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THE DIPLOMACY OF SIR NEVILE HENDERSON 1937-9

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

This thesis, the first study of Nevile Henderson to be completed at doctoral level in the UK, takes a fresh look at Henderson's controversial role in Berlin between 1937 and 1939.

It begins by re-examining Henderson's controversial appointment to the Berlin Embassy, and contends that a close study of his earlier career (especially in Belgrade between 1929 and 1935) help to explain those aspects of his behaviour that gave rise to criticism.

After close analysis of published and unpublished Foreign Office documents, the thesis challenges the traditional view that Henderson favoured the Anschluss and the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in 1938. It also re-examines the charge that he undermined British policy by making indiscreet remarks in Germany, and argues that his scepticism about the anti-Nazi opposition was fully justified. And that he did, to a degree, carry out his 'warning' function in Berlin.

Another key aspect concerns the extent to which Henderson's line in Berlin had support in the Foreign Office, and the re-consideration of his pivotal relation-ships with Chamberlain and Halifax. Particular attention is paid to the decision to send Henderson (by then a seriously ill man) back to Berlin in February 1939.

The author's overall view is that, given Henderson's

flawed analysis of the Nazi regime, a totally revisionist analysis of his time in Berlin would be untenable. The main conclusions are (a) that Henderson's influence on British policy has been exaggerated and (b) that he has been unfairly treated by historians.

This thesis seeks to redress the historical balance by presenting the first close analysis, and rounded account of what Henderson called the 'failure of a mission'.

Introduction

As British Ambassador in Berlin between 1937 and 1939 Nevile Henderson has understandably attracted the attention of historians analysing the causes of the Second World War. For most of the post-war period however, his period of service in Berlin has been viewed by historians with a surprising degree of uniformity, and this uniformity has been largely negative and critical.

The trend was set in the late 1940s and early 1950s by Sir Lewis Namier, who castigated Henderson as 'un homme néfaste', a posturing incompetent, who attempted in unconvincing fashion to defend his role in Germany as Ambassador by means of the 'pseudo artistic claptrap' in his memoir Failure of A Mission published in 1940.[1]

There has been little disposition to challenge Namier's conclusions amongst historians thereafter. In 1953 the seminal study of inter-war diplomats by Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert accused Henderson of ignoring his own injunction that an ambassador should 'act as "faithful interpreter" of his government's instructions'.[2] It also saw Henderson as not only an unsuccessful diplomat, but also a representative of 'a declining ruling class' which could not reconcile itself to 'the social transformation of the 1920s and 1930s.'[3] The hostile theme continued in 1963 with the savage critique of appeasement presented by Martin Gilbert and Richard Gott in The Appeasers which depicted

Henderson in much the same way as Namier as 'our Nazi ambassador in Berlin', a diplomat who failed disastrously either to convey British views accurately to Hitler or to avoid showing overt sympathy for the Nazi regime.[4] The Appeasers coincided with the publication in the previous year of the former Foreign Secretary Lord Avon's first volume of memoirs Facing the Dictators, in which the former Anthony Eden described Henderson's appointment in 1937 as 'an international misfortune' and regretted the fact that he had sent him to Berlin. (Henderson's selection for this key post was a surprise both to himself and others in the diplomatic service.)[5] A decade earlier, Craig and Gilbert had speculated on why it was that Henderson had insisted on behaving like 'a "great ambassador" in the style of the eighteenth or nineteenth century',[6] and highlighted Henderson's own belief that 'God had granted him a special mission' 'to save the peace and create a long-lasting Anglo-German entente.'[7]

The implementation of the Thirty Year Rule in 1968, which opened many Foreign Office files hitherto unavailable (including Henderson's own personal file) did not in the opinion of Professor Paul Kennedy require any revision of the way in which Henderson's diplomacy had been portrayed by earlier historians. This conclusion was supported in 1976 by Edward Ingram, who compared Henderson's lack of competence and professionalism with that of Shirley Temple Black.[8] As recently as 1996 Professor D. Cameron Watt in an essay entitled 'Chamberlain's Ambassadors' reiterated the charge that Henderson had failed in his duty to warn the Germans effectively about the likely consequences of

aggression on their part."

Henderson also aroused unfavourable comparison with his subordinates in the Berlin Embassy. Both Professor Watt and Bruce Strang, writing in 1989 and 1994 respectively, argued that Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes, the then Counsellor at the Embassy, was both more realistic and more robust than Henderson in his attitude to the Nazis (particularly in 1938-9 when he stood in for him during the latter's absence on sick leave).[10]

Another accusation, put forward in Patricia Meehan's 1992 monograph, 'The Unnecessary War, is that Henderson failed miserably to take seriously the German opposition to Hitler, or to encourage his government to do so. Meehan supported the charge that Henderson had been guilty of fawning acquiescence to the Nazi regime's aspirations.[11]

Attempts to rehabilitate Henderson have been few and far between. One attempt in 1958, very much in the teeth of the received wisdom about Henderson at the time, was made by the Irish historian T. Desmond Williams. Williams suggested that the prestigious British Foreign Policy Documents series had been edited in such a way as to deliberately show Henderson in a poor light.[12] There was no equivalent attempt to rehabilitate Henderson in the 1960s, but a cogent analysis of his diplomacy is in the US historian Vaughan B. Baker's unpublished Ph.D. thesis in 1975, and a subsequent article in 1977. Baker's view is that Henderson laboured heroically to represent Britain in Berlin despite the confusion created by the existence of a large faction in the Foreign Office, led by Sir Robert Vansittart and Orme Sargent, which was critical of the Government's appeasement

line towards Germany.

Henderson, according to Baker, was a Wilsonian idealist who had always believed that the aspirations of ethnic Germans had been cruelly crushed by the Versailles Treaty and its associated treaties, and subsequently ignored. But Henderson's idealism, in Baker's view, was also blended with a strong streak of realism. Henderson consistently warned against pointless military posturing against Germany in 1938-9, when in his judgement, Britain lacked the military muscle to carry out its threats.[13]

A subsequent article in The Journal of British International Studies (1980) by Aaron Goldman, while acknowledging Henderson's flaws as an ambassador, questioned why it was that he had been sent to Berlin in the first place in 1937, and why, when a very sick man in 1939, he had been sent back to his post after four months' sick leave, by Halifax and the Foreign Office. Goldman was critical of Vansittart's attitude to Germany which he compared to Henderson's (noting that Vansittart was not always as anti-German as his reputation suggests), but did not adopt the more revisionist position of Baker about the practicality of Henderson's position, and his sympathy for German grievances.[14]

Amongst the very few monographs which adopted a more sympathetic attitude to Henderson's diplomacy was Maurice Cowling's The Impact of Hitler, published in 1975, and John Charmley's Chamberlain and the Lost Peace, which appeared in 1989. Unusually, Cowling believed that: 'Before the Anschluss Henderson was not optimistic. Nor did he want it to be the Nazis who brought it about.' Neither did he actually advocate, Cowling argued, the dismemberment of

Czechoslovakia in 1938. Cowling recognised that Henderson 'held no brief for the Nazi system', whereas other historians had accused Henderson of just that offence. Crucially Cowling recognised that Henderson was 'ill, in touch, and overworked', factors curiously ignored by his many critics. Conversely, Cowling was critical of Henderson's former friend, and admirer, Vansittart, whom he believed to be inconsistent and contradictory.[15]

Charmley, who devoted the first chapter of his book to the key relationship between Henderson and Neville Chamberlain, saw Henderson as someone in the tradition of British diplomats who had not regarded Eastern Europe as a vital British national interest in the context of German demands for territorial revision after the 1919 settlement. Charmley pointed out that Neville Chamberlain's own half-brother Austen said, when Foreign Secretary in 1925, that the Polish Corridor (with its large population of ethnic Germans) was not worth 'the bones of a British grenadier' Thus Henderson, Charmley argued, was in the same tradition as Sanderson before the First World War, who did not regard Germany as a menace, as Vansittart was in that of Sir Eyre Crowe, who suspected German intentions and insisted on a forward policy to safeguard British interests.[16]

On the German side there has been some significant evidence that Henderson did in fact, contrary to the assertions of Professor Watt and others, pass on serious warnings that German aggression against Czechoslovakia or Poland would mean war. The Von Hassell Diaries, first published in German in 1946, show this to have been the case in 1938, and <u>How We Squandered the Reich</u>, the memoirs of

Reinhard Spitzy, an aide to Ribbentrop, published in an English translation in 1997, show that Henderson did carry out this function in the summer of 1939.[17] Spitzy went so far as to dedicate his book to Henderson as a man 'who risked both himself and his reputation' in the process of trying to prevent war in 1939.[18]

The reactions to Henderson's period as Ambassador in Berlin seem to have left little room for neutrality. The historiography portrays him as either an incompetent, prejudiced bungler or as a high-minded, patriotic idealist.

One of the central contentions of this thesis is that there has been, amongst historians, a tendency to ignore Henderson's earlier career and especially his period in Belgrade between 1929 and 1935. This has distorted the view of his time in Berlin and his capacity for unorthodox diplomacy, both in terms of his relationship with the Foreign Office and his relationships with foreign leaders like King Alexander of Yugoslavia and Hermann Göring in Germany. He was, after all, sent to Berlin in 1937 because of his ability to 'hit it off' with authoritarian rulers.[19]

There were also more nuances to Henderson's diplomacy than traditional analyses have allowed (as the thesis will show). A more detailed scrutiny of even the published British Foreign Policy Documents, shows that Henderson tried to preserve both Austrian and Czechoslovak integrity in 1938, but that he was badly shaken by the events of the so-called 'May Scare', the weekend of 20-21 May. Thereafter Henderson, in one sense laudably, was desperate to preserve the peace at almost any cost.

Henderson was never an apologist for the Nazi system,

although he undoubtedly sympathised with German grievances because he had always believed (from the period when he worked in the Paris Embassy in 1919) that the Versailles Treaty was unjust. Hence his insistence on the importance of morality in Britain's dealings with Germany. Making sure that Britain, and not Hitler, took the moral high ground was an essential part of Henderson's approach to Anglo-German relations. Yet at the same time he could be brutally realistic about Britain's military weakness in 1938-9, while failing to perceive the ultimate objectives of Nazi foreign policy.

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15. M. Cowling, The Impact of Hitler, Oxford, 1975, pp.286-7.

16. J. Charmley, Chamberlain and the Lost Peace, London, 1989, pp.8-9.

17. R. Spitzy, How We Squandered the Reich, London, 1996; The Von Hassell Diaries, Zurich, 1946.

18. Spitzy, p.365.

19. In a post-war gibe at Henderson, Lord Vansittart said that in Belgrade the then Minister 'made such a hit with the dictator by his skill in shooting that he was ultimately picked for Berlin'. Vansittart was perhaps trying to exorcise his own guilt for appointing Henderson to Berlin. The Mist Procession, London, 1958, p.360.

Chapter One

The Emergent Diplomat

Nevile Meyrick Henderson was born on 10 June 1882, the third child of Robert and Emma Henderson of Sedgwick Park near Horsham, Sussex. Sedgwick was to play a central role in Nevile Henderson's life thereafter, as he himself noted many years later while awaiting his own death from the cruel cancer that killed him. 'Each time that I returned to England,' Henderson wrote,

> the white cliffs of Dover meant Sedgwick for me, and when my mother died in 1931 and my home was sold by my elder brother's wife, something went out of my life that nothing can replace.[1]

The Hendersons were of Scots ancestry (Nevile wore the kilt at home until he went to preparatory school) and his grandfather Alexander moved to England from Leuchars in Fife, leaving on his death a vast fortune for those days of half a million pounds, and three substantial estates. One called Park, was on the Clyde south of Glasgow, and the second, Randell's Park, was near Leatherhead in Surrey. As the eldest son, Robert Henderson received Sedgwick Park in his father's will, a vast estate of up to 5,000 acres.[2]

It is clear that Henderson had a privileged and largely secure childhood. Robert Henderson was a Director of the Bank of England, who did well out of the family firms of R & I Henderson and the Borneo Company. His sudden death,

when Nevile was thirteen and had barely entered Eton, precipitated a minor crisis in the family's fortunes. But Emma Henderson was a formidable woman (who had gone on a tour around the world at the tender age of twenty-four) and she rose to the challenge. Henderson wrote in his memoirs of how Emma, a tenacious and conservative property-owner, staved off disaster by selling a farm and shooting rights on the estate . His mother also made the gardens at Sedgwick sufficiently famous for them to be photographed for the magazine Country Life in 1901. Henderson appears to have been somewhat in awe of 'the presiding genius of Sedgwick', who was 'a wonderful and masterful woman if ever there was one'. She lived on to be eighty-one and died in 1931, eleven months before Henderson's work for the Diplomatic Service was acknowledged with a KCMG.[3] By coincidence, the sale of Sedgwick in 1931 happened in the same year that the Henderson family also lost Park and Randell's Park. Too much can be made of the subsequent decline in the Henderson family's fortunes. Henderson may, as one authority notes, have been 'something of a snob', but it is surely reading too much into the loss of the family estate in 1931 to pronounce definitely that

> Henderson is more than merely a diplomat who failed. He is, rather, typical of the helplessness with which members of declining ruling class faced the social transformation of the 1920s and 1930s.[4]

Plainly, however, Henderson was a member of the ruling class which provided the narrow circle of public school and Oxbridge entrants from which future diplomats were selected. He was at Eton with George Lloyd, who was to be his chief in

Egypt in the 1920s, and Alexander Cadogan, who was to be his Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office in the 1930s. And he acquired all those social and sporting skills required by a Victorian or Edwardian gentleman. Even his garb for long-distance rail travel underlines this point. It consisted, somewhat bizarrely, of

> an old coat, a pair of flannel trousers, and that much abused and maligned article, an old school tie, generally the old Etonian cricket colours known as the Eton Ramblers or that of I. Zingari.

Above everything else in Henderson's gentlemanly image was his obsession with hunting and shooting to which all three of his memoirs frequently refer.[5] He spent much time shooting game in the company of foreigners like King Alexander of Yugoslavia and Hermann Göring.[6] The gentle-manly image was carefully cultivated. For Adolf Hitler, Henderson became 'the man with the carnation', while the contemporary political diarist Chips Channon noted how Henderson was 'as usual, faultlessly dressed'.[7]

Henderson's mother was a major influence upon him, and his Dictionary of National Biography entry (not the work of an admirer) noted that 'affection for his mother played a large part in his life, as did also certain female friend-ships'[8] (a reference perhaps to Henderson's proclivity for platonic relationships with society ladies like Princess Olga of Yugoslavia). There might be a tendency in the 1990s to make assumptions about Henderson's sexual preferences from the fact that he was a bachelor (although unmarried status was common enough for diplomats in his era). The German diplomat von Weizsäcker described Henderson as 'a

ladies' man' and it is clear that women played an important role in his life. Henderson is described as 'a tall, slim, good looking man with fine features'[9] and someone who 'displayed a careless elegance, was never without a real carnation in his button-hole, was a sportsman, especially keen on blood sports, hated crowds...'[10]

Henderson was an open air man, not an intellectual. On his own admission he was a moderate scholar at Eton, he did not go to university, and he would have preferred a career in the Army. Indeed he passed the examination for the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, and was only prevented from taking it up by family pressure upon him after the near death of his brother Evelyn from enteric fever during the South African War. Henderson himself was puzzled that for 'some unknown reason, always a mystery to me, I had been destined from earliest days to the Diplomatic Service'.[11] He was also a fatalist. Was the quirk of fate which prevented him from joining the military in 1900 the root of the fatalistic belief, more than thirty years later, that he 'had been specially selected by Providence for the definite mission of, as I trusted, helping to preserve the peace of the world' in Berlin?[12] Diplomatic colleagues of long-standing noted a 'fey' streak in Henderson's character which seemed to predispose him to fatalism. Interestingly, Henderson himself recognised this flaw.[13]

After leaving Eton in 1900 Henderson was to spend four years abroad improving his German, French and Italian together with periods in examination crammers in London. He failed the Foreign Office examination in French the first time around, but did not regret this failure 'as it

compelled me to study that language so useful in diplomacy far more intensively than I would otherwise have done.[14] In his memoirs, he relates with some pride the fact that he passed out first in French in the next round of examinations, although his German was considerably weaker.

The Foreign Office which Nevile Henderson entered in May 1905 was a closed, intimate society, almost entirely male (apart from a few female typists) and socially exclusive. In those days the Foreign Office was divided from the Diplomatic Service, although it was normal for new entrants to spend a year at the Foreign Office in London before being posted abroad. In Henderson's own case even this short period was truncated, as he was posted to the Saint Petersburg Embassy as early as November 1905. In his memoir Water Under the Bridges Henderson regretted the fact that he had not had the opportunity to have a longer stint at the Foreign Office (he worked there again for a brief period in 1915). He was to be abroad continuously from 1905 to 1939, and was aware of the disadvantages of the separation of the Foreign Office and the Diplomatic Service. And of the strange life pattern of the professional diplomat:

> A man who lives abroad all his life becomes a stranger in his own country and loses touch with his own people and the personalities in it ... The Foreign Office, moreover, has its own habits, methods and idiosyncrasies and it is better that HM's representatives abroad should be familiar with them. Otherwise there is friction and misunderstanding and a mutual lack of sympathy which is prejudicial to the best possible results ... I have

> always regretted that I never came back to work at the Foreign Office for a spell of at least a year or two.[15]

The corollary was also true. Henderson's colleague and superior Orme Sargent, who was a leading critic of his diplomacy in Berlin, never held a major diplomatic post and rarely left the Foreign Office in London.

Nevertheless, even during his short period at the Foreign Office in 1905, Henderson was forging some of the central relationships of his professional career. Most crucially that with Lancelot Oliphant, a future Ambassador to Brussels and Head of the Eastern Department, who was effectively Henderson's mentor and source of solace in his (not infrequent) moments of depression later in his career. Oliphant, Henderson wrote later, was a 'kindly and competent teacher, and I have a lifelong affection for him'.[16]

When Henderson was sent to Saint Petersburg as an attaché in 1905 he served under Sir Arthur Nicolson, and remained in Russia until 1909. Thereafter he served in Tokyo between 1909 and 1912, where Horace Rumbold, another significant influence on Henderson's own career, was Counsellor, before returning for a second stint at Saint Petersburg in 1912. During this second tour in Russia, the First Secretary at the Embassy was Eric Phipps, who was to be Henderson's predecessor at the Berlin Embassy from 1933 to 1937.[17] Then, during a period of home leave in 1913, Henderson, rather recklessly, became involved in running guns into Ulster with his brother-in-law Lord Leitrim, 'one of the most fanatical of Ulstermen'[18] at the height of the 1912-14 Home Rule Crisis. Henderson was often to make

references to the Ulster case for separation from the South in his despatches, especially in the 1938 Czechoslovak crisis, when the issue of Sudeten autonomy was so crucial. Repetitive themes were to be a feature of his career.

From June to October 1914 Henderson was posted from June to October to Rome, where Sir Rennell Rodd (later Lord Rennell of Rodd) was Ambassador. But when war broke out in August 1914, he made the first of several unsuccessful attempts to join the British Army. This first attempt resulted in his being posted by an irritated Foreign Office to the Serbian capital Nish, the seat of government after the Austrian occupation of Belgrade. Following the joint German/Austrian/Bulgar attack on unoccupied Serbia, Henderson was forced to return to London, and spent his second brief spell working at the Foreign Office. There his colleagues included Orme Sargent and Hugh Knatchbull-Hugessen, a future Ambassador to Turkey.[19]

The next posting was to be a highly significant one for Henderson, for in February 1916 he was posted to Paris, where he served initially under Lord Bertie of Thame and then under Lord Derby.[20] It was important for two reasons. Firstly, Henderson showed his obstinate streak and personal bravery, while annoying Lord Bertie, by refusing a posting in Athens. He still had hopes of joining the Army. The Foreign Office was also angered by Henderson's refusal to go to Athens, the Diplomatic Secretary to Sir Edward Grey, Theo Russell, telegraphing Henderson that 'with the utmost difficulty we have succeeded in finding someone to take your place at Athens'.[21] This sort of behaviour was later to obtain for Henderson something of a reputation for being

pig-headed. He relates that Lord Bertie refused to allow him inside his house for a year after the Athens episode.[22] But once he had made up his mind to follow a certain course of action, Henderson could be mulish and obdurate.

The second reason why Henderson's stay in Paris is significant is that he was First Secretary and Head of Chancery at the time of the 1919 Peace Conference. One analyst has accurately described how Henderson 'objected to the Versailles Treaty from its inception and had been an ardent advocate of revision'.[23] Recalling his own reaction to the signature of the Treaty in the Galérie des Glaces at Versailles, Henderson wrote that

> one sensed a feeling of deception and disillusionment and a suspicion that the great opportunity which all the world at that time sought so ardently, and had the right to anticipate, had been lost ... The Germans were left bitter and resentful.[24]

This was evidence of the birth of a prototype appeaser, for time after time in his telegrams to the Foreign Office, after his appointment as Ambassador in Berlin in 1937, Henderson was to stress the justice of German grievances against Versailles. While at the same time complaining about the 'national artificiality of states created by Versailles like Czechoslovakia.[25]

Henderson's posting in Paris ended in November 1920, when he was sent as First Secretary to serve under Sir Horace Rumbold in Constantinople, a highly responsible post as it turned out, because the Ambassador was to be away for lengthy periods at the Lausanne Peace Conference. Henderson was an admirer of Sir Horace, whom he saw as 'a representa-

tive who would take no rot from anybody'.[26] This was a period of extreme tension between the new regime in Turkey under Kemal Ataturk, the Greeks, who had territorial aspirations in Asia Minor (and especially Smyrna) and the Allied powers Britain, France and Italy.

Henderson seemed to cope well. Rumbold offered qualified endorsement of his protégé. Henderson, he told the Foreign Office, was not 'a strong man', but someone who 'by his own personality can influence the Ministers with whom he has to deal'. He was a diplomat, Rumbold opined, who used 'jujitsu methods in diplomacy' but would in certain circumstances take the line of least resistance which could, Rumbold conceded, sometimes pay quite well.[27]

The most important event of Henderson's period at Constantinople was the Chanak crisis of 1922. Chanak was the main defensive position of the Allied powers (Britain, France and Italy) outside Constantinople and it was menaced by the forces of Kemal Ataturk. The prospect of war alarmed Henderson, but he warned (as he was to do many times in Berlin) about the dangers of bluff if Britain was not really prepared to fight.

> The Turk is rattling his sabre [Henderson wrote to Rumbold] and I wish I could feel certain that he does not mean to draw it. I can hardly conceive the possibility of war when the two sides to the quarrel both want peace so badly.[28] They think [Henderson went on] we are bluffing nor is it astonishing that they think so for we certainly are making no preparations for war. We think on the other hand that <u>they</u> are bluffing.

But Henderson was no supine appeaser over Chanak, and he wanted to make British intentions absolutely clear.

> I fear trouble [he told Rumbold] unless we make it quite clear that we mean war if the Turk won't yield. Can't we make it clear? Send 10,000 men to Malta or something. It will be necessary in the end.[29]

Henderson was therefore prepared to use force if need be.

He also noted the essentially pacific mood of British public opinion. 'The nation wants peace so badly,' he wrote to Rumbold on 8 January 1923, 'that neither it nor Bonar Law want to take even the slight risk of war which the preparation for war would entail.'[30] Henderson was convinced that if Britain showed it would fight, the Turks would give in.

But the Turks had to be taken seriously, as 'there is more than bluff in them ... The ominous part is the apparent thoroughness of Turkish preparations'.[31] He admired Rumbold's steadiness throughout the Chanak crisis, and the manner in which he argued his own case even when it disagreed with the line taken by the Cabinet. When the Cabinet wanted to send an ultimatum to Kemal warning of the perils of attacking Chanak, Rumbold supported the unwillingness of the military commander General Harington to do so. When Henderson was in Berlin he was frequently to query his own instructions in the same manner, and given his admiration for Rumbold, it is likely that he was influenced by his mentor's independence of mind.

Henderson was disgusted by the way in which Britain was deserted by its French and Italian allies at Chanak, leaving a tiny British force to confront Kemal alone. He became

convinced that all alliances were

> a snare and a delusion and that it is impossible to count on Allies who do not speak the same language as oneself. I felt this very strongly when I went to Berlin in 1937.[32]

His anti-French prejudice in particular grew stronger, based as it was on his experience at the Paris Embassy during the Paris Peace Conference. He wrote to Oliphant in November 1922, at the height of the Chanak crisis wishing 'we could get rid of Poincaré [the French Prime Minister who had a notoriously poor relationship with the British Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon].[33] Henderson was extremely suspicious of the influence of the press in international relations. He followed up his attack on Poincaré with an attack on the French press, which he believed to be 'in the grip of the international financier or Jew who only cares for French financial interests and nothing else'.

The Turkish press fared no better. On 13 February 1924, Henderson sent an article from Constantinople to Oliphant at the Foreign Office which he said was

> a typical example of the sort of trash, incorrect in nearly all the facts which Turkish press perpetuates. The general idea is however one which is commonly held by those misguided barbarians.[34]

To judge from these extracts, Henderson would appear to have been xenophobic in his attitude towards both the French and the Turks. He was certainly critical of the Turks in his despatches in the manner of his Ambassador (who was also known to refer to the French as 'cads and apes'). But this impression would be misleading, as Henderson's colleague,

Andrew Ryan, noted. Writing about Henderson's period as Acting High Commissioner during Rumbold's absence at the Lausanne Conference (November 1922 to July 1923), Ryan observed that

> the impression prevailed in Turkish circles that leading British people concerned in their affairs might be divided into two anti-Turkish Rs, Rumbold and Ryan, and two pro-Turkish Hs, Harington and Henderson. This was not wholly without foundation, but the difference was one of general outlook and approach to the question under discussion at the Conference.[35]

In Constantinople, as in Berlin, Henderson was prone to be over-sympathetic to the government to which he was accredited. But in Constantinople Ryan did not believe that this distorted Henderson's judgement, and Rumbold was impressed by his work. In a crisis Henderson was quite prepared to put considerable diplomatic pressure on the Turks, as the record shows.

Henderson learnt much from Rumbold about crisis-management during the Chanak crisis. After the successful resolution of the problem by diplomacy, Rumbold wrote to Henderson on 2 January 1923 about the lessons which could be absorbed. He had seen over and over again, he told Henderson, how situations arise 'from which one would think that there was no escape except a conflict, and yet in the end a formula has been found which averts the impending catastrophe'.[36] Henderson was to seek just such a formula in his desperate struggle to preserve peace in the Czech crisis of 1938 and the Polish crisis of 1939. Indeed it is possible

that Henderson, whose initial reaction to Turkish behaviour was to want 10,000 men to be sent to Malta, became a convert to Rumbold's more emollient approach as a result of the Chanak crisis. He certainly admired the way in which Rumbold kept his head, while the Cabinet in London (Curzon apart) were losing theirs. He would have learnt too, about the dangers of sabre-rattling when the military means to back up a policy of armed intervention were not available.

Chanak would also have taught Henderson a valuable lesson about the reliability of the Empire. Only New Zealand of Britain's white dominions was willing to send troops to defend Chanak in 1922, a situation which was to be almost exactly duplicated in September 1938. Sixteen years later Australia, Canada and South Africa were to find the Czech Sudetenland no more attractive a cause than the Straits in 1922.

Here then was the gist of Henderson's later approach in Germany. Be prepared to negotiate with your opponent, however brutish and unpleasant, but avoid threats and bluff that could not be backed up with force. Henderson followed this line with unwavering consistency from Chanak to Danzig. Arguably there would have been less surprise in the Foreign Office about his behaviour in Berlin in 1937, if more serious attention had been devoted to his earlier career.

Henderson the rebel, who often queried his Foreign Office instructions and complained about his postings, was clearly in evidence in Turkey. The issue of Mosul, which remained in British hands after the 1923 Lausanne Conference against Turkish protests, was an especially thorny one, and in July 1924 Henderson wrote to Oliphant worried lest

> the FO may think I am always querying their instructions... respecting Mosul. But I do not want to leave any doubt in a matter in which it is of the utmost importance that we should be absolutely frank and explicit.[37]

Henderson also admitted to what his critics regarded as a besetting sin, a tendency to exceed his brief when talking to representatives of the host government. 'I said privately,' he informed Oliphant, 'as much as I could - perhaps more than I should.'[38] Three weeks later, on 4 August, Henderson was complaining to Oliphant about confusing instructions from the Foreign Office about a frontier dispute between Britain's mandate Iraq and Turkey. He had 'no desire to be fractious', Henderson informed his old mentor 'though I felt so last Saturday'. Oliphant replied tactfully the next day that 'your views are always welcome'. Others would not be so tolerant in the 1930s.[39]

It is therefore possible to see Henderson as something of a stormy petrel in Foreign Office ranks: argumentative, indiscreet and on occasion self-righteous. But colleagues appreciated his good qualities. Horace Rumbold clearly had considerable faith in Henderson's abilities when he wrote to Oliphant on 5 March 1923 observing that 'there is very little danger of trouble here and Henderson could very well look after the show during the three or four weeks during which the discussions are likely to last' [a reference to the Lausanne Conference].[40] And Andrew Ryan was to write of Henderson in his memoirs 'He was a capable diplomat ... We were very good friends, though I think he leaned more to the Turkish cause than either Rumbold or myself.'[41] These

comments, while calling into question the legend that Henderson was a fractious colleague, do seem to provide evidence for the accusation that Henderson was inclined to 'go native' in post, and forget his own injunction that a diplomat should 'faithfully ... interpret the views of his own Government to the Government to which he is accredited'.[42] It is worth noting that Ryan, who had come to know Henderson well in Constantinople, added a caveat, 'he hardly seemed cast for the important rôle he played in Berlin on the eve of war'.[43] Yet Lord Derby, Henderson's former Ambassador in Paris, wrote to him in a personal letter in 1922 about the 'good opinion expressed by my fellow-members in the Cabinet about your handling of all the difficult questions with which you have to deal in Constantinople'.[44] Henderson, then, was deemed to be a capable career diplomat, and was chosen as Minister Plenipotentiary in Cairo under the High Commissioner Lord Allenby, when Sir Lee Stack, the Sirdar, was assassinated in the streets of Cairo in 1924.[45]

Henderson was carefully briefed prior to his departure by the Foreign Secretary, Austen Chamberlain, and the then Permanent Under-Secretary Sir Eyre Crowe, for what was a sensitive and difficult post. The parting shot from Walford Selby, a friend of the Henderson family, and Chamberlain's Private Secretary, was 'For goodness' sake do not lose your temper with Allenby' (Allenby was the conqueror of the Turks in Palestine and suspicious of Henderson, whom he thought the Foreign Office had sent out to undermine his authority as High Commissioner).[46] But Henderson was able to cope well enough with 'the Bull'.

On his own admission it was the complexities of

Egyptian politics which he found most daunting; for the country, after being virtually a colony between 1914 and 1918, had reverted to its quasi-independent status afterwards. Britain was granted a special role in the Nile Valley, and Egypt was to avoid an anti-British stance in its foreign policy but otherwise the country was supposedly independent under King Fuad. The agreement of 1922 had however left the exact relationship between Britain and Egypt somewhat unclear, and this was resented by Egyptian nationalists like Zagloul Pasha who regarded Egypt's position as humiliating. The constitutional monarchy was supported by the Conservative Party led by politicians such as Ziwar Pasha and the Liberals led by Sidky.

Henderson saw his task as being the achievement of an Anglo-Egyptian Treaty which would put relations on a proper basis. But the replacement of Allenby as High Commissioner by Lord Lloyd, Henderson's old Eton school-friend, put this objective in jeopardy. Henderson acknowledges this fact in a key passage of Water Under the Bridges. Lloyd's lifetime ambition had been to become Viceroy of India, and in Henderson's view he was too inflexible for the post of High Commissioner in Egypt.

> All the time we were in Egypt together [Henderson wrote] we remained personal friends, but politically we were poles apart, and in the end he short-circuited me and worked entirely through the First Secretary Wiggin. Nor could I, nor did I take exception, somewhat galling though it might be, for I would have done the same myself ... He [Lloyd] came out to Cairo with the definite instruction of

> HM Government to endeavour to conclude a bi-lateral agreement and alliance with Egypt. That entailed appeasement and concession and both were anathema to George Lloyd.'[47]

Henderson claimed to have been publicly loyal to Lloyd despite their differences, but this claim is disputed by Lloyd's biographer, Charmley. He notes that Henderson and Lloyd had kept up 'a detailed correspondence' about Egypt between 1918 and 1925 but accuses Henderson of sniping at Lloyd behind his back with Foreign Office officials.[48] There is some substance in this charge. On 31 July 1926 Henderson wrote to his old friend Walford Selby,

> Entre nous I do not see eye to eye on many things with Lloyd. What I find hardest is to do good work and loyal service with a man who is set on a policy which though it may promise kudos for a while and the praise of the Daily Mail and the Diehards, I regard as contrary to our ultimate advantage. I mean going back on the Milner Report and the 1922 declaration [the Milner Report of 1920 advocated the regulation of Anglo-Egyptian affairs by means of a treaty].'[49]

Superficially all was well between the two men. Henderson wrote on 21 May 1925 of his pleasure at having Lloyd as his chief and promising to 'help in any way I can if you will let me know your views'. He warned Lloyd (in familiar style) against the Egyptians shortly afterwards. 'Among Egyptians 98% are influenced solely by personal interest. Convictions are "rarae aves"!' and lectured him about diplomatic virtues, saying that the 'one indispensable

quality of a diplomat is that they should be gentlemen'. He was glad that Lloyd was interested in duck-shooting, and characteristically wanted the High Commissioner to come to Egypt in a warship (presumably to overawe the natives).[50] But underneath all this lay a very serious difference of opinion on Britain's imperial role, Lloyd's die-hardism (Churchill was a friend and supporter) versus Henderson's belief that concessions to the Egyptians were essential, if Britain was to safeguard the Suez Canal and her regional security.[51]

John Charmley accuses Henderson of siding with the Foreign Office against his superior. Lloyd's fears about the Foreign Office did not, he argues, 'extend to Henderson, the man he left in charge of the residency' on visits to London, who let him down.[52] Yet, despite Henderson's alleged treachery, Lloyd was to write of him in the warmest terms to Austen Chamberlain on 6 May 1928, as his term as High Commissioner came to an end. Lloyd referred to 'the gratitude which I feel I owe to him for all the loyal and efficient help he has given me since I have been here'.[53] Lloyd would have wished Henderson to be awarded a KCMG, but knew that in Foreign Office career terms this would have been premature. But Chamberlain agreed with his high regard for Henderson writing in a personal letter on 15 May,

> Your tribute to Nevile Henderson has given me much pleasure. You are right in believing that I think highly of him and your testimony to his loyalty and usefulness is therefore very welcome... I was just sitting down to write to you when I heard that he himself was in the Private Secretary's room

[Henderson was en route to Paris as Counsellor]. I had the pleasure, therefore, of telling him of your praise. On his side he spoke most warmly of you, and not only with the loyalty which is characteristic of him, but with a real regard for you and a quick appreciation of the inevitable difficulties of the High Commissioner's position.[54]

Two more striking endorsements of Henderson's abilities would be difficult to imagine.

It is true that later in his career Lord Lloyd did exhibit some bitterness towards Henderson in a talk with a member of the anti-Nazi German resistance in the summer of 1939. Fabian von Schlabrendorf was to write later of how Lloyd 'made some scathing remarks about Henderson's abilities and qualifications'.[55] By 1939 however, Lloyd had been out of public office for a decade, because his intransigence on Egypt meant that the 1929 Labour Government refused to employ him, and their view was endorsed by the Conservative leader Stanley Baldwin.

Henderson's conflict with George Lloyd shows him in an unusual light as the Foreign Office loyalist who supported British policy when the die-hard Lloyd would not, in contrast with his image as the pariah of the late 1930s.

Nevertheless by the end of his tour in Egypt Henderson was an exhausted, disillusioned man. He had failed to get the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty he had fought for, and wrote in dispirited fashion to his friend Walford Selby,

> Do send me a line Walford, to tell me if my plan of getting up to Paris early in May is OK and if I can go ahead here accordingly. I am feeling very

depressed so forgive this disjointed scrawl.[56]

Throughout his career Henderson was to be prey to black moods of despondency, although in 1927/8 he was also concerned about the poor health of his mother who was in her seventy-eighth year, and had been the major influence in his life. This concern may have been behind the decision to return to Paris a second time, which he subsequently recognised to have been a mistake, as he was only paid at Counsellor grade and could have asked for an independent legation.[57]

In Egypt, as in Turkey, Henderson had been unorthodox. One of his last duties in Egypt had been to attend the funeral of Zagloul Pasha, although he had not cleared this action with the Foreign Office first.[58] Privately Henderson had been critical of Zagloul's exile to Gibraltar and the Andaman Islands by the British Government. He was always seeking a modus vivendi which would allow moderation to triumph (he persisted in his search for 'moderates' even in Nazi Germany). Thus in writing to a Foreign Office colleague Mark Patrick on 24 October 1927 (a letter copied to Lloyd), Henderson stated his view that

> Egypt is becoming more clearly divided into two camps, moderates and extremists. The Wafd [The Nationalists] is tending towards a split into a moderate section which will include its Old Liberal adherents and an extreme party.[59]

Henderson was a convinced supporter of moderation and constitutional government. But he had no intellectual problem with authoritarian rule as such. Strong government was necessary at times, just as was strong diplomacy (what

Henderson liked to call the 'velvet glove on the iron hand').[60]

Henderson's own verdict on his stay in Egypt showed that same strain of fatalism that future colleagues, like Ivone Kirkpatrick, were to notice in Berlin. Henderson expressed his disappointment as 'not getting the Treaty through ... It will be a tragedy. Kismet'.[61]

Henderson's stay in Paris, which he had lobbied for as a posting, was to be brief.[62] It coincided with the signing of the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928, whereby states renounced 'war as an instrument of policy', but Henderson was resolutely sceptical. 'What a mockery!' he wrote in his memoirs. 'I can well recall thinking at the time how utterly dishonest and unfair it was to delude the British public by eyewash of that kind'.[63] This comment, albeit after the event, reflected Henderson's long-standing belief in nationalism rather than internationalism.

A year after his arrival in Paris, Henderson was 'shocked and horrified' to be told by the Foreign Office that he was to be posted to Belgrade as Minister.[64] As he subsequently admitted, Henderson made every effort to avoid being sent to Yugoslavia, but to no avail. He arrived in Belgrade in December 1929 although he kept on his Paris flat.

Belgrade was outside the inner circle of desirable postings like Paris, Berlin or Washington, and as a senior diplomat Henderson would have expected better.[65] But he was determined to make a success of his new posting.[66]

Henderson's key relationship in Yugoslavia was with King Alexander, whose personal dictatorship (1929-34)

coincided with his tenure of the Belgrade Embassy. Even Henderson's strongest critic Vansittart had to admit in his memoirs that 'Nevile Henderson, our Minister in Belgrade, made such a hit with the dictator by his skill in shooting that he was ultimately picked for Berlin'.[67] But he did Henderson less than justice, for he was able to forge a very close relationship with the King which was unusual for a foreign ambassador. Some found the relationship verging on the obsessive, and Henderson wrote later (following the assassination of King Alexander in 1934), 'I felt more emotion at King Alexander's funeral than I had felt at any other except my mother's.'[68] At the time Henderson wrote to a Foreign Office colleague,

> My sixth winter in the Belgrade trenches is the worst of all. The zest has gone out of it with King Alexander gone. It interested me enormously to play Stockmar to his Albert and that made all the difference.[69]

It was in Yugoslavia therefore, that Henderson showed the strongest evidence of a tendency to hero-worship which was replicated in Germany in his relationship with Göring.[70] And his close relationship with, and sympathy for, King Alexander made him notoriously and tenaciously pro-Yugoslav.[71] Thus infringing his own dictum about faithfully representing his own country's views and those of the host country.[72]

This partiality had some striking consequences. Previously Henderson had complained about the French and Turkish press, now he began to complain about the British press for not being pro-Yugoslav enough (a characteristic

repeated in Berlin).[73] His tendency to be indiscreet, in this instance in the Yugoslav cause against the Italians (who were in dispute with Yugoslavia over Trieste and Fiume), was marked enough to earn rebukes from Vansittart. The most celebrated example of indiscretion came in January 1935 when Vansittart was disturbed by a secret letter which Henderson had written to King Alexander's successor, the Regent Prince Paul, appearing to support Yugoslavia's hostile attitude to Italy (Henderson sent a copy of this letter to the Foreign Office). Henderson had, Vansittart thought, given Prince Paul the impression that the British Government agreed that the Italians had followed a disruptive policy towards Yugoslavia, and a protectionist policy towards neighbouring Albania. 'Are we convinced,' Vansittart went on, 'of this, and do we wish Prince Paul to think that we are convinced of it?' Henderson had complained about Italy's backing for separatist Croatian terrorists, but Vansittart believed Mussolini would expel any on his territory.

> Whatever our private convictions [Vansittart wrote to Henderson] was it really wise to suggest even by implication to Prince Paul that His Majesty's Government share the views which he presumably holds himself about the inherent mischievousness of Italian policy?[74]

Characteristically, Henderson tried at first to defend his action replying,'My dear Van, I am sorry if you think I went further than I was entitled to do in writing to Prince Paul.' Henderson claimed, however, that he had not distorted British views and that if he had talked about

Italy's disruptive policy vis à vis Yugoslavia or her protectionist policy vis à vis Albania, it is the Yugoslav point of view that I am referring to; not mine and still less that of His Majesty's Government. It distresses me [Henderson went on] that you, as I gather you do, should even imagine that I take any other line with the Yugoslavs ... He [Prince Paul] knows that His Majesty's Government does not hold these views from what I told him of yours and the Secretary of State's opinions.[75]

This despatch prefigures the defence Henderson was to offer for his diplomacy in Berlin, when criticised by the Foreign Office for being unduly partial towards the Germans.

But he remained unrepentant in a letter to his colleague Eric Phipps in Berlin, complaining that he could not 'get the Foreign Office to appreciate that Italy must be persuaded to make the first step, and make it soon, towards Yugoslavia'.[76] This was a typical response.

Vansittart had occasion to reprimand the errant Minister again on 13 February 1935, when Henderson had written in a tart manner to Sir Edward Boyle of the Treasury about the latter's efforts to counter IMRO (a Macedonian terrorist organisation) activities around Yugoslavia's frontiers. Henderson's language had been strong and Vansittart felt obliged, after looking at the papers, to warn Henderson 'as an old friend, as an admirer, and as a sharer of many of your views'. In this instance Henderson accepted the rebuke and wrote back to Vansittart penitently 'Peccavi. And the more readily because I had fully recognised my asperities myself.' Vansittart was appreciative in

his reply and went out of his way to reassure Henderson about the value of his services.

> You know [he wrote] that I was only prompted to write, as I should always be prompted to write to you, as a friend. You have done splendidly in Belgrade and made a great name for yourself, but of course it has been done at great expense to yourself.

Vansittart agreed with Henderson that it was time he had a new posting because 'as much and more than is fair has already been demanded of you and fully paid. And now it is time to have some of your life in the sun and in the First Eleven'." The contrast between this effusive tribute and Vansittart's later castigation of Henderson's work could not be sharper, and seemingly calls his judgement into question. Yet he was far from being alone in the 1930s. Oliphant was to tell Henderson that his record in Yugoslavia had been 'quite excellent' and that he hoped to see him 'in one of the very biggest posts'.[78] And one of Henderson's political masters, Hugh Dalton, as Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, was equally complimentary. His diary entry for 12 December 1930 read

> Talk with Nevile Henderson, our Minister in Belgrade. Very pro-Yugoslav. Uncle [Arthur Henderson, the Foreign Secretary] thinks he has more vitality than most of our ministers abroad. I agree. I also think he has more intelligence.[79]

These high opinions of Henderson's work were to be particularly relevant in 1937, when the question of sending him to Berlin arose. The golden words from Vansittart demonstrate

very clearly that Henderson was held in high regard in the Foreign Office, and offer a significant insight into why he was in the running for a major post in 1937.[80] They also demonstrate that the two men had a close, friendly relationship which was severed by Henderson's performance in Berlin between 1937 and 1939 and Vansittart's reaction to it, which was fiercely critical.

Familiar patterns reappear during Henderson's period of service in Belgrade. Henderson was critical of French policy in Yugoslavia, and wanted Britain to be more pro-active both in commercial and military terms. He was alarmed in May 1935 when the French secured an order for their aircraft, and complained to O'Malley in the Foreign Office, 'I quote you this as an instance of habitual unfair competition here on the part of the French. It only makes me still more anxious that our Air Ministry should raise no difficulties.'[81]

Henderson's anti-French bias resulted in lapses into racial stereotyping as well. Although he was sure that the French wanted 'Italy and Yugoslavia to make friends [Yugoslavia was after all a member of the pro-French Little Entente] the female side of the French mind can never resist making mischief between them.'[82]

Henderson retained his sympathy for German grievances, and his conviction that they must be addressed within the context of a substantial revision of the Versailles Settlement. He did in fact warn the Foreign Office against the dangers of German economic penetration of the Balkans, but also believed that to a degree German hegemony over the region was both natural and inevitable.[83] He was also con-

vinced that both Austria and Czechoslovakia were unviable, and of the need for both naval and air pacts with Germany. And the political realism on which Henderson prided himself also came into play. 'It is a question of hard facts,' Henderson wrote to Orme Sargent, 'which have got to be faced and what is practical.'[84]

These points were reiterated in a further letter to Vansittart on 24 June 1935.

> How far Czechoslovakia is really a viable State as it is at present constituted is a very hard question to answer, though I fancy Joseph Addison [the British Minister in Prague 1930-6] would give you a definite expression of opinion. And it is the same with Austria. Nazism is maybe a passing phenomenon but Deutschtum is not (q.v. the Saar). The Yugoslavs do not blink at the fact that nearly 70 million Germans in Central Europe are an expansionist force and they have made up their minds that no dam will permanently contain it.[85]

There was a degree of bias present in Henderson's thinking about Central Europe. Realism was applied in Germany's favour to accommodate her territorial revisionism, but Henderson fully supported Yugoslavia's attempts to defend herself against aggressive Italian nationalism and wanted the Foreign Office to be active on the Yugoslav side. Thus the Italians should make concessions to Yugoslavia, but the Austrians and Czechs should make concessions to Germany. In Yugoslavia, as in Berlin, Henderson was to be accused of undue indulgence of his hosts' views and prejudices. No one in the Foreign Office could pretend however, that

Henderson's views on policy towards Germany and Central Europe were not known. They were there in his letters and despatches for all to see. As was his tendency to place too much faith in the importance of friendships with key foreign leaders, which sometimes gave him an inflated view of his own importance. Writing just before his death in 1942 Henderson observed that in 1939 on his return from Berlin, he had volunteered to return to Belgrade as minister. The Foreign Office had turned him down, a decision which Henderson deplored as 'however competent the British Minister, he could never have exercised the same influence as I could have done'.[86]

In the winter of 1934-5, following the assassination of King Alexander in October 1934, Henderson's spirits were at a low ebb. He was offered a posting to Lisbon and seemed to be enthusiastic, writing to a colleague about his difficult experiences in Yugoslavia, 'It is just what I wanted after all these years sitting on a volcano. Please God it does not erupt before I am safely away'.[87] Subsequently he had second thoughts and asked the Foreign Office if he could stay on in Belgrade while the situation in Yugoslavia remained unsettled. The Department then offered Henderson the Embassy in Buenos Aires instead.

This was a devastating blow. Buenos Aires was certainly not 'in the First Eleven', to use Vansittart's phrase, and Henderson regarded it as a demotion. He poured out his distress to Lancelot Oliphant in a personal letter, who replied by saying that he was

> only more than grieved that your recent selection hurts so much ... Try to cheer up, old man. I hope

I live to see you in of the very biggest posts.

Your merit is really appreciated.

Henderson's bitter disappointment is glossed over in his memoir with just a reference to the fact that he was 'exceedingly loath to leave Europe'.[88]

Henderson's time in Argentina was largely uneventful. He met Franklin Roosevelt when the US President visited Argentina, and enjoyed the company of the large Scots community, but as he noted the post was largely an economic one.[89]

One area of British interest in which Henderson was involved during his spell in Buenos Aires was the long-standing Anglo-Argentinean dispute over the Falkland Islands. Henderson was stoutly patriotic on the issue in 1935. He wrote to Craigie in the Foreign Office on 12 December observing 'that for one reason or another incomprehensible to me, British lawyers consider our legal title weak'. He wondered whether a commercial treaty between Britain and Argentina could recognise the

> legal sovereignty of Argentina ... it is the shadow which appeals to Argentine sentiment and which might serve a considerable purpose in overcoming final difficulties and one which it might be worth exploring.

As ever, Henderson favoured the emollient approach, which recognised the aspirations of his host country. But the Falklands dispute remained unsettled.[90]

Then in January 1937 came the surprising news that Henderson had been selected by the Foreign Office to replace Eric Phipps in the Berlin Embassy.[91] When this news came

through, Nevile Henderson was fifty-five, in post in something of a diplomatic backwater, and on the face of it destined to serve out the rest of his diplomatic career on the periphery of the great events which were taking place in Europe. He was a hard-working, competent diplomat with a flair for personal friendship. But he was also, as his record showed, prone to the sin of identifying himself too closely with the countries to which he had been accredited, and cutting diplomatic corners when it suited him.

References

1. Nevile Henderson, Water Under the Bridges, London, 1945, p.11.

2. ibid., p.9.

3. ibid., p.14.

4. Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert (eds.), The Diplomats 1919-39, Vol.2, The Thirties, New York, 1968, p.553. Sedgwick was a magnificent estate in its day, and Henderson was not exaggerating about the view. The writer is grateful to the present owners Mr and Mrs J. Jackson for letting him view the original house which is being renovated after decades of neglect. Mr and Mrs Jackson have ambitious plans to restore the gardens to the magnificence of Emma Henderson's time. The original estate has long since been broken up into several properties.

5. Water Under the Bridges, p.100. See D. Dilks (ed.), The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, London, 1971, p.43; Water Under the Bridges, p.130; J. Charmley, Lord Lloyd and the Collapse of the British Empire, London, 1987, p.109.

6. Henderson's zeal for the hunt resulted in the publication of his second posthumous memoir, Hippy. In Memoriam. The Story of A Dog, London, 1943. Hippy was a dachsbracke, a hunting dog from southern Austria, whom Henderson acquired in 1930 while on mission in Yugoslavia. I am grateful to my publishers, Hodder & Stoughton, for the research done in unearthing one of the few (presumably) remaining copies of this bizarre memoir.

7. R. Rhodes James (ed.), Chips: The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon 8 September 1939, London, 1967, p.219.

8. Dictionary of National Biography, 'Nevile Henderson' by Orme Sargent. Sargent was to be a relentless critic of Henderson's diplomacy in the late 30s, although his concluding remarks in D.N.B. are surprisingly mild.

9. ibid.

10. Ernst von Weizsäcker, Memoirs, London, 1951, p.134.

11. Water Under the Bridges, p.18.

12. Nevile Henderson, Failure of A Mission, London, 1940, p.13.

13. Notably his Berlin colleague Ivone Kirkpatrick (a future Permanent Under-Secretary at the FO) who liked Henderson personally, but detected 'a fey streak' in his character. Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, The Inner Circle, London, 1959, p.91; Failure of A Mission, p.59.

14. Water Under the Bridges, p.18.

15. ibid, p.23, Henderson's critics in the FO when he was in Berlin would doubtless have had a wry smile about this confession; Henderson also noted that he had never lived more than five months in England in the entire period 1906-39, Failure of A Mission, p.viii; for an analysis of the process of integrating the Foreign Office and the Diplomatic Service, see Lord Strang, The Foreign Office, London, 1955, pp.214-222.

16. Water Under The Bridges, p.21; Oliphant was captured by the Germans while in post in 1940, Ambassador in Bonds, London, 1944; see also Henderson to Oliphant 3/1/23, FO 371/253, PRO.

17. For details of Phipps' career, see J. Hermann's unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London School of Economics, 1996; Henderson was involved in a bizarre incident at the Saint Petersburg Embassy during his first tour of duty when he almost throttled Sir Arthur Nicolson, mistaking him for a burglar! Nicolson explained his absence from a forthcoming dinner with one of the Russian Grand Dukes by saying that 'he had had an accident owing to one of his secretaries trying to get quick promotion', Water Under the Bridges, pp.32-3. Harold Nicolson, Sir Arthur's son, was to be the author of a text on diplomacy, and a celebrated diarist. In his second volume of diaries, Nicolson refers to diplomats who 'like my father and Nevile Henderson' refused to believe 'anything bad about the country to which they are accredited', N. Nicolson, Diaries and Letters 1939-45, N. Nicolson (ed.), 18/1/44, London, 1967, pp.345-6.

18. ibid, p.67.

19. The Foreign Office and the Diplomatic Service, had a penchant for nicknames. Sargent was to become known as 'Moley' (because of his burrowing against appeasement) and Knatchbull-Hugessen as 'Snatch'.

20. One of Lord Bertie's more celebrated remarks was that an ambassador was 'only a d....d marionette', a comment that Henderson should have remembered later in his career.

21. Water Under the Bridges, p.85.

22. ibid, p.85.

23. Vaughan B. Baker, 'Nevile Henderson in Berlin', Red River Valley Historical Journal, Vol.II, No.4, Winter 1977, p.343.

24. Water Under the Bridges, p.94.

25. Failure of A Mission, p.130.

26. Water Under the Bridges, p.109.

27. Rumbold to Selby 15/7/27 (FO 794/10), Foreign Office Individual Files, PRO. Ms Vaughan B. Baker's praiseworthy attempt to rehabilitate Henderson rather distorts what Rumbold said in his letter. He did not think Henderson was a strong man, as her article cited in footnote 22 above suggests at p.344.

28. Henderson to Rumbold 23/1/23, FO 800/254, Oliphant Papers, PRO.

29. ibid.

30. Henderson to Rumbold 8/1/23; M. Gilbert, Sir Horace Rumbold. Portrait of A Diplomat, London, 1973, p.281.

31. Henderson to Rumbold 29/12/22, FO 800/254.

32. Water Under the Bridges, p.111.

33. Henderson to Oliphant 13/11/22, FO 800/254.

34. Henderson to Oliphant 13/2/24, ibid.

35. Sir A. Ryan, The Last of the Dragomans, London, 1951, pp.179-180.

36. Rumbold to Henderson 2/1/23; Gilbert, p.281.

37. Henderson to Oliphant 15/7/24, 800/254; the Mosul issue was not finally resolved until 1926. For details see F.S. Northedge, The Troubled Giant. Britain Among the Great Powers 1916-1939, London, 1966, pp.153-155.

38. Henderson to Oliphant 15/7/24.

39. Henderson to Oliphant 4/8/24.

40. Oliphant to Henderson 5/8/24, FO 371/800/254.

41. Rumbold to Oliphant 5/3/23. ibid.; Sir Andrew Ryan, The Last of the Dragomans, p.166.

42. Failure of A Mission, p.vi.

43. The Last of the Dragomans, Ryan, p.166.

44. Water Under the Bridges, p.113.

45. An interesting point here is that at the time Henderson was meant to be staying with Robert Vansittart, then a personal friend, but later a bitter critic, before being hurriedly sent off to Cairo by the FO, ibid., p.134.

46. Water Under the Bridges, pp.136-7.

47. Henderson did in fact behave in just such a way in Berlin, short-circuiting the Counsellor Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes (much to his irritation) in favour of the First Secretary Ivone Kirkpatrick, Water Under the Bridges, p.150; for an analysis of the Egyptian problem, see P.J. Vatikiotis, Conflict in The Middle East, London, 1971, pp.42-47.

48. J. Charmley, Lord Lloyd and the Collapse of the British Empire, London, 1987, p.117.

49. Henderson to Selby 31/7/26, FO 371/800/265, Henderson Papers, PRO.

50. Henderson to Lloyd 21/5/25; Henderson to Lloyd 15/8/25; 17/7/25 Lord Lloyd Papers 19/14, Churchill College, Cambridge.

51. Charmley, p.118.

52. Water Under the Bridges, p.140.

53. Lloyd to Chamberlain 6/5/28, FO 794/10, Foreign Office Individual Files, PRO.

54. Chamberlain to Lloyd 15/5/28, ibid., FO Individual Files.

55. Fabian von Schlabrendorf, The Secret War Against Hitler, Oxford, 1994, p.96.

56. Henderson to Selby 1/2/28. See Selby's reply 16/2/28, 'I shall sympathise with you if nothing has been settled before you leave Egypt', FO 794/10, FO Individual Files, PRO.

57. Water Under the Bridges, p.161; Henderson to Selby 21/10/27, FO 794/10; yet again Eric Phipps had preceded him in this post.

58. ibid., p.160.

59. Henderson to Mark Patrick 24/10/27, Lloyd Papers, 19/14, Churchill College.

60. Henderson to Oliphant 9/1/24, FO 800/294, Henderson Papers, PRO.

61. Henderson to Selby 1/2/28, FO 794/10, FO Individual Files, PRO.

62. Henderson to Selby 21/10/27, FO 794/10; Henderson had asked to replace Phipps as Counsellor for 'family reasons to be ... as near home as possible', almost certainly a reference to his mother's illness.

63. Water Under the Bridges, p.167.

64. ibid., p.169.

65. As Henderson himself notes 'Punch' made a joke about it being a flower.

66. For an account of the development of independent Yugoslavia after 1919, see E. Crampton, Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century, London, 1994, Ch.9.

67. Lord Vansittart, The Mist Procession, London, 1958, p.360. It is true that in Hippy. The Story of A Dog there are photos of Henderson and King Alexander with the victims of their shooting exploits.

68. Water Under the Bridges, p.197; Henderson to Vansittart 28/2/35, F0 800/268, Henderson Papers, PRO.

69. Henderson to Waterlow 11/2/35, ibid. Baron Stockmar was an adviser to the Prince Consort Prince Albert.

70. A whole chapter in Failure of A Mission is devoted to Göring.

71. Hence Hugh Dalton's quoted remark to him, 'Hallo, here's the pro-Yugoslav' which annoyed Henderson. Water Under the Bridges, p.171.

72. Failure of A Mission, p.vi.

73. Water Under the Bridges, p.186.

74. Vansittart to Henderson 31/1/35, FO 800/268, Henderson Papers, PRO.

75. Henderson to Vansittart 4/2/35, FO 800/268.

76. Henderson to Phipps 10/2/35, FO 800/268.

77. Vansittart to Henderson 13/2/35; Henderson to Vansittart 28/2/35.

78. Oliphant to Henderson 18/4/35, FO 800/268.

79. B. Pimlott (ed.), The Political Diary of Hugh Dalton 1918-1940, London, 1986, p.134.

80. Vansittart did however, have to reprimand Henderson on other occasions while he was in Yugoslavia. On 19 June 1935, he told Henderson, 'I think you will be well advised to refrain from giving advice unless you are actually pressed for it.' Vansittart to Henderson 19/6/35, FO 800/268, Henderson Papers, PRO.

81. Henderson to O'Malley 21/5/35, FO 800/268; Water Under the Bridges, p.187.

82. Henderson to Vansittart 21/5/35, FO 800/268.

83. Henderson to Vansittart 23/4/31, FO 800/267.

84. Henderson to Sargent 19/6/35, FO 800/268, Henderson Papers, PRO.

85. Henderson to Vansittart 24/6/35, FO 800/268; Joseph Addison was the British Ambassador to Prague 1930-6 and was notoriously anti-Czech. His thinking clearly influenced both the Foreign Office and his successor Basil Newton. Henderson had worked with Addison in Paris earlier in his career. Water Under the Bridges, p.84.

86. ibid., p.172.

87. Henderson to Waterlow 19/2/35, FO 800/268, Henderson Papers, PRO.

88. Oliphant to Henderson 18/4/35. The letter refers to a 'manuscript letter' from Henderson which is not amongst his papers at the PRO (FO 800/268); Water Under the Bridges, p.198.

89. Water Under the Bridges, pp.199-208; some colour was lent to Henderson's life when his dog Hippy went missing on the Pampas and a large part of the Argentine police force was involved in tracking him down! Hippy, In Memoriam, The Story of A Dog, pp.38-9.

90. Henderson to Craigie 6/12/35, FO 800/268, Henderson Papers, PRO.

91. Henderson's surprise is reflected in Failure of A Mission, p.13.

Chapter Two

A Man With A Mission

Nevile Henderson's appointment to the Berlin Embassy came as a surprise. He had, after all, seemingly been cast out of the 'charmed European Inner Circle' of the Foreign Office and been 'moved very much to the periphery in Buenos Aires'.[1] At the time he recorded his reaction in his memoirs, recognising 'a sense of my own inadequacy for what was obviously the most difficult and most important post in the whole of the diplomatic service'. Henderson also believed that he had been 'specially selected by Providence for the definite mission of, as I trusted, helping to preserve the peace of the world'.[2] In this messianic spirit Henderson came back to Britain, reading Hitler's Mein Kampf in its original German on the way home. While awaiting his transfer to Berlin, Henderson had an interview with Neville Chamberlain the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Prime Minister designate, who

> outlined to me his views on general policy towards Germany, and I think I may honestly say that to the last and bitter end I followed the general line which he set me, all the more easily and faithfully since it corresponded so closely with my private conception of the service which I could best render in Germany to my own country.[3]

There has been a degree of controversy about exactly

what Chamberlain said to Henderson in this interview in April 1937, and the gloss that Henderson subsequently put on the future premier's remarks. According to one authority, Henderson did not think of 'his mission as urgent' until Chamberlain talked to him in October.[4] This interpretation rather plays down the importance of the April interview to which Henderson refers in his memoirs. Yet according to the British Foreign Policy Document series, 'Henderson worked out for himself' the line he would follow in Berlin. The editors note that Henderson said nothing in Failure of A Mission about a Foreign Office briefing prior to his departure, or indeed what the Foreign Office thought about the current state of Anglo-German relations. Henderson did, though, claim to have told the Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden that 'he would probably incur the appellation of pro-German'.[5]

T.P. Conwell Evans, the maverick English professor who taught at Königsberg University, and had links with the Berlin Embassy, subsequently claimed however, that Henderson had offered him an alternative explanation for his line. This was that it was based on 'instructions constantly received from Downing Street and not on the views of the Permanent Head of the Foreign Office'.[6] This explanation is in line with the account given in Henderson's memoirs. His task was to improve Anglo-German relations, which had allegedly suffered at the hands of his predecessor, Sir Eric Phipps. In carrying it out Henderson saw himself as the personal envoy of the Prime Minister.

Dissatisfaction with Phipps's performance was at the root of the decision to move Henderson to Berlin. A

whispering campaign was initiated against Phipps, who was judged to be too anti-Nazi in his approach. Vansittart was sufficiently concerned about the attacks to write to Baldwin's Private Secretary on 31 March 1936, although Phipps was not actually moved for another year. Eden assured Baldwin that the rumours about Phipps' excessive anti-Nazism were untrue, but that members of the Diplomatic Service (and he referred especially to the Berlin posting) 'should be posted to best advantage'.[7] In December 1936, Baldwin's 'éminence grise', Tom Jones had also advised the Prime Minister that 'if it is our policy to get alongside Germany, then the sooner Phipps is transferred the better'.[8] Phipps had to go, but why was Henderson selected as his successor?

Part of the explanation is provided by the analysis in the previous chapter. Henderson was well thought of by Vansittart, who valued his qualities. So did Austen Chamberlain, Lord Derby, Horace Rumbold and Lancelot Oliphant. Yet being posted to Buenos Aires had represented, on the face of it, a demotion.

In his own memoir <u>The Mist Procession</u> (which tantalisingly ends at the close of the year 1936) Vansittart remarked acidly:

> It was hard to find a corner of the earth sensibly governed. In this one [Yugoslavia] Nevile Henderson, our Minister in Belgrade, made such a hit with the dictator by his skill in shooting that he was ultimately picked for Berlin.[9]

This comment is strikingly similar to a remark made by Stanley Baldwin to Thomas Jones on 15 February 1937 about

why Henderson had been appointed. Jones asked Baldwin 'Why did you appoint Henderson to succeed Phipps at Berlin? Why not Willingdon?' Baldwin replied that he had gone into the matter with Eden and Vansittart and they could find no one in the Service better than Henderson, 'who was a man and good shot'.[10] Baldwin, who was notorious for his indifference to foreign affairs, could be excused for making such a remark. Vansittart plainly could not.

Eden could at least put forward the excuse that he had not met Henderson prior to his appointment.[11] But Vansittart knew his man, and may have been influenced by a desire to avoid a political appointment of the sort Tom Jones was advocating (apart from Willingdon, a former Viceroy of India, he had also thought of Lord Halifax). When Henderson made contentious comments about Anglo-German relations at Windsor Castle after his appointment, Eden's Private Secretary, Oliver Harvey, observed that his new post

> seems quite to have gone to his head ... I hope we are not sending another Ribbentrop to Berlin. Nevile Henderson may steady down when he sees what he is up against, and there really is not anybody else to send.[12]

The suggestion that there was 'not anybody else to send' does not stand up to serious examination. Eden admitted in his memoirs that: 'The most fancied alternatives were Sir Miles Lampson and Sir Percy Loraine, and I deeply regret that I did not choose either of them.'[13] But the reason that Henderson was chosen rather than Lampson or Loraine (or indeed Willingdon, Halifax and a fifth possibility, Sir Ronald Lindsay) was the fault of Vansittart, who

heavily influenced the appointment.[14]

Throughout 'the latter half of 1936', his biographer writes, Sir Percy Loraine 'had been tantalised by the many rumours that he was to be assigned either to Berlin or to Paris, a change-over in both capitals being known to be imminent'. Loraine was then 'stunned and disheartened' in January 1937 to be told by Eden that the Foreign Office wanted him to stay in his existing post in Ankara.[15] Lampson in Cairo, who harboured similar hopes about Berlin, was also kept in post by Eden and Vansittart.[16]

In retrospect it does seem astonishing, as one analyst has written:

> that a diplomat with such a long and illustrious career as Vansittart (he joined the diplomatic service in 1903 and had served as head of the FO since 1930) should have been responsible for having chosen as the envoy to the most sensitive and difficult and potentially dangerous post abroad a man whom he and most of the important figures in the Foreign Office shortly came to consider a disaster.[17]

Eden wrote later 'that no one foresaw the opinions Henderson was to hold'.[18]

The historical record does not support such a view, particularly in the light of Vansittart's reference (cited in the last chapter) about Henderson's fitness for the Diplomatic 'First Eleven', and the golden opinions obtained from others. In the nineteen fifties Vansittart got into a bitter dispute with the former British minister in Vienna, Sir Walford Selby, about references in Selby's memoirs which

suggested that Vansittart, like Henderson, had effectively supported the Anschluss in 1938; but in his anger the former Permanent Under-Secretary also took a sideswipe at Henderson's appointment. Writing to the historian Robert Blake (now Lord Blake), Vansittart wrote:

> As to Nevile Henderson himself, he was not my preference. My first choice was Sir Percy Loraine but there was a consensus the other way, particularly of course with Mr Chamberlain, so that Henderson got the post. We were always at loggerheads.[19]

This is a curious statement by any standards. Eden, as indicated above, had never met Henderson, so he was bound to be swayed by the opinion of such an experienced diplomat as Vansittart. And Henderson received the Foreign Office letter offering him the Berlin post in January 1937, five months before Neville Chamberlain became Prime Minister. Chamberlain, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, could not have been involved in Henderson's appointment. Vansittart's comments in his memoirs seem to suggest that Henderson was appointed to carry out Chamberlain's policy of appeasement with Germany, but there is no evidence to support such an assertion.

Vansittart's post-war feud with Selby is of particular interest, because Selby knew Henderson well, and Henderson had been a frequent visitor to the Vienna embassy while he was posted to Belgrade between 1929 and 1935. According to Selby, Henderson made no secret of his sympathy for German aspirations. Selby claimed to have been 'staggered' when Henderson was sent to Berlin.[20]

Various other suggestions have been put forward to

explain Henderson's appointment. One is the 'Buggins turn' argument, as Henderson had been in the Diplomatic Service since 1905 and was in line for a major post (although the posting to remote Buenos Aires had been a disconcerting career blip for him). But more convincing is the argument that Henderson had shown himself to be successful at getting on with dictators like King Alexander, and that this capacity clinched his appointment.

Vansittart has been accused of inflating the importance of personal relationships in diplomacy, and may have believed that a strong character like Henderson would be at an advantage in dealing with men like Hitler and Göring.[21] He may also have feared a political appointee being sent to Berlin to push the appeasement policy. Henderson was at least a career diplomat and one whom Vansittart, for all his later declarations of detestation, knew well. There is plenty of evidence to show that Vansittart was well aware, through Henderson's service in Yugoslavia and before, of his strengths and foibles. His behaviour in Berlin therefore should not have been an entire surprise to Vansittart, even if it was a shock for Eden.

Vansittart was of course himself, a possible choice to replace his brother-in-law Phipps in the Berlin embassy.[22] But he used his wife's ill-health as an excuse to resist Eden's plan to send him to Paris, so that Phipps was ultimately sent to Paris, and Henderson to Berlin.

Apart from his appreciation of Henderson's good qualities, and promise of a key post in 1935 (cited in the previous chapter), Vansittart may have had another motive for the promotion. For at the time of the Abyssinian crisis

of 1935-6 and the ill-fated Hoare-Laval Pact, which would have conceded much of Abyssinia to Mussolini, Henderson had been conspicuously loyal to the plan's author Vansittart. Deploring the way Vansittart was under attack for his role in formulating the plan, Henderson wrote from Buenos Aires in January 1936 to support Foreign Office policy. 'War to prevent war,' Henderson told Vansittart, 'is a reductio ad absurdum', and Britain should certainly not risk all-out war in support of Abyssinia.[23] Vansittart may well have wished to reward such loyalty by granting Henderson a senior post.

All in all, however, the most convincing explanation for Henderson's surprising elevation is that he had been a conspicuous success in Belgrade and that this was 'the strongest element in determining his selection for Berlin', together with 'Vansittart's knowledge of, and admiration for, the qualities Henderson had shown in Belgrade'.[24] By contrast, at least one Foreign Office colleague thought Eric Phipps 'more suited to Paris salons'.[25]

Certainly Vansittart knew Henderson's record. The protestations of incredulity about Henderson's behaviour in Berlin hardly ring true therefore. Henderson believed in the force of twentieth century nationalism and he always thought that the Versailles Treaty dangerously ignored German nationalism and the need for self determination in those parts of Europe containing large concentrations of ethnic Germans.

He was also inclined to go in for hero-worship as his relationship with King Alexander, and later with Hermann Göring show all too clearly. Henderson's partiality for Yugoslavia was after all notorious, so that Hugh Dalton

could easily irritate him on meeting by remarking 'Hallo, here's the pro-Yugoslav'.[26] It was reasonable to conclude, therefore, that Henderson might 'go native' in Berlin as well. Yet Vansittart chose to overlook such tendencies, because he apparently believed that Henderson would get on well with dictators and had no in-built prejudices against Germany. Henderson's unattractive desire to suppress criticism of Germany in the British press, lest they upset the state to which he was accredited, was equally discernible in Yugoslavia.[27]

It is legitimate to ask in the context of Henderson's appointment whether the alternatives would have proved any better. Percy Loraine has the reputation of being a tough diplomat, who stood up to Mussolini, but he clearly supported Chamberlain's appeasement policy at the time of Munich, arguing that 'another gruesome and futile slaughter had been avoided'.[28] Later when in Rome, he was to be criticised by Churchill for not taking a robust enough line with Mussolini, and his hero-worship of Kemal Ataturk was in the same class as Henderson's obsessive regard for King Alexander of Yugoslavia. Loraine claimed somewhat unconvincingly that Kemal was not a dictator, as were Hitler and Mussolini, because he was deliberately 'trying to create a system of government that would survive him'.[29]

There is always a danger that an ambassador will become over-sympathetic to the régime to which he is accredited, and Loraine seems to have been a case in point, at least while in post in Ankara. Precisely the same accusation was to be levied against Henderson in Berlin.

Loraine's colleague Miles Lampson in Cairo certainly

did not seem to be out of step with the appeasement policy either. He wrote to Henderson (with whom he had served in the Tokyo embassy from 1910 to 1911 when both were Third Secretaries) early in 1938, stating his view that the solution of Britain's problems in Egypt and the Mediterranean 'lies ... through Berlin'. Lampson also bemoaned the fact that Britain was 'tied to France's chariot'.[30]

The question remains as to why Henderson was not content with the ordinary ambassadorial role and 'aimed at being a "great ambassador" in the style of the eighteenth or nineteenth century'.[31] His obsession with the idea of personal fate which had reserved this mission for him, provides only a partial answer. For he seems to have been convinced that he was acting as the personal agent of Neville Chamberlain's appeasement policy. His authority for this conviction is difficult to pin down, as there is no evidence for it in Chamberlain's papers: Henderson's own personal papers disappeared in mysterious circumstances after the outbreak of war in September 1939.[32]

What can be asserted with some confidence is that Henderson's appointment in 1937 was not part of any grand diplomatic design to aid Chamberlain's appeasement policy, as Vansittart misleadingly suggested after the war.

At best Henderson's appointment was occasioned by a Foreign Office hope that his proven ability to hit it off with dictators, and his absence from the great European capitals while posted to the Near East, Balkans and Latin America (which suggested that he had no intrinsic anti-German or pro-French bias), would make him better able to get on with the Germans than Rumbold and Phipps had been.

But his Foreign Office superiors had no grounds for later complaining that Henderson's behaviour came as a surprise, for it was his known qualities in post which precipitated his selection in the first place.

Once in post, Henderson's relations with the Foreign Office worsened rapidly. His reported remarks at Windsor Castle on 22 April prior to departure had already irritated Eden whom Harvey reported as being 'rather aghast at the nonsense that he was talking about what he was going to do in Germany'.[33] In his memoirs Eden was to write that Henderson's appointment was to prove to be 'an international misfortune'.[34]

Within weeks of arriving in Berlin Henderson was making his view of Anglo-Germans relations plain to Bruce, the Australian High Commissioner in London, a known sympathiser with the policy of appeasement. Austria (banned from union with Germany by Article 80 of the Versailles Treaty) was 'bound to go back to Germany one day' Henderson wrote and

> one might equally well argue on the same lines as regards the so-called Sudentendeutsche in Czecho-slovakia. It is exasperating to think of the folly of 3½ million Germans in that Slav state, especially living as they do on the frontier of Germany proper.

Henderson concluded by saying that Austria and Czechoslo-vakia were not something 'for which the British Empire should risk either its peace or even its existence'.[35]

Two major disputes with Vansittart arose within two months of Henderson's arrival in Berlin, which highlighted both Henderson's capacity for indiscretion (demonstrated by the Prince Paul of Yugoslavia letter episode), and his

tendency to make decisions without Foreign Office authority.

First of all, Henderson infuriated Vansittart by telling the French Ambassador André François-Poncet, that unlike his predecessor Phipps, he intended to attend the annual Nazi Party Rally at Nuremberg in September. Vansittart minuted his objections to Eden on 5 June and expressed his concern that

> Sir N Henderson should not only (a) take an important decision like this off his own bat without giving us a chance of consultation ... but also (b) announce it to a foreign colleague as a decision.

Henderson's behaviour, complained Vansittart, was both irregular and dangerous, and it was extraordinary that Henderson had told the Foreign Office about his decision 'in a letter to your Private Secretary [Oliver Harvey] about his leave!'.[36]

Henderson was sharply rebuked by Vansittart in a following letter, but the tone was still friendly in that he began it 'My dear Nevile.' It was quite wrong, Vansittart pointed out, for Henderson to have spoken in this off-the-cuff manner, which would incur a great deal of domestic criticism and leave the Foreign Office. 'to clear up the mess'. Thus 'consultation with us is absolutely necessary before anybody in so high a position as the Ambassador takes or announces such a decision'.

As in the case of his unauthorised private letter to Prince Paul about Yugoslav-Italian relations in 1935, Henderson appeared to be contrite. But he denied that he had told François-Poncet that he would go to Nuremberg without prior Foreign Office permission beforehand (angrily

Vansittart wrote in the margin against this comment 'No, he did not say this in his letter' [to Harvey]). Henderson went on to assure Vansittart that

> I don't love the Nazi system any more than you do - but it has come to stay ... Nobody wishes to cause the Foreign Office less bother than I do, and the fact that I have already given the Secretary of State bother in the House of Commons weighs heavily on my conscience.

(Eden had been forced to try and defend Henderson's decision to go to Nuremberg in the Commons.) Characteristically Henderson still thought he should go to Nuremberg, and saw the episode as a breach of procedure rather than a deviation from fundamental government policy. His assurance about the Nazi system, which showed that he was not pro-Nazi, would not satisfy his critics when he seemed to them to be going out of his way, and beyond his brief, in accommodating the Berlin Government. Henderson also had some typical reflections in this instance about the doleful life of 'the unfortunate Ambassador who has willy-nilly to work with those people however objectionable their creed'.[37] But those were absolutely consistent with his behaviour fifteen years before in Constantinople, when he wrote home about the Turks being 'uncivilised brutes', while also (as outlined in the previous chapter) acquiring a reputation both with embassy colleagues and his hosts alike, for being pro-Turkish.

At this early stage Vansittart was prepared to take his old friend's reassurances at face value, and he replied that he would look again at the issue nearer the time of the

Party Rally, but that Henderson's letter dated 15 June 'entirely relieves us of apprehensions'.[38] In the end Henderson did go to Nuremberg.

Apprehensions however, were again to be raised in November 1937 when Henderson wanted to come back to London and speak to the Anglo-German Fellowship (a notorious pro-Nazi lobby group). Eden refused his request, pointing out that it was not normal practice for ambassadors to make such speeches outside the states to which they were accredited.[39] Neither was it normal practice for diplomats to attend the funerals of leading foreign leaders without Foreign Office clearance, but Henderson had done this in the case of Saad Zagloul in Egypt in 1928. Throughout his career Henderson demonstrated a marked tendency to ignore regulations and convention when it suited him (conversely he had been equally capable of arguing points of etiquette such as whether embassy servants in Constantinople should be allowed to wear swords).[40]

Vansittart was to be still more infuriated by another apparent transgression by his subordinate in June 1937. Henderson claimed in his memoirs that in his meeting with Chamberlain in April he had secured the Prime Minister designate's permission to commit calculated indiscretions.[41] He now proceeded to take full advantage of such largesse (in the eyes of his Foreign Office critics) in an interview with the Austrian Minister to Berlin Tauschitz, in which he appeared to support the idea of Austro-German union. Again Vansittart complained angrily to Eden, telling him that the Austrian Minister in London had come to see him about Henderson's comments. 'I am bound to say,' minuted Vansittart,

'that I cannot recollect any previous instance of an ambassador talking in this astoundingly indiscreet manner.' Henderson's language, went on Vansittart, would create the impression that Britain approved of the idea of Anschluss, which was 'in flagrant contradiction with the attitude of HMG'.[42] Henderson's comments to Bruce, cited above, had already shown his sympathy for the idea of Austro-German union.

Eden wrote to Henderson on 22 June telling him that the Austrians were quoting a comment he allegedly made about Austria being 'just as German as Germany'. Eden was 'disinclined to think that you could really have spoken in this vein, and I feel sure that there has been some misunderstanding'. Eden was sure that Henderson could not have used such language 'when the views attributed to you do not correspond with the policy of the Government'. The Secretary of State had felt obliged, however, to draw the matter to Henderson's attention 'in a private and friendly manner'.[43] The facts behind this episode must now be examined more closely.

When Henderson replied on 28 June, his reply took two different tacks. First of all he said that he had spoken to his Austrian colleague, Tauschitz, about the matter. Tauschitz had denied attributing the remarks to Henderson, and said that he personally had just returned from Vienna where there had been no mention of it.

Subsequently, though, Tauschitz had claimed that Henderson <u>had</u> described the Austrians as Germans. Henderson agreed in his despatch to Eden that he did indeed call the Austrians 'a German people', but claimed that the late

Austrian dictator Dollfuss (assassinated by Austrian Nazis in 1934) had often used the phrase 'unser deutsches volk'. Henderson went on to tell Tauschitz, he told Eden, that while on a visit to Vienna in 1935, he thought 40 per cent of the population may have been Nazi but that

> I much doubted now, as the result of Catholic and Jew persecution and of the political and economic situation in Germany, if the percentage was as much as 25%. That did not sound like failing to understand why Austria desired to remain independent.

Tauschitz, according to Henderson had been forced to agree with this observation, but Henderson went on to ram the point home. 'Quite frankly,' Henderson told Tauschitz on the subject of Anschluss, 'I would hate it ... I earnestly hoped that Austria would always remain independent.'[44] This appeared to be a ringing endorsement of Austrian independence, and Tauschitz promised to pass on Henderson's comments to Vienna. But Henderson added a caveat, telling his Austrian colleague that if ever the day came 'when Austria herself, of her own volition, decides to unite with Germany, I personally do not see on what moral grounds her right to do so could be contested'.[45]

In many respects this was a classic exposition of Henderson's ambiguous style of diplomacy in Berlin, and indeed earlier in his career. He had been rebuked by the Foreign Secretary, albeit in the politest of terms, and responded by trying to water down the significance of the offence. The reference throughout the despatch to personal, as apart from Foreign Office, or British Government views, was characteristic, as was the reference to 'moral grounds'. References

to morality were extremely common in Henderson's despatches, especially where such references allowed him to use morality as a stick to beat the Versailles Settlement. Here too is Henderson's constant reiteration of the right of ethnic Germans to self-determination, even when he concedes that in 1937 the majority of Austrians did not want Anschluss.

Henderson sent a copy of this despatch to Walford Selby, British minister in Vienna, who was obviously kept informed about the Tauschitz episode by the Foreign Office. Given Selby's views about Henderson's pro-Germanism, as expressed in his memoirs, Selby would hardly have been surprised by Tauschitz's accusations. But he wrote in a tactful manner to Henderson, telling him that the Austrians had not spoken to him personally about it, but that they did look to the British Government for support and were

> extremely susceptible to even the remotest suspicion of our weakening. Perhaps you will be able to bear this in mind should the question of Austro-German relations ever arise in discussion with your German friends - In the mean time no harm has been done.[46]

The Tauschitz episode is, on the face of it, one of several gaffes perpetrated by Henderson in Berlin in 1937 alone. But there is a whiff of a storm in a teacup about it, for it is significant that the Austrians had not seen fit to raise the matter with Selby. Vansittart too had a tendency to go in for histrionics, which much irritated his colleague and successor Alex Cadogan, and this needs to be taken into account in any evaluation of Henderson's behaviour.[47] Some consideration also needs to be given to Henderson's linguistic skill, for although Henderson liked

to speak German 'he was not exactly a master of it'.[48] The potential for a misunderstanding was therefore present.

Nevertheless Henderson had not attempted, even in his defence of his conduct in the Tauschitz interview, to disguise his sympathy for German aspirations (or indeed Austrian ones) about an Anschluss. His critics would argue that this was one of several instances where Henderson exceeded his brief, and undermined existing British policy.

Further trouble had been caused on 1 June 1937 by a speech which Henderson had made to the Deutsche-Englische Gesellschaft. 'In England,' he told the diners, who included both Himmler and Rosenberg, 'far too many people have an erroneous conception of what the National Socialist régime really stands for.'[49] Henderson went on to say that more notice should be taken of the great social experiment that was going on in Germany, and given the opportunity, Britain could prove to be a valuable friend to the Reich Government.

The speech was badly received in many quarters at home, and in the House of Commons Arthur Henderson, the former Labour Foreign Secretary asked tartly whether it was

> an erroneous conception of what the National-Socialist party in Germany stands for to allege they have oppressed the Jews, suppressed all political opposition, placed many of their opponents in concentration camps and destroyed free trade-unionism.[50]

But Henderson had allies in his search for Anglo-German accommodation. One of them was his former superior Lord Derby, who wrote to Neville Chamberlain on 16 June about

Henderson's speech to the Deutsche-Englische Gesellschaft, saying that to his mind

> the speech he made was just the one we wanted. It was well received in this country. It was equally well received in Germany ... instead of being thanked for the speech, as I feel he ought to have been, Henderson had been snubbed by Eden. The result is that this speech, instead of doing the good it would have done - indeed had done - to the drawing together of Germany and ourselves has, owing to its disavowal, done harm.[51]

A pattern was being established whereby Henderson felt increasingly isolated in the Foreign Office (although he had some supporters there) and looked elsewhere for support. One of Henderson's Foreign Office supporters was Owen O'Malley, the newly appointed Ambassador to Mexico, who wrote to him at some length on 9 June. O'Malley told Henderson that 'for the last ten years' he had felt doubtful about the wisdom of Foreign Office policy towards Germany and France and that

> even though I might be wrong and my masters might be right, yet it was good for them that there should be someone in the Office ready to put up an opposition view.
>
> Naturally I cannot suppose that they shared these feelings, and for all I know the afterthought may have been present in their minds when they appointed me to Mexico, that their critics would now be silenced for good.
>
> Holding the opinions about the Germans which

you expressed when I saw you in the Foreign Office, I have never had any illusions about the difficulties which you were likely to meet with here [O'Malley told Henderson] nor I am sure have you. I am, however, friends with some of the highest authorities outside the Foreign Office whom saw you before leaving for Berlin [a tantalising reference - was O'Malley talking about Chamberlain?] and I was glad to find there was a weighty body of opinion ready to support you.

O'Malley assured Henderson that

> those who think like me will watch your work in Berlin with the deepest sympathy and solicitude. We shall not think that because you try to make friends with the Germans that you have illusions about them, and we shall not expect you to work miracles.

O'Malley and those who thought like him detected a change of atmosphere in Anglo-German relations since Henderson had gone to Berlin, and they hoped for a continuance of this situation.

The closing section of the letter hints at factional in-fighting, and distrust, inside the Foreign Office at this time, for O'Malley refers to an

> enclosed paper [missing from Henderson's personal papers at the Public Record Office] which I meant to give you when you were in London. I rather think Secretary of State never read it, but I got Van's permission to let Warren Fisher and the C.I.G.S. read it and there cannot therefore be no [sic] to your seeing it also. It would however be better if

> you treated it as a paper which you had read when you were in my room here and do not refer to it in any letters or despatches. A lot has happened since it was written but, but parts of it are I think still applicable.[52]

This intriguing letter leaves open the question of what exactly was in O'Malley's paper (or indeed why Vansittart allowed it to be circulated to Fisher and C.I.G.S., as he can hardly have approved of its contents), and who O'Malley's contacts in the Government were. But its timing, just as Henderson was running into severe criticism from Vansittart, can only have been an encouragement. A high-ranking colleague was prepared to put his career at some risk to support Henderson's approach in Berlin. He remained secure, at least for most of his period of accreditation to Germany, in the knowledge that the Prime Minister also fully supported him.

Henderson's stock at the Foreign Office sank even lower as a result of a despatch he sent on 5 July. Vansittart's irritation with his appointee was already great, when Henderson proceeded to attack his entire perception of how British foreign policy should be run.

'The aim of German policy,' Henderson wrote was 'to induce Great Britain to dissociate herself, not from France, but from the French system of alliances in Central and Eastern Europe' (that is with Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Rumania).[53] This coincided exactly with Henderson's own view that 'coalitions are a snare', and reflected his suspicion of French policy. He wrote later of his horror in arriving in Berlin and learning that 'the

British embassy there was popularly regarded as a branch of the French embassy'.[54] In Henderson's view German and British policy should be in accord about the danger posed by France's alliance system.

Vansittart's pro-French sympathies were well known, and he was further angered by Henderson's suggestion that Germany's natural sphere of expansion lay to the east where 'her future lies by means of the realisation of aspirations which are in her opinion vital to her well-being, legitimate and not in conflict with any direct British interest'.[55]

July was also an equally difficult month for Henderson's relations with the Foreign Office. On 14 July Henderson wrote to Maxwell Garnett of The League of Nations Union about a pamphlet the latter had written concerning the effectiveness of the League. Henderson's letter was phrased in his usual trenchant style. He had no faith in the League, Henderson told Garnett, unless all European states belonged to it, and where Germany was concerned Henderson was even more blunt. 'Forgive me if I say that I think you are completely mistaken,' Henderson wrote. 'I doubt if the Germans know themselves what their policy is.' (Vansittart minuted furiously here 'This will be thought very thin (And it is)'.)

Henderson went on to assert that German unity (an obvious reference to Anschluss) was inevitable providing that it was desired by the 'peoples themselves and with due regard to the intangibility of truly national frontiers and to the independence of other nations who have a right to exist just as much as Germany'.

Henderson's Foreign Office superiors lined up to

express their disapproval of the errant Ambassador. William Strang minuted that it was a mistake for 'HM Ambassadors to air their views like this, especially when their views are unorthodox'. Orme Sargent agreed. He thought Henderson's letter to Garnett 'both uncalled for and regrettable', in his minute of 29 July.

Vansittart's response the next day was as withering as it was predictable. Henderson's letter was in his view 'an act of folly and completely improper', and Vansittart linked it to the Tauschitz affair, and complaints about Henderson by the US Ambassador William Dodd (to the effect that he was too pro-Nazi).

Vansittart went on in scathing fashion about his old friend's behaviour:

> This kind of thing cannot go on. Sir N. Henderson seems to have failed to grasp the responsibilities of his position. It seems incredible that he should have sent us a copy of the letter like this without apparently realising what he has done ... In 35 years' experience I cannot recall such a series of incidents created by an Ambassador - and in so short a while. He is exceeding his functions and exceeding them lightheartedly.

Henderson, concluded Vansittart, was misrepresenting British policy to the Germans, and the Foreign Office would have to look at this series of incidents ' and try and find means for improving his judgement'.[56]

This celebrated attack on Henderson by Vansittart shows Henderson in the worst possible light. Yet were the views expressed so outrageous? For the thinly veiled reference to

the likelihood of an Austro-German Anschluss was qualified by the reasonable observation that such an event was not possible without the consent of the parties involved, peaceful means, and the absence of any threat to the independence of other states.

Strang should not have been surprised either, that Henderson was behaving in an 'unorthodox' manner. He had been unorthodox throughout his career, but this had not prevented his obtaining golden opinions inside the Foreign Office. And from Vansittart in particular.

Henderson was also in this instance almost naively honest. He conducted no covert correspondence with Maxwell Garnett, but copied it to the Foreign Office, so that Vansittart's tirade about Henderson 'exceeding his functions' seems inappropriate. If Vansittart faulted his judgement, he had found little wrong with it in earlier years. Henderson's view of his functions was almost certainly influenced by the wide brief he believed Neville Chamberlain had given him before he went to Berlin. The Maxwell Garnett episode seems to show that Henderson still imagined he might be able to influence his Foreign Office superiors.

This may also have been the intention behind the memorandum which Henderson wrote to Orme Sargent on 10 May 1937. This memorandum was thirteen pages long, and laid down what Henderson thought should be the parameters of British policy towards Germany. Henderson told Sargent that: 'Germany herself impinges on no British possession: Great Britain is excentric [sic] to Europe, whereas Germany is practically entirely central.' Vansittart, whose marginal comments are to be found on every page of the memorandum, asked at this

point 'What about colonies?'

Henderson went on to observe that British friendship with Germany 'could and would serve British national policy' by restraining Russian ambitions in Asia or the Near East, as well as curbing Italian aspirations in the Mediterranean (at this point Vansittart minuted angrily 'This is German doctrine'). When Henderson went on to talk about Joseph Chamberlain's attempts to secure an Anglo-German alliance in 1899, Vansittart remarked that this was precisely what Henderson had said to US Ambassador Dodd, who said that Henderson had suggested that such an alliance was desirable and natural.

This sparring between the Permanent Under Secretary and his Ambassador went on for page after page. When Henderson wrote that if France would not renounce her relationship with the Little Entente powers in Eastern Europe (Czecho-slovakia, Rumania, and Yugoslavia - Henderson had always been critical of French influence when in Belgrade), Vansittart retorted again 'This is full acceptance of the German attitude'.

The battleground then shifted to Austria. Henderson thought that the Austrians would wish 'to be reunited with Germany'. Vansittart here detected the malign influence of Lord Lothian, who had visited Germany in April 1937 and spoken to several Nazi leaders including Hitler. (On his return Lothian sent Henderson a copy of a memorandum about the visit.)

Henderson felt that Britain should be prepared to 'submit ... without too great discomfort to the surge and swell of restless Pan-Germanism'. This, according to

Vansittart was 'Lord Lothian again and in full'. And when Henderson opined that Britain should have no objection in principle 'to German economic and even political predominance in Eastern Europe' Vansittart minuted tartly 'What does that mean exactly?'

Close reading of the memorandum of 10 May provides a coherent scenario for British policy as Henderson thought it should operate towards Germany. In Henderson's view, there were two options if no accommodation could be reached with the Nazi régime. One would be to 'protest vehemently' but do nothing in the event of an enforced Anschluss with Austria or seizure of the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia. The other was to revert to what Henderson called the 'Block System' of pre-war alliances and prepare for war, in less favourable conditions than those of 1914. In Henderson's opinion both alternatives were 'counsels of despair'.[57]

Henderson was not as naive as Vansittart's numerous angry interventions may suggest. He fully recognised the difficulties involved in securing an Anglo-German understanding and described them indeed as

> extraordinarily formidable. Quite apart from Germany itself, the Nazi régime, her traditional mentality and her inevitable urge towards unity and expansion it is not in the interests - for obvious reasons - either of Italy or of Russia to witness its consummation.

Henderson was sympathetic in the memorandum to colonial revision but argued, as he was often to do in Berlin, that Britain should take the moral high ground. Hitler ought to be bound to the undertaking he had given on 21 May 1935 that

he would unconditionally respect the remaining articles of the Versailles Treaty (a somewhat forlorn hope) in his conduct of Germany's international affairs.

'However little faith,' Henderson argued, 'one may have in German promises, an agreement would increase our influence over Germany and it is surely better than none.' This after all was why Henderson had been sent to Berlin, to mend the fences allegedly broken by Rumbold and Phipps. If on the other hand Hitler persisted in his illegal behaviour, and broke his 1935 pledge, Henderson believed that 'the moral disapproval of the world had some weight'. Foreign Office critics could perhaps have argued that for someone who spoke so much about morality, Henderson's scepticism about the League (as shown in his letter to Maxwell Garnett) was surprising. He did, however, share such scepticism with Chamberlain.

One historian sees in the debate between Henderson and Vansittart in 1937 an echo of the pre-1914 arguments between Sanderson and Crowe and the relevance of the balance of power in the conduct of Britain's foreign relations.[58] Henderson was decidedly in the Crowe tradition, broadly supported by Vansittart, in his argument that Britain's national interest must be the predominant factor in policy-making. This ran parallel with Henderson's belief that British Governments must be aware of their limitations and not engage in pointless threats and sabre-rattling. At the root of some of Henderson's indiscretions and cutting of diplomatic corners, was the belief that on some occasions in Turkey, Egypt and Yugoslavia as well as in Berlin, obfus-cation gave foreign governments the wrong impression. In

Belgrade he had despaired about getting the Foreign Office to see that Italy must make concessions to the Yugoslavs. Whereas in Berlin he feared that the British were becoming Job's comforters to those, like the Austrians and the Czechs, whom they could not help.

Henderson was vigorous, indeed zealous, in his efforts to improve Anglo-German relations from the moment he arrived in Berlin in April 1937. Yet already there were indications that his health had been fatally weakened, and the whole issue of his health had been neglected.

On 21 June Henderson had written to Eden about his health saying:

> I have known something was wrong for nearly a year and had originally meant to come back peacefully from Buenos Aires and deal with it this year. The worst of Berlin is that crises are endemic.

He went on to report that he had been to see a German doctor, who insisted that he go to the health spa at Marienbad. 'The trouble is chiefly lungs - but I am letting nobody but you know that.'

Eden was solicitous. He was 'most distressed' he wrote back on 28 June 'to hear what you had to say about your health. I do hope the trouble will prove amenable to prompt treatment ... of course we have every confidence in Ogilvie Forbes' (Henderson did not get on well with his Counsellor Ogilvie-Forbes and preferred to work with the First Secretary Ivone Kirkpatrick).[59] These were early inklings of the serious cancer which was to force Henderson to take four months' sick leave in 1938-9, and ultimately kill him at the age of sixty in 1942. Historians have tended to understate

the pain and suffering which Nevile Henderson endured in Berlin and which must have had an effect on his performance.[60] Berlin was a stressful enough post for a diplomat without the double burden of a serious illness as well.

Nevertheless in those early days of his mission in Berlin, Henderson was zealous in trying to attract influential adherents to his cause. On 24 October 1937 he was a weekend guest of the Astors at Cliveden, those well-known supporters of Chamberlain, and also found himself in the company of Geoffrey Dawson, the pro-appeasement editor of 'The Times', Lord Lothian and Anthony Eden. The ubiquitous Tom Jones was also staying at Cliveden and was impressed by what Henderson had to say, writing in his diary:

> I sat between him [Eden] and Henderson after the ladies left last night and found they differed widely in policy. Henderson struck me as sensible and informed without distinction. He has lived in the countries we talked about and Eden has not and this was apparent.[61]

Lord Astor found that although he had not seen Henderson since they were schoolboys at Eton, he 'liked him very much'.[62] Since Astor was a strong supporter of Neville Chamberlain's appeasement policy this was hardly surprising. Henderson told his audience at Cliveden that he was 'sticking courageously to his policy of trying to arrive at a settlement between ourselves and Germany.[63] This won Astor's approval as well as that of the influential Geoffrey Dawson, whose newspaper was often regarded abroad as the official organ of the British Government. Henderson's thoughts were incorporated into 'The Times' leader which

appeared on 28 October. Henderson was proving adept at building up a circle of sympathisers in establishment circles in Britain, for he was also in correspondence with Lothian about Anglo-German relations.[64]

Allies like Astor, Dawson and Lothian were important to Henderson's cause. But the pivotal relationship, as far as Henderson was concerned, was with Chamberlain. For if Henderson retained the good opinion of Chamberlain, he could to a considerable degree override the opposition of Vansittart, Orme Sargent and their supporters in the Foreign Office, who thought him far too accommodating to German views.

It is clear from the record that Henderson did indeed have Chamberlain's confidence. The Prime Minister's response to Lord Derby's comments on Henderson's controversial speech to the Deutsche Englische Gesellschaft was to assure Derby that there was 'every confidence in Henderson'.[65]

Chamberlain himself had little confidence in the Foreign Office, which he believed was peopled by poets and dreamers.[66] So there is good ground for thinking that he saw in Henderson a useful diplomatic weapon for by-passing the reputedly pro-French Foreign Office, just as Sir Horace Wilson (who had no foreign policy background whatever) was to be later. Chamberlain's persistent distrust of the Foreign Office was well demonstrated in a letter he wrote to his sister Hilda on 24 October 1937. 'But really, the FO! I am only waiting for my opportunity to stir it with a long pole.'[67]

Chamberlain's faith in Henderson is clearly implied by remarks made by the Under-Secretary of State in the Foreign Office, R.A. Butler, to the German Ambassador in 1938. The

Germans should be aware, Butler opined, that:

> Baldwin as Prime Minister had concerned himself with foreign policy only to the degree that was absolutely necessary, and consequently the predominant, pro-French element in the Foreign Office had been able to exert its influence to the fullest extent. The generation which had come up in the Foreign Office in recent years on the other hand, was free from any pro-French leaning. But this group in the Foreign Office had never really made much headway, the first real break in the French line had come with Sir Nevile Henderson.[68]

Leaving aside the chronological inaccuracy of Butler's statement (Henderson had after all joined the Diplomatic Service in 1905, just two years after Vansittart), this statement probably gives an accurate enough insight into Chamberlain's views about Henderson, as Butler was very much his master's voice. Although Henderson denied being anti-French, there is no doubt that he was critical of French policy.[69] This was totally compatible with his strong belief in Britain's old 'blue water' strategy. He, like Chamberlain, was appalled by the carnage of the Great War.

As a result of his strong commitment to better Anglo-German relations, Henderson became even more obsessed with the need to ensure that the British media was friendly towards Germany, or at least even-handed. This was to be a consistent characteristic of his tenure of the Berlin Embassy, and one which immediately brought him into sharp conflict with his Foreign Office superiors.

This first became a major issue when Lord Halifax, Lord

President of the Council, visited Germany in November 1937 (although the visit itself caused controversy in Government circles). Halifax had received an invitation from Göring to attend a hunting exhibition (he was a master of hounds in Yorkshire), and Chamberlain was keen that he should accept and use the occasion of the visit to improve Anglo-German relations.[70] The perception in Whitehall was that Göring was a 'moderate' who could be used to mollify Hitler's excesses. This view, which proved to be erroneous, was subscribed to by Henderson himself.

Initially Henderson had doubts about whether a visit by Halifax would be fruitful. But his doubts were resolved after a personal interview with Chamberlain on 28 October. As Henderson told Halifax, 'The way in which the PM put it to me yesterday, your visit there takes a quite different aspect. And in its new light I am definitely more enthusiastic than I was at first about it.'[71] Henderson concluded his private letter to Halifax by saying that 'I do really believe that the PM's idea, as outlined to me, opens a new door on to a road along which progress is really possible'.[72] Chamberlain saw Halifax's visit as 'an opportunity for making contact with the Nazi leaders at a high level' and he doubted the Foreign Office's commitment to achieving this end.[73]

Controversy also surrounded the invitation to Halifax and whether it had Foreign Office approval. This is significant, because it underlines the tensions within Whitehall, with which Henderson had to contend throughout his period in Berlin. On the one hand, the Prime Minister supported the visit, and on the other, predictably Vansittart opposed it.

Vansittart found Halifax 'boring and his subservience to Chamberlain an act of treason'.[74] Eden, according to the traditional account, opposed the visit because Halifax might encourage Hitler to hope for concessions.[75]

But after the war, Halifax himself alerted the Foreign Office to the fact that at the time, he himself had 'pooh-poohed the idea, but he (A.E.) stuck to it', and that his decision to take up Göring's invitation was a result of 'their (A.E. and N.C.) joint exhortation to me to take the opportunity'.[76] Chamberlain also wrote at the time that Eden seemed 'quite happy'.[77]

What Eden did oppose was a visit by Halifax to Hitler personally for, he told Henderson, 'a visit by a leading Cabinet Minister could arouse such publicity and speculation as would almost certainly defeat its purpose'.[78] While it was true that Halifax's inexperience in foreign affairs might have caused him to make some indiscretion, as when he paid a scheduled visit to Hitler at Berchtesgaden, the real reason for Eden's concern may well have been that Halifax was not part of Eden's personal cabal, 'he was too close to the Prime Minister and could not be relied upon to put over a Foreign Office rather than a No.10 line'.[79] Exactly the same could have been said about Henderson, but the Ambassador found himself in the middle of the Eden, Vansittart, Chamberlain feud over the visit.

Nevertheless, Henderson was keen to push the visit, writing privately again to Halifax on 4 November to express his view that 'We are on a rising market and if we miss it we shall have much more to pay in the end. I am utterly convinced of that.' As so often, Henderson was concerned

about the moral dimension of policy and the inequalities created by Versailles and the post-war settlement. 'Morally,' he wrote, 'even we cannot deny the right of Germans living in large blocks on the German frontier to decide their own fate .. we should not oppose peaceful evolution.'[80]

A week later Henderson was expressing to the Foreign Office his concerns about press behaviour. He had spoken to Goebbels about Halifax's impending visit, which Goebbels supported, but Goebbels was worried about the possible tone of the British Press. Henderson had to explain that it was 'not controlled', but expressed his hope that British press coverage would not undermine the visit.[81] Later Henderson was to write that the British Press had 'handicapped my attempts in 1937 and 1938 to contribute to the improvement of Anglo-German relations, and thereby to the preservation of peace'.[82]

In Henderson's view, the British Press misbehaved from the outset. On the very day he spoke to Goebbels in fact, on 14 November, 'The Evening Standard' came out with what, from Henderson's perspective, was a provocative article. This speculated on whether Hitler would be given a free hand in Central Europe if he agreed to drop Germany's claim for the restoration of colonies. Hitler was furious, because he had wanted the visit and its agenda to be kept secret, and so was Henderson. He cabled London angrily that 'The Evening Standard' piece was an 'almost incredible attempt to poison the atmosphere ... which even the history of western journalism has seldom hitherto approached'.

So angry indeed was Henderson that he asked for

Halifax's visit to be postponed until the Press 'evinces that calm which is usually called decency and trustfulness in our countries'.[83] This rather splenetic outburst was clearly unfair, because 'The Times' had carried a series of letters (from leading figures like Gilbert Murray, Arnold Toynbee and George Lansbury) which largely favoured a sympathetic response to German claims for colonial revision. It was another example of Henderson's propensity to get carried away into special pleading, but others in the Foreign Office shared his hostility to the British Press.[84]

Henderson used strong language about the Press, but it was no stronger than his strictures on it when he was posted to Belgrade. Rightly or wrongly, Henderson saw himself as a proselytizer for the country to which he was accredited. His previous record was there for all to see in the Foreign Office files, and no one could legitimately claim that they had not been warned. However unsound Henderson's attitude to the Press might have seemed in a democracy, it was a consistent one which was echoed by Chamberlain himself, who tried to use the Press Office at 10 Downing Street to muzzle the newspapers.

In the event, the Halifax visit was not postponed. Chamberlain decided to make the best of a bad job, and follow up 'The Evening Standard' leak by disclosing the real purpose of the visit. Stories printed by 'The Times' and 'The Daily Telegraph' allowed Henderson to report on 15 November that the Germans regarded them as 'very satisfactory', although by early December he was again complaining about 'The Daily Telegraph'.[85]

The contingent thinking on Press policy by Henderson

and Chamberlain is underlined by the fact that the Prime Minister instructed his Press Secretary, George Seward, to approach Fritz Hesse, the Press Attaché at the German Embassy, in order to disavow 'The Evening Standard' piece. Not only was the paper insignificant in the ranks of British papers, Hesse was told, but the article had made Chamberlain very angry. Downing Street's Press line was exactly the same as Henderson's, both were anxious that German susceptibilities were not to be hurt.

This was not, of course, the Foreign Office line. Henderson believed that as 'The Evening Standard' diplomatic correspondent Poliakoff had received 'first information of the visit from the FO, he is continuing to receive information from the same persons for the same purpose'.[86] The finger of suspicion pointed at Vansittart, although Seward tried to persuade the Germans that the leak came from the Italian Embassy.

This was what Vansittart told Henderson, claiming that the accusation that the Foreign Office had leaked the news of Halifax's visit was 'wholly unjustified'. Without a trace of irony, Vansittart went on to assure his Ambassador that 'there are no persons in the FO who were against the visit, nor as you are well aware are these our methods'.

This was nonsense. Vansittart had developed, 'particularly during his last two years as Permanent Under-Secretary (1936-7), his own "private detective agency" dealing in German intelligence.'[87] He had also been responsible for helping to set up the so-called 'Z organisation' for channelling secret intelligence back to London, without the knowledge of SIS headquarters staff other than its leader

Sinclair.

One of the members of the Z organisation was Frederick Voigt, the Central European correspondent of 'The Manchester Guardian' in Vienna. Voigt, the doyen of Central European correspondents in the 1930s, was firmly convinced that Poliakoff had got his information from

> a high official in the FO who told him that this was the actual German plan for the talks but did not reveal the fact that the plan had been accepted as a basis for the conversations in Berlin.[88]

The high official, Voigt was convinced, was Vansittart himself, who masterminded a plot to publicise the German invitation to Halifax and force Berlin to deny its existence. The visit might then be the victim of unfavourable publicity and be cancelled. But as Vansittart's memoirs do not cover the year 1937, we cannot be sure that he would have preserved the version of events given to Henderson.

This episode is particularly relevant because of the many caustic criticisms minuted on Henderson's despatches by Vansittart for disregarding his instructions. In this instance, Henderson's most trenchant and consistent critic (yet erstwhile friend), is found to have been effectively undermining official policy while holding the most senior post in the Foreign Office. Vansittart's behaviour almost certainly involved a breach of the 1911 Official Secrets Act, and he was not empowered to leak official information to the Press, whatever he may have thought about Chamberlain's policy.[89]

The confusion surrounding the visit is striking, therefore, both in the wider context, and in the manner in which

it affected Henderson. Here was an ambassador who, whatever his faults, had a Prime Minister and a service chief who were hopelessly at odds with one another, and were prepared to be quite unscrupulous in their tactics.[90] To make matters worse, Eden himself both disliked Chamberlain's penchant for running foreign policy (having previously deplored Baldwin's passivity), and resented Vansittart's overwhelming dominance in the corridors of the Foreign Office.[91]

Eden had grudgingly agreed to Halifax's visit, provided that Halifax adhered to the guidelines given to him and did not encourage the Germans to demand concessions. Just to compound the confusion, Halifax did just that when he saw Hitler on 19 November, in respect both of colonies and a change in the Central European Settlement, thus ignoring Eden's guidelines. Any ambassador who had to operate in a context of such internal warfare was in an unenviable position.

While he was in Germany, Halifax met the Foreign Minister, von Neurath (whose visit to London had been cancelled in June), as well as Göring (who struck him as being a cross between a film star and a gangster), Goebbels and Hitler. Henderson thought subsequently that Hitler could not fail to 'have been - and in fact so I heard was - impressed by the obvious sincerity, high principles, and straightforward honesty of a man like Lord Halifax'.[92]

Henderson wrote again to Halifax, after his return from Germany, on 23 November. He was convinced that the next initiative after the Halifax visit should come from the British Government. He referred to an article by J.L.

Garvin, editor of 'The Observer' who broadly favoured the appeasement of Germany. Yet here Henderson's tone was circumspect, and he thought Garvin had gone too far in his article.

> HMG cannot go as far as to wash their hands of Austrians and Sudetendeutschen: that would look too cynical and immoral. Ultimately however if our last state is not to be worse than the first we shall have to fall back on the line of self-determination under suitable guarantees that it is freely exercised. It would be a world tragedy if Austria were to be incorporated at any early date into the German Reich, for the fact is that Vienna is today the only real centre of independent German culture. The Nazis have temporarily killed free thought and independent science and learning.

Henderson followed this rare venture into the cultural realm by saying that until German culture recovered 'its freedom I personally do not want to see Austria swallowed up'.[93] It was unlikely that German cultural freedom would ever be recovered under the Nazis.

This passage, which was approved by Neville Chamberlain, to whom Halifax had copied Henderson's private letter, contrasts strongly with what Henderson had written to the Australian High Commissioner Bruce in May.[94] Then Austria and Czechoslovakia were not worth risking the British Empire for, since Austria was 'bound' to return to Germany one day (it had of course never been part of Germany), and the fact that 3½ million Germans lived in a Slav state was 'exasperating'.[95] It could be that the tone of Henderson's letter

to Halifax is more temperate than that of the letter to Bruce, because Henderson was writing to a Cabinet Minister who would, after all, be Foreign Secretary less than four months later. But the two letters do highlight a persistent difficulty with Henderson, in determining which particular diplomatic nuance he favoured at any given moment. Taken at its face value, the Halifax letter of 23 November shows Henderson, contrary to his traditional reputation, being against the annexation of Austria, or the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. Like his Prime Minister, Henderson felt sure that the Halifax visit had been a great success and would prove to be 'a turning point'.[96]

The other dimension to Henderson's work in Germany centres on his relationship with the Nazi leadership. Henderson was sent to Berlin specifically because he was expected to get on better with the leadership than Rumbold or Phipps had been able (or willing) to do.

For Henderson the pivotal relationship was with Göring, although he was also to develop a close relationship with Ernst von Weizsäcker the State Secretary at the Wilhelm-strasse. Significantly Henderson devoted a whole chapter of Failure of A Mission to Göring. Göring was for Henderson 'by far the most sympathetic of the Nazi leaders' and he admitted that he had 'a real personal liking for him'.[97] Göring, like Henderson, was a keen sportsman, and a first class shot, and they went stag shooting together when Henderson stayed at Göring's hunting lodge at Romintern.

The two men first met on 24 May 1937, when Göring stressed the importance and need for Anglo-German co-operation, but pointed out the dangers of allowing Germans to

continue to see Great Britain as an enemy. Eden wanted this remark by Göring challenged, as it inferred that the British Government had been following an anti-German policy, and Henderson was told to seek another interview with Göring, which he duly did. Eden further instructed Henderson to obtain an explanation about why Britain was regarded as an enemy in Germany."

Henderson reported back that he had told Göring that it was 'as fallacious as it was miserable' to think of Britain as an enemy, and that British policy was peaceful in its intent and not obstructive. Henderson went on to stress, however, that France's security was also vital for Britain, and that although Britain recognised Germany's right to discuss colonial revision, real practical problems were involved."

Eden had hoped to discuss these issues with the German Foreign Minister von Neurath during his planned visit to London in June 1937, but the visit was cancelled at Hitler's express command in the wake of the alleged torpedo attack on the German cruiser 'Leipzig'.[100] Neurath, like Göring, was regarded as one of the 'moderate' faction in the German leadership, with whom rational debate was possible. Henderson never wavered from this view as far as Göring was concerned. The two men continued to meet at a variety of venues such as Romintern, Karinhall (Göring's massive country estate), the Party Rallies at Nuremberg, and as he told Eden on 21 June 1937, 'on the neutral ground of a race course'.[101]

One of Henderson's problems in Berlin was that it was not easy for him to get access to Hitler personally, since

Hitler's work habits were notoriously unpredictable. But he did manage to get an interview at the 1937 Party Rally. According to Henderson Hitler 'was undoubtedly pleased at the attendance for the first time of the British, French and American representatives, and he indicated that he attributed this innovation to my initiative'[102] Hitler's personal pleasure on this occasion may, though, have misled Henderson, as other eyewitnesses detected Hitler's personal aversion to the diplomat he called 'the man with the carnation'.[103]

The Nuremberg Rally issue had got Henderson into a row with Vansittart at the Foreign Office in 1937, and it is evident also that not all his fellow members of the Diplomatic Corps in Berlin were happy with this particular initiative by Henderson. Neither were they happy with his general line towards the Nazi régime.

On 23 June the US Ambassador William Dodd met Henderson. He reported him as saying 'My Government has been unwise in its attitude towards Germany.' Henderson went on to say, alleged Dodd, that 'Germany was following Bismarck's policy of annexing all European peoples of German descent, Austria, Czechoslovakia and other countries'.

Dodd thought Henderson far too pro-German, but it is unlikely that his British colleague's knowledge of modern European history was quite as bad as Dodd suggested (it was not Bismarck's policy to create a Greater Germany). Henderson vehemently denied making these comments when Dodd's Diaries were published in 1941. He wrote to the publishers saying that 'it was quite inconceivable' that he would have spoken in such terms.[104] And it is pertinent to point out

that Henderson had a much better personal relationship with Dodd's successor, Hugh Wilson, who thought highly of him.[105]

Another critic was the French Ambassador André François-Poncet, to whom Henderson had allegedly made the offending remarks about the Nuremberg Rally which so enraged Vansittart, and which Henderson denied making. Henderson's superior at the Foreign Office, when he was in Belgrade, Hugh Dalton, spoke to the French politician Leon Blum on 14 September 1937, and recorded his comments in his diary. Blum had passed on to him, Dalton wrote, François-Poncet's complaint 'that he could not get the same intimate relationship with Sir Nevile Henderson which he had with Phipps. He thought Henderson leaned too much towards the Nazis'.[106]

There would seem to be a simple explanation for Henderson's behaviour in this instance, which was his acknowledged fear that the British Embassy was perceived by the Germans to be hand in glove with the French in Phipps' time, so that Henderson made a point of keeping his distance. As it was, François-Poncet's role as Hitler's favourite Ambassador opened him to exactly the same accusation of partiality.[107] Too much has been made by the traditional anti-appeasement lobby of other ambassadors' opinions about Henderson, when their own records were undistinguished in this regard.

The year 1937 ended with the disappearance of Henderson's protagonist Vansittart from any position of any real influence in the Foreign Office. To the surprise of many, Vansittart accepted the post of Chief Diplomatic Adviser to the Government (which effectively meant that he had been 'kicked upstairs'), while Alexander Cadogan replaced him as Permanent Under Secretary. Vansittart's old friendship with

Henderson had been irrevocably sundered, and the latter wrote to Halifax to express his relief. 'I shall feel happier,' he said, 'with Alec Cadogan as head of the Foreign Office.'[108]

On a superficial reading, Henderson's balance sheet for 1937 looks catastrophic. He had angered Vansittart and Eden on several occasions, offended the Austrians over the Tauschitz episode, and upset domestic opinion because of his remarks to the Deutsche-Englische Gesellschaft.[109] Yet his behaviour in Berlin was entirely predictable in the light of his previous record, and in the Tauschitz affair at least, Vansittart showed a propensity for hysteria.

If Henderson's assessment of Göring turned out to be wrong, it has to be recognised that he was sent to Berlin to cultivate what was thought to be moderate opinion, as the British Government, especially when Chamberlain became Prime Minister, tried to improve Anglo-German relations. This was the rationale for Henderson attending the Nuremberg Rally, which occasioned the row with Vansittart, and where Henderson obtained one of his rare personal interviews with Hitler. The policy of scornful aloofness had after all been tried by Rumbold and Phipps, and a more emollient one at least deserved a try. Henderson was attempting to meet the requirements laid down by Tom Jones when he was advising Baldwin about Phipps' replacement. The new Ambassador, Jones said, should be able 'to enter with sympathetic interest into Hitler's aspirations'. This was precisely what Henderson was attempting to do in the early months of his Ambassadorship in Berlin.[110]

References

1. Sir Frank Roberts to writer 17 A8/90.

2. Failure of A Mission, p.13.

3. ibid., p.17.

4. M. Cowling, The Impact of Hitler, Chicago Press, 1977, p.286.

5. DBFP, II, 18, footnote to Eden to Henderson 30/4/37, No.455; See also Failure of A Mission p.21 and Water Under the Bridges p.213.

6. T.P. Conwell Evans, None So Blind, London, 1947 (printed and distributed privately), p.72. It is important to add that the editors of the British Foreign Policy Documents series remarked that there was 'no evidence' to support Henderson's assertion in Foreign Office archives, or in Neville Chamberlain's personal papers consulted by them at Birmingham University. ibid., No.455.

7. Vansittart to Cleverly 31/3/36, Baldwin Papers 124, University Library, Cambridge; Eden to Baldwin 27/12/36, Baldwin Papers 124; J. Herman, 'The Paris Embassy of Sir Eric Phipps 1937-9', Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, LSE, 1996.

8. T. Jones, A Diary With Letters, 22/5/36, O.U.P., 1954, p.208. Jones had told Baldwin that Phipps should be 'replaced by a man of the D'Abernon or Willingdon type, unhampered by a professional diplomatic tradition, able of course to speak German, and to enter with sympathetic interest into Hitler's aspirations'.

9. Lord Vansittart, The Mist Procession, London, 1958, p.360.

10. T. Jones, A Diary With Letters, p.314.

11. Eden subsequently told Sir Nicholas Henderson how much he regretted not having met Henderson before he was posted to Berlin. Sir N. Henderson Mandarin, The Diaries of Sir Nicholas Henderson, London, 1994, p.4.

12. J. Harvey (ed.), The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-40, 12/4/37, London, 1970.

13. Lord Avon, Facing the Dictators, London, 1961, p.504.

14. Lindsay was then the British ambassador in Washington. His name was also mentioned by Jones, Diary With Letters, p.314.

15. G. Waterfield, Professional Diplomat, London, 1973, pp.223/4. Loraine was promised an important post by Eden and sent to Rome by his successor Lord Halifax in 1939.

16. T. Evans (ed.), The Killearn Diaries, London, 1972, are a singularly disappointing source on Lampson's expectations at the time.

17. A. Goldman, 'Two Views of Germany: Nevile Henderson and Vansittart', British Journal of International Studies, 6 (1980), p.247.

18. Avon, p.570.

19. Vansittart to Blake 1/5/53, Vansittart Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge, 1/50; Sir Walford Selby, Diplomatic Twilight, London, 1953.

20. ibid., p.74; Selby was extremely critical of the way the Diplomatic Service had been run in the 1930s, and especially of undue Treasury interference in foreign policy formulation.

21. A suggestion put forward in D.C. Watt, 'Sir Nevile Henderson Reappraised', Contemporary Review, March 1962.

22. Relations between the two men were in fact notoriously bad. Writing to Sir Maurice Hankey in 1940 Phipps complained bitterly about 'constant stabs in the back from my relative at the F.O.', Phipps to Hankey, 29/12/40, Phipps Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge, 2/19.

23. Henderson to Vansittart 29/1/36, FO 800/371/268, Henderson Papers, PRO.

24. Vaughan B. Baker, 'Nevile Henderson in Berlin: A Re-evaluation', Red River Valley Historical Journal, No.4, Winter 1977, p.343.

25. Sir Frank Roberts to writer, 7/8/90.

26. Water Under the Bridges, p.94.

27. ibid., p.171.

28. Loraine to Halifax 25/11/38, FO 424/282.

29. G. Waterfield, Professional Diplomat, London, 1973, p.224; Churchill was not Loraine's only critic. Orme Sargent complained about 'useless and verbose telegraphing from Sir P. Loraine recently', Sargent minute 20/3/38, FO 371/21674 C1829/132/18.

30. Lampson to Henderson 4/1/38, FO 800/269, Henderson Papers, PRO.

31. G. Craig and F. Gilbert (eds.), The Diplomats, Vol.II, p.552.

32. They were interned in Switzerland during the war, and when the relevant box cars were opened afterwards Henderson's diary and papers were missing; see Vaughan B. Baker, Nevile Henderson in Berlin: A Re-evaluation, p.352, footnote 54.

33. Harvey Diaries 23/4/37, p.41; Harvey also reported that Eden had vetoed Henderson's request to go to Munich and receive 'some special message' which Prince Paul of Yugoslavia wanted to give him. Eden told Henderson that he was no longer minister to Belgrade and that any messages should go through the then minister Sir Ronald Campbell.

34. Avon, p.504. Not everyone in the Foreign Office took the Eden/Vansittart line. Cadogan thought that Henderson 'was in the right mood', 24/4/37, Cadogan Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge.

35. Henderson to Bruce 25/5/37, FO 800/268, Henderson Papers PRO. Henderson had known Bruce since 1924. Water Under the Bridges, p.133.

36. Vansittart minute 5/6/37, FO 800/268, Henderson Papers PRO.

37. Vansittart to Henderson 8/6/37; Henderson to Vansittart 15/6/37, FO 800/268.

38. Vansittart to Henderson 21/6/37, ibid. Henderson admits his partiality towards the Turks in Failure of A Mission, p.20.

39. Eden to Henderson 9/11/37, FO 800/268.

40. Water Under the Bridges, pp.127-8.

41. Failure of A Mission, p.16.

42. Vansittart to Eden 18/6/37, FO 800/268, Henderson Papers PRO. Other evidence about Henderson's indiscretions can be found in PRO 371/20736, Vansittart minute 30/7/37 (C5377 and in 371/20737 (C8293/270/18 270/18).

43. Eden to Henderson 22/6/37, FO 800/268.

44. Henderson to Eden 28/6/37, FO 860/268.

45. ibid., FO 800/268.

46. Selby to Henderson 19/7/37, FO 800/268; see also footnote 20 above.

47. The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, pp.40-2, 182, 156.

48. P. Schmidt, Hitler's Interpreter, London, 1951, p.150; D. Cameron Watt also comments on how German was 'a language over which Henderson had not as much command as he believed', How War Came, London, 1989, p.520.

49. 'The Times' 2/6/37.

50. Hansard 8/6/37.

51. Derby to Chamberlain 15/6/37, Earl of Derby Papers, Liverpool Public Library Record Office, 920 DER (17) 33.

52. O'Malley to Henderson 9/6/37, Henderson Papers, PRO 371/800/268.

53. Henderson to Eden 5/7/37, DBFP, 2nd Series, Vol.IX, No.16.

54. Water Under The Bridges, pp.111-112.

55. Henderson to Eden 5/7/37, DBFP, 2, IX, No.16.

56. Henderson to Maxwell Garnett 14/7/37, Minutes by Strang (27/7), Sargent (29/7), and Vansittart (30/7), FO 371/ 20736/5377/270/18, PRO.

57. Henderson to Sargent 20/7/37, FO 371/20736/5377/270/18, PRO. At the beginning of the memorandum Henderson told Sargent 'As you will see it is dated May 10th 1937'. See also DBFP, 2, IX, No.53.

58. ibid.; J. Charmley, Chamberlain and the Lost Peace, London, 1989, p.7. Chapter One 'The Prime Minister and the Ambassador' gives an unusually sympathetic analysis of Henderson's aims at the outset of his 'mission'.

59. Henderson to Eden 21/6/37; Eden to Henderson 28/6/37, FO 800/268, Henderson Papers, PRO.

60. The extent of Henderson's physical suffering in his last years was poignantly acknowledged by his literary agent Raymond Savage in 1945, Water Under the Bridges, p.7.

61. T. Jones, A Diary With Letters, pp.369-70; The cohesiveness of the so-called 'Cliveden set' has been exaggerated. R. Cockett, The Twilight of Truth, London, 1989, p.29.

62. Lord Astor to Garvin 27/10/37, Garvin Papers, Astor File, Harry Ranson Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin Texas, cited in Cockett, p.29.

63. ibid.

64. See for example Lothian to Henderson 11/5/37; Lothian to Henderson 14/4/38 and Henderson to Lothian 22/4/38, Lothian Papers, Scottish Record Office GD 40/17/204, GD 40/17/362.

65. Chamberlain to Derby 16/6/37, Earl of Derby Papers, DER (17) 33.

66. It was true that Vansittart wrote poetry, plays and film scripts.

67. Neville Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain 24/10/37, NC 18/1/1020, Chamberlain Papers, University of Birmingham.

68. Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D, Vol.I, No.128, Memorandum 25/2/38.

69. See for example Henderson's castigation of French policy in Yugoslavia, Water Under The Bridges, p.187; Henderson might have retorted that his pro-French credentials included the fact that he kept on his flat in Paris when he was sent to Belgrade, and paid for his female French cook to go to the Yugoslav capital for several months of the year as well. He had also had a duodenal ulcer removed by a French surgeon.

70. For analysis of the Halifax visit see R. Cockett, The Twilight of Truth, London, 1989, pp.33-42; M. Gilbert and R. Gott, The Appeasers, London, 1963, pp.71-6; Failure of A Mission, pp.96-100; R.A.C. Parker, Chamberlain and Appeasement, London, 1993, pp.97-100; R. Lamb, The Drift to War, London, 1989, pp.209-210; A.R. Peters, Anthony Eden at the Foreign Office, Aldershot, 1986, pp.299-305; Lord Avon, Facing the Dictators, London, 1962, pp.508-16; A. Roberts, The Holy Fox. A Biography of Lord Halifax, London, 1991, pp.64-75; D. Dutton, Anthony Eden. A Life and Reputation, London, 1997, pp.92-3.

71. Henderson to Halifax 29/10/37, Hickleton Papers, Borthwick Institute, University of York, A 4 410 3 2 (iii).

72. ibid.; surprisingly Henderson makes no reference to his interview with Chamberlain in Failure of A Mission.

73. J. Charmley, Chamberlain and the Lost Peace, London, 1989, p.14.

74. C. King, With Malice Towards None, London, 1970, p.54.

75. Avon, Facing the Dictators, p.513. Eden claimed that he had got Halifax to read a memorandum by William Strang of the Foreign Office which corrected the impression created in Henderson's memo of 10 May 1937. This according to Eden 'was much too loose and yielding a document'.

76. Hickleton Papers 6/5/46, A 4 410 3.

77. Chamberlain to his sister Hilda Chamberlain 24/10/37, Chamberlain Papers, 18/1/1025; predictably Eden was backed by his loyal Private Secretary Oliver Harvey, Diaries 7/11/37, p.37; see also I. Macleod, Neville Chamberlain, London, 1961, p.210.

78. Eden to Henderson.

79. A. Roberts, Holy Fox, p.66.

80. Henderson to Halifax 4/11/37, Hickleton Papers, A 4 410 3. Henderson's keenness was sharpened by the cancellation of a projected visit by the German Foreign Minister von Neurath to London in June 1937, Failure of A Mission, pp.67-69.

81. Henderson to the Foreign Office 14/11/37, FO 371/20763/7799, PRO.

82. Failure of A Mission, p.65. Henderson went on to say that 'Hitler's back was constantly being rubbed up the wrong way by Press criticisms'.

83. Henderson to the Foreign Office 15/11/37, FO 371/10751/7324, PRO.

84. A. Crozier, Appeasement and Germany's Last Bid for Colonies, London, 1988, p.226; it is interesting to note that Clifford Norton, Vansittart's Private Secretary from 1930 to 1939, wrote supportively to Henderson on 7 July about the British Press being 'unnecessarily provocative and sensational'. He warned Henderson about an impending 'News Chronicle' article on the Tauschitz affair.

85. Henderson to the Foreign Office 15/11/37, Hickleton Papers, A 4 410 3 3; Henderson to Halifax 9/12/37, Hickleton Papers, A 4 410 3 2. The offending journalist was Gordon Lennox.

86. Henderson to Foreign Office 14/11/37, FO 371/20751/7828, PRO.

87. Vansittart to Henderson 15/11/37, FO 371/20751. PRO; C. Andrew, Secret Service. The Making of the British Intelligence Community, London, 1985, p.382.

88. Voigt to Crozier 17/11/37, Manchester Guardian Archive, 218; for further detail on the Poliakoff leak see Cockett, pp.34-9.

89. It was of course true that Winston Churchill, the senior Privy Counsellor of the realm, also had a private army of informants in government ministries, and consistently broke the provisions of the Act. M. Gilbert, Winston Churchill. The Wilderness Years, London, 1981, Ch.5.

90. It was also a fact that Chamberlain had Vansittart followed by MI5 agents even before he ceased to be Permanent Under-Secretary at the end of 1937. Andrew, p.385.

91. Eden's criticism of Vansittart is well known. He was 'seldom an official giving good and disinterested advice based on study and experience ... and much more a Secretary of State in mentality than a permanent official'. Avon, p.242; third parties thought Eden fearful of being overshadowed by the older man. J. Colville, The Fringes of Power, London, 1985, p.189.

92. Roberts, pp.73-4, Halifax's biographer also comments on how the Lord Privy Seal 'felt disdain for British journalistic standards'; Failure of A Mission, p.98; Earl of Halifax, Fullness of Days, London, 1957, p.191.

93. Henderson to Halifax 23/11/37, Hickleton Papers, A 4 410 3.

94. Chamberlain to Halifax 25/11/37, A 4 410 3.

95. Henderson to Bruce 25/5/37, FO 800/268, Henderson Papers, PRO.

96. Henderson to Halifax 2/12/37, Hickleton Papers, A 4 410 3.

97. Failure of A Mission, p.80.

98. Memorandum by A. Eden circulating correspondence with Sir N. Henderson 30/7/37, CAB 24/271; Henderson to Eden 25/5/37; Eden to Henderson 4/6/37.

99. Memorandum by A. Eden circulating correspondence with Sir N. Henderson 30/7/37.

100. Arranged for 23-28 June 1937, the Germans claimed the Leipzig had been attacked by a Spanish Republican submarine. Failure of A Mission, p.67.

101. Henderson to Eden 21/6/37, Henderson Papers, FO 800/268.

102. Failure of A Mission, p.75.

103. P. Schmidt, Hitler's Interpreter, p.86.

104. Martha Dodd and Wm Dodd Junior (eds.), Ambassador Dodd's Diary 1933-38, London, 1941, pp.424-6. Henderson's complaint to the publisher Gollanz is footnoted; Failure of A Mission, p.46.

105. Water Under the Bridges, p.211; Wilson shared Henderson's view of Göring. R. Hessen (ed.), Berlin Alert: The Memoirs and Reports of Truman Smith, Stanford, 1984, pp.127-8.

106. H. Dalton, The Political Diary of Hugh Dalton 1918-40, B. Pimlott (ed.), London, 1986, p.218; Henderson visited Dalton in person on 28 October 1937 to persuade him of the merits of appeasement, Diary 28/10/37, p.219.

107. G. Craig and F. Gilbert, The Diplomats, Vol.2, pp.469-70.

108. Henderson to Halifax 10/1/38, Hickleton Papers, A 4 410 3.

109. The fact that Henderson's work could be commended has been largely ignored, see for example Eden to Henderson 22/6/37, DBFP, 2nd Series, Vol.XVIII, No.640. Eden

conveyed his 'warm appreciation' for the way Henderson had conducted interviews with Hitler and von Neurath on 22 June.

110. Jones' Diary, p.314.

Chapter Three

The Anschluss

In the early months of 1938 Henderson's attentions were to be focused on two major issues, the possible restoration of German colonies which had been confiscated at Versailles, and the status of the Austrian Republic. As events turned out, the second issue was to overshadow the first as independent Austria, a fragile creation of the 1919 Treaty of Saint Germain, disappeared from the map of Europe as an independent state in March 1938.

Ever since Hitler came to power in January 1933 his intentions towards his homeland were plain for all to see, in that he wanted a closer relationship between Austria and the Reich. In July 1934 Hitler was implicated in the failed Austrian Nazi coup which resulted in the assassination of Chancellor Dollfuss. This also brought about the threat of Italian intervention which forced Hitler to hand over the assassins of Dollfuss, who had fled to Germany after the murder.

But neither the illusion of unity between Britain, France and Italy nor the ban on Austro-German unity enshrined in Article 80 of the Versailles Treaty could prevent growing pressure on the régime of the new Austrian Chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg. This culminated in the so-called Austro-German 'Gentleman's Agreement' in 1936 which brought two crypto Nazis Glaise-Hortenau and Guido Schmidt

into the Schuschnigg Government. The agreement also forced Austria to recognise herself to be a German state, and allowed Nazi German newspapers to circulate in Austria again.

The Gentleman's Agreement was also clearly a consequence of the great power realignment which followed Mussolini's attack on Abyssinia in the autumn of 1935. The Austrian Government could no longer rely on Italy for protection. German pressure on Austria reached its extreme point with Hitler's bullying interview with Schuschnigg on 12 February.[1]

At the beginning of 1938, both Eden and Chamberlain had been instructing Henderson to seek out the German view on colonial readjustment, and on 26 January Henderson saw the German Foreign Minister von Neurath to ask him whether the Reich Government would engage in discussions about Germany's former colonies in exchange for an exchange of views on rearmament.

Neurath responded by saying that the colonial issue 'could not be the subject of bargaining' and that Germany would await a concrete offer from Britain on the subject. Ominously the issue of Austro-German relations was also raised when von Neurath told Henderson that English interference would not be tolerated.[2]

Henderson was following up Chamberlain's initiative at the Cabinet Foreign Policy Committee meeting on 24 January when the Prime Minister had stressed that a colonial settlement could only be a result of a more general settlement. Nevertheless he was personally convinced that 'any satisfactory settlement would involve the handing over of

Tanganyika'. Chamberlain was gratified when his scheme was 'accepted promptly and even enthusiastically' by the Committee.[3] After his rather negative experience with von Neurath, Henderson was to be less sanguine than his Prime Minister about the prospects of colonial appeasement, and did indeed warn the Foreign Office on 26 January that Germany would demand 'full sovereignty' over her former colonies. Henderson had also stated his belief that, for the moment, Italy would offer a better prospect for rapprochement than Germany.[4] Chamberlain was also encouraged in this belief by his sister-in-law Lady Ivy Chamberlain, Austen Chamberlain's widow, an admirer of the Duce who happened to be staying in Rome. This was an early example of what became a persistent characteristic of Chamberlain, the use of unorthodox diplomatic channels (even Henderson was to be by-passed by unofficial intermediaries by 1939).

Henderson was recalled to London at the end of January 1938 for consultations, and actually attended the meeting of the Foreign Policy Committee on 3 February (a rare privilege for an ambassador). The Committee decided to go ahead with this colonial initiative, although Henderson had warned that the Reich Government would be unenthusiastic about Chamberlain's offer to accommodate German colonial grievances.[5]

During this visit to London Henderson also had the opportunity of a discussion with the Permanent Under-Secretary Sir Alexander Cadogan who had succeeded Vansittart after the latter's 'promotion' to the rather meaningless post of Chief Diplomatic Adviser in the New Year. Cadogan knew Henderson well in social circles, and recorded his

opinion of his old schoolmate (they had both been at Eton) in his diary: 'Nevile Henderson dined. I think he's very good.'[6] This opinion differed rather sharply from that of his disgruntled predecessor, who was now excluded from the day to day running of the Foreign Office.

Henderson returned to Berlin on 4 February to find himself in the middle of the Blomberg crisis, when the Reich Defence Minister was discovered to have married a former prostitute after Hitler had been a witness at his wedding. This mysterious episode (for the evidence suggests that the Gestapo were well aware of Frau Blomberg's dubious past) provided Hitler with an excuse to rid himself of moderates like the Foreign Minister von Neurath, as well as the Reichswehr Chief of Staff von Fritsch, who was falsely accused of having been involved in a homosexual affair, and Blomberg himself.[7]

As far as Henderson was concerned, the Blomberg affair had two immediate consequences. A planned meeting with Hitler was deferred until 3 March, but much more importantly von Neurath was replaced as Foreign Minister by the former German Ambassador in London, Joachim von Ribbentrop, who rapidly became Henderson's bête noire. In Failure of A Mission Henderson wrote that he had 'no personal quarrel with Herr von Ribbentrop' but went on to attack him for his 'vanity, his resentments, and his misconceptions of England and the English mentality', which Henderson believed were a serious obstacle to the achievement of the task he had set himself, the improvement of Anglo-German relations.[8] The tone of a letter which Henderson wrote to King George VI later that year, casts serious doubt on Henderson's claim

that there was no personal animosity between Ribbentrop and himself. Ribbentrop, Henderson told the King

> is eaten up with conceit and, if he can make himself out in his new position to be the author of better relations with Great Britain, he may sincerely work to that end. An understanding with Great Britain would at least give him that great prestige and popularity with Germany which he seeks - London's gain has been Sir Nevile Henderson's loss and that is the most he cares to say about Ribbentrop for the moment.[9]

There is plenty of contemporary testimony about the extremely poor relationship between Henderson and Ribbentrop. From the diplomatic point of view this made Henderson's job even more difficult, as Ribbentrop attempted to block his already limited access to Hitler.[10] According to von Ribbentrop's aide Reinhard Spitzy, Ribbentrop, much influenced by his wife and his experiences in London, had abandoned any hope of an Anglo-German accommodation, and saw Henderson as a threat because he worked hard to achieve just such an agreement. Ribbentrop therefore

> did everything in his power to discredit Henderson in Hitler's eyes. For instance, he pointed to Sir Nevile's friendship with the Rothschilds ... and he even asserted that Henderson turned up improperly dressed for discussions in the Chancellery. How on earth could anybody take seriously a man who wore a blue pin-stripe suit with a claret pullover and a red carnation?[11]

When ultimately Henderson did see Hitler on 3 March, he

spoke for about ten minutes about the need for agreement on the limitation of armaments, a restriction on aerial bombing, the colonial question, and the Austrian and Czechoslovak issues. According to Henderson, during his presentation of the British position Hitler 'remained crouching in his armchair with the most ferocious scowl on his face, which my firm, but at the same time conciliatory remarks scarcely warranted'.[12] At the time, Henderson had been pessimistic about the outcome of the interview, because it occurred while the crisis over Austria was intensifying, but he had been instructed to seek such an interview through Ribbentrop, during which he would pass on a message from Chamberlain about the colonial issue in particular.

> Henderson
>
> put to the Chancellor the questions whether Germany (1) was ready in principle to take part in a new colonial régime as outlined in the English proposal and (2) what contributions she was ready to make for general order and security in Europe.[13]

Hitler's reply was intemperate and aggressive. Henderson later wrote that, 'As for colonies, he did not seem the least interested in them, and the sum of his reply was that the colonial problem could wait for four, six, eight or even ten years.' Hitler did 'not consider the colonial question ripe for solution since Paris and London had set themselves so strongly against a return. For this reason he did not want to press the question'.[14]

As a mechanism for examining the colonial issue, the Hitler-Henderson interview of 3 March 1938 has been accurately described as 'a complete disaster'.[15] The

British had been encouraged by the overtures made by Dr. Hjalmar Schacht, the German Minister of Economics, in August 1936 about colonial readjustment (Schacht resigned his post in 1937 after conflicts over policy), and by statements made by Ribbentrop to the Anglo-German fellowship in London in December 1937.[16] But British hopes on the colonial issue were rudely shattered by Hitler's attitude on 3 March.

Henderson was convinced that this was because the Austrian question was now predominant in Hitler's mind. And he also came to believe that the Blomberg incident had imposed on Hitler as a dictator the need 'to obliterate its memory by some striking external success' which accelerated the pace of events leading to the Anschluss in March 1938.[17] But in retrospect Hitler's reaction to the British initiative seems predictable. Henderson had been forced to tell Hitler that Britain did not wish to return former German East Africa (Tanganyika), and South Africa could not be persuaded to give up former German South-West Africa. This meant that either Belgium or Portugal would have to be persuaded to cede colonial territory to Germany.[18] Hitler was understandably sceptical about likely Belgian or Portuguese reaction, and he was right to be so, as the Portuguese in particular were horrified by the prospect of a German return to Africa, and told the British Ambassador in Lisbon (Henderson's old friend Walford Selby) that Portugal would 'surrender nothing in the matter of colonies'.[19]

As far as Austria was concerned, Henderson's later belief was that the Germans 'desired ... the consolidation of National-Socialism with the Reich and the fulfilment of Greater Germany by the incorporation in it of Austria'. In

the view of the German Government, he wrote later, Austria was already Nazi to the core, and if a free plebiscite were held there, unhampered by the 'Schuschnigg tyranny', the vote would reflect this.[20] This was a cunning cocktail of German revisionism and propaganda designed to touch on that sensitive British nerve of guilt about the 1919 Peace Settlement. Henderson, who believed, like other appeasers, that Germany had been sinned against at Versailles, was undeniably susceptible to this approach.

This became clear when Henderson saw Hitler on 3 March (in the presence of Ribbentrop). He did pass on in this interview his Government's concern about the recent interview between Hitler and Schuschnigg on 12 February (when Hitler had terrorized the unfortunate Austrian leader with threats about what would happen if he did not co-operate with German policy). And he went on to warn the Germans that the British Government could not conceal from itself the fact 'that recent events have aroused apprehension in many quarters which must inevitably render more difficult the negotiation of a general settlement'. Hitler in turn accused Britain and France of obstructing his efforts to achieve a settlement with Schuschnigg. Henderson denied this but allegedly said later in the conversation that 'he, Sir Nevile Henderson, had himself often advocated the Anschluss'.[21] On the face of it this was another classic example of Henderson acting as a Nazi dupe, allowing his personal opinions to carry him outside his brief.

Henderson, however, disputed the German record of the conservation on 3 March when it was made available to him and did so in strong terms. 'I never said,' he told

Ribbentrop,

> that I had spoken here in favour of the Anschluss. What I did say was that I had sometimes expressed personal views which may not have been entirely in accordance with those of my Government.[22]

Expressing such personal views was of course precisely what had got Henderson into trouble with Vansittart in the summer of 1937. But in this instance Henderson did show that he fully realised that the British Ambassador in Berlin ought not to be talking in such terms to the Germans. His anxiety to set the record straight shows that he was at least aware that the Germans must not be encouraged to think that Britain would approve of an Anschluss. Vansittart and Orme Sargent had already expressed their view that an ambassador, especially in such a sensitive post as Berlin, should never be heard to make statements which were not in accordance with British policy, either on the Anschluss or on anything else.[23]

But those critics of Henderson who accuse him of deliberately encouraging German aspirations about Austria have, in this instance, to account for his anxiety to clarify his position. It was the German documentation about the Hitler interview which Henderson wanted amended, which his Foreign Office superiors in London would not have been able to see until the end of the Second World War. According to the German version of the interview, Henderson also denied claims by both Hitler and von Ribbentrop that the British press was hostile to Germany (even though he was himself critical of it at times) by rejoining that the German press itself had made violent and unjustified attacks on

Britain.[24] Subsequently in a telegram to Henderson on 10 March it was Halifax who played down the press issue, saying that it would be resolved by better Anglo-German relations.[25]

Having battled with the Germans about what was or was not said on 3 March, Henderson was soon embroiled once again with the Foreign Office. The issue this time was Chancellor Schuschnigg's decision on 13 March to ascertain whether the Austrian people wanted union with Germany or not.

Henderson's colleague in Vienna, Michael Palairet, supported Schuschnigg's decision, saying 'my own view is that the risk is worth taking. Chancellor would lose his authority if the present atmosphere of alarm and uncertainty were to continue'.[26] So did Halifax, who told Ribbentrop in an interview that 'it seemed a pretty tall order to say that the Head of a State could not have a plebiscite if he wanted to'.

Henderson disagreed. He conceded that German methods were 'indefensible' but thought Schuschnigg's action 'precipitous and unwise', when he telegraphed Halifax on 11 March.[27] On the same day he saw the Austrian Minister in Berlin and said that although he had every sympathy for Schuschnigg's predicament he thought 'this plebiscite ... provocative and agreed that in the event of bloodshed in Austria Herr Hitler would be unable to hold back his extremists' (showing Henderson's susceptibility to the theory that Hitler was influenced by extremists, when he himself was the most extreme of all).[28]

Henderson's next telegram on 12 March went even further. He had spoken to Göring, who denied that Germany

had sent any kind of ultimatum to Austria, and gave Henderson his word that the German troops which had entered Austria over the night of 11-12 March would be withdrawn when the situation was stable. This would be followed, Henderson was assured, by free elections. Henderson had agreed with Göring he told Halifax, that 'Dr Schuschnigg had acted with precipitate folly'.[29]

The 'precipitate folly' remark has been held up by historians as one of Henderson's most notorious gaffes.[30] He was rebuked for it by Halifax in his telegram on 12 March, and for giving personal opinions to Göring. 'I cannot help feeling,' Halifax telegraphed tartly. 'that by the admission to General Göring quoted above you cannot have but diminished the force of the protest you were instructed to make in my telegram No.79'.[31] Although Henderson tried to defend himself in a further telegram on 13 March, it is difficult to account for his behaviour in this interview (and his admission of the transgression), after the passage of arms with Ribbentrop about what he said to Hitler on 3 March.[32] It was clearly foolish of Henderson to have spoken in such terms to Göring, at a moment when Germany had flagrantly broken the Versailles Treaty.

There are various explanations which could be put forward for such behaviour. One is that in talking to Göring, whom he liked and regarded as an anti-war moderate, Henderson forgot himself. Throughout his career, he had a predisposition to allow personal relationships to influence his behaviour. In Yugoslavia this was a strength, in Berlin dealing with people he himself called 'gangsters', it was a weakness. But Henderson's estimate of Göring, which was

shown to be wrong in March 1938 when he helped to precipitate the Anschluss, was vindicated by Göring's behaviour in August-September 1939 when he did strive to prevent war.

Henderson may also have believed, not unreasonably, that Schuschnigg's decision may actually have precipitated the event which British policy was striving to prevent. For it is clear from the record that Hitler was beset with nervous anxiety over the weekend of 11-12 March, and that it was Göring, Henderson's 'moderate', who made the running, not Hitler himself. It was Göring for example, who masterminded the device of Seyss-Inquart's (the crypto-Nazi in the then Austrian Government) fictitious telegram asking for German assistance.[33]

Hitler by contrast was in a state bordering on hysteria and was later to pay tribute to Göring's resolve, saying that he was 'ice cold in crises. In time of crisis you cannot have a better adviser than the Reich Marshal'. In Hitler's confused state at the time of the Anschluss it was by no means certain that the forceable incorporation of Austria into the Reich was inevitable. Hitler did not actually decide on Anschluss until 'under the impact of the triumphal ride from Branau to Linz, the cheers, the flowers and the flags'.[34] Before this Hitler had appeared to opt for an internal Gleichshaltung in Austria. This would have involved

> a constitutional or pseudo-constitutional transfer of power within Austria to a man who had his confidence. This was the procedure he had used in Bavaria and Danzig and had previously tried in Austria with Theo Habicht.[35]

Thus Henderson's reaction to Schuschnigg's decision about the plebiscite may not have been as maladroit as it has traditionally been presented. Without Italian support (and Mussolini had made it clear that he regarded the issue of the Anschluss as a 'German problem') Austria's best change of survival was as a satellite of Germany, but retaining its domestic autonomy.'[6]

If this perspective on the Anschluss is accepted, then Henderson's 'precipitate folly' comment loses its heretical sound, because Schuschnigg's decision may well have precipitated a short, sharp, shock solution instead of the gradualist one which Hitler seems to have previously favoured. As it was, Henderson's sin was not that he had expressed such a view, but that he had done so publicly in a conversation with Göring, and allegedly undermined the stance on Austria which the British Government was trying to take.

This raises the issue of what British intentions were in March 1938. It is clear from a variety of sources that the British Government never intended to fight to preserve Austrian independence. Cadogan's comment in his diary on 15 February that 'Personally I almost wish Germany would swallow Austria up and get it over ... I shouldn't mind if Austria were gleichgesschaltet,'[7] was a fairly typical Government and Foreign Office response at the time of the Austrian crisis. Neither did Halifax privately show any greater backbone over the issue than did Cadogan. His rebuke to Henderson on 12 March was justified, in the sense that the Ambassador was open to the accusation that his remark might appear to convey British approval for the Anschluss. But the fact remains that it was made after the

event, when Halifax's bluff had been called as he surely knew it must be. Indeed when Schuschnigg sought out British support on the eve of the Anschluss, Halifax instructed Palairet to give a blunt, unsympathetic response.

> His Majesty's Government [Halifax telegraphed Palairet] cannot take the responsibility of advising the Chancellor to take any course of action which might expose his country to dangers against which HM Government are unable to guarantee protection.[38]

This tortuous phraseology provided a fig leaf for the naked fact (which Henderson fully recognised) that there was nothing the British Government could do anyway, although in the event the message was never passed on to the Austria Government because Schuschnigg's resignation was known to be imminent.

Halifax's behaviour in March 1938 prefigured the British line six months later over the Sudeten crisis. Hitler was to be bluffed about any likely British response to aggression, a policy which Henderson always found to be both dangerous and uncongenial.[39] He never believed that threats should be made, unless they could be backed up, and Halifax's language to von Ribbentrop in the interview of 9 March contained at least an inference of British disapproval of German policy towards Austria. But British policy did contain an element of sinuous ambiguity. On the one hand the Germans were being told that an independent state had a perfect right to hold a plebiscite if it wished. On the other, Schuschnigg was warned not to take any action which 'might expose his country to dangers' which Britain could not protect Austria against. Henderson, and others,

might reasonably feel that the plebiscite, planned for 13 March, which Halifax seemed to endorse on 9 March, came into exactly this category.

Henderson's anxiety about British policy was, in fact, shared by Cadogan, who confronted Vansittart, as ever the apparent apostle of intervention, about the hypocrisy of creating an impression that Britain might intervene, when she had no intention of doing so.

> 'It's easy to be brave in speech,' Cadogan told Vansittart.
>
> 'Will you fight?' Cadogan said.
>
> 'No,' Vansittart replied.
>
> 'Then what's it all about? To me it seems a cowardly thing to do to urge a small man to fight ... if you won't help him.'[40]

This was Nevile Henderson's view writ large. Even Palairet, who had robustly defended Schuschnigg's decision on 9 March, reflected on 13 March that 'his tactics may have been mistaken'.[41] This remark showed the element of inconsistency which ran through British policy at the time.

Just a month before the Anschluss, Henderson's superior at the Foreign Office, Orme Sargent, a persistent critic of Henderson's despatches, summarised his views on the Austrian situation in a memorandum:

> I think we are all convinced [Sargent wrote] that the process of absorption of Austria by Germany has now begun and will continue steadily to its appointed end. Nothing that we can say is going to prevent this process, and any further protests by France and ourselves may merely encourage

> Schuschnigg and his followers in Austria to prolong the agony unnecessarily, while at the same time revealing our impotence to alter or even delay events. In fact ... we should begin to withdraw, from a position which has now become untenable.[42]

In the light of such defeatism about Austria's future Henderson's comment to Göring seems a venial offence indeed, and has to be seen in a different light. Schuschnigg would be guilty of folly unless there was a real alternative to Austria's incorporation into the Reich. Evidently his colleague, Sargent, did not believe there was, and had long given up the ghost.

In the context of Sargent's comments, it is hard to see why Vansittart railed so loudly against the Henderson's comments on Austria in his notorious memorandum of 10 May 1937. In the memorandum Henderson had warned about the fact that it was conceivable in the near future Austria might wish to 'want to be united with Germany'.[43] Whereas in May 1937 Henderson was using a tentative 'conceivable', Sargent on 16 February 1938 was talking of Anschluss as Austria's 'appointed end'.

Ultimately, then, Henderson's behaviour during his interview with Göring on 12 March may be susceptible to a third interpretation. He realised that independent Austria was dead, but regretted the fact that Schuschnigg's action might bring upon Austria the very absorption that Austrian nationalists whether of the Right or the Left sought to avoid. Yet at the moment that Henderson spoke to Göring, this fate for Austria was not certain, and it was just conceivable that a gradualist solution under a different

Austrian Head of State might be possible. Hence the tone of his remark to Göring.

Henderson never condoned Germany's use of force over the weekend of 11-12 March. This is demonstrated in another telegram he sent to Halifax on 12 March, which historians have chosen to ignore. It concerned a policy statement made by the Propaganda Minister Goebbels, in which the Germans disingenuously attempted to deny that any ultimatum had ever been sent to Schuschnigg about the plebiscite, and that Seyss-Inquart's procured request for the 'assistance' of German troops was genuine.

> Doctor Goebbels [wrote Henderson] to the general disappointment did not explain why, if the Nazis enjoyed the enthusiastic support of the Austrian people as stated in Herr Hitler's proclamation, it was necessary to send troops to help them.[44]

The important point about this telegram is that it was sent <u>before</u> Halifax's telegram of reproof for the 'precipitate folly' remark, and could not have been part of an attempt to ingratiate himself with an irritated Foreign Secretary. The same Foreign Secretary, however, who told his Private Secretary Oliver Harvey that he too thought Schuschnigg's decision to hold the plebiscite 'foolish and provocative' (identical language to that used by Henderson himself).[45]

At the same time, Henderson showed his disapproval of German action by boycotting the annual Heroes' Memorial Day parade on 13 March, which was normally attended by all ambassadors and envoys. He also planned to drive to the Austrian Mission in the Embassy Rolls-Royce (with Union Jacks displayed) to express his sympathy, but this gesture

was sabotaged by the Austrian Minister himself, who was already on his way to the Heroes' Day parade where he gave the Hitler salute.[46]

Shortly after the Anschluss on 16 March, Henderson wrote in scathing terms to Cadogan about the former Austrian Foreign Minister Guido Schmidt, who was attempting to procure a German diplomatic post for himself.

> Talk of Judas [Henderson wrote in this private letter]. He has lost no time in coming for his thirty pieces of silver. He has long been the Nazi spy in Schuschnigg's camp all the time. It was undoubtedly from him that Göring got all his information about what being said not only in Vienna but in London.[47]

Rather uncharacteristically when he wrote to Halifax on the same day, Henderson was even prepared to concede that he might have been 'unjust to Schuschnigg' (Palairet had accused him of being so). But he felt that the fallen Austrian Chancellor had underestimated the forces against him and exaggerated the degree of support he did have.

> He had 'never believed' Henderson told Halifax,
>
> > that it would be possible to preserve Austria's independence either wholly or indefinitely: but there was a half-way house which seemed feasible namely that Austria's policy should be German, but her independence Austrian even if it were only in the form of a pre-war Bavaria.
>
> Henderson went on to admit that he
>
> > was sorry that I telegraphed that as I had agreed with Göring as to Schuschnigg's precipitate folly.

> I did not use those words though I certainly felt them. As a matter of fact I could not have put them into German.

Having made this admission, Henderson then reverted to character, in trying to absolve himself of blame.

> What I did say to Göring himself may have meant more or less the same thing but in a less direct form and in a manner by which I hoped to strengthen rather than diminish the force of our protest.

This torturous style can hardly have done much to enlighten Halifax about what was really said on 12 March to Göring. But his comments about Guido Schmidt, and the consistency of his attitude to the Austrian problem over the years, do not smack of the Nazi apologist so commonly presented. 'The methods which Hitler has employed in making Austria one,' Henderson had also told Halifax, 'are indefensible ... The plebiscite will be a farce.' (This prediction about Hitler's plebiscite in Austria proved to be only too accurate). Above all Henderson was deeply depressed by the events of the Anschluss, telling Halifax in the letter that 'All the work of the past eleven months had crashed to the ground.'[48] Henderson's propensity for melodrama is apparent again here, underlaid as it was by his conviction that he had been specially selected by Providence to improve Anglo-German relations, and save the peace. Nevertheless the letter does offer evidence that Henderson was not an advocate of the outright absorption of Austria, just as he was to oppose the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia.

Henderson's essential problem at the time of the Anschluss and thereafter was that British policy was based

on bluff and obfuscation, which suited Halifax more than his Ambassador, who preferred more clear-cut tactics. But any British policy at this time faced peculiar difficulties because of the character of its most dangerous adversary. For Hitler had, on the one hand, a certainty that the British were in a position of weakness, while on the other, showing symptoms of acute nervousness and indecision at times of crisis in 1936 and 1938. The Führer's amoral policy and bewildering switches of mood defeated attempts to read his mind, and Henderson was further hindered by attempts to undermine him because he was 'extremely anxious lest the new Ambassador should make a favourable impression in Berlin'.[49] According to Ribbentrop's own aide Spitzy, Henderson was, throughout his stay in Berlin, 'systematically hounded, hindered and denounced by the Ribbentrops' (Frau Ribbentrop being perceived as some soft of 'éminence grise').[50]

In this context Henderson's old mentor Horace Rumbold was quite right in rejecting the validity of the title 'Failure of A Mission' for Henderson's first memoir in 1940.

> You have described your book [Rumbold wrote] as 'the failure of a mission' but for two reasons nobody could have succeeded at Berlin. These reasons are a) the nature of the character of the beast with which any British representative would have to deal and b) the fatuous belief of Chamberlain and, presumably, of his Government that in 1937, it was possible to achieve anything by a policy of appeasement of Germany. Hitler [went on Rumbold] is an evil man and his régime and philosophy are evil.

> You cannot compromise with evil.[51]

Rumbold also believed that at the time of the Anschluss Henderson had been guilty of 'rushing his fences'. In particular he thought Henderson 'rather stupid in identifying himself with Göring, from whom he can get nothing and whom he can't influence'.[52]

These views were stated in Rumbold's usual forthright manner but there was, as always, another perspective. Reinhard Spitzy wrote in his memoirs:

> Had there been a more intelligent and more energetic British ambassador in Berlin during the early years of the Third Reich, it is probable that he would have been able to exercise a more positive influence, and might even have succeeded in preventing many of the disastrous developments which subsequently befell us. Henderson arrived too late...[53]

No one could accuse Henderson of lacking energy but Spitzy almost certainly exaggerates the power and influence of any ambassador in the 1930s (as did Henderson himself). Hitler, after all, admired François-Poncet, and despised Henderson.[54] This affected his foreign policy not one jot. Ultimately, then, Henderson's infamous Anschluss 'gaffes' though indiscreet, did not affect the course of events in any measurable way. Hitler's policy was set either towards absorption of Austria, or towards a gradualist solution of some sort. At no point was Britain prepared to fight for Austrian independence, and even Palairet in Vienna had thought Schuschnigg's plebiscite 'a very dangerous card to play'.[55]

References

1. Good, coherent background material on the Anschluss is provided in Weinberg, pp.261-8, and C. Thorne, The Approach to War 1938-9, London, 1967, pp.35-9; Failure of A Mission, pp.119-120; R. Spitzy, How we Squandered the Reich, London, 1997, pp.166-202.

2. Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D, Vol.I, Memorandum by von Neurath 26/1/38, No.108.

3. CAB 27/623 Foreign Policy Committee Minutes 24/1/38, PRO; Neville Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain 30/1/38, Chamberlain Papers, University of Birmingham 18/1/1037.

4. Henderson to Eden 26/1/38, DBFP, 2, XVIII, No.471.

5. CAB 27/623 Foreign Policy Committee Minutes 3/2/38; Henderson to Eden 26/1/38, FO 371/21678 C 522/184/18, PRO.

6. The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan 1938, D. Dilks (ed.), 30/1/38, London, 1971, p.43. It is only right to mention here the editor's note that Cadogan had modified his opinion by the spring of 1939.

7. For details of the purge of the moderates in Germany in January 1938 see A. Gill, An Honourable Defeat. A History of the German Resistance to Hitler, London, 1994, pp.69-74; J. Fest, Plotting Hitler's Death. The German Resistance to Hitler 1933-45, London, 1996, pp.69-72; P. Meehan, The Unnecessary War. Whitehall and German Resistance to Hitler, London, 1992, pp.116-117; Failure of A Mission, pp.107-111.

8. Failure of A Mission, pp.110-111.

9. Henderson to King George VI 2/10/38, FO 800/269, Henderson Papers, PRO.

10. See for example P. Schmidt, Hitler's Interpreter, London, 1951, pp.85-6, and J. Weitz, Joachim von Ribbentrop. Hitler's Diplomat, London, 1992, p.124. Henderson's predecessor Eric Phipps regarded Ribbentrop and his wife as 'intriguing busybodies', DBFP, 2, VI, Phipps to Simon 8/2/34, No.262.

11. R. Spitzy, How We Squandered The Reich, London, 1997, p.68; see also J. Weitz, Joachim von Ribbentrop. Hitler's Diplomat, London, 1992, p.124.

12. Failure of A Mission, p.115.

13. Premier 1/247 Henderson to Halifax 16/3/38.

14. Failure of A Mission, p.118; Premier 1/247, Henderson to Halifax 16/3/38.

15. A. Crozier, Appeasement and Germany's Last Bid for Colonies, London, 1988, p.239; R. Spitzy, How We Squandered the Reich, Norwich, 1997, pp.177/8.

16. For Schacht's role in discussions about colonial readjustment, see Crozier, Ch.7.

17. Failure of A Mission, p.111.

18. M. Gilbert and R. Gott, The Appeasers, London, 1963, pp.99-100.

19. Monteiro to Salazar 16/12/37, Dez Anos de Politica Externa 1936-47, Part I, Vol.I, No.176, cited in Crozier, p.232.

20. Failure of A Mission, p.92.

21. Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D, Vol.I, No.138. Wilhelmstrasse to Henderson 4/3/38.

22. Henderson to Ribbentrop 4/3/38 DGFP, D, I, No.139.

23. See Vansittart minute of 30/7/37 and Sargent minute 29/7/37 in FO 371/20736/C 5377/270/18, PRO.

24. Memorandum on Henderson-Hitler interview 4/3/38, DGFP, D, I, No.138.

25. Halifax to Henderson re conversation with von Ribbentrop 10/3/38, DBFP, 3, I, No.145.

26. Palairet to Halifax 9/3/38, ibid., No.2.

27. Henderson to Halifax 11/3/38, No.14.

28. Henderson to Halifax 11/3/38, No.23.

29. Henderson to Halifax 11/3/38, No.39.

30. A typical response to Henderson's behaviour is that in C. Thorne, The Approach of War 1938-9, London, 1967, p.50.

31. Halifax to Henderson 12/3/38, No.54. The telegram which Halifax calls No.79 is listed as Telegram Number 39 in DBFP, 3, I.

32. Henderson to Halifax 13/3/38, No.68.

33. R. Lamb, The Drift To War, London, 1989, Ch.10; I. Kershaw, Hitler, London, 1991, p.145.

34. Joachim Fest, Hitler, London, 1977, p.814.

35. G.L. Weinberg, The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany, Vol.II, Chicago, 1980, p.298.

36. Mussolini appears to have assumed that Hitler would give him sufficient warning to enable him to prepare Italian public opinion for his abandonment of Schuschnigg. D. Mack Smith, Mussolini, London, 1981, p.218.

37. Cadogan Diaries 15/2/38, p.47.

38. Halifax to Palairet 11/3/38, DBFP, 3, I, No.25.

39. Water Under The Bridges, p.104.

40. Cadogan Diaries 16/3/38, p.63.

41. Palairet to Halifax 13/3/38, DBFP, 3, I, No.65.

42. Sargent Memorandum 16/2/38, FO 371/22311/01502.

43. Henderson Memorandum 10/5/37, FO 371/5316/270/18. The memo was actually sent to Sargent on 20 July.

44. Henderson to Halifax 12/3/38, DBFP, 3, I, No.50. Halifax's rebuke appears as Document 54 in the DBFP volume.

45. Harvey Diaries 11/3/38, p.113.

46. Failure of A Mission, p.127.

47. Henderson to Cadogan 16/3/39, FO 800/269, Henderson Papers, PRO.

48. Henderson to Halifax 16/3/39, ibid. The issue of Henderson's rather indifferent German was referred to in the last chapter.

49. R. Spitzy, How We Squandered the Reich, Norwich, 1997, p.224.

50. ibid., p.366. Spitzy dedicated his book to Henderson along with von Weizsäcker, and Walter Hewel, p.18.

51. Rumbold to Henderson 15/4/40, Henderson Papers, PRO.

52. Rumbold to Londonderry 12/4/38. Londonderry forwarded Rumbold's letter to Halifax two weeks later but deleted the criticism of Henderson in it.

53. Spitzy, p.243.

54. ibid., pp.121-2.

55. Palairet to Halifax 13/3/38, DBFP, 3, I, No.65.

Chapter Four

From the Anschluss to the 'May Scare' 1938

Writing to Lord Lothian some six weeks after the Anschluss, Nevile Henderson remained bleak about the prospects of Anglo-German accord.

> The British attitude to Austria [Henderson wrote] however justified and honourable on moral grounds and in our own eyes, has undone the good of the Halifax visit and of my own year's work here and the Germans are more convinced than ever that England alone refuses to understand this urge for unity.

Knowing that he had a sympathetic correspondent in Lothian (who as Philip Kerr had served in Paris at the same time as Henderson in 1919, and was a prominent appeaser), the Ambassador went on to trace the story of his own conversion to the view that 'the Greater Germany urge is irresistible'. Henderson was convinced that:

> Had we been prepared to face facts or to see them in their true light, Austria could have been liquidated differently. It is we who have proved to Germany that she can only settle matters by a display of overwhelming force. The Sudeten afford us a last chance.[1]

Henderson with his acceptance of the vital force of Pan-Germanism and the iniquities of Versailles, also accepted the right of the three million strong German

majority in the Czech Sudetenland to greater autonomy, and ultimately, perhaps, if circumstances decreed it, outright secession to the Reich.

> Unless [Henderson wrote to Lothian] the Sudeten can be made into <u>willing</u> citizens of Czechoslovakia it is useless to try to force them to remain unwillingly there. It may be hard for the Czechs, just as it was hard for the Austria which we created after the war to exist as a practicable entity. But the alternative is quite impossible in the long run.[2]

Henderson was apparently willing to concede the justice of the German demands which the Germans were still in the process of formulating.

Henderson had no qualms about criticising the constitutional position of Czechoslovakia as a unitary rather than a federal state and said, 'Czechoslovakia is a state of nationalities, not a national state and in the former there can be no minorities but all equals'. In Henderson's view (which coincided exactly with Chamberlain's), if Britain

> <u>insisted</u> on the no minority policy and carried it through regardless of the Czechs or the French or the Soviets, we would for once have solved a really big and thorny problem by peaceful negotiation and to cut (for the first time) the ground under the German view that nothing is ever arranged except by force or the display of it.

Henderson linked the Sudeten question with the issue of arms limitation, which he was convinced Germany would not address 'until the Sudeten problem is settled'.

Henderson conceded to Lothian that his was 'an unpopular theory (a reference presumably to his Foreign Office colleagues) but it is not my duty to preach what is pleasing'. He remained sure that: 'Settle the Sudeten and we can count on peace in our time. Fail and war will be a daily menace.'[3]

If Henderson's theory was 'unpopular', as it certainly was with Vansittart and his supporters in the Foreign Office, it was also not entirely novel. Since 1937 the British Government had been trying to get Prague to make concessions to the Sudeten German minority; and even if these overtures can be described as 'gentle warnings', later frustration in London has to be seen in the context of this lengthy and unsuccessful diplomatic offensive in Czechoslovakia. Some criticisms can be made of the treatment of the Sudeten Germans by the Czechoslovak Government, and the Sudetens were not alone in their complaints, which were echoed by the strong Slovak nationalist movement. But the British attitude towards the Czechs was unduly influenced by the British Minister in Prague from 1930 to 1936, Joseph Addison, who was notoriously biased against the Czechs and over-sympathetic to Sudeten German complaints about the post-war land settlement in the Republic. Addison passed on his prejudices about the Czechs to Henderson, Newton and other colleagues in the Foreign Office.[4]

Henderson's position, however, rested on more than mere accusations of discriminatory behaviour by successive Czech governments. It was as baldly stated in private communications with his superior Halifax, as it was with the amateur diplomatist Lothian (who visited Berlin on several occasions

in the 1930s). Three days after the Anschluss, Henderson wrote to Halifax making no secret of his view that:

> Czechoslovakia is, as I have always pointed out from here, a far more potentially dangerous proposition. British interests and the standard of morality can only be combined if we insist upon the fullest possible equality for the Sudeten minority of Czechoslovakia. If the Czechs cannot make their German fellow citizens into contented Bohemians instead of treating them as a German minority, they can only end by losing them altogether.[5]

This position was obviously closer to that of the Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain than to Vansittart's supporters who (in the words of Sir Frank Roberts, then a second secretary in the Central Department), believed that the Ambassador was being 'less than objective, failing to warn the PM of Hitler's long-term aims ranging far wider than bringing Germans into the Reich'.[6] Chamberlain had seemingly made up his own mind about the viability of Czechoslovakia. In a letter to his sister Ida on 20 March 1938, the Prime Minister had written that in his view Britain could do nothing to prevent Czechoslovakia being overrun by the Germans. All he could do for the Czechs would be to approach Hitler personally and say

> The best thing you can do is tell us exactly what you want for your Sudeten Germans. If it is reasonable we will urge the Czechs to accept and if they do, you must give assurances that you will let them alone in the future.[7]

Henderson was in total sympathy with this view.

Significantly, Henderson and Chamberlain's views on Czechoslovakia were endorsed by Basil Newton, the man on the spot as Minister in Prague, who had formerly served in Berlin under Rumbold and Phipps between 1930 and 1935 and had therefore obtained some insight into Nazi policy. Newton made little attempt to disguise his lack of sympathy for the Czechoslovaks.

Reporting, like Henderson, just after the Anschluss, Newton told Halifax that 'If I am right in thinking that Czechoslovakia's present political position is not permanently tenable, it will be no kindness in the long run to try and maintain her in it'.[8] Newton, who unlike Henderson, has mysteriously avoided attracting the castigation of historians,[9] reported shortly afterwards that the Sudeten German Party, led by Konrad Henlein, was moving towards a position of demanding 'incorporation in the Reich'.[10] Nothing in Newton's subsequent despatches suggests that he objected to the ultimate incorporation of the Sudetenland into the Reich.

It was Newton's telegrams which most influenced the Lord Halifax, because he openly advocated the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia and was in this sense more radical than Henderson.[11] Newton stated his belief that in the event of war breaking out 'nothing that we or France could do would save Czechoslovakia from being overrun'.[12] When Halifax spoke to the Foreign Policy Committee of the Cabinet on 18 March, he referred to Newton's viewpoint and said that the Government was 'entitled to decline the risk of involving Great Britain in a fresh war to shore up the present position which seems to us fundamentally

untenable'.[13] References to Nevile Henderson's alleged influence on policy-making invariably ignore Newton's influence on the Foreign Office during the Czech crisis, which has been much understated. John Charmley also points out that Chamberlain's view of the Czech question was based 'not upon some craven desire to grovel to Hitler, but upon advice coming from the very Foreign Office which he is supposed to have ignored'.[14] Henderson himself unsurprisingly, refers to Newton's 'sage counsel' in his memoirs, as both men agreed on the ultimate inviability of the Czech state.[15]

There was therefore a degree of consensus between Halifax and the British representatives in the key Berlin and Prague postings, about the undesirability of making any commitment to defend the Czechoslovak Republic against potential German aggression. Although Britain's ally France had a defence treaty with the Czechs, Britain did not, and resisted any attempt to be drawn into commitments in Central and Eastern Europe that involved armed intervention.

Halifax's problem was that the British Government did not wish the Germans to become aware of Britain's unwillingness to back her French ally in a conflict over the Sudetenland (although Britain refused to give formal military shape to Anglo-French friendship). France's problem was that she had a revised defence treaty with the Czechs dating from 1935, and contingent on this was a Czech-Soviet treaty which became operative if the French honoured their commitment to the Czechs. But the French were in their turn equally desperate to avoid being forced to honour their commitment to the Czechs, and if they were successful in this, to

implicate the British in their betrayal. Both powers became increasingly involved in a strategy of trying to coerce the Czechs into making concessions over the Sudetenland. But a surprising feature of the whole Czech crisis in 1938 was the limpet-like way in which London clung to the French alliance, despite the fact that such a policy would force Britain to abandon its traditional policy of disinterest in Central and Eastern Europe. It has indeed been argued that ultimately it was French policy, rather than British, which prevailed over the Sudeten question, although the record of the summer months shows that it was Britain, rather than France, who took the initiative over the Sudeten question.[16] Everything in previous record suggested that he would resist both a commitment to the Czechs, and any French attempt to involve Britain in resolving the Czech crisis by the threat of force.

It was clear to the Foreign Office that the Sudeten question would be difficult to solve. The unwillingness of the Czechs to make concessions had been underlined in a note by Vansittart to Halifax, prior to the latter's visit to Germany in November 1937. In the note, Vansittart referred to a letter sent by the Czech Minister in London, Jan Masaryk, to 'a member of the Foreign Office' on 5 November. Masaryk was caustic about the recent speech made by Henlein, the Sudeten German leader, to the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House:

> Do the friends of Czechoslovakia really believe [said Masaryk] that Henlein-Chatham House experiments will bring about an understanding between the two nations of my country and help to secure the

> peace of Europe? Do they actually imagine that we could be prepared under any circumstances other than war to grant autonomy such as Henlein envisages, meaning nothing less that a totalitarian state within our state.

Vansittart, then in his last weeks as Permanent Under-Secretary, believed that Masaryk's comments merely underlined the need for 'patience and caution' over the Sudeten issue. In this at least he was at one with Halifax, Henderson and Newton.[17]

After Vansittart's effective demotion to the meaningless post of Chief Diplomatic Adviser at the end of 1937, the evolution of British policy towards the Sudeten question rested primarily with four men, Halifax, Henderson, Newton, and most important of all, Neville Chamberlain. An intermediate role between the diplomats was played by Vansittart's successor Cadogan, and briefly by Eden.

Between December 1935 and February 1938, Eden was Foreign Secretary before being replaced by Halifax, but the documentary record does not suggest that Eden's line over Czechoslovakia would have been markedly different from that of Halifax. In November 1937 Eden had told the French Foreign Minister, Delbos, that Great Britain and France might usefully 'concert with Germany in seeking to find a satisfactory solution to the problem',[18] but that

> there would be little public support in Britain for a war to maintain Czechoslovakian sovereignty and he urged the Czechoslovakian Government to defuse the situation by granting further autonomy to its German subjects.[19]

Even when Eden was out of office, his attitude to the Czech problem was ambivalent and does not square with the traditional view of him as an anti-appeaser.[20] Meanwhile from February until late May 1938, policy towards Czechoslovakia depended on the triumvirate of Halifax, Henderson and Newton.

The relationship between Halifax and his two pivotal diplomats can be traced in the British Foreign Policy Document series, in Foreign Office files, and in private correspondence. After his passage of arms with Halifax (see Chapter Three) over the 'precipitate folly' remark, for which he had been rebuked, Henderson was initially cautious about the Sudeten question. In an interview with Mastny, the Czech Minister in Berlin, on 17 March, he telegraphed to the Halifax that he had put forward the view that although the Anschluss success might have gone to Hitler's head, and even more to 'the heads of the extremist followers', he personally doubted whether having achieved this primary objective Hitler would 'risk all again for a secondary one'.[21]

By contrast Newton in Prague was continuing to put pressure on Beneš in an even more radical approach to the Sudeten issue. When the Czech President stated his belief that some 25 per cent of the Sudeten Germans would not support Henlein's position, Newton was sceptical. 'In this,' he wrote to Halifax, 'as indeed in attitude which he continues to maintain to the minority questions, I fear that the President may be cherishing illusions.'[22] Beneš felt that the Anglo-French 'were too far away to understand things', according to the German Minister in Prague. [23]

Newton's interview with Beneš was on 20 March 1938, and is of particular interest in that at a time when his Berlin colleague was being cautious about the Sudeten issue, Newton was actively pushing the issue of minority rights in Prague.

Three days later on 23 March, Halifax made clear to Newton what the official British position on Czechoslovakia was. While assuring the Czechs that the 'obligations of Great Britain to Czechoslovakia are those of one member of the League to another' he (Newton) was to tell them that it was

> with the greatest regret that His Majesty's Government have been forced to the conclusion that they are unable to take any further direct and definite commitment in respect of Czechoslovakia.[24]

Halifax's statement was endorsed in Chamberlain's foreign policy statement to the House of Commons the next day, when he warned that France's commitment to the Czechs should not be interpreted by the latter as in any way committing Britain to the defence of Czechoslovakia. This would have created a position, the Prime Minister stated, whereby the decision 'as to whether or not this country should find itself involved in war would be automatically removed from the discretion of His Majesty's Government'.[25] The same day, in a telegram to Halifax, Henderson reiterated his long-held view that forceful protests were of no use if they were 'unbacked by force or fear of force. Experience has taught Hitler,' Henderson went on, 'that only by jungle law can he achieve his objectives'.[26] He shared the Prime Minister's lack of faith in collective security, which Chamberlain had so strongly expressed when opposing the

imposition of sanctions against Mussolini over Abyssinia. It was 'tragic,' Henderson concluded, 'that the League of Nations and collective security should be reduced to such a pass, but it is nevertheless the case'.[27]

However, Henderson remained unconvinced that the Germans were <u>ready</u> to intervene in Czechoslovakia in the early spring of 1938. A week later on 1 April he told the Foreign Secretary that if such an intervention did take place

> as far as my information goes this will not be for a year or so. All other things being equal there should still remain therefore a period during which either preparation can be made at home for another world war or for the negotiation of a peaceful settlement as regards the Sudeten.[28]

This comment is instructive, indicating that as late as six months before Munich, Henderson believed that the Sudeten problem could be addressed over a much longer time span than was actually to be available, and that in the last resort he believed 'preparations' might have to be made for 'another world war'. Beneš might yield to Anglo-French pressure and agree to a settlement without fighting; but if he did not, Britain and France would have another year to complete their rearmament. This at least is a reasonable inference to make from Henderson's remarks. A peaceful solution of the Sudeten issue would be preferable, but in the longer time-span foreseen by Henderson, German intransigence would permit a more forceful response.

Henderson's assessment was supported by the military attaché in Prague, Lieutenant-Colonel Stronge, whose report

on the war-readiness of the Czech and German forces was sent by Newton to Halifax two days later on 3 April. Stronge believed that it seemed 'probable that the German army is not ready for a European war' adding that in a year's time 'the Czechs will be in a far better position to resist an invasion'.[29] Stronge's support for Henderson's view was further endorsed by an enclosure with Newton's next telegram to Halifax from the British Consul in Liberec, Pares. Henderson's view that the existing Czechoslovak state was unviable was supported by Pares, who believed that the Sudeten Germans had no loyalty to that state, and were hiding arms in secret dumps in the frontier area. This testimony was particularly valuable, coming as it did from the man on the spot.[30] Such information appeared to endorse Henderson's parallel view that in the long run the position of the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia was unsustainable.

Turning now to any likely involvement in the crisis of Czechoslovakia's ally, the Soviet Union, it is clear that Henderson believed that any intervention by the USSR was undesirable. The Prime Minister's 'underlying ideological hostility towards the USSR' was well known, and was shared by Halifax.[31] So Henderson knew that unsympathetic references to the Czech-Soviet alliance of 1935 would be well received in London. In his despatch of 1 April he advocated that the Czechs abandon the alliance.

Newton shared Henderson's view. Indeed he went further and expressed his doubts about 'whether a permanent solution can be expected unless Czechoslovakia is, if not to give up her existing alliance with France, at least to change its character'. In an extraordinarily anti-Czech despatch,

which was more extreme than any of Henderson's anti-Czech statements, Newton went on to refer to the 'temperamental obstinacy', which made the Czechs 'so determinedly uncompromising', thus making their state 'more untenable every day'.[32] It was Henderson who was to become notorious for anti-Czech sentiments, but Newton had been consistently critical of his hosts, opining in October 1937 that 'the Czechs are an obstinate people with whom fear may more easily breed hatred than readiness to yield'.[33]

In 1938 Newton believed that the solution to the Sudeten problem was 'a neutralised position', which would be 'comparable to that of Switzerland whereby Czechoslovakia would become a kind of sanctuary or reserved area immunised against aggression'.[34] Newton had clearly reached a position whereby defence of his host state had become a lost cause because Czechoslovakia was

> at Germany's very doors, surrounded by potential enemies, completely inaccessible to any force that Great Britain could possibly put into the field, and exposed in any case to economic strangulation.[35]

There could scarcely have been a bleaker analysis of Czechoslovakia's prospects, coming as it did from Newton himself, a month after the Anschluss.

By contrast Henderson, in an interview with Göring on 16 April, obeyed his instructions to keep the Germans guessing about British intentions, even if to Halifax he remained pessimistic about the Sudeten issue and the likelihood of the German minority remaining 'citizens of Czechoslovakia unless they do so willingly'. Göring, according to Henderson in his despatch, had talked 'wildly' about

dividing up Czechoslovakia between Germany, Poland and Hungary (a reference to the discontented Polish and Magyar minorities in the Czech State). But Henderson warned him that 'aggression was likely to have far more serious consequences than in the case of Austria'. Nor, Henderson suggested, should Germany find it 'surprising that people asked where the limit was and did not believe that Germany would ever settle down peacefully as a satisfactory (sic) country'.[36] In this instance at least Henderson carried out to the letter his instructions to keep the Germans guessing about likely British reaction to German aggression against the Czechs.

Meanwhile Halifax was anxious to keep the situation under control by addressing German grievances over the Sudetenland directly. In his telegram of 4 May to Henderson, Halifax told his Ambassador that if

> the German government could indicate the lines of a settlement which in their view would be satisfactory to the Sudeten Deutsch, His Majesty's Government would consider how far they could recommend acceptance by the Czechoslovak Government.[37]

The policy of trying to coerce the unwilling Czechs into concessions, enthusiastically supported by Newton in Prague, was therefore to continue in the Government's two-pronged assault on the Sudeten problem through Newton and Henderson. Newton was doubtful in his despatch of 16 May that there was

> any permanent halfway house between a Czechoslovakia within her present frontiers ... and the abandonment to Germany of the whole area covered by the Historic

> Provinces (save perhaps such parts as might be snatched by the Poles).[38]

The picture of Henderson that emerges therefore from the official British documents, and which undermines the usual presumption that Nevile Henderson was hopelessly anti-Czech, is that he, rather than Newton, hoped for a long-term solution of the Sudeten issue which might conceivably avoid fragmentation of the Czech state if the Sudeten Germans could be persuaded to remain inside that state.

Private correspondence between Henderson and Halifax supports this view. Writing to the Foreign Secretary on 27 February, Henderson repeated his belief that a German move against the Czechs could only come in the long term, because assimilation of Austria would be a lengthy business. But he went on to say that 'the objective which I would far rather achieve is the integrity of Czechoslovakia'.[39] This theme was reiterated just after the Anschluss on 16 March, when Henderson told Halifax that 'we have now to consider how to secure, if we can, the integrity of Czechoslovakia'. This was a different issue from that of Austria, in Henderson's view, because a 'considerable proportion' of Austrians 'did not even want independence' whereas the Czechs wanted to remain independent.[40]

Henderson still expressed support for the 'integrity' of Czechoslovakia in a further despatch on 30 March, after a conversation with Mastny. His faith in the principle of nationality as 'the governing principle of the twentieth century' remained, and in a classic exposition of his views Henderson went on to concede that Prague extended more national rights than perhaps any other government. However,

even Mastny, he said, admitted that in practice 'they were often disregarded'. Henderson went on to claim that the only real solution was a 'Federal State', which he believed was what the founder of the Czech Republic, Tomas Masaryk, had originally intended. He concluded his interview with Mastny, Henderson told Halifax, by advising the Czech Minister to rely on a Prague-Berlin-Paris axis rather than the existing Prague-Paris-Moscow one.[41] This was a far more moderate position than the one advocated by Basil Newton.

The evidence suggests, therefore, that in the crucial period between the Anschluss and the 'May Scare', Henderson did make some effort to accede to his instructions about Czechoslovakia, and that he personally believed that a long-term solution of the Sudeten issue might be possible because Germany was not ready to fight in 1938. Henderson believed however that Britain was not ready to fight. This view was also supported by Cadogan, who confided in his diary on 30 March 'We must not precipitate a conflict now - we shall be smashed'.[42] This too was overwhelmingly the view of the Chiefs of Staff at the time.[43]

It is clear from the official British Foreign Policy Documents that Henderson maintained his scepticism about German capacity to intervene in Czechoslovakia right up to the eve of the 'May scare'. As late as 19 May Henderson was telling Halifax that Hitler would welcome Britain's 'good offices' (this was doubtful) over the Sudeten issue, because he shrank from the prospect of 'armed intervention ... particularly in view of possibility of British participation in any war which might ensue'. This was because, Henderson reiterated, 'Austria is not digested, the German army not

ready for all eventualities and Four-Year Plan far from its maximum development'.[44] Henderson's view accurately reflected, in fact, the reservations of the German High Command at the time about their likely military performance in any war over the Sudetenland; and Henderson did not believe that Britain would be forced to give in to Germany because of her overwhelming military might.[45] Henderson's telegram on 9 May shows, however, that in his interview with Mastny he was supporting Newton's attempt to persuade the Czechs of the virtues of concession. Germany, Henderson feared, would not be 'deterred by the risk of war with Britain' (an observation which ran counter to his statement to Halifax) and he told Mastny that 'Czechoslovakia had nothing to gain and everything to lose by delay'.[46] Henderson was adhering to his instructions in his talk with Mastny, and putting pressure on him to get concessions from Prague, just as Newton was doing with Beneš. He did this even though he did not believe in the long-term viability of the Czech state in its existing form.

A consistent theme emerges nonetheless. Henderson was not convinced that Germany was ready for war in 1938, but he was convinced of the 'morality' of the Sudeten German claims. He was sceptical about the ability of the Beneš government to keep the Sudeten Deutsch inside Czech frontiers, and believed that in the short run some form of devolution was the best available solution. Minority status for the Sudetens in 'a state of nationalities' was unacceptable, and equal status must be insisted on by Britain if they were to be 'willing' citizens of the Czech Republic. At root Versailles was to blame for the situation, because

it had ignored the national principle in 1919, as far as full self-determination for the Germans was concerned. While the record shows that Henderson was prepared to use the fear of German armed intervention to extract concessions from Prague, as were his political masters in London, he did not personally believe that Germany was ready for war. This accounts for the ambivalence in tone in his two telegrams to Halifax on 19 May, the second of which gave details of his interview with Mastny. But ambivalence and guesswork were predominant characteristics of the period 13 March to 20 May 1938 in Europe. Not the least curious aspect of this was the pessimistic assessments of the military situation: 'both German and British military chiefs were urging upon their respective heads of government their inability to engage upon a successful war'.[47]

Nevertheless, Henderson did not use the military weakness argument to justify his diplomacy in the Sudeten crisis. He remained convinced, and would continue to be so, of the morality of the Sudeten case and wrote in his memoirs that it 'was difficult to justify off-hand the refusal of the right of self-determination to the 2,750,000 Sudetens living in solid blocs just across Germany's border'.[48] He also observed, accurately enough, that: 'The negotiations at Prague were not my concern, and it is from the German angle alone that I am competent to speak with authority.'[49] These negotiations were of course the responsibility of Basil Newton, who has left no written defence of his unsympathetic attitude to the endangered Czech democracy, and the assessment of whose role has been neglected.

While Newton clearly advocated partition of Czechoslo-

vakia, Henderson, despite his post-war reputation, 'did not advocate dismemberment', which he believed the Germans did not want.[50] Newton's line of thought had obviously been picked up by Halifax, who by 25 May was telling Masaryk that the least Prague could get away with would be autonomy 'on the Swiss model'.[51] Halifax may have had some grounds for hoping that such a solution might be acceptable to the Czechs.[52] It is significant, however, that by contrast with Henderson's experience in Berlin, there is no record of rebukes from the Foreign Secretary to his Minister in Prague. This seems to imply that Newton's line in Prague, however harsh it seems in retrospect, had Halifax's full approval. And this despite some accusations that on occasion Newton misrepresented the views of Beneš.[53]

Tensions surrounding the Sudeten issue were markedly increased when, over the weekend of 20-21 May 1938, the Czech Government ordered a partial mobilisation of its forces. This was a response to rumours about an impending German attack as a result of information the Czechs received about troop manoeuvres in Saxony.

Nevile Henderson was intimately involved in the events of this so-called 'May scare' of 1938 and even his trivial personal actions were linked to the heightening of tension over that traumatic spring weekend. In particular, Henderson's decision to send some British Embassy staff home on leave sparked off speculation in Germany that war was about to break out in the wake of the Czech Government's decision to order partial mobilisation.

There has been much controversy about the origins over the May Crisis over the years. Henderson was convinced that

German troop movements in Saxony over the weekend of 20-21 May were no more than manoeuvres. Writing after the event he conceded that

> in fairness to the Czechs much abnormal military activity - judged by normal standards - was continually going on in Germany and that unskilled agents and observers can easily be misled.[54]

Henderson sent his military attachés, Colonel Noel Mason-MacFarlane and Major Kenneth Strong, on 'extensive military reconnaissance through Saxony and Silesia' which, as he expected, disclosed no significant military activity by the Germans.[55] But sections of the British press, much to Henderson's annoyance, insisted that there had been a real threat of a German attack, and rejoiced when the French reasserted their commitment to defend Czechoslovakia, and this commitment was backed by Britain, albeit in the usual rather ambivalent terms which were part of the policy of keeping the Germans 'guessing'.[56] On 21 May Halifax instructed Henderson to tell Ribbentrop that the British Government 'could not foresee the results if force were resorted to and there could be no guarantee that Britain would stand aside'.[57] But this ambivalence and the 'fuzziness of the government's position was intentional'.[58]

For Henderson himself this was a fraught period. In the course of two stormy interviews with Ribbentrop on 21 May, relations with the Foreign Minister reached a nadir when Ribbentrop accused Henderson of a breach of protocol in citing General Keitel as his authority for denying that there had been any troop movements. As a result, Ribbentrop said that no more military information from the Germans

would be made available to Henderson.[59]

According to one source, Henderson, 'a gentlemanly Englishman of the old school', was taken aback by Ribbentrop's 'churlish manner of speaking, and ... was not of the calibre to return coarseness for coarseness'.[60] But in the two interviews with the bullying Ribbentrop on 21 May and a subsequent one on 22 May, he did, according to another source, show a firmness 'that was neither characteristic nor customary in him'.[61]

Why this apparent wavering from Henderson's allegedly supine attitude to the Nazis occurred is never explained by his critics; but the outburst was almost certainly caused by his notoriously poor relationship with von Ribbentrop. Henderson was also infuriated by the circulation of another bizarre rumour over that May weekend which heightened the fraught atmosphere of the time. This was the rumoured evacuation of some British Embassy staff in Berlin and the hiring of a special train for them, which strengthened war rumours in Germany.

According to Henderson's memoirs, these rumours started as a result of a normal leave arrangement for the British naval attaché, Troubridge, when an extra train coach had to be obtained because some other staff members wanted to take leave too. The French Ambassador, François-Poncet, on hearing this, assumed that all British Embassy staff were being evacuated as a prelude to hostilities, and rang the Secretary of State at the Wilhelmstrasse, von Weizsäcker, who also assumed the worst. Henderson, who regarded the whole affair as 'rather childish', relates that the 'special train' rumour was taken so seriously that he found François-

Poncet on his doorstep on 21 May asking about it.[62]

At no point during the weekend did British behaviour suggest that London would go to war for the Czechs, and Henderson was angered by the suggestion that war was imminent. But it is clear that at the time the British Cabinet did believe that the impression of firmness had deterred Hitler from a possible attack. The First Lord of the Admiralty Duff Cooper wrote in his diary on 22 May that 'everybody believes that it was entirely due to the firmness of the British Government'. Duff Cooper agreed with Henderson that 'this was a complete misapprehension'.[63] But Chamberlain and Halifax believed, despite what Henderson had been telling them from Berlin, 'that there had been a crisis and that firmness had some effect. Moderate counsels had prevailed in Germany', even if only in the short run.[64]

The capture of German documents after the Second World War made it possible to show that Hitler never intended to attack Czechoslovakia in May 1938. On 21 May General Keitel submitted a draft directive to the Führer for the so-called Operation Green which began with the words 'It is not my intention to smash Czechoslovakia by military action in the immediate future' and went on to say that Czechoslovakia would not be attacked 'without provocation, unless an unavoidable development of the political events in Europe create a particularly favourable opportunity'.[65] Henderson therefore was right in his appraisal. For the actual consequence of Anglo-French misjudgement of Hitler's behaviour, was to infuriate the German Dictator so that on 30 May he was telling his entourage of his 'unalterable decision to smash Czechoslovakia by military means in the near future'.

1 October was the deadline set for the solution of the Sudeten problem before Germany resorted to force.[66] Henderson was also right in his judgement that threats against Hitler, which could not be backed up by force, were counter-productive. Hitler was in deadly earnest after the May Scare.

By contrast the British Government while apparently convinced that Hitler had been deterred by Anglo-French support for the Czechs, was determined to prevent such a crisis arising again.

> The lesson drawn from the May crisis by Chamberlain and his colleagues was thus, not that the Nazi leader would be restrained by a firm stand against him, but that everything must be done to avoid a repetition of the crisis since next time the outcome would be far more unpleasant.[67]

In his seminal article on the Sudeten crisis, H. Aulach sees the May crisis as part of an 'activist' phase in British policy, following lengthy talks with the French in April 1938 about their commitment to Czechoslovakia. The British Government was motivated by concern that delay in dealing with the issue was dangerous.[68] This followed a 'deliberative' phase between the achievement of the Anschluss and the Anglo/French talks of 28-29 April.[69] Given Henderson's longstanding reservations about the desirability of following French policy towards Germany, it is unlikely that he would have accepted Aulach's contention that it was the French who really dictated policy over the Sudeten issue: but the broad heading of 'activist' seems appropriate for the diplomacy pursued in the post-Anschluss period by

Halifax, Newton and Henderson. It is also true that the British Government's 'deliberative' phase really stretched back to 1937, when Eden was still in office, and the doubts about, lack of sympathy for, and sheer ignorance of the Czechoslovak state in the British establishment were of even older vintage.[70] Henderson was one of those who queried the legitimacy of and doubted the durability of, the Czechoslovak state. Whether he was, as has been suggested, unwontedly firm during the May crisis and then abandoned all firmness, is open to question. His position on the Sudeten Deutsch issue in the two months after the Anschluss appears to have been consistent, and in line with Foreign Office policy at the time.[71] And the record shows that Henderson's firm attitude on 21 May with Ribbentrop was not an aberration.

This contrasts with a recent appraisal of Henderson's role by D. Cameron Watt, who argues that he was unable to abandon the policy of offering colonial readjustments to Germany (see Chapter Three) which had preceded the Anschluss, and so could not 'play the warning and restraining role with his German contacts this new phase of British foreign policy demanded'.[72]

Yet in his interview with Göring on 16 April, and his two interviews with von Ribbentrop on 21 May, Henderson displayed a robust 'warning and restraining role'. Newton by contrast, remained consistently and, it can be argued, unpleasantly hostile to the Government to which he was accredited. Remembering Henderson's admonition in Failure of A Mission that the task of an ambassador was in the first instance to 'faithfully interpret the views of his own

Government to the Government to which he is accredited' and in the second 'to explain, no less accurately, the views and standpoint of the Government of the country in which he is stationed to the Government of his own country', it could be argued that Henderson sometimes failed the first test, and that Newton failed the second.'[1] Henderson was not, however, as consistently anti-Czech as has frequently been suggested, and in the period before the May Scare he was not an advocate of dismemberment. He also seems to have carried out his instructions to the letter in this period, although it has to be recognised that such caution may have been induced by Halifax's admonition over the 'precipitate folly' remark. For, as will be seen, Henderson never lost his capacity for the 'blazing indiscretion'.

References

1. Henderson to Lothian 22/4/38, Lothian Papers, Scottish Record Office LD 40/17/362.

2. ibid.

3. ibid.

4. When asked by a visitor whether he had any Czech friends Addison allegedly replied 'Friends! ... They eat in their kitchens.' S. Grant Duff, The Parting of Ways, London, 1982, p.127. He, like his successor Basil Newton were undoubtedly influenced by their periods of service in Berlin. For further detail on Addison's animus against the Czechs, see M. Cornwall, 'The Rise and Fall of "a special relationship", Britain and Czechoslovakia 1930-1948' in B. Brivati and H. Jones (eds.), What Difference Did the War Make?, London, 1993, p.132.

5. Henderson to Halifax, 16/3/38, PRO 800/269.

6. Letter from Sir Frank Roberts to writer 7/8/90.

7. Neville Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain 20/3/38, Chamberlain Papers, University of Birmingham, 18/1/1042.

8. Newton to Halifax 15/3/38, DBFP, 3rd Series, Vol.I, No.86.

9. An exception being M. Gilbert and R. Gott, The Appeasers, London, 1963, pp.111-114. Newton's role is described by the authors as 'all-important', but he is stated to have 'continually supported German claims'. For a contemporary critic see S. Grant Duff, The Parting of Ways, p.96.

10. Newton to Halifax 9/4/38, DBFP, I, No.98.

11. J. Charmley, Chamberlain and the Lost Peace, London, 1989, p.67.

12. Newton to Halifax 15/3/38, DBFP, I, No.86.

13. PRO, Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy, Cab 27/623 FP (36) 26 18/3/38.

14. Charmley, p.67.

15. Sir N. Henderson, Failure of A Mission, London, 1940, p.129.

16. H. Aulach, 'Britain and the Sudeten Issue 1938: The Evolution of a Policy', Journal of Contemporary History, 1983, (18), No.2, pp.233-60. Aulach argues that 'It was France ... that kept Britain in suspense'.

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18. FO 371/21131 quoted in J.W. Bruegel, Czechoslovakia before Munich: The German Minority Problem and British Appeasement Policy, Cambridge, 1973, p.158; Facing the Dictators, pp.502-3.

19. A.R. Peters, Anthony Eden at the Foreign Office 1931-8, Aldershot, 1986, p.305.

20. For other analyses of Eden's attitude towards Czechoslovakia see D. Carlton, Anthony Eden, London, 1981, pp.136-6; M. Gilbert and R. Gott, The Appeasers, pp.106-7; F.S. Northedge, The Troubled Giant, London, 1966, pp.498-9; J. Charmley, Chamberlain and the Lost Peace, London, 1989, pp.32-3; R. Rhodes James, Anthony Eden, London, 1986, pp.186, 206-7; D. Dutton, Anthony Eden. A Life and Reputation, London, 1997, pp.93, 102.

21. Henderson to Halifax 17/3/38, DBFP, 3rd Series, Volume I, No.93.

22. Newton to Halifax 20/3/38, ibid., No.100.

23. Eisenlohr to Wilhelmstrasse 21/12/37, DGFP, D, II, No.38.

24. Halifax to Newton 23/3/38, ibid., No.110.

25. House of Commons Debates 24/3/38, 5th Series, Vol.333, Cols.1403-7.

26. Henderson to Halifax 24/3/38, ibid., No.115.

27. ibid.

28. ibid., 1/4/38, No.121.

29. Newton to Halifax 3/4/38, No.129.

30. ibid., 3/4/38, No.130. A week later Halifax, in a telegram to Phipps in Paris, referred to his own mention (telegram No.213) of a report by the well-known French journalist M. Sauerwein who, after a recent visit to the Sudetenland, stated that the German minority 'were persecuted by the lesser officials in a way which had to be seen to be believed'. Halifax to Phipps 11/4/38, No.135.

31. J. Haslam, The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe 1933-39, London, 1984, p.167.

32. Newton to Halifax 12/4/38, No.140.

33. S. Grant Duff, The Parting of Ways, London, 1982, p.159.

34. Newton to Halifax 12/4/38, DBFP, 3, I, No.140.

35. ibid., No.140.

36. Henderson to Halifax 20/4/38, No.152.

37. Halifax to Henderson 4/5/38, No.172.

38. Newton to Halifax 16/5/38, No.221, the provinces being Bohemia and Moravia. Vansittart was warning against 'the danger of setting up a Nazi state within the borders of a democratic state'. Halifax to Newton 16/5/38; Vansittart had just had a meeting with Henlein in London.

39. Henderson to Halifax 27/2/38, 800/269, Henderson Papers, PRO.

40. ibid., Henderson to Halifax 16/3/38 (50) 38/20.

41. ibid., Henderson to Halifax 30/3/38, 38/28.

42. D. Dilks (ed.), The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, London, 1971, p.63.

43. See R. Macleod and D. Kelly (eds.), Ironside Diaries, 22/9/38, London, 1962, p.62.

44. Henderson to Halifax 19/5/38, No.234.

45. P. Meehan, The Unnecessary War, Whitehall and the German Resistance to Hitler, London, 1992, pp.132-4.

46. Henderson to Halifax 19/5/38, No.235.

47. Meehan, p.132.

48. Failure of A Mission, p.130.

49. ibid., p.133.

50. M. Cowling, The Impact of Hitler, London, 1977, p.287.

51. Halifax to Newton 25/5/38, DBFP, 3, I, No.315.

52. In his memoir (Nine Troubled Years, London, 1954, p.295), Lord Templewood (the former Sir Samuel Hoare) includes a reference to correspondence and interviews with Jan Masaryk, including an interview with the Czech Minister on 25 March 1938 during which Masaryk is alleged to have said that 'his father had originally supported the idea of a federation on the lines of Switzerland', and that he himself had not excluded the possibility of a confederation of Germans, Slovaks and

Czechs. But such a solution would be 'useless' if Hitler had 'a free hand with his propaganda and threats'. This information was included in a letter to Halifax who was 'greatly interested' (Halifax to Hoare 28/3/38, Templewood, p.195).

53. Gilbert and Gott, p.114; Keith Middlemass also notes that 'Successive British ministers in Prague, especially Newton, had been hostile to what they thought were Czech pretensions', Diplomacy of Illusion, London, 1972, p.245. Cornwall's article (see footnote 4) makes it clear that Addison was the greater sinner.

54. Failure of A Mission, p.135.

55. ibid. Only Mason MacFarlane is mentioned by name.

56. For the attitude of the British press towards the Sudeten issue and Henderson's attitude to the press, see R. Cockett, The Twilight of Truth, London, 1989, pp.55-83.

57. DBFP, 3rd Series, I, p.340. Henderson, op.cit., pp.135-7. R. Spitzy, How We Squandered the Reich, London, 1997, p.219.

58. K. Robbins, Appeasement, Oxford, 1988, pp.68-9.

59. Failure of A Mission, p.135.

60. P. Schmidt, Hitler's Interpreter, London, 1951, p.85.

61. H. Noguères, Munich, London, 1965, pp.63-5.

62. Failure of A Mission, pp.137-8.

63. A. Duff Cooper, Old Men Forget, London, 1955, p.211.

64. R.A.C. Parker, Chamberlain and Appeasement, London, 1993, p.149. See also Neville Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain 22/5/38, 18/1/1053.

65. DGFP, Vol.II, No.175.

66. ibid., No.221.

67. F.S. Northedge, The Troubled Giant, London, 1966, p.510.

68. Halifax to Newton 4/5/38, DBFP, 3rd Series, I, No.138. 'Delay seems to me dangerous.'

69. H. Aulach, 'Britain and the Sudeten Issue 1938: The Evolution of a Policy', JCH, 1983 (18), No.2, pp.240.
For another view of the May crisis, see also D.C. Watt, 'Hitler's Visit to Rome and the May Weekend Crisis: A Study in Hitler's Response to External Stimuli', JCH, 9, No.1 (Jan 1974), 23-32. Watt argues that Hitler's attitude to Czechoslovakia was affected

by the lukewarm support shown by the Italians for Hitler when he visited Rome early in May 1938. This view is refuted by G. Weinberg in The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany. Starting World War Two 1937-9, p.399, footnote 210. He denies that Hitler was 'undecided' about action on 20-21 May, and claims that the revised draft directive of 30 May was based on a discussion between Hitler and Keitel on 20 April.

70. It was not uncommon for ill-informed MPs to refer to Czechoslovakia as 'Czechoslovenia'; R. Bruce Lockhart, Jan Masaryk, London, 1951, p.18.

71. H. Noguères, Munich, p.65.

72. D.C. Watt, 'Chamberlain's Ambassadors' in M. Dockrill and B. McKercher (eds.), Diplomacy and World Power, Cambridge, 1996, p.151.

73. Failure of A Mission, p.vi.

Chapter Five

From the May Crisis to the Nuremberg Rally

May-September 1938

The May crisis of 1938 was clearly a very unsettling experience for Henderson. His despatches in the three months that followed it were full of references to the need to avoid such alarms and excursions; again (a lengthy telegram to Halifax on 12 August, for example, stated that 'We cannot keep having May 21sts'[1]).

Doubly galling, therefore, for the Ambassador was the persistent belief that the supposed 'evacuation' of the Berlin Embassy in May represented some form of anti-German stand persisted. Writing to Halifax on 12 June, Henderson told of how he had been caused 'some distress' by a letter from Lord Stanley of Alderney, copied to him by the Foreign Office, in which Stanley said that Henderson's action had 'a restraining effect' on the German Government. Henderson's annoyance is clear from the tone of his comments. 'The tragedy of a lie,' he wrote, 'is that once started it is never quite caught up with', deploring the fact that Wolf was 'being cried too soon'.[2]

Henderson would have been equally irritated by the comments made by his Counsellor, George Ogilvie-Forbes, in a letter to William Strang at the Foreign Office, shortly after the May crisis. Although Ogilvie-Forbes confirmed that the Embassy in Berlin had 'no evidence whatever of

abnormal concentrations of troops', he went on to reflect that

> Hitler may have intended some grave step such as an ultimatum, and that for the moment he has shied off, thanks to the energetic intervention of the Ambassador who has had a most trying interview with von Ribbentrop.[1]

It is in fact odd that Ogilvie-Forbes wrote in such terms to Strang, as he must have known (although his personal relationship with Henderson was poor) that Henderson was not rejoicing over the events of 20-21 May, or his personal role in them.

More mollifying would have been a private letter from Henderson's fellow diplomat Basil Newton on 27 May, expressing his thanks for an encouraging note which Henderson had sent to him on 19 May. Newton expressed his hope that Henderson would 'be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and when that is done, I hope I may receive honourable mention'. 'You,' opined Newton, 'have much the hardest job.'[4]

Several related themes emerge relentlessly from Henderson's telegrams and personal letters in the period after the May scare, leading up to the Nazi Party Rally at Nuremberg in early September 1938.

One was that Henderson remained convinced that Hitler did not want war, as he told Halifax on 24 July, telegraphing that the German Government 'as apart from sections of the Nazi Party, are as frightened as we are of an incident which may precipitate a war'.[5] The evidence available to Henderson suggested that the German public itself did not want war, and wanted a peaceful resolution of

the Sudeten issue.'

Henderson continued to reiterate another of his favourite themes, the danger of driving Hitler into the arms of his 'extremists', who wanted to resolve the Sudeten Question by force. Thus he wrote to Halifax that in his view,

> We are more likely to strengthen the Chancellor's hand against extremists if we show belief in his good faith than if we reiterated a warning and a threat which has already been taken to heart.

It is easy to scoff at Henderson's naivety in continuing to subscribe to the 'moderates' and 'extremists' analysis of the Nazi leadership, but worthy of note that his predecessor Eric Phipps had made the same sort of error in his estimate of Göring that Henderson was prone to. In November 1936, in his fourth year in Berlin, Phipps had telegraphed to London about 'very helpful points of contacts with General Göring, who is an old army officer with few Nazi proclivities in his saner moments'.[7] Henderson was at least capable of wondering in early August 1938 about whether Göring might be 'out of the moderation camp'.[8] The fundamental error, and it was not Henderson's alone, was to imagine that Hitler would ever be susceptible to moderate advice.

Neither was Henderson blind to German tendencies to stupidity and inability to see anyone else's point of view, which he regarded as 'one of the worst German failings'.[9] This tendency was at its worst in von Ribbentrop whose personal animosity towards Henderson restricted his access to the Führer. Writing to the Permanent Under-Secretary Cadogan, Henderson deplored the lack of contact with 'the sole arbiter of Germany's fate', which meant that one is

consequently groping in the dark'.[10]

During these crucial weeks Henderson made little secret of his low opinion of, and lack of trust in, the Czech President Eduord Beneš.[11] In Henderson's view, Beneš was 'a small man' especially by comparison with his illustrious predecessor Tomas Masaryk, and needed constant reminders that the solution to the Sudeten problem was in the Czech, as well as the wider European interest.[12] Unless pressure was constantly applied in Prague, Henderson believed, Beneš would hide behind a wall of rhetoric and no progress would be achieved in meeting Sudeten German grievances, and their demand for autonomy.

Henderson's preferred solution, stated in several telegrams over the three months before the Party Rally, was 'a Swiss cantonal system for the Sudeten', which would prevent them from being harassed continuously by minor Czech officials.[13] But he was concerned that when Lord Runciman was sent to the Sudetenland as a mediator in August by the British Government, he should reach a conclusion to his deliberations before the Nuremberg Rally.[14] Otherwise Hitler, he believed, would be handed a propaganda victory.

In a stream of telegrams and private letters in August and early September 1938, Henderson continued to offer Halifax and the Foreign Office suggestions and warnings about the right strategy to adopt in dealing with Hitler and Ribbentrop. He was scathing about Ribbentrop, whom he described (accurately) as being 'as vain as he is stupid, and as stupid as he is vain'.[15] Then Henderson was brought to the centre of the stage, when he was asked to be present at a Cabinet meeting on 30 August (he reported back to

London on 28 August and returned to Berlin on 31 August).

New sub-plots also emerge in the period after the May Crisis. Henderson's military attaché, Colonel Frank Mason MacFarlane, becomes an important figure in the events leading up to Nuremberg, and there are also several significant references in Henderson's personal papers, and in the published documents, to the role of the Italian Ambassador, Attolico, who broadly shared Henderson's perceptions about likely German behaviour.[16] Henderson could also rely on the support of his new American colleague, Hugh Wilson, whom he later described as having 'keen observation and sound judgement'.[17] Relations with Wilson were much better than with Wilson's predecessor Dodd who thought Henderson far too pro-German (and with whom Henderson was later to be in dispute about entries in Dodd's published diary).[18]

Henderson was concerned about having a reputation for being too sympathetic towards the Hitler régime with diplomatic colleagues or inside the Foreign Office itself. Just before the onset of the May Scare Henderson had expressed these concerns to Halifax in a private letter.

> Believe me or not, [Henderson wrote] and anyway your Department seems to have some doubts, I have not prejudiced the issue in any way with the German Government either as regards the 'State of Nationalities' or what we shall do in the event of trouble ... I am in fact very much alive to the delicacy of our operation.[19]

Henderson concluded this letter by telling Halifax that he could rest assured that 'the Germans do not at all have the impression that Britain will sit still in all

circumstances and that they do have confidence in our sincerity'.[20] Henderson repeated this assurance on 12 August when he told Halifax that

> I lose no opportunity of reminding, tactfully or not, Germans of every kind (all Germans are working gramophones so every little helps) of what we might do in certain circumstances.[21]

His critics in the Foreign Office remained unconvinced.

Nevertheless Henderson did have sympathizers in the Foreign Office. One was R.H. Hadow, formerly the First Secretary in the Prague Embassy during Addison's time, who by 1938 was a First Secretary in the Northern Department. Hadow wrote to Henderson on 11 May, enclosing a memorandum which he had prepared for the Foreign Office on the prospects of an Anglo-French alliance with the USSR. He told Henderson that

> All that you have said will of course come true; but here the clique who would not allow of any right on the German side are still doing what they can to bring on the day of reckoning.

In Cabinet circles, Hadow went on, 'on the other hand your telegrams and those of Newton (who had been castigated by Vansittart but endorsed by Butler and S of S) are receiving anxious attention'. Hadow bemoaned the failure of the Foreign Office to speak bluntly to the French about the Sudeten problem, and complained that

> in the Office 'Russian help' is part of a creed which is not helpful to your efforts to keep peace in Europe. I hope you will succeed and wish I could help but in the Northern Department one is side-

> tracked and anyway a 1st Secretary is easily smothered though, as you will see, not silenced.
>
> I have of course no authority to send on these documents so hope you will not mind treating them as 'nul et non avenu'.

Hadow concluded his private letter by saying that if he could be 'of any help at any time I shall be only too glad'.[22] Hadow's reference to Newton being 'castigated' by Vansittart is interesting, although no reference to this criticism appears in the published British Foreign Policy Documents, whereas there are numerous examples of Henderson being reproved by the Foreign Office. Hadow was taking a considerable risk in writing to Henderson in such terms, as his request for secrecy indicates. The reference in Chapter Two to Owen O'Malley's supportive letter to Henderson in June 1937 shows that he did indeed have support from senior officials in the Foreign Office, and O'Malley, like Hadow, was prepared to take some risks to encourage Henderson's style of diplomacy in Berlin.[23]

Henderson also maintained good relations (Ribbentrop apart), with officials at the Wilhelmstrasse, particularly with the State Secretary Ernst von Weizsäcker. He understood Weizsäcker's own difficulties with the pompous Ribbentrop when the State Secretary told him that he had to be 'loyal to my chief'. Henderson told Halifax on 30 July that this was 'a sentiment in which I outwardly fully concurred, but which inwardly I feared in this particular case would be scarcely likely to be helpful'.[24] Weizsäcker himself remains an ambivalent figure, whose position over the Czech issue has been criticised for merely substituting his

'cherished but not much less questionable formula for the "chemical dissolution" of the Czechoslovak State' for the aggressive threats of Adolf Hitler. He was, observes the same critic, 'a German counterpart of Sir Nevile Henderson' who feared war but 'wanted a more respectable expansionist Reich'.[25] The analogy presumably refers to the heartfelt desire for peace which both men possessed, but Henderson was dedicated to the conservation of the British Empire, not to its expansion. By contrast, Weizsäcker wanted to secure the cession of the Sudetenland to the Reich, albeit by peaceful means.

Henderson also got on well with his counterpart in London, the German Ambassador von Dirksen. In his memoirs von Dirksen wrote

> from the very beginning we liked each other, because we both had to bear heavy responsibility and were approaching our task with equal goodwill. We gave advice to each other ... I recommended Göring, Weizsäcker and the Generals to him.[26]

The two men lunched together in Berlin in early August, at a time of acute tension caused by German troop movements close to the Czech frontier, which, Henderson warned von Dirksen (another example of Henderson carrying out his warning function)

> might easily produce panic in Czechoslovakia and elsewhere. However expedient on purely military grounds, such a step would assuredly be misunderstood abroad and if anything happened would be held as proof of German intention to be aggressive.[27]

The accusation that Henderson did not carry out his warning

function after the Anschluss therefore flies in the face of the testimony of this reliable German career diplomat. Von Dirksen was

> a career foreign servant, and for this reason Ribbentrop would never wholly trust him. During neither his Japanese nor his British assignments was Dirksen made privy to the party's plans in foreign affairs.[28]

Henderson's confidantes, with the notable exception of Göring, were career diplomats, not Nazis, and even in Göring's case, Henderson was following the guidelines laid down by Eric Phipps.

The problem with Henderson was that he could still be indiscreet with sympathetic foreigners. In June, he told von Weizsäcker about a confidential British initiative in Prague when the Czechs were warned that they would be abandoned by Britain if they did not make concessions over the Sudetenland. But he may have calculated that Weizsäcker, whom he plainly regarded as an anti-Nazi, would not pass on such indiscretions to Ribbentrop whose anti-British bias was by now notorious.[29] Ribbentrop was likely to perceive such a British initiative as an example of British double-dealing, and to further poison Hitler's mind about British sincerity. As it was, Ribbentrop was already convinced that Britain would never take any action if Germany were to attack Czechoslovakia.[30]

The whole issue of Nevile Henderson's relationship with the German opposition to Hitler is a thorny one. But it was not Henderson's job to assist 'oppositionists' like Weizsäcker (and as indicated above there have to be some doubts

about the latter's credentials as an oppositionist) to overthrow the German Government. He saw in the State Secretary someone, like himself, who wished to prevent Britain and Germany from going to war. To criticise him for not advocating a sympathetic hearing for the German oppositionists, which neither his Prime Minister nor Foreign Secretary then supported, seems somewhat absurd. Even Vansittart had his doubts about the German opposition and their insistence on maintaining revisionist territorial claims to Austria, the Sudetenland and the Polish Corridor.[31] Both Henderson, and Neville Chamberlain, believed that maintaining relations with the anti-Nazi opposition might 'compromise relations with the Nazi state which was a sovereign state with which Britain was maintaining diplomatic relations'.[32]

Ribbentrop predictably continued to make life difficult for the 'man with the carnation' after the May crisis.[33] When the British Government nominated Lord Runciman as a mediator in the Sudetenland in late July, Ribbentrop instructed von Weizsäcker to complain to Henderson that the announcement of the Runciman mission had been made before the German Government had been informed. Henderson informed Halifax that he had

> told the State Secretary that I regarded such unhelpful messages as quite deplorable and since German government professed not to influence Sudeten Party I trusted that the latter would show more sense and understanding.[34]

It is difficult to square such language with accusations that Henderson abandoned 'all firmness' after the May Crisis. Henderson was also angered by the behaviour of

Woermann, the Political Director at the Wilhelmstrasse, when Chamberlain passed on a personal message to Henderson for transmission to Hitler. Woermann, Henderson reported, verged on the truculent and his attitude was 'that of von Ribbentrop' (Woermann had contended that such a personal message should be routed through Ribbentrop in the first instance).'"

In a personal interview with Ribbentrop on 1 September, Henderson conveyed the Foreign Office warning that the Germans should reflect on 'the probability of Great Britain becoming involved if France found herself at war with Germany'. After his experiences with Ribbentrop on 21 May Henderson made the best of a bad job in his subsequent interviews. He had no illusions where Ribbentrop was concerned.

Henderson also kept up contacts with assumed 'moderates' in the German establishment, even when they had fallen out with their Führer. Thus on 3 September, just before his departure to the Party Rally at Nuremberg, Henderson had an interview with the former Foreign Minister von Neurath, who had been displaced in Hitler's reshuffle in January 1938. Yet again Henderson warned that 'circumstances might be such as to compel us to participate'. Neurath wanted to see Henderson at Nuremberg, but Henderson told him that he was anxious lest he be forced to hear speeches by Nazi leaders of which his Government might disapprove.[36] It is instructive indeed, given the constant attention given to Henderson's gaffes, and the reprimands which he received from the Foreign Office, to note that on 5 September he was informed that his language in the inter-

view with Weizsäcker on 1 September when he had commented 'with amazement and regret' on the growing strength of anti-German feeling in Britain, had been approved. Henderson also warned Weizsäcker in that interview that no British government could cause France to act 'contrary to her honour' over the Sudeten issue. His language to Ribbentrop on 1 September was also approved by the Foreign Office.[37]

Ill-thought of by many in the Foreign Office and with nerves frayed by Ribbentrop's persistent rudeness in interviews, Henderson seemed during this period (whatever Halifax may have felt later about Henderson being 'a light-weight') to have retained the confidence of the Foreign Secretary.[38] In a long letter early in August Halifax wrote to Henderson: 'It has been of the greatest help to me to have your views and judgements'. He went on to sum up Britain's policy as one of 'perpetually telling Beneš of what we might not do in the event of trouble: and of tactfully reminding the Germans of what we might do'. Halifax also expressed some sympathy for his hard-pressed Ambassador.

> Meanwhile, I am sorry for you in Berlin when the atmosphere in all respects must be beastly. But we are all in this very disagreeable job together and yours is not the least important part. Write as often as you can or like. It is very helpful.[39]

Henderson plainly took him up on his offer although shortly afterwards he was expressing regret at 'flooding you with all this correspondence'.[40]

Much of this correspondence in August and September concerned the likelihood of Lord Runciman achieving a compromise about the status of the Sudetenland. Hearing of

Runciman's appointment on 26 July, Henderson told Halifax that he did not 'envy Lord Runciman the difficult and thankless task which he is undertaking'. This was because 'The Czechs are a pig-headed race and Beneš not the least pig-headed among them'. Henderson went on to invoke the memory of his halcyon days in Belgrade, recalling the low opinion that 'King Alexander and the Yugoslavs had of him [Beneš]'.[41] He also assured Weizsäcker that Runciman was to have complete independence and hoped that he would be able to establish the 'bases for a settlement which ought to be "on the basis" of Home Rule' (Henderson was fond of analogies with Ireland).[42] Throughout Henderson was insistent that Runciman should make known the lines on which he was working before the Nazi Party Rally in September. As for Runciman, he too soon fell victim to the Addison school of anti-Czech prejudice to which Henderson and Newton were heirs.[43]

At the end of August, Henderson's local knowledge was required in London, and he was to attend the Cabinet meeting on 30 August. He was subjected to intensive questioning by Cabinet Ministers about Hitler's intentions. He was not sure that Hitler had made up his mind to use force to settle the Sudeten question immediately but he thought that he would try and do so 'before the winter'. Assessments in late August that Hitler would use force, according to Henderson, came 'from enemies of the régime who would be unlikely to know the facts'. But if Beneš did not make some meaningful concessions before the Nuremberg Rally, Hitler would make 'some strong pronouncement' at the Rally. Asked about the rôle of the Sudeten leader, Konrad Henlein,

Henderson did not think that Henlein was 'entirely in Hitler's pocket although some of his followers were'.

Henderson, as ever, was against the use of pointless threats against Germany, which he was sure would strengthen the 'extremists' like Goebbels and Himmler. 'The extremists would say that we were moving towards a preventative war.' A threat of British intervention over the Sudetenland might cause Hitler to 'draw in his horns now; but that would not be the end. He would press on with his rearmament'. When the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Winterton, asked about the colonial issue, Henderson told him that Hitler knew that if he attacked Czechoslovakia, colonial readjustment would be impossible.[44]

Henderson's attendance at this Cabinet meeting was significant, but its importance should not be exaggerated. It was not unprecedented for ambassadors to attend Cabinet meetings, and Palairet had done so at the time of the Anschluss.

Henderson's comments at the Cabinet meeting on 30 August underline one of the problems which he, and the Foreign Office in general, had to deal with. This was the question of how independent Henlein really was. In April, for example, Halifax told the Cabinet that: 'Henlein was more and more coming under the influence of Herr Hitler'. But a month later (after Henlein visited London on 18 May) he told his colleagues that Sir Robert Vansittart now believed 'that Dr Henlein had no instructions from Berlin', and that based on this premise 'Dr Beneš could get an agreement of a useful character if only he would act quickly'.[45] Henderson had already demonstrated scepticism about Henlein

when he wrote to Halifax on 27 August about his belief that Hitler's position was

> of course equivocal in that he takes credit for leaving Herr Henlein free to negotiate with the Czechs at the same time allowing his party to instigate Sudeten to put forward far-reaching demands."

This was merely a polite way of saying that Hitler and Henlein were hand in glove, as they assuredly were, although Henderson seemed to qualify this statement at the Cabinet meeting on 30 August. Nevertheless he deserves credit for being able to discern the duplicity behind the overall German strategy. In this instance Henderson was right, and his great critic Vansittart, who had been taken in by Henlein's professions of goodwill since 1935, was wrong.

Whatever his doubts about Henlein's trustworthiness, Henderson continued to press for compromise, talking of the need for 'real autonomy on the lines of the Swiss Federation, and absolute equality of rights'.[47] He also asked on 28 August whether Runciman could not 'report to His Majesty's Government what he intends to recommend to Czech Government as basis for negotiation, say Swiss cantonal authority'.[48]

Underlining all his pleas for compromise throughout the summer and early autumn of 1938, was Henderson's demand that Britain should be seen to be following the morally correct course on the Sudeten issue. This was most famously expressed in his plea on 12 August that the British case be 'morally copper-bottomed' and his certainty that the British Empire could not 'set itself against the principle of self-

determination'.

He urged Halifax to point out that British policy was dictated not by self-interest (something the Czechs might have had doubts about) but by a desire to uphold the principle of self-determination which the democracies had fought for in the first World War.[49] This was laudable enough, but in his enthusiasm to protect Sudeten German rights, Henderson tended to lose sight of the related issue of Czechoslovak rights, especially when he, quite correctly, foresaw that there would be additional problems with Hungarian and Polish claims for territorial revision in respect of Czech Ruthenia and Teschen. On 28 June, Henderson had written to Cadogan that if there was 'trouble over Czechoslovakia I think we must take it for granted that the Germans have nobbled the Magyars'.[50] He believed that both Hungary and Poland were likely to mobilise in the event of a Czech-German crisis, maintain 'benevolent' neutrality, and then 'move to seize their respectively agreed portion of the skin once the bear is on the ground. A charming picture'.[51] Henderson was thus well aware of the dangers of Hungarian-Polish irredentism, but shut his eyes to the fact that such behaviour would be a direct consequence of encouraging Sudeten German separatism. But he was not alone in his myopia, and had at least put forward the idea of a Four Power guarantee for a truncated Czech state without the Sudetenland, which at the time was a plausible solution and offered Beneš some protection against future German aggression.[52]

At times too, Henderson showed some sympathy for the unfortunate Czechs whom he described as 'a small and heroic

race', and as late as 2 June, he hoped, in another letter to Cadogan, that there was still 'a chance to preserve the integrity of Czechoslovakia and keep the Sudeten within it'.[53] This sympathy, however, was overridden by his sympathy for the Sudeten Germans, and when in early August the Czechs produced a plan for so-called mixed provinces, in which the Germans would have been placed in a minority, Henderson believed that this was not workable. The Sudeten German demand for a State of Nationalities would not, he said, be met by what was just a variant of the existing minority statute in Czechoslovakia.[54] Oddly, and ignoring the ethnic mix in their states, he told Halifax that 'England would fight for Hungarians, Poles or Rumanians, but not for the Czech Sudetenland' because it had a majority German population.[55] This ignored the fact that many Czechs lived in the Sudetenland, although Joseph Addison (even though he was on the retired list), had done his best to muddy the waters about the racial composition of the Czechoslovak 'Republic in a memorandum to the Foreign Office in May.[56]

Henderson's perception of the Czech crisis differed from that of his military attaché in the British Embassy, Mason MacFarlane, who became an important figure in this period.[57] MacFarlane's papers make it clear that there was a degree of personal antagonism between Henderson and himself, and he thought that Henderson was not taking a tough enough line with the Nazis.[58] Nevertheless in August 1938 MacFarlane's despatches, normally covered by a letter from Henderson, played an increasingly important part in the British Cabinet's assessment of Hitler's likely behaviour.

On 27 July, MacFarlane thought that Hitler's armed

forces were 'seeing to it that if the emergency arises their preparations shall not be found wanting'. He believed that Hitler might make a surprise attack on the Czechs. Henderson did not agree. 'I am not so sure,' he told Halifax, 'that he will begin marching without warning.' Henderson thought that Hitler would not take any aggressive action against the Czechs, without giving Britain at least 24 hours' warning so that disaster could be avoided.[59]

In his telegram of 3 August, Henderson commented on MacFarlane's warning that up to eight German divisions in Germany, and all German forces in Austria, had been put in a state of war readiness. Henderson believed, he told Halifax, that this move was 'a mixture of bluff and of real menace' (seeming therefore to be hedging his bets). But he conceded that such moves could not 'but have regrettable repercussions'. Mason MacFarlane worded his anxieties more strongly. He thought that the German test mobilisation was 'desperately provocative. It is hard to see how Czechoslovakia can fail to mobilise in reply'. Although Henderson confessed himself to be 'extremely perturbed' about the projected Czech plan for three years' military service, which he believed would be provocative in turn, in fact the Czechs did not mobilise at this point.[60]

Henderson's fears about a repetition of the May Crisis reappeared in his telegram to Halifax the next day 4 August.

> During the past few months [Henderson reminded Halifax] he had consistently endeavoured to discount rumours which ran contrary to my evidence and personal opinions, regarding intention on Germany's part to take action against Czechoslovakia.[61]

He was by now desperately anxious that the Sudeten issue might lead to war, and abandoned his earlier opposition to dismemberment of the Czech State if that would preserve the peace.

He was nonetheless sufficiently impressed by the test mobilisation, and rumours of German preparations, to send Mason MacFarlane to London in early August to 'discuss the extent and significance of German military preparations'.[62] This statement in Henderson's memoirs presents the problem rather baldly, as there was a clear difference of view between the two men and MacFarlane spent some time

> trying to correct Henderson's presentation of the military information. The War Office staff having known him as a consistent optimist were impressed with his sombre account of the military preparations in eastern Germany.[63]

On his return to Berlin, MacFarlane continued on the same theme. He had good contacts with the German military establishment, and on 8 August he reported to Henderson and Halifax about a conversation with Victor von Koerber, a retired army captain, who was also chief correspondent in Berlin for Wiener Journal. Koerber told MacFarlane that Hitler had already decided upon war in September, but also commented on a great upsurge in opposition to the Nazis in the past few months. MacFarlane himself had commented on the unpopularity of the Nazi régime during his visit to London during the first week in August; but on the issue of British support for German opposition to Hitler he and his Ambassador were of one mind. MacFarlane thought that

> any bungling of an attempt to interfere from without

> with Germany's domestic politics during Hitler's lifetime would most assuredly lead to exactly what we all wished to avoid.'

Henderson for his part repeated his view that any outside interference in German affairs would be counterproductive.[65]

In fact Mason MacFarlane's position was not as clear-cut as his biographer has suggested, and he was prone to the same doubts and fears as his Ambassador. For a week later MacFarlane was cautious about Hitler's intentions, and thought that the British would not be 'justified in supposing that Herr Hitler has made up his mind to go to war this autumn'.[66] Henderson agreed, writing of the Führer 'I do not believe he wants war'; but while MacFarlane was inclined to think war would come, Henderson thought that Hitler was bluffing because Germany was still not ready for war.[67] This meant that:

> Two entirely different courses of action opened out from these reports. Britain could either be firm and repeat the warning of 21 May, hoping that internal disagreements in Germany would produce the same result as before; or she could hasten at all costs the Runciman Report and keep Germany as sweet as possible in the meantime.[68]

MacFarlane preferred the former course of action. Henderson, who still believed that Hitler could be reined in, the latter. His interpretation of what had happened on 21 May was the correct one, and it was not unreasonable of him to assume that a warning which had enraged Hitler on 21 May and strengthened his determination to attack the Czechs would again produce the opposite effect to that intended. The

flaw in MacFarlane's position was that he was on the one hand warning about German preparations (and 'crying wolf'), while also doubting on the other whether Hitler was about to attack. His comments in his personal papers smack of post hoc justification, and the information he was passing on to Henderson and London is apt to confuse rather than to enlighten.[69] Henderson, although fearful of war, was consistent in his argument that Germany was not ready for war, but that in any case the Sudetenland was not worth one. And his view that the Czech army would only hold out for a matter of weeks was based on an assessment made by the British Chiefs of Staff in March 1938.

To be fair to both men, the situation in August and September 1938 was highly confused. The French Prime Minister Dalader had suggested that if war came the Czechs could hold out for up to three months, but his Chief of Staff Gamelin had told the US Ambassador Bullitt that the Anschluss had made any effective defence of Czechoslovakia impossible.[70]

Henderson was decidedly unenthusiastic about consultations with the French, and opposed the idea of sending a personal message to Hitler which Halifax had mooted during MacFarlane's visit to London. He hoped in his telegram of 19 August that Halifax would not 'decide to inform the French government at this stage of memorandum which you instructed me to communicate to Herr Hitler' (Halifax had told Henderson to make a démarche to Hitler, expressing British concern about the German test mobilisation on 11 August).[71] This was not the first, or last time that Henderson queried his instructions, and he won a technical

victory on this occasion. Henderson was concerned that a personal approach to Hitler about the test mobilisation might enrage him, and in his reply on 19 August, Halifax agreed that it was only necessary to inform the Wilhelmstrasse about British anxieties. But, Halifax said, if the French raised the matter of German military measures with him, he would be bound to tell them about the approach he had ordered Henderson to make on 11 August.[72] Henderson could however, claim that there was a good precedent for withholding information from the French, as they had only been told about the plan for the Runciman mission during the visit by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth to Paris in July 1938.[73]

Although Henderson told von Weizsäcker on 1 September that no British government would advise France to act 'contrary to her honour', he was in fact sceptical about what the French could do in the event of war over the Sudetenland. He did not believe that the French would attack the Siegfried Line on the Franco-German frontier, or that the Germans would attack the Maginot Line. The result would be a stalemate which would be of no assistance to the beleaguered Czechs.[74] This point was reiterated in Henderson's personal letter to Halifax on 28 August. The Czechs and the Sudetens, wrote Henderson, 'would be heroically butchered' while France would stand by unless Britain came in and blockaded Germany as she had done in the First World War.[75]

This assessment has been supported in the latest seminal study of Franco-British relations.

> In fact [writes P.M.H. Bell] the French position was

much less clear-cut than their treaty obligations implied. The French High Command ruled out any prospect of an immediate assault on the newly built Germany fortifications in the West, which meant that the best they could hope to do was to rescue Czecho-slovakia at a final peace treaty and not by prompt military action.[76]

Henderson's attitude to the French alliance, though conditioned by his overwhelming desire to prevent British involvement in a war for the Sudetenland, was in fact based on a pretty sound assessment of the existing military realities. The British Chiefs of Staff were convinced that only a long war, using Britain's overwhelming naval superio-rity, brought any prospect of victory over Germany. In the short run 'no pressure we and France could bring by sea, land or air could stop Germany over-running Bohemia and inflicting a decisive defeat on Czechoslovakia'.[77]

Henderson, then, although sticking to his view that Hitler (unless swayed by his extremists) did not want war, was convinced that the Sudeten issue was not worth fighting for because the cause was not morally sound, and did not merit the squandering of British lives.[78] British policy was to keep the Germans guessing about what Britain would do in an emergency, while putting pressure on both the Czechs and the French to settle. Henderson's essential task was to warn the Germans about the consequences of an invasion of Czechoslovakia, and create enough uncertainty in the German mind about Britain's response to deter Hitler.[79]

He is open to the accusation that he failed to do this. Reference has already been made to the June conversation

with Weizsäcker, when Henderson had allegedly said that the Czechs would be abandoned by Britain if they did not come to terms, and that Prague had been told this.[80] And he is further accused of saying on 6 August (at a party) that 'Great Britain would not think of risking one sailor or airman for Czechoslovakia', the sort of reported comment that caused the French to complain about him.[81] On the face of it, this was pretty damning evidence, which shows Henderson failing to stick to his brief of keeping Germany guessing. Two points seem pertinent here. Firstly, did the Germans pay any real heed to what Henderson said, and would it have had any more influence on what Ribbentrop and Hitler did than the critical attitudes of his predecessors Rumbold and Phipps? It is on the record that 'the sight of Henderson seemed to arouse Hitler's antagonism', and that Ribbentrop had made up his mind that Britain would never go to war with Germany.[82]

The second point is that reliable witnesses, like von Dirksen and Spitzy, bear witness to the fact that in the months before the Party Rally in Nuremberg, Henderson did carry out his warning function properly. The paradox is (unless the contrary evidence is dismissed as a German fabrication) that he appeared to undermine his good work by being indiscreet on public occasions. But then this was nothing new in Henderson's career.[83]

One possible explanation for Henderson's behaviour is offered by Sir Frank Roberts, a fellow diplomat with post-war experience as an ambassador in a totalitarian state, who offers a more sympathetic analysis of Henderson's behaviour than many historians have done. Roberts notes that

Henderson was sent to Berlin in the expectation that he would be able to 'talk more frankly' with the Nazi leaders than his more intellectual predecessor Phipps.

> Henderson thus unexpectedly brought back from a distant post, [Roberts writes] ... not unnaturally regarded his mission primarily as one of support for the Chamberlain appeasement policy, and took his lead much more from Number 10 than from the Foreign Office, with the result that during the Czech crisis he always seemed to be criticising the Czechs and defending the Nazis."

This analysis centres on the premise that because Henderson saw himself as Chamberlain's man in Berlin, he could not be balanced in his appraisal of Czech-German relations, but, as has already been outlined above, the Foreign Office itself lacked this balance because of Addison's influence.

It is also true that Henderson did not owe his appointment to Chamberlain but to Vansittart, who was sufficiently concerned about Phipps' alleged anti-Germanism to accommodate the process whereby Henderson was sent to Berlin in 1937.[85] But when Henderson took the opposite, more emollient line, he too was heavily criticised.[86]

The main problem with Henderson was not that he was anti-Czech, or unable to carry out his warning function as such, but that because he saw himself as the Prime Minister's emissary, he could not, or would not, master the complexities of the Foreign Office's policy of keeping Hitler guessing. In his parallel task of guessing what Hitler would do next, Henderson was in an unenviable position, as Halifax fully recognised. Halifax himself

confessed when writing to Henderson 'I am ... all the time groping like a blind man trying to find his way across a bog, with everybody shouting from the banks different information as to where the next quagmire is.'[87] Henderson found his task equally daunting, and the evidence suggests that when he did exercise his warning function, it was more likely to be taken seriously by the Germans because they knew that such criticism came from a sympathetic source.[88] Whether Henderson ever had any real influence with a German leadership headed by Hitler and Ribbentrop is another matter entirely.

References

1. Henderson to Halifax 12/8/38, DBFP, 3rd Series, Vol.II, No.613. See also Nos.539 and 576.

2. Henderson to Halifax 12/6/38, FO 800/269, Henderson Papers, PRO.

3. Ogilvie-Forbes to Strang 25/5/38, Ogilvie-Forbes Papers, University of Aberdeen 2750/44; see Vaughan B. Baker, 'Nevile Henderson in Berlin: A Re-evaluation', Red River Historical Journal, Vol.II, Nol.4, Spring 1977, p.347.

4. Newton to Henderson 27/5/38, Henderson Papers, PRO.

5. Henderson to Halifax 8/8/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.539.

6. ibid., 13/8/38, No.614.

7. ibid., No.614; Phipps to Foreign Office 4/11/36, Phipps Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge.

8. Henderson to Halifax 8/8/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.594; although subsequently Henderson never denied his liking for Göring, Failure of A Mission, p.80.

9. Henderson to Halifax 24/5/38, FO 800/269, Henderson Papers, PRO.

10. Henderson to Cadogan 20/7/38, Henderson Papers.

11. This in itself is not surprising. The general anti-Czech bias in the Foreign Office was extended to Beneš in person. 'Beneš was not popular in the Foreign Office', Interview with Sir Frank Roberts 10/10/96. By contrast the Czech Ambassador in London Jan Masaryk was well liked.

12. Henderson to Halifax 22/8/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.665.

13. ibid., No.665.

14. ibid., No.665; Newton in Prague, by contrast, thought it 'unreasonable' that Lord Runciman should be expected to make a judgement on the Sudeten problem by 'any given date'.

15. Henderson to Halifax 24/5/38, Henderson Papers, PRO.

16. MacFarlane did not have a high opinion of his chief, and spent some of his time in Berlin writing verse which deplored the appeasing tendencies of 'our celibate and caustic chief', Mason MacFarlane Papers, Imperial War Museum, MM 28 27/8/38; for references to Attolico see Henderson to Halifax 27/8/38, No.703 and

Henderson to Halifax 4/9/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.767.

17. Failure of A Mission, p.46; Water Under the Bridges, pp.210-11; this esteem was reciprocated. See Wilson Papers: Hugh R. Wilson Jr. (ed.), A Career Diplomat. The Third Chapter, New York, 1960.

18. An interesting reference in the Orme Sargent Papers at the PRO shows that the US Government was so concerned about Dodd's 'ineptitude' and was so much 'in the dark' about British policy in Berlin that it sent the US Ambassador in Budapest Montgomery to Berlin to see Henderson en route from home leave. The initiative failed as Henderson was away. Knox to Sargent 20/12/38, Sargent Papers.

19. Henderson to Halifax 19/5/38, Henderson Papers.

20. ibid.

21. Henderson to Halifax 12/8/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.613.

22. Hadow to Henderson 11/5/38, Henderson Papers. Hadow also claimed to have certain 'contacts' with the Cabinet but these were of no use because 'any Cabinet minister who puts up a stand is curiously enough since Mr Elisha got into that august body, immediately the object of rumours and attacks in the Press'. This was an unpleasant anti-Semitic smear against the then War Minister Leslie Hore-Belisha who was Jewish.

Hadow's memorandum is not attached to the letter in Henderson's Papers at the PRO. He may have been the author of another unattributed paper entitled 'Possibility of German Economic Pressure on Czechoslovakia. Memoranda prepared in Connexion with Anglo-French Conversations of 28/29 April 1938', C 3869/1941/18, FO 371/21717, PRO.

23. O'Malley was not prepared however, to put this support on the record in his disappointing memoir published in 1954. O'Malley claimed that he was precluded from writing about 'the debates which raged over the Anschluss and Hitler's rise to power' by the Official Secrets Act. Between 1929 and 1937 O'Malley worked in the Foreign Office as Assistant in the Central Department, and then as Head of the Southern Department prior to his posting to Mexico. The Phantom Caravan, London, 1954, p.157.

24. Henderson to Halifax 30/7/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.560.

25. K. von Klemperer, German Resistance Against Hitler, Oxford, 1994, p.103; for a more friendly assessment of Weizsäcker's role see M. Thielenhaus, Zwischen Anpassung und Widerstand: Deutsche Diplomaten 1938-1941, Munich, 1985. Thielenhaus says that Weizsäcker regarded Ribbentrop as being his 'main adversary in the struggle to maintain peace, and thus sought by his activities to discredit the Foreign Minister in the

hope of preventing Hitler from resorting to military action'. p.224 refers.

26. H. von Dirksen, Moskau, Tokyo, London: Errinerungen und Betrachthungen zu zwantig Jahren Aussenpolitik, Stuttgart, 1949, p.208.

27. ibid., p.208; Dirksen's portrayal of Henderson's role is supported in R. Spitzy, How We Squandered the Reich, Norwich, 1997, and also in a personal letter to the writer on 31 December 1997. Herr Spitzy wrote, 'Henderson was clear and outspoken with his continuous warnings'.

28. C. Schorske, 'Two German Ambassadors: Dirksen and Schulenburg' in G. Craig and F. Gilbert (eds.), The Diplomats 1919-39, Princeton, 1953, p.481. von Dirksen was the German Ambassador in Tokyo from 1935 to 1938. For his conversation with Henderson see also Henderson to Halifax 4/8/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.581.

29. For Henderson's view of Weizsäcker see Failure of A Mission, p.204; on Ribbentrop's anti-British animus see Spitzy, p.67.

30. Henderson to Halifax 1/9/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.736.

31. For Vansittart's relationship with the German opposition to Hitler (and especially with Gordeler) see von Klemperer, pp.89-96. Henderson's attitude to the German opposition has been criticised, often unfairly, in P. Meehan, The Unnecessary War, London, 1992.

32. von Klemperer, p.121.

33. J. Weitz, Hitler's Diplomat, The Life and Times of Joachim von Ribbentrop, New York, 1992, p.127.

34. Henderson to Halifax, DBFP, 3, II, No.552; Noguères, p.65.

35. Henderson to Halifax 13/8/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.614.

36. ibid., 3/9/38, No.757. Henderson had used almost the same language in his interview with von Ribbentrop on 1 September saying that 'if anything intolerable were said in my presence I would propose to leave at once and return to Berlin'. ibid., No.736. Henderson had returned from his visit to Britain on 31 August.

37. Footnote 3 to DBFP, 3, II, No.738. The relevant telegrams were No.736 and No.738.

38. A. Roberts, The Holy Fox, A Biography of Lord Halifax, London, 1991, p.142. Roberts cites Lady Halifax's opinion that Henderson was a 'light-weight'. This judgement he alleges was largely responsible for the fact that 'Henderson had largely lost Halifax's confidence' by March 1939.

39. Halifax to Henderson 5/8/38, No.587. In the letter Halifax also asked Henderson to pass on his view of 'things as you see them' to Newton in Prague. 'You could tell him that I had asked you to do so.'

40. Henderson to Halifax 23/8/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.672.

41. Henderson to Halifax 26/7/38, No.551.

42. ibid., 27/7/38, No.552. See also Chapter One.

43. This is evident from the letter to Chamberlain written by Runciman on 21 September. Czech behaviour towards the Sudeten Germans had been marked by 'tactlessness, lack of understanding, petty intolerance and discrimination'. Runciman to Chamberlain 21/9/38, C 10666/1941/18 FO 371/21741, PRO. Wisely, although Joseph Addison (bizarrely) was on the list of candidates for Runciman's job, he was not appointed by the Foreign Office.

44. CAB 23/94, 30/8/38.

45. CAB 23/93; DBFP, 3, I, Appendix 2. See also Weinberg, p.391, fn.57. He links Vansittart's naivety about Henlein with his subsequent extreme anti-Germanism. Walford Selby also criticises Vansittart's relationship with Henlein, Diplomatic Twilight, p.73.

46. Henderson to Halifax 27/8/38, No.701.

47. ibid., 12/8/38, No.613.

48. ibid., 25/8/38, No.689.

49. ibid., No.613.

50. Cadogan knew Henderson well. They had been at Eton together and continued to meet socially. In January 1938 Cadogan wrote in his diary after a meeting with Henderson, 'I think he is very good.' Diaries of Sir A. Cadogan, 30/1/38, p.43. It has to be added that Cadogan changed his mind about Henderson and sought his removal in 1939.

51. Henderson to Cadogan 28/6/38, FO 800/269, Henderson Papers, PRO.

52. Henderson to Halifax 25/8/38. DBFP, 3, II, No.689.

53. Henderson to Halifax 26/7/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.551.
Henderson to Cadogan 2/6/38, Henderson Papers, PRO.

54. Henderson to Strang, 2/8/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.568.

55. ibid., 22/8/38, No.665.

56. Addison told the Foreign Office that there were only six million ethnic Czechs while other minorities amounted to eight millions. As usual Addison attacked the record of the Czech Government. His views were passed on by Phipps in Paris, with whom he was staying, although Phipps noted that Addison was 'violently anti-Czech'. Ivo Mallet of the F.O. minuted that 'certain of the figures he quotes are inaccurate', C 3745/194/18 FO 21717, PRO.

57. Footnote 16 refers above; 'Mason Mac' as he was generally known was an eccentric character who once volunteered to shoot Hitler dead. Henderson's old colleague Walford Selby had served with MacFarlane in Vienna, and praised his steadiness and 'consistently good advice'. Diplomatic Twilight, p.27. Others, like Cadogan, thought him excitable.

58. E. Butler, Mason-Mac. The Life of Lieutenant-General Sir Noel Mason-MacFarlane, London, 1972, p.78; Mason-MacFarlane Papers, MM28, Imperial War Museum.

59. Henderson to Halifax, enclosing MacFarlane's report 27/7/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.552.

60. Henderson to Halifax 3/8/38, DBFP, 3, II, Nos. 573, 575, 576.

61. ibid., 4/8/38, No.577.

62. Failure of A Mission, p.143.

63. K. Middlemass, The Diplomacy of Illusion, pp.272-3. Mason MacFarlane's own account doe not quite tally with that of Middlemass. He wrote that he failed to get a 'very senior officer to appreciate the gravity of his information'. He was told he claimed to go back to Berlin and to stop 'wasting time in coming home with stories that were, in all probability unfounded' (this was unfair as Henderson had sent 'Mason-Mac' back to London). MacFarlane also saw Halifax, Vansittart and Horace Wilson. Halifax wanted to send Hitler a personal message which MacFarlane thought would be a waste of time and only annoy Ribbentrop. Mason Mac-Farlane Papers, MM28; Halifax has also been described as being 'completely flummoxed by Mason-MacFarlane's news', Butler, p.76. P. Meehan in The Unnecessary War points out that Mason MacFarlane had been warning the War Office about German preparations since at least January 1938, pp.100-101; see also R. Strauch, Sir Nevile Henderson. Britischer Botschafter im Berlin 1937-9, Bonn, 1959, pp.134-8.

64. A surprising comment on the fact of it from a man who was prepared to assassinate Hitler. On the von Koerber relationship, see von Klemperer, p.97, and Henderson to Halifax 8/8/38 covering MacFarlane's report, DBFP, 3, II, No.595.

65. Henderson to Halifax 17/8/38, DBFP, 3. II, p.108, fn.2.

66. ibid. (enclosure from Military Attaché), 17/8/38, No.635.

67. ibid., 19/8/38, No.649.

68. Middlemass, p.271.

69. MacFarlane's subsequent pessimistic assessment of morale in the Czech army did not agree with that of the British Military Attaché in Prague Brigadier H.B.C. Stronge; see Personal Memorandum relating to the state of morale and general readiness for war of the Army of the Czechoslovak Republic, Imperial War Museum.

70. M. Alexander, The Republic in Danger: General Maurice Gamelin and the Politics of French Defence 1933-1940, Cambridge, 1992, p.27; Middlemass, pp.246-7.

71. Halifax to Henderson 11/8/38, No.608; Henderson to Halifax 19/8/38, No.647.

72. ibid., No.647.

73. P.M.H. Bell, France and Britain 1900-1940. Entente and Estrangement, London, 1996, p.215.

74. Henderson to Halifax 12/8/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.613.

75. Henderson to Halifax 28/8/38, No.672.

76. Bell, p.213.

77. Conclusions of the Chiefs of Staff 14/9/38, 770/771, PRO.

78. Henderson would have known that the Empire agreed. Lyons to Chamberlain 2/9/38, Documents on Australian Foreign Policy, Vol.1937-8.

79. Henderson himself made the analogy with the position in 1914, when uncertainty about Britain's position may have contributed to the 'July Crisis', Henderson to Halifax 1/9/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.738.

80. DGFP, Series D, Vol.II, p.377.

81. ibid., Vol.2, p.536. For examples of French complaints about Henderson see DDF, 2 série, 1936-9, Tome X 10 June-2 September 1938, Nos.336, 338, 359. But see also the defence of Henderson by François-Poncet, his Berlin colleague in No.373.

82. Ribbentrop told von Weizsäcker on 19 August that he was sure no other nation would fight for the Sudetenland. E. von Weizsäcker, Die Weizsäcker Papiere 1933-1950, Berlin, 1974, p.136; P. Schmidt, Hitler's Interpreter, London, 1951, p.86; R. Spitzy, How We Squandered the

Reich, Norwich, 1997, p.67. Spitzy comments on how Frau von Ribbentrop 'began to work on her husband to steer him towards the promotion of an anti-British policy'.

83. This may sound far fetched, but the Germans did mount a misinformation campaign about Basil Newton being pro-Czech and anti-German and that this would interfere with Runciman's mission. It was Henderson who warned the Foreign Office about this nonsense. Henderson to Halifax 12/8/38, FO 800/371, Halifax Papers, PRO. Newton's anti-Czech credentials were impeccable, as the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Winterton had noted while representing the British Government at the funeral of Tomas Masaryk in 1937. A.H. Brodrick, Near to Greatness. A Life of Earl Winterton, London, 1991, p.39.

84. F. Roberts, Dealing With Dictators. The Destruction and Revival of Europe 1930-1970, London, 1991, p.39.

85. As Sir Frank Roberts recognises on p.39 also. For further details on the circumstances surrounding Phipps' removal, see J. Herman, 'The Paris Embassy of Sir Eric Phipps 1937-39', unpublished Ph.D thesis, LSE, 1996.

86. Vansittart wrote scathingly of Henderson saying that 'while wishing to avoid standing up, and anxious to run away [he] makes no attempt to say how far he would run'. Vansittart minute 9/8/38, Vansittart Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge.

87. Halifax to Henderson 6/9/38, FO 800/314, Halifax Papers, PRO. In her zeal to damn Henderson, Patricia Meehan wrongly attributes this statement to Henderson as an example of his confused thinking! The Unnecessary War, p.160.

88. A point made to the writer in Henderson's defence. Interview with Sir Frank Roberts 10/10/96.

Chapter Six

From Nuremberg to Munich

The month of September 1938, when he made a significant contribution to British policy-making, was a crucial one in Henderson's career. He was however left exhausted, and pessimistic by the process of coercing the Czechs into ceding the Sudetenland at the Munich Conference.

Henderson's role was important in three respects. He was averse to the British Government's suggestion that Hitler be sent a personal warning about the consequences of an attack on Czechoslovakia. He was involved in the evolution of the so-called Plan Z whereby Neville Chamberlain was to fly to Germany to see Hitler in an attempt to reach an accommodation over the Sudetenland. And he advised Chamberlain not be swayed by the pleas of German oppositionists, like Gordeler and von Kleist, that Britain could assist Hitler's overthrow by standing up to him. This, according to the anti-Nazis, would create the scenario which would enable them to overthrow Hitler, because a war would be unpopular in Germany.

The dangers of antagonising Hitler by passing on warnings had been a preoccupation with Henderson since, what he saw as the disastrous consequences of the May Scare. On 4 September 1938, Henderson reiterated his fears about the damage that could be done. He repeated to Cadogan what he had said on 21 May. It was 'more and more brought home to

me', Henderson wrote, 'not that I did not always appreciate it - how unfortunate was the public interpretation of our action here on May 21st'. This warning had been 'resented especially by Hitler'.[1] This old concern was linked in early September to Henderson's new preoccupation with the dangers of presenting Hitler with an ultimatum at the time that the Party Rally in Nuremberg was about to start.

Henderson was unwilling to pass on a warning about the consequences of German aggression for a variety of reasons. One was that he had seen what he regarded as the counter-productive consequences of the May warning. Another was his awareness of Hitler's abnormal psychology, and there are numerous references in Henderson's despatches to Hitler's irrational behaviour as a reason for not risking a repetition of the 21 May warning.

Hitler, according to Henderson, was in a state of 'extreme nervous tension' on 12 September at Nuremberg, and 'his abnormality seemed to me greater than ever'.[2] On the same day Henderson expressed his anxiety that Hitler might 'have crossed the border-line of insanity'.[3] Hence Henderson's particular reluctance to provoke Hitler by passing on such a warning at the time of the Party Rally.

Another reason for Henderson's unwillingness to risk provoking war by passing on a warning to Hitler, was that he had no faith in the ability of the Czechs to hold out against a German attack. On 4 September he told Halifax that 'the Czechs would collapse much quicker than people think, after the first week or two', a view which he shared with Mason MacFarlane.[4] Thus, Henderson believed, Beneš must not be allowed to drag his feet and force Britain into

an unwinnable war which could not save Czechoslovakia. Increasingly, Beneš reminded Henderson of the unfortunate Austrian Chancellor, Schuschnigg. Beneš seemed 'cast to play the same role ... and will end up doing incalculable harm to his country and possibly to all of us.'[5] Pressure had therefore to be continually applied to Beneš before it was too late.

The last reason for Henderson's unwillingness to pass on a warning was his conviction, already underlined in Chapter Five, that the German claim for autonomy in the Sudetenland was just. Ultimately also, if it avoided the war which Henderson, like Neville Chamberlain, so dreaded, he was willing to approve the secession of the frontier area to Germany. Britain and its empire could not be put in jeopardy to save the integrity of the Czechoslovak state.[6] Henderson began by opposing the fragmentation of Czechoslovakia, but as the Sudeten crisis worsened, he came to see the loss of the Sudetenland to Germany as a necessary evil.

Henderson was also directly involved in a second major thrust of British policy in early September. This concerned the plan for a personal visit to Germany by Chamberlain, as the Prime Minister became more and more alarmed by the possibility that war might break out over the Sudeten issue. Runciman's mediation had merely strengthened British sympathy for Sudeten German grievances, but there was still a distinct danger that Hitler might attack the Czechs and throw aside the diplomatic option. This danger brought about the formulation of Plan Z, which might have actually involved a visit by Chamberlain while the Nuremberg Rally was taking place between 5 September and 12 September.

Henderson was notably cautious about the efficacy of Plan Z. When Horace Wilson, Chamberlain's Chief Diplomatic Adviser, wrote to Henderson about it on 9 September, he referred to 'the talk we had the day you left', and expressed Chamberlain's view that 'the moment is approaching when it might have to be decided to adopt it' [that is Plan Z].' In this correspondence Chamberlain's identity was disguised under the codename X. Henderson, however, wrote back that 'the moment for X is not come in my opinion. Here at Nuremberg it is out of the question.'[8] He appears to have been told about the projected visit during his visit to London between 28 and 31 August. This at least is the inference behind Wilson's reference to 'the day you left', and this interpretation is supported by what Henderson subsequently wrote in his memoirs about his visit to London 'in the course of which the idea of actual personal contact took concrete shape'.[9]

Henderson did not think it appropriate for Chamberlain to interrupt the Party Rally at Nuremberg by a personal intervention, and, he told Wilson on 9 September, much would depend on Hitler's closing speech on 12 September.

> I don't believe Hitler will bang the door though he may bang it if I make another communication like May 21st. Göring said again yesterday to me, 'Chamberlain and Hitler must meet.'

Henderson agreed, but the time was not ripe, in his view, until after 12 September. Henderson remained fearful of 'the unpredictability of Hitler and his moods'.[10]

But once more he hammered home his point about the morality of the Sudeten-German case. It was possible, he

wrote to Halifax on 13 September, that Britain might be forced into a shameful surrender to avoid war. But if she were, Britain could claim justly that this would be a consequence of 'adhering to the principle of self determination ... This principle we fought for in war'.[11] This was a reiteration of Henderson's insistence that the Britain position on the Sudetenland be 'morally copper bottomed'.[12]

Henderson's behaviour at the Nuremberg Rally, occasioned by his sincere desire to avoid war, has opened him up to both criticism and ridicule. He had clashed bitterly with Vansittart about the very issue of whether he should attend the Rally at all in 1937 (see Chapter Two). But Halifax had agreed that he should go in 1938, in a personal letter to Henderson on 8 August, and hoped that an interview could be arranged with Hitler. Halifax had hoped that such an interview could be used to warn Hitler about the consequences of German aggression; but by early September, Henderson was determined to resist such an instruction.[13]

Henderson's behaviour at Nuremberg was certainly odd. He left Berlin on 6 September, and while meaning to stay in Nuremberg for thirty-six hours, he actually spent five days there. Amazingly, he 'foolishly omitted to provide myself with any materials [for writing]' and 'was obliged to use for the purpose the blank pages torn from some detective stories which I happened to have taken with me'.[14] Even more bizarre was the episode when Henderson met Unity Mitford, the aristocratic British admirer of Hitler. When Miss Mitford 'squeaked out Heil Hitler to me, I was so dumbfounded that I forgot my usual retort which is "Rule Britannia"'.[15]

Henderson complained bitterly about the cramped conditions in the wagon-lit in which he was forced to live, while attempting to keep in contact with London via his colleagues in the Berlin Embassy. But these issues pale before the serious accusations made against Henderson's behaviour during his five-day stay. They are that he made indiscreet remarks at the Rally which exceeded his brief, and that, in the words of the Labour MP, Josiah Wedgwood, he 'smiled, fraternised with evil, and did not stand apart with nose in the air'.[16]

Henderson was allocated an SS minder, called SS Untersturmbanführer Baumann, who reported Henderson's alleged indiscretions to his superiors. But these do not seem to have amounted to very much, and the more telling accusations were made by the maverick correspondent of 'The News Chronicle', Ian Colvin. The one exception being a comment reported by Baumann, when Henderson 'expressed his aversion to the Czechs in very strong terms'.

There is no evidence that Baumann was Henderson's 'SS friend', as Patricia Meehan alleges.[17] Neither does it seem fair to prefer the testimony of an SS officer like Baumann, to that of German diplomats like von Dirksen and von Hassell, who both knew Henderson well.

Colvin appears to be a more reliable witness. He claimed to have heard Henderson say at a party at Nuremberg that he could not

> warn the Führer and talk policy to him at a Party occasion. If I did he wouldn't listen, wouldn't understand it. It would have the wrong effect and send him off the deep end. They must start with the

Czechs.[18]

However, this alleged comment by Henderson was recorded twenty-seven years after the event, and Colvin's credentials as an historian have been questioned. One analyst has expressed surprise about 'how Colvin obtained the influence he undoubtedly had at this time', and suggested that his two books on the period 'should be treated with caution'.[19] Colvin was, after all, a close associate of the embittered Vansittart, to whom he fed information about Germany; and Cadogan, another recipient of his accounts found him to be 'rather highly strung'.[20] Colvin was to be a major source of alarmist rumours about German intentions early in 1939, which proved to be highly inaccurate. Crucially, Colvin does not state to whom Henderson's remarks were made. If it is legitimate to raise the issue of Henderson's capacity for indiscretion, it is also legitimate to query the bona fides of some of his accusers. It is also true that the Germans were not beyond mischief-making where British diplomats were concerned, as their attempts to spread rumours about Basil Newton being pro-Czech and anti-German underline.[21]

There had, however, been other complaints about Henderson from the French Minister in Prague, Lacroix, which worried Foreign Minister Bonnet because they seemed to raise questions about Henderson's commitment to the Anglo-French alliance. Bonnet was particularly concerned about Henderson's support for a plebiscite in the Sudetenland in mid-August. But his Berlin French colleague André François-Poncet came to Henderson's aid in a telegram on 15 August.

> 'L'éventualité à laquelle ces communications font allusion n'a jamais été conçue par mon collègue que

comme une sorte d'expédient in extremis et pour le cas où l'on voudrait a tout prix éviter un choc belliqueux.

Mais de ce qu'il ait parlé librement il serait inexact et injuste de conclure qu'il préconise ouvertement dans ses propos une telle solution.[22]

François-Poncet, unlike most of Henderson's critics, was the man on the spot, who had day to day dealings with him. He also had an appreciation of the difficulties involved in dealing with a totalitarian régime.[23]

Whatever Henderson may or may not have said at social gatherings at Nuremberg, there is no doubt about what he was saying to the Foreign Office. This brought him into conflict with Halifax.

Halifax had written to Chamberlain on 6 September about the question of what Henderson should, or should not, say to Hitler at Nuremberg. He wanted Henderson to make it clear to Hitler that if he attacked the Czechs 'this country would inevitably have to come to her assistance'. But then he had second thoughts and told Chamberlain that to speak in such terms at Nuremberg would be premature.

Rather confusingly Halifax then suggested a second formula for a warning that Henderson might use, saying that 'if France were ... to be involved in a war arising out of the present crisis Great Britain could not allow her to be defeated'. He recognised that Chamberlain might feel that nothing like this ought to be said by Henderson without consulting the Cabinet first.[24]

Henderson's own view, sent to Halifax on 6 September, about the usefulness of a warning, was clear cut. 'An

official démarche,' he said, 'will drive him [Hitler] to greater violence or greater menace ... another warning will not help.'[25] Henderson's position on the efficacy of a personal warning to Hitler at Nuremberg was unwavering. He believed that it would be both provocative, and counter-productive.

Halifax remained convinced of the usefulness of warning Hitler, even if only in an informal way. On 6 September he telegraphed his instructions to Henderson. He was not to ask for a special interview with Hitler at Nuremberg but to seek to speak to him privately. If he was successful, Henderson was to speak along the lines he had already followed in the interviews with Ribbentrop and Weizsäcker on 1 September, and warn Hitler 'not to underestimate the dangers to the general peace of Europe'. Halifax concluded by saying that, 'Even if you do not have opportunity of speaking to Hitler, you will no doubt use this kind of language to any other leaders that you may meet at Nuremberg.'[26] Henderson's language in the Ribbentrop-Weizsäcker interviews had already been approved by the Foreign Office (see Chapter Five).

Halifax was still exercised by the chance of a meeting between Henderson and Hitler therefore, and in a following telegram on 6 September he hoped that Henderson would agree with his view about a meeting and the tone of his instructions.[27]

Henderson did not agree, writing on that same day to Cadogan in emotive style about the dangers of war. 'And all the world is looking to us to save civilisation. So we must take the bull by the horns.' He thought that the chances of

peace surviving Hitler's Nuremberg speech on 12 September were only 50-50, unless the Czechs made concessions.[28]

Cadogan himself was engaged in a parallel debate in London about the issue of any warning that the Foreign Office might give to Hitler. On 4 September he noted in his diary: 'After my reading of the papers, I gave some support to the idea of private warning to Hitler that we should have to come in to protect France.'[29] Four days later on 8 September he was engaged in further debate with Halifax, Vansittart, Chamberlain and Simon, this time about whether Chamberlain should go to Germany.

> PM now against telling H[itler] he is coming and he produced no draft ... He seems to want simply to wait till after Nuremberg and then spring himself on Germany. I think we want to do what we can to prevent Hitler committing himself irretrievably at Nuremberg.[30]

Henderson's advice about Chamberlain's visit to Nuremberg had plainly prevailed therefore, and the result of these consultations was that on 9 September Halifax sent instructions, via Kirkpatrick at the Berlin Embassy, to Henderson in Nuremberg about the extent of British obligations to France, which were to be made clear to the German Government. 'France thus having become involved,' the telegram ran, 'it seems to his Majesty's Government inevitable that the sequence of events must result in a general conflict from which Great Britain could not stand aside.'[31]

Henderson was now thoroughly alarmed. The next day, 10 September, his response reached the Foreign Office, conveying his views about the dangers of using such language

to the Germans. Such a warning, he argued, 'would be ill-timed and disastrous'; but, he added, if a warning had to be passed on 'it is clearly most important that démarche should be kept secret'.[32] A second strongly-worded telegram from Henderson, via the Embassy Counsellor Ogilvie-Forbes, was sent on the same day.

> The most fatal thing [Henderson wrote] would be any repeat of May 21 threat ... As it is the tale of a London aeroplane with a message for me is enough to start stories of another May 21, and that must be avoided at all costs. It will drive Hitler straight off the deep end.[33]

Cadogan noted his subordinate's agitation in his diary that night. 'NH violently against a warning and Ministers decide to hold their hand. I think right.'[34] So Henderson's advice prevailed, as Cadogan acknowledged the next day: 'Yesterday on NH's recommendation we refrained from further warning owing to possible irritant effect'.[35] The aftermath of the May Scare shows that Henderson was right in his analysis of Hitler's reactions to provocation, for he 'spotted earlier than most the degree to which Hitler was liable to be driven to more extreme action by overt attempts to put pressure upon him'.[36] And Cadogan agreed with Henderson's judgement about the warning.

Others did not, notably Duff Cooper the First Lord of the Admiralty, whose diary entry for 12 September stated that amongst numerous Foreign Office telegrams which Cabinet members had been obliged to read were

> a series of messages from Henderson which seemed almost hysterical, imploring the Government not to

insist upon his carrying out his instructions which he was sure would have the opposite effect to that desired. And the Government has given way. By the Government now is meant the PM, Simon, Halifax and Sam Hoare. Henderson had already left for Nuremberg, therefore it seemed to me that the Cabinet was called at the worst possible moment.[37]

Yet Duff Cooper had agreed with Henderson that British firmness had nothing to do with deterring Hitler in the May Crisis. But his testimony also supports the view that over the question of the Nuremberg warning it was Henderson's opinion that prevailed, regardless of what Duff Cooper thought of it personally.[38]

In fact the Government's decision to heed Henderson's advice was soundly based. For when

> a senior ambassador writes 'I am acquainted with the views of HMG and being on the spot I feel that they would be well advised to trust me,' a government has to have powerful reason for disregarding his words; when that view coincides with the thinking of the Prime Minister and the head of the diplomatic service, it provides powerful reinforcement for that thinking.[39]

It is also true that constant warnings to Germany which were not followed by any action would be regarded by Hitler as bluff.[40] Pointless threats were a diplomatic tactic which Henderson had castigated throughout his Foreign Office career, especially as a result of his experience in the Chanak crisis.[41] Henderson had indeed reminded Horace Wilson on 9 September that 'I am acquainted with the views

of HMG and being on the spot I feel that they would be well advised to trust me.'[42] His victory over the Nuremberg warning shows that the Government and Cadogan did ultimately defer to his judgement. Another option was always open to them, insistence that Henderson deliver the warning to Hitler in person at the Rally. Vansittart had argued in favour of this, but he had been overruled.[43]

In its way Henderson's logic was impeccable. The Czech case over the Sudetenland was not a moral one. Beneš was in the wrong, and it was the British task to persuade him of this. Threatening Hitler, therefore, in a manner likely to provoke a war which was not morally justifiable, would be foolish and have catastrophic consequences for Britain and its empire. Henderson would go to the limits of diplomacy to prevent this.

Halifax also accepted Henderson's analysis, whatever he may have said later about Hitler's behaviour and state of mind, which must have contributed to the decision not to send a warning. He told the Cabinet meeting on 12 September that 'he thought Herr Hitler was possibly or even probably mad'. Was it wise to provoke a madman? Halifax thought not.[44]

Halifax's actual capitulation to Henderson's view that no warning should be sent to Hitler was contained in his telegram of 10 September. Henderson was told that the withdrawal of the instruction to warn Hitler either publicly or privately, was subject to 'an understanding that you have in fact already conveyed to Herr von Ribbentrop and others substance of what you were instructed to say in my telegram of yesterday'.[45] If this was the case, Halifax told Henderson,

'I agree you need make no further communication'.[46] The German documents contain no record of what Henderson actually said to Ribbentrop on 1 September, and Halifax was accepting here Henderson's assurance that he had conveyed the British Government's view accurately and vigorously to the Nazi leadership. Doubts have been expressed about whether Henderson did warn the Germans properly in this period. There is however, existing evidence, which historians have ignored, that Henderson did indeed carry out his instructions to speak in forceful terms to important German figures.[47]

On 14 September, just after his return from Nuremberg to Berlin, Henderson had an interview with Ulrich von Hassell, the former German Ambassador in Rome. Von Hassell also had links with the German opposition to Hitler. Henderson's account, given in the relevant volume of the British Foreign Policy Documents, tells us that

> Since he was seeing General Keitel, who is a friend of his, later in the afternoon, I asked Herr von Hassell to tell the General that while nothing will be more distasteful to British nation than to go to war with Germany again, it would be impossible for us to keep out if Germany acted in any way which would compel France to come to the aid of Czechoslovakia. Herr von Hassell undertook to give this message faithfully and, in strict confidence, I told him of Prime Minister's projected visit to Chancellor in interests of peace.[48]

Von Hassell's diary corroborates exactly what Henderson said in his telegram. Von Hassell wrote

I lunched alone with Henderson. He was very frank and friendly but at the same time visibly agitated. He explained the English position to me as follows: (1) to work with all their might to preserve the peace, even if this involves sacrifices; (2) but if Germany resorts to force, and if France finds it necessary to act, the English will march with France.

He complained bitterly about Ribbentrop, who was chiefly responsible for the fact that England and Germany were not getting along better. Furthermore he was of the opinion that all might yet go well if the Nazi régime did not make itself so terribly hated throughout the world, and especially in England. Finally he said he had made a final attempt and induced the British Cabinet to propose Chamberlain's visit to Hitler. It was decided yesterday evening. This morning at eight o'clock he had informed Weizsäcker and Woermann, and he was now waiting for an answer. Unfortunately Ribbentrop was off somewhere with the Führer.

In my presence he telephoned Göring at Karinhall and explained the developments. Henderson had sworn me to secrecy, but when he heard that I was to see Keitel in the evening he asked me to tell Keitel what he had revealed to me. I did so and was surprised to observe that Keitel was manifestly astonished at England's readiness to march with France.[49]

Von Hassell's testimony is so important that it is

reproduced here in full. Several points of importance emerge. First of all, it is clear that Henderson was obeying Halifax's instruction of 10 September, to warn Ribbentrop 'and others' about the likely consequences of German aggression against the Czechs. Henderson had been ordered to do this as the price of Halifax's argument that he need not pass on a warning to Hitler in person.

Secondly, von Hassell's evidence also shows that he passed on Henderson's warning to Keitel, who would presumably have informed Hitler.[50] This was an intelligent move by Henderson, whose access to Hitler was constantly blocked by Ribbentrop. The inference behind von Hassell's diary entry, although he does not explicitly say so, is that Henderson spoke in similar terms to Göring on the telephone.

Lastly, Henderson had sufficient trust in von Hassell to tell him in confidence about Chamberlain's impending visit to see Hitler at Berchtesgaden on 15 September. This is a significant point in the context of Henderson's alleged gaffes. For Henderson appears to have been saying one thing to one sort of German (von Dirksen or von Hassell) and another to a second (Baumann). The question that has to be asked is whether the account given by the SS man Baumann is more reliable than that given by von Hassell. And whether Henderson would speak as frankly with Baumann as he would with von Hassell.[51] The von Hassell Diaries make it clear that on 14 September he was telling the Germans precisely what he claimed to be saying in his telegrams back to the Foreign Office. It also seems highly unlikely that Henderson, always renowned for being something of a snob, would unburden himself to someone like Baumann.

Apart from the von Hassell Diaries, additional support for Henderson has recently been provided by Ribbentrop's aide Reinhard Spitzy. Spitzy attests that 'Henderson was clear and outspoken with his continuous warnings' in the period when the two men knew each other in 1938-39. And unlike Ribbentrop, who believed that Henderson 'was only feigning friendship for Germany while in reality acting completely with Czech interests', Spitzy knew that Henderson was a convinced friend of Germany.[52] Henderson's problem was that Ribbentrop's animus against him was so extreme that nothing he said was likely to be believed by the Foreign Minister, who had also poisoned Hitler's mind against him. In these circumstances it is difficult to understand why Henderson has been accused of exercising such a malign influence. His advice to the Government about the warning to Hitler had been clear and consistent. He had carried out Halifax's instructions to warn other important German figures about the potential consequences of Hitler's policy on Czechoslovakia. And policy was made in the last analysis in Downing Street, and not in the Berlin Embassy. This policy was faithfully represented by Henderson in Berlin in September 1938. The assumption that somehow he could have altered Germany policy underlies most of the misconceptions about Henderson's role in Berlin.

Another assumption is that Henderson could have played a more positive role in encouraging the German opposition to Hitler. Henderson did, as has been shown, keep open his lines of communication with Weizsäcker, a shadowy figure whose policy of covert opposition from within has been regarded with scepticism by some historians. He also spoke

frankly to von Hassell, who by September 1938 had clearly thrown in his lot with the German Opposition. But the accusation remains that somehow Henderson, because of his negative attitude to the anti-Nazi opposition, weakened its resolve in the crucial period before the Munich Agreement on 29 September 1938.

One leading critic of Henderson's behaviour was Fabian von Schlabrendorf, who wrote in his post-war account about Henderson's negative influence. There could be 'no doubt', according to von Schlabrendorf

> that the reports and opinions voiced by the British Ambassador in Germany, Sir Nevile Henderson, played an important role in supporting the British Government's conciliatory attitude towards Hitler. We all had the feeling that Henderson was captivated by Hitler and National Socialism.

Von Schlabrendorf also comments on the unfortunate combination of Chamberlain, Halifax and Henderson for 'the purposes of the German anti-Nazi Resistance'.[53]

Von Schlabrendorf's bitterness about the appeasement policy is perhaps understandable, as he was incarcerated in Flossenburg Concentration Camp after narrowly escaping death after the abortive attempt on Hitler's life in 1944.[54] But his case against Henderson is a flimsy one, on two grounds. Henderson was following his Government's instructions in not attempting to subvert a legitimate régime with which Britain had a normal diplomatic relationship. He was alarmed during his return journey from the Nuremberg Rally to hear officials from the Wilhelmstrasse talking a lot of treason 'on the train'.[55] For this he has been ridiculed, but his

reaction was precisely the same as that of Vansittart when the German Oppositionist Carl Gordeler visited him earlier in 1938. Both Henderson and Vansittart then had difficulties about encouraging the overthrow of a legitimate, albeit odious, régime. This, it can be convincingly argued, is a perennial problem in the conduct of foreign relations when the accepted premise is that states choose their own form of government.

The second point, already made in Chapter Five, is that the German Opposition made revisionist territorial claims to Austria and the Sudetenland, which were indistinguishable from those of the Nazis. Even Vansittart eventually became disillusioned with people like Gordeler, and his vehemently expressed demands that Germany had a right to the Sudetenland and the Polish Corridor.[56] For Chamberlain, Halifax and Henderson, therefore, there was little obvious merit in assisting the opposition. War could only be justified by the clearest evidence of German aggression against neighbouring states.

A final observation also needs to be made about the post hoc judgement on Henderson's handling of the German Opposition. This is that leading historians of the German Resistance have not seen fit to credit Henderson with any especially significant role at all.[57] The main problem with the German Opposition was that it seemed predisposed to load the responsibility for its own failure to act decisively against Hitler onto Henderson and others, the responsibility for its own failure to act decisively. It seems a curious argument to say that the anti-Nazi opposition could only act when Britain and France did, and that their failure to act

against Hitler over Czechoslovakia justified the Opposition's own inaction.

That said, Henderson obviously did play a part in influencing the British attitude towards the German Opposition. But his advice was not always taken. When the Opposition emissary von Kleist came to London on 16 August, Henderson advised that Cabinet members should not see him, deeming that it 'would be unwise'.[58] Chamberlain still saw von Kleist in fact on 19 August and wrote to Halifax that 'He reminds me of the Jacobites at the Court of France in King William's time and I think we must discount a good deal of what he says'.[59] Chamberlain was eminently capable of making his own judgement about links with the German Opposition, without advice from Henderson.

Once the decision was taken that Chamberlain should fly to meet Hitler at Berchtesgaden, and subsequently at Godesberg and Munich, Henderson's role became less significant. This was because the Prime Minister was actually in Germany, and because Henderson's Foreign Office superior William Strang was present at the first meeting. Henderson's claim in the von Hassell interview that he had 'induced' the British Government to propose the Chamberlain visit is curious, as he makes no such claim in his memoirs. He was in fact instructed to arrange the visit by Halifax on 13 September.[60]

He did, though, score a minor triumph when he secured the exclusion of the tiresome Ribbentrop from the Berchtesgaden meeting which was to take place on 15 September. Even Hitler realised that the presence of von Ribbentrop, with his known anti-British bias, would hinder rather than help

the proceedings.'[61]

Even though Henderson's role became less prominent once the Berchtesgaden meeting had been arranged, disagreements with the Foreign Office continued. On 13 September (the day before the Cabinet meeting which endorsed the decision by Chamberlain to go to Berchtesgaden), Henderson raised the issue of the wording of one of Halifax's telegrams to the French Ambassador on 7 September. Halifax had said that British public opinion would not be prepared to support a war over German aggression against Czechoslovakia. Neither would the British Government, according to Halifax, 'be prepared to fight Germany'.[62] Henderson felt obliged

> to point out that in consequence of public warnings to Germany and of language which I was instructed to hold, and held in Berlin and Nuremberg, official circles and German nation have been led to believe that in the event of aggression on Czechoslovakia France would carry out treaty obligations and England would stand by France. If after all Germany deliberately and maliciously attacks Czechoslovakia and His Majesty's Government do no more than express their disapproval we shall be regarded in Germany with universal contempt.[63]

Two points were being made by Henderson in this telegram. As he had consistently done since his time in Turkey, Henderson decried the use of what he called in the same telegram 'impotent reprobation', the threat of force without the capacity, or will, to back it up. But Henderson also drew Halifax's attention to the degree of ambiguity in British policy. Telling the French that Britain could not

fight over the Sudeten question might have been part of the strategy of applying pressure in Prague and Paris; but in a leak-prone Quai d'Orsay it was a dangerous one which might well get back to the Germans. This would undermine Britain's game-plan.

Halifax's reply to Henderson's comments came on 14 September, and it was brusque and to the point. Halifax said that he had told Corbin, the French Ambassador in London, that in the event of war Britain might feel obliged to help France. But such support, warned Halifax, should not be regarded as automatic.

Then came a rebuff for Henderson. The British Government had not therefore

> as you imply gone so far as to declare 'that in the event of aggression on Czechoslovakia France would carry out her treaty obligations and England would stand by France', and still less should we be prepared to intervene on the sole ground of a German attack on Czechoslovakia.[64]

In this instance Henderson was being reprimanded for taking too tough a line with the Germans, by overstating Britain's commitment to France in the event of war over the Sudetenland. As the von Hassell interview shows, Henderson had been using such language to the Germans, and was now being told by Halifax that if Germany resorted to force, then British support would not be automatic. In the light of Halifax's reprimand Henderson might have felt justified in asking exactly under what circumstances Britain would intervene. 'Faulted for not sufficiently intimidating the Germans, he was reprimanded when he did.'[65]

Much effort had been applied by the Chamberlain Government in trying to make the Germans wary of British intervention if Hitler persisted with his aggressive policy. Henderson, as has been seen, was criticised for selling the pass by being indiscreet. It is therefore difficult to understand why, when Chamberlain met Hitler at Berchtesgaden on 15 September, he immediately conceded in principle the German demand for cession of the Sudetenland before securing the approval of Cabinet colleagues.

Chamberlain's personal notes about the interview show that he gave Hitler his 'personal opinion' that there could be no objection in principle to the cession of the Sudeten-land. He had prefaced his remarks by saying that he could not give an assurance on the principle of secession 'on behalf of the British Government who had not authorised me to say anything of the kind'.[6] But Chamberlain destroyed the negotiating stance by giving a personal opinion which could only encourage Hitler, undoubtedly aware of Chamber-lain's dominance over his Cabinet colleagues, to assume that their agreement would only be a formality. Henderson had devoted much energy to warning German leaders and diplomats about what would happen if Hitler attacked the Czechs, only for Chamberlain to sabotage his efforts in a single moment. In such circumstances it seems invidious to criticise Henderson for alleged indiscretions, when Chamberlain had undermined at a stroke the strategy of keeping the Germans guessing. Chamberlain had already made a considerable concession by flying to Germany at the age of sixty-nine, and for the first time, without needlessly conceding what the Germans wanted at the first hurdle. Small wonder that

Henderson tended to be confused by his instructions, and by Government policy.

The constant feature in Henderson's diplomacy in the last half of September was his determination that there should be no war. At Berchtesgaden Hitler had promised Chamberlain that he would not resort to war if he could help it. Henderson believed him, and told Halifax on 16 September that Hitler would not be 'so unwise as to seek for trouble just when he is on the point of obtaining his object without war'. Henderson's main anxiety, he told Halifax, was that Czech refusal to hand over the Sudetenland would drive Hitler to 'such violence as may in Herr Hitler's eyes, justify him in going back on his assurance'.[67]

Thus, although Henderson believed that Hitler did not want war, he was also convinced that he would march if self-determination was not conceded to the Sudeten Germans. 'At the risk of exceeding my proper functions,' Henderson told Halifax on 18 September, 'I am compelled to tell you that this is an absolute certainty.'[68]

Although Chamberlain had effectively preempted the British position by his comments at Berchtesgaden, he did go through the formality of securing Cabinet approval for the principle of self-determination for the Sudeten Germans. A second meeting with Hitler was then arranged at Bad Godesberg on 22 September. Henderson was enthusiastic about the prospects, as he believed that Hitler's agreement to a second meeting showed that he would do nothing until the meeting was over. His sources of information in Germany had told him that Hitler was impressed by Chamberlain.[69]

Henderson was still anxious that British diplomacy

should not drive Hitler to extremes. When Halifax's telegram of 20 September instructed him to complain about German troop movements near the Czech border, he objected, and took advantage of a caveat in the telegram. Halifax had concluded his instruction by saying 'unless you think it will do harm'.[70] In his reply on 21 September Henderson said that

> I am decidedly of the opinion that the message in your telegram ... would cause Herr Hitler resentment and disappointment ... I am consequently availing myself of your discretion not to transmit it.[71]

Henderson's decision was not surprising. What is surprising is the amount of latitude which Halifax allowed him at this moment of extreme crisis, which suggests that Halifax had confidence in the man on the spot.

Henderson's lack of sympathy for the Czech case over the Sudetenland was obvious throughout the summer of 1938, but the language used by Halifax was no more friendly. On 20 September the Czech Cabinet rejected the Anglo-French demand that areas of the Sudetenland that were more than 50 per cent German should be directly transferred to the Reich. Halifax responded in aggressive fashion, by saying that the Czech reply in no way met 'the critical situation which Anglo-French proposals were designated to avert'. He threatened the Czechs with the cancellation of Chamberlain's Godesberg visit, and this had the desired effect.[72] On the evening of 21 September the Czech Government accepted under protest the Anglo-French proposals.

The problem also arose of whether or not Britain should advise the Czechs to mobilise. Halifax had intended to

instruct Newton to tell the Czechs that Britain could not advise them against mobilisation. Now, in what seems like a fit of pique, after the Czech had rejected the Anglo-French proposals, he told Henderson that he had decided not to instruct Newton along those lines. The only other explanation for Halifax's volte-face lies in a reference to a message from Sir Horace Wilson (which has never been traced in Foreign Office archives) which may have caused Halifax to change his mind."[3] This must, presumably, have conveyed some anxiety that Czech mobilisation ahead of the Godesberg meeting would be provocative. In his telegram Halifax assumed that Henderson would agree with the suspension of the instructions about Czech mobilisation. A reply from Godesberg on 23 September passed on the agreement of the 'British Delegation' of which Henderson was part, about suspension."[4] Henderson was present at Godesberg together with William Strang, his Foreign Office superior.

Halifax's attitude towards the Czechs, which was quite independent of any advice he was getting from Henderson, and in accord with that of Chamberlain at Berchtesgaden, had thoroughly undermined Czech resolve. In the light of this behaviour, the attempts of his latest biographer to depict a 'Damascus Road' conversion to anti-appeasement after the Godesberg terms became known do not convince. Free from the influence of Chamberlain, who flew to Germany on 21 September, and influenced by Cadogan (whose doubts do seem to have been genuine) Halifax evinced a belated respect for Czech sovereignty not evident before. Meanwhile Henderson had to cope with Halifax's vacillation and tendency to obfuscation in his instructions. Halifax had after all told Henderson

on the eve of the Anschluss in March 1938 that it would be a tall order if Schuschnigg could not order a plebiscite in his own country if he wished. In September he was ordering the Czechs to hold plebiscites in the Sudetenland willy-nilly, and threatening them when they objected. This was the confusion of mind and action which Halifax had admitted to in his personal letter to Henderson on 6 September, likening himself to 'a blind man' groping in a bog.[75] Henderson, by contrast, had the virtue of consistency in his conviction that the Czech cause was a forlorn one, and he had always believed that Schuschnigg's decision to hold a plebiscite was a mistake.

At Godesberg on 22 September Chamberlain expected to reach agreement with Hitler. Instead when Chamberlain told Hitler that the British and French had agreed in principle to the cession of majority German areas of the Sudetenland (although there would need to be a plebiscite in areas where the German majority was 65 per cent or less), Hitler replied 'I'm sorry but that won't do any more'.[76] Instead, pointing out that there were Hungarian and Polish claims to Czech territory (a development which Henderson had foreseen), Hitler insisted that a new frontier for Czechoslovakia must be drawn up at once, and that the Czechs must evacuate all the disputed territory by 1 October at the latest. Chamberlain capitulated on the point about plebiscites by agreeing that only a bare majority would be needed in Sudeten areas, before returning to London to consult his colleagues.[77]

Despite the setback that Chamberlain had undoubtedly suffered at Godesberg, Henderson was convinced that war would have broken out 'had it not been for the Prime

Minister's two journeys'.[78] On 26 September Henderson was present at an interview between Hitler, Ribbentrop and Chamberlain's emissary Horace Wilson. Wilson told the Foreign Office subsequently that it was a 'very violent hour'.[79]

In the interview Hitler expressed doubts about Britain's ability to coerce the Czechs into agreement, and Henderson intervened.

> His Majesty's Government [he told Hitler and Ribbentrop] would see that the Czechs handed over the territory; they were in a position to put adequate pressure on the Czech Government. Moreover Hitler surely trusted Mr. Chamberlain.[80]

In fact Henderson was growing more desperate by the hour. His state of mind was reflected in a telegram to Halifax on 26 September, when he pleaded with the Foreign Office to ensure that if the British Government contemplated war

> in support of the Czechoslovak Government's refusal to accept German plan as it stands Sir Horace Wilson and I should be authorized to make this quite clear to the Chancellor this afternoon.[81]

Henderson feared a repeat of 1914, when the ambiguities of British policy had contributed to the July crisis. There must be no room for misunderstanding.

By 27 September the chances of preserving peace looked bleak. Halifax, influenced by Cadogan, had revolted against the Godesberg terms and reversed his position on Czech mobilisation on 23 September. The Czechs themselves rejected the Godesberg terms on 25 September as 'absolutely and unconditionally unacceptable'.[82]

Henderson had an interview with Göring on 26 September, when he was told that if war came and Russia honoured her 1935 alliance with the Czechs, she would be attacked by Germany's friend Japan. He also said that Poland would side with Germany. And Göring's aide, Bodenschatz, probably irritated Henderson by stating that his beloved Yugoslavia, under his friend the Regent Prince Paul, would also side with Germany. He then reiterated his warning to Halifax about the consequences of Czech resistance.

> If His Majesty's Government [said Henderson] do not at this eleventh hour advise the Czechs themselves in the name of humanity since we cannot in practice help them, to make best terms they can with Berlin, we shall be exposing Czechoslovakia to the same fate as Abyssinia.[83]

Henderson's observations were supported by comments by Mason MacFarlane in London about the war-readiness of the Czech army. MacFarlane had volunteered to undertake a perilous journey from Berlin to Prague, with a map and memoranda about the German demands for a new frontier, and this meant travelling through the Czech frontier defences. He was not impressed by what he saw, but the Foreign Office queried his credentials as an observer. R. Speaght of the Foreign Office minuted that it was

> surprising that Colonel MacFarlane should find Czech morale poor. This is certainly contrary to information from Mr Newton, to the view of the French General Staff (of General Gamelin's remarks yesterday) and to reports of reliable special correspondents.[84]

Henderson was influenced by MacFarlane's opinion, which strengthened his anti-war case, and sent him back to London to report to the Cabinet on 27 September. MacFarlane found that some Cabinet ministers thought Hitler was bluffing, 'and he did what he could to dispel this belief'.[85] Henderson agreed with him entirely in his assessment of Hitler's intentions.

In a telegram on 27 September Henderson warned that if the Czechs had not accepted the German plan by 2 p.m. on the following day, Hitler would order general mobilisation. At this point even Henderson appeared to accept that war was inevitable and that 'there is nothing to be done except to prepare for it. It is in any case quite useless to say anything more at Berlin'. Henderson remained convinced that war would be the ruin of Beneš and Czechoslovakia. He had also seen the Czech Chargé d'Affaires in Berlin on 27 September and urged upon him the virtues of an eleventh hour capitulation. Beneš, Henderson told his diplomatic colleague, 'would go down in history as a far greater man if he did this than if he involved his country and perhaps the world in disaster'.[86] But on 28 September Weizsäcker told Henderson that the Czechs must accept the German demand for withdrawal from the Sudetenland by 1 October, although the British were maintaining that this would be practically impossible.[87]

War was now very close and Horace Wilson sought another interview with Hitler on 27 September in which he warned the Chancellor that if Germany attacked Czechoslovakia, and forced France to stand by her commitment to the Czechs, 'the British Government would feel obliged to support her'.[88]

The contrast between what Halifax said to Henderson in his reprimand on 14 September, and what Wilson said to Hitler on 27 September is marked, and justifies Henderson's original protest about Halifax's language in the Corbin interview on 7 September. Wilson would undoubtedly have had the approval of both Chamberlain and Halifax before using such language, and Halifax is open to an accusation of confusing ambiguity regardless of his post-Godesberg conversion to a tougher stance.

On 28 September Henderson tried another tack, putting forward the idea that there should be direct contact between the Czechs and the Germans.[89] This meant abandoning the previous policy of Anglo-French mediation in Prague. At the same time Halifax was telling him about Chamberlain's plan to fly directly to Berlin, which he wanted Henderson to pass on to Hitler. Halifax was also willing to allow German troops into the Sudetenland by 10 October if this would placate Hitler.[90]

Henderson was working closely with his French colleague in these anxiety-ridden days, but François-Poncet thought that Halifax's planned concession was an irrelevance.[91] When the two men spoke on 28 September François-Poncet was about to have an interview with Hitler, and Henderson urged him to make it clear to Hitler that the Czechs could not reject Halifax's plan 'without forfeiting their claim to French support'. He himself was asking for an interview with Hitler to pass on Chamberlain's offer to come to Berlin.[92] Henderson still thought, like Chamberlain, that agreement could be reached 'within a week'.[93]

This view was not shared by Cadogan in London, who

rejected Henderson's suggestion that there should be direct Czech-German contacts. The Germans should be told, Cadogan instructed Henderson, that they would be dealing with the British.'[94] Despite this setback, Henderson could still see 'a glimpse of hope', and his belief in unorthodox diplomacy surfaced again with a suggestion that Stanley Bruce, the Australian High Commissioner in London, should be sent to Germany as a British plenipotentiary, now that Cadogan had vetoed his plan for direct contacts between Czechs and Germans.'[95] At this point Henderson received news that Hitler was about to invite Chamberlain to meet him in Munich.

The subsequent Conference at Munich on 29 September gave the Germans what they had asked for at Godesberg, and sanctioned the handover of the Sudetenland, starting on 1 October. But it agreed that the occupation should take place in five stages. The limited demarcation areas were to be occupied by 7 October, while the rest of the largely German areas of the Sudetenland would be occupied by 10 October. These areas were to be defined by an international commission set up by the four signatory powers (Germany, Italy, France and Britain). Henderson's joy at the achievement at Munich was evident in the letter of congratulations which he sent to Chamberlain. 'Millions of mothers,' he told Chamberlain, 'will be blessing your name tonight for having saved their sons from the horrors of war. Oceans of ink will flow hereafter in criticism.'[96] The last remark was to prove all too accurate.

Henderson had no doubts about the wisdom of Chamberlain's action and wrote later that 'the Munich compromise

had to be tried as a final attempt to save the world from the catastrophe of war'.[97] This view was shared by Halifax, who wrote in his memoirs that Munich was 'a horrible and wretched business, but the lesser of two evils'.[98]

Henderson's behaviour in the month of September 1938 is consistent in a number of respects. He believed that if the Czechs did not make concessions Hitler would march, and he was consistently critical of Beneš for his unwillingness to do so. His disregard for Czech sovereignty was as marked as his sympathy for Sudeten German grievances. And throughout the crisis he demanded that Britain should behave morally, and avoid a futile conflict over a lost, and unjust cause. For Henderson war was the ultimate evil, and to avoid it he would use any device to hand be it pressure on the Czechs or French, or personal interventions by Chamberlain, Runciman or even Stanley Bruce. He shared with his military attaché Mason-MacFarlane the belief that the Czechs could not hold out for long if war came, and that there was nothing that Britain or France could do to save them.

This assessment was correct. Czechoslovakia was surrounded on three sides by German territory, and had no common border with its nearest ally the USSR, whose intentions were uncertain. French military planning did not provide for a rapid offensive into Germany, and Britain was certainly in no position to offer immediate and effective aid to the Czechs, as the Chiefs of Staff persistently pointed out to Chamberlain. The Dominions were against war over the Sudetenland, and there was no prospect of American help either.

Henderson was also consistent in his demand that the

language of British diplomacy in Germany should be clear, notably in his telegram of 13 September to Halifax which earned him a rebuke. This demand was occasioned in part by his belief that British obfuscation in 1914 had contributed to the outbreak of war.

Both Henderson and Newton, his colleague in Prague, were by now of the opinion, as Henderson himself put it on 25 September that 'only immediate surrender of territories can save them [the Czechs] from tragedy'."

There was of course another solution to the Sudeten question for Britain, which was never advocated by Henderson. This was complete disengagement, which would have forced the Czechs, the French and the Germans to sort the problem out for themselves. Yet it was one the Foreign Office never seriously considered, and even Henderson, with his personal reservations about the French alliance, persisted in his belief that pressure must be applied in Prague to achieve a settlement.[100]

Once this option was rejected, the British stance was to warn off the Germans and coerce the French and the Czechs. Henderson's task was to warn the Germans about the consequences of an attack on the Czechs, and it was one he found difficult because he did not believe in the morality of the Czech case.

But Henderson also knew that Chamberlain, and indeed the Foreign Office, were hostile to the Czechs; and his frustration with his role of double bluff frequently surfaced. Henderson saw little point in pretending that Britain would fight for Czechoslovakia when it was clear that, after the May Crisis, the Chamberlain Government had

no intention of doing so. His tendency to query instructions however, or even to refuse to carry them out (as in the case of the Nuremberg warning) can be traced back to earlier phases of his diplomatic career.[101] He was not alone in doing so however, and even his redoubtable mentor Horace Rumbold had refused to carry out his instructions during the Chanak Crisis.[102] Henderson's action in the light of Hitler's response at the time of the May Scare, and the sensitivity of the occasion at Nuremberg, was both reasonable and justified.

In the last analysis, responsibility for ensuring that instructions were carried out lay with Halifax in London, just as the appropriate judgements about policy towards Czechoslovakia had to be made in Cabinet. To assume otherwise is to dangerously inflate the influence of diplomatic servants like Henderson.

Such an exaggeration of Henderson's role may have occurred in the prestigious British Foreign Policy Documents Series, which uses Henderson's personal letters in a manner not applied to other ambassadors, often in a way that is not flattering to him. Halifax's reprimands of Henderson are also published together with those of Sir Orme Sargent, 'whereas the mistakes of other members of the Foreign Office are hardly mentioned at all'.[103] The dangers of this sort of historical personalisation are obvious in the work of two of Henderson's critics, Lewis Namier, who began the historiographical assault on him, and more recently by D. Cameron Watt. Watt's line is to contrast Henderson unfavourably with other ambassadors of the period, where Namier indulges in character assassination.

Henderson was neither a fool nor a knave, although he can be accused of partiality. He may have rejoiced initially about Munich but he was soon in despondent mood. Writing to Halifax privately on 6 October Henderson remarked that the experience of the previous weeks had been

> intensely disagreeable and painful. I want to wash the taste out of my mouth, and I will rejoice from the bottom of my heart if you could remove me to some other sphere. I never want to work with Germans again ... As it is by keeping the peace we have saved Hitler and his régime and I am still in Berlin.[104]

Any sense of relief was therefore short-lived, but Halifax would not agree to Henderson's plea for a transfer.

Henderson's disillusionment reflected his physical and mental exhaustion after weeks of crisis. But in fact Munich represented a triumph for his diplomacy, as he had consistently opposed both the Czech position on the Sudetenland, and the issuing of threats to the Nazi régime which could only be counter-productive.[105] Henderson presented Munich as a triumph for Wilsonian idealism because of the victory of the ethnic principle over the power politics which, he believed, had resulted in the creation of Czechoslovakia in the post-war settlement. Henderson had also warned, quite rightly, against the encouragement of a German opposition whose goals were generally indistinguishable (excepting his racial imperative) from those of Hitler. Neither could Britain, he claimed, interfere in the internal affairs of another sovereign state, and subvert its government.

Henderson argued on two levels, one of principle, and

one of hard-headed realism. The Czech position was immoral, but Britain could not in any case fight a war which might jeopardise the existence of her empire. Chamberlain well knew that Britain's armed forces were in no position to take on the Germans, and her ally France was an uncertain quantity. Henderson remained convinced that 'in 1938 it was useless to presume to stop a dictator by saying "No" to him when he knew himself to be infinitely readier and stronger than his opponents'.[106] He pointed out persistently, and rightly that nothing that Britain and France could have done in the event of war would have saved the Czechoslovak state which was riven with ethnic dissension, from destruction. Faced by a powerful external foe, and minority Slovak, Hungarian and German discontent, Czechoslovakia was, as Henderson believed tragically, but surely, doomed.

References

1. Henderson to Cadogan 4/9/38, DBFP, 3rd Series, Volume II, No.772. See also Henderson to Halifax 10/9/38 (two references in the same telegram), No.823, Henderson to Halifax 12/9/38, No.839. In a letter to Halifax on 13 September Henderson also quoted the opinion of the former German Foreign Minister von Neurath that a repetition of 21 May would be the 'straw that broke the camel's back' as far as Hitler was concerned. Henderson to Halifax 13/9/38, FO 800/371/269, Henderson Papers, PRO.

2. ibid., Henderson to Halifax 12/9/38, No.837.

3. ibid., 12/9/38, No.839. See also Henderson to Halifax 13/9/38 which refers to a meeting between the Ambassador and Hitler at the Nuremberg Rally. An informant told Henderson that Hitler 'has become quite mad'. Henderson added that he 'had heard that for months'. Henderson to Halifax 13/9/38, FO 800/371/269, Henderson Papers, PRO.

4. Henderson to Halifax 4/9/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.771; although MacFarlane's knowledge of the Czech army was sketchy, and clashed with that of his counterpart Stronge in Prague. This fact was acidly commented on by Cadogan who wrote in his diary for 27 September, 'Unfortunately Mason MacFarlane ... also here, and he painted gloomy picture of Czechoslovakia. What does he know about it?' Cadogan Diaries, p.107. See also Newton to Halifax, No.794 in DBFP for Stronge's assessment of the Czechoslovak army. To be fair to MacFarlane his assessment was shared by Winterton the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who wrote in his diary for 20 September 1937, while on a visit to Czechoslovakia, 'I did not think much of what I saw of the Czechoslovak Army'. A.H. Brodrick, Near to Greatness. A Life of Earl Winterton, London, 1965, p.230.

5. Henderson to Halifax 4/9/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.771.

6. Oliver Harvey noted in his diary on 6 September that 'Henderson in Berlin sends streams of telegrams to emphasize the urgency of settlement', Harvey Diaries, p.169.

7. Wilson to Henderson 9/9/38, FO 800/371/314, Halifax Papers, PRO.

8. Henderson to Wilson 9/9/38, FO 800/371/269, Henderson Papers and FO 800/371/314, Halifax Papers, PRO.

9. Failure of A Mission, p.144.

10. Henderson to Wilson 9/9/38, Henderson Papers, PRO.

11. Henderson to Halifax 13/9/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.849.

12. ibid., 12/8/38, No.613.

13. Halifax to Henderson 8/8/38, FO 800/371/314, Halifax Papers, PRO.

14. Failure of A Mission, p.145.

15. Henderson to Halifax 20/9/38, DBFP, 3, II, Appendix I, p.654.

16. J. Wedgwood, Memoirs of A Fighting Life, London, 1941, p.225.

17. Meehan, pp.161-4; Ms Meehan's criticisms are fairly trivial. One relates to Henderson's desire to 'eat sausages in a real old Nuremberg restaurant'. Baumann's account of Henderson's remarks is cited on p.163, together with the comment on Sir Nevile's gastronomic preferences. The one exception being a comment reported by Baumann when Henderson 'expressed his aversion to the Czechs in very strong terms', Meehan, p.163.

18. I. Colvin, Vansittart in Office, London, 1965, p.239.

19. W.J. West, Truth Betrayed, London, 1978, pp.133-4. Colvin's father Duncan was a personal friend of Vansittart and Winston Churchill.

20. Cadogan to Ogilvie-Forbes 18/4/38, FO 800/371/294, Cadogan Papers, PRO.

21. For details of this smear campaign, see Chapter Five, footnote 83.

22. Bonnet to François-Poncet 11/8/38, No.359, and François-Poncet to Bonnet 15/8/38, No.373, DDF, 2 série, 1936-9, Tome X, Paris, 1976.

23. The French documents referred to above had not been published when Ms Vaughan Baker wrote in 1975. They were not referred to in the theses by Robert Cowie and Thomas Kelly in 1979.

24. Halifax to Chamberlain 6/9/38, FO 800/371/314, Halifax Papers, PRO.

25. Henderson to Halifax 6/9/38, Halifax Papers, PRO; Henderson also claimed to have spoken to Göring 'with brutal frankness' about the consequences of a German attack. Henderson regarded Göring as a more reasonable recipient of such a warning.

26. Halifax to Henderson 6/9/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.784.

27. Halifax to Henderson 6/9/38, No.792.

28. Henderson to Cadogan 6/9/38, No.793.

29. Cadogan Diaries, 4/9/38, p.94.

30. ibid., 8/9/38, p.95.

31. Halifax to Kirkpatrick (the First Secretary at the Berlin Embassy) 9/9/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.815.

32. Ogilvie-Forbes to Halifax 10/9/38, No.818.

33. Ogilvie-Forbes to Halifax 10/9/38, No.819.

34. Diaries, 10/9/38, p.96.

35. ibid., 11/9/38, pp.96-7; Anthony Eden agreed that 'he saw the point of not sending the warning in view of Henderson's advice' when he saw Halifax on 10 September but added ambiguously that 'he mistrusted his judgement'. Harvey Diaries 10/9/38, p.96. But Eden's latest biographer David Dutton notes that when Eden visited Halifax for a second time on 11 September he told Halifax that in his view 'we could not have done otherwise'. D. Dutton, Anthony Eden, London, 1997, p.503, fn.97.

36. D.C. Watt, 'Chamberlain's Ambassadors' in M. Dockrill and B. McKercher, Diplomacy and World Power, London, 1996, p.152.

37. A. Duff Cooper, Old Men Forget, p.216.

38. ibid., p.211.

39. J. Charmley, Chamberlain and the Lost Peace, London, 1989, p.100.

40. K. Middlemass, The Diplomacy of Illusion, London, 1972, p.455.

41. Water Under the Bridges, p.109.

42. Henderson to Wilson 9/9/38, DBFP, 3, II, Appendix I, pp.647-8.

43. Cadogan Diaries 8/9/38, p.95; Cadogan's reaction to Duff Cooper's later resignation is instructive; 'Good riddance to bad rubbish', Cadogan Diaries, p.111. His increasing antagonism to Vansittart is also evident. Thus on 15 September, 'Re Van. Silly creatures - why don't they sack him.' Again on 17 September, 'Why not sack him,' Diaries, pp.98-100.

44. CAB 23/95 37 (38), Cabinet Conclusions, PRO.

45. Halifax to Henderson 10/9/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.825.

46. ibid.

47. Notably by Professor D. Cameron Watt. See Chamberlain's Ambassadors, p.152.

48. Henderson to Halifax 15/9/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.886.

49. U. von Hassell, The Von Hassell Diaries, New York, 1946, pp.2-3. There is some confusion in the von Hassell Diaries about the date of the interview with Henderson which von Hassell dates as Wednesday 4 September before Henderson went to Nuremberg. But the reference to 'Hitler's speech on Monday' (p.2) that is on 12 September, makes it clear that von Hassell is talking about Wednesday 14 September because the speech is referred to in the past tense as 'having left open the door for diplomacy'. In fact it makes little difference whether von Hassell saw Henderson before or after Nuremberg as his testimony shows that Henderson did carry out his instructions. It is surprising that Ms Vaughan B. Baker in her 1975 Ph.D., which is sympathetic to Henderson, misses this important piece of evidence.

50. Keitel was the head of the OKW, and generally regarded by the military as Hitler's poodle. He was nicknamed Laikaitel, a play both on his surname and Lakai, the German word for lackey. J. Fest, Plotting Hitler's Death, London, 1996, p.390.

51. Von Hassell knew Henderson well. He had served with him in Belgrade, Diaries, p.ix; von Hassell also wrote 'Nevile Henderson by the way was well informed on conditions and persons in Germany (ibid., p.117). On hearing of his death on 31 December 1942 von Hassell observed 'One witness less and one gentleman less!', p.279.

52. R. Spitzy to the writer, 31 December 1997; How We Squandered the Reich, p.242. Spitzy overheard an argument between Henderson and the Belgian Ambassador Count Davignon in the British Embassy when he referred to 'Those damned Czechs'. When he recounted this story to Frau von Ribbentrop, she refused to accept this evidence of Henderson's pro-Germany sympathy. Ribbentrop's absurd belief that Henderson was pro-Czech was paralleled by the apparent belief that Basil Newton was pro-Czech too.

53. F. von Schlabrendorf, The Secret War Against Hitler, Oxford, 1994, pp.93-4.

54. He might also have been influenced by some professional animosity towards Henderson from his old friend, and superior in Egypt, George Lloyd. When the two men met in London in the summer of 1939 Lloyd made 'some scathing remarks about Henderson's abilities and qualifications', von Schlabrendorf, p.96.

55. Henderson to Wilson 13/9/38, DBFP, 3, II, Appendix I, p.654; Meehan, p.168.

56. von Klemperer, p.114.

57. Klemens von Klemperer is something of an exception. J. Fest, Plotting Hitler's Death, London, 1996, M. Baigent and R. Leigh, Secret Germany. Claus von Stauffenburg and the Mystical Crusade Against Hitler, London, 1994, and the older classic study by J. Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, London, 1964, have virtually nothing to say about Henderson's relationship with the Germany opposition at all.

58. Henderson to Halifax 16/8/38, DBFP, 3, II, Appendix IV, p.683 (this telegram is not published in the official documents series and is only referred to in the Appendix).

59. Chamberlain to Halifax 19/8/38, ibid., p.686.

60. Failure of A Mission, p.144. Henderson refers merely to 'the idea of actual personal contact' without taking personal credit for it.

61. Failure of A Mission, pp.150. In contrast Henderson does say that the exclusion of Ribbentrop 'had been my idea'; P. Schmidt, Hitler's Interpreter, London, 1951, p.91. The exclusion of the unpopular Ribbentrop also had the enthusiastic support of Göring and von Weizsäcker. See also J. Weitz, Hitler's Diplomat, New York, 1992, p.180.

62. Halifax to Henderson 13/9/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.849; Halifax's original telegram to Phipps on 7 September has not been included in the relevant British Foreign Policy Documents volume.

63. Henderson to Halifax 13/9/38, ibid., No.849.

64. Halifax to Henderson 14/9/38, No.881.

65. Vaughan B. Baker, 'Nevile Henderson in Berlin: A Re-evaluation', Red River Historical Journal, No.4 (Winter, 1977), p.350. Ms Baker misses the crucial point about Henderson's telegram of 13 September, which is its reference to Halifax's language to Corbin on 7 September.

66. Notes by Mr Chamberlain of his conversation with Herr Hitler at Berchtesgaden on 15 September 1938, DBFP, 3, II, No.895.

67. Henderson to Halifax 16/9/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.903.

68. Henderson to Halifax 18/9/38, No.923.

69. ibid., 21/9/38, No.990.

70. Halifax to Henderson 20/9/38, No.977.

71. Henderson to Halifax 21/9/38, No.990.

72. Halifax to Newton 21/9/38, No.991.

73. Halifax to Phipps 22/92/38, No.1030, fn.1.

74. British Delegation Godesberg to Halifax 23/9/38, No.1035.

75. Halifax to Henderson 6/9/38, FO 371/800/314, Halifax Papers.

76. T. Taylor, Munich. The Price of Peace, London, 1979, p.806.

77. R. Kee, Munich. The Eleventh Hour, London, 1988, p.175.

78. Henderson to Halifax 26/9/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.1087.

79. Henderson to Halifax 26/9/38, No.1115.

80. Notes of A Talk Between Sir Horace Wilson and Herr Hitler 26/9/38, No.1118.

81. Henderson to Halifax 26/9/38, No.1103.

82. Documents on International Affairs 1938, Volume II, pp.236-8.

83. Henderson to Halifax 26/9/38, No.1126; Göring also referred to German telephone intercepts about allegedly insulting remarks made by Jan Masaryk about British leaders, including Chamberlain, to the Czech Government. Masaryk vehemently denied the allegations (DBFP, 3, II, No.1201) that he called Chamberlain 'this stupid, badly informed little man'. Dr Christopher Andrew is convinced by the German allegations in Secret Service, London, 1989, pp.400-401. Professor Watt also points out that the Germans also had some access to British diplomatic documents as a result of Italian espionage activities in Britain's Rome Embassy. Chamberlain's Ambassadors, p.148, fn.28. The Foreign Office was dubious about Göring's claims about the Poles. R. Speaght minuted that Hitler had 'no reason to be certain'. Ivo Mallet agreed adding on 26 September that 'I don't think that in certain circumstances, it is certain'. C 10677/1941/18 FO 371/21741, PRO.

84. Minute by R. Speaght 26/9/38, FO 371/217141 C106075/1941/8, PRO.

85. E. Butler, Mason-Mac. The Life of Lieutenant-General Sir Noel Mason-MacFarlane, London, 1972, p.84.

86. Henderson to Halifax 27/9/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.1145.

87. Henderson to Halifax 28/9/38, No.1155. Henderson also used the Abyssinia analogy in referring to the danger of the 'complete destruction of Czechoslovakia'.

88. Notes of A Conversation Between Herr Hitler and Sir Horace Wilson 27/9/38, No.1129.

89. Henderson to Halifax 28/9/38, DBFP, 3, II, Nos.1157.

90. Halifax to Henderson 27/9/38, Nos.1158, 1140.

91. Henderson to Halifax 28/9/38, No.1157.

92. ibid., No.1162.

93. Chamberlain's opinion was passed on by Halifax in telegram No.1158.

94. Note by Cadogan 28/9/38, No.1172.

95. ibid. The Dominions were solidly behind Chamberlain throughout the Sudeten crisis; which was why Henderson had this somewhat bizarre idea. He had corresponded with Bruce about Anglo-German relations in 1937. See Lord Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, London, 1954, pp.323-5, and also Lyons to Chamberlain 2/9/38, Documents on Australian Foreign Policy, Vol.I, 1937-8, No.245.

96. Failure of A Mission, p.168; see also Water Under the Bridges, p.211.

97. Water Under the Bridges, p.211.

98. First Earl of Halifax, Fullness of Days, London, 1957, p.198. For a defence of Munich put forward by two other Cabinet Ministers see Templewood, pp.322-324 and Viscount Simon, Retrospect, London, 1952, Chapter XIII.

99. Henderson to Halifax 25/9/38, DBFP, 3, II, No.1082.

100. This point is made in an interesting essay by Roy Douglas, see 'Chamberlain and Appeasement' in W. Mommsen and L. Kettenacker (eds.), The Fascist Challenge, London, 1983, p.83.

101. As for example over the question of his private letter to Prince Paul of Yugoslavia cited in Chapter Two.

102. Rumbold refused to deliver the British ultimatum to Turkey, and Henderson was a firm admirer of his handling of the crisis. Craig and Gilbert, p.439; Water Under the Bridges, p.109.

103. T. Desmond Williams, 'The Historiography of the Second World War' in E. Robertson (ed.), The Origins of the Second World War, London, 1971, p.43. Williams' criticisms have been studiously ignored by historians, but he accuses Namier of indulging in 'the play of ridicule', p.52 refers. D. Cameron Watt falls into the same trap in Chamberlain's Ambassadors. Watt ignores Williams' point about Henderson's letters, although he notes that DBFP publishes 'a copious selection' and

refers to 'poor Sir Nevile' in a scathing attack on Henderson on page 154. This should be compared with his partiality towards Sir Percy Loraine whom Orme Sargent certainly criticised in unpublished Foreign Office material, How War Came, London, 1989, p.350. Another key to the editing of DBFP may be given by the known antipathy of one of the editors, Rohan Butler, to the appeasers. The volumes on Czechoslovakia were also published in 1949 at the height of Namier's onslaught on Henderson in books like Diplomatic Prelude, London, 1948.

104. Henderson to Halifax 6/12/38, FO 800/314, Halifax Papers, PRO. Not surprisingly Ms Meehan chooses ridicule Henderson's gloom, Meehan, p.183.

105. Even Professor Watt concedes that Henderson was right about this. Chamberlain's Ambassadors, p.152.

106. Water Under the Bridges, p.212.

Chapter Seven

Interlude. October 1938-February 1939

Nevile Henderson was a very sick man by the autumn of 1938, with a cancer of the throat which needed immediate surgery, and necessitated a return to London. He left Berlin in the middle of October and only returned in February 1939. During this period, however, and despite his illness, Henderson remained in touch with Embassy colleagues like Ogilvie-Forbes, and corresponded with Halifax, Cadogan, and influential figures like Lord Londonderry. He continued, from afar, to try and influence the course of Anglo-German relations.

Henderson's conviction that he had a 'mission' to preserve good Anglo-German relations meant that he went home unwillingly, and he himself (with what could be regarded as vanity) describes his absence in the important post-Munich period as 'a minor disaster'. But he redeemed himself by adding 'I am not presuming to suggest that anything might have been altered by my presence in Berlin', although he thought that four months was far too long an absence.[1] This modesty reads oddly when it is recalled that Henderson believed that he had been selected by Providence to represent the British Government in Berlin, and his critics in the Foreign Office and elsewhere continued to believe that sending him back to Berlin after his sick leave would indeed be a disaster.[2] Henderson's caveat, however, does protect

him from Namier's charge of hubris.

During this period, with the exception of the two weeks that followed the Munich Agreement, Henderson was an invalid. But his prolonged absence from Berlin has also prompted historians to contrast his record as Ambassador unfavourably with that of Ogilvie-Forbes, who acted as his temporary replacement. A related issue is the extent to which Henderson's personality and behaviour had put, and continued to put, undue strain on the Embassy staff as a whole. The fact that the Foreign Office still opted, in February 1939, to send this sick, exhausted man back to Berlin has also come under critical examination. Historians have also questioned Halifax's failure to recall Henderson permanently, when he was withdrawn from Berlin in March as a protest against the German occupation of Bohemia and Moravia. The failure to do so, in the light of Halifax's known reservations about Henderson by early 1939, can only be described as bizarre. Henderson himself later admitted that it would have been 'natural, and possibly more politic, to have withdrawn me altogether'.[3]

During the short period between Munich and the start of his sick leave, Henderson had two major concerns. One was to warn the British Government about the weak state of Britain's aerial defences, about which Henderson had become increasingly concerned.

Henderson's concern about Britain's air defences emerged from his experience over Munich and the tension of the preceding weeks. On 11 October, a few days after his heartfelt plea to Halifax that he should be moved from Berlin (see Chapter Six). Henderson wrote to the Foreign

Secretary about 'the melancholy question of German air strength and the threat which it constitutes to our safety'. Henderson told Halifax that there was a division of opinion on this question between the two air attachés in Berlin. The senior man, Group Captain Vachell, thought that 'the strength of the German Air Force is grossly exaggerated', whereas the Assistant Air Attaché, Cooper (who, Henderson pointed out, had been in Germany much longer), was prone 'to err slightly on the side of pessimism'. This seems to have been a considerable understatement of Cooper's position because Henderson also reported him as saying that unless the British Government took steps to remedy the situation, 'our position in the air vis à vis Germany will be hopeless'.[4] Predictably, Henderson with his pessimistic assessment of the military situation, thought that Cooper the pessimist rather than Vachell ought to be consulted by London.

On October 12 Henderson was again reporting to Halifax about 'the reality of the German air peril'. He believed that the British authorities did not grasp the urgency of the situation and the immensity of German rearmaments in the air, which was 'at least double ours. In design and performance they are far ahead of us'.[5]

Henderson continued to express his concern about Britain's aerial weakness when he was back in Britain. In this case his correspondent was Lord Londonderry (the former Secretary of State of Air 1931-5). Henderson wrote to him on 12 December about his concern over Britain's lack of anti-aircraft guns and went on

> Personally I would shrink from any approach to

> Germany till we are in a position to say to her, 'Make war if you like but realise that though yr [sic] aeroplanes may bomb London, 75% of them will never get back to Germany. It is not gas masks we want but anti-aircraft guns and a British air equivalent of the Maginot Line. Then we can talk.'[6]

Henderson's views on the state of Britain's air defences were commonly held at the time, and he was absolutely right about the deplorable state of Britain's anti-aircraft guns for the defence of London at the time of Munich). In September 1938 Ismay, the Secretary of the Imperial Defence committee, produced a paper saying that Britain would be better able to counter a German knock-out blow in six or twelve months' time. Henderson wanted to postpone any new démarche to the Germans until after Britain had strengthened its defences. His post-Munich gloom reflected his concern about Britain's defence weakness at the time. But he was prescient about the heavy price the Germans would pay for any aerial assault on Britain when its defences had been adequately strengthened.

The second of Henderson's concerns before his return to England was his role on the border commission, set up under the terms of the Munich Agreement to adjudicate on the details of the revised Czech-German frontier. As far as the new frontier was concerned Henderson was pragmatic in his willingness to countenance further modifications.

Henderson was sure that the Czechs would be 'well advised to yield once again to force majeure and to endeavour after October 10 to recover certain positions by direct negotiations'.[7] He made this statement because he

himself, the French and Italian Ambassadors on the International Commission were siding with the Germans on the crucial issue of whether the 1930 or the 1910 census should be used to determine which areas of occupation were predominantly German. The former would give more territory to the Czechs (the eventual settlement agreed to by the International Commission transferred eleven thousand square miles of territory to Germany). The Germans insisted that the 1910 census should be used, with its criteria that the language most in daily use in the area should be accepted, rather than the mother-tongue.

Henderson agreed because there was no post-war map available showing the racial compositions of the areas between 1910 and 1923, and the pre-war situation had changed considerably since the war. He thought that if the Czechs, in the face of the great power unanimity, felt aggrieved, they should negotiate later with the Germans on a bi-lateral basis. He felt sure, writing on 7 October, that

> It would be unwise as it would be misleading to encourage the Czech Government to believe that they have much to hope from the International Commission. The question of the standard year and the percentage for preponderantly German areas is an instance of this reality.[8]

Henderson's motivation for taking this position calls for some comment. He was later to give three reasons for siding with the Germans about the question of the ultimate shape of the Czech-German frontier. First of all, he said that it removed the need for plebiscites in the areas about to be transferred. Secondly, he thought that it would be

wise to 'pin the Germans down to a line of their own choosing which they would find it difficult afterward to modify again to their renewed advantage'. Finally Henderson thought that the German position on the census was the more convincing case of the two. (Henderson does not explain why he thought this in his memoirs, other than to make the point about the absence of maps.)'

For Henderson the last point was crucial. He could not lightly abandon his insistence on a moral position. If the German case on the transfers of territory was the correct one, it must be supported. But to safeguard compliance with any agreement, the Germans must be pinned down to a 'line of their own choosing'. Thus although Henderson's language about the Czechs was unsympathetic, he can still be shown to be completely consistent in his desire that any British position should be 'morally copper bottomed'.

Neither was Henderson naive about the Germans, writing in the same despatch on 7 October that: 'the Germans are certainly not a magnanimous race: nevertheless the best tactical chance for the Czechs lies in direct negotiations'.[10]

The Germans persisted in demanding plebiscites, beyond the 1910 census line; and this infuriated Henderson, who was by now thoroughly disillusioned with the Germans. At the time, he threatened to resign from the International Commission when the Germans resorted to this tactic. He would withdraw from it unless the demand was withdrawn.

> At a subsequent meeting of the ambassadors with Ribbentrop [he wrote in his memoirs] I made it clear that I deeply resented the method employed by the

> German Government, and would, if were resorted to again seek the authority of my Government to resign.[11]

This was an absolutely accurate report by Henderson after the event, as he did indeed report to Halifax his anxieties about bullying German tactics. In Cadogan he also had an ally on the issue of any new Czech-German border. Cadogan noted in his diary for 5 October that 'Van in a splutter, and got H[alifax] to agree to tell N.H. to stick up for something we can't get'.[12] Cadogan agreed with Henderson's view about the validity of the German position on the 1910 census, and that Britain had to give way.

On 10 October Henderson told Halifax that the Germans had been told by the Czechs that they would not agree to plebiscites in areas outside the scope of the Munich Agreement. He noted that this amounted to 'acquiescence' in the current line of occupation as the final boundary.[13]

On the same day Henderson had an interview with Weizsäcker who could

> express no opinion as to the view the Chancellor himself may take on the subject of plebiscites ... there were forces at work [Ribbentrop for example] in favour of them with a view to including in the Reich the areas mentioned in my telegram No.600.[14]

Henderson went on:

> I consequently spoke with the utmost gravity. I said that I personally would never agree to plebiscites being held for such a purpose and would if were suggested withdraw from the International Commission pending instructions from my Government.

Henderson correctly pointed out to Weizsäcker that at Munich Hitler had given Chamberlain an assurance that any territorial changes after the agreement would favour the Czechs rather than the Germans.

> If I said, Chancellor went back on all these assurances Prime Minister's confidence in his good faith would be completely destroyed, there would be no possibility of any talk of Anglo-German understanding, and I personally would do my utmost to be relieved of a mission which had become utterly distasteful to me.[15]

Henderson was reiterating here the line he had taken with Halifax in the private letter of 6 October referred to in the last chapter. He may indeed have been trying to use his forthcoming sick leave, which was to start on 18 October, as a device for showing British disapproval of German tactics on the International Commission. The Germans knew, after all, that Henderson was sympathetic to their grievances, whereas his replacement Ogilvie-Forbes, might be less so.

Halifax was sympathetic about German behaviour in his telegram of 13 October. He also approved of the

> attitude you adopted in this matter in your conversation with State Secretary, though I would not wish you to withdraw from Commission in any circumstances without personal authority from me.[16]

This was a reminder to Henderson to observe Foreign Office procedures, something which he had been prone to ignore throughout his diplomatic career in unorthodox fashion. He had however, contrary to the Watt thesis, shown a

willingness to stand up to the Germans over the issue of plebiscites, and even been prepared to resign from the Commission as a protest against German behaviour. It is also important to recognise that in the general issue of the German-Czech border readjustment Britain could not act alone. British policy had to be co-ordinated with that of France and Italy, as well as Germany. Henderson recognised that the Great Powers agreed about accepting the German position on the 1910 census, and his advice to the Czechs to seek post hoc readjustments on a bi-lateral basis was therefore sound, if optimistic.

Henderson's tactics on the International Commission were successful in that the Germans withdrew their demand for plebiscites. But they rested on a new formula whereby the line agreed to by the Commission on 5 October (based on the 1910 Austro-Hungarian census statistics) could be varied in accordance with Article 6 of the Munich Agreement.[17] This meant that the Germans were able to demand minor modifications beyond any agreed line. A further German demand was put forward on 14 November, involving the transfer to Reich jurisdiction of a further 40,000 people, most of whom were ethnic Czechs. No protest by the Czechs was allowed, and Henderson's colleague and successor on the Commission, Ogilvie-Forbes, told the Czechs that they had no option but to agree.[18] But by then Henderson had been on sick leave for a month.

A comparison between Henderson's behaviour on the International Commission, and that of Ogilvie-Forbes is particularly pertinent here in the light of unfavourable comparisons that have been made between the two men.

Ogilvie-Forbes is described as being 'part of the anti-appeasement camp' and someone who was more robust in his dealings with the Nazis, both before and after the point where he took over as acting Ambassador until Henderson's return in February 1939.[19]

For such an accusation to be sustained, there has to be clear cut evidence that Ogilvie-Forbes, had as Watt argues, 'none of Henderson's [alleged] desperate willingness to ingratiate himself to substitute optimism for observation, nor his fear of failure'.[20] A first riposte would be that Henderson's fear of failure was clearly not so great if, firstly, he could request a transfer elsewhere after Munich, and, secondly, threaten to boycott the International Commission in protest at German tactics. Confusingly, the same critic who accuses Henderson of ingratiating himself also concedes that Ogilvie-Forbes was 'a second rank diplomat' who was 'not a toughie'.[21]

The available evidence on Ogilvie-Forbes' performance on the International Commission does not show him in a particularly favourable light in comparison with Henderson. Roger Makins of the Foreign Office, who was sent to Berlin by William Strang after concern about Henderson's management of the Embassy and pre-Munich 'panic-burning' of Embassy papers, was an important witness here.[22] Makins was blunt both about the operation of the International Commission and Ogilvie-Forbes' role on it. Before Henderson left on sick leave, Ogilvie-Forbes was on one of the Sub-Committees of the Commission as Chairman, and Makins was decidedly unimpressed by his performance. He told Strang on 6 October that

> The Chairman of our Sub-Committee is a cipher, and the proceedings have been apt to degenerate into a shouting match, four or five people frequently shouting at once.[23]

Ogilvie-Forbes had 'rolled over' before the Germans.[24] Matters had not improved by 18 October, the day Henderson went on sick leave, when Makins wrote to R.A. Butler, Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, complaining about 'a good deal of shouting and banging of the table'. Makins went on to report that the Nazis presented the Sub-Committee, which was trying to draw up a new frontier, with a twelve-hour ultimatum and that the Ambassadors 'had no choice but to agree'. As a result of this blackmail, over which Ogilvie-Forbes presided, 'plebiscites became both unnecessary and dangerous and would not have been of much help to the Czechs' (Makins' view endorsed Henderson's preference for bi-lateral Czech-German talks).[25] Subsequently, on 14 November, it was Ogilvie-Forbes who told the Czechs that they had no option but to agree to the further German demands for territorial modifications under Article 6 of the Munich Treaty. Ogilvie-Forbes did not make a strong protest against German behaviour on the Commission until it was about to be wound up, which was far too late. By contrast Henderson, a tired and exhausted man who was about to go on sick leave, did so in a forceful manner.

A recent article by Bruce Strang provides further insight into Ogilvie-Forbes' period as temporary Ambassador in 1938-9, while also recognising that 'Henderson perhaps even more than Chamberlain has provided a soft target for both left and right-wing critics of appeasement'.[26]

The case presented in this article is that Ogilvie-Forbes was indeed tougher than Henderson in his attitude to Nazism, and brought about an important change in the Foreign Office's thinking about Germany in 1938-9, and especially Halifax's. Some of the evidence presented seems impressive, particularly in its emphasis on Ogilvie-Forbes' trenchant attack on the behaviour of the Reich Government in the aftermath of the Kristallnacht in November 1938.

On 13 November 1938 Ogilvie-Forbes wrote to Halifax,

> I can find no words strong enough in condemnation of the disgusting treatment of innocent people and the civilised world is faced with [the] appalling sight of 500,000 people about to rot away in starvation.[27]

This angry despatch is contrasted with Henderson's 'amazingly ill-timed suggestion to Halifax, the day after the Kristallnacht [9 November] that the time was now ripe for a comprehensive offer to return erstwhile German colonies'.[28]

The inference is clear: Henderson was so cold-blooded in his appeasing obsession that he suggested this initiative despite the clearest evidence of Nazi anti-Semitic atrocities. Strang also comments on Henderson's 'anti-Semitism and anti-Slavism'.[29]

Several points can be made here in Henderson's defence. His memoirs, admittedly written long after the event but published in 1940 before the Holocaust took place, contain the clearest possible denunciation of the Kristallnacht.

> With the connivance and actual participation of Himmler's secret police and extreme Nazis, [Henderson wrote] squads of German hooligans reverted to

the barbarism of the Middle Ages and indulged in an orgy of violent ill-treatment of the Jews such as even the Middle Ages could scarcely equal. The motives of this disgusting exhibition, which shocked all decent Germans as much as it did the whole outside world, were twofold. One was utterly ignoble and revolting - namely, the opportunity which the murder afforded to plunder the Jews and expedite their expulsion. The second, within limits, might have been comprehensible. The German authorities were undoubtedly seriously alarmed lest another Jew, emboldened by the success of Grynzspan, should follow his example and murder either Hitler or one of themselves.[30]

At the time, Henderson was away from Berlin, and may not have fully realised how appalling the events of the Kristallnacht actually were. He soon did so, however, and on 12 December was writing to Lord Londonderry about the unlikelihood of an Anglo-German accord 'with England in the mood it is over the Jews'.[31] There is also the pertinent fact that Henderson was known to be a friend of the Rothschild family (which hardly suggests that he was a convinced anti-Semite), a fact which Ribbentrop highlighted to discredit Henderson and sabotage his efforts to achieve an Anglo-German understanding.[32] Such attempts to smear Henderson with the charge of anti-Semitism do not stand up, and smack of that involuntary prejudice against him which so many historians have been guilty of. A reference to the Cadogan Diaries for the month of November 1938, for example, will find no reference to the Kristallnacht at all. And

even Halifax, that pillar of High Anglican rectitude, confessed himself to having been 'always rather anti-Semitic'."

By contrast Henderson was prejudiced against Slavs (or at least some of them, such prejudice did not extend to the Yugoslav Royal Family), but he shared this defect with colleagues like Sargent, Hadow and Addison. Indeed there was precious little evidence of pro-Slav sentiment in the Foreign Office at all.

Ultimately, Strang's claim that Ogilvie-Forbes 'fostered the moral revulsion that partly underlay the Foreign Secretary's personal evolution towards resistance' is somewhat weakened by the evidence of Halifax's own anti-Semitic tendencies, evident in the circumstances surrounding the dismissal of the Jewish War Minister Hore-Belisha in January 1940.[34]

In 1938, unlike his US counterpart, the acting British Ambassador was not withdrawn in protest at the time of the Kristallnacht, an act of disapproval, which many might have expected from Halifax, a devout Anglican, the man Churchill named 'Holy Fox'. It would be unfair perhaps, to suggest that Halifax's anti-Semitism was anything more than 'the relatively mild form common to a number of his social contemporaries'.[35] Neither however, is it fair to smear Henderson, whom Strang, unlike some others, recognises 'was not a Nazi sympathiser'.[36] But Henderson has consistently been a 'soft target' even among those disposed to be fair to him. He may not have shown that immediate moral revulsion to Nazism which his post-war critics have demanded. If so, he shared this failing with most other members of the

Foreign Office and the British establishment.

The evidence that Ogilvie-Forbes was linked to Mason MacFarlane and other critics of Henderson inside the Berlin Embassy seems quite convincing (he was also, like Henderson, a protégé of Vansittart's, and a regular correspondent of William Strang's in the Foreign Office Central Department). His role however, in 'raising the spectre of a German attack in the West'[3]' early in 1939 does not allow him to be viewed as what Professor Watt calls 'a toughie', whose conduct contrasts with the appeasing Henderson.

The sheer number of 'scares' about German attacks in the period of Henderson's absence, meant that Chamberlain and Halifax were not totally convinced about the likelihood of an attack in the West during the winter of 1938-9, or a surprise Luftwaffe attack on London. Henderson had been consistently sceptical about such reports before he went on leave, and he was largely justified in his scepticism. For one of Ogilvie-Forbes' main confidantes was the excitable Ian Colvin of 'The News Chronicle', whose unreliability was commented on in the last chapter. Henderson was just as concerned about the German aerial threat in the winter of 1938-9 as Ogilvie-Forbes showed himself to be.

Comments by their contemporaries on the relative merits of Henderson and Ogilvie-Forbes tend to confuse rather than to enlighten, particularly when the comments come from men who served with them. But it is important to analyse in more detail the network of relationships in the Berlin Embassy of which Henderson and Ogilvie-Forbes were the apex.

Henderson's chief aide in the Embassy was the First Secretary, Ivone Kirkpatrick, who remained in post for the

first eighteen months of Henderson's period in Berlin. Kirkpatrick wrote subsequently that he 'liked him very much. He was a human chief for whom it was a pleasure to work, and except for a few outbursts he never was anything but kind and appreciative'.[38] This quotation has rarely surfaced amongst Henderson's critics, and it is a significant one, as Kirkpatrick went on to become Permanent Under Secretary. Henderson's own memoirs make it clear that Kirkpatrick's affection was reciprocated.[39]

The mutual esteem between Henderson and Kirkpatrick contrasts sharply with his more difficult relationships with Ogilvie-Forbes and MacFarlane, (whose maverick qualities were discussed in the last chapter). On the surface Ogilvie-Forbes was loyal to his superior and wrote to sympathise with him on 12 December on hearing 'that you are still in considerable pain'.[40] He also kept Henderson abreast of developments among the Embassy staff, telling him for example about the resignation of the highly-promising Con O'Neill, a Third Secretary, over the Munich Agreement.[41]

But underneath there was a strong feeling of resentment towards Henderson which had emerged as early as August 1937. Ogilvie-Forbes wrote to Oliver Harvey, Eden's Private Secretary, on 2 August about Henderson's behaviour:

> In the major political business of the embassy I have always been ignored. My views or participation are neither asked for nor wanted nor do I see the papers (and by no means all of them until long after action ...). It is also very difficult to work for someone who is often excited, rude and domineering over trivial and sensitive ?[text unclear] matters

> and all the more discouraging because I have been constantly loyal to both his personality and his policy, as is my duty.[42]

The vehemence of Ogilvie-Forbes' complaints about Henderson, so soon after his arrival in Berlin must point to extreme tension between the two men, and it is significant that Henderson fails directly to acknowledge Ogilvie-Forbes' services in Failure of A Mission.[43] And despite Ogilvie-Forbes' protestations to Harvey of loyalty to Henderson, his actions were not those of a loyal subordinate.

Ogilvie-Forbes' complaints about Henderson's behaviour in Berlin are endorsed to a degree by Geoffrey Harrison, another diplomat to hold the position of First Secretary under Henderson, who did however support Henderson's appeasement line. Harrison told Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart after the war that he himself was

> pro-Munich; said everyone in Germany was [clearly Con O'Neill was an exception]. Neville [sic] Henderson was sent out with special instructions to get on with the Nazis, was therefore acting on general orders and to that extent could be excused. He ran the whole policy himself; wrote all the telegrams.[44]

Harrison's testimony underlines Henderson's tendency to behave like a 'one man band' (although he obviously used Kirkpatrick), and also gives Ogilvie-Forbes a rather back-handed compliment. 'George Ogilvie-Forbes,' Harrison told Bruce-Lockhart, 'who had not much real grey matter, turned out to be more nearly right than anyone else.'[45] It is also on the record that Harold Nicolson, who knew Henderson from

his early days in St Petersburg, regarded Ogilvie-Forbes as being 'one of the most successful and resolute of our diplomats'.[46] But Harrison's comments go some way to explaining Henderson's reluctance to consult Ogilvie-Forbes, and the latter's embittered reaction.

What does all this tell us about Henderson's relations with his Embassy staff? Plainly he was not always the easiest of men to work with, and had attitudes 'towards his support personnel [which] seem unwise in the extreme, particularly in view of the heavy pressures of working in the Berlin Embassy'.[47] Ogilvie-Forbes reported to him that staff were resigning because they were 'apparently tired out and discouraged'.[48] But Henderson himself was under intense pressure and in poor health, working in the most demanding post in the diplomatic service in an atmosphere so taut that Ogilvie-Forbes complained to Henderson that 'one cannot get any peace and quiet'.[49] Ultimately Harrison's comments are perhaps the most revealing. Henderson was obsessed with his mission, and drove himself, and perhaps his subordinates, too hard. Yet tensions in the Embassy were not just a creation of Henderson's. Ogilvie-Forbes himself wrote of Mason MacFarlane, supposedly an ally against Henderson's maladroit diplomacy, that 'Mason-Mac' was

> sometimes rather overwrought and has on several occasions been unsuccessful in pressing me to send recommendations of a warlike nature on political groups, quite outside the competence of the Embassy.[50]

This letter was written in April 1939, after Henderson's return from sick leave, and its sentiments would have been

shared by its recipient Cadogan. But Ogilvie-Forbes still claimed to be on good personal terms with Mason MacFarlane, and wanted his letter to Cadogan to be kept secret. As has been seen, Harrison could be caustic about Ogilvie-Forbes' intellectual capacities.

The most that this proves, perhaps, is that personal relationships can be notoriously difficult, especially in the pressurised conditions which Henderson and his staff were forced to endure between 1937 and 1939. Certainly the assumption that somehow Ogilvie-Forbes offered a distinctively different form of leadership during Henderson's absence, does not really seem to bear scrutiny. With the Embassy there were differences of opinion, as would normally be expected among colleagues, but Henderson's critics like Mason MacFarlane could not claim to be consistent opponents of Chamberlain and his policy (as was shown by the episode of his pessimistic assessment of the Czech army before Munich). Where Ogilvie-Forbes is concerned, personal animus must be allowed for in his conduct of Embassy affairs in 1938-9 when Henderson was away, together with a desire (perhaps) to be seen to be doing things differently in the absence of his superior. Especially, as Ogilvie-Forbes well knew that Henderson had his critics in the Foreign Office.

Memoirs by, and studies of, Henderson's political masters in the Foreign Office, Halifax and R.A. Butler, are no more helpful about any difference of nuance between Henderson and Ogilvie-Forbes.[51] They contain no reference at all to either Henderson or Ogilvie-Forbes, and of the few surviving scraps of evidence, a letter from Butler, who remained a warm admirer of Chamberlain's policy long after

it started to unravel after Munich, hardly endorses the view that there was an abrupt change after Henderson went home.

> It has been a great pleasure to read your despatches and telegrams since you have been in charge [Butler wrote to Ogilvie-Forbes on 19 December] ... We are naturally passing through a difficult period but all the friends of Germany have their feet on the ground.[52]

The inference behind this private letter is that Ogilvie-Forbes, like Henderson, is counted as a friend of Germany.

Henderson ought of course to be seen against a wider Foreign Office background as well. Was he a rogue elephant in the Foreign Office, naively pro-German and hopelessly out of tune with Foreign Office policy? A seminal article written in 1973 by Donald Lammers has provided good grounds for saying that he was not. Lammers notes Henderson's concern about Britain's air defences after Munich (referred to above), but also argues that an examination of Foreign Office papers makes it hard to sustain the argument that 'there was a deep and coherent opposition to the main lines of government policy'. According to Lammers, a group of officials could be identified in the post-Munich period who could be described as broadly speaking 'endorsing the policy of appeasement in the later 1930s or at the very least they refrained from negative comment on it'.[53] Amongst the Ambassadors in this group were Henderson, Phipps, Perth, Chilston (Ambassador in Moscow), Newton and Ogilvie-Forbes (Lammers is a more accurate assessment than Strang's attempt to portray Ogilvie-Forbes as a toughie). Also mentioned by Lammers is Owen O'Malley, appointed Ambassador to Mexico,

and a long-time official in the Central Department, who clearly supported appeasement (his sympathetic letter to Henderson in 1938 has already been referred to).[54]

In London the group of pro-appeasers included Cadogan, Strang, Ashton Gwatkin (an economic expert who had gone to the Sudetenland with Lord Runciman), Kirkpatrick, Oliphant, Jebb and Hadow, whose anti-Czech prejudices were well known and who was now in the Northern Department. Hadow too, as has been noted, wrote secretly and sympathetically to Henderson. As Lammers observes, 'the known sceptics about appeasement made up a much shorter list',[55] consisting of Vansittart and his supporters like Sargent and Rex Leeper. More recently, even Sargent's credentials as an anti-appeaser have come under attack, because of his vehement opposition to a Soviet alliance, which helped to undermine any real prospect of collective security from 1934 onwards. Sargent had been prone to see the doomed Czech Republic as a sort of Bolshevik aircraft carrier in Central Europe.[56]

The case of Gladwyn Jebb, Private Secretary to both Vansittart and Cadogan, is particularly instructive. Jebb (later Lord Gladwyn) is especially snide about Henderson in his memoirs; but the record does not suggest that he was justified in regarding Henderson's diplomacy in Berlin with such 'post hoc' scorn.[57] In a memorandum dated 19 January 1939 Jebb said of Germany that

> the extremist leaders are advocating a course which is likely to lead to a general war in the spring and ... this is opposed not only by important people in the Army, the industrial world, and so on, but even by the moderates in the ranks of the party itself.[58]

Jebb may be credited here with rather more insight into the psychology of the German Opposition (though none of its members openly opposed war in September 1939), but in his conception of 'extremists' and 'moderates' he was just as blinkered as Henderson has frequently been accused of being.

The date of the memorandum is also significant, for it was written during Ogilvie-Forbes' stewardship in Berlin, and not under the supposedly malign influence of Henderson. Jebb also contributed a paper to an extensive Foreign Office review of policy in the aftermath of Munich. In this paper Jebb took an extreme pro-appeasement line, advising that the French should be pressed to denounce their 1935 pact with the USSR (Henderson never went this far). He also stated his view that 'if Germany required further "expansion" she could always seek it in the Ukraine'. In his memoirs, Jebb carefully avoids any reference to these projected concessions to Germany. Showing no apparent concern for the balance of power in Eastern Europe, Jebb stated his view that Germany's case for the return of its former colonies 'would be destroyed' if she were allowed to have her colonies, or the equivalent of colonies.[59] At no point in his despatches did Henderson go so far in trying to appease the Germans, and he became ultimately an advocate of a Soviet alliance. He believed that it was natural for Germany to dominate Eastern Europe in economic terms, but this was a long way from conceding political control. Henderson never encouraged his German contacts either inside, or outside, the Wilhelmstrasse to believe that military conquest of areas like the Ukraine would be acceptable to the British Government. Neither, as has been seen,

did he initially support fragmentation of Austria or Czechoslovakia. Jebb's suggested concessions show none of Henderson's concern about the need for Britain to secure the moral high ground, but merely a ruthless, but narrow and short-sighted, obsession with the national interest at the expense of other states.

Cadogan and Strang rejected Jebb's suggestion that the Ukraine be ceded to Germany.[60] It was of course easy for home-based officials like Jebb and Sargent to criticise Henderson and other ambassadors, who had to deal with the unpredictable régimes of totalitarian states.[61] But in Jebb's case it is clear that in 1938 he was just as much a supporter of Chamberlain's policy as was Henderson. Indeed he was still unrepentant with the advantage of much hindsight in the nineteen-seventies, writing that 'I do not believe that there was ever any prospect that either France or Britain would have gone to war to protect Czechoslovakia'.[62] Henderson was castigated for writing this in 1940, but Jebb's reputation has escaped unscathed, and he prospered in the post-war period in the Foreign Office, while Henderson has been more roundly denounced for his diplomacy in Berlin that even Neville Chamberlain has been (the Prime Minister being a beneficiary of revisionist analyses of appeasement since the nineteen-seventies).

Over and above the network of relationships between Henderson and his Foreign Office colleagues was of course his crucial relationship with the Prime Minister, on which Henderson set such store. The assumption has been that Henderson had Chamberlain's complete confidence throughout his period as Ambassador in Berlin. This assumption is

probably correct, but there is some evidence that Chamberlain did not regard Henderson as a totally reliable agent of his policy. The evidence for this comes from Fritz Hesse, the German Press Attaché in London, who wrote in a despatch on 11 October 1938 about a recent interview with George Seward, the head of Chamberlain's Press Office. Seward allegedly told Hesse that

> in all future moves it was important that all major questions should be dealt with direct, thus by-passing the Foreign Office and also Sir Nevile Henderson, since it has unfortunately become apparent that the latter was not completely reliable when forwarding communications. Furthermore the Foreign Office would always be brought in by Henderson, and thus there was the risk of causing all kinds of obstruction and undesirable publicity.[63]

The fact that Henderson was sent back to Berlin in February 1939, despite Chamberlain's apparent reservations, makes this a puzzling document to interpret. But in the absence of any significant surviving correspondence between Henderson and Chamberlain, it does throw some light on Chamberlain's expectations. If the Hesse account is accurate, Henderson was plainly in an impossible position. As an ambassador in the employ of the Diplomatic Service he was duty bound to involve his Foreign Office superiors in questions relating to Anglo-German relations. If he did not, this must have been because his view of himself as an agent of the Prime Minister's policy, and not the Foreign Office's, was essentially correct. Chamberlain was

intensely suspicious of the Foreign Office, but this suspicion put any British ambassador in Berlin during his premiership in an unenviable position. Henderson could not please two masters, particularly when one of them was a dominant prime minister, determined to impose his individual imprint on the running of British Foreign Policy. The Hesse interview therefore may offer an insight into how exacting a taskmaster Chamberlain was. Yet Chamberlain did keep Henderson in post despite his worsening health.

Over the whole period from mid-October 1938 to mid-February 1939 loomed the issue of Henderson's health. The idea that Henderson was constrained by a 'stiff upper lip' from speaking about the seriousness of his illness, or fear that he might be permanently recalled, cannot be sustained.[64] Ogilvie-Forbes was plainly in the know about the pain which the condition was causing his superior. Entries in Sir Alexander Cadogan's diary also indicate that he too was aware of the situation (as he had to be as Henderson's service boss). On 20 October Cadogan saw Henderson, newly returned from Germany. Henderson told him that 'he was exhausted as he should be - but didn't look so'. But on 11 November Cadogan wrote of how he had seen 'poor Nevile H who has what he told me was a growth under his tongue. He was being operated today. And then they've got to do something to his neck. Sounds bad. I <u>am</u> sorry.'[65]

Other colleagues were aware of Henderson's health problem as well. Writing after the war, Mason MacFarlane recorded the fact that even when Henderson returned to duty in 1939, 'he was a much sicker man than he imagined himself

to be'.“ This raises the issue of why Henderson was sent back to duty in such a state of health, and subsequently why so little allowance has been made for it thereafter by critical contemporaries like Jebb, and historians.[67] The return to duty of a seriously sick man in the most sensitive posting in the diplomatic service is decidedly odd, and cannot be entirely explained away by the suggestion that Neville Chamberlain wanted to keep his own man in Berlin, as Halifax had allegedly lost faith in him.[68] Or that Chamberlain and Halifax were reluctant to pension off a faithful servant of the appeasement policy.[69] Henderson predictably, wanted to go back, but even he realised that his health was below par, writing in his memoir that 'Physically I was still unfit'.[70]

After Henderson's return to Berlin on 13 February his health was still clearly a matter of concern to his Foreign Office superiors. This is indicated by the letter which Halifax wrote to him on 13 March, which had a footnote asking 'How are you yourself? I hope not feeling the worse for being suddenly thrown back into the maelstrom'.[71]

This letter is also interesting from another point of view which is at what point, precisely, Halifax lost faith in Henderson.[72] There is little sign here, two days before the German occupation of Prague, that Henderson had lost the Foreign Secretary's confidence. Halifax told Henderson that he had

> been very glad from time to time, to receive your private letters in which you give me your impression of the situation in Germany ... I hope you will continue to write: and you may do so in complete

> confidence as I will give your letters only the most discreet circulation.

While it is true that Halifax warned Henderson not to put in official telegrams conclusions based on 'rather impalpable evidence', he was also aware that Henderson's telegrams could be read in the Foreign Office 'by people who may not have the necessary background ... which may lead such people to unwarrantable conclusions'.[73] At all events this letter does not give the impression of having been written by a man who had lost faith in his ambassador.

When Henderson returned to his post in Berlin he was in better spirits, after some initial caution. On 15 February he wrote to Cadogan that 'After nearly 4 months' respite I ask myself which is most disagreeable Berlin or the London Clinic'. He thought the Germans 'glad to have me back'.[74]

Henderson's optimism had been restored by the next day 16 February. Henderson believed, he told Cadogan, that 'the Germans are not contemplating any immediate wild adventure and that their compass is pointing towards peace'. He had also seen Ribbentrop on 15 February who said

> he was glad to see me back ... In my mind I am quite sure that he was intensely suspicious that my delay in returning had been due to a 'diplomatic' malady and connected with the non-return of Hugh Wilson [US Ambassador]. This was probably no bad thing but I told him the truth, whereupon he became more friendly than I have ever known him.

Henderson's difficulties with Ribbentrop were notorious, and the Foreign Minister had made strenuous efforts to prevent him having access to Hitler. Henderson had retaliated (for

example) by conspiring with Weizsäcker to exclude Ribbentrop from the Berchtesgaden meeting. But on his return to Berlin Henderson thought that Ribbentrop was now more secure in his position as Reich Foreign minister, but he was aware that his own critics in the Foreign Office thought he was being over-optimistic about likely German behaviour, and would 'doubtless say "dust in the eye" or "excessive receptivity to what I want and believe" - Maybe but I am also conscious of a big responsibility'.[75] Henderson can hardly have lost his doubts about Ribbentrop, but his analysis of the situation was regarded as fatuous by Vansittart.[76] Yet Halifax agreed with it as late as 13 March. In his letter to Henderson, quoted above, Halifax put forward his view that in

> the last few weeks there has certainly been a negative improvement in the situation, in that rumours and scares have died down, and it is not plain that the German Government are planning mischief in any particular quarter.[77]

Allowing for Halifax's more sedate language, this prediction was as big a 'gaffe' as Sir Samuel Hoare's 'golden age of peace' speech a couple of days before on 10 March.

While Henderson, somewhat naively, was gratified by praise emanating from State Secretary von Weizsäcker. When he saw Henderson on 18 February Weizsäcker told him 'Your reputation in Germany has risen still since Munich ... you succeeded in persuading Hitler and the rest of them that England would have fought'. According to the Nazi leader-ship, said Weizsäcker,

> that damned British ambassador bluffed us from start

> to finish: first by his special train on May 21st and then by convincing everybody at Nuremberg and afterwards that England would have made war on us. Blast the bloody British ambassador!

This would not quite have been music to Henderson's ears, given his persistent efforts to squash the 'special train' story. He had laughed but repeated the story to Halifax because

> I am well aware that a section of opinion at home chose to believe at the time, and particularly while I was at Nuremberg that I had completely failed to impress upon the Germans the gravity of the position and the seriousness of Britain's determination.[78]

Henderson shows again here his sensitivity to Foreign Office criticism of his diplomacy. Weizsäcker's motives in flattering Henderson so assiduously are open to question, although he knew of Ribbentrop's animosity towards Henderson. Even his superior Ribbentrop, more truthful than usual perhaps, when facing trial and execution in 1946, could remember no occasion when Weizsäcker contradicted him or indicated disagreement with Nazi foreign policy.[79] Yet we are expected to believe that Henderson was at fault in failing to pick up the hidden oppositionist signals Weizsäcker was allegedly sending out in 1938-9.

This said, Henderson seems to have been badly at fault in failing to predict that Hitler would occupy the whole of the Czech lands on 15 March 1939, and reduce Slovakia to being a puppet state. The obvious, and traditional conclusion, is that Henderson did not see them because he did not wish to do so. According to Mason MacFarlane's account he

was extremely annoyed by the Embassy's performance during his absence saying

> He was much concerned at the reports which we had been submitting to London while he was away. He considered that we were appreciating the situation wrongly and misinforming HMG. He wished us to understand that in future all reports emanating from Embassy would have to be strictly in accordance with his personal opinions. There was little to be said on our side except to point out to him that we remained in disagreement with his views on Hitler and on the course which Nazi Germany was likely to pursue.[80]

Unfortunately MacFarlane does not identify the Embassy colleagues who shared his own view, but it is possible to make an accurate guess about the nature of Henderson's complaints (although the evidence quoted above does not suggest that Ogilvie-Forbes had any serious difference of perspective with his Ambassador).

The period between mid-December 1938 and mid-April 1939 was one of alarms and excursions for the British Government during which no less than twenty warnings were received from different secret sources about possible German or Italian aggression. Henderson was away from his post for the first two months of this period, but was obviously briefed on these 'scares'. They had started on 11 December, when Ivone Kirkpatrick, then completing his tour as First Secretary, was warned that the British ciphers had been broken (the source was a 'German high official') and that Hitler had ordered an air attack on London in three weeks' time (which,

if true, would have made Henderson's October warnings prescient). Cadogan also noted in his diary, after seeing Kirkpatrick on his return to London, that 'Hitler will bomb London in March'.[81] The Cabinet seems to have taken Kirkpatrick's message very seriously, and 'illusory fears of a sudden knock out blow by the Luftwaffe lingered into the New Year'.[82]

Then in mid-January another 'knock out blow' scare emerged via Vansittart's secret intelligence sources, which ran in parallel to the official SIS. Days later SIS itself reported that Hitler and his advisers believed that London could be destroyed in a matter of days from the air. And yet more false intelligence suggested that the Germans were about to make a surprise attack on Holland or even Switzerland. One result of these false rumours, which may have been planted by the éminence grise of the German Abwehr, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, was that at their meeting on 1 February Chamberlain and his colleagues accepted the principle of a continental commitment, which the Prime Minister in particular, had so long rejected.

But given the number of scares during this period, and the fact that they all turned out to be fictitious, it is hardly surprising that by the time Henderson returned to Berlin, both Chamberlain and Halifax were dubious about such intelligence, especially as much of it emanated from Vansittart's intelligence sources, and he was as fervent an advocate of scare stories as Henderson was a sceptic about them.

Henderson was clearly sceptical about SIS reports, and was rebuked for his agnosticism by Cadogan, after his

despatch stating that 'the German compass was pointing towards peace'. It was the job of SIS agents, Cadogan told Henderson,

> to report rumours or items of information which come into their possession: they exercise a certain amount of discrimination themselves, but naturally do not take the responsibility of too much selection and it is our job here to weigh up the information which we receive and try to draw more or less reasonable conclusions from it. In that we may fail and if so, it is our fault, but I do not think that it is fair to blame the SIS. Moreover, it is true to say that the recent scares have not originated principally with the SIS agents in Germany, but have come to us from other sources.[83]

The last line contains a side swipe at Vansittart and his private intelligence sources, but on 15 March Cadogan had to admit that he, like Henderson, had been wrong. 'I must say,' Cadogan wrote in his diary as Prague fell under German occupation, 'it is turning out - at present - as Van predicted and as I never believed it would. If we want to stem the German expansion, I believe we must try to build now.'[84] Henderson was equally dumbfounded by the course of events, which undermined everything he had been working for since 1937.

But both Henderson and Cadogan had been wrong in an atmosphere of scares and false rumours, and in this sense Henderson's scepticism about the sources of these reports (one of which was Conwell Evans, who had by 1938-9 become a friend of Vansittart) is understandable. Other Embassy

staff like Kirkpatrick had been a conduit for false information to London, and Henderson would have been within his rights as Ambassador in expressing an opinion on this behaviour. Conversely, it has to be recognised that Henderson wanted to believe in the sincerity of expressed German good intentions, but he personally was aware of internal Foreign Office criticisms that he was being naive.

Ultimately, as in all these instances, Chamberlain and Halifax were the final arbiters on the genuineness of the German threat, and on 19 February Chamberlain was saying that 'All the information I get seems to point in the direction of peace'.[85]

The Foreign Office's attitude to Henderson after the Prague coup by Hitler is hard to understand. On the one hand Halifax and Cadogan were considering Henderson's permanent recall as a protest (following the precedent created by the withdrawal of the US Ambassador Wilson after the Kristallnacht). But on the other, they were prepared to recall him as an expression of dissatisfaction with his work as Ambassador.

That this was under active consideration by the Foreign Office after Henderson's return from sick leave on 13 February, is clear from the diaries of both Cadogan and of Halifax's Private Secretary Oliver Harvey. Even Henderson himself recognised that his tenure of the Berlin Embassy might be coming to an end in March 1939. In <u>Failure of A Mission</u> he wrote that:

> The ostensible motive of my recall to London was to report but I left Berlin feeling that I might well never return there. It would have been natural, and

possibly more politic, to have withdrawn me altogether. I represented a policy of attempting to seek a modus vivendi with the Government of Hitler. That policy had been wrecked by Hitler's act of piracy on the Ides of March, and in ordinary circumstances it would have been more normal to appoint another ambassador in my place. But events were moving rapidly, and His Majesty's Government presumably preferred not to swap horses in the middle of the stream.[86]

Ultimately the Foreign Office decided to recall Henderson for a limited period, but the issue did arouse some lively debate outside its portals. Henderson's superior at the Foreign Office, R.A. Butler was in frequent contact at this time with the Duke of Buccleuth, who had strong pro-German sympathies. Buccleuth was concerned about Henderson's short-term absence from Berlin telling Butler that

> I do not like speaking on matters about which Nevile Henderson must know so much more, but the absence of contact through him and other ambassadors does seem an additional danger. Neither Hitler nor Ribbentrop are likely to be quite as inhuman as featured ...[87]

Henderson's critics inside the Foreign Office would have challenged Buccleuth's contention that Henderson's knowledge of Germany was great, and after 15 March they had been joined by Cadogan who had lost confidence in him. 15 March was a bombshell for the appeasers, and Henderson was accused by his critics of failing disastrously to predict Hitler's latest coup. Hitler's invasion of the Czech lands (for that is what it was), invalidated the

assumption made by Chamberlain, and Henderson, that all Hitler wanted was a Greater Germany. Czechs were not ethnic Germans.

Even Henderson appears to have been disillusioned by Hitler's latest act of aggression. On returning to London Henderson looked

> very shattered. He said Hitler was now quite unpredictable: he thought his action against Czechoslovakia was simply and solely out of fury aroused by the broadcast accounts of alleged Czech atrocities against Germans - all of which had been either invented or magnified by Goebbels. He did not know what Hitler might do now as a result of PM's speech and Duff Cooper's remarks.[88]

Henderson's rationale for Hitler's behaviour was unconvincing, but he did seem to have taken on board the idea that Hitler needed to be warned off in vigorous fashion. On 7 April (after Chamberlain had given a guarantee of assistance to Poland should she be attacked by Germany) Henderson had an interview with the former German Chancellor Franz von Papen,[89] who was passing through Berlin, and Papen recorded that Henderson 'confirmed my opinion, that the situation could yet be saved if it were made clear to Hitler than any new aggression would automatically mean war'.[90] Here is another example of Henderson carrying out his warning function to a high-ranking German.

During this new period of enforced leave (Henderson returned to Berlin on 23 April) Henderson's long-term future was in fact being decided by his superiors in the Foreign

Office. On 6 April, Oliver Harvey wrote at length about Henderson in his diary.

> One of our minor problems is to know what to do with Henderson who is now here having been ordered back 'to report' after the annexation of Czechoslovakia. H[alifax] asked me and I said that I would not send him back on personal grounds as I thought his reports were bad and had a bad effect here, while his attitude in Berlin had the effect of convincing the Germans we were flabby. On the main question of whether there was any advantage or disadvantage in not having an Ambassador there, I rather agreed with him that it was better in principle to have an Ambassador.
>
> H. also talked to Alec Cadogan and it is under consideration whether he should not now be replaced. But it is complicated. No ambassador can do any good in Berlin at present. It is going to be announced that Nevile Henderson has been given a short period of leave. I discussed with A.C[adogan] whom we could send there and the favourites are Archie Clark-Kerr and Horace Seymour.[91]

Cadogan had been wrestling with the problem of what to do about Henderson even <u>before</u> the Germans destroyed Czechoslovakia. His diary entry for 14 March noted that: 'Van wants to withdraw Nevile. I against - it's futile. But of course Van doesn't like Nevile in Berlin.' (Cadogan was by now as irritated with Vansittart as he was with Henderson.)[92] On 3 April Cadogan had a talk with Chamberlain, part of which was spent 'discussing N. Henderson's return. I

don't see much harm if it's done quickly and naturally'. Three days later he had a further meeting with both Halifax and Chamberlain and 'sat talking about Nevile H. They agreed he ought to be changed ... Saw NH who has been given a hint of his move by H'. A further reference on 20 April refers merely to the end of Henderson's short 'protest' leave and the fact that 'we want to have N.H. back in Berlin on Monday...'."[93]

Oddly, the whole question of Henderson's recall then disappears from Cadogan's record of events, although there are numerous further references to the Ambassador both before, and after, the outbreak of war on 3 September.

The question had clearly not been resolved, however. Oliver Harvey was elated on 27 May because:

> I hear it is intended to get rid of Henderson at last. AC and I want to send Horace Seymour there, who can be counted on to report faithfully what is going on without parti pris and to carry out his instructions loyally. No ambassador is going to swing Hitler or German opinion. Germany policy is governed by British policy in London."[94]

This is an extremely important statement as regards Henderson's role. Firstly it makes the accusation that Henderson had been disloyal to the Foreign Office, clearly the basis for much of the animus against him, and secondly Harvey admits what Vansittart and his supporters seemed unable to see, that policy was made in London and not by Henderson in Berlin. Equally important is Harvey's recognition that no British ambassador in Berlin at that moment could 'swing Hitler or German opinion'.

The issue of Henderson's recall dragged on through the summer of 1939. As late as 9 July, only two months before war broke out, Harvey was noting that: 'Henderson came over to see his doctor. Position is that Halifax and No.10 would be very glad if he were found no longer fit.'[95] Yet Henderson was not recalled despite his very poor state of health and the reservations Chamberlain, Halifax and Cadogan clearly had about him.

This is a matter far more mysterious than Henderson's appointment in 1937. For the suggestion that Henderson was kept in post at Chamberlain's wish, and because his known German sympathies would still render him a more effective representative does not square with Chamberlain's reported reservations about him, or with the evidence from Cadogan and Harvey that the Prime Minister wanted to recall him.[96] Neither does the evidence support suggestions that Halifax and Chamberlain did not wish to be ungracious to a loyal servant of the Appeasement policy, or that Henderson still had credibility with the Nazis after Prague. The same historian concedes that the decision not to replace Henderson after 15 March 'seems extraordinary indeed', but was related to the fact that Henderson was 'personable, intelligent, and very convincing'.[97]

The conclusion must be that the decision to keep Henderson in post, even when <u>he himself</u> expected to be recalled, must go down as one of the more bizarre made by the Foreign Office in this period. Henderson himself was an exhausted, and extremely sick man, a fact which contemporaries and historians alike have not properly acknowledged. Quite why the Foreign Office felt able to recall Lord Perth

(deemed to be too pro-fascist) from Rome in 1939, and replace him with Sir Percy Loraine, yet left the sick Henderson in Berlin has never been satisfactorily explained."[98] Particularly as the policy with which he had been so closely associated was largely discredited by the events of 15 March 1939. This point at least was appreciated by Oliver Harvey, a trenchant Foreign Office critic of Henderson. While noting that

> Henderson did not look at all fit and is obviously in a very nervous and overwrought state - quite unfit to be in such a post at such a time. He ought of course to be withdrawn.

Harvey recognised that

> the policy that he was chosen to represent appeasement, in which he passionately believes, has been reversed, and so long as he is there Germany and everybody else will never believe we may not have more appeasement.[99]

Harvey reiterated this point in a letter to Halifax on 15 July 1939, when the time for replacing Henderson had long since gone.

> He is the symbol of appeasement [Harvey wrote] and so long as he is at his post Berlin will believe that 'appeasement' is not dead. His withdrawal would be a piece of ocular evidence that we are always being advised to give in order to convince Hitler that we mean business.

A rare contemporary note of sympathy for Henderson then occurs in Harvey's diary. He believed that it was unfair to keep Henderson 'who has always believed sincerely and

passionately in appeasement' in Berlin after the complete reversal of policy after 15 March 1939.[100]

If Harvey's analysis is accepted then the role of Chamberlain and Halifax in keeping Henderson in post seems pusillanimous. According to Harvey, 'they did not want to retire him themselves' and were confounded when Henderson's doctor said he was quite fit (an odd medical opinion about a man who had a diagnosed cancerous growth under his tongue and in his neck).[101] But this version of events sits oddly too with the (not totally convincing) evidence from the Steward-Hesse interview referred to above.

Why then was Henderson's continued presence in Berlin deemed necessary?

Henderson's greatest shortcomings were allegedly made evident in the Polish crisis in the summer of 1939. But only the harshest critic could fail to feel some sympathy for this grievously sick man, left to flounder in Berlin in the advocacy of a policy which went against all his natural inclinations. And a man also who realised the wisdom of a move from Berlin and had been prepared by Halifax for such a move. Inexplicably, and with a degree of moral cowardice, Chamberlain and Halifax then left Henderson in Berlin.

References

1. Failure of A Mission, pp.171-2. He had similar feelings about his recall from Belgrade in 1935, convinced as he was that he alone could help keep Anglo-Yugoslav relations on an even keel.

2. ibid., p.13. Henderson did confess on appointment however, to 'a sense of my own inadequacy for what was obviously the most difficult and important post in the whole of the diplomatic service'.

3. A. Roberts, Holy Fox, p.142; Failure of A Mission, p.215.

4. Henderson to Halifax 11/10/38, FO 800/314, Halifax Papers, PRO.

5. ibid., 12/10/38. Henderson thought that the Germans were producing 1,000 aircraft a month. He was wrong in this as in his technical assessment because the Spitfire, now in production, was superior to its German equivalent, the ME 109 both in terms of speed and armament. It was true that Britain was deficient in anti-aircraft guns.
   For an assessment of relative Anglo-German air strength see P.M.H. Bell, The Origins of the Second World War, London, 1986, p.181, Table 7. Henderson also referred in this letter to Halifax to conversations he had with Air Marshal Trenchard and Lord Swinton, the then Secretary of State for Air, in 1937 prior to taking up the Berlin posting. Both men had wanted Britain to have a 100-75 margin of superiority over the Luftwaffe but such hopes, said Henderson, had 'been rudely shattered'.

6. Henderson to Londonderry 12/12/38, 237/8 Londonderry Papers, Durham County Record Office (the letter is wrongly catalogued for 12/12/37). Not surprisingly in the circumstances, Henderson was in generally low spirits as he was 'passing through the disagreeable reaction after the use of radium needles and when that is a little better, I have to return to London for more radium (external) treatment'. In the light of the current state of Anglo-German relations Henderson thought 'my malady ... a blessing in disguise'.

7. Henderson to Halifax, DBFP, 3, III, pp.93-4.

8. Henderson to Halifax 7/10/38, No.157.

9. Failure of a Mission, p.175.

10. Henderson to Halifax 7/10/38, No.157. Later he was to write that he had 'the utmost misgivings as to Hitler's good faith, Failure of A Mission, p.171.

11. Failure of A Mission, pp.169-70; DBFP, 3, II, has maps appended to it to show the Czech areas annexed by Germany in October 1938; Henderson to Halifax, DBFP, 3, III.

12. Cadogan Diaries 5/10/38, p.115.

13. Henderson to Halifax 10/10/38, DBFP, 3, III, No.177.

14. ibid., No.177. The areas on question were Olmütz-Brünn and Mährisch-Ostrau.

15. ibid., No.177.

16. Halifax to Henderson 13/10/38, DBFP, 3, III, No.192.

17. Article 6 of the Munich Agreement actually stated that: 'The final determinations of the frontiers will be carried out by the international commission. This commission will be entitled to recommend to the four Powers Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Italy, in certain exceptional cases minor modifications sin the strictly ethnographical determination of the zones which are to be transferred without plebiscite.' R. Kee, Munich. The Eleventh Hour, London, 1988, Appendix II, pp.215-216.

18. Ogilvie-Forbes to Halifax 21/11/38. Subsequently Ogilvie-Forbes protested about the winding up of the Commission when the final delineation of the German-Czech border was agreed upon, but his protest was ignored by Germany.

19. A. Gill, An Honourable Defeat: A History of the German Resistance to Hitler, London, 1994, p.105.

19. D.C. Watt, Chamberlain's Ambassadors, p.153.

21. ibid., p.153.

22. The Makins mission in October 1938 is a somewhat mysterious affair. Makins was telephoned by William Strang and asked to go to Berlin after Munich. No written record of such a request appears to exist either in the Makins papers at the PRO, or the Strang Papers at Churchill College Cambridge. The late Lord Sherfield (the former Roger Makins) met Henderson briefly while in Berlin and described him as 'looking exhausted'. After visiting the Embassy and talking to officials like Ivone Kirkpatrick, the First Secretary (a great personal friend), Makins went on to sit on the Sub-Committee before returning to London in late October. Interview with Lord Sherfield 16/5/96. The issue of the burning of papers in Berlin is addressed in L6847/453, FO 370/564 and L6847/453, FO 370/565, PRO. A request to burn papers had been received from the Embassy at the Foreign Office on 8 September.

23. Makins to Strang 6/10/38, DBFP, 3, III, No.150. The fact that Makins wrote to Strang helps to authenticate Lord Sherfield's account above. This is his only telegram in the relevant DBFP volume.

24. The late Lord Sherfield used this phrase about Ogilvie-Forbes' behaviour, and confirmed to the writer that although 'the Chairman' was not identified in the diplomatic document in footnote 23 he was in fact Ogilvie-Forbes. His anonymity contrasts interestingly with the ready identification of Henderson in DBFP in various unflattering guises.

25. Makins to Butler 18/10/38, R.A. Butler Papers, Trinity College Cambridge, G11/130. John Charmley has pointed out that this letter has been wrongly attributed in the catalogue. Chamberlain and the Lost Peace, London, 1989, p.227, fn.62.

26. B. Strang, 'Two Unequal Tempers: Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes, Sir Nevile Henderson and British Foreign Policy 1938-9' in Diplomacy and Statecraft, Vol.5, No.1, March 1994, p.105.

27. Ogilvie-Forbes to Halifax 13/11/38, C 13733/1667/62, FO 371/21637, PRO.

28. Henderson made this suggestion on 11 November. Henderson to Halifax 11/10/38, FO 800/314, Halifax Papers, PRO; Strang, p.107.

29. Strang, p.108.

30. Failure of A Mission, p.172; the young Jew Hershel Grynzspan had murdered the Third Secretary in Germany's Paris vom Rath in retaliation for the forcible deportation of his parents.

31. Henderson to Londonderry 12/12/38, Londonderry Papers, Durham County Record Office, 237/8.

32. R. Spitzy, How We Squandered the Reich, Norwich, 1997, p.68.

33. Roberts, p.128.

34. Strang, p.109; Roberts, pp.191-2.

35. Roberts, p.128; the author still condemns Halifax's anti-Semitism as 'inexcusable, especially in a practising Christian'.

36. Strang, p.109.

37. Strang, p.109.

38. Sir I. Kirkpatrick, The Inner Circle, London, 1959, p.90.

39. Failure of A Mission, p.37. Kirkpatrick is described as 'extremely able and intelligent'. It is to Henderson's credit that he never spoke badly of colleagues in his two diplomatic memoirs. The same cannot be said of all his peers. Henderson's comments about Kirkpatrick show that he had an eye for upcoming talent in the Foreign Office.

40. Ogilvie-Forbes to Henderson 12/12/38. Ogilvie-Forbes Papers, University of Aberdeen, NS, 2740/39.

41. ibid., 7/12/39.

42. Ogilvie-Forbes to Harvey 2/8/37, Ogilvie-Forbes Papers, University of Aberdeen, 1740/39.

43. By contrast Henderson does praise the work of Adrian Holman, Kirkpatrick's successor as the First Secretary. But his papers contain no such vitriolic attack on a colleague, and he understood an ambassador's preference for one colleague over another, as he had endured a similar experience as Counsellor in Egypt over policy differences with George Lloyd (although their personal relations remained cordial). Water Under the Bridges, p.150.

44. K. Young (ed.), Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart, Volume II, 1939-45, 8/12/1949, London, 1973, p.707. Harrison has also been accused of being one of the least sympathetic Foreign Office officials in his attitude to the German Resistance, a view he shared with his former ambassador, Meehan, p.30.

45. ibid., p.707.

46. Nicolson to Ogilvie-Forbes 27/3/39, Ogilvie-Forbes Papers, 2740/39. He also criticised Henderson; Diaries & Letters 1939-45, p.346.

47. Baker, p.347.

48. Ogilvie-Forbes to Henderson 7/12/38, Ogilvie-Forbes Papers, University of Aberdeen, 2740/39.

49. ibid., 7/12/39.

50. Ogilvie-Forbes to Cadogan 10/4/39, FO 800/294, Cadogan Papers, PRO.

51. First Earl Halifax, Fullness of Days, London, 1957; R.A. Butler, The Art of the Possible, London, 1971. Halifax's biographer Andrew Roberts has nothing to say in Holy Fox, London, 1991 about Ogilvie-Forbes. Neither does Anthony Howard in his biography, RAB, The Life of R.A. Butler, London, 1986. Amazingly Halifax says nothing in his own autobiography about Butler, let alone Henderson.

52. Butler to Ogilvie-Forbes 19/12/38, Ogilvie-Forbes Papers, University of Aberdeen, 2740/39; even Bruce Strang hedges his bets on Ogilvie-Forbes' significance during the period of Henderson's absence saying that Ogilvie-Forbes' influence on British Foreign Policy was not 'precisely quantifiable' and that the impact of his despatches is 'easy to overstate'. Strang, p.130.

53. D. Lammers, 'From Whitehall After Munich', Historical Journal XVI, 4 (1973), pp.831-856.

54. The papers in the PRO underline the degree of obfuscation indulged in by O'Malley in his memoirs about appeasement. The Phantom Caravan, London, 1954, pp.157-9.

55. Lammers, pp.845, 854.

56. M.J. Carley, 'A Fearful Concatenation of Circumstances: The Anglo-Soviet Rapprochement 1934-6', Contemporary European History, 5, I (1996), pp.262-69.

57. In discussing, rather smugly, the issue of the number of Old Etonians in the Foreign Office and Government, Jebb (Gladwyn) mentions 'Neville [sic] Henderson (regretfully)'. He is however, also critical of Henderson's rival for the Berlin post Percy Loraine for 'a rather ponderous manner and perhaps a certain lack of sense of humour'. The Memoirs of Lord Gladwyn, London, 1972, pp.106, 23.

58. Memorandum by Jebb, 'Summary of Information From Secret Sources', 19 January 1939, FP (36) 74, CAB 27/627.

59. Jebb's paper was one of several written by Cadogan, Strang, P.B. Nichols (head of the Northern Department) and Ashton Gwatkin, the Foreign Office's diplomatic expert, C 1447/14/18, FO 371/21659, PRO refers; Gladwyn merely refers elsewhere to his scepticism about the so-called 'Grand Alliance' between GB, France and the USSR leading out his 1938 suggestion that France be prised away from her Soviet alliance, Gladwyn, p.83.

60. Lammers, pp.843-845; he comments on Jebb's naivety in imagining that giving the Ukraine to Hitler would not undermine the Anglo-French strategic position in 1938-9. But Ashton-Gwatkin and Nichols also supported Jebb's position. The furthest that Henderson went was to concede in his May 1937 memorandum to Sargent that Germany might be ceded 'economic and even political dominance' in Eastern Europe, Henderson to Sargent 10/5/39, DBFP, 2, XIX, No.53.

61. Gladwyn himself points out that Orme Sargent had almost no experience of service abroad, Gladwyn, p.73. Sargent made only a brief excursion to the Ambassadors' Conference in Paris in 1919, and remained in London after 1920. The exact antithesis in fact of Henderson's experience, he being almost exclusively

posted abroad between 1905 and 1939.

62. Gladwyn, p.106.

63. Dirksen to Weizsäcker 12/10/38, GFPD, D, IV, No.249.

64. As suggested by Robert Cowie for example in Nevile Henderson and the Chamberlain Government: A Case Study in Democratic Foreign Policy 1937-1939, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Bowling Green State University, USA, 1977, p.12. Henderson's letter to Londonderry was quite frank about his illness.

65. Cadogan Diaries 11/11/38, p.124.

66. Mason MacFarlane Papers, Imperial War Museum, MM 28.

67. Compare for example with the references to the impact of Eden's botched gallbladder operation in the 1950s. D. Dutton, Anthony Eden. A Life and A Reputation, London, 1996, pp.422-3.

68. Interview with Sir Frank Roberts 11/10/96; A. Roberts, Holy Fox, pp.142, 153.

69. Goldman, p.273. The suggestion made is that Halifax and Chamberlain did not want to 'be ungracious' to a sick, but loyal, man.

70. Failure of A Mission, p.183.

71. Halifax to Henderson 13/3/39, Halifax Papers, 800/316, PRO.

72. Roberts, p.142.

73. Halifax to Henderson 13/3/39.

74. Henderson to Cadogan 15/2/39, Cadogan Papers, 800/294, PRO.

75. Henderson to Cadogan 16/2/39, Cadogan Papers, 800/294; see also Henderson to Halifax 18/2/39, DBFP, 3, III, No.118. A.J.P. Taylor found Henderson's view unsurprising, Origins of the Second World War, p.248.

76. Vansittart was scathing (even by his standards) about Henderson's analysis on the Ambassador's return to Berlin. Henderson was 'a national danger in Berlin'; talking 'dangerous rubbish', and had views that were 'not only strange, they were fantastic'. All in 23/2/39, C2762/53/18, FO 371/23006.

77. Halifax to Henderson 13/3/39, Henderson Papers, 800/270.

78. Henderson to Halifax, 18/2/39, ibid.

79. Ribbentrop Memoirs, London, 1954, p.180. Of Weizsäcker Ribbentrop wrote 'If he disagreed with me on principles of foreign policy, then he certainly never expressed this to me in a major discussion'. By contrast former Foreign Minister von Neurath did disagree openly with Hitler.

80. Mason MacFarlane Papers, Imperial War Museum, MM 28.

81. Cadogan Diaries 15/12/38, p.130.

82. Andrew, p.414; Ivone Kirkpatrick, The Inner Circle, London, 1959, pp.136-8.

83. Cadogan to Henderson 26/2/39, Cadogan Papers, 800/294, PRO.

84. Cadogan Diaries 15/3/39, p.163.

85. K. Feiling, Neville Chamberlain, London, 1946, pp.396-7.

86. Failure of A Mission, p.215.

87. Buccleuth to Butler 18/4/39, R.A. Butler Papers, Trinity College Cambridge, G10/3. Buccleuth visited Berlin between 15 and 18 April 1939.

88. Neville Chamberlain had made a speech at Birmingham on 17 March condemning Hitler's action and saying that Britain had not 'lost its fibre'. It is not clear what remarks by Duff Cooper Henderson was referring to. Neither Duff Cooper himself (Old Men Forget, p.243) nor his biographer John Charmley refer to any such statement after the occupation of Prague. J. Charmley, Duff Cooper. The Authorized Biography, London, 1986, p.134. Indeed Chamberlain wrote to his sister Ida on 12 March saying 'Duff Cooper is loud in his praises', and Charmley notes his desire to 'remain on the right side of the Prime Minister', ibid., p.134.

89. Subsequently Vice Chancellor of the Reich, and then successively Ambassador in Vienna and Ankara.

90. Franz von Papen, Memoirs, London, 1952, p.444.

91. Harvey Diaries 6/4/39, p.274. Sir Archibald Clark-Kerr, later Ambassador in Moscow, was then Ambassador in Peking. Horace Seymour was then Minister in Teheran; in 1940 he was appointed Assistant Secretary at the Foreign Office.

92. Cadogan Diaries 14/3/39, p.156. Cadogan's frustration with both men had been famously expressed in an earlier entry on 24 February in which he accused Henderson of being 'completely bewitched by his German friends'. Vansittart was castigated for being 'a prize ass'. Cadogan's conclusion was that Halifax ought 'to rebuke Van or recall NH. I don't know which is the sillier of

the 2, or which destroys his case more effectively. Van I think'.

93. ibid., 14/3/39, p.156; 3/4/39. p.168; 6/4/39, p.170; 20/4/39, p.176.

94. Harvey Diaries 27/5/39, p.292.

95. ibid., 9/7/39, p.302.

96. Interview with Sir Frank Roberts 11/10/96. See also Footnote 44 above.

97. Goldman, pp.271, 273. It is worth noting that R.A. Butler defended Henderson's record inside in the Foreign Office, noting that he had often warned the British Government about Hitler's unpredictability, 10/3/39, C2914/7/12 in FO 371/22896. Another supporter was Butler's P.P.S. 'Chips' Channon, who dined with Henderson on 10 January and noted that he 'seems very ill'. The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon, James R. Rhodes (ed.), London, 1993 (Second Edition), p.183.

98. For criticism of Perth's performance see How War Came, p.85; Craig and Gilbert (eds.), 'Two British Ambassadors: Perth and Henderson' in the Diplomats 1919-39. It is true that Perth had reached retiring age by 1939, but he was still employed by the Foreign Office as a special Under-Secretary pending the outbreak of war, and his appointment as Director-General of the Ministry of Information. Oliver Harvey was furious about this appointment, and Halifax's 'really unforgivable acquiescence'. Diaries 24/5/39 and 29/5/39, pp.291, 294; Phipps, whom Harvey also wanted to see removed, was kept on in Paris until November 1939. Further evidence it seems of Halifax's executive weakness.

99. ibid., 7/7/39, p.302; see also Appendices, p.435 where Harvey refers to the fact that Henderson is 'no longer physically equal to the strain of the coming months'. A point which should have been evident to his superiors.

100. ibid., 15/7/39, p.435.

101. ibid., 9/7/39, p.302. It is strange that Professor Watt ignores the point about Henderson's health while focusing on Cadogan's alleged loss of faith in him in 1939 (based on the declining number of references to Henderson in the Cadogan Diaries after 15 March). Chamberlain's Ambassadors, pp.153-4. 'He lived on his nerves' according to Watt, who proceeds to catalogue his alleged incompetence in the Polish crisis. Harvey's verdict is kinder and more perceptive, in its analysis of Henderson's position after 15 March.

Chapter Eight

The Polish Crisis

Once Henderson returned to his duties on 24 April 1939, following his authorised absence in protest against the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, he was thrust into a situation of accelerating tension between Germany and Poland. Britain attempted, as it had done over Czechoslovakia in 1938, to play the role of mediator between the two parties.[1]

Poland had taken advantage of the Czech crisis in 1938 to seize the area of Teschen from its neighbour, but in the spring and summer of 1939, the Poles came under increasing pressure from Berlin in their turn, over the issue of Danzig and the Corridor. The Versailles Treaty had placed the largely German city of Danzig under overall League of Nations' control, but had given the Poles access to the port facilities. It had also created a corridor of territory through Germany, which both gave the Poles access to the Baltic Sea, and isolated East Prussia from the rest of Germany.

It was to be expected that Hitler would seek to revise this aspect of Versailles, which had never been acceptable to the vast majority of Germans; and Henderson agreed that the German case was a morally valid one, just as he had accepted the German case over the Sudetenland in 1938.[2] In one sense the German case was stronger over Danzig and the

Corridor because (unlike the Sudetenland) both had formerly been part of the Reich. And unlike Czechoslovakia, the 'régime of the Colonels' in Warsaw was undemocratic and authoritarian, with few admirers in Britain. For Henderson himself however, this aspect would have posed few problems as he believed that people in Britain

> sometimes forget that there are 'less happier lands' than theirs, and fail to realise that even dictators can be, up to a point, necessary for a period and even extremely beneficial for a nation.[3]

Henderson had as little sympathy for the Poles on this issue as he had had for the Czechs a year earlier. They should not be allowed through intransigence over Danzig and the Corridor to drag a militarily underprepared Britain into war. He felt more concerned about the Polish Question in April 1939 than he had done about the Sudeten issue at an equivalent stage, because the Poles made it clear that they would be prepared to fight for Danzig and because Britain had given a commitment to defend Poland. But he still thought the question of Danzig and the Corridor easily capable of settlement. 'Can we allow,' he asked Halifax, 'the Polish Government to be too uncompromising in regard to them?'[4] There was a distinct echo here of Henderson's diplomacy in the Sudeten crisis, for it was to be the Poles who were required, in Henderson's view, to take the initiative in settling the problem rather than the Germans. Henderson, though, constantly denied bias in his dealings with the Poles, telling Halifax that he was 'neither pro-Polish nor pro-German. One is always for the weaker side and whereas Germany is a menace all the time, Poland is only

a menace as an ally'.[5] But although Henderson was capable of seeing that Germany was the real menace, he still expected the Poles to make the concessions and in this sense he was not even-handed. Critics have been unconvinced by his protestations of fairness to German and Pole.[6] He was, however, consistent because he had always maintained that the Versailles territorial settlement was unfair to Germany; and he remained convinced until his death that leaving large numbers of ethnic Germans outside Germany was a recipe for disaster. His solution to the Polish problem in 1939, therefore, was territorial revision.

Henderson had to face a situation on his return to Berlin whereby Britain had given a guarantee of assistance to Poland on 31 March in the wake of the German annexation of Bohemia and Moravia on 15 March, and of the largely German speaking city of Memel which was seized from Lithuania on 21 March. British policy was now to construct a bloc of interested states to control and deter Germany.

The Cabinet meeting on 29 March had shown that Halifax was worried that if, as was feared, Germany attacked Rumania (and rumours had been spread by the Rumanian Minister in London Tilea to this effect) Poland might 'stand aside'. Halifax was therefore anxious, now that collective security was on the agenda, to secure Polish assistance and 'as much assistance from Russia as was practicable'.[7]

Henderson had long been suspicious of Soviet communism because it sought to 'spread its ideology abroad', but was prescient enough to see (unlike Chamberlain) that a Nazi-Soviet pact was a possibility in the summer of 1939. He was therefore prepared to put aside his anti-Soviet prejudice,

and his suspicious of alliances, in the interests of British policy. In the summer of 1939 he, like Vansittart, became an advocate of a Soviet alliance, but his advice was ignored, a crucial error by the Foreign Office, which had indications from the French, and from the German press, long before the event, that Germany and Russia were likely to reach an agreement.[8] Henderson deserves credit for his prescience and flexibility over the issue of the Soviet alliance, which was badly handled by Chamberlain, Halifax and the Foreign Office. He did not trust the Russians, but wished to get the USSR 'into the anti-aggression block ... I feel intuitively that the Germans are getting at Stalin'.[9]

In contrast Chamberlain was notoriously reluctant to make an alliance with Soviet Russia and refused to accept that a Nazi-Soviet pact was imminent. Halifax shared this attitude, an alliance with Poland was to be preferred. Henderson thought that the USSR could be used to deter German aggression; but he continued to believe in the morality of the German case over Danzig and the Corridor, and in peaceful revision of Versailles.

> I may be wrong [he wrote to Horace Wilson on 24 May] but I am personally convinced that there can be no permanent peace in Europe until Danzig has reverted to Germany. The Poles cannot be master of 400,000 Germans in Danzig - ergo Germany must be.[10]

Yet again Henderson appears as the moralist and the revisionist, still convinced that the accommodation of German grievances against Versailles would carry the day. If these grievances were not addressed, Henderson argued, Britain would be the pawn of a revanchist Polish foreign policy, and

Polish stubbornness over Danzig and the Corridor would be encouraged. Henderson was to persist with this line to the eve of the outbreak of war in September 1939.

This persistence brought him under attack from Foreign Office colleagues and friendly foreign diplomats alike. Henderson was barely back in post on 24 April when his apparent failure to learn from previous experience was criticised by the Counsellor in the Warsaw Embassy, Clifford Norton. He complained to Strang on 27 April that it seemed

> most dangerous for Berlin to use the same language about Danzig as they did about Czechoslovakia a year ago ... I can quite understand [Norton added acidly] that in Berlin life is not conducive to critical thought.[11]

Henderson's French colleague Coulondre was equally critical when telegraphing to Foreign Minister Bonnet. Referring to Henderson's reaction to the events of 15 March, Coulondre made a powerful condemnation of the British Ambassador's diplomacy

> les événements ont coulé sur Sir Nevile Henderson comme l'eau sur un mirroir; it n'en reste plus trace et mon collègue ne reflète plus à nouveau que le visage à son avis prestigieux de M. Hitler. Il semble qu'il ait oublié et n'ait rien appris.

Coulondre did add that Henderson told him in March that he had not wished to return to Berlin, and that he had repeated this comment on 26 April. But noted Coulondre 'cependant il est là'.[12] Coulondre was more critical of Henderson than the previous French Ambassador François-Poncet, who had been posted to Rome.[13] His complaints echoed those of the French

Minister in Prague Lacroix who complained in 1938 that Henderson's behaviour was undermining the Anglo-French alliance. But Henderson was no admirer of alliances or collective security.

Henderson had been on enforced leave when the British decision to guarantee Poland was made on 31 March. He was obviously unhappy about it because of his predisposition to fear alliances which went back to his period of service in Constantinople when he felt (like the Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon) that Britain had been betrayed by the French at the time of the Chanak crisis. 'No sooner had we taken up a position,' Henderson was to write later of that experience, 'than the French and Italians had ratted on us.'[14] Most important however, was Henderson's fear that the guarantee effectively meant that British policy could be determined in Warsaw. Britain would become a prisoner of Polish policy-makers.

Coulondre's comment, however, that Henderson seemed to have 'learnt nothing and forgotten nothing' contained at best only a half truth. While Henderson continued to believe that appeasement was the best policy available, he had been deeply shaken by the events of 15 March. He realised that the sensible option for the Foreign Office would have been to transfer him, and replace him with some-one who was a natural supporter of a policy of collective security. Henderson admitted as much in Failure of A Mission.

This option had been available to Halifax and Chamber-lain, particularly in the light of Henderson's very poor health, but they had failed to avail themselves of it.

Instead Henderson was left in post after there had been a revolution in British foreign policy with which, he was out of sympathy. In the brave new world of collective security in April 1939 (Britain had also guaranteed Greece, Rumania and Turkey), Henderson was ill at ease. Nevertheless Coulondre's assessment proved to be wrong in the long run. Henderson may have been out of sympathy with the concept of collective security, but he was intelligent enough to see the need for it after 15 March, and to press for a Soviet alliance. He remained fearful however that 'if the Poles took up arms, then Britain fought too'.[15] Neither, Henderson believed, would the Poles be able to withstand a German onslaught, or Britain and France be in any position to 'render any effective immediate aid' to Poland (in both beliefs he turned out to be absolutely correct).[16]

In the new situation after the British guarantee had been given to Poland, Henderson saw his role to be one of warning the Foreign Office to beware of encouraging Polish intransigence about Danzig and the Corridor. He shared this anxiety with Cadogan on 20 April and hinted to the Polish Ambassador in Berlin that 'they mustn't be intransigent about Danzig now that we have guaranteed them'.[17] Henderson therefore saw the guarantee to Poland as a means of securing Polish acquiescence in a policy of territorial revision. He was sure both that the Poles were being intransigent, and that the Germans had by far the better case over Danzig. Henderson's critics, like Oliver Harvey, thought that he was failing in his duty to make Hitler take the British guarantee seriously. This was not the case, as evidence from German sources makes clear, but Henderson clearly saw the

guarantee to Poland as a double-edged sword.[18] It could be used to warn the Germans about the perils of aggression but it could also be used to demand concessions from the Poles. Britain was, after all, in a stronger position than she had been with the Czechs in 1938, in that she did have a commitment to Poland which had not been the case with Czechoslovakia, and this gave British warnings more weight. With commitment, Henderson believed, not unreasonably, went greater Polish responsibilities. Others, like Coulondre, saw Henderson's attitude as a dangerous reprise of the British attitude to the Sudeten crisis, which had merely presented Hitler with a bloodless triumph. While the British Government saw the prevention of German hegemony as its priority, Henderson still saw the avoidance of war as his paramount task.

Henderson was especially busy in early May, bombarding London with telegrams about an interview with Ribbentrop on 2 May, and expressing doubts about the sincerity of Josef Beck in the same manner as he had attacked the integrity of Beneš a year earlier.

Henderson warned Ribbentrop about the anti-German feeling which Hitler's Prague coup had unleashed in Britain, but he was sure that Ribbentrop was 'impervious to argument or reason'. He told Halifax, however, that in his view Ribbentrop was not so confident as he had been before that Britain would never fight. Henderson had rejected an accusation in this interview that Britain and France were encouraging Beck to be intransigent. This, he told Ribbentrop, was 'quite untrue'.[19] On 3 May Henderson reported back about attacks on the Poles and the British in the

German press, which had castigated Chamberlain and Daladier as the protectors of Poland. The British press were accused of inciting the Poles to acts of provocation.[20]

This was Henderson in the required assertive mode, warning the Germans off, and reporting back accurately on the attitude of the German press. But he retained his doubts about Polish foreign policy, for on the day of his latest fractious interview with Ribbentrop, Henderson criticised Beck's diplomacy. He pointed out to Halifax that Beck had denied that the Germans had ever made a specific offer to guarantee the existing Polish-German frontier. This flew in the face of what Henderson's colleague Ogilvie-Forbes had been told by the Polish Ambassador Lipski on 22 April, namely that the Germans had offered such a guarantee for a period of between 25 and 30 years. In exchange, Lipski had told Ogilvie-Forbes, the Germans wanted an extra-territorial corridor across the Polish Corridor. Beck's comments were, therefore, Henderson said, 'surely disingenuous'.[21] His instincts about this were sound, as Beck was a notoriously elusive, and untrustworthy character who was for this reason cordially disliked by his French allies. Beck's policy was to extract as much protection for the Poles as possible, without giving up his territorial ambitions, which included an interest in the puppet state of Slovakia which had obtained an illusory independence after 15 March.[22]

Nevertheless, and despite his legitimate reservations about Beck, Henderson had enough insight to see that Hitler might be hoping that his offer of a frontier guarantee would be rejected. For if it carried with it a demand for an

extra-territorial corridor, Hitler knew that the Poles would turn it down.

Henderson though did not make the logical leap required to see that Hitler's olive branch, reported on by Lipski on 22 April, was in fact nothing of the sort. Either Poland accepted Hitler's terms, and became a German client state, or she would be attacked, and Henderson's unwillingness to grasp this fact infuriated colleagues like Norton and Coulondre. It remains true nonetheless, in Henderson's defence, that many British politicians and diplomats 'tended to see in the Polish régime, deviousness, megalomania, total national, self-centredness and greed'.[23] Only in the anxiety ridden atmosphere of March 1939 did an Anglo-Polish entente come to see desirable in the interest of stopping Hitler. Halifax's fear, referred to above, was that failure to reach agreement with Poland would leave it susceptible to German offers, and draw it into the Nazi orbit.[24] The Poles had shown a capacity for self aggrandisement at the time of Munich.

Henderson disagreed with Halifax's analysis. He did not believe that a Polish alliance was preferable to a Soviet one. He opposed <u>all</u> alliances but ultimately saw the force of the argument for a pact with the USSR.[25]

Despite his reservations about collective security however, Henderson was concerned that the Nazis should take the British guarantee to Poland seriously. Even when the British Government introduced partial conscription in April 1939, he did not think that the German government was convinced of Britain's determination to help the Poles.

> I constantly hear reports [he wrote in a private

> letter to Cadogan on 26 April] which cannot be disregarded, that the Nazi Party leaders including of course Ribbentrop believe that England is still unprepared in the last resort to go to war. I realise the danger of this frame of mind.

Henderson had also asked his confidant the Italian Ambassador Attolico about the situation. Attolico believed that there was a difference between the situation in the spring of 1939 and September 1938. In Attolico's opinion, Henderson reported, the 'Ribbentrop crowd then believed that Britain would not fight because she was not ready. Today that crowd did not believe that Britain would fight over a question like Danzig'.[26] Further evidence had been provided to the Foreign Office by Ogilvie-Forbes about a conversation between the Japanese Ambassador, in which Oshima had stated that the Germans believed that British rearmament was only bluff.[27]

Henderson had been rightly sceptical about the numerous false alarms about German intentions in the early months of 1939; but he fully realised that it was dangerous for the Germans to be allowed to assume that because Britain had not fought in September 1938, it would not honour its guarantee to Poland. It is not, therefore, the case that, as Aster contends, he 'ignored the crisis of confidence created by the occupation of Prague'.[28] Henderson left German officials in no doubt that if an attack was made on Poland, it would mean war. But unlike many of his Foreign Office colleagues, Henderson still believed that Hitler's ambitions were limited, and that the Danzig issue could be settled by peaceful negotiation. Makins, for example, minuted 'How can

we ensure that a settlement of the Danzig question will in fact be the end, and not a prelude to further demands?'[29] Henderson by contrast went on hoping desperately that Hitler was not an extremist and might still be susceptible to diplomacy, providing the Poles could be persuaded to make concessions. He also continued to hope that British mediation might prevent war. Nevertheless Henderson was aware of the dangers of allowing the Germans to believe that they could achieve another bloodless coup, and he carried out faithfully his warning function about the consequences of further aggression. He, like Neville Chamberlain, continued to hope that the peace might be preserved.

In early May there were persistent rumours about a German coup in Danzig. On 8 May Henderson's former First Secretary Kirkpatrick (now back in the Central Department) minuted that 'if any coup of any sort whatever is made in Danzig, we should instantly mobilise'. Strang agreed with Jebb's suggestion that Henderson should speak to Generals Keitel and Halder, if the right opportunity presented itself to warn the Germans off. Henderson's critic Sargent disagreed with Jebb's suggestion. He thought it would make more sense to sound out Beck in Warsaw about what Poland would do in the event of a German coup in Danzig. 'I doubt,' Sargent observed, 'whether it is any good telling Sir N. Henderson to talk to the German generals and on the whole I should prefer not to do so.' But Cadogan sided with Strang and Jebb, minuting that 'perhaps Sir N. Henderson can be instructed to say a word or two to both Keitel and Halder'.[30]

A passage of arms then ensued as Henderson, not for the

first time in his career, queried his instructions. The advice of the Foreign Office officials had by then reached Halifax, who wanted Henderson to seek out an opportunity to speak to Keitel and Halder. On 11 May Henderson telegraphed the Foreign Office that he could not

> well act personally as regards persons mentioned in paragraph 2 of Foreign Office telegram No.150 unless I get favourable opportunity. I have asked Military Attaché to see Deputy Chief of Staff [Halder] at an early date.

Halifax was insistent. He quite understood that Henderson might have some difficulty in getting access to a member of the High Command. But he did not want the message to be delivered 'through a third party such as a Military Attaché'. In the following telegram on 13 May a tone of exasperation had crept into Halifax's response. He still thought it

> desirable that you should speak as authorised to members of the High Command if an opportunity offers ... I should prefer that action should be taken by yourself rather than by your Military Attaché'.

If Henderson failed to deliver the message in person, Halifax had already said in his telegram of 11 May this would 'rob our words of a good deal of their effect'.[31]

Henderson still believed he was in the right about this issue, as he demonstrated in private correspondence with Cadogan.

> The language he had been instructed to use to the German generals [he wrote to Cadogan on 10 May] is practically identical with what I use to all and

> sundry who, in my opinion, are likely to repeat it in useful quarters.

The record shows that Henderson's claim was accurate, and he went on to tell Cadogan that he would continue to pass on warnings to leading Germans, and instruct Mason MacFarlane to do the same. He would also speak to Keitel in such terms if he got the opportunity to see him in the near future.[32] If, however, no such opportunity arose Henderson was prepared to take up Sargent's suggestion on 8 May that a warning be 'planted' 'on suitable Nazi agents'.[33] Ingeniously Henderson suggested to Cadogan that any message to the German military via the Embassy should be sent, as if by mistake in a telegram 'in a cypher which we know that the Germans can decode'. This suggestion was taken up by the Foreign Office and on 11 May the warning was telegraphed to Berlin in the 'R' Code (a code used to communicate with the British Embassies in Berlin and Warsaw at the time).[34]

Nevertheless Henderson was still obliged to carry out his instructions, following Halifax's testy telegram on 13 May. But both Halter and Keitel kept refusing invitations to lunch, and Henderson had to make do with Weizsäcker whom he saw on 16 May and to whom he gave the warning (he also passed on a warning to Halder when he saw him some weeks later on 30 May).[35]

This episode, which is not mentioned by Henderson in Failure of A Mission, showed that Halifax would not give Henderson the freedom of manoeuvre accorded to him at the time of the Nuremberg Rally in 1938, when Henderson had declined to pass on a warning to Hitler and got his way. But it also showed that if Halifax exercised his authority

as Secretary of State fully, Henderson would comply as he was bound to do.

As it was, the plan to use the German generals to receive a warning was a somewhat desperate Foreign Office expedient, devised to deal with the problem of the obdurate Ribbentrop, who was telling Hitler that the British would never fight. Sargent had been unenthusiastic about the tactic, as was Henderson, although the grounds for his objection are not entirely clear. He may have objected to Halifax's instruction purely on grounds of protocol, as it would be normal for MacFarlane to make such an intervention with the German military and not the Ambassador directly. Henderson had no objection in principle however, to using the German military as a conduit for warnings. He made this clear at the time of the von Hassell interview in September 1938, when he had specifically asked von Hassell to relay a warning to Keitel. Sometimes Henderson could be a stickler for protocol, just as on other occasions he could ignore it. Or as stated in his letter to Cadogan, he may have felt that he was already giving enough warnings.

The letter to Cadogan on 10 May also provides an insight into Henderson's behaviour over this, and many other aspects of Anglo-German relations. 'The PM said to me two years ago,' he confided to Cadogan, 'that sometimes a calculated indiscretion was a very useful expedience. (Hence my first speech in Berlin!!).'[36] This advice from Chamberlain clearly made Henderson believe, and he had shown plenty of capacity for unorthodox diplomacy before he went to Berlin, that normal Foreign Office rules did not apply to him. He would continue to query his instructions, and commit

'indiscretions', in carrying out his one-man mission to preserve the peace.

Henderson did, though, inform the Foreign Office about German press attacks on the British Government (D. Cameron Watt wrongly claims that he did not).[37] He telegraphed on 5 May that the British were being blamed, in the Nazi paper 'Volkischer Beobachter', for encouraging the Poles to be obdurate . Goebbels, whom Henderson regularly identified as an 'extremist' in the Nazi leadership, was quoted in the paper as saying that 'the jingoism of the Polish Press ... comes from the stimulation it has received in England'. This particular remark was passed on by Henderson without comment. Henderson did not endorse the point about Polish jingoism, or a further accusation that the Poles were claiming East Prussia up to, and beyond, the line of the River Oder.[38]

Nevertheless Henderson's anti-Polish line was consistently present in his telegrams and letters. It was there for example when Henderson wrote privately to Halifax on 6 May about an interview with Göring. When Göring had hinted at 'the solution of a corridor over the corridor,' Henderson wrote, 'I never even discussed it because I thought it too good to be true'. Kirkpatrick minuted crossly 'Where this argument goes wrong is in the assumption that Germany is in the right over Danzig', but Henderson focused his criticism on the Poles. Their chauvinism he argued in the same letter 'had made Colonel Beck overplay his hand over the issue of Danzig and the Corridor'.[39] This reflected Henderson's view that Poland was refusing to make concessions when faced with reasonable German demands.

Henderson was also consistent in his view that Göring was a 'moderate', who might be used to influence Hitler, and Chamberlain shared this view (although Göring was not mentioned by name) when he spoke to the Cabinet Foreign Policy Committee on 16 May. There were still 'important moderate elements in Germany', Chamberlain told his colleagues, 'which it was desirable to foster and encourage. He greatly feared that an alliance with Russia would drive these moderate elements into Hitler's camp.'[40] Henderson shared Chamberlain's anxiety about a Soviet alliance, but by mid-May Chamberlain had evidently come to recognise that Hitler himself was an extremist, and not a misunderstood dictator.

Henderson kept the lines to Göring open, and saw him again on 8 June. He warned Göring that Britain would certainly go to war if Germany attacked Poland, but exceeded his brief by adding that Chamberlain would 'be ready to give a not unfriendly reply (I made it clear that I was speaking personally)' if Hitler would abandon his aggressive attitude to the Poles. Henderson went on to say that after all Danzig was a German city run by Germans, and there was no question of ethnic Germans being oppressed. 'I wanted to add,' Henderson told Halifax, 'that the only people who were ill-treated in Danzig were Poles and Jews', but at that point Göring had interrupted to say that Danzig 'was not a matter of urgency'.

Ironically Henderson was forced to defend his old mentor Vansittart, whom Göring singled out for mention as a focus for anti-Germanism in Britain. 'I retorted,' Henderson said, 'that people in England with probably far greater

justification regarded Ribbentrop as enemy No.1 of the British Empire.' Göring's reply was significant, for he told Henderson that 'neither Ribbentrop nor himself for that matter, had more power to influence Hitler than the pebbles we were standing on'.[41] This revealing insight should have been taken to heart by Henderson, who might then have invested less time and energy (and optimism) securing Göring's support to rein in Hitler in the weeks to come.[42] Göring was clearly wrong in his assessment of Ribbentrop (influenced as it was by personal hatred) who did significantly influence Hitler's attitude towards Britain.[43] Hitler was profoundly ignorant about Britain, and relied on Ribbentrop for what proved to be disastrously inaccurate advice. Nevertheless Henderson was right in his assessment that Göring did not want war with Britain in 1939.[44] And he duly reported back Göring's comments to the Foreign Office, which should have been able to draw its own conclusions about the extent of Hitler's personal dominance.

German illusions about the position in Britain were underlined by Göring's remarks about Vansittart, and his reference to 'a clique in the Foreign Office which wanted war at any price'. Henderson was forced to point out that Halifax and Chamberlain were 'the arbiters of Britain's foreign policy and that any false conceptions on this score only lead to disastrous mistakes'.[45]

By June 1939 Henderson was becoming alarmed at the failure to reach a settlement over Danzig and the Corridor. He was convinced that if no solution was found by the end of August, Hitler would move against the Poles before the Party Rally in September. For once he found an ally in

Vansittart, who minuted on 30 June that

> Sir N. Henderson says, as I do that the German people are being prepared by a campaign of insults and contemptuous invective [recognition from his greatest critic that Henderson was briefing the Foreign Office fully about the hostility of the German press and propaganda machine] for war with this country. That the views of His Majesty's Ambassador in Berlin should accord with mine is an event so rare that I trust the conjunction will carry due weight.[46]

It was not in fact the first time the two men had been in agreement (they were at one over the Soviet alliance), although as Vansittart's caustic remark acknowledged, they were more often at loggerheads. In this instance Henderson was carrying out his warning function to the British Government, and giving it an accurate picture of the mendacious Nazi propaganda campaign in the summer of 1939.[47]

The sheer physical strain on Henderson at this time, sick as he was, must have been tremendous.

> He was increasingly operating at the limits of physical tolerance. His letters became increasingly intense as he discerned increasing insensitivity to the central fact that 'hundreds of thousands of British lives' were being risked.[48]

The use of the word 'intense' by Maurice Cowling is kinder to Henderson, and more accurate, than the mere pejorative 'hysterical' which censorious historians have favoured. And why was Henderson at fault for trying desperately in the last months of peace to avoid the conflict he dreaded so

much? Henderson was no physical coward (he had badgered the Foreign Office constantly to allow him to join the Army in the First World War), but he possessed, perhaps more imagination and sensitivity than some Foreign Office colleagues about what such a conflict might mean, his agony being sharpened by his conviction that Danzig was not a cause worth dying for. He also knew that he had lost the confidence of Halifax and the Foreign Office, who added to his problems by hinting at a transfer, and then failing to do anything about it. Yet the 'crushing weight' of illness and departmental isolation only spurred Henderson to greater efforts.[49] There was nothing ignoble about Henderson's belief that 'War is such an appalling adventure that I have always felt, and still feel that everything else must be tried'.[50]

In essence Henderson was of course right about the Polish commitment. The British guarantee to Poland was a paper guarantee. The Chiefs of Staff would not give the Poles the arms they requested, and the Treasury would not give them the financial credits they required.[51] Chamberlain and his colleagues never had any intention of giving effective assistance to Poland, and their policy was open to exactly the same criticism that Cadogan had levelled at Vansittart at the time of the Anschluss. That is, of encouraging 'a small man to fight' when one wasn't prepared to help him.[52] Henderson saw the flawed logic in the British position. First of all Britain was putting its foreign policy at the mercy of Beck, and then it was making false promises to his government. As his correspondence with Lord Londonderry at the end of 1938 shows, Henderson

believed that Britain could avoid war only by rearming in depth, and negotiating with Germany from a position of strength rather than weakness. But he also remained convinced that the problem of Danzig could, and should, be solved.

All that the British Government had to offer in 1939 to the Poles was bluff, and Henderson had always warned against the danger of threats which could not be backed up with adequate force. The Chamberlain Government did not want the Poles to slide into the German camp after 15 March, but it lacked the political or military will to assist the Poles if their courageous refusal to bow to Hitler's demands led to war.

The military teeth which Britain needed could only really be provided by an alliance with the USSR, which (as has been seen) Henderson came around reluctantly to support. 'Clearly,' he wrote in 1940, 'the Russian negotiations were a form of encirclement, but in no offensive sense, and solely as a means to resist aggression.[53] But he had little confidence that the Anglo-French talks with the Russians which started in early August would be successful, especially after the dismissal of Foreign Affairs Minister Litvinov in May who had been closely associated with a Soviet policy of anti-fascist collective security.

Henderson was also anxious that Germany should not be provoked by sending the Anglo-French delegation to Russia across German territory by rail (as the French wished). He advised the Foreign Office not to agree to this, and his advice prevailed with the delegation being sent on a lengthy sea journey (the Germans had already complained about

British service aircraft flying over Germany).[54] Henderson however, could hardly be blamed for the fact that the ship could only travel at 13 knots and took a week to get to Leningrad. But the fact that his advice on this point was accepted by the Foreign Office is significant, given the comments by leading historians about the disdain with which he was allegedly regarded after his second return to Germany on 24 April.[55]

Henderson continued to hope for an accord with Germany, noting in a despatch to the Foreign Office that 'a settlement with Germany and Italy will be easier ... if the Russian negotiations end in some quite anodyne agreement'.[56] This reflected Chamberlain's own view. At the meeting of the Cabinet Foreign Policy Committee on 16 May Chamberlain had told his colleagues that 'Rather than consent to a Triple Alliance to include Russia, he, the Prime Minister would prefer to extend our guarantee against aggression to the Baltic States'.[57] Henderson as ever, was in agreement with Downing Street rather than with the Foreign Office.

In the meantime Henderson was involved in day-to-day dealings with the Wilhelmstrasse, albeit in the knowledge that Ribbentrop would prevent him from seeing Hitler, and was telling Hitler that Britain would never fight. Henderson had two important interviews with Weizsäcker on 15 May and 13 June. On the first occasion, according to Weizsäcker's minute, Henderson was anxious that the Germans should realise that

> England did not want war and wished to avoid it through a German-Polish agreement, but that she was ready and determined to keep her promise and come to

> Poland's assistance should we try to change the status quo in Danzig and thereby make Poland go to war.

Here is clear evidence that Henderson was carrying out his instructions and warning Weizsäcker about the consequences of aggression. Henderson went on to concur with Weizsäcker about Polish rashness, but told him that the German coup in Prague had 'produced a complete revulsion in London'. Yet, according to Weizsäcker, who was no friend of the Poles, Henderson then said that he believed that Beck too, was against war, but that 'like the British Government, he was convinced of the ultimate victory of the British-French-Polish arms'. Henderson was convinced that in the end, the Axis powers would be defeated by such a combination 'for the Axis was shorter of breath'.[58]

For his part Henderson recognised that Weizsäcker was 'as bitter about the Poles as all of them' although he thought Weizsäcker 'a "thorough" German but ... an honest man and he is certainly not a firebrand'.[59]

Perversely, Lewis Namier used the Weizsäcker interview on 15 May as evidence against Henderson for failing to disguise his mixed feelings about the Poles. Any balanced reading of Henderson's remarks shows that he did carry out his instructions and even (contrary to his anti-Polish reputation) stated his belief that Beck did not want war.[60] Astonishingly, another historian C. Thorne, takes Henderson's comment that any war would 'be conducted defensively the Western Powers' as evidence that Henderson chose 'a markedly personal interpretation of how best to serve his country'.[61] In fact Weizsäcker's text reads

> In the war, added Henderson, the Western Powers would remain on the defensive. We would bomb each other's houses, but the final victory in the British view did not lie with Germany and Italy, for the Axis was shorter of breath.[62]

Henderson was stating his opinion that the Allied side would win the war and for this is, as usual, unfairly castigated.

When the two men met again on 13 June Henderson was recorded by Weizsäcker as saying that 'England desired to retain the sea; the European Continent could be left to Germany'.[63] Even Namier finds this attribution 'astonishing' and needing 'substantiating'.[64] Henderson had never been so extreme in any of his other interviews with German leaders or officials. In his own version of the interview, Henderson recorded Weizsäcker as saying that it was Britain's task to see that the Poles behaved themselves. He telegraphed back to London that

> I may talk till I am hoarse that it is the German themselves who are to blame, but if I had the eloquence of Demosthenes I would not have the slightest prospect of convincing them to the contrary.[65]

It seems extremely unlikely that Henderson would have made such a massive indiscretion on 13 June as alleged by Weizsäcker. Namier himself concedes that Henderson was 'firmly convinced' of Britain's determination to fight which 'emotionally, he only half shared'.[66] This comment in itself tends to confuse, for Henderson's doubts, which were genuine enough, did not prevent him from warning Weizsäcker and others that Britain would indeed fight if called upon to do so. He supported his warning by telling Weizsäcker on

15 May that Britain and France would win any such struggle, and his reference to blockade tactics (which had after all won the First World War) was perfectly proper. As was his expressed anxiety about the possibility of war on 13 June, and feeling 'the weight of responsibility which rests on him as Ambassador in Berlin'.[67] Weizsäcker professed surprise after the June interview that Henderson had no opinion about Anglo-French attempts to secure an alliance with the USSR, but this discretion seems entirely proper when the delegation was only to be sent to Russia six weeks later. It contrasts oddly with the alleged indiscretion earlier in the interview. As does the record of Henderson's comments to sympathetic Germans with no particular axe to grind like von Hassell and Spitzy, and officials in the employ of the Reich Government.[68] A possible explanation of the alleged 15 May gaffe may be that Henderson, frustrated by Ribbentrop's obstructive tactics against his aim of Anglo-German détente, perpetrated an 'indiscretion' to open the direct channel of communication to Hitler which had been closed to him. But he had never spoken in such defeatist terms before, and the accuracy of Weizsäcker's report must be in doubt.

At the start of July Henderson was back in London for consultations with his doctor about his cancer condition. This had shown no improvement, and together with the gathering crisis over Poland, may have contributed to his darkening mood. He recognised, when telegraphing to Halifax on 11 July, that if Hitler 'persisted in forcible solutions ... then we shall have to make the great sacrifice'.[69] Nonetheless he still thought as late as 8 August that Hitler's mind was not yet made up in favour of war, although

when he saw Weizsäcker again on 5 August, he found the German diplomat's belief that the Polish crisis was not as dangerous as the preceding Czech one 'complacent'.[70] Henderson's anxieties were not allayed by the fact that despite the worsening Polish crisis, the Cabinet Foreign Policy Committee did not meet at all between 1 August and 25 August.

Henderson's hopes about Hitler's state of mind were steadily eroded. 'We cannot yield,' he told Cadogan on 15 August, 'and I am afraid that I do not believe Hitler will either.'[71] And again on 24 August he conceded that 'if the British public cannot stand Hitler's fidgetiness [an odd choice of phrase] any longer there is nothing more to be said'.[72] In the meantime the Poles were likely to be attacked if they did not meet Hitler's demand that a plenipotentiary should be sent to Berlin to negotiate about Danzig and the Corridor.[73]

In those last desperate days of peace. Henderson tried his hand again at personal diplomacy. He saw everyone he could, including Spitzy (who had left the Wilhelmstrasse), in a despairing attempt to stave off the unthinkable. Spitzy recorded that he met Henderson at the Dutch Legation and how

> Henderson put his hands on my shoulders and begged me to do everything I could to make it clear to all my influential acquaintances in Berlin that Britain would come in if Germany attacked Poland. [Henderson went on] You must tell all your old friends and all other reasonable people, I implore you.

Spitzy promised so to do, writing that he had 'never

forgotten' Henderson's emotional appeal.[74]

Henderson even wrote a letter to his old enemy Ribbentrop asking if, after Hitler had shown so much patience with the Poles, 'it is too much to ask that he should wait that little while more which may make all the difference'. Henderson made it clear that he was writing to Ribbentrop 'quite personally' to prevent the greatest of all catastrophes.[75] But by the time this letter was written on 25 August it was already too late. Ribbentrop had already signed his notorious non-aggression pact with Molotov on 22 August (an alignment which Henderson had foreseen) On the same day that Henderson wrote to Ribbentrop, Chamberlain transformed the guarantee to Poland into a full-blown military alliance. Hitler called Ribbentrop the 'second Bismarck', but the triumphant duo were shaken when the British were not intimidated by the agreement between Germany and the USSR into abandoning Poland. Only to the extent however that Hitler postponed 'Case White', the planned attack on Poland, until 1 September. An interview between Henderson and Hitler at Berchtesgaden on 23 August achieved little, although Henderson passed on a letter from Chamberlain to Hitler (the letter had been Henderson's idea) underlining Britain's commitment to Poland.

Strange unofficial intermediaries now appeared on the scene in an attempt to save the peace. One was the Swedish amateur diplomat Berger Dalherus (who knew Göring and other Nazi leaders). After seeing Göring, Dalherus told Henderson that Hitler was 'fully alive to fact that Great Britain was not bluffing'. Göring however, told Dalherus that he feared that the Poles would make difficulties about sending an

emissary to Berlin as Hitler demanded.[76] Henderson could claim at least that Hitler now understood that Britain was not bluffing. He still hoped that Göring's influence could be used for peace.

Henderson managed to see Hitler on 25 August and again on 29 August. On 25 August Hitler asked Henderson to come to the Reich Chancellery where Henderson found the Führer 'calm and normal'.[77] He told Henderson that the problem of Danzig and the Corridor must be solved, and then he would make Britain an offer to guarantee the British Empire, and even put German forces at the disposal of the British Government.

Henderson tried to point out that Britain would never abandon the Poles, and that Hitler's 'plan' said nothing about a peaceful settlement with Poland. He offered nonetheless, to take up Hitler's suggestion that he fly to London at once.

The Foreign Office were outraged by Hitler's offer, but arranged for Henderson to attend a crucial Cabinet meeting, the second such meeting Henderson had attended since 30 August 1938. Three Cabinet meetings were held between 26 August and 28 August. Halifax seemed impressed by the fact that Hitler had put a German plane at Henderson's disposal, which he thought showed that Hitler's intentions were honourable. There was however, no backing away from the commitment to Poland.

Henderson was cross-questioned at the Cabinet meeting on 26 August. He wanted Britain to sign an alliance with Germany, or a non-aggression pact. In answer to questions about Hitler's intentions, Henderson replied by saying that

'however little faith one might have in Herr Hitler's promises, one might at least test them out'.[78] As Sidney Aster has pointed out this 'seemingly fatuous advice'[79] made good practical sense. This was because on 25 August the Chiefs of Staff had decided that if a British ultimatum had to be issued to Germany, war preparations would only be complete on 31 August. Time needed to be bought therefore. Henderson wanted Britain to arrange direct bi-lateral talks between Poland and Germany and the Cabinet agreed with this proposal.[80] Hitler wanted a Polish plenipotentiary to go to Berlin. Henderson had been urging his Polish counterpart Lipski to see Hitler about such a visit. His colleague in Warsaw Sir Howard Kennard, thought that 'it would be too much like Canossa'.[81] And Cadogan agreed with him; a sanction from Beck in Warsaw was required if there were to be direct Polish-German talks.

This sanction came on the afternoon of 28 August, and Henderson was soon on his way back to Berlin from Croydon Airport. When Henderson saw Hitler again at the Reich-chancery on the evening of 28 August he was 'once again friendly and reasonable'.[82] He seemed prepared to accept British proposals for an international guarantee to Poland and the opening of direct conversations with Warsaw. Hitler undertook to give Henderson a written answer the next day, but it was to be almost midnight before Henderson got back to the British Embassy. He wrote later that it was 'the only one of my interviews with Hitler at which it was I who did most of the talking'.[83]

Henderson warned Hitler repeatedly that Germany had a stark choice. It could have friendship with Britain, or war

with Poland, Britain and France if it insisted on the use of force. If Hitler opted for the latter, then war with Britain and France would become inevitable. Henderson 'succeeded admirably' in finding out what Hitler's immediate objectives were.[84] He wanted Danzig and the Polish Corridor along with frontier modifications in Silesia (another bone of contention between the two states).

Even Vansittart, long Henderson's leading critic in the Foreign Office, had to concede that Henderson 'had conducted the interview very well'.[85] He was unhappy, however, that Henderson had stated that he personally did not rule out the possibility of Britain accepting an alliance with Germany. Henderson was subsequently to be instructed that he should not make any references to Anglo-German alliances in future interviews.[86]

Credit however needs to be given to Henderson for a job well done, though some historians seem unwilling to give it even when it is due.[87] But the Foreign Office made it clear that it wanted neither an alliance, nor a non-aggression pact (which Henderson had advocated at the Cabinet meeting on 26 August). The Germans would have known about such an instruction instantly, had it been telephoned, as their Forschungsamt (Research Office) was regularly monitoring telephone calls from the British Embassy. Henderson and his Embassy colleagues were criticised for indiscretions on the telephone.[88] It was normal practice, however, for documents which were to be handed over to foreign governments to be sent 'en clair' to avoid compromising the normal codes and ciphers by inadvertently providing foreign cryptographers with useful clues. Particularly secret instructions would

be encoded.

On 29 August Henderson had his famous row with Hitler, who demanded that the British ensure that a Polish plenipotentiary arrived in Berlin on 30 August. As Henderson only received the German response to the British note at 7.15 pm on 29 August this was plainly impossible. When Henderson pointed out that this sounded like an ultimatum, Hitler became abusive. He shouted that

> I or His Majesty's Government did not give a row of pins whether Germans were slaughtered or not. I therefore proceeded to out-shout Hitler. I told him that I would not listen to such language from anybody ... I added a good deal more shouting at the top of my voice.

Roger Makins minuted two days later, 'Sir N. Henderson's language has already been approved ... He was probably quite right to shout'.[89] Henderson had shown his mettle in a crisis, especially as he had been taken aback by Hitler's rudeness after his polite behaviour on 25 August and 29 August. His row with Hitler had been witnessed by the Führer's reliable interpreter Paul Schmidt, whose subsequent account of the interview tallies with Henderson's own.

For Henderson's detractors this was a belated sign that the worm had turned at last. Yet Henderson had never been afraid to take on Ribbentrop, and he did so again on 30 August. Ribbentrop produced the text of what purported to be German peace proposals to the Poles, but refused to hand them over to Henderson. There were sixteen points, which included the return of Danzig to Germany, while the nearby port of Gdynia (built by the Poles after 1919)

remained in Polish hands. A plebiscite within twelve months, supervised by an international delegation, would decide the fate of the Corridor. An international commission of inquiry would then look into minority complaints from either the Germans or the Poles.[90]

Ribbentrop proceeded to read the sixteen points to Henderson, whose German was flawed, at what Henderson subsequently called 'top speed'.[91] When Henderson asked for the text of the document Ribbentrop refused, saying that it was now out of date. This had followed Henderson's complaint that a German demand that the British produce a Polish envoy in Berlin within twenty-four hours was 'unreasonable'. An undignified slanging match ensured, when Henderson the old-style diplomat took particular exception to Ribbentrop's use of the word 'damned' and lost his temper. Schmidt, who was present in his usual capacity as interpreter, feared that Ribbentrop would throw Henderson bodily out of the room.[92] Henderson wrote later, 'I do not desire to stress the unpleasant nature of this interview'.[93]

Diplomatic protocol had been breached by the abrasive Ribbentrop, in Henderson's view, but it was now too late for the diplomatic niceties on which Sir Nevile had been bred. Germany would go to war over a technicality. The Poles would negotiate directly with Germany, but they would not be bullied into sending an envoy to Berlin within the German timescale. Neither would Britain put pressure on the Poles to give way to this German intimidation.

A telegram was sent to Henderson by the Foreign Office on 2 September, the day after Hitler finally attacked Poland. It suggested that if the Germans withdrew from

Poland, 'His Majesty's Government would be willing to regard the position as being the same as it was before the German forces crossed the Polish frontier.'[94]

It was of no avail. Early in the morning of 3 September Henderson went to deliver the British ultimatum to Germany requiring her to withdraw her troops from Poland, and to begin that process by 11 am. Henderson arrived at 9 am precisely but was received not by Ribbentrop, who was well aware of its likely contents, but by Schmidt the interpreter. Schmidt expressed his regret about the circumstances to Henderson as he had 'always had the highest regard for the British Ambassador'.[95] Henderson also expressed regret. For him transmission of the ultimatum was recognition that his 'mission' had indeed failed. No response was ever received to the British ultimatum, and Britain and Germany were at war.

No one could have tried harder than Henderson to preserve the peace in August and September 1939. He had fought physical exhaustion and deadly disease to do so, and he had stood up to the bullying of both Hitler and Ribbentrop. It was no fault of his that Hitler insisted on having his war, precipitated by his assumption (based on Ribbentrop's bad advice) that Britain would never go to war for Poland. The record shows clearly that Henderson did everything possible to ensure that the German leadership was aware of the consequences of its actions. And he succeeded in doing so.[96]

Henderson was back in England by 7 September and he reported to Cadogan the following day.[97] His journey home had been largely uneventful although he noted the lack of

enthusiasm of the older generation of Germans for the war.[98] He offered to go back to his old post in Belgrade, but his offer was turned down, presumably on health grounds. On 25 January 1940, Cadogan noted in his diary that he had been to see Horace Wilson, the Head of the Civil Service, about Henderson 'who wants to retire on a health certificate'.[99]

Henderson had just over three years to live when he returned to England, his cancer condition worsening all the time. During this time he lived in hotels and country houses in London, Lincolnshire and Wales. The family home Sedgwick Park had been sold by his sister-in-law in 1931.[100] His main preoccupation was the publication of his account of his time in Berlin under the title Failure of A Mission, although subsequently Henderson wrote a second, more general memoir Water Under The Bridges, which was published post-humously in 1945.

Halifax gave his authority for the publication of Failure of A Mission in January 1940, but Cadogan told Henderson that 'there is a difficulty raised by your mention of our colonial offer in March 1939'. This had never been made public, Cadogan told Henderson, and the Foreign Office was afraid of parliamentary reaction if the first reference to the offer appeared in Henderson's book.[101] The section was therefore omitted, but by 6 March Henderson's book was in sufficient favour for the Ministry of Information to want to make use of it for 'propaganda abroad'.[102]

Oliver Harvey saw Henderson on 22 April, and Henderson told him that all the profits of his book, past and present, would be paid into a trust fund to help British refugees from Germany. Harvey's diary entry continues,

> He expects it will bring in some £40,000. He has now retired from the Service and is going to the South of France to try to get fit. I am afraid he is not very well and also that he realises it himself. Rather sad.[103]

The penchant for understatement of the age prevented Harvey from acknowledging the real tragedy of Henderson's situation.

Henderson sent a copy of Failure of A Mission to Horace Rumbold, who wrote back thanking him on 15 April and described the book as an 'absorbing and vivid account of the progress of events'. But Rumbold thought the title of the book was inappropriate as 'nobody could have succeeded in Berlin'. The character of the régime made this impossible said Rumbold who thanked his 'lucky stars that I left Berlin before having social intercourse with those ruffians surrounding Hitler'.[104] There is no record of any reply by Henderson to Rumbold's letter, but as his book shows, he still believed in 1940 that appeasement had been the correct policy to follow.

Even in retirement Henderson continued to make his views on Anglo-German relations known, and was anxious that Germany should not be obliterated from the map of Europe. Halifax wrote on 25 July to reassure him that 'we had no intention of destroying her or denying her a proper place in Europe'.[105]

To the end Henderson retained his capacity for getting into scrapes with the Foreign Office. A speech which he made at Stamford in July 1941 at the time of Rudolf Hess's flight to Scotland, was seen by some as being too pro-

German. Henderson wrote to the Foreign Office on 19 July regretting that 'anyone at Stamford mistook what I said about Hess to be a panegyric of him'.[106]

Nevile Henderson died of the cruel cancer which had afflicted him since 1938, on 30 December 1942. His 'Times' obituary recorded that Henderson had 'striven hard, long and sincerely to bring about an understanding with Nazi Germany'. He would have accepted this judgement, although 'The Times' assessment that 'he seems to have misunderstood or at least underrated what National Socialism portended for Germany and for Europe',[107] also contained some truth. Henderson had never been a Nazi sympathiser, and his striving for peace was both strenuous and heartfelt. But, like others, his fear and loathing of war sometimes blinded him to the intrinsic evil behind the forces he was dealing with.

References

1. Foreign Office to Ogilvie-Forbes 22/4/39, C6522/191/18, FO 371/22997; Cabinet Conclusions 23 (98) 19/4/39. At the Cabinet meeting Halifax told his colleagues that although Henderson should have returned to Berlin shortly after Easter 'events' had forced a postponement. It was thought wiser that Henderson should return only after 'the Führer's birthday celebrations' [i.e. 20 April 1939]. The British Press had been told that after reporting back to London Henderson had taken a short period of leave.

2. Henderson to Halifax 6/5/39, DBFP, 3, V, No.457; there were only 15,000 Poles in Danzig in 1939 out of a total population of 400,000. Although a free city under the auspices of the League, Danzig had been subjected to increased Nazi activity particularly after the denunciation of the German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact on 5 May 1939. There were more parades by the Hitler Youth and the SA, and rumours of a Nazi coup.

3. Failure of A Mission, p.10; in Orme Sargent's contribution on Henderson in the Dictionary of National Biography (1959) he wrote that Henderson 'had no preconceived dislike of authoritarian government as such'.

4. Henderson to Halifax 24/5/39, DBFP, 3, V, No.281.

5. Henderson to Halifax 2/8/39, FO 800/270, Henderson Papers, PRO; Henderson also protested to the Polish First Secretary at their Berlin Embassy that he was wrongly regarded as 'a sympathiser of Germany unfriendly to Poland ... this was not so ... He had many friends in Poland ... and he had grown fond of the country and its people'. Notes by Malhomme on conversation with Henderson 31/8/39, J. Lipski, Diplomat in Berlin 1933-9, W. Jedrejewicz (ed.), Cambridge, 1968, p.569.

6. Water Under The Bridges, pp.220, 225; see for example A. Prazmowska, Britain, Poland and the Eastern Front, Cambridge, 1987, pp.74-6. Prazmowska is critical of Henderson's anti-Polish prejudices and stresses how his despatches were 'avidly read' both in the Foreign Office and the Cabinet. This contrasts with Watt's view in Chamberlain's Ambassadors, p.154.

7. Cabinet Conclusions 29/3/39, CAB (15) 39, PRO; Tilea had spread these rumours (which were not supported by his Government in Bucharest) on 16 March. For further detail on the 'Tilea scare' see F.S. Northedge, The Troubled Giant; S. Newman, The British Guarantee to Poland, Oxford, 1976, pp.107-113; A.J. Crozier, The Causes of the Second World War, London, 1997, pp.149-150. For other factors behind the British decision to

guarantee Poland, see also B. Strang, 'Once More Into the Breach: Britain's Guarantee to Poland March 1939', JCH, No.4, Oct. 1996, pp.721-757.

8. Water Under the Bridges, p.45; for Henderson's urgings about a Soviet alliance, see Henderson to Halifax 28/5/39, DBFP, 3, V, No.717, Henderson to Halifax 17/6/39, DBFP, 3, VI, No.706, Henderson to Cadogan 13/6/39, No.702. On the danger that if Britain and France did not reach a settlement, Germany would, see also Henderson to Halifax 18/7/39, DBFP, 3, VI, No.385; Richard Lamb is severely critical of the failure of the Foreign Office Eastern Department to take warnings about a Soviet-German rapprochement seriously. The Drift To War 1922-1939, London, 1989, pp.309-10.

9. Henderson to Cadogan 31/5/39, FO 800/294, Cadogan Papers, PRO. Henderson's prescience is rather snidely acknowledged by Gladwyn Jebb in his memoirs Gladwyn, p.93. The Germans had indeed been 'getting at Stalin' since mid-April 1939, Crozier, p.154. A new Soviet-German trade agreement had been signed as far back as 19 December 1938, How War Came, pp.121-3.

10. Henderson to Wilson 24/5/39, PREM 1/331A, PRO.

11. Norton to Strang 27/4/39, DBFP, 3, V, No.301.

12. Coulondre to Bonnet 27/4/39, DDF, 2, XV, 16 March-30 April 1939, Paris, 1981, No.507.

13. Coulondre asked Bonnet to ensure that the contents of this particular telegram were kept secret within the Quai d'Orsay.

14. G.A. Craig and F. Gilbert, The Diplomats, New York, 1968, is the source for a comparative study of the work of François-Poncet and Coulondre, pp.437-76, 555-578.

15. Water Under the Bridges, p.109.

16. D. Cameron Watt, How War Came, London, 1989, pp.185-6.

17. Failure of A Mission, p.218. Henderson would have been unimpressed by the fact that the decision to guarantee Poland was triggered in part by a report from Ian Colvin of 'The News Chronicle'. Colvin warned Halifax that Germany was about to attack Poland on 29 March, but Cadogan's doubts about him were endorsed by Frank Roberts of the Central Department who minuted on 14 April that Colvin's reports were 'sometimes highly coloured and imaginative'. Henderson himself was involved in a row with the Wilhelmstrasse about Colvin's behaviour, as the Germans did not wish to renew Colvin's visa in February 1939. His reward was to be castigated in Colvin's post-war writings, but Colvin contributed to the atmosphere of alarm which brought about the volte-face in British policy after 15 March. Minute by F.K. Roberts 14/4/39, C5032/54/18,

FO 371/23016; see also minute by Roberts 21/3/39, C3568/16/18, FO 371/22988, PRO; Colvin is described by Simon Newman as 'an enigmatic character', The British Guarantee to Poland, Oxford, 1976, p.182; How War Came, pp.182-4; Harvey Diaries 29/3/39, p.271.

18. See for example, R. Spitzy, How We Squandered the Reich, pp.285-6, Spitzy tells of how 'poor Henderson wandered through Berlin telling everybody that this time Britain was absolutely determined to fight'.

19. Henderson to Halifax 2/5/39, DBFP, 3, V, Nos.330, 333.

20. ibid., No.328. Henderson's comments here contradict assertions by Professor Watt that he had not been reporting back accurately on German press campaigns. How War Came, p.100.

21. Henderson to Halifax 2/5/39, DBFP, 3, V, No.328.

22. For an analysis of Beck's diplomacy in 1938-9, see Craig and Gilbert, The Diplomats, pp.566-79; How War Came, pp.58-9; Prazmowska, pp.14-17, 33-4, 49-50, 59-61; Newman, pp.145-6.

23. B. Strang, Once More Into the Breach, p.739; D.C. Watt, 'Misinformation, Misconception, Mistrust Episodes in British Policy and the Approach of War' in M. Bentley and J. Stevenson (eds.), High and Low Politics in Modern Britain, Oxford, 1983, p.235. For a scathing assessment of the Poles, see M. Gilbert, Sir Horace Rumbold, London, 1973, pp.182-218.

24. Strang, p.740.

25. Neither had Henderson believed the various 'scare' stories about German attacks while he was on sick leave. Even Strang has to admit that 'virtually none of the specific predictions that members of the Berlin Embassy made regarding Hitler's future plans came to pass', B. Strang, 'Two Unequal Tempers: Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes, Sir Nevile Henderson and British Foreign Policy 1938-9', Diplomacy and Statecraft, Vol.5, No.1, March 1994, p.126.

26. Henderson to Cadogan 26/4/39, FO 371/23018, PRO; see also DBFP, 3, V, No.365; the Foreign Office approved of a speech made by Colonel Beck on 5 May, a minute stating that it was 'unprovocative in tone on Danzig', FO 371/23018, PRO.

27. Ogilvie-Forbes to Foreign Office 11/4/39, C5384/15/18, FO 371/22969, PRO. Forbes wrote that because Oshima had close links with the German military his views 'very possibly reflect informed German opinion'.

28. S. Aster, The Making of the Second World War, p.202; R. Spitzy, How We Squandered the Reich, pp.285-6.

29. Makins minute 23/5/39, C7317/7324/54/18, PRO, Makins had been critical (see Chapter Seven) of Ogilvie-Forbes' behaviour on the International Commission in October 1938, and he subsequently came to have a low opinion of Mason MacFarlane. Remarkably, given his willingness to give away the Ukraine to Germany early in 1939, Gladwyn Jebb thought the Polish guarantee 'less hazardous' after a visit to Poland in June 1939. Memorandum by Jebb 9/6/39, C8336/15/14, PRO.

30. Minutes by Kirkpatrick, Jebb, Strang, Cadogan and Sargent, all 8/5/39, C6861/154/1118, FO 371/23018, PRO. Jebb had also noted that it would be a waste of time talking to Henderson's bête noire Ribbentrop who was stupid and vain.

31. Henderson to Halifax 11/5/39; Halifax to Henderson 11/5/39 and 13/5/39, C6914/54/18, FO 371/23018.

32. Henderson to Cadogan 10/5/39, ibid.

33. Sargent minute 8/5/39, C6861/154/18.

34. Aster, p.201; Henderson to Cadogan 10/5/39; Halifax to Henderson 11/5/39, DBFP, 3, V, Nos.471, 475, 489.

35. Henderson to Halifax 16 and 30/5/39, ibid., Nos.525, 671.

36. Henderson to Cadogan 10/5/39; Failure of A Mission, p.17. The speech referred to was the one made by Henderson to the Deutsche-Englische Gessellschaft in May 1937, ibid., p.69.

37. How War Came, p.100.

38. Henderson to the Foreign Office 5/5/39, C6722/54/18, FO 371/23066.

39. Henderson to Halifax 6/5/39, Strang minute 16/5/39, C7096/54/18, FO 371/23018. Vansittart had minuted in his usual acerbic fashion, 'This letter contains some gems as usual'. Vansittart minute 16/5/39, ibid.

40. Foreign Policy Committee (36) 47th Meeting 16/5/39, FO 371/23066. Chamberlain's anxieties about a Soviet alliance were demonstrated by the Cabinet's refusal to send a Cabinet minister on a visit to Moscow. This idea had been put forward by the Labour MP Mander in a parliamentary question to R.A. Butler, the Under Secretary at the FO. Mander wanted Eden to go, but Makins put forward the FO view that the British Government should not 'give the Russians the impression that if only they are sufficiently obstinate a Cabinet or ex-Cabinet minister may go to Moscow'. A British mission was to go to Russia in August.

41. Henderson to Halifax 8/6/39, DBFP, 3, VI, No.8.

42. His faith in (or naivety about) Göring being strongly demonstrated in Chapter VI of Failure of A Mission.

43. This hatred being most famously demonstrated in an undignified outburst just after the attempt on Hitler's life on 20 July 1944, A. Bullock, Hitler. A Study in Tyranny, London, 1952, p.745, fn.1; Spitzy, p.284.

44. Spitzy, p.146.

45. Henderson to Halifax 8/6/39, DBFP, 3, VI, No.8; Henderson to Halifax 5/6/39, ibid.

46. Vansittart to Halifax 30/6/39, Vansittart Papers 2/41, Churchill College Cambridge.

47. Professor Watt's suggestion that Henderson was failing in this function, which improved only when Ogilvie-Forbes was in charge, has already been referred to.

48. M. Cowling, The Impact of Hitler, Oxford, 1977, p.289; Henderson to Halifax 17/7/39, FO 371/800/316, Halifax Papers, PRO.

49. Aster, p.201; A. Prazmowska's contrary view is referred to in footnote 6.

50. Henderson to Halifax 17/5/39, DBFP, 3, V, No.542.

51. Just 44 planes and 5,000 Hotchkiss guns were sent to Poland in September 1939. The Poles asked for up to £66.5 million in loans, plus a further £24 million in convertible currencies or gold to purchase materials outside Britain. They were given just £5 million in credits by the Treasury. A. Prazmowska, Britain, Poland and the Eastern Front, Cambridge, 1987, pp.115-118, 190

52. Cadogan Diaries 11/3/38, p.60.

53. Failure of A Mission, p.219.

54. Henderson to Halifax 31/7/39, DBFP, 3, VI, No.495.

55. Aster, pp.202-3; D. Cameron Watt, Chamberlain's Ambassadors, p.154. Vansittart's comment on 30 June also rather refutes Watt's suggestion that Henderson 'had placed himself in a position beyond all usefulness'.

56. Henderson to the Foreign Office, 4/5/39, DBFP, 3, VI, No.589.

57. Conclusions of the Cabinet Foreign Policy Committee (36), 47th Meeting, 16/5/39.

58. Weizsäcker minute 15/5/39, DGFP, D, VI, No.385.

59. Henderson to Halifax 16/5/39, FO 800/270, Henderson Papers, PRO. Makins was more critical of Weizsäcker minuting on 17 August that 'It must be remembered that

Baron von Weizsäcker is a Prussian with an inbred dislike of the Poles and that if he was last year opposed to taking extreme measures against the Czechs, he is probably this year by no means so averse to taking action against the Poles', C11375/15/18, FO 371/22976; for Weizsäcker's anti-Polish prejudices, see also Weinberg, p.560.

60. L.B. Namier, Diplomatic Prelude, London, 1949, pp.221-2

61. C. Thorne, The Approach of War 1938-9, London, 1967, p.162.

62. Weizsäcker minute 15/5/39, DGFP, D, VI.

63. Weizsäcker minute 13/6/39, DGFP, D, VI.

64. Namier, p.221, fn.1.

65. Henderson to Halifax 16/5/39, FO 800/270.

66. Namier, p.221.

67. ibid., p.222.

68. It should be noted that both von Hassell and Spitzy had left the Wilhelmstrasse by the summer of 1939.

69. Henderson to Halifax 11/7/39, FO 800/270, Henderson Papers.

70. Henderson to Halifax 8/8/39, DBFP, 3, VI, Nos.609, 610; Henderson to Halifax 5/8/39, ibid., No.626.

71. Henderson to Cadogan 15/8/39, DBFP, 3, VI, No.16.

72. Henderson to Halifax 24/8/39, FO 800/316, Halifax Papers, PRO.

73. ibid., 22/8/39, 24/8/39.

74. Spitzy, pp.285-6.

75. Henderson to Ribbentrop 26/8/39, C.12238/15/18, FO 371/22975.

76. How War Came. Ibid., 28/9/39, C12338/15/18; Orme Sargent minutely accurately that 'we ought to beware of considering him [Dalherus] as an impartial intermediary'. Kirkpatrick saw no reason 'why the Poles should have to go to Berlin'.

77. Henderson to Halifax 25/8/39, DBFP, 3, VII, Nos.283-4, 288; Statement by Hitler to Henderson 25/8/39, DGFP, D, VII, No.265.

78. Cabinet Conclusions 26/8/39, CAB 43 (39).

79. Aster, p.341.

80. ibid., CAB 43 (39).

81. Kennard to Cadogan 26/8/39, DBFP, 3, VII, No.357.

82. Failure of A Mission, p.262.

83. ibid.

84. Aster, p.351.

85. ibid., p.351.

86. How War Came, p.519.

87. The contrast here between Aster and Watt is sharp, the latter being more concerned with showing that when Henderson claimed in a telegram to be drinking champagne he was in fact on the telephone to his French colleague Coulondre. All this to show what Henderson was doing in the half hour before his interview with Hitler on 28 August.

88. How War Came, p.510.

89. Henderson to Foreign Office, C12401/15/18, FO 371/22975; Failure of A Mission, pp.2682-9; Makins minute 31/8/39, C1240/15/18 FO 37/122975; P. Schmidt, Hitler's Interpreter, London, 1951, pp.150-52; Aster, pp.354-55; How War Came, pp.513-15. Watt makes a belated reference to 'the cancer from which he was to die', but it is critical of the drafting of telegrams from Berlin to London which did not convey the full fury of Hitler's verbal assault on Henderson. Henderson's Papers at the PRO contain a draft of an article by William Hillman, a journalist who interviewed Henderson after the event. Under the title 'the Man Who Shouted at Hitler' it describes Henderson as 'a fashion plate diplomat' who showed signs of 'extreme sensibility and intelligence, gentleness and irony'. Henderson told Hillman that 'the people governing Germany today are utterly worthless', FO 371/800/270, Henderson Papers.

90. Paul Schmidt was surprised by the moderation of the German proposals. 'It was a real League of Nations proposal. I felt I was back in Geneva,' Schmidt, p.150.

91. Henderson's account suggests that Ribbentrop read the proposals at speed but this version is denied by Schmidt who wrote that Ribbentrop 'elaborated on some of the points'. Schmidt, p.152. It has also been suggested that Henderson should have waited for a translation because his German was less fluent than he imagined, Aster, p.359; for other descriptions of the interview see Failure of A Mission, pp.270-1; How War Came, pp.520-2; J. Weitz, Hitler's Diplomat, London, 1992, p.206.

92. Schmidt, p.157; Failure of A Mission, pp.283-4.

93. Failure of A Mission, p.271.

94. Foreign Office to Henderson 2/9/39, C12323/15/18, FO 371/22975.

95. Henderson would have derived some pleasure from Hitler's response to the news of the British ultimatum. Turning to Ribbentrop, the conveyor of soothing messages about British effeteness, Hitler asked 'What now?'. Schmidt, p.158.
Henderson's desperate desire to save the peace has been underlined by a private letter from a surviving member of the British Embassy staff, Gordon Etherington Smith (a third secretary in September 1939). According to Etherington Smith when he brought Henderson the telegram instructing him to pass on the British ultimatum, the Ambassador said, 'they are only doing this to give them the satisfaction of kicking a dictator in the pants'. G. Etherington Smith to writer 2/5/97.

96. Dalherus had told Henderson on 29 August that Göring had told him that 'Herr Hitler was fully alive to fact that Great Britain was not bluffing'. Henderson to Foreign Office 29/8/39, C12338/15/18, FO 371/22975, PRO.

97. Cadogan Diaries 8/9/39, p.215. Cadogan recorded that Henderson had been 'rather excitable and silly...' But Cadogan could be excitable himself when pressurised, becoming quite tetchy when Henderson wanted him to read his manuscript for Failure of A Mission. His diary entry for 12 December read 'He wants an opinion by Thursday. He damned well won't get it. Do people think I lead a life of leisure?'

98. Failure of A Mission, p.290.

99. Cadogan Diaries 25/1/40, p.249.

100. Water Under the Bridges, p.176.

101. Cadogan to Henderson 4/1/40, FO 800/270, PRO. Cadogan's reference is rather mysterious. Chamberlain had made a reference to the possibility of colonial concessions in a speech he made at Blackburn on 23 February 1939, so this matter was already in the public domain. R.A.C. Parker, Chamberlain and Appeasement, p.196. There is no reference to any such offer in Failure of A Mission.

102. ibid., 6/3/40.

103. Harvey Diaries 22/4/40, p.350.

104. Rumbold to Henderson 15/4/40, FO 800/270, Henderson Papers.

105. Halifax to Henderson 25/7/40, ibid.

106. Henderson to Foreign Office 19/7/41, ibid.

107. 'The Times', 31/12/42.

Conclusion

Nevile Henderson's career is a paradox. He was a career diplomat who was so highly regarded by his Foreign Office superiors in 1937 that he was appointed to the all-important Berlin Embassy. By the time he returned from Berlin in September 1939, he was isolated and unpopular in the Foreign Office. He has subsequently attracted such negative comments from historians, that any favourable reference to him has become regarded as a form of heresy.

The record suggests that the degree of castigation to which Henderson has been subjected has been unfair. The main problem in assessments of his career hitherto has been the tendency to take his time in Berlin out of context, and regard his behaviour as ambassador as a surprise. Thus Lord Avon could write in the 1960s that 'no one foresaw the opinions that he was to hold'.[1] This view is no longer sustainable, if indeed it ever was. Walford Selby, a senior diplomat and long-term colleague of Henderson's, was well aware of Henderson's views on Germany when the latter was Minister in Belgrade between 1929 and 1935.[2] Vansittart, and Orme Sargent, were similarly aware of Henderson's views.

There was also the clearest evidence from Henderson's earlier service that he was prone to take the side of the government to which he was accredited, and to query his instructions. In Constantinople in the 1920s he was pro-Turk, as his colleague Andrew Ryan noted, and in Belgrade he

was pro-Yugoslav.[3] Yet Henderson could also be loyal as his support for the Foreign Office against George Lloyd over the issue of the Egyptian treaty showed. Nevertheless, this tendency towards partiality was the cause of the reprimand Vansittart gave him over the question of his personal letter to the Yugoslav Regent Prince Paul on Italian-Yugoslav relations. And it was not an isolated example.[4] Just as Henderson was pro-Yugoslav in Belgrade he was to be pro-German in Berlin. But he was never pro-Nazi, and there is an important difference.

Henderson has been so severely criticised that it is easy to forget the golden opinions that he had obtained from Austen Chamberlain and George Lloyd in the 1920s. These were endorsed in 1935 by Vansittart, who knew Henderson well and thought he should be a member of the 'First Eleven', worthy of a top diplomatic posting.[5] He was regarded as a coming man, both by his Foreign Office superiors and by leading politicians of the day like Hugh Dalton and Sir Samuel Hoare, both of whom were Foreign Office Ministers during Henderson's time in Belgrade.[6] Hence Henderson's bitter disappointment when the Foreign Office proposed to send him first to Lisbon (a decision later rescinded after Henderson's protests) and ultimately to Argentina.

The Berlin appointment, on Vansittart's recommendation, was predictable in the context of Henderson's whole career. He was an able, and up to that point, well thought of career diplomat who had also supported Vansittart loyally over the controversial Hoare-Laval pact in 1935.[7]

The other point to make about Henderson's early career is that he was not a natural appeaser. In Constantinople he

had advocated a tough line against the Turks, and in Belgrade he had wanted the British Government to take a stronger position against Italy.

Did the Foreign Office loyalist, and career diplomat, then suddenly become a heretical non-conformist in 1937? Clearly he did not. Although loyal Henderson was never an orthodox diplomat, as he admitted himself, and on occasion he acted more forcefully than was acceptable in the Foreign Office.[8] One occasion was when Henderson expressed his dissatisfaction with Britain's unassertive position on Italian-Yugoslav relations to Eric Phipps in 1935.[9] He also tended to exceed his brief by offering personal opinions which had not been cleared by the Foreign Office first. These views were also influenced by Henderson's high regard for individuals, like King Alexander of Yugoslavia (and later Göring) which verged on hero worship.[10] Henderson's appointment to Berlin therefore, was made in the knowledge that he would be an unorthodox ambassador who would be likely to hold and express strong views.

Henderson's strengths and weaknesses would have been taken into account when he was appointed to Berlin. Oliver Harvey's comment that 'there really is not anybody else obvious to send' is unconvincing.[11] There were alternatives. And while it is right to say, as D. Cameron Watt does, that 'one can only speculate how any of the alternative candidates would have coped', the available evidence does not necessarily suggest that Sir Miles Lampson or Sir Percy Loraine would have fared better than Henderson.[12]

It is important to recall <u>why</u> Henderson was appointed. Rumbold and Phipps had made known their distaste for the

Nazi régime between 1933 and 1937, but by the time of Henderson's appointment Baldwin wanted a more emollient approach. His adviser Tom Jones wrote in his diary on 15 January 1937 that 'Phipps, our ambassador "has no telephone line" to Hitler who despises him'.[13] Henderson went to Berlin to change the atmosphere, and to try to build bridges to the Nazi leaders. His success with the authoritarian King Alexander suggested that he might be better able to achieve this than his two predecessors. Ironically the evidence shows that Hitler disliked Henderson, and his relationship with Ribbentrop was to be very poor. But a change of approach was felt to be needed in 1937, and the Foreign Office did not want to send another Phipps to Berlin, or to have a political appointee foisted on them. Henderson, then, was not appointed to Berlin without careful scrutiny of his previous record, and his known strengths and weaknesses. The alternatives to serving diplomats, Halifax and Willingdon, were rejected, and Vansittart would not leave the Foreign Office himself to take up the post despite attempts by Eden to ease him out of the office as Permanent Under Secretary.[14]

This raises the crucial issue of Henderson's interview with Chamberlain in 1937, before he became Prime Minister in May 1937. It is impossible to verify the exact date of the interview of which there is no record in Chamberlain's personal papers, but Henderson set great store by it.

> I think I may honestly say that to the last and bitter end I followed the general line which he set me, all the more easily and faithfully since it corresponded so closely with my own private

conception.

It was during this interview, Henderson recorded, that Chamberlain told him that 'a calculated indiscretion was sometimes a very useful form of diplomacy'.[15] He followed this advice to the letter when he reached Berlin, to the discomforture of colleagues like Vansittart and Orme Sargent. And Henderson's line was to be unrelenting in Berlin in pursuing Chamberlain's policy. War must be avoided at all costs because Britain needed to rearm in the air. Certainly it was to be avoided over issues which Henderson (like Chamberlain) deemed to be morally dubious, like the Sudetenland. Germany's claim to territory where the Germans were in a majority must be recognised. Henderson's disapproval of the territorial clause of Versailles Treaty had been evident since his period in the Paris Embassy in 1919.

Henderson would be working to do the job he had been appointed to do, to secure an accommodation with the Nazi régime. Britain's interests must be paramount in relation to France's, not least because Henderson's experience with the French at Chanak made him suspicious of allies who might dictate Britain's foreign policy. It has been too easily forgotten that Henderson stressed the need for overall rearmament. He told Chamberlain in the 1937 interview that 'British rearmament should be relentlessly pursued since no argument would count with the Government of Hitler except that of force'.[16] Throughout his career Henderson had always stressed the need to avoid pointless threats which could not be backed up with force. He was an advocate of 'the velvet glove on the iron hand'.[17]

The significance of the Chamberlain-Henderson interview was that Henderson came away from it convinced that he was the personal agent of the Prime Minister, rather than of the Foreign Office. His subsequent behaviour in Berlin should be seen in this light; and in this context his initiatives over the Maxwell Garnett letter, the Anglo-German fellowship speech, and the Nuremberg Rally in 1937, should cause no surprise. Henderson was trying both to re-establish a relationship with the Nazi leadership and to avail himself of Chamberlain's permission to commit purposeful indiscretions. These infuriated Vansittart, and exposed Henderson to Foreign Office charges of disloyalty. Henderson accepted this risk before going to Berlin, and had already told Eden that he might make himself unpopular because of his behaviour there.

Even if it is conceded that Henderson committed indiscretions in Berlin, and he obviously did, there are still strong grounds for saying that he has been unfairly treated by historians. First and foremost, there is the evidence in the published British documents which, as Desmond Williams suggested as long ago as 1958, were edited in such a way as to present Henderson in a negative light.[18] This charge has been completely ignored by other historians, but it has some substance.

Secondly, the published documents themselves show quite clearly that Henderson did not favour the Anschluss, unless it was by peaceful means, and did not want the fragmentation of the Czechoslovak state in 1938. His first preference, as his personal letters to Halifax and Cadogan also make clear, was always to preserve the integrity of Czechoslovakia.[19]

Only after the May Scare did Henderson, by now understandably desperate to avoid war, abandon his support for the preservation of Czechoslovakia and support the cession of the Sudetenland to Germany. Henderson was right in his assessment that Hitler was not bluffing after the May Scare, and would indeed invade Czechoslovakia if necessary.

Evidence from German sources like von Hassell and Spitzy also makes it clear that, contrary to the received wisdom, Henderson did his utmost to warn the Germans about the consequences of an invasion of Czechoslovakia and Poland. His problem was that Hitler, heavily influenced by Ribbentrop, chose to believe that Britain would not fight.

Henderson may have been indiscreet in private conversations in 1938 during the Czech crisis, but more attention should have been paid to the reliability of eyewitnesses like Colvin, whom Henderson's superior Cadogan found excitable and not totally reliable.[10] Colvin accused Henderson of making anti-Czech statements at a party, and censorious historians have always been inclined to take the word of Henderson's critics, rather than his admirers like von Hassell.

The same point must be made about Henderson's alleged undermining of the German opposition to Hitler. Only by making a British diplomat responsible for the opposition's inactivity (and even Vansittart became disillusioned with anti-Nazis like Gordeler, as has been shown) can this accusation be sustained. The case against Henderson was devastatingly dismissed by his own arch-critic Orme Sargent on 15 April 1939.

> Last year [Sargent minuted] we were reportedly told

> that moderate opinion was disappointed and discouraged because HMG was not standing up to Hitler. Now that HMG are standing up to Hitler we hear this same moderate opinion is disgusted with us and can't understand why HMG are standing up to Hitler.[21]

In September 1938 it was a member of the German opposition, von Hassell, who passed on to Keitel Henderson's warning about the consequences of German aggression. The subsequent failure of Beck and his colleagues to take action against Hitler was, in the last analysis, a matter for them.

The occupation of Bohemia and Moravia by the Germans on 15 March 1939 obviously marked a major turning-point in Anglo-German relations during Henderson's period in Berlin. Henderson recognised this himself, and thought he should have been transferred elsewhere. He also indicated after Munich that he wanted a transfer, but Halifax would not accommodate him.[22] But the case for moving him after the Prague coup was surely overwhelming, because Henderson had identified himself so strongly with the appeasement policy and found himself ill at ease in the post-Prague period. The fact that he was not moved, also questions the extent to which Chamberlain and Halifax had really abandoned appeasement.

Why Henderson was not moved at this point is the major mystery of his career. He was suffering from a serious cancer, which surgery during his sick leave had failed to alleviate, and had been led to believe by Halifax after 15 March that he would indeed be moved. Yet no action was taken, and one explanation is serious executive weakness on the part of Halifax. The other explanations for Halifax's

failure to act are unconvincing, especially in the light of his avowed loss of confidence in Henderson after Munich.[23] Unless of course Halifax's revolt against appeasement since Godesberg was much less wholehearted than has recently been suggested.

Halifax himself allowed Henderson a great deal of freedom of manoeuvre during the Czech crisis, while creating obfuscation about the precise nature of Britain's obligation to the Czechs. Hence Henderson's complaint in his telegram of 13 September 1938 about the watering down of Britain's commitment, for which he was rebuked by Halifax.[24] In contrast Henderson retained Chamberlain's confidence throughout his period in Berlin. Evidence that he was losing it early in 1939 is inconclusive. Henderson was Chamberlain's man, and behaved like the political appointee that Vansittart had so dreaded in 1937, when he supported Henderson's appointment.

Those historians who have been prepared to look at Henderson's career in an objective fashion have found that even after 15 March 1939 he stuck to his task manfully, in the last days before the outbreak of war. He 'would succeed in making the British position clear',[25] but Henderson has received precious little credit for carrying out his final instructions. If Hitler continued to believe that Britain was bluffing, it was not for want of effort on Henderson's part.

Henderson's unwillingness to repent over his support for appeasement clearly played a part in influencing the historiography. Failure of A Mission appeared far more quickly than the memoirs of his colleagues or superiors

(such as Halifax or Butler), for the obvious reason that Henderson knew he had very little time to live. By contrast, in the 1960s and 1970s, colleagues like Jebb developed convenient memory lapses about their role in events, or simply failed to address the issue of appeasement at all (as in the case of Owen O'Malley). It is significant that the memoirs of Sir Frank Roberts, who had experience of being an ambassador in a totalitarian state, were less censorious about Henderson than those of the Whitehall-based Jebb.[26] Henderson's own memoirs are generous to his colleagues, even in instances (as with George Lloyd over Egypt) where he had sharply disagreed with them.

Henderson's vices, such as they were, have been writ large. His anti-Slavism and alleged anti-Semitism have often been singled out, and it is true that there are prejudiced references to Czech and Poles in Henderson's despatches. Yet this was in a context where there was little sympathy for either nation at the Foreign Office, or for leaders like Beneš or Beck. Henderson's own prejudice against a Soviet alliance were held even more strongly by Sargent, who did not seem to understand that if Britain was to deter Germany an alliance with the USSR was essential.[27]

Henderson's anti-Semitism was not of a virulent variety, and it did not prevent him being a friend of the Rothschilds. The contrast here with his mentor Rumbold is striking. Rumbold is a hero of the anti-appeasement camp, so his blatantly anti-Semitic remarks in Berlin have been overlooked, even though they have been on the record for twenty five years.[28]

The argument in this instance is not just about

Henderson being no worse than his Foreign Office colleagues and superiors, but about a serious case of scape-goating. Henderson could be an awkward colleague, being both a querulous subordinate and an overexacting boss. He would have done well to remember Sir Francis Bertie's comment about an ambassador being nothing more than 'a d.....d marionette', whose strings were pulled in 10 Downing Street.' Certainly (buoyed up by his interview with Chamberlain) he seemed to suffer from delusions of grandeur when he was sent to Berlin. But he did not make policy, and although he tried to influence it over Germany, it was for Eden, Halifax or Chamberlain to take his advice or reject it. His reluctance to pass on a warning to Hitler at the 1938 Party Rally for example, could have been dealt with by a more decisive Halifax. Six months later Halifax was far more assertive in insisting that Henderson see Keitel or Halder, to pass on a warning, and Henderson complied.[30] Henderson cannot be held responsible for the executive weakness of the Foreign Secretary. Neither was he the only source of information available to Secretaries of State; yet the impression has been created that Henderson exerted a unique, decisive and catastrophic influence on Halifax.

The paradox is that having been supposedly identified by Halifax and Cadogan as someone who was failing in his post, Henderson was left in Berlin for another six months during the crucial Polish crisis, which led to war. Or was this a virtual admission that the post of Ambassador was not as significant as Henderson himself believed, or his detractors subsequently suggested? If the French could move François-Poncet, why could the Foreign Office not move

Henderson? If Halifax had moved decisively away from support for appeasement, why did he not move Henderson on?[31] Halifax was in a strong position in the Cabinet after Godesberg, and could have overridden Chamberlain's objections. Henderson's critics have tried to argue on the one hand that he was a disastrous influence before Prague, and then that he had no influence at all after it.[32]

Throughout Henderson's time in Berlin he was bedeviled by executive weakness, policy obfuscation and internal Foreign Office feuds. Eden mistrusted Vansittart, while Cadogan wanted Vansittart dismissed as Chief Diplomatic Adviser. Chamberlain distrusted the Foreign Office as a whole, and used Horace Wilson as his foreign policy adviser. Halifax fluctuated between slavish support for Chamberlain, and crises of conscience over the treatment of the Czechs and the validity of appeasement. Little wonder that Henderson stuck by the most determined, and consistent star in this uncertain universe, the Prime Minister.

Ultimately, however, a completely revisionist defence of Henderson is not possible. His assessment of Nazism, and particularly of the real nature of Hitler's foreign policy with its ideological imperative (even though he had read Mein Kampf) was flawed. He put too much faith in the alleged moderation of Göring, although he saw accurately enough how futile Anglo-French threats might drive Hitler 'off the deep end'. He was right in his assessment of the inept Ribbentrop, but too willing to be taken in by Weizsäcker's moderate assessment of Hitler's foreign policy objectives. And he showed insufficient concern for the non-German races like the Czechs and Poles, who also had rights,

however flawed Henderson believed the post-war peace settlement to be.

Yet Nevile Henderson was a man of honour. He tried valiantly and unsuccessfully to reach an accommodation with what, he had ultimately to concede, was a gangster régime. He did not of course live to see the exposure of the horrors perpetrated by the Third Reich, and we can only speculate about whether the opinions put forward in Failure of A Mission would have been substantially revised in the light of such knowledge. Even at the time, some of his Foreign Office colleagues could not accept the evidence confronting them."

Henderson believed in adopting moral positions in international relations, and righting acknowledged wrongs. In this sense he can be described as a Wilsonian idealist. But he was also a firm believer in protecting British interests. Above all else, he detested the prospect of a war which could destroy the British Empire. Henderson provided his own epitaph for the time he spent in Berlin.

> I had gone to Berlin without illusion. It was my duty to understand them and their view point. I talked frankly, and listened freely and was listened to freely. I went to bless and ended up cursing.[34]

The failure of his mission was the failure of a policy of accommodation with a ruthless, totalitarian régime which nothing in Henderson's previous career could have prepared him for. Very few people in Britain understood the real nature of Nazism, and Henderson was not alone in perceiving Hitler as a traditional, albeit rabid German nationalist who could be satisfied by territorial revision.

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2. W. Selby, Diplomatic Twilight, London, 1953, p.74.

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6. Lord Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, London, 1954, p.299. Templewood (Hoare) described Henderson as 'very alert, sensitive, and agreeable'. B. Pilmlott, The Political Diary of Hugh Dalton 1918-40, London, 1986, p.134.

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8. Water Under the Bridges, p.176. Henderson wrote, 'I had never been a very orthodox diplomat.'

9. Henderson to Phipps 10/2/35, FO 800/268.

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11. Harvey Diaries 23/4/37, p.41.

12. D.C. Watt, Chamberlain's Ambassadors, p.154.

13. T. Jones, A Diary With Letters 1931-40, Oxford, 1954, p.304.

14. A. Peters, Anthony Eden at the Foreign Office, Aldershot and New York, 1986, pp.256-8. Eden had wanted him to go to Paris.

15. Failure of A Mission, p.17.

16. ibid., p.17.

17. Henderson to Oliphant 9/1/24, FO 800/264.

18. T. Desmond Williams, 'The Historiography of World War Two' in Esmonde M. Robertson (ed.), The Origins of the Second World War, London, 1971, p.46.

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20. Cadogan to Ogilvie-Forbes 18/4/39, FO 800/371/294, Cadogan Papers, PRO.

21. Sargent minute 15/4/39, C4897/13/18, FO 371/22958.

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23. A. Roberts, Holy Fox, p.142.

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25. G.L. Weinberg, The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany, London, 1980, p.617.

26. Lord Gladwyn Memoirs, London, 1972; Sir Frank Roberts, Dealing With Dictators, London, 1991, p.39.

27. P. Carley, 'A Fearful Concatenation of Circumstances: The Anglo-Soviet Rapprochement 1934-6' in Contemporary European History, 5, I (1996), pp.262-69.

28. M. Gilbert, Sir Horace Rumbold, Portrait of A Diplomat, London, 1973, p.319. On arriving in Berlin to take up his post as Ambassador in 1938, Rumbold wrote to Sir Ronald Lindsay 'I am appalled by the number of Jews in this place. One cannot get away from them'.

29. Chirol to Hardinge 10/8/1904, Hardinge Papers, Cambridge University Library.

30. Aster, p.201.

31. Roberts, Ch.26.

32. Chamberlain's Ambassadors, p.154.

33. T. Bower, Blind Eye to Murder

34. Draft for 'The Man Who Shouted at Hitler' by William Hillman, FO 800/270, Henderson Papers, PRO.

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