvre against..

819⁷⁶³ Dr Wohlad was Economic counsellor to the German 4 year Economic Plan. As such he was a close collaborator of Goering. He was considered a reliable and able negotiator.

820⁷⁶⁴ Sydney Aster, op. cit., Chapter 13, pp. 243-259

821⁷⁶⁵ 'The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan', op. cit., p. 178

822⁷⁶⁶ 'The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan', op. cit., p. 190

The quote is not specific. However, in the context of his other entries concerning Wilson, it is likely that Cadogan thought he had to be alert against Wilson's steps at the service of an 'understanding' with Germany.

As to the conversations with Wohlat, there is no doubt that they had, on the British side, a conspiratorial aspect. Sydney Aster indirectly recognises that fact. He wrote⁷⁶⁷:

Sir Orme Sargent's brief minute of his conversation with Dirksen cleverly disguised his curiosity and, doubtless, suppressed anger. ***For the Foreign Office had been deliberately excluded from any contacts with Wohlat*** and had been denied initially any details. Halifax at once ***complained to Chamberlain***. He wanted to be shown the exact records of the conversations. Hudson's note was sent to the Foreign Office on July 24th. Wilson sent his, on Chamberlain's instructions, a day later.

Wilson clearly intended to keep his conversations secret with respect to the Foreign Office. Under order from Chamberlain, he reluctantly wrote a report. The possibility therefore remained that what he thought should be kept secret was not mentioned in his report. Sydney Aster agreed that Wilson would do nothing without Chamberlain's knowledge and agreement. Halifax must have thought likewise and chose to complain directly to Chamberlain.

This conspiratorial behaviour of Wilson, which, by the way, had precedents, does not encourage trust in his report. The same can be said with respect to Hudson's report.

Wohlat reported to his superiors a detailed proposal from Wilson for a British-German agreement having economic, political and military aspects. Sydney Aster would have the reader believed that this was a complete invention. What would then be the motivation for producing such an imaginary proposal?

According to Sydney Aster⁷⁶⁸:

Helmet Wohlat was ***possibly*** as ambitious as Robert Hudson, and ***he was desperate for success*** in his secret economic negotiations in London. ***Goring was not taking him seriously enough***; Hitler was inaccessible and deaf to economic considerations. How better to gain attention than to weld hints, suggestions and various proposals into an orderly programme of wide-ranging appeasement. And this is what Wohlat did in Berlin.

Sydney gives no evidence that Wohlat was desperate, that Goering was not taking him seriously and that Wohlat was the kind of person who, in such circumstances, would embellish the facts to the point of inventing a detailed proposal and pretending he had received it from Wilson. The only

823⁷⁶⁷ Sydney Aster, op. cit., pp. 149-150
824⁷⁶⁸ Op. cit., p. 247

circumstantial evidence presented by Sydney Aster are the Wilson and Hudson reports he chose to trust.

Moreover, there exist a report by Dirksen on his meeting with Wilson on August 3, 1939. He writes that, at that meeting, Wilson confirmed to him all the details of the proposal he made to Wohlat. Was then Dirksen also a desperate man ready to attribute invented statements to Wilson?

However desperate Wohlat and Dirksen may have been, they could not have been so stupid as to invent a story that would then be proven false in a very short time. They could not know that Hudson would leak the matter. It was therefore expected that such an important fact as the detailed proposal, might have an immediate follow-up. The follow-up would then expose them as impudent liars.

If their story was false, the leak to the press would have been for them a blessing. Their superiors in Germany would give no credit to British denials which could easily be interpreted as caused by public pressure. Dirksen however underlined the fact that the leak concerned the non-important discussions with Hudson, while, according to Dirksen, the really important discussions with Wilson, not having been leaked, could be continued. Would Dirksen, miraculously out of a bind, encourage resuming the contacts with Wilson?

Finally, one should remember that part of Wohlat's report concerned a suggestion made by Wilson for a meeting between representatives of highest rank of the two countries. Such a suggestion, if based on a false report, was bound to uncover Dirksen's and Wohlat's brazen concoctions, if concoctions they were!

Trusting Hudson and Wilson requires assumptions specially made for the purpose. Not trusting them requires only to know, and not to assume, that, from the point of view of the reigning mood, it would have been dangerous for them to acknowledge having resumed the path of appeasement. We will therefore proceed with the reasonable assumption that Dirksen, as a faithful and experienced German Ambassador, reported accurately the essentials of his conversations with Wohlat, which confirmed the veracity of the detailed proposals given to Wohlat by Wilson.

In a record of his conversation with Dr. Wohlat, Hudson started his report with: "The German Embassy rang up this morning and asked if I would see Herr Wohlat." The German versions mentions that Dr. Wohlat was approached by the British leaders through the intermediary of a Norwegian member at the whaling convention. The German version is more credible. Dirksen had protested to Sargent by telephone against the British declaration of a German initiated conversation. He would not have done it were he liable to be contradicted by the Norwegian delegation. Moreover, the mood in Britain was such that it would have been politically dangerous

for Hudson to acknowledge having initiated the conversations. On July 24, 1939, Dirksen, from London, wrote to the German Foreign Ministry⁷⁶⁹:

Public opinion is so roused and the warmongers and intriguers have gained such an ascendancy, that publication of such plans for negotiations with Germany would immediately be torpedoed by Churchill and other agitators with cries of “No second Munich!” or “No return to the policy of appeasement!”

..Those concerned with working out a list of points for negotiation therefore realize that the preparatory steps in respect of Germany must be taken in the greatest secrecy

Hudson’s conversation with Dr. Wohlat was leaked to the press. Chamberlain declared that he knew nothing of it and that Hudson was not authorised to hold these conversations. Chamberlain, most likely, took liberties with the facts. The records indicate that Wilson, Chamberlain’s *alter ego*, affirmed to Wohlat that he had Chamberlain’s support. Chamberlain did not mention in the House of Commons, that, besides Hudson, Wilson and Ball were also involved.

A message from Dirksen to Weizsacker shows how misleading Chamberlain’s statement to the House was. Dirksen wrote on July 25, 1939⁷⁷⁰:

Owing to the indiscretion of the press and Mr Hudson’s garrulity and incorrect presentation of the facts, these conversations have given the public a completely distorted picture; in many ways *this is perhaps quite a good thing* since, as a result, *the really serious and significant part of his talks here — namely his two conversations with Sir Horace Wilson — has to some extent been kept dark*; therefore the possibility of continuing them remains.

There are various accounts of these conversations. They complement each other with little contradiction, except for parts of Hudson reports. Hudson claimed that he offered Germany a loan destined to help the reconversion of the German military industries into peace industries. Such a reconversion would have appealed to the British public and would have justified the size of the loan (rumoured to have been one thousand million pounds). Since efforts were made in British Governmental circles to cover up the whole matter, those parts of Hudson report differing from or contradicting the German reports, could be suspected of being part of the cover up. According to Hudson’s own report⁷⁷¹:

825⁷⁶⁹ DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 710, p. 970

826⁷⁷⁰ DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 723, p. 1001

827⁷⁷¹ DBFP, series 3, vol. 6, doc. 370, p. 407

He [Wohlat] asked me whether I thought that if the present political difficulties between Germany and ourselves were got out of the way we could look forward to a period of considerable economic prosperity. I agreed. I said that one of the problems, as I saw it, before Germany, and, to a lesser extent before this country, was how, when rearmament came to an end, we could find markets for the products of our heavy industries. He said that that would be comparatively easy in Germany, because they had south-eastern Europe.. I said that we regard it as *falling in the natural economic sphere of Germany* and we had no objection to her developing her position in that market, provided we are assured of a reasonable share.. I said, however, that it seemed to me that there were much wider possibilities involved.

Each powerful country had, it seemed, an economic sphere readily acknowledged by the other strong countries. The weak countries, apparently, had no say. This, in itself was outrageous, coming from a representative of a country claiming to be ready to go to war for the protection of weaker nations. However 'the much wider possibilities' were more outrageous.

I regarded Russia, China and the various Colonial Dependencies of European Powers as areas which would provide almost unlimited openings for capital development and act as outlets for the heavy industries of ourselves, the Germans and the United States; that given the necessary preliminary of a solution of the political questions, it ought not to be impossible to work out some forms of economic and industrial collaboration between our three countries, which would include, in my view, the abolition of barter agreements, exchange restrictions, import quotas, and so forth.

China and the European colonies were part of the capitalist market. Within some preferential restrictions, it was already possible to exploit these markets as outlets for the industrial countries. Such was not the case of the Soviet Union. To mention Russia as a country that could provide 'unlimited openings for capital development' implied the reduction of Soviet Union to a colony included in the capitalist market. One should notice the category of regions in which the Soviet Union is included: China (being colonised by Japan) and the various Colonial Dependencies of European powers.

The British public point of view was that the German invasion of Czechoslovakia had demonstrated the German will at world domination. This was also the official British stand. The problem of resuming good relations was that of obtaining credible assurances that there would be no other German aggression. It is in this spirit that the guarantees to Poland, Roumania and Greece had been welcomed and that the public was looking forward at a successful conclusion of the negotiations with the Soviet Union for an alliance capable to stand against aggression.

In this context, good relations with Germany were an impossibility. No one expected Germany to abandon her ambitions for expansion. Therefore either these ambitions had to be satisfied, or Germany had to be restrained. There was no middle-of-the-way solution.

Hudson's solution was not one which would restrain Germany. It provided unlimited openings for capital development and outlets for the industries of the three main capitalist countries (Britain, Germany and the U.S.).

Obviously, Hudson knew that Stalin could not peacefully be convinced to open up his country to the capitalist free market; much less to allow that opening to take a shape similar to Britain's opening of her colonies and Japan's opening of China. Barter elimination implied a strong restriction on economic exchanges with the Soviet Union.

Hudson could not have ignored that, without defeating Russia in war, it would have been impossible to use that country in the way he described. In his proposal, there was an implicit assumption that Germany would be given those unlimited possibilities in the form of a free hand with respect to expansion at the expense of the Soviet Union.

When the news of Hudson's meeting with Wohlat were leaked to the press, Hudson stated that the subject of the conversations had been a large loan to be made by Britain to Germany to help the reconversion of her military industry into peaceful industry. Disarmament as an object of conversation could be welcomed by the British Cabinet and public opinion. This could explain why Hudson mentioned it, while this is absent in the German reports⁷⁷².

Dirksen, we have seen, reported that the talks with Wilson were the real serious and important ones. They are reported in a number of German documents. The earliest one is a report by Dirksen on July 21, 1939, on his brief by Wohlat after the latter returned from his talks with Wilson. On August 3, 1939, Dirksen met with Wilson for two hours. Wilson repeated to Dirksen the proposals he had made to Wohlat⁷⁷³.

828⁷⁷² Here is what Lord Gladwin (Jeff) from the Foreign Office had to say on the matter (op. cit., p. 93): "...But at the end of July there were mysterious rumours that the minister in charge of the Department of Overseas Trade (Rob Hudson) had hinted that His Majesty's Government might, in certain circumstances, be willing to grant Germany a loan of no less than £1,000 million. Tremendous efforts by the Foreign Office to get to the bottom of this extraordinary story were headed off; but documents seized from the Germans have revealed that Horace Wilson had during the summer been secretly negotiating on this point with Wohlat, the German Trade Commissioner. We suspected this, and also believed that Rob Hudson and perhaps another member of the Government were in on the negotiations, though we had no evidence. 'The immediate effect of this piece of super-appeasement', I told Cadogan, who was on leave, 'has been to arouse all the suspicions of the Bolsheviks, dishearten the Poles.. and encourage the Germans into thinking that we are prepared to buy peace.. I must say I doubt whether folly could be pushed to a further extreme.' "

829⁷⁷³ Herbert Von Dirksen, 'Moscow, Tokyo, London', University of Oklahoma Press, 1952, pp. 226-227

Dirksen write in his report of July 21, 1939⁷⁷⁴:

Sir Horace Wilson made it perfectly clear that Chamberlain approved this program; Wilson invited Wohlat to have a talk there and then with Chamberlain, in which the latter would confirm what he had said. However, in view of the unofficial nature of his talks, Wohlat did not consider it appropriate to have such a conversation with Chamberlain.

'This program', had therefore Chamberlain's approval. The program consisted of a) a pact of non-aggression to be understood as renunciation of aggression in principle. b) a pact of non-intervention which would delineate the respective spheres of interest. Disarmament and colonies were also to be considered. Economic questions were also to be settled. The document mentioned that:

Sir Horace Wilson definitely told Herr Wohlat that the conclusion of a non aggression pact *would enable Britain to rid herself of her commitments vis-a-vis Poland*. As a result the Polish problem would lose much of its acuteness.

Chamberlain and Horace Wilson knew quite well that a pact of non-aggression with Germany would enable her to expand aggressively in the East without worrying for a western front. It is true that Wilson added that the pact would include a renunciation to aggression. Such a principle had been adopted by most European countries and codified within the Briand-Kellog pact. It proved to be of no consequence.

Chamberlain and Wohlat did not suggest a similar non-aggression act between Germany and Poland. They did not suggest to include in the pact a clause saying that an aggression committed against whatever country by a signatory would relieve the other signatory from the obligations of the pact. The innocuous 'renunciation of aggression' was essential to justify a pact of non-aggression to British public opinion.

Wilson did not explain how, with a British-German pact of non-aggression, the Polish question would lose its acuteness. Is it because Germany would renounce Danzig and the Corridor? Nothing in Germany's stand allowed any one to make such a presumption. The same is true concerning a sudden willingness by Poland to satisfy German's claims on Danzig and the Corridor.

The acuteness would disappear because, Britain tied with the non-aggression pact would be unable to help Poland. Poland, without support from the West may have to submit to Germany's demands. Were she to refuse, war would ensue, but it would be localised. Thus would the problem

830⁷⁷⁴ 'Documents and Material relating to the Eve of the Second World War', p[. cit., vol. 2, pp. 67-72

lose its acuteness, i.e. by abandoning the victim to the aggressor. The document continued:

Sir Horace Wilson said that it was contemplated holding new elections in Britain this autumn. From the point of view of purely domestic political tactics, it was all one to the Government whether the elections were held under the cry "Be Ready for A Coming War!" or under the cry "A Lasting Understanding With Germany in Prospect and Achievable!" It could obtain the backing of the electors for either of these cries and assure its rule for another five years. Naturally, it preferred the peaceful cry.

This urging for a decision before the British upcoming elections is a theme common to most of the contacts made with Germany at that time. It lends support to the belief that these contacts were all orchestrated by the Chamberlain circle.

In his own report written on July 24, 1939, Wohlat⁷⁷⁵ described the arguments given by Wilson to explain the British rearmament. It was done in response to the opposition pressure which had 'assumed that the reason for British attitude at Munich had been that Britain's armaments were not completed'. Now 'Britain was militarily prepared; one need, so to say, only press a button in London and the whole war industry would go full steam ahead'.

Hudson, having driven the point that Britain was not motivated by a feeling of weakness, produced a memorandum. Wohlat wrote:

This memorandum obviously contained an elaboration, approved by Neville Chamberlain, of the points which would have to be dealt with between the German and British Governments. *On the basis of the Fuhrer's speech of April 28*, he had drawn up these points for negotiations.

Sir Horace Wilson holds the view that the conversations must be held in secret. At present only Britain and Germany should negotiate; France and Italy should only be brought in later. Both Governments could come to an understanding to inform the friendly Powers by a definite date. Sir Horace declared that Great Britain wished to negotiate with Germany as an equal partner. *The highest-ranking personages should be brought together throughout the negotiations*⁷⁷⁶.. The results of the conversations

831⁷⁷⁵ DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 716, pp. 977-983. Wohlat has been described by Dirksen as 'Master in the English Language'. There was no need for a translator between Wilson and Wohlat.

832⁷⁷⁶ Britain reveals here her awareness of the rank's importance in negotiations. No wonder Dirksen could write about the Anglo-Soviet negotiations: "The progress of the pact negotiations with Russia is regarded sceptically, in spite, or just because of, the dispatch of a Military Mission. This is borne out by the composition of the British Military Mission.." [DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 752, p. 1033

should be concerned with agreements in which the basic principles of *a joint German-British policy* are laid down, which will then have to be worked out by constant further cooperation in individual agreements.

..If *the Greater German policy* in respect of territorial claims *was approaching the end of its demands*, the Fuhrer could take this opportunity of finding, in conjunction with Britain, *a form* which would enable him to go down in history as one of the greatest statesmen and which would lead to a revolution in world opinion.

Britain was not only prepared to come to terms with Germany's occupation of Czechoslovakia but would accept further annexations, provided that, concerning Germany's territorial claims, 'the end of its demands' was approaching. The policy of 'appeasement was back on track' even though Britain was feeling strong and had only, so to say, one button to press to have an impressive war production go rolling.

According to Wohlat⁷⁷⁷, Wilson proposed the following:

2) Mutual declarations of non-interference by Germany in respect of the British Commonwealth of Nations and by Great Britain with respect to Germany. I drew attention to the fact that it was not only a question of the frontiers of States and possessions, but also of territories of special interest and of economic influence. For Germany this would apply especially to East and South East Europe. Sir Horace replied that *this point needed especially careful political wording* and that the political definition would probably best result from an examination of Germany's economic interests. Britain was only interested in keeping her share of European trade.

Hudson had already explained to Wohlat that Britain, alone, cannot fulfil the needs of her colonial market. He added that this was the same with Japan in relation to China. With the addition of the Russian market, there would therefore be plenty opportunities for Germany to participate in these markets. The non-interference clause was therefore not designed to restrict the economic activities of each party to its sphere of interests.

Wilson acknowledged that Central and South East Europe were within Germany's sphere of interests. The problem was to find a proper wording and a proper 'political definition'. Similarly, the non-interference clause had to be worded delicately. In view of a pledge of renunciation of aggression, annexations, and the like, it would also have to take special forms, submit to

833The Soviets were also attentive to the rank of negotiators. On July 29, 1939, In a discussion between Astrakhov, a Soviet representative and Schnurre, a German representative, "Astrakhov asked.. whether, if a high-ranking Soviet personage discussed these questions with a high-ranking German personage, similar views would be put forward by us [Germany]." [DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 736, p. 1015

834⁷⁷⁷ DGFP, series D, vol. 6, doc. 716, pp 977-983

special manners, and wordings. With good will and imagination, and a modicum of restraint, something would be found on each occasion.

This could be considered a cynical interpretation. It is not so. What is cynical is the nerve of Wilson proposing to Germany a pledge of non-aggression, knowing so well that the only use of that pledge would be with respect to internal consumption in Britain. The fact is that Germany had not only constantly broken her pledges, but did not shy from broadcasting loud and clear her exorbitant ambitions. What Wilson was looking for was a *modus vivendi* whereby Germany would accept to realise her ambitions, while respecting such forms and wordings necessary to put the British leaders in position where they can abstain from interfering, and still keep control of the British public opinion.

Wohlat described further Wilson's proposals:

B. Military questions. A German-British declaration on the limitation of the armaments and a common policy towards third countries... The Air Agreement and the Army Agreement should take into account the special strategic and military conditions of the British Empire and of the Greater German Reich in Central Europe.

The special strategic and military conditions of the Greater Reich in Central Europe were not defined. However, the recognition of such special conditions might allow Germany to justify unilateral action in this region.

Like Hudson, Wilson proposed to Germany the sharing and the extension of markets:

Systematic German-British cooperation would, above all, extend to the economic development of three great markets:
The British Empire (especially India, South Africa, Canada, Australia)
China (in cooperation with Japan)
Russia (assuming that Stalin's policy develops accordingly)

Politicians do not have the time to indulge in impossible assumptions. The Russian market, under the Communist regime, could not be assumed to develop 'accordingly'. The Russian market was worthy consideration under a more practical assumption, that of an overthrow of the regime as a result of foreign intervention — most likely to be German.

Wilson's proposal had a definite structure. A) for political Questions. B) for military questions and C) for economic questions. A) was subdivided into 1), 2) and 3) respectively for renunciation of aggression, non-interference and colonial/mandate questions. B) was subdivided in 1), 2) and 3) respectively for Naval agreement, Air agreement, Army agreement. Finally C) was subdivided into 1), 2) and 3) respectively for markets (The British Empire, China and Russia), colonial questions and German-British

agreements on the British share in the Greater German Reich in Eastern and South East Europe. (Eastern Europe meant Poland and Russia).

Such a structured and detailed program could not have been invented by Wohlat. Moreover, Dirksen confirmed that the same program with the same structure had been exposed to him on August 3, 1939, by Wilson. The fact that he confirmed it in his memoirs published in 1952, under no motivation to please Nazi authorities, add credibility to his testimony.

Wilson's report on his conversations with Dirksen ended with the following⁷⁷⁸:

Von Dirksen said what he wanted to do was to see what help he or Kordt might give towards the furtherance of discussion if we felt that conditions existed that would make it worthwhile for such a discussion to take place. I said that the answer to this question rested solely with the German Government. There seemed to be three propositions which he and Kordt might keep in their minds:

1. What instructions has the Fuhrer given as to the follow-up of Wohlat's report? What are the next steps which the German Government think should be taken?
2. What will the German Chancellor do to prevent the position from becoming worse during the next few weeks? Will he so arrange the events during these weeks that they are non-provocative?
3. Assuming an agenda and programme to have been worked out, what will the German Chancellor do to show his determination to give the lead in creating a suitable atmosphere so that the agenda and programme may be discussed with due prospect of success.

To Dirksen, Wilson laid down the question as to the follow-up given to Wohlat's report on Wilson's conversation with him. However, if the conversation Wilson-Wohlat were correctly described by Wilson's report⁷⁷⁹, then there was no provision and no need for a follow up.

Likewise, question No 3 that Wilson says he asked the German to keep in mind, suddenly mentions: 'assuming an agenda and programme to have been worked out', assumption which, if Wilson was to be believed, seemed totally unrelated with the conversations with Wohlat, and unrelated with Wilson's report of his conversation with Dirksen. However, a detailed program based on detailed proposals by Wilson is mentioned by Wohlat and Dirksen in their reports.

The reports by Wohlat and Dirksen are much more consistent and more credible. Wilson abstention from mentioning in his reports the detailed

835⁷⁷⁸ DBFP, series 3, vol. 6, doc. 533, p. 582

836⁷⁷⁹ DBFP, series 3, vol. 6, doc. 354. pp. 389-391

proposals he made to Wohlat, is indicative of the fact that the proposals were to remain known only within a close circle of people which would not include even the highest public servants of the Foreign Office. Dirksen memoirs seemed to give an accurate rendering of the whole matter. He wrote⁷⁸⁰:

A general election was due in the autumn. By then Chamberlain would have to stand before the electors with the clear alternative: either "the compromise with Germany has been successful," or "we must prepare for war with Germany." I was plainly told by both Lord Halifax and Sir Horace Wilson that Parliament and public would accept either of these solutions unanimously. Hitler, too, heard it from the press magnate Lord Kemsley in a long conversation with him..

Thus the British Cabinet had the unusual difficult task of carrying through a dual foreign policy. On the one hand there were the negotiations with Moscow, which had to be kept alive; on the other hand, a compromise on a broad front had to be reached with Germany. If the compromise failed, the formation of an Eastern front would have to be achieved. If it succeeded, the Moscow negotiations would lose their importance. In view of the excited feelings in Britain, contacts with Germany had to be made in the utmost secrecy.

This was a fair assessment of the thoughts prevailing in the Chamberlain circle. Dirksen went on describing the meeting with Wohlat as reported to him by the latter. He then gave details concerning his own meeting with Wilson:

To give the discussion an official status, Sir Horace Wilson invited me to a conference. It was held in his private residence on August 3 and lasted for two hours. With circumstantial details he disclosed his program which had already been proposed to Wohlat. It fell into three sections..

Dirksen continued with details of Wilson's proposals. They did not differ from what Wohlat had reported. At the time, on August 1, 1939, Dirksen had minuted his conversation with Wilson and included these minutes in a report to the German Foreign Office. They reveal the following⁷⁸¹:

I set worth on having Sir Horace Wilson confirm the notes which I had made on the basis of my talk with Herr Wohlat regarding his conversations with Sir Horace Wilson. It seemed to me essential to have this corroboration in order that there might be

837⁷⁸⁰ 'Moscow, Tokyo, London', op. cit., p. 223

838⁷⁸¹ Documents and Material...' op., cit., vol .2, p. 116-123

full clarity on these important points, all the more that since Hudson's indiscretion a new campaign had been started against Chamberlain's appeasement policy. It appeared that *the basis of the Wohlat-Wilson conversation remained in force.*

Dirksen minutes continued with the description of Wilson's proposals. An interesting detail is worth quoting:

7) Armaments. On this point Sir Horace Wilson said that he wanted to make it quite clear *that it was not disarmament that was meant*, but negotiations regarding armaments in general. It was apparent from the further course of the conversation that he was well aware of the difficulties that would attend any agreement for limitation of armaments, as well as of the fact that it would take years to get going and become effective.

Once more it was evident that Britain did not believe in the possibility of reaching an agreement for disarmament with Germany. It was necessary, however, to deal with disarmament in a 'make-believe' manner so as to render any agreement with Germany, acceptable to the British public.

The minutes continued:

..After recapitulating his conversation with Wohlat, Sir Horace Wilson expatiated at length on the great risk Chamberlain would incur by starting confidential negotiations with the German Government. *If anything about them were to leak out there would be a grand scandal, and Chamberlain would probably be forced to resign...*

When I questioned whether in general, in view of the prevailing state of feeling — everyone who came out in favour of adjustments with Germany was regarded as a traitor and branded as such — it was possible for a British Government to arrive at any binding agreements with Germany, Sir Horace Wilson replied that it was possible, but that it would require all the skill of the British persons involved not to come to grief in the attempt. *Above all, the greatest secret was necessary at the present stage.*

This was not the first time that Chamberlain was trying to implement a very unpopular policy. Other leaders have occasionally do the same. What was particular, dangerous and contemptuous in Chamberlain's attempts was that they were made secretly with the help of a very limited circle of people. Chamberlain was trying to overcome the democratic process which he considered as too restraining. This is made clearer by the following quotes from what followed in the minutes in terms of Wilson's explanations:

The question was, how and *in what form* the public were later to be informed of the Government's plans. Here Wilson pointed out

that in England — whether rightly or wrongly he would not say — confidence in Germany and her peaceful intentions had been shattered; *the thing above all was to convince the British public that confidence was warranted.*

There is no difficulty of forms when the intention is to say the truth to the people. It is when the intention is to deceive the people that forms become important. Not all forms are liable to be equally successful. A wrong form could result either in the public not being convinced of the wisdom of the policy, or lead to the belief that the Government is either lying or concealing the truth.

Even when proper forms are chosen, dictatorship has, according to Wilson, a definite advantage over democracy. Wilson, the minutes show, explained:

There would be no sense in negotiating for an adjustment if another dangerous crisis was to be expected. It had to be admitted that it was a sort of vicious circle: on the one hand, the public could not be reassured by announcing that negotiations were in prospect (because that would jeopardize the negotiations), and, on the other, the German side declined to make reassuring declarations before they had a clear picture regarding the negotiations. *It was difficult, because of Britain's democratic constitution, for Chamberlain to come out publicly with a conciliatory statement, for then he and the Cabinet would probably be forced to resign.* The vicious circle could therefore perhaps be more easily broken if the Fuhrer, who had no political attacks to fear at home, took the initiative and himself made such a conciliatory statement.

Wilson is requesting help from Germany to circumvent Democracy, and enable Chamberlain to implement a policy abhorrent to the British people and to the House. At the same time he explains the necessity of avoiding a new crisis. He hopes that if there is political calm for some time, a peaceful statement by Hitler would allow the negotiations between the two countries to go public. Wilson explained to Wohlat and Dirksen that, once a treaty of non-aggression, with a pledge of renunciation of aggression, would be signed, Britain could disengage from the guarantees she gave to Poland Roumania and Greece.

On August 1, Dirksen sent to Weizsacker a letter⁷⁸² accompanied with the minutes made by Kordt of his conversations on July 29, 1939, with Charles Roden Buxton, a Labour politician. Though Buxton declared that he was visiting Kordt in a personal capacity, Dirksen thought that Chamberlain must have approved that visit and must have discussed with Buxton the proposals he was to present.

839⁷⁸² 'Documents and Materials...', op. cit., pp. 105-112

Dirksen justifies his opinion on the basis that on July 31, two days after Buxton's conversation with Kordt, Chamberlain made a speech in the House of Commons and "— like Buxton — specifically referred to the Anglo-French agreement of 1904 and the Anglo-Russian treaty of 1907." The circumstance for mentioning these treaties are not relevant to the point Dirksen is making. What mattered was that Buxton mentioned them two days before Chamberlain. Dirksen thought that it proved that they had concerted together just before Buxton's visit to Kordt. Moreover, Buxton used the expression 'spheres of interests', which had been used by Wilson in his conversations with Wohlat. It seems that 'spheres of interests' was considered an expression less common than 'spheres of influence'.

Kordt described Buxton's proposals in his minutes:

- 1) Germany promises not to interfere in British Empire affairs.
- 2) Great Britain promises fully to respect the German spheres of interest in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. A consequence of this would be that Great Britain would renounce the guarantee she gave to certain states in the German sphere of interest. Great Britain further promises to influence France to break her alliance with the Soviet Union and to give up her ties in Southeastern Europe.
- 3) Great Britain promises to give up the present negotiations for a pact with the Soviet Union..

In return for this, besides the afore-mentioned non-interference, Germany is to promise:

- 1) To proclaim her readiness for European co-operation..
- 2) To grant at a later stage some kind of autonomy to Bohemia and Moravia (I pointed out that this cultural autonomy already existed, after which Mr. Roden Buxton did not pursue the idea)
- 3) To agree to a general reduction of armaments.. Such a concession was essential to make it at all possible for Chamberlain and Lord Halifax to enter into reasonable and realistic negotiations with us.

It was obvious that such a far-reaching program, which would also settle the colonial question in a manner favourable to Germany, could only be discussed quite confidentially and in an atmosphere of improved confidence.

On August 2, Lord Kimsley, just back from Germany where he had a meeting with Hitler, met Dirksen to whom he repeated Wilson's statement⁷⁸³ that Chamberlain would meet unanimous support in the House whether he was asking for preparation for an incoming war or whether he considered an agreement with Germany as feasible and imminent. Kordt mentioned:

840⁷⁸³ 'Documents and Materials...', op. cit., pp. 113-114

Lord Kimsley spoke with pleasure of his conversation with Reichsleiter Rosenberg (charming personality), to whom he had said that Chamberlain was in his way the Fuhrer of England, similar to Hitler and Mussolini.

It is not a coincidence that in so short a period so many confidential contacts were made between Britain and Germany. Buxton's visit to Kordt tended to show that even non-Conservatives were favouring an understanding with Germany. Chamberlain could be trusted to be supported by a larger base than would be thought. Lord Kimsley tried to show that Chamberlain is as master of the situation in Britain as Hitler is in Germany. If Chamberlain promises, he can deliver.

Moreover, it was true that, soon, a decision had to be made, one way or the other. General elections in Britain were due in autumn and it was time for Chamberlain to chose the theme of the campaign.

The special contacts continued. Not all were of great interest and none would add to our understanding. A conversation between Halifax and Dahlerus on July 25, 1939, (DBFP, series 3 vol. 6, p. 484) is however worthy mentioning It had been minuted by Halifax. After having expressed his interest on a possible *incognito* visit by Goring to Britain, Halifax added:

It was, however, essential that I should know nothing about it officially and I should not even wish to have any communication sent to me directly by those taking part in the meeting [with Goering]. He could, if he so desired, always communicate with me through Sir H. Wernher, *but if any official connection were ever to be established, it would only do mischief and create quite unnecessary and undesirable misunderstandings.*

Halifax knew the necessity, when pursuing a policy of appeasement, to prepare a credible case of deniability. It is therefore not astonishing that Cadogan attached little importance to Wilson's denials, and that the historians should attach limited importance to Wilson's denials with respects to his meetings with Wohlat.

In a world in which each country is spying on so many others, and when it is known that a number of well-informed British officials where spying for the Soviet Union, it cannot be ruled out that Chamberlain's secret efforts at reaching an understanding with Germany, were known to the Soviet Union. It would justify a suspicious stand from that country and an insistence for nothing less than an ironclad agreement with the West, devoid of any loophole.

Negotiations With The Soviet-Union

We saw that, prior to Germany's occupation of Prague, Chamberlain's policy was to give a free hand to Germany in Eastern Europe. After the invasion and the resulting crossing of the Rubicon, Chamberlain, together with the Cabinet, endeavoured to create an Eastern front against Germany. The role of the Soviet Union in this front had to be considered.

The story of the negotiations between Britain, France and the Soviet Union, aiming at presenting a common front against further German aggression, is long and convoluted. A history of these negotiations is not attempted here. The purpose of the following pages is to examine those aspects of the negotiation which either throw additional light on Chamberlain's policy of giving a free hand to Hitler in the East, or on those other aspects which seemed to be at variance with it.

The record of the Soviet Foreign Policy during the thirties — particularly since 1933 — was impeccable. There was no need to trust or distrust the Soviet Policy of resistance to aggression. It was enough to notice that she was an expected victim of aggression and had therefore a vital interest in resisting the increase of strength that would accrue to Germany from further aggressions in Europe. In contrast, the record of the British and French Foreign Policy was not of a nature that could inspire trust to the Soviet Union.

When considering an understanding with Germany, Chamberlain thought it essential to take trust-inspiring measures. He went so far as to avoid implementing a program for bombers production, program which he earlier considered as an essential deterrent. He even refused to create a ministry of supplies for fear that it would be misinterpreted by Germany.

This readiness to humour the German susceptibilities was not designed to counteract a history of misunderstandings between the two countries. There was little in British Foreign Policy which Germany could honestly find provocative. Britain had proved, time after time, that she would not oppose Germany's expansion in Central Eastern Europe, provided this was done in a manner devoid of threat to the West, and provided the German plans were executed with a modicum of 'justification' as to cause little problem to British public opinion.

In the case of negotiations with the Soviet Union, the starting point was deep distrust. The West, convinced that a Germano-Soviet understanding was an impossibility, could not but acknowledge Soviet Union's interest in preventing further German aggression. On the other hand, the Soviet Union having been kept at arms length from the Munich negotiations, having witnessed the British continual efforts at reaching an understanding with Germany, having witnessed the surrender of the West in the case of Germany's rearmament, her remilitarisation of the Rhineland, her annexation of Austria and the Sudeten region, having seen all her proposals for collective security denigrated by Britain, was doubting Britain's sincerity in the suddenly expressed desire to resist aggression.

An essential component for the success of the negotiation with the Soviet Union was therefore, for the West, to avoid taking ambiguous steps suggestive of a continuation of the appeasement policy, or of a reluctance to start serious negotiations.

It was not just a Soviet suspicion but a fact that Chamberlain was reluctant to conclude a pact of mutual assistance with the Soviet Union. He was forced into the negotiations by the pressure of the opposition, by public opinion and by a section of the Conservative Party⁷⁸⁴. Many of the British suggestions, proposals and stands would not have been different, had the intention been to increase the Soviet Union's distrust.

One could think that the Soviet misgivings, however natural and predictable they might have been, were not justified once Britain had guaranteed Poland against aggression. There were, however, indications that Britain had ulterior motives. The ambiguity of the British position is revealed by comparing quotes from two documents. On April 12, 1939, Halifax wrote to Seeds (Moscow) concerning his meeting with Maisky, the Soviet Ambassador in Britain⁷⁸⁵:

The second point was that M. Maisky did not readily see why, if we and France wished to help Poland and Roumania, we could not make such help conditional on their adopting a reasonable attitude towards the acceptance of help from Russia. I told him that *we should not certainly exclude such a possibility from our mind*, but that, on the other hand, we could not ignore the possibility that, if anything of this sort were forced upon Poland and Roumania, they might in self defence feel obliged to enter some formal protest of dissociation, the general effect of which would be damaging to the common cause we all wished to serve.

Halifax, while pointing to the drawbacks of the Soviet proposal, expresses the view that the Soviet proposal should certainly be kept in mind. However, on the next day (April, 12, 1939), Halifax wrote the following to Kennard, the British Ambassador to Poland⁷⁸⁶:

I told Count Raczynski that when the Soviet Ambassador had criticized our attitude, I had observed that the difficulties of which he complained were not of our making, but were inherent in the situation. The best thing that the Soviet Government could do would be to remove the anxieties of their neighbours. M. Maisky's reply to this had been to suggest that, before undertaking to come to the help of Poland and Roumania, we should insist, as a condition, that they should come to an

841⁷⁸⁴ DBFP, series 3, vol. 5, doc. 1, p. 8

842⁷⁸⁵ 'The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon', op. cit., p. 199 (entries of May 15 and 17 1939)

843⁷⁸⁵ DBFP, series 3, vol. 5, doc. 42, pp. 82-84

844⁷⁸⁶ DBFP, series 3, vol. 5, doc. 50, p. 98

arrangement with the Soviet Union. *I had told him that I could not feel this to be a very helpful contribution.*

The Anglo-Polish agreement obligated each party to keep the other informed on question of common interest. Britain did not always respect this obligation. Poland was the object of disrespectful remarks between France and Britain. These remarks were, of course, never reported to Poland. However, at his meeting with Count Raczynsky, Halifax felt it necessary to report to Poland the Soviet suggestion of conditioning help to Poland on her being reasonable with respect to the acceptance of Soviet help.

The least that could be said about Halifax's behaviour is that it was devious and counter-productive. Devious because he did not candidly report his conversation with Maisky. He said to him that the suggestion should certainly be kept in mind. To Raczynski he pretended having told Maisky that he did not feel the Soviet suggestion to be a very helpful contribution.

Halifax's behaviour was counter-productive because he knew that the British General Staff had more than once underlined the vital importance of permitting the Soviet troops to enter Poland for her defence against a German aggression. Halifax was therefore required to influence Poland to this effect. Instead, talking to the Polish representative, he threw on the Soviet Union the responsibility of relieving Poland from her anxieties. There is no suggestion as to how the Soviet Union could achieve such a result. Besides, Halifax's report on his conversation with Maisky does not support his contention that he so much as hinted to Maisky that it was Soviet's responsibility to remove Poland's anxieties. At no point, despite the British General Staff's views, had a serious effort been made by Britain to convince Poland to permit the passage of Russian forces in time of war.

On April 13, 1939, Seeds, the British Ambassador to Moscow sent a message to Halifax saying⁷⁸⁷:

I venture to point out that it is difficult to see how the Soviet Government can effectively contribute towards a solution of our difficulties so long as the countries where the Soviet contribution could be effective resolutely refuse to consider any idea of cooperating with or even consulting this country.

5. But I do emphatically agree with the Russian Ambassador *in the hope that some means may be found by His Majesty's Government to prevail on Poland and Roumania to accept the idea of some form of Soviet military assistance.* Such acceptance to be notified *now* and not put off until an outbreak of war when this country might be tempted to follow counsels of prudence or worse.

845⁷⁸⁷ DBFP, series 3, vol. 5, doc. 52, p. 104

Maisky was not the only one to underline the necessity of 'prevailing' on Poland to accept the Soviet assistance. Bonnet also expressed such a view. Lloyd George, in the House of Commons also pointed to its necessity. However, at the time, Chamberlain had no enthusiasm for reaching an agreement with the Soviet Union.

On April 18, 1939, the Soviet Union proposed to Britain and France an alliance against aggression based on 8 points. These points were mentioned in a message from Seeds to Halifax⁷⁸⁸:

1. England, France and the U.S.S.R. to conclude with one another an agreement for a period of five to ten years by which they would oblige themselves to render mutually forthwith all manner of assistance, including that of a military nature, in case of aggression in Europe against any one of the contracting Powers.
2. England, France and the U.S.S.R. to undertake to render all manner of assistance, including that of a military nature, to Eastern European States situated between Baltic and Black Seas and bordering on U.S.S.R., in case of aggression against these States.
3. England, France and the U.S.S.R. to undertake to discuss and to settle within the shortest period of time extent and forms of military assistance to be rendered by each of these States in fulfilment of paragraphs 1. and 2.
4. English Government to explain that assistance recently promised to Poland concerned exclusively aggression on the part of Germany.
5. The treaty alliance which exists between Poland and Roumania is to be declared operative in case of aggression of any nature against Poland and Roumania, or else to be revoked altogether as one directed against U.S.S.R.
6. England, France and U.S.S.R. to undertake following outbreak of hostilities not to enter into negotiations of any kind whatsoever and not to conclude peace with aggressors separately from one another and without consent of the three Powers.
7. An agreement on above lines to be signed simultaneously with terms of convention which has been described above under paragraph 3.
8. The necessity is recognised for England, France (? and U.S.S.R. [the text here is uncertain]) to enter into joint negotiations with Turkey having in view conclusion of a special agreement on mutual assistance.

846⁷⁸⁸ DBFP, series 3, vol. 5, doc. 201, pp. 228-229

Seeds' message included the Soviet arguments presented to him by Litvinov in justification of points 2., 4., 5., 7. and 8. They appeared to be reasonable. The proposals had an obvious drawback: a lack of reciprocity. Whereas they obliged France and England to guarantee all the states lying along the Soviet frontiers, they were not pledging the Soviet Union to guarantee Belgium, Luxembourg and Switzerland, countries lying along the French boundaries.

The Soviet Union had been asked by Britain and France to make a unilateral declaration indicating her readiness to assist Roumania in case of an aggression against her. To overcome the Soviet misgivings, it was suggested that she could add that her pledge to help Roumania would be operative only if Britain and France were first involved in the defence of Roumania⁷⁸⁹. This would not cover the case of a German attack against the Soviet Union with the consent of Roumania or Poland. The Soviet proposal represented a better protection to the Soviet Union, while satisfying the West request for assistance to Poland and Roumania. It is to be noted that point 7. is equivalent to the request that a political agreement should come into effect simultaneously with a military agreement. This point, contrary to what Britain and France would subsequently say, had therefore been raised quite early in the negotiations.

The Soviet Union had not been asked to guarantee the small Nations in the West. Nevertheless her negotiating position would have been much stronger had she volunteered to do it. In fact since she was to assist France in the case of an attack by Germany, it would have been in the interest of the three powers to stop Germany before she succeed in conquering Belgium or Luxembourg. It would have made sense to also propose a guarantee of Holland and Denmark. However, as a first draft, the Soviet proposals had great merits and it was up to Britain and France to point out the lack of reciprocity in them.

The Soviet proposals were not welcome by Britain and France. On April, 18, 1939, Cadogan minuted his suggestion for rejecting the Russian proposals. He wrote⁷⁹⁰:

We have to balance the advantage of a paper commitment by Russia to join in a war on one side against the disadvantage of associating ourselves openly with Russia. The advantage is, to say the least, problematical.. If we are attacked by Germany, Poland under our mutual guarantee will come to our assistance,

847⁷⁸⁹ DBFP, series 3, vol. 5, doc. 247, p. 266. The document is a message from Halifax to Phipps (Paris) in which he mentions this suggestion, which might answer the Soviet Union's suggestions. It is to be noted that this document is dated April 21, 1939, two days after British received the Soviet proposals. Instructions to convey that suggestion to the Soviet Union were sent to Seeds on May 6, 1939, eighteen days after receiving the Soviet proposals [DBFP, series 3, vol. 5, doc. 397, p. 448].

848⁷⁹⁰ 'The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan', op. cit., p. 175

i.e. make war on Germany. If the Soviet are bound to do the same, how can they fulfil their obligation without sending troops through or aircraft over Polish territory? That is exactly what frightens the Poles.

Cadogan only refers to a German attack against England, in which case, the Soviet help would be unavailable in the face of Polish reluctance. He does not consider the opposite case, that of a German attack against Poland, in which case the British help to Poland would be unavailable, in view of the purely defensive policy Britain and France intended to follow on the Western front.

Those are problems for people unwilling to make the necessary effort to solve them. The defensive policy on the Western front could have been modified and Poland could have been subjected to adequate pressure — vide Czechoslovakia — so that means could be found for benefiting from Soviet help. Next day, Cadogan called the proposals ‘mischievous’. Writing to Phipps (Paris), Halifax said that the proposals ‘were in very precise form and might not improbably cause some embarrassment in certain quarters’. On April 20, 1939, Halifax sent to Phipps a very short telegram which is here quoted in full⁷⁹¹:

We should be glad to be informed of the views of the French Government at their earliest convenience. Meanwhile *it is most important* that neither the terms of the Soviet proposal nor the reactions of His Majesty’s Government or the French Government to it should be made public.

The following quotation might explain why it was so important to prevent the proposals, and the British Government’s reaction from becoming public. On April 20, 1939, Halifax wrote to Phipps (Paris)⁷⁹²:

3. Mr Corbin, to whom I outlined our misgivings in regard to these proposals, said that the difficulties which their acceptance would create were plain enough. On the other hand, *great care would have to be taken in handling the matter*; a flat rejection would enable the Russians to cause both Governments considerable embarrassment, and it would be better if some practical counter-proposals could be devised.

Had the West been interested in an alliance with the Soviet Union, they would have welcome their proposals and indicated ways to improve on them. The need for ‘practical counter-proposals’ is stressed, not in relation to a needed alliance, but in relation of the public relation problems that would result from a flat refusal. The conclusion can legitimately be reached that,

849⁷⁹¹ DBFP, series 3, vol. 5, doc. 232, p. 254

850⁷⁹² DBFP, series 3, vol. 5, doc. 240, p. 260

was it not for the public opinion, a flat rejection would have constituted the first choice of Britain and France.

The intended British response was a reaffirmation of her previous suggestion for a Soviet unilateral declaration equivalent to a guarantee of Poland and Roumania. At first, the French Government was unwilling to associate itself any longer with such a suggestion. Phipps reported to Halifax on April 24, 1939⁷⁹³:

Extremely *precise and certain* information which has reached French Government shows that such an agreement will only be possible on two conditions.

(b) French Government are also assured that the adherence of Soviet Government to immediate agreement proposed can only be secured in so far as it receives assurance that if assistance asked of it exposed Russia to an attack by Germany, France and Great Britain would come to help her. The Russian Government has made this a *sine qua non*. **French Government do not therefore consider it possible to retain and support in Moscow the British suggestion for Russian unilateral declaration of assistance parallel to French and British declarations but with no guarantee or obligation of direct or indirect assistance between the three Governments.** The only solution lies in formula by which France and Great Britain would guarantee Russia against consequences of assistance asked from her.

It was evident that the British proposals for a Soviet unilateral declaration had no chance of being accepted by the Soviet Union. Britain, nevertheless presented them to the Soviet Union as a Franco-British common move. France had a different suggestion mentioned in the document last quoted:

French Government therefore propose Tripartite Agreement on following general lines:

If France and Great Britain found themselves at war with Germany as result of executing engagements taken by them to prevent all changes by force of *status quo*, Russia would immediately assist them.

If as a result of the help given by Russia to France and Great Britain in above conditions Russia found herself at war with Germany, they would immediately assist her.

The three Governments will concert without delay nature, in both cases, of this assistance and will take all steps to assure its full efficacy.

851⁷⁹³ DBFP, series 3, vol. 5, doc 277, p. 295

The French proposals contained an element of asymmetry. Only Britain and France were expected to be at war for assisting Poland and Roumania. The Soviet Union would then have to assist Britain and France. The second case was, in reality, identical to the first. Though it started with 'If ... Russia found herself at war with Germany' — as distinct from 'if France and Great Britain found themselves at war with Germany' -, it cannot hide the fact that the chronology of the events described by the second point is identical to that of the first case.

In the first case, the one in which Britain and France would find themselves at war with Germany, three events are to occur in succession:

w at first Germany would invade Poland or Roumania.

w then Britain and France would find themselves at war with Germany as a result of their engagements.

w finally Russia is to assist Britain and France.

In the second case, the one in which Russia would find herself at war with Germany, the same three events are occurring in the same order, though the descriptive order is different:

w Russia finds herself at war with Germany as a result of helping France and Great Britain.

w this means that France and Great Britain must have already been at war with Germany.

w Finally, it is specified that France and Britain would receive the Russian help 'in the above conditions'. However the above conditions are that the two countries would find themselves at war as the result of their obligation towards Poland and Roumania, obligations that are triggered by a German invasion.

The second case therefore, also presupposes a German attack against Poland and Roumania followed by a British and French involvement — through their guarantees to the two countries — followed by the Soviet Union assisting Britain and France.

The net result is that there is only a single case. In short Britain and France are asking the Soviet Union's assistance directly to them, and not to the first expected victims of aggression.

On April 24 1939, Gafencu, during conversations in London with a British delegation including Halifax and Chamberlain, reported the results of his conversations with various European leaders. The minutes refers to

Gafencu by his name, and to Chamberlain by his title 'Prime Minister'. Gafencu reporting on his conversation with Hitler said⁷⁹⁴:

Herr Hitler had also said that he had nothing to say against an Anglo-French guarantee to Roumania; but he had added that, if this was linked up with Russia, the position would be changed. In Herr Hitler's view, Great Britain France and Germany, whatever their differences, had a common interest in saving Europe. The Soviet Union was a danger, not only to Germany but to Europe as a whole.

The Prime Minister said he gathered therefore that Herr Hitler's dislike and fear of Russia had not diminished.

The information conveyed by Gafencu could be interpreted as an attempt by Hitler to prevent Britain and France from reaching an agreement with the Soviet Union. If this was the case, then the natural conclusion would be that Hitler feared an alliance between the three countries. Chamberlain did not see it that way. His conclusion was that Hitler remained as anti-communist as ever. There was therefore some latitude for justifying appeasing him.

During the same conversations, while noting that Russia should not be 'too much' cold-shouldered in view of the assistance she could possibly give to Roumania and Poland in time of war, Halifax remarked that:

His Majesty's Government also had the domestic aspect to consider, since many members of the opposition considered that if only an agreement could be made with Russia everything would be alright.

A measure of cold-shouldering was considered to be in order. Too much of it would cause domestic problems.

On April 28, 1939, Halifax summarised for Kennard (Warsaw) the British policy⁷⁹⁵:

2. His Majesty's Government are trying to reconcile the following considerations:

- (a) not to forego the chance of our receiving help from the Soviet Government in case of war;
- (b) not to jeopardize the common front by disregarding the susceptibilities of Poland and Roumania;
- (c) not to forfeit the sympathy of the world at large by giving a handle to Germany's anti-Comintern propaganda;
- (d) not to jeopardise the cause of peace by provoking violent action by Germany.

852⁷⁹⁴ DBFP, series 3, vol. 5, doc. 279 pp. 309-315. We previously commented on the conversation in a different context

853⁷⁹⁵ DBFP, series 3, vol. 5, doc. 304, p. 357

Paragraph (c) meant that, in Halifax's opinion, close association with the Soviet Union would work to the advantage of Germany in her propaganda. Paragraph (d) underlines the danger of the close association with the Soviet Union in provoking a war with Germany instead of acting as a deterrent. Paragraph (b) seemed to give more importance to Roumania and Poland than to the Soviet Union.

Of the four paragraphs only one is in support of some association with the Soviet Union. To 'reconcile' the four considerations is therefore not so difficult. Halifax exaggerates the difficulty in mentioning four different elements. Since, however, (b), (c) and (d) are convergent, he is presenting a very unbalanced picture. On the one hand Britain had to care 'not to jeopardise the common front', 'not to forfeit the sympathy of the world' and 'not to jeopardise the cause of peace'. On the other hand stood only 'the chance of our receiving help from the Soviet Union'.

The case, as presented by Halifax, is clear and cut, and since the reconciliation of the two aspects, pro and con, is as impossible as the squaring of the circle, an alliance with the Soviet Union seemed impossible.

The Chiefs of Staff had underlined that the Soviet Union was militarily more important than Poland. It was obvious that Germany herself feared the alliance of Britain and France with the Soviet Union. The British Opposition was demanding it. Nevertheless Halifax is arguing that it might be a provocation to Germany, as if the guarantee to Poland were not in fact a much greater 'provocation'. Halifax's attitude smacked of appeasement.

For some time Chamberlain refused to include in the negotiated treaty a clause preventing a party to the treaty from concluding a separate peace with Germany. He had little regard to the argument that Britain would have been suspicious to the extreme, had the Soviet Union originated the request for a right to a separate peace with the enemy. In a telegram sent to Seeds (Moscow) on May 7, 1939, Halifax precise the meaning of terms used in a previous telegram. He said⁷⁹⁶:

By *point 6* I meant to refer to Soviet proposal that the three Governments would undertake not to make separate peace, and paragraphs 7 and 8 of my telegram.. deal with this point.

We now quote the relevant paragraphs which were part of a message sent by Halifax to Seeds on May 6, 1939⁷⁹⁷:

6. His Majesty's Government fully realise the force of the considerations which led the Soviet Government to formulate *Point 6* of their proposals.

854⁷⁹⁶ DBFP, series 3, vol. 5, doc. 408, p.461

855⁷⁹⁷ DBFP, series 3, vol 5, doc. 389, pp. 443-444

7. In order to try to meet the Soviet Government to some extent we have inserted towards the end of our proposed formula the words ‘and on such terms.’ It would then be possible to deal with this matter *if and when the event arises*.

8. His Majesty’s Government would hope that it might be possible for you to persuade the Soviet Government not to press this point, *which is one of obvious difficulty*..

To suggest that the matter could be considered ‘if and when the event arises’ cannot possibly answer the Soviet concerns. It was difficult for the Soviet union not to conclude that ‘the obvious difficulties’ were related to the British reluctance to forego, even in time of war, the option to come to terms with Germany, thus leaving the Soviet Union at war with Germany. The acceptance by Britain of Point 6 took some time and appeared to have been the result of duress — pressure by France, the opposition and British public opinion.

On June 18, 1939, Corbin, the French Ambassador to Britain sent a letter to Cadogan saying⁷⁹⁸:

(2) *Conclusion of a separate peace or armistice*

In relation to this, M. George Bonnet is of the opinion that it may be more to our advantage than to the Russian’s to maintain this paragraph. On the other hand, in order to understand the Soviet psychology in this respect, it would suffice to imagine the state of mind in which we would ourselves be if we would have proposed such a clause and the Russian were refusing to accept it. [our translation]

Britain’s long hesitation at responding to the Soviet natural concerns cannot but suggest to the distrustful Soviet Government that Britain had unavowable motives for their refusal.. The letter by Corbin proves that the Soviet misgivings were not only natural, but also predictable.

The nature of the Soviet suspicions was revealed to Halifax the British ambassador in Turkey. In a message dated May 17, 1939, the British ambassador wrote⁷⁹⁹:

3. Turkish Ambassador, Moscow, explains attitude of Soviet Government as follows:

(a) As regards advent to Russia through the Baltic States he points out that Germany could not attack Russia by this route without Poland’s acquiescence. Soviet request for guarantees as regards

856⁷⁹⁸ DBFP, series 3, vol. 6, doc. 85, pp. 99

857⁷⁹⁹ DBFP, series 3, vol. 5, doc. 535, p. 573

attack through Baltic States is therefore somewhat in the nature of window dressing.

(b) Soviet Government nevertheless entertain a *fear*, which they do not like to put into words, *of possible German attack on Russia with Polish cooperation. It is against this that they wish to be safeguarded.*

5. Minister of Foreign Affairs feels convinced that Soviet Government desire to co-operate with us if only their suspicions and the difficulties explained above can be repelled [*sic* ? dispelled].. he adopted attitude in speaking to me, of speaking indirectly *on behalf of Soviet Government.*

These Soviet fears were not far-fetched. Only four days later, on May 21, 1939, Halifax sent from Geneva to Cadogan a message concerning conversations he held with French Ministers concerning 'our Russian conversations. Halifax wrote⁸⁰⁰:

3. I explained to them that His Majesty's Government would see great difficulty in agreeing to a straight triple alliance. Our main objections.. were, first, that such a pact might well provoke Germany to violent action which we all wished to avoid and secondly that it might divide opinion in Great Britain which was at present firmly united behind the policy which His Majesty's Government had been pursuing during the recent months.

4. We had however set down on paper outline of a direct triple pact in order to see what it would look like. I then read to the French Ministers the draft (known as draft B) .. I emphasised that I thought it unlikely that His Majesty's Government would be able to accept such a draft.

5. Daladier said that the draft seemed to him quite acceptable and he could not understand our difficulties. Unless we concluded such an agreement quickly we should increase rather than diminish the risk of an act of force by Germany. Such an act could only be averted if Germany could be convinced that if she embarked upon this course she would meet with effective resistance. Without collaboration of Russia assistance could not be effective. He did not believe that conclusion of such a pact would provoke Germany to violent action. Quite apart from the benefits he did not think that Russia ought to be treated on a basis less favourable than Poland. We had entered into direct reciprocal undertaking with Poland and the Soviet Union would have cause to complain if we did not do the same with her. He did not think that the Soviet Union would accept anything less than this now

858⁸⁰⁰ DBFP, series 3, vol. 5, doc. 576, pp 623-625

although they might have accepted less a few weeks ago when the French formula had been drafted.

The British reluctance to conclude an alliance with the Soviet Union was obvious. The reasons advanced by Halifax did not convince Daladier whose arguments were not properly answered. The discussion that followed revealed a dark corner of British policy:

6. M. Daladier added that *an attack by Germany on Russia which did not bring our Polish and Roumanian guarantees into play was most unlikely to occur*. We should in fact not be increasing our obligations much by accepting triple pact. I replied that if as he himself had pointed out what Russians feared was attack by Germany with Polish or Roumanian connivance or acquiescence *we should in fact be undertaking a heavier obligation since unless Poland and Roumania resisted, our guarantee to them would not come into force*.

The Soviet suspicions, expressed four days earlier to Turkey, were therefore totally justified. Daladier himself seems to agree that, were there a way for Germany to attack the Soviet Union without crossing Roumania or Poland, it would make sense not to conclude an alliance with the Soviet Union. He underestimated Britain's cunning and her willingness to consider the possibility of a war between Germany and the Soviet Union in which the Soviet Union would be abandoned to her fate.

Negotiations with the Soviet Union were not part and parcel of the policy of giving Hitler a free hand towards Eastern Europe. They had become necessary as a response to the opposition pressure and that of public opinion. Chamberlain accepted the negotiations very reluctantly. However, other members of the Cabinet saw in them a kind of insurance to cover the case of the failure of the free hand policy. As a first priority, the Soviet Union was to be thrown to the wolves. As a second priority, the Soviet Union was to be kept in reserve as an ally against a German attack Westwards.

The contradictions involved in this dual policy prevented Britain from taking decisive steps to ensure their success.

w When the Cabinet insisted on accepting most of the Soviet suggestions, Chamberlain insisted that the pact with the Soviet Union should mention its dependence on the League of Nations. In a letter to his sister, Chamberlain explained that it would then be possible to neutralise the pact by modifying the obligations under the Covenant of the League⁸⁰¹.

w While negotiating a treaty of mutual assistance between Britain, France and the Soviet Union, Chamberlain still hoped that it might be possible to

859⁸⁰¹ See Aster, Op. Cit., pp. 186-7

reach an understanding with Germany. The idea was that Germany would provide England with the appearance of a justification for trusting her. The policy of a free hand to Germany in the East could then be resumed. Leaks concerning secret Germano-British talks reached the newspapers and, naturally, increased Soviet suspicions.

w The conclusion of the Soviet-German non-aggression pact put an end to these expectations. They were replaced by the hope of achieving an understanding with a nazi leader who would overthrow Hitler. Goering seemed to be a likely candidate.

Chamberlain attached little importance to the military value of the Soviet Union. He wished the negotiations would fail and, at times, said that he would rather resign than sign a treaty with the Soviet Union. The negotiations were pursued in the belief that, as long as they were ongoing, Germany would abstain from resuming her aggressive march. Instructions were given to the British negotiators to go slow enough in order not to reach conclusions, and fast enough to avoid their rupture. The British negotiators were to favour agreements lacking specificity and providing escaping loopholes.

The record shows that Britain's attitude during the negotiations discouraged the Soviet Union and created in that country the belief that Britain was not serious in the negotiations. Altogether, Britain cut a poor figure in the negotiations. Comparatively, the Soviet-Union acted with suspicion, suspicion justified by her past and present experience. The pact she signed with Germany, but not the odious codicil, can be defended, to a point.

Britain being an open society, the blame that can be thrown on her can easily be established. The Soviet archives are not yet open and available to all historians. Documents which could shed a bad light on the Soviet Union have not yet been released. Therefore, Britain's blame, however great, cannot be measured against the Soviet blame, which is still to be evaluated properly.

There is hope that the Soviet archives will be accessible within a few years. When this occurs, the story of the Soviet-French-British negotiations may have to be rewritten. We should however underline that, even within the paucity of available Soviet documents, the Soviet Union is definitely not blameless.

The Soviet Union, while suspicious of the Chamberlain schemes, must have observed the strength with which Chamberlain was dragged away from the policy of appeasement by the public mood. The Soviet Union could have trusted British public opinion to make it impossible for Chamberlain to betray an alliance with the Soviet Union. This was a risk the Soviet Union, apparently, did not want to take. What if, as the events proved it possible, Britain and France would have been content with launching a phoney war

against Germany, leaving the Soviet Union to face alone the full blast of the German military machine?

Was it not for the codicil to the Soviet-German pact of non-aggression, one could sympathise with the difficult choice facing the Soviet Union in August 1939. One could have made allowance for the ferocious battles already going on at her Siberian border against a Japanese army.

The codicil was not a step towards peace. It was anticipating the outbreak of war and mentioning that the Soviet Union and Germany would decide, in consultation, whether Poland should continue to have an independent national existence. That decision, obviously, was expected to be made with no regard to Polish people's will.

War And A General Settlement With Germany

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. From the very start, Germany had recourse to indiscriminate bombing against the civil population. Britain was pledged to assist Poland with all her might. This implied retaliation air raids against German military and civilian targets.

Chamberlain had tried his best at reaching a settlement with Germany. This war was not the one he contemplated. When the moment of truth came, there was in Chamberlain's circle a wishful thinking attitude which amounted to the belief that, by postponing the declaration of war, there may appear some unseen possibility for peacefully resolving the crisis. Mussolini had been asked to use his good offices to intercede for peace. Eventually, war was declared on Germany. But it did not put an end to attempts at understanding with Germany.

Thus, in spite of the overwhelming abundance of proof that Germany was bombing the Polish population, Britain refused to acknowledge that this was true. Kingsley Wood argued that bombing the Black Forest, where the German army held large depots of munitions, would be impossible because this would be an attempt against private property. The same held for Essen's armament factories. Spears wrote⁸⁰²:

It was ignominious to stage a confetti⁸⁰³ war against an utterly ruthless enemy who was meanwhile destroying a whole nation, and to pretend that we were thereby fulfilling our obligations.

In order to justify their inaction responsible Ministers said in Cabinet meetings that Germany was following the generally accepted rules of war, and that the head of the Polish mission in London confirmed it. This was not true.

860⁸⁰² 'Assignment to Catastrophe', Major-General Sir Edward Spears, William Heinemann Ltd., London, 1954, p. 31

861⁸⁰³ The expression 'confetti war' refers to restricting the use of the air force to throwing propaganda leaflets on Germany.

On September 10, 1939, Chamberlain wrote to his sister⁸⁰⁴:

..the final long-drawn-out agonies that preceded the actual declarations of war were as nearly unendurable as could be. We were anxious to bring things to a head, but ***there were three complications***, — the secret communications that were going on with Goering and Hitler.. the conference proposal of Mussolini, and the French anxiety to postpone the actual declaration.. until they could evacuate their women and children, and mobilise their armies.

The communications with Hitler and Goering looked rather promising.. They gave the impression.. that it was possible ***to persuade Hitler to accept a peaceful and reasonable solution of the Polish question, in order to get to an Anglo-German agreement***, which he continually declared to be his greatest ambition.

Chamberlain had delayed the war declaration for reasons, two of which related to peace negotiations. He did not say what ‘a peaceful and reasonable solution to the Polish question’ meant to him. There was no longer a Polish question to solve but an ally to assist. To persuade Hitler to accept a reasonable solution meant that the solution must be made to appear reasonable to him. There could be no shred of doubt that the very minimum of Hitler’s request would be to get Danzig and the Polish Corridor which divided Germany into two.

Before the invasion, such a solution was rejected by Poland. It was recognised by all Western leaders that Germany had valid claims against Poland. However, the question as presented to the public, had stopped to be the validity of the claims. What mattered, it was said, was that Germany had to be prevented from pursuing a policy of aggression as exemplified by the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Trying to find a solution to the Polish question, while that country was being ruthlessly invaded and bombed, was therefore a clear step back towards the policy of appeasement. Chamberlain was still explicitly dreaming of an Anglo-German agreement which remained the main objective for which it was necessary to find a solution to the Polish question. Chamberlain went on:

..what I hope for is not a military victory — I very much doubt the feasibility of that — but a collapse of the German home front. For that it is necessary to convince the Germans that they cannot win. And U.S.A. might at the right moment help there. On this theory one must weigh every action in the light of its probable effect on German mentality. I hope myself we shall not start to

862⁸⁰⁴ ‘The Chamberlain Cabinet’, op. cit., p. 416-417

bomb their munitions centres and objectives in towns, unless they begin it.

Poland was engaged in a struggle for her life. She needed all the assistance that had been pledged to her, including retaliation air raids against Germany. Chamberlain, however, worried more about the German mentality. Retaliations would be made only in the case of bombings on British territory. Germany remained free to bomb the Polish population without having to protect the German cities against the British air force.

Poland, before the invasion and in order to meet that eventuality, needed economic help and military equipment. The negotiations were made difficult by Britain who wanted to impose on Poland a given policy as to her coal exports in addition to a devaluation of her currency. Though the negotiations ended in an accord, it had no practical effect, having been signed too late.

However, when Finland faced the Soviet invasion, military help was sent to Finland unconditionally. Plans were drawn for aggressive measures against the Soviet Union which would have resulted in military hostilities with her. The plans had to be abandoned when Finland made peace with the Soviet Union.

Poland, fighting Germany did, apparently, not deserve much help. Finland, on the other hand, was fighting the Soviet Union, and, therefore, apparently, deserved much more sympathy from Britain and France.

Nicholas Bethell has documented the case of the Duke of Westminster, a known anti-Semite and admirer of Germany, who, on September 12, 1939, assembled a group of opponents to the war which included Lord Arnold, Lord Rushcliffe and the Duke of Buccleuch⁸⁰⁵. At the meeting he read a document opposing blood shedding between 'the two races which are the most akin and most disciplined in the world'.

The group was later joined by Lord Ponsoby, a former Cabinet Minister (1931). Bethell wrote⁸⁰⁶

Men such as these were the gilded tip of the iceberg. Lurking below there were many thousands of right-wingers in England, as in other countries, who had been captivated by Hitler and his New Order. Even now, after the outbreak of the war. they were ready to give him their support.

A copy of the document reached Chamberlain. He handed it to Joseph Ball a senior officer in British Counter-Intelligence⁸⁰⁷. Joseph Ball reported

863⁸⁰⁵ Nicholas Bethell, 'The War Hitler Won', Allen Lane The Penguin Press', London, 1972, pp. 175-180. The official references to the events related to the activities of the Duke of Westminster at the start of the war can be found in that work.

864⁸⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p. 176

865⁸⁰⁷ Joseph Ball was also Chamberlain's confidential agent functioning as a secret link between Chamberlain and the Italian Ambassador to London. [Howard McGraw Smyth, 'Secrets of the Fascist Era', Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, 1975, p. 17]

back to Chamberlain through Horace Wilson. He noted that the document advocated allowing Germany to have Danzig. It suggested that, were no obstacles to be put in the way of Germany's economic expansion in south-eastern Europe, the Germans would be satisfied.

In his letter to Wilson, Joseph Ball reveals his sympathy for the views expressed in the document. He, however, objects to the timing. He wrote:

..if the group really desire to see that anything of the kind should happen, they have been extremely foolish in allowing their views to transpire *at the present juncture*. If, as I understand is the case, Winston [Churchill] has heard of them, he will I imagine press hard for their immediate and categorical rejection; and should he do so, *it is difficult to see how the P.M. can avoid giving him some assurance*.

Joseph Ball, a close associate of Chamberlain, was implying that Chamberlain, while agreeing with the document's views, would not be able to support it 'at this juncture'. A proper juncture did not present itself.

In conclusion, the story of the free hand in Eastern Europe given by Chamberlain to Hitler, is no longer the subject matter of conspiracy theories. It can legitimately be considered a well documented historical fact. The Appendix which follows will, hopefully, add clarity to the understanding of that policy.

APPENDIX I

THE BRITISH CASE

In Britain, as in many other countries, a government rules as long as it enjoys the confidence of the main legislative body, in our case the House of Commons.

Therefore governments can fall and be replaced either through a decision by the majority of the House of Commons, or following the holding of general elections.

In general, the fall of a government, or its resignation, leaves almost intact the rest of the ruling body. The magistrature is untouched. The civil servants remain mostly unaffected. The leaders of the army and the police are not removed from their positions. The people shaping and controlling the economy of the country and its financial institutions are still the same as are very often the government representatives in foreign countries. It is often the case that the new government has an outlook mostly influenced by the same pool of friends and inspirational sources as was the case with the previous government.

This amalgam of people, the composition of which evolves very slowly and which enjoys a great stability, can be called 'the establishment'.

The loyalty of the government is to his people. However, when the government is intrinsically part of the establishment, loyalty to the people is perceived by them as loyalty to the establishment. This comes naturally, and selectively.

Naturally, because, being mainly influenced by a restricted pool of people, a member of such a government comes to trust this pool, and looks to it for inspiration.

Selectively, because, otherwise, the political machinery would not have allowed a member of the government to rise to his position.

The government cannot freely voice the opinion of the establishment. Sometimes, the establishment itself cannot voice its own opinion as is the case when the establishment aims at implementing an agenda that has no public approval and which therefore, for the sake of success, has to remain unexpressed.

When the interests of the establishment conflict with those of the people, the government often finds it convenient to implement a policy favourable to the establishment while voicing opinions which contradict the policy they are implementing. Salvemini⁸⁰⁸ observed that in such cases the real aims of the

866⁸⁰⁸ Gaetano Salvemini, 'Prelude to World War II', Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, 1953, p.220

[conservative] government are not found in their statements but are clearly expressed in the House of Lord by their peers in the establishment.

However reasonable Salvemini's observation may be, however confirmed it may appear to be in a number of particular cases, it must be admitted that it is of limited value. His observation can be useful as a hint, as an indication of what further research is to be made. The opinions voiced in the House of Lord by the establishment are not more than circumstantial evidence, however strong.

In this respect there is a unique document, 'The British Case', written by a member of the establishment and expressing fascist sympathies the government, never before, dared to voice as its own. And still, *these fascist sympathies are endorsed by the government* in the form of an introduction by Lord Halifax, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

It is a rare case which proves that the unpalatable fascist opinions of the establishment inspired the British governments of the thirties. Considered today, the document is more in the class of 'confessional evidence' than of circumstantial evidence.

Such a document, with such an introduction could not have appeared except in very special circumstances, during a 'window of opportunity'.

While the establishment expressed in many ways a sympathy for fascism, the government had to refrain from doing the same. When it comes to fascism, the government is at odds with the opposition and with the people. The government knows that it does not pay to unveil its real feelings on that matter.

Before August 23rd, 1939, the government was on the defensive accused of not pursuing vigorously enough a policy of collective security designed to stop Germany's aggressions. It was accused of being reluctant to wind up the negotiations for a treaty of mutual assistance with the Soviet Union. At such a time, any official expression of sympathy with fascism would have added credibility to the accusations.

After May 10, 1940 a combative government was at the helm under Churchill's leadership. The 'phoney war' had ended and the war against Germany was pursued in earnest. To court fascism was 'out of place'. Moreover, Italy declared war on France and Great Britain on June 10, 1940. Tender words for fascism became betrayal.

However, between August 23, 1939 and May 10, 1940 — a period of 9 months — a peculiar situation reigned in Britain:

w The Soviet-German non-aggression treaty was a source of confusion. While many politician still blamed Chamberlain for having been cool to the prospect of an alliance with the Soviet Union — with the result that the Soviet Union ended up in the arms of Germany — a different explanation of the situation was being commonly spread. The Soviet Union, it was claimed, never intended to sign a treaty with the West. Germany had betrayed its own philosophy by allying herself with the Bolsheviks. Only Italy had remained

faithful to true fascism. The correct stand of Italy did not only consist in refusing to join Germany in its war against the West but also in remaining anti-communist as it had always been. This, it is claimed, should cause no wonder considering the many good aspects of the fascist regime.

w The government was still headed by Chamberlain. Its war aims had not been defined. It was prepared to make peace with a German Government headed by a politician (Nazi or not) whose word could be trusted. Hitler, in any case, would have had to be discarded. The war was not ideological and was not directed against nazism, only against its attempt at 'world domination'.

w On the Western front, the war was a war of words. Britain threw leaflets on Germany instead of bombs. The greatest reproach against Germany was still that her word had been unreliable and that she had gone pro-Bolshevik

In such a situation, not only did the establishment feel free to attack Hitler for his pro-bolshevism (his apostasy) but, by underlining that he had thus betrayed fascism and nazism, it put fascism in a good light. If the spirit of fascism did condemn Hitler's action, then fascism must be good. Moreover the confusion was such that Halifax, a senior member of the Government, felt no restraint at appearing as a fascist sympathiser.

This 'window of opportunity' which allowed the government to get its fascist sympathies out of the closet, was short. Even then, those sympathies were not loudly and frequently expressed in official circles. At any other time Halifax would not have dared to put himself on record so openly. But, apparently, Lord Dolobran's pamphlet was too close to his heart, and the times may have been right for a timid and first show of such open fascist sympathies. And it is thus that it was possible, at this very particular time, to have Lord Halifax give his enthusiastic *imprimatur* to "The British Case" by Lord Dolobran.

Halifax's support to Dolobran's pamphlet is both enthusiastic and without reservation. We may therefore analyse the pamphlet as representing Halifax's opinion as well.

The British Case

In the very first sentence, the book summarises 'the British case'. It states:

The people of the British Commonwealth are engaged today in a life and death struggle for a political principle necessary to the liberties, and therefore to the prosperity and progress, of the people of Europe. It is the principle of national independence.

One could think that the restriction of the ‘principle of national independence’ to Europe is here just an oversight. This is not the case. The author makes this specific restriction on many other occasions. This has at least the advantage of avoiding the consideration of the relevance of this principle to the nations composing the colonial British Empire.

There is no specific mention of nazism or fascism as being in any way related to the British case. Only one single item seems to be of importance: ‘national independence’.

In page 19, for instance, speaking of Hitler, the book mentions:

He wants self-determination for Germans, but self-determination for Poles he denounces as an intolerable outrage.

By this lack of principle, Germany has destroyed her own title-deeds. She will only regain them *when she has a Government whose practices are compatible with the preservation of the principle of national independence.*

This means that the war against Hitler’s Germany does not differ, say, from the war against Germany in 1914. The book says it explicitly (p. 31):

This war which we are fighting today is a continuation of the war of 1914-1918 *and is due to the same causes*

All doubts can be eliminated with the following quotations (p.41):

The dividing line in Europe is not, *as has been sometimes absurdly suggested*, between democratic and non-democratic states, but between those who, irrespective of their form of government, have sought to preserve the system of independent nationalities, each providing *within the framework of its own institutions* a full and free life for its citizens, and those Powers who have long aimed at the destruction of the independent nationalities in order to provide the necessary diversion for the helpless, impoverished and enslaved victims of their own tyrannies.

In the opinion of Dolobran, and Halifax, non-democratic institutions could be compatible with ‘a full and free life’. On this account, non-democratic regimes, some of them at least, could be quite nice.

The author says it himself (p. 37):

During the intervening years, the whole of Central and Southern Europe and Mediterranean littoral abandoned the parliamentary form of government in favour of some kind or another of authoritarian or dictatorial regime.. It is.. essential that the world should know that however decided our views as to our own

institutions, we realize that *freedom can be combined with order and peaceful external policies pursued by other types of regime.*

Our most ancient and very faithful ally, Portugal, enjoys today greater prosperity than ever before in the modern world under the wise but authoritarian government of Senior Salazar. The government of Poland itself was definitely authoritarian. *Above all*, the Italian genius⁸⁰⁹ has developed, in the characteristic Fascist institutions, a highly authoritarian regime which, however, threatens neither religious nor economic freedom, nor the security of other European nations.

Dolobran is concerned with the security of 'European nations' exclusively. The conquest of Abyssinia therefore is not to be considered as a counter-example when Fascism, developed by the Italian genius, is considered no threat to other nations. But then, what about the invasion of Albania? This seems to be conveniently forgotten.

Dolobran continues:

The Italian system is *founded on two rocks*: first, the separation of Church and State and the supremacy of the Church in matters not only of faith but of morals; second the rights of labour. The political machinery of Fascism is, indeed, built up on Trade Unionism while that of the German State is built up on the ruins of the German labour movement.

And what does supremacy of the church in matters of morals means? When Mussolini states that⁸¹⁰:

War is a phenomenon accompanying the development of humanity... The fundamental virtues of man are revealed to the full light of the sun only in blood-stained struggles.

and when, in the same vein, he tells visitors⁸¹¹ that:

to remain healthy, a nation must go to war every twenty-five years

is he then displaying the supremacy of the church over morals? Dolobran ignores the invasion of Albania, the suppression of the opposition by murdering or jailing its members, the poison gassing of the Abyssinian population, the statement of Vittorio Mussolini, son of the ruler and a product of the Fascist regime, to the effect that bombing the natives was very

867⁸⁰⁹ It takes genius to develop Fascism!

868⁸¹⁰ Quoted by Frederick L. Schuman in 'Europe on the Eve', Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1942, p. 51

869⁸¹¹ Telford Taylor, 'Munich, the Price of Peace', Doubleday, New York, 1979, p. 162

amusing. Dolobran must have heard of the murder of Matteoti and the introduction of Anti-Semitic racial laws so as not to be left behind Hitler. He must have heard also of Italian submarine piracy during the Spanish civil war. And, finally, he ignores Italy's challenge to the League of Nations standing there alone against all the *European* community.

Dolobran says (p. 39):

There is much in the non-political character of Italian Fascism which would be wholly distasteful to the English, *but there is much in the Italian Labour Charter which we should and do admire*

It is worth noting that this Fascist Charter forbids workers to strike.

Dolobran makes it clear that the British case against Germany is not the nazi regime. What is it then?

Dolobran is stating that as long as German expansion policies could be considered as compatible with the principle of national independence, as long as it resulted in extending the German frontiers to regions with a predominantly German population, Britain could see some justification for it. Concerning the remilitarisation by Germany of the Rhineland in 1936 Dolobran says (pp. 42-3):

She merely wished, she said., to restore completely to German sovereignty the population of those districts which happened to abut on the Rhine. *The excuse was perhaps adequate.*

He then adds (p. 42)

The German attack on Austria was *equally not without excuse...*
Once more *the excuse was fairly adequate*

And then, about Czechoslovakia (p. 44):

And so the sufferings of the German minority on the northern borders of Czechoslovakia provided the material for a timely crusade of rescue.

For a third time *the excuse was adequate*, if only just so.

The interesting question is: for what purpose were the excuses adequate? Were they adequate to convince the British government that Germany had no aggressive intentions, that Justice happened to be on Germany's side?

With the full knowledge of Germany's ambitions, the British government proceeded to *appease* Hitler. It did it *so long as the excuse was adequate*, even if barely so. For the British government's purpose an excuse is adequate if it can be used by the government to justify its appeasement policy in the people's eyes. The excuse stops being adequate when it is

impossible to have it swallowed by the British people, thus forcing the British Government to stand against it. It is inadequate when it does not respect a façade of respectability.

It is then that the principle of national independence is supposed to enter into play. This principle is sanctified by its relation to Christianity (pp. 13-5 and p. 27)

..the rights of nationalities.. are not legal abstractions, nor the invention of politicians, but one of the rocks on which our Christian civilization is founded.

The European conception of freedom derives directly from Christianity..

..It was the nation-state which was, always and everywhere, the condition of this freedom and this growth..

..the principle of nationality is not one among many forms of political organization but a unique experiment *necessitated by Christian freedom*

Dolobran seems to think that Britain, bound by Christian morality to the integrity of the nation-states, was each time considering whether Hitler had an adequate excuse. On March 15, 1939, Hitler invaded whatever remained of Czechoslovakia. From the point of view of the principle of nation-states there was no way of justifying this action. As explained in the first sentence of the book, Britain then was ready to go to war in defence of this principle. However, the matter is not that simple. Dolobran writes (p. 16):

However deeply we might feel for a country which has suffered an *injury to its prestige by losing its political independence*, we should have no right to fight if the lives and happiness of the people of *Europe as a whole*, were, in the long run, not going to be affected. But reason and history alike prove beyond the remotest possibility of doubt, that it is precisely the lives and happiness of the people of Europe which are today in jeopardy

When a country has lost its political independence, injury is not just to its prestige. No Christian principle would justify abstaining from helping a victim on the ground that its injuries have not affected the lives and happiness of Europe as a whole. Such an understanding of European Civilisation is precisely tainted with the reproach made to 'Centralised autocracies' where the interest of the individuals are sacrificed for the interests of the state.

If through impotence or egotism Britain opts not to assist a victim of an aggression, there is no need to add insult to injury by exhibiting the pride of having done what is pretended to be morally compelling.

In view of the last quotation, one is to wonder what has become of the principle of nation-states for which Britain is going to war. It seems to have been replaced by the long run effect on the lives and happiness of the people of Europe as a whole. 'Europe as a whole' seems to have become the principle and not the 'nation-state'.

In addition, on various occasions, the British Government let it publicly known that the small and weak nations could not rely on the League for protection against strong nations, and that Britain should not be expected to be involved in conflicts in regions where her interests are not vital. The region of vital interests were specified. They excluded all of Central and Eastern Europe.

If the policy of appeasement could have neglected for so long the principle of national independence, it would have been difficult to motivate the English people on the basis of such a cause. However, since the war was 'phoney' a 'phoney' cause could do.

The Historic Perspective Of National Independence

Dolobran states (p. 13):

..we are not properly equipped to sustain this war, or to think out the terms of a lasting peace, unless we understand the historical basis of the rights of nationalities.

The peace that followed the first World War obviously was not a lasting one. Was there then a lack of understanding of the historical basis of the right of nationalities. Dolobran denies it and, nevertheless, does not notice the inevitable conclusion: either the historical basis had not been understood, or the understanding does not ensure a lasting peace. To look therefore for a lasting peace in the direction of the understanding of the historical basis of the rights of nationalities does not bode well for the future.

Let us, nevertheless, look into Dolobran's understanding of the historical basis of the rights of nationalities. This basis, according to him is the rock of Christianity (p. 14):

The *European* conception of freedom derives directly from Christianity.. Ours is the first free civilization, and it became free because Christ asserted not the dignity of some men, but of all and the capacity and duty of all to win salvation. Man redeemed by Christ could never again be enslaved to man. He must, to fulfil the purpose for which he had now learnt to be the very core of his being, be a free moral agent.

Apparently, there is an European conception of freedom deriving from Christianity, and non-European concepts. This is worth being mentioned

here because, as we shall see, Dolobran is as full of contempt for non-European civilisations as he is of praise for the European example.

Christianity dominated Europe for more than a thousand years before the people would have its rights recognised. Why did it take so much time? Dolobran explains (p. 14):

Freedom spread *slowly* downward. At first was only the freedom of governments to fashion the destinies of their people. Then the freedom of the nobles to share in the government: then the freedom of the yeoman and trading classes: finally, the freedom of the people themselves.. But it was the nation-state which was always and everywhere, the condition of this freedom and this growth

This trickling down of freedom, from top to bottom, was also evident in the Roman empire where the Roman citizen enjoyed definite freedoms. On the other hand, there are example of Christian autocracies where the freedom and rights of the people were severely restricted. In Britain, this trickling of rights from top to bottom was no more a Christian effect than it was a gravity effect. Rights had to be fought for against very Christian authorities. Likewise, the formation of nation-states was not due to Christianity. Some national rights could not be properly secured till today as is witnessed by the Welsh and the Scots whose national freedoms have not been encouraged. Christianity, as indicated by the meaning of Catholicism, tends to universality in spirit and does not, by itself, foster national boundaries or national independence.

If, however, we believe Dolobran, we now know that freedom is a Christian concept and that it spreads slowly from top to bottom thanks to the existence of a nation-state. The British cause, however, and that of everlasting peace is still obscure. Dolobran continues with what is presented as an explanation (p.15)

And for this reason.

The need that all men have to be governed *is only compatible with freedom within a community small and homogeneous enough to realize its common interests*, to desire and to need the same type of institution, and to be able to enjoy the benefits of efficient administration without sacrificing popular control. There must be a common language or languages. There must be a realized community of interest, based on historical association over a long period. *A vast expanse of territory, even if peopled by men of one race or religion, will never fulfil the conditions.*

What is the point being made? Is Dolobran trying to prove that an enlarged Germany, by its mere size, could not secure the rights and freedoms of its citizens? This attempt would seem quite preposterous. Germany had

invaded Czechoslovakia and Poland against the will of its citizens. Even before expanding, the Nazi regime deprived the German people of its freedoms and liberties. What is the need for proving that the size of Germany is THE threat to freedoms and rights — notion quite controversial — when there is no doubt in the mind of anybody that *Hitler's* Germany is the threat. Ironically, Dolobran has forgotten that the United States is an example of 'a vast expanse of territory' and, by a long shot, cannot be described as ensuring less the rights of its citizen than Britain herself does. This contradiction is eliminated by ignoring the existence of the United States.

However, to state the problem in terms of size has for some a definite advantage. It, somewhat, absolves nazism⁸¹² and, by stressing the nefarious aspect of size, implicates Russia, and that is what matters. Dolobran states (p. 16):

The vast areas of Russia and China, where hundreds of races enjoying every variety of climate and speaking literally hundreds of different languages, but subject throughout the course of history to a single government, *have stood outside the course of progress throughout modern history*. Alike in population and in natural resource Russia and China are immeasurably stronger than the whole of Western Europe. Yet it is the nation states of Western Europe, and their traditions and principles, *which have been for ten centuries solely responsible for the progress of civilization*.

870⁸¹² Neville Henderson, the British Ambassador to Germany during the critical years of 1937 to 1939, was an enthusiastic supporter of Chamberlain's policy of appeasement. He was known also as an admirer of the nazi regime. In his book 'Failure of a Mission', G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, written in October 1939 at the start of the war, he still cannot but express his appreciation for dictatorship and nazism. In pages 4-5 he blames the bad German qualities to an admixture of slavish blood which has affected militant Prussianism which in turn, he says, 'has prostituted or is prostituting the great qualities of order and efficiency, probity and kindness of the *purier German of Northwest*. The 'nerve' of those Slavs daring to prostitute the pure German blood! Here are some quotes from his book: "People in England..fail to realize that even dictators can be, up to a point, necessary for a period and even *extremely beneficial for a nation* (p. 11)"..."Nor are all dictatorships, *even if prolonged*, reprehensible (p. 12)"..."One cannot, just because he is a dictator, refuse to admit the great services which Signor Mussolini has rendered to Italy (p. 12)"..."nor would the world have failed to acclaim Hitler as a great German if he had known when and where to stop; *even, for instance, after Munich and the Nuremberg decrees for the Jews*. Dr. Salazar, the present Dictator of Portugal..is assuredly one of the wisest statesman which the postwar period has produced in Europe (p.12)".In page 12 he reminds us that, in one occasion, "I remarked that it would be better if people in England laid less stress on the Nazi dictatorship and paid more attention to *the greater social experiment* which has been tried out in Germany. I said that, if they did so, they might learn some useful lessons; and I remarked that too much concentration on those trees which appeared misshapen in English eyes *rendered us insufficiently appreciative of the forest as a whole*." Nazism as a whole should be appreciated, except for some trees! He then adds: "there are, in fact, many things in the Nazi organization and social institutions, as distinct from its rabid nationalism and ideology, which we might study and adapt to our own use with great profit to both health and happiness of our own nation and old democracy.".. "National Socialism is..a revolution..it would be foolish to assume either that there is nothing to be learned from it, or that it will vanish in all its forms 'unwept, unhonoured, unsung' from this earth (p. 16)". There is more of the same in the rest of the book

Had Dolobran mused over 'The Outline of History' of his contemporary H.G. Wells, he would not have written in this vein. He would have learned that it is a false and outrageous statement to affirm that, for ten centuries, the nation-states of Western Europe were 'solely' responsible for the progress of civilisation.

Each generation develops its culture and civilisation on the base of that of the previous generations in all the world. The European civilisation would not have been possible without the important contributions of the Arabs and the peoples of Asia, much of which was developed during those ten centuries.

Dolobran deals with the British case against Germany by reminding us that Russia is the source of all evil (p. 36):

During the first decade after the post-war treaties the main responsibility for European unrest lay with Russia. Subversive revolutions were attempted, and for a time succeeded, in Finland, Estonia, Bulgaria and Hungary. Poland was almost conquered. A little later again, Italy was on the verge of red revolution. By 1929 Germany itself was in disorder. A little later again, Spain dissolved in anarchy. Russia agents and Russia money were busy all over Europe

While the war, phoney or not, had been declared against Germany, to Dolobran, as will become clear, the main enemy still seems to be Russia and communism. A pamphlet explicitly aimed at stating the cause of Britain against Germany, is more of a pamphlet for fascism and against Russia and communism. The principle of national independence is dealt by Dolobran in a distorted historical and present perspective, so as to be more of a tool against Russia than against Germany.

Against Russia, Dolobran is using Hitler's language. He adds that Russia is responsible for the existence of the fascist and nazi regimes. Speaking of the tortures inflicted by Russia he says (p.36):

..those who had the misfortune to suffer these events at close quarters, developed a tolerance for any party or person who, at whatever sacrifice of liberty, offered them security from murder, sacrilege and rape.

Fascism and nazism, Dolobran shows, had their merits. Russia's responsibility does not stop at that. According to Dolobran, while fascism had a lot to be admired (p. 38):

It is far otherwise in Central Europe. There the Communist threat was much closer and the reaction correspondingly more extreme. In reply to the internationalism of Moscow, racialism became the political fashion

The racist theories of Nazism, according to Dolobran, were the result of the communist threat.

Finally, Dolobran becomes more specific (p.48):

Within a week of the entry into Prague.. Herr Hitler announced his “terms” to Poland.. It was a gesture of insolent defiance to the Christian tradition of Europe. Poland is the natural bastion of the European defence against Oriental incursions.. The Bolshevik armies reached the gates of Warsaw in 1920, and were broken by the Polish army. Once again, Germany, and Europe, was saved by Poland.

The threat first offered by Herr Hitler to the integrity of Poland.. was thus not only an outrage against the public law of Europe but an affront to every Christian conscience.

To brake the Russian armies is equated to stopping an Oriental incursion. To make this point, Dolobran does not shy from distorting history. It is well known that in the Polish-Russian conflict he mentions, Poland and not Russia was the aggressor.

It is only in the last six of the 61 pages pamphlet that Dolobran formulates clearly the British case against Germany (p. 54):

For *all the other acts of brutality at home and aggression* without, Herr Hitler had been able to offer an excuse, inadequate indeed, but not fantastic. *The need for order* and discipline in Europe, for strength at the centre to withstand the incessant infiltration of false and revolutionary ideas — this is certainly no more than the conventional excuse offered by every military dictator who has ever suppressed the liberties of his own people or advanced the conquest of his neighbours. Nevertheless, *so long as it could be believed that the excuse was offered with sincerity, and in Hitler’s case the appearance of sincerity were not lacking* over a period of years, *the world’s judgement of the man remained more favourable than its judgement of his actions.* The faint possibility of an ultimate settlement with Herr Hitler still, in these circumstances, remained, however abominable his methods, however deceitful his diplomacy, however intolerant he might show himself of the rights of other European peoples, he still claimed to stand ultimately for something which was a common European interest, and which therefore could conceivably provide some day a basis for understanding with other nations equally determined not to sacrifice their traditional institutions and habits on the bloodstained altars of the World Revolution.

The conclusion of the German-Soviet pact removed even this faint possibility of an honourable peace.

The principle of national independence is now forgotten. Dolobran, with the support of Halifax, is prepared to forgive Hitler years of brutality and aggression, years of abominable methods and deceitful diplomacy, on the faint hope that, ultimately, he will take a stand against Soviet Union. The faint possibility was removed **not by Hitler's aggression against Poland but by the German Soviet pact**. This then is, in Dolobran-Halifax view, the British case against Germany.

It is an astounding confession. Hitler was treated as a spoiled child. His tantrums were tolerated and the realisation of his wishes were facilitated, even at the expense of small nationally-independent countries. All that was asked was that he take the pain of having 'an adequate excuse' even if weak. Even after the swallowing of all of Czechoslovakia by Germany, England expressed her readiness to bring back appeasement on track. Poland too could have been dealt with. But a German agreement with Russia removed any possibility of **understanding**. Dolobran wrote a few page earlier about the German Soviet pact — which he incorrectly calls 'alliance' — (p. 53 and 56):

This was Herr Hitler's final apostasy. It was the betrayal of Europe

..It is in the light of this cynical apostasy that we must judge of the sincerity of the subsequent professions made by Germany of her concern for the future of **European civilization**

Dolobran starts with national independence as a Christian virtue. It is not a coincidence that, against all historical evidence to the contrary, the virtue has been chosen to be Christian. Communism has been constantly described as being anti-Christian so that the mere mention of national independence as a Christian virtue puts it in antagonism with communism.

And then, Dolobran, arbitrarily, states that national independence cannot be sustained in 'vast expanses of territory'. This also puts Soviet Union in antagonism with national independence — with some regretful side-effects for the U.S.

To complete the picture, Russia is associated to Asiatic, Oriental countries, and therefore pushed outside of Europe. This allows Dolobran to speak of Civilisation as mainly European (in the ten last centuries) with no Russian contribution. The defence of Europe against Oriental incursions is then associated with Poland saving Europe by stopping the Russian army at Warsaw.

That is how Dolobran gradually builds the British case against Germany! It is not as illogical as it sounds. It reflects Dolobran's opinion that nothing has real importance except standing against Russia. Toward the end, Dolobran states (p. 58):

The issue we see, and shall continue to see, is the issue of European freedom.

we now know what he means. That explains the phoney war. The issue is still the defence of Europe against communism.

Let us now revert to Halifax's introduction. He says⁸¹³:

Those who wish to understand the real causes of the war will do well to read Lord Lloyd's pamphlet on "The British Case"

..The British Blue Book, which was published soon after the outbreak of the war, gave the diplomatic history of the preceding months.. Lord Lloyd has penetrated deeper...

As we see, the support is without any reservation. To leave us in no doubt, Halifax summarises some of the main points of Dolobran's pamphlet:

The background of the present conflict is a conflict much more profound between forces that support our civilisation and forces that are in revolt against it.. It has been built upon, and moulded by, Christian ideals..

The Christian conceptions of freedom has found political expression by successive stages. It has developed in Europe through nation-states...

The domination of Europe by one super-national state would destroy that freedom reducing men to a dull uniformity...

We have underlined before that the notion of nation-state has a specific use in the anti-communist ideology. The pre-eminent role given to this notion is therefore out of place in a document specifically written against Germany. It is hoped that the following quote will convince the reader that we did not exaggerate the importance of 'nation-state' as a concept directed against Soviet Union. The German chargé d'Affaires in London reports to his superiors⁸¹⁴:

I told Sir Horace [Wilson] that..[Czechoslovakia] ties with Soviet Russia and France must cease.. Here British policy had an opportunity of taking really constructive action towards European peace.. He replied that a policy of this nature could quite well be discussed with Great Britain. It was only necessary that this policy should not be rendered impossible by the sudden use of force by us. He completely agreed with my remarks on the present unnatural and absurd position of Czechoslovakia. If there

871⁸¹³ Lord Lloyd of Dolobran, "The British Case", WM. Collins Sons & Co. Canada Ltd, Toronto, 1940, p. 9

872⁸¹⁴ DGFP, series D, vol 2, document No. 382, p. 608

was a possibility here of settling the question by peaceful political means, the British government were prepared to enter into serious negotiations. He asked me if the Fuhrer was prepared to regard such a solution of the Czechoslovakian problem as the beginning of further negotiations on a large scale. The Fuhrer had used the simile to an Englishman (He thought that it was Halifax), that Europe culture rested on two pillars which must be linked by a powerful arch: Great Britain and Germany. Great Britain & Germany were in fact the two countries in which the greatest order reigned and which were the best governed. ***Both were built up on the national principle***, which had been designed by nature itself as the only working principle of human relationship. ***The reverse of this, Bolshevism, meant anarchy and barbarism***. It would be the height of folly if the two leading white races were to exterminate each other in war. Bolshevism would be the only gainer thereby

It is remarkable that, in the introduction to a pamphlet stating the British Case for being at war, presumably with Germany, the words ‘Germany’, ‘Hitler’ and ‘Nazism’ do not appear a single time. The introduction summarises Dolobran’s views in a way that makes the British Case more of one against Russia than against Germany. In his short introduction, Halifax cannot be as specific as Dolobran. The meaning, however, of the defence of civilisation, of Europe, of nation-states, have been specified by Dolobran, with Halifax approval. These words have been used by Halifax himself with the same meaning, the anti-communist meaning.

There were good reasons for Halifax not to mention Germany. In this respect, it is interesting to quote from a debate at the House of Commons on November 28, 1939, in which Chamberlain said⁸¹⁵

When I spoke on this subject on Sunday, I said that the conditions in which peace aims could be achieved could not at present be foreseen. I did not say that they were remote. I did not know. I said that they could not be foreseen, and I say now that none of us knows how long this war will last, none of us knows in what directions it will develop, none of us knows, when it is ended, ***who will be standing by our side and who will be against us***; and in those circumstances, it would be absolutely futile — indeed, it would be worse than futile, it would be mischievous — if we were to attempt to lay down to-day the conditions in which the new world is to be created.

According to Chamberlain, the war aims cannot be defined because we do not know who, at the end of the war will be with us and who will be

873⁸¹⁵ Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons), 5th series, vol 355, column 27

against us⁸¹⁶. It was commonly believed at the time that the 'unknown quantities' were Italy, the Soviet Union and the United States. From the point of view of the future stand of Soviet Union and the United States there are no difficulties in defining anti-nazi and anti-fascist war aims. The United States, neutral or involved, would, without doubt oppose fascism and nazism. This was clear from numerous stands by President Roosevelt. They would, without doubt, defend a clearly stated aim for democracy.

Would the Soviet Union become involved in the war on the side of Germany, pro-democratic war aims would be no impediment for Britain. If involved against Germany, then, there are enough Soviet traditions of condemning fascism and nazism (and verbal support for democracy, albeit of the Soviet type) that this eventuality cannot be jeopardised by the adoption of democratic anti-fascist aims.

The only difficulty is related with Germany and Italy: in what side will they end up? According to Chamberlain nobody knows. For war aims it should not make a difference where the United States and Soviet Union will end. This was made clear when, later, Soviet Union endorsed the Atlantic Charter.

If Chamberlain intended to leave the door open for Germany to end up on the side of the allies, then, against whom would the war have been conducted? Remains the possibility that Chamberlain wanted to deal tactfully with Italy. To proclaim anti-nazi democratic aims may result in throwing Italy on the side of Germany.

The British people could not be galvanised in a life and death struggle against Germany without clear aims close to the people's heart. It would be criminal to neglect the moral mobilisation of the British people for the sake of restraining Italy.

Chamberlain did even more than just abstaining from mentioning democracy as an aim. He explicitly excluded it from war aims. On November 26, 1939, he said in a broadcast about post-war Europe⁸¹⁷:

In such a Europe each country would have the unfettered right to chose its own form of internal government, so long as that government did not pursue an external policy injurious to his neighbours.

874⁸¹⁶This is no idle talk.. In his autobiography (Paul Einzig's *Autobiography*, Hutchison of London, 1969), Paul Einzig mentions the lack of enthusiasm of Chamberlain's Government, at the start of the war in 1939, for the conversion of the economy to war economy. "I came across evidence indicating that the economic war effort was kept down to well below capacity, presumably in anticipation of concluding peace with Hitler. Early in 1940 a leading Cabinet Minister actually told a leading Financial Editor quite candidly that his newspaper was rendering a disservice by agitating for intensified economic war effort, because if we were to convert our economy to war requirements it would be very costly to re-convert it again to peace requirement" (Chapter 21 of the book is worth being read in its entirety.

875⁸¹⁷ 'The *Autobiography of D.N. Pritt*', Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1965, p. 200

Chamberlain does not exclude nazism from post-war Europe ‘so long as...’

We cannot assert, just from those Chamberlain quotes, that he hoped the war would end up in a coalition with Germany against Soviet Union. The quotes are however quite compatible with such an interpretation, and in line with the free hand he did give Germany against the Soviet Union. It would explain why, in an introduction to *The British Case, Germany, Hitler and Nazism* were not mentioned.

To give Hitler a free hand against the Soviet Union is a grave thing, but to join Hitler in a war against the Soviet Union is a different thing. It was the fear that Britain and France would do just that which seems to have prevented Czechoslovakia, at Munich time, from requesting and accepting Soviet help when it became clear that France would betray her treaty with Czechoslovakia. If such a scenario, that seemed likely to Czechoslovakia, was still being considered, Chamberlain had good reasons to worry about who, at the end of the war, would be a British ally, and who a British enemy.

APPENDIX II

NOT SEEING THE WRITING ON THE WALL

Chamberlain did give Germany a free hand in Eastern Europe. Few 'historical facts' are supported by such an abundance of evidence of a direct, circumstantial and corroborating nature. This raises the question as to the reasons for which most historians have chosen not to give serious consideration to that aspect of history. I can think of two main reasons:

w Chamberlain had an *alibi*

w historians are reluctant, to the point of blindness, to believe that a British Prime Minister could have pursued such an unscrupulous policy.

Chamberlain's *alibi* is that, in the name of Britain, he did give Poland a guarantee, thus barring for Germany the way of expansion to the east. It seemed to prove indeed that Chamberlain led Britain to war rather than allow Germany to expand freely in the East.

In the late sixties, it became known that, in December 1938, the British and French intelligence asserted, with a degree of confidence verging on certainty, that Germany had unexpectedly decided to move Westwards instead of Eastwards. The British Cabinet deliberations show that Chamberlain gave the guarantee to Poland, not to bar Hitler's way to the East, but in the expectation the guarantee would become reciprocal. It would then ensure an eastern war-front against Germany, a prospect which, at least, would weaken Germany's likelihood of winning the war against the West and, at best, induce Germany not to start the war in the West direction.

This being the case, the guarantee to Poland is no longer a valid *alibi*. However, these facts were not known prior to 1969. Till that year, most historians chose to consider the *alibi* to be unshakeable. Accepting the validity of the *alibi* left the history of the period ridden with riddles. It was not difficult to read in the minutes of the meetings between Chamberlain and Hitler, the discussion and then the granting of a free hand to the East to Germany. The memoirs of Hitler's interpreter, whose professionalism and honesty is doubted by no one, confirm the fact. The granting of the free hand was a *de-facto* situation resulting from the Anglo-German Naval treaty. Many historians recognise this but argue that Britain at the time was not realising that they were doing just that.

Even before the late sixties, an historian could have reached the correct conclusions had he be willing to examine closely some documents in the French 'Livre Jaune' which were made public in 1939. He would have found

telegrams from Coulondre, the French Ambassador to Germany, explaining that the change of the German Policy relative to Ruthenia was an indication that Germany was intending to go West instead of East. The telegram is dated March 14 and reveals that the relevant piece of news was already suspected in February 1939. The telegram itself was written more than two weeks before the granting of the guarantee to Poland.

This means that a historian could have known, already in 1939, that Germany, by allowing Hungary to annex Ruthenia, had renounced its intended invasion of Ukraine. In short, Hitler had rejected the free hand given to him by Chamberlain. He even hinted to the reason in a public speech: it would be enough that Chamberlain be later replaced by Churchill or Eden or Duff Cooper, to totally change the British attitude towards Germany. Moreover *The British Case* written and published by Lord Lloyd of Dolobran in 1940 with a strongly supportive preface by Halifax, does make it clear that Britain was prepared to 'forgive' Germany all her aggressions against the smaller nations, if only she would have not stopped to be anti-communist.

The reluctance of many historians to reach the correct conclusions was such that they refused to objectively look at the evidence. This can be illustrated by the case of F.L. Loewenheim.

Not Wanting To Read The Writing On The Wall

Francis L. Loewenheim is the editor of a book⁸¹⁸ made of an introduction and a collection of documents shortened by cutting off a number of passages. The reader would naturally assume that these passages are of little importance or of much less importance than those printed.

Documents are not always quoted in their entirety. Often, the part relevant to an argument is all that is really needed, provided it is not taken out of context. However, when a document is published as reference, the editor must be very careful. Since he is not making a particular point, he should not be politically or ideologically selecting the particular passages he eliminates. To prune a document of its most revealing passages without warning the reader of their importance, is precisely what Loewenheim did, and that begs for an explanation.

I will exclude the possibility of a wilful act of deception, and take it as a fact that Loewenheim did believe he pruned away the least important parts of the document in question which we will soon consider. The point is that he published a document in which Hitler and Chamberlain were shown discussing a request by Hitler for a free hand in Eastern Europe, and he, Loewenheim, cut from the document all the passages which pointed to that discussion.

⁸¹⁸ Francis L. Loewenheim, 'Peace or appeasement? Hitler, Chamberlain and the Munich Crisis', Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1965

This document is a memorandum of the minutes of the first meeting between Chamberlain and Hitler at Berchtesgaden, as recorded by Dr. Paul Schmidt and printed in full in DGFB series D, vol. 2, doc. 487, pp. 786-98. This document is reproduced in a section of Loewenheim's book titled: "The Documentary record." Some of these records are reproduced in full other are preceded with the word EXTRACT. In such cases, three periods "... " indicate the places where cuts have been made.

The record No 13., pp. 21-7 is the reproduction of the German document. It is not preceded by the word EXTRACT. The original document is made of 394 lines. The first 50 lines are concerned with an exchange of greetings and compliments. We are therefore concerned with a document of 344 lines. Of these lines Loewenheim has cut 204 lines which is about 59% of the meaningful text and 52% of the whole text. In short, less than half the document is reproduced without being downgraded to be an EXTRACT.

The cut passages are 6 in number. The first cut is 62 lines long. Its text is much more important than the polite exchanges which are, nevertheless, reproduced in full. In this cut passage Hitler explains that his political freedom is restricted by the need to keep the confidence of his people. He asserts that he distinguishes well between what is now possible and what is not. It is impossible to unite all the Germans. It is not true that Germany's appetite grew with eating. Nothing, he says, could support such an accusation. He then cites four facts that prove Germany's good intentions. He gives most of the time to one of them: the Anglo-German Naval Pact. In this respect Hitler is reported saying:

.... 2) Germany had, of her own free will, limited the strength of her fleet to a definite proportion of British Naval power. The precondition for this agreement was, of course, the mutual determination never again to make war on the other contracting party. If, therefore, Britain were to continue to make it plain that in certain circumstances she would intervene against Germany, this precondition for the Naval Agreement would cease to hold good, and it would be more honest for Germany to denounce the agreement.

On the British Prime Minister's interpolating the question whether this denunciation would be contemplated by Germany before any possible conflict broke out, or on the actual outbreak of such a conflict, the Fuehrer replied that if Britain constantly proclaimed the possibility of intervention against Germany, while Germany herself had concluded the Naval Agreement with the intention of never again going to war with Britain, a one-sided disadvantage for Germany was bound to result, and that it would, therefore, be more sincere and more honest in such a case to terminate the treaty relationship....

The remaining of the cut passage is also interesting though not as revealing.

The third cut passage is 34 lines long and deals again with the significance of the Naval agreement. In this passage, Chamberlain concedes the correctness of Hitler's interpretation and the relation existing between the Naval Agreement and the belief that there could be no question of war between the two countries. Chamberlain, however, wants to take into account the possibility of changed situation. Hitler disagrees and asserts that in no circumstances war should be considered as a possibility between the two countries.

After this, the reproduced text starts with: "Mr. Chamberlain thanked the Fuhrer for his clear and frank exposition of the German attitude." The reader is given here a false impression by the way Loewenheim presents the document. What is the German exposition alluded to by the text presented to the readers? The reader cannot know it since it has been cut. If he innocently thinks that nothing important had been cut, he concludes that Chamberlain's thanks Hitler for having stated that the situation in Czechoslovakia is very grave. That is not the case. In reality, the complete document shows that Chamberlain is thanking Hitler for having clarified the matter of the relation between the Naval Treaty and the notion that in no circumstance could a war between the two countries be considered.

In previous chapters, we showed that this amounted in fact to a request for a free hand, and has been considered by Loewenheim of no importance, at best not as important as the polite introductory exchanges.

In the 4th cut out section is 32 lines long. The reader is prevented from knowing that Chamberlain proposed to eliminate the danger perceived by Hitler that Czechoslovakia was a spearhead against Germany. This danger, according to Chamberlain's proposal, would be eliminated if Czechoslovakia was not to help Russia were the latter to be the object of an attack and, on the other hand, Czechoslovakia (like Belgium) would be deprived of assistance from any country.

This missing section is very important. On the one hand it is demagogic. Great Britain had more than once explicitly said that she would go to war if Belgium was invaded. On the other hand, this proposal would make it easier for Germany to attack Russia. Now, even if this interpretation is not true, why should the reader not be the judge?

In the 5th section, Hitler uses an abusive language against the Czechoslovakian people calling it inferior. He said that Czechs are cowards, cruel etc.. In the absence of that section, the reader cannot possibly know that Chamberlain did not protest to such a language. It is not possible to read that section without thinking less well of a British leader listening to such language without disassociating himself from the speaker.

The other cut out sections also do not show Chamberlain in a good light. However, what has been shown in the preceding descriptions should suffice to make the point: ***the reading was on the wall, but Loewenheim neither wanted to read it, nor would let his readers see it.***

The discussion of the Naval Treaty took an important part of the time of the two leaders who certainly had better things to do than thoroughly discussing an irrelevant matter and repeatedly coming back to it. The fact is that the matter was also mentioned in a Munich separate document bearing the sole signatures of Chamberlain and Hitler. The fact is that this document had been prepared by Chamberlain in advance and that when it was being written, Chamberlain insisted it should mention the Naval Treaty, in spite of Strang's affirmation that Britain could not be proud of that treaty. Finally, the fact remains that Hitler denounced the Naval Treaty in April 1939 arguing that the free hand implied by it had not been respected by Britain.

Loewenheim knew all that. Nevertheless, he cuts out from the document all clues that could point to a close examination of the Anglo-Naval Treaty, while keeping the exchange of amenities between the two leaders. Loewenheim is certainly not dishonest, he is just blind to the wrongs Chamberlain has committed when these wrongs verge on evil and immorality. He sees no Chamberlain-evil, he hears of no Chamberlain-evil and will therefore not speak of Chamberlain-evil.

It illustrates how early historians, till the mid-sixties, have avoided recognising the free hand given by Chamberlain to Hitler. The case of later historians is obviously more pathetic.

ANNEX

Documents were quoted in previous chapters to the effect that the British leaders were aware of the feeling for revenge pervading the German ruling circles and their leaders, including those considered 'moderate'. These quotes fall short from reflecting the large amount of reliable information which was available to the British leaders. They do not show sufficiently how knowledgeable these leaders were of Germany's aggressive preparations, be they in terms of secret rearmament or in terms of inculcating, specially among the youth, a war spirit. This annex is but a small indication of the voluminous reports and letters pertaining to the subject.

Sir H. Rumbold, British ambassador to Berlin sent to Simon a report on April 26, 1933, from which we quote⁸¹⁹:

Now that Hitler has acquired absolute control.. it may be advisable to consider the uses to which he may put his unlimited opportunities.. The prospect is disquieting, as *the only programme.. which the Government appear to possess may be described as the revival of militarism and the stamping out of pacifism*. The plans of the Government are far-reaching, they will take several years to mature and they realize that it would be idle to embark on them if there were any danger of premature disturbance either abroad or at home. *They may therefore be expected to repeat their protestations of peaceful intent from time to time and to have recourse to other measures, including propaganda, to lull the outer world into a sense of security.*

5. The outlook for Europe is far from peaceful if the speeches of Nazi leaders, especially of the Chancellor, are borne in mind.. Hitler's thesis is extremely simple. He starts with the assertions than man is a fighting animal; therefore the nation is, he concludes, a fighting unit, being a community of fighters... A country or a race which ceases to fight is .. doomed.. *Pacifism is the deadliest sin, for pacifism means the surrender of the race in the fight for existence... Only brute force can ensure the survival of the race*. Hence the necessity for military forms. The race must fight; a race that rests must rust and perish. The German race, had it been united in time, would now be master of the globe today...

The British leaders therefore knew what Hitlerism was about. However, there was an additional aspect that seemed to have drawn their attention. The report continues:

877⁸¹⁹ DBFP, series 2, vol. 5, doc. 36 pp. 47-55

8. Hitler admits that it is difficult to preach chauvinism without attracting undesirable attention, but it can be done.. To attack France for purely sentimental reasons would be foolish. What Germany needs is an increase of territory in Europe. Hitler even urges that Germany's pre-war colonial policy must be abandoned, and that *the new Germany must look for expansion to Russia and especially to the Baltic States*. He condemns the alliance with Russia because the ultimate aim of all alliance is war. *To wage war with Russia against the West would be criminal, especially as the aim of the Soviets is the triumph of international Judaism.*

11.. The task of the present German Government is more complicated. They have to rearm on land, and as Herr Hitler explains in his memoirs, *they have to lull their adversaries into such a state of coma that they will allow themselves to be engaged one by one*.. What he probably means can be more accurately expressed by the formula: Germany needs peace until she has recovered such strength that no country can challenge her.. I fear that it would be misleading to base any hopes on a return to sanity or a serious modification of the views of the Chancellor and his entourage.

...I do not, of course, rule out the contingency that there may be a revulsion of feeling in this country, and that saner counsels may prevail when the new regime has had time to take stock of the European and world situation. But the spirit of the moment is definitely disquieting, and the Government of this country, for the first time since the war, are giving State sanction and encouragement to an attitude of mind, as well as to various forms of military training, which can only end in one way. I therefore feel that Germany's neighbours have reason to be vigilant, and that it may be necessary for them to determine their attitude towards coming developments in this country sooner than they may have contemplated.

A note to the document says that 'This despatch was read by the Prime Minister, and was circulated to the Cabinet..'

On May 10, 1933, Cadogan forwarded to Leeper (of the British delegation to the League, Geneva) a memorandum written by Brigadier Temperley. Cadogan accompanied the memo with the comment: "It is, I think, of the utmost importance and interest." He added that a copy is with the War Office and that Eden had read the report. Vansittart agreed with the report. He suggested it be circulated to the Cabinet. This was done on May 16, 1933. We quote from the memo⁸²⁰ in full:

...Within a few weeks of his arrival, Hitler has carried out a revolution and made himself complete master of Germany. The

878⁸²⁰ DBFP, series 2, vol. 5, doc. 127, pp. 213-217

country has given herself up to a delirium of reawakened nationalism and of the most blatant and dangerous militarism. Fuel has been added to the flames by an orgy of military parades and torch-light processions and by a constant stream of patriotic wireless addresses delivered by masters of the art of propaganda, including Hitler himself.

...On the military side, Storm detachments of the Nazis and Stahlhelm have been converted into auxiliary police. As the Nazi detachments were recruited from the most desperate and violent elements of the unemployed, they do not seem particularly suitable for police work, the more so since arms have been placed in their hands. Their number are probably in the vicinity of 75,000. They are to undergo military training similar to that given to the militarized police. The incorporation of these groups in the police is, of course, a flagrant violation of the Peace-Treaty. It is believed that the total strength of the Nazi Storm detachments is 300,000 men. Schleicher had started voluntary camps for Youth Training in military subjects and they were already in full swing before Hitler's arrival. The openly expressed intention of this organisation is to train instructors in 'Defence Sport' and Field Exercises for the Associations. By March 1934 it is estimated that 40,000 potential instructors will have received training. A National Labour Corps was also in existence, 250,000 strong. They are dressed in uniforms and trained in camps under military discipline. Photographs and recent accounts of them in "The Times" clearly indicate the military character of their training, though part of their time is devoted to work on roads, etc. It has just been announced that the Chancellor has issued a decree calling up all youths of 20 years of age annually for national labour service for twelve months beginning on January 1, 1934. This will produce an annual contingent of 350,000. The Secretary of State for Labour Services announces that every youth must do his year in the Labour Service before passing on to military service, *when conscription has been reintroduced.*

...There are numerous indications in the last two months of increased activity in the German armament industry. Reports have been received that twelve firms, which are not allowed to produce armaments, have received test orders for war material. Preparations are reported to have been made for reopening of eight former Government arsenals.

At Geneva the German attitude has stiffened considerably. The German delegate has reiterated his refusal to accept the cardinal points of the British Draft Convention and has, in particular, declined to give up the Reichwehr and accept the uniformisation of European armies on a militia basis. The increasing insolence of the Germans has brought discussion on effectives to a complete standstill. When material is discussed, there are strong indications that the demands for samples of military aeroplanes, tanks and heavy guns will be very large.

What then is to be our attitude? Are we to go forward as if nothing has happened? Can we afford to ignore what is going on behind the scenes in Germany? The brief sketch of the post-war position, and particularly the intensification of military preparations under Hitler regime, coupled with the strident appeals to force of the Nazi leaders, not only means a secret German rearmament, but create an entirely new situation. Admittedly it would be a good thing to get Germany bound by a Convention, as a breakdown would mean that she would commence to rearm at once. On the other hand, there is little use in a Convention limiting effectives and material, if the preparations above indicated are to proceed unchecked, while the war-like spirit is being openly roused to a fever heat against the Poles as the first objective, with France as the ultimate enemy. Viscount Grey, in a recent speech, remarked how thankful the world must be that in the present condition of Germany she was disarmed by the Peace Treaty. Had this not been the case, Viscount Grey remarked, we should inevitably be once more on the verge of war. No moment could be worse chosen than the present one to advocate drastic reductions in the armaments of France, the Little Entente and Poland. Moreover, the destruction of all heavy material and bombing machines belonging to the French and her allies and to our own armed forces seems madness in the face of this direct German menace. We should do well to remember the old Ironsides motto of 'Trust in God and keep your powder dry'.

If it is dangerous to go forward with disarmament, what then is to be done? There appears to be one bold solution. France, the United States and ourselves should address a stern warning to Germany that there can be no disarmament, no equality of status and no relaxation of the Treaty of Versailles unless a complete reversion of present military preparations and tendencies takes place in Germany. Admittedly this will provoke a crisis and the danger of war will be brought appreciably nearer. We should have to say that we shall insist upon the enforcement of the Treaty of Versailles, and in this insistence, with its hint of force in the background, presumably the United States would not join. But Germany knows that she cannot fight at present and we must call her bluff. She is powerless before the French army and our fleet. Hitler, for all his bombast, must give way. If such a step seems too forceful, ***the only alternative is to carry out some minimum measure of disarmament and to allow things to drift for another five years, by which time, unless there is a change of heart in Germany, war seems inevitable.*** Germany rearmament will by then be an accomplished fact and the material of ex-Allies, which would takes years of work and scores of millions of pounds to replace, may have been destroyed. This is an alternative which is unlikely to lead us anywhere. Strong combined action, however, as suggested above, should prove

decisive, even though the threat of military pressure might have to be maintained for years, calling for fresh monetary sacrifices, until Germany is brought to her senses. But even this heavy responsibility should be accepted rather than that we should allow all the sacrifices of the last war to be in vain and the world to go down in economic ruin. ***There is a mad dog abroad once more and we must resolutely combine either to ensure its destruction or at least its confinement until the disease has run its course.***

Brigadier Temperley was not aware of another alternative: to be nice and kind with Germany (justifications would have to be found for public opinion) so that she may expand Eastward.

On August 28, 1933, Vansittart wrote a long memorandum on the present and future situation in Europe. He said⁸²¹:

9. From the very outset of the new regime in Germany, I have felt, with all deference to those with more sweet reasonableness were disposed for at least a little to wait and see, that there was no doubt whatsoever about the ultimate intentions of the Nazis. The same words now appear in our last intelligence report, and our sources are particularly good. It is an open secret that ***anything peaceful said by Hitler is merely for foreign consumption and designed to gain time***; and it is a significant fact that no utterance of Hitler may now be published without special sanction. Hitler's disarmament speech was a unique event, a solitary exception not only in his own history, but in that of his party, in which he would have lost ground but for the fact that no Germans has taken it seriously. We should no more be deceived than the Germans. On the other hand, the intention to strike when ready is constantly proclaimed. ***Never was writing larger on the wall***⁸²² ..

11. The will to fight is being fully advertised in Germany, and the whole of the younger generation is falling rapidly into the hands of the war-masters.. By every form of tuition and propaganda the youth of Germany is being fed on false history, hate and pugnancy; in, in effect, again being told to prepare for the day.

12. Unless, therefore, these prognostications are falsified by a change of the German heart, which the action of other powers alone can induce, we must begin to take early account of the possibility that a rearmed Germany = and Germany intends without any doubt to rearm.. — will, within the next decade, be in a position to attack either France and the United Kingdom together, or, if we find means to escape from our obligations under the Locarno treaty.. France alone. . On either hypothesis,

879⁸²¹ DBFP, series 2, vol. 5, doc. 371, pp. 547-560

880⁸²² Since this was written in 1933 by a person holding a highly responsible position in the Foreign Office, it cannot be denied that the policy of appeasement was pursued with complete and early awareness of the German military threat.

and on the form of 1914, *Germany would win*; *a fortiori* on the form of 1933, when we certainly, and France probably, are weaker. The evilly reborn Germany, on the other hand, will be stronger in a decade, if the present regime lasts. There is already in Germany a wider war-spirit, and a more complete lack of effective opposition, than in 1914.,

13 .. I would suggest, therefore, that in the general interest Germany should be kept underweight. It will be expensive, and in some quarters unwelcome.. There are, however, cases in which skin is more important than pocket. We can ill afford to let Hitlerite Germany prosper. The Trades Union Congress is also of this opinion, thought for different motives, seeing their recently announced boycott of German goods.. Ought we not to wish strongly enough to see Hitlerism fail, to be prepared at least to risk the consequences, which could hardly be more dangerous to European peace? German communism has never seemed a menace to any observer who knows the German character, and is not gulled by German propaganda as to the fictitious 'dangers' from which Hitlerism saved a Germany that required no saving. The collapse of Hitlerism should leave Germany too weak and disordered for external aggression. That is the essential point. We are now at a pass where 'peace in our time' (and even in Eastern Europe) must be the first consideration.

Vansittart goes on examining the ways by which the West could weaken Hitlerism. None of his suggestion were considered seriously. Britain did not prevent the British Banks from investing heavily in Germany. As to the boycott, there are cases in which the British Government exerted pressure on individuals not to voice the need for such a policy.

On December 22, 1933 a meeting was held in Paris between a French delegation headed by Paul-Boncour, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs and an English delegation headed by Simon, the British Secretary for Foreign Affairs. We quote from the British minutes⁸²³:

M. Paul-Boncour enquired how Sir John Simon reconciled the statement that the information in possession of His Majesty's Government confirmed the majority of the points contained in the French memorandum, with the further statement that he did not consider it possible to substantiate the charges that breaches of the treaty had been committed. The French memorandum itself furnished the proofs of the contention contained therein.

A discussion followed which demonstrated the weakness of the British case. The French were prepared to produce the most stringent proofs, and still Simon did not want to commit the British Government to a line of action

881⁸²³ DBFP, series 2, vol. 6, doc. 144, pp. 216-225

that would imply exposing publicly Germany's violations of the Peace Treaty.

It seems that Vansittart's argument that Germany was not at risk of becoming Communist in the wake of an Hitlerite defeat, did not convince Simon. He wanted Germany to be treated nicely. He often asked the question: what is the alternative? He never answered his own question. He seemed to imply that there was no alternative except war. This in spite of the fact that all the reports pointed to the fact that being nice to Germany and ignoring her treaty violations was precisely the policy which was bound to end in war. Simon's question makes sense only if rephrased as follows: If we want to prevent Germany from becoming communist, what other alternative do we have except humouring Hitler and being nice to him?

On January 31, 1934 Phipps sent a report to Simon from which we quote⁸²⁴:

2. .. The fear of France for her security arose from the very knowledge that, sooner or later, Germany must recover her strength.

5. .. Here it may be said that *nothing had so enhanced the prestige of Herr Hitler in Germany as the behaviour of the ex-Allies since he took office*. All reasonable and cautious opinion in Germany foretold disaster, occupation of the Rhineland, sanctions, perhaps blockade, if Germany reverted to nationalism. The Nazi seized power, *and nothing happened*. Herr Hitler left the League and *still nothing happened*. On the contrary, the statesmen in Europe were represented here as having been galvanised into running after Germany. The fear that force may be used against Germany exists, but is rapidly disappearing, and the man, particularly the young man, in the street thanks Hitler for the removal of a distressing bogey. It is therefore not surprising if the Chancellor pursues methods which hitherto have brought him success.

6. To attain his aims, the first step is obviously to discard the remaining servitudes of the Peace Treaty which stand in his way, namely, the disarmament stipulations. His policy is simple and straightforward. *If his neighbours allow him, he will become strong by the simplest and most direct methods*. The mere fact that he is making himself unpopular abroad will not deter him, for, as he said in his speech.. of the 17th January, it is better to be respected and disliked than to be weak and liked. If he finds that he arouses no real opposition, the *tempo* of his advance will increase. On the other hand, if he is vigorously opposed, he is unlikely at this stage to risk a break, and his policy will probably be to gain time and to go forward as best he can, trying to divide

882⁸²⁴ DBFP, series 2, vol. 6, doc. 241, pp. 362-366

his opponents, and even reverting to the derided methods of his predecessors...

7. *Recent events have, however, given heart to the Nazis..* There is an ever-growing conviction that *the day is not so far distant when Germany can at last emerge safely into the open.* Hence the Chancellor's foreign policy today may be summed up in the word 'rearmament'. With the passing of every month the demand for 'equality', that is to say, rearmament, becomes more insistent and the German requirements more extensive. *Nothing short of a vigorous and united policy on the part of his adversaries would impress the Chancellor or the German people.* Although Germany appears now to be flouting the opinion of Europe over a variety of major questions, she is doing so because she believes she can now safely pursue this course. She is, I consider, *still sufficiently conscious of her weakness and isolation to be brought to a halt by a united front abroad,* though *the time is not far distant when even a threat of force will prove ineffective.*

Such warnings as those given by Ambassador Phipps and Brigadier Temperley had either to be proven unfounded or to be acted upon. Nobody in the British Government circles dared denying their accuracy. The messages called for emergency measures. In short they were telling: "There is still time, but not much, to avoid a catastrophe." The reason why nothing was done before it became late cannot be, as sometimes claimed, lack of knowledge or even lack of conviction of the seriousness of the German challenge. The seriousness had been acknowledged even before Hitler came to power. Since then only people pretending to have been blind, could have ignored the writing on the wall in giant characters.

The mood in the British Government circles can be fairly deduced from the quotes of a document dated February 9, 1934, and titled "Memorandum on the Possibility of a French Demand for an Investigation into the State of German Rearmament under Article 213 of the Treaty of Versailles"⁸²⁵:

The French Government have on more than one occasion alluded publicly, in connection with the disarmament discussions, to their right, under Article 213 of the Treaty of Versailles, to ask the League Council to institute an investigation into the state of German rearmament.

4. According to the opinion expressed by His Majesty's Minister at Paris on the 5th February, the possibility of a French appeal to Article 213 is perhaps somewhat more remote at the present time.. *There is always the danger,* however, that circumstances may suddenly deteriorate in such a way as to call the French threat into operation, and the object of the present paper is, therefore, to consider the possible effect in present circumstances

883⁸²⁵ DBFP, series 2, vol. 6, doc. 264, pp. 395-398

of an appeal in the connection indicated to Article 213 of the Treaty of Versailles.

Clearly, the perceived danger is not Germany's rearmament but the possibility of a French call for its being investigated. One could have thought that, after the stern warnings from the most reliable sources as to the danger of rearmament of a Germany led by leaders bound on aggressive expansion, the British leaders would have eagerly urged France to call for investigations. Such was not the case. The danger was elsewhere. The document continues:

10. It must be here observed that a difference between Britain and France on such an issue **would place us in a most unsatisfactory position**. We should have been divided from France on a critical matter, on which **it would be difficult for us to maintain that the French contention was unjustified**. Further, **unless we are extremely careful**, we might be regarded as **indifferent to German rearmament**, which would **certainly be rapidly continued** and would already have included the alleged military training in the associations of 2 1/2 million men in defiance of the provisions of the treaty.

This last paragraph reveals the following:

w Britain's main concern is not Germany's rearmament but rather 'the most unsatisfactory position' she would be placed in, were she, as she would have liked, to oppose France's expected request for an investigation of Germany's rearmament.

w Britain regrets that it would be 'difficult for us' to maintain that French contentions are unjustified. Germany's violations to the disarmament clauses of the Versailles Treaty were so blatant that Britain had been obliged previously to acknowledge to France that France's contentions were factual.

w Britain is aware that Germany's rearmament would 'certainly be rapidly continued'.

w Britain, while displaying a lack of concern for Germany's rearmament, found it necessary to be 'extremely careful' to avoid being accused of indifference towards Germany's rearmament. This task indeed necessitate 'extreme care'. It is not easy to prevent France from implementing measures restraining Germany's rearmament, and avoid being accused of helping Germany to avoid such restraints. To eat a cake and still have it requires the greatest juggling skills.

In the full knowledge of Germany's rearmament and its ensuing danger to the cause of peace, Britain, while there was still time to restrain Germany, preferred to scheme on how to prevent France from causing difficulties to Hitler's Germany. Had the British leaders been convinced that Germany's military machine would be directed against the West, they certainly would have acted differently. Only the belief, and for some the hope, that Germany would 'look' eastward could explain the British 'indifference' towards Germany's rearmament. This is not just a logical deduction. We did quote British leaders affirming that Germany would move eastward and not westwards.

Germany had left the League and the Disarmament Conference. All information pointed to the fact that rearmament was Germany's aim and that she would certainly continue rearming secretly or openly. Nevertheless, Britain went through the movements of negotiating with France disarmament programmes to be proposed to Germany. This was a façade which would justify a refusal for supporting measures against Germany's rearmament 'as long as there was hope' for reaching a disarmament agreement with her. But there was no hope. Politically, it was useful for British leaders, unconcerned with Germany's rearmament, to display such hope, though it was proven unjustified by an avalanche of reliable reports. An exchange of opinions, in February 18, 1934, between Barthou and Eden is to the point⁸²⁶:

Barthou said.. If it were asked why the French Government resisted reduction in its armaments, the reply was because the United Kingdom memorandum offered them nothing in exchange. It contained nothing about sanctions, but merely a proposal for consultations. At what moment would this consultation take place? Only after the violation of the convention had occurred. And what action would be taken as a result of such consultation? On this point the memorandum said nothing. The declaration of the 11th December, 1932, [prior to Hitler's assumption of power], contained a reference to security as well as to equality of rights. In spite of this, the United Kingdom had given the French nothing in the matter of security..

It was not unfair to remark in conclusion that, as regards naval armaments and air armaments, equality of rights had been put off for two years and that these were both spheres of special interest to the United Kingdom; whereas in the matter of land armaments His Majesty's Government had said: *Que messieurs les Français désarment les premiers!* [Let the French disarm first!].

884⁸²⁶ DBFP, series 2, vol. 6, doc. 297, pp. 435-442. This exchange occurred at a meeting between a British and a French delegation. The French delegation was composed of the French Prime Minister Doumergue, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs Barthou, Leger and Massigli. The British delegation was composed of Eden, Tyrell, Campbell and Strang.

On March 21, 1934 a memorandum was prepared by the Foreign Office for the Cabinet. It said⁸²⁷:

5. Annex II to this memorandum shows that in both the aeronautical and military spheres German rearmament may soon become a menace to the balance of power in Europe. German civil aviation is now the first in Europe; Germany already has in effect a fleet of 600 military aeroplanes and facilities for its very rapid expansion. She can already immediately mobilise an army three times as great as that authorized by the Treaty, and a rapid expansion of her mobilisation facilities must be expected. In such circumstances the continuation of effective demilitarisation of the Rhineland becomes problematical.

The British Government had received previously a great number of reports of the same nature, detailing the extent of Germany's rearmament. Each report, as time passed, described the German danger in more dramatic terms. The document continues:

6. His Majesty's Government *have long been disinclined* to try to secure the literal enforcement of Part V of the Treaty. They were guided, especially after the withdrawal of the Central Commission, by the practical difficulty of securing such enforcement and by the set back to European reconciliation which such attempts would in their opinion have involved. They considered that the disarmament clauses had achieved their main object, i.e., the reduction of Germany to such a condition of military impotence as to render her incapable of waging an aggressive war against her neighbours within a measurable period of time. Indeed, until the beginning of 1932, it seemed legitimate to hope that *the forces of the Left* in Germany would be able to keep in check any attempt at serious rearmament.

Britain had no sympathy for 'the forces of the Left' in Germany in spite of the guarantee they offered of keeping Germany disarmed. The document continued:

7. For the last two years the *illegal character and the extent of German rearmament have been overshadowed and obscured by the discussions at the Disarmament conference*. In our desire to obtain 'the general limitation of the armaments of all nations' rendered possible by the terms imposed on Germany by Part V of the Treaty of Versailles, *we have been inclined to ignore the manner in which Part V was being infringed. We had hoped to solve the problem raised by the illegal rearmament of Germany, before it became unbearable acute, by the negotiation of a Disarmament Convention, which would*

885⁸²⁷ DBFP, series 2, vol. 6, doc. 363, pp. 574-582

cancel Part V of the Treaty and legalise some measure of German rearmament.

The discussions for rearmament would not ‘overshadow’ the illegal character and the extent of German rearmament unless permitted to do so. The ‘inclination to ignore’ Germany’s infringements to Versailles’ Peace Treaty were not due to the hope of reaching a real disarmament of the European powers. Britain had been warned that disarmament based on ‘equality’ meant at first an appreciable rearmament of Germany. It was known that Germany would not respect a disarmament agreement. It was understood that the inculcation of a military spirit in Germany was aimed at preparing the country to war. The document went on:

14. That we have a real grievance against Germany is shown by the fact that now, even if we obtain a Convention for limiting Germany’s rearmament, it is generally recognised that vital British interests will require a certain rearmament on our part in order to defend them against the threat of Germany’s growing military and aeronautical strength.

There are a numerous communications and reports describing in detail the extent of Germany’s illegal rearmament. They are long and technical. They, however, all convey a sense of urgency as to the necessity of facing the situation ‘before it be too late’.



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Larry Pratt (Professor of Political Sciences at the University of Alberta and author of "East of Malta, West of Suez")

