

"PUBLIC OPINION," APPEASEMENT, AND THE TIMES

MANIPULATING CONSENT IN THE 1930S

by

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ABSTRACT

What was the role of "public opinion" in Britain during the Prime Ministership of Neville Chamberlain? Was it a significant factor in the government's policy regarding rearmament and appeasement of Europe's dictators? Also, what was the nature of the policy-press-opinion dynamic in the two years prior to the outbreak of the Second World War?

This study attempts to ascertain the extent to which "public opinion" necessitated a slow pace of rearmament in Britain until 1939, or if government leaders used "public opinion" to justify their actions in foreign affairs. Did the political leadership in Britain merely see the benefits of a receptive "public opinion," or did it attempt to actually alter "public" perceptions of European affairs to facilitate support for appeasement? In the 1930s, the British press was the most important conduit of information and influence between government and "public," as well as among members of the interested political community. No newspaper was more powerful in this respect than The Times of London under its Chief Editor Geoffrey Dawson. This study will focus on The Times' approach to government policy and leadership. It will also assess the role played by the newspaper in the formulation of opinion and in the governmental decision-making process.

In order to appreciate The Times' influence on appeasement policy it is necessary to go beyond the daily lead editorials. A thorough content analysis of The Times must include reference to correspondents' dispatches, letters to the editor, reported public speeches, advertising formatting and placement, and photographic displays, all of which were used to present the newspaper's image of world affairs. In other words, a holistic approach to newspaper reading is required for a proper assessment of editorial policy. Also, it requires an understanding of the key

personalities involved in the formulation of newspaper policy, and their relationship to government officials walking the corridors of political power.

Numerous historical studies of the press and "public opinion" suggest that newspapers are mirror images of the mood of the times in which they are printed. In an ideal world enjoying free and unfettered access to information by all interested members of the "public," and where the press maintains a high level of objectivity when scrutinizing governmental affairs, such may be the case. But in the real world of cutthroat politics there is an even greater likelihood for "public opinion" to become a pawn of powerful decision-makers. Within such an environment, the role of the press is much more problematic, and its identification with "public opinion" tenuous at best.

It may be true that virtually every British politician in the twentieth century has attempted to manipulate the press to suit government policy. Neville Chamberlain, however, pursued this goal with a thoroughness and vigour unmatched by previous occupants of Downing Street. He was greatly assisted in his task by the most powerful editor on Fleet Street, Geoffrey Dawson, who willingly oversaw the debasement of one of democracy's most cherished institutions and traditions - an uncompromised press serving as a guarantor for "public" freedoms of speech. From the lofty heights of being considered Britain's crown jewel of journalism, The Times stooped to become during the 1930s an organ of government propaganda. In the process, it distorted "public opinion" to the extent that the general "public's" ability to influence national policy was immeasurably weakened. The Times was also seriously compromised when its prior policy of being prime critic of governmental decision-making was reversed in the cause of partisan advocacy. The result was a dangerous lag in "public" perceptions of the perilous course on which Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's foreign policy was leading the country until the virtual outbreak of war.

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INTRODUCTION

This is a study about the interrelationship of press, government and "public opinion" in the two years prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. By some accounts Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain was the most effective and autocratic manipulator of press opinion in the first half of the twentieth century. According to former Sunday Times correspondent James Margach he was also the first prime minister to employ news management on a grand scale, and in a thoroughly ruthless fashion.¹ Margach's main concern is the interactions of press and Prime Minister while assuming their impact on "public opinion." In a later book the author addressed the latter issue more directly, but only to assume that Chamberlain's international perspective was a virtual mirror reflection of an entirely pacifist "public opinion."² This is also the position taken by The History of The Times. Though the in-house publication was surprisingly critical of the newspaper's pro-appeasement stance under its chief editor, Geoffrey Dawson, it suggested that The Times did little more than parrot "public opinion" in the 1930s when it might have served as "public" watchdog on both domestic and foreign fronts.³ Illuminating as this account is, it does not delve into the issue of governmental manipulation of the press. Nor is it entirely satisfactory

¹ James Margach, The Abuse of Power: The War Between Downing Street and the Media, from Lloyd George to James Callahan (London, 1978), pp.50-63.

² James Margach, The Anatomy of Power: An Enquiry Into the Personality of Leadership (London, 1979), pp.24-26.

³ The History of The Times, Part II, Vol.4, 1921-1948 (London, 1952), pp.946-948,997,1007-1008.

in its coverage of the close relationship between Dawson and the Prime Minister. Thus, we are left with uncertainties over how this might have affected the shaping of "public opinion."

Surveys on the daily and weekly press in the 1930s also give cursory emphasis to this issue. Franklin Gannon provided the first broad overview of British press coverage on Nazi Germany. Like Margach and The Times' history, Gannon claims that the press accurately reflected "public opinion," though he also suggests that newspapers and correspondents actively helped shape "public" attitudes. Still, his focus is clearly on how the British press was compelled to write less critically of Germany by a "public" seeking entertainment in its news rather than realistic reports of Nazism's brutality. He makes a less convincing argument for The Times' consistently pro-government attitude, attributing it to a sense of responsibility over the newspaper's reputation abroad as spokesman for the British government.⁴ Consequently, Gannon only loosely connects newspaper opinion to government decision-making in order to bolster his argument that "public opinion" was crucial in forming policy.

Another survey of press coverage in the 1930s is provided by Benny Morris, who examines Britain's weekly publications. Though he assumes they were influential in moulding "public opinion" he is less clear on the influence of government upon the press in fashioning opinion. His analysis of the political affiliations and editorial opinions of major British weeklies is fascinating.⁵ But he mistakenly views the opinion-making process as primarily a one-way lane between Fleet Street and Westminster. Perhaps more accurate is Richard Cockett's contention that The Times and other publications in the late 1930s abandoned their role of reflecting "public opinion" in favour of religiously partisan support for Prime Minister Chamberlain's mission of

⁴ Franklin Gannon, The British Press and Germany, 1936-1939 (Oxford, 1971), pp.vii,2,6-13,29-30.

⁵ Benny Morris, The Roots of Appeasement: The British Weekly Press and Nazi Germany During the 1930s (London, 1991), pp.1-10.

peace through conciliation and compromise.⁶ Cockett places his main focus on the government's role in this symbiotic relationship. He also presumes to know that "public opinion" was strongly against Chamberlain in 1938. In order to test his interesting and provocative theory, it is necessary to re-analyze the government, press and "public opinion" dynamic, with greater emphasis placed on the conduits of information and influence. It is also useful to pay particular attention to The Times, as no other newspaper in Britain was more prestigious or more closely connected to the corridors of power during Chamberlain's tenure in office.

Analysis of press and politics in pre-War Britain, and their relationship to "public opinion," also requires close scrutiny of The Times because of the newspaper's perceived importance in shaping the contemporary debate on appeasement. Even if this influence was exaggerated, the truly relevant consideration must be that powerful actors in the appeasement drama believed The Times' policies to be significant, if not decisive, and took actions accordingly. Furthermore, the paper's chief editors represented some of the most articulate (if disingenuous) proponents of the Conservative-led policy of appeasing fascist dictators, and hence formulated and led much of the debate over the proper course of action for the democracies. The vast information-gathering network of the newspaper, combined with the close proximity of Chief Editor Geoffrey Dawson to the corridors of political power in London gave The Times a unique ability to play an active part in the foreign policy process, not least because of its reputation on the European continent for being the mouthpiece of the British government. The fact that Dawson also professed (wrongly) a special understanding of what the British people wanted their government's relations with continental powers to be makes The Times a valuable source for assessing the manner in which pro-appeasement forces in government and media worked closely

⁶ Richard Cockett, Twilight of Truth: Chamberlain, Appeasement and the Manipulation of the Press (New York, 1989), pp.16,64-67,83,118-120.

together to manipulate "public opinion" as a weapon against the policy's detractors. At the same time, additional analysis of the newspaper is needed to explain how the search for rapprochement with Germany overrode doubts about Nazism's odious brutality.⁷ However, any new study concerning the role of press and "public opinion" in the appeasement debate must first be placed into the context of the vast amount of historical writing that has gone before.

Only a few subjects of modern international history have attracted more attention than the events leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War. Whereas debates over the causes and consequences of French, German, and American decision-making before World War II have led in the direction of general consensus, British and Soviet foreign policies continue to provoke spirited discourse. Since Soviet archives are only slowly opening up to Western scholars most new publications of pre-war developments focus on British policies in the two decades from 1919 to 1939. James Joll suggests that modern historiography has become two-tiered, with one level focusing on broad social and economic developments while the other level looks at the decisions of individual leaders. In the context of appeasement, this is evidenced by the emergence of two major schools of thought. One perspective suggests that Britain's political leadership had no choice but to pursue appeasement given the economic, social and political obstacles to effective armed resistance of Nazism. In contrast, the "orthodox" approach argues that British policy makers were guilty of negligence in failing to make realistic appraisals of the deteriorating international situation. Historians of appeasement who emphasize the latter approach argue that there were always alternatives in British foreign policy, that scholars of the first level have gone

⁷ Frank McDonough, "The Times, Norman Ebbut, and the Nazis," *Journal of Contemporary History* 27 (1992), pp.407,421-422: this is still an unanswered question despite the already considerable historiography on *The Times*, probably because so much of what has been written about Printing House Square derives from accounts of former staff hesitant to probe less complimentary aspects of the publication's role in the 1930s.

too far in substituting "helpless men" for "guilty men." Perhaps Toynbee was right more than fifty years ago in asserting that the question of whether leaders determine events or visa versa is not a matter of either/or but of more or less.⁸

Part of the reason for differing interpretations of British foreign policy in the 1930s stems from the fact that appeasement is a nebulous concept that defies simple definition. Broadly stated, appeasement was not a single, clearly articulated policy. Rather, it was a series of interrelated measures in a diverse range of fields, implemented over a protracted period of time, and designed to respond to changing domestic and international circumstances. Chamberlain, however, explained appeasement more narrowly as a policy of effecting timely concessions to aggrieved powers in an effort to defuse potential flashpoints before they disrupted the peace and stability of Europe.⁹ Inherent in this explanation was the belief, premised on the experiences of the First World War, that any conflict in Europe could not be contained and would soon lead to a general war involving all the Great Powers. Much uncertainty existed in Britain surrounding the re-emergence of German power in the 1930s. Baldwin dealt with this dilemma by taking no initiatives. Chamberlain determined on a more active course. He recognized the inter-relatedness of defence, diplomacy and economic strength. When defence requirements threatened to jeopardize economic recovery he struck upon the idea of using diplomacy to fill the gap.¹⁰ Chamberlain was further convinced that Britain had no specific goals in Europe worthy of war. He felt that British leadership could best be used to mediate disputes through summit diplomacy.

⁸ See Joll's comment in C.J. Bartlett, British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century (New York, 1989), pp. vii.-ix; Toynbee is quoted in Curtis MacDougall, Understanding Public Opinion: A Guide for Newspapermen and Newspaper Readers (Dubuque, 1966), p.56.

⁹ Paul Kennedy, The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980 (London, 1981), pp.224-225.

¹⁰ William Rock, British Appeasement in the 1930s (London, 1977), p.4.

It was Edward Grey's refusal to visit Berlin in 1914, Chamberlain believed, that led to the escalation of an eminently avoidable dispute in Bosnia into World War. His belief in personal diplomacy was reinforced by impatience with what he saw as the obstructive views of the Foreign Office. In addition, his brother Austen's successful application of summit diplomacy at Locarno in 1925 served as a powerful precedent for him in 1938. As a result, Chamberlain became determined not to be deterred by an unruly press or "public opinion" in achieving the noble goal of long-term peace in Europe. At the same time, it caused him to disparage alliances or the ability of other powers to assist in his mission to bring peace and stability to Europe.¹¹ Though numerous economic, domestic political, and foreign policy factors motivating appeasement are evident, this study is concerned specifically with the opinion-policy dynamic and the role of The Times in influencing it.

In 1940, the complete collapse of appeasement led to a rare consensus among historians and political leaders in which anti-appeasement and deterrence of aggression became a central part of Western foreign policy thinking.¹² The generation of historians emerging in the early post-war era had been active participants in the fight against fascism and Nazism. Consequently, they viewed the critical years between 1933 and 1939 in personal and often polemical terms. Appeasers like Hoare, Inskip, Halifax and Chamberlain were portrayed as weak and ineffectual, shamefully surrendering to the bluffs and bellicose threats of unscrupulous dictators.¹³ Notable exceptions to this approach were Chamberlain's biographers Keith Feiling and Iain MacLeod, who presented their subject as a forceful and determined politician, though someone who could be

¹¹ Ibid., pp.1-23,88.

¹² D.C. Watt, "The Historiography of Appeasement," in Crisis and Controversy, eds. Alan Sked and Cris Cook (London, 1976), pp.110-113.

¹³ The most brilliant of these accounts is A.L. Rowse, Appeasement: A Study in Political Decline (New York, 1961): the author's savage wit has occasionally made him a source of controversy, but he writes with great conviction.

very stubborn and self-righteous.¹⁴

Nonetheless, war in the 1940s and economic prosperity in the ensuing decades lent credence to the idea that the 1930s had been a time of incompetence in government, both in domestic and foreign affairs. The fact that between 1940 and 1963 anti-appeasers like Churchill, Eden and MacMillan were Britain's top political leaders contributed to the disparagement of the 1930s as the Devil's Decade.¹⁵ The "orthodox," or traditional, school of thought underwent its first major challenge in the late 1950s following the Suez Crisis, when history by analogy became discredited. Two British historians, D.C. Watt and A.J.P. Taylor initiated new revisionist interpretations of the appeasement era which attempted to place the debate within the context of Britain's overall geopolitical decline.¹⁶ Watt's career as editor in the Foreign Office and official historian for the Cabinet Office, may have contributed to his desire to overturn the prevailing negative verdict of Chamberlain's government.¹⁷ His historiographical essay of 1965 had a great impact on historians keen to overthrow the "guilty men" thesis by applying less moralistic and more analytic perspectives towards appeasement. These revisionists also were witnessing the British Empire in full decline by the mid-1960s. Its colonies mostly gone, its economy troubled, Britain could no longer lay claim to great power status. Some revisionists projected this general

¹⁴ Keith Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain (London, 1947); also, Iain MacLeod, Chamberlain (London, 1961).

¹⁵ Andrew Thorpe, Britain in the 1930s: The Deceptive Decade (Cambridge, 1992), pp.3-6; for the earliest known references to the "Devil's Decade", see Malcolm Muggeridge, The Thirties (London, 1940), pp.29-32.

¹⁶ D.C. Watt, "The Historiography of Appeasement," in Crisis and Controversy ; also, A.J.P. Taylor, The Origins of the Second World War (New York, 1961). For an assessment of the firestorm of controversy which Taylor's book has set off, see Gordon Martel, ed., The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered (Boston, 1986); also, Esmonde Robertson, ed., The Origins of the Second World War (London, 1971); a strong refutation of the Taylor thesis is found in Leonidas Hill, "Three Crises, 1938-39," Journal of Contemporary History 3 (1968), pp.113-144; also, Gerhard Weinberg, The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: Starting the War (Chicago, 1980).

¹⁷ Robert Skidelsky, "Going to War with Germany: Between Revisionism and Orthodoxy," Encounter 39 (July 1972), p.58: he writes that "a historian who comes, naked, to the corridors of power is almost as likely to write conservative history as is the politician who arrives in the same condition to make conservative history."

state of decline as far back as the late 1800s. They concluded that British politicians at the time were fully cognizant of this trend, and hence realistic in resigning themselves to an accommodationist path in international affairs.¹⁸

In contrast, Correlli Barnett much more savagely criticizes what he sees as the failings of British culture leading to its outright collapse of power in the 1940s. Though he agrees with D.C. Watt that the British Empire in the 1920s represented a classic example of strategic over-extension, he places the blame for this weakness on the Victorian educational system which failed to train the ruling elite in the realities of world affairs. He further suggests that Britain's strategic dilemma in the 1930s was attributable to the unwillingness of the complacent ruling classes to choose either a vigorous strengthening of the Empire or the shedding of imperial responsibilities altogether.¹⁹ Other revisionists took a less Eurocentric perspective on British global decline. They stressed the dangers of imperial "overstretch" faced by Britain's political leaders in the 1930s in an attempt to rationalise a policy of limited continental commitments and narrowly defined self-interest. Greater attention was paid to developments in Asia and how those events impinged on European strategies. Most notably, Ian Nish wrote on the impact of British concerns over a predatory Japan eagerly pursuing economic and military expansion into Britain's colonial markets.²⁰

Watt's historiographical assessment in 1965 suggested that revisionism was a uniquely British development. In America, he saw the "dogma of anti-appeasement" unchanged by the

¹⁸ Donald Watt, Personalities and Policies: Studies in the Formulation of British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century (London, 1965), pp.100-116; also, Maurice Cowling, The Impact of Hitler: British Politics and British Policy, 1933-1940 (Cambridge, 1975), pp.178-179.

¹⁹ Correlli Barnett, The Collapse of British Power (London, 1972), pp.15-20,120,237-248,329; see also his The Audit of War: The Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation (London, 1986):he attacks British complacency stemming from what he sees as a nineteenth century elitist cultural philosophy of anti-industrialism and anti-commercialism.

²⁰ Ian Nish, Alliance in Decline: A Study in Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1908-1923 (London, 1972); also Ian Nish, ed., Anglo-Japanese Alienation, 1919-1952 (Cambridge, 1982), pp.1-32.

growing Vietnam debacle, championed by "Churchillians" and holdovers from Dullesism.²¹ However, since the mid-1960s one American has achieved what Alan Goodwin believes are special qualities of impartiality, sympathy and balance, which he says are often missing among British historians on the subject. Though defending the moral validity of opposition to appeasement in the 1930s, William Rock highlights the vexing complexities which confronted British policy-makers, without necessarily becoming an apologist for them.²² On the other hand, some American writers are distinctly revisionist in their re-interpretation of the Roosevelt administration's role in promoting appeasement during the 1930s.²³ In short, revisionists have introduced such diverse issues as the Far East, Imperial factors, the role of the U.S., France, and Russia, economic circumstances, and party politics into the appeasement debate.²⁴ Unfortunately, most of these studies deal with "public opinion" only tangentially, or simply assume it was influential on government policy.

A further stimulus to revisionism was the opening up of the British government archives pursuant to the Public Records Act (1967). This new outpouring of evidence revealed added dimensions to the complex economic problems faced by the governments of the 1930s. The additional accessibility of private archives also presented some political leaders in a slightly better light (most notably Stanley Baldwin), while revealing Churchill and Eden to have been less anti-appeasement oriented (at least in the early stages of Nazism's rise to world power) than their

²¹ D.C. Watt, "The Historiography of Appeasement," pp.112-113.

²² William Rock, British Appeasement in the 1930s, pp.1-23; and Neville Chamberlain (New York, 1969); and Appeasement on Trial: British Foreign Policy and Its Critics, 1938-39 (Hamden, 1966).

²³ A.A. Offner, "Influence without Responsibility: American Statecraft and the Munich Conference," pp.51-77; and Douglas Little, "Architects of Appeasement: Franklin Roosevelt, the State Department, and the Spanish Civil War," pp.73-88 in Appeasing Fascism, eds. Melvin Small and Otto Feinstein (Lanham, Md., 1991).

²⁴ John D. Fair, "The Chamberlain-Temperley Connection: Munich's Historical Dimension," Historian 48 (1985), pp.1-23; for a thoroughly documented study of the role of political rivalries in the appeasement debate of the 1930s see Maurice Cowling, The Impact of Hitler.

highly influential memoirs previously suggested.²⁵ In the early 1970s, economic stagnation, increased unemployment, and worsening inflation caused some historians to write more sympathetically of Britain's interwar plight.²⁶ In a synthesis of the revisionist viewpoint, Wolfgang Mommsen suggests that any alternative course to appeasement faced insurmountable obstacles.²⁷

During the 1970s a few historians sought a more ambitious synthesis, one which incorporates the best theories from both major schools of historiographical analysis. Foremost among these seekers of the middle ground are Paul Kennedy and Keith Robbins.²⁸ In assessing the many different causes and rationales motivating appeasement policy Kennedy notes economic restraints, domestic political and social concerns, and a British military hierarchy mesmerized by German "shop window" displays of armed might. Despite such evidence, which some revisionists have used to argue that appeasement was "overdetermined," Kennedy arrives at a quite different conclusion. He postulates limited British capacity to intervene on the continent of Europe as a deliberate policy of government. British leaders failed to make objective analyses of the developing strategic situation or to consider alternative strategies,²⁹ and:

"For all the plausible, objectively valid grounds behind the British government's desire to avoid standing up to the dictator states, there is much in its ungenerous, narrow

²⁵ Andrew Thorpe, Britain in the 1930s, pp.2-3; for memoirs see Winston Churchill, The Gathering Storm; also, Anthony Eden (Earl of Avon), Facing the Dictators (London, 1962).

²⁶ Andrew Thorpe, Britain in the 1930s, p.4.

²⁷ Wolfgang Mommsen and Lothar Kettenacker, eds., The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement (London, 1983), pp. ix-xii; also, Anthony Adamthwaite, "War Origins Again," Journal of Modern History 56 (1984), p.106.

²⁸ Paul Kennedy, The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on the British External Policy, 1865-1980 (London, 1981); also, Keith Robbins, Appeasement (Oxford, 1988); it would perhaps be unfair to impute a synthesis to Correlli Barnett, The Collapse of British Power, even if his acerbic attacks on appeasers and anti-appeasers alike does challenge both revisionist and traditional schools of interpretation.

²⁹ Paul Kennedy, The Realities Behind Diplomacy, pp.292-293, 302.

attitudes that looks dubious, even at this distance in time."³⁰

Kennedy also points out Chamberlain's rhetorical references to adhering to "public opinion" while actually keeping it at bay with the help of The Times' Geoffrey Dawson.³¹ His general survey, however, does not delve into the precise manner in which this was achieved.

Keith Robbins also seeks to reconcile revisionist views of the inevitability of war with traditionalist dissatisfaction over the Chamberlain government's apparent indifference to the plight of Czechoslovakia. The dilemma of being unprepared for war but not wanting to be seen as abandoning defence of democratic principles was the source of British anguish during the Munich crisis and for a long time thereafter. In terms of "public opinion," Robbins gives mostly anecdotal evidence to support the idea pacifism gained strength after 1936. He also does not discuss the degree to which this "opinion" may have been premised on distorted press coverage of Nazi Germany.³² In another survey of war origins, Jeffrey Hughes suggests that explanations for the outbreak of World War II center around faulty judgements and strategies on the one hand, and inexorable processes on the other hand. He argues that attention to both dimensions is necessary for an appreciation of British policy in the 1930s.³³

Aside from attempts at syntheses of traditional and revisionist approaches, the last two decades have seen a profusion of specialized studies dealing with military strategies, intelligence, finance, rearmament, the Dominions, Cabinet policies and "public opinion" during the interwar years. These works challenge many standard interpretations of British foreign policy before

³⁰ Paul Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000 (London, 1990), pp.318-319.

³¹ Paul Kennedy, The Realities Behind Diplomacy, pp.296-301,310.

³² Keith Robbins, Appeasement, pp.78-82; and Munich 1938 (London, 1968), pp.123-133,253-257.

³³ Jeffrey Hughes, "The Origins of World War II in Europe: British Deterrence Failure and German Expansionism," Journal of Interdisciplinary History 18 (1988), p.851.

World War II, raising doubts as to whether a consensus on appeasement is attainable. Though a great deal of insight can be gained from recent scholarly works, more emphasis is needed on developing less impressionistic conclusions of "public opinion's" ability to influence government policy.

Since the mid-1970s much attention has been given to the rearmament issue, but here too the role of "public opinion" in shaping government policy is treated unevenly. Telford Taylor's definitive work in 1979 on the Munich conference rejects the notion that Chamberlain did the best that could be hoped for under the circumstances. Taylor emphasizes that appeasement did not represent a realistic search for European detente. Chamberlain failed to consider, let alone attempt, strategies and formulas which were available at the time, but which ran counter to his conviction that wholesale concessions would pacify aggressive dictators.³⁴ Taylor argues that the Prime Minister accepted the theory of rearmament but it was empty of meaning because he rejected one specific proposal after another.³⁵ Williamson Murray arrives at the even more striking conclusion that nearly every decision made by British society in the 1930s in terms of rearmament, diplomacy and military doctrine was disastrous, reflecting a failing of British society in the widest sense.³⁶ Needless to say, this sweeping indictment has not been received well by the co-founder of revisionism D.C. Watt, whose rebuttal criticizes those who cast moral judgments on British statesmen of previous decades.³⁷ Nonetheless, Murray has conducted a meticulous and original study of German and Allied archival materials, revealing that there were formidable resources available with which to resist Hitler, and far greater economic and military

³⁴ Telford Taylor, Munich: The Price of Peace (New York, 1979), pp.595-599, 949-950,973,989,992.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.938.

³⁶ Williamson Murray, The Change in the European Balance of Power (Princeton, 1984), p.91.

³⁷ D.C. Watt, How War Came: The Immediate Origins of the Second World War (New York, 1988), p.623.

weaknesses in Germany than appeasers were willing to admit. Tragically, he says, there was a complete lack of hardheaded strategic thinking or effective leadership needed to overcome bureaucratic inertia and conformity to routine.³⁸ Though informative of rearmament issues, only the Taylor study gives more than passing attention to government news management and its influence on "public opinion." However, Taylor occasionally makes speculative statements on what he believes was the "public" mood at various times. Chamberlain is also perceived as pursuing his own course of action regardless of "public opinion."

The paucity of strategizing before and after Munich is confirmed by the British military historian, Brian Bond. He notes that the main cause of military unpreparedness in the 1930s lay in protracted indecision by the ruling elite over Britain's proper role in Europe. He also suggests that naive pacifism was preached in schools, universities, pulpits and press.³⁹ Bond's biography of the brilliant military strategist and tactician Basil Liddell Hart reveals that his advocacy of "limited liability" in The Times enhanced the government's proclivity towards deferring debate over Britain's continental role.⁴⁰ Likewise, Gaines Post Jr.'s study of Britain's deterrence strategy in the mid-1930s concludes that delays in the policy of rearmament were caused not only by a difficult strategic and economic situation, but also as the result of indecision in the machinery of policy making when it attempted to apply peacetime routines to warlike preparations. Post notes government assumptions about "public opinion's" hostility to rearmament. But he suggests it used a fraudulent method of educating the "public" to the needs for rearmament by suppressing intragovernmental doubts about the adequacy of the rearmament program. Neither did its rhetoric

³⁸ Williamson Murray, The Change in the European Balance of Power, pp.127-128,154,195-96,354-369.

³⁹ Brian Bond, British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars (Oxford, 1980), pp.6-8,35,249,280-281.

⁴⁰ Brian Bond, Liddell Hart (London, 1977), pp.88-97,304-305: ironically, it was the failure of Britain's government to implement the revolutionary new approach of using mobile armoured offensive units to spearhead attacks that finally convinced Liddell Hart in 1938 of the necessity for avoiding continental commitments.

in support of collective security match its commitment. Nonetheless, Post attributes this to confusion in the system of policy making rather than to Maurice Cowling's assertion that the Conservative Party feared polarization of "public opinion."⁴¹ The urge to maintain business as usual for the sake of investor confidence overrode alarm in military quarters of the precarious state of Britain's armaments and defence preparations. It also prevented "public opinion" from becoming similarly concerned.

Another interesting historiographical development in recent years has been analysis of the Treasury and its role in shaping intragovernmental debate over rearmament and foreign policy. In two important works, G.C. Peden partially rehabilitates the Treasury from earlier charges that it placed cost accounting before national security. Nonetheless, he takes the National Government to task for failing to utilize the large pools of unemployed labour that were readily available in the 1930s. A more imaginative government leadership could have used job re-training programs to boost industrial capacity at the same time that it eased social tensions among the working classes. By acting too cautiously, the governments of the 1930s allowed fear of a financial crisis (rather than "public opinion") to outweigh the dangers to national security. In his second thesis, Peden challenges the revisionist assumption that Imperial considerations were a source of weakness for Britain, arguing instead that the Empire gave the country unique economic, military and strategic advantages over continental rivals.⁴² Nicholas Mansergh's masterly work from the 1950s doubted the enthusiasm (though not the grudging willingness) of the majority of Dominion subjects to rally to Britain's defense before 1939. On the other hand, Correlli Barnett confirms

⁴¹ Gaines Post, Jr., Dilemmas of Appeasement: British Deterrence and Defense, 1934-1937 (Ithaca, N.Y., 1993), pp.219-220,295,298-299,332; also, Maurice Cowling, The Impact of Hitler, pp.117-138.

⁴² G.C. Peden, British Rearmament and the Treasury: 1932-1939 (Edinburgh, 1979), pp.12-13,59,149-150,178-184; and "The Burden of Imperial Defence and the Continental Commitment Reconsidered," The Historical Journal 27 (1984), pp.405-423.

Peden's argument that the arms industry was crippled by a severe lack of skilled personnel which the British government and industry did nothing to rectify.⁴³

A related study by Robert Shay examines the financial and industrial obstacles to rearmament while implying marginal importance to "public opinion" in government and business circles. Like Peden, he notes the powerful influence of the Treasury and its concern that rearmament posed a greater danger to the well-being of British society than did the rise of Nazism. However, in contrast to Peden's sympathetic treatment of Treasury policy, Shay's study of the inter-relationship between industrial magnates and leaders of the Conservative Party reveals how the ruling elite in Britain failed to appreciate fully the dire peril which was facing the nation, and instead focused on narrow self-interests based on profit margins and electoral success, with the result that rearmament was not conducted on the basis of strategic needs until the spring of 1939; but by then it was too little and too late to avert the catastrophe of 1940.⁴⁴ Such neglect of the commonweal for the sake of a small group of special interests in big business was irresponsible of government and reflective of its treatment of "public opinion."

In the last decade, internationalization of the appeasement debate has become evident through the seminal work of Gustav Schmidt, who addresses the rearmament issue in structural terms, viewing it as the hinge that connected domestic and foreign policies in Britain. His thesis challenges the view that Britain's diminished economic and military power following World War I necessitated appeasement. Rather, he contends that this "policy on the cheap" was not something new in British diplomacy, but in fact was a "structural (traditional) element of Britain's

⁴³ Nicholas Mansergh, Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs (London, 1952), pp.168-173,267,358-360,417-418; also, Correlli Barnett, The Collapse of British Power, pp.477-478.

⁴⁴ Robert Paul Shay, Jr. British Rearmament in the Thirties: Politics and Profits (Princeton, 1977), pp.9-10,224-227,246-257,286-288; also, Correlli Barnett, The Collapse of British Power, pp.485-487: he is more critical of the business end of this relationship, suggesting that "rearmament put British industry to the proof and found it wanting" due largely to an unwillingness to innovate.

expansion overseas and has figured prominently in many theories of (British) imperialism."⁴⁵ Therefore, the notion of appeasement as a product of ruling class perceptions over relative decline in world power is rejected in favour of the concept of appeasement as a crisis strategy, based on faith in Britain's political strength and determined to counter risks of class war on the domestic front.⁴⁶

The attempt to demonstrate the interrelationship between domestic and foreign policy dynamics naturally leads to consideration of the composition and attitudes of the constituent elements of British society in the 1930s and their significance for appeasement and rearmament. As already noted, the influence of "public opinion" on British foreign policy in the pre-War years has been treated unevenly by historians. Often, writers use "public opinion" in purely impressionistic terms in an attempt to provide additional weight of evidence to substantiate arguments of varying merit. The wholly amorphous nature of "public opinion" -or at least the absence of statistical verification- lends itself easily to polemics, or misguided emphasis. Many studies which give "public opinion" only passing attention perpetuate the notion that pacifism in the 1930s was so deeply ingrained in the British psyche as to preclude accelerated rearmament, thereby necessitating the diplomacy of conciliation. Revisionists revealed the importance of not making hasty moral judgments about appeasement but did not adequately address what the British "public" actually knew or wanted in its foreign policy. Some analyses of the inter-relationship of press reporting and "public opinion" suggest that the Conservative Party leadership's hands

⁴⁵ Gustav Schmidt, The Politics and Economics of Appeasement: British Foreign Policy in the 1930s, trans. Jackie Bennett-Ruete (New York, 1986), pp.5-7,14-17.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.233-234,388.

were tied when it considered policy alternatives.⁴⁷

In the last two decades, however, numerous books and articles concerning "public opinion" and its role in the decision-making process⁴⁸ raise doubts that British foreign policy was directed by the invisible hand of massed sentiment. For instance, Ritchie Owendale demonstrates how little Chamberlain actually weighed "public" or governmental opinion in the Dominions and the United States before deciding on his course of action during the crises of 1938-39.⁴⁹ Other works expose how Chamberlain manipulated "public opinion," primarily through his heavy-handed (even authoritarian) control of the conduits of information gathering and dissemination.⁵⁰ These studies offer renewed criticisms of the motives behind government policy, revealing just how far Chamberlain's government was prepared to go in undermining democratic principles of free speech in the single-minded pursuit of appeasement. Consequently, Richard Cockett articulates the need to re-evaluate this epoch not merely in terms of its policy but also in respect to the actions of its principal advocates. That is, since Chamberlain personalized his policy to such an extraordinary extent, it would be misleading for historians assessing it to ignore or diminish this fact. By some accounts Chamberlain possessed a messianic conviction that his

⁴⁷ A few of the earlier works on "public opinion" are in A.J.P. Taylor, The Origins of the Second World War; Martin Gilbert, The Roots of Appeasement (London, 1966); Brigitte Granzow, A Mirror of Nazism: British Opinion and the Emergence of Nazism (London, 1964); K.W. Watkins, Britain Divided: The Effect of the Spanish Civil War on British Public Opinion (London, 1963); in regard to views of the Press as a reflection of "public opinion", see Franklin Gannon, The British Press and Germany 1936-1939 (Oxford, 1971); also, The History of The Times Part II, Vol.4, 1921-1948. (London, 1952); also, Andrew Sharf, The British Press and Jews Under Nazi Rule (London, 1964).

⁴⁸ Paul Kennedy, "Appeasement," in The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered, p.146: he calls the recent debate on "public opinion" something of a growth industry.

⁴⁹ Ritchie Owendale, Appeasement and the English-Speaking World: Britain, the United States, the Dominions, and the Policy of Appeasement, 1937-1939 (Cardiff, 1975), pp.185-189, 209-210, 218, 222.

⁵⁰ Most notable among these are Anthony Adamthwaite, "The British Government and the Media, 1937-38," Journal of Contemporary History 18 (1983), pp.281-297; Robert Shepherd, A Class Divided (London, 1988); Richard Lamb, The Drift to War 1922-1939 (London, 1989); Richard Cockett, Twilight of Truth; a flawed work examining the climate of British "public opinion" in the context of British popular culture is Terrance Lewis', A Climate For Appeasement? (New York, 1991); an apologia for the political manipulation of the press can be found in Stephen Koss, The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain, Vol.2, The Twentieth Century (London, 1984).

political leadership could single-handedly secure a new post-Versailles order in Europe.⁵¹ In pursuing that objective, he used every means at his disposal to engineer the full support of the British people (or at least the appearance of such) for his self-professed peace mission. In addition, people like The Times' editor Geoffrey Dawson, who claimed a special appreciation for "public opinion," were brought into the decision-making process to help the political leadership package foreign policy in a form "saleable" to the British "public." As part of this effort, the Chamberlain administration deceived the British people of the Nazi threat, thereby greatly weakening perceptions of the need to rearm for the survival of the nation.⁵²

According to Sydney Aster, Chamberlain's belief that he could deter Germany with a strengthened air force alone (thereby avoiding a costly expeditionary force) was a failure because it neither deterred nor defended.⁵³ A less dogmatic approach might have achieved at least one of those vital goals. Chamberlain and his Cabinet made choices among various alternatives available, and those choices were consistently in favour of conciliation rather than alerting "public opinion" to the need for resistance.⁵⁴ Such perspectives recognize the forceful, talented, and determined leadership behind British policy in the 1930s but argue that it was responsible for misguided priorities and deceit towards an unsuspecting "public." Chamberlain pursued such a policy, not because he was wicked, but because he mistakenly believed no effective resistance to Nazi aggression could be mounted. Nonetheless, in the process he preserved peace in 1938

⁵¹ William Rock, British Appeasement in the 1930s, pp.4-15.

⁵² Gustav Schmidt, The Politics and Economics of Appeasement, pp.315-317, 320; also, Richard Cockett, Twilight of Truth, pp.83,87-89,120.

⁵³ Sydney Aster, "Chamberlain: The Guiltiest Man?" in British Appeasement and the Origins of World War II, ed. R.J.Q. Adams (London, 1994), pp.141-42.

⁵⁴ R.A.C. Parker, Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War (London, 1993), p.343.

only at the expense of the Czechs. Resistance rather than appeasement would almost certainly have resulted in war. Hitler was clearly not bluffing when he said Germany would attack if not given the Sudetenland. But that does not necessarily mean it had to be a World War. Chamberlain's conclusion at Munich that all alternatives to appeasement were too horrible to contemplate only made the outbreak of war a year later that much more terrible. In determining when to resist, the British government never gave the "public" a chance to second-guess it by providing information necessary for the development of informed opinion.

CHAPTER II

"PUBLIC OPINION," POLICY MAKERS, AND THE TIMES

In scrutinizing the means by which "public opinion" became an instrument of Chamberlain's appeasement policy, historians should not ignore the benefits to be derived from rigorous content analysis of the political press, particularly The Times which was the primary conduit of information between policy makers and influential members of the political "public" in the 1930s. To date, only a few scholars of appeasement have considered methodological approaches from the social sciences.⁵⁵ There are logical reasons why historians are hesitant to pursue this course. Social scientists use highly abstract theoretical models to depict recurrent social and political patterns of behaviour. Historians, on the other hand, search for truth within specific historical contexts, and are rightfully dubious of models suggesting universal application. Nonetheless, Arthur Marwick says writers of history should be aware of their relationship with the social science disciplines in order to pursue better problem-solving tasks. This is especially relevant to the field of "public opinion" analysis, where historians stand to gain new insights through the efforts of social scientists to identify and measure the influence of "public opinion"

⁵⁵ Gaines Post, Jr., Dilemmas of Appeasement: British Deterrence and Defense, 1934-1937 (Ithaca, N.Y., 1993), pp.4-9,14,20,134,153,164-169,244: he discusses cybernetic and analytic methodological constructs from the social sciences to study the dynamics of intragovernmental committees and bureaucratic decision-making process. In doing so, he notes the conflicting premises on which rearmament timetables were formulated which caused the machinery of policy "to lose time through confusion while trying to buy time through conciliation."

on the foreign policy-making process.⁵⁶ Even though applying "scientific" methodologies may be impossible where they cannot be tested, historians would do well to examine how differing assumptions and definitions of "public opinion" may assist in bringing this highly nebulous concept into greater focus.

"Public opinion" is a term frequently used by individuals or groups wishing to accord greater force to their own particular arguments. In the realm of foreign affairs, government officials in modern democracies use and influence "public opinion" in order to advance their chosen policies. Seldom does the inverse occur, political rhetoric notwithstanding. That is, in situations where the "prevailing mood" appears to dictate a particular foreign policy stance, closer scrutiny reveals a "public" open to governmental leads, given plausible justification.⁵⁷ Therefore, when assessing the impact of "public opinion" in the context of the appeasement debate it is necessary to ask how it is being interpreted, measured, and advanced. What is the evidence concerning government policy makers' perceptions of "public opinion" and what constraints, if any, were thereby imposed on their policies? Such an approach involves an examination of the rhetorical and "real" aspects of "public opinion."

Care must therefore be taken to avoid interpreting government policy in terms of vague assumptions about the impact that "public opinion" has upon the behaviour of officials. Failure to specify the concrete action from which "public opinion" is inferred creates the impression of influence as an intangible force (separate from the individuals and groups that employ it) acting on political leaders and determining the course of events. One way to avoid this trap is to focus

⁵⁶ Arthur Marwick, The Nature of History (London, 1989), pp.186-87.

⁵⁷ Bernard Cohen, "The Relationship Between Public Opinion and Foreign Policy Makers," in Public Opinion and Historians, ed. Melvin Small (Detroit, 1970), p.68.

on the key issue of how opinion and influence is transmitted.⁵⁸ In other words, close scrutiny of the news media-government relationship is needed to determine the extent to which decision-making integrates "public opinion" into its considerations.⁵⁹

During Chamberlain's rule as Prime Minister Britain's most prestigious newspaper, The Times, played a central role in promoting appeasement. Repeatedly it invoked the will of "public opinion" to justify Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's continued appeasement of Nazi Germany. In order to understand better how Britain's most prestigious newspaper interpreted "public opinion" a clearer conceptual framework for that term, and how it relates to the foreign policy making process, is necessary. According to Curtis MacDougall, the power of "public opinion" derives as much from belief in its potency as from reality. Moulders of "public opinion" try to convince whoever it is who counts in the particular instance that reward or punishment lies in a certain direction. These forces of influence try to create the impression that they speak for many others, often for the people as a whole. Those who accept such ideas succumb not to "public opinion" but to its myth.⁶⁰ Newspapers frequently indicate in news reports and editorials how mighty a social force they consider "public opinion," misreading expressions of opinion by segments of the population with "public opinion" as a whole. When news sources create images of a united national polity for what is in fact pressure exerted by an influential person or group they are diverting attention from reality. In fact, MacDougall asserts, "public opinion" is usually more the result than the cause of other social and political forces, though his

⁵⁸ James Rosenau, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy (New York, 1961), pp.6-18.

⁵⁹ Colin Seymour-Uri, The Press, Politics and the Public (London, 1968), pp.285-309; also, Virginia Berridge, "Content Analysis and Historical Research on Newspapers," in The Press in English Society, eds. Michael Harris and Alan Lee (London, 1986), pp.203-207.

⁶⁰ Curtis MacDougall, Understanding Public Opinion, pp.16-26,560: "public opinion" is not essentially rational but based on attitudes which are in turn based on emotions, prejudices, stereotypes, etc. "In many if not most cases involving government, even in a democracy, the role of public opinion is restricted to approval or disapproval of a *fait accompli*."

evidence for this is largely anecdotal, not empirical.⁶¹

Bernard Cohen also is critical of writers who attribute a mysterious power to "public opinion" in specific cases to explain government policy. He says of such approaches:

"[T]hey are part of the folklore of our time, a central element in the explanation of the vast tragedies that have swept the world in this century. Folly on so grand a scale needs to have its source in some ultimate authority; and in our secular democracy, 'public opinion' has replaced the Gods or the Fates or the Kings as that authority."⁶²

Cohen suggests that studies of foreign policy making establishments in the twentieth century reveal them to have been under very few "public opinion" constraints. It is sometimes argued that "public opinion" is powerful, but at the edges of policy rather than at the center. That is, it sets the boundaries within which foreign policy operates. But Cohen contends this notion is false because the boundaries of policy are unknowable and undefinable. They only become defined by the things policy makers have done or chose not to do. Policy makers themselves have encouraged belief in the power of "public opinion" and for that reason the idea ought to be viewed with scepticism. Most official government references to the power of the "public" are ritualistic and not seen by officials as in fact tying their hands.⁶³ Another political scientist contends that "the bogey of 'public opinion,' frequently made synonymous with the press (but probably less by diplomats than by historians) was dragged as a herring across the trail when policies already had been determined."⁶⁴ Historians of appeasement, then, need to make conscious effort to separate themselves from such unedifying practices when assessing "public opinion" and its impact upon Britain's political leadership.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp.,26-28,564-65.

⁶² Bernard C. Cohen, "The Relationship Between Public Opinion and Foreign Policy Makers," pp.68-69.

⁶³ Ibid., pp.75-79.

⁶⁴ Richard Heindel, "British Diplomats and the Press," Public Opinion Quarterly 2 (July 1938), pp.435,436-41.

Unfortunately, recent historical research of the 1930s has not been immune to the "public opinion" fallacy. In his survey of Britain's weekly press from the 1930s, Benny Morris asserts that such publications furnish a good guide to Britain's "public opinion."⁶⁵ Thus do journalistic fallacies become historical ones. Nonetheless, the tools of editorializing which makes the press a force in the historical process also makes it deserving of the historian's attention.⁶⁶ The rapid availability of this form of primary source material has prompted many scholars to take up the challenge of negotiating the slippery slopes of "public opinion" and the press. Franklin Gannon maintains that British attitudes were fully expressed in the major London-based national publications.⁶⁷ Perhaps a comprehensive survey of newspapers as he has conducted can detect the myriad aspects of British "public opinion." But given the extent to which press ownership has historically been confined to a handful of magnates, and considering the tight content control held by powerful editors, Gannon's premise is doubtful, or at least overstated.

The opaqueness of "public opinion" is illustrated by starkly contrasting assessments among historians of the popularity of appeasement. For example, William Rock suggests that appeasement enjoyed widespread support because it had broad compatibility with the English frame of mind.⁶⁸ Rita Thalmann, on the other hand, maintains that by 1938 at least the press in Britain reflected the reluctance with which "public opinion" embraced that policy.⁶⁹ Even election results can be misconstrued as "public opinion" on something that may not have been true. For

⁶⁵ Benny Morris, The Roots of Appeasement, p.167.

⁶⁶ Deborah E. Lipstadt, Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust 1933-45 (New York, 1986), p.3.

⁶⁷ Franklin Gannon, The British Press and Germany 1936-39 , pp.21-23,30-31.

⁶⁸ William Rock, British Appeasement in the 1930's, pp.25-29,31-34.

⁶⁹ Rita Thalmann and Emmanuel Feinermann, Crystal Night, trans. Gilles Crimonesi (London, 1974), p.148.

instance, twelve days after Germany left the Geneva Disarmament Conference in 1933, the Labour candidate at East Fulham turned an adverse majority of 14,000 votes into a victory by 5000 votes. Contrary to some assessments, A.J.P. Taylor argues that Labour's success was incorrectly seen by much of the press as a triumph for pacifism when it more likely represented an attack on the government's introduction of a means test to determine eligibility for the dole.⁷⁰ Such discrepancies highlight a major problem with assessing newspapers for the state of "public opinion." In addition, even the most scientific approaches involve using inherently biased weighting rules for format issues; and content analysis cannot always determine what impact articles in newspapers had on their readership.⁷¹

"Public opinion" polls also cannot necessarily be taken as sure determinants of opinion on a particular issue. Even computerized polling techniques have proven flawed in their assessments of what the "public" is thinking or what it is prepared to countenance in the way of government policy. Historians of the 1930s are confronted with the added difficulty of a paucity of polling data, while the information which does exist from the pre-War years is often suspect on account of the experimental nature of poll-taking procedures. These problems aside, statisticians have brought into question the entire process by arguing that the recorded percentages from opinion polls do not necessarily equate to "public opinion" since they merely represent question-response frequency:

"Widely disparate findings may emerge from different polls on a common issue due to the way questions are phrased, the sequence in which questions are asked, and other dimensions of what the statistician refers to as 'nonsampling error' in surveys."⁷²

⁷⁰ A.J.P. Taylor, English History (London, 1965), p.367: Chamberlain, apparently, was not one of those fooled into thinking that the vote was a plebiscite on foreign policy.

⁷¹ Melvin Small, "Historians Look at Public Opinion," p.30.

⁷² Albert Cantril, ed. Polling on the Issues (Cabin John, Md., 1980), pp.6-16.

Further indeterminates in the polling process are inherent in the degree to which the "public" enjoys full and accurate knowledge of an issue. The lack of either variable arising out of government censorship, misinformation, or "public" apathy may considerably distort the findings of poll-takers. In the final analysis, "public opinion" polling must be perceived as an art-science at best.

Despite difficulties in examining "public opinion" and its relationship to foreign policy, assessing The Times for its world view reveals underlying motivations for spearheading the government's appeasement agenda. The Times had not always been an organ of the national ruling authority. In the nineteenth century it led the fight against early government attempts to establish a bureau of "public opinion," adopting editorial guidelines whose stated objective was to inform, instruct, and encourage the British people, which at that time meant the small percentage of the population that was literate. Starting in the 1920's, however, The Times' policy under Geoffrey Dawson was reversed so that "public opinion" became a tool for providing added weight of authority to government initiatives.⁷³

Like other major organs of the press, The Times was Tory in outlook and reflected a Conservative Party which (by the 1920s) was run by local people of wealth and influence who saw as their primary responsibility protecting landed and business interests.⁷⁴ In philosophical outlook, Conservatives in Britain during the 1920s and '30s were heirs to nineteenth century liberalism which believed in the rational and progressive nature of the historical process. Its principles of pragmatism, compromise and reason formed the moral foundation of appeasement.

⁷³ The History of The Times, pp.1015-1019.

⁷⁴ Arthur Marwick, "The British Elite in the Inter-War Years," in Transformation of a Continent, ed. G.L. Weinberg (Chapel Hill, 1975), pp.159-62.

However, the sweep of events in the 1930s soon turned the policy into one compelled by fear and expediency.⁷⁵ Unfortunately, the old rhetoric remained, clouding the ability of the ruling-class elite to comprehend the demons rising out of the ashes of the First World War.

At the heart of The Times' appeasement agenda was hostility to the 1919 Paris Peace Treaty, which it contemptuously referred to as the "shackles of Versailles."⁷⁶ Not surprisingly, The Times delighted in denigrating the League of Nations, which had emerged as the crowning achievement of the Versailles settlement. It steadfastly maintained that the overwhelming body of British "public opinion" opposed using the League to impose sanctions on violators of international law, even after the Peace Ballot suggested otherwise.⁷⁷ In fact, The Times argued that removal of compulsion upon aggressor states "might actually heighten the force of the deterrent."⁷⁸ Just why or how this would occur the paper did not explain. Nor did it justify the allegation that opinion was unanimous on this issue.

Underlying dislike of the League was its association with collective security, which The Times asserted would polarize Europe into hostile alliances inevitably leading to war.⁷⁹ At the same time, collective security was seen as untenable because it would draw Communist Russia into Eastern European affairs. The paper preferred leaving that region to anti-communist Germany on the assumption that no vital British interests were involved in Eastern Europe.⁸⁰ Consequently,

⁷⁵ Benny Morris, The Roots of Appeasement , pp.2-4.

⁷⁶ The Times, January 13, 1938, Leader, p.13.

⁷⁷ Ibid., January 28, 1938, Leader, p.15.

⁷⁸ Ibid., February 11, 1938, Leader, p.15.

⁷⁹ Ibid., April 9, 1938, Leader, p.15.

⁸⁰ Alan Foster, "The Times and Appeasement: The Second Phase," Journal of Contemporary History 16 (1981), pp.442-43: an interesting appraisal of The Times' world view, which led it to seek appeasement with Russia in the late 1940's, for much the same reasons; that is, The Times argued that no vital British interests were reputedly at stake, and in addition, stable representative democracy was not viable east of the Elbe.

Chamberlain was applauded when he labelled a "counsel of despair" calls in Parliament for rapprochement with Russia as a means of strengthening collective security.⁸¹ Ironically, Chamberlain once served as honorary president of the League of Nations Union, which promoted a strong League and collective security as the guardian for less developed countries.⁸² In the late 1930s, however, the Prime Minister distanced himself from any actions which might enhance the League's role in protecting eastern Europe from predatory nations. The Times enthusiastically supported this position at every opportunity. Not until Hitler marched into Prague in March 1939 did it accept that German assurances of peaceful intentions in Eastern Europe could no longer be taken at face value.⁸³

Another reason the newspaper treated Germany so generously in the 1930s stemmed from a conviction (without hard evidence) that concessions to the Nazis would "create greater and wider confidence which would in turn act as an economic stimulant."⁸⁴ These were appealing words in the midst of rising unemployment but completely overlooked mounting evidence of Nazi radicalism in action.⁸⁵ Instead, The Times rosily reported that Anglo-German relations were

⁸¹ The Times, March 25, 1938, Leader, p.15.

⁸² Arthur Marwick, "Middle Opinion in the Thirties: Planning, Progress and Political Agreement," English Historical Review 79 (1964), pp.291-292: he refers to it as "the hollowest of ironies."

⁸³ The History of The Times, p.903; also, Gaines Post, Jr. Dilemmas of Appeasement, pp.219-220: government officials were aware of "public" support for collective security but decided to try and steer it in the direction of Imperial security through means of an education campaign. "But if the public needed educating the Government used a fraudulent method of teaching." It suppressed doubts about the adequacy of rearmament and supported collective security in words while undermining the League in fact. Post suggests this dissembling was due to the fear that telling the truth about international politics would confuse the "public."

⁸⁴ The Times, July 30, 1938, Leader, p.13.

⁸⁵ Andrew Sharf, The British Press and Jews under Nazi Rule (London, 1964), pp.17-19,57-59,72,169-172,193-194: between 1933 and 1938 anti-Semitism in Germany was seen by most of the British press as part of a class conflict rather than a "racial" struggle, and no worse than attacks on other religious groups. The Times tried to mitigate the effects of growing Nazis violence against Jews by differentiating between "official" and "extreme" Nazis, suggesting it was still possible to do business with the former group.

healthy, proof that democracies and dictatorships could work amicably together.⁸⁶ This view was maintained despite the fact that even the most basic human rights were being denied to broad sectors of German society.

The consistently pro-German policy on the editorial pages even ignored The Times' own correspondents who reported, when allowed, on the horrors of anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany.⁸⁷ One editorial maintained that there was "too great a readiness in this country drastically to condemn the National Socialist *Weltanschauung*...." It further expressed admiration for German willingness to subordinate self to the state, and in that way serve one's fellow men.⁸⁸ Instead of criticizing increasingly harsh treatment of Jews The Times praised Hitler's achievements in ridding Germany of its air of defeatism.⁸⁹ Radical Nazi measures which might appear repugnant to British eyes were attributed to extremist fringe elements of the Party.⁹⁰ Reports of Hitler's temporary ban on the luridly anti-Jewish *Stürmer* newspaper prompted an editorial suggesting that since the publication's circulation of 500,000 copies was less due to home or tram-car reading than to distributions in lobbies and waiting rooms it "goes a long way towards absolving the German people from a charge of bad taste."⁹¹ Its response to the mounting refugee crisis in 1938

⁸⁶ The Times, July 25, 1938, Leader, p.15.

⁸⁷ Frank McDonough, "The Times, Norman Ebbut and the Nazis, 1927-37," pp.407-424: for an account of the Berlin correspondent's frustrations with being denied opportunities to report on Nazism's brutality, including the concentration camps.

⁸⁸ The Times, August 9, 1938, Leader, p. 13.

⁸⁹ Franklin Gannon, The British Press and Germany, p.139.

⁹⁰ John Wrench, Geoffrey Dawson and Our Times (London, 1955), p.361; also, Michael Jones, "Reporting on Germany: Historical Perspectives and the Contemporary Situation," German Life and Letters 34 (1981), pp.430-440 for an overview of Press reporting on Germany from 1910-1980. In noting reactions to Neo-Nazis in post-war Germany, Jones states that The Times is at pains to play down the phenomenon, claiming for the most part that they represent an extremist fringe element of German society, and printing extracts (without comment) of official Bonn denials of the significance of these groups' activities.

⁹¹ The Times, January 24, 1938, Leader, p.12.

was less than sympathetic:

"It may of course be argued that with years of persecution and wandering behind them the members of this race are most easily able to adapt themselves to existence in countries in which they are settled."⁹²

Insensitivity to the plight of helpless people fleeing their tormentors also played a role in the paper's consideration of Czechoslovakia's viability. Though these expressions bear the unmistakable imprint of Geoffrey Dawson, he was certainly not alone in maintaining them.⁹³

In order to understand better this tendency in news coverage it is essential to scrutinize more closely the key personalities at The Times. In 1922, the death of the proprietor, Lord Northcliffe, resulted in a fundamental re-direction of policy by the new owners, Lord Astor and the American John Walter. Chief Editor Wickam Steed, an ardent advocate of closer continental ties and support for the fledgling Czech democracy, was dismissed and replaced with Geoffrey Dawson.⁹⁴ Through the personal intercession of his mentor Lord Milner (a man of strong pro-German and Imperialist leanings), Dawson secured a guarantee from the new owners that he would have complete control over the newspaper's content.⁹⁵ It was this power base which allowed him to play such a significant political role in the next two decades.

Within five years Dawson was one of the half-dozen most influential men in Britain. A.L.

⁹² Ibid., July 27, 1938, Leader, p.15.

⁹³ Richard Griffiths, Fellow Travellers on the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany (London, 1980), pp.10,112-114,150-154: he gives an accounting of the most prominent Britons with pro-fascist sentiment, including some whose attraction to Nazism was based on anti-Semitic proclivities; prominent names from Fleet Street and London high society are well represented, several of whom (Noel-Buxton, Lord Lothian) Dawson gave plenty of opportunity through The Times to disseminate their views of Hitler the visionary.

⁹⁴ Klemens von Klemperer, ed., A Noble Combat: The Letters of Sheila Grant Duff and Adam von Trott zu Solz 1932-1939 (Oxford, 1988), p.309: regarding democracy in Czechoslovakia, Duff wrote that in Bohemia democracy was vigorous and the people serious about politics, whereas in London "it is a game of self-advancement....[British politicians] don't believe in anything - that is what is so terrible - and when I say that Liberty is worth fighting for and an idea worth more than any other the world fights and dies for today, they say that is high faluting."

⁹⁵ The History of The Times, pp.775, 793-795.

Rowse, a historian and former colleague of Dawson's at Oxford described him as an empiricist with no principles. He didn't like people who posed serious, pointed questions or those lacking a hereditary sense of tact. He was unwilling to inform himself of European affairs yet attempted to influence their direction due to his "superciliousness, a lofty smugness, as well as superficiality of mind."⁹⁶ A graduate of Lord Milner's "kindergarten" in South Africa, where he also developed his skills as a newspaper writer for the Johannesburg Star, he was supremely confident and self-righteous.⁹⁷ Such character traits eventually led him to turn The Times into a propaganda sheet full of distortions.⁹⁸

Dawson moved in very narrow circles yet took the views expressed in them to represent average British "public opinion."⁹⁹ Though in previous years The Times had touted itself an impartial opinion leader, under Dawson it echoed views of the small ruling Tory clique. When leading liberals wrote to The Times supporting a campaign for a broad-based, truly national government, Dawson refused to publish any of their letters. He also refused to publish letters accusing The Times of censoring opinion.¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, he solicited letters from prominent members of the clergy whom he found useful as allies in encouraging appeasement, driving both anti-appeasers and anti-Nazi Germans to despair.¹⁰¹ So thoroughly did the chief

⁹⁶ A.L. Rowse, Appeasement, p.30.

⁹⁷ Maurice Cowling, The Impact of Hitler, p.128; a good account of Geoffrey Dawson's earlier years before he assumed charge of The Times for his "second innings" is John Wrench, Geoffrey Dawson and Our Times.

⁹⁸ A.J.P. Taylor, English History, pp.417-18.

⁹⁹ A.L. Rowse, Appeasement, pp.30-32.

¹⁰⁰ Charles Mowat, Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940 (London, 1959), pp.534-37,641.

¹⁰¹ Catherine Cline, "Ecumenism and Appeasement: The Bishops of the Church of England and the Treaty of Versailles," Journal of Modern History 61 (1989), p.700; also, Sidney Aster, ed., A.P. Young: The 'X' Documents (London, 1974), pp.60-63: Goerdeler's resistance movement was horrified over the Bishop of Gloucester's letter to The Times on July 14, 1938 criticizing notions of religious oppression in Germany; see John Conway, The Nazi Persecution of the Churches 1933-45 (Toronto, 1968) for an excellent depiction of this issue.

editor oversee the flow of information entering the newspaper that Lord Beaverbrook commented in early 1939: "[N]ever has Dawson's skill as a propagandist been shown to better advantage than during the past twelve months."¹⁰² In that task, he had the enthusiastic support of Deputy Editor, Barrington-Ward.¹⁰³

Both editors kept very tight control of the newspaper's pro-appeasement slant even after a good many of the correspondents and staff had turned against it. For instance, prior to Ebbut's expulsion from Germany, Dawson did his utmost to keep the reporter's more revealing comments on Nazi excesses and brutalities out of the paper so as not to offend German susceptibilities. Evidence for this comes not only from reporters in daily touch with Ebbut, but also from Dawson's personal correspondence.¹⁰⁴ Basil Liddell Hart, The Times' military correspondent also chafed at the paper's editorial policy, despite his agreement with Dawson on the need for limited continental commitments and defensive rearmament.¹⁰⁵ By the late 1930s The Times became rife with dissent but maintained an outward display of unity. In this respect, it was a microcosm for what was happening on a national level.¹⁰⁶

The most prominent arena for the national debate on foreign policy was, naturally, the House of Commons. Parliament in the 1930s reflected the social upheaval caused by the First World War in which one quarter of all men between 20 and 45 years of age became casualties.

¹⁰² John Wrench, Geoffrey Dawson and Our Times p.387; also, A.J.P. Taylor, Beaverbrook (London, 1972), pp.364-365; also, A.J.P. Taylor, English History, pp.417-418..

¹⁰³ For a sympathetic look at Barrington-Ward see Donald Mclachlan, In The Chair (London,1971), pp.101-02: he suggests that B.-W.'s support of appeasement, "Britain's only realistic foreign policy," was masterly journalism; contra A.L. Rowse, Appeasement, pp.57-58 for an unflattering portrayal of B.-W.'s "morality without distinction."

¹⁰⁴ The History of The Times, pp.907-908,916-920,1003; also, William Shirer, The Rise and Fall of The Third Reich (Greenwich, 1960), p.396; and Frank McDonough, "The Times, Norman Ebbut, and the Nazis," pp.415-417.

¹⁰⁵ Brian Bond, Liddell Hart, pp.88-91.

¹⁰⁶ Richard Cockett, Twilight of Truth, p.65.

This "lost generation" led to the rise of businessmen-politicians, encouraged by the prestige industry had acquired in the war of machines and industrial systems. These new politicians had been, for the most part, too old in 1914 to engage in active military service. Nonetheless, their views were profoundly shaped by the Great War which so dramatically altered nearly every facet of British society and culture. The Conservative Party saw an influx of mostly local businessmen possessing limited experience in national and foreign affairs.¹⁰⁷ Probably the fastest rising star was Neville Chamberlain, who went from Member of Parliament in 1918 to Privy Counsellor and Chancellor of the Exchequer by 1923.¹⁰⁸ Chamberlain also lacked practical experience in foreign policy matters, though he undoubtedly acquired some appreciation for the subject from his father, Joseph, who enjoyed national prominence in the 1880s. One of his biographers wrote that "Neville was almost inescapably drawn into the 'big issues' of the day."¹⁰⁹ In the mid-1930s his energy, and Stanley Baldwin's inertia, allowed Chamberlain virtually to assume command of running the government. Despite his aloofness, Chamberlain achieved great control over governmental affairs due largely to his adroit handling of the press. He was reputedly the most effective Prime Minister at managing his press image.¹¹⁰ But Telford Taylor notes that Chamberlain's diary and letters to his sisters reveal "a pent-up tide of self-confidence and arrogance that boded no good for those, friend or foe, who stood out against him."¹¹¹ Though his brother Austen once said, "Neville, you know nothing about foreign affairs," as Prime Minister

¹⁰⁷ Arthur Marwick, "The British Elite," pp. 153-55, 156.

¹⁰⁸ Keith Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain, pp. 63-75.

¹⁰⁹ William Rock, Neville Chamberlain, pp. 21-23.

¹¹⁰ Robert Shepherd, A Class Divided, p. 111.

¹¹¹ Telford Taylor, Munich, p. 549.

he insisted on being his own foreign minister.¹¹² At heart he was an autocrat who took to manipulating the press into supporting his single-minded policy of appeasement.¹¹³ This partially explains how Chamberlain could translate Hitler's vitriolic attacks on the foreign press into calls in Parliament for greater media restraint and cooperation with government.¹¹⁴ Not only did The Times fail to condemn this political intrusion into the sanctity of Britain's hallowed freedom of speech, it used the occasion of Chamberlain's appeal to praise the Prime Minister for tolerating "as no dictator would" attacks in the press concerning his indecisiveness when confronted with sudden crises.¹¹⁵

Chamberlain was nonetheless very effective at using the machinery of government information services in conjunction with the press to guide and control expressions of "public opinion." In effect, the government engaged in covert censorship of news emanating from #10 Downing Street and the Foreign Office.¹¹⁶ At the same time, Parliamentary expressions of "public opinion" were managed or suppressed by keeping the House of Commons in recess throughout much of 1938, including virtually the entire month of September. The Prime Minister persisted in this practice despite vigorous protests from Labour leader Clement Attlee and some of Chamberlain's own Conservative backbenchers.

In order to disguise strong opposition to appeasement in the Foreign Office, Chamberlain "promoted" Sir Robert Vansittart to the symbolic post of Chief Diplomatic Adviser because he correctly suspected the experienced official of leaking information to the press. Vansittart did not

¹¹² Ibid., p.553.

¹¹³ Richard Cockett, Twilight of Truth, p.16.

¹¹⁴ Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th Series, 332 (1938-39), col.746.

¹¹⁵ The Times, March 21, 1938, Leader, p.13.

¹¹⁶ Anthony Adamthwaite, "The British Government and the Media, 1937-38," pp.281-88.

disguise his strong anti-German outlook and Chamberlain was determined not to allow such sentiments to prevail in his administration. He feared this would destroy his credibility as an impartial mediator of disputes on the continent. For similar reasons, the Prime Minister isolated another high-level civil servant, Sir Reginald Leeper, because of his avowed anti-appeasement views. It was Leeper who provided Iverach McDonald, The Times' diplomatic correspondent, access to ambassadorial dispatches, memorandums and official papers for private guidance. In addition, he routinely released information to a select group of correspondents in "unattributable briefings." However, Chamberlain's reshuffle at the Foreign Office caused information hostile to the government's foreign policy to dry up rapidly.¹¹⁷ At the same time, the Prime Minister employed cabinet ministers to meet with proprietors and editors of newspapers to cajole them into acts of self-censorship. So effective was he in stifling dissenting voices within the government and press that diplomatic correspondents from the most prestigious newspapers in London started their own underground publication in an attempt to counteract one-sided news releases emanating from Downing Street.¹¹⁸

These instances of manipulation and control of "public opinion" suggest Chamberlain's foreign policy was not shaped in any meaningful way by a critical press or strong pacifist sentiment. In fact, Chamberlain most often justified his foreign policy on moral or economic grounds, not on the state of "public opinion" or inadequacies in British armaments. In other words, concession or resistance were decided on for their own sake.¹¹⁹ Granted, Conservative and

¹¹⁷ Richard Cockett, "The Foreign Office News Department and the Struggle Against Appeasement," Historical Research 63 (1990), pp.73-78,81; also, Zara Steiner,ed., The Times Survey of Foreign Ministers of the World (London, 1982), pp.554-563: between 1937 and 1940 the Foreign Office lost power to the executive branch due to the Chamberlain-Vansittart clash, the rise of the Treasury in influencing foreign policy, and the tendency of Halifax and other Cabinet members to yield to Chamberlain on questions of foreign policy.

¹¹⁸ Richard Cockett, "The Foreign Office News Department and Struggle Against Appeasement," p.85.

¹¹⁹ A.J.P. Taylor, English History, p.409.

Opposition M.P.'s alike expressed doubt that "public opinion" would tolerate an arms buildup, or even the imposing of sanctions against truculent dictators.¹²⁰ Nonetheless, the government never attempted to test "public opinion" on these issues by setting out clearly the conditions under which Britain would be forced to resist foreign aggression. Robert McCallum suggests that had it done so the population would likely have rallied behind its political leadership.¹²¹ That, after all, is what happened briefly in September 1938, and again in the summer of 1939. In contrast, the Peace Ballot is frequently cited as evidence of "public" desire to avoid foreign entanglements and a costly rearmament program. However, the plebiscite reveals a huge majority of citizens polled favoured both economic and military sanctions against transgressor nations.¹²² Even after Munich, when Chamberlain acknowledged that "public opinion" demanded an escalation in the pace of rearmament little was done for months to facilitate that process.¹²³ Thus, Maurice Cowling's assertion that Dawson was the driving force behind Chamberlain's appeasement policy is brought into question here by the fact that The Times joined in the chorus of voices calling for rearmament after Munich, but to little avail.

Though a fervent advocate of rearmament in the 1930s, Churchill shares responsibility for Britain's military unpreparedness, despite the rather tactical assertions to the contrary in his memoirs. It was he who made the unfortunate decision in the mid-1920s (when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer) to float on a daily basis the Ten Year Rule concerning defence

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp.387-88.

¹²¹ Robert McCallum, Public Opinion and the Last Peace (London, 1944), pp.180-81.

¹²² Ibid., p.188; also, Harold Nicolson, "British Public Opinion and Foreign Policy," Public Opinion Quarterly 1 (1937), pp.53-63: balloting totals in favour of economic sanctions were 10 million to 600,000. Military sanctions were favoured by 6.7 million to 2.3 million, but Nicolson speculates the Ballot represented what the British "public" wished might happen, not what it was willing to do.

¹²³ Robert McCallum, Public Opinion and the Last Peace, p.188; also, Telford Taylor, Munich, pp.958-997.

procurements.¹²⁴ Churchill was also highly ambivalent about Hitler's ambitions, at times praising his Nazi form of government and other times warning of the menace from a resurgent Germany. However, he was consistent in his determined fight for a more energetic British rearmament program on the sound premise that if the highly irrational Hitler should turn hostile to Britain and its interests, the Empire must be ready to respond with force. Though his figures on German rearmament were often over-stated, he recognized better than most people the slipping away of Britain's lead in armed mechanization. But he failed miserably to rally Conservative Party benchers to his cause, largely because of eccentric and unrealistic stands taken on other issues. Chamberlain also disagreed with Churchill's inflated view of the Empire's strength and doubted that a show of solidarity would deter Hitler. In fact, the Prime Minister was not interested in dealing with Europe's problems from the strategic angle at all. He had very different priorities in his attempt to retain British power and influence in the world. In the important positions he occupied during the 1930s Chamberlain was able to make his views prevail over those of Churchill. Through most of Chamberlain's tenure in office The Times trumpeted his cause, while largely ignoring Churchill's demands for a tougher foreign policy towards Germany.

As Chancellor of the Exchequer, Chamberlain had presided over the lowest defence budget estimates in the interwar years.¹²⁵ As Prime Minister, he led the attack against arming a continental contingent on grounds that the Army was needed for Imperial defence.¹²⁶ Consequently, Chamberlain concluded that continental commitments had to be kept to a minimum

¹²⁴ Brian Bond, British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars, pp.24-25,33: the Ten Year Rule was based on the premise that no war could be expected for the next 10 years.

¹²⁵ Robert McCallum, Public Opinion and the Last Peace, p.139.

¹²⁶ Brian Bond, British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars, p.161.

and would-be enemies appeased.¹²⁷ But Peden maintains that the defence of the Empire did not significantly deplete British military resources for Europe. Of 37 new air squadrons created after 1934, 33 went to home defence and only 4 to Imperial defence. Instead of a handicap, as proponents of appeasement suggested, the Empire was a potential source of manpower and raw materials.¹²⁸ British military strategists at all times considered the United Kingdom to be the heart of the Empire and deserving top priority for armaments. In addition, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada were all supportive of Britain if it came to war. However, the Czech crisis revealed Chamberlain's disinterest in the opinion of Dominion governments about his foreign policy stance.¹²⁹ The Times, however, repeatedly propounded an unwillingness in the Dominions to fight a war in 1938 over Czechoslovakia.¹³⁰ "Public opinion" in the Dominions was unanimous, it said, in opposition to Britain's involvement in war for the sake of the Czechs.

In terms of the debate over rearmament and military strategy The Times ostensibly derived its views from its military correspondent. In the 1920s Liddell Hart had teamed with the brilliant military strategist J.C. Fuller to propose a radical new form of mobile, armoured warfare spearheading fast-moving offensives.¹³¹ Ironically, by 1938 Liddell Hart was advocating the primacy of defensive strategies, anachronistically suggesting that training in counteroffensive measures was unnecessary. His series of articles in June and August 1938 argued for priority to

¹²⁷ G.C. Peden, "The Burden of Imperial Defence and the Continental Commitment Reconsidered," The Historical Journal, 27 (1984), p.406.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.406-409.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.417; contra Nicholas Mansergh, Survey of Commonwealth Affairs, pp.72-73,80-84,131-133,439-446: he contends Dominion isolationism and hostility toward continental commitments. But Mansergh deals mostly with Dominion opinion before the Czech crisis and does not refute indications that the commonwealth would have stood by Britain if it had come to war in 1938. In fact, the Dominions relied heavily on Britain's Foreign Office for information and guidance.

¹³⁰ Telford Taylor, Munich, pp.733-740,816-832,992.

¹³¹ Brian Bond, British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars, p.129.

air defence and caused an outpouring of letters to the editor for weeks afterwards, which at least suggests that a good many Britons at that time were terribly concerned over inadequacies in the rearmament program.¹³² By late 1938, however, Liddell Hart was having doubts about limited liability in light of developments on the continent. The strain this put on his relationship with Dawson led to his sudden resignation. Nonetheless, Dawson continued to publish previously written articles from his former correspondent well into 1939, indicative of his penchant for deceptive editing.¹³³ Possibly, he wanted to encourage Chamberlain and pro-appeasement forces to retain the "no-guarantees" approach to Eastern Europe despite a rapidly deteriorating international situation.

Thus, it is apparent that Dawson invoked "public opinion" frequently to bolster the Prime Minister in his pursuit of appeasement. At times the newspaper accorded "public opinion" the highest status as final arbiter of government policy. But most of the time it used the concept arbitrarily, to cloak in moral righteousness a policy whose principal virtues lay in short-term expediency and narrow self-interest. In doing so, The Times and its chief editor Geoffrey Dawson fell into close collaboration with government authorities, distorting its analysis of "public opinion" in order to comport with increasingly unrealistic foreign policy objectives rather than acting as watchdog of the government and protector of the national interest. This abdication of responsible leadership by the country's premier news source contributed to the disastrous delay and confusion surrounding "public" reaction to the dangers confronting the nation from Hitler's Germany. In this context, the notion that "public opinion" was too divided to countenance bolder

¹³² The articles appeared in The Times, June 10, 1938, pp.15-16; June 17, 1938, p.17; August 26, 1938, p.16 and August 27, 1938, p.16.

¹³³ Brian Bond, Liddell Hart, pp.88-91,119; for a perspective more sympathetic to Dawson see Oliver Woods and James Bishop, The Story of the Times (London, 1985), pp.301-303 explaining Liddell Hart's decision to leave the newspaper.

policies in foreign affairs is misleading. It was the very lack of direction in terms of educating the "public" to the perils of Nazism which contributed to confusion within the national polity.

CHAPTER III

MUNICH: THE APOGEE OF APPEASEMENT

An overview of The Times' pro-appeasement stance in the 1920s and 30s indicated a rigidly focused editorial policy relating to rapprochement in Europe and rearmament in Britain. It also revealed Geoffrey Dawson's proclivity towards a policy of distortion concerning "public opinion." However, the importance of European developments following Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax's foray to Hitler's lair in November 1937 up to the outbreak of war in 1939 necessitates more detailed scrutiny of the newspaper's approach to "public opinion" in that time period. It reveals Geoffrey Dawson and the editorial staff to be increasingly strident in their rationalizations of a policy rapidly becoming untenable in light of its negative impact on Nazi expansionists. The harder and further Hitler pushed the more fallacious became the arguments presented in The Times' leaders to justify Chamberlain's attempts at removing impediments to bilateral negotiations and rapprochement with Germany. In fact, Maurice Cowling argues that Chamberlain had to strive hard to convince Dawson he was moving fast enough towards detente with Hitler's Germany:

"Dawson thought of The Times (rightly) as a world power: his journalism up to a point was tactical. The object, on The Times no less than with Eden, was to lead Hitler towards a settlement."¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Maurice Cowling, The Impact of Hitler, pp.128-133.

Deputy Editor Barrington-Ward agreed with Dawson that the road to peace lay through Berlin, not Geneva, since the League of Nations was perceived as no guarantee against aggression from belligerent states.¹³⁵

As a result, both editors put considerable effort into discrediting those who advocated support for the League of Nations. The opinion of many League supporters was that it stood for collective security, and in that capacity represented the last best chance of stemming the tide of fascism before it overran all of Europe.¹³⁶ But in a New Year's Message to the nation at the start of 1938 Chamberlain reiterated his opposition to dividing the democracies and dictatorships into hostile camps, implying this would result if the League continued to pursue sanctions against aggressor nations. Instead, he called for moderation and trust.¹³⁷ Two weeks later The Times printed an editorial captioned "Democracy and the League," which attacked efforts to form League alliances or employ sanctions of any kind, suggesting that coercive measures were counterproductive. It then invoked the "public will of democratic peoples" not to refuse accommodation with other powers merely because they were undemocratic.¹³⁸ This tactic of arrogating the will of the people to the defence of appeasement was a common theme in both Chamberlain's speeches and The Times' editorials throughout 1938.

In early March Chamberlain further undermined League credibility by asserting it could not secure any country's peace. The Times added in its followup leader that this necessitated negotiations with the dictators, a policy which it maintained "the great majority" of the nation

¹³⁵ Ibid., p.132.

¹³⁶ A.L. Rowse, Appeasement, p.14.

¹³⁷ The Times Weekly Edition, January 6, 1938, p.11.

¹³⁸ The Times, January 25, 1938, Leader, p.13.

supported.¹³⁹ But if this was true, Dawson engaged in overkill when he devoted one and a half columns to sarcastic invective against those Opposition M.P.'s who challenged the government's policy of sacrificing the League and surrendering to fascism. In highly partisan tones, The Times heaped ridicule on all those who opposed resuming negotiations with Hitler barely three weeks after the *Anschluss* of Austria.¹⁴⁰ Earlier, the newspaper even called for an end to debates in Parliament on foreign policy issues because they "proved to be quite superfluous last year" and were filled, according to the editorial, with pedantic interruptions.¹⁴¹ Thus, with opposition to the government's foreign policy rapidly swept aside by airy phraseology, active appeasement could swing into high gear.

In order to facilitate this process, The Times downplayed Hitler's diplomatic and press disinformation campaigns designed to discredit the governments of neighboring Austria and Czechoslovakia. It was probably not coincidental that the German press launched into tirades against so-called oppressed Germans beyond the Reich's borders at the very moment that dissension in the military ranks over Hitler's handling of the Blomberg scandal gave rise to rumours of a coup.¹⁴² The Times' editors, who knew from their Vienna correspondent the true nature of Hitler's "diplomatic offensive" on Austria in February and March, made no effort to include that information in either the correspondent's reports or in editorials on the developing

¹³⁹ Ibid., March 3, 1938, Leader, p. 17; also, Sheila Grant Duff, Europe and the Czechs (Penguin Books, 1938), p.187: Chamberlain said: "What country in Europe today if threatened by a larger one, can rely upon the League to give it protection. None." He knew what of he spoke, as few statesmen had done more to make that situation a reality than himself.

¹⁴⁰ The Times, April 5, 1938, Leader, p.17.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., February 1, 1938, Leader, p.15.

¹⁴² Ibid., February 2, 1938, Berlin, p.8: the correspondent in Berlin usually reported Nazi party and government press releases without comment on their veracity; however, in this dispatch it was suggested that Hitler's reshuffle of the top military brass and his appointment of radical Nazis Himmler and Ley to cabinet positions was a "tactful move," an editorial comment out of context to the purely factual statements given elsewhere in this and other dispatches.

crisis. The paper claimed instead that it could "easily be imagined" how better relations between Rome and London would follow from Hitler's actions towards Austria.¹⁴³ Two days later Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden angrily resigned from the Cabinet, frustrated over Chamberlain's intention to continue negotiations with the dictators (especially Mussolini whom he saw as the greater danger) despite their failure to reciprocate British gestures of good faith. The Times attributed the falling-out to a mere clash of personalities, and not evidence of any fundamental foreign policy differences between them.¹⁴⁴ Dawson further derided as "lunatic and crank" plans by a pro-League organization to hold a test ballot on Eden's resignation.¹⁴⁵ Nonetheless, a March survey by the British Institute of Public Opinion found 71% of those questioned felt Eden correct in resigning, 58% opposed Chamberlain's foreign policy stand, while only 43% were against giving assistance to Czechoslovakia.¹⁴⁶ This suggests the existence of a semblance of "public opinion" in favour of resisting Nazi aggression which the government could have built upon had it been so inclined. But this would have meant abandoning or radically revising the Prime Minister's set agenda. Already in the spring of 1938 Chamberlain decided that British policy must be to accept virtually any solution to the Austrian and Sudetenland issues which would avoid war, including the cession of territory to Germany. He did not waver from that policy in the months ahead, despite dramatic new developments which cast serious doubt over Hitler's ability to be appeased. In order to ensure Germany got the message that Britain was amenable to status

¹⁴³ Ibid., February 21, 1938, Rome, p.8; also, William Shirer, The Rise and Fall of The Third Reich, pp.467-470: a first-hand account of The Times' cover-up of information pertaining to Hitler's haranguing of Schuschnigg at Berchtesgaden. At the time of the *Anschluss*, Shirer was a reporter stationed in Vienna and personally informed of the content of The Times' correspondent's dispatches to London.

¹⁴⁴ The Times, February 23, 1938, Leader, p.15.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., March 10, 1938, Leader, p.15, which was acidly titled "The Council of Faction."

¹⁴⁶ Anthony Adamthwaite, "The British Government and the Media," pp.288,291-92.

quo revisions, the Prime Minister's Office conveyed confidential opinions and information to German Ambassador von Dirksen in several "informal" discussions.¹⁴⁷

In March 1938, while the British government and The Times concentrated on addressing Nazi allegations of Czech "atrocities" and denials of self-determination to Sudeten Germans, Hitler suddenly marched into Austria, thwarting a plebiscite on that nation's political independence. The Times immediately announced "undoubtedly spontaneous" celebrations of Hitler's arrival in Vienna, even though there was much evidence from its own reporter on the scene of contrivance by fifth columnists.¹⁴⁸ Other journalists in Austria also flooded Britain with harrowing accounts of relentless manhunts. The usually well-informed author and journalist Sheila Grant Duff (who had many friends and contacts in Germany and Czechoslovakia) arrived in Vienna on March 12th, one day after the *Anschluss*, to witness a tragic spectacle:

"In fear, all countries are shutting their frontiers so that the hunted are like rabbits in a warren, nets on all the holes and ferrets sent in."

Back in London three weeks later, Duff noted in a letter to her German friend, Adam von Trott zu Solz, (whom she was beginning to suspect of Nazi sympathies):

"Opinion here is hardening except in the Government which is ruled by all your friends - Lothian, Lady Astor. Low calls them the Shiver Sisters and they are attacked everywhere but nonetheless are very powerful and have great influence."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Documents on German Foreign Policy, v.2, Series D, Germany and Czechoslovakia, 1937-1938, #14, p.31: on November 9, 1937 the German Ambassador reported that the British were "extremely ready" to support Sudeten autonomy; #149, pp.261-262: on May 7, 1938 Henderson intimated to the German Foreign Ministry that the British government was highly sympathetic towards the Karlsbad Demands; #184, pp.311-313: on May 21st Henderson asked for German patience as "he was certain that all would end well and that Germany would win all along the line;" #244, pp.390-395: on June 8th Dirksen declared British advice was "Don't shoot Czechoslovakia, strangle her;" #247, pp.399-401: on June 9th two unidentified Times' staff members questioned why Germany was only demanding autonomy for the Sudeten Germans since it was obvious to them that border revisions were necessary. Chamberlain's failure to disavow The Times' leader calling for a plebiscite on cession was deemed significant.

¹⁴⁸ The Times, March 15, 1938, Leader, p.15; and Vienna Correspondent, p.13.

¹⁴⁹ Klemens von Klemperer, ed., A Noble Combat, pp.301-303: von Trott later gained prominence as member of an anti-Nazi group in Germany. In the wake of Stauffenberg's assassination attempt on Hitler, von Trott was executed. For an interesting look at him and other resistance movements in Nazi Germany, see F.R. Nicosia and L.D. Stokes, eds., Germans Against Nazism: Nonconformity, Opposition and Resistance in the Third Reich (Oxford, 1990).

In contrast, The Times stated that the Prime Minister had shown strength by refusing to act hastily, as "public opinion in all free countries takes time for its formation, and it will take time here."¹⁵⁰ However, just a few weeks later it boldly asserted that "[a]part from the methods by which it was accomplished there has never been any public feeling in England against the union of Austria and Germany."¹⁵¹ Thus, at the hands of a determined editorial staff, "public opinion" proved a malleable property indeed.

When Hitler turned his attention fully to Czechoslovakia in May 1938, he employed the same methods used to initiate earlier acts of aggression. Once again the old charges of Versailles injustices were vigorously proclaimed by the German press. In reporting these assertions from Germany The Times adopted a double standard, making no comment on the abusively anti-Czech diatribes in the German papers (other than to print them) while condescendingly praising the Czech government's expulsion of German expatriates (mostly Social Democrats and Communists) who had been publishing anti-Nazi newspapers in Prague and the Sudeten region. The Times suggested that this "get-tough" policy would assure improved German-Czech relations.¹⁵² At the same time, editorials consistently portrayed Germany as right and Versailles as wrong concerning claims to self-determination for Sudeten Germans. The paper suggested "it has been held as axiomatic truth by every student of Europe that there can be no peace without revision of 1919."¹⁵³ Chamberlain also was convinced of these "axiomatic truths," and consequently put continuous pressure on the Czech government to make concessions to the Sudeten German Party led by Konrad Henlein. However, the Prime Minister continued to maintain in Parliament and

¹⁵⁰ The Times, March 19, 1938, Leader, p.13.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, April 11, 1938, Leader, p.13.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, January 1, 1938, "German Emigres in Czechoslovakia," p.14.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, September 23, 1938, Leader, p.13.

the press that his administration was only attempting to act as a neutral go-between. Such pretence of impartiality was also maintained in regards to Lord Runciman's mission in July and August 1938. Chamberlain asserted that the emissary was not under the direct authority of the Foreign Office, when in fact Lord Runciman sent and received communiques regularly from the British Embassy in Prague.¹⁵⁴

Despite the government's determination to seek a reconciliation with Germany on the basis of appeasement, there was evidence of growing support in Britain for resisting Hitler's bellicose threats to the integrity of Czechoslovakia. The Times acknowledged as much in June 1938, admitting that previous elections had shown strong support among the British electorate for collective security, which if applied to eastern Europe would necessitate support of Czechoslovakia's integrity as a nation. But this did not mean, said The Times, "barren immobility in international relationships."¹⁵⁵ Instead, the editorials observed that government and people were united in wanting to maintain peace, even if it meant revision of the status quo.¹⁵⁶ The paper stated that it was "useless to suppose that the world can be encased forever in an unchangeable mold."¹⁵⁷ By couching arguments in such terms, the editorials steered debate away from Czech concessions to Sudeten Germans towards the more radical solution of carving up Bohemia and Moravia.¹⁵⁸ In this manner, Dawson helped to undermine the entire foundation of the post-war

¹⁵⁴ Sheila Grant Duff, Europe and the Czechs, p.194; also, Sidney Aster, ed., A.P. Young: The 'X' Documents, pp.50-59: Nazi resister Carl Goerdeler met frequently from July to September with British industrialists acting as Vansittart contacts. He reiterated most forcefully that Runciman's mission was doomed because Hitler was already decided on war, though his generals were opposed to it. He also profiled Hitler's personality, calling him a criminal who thought himself God, and capable of maintaining two distinctly different personas.

¹⁵⁵ The Times, June 13, 1938, Leader, p.15.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., May 6, 1938, Leader, p.15.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., May 30, 1938, Leader, p.15.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., June 1, 1938, Leader, p.13.

Czechoslovak state, based as it was on The Treaties of Versailles and Trianon.¹⁵⁹ Certainly the Nazi government took note of this inclination in influential British circles to consider incorporation of more territory into the Greater German Reich.

Without question Versailles was an ambitious peace accord with many compromises certain not to please everybody. Still, the wholesale restructuring of Eastern European borders after World War I resulted in divisions which more closely accorded with ethnic composition than any previous demarcations in European history. All this was ignored by The Times in its urge to vilify the Versailles peace. The Articles establishing the State of Czechoslovakia, however, appear considerably more humane than later revisions devised at Munich, which The Times praised so effusively.¹⁶⁰

But Treaty considerations, or geographic and historical factors, were not matters which The Times and the Chamberlain government allowed to interfere with a single-minded desire to use appeasement as a means of reaching a stable settlement in Europe. If it meant sacrificing a part of Czechoslovakia in the process, that seemed a small price to pay. Chamberlain argued that Sudeten Germans were clamouring for self-determination and in Hitler they were lucky to have found their benefactor. But this viewpoint was misrepresentative of the fact that Henlein's supporters were closely allied with German Nazis and little more than eager purveyors of Hitler's will. The British Foreign Office also knew that Henleinists, though a powerful force in the

¹⁵⁹ Dagmar Horna-Perman, "The Making of a New State," in Transformation of a Continent, p.73: the country's borders were drawn at Versailles with strategic and economic viability of the new state foremost in mind. There was also historical precedent for making the demarkation line the Erzgebirge mountains. For over 700 years the farms and towns of the Sudeten region had been tied commercially to Prague, not Saxony on the other side of the range.

¹⁶⁰ Treaties Related to Treaty of Versailles. Treaty of Czechoslovakia, Articles 1-14: ethnic Germans were given 2 full years to declare their nationality, freedom to remove their possessions to Germany and rights to retain control of immovable property in Czechoslovakia. Those who remained were guaranteed minority rights pertaining to language, religion, education and culture. In contrast, Chamberlain at Munich secured for the Czechs less than 10 days in which to vacate the Sudetenland, without the right to remove fixtures or business inventories before the German army occupied the region; also, Telford Taylor, Munich, pp.65-66,906-910.

Sudetenland, were not representative of the entire Sudeten German community.¹⁶¹ Nonetheless, Henlein learned his lessons in propaganda from Joseph Goebbels well. In short order, he succeeded in orchestrating his followers' actions in such a way as to present to the world a picture of united German Sudetenlanders straining for freedom from oppressive Czech authorities. In fact, by March 1938 German foreign policy had become the sole determining factor for tactics of the Sudeten Deutsche Partei (SDP). Ambassador Newton duly became suspicious of Henlein's good intentions in negotiations with the Czechs,¹⁶² but if Chamberlain harboured similar doubts he did not express them publically. Though he surely knew Henlein was only a Nazi puppet, the Prime Minister also realized that the Sudetenland was a potential flashpoint for war. Since he doubted Britain's ability to resist Hitler, Chamberlain concentrated on defusing the crisis rather than confronting the Nazis.

Dawson also carefully avoided mentioning the close Nazi-SDP connection. After Henlein's trip to London in May 1938, The Times' leader maintained that despite the dramatic escalation in his demands, which were seen as likely to continue to increase, "the best chance of a friendly settlement is that the maximum of concessions - and concessions there must be - should be offered now and not in ineffectual instalments." The article made clear that it was the Czechs who must make the necessary sacrifices.¹⁶³ Yet even as Benes proffered new proposals which satisfied 90-95% of what Henleinists were demanding, Dawson undercut Czechoslovakia further

¹⁶¹ Klemens von Klemperer, ed., A Noble Combat, p.240: but even wizened historian Arnold Toynbee was fooled by Henlein; also, E.L. Woodward and Rohan Butler, eds., Documents on British Foreign Policy, v.2, Ser.3, #549 (July 26, 1938), p.9; #619 (Aug. 13th), p.91; #697 (Aug. 26th), p.167; #1008 (Sept. 21st), pp.450-451; #1073 (Sept. 24th), pp.499-508; #1113 (Sept. 26th), pp.551-552; also, Telford Taylor, Munich, pp.192-196: as early as June 1936 Henlein had publically declared his Nazi sympathies.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp.376, 407.

¹⁶³ The Times, May 16, 1938, Leader, p.15.

by hinting at the need for cession of the Sudetenland to Germany.¹⁶⁴ This suggestion was made only seven days after The Times' Prague correspondent reported on limited support for the SDP among Sudeten Germans, who generally appeared sick and tired of the dispute and apprehensive of what might arise.¹⁶⁵ This dispatch, and The Times' subsequent leader, are also illustrative of an increasing disparity between the paper's editorial pages and news reports emanating from the continent. Indications of this incongruity first appeared in the newspaper around the time of the *Anschluss*. In September it became even more obvious as Dawson struggled to keep the appeasement agenda on track despite Hitler's best efforts to derail it.

Further evidence of editorial drift from realities on the continent is found in reactions to Germany's announced mobilization of its army in August. Whereas correspondents reported resolute calm in Britain, on the editorial pages of The Times there was panic. Dawson suggested that no solution should be considered too drastic:

"In this country there has never been any doubt about the nature of the sacrifices required from the Czechoslovak government. Opinion from the left to the right of politics is agreed...."¹⁶⁶

The Chief Editor considered Chamberlain to be in a race against time to solve the crisis before Hitler burned his bridges and irrevocably committed Germany to action.¹⁶⁷ At the Nuremberg rallies Hitler was expected to make a major foreign policy announcement. Hence, on behalf of

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., September 7, 1938, Leader, p.15; also, Telford Taylor, Munich, p.407; also, DBFP, v.2, Ser.3, #808 (Sept. 8, 1938), pp.271-272: Halifax noted that The Times was engaged in adventurous speculation, and added "The last paragraph of article is a recommendation of an Anschluss."

¹⁶⁵ The Times, August 30, 1938, Prague, p.10.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., August 31, 1938, Leader, p.11.

¹⁶⁷ But see DBFP v.2, Ser.3, #595 (Aug. 8, 1938), pp.65-67: Mason-MacFarlane reported the German army was entirely unfit for a major war; also, App. IV (Aug. 18th), pp.683-686: von Kleist's conversation with Vansittart revealed that Hitler was the only real extremist wanting war; also, App. IV (Aug. 19th), pp. 686-687: Chamberlain considered von Kleist an untrustworthy "Jacobite"; also, #769 (Sept. 4th), pp.257-258: Chamberlain was well informed of the extreme displeasure of the German Staff Officers with the scale of German mobilization and its possible consequences, yet chose to strengthen Hitler's hand by offering further concessions.

an Inner Cabinet "cabal," Dawson floated the idea of cession on September 7th. The article implied that the proposal was an agreed solution of the government, a totally misleading picture, given that a majority of the Cabinet and Foreign Office were hostile to the idea.¹⁶⁸ Letters to the editor that were printed ran 50% against The Times' suggestion.¹⁶⁹ Dawson surely knew of The Times' reputation on the continent for reflecting official British government policy. Thus, he could hardly be surprised when on September 9th Henlein broke off negotiations with Czech President Beneš on the pretext of minor border incidents, even though the Czech government was offering full compliance with SDP demands. At the Nuremberg Party Rallies a few days later, Hitler toughened his stance as well by demanding full self-determination for Sudeten Germans.¹⁷⁰ The Times' intervention at a critical stage of the crisis may not have caused the increased belligerency of Hitler's government, but it served to fuel the flames of Nazism's already raging urge for expansion.

As events moved towards a climax in the final two weeks of September The Times repeatedly referred to "public opinion" support for Chamberlain's efforts at conciliation and compromise, despite Hitler's intransigence and aggressiveness. Attention was drawn to the crowds in front of #10 Downing Street, with suggestions that they reflected universal gratitude for the Prime Minister's policies.¹⁷¹ In contrast, Herbert Morrison, Labour M.P., spoke just four days later of mounting "public opinion" in the rest of the world against the unlimited demands of fascists.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Richard Cockett, Twilight of Truth, p.72: only Dawson, Halifax and Chamberlain were parties to the plan.

¹⁶⁹ The Times, September 13, 1938, p.8: one person wrote, "When I first read it [the leader] I assumed that it had somehow strayed from the columns of the Angriff."

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, September 13, 1938, Special Correspondent, p.8.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, September 15, 1938, Leader, p.11.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, September 19, 1938, p.14.

Truly, the closer Chamberlain's shuttle diplomacy came to foundering on the rocks of Nazi truculence the stronger American and Dominion leaders became in expressions of solidarity with Britain.¹⁷³ Still, The Times insisted that the British people were "emphatically not prepared to find the occasion of a world war" in the Czech crisis,¹⁷⁴ though a memorandum from Lord Halifax to the Prime Minister on September 23rd stated precisely the opposite conclusion.¹⁷⁵ Halifax indicated that the tide of "public opinion" was turning clearly against the Prime Minister, confirming the conclusions of two British pioneers of "public opinion" gathering. Basing their findings on the work of 1500 amateur observers scattered throughout London, Charles Madge and Tom Harrison determined that the general "public" (as opposed to the political "public") had been largely apathetic to foreign affairs at the start of the crisis, without strong sentiment for or against appeasement. However, with Chamberlain's flight to Germany the polls showed what political scientists suggest is a rally-round-the-leader phenomenon in times of international crises. Telford Taylor believes the "public" may have been under the mistaken assumption Chamberlain was finally intending to get tough with Hitler in a face-to-face confrontation. It is equally possible that segments of "public opinion" believed along with the Prime Minister that Hitler's invitations signalled a willingness to compromise. But when details of the Anglo-French proposals calling for yet more concessions from Czechoslovakia were released to the "public" on September 20th,

¹⁷³ For views from Australia, Canada, India, South Africa and New Zealand, see the correspondents' reports in The Times Sept.27th-30th, 1938: clearly, the Dominion governments wanted Chamberlain to effect a peaceful settlement. But they were prepared, nonetheless, to rely on British leadership to see them through the crisis and to determine what was in the Empire's interests; also, DBFP, v.2, Ser.3, #824 (Sept. 10th), pp.284-285: Halifax noted that American opinion was "20 times as excited as in 1914" in opposition to Germany and that if war started and London was bombed the U.S. would become involved much quicker than in the last war.

¹⁷⁴ The Times, September 21, 1938, Leader, p.11.

¹⁷⁵ Richard Cockett, Twilight of Truth, pp.81-82.

opinion in the Madge/Harrison polls shifted strongly against Chamberlain's policy.¹⁷⁶ The Prime Minister, though, remained undaunted in his conviction that he was acting in the best interests of all the people of Europe in effecting a compromise settlement with Hitler.

In the same week that Chamberlain flew to Godesberg, Dawson asserted that all "right thinking people" and any "realistic observer" could tell that Czechoslovakia was indefensible against German attack, though he made no effort to consult with his military correspondent before recording such conclusions. Liddell Hart was shocked at the advocacy of territorial cession because he believed, as did the Foreign Office, that Germany was confronted with a well-entrenched, heavily armed and high-spirited opponent enjoying the advantage of interior lines of communication.¹⁷⁷ In other words, knowledgeable military sources were aware that an attack on Czechoslovakia would be extremely costly in both men and *materiel*. Destruction of Czech weapons factories would also deny Germany the principal motivation for seeking incorporation of Bohemia and Moravia into the Reich's economic orbit. But aside from a single exception, The Times' editorial pages revealed a rigid unwillingness to contemplate Czech military capabilities or strategic considerations inherent in surrendering the Sudetenland to Germany.

Since the previous spring Czechoslovakia had worked day and night on fortifications along its thousand mile frontier with Germany, making it into a formidable obstacle. In addition, Lieutenant-Colonel Stronge, British military attache in Prague, reported to London on the strength of the Czech field army, which he considered to be the best among Europe's smaller states. In lengthy dispatches to his superiors in the Foreign Office he noted that Czech staff work was good

¹⁷⁶ Telford Taylor, Munich, pp.831-832; also, DGFP, v.2, Series D, #244 (June 8, 1938), pp.390-395; #266 (June 23rd), pp.432-434; #279 (July 4th), pp.456-467; #458 (Sept. 12th); #549 (Sept. 21st), pp.742-743; #579 (Sept. 23rd), pp.895-896; #589 (Sept. 24th), p.919: Ambassador von Dirksen and *Chargé d'Affairs* Kordt sent frequent lengthy memorandums to Berlin on British "public opinion" which appear to corroborate many of the pollsters' findings.

¹⁷⁷ Brian Bond, Liddell Hart, p.102.

and leadership of most units was excellent (the Czechs appeared to match the Germans in large numbers of competent non-commissioned officers), though perhaps less solid at the level of divisional command. In addition, Stronge observed a powerful *esprit de corps* throughout the ranks, concluding that there were no shortcomings in the Czech army which were of sufficient consequence to warrant a belief that it could not give a good account of itself. If Czech morale held up, he saw a potential war lasting over several months.¹⁷⁸

At the same time, a major weakness in Czech armaments was being substantially rectified by purchases of long range bombers from the U.S.S.R.¹⁷⁹ British intelligence also believed that the Soviets had promised assistance to Czechoslovakia in the event of war, though it was conditioned on the initial support of France. No one knew, however, what price Stalin would exact for granting assistance to the Czechs. Also, Russia's ability to succour Czechoslovakia was greatly hindered by Poland's refusal to accept passage of Soviet arms over its borders. Still, the actions of the U.S.S.R. represented a significant token of good faith. More importantly, it would have neutralized a threat from Poland (still hungering for a slice of Czechoslovakia it felt unjustly deprived of at Versailles) as well as tie down considerable German forces in East Prussia.¹⁸⁰ Chamberlain, however, was not interested in considering, let alone playing, the Russian card in Hitler's high-stakes poker game. Nor was Dawson, who showed suspicion of the "Bolshies" and their Comintern. Chamberlain and Dawson feared, with some justification, that involving the

¹⁷⁸ *DBFP*, v.2, Ser.3, #794 (Sept.6, 1938), pp.257-259; also, #805 (Sept. 8th), p.268: Stronge received information from a German Military attache that the Nazi leadership was using Sudeten Germans as a pretext for grabbing Czechoslovakia itself, and that German morale was not nearly as high as the Nazi press asserted.

¹⁷⁹ *DGFP*, v.2, Ser.D, #126 (April 14, 1938), p.230; #262 (July 14th), p.426; #370 (Aug. 18th), p.587; #437 (Sept. 7th), pp.710-711; #445 (Sept. 9th), p.724; #478 (Sept. 14th), pp.761-762; #505 (Sept.16th), p.815: Schulenberg in Moscow and Henke in Prague reported on the flight of approximately 300-600 Russian combat planes to Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1938, and Rumania's decision to look the other way if Russian troops tried to cross into Czechoslovakia.

¹⁸⁰ Telford Taylor, *Munich*, pp.399,453-455.

Russians at Munich would invite the spread of Communism into Eastern Europe.¹⁸¹ Consequently, Chamberlain lectured French leaders on the perils of a military pact with Stalin. Moscow, he said, was not a respectable neighborhood. Telford Taylor notes that Whitehall sent an unremitting barrage of admonition and remonstrance to France concerning its eastern entanglements.¹⁸² Throughout the tense weeks of September, The Times heartily concurred in the Prime Minister's handling of foreign affairs, maintaining this was no time for a call to arms which it felt would only exacerbate matters.

However, one exception to this editorial tone appeared just two days before Chamberlain's announcement of plans for a third trip to Germany. On September 27th an article from an unnamed Belgian military correspondent was published, echoing many of Lt.-Col. Stronge's assessments. It maintained that the Czechs were capable of mobilizing up to 40 well-armed divisions of high calibre and morale. Czech troops combined "Gallic warlike initiative with German collective discipline." Furthermore, Czech weaponry was thoroughly tested under wartime conditions in China and had proven outstanding in strength, precision, and efficiency. Czechoslovakia also possessed the ability to replenish supplies due to an extensive armaments industry, including tank production facilities. The article added that "[i]ndustrial mobilization is completely organized and is of extreme rigour;" so much so that by late September arms plants already had been transported into the inaccessible Carpathian mountains where it would be difficult for German bombers to hit them.¹⁸³ Nonetheless, throughout the crisis, The Times' lead editorials were in full agreement with Chamberlain that military factors precluded any guarantees to Czechoslovakia as no coalition of forces allied against Germany could possibly save the

¹⁸¹ Maurice Cowling, The Impact of Hitler, pp.130-131.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, pp.514-515,528.

¹⁸³ The Times, September 27, 1938, "The Czech Army," p.13.

country. In addition, Chamberlain and The Times contended over and over again that even were Britain to successfully wage war on Czechoslovakia's behalf the state as it then existed could never be reconstituted. To be sure, the Czechs would have been hard pressed to hold out for the time it would take for Britain and France to marshal sufficient forces to launch a major offensive against Germany. But that does not negate the fact that Western allies in September 1938 were capable of immediate retaliatory action in the form of air strikes and a naval blockade.¹⁸⁴ However, Chamberlain was desperate to avoid war, not to wage it, in the waning days of September. Thus, he prepared to attempt one last diplomatic gambit to see if he could not pluck a flower out of the nettle.

When the Prime Minister's appeal to Mussolini on September 27th culminated in the announcement next day of plans for a conference in Munich to settle the Czech crisis, The Times reported that he had correctly interpreted and anticipated "public opinion:" "If it were ever possible to question the national mandate behind his mission, it is open to no one now."¹⁸⁵ This was undoubtedly based on the unprecedented eruption of wild cheers in Parliament when Chamberlain announced his intention to visit Munich. Certainly there was an outpouring of relief in "public" after weeks of intense worry and preparation for war, but without disclosure of all the facts, it is doubtful one could call it a true mandate. The Times also made much of Chamberlain's negotiating skills, implying that Britain was in good hands going into the conference. Truly, the Prime Minister was a tough negotiator as a former businessman and leader of the Conservative Party. However, at Munich he was faced with a ruthless opportunist who spared no quarter and saw any concession as a sign of weakness. Thus, Chamberlain obtained

¹⁸⁴ Williamson Murray, The Change in the European Balance of Power, pp.155-164,210-213,310,332,353; also, Telford Taylor, Munich, pp.628-629,632.

¹⁸⁵ The Times, September 29, 1938, Leader, p.13.

only one trivial concession on Hitler's declared intention to begin his march into the Sudetenland on October 1st; the first contingent of *Wehrmacht* troops to cross the border would wear forage caps rather than their steel helmets.¹⁸⁶ He did not even obtain a German promise to demobilize. Still, Dawson contended that the "British people would readily acknowledge the earnestness of Hitler's good intentions, and show gratitude for Chamberlain's good efforts."¹⁸⁷ It would not be long, however, before the Munich peace showed itself to be built of straw and the Prime Minister's strenuous efforts all for naught.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., September 30, 1938, p.12 and Leader, p.13.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., October 1, 1938, Leader, p.13.

CHAPTER IV

FROM MUNICH TO PRAGUE - THE SHORT ROAD AHEAD

Chamberlain's hastily arranged trip to Munich was followed by an equally hasty conference. Everything was handled informally and perfunctorily. Neither the Czechs nor Russians were present as the Four Powers (Britain, France, Germany, and Italy) quickly thrashed out a bare-bones agreement which would allow Germany's occupation of the Sudetenland to begin in less than 24 hours. All of the details concerning demarkation lines and property rights were sloughed off onto an International Commission. Due to the time constraints involved, the Commission was required to begin its task of establishing zones of occupation even before the ink from the pens of the signatories had dried. The result was to lend a rather undignified atmosphere to an occasion of monumental import for the future destiny of Europe.

Churchill had already foretold the magnitude of the disaster Britain was being led into during one of his most eloquent speeches before Parliament a week before the Munich Conference was announced. Though he had made many miscalculations in his checkered career,¹⁸⁸ on this occasion he proved prescient in noting the complete surrender to Nazi force, Czechoslovakia's neutralization (which immediately freed 25 German divisions for the Western

¹⁸⁸ The enigma of Churchill, capable of such brilliance yet so problematic, continues to produce great interest among scholars. For a review of four recent books on the man "whose greatness is proof against revisionism," see Geoffrey Wheatcroft, "The Saviour of His Country," *The Atlantic Monthly* 273:2 (1994), pp.116-123.

Front), and the opening to Germany of a clear path to the Black Sea. He also warned that a lengthy peace was now only possible through the combining of European powers to oppose Nazi hegemony. In response, The Times' editorial contended that anti-appeasers offered no alternative to Chamberlain's bold diplomacy other than to suggest a failed policy of containment. It also maintained as absurd charges that Chamberlain had betrayed the Czechs and surrendered to a brutal dictator.¹⁸⁹ Though Munich stimulated the British Cabinet finally to support Churchill's push for intensified rearmament, the Prime Minister continued to equivocate, avoiding any mention in the House of Commons of plans for accelerating or expanding the rearmament program. Instead, Chamberlain appealed for more time for reflection before considering urgent demands to accelerate the military buildup. While he accepted the necessity for rearmament in theory, his assurances were largely devoid of meaning because he rejected one specific proposal after another for stimulating the nation's preparedness.¹⁹⁰

As late as February 1939, Chamberlain raised financial issues as the reason for turning down Secretary of State for War Hore-Belisha's urgent requests for more military expenditures. Only on February 22nd, almost five months after Munich, did he finally authorize additional funds to equip a continental army. But it took two more months before Chamberlain relented to demands for the formation of a Ministry of Supply and imposition of conscription.¹⁹¹ By procrastinating in such a manner, the Prime Minister forfeited the breathing space which Munich offered before the next crisis. This policy was the first one since Chamberlain's arrival at #10 Downing Street in which The Times showed a modicum of independent thinking. In the months

¹⁸⁹ The Times, September 22, 1938, Parliament, p.15; also, Leader, p.11.

¹⁹⁰ Telford Taylor, Munich, pp.927-928,938; also, Gerhard Weinberg, The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany, pp.516-517.

¹⁹¹ Telford Taylor, Munich, pp.949-950,973.

following Munich, the editorials once again invoked "public opinion," but now it was in full support of faster rearmament.

Pro-appeasers initially defended Chamberlain's peace accord with Hitler as allowing Britain to fight a war on better terms in 1939 than if war had begun in 1938. But, given the enormous gains which Germany secured from Munich and the lethargic response of Chamberlain to rearmament matters in the months following, such arguments are without foundation. In terms of overall balance of forces, Britain and France were in a far stronger position to wage war in 1938. Whereas the allied armies made modest advances in rearming after Munich, Germany accomplished enormous strides.¹⁹² For example, Britain's stock of arms increased from two to five army divisions between September 1938 and August 1939, whereas the Wehrmacht mushroomed from 51 to 106 divisions in the same time period. Also, the 35 lost Czech divisions together with their enormous stockpile of high-quality weaponry represented a huge windfall for Germany. Only in the areas of radar and fighter planes did Britain appear significantly stronger in 1939, but partially offsetting that accomplishment was an increase of 60% in German aircraft production.¹⁹³ As Churchill's speech of September 21st made apparent, most of this information was already known at the time of Munich but went unheeded.¹⁹⁴ It was not long, however, before Chamberlain and the British people learned the reward for trusting in Hitler's declarations of peaceful intent.

In fact, the jubilation and relief which greeted Chamberlain upon his return from Germany started to dissipate within days. When Parliament re-convened on October 3rd to discuss the Munich Accord there was considerable recrimination and acrimony among its members. Some

¹⁹² Ibid., pp.985-989.

¹⁹³ Charles Mowat, Britain Between the Wars, pp.630-631.

¹⁹⁴ Telford Taylor, Munich, p.989.

of the most stinging criticisms of government policy came from the Conservative Party's own benches. In his resignation speech, Duff Cooper expressed incredulity at the Prime Minister's reference to "peace in our time" when other appeasement advocates were touting the Agreement as providing much needed breathing space to rearm.¹⁹⁵ Anthony Eden branded the deal "both humiliating and cruel" given that Czech nationals and Sudeten Social Democrats were never allowed adequately to present their case against cession.¹⁹⁶ Churchill gave a masterful strategic summation of the severe costs inherent in the Munich Agreement. In another of his memorable speeches before Parliament he outlined how cession of the Sudetenland relieved Germany of security concerns in the East, secured resources with which it could more easily circumvent a naval blockade, and allowed the Nazi leadership free choice over which direction to turn next. Ominously, he contended:

"The policy of submission would carry with it restrictions upon the freedom of speech and debate in Parliament, on public platforms and discussions in the Press. With every organ of public opinion doped and chloroformed into acquiescence, we should be conducted along further stages of our journey."¹⁹⁷

The Times, however, was not to be outdone, firing off a fiery retort:

"For an alternative policy explicitly defined the pages of Hansard may be searched in vain; implicit in all the argument is the barren suicidal policy of preventive war."¹⁹⁸

Nonetheless, Harold MacMillan lent credence to Churchill's assertion when he attacked the Prime Minister's tactic of keeping Parliament in recess during most of the crisis as "a dangerous

¹⁹⁵ Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th Series, 339 (1938-39), col.29-40,151-152.

¹⁹⁶ The Times, October 4, 1938, Parliament, p.14.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, October 6, 1938, Parliament, p.7; also, Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th Series, 339 (1938-39), col.455-457: Churchill recognized what Chamberlain was incapable of admitting: "Never could there be friendship between the British democracy and the Nazi Power, that power which spurred Christian ethics, which cheered its onward course by a barbarous paganism, which vaunted the spirit of aggression and conquest, which derived strength and perverted pleasure from persecution, and used with pitiless brutality the threat of murderous force."

¹⁹⁸ The Times, October 6, 1938, Leader, p.13.

tendency to treat the House more and more as a kind of Reichstag to meet only to hear the orations and register the decrees of the Government."¹⁹⁹ Though perhaps an unfair analogy it did reflect the fact that Chamberlain had allowed Parliament to sit silent through weeks of crisis bordering on war only to reconvene it on the eve of the Munich Conference.

The Times continued its vigorous defence of the Prime Minister on the basis of "public opinion's" presumed mandate. Referring to the Prime Minister's daring diplomacy which had arrested universal destruction, it denigrated "the cavillings of party" as insignificant compared to the nation's gratitude. In fact, the paper asserted, Munich was a peace dictated by the peoples of Germany and Britain.²⁰⁰ A subsequent editorial proclaimed that reason had prevailed long enough for the decisive weight of opinion in all countries to mobilize behind the drive for an honourable peace. However, in an irony of juxtaposition, the adjoining column contained a disconcerting advertisement for ARP (Air Raid Protection) equipment, depicting a family in gas masks.²⁰¹ But such unsettling reminders of Munich's fragile peace were the exception as The Times filled its photograph displays with images of flower garlanded Nazis and jubilant Sudeten Germans greeting smiling Wehrmacht troops. Conspicuously missing from these happy montages were pictures of the more than 70,000 panic-stricken Sudeten refugees fleeing the advance of Hitler's terror apparatus. Only two brief references were made to the mounting refugee crisis in the first weeks of October, though Wickam Steed's critical letter to the editor on the subject was among those published. Steed reminded readers that thousands of Henlein's own supporters had not been enthusiastic for a union with Nazi Germany, and as for the large number of Sudetenlanders who actively opposed annexation, they were now to pay the price for their

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., October 7, 1938, Parliament, p.6.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., October 3, 1938, Leader, p.13.

²⁰¹ Ibid., October 4, 1938, p.15.

hostility to fascism.²⁰²

When the Prime Minister finally spoke in Parliament on October 7th he declared that the British people had demonstrated their unwillingness to fight Germany over the Sudetenland, adding:

"To say that we betrayed Czechoslovakia is preposterous. What we gave her was salvation from annihilation and the opportunity to live in neutrality as Switzerland does today."²⁰³

The emptiness of this assertion became apparent in the weeks following, when Chamberlain's government abandoned Czechoslovakia to its fate after sending it on her way with £10M in conscience money, most of which was badly needed to alleviate the distress of Sudeten refugees crowding the streets of Prague.

Though Chamberlain and The Times were fond of referring to the indomitable will of "public opinion" before which they were but humble servants, the Prime Minister revealed his lack of faith in the British people when he stated:

"I cannot help feeling that if, after all, war had come upon us, the people of this country would have lost their spiritual faith altogether. As it turned out the other way, I think we have all seen something like a new spiritual revival..."²⁰⁴

He then went on to acknowledge that the crisis had revealed a strong desire among Britons to show their readiness to serve the country in its hour of need. Lamely, Chamberlain claimed not to be able to imagine any particular scheme for harnessing this "public" spiritedness, but said he welcomed any useful suggestion. The next day The Times struck an unusually discordant note

²⁰² Ibid., October 1, 1938, Letters to the Editor, p.8: Steed asserted that over 50% of Henleinists sought greater autonomy as a region, not outright annexation. For photos of the German march into the Sudetenland see newspaper editions from October 3-8, 1938. In late October, however, The Times noted the plight of Sudeten refugees, and acknowledged the harsh fate of those left to the mercy of Nazi henchmen. On October 26th it editorialized that the plight of some Jews was appalling with many German anti-Nazis destined for the slow torture of concentration camps. It then applauded the British government for accepting 350 refugees "of good stock." (p.15).

²⁰³ Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th Series, 339 (1938-39), col.464-479.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., col.544-554.

from the tenor of the Prime Minister's speech when it declared that strengthening Britain's defences was imperative for a continued policy of conciliation. It called on the government to strain every nerve to employ more effectively "the magnificent national spirit which is awaiting enlistment behind a policy which can command the greatest possible measure of national unity."²⁰⁵

But in the ensuing weeks Chamberlain initiated no specific measures to meet demands in Parliament for escalating the pace of rearmament. Whereas the war scare also prompted Cabinet members and the Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces to press for faster rearmament, Chamberlain resisted taking action in this direction, partially out of a misguided fear it would alarm the country and antagonize Hitler. Thus, in the months following Munich, while the Nazi regime applied its newly acquired leverage in Eastern Europe to mould economic satellites out of Hungary, Roumania, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia, Chamberlain continued to dwell on diplomatic efforts at achieving rapprochement through trade agreements with Germany and Italy.²⁰⁶ He even refused to be disabused of such notions when State Secretary von Weizsäcker quietly discouraged British diplomats against making further initiatives in that direction.²⁰⁷ Hitler, by contrast, was positively violent in his post-Munich speeches, warning Germans against harbouring any thoughts of an Anglo-German alliance as "the world is against us."²⁰⁸ Ambassador

²⁰⁵ The Times, October 7, 1938, Parliament, p.7; October 8, 1938, Leader, p.13.

²⁰⁶ John Wheeler-Bennett, Munich: A Prologue to Tragedy, pp.321-324, 327; also, Paul Kennedy, The Politics of Appeasement, p.302: he sees such attempts at financial detente as revealing a "remarkably myopic view" that Nazism could be made to work compatibly with liberal political and economic systems of government.

²⁰⁷ Leonidas Hill, "Three Crises, 1938-39," p.116: earlier, Weizsäcker tried to warn Britain secretly that Hitler was not bluffing during the Czech crisis but was ignored; also, DBFP, v.2, Ser.3, #775 and App.IV, p.654: Henderson probably had the State Secretary in mind when he alluded to treasonous talk by some German diplomats; also, Leonidas Hill, Die Weizsäcker Papiere 1933-1950 (Frankfurt, 1974), pp.139,142.

²⁰⁸ Gerhard Weinberg, The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany, p.519; also, The Times, October 10, 1938, p.12; and October 22, 1938, pp.12,14: Goebbels bellowed the same theme before a receptive audience in Berlin.

Henderson also reported Nazi leaders were exhorting Germans to allow no let-up in rearming with fanatical zeal.²⁰⁹

Despite these unpromising developments in Anglo-German relations, The Times still found much it could admire in Nazi Germany. Barely a month after Munich (and just days before the *Kristallnacht* pogrom) the newspaper wrote that much of the pessimism over events in Central Europe was "gibbering hysteria," but that fortunately "public opinion" was not impressed by such sensationalism. It asserted that while self-appointed experts were making people's flesh creep, the "public" grasped well enough the terrible necessity for harsh and arbitrary revisions to the Treaty of Versailles:

"Central Europe has begun its always destined passage from an unstable to a stable equilibrium. The historian of these days, looking beneath the surface manifestations of Nazism and Fascism, will record that this revolution was in essence indispensable to the evolution of Europe...."²¹⁰

Another editorial asked Britons to accept Germans as they were and work to build confidence between the two peoples. It argued that German hearts and minds could be won by example:

"But our example will convince no German patriot unless we can show that the distinctive virtues that the National-Socialist regime has developed can also be attained by free institutions."²¹¹

The Times even suggested that democracies might learn from dictatorships "what to treasure and what to strengthen."²¹² Indeed, a growing number of British parliamentarians had learned from

²⁰⁹ DBFP, v.3, Ser. 3, App.I, Letter from Henderson to Halifax, October 6, 1938, p.615: Henderson was usually full of assurances about German good intentions, but in the wake of Munich he appeared momentarily to lose his nerve, giving wildly exaggerated assessments of German air power and asserting that the danger to Britain was now equal to Napoleon at Boulogne.

²¹⁰ The Times, November 7, 1938, Leader, p.15.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, October 27, 1938, Leader, p.15.

²¹² *Ibid.*, October 7, 1938, Leader, p.15.

Nazi actions - to value stronger armaments as the only sure means of preserving democratic liberties and freedoms from demagogues who would destroy them.

Thus, while The Times supported the Prime Minister's efforts at diplomatic rapprochement, it also acknowledged evidence of Parliament and "public opinion" anxious to press ahead with defence preparations.²¹³ The Times acknowledged that members of Parliament were reporting finding at constituency meetings a strong desire to stimulate national service. In an attempt to nudge the Prime Minister in the direction of firmer action on defence The Times paid him an unusual compliment:

"In the uncertainties, doubts and confusions of the past months, Mr. CHAMBERLAIN acted with the faith, sureness, and courage of a born leader...showing that the vaunted Führerprinzip can exist and operate within the framework of Parliamentary institutions."

It was now time, the editorial said, to apply these skills toward marshalling the nation's defenses.²¹⁴ The Times' military correspondent was more blunt, asserting that there were deficiencies in resources, poor organization, lack of coordination, and inherent inertia in the government's handling of air defence problems.²¹⁵

The Prime Minister, however, seemed disinterested in taking advantage of the opportunities which the fall crisis afforded for promoting rearmament. Possibly he intended that Munich not dominate the domestic political agenda. Certainly he failed both before and after Munich to recognize Nazi hegemonic aspirations. Whereas some of his most trusted stalwarts were beginning to doubt the efficacy of appeasement so long as Britain remained militarily weaker than Germany, Chamberlain stubbornly clung to his conviction that rearmament would

²¹³ Ibid., October 15, 1938, Leader, p.13.

²¹⁴ Ibid., October 17, 1938, Leader, p.14.

²¹⁵ Ibid., October 20, 1938, Military Correspondent, p.15.

disrupt the social fabric and financial status of the country.²¹⁶ This intractability, and the continuing deterioration in European affairs, induced further signs of unease from The Times when it noted in another article praising the Prime Minister's policies that the country's finances were easily strong enough to absorb the necessary loans for defense spending. Furthermore, it now asserted that "[t]he public will cheerfully endure the consequences of the defence programme provided it gives us defence...."²¹⁷ Nonetheless, when Parliament re-convened in December it learned that the government would not approve even the tentative step of establishing a National Register of eligible draftees. The Times dutifully supported this announcement by maintaining that "public opinion" did not yet require compulsory service,²¹⁸ though the general "public" was hardly in a position to know how prepared the three branches of the Armed Forces were to meet future contingencies. The government's decision also precluded the organization of a continental expeditionary force before 1939, something which the French had been clamouring for since the previous summer. In light of foreboding developments in Europe, Chamberlain's conduct is only explicable as mistaken faith in Munich's peace-generating potential.²¹⁹

Thus, the National Service Register and Ministry of Supply would have to wait until spring before the glaring weaknesses in the rearmament program could be rectified. Hore-Belisha's requests for 250,000 recruits and more military expenditures were deferred. At the same

²¹⁶ Gustav Schmidt, The Politics and Economics of Appeasement, pp.279-280,388.

²¹⁷ The Times, November 9, 1938, Leader, p.15.

²¹⁸ Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th Series, 342 (1938-39), col.606-607; also, The Times, December 7, 1938, Leader, p.15.

²¹⁹ Telford Taylor, Munich, pp.930-932; also, Sidney Aster,ed., A.P. Young: The 'X' Documents, pp.154-162: in October and again in December the British Foreign Office received memorandums from Goerdeler outlining Hitler's contempt for the "degenerate, weak and timid" British as a result of their actions at Munich. It also revealed that Hitler was already contemplating the next crisis in which Ribbentrop rather than the "cowardly" Goering would be put in charge.

time, France was fobbed off with charges concerning Paris' own shortcomings in rearmament.²²⁰ But as events in the autumn of 1938 increasingly revealed Hitler's lack of faith in both the Munich Accord and British friendship generally,²²¹ the Prime Minister found himself isolated and at odds with many in his own Party. However, he stubbornly insisted on business as usual for many more months.²²² He simply was unwilling to face the consequences if Hitler's ambitions proved to be in direct conflict with democratic principles or European stability.

Between October 1938 and March 1939 Hitler's foreign policy had two primary objectives: the elimination of Czechoslovakia and isolation of Poland. It became apparent within days of the Munich Conference that the Nazi *führer* was bent on taking maximum advantage of the weakened Czech position, in violation of both the spirit and letter of the Munich Agreement. Hitler instructed German delegates on the International Commission set up to oversee the transfer of Sudeten territory to take the harshest negotiating stance by issuing repeated ultimata and new demands.²²³ None of the provisions in the Munich Agreement inserted for the benefit of the Czechs were fulfilled, as the International Commission quickly degenerated into a German *Diktat*, settling borders which gave the Reich even more territory than Hitler had demanded in his Godesberg ultimatum. Despite this travesty which saw 800,000 Czech nationals transferred to

²²⁰ Telford Taylor, Munich, pp.949-950; also, DBFP, v.3, Series 3, #189 (October 12, 1938), pp.159-160; also, Brian Bond, British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars, p.249: Chamberlain continued to give priority to financial stability over defense matters until virtually the eve of war.

²²¹ DBFP, v.3, Series 3, #315 (November 18, 1938), pp.278-279; #320 (November 21, 1938), p.282.

²²² R.A.C. Parker, Chamberlain and Appeasement, pp.9-11,343-347: an even-handed portrayal of Chamberlain's intelligence and hardworking nature combined with a total lack of ability to self-criticize and a stifling, obstinate personality which prompted him to cling to illusions of a Munich-based peace for too long.

²²³ Gerhard Weinberg, The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany, pp.465-467: before Munich, Hitler told his confidants that if he could not occupy all of Czechoslovakia by October 1938 he would most certainly finish the task the following spring; also, DGFP, v.4, Ser.D, #12,17,53.

Nazi control, only one newspaper editorial in London commented on this fact.²²⁴ Though The Times' Berlin correspondent referred to many Czechs left behind German lines, the editorial page focused on the "friendly atmosphere" of negotiations, alleging concessions and compromise from both sides. The newspaper also suggested that the revised borders were as closely based on "racial" distribution as could reasonably be expected, and that the towns in the annexed territory "never felt or looked quite themselves under their Czech names."²²⁵ This represented a whitewash of British and French abdication of responsibility for ensuring fair implementation of the vaguely-worded Munich Agreement.

It was surely not a coincidence that such press coverage was precisely what Ambassador Henderson, the British representative on the International Commission, had requested only days earlier. After the first meeting of Commission business he cabled London that any communiques issued should be designed to induce the world press to help and not hinder the task at hand:

"The best help which the British press could give would be to write nothing awkward calculated to encourage the Czechs to resist. It is perfectly obvious from now on that such incidents as do occur will be indicative of Czechs' resistance. Germans have nothing to gain by creating trouble, but Czechs have and they will certainly try to make what capital they can out of incidents. This should be clearly realized by the British press."²²⁶

In Prague, however, Ambassador Newton noted the complete stranglehold over Czechoslovakia that Germany was acquiring by the International Commission's decision to cede land which effectively severed the main arteries in the country's railway communications system.²²⁷ In fact, the Commission did little more than cloak a German *Diktat* in a façade of legality. The British

²²⁴ Telford Taylor, Munich, pp.66,907-909: the London Daily Telegraph made brief mention of the discrepancies with the Godesberg line.

²²⁵ The Times, October 7, 1938, Berlin, p.14; also, Oct. 10, Leader, p.15.

²²⁶ DBFP, v.3, Ser.3, #79, (September 30, 1938), p.56.

²²⁷ Ibid., v.3, Ser.3, #139, (October 6, 1938), pp.108-109.

government maintained the pretence even after Hitler roughly informed Czech Foreign Minister Chvalkovsky that he intended the truncated state to become an agricultural milch cow for the benefit of industrial Germany.²²⁸ This should have dispelled any illusions of creating a Swiss-style independence for the truncated state. Yet, it was months before the British government or The Times awakened the general "public" to that reality.

In the meantime, British policy was motivated by the desire to be done with a tiresome source of friction so as to resume business as usual. As a result, neither British nor French delegates on the International Commission made an issue of the 70,000 fleeing refugees pouring into Prague.²²⁹ The Times was also slow to acknowledge the unfolding of this tragedy. Despite the enormous human cost which the Munich Agreement imposed, Germany's Ambassador in Great Britain informed Berlin of Chamberlain's complete confidence in the *Führer's* actions, and satisfaction that the annexation of territory had succeeded "without a hitch." British officials also reputedly intimated to him that a defensive guarantee between the Four Powers of Munich against Soviet Russia was conceivable once thorough preparation of Britain's press and "public opinion" was arranged.²³⁰ The Times did its best to help Chamberlain's government bury the past by hailing the arrival of a new epoch of reconciliation.²³¹ As for the proposed guarantee to Czechoslovakia, Berlin was given the impression from diplomatic sources in London that the British and French governments had insisted on its inclusion in the Munich Agreement solely for

²²⁸ DGFP, v.4, Ser.D, #61, (October 14, 1938), pp.69-72.

²²⁹ A.J. Sherman, Island Refuge, p.137: he takes a more sympathetic approach to Britain's overall handling of the refugee problem than he does towards other Western nations' responses to the crisis.

²³⁰ DGFP, v. 4, Ser.D, #260 (October 31, 1938), pp.319-320.

²³¹ The Times, October 6, 1938, Leader, p.13.

the purpose of assuaging the consciences of their respective "publics."²³² If this observation was accurate, it casts in a highly cynical light the British government's utterances of concern for the preservation of Czech independence. The rapid deterioration in Czechoslovakian autonomy after Munich revealed those words to be mere rhetoric. Throughout the autumn and into 1939 the democracies remained idle while Germany openly undermined its neighbor's ability to govern.

In mid-October Newton notified the Foreign Office of Hitler's blunt warning that the Czechs must accept vassaldom or face a German march on Prague.²³³ In follow-up reports, he laid out the insidiously intrusive forms of Nazi pressure intended to mould Czech internal policies, including imposition of discriminatory edicts against Jews, Socialists, and Beneš supporters. Forlornly, Newton noted that events were moving rapidly since Munich "in what is commonly described as a Fascist direction...[T]he paths of democracy have led them but to the grave."²³⁴ In addition, German troops had breached without authorization the October 10th demarcation line at 300 points in what amounted to an undeclared sixth zone. These developments only had the effect of eliciting a hypocritical warning to the Czechs from the Western powers that further advances on loans promised at Munich would be contingent upon Czechoslovakia's treatment of Jews and refugees. But within two days of this warning, the Treasury Department suddenly declared it would withhold funding for the reconstruction of the crippled Czech economy on account of its assessment that any fresh money would only benefit Germany since by then the Czechs had lost their ability to control the country's economic

²³² DGFP, v.4, Ser.D, #54, (October 12, 1938), pp.56-59.

²³³ DBFP, v. 3, Ser.3, #171, (October 9, 1938), pp.140-141.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, v.3, Ser.3, #245 (November 1, 1938), pp.213-218.

affairs.²³⁵ The Times' leaders made few comments on the Czech situation in the first two months following Chamberlain's trips to Germany but did acknowledge in December "the untoward happenings" since Munich. Nonetheless, it argued that the Munich Agreement continued to give hope for friendly relations between totalitarian and democratic states.²³⁶ But hope was fast running out in many quarters as Hitler continued to show his utter contempt for the "Munich spirit."

Though apprised of what was taking place in Eastern Europe, Dawson did his best to assist his government by obscuring the darkening legacy of appeasement's handiwork. Responding to the vulture-like bearing of Hungary and Poland towards their weakened neighbor, The Times cast Germany in the role of sympathetic protector of Czech interests.²³⁷ It also suggested that the dominant position which Germany now enjoyed in that part of Europe would prevent the "evil" of stiff economic barriers being established.²³⁸ To steer talk of a British guarantee to Czechoslovakia away from substantive commitments, the newspaper maintained that any such undertaking would only become effective in the event of unprovoked aggression by a third party, and did not imply the dangerous "crystallization of frontiers."²³⁹ When the Labour Party indignantly accused government policy of doing nothing to prevent the only democracy east of the Rhine being "trussed up, carved about, and skewered" by an extra-territorial motorway, The

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, v.3, Ser.3, Appendix I, Halifax to Newton, (December 6, 1938), p.631; also, Appendix I, Newton to Halifax, (December 8, 1938), p.632.

²³⁶ The Times, December 7, 1938, Leader, p.15.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, October 18, 1938, "Germany and the Czechs," p.12.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, November 4, 1938, Leader, p.13.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, November 30, 1938, Leader, p.15: in late October The Times adopted the hyphenated usage to describe the country re-made by Munich; also, John Wheeler-Bennett, Munich, p.315; also, DBFP, v.3, Ser.3, #439 (December 12, 1938), pp.440-441: Halifax informed the French that his government could only enter into a guarantee in which "effective help" could be rendered. Consequently, a German guarantee was a prerequisite.

Times weakly responded that the construction project would likely provide much needed employment for thousands of Czechs.²⁴⁰ But in most other respects the editorial staff proved very effective at presenting an optimistic picture of the situation in post-Munich Europe. The Times' readers could only have glimpsed the tragic demise of democratic principles in Czechoslovakia (which Chamberlain claimed to have rescued from annihilation) by reading between the lines of news dispatches from Europe, or by perusing speeches of Opposition and dissident Conservative parliamentarians. The general tone and thrust of argument put forth by the Astor press mitigated through self-censorship evidence which did not comport with the Chamberlain government's claim of lasting peace and prosperity. At Printing House Square Dawson and Barrington-Ward sensed widespread hostility to the paper's stance on appeasement. Dawson's response was to treat his staff even more dictatorially than was his usual custom.²⁴¹

But despite continued obfuscation of facts by press and government, there were several indicators in the autumn of an increasingly sceptical "public." In seven by-elections between early October and late November, 1938, Conservative candidates all fared more poorly than in the 1935 campaigns. Roger Eatwell's analysis of these elections acknowledges that empirical studies of voter ignorance and irrationality have undermined any simple belief that by-elections necessarily reflect "public opinion." But he argues that these post-Munich political contests are, in fact, reflective of "public opinion" on appeasement due to the extent that foreign affairs became a "public" issue during the fall crisis. He notes a close correlation between the nature of the campaigns conducted and the voting patterns produced, concluding that it is mainly in terms of opposition to Neville Chamberlain's foreign policy, and especially Munich, that one must interpret

²⁴⁰ The Times, November 30, 1938, Leader, p.15.

²⁴¹ Richard Cockett, Twilight of Truth, pp.96-97: for Dawson's distortions of text from before Munich see Frank MacDonough, "The Times, Norman Ebbut, and the Nazis," pp.407,413-415,423-424.

this shift in "public opinion."²⁴² In contrast, The Times' post-election analysis rationalized the embarrassing results by claiming they were not a proper gauge of "public opinion" on the government's foreign policy as only a General Election could test such trends. Instead, it suggested that the voting represented nothing more than a "normal swing of the pendulum at this stage in the life of a Parliament."²⁴³ But corroborating evidence was already at hand, though government intervention on Fleet Street ensured it did not reach print.

In early November 1938 an independent poll conducted by the News Chronicle revealed that 86% of Britons surveyed did not believe Hitler's claim to have no more territorial ambitions in Europe. However, the poll results were not published after Chamberlain told the newspaper's editor that "so blunt an advertisement of the state of public opinion on this matter would exacerbate feelings in Germany."²⁴⁴ Such editorial compliance, however, did not prevent Chamberlain from allegedly commenting to Dirksen at a party several months later that he considered the News Chronicle to be "the most dangerous British newspaper."²⁴⁵ In fact, the Prime Minister was in the habit of keeping the German Embassy apprised of nuances in British news coverage through special briefings. These consultations also included updates on the Prime Minister's efforts to emasculate the Foreign Office News Department in order to make Downing Street the sole purveyor of official government news.²⁴⁶ Internal power struggles between various

²⁴² Roger Eatwell, "Munich, Public Opinion, and Popular Front," Contemporary History 6 (1971), pp.123,138-139.

²⁴³ The Times, November 28, 1938, Leader, p.15.

²⁴⁴ Richard Cockett, Twilight of Truth, p.101.

²⁴⁵ DGFP, v.4, Ser.D, #300, (January 25, 1939), pp.390-391; #290, (January 5, 1939), pp.377-379: Dirksen relates a conversation with Halifax concerning an article in the News Chronicle by H.G. Wells describing Hitler, Göring and Goebbels as "certifiable lunatics." He suggests Halifax was at pains to explain his strenuous efforts since 1937 to prevent "excesses" in the British press, and would do everything possible to prevent such insults in the future. He recommended that the German government might consider a libel suit against the newspaper.

²⁴⁶ Richard Cockett, Twilight of Truth, pp.85-86.

departments of government are hardly unusual, but providing regular reports of such developments to a foreign government against whom war had been nearly declared weeks earlier appears naive, if not foolhardy.

It is also indicative of the Prime Minister's post-Munich euphoria over his perceived role in history that prompted him to become more heavy-handed with the press, treating virtually all criticism of his policy as treasonable, with the result that the media became farther removed than ever from its potential as an outlet for free expression of "public opinion."²⁴⁷ In November, Labour M.P.s in Parliament raised the issue of whether official or unofficial representations had been made by members of the Inner Cabinet to owners and editors of national newspapers as to the way they ought to treat certain matters involving foreign affairs. In response, Chamberlain lied: "No such advise was tendered."²⁴⁸ The Times did its best to squelch the rumour by contributing editorials on December 6th suggesting the press would always resist such encroachments upon its freedoms, and again on December 9th mocking Labour M.P. Geoffrey Mander's allegations as "so comically remote from practical experience that the whole of Fleet Street was laughing at them...." The latter article implied that Mander's real purpose was to wage a cheap campaign against the government's leaders who it said "happen to be quite unusually remote from the press."²⁴⁹ Nonetheless, at that moment government and press were coordinating plans for the managed release of information to the "public" concerning Germany's notification of intentions to expand its submarine fleet beyond the terms of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p.88.

²⁴⁸ The Times, November 23, 1938, Parliament, p.7.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., December 6, 1938, Leader, p.15; and December 9, 1938, Leader, p.17; also, James Margach, The Abuse of Power, p.13: Lloyd George allegedly commented that it was regular policy for British Prime Ministers to control and subvert the press, saying "What you can't square, you squash, and what you can't squash you square."

Earlier, The Times' correspondent in Germany learned that Hitler had ordered a press campaign against England to dispel illusions that Munich signified peace and to prepare the country for a re-doubling of the naval rearmament program.²⁵⁰ This unsettling information was soon supplemented by a secret service report from Major Desmond Morton, head of the British Industrial Intelligence Centre, indicating that Munich had resulted in no abatement of Germany's frenetic air and naval rearmament drive. When it was discovered that a major expansion in Germany's bomber force and submarine fleet was planned, Chamberlain momentarily suppressed the information while seeking means to cushion the blow of the revelation to the British "public."

Years later, Morton related to Basil Liddell Hart:

"Our reports raised riot...In November 1938, I was roughly warned by Neville [Chamberlain] and his ministers that if a spot of it leaked out, I would be hung."²⁵¹

These sources, however, only confirmed what the Foreign Office already knew since the previous summer; that is, Germany was preparing to denounce the Naval Agreement.²⁵²

Nonetheless, when the German government took the lesser step in December 1938 of giving official notice regarding plans to build up to 100% of British submarine strength (which technically was allowed under the Agreement), Halifax ordered Foreign Office personnel to keep the matter "entirely to ourselves for the moment." He and Chamberlain then set about to prepare "public opinion" through a series of carefully timed disclosures.²⁵³ When The Times finally broke the news on December 31st it provided an accompanying editorial which soothingly suggested

²⁵⁰ Gerhard Weinberg, The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany, pp.514-516.

²⁵¹ Uri Bialer, The Shadow of the Bomber (London, 1980), pp.54-55; also, Wesley K. Wark, The Ultimate Enemy: British Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1933-1939 (London, 1985), pp.166-172: Morton saw the root of the problem in Britain's rearmament program in its *laissez-faire* attitude to defense economics.

²⁵² DBFP, v.3, Ser.3, Appendix VII, (August 17, 1938), pp.662-663.

²⁵³ Ibid., v.3, Ser.3, #433, (December 16, 1938), pp.435-436.

that limiting Germany's navy to a fraction of Britain's force while other powers built larger fleets was not reasonable, since it would unduly hamper German defensive capabilities. Though the article acknowledged that the news was disappointing, it assured readers there was no need for disquiet or ground for complaint in this latest German action.²⁵⁴ Thus, The Times manifested Chamberlain's expressed desire to assure and reassure the British "public" that German bellicosity and flexing of military muscle did not signify war was imminent. To this end, a new press campaign of optimism was launched as 1938 drew to a close.²⁵⁵ After the unleashing of further horrors by Nazi anti-Semites in November, the Prime Minister reasoned that his government was badly in need of some optimistic news if he hoped to keep appeasement alive in the new year.

Expressions of "public" sentiment in favour of Germany had virtually collapsed, even among Nazi admirers in Britain, following the *Kristallnacht* pogrom.²⁵⁶ While the government had considerable success manipulating press and "public opinion" in terms of disguising some aspects of German rearmament and evidence of Hitler's continued expansionist ambitions, it could do little to mitigate the public relations disaster when reports began flooding into London of Europe's worst pogrom in modern history.²⁵⁷ Cowling suggests the two days and nights of rioting

²⁵⁴ The Times, December 31, 1938, p.12; Leader, p.14.

²⁵⁵ John Wheeler-Bennett, Munich, pp.328-329.

²⁵⁶ Richard Griffiths, Fellow Travellers on the Right, pp.156,168-186,293-296,251: his assessments of "public opinion" (based on books, articles, newspapers, and memoirs) are anecdotal. Though he acknowledges that generalizations are dangerous he suggests a widening gap in 1938 between appeasers and enthusiasts of Nazism; also, Andrew Sharf, The British Press and Jews under Nazi Rule, pp.57-64,79-81,200: the reality of German anti-Semitism finally began to sink in on Fleet Street after *Kristallnacht*, but also suggests that the press focused on economic consequences of the pogrom, ignoring its broader significance in the Nazi scheme of things (i.e. *Kristallnacht*, like Munich, represented the abandonment by Hitler of legalities and the adoption of open criminality). One British opinion poll after November 9th registered 73% of pollees felt persecution of Jews in Germany an obstacle to Anglo-German understanding.

²⁵⁷ Though the immediate shock registered by "public opinion" is beyond doubt, gauging the long-term consequences of it is more problematic. See Rita Thalmann, et.al., Crystal Night, p.7: she refers to British "public opinion" representing the most vigorous response among Western nations against this brutal betrayal of the appeasement policy. Contrast this with Gerhard Weinberg, The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany, pp.520-522: he assesses the "less spectacular" reaction to *Kristallnacht* in Britain than in North America; also, George H. Gallup, ed. The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-71, V.1 (New York, 1972): an American poll on November 11th showed 92% of those polled distrustful of Hitler's territorial

starting on November 9th, euphemistically called "*Kristallnacht*" (Night of broken glass) by the Nazi perpetrators, represented a "psychological recession" for Chamberlain and his policies.²⁵⁸ The Times' initial response was to attempt some form of damage control. A brief 10-line report of the rioting was included within another report of Hitler's Munich speech commemorating the anniversary of the Beer Hall Putsch. More attention was given to the parade and gun salute for the fallen Nazi comrades than was directed at the burning of synagogues taking place that same night.²⁵⁹ In Berlin, Ambassador Henderson did his best to exonerate Hitler from responsibility for the pogrom, but Halifax and a growing number of junior ministers in the Foreign Office and Conservative Party became convinced of Hitler's evil nature, and consequently more doubtful of Chamberlain's appeasement policy.²⁶⁰ Even the Prime Minister acknowledged privately a certain "fatality about Anglo-German relations which invariably blocks every effort to improve them." But whereas Halifax was prompted by *Kristallnacht* to re-think his stance on foreign affairs and rearmament, Chamberlain was not moved to abandon hope for detente.²⁶¹ Thus, a few weeks later he asked South African diplomat Oswald Pirow to act as liaison for discussions with Hitler concerning the return of colonies to Germany in return for German help in financing Jewish emigration. Without additional funds, Chamberlain reasoned, Britain's government would find it difficult to assist in the removal of Germany's "problem."²⁶² However, under intense pressure

ambitions versus 77% who said that in October, but since no question was asked about German anti-Semitism it is impossible to prove a correlation between poll results and the pogrom. In contrast, The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls: Great Britain 1937-1975, V.1 (New York, 1976), pp.v,9-12 suggests no dramatic change in attitudes regarding Anglo-German relations during October and early November 1938.

²⁵⁸ Maurice Cowling, The Impact of Hitler, p.259.

²⁵⁹ The Times, November 10, 1938, Munich, p.16.

²⁶⁰ Maurice Cowling, The Impact of Hitler, pp.273,282-83,288.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp.203-205.

²⁶² Rita Thalmann, et.al., Crystal Night, pp.149-150; also, Maurice Cowling, The Impact of Hitler, p.133.

from Cabinet members to make a determined response to Nazi excesses that Hitler would understand, the Prime Minister finally agreed to Anglo-French military staff talks.²⁶³ Nonetheless, it was evident Chamberlain's heart was not in the matter, as he soon reverted to his preferred policy of pursuing rapprochement with Germany.

Only the Prime Minister's indomitable will ensured that the Conservative Party held rank and continued to project a united front. Meekly, Conservative benchers followed their leader's decision that *Kristallnacht*, though representing a setback to appeasement, should not discourage Britain from pursuing the policy of reconciliation with Germany. Thus, in the House of Commons Sir Samuel Hoare proclaimed that despite the Jewish plight "on no account must we fall from the height of exaltation to which the world was lifted by the Munich peace to a slough of despondency in which there is no hope."²⁶⁴ Obscuring the fact that the British government had not even deigned to lodge a formal protest with Germany, Chamberlain told Parliament there were many means by which the government might let Nazi leaders know of British revulsion toward the recent events. But when the Embassy in Berlin eventually issued a protest, it was directed at spurious German press allegations of British political complicity in the vom Rath murder.²⁶⁵ No complaint was specifically made of the treatment of thousands of innocent Jews tortured and carted off to concentration camps; not even after British nationals of Jewish extraction living in Berlin were mistakenly taken for Germans and severely beaten.

The Times also seemed more concerned with preserving the honour of British statesmen than with expressing genuine revulsion at the barbarity of Nazi anti-Semitism. Its first editorial on the subject contained only three brief paragraphs. The leader discussed firstly, the insane

²⁶³ Gerhard Weinberg, The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany, p.523.

²⁶⁴ The Times, November 25, 1938, Parliament, p.9.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., November 15, 1938, Parliament, pp.8,12.

criminality of the assassin Grynzpan. Secondly, it referred to the millions of Germans who must detest the shame done to their name. Finally, it denounced the "ludicrous and intolerable" suggestion by the Nazi press that British politicians were connected with the slaying.²⁶⁶ In two subsequent editorials the newspaper cautioned that much of the lament in Britain over the plight of the Jews in Germany only worsened their fate. The closest The Times came to actual condemnation of Nazi bestiality was to call German persecution of the Jews a crime and a blunder. But the paper then hastened to add that British sympathy should also be directed "for one class of refugee which has a particular claim upon the conscience of Christians of every denomination - the non-Aryan Christians."²⁶⁷ At no point did The Times attempt to place Nazi violence and subsequent decrees against Jews in a wider framework than the original pretext given by the Nazis. Nor did its leaders comment on the broad publicity given in Germany to statements by Goebbels and Funk (Minister of Economics) that the riots and new laws were part of a government policy to isolate and destroy an infection to the German people. But in this failing The Times was not alone, as most of Britain's press did not comprehend the diabolically literal conclusions that were being drawn from such utterances,²⁶⁸ though the forewarning printed in the Schwarze Corps newspaper was as blunt about Nazi plans as could be imagined:

"We shall now bring the Jewish Question to its final solution. The programme is clear. It reads: complete elimination..."²⁶⁹

The refusal of Britain's government and influential press to see such anti-Semitic tirades as anything more than a domestic anomaly allowed for the tidy compartmentalization of this issue

²⁶⁶ Ibid., November 11, 1938, Leader, p.15.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., November 16th and 18th, 1938, Leaders, p.15.

²⁶⁸ Andrew Sharf, The British Press and Jews Under Nazi Rule, pp.61-61,69,72.

²⁶⁹ The Times, November 23, 1938, Berlin, p.13.

in a way which avoided dissonance among the general "public" that otherwise would have arisen if it had been allowed to impinge upon existing rationalizations for supporting appeasement.

Nonetheless, Andrew Sharf suggests that Nazi press attacks on British political figures in the wake of *Kristallnacht* had a dramatic effect, connecting in the minds of many Britons the internal and foreign policies of Nazi Germany. For the first time, Nazi anti-Semitism became tightly linked with the appeasement issue.²⁷⁰ In a survey conducted shortly after *Kristallnacht* four out of five Britons polled said they considered persecution of the Jews in Germany to be an obstacle to achieving rapprochement between the two countries.²⁷¹ The German Embassy also conducted its own "man-in-the-streets" survey following the pogroms, reporting to Berlin that pessimism had overtaken appeasement advocates with the result that Chamberlain's position among the "public" had deteriorated markedly. It concluded that there was a widespread feeling of disappointment and doubt about German intentions prompted by the burning of synagogues. This was exacerbated, it noted, by Germany's harsh treatment of refugees, Nazi press attacks on Britain, and the general lack of responsiveness to Chamberlain's numerous friendly speeches regarding the state of Anglo-German relations. Nonetheless, Ambassador Dirksen noted hopefully that the current furore might soon recede, at least in official government circles. He based this conclusion partly on an extrapolation from remarks frequently made in conversation with British diplomats that "four hundred thousand Jews cannot be allowed forever to affect adversely the destiny of 120 million human beings."²⁷² Though the Ambassador also regularly sent to Berlin complete analyses of British press reporting, only the News Chronicle aroused the anger of the

²⁷⁰ Andrew Sharf, The British Press and Jews Under Nazi Rule, p.63.

²⁷¹ Rita Thalmann, et.al., Crystal Night, p.147.

²⁷² DGFP, v.4, Ser.D, #269, (November 17, 1938), pp.332-334; #281, (December 6th), pp.352-354; #286, (January 3, 1939), pp.357-364.

German government over its coverage of the *Kristallnacht* pogrom. Chamberlain later apologized to Dirksen for the newspaper's commentary, especially its vilification of Hitler and his Nazi cohorts.²⁷³

Following the setback to rapprochement with Germany caused by the November pogrom and the announcement of a German naval buildup, the Prime Minister sought a public relations ploy with which to revitalize sentiment for appeasement. He found his opportunity in a planned visit to Rome in January 1939. Chamberlain paved the way for his trip by formally recognizing Italy's conquest of Abyssinia, even though Mussolini at that moment was in the process of introducing harsh new anti-Jewish decrees. In addition, Chamberlain ignored the Duce's failure to fulfil his long-standing promise to withdraw Italian troops from involvement in the Spanish Civil War. Mussolini was also still vacillating on giving assurances that unarmed British merchant ships in Spanish waters would not be bombed.²⁷⁴ Despite these inauspicious developments, The Times hailed Chamberlain's decision to recognize Italy's conquest of Ethiopia as appropriate and timely, due to what it argued was a remarkable improvement in Italian expressions of "public" feeling towards Britain during the previous six months.²⁷⁵ With Dawson's encouragement and cooperation, the Prime Minister's Office orchestrated what Richard Cockett calls "the most complete setpiece of news manipulation yet attempted by a British government."²⁷⁶ The British Embassy in Rome was instructed to cooperate fully with local

²⁷³ Franklin Gannon, The British Press and Germany 1936- 1939, pp.41-42; also, DGFP, v.4, Ser.D, #290, (Jan. 5, 1939), pp.377-379; #300, (January 25th), pp.390-391.

²⁷⁴ DBFP, v.3, Ser.3, #340, (October 7, 1938), p.329; #351, (October 15th), pp.339-340; #355, (October 26th), pp.341-342; #360, (October 28th), pp.344-345: the most British negotiators could wrest from the Italian government was agreement to withdraw 25% of its armed forces stationed in Spain by the end of 1938. In response to British complaints that 30 sailors had been killed by the indiscriminate attacks on merchant shipping, the Italian diplomats claimed they could not accept responsibility, and that in any event, most of those killed were of Greek extraction.

²⁷⁵ The Times, November 17, 1938, Leader, p.15.

²⁷⁶ Richard Cockett, Twilight of Truth, p.90.

authorities in organizing an intensive cultural program for visiting journalists, on the theory they would be exhausted by peripheral activities, and therefore less likely to sleuth for details about the more unsavoury aspects of Italian fascism. In addition, all foreign correspondents were concentrated at a single hotel in order to keep their movements under stricter control.²⁷⁷ Thus, the Prime Minister was able to bask in the glow of handpicked crowds cheering the two leaders along lengthy procession routes. According to plan, this happy scene was primarily what reporters noted in their dispatches back to Britain, there being very little substantive news to comment upon. Nonetheless, The Times' editors justified the trip by acclaiming the Prime Minister a genius at inspiring peace feelings in the dictator countries. It also alleged that the visit with Mussolini enjoyed the full support of the entire country.²⁷⁸ Ironically, Chamberlain's reception among his own general "public" was actually becoming more problematic, marred by protest demonstrations and jeering from occasionally unruly crowds. Prior to his departure for Rome it was necessary to tighten security surrounding the Prime Minister by employing Scotland Yard and secret service units to bolster existing police protection.²⁷⁹ The Times also admitted in a lead article devoted to ARP that the mood of "public opinion" was becoming impatient with government policy:

"For many years now the temper of the people has been to demand drastic action and to believe that anything is better than drift. That is certainly the public attitude toward all forms of preparedness."²⁸⁰

Under the strain of continued war scares, The Times' editorial policy appeared confused, attempting to move toward reconciliation and resistance at once.

The flurry of war scare telegrams emanating from the Embassy in Berlin that had begun

²⁷⁷ Ibid., pp.92-93.

²⁷⁸ The Times, January 10, 1939, Leader, p.13.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., January 11, 1939, Home News, p.10; January 23, 1939, Foreign and Imperial News, p.12.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., January 6, 1939, Leader, p.13.

in late December continued unabated in the New Year. In the absence of Ambassador Henderson (who was on a lengthy leave to recover from the strain of the Munich crisis, later to be diagnosed as cancer) *Chargé d'Affaires* Ogilvie-Forbes sent illuminating dispatches to London referring to military and civilian preparations for an emergency in Germany proceeding "at full throttle." In addition he noted:

"There are in Germany today factors to which one cannot be blind, and which point to the necessity of relieving by some foreign excursion the present political and economic discomforts."²⁸¹

Reliable sources provided reports that Germany was being made ready for war by the coming summer. But there were also numerous signs that military action was contemplated for an even earlier date. The situation at the start of 1939 found Hitler drunk with success and thirsting for more foreign adventure. With Pax Britannica no longer respected in Eastern Europe as a result of the Munich Agreement,²⁸² it did not take a genius strategist to surmise the most likely flashpoint was in that region.

Though there was considerable alarm over rumours of a German military move westward, it was apparent that the most concentrated Nazi diplomatic and economic pressure was being applied to Czecho-Slovakia. The British Embassy in Prague noted that the German drive to separate Slovakia from the Czech provinces of Bohemia and Moravia was gathering momentum. The Foreign Office also received memoranda from Carl Goerdeler which precisely outlined how the dire economic circumstances in Germany would precipitate Hitler's attack on Czecho-Slovakia before the end of March. With terrific emphasis he reiterated the utter criminality of the Hitler-

²⁸¹ *DBFP*, v.3, Ser.3, #505, (December 29, 1938), pp.544-545.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, v.3, Ser.3, #515, January 3, 1939, pp.561-564.

Ribbentrop-Himmler gang of murderous thugs in charge of Germany's government.²⁸³ In contrast, The Times contended that the spread of German influence into southeast Europe had a silver lining for governments on route:

"For whatever may be the latter manifestations of the Nazi creed, neighboring countries have had to recognize that in its pristine form it was a challenge to political inefficiency and moral slackness...."²⁸⁴

In a similar vein, Ambassador Henderson's return to his post in February resulted in a series of telegrams to London designed to mitigate the effects of Newton's and Ogilvie-Forbes' discouraging assessments. Henderson expressed irritation over the many reports submitted in his absence from sources he considered unreliable due to their "purely selfish or malicious" purposes. He countered such evidence by noting Hitler's "comparatively moderate" speech of January 30th, which in his estimation ushered in a new period of relative calm.²⁸⁵ Chamberlain heartily concurred with his ambassador's conclusion, stating that he "very definitely got the impression that it was not the speech of a man who was preparing to throw Europe into another crisis."²⁸⁶ The fact Hitler also uttered a chilling warning that war would result in the extermination of European Jewry was conveniently ignored.

The Times fully supported the Prime Minister's optimism, pressing in mid-February for a resumption of Anglo-German negotiations. At the same time, however, the newspaper hedged its bets by calling for an urgent build-up of all three Armed Services. Therefore, it applauded the

²⁸³ Ibid., v.4, Ser.3, #68 (January 31, 1939), pp.61-64; also, Sydney Aster, ed., A.P. Young: The 'X' Documents, pp.163-172; also, Leonidas Hill, Die Weizsäcker Papiere, pp.150-152; and "The Three Crises, 1938-39," pp.124-125: such evidence, along with Weizsäcker's diary entries of February 13, 1939 and "Auf 39, wohl 2. Hälfte Februar" note Hitler's planned death blow to Czecho-Slovakia in approximately four weeks along with a breakdown of the methods to be employed. It offers irrefutable proof that the march into Prague was premeditated, and not as AJP Taylor suggests, without design.

²⁸⁴ The Times, January 13, 1939, Leader, p.13.

²⁸⁵ DBFP, v.4, Ser.3, #162, (February 28, 1939), pp.163-165.

²⁸⁶ John Wheeler-Bennett, Munich, pp.328-329.

Defence Loan Act introduced that month which was designed to finance major new expenditures on armaments, justifying the costs on the basis that "[i]t has become very clear that public opinion in this country is more deeply concerned with the results accruing from expenditure on defence than with the burdens which such expenditure involves."²⁸⁷ This dual-track approach to foreign policy asserted that the Prime Minister was correct in showing readiness to negotiate and cooperate with Nazi Germany whenever possible. At the same time, it justified rearmament as strictly defensive in nature and not in any way indicative of a heightened danger to peace. So heavily had The Times invested in appeasement that as reports began circulating in March of *Wehrmacht* units once again on the move, the newspaper optimistically maintained there was a "more cheerful feeling" in diplomatic circles which implied a fresh start in foreign affairs. It buttressed this argument by maintaining that the majority of the British people still supported Chamberlain's readiness to negotiate and cooperate with Germany. High "public" confidence, it suggested, was attributable to the Prime Minister's "contempt for the meretricious appeal which fits naturally with his clean-cut executive qualities."²⁸⁸ But change was in the offing, and in the opposite direction from which the unaccountably hopeful policy of Chamberlain's appeasement had led Britain by the spring of 1939.

With the Czecho-Slovak state already dominated by Germany, Hitler was in a position to administer a *coup de grâce* at will. Therefore, when Czech authorities had the audacity courageously to quash a German-inspired separatist putsch in Bratislava, Hitler promptly summoned the aged President Hacha to Berlin in order to wrest consent from him for another *Anschluss*. Sensing trouble, The Times noted that Hacha was acting in a strong manner in order

²⁸⁷ The Times, February 16, 1939, Leader, p.15; also, The History of The Times, v.4, pp.953-955.

²⁸⁸ The Times, March 13, 1939, Diplomatic Correspondent, p.14; and Leader, p.15.

to assert his authority.²⁸⁹ But it was in fact Hitler who was determined to prove he was in charge. In Berlin, Hitler and Goering mercilessly browbeat the harried President into signing his country's death warrant, even as German military units crossed the frontier. Since Nazism's entire political culture was based on glorification of war and conquest, and as signs were aplenty that Nazi leadership was re-doubling its efforts to assert this warriors' creed in the wake of Munich,²⁹⁰ the takeover of Prague might well have been anticipated in London. Economists had been warning since the previous autumn that Germany's domestic economy was under severe strain from an overheated rearmament program. This predicament was seen as likely to stimulate desire for quick aggrandizement of nearby industrial and military resources as the easiest means of staving off financial collapse.²⁹¹ In addition, the Foreign Office received fresh reports in the first week of March of a probable imminent German coup in Czecho-Slovakia. The pretext for it was to be civil disturbances fomented by Nazi agents and Slovakian separatists.²⁹² The Times' leader the next day appeared at a loss, expressing surprise and disappointment that the Reich government was not on the side of maintaining law and order in Czecho-Slovakia.

However, confronted with a *fait accompli* on the Ides of March, Dawson attempted to avoid precipitate action by the British government, suggesting that developments in Central Europe had followed a course which was entirely foreseen. The Times' leader maintained it was long realized in government circles that the three parts of Czecho-Slovakia could not survive. Left unstated was the clear implication that the Nazi coup was natural and inevitable. Only the

²⁸⁹ Ibid., March 11, 1939, Leader, p.13.

²⁹⁰ Paul Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of The Great Powers, pp.304-307.

²⁹¹ Ibid., p.308.

²⁹² DBFP, v.4, Ser.3, #180, (March 6, 1939), pp.183-184; #195-197, (March 9-10th), pp.210-217, 218; #203, (March 11th), p.223.

rather violent means employed were disparaged.²⁹³ But if Chamberlain's government was as attuned to what was occurring in Czecho-Slovakia as The Times alleged it is difficult to comprehend Hoare's assertion on the eve of Germany's latest military conquest:

"Confidence, almost suffocated in the late autumn by defeatism, had returned, hope had taken place of fear, moral and physical robustness had overcome hysteria and hesitation."²⁹⁴

In the course of Germany's occupation of Prague, Halifax reassured the Nazi regime that Britain had no desire to interfere unnecessarily in German affairs and still anxiously desired detente with the Third Reich.²⁹⁵ Thus, Hitler's trampling of a proud independent nation was treated as merely a local matter which should not interfere in the grander vision of European detente. The Times, however, finally awoke to reality on March 16th when it noted the end of Germany's claim to a moral case. The militaristic triumph of reaction, it said, could not endure. In the meantime, it observed:

"Seven and a half millions of a dour, proud, patriot and industrious race pass under the German yoke. It is not as though they had never tasted liberty."²⁹⁶

Overall though, the German ambassador to London was pleased to observe that Britain's press judged developments calmly. He gladly noted Sir Horace Wilson's comment that "this attitude of the press was due to the continued influence of the government in this direction." Wilson added that as long as the outward appearance of self-determination was preserved there

²⁹³ The Times, March 15, 1939, Leader, p.17.

²⁹⁴ The Times, March 11, 1939, p.7; also, Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th Series, 344 (1938-39), col.2342-2345.

²⁹⁵ DBFP, v.4, Ser.3, #247, (March 14, 1939), p.250; also, DGFP, v.6, Ser.D, #9, (March 16, 1939), p.10.

²⁹⁶ The Times, March 16, 1939, Leader, p.17.

would be no "public" outcry in Britain.²⁹⁷ While German troops consolidated their hold on Bohemia and Moravia, Chamberlain's government asserted that "internal disruptions" in Czechoslovakia meant Britain was no longer bound by its promise to preserve the country. Amidst the uproar in Parliament that this stance precipitated, the Prime Minister remained undeterred, refusing to lodge a protest against Nazi aggression on the rather spurious grounds that it would be wrong to assume the German government had any intention of attacking the lives or liberties of Czech leaders.²⁹⁸ In private meetings, Chamberlain went further, asserting he was determined to run no risks and make no sacrifices for that nation which his government had pressured so unrelentingly the year before into making such enormous sacrifices of its own.²⁹⁹

Despite the Prime Minister's protestations of Nazi good intentions, The Times' Prague correspondent reported more than 5000 Gestapo arrests made in the first two days of the German advance, and the imposition of draconian anti-Jewish measures. In frustration, The Times' leader that day abandoned restraint, labelling Hitler a "demagogic denouncer of dictated peace." Nazi methods were described as cunning and ruthless, their purpose more and more revealed as sheer aggrandizement.³⁰⁰ The scales continued to fall from the eyes of the lead editors in the ensuing days, prompting them to describe German justifications for the coup as manifestly ridiculous. Hitler was branded the perpetrator of a crime, the enemy of political and intellectual freedom everywhere.³⁰¹ Following the sudden German takeover of Memel, The Times took the

²⁹⁷ DGFP, v.4, Ser.D, #219, (March 14, 1939), pp.257-258; also, Richard Cockett, Twilight of Truth, pp.105-106: until the second week of March Chamberlain continued to go behind the Foreign Office News Department, using Lobby correspondents to inspire news stories and editorial comments which presented an optimistic picture of the international situation.

²⁹⁸ John Wheeler-Bennett, Munich, p.353; also, The Times, March 17, 1939, Parliament, p.7.

²⁹⁹ Gerhard Weinberg, The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany, pp.523-524.

³⁰⁰ The Times, March 17, 1939, Prague, p.12; and Leader, p.17.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, March 20, 1939, Leader, p.15.

extraordinary step of calling for a collective front against what it saw as a new manifestation of Prussianism. It also demanded total mobilization of the nation's resources to defend the peace.³⁰² Another leader totally contradicted prior assertions regarding the ability of dictatorships and democracies to work harmoniously together. It now suggested that "the incompatibility of Nazi methods with any reasonable code of international intercourse remains as glaring as ever."³⁰³ Momentarily, the newspaper's pro-appeasement strategy had suffered a monumental blow, and in confusion it groped for new footing. Before the month was out, however, Dawson returned The Times to its familiar stance of counselling against resistance to Germany's eastward march.

Chamberlain also revealed in the weeks following the Prague takeover that he had not lost any of his infatuation with appeasement. His less compromising speech of March 17th at Birmingham in which he appeared to signal a new course was but a temporary lapse due to the shock administered by Germany's *führer* and domestic pressure for him to respond more firmly than he had done in Parliament the previous day. To be sure, he acknowledged that negotiation on the basis of assurances given by Nazi leaders was no longer possible.³⁰⁴ However, he then relented to Nazi demands by allowing the Treasury one week later to transfer £6M of Czech money into German hands.³⁰⁵ This startling lack of realism, along with Chamberlain's continued footdragging over implementation of specific measures to strengthen the nation's defences, reveals his speech of March 17th to contain more smoke than fire. In fact, obscured by some of his tougher sounding rhetoric was a conviction that after Munich the great majority of British people

³⁰² Ibid., March 23, 1939, Leader, p.17; and March 24, 1939, Leader, p.15.

³⁰³ Ibid., March 23, 1938, Leader, p.17: it further suggested that other countries menaced by Nazi Germany must make common cause against this danger.

³⁰⁴ Gerhard Weinberg, The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany, p.542.

³⁰⁵ John Wheeler-Bennett, Munich, pp.356-357.

wished for him to carry forward with appeasement.³⁰⁶

Thus, in the days following Prague the Prime Minister's words may have symbolized dramatic change but his actions demonstrated only incremental adjustments to a policy in need of being totally revamped. Even after being frightened into offering an open-ended guarantee to Poland on March 31st following rumours of a German move in that direction, he soon reverted to his previous policy of seeking accommodation with Germany. His government intimated privately the possibility of further frontier revisions, along with economic benefits to be derived from increased trade with Britain.³⁰⁷ The Times, however, created a stir in Britain similar to the one caused by its leader of September 7th when it suggested that the Prime Minister's guarantee to Poland did not preclude further changes to the status quo in Eastern Europe. At the same time, it expressed anxiety over the slow pace of rearmament.³⁰⁸ Gustav Schmidt maintains this dual approach to continental developments reflected the mainstream Conservative philosophy of the day. In more peaceful times it had insisted on a British foreign policy that preserved the nation's freedom to develop in whatever direction it saw fit while avoiding the division of Europe into competing military and economic blocs.³⁰⁹ By the spring of 1939, however, such notions simply did not comport with reality on the continent.

The annexation of Czecho-Slovakia also aroused enormous anger among Britons of all political affiliations, which was only exacerbated by the gloating and jubilant tone of Germany's press mocking Britain's rebuff. Left and Right on the political spectrum converged for the first

³⁰⁶ The Times, March 18, 1938, Birmingham, p.14.

³⁰⁷ Maurice Cowling, The Impact of Hitler, pp.296-297; also, George H. Gallup, ed., The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls, pp.16-17: an April poll showed 72% approval for the British government extending military guarantees to preserve the independence of small European nations, and fully 87% favoured a military alliance with the Soviet Union.

³⁰⁸ The Times, April 1, 1939, Leader, p.15.

³⁰⁹ Gustav Schmidt, The Politics and Economics of Appeasement, pp.26-28.

time, evidenced by Labour shedding all vestiges of pacifism and forming an alliance with Churchill and other disaffected Conservatives in attempts to make resistance against Nazism the government's top priority.³¹⁰ Paul Kennedy sees this development as indicative of the widening gulf between "public opinion" and a government leadership desperately clinging to the wreckage of appeasement. In Parliament the Prime Minister seemed no longer able to resist the frequent expressions by fellow M.P.'s of hostility to Nazi Germany, but in private he remained as dogmatic as before.³¹¹ The Times also continued to insist there was not the slightest reason to doubt that the nation was solidly behind its government leaders.³¹² But what Dawson knew and didn't reveal is that the Prime Minister was not solidly behind his own tougher sounding rhetoric.

Throughout the spring and summer of 1939 the British government continued taking halting steps to prepare the country for what was becoming an increasingly inevitable confrontation with the lawless dictatorships of Europe. Though Germany's takeover of Bohemia and Moravia provided a vast military windfall for the German Armed Forces, increasing its fighting power on land by more than 25%,³¹³ Chamberlain waited five more weeks before ordering conscription to satisfy military needs for thousands of more recruits.³¹⁴ But just days after The Times announced the decision to enlarge Britain's army, Mussolini precipitated another

³¹⁰ . Gerhard Weinberg, The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany, p.555; also, DGFP, v.6, Ser.D, #23 (March 18, 1939), pp.24-25.

³¹¹ Paul Kennedy, The Realities Behind Diplomacy, p.308.

³¹² The Times, April 13, 1939, Leader, p.13.

³¹³ DBFP, v.4, Ser.3, #434 (March 19, 1939), pp.393-394; #555, (March 28th), p.535; also, DGFP, v.6, Ser.D, #296 (April 29, 1939), pp.376-380: the arms cache allowed Germany to create 40 new divisions. War *materiel* included 600 high quality tanks, 750-1000 airplanes, 43,000 machine guns, and one million rifles. Hitler reportedly expressed surprise that Czech arms depots had been so well looked after, believing them to have been the most strongly armed nation in the world.

³¹⁴ Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th Series, 345 (1938-39), col.2048-2052; also, George Gallup, ed., The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls, pp.16-18: April opinion polls revealed "public" ambivalence on this issue. Up to 87% of those questioned favoured military alliances with continental powers while only 48% of those polled approved of compulsory national service.

international crisis by invading Albania. Hastily, Halifax informed the German *Chargé d' Affaires* in London that the British government would need to subdue the excitement of "public opinion" by using sharp words in Parliament against the Italian aggressors. However, such posturing, he stressed, was not intended to hinder in any substantive way Anglo-Italian relations.³¹⁵

While Chamberlain's administration went out of its way to soothe the temperaments of Hitler and Mussolini, the Prime Minister remained deeply distrustful of Soviet Russia, even though to many observers it represented the last real chance of curtailing German hegemony in Europe. He feared an Anglo-Russian accord would destroy his chance of revitalizing the British economy through detente with Germany. Therefore, he did not energetically pursue negotiations with Moscow, despite confirmation of reports that the Nazis were making overtures to Stalin.³¹⁶ At this time, Weizsäcker was using several channels of communication to London, Paris and Hungary to warn of Hitler's serious intentions for territorial expansion, and of overtures to Moscow. He hoped to spur a quiet but firm British warning to Hitler. The result, however, only heightened Chamberlain's deep-seated suspicions of Stalin.³¹⁷ Dawson shared Chamberlain's phobia of the Soviet Union, vilifying Stalin's bad faith and expounding at length upon the Red Army's military unworthiness, despite the fact it possessed more tanks and combat planes than the rest of the world combined.³¹⁸ Though Western estimations of Soviet military capabilities were distorted, there was good reason to fear Stalin was playing the democracies off against Germany in an attempt to negotiate better terms for himself. Thus, according to Gerhard

³¹⁵ DGFP, v.6, Ser.D, #182, (April 11, 1939), pp.219-220.

³¹⁶ Maurice Cowling, The Impact of Hitler, pp.303-304.

³¹⁷ Leonidas Hill, "Three Crises, 1938-39," pp.128-129; and Die Weizsäcker-Papiere, pp.154-155.

³¹⁸ Richard Cockett, Twilight of Truth, pp.116-117: Chamberlain's views of Russia were not shared by most Britons (see poll above) who perhaps favoured Churchill's efforts in the summer of 1939 to form a Grand Alliance against fascism.

Weinberg neither Stalin nor Chamberlain seemed enthusiastic to secure an early alliance. He also suggests that it was Stalin who imposed impossible terms as a condition for a treaty after the British government had shown willingness to meet him half-way.³¹⁹ In contrast, William Rock maintains that British officials never grasped the Russians' sense of urgency and fear for their own security, and thus never moved quickly enough to satisfy Stalin's stern and escalating demands for a mutual aid pact.³²⁰

As tensions mounted again in August 1939 Dawson and Chamberlain worked closely together (as they had in September 1938) to encourage a spirit of optimism and conciliation among the "public." Just three days before the Nazi invasion of Poland, the Inner Cabinet instructed Sir Samuel Hoare to reprise his role as liaison between government and press in order to ensure that nothing was put into print which might offend Hitler. In the last week of August Hoare met every day with newspaper owners and editors in an effort to minimize reports of mounting international tension.³²¹ The Prime Minister's obsession with pursuing detente was such that for 55 hours in September, while German tanks and Stukas cut a swath of destruction through Poland, he continued to search for a *modus vivendi* with Nazi Germany. But this time he could not escape the intense pressure from within the Cabinet and Party to act decisively by declaring war.³²² Despite this complete abnegation of appeasement, The Times continued its faithful support of Chamberlain until May 1940, when it finally called for "a stock-taking, both of the structure and of the personnel of Government."³²³ By then, however, the country stood

³¹⁹ Gerhard Weinberg, The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany, pp.568-577,612-618.

³²⁰ William Rock, British Appeasement in the 1930s, pp.20-22.

³²¹ Richard Cockett, Twilight of Truth, pp.118-120.

³²² Paul Kennedy, The Realities Behind Diplomacy, p.310.

³²³ Stephen Koss, The Rise and Fall of the Political Press, p.599.

virtually with its back to the wall, supported only by a thoroughly demoralized France with which to withstand the deadliest assault ever to confront the Western democratic world. Such was the perilous state to which appeasement of Nazism and the obfuscation of prior warning signs had brought the people of Britain.

CONCLUSION

In the years following the outbreak of war, appeasement was vilified by a good many politicians as having no place in the foreign policies of leading nations. Both American and Soviet leaders throughout much of the Cold War disparaged any hint of appeasement in their relations with other foreign powers. The enormous consequences of appeasement's failure to prevent the outbreak of World War II resulted in the near-total rejection of that policy. But such a straight-jacketed approach to foreign affairs is as surely naive as Chamberlain's belief in the ability to paper over Hitler's grievances by appeasing his most ardent desires. Shrewdly employed, appeasement can be a valuable tool in the diplomatic arsenal of political leaders desiring to reach accommodation with a seemingly intractable foe. But for it to work, the man or woman on the opposite side of the negotiating table must first be appeasable. Chamberlain's greatest error was not in attempting appeasement, but in attempting it on Hitler. The British Prime Minister set off to visit the "wolf's lair" wearing blinkers of his own construction. Is it any surprise that he was blind-sided by Hitler's cynical opportunism on the way to and from Munich? Chamberlain faced a great many complex and seemingly intractable problems as leader of Britain in the 1930s. His policy of appeasement was based as much on domestic considerations as on international circumstances. Few political leaders can be equally adept in all areas of policy formulation at once. But it is one of the strengths of democratic systems of government that the

freer and wider flow of information and expertise can compensate for a political leader's shortcomings.

Britain's tragedy in the late 1930s was that Chamberlain's deficiencies in foreign policy were compounded by his repressive and manipulative use of the primary channels of communication for the country at large. The Times might have resisted this incursion on the traditional role of the press as a voice for expressions of dissent. It also could have used its vast information network to alert the nation to Nazism's inherent danger to democratic values and institutions in Europe. Instead, Dawson joined with the Prime Minister in uncritically portraying the virtues of government policy. Simultaneously, The Times gratified Chamberlain's obsession with managing his "public" image by stifling dissent. It cannot be disputed that Chamberlain genuinely felt he was acting in a righteous and noble cause. But in the process of seeking lasting peace and stability in Europe he employed less than noble means to ensure no one -least of all, "public opinion"- interfered with his self-professed mission.

It may well be true that the majority of Britons throughout most of the 1930s felt a strong aversion to waging war. Given the experiences of the previous major European conflict, such sentiment was entirely understandable and proper. Nonetheless, the British people displayed strong hostility to Nazi Germany in late 1938 and early 1939 when unmistakable proof of its brutality and lust for conquest were revealed to the world. This suggests that Britons were not so imbued with anti-war sentiment as to preclude their government from considering tougher military options for preserving the integrity of Czechoslovakia, which many believed to be the last bastion of democratic values in eastern and central Europe. Were they informed of what the British government knew about Hitler's regime earlier, "public opinion" might just as easily have become a weapon for resisting Nazi expansionism as The Times suggested it was for continuing the policy of appeasement.

Generally, "public opinion" in modern democracies focuses on domestic concerns, where it is capable of bringing effective force to bear on local issues and political leaders. In foreign affairs, however, the "public" usually looks to its national government for direction and lead. In the 1930s, Britain's Prime Minister Chamberlain proved unwilling to stimulate the national polity into greater effort to confront a serious international threat to European security. Rather than rely on experts in foreign policy who took far more seriously than he did the many warnings of impending European disaster, the Prime Minister deceived himself and the British people into thinking peace was at hand. As the most respected and influential newspaper in Britain, The Times might have alerted and galvanized the "public" into exerting influence on Chamberlain's government to revise policies which were leading Britain into dangerous waters. Unfortunately, not until the spring of 1939 did The Times abandon its efforts to depict Hitler and Nazism as constructive forces for European stability and order. But by then, there was precious little time to re-direct energies before an onslaught from the evil forces of nihilism brought the abyss to Britain's doorstep. The Times contributed to Britons finding themselves in such precarious circumstances by working hand-in-glove with the government in disguising for too long unpleasant truths about the state of foreign affairs. Instead of fighting to protect press freedoms by remaining at arms-length from the politicians in power, The Times, along with many of Britain's other leading publications, fell into a cosy compliance with the authorities. They therefore turned their considerable resources for fact-finding into products of deception and bias. In the process, they unwittingly aided and abetted Hitler in leading the British people into a blind alley, with little more than Churchillian rhetoric to comfort them in the trying days ahead.

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