PARLIAMENT'S CHANGING ATTITUDE TOWARD GERMANY: SEPTEMBER, 1938, TO MARCH, 1939

By

Charles Wayne Goss

Bachelor of Arts

East Central State College

Ada, Oklahoma

1964

Submitted to the
faculty of the Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
July, 1967

PARLIAMENT'S CHANGING ATTITUDE TOWARD GERMANY: SEPTEMBER, 1938, TO MARCH, 1939

Thesis Approved:

Theodore L. Agnew
Thesis Adviser

LeRoy H. Fischer

A. D. Durham
Dean of the Graduate College

PREFACE

An understanding of the events between September, 1938, and March, 1939, is important if one is to gain an understanding of the origins of the Second World War. In September, 1938, Chamberlain was proclaiming "peace for our time;" by March, 1939, Britain was preparing for war against Germany. This thesis is an attempt to determine what factors caused the British Parliament to make such a radical change in course in the short space of six months.

The writer wishes to express his sincere appreciation to Dr. Douglas D. Hale, Jr., Chairman of the Advisory Committee, to Dr. Homer L. Knight and Dr. Alexander M. Ospovat for their helpful criticism and guidance in the preparation of this thesis. I especially wish to express gratitude to my wife, Ruth, for her constant encouragement and patience.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The foreign policy of Neville Chamberlain, Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1937 to 1940, underwent a metamorphosis between the Munich Conference of September 29, 1938, and the British decision to guarantee Poland's independence on March 31, 1939. At the time of the Munich meeting the British Government felt that Germany had valid complaints against the treatment she had received under the Treaty of Versailles and in the years that followed. Britain was willing to make an attempt to rectify these wrongs. The policy of appeasement was the means by which this was to be accomplished. However, by mid-March, 1939, there had emerged a growing demand that this policy be changed. Chamberlain's Birmingham speech of March 17, 1939, marks the beginning of the abandonment of appeasement and the attempt to create a coalition to stop German aggression. On March 31, 1939, Britain pledged to support Poland if Germany invaded Polish territory. The purpose of this thesis is to attempt to determine the main factor in the reversal of British policy toward Germany between September, 1938, and March, 1939.

There have been any number of reasons advanced to

explain the abandonment of the policy that many had hoped would mark the beginning of a period of European peace and tranquillity. Some have said that there occurred in Britain a revulsion against various aspects of the Nazi regime which were unpalatable to the British public. Others hold that appeasement was merely a policy of convenience to be discarded when England felt she was militarily capable of challenging Hitler. Another possibility is that appeasement proved to be unproductive. That is, it failed to accomplish the goal of satisfying Hitler, but only increased the German dictator's inclination toward aggression. It has also been brought out that there may have been a growing revolt among the backbenchers of the Conservative Party who threatened a shift in power toward the opposition. The Government was faced with a threat of revolt until it convinced its supporters that the practice of giving in to Hitler's demands would cease and that an attempt would be made to halt German aggression.

An understanding of the change in policy toward Germany is essential since it has a direct bearing on the outbreak of the Second World War. Britain's abandonment of appeasement and consequent support of continental powers as a method of halting German aggression led to Poland's refusal to negotiate over the question of Danzig and the Polish Corridor. When Poland was invaded by German troops on September 1, 1939, England, because of her previous commitments, was plunged into the holocaust that was to become

World War II.

Traditionally Great Britain's foreign policy has been based on two main principles. One of these pillars has been to maintain peace in Europe; the other, non-involvement in European affairs unless British interests were threatened. This policy evolved due to Britain's insular position in relation to the European continent. However, her reliance on commerce for her economic well-being has at times led to periods of extensive involvement on the continent. In order to implement these aims, Britain has relied upon the balance of power principle and the maintenance of a great navy. A large navy was needed to protect the commercial routes of the nation. Thus it has been the navy that carried the major portion of England's defense, while the army has been limited to garrison work and relatively minor involvement in major wars.

In applying the balance of power philosophy, Britain has lent her support to those power blocs which happened to be weakest at any given time. An example of this principle at work was the aid given to Prussia, Austria, and Russia against France in the period 1800-1814, and of the British alliance with France against Germany in 1914, and again in 1939. The idea behind this principle was that if the major rival blocs were relatively equal in power it would be possible to maintain the peace because war in such a situation would not be profitable to either side.

These pillars of British foreign policy underwent a

transformation after the First World War. No longer could Britain rely on maintaining the largest naval force in the world, but was forced to accept maritime parity with the United States. Among the factors which had necessitated this change in policy for Britain was the advent of the airplane. In the age of mechanized warfare, moreover, Britain no longer occupied an invulnerable insular position. As Stanley Baldwin remarked in July, 1934, "When you think of the defence of England you no longer think of the chalk cliffs of Dover; you think of the Rhine."[1]

Flexibility has also been a traditional aspect of England's foreign policy. There has been a tendency among British diplomats to view all treaties as temporary and subject to revision.[2] An example of this may be seen in the period following the Napoleonic wars. Though Britain participated in the coalition of anti-Bonapartist powers and was represented at the Congress of Vienna, she refused to be drawn into any binding agreement that could maintain the dominance of the reactionary forces after 1822.

The doctrine of appeasement which dominated Britain's foreign policy from 1937 to 1939, fits the traditional outlook of Britain quite comfortably. If, for example, one

---

[1] Arnold Wolfers, Britain and France Between Two Wars (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1963), p. 229.

[2] Ibid., p. 202. See also The Foreign Policy of the Powers (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1935), pp. 60-64.

accepts as two precepts the idea of temporary commitments and the desire for peace on the continent, it is possible to argue that appeasement was but a modern technique by which the traditional goals of British foreign policy might be attained. Appeasement was to offer a method of revising the Treaty of Versailles and to maintain peace in Europe. In short, appeasement was Chamberlain's approach to the objectives of traditional British foreign policy.

The main purpose of the policy, as envisioned by Chamberlain, was to create an atmosphere of trust and tranquillity in Europe. Appeasement did not mean that every demand of the dictators would be met, but rather it was designed to allow each nation ample opportunity to secure "a share of international trade, and improve the material conditions of its own people." The ultimate goal of this policy was to create an atmosphere of "good will and understanding" in which mutual problems "could be resolved by discussion without the use of force."[3]

When viewed in the light of traditional British diplomacy, the Treaty of Versailles was open to severe criticism. Unlike France, Britain was not committed to the idea that the restrictions imposed upon Germany in 1919 were to be maintained forever. As early as 1919, Lord Curzon, then

---

[3]Keith Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain (London: Macmillan, 1946), pp. 320,328. See also Keith Eubank, Munich (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), p. 263.

Foreign Secretary, declared that Britain refused to consider the recently dictated treaty a permanently binding one.[4] The British were willing to revise the treaty to make it conform more readily to reality. Examples of this are the Anglo-Italian Agreement of April, 1938, and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of June, 1935. The Anglo-Italian Agreement was designed to settle the various differences between the two nations, especially those over Ethiopia and Spain. The Anglo-German Naval Agreement, which allowed Germany the right to build up to 35% of Britain's surface naval capacity and 100% parity in submarines, was, in the British view, merely an official acceptance of the fact that Germany was no longer to be considered an inferior member of the European community.[5]

The policy advocated by Chamberlain was in line with British traditions. The policy took on added significance when it was coupled with the Prime Minister's own aversion to war. Under Chamberlain it became almost an obsession to end the possibility of war in Europe forever.

Chamberlain had been an active participant in

---

[4]Wolfers, pp. 202, 212, 214.

[5]Frank P. Chambers, This Age of Conflict (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962), pp. 390-391, 475. Chamberlain, himself, showed this tendency toward appeasement even before he became Prime Minister. In June, 1936, for example, he suggested that the sanctions against Italy for her invasion of Ethiopia be ended. Donald G. Bishop, The Administration of British Foreign Relations, (Syracuse, N. Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1961), p. 122.

political life following a tradition that had been set by his father, Joseph, and his half-brother, Austen. His father was elected Lord Mayor of Birmingham, a post he held from 1873 to 1876,[6] and later served in the House of Commons where he distinguished himself as a political reformer. He had entered Parliament as a Liberal but became a Conservative in 1895, when he joined Salisbury's Cabinet as Colonial Secretary. Austen had been Chancellor of the Exchequer under Stanley Baldwin between 1924 and 1929. Neville had served as Lord Mayor of Birmingham, as had his father before him, and entered the House of Commons in 1918, as the representative of Ladywood, a section of Birmingham.[7] Between 1919 and 1939, he held various Government positions. He was Minister of Health in the Cabinets of Bonar Law, Ramsay MacDonald, and Stanley Baldwin. He also held the position of Chancellor of the Exchequer three times, once in MacDonald's Cabinet and twice in Baldwin's. When Baldwin retired in 1937, Chamberlain was elected leader of the Conservative Party and served as Prime Minister until May, 1940.[8]

What kind of man was the new Prime Minister? Like

---

[6] Feiling, p. 2.

[7] Iain Macleod, Neville Chamberlain (London: Frederick Muller, 1961), p. 77.

[8] Charles Loch Mowat, Britain Between the Wars (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), pp. 665-672.

most men he was a complex being, one not easily classified by a simple term. He was a difficult man to get to know. Chamberlain paid close attention to the details of government, reading all documents that came across his desk. He also had great feeling for the underprivileged. Chamberlain told a group at Birmingham in 1937 that he had entered the House of Commons because he saw that there were many who were unable to provide the essentials of life for their families. He hoped to help correct the situation by "better education" and "full employment."[9]

Chamberlain leaned heavily on the advice of three men who tended to agree with his estimation of the foreign scene and reinforced his devotion to appeasement. These men made up the group known as the "Inner Cabinet" which had evolved from the Foreign Policy Committee of the Cabinet. Chamberlain believed this committee was too unwieldy to function effectively and so limited it to himself and three other men: Edward Wood (Viscount Halifax), Sir John Simon, and Sir Samuel Hoare.[10] Simon was Chancellor of the Exchequer, Hoare was Home Secretary, and Halifax was Lord President and subsequently Foreign Secretary after Eden's resignation in March, 1938. These three men and the Prime

---

[9]Feiling, pp. 203-204.

[10]Bishop, p. 83. See also Alfred Duff Cooper, Old Men Forget (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1953), p. 226. Also see Alan Campbell Johnson, Viscount Halifax (New York: Ives Washburn, 1941), p. 474.

Minister made most of the decisions on foreign policy.[11]

The government that Chamberlain headed was called a National Government, but the Conservative Party in fact held a majority of the Parliamentary seats. Out of 615 members of the House of Commons, the Conservatives could claim 432, while the Labour Party, the next largest, held only 154 seats.[12] Besides Chamberlain, the more important leaders in the Conservative Party were Winston Churchill, who, though out of office, was still one to be reckoned with, and Anthony Eden, who had served as Foreign Secretary from 1935 to 1938. It was around Eden that most of those within the party that did not agree with the appeasement program tended to rally. Hoare and Simon were, of course, important members of the party. Lord Stanhope was Conservative leader in the House of Lords. In the Labour Party the leaders were Clement Attlee, Arthur Greenwood, Herbert Morrison, Hugh Dalton and Stafford Cripps. The Liberal Party, which had been one of the major parties of the nineteenth century, held only 20 seats. Its leader was Archibald Sinclair. The Independent Labour Party was led by James Maxton, but had only 4 members in the House of Commons. The Liberal National Party, under the leadership

---

[11] Johnson, p. 474.

[12] David Butler and Jeanie Freeman, British Political Facts 1900-1960 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1963), p. 124.

of John Simon, had joined in an alliance with the Conservatives in 1935, and won 33 seats. The National Labour Party picked up 8 seats in the General Election of 1935, and supported the Government. The Communist Party won one seat in 1935, when William Gallacher was elected from West Fife.[13] Gallacher, who supported neither the Government nor the Opposition Labour Party, was one of the most vehement critics of appeasement.

The basic objective of Conservative foreign policy was to bring about a peaceful settlement of European problems. The Labour Party, like the Conservative, advocated peace in Europe, but favored a different approach. It emphasized the principle of collective security through the League of Nations. By 1937, however, it was evident that the League no longer was an effective means of securing world peace. The Conservatives, therefore, were attempting to re-create a new "concert of Europe" directed by Britain, France, Italy, and Germany to replace the League.[14] During these years, however, Labour continued to advocate a return to collective security through the League and the settlement of disputes by peaceful means.[15]

---

[13] Ibid., pp. 89-107.

[14] Gordon Craig and Felix Gilbert, The Diplomats 1919-1939 (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 548.

[15] Elaine Windrich, British Labour's Foreign Policy (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1952), p. 9. See also Craig, p. 313.

Labour's attitude toward rearmament was also closely tied to the idea of international cooperation. At the Edinburgh Conference of 1936, the party passed a resolution that called for armaments equal to the arms of those nations which were not loyal to the League.[16] In 1937, a Labour spokesman declared that the party would support collective security through the League but would resist an arms build-up simply as a means to implement national policy.[17] This policy was reaffirmed at a Birmingham Conference of the party in 1938.[18] Thus, Labour's attitude toward rearmament was contingent upon its reliance upon the League as the means of assuring the peace. Apparently the Labour leaders failed to see the impracticality of this policy: England and France working in unison within the League could have little deterrent influence over Germany, Italy, and Japan since they were no longer members of the League and thus no longer bound by its Covenant.

There were, of course, alternative policies which the Government might have pursued other than appeasement or collective security through the League. Some of these were not feasible and others were unpalatable to Chamberlain.

---

[16]Clement R. Attlee, As It Happened (New York: The Viking Press, 1954), p. 144.

[17]William R. Tucker, The Attitude of the British Labour Party Towards European and Collective Security Problems 1920-1939 (Geneve: Imprimerie du Journal de Geneve, 1950), p. 207.

[18]Craig, pp. 318-319.

One possibility was to form an alliance with the United States in an effort to halt not only German aggression but that of Japan as well. This plan held certain attractions for both nations. Both were interested in the Pacific area and had possessions or concessions which would be endangered if Japan were not stopped.

Nevertheless, though there may have been some official desire in Washington for an Anglo-American agreement, it was not to come to pass before the outbreak of World War II. The main reason for the failure of the two nations to come together was the isolationist attitude of the American public during the interwar years. Congress passed two neutrality laws which were designed to keep America from becoming involved in international disputes.[19] Another expression of this American isolation occurred in 1937, when President Roosevelt proposed a quarantine of those nations that broke international law. Public reaction to this statement was so great that Roosevelt was forced to publicly disavow his declaration as official American policy.[20]

Another possible course of action Britain might have considered was to form an alliance with the Soviet Union. The Soviets had interests both in Europe and in Asia which

---

[19] The laws were passed in 1935 and 1937. The 1937 law forbade American citizens from traveling on belligerent ships.

[20] Chambers, pp. 466-468.

could easily lead to open conflict with either Japan or Germany or both. Even though there were factors which could have been instrumental in bringing England and the Soviet Union together, there were still more that kept them apart. Among these factors were the different ideologies of the two nations and the fact that the military capabilities of the Soviet Union were an unknown quantity since the great purges of the middle thirties.[21] Moreover, Chamberlain suspected that the Soviet Union hoped to incite a war between Britain and Germany.[22]

Because of American isolation, distrust of the Soviet Union, and the inability of the League to act when faced with a crisis, Britain had only one course to follow if European peace was to be preserved. Britain could only hope to create an atmosphere of mutual confidence and trust, thus setting the stage for international appeasement. Also appeasement fit into the traditional foreign policy of Britain and corresponded with Chamberlain's own philosophy.

While Chamberlain set about implementing appeasement, the Foreign Office attempted to influence his decisions, but was enjoying little success. The position of the Foreign Office, headed by Lord Halifax, was an entirely different one than it had been before World War I. Prior to

---

[21] A. J. P. Taylor, The Origins of the Second World War (New York: Atheneum, 1961), pp. 111-112.

[22] Feiling, p. 226.

1914, foreign policy had been the domain of the Foreign Secretary, who brought to the Cabinet proposals based upon the expert advice of the professional diplomats in the Foreign Office. At the Cabinet meetings there were opportunities to modify or change policy, but this was rarely done, since any proposal placed before the Cabinet was carefully worked out beforehand and based on all available information.[23]

During the period between the wars, however, a change took place in the relationship between the Foreign Office and Parliament. For one thing, the House of Commons began to take a more active interest in Foreign Office affairs. That the Foreign Office no longer enjoyed pre-eminence in the decision-making process was evident as early as 1919, when Lloyd George refused to take Foreign Office experts to the Paris Peace Conference, but relied instead on persons of his own choosing.[24] The influence of the Foreign Office on Britain's international relations continued to wane until, under Chamberlain, it was by-passed by the Prime Minister with little regard. The position of the Foreign Secretary had become a difficult one indeed.

In 1937, Anthony Eden had become Foreign Secretary under Chamberlain, a position he was to hold until March 1938,

---

[23] Craig, pp. 15-16.

[24] Ibid., p. 20.

when he resigned because he no longer had any faith in the policy the Prime Minister was following. Eden was replaced by Halifax, a man in whom Chamberlain had complete confidence, but the process of decision-making was not changed. The Prime Minister continued to distrust the Foreign Office and to make decisions with little or no reliance on the expert advice available there. This, of course, was nothing new; other Prime Ministers such as Gladstone, Lloyd George, and MacDonald had by-passed the Foreign Office frequently. It was by no means a departure from tradition for Chamberlain to interfere in the activities of the experts at Whitehall or ignore their advice.[25]

There are two reasons for Chamberlain's assumption of the duties of the Foreign Office. For one thing, Chamberlain mistrusted this agency, believing it to be dominated by people who were pro-French. He did not want Britain to be caught up in a situation similar to that of 1914. The second reason for his interference was his belief in the power of personal diplomacy. Chamberlain was of the opinion that more could be accomplished in two hours of personal contact than in weeks of communications between ministers.[26] Chamberlain held war in complete aversion and because of

---

[25]Craig, p. 549. See also Arthur Salter, Personality in Politics (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), pp. 67, 84. See also Macleod, p. 209.

[26]Mowat, pp. 590-591.

this he believed that only a monumental effort on his part could assure peace. The Prime Minister was confident that he had the answer for a lasting peace in the form of a general European appeasement.

There were, of course, those who opposed Chamberlain's monopoly of decision-making power. Ronald Cartland, a Conservative member of the House of Commons, accused the Prime Minister of behaving like the dictators in his actions and attitudes concerning the foreign scene.[27] It was charged that there was a small clique outside Parliament that was forming policy to the exclusion of other views.[28] Nevertheless, Chamberlain dominated the formulation of foreign policy between 1937 and 1939, and was not necessarily exceeding the traditional powers of the Prime Minister.

Although appeasement was the official policy of the Government and probably had the support of the majority of the electorate, Britain still had obligations under the Treaty of Versailles, the Locarno Pact, and the League Covenant which might run counter to this policy. At the time

---

[27] Hugh Dalton, The Fateful Years (London: Frederick Muller, 1957), p. 162.

[28] "The Opposition," The Economist, CXXXIV (March 25, 1939), p. 610. The article referred to the so-called "Cliveden Set" which many believed to be exerting undue influence over Chamberlain and the appeasement policy. The group included Geoffery Dawson, editor of The Times; Viscount and Viscountess Astor, in whose home the "Cliveden Set" allegedly met, and Barrington-Ward, assistant editor of The Times.

of the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, in order to allay French fears of future attack by Germany, Britain agreed to guarantee French territorial integrity. If France were invaded by Germany, Britain agreed to give her military support.[29] Also each nation that joined the League of Nations assumed certain obligations toward the other members. Under Article X, each member undertook to insure against "external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all members of the League." The Lacarno Pact of 1925, provided for a British guarantee of the boundary between France and Germany.[30]

At the Peace Conference concluding the First World War, Britain had pledged to protect France if France were attacked by Germany. However, during the twenties and early thirties there existed a basic divergence between the British and French appraisals of the relative danger of Germany. France, assuming that her own safety lay in German impotence, was determined to keep Germany as weak as possible so that her own security would not be endangered. Always on the horizon of French thought was the fear of another invasion from across the Rhine. For this reason she desired a demilitarized Rhineland under French control.

British foreign policy, in contrast to the French,

---

[29] Chambers, pp. 106-109.

[30] Ibid., pp. 123-124, 834-839.

followed the traditional standard of revision and temporary alliance when needed. The British desired that Germany find a "happy medium" between the limitations of the Treaty of Versailles and the maximum expansion of German power which Britain would tolerate.[31] The maximum level would be reached only when Germany began to threaten the Low Countries by her military build-up and when Germany had an air force that could neutralize the British fleet.

By the summer of 1934, however, British and French policies had begun to merge. On July 30, 1934, Stanley Baldwin announced that the frontier of Britain was on the Rhine River. By this he was drawing attention to the fact that Britain could not isolate herself from the events on the continent. What happened in Germany, France, or any other Western European nation could have an effect on Britain. At the same time there was a growing distinction between Anglo-French and Anglo-German relations. Henceforth France would be considered a potential ally of Britain and Germany a potential enemy.[32]

It was not until the Czechoslovakian crisis of 1938, however, that Britain emerged as a full participant, and in fact the leading participant, in continental affairs. The only obligations England had toward Czechoslovakia were

---

[31] Wolfers, pp. 233-244.

[32] Ibid., pp. 229-230.

those which came through membership in the League of Nations. France, an ally of Czechoslovakia since 1924, had, by 1938, subordinated herself to Britain in foreign policy matters and was thus looking to London for guidance.[33] When Germany began to make demands on Czechoslovakia it was London that assumed the role of leadership rather than Paris. Hence it was in regard to Czechoslovakia that appeasement was given its greatest test and Chamberlain was to say that he had gained "peace for our time."

However, appeasement did not bring peace. Instead, the eleven months between October, 1938, and September, 1939, witnessed the abandonment of appeasement and the outbreak of war. Various explanations have been offered for the change in British policy from appeasement to resistance against German aggression. One reason often cited as the cause for this reversal is that there was a change in British public opinion toward the Nazi regime of Hitler. Among those who consider this to be a factor are two well-known British historians, A. J. P. Taylor, and Lewis B. Namier.[34] Taylor claims that there is no single factor that brought about the change in opinion, but that one important cause was the Nazi occupation of Prague on March 15, 1939. The

---

[33] Ibid., p. 280.

[34] Taylor, p. 205. Lewis B. Namier, Diplomatic Prelude 1938-1939 (London: Macmillan, 1948), p. 75. See also Mowat, p. 637.

public mood was different at this time than it had been during the Austrian Anschluss or the Munich Conference.[35]

The exact role of public opinion, however, is difficult to ascertain because of its nebulous character. However, in a democratic society it is of great importance, for on the caprice of public opinion rests the success or failure of a government's policy. Among the various means of determining the drift of public opinion within Britain at this time is to examine the letters sections of the various newspapers and journals. Public opinion may also be measured by reference to the results of by-elections. If a Government-sponsored candidate in any contested borough wins by a large majority it may be assumed that the public is, at least in that particular area of the country, in favor of the course of action being taken. If this should be repeated in many dispersed boroughs, the assumption takes on added validity.

Some authorities, on the other hand, suggest that it was Cabinet pressure rather than public opinion that caused Chamberlain to abandon appeasement. The British historian, R. W. Seton-Watson, argues that the policy of appeasement was abandoned because of Cabinet influence on Chamberlain. According to this view, the Cabinet reacted against the apparent indifference of the Prime Minister to the occupa-

---

[35] Taylor, pp. 203-204.

tion of Prague by placing great pressure on him.[36] It was this pressure that caused Chamberlain to take a firmer attitude toward Germany, an attitude that was revealed in the Prime Minister's speech at Birmingham on March 17, 1939.

Another factor that is sometimes cited as a reason for appeasement is the role of the dominion nations at this time. Every dominion, while recognizing the same monarch, was completely free to determine its own foreign policy. This made it important for Britain to take into consideration the attitude of her dominions before acting in a critical international situation. Great Britain, with a population of 50 million, had to acknowledge the role of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and India when she was confronted with a revived Germany of 70 million people. Since the dominions were the source of manpower for the land

---

[36] R. W. Seton-Watson, From Munich to Danzig (London: Methuen, 1939), p. 201. Members of Chamberlain's Cabinet between the Munich Conference and the outbreak of the Second World War were:

Neville Chamberlain	Prime Minister
Lord Halifax	Foreign Secretary
Sir Samuel Hoare	Home Secretary
Sir Thomas Inskip	Minister for Coordination of Defense
W. E. Elliot	Minister of Health
Sir Kingsley Wood	Secretary for Air
W. S. Morrison	Minister of Agriculture
Earl Stanhope	First Lord of the Admiralty
Sir John Simon	Chancellor of the Exchequer
Ernest Brown	Minister of Labour
L. Hore-Belisha	Secretary for War
E. L. Burgin	Minister of Transport
Major G. C. Tryon	Postmaster General

armies which would be needed for any European war, they could wield great influence in the determination of British foreign policy.

Another factor in the abandonment of appeasement that is considered to be crucial is the role that Parliament played. Traditionally the role of Parliament in the formulation of foreign policy has been passive, but there is evidence that there was a re-evaluation of its role at this time. Historically, Parliament has allowed the Foreign Office, in co-operation with the Prime Minister, to formulate foreign policy. Since the First World War, however, there was a growing interest on the part of Parliament in the manipulation of foreign affairs. This has caused the Government to keep Parliament well informed and seek a strong backing from that body for Government policies.[37]

All of these forces--public opinion, the Foreign Office, the Dominions, and Chamberlain himself--played a part in the change in British policy toward Germany between September, 1938, and March, 1939. This thesis shall deal with only one of these possible reasons: the role of Parliament. This factor seems to be the most significant when considering the changing attitude toward Germany.

---

[37]H. M. Stout, British Government (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 319.

CHAPTER II

THE MUNICH SETTLEMENT AND THE REACTION IN PARLIAMENT AND NATION

September, 1938, may be characterized as a month of gradually increasing concern and sudden relief in Britain. Throughout the month the general consensus within England was that war was going to break out momentarily over the Sudeten question despite Britain's attempts to avert the catastrophe. After the Munich agreement of September 29, however, a deep feeling of relief pervaded the country, because it was now believed that war had been postponed, at the very least, for the near future. Since Munich is of such importance to an understanding of the British mood, it will be necessary to examine the agreement more closely.

The events leading to the Munich Conference had been set in motion once it became apparent that France, which had treaty obligations toward Czechoslovakia, had subordinated her foreign policy aims to the desires of Great Britain: an England that had no obligations toward the Czech state other than those which went along with membership in the League of Nations. Other factors to be considered are the British estimate of Konrad Henlein, the leader of the Sudeten Germany Party, and the designs of

Adolph Hitler on Czechslovakia. The British assumed that Henlein was a patriot working for the rectification of wrongs perpetrated upon the three and a half million German-speaking inhabitants within Czechoslovakia.[1] It was believed that he was seeking only justice for his people. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Henlein was nothing more than a pawn in the hands of Hitler, and his Sudeten Party was under the control of the German Minister in Prague, whose orders the party was to obey completely.[2]

That Hitler had designs on Central Europe was revealed on November 5, 1937, at a secret meeting with his generals. In this meeting he declared that Germany needed Lebensraum in Central Europe, and the best opportunities to gain this territory were in Austria and Czechoslovakia.[3] On February 20, 1938, in a speech before the Reichstag, Hitler made an allusion to this when he emphasized that Germany had a right to protect the "over ten million Germans /living/ in two of the States adjoining our frontiers." The Czech leaders were aware that Hitler was addressing himself to Prague as well as Vienna.[4] With the successful

---

[1]Keith Eubank, Munich (Norman, Oklahoma: Oklahoma University Press, 1963), pp. 8-9.

[2]John Wheeler-Bennett, Munich: Prologue to Tragedy (New York: Buell, Sloan and Pearce, 1948), p. 45.

[3]William L. Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), pp. 305-307.

[4]Wheeler-Bennett, p. 29.

conclusion of the Austrian Anschluss in March, 1938, Hitler was ready to turn to Czechoslovakia.

The Czechs were not willing merely to wait for Hitler's next move. Because of rumoured troop movements toward the Czech borders in the spring of 1938, the Czech Government, believing that an invasion was imminent, ordered the partial mobilization of the nation's forces on May 20. The immediate reaction of France was to pledge her support in the event of any German aggression. Russia also gave evidence of being ready to come to the aid of Czechoslovakia in the event of unwarranted aggression by Germany.[5] Hitler, enraged because the Czech mobilization had thwarted his plans, now determined to isolate and annihilate Czechoslovakia. This was to be accomplished through the implementation of "Operation Green." October 1, 1939, was the date given as the deadline for putting the plan into effect.[6] For the time being, however, the crisis over Czechoslovakia had been averted, and the Czech nation rested secure in the knowledge that her allies were going to stand firm in the time of need.

But in the late spring and early summer of 1938, Britain and France began to vacillate in their policy. After the unnerving experience of the May crisis, Paris

---

[5] Ibid., pp. 55,57. See also Chambers, p. 481.

[6] Wheeler-Bennett, pp. 60-61.

and London decided that the only way to preserve the peace was to force a reconciliation between the Reich and Czechoslovakia. This was to be accomplished by applying diplomatic pressure on both governments. To Germany, Britain and France reaffirmed their determination to stand by Czechoslovakia. At the same time they threatened to withdraw their support from the Czechs unless Prague proved willing to settle the Sudeten German problem by negotiating with Germany.[7]

The implementation of this plan proved to be only partially successful. Czechoslovakia was indeed cajoled into placing her destinies in the hands of her allies. This was done because the Czechs believed that Britain and France would insure that a just settlement would be brought about. Germany, however, was not impressed by these warnings. The main reason for their attitude was the activity of the British ambassador to Germany, Nevile Henderson. While the British Government was issuing these warnings, Henderson was reassuring the German Government that they had nothing to fear from England because England was desirous of peace. Henderson's activity undermined the attempts of the British to bring Germany to the conference table where a just settlement could be achieved. Henderson also played a vital role in the decision-making process

---

[7] Ibid., p. 71; Craig, p. 541.

concerning the steps the British Government was to take in the critical months before the Munich Conference.[8]

Henderson believed that pressure applied to Czechoslovakia would be more effective than that applied to Germany. As a result of this he often failed to carry out the directives he received from the Foreign Office. Henderson softened the impact of British representations at Berlin by "expressing a purely personal opinion" that was favorable to the German viewpoint. This "personal opinion" was clearly in sympathy with the German position.[9] The ambassador's actions undermined the British plan while it gave Germany room to maneuver. The German policy makers were confident that Britain would not come to the aid of the Czechs unless they pushed too far too rapidly. Henderson's attitude tended to support the German conviction that Britain would not object to changes in the European status quo if they could be brought about peacefully.[10]

Germany, reasonably sure of the British attitude concerning the Sudeten question, began to apply pressure on the Czech Government through Henlein's Sudeten German Party.

---

[8]Henderson took the attitude that Prague should give in to the demands of Germany. He was dissatisfied with the decision to approach both capitals, and the German government was well aware of Henderson's attitude. Craig, p. 538, 541.

[9]Ibid., pp. 538-540.

[10]Eubank, p. 19.

One example of this may be seen in the eight demands put forth by the leader of the party at Karlsbad in April, 1938. Henlein was instructed to raise these demands at any time it appeared that Czechoslovakia was about to accept them.[11] Britain's reaction to this new development was to propose an independent mission to investigate and mediate the controversy.[12] The man given the responsibility of carrying out this assignment was Walter Runciman, former President of the Board of Trade and a successful ship builder. In Britain it was a foregone conclusion that Czechoslovakia would accept the plan and the settlement that hopefully would be forthcoming. If Prague should oppose the idea, the British were prepared to make their proposal public along with the Czech refusal. This would have placed the stigma of refusal to settle the Sudeten question squarely on Czechoslovakia.[13] Chamberlain emphasized that Runciman was to be an impartial investigator, looking at both sides and then perhaps proposing a settlement equitable for both parties.[14]

---

[11] E. J. Knapton and T. K. Derry, Europe and the World Since 1914 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 245.

[12] Wheeler-Bennett, p. 75.

[13] Eubank, pp. 78-79.

[14] Wheeler-Bennett, p. 75. See also Francis L. Loewenheim, (ed.), Peace or Appeasement? (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1965), pp. 18-19.

The Runciman mission arrived at Prague in August, 1938, and began to hold interviews with the contending parties. However, it soon became evident that there were problems that could not be easily surmounted. The Sudeten Germans had been instructed to "hold out and wait."[15] Henlein demanded that his Karlsbad program of April, calling for autonomy for the Sudeten areas, plus the right of the Sudeten Germans "to profess German political philosophy" be accepted.[16] The Czechs, for their part, refused to acknowledge these demands as a basis for negotiations. It soon appeared that the mission was to end in failure. However, Dr. Beneš, President of Czechoslovakia, in order to prove to Runciman and the world that Henlein did not desire to settle the question, brought the negotiations to a head on September 4. He called in two of the leaders of the Sudeten Party and offered to fulfill their demands without attempting to compromise on any point.[17] This would have placed the responsibility for failure squarely on the Sudeten German Party. However, Henlein's group was saved from having to make a decision by an incident between Czechs and Sudeten Germans in the town of Morawska-Ostrava. This incident was used as a pretext to halt negotiations

---

[15]Eubank, p. 90.

[16]Chambers, p. 481.

[17]Eubank, p. 92; Wheeler-Bennett, p. 91.

until after Hitler's speech at the Nazi Party rally at Nuremberg on September 12.[18] In this very bellicose address, Hitler demanded that the Sudeten Germans be granted the right of self-determination.[19]

In the meantime, Hitler was given added incentive for maintaining pressure on Czechoslovakia. This took the form of an editorial in The Times of September 7, 1938, which suggested that Czechoslovakia give freedom to her minority groups and thus render its population more homogeneous.[20] It was generally assumed that the editorial was inspired by the government, for it was known that there existed close connections between the newspaper and the government. Although the Foreign Office quickly disclaimed any official connection with the editorial, the belief still persisted that it was an expression of the current governmental attitude on the Sudeten problem. In this atmosphere, the Runciman mission had no chance of success. A final effort was made, however, to persuade Henlein to reopen negotiations but he refused to do so. Runciman returned to England on September 16, without making any appreciable

---

[18] Wheeler-Bennett, pp. 92-95. The incident that provided the excuse was alleged police brutality against Sudeten demonstrators. Actually the incident was blown out of all proportion by the German press.

[19] Loewenheim, p. x.

[20] Quoted in Winston Churchill, The Gathering Storm (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), p. 296.

headway in the search for peace.[21]

While the Runciman Mission prepared to return to England, and Europe was expecting to hear of the outbreak of war at any moment, Chamberlain was embarking on the course of personal diplomacy that was to culminate in the Munich Conference. As the Prime Minister confided to his diary on September 11, he was sure that the plan he was pursuing was the best for Britain. He did not want the decision of war or peace for England to "pass out of our hands into those of a ruler of another country, and a lunatic at that."[22]

In order to preserve the peace at this critical hour, Chamberlain personally intervened and proposed to Hitler that they meet to discuss the highly volatile problem of the status of the Sudeten area.[23] Hitler's reaction to the invitation was one of unrestrained joy,[24] not so much because an opportunity had been presented for a negotiated settlement, but because he saw a chance to gain his objective without recourse to war. His bluff was beginning to pay off. Hitler readily agreed to meet Chamberlain at

---

[21]Wheeler-Bennett, p. 93.

[22]Feiling, p. 360.

[23]Neville Chamberlain, In Search of Peace (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939), pp. 186-187.

[24]Eubank, p. 130.

Berchtesgaden on September 15. Within Britain, the news of Chamberlain's offer and Hitler's acceptance was received with renewed hope and a sigh of relief, for most people had expected war by the fifteenth.

Chamberlain went to Berchtesgaden with two companions, Hoarce Wilson, Chief Industrial Adviser to the British Government, and William Strang, head of the Central Department of the Foreign Office.[25] In the ensuing talks, the principle of self-determination for the Sudeten minority was accepted. Hitler in return promised to keep his army under control unless the Czechs forced him to intervene. Chamberlain returned to England believing that he had saved Europe from war because Hitler had given him his word that he would not make any drastic moves unless forced to do so by the Czechs. The Prime Minister placed great faith in the sanctity of Hitler's word, believing that his promises would be kept because the German leader had personally given them.[26]

Between September 16 and 22, Chamberlain convinced the Cabinet, Parliament, and France that self-determination for the Sudeten Germans was the only means available to preserve the peace of Europe. The French Premier, Daladier, and Foreign Minister, Bonnet, came for a series of

---

[25]Wheeler-Bennett, p. 108.

[26]Feiling, p. 367; Dalton, p. 176.

talks that were initially stalled by French unwillingness to accept the principle of self-determination. Apparently, French unwillingness centered around the fact that the contemplated plebiscite would involve all the Czechoslovakian minorities and result in a partition of the country.[27] The question was finally settled to the satisfaction of both nations when Britain agreed to guarantee the remaining portions of Czechoslovakia after the Sudeten area had been granted to Germany.[28]

Next the Czechs had to be convinced that if they rejected the plan for self-determination they would be forced to face Germany without British and French support. Both Czechoslovakia and Germany had been mobilizing their forces during this time, and when the proposal to cede areas of over 50 per cent German population to Germany was first communicated to Prague on September 19, the first reaction in the Czech capital was to reject the proposal. However, once Prague was convinced that they could not rely on French

---

[27]Loewenheim, p. 108. Daladier had been given a map before he left France, showing the minimum frontier Czechoslovakia needed to maintain if the country was not to be "surrendered and . . . ruined." He says that when this was presented to Chamberlain it only tended to strengthen the British position. Thus he went along with the decision to ask Czechoslovakia to accept the idea of self-determination, especially when his government could offer no other solution.

[28]Eubank, pp. 134-140.

help, they were forced to accept the proposed settlement.[29]

The way was now open for an agreement which would set at ease all parties concerned, although Czech acceptance had been gained only by the threat of virtual diplomatic isolation. Chamberlain once more flew to the continent only to be told that self-determination for the Sudeten Germans alone was no longer acceptable to Germany. At Godesberg, Hitler now demanded that Czechoslovakia also give Poland and Hungary those regions of the Czech nation containing Polish and Hungarian minorities. The Fuehrer also set forth other demands in a memorandum that was little more than an ultimatum.

Among the new demands, Hitler called for a frontier between the Reich and Czechoslovakia based on language. Furthermore, the Czech police, army, and government officials were to retire behind this line while the German army occupied all of the area. After this was accomplished, plebiscites were to be held in the area using the 1918 census as a guide. It was also stipulated that there was to be no removal or destruction of Czech property within the area, neither was Czechoslovakia to receive any indemnification for state property ceded to Germany. The final demand was that all Germans serving in the Czech army and police be released from their duties. In return

---

[29] Ibid., pp. 143-149.

for the fulfillment of these demands, Germany agreed to sign a non-aggression pact with Czechoslovakia.[30]

Chamberlain was astounded at these new terms and was understandably distressed that Hitler could not be persuaded to accept anything short of complete compliance with the new demands. Chamberlain, therefore, agreed to send the memorandum to Czechoslovakia if Hitler would restrain his troops. He did not, however, agree to recommend that Czechoslovakia accept or reject the new demands. Hitler accepted this proposal and extended the date for Czech evacuation of the disputed territory to October 1, 1938.[31]

The British Prime Minister returned from Godesberg on September 24 only to find that there was a division within the Cabinet over the advisibility of accepting the Godesberg Memorandum. Czechoslovakia had rejected Hitler's proposal as being an ultimatum. France also rejected the new plan and in talks with Britain was attempting to soften the demands. The French felt that this could be accomplished by facing Germany with a united front. Chamberlain, after much consideration, agreed to follow the recommendations of the French and the majority of his Cabinet and reject the Godesberg Memorandum. However, he made one last effort to preserve the peace by instructing Horace Wilson to

---

[30] Ibid., pp. 157-158.

[31] Ibid., pp. 158-165.

deliver a personal letter proposing that the Sudeten problem be settled by international arbitration. Chamberlain hoped by this last-minute appeal to snatch the world from the brink of war.[32] At this point it appeared that the outbreak of hostilities was only a matter of time.[33] The British fleet was mobilized on September 27, while at the same time trenches were being dug in the parks of London and the population of the city was being issued gas masks.[34]

The Prime Minister, as he reviewed the past events in a speech before the House of Commons on September 28, seemed a bewildered old man. Then in the darkest hour, a ray of hope appeared in the form of an invitation from Hitler to come to Munich for one more conference in an attempt to preserve the peace. Apparently Chamberlain's final appeal had had the desired effect on the German dictator. Chamberlain read the note containing what he believed to be the answer to Europe's problems and then concluded his speech by saying:

> I have now been informed by Herr Hitler that he invites me to meet him at Munich to-morrow morning. He has also invited Signor Mussolini

---

[32]William R. Rock, Appeasement on Trial (Hamden, Conn: The Shoe String Press, 1966), pp. 127-128.

[33]Wheeler-Bennett, p. 142.

[34]Anthony Eden, The Reckoning (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 32. See also Chamberlain, p. 174.

> and M. Daladier. Signor Mussolini has accepted and I have no doubt M. Daladier will also accept. I need not say what my answer will be.[35]

At this announcement the Parliament erupted in pandemonium, and Government and opposition members of Parliament joined in cheering the Prime Minister. The House of Commons then voted to adjourn until October 1, 1938, but not until various Parliamentary figures voiced their support of Chamberlain's third and most important journey to Germany. Archibald Sinclair, a Liberal and representative for Caithness, extended to the Prime Minister expressions of hope for the coming trip. He warned, however, that the independence of Czechoslovakia must be assured.[36] Clement Attlee, the leader of the Labour opposition, welcomed the new opportunity to prevent war and also extended his willingness to cooperate "to give the Prime Minister every opportunity of following up this new move."[37] George Lansbury, Labour representative for Poplar, Bow, and Bromley, followed the trend of well-wishing when he said that the nation was grateful and was hoping and praying that the trip would be a success.[38] The lone dissenting voice was

---

[35] Great Britain, 5 Parliamentary Debates (Commons), CCCXXXIX (1937-1938), co. 26. Hereafter cited as House of Commons Debates.

[36] Ibid., col. 27.

[37] Ibid., col. 26.

[38] Ibid., col. 27-28.

that of William Gallacher, the only Communist in Parliament, who charged that there were as many Fascists in the Conservative Party as there were in Germany. He also protested the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, saying that true peace had to be based upon freedom and democracy, not the dissolution of the Czech nation.[39]

The result of the Munich Conference of September 29 and 30, was an eight point agreement which spelled out the manner in which the Sudeten areas of Czechoslovakia were to be added to the German Reich: (1) Czechoslovakian evacuation of the Sudeten areas was to begin on October 1, 1938. (2) The evacuation was to be completed by October 10, 1938, and none of the existing installations were to be damaged. (3) There was to be an International Commission with the power to control the evacuation; the Commission was to be made up of the four major European powers plus Czechoslovakia. (4) A detailed plan for the German occupation of the former Czech territory was worked out. (5) There were to be provisions for plebiscites in disputed areas which were to be held under the supervision of the International Commission. (6) The final boundaries were to be decided by the Commission. (7) Inhabitants were given six months to leave any territory which had changed hands if they desired to leave. (8) Any Germans serving as soldiers in the Czech

---

[39] Ibid., col. 28.

army were to be released within four weeks if they expressed a desire to be released. Furthermore, any Studeten Germans serving prison sentences for political activities were to be given their freedom.[40] There was very little difference between the Munich Agreement and the Godesberg Memorandum, yet the Agreement was accepted while the Memorandum had been rejected. Apparently, the fact that the Agreement was ostensibly the result of international cooperation made it more palatable, while the Memorandum, a unilateral declaration of demands, was unacceptable.

Chamberlain did leave Munich with Hitler's signature on a declaration that pledged their two nations to settle by consultation any further question that concerned them. This served to strengthen the Prime Minister's belief that Hitler was amenable to compromise if approached in the right manner. When Chamberlain returned to England he declared that the agreement reached at Munich represented "peace for our time." He further let it be known that since the question of Czechoslovakia had been settled without resort to war, "further progress along the road to sanity" was now a distinct possibility.[41]

Czechoslovakia, the victim of the policy of appease-

---

[40] Frederick L. Schuman, Europe on the Eve (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1939), pp. 444-445.

[41] Chamberlain, p. 210.

ment, was now pushed into the background of British policy. The British people, and especially the politicians, conveniently neglected to concern themselves with the future of the Czechs until Hitler again resorted to coercion in March, 1939. However, the Munich Agreement itself became the focal point for a sometimes bitter debate on the advisability of continuing the policy of appeasement. There was a certain element within Parliament and the nation that had not accepted the foreign policy that culminated in the Munich meeting as the prescription for "peace for our time."

Evidence that there did exist disagreement over the results of the Munich meeting was seen even before Parliament reconvened on October 3, 1938. Generally, opinion about the Munich Agreement was determined by party affiliation, with the opposition Labour Party being the most critical of the Agreement and the Conservatives supporting the Prime Minister.

Among those who were having second thoughts about the results of the Munich meeting was the Liberal leader Sinclair who contended that "peace had not been established," and that true peace had to be based on the "principles of law and justice backed by the firm will and close cooperation of all those nations who loyally profess them."[42]

---

[42] The Times (London), October 1, 1938, p. 6.

Labourite Stafford Cripps, while relieved that war had been averted for the present, believed that the recent action had only made the possibility of a future war more certain.[43] Attlee also spoke out against the Agreement, calling it a defeat for Britain and a victory for Hitler's Germany.[44] There was also a faction of the Government party that rejected appeasement, but since it numbered only about 30 members, its influence was negligible at this point. However, any group that included men such as Eden, Chruchill, and Duff Cooper was to be reckoned with. And, indeed, it was to serve as a rallying point for those Conservatives who became disenchanted with the Prime Minister's foreign policy.[45]

Despite evidence of dissatisfaction with the Munich Agreement by opposition and Government members of Parliament, the debate which began on October 3, 1938, was conducted primarily along party lines. For example, both Attlee and Sinclair, as leaders of political parties outside the pale of government, were highly critical of the Agreement. Attlee considered it a "terrible defeat" for

---

[43] Colin Cooke, The Life of Richard Stafford Cripps (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1957), pp. 225,227.

[44] Clement Attlee, As It Happened (New York: Viking Press, 1954), p. 146.

[45] Eden, p. 4. Another factor that limited the influence of this group was its own lack of unity. There developed two factions, one headed by Eden, and the other by Chruchill.

democracy, while Sinclair viewed it as an unjust settlement that could never be the basis for a lasting peace.[46]

During the course of the debate, the Government was embarrased by defections and criticism within its own ranks. Harry Crookshank and Duff Cooper both resigned their positions in the Government. Crookshank, Secretary for Mines, resigned during the deliberations over the Godesberg Memorandum because he could not support a foreign policy that appeared to be leading to disaster.[47] More important, however, was Duff Cooper's resignation. Cooper had served as First Lord of the Admirality and was responsible for the mobilization of the fleet on September 27. On October 3, 1938, he resigned this position because he felt he could no longer support Chamberlain and the policy of appeasement.[48] There was also a conflict between Cooper and the Prime Minister over the best method of making Britain's views known and understood in Berlin. Cooper was of the opinion that the Prime Minister had only succeeded in reaffirming Hitler's belief that England did not represent an insurmountable obstacle to his plan of German domination of Europe.[49] He did not believe that the "language of

---

[46] House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 339, col. 51, 68.

[47] Eden, p. 32.

[48] The Times (London), October 3, 1938, p. 19.

[49] House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 339, col. 31.

sweet reasonableness" would have any effect on a Hitler who "was more open to the language of the mailed fist."[50]

Winston Churchill was also quite critical of the course Chamberlain had chosen to follow. He called the Munich Agreement "a total and unmitigated defeat" and believed it to be only the first, in what he feared would be a long series of defeats for Britain. He was also of the opinion that Britain had abandoned her long commitment to freedom, a commitment that had to be reaffirmed if England was going to avert future diplomatic, and perhaps, military reversals.[51]

Despite these defections from Conservative ranks, the reopening of Parliament on October 3, made it clear that the majority of the Conservative Party continued to stand behind the Prime Minister and gave him their unlimited support. Henry Raikes, Conservative representative for Southeastern Essex, set the tone when he came out in unequivocal support of the Government's policy and recent actions. He argued that if war had been averted for even a few years, then Chamberlain's actions were entirely justified. He concluded his argument by predicting that Chamberlain would go "down in history as the greatest

---

[50] Ibid., col. 34.

[51] Winston Churchill, Blood, Sweat, and Tears (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1941), pp. 64, 66.

European statesman of this or any other time."[52]

C. T. Culverwell, the representative from West Bristol, urged greater fairness toward Hitler. Just what had Hitler done that warranted the virulent attacks of the opposition?[53] Why not give Hitler a chance to keep his word. In Culverwell's opinion, the methods which Hitler used had been forced upon him and used only with great reluctance.[54] The member from West Bristol was unable to conceive of a man who did not have a moral outlook, and when Hitler said he would be satisfied with reasonable concessions, Culverwell felt the German leader could be taken at his word.

Another conservative answer to the criticism of the opposition was that peace was essential to the program and well-being of the German Government. In their conviction that peace was essential to Hitler, the Conservatives deluded themselves into thinking that he would do nothing to upset the delicate balance of peace and precipitate a crisis that would prove his undoing. Another favorite argument of the Conservatives was that Britain was not prepared to fight a war in 1938, and that by postponing war for even a year, the nation would have a chance to arm and be in a better

---

[52] House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 339, cols. 94, 97.

[53] Ibid., col. 105.

[54] Ibid., col. 109.

position to face any aggressor.[55]

The Secretary of State for Home Affairs, Samuel Hoare, predicted that the period of appeasement would be one in which many old problems would be resolved, and he looked forward to the day when the dictatorships and the democracies could exist together in mutual respect.[56] Another Conservative pointed out that the Czechoslovakian problem was not important enough to warrant British involvement in a war in their behalf. "If we have to fight," he declared, "let it be a question of principle affecting us and the future of civilization."[57]

On October 6, 1938, the first debate on the policy of appeasement came to a close. The following resolution was passed by a vote of 366 to 144: "That this House approves the policy of His Majesty's Government by which war was averted in the recent crisis and supports their efforts to secure a lasting peace."[58] The House of Commons by this action had given the Government an overwhelming vote of confidence. The Conservative Party was firmly in command of the situation, and those on the Government benches who were dissatisfied, such as Churchill, Eden and Duff Cooper,

---

[55] Ibid., cols. 119-120.

[56] Ibid., cols. 161-162.

[57] Ibid., col. 264.

[58] Ibid., cols. 557-558.

were unable to generate any significant opposition from within the party at this juncture.

The reaction of the public resembled that of Parliament. Many Britons felt the question of the Sudeten Germans was merely one of a minority people wishing to return to their homeland, and not an attempt by Hitler to dominate Europe. Englishmen travelling in Germany reported that they found the German people anxious to avoid war and very much in favor of maintaining peaceful relations with England.[59] Hitler, at the same time, was also making a favorable impression. For example, Sir Ian Hamilton, who headed a group of British ex-servicemen touring Germany, spent the night at Berchtesgaden as Hitler's guest. He reported that Hitler and the German people strongly desired peace and good relations with England:

> After the discussions we had together I am sure that Hitler's attitude is strongly for peace . . . . The general attitude of the people is undoubtedly strong for peace and they are filled with a fear of war.[60]

An article in The Times by Marcus Samuel, who represented Wandsworth in the House of Commons, reflected the belief that the German people were not going to resort to war as

---

[59] The Times (London), August 6, 1938, p. 6. Chamberlain also gives evidence of this when he recounts the warm welcome he received from the German people on September 22, 1938. This, he said, showed the German people's desire for peace. Chamberlain, p. 192.

[60] The Times (London), August 8, 1938, p. 9.

an instrument of national policy. Samuel believed that the danger was in the feeling of "claustrophobia" that prevailed in the German nation; if this fear could somehow be healed the possibility of a lasting peace would be greatly enhanced.[61]

Despite these frequent expressions of confidence in the German will for peace, there were a number of indications that public opinion was undergoing a subtle change in temper at the time of the Munich crisis. During the month of September, for example, a number of warnings were heard concerning the dangers of the appeasement policy. In late September, when war seemed imminent, Eden saw among the English people a growing awareness that a stand had to be made soon if the tide of dictatorship was to be stopped.[62] Also the General Secretary of the Trade Union Congress, Walter Citrine, charged that Germany's demand for self-determination for the Sudeten Germans was only a pretext for aggression in Central Europe.[63] Another example comes from the pen of Christopher Hobhouse, a writer for The Spectator, who said that he and his generation were ready to die "as other generations had done before them" for the cause of

---

[61] Ibid., August 1, 1938, p. 12.

[62] Eden, p. 30.

[63] The Times (London), September 26, 1938, p. 7.

freedom.[64]

Earlier, a National Council for Labour spokesman urged the Government to make Germany aware that Britain would not tolerate any attack on Czechoslovakia.[65] In early September, The Economist reported that British public opinion was hardening as the people became aware that security could not become a reality while Germany relied on the methods of intimidation she was currently utilizing. The editorial further warned that should Germany start a war she would find a world united against her.[66]

Those who issued such warnings represented but a small portion of the public. Most of the people were unperturbed by the actions of Hitler at this time, for they believed that Germany had some valid claims to make on the world because of the dictated peace at Versailles. Many also accepted the view of The Times editorial of September 7, 1938, which suggested that the Sudeten problem was merely one of a minority group wanting to be united with its own people.[67]

On the whole then, the immediate reaction of Parlia-

---

[64] "A Younger Point of View," The Spectator, CLXI (September 23, 1938), p. 474.

[65] The Times (London), September 17, 1938, p. 12.

[66] "A Clear Warning," The Economist, September 3, 1938, p. 442.

[67] Mowat, p. 591.

ment and the people to Munich was favorable. Chamberlain was confident that he had cracked the armor of the dictator and that now peace in Europe was a foregone conclusion. As Arthur Salter put it:

> The party was united on domestic questions, and though, as the German menace grew, an increasing minority within it thought the Government's foreign policy too weak and its defence preparations inadequate, their dissatisfaction was not enough to lead a revolt . . . . Mr. Churchill's hour had not yet come.[68]

---

[68] Arthur Salter, Memories of a Public Servant (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 248.

CHAPTER III

MONTHS OF INDECISION: OCTOBER, 1938, TO FEBRUARY, 1939

On the surface the international scene appeared to be quiet between October, 1938, and February, 1939. Hitler was consolidating Germany's position in the newly acquired areas of Austria and the Sudetenland. In England, Chamberlain continued to espouse the theme of trust in Hitler and was looking forward to an era of peace and good feeling between Germany and England. The Prime Minister was still hesitant about accepting advice from experts on German and European affairs within the Foreign Office and relied instead on the advice of Horace Wilson.[1] The British ambassador to Germany, Henderson, continued to undermine Foreign Office directives by expressing his personal attitudes at Berlin.[2]

Outwardly it appeared that the status quo as of October, 1938, would be accepted and maintained by both Germany and Britain. The English were not attempting to create a coalition of powers to halt German aggression, nor did

---

[1]Feiling, p. 327.

[2]Craig, pp. 538-540.

Germany appear to be planning any overt act of belligerence. The outward calm, however, hid undercurrents which suggested that all was not as tranquil as the exterior image seemed to indicate. A number of incidents during the period suggested that Munich would not represent the last of Germany's territorial demands after all; that Hitler aimed at German hegemony over eastern Europe.

One of the most shocking events to occur in Germany during these intermediary months between Munich and the occupation of Prague was the Jewish pogrom of November 10, 1938. The immediate pretext for the action against the German Jewish community was the murder of Ernst von Rath, a third secretary at the German embassy in Paris, by a young Jew. The German press demanded that Jews living in Germany be forced to pay for the attack on a German life,[3] and on November 10, riots broke out all over Germany. These riots had been planned in advance by the Nazis, who destroyed Jewish property and killed a number of Jews.[4] The degradation of the Jews did not stop with the destruction of their property, but continued when the money paid out in insurance claims for damages was confiscated by the

---

[3] Ogilvie-Forbes to Halifax, Berlin, /November 8, 1938/, E. L. Woodward and Rohan Butler, ed. Documents of British Foreign Policy 1919-1939 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1951), 3rd Series, Vol. III, p. 261. Hereafter cited as DBFP.

[4] Ibid., p. 277.

German state. Also the German Jews were fined one billion marks "for their abominable crimes."

The reaction to this night of bloodshed and carnage was immediate in Britain, and the population rallied to the support of the Jews with gifts of money. The Government, however, took no action to alleviate the situation. The German Government argued that the riots were an internal German concern, and that all others should mind their own business. Although the British Government was officially silent on the matter, there were a number of high ranking Government officials who spoke out against the pogrom. Among this group were John Simon, Lord Zetland, Samuel Hoare and Stanley Baldwin.[5] At the same time there was some indication that a few who had earlier favored appeasement were beginning to doubt that further cooperation with Germany would lead to a lessening of tension.[6]

Simultaneously, events were taking place in Czechoslovakia which indicated that the Czech nation was in for a very difficult time. The Czechs were alone and unprotected, completely at the mercy of Germany, and it did not take Germany long to exercise her power over Czechoslovakia.

---

[5] R. G. D. Laffan, et al, Survey of International Affairs 1938, Vol. III (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), pp. 162, 165.

[6] Ibid., p. 161. See also Frederick Schuman, Night Over Europe (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), p. 39.

President Beneš had resigned as head of the Czech state and was soon to find his way to England and from there to America. Beneš was aware that he would have to leave his position of leadership after the results of the Munich Conference were transmitted to his government. To further emphasize this, Hitler in a speech at the Berlin Sports Palace, on September 26, had made an extremely violent attack on Beneš, declaring that there existed a life and death struggle between himself and the Czech President.[7] On October 1, Czechoslovakia was officially informed by the German Government that Beneš would have to resign from the Presidency of Czechoslovakia. It was hinted that if Beneš did not resign the Czech state would be dealt with very harshly.[8] Therefore Beneš resigned on October 5, believing this action to be in the best interests of his nation.[9]

At the same time Czechoslovakia was further weakened by granting autonomy to Slovakia and Ruthenia. There had been prior movements and agitation for Slovakian independence from the Czech portion of Czechoslovakia. The two areas had different cultural backgrounds, as the Czechs

---

[7]Eduard Beneš, Memoirs of Dr Eduard Beneš, trans. by Godfrey Lian (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1954), p. 51.

[8]Ibid. Beneš received the same information from the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs and from a number of unofficial sources.

[9]Ibid., pp. 51-52.

tended to be more modernized while the Slovaks were more oriented toward peasant agriculture. Czech political domination, coupled with the economic backwardness of Slovakia, created a conflict between Czechs and Slovaks when the areas were united after World War I.[10] This dispute weakened Czechoslovakia in 1938, at a time when the nation could ill afford any internal strife.

On October 6, 1938, an autonomous Slovakia was created. The name of the state was now spelled with a hyphen; Czecho-Slovakia. This was done to emphasize the equality of the two parts of the nation. It is also a symbol of the weakness of the Czech nation after Munich. The former strong centralized state with its headquarters at Prague was now replaced by a federation of autonomous states with only tenuous ties with the central government.

There were other indicators on the international scene that gave one reason to pause and reflect. For example, Britain attempted to keep Italy from falling under German influence by bringing into force the Anglo-Italian Agreement that had been negotiated in April, 1938. Basically the agreement called for British recognition of Italy's conquests in Ethiopia; in return Italy was to withdraw her volunteers from Spain.[11] It was widely held in England

---

[10] Chambers, p. 172. See also Taylor, p. 201.

[11] Rock, p. 70.

that Mussolini had played a major role in bringing Hitler to the bargaining table at Munich. Thus it was believed that the Italian dictator's influence could be used as a means of moderating German demands in Europe.

Consequently on October 4, 1938, the Earl of Perth, British ambassador to Rome, notified Viscount Halifax that if London were willing to bring the agreement into force, Mussolini would do all he could to create a "European detente and general pacification." However, he continued, if it appeared that Britain was not going to bring the agreement into force, Mussolini would be obliged to conclude a "definite military alliance with Germany."[12] On October 26, Halifax informed Perth that the Cabinet had agreed to bring the agreement to its natural conclusion.[13] On November 16, Perth and Ciano, the Italian Foreign Secretary, signed the declaration bringing the Anglo-Italian Agreement into effect.[14]

Another attempt to woo Italy away from German influence was Chamberlain's visit to Rome. This project of the Prime Minister was another effort on his part to keep the peace in Europe. On October 31, Halifax requested Perth to suggest a visit to Rome by himself and Chamberlain as a

---

[12] DBFP, 3rd Series, Vol. III, p. 332.

[13] Ibid., p. 342.

[14] Ibid., p. 362.

means of cementing "more cordial relations with Italy." Perth considered this an effective move and arranged for a state visit during the second week of January, 1939.[15] Chamberlain's warm reception by the Italian people reinforced his belief in appeasement, but little was accomplished toward weakening the ties between Italy and Germany. On the other hand, Chamberlain could consider the journey a success because it brought him into personal contact with Mussolini. This, the Prime Minister believed, would further the cause of peace.[16] Another aspect of the Italian journey was the trepidation with which the French Government viewed the trip.

To fully understand the French position one must be aware of the strained relationship between France and Italy at this time. France and Italy had been in conflict with one another over Tunisia and Corsica. Both areas were under French rule but each contained large Italian minorities. When Africa was being divided among the European powers in the years between 1870 and 1890, Italy attempted to gain Tunisia as a colony. However, it was France that finally gained the area as a colony in 1881, and by 1896 Italy had accepted the control of Tunisia by France. However, there continued to exist an element of dissatisfaction

---

[15] Ibid., pp. 356-362.

[16] Churchill brings out Chamberlain's view in The Gathering Storm, pp. 304-305.

within Italy over the turn of events. The other area of strained relations between the two nations, Corsica, had been ceded to France in 1768, by Genoa. The fact that it had been Italian and still possessed a large Italian population made it attractive to Mussolini as another area of possible embarrassment to France. Corsica and Tunis might be used in the same way Hitler had used the Sudeten Germans: a lever to force France into a Munich type settlement.

On November 30, 1938, an anti-French demonstration took place in the Italian Chamber of Deputies. Apparently under government guidance, the Chamber demanded that Tunisia and Corsica be given to Italy. Thus, when it became known that Chamberlain was going to visit Italy in January, 1939, there was no element of fear in French governmental circles that Chamberlain might inject himself into the conflict between the two nations and bring about a situation in which France would be forced to accede to the Italian demands. Fear of this occurring was allayed when Chamberlain and Halifax stopped off at Paris and held a conference with Daladier and Bonnet before proceeding to Rome.[17] The purpose of the Paris meeting was to assure France that Britain would not be a part of any attempt to bring about a territorial adjustment in Corsica or Tunisia. The results of

---

[17]Arnold J. Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs, 1938, Vol. I (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 176.

the Rome meeting were anything but conclusive. Chamberlain refused to enter into the Franco-Italian controversy and Count Ciano reported that the "visit was kept on a minor tone."[18] The Prime Minister, however, believed that the journey had been a step toward peace.[19]

Another phase of this period which must be examined is the correspondence of the British Foreign Office with its representatives abroad. Two foreign posts were most important to British diplomacy--Paris and Berlin. These two capitals were the centers of British concern during the months between Munich and the decision to aid Poland. The ambassador to Germany was Nevile Henderson, but during the months between October and February, he was in England recovering from an illness. In his absence the position was filled by Sir G. Ogilvie-Forbes.

Paris was also an important diplomatic post for the British. The two nations had pledged themselves to come to the assistance of one another in case of attack from Germany during the negotiations over the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. The closeness of the two nations was brought out in 1935, at the Anglo-French Conference concerning Germany's announcement of rearmament.[20] France was also

---

[18]Rock, pp. 185-188.

[19]Feiling, p. 393.

[20]Alfred A. Havighurst, Twentieth Century Britain (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 245.

following Britain's lead in the attempted appeasement of Germany. The British ambassador to France was Sir Eric Phipps, a man who had followed a family tradition by entering the foreign service. His diplomatic career included an ambassadorial post in Germany between 1933 and 1937. While serving in this position he had warned London that appeasement would increase rather than satisfy Hitler's demands. After leaving Berlin, Phipps was appointed to the post at Paris, a position he was to hold until he retired from diplomatic service in 1939.[21]

There is ample evidence to indicate that the British Government was being informed of rumors of impending German moves during the months between October, 1938, and March, 1939. Warnings were forthcoming from both Phipps and Ogilvie-Forbes as well as from other sources, both official and unofficial. It appears, however, that there existed no clear-cut indication as to what Hitler planned to do next, although there existed numerous guesses.

For example, Lord Halifax reports that London received a message, in December, 1938, from a staff member in the Berlin Embassy which indicated that Germany was preparing to attack England in the middle of March, 1939.[22] A more

---

[21] Dictionary of National Biography 1941-1950, (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 670.

[22] Earl of Halifax, Fulness of Days (London: Collins, 1957), p. 200.

reliable report came from Ogilvie-Forbes on December 29, in which he reported that Hitler's future moves were unknown, but one could assume that the German dictator would undertake no foreign adventures as long as internal pressure within Germany did not reach serious proportions.[23]

In January new rumors were received from various sources. One concerned the imminent incorporation of the remaining portions of Czechoslovakia into the Reich. The rumors became so pronounced that Chvalkovsky, the Czech Foreign Minister, asked the German Foreign Office to disavow any intention of annexing Czecho-Slovakia.[24] At the same time the British Foreign Office, on the basis of the rumors, warned its ambassador in Washington that Hitler was planning some action for the spring of 1939, perhaps as early as late February.[25] At the same time Ogilvie-Forbes received a report from the military attache at the Berlin embassy, Colonel Mason-MacFarlane, who stated that Germany would likely come to an agreement with Poland "leaving herself a freer hand elsewhere." It was also reported that there were indications that pointed toward a German

---

[23] DBFP, 3rd Series, Vol. III, pp. 544-545.

[24] Laffan, Vol. III, p. 236. These rumors were apparently coming from the Sudeten Party which may have become a little overzealous at this point, and began agitation which was premature.

[25] DBFP, 3rd Series, Vol. IV, pp. 4-5, Halifax to Mallet, Jan. 24, 1939.

military concentration on southern Europe for the time being.[26]

The belief that there would be no great pressure brought to bear on Poland was one widely held in British diplomatic circles. Halifax informed the British ambassador to Poland that the Polish nation was safe, for the present, from any pressure by Germany.[27] The ambassador in turn informed Halifax that this assessment was apparently correct, for Ribbentropp had recently reaffirmed the sanctity of the Polish-German Agreement of 1934.[28]

Another area that was viewed as a possible territory for German advancement was the Netherlands. Halifax informed Sir Neville Bland, ambassador to the Netherlands, that this possibility did exist and that such a move could be used as a means for securing a base for operations against Great Britain by Germany. However, the Dutch themselves discounted the possibility of a German attack against their nation.[29]

One of the most astute observers of the international scene at this time was Ogilvie-Forbes in Berlin. Even though he received numerous reports that covered a wide

---

[26] Ibid., p. 23.

[27] Ibid., p. 11. Halifax gained this impression from a meeting with the Polish ambassador to Great Britain.

[28] Ibid., p. 15.

[29] Ibid., p. 16, 48.

number of speculations, many of which he considered to be highly unlikely, he continued to inform London on the presumption that they might contain an element of truth.[30] On January 27, 1939, he reported that Hitler considered his military position in relation to Britain and France to be at its most suitable point for a strike at the two powers than at any time in the near future. Thus it appears that Ogilvie-Forbes believed that the possibility of a major war in 1939 was conceivable.[31]

The next day Halifax informed Phipps in Paris and Clive in Brussels that the danger period in international affairs would be in the latter part of February, 1939.[32] Even though there was a general consensus that Hitler was preparing for a move sometime in early 1939, the British were in the dark as to where this aggression would take place. The French Government was as much in the dark as was Britain. The French ambassador to Great Britain, Corbin, informed Halifax that Paris believed the next move would involve an aggressive act against Roumania.[33]

---

[30] Ibid., p. 18. One such report came from Conwell-Evans, Joint Honorary Secretary of Anglo-German Fellowship, who informed Forbes that Hitler planned to attack in March, 1939. This date was chosen because England and France were not prepared for a major war.

[31] Ibid., p. 30.

[32] Ibid., p. 39.

[33] Ibid., p. 43.

Reports were coming in not only from Berlin and Paris, but from Moscow and Prague as well. From Moscow Britain's ambassador reported that a "reliable informant . . . in Memel" was expecting that Germany would annex the city on March 15, 1939.[34] The date was correct; only the victim, Memel, was wrong. At the same time it was reported from A. H. H. MacDonald, air attache at Prague, that a senior member of the Czech intelligence corps had informed him that Hitler was not going to do anything about Czecho-Slovakia but concentrate on England and France.[35]

Britain, in the face of all these rumors and reports was not simply waiting for Hitler to make a move and then react to it. In February, Halifax informed Phipps that talks between the British and French General Staffs should "proceed on the basis of war against Germany and Italy in combination" and should cover all possible fields of operations.[36] Three days later, on February 10, Phipps was informed that Britain would support France in any declaration of war on Germany brought about by German aggression in Switzerland or Holland.[37] The British Government would consider any military action against these two nations as

---

[34] Ibid., p. 52.

[35] Ibid., p. 65.

[36] Ibid., p. 79.

[37] Ibid., pp. 100-101.

a threat to the security of Britain.[38]

Even as these discussions were going on, a new voice was being heard from Germany. Nevile Henderson had recovered from his illness and had returned to his post in Berlin. Once again his totally unrealistic belief in the essential truthfulness and goodness of Hitler was in evidence. In his official dispatches he informed London that Hitler was not planning any overt warlike action in Europe. He was also of the opinion that the "stories and rumours" about immediate German aggression were completely without foundation. Finally he proposed that the British press begin to emphasize the "peaceful intentions" of Hitler rather than showing "suspicion of them."[39] Apparently this report by Henderson had its desired effect on Halifax, for a week later he informed Lindsay, British Ambassador to the United States, that the latest information on the possible future moves of Germany indicated that Hitler had abandoned any plans for creating a crisis in late February or March, 1939.[40]

It appears that Halifax, by giving credence to the views of Henderson, who had been absent from his post for a number of months, was totally disregarding reports that

---

[38] Ibid., p. 83.

[39] Ibid., pp. 121-122.

[40] Ibid., p. 159.

were coming in from other sources that were based more on fact than fancy. The views of Henderson were, of course, popular with the British Government and fit in nicely with the appeasement policy. There is also justification for the belief that a government should emphasize the peaceful intentions of its neighbors when attempting to maintain good relations. However, there was little justification for abandoning a watchful attitude toward areas of possible German aggression in the future. Even though Henderson was proclaiming Hitler's peaceful intentions to the British Government, and Halifax was obviously influenced by these reports, the Government was still aware that at any time Germany might create a new international crisis.

One example of this continuing vigilance was the increase in British rearmament programs. There were two divergent views about Britain's arms program: some believed that it was incompatible with the appeasement policy. How, it was asked, could Britain hope to come to a lasting peace with Germany while she prepared for war? On the other hand, the official Government attitude toward rearmament was that it was entirely compatible with the policy of appeasement. The Government was walking the proverbial tightrope in that she was attempting to increase her defensive capabilities without bringing about an arms race with Germany.[41]

---

[41] Laffan, Vol. III, pp. 145-146.

The defensive aspect of the British arms program was made public on October 10, 1938, when the Secretary of State for War, Hore-Belisha, announced that Britain's army would be increased to eighteen divisions.[42] Throughout October, 1938, almost every important member of the Government made some type of statement about the justification of Britain's rearmament policy and its relationship to appeasement as an instrument of national policy. Among these were Thomas Inskip, Minister for Coordination of Defense, Hoare, and Halifax. Halifax made perhaps the best statement on the need for rearmament as a step toward general appeasement and peace in Europe. It was his belief that disarmament by Britain alone would not bring about peace in Europe. He said that Britain's ultimate aim was peace by mutual understanding, a goal that might be attainable only by first passing through a period of armed peace.[43]

In connection with rearmament, a new aspect of the character of Chamberlain is revealed. It would appear that the Prime Minister was not quite as naive as the critics of appeasement so often picture him. Chamberlain was an advocate of rearmament because it would enable Britain to enter into "discussions with other powers on an equal

---

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

footing."[44] Chamberlain was well aware of the fact that Britain was operating at Munich from a position of weakness and he determined that this should never again be the case. However, at the same time he reaffirmed his belief in the basic honesty of Hitler. He believed that Hitler was committed to the idea of arbitration of international problems, a belief that unfortunately was not justified.

Britain's rearmament program did not start an arms race with Germany because Germany had been rapidly building up her armed power before England began her own rearmament program. Germany was in fact expanding her arms production at a far faster rate than was Britain.[45] Within Germany it was believed that German military power, not a desire to revise the Treaty of Versailles, had caused England to accept the Munich Agreement.[46]

Within Britain the movement for rearmament also received the support of Parliament. Even the Labour Party, traditionally pacifistic, was willing by 1939 to support rearmament for defensive purposes. The main goal of the

---

[44] Ibid., pp. 146-147.

[45] According to Mowat, p. 628, British and German expenditures on armaments in millions of £ were as follows:

	1934	1938 (1934 prices)	Increase (%)
Britain	99.1	350.0	250
Germany	280.0	1600.0	470

[46] DBFP, 3rd Series, Vol. III, pp. 247-248.

party, however, remained the achievement of peace through a collective security system based on the League of Nations.[47]

Britain was concentrating primarily on air power during these critical months. The major accomplishment at this time was the development of the Spitfire fighter that would play such an important part in the Battle of Britain. The development of the aircraft industry was carried out at a rapid pace, and by the outbreak of the war the air force was in a very good position to carry out the defense of Britain.[48] Even though the total number of Britain's first line aircraft was considerably lower than that of Germany, Britain's rate of production was much higher.[49]

Britain's rearmament program did not mean, however, that appeasement was a thing of the past or that Britain was going to take a more bellicose position in international affairs. On the contrary, the general attitude remained highly optimistic. Chamberlain wrote in February, 1939, that all the information he was able to gather indicated that peace was being achieved. Samuel Hoare was of the opinion that a "Golden Age" had arrived "in which Five Men

---

[47]Tucker, pp. 207, 213.

[48]Mowat, pp. 626-627.

[49]Ibid., p. 631. Britain produced 2,827 first line aircraft in 1938; Germany 5,235. By 1939, Britain had produced 7,940 and Germany 8,295.

in Europe, the three dictators and the Prime Ministers of England and France . . . might in an incredibly short time transform the whole history of the world."[50]

Unfortunately this attitude was not shared by Hitler. Already in the autumn of 1938, he was beginning to apply pressure against Poland for the construction of an Autobahn across the Polish Corridor and the annexation of Danzig to the Reich. On October 24, 1938, Ribbentrop, the German Foreign Minister, proposed to the Polish ambassador to Germany, Lipske, that the two nations reach an agreement about the future of Danzig, the Polish Corridor and the possibility of a Russian threat to both countries.[51] This reminder to Poland about Germany's desire for a settlement of the Danzig and Corridor questions may have been the result of a note from the German ambassador to Poland, Moltke, to the German Foreign Office in which he reminded the Foreign Office that he had broached the subject of an Autobahn across the Corridor in 1935, but had received no reply from the Polish Government.[52] Ribeentrop did not make this a major

---

[50]Havighurst, pp. 275-276.

[51]United States Government, Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D, Vol. VI (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1953), pp. 104-107. Hereafter cited as DGFP. All material cited in this study comes from Series D.

[52]Ibid., Vol. V., pp. 20-21. Moltke now proposed that the Autobahn be built from Germany and East Prussia up to the Corridor boundries. He believed this would pressure Poland into coming to terms with Germany.

issue at this time because Hitler on November 5, let it be known that German-Polish relations were not to be disturbed by the question of Danzig and the Corridor at this time.[53]

However, by January, 1939, it was evident that Poland's period of grace had run out. Once again the tactics applied to Czechoslovakia were brought into play. On January 13, Nazi activity in Danzig was ordered stepped up. This was to be done by forming a Schutzstaffel (S.S.) unit in the city, official adoption of the German salute, and adoption of the German flag.[54] The groundwork was being laid to create internal strife within Danzig as an excuse for intervention.

Thus the international situation, while appearing to be relatively calm, possessed all of the ingredients necessary to bring about another crisis comparable to that which resulted in the Munich meeting of September, 1938. Britain was attempting to bring her defensive capabilities to a position that would cause Hitler to think twice before precipitating any foreign adventure. The British Foreign Office was receiving numerous rumors about possible actions to be undertaken by Germany, but these reports appeared to be simply rumors with little basis of fact. The inter-

---

[53] Ibid., p. 26.

[54] Ibid., p. 162.

national scene was highly confused, but the British Government, especially Chamberlain and Henderson, appeared to be very optimistic. The Government saw little reason for alarm and was willing to continue to appease the dictators. Even those factions within Parliament which were fearful of the consequences of appeasement were unable to unite in a common front against Chamberlain's policy.

The Labour Party, the largest of the opposition parties in Parliament, was split within its own membership as to which course of action to follow. One faction desired a coalition with the dissatisfied Conservatives such as Churchill and Eden. One Labourite who supported this view was Stafford Cripps. As early as October, 1938, he had proposed that the anti-Chamberlain Conservatives and the Labour Party join forces in an attempt to unseat the Prime Minister.[55]

The program Cripps wished to have adopted could have proven to be a successful counter to the growth of German power. He called for "a positive policy of peace, by collective action with France, Russia, /and/ the United States of America."[56] Although Cripps advocated a policy of collective security, a mainstay of the Labour Party policy, he was unable to get his program adopted by the Party. How-

---

[55]Dalton, p. 200.

[56]Cooke, p. 232.

ever, he did not give up but continued to advocate this plan. Finally in January, 1939, in a memorandum to the Labour Executive Board, he urged a united opposition to the Chamberlain Government. The reaction of the Board was to reject Cripps plan and order him to stop the campaign or face expulsion from the party. Cripps refused to cease his activities and in April, 1939, after a bitter fight, he was expelled from the party.[57]

Thus, while there were a few people among the various political parties who were fearful of the threat that German power represented, the majority of the Parliament was content to allow Chamberlain to continue in the pursuit of appeasement. Despite this feeling, there existed a minority that was not enthralled by the glorious promises of appeasement. Men such as Churchill and Eden were critical of the policy and they were able to make their criticism known and even gain some converts to their way of thinking. For example, Robert Boothby, an influential member of the Conservative Party, spoke out in favor of a rearmament program for Britain.[58]

Public opinion polls of this period also indicate that not all of the English people supported the Conserva-

---

[57]Mark M. Krug, Aneurin Bevan (New York: T. Yoseloff, 1961), pp. 54-55.

[58]House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 341, col. 48.

tive policies. In February, 1939, the question was asked: "If there were a General Election tomorrow, how would you vote?" Fifty per cent of the people polled indicated that they would vote for the Government, 44% would vote for the opposition, and 6% were undecided.[59] By no means did all the electorate regard appeasement as the great panacea for the ills of the world. In February, 1939, only 28% of the people believed that appeasement would lead to enduring peace while 46% believed that it had kept Britain out of war.[60] Apparently the majority of the people did not share Chamberlain's great belief in the power of appeasement as an instrument of preventing war. Britain's people, while desiring peace and hoping for the success of appeasement, were, perhaps, a little more realistic than the Prime Minister.

The months between October, 1938, and February, 1939, offer little evidence that any great change had taken place in Parliament's attitude toward Germany. It is to the month of March, 1939, that we must now turn to find a real alteration in policy and the reasons why it took place.

---

[59]Butler, p. 132.

[60]Mildred Strunk and Hadley Cantril (eds.), Public Opinion 1935-1946 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 275.

CHAPTER IV

THE HARVEST OF APPEASEMENT

The month of March that was to witness the end of the appeasement policy gave no early indication that it was to be one of the pivotal times in British history. Chamberlain believed that Hitler had been appeased, and most Englishmen were of the opinion that war had been averted for the foreseeable future. The Prime Minister's popularity was at a respectable mark,[1] and The Times praised his unceasing quest for a peaceful solution to the problems of the world, calling this his "supreme achievement in the international field." He was further pictured as a man who, by his determination and "by his journeys at critical moments," had brought to the people of Europe a faith in the ultimate victory of peace over war.[2]

In February, Henderson, the British ambassador to Germany, wrote from Berlin that he did not foresee any new moves by Hitler in the near future that might upset the so

---

[1]According to Strunk, p. 96, Chamberlain had the support of 58% of the people polled in March, 1939. Unfortunately, Strunk does not give the date of the poll or its source, so it is impossible to determine if the poll was taken before or after March 15, 1939.

[2]The Times (London), March 6, 1939, p. 15.

recently inaugurated trend toward peace.[3] Chamberlain, in a press conference on March 9, expressed the opinion that more conferences would be held for the purpose of concluding general arms limitations.[4]

This period may be described as the calm before the storm, for on March 15, 1939, all speculation as to Hitler's future moves suddenly came to an end. On that day German troops marched into Prague and ended the idyll of British complacency. Before we examine Britain's reaction to this, we must first determine why Hitler so flagrantly disregarded the Munich Agreement and set the world on a collision course with World War II.

At Munich Hitler had agreed to consult Britain if any change were contemplated in the status quo of Central Europe. However, he soon broke his word in the Vienna Award of 1938, in which he granted Hungary's claims for Czech territory without consulting either Britain or France.[5] Hitler was already breaking the word in which Chamberlain had placed so much faith.

Czechoslovakia was in an untenable position after the Munich Conference; her lines of defence had been taken over by German troops. The nation was further weakened by independence movements within the state. Slovakia and Carpatho-

---

[3] DBFP, Vol. IV, pp. 121-122, 230.

[4] Ibid., p. 276.

[5] Wheeler-Bennett, p. 297.

Ruthenia became independent provinces with only the most tenuous ties with the Central Government in Prague.[6] Germany was quick to support the autonomous movement in Slovakia because it would further weaken the Czechs.[7]

Why was Hitler bent on the destruction of the Czech state? The reasons apparently are to be found in the Munich Agreement itself. Hitler felt that Munich had cheated him out of using his army which had never seen action. He had also failed to achieve his goal of the complete takeover of all of Czechoslovakia. Hitler preferred violence to negotiation; thus the Munich Agreement left him dissatisfied. He determined that this must be corrected by the total subjugation of Czechoslovakia by military force.[8] Hitler began to apply more and more pressure to what was left of Czechoslovakia, and when the Czech Government sought to salvage what it could by obtaining a guarantee from Germany pledging Czech independence, it was met with rebuff.

Chvalkovsky, the Czech Foreign Minister, arranged to see Hitler on January 21, 1939. At this time Hitler demanded that Czechoslovakia "do as the Germans bade" by withdrawing from the League of Nations, joining the anti-Comintern Pact, and generally placing her destinies in the

---

[6] Ibid., p. 337.

[7] Ibid., p. 339.

[8] A. Bullock, Hitler: A Study in Tyranny (New York: Bantam Books, 1961), p. 418.

hands of Germany.[9] To further insure that Czechoslovakia would falter in her attempt to maintain a semblance of nationhood, Hitler began to encourage the Slovaks in their demand for independence from the government located at Prague. As the situation deteriorated, the central government made a desperate attempt to regain control of what was left of the country. The president of Czechoslovakia, Emil Hacha, dismissed Ruthenia's government on March 6, 1939. On March 9, he dismissed the government of Slovakia. Hitler used this as an excuse to begin the takeover of Czechoslovakia. He sent Seyss-Inquart, Governor of Austria, and five German generals to Slovakia to demand that the Slovaks announce their independence of the central government. On March 14, Slovakia complied with these demands.[10]

At the same time the German press began to mount attacks against the Czechs for alleged atrocities committed by Czechs upon Germans. The final act in the Czech experiment with democracy was beginning to unfold. On March 13, Hacha appealed directly to Hitler, and on the fourteenth he and Chvalkovsky left for Berlin.[11] When they arrived in Berlin they found themselves faced with a choice of either

---

[9] Ibid., p. 425. See also Shirer, pp. 438-439.

[10] Bullock, pp. 427-429, has the best discussion of this period, but it is also ably described by Shirer, pp. 440-441 and Wheeler-Bennett, p. 341.

[11] Bullock, p. 429.

peacefully submitting to German control or of fighting for perhaps two days and then falling to Germany. Hacha, convinced that resistance was futile, acceded to Hitler's demands and signed the document making the Czech nation a protectorate of the Reich.[12] On March 15, German troops entered Prague, and concluded the chapter of aggression which had begun at Munich six months before. But Hitler was not yet finished, for on March 16, he extended the protectorate to include Slovakia.[13]

The immediate reaction within Britain to the occupation of Prague was shocked disbelief and a groundswell of public opinion against the policy of appeasement. This sudden shift of sentiment was clearly reflected in the press. The general consensus now held that appeasement was finished and that a new policy based on "collective action" had to be instituted.[14] Even The Times, which had been the most fervent supporter of appeasement, recognized that the policy was no longer tenable. A Times editorial on March 15, charged that Hitler had never intended to live up to his Munich pledge and that it now appeared that Nazism was determined "to extend its domination wherever the weakness of other nations may seem to make extention

---

[12] Ibid., pp. 429-431.

[13] Shirer, p. 449.

[14] Rock, pp. 207-209.

possible."[15] The belief that Hitler was only attempting to bring Germans into the Reich and redress the wrongs of Versailles was shattered by the occupation of Prague. No longer could Hitler be pictured as a man with just claims on the European powers. It was now apparent that he was an aggressor who had to be stopped if Europe was to survive in freedom.

The opposition parties in Parliament reacted to the occupation with a surge of outspoken criticism against the Prime Minister's policy. Most of the Conservatives, however, still remained true to Chamberlain. The most outspoken of this group was Archibald Southby, a Conservative representing Epsom, Surrey, who continued to express explicit faith in the Prime Minister's policy. He maintained that even though the policy "appears for a time to be unsuccessful," it must end in an "era of world peace" if continued.[16] Somerset De Chair, Conservative representative from southwest Norfolk, declared that he had no "hesitation whatever in supporting the Prime Minister in that policy [of appeasement]."[17] Annesley Somerville, another Conservative, believed that Chamberlain's course was the correct course and that the people supported the Prime Minister and

---

[15] The Times (London), March 15, 1939, p. 15.

[16] House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 345, col. 528.

[17] Ibid., col. 494.

continued to have faith in him.[18]

Speaking for the opposition Liberals, Archibald Sinclair argued that Hitler was out to conquer the world and that while Chamberlain headed the government of Britain there was little hope of stopping Hitler.[19] Hugh Dalton viewed the annexation with trepidation and said that Britain was in immediate danger from Germany. Appeasement had failed, and Britain must tell Hitler he could go no further.[20] Gallacher, the only Communist member of Parliament, demanded that Chamberlain resign and that a government which represented the desires of the people be put in power.[21] Eden, speaking for the anti-Chamberlain Conservatives, warned that Hitler had to be stopped or else Europe would face anarchy and war.[22]

While Parliament remained split along the same lines that had divided it since Munich and had not as yet felt the wave of popular indignation against the occupation of Prague, the Foreign Office was undergoing a change. The advice of the appeasers was no longer accepted without question. Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, was by March,

---

[18] Ibid., col. 478.

[19] Ibid., cols. 454, 457.

[20] Ibid., cols. 535-536, 545.

[21] Ibid., col. 562.

[22] Ibid., col. 461.

1939, accepting the views of the "senior Foreign Office advisers that it was disastrous to rely on Hitler's good faith."[23] On March 15, he informed Henderson that Hitler's word should not be accepted on faith and that he did not believe that Hitler could be trusted.[24] This change in attitude at the Foreign Office was based on earlier reports that indicated Hitler was preparing to move. In early March, Newton, the ambassador to Prague, had reported that a crisis was coming between the Czechs and the Slovaks.[25] Phipps reported from Paris that he had been told that Czechoslovakia would be a German protectorate by the end of the year.[26] On March 12, even Henderson warned that Germany was contemplating some form of intervention in Czech affairs.[27]

It is apparent that the Foreign Office was aware that Germany was preparing to strike soon, and it is safe to assume that Halifax was aware that Czechoslovakia was to be the victim. Why then were not preparations made to protest this flagrant disregard of the Munich Agreement? The answer is to be found in a Foreign Office memorandum of March 13,

---

[23] Bishop, p. 79.

[24] DBFP, Vol. IV, p. 271.

[25] Ibid., p. 183.

[26] Ibid., p. 222.

[27] Ibid., p. 232.

1939. It was stated that if agression against Czechoslovakia occurred and Britain were asked to live up to her guarantee of Czech boundaries against unprovoked attack, Britain would not be able to fulfill her obligations unless the French government took action, and it was unlikely that France would take any action.[28] Halifax did, however, send a very mild note of caution to Germany on March 14, in which he asked Henderson to inform the German government that Britain desired that Germany not do anything that might disrupt the recent growth of general confidence.[29] On March 15, after Prague had been occupied, Halifax called in the German ambassador to Britain, Herbert von Dirksen, and told him that the proposed visit of the President of the Board of Trade to Germany was now cancelled.[30] This was one of the first steps in the abandonment of appeasement. While the Foreign Office took some action, albeit minor, to inform Germany of its displeasure at the occupation of Prague, the Prime Minister was still dedicated to his former course.

When the Prime Minister spoke before the House of Commons on March 15, it was as though the occupation of Prague had changed nothing at all. Chamberlain insisted

---

[28] Ibid., p. 260.

[29] Ibid., p. 250.

[30] Wheeler-Bennett, p. 360.

that the objective of his government would be to "substitute the method of discussion for the method of force in the settlement of differences."[31] The Prime Minister still believed discussion was the best means of preventing the outbreak of hostilities.

The German ambassador to Britain, Dirksen, reported to his government on March 15, that the general British governmental attitude toward the annexation of Czechoslovakia was disapproving but moderate. It was Dirksen's estimation that this attitude was due to the traditional British slowness in making decisions and a desire to prevent a recurrence of the September crisis.[32]

Two days later in a speech at Birmingham, however, Chamberlain expressed an attitude diametrically opposed to his sentiments of the fifteenth. He acknowledged that the hopes of appeasement had been shattered by Hitler's aggression. He further acknowledged that he had been wrong in his belief that Hitler was only attempting to include Germans in the Reich, as he proclaimed at Munich. Most important of all, he acknowledged that reliance could no longer be placed on assurances that Hitler gave so solemnly and broke so freely. He had finally realized

---

[31] House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 345, col. 435-440.

[32] DGFP, Series D, Vol. VI, pp. 36-39.

that Hitler was not a man of his word. Chamberlain concluded by saying that Britain was willing to accept the challenge that Hitler had laid before her and he knew that he would have the support of all the "British Empire and all other nations who value peace indeed, but who value freedom even more" in accepting this challenge.[33]

What had happened to cause the Prime Minister to abandon appeasement, the basis of his foreing policy? One factor was the reaction of the Conservative Party to his somewhat complacent attitude toward the annexation of Czechoslovakia. By the seventeenth of March, Chamberlain's own party was no longer willing to accept appeasement as the policy of the nation.[34] One of the prime movers in convincing Chamberlain that he was faced with a revolt from within the party was Halifax, who impressed the Prime Minister with the gravity of the situation.

Halifax now began to assume a far greater position in the policy-making process of the British government than he had held prior to this time. When he had assumed the position of Foreign Minister in March, 1938, Halifax had been willing to go along with the policy of the Prime Minister. Now, however, he began to assume leadership in the determ-

---

[33] House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 345, col. 435-440.

[34] A. L. Rowse, Appeasement (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), p. 88.

ination of foreign policy. The first instance in which this may be seen is in the speech Chamberlain delivered at Birmingham on March 17. Dirksen, in a report to the German government, asserted that it was Halifax who had taken a stand in the Cabinet for a sterner attitude toward Germany, the results of which were seen in the Birmingham speech.[35]

After the occupation of Prague, Halifax "put the issue before Chamberlain with all the force at his command." He impressed upon the Prime Minister "that the moment had come when Britain's attitude to further German aggression must be forcefully proclaimed, and that the Party, The House of Commons, and above all the British people demanded this should be done with no further delay."[36]

Chamberlain's views were also affected by the changed attitude of Henderson, who had been a staunch supporter of appeasement. On March 16, Henderson reported that the annexation of Prague was going to prove to be a costly error, for it would convince Germany's eastern neighbors that they must combine against a common foe.[37]

The Prime Minister's response to the warnings of Halifax, the disillusionment of Henderson over Hitler's

---

[35] DGFP, Series D, Vol. VI, pp. 36-39.

[36] The Earl of Birkenhead, Halifax: the Life of Lord Halifax (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1965), p. 432.

[37] DBFP, Vol. IV, p. 279.

aggression, and the altered tone of public and Parliamentary opinion was the speech at Birmingham. On the same day that Chamberlain made this monumental speech, Halifax delivered a note of protest over the annexation of Czechoslovakia to the German government. Henderson was called home to report; he was never to return to Germany.[38]

Henderson's recall and the Birmingham speech marked a great change in the attitude of Britain toward Germany. Appeasement was now a product of the past; the hope of the future was to be a form of collective security against German aggression. The new policy was not immediately evidenced in British diplomatic circles, for it was not known just what form of collective security would be best suited to serve as a deterrent to German aggression.

Once again Halifax led the way. In an attempt to gain the Soviet Union as an ally of Britain he authorized Robert Vansittart, chief diplomatic advisor to the government, to consult with Ivan Maisky, the Russian ambassador to Britain, about the Russian response to a German threat to Poland.[39] The Soviet response to this inquiry was a proposal for a meeting of "anti-Fascist Powers" at Bucharest to determine what action could be taken against any

---

[38] Ibid., p. 291.

[39] Birkenhead, p. 435.

future German aggression.[40] The British Cabinet, because of a basic lack of trust in the capabilities of the Soviet Union, refused to accept this proposal but countered with one of their own on the twentieth of March. Chamberlain proposed a Four-Power Declaration by France, Britain, Russia, and Poland as the most feasible method of stopping Hitler. The draft of the Declaration read:

> We, the undersigned, duly authorized to that effect, hereby declare that inasmuch as peace and security in Europe are matters of common interest and concern, and since European peace and security may be affected by any action which constitutes a threat to the political independence of any European State, our respective Governments hereby undertake immediately to consult together as to what steps should be taken to offer joint resistance to any such action.[41]

Although Dirksen had been recalled to Germany, Theodor Kordt, the Charge d'Affaires, continued to report to his government the changes in attitude within Britain. On March 20, he reported that the British intentions had not yet clarified, but that it appeared the British were now willing to draw a demarcation line; any infringement of this would constitute a casus belli. He also emphasized that Halifax was taking the lead in this by calling for

---

[40] E. H. Carr, German-Soviet Relations Between the Two World Wars, 1919-1939 (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), p. 128.

[41] As quoted in Namier, p. 83.

"far-reaching mutual guarantees."[42]

Within Britain the shift in policy, whatever its ultimate result, was well received. The Archbishop of Canterbury said that Hitler was a threat to "order among nations" and the ideas he represented had to be met and defeated for the "sake of the world itself."[43] A letter to the editor of The Times gave support for a policy that would convince Germany that if she did not cease her activities she would soon become embroiled in a war.[44] The Economist, a journal of moderate liberal persuasion, was favorable to the idea of collective resistance.[45] The conservative Spectator took the position that Hitler understood nothing but force, and that force was the only thing that might cause Germany to reconsider and take her place among the peaceful nations of the world.[46]

Support was also forthcoming from the Dominions. W. M. Hughes, Attorney-General of Australia, declared that "there could be no peace or security or progress in the world until the aggressor nations were confronted by reso-

---

[42] DGFP, Series D, Vol. VI, pp. 50-51.

[43] The Times (London), March 27, 1939, p. 9.

[44] Ibid., March 25, 1939, p. 8.

[45] "England Awakes," The Economist CXXXIV (March 25, 1939), p. 601.

[46] "Britain's Rejoinder," The Spectator, CLXII (March 24, 1939), p. 472.

lute peoples barring their path with drawn swords." A representative of the Canadian government pledged that an attack on Britain would be considered an attack on Canada.[47]

Parliamentary reaction to the change in policy was also favorable. For example, Robert Boothby, one of the more important Conservatives and former supporter of appeasement, warned Hitler that "there is not a man in these islands who would not rather die in battle than live in a world that accepts your standards."[48]

Reaction of the continental powers to Chamberlain's four-power pact was mixed. France agreed to the Declaration and Russia said she would accept it if both France and Poland would support the pact. The success or failure of the attempt to limit German aggression thus rested with Poland. On March 21, 1939, the proposal was given to the Polish Foreign Office. On the twenty-third, Poland rejected the proposal in favor of a bilateral agreement with Britain.[49]

The reason for Poland's rejection of the proposal lies within her history. The nation has no natural frontiers, and she had long been at the mercy of either Russia or Germany or both. The Poles distrusted both countries

---

[47]"The Dominions and the Crisis," The Economist CXXXIV (March 25, 1939), p. 610.

[48]Quoted in Rock, p. 226.

[49]Namier, pp. 91-94.

and they feared that if Russian troops were admitted to Polish territory, as they would have to be in case of war with Germany under the British proposal, it would be difficult to make them leave once the crisis had passed.

Poland's refusal to accept the four-power pact and the British decision to accept a bilateral agreement with Poland was to have serious repercussions. The Soviet Union became convinced that Britain had no desire to come to an agreement with Russia, and was, in effect, attempting to settle European problems without consulting one of Europe's major powers. The effect of this was to make Russia willing to come to an agreement with Germany.[50] Thus the fate of Poland was sealed, and an opportunity to form a truly effective military balance to the German war machine was lost.

On the same day that Poland rejected the four-power pact, Lithuania was forced to cede Memel to Germany. This event was not entirely unexpected, for Germany had begun to apply the same tactics to Lithuania as she had earlier used on Czechoslovakia. For example, on March 17, 1939, Halifax had received word from France that the French were expecting an immediate German move on Memel. On the eighteenth word came that German arms were being sent to Memel and that German troops were being sent to East Prussia.[51]

---

[50] Carr, p. 128.

[51] DBFP, Vol. IV, p. 363, 369.

Chamberlain's reaction to this information was to announce to Parliament that Britain would resist any method that forced independent states to give up their independence.[52] An example of this new determination may be seen in Chamberlain's announcement to the House of Commons on March 29, that the Territorial Army would be doubled in size to 340,000 men.[53] In accordance with this declaration and upon Poland's refusal to accept the Four-Power Declaration, Chamberlain declared on March 31, 1939, that Britain would support Poland if that nation were attacked by Germany. In the Prime Minister's words,

> in the event of any action which clearly threatened Polish independence, and which the Polish Government accordingly considered it vital to resist with their national forces, His Majesty's Government would feel themselves bound at once to lend the Polish Government all support in their power.[54]

The German government had been informed by Kordt that the British attitude had sufficiently stiffened by the twenty-ninth of March that "aggression" would mean either the use of force or the threat of force.[55] So Chamberlain's announcement did not come as a complete surprise to the German leaders.

---

[52] Namier, p. 117.

[53] House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 345, col. 2048.

[54] Ibid., col. 2415.

[55] DGFP, Series D, Vol. VI, pp. 150-151.

The reaction of Parliament to this announcement was favorable, although there were some who questioned Chamberlain's ability to lead the nation. Gallacher, the Communist, called for the formation of a government from all political parties.[56] At this point the Labour opposition agreed to support the new course, but it would not be until 1940 that the party would be willing to come into a coalition government headed by Churchill.

The government of Britain had now embarked upon a new policy that was to involve her in a war which no rational person wanted. March 15, 1939, and the occupation of Prague marked the beginning of this new policy. It is doubtful if the British people would have tolerated another Munich, and Hitler was not going to moderate his actions because he was convinced that Britain would not fight, a supposition based upon Britain's past actions. Chamberlain had pledged that Britain would meet any challenge that Germany might make, and the nation was preparing for the day it would have to make good that pledge.

---

[56] House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, 345, col. 2418.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The semantics of appeasement have often been debated, as has been the role of Neville Chamberlain as a practitioner of the policy. Was Chamberlain a fool to believe that Hitler was "open to sweet reasonableness" or was he so convinced that it was unthinkable that he was willing to go to any extreme to prevent such a catastrophe from occurring? The Prime Minister presents a pitable picture of a man who was dedicated to peace and naive enough to believe that this was the desire of all statesmen. Chamberlain truly believed that Nazi Germany had some just claims to make upon the victorious allies of World War I, and he felt that by satisfying these demands he was helping to launch the world on a new era of peace and tranquillity. Appeasement, to Chamberlain, meant the just satisfaction of reasonable claims to be worked out by arbitration and not by use of force. Had Hitler been willing to moderate his demands and limit his desire only to that territory which had historically been German, then appeasement might have been an effective deterrent to war.

However, once Hitler embarked upon the course of subjecting all of Europe to German control, as witnessed by

the occupation of Czechoslovakia, Great Britain began to search out ways to halt German aggression. Chamberlain's Birmingham speech of March 17, marks the end of the appeasement era and the beginning of a new British policy. This new departure was in large part the handiwork of Halifax, who realized that the public, the Parliament, and the Party would no longer support continued appeasement after the occupation of Prague.

It was unfortunate that by this time Hitler had convinced himself that Britain would not attempt to stop his plans. The German dictator would not heed the British warning that if he attacked Poland the English would declare war. Hitler believed that if Poland resisted his demands he could obtain satisfaction through the use of the same tactics that gained him the Sudeten area at the Munich Conference. However, British public opinion and Parliament would not accept another Munich. Hitler failed to realize that Chamberlain was responsible to the people of Britain, and that even if he desired he could not continue a policy that did not have popular support.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Public Documents

Great Britain. Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939. Edited by E. L. Woodward and Rohan Butler. Third Series. (London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1949-1955).

An official transcript of the documents pertaining to British foreign relations in the months between the Munich Agreement and the decision to support Poland in the event of war with Germany. Primarily helpful in determining the attitude of the Foreign Office concerning future German moves.

_____. Parliamentary Debates (5th Series). (Commons.) Vol. CCCXXXIX-CCCXLV (London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1937-1939).

An official transcript of the proceedings of the House of Commons. Very helpful in determing the reaction of Parliament to the Munich Agreement and the occupation of Prague.

United States. Department of State. Documents on German Foreign Policy (Series D). Vol. V, VI. (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1953).

Very helpful in determining the British reaction to German moves as seen through the eyes of the German ambassador to Britain, Dirksen. These documents also shed light on the German evaluation of the effect of Halifax on British foreign policy during the month of March, 1939.

Memoirs

Attlee, Clement R. As It Happened. New York: Viking Press, 1954.

As leader of the Labour Party, Attlee presents a very lucid account of Labour's position during the critical months after Munich. However, he does not go into great detail about the role Labour played in bringing about a reversal of the British attitude toward Hitler.

Beneš, Eduard. Memoirs of Dr Eduard Beneš. Translated by Godfrey Lian. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1954.
As president of Czechoslovakia during the Munich crisis Dr. Beneš gives a very clear account of how the agreement affected his country's future.

Chamberlain, Neville. In Search of Peace. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939.
The Prime Minister gives an account of his attempts to secure the peace of the world. However, he does not go into any detail about the factors that caused him to abandon appeasement.

Churchill, Winston S. Blood, Sweat, and Tears. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1941.
A collection of some of Churchill's wartime speeches. Some were germane, but generally they did not pertain to the thesis topic.

_____. The Gathering Storm. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948.
The first volume in Churchill's history of the Second World War. Churchill tends to give his interpretation of the events, but it is very well written and also gives some insights into the thought patterns of the former British leader. Unfortunately it does not go into great detail about the reasons for Parliament's change in attitude in the month of March.

Dalton, Hugh. The Fateful Years. London: Frederick Muller, 1947.
As a leader of the Labour Party, Dalton was in the forefront in presenting the Labour program and policies concerning Britain's relations with Germany. He does not go into great detail about why Britain's leadership decided not to continue with appeasement after the German occupation of Czechoslovakia.

Duff Copper, Alfred. Old Men Forget. London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1953.
Duff Cooper gives a clear, concise account of his actions and reasons for resigning from Chamberlain's government after the Munich Agreement.

Eden, Anthony. The Reckoning. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965.
A very descriptive account of the attitude of Eden during the months between the Munich Agreement and the decision to support Poland.

Halifax, Earl of. Fulness of Days. London: Collins, 1957.
Viscount Halifax unfortunately does not go into great detail about the factors causing the British Government to take a stronger stand toward Germany. Especially lacking is information concerning the role he played as Foreign Secretary during March, 1939.

Salter, Arthur. Memoirs of a Public Servant. London: Faber and Faber, 1961.
This volume does not offer any new material on the question being considered. What information there is tends to be sketchy and of little importance.

_____. Personality in Politics: Studies of Contemporary Statesmen. London: Faber and Faber, 1948.
Salter has presented a fair and relatively objective evaluation of Neville Chamberlain. He concludes that the Prime Minister's greatest failing was that he could not change his mind once it had been made up.

Books

Birkenhead, Earl of. Halifax: The Life of Lord Halifax. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1965.
This is the best volume about the career of Lord Halifax. It is very informative about the role that Halifax played in the changing course of British policy toward Germany.

Bishop, Donald G. The Administration of British Foreign Relations. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1961.
This is a very perceptive volume. Well written and extremely germane to the development of British foreign relations.

Bullock, Alan. Hitler: A Study in Tyranny. New York: Bantam Books, 1961.
This is one of the best books about Hitler. Bullock's judgements and evaluations are sound. This is primarily helpful in determining Hitler's reasons for acting as he did on the occasion of the Munich Agreement and the occupation of Prague.

Butler, David and Jeanie Freeman. British Political Facts 1900-1960. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1963.
This places at finger-tip essential information about the British form of government.

Carr, E. H. German-Soviet Relations Between the Two World Wars, 1919-1939. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966.
Carr is one of the leading experts on international diplomacy during the interwar years. This volume is exceptionally helpful in viewing the British ineptness in its relations with Russia during the month of March, 1939.

Chambers, Frank P. This Age of Conflict. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962.
Chambers has presented a general history of the twentieth century.

Cooke, Colin. The Life of Richard Stafford Cripps. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1957.
A very good study of the life of Cripps and his frustrating attempts to persuade the Labour Party to join in an effective alliance against Hitler.

Craig, Gordon and Felix Gilbert. The Diplomats 1919-1939. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1953.
This is an essential work for the study of the period of appeasement. It goes into great detail about the happenings within the capitals and leading diplomats of this time.

Dictionary of National Biography 1941-1950. London: Oxford University Press, 1959.
A source of information about the personal lives of many of the men connected with the policy of appeasement.

Eubank, Keith. Munich. Norman, Oklahoma: Oklahoma University Press, 1963.
Although this is of more recent vintage than Wheeler-Bennett's book over the same subject, it does not add much more to an understanding of the period.

Feiling, Keith. The Life of Neville Chamberlain. London: Macmillan, 1946.
This is still the best biography of Neville Chamberlain. Feiling has used a number of pages from Chamberlain's diary and has shown quite effectively the former Prime Minister's dedication to peace.

Foreign Policy of the Powers. New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1935.
A very good study of the foreign policy of the major powers. It is well written and gives a clear interpretation of the goals and aims of Britain up to 1935.

Havighurst, Alfred A. Twentieth Century Britain. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.
A very good detailed study of Britain in this century.

Johnson, Alan Campbell. Viscount Halifax. New York: Ives Washburn, 1941.
A general work which is helpful in some instances but is not the detailed study that Birkenhead has made.

Knapton, E. J. and T. K. Derry. Europe and the World Since 1914. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966.
A general history of Europe. Its greatest asset is that it makes information easily accessible in a broad outline form.

Krug, Mark M. Anuerin Bevan. New York: T. Yoseloff, 1961.
Although Bevan plays a minor role in this period, as far as foreign policy is concerned, he was a supporter of the ideas of Cripps.

Laffan, R. G. D., et al. Survey of International Affairs 1938. Vol. III. London: Oxford University Press, 1951.
A collection of newspaper articles and comments about the international problems of 1938.

Loewenheim, Francis L. (ed). Peace or Appeasement? Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965.
A collection of memoirs by a number of officials closely connected with the appeasement policy. Extremely helpful in this study.

Macleod, Iain. Neville Chamberlain. London: Frederick Muller, 1961.
A more recent, but unfortunately not a better, biography of Neville Chamberlain. It does not go into great detail about the factors causing Chamberlain to change his attitude toward Germany between March 15 and 17, 1939.

Mowat, Charles Loch. Britain Between the Wars. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955.
A very perceptive study of the period between 1919 and 1939. Perhaps its greatest asset is the use made of figures and data concerning the relative amounts spent on armaments in Britain and Germany.

Namier, Lewis B. Diplomatic Prelude 1938-1939. London: Macmillan, 1948.

Professor Namier was one of the most informed experts on foreign relations, and this volume bears out this reputation. It is very helpful concerning why Chamberlain acted in the manner which he did before and after Munich.

Rock, William R. Appeasement on Trial. Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Press, 1966.
A detailed study of the Chamberlain governments' attempt to make appeasement work. It is brought out that there was opposition to the policy, although the opposition was not extensive until after March 15, 1939.

Schuman, Frederick L. Europe on the Eve. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1939.
A highly critical study of the appeasement policy and Neville Chamberlain.

_____. Night Over Europe. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948.
Critical of the appeasement policy and the Munich Agreement. A factual though somewhat biased study.

Seton-Watson, R. W. From Munich to Danzig. London: Methuen, 1939.
A detailed study of the Munich Agreement.

Shirer, William L. The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960.
A very popular study about the Third Reich. It is well documented although written in an easy style. This and Alan Bullock's book are probably the two best known works on Nazi Germany at this time.

Stout, H. M. British Government. New York: Oxford University Press, 1953.
A general study of the British system of government and how it works.

Strunk, Mildred and Hadley Cantril (eds). Public Opinion 1935-1946. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1951.
A collection of public opinion polls from all over the world covering almost every topic. This is very valuable for a topic which is dependent upon public opinion.

Taylor, A. J. P. The Origins of the Second World War. New York: Atheneum, 1961.
A very controversial volume on the origins of

the Second World War. Taylor blames the war not on Hitler, whom the author regards as a statesman like any other statesman, but rather on the United States because she did not join the League of Nations.

Toynbee, Arnold J. Survey of International Affairs, 1938. Vol. I. London: Oxford University Press, 1941.
A helpful study.

Tucker, William R. The Attitude of the British Labour Party Towards European and Collective Security Problems 1920-1939. Geneve: Imprimerie du Journal de Geneve, 1950.
A very good study of the foreign policy of the Labour Party.

Wheeler-Bennett, John. Munich: Prologue to Tragedy. New York: Buell, Sloan and Pearce, 1948.
Although all the documents were not available to Wheeler-Bennett, he has written a detailed study of this period which is still one of the best.

Windrich, Elaine. British Labour's Foreign Policy. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1952.
A detailed study of the Labour Party's foreign policy. It is well written and concise.

Wolfers, Arnold. Britain and France Between Two Wars. Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1963.
A penetrating study of Britain and France in this critical period of their histories. A well-documented and helpful study.

Articles

"Britain's Rejoinder," The Spectator, CLXII, (March 24, 1939), p. 472.
This editorial shows in detail that the British attitude toward Hitler was changing.

"A Clear Warning," The Economist, CXXXIV, (September 3, 1938), p. 442.
An early warning that Hitler had to be stopped before it was too late.

"The Dominions and the Crisis," The Economist, CXXXIV, (March 25, 1939), p. 610.
An article which conveys the attitude of the Dominions toward supporting Britain in the event of war with Germany.

"England Awakes," The Economist, CXXXIV, (March 25, 1939), p. 601.
An article which favored collective resistance.

"The Opposition," The Economist, CXXXIV, (March 25, 1939), p. 610.
An editorial about the "Cliveden Set."

"A Younger Point of View," The Spectator, CLXI, (September 23, 1938), p. 474.
A young man's impassioned plea for a strong policy to be utilized against Germany.

Newspapers

The Times (London). August, 1938-March, 1939.

VITA

Charles Wayne Goss

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: PARLIAMENT'S CHANGING ATTITUDE TOWARD GERMANY: SEPTEMBER, 1938, TO MARCH, 1939

Major Field: History

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, February 4, 1943, the son of Charles Herman and Judy A. Goss.

Education: Attended elementary school in California, Oregon, and Oklahoma and graduated from Thomas Alva Edison High School, Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1960. Received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from East Central State College, Ada, Oklahoma, in 1964.

Professional Experience: Graduate Assistant in the Department of History at Oklahoma State University, 1964-1965. Instructor in the Social Science Department at Southeastern State College, Durant, Oklahoma, 1966.