

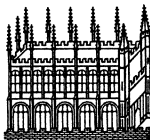


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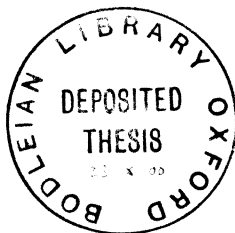


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**Perceptions of Public Opinion. British Foreign Policy Decisions
About Nazi Germany, 1933-1938.**

Sarah Wilkinson, All Souls College.

**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Faculty of Modern History,
University of Oxford, Trinity Term 2000.**



For my parents.

Abstract

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**Sarah Wilkinson, All Souls College.
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This thesis examines the historical problem of determining the relationship between a government's perception of public opinion and the decisions it takes. We introduce evidence for the social habits of the Cabinet in order to suggest new formulations of 'élite' and 'mass' public opinion. We argue that parliamentary opinion was generally more important in decision-making for the Cabinet, except at moments of extreme crisis when a conception of 'mass' opinion became equally significant. These characterizations of mass opinion were drawn from a set of stereotypes about public opinion which academic and political theorization had produced. It is argued that this theorization was stimulated by ongoing debates about mass communication, the importance of the ordinary man in democracy and the outbreak of the first world war during the inter-war period.

The thesis begins with an introduction to the methodological problems involved, followed by one chapter on theorization about public opinion in the inter-war period. Three diplomatic crises are considered in the case study chapters: the withdrawal of Germany from the Disarmament Conference in 1933, the German reoccupation of the Rhineland in 1936 and the threat of invasion of the Sudetenland in 1938. Two further chapters examine the role of public opinion in protests to Germany about the treatment of the Jews in 1933 and in 1938. It is argued that perceptions of public opinion played a much more important role in decision-making than has hitherto been thought. The most significant argument posits that perceptions of public opinion were equally as important as military considerations in the decision to refuse the Godesberg terms in 1938. More generally, the way in which politicians used public opinion rhetorically is described and the limits of the usefulness of the term for historians are suggested.

Abstract

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This thesis examines the historical problem of determining the relationship between a government's perception of public opinion and the decisions it takes. It examines both the function and character of Cabinet and Foreign Office pronouncements on public opinion and the problems which the historian faces in trying to reconstruct perceptions, which were sometimes expressed, but which were also, by their very nature, personal and undocumented. It is argued that perceptions of public opinion played a much more important role in decision-making than has hitherto been thought. The most significant argument posits that perceptions of public opinion were equally as important as military considerations in the decision to refuse the Godesberg terms in 1938, which brought Britain to the brink of war with Germany. More generally, the way in which politicians used public opinion rhetorically is described and the limits of the usefulness of the term for historians, are suggested.

We introduce evidence for the social habits of the Cabinet in order to suggest new formulations of 'élite' and 'mass' public opinion. We argue that parliamentary opinion was generally more important in decision-making for the Cabinet, except at moments of extreme crisis when a conception of 'mass' opinion became equally significant. However, we nuance the distinction between élite and mass opinion by showing that parliamentary opinion, in itself a form of public opinion for the Cabinet, also spent a

good deal of time telling Cabinet Ministers what it thought the rest of the country was thinking. These characterizations of mass opinion were drawn from a set of stereotypes about public opinion which academic and political theorization had produced. It is argued that this theorization was stimulated by ongoing debates about mass communication, the importance of the ordinary man in democracy and the outbreak of the first world war during the inter-war period.

It is argued that written evidence of the phrase 'public opinion' can be used as a source for perception only if carefully compared with a range of other contemporary sources. The conclusions drawn from a study of perception must of necessity be suggestive rather than definitive, leaving as unrecoverable the physical and psychological processes of information selection and of the neurological basis of perception.¹ However, it is argued that the use of sources in this study comprises the most complete survey yet dedicated to the subject. Is the reconstruction of 'mental maps' and by extension, perceptions of public opinion, really possible within an historical methodology? Firstly, the concept of assessing perception at all must be challenged. Richard Snyder posed the central questions as to whether or not we can obtain reliable data concerning the state of mind of actors whose behaviour we wish to describe and explain and if assumptions could be replaced by evidence.² On a very basic level, this study follows his methodology that, from an objectivist position, it should be possible to present such evidence because

¹ Decision-making theories from the political science stable such as attribution theory are thus rejected in favour of a particularist rather than a systemic approach. For examples of systemic theories, see E.E. Jones et al. (eds.), *Attribution: Perceiving the Causes of Behaviour* (Morristown, New Jersey, U.S.A., 1972) and J.D. Steinbruner, *The Cybernetic Theory of Decision. New Dimensions of Political Analysis* (Princeton University Press, 1974).

² R.C. Snyder, H.W. Bruck, B. Sapin, (eds.), *Foreign Policy Decision-Making. An Approach to the Study of International Politics* (The Free Press of Glencoe, U.S.A., 1962), p.5.

such attitudes may have been committed to paper in various forms.³ Previously, high political studies have concentrated on using official documentation supplemented by some private papers. This thesis combines a very wide selection of private paper research with an attempt to reconstruct when and where the central protagonists met, whom their regular companions and friends were and how far such combinations influenced the development of perceptions of what the public were thinking about foreign policy. Hence, dining records from London clubs, engagement diaries, visitor's books and lecture meetings have also been incorporated into the analysis.

Some historians have expressed doubts that this type of analysis can be regarded as in any way conclusive. Writing about conspiracy theories connected with appeasement, Middlemas said that, 'the juxtaposition of comments about the 'appeasers', leading articles in certain newspapers, house-parties at Cliveden, dinners at All Souls, and actual political decisions is quite inadequate as a method of showing that influence actually existed.' He added that it remained to be demonstrated that agencies outside the governmental machine exercised a powerful or even exclusive influence at specific moments before these decisions were taken.⁴ In this study, close narrative detail aims to prevent using the mere juxtaposition of such social events to suggest influence. Where possible, what was said at these events and meetings on the subject of public opinion and foreign policy is compared with other accounts of decision-making. Each case study is a narrative told through a collation of references to public opinion from official and private sources. Several layers of comparative and corroborative evidence, therefore, need to be presented. The copious official documentation from the 1930s forms the basis of the

³ R.C. Snyder et al., (1962), p.5.

evidence. The central sources are the minutes of Cabinet meetings, which during this period are the product of two men with very different styles and the files of the central department of the Foreign Office, which in turn are the product of a vast array of hands.⁵

The first layer of comparison to official records is added through the unofficial papers, diaries and correspondence of the politicians and diplomats themselves. A second layer is added through the private papers of a large penumbra of their social circles. The evidence of these two groups challenges Middlemas' statement that the private papers of close participants such as Chamberlain, Eden, Simon, Halifax, Inskip and Vansittart do not suggest a Cabinet open 'to the variable winds of the Press, public or private opinion' to suggest that they and others were very much concerned with public opinion.⁶ The nature of the sources used permits a tangential analysis of the social milieu and relationships of the governing group on an attitudinal basis rather than on the party political index which has hitherto been the norm.⁷ The complexion of the Cabinet and its closest friends has meant that the bulk of papers examined are those of Conservatives. This trend was exacerbated by the retention of the Stafford Cripps papers by his new biographer and the paucity of material in the Attlee collection for the period before 1940.⁸

⁴ K. Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion. The British Government and Germany, 1937-9* (1972), p.94-5.

⁵ Donald Watt has suggested the benefit of continued attention to diplomatic archives in this type of study as the views of diplomats may reflect the value system of those who appointed them and to whom they report, see D.C. Watt, 'Foreword: The New International History', *IHR* [Canada] vol. ix (1987), p.519.

⁶ Middlemas, (1972), p. 96. The recent publication of much new diary material also makes a new narrative which synthesizes this evidence desirable.

⁷ See, for example, M. Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler. British Politics and British Policy 1933-40* (Cambridge, 1975). N.J. Crowson, *Facing Fascism. The Conservative Party and the European Dictators, 1935-1940* (1997) is a more recent party political approach.

⁸ My thanks to Victoria Child of Nuffield College Library, Oxford for information about the Cripps papers. They may be returned to Nuffield later this year. The Attlee papers are housed at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

A third layer of comparison is added to possible definitions of what the term 'public opinion' might have meant through a contextual comparison with theoretical literature of the period. This is taken largely from the periodical and journal press, but also from books, pamphlets and newspapers. The enormity of sources available has necessitated reliance on the work of other historians for some aspects of this task, notably Benny Morris, F.R. Gannon and Patrick Kyba for analyses of the British press other than *The Times*. However, the thesis itself does examine relations between *The Times* and the Government as a test case of newspaper influence on the question of public opinion. *The Times* was chosen both because of the importance of the editor Geoffrey Dawson's contacts with the Government and because it was felt necessary for reasons of space to limit the case study to one newspaper. The socially exclusive nature of political life at this period means that, very often, those who had delivered a speech or written an article on the subject of public opinion might come into social contact with those who had used the phrase rhetorically in decision-making or diplomacy. The extent of writing and theorization about public opinion and its related subjects in the 1930s suggests, at the very least, that politicians and diplomats may well have been aware of the state of debate on the subject and that this may have influenced the way in which they regarded it. The juxtaposition of such evidence is no less relevant than the juxtaposition of evidence such as Mass-Observation surveys and press articles as indications of public opinion of which, it is thought, the Government must have been aware.⁹

The archives of organs of public opinion demonstration such as the League of Nations Union, the peace groups, the Labour Party and other pressure groups have not

⁹ See, for example, Middlemas, (1972), p.324.

been used, although secondary works on them are constantly referred to. Since the aim of the study is to identify whether or not the resolutions of these groups were noted by the Cabinet, evidence for their resolutions and representations has been sought in the official minutes of the Cabinet and in the correspondence files of the Foreign Office. Reports in the press of their activities at crucial moments have also been noted. This decision was taken in order to answer Middlemas' worries about the juxtaposition of events, meetings and resolutions being used to denote influence over the Cabinet. Whilst it is likely that the Cabinet did know if there had been a large protest meeting at the Albert Hall against rearmament, for example, we need to know whether that knowledge was mediated through press reports, wireless reports or through personal contacts with the leaders of such groups, and, more importantly, whether such information was acted upon. This information can best be discovered through a 'top to bottom' analysis.

Perceptions of public opinion are examined in relation to two subjects. Firstly, political and diplomatic perceptions of how the public saw Britain's role in crisis diplomacy with Nazi Germany are approached. The responses to three diplomatic crises are considered: the withdrawal of Germany from the Disarmament Conference in 1933, the German reoccupation of the Rhineland in 1936 and the threat of invasion of the Sudetenland in 1938. The extent to which decision makers felt themselves curtailed, encouraged or held in limbo by public opinion is examined. It is argued that perceptions of public opinion played an increasingly important part in decision-making as the possibility of war with Germany came nearer and some conjectures are offered on the types of political decision which potentially had moral dimensions, such as recourse to war and humanitarian disasters and in which it was thought that the public's views should

be involved. The extent to which politicians and diplomats possessed tangible evidence about public opinion, and used it, is also incorporated into the analysis.

Secondly, perceptions of how the British public was thought to regard the Nazi persecution of Jews and the effect of these perceptions on diplomacy are examined. The two case studies on this subject run in chronological parallel to the first and last diplomatic crises described above. It is argued that perceptions of public opinion encouraged the British Government to make informal representations to the German Government when other means of helping refugees and those persecuted were more difficult. This often meant that the Jewish issue and German internal policy became part of the rhetoric about other issues, such as disarmament or a general European settlement. In this way, the issue of German internal repression was used as a diplomatic pawn, but not in an entirely cynical way, since diplomats and politicians often risked jeopardizing Anglo-German relations as a result of the extreme Nazi sensitivity to criticism in parliament and in the British press.

Chapter one considers the theoretical perception of public opinion in relation to foreign policy in the inter-war period. It is argued that despite pessimism about the suitability of the public to be involved and informed on international affairs, it was widely held that efforts should be made to provide education because democracy could only survive if national unity were created behind governmental policies. This chapter also starts to examine the National Government's lack of confidence in the public's reaction to its foreign policy decisions. Chapter two begins the assessment of perceptions of public opinion in 1933 by arguing that parliamentary reactions to Jewish persecution, in the first months of the Hitler régime, had a profound effect on the way that Germany

was viewed and approached by foreign policy makers, to the extent that they were far less willing to make concessions to the new German Government. Chapter three continues this analysis into the second half of 1933, comparing statements about public opinion made in diplomatic rhetoric with other assumptions about the public's tolerance of any potential rearmament of Germany. It notes the discrepancy between the prevalence of public opinion in Cabinet minutes and diplomatic conversations and the apparent lack of appreciation of public opinion in the diaries of those conducting the negotiations at Geneva. Both chapters argue that some notion of mass opinion was important, though probably less so than parliamentary opinion, in decision-making.

Chapter four argues that in early 1936 the future of Anglo-German relations was being reconsidered in the Foreign Office in light of perceptions of public opinion which had been gleaned from the experiences of 1935, but that these perceptions contradicted some of the evidence for public opinion which had presented itself during the general election and the Hoare-Laval debate. Chapter five demonstrates that this set of assumptions was brought into play during the Rhineland crisis in March 1936. The chapter also makes a clear distinction between parliamentary and mass public opinion when examining Cabinet perceptions of reactions to the reoccupation. It is shown that perceptions of public opinion fluctuated far more in the following two months and during the crisis itself than has been suggested before.

Chapter six argues that at the time of the Munich crisis, perceptions of mass opinion were very important to the Cabinet, particularly in the decision to refuse the Godesberg terms. It nuances the view of Neville Chamberlain as unmoved by such perceptions to show how he invoked them in diplomacy and around the Cabinet table. It

is also shown that dissent from Chamberlain's line was most often expressed in Cabinet in terms of what the public were thinking and would tolerate. It also argues that the Munich agreement itself was made against all the evidence of the mood of the public which Chamberlain had at his disposal: namely, that although the people did not want war, they did not want to see Czechoslovakia's domination as the price of peace. Chapter seven considers perceptions of public opinion in the aftermath of the Munich settlement and balances perceived reactions to the crisis with reactions to the Kristallnacht pogrom. It concludes that public reaction appears to have played a very significant part in the decision taken by Halifax and ratified by the Cabinet, not to pursue negotiations with Germany before Christmas 1938. It even played a substantial role in Chamberlain's assessments of his next moves towards the dictators. In the conclusion, we summarize the case study findings and suggest the applicability of the methodology introduced here for other subjects and the significance of the continuing issue of the relationship between government and public opinion in democratic societies. The utility for the historian of the concept of perceptions of public opinion is evaluated and the limits of evidential reconstruction of its role in decision-making are described.

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Abbreviations

1.. Manuscript Collections

Bodleian	Bodleian Library, Oxford.
BUL AVON	Birmingham University Library, Avon papers
BUL NC	Birmingham University Library, Neville Chamberlain Papers
BUL AC	Birmingham University Library, Austen Chamberlain Papers
BL	British Library.
Borthwick HKTON	Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, York, Hickleton Papers (Earl Halifax)
Churchill ACAD	Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge, Cadogan Papers
Churchill Chartwell	Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge, Chartwell Papers (Winston Churchill papers)
Churchill HB	Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge, Hore-Belisha Papers
CUL BWIN	Cambridge University Library, Baldwin Papers
CUL TWOOD	Cambridge University Library, Templewood Papers
DUL	Durham University Library.
HOL	House of Lords Record Office.
NAS	National Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh.
NLS	National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.
NUL WR	Newcastle University Library, Walter Runciman Papers
PRO	Public Record Office.
RUL	Reading University Library

2. Printed Sources

DBFP	R. Butler, W.N. Medlicott and others (eds.), <i>Documents on British Foreign Policy, Second Series, 1929-38</i> , 21 volumes (1946-85), followed by volume and document number.
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- DGFP** M. Lambert, E.C.M. Breuning, K.H.M. Duke, F.G. Stambrook, D.C. Watt (eds.), *Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series C (1933-37)*, 6 volumes (1966), followed by volume and document number.
- DDF** M. Renouvin, (ed.), *Documents Diplomatiques Français, deuxième série 1-2 (1932-39)* (1963) followed by volume and document number.

3. Books cited *passim*.

Place of publication is London unless otherwise stated.

- Amery**, Barnes, J., and Nicholson, D., (eds.), *The Empire at bay: the Leo Amery diaries 1929-1945* (1988).
- Cockett** Cockett, R.B., *Twilight of Truth. Chamberlain, Appeasement and the Manipulation of the Press* (1989).
- Dilks** Dilks, D., *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-45* (1971).
- Feiling** Feiling, K., *The Life of Neville Chamberlain* (1946).
- Friedländer** Friedländer, S., *Nazi Germany and the Jews. The Years of Persecution, 1933-39* (1997).
- Gilbert** Gilbert, M., *Winston. S. Churchill Volume V 1922-1939* (1976).
- Harvey** Harvey, J., (ed.), *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-1940* (1970).
- Middlemas** Middlemas, K., *Diplomacy of Illusion. The British Government and Germany, 1937-39* (1973)
- Minney** Minney, R.J., *The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha* (Aldershot, 1960).
- Nicolson** Nicolson, N., (ed.), *Harold Nicolson. Diaries and Letters 1930-1939* (1966).
- Parker** Parker, R.A.C., *Chamberlain and Appeasement. British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* (1993).
- Robbins** Robbins, K., *Munich 1938* (1968).
- Templewood** Templewood, Viscount, *Nine Troubled Years* (1954).

Watt	Watt, D.C., <i>How War Came</i> (1989).
Weinberg	Weinberg, G.L., <i>The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany. Starting World War II, Vol.II 1937-1939</i> (Chicago, 1980).

4. Journal Abbreviations

BIHR	Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research
BJIS	British Journal of International Studies
EHR	English Historical Review
JCH	Journal of Contemporary History
JSS	Journal of Strategic Studies
HJ	The Historical Journal
IA	International Affairs
IHR	International History Review
IM	Immigrants and Minorities
PBA	Proceedings of the British Academy.
WLB	The Wiener Library Bulletin
YVS	Yad Vashem Studies

Introduction

'The month of September, 1938, will provide the historian of the future, or even of next year, with a supremely illuminating insight into sense and statesmanship and the status quo. But if, as has been the custom in the past, the historian accepts as statements of fact the numerous published assertions as to what the public of England are thinking about it all, he will, as so often before, be a typically lousy historian.'

C. Madge and T. Harrison, *Britain by Mass-Observation*, (1939), p.103.

This thesis continues the aims of Mass-Observation in deconstructing the published assertions about public opinion in times of crisis. The relationship between a government's perception of public opinion and the decisions it takes had been a historiographical problem before the Mass-Observation experiment and continues to be a matter of debate. This thesis examines the role of perceptions of public opinion in foreign policy decision-making about Nazi Germany among the members of the British Cabinet, Foreign Office and their immediate social circles as a contribution to work on this problem. It examines both the usage and character of the Government's pronouncements on public opinion and the problems which the historian faces in trying to reconstruct perceptions, which were sometimes expressed, but which were also, by their very nature, personal and undocumented.

The thesis consists of six case studies which reconstruct, as far as possible, situations in which public opinion has been thought to have affected decision-making. These occasions are either crises involving the threat of war in Europe, or the periods immediately before or after such crises. We look at Cabinet concern for both public opinion in parliament and among the mass of the electorate at the high points of crises and at the changing image of public opinion which less dangerous circumstances produced. The need for 'national unity' under a National Government was closely tied up with these crises, and the thesis also examines why it was that the National Government

felt unable to count on the unconditional support of its electors when decisions of war and peace had to be made.

The narratives show that perceptions of public opinion were used in political life in two ways. Firstly, diplomats and politicians invoked their perceptions rhetorically, as devices to add gravitas to an argument in Cabinet discussion, diplomatic exchange and private debate. Secondly, perceptions of public opinion were often given equal weight to military and economic strength, grand strategy and party politics in the decision-making process. By extension, it is argued that politicians, diplomats and their friends believed, albeit to different degrees, in a tangible 'public opinion' which they could divine, were beholden to and could, occasionally, see. The processes by which this took place are suggested.

By redefining what politicians might have meant by this enigmatic phrase, both the argument and the approach adopted here argue that perceptions of public opinion played a much more important part in Cabinet and Foreign Office decision-making than historians have suggested. The thesis aims to fill the gap identified by both historians and political scientists for a study of perceptions of public opinion in the inter-war period which draws upon the political science vocabulary for the reconstruction of attitudes of mind of a governing group but which uses historical sources and techniques. Before embarking on such case studies, however, their methodological basis needs to be explained. The rest of this introduction reviews and builds on existing historiography to advance some new ways of viewing the circularity of opinion formation. It also comments on the limitations of historiographical use of the term 'public opinion' before

describing the sources used in this study and its wider significance for work on British inter-war foreign policy.

Historiography

Several questions present themselves to all historians wishing to describe public opinion and its role in decision-making. Firstly, the question of which sections of society the term refers to invites a divide between those sections the historian views as public opinion and those which may have denoted public opinion to the historical figures who used the term. In other words, are we trying to reconstruct what we, as historians, think public opinion was thinking or what they, as historical figures, thought it was thinking? Secondly, having established which groups and relationships we are interested in, how do we find out about it? This again invites a division between our own perceptions of public opinion measuring and those of historical figures who gauged and described public opinion before the advent of scientific opinion-polling and focus groups.

Historians have, hitherto, tended to skirt the subject of perception of public opinion, despite their fascination with the development of a public political consciousness in the 1930s. Historical analysis of a public political consciousness has taken three forms. The first examined governmental organization for publicity and propaganda, starting with propaganda during the first world war and culminating in the National Publicity Bureau's efforts on behalf of the Conservative elements of the National Government.¹ The second

¹ See P.M. Taylor and M.L. Sanders, *British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914-1918* (1982), P.M. Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: Selling Democracy* (Edinburgh, 1999), M.L. Grant, *Propaganda and the Role of the State in Inter-war Britain* (Oxford, 1994), D.L. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communications and the Cultivated Mind in Britain between the Wars* (Oxford, 1988), N. Pronay and D.W. Spring, *Propaganda, Politics and Film, 1918-1945* (1982), T.J. Hollins, *The Presentation of Politics: The Place of Party Publicity, Broadcasting and Film in British Politics 1918-1939* (Leeds University D.Phil. thesis, 1981).

examined specific organizations such as the peace groups, the League of Nations Union and those concerned with measuring public opinion, such as Mass Observation.¹ The last form examined public opinion in relation to specific issues such as collective security, the Spanish civil war and the Abyssinian war.²

Most of these studies either aimed at describing what public opinion, in all its manifestations, actually was on a certain issue, or else how the Government sought to manipulate a mass electorate through the mass media. Some studies have offered some tentative methodological thoughts on the wider problems of public opinion. Writing about the public's support for rearmament as seen through the press, Patrick Kyba asked whether or not it was possible to know if a Government was influenced by public opinion in making policy or not, and if so, to what degree?³ In answer, Kyba suggested that it was possible to make such a judgement. He argued that it was reasonable to accept Ministers' statements about public opinion at face value, when allowance for 'setting the record straight' in memoirs and minutes had been made.⁴ In relation to his own case study, he concluded that on the issue of rearmament, Ministers chose their sense of national responsibility in going ahead with rearmament against their perception that the majority sentiment was for disarmament.⁵

¹ See Ceadel. See also D. S. Birn, *The League of Nations Union, 1918-1945* (Oxford, 1981), B. Beavan, *Mass Observation and Civilian Morale: Working Class Communities during the Blitz 1940-1941* (Brighton, 1998).

² P. Kyba, *Covenants Without the Sword* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 1983), T. Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge, 1997), D. Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War 1935-6* (1975).

³ P. Kyba, (1983), p.4.

⁴ On problems of politicians having 'set the record straight', Kyba can be supported by R.C. Snyder, H.W. Bruck, B. Sapin, (eds.), *Foreign Policy Decision-Making. An Approach to the Study of International Politics* (The Free Press of Glencoe, U.S.A., 1962), p. 148, 'there may be circumstances under which real motives cannot be inferred from the factors which governed the choice of vocabulary, but it ought not to be assumed that because motive statements do have social consequences (acceptance) they are necessarily fraudulent.'

⁵ P. Kyba, (1983), p.97.

Two studies on decision-making have appeared in the last ten years which again tackled the issue tangentially. In 1991, Christopher Hill examined the period immediately after that considered here and concentrated on a study of power relationships within the Cabinet and their effect on decision-making. Hill used Cabinet conclusions and private papers to establish that, during the crisis of September 1939, public opinion was an important factor for at least one Cabinet Minister, but, in general, public opinion was not afforded a central part in the analysis.¹ Published in 1993, Gaines Post Junior's study of British deterrence and defence policy was an explicit marriage between a systemic study of the defects of British decision-making machinery and a detailed narrative approach in order to review the premise that Britain wanted to buy time for rearmament.² Post included public opinion as a factor in decision-making, but always in terms of the machinery and process of decision-making rather than in terms of the personal perceptions of politicians.

Although historians have recognized the importance of public opinion in this period in more general studies, no study has concentrated solely on historical figures' perceptions of public opinion in the decision-making process. Where perceptions of public opinion have been tackled, contrasting views appeared as to its importance. In the respected and highly detailed narrative accounts which were produced after the release of Foreign Office documents for the inter-war period in 1969, we often find statements about the behaviour and perception of public opinion. As parallel studies in economic appeasement, military strategy and the role of the Dominions appeared over the next

¹ C. Hill, *Cabinet Decisions on Foreign Policy. The British Experience October 1938-June 1941* (Cambridge, 1991), p.93.

² Gaines Post, Jr., *Dilemmas of Appeasement. British Deterrence and Defense, 1934-1937* (Cornell University Press, 1993), p.3.

twenty years, the role of public opinion as a determinant of Cabinet policy began to emerge more clearly.¹

Statements in such accounts often acknowledged the importance of public opinion in decisions but suggested no set of mechanisms by which public and government interacted. At the beginning of the 1980s, Craig and George related the importance of work on public opinion specifically to the inter-war period, pointing out that excessive preoccupation with the mood of the electorate in democratic countries was a characteristic of the inter-war period, resulting in a governmental tendency to follow rather than to lead opinion.² Keith Robbins suggested, in 1988, that any such division into leader and led was far too simplistic a construction of the relationship between Government and public, and that a more nuanced description of Cabinet views at moments of important decisions was needed.³ In his masterly narrative of 1937-1939, Keith Middlemas suggested that the Government used the term public opinion frequently, but that what they referred to bore little resemblance to reality, although he does not expand on what that reality might have been or how we might go about discovering it.⁴

Despite acknowledging that politicians used the phrase 'public opinion' a good deal, Middlemas also stated that there was little evidence that perceptions of public opinion played any significant part in decision-making. In *Diplomacy of Illusion*, he

¹ For examples of parallel narrative accounts see, G.C. Peden, *British Rearmament and the Treasury, 1932-39* (Edinburgh, 1979) and R. Ovendale, "Appeasement" and the English Speaking World: Britain, the United States, the Dominions and the Policy of "appeasement" 1937-9 (Cardiff, 1975).

² G.A. Craig and A.L. George, *Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Problems of Our Time* (third edition, Oxford, 1995), p. 60.

³ K. Robbins, *Appeasement* (Oxford, 1988), p.25-6. It is interesting to note that in the recent second edition of this book (1997, p. 29), Robbins again acknowledged the complexity of the public-government relationship but offered the theory as a primary way in which this relationship functions that almost invariably politicians, pleading a lack of objective evidence, tend to think that public opinion supports the particular policy that they themselves support.

⁴ Middlemas, p.7.

argued that neither Cabinet papers nor private papers revealed any evidence that politicians or permanent officials at the Foreign Office were very open to or influenced by outside pressures.¹ R.A.C. Parker, however, has described a Foreign Secretary as being very open to outside pressures. His comment about the Rhineland crisis of March 1936, made twenty years after Middlemas wrote *Diplomacy of Illusion*, shows the continuing historiographical trend of making statements about public opinion which appear plausible but that are left unsubstantiated,

*'He [Eden] did not need to consult anyone. He knew well enough what everyone, his colleagues and the public, would expect him to do and his own point of view was exactly the same. He must curb the French. 'Public opinion' is often difficult to delineate, it is impalpable like some shifting formation of cloud and it is hard to be precise about its effect. This time there is no difficulty. The 'Rhineland crisis' spared Eden and the Cabinet the subtle problems presented by Italian aggression in Ethiopia.'*²

Three historians of specific policy areas have, however, offered preliminary ideas about the way in which perceptions of public opinion were used in government decision-making. Brian Bond agreed with Keith Robbins that it was often used as a rhetorical justification,

*'Whether or not 'public opinion' would have responded earlier to the need to meet German aggression by all-out rearmament if given more determined political leadership must remain a matter of speculation. Since the Press was largely Tory it could easily have been prompted to campaign for rearmament. It is noticeable that politicians invoked 'public opinion' in support of whatever policy they wished to pursue.'*³

¹ Middlemas, p. 95-96. See also P. Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy* (1985), p.59 and p.65 for caution about the influence of the press and organized pressure groups on the Cabinet tempered by the idea that the involvement of non-foreign policy experts in Cabinet in crisis decisions meant that a wide range of outside influences were considered.

² Parker, p. 62. See R.C. Snyder et al., (1962), p. 39 for criticism of the reification of public opinion in this way, *'The description and explanation of national behaviour has also suffered from the common fallacy of misplaced concreteness or reification exemplified chiefly by the subtle transformation of the word 'state' from a proper analytical abstraction into a symbol allegedly standing for a concrete entity - that is, an object or system having an existence of its own apart from real persons and their behaviours.'*

³ B. Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars* (1980), p. 217. For a similar judgement see also, G.C. Kennedy, 'Britain's Policy-Making Elite, the Naval Disarmament Puzzle, and Public Opinion', *Albion*, vol.26 no.4 (1994), p.643.

In a similar vein to Bond, Nicholas Pronay offered a specific judgement on Neville Chamberlain's perception of public opinion, arguing that he was the least likely of the Cabinet to be moved by what he took to be public opinion but the most likely to invoke the weight of it to browbeat his military advisors.¹ Donald Watt agreed with this diagnosis of Chamberlain, suggesting that he both disliked and distrusted public opinion and that, as a result, much of the truth of the foreign policy situation was concealed.² Middlemas also considered, rather contradictorily, that Cabinet Ministers invoked public opinion in their support, but that they offered no substantive evidence of its existence and no analysis of what they themselves meant.³ In contrast, Gustav Schmidt suggested that perceptions of public opinion could be used as leverage in diplomatic negotiations and that this rested on both perceptions and actual manifestations of public opinion such as the Peace Ballot.⁴

When it has been acknowledged that there were obvious currents of public opinion at crucial moments which influenced the Government, sometimes as far as the instigation of major policy shifts, historical descriptions of the ways in which the Government acquired knowledge about the state of public opinion remain vague. Perhaps the most obvious encapsulation of this problem is the British reaction to Munich, the

¹ N. Pronay, 'Rearmament and the British Public: Policy and Propaganda' in J. Curran, A. Smith and P. Wingate (eds.), *Impacts and Influences. Essays on Media Power in the Twentieth Century* (1987), p.60. See also Middlemas, p.7, '*Like the notables outside the Government, most backbench M.P.s, the parliamentary opposition and the Press appear to have made little impact on decisions during the Chamberlain government [...] quite apart from the fact that on the personality of the Prime Minister whose supremacy in these matters was almost undisputed, public opinion, however defined, made little impression.*'

² Watt, p.78. See Middlemas, p.7 and p.289 for similar judgements.

³ Middlemas, p.108 and p.287.

⁴ G. Schmidt, 'The Domestic Background to British Appeasement Policy' in W.J. Mommsen and L. Kettenacker (eds.), *The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement* (1983), p. 113.

Kristallnacht pogroms and the invasion of Czechoslovakia in March 1939. Most historians have identified some sort of change in atmosphere between October and March. A.J.P. Taylor placed the change in opinion and, consequently, the turning point in policy in March 1939.¹ In contrast, Donald Watt described the shift in opinion as a gradual deterioration from the direct aftermath of Munich, through reactions to the November pogroms to the January war scare and on to the invasion of Czechoslovakia.² Neither historian identified from which manifestations of public opinion they had drawn these conclusions.³

However, two historians have produced interpretative essays on the problems of examining public opinion in decision-making. In 1978, D.G. Boyce produced an essay on both public opinion and its perceptions which remains the best statement of the methodological problems involved in their examination. Boyce resolved the problem of the ambiguity of the phrase 'public opinion' itself by saying that once the abstraction of a general term for the beliefs of a number of individuals is accepted, the historian can decide which individuals he is interested in and settle down to his sources with a happy heart.⁴ Boyce then identified the same problems of detecting opinion from written sources in examining the 'opinion' of politicians and diplomats as the historian encounters in examining the 'perception' of public opinion of politicians and diplomats,

¹ A.J.P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (first edition 1961, Penguin, 1991), p.251-2. See also A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (first edition 1965, Pelican edition, 1975), p. 515.

² D.C Watt, 'British Domestic Politics and the Onset of War' in *Les Relations Franco-Britanniques de 1935 à 1939* (1975), p. 255-6.

³ See also Z.S. Steiner, 'On Writing International History: chaps, maps and much more', *IA*, vol.lxxiii no.3 (1997), p. 543, 'There is no study in depth of the sea change in British opinion between September 1938 and August 1939, although every historical work on the subject refers to the phenomenon.'

⁴ D.G. Boyce, 'Public Opinion and Historians' *History*, vol.63 no.203 (1978), p. 217-9.

namely that the whole context in which the individual operates, the values he shares and the influence of his comrades upon him are all crucial and difficult to determine. In studying democratic polities, Boyce then suggested that the most fruitful way of looking at public opinion might be 'to set aside abstract definitions, and to consider instead the variety of ways in which public opinion exists, or is perceived to exist.'¹ He went on to say that public opinion is primarily what contemporaries perceived it to be and that whilst the historian of this perception runs more of a risk than his colleagues in other fields of making an unrepresentative general statement, because of the vastness of the sample, this should not preclude the attempt to be as representative as possible.

Anthony Adamthwaite stated more categorically in his study of government, press and opinion during the approach to Munich that the interplay between government and opinion was crucial in the crisis. He argued that Ministerial estimates of public opinion in Britain and the Dominions were used to justify the decision not to undertake further commitments in Europe. Adamthwaite concluded that in any study of appeasement diplomacy which admitted some freedom of choice in decision-making and did not stress the inevitability of some policies, it should be said that as late as the summer of 1938, politicians had the opportunity to guide public opinion towards resistance to the dictatorships.²

There is no consensus on the importance or function of public opinion in decision-making at crisis points in foreign policy during the 1930s, although it has been

¹ *ibid.*, p. 221.

² A. Adamthwaite, 'Democracies, Dictatorships and Public Opinion: Government, Press and Opinion in Britain and France in the Approach to Munich' in *Opinion Publique et Politique Extérieure Vol.2, 1915-1940*, Collection de l'école française de Rome, no.54 part 2 (1984), p.341, 346, 351. In the same collection, see also D.N. Dilks, 'Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: Great Britain' for a study of the sources available to the historian.

suggested that it could, and should, be studied. Therefore, our first task in attempting case studies within the period is to test the assumptions which have been made about specific occasions and which we have seen exemplified for the reoccupation of the Rhineland and the aftermath of the Kristallnacht pogrom. One way in which this can be achieved is to review the actual evidence which the Cabinet possessed about the state of public opinion. In this way, historiographical citation of the Peace Ballot, the Oxford Union resolution, Mass-Observation, the League of Nations and Peace Pledge Unions and Gallup polls is related, in a more specific way, to the everyday process of government. This does not diminish the citation of these sources as measures for historians of public opinion itself but aims to eliminate the vagueness with which they have been associated with changes in government policy. We can also accept Patrick Kyba's caveats about written evidence and Adamthwaite's acceptance of the freedom of choice in decision-making. Most importantly, in this thesis, we use Boyce's idea that public opinion exists primarily as a perception of its contemporaries to justify the type of sources used and the claims made that perception can be reconstructed to some extent.

What constituted public opinion for politicians? Élite opinion and political friendship in the 1930s.

Having established that perceptions of public opinion are considered to have been important in decision-making in some vague way, the next methodological question which we need to ask concerns who was perceived to be public opinion by contemporary politicians. A central section of historiography on public opinion has suggested that the

only opinion which mattered to the Cabinet was educated opinion.¹ In this section, we examine the concept of 'élite' public opinion before arguing in chapter one that the idea of 'mass' public opinion was also part of politicians' understanding of the term. Outside psephological studies, historians have tended to think, not unreasonably, that those closest to the Cabinet were the subjects of the phrase 'public opinion' when it was used by politicians in decision-making. Is it accurate enough to say, as Donald Watt has done, that public opinion constituted an amalgam of club, press, Commons, social and pressure group opinion for decisions makers?² One social group or dining society may well have had such a different complexion from another that an 'amalgam' may not have been possible. Consequently, a detailed examination of the social milieu should take us beyond these generalizations to the examination of exactly which groups were influential at which moments, who had dinner with whom, which country houses were frequented by which guests and which clubs and houses in London formed the staple of this 'public opinion' diet.

In such an analysis, we have to bear in mind that a circular process is taking place. Naomi Black has suggested that society leaders could be thought to articulate the feelings

¹ See, for example, G.A. Craig and A.L. George, *Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Problems of Our Time* (third edition, Oxford, 1995), p. 61, 'The "enlightened public" which was the only public that counted, didn't need the press in any case and could be counted on to agree with the professional elite in the Foreign Office'; N. Black, 'Decision-Making and the Munich Crisis' *BJIS* vol.6 no.3 (1980), p.281 talks about the 'competing leaderships who articulate public opinion'; G. Post, Jr., (1993) p. 13 describes policy formation in terms of the social round.

² D.C Watt, 'British Domestic Politics', (1975) p.250. See also D.N. Dilks, 'Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: Great Britain' in *Collection de l'Ecole Française de Rome* no.54 part 2, *Opinion Publique et Politique Extérieure Vol. 2, 1915-1940* (1984), p.57 and Y. Lacaze, *L'opinion publique française et la crise de Munich* (Bern, 1991), p.47, 'La prise en compte des réactions à tel ou tel événement de ces cadres de la société que constituent le gouvernement, le Parlement, les partis, les organes de la presse, certains groupes culturels ou socio-professionnels, certain lobbies importe en revanche au premier chef.' P. Kennedy, (1985), p.65 also sees the dynamics of British politics as frequent struggles between sub-groups of the establishment. Keith Middlemas, p.108, argues that it is hard to define public opinion, except in terms of leaders of opinion, such as the League of Nations Union or the Next Five Years' Group.

of their interest groups. By extension, it could be argued that M.P.s articulated the feelings of their constituents, and the Government the feelings of the electorate at large. In chapter one, we discuss cases where politicians were believed by their contemporaries to do just this. However, this quality was regarded as rare, and so we should look for another mechanism to explain the possible reliance of politicians on the opinions of their friends as constituting 'public opinion.' To the historian, those who dined, hunted, and debated with the Cabinet are potentially sources of public opinion for the Cabinet. In reality, this group may have been so close to the Cabinet that it was not regarded as falling into the public opinion category at all. However, this group did offer their own views of public opinion to Cabinet members. Sometimes these views were derived from identifiable sources and, sometimes, we suspect, from thin air as well. In turn, what the Cabinet said about public opinion influenced their closest friends. These are the 'unrecoverable' processes which the historian can only suggest and outline wherever evidence exists, and which Gaines Post Jnr. has described, 'policy was shaped by countless undocumented conversations on the telephone, at private clubs, on walks in St. James' Park, during public school reunion, at college gaudies in Oxford and Cambridge, on weekends in the country.'¹ Thus, we move away from using social networks as evidence of public opinion itself to using them as sources which did not regard themselves as public opinion necessarily, but often thought that they themselves knew what public opinion was thinking.

Donald Watt has hinted at this as an approach to describing the environment of British foreign policy makers in the 1930s, imputing to the term public opinion, 'informal networks of social ties, of varying degrees of intimacy, the rationale of which differed

¹ G. Post, Jr., (1993), p. 13.

largely, in some cases being shared political loyalties or interests, in others being of purely social significance in the first instance.¹ Watt also gives a brief list of some of those networks, encompassing Lord Lothian's circle, the Cliveden circle, Churchill's 'Focus' group, the League of Nations Union, the Union of Democratic Control and the New Commonwealth group.² As one part of the analysis of perceived public opinion, these groups, which have been argued to have constituted 'British opinion' in some part, need to be expanded and delineated. Firstly, the physical proximity of different social networks can be illustrated to suggest the degree of intimacy involved in every day public life. Unlike Claud Cockburn's *The Week*, however, such an analysis is not used per se in this thesis to suggest any degree of conspiracy in decision-making. These contacts are outlined as being normal London social relations, largely unchanged by the tense diplomatic atmosphere of the later 1930s. The only area in which covert manipulation of governmental authority is suggested is in relations with the press, which is discussed later in the introduction.³

The first stage in depicting these networks is to draw a map of the area of London in which most governmental activity, both formal and informal took place. Appendix one shows the governmental district of London and the cluster of clubs around Pall Mall and St. James's Square with Nancy Astor's house nestling in the middle. Club-land was a short walk up Whitehall or across St. James Park from Downing Street, the Cabinet Office and the Foreign Office. As two hour lunch breaks were permissible in the Foreign Office, it is not surprising that officials took the opportunity to make this short journey to

¹ D.C Watt, 'British Domestic Politics', (1975), p. 252.

² *ibid.*, p. 252. See also D.C. Watt, *Personalities and Policies* (1965).

³ See p.21.

the Travellers' Club for lunch, for example. Sometimes, of course, time was too pressing and officials might eat a hasty lunch in a Whitehall pub.¹ Diplomats and politicians probably used their clubs to escape conversations about their work as much as to continue them and the varied professional composition of London clubs meant that this was easily done.

The Travellers' was often referred to as the Foreign Office Canteen. The heads of visiting foreign delegations were often made temporary members.² The St. James' Club was also a Foreign Office haunt, whilst Brooks's, White's and Boodles were, according to their historian, much of a muchness when it came to membership.³ That membership was often political, but not exclusively so. The Beefsteak Club was (and is) a drop-in grill room, which was most frequented at lunch-time but which had a small number of regular diners as well.⁴ Lists of the clubs of Prime Ministers and Foreign Secretaries are given in Appendix two. The Labour leaders tended not to be members of the same clubs. Neither Attlee nor George Lansbury were members of London clubs, according to Who's Who. Cripps, on the other hand, was a member of some of the smaller clubs, such as the Royal Automobile and the English Speaking Union. The Liberal leader, Archibald Sinclair, was, however, a member of the Travellers', Brooks's and the Royal Automobile Club. That Labour leaders might not be met at the Travellers' does not mean that they could not have been considered to have constituted 'public' opinion by the Cabinet, but it does mean that their social interaction with the Cabinet was not as great as those of

¹ Patrick Reilly kindly suggested this point.

² See for example, Travellers' Club Agenda Committee Books (unnumbered and unfoliated), entry for 19 November 1936 for a letter from von Ribbentrop thanking the club for his period of membership.

³ A. Lejeune, *White's. The First Three Hundred Years* (1993), p.2.

⁴ A. Lejeune and M. Lewis, *The Gentlemen's Clubs of London* (1979), p.53. My thanks to Alan Bell for details about London clubs.

Conservative and Liberal M.P.s. They do not appear in the engagement diaries of prominent Cabinet Ministers either, except on official business, and we may conclude that, to the Cabinet, 'club' opinion had an overwhelmingly Conservative tone to it.

Of the informal networks shown in Figure one overleaf, the two dining societies, Grillion's and the Literary Society (both extant), seem to be those which have been largely overlooked in social analyses of the period.¹ Their membership was primarily political, with a strong bias towards those who were serving or had served in the Cabinet. There is one piece of evidence which suggests that political gossip, as well as other kinds, took place at such societies. In February 1936, Austen Chamberlain and Lord Salisbury exchanged letters about a plan for reform of the Cabinet which they had talked about at Grillion's. Salisbury wrote with fuller details of the plan, remarking, 'most naturally you have forgotten a short interchange of observations across the table at Grillion's.' The Beefsteak Club was used as a casual restaurant by its members, which allowed both planned and impromptu meetings. The topics of conversation can only be surmised but it seems reasonable to assume that political subjects would have been as prominent as any other.²

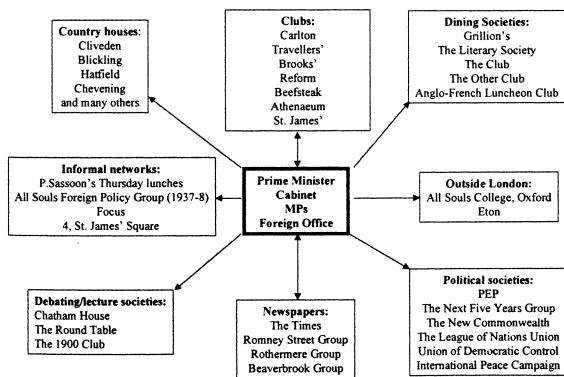
Of the groups of public men in this thesis, one of the most frequent diners at the Beefsteak was the editor of *The Times*, Geoffrey Dawson. Dawson's ubiquity in London social life is one of the remarkable features of this period. Not only was he a member of the main London clubs, but he also had academic links, being a Fellow of both All Souls College and Eton College, and imperial links from his days in Milner's kindergarten. His diaries contain detailed accounts of attendance at lunches and dinners and, occasionally,

¹ See Appendix two for lists of members.

² My thanks to Alan Bell for inviting me to the Beefsteak Club for dinner for reconnaissance.

particulars of conversations held, an aspect which is underplayed by his biographer.¹ His correspondence with the deputy editor of *The Times*, Robin Barrington-Ward, illustrates how careful the paper sometimes was to acquire Foreign Office approval for any 'hints' it gave out in its leaders.² Dawson saw Ramsay MacDonald and Baldwin regularly and, whilst Neville Chamberlain was closer to the editor of *The Sunday Times*, W.W. Hadley, Dawson appears to have met him socially and to have kept in close touch at the time of the Sudeten crisis. The figure below expands Watt's work on informal networks to suggest the main networks significant to this study. A list of members of these groups is given in Appendix two.

Figure 1: Significant Social Networks, 1933-1938³



¹ J.E. Wrench, *Geoffrey Dawson and Our Times* (1955) is the only full treatment of Dawson's life although there is a strong argument for a new, expanded biography in light of recent historiography on the outbreak of the second world war. Wrench, for example, does not give any diary entries at all for 1933.

² TNL Archive, Dawson-Barrington-Ward correspondence file 1933-35, letters dated 4 May 1934 and 11 January 1935.

³ For the Romney Street group see K. Martin, *Editor* (1968), p.57-8. See Appendix two for lists of members of other groups and brief descriptions of their functions where evidence for membership was available.

In addition to Dawson's diaries, the engagement diaries of Neville and Austen Chamberlain, Ramsay MacDonald, Maurice Hankey, and Sir Edward Spears afford us glimpses of different social circles which have not yet been historically described. These diaries allow us to see the frequent overlaps between groups and also where the most direct access to the Cabinet lay, which, by and large, was through clubs, dining societies and country house weekends. Throughout each narrative chapter, these social networks are delineated as far as possible and the connections and social habits of the Cabinet particularly emphasized.

The figure of Geoffrey Dawson raises questions about the role of the press in the formation of the Cabinet's perceptions of public opinion. Both then and since, commentators have debated the same questions of whether the press followed or led public opinion and contemporary views on the subject are discussed in chapter one.¹ In general, in this thesis, we argue that the press can be regarded in the same light as much of 'educated opinion'. It was written by people closely in touch with politicians on both personal and business footings.² Some editors sought to influence the Government as much as governments sought to influence them. Leader writers in particular published perceptions of public opinion which politicians would have read. The circularity of this process is illustrated in chapter three.

¹ See, for example, Y. Lacaze, (1991), p.48, '*Les appréciations du journaliste sur les événements ne correspondent pas nécessairement à l'état d'esprit des lecteurs: le journaliste peut être le reflet de l'opinion [...] mais aussi se vouloir guide [...]*' and F. R. Gannon, *The British Press and Germany, 1936-9* (Oxford, 1971), p.1-3 for the argument that the people got what they wanted from the press, namely entertainment but that newspapers did play a significant part in shaping public attitudes. Gannon does not talk about press relations with the government.

² See A. Adamthwaite, 'The British Government and the Media, 1937-8' *JCH*, vol.18 no.2 (1983), p. 282 for the government's efforts to 'persuade' rather than compel press barons to act in a certain way. Zara Steiner, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War* (1977), p.168-9 has also made this point in relation to opinion-formation during the first world war.

It is also worth mentioning another aspect of the rôle of the press at this time, and an aspect which at least one editor was concerned about. While the House of Commons was not sitting, newspapers might be the Cabinet's central way of gauging public opinion. The parliamentary year was relatively short, with parliament and its observers taking a month's holiday in April over Easter and a longer holiday from the end of July to the beginning of October, although many people popped back from the country at the beginning of September to secure their affairs for another month. This phenomenon was of particular importance to the Czechoslovakian crisis when the bulk of Cabinet decisions were taken when its members were returning in dribs and drabs from the country and parliament was still in recess. Writing to Winston Churchill in November 1938, Walter Layton, editor of the News Chronicle, described the burden which he felt had fallen on the press in this time, 'I was deeply conscious during August and September that the course of history might have been different if parliament had been in session, and that while the press might throw out opinion day by day, it could not bring to bear upon the Government the reaction of public opinion in the same way that parliament can do.'¹ We examine the other sources for opinion which the Cabinet might have been aware of, in the absence of parliament, in chapters three and six, emphasizing the degree of press control which the level of crisis had prompted the government to exercise.

Methodology and Sources

The concept of élite opinion has been argued to function in two ways, both as a source for public opinion and as a source for perceptions of public opinion. Having

¹ Churchill Chartwell 2/233 fol.72: Layton to Churchill, 22 November 1938.

established the extent of the group whose perceptions we wish to study, we need to probe the limitations of trying to reconstruct perception. Theoretical literature on international history by political scientists and historians acknowledges the importance of the perceptions of high political players, both in explanations which seek comprehensive theories and in historically particular studies. Donald Watt pointed out in 1983 in his inaugural lecture at the London School of Economics that work on the 'mental maps' of the decision makers had really begun with first world war studies but had grown both in scope of subject and in sophistication.¹ In this exposition, Watt also resolved potential conflict between history and political science by referring to the 'bag of tools and vocabulary' which international history could borrow from international relations theory without sacrificing historical methodology.

Much of the theorization about charting perception comes from that stable. Richard Snyder stated in 1962 that the effective discrimination of the setting by the actors may limit their action. What decision makers 'see' is what they act upon, and through those perceptions, external limitations gain their significance.² Paul W. Schroeder has also suggested the need for the reconstruction of the 'largely unarticulated assumptions, hidden axioms and half-consciously apprehended rules about how the game is played' which are to be found in and under the historical data.³ Stephen Pelz phrases this in systemic language to say that 'aggregate belief systems and group pressures can be an

¹ D.C. Watt, 'What about the people? Abstraction and Reality in History and the Social Sciences', *London School of Economics Inaugural Lecture* (1983), p.15.

² R.C. Snyder et al., (1962), p.102.

³ P.W. Schroeder, " 'System' and Systemic Thinking in International History", *IHR* [Canada], vol.xv no.1 (1993), p. 134.

underlying cause of those decisions that may seem difficult to explain because they are so dysfunctional.’¹

Is the reconstruction of ‘mental maps’ and by extension, perceptions of public opinion, really possible within an historical methodology? Firstly, the concept of assessing perception at all must be challenged. Richard Snyder posed the central questions as to whether or not we can obtain reliable data concerning the state of mind of actors whose behaviour we wish to describe and explain and if assumptions could be replaced by evidence.² On a very basic level, this study follows his methodology that, from an objectivist position, it should be possible to present such evidence because such attitudes may have been committed to paper in various forms.³ Previously, high political studies have concentrated on using official documentation supplemented by some private papers. This thesis combines a very wide selection of private paper research with an attempt to reconstruct when and where the central protagonists met, whom their regular companions and friends were and how far such combinations influenced the development of perceptions of what the public were thinking about foreign policy. Hence, dining records from London clubs, engagement diaries, visitor’s books and lecture meetings have also been incorporated into the analysis. This is an attempt to recover Gaines Post’s unrecoverable processes mentioned earlier.⁴

Some historians have expressed doubts that this type of analysis can be regarded as in any way conclusive. Writing about conspiracy theories connected with

¹ S. Pelz, ‘Essay and Reflection: On Systematic Explanation in International History’, *IHR* [Canada], vol.xii no.4 (1990), p. 763-4.

² R.C. Snyder et al., (1962), p.5.

³ R.C. Snyder et al., (1962), p.5.

⁴ See p.16.

appeasement, Middlemas said that, 'the juxtaposition of comments about the 'appeasers', leading articles in certain newspapers, house-parties at Cliveden, dinners at All Souls, and actual political decisions is quite inadequate as a method of showing that influence actually existed.' He added that it remained to be demonstrated that agencies outside the governmental machine exercised a powerful or even exclusive influence at specific moments before these decisions were taken.¹ In this study, close narrative detail aims to prevent using the mere juxtaposition of such social events to suggest influence. Where possible, what was said at these events and meetings on the subject of public opinion and foreign policy is compared with other accounts of decision-making. Each case study is a narrative told through a collation of references to public opinion from official and private sources. Several layers of comparative and corroborative evidence, therefore, need to be presented. The copious official documentation from the 1930s forms the basis of the evidence. The central sources are the minutes of Cabinet meetings, which during this period are the product of two men with very different styles and the files of the central department of the Foreign Office, which in turn are the product of a vast array of hands.²

The first layer of comparison to official records is added through the unofficial papers, diaries and correspondence of the politicians and diplomats themselves. A second layer is added through the private papers of a large penumbra of their social circles. The evidence of these two groups challenges Middlemas' statement that the private papers of close participants such as Chamberlain, Eden, Simon, Halifax, Inskip and Vansittart do not suggest a Cabinet open 'to the variable winds of the Press, public or private opinion'

¹ Middlemas, p.94-5.

² Donald Watt has suggested the benefit of continued attention to diplomatic archives in this type of study as the views of diplomats may reflect the value system of those who appointed them and to whom they report, see D.C. Watt, 'Foreword: The New International History', *IHR* [Canada] vol.ix (1987), p.519.

to suggest that they and others were very much concerned with public opinion.¹ The nature of the sources used permits a tangential analysis of the social milieu and relationships of the governing group on an attitudinal basis rather than on the party political index which has hitherto been the norm. The complexion of the Cabinet has meant that the bulk of papers examined are those of Conservatives and National Labour M.P.s. Labour and Liberal M.P.s, other than Sir Archibald Sinclair, have not been consulted in depth in order to emphasize the relationship between the Foreign Office, the Cabinet and their social circles rather than cross-party political influence.²

A third layer of comparison is added to possible definitions of what the term 'public opinion' might have meant through a contextual comparison with theoretical literature of the period. This is taken largely from the periodical and journal press, but also from books, pamphlets and newspapers. The enormity of sources available has necessitated reliance on the work of other historians for some aspects of this task, notably Benny Morris, F.R. Gannon and Patrick Kyba for analyses of the British press other than The Times. However, the thesis itself does examine relations between The Times and the Government as a test case of newspaper influence on the question of public opinion. The Times was chosen both because of the importance of the editor Geoffrey Dawson's contacts with the Government and because it was felt necessary for reasons of space to limit the case study to one newspaper. The socially exclusive nature of political life during this period means that, very often, those who had delivered a speech or written an

¹ Middlemas, p. 96. The recent publication of much new diary material also makes a new narrative which synthesizes this evidence desirable.

² My thanks to Victoria Child of Nuffield College Library, Oxford for information about the Cripps papers, which are currently retained by Cripps' official biographer. They may be returned to Nuffield later this year.

article on the subject of public opinion might come into social contact with those who had used the phrase rhetorically in decision-making or diplomacy. The extent of writing and theorization about public opinion and its related subjects in the 1930s suggests, at the very least, that politicians and diplomats may well have been aware of the state of debate on the subject and that this may have influenced the way in which they regarded it. The juxtaposition of such evidence is no less relevant than the juxtaposition of evidence such as Mass-Observation surveys and press articles as indications of public opinion of which, it is thought, the Government must have been aware.¹

The archives of organs of public opinion demonstration such as the League of Nations Union, the peace groups, the Labour Party and other pressure groups have not been used, although secondary works on them are constantly referred to. Since the aim of the study is to identify whether or not the resolutions of these groups were noted by the Cabinet, evidence for their resolutions and representations has been sought in the official minutes of the Cabinet and in the correspondence files of the Foreign Office. Reports in the press of their activities at crucial moments have also been noted. This decision was taken in order to answer Middlemas' worries about the juxtaposition of events, meetings and resolutions being used to denote influence over the Cabinet. Whilst it is likely that the Cabinet did know if there had been a large protest meeting at the Albert Hall against rearmament, for example, we need to know whether that knowledge was mediated through press reports, wireless reports or through personal contacts with the leaders of such groups, and, more importantly, whether such information was acted upon. This information can best be discovered through a 'top to bottom' analysis.

¹ See, for example, Middlemas, p.324.

There are problems in assessing what politicians and diplomats meant by written pronouncements in which they said that 'public opinion' was doing and thinking one thing or another. The phrase itself may have connoted different sections of opinion to different politicians and the semantic boundaries of the phrase are examined in chapter one. There are textual problems with some of the sources used. In the case of the Cabinet records, the danger exists that the phrase 'public opinion' has been minuted as a composite of other phrases denoting a similar concept, such as 'the country' or 'the nation', with the result that the semantic boundaries of the term are difficult to determine. In some cases, we cannot even be sure that the words were uttered by Cabinet Ministers at all. Sir Maurice Hankey, Cabinet Secretary until 1936, compounded the historian's difficulties by rarely assigning views recorded to individual Cabinet Ministers unless they had asked a question. Instead the terms, 'in the course of the general discussion,' and, 'it was generally thought,' are dominant. Consequently, the views of individual Ministers on the subject remain largely hidden. Unfortunately, no original notes of Cabinet meetings taken by Cabinet secretaries survive for the pre-war period.¹ Some anecdotal evidence suggests that, after a Cabinet discussion on foreign policy matters, Maurice Hankey might even have gone to the Foreign Office to check how the discussion should be recorded.² Hankey's successor, Edward Bridges, was kinder to the historian, providing fuller accounts with individual attributions, and so the divergence of opinion about what the public thought on specific issues becomes much clearer.

¹ My thanks to Richard Ponman of the Cabinet Office for this information. Keith Middlemas, p.96, does acknowledge the fact that the process of minuting may have concealed evidence for outside influences on Cabinet decision-making.

² Bodleian, Sir Patrick Reilly, unpublished memoirs 1933-5, p.19-20.

We are forced to take Hankey's minutes as approximations of what was said, but it is plausible that they were accurate in outline if not in detail. The commonness of the phrase 'public opinion' in parliamentary speeches, journal articles and newspapers suggests that it would have been a convenient shorthand for a minute writer, and so it is assumed here that the phrase in the minutes does denote some usage of it or associated wording in the meetings themselves. Regarding Foreign Office records, the minuting of telegrams and memoranda by initial in the Foreign Office makes the attribution of views much easier. However, a piece of evidence from the Avon papers casts some doubt on the way that international conferences were recorded with the result that it would be wise to regard such documents as accounts which are not necessarily verbatim. In his diary of the negotiations after the withdrawal of Germany from the Disarmament Conference, Anthony Eden recorded a conversation he had had with William Strang, one of the Foreign Office Counsellors, in which the Foreign Secretary, Sir John Simon, was clearly attempting to save face,

*'Later in the evening Strang came to see me to warn me not to be surprised if I appeared to have said nothing in the records of today's conversations. Simon had given orders that my name should not appear since it annoyed PM [sic] and even when repeating German ambassador's remarks to me they must be given as having been addressed to Simon.'*¹

Therefore, it is argued here that written evidence of the phrase 'public opinion' can be used as a source for perception only if carefully compared with a range of other contemporary sources. The conclusions drawn from a study of perception must of necessity be suggestive rather than definitive, leaving as unrecoverable the physical and psychological processes of information selection and of the neurological basis of

¹ BUL Avon AP 20/1/1-32, diary, 19 November 1933.

perception.¹ However, it is argued that the use of sources in this study comprises the most complete survey yet dedicated to this subject, with belief in the possibility of the partial reconstruction of perceptions and the importance of such work.

Historiography on the British Governmental Reaction to the Nazi persecution of the Jews

In two chapters, this thesis engages with the historiography of the British response to Nazi persecution of the Jews. Most of the historiography has dealt with the immigration policy of the British Government with varying degrees of criticism.² In contrast, this thesis tackles diplomatic and unofficial representation to the German Government against persecution, which used perceptions of public opinion. Several themes from immigration literature are developed. John Fox's arguments that Britain claimed she could make no official representations to Germany because the Jewish issue was an internal German affair are countered with evidence of the numerous occasions on which informal representations were made in the course of ordinary diplomatic dialogue.³ Tony Kushner's theories about the inflexibility of Government policy on the Jewish issue

¹ Decision-making theories from the political science stable such as attribution theory are thus rejected in favour of a particularist rather than a systemic approach. For examples of systemic theories, see E.E. Jones et al. (eds.), *Attribution: Perceiving the Causes of Behaviour* (Morristown, New Jersey, U.S.A., 1972) and J.D. Steinbruner, *The Cybernetic Theory of Decision. New Dimensions of Political Analysis* (Princeton University Press, 1974).

² See A. Sherman, *Island Refuge: Britain and refugees from the Third Reich* (second edition, 1973), B. Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945* (second edition, Leicester University Press and Institute for Jewish Policy Research, 1999) and L. London, *Whitehall and the Jews 1933-48. British Immigration Policy and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, 2000).

³ J.P. Fox, 'Great Britain and the German Jews 1933', *WLB*, vol.xxvi nos.1-2 (1972), p.40-46 and 'Nazi Germany and German Emigration to Great Britain' in G. Hirschfeld (ed.), *Exile in Great Britain. Refugees from Hitler's Germany* (Leamington Spa, 1984), p.29-62.

are also nuanced in this way.¹ It is argued in both chapters that British diplomats heaped the wrath of British public opinion upon the German Government by suggesting that negotiations on disarmament and revision of the Treaty of Versailles might be hindered by the German Jewish policy.² In this way, we show that they were far more willing to jeopardize Anglo-German diplomatic relations than has previously been imagined.

In offering this complementary approach to the study of immigration policy, attention is referred back to the Foreign Office, in contrast to studies which have relied upon Home Office sources up to 1938.³ This follows recent work by Shlomo Katz, Joshua Stein and Shlomo Shafir on the diplomatic response to the Evian conference and the Kristallnacht pogrom.⁴ The actions of private individuals in assisting the Jews has often been lauded in historiography, and it is argued here that such individuals also existed in the Cabinet and Foreign Office. Overall, the arguments presented here follow A.J. Sherman's judgement that, 'a survey of that policy [towards refugees] does however refute the widely-held view, based largely on the dramatic clash over Palestine, that the British Government was both ungenerous and indifferent to the fate of refugees from the Nazi régime.'⁵

¹ T. Kushner, 'Beyond the Pale? British Reactions to Nazi anti-Semitism, 1933-39, *Immigrants and Minorities*, vol.viii nos.1-2 (1989), p.143-60. See also, S. Gewirtz, 'Anglo-Jewish Responses to Nazi Germany 1933-39: The Anti-Nazi Boycott and the Board of Deputies of British Jews', *JCH*, vol.xxvi no.2 (1991), p.255-76.

² See A. Sherman, (1973), p.15.

³ See, for example, L. London, 'Jewish Refugees, Anglo-Jewry and British Government Policy, 1930-40' in D. Cesarani (ed.), *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry* (Oxford, 1990), p.163-90.

⁴ S.Z. Katz, 'Public Opinion in Western Europe and the Evian Conference of July 1938', *YJS* [Jerusalem], vol.ix (1973), p.105-132; J.B. Stein, 'Great Britain and the Evian Conference of 1938', *WLB*, vol.xxix new series 37/8 (1976), p.40-52; S. Shafir, 'American Diplomats in Berlin [1933-1939] and their Attitude to the Nazi Persecution of the Jews' *YJS* [Jerusalem], vol.ix (1973), p.71-104.

⁵ A. Sherman, (1973), p.14.

Guilty Men?

Any study which deals with British foreign policy in the 1930s is drawn into the debate about the wisdom of the Government's choices in its policy towards Nazi Germany. Recent work has both departed from and added to this debate. In *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, Parker suggested that Chamberlain's policy was one of several viable choices.¹ On a more apologetic note, Peter Neville has suggested that misinterpreting the nature of Nazism was a common phenomenon among public servants because there was little in their experience which had prepared them for dealing with such a régime.² The most recent study of the Munich crisis has suggested the importance of public resolve for intervention by large states in international disputes in which they are not involved because of territorial imperative.³

As a subject, perceptions of public opinion clearly contribute to that part of the historiography of foreign policy which attempts to deconstruct the reality of policy alternatives. In this sense it is 'counter-revisionist,' to use Parker's own phrase, in not seeking directly to evaluate the appropriateness of the policies chosen, more the reasons why some seemed more compelling than others to certain individuals.⁴ If this thesis does cast a judgmental eye over the Cabinet's decisions, it is to rehabilitate the Cabinet's actions in September 1938. In chapter six it is argued that the Cabinet's changing

¹ Parker, p.347. Parker's new book on Churchill and appeasement had not been published when this thesis was submitted.

² P. Neville, *Appeasing Hitler. The Diplomacy of Sir Neville Henderson, 1937-39* (2000), p.176.

³ G.L. Weinberg, 'Reflections on Munich after 60 Years' in I. Lukes and E. Goldstein (eds.), *The Munich Crisis, 1938. Prelude to World War II* (1999), p.11.

⁴ Parker, p.347. This terminology takes the first wave of histories produced after the release of official documents in 1969 as 'revisionist' of those histories such as M. Gilbert and R. Gott, *The Appeasers* (1963) or Cato, *Guilty Men* (1940). See also, D.C. Watt, 'Appeasement: the rise of a revisionist school' *Political Quarterly*, vol.36 no.2 (1965), p.191-213 and 'Restrictions on Research. The Fifty-Year Rule and British Foreign Policy' *LA*, vol.41 no.1 (1965), p.89-95.

appreciation of public opinion in that month is probably the most significant factor in bringing them to the brink of war with Germany on 27 September. The Munich agreement is often criticized for the weakness, lack of leadership and betrayal which it represented. In this thesis, that judgement is tempered by the argument that the Government sent a very strong message to Germany by pushing events to the brink of war and that events in the autumn of 1938 suggest that this brinkmanship had a profound effect in accelerating preparations for war thereafter, not least of which was the education of public opinion about air raids, national service and the nature of the international situation.

Structure

Perceptions of public opinion are examined in relation to two subjects. Firstly, political and diplomatic perceptions of how the public saw Britain's role in crisis diplomacy with Nazi Germany are approached. The responses to three diplomatic crises are considered: the withdrawal of Germany from the Disarmament Conference in 1933, the German reoccupation of the Rhineland in 1936 and the threat of invasion of the Sudetenland in 1938. The extent to which decision makers felt themselves curtailed, encouraged or held in limbo by public opinion is examined. It is argued that perceptions of public opinion played an increasingly important part in decision-making as the possibility of war with Germany came nearer and some conjectures are offered on the types of political decision which potentially had moral dimensions, such as recourse to war and humanitarian disasters and in which it was thought that the public's views should

be involved. The extent to which politicians and diplomats possessed tangible evidence about public opinion, and used it, is also incorporated into the analysis.

Secondly, perceptions of how the British public was thought to regard the Nazi persecution of Jews and the effect of these perceptions on diplomacy are examined. The two case studies on this subject run in chronological parallel to the first and last diplomatic crises described above. It is argued that perceptions of public opinion encouraged the British Government to make informal representations to the German Government when other means of helping refugees and those persecuted were more difficult. This often meant that the Jewish issue and German internal policy became part of the rhetoric about other issues, such as disarmament or a general European settlement. In this way, the issue of German internal repression was used as a diplomatic pawn, but not in an entirely cynical way, since diplomats and politicians often risked jeopardizing Anglo-German relations as a result of the extreme Nazi sensitivity to criticism in parliament and in the British press.

As a consequence of the depth and breadth of sources consulted, it has been necessary to limit the case studies to six in order to match the depth of narrative which has been set as a standard by earlier historians for work in this field and also to show some chronological development of the usage of perceptions of public opinion. The studies stop in 1938 rather than 1939 because it was felt that the year in which war broke out deserved full length treatment in itself. Since the primary aim of the case study approach is to experiment with the type of methodology described above, it was also considered necessary to have a set of conclusions about the preceding years before examining September 1939. The case studies have not been chosen according to the

criterion favoured by political scientists of complete compatibility of central features, but rather in favour of a chronological approach which illustrates the response to different types and degree of crisis.¹ This development moves from initial fears of war against Germany, which the nature of the Nazi régime prompted in 1933, to the actuality of an ultimatum sent in September 1938. Each chapter aims to blend narrative with methodological comments about the sources involved.

Chapter one considers the theoretical perception of public opinion in relation to foreign policy in the inter-war period. It is argued that despite pessimism about the suitability of the public to be involved and informed on international affairs, it was widely held that efforts should be made to provide education because democracy could only survive if national unity were created behind governmental policies. This chapter also starts to examine the National Government's lack of confidence in the public's reaction to its foreign policy decisions. Chapter two begins the assessment of perceptions of public opinion in 1933 by arguing that parliamentary reactions to Jewish persecution, in the first months of the Hitler régime, had a profound effect on the way that Germany was viewed and approached by foreign policy makers, to the extent that they were far less willing to make concessions to the new German Government. Chapter three continues this analysis into the second half of 1933, comparing statements about public opinion made in diplomatic rhetoric with other assumptions about the public's tolerance of any potential rearmament of Germany. It notes the discrepancy between the prevalence of public opinion in Cabinet minutes and diplomatic conversations and the apparent lack of

¹ For a political science approach to case studies in foreign policy decision-making, see R. Jervis, 'Perception and Misperception in International Politics' in P.G. Lauren (ed.) *Diplomacy. New Approaches in History, Theory and Policy* (New York, 1979) p. 50-51.

appreciation of public opinion in the diaries of those conducting the negotiations at Geneva. Both chapters argue that some notion of mass opinion was important, though probably less so than parliamentary opinion, in decision-making.

Chapter four argues that in early 1936 the future of Anglo-German relations was being reconsidered in the Foreign Office in light of perceptions of public opinion which had been gleaned from the experiences of 1935, but that these perceptions contradicted some of the evidence for public opinion which had presented itself during the general election and the Hoare-Laval debate. Chapter five demonstrates that this set of assumptions was brought into play during the Rhineland crisis in March 1936. The chapter also makes a clear distinction between parliamentary and mass public opinion when examining Cabinet perceptions of reactions to the reoccupation. It is shown that perceptions of public opinion fluctuated far more in the following two months and during the crisis itself than has been suggested before.

Chapter six argues that at the time of the Munich crisis, perceptions of mass opinion were very important to the Cabinet, particularly in the decision to refuse the Godesberg terms. It nuances the view of Neville Chamberlain as unmoved by such perceptions to show how he invoked them in diplomacy and around the Cabinet table. It is also shown that dissent from Chamberlain's line was most often expressed in Cabinet in terms of what the public were thinking and would tolerate. It also argues that the Munich agreement itself was made against all the evidence of the mood of the public which Chamberlain had at his disposal: namely, that although the people did not want war, they did not want to see Czechoslovakia's domination as the price of peace. Chapter seven considers perceptions of public opinion in the aftermath of the Munich settlement

and balances perceived reactions to the crisis with reactions to the Kristallnacht pogrom. It concludes that public reaction appears to have played a very significant part in the decision taken by Halifax and ratified by the Cabinet, not to pursue negotiations with Germany before Christmas 1938. It even played a substantial role in Chamberlain's assessments of his next moves towards the dictators. In the conclusion, we summarise the case study findings and suggest the applicability of the methodology used here for other subjects and the significance of the continuing issue of the relationship between Government and public opinion in democratic societies. The utility for the historian of the concept of perceptions of public opinion is evaluated and the limits of evidential reconstruction of its role in decision-making are described.

Chapter One.

Theoretical perceptions of public opinion in inter-war Britain.

'We are all of us so accustomed to endow public opinion with a mysterious or almost supernatural power, that we neglect to examine what it is that we mean by public opinion, to measure the true limits of its authority, and to ascertain the mode of its operation.'

A.V. Dicey, *Lectures on the Relation between Law and Public Opinion in England during the Nineteenth Century* (1914), p.1.

To what or whom did politicians, diplomats and journalists think they were referring when they mentioned public opinion in Cabinet meetings, dispatches and articles? Did politicians distinguish between the opinion of an M.P. and that of a working man? Were such distinctions static or fluid? Which section of opinion was more important in decisions of peace and war? In this chapter, we examine the theoretical literature about public opinion written in the inter-war period. We concentrate on those authors who also played some part in government or who were part of government circles and supplement theoretical writings with the various programmatic statements about public opinion which diary, memoir and correspondence evidence affords us. In this way, we argue that when public men spoke about public opinion, they did so with probable reference to a common set of ideas about the nature of public opinion which they could have gleaned from speeches and lectures they had heard, books they had read, and conversations they had had.

Whilst again a suggestive rather than provable set of influences, this approach presents a completely different way of examining whether or not decision makers were influenced by parliament, by-elections, the press or 'the man-in-the-street.' The nature and future of public opinion in democratic government was a prominent topic of debate, particularly after 1931, for three reasons. Firstly, the Nazi revolution, together with the existing natures of the Italian and Soviet governments, produced the sense that

democratic government faced a serious challenge and that the role and education of public opinion would be crucial in determining whether or not Britain followed a similar path or chose a bloodless revolution to meet the demands of modern government. Secondly, as the possibility of another European war increased, the expert conduct of foreign policy was contested and the power of mass opinion invoked as a guard against war.

Thirdly, and more broadly, public opinion is an obvious practical consideration for a politician as well as a subject for theorization. At any level of government, we would expect politicians to be concerned with electoral and parliamentary support for policies. In the 1930s, this problem could have been compounded by the recent experiences of public disturbance and criticism of the government's industrial policies as well as retrospective anger at the way in which the first world war had been conducted.¹ The flood of anti-war literature in the late 1920s and early 1930s, which complained bitterly about the propaganda techniques of the war, together with the growing fears of aerial bombardment on cities in the event of war, may have been particularly important in impelling politicians to nod in the direction of public opinion in public.² Did this constitute a major change from the pre-1914 position? There is some acknowledgement of perceptions of public opinion as a factor in British diplomacy before the first world war, although no consensus about its significance. Keith Robbins has argued that Sir Edward Grey was not heavily influenced by outside pressures in diplomacy before the

¹ See P. Williamson, *National Crisis and National Government* (Cambridge, 1992), p.15 on Conservative and Labour problems of achieving mass support from a poorly educated electorate during the Liberal revival in the late 1930s.

² See, for example, V. Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925* (1933), R. Graves, *Goodbye to All That: An Autobiography* (1929), B. Nichols, *Cry Havoc!* (1933). For criticism of propaganda during the war, see A. Ponsonby, *Falsehoods in Wartime* (1928). On the bomber threat, see U. Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber* (1980).

outbreak of war in 1914 but subsequently considered that government by public opinion was an admirable formula.¹ Zara Steiner, on the other hand, has shown that Grey, himself, as well as other members of the Foreign Office, used the phrase in diplomatic conversations but also felt constrained by the nature of parliamentary democracy.² More generally, Keith Wilson has suggested that the expectation of public deference to authority was greater in pre-1917 statesmen and has emphasized the Foreign Office's impatience with the disinterest of the electorate in foreign affairs.³ In terms of Cabinet politics, Turner has argued that pre-war categories of the Free Churches, Labour and the working men were used during the war.⁴

Public opinion as a factor in decision-making was clearly not a new idea in the 1930s, but it assumed new dimensions. Building on the construction of élite opinion formulated in the introduction, we start by looking at the general views of individual politicians on public opinion in the inter-war period, which focus mainly on the need to communicate more effectively with the electorate. We then move on to programmatic statements about public opinion in the memoirs, diaries and biographies of political figures. Finally, we illustrate the range of theorists writing about public opinion both within and outside the political sphere. Within this structure, we look at Mariel Grant's idea of the increasing importance of the average citizen in democracy at this time with close reference to the conduct of foreign policy and the perceived crisis of democracy.⁵ We then consider the stereotypes of the public which were invoked most frequently.

¹ K. Robbins, *Politicians, Diplomacy and War in Modern British History* (1994), p.146-7.

² Z.S. Steiner, (1977), p.168-9.

³ K. Wilson, 'The Foreign Office and the "education" of public opinion before the first world war' *HJ* vol.26 no.2, p.408.

⁴ J. Turner, *British Politics and the Great War. Coalition and Conflict 1915-1918* (1992), p.104-5.

⁵ M. Grant, (Oxford, 1994), p.12. See also A. Marwick, 'Middle Opinion in the Thirties' *EHR* vol.79 no.311 (1964), p.285-298.

These were based mainly on British national characteristics but also on assumptions about the influence of the press, the role of propaganda, the relationship of leader and led and the need to educate the public, particularly in relation to foreign affairs.¹

The role of public opinion in foreign policy-making has been portrayed in many different ways by biographers and historians. Some have suggested that Foreign Secretaries could accurately reflect the tenor of public opinion in their actions.² Of the Foreign Office permanent staff, Sir Robert Vansittart has received the most biographical attention. In the most recent account of his career, Michael Roi is very precise about the role of public opinion for Vansittart. He suggests that public pressures never determined his policies but that they presented tactical concerns that had to be addressed when formulating policies.³ Others have concentrated on Vansittart's pragmatic attempts to raise awareness of the German air threat through leaking information to the press.⁴

Did politicians themselves express any programmatic views about the role of public opinion in the way that they made decisions? Private papers reveal the occasional statement about the general role of public opinion but tend to contain more about specific issues. Memoir literature on foreign policy decision-making employs much the same technique as historiographical writing: public opinion is always mentioned as a factor, but is rarely deconstructed or attributed as an individual's view. Remembering Kyba's caveat about setting the record straight, it is understandable that politicians writing in the

¹ For the nineteenth century background to theorization on public opinion, see P. Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy* (1985), p.51-65 and J. Thompson, *Public Opinion in Late Nineteenth Century Politics*, (University of Cambridge Ph.D thesis 1999).

² See for example, Robert Rhodes James, *Anthony Eden* (1986), p.137.

³ M. Roi, *Alternative to Appeasement. Sir Robert Vansittart and Alliance Diplomacy, 1934-1937* (Westport, 1997), p.34.

⁴ N. Rose, *Vansittart. Study of a Diplomat* (1978), p.145-6.

wake of books such as Cato's accusatory *Guilty Men* might use public opinion solely to support the courses of action which they had taken. All the Foreign Secretaries of the National Government mention public opinion as a factor in either the Munich or the Rhineland crises in the broadest terms. In *Retrospect*, Simon wrote of the possibility of opposing the reoccupation of the Rhineland,

*'It is easy to say now that Britain should have chosen that moment to insist at all costs that this further development of Hitler's plans should be stopped, but that was not the prevailing feeling of parliament or of the Country at large.'*¹

Memoirs, in general, only contain summaries of events, aimed at sketching a career or personality, so we should not, necessarily, be shocked at the absence of programmatic statements about the role of public opinion. Biographies, however, fulfil a different aim, and analysis of the issue might reasonably be expected in their pages. In the case of Baldwin, Philip Williamson has written that most of his biographers, from G.M. Young onwards, have transmitted Baldwin's own cherished image of being able to reflect public opinion but have offered it as an evasion rather than an explanation of his real attitudes.² Williamson's own appraisal of Baldwin's public speeches criticizes the idea that we can describe him in terms of embodying 'Englishness', where Englishness means a homogenous, identifiable public opinion.³ Williamson places Baldwin within the mainstream of the writers on public opinion described in this chapter, however, when he says that he was concerned 'not to join the prevailing shift towards less "rational" and more "sensational" appeals, but, on the contrary, to attempt to 'educate' the electorate, to

¹ Viscount Simon, *Retrospect* (1952), p.214. See also Earl of Halifax, *Fulness of Days* (1957), p.197, The Earl of Avon, *The Eden Memoirs. Facing the Dictators* (1962), p.346-7, Viscount Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years* (1954), p.201.

² P. Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin. Conservative Leadership and National Values* (Cambridge, 1999), p.9.

³ P. Williamson, (Cambridge, 1999), p.9.

raise its political awareness.¹ In this analysis, Baldwin's conviction that he could give expression to what the English people thought is secondary to his role of shaping public opinion.² However, the idea of representativeness did have some currency outside the Baldwinite imagination and Harold Nicolson once used him in an article to embody the Englishman, describing how, for him, the caricature of the Englishman resolved itself into the features of the Prime Minister,

*'In such outward semblance [sic] do I visualise the solidity, the good humour, the honesty and the indolence of our race.'*³

Part of the fascination with national character at this time must be attributed to the existence of a 'National' Government. In Williamson's analysis, national characteristics were associated with pulling the nation together in Baldwinian rhetoric.⁴ Perhaps stemming from Baldwin's anti-class war speeches of the 1920s, exhortations for national unity could sometimes be found on the Left as well.⁵ In June 1936, Malcolm MacDonald, then Secretary of State for the Dominions, told the National Labour Council that Britain needed a Government which could rally the people behind rearmament and which could represent a combination of forces drawn from beyond the confines of any one party; in other words, national government was indispensable.⁶ On another, unnamed, occasion after the Munich agreement, MacDonald's speech notes contained a passage about liberty as the genius of the British. In these notes, he also wrote that there was general unity on

¹ *ibid.*, p.225.

² *ibid.*, p.341.

³ H. Nicolson, 'As Others See Us. How the English Appear to the Foreign Mind' *The Listener*, vol.13 no.331 (15 May 1935).

⁴ P. Williamson, (Cambridge, 1999), p.137, 225. See K. Robbins, (1988), p.10-11 for the contemporary view that the nature of mass participation made it impossible to contemplate a war in which a substantial part of the population was disaffected.

⁵ See F. O'Gorman, *British Conservatism. Conservative Thought from Burke to Thatcher* (1986), p.43 for the argument that Conservatives were instructed to cultivate a specifically national spirit.

⁶ *DUL Malcolm MacDonald Papers 94/4 fol.25: 22 June 1938.*

the need for rearmament, so why could parties not unite in the Government,

*'we [are] so accustomed [to] hear appeals for National Unity. We live in exceedingly difficult and dangerous times. They [are] so critical that there is widespread feeling that we ought to have more national unity than we have got. People contemplate the machine-like unity which is produced in some other countries, and they say "why can't we forge the same powerful weapon here?" "Then", they say, "Britain's voice would be heeded more than it sometimes appears to be in world affairs today."'*¹

This impulse seems to have been particularly strong after Munich, when there were widespread discussions about the possibility of widening the spectrum of Government Ministers to form an administration of 'National Unity' by the possible inclusions of figures such as Eden and Churchill.² Viewing the Munich crisis from Australia, Lord Lothian wrote to John Simon in November 1938 that if national unity were to be achieved, people had to be made to realize the hard doctrine that in a world of sovereign nations, serious differences of opinion were settled by force.³ Clearly, to be able to retain the confidence of the country on a Baldwinian scale was a highly desirable political characteristic. One Conservative commentator also imbued Chamberlain with the ability to embody the views of his fellow countrymen. In a very critical portrait of Chamberlain, written between September 1939 and May 1940, David Margesson, the Conservative chief whip, described Chamberlain's appeal, even when his policies were criticized, in overtly Baldwinian terms,

*'Why then, it may be asked, in view of such a record of failure and such a lack of compelling eloquence, does Neville Chamberlain still retain so strong a hold upon the hearts of his fellow countrymen? The truest explanation may be that they see in him a reflection of themselves and that therefore they feel that he is one they can understand and trust.'*⁴

¹ DUL Malcolm MacDonald Papers 95/1 fol.62-67: undated but after Munich from the context of the file.

² See Earl of Halifax, *Fulness of Days* (1957), p.200.

³ NAS (Philip Kerr Papers) GD 40/17/377, fol. 809-812: letter to John Simon, 3 November 1938.

⁴ Churchill Margesson 1/5 undated: Chamberlain: a candid portrait, fol.6.

In his biography of Neville Chamberlain, Keith Feiling pointed out that Chamberlain knew he could not appeal to the public with the same breadth and ubiquity as Baldwin.¹ Chamberlain, himself, sometimes displayed pessimism about public opinion, rather than strict indifference. In April 1933, while preparing for the World Economic Conference, he wrote to his sister, Hilda, that being in politics at that time was a depressing business and that he was weary of it. Lamenting that he did not enjoy political combat as much as his father, he saw nothing ahead but long struggles against an increasingly disgruntled public opinion.²

Despite their occasional impatience with the reality of it, politicians and civil servants moved in circles in which public opinion was discussed and conceptualized widely. Outside their own circles, a mass of literature existed about the role of the public in modern democratic society.³ A very wide range of authors interested themselves in public opinion and its related topics after the first world war. Taking them in rough chronological order, the first to produce articles and analyses were often those who had been involved in wartime propaganda efforts and who had then returned to or gone into the advertising industry. Charles Higham and Philip Cambray are perhaps most notable from this group, although less well-known war propagandists, such as Sidney Rogerson, began prophesying about propaganda in the next war by the late 1930s.⁴ The academic development of the subject straddled the first world war under the auspices of a group of professional and amateur political scientists, mainly American, who were also major

¹ Feiling, p.306.

² BUL NC 18/1/825 fol.29: letter to Hilda Chamberlain, 29 April 1933.

³ It could be argued that serious theorization about public opinion began with the idea of 'the general will' in J-J. Rousseau, 'The General Society of the Human Race' in G.D.H. Cole (trans.), *The Social Contract and The Discourses* (Everyman, 1973), p.174. According to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, there are earlier isolated references from 1425 onwards.

⁴ S. Rogerson, *Propaganda in the Next War* (1938).

contributors to periodicals. This group, consisting of the scientists Harold Lasswell, H.L. Childs, A. Lowell Lawrence, James Bryce and George Gallup remained prominent throughout the inter-war period, with the additions of the journalists Walter Lippmann and Norman Angell.

We may follow Keith Middlemas' line in identifying the next group since the leaders of special interest and pressure groups such as the League of Nations Union were very active on the lecture and periodical circuit in the 1930s, notably within the forum of the Royal Institute for International Affairs (Chatham House).¹ Leaders such as Gilbert Murray, Alfred Zimmern, Arnold Toynbee, Arthur Salter and Lionel Curtis also held academic posts.² Of this group, Salter and Curtis mixed most with governmental circles. Murray, Toynbee and Zimmern were in regular correspondence with politicians if they were somewhat less frequent dinner companions. Lord Allen of Hurtwood was both an independent author, Labour politician and pressure group leader. Of an earlier generation of academic politicians, James Bryce managed to be, as the Dictionary of National Biography puts it, 'jurist, historian and politician.'³

Naturally, there was considerable journalistic interest in the subject of public opinion. Two types of journalist seem to have dwelt on the subject. Editors and writers,

¹ Articles published under its aegis were contained in a quarterly journal called 'International Affairs': *IA* here.

² Murray had been Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford since 1908, the President of the International Committee of Intellectual Co-operation since 1928 and Chairman of the League of Nations Union since 1923. Zimmern had been Montague Burton Professor of International Relations at Oxford since 1930, Deputy Director of the League of Nations Institute of Intellectual Co-operation, 1926-30 and was a director of the Geneva School of International Studies. Toynbee had been a director of studies in the Royal Institute of International Affairs since 1925 and was Research Professor of International History in the University of London. Salter had been a member of the Economic Advisory Council since 1932, had spent much of his life in the civil service and was a Fellow of All Souls. Curtis was the Beit Lecturer in Colonial History at Oxford, a Fellow of All Souls and a member of the Round Table.

³ Viscount Bryce, 1838-1922. See K. Robbins, *Politicians, Diplomacy and War in Modern British History* (1994), p.53-65 for an account of Bryce's problems in combining these roles.

who often had a special interest in foreign affairs, such as Kingsley Martin, Henry Wickham Steed and Vernon Bartlett, and moonlighting politicians such as Harold Nicolson.¹ Nicolson is the most prolific writer on public opinion of those under consideration. His unique position as a former diplomat, member of the National Labour Party and member of the London social scene made him not only well-known but most likely to be read by a broad section of political life.² He wrote in a wide variety of publications from Chatham House's journal, *International Affairs*, to *The Listener* and *The Daily Telegraph*. In addition, his books on foreign policy, *Peacemaking 1919*, *Curzon and Diplomacy* had earned him a reputation as a serious amateur historian.³

One factor that these disparate authors had in common in writing about public opinion and related issues was the sense of a crisis of democracy, identifiable in Britain since the economic crisis of 1931. The majority of authors relating public opinion to the crisis viewed it in the same way as Oswald Mosley, that Britain had failed to recover from the first world war and was equipped with political institutions which had been designed for the nineteenth century.⁴ Reappraisals also took place of the nature of democratic government because of the perceived threat to it from outside, in addition to what were seen as its inherent weaknesses.⁵ George Gallup named the external threats as

¹ Kingsley Martin described himself as a member of the 'intelligentsia in England in the thirties' in *Editor, a second volume of autobiography, 1931-1945* (1968), p.57.

² Nicolson was a member of Mosley's New Party until its transformation into the British Union of Fascists in 1932. He was elected as a National Labour M.P. in 1935.

³ H. Nicolson, *Peacemaking 1919* (1933), *Curzon* (1934). *Peacemaking 1919* was on Neville Chamberlain's list of books to read for 1933, BUL NC2/29; diary for 1933 contains list of books read and books to read at the back.

⁴ O. Mosley, *The Greater Britain* (1927), p.11 reproduced in P. Deane (ed.), *History in Our Hands. A Critical Anthology of Writings on Literature, Culture and Politics from the 1930s* (1998), p.26. A. C. Stewart in 'The Significance of "Public"' *Public Administration* XIII 3, July 1935, p.273 thought the crisis of nineteenth century democratic machinery had begun in 1928, if not earlier.

⁵ See for example Baldwin's speech in Glasgow in 1934 quoted in P. Williamson, (Cambridge, 1999), p.321, 324.

fascism and communism whilst others, such as Lord Allen of Hurtwood, labelled the forces at work outside Britain, more dramatically as 'Dark Age barbarism'.¹ The philosopher Cyril Joad even considered that Liberalism was dead and Britain had no choice but to convert to fascism or communism.² More generally, the threat was seen to be the freedom of political action gained by governments who exercised press control and had advanced propaganda machines in comparison to the British Government, still tied by the vagaries of public opinion. In 1936, the former Conservative Chief Whip, J.C.C. Davidson, wrote a memorandum entitled 'Democracy and Leadership,' which identified this difference between the democratic and dictatorship systems.³ Davidson also wrote to Viscount Greenwood in 1938 that he and Baldwin had been discussing for years how the democratic system could withstand the onslaughts of dictatorship and thought that it required an active sense of citizenship.⁴

'Planning on an international scale', as suggested by Norman Angell, was the only way out of the situation for many, and it was thought that this should extend to the education of public opinion.⁵ If it was so important that it should be planned, what specific role was public opinion perceived to play in the State? The organization Political and Economic Planning devoted several articles in their journal, entitled 'Planning,' to the subject.⁶ Apart from agreeing about its importance, definitions of its role remained

¹ G. Gallup, *Public Opinion in a Democracy* (1939), p. 3. See Lord Allen of Hurtwood, *Britain's Political Future: a plea for liberty and leadership* (1934), p.2.

² Balliol HN, diary for 1933, fol.131: 21 July 1933.

³ HOL, J.C.C. Davidson Papers, 226: Hankey to Davidson, 17 July 1936.

⁴ HOL, J.C.C. Davidson Papers, 258: Davidson to Greenwood, 16 November 1938.

⁵ N. Angell, *From Chaos to Control* (1933), p.146. See also D. Thomson, 'The Implications of Public Morality' *Political Quarterly* vol.II no.1 (1936) p.49-52.

⁶ See for example, 'Growth of Public Relations Work' *Planning* no.46 (26 March 1935), 'The Press and the Public' *Planning* no.58 (24 September 1935) and no.118 (8 March 1938). For a history of PEP see, J. Pinder (ed.) *Fifty Years of Political and Economic Planning* (1981).

broad and inconclusive throughout the inter-war period. Writing in 1933, Angell thought it a truism to state that any society depended on prevailing public opinion.¹ Five years later, Alfred Zimmern restated the integrity of public opinion to the governmental process, 'the common man controlled politics in the free democracies because he made the great public opinion without which the Government could not act.'² In 1920, Charles Higham described it as something that could never be ignored, a 'blind, instinctive, shifting factor,' and, oddly, given these adjectives, as the cement that held the State together.³ Given its supposed unpredictability, it is not surprising that the American political scientist, DeWitt C. Poole should describe politicians as being 'baffled and almost paralyzed by the incalculable forces of public opinion.'⁴ Echoing Norman Angell's planning conviction, he added that making public opinion calculable was the problem on which the future of democracy would turn. Allen of Hurtwood was also concerned that politicians were the slaves rather than the leaders of public opinion and that their timidity was based on a set of false assumptions about what the public would bear.⁵ Nonetheless, he regarded the existence of free public opinion and its cultivation as the only means by which democracy could be preserved.⁶

Political scientists such as John W. Dafoe and James Bryce had identified a more tangible form of public opinion in the way that it was channelled through the institutions

¹ N. Angell, *The Press and the Organisation of Society* (1922, this edition, 1933), p. 9.

² A. Zimmern, 'The Decline of International Standards' *IA* vol.17 no.1 (Jan-Feb., 1938).

³ C.F. Higham, *Looking Forward. Mass Education Through Publicity* (1920). See John W. Dafoe, 'Public Opinion as a Factor in Government' in Q. Wright (ed.), *Public Opinion and World Politics, Lectures of the Harris Foundation* (1933), p.3 for a similar description of public opinion as a 'strange, intractable, unpredictable, ungovernable power'.

⁴ DeWitt C. Poole, foreword to H.L. Childs (ed), *Propaganda And Dictatorship: A Collection of Papers* (1936), v.

⁵ Lord Allen of Hurtwood, *Britain's Political Future: a plea for liberty and leadership* (1934), p.1 and 16.

⁶ Lord Allen of Hurtwood, 'Public Opinion and the Idea of International Government' *IA* vol.13 no.2 (Mar-April, 1934), p.187.

of representative government and its indirect influence on agencies of government.¹ Dafoe thought it possible that even in the British system, the Government front bench would be out of touch with opinion and that indirect influence was therefore of greater importance.² Writing eleven years earlier, Bryce had already pointed out that whilst it might be true in principle that popular opinion ought to be ascertained and obeyed, the difficulty was how to know what the people really did wish, without taking a vote on every issue.³ Commenting on Bryce in 1936, Harwood S. Childs could add the invention of opinion polls as a way of identifying public opinion but still had to confront the problem of the receptiveness of Government officials to such information in incorporating public opinion into decision-making.⁴

The most pressing problem of public opinion in democratic government for all these authors was the idea of public involvement in foreign policy. Theorists attributed much less vague characteristics to public opinion when it came to its role in foreign affairs. Through this subject, views about the nature of public opinion emerge much more clearly than in programmatic statements about its role in democracy. Public opinion and foreign policy were not new partners. In 1886, the barrister, G.C. Thompson, had published a survey of public opinion in the time of Lord Beaconsfield which identified the issue as fundamental to definitions of the English constitution,

*'A particular line of policy in foreign affairs was earnestly pressed upon the English Government. In this matter, Public Opinion [sic] at first assumed its own right to dictate, and took for granted that this right was unquestionable. But in the struggle which ensued, the question "What ought to be done?" got mixed up with the question "Who has the right to decide?"'*⁵

¹ John W. Dafoe, 'Public Opinion as a Factor in Government' in Q. Wright (ed.), (1933), p.10.

² *ibid.*, p.16.

³ J. Bryce, *International Relations Lecture Six* (1922), p.179.

⁴ H.S. Childs, 'Rule by Public Opinion' *The Atlantic Quarterly* (June 1936), p.764.

⁵ G.C. Thompson, *Public Opinion and Lord Beaconsfield* (1886), p.3.

In 1922, James Bryce gave a lecture tour in the United States on the future of international relations in which he reviewed the problems of the increasing demand for public opinion to be involved in foreign policy making. He traced the origins of this demand to the perceived defects of diplomacy during the first world war and identified several areas which needed to be addressed. His analysis appears to have set a template for discussions of the question over the next fifteen years which all examine Bryce's central issues of the fitness of the public for decision-making; how to provide the public with information, the reliability of the public on broad moral issues and the problem of governmental receptivity to demonstrations of public opinion.¹

Bryce's own diagnosis of the situation was not particularly optimistic. On the fitness of the public, he considered that the average 'good citizen' did not care for foreign affairs, did not read about them and lacked the knowledge of history and geography required. In this respect, the citizen's knowledge of foreign affairs differed greatly to his knowledge of domestic affairs about which, Bryce thought, he could be relied upon to make rational decisions.² He admitted that the press was one source of information but that, as a profit-making industry, it was likely to give the public what pleased them, not what they needed to know. Given the general lack of confidence in the average good citizen, Bryce did imbue him with one rather surprising characteristic; the ability to form a fair, reasonable, commonsensical opinion on simple, broad issues, particularly if they involved a moral dimension.³ To facilitate the transmission of such ideas, Bryce recommended the formation of a small committee of the legislature which could be

¹ J. Bryce, *International Relations* (1922).

² *ibid.*, p.180.

³ *ibid.*, p.186.

brought into touch with public opinion outside and act as a channel to parliament and the Cabinet.¹

If we compare Bryce with Harold Nicolson's analysis of diplomacy written at the other end of our period, in 1939, we find very similar judgements. Nicolson located the increasing importance of public opinion in diplomacy as the immediate product of the first world war but also as a factor alongside two others: the increased sense of a community of nations and the rapid growth in communications.² Nicolson also identified several dangerous characteristics of public opinion: irresponsibility, ignorance and laziness. Failing to manifest the balance and good sense which they applied to domestic problems, the public did not try to understand foreign affairs, were unduly influenced by an unscrupulous press and, above all, needed education in the principles of good sense and experience which they could then apply to foreign affairs.

This topic was also under discussion in political circles. In late October 1933, Maurice Hankey, the Cabinet secretary, and Lord Robert Cecil corresponded on the effectiveness of public and private diplomacy in relation to the floundering negotiations at Geneva. Hankey defended a blend of the two methods as the secret of making international conferences work and thought that the present example, the Disarmament Conference at Geneva, was suffering from a surfeit of public meetings.³ Cecil responded forcefully, arguing that because Hankey was not in favour of the abolition of war, he disliked any method which would bring 'the whole force of public opinion into play

¹ *ibid.*, p.188.

² H. Nicolson, *Diplomacy* (1939), p.70.

³ BL Add. MSS.51088 (Cecil of Chelwood Papers), fol.97: letter from Hankey, 27 October 1933. See also the memorandum by J.C.C. Davidson, HOL, J.C.C. Davidson Papers, 201: Hankey to Davidson, 17 July 1936, '*In a time of international crisis it really is monstrous that the time of the Foreign Secretary should be spent in answering publicly – so that the whole world shall know the answer – questions which are critical, and sometimes intended to be mischievous.*'

against the professional advisors of the various governments'.¹ For Cecil, the growth of strong public attitudes on international questions meant that both Ministers and civil servants had to have the support of their people behind them in concluding agreements at conferences. Leaving foreign affairs to the privileged few would bring great disasters to the world.²

In the same vein as Hankey and Nicolson, other authors, particularly those in the political rather than academic sphere, adduced a whole series of uncomplimentary adjectives to describe public opinion's unsuitability for participation in foreign policy. Charles Higham noted the tendency to describe the concept in terms of adjectival lists, 'it is a weapon, a nuisance, a cantankerous, or useful, or dangerous element all in turn.'³ Most authors admitted the increasing interest of the public in foreign affairs but only a few admitted that the public's intelligence was capable of dealing with the new problems it faced. Alfred Zimmern told Chatham House, in 1938, that recent reports showed that foreign affairs claimed ninety-five per cent of the public interest but that in the case of the reoccupation of the Rhineland, the public had condoned a breach of treaty in favour of 'fair play for the Germans' because they had not had the issue explained to them and had not been able to grasp its complexity at short notice.⁴

In contrast, four years earlier, Allen of Hurtwood had suggested that the electorate was more intelligent than ever before, was more able to face contemporary problems and

¹ BL Add. MSS.51088 (Cecil of Chelwood Papers), fol.99-100: letter to Hankey, 28 October 1933.

² BL Add. MSS.51088 (Cecil of Chelwood Papers), fol.105: letter to Hankey, 3 November 1933. Cecil also had a very similar argument with Baldwin in October 1933, urging, in the aftermath of the German withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference, that conferences only achieved success when they did things publicly and not in secret, see CUL BWIN Series B 121, fol.94: Cecil to Baldwin, 21 October 1933.

³ C.F. Higham, *Looking Forward. Mass Education Through Publicity* (1920), p.18.

⁴ A. Zimmern, 'The Decline of International Standards' (Jan-Feb., 1938), p.30.

to solve them but suffered from being underestimated by those in the Government.¹ Allen's theories were linked specifically to the need for continued publicity efforts by the various peace movements to explain how they would construct methods of upholding international pacts and formulae. Despite his confidence in the electorate, Allen still felt the need to answer critics of the public's intellectual abilities by pointing out that, although in the past it had proved itself unable to think and to be easily deceivable, great changes for the better had recently taken place.² War, science and education had brought about this change in the public's level of knowledge.³

On a more general level, the main charge against public opinion was that it acted on its emotions rather than its intellect. It was argued that reliance on instinct and emotion had developed because the public was too lazy to think, or was too unschooled in how to think. Writing to his half-brother, Austen, in early 1933, Neville Chamberlain remarked that the minds of the majority of the people in the country were so wrapped in lethargy that unless they were given a sharp jab in a tender place, they did not even take the trouble to think.⁴ Both Norman Angell and Harold Nicolson thought that public education ought to concentrate on how to think rather than on disseminating facts.⁵ Lord Lothian, writing in 1938, despaired of democratic civilization since 'the average Englishman won't think at all until some fact hits him between the eyes.'⁶ Amber Reeves Blanco White, a socialist propaganda theorist, thought it a commonplace that the great

¹ See for example, Lord Allen of Hurtwood, 'Public Opinion and the Idea of International Government' (Mar-April, 1934), p.188.

² Lord Allen of Hurtwood, *Britain's Political Future* (1934), p.16.

³ Lord Allen of Hurtwood, 'Public Opinion and the Idea of International Government' (Mar-April, 1934), p.190-191.

⁴ BUL NC 7/11/26/1-31 fol.9: letter to Austen Chamberlain, 20 February 1933.

⁵ N. Angell, *From Chaos to Control* (1933), p.103, H. Nicolson, *Diplomacy* (1939), p.102.

⁶ NAS (Philip Kerr Papers) GD 40/17/364, fol.524: letter to Walter Newbold, 25 March 1938.

majority of a country's inhabitants recoiled from using their intellects as an onerous and disagreeable form of labour.¹ In relation to foreign affairs, Nicolson thought that the public suffered from both ignorance of foreign facts and ignorance of foreign mentalities and that this ignorance generated a fear of the unknown which meant the average man distrusted the expert on foreign affairs who was qualified to make important decisions.²

Occasionally, politicians even theorized about public opinion in correspondence with each other. In a letter to Baldwin in October 1938, R.A. Butler examined the problems confronting the Government in presenting the Munich agreement to the people, in light of the fact that not all the instruments of propaganda were in the Government's hands. Drawing on Algernon Cecil's essay in the Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy, Butler said that there were two streams of British public opinion which influenced decisions. The first stemmed from British sympathies and the second from British interests. After the tension of late September, Butler saw the former welling up, abetted by the fact that the propaganda machines were in the hands of sentimental people. The ordinary public, whom Baldwin had once illustrated to him, through a Bateman cartoon of a man who sat, unmoved, with his pipe during the thrills of the cinema, really wanted peace and to fight only for what they could understand.³

However, the public's instinctive approach to foreign affairs was seen to possess some beneficial qualities. Some authors appear to have trusted the public's judgement on moral questions where they distrusted their grasp of international debt economics. As part of a series of articles on public opinion in *The Listener*, Lord Elton acknowledged that

¹ A.R. Blanco White, *The New Propaganda* (1938), p.28.

² H. Nicolson, 'Modern Diplomacy and Public Opinion' *14* vol.14 no.5 (Sept-Oct., 1935), p.601.

³ CUL BWIN Series B 174, fol.13-14: Butler to Baldwin, 11 October 1938.

the public had more influence over foreign affairs than ever before but that, unless properly directed, even public opinion on moral issues would descend into meaninglessness,

*'There is the danger that the government may neglect public opinion because it writes it off as worthless, because uninformed. And there is the danger that, without that lead, public opinion may be distorted because one of its characteristic virtues, patriotism, self-confidence or moral idealism, degenerates into one of the excesses to which it is specially liable – the self-confidence into arrogance or the moral idealism into vague benevolences.'*¹

Sound moral judgement was one of a catalogue of British national characteristics which were also considered to describe public opinion. In a League of Nations' pamphlet on the educational role of the press, the French journalist, Henri de Jouvenal, said that opinion could derive from either national temperament or from individual preference.² Such characteristics were described with varying degrees of subtlety. In a series of lectures at Heidelberg University in 1936, the National Liberal M.P., Tom Magnay, spoke of the desire for fair play, the aptitude for self-government as a result of the village, and the virility through racial diversity of the English people.³ Harold Nicolson listed both good and bad qualities, describing in *The Listener* the solidity, good humour, honesty, inconsequence and indolence of the British.⁴ Such discussions even permeated Nicolson's social engagements. Over lunch one day in 1936, Nicolson recorded that Winston Churchill had been discussing the national character, observing that the British were more individualistic than any race on earth.⁵

¹ Lord Elton, 'Public Opinion and Foreign Affairs' *The Listener* vol.16 no.390 (1 July 1936), p.22.

² H. de Jouvenal, 'Dialogue between a reader of a newspaper and wireless listener' League of Nations International Institute of Intellectual Co-Operation, *The Educational Role of the Press* (Paris, 1934), p.13. De Jouvenal had been editor of the Paris newspaper, *Matin*.

³ T. Magnay, *English Political Institutions and Public Opinion* (1936), p.6, 56.

⁴ H. Nicolson, 'As Others See Us. How the English Appear to the Foreign Mind' *The Listener* vol.13 no.331 (15 May 1935). See also Sir P. Gibbs, *England Speaks*, (1937), p.459, 'We are in the mass a kindly, whimsical, humorous folk.'

⁵ Balliol HN, diary for 1936, fol.84: 9 June 1936.

Smaller gatherings, on the academic-political cusp, also considered public opinion to be central to foreign policy. At Chatham House in early 1938, a symposium was held on Anglo-French relations. Opening the debate, Lord Astor remarked that public opinion, as a whole, had a vital influence on questions of peace and war, but that opinion varied in different parts of the country and from constituency to constituency. London could not be assumed to be representative. In the course of the discussion, one of the French delegates, Dennery, suggested that foreign policy as affected by public opinion should be studied in its own right. The conference decided to break the issue down into examining public opinion with regard to specific topics, such as colonies, central Europe, Russia and monetary policy.¹

Kingsley Martin, editor of the *New Statesman and Nation* magazine, also wrote a column for 'Political Quarterly' on public opinion on topical issues. After the Munich crisis in 1938, he produced an independent pamphlet criticizing governmental interference with the press during the negotiations and explaining why British institutions were still regarded as the home of liberty, particularly in comparison with their continental counterparts. When people spoke of England as the home of liberty, he wrote, they referred to something very deep in the character of the British people and institutions, to a conception of fair play and toleration and to that habit of reasonable compromise and common sense in politics which is the only alternative to violence and dictatorship.²

¹ NAS (Philip Kerr Papers) GD 40/17/366, fol.716-21: Record of joint meeting between Anglo-French groups for the study of Anglo-French relations, 25 April 1938.

² K. Martin, *Fascism, Democracy and the Press* (1938), p.31. See also, K. Martin, 'The Freedom of the Press' *Political Quarterly* vol.9 no.2 (1938).

Writers also described the characteristics of public opinion in relation to more specific foreign policy problems. In his inaugural lecture at the University College of Wales at Cardiff entitled, 'Public Opinion as a Safeguard of Peace,' E.H. Carr reprimanded critics of public opinion for their exaggeration of the public's worst qualities of fickleness, slowness, gullibility and ignorance. Whilst referring to public opinion as a 'mysterious entity,' Carr also raised the question of the need for the intellectual to stay in touch with public opinion. In the case of opinion on the League of Nations, he considered that the isolation of the intellectuals had produced a gulf between their views and those of the man in the street. The latter was guided by an emotional rather than an intellectual attachment to the League and the discrepancy accounted for the difference between British professions of belief and British actions in League disputes in recent years.¹

E.H. Carr had left the Foreign Office to take up his chair in 1936.² We can widen the circle of theorization about public opinion to include other Foreign Office members who were considering the role of public opinion in 1936. In the news department, Rex Leeper was planning to try to educate the public as to Britain's treaty commitments, which plan resulted in the involvement of Winston Churchill and Robert Vansittart in setting up the 'Focus' group and in the early planning for a wartime Ministry of Information.³ Leeper's memoranda echo the sense we have already seen of the need for

¹ E.H. Carr, 'Public Opinion as a Safeguard of Peace' *IA* vol.15 no.6 (Nov-Dec., 1936), pp.846-862.

² Whilst in the Foreign Office, Carr had worked on the problem of the control of the machinery for applying embargoes on the shipment of arms to aggressor states including publicity, PRO CAB 27/513, Memoranda on the Interdepartmental Committee on the Disarmament Conference, papers 25, 29, 33 and 35 (D.C. (I) (32) series).

³ See M. Roi, (Westport, 1997), p.34, N. Rose, *Vansittart. Study of a Diplomat* (1978), p.188-9, M. Gilbert, *Winston Churchill Volume V 1922-1939* (1976), p.725-6 and E.Spier, *Focus, A Footnote to the History of the Thirties* (1963), p.43. See also P.M. Taylor, *The Projection of Britain. British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda 1919-1939* (1981), p.29-40 and T. Willcox 'Project or Publicity? Rival Concepts in the Pre-War Planning of the British Ministry of Information' *JCH* vol.18 no.1 (1983), p.97-116 for Leeper and Vansittart's plans.

further public education on foreign affairs, of the need for the Government to take control of the situation and of the fine dividing line between propaganda and education. In the first note, Leeper echoed Carr's point that there was public confusion over Britain's role in the League of Nations. Leeper was in favour of promoting a policy of peace through negotiation and compromise but was also anxious that this should be allowed to sink in, gradually, without the need for propaganda or compulsion.¹

This point was particularly telling in comparison with his description, in a subsequent memorandum, of the moral preparation of the public taking place in Hitler's Germany. Leeper recognized that using the word 'propaganda' might conjure up evil associations from the last war, so preferred to substitute 'education' for what he himself was proposing to do.² The lack of funding from the Government for existing 'education' programmes, such as the National Publicity Bureau, illustrated, in Leeper's opinion, that the British Government had not yet grasped the importance of educating their own public, or the public of other countries, about the British attitude. He concluded these recommendations by saying that he was motivated by the desire to have the British policy understood by as many classes of people as possible. Much information already existed on foreign affairs but he feared that with insufficient guidance, visibility rather than vision benefited.³

¹ PRO FO 395/538 P 781/74/150, C.I.D. M.I.C. Sub-Committee to prepare plans for the establishment of a Ministry of Information, Note by the Leeper sub-committee, 19 January 1936.

² See M. Grant, (Oxford, 1994), p.14 for the argument that propaganda, education, publicity and advertising were sometimes interchangeable terms. A.G. Highet, Controller of Publicity in the Public Relations Department of the G.P.O. thought there was a middle ground, 'Regarding "propaganda" for our purposes as "education" the truth lies, I think, somewhere between the two extremes', A.G. Highet, 'The Public's Part in Administration' *Public Administration* vol.17 no. 2 (April, 1939), p. 130.

³ PRO FO 395/541 P 332/332/150: F.O. Minute by Mr. Leeper, Proposed Campaign for the Education of the Public as regards the Foreign Policy of H.M.G, 27 January 1936.

Other theorists were also coming to the same conclusion, that it was the Government's responsibility to educate public opinion about its policy. Harold Nicolson wrote to Alfred Zimmern, in April 1936, stating that the real problem of the international structure was complete unreality. Zimmern scribbled a pencil note on the letter, marking it for answer, 'Urge the Government to give the people a realistic educ-n [sic] in foreign affairs. Could be done in a month by wireless.'¹ Harold Nicolson had already pointed out a year earlier in an article in *International Affairs* that the British public were not told of the basic purposes of British foreign policy. In his conclusion, he looked forward, more hopefully, to a time when a level of public awareness had been reached in which no popular newspaper could dare to advocate the repudiation of treaties which, at the time of their conclusion, both parliament and the people had enthusiastically approved.² Different views existed as to the best way to lead the public. In 1933, the journalist Henry Wickham Steed launched a campaign to recruit politicians for a programme to raise public awareness of international problems. Writing to Austen Chamberlain, he argued that leadership from responsible men of authority was essential to guide public sentiment (he thought it could not be called 'opinion') when the Government took no lead at all.³ Chamberlain himself, however, declined to join, stating that he felt he could lead the public more effectively by preserving his independence.

Waking the public up to the realities of the international situation was a constant refrain in Foreign Office correspondence and in the notes of some Government

¹ Bodleian Zimmern Papers 39, fols. 83-4: letter from Harold Nicolson, 30 April 1936. H. A. Mess, the Director of Tyneside Council of Social Service, also saw the B.B.C as the best way of making a wide range of views and information available, see H.A Mess, 'Makers of Public Opinion' *The Listener* vol.13 no.333 (29 May 1935), p.934.

² H. Nicolson, 'Modern Diplomacy and Public Opinion' *IA* (Sept-Oct., 1935), p. 605 and 614. See also H. Nicolson, *Diplomacy* (1939), p.91 for the same idea.

³ BUL AC 40/5/65 from Wickham Steed, 16 May 1933.

Ministers.¹ The need for Britain to rearm prompted governmental thinking about 'educating' the public.² The need to wake the public up to wider international problems is particularly obvious in minutes and reports written by Anthony Eden, Ralph Wigram and Robert Vansittart.³ For example, in October 1933, Wigram was particularly concerned that a newsreel was being shown which contained an interview with Lloyd George which, by implication, he thought supported the German thesis on disarmament. Wigram did not think that any attempt had been made to put the British case in a similar medium.⁴ At the time of the Rhineland crisis, Wigram reiterated the need to convince public opinion of the wisdom of the Government's policy towards Germany whilst Eden was anxious to show them that the Government was making every effort to get on terms with Germany.⁵

Considerable column space was devoted to the actual and potential role of the press in this problem. By and large, opinions of the conduct of the press were not complimentary.⁶ The consensus appeared to be that the public might be getting the press they deserved,⁷ but even if they were not, they were not receiving the unpleasant truth

¹ See for example, BUL AVON 20/1/1-32, diary, 9 September 1933, '*If on the other hand we tackle Hitler skilfully as Phipps can be trusted to do, we shall discover whether the German demands are in truth exorbitant as I anticipate or reasonable. If the former the sooner British public opinion wakes up to the fact the better, if the latter we shall then have something definite after which to work.*' See also PRO FO 371/16712 C 10740/245/18: minute by Eden, 6 December 1933. Compare this with the government's sense that the public should be woken up to the dangers of the Near Eastern situation before the first world war although no action was taken in K. Wilson, 'The Foreign Office and the "education" of public opinion before the first world war' *HJ* vol.26 no.2, p.405.

² See P. Williamson, (Cambridge, 1999), p.308 for the point that the Defence Requirements Committee recommended public education in March 1934.

³ See for example, PRO FO 371/16723 C 3990/319/18: Rumbold to Simon, Memorandum by Mr. Wigram, 9 May 1933.

⁴ PRO FO 395/485 P 2555/127/150: Mr. Keith Ayling of Movietone to Private Secretary, Minute by Wigram, 16 October 1933. See also PRO FO 395/536 P 3781/15/150, memorandum by Mr. Johnstone, 10 October 1936 in which Vansittart urges increased expenditure to combat German and Italian propaganda in Britain by cultural propaganda in those countries. Eden was sceptical about the value of this in Italy, Eden minute 15 October 1936.

⁵ PRO FO 371/19906 C 3746/4/18: Phipps to Eden, minute by Wigram 20 May 1936 and PRO FO 371/19905 C 3677/4/18: Phipps to Eden, 15 May 1936, minutes by Vansittart 17 May and Eden 18 May.

⁶ M. Grant, (Oxford, 1994), p.16.

⁷ N. Angell, *From Chaos to Control* (1933), p.176.

about events. Instead, they were at the mercy of the profit motives of the newspaper proprietors who gave them material that was unchallenging and sensational.¹ Even newspaper men themselves could acknowledge the problems of printing foreign news for a mass audience,

*'Three million people may die of hunger in China without needing from the point of view of the commercial proprietor, as much space as a bus accident in Piccadilly. Foreign affairs, then, except under special circumstances, are only of considerable news value to papers which cater for a comparatively small educated public.'*²

Harold Nicolson agreed that foreign news was only printed in the popular press if it was sensational, although he was hopeful that British correspondents would begin to imitate the higher standard of reporting of their colleagues in America.³ Walter Lippmann referred to the press as the beam of a searchlight moving restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another out of darkness into vision. This intermittent illumination deprived men of the steady attention which issues deserved if opinion were to be formed.⁴ The assumption that the public followed the opinions of the press was also contested by Jules Sauerwein who argued that the fact that the public bought a paper merely meant that they liked the stuff in it and found it entertaining rather than that they

¹ See for example, N. Angell, *The Press and the Organisation of Society* (1922, this edition, 1933), p.39, N. Angell, *From Chaos to Control* (1933), p.47, 184, F.R. Leavis, *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (1930), p.25-6.

² K. Martin, 'The Educational Role of the Press' (Paris, 1934), p.27. See C. Madge and T. Harrison, *Britain by Mass-Observation* (1939), p.26, 'a 'plane crash in Edmonton is front-page news, when a war in Spain is crowded right out of the paper' and 'What Keeps the News out of the Newspapers' and 'The Freedom of the Press' *Planning* no.82 (22 September 1936) and the entire editions of *Planning* nos.118 and 119 (22 March and 5 April 1938) the second of which contained the PEP 'Press Report.'

³ H. Nicolson, 'Modern Diplomacy and Public Opinion' (Sept-Oct., 1935), p.600. See also H.A. Mess, 'Makers of Public Opinion' (29 May 1935), p.916.

⁴ W. Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (1922, this ed. New York, 1956), p.364.

doggedly followed its line.¹ Even social scientists admitted that there was no precise correlation between the editorial opinions of newspapers and a certain reading public. Harwood S. Childs pointed out that the press was, nonetheless, often taken as a means for ascertaining the state of public opinion.² In its first published survey into the attitudes and customs of ordinary British people, Mass-Observation pointed out that the press itself contributed to the confusion by giving its own appraisal of public opinion in addition to reporting facts.³ Those without confidence in the ability of a free press and media to provide information for the public exhorted the use of propaganda informed by psychological techniques.⁴ Kingsley Martin thought that the burden of responsibility and respect towards a predominantly Conservative Government which persuaded the established organs of the press not to interfere, when it was hinted they should not, might not pertain under a Socialist Government.⁵ In a further article after the Munich crisis, Martin suggested that such deferential control of the press was disliked by the country anyway.⁶

One of the problems of defining public opinion for contemporary theorists was the type of opinion to which the phrase really referred. One way in which politicians and commentators dealt with this problem was to incarnate public opinion as 'the man-in-the-

¹ J.A. Sauerwein, 'The Molders [sic] of Public Opinion' in Q. Wright (ed.) *Public Opinion and World Politics* (1933), p.35. Sauerwein was the foreign editor of *Paris-Soir*. Mass-Observation argued that in ordinary circumstances, a large proportion of readers did not believe what they read in newspapers, C. Madge and T. Harrison, *Britain by Mass-Observation* (1939), p. 106. See D. Harding, 'General Conceptions in the Study of the Press and Public Opinion' *The Sociological Review*, (October 1937) for a general discussion of these ideas.

² H.S. Childs, 'Rule by Public Opinion' *The Atlantic Quarterly*, (June 1936), p.756.

³ C. Madge and T. Harrison, (1939), p.32.

⁴ See for example, S. Rogerson, (1938), p.81 and A.R. Blanco White, (1938), p.28. See M. Grant, (Oxford, 1994), p.19 for the argument that propaganda was crucial to domestic politics in the democratic state.

⁵ K. Martin, *Fascism, Democracy and the Press* (1938), p.12.

⁶ K. Martin, 'Public Opinion: censorship during the crisis' *Political Quarterly*, vol.10 no.1 (1939), p.134.

street,' otherwise known as the common man or the average man. Some observers pointed out this tendency to present public opinion as a being which dwelt in or above the group and expressed its view. They demonstrated that 'the voice of public opinion' and 'the public conscience' were both metaphors of this type.¹ First of all, there was considerable interest in what this individual thought on a very wide range of issues. Sir Philip Gibbs and Sir Arnold Wilson both attempted to give vignettes of ordinary lives in their books on public opinion, as the foreword to Gibbs' *England Speaks* makes plain,

*'Being talks with road-sweepers, barbers, statesmen, Lords and Ladies, beggars, farming folk, actors, artist, literary gentlemen, tramps, down-and-outs, miners, steel-workers, blacksmiths, the-man-in-the-street, high-brows, low-brows, and all manner of folk of humble and exalted ranks with a panorama of the English scene in this year of grace 1935.'*²

Class distinctions were in operation in these simplifications of the public, based largely around levels of education.³ The American political scientist, William Albig, made it quite plain in his treatise that by 'the common man' he meant the non-intellectual man, who was unaware of intellectual traditions and the history of thought.⁴ Gibbs, an author and prominent journalist, was himself impressed with the intelligence of the average mind. According to him, the young men and women, who went youth hostelling at weekends, thought, read and talked well and the average City clerk in a Lyons café would be polite, shrewd and awake to the world around him.⁵ Wilson considered working

¹ W. Albig, *Public Opinion* (1939), p.6.

² Sir P. Gibbs, *England Speaks* (1935), p.1937; Sir Arnold Wilson, *Thoughts and Talks: the Diary of a Member of parliament* (1938) and *More Thoughts and Talks: the Diary and Scrapbook of a Member of parliament from December 1937 to August 1939* (1939).

³ See R. McKibbin, 'Class and Conventional Wisdom' (1990), p. 259 for the argument that society's relations with the working class had become a central political problem by 1918.

⁴ W. Albig, *Public Opinion* (1939) v.

⁵ Sir P. Gibbs, *Ordeal in England (England Speaks Again)*, (1937), p.414-5. See J. Carey, 'The Suburbs and the Clerks' in *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (1992), p.46-70 for more critical literary descriptions of the clerk.

class and lower-middle class opinion to be better balanced and more steadfast than that of the minority he depicted as the voice of the universities and intellectuals.¹

Norman Angell also took a lower-middle class example in talking about the average man, and was more cautious to suggest that governments realized the significance of such a person. In *The Unseen Assassins*, the average man is named as Mr. John Smith, and, according to Angell, his profession might be 'doctoring or dentistry or shop or labour in a factory.' John Smith's preoccupations were all parochial; earning a living, the decline of business, multitudes of domestic problems; but he was also called upon to make spare time decisions, in matters which had baffled experts who had spent their whole lives studying them.² In Angell's exposition, the auto-didact Mr. Smith, who had attended lectures and joined study groups to try to improve his knowledge, had almost resigned himself to accepting that 'folly' was his lot. The author hoped that organized education might do more for Mr. Smith, in the future, because of his importance in matters of peace and war: an importance which he considered to be almost universally overlooked.³

The cult of the ordinary man was also alive in literary and cinematic techniques and theories during the inter-war period and particularly in the 1930s. Investigations into poverty and everyday life made facts about the ordinary man an important subject of academic study. The arrival of opinion polling in the mid-thirties also lent an air of quasi-

¹ Sir Arnold Wilson, *Thoughts and Talks: the Diary of a Member of parliament* (1938), p.144. See R. McKibbin, 'Class and Conventional Wisdom' in *The Ideologies of Class* (1990), p. 272-273 for middle class attitudes to the working class.

² N. Angell, *The Unseen Assassins* (1932), p.24.

³ *ibid.*, p.38.

objectivity to the study of public opinion.¹ The importance of the realism of a subject informed many documentary film directors and travel writers.² A variety of genres were employed to illustrate the attitude of the average man to foreign affairs. In 1937, Raymond Postgate and Aylmer Vallance published a newspaper history of 'the English people's opinion on foreign affairs', thereby drawing together their interests in labour history and in contemporary journalism.³ The novelist, Rupert Croft-Cooke, adopted a mixture of reportage and travelogue in search of 'The Man in Europe Street.' Once found, Croft-Cooke was certain that he would prove a good fellow and that his views on war and peace would be reassuring enough. He also thought that if English people knew how similar were his ambitions and opinions to their own, they would not be so apt to distrust him.⁴

Even *The Times* was concerned with the semantics of describing the man in the street. It ran a leader on the subject on 16 August 1933, which pointed out that the journalist was hard pressed to find a substitute for the phrase because the 'plain' and the 'average' man were affected by the potentially pejorative nature of the adjectives. The *Times* also reported that a prominent statesman had described John Smith as the ultimate personification of the man in the street, suggesting that Angell's formula was quite

¹ G. Gallup, *Public Opinion in a Democracy* (1939). See also R. Worcester, *British Public Opinion: A Guide to the History and Methodology of Political Opinion Polling* (Oxford, 1991), H. Cantril, *Public Opinion 1935-1946* (Princeton, 1951).

² On the documentary film movement, see J. Baxendale and C. Pawling, *Narrating The Thirties. A Decade In the Making: 1930 to the Present*, (Basingstoke, 1996), p.17-45, F. Hardy, *Grierson on Documentary* (1946) and P. Rotha, *Documentary on Film* (1936). On the investigation of social conditions see J. Stevenson, *Social Conditions in Britain Between the Wars* (1977) and J. Carey, (1992), p.25.

³ R. Postgate and A. Vallance, *Those Foreigners. The English People's Opinion on Foreign Affairs as Reflected in their Newspapers since Waterloo* (1937). Postgate was collaborating with G.D.H Cole on various projects at this time and Vallance had just resigned the editorship of the *News Chronicle* to become assistant editor of the *New Statesman* under Kingsley Martin.

⁴ R. Croft-Cooke, *The Man in Europe Street* (1938). See also the documentary classics on life in Britain, G. Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) and J.B. Priestley, *An English Journey* (1933).

common. The Times' leader writer also dealt with the problem of how the man in the street should be treated politically. He compared the benefits of philosopher kings ruling autocratically, with the possibility of 'the many-headed mob' cutting down all stature to its 'own dead level.' The healthiness of the perpetual struggle between these various forms of government was described, however, as the stuff of which life was made and as an essential of the evolutionary process.¹

Without identifying a class stereotype, the B.B.C. also turned their attention to average opinion. In September 1938, a programme called 'The Man with the Microphone' was launched in which a lone interviewer would venture onto the streets on London in order to find an answer to 'that age-old question, who *is* 'the man in the street?''² The Listener even claimed that this would enable public figures, who had long prided themselves on keeping in touch with the people, by the possibly undignified and certainly uncomfortable method of keeping their ears to the ground, to find out what the man in the street was thinking whilst reclining in armchairs and keeping their ears to the loudspeaker. After the Munich agreement, the B.B.C. ran a series of interviews with a variety of people, from a doctor's wife, to a clerk, to the German wife of an Englishman to assess their views of the crisis. The Listener concluded the series by remarking that it had indeed been a significant event in the history of public opinion, although it did not state whether the average ordinary citizen could be said to be for or against Chamberlain's policy.³

¹ The Times, 11d, 16 August 1933.

² The Listener, vol.20 no.503 (8 September 1938), p.480.

³ The Listener, vol.20 no.517 (8 December 1938), p.1253.

Mass-Observation's 1939 social study was another medium in which the isolation of the decision makers from ordinary folk was highlighted. Apart from illustrating the divide, however, no real remedy for the problem was offered, except to present the social survey as a way of providing facts about the state of public opinion. The founders, Charles Madge and Tom Harrison, described the social problems which had prompted the organization as, 'the urgency of fact, the voicelessness of everyman and the smallness of the group which controls fact-getting and fact-distributing,' contrasting the 'Man in the Street' with the 'Intellectual Few'¹. The latter were charged with a very imperfect knowledge of what the masses were thinking, particularly at times of crisis, with the Abdication and Munich as the prime examples.² Nonetheless, crises were identified as the time when a usually inert public opinion became a real factor with which politicians had to grapple.³ Arguing that this was the result of estimations of public opinion being based on personal judgement rather than on observation, Madge and Harrison concluded that many recent public decisions, and nearly all the news in the international crisis of 1938, had been based on inaccurate reports of fact and always on inadequate representation or misrepresentation of public opinion.⁴

There were several direct links between politicians and this type of public opinion theorist. One such was the National Labour Committee, which produced a publication called 'News Letter', edited first by Clifford Allen (before he became a National Labour peer in 1932) and then by Godfrey Elton (who became a peer in 1934).⁵ This organ

¹ C. Madge and T. Harrison, (1939), p.9.

² *ibid.*, p.23.

³ *ibid.*, p.30.

⁴ *ibid.*, p.109.

⁵ D. Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald* (1977), p.677.

became a mouthpiece through which Ramsay MacDonald could offer public defences of Government action. His diary records a meeting, in January 1933, with Angell, Zimmern, Allen and Malcolm MacDonald to discuss a foreign supplement to the News Letter in order to defend, or explain if that proved too difficult, Government policy, probably with regard to the Manchurian crisis.¹ The links to these authors were even closer for Ramsay MacDonald, who had been instrumental in the foundation of the Union of Democratic Control during the first world war.² Bryce, Norman Angell, Gilbert Murray, and Robert Cecil had all been involved and had been joined by J.H. Thomas, J.L. Garvin and H.G. Wells in the spin-off League of Free Nations Society.³ The left wing and liberal complexion of these groups was diluted in the 1920s and 1930s in the League of Nations Union which contained Conservative M.P.s such as Arthur Steel-Maitland.⁴

Apart from meeting the authors socially, or buying the books, Ministers and civil servants might have come across theorization about public opinion and its offshoots in the comfort of their own clubs. According to their Who's Who entries, both Stanley Baldwin and James Ramsay MacDonald were members of The Athenaeum, although Arnold Wilson suggests that Baldwin spent rather more time canvassing opinion in the Smoking Room of the House of Commons.⁵ The Athenaeum held a series of monthly dinner talks from 1926 onwards at which a prominent specialist would open a discussion on a topical issue. Unfortunately, no guest lists were kept, but we may surmise that these

¹ PRO 30/69/1753 fol.430, diary, 16 January 1933.

² See M. Schwartz, *The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics during the First World War* (Oxford, 1971), K. Robbins, *The Abolition of War. The 'Peace Movement' in Britain, 1914-1919* (Cardiff, 1976) and L. Bisceglia, *Norman Angell and Liberal Internationalism in Britain, 1931-1935* (1982).

³ D.S. Birm, (1981), p.7-8.

⁴ *ibid.*, p.12.

⁵ Sir A. Wilson, *Thoughts and Talks: the Diary of a Member of parliament* (1938), p.1. Ramsay MacDonald did use the club for lunching with colleagues, see PRO 30/69/1753 fol., 437, diary, 2 March 1933 for a lunch with Simon and Eden on their return from Geneva.

dinners were known about by governmental members of the club, even if they were not attended and that the idea of public opinion and the media was therefore established as a topic of contemporary debate within Whitehall circles. Appendix two gives a broad outline of Government and Foreign Office membership of the London clubs in the 1930s. Titles of these talks, on subjects other than public opinion, included, 'The Artist: Servant or Parasite' by Sir William Rothenstein, 'The Devaluation of Currency' by Sir Josiah Stamp and 'Is the Universe Running Down?' by Sir J. Jeans. There was also considerable coverage of media affairs. On 6 May 1935, Dr. C.R.S. Harris, Fellow of All Souls, member of The Times' editorial board and editor of *Nineteenth Century*, introduced the subject, 'The Press and Public Opinion.' Sir Stephen Tallents, former head of the Empire Marketing Board gave a talk on 'The Relationship of the Arts to the Government' on 1 March 1937 and Sir Arnold Wilson spoke on 'Is Full Liberty of the Press Desirable' on 3 January 1938.¹ The National Liberal Club's 'Political and Economic Circle' held similar talks. The records for these talks are fuller and they generally drew an audience of about one hundred. In February 1933, Norman Angell spoke at a lunch meeting on 'Popular Education and the Present Mess'. He spoke again in September on 'Can Democracy be Intelligent?' In December 1938, Henry Wickham Steed spoke on 'The Freedom of the Press.'²

In this chapter we have explored the range of ideas in political and academic thought about the role of public opinion in politics in the inter-war period. Despite pessimism about the suitability of public opinion for participation in foreign policy

¹ Details from the archives of The Athenaeum, Cttee. MTD 37/38. My thanks to Sarah Dodgson for her help with this information. There was also a series of talks at the club's annexe, 6, Carlton Gardens.

² National Liberal Club Political Committee Minutes 8 fols, 66, 130 and 176. My thanks to Sheila Markham for her help in finding these archives.

making, it was acknowledged that education on the subject could improve and that it should be directed by the Government. When they spoke about public opinion in theoretical terms, politicians and writers seemed, usually, to be referring to 'the man in the street' rather than to their own social circles. In light of the achievements of the totalitarian governments of Europe, the need for national unity was felt to be greater than ever, and this sense increased as the international situation worsened in the later 1930s. The moral approbation of public opinion for Government policy was desired, although ways in which this could be ascertained remained vague, since no comprehensive theory of the relations between the press and the public was widely accepted. Governmental preoccupation with taming the press at crucial diplomatic moments suggests, however, that the press was seen as an important way of representing British public opinion abroad.

The debate about the public's role in foreign policy predated the first world war, although the charges levied against 'the old diplomacy' certainly accelerated the frequency with which the subject was discussed. Similarly, debates about the role of the press and the dangers of the popular press can be traced back to political writing in the nineteenth century and before. Therefore, whilst discussions on public opinion in the 1930s had long antecedents, the specific context of governmental crisis, spurred on by economic dislocation and European revolutions, pushed the question of the education and appreciation of public opinion, in democratic government, to the forefront of debate. Given the lack of programmatic statements from politicians, themselves, about the role of public opinion, an examination of theoretical debate gives a much more detailed semantic backdrop to the language politicians and diplomats employed when they invoked public

opinion in decision-making and diplomacy, which language in practice is explored in the following chapters.

Chapter Two.

Parliament and the press: the use of public opinion in protests at the Nazi treatment of the Jews, February to May, 1933.

'Why rulers should be so extremely susceptible to remarks about themselves and their respective countries made in the foreign press is something I have never been able to understand'

Aldous Huxley, *Ballyhoo for Nations*, (July 1935)¹.

In this chapter we begin to dissect what the phrase 'public opinion' meant in Cabinet and Foreign Office parlance. This chapter explores how British diplomats invoked public indignation about the persecution of the Jews against their German counterparts in the early part of 1933. It is argued that, in this instance, perceptions of public opinion on the Jewish question were derived by the Cabinet and Foreign Office from several sources, including parliamentary and pressure group opinion, and that this pressure could be used effectively in diplomacy to suggest a change in the international atmosphere in general. The wider significance of this rhetoric was the potential which it carried for hindering the progress of the Disarmament Conference at Geneva.

1933 has received more attention from historians of British domestic politics than by those concerned with international relations. The legendary 'impact of Hitler,'² has been traced through studies of party politics, both as it affected opposition elements to the National Government and as it defined and refined Socialist, Liberal and Conservative doctrines about war and the price of peace.³ The first year of the Hitler régime has also been seen by historians as a concomitant to the height of pacifist sentiment in Britain.

¹ D. Bradshaw (ed.), *The Hidden Huxley* (1994), p. 183.

² M. Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler. British Politics and British Policy 1933-40* (Cambridge, 1975).

³ See N. Thompson, *The Anti-Appeasers: Conservative Opposition to Appeasement in the 30s* (Oxford, 1971), N.J. Crowson, (1997).

This sentiment is argued to have been compounded, both by the contemporary parallels made between the situation in 1933 and the outbreak of war in 1914, and by the sense that, this time, a breakdown in international co-operation could lead to war.¹

Writing from an international history angle, E.W. Bennett has suggested that reports on the internal situation in Germany did have a direct effect on the international situation and made British politicians less favourable to diplomatic concessions to Germany.² The specific question of the British response to the treatment of the Jews in Germany has a large historiography, which deals mainly with immigration policy, but which does make some mention of diplomatic responses.³ From this perspective, historians have disagreed with Bennett's assertion, suggesting that the British Government was loathe to make any official response which might jeopardize Anglo-German relations.⁴ Emphasis has been laid on the refusal of the Foreign Office to make any official representations to the German Government and criticisms made of their defence that they had no locus standi to intervene in the internal affairs of a foreign country.⁵ Such historians have also made the point that, in taking this line, the British Government failed to give expression to the widespread public condemnation of Nazi methods.⁶

¹ Ceadel, p.124-6, P. Kyba, (Waterloo, Ontario, 1983), p.32.

² E. W. Bennett, *German Rearmament and the West, 1932-1933* (Princeton, 1979), p.377-380.

³ See, for example, L. London, (Cambridge, 2000), A.J. Sherman, (1973), B. Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1919-1945* (2nd edition, 1999).

⁴ J. P. Fox, 'Great Britain and the German Jews 1933' *WLB* vol.26 nos.1-2 (1972), p.41, 46.

⁵ See S. Gewirtz, 'Anglo-Jewish Responses to Nazi Germany 1933-39: The Anti-Nazi Boycott and the Board of Deputies of British Jews' *JCH* vol.26 no.2 (1991), p.266.

⁶ J. P. Fox, 'Great Britain and the German Jews 1933' (1972), p.46 and J.P. Fox, 'Nazi German and German Emigration to Great Britain' in G. Hirschfeld, (ed.), *Exile in Great Britain: Refugees from Hitler's Germany* (1984), p.47.

As a preliminary to Bennett's argument about the Disarmament Conference, we show, in this chapter, how the perception that public opinion was concerned about the treatment of Jews appeared, simultaneously, in Foreign Office minutes with the general increase in public information about the Jews at the end of February. We also demonstrate that the Jewish issue emerged as a topic of conversation in London society at the same time, although there were other subjects which competed with it for dominance. In this way, the newsworthiness of a subject, both within and outside the Foreign Office, and the appearance of statements about public opinion are linked. This demonstrates the assumption which appears to have been made by politicians and diplomats that, if there were an issue of humanitarian concern in the press, the public would be concerned about it. The Nazi view that this was the case, and that it would alienate Britain from Germany, is also illustrated.

Firstly, the information received about the Jewish situation by the Foreign Office and Cabinet is briefly reviewed. Secondly, the moves for a boycott of German goods by Jewish groups and other forms of protest in Britain which the Cabinet and Foreign Office became aware of are examined, together with the British Government's appraisal of the effectiveness and appropriateness of such protests. A situation was produced by the German boycott of Jewish businesses in early April which ranged those wary of making protests, for fear of exacerbating the situation, against those who felt that something should be said. The Foreign Secretary and the Permanent Under-Secretary incorporated the caution of the ambassador in Berlin about making protests into diplomacy by allowing private representations and public demonstrations to take place but not official complaints. This tactic had the advantage of allowing the Foreign Office to claim that

they were not fettering the expression of public opinion in Britain on the subject, which they clearly felt was a plus point for a democratic civil service department.

The Foreign Office also denied influence over the British press to the Germans, although with rather less honesty. Whilst there is occasional evidence that the Foreign Office acted to prevent something being published, there is much more evidence to show them influencing what was published, down to the timing of leader articles. In terms of the Jewish question, British press coverage of the new régime is argued here to have been a parallel response to that of the perceived public outcry. Often condemnatory, British press coverage soured diplomatic relations between Britain and Germany but also formed one of the main channels of protest against the internal policy of the new German Government. In reply, the German Government evolved a policy to counteract adverse press coverage, suggesting that the plight of the Jews would worsen unless press condemnation of German internal policy abated. The German Government also sent a representative to London to try to educate British political opinion about the nature of the Nazi revolution. We conclude the chapter with some preliminary methodological thoughts about the usage of perceptions of public opinion in diplomatic rhetoric.

In February 1933, the attention of the Foreign Office had been divided between Berlin and Geneva, where the Disarmament Conference seemed, once more, to be on the verge of breakdown.¹ Initial reactions to the reports of the British Ambassador, Sir Horace Rumbold, tended to be reappraisals of how far the new German Government was likely to change the existing German line at Geneva.² Allen Leeper was particularly

¹ See PRO CAB 23/75 1(33) 19 January 1933, CAB 24/237 3(33), The Disarmament Conference by Sir J. Simon, 12 January 1933, CAB 24/239 52(33), The Crisis in Europe by Sir J. Simon, 28 February 1933.

² M. Gilbert, *Sir Horace Rumbold: portrait of a diplomat, 1869-1941* (1973) is the standard biography.

concerned about the appointment of Göring as Air Minister, as an indication that, unless Britain pressed vigorously for the total abolition of military aviation, German air rearmament would proceed unchecked.¹ Orme Sargent, the counsellor in charge of the central department, was sufficiently unsure of the probable direction of the new Government in foreign policy to be following the new Chancellor's speeches carefully. On 1 February, Sargent minuted that it looked as though Hitler were claiming for Germany the right to rearm in the event of the Disarmament Conference failing to produce a disarmament convention. According to Sargent, this was a claim which Britain did not recognize, even though she knew full well that the Germans would eventually enforce it.²

The initial surprise in Whitehall at the actions of the new German Government and the attendant concern for the future of the conference were, to some extent, allayed by Rumbold's conversation with the German Foreign Minister, von Neurath, on 4 February. Rumbold was assured that German foreign policy had not changed, but, as Patrick Scrivener, second secretary in the central department, pointed out, this might well change if the new Government won the elections on 5 March.³ Right up until the Reichstag fire on 27 February, the Foreign Office maintained this perspective of seeing the German Government almost exclusively in the context of Geneva. After 28 February, attention shifted to Nazi domestic policy, to the extent that the political files of the

¹ Allen Leeper was a counsellor in the central department and was the brother of Rex, the head of the news department.

² PRO FO 371/16717 C 922/319/18: Rumbold to Simon, Sargent minute, 2 February 1933. See also minutes on Hitler's broadcast, FO 371/16717 C 1052/319/18: Rumbold to Simon, 3 February 1933.

³ PRO FO 371/16717 C 992/319/18: Rumbold to Simon, Scrivener minute, 4 February 1933. For a full account of Rumbold's reports on legislative action against the Jews in 1933 see D. Clemens, *Herr Hitler in Germany. Wahrnehmung und Deutungen des Nationalsozialismus in Grossbritannien, 1920 bis 1939*, (Gottingen, 1996), p.272-281.

Foreign Office become almost exclusively concerned with political violence, arrests and the targeting of the Jewish community by the SA.

As might be expected, the Jewish issue came to prominence simultaneously within the Foreign Office, the House of Commons and political circles. Evidence for the perception that public opinion was concerned is roughly proportional to the level of information on the treatment of the Jews available to the Foreign Office and the press. The first evidence received by the Foreign Office for anti-Semitic ideology at the centre, rather than the fringe of the new Government, was gathered from speeches by Hitler and Goebbels at a meeting in the Sportspalast in Berlin on 14 February. At this point, however, Rumbold still identified the circumstances in which Hitler's speech was made as more telling than the actual subject matter of the Marxist and Jewish conspiracies. The report gave a vivid picture of Goebbels' propaganda methods and the scale of the Nazi investment in mass communication. Rumbold prefaced the dispatch by describing the vigour with which Goebbels had carried out the relay of the speech to loudspeakers stationed on street corners all over Berlin. This operation had produced one of the first outbursts by the Nazi Party propaganda guru against the Jews. The Berliner Tageblatt, on the preceding day, had enquired how this massive outside broadcast was to be financed. Goebbels responded, from the platform, with a bitter attack on the Jewish press in which he threatened the Jewish papers with the direst penalties if they dared to transgress the provisions of the new press decree.¹

¹ DBFP 2nd vol.IV no.240: 14 February 1933.

By the beginning of March, the political temperature in Berlin had risen dramatically, as the Nazi efforts to produce a convincing result at the polls intensified. Rumbold had been monitoring the levels of intimidation in the days before the election and concluded that, whilst there was evidence of a strong police presence on the streets, there were even more subtle methods of intimidation at play.¹ After the suspension of all the guarantees contained in the Weimar constitution, Goebbels had carefully had hints dropped, just before the election, that a massacre of the Jews and the leading Marxist politicians would take place on the night before the poll, in an attempt to maximize the Nazi vote through fear.² The shift in the Foreign Office's interest in Nazi foreign policy to domestic policy roughly coincided with a parallel case to the mistreatment of the Jews and the problems of making protests against it coming to prominence. Press correspondents abroad tended to move in the same circles as Embassy staff, and often had close links to Whitehall, and both groups started to receive information at this point, sometimes donated to each other, of an increasing harshness against the press correspondents themselves. Worldwide press interest in German politics at this point provided the first concrete evidence of Nazi sensitivity to press opinion which the earlier censorship laws had suggested to Rex Leeper in the Foreign Office news department.³

¹ DBFP 2nd vol.IV no.245: 1 March 1933.

² DBFP 2nd vol.IV no.258: 7 March 1933.

³ PRO FO 371/16718 C 1491/319/18: Rumbold to Sargent, Leeper minute, [undated but early Feb. from context of file]. For historiographical references to Nazi sensitivity to foreign press criticism, see J.P. Fox, 'Nazi German and German Emigration to Great Britain' in G. Hirschfeld (ed.), (1984), p.38, 47.

The Times had covered the constitutional changes made by the new régime but the first reference to the Jewish issue did not appear until 2 March.¹ The previous day, the Foreign Office had begun to appreciate how sensitive the German Government was to press opinion, through the decision of the Hitler Government to challenge the image of the new régime being disseminated by the foreign correspondents stationed in Berlin. On 2 March, Rumbold had sent a lengthy dispatch on the Nazi attitude to the foreign press. In it, he recorded that the Director of the German Press Department, Aschmann, had approached the British embassy press attaché, Tim Breen, to persuade him to try to moderate the attitude of the British correspondents in Berlin towards the new Government. Breen had vehemently defended the freedom of the British press against Aschmann's description of the need to adopt 'new standards' if the significance of the Hitler movement was to be properly judged.² The reaction in Whitehall was slightly incredulous. On the central department desk, Michael Huxley, the second secretary, pointed out that Germany was going to get a worse, not a better, press as a result.³

Aschmann's approach demonstrated the German Government's apparent fear that adverse foreign press reports ran the risk of upsetting the election campaign which had been so nearly brought to fruition. The German Conference of Ministers, held at the Reich Chancellery on 2 March, evinced the same anger and frustration at the attitude of

¹ The Times, 7c, 12d, 2 March and 13e, 4 March 1933. The second Times report on the Jewish issue was a speech made by Chaim Weizmann to the 'Friends of Palestine in parliament' which gave details of the dangers which Jews in Germany now ran. The following day, the letters page carried a response from the leaders of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, Neville Laski and Leonard Montefiore, urging that a world wide effort should be made for those suffering, *'In this hour of sore trial for their co-religionists in Germany, Jews all over the world trust and believe that the support of public opinion, once enlightened as to the true facts, will be extended to them.'*

² DBFP 2nd vol.IV no.248: 2 March 1933.

³ PRO FO 371/16718 C 1979/319/18: Rumbold to Simon, 2 March 1933, Huxley minute. Michael Huxley left the Diplomatic Service in 1934 and started the National Geographic Magazine. Patrick Reilly kindly provided this information. See also FO 371/16718 C 2020/319/18: Rumbold to Simon, 3 March 1933.

the foreign press as Aschmann had displayed to Breen. Göring stated that the press were suggesting that he, himself, had set fire to the Reichstag. Hitler agreed that the agitation of the world press was very dangerous and that all grounds for the clamour would have been removed if the culprit had been hanged right away.¹ The Foreign Minister, von Neurath, responded that representations had been made, where necessary, but that it was very difficult to do anything effective against the propaganda abroad. On 7 March, however, von Neurath was able to report to the Conference of Ministers that those who had reported maliciously on German domestic conditions had promised to refrain from such activities in the future.² Consequently, he advised, and the Ministers agreed, that foreign correspondents were to be given a trial period, of two months, before any expulsions were made.

However, the agitation by the foreign press had had another effect on the German Government. On 15 March, Rumbold reported that the level of foreign press criticism had prompted Hitler to issue an appeal to his followers, on 10 March, asking them to desist from violence. Hitler had had to reiterate this request after aggressive speeches by Göring, at Essen, on 11 March.³ On 21 March, Rumbold reported the limited success of these appeals, saying that, whilst foreign journalists thought that the terror had ended on 15 March, it was quite evident that cases of political persecution, or of private revenge, were still of daily occurrence.⁴ Rumbold also recorded Göring's speech in the Reichstag, on 23 March, when he denied the ill-treatment of German political prisoners. He had admitted that individuals had been killed and mistreated but insisted that the excesses had

¹ DGFP Series C vol.I no.44: Extract from the minutes of the Conference of Ministers, 2 March 1933.

² DGFP Series C vol.I no.54: Minutes of the Conference of Ministers, 7 March 1933.

³ DBFP 2nd vol.IV no.265: 15 March 1933.

⁴ DBFP 2nd vol.IV no.268: 21 March 1933.

been insignificant in view of the revolutionary experience through which the country had just passed.¹

Some evidence of disquiet about these moves by the German Government was evident in the House of Commons. The efficiency of Goebbels's propaganda machine was demonstrated when, on 1 March, a question was put to the Foreign Secretary, Sir John Simon, in the House of Commons by the Conservative M.P., Robert Boothby, about the truth of rumours that the German Government intended a purge of political opponents. Before he could answer in full, Simon was overtaken by a number of supplementary questions. George Lansbury, for Labour, pointed out that the press contained a good deal of very alarmist news and that people with relations in Germany wished to be reassured. He was supported by Josiah Wedgwood who wanted 'the feelings of British subjects on this matter' to be made known to the German Government. The isolationist case was put by Michael Beaumont who pointed out 'the necessity of allowing the German Government to manage their own affairs.'² The following day, Simon made it clear, in a Foreign Office minute, that he agreed with Beaumont,

*'I fully realise that we have no locus standi to make representations as regards German subjects, and I feel sure that the German Government will recognize the propriety of my answer in the House of Commons yesterday.'*³

That answer had been absolutely non-committal, merely affirming the Foreign Secretary's responsibility to keep in constant communication with His Majesty's Ambassador in Berlin. Until mid-February, the attention of London political circles, outside the Foreign Office and parliament, seem to have been focused on issues other than Germany's internal situation and it was not until the end of March that people began

¹ PRO FO 371/16720 C 3074/319/18: Rumbold to Simon, 28 March 1933.

² Hansard, 5th Series, 1932-33, 275, 375-77, 1 March 1933.

³ DBFP 2nd vol.IV no.249: Foreign Office Minute, 2 March 1933.

to take note of the violence of the German internal situation under the new Government. Even then, from the fragmentary diary and correspondence evidence that we have, the issue remained one of a list of which India, war debts to America and Manchuria were equally as important. From within the Conservative Party, the position of the National Government was seen to be steady and to have recovered from the trials of the previous year.¹ Cabinet discussions were dominated by the Manchurian crisis, British war debts to America and the redesign of the Indian constitution.² At the Astors' house, in St. James' Square, the topic of conversation at dinner, on 11 February, was the American war debt.³ However, the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, noted in his diary, for 28 February, that the Astor crowd had been discussing the development of brutal dictatorship in Germany and the burning of the Reichstag to discredit the left wing parties.⁴

The Cabinet was also grappling with other problems connected with disarmament, both on a personal and on a governmental level. The Foreign Secretary, Sir John Simon, was facing a barrage of letters about the shares he had once held, in Imperial Chemical Industries, because of the association of this industry with manufacture of material for

¹ HOL J.C.C. Davidson Papers 201: letter to Sir Leslie Wilson, 13 February 1933.

² PRO CAB 23/75 1 (33), 19 February 1933; 5 (33), 30 January 1933; 7 (33) 8 February 1933; 8 (33) 13 February 1933. See also, PRO 30/69/1753 File D-K, fols. 430-1, 434 and PRO 30/69/679 fols 1-12: MacDonald's correspondence with Lord Davies in January 1933. Davies was forwarding an array of protest resolutions and petitions from League of Nations Union branches about the need for sanctions against Japan. See also Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/37, diary, 11 January 1933: Dawson recorded that there was a 'great deal of chatter about the Debt' at a dinner party given by the Astors at 4, St. James' Square. Bertie Spender Clay was also passing on gossip about the debt from Cliveden to the Cabinet, see Churchill Margesson 1/2 fol.2: Spender Clay to Margesson and Baldwin, 2 January 1933. Dawson also had a plan for the Indian constitution which he was planning to advance in a supplement to The Times at this time, see diary, 8 March 1933.

³ Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/37, diary, 11 February 1933. Dawson had also met the British ambassador to Washington, Ronald Lindsay, on 7 February 1933 to discuss the debt situation. See also Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954), p.98.

⁴ PRO 30/69/1753, fol. 437, 28 February 1933.

war.¹ On the question of the export of arms to the Far East, Cabinet minutes record that it was urged that the moral sense in Britain should not be underestimated and that large numbers of people revolted against the idea of Britain making profits out of supplying munitions in a war such as that in Manchuria.² The Cabinet turned to the situation in Germany on 1 March 1933, just before the election, and noted the overwhelming majority by which the new Government had been confirmed on 8 March, thus dispelling their original theory that the Nazi administration might be short-lived.³ The Cabinet did not deal with the Jewish question, however, until 5 April, when the problem of restrictions on aliens entering Britain was raised. A committee was formed to discuss the proposals for the care of Jewish refugees which the Jewish community in Britain had put forward to the Home Secretary.⁴

From the end of February, however, the internal position in Germany began to intrude more upon political conversation. At *The Times*, Geoffrey Dawson had got wind of Goebbels' threats to the Jewish population before the election as early as 28 February.⁵ Gilbert Murray wrote to Albert Einstein, on 31 March, sympathizing with the plight of the Jews and pointing out that he would be inundated with offers of asylum.⁶ From a letter from the Greek scholar Edwyn Bevan, on 9 April, Murray learnt that the historian,

¹ Bodleian MSS.Simon 76, fol.17: letter to Frank Hillier, 10 March 1933 and fol.29: letter from M.L.V. Hughes, Local Honorary Secretary of the Peace Army, Mosely, Birmingham, 14 March 1933.

² PRO CAB 23/75 12 (33), 27 February 1933, 11am and CAB 27/504 (Ministerial Committee on the Disarmament Conference), fol.152 (20 January 1933) for J.H. Thomas on the need not to give the 'man-in-the-street' the impression that Britain was surreptitiously engaged in manufacturing arms. The debate about the regulation of the armament industry continued throughout the year, see, for example, BL Add.MSS. 51132 (Cecil of Chelwood Papers), fol.182: letter from Gilbert Murray, 3 October 1933, 'the country is really roused on the subject.'

³ PRO CAB 23/75 13 (33), 1 March 1933 and 15 (33) 8 March 1933.

⁴ PRO CAB 23/75 23 (33), 5 April 1933.

⁵ Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/37, diary, 28 February 1933.

⁶ Bodleian MSS.Murray 64, fol.176: letter to Albert Einstein, 31 March 1933.

Lewis Namier, had been converted by the persecution of the Jews in Germany into being pro-Polish. Namier had also given Bevan examples of what was happening in Germany, naming names and places, including one case, where a number of Jews had been dragged from their houses and 'beaten into a jelly.' The victims had been told that if any allusion to it appeared in the foreign press, the attacks would be repeated. In light of this, and other evidence, Bevan thought it impossible to urge the French and Poles to reduce their armaments when there was a nation in the centre of Europe whose ruling element could, at any time, break out into hideous barbarism.¹

Hilda Runciman, wife of the President of the Board of Trade, also recorded, in her diary for April, that the persecution of the Jews had aroused great animosity. She had even had an explanation of the motivation for the persecution from the German ambassador, von Hoesch. He had told her that the intense hatred was, largely, due to the fact that Jews from other countries had made fortunes out of the calamities of the Germans during the inflation period and also to the young Germans who thought that the Jews had jobs which they wanted.² By the end of April, Robert Bernays was planning a trip to Berlin to discover what was happening to the Jews, in the hope that the German Government was still sensitive to foreign opinion and could be made to revise their position.³ Thomas Jones also noted, at the end of April, that the baiting of the Jews had done the Germans no end of harm and was fresh evidence of von Bülow's point in his memoirs, that the Germans had no political sense.⁴

¹ Bodleian MSS. Murray Papers 216, fol. 189: letter from E.R. Bevan, 9 April 1933.

² NUL WR Add.8, entry 20 April 1933.

³ N. Smart (ed.) *The Diaries and Letters of Robert Bernays, 1932-1939. An Insider's Account of the House of Commons* (Lewiston, New York, 1996), p.72 and p.76.

⁴ Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954), p.108.

Simon was well aware that there was considerable feeling in parliament on the subject when he requested a report from Rumbold, on 30 March, on the Jewish situation, on the grounds that 'indignation is growing both in the House of Commons and in the country generally at the treatment of the Jews and political opponents generally by the German Government and the Nazi Party.'¹ Together with the Home Secretary, Sir John Gilmour, he had borne the brunt of parliamentary questions on conditions inside Germany. A survey of parliamentary time devoted to the subject of Jewish persecution and the entry of aliens into Britain confirms the more fragmentary evidence about conversations in political circles already reviewed. Until 3 March, nothing had been said in the Commons about the problem, although Germany's attitude at the Disarmament Conference was coming under closer scrutiny. From 22 March to 11 May, regular requests for representations to Germany on the issue were made, coinciding with the proposed German boycott of Jewish businesses and the retaliatory action planned by Jews in Britain.

Simon had fielded questions from both Jewish and non-Jewish members in the previous month, on subjects ranging from removal of anti-German posters in the East End to the arraignment of Germany before the League of Nations.² East End M.P.s, Barnett Janner and Harry Nathan had been particularly vocal, speaking both on behalf of their constituents and as members of prominent Jewish organizations.³ A small group of

¹ PRO FO 371/16720 C 2971/319/18: Simon to Rumbold, 30 March 1933. Simon attached a list of the seven parliamentary questions he had faced in the Commons on the subject during March to this dispatch. D. Clemens, (Gottingen, 1996), p.276-7 describes this dispatch as being sent under pressure from parliamentary opinion.

² Hansard, 5th Series, 1932-33, 276, 1184-5, 30 March 1933; 2168-70, 10 April 1933.

³ Barnett Janner had been a National Liberal M.P. for Whitechapel and St. George's division of Stepney since 1931, and was a member of the Joint Foreign Committee of the Jewish Board of Deputies. Major Harry Nathan had been a Liberal M.P. for North East Bethnal Green since 1929 and was a member of the Jewish Agency under Mandate for Palestine and Chairman of the Central Jewish Consultative Committee.

other M.P.s, some with East End constituencies like George Lansbury (Bow and Bromley division of Poplar since 1922), and others, with no apparent connection to the main areas of protest against the persecution, were also active. Spanning the party political spectrum, Geoffrey Mander, Josiah Wedgwood, John Morris and Oliver Locker Lampson all participated, regularly, in the brief exchanges which parliamentary time allowed on the subject of the Government's knowledge of, and actions towards, the treatment of the German Jews.¹ John Morris had even produced a motion suggesting that the British Government, whilst not desiring to interfere with the domestic government of any country, should make friendly representations to the German Government respecting the numerical weakness and defenceless position of the Jews in Germany.² Ramsay MacDonald apologized for the lack of parliamentary time which made it impossible for such a motion to be discussed but added that the views widely held in the country had recently found very full expression.³

It is possible to say, therefore, that the Government could reasonably point to a cross-party section of parliamentary opinion as agitated about the Jewish issue in late March, and that this sentiment was also discernible, if not overwhelming, in political circles. This coincided with Foreign Office and press interest in the subject. The proposed German boycott of Jewish businesses, at the beginning of April, posed the question for the Government and Foreign Office whether they should invoke this public opinion to the

¹ Mander had been Labour member for East Wolverhampton since 1929; Wedgwood had sat for Labour in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1906; Morris as a Unionist for Salford North since 1931 and Locker-Lampson as a Conservative for Handsworth division of Birmingham since 1922. For the main parliamentary exchanges on the Jewish question before 13 April 1933, see, Hansard, 5th Series, 1932-33, 276, 1185, 30 March 1933; 1913-4, 6 April 1933; 2164-5, 10 April 1933; 2360, 11 April 1933.

² The motion had been signed by forty M.P.s, see PRO FO 371/16721 C 3285/319/18: parliamentary question from Mr. J. Morris, 6 April 1933.

³ Hansard, 5th Series, 1932-33, 276, 1913-4, 6 April 1933.

German Government in protest. There had been a brief lull in activity against the Jews in the middle of March but the growing foreign interest in the question was then exploited by the German government in their handling of the boycott of Jewish businesses at the beginning of April.

The Foreign Office had been approached by Jewish organizations, at the beginning of March, who hoped to obtain some assurance that the British Government would make representations to Germany on behalf of the German Jews.¹ By the end of March, however, there was some sense amongst Jewish leaders in Britain, shared by Rumbold, that protest meetings abroad might do more harm than good. This sense seems to have been encouraged, perversely, by the fact that the German Government had already retreated once over political violence. The conclusion was drawn by some that further pressure might annoy them and cause them to turn against the Jews again. On 22 March, Neville Laski and Leonard Montefiore called at the Foreign Office to ask for an official opinion about the wisdom of the many meetings of protest that they knew were planned. They said that they thought that such meetings might be a mistake because they would irritate the Germans and, possibly, lead to the intensification of the campaign against the Jews. If the Foreign Office would support them in trying to get them stopped, they argued, it would greatly strengthen their hand. In response to this interview, Orme Sargent minuted that, whilst the position of the Jewish leaders was understandable, he did not think it wise to try to prevent the growing indignation in Britain from manifesting itself. Göring had already shown that he was not immune to foreign criticism by going on

¹ PRO FO 371/16718 C 2013/319/18: Foreign Office Minute, 2 March 1933.

the defensive for a brief period.¹

Four days later, Rumbold reported that whilst he agreed that the Chancellor's appeal to the S.A. for moderation, on 14 March, had had some effect, cases of 'bodily maltreatment' still occurred daily.² On 27 March, he reported that Jews were also experiencing great hardship through wholesale dismissal from State and municipal employment.³ The next stage of Göring's 'defensive', however, was to launch an attack against those foreign countries that had criticized the new Government. A semi-official statement warned that protest meetings abroad might lead to the boycott of Jewish shops in Germany.⁴ On 28 March, Rumbold advised that, in light of these threats, Jewish organizations abroad would be well advised to desist, for the time being, from public forms of agitation since they were dealing with ruthless and intelligent opponents.⁵

Rumbold seems to have been amazed that the Germans should have chosen this time to revive the issue. The revival continued on 29 March, when it was announced that there was to be a general boycott of Jewish businesses in Germany on 1 April.⁶ The announcement of the boycott simultaneously set up a paradox for the British and provided a way for the Nazi Government in which foreign press criticism of the new Germany could be explained. The evident ambiguity, on both sides, about how far governments could be influenced, by press and public opinion, was exploited by

¹ PRO FO 371/16720 C 2978/319/18: Minute by Mr. Hankey, 22 March 1933. Montefiore had also approached Herbert Samuel earlier in the month who had forwarded his concerns to Baldwin, see, CUL BWIN, Series B 120 fol. 22: Samuel to Baldwin 2 March 1933.

² DBFP 2nd vol.V no.2: 26 March 1933. See also D. Clemens, (Gottingen, 1996), p.273-4 for another account of these dispatches.

³ DBFP 2nd vol.V no.3: 27 March 1933.

⁴ DBFP 2nd vol.V no.4: 27 March 1933.

⁵ DBFP 2nd vol.V no.5: 28 March 1933.

⁶ S. Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews. Vol. I*, (1997), p.20-1 suggests that this decision came from Hitler as well as from the radical wing of the party.

blackmailing the protesters in both Britain and in Germany. The Foreign Office were no less surprised than Rumbold that the boycott had been launched at the very moment when the attacks on Jews had seemed to be fewer and foreign press coverage of Germany had improved slightly. A minute written by Michael Huxley, on 27 March, however, demonstrates exactly how Hitler had found a solution to the adverse press reporting, not merely by limiting anti-Semitic attacks but by the far more effective way of suggesting that it would harm the German Jews if further protests were launched. In answer to a dispatch from Rumbold, announcing that Hitler and Goebbels were discussing the most effective way of countering anti-German propaganda engendered by Jewish circles in Britain and America, Huxley wrote,

*'Sir Horace Rumbold has told us that the situation of the Jews has very definitely improved, and while the agitation conducted in foreign countries hitherto may have contributed to bring about this improvement, it seems probable that a continuance of the agitation will do more harm than good, by provoking retaliation. Perhaps the News Department could do something to moderate the agitation in the press here.'*¹

On 1 April, Rumbold reported that von Neurath had offered a deal: the boycott would not be resumed (after the two days respite which had been allowed), on 4 April, if statements could be produced by prominent Jews in Britain and the USA to the effect that they were satisfied that reports of excesses against Jews in the press were exaggerated and that there would be no retaliatory boycott of German goods. The Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, Sir Robert Vansittart, described this approach as 'pure blackmail' and minuted that Britain could not and would not agree to such a declaration.² Sir John Simon saw the German ambassador on 30 March. Von Hoesch told him that he

¹ PRO FO 371/16720 C 2813/319/18: Rumbold to Simon, Huxley minute, 27 March 1933.

² PRO FO 371/16720 C 2999/319/18: Rumbold to Simon, 1 April 1933.

had been reassuring British Jewish leaders, including Laski and Montefiore, that the accounts of mistreatment of Jews were greatly exaggerated. Simon had responded by saying that he thought an anti-Jewish campaign would cause Germany to lose much of the sympathy she had accumulated in Britain after the Great War. He reminded von Hoesch that expressions of British public opinion against the German treatment of the Jews were not confined to Jewish circles but were widespread among liberal-minded people and were likely to receive expression both in the House of Commons and outside.¹

Rumbold responded to this interview by advising, again, that the situation was so delicate that foreign protests were likely to do more harm than good, although he fully understood the indignation that the boycott had created.² Already tending to think that retreat, following the initial victory in mid-March, was the best policy, British Jewish leaders, represented by Lord Reading and Sir Herbert Samuel, did submit the document requested by von Neurath and Simon endorsed its contents in a letter to von Hoesch.³ The boycott was not resumed but von Neurath took the step of not publishing the document acknowledging that the reports were exaggerated, which left the British Government publicly, at any rate, disassociated from the Jewish organizations, and thus having not interfered in an issue of German domestic policy.⁴

Rumbold seems to have been convinced that further protests would have been dangerous. He also pursued the reasoning it would make things worse for the Jews if the Foreign Office published his official report on the situation. He wrote to Margot Asquith,

¹ DBFP 2nd vol.V no.11: 30 March 1933.

² DBFP 2nd vol.V no.15: 1 April 1933.

³ DBFP 2nd vol.V no.15 n.4: 1 April 1933.

⁴ S. Friedländer, (1997), p.20 claims that the plan to resume the boycott had been ditched on 31 March anyway.

on 10 April, that he hoped that his report would not be published despite the fact that many of the recent happenings in Germany were 'bound to antagonize an Englishman.' He felt that publication might stir up trouble again, and added that it would be a mistake to imagine that the whole of Germany endorsed the attitude of their Government towards Jews, because they did not, and many were very unhappy about the whole business.¹ He put this view officially to the Foreign Office, on 6 April, saying that he thought publication might delay the growth of sympathy in Germany itself for the Jewish plight.² Huxley thought that publication might give the Germans some idea that feeling against the Nazi party abroad was not merely the result of Jewish propaganda but that it was, nevertheless, undesirable.³

In Cabinet, on 12 April, Simon reported that he had received a full report from Rumbold on the situation of the Jews, in which Rumbold, himself, had recommended that the report should not be published because it was likely to aggravate the situation in Germany.⁴ The Cabinet agreed with this proposal, although it was decided that prominent Jewish members of parliament, namely Lord Reading and Sir Herbert Samuel, would be shown the report. Rumbold's report was also made available to Leo Kennedy, who actually wrote his notes in the Foreign Office, with the report in front of him, and who recorded that that report had informed all his subsequent leaders on Germany.⁵ The

¹ Bodleian MSS.Rumbold 41, fols.172-74: letter to Lady Oxford, 10 April 1933.

² PRO FO 371/16721 C 3270/19/18: Rumbold to Simon, 6 April 1933.

³ PRO FO 371/16720 C 3213/319/18: Rumbold to Simon, Huxley minute, 5 April 1933.

⁴ Further evidence for the atmosphere surrounding this meeting is difficult to obtain. Of the diarists most likely to take note, Geoffrey Dawson had left on a cruise on 7 April and Thomas Jones was undergoing sporadic treatment and convalescence for a duodenal ulcer. Simon's memoirs make no mention of the Jewish issue at this time.

⁵ Churchill Kennedy 1/14: entries for 7 and 21 May 1933. Kennedy was The Times' main leader writer on foreign affairs. See also G. Martel, (ed.), *An Appeasement Diary: A.L. Kennedy & The Times* (forthcoming, 2000) for a selection of Kennedy's diaries and scrap books with an introduction.

Cabinet also acknowledged the fact that pressure appeared to be mounting for Britain to act, in some way, to assist the German Jews and decided to make a statement in the Commons the following day about the change in the international atmosphere. MacDonald had even suggested in Cabinet that Simon could imply that Germany could regard the international situation as having worsened as a result.¹ From this time onward the Cabinet and Foreign Office began to receive very real evidence of public opinion about the Nazi Government both in parliament and in petitions to Whitehall from many smaller organizations.

Parliamentary pressure probably had the most impact on the Cabinet's decision to take this diplomatic line with Germany. In the Commons, on 13 April, pressure on the Government was exerted during a general debate on foreign affairs. Most speakers expounded how anxious public opinion was thought to be, both about the internal situation in Germany and about her international position.² The considerable degree of cross-party sympathy between speakers was commented on in the debate itself and to some extent mirrored the earlier questions put to the Foreign Secretary in which no one party had been dominant.³ Two of the chief spokesmen and critics of Germany in this debate, Attlee and Lansbury, were Labour men. Yet the impulse to criticize Germany was not confined to the Labour benches. The former Foreign Secretary, Sir Austen Chamberlain, was even more forthright than Attlee in his description of the Nazi Government and more explicit in his link between its internal and external policy,

'Imperialism, with an added savagery, a racial pride, an exclusiveness which cannot allow to any fellow-subject not of "pure Nordic birth" equality of rights and citizenship within the nation to which he belongs? Are you going to discuss revision with a

¹ PRO CAB 23/75 27(33), 12 April 1933.

² See speech by Attlee, Hansard, 5th Series, 1932-33, 276, 2745, 13 April 1933.

³ See speech by Eleanor Rathbone, Hansard, 5th Series, 1932-33, 276, 2762, 13 April 1933.

*Government like that? [...] Europe is menaced and Germany afflicted by this narrow, exclusive spirit, by which it is a crime to be in favour of peace and a crime to be a Jew.*¹

Chamberlain dealt, specifically, with the problem of the Nazi attitude to the press and the charge that reports outside Germany had been grossly exaggerated and had unfairly prejudiced nations against the new Government. Dismissing the charge against serious newspapers, and discounting the sensationalist press as ‘not the kind of paper from which I seek to get information’, Chamberlain claimed that the information he received, from high ranking German officials themselves, was sufficient to condemn the Nazi Government out of hand. Apart from this response to the Nazi manipulation of the press at the time of the boycott, Chamberlain’s other main point was to translate this knowledge about the German Government, not into a protest against the internal affairs of the country, but into the sphere of international relations involving her. According to Chamberlain, this was not a Germany to which Europe could afford to give equality.²

Chamberlain’s speech was praised, throughout the debate, as a paradigm of liberal statesmanship. His half-brother, Neville, remarked that he had made the Germans very cross but that he was the one man, whose name was known abroad, who could say such things.³ Austen Chamberlain, himself, was very pleased both with the unanimity of sentiment in the House and with John Simon, who had told him that he agreed with every word.⁴ Alec Cadogan, on a brief visit to London from the Disarmament Conference, was less pleased and wrote in his diary that this antagonism was going to make Geneva even

¹ Hansard, 5th Series, 1932-33, 276, 2759, 13 April 1933. See also D. Dutton, *Austen Chamberlain. Gentleman in Politics* (Bolton, 1985), p.309-310.

² Hansard, 5th Series, 1932-33, 276, 2758-9, 13 April 1933. Equality of status was one of the main German claims at the Disarmament Conference.

³ BUL NC 18/1/824a: letter to Hilda, 29 April 1933.

⁴ R.C. Self, *The Austen Chamberlain Diary Letters* (1995), p.437.

more difficult.¹ The only speech which varied from the tone set by Chamberlain was that made by Churchill, who spoke on the nature of the peace treaties and the need to put Britain's own defences in good order.² As Sir Herbert Samuel remarked in the next speech, here Churchill was entering areas of considerable controversy,³ but the most radical of his proposals was the call for Britain not to take a lead in Europe in the defence of liberal values, but for her to cultivate detachment from the European scene and to offer what she could to Europe, in an altogether more modest role than that which she was currently carving for herself as the promoter of Mussolini's four power pact.⁴

Churchill devoted considerably less time to public opinion than the majority of speakers, and appeared substantially outside the mainstream of opinion on this occasion.⁵ Throughout the rest of the House, there appears to have been a consensus that, whilst it would be unjustifiable and a discourtesy, to interfere in German politics, the weight of demonstrable public opinion would, eventually, divert Germany from her anti-Semitic policy. Only Harry Nathan suggested that racial and religious persecution had a general significance outside domestic politics which might warrant interference, and this view can probably be traced to the general pressure from Jewish organizations, at this point, for the British Government to make private representations to Germany.⁶ Simon answered this point using the device set up by the German Government at the time of the

¹ Churchill ACAD 1/1, diary for 1933, 15 April 1933.

² Hansard, 5th Series, 1932-33, 276, 2786-2800, 13 April 1933.

³ Hansard, 5th Series, 1932-33, 276, 2800, 13 April 1933.

⁴ Hansard, 5th Series, 1932-33, 276, 2793, 13 April 1933. See also M. Gilbert, (1976) p.462-3 for Churchill's research for this speech.

⁵ See E.W. Bennett, (Princeton, 1979), p.379-80 for a discussion of the limitations of the commitment of Attlee, Churchill and Chamberlain in advocating a stronger line against Germany. Bennett argues that whilst Nazi methods were consistently condemned, the dangers of the European power situation were beginning to force the British to consider the need for a European settlement including Germany.

⁶ Hansard, 5th Series, 1932-33, 276, 2769, 13 April 1933.

boycott, that it would, in fact, do the Jewish community more harm than good if the issue were resurrected and the German Government felt themselves forced to retaliate,

*'I do not think it will be in the interest of the Jews themselves for His Majesty's Government to conceive themselves as clothed with authority to intervene on behalf of foreign citizens in another country.'*¹

Two days after the Commons debate, a German representative complained to the Foreign Office about the tone of it. Rumbold also reported the considerable press attention which the debate had attracted in Germany. Huxley expressed the general sense of exasperation with German attitudes to foreign opinion when he minuted Rumbold's report of the protest,

*'The German Government would lose much less respect abroad if it consistently ignored foreign opinion altogether. At present its spokesmen and its propagandists say: "What happens on German soil is Germany's business and no-one else's", - while at the same time they appeal continually for "fair play" in England and America and display a ridiculous degree of sensitiveness as regards English or American opinion.'*²

The Prime Minister was also following Simon's tactic of continually reiterating to the Germans that they had lost a great deal of public sympathy in Britain over the violence that had accompanied their revolution. In an interview with von Hoesch, on 12 April, MacDonald said that he and the Foreign Secretary had noticed a change in the atmosphere in Britain when they returned from Rome, on 22 March, particularly in the quarters that had supported the rights of Germany a short time before. Less sympathetically, he said that it was not so much the Jews but the fate of the intelligentsia which caused him difficulties and he was, therefore, rather concerned about future developments.³

¹ Hansard, 5th Series, 1932-33, 276, 2812, 13 April 1933.

² PRO FO 371/16721 C 3416/319/18: Rumbold to Simon, Huxley minute, 15 April 1933.

³ DGFP Series C, vol.I no.152, 12 April 1933. See also E.W. Bennett, (Princeton, 1979), p.378.

In the Lords, the movement away from direct intervention, and towards letting unofficial expressions of public opinion work on Germany, was also being pursued. Humanitarian concern was expressed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, in the Upper House, on 30 March, to be followed by a short speech from the most prominent Jewish member of the Lords, Reading, that he in no way advocated interference in German affairs.¹ The Secretary of State for War, Viscount Hailsham, speaking for the Government, made a speech which would be echoed, almost exactly, in the Lower House a fortnight later, saying that he could think of no more effective way of expressing the views held very largely by the people of Britain than the speeches which had been made in the Lords. However, there was rather more sympathy for the German plight as a result of the Treaty of Versailles, notably from the Earl of Halsbury, and also less explicit statements that the Jewish question should affect the disarmament negotiations. Viscount Cecil of Chelwood introduced the subject to the debate, and, whilst deploring the hypocrisy of the German attitude to minorities, he also stated that the Disarmament Conference should still be pursued, not least because of Germany's legitimate claim to have those pledges, made to her at the Paris conference, carried out.²

Outside parliament, links were also being made between Nazi internal policy and the problems of conducting disarmament diplomacy with the new German Government. In the May and June edition of *International Affairs*, a paper given by the journalist John Wheeler-Bennett and the subsequent discussion were published. Wheeler-Bennett reported that the atmosphere in Berlin contained 'all the terrors of espionage and

¹ Hansard, 5th Series, 1932-33, 87, 225-230, 30 March 1933.

² Hansard, 5th Series, 1932-33, 87, 192-6, 30 March 1933. Cecil was supported in this view by Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede.

informants' and gave details of beatings of both Jews and non-Jews. Wheeler-Bennett also thought that, were it not for the anxieties felt about the policy and intentions of the Nazi régime, most people would think a settlement on the basis he had suggested (League of Nations reform, colonies and economic dominance in eastern Europe for Germany) should be made if it were possible.

There was some dissent from this view in the discussion that followed. The journalist, Henry Wickham Steed, said that he agreed that Britain should not try to bluff Germany but that he did not agree with any of Wheeler-Bennett's other suggestions. Lord Allen of Hurtwood thought that German grievances should be comprehensively investigated at Geneva instead of issues being tackled singly, as Britain had been doing. Lord Arnold's contribution is, perhaps, the most interesting of the discussion, since it stands well outside all the other views so far examined.¹ Arnold criticized the British press for its attacks on Germany but also the German reaction to moderate speeches by British statesmen. He considered it necessary to bring about a better understanding with Germany, to see her point of view and to meet her just grievances. He also said, explicitly, that although violence and the persecution of the Jews were disliked by all, they were lesser matters when compared with the great issue of peace and war.²

Gilbert Murray took the opposite view and wrote, on 7 April, in response to a letter from the Deutsche Liga für Völkerbund³, that it was the underlying spirit of the German revolution which was losing Germany sympathy in Britain. Murray described the deprivation of Jewish civic rights and the suppression of political opposition as a

¹ Lord Arnold had been an M.P. until 1921, was a stockbroker by profession and worked for Free Trade and Temperance causes.

² J. Wheeler-Bennett, *JA*, 'The New Regime in Germany', vol.12 no.3 (May-June 1933), p.313-326.

³ The equivalent of the German League of Nations Union.

contradiction of the new Government's assurance of pacific intentions towards minorities, quite apart from the acts of physical violence which had taken place. He concluded by invoking the power of public opinion in international affairs,

*'we should be failing in our duty to you if we did not tell you [...] the thoughts which are now passing through the minds of the vast majority of the people of this country, including those sections of opinion which only in last October were so strongly in favour of the fulfilment of the promises made to Germany at the Peace Conference concerning equality of status in disarmament, that they were able to modify the Government's official policy in that sense.'*¹

Sir John Simon was, however, trying to make public reactions to the persecution of the Jews a diplomatic bargaining tool to make Germany more pliable at Geneva and, presumably, to try to lessen the extent of the violence. On 7 April, Simon reported to Rumbold that he had again warned Germany to take what she could get at the Disarmament Conference and not to prove too intractable since the weight of public opinion was still against her based on recent events in the interior of Germany.² Three days later, Simon wrote to the British ambassador to Rome, Sir Ronald Graham, that he had hinted to Signor Grandi, the Italian ambassador to London, that Göring's visit to Rome might be a good opportunity to give him some advice about German domestic policy,

*'I dropped the hint that the Italian Government might be able to use the opportunity to give him some good advice and restrain the excesses of German action in regard to the Jews and others. The Ambassador said that he well understood how British public opinion was stirred on this subject and not merely Anglo-Jewish opinion, and promised to convey to Signor Mussolini our hopes that he might be able to use his influence directly with Herr Goring on the side of moderation.'*³

In addition to the protests against persecution of the Jews in political circles, manifestations of public opinion included regional pressure groups, angry at the actions

¹ Bodleian MSS.Murray 217, fol.79: 7 April 1933.

² DBFP 2nd vol.V no.69: 7 April 1933. See also DGFP Series C, vol.I no.223, 11 May 1933 for Rumbold using similar language in an interview with Hitler.

³ DBFP 2nd vol.V no.72: 10 April 1933.

of the German Government and exhorting their own to do something. Protests were received in the Foreign Office from a significant body of non-Jewish organizations, ranging from the parochial to the nationally established. Generally, protests encompassed the treatment not only of the Jews but also of all those marginalized by the Nazis. Amongst the protests were those received from the Birmingham and Leeds Borough Labour parties in early March, from the Montague Burton Branch of the League of Nations Union on 14 March, and from the Pontypridd and District League of Christian Churches on 1 May¹. Most received a polite, if short, reply, thanking them for their concern but regretting that the Foreign Office could not undertake to act on behalf of individual organizations. There is no evidence that Simon saw these protests, but it is possible that the increasing size of the post-bag on the subject was mentioned to him.

Other, larger, institutions preferred to make individual representations directly to the German Embassy, after consultation with the Foreign Office. The vice-chancellor of Cambridge University adopted this tactic, after being approached by the Board of Deputies of British Jews to endorse a protest rally to be held at the Mansion House in London. The vice-chancellor had alerted the Foreign Office to the fact that some dons, notably G.M. Trevelyan, the Regius Professor of Modern History and Lord Rutherford, Cavendish Professor of Experimental Physics, wanted to sign a petition and send it to The Times. The vice-chancellors of Oxford and London had also been approached, and a decision appears to have been taken that the originators of the petition plan would obtain influential signatures and that the vice-chancellor and Lord Rutherford should then go to the German Embassy and hand it to the Ambassador, asking him to transmit it to his

¹ PRO FO 371/16718 C 2338/319/18: 13 March 1933; C 2362/319/18: 14 March 1933; FO 371/16723 C 4034/319/18: 1 May 1933.

Government as an expression of British university opinion.¹ The Foreign Office decided to do nothing about this petition and it was duly presented on 10 May 1933.

Although the Foreign Office could not, formally, endorse protests, they did not discourage them. Having its hands tied by international protocol, the Foreign Office, itself, could not complain about German domestic policy, but public demonstrations could be used as signals to the new Reich. In the case of the Cambridge representation, some worries were expressed in the Foreign Office as to whether Germany would take a protest from such an important national institution as having the Government's sanction. Simon acknowledged the danger but thought that such an attitude of strict neutrality could only lend weight to the Government's line, that they were acting merely because of the unfettered impetus of public opinion,

*'I am wholly in favour of these private representations. But I agree with Mr. Wigram's warning, we should do nothing to give the false impression that this Govt. either can or would control public opinion. This is the more important since we are not [sic] discouraging the Guildhall meeting.'*²

The Guildhall meeting, itself, was being organized by the Board of Deputies of British Jews, who kept the Foreign Office abreast of all protest meetings going on around the country, presumably in the hope of eventually obtaining Whitehall's endorsement for one of them.³ The Foreign Office remained aloof from all such pressure, however, in relation to the meetings at Cardiff, Leeds and Liverpool which took place in April and May. At the beginning of May, the Foreign Office made its stance clear to Lord Reading, when he tried to suggest that there was some ambiguity about the position of the Foreign

¹ PRO FO 371/16722 C 3937/319/18: FO minute by Mr. Gaselee [undated]. See also Bodleian MSS.Murray 64, fol.215: letter from the vice-chancellor of Oxford, 25 April 1933.

² PRO FO 371/16722 C 3937/319/18: Foreign Office minute by Mr. Gaselee, Simon minute, [undated] but the petition is marked on the document as being submitted to the German embassy on 10 May 1933.

³ PRO FO 371/16721 C 3451/319/18: Board of Deputies of British Jews to the Foreign Office, 18 April 1933.

Office, in connection with the forthcoming Mansion House rally, in that he had heard it was opposed to such a meeting. After consultation with the deputy under-secretary, Sir Victor Wellesley, it was decided to tell Lord Reading that, in the first place, the Foreign Office had not taken any objection at all, that the Government had no desire or right to influence public opinion on this matter and that Lord Reading was perfectly at liberty to quote the Foreign Office as holding this view.¹

The Foreign Office had based its original response, when approached about the Mansion House meeting, on the precedent of the meetings held in 1882 and 1890 'to express public opinion' regarding the persecution of the Jews in Russia. These meetings had been considered useful, at the time, because it was not a situation in which diplomatic action was possible as it would have antagonized the Russians. On the basis of this parallel, Simon decided that a straight 'thank you' letter should be sent to the Board of Deputies of British Jews together with a statement that the Foreign Office recognized similar meetings had already taken place in the provinces and that it had no desire to stand in the way of public opinion.²

What effect did British diplomats think these protests would have on their German counterparts? The apparent attention paid by the British to public opinion was taken seriously by the Nazi administration, not least, perhaps, because of their own appreciation of the power of the press and of the need to educate opinion, through propaganda, at home. The German Conference of Ministers had also been informed, by von Neurath, that a good relationship with Britain was of considerable importance

¹ PRO FO 371/16721 C 4106/319/18: Foreign Office Minute by Mr. Seymour, 3 May 1933 (Seymour was Sir John Simon's private secretary).

² PRO FO 371/16722 C 3660/319/18: Board of Deputies of British Jews to the Foreign Office, 22 April 1933.

because Britain would never ally with Italy against France, and any understanding between France and Germany, in the foreseeable future, was as good as impossible.¹ In early May, a Nazi supporter, Dr. Rosenberg, ostensibly acting in an unofficial capacity, visited Britain to enlighten British public opinion about the revolution under way in Germany.² Hitler told Rumbold, on 11 May, that he had gone to form a personal picture of sentiment in England and, if possible, to bring about a greater understanding of the German position.³ The following day at the Conference of Ministers, von Neurath revealed the extent of German anxiety about foreign opinion, saying that the position was deteriorating daily and that attempts were being made to blame Germany for the failure of the Disarmament Conference.⁴

On 15 May, however, von Hoesch reported that Rosenberg's visit had not been a success and had caused England's hostility towards the new Germany to break out in full force. He reported the wide spectrum of people that Rosenberg had seen and offered a summary of various quarters of public opinion. He considered that the Labour party and the entire working class, formerly Germany's warmest allies, now viewed her with 'implacable enmity'. This, he thought, was also the case with the Liberals and the League of Nations Union. The Conservative left, which he described as closely connected with Jewish elements and as represented by the Daily Telegraph, were opposed, both to the treatment of the Jews and to a new German military spirit, which could result in war. Rosenberg had found some sympathy with Lord Hailsham, however. In light of these

¹ DGFP Series C, vol.I no.142: Extract from the Minutes of the Conference of Ministers, 7 April 1933.

² DBFP 2nd vol.V no.118: 8 May 1933. See also E.W. Bennett, (Princeton, 1979), p.381.

³ DGFP Series C, vol.I no.223: 11 May 1933.

⁴ DGFP Series C, vol.I no.226: Extract from the Minutes of the Conference of Ministers, 12 May 1933.

opinions, von Hoesch advocated moving with extreme caution with regard to Britain and far-sighted, careful and considerate wooing of 'Anglo-Saxon' opinion.¹

Rosenberg's visit had not been regarded as a success by the British either. Simon played the public opinion card with Rosenberg when he saw him, saying that it was a great mistake to believe that any particular section of society, or only those which had been inspired by the Jews, objected to the treatment meted out to them in Germany. Taking Vansittart's advice on how to handle him, Simon adopted a strongly liberal line, insisting that people in Great Britain did not care to see the press suppressed, persons deprived of their living on account of their race, and minorities, including elected representatives of the people, shut up in concentration camps because of their political opinion. Several questions were also asked in the House of Commons about the Rosenberg visit, the main thrust of which was a desire to have him declare that he would not engage in any propaganda activities. Simon defended his right to see Rosenberg and reported, honestly, that he had used the opportunity to convey to him the prevailing sentiment in Britain about the internal policy of Germany.²

Simon also told Rosenberg what by now must have become familiar to German ears, that, in the previous two months, Germany had lost the sympathy which she had gained in ten years, and especially in those quarters which had hitherto been most sympathetic to her.³ The Labour M.P., Hugh Dalton, used almost exactly the same phraseology to Dieckhoff, of the German Foreign Office, on a visit to Berlin in April 1933.⁴ Bennett suggests that the wave of anti-Nazi demonstrations, which coincided with

¹ DGFP Series C, vol.I no. 237: 15 May 1933.

² Hansard, 5th, 1932-33, 277, 1521-2. See also, 1680-1 and 1703.

³ DBFP 2nd vol.V no.118: 8 May 1933.

⁴ H. Dalton, *The Fateful Years. Memoirs 1931-1945* (1957), p.39.

Rosenberg's visit, may actually have produced a certain amount of reaction in his favour.¹ Generally speaking, however, Rosenberg's visit was not regarded as a success by either side, which result produced a certain amount of Schadenfreude amongst the British. The King's private secretary, Sir Clive Wigram, wrote to Sir Horace Rumbold that Rosenberg's gesture of laying a wreath with a swastika flag on the Cenotaph had not been appreciated.² Harold Nicolson recorded in his diary that the wreath had subsequently been seized and thrown into the Thames. There had also been crowds demonstrating outside Claridges where Rosenberg was staying, begging him to go home.³ Rumbold wrote to Wigram that he was very pleased the visit had not been a success.⁴

Perceptions of public opinion about Nazi domestic policy were used as a diplomatic ploy in the early months of 1933, but were turned back, in retaliation, against the British by the German Foreign Office. It was convincing, for both sides, that public opinion should be roused on a humanitarian issue, conforming to the stereotypes of public opinion examined in chapter one. Press, parliamentary, political and local pressure group opinion all contributed to the sense in the Foreign Office that some representation to the German Government had to be allowed on the subject of Jewish persecution, even against the advice of Jewish leaders and the British ambassador in Berlin. Of these groups, cross-party parliamentary opinion, and particularly the debate on 13 April, seems to have been the most significant in persuading Sir John Simon to remonstrate with Germany unofficially. Within the constraints which the unwritten laws about interference in the affairs of sovereign states imposed, Sir John Simon expressed public opinion on

¹ E.W. Bennett, (Princeton, 1979), p.381.

² Bodleian MSS.Rumbold 41, fols. 211-12: letter from Sir Clive Wigram, 12 May 1933.

³ Balliol HN, diary for 1933, fol.116-117, 11-12 May 1933.

⁴ Bodleian MSS.Rumbold 41, fols. 216-7: letter to Sir Clive Wigram, 17 May 1933.

the subject to the German ambassador both verbally, in private conversations, and by allowing public meetings and demonstrations to take place.

Such protests reached the highest level of the German Government and were taken seriously. Early evidence that the German Government could be influenced by foreign criticism was tempered by the idea, promoted by the British ambassador in Berlin, that too much criticism might make things worse for the victims again. This attitude was exploited by the blackmail tactics which the German Government employed, over the boycott of Jewish shops, in April. Despite these fears, unofficial verbal warnings that the public indignation caused might have a deleterious effect on international relations, and specifically on the outcome of the Disarmament Conference, continued to be made at the highest diplomatic level, sanctioned by both the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister. This rhetoric was, therefore, used in the full knowledge that it might jeopardize Anglo-German relations and was exploited as such as a bargaining ploy.

This chapter suggests several methodological points. Firstly, the coincidence of Foreign Office and press reports on the Jewish issue demonstrates that perceptions of public opinion started to be voiced as soon as an issue became newsworthy. The interdependence of press correspondents and embassies abroad does not make this coincidence surprising but should alert us to the fact that the idea that the public were concerned with an issue could be created in a politician's mind by the mere fact of it appearing in the quality press. Secondly, parliamentarians and pressure group leaders were happy to make statements which claimed to know what was going through the minds of the mass of the population. As we saw in chapter one, this was not an uncommon phenomenon in abstract writing about public opinion, but, in this chapter, we

see it happening on actual issues of policy. The fact that it appears in private correspondence and in Cabinet discussion, as well as in parliament, suggests that the phrase may have been more than an empty rhetorical ploy. Here, the circularity of one source for public opinion commenting on other sections of public opinion can be clearly seen. In chapter three we examine further how the perception that there was a broad public outcry against German domestic policy affected international diplomacy at the Disarmament Conference.

Chapter Three.

Perceptions of public opinion in international diplomacy: browbeating Germany during the Disarmament Conference, March to October 1933.

In a supplementary report on the Rosenberg visit, von Hoesch thought it interesting that English opposition to Germany's domestic politics and warlike spirit was, at some points, in conflict with England's desire to avoid any bad feeling which might run the risk of war. England would, therefore, he construed, pursue a policy of understanding with Germany as long as she thought Germany would be receptive to it.¹ In chapter two, we saw that the British Government felt that the rhetoric of public opinion was one way in which they could voice the evident disapproval of the direction of German domestic policy. One consequence of this rhetoric, however, was to constrain how far Britain could be seen to concede to Germany in negotiations at the Disarmament Conference. The constraint imposed by this rhetoric sat uneasily with the desire of the British Government, noted by von Hoesch, to conclude some form of limitation treaty, as quickly as possible, to avoid Germany deciding to rearm, unchecked, outside any international framework.

In this chapter, we explicate how the tensions between these two motivations affected diplomacy at Geneva. Both motivations were justified by the invocation of public opinion. In early 1933, the perception that public opinion was critical of Germany and was less willing to be conciliatory was used as a diplomatic device, but it also had some impact upon the extent of concessions to Germany at Geneva. Later that year, potentially contradictory ideas about public opinion on the disarmament issue emerged,

¹ DGFP Series C vol.I no.242, 16 May 1933.

culminating, in September, with the sense amongst the Cabinet that the public was against any degree of German rearmament, even to achieve equality of status for Germany. Simultaneously, they thought that the public was against any further international obligations which formalized ways in which Germany might be stopped if she did rearm. However, it was also thought that the public was desperate for any sort of disarmament convention to avoid another armaments race. The contradictions between these perceptions constrained the British negotiators. Their final invocation of public opinion in diplomacy, in October 1933, can be argued to follow manifestations of public opinion very closely and to have found a formula which reconciled this contradiction between no rearmament and the need to sign a convention.

Historians have described prevalent atmosphere at the Geneva Disarmament Conference in broad terms and have assessed the impact of public opinion, rather than perceptions of public opinion, on its course. E.W. Bennett and Christopher Kimmich have both suggested that the atmosphere at Geneva was affected by the excesses of German domestic policy in 1933.¹ Kimmich has even suggested that it was Nazi domestic policy which hardened the attitudes of the other delegations against the German counter-proposals in April.² Although he said that the atmosphere was affected by the British reaction to Nazi domestic excesses, Bennett did not include the British perception, that public opinion was against the increase of armaments, as one of the influences which constrained British politicians from admitting any German rearmament as part of a convention in October.³ Yet he also argued that, given the Cabinet's domination of

¹ E.W. Bennett, (Princeton, 1979), p.377, C.M. Kimmich, *Germany and the League of Nations* (Chicago, 1976), p.181 n. 34 and 36.

² C. Kimmich, (Chicago, 1976), p.178.

³ E.W. Bennett, (Princeton, 1979), p.380.

policy-making, their sensitivity to public opinion and their access to leaders of opinion, such as Lord Cecil of Chelwood and Geoffrey Dawson, there would scarcely be a serious divergence between public opinion and actual policy. In Bennett's view, Ministers and officials shared the opinions of the educated public, suggesting, perhaps, that this was the group which the Cabinet considered to be 'public opinion.'¹ However, later in the narrative, he suggested that the Cabinet's adherence to disarmament was to appease the liberal, reformist public at large.² In this chapter, we continue the process begun in chapter two, of extending the Bennett argument to show exactly which perceptions of public opinion were used in diplomacy at Geneva, but we also question the assumption that there would be no divergence of opinion between policy makers and opinion leaders and start to break down his ideas about the Cabinet's sensitivity to public opinion in all its manifestations.

The Disarmament Conference has not received very detailed attention in the historiography of actual public opinion for this year. Martin Ceadel concentrated on interpreting the King and Country Debate in his survey of peace groups, although he did suggest that 'war-resistance', as opposed to other forms of peace theory, became dominant because of the parallels which were made between the international tensions of the year and those of 1914. There is, however, some historiographical evidence for those contradictions in perceptions of public opinion on the conference which we have outlined above. Donald Birn argued that the advent of Hitler only served to reinforce the League of Nations Union's argument that Germany should be granted equality. Birn pointed out

¹ *ibid.*, p.102.

² *ibid.*, p.230. See also p.240, 'If British leaders occasionally saw that the Germans intended to rearm, they were also impressed by the sympathy of the British public for the German case, they were influenced by the demand in elite circles and in the Foreign Office itself for a British disarmament plan.'

that the L.N.U. did demand, in June 1933, that there should be a continuation of the prohibition of the weapons denied to Germany in order to deprive her of any excuse for rearmament. He draws out the contradiction between this and the L.N.U.'s statement after Germany's withdrawal from the Conference which demanded that the British Government secure an immediate first measure of disarmament on the part of the Powers that had made pledges to Germany.¹ However, his account juxtaposed these L.N.U. resolutions with the course of the conference and did not show how, or if, they affected the Government.

We examine in this chapter the various types of opinion which the Cabinet might have been aware of and have referred to. Cabinet Ministers used the phrase in several ways: as a rhetorical ploy in diplomacy, as a justification to a British envoy for a policy decision, as a justification within the Cabinet itself for policy, and to denote parliamentary opinion. We examine the circumstantial evidence for pressure group opinion affecting the Cabinet. To do this, we look, in detail, at prominent parliamentary speakers, Cabinet social life and the pages of *The Times*, to show how any section of opinion might have suggested itself more strongly to the Cabinet at any one time. After these methodological comments, we follow the course of the disarmament negotiations through comments made about public opinion. This begins with the British attempt to save the conference in March, progresses through the stalemate of negotiations on the British draft convention in May, to the British intransigence on the retention of police bombing in June and July, and rejoins the conference at its opening sessions in September 1933.

¹ D.S. Bim, (Oxford, 1981), p.114-115.

We start with some methodological thoughts which can be illustrated by events in 1933. The newsworthiness of foreign policy issues and the assumption of public opinion on a subject because of press coverage of it has already been mentioned as one of the circular processes of opinion formation. Public opinion might be divined from newspapers in several ways. Press coverage might have helped the Cabinet to identify members of parliament and those prominent in pressure group politics with certain points of views through 'Letters to the Editor'. Letters from unknown members of the public might have given rise to theories about public opinion. The tendency of leader writers to talk about the 'general feeling of the country' and 'public opinion' might have persuaded Ministers that these phrases really did reflect the feeling in the country. For example, The Times' leader, on 30 May 1933, suggested that police bombing would have to be sacrificed by Britain for the wider aim of securing a disarmament convention because 'British public opinion will not be satisfied that the work of the Disarmament Conference should be held up on account of the British claim to use the air-bomb, however well justified have been the method and the purpose of its employment hitherto.'¹ Some observers thought that The Times' leaders could have more effect on Germany than even the most impassioned parliamentary speeches.²

It is also possible that the weight of business on an issue at any one time prompted the belief that public opinion was currently concerned with it. Newspapers, particularly those like The Times, which carried details of parliamentary business, would have reflected the immediacy of issues. For example, a preliminary, quantitative survey of The

¹ The Times, 17c, 30 May 1933.

² Churchill Kennedy 1/14: entry for 4 May 1933. Watford Selby had told Kennedy that he thought The Times' leader of 5 May had had more effect than Austen Chamberlain's speech on 13 April.

Times shows the dominance of disarmament as the central issue in the later months of 1933 and the high water mark of the Jewish issue in April to June. Consequently, it is possible that one way in which opinion was formed was that newspaper men theorized about public opinion because of the importance of an issue in parliament or at a conference and that those reading the newspaper then believed what had been said about it. The peaks and troughs of the figures shown in table one correspond, roughly, with the level of Government use of the phrase 'public opinion' in diplomacy and decision-making. Austen Chamberlain, himself, remarked on the unity of British newspaper opinion against Germany on 14 May.¹

Table 1: Number of column entries on disarmament and Jews in Germany in The Times, 1933²

No. of individual column entries for this subject	Disarmament	Jews in Germany
Jan-March	255	40
April-June	230	133
July-Sept	126	71
Oct-Dec	583	41

The press also reported the activities of pressure groups, such as the League of Nations Union and the National Peace Council. Reports of the resolutions passed at the League of Nations Union's Executive were regular, if rather small and hidden in the depths of the home news pages. It would be an unconvincingly circumstantial use of

¹ R.C. Self, (1995), p.439.

² These figures were taken from The Times indexes for 1933 by hand and were checked at <http://history.chadwyck.co.uk> Official Index to The Times, 1906-1980. They only include entries catalogued under 'Armaments, limitation' and 'Jews, Germany'. These means that categories such as 'concentration camps,' 'aliens,' 'political prisoners,' and 'Germany, foreign policy' are excluded, but the numbers for these other categories are much smaller than those given here. These figures are for individual entries; some may have been indexed in sub-divisions of these categories more than once, but for the purposes of comparing the column space over time of one subject, this should not prejudice the results as the same basic sub-divisions were used in the indexes for each month. More were added, e.g. names of M.P.s as the length of Commons' debates or the complexity of the issue demanded.

evidence to suggest that Cabinet Ministers were aware of these resolutions just because they appeared in *The Times*. However, it is plausible that social contacts with the leaders of such groups, in addition to the published reports of resolutions, might have convinced the Cabinet that these resolutions were manifestations of public opinion. The example of the League of Nations Union leaders, Austen Chamberlain and Lord Robert Cecil, demonstrates neatly the plural functions of the Cabinet's closest social circle in public opinion terms: they were mouthpieces for pressure groups, sources of public opinion as individuals in their own right and people willing to state what they thought that the bulk of the population were thinking.

Turning to parliamentary opinion, the Cabinet generally took account of reports in the press but was not always minded to bow to the information it gleaned from them. The Cabinet minutes record that, on 13 June, Ministers inferred, from the tone of the press, that the main issue in the Commons' debate on 13 June would be Britain's desire to retain police bombing rights on the frontiers of the empire.¹ To fend off criticisms that this issue was holding up the conclusion of a disarmament convention, the Cabinet decided to tackle the subject by emphasizing that police bombing was a side issue compared with the central problem of the irreconcilable differences between France and Germany. There is absolutely no indication that this perception that parliamentary opinion would be hostile made the Cabinet waver at all over its decision to retain the police bombing clause. It was decided, instead, to emphasize Britain's role in saving the conference.² When it happened, the debate itself was very wide ranging, touching upon the relation of

¹ See the example from *The Times*, 17c, 30 May, cited above for a leader which said that public opinion would want police bombing to be sacrificed to the cause of the disarmament convention.

² PRO CAB 23/76 42 (33), 27 June 1933.

the World Economic Conference to international relations, the Sino-Japanese dispute, the American debt and conditions inside Germany, as well as on the bombing issue.¹

Parliamentary opinion on these subjects, however, meant a relatively small group of M.P.s. The main speakers in the debate on 13 June were drawn very much from the caucus of regular contributors to foreign policy debates. This pattern, of a small, vociferous group dominating parliamentary discussion of disarmament and the Jewish question, was repeated throughout the year both in debates and in parliamentary questions. In debates, Vyvyan Adams, Austen Chamberlain, Leo Amery, John McGovern, Josiah Wedgwood, Geoffrey Mander, Winston Churchill and John Moore-Brabazon were the most frequent speakers in addition to the Government and opposition front bench teams.² In terms of parliamentary questions, Geoffrey Mander dominated the arena on both issues, supported, on the Jewish question, by Barnett Janner. Austen Chamberlain did not consider Mander, however, to be a popular speaker, judging that he was more concerned with self-publicity.³

Table two shows how some of this group of foreign policy speakers, generally the older generation, were social companions of the Cabinet and its immediate social circles. We suggest here, therefore, that the phrase, 'parliamentary opinion' may be something of a misnomer when used to describe the Cabinet's potential perceptions of public opinion. If public opinion did, specifically, mean parliamentary opinion on some occasions, it also meant the opinion of close friends and party colleagues. If those colleagues were going to

¹ Hansard, 5th Series, 1932-33, 279, 29-144, 13 June 1933.

² Adams (National Unionist) M.P. for West Leeds since 1931, Austen Chamberlain, (Unionist) M.P. for Birmingham West since 1914, Amery (Unionist) M.P. for Sparkbrook division of Birmingham since 1918, McGovern (Labour) M.P. for Shettleston division of Glasgow since 1930, Wedgwood (Labour) M.P. for Newcastle under Lyme since 1906, Mander, (Labour) M.P. for East Wolverhampton since 1929, Churchill (Conservative) M.P. for Epping since 1924, Moore-Brabazon (Unionist) M.P. for Wallasey since 1931.

³ R.C. Self, (1995), p.440.

be troublesome, they were dealt with privately. For example, in late May 1933, Sir John Simon had sounded out Austen Chamberlain's position on the Four Power Pact, suspecting him of being opposed to it and eventually secured his grudging consent for it.¹ If those colleagues were designated 'Opposition' regularly, either because they were out of the government, or because they belonged to the Labour party, we can posit a Cabinet tendency to acknowledge but not to follow that opinion, since it was likely to oppose the government on party political grounds anyway.²

Cabinets did, by and large, distinguish 'opposition' from 'public opinion.' For example, on the issue of police bombing, Ramsay MacDonald named Austen Chamberlain, specifically, as the source of parliamentary criticism of police bombing in the debate on 5 July, and distinguished this from the 'large number of letters enclosing resolutions and so forth, on the question of police bombing' that he was receiving.³ Cabinet members may also have thought of M.P.s, claiming to represent their constituencies' opinion, as 'public opinion', but the long political reputations of most of those involved, such as Austen Chamberlain, placed them firmly within personal political and party political agendas. It may well have been hard, for example, to have seen Winston Churchill more as the member for Epping than as a disgruntled former Minister seeking office again. As an example of these distinctions, on 15 March 1933, it was suggested in Cabinet that the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, who were in Geneva, should be given some indications of the state of opinion in the House, which a recent debate had made plain. Some of this opinion had been critical but it was pointed out that

¹ PRO CAB 23/76 37 (33), 26 May 1933.

² See p.117.

³ PRO CAB 23/76 45 (33), 12 July 1933.

the more important criticisms were perhaps not wholly disinterested and had been prompted to some extent by political motives.¹

Table two shows the meetings, lunches and dinners which can be traced from diary evidence for the month of June 1933 and hence the closeness of contacts between the Cabinet and some sections of parliamentary opinion. Specifically, it demonstrates the contacts between the Cabinet, the Permanent Under Secretary of the Foreign Office, the editor of *The Times* and prominent foreign policy speakers. Such contacts between sometime critics, as well as supporters, of the Government's policy suggest that the terms 'supporter' and 'critic' may be misleadingly binary.²

Table 2: Social Events, 25 May-1 July 1933³

Date and Time	Place	People
MAY		
25 DINNER	SAVOY HOTEL	WINSTON CHURCHILL, ABE BAILEY, LORD DERBY, LORD CAMROSE ⁴
29 lunch		<i>Neville Chamberlain and Leo Amery</i> ⁵
JUNE		
2 Lunch	Vansittart's house	Vansittart, Geoffrey Dawson, the Ralph Glynn ⁶
3 Lunch	Cliveden	Geoffrey Dawson and Halifax on way to Eton, Dick Cavendishes
6 Lunch	Beefsteak Club	Malcolm Robertson, Harold Macmillan, Geoffrey Dawson
7 Dinner	Beefsteak Club	Arthur Salter, H. Ainley, Percy Lee, Geoffrey Dawson
8	11 Downing St	Geoffrey Dawson saw Stanley Baldwin
9 lunch 6.30		Hubert Walters, Sam Hoare, Geoffrey Dawson Billy Gore and Geoffrey Dawson
10	Cliveden	Nancy and Waldorf Astor, Geoffrey Dawson, Arthur Salter
13 lunch		German Ambassador, Mirza, Lady Titchfield, Nancy Astor, Lady Birdie Geoffrey Dawson
dinner	At Philip Sassoon's	Ramsay MacDonald, Philip Sassoon ⁷
14 lunch		Arthur Salter and Ramsay MacDonald

¹ PRO CAB 23/75 18 (33), 15 March 1933.

² See M. Cowling, (Cambridge, 1975), p.15-16 for the identification of foreign policy critics for 1934 and N.J. Crowson, (1975), Appendix I for lists of critics and fellow travellers for the later 1930s.

³ This is not a complete list of all those who attended these events. Those pertinent to the question or prominent in political life have been included and everyone else excluded. The diaries used do not give full lists of those who attended either, so that these names may be a very small sample of those present.

⁴ Entry in capital letters taken from M. Gilbert, (1976), plate 20.

⁵ Entries in italics are taken from BUL NC 2/29 (Pocket Diaries).

⁶ Entries in plain text are taken from Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/37, diary for 1933.

⁷ Entries in bold text are taken from PRO 30/69/1757/2 Ramsay MacDonald's engagement diaries.

14 dinner	Grillion's	George Lloyd, Sumner, Lord Salisbury, Lord Devonshire, Lord Cromer, Vansittart, Austen Chamberlain, Arthur Salter, Geoffrey Dawson
17 breakfast lunch	All Souls College Denham (<i>Vansittart's country house</i>)	Lionel Curtis and Geoffrey Dawson <i>Neville Chamberlain and Vansittart</i>
19		Geoffrey Dawson saw Stanley Baldwin
20 lunch dinner party	Geoffrey Dawson's house	Archbishop of Canterbury and Geoffrey Dawson Godfrey Thomas, Kate Grenfell, the John Fosters Londonderry House reception for King Faisal including, Geoffrey Dawson, Neville Chamberlain and Ramsay MacDonald
dinner	Leo Amery's House	Leo Amery and John Simon ¹
21 6.30	No.10 Downing Street	Geoffrey Dawson and Ramsay MacDonald
23 lunch dinner		Titchfields, Lord Irwin, Geoffrey Dawson Abe Bailey, Leo Amery, <i>Neville Chamberlain</i> , Walter Elliot, Lord Salisbury et al.
27 lunch		Brabournes, Chetwodes, Rex Bensons. Geoffrey Dawson
July		
1	<i>Cliveden</i>	<i>Neville Chamberlain, Ramsay MacDonald</i>

We have, therefore, some rather circular models about the way that the semantics of the phrase 'public opinion' may have been influenced by press and parliamentary contacts. In the later months of 1933, the phrase, 'public opinion,' seems to acquire an additional meaning. From September to December, it appears to denote a much more nebulous concept of 'mass' opinion than the specific references to parliamentary opinion of April to July. In September and October, in particular, in the absence of a parliamentary session, Ministers seem to impute the perceptions of opinion they were using earlier in the year to the mass of public opinion, with renewed emphasis on the opposition to allowing Germany any rearmament at all. By the end of the year, the problems of informing the man in the street as to why the conference was in ruins became dominant.

To illustrate these rather tortuous processes, we begin with the Cabinet's perception of public opinion on internal conditions in Germany in relation to the

¹ Shaded entries are taken from Amery, p. 297.

Disarmament Conference in the first months of 1933. On 2 March, Simon and Eden reported the imminent collapse of the Conference to Ramsay MacDonald at a meeting at The Athenaeum.¹ In the Ministerial committee which followed on Sunday 5 March, MacDonald made it plain that he thought public opinion was so utterly determined to keep Britain out of war that it would allow a little leeway over the type of pact concluded, if it could be shown that such a pact would be of any use.² The Cabinet were also troubled by the idea that Britain would take the blame if the conference failed. In Cabinet, on 8 March, Ministers were presented with a paper entitled, 'The Crisis in Europe,' which had been prepared by Sir John Simon and Sir Robert Vansittart at the beginning of February.³ In this paper Simon pointed out the problems of the Conference failing at this point for Britain's future attempts to mediate with Germany,

*'we must, in addition, realise that if there is a breakdown at Geneva part of the blame will, however undeservedly, be put on us. A list will be made of the instances in which we have resisted proposals put forward by others, the acceptance of which, it will be suggested, would have made all the difference. The role of Great Britain at Geneva is to be the whipping boy and the comment is quite unfair. But it will be made, in Europe, in America, and among a section of our own people. It would be something gained if we could, even in the dying agonies of the conference, take a position which would silence the captive critics.'*⁴

At the Cabinet meeting at which this paper was discussed, MacDonald had also said that he thought the German refusal to co-operate would react on them if the situation deteriorated further. Just before this meeting, MacDonald had had lunch at The Athenaeum with The Times' leader writer, Leo Kennedy. Kennedy thought that MacDonald had seemed anti-French and pro-German all through the meeting and even went so far as to describe him as having consistently spoken like a Conservative.⁵ Two

¹ PRO 30/69/1753 fol.436: 2 March 1933. See also D. Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald* (1977), p.752-4.

² PRO CAB 27/504 D.C (M) 14 (32), 5 March 1933.

³ E.W. Bennett, (Princeton, 1979), p.364.

⁴ CAB 24/239 52(33), The Crisis in Europe by Sir J. Simon, 2 February 1933.

⁵ Churchill Kennedy 1/14: entry for 8 March 1933.

days later, in Paris, MacDonald made clear what Britain perceived to be the best way to 'take a position to silence the captive critics,' which rather contradicted Kennedy's appraisal of his view and which was certainly not sympathetic to Germany. He emphasized the importance for public opinion that it should be proven by public facts that, if Germany had grievances, it was her own fault that she did not bring them to Geneva to discuss them. As Germany had behaved so badly, he stated that he wished to place the onus for failure on her and that was why he wished to be at Geneva himself and why he attached importance to the presence there of other Prime Ministers.¹

After the consultations in France, it was agreed by the Cabinet that Simon and MacDonald should make a mercy dash to Geneva, armed with a new draft convention, which they could produce if they thought it stood a chance of success. Apart from showing again the pervasiveness of the rhetoric of public opinion in diplomatic discourse, MacDonald's conversations at Geneva illustrate that Britain was far from being a willing supporter of the new German Government. Consequently, any refusal to interfere in German policy regarding the Jews, at this point, can scarcely be said to stem from a fear of jeopardizing Anglo-German relations. On the contrary, the British were anxious to show Germany how easily those relations could be threatened and were quite willing to invoke the weight of public opinion to reinforce their points about the internal policy of Germany and her diplomatic relations, where more formal international machinery was inappropriate.²

At Geneva, MacDonald made his view clear to the German delegate, Nadolny,

¹ DBFP 2nd vol.IV no.290: 10 March 1933.

² See Hansard, 5th Series, 1932-33, 276, 2808-9, 13 April 1933 for Simon's defence of non-intervention in the internal affairs of another country on behalf of a section of that country's nationals.

pointing out the change in atmosphere during the last weeks. He argued that Nadolny, himself, would recognize that recent events in Germany had caused some uneasiness in certain other countries which would, inevitably, place obstacles in the way of securing a full measure of disarmament. Nadolny replied that internal changes in Germany would have no effect on foreign policy and that they were merely a reaction to the over-hasty development of democratic institutions. MacDonald answered this directly, saying that it was far from his intention to pass any criticism on German internal affairs and that the reason he had not referred to the recent change in régime, but to certain events in Germany, was that these had had an effect on the mentality of other countries and that this was a simple fact which could not be denied.¹

Later that day, Simon and MacDonald saw Politis, the Greek delegate, who had come to offer his own view that Britain should now step in to say what sort of compromise was possible to expedite the signing of a convention and to save the conference. MacDonald argued that the formulation of a compromise would be beneficial, even if Germany did not accept it, because it would swing world opinion round to the side of those who were prepared to make concessions and would thus prevent the exploitation of public opinion in Germany's favour. He warned that there was also a section of British public opinion which felt that efforts to meet Germany's claim for equality had been too long delayed and, although recent events in Germany had caused even this section to look askance at Germany's proceedings, it was still necessary to continue influencing opinion in favour of those trying to make the Conference work.²

¹ DBFP 2nd vol.IV no.295: 11 March 1933.

² DBFP 2nd vol.IV no.296: 11 March 1933.

The existence of a public opinion whose attention was focused on the international situation continued to be of service to MacDonald in conversations at the conference. As it seemed impossible that the existing French proposals would produce any agreement, Mussolini invited MacDonald and Simon to visit Rome to discuss a Four Power Pact. In accepting the Italian invitation, MacDonald announced to Baron Aloisi that the British would first put forward a draft, compromise plan to try to keep the conference alive. MacDonald told the Italian delegate that if he did not make some contribution to the process at Geneva, public opinion at home would not understand why he had gone to Rome and critics might say that he had gone in order to escape from the difficulties at Geneva.¹ The following day in Cabinet, when Mussolini's invitation was discussed, the suggestion was made that MacDonald should be sent some hints about the state of opinion in the House of Commons.²

At this time, the British delegation might have been aware, although there is no direct reference to it, that the League of Nations Union's Executive had passed a resolution which emphasized the urgent need for a disarmament convention. The resolution stated that, whilst not reneging on any earlier assurances to grant equality of status to Germany, the existing provisions which limited armaments should be strictly maintained; in other words, that Germany should not rearm. The resolution ended by reassuring the British Government of their support for any action that might be necessary for the fulfilment of British treaty obligations; or, in other words, collective security.

¹ DBFP 2nd vol.IV no.302: 14 March 1933. See K. Middlemas and J. Barnes, *Baldwin, A Biography*, (1969) p. 738, on the reception of the Draft convention and the distraction of the Four Power Pact talks which followed immediately after its presentation.

² PRO CAB 23/75 18 (33), 15 March 1933.

Other delegates to Geneva were also using public opinion rhetoric. Responding to the British aide-mémoire, which summarized what the British draft convention would contain, the French Prime Minister, Daladier, remarked that he could not agree with the proposition that Germany was disarmed. He feared that his public opinion would not be amenable to making sacrifices to Germany when that country had not honoured her signature and had violated the military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles.¹ The aide-mémoire itself showed the British reasoning that the presentation of a draft treaty could only do the National Government good in terms of public opinion's perceived commitment to disarmament. It stated that the practical choice at Geneva lay between failing to reach any agreement at all and reaching, or offering to reach, an agreement covering the whole ground. In the former case, Germany would be free to rearm as she liked. In the latter, if Germany refused to sign an agreement, she would mobilize world opinion against her.

However, in negotiations with Mussolini himself, on 19 March, MacDonald's language suggested that parliamentary backlash was a practical problem, not merely a turn of phrase. MacDonald had objected to the loose use of the phrase, 'colonial sphere', in the proposed pact because he was sure he would be asked questions on it and, he said, because public opinion was always ready to make its own interpretations of documents. He added that there was a large section of opinion in England that held that a good many injustices ought to be undone but which was rather apprehensive of the after-effects of the undoing. If granting equality to Germany meant that she rearmed, Britain would have

¹ DBFP 2nd vol.IV no.310: 16 March 1933.

to consider whether to increase her own navy and air force.¹ Mussolini, obligingly, replied that he was content to omit the phrases to which the British took exception.

MacDonald reported to the House of Commons on the Geneva and Rome visits on 23 March. As we saw in chapter two, questions about immigration from Germany had begun in the House during the previous ten days. On 23 March, the issue of the internal policy of Germany and the future of the Disarmament Conference were more closely linked together by speakers. Most referred, in vague terms, to the change of atmosphere inside Germany,² but Josiah Wedgwood decided to explain to MacDonald the change that had taken place inside Britain in his absence. In his view, England had been converted from a pro-German to a pro-French country. The bright young things, who had passed resolutions a fortnight ago saying that they would never fight, were now muttering that if things went much further in Germany she would have to be tackled.³ On a semantic level, Wedgwood had also differentiated between the House itself and the rest of public opinion,

*'I would like to draw the attention of the House, and the Prime Minister, to the strange revolution that has come over public opinion, and opinion in this House – which is illustrated by the speech the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Epping had the courage to make to-day.'*⁴

The overall tenor of the debate was one of support for the Government's efforts to continue to find some way of achieving disarmament, although there was criticism of some of the proposed figures for military personnel and material, and some dissent from the idea that Germany be allowed some measure of rearmament to achieve equality.⁵ It

¹ DBFP 2nd vol.V no.44: 20 March 1933.

² Hansard, 5th Series, 1932-33, 276, 531, 542, 556-7.

³ Hansard, 5th Series, 1932-33, 276, 563.

⁴ Hansard, 5th Series, 1932-33, 276, 562.

⁵ Hansard, 5th Series, 1932-33, 276, 523, 569. The figures concerned the standardisation of 'effectives' i.e. trained military personnel.

can be argued that this perception, that public opinion opposed German internal policy, actually prevented the British delegation from conceding anything to Germany, as the discussions of the draft conventions became bogged down in detailed analyses of figures and terminology during April and May.

Both Anthony Eden and Cadogan kept reasonably detailed diaries of their time at Geneva. Their accounts are characterized by respect for each other but increasing impatience with John Simon. The other remarkable feature of their accounts, which substantiates the argument made here about the rhetorical significance of the phrase public opinion in diplomacy, is that the phrase itself hardly ever appears in their diaries. Cadogan used the metaphor described below to denote a firm attitude in negotiation but gave no details of the language he used. Further, there is no mention that they thought perceptions of public opinion were influencing the Cabinet in London. On a strictly semantic level, we might argue, this shows that the perception of public opinion was not important. However, the ubiquity of the phrase in Cabinet discussion makes it more likely that it did have some further significance but that it was such a commonplace turn of phrase in diplomacy that it was not worth recording in a private journal. It does, however, appear in the official accounts of diplomatic interviews.

It had emerged at Geneva that Germany wanted samples of new guns, as opposed to merely retaining examples of previous models, and that she was trying to force a confrontation.¹ On 9 May, Rumbold reported that the Germans were feeling very isolated and felt that they had even lost the sympathy of the United States.² The British delegate, Eden, had been sent instructions to inform other delegations of the revised German

¹ PRO CAB 23/76 34 (33), 10 May 1933.

² DBFP 2nd vol.V no.122: 9 May 1933.

demands he had received on 10 May. He took up an uncompromising attitude towards Nadolny, making it clear where the blame for the failure of the Conference would lie, if Germany were to withdraw, and his stance was endorsed by the Cabinet later that day.¹ By 12 May, the German Conference of Ministers felt themselves to be facing a united front at the Disarmament Conference, led by Britain but now supported by Italy, and moved to produce a declaration from the Reichstag about Germany's future conduct at Geneva.² At Geneva, diplomatic pressure from the British was certainly mounting. Sir Alexander Cadogan described any sort of pressure being put on the Germans through the metaphor of hitting the Germans about the head. On 9 May, he described a private conversation with Nadolny, 'as sticky (and as slimy) as ever',

*'We gave him one crack on the head this afternoon, are going to see him after dinner to belabour him. No German pays attention to anything unless you have cracked his skull.'*³

In the private discussions taking place about the future of the Disarmament Conference, informal representations about the Jewish question which invoked the wrath of public opinion were increasing. The day before the German Conference of Ministers met, Hitler had seen Sir Horace Rumbold, who had been instructed by Sir John Simon to make considerable mention of the sympathy which the Germans had lost in the previous two months, echoing the conversation Simon had had with Rosenberg about the oppressive treatment of Jews and political opponents by the Nazi party. Simon also instructed Rumbold to mention the harm caused by the delay in bringing a Mr. Fraser, a British citizen in Germany, to trial. Rumbold was told not to broach the subject of the aggressive German attitude at the conference, as negotiations between Eden and Nadolny

¹ DBFP 2nd vol.V no.124: 10 May 1933.

² DGFP Series C, vol.I no.226: 12 May 1933.

³ Churchill ACAD I/1: 9 May 1933.

were still going on, but if the occasion offered the opportunity, Simon gave Rumbold a formula to use. He was to urge that in the interests both of the Disarmament and of the World Economic Conference, tranquillity in Europe should be preserved and Britain trusted that Germany would abstain from doing, or saying, anything that would increase the existing nervousness of public opinion in Europe.¹ Rumbold did make these comments about the Jewish issue in the interview and concluded, from Hitler's ferocious answers, that Hitler, himself, was responsible for the anti-Jewish policy of the German Government.²

Three different sets of resolutions by pressure groups were also passed in May which could have strengthened the Government's intransigent line against Germany. On 16 May, the League of Nations Union's Executive passed three resolutions. The first asked the British Government to convey to the Germans the abhorrence with which Jewish persecution was regarded by all sections of British society. The second was about trade and the third restated their commitment to international co-operation and criticized the German Government's attitude to international discussion.³ On 18 May, the Women's National Liberal Federation was reported as urging the Government to accept the total abolition of aerial bombardment and their male counterparts also passed a resolution in favour of peace and disarmament.⁴

British Ministers appear to have felt bolstered by the swell of opinion against Germany but also to have sensed opposition in the country to any rearmament which a revised convention might entail. Simon made this point, in a letter to the Ministerial

¹ DBFP 2nd vol.V no.126: 10 May 1933.

² DBFP 2nd vol.V no.139: 11 May 1933.

³ The Times, 9c, 16 May 1933.

⁴ The Times, 9c, 18 May and 7c, 20 May 1933.

committee on the conference, on 12 May, saying that it was vital that Britain should avoid being manoeuvred into any admission that she accepted German rearmament. He added that public opinion was strongly opposed to it and that any concession would open the way for Germany to ask for more.¹ The committee, consequently, produced a telegram to Eden, in Geneva, saying that public opinion in Britain was united in opposition to the German view. Yet, it was emphasized that to maintain this unity, it was important that discussions should be kept to the broad issue of the acceptance of disarmament by stages and not steered into discussions on civil aviation or weapons samples.²

In advocating a firm line to be taken against Germany, the Cabinet were adducing the strength of public opinion as an important factor in this decision, not merely as a rhetorical device to impress a German diplomat, but to a member of their own delegation, having, apparently, accepted that reasoning themselves. To reinforce this message, MacDonald also suggested that Eden might suggest to the German delegates that the situation was not the same as it had been six months ago, because of events in Germany. The Jewish issue was certainly proving useful to the delegates as a bargaining tool with Germany. At the end of May, Alec Cadogan recorded that the Germans would not accept the League's report on the Jews of Upper Silesia and that, in the discussions over it, 'the Germans got a whack on the head from almost everyone present.'³

¹ PRO CAB 27/504 D.C. (M) 16 (32), 12 May 1933. Simon had written to Baldwin so the letter could be read out in committee if Simon was unable to attend. The reported Cabinet minutes match the phraseology of the letter exactly, see CUL BWIN, Series B, fol.33: Simon to Baldwin, 12 May 1933. The letter added, *'What I dread is that we should seem to concede a little bit in this direction only to find that Germany demands more, and the conference breaks down after we have, by our concession, lost the overwhelming public support which would be given to a stiffer attitude.'*

² DBFP 2nd vol.V no.141: 12 May 1933.

³ Churchill ACAD 1/1: 30 May 1933.

Anthony Eden, was, however, receiving different advice about the line to be taken with Germany. On 17 May, Lord Robert Cecil wrote to him, urging the consideration of the proposals which Hitler had made in his speech on 14 May. He argued that English and world opinion would be bitterly disappointed if they were rejected and that Britain would bear the burden for the failure of the conference. Alec Cadogan recorded that, at dinner that night, Eden had been rather disturbed by this letter.¹ In addition, on 26 April, Eden had received a note, probably from his private secretary, reminding him that the House still felt very deeply on the persecution and discrimination which was going on in Germany.²

Did Cabinet references to public opinion just mean parliamentary opinion at this time? The scanty social evidence suggests that the Jewish issue had a slightly wider currency but the Cabinet's views seem to have been largely predicated on the debate of 13 April. In London society, interest had been maintained in the Disarmament Conference but it was by no means the only topic of conversation. The editor of *The Times*, Geoffrey Dawson, had had lunch with the American delegate, Norman Davies, who was also in close touch with Ramsay MacDonald, to discuss Davies' visit to Berlin and his talks with Rosenberg.³ On 17 May, when Hitler delivered his speech on German intentions, Dawson had been dining at Grillion's with Lords Salisbury, Hailsham and Fitzalan, and Arthur Salter, Sir Eustace Percy, and William Ormsby-Gore before returning to deal with the speech which he described as 'unimpeachable in its pacifism.' He also recorded late night discussions about 'Great Britain, the Empire, the USA and

¹ Churchill ACAD 1/1: 18 May 1933.

² BUL Avon 14/1, fol.160: Cecil to Eden, 17 May 1933 and fol.164: unattributed, 26 April 1933.

³ Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/37, diary, 17 May 1933. See also PRO 30/69/1757/2, diary, 3 April, 4 and 5 May for MacDonald's appointments with Norman Davies.

Europe' at Lord Lothian's house, Blickling, later in May, with Lionel Curtis, Dougie Malcolm and others. By the end of the month, the negotiations were giving Dawson problems with leader-writing. On 29th May, he noted that Britain was apparently holding up the conference by insisting on the right to bomb on the frontiers of the empire.¹ In contrast, Leo Amery's circle continued to discuss the future of India during May.² Dawson had also experienced this during his visit to John Astor's house, Hever Castle, when Earl Winterton, in particular, had been minded to talk Indian politics.³ In Labour circles, Hugh Dalton recorded that many M.P.s had been stricken with apocalyptic visions of fascism in Britain during May.⁴

However, the reservation of the right to police bombing was the one area, during 1933, where the Cabinet seems to have ignored all the manifestations of public opinion which it could have been aware of. In the methodological section at the beginning of this chapter we noted two examples where the Cabinet was aware that parliament and The Times opposed the Cabinet's intransigence on this point.⁵ There was other evidence of opposition to it. On 23 June, The Times reported Austen Chamberlain's speech at a meeting of the League of Nations Union Council in Edinburgh, in which he had opposed, and won, a resolution against police bombing.⁶ A month later, at the National Peace Council Congress in Oxford, a resolution was also passed urging the Government to drop its reservation of this right, which was primarily aimed at security in India.⁷ These

¹ Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/37, diary, 26-27. May 1933 and 29 May 1933.

² Amery, p.292-4.

³ Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/37, diary, 6-7 May 1933.

⁴ H. Dalton, (1957), p.42-3. In retrospect, Dalton considered fear of fascism within Britain to be 'quite silly,' see H. Dalton, *The Fateful Years. Memoirs 1931-1945* (1957).

⁵ See p.116.

⁶ The Times, 9b, 23 June 1933.

⁷ The Times, 16c, 10 July 1933.

statements, in addition to those of The Times' leader mentioned above, provided at least as much evidence for public opinion as that acted upon on the subject of the refusal to allow Germany to rearm, but the Cabinet refused to give way.¹ In Cabinet, on 12 July, MacDonald pointed out the strength of parliamentary feeling on police bombing to his colleagues and reminded them that the situation would have to be handled with great delicacy. Hankey's minutes did not reveal that the delicacy would be employed to make sure that Britain retained this right with the minimum of adverse publicity. Bennett has hinted that the British acceptance of the lengthy adjournment of the conference and of Henderson's peripatetic diplomacy might have been one way out of this awkward situation for the British.²

The signing of the Four Power Pact in early June, restating the commitments of Germany, France, Great Britain and Italy to Locarno, Kellogg-Briand and the Covenant of the League, marked the end of the first Disarmament Conference crisis of 1933. After the adjournment for the summer recess of the conference, on 10 July, increasing German activity on the Austrian border, and the French attempt to bring evidence for Germany's secret rearmament to international attention, dominated diplomatic conversations. At the beginning of July, however, the Jewish issue was still a live part of diplomacy. German sensitivity about foreign opinion was undiminished and the head of the English section of the German Foreign Ministry made a protest through the British embassy about Simon's speech in the Commons on 5 July. Dieckhoff made it plain to Newton³, that exception was taken to Simon's criticisms of Nazi internal policy as a ruse to 'inflame public

¹ See p.112.

² E.W. Bennett, (Princeton, 1979), p.424-427. See also Uri Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber* (1980), p.39.

³ Acting Ambassador between Rumbold's retirement and the arrival of the new man in Berlin, Sir Eric Phipps, and usually first secretary at the embassy.

opinion'.¹ These claims were strenuously denied by Simon who said he had taken every precaution in wording his speech so that it would not be unpalatable to a German audience.² A week later, however, Simon told the Cabinet that public opinion was so roused by German domestic policy that it would not tolerate the idea of German rearmament at all.³

The conference itself had petered out into the flying visits of its president, Arthur Henderson, around European capitals to try to ascertain the demands of individual countries. Ramsay MacDonald thought these trips more likely to damn than save the situation and noted in his diary for 26 July that the conference was doomed to failure.⁴ During the summer vacation, when most Cabinet Ministers departed to the country or abroad, the bulk of activity on disarmament was controlled by the Foreign Office. This was facilitated by the departure of Sir John Simon on a cruise to South America to recover his health. In his absence, Vansittart assumed virtual control of policy. During this period, he carried out a number of representations to Germany, sanctioned by the Cabinet, about the level of German air rearmament and her activities in Austria, made either in concert with France or by supporting Italian protests unofficially.⁵ These representations, made in Berlin, are remarkable for the almost total lack of public opinion rhetoric in them, although it could, perhaps, be argued that they were made because of perceived public anxiety on these issues. Alternatively, Vansittart may have tried to tone down criticisms to facilitate the signature of a disarmament convention in the autumn,

¹ DBFP 2nd vol.V no.242: 10 July 1933.

² DBFP 2nd vol.V no.238: 8 July 1933.

³ CAB 24/242 184 (33), Indications of Germany's disregard of Part V of the Versailles Treaty. Note by Sir J. Simon covering a memorandum on German rearmament by Sir R. Vansittart, 14 July 1933.

⁴ PRO 30/69/1753 fols.447-8: 19 and 26 July 1933.

⁵ PRO CAB 23/76 48 (33), 26 July 1933, DBFP 2nd vol.V nos.284, 303: 29 July and 4 August 1933.

thus reacting to the other perception that the public were very anxious to see the conference produce a result.

When Simon returned, at the beginning of September, semantic pressure was applied to Germany in the discussions which preceded the reassembly of the Disarmament Conference. This was stimulated, to an extent, by the tendency already seen earlier in the year of the French to follow perceptions of British public opinion closely and even to act upon them. Early in September, the First Secretary at the Paris Embassy, Campbell, sent a series of reports to Whitehall about the scrutiny with which the French press were following the vagaries of British opinion. Public opinion was not being gleaned merely from *The Times*, in this case, but from the resolutions of bodies such as the Trades Union Congress, which was holding its annual conference at Brighton.¹ Campbell drew particular attention to the apparent change of heart which the Liberal and Labour organs had undergone, in throwing their weight behind the French, since the arrival of the Nazi Government. Campbell viewed this as reinforcing the united front developed in May at the Disarmament Conference and as, therefore, having implications for the new session of the conference, due to start at the end of September,

*'Such quotations [from the British Liberal and Labour organs] are being used more especially to strengthen the campaign against concessions in disarmament since it is represented that British opinion whatever its previous attitude, now fully approves the policy of caution and mistrust hitherto pursued by France.'*²

The perception that the public were intransigently opposed to German rearmament was contradicted, however, by some perceptions about what the public would want to do if Germany launched a putsch in Austria. Vansittart had suggested that given the current temper of the British people, the Cabinet might consider wanting to

¹ See Lord Citrine, *Men and Work. The Autobiography of Lord Citrine* (1964), p.345.

²PRO FO 371/16727 C 7941/319/18: Campbell to Simon, 7 September 1933.

escape from their Locarno obligations if Germany launched a putsch in Austria. The paper containing this idea had been discussed by the Cabinet on 5 September.¹ Neville Chamberlain pointed out that, if the British line on German activities in Austria continued to harden, there were some public opinion problems involved in the way in which representations were made. If the issue were taken to Geneva, it was more than likely that an operative resolution would be produced, and the danger would be that Italy would find the division of Austria, abetted by Germany, to be attractive and, consequently, that Anglo-French-Italian unity would be broken. If they resorted to the Four Power Pact instead, Chamberlain suggested that there would be a section of public opinion which would be much concerned because the League of Nations was being usurped.² Simon said this would apply particularly to the Trade Unionists and Labour organizations.³ The Foreign Secretary might have recalled, at this point, the League of Nations Union resolution in March when they pledged their support for collective security action.⁴ The Cabinet, as a whole, clearly did not recall this resolution as it was eventually decided that if anything happened in Austria, they would steer away from using the League of Nations to protest, because of the danger of punitive measures being agreed which would offend those sections of opinion which wanted to run no risk of war at all.

British public opinion was used a great deal in the first weeks of September in diplomacy between Britain and France. When British and French Ministers met in Paris,

¹ PRO CAB 23/77 50 (33), 5 September 1933 and DBFP 2nd vol.V no.371: 28 August 1933. The idea of 'escape' contrasts sharply with the line advocated by Angell and Allen at the National Peace Congress in July which accepted the minimum of internationally-controlled force necessary to provide the security essential for international peace, see Ceadel, p.141-2.

² See Viscount Cecil, *A Great Experiment* (1941), p.245, for the belief that one of the chief objects of the government at this time was to weaken the prestige and authority of the League.

³ PRO CAB 23/77 50 (33), 5 September 1933.

⁴ See p.122.

just before the opening of the Disarmament Conference, Daladier made repeated use of the alleged strength of French public opinion against any further disarmament, whilst expressing the hope that France would not have to pursue rearmament alone but could act in concert with Britain and Italy to save the Disarmament Conference. At the same meeting, Eden told the French that it would be unfair to ask Britain to participate in an all-round reduction of fifty percent of air power since she had already disarmed more than everyone else. He pointed out that British public opinion felt very strongly about the need for air defence. In the Cabinet meeting, on 20 September, it had been suggested that if the Government were prepared to face the idea of giving Germany weapons samples in the second period, a covenant might be reached. The conversations that followed suggest, very strongly, that the Cabinet decided that samples in the first period were out of the question but that samples in the second period were a possibility. Simon also agreed in this meeting that Britain would take no action if Germany violated the treaty, which can be construed as Vansittart's 'escape from Locarno.'¹

Correspondence between Cabinet Ministers at this time suggests some confidence in taking a position against Germany and, also, in the things that Britain would sacrifice to obtain a disarmament convention. Writing to the Prime Minister on 23 September, William Ormsby-Gore, the first commissioner of works, felt that he ought to give his views of the Government's standing in the country before he left for Geneva. He noted that conferences had become a distinctly unpopular way of dealing with international problems and, whilst the National Government was still regarded with benevolent tolerance, there was little enthusiasm for it. On the specific question of disarmament, Ormsby-Gore urged that Britain should draw closer to France, and to all other states who

¹ PRO CAB 23/77 51 (33), 20 September 1933.

had German frontiers, and to make it clear to the British people that that was what they were doing. He was unequivocal about the threat that Germany posed to liberty, tolerance and human values, describing her as 'the big bully of Europe, the bad neighbour, the embodiment of the "idea" which the World War was fought to eliminate.'¹

Ramsay MacDonald agreed with Gore that the National Government was very weak on its propaganda side and replied that he would try to get something done that winter.² A letter to Simon on 22 September explained that he was expecting his Foreign Secretary to hold the fort for the next fortnight while he worked on a domestic policy programme for the opening of parliament.³ Three days earlier, in a letter to Sam Hoare, John Simon had recorded the degree of Cabinet unanimity on 20 September. If the Disarmament Conference came down to the problem of supervision of disarmament in individual countries then Britain could not treat it as an insurmountable obstacle. The main thing, Simon wrote, was to get agreement on some measure of disarmament, however modified and to get everybody's signature to it.⁴

In his talks at Geneva in the last week of September, Simon presented all these ideas about the limits and aims of British policy in terms of public opinion, and in language very close to that which had been used in Cabinet. On 21 September, just before leaving for Geneva, Simon saw the French Ambassador in London, Corbin. He made it clear that the substantive issue to be settled was weapons samples and that, if the only barrier to an agreed convention was the method of supervision, Britain would not

¹ PRO 30/69/679 File L-Q: Ormsby-Gore to MacDonald, 23 September 1933.

² PRO 30/69/679 File L-Q: MacDonald to Ormsby-Gore, 24 September 1933.

³ Bodleian MSS.Simon 77, fol.33: MacDonald to Simon, 22 September 1933.

⁴ Bodleian MSS.Simon 77, fols.31-32: Simon to Hoare, 21 September 1933.

necessarily regard this as an insuperable obstacle.¹ Having listened to Corbin's analysis of French public opinion, Simon then made three points about Britain. Not only had Germany's support been diminished by recent events, but British public opinion was also sympathetic to French security fears. Yet the British still held that the best form of security was a disarmament convention, however modified. British public opinion, and some sections of American, would not be pleased by the idea of supervision but this need not be a barrier if the substance and degree of disarmament itself had been fixed.²

On 22 September, the French were pressing harder for a statement that Britain would support action against Germany if Germany were found to be flouting the convention during the period of supervision. Simon's answer drew on Vansittart's 'escape from Locarno' theory and the Cabinet's line that Britain would do nothing. He told the French that Britain could enter into no new responsibilities in the nature of sanctions in the new convention agreement, because public opinion simply would not stand it. However, the British would go as far as saying that the second period of disarmament could only go ahead if the first had been fully observed. Baldwin supported this statement by suggesting, with splendid vagueness, that Britain would face the issue of what to do about German rearmament, in contravention of a disarmament agreement, when and, if, it had been proven to have happened.³

Simon and Eden used the same tactics to relay the British point of view to the Italian delegation on 26 September. In conversation with Signor Aloisi, Simon had said that he saw the utmost difficulty in getting British public opinion to accept the idea that

¹ He used 'insurmountable obstacle' in the letter to Hoare.

² DBFP 2nd vol.V no.403: 21 September 1933.

³ DBFP 2nd vol.V no.406: 22 September 1933.

Germany would receive samples of weapons in the first period.¹ The same idea was used in discussions with the Germans. Just before von Neurath returned to Berlin on 1 October, to consult with Hitler, Simon made clear that the outstanding difficulty was the German demand for samples during the first period of the convention since it would be impossible to persuade English opinion to accept this claim,

*'We gladly recognized the German claim to equality of rights, but what public opinion in England concerned itself with first and foremost was disarmament, and would not accept the idea that equality of rights should be sought by raising the level of armaments.'*²

Simon finished this interview with Neurath by suggesting that Germany should consider, very carefully, what advantage might accrue to her after a comparatively short period of waiting by accepting a convention on the lines now indicated. To achieve some consistency in this approach, Graham, in Rome, was instructed the following day to tell Mussolini the strength of feeling in Britain against allowing Germany samples in the first period.³ In his report to MacDonald, however, Simon described the central point of difference between the French and Germans as being the issue of samples of weapons for Germany in the trial period, not that he had been using British public opinion to support the French view against Germany.

Simon was, therefore, telling the French that weapons samples were not an insuperable obstacle if accepting them meant a Convention was signed, but was telling the Germans and Italians that this could only happen in the second disarmament period. Press comment on these conversations seems not to have influenced the negotiators but to have been manipulated by them. A Times' leader, on 5 September, had called for the

¹ DBFP 2nd vol.V no.409: 23 September 1933.

² DBFP 2nd vol. V no.422: 29 September 1933. See also No.411: 27 September and Churchill ACAD 1/1: 19 September 1933 for the same language with von Neurath.

³ DBFP 2nd vol.V no.423: 29 September 1933.

supervised limitation of armaments despite the fact that mistrust of Germany made it impossible that any of her neighbours would reduce their armaments immediately.¹ However, on 16 September, the leader stated that the fact of German rearmament would have to be faced and that it was better that this should happen within a framework of arms limitation.² Both articles were written by Leo Kennedy and his diaries state that Eden and Cadogan were, at this time, suggesting suitable days for leaders to be published which would put pressure on the French.³

The resolutions of peace organizations in September did, however, allow for the conflicting ideas that the public wanted any sort of convention apart from one which allowed Germany to rearm. On 22 September, The Times reported a League of Nations Union Executive resolution which supported the Government in its efforts to secure reduction and limitations of armaments and which expected reduction of arms to begin with the ratification of the treaty. The British plan to allow weapons samples in the second period was not incompatible with this, whilst preserving a stick with which to beat Germany, namely, that public opinion was against any rearmament.⁴ The National Peace Council's resolution, on 28 September, was even more obliging, urging the Government to secure a convention which would provide, at least, for the substantial and progressive reduction of armaments.⁵

Behind the negotiations on disarmament, the Jewish issue was still being used against Germany, in what appeared to be a growing tide of criticism of the German

¹ The Times, 11b, 5 September 1933.

² The Times, 11b-c, 16 September 1933.

³ Churchill Kennedy 2/9 Press Cuttings July 1933-Jan 1934 and 1/15, entry for 16 September 1933.

⁴ The Times, 14a, 22 September 1933. See also the LNU 6 Point Policy on rearmament in mid-August, The Times, 12g, 17 August 1933.

⁵ The Times, 12f, 30 September 1933.

delegation in the League's committee on minorities. In a departure from the earlier part of the year, the impetus for this came from the delegation at Geneva, itself, rather than from London. On 3 October, the German delegate had made what Cadogan described as a 'long and tactless' speech, in which he denied that the Jews in Germany were a minority and said that they did not fall within the purview of the committee. This speech created considerable feeling against the German speaker. The following day, the British representative on the committee, Ormsby-Gore, fired off a speech, in response, which described the tolerance of the British empire and the glories of the parliamentary system. Cadogan recorded that the speech had had a huge success but that he was less sure how Simon would receive it, since the British delegation had just had a telegram from the Foreign Office telling them to be tender with the Germans on the subject of the Jews. Cadogan thought that Gore's speech was justified in light of the Germans delegate's speech, however, and reminded himself that the Foreign Office had not known about it when they had sent their instructions.¹ A report on Ormsby-Gore's speech to the Foreign Office made it plain that the British delegation had tried not to arouse any undue resentment but could not accept the statements of the German delegate.²

The British trust in the strength of representations made to Germany on the basis of public opinion was further demonstrated when the conference first showed signs of collapse. The new Ambassador in Berlin, Sir Eric Phipps, reported, on 5 October, that the German Foreign Minister's report of proceedings at Geneva had created a disastrous impression on the German Government. They felt attacked by a united front and Phipps' informant, von Bülow, hinted that, if this front tried to impose unfair terms on Germany,

¹ Churchill ACAD 1/1: 3-4 October 1933.

² PRO FO 371/16757 C 8823/6839/18: Mr. Ashley-Clarke to Perowne, 7 October 1933.

then Germany would leave the conference. Phipps had tried to allay this sense of encirclement, which the French no doubt intended, by emphatically repeating the message which Simon had been sending to Berlin since March,

*'I told Herr von Bulow that it was important that German Government should realise strength of anti-German public opinion in Great Britain brought about by recent events in Germany. What made this worse was that it was thought that quarters which had previously been most friendly to Germany were now most hostile. It was greatly to be hoped therefore that German Government would bear this in mind during forthcoming negotiations, for public opinion had perhaps a greater influence in Great Britain than in other countries.'*¹

On 4 October, Baldwin, MacDonald, Simon and Eden had consulted twice during the day as they waited for news from Berlin on the issue of samples in the first period.² Corbin visited Eden, hoping for similar news, but was nudged off with the repetition of the idea that English opinion would not support any new commitments on the continent of Europe.³ Bennett has recounted the tale of the Germans getting wind of an alleged new British disarmament plan which appeared to supersede the MacDonald plan and which the Germans thought might be used as a justification to withdraw if the Geneva atmosphere continued to be hostile.⁴ The upshot of this was that the news from Berlin took the form of a new proposal which Bismarck presented to Simon on 6 October. Simon considered that the new proposal went far beyond the concept of limited weapons specimens in the first period and ignored the idea of two stages of disarmament altogether.⁵

MacDonald's reaction was stern and suggests that he may have been the motive force behind the continued statements in the previous week about the limits of the British

¹ DBFP 2nd vol.V, No.427: 5 October 1933.

² PRO 30/69/1757/2, diary, 4 October 1933.

³ DBFP 2nd vol.V no.426: 4 October 1933.

⁴ E.W. Bennett, (Princeton, 1979), p.466-470.

⁵ DBFP 2nd vol.V no.434: 6 October 1933.

public's tolerance. On 8 October, he recorded that it was most important that there should be no mistake in Berlin as to the British attitude and that, the previous Monday, he had advised the Foreign Office to speak plainly to Germany on British views regarding disarmament (was this the source of Phipps' line to von Bülow?). MacDonald was adamant that, however important it was to exchange co-operative views with France, it was far more important to exchange opposition views with Germany.¹ Geoffrey Dawson went down to Chequers to visit MacDonald that evening and found him worried about the party conferences and the European situation. Dawson had also consulted with Baldwin about the speech the latter was to give at Birmingham on 6 October, restating Britain's commitment to her obligations and the importance of the Disarmament Conference.² Baldwin had also received a communication from Geneva, dated 8 October, urging that the Cabinet should stand by France and not give in any more to the Germans.³

Dawson's comment about MacDonald's concern over the party conferences on 8 October is interesting. The Labour Party were holding their annual conference at Hastings between 2 and 6 October and considerable time had been devoted to the foreign policy question. A resolution, inspired by Stafford Cripps and the Socialist League, had been accepted by the National Executive. It pledged the Labour party to take no part in war and to consider what steps, including a general strike, might be taken in the event or

¹ PRO 30/69/1753 fol.451: 8 October 1933.

² Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/37, entries for 5, 6 and 8 October. The audience of this speech were not unaware of the fact that it was supposed to be a warning to the Germans, see J. Ramsden (ed.), *Real Old Tory Politics. The Political Diaries of Sir Robert Sanders, Lord Bayford, 1910-35* (1984), p.250. Vyvyan Adams wrote to Baldwin to congratulate him on it, as did Geoffrey Dawson who said that Baldwin seemed to have put it over to the conference very successfully. see CUL BWIN Series B 168, fols.2 and 24: Adams to Baldwin, 6 October 1933 and Dawson to Baldwin, 9 October 1933.

³ CUL BWIN Series B, 121 fol. 83: Ormsby-Gore to Baldwin, 8 October 1933.

threat of war.¹ The possible collapse of the Disarmament Conference was certainly not a step away from war, yet none of the Labour leaders tied the increasing tensions at Geneva in early October to the passing of this resolution. There is no evidence that the Cabinet took any notice of it either, but it was reported in *The Times* in some detail.² Simon had received a delegation from the Independent Labour Party at the end of August, but that had been to express outrage at German treatment of Jews, Communists and Socialists.³

Further evidence for press comments, however, suggests that *The Times* was still acting on information given to it by the Cabinet, rather than the other way around. The leader on 9 October, written by Kennedy, mirrors the line taken by Simon at Geneva and the line taken in Cabinet on 5 and 9 October. It appears to have been inspired by MacDonald himself. On 8 October, Dawson had seen the Prime Minister at Chequers. The following day, a leader appeared which stated categorically, with remarkable closeness to what MacDonald said that day in Cabinet, that there was not the smallest prospect that any agreement could be reached at Geneva, on the basis of the immediate acquisition by Germany of arms prohibited to her by treaty. It also stressed the danger of the warlike Nazi speeches which could not be regarded by other countries as an internal matter.⁴

In terms of social meetings, from which the Cabinet might have taken the 'public opinion' of their friends or have been told their friends' theories about public opinion, table three shows that there was less happening, in London than during the period in June

¹ J. Naylor, *Labour's International Policy. The Labour Party in the 1930's* (Boston, 1969), p.58. See H. Dalton, (1957), p.44-45 for an account of the accidental way in which this resolution was passed. Attlee does not mention the resolution in his memoirs. For a biographical account, see T. Burridge, *Clement Attlee* (1985), p.103.

² *The Times*, 7a, 5 October and 7d, 6 October 1933.

³ PRO FO 371/16756 C 7798/6839/18: F.O. Minute, 31 August 1931.

⁴ *The Times*, 15b-c, 9 October 1933.

examined in table two, although the sources used for both are the same. Geoffrey Dawson, returning from his holiday on 20 September, was as active as ever, but Cabinet members seem to have spent most of their time meeting each other. This was probably the result of much of London society still being away and of the intensity of activity because of the Disarmament Conference. MacDonald consulted Waldorf Astor on 8 October which may have had some significance for his line in Cabinet the following day.¹ Other than that, he only immersed himself in society talk on the day after Germany's withdrawal, when he disappeared to Cliveden.

¹ See also PRO 30/69/679, fol.157, letter to Waldorf Astor, 3 October 1933 saying that MacDonald would love to talk to him about his recent trip to Berlin and asking when he would be free.

Table 3: Social Events, September –October 1933¹

Date and Time	Place	People
September		
4		MacDonald returned to London
5		MacDonald and J.H. Thomas
Breakfast		
11-18		MacDonald in Lossiemouth
18		Norman Davies and Ramsay MacDonald
8.30		MacDonald, Arthur Salter, Walter Layton, Josiah Stamp
11am		
19		
11.10		Ramsay MacDonald and Neville Chamberlain
Lunch		MacDonald and Sir H. Betterton
Meeting		Neville Chamberlain, Sam Hoare, Leith Ross
3.30		MacDonald, Eden and Vansittart
20		Geoffrey Dawson returns from Yorkshire
25		
11.30		Vansittart and MacDonald
lunch		J.H. Thomas and MacDonald
		Geoffrey Dawson and Vansittart
26		
Lunch	Travellers' Club	Geoffrey Dawson and Roger Makins
29		
11am		Neville Chamberlain and MacDonald
OCTOBER		
2		
10		J.H. Thomas and MacDonald
12.45		Zieff and MacDonald
3		
11.30		MacDonald and the Chief Whip
Lunch		Percy Alder and MacDonald
Dinner		MacDonald and 'Bogey' Harris
		The Literary Society: Geoffrey Dawson, Baldwin, Sir James Barrie, Vansittart, Sir Edward Grigg, Dougie Malcolm et al.
3		Geoffrey Dawson and Baldwin
Lunch		Geoffrey Dawson and Waldorf Astor
4		
11		Simon, Eden, Baldwin, MacDonald
2.30		Sam Hoare
3		Simon, Eden, Baldwin, MacDonald
5		
11.45		Vansittart and MacDonald
	Chequers	Geoffrey Dawson and MacDonald
7.30	Chequers	Lord Astor and MacDonald
Dinner		Neville Chamberlain, G. Ellis and Lady Falmouth
7	All Souls, Oxford	Geoffrey Dawson
9		
11.15		Sir H. Betterton and MacDonald
Dinner		Neville Chamberlain, Ramsay MacDonald, James Roosevelt and wife
10		
Dinner		Geoffrey Dawson, John Astor, Bill Adams (Warden of All Souls)
11		
Lunch		Geoffrey Dawson and Nancy Astor
12		
12		Conwell Evans and MacDonald
Dinner		Round Table Dinner: Dougie Malcolm, Geoffrey Dawson, Philip Lothian, Lionel Curtis, John Dove et al.
13		
2.30	11 Downing St	National Labour Meeting
		Simon and MacDonald
		Geoffrey Dawson and Baldwin
14	Cliveden	American Ambassador, Geoffrey Dawson, the Astors, Japanese Ambassador, Sir Edward Grigg, Harold Macmillan, Arthur Salter et al
15	Cliveden	MacDonald arrives at Cliveden, talks with Dawson, the Astors and Arthur Salter

¹ The same sourcing conventions apply as for table 2.

16 10 Lunch		Sir Clive Wigram and MacDonald Sir Louis Greig and MacDonald
17 Lunch Dinner		Neville Chamberlain and Lord Camrose Neville and Austen Chamberlain

In the Cabinet meeting on 9 October, it had emerged that the Cabinet's worry about the criticism it would receive if weapons samples were allowed to Germany in the first period had stiffened into a complete rejection of this idea because the French would never accept it, although someone did suggest that it would be better to give Germany samples than for her to leave the conference. MacDonald continued his uncompromising line and decided to call British public opinion back into service. He thought it was important that the British conscience be clear in light of what might happen next, and, to that end, he suggested that the Germans be warned, privately, that the British would publish Bismarck's new proposal if they persisted in upsetting the Disarmament Conference. He added that the strength of public opinion and of Cabinet opinion would be impressed upon the German Government objectively and without threats, except that it might be intimated that a refusal on Germany's part to co-operate in disarmament might compel Britain to declare her attitude, openly, during the coming meetings at Geneva. The Cabinet registered no decision about the way in which Germany should be approached, however, and left Simon, in consultation with the Prime Minister, to use his judgement as to the action to be taken in Geneva and London.¹ Cadogan's interpretation of the Cabinet's decision was that they wanted the conference to break down and for the blame to be put on Germany.²

¹ PRO CAB 23/77, 52 (33), 9 October 1933.

² Churchill ACAD 1/1: 11 October 1933.

However, Eden was having problems in getting Simon to go to Geneva, describing him, after a telephone conversation on the 9th, as having 'cold feet, as usual.'¹ Simon, in fact, approached von Hoesch in London the following day, using MacDonald's line that these proposals were calculated to make agreement at Geneva almost impossible and emphasizing the role that Britain had played in promoting the German case since 1919. Von Hoesch replied that Germany felt she was, now, not being offered disarmament, just the hope of it in the future if she made substantial concessions over the Reichswehr and supervision. Von Hoesch saw Nazi domestic policy as the reason why this attitude had developed and Simon made it clear that, whether the view of outside opinion was justified or not, it was the general atmosphere of insecurity which had shaken world opinion, without whose confidence disarmament could not be achieved.²

The German ambassador reported Simon's words faithfully to the Foreign Ministry in Berlin.³ Von Neurath's message to Nadjolny at Geneva, on 11 October, cited both Baldwin's speech at Birmingham and Simon's conversations with von Hoesch as the stimuli for the idea that if the British position continued to be irreconcilable with German demands, Germany would withdraw.⁴ The following day, Nadjolny informed von Neurath of Simon's further statement to him that in the present state of roused public opinion, it was impossible, at present, for the British Government to grant Germany equality of rights.⁵ Thus, when the German withdrawal came on 14 October, and Simon's speech was vilified by the Germans as the cause of their withdrawal, it might be reasonable to

¹ BUL AVON AP 20/1/32, diary, 9 October 1933.

² DBFP 2nd vol.V no.443: 10 October 1933.

³ DGFP Series C vol.I no.486: 10 October 1933.

⁴ DGFP Series C vol.I no.489: 11 October 1933.

⁵ DGFP Series C vol.I no.493: 12 October 1933. See also E.W. Bennett, (Princeton, 1979), p.478.

assume that the strength of British public opinion, as a rhetorical device, had been proven not to carry the weight which British policy had attached to it, throughout 1933, as a means of moderating German policy.¹ Alternatively, and more plausibly, it can be seen to have convinced the Germans that Britain would not back down. Later dispatches, from the German ambassador in London, show that the German Foreign Ministry wanted to know about British public opinion and did not see it merely as a rhetorical ploy. On 18 October, a roundabout report reached the Foreign Office that von Hoesch had written a report dividing British society into five sections, from the politicians and 'Society', down to the man in the street. On this occasion, he thought there was some respect for Germany in military circles and on the far right, but that almost everyone else was opposed to her. The man in the street, on the other hand, was inclined to suspend judgement because he 'did not altogether understand the situation.'²

The British Cabinet now had several issues to decide. The first problem was to make it apparent to the public that it had not been Simon's speech that had precipitated the German withdrawal, which Simon tried to do in a B.B.C. broadcast on 17 October.³ Leo Kennedy recorded on 16 October that MacDonald had also instructed Geoffrey Dawson, at Cliveden, as to what line he wanted *The Times* to take.⁴ Parliamentary criticism does not seem to have caused undue concern. In the debates on the address, when parliament reopened, the Government defeated two motions of censure against it

¹ A telegram to the German embassy in Italy on 13 October to inform Mussolini of the German intention to withdraw on the evening of 14 October shows that Simon's speech was not the cause of the decision to leave the conference, DGFP Series C vol.I no.498: 13 October 1933 and no.499, Minutes of the Conference of Ministers on October 14, before Simon's speech, makes this explicit, although Bennett posits that Hitler already had the text of the speech at this time but that it had no effect on the decision, see E.W. Bennett, (Princeton, 1979), p.485.

² PRO FO 371/16760 C 9788/8176/18: Mr. Sterling (Helsingfors) to Mr. Collier, 18 October 1933.

³ PRO CAB 23/77 53 (33), 18 October 1933 and Bodleian MSS.Simon 112, fols.67-73 text of broadcast.

⁴ Churchill Kennedy 1/15, diary, 16 October 1933.

with huge majorities, although discussion on disarmament had been protracted and not altogether complimentary of the Government's handling of the situation.¹

Secondly, the future of what remained of the Disarmament Conference had to be decided but these talks did not result in any decisions until December 1933. Of the Cabinet's two perceptions of public opinion, the League of Nations Union reinforced the idea that immediate disarmament was the overriding concern in a resolution on 19 October 1933.² By December 1933, concern was being expressed that Hitler's proposals for the basis of peace in Europe would dupe the British public into pacifistic tolerance of Germany. The Ministerial committee on the Disarmament Conference considered a propaganda campaign to make it clear that what the German proposals really meant was rearmament for Germany. J.H. Thomas and MacDonald were particularly concerned by this but Lord Irwin reminded them that, if they did expose German rearmament to the press, they might find it difficult to square this approach with a possible, future decision to rearm themselves. MacDonald thought this was a good point but that the press should be given a strong hint to study the German proposals carefully, 'to avoid any stampeding of public opinion.' A statement should be made by the Government in terms which the man in the street could understand, which was what Hitler had done.³

To conclude, perceptions of public opinion played a crucial rhetorical role in diplomacy at the Disarmament Conference. Ramsay MacDonald and John Simon sanctioned the use of such language and Eden translated it into practice. It was the

¹ Hansard, 5th Series, 1932-33, 281, 702-6 and vol.283, 653.

² D.S. Birn, (1981), p.114.

³ PRO CAB 27/504 D.C. (M) 24 (32), 15 December 1933. Geoffrey Dawson had seen MacDonald on 27 November and had thought that he spoke more freely than usual and was clearly worried about the position of the National Government, Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/37, diary, 27 November 1933.

language in which not only the British, but also the French, attempted to win both points of detail and larger conceptual battles. Perceptions of public opinion were also used in Cabinet discussions and in correspondence to justify policy decisions within the decision-making group itself. The most important idea used against Germany was that the British public would not tolerate any degree of German rearmament, under the convention, until she had demonstrated some good behaviour. However, the British were privately intimating to the French that, if the Germans would agree to samples in the second period, they would sign the convention. This suggests that the British felt the need to reflect public opinion's desire to sign a convention immediately but also to pay lip-service to the idea that Germany should not rearm. The only other reasons given for not allowing samples in the first period were that the French would not accept it and that it would open the door to Germany to ask for further concessions if they were allowed.

The evidence of the first few months of 1933 suggests that opposition to German internal policy contributed to the perception that the public did not want to allow the Germans any leeway. The debate of 13 April had linked this sentiment against Germany to the conduct of the Disarmament Conference and had been reinforced by mistrust of German intentions in Austria during the summer. There appears to have been a close correlation between parliamentary opinion and the Cabinet's perception of public opinion, but it should not be forgotten that, quite often, parliamentary opinion on these issues was also 'club' opinion and the views of friends and former colleagues. In another circular model for the formation of perceptions of public opinion, we have seen that The Times had both supported and opposed the Government's line on disarmament during the year, opposing the idea of retaining police bombing, if it jeopardized the signing of a

convention, but supporting firmness against Germany in September and October. We can conclude that The Times was not a crucial arbiter of governmental opinion since the leading articles at vital moments seem to have been inspired by the negotiators themselves.

Turning from the function of the phrase to methodology, the Cabinet's line does seem to mirror the resolutions passed by various pressure groups during the year. We cannot show, definitively, that the press reports and social contacts, which might have brought this information to the Cabinet, actually did perform this function and this is one of the limits of reconstructing perceptions about public opinion from such sources. However, the timing of various resolutions, particularly that of the Labour Party in early October and of the National Peace Council and the League of Nations Union in late September produces a plausible accumulation of manifestations of public opinion which could have influenced the Cabinet. Only on the reservation of the right to bomb from the air for police purposes did the Cabinet knowingly contradict what it acknowledged to be the weight of public opinion.

Given the lack of traceable links between pressure groups and the Cabinet, we might also suggest that pressure group statements could have been extrapolated by the Cabinet to have been the opinion of the bulk of the public. Alternatively, it is plausible that the linkage in parliament of the conduct of negotiations with Germany with nationwide anger about the Jewish issue created the perception, spontaneously, among the Cabinet that granting weapons samples to an aggressive Germany would not be tolerated by the public. The mere repetition of the phrase 'public opinion' in diplomacy and discussion might have meant that the phrase became self-perpetuating for the Cabinet.

Parliamentary opinion before July 1933 had certainly enunciated all the views which the Cabinet attributed to public opinion at large, when parliament was not sitting. These arguments add several nuances to Bennett's theory that the Cabinet's intransigence on disarmament was influenced by public anger at German internal policy and shows that there were other perceptions about the public that were just as important. This first set of conclusions has revealed evidential gaps which mean only circumstantial conclusions can be drawn. In chapters four and five we examine the greater number of direct citations of outside opinion in decision-making and the increase in formal theorization about the public's beliefs, during 1936, as the threat of war came much closer.

Chapter Four.

Conviction or Rhetoric? Planning Diplomacy after the Hoare-Laval Pact.

In this chapter, we examine the possible influences, both official and unofficial, on the Cabinet's perception of public opinion during January and February 1936. It has been suggested that heightened Cabinet sensitivity to the public's attitude to some aspects of foreign and defence policy developed through the experiences of the 1935 general election, the Peace Ballot and the Hoare-Laval affair.¹ We can extrapolate that the perceptions of public opinion derived during these events might have influenced the Government's statements considerably during the Rhineland crisis, only three months after Hoare's resignation. Historians have agreed that all three events in 1935 presented the Cabinet with external, identifiable manifestations of public opinion which they had to take account of in decision-making, yet their characterizations of the Cabinet's reluctance to embrace collective security in 1936 do not match the apparent mandates which 1935 had delivered.

This chapter argues that the Government's lack of confidence in the public's decisions in 1935 pre-dated the Hoare-Laval pact and was symptomatic of the general lack of confidence in public judgment on international affairs which was suggested in chapter one. This modifies the argument that Baldwin's retreat from collective security in 1936 was purely cynical and that the perception of public fear of war over the Rhineland provided him with an escape route from the constraints which Hoare-Laval had imposed. Instead, we suggest that there were other ideas about the public's attitudes to rearmament, Germany and collective security which were formulated in the Foreign Office in late

¹ M. Ceadel, 'The first British referendum: the Peace Ballot, 1934-5' *EHR* vol.95 no.377 (1980), p. 837.

1935 and which were used by Anthony Eden to support his own desire to achieve a general settlement with Germany. It is also argued that there were some actual manifestations of parliamentary opinion in early 1936 which supported Eden and Baldwin's lack of confidence in the public opinion of 1935 and which suggests that parliamentary opinion was much more important in Cabinet decision-making at this time, shortly after a successful general election but also a rough Commons ride over Abyssinia, than the apparent beliefs of uneducated mass opinion.

Firstly, historiography on the events of 1935 is examined to establish the standard assumptions about the effects of the Peace Ballot and the Hoare-Laval pact. Secondly, we contrast and expand these historiographical characterizations of public opinion with evidence for other sources for the perception of public opinion in late 1935 and early 1936. Thirdly, we introduce and delineate social groups with defined attitudes which may have influenced the Government. We also look at how these social groups themselves described public opinion and how these perceptions may have been communicated to the Cabinet in relation to four issues: the implementation of the Government's rearmament programme, the education of public opinion, the search for a settlement with Germany and the future of the Rhineland demilitarized zone.

The perceptions of public opinion which the Cabinet were acting upon, and manipulating, during the Rhineland crisis are generally seen to have been heavily influenced by the Peace Ballot and the Hoare-Laval Pact in 1935, although Emmerson also suggests the prejudicial effect of the French invasion of the Ruhr in 1923 in causing opposition to military sanctions along the Franco-German border.¹ The Peace Ballot of

¹ J.T. Emmerson, *The Rhineland Crisis, 7 March 1936. A study in multilateral diplomacy* (1977), p.22.

1934-5 has been argued to have demonstrated to the Government the commitment of the British population to collective security. Specifically, the Peace Ballot was thought to have shown an overwhelming commitment to collective security, in the form of economic sanctions, although Michael Pugh depicts the results of the Peace Ballot as diminishing the impact of the hardening of opinion which occurred once Italy had actually invaded Abyssinia.¹ Frank Hardie has written that the results of the Peace Ballot could even be said to have been unofficially adopted by the Conservative Party as policy,

*'The 'Peace Ballot' had plainly indicated that a sizeable proportion of the electorate backed economic, but not military, sanctions. This was now Government policy; 'All sanctions short of war' could have been a Conservative electoral slogan.'*²

The general assumption seems to have been that economic sanctions found far greater support than military sanctions within a collective security system.³ Donald Birn has suggested that there was no general conception of an alternative peace keeping system to collective security, merely an acceptance that collective security could prevent war.⁴ In fact, the results of the Peace Ballot demonstrated considerable support for military sanctions against aggressors as well.⁵ Although the answers to question five (b), which asked about economic and military sanctions against an aggressor, were more divided than the responses to the other questions, a significant majority of over four and a half million people responded positively to the idea of military sanctions against an aggressor within a collective security system.⁶

¹ M. Pugh, 'Pacifism and Politics in Britain, 1931-1935' *HJ* vol.23 no.3 (1980), p. 656.

² F. Hardie, *The Abyssinian Crisis* (1974), p. 146.

³ See Ceadel, p. 156.

⁴ D.S. Birn, (Oxford, 1981), p.152.

⁵ See D.S. Birn, (Oxford, 1981), p. 144-5, 150 for the questions and answers.

⁶ See the Rt.Hon the Earl of Avon, *The Eden Memoirs: Facing the Dictators* (1962), p. 237 for a tentative acknowledgement that the Ballot showed that some people would use force in a righteous cause.

Martin Ceadel has described the methodological problems attached to question five, concluding that while the figures dispose of any theories of general public pacifism, it was no 'ringing call' for defiance of all aggressors.¹ Baldwin's 1935 election slogan, 'Arms and the Covenant,' can, therefore, be argued to have been a successful amalgamation of Peace Ballot responses to question five. Historians have made direct links between the choice of this slogan and the results of the Peace Ballot with varying degrees of cynicism about the Prime Minister's motives. Baldwin is generally described as continuing to be cautious about the viability of collective security but unable to ignore this type of public demonstration, deciding instead to capitalize on it.² At the time, a direct link does seem to have been made between public opinion, as illustrated by the Peace Ballot, and the tenor of the election campaign. In the Foreign Office, Ralph Wigram was certainly sceptical about the Government's commitment to the League of Nations. He thought that they were planning words for domestic consumption about the League but no actual embroilment with Italy. He added that some said if the election were over, there would be no mention of Abyssinia.³ At the end of October, Wigram wrote to Phipps saying that he thought most people thought too much attention was being paid to public opinion,

*'I think everybody of importance in the F.O., except Eden and possibly the people who work immediately under him, is now of opinion that we have beaten the drum too vigorously in response to the demands of the ignorant public here.'*⁴

¹ M. Ceadel, *The first British referendum: the Peace Ballot, 1934-5* (1980) p. 833.

² D. Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War 1935-6* (1975), p. 20, K. Middlemas and J. Barnes, *Baldwin* (1969), p.837, P. Williamson, (Cambridge, 1999), p. 51, M. Cowling, (Cambridge, 1975), p.22, 79, N.J. Crowson, (1997), p.55, M. Ceadel, 'The first British referendum: the Peace Ballot, 1934-5' (1980), p. 836.

³ Churchill Phipps Papers, 2/25: Wigram to Phipps, 3 October 1935.

⁴ Churchill Phipps Papers, 2/25: Wigram to Phipps, 25 October 1935.

Philip Williamson has pointed out that Baldwin was also anxious to steal the League of Nations ground from under the feet of Lloyd George's Council of Action during the election campaign and Martin Ceadel has suggested that Baldwin was trying to undercut the L.N.U's anti-Government stance by being seen to support collective security.¹ R.A.C. Parker has judged Baldwin to have exploited League of Nations sentiment after the Peace Ballot, 'eager to drown in humbug some inconvenient indiscretions such as his speech in November 1934: "a collective peace system in my view is perfectly impracticable. It is hardly worth considering."' Parker qualified this cynicism by saying that politicians were not merely puppets of a public opinion they did not share. Collective security to them was an unattainable ideal but one which they had to be seen to try to make work in the circumstances.² Martin Ceadel also suggested that the international events of 1936 did the work of political education which Baldwin postponed by adopting the slogan, 'Arms and the Covenant'. The Rhineland crisis, in these terms, demonstrated to the public, without the Government reneging on its promises, that any sanctions ran the risk of war and that collective security as founded on a sanctionist basis was dangerous.³

The historiographical consensus on the influence of public opinion on the Cabinet's repudiation of the Hoare-Laval plan for Abyssinia is that public opinion, in general, had been hardening in favour of Abyssinia over the summer of 1935 but that it was parliamentary opinion which brought Hoare down.⁴ Waley illustrated this 'hardening

¹ P. Williamson, (Cambridge, 1999), p. 311, M. Cowling, (Cambridge, 1975), p.79 and M. Ceadel, 'The first British referendum: the Peace Ballot, 1934-5' (1980), p. 837.

² Parker, p.47.

³ M. Ceadel, 'The first British referendum: the Peace Ballot, 1934-5' (1980), p. 838-839.

⁴ D. Waley, (1975), p. 29, 32, 68.

of opinion' through Philip Noel-Baker's perception that his constituents were prepared for the British navy to have to fight for Abyssinia,

*'Nevertheless the picture it [Noel-Baker's perception] presents of bellicose citizens, out of tune with their pacific government, is a thought-provoking one and a reminder that public opinion, at least among those who had no memory of the Western Front, was not irremediably pacifistic and that more might have been done to mould it accordingly.'*¹

He also cited a comment that Hoare, himself, had made in a letter to Neville Chamberlain in August to the effect that opinion was hardening against Italy and papers like the Birmingham Post were getting very restive over the ineffectiveness of the League.² Waley used an investigation of parliamentary postbags to suggest that both the extent and impact of constituency opinion had been exaggerated but concluded that it was very difficult to know whether public opinion influenced M.P.s, because, 'it would have been extraordinary had the reactions of the public and M.P.s been entirely different.'³ Finally, he suggested that Baldwin might have over-emphasized the impact of the public outcry against the proposals in order to hide the fact that the Cabinet was, in fact, letting its foreign secretary down.⁴ Frank Hardie was more ambiguous, pointing out that Baldwin did say in Cabinet that it was a worse situation in the Commons than he had ever known. Leo Amery, on the other hand, thought that Hoare could have converted the House completely, if he had been allowed to make his defence speech on 19 December from his seat as foreign secretary.⁵ Hardie concluded his analysis with the vague words, 'outraged public opinion, however, remained outraged.'⁶ Whatever the reality of Baldwin's decision to abandon Hoare, the justification he used, that public opinion, of

¹ *ibid.*, p.40-41.

² *ibid.*, p.30.

³ *ibid.*, p.68.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 68-9. See also F. Hardie, (1974), p.175.

⁵ F. Hardie, (1974), p.279 n.70.

⁶ *ibid.*, p.191.

whatever description, did not want to deliver a small nation into the arms of an aggressor was clearly plausible at the time.

Historians have also studied the effects of Hoare-Laval and the Peace Ballot on sections of parliamentary opinion. Nick Crowson on Conservative parliamentary opinion has identified an anti-sanctionist, pro-Hoare-Laval group led by Leo Amery in 1935 and joined by Austen Chamberlain, Winston Churchill and the Commons' foreign affairs committee, in the summer of 1936, when the issue of sanctions was revived. The views of this group were not consistent in the twelve months after Hoare-Laval. Within the foreign affairs committee, Crowson identified a small group in favour of forcing Germany to withdraw from the Rhineland (Earl Winterton, Austen Chamberlain, Robert Boothby and Edward Grigg), and separate positions maintained by Amery and Churchill. The former acknowledged Britain's moral right to support France but also Britain's right to insist that Hitler's peace proposals be discussed. The latter supported the French calls for sanctions against Germany.¹

The overall historiographical picture of 1935 is of a cynical Baldwin, forced to pledge himself to collective security but unwilling to use it, supported by a group of vociferous, but inconsistent, Conservative M.P.s who varied in their support of firm action against Italy and then Germany. Hitherto, historians have examined the Cabinet's perceptions of public opinion in 1936 purely in terms of the retardant effect they had on taking action against Germany after the reoccupation, without taking account of the diversity of the Cabinet's perceptions, contacts and influences. They are unanimous that public opinion was a factor in the decision-making process, generally suggesting that it

¹ N.J. Crowson, (1997), p.52-74.

was of almost equal importance to military considerations. Emmerson ranked it second, behind military-strategic factors.¹ Parker suggested two factors which determined the outcome of the crisis.² The first was the French decision to take counter action only in collaboration with the British. The second was the British decision to do nothing to damage a renewed attempt to come to terms with Germany. It is presumably in the context of the latter that he then described the Cabinet as ‘meditating’ on public opinion on 11 March.³ Keith Middlemas added British public opinion as a third factor to those of mutual Anglo-French distrust and military unpreparedness.⁴

There is also considerable agreement among historians as to the character of public opinion during the Rhineland crisis and its aftermath. This may stem from a general consonance with Parker’s view that,

*“ ‘Public opinion’ is often difficult to delineate, it is impalpable like some shifting formation of cloud and it is hard to be precise about its effect. This time there is no difficulty ... This time the solution was obvious: prevent the French again spoiling the unexpected new opportunity of coming to terms with Hitler.”*⁵

Certainly, Emmerson, Parker and Middlemas are agreed that the British public was very opposed to military action against the Germans in the Rhineland.⁶ This sentiment is linked to the idea that the reoccupation of the left bank of the Rhineland was a reasonable, and inevitable, revision of the Treaty of Versailles. Only Emmerson charts some shift in opinion in the following months, as negotiations dragged, on to the extent that it was felt that Germany should make a more positive contribution to the discussions

¹ J.T. Emmerson, (1977), p.135 gives two other reasons: personal-political and ideological motivations.

² Parker, p.62.

³ Parker, p.64.

⁴ Middlemas, p.40.

⁵ Parker, p.62.

⁶ J.T. Emmerson, (1977), p.142, Middlemas, p.40 and Parker, p. 64.

in hand.¹ We start this examination of the period before the Rhineland crisis by asking whether the perceptions of public opinion which have been attributed to the Cabinet predated the crisis itself or were produced by the occasion. There are sources of evidence for perceptions of public opinion in late 1935 and early 1936, other than the Hoare-Laval crisis and the Peace Ballot from within the news and central departments of the Foreign Office and from the social groups we began to describe in chapters two and three. A larger amount of diary evidence for 1936 allows us to look at these groups in closer detail.²

In November 1935, before the Hoare-Laval proposals, Ralph Wigram and Orme Sargent produced a Foreign Office memorandum on the future of negotiations with Germany. The memorandum was founded on the fear of the imminent realization of further German territorial ambitions to reunite German-speakers in central Europe. The British role was seen to be one of heading Germany off at the pass, by discussing potential settlement of these areas, before she forced diplomatic incidents which, unless carefully managed, ran the risk of causing a European war. Of the three potential policies outlined, a policy of waiting to see what claims Germany made next was rejected on the grounds that public opinion would not allow it. A policy of settlement was rejected, if it included bargaining away the sovereign territory of other states, on the grounds that it was both immoral in terms of British obligations under the Locarno treaty and that public opinion would not countenance such an abandonment of the League of Nations. If any policy of settlement were to be followed, Wigram and Sargent argued that the British

¹ J.T. Emmerson, (1977), p.208, 212.

² Unfortunately, Eden's diary for 1936 only starts on 31 March, and there are only a few entries between then and June, BUL AVON AP 20/1/16, diary 1936.

public would expect a general settlement to have been attempted before Britain proceeded to intensive rearmament or to further defensive pacts.¹

Minutes on this memorandum disputed their perceptions of public opinion. Lawrence Collier, head of the northern department, was not convinced that such pre-emptive diplomacy was really necessary for the simple reason that few, if any, of the revisions to the Versailles settlement which Germany wanted to make were in the strategic interests of Britain herself. Collier was not sanguine about the likelihood of German ambitions abating of their own accord, but felt that if they were inevitable, it would be better for the British Government not to have shown complicity,

*'Even if German ambitions were realised without us, however, I cannot see that we should be worse off than if we had involved ourselves in them by attempting to control them, while we should at least be able to come before our public opinion with clean hands.'*²

In addition, Collier did not agree with Wigram and Sargent that public opinion would expect a settlement with Germany before Britain had rearmed. He argued that the same public opinion had just provided the Government with an unqualified mandate for rearmament in the general election. He urged, therefore, that Britain stick to her present policy of discussing practical questions with Germany, one by one as they arose, and of endeavouring to satisfy her legitimate claims without encouraging those which were illegitimate. The only practical question on which Britain should, therefore, proceed was the proposed air pact.

In his minute on Sargent and Wigram, Sir Robert Vansittart was also unconvinced that 'further intensive rearmament' would have to wait, in the eyes of the public, for

¹ DBFP 2nd vol.XV Appendix I (a): Memorandum by Mssrs. O.G. Sargent and R.F. Wigram on 'Britain, France and Germany,' with an Annex by Mr. F.T.A. Ashton-Gwatkin on Germany's economic position, 21 November 1935.

² DBFP 2nd vol.XV Appendix I (a): C 8523/55/18, 21 November 1935, comments by Mr. L. Collier..

further negotiations to take place, reiterating that the Government had just been given an imposing majority for re-equipment.¹ He felt greater sympathy for Collier's comments, agreeing that it was disadvantageous for Britain to get involved in conversations with Germany about her ambitions in eastern Europe. However, he could not rule out the possibility of conversations with Germany at all, preferring that Germany expand in Africa rather than Europe if she could be made to do so and that colonial transfer questions might be worth pursuing.

Michael Roi has shown that Sargent and Collier had been carrying on this sort of parrying on the subject of public opinion for some time. Earlier in the year, in relation to the question of a Franco-Russian alliance, they had traded views about the public's opinion of the encirclement of Germany if the alliance took place. Collier was sceptical about Sargent's belief that it would reawaken memories of 1914 when the alliance system had dragged Britain into war.² Roi also pointed out that it was Vansittart's sponsorship of Sargent and Wigram's work that ensured their ideas reached the Cabinet.³ Ironically, the Foreign Secretary, Hoare, noted at the bottom of the November memoranda that he would like to take them away on holiday with him – the holiday which ended in his concluding the pact with Laval in Paris and which cost him his seat in Cabinet.⁴ Vansittart also asked in his minute that Eden should read the paper, but there is no evidence to show when or if he did.

From diary evidence, the Christmas and New Year period of 1936 was overshadowed for most of London by the King's illness and death. The Foreign Office,

¹ DBFP 2nd vol.XV Appendix I (a): C 8524/55/18, 21 November 1935, comments by Sir R. Vansittart.

² M.L. Roi, (Westport, Connecticut, USA, 1997), p. 104.

³ *ibid.*, p.122.

⁴ DBFP 2nd vol.XV, p.736 n.16.

however, remained focused on the European situation. One direct result of the Hoare-Laval proposals was to prompt a movement within the Foreign Office for the education of public opinion about the nature of collective security. This was the first indication that the Foreign Office did not think that the public's devotion to collective security and sanctions, which risked war, was as permanent as both the Hoare-Laval affair and the Peace Ballot might have suggested. Unsurprisingly, this movement was initiated by the official most compromised by the proposals, Sir Robert Vansittart, with the help of Rex Leeper, the head of the news department.¹ Leeper had also discussed the future of the League of Nations with Harold Nicolson and Eustace Percy at a club lunch on 16 January.² Norman Rose, Martin Gilbert and Neville Thompson have shown how the memoranda that Leeper prepared in January 1936 were shown to Winston Churchill and provided the stimulus for the formation of the 'Focus' group later in 1936 and for the increased activities of the Anti-Nazi Council under Churchill's sponsorship.³ It is perhaps worth noting, however, some of the language used in Leeper's memoranda as he identified some of the major problems in the presentation of the work of the League of Nations which caused the Government to question their commitment to collective security in the summer of 1936.

¹ See R.B. Cockett, 'The Foreign Office News Department and the Struggle against Appeasement' *BIHR* vol.63 no.150 (1990), pp.73-85. R.C. Cole, 'The Conflict Within: Sir Stephen Tallents and Planning Propaganda Overseas before the Second World War' *Albion* vol.14 no.1 (1982), pp.50-71 and T. Willcox, 'Projection or Publicity? Rival Concepts in the pre-War Planning of the British Ministry of Information' *JCH* vol.18 no.1 (1983), pp.97-116. See DBFP 2nd vol.XV no.437: 8 January 1936 for Eden's conviction that Vansittart should be retained as the head of the Foreign Office after the Hoare-Laval incident.

² Balliol HN, diary for 1936, fol.8 16 January 1936.

³ N. Rose, *Vansittart. Study of a Diplomat* (1978), p.188-9; M. Gilbert, (1976), p.725-6 and E. Spier, *Focus, A Footnote to the History of the Thirties* (1963), p.43. See also P.M. Taylor, *The Projection of Britain. British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda 1919-1939* (1981), p.29-40 for Leeper and Vansittart's co-operation.

Leeper's first memorandum, on 1 January 1936, argued that the League's image should not be as a body designed to impose punitive settlements but should rather create, by international settlement, a situation which would eliminate any further acts of aggression.¹ Leeper's second memorandum, on 29 January, talked in more practical terms about the education of the public. He advocated capitalizing on existing Foreign Office links to the League of Nations Union, the B.B.C. and the press to produce a co-ordinated effort to publicize the League of Nations. He described this effort as a counterweight to the propaganda saturating the German people which was preparing them to face harsh realities as a united country. He thought something similar could be achieved on behalf of the League if the Government fully realized the importance of this sort of political education. He was careful to use the phrase 'education' to distinguish what he was proposing from the word 'propaganda' and, as he described it, its 'evil associations from the last war.'²

Leeper thought the greatest danger of aggressive war came from Germany. Other sections of the Foreign Office were working on a similar assumption, but with the aim of reducing the danger by diplomatic means rather than alerting the public to it. Anthony Eden began his term as foreign secretary by preparing a covering note for a collection of despatches from the ambassador to Berlin, Sir Eric Phipps, designed to alert the Cabinet to Nazi intentions for 'the destruction of the peace settlement and re-establishment of

¹ PRO FO 395/538 P 224/46/150: Memorandum by Mr. Leeper, Guidance of the press and public opinion as regards the foreign policy of His Majesty's Government, 1 January 1936.

² PRO FO 395/538 P 332/46/150: Memorandum by Mr. Leeper, Proposed campaign for the education of the public as regards the foreign policy of His Majesty's Government, 29 January 1936.

Germany as the dominant Power [sic] in Europe.¹ In this paper, Eden posed the question of the viability of achieving any modus vivendi with Germany at all. Rearmament, he argued, should be hastened, whether any agreement was possible or not. Hankey had also argued that the White Paper on defence should not be too informative so that it did not alienate the public by the size of the programme envisaged.² The Cabinet deferred a decision on British policy on Germany when they discussed this paper on 29 January but the discussion which did take place emphasized both the French view that it was impossible to do anything at present and the difficulties of diplomatic relations with Germany.³

Eden finally decided that reconditioning the defence services must be accompanied by some attempt in the political sphere with Germany.⁴ Several consultations may have helped him to reach this conclusion. Together with representatives of the Air Ministry and the War Office, Wigram, Sargent and Collier had reached a general agreement that the conclusion of an air pact would be valuable, from the political rather than the military point of view, on account of the reassuring effect it would have on public opinion.⁵ On 13 February, Eden was considerably more candid in conversation with Harold Nicolson than he had allowed himself to be on paper. Nicolson wrote favourably of Eden's proposed long-term policy towards Germany,

¹ DBFP 2nd vol.XV no.460: Memorandum by Mr. Eden on 'The German Danger', 17 January 1936. This memorandum has tended to be overshadowed by Vansittart's productions of the same time and is rarely mentioned by historians. See, for example, Parker, p.58-9 and M.L. Roi, (Westport, Connecticut, USA, 1997), p. 119-127.

² PRO PREM 1/192, fols.7-12: White Paper on Defence, undated note from Hankey to Ramsay MacDonald, John Simon, Neville Chamberlain and Baldwin.

³ PRO CAB 23/83 3 (36), 29 January 1936, 11am. This discussion also contained the unfortunate intelligence from the Belgian Prime Minister that as long as the Western Powers were strong, there was not much danger from Germany to the demilitarised zone.

⁴ PRO CAB 23/83 4 (36), 5 February 1936.

⁵ PRO FO 371/19884 C 682/4/18: F.O. Minute by Mr. Wigram, 23 January 1936.

*'He says that his aim is to avert another German war. To do that he is prepared to make great concessions to German appetites provided they will sign a disarmament treaty and join the League of Nations. His idea is to work for this during the next three years and then suddenly to put it before the League.'*¹

If we believe Nicolson's record, Eden was using public opinion's alleged desire for further negotiations with Germany as a pre-condition of rearmament to assist his own efforts to achieve a generous settlement for Germany.² This, in turn, suggests that there was less governmental paranoia about the election results than the theory that the public needed further reassurance about rearmament, despite the huge electoral mandate, might suggest. Subsequent Foreign Office memoranda supported Eden's view that the public would not support rearmament unless it was accompanied by an attempt to come to terms with Germany. Sargent and Wigram reiterated the sense of their paper of November 1935 on 10 February.³ In introducing Vansittart's paper, 'Britain, France and Germany,' Eden made this link between public opinion and the need for a settlement more emphatic. Vansittart merely said that it would be well to come to terms with Germany and that a general settlement might be approached through a particular subject, such as an air pact. He also said that any settlement would involve territorial bargaining and that the British public's reaction to any proposed transfer of colonies should be borne in mind.⁴ Eden added to this that there was a strong argument, as far as the home front was concerned, for coming to terms with Germany and that even if this attempt failed, German intransigence would have been demonstrated and collective security strengthened,

"We have lately been engaged in the examination of our own rearmament programme, and parliament is shortly to be asked to foot a formidable bill made inevitable by

¹ N. Nicolson, (ed.), *Harold Nicolson. Diaries and Letters 1930-1939* (1966), p.243.

² Both Cowling and Parker have described Eden as a collective security advocate when he took office, see M. Cowling, (Cambridge, 1975), p.102 and Parker, p.55.

³ PRO FO 371/19884 C 796/4/18: F.O. Memorandum by Mr. Sargent and Mr. Wigram and minute by Sargent, 10 February 1936.

⁴ DBFP 2nd vol.XV Appendix 4(b): Memorandum by Sir R. Vansittart on 'Britain, France and Germany', 3 February 1936.

rearmament elsewhere. Will the British public be satisfied with rearmament alone? Will they not say 'Your action in this sphere may be indispensable, but why do you not accompany it with some effort to come to terms with Germany if that be possible, and thereby seek to spare the world the political and financial risks inherent in general rearmament?'"¹

Eden had also consulted with Sir Eric Phipps in person. It is not clear, however, exactly what Phipps advised Eden to do as there are no records of the conversations. Nevertheless, Phipps had been preparing for such discussions for some time. In December 1935, he had asked the Cabinet secretary, Hankey, for some guidance as to the direction of future British action towards Germany.² Hankey's response seems to suggest the continued influence of the rejection of Hoare-Laval. Hankey replied, even before the Cabinet's discussion of 'The German Danger,' that adherence to the League was the only possible policy because the public stuck to it and the Government would too, particularly with Eden at the Foreign Office. As regards Germany, Hankey had noted the sense amongst 'some important people', including Baldwin, that Britain should try to get a bit closer to Germany and that some serious people, even in the Foreign Office, would 'chuck in' a colony or two for Hitler's benefit. Hankey, himself, said he was dead against any such thing.³ Wigram had also written to Phipps to explain why he had been recalled to London to see Eden. In this letter, Wigram described the sort of thing that he thought was in people's minds, concluding that the demilitarized zone might have to go, but that

¹ DBFP 2nd vol.XV no.510: Eden to Phipps, 11 February 1936. Eden also thought that the public needed to see rearmament as a response to German rearmament and that the British press were confusing collective security and encirclement as a consequence of rearmament. The language of encirclement was irritating the German embassy in London, see PRO FO 371/19884 C 850/4/18: Phipps to Eden, 11 February 1936, minutes by Wigram and Sargent, 12 February 1936 and Eden, 13 February 1936. However, on 14 February 1936, the German embassy reported to Berlin that British press antagonism to Germany was abating, DGFP Series C vol.IV no.563: 14 February 1936.

² Churchill Hankey papers, 5/5: Phipps to Hankey, 30 December 1935.

³ Churchill Hankey papers, 5/5: Hankey to Phipps, 2 January 1936.

the main thing was that it should go peacefully as part of a general policy towards Germany.¹

A Cabinet committee was formed to discuss these various memoranda about German intentions and the possibility of concluding an agreement with her. It met only once, before being overtaken by the committee set up to deal with the Rhineland crisis, and was formerly reconstituted as the foreign policy committee in July 1936.² In this committee, Eden once again put forward the idea that, although Britain was now committed to modernizing her defence forces, there was an important section of opinion which would not accept that measure unless it were accompanied by a renewed attempt towards a political settlement in Europe. Ramsay MacDonald and John Simon stated that they agreed with this diagnosis of British opinion. Predicated on this idea, the discussion then moved to considerations of long and short term policy. Finally, it was agreed that nothing could be finalized until the committee had had a chance to consider the numerous memoranda that the Foreign Office were preparing on the subject.

It appears that the committee never reassembled to complete this. In full Cabinet, other assumptions about public opinion were being made simultaneously on the question of the need to impose an oil sanction on Italy.³ There was some Cabinet uncertainty about the future of collective security in this meeting. Ramsay MacDonald had written to Eden on 5 February expressing his worries about the number of variables in the situation and wondering whether sanctions were not a 'step in the dark'.⁴ Both Eden and Baldwin

¹ Churchill Phipps Papers, 2/25: Wigram to Phipps, 18 January 1936.

² PRO CAB 27/599 (Cabinet Committee on Germany), fol. 1 and appendix, letter from Hankey to Baldwin, 8 July 1936.

³ Martin Ceadel has argued that the Peace Ballot's articulation of a 'public opinion' on collective security may prompted the Cabinet to give as much consideration as it did to the oil sanction, M. Ceadel, 'The first British referendum: the Peace Ballot, 1934-5' (1980), p. 838.

⁴ PRO 30/69/8 fols. 13-14: 5 February 1936.

thought that the co-operation of Labour in carrying out the Defence Requirements programme necessitated carrying out the Government's commitment to collective security, although Eden foresaw criticisms of being seen to give in to 'left-wing' opinion, presumably from right-wing isolationists. However, he thought they should not shirk the application of an oil sanction because it affirmed the collective security system.¹ This, again, suggests that the Government's commitment to collective security was wavering in favour of securing a settlement with Germany.

Baldwin also felt personally implicated in the commitment to collective security because of the general election platform he had created, saying that the feeling of the country during the last election had been in favour of trying the League system and that a refusal to impose the oil sanction would have a disastrous effect at the next one. Walter Runciman's account of the meeting to his wife prompted her to write that the decision to impose the oil sanction had been taken because the Cabinet were afraid of the peace party and the eleven million who had signed the Peace Ballot, but who knew very little of the actual situation. Runciman himself was opposed to sanctions, thinking that it might provoke the feared 'mad dog' action in the Mediterranean.² However, he was unable to persuade the Cabinet and Eden was authorized to agree to the oil sanction in Geneva on 2 March.

If the electoral mandate for collective security was not completely clear in the Cabinet's mind, parliamentary support for it was even less obvious. Here we can add

¹ PRO CAB 23/83 11 (36), 26 February 1936. See J. Barnes and K. Middlemas, (eds.), (1969), p.911-912 for an account of this Cabinet which does not make Baldwin's concerns about Labour and carrying out the defence requirements programme explicit. Eden had also discussed the oil sanction, the state of Germany with Geoffrey Dawson on 20 February and discussed the oil embargo again with him on 28 February 1936, Bodleian MSS. Dawson 1/40, diary, 20 and 28 February 1933. See M. Cowling, (Cambridge, 1975), p.128 for the argument that Dawson stood behind Eden's policy until early 1938.

² NUL WR Addit.11, Hilda Runciman's diary, 21 March 1936.

some details about the social groups surrounding the Cabinet. Diary sources for 1936 are fuller than for 1933, so this chapter will concentrate more on the Government's perception of this group of M.P.s and this group's own perceptions of public opinion. We can add other circles of social contact to Crowson's picture of parliamentary groups to suggest, more closely, the ways in which political figures met and talked informally. In 1936, one of the best documented and best known forum for all shades of opinion was the Astors' house in Buckinghamshire, Cliveden. Table four shows those that visited Cliveden in the first six months of 1936.

Table 4: Cliveden gatherings, 1936¹

18-20 January	25-26 January	2 February	8-10 February	28 February – 1 March	Easter (24 April – 4 May)	16-18 May	Undated signatures after May 1936
W. Ormsby-Gore	Peter Fleming	Vernon Bartlett	Lord Lothian	W. Ormsby-Gore	Peter Fleming	Robert Bernays	Arthur Salter
Lord Brand	Lionel Curtis	Neville Chamberlain		Lord Cranborne	Lord Mildmay	Sir Horace Rumbold	Vincent Massey
Joyce Grenfell		More-Brabazon ²		Harold Nicolson	Dr. Thomas Jones	Ralph Wigram	Lord Cranborne
		Lord Brand		Robert Bernays	Joyce Grenfell	Geoffrey Dawson	Lord Brand
		Geoffrey Dawson		Earl Winterton	Lord Lothian	Lord Brand	Dr. Thomas Jones
		Edward Grigg ³		Lionel Curtis	Lord Brand	Lord Lothian	Harold Nicolson
		Thomas Inskip		Geoffrey Dawson	Arthur Salter ⁴		Robert Bernays
		Walter Elliot		Samuel Hoare ⁵	Geoffrey Dawson		Samuel Hoare
		W. Morrison					Alice Makins
		Thomas Jones					

¹ RUL Nancy Astor Papers, 2421/7 Cliveden Visitors Book for April 1935-July 1938 and Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/40, diary, 2 February and 29 February 1938.

² Director of several firms including Kodak.

³ Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954) p.176 described Grigg on 25 February 1936 as dogmatically against the government, '*Baldwin must go. The Cabinet is useless. Defences have been shockingly neglected. We are impotent in the air. By July we shall be in the soup. Musso will be on top and we will have to decide between War and Humiliation [sic]*'

⁴ Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954) p.193 lists Arthur Salter and Dawson as present.

⁵ Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954) p.160 notes that Waldorf Astor and Hoare were old friends who had been at Oxford together.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the Cliveden list is the diversity of guests.¹ Foreign Office grantees such as Ralph Wigram and former ambassadors such as Horace Rumbold mingled with politicians, academics and actresses. As before, the juxtaposition of people does not prove that they influenced each other directly, but it does suggest that the opportunity for the exchange of views certainly existed. In the first two months of the year, confidants of the Astor family and regular visitors, such as Thomas Jones, were aware that the Astors were anti-Baldwin and were only prepared to tolerate him until after the coronation.² Of the Cliveden visitors, Thomas Jones was most likely to be in touch with Baldwin and did keep him well informed of the tenor of opinion amongst this group. The Prime Minister was an increasingly isolated figure during 1936, plagued by nervous exhaustion and seeming to count the days until he could retire.

Although notable by his absence from the Cliveden list, Anthony Eden was not a total stranger to this company and was invited to the Astors' house at 4, St. James' Square on 19 February with a large party consisting of Geoffrey Dawson, Lord Cranborne, the Italian ambassador, Grandi, and Baffy Dugdale amongst others.³ Eden was also scheduled to spend a weekend with Lord Lothian, another Cliveden regular, the Astors, the Inskips, Arnold Toynbee, Thomas Jones and the Walter Laytons on 7 March, but the appointment was pre-empted by the German action in the Rhineland.⁴ Lothian

¹ See Michael Astor, *Tribal Feeling* (1963), p. 137 for a characterisation of Cliveden's guests at this period.

² Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954) p. 177.

³ Bodleian MSS. Dawson 1/40, diary, 19 February 1936.

⁴ NAS (Philip Kerr papers) GC 40/17/307 fol. 206: letter to Norman Davis, 28 February 1936. See also, Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954) p. 179.

occasionally offered his views to Eden and Lord Halifax, as in June 1936, when he sent an overview of the international situation to both.¹

Eden was also concerned with reaching the public beyond the Commons, as a foreign secretary at the beginning of his term of office, perhaps mindful of what had happened to his predecessor. He approached Robert Bernays, Harold Nicolson, Roger Lumley and one or two others to support him in an effort to speak more outside the Commons. Harold Nicolson described Eden's idea as being 'that we should speak in the provinces on Foreign Affairs and thereby get the country accustomed to certain ideas.' Bernays was delighted by the invitation which meant he was in close touch with events during the Rhineland crisis.² Bernays was a regular visitor to Cliveden and may well have been one of Eden's main sources for this section of opinion, together with Geoffrey Dawson and Lord Cranborne. Unfortunately, neither Bernays nor Nicolson reveals what the 'certain ideas' were.

In addition to the country house circuit, two of the London dining societies appear to have been particularly influential as meetings places in this year, at least on the evidence of the ubiquitous Geoffrey Dawson. Grillion's attracted a central group of foreign policy enthusiasts and diplomats and the dates of meetings given in table five are taken from Dawson's diary. The significant factor about this grouping is the communal dining habits of those whom historians have, hitherto, divided into camps. These camps may have been identifiable in the Commons but in society, debate took place within a reasonably homogenous community. The other dining society of note in this period was

¹ NAS (Philip Kerr papers) GC 40/17/320 fol.357: letter to Halifax, 3 June 1936.

² N. Smart, (ed.), (Lewiston, New York, 1996), p.238, 14 February 1936 and Balliol HN, diary for 1936, fol.25c: 13 February 1936.

the Literary Society, where Geoffrey Dawson, Edward Halifax and Alfred Duff Cooper regularly dined and from where, on 2 March, Edward Halifax left in a hurry to get back to Cabinet to a discussion on defence.¹

Table 5: Dinners at Grillion's²

5 February	19 February	24 April	6 May	13 May
Geoffrey Dawson	Geoffrey Dawson	Geoffrey Dawson	Geoffrey Dawson	Geoffrey Dawson
Hugh Cecil	Sir John Simon	Sir Horace Rumbold	Frank Lindley	Sir Clive Wigram ³
Lord Zetland ⁴	Sir Samuel Hoare	W. Ormsby Gore	Winston Churchill	'and a large party'
Harold Macmillan	Anthony Eden	Alec Hardinge ⁵	Austen Chamberlain	
	Winston Churchill	John Anderson	Harold Macmillan	
	Lord Cranborne	Sir Philip Chetwode ⁶	Sir Horace Rumbold	
		Duke of Devonshire	Edward Hartington	
		Edward Hartington ⁷	Sir Harcourt Butler ⁸	

One other diary source affords us a glimpse of London social life. Blanche Dugdale, known as 'Baffy', was on the fringes of the Astor circle and of the Cabinet. Her closest confidant was Walter Elliot, then Minister of agriculture, and they met regularly during the period of the Rhineland crisis before Baffy left for a visit to Palestine at the beginning of April. She was also on the executive of the League of Nations Union and her diaries therefore span the political spectrum from pressure groups to decision makers.

¹ Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/40, diary, 2 March 1936.

² Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/40, diary for 1933.

³ Private secretary to King George V, Keeper of the Privy Purse, became Permanent Lord in Waiting to King George VI.

⁴ Secretary of State for India.

⁵ Private secretary to King Edward VIII.

⁶ Commander in Chief of the Indian Army, 1930-35.

⁷ Marquis of Hartington, M.P. (Unionist) for Western Division of Derbyshire, made Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs in 1936.

⁸ Former Indian State Governor, then held banking directorships.

She herself came from a Unionist family, the Balfours, but she joined National Labour in 1937.¹

The Cabinet was making decisions about future negotiations with Germany and Italy in an increasingly combative parliamentary environment.² On 14 February, Baldwin was attacked by Austen Chamberlain in the Commons on the need for a Minister of Defence and Baldwin's lack of grasp of the strength of the German air force.³ Opinions varied as to the success of the attack. Chips Channon thought it had fallen flat, but Collin Brooks thought it effective because it came from such an unexpected quarter.⁴ Amery thought the personal attack on Baldwin diminished the force of the more general criticisms.⁵ David Dutton has noted that, at this time, Austen Chamberlain and Winston Churchill were working together to oppose the National Government's foreign policy.⁶ Baffy Dugdale thought such an onslaught was a sign of the impending fall of the Government. In Cabinet, Baldwin also rated the attack highly and said that the arguments about the organization of defence had carried a large measure of assent.⁷ These speeches prompted the long awaited appointment of a Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence, although Sir Thomas Inskip, the attorney-general, was chosen over Sam Hoare or Winston Churchill.⁸ Thomas Jones breakfasted with the Prime Minister on 20 February

¹ N.A. Rose (ed.), *Baffy. The Diaries of Blanche Dugdale 1936-1947* (1973), xvi-xviii.

² Observers had noted that the government had suffered a considerable loss of prestige after the Hoare-Laval affair, see N.A. Rose (ed.), (1973), p.2 for Baffy Dugdale's view.

³ D. Dutton, (Bolton, 1985), p.319.

⁴ R. Rhodes James, *Chips. The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon* (1967), p.59 and N.J. Crowson, *Fleet Street, Press Barons and Politics* (1998), p.157.

⁵ Amery, p.408.

⁶ D. Dutton, (Bolton, 1985), p.318.

⁷ PRO CAB 23/83 7 (36), 17 February 1936.

⁸ R. Rhodes James, *Memoirs of a Conservative. J. C. C. Davidson's Memoirs and Papers, 1910-1937* (1969), p.410.

and found him tired and sorry for himself, worn out by the succession of crises, of which the last had been Austen Chamberlain's attack.¹

Chamberlain's attack may well have been the result of Baldwin's decision to appoint Eden over him to the Foreign Office after Hoare's resignation, but other quarters of the House were also polemicizing.² On 24 February, Eden made his maiden speech as Foreign Secretary in the Commons but was countered by an effective speech from Leo Amery. Three days later, Harold Nicolson (National Labour) gave a speech to the Commons' foreign affairs committee which talked up the German danger with the effect that, as Chips Channon described it, 'we almost heard the tramp-tramp of the troops.'³ Nicolson, himself, thought his speech had been well received. His general line had been that Germany was an aggressive power who wanted war and that Britain must first rearm in order to speak to her with authority. She should then be faced with a choice between encirclement or the League and disarmament.⁴

Perhaps a little drunk on the success of his own speech, Amery recorded on 24 February that he did not think that the Government were in the least aware of how strongly the tide was beginning to flow against their policy.⁵ He congratulated himself that his speech had not only been approved in the House but also by a great many people outside. His speech had contained some controversial ideas. Perhaps most startling was his argument that the Government should have said 'no' to sanctions in November if, by imposing them, they risked war, which they had promised not to do. If they could not

¹ Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954), p.175.

² D. Dutton, (Bolton, 1985), p.319.

³ R. Rhodes James, (1967), p.59.

⁴ Balliol HN, diary for 1936, fol.31: 27 February 1936.

⁵ Amery, p.409.

avoid that, they should have stuck to the Hoare-Laval peace proposals, which were essentially reasonable, and which could have been carried through the Commons if the Government has stuck to them. He said that there would have been a clamour in the country but that with every week that passed the Government's position in the country would have been stronger.¹

Gilbert Murray, president of the League of Nations Union, wrote to a German correspondent on 18 January about another trend he perceived to be developing in political life. He identified a violent reluctance amongst Conservatives to get dragged into a war or a risk of war where British interests were not immediately concerned. This feeling, he wrote, was backed up by the natural pacifist feeling of the country.² In a letter written a month later, he explained that he did not think that the Hoare-Laval experience had really changed the Government's attitude towards the League of Nations at all,

*'Baldwin had to give way to the outburst of national feeling against the Hoare-Laval proposals, but those proposals are the real policy of the government, and they are clinging to this idiotic hope of conciliating Mussolini.'*³

There were other identifiable strands of opinion developing which Eden could have met rather than read about. Two important gatherings of different shades of opinion took place in February. Thomas Jones reported that he had spent much of the weekend of 2-4 February at Cliveden, defending Baldwin's character to the rest of the company, in which he had been backed up by Tom Inskip.⁴ Eden himself had been present at a dinner at Grillion's on 19 February which such diverse spirits as Churchill and Dawson had also attended. Although Eden was not present, four of his confidants, Bernays, Cranborne,

¹ Hansard, 5th Series, 1935-6, 309, 102-103.

² Bodleian MSS.Murray 75, fol.85: letter to Professor Buell, 18 January 1936.

³ Bodleian MSS.Murray 75, fol.266: letter to Beazley, 29 February 1936.

⁴ Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954), p.171.

Nicolson and Dawson were at Cliveden for the weekend of 28 February – 1 March.¹ Eden, therefore, along with other members of the Cabinet, had had several chances of gauging the opinions of several prominent foreign affairs experts, some of whom were wavering in their support for collective security.

Public opinion regarding the future of the demilitarized zone was also being considered. This involved the principle of collective security because the Locarno agreement guaranteed collective action against any one of the signatories who violated the Versailles settlement. The Foreign Office and service chiefs had prepared papers on the importance of the Rhineland to Britain's strategy in February, after a series of papers in early January had confirmed that Germany was working up the Franco-Soviet pact as an excuse for an occupation.² Eden had prefaced these papers for Cabinet by saying that he did not feel that Britain should tell France her likely reaction to a reoccupation but that it was as well that Britain herself should know what value she attached to the zone.³ Eden also had the Sargent and Wigram memorandum of 10 February before him, which stated that since public opinion would not respond with enthusiasm to a decision to combat, by force of arms, a German occupation of the Rhineland, should the French not be approached to suggest negotiations with Germany immediately to secure the abandonment of the zone?⁴ Anglo-French discussions on the Rhineland resulted in reassurances for Britain that the French would take no forcible action without the full

¹ Balliol HN, diary for 1936, fol.32: 29 February 1936.

² PRO FO 371/19883 C 213/4/18: Air Vice Marshall Courtney to Mr. Wigram, 11 January 1936, C 291/4/18: M. Margerie (French Embassy) to the Foreign Office, 11 January 1936, minutes by Wigram, Sargent and Vansittart; C 435/4/18 Consul A.E. Redmond (Geneva) transmits conversation between Eden and Laval, 21 January 1936.

³ DBFP 2nd vol.XV no.521: 14 February 1936.

⁴ PRO FO 371/19884 C 796/4/18: F.O. Memorandum by Mr. Sargent and Mr. Wigram and minute by Sargent, 10 February 1936.

agreement of the British Government and that the French would not take any isolated action.¹

In relation to the future of the demilitarized zone, there was some sense of public opinion being rather more pro-German than it was pro-French in both German and British Governmental circles in the two months preceding the German reoccupation.² Eden described a general sense of anti-French sentiment in the country when he took over as foreign secretary.³ Thomas Jones, for example, was urging the Prime Minister not to ostracize Germany and to resist Vansittart's pro-French bias.⁴ Implication in the Hoare-Laval plan may have had some anti-French impact, but not in all quarters. In his speech on 24 February, Amery also expressed regret that Britain's repudiation of the Hoare-Laval proposals had driven the French into the arms of the Russians.⁵ Francophobia could also have derived from Flandin's refusal to agree to the oil embargo at Geneva on 3 March.⁶

In the same Cabinet meeting during which Eden reported the French refusal of the oil embargo, likely public reactions to a German move in the Rhineland were suggested. Both the military situation and the state of public opinion were alleged to mitigate against taking any military action against Germany in this eventuality. After Hankey minuted that it had been argued that Britain was not in a position to take military action in the event of a violation of the treaty of Locarno, he recorded that it had become apparent to some members of the Cabinet that the French wanted to know what the British would do

¹ A. Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War 1936-1939* (1977), p. 38.

² *ibid.*, p.38 suggests that this feeling was engendered by Laval's handling of sanctions against Italy.

³ The Rt. Hon, The Earl of Avon, (1962), p.317.

⁴ Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954), p.175.

⁵ Hansard, 5th Series, 1935-6, 309, 104.

⁶ Parker, p.56 and The Rt. Hon, The Earl of Avon, (1962), p.329.

in advance to give them an excuse to put it before their own public to avoid acquiescing in an oil embargo,

*'not so much to secure our active co-operation which they themselves must know was not feasible in the present state of our public opinion and armaments.'*¹

Other papers presented to Cabinet, earlier in February, had depicted the solution of the Rhineland question as another potential way into general negotiations which would avoid Great Britain finding herself in a position where she would either have to fight for the demilitarized zone or abandon it in the face of a German occupation.² In his memoirs, Eden depicted the decision to approach the Germans on the air pact, or on the abandonment of the zone, as the product of growing anxiety about an imminent German move there, rather than as the result of the longer consultative process suggested here.³ It is, perhaps, most likely that the growing number of reports about German intentions in the Rhineland, at the end of February, and the French request to know what Britain would do, if an occupation took place, accelerated the process of approaching Germany which culminated in Eden's interview with the German ambassador, on 6 March, to suggest opening discussions on an air pact.⁴

When Eden did see the German ambassador, on 6 March, he couched his suggestion for Anglo-German talks on an air pact in terms of public opinion. Diplomatic exchanges, in the two months prior to this meeting, had not touched on public opinion, or used it rhetorically, as far as the reports allow us to tell. Conversation had, instead,

¹ PRO CAB 23/83 15 (36), 5 March 1936.

² DBFP 2nd vol.XV no.521: 14 February 1936 and No.522: F.O. Memorandum on terms of a working arrangement with Germany 15 February 1936.

³ The Rt. Hon, The Earl of Avon (1962), p.338.

⁴ For Foreign Office theories on a likely reoccupation, see PRO FO 371/19883 C 151/4/18: F.O. Memorandum, Note on references to the Rhineland demilitarised zone in telegrams and despatches received in the Foreign Office from 1933 to January 1938, 9 January 1936, seen by Eden on 13 January.

revolved around tentative feelers between Berlin and London on bilateral pacts and the problems of the Franco-Russian pact hindering, in the German view, the possibility of an 'Air Locarno.'¹ On this occasion, Eden pointed out to von Hoesch that British public opinion was preoccupied by Germany's absence from the League, with the results that contacts were more difficult to establish and co-operation more difficult to obtain. It might not be possible now for Germany to return to the League, but could not the possibility of progress in some other sphere be explored which would result in an increase in confidence in western Europe?²

Press opinion seems to have mirrored Cabinet assumptions about the likely British reaction to a reoccupation of the Rhineland. Benny Morris states that liberal and left wing journals condemned the contemplated Nazi move but omitted any calls for a firm British commitment to buttress the Locarno stipulations. The right wing journals, in comparison, rehearsed the German justifications for the move in advance.³ As regards the daily press, F.R. Gannon has characterized them as anxious to keep Britain out of machinations caused by the Franco-Russian pact and all as able to make a case for Germany's claims in the Rhineland.⁴

Emmerson suggests that Hitler was, in fact, more concerned with the reactions of French public opinion to a reoccupation than with that of the British public.⁵ Yet, he also points out that Hitler and Ribbentrop were interested in the reactions of the upper echelons of London society and there is evidence for informal investigations into some

¹ See, for examples, DGFP Series C vol.IV nos.496, 501, 523.

² PRO FO 371/19887 C 1450/4/18: Conversation between the Secretary of State and the German Ambassador, 6 March 1936.

³ B. Morris, *The Roots of Appeasement. The British Weekly Press and Nazi Germany during the 1930s* (1991), p.99.

⁴ F.R. Gannon, (1971), p.98-9.

⁵ J.T. Emmerson, (1977), p.77-78.

sections of public opinion by the Nazi apparatus. At the funeral of George V, the Duke of Coburg held informal conversations with Lord Wigram (described by the Duke as 'Chef de Cabinet to George V'), Edward VIII, Anthony Eden, Lord Monsell (First Lord of the Admiralty), Duff Cooper (Minister for War), Neville Chamberlain, the Dukes of York and Kent, Lord Mount Temple (Privy Councillor and Chairman of the Anglo-German Fellowship), and Mr. John Astor (billed as editor of *The Times*, but, in fact, the proprietor).

Emmerson's summary of these interviews is that Germany clearly had friends in important places in London.¹ This may be derived from the unsurprising statements by those interviewed that they wanted closer collaboration between Britain, Germany and France to safeguard European peace. There are, however, more subtle distinctions of opinion to be drawn from these interviews. The new King had shown himself most anxious for an Anglo-German alliance and Monsell and Mount Temple had been enthusiastic about an air pact. Wigram was rather more abrasive, though in favour of collaboration, asking directly what colonies Germany wanted back. He thought German fear of Russia exaggerated and expressed the hope that the widely held opinion that Germany was not prepared to contribute to a peaceful solution of the Versailles situation did not correspond to the facts.

Eden, Duff Cooper and Mount Temple had all talked about British public opinion. Eden pointed out the importance of public opinion in Government decision-making, in light of the Hoare-Laval affair, and said that British public opinion was as opposed to those who disturbed the peace as anyone. Duff Cooper recommended reciprocal visits

¹ J.T. Emmerson, (1977), p.81.

between British and German ex-servicemen as the best way of promoting understanding among the broad masses in the country and, thus, in public opinion. Mount Temple pointed out that, whilst Britain might give Germany a mandate over the old Portuguese possessions in Africa, neither she, nor the Dominions, would surrender one of their own mandates as this would be incompatible with public opinion.¹

The Duke's general conclusion was that the distrust of Germany which existed amongst the British people was on the wane. The Naval Agreement, visits by ex-servicemen and sport had all played their part in this process. He felt, however, that the forces which were working against Germany should not be underestimated and the slightest weakness would become a target for concentrated attack. In this respect, he felt that a genuine mistake on Germany's part would be less dangerous than inconsistent behaviour. However, he did find assessing public opinion in Britain rather hard,

'Public opinion, which in England plays a role which we cannot always appreciate, is turning, so my family and a number of members of the Government think, even though slowly, in our favour.'

Can we resolve this apparent dichotomy between the evidence for public opinion from 1935 and the Government's retreat from public opinion's support for collective security in 1936 by deconstructing perceptions of public opinion? This case study supports the historiographical consensus about a general governmental retreat from collective security in early 1936, particularly with reference to Germany. We have shown, however, that Eden, was using this, and other, perceptions of public opinion to bolster his plans for a grand rapprochement with Germany. The distinction between convictions about public opinion and rhetorical usage is very difficult to determine from

¹ DGFP Series C vol.IV no.531: unsigned memorandum, January 1936.

Foreign Office planning, but the evidence presented here, from both official and unofficial sources, does suggest the existence of such a distinction.

The other perceptions in circulation were threefold. Firstly, the idea had emerged from the Foreign Office that public acceptance of the Government's White Paper on defence expenditure was dependent on continued negotiations with Germany on a specific issue, which might lead to a general settlement, despite the electoral mandate for rearmament won in 1935. Secondly, the Cabinet felt that collective security still had to be affirmed against Italy. Baldwin was certain that there must be an oil embargo against Italy, because Labour wanted it, and Labour was crucial to the fulfillment of the Government's defence programme. Thirdly, there was a very general sense that peace negotiations should not be offered to aggressors at the expense of their victims and that economic sanctions were acceptable to the public but that military ones were less so. Yet, the Cabinet was not convinced that the public would view any German treaty violation, in respect of the Rhineland zone, in the same light. This perception was reinforced by a general sense of Francophobia in political circles and by the increasing tendency to single out Germany as a candidate for special diplomatic overtures.

Was this use of public opinion in Foreign Office planning a purely cynical means of buttressing an attempt to come to terms with Germany, as Eden wished to do? There is some evidence that his arguments might have been based on actual manifestations of public opinion. Although the idea that the public wanted negotiations to accompany rearmament had been mooted by Sargent and Wigram before Hoare-Laval tested the Government's commitment to collective security, Eden's development of this idea into a firm policy, in the first months of 1936, does seem to mirror the scepticism about

collective security being displayed in the foreign affairs committee during February. There were several occasions on which Eden would have come into contact with Austen Chamberlain, Winston Churchill and Leo Amery who all had pronounced views on the subject. It seems fair to conclude that Eden could have used public opinion to support the approach to Germany he wanted to make, with the knowledge that he was reflecting some sections of parliamentary opinion, even if it seemed to fly in the face of the collective security mandate which the mass of the electorate had supported. This scepticism about the general public's professions of 1935 illustrates an underlying lack of confidence in government circles about the level of public awareness of the risks of the international situation. In chapter five, we examine how far these pre-existing perceptions of public opinion were carried over into the Rhineland crisis itself.

Chapter Five.

Parliamentary versus mass opinion: perceptions of collective security during the reoccupation of the Rhineland, 1936.

' "What justification could there be for a European war to uphold an out-of-date clause in the Versailles Treaty, and why should the Germans not have full sovereign rights in some of the most German territories of the Reich?" These are the questions that three people out of four were asking themselves.'

Viscount Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years* (1954), p.201.

This chapter examines whether Templewood's rhetorical question formed the basis of the Cabinet's perception of public opinion during the Rhineland crisis. Building on the characterizations of public opinion which the Cabinet had developed in January and February 1936, we nuance the rather broad descriptions of public opinion which historians have suggested were important during the crisis itself, by arguing that perceptions of parliamentary opinion fluctuated during the negotiations of March and April. The perception of what the man in the street was thinking, however, remained more static and was, almost entirely, based on Foreign Office theorizing about the public's attitude to Germany since November 1935. The Government also acted to give specific, but varying, impressions of public opinion to the French and German Governments and to the British parliament. These, calculated, enunciations of public opinion can be differentiated from the Cabinet's private deliberations about the state of both mass and parliamentary opinion with regard to the future of collective security in Europe.

The Cabinet's use and appreciation of public opinion during the Rhineland crisis was complex and operated at several levels, both rhetorical and practical. On a rhetorical level, the Government attempted to give the impression to the German Government that

the public did not condone the German move but condemned it. In these terms, the British public were seeking, rather magnanimously, to preserve peace, by supporting negotiation for a general settlement rather than imposing sanctions on Germany. This was important because the Cabinet wanted Germany to feel that Britain was negotiating with her from a position of strength which the actual state of British defence forces did not, in fact, afford her. This impression was created by suggesting public disapproval of German methods of resolving international questions. In contrast, the Government presented a public opinion to the French which was rather less condemnatory of the action, whom they were anxious to persuade that military sanctions were out of the question. Information received by the Foreign Office suggested, initially, that the French Government, itself, felt constrained by its public opinion. However, the Foreign Office and Foreign Secretary became aware of the French use, and exaggeration, of their domestic political feeling to force Britain to support her.

On a practical political level, the Cabinet was genuinely concerned with the tenor of domestic public opinion, particularly as expressed in parliament. The overwhelming perception of parliamentary opinion was that France should be restrained, but not betrayed, and it was this idea which the Government sought to accentuate in the Commons' debate on 26 March, largely because of the growing tide of criticism of the Government's foreign policy, which we examined in chapter four. The problem with mass public opinion was perceived to be that it did not understand the extent of Britain's existing obligations under Locarno and needed to be told, because it was profoundly anti-French, and thought Britain should not be involved in the Rhineland affair at all. The Government was also using this perception of mass public opinion in negotiation with the

French to show that Britain would not become involved, militarily, on the continent. On the other hand, it was the sense in parliament that Germany had broken a treaty, freely entered into, which characterized representations to the German Government. The difference between perceptions of parliamentary and mass public opinion left the Cabinet with serious problems, however, in interpreting the long-term trend of opinion from 1935 to 1936 and in extrapolating what should be done about Abyssinia, in the summer of 1936.

We start with reactions to news of the reoccupation of the Rhineland, on 7 March 1936, and then chart the negotiations over the crisis, in terms of the Government's perceptions and invocations of public opinion, concentrating on the influence of the social groups introduced in chapter four on these perceptions. Eden's initial reaction was, as Parker has pointed out, favourable to the German proposals for long-term peace settlements, which accompanied the announcement of the reoccupation. He suggested to the French ambassador, on 7 March, that they would have a very considerable effect on public opinion.¹ The paper which he prepared for the Cabinet on 8 March was rather more sceptical about the durability of any agreement reached with Hitler, but, nonetheless, urged that this opportunity be taken to pursue negotiations. The most pressing issue, however, was to prevent the French from demanding a German withdrawal of troops, which demand might be accepted by the Locarno powers, and which might have to be backed by force. Eden regarded the strength of the British position to be that France was not in the mood for military adventure, but that Britain

¹ Parker, p.61-62.

might also have to contend with the 'sulky obstructionism' to which the French might resort.¹

In his memoirs, Eden recorded that Baldwin also adhered to this non-sanctionist, non-interventionist view when he visited him, at Chequers, during the afternoon of 7 March.² At 10pm the next day, Eden met Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain, who had come down from Birmingham for the purpose.³ Chamberlain agreed with the tenor of Eden's proposed Commons' statement and suggested that Eden should talk to the leaders of the Opposition beforehand.⁴ Earlier that day, Thomas Jones had telephoned to Baldwin with the conclusions of a Blickling weekend party, which seem to match rather exactly the decisions taken at the Cabinet meeting three days later, on 11 March. Jones' group urged that Hitler's proposals be put to the test, that the reoccupation should not be treated as an act of aggression, that France should be supported, if she were attacked, and that British rearmament should continue apace. Jones told Lady Grigg that he had made this telephone call and said that he had reached Baldwin early because he wanted the Prime Minister's mind to be made up before he got to Cabinet where he would encounter all sorts of contradictory advice.⁵ However, later that year, Baldwin confessed to Jones that he had been terribly anxious for three days when Germany re-entered the demilitarized zone and there had been people clamouring for Britain to occupy the Rhineland. At this later stage, Baldwin seemed overwhelmingly relieved that he had at least managed to keep Britain out of war.⁶

¹ DBFP 2nd vol.XVI no.48: 8 March 1936.

² The Rt. Hon, The Earl of Avon, (1962), p.343-4. See also J. Barnes and K. Middlemas, (1969), p.915 and PRO PREM 1/194 (Reoccupation of the Rhineland), fol.7.

³ PRO PREM 1/194, (Reoccupation of the Rhineland), fol.7.

⁴ BUL NC 2/23a fol. 266.

⁵ Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954), p.180-181.

⁶ Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954), p.206-7.

On Monday 9 March, Eden undertook a personal attempt at opinion polling on his way to Cabinet, when he asked his taxi driver what he thought of the situation and received the answer that he supposed Jerry could do what he liked, in his own back garden.¹ In his memoirs, Eden wrote of the driver's attitude, 'This, I was sure, represented the majority opinion in Britain, when once convinced that no German attack on France or Belgium was immediately intended.'² This was certainly the perception of public opinion which Eden presented to the Cabinet, when it met that morning for the first appraisal of the crisis. The meeting was businesslike, approving a statement to be made in the Commons, and noting that Eden was to meet Flandin, the French foreign minister, and representatives of the other Locarno powers, on 10 March. Outside the Cabinet, some Ministers decided to take their perceptions of public opinion direct to the German camp. On the evening of 9 March, Duff Cooper, the secretary of state for war, made it clear to the German ambassador that the British public would fight for France, if she were attacked by Germany, but would not resort to arms on account of the recent occupation of the Rhineland. Most of them did not care 'two hoots' about Germany occupying her own territory. Significantly, he separated this from opinion in parliament. He told von Hoesch that the Right, and some parts of the Left, wanted Germany's proposals to be accepted but that this tendency was held in check by opposition to the new Germany. At this dinner, von Hoesch, himself, recorded that he thought there was general acceptance for the basic idea of the solution which Germany proposed, coupled with some regret over the breach of a treaty.³

¹ This phrase has been quoted by historians as evidence for British public opinion in general, see J.T. Emmerson, (1977), p.142.

² The Rt. Hon, The Earl of Avon, (1962), p.346-7.

³ DGFP Series C vol.V no.47: 10 March 1936. See also no.50: 10 March 1936.

Diary accounts of the atmosphere when the news of the reoccupation broke, on 7 and 8 March, also suggest an anti-war atmosphere. Collin Brooks, editor of the *Sunday Dispatch*, described the development of opinion in this direction to have occurred within hours of the news of the event itself, 'Britain had become strongly pro-Hitler, with a mood of irritation against France that her damned punctilio might precipitate a war in which Britain is unfitted to participate.'¹ Two days after the announcement, Harold Nicolson thought that the mood of the House was one of fear, 'anything to keep out of war.' The following day, he enlarged his sample of opinion, writing that the country would not stand for anything that made for war and that, on all sides, sympathy for Germany could be heard.² Yet, on the lunch circuit, Lady Lloyd thought a party held by Sir Edward Grigg at the Commons, on 10 March, had talked a lot of nonsense when they had said they were 'all for Hitler' and 'why not chuck France and accept Germany's terms.' She remonstrated to her diary, 'as if Germany could be relied upon to keep any promise 5 minutes longer than it suited her to do so.'³

The language of missed opportunities was also being employed in British political circles. On 6 March, just before the crisis, Lord Lothian had written to Lloyd George to the effect that he thought Hitler's latest speech had created a real chance of European peace. Lothian thought that British public opinion ought to insist that this last chance should not be missed but should be explored to the uttermost.⁴ Eden, himself, was supposed to have spent the weekend of 7 March at Lord Lothian's house, Blickling, but worries about the Rhineland had forced him to stay in London. At Blickling, that

¹ N.J. Crowson, (ed.), (1998), p.159.

² N. Nicolson, (ed.), (1966), p.248-249.

³ Churchill Lloyd 28/19, entry for 10 March 1933. Lady Lloyd was the wife of Lord Lloyd of Dolobran.

⁴ NAS (Philip Kerr papers) GC 40/17/310 fol.446: letter to David Lloyd George, 6 March 1936.

weekend, from where Thomas Jones had telephoned to Baldwin, Walter Layton, editor of The Economist and chairman of the News Chronicle, thought that there was such widespread fear of Germany's ultimate ambitions that France, and some other countries, would want a preventive war immediately. The rest of the party maintained a line more akin to the Cabinet's view, and Thomas Jones recorded that Waldorf Astor was already making a comparison between the British attitude to Germany and her attitude to Italy,

*'the rest of us maintain that English public opinion will fasten on Hitler's proposal for a 25 years peace and will not back France, while willing to do all possible to bring France along. Layton and Astor are more pro-French than the rest of us and Astor ... has naturally been rubbing in the line we've taken at Geneva over Italy's aggression, and asking "What about Germany's breach on the Rhine?"'*¹

On 10 March, the German ambassador, von Hoesch, compiled a more thorough survey of British public opinion which seems to match Cabinet perceptions of the position very exactly. His reports, throughout this period, offer a useful corroboration of some sections of opinion, since it was the ambassador's business to move in important political and society circles. That Berlin wanted reports of British public opinion suggests that British opinion still carried some weight with the German Government and that, consequently, the British Government were tapping a vulnerable spot when they invoked public opinion in their negotiations with Germany. Von Hoesch separated opinion into four sections: the broad mass of the people (including the 'man-in-the-street'), the press, parliamentary and governmental circles and important political figures. The masses were the most favourable to Germany, the press satisfactory, despite sharp criticism of the treaty violation in some papers, but parliament was 'several degrees more critical and nervous' than either the masses or the press. Criticism and indignation there were affecting the response to the German proposals, although the Commons was aware of the

¹ Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954), p.180.

need to keep out of war. He felt that the British Government was in a complicated position, torn by conflicting obligations to France, treaties and peace. Germany was particularly reproached, in these circles, for judging her own case herself rather than discussing it on the international stage through arbitration.¹

In private session at the Locarno meeting in Paris, on 10 March, Eden was presented with a description of French public opinion which did, indeed, suggest that Britain would be torn by conflicting obligations. Faced with the French demand for Germany to evacuate the Rhineland, before negotiations on the German peace proposals could begin, he expressed surprise to Flandin that French public opinion was prepared to contemplate military action over this question. The French Ministers replied that all sections of the French public, even the most pacifist, realized that everything was at stake.² Eden made it clear that Britain saw the German action as a chance to start serious negotiations with the French, invoking the weight of British public opinion to counter Flandin,

*'He [Eden] would not disguise that, in the view of His Majesty's Government and of British public opinion, several opportunities of reaching an agreement with Germany had been missed. That was why he had said in the House of Commons that, while the action of Germany was to be condemned, there still remained the task of reconstruction.'*³

The Cabinet held its own consultations on the state of French public opinion in the meeting which followed Eden and Halifax's return from Paris. Eden chose to present the obduracy of the French in terms of their public opinion, suggesting that he either thought that this was a perfectly plausible state of affairs and that it was the French people who had forced their Government into this position, or that the Cabinet would

¹ DGFP Series C vol.V no.66: 10 March 1936.

² DBFP 2nd vol.XVI no.61: 10 March 1936.

³ DBFP 2nd vol.XVI no.63: 10 March 1936.

recognize these statements as French rhetorical devices. He reported that private conversations, which he had had with both Flandin and the Belgian Prime Minister, Van Zeeland, had been useful for the light they had shed on their respective public opinions. Both nations felt that the risk of war being precipitated by firm action at this time was remote but that, if Germany was allowed to remain unmolested in military occupation of the Rhineland, war in two years' time was a certainty and would be fought under very unfavourable conditions.¹

To illustrate this, he recounted the views of one Frenchman he had met who had described the French people as being very nervy.² They felt that, if Germany could tear up the Locarno treaty, they could have no confidence in German good faith or in any treaty of guarantee. If that were the case, France would not leave the League of Nations, but any Government would become a laughing stock that continued to rely upon collective security and, in that case, the French and Belgians would fall back on an alliance system. We may surmise whether or not this bellicose Frenchman existed but this device fits the pattern during this crisis of politicians invoking single figures they had met to prove a point about public opinion. Eden went on to outline what would happen if France forced the League to make a pronouncement, Germany then refused to evacuate and military measures came into being. At this point, he argued, Britain would have to tell France what her position was with regard to actual material and men available. To reveal the state of the British armed forces might be fraught with grave issues for the future of the League of Nations and the principle of collective security.

¹ PRO CAB 23/83 17 (36) 11 March 1936.

² The actual phrase used was 'au bout des nerfs'.

In such a situation, diplomacy counted for everything and what the British Government lacked in military power, they compensated for in diplomacy, which painted British public opinion as the voice of reason and justice in the situation. In what Hankey minuted as a 'general discussion', the Cabinet decided to match the French justification of their action through their public opinion with one of their own, which probably had both some rhetorical purpose and some basis in perception. Public opinion, it was said, was strongly opposed to any military action against the Germans in the demilitarized zone. In particular, the ex-servicemen were very anti-French. Many people, perhaps most people, were saying openly that they did not see why the Germans should not reoccupy the Rhineland. Chamberlain described the atmosphere to his diary as unanimous, 'everyone agreed that we could not contemplate war and must make every effort to avoid the repudiation of Locarno.'¹ In these circumstances, it was generally accepted that it was worth taking almost any risk in order to escape that scenario.

The Cabinet also argued that, although the public did not want to fight for the Rhineland, they would require some demonstration of contrition from the Germans to show how seriously they took this treaty violation. It was suggested that public opinion would consider that the Government had taken a reasonable step in handling the situation if Eden's suggestion was adopted that the German ambassador should be told that a further contribution was needed from Germany if a settlement on the proposed lines was to be pursued. This proposal can also be read as an attempt to offer some middle ground to the French, which they might accept instead of their demand for the withdrawal of German troops before negotiations began. The Prime Minister thought that the French were exploiting the fact that the British public had not yet caught up with the idea of

¹ BUL NC 2/23a, fol. 269.

sanctions, backed by rearmament, against international offenders. This implied that, if Britain refused, even hypothetically, to honour her Locarno obligations, the Government would suffer some political backlash from an ignorant public who still did not realize that sanctions incurred the risk of war.

Finally, the Cabinet agreed that Eden should see the German ambassador, that evening, to ask the German Government to undertake not to fortify the Rhineland zone and not to send in more troops during the period of negotiations.¹ The Foreign Secretary was to speak quite plainly as to the feelings of the Government and the House of Commons on the subject. When the Cabinet met the following day, it was still waiting anxiously to hear from Berlin how Eden's démarche had been received.² Leakage of the information that Eden had seen the German ambassador earned the Cabinet a reprimand from Eden and prompted the decision to tell the French Ministers formally what had taken place, at the earliest opportunity. The Foreign Office received news of the leakage while Eden was in Cabinet and Vansittart managed to get a message to Eden at the Cabinet table, recommending that he tell Flandin of his interview with the German ambassador at lunch that day.³ The Chancellor of the Exchequer also took it upon himself to have a word with Flandin. At lunch, at the French Embassy, after the Cabinet meeting, Chamberlain emphasized to Flandin that British public opinion would not support the Government in sanctions of any kind. In his diary for the day, he remarked that they were not getting very far with the French because the French Ministers were afraid of public

¹ See DBFP 2nd vol.XVI no.70: 12 March 1936.

² PRO CAB 23/83 19 (36), 12 March 1936.

³ DBFP 2nd vol.XVI no.78: 12 March 1936.

opinion in Paris and, particularly, of the intrigues of their enemy Laval.¹ Thereafter, Chamberlain was formally co-opted to help Eden and Halifax with negotiations between the Locarno powers. With customary modesty, he wrote to his sister that he had, of course, been called in because the negotiations were peculiarly difficult and delicate.² Chamberlain was confident, at this point, that they could get through things without an outbreak of hostilities although he was still doubtful if the French would agree to anything constructive. On Sunday 15 March, there was a large party for Flandin and van Zeeland at Farnham Royal. Chamberlain recorded how he and Flandin had walked up and down the drive in conversation. Flandin had responded enthusiastically to the idea that an international force might be stationed in the demilitarized zone if the British public would not support sanctions. Chamberlain told him that this would have the added benefit of hardening British opinion against Germany if the offer were refused.³

Two days earlier, on 13 March, the same opinions had been voiced in the Cabinet sub-committee set up to monitor the situation. The senior members of the Cabinet had been co-opted: Baldwin, Ramsay MacDonald, Neville Chamberlain, Hailsham, Simon, Eden and Halifax. Chamberlain opened the meeting by pointing out that the country was definitely more favourable to Germany than to France and was against any possibility of war. He also mentioned a meeting of the foreign affairs committee of the Commons which had been addressed by Austen Chamberlain, Winston Churchill and Sam Hoare.

¹ BUL NC 2/23a fol. 269-270. Other quarters were also fighting for Flandin's ear. On 28 March, he dined with Churchill, Austen Chamberlain, Sam Hoare and Robert Horne, see Churchill, *Chartwell* 2/251, fol.27, 27 March 1936. See Gilbert, p.691 and 738 for Churchill's friendship with and use of Flandin. Harold Nicolson also met Flandin on 17 March at a meeting of the Commons' December Club, see N. Nicolson (ed.), (1962), p.250-252.

² BUL NC 1/18/1 fol. 951: 14 March 1936.

³ BUL NC 2/23a, fol. 273-274.

Several members were reported to have left this meeting in a rather excited state.¹ From his correspondence, we know that Austen Chamberlain, at least, was very upset at the Government's attitude. On 15 March, he wrote to his sister, Hilda, protesting both about the Government's vacillation over supporting France and the public's support for the Government's search for excuses with which to evade responsibility.²

Nick Crowson has noted that Alec Duglass, then Chamberlain's parliamentary private secretary, had written reports on the meetings of this committee for the Cabinet.³ The report of the meeting of the foreign affairs committee, on 12 March, was sent to Baldwin's secretary, Thomas Dugdale, who passed it on to Baldwin. The Prime Minister saw the report, although we do not know exactly when.⁴ It is possible that the report itself may have been the source of Baldwin's later comment to Thomas Jones that he had been frightened, at the start of the crisis, by the sense that some people wanted to force Germany to leave the Rhineland. The report summarized the meeting by saying that, initially, a substantial proportion of the committee seemed inclined not to stop short of being prepared to see Britain go to war. Sir Samuel Hoare's speech, in which he talked about the strong pro-German feeling in the country, had sobered the meeting down and had commanded the support of almost the whole meeting. Hoare had also urged that no reservation should be made in Britain's condemnation of the German action but that no action to prescribe her withdrawal from the zone should be taken before the meeting of the League Council.⁵

¹ PRO CAB 27/603 (Committee on Germany and the Locarno Treaty), L.P. 1 (L), 13 March 1936.

² R.C. Self, (1995), p.502.

³ N.J. Crowson, (1997), p.68.

⁴ Major Thomas Lionel Dugdale (Lord Crathorne). The reports are initialled by him. The report of the meeting of 12 March 1936 is marked 'seen by P.M.' at the top of the first page.

⁵ PRO PREM 1/194, fols. 58-60, 12 March 1936.

Some of Eden's closest advisors also perceived feeling against France around 13 March. Robert Bernays wrote that there was great anti-French feeling in the country, or, at least, there had been at the beginning of the week. He thought that the previous day, however, there had been a change in the tone of the press and the country was beginning to realize that to be anti-French was to be anti-League.¹ On 17 March, Bernays reported that he had given three speeches in Bristol and that there was, undoubtedly, a strong, pro-German feeling in the country, but that people were now less anti-French at the same time.² Bernays' letter also captures well the tension in governmental circles, which Nancy Astor had tried to alleviate at a reception, on 15 March, by organizing a game of musical chairs. Bernays found the scene rather bathetic,

*'There was something extraordinarily comic about the Russian ambassador and the German ambassador competing for the same chair. What an odd world it is. In a few months the massed strengths of these nations may be hurled against one another in the last death grapple of civilisation.'*³

Here, Bernays may have been over-exercising his imagination, since Baffy Dugdale reported that neither von Hoesch nor Maisky actually played the game, thus dashing her own hopes of seeing them scrabbling for the same chair.⁴ Baffy also recorded that Nancy had invited forty-six people to this soirée, including a high proportion of diplomatic and political figures, such as the Secretary-General of the League of Nations. Her evidence supported that of Bernays, when she noted how shocked she was to find such pro-German feeling amongst her friends at an evening of music at Tom Inskip's four days later.⁵

¹ N. Smart, (ed.), (Lewiston, NY, 1996), p.246.

² *ibid.*, p.247.

³ See also Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/40, diary, 15 March 1936.

⁴ N.A Rose (ed.), (1973), p.9.

⁵ N.A Rose (ed.), (1973), p.10.

Eden's advisors in the Foreign Office were also receiving information, from their ambassador in Paris, which suggested that Flandin had been purposefully overstating the bellicosity of French public opinion. On 13 March, at the meeting of the Locarno powers in London, Flandin had called upon Paul-Boncour to give an assessment of French public opinion in response to the Belgian Prime Minister's draft proposal. This proposal suggested that respect for treaties and the Locarno obligations be reiterated and that the Germans should not erect fortifications, or send in any more troops. Paul-Boncour said that he was staggered to see how far from the point of view of the French public the negotiations had already drifted and that these proposals would not be acceptable in France. For the French, it was indispensable that the German troops should be withdrawn from the Rhineland, as a preliminary to negotiations. The British response to this showed that they were still viewing a revision of the Rhineland clauses of the Treaty of Versailles as part of a general settlement. They reiterated that they thought that the French policy would result in war because Germany would not back down if faced with such an ultimatum. They added that they were convinced that British public opinion was not prepared to go to war in order that the Germans should be compelled to go out of the Rhineland one week and be allowed to come into it the next. In the view of the British public, it would not be worth the number of British lives.¹

Throughout the period of these Locarno meetings, the Foreign Office was almost exclusively preoccupied with ascertaining the state of French public opinion, in an attempt to gauge how far the French Government might feel themselves impelled to take a firm line against Germany and how far Britain could, therefore, push her not to take precipitate action. Initial reports from the ambassador in Paris, Sir George Clerk, on 8

¹ DBFP 2nd vol.XVI no.91: 14 March 1936.

and 10 March, suggested that the French public was calm and showed no disposition to panic, although there was an undercurrent of anxiety in the press. Opinion was divided, however, as to the wisdom of the French Prime Minister's statement that the French Government would not negotiate, unless Germany withdrew from the demilitarized zone.¹

Sir George Clerk had also been collecting information, from his regional consuls, about the purported state of French opinion. On 17 March, he reported to the Foreign Office that the consuls at Rouen, Lyon and Le Havre had reported a complete absence of excitement in their districts. In Strasbourg, where agitation was to be expected, excitement had now died down.² The following day, Clerk sent a report of political opinion to the Foreign Office, by telephone. He pointed out that the various external and domestic problems in France made estimating the true state of public opinion very hard, but he had consulted widely and concluded that the French Government's policy had 'rather outrun public opinion.' He then contradicted Paul-Boncour's description of opinion, saying that the French people, as a whole, did not want drastic measures which entailed the risk of war, and they would be prepared for any reasonable concessions, as regards negotiations with Germany, as long as these were offset by some guarantee of security from the western powers.³

Vansittart remarked that this information would have been useful earlier and passed it on to Eden. Sargent pointed out that it appeared that Flandin had been exaggerating the political feeling in France, partly for the purposes of negotiation and

¹ PRO FO 371/19888, C 1513/4/18: Clerk to Eden, 8 March 1936 and C 1544/4/18, Clerk to Eden, 9 March 1936.

² PRO FO 371/19893 C 1987/4/18: Clerk to Eden, 17 March 1936.

³ PRO FO 371/19894 C 2048/4/18: Clerk to Eden, 18 March 1936.

partly because he had been subjected to a great deal of pressure from his pro-Bolshevik supporters. Sargent also suspected that the Roumanian and Russian ambassadors in London had been pressurizing him.¹ Yet, on 19 March, Clerk noted a deterioration in the French position, reporting that the British were increasingly vilified for trying to wriggle out of their Locarno obligations. He feared that if something were not done to calm French fears immediately, the effect on Anglo-French relations would be disastrous.²

In the Cabinet held on 18 March, there had already been some sense that the British should not be made scapegoats for the lack of international action by the French. It was suggested that it was inexpedient to let Flandin return to France to tell the French people that Britain would not support them, because she disliked the idea of a preemptive war, and because British public opinion would not support forcible action. If he did return with such news, in all probability, his Government would fall and one would be returned which would be anxious to ally itself with Germany.³ The Cabinet also resumed discussion of what security guarantees it could offer to France in return for her dropping the demand for immediate evacuation. Again, each proposal was evaluated in terms of the likely response of public opinion. Military conversations with the French were thought to be problematic because the British public would not grasp how limited they were to be and would assume that they covered potential action against Germany. It was thought that, if Germany proved recalcitrant in the forthcoming negotiations, people might support economic and financial sanctions, even though these ran the risk of war. Military conversations were generally approved, if it could be made very clear to the

¹ PRO FO 371/19894 C 2048/4/18: Clerk to Eden, 18 March 1936, minutes by Sargent and Vansittart, 19 March 1936 and by Eden, 23 March 1936.

² DBFP 2nd vol.XVI no.139: 19 March 1936.

³ PRO CAB 23/83 21 (36), 18 March 1936.

British public that they were confined to mutual arrangements in the event of German aggression against France or Belgium during the period of negotiations. The meeting ended on a humorous note. Eden produced a telegram from Sir Eric Phipps reporting that Ribbentrop had strongly supported the occupation of the Rhineland and had even told the German Chancellor that it would be warmly welcomed in England. Ribbentrop was convinced that the majority of the British people were pro-German. Eden, wryly, asked that any of his colleagues who might come into contact with Herr von Ribbentrop should disillusion him on this subject.

Eden eventually managed to push the French into a moderate stance, in which some gesture of contrition, but not complete withdrawal, would be requested from the Germans, before negotiations began. An international force, to appease French security worries, would be stationed in the zone. Eden had to gauge next whether these proposals would be accepted by parliament, when they came before the Commons, in the form of a White Paper, on 26 March. The tenor of his statement to the Commons would be crucial, given the rumblings of discontent for more forceful action which the Cabinet had gathered from the foreign affairs committee. By 19 March, Eden had some evidence of support for his proposals. He had outlined his plans to a dinner party at the Belgian Embassy, on 17 March, attended by Winston Churchill, Harold Nicolson, Herbert Samuel and Austen Chamberlain. Nicolson related to his wife how all had agreed with Eden's plans and that Churchill had suggested that this showed cross-party union. Eden, however, remained convinced that the House of Commons and the Government were riven with dissent.¹ If Nicolson's other notes for the day are to be believed, Eden may

¹ N. Nicolson, (ed.), (1966), p. 252.

well have been right. Flandin had addressed a Commons' club that day and had been blunt about the need for Britain not to dishonour her obligations when faced by Hitler's bluff. After the meeting, Nicolson emerged to find the corridors buzzing with people trying to get signatures for resolutions; firstly, that nothing would make Britain go to war and secondly, and paradoxically, that nothing would induce Britain to break her word.¹

Earlier, on 17 March, before the dinner party at the Belgian Embassy, there had been a meeting of the foreign affairs committee and the atmosphere at this meeting was reported to the Cabinet on 25 March. There was considerable overlap between the Belgian dinner party and the committee, so it is likely that Eden knew about its proceedings before Dunglass' report for the Cabinet on 25 March.² The committee now seemed to find inaction over the Rhineland inevitable, but rather humiliating, for Britain. Harold Nicolson wrote, on 12 March, that the people would not have a war against Germany and that, even if Britain honoured her Locarno obligations to defend treaties and used force, there would only be communism in a defeated Germany. Therefore, Britain would have to back down and Hitler would have won.³ Leo Amery reported that he found the atmosphere, in the smoking room of the Commons as well as in the lobbies, to be one of very strong dissatisfaction with the Government. His speech at the meeting, on 17 March, however, sounds not dissimilar to the policy which the Government wanted to follow and to get the French to follow,

'After the discussion had run nearly an hour I chipped in, taking as my text Nicolson's remark that we should restrain France but not betray her, came down definitely against anything military, or in the nature of sanctions, but laid stress on the extent of the moral obligations to France we had incurred in recent months, and pointed out that not going

¹ *ibid.*, p.251.

² N.J. Crowson, (1997), p.68.

³ N. Nicolson, (ed.), (1966), p.249.

*to war was no reason for falling on Hitler's neck, and that if France did not want to discuss the German offer we should not be in a hurry about it.*¹

All the speakers that mentioned public opinion in Dunglass' record (five of twelve) spoke of it as anti-war and pro-German. There was still little sympathy for France.² Dunglass noted that it was Amery who voiced the views of the moderates of the committee when he said that Britain should restrain France, but not betray her. There also seemed to be a general consensus in favour of the British Government's role as an honest broker between the two sides.³

Other sections of opinion were making the judgement that it was the attitude of 'the-man-in-the-street' which was the decisive factor in the situation. At a meeting of the League of Nations Union executive, on 12 March, the Dean of Chichester had said that the ordinary man had almost breathed a sigh of relief when he heard that Hitler had entered the zone. At this, Austen Chamberlain gasped, having just given a speech in which he had said that Germany should not get away with this treaty violation and that Britain should not negotiate with Germany until she had withdrawn.⁴ An observer of this meeting, Baffy Dugdale, wrote that she agreed with everything Chamberlain had said, but that she feared that the Dean's appraisal of public opinion was correct. She thought that ninety out of a hundred people felt no anger towards the Germans and this had been demonstrated at a sherry party she had recently attended. Nearly everybody there had abused the French and had wanted to restrain them.

¹ Amery, p.411.

² Thomas Jones recorded at the end of April that the Whips had found that in a large attendance at the foreign affairs committee immediately before Eden's speech, seventy per cent of the government's supporters were anti-French. Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954), p.188.

³ PRO PREM 1/194, fols.39-42.

⁴ Compare this speech with Neville Thompson's characterization of British political opinion as practically all hostile to France, *The Anti-Appeasers. Conservative Opposition to Appeasement in the 1930s* (Oxford, 1971), p.105.

At Chatham House, where special meetings took place on the crisis on 18 and 25 March and 2 April, public opinion was also seen by participants as the decisive factor in the negotiations. Over the three meetings, there was little other agreement, with both pro-German and pro-French opinions expressed. Most agreed that people did not understand the nature of sanctions in a collective security system and the only way forward for Britain seemed to be the education of public opinion and mediation between France and Germany. Harold Nicolson opened the discussion by comparing the states of mind of two, putative men-in-the-street, one from Lyons and the other from Leicester.¹ He thought that the Englishman realized that the French were frightened but that the Germans had not committed an act of war. They had just acted to relieve their anxieties by occupying their own land. In contrast, he thought the Lyonnais was preoccupied with the thought that England might betray him. Nicolson was quite sure, and received support for this view, that the state of mind in the three countries concerned would determine the outcome more than treaties, politics or economics.²

On 25 March, the Chatham House participants characterized public opinion as, in Eleanor Rathbone's phrase, 'Sentimental Pro-Germanism.' She attributed this to a misconception of the facts, by the same public opinion which had rescued Britain from the disgrace of the Hoare-Laval proposals.³ A week later, Lord Lothian thought British public opinion was 'sentimentally pro-German' because it did perceive the essential justice of the German position.⁴ The Polish specialist, John Harley, thought that the

¹ *Germany and the Rhineland. A Record of the Proceedings of 3 meetings held at Chatham House on March 18th, 25th and April 2nd*, Special Supplement to *IA* vol.15 no.2 (Mar/April 1936).

² *ibid.*, p.15-16. Nicolson was supported by the Conservative M.P for South Derbyshire, Paul Emrys-Evans and the secretary of the League of Nations Union, Dr. Maxwell Garnett.

³ *ibid.*, p.40-41.

⁴ *ibid.*, p.50.

public was confused. He had heard ex-servicemen saying that they would prefer to fight against France than Germany.¹ Many were agreed that there was a lack of leadership and education of public opinion. Dr. Maxwell Garnett cited Lord Grey's conclusion, after twenty-five years' experience of international relations, that the education and organization of public opinion was essential for the maintenance of peace.²

Norman Angell took the view that the Government had failed to explain to the public what the implications of sanctions were. He thought that sanctions themselves did not make war – just uncertainty about them, which could be exploited by those they were directed against.³ Lieutenant-General Sir John Gathorne-Hardy agreed, but said that, if you were never going to face a situation which might mean war, you would be the slave of every bully. He, himself, was dismayed by the attitude of the press, which ignored the essentials, and talked about 'A Chance to Rebuild.' If London were bombed, he said sardonically, that would be a chance to rebuild.⁴ The journalist, Henry Wickham Steed, hoped that the Government would not misunderstand the people's love of peace or that they would imagine that the country wished to grovel before Hitler.⁵

From this secondhand evidence, the press seems to have adopted an overwhelmingly anti-French position. Historians have concurred, to some degree, with this view. Benny Morris depicted the weekly press as having one persistent feature during the negotiations. While there was a risk of war, anti-Nazi pronouncements were moderated but as soon as this threat receded, a degree of militancy crept back in. Of the

¹ *ibid.*, p.61.

² *ibid.*, p.16.

³ *ibid.*, p.32.

⁴ *ibid.*, p.38-39.

⁵ *ibid.*, p.37.

daily papers, only the Daily Telegraph was suspicious of the German proposals, while on 9 March, The Times ran a leader entitled 'A Chance to Rebuild' (as ridiculed at Chatham House by Gathorne-Hardy). The other papers also thought war was out of the question and that this opportunity for an agreement should not be missed. Only the Manchester Guardian's diplomatic correspondent, F.A. Voigt, suggested that Britain and France should oppose Germany. Although it would be safe to assume that the political groups under examination in this chapter read the newspapers fairly frequently, there is only one piece of evidence describing someone actually doing it. This was a moment at Chequers, recorded by Thomas Jones, when Baldwin spent ten minutes perusing The Times and The Daily Telegraph, at breakfast, before turning to his official box correspondence.¹

Other people in governmental circles had noted an outbreak of anti-French feeling, around 20 March. Gilbert Murray was particularly surprised at the attitude of the popular press. He accounted for this by presuming that the man in the street loved everybody who offered him peace, without looking further, and hated everybody who wanted him to face trouble or risk.² By 25 March, he was more worried, and wrote to Crozier, editor of the Manchester Guardian. He said that the flood of anti-French feeling in the English papers was playing into Hitler's plans to drive a wedge between Britain and France and to bring France to her knees. He also offered some explanation for the British reaction which casts light on later crises,

'He [Hitler] breaks his treaty at a point vital to the French, where we are legally but not morally or emotionally bound. If we acquiesce here, what shall we do when he makes aggressions in Czecho-Slovakia [sic], or Austria, where we are bound by no special treaty?'

¹ Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954), p.205.

² Bodleian MSS.Murray 76, fol.266: letter to the editor of the Spectator, 20 March 1936, fol. 90 and letter to Carruthers, 25 March 1936.

Walter Runciman's wife, Hilda, also felt that the French were very much less popular than the Germans.¹ She had personally undertaken a little survey of 'what ordinary people thought.' She began this, rather strangely, in the House of Commons, when Eden made his statement, on 26 March, and derived the impression that the Right was rather pro-French and the Left pro-German. Outside the Commons, she thought that the general attitude was not so much pro-German as anti-French. Her husband had met two groups of Lancashire business men who had told him that they were certainly supporting the French and would rather do business with them than the Germans. Hilda, herself, found at lunch and tea parties that there was reasonably little sympathy for the French.² From a comparable social position, Lady Lloyd recorded that, at dinner on 20 March, there was much speculation about what Britain should do, but no real agreement except to admit that Germany did not really want to fight at that time.³

The Foreign Office had also been gathering information about British public opinion, although it is difficult to gauge how much of this material was seen by Eden or was reported to him verbally. Estimations of British public opinion started rather later than those about French public opinion. It was not until 14 March that Valentine Lawford, third secretary in the central department, minuted a dispatch from Clerk with an assessment of British public opinion,

*'British public opinion (if letters to this dept. [sic] are any indication) is almost wholly opposed to the French attitude as it is understood.'*⁴

On 16 March, Sargent attempted a more thorough review of the situation, from the point of view of public opinion, although the minutes suggest that it did not reach

¹ NUL WR Addit.10, Hilda Runciman's diary, 18 March 1936.

² NUL WR Addit.11, Hilda Runciman's diary, entry titled, 'Wednesday after the crisis'.

³ Churchill Lloyd 28/19, entry for 20 March 1933.

⁴ PRO FO 371/19891 C 1818/4/18: Clerk to Eden, 13 March 1936, minute by Lawford, 14 March 1936.

Eden and only got as far as Vansittart. It is useful, however, as a rough guide to Foreign Office perceptions of public opinion at this point. Sargent suggested that one way in which Britain might try to induce the French to abandon their plan, to force Germany to withdraw, before negotiations could begin, would be to offer her some politico-military agreement, which could be offered to Holland and Belgium as well. He thought that such an agreement would prove popular with the British public, particularly with regard to the Low Countries. As a corollary of this, he suggested that the British public would demand some control over French foreign policy in eastern Europe, which might entail France freeing herself of her special obligations in that area. Vansittart minuted that this proposal would be discussed later but that France could not be asked to sever her Eastern connections.¹

Sargent added a further note to his memorandum, mooted an idea which Wigram had put forward. Wigram had suggested that what would really reconcile the British public to giving France a guarantee against German attack would be to obtain a corresponding guarantee for Britain from France. Wigram thought that this might outweigh the British public's worries about being drawn into French quarrels on the continent. He thought that these worries were, perhaps, justified, but, equally, that persuading the public of a mutual guarantee would presuppose a vast amount of education of public opinion by the British Government. This type of education, he added, would, from the political point of view, be by no means easy or popular.

The Foreign Office's normal sources about the state of certain sections of opinion

¹ PRO FO 371/19895 C 2134/4/18: F.O. Minute by Mr. Sargent, 16 March 1936, minutes by Vansittart and Sargent of the same date.

had also been at work. Nigel Law's reports on City opinion were read by Vansittart but there is no written evidence to suggest that they were read by Eden.¹ Vansittart clearly enjoyed and valued them, adding to the report of 12 March that Mr. Law should be thanked for such valuable insights at critical times. He added that, whenever he was tempted toward optimism in regard to human wisdom, a little synopsis of City opinion had a markedly stabilizing effect.² Even if Eden did not see this report, his closest foreign policy advisors did have some tangible evidence for the state of an important section of opinion which did not exactly match the description of public opinion which the Cabinet was taking as its benchmark.

On 9 March, Nigel Law reported to Sargent on the state of City opinion which was, as he thought Sargent would expect, overwhelmingly pro-German. Opinions varied, from the sense that the move had redressed the Versailles imbalance, to the hope that Hitler's proposals would be the basis of a new settlement, to those who washed their hands of international treaties and thought heavily armed isolationism was the only way forward. Law added a considerable caveat about this initial reaction which is worth quoting in full,

*'The above are the first reactions of the City and I feel bound to give them to you, however reluctantly. It does not follow that these are the reactions of the country at large. I have seen too often the extent of the views of the City differ from those of the country on foreign affairs to suppose that on this occasion they are identical. Nor does it necessarily follow that second thoughts will be as extreme as those described. Much will depend on the leadership which the government will give.'*³

Indeed, Law's second report, on 12 March, noted that up to fifty per cent of the City had altered their view. There was a general move away from support of Germany,

¹ Law had been in the Foreign Service but had left, after marital indiscretions, to take up a career in the City. Patrick Reilly kindly helped with this point.

² DBFP 2nd vol.XVI no.79: 12 March 1936, minute by Vansittart, 13 March 1936.

³ DBFP 2nd vol.XVI no.55: 9 March 1936.

although not towards the French position. A smaller group was prepared to ask Germany to make a 'symbolic' withdrawal from the Rhineland, at least, and to impose sanctions with France if Germany refused. Law felt that the seriousness of the situation and of Germany's treaty breach was being realized, helped by speeches such as those by Austen Chamberlain and Eustace Percy. He concluded that, if the Government would give the House of Commons a lead, the City and, he presumed, the country would follow in time (presumably towards a stronger stand against Germany) despite the efforts of the press to drive a wedge between Britain and France.¹

Although Eden would not have known this, the German ambassador seemed to agree with most of the perceptions of opinion which the Cabinet were acting upon. On 21 March, von Hoesch, who had been superseded by Ribbentrop in the handling of the Locarno discussions, sent a summary of the crisis to Berlin which contained another lengthy examination of British public opinion. Von Hoesch remained very impressed with the 'sense of justice and decency' of the broad masses of the British people who had realized Germany's claim and had rejected French methods of 'denying justice'. To support this, he said that, even if it had not been evident among the people themselves, he had received numerous letters during the last few days, from people in all walks of life, in which this attitude was repeatedly expressed. He was hopeful that this sentiment would persist through the next phase of negotiations. He also mentioned the attitude of the City as being pro-German, although possibly owing to their business interests and he had praise both for the King and for Germany's old friends, who had risked public criticism

¹ DBFP 2nd vol.XVI no.79: 12 March 1936.

in supporting Germany's case: Lord Londonderry, Sir Ian Hamilton, Lord Lothian, Lord Snowden¹, Lloyd George and many others.²

Preparing for the Cabinet meeting on 25 March, when the Commons statement would be discussed, Eden read the dispatches from Clerk on 23 March, which suggested that the French were exaggerating the force of their public opinion's desire for action against Germany. We may surmise that the sense that the French were exaggerating their public opinion encouraged Eden to think that his White Paper proposals, on the progress of negotiations, during the crisis would not risk the French Government falling. At the Cabinet meeting, on 25 March, however, French public opinion and its vagaries were forgotten, as the Cabinet focused on how to present the new Locarno proposals both to Germany and, more importantly, to the British public. It was pointed out that 'the great mass' of public opinion appeared to assume that Britain had no commitments on the Continent and did not realize the extent of the obligations she had already assumed under the treaty of Locarno, echoing Rex Leeper's concerns in his January memorandum.³ Reports of the Commons' debate would ensure some coverage for Eden's policy explanations but the Cabinet was also concerned to reach an even wider audience, in a way that suggests that it was concerned with the actual state of mind of the constituencies. It was felt that the opportunity should be taken to enlighten public opinion which was assuming that Germany was the "white sheep" and not the "black sheep". The public should be made aware that all the present difficulties had been created by a

¹ Snowden's biographer notes that by 1936, Snowden was out of political circulation and spending his time in the care of nurses, so the value of his support to Germany may be questioned although he did keep writing into 1937, see C. Cross, *Philip Snowden* (1966), p.339-340.

² DGFP Series C vol.V no.178: 21 March 1936.

³ See chapter four, p.164. See also N.A Rose (ed.), (1973), p.8, entry for 12 March 1936 for the perception that the public was totally unaware of the solemnity of the British engagements under Locarno.

Germany who had broken the terms of a treaty into which she had entered freely. It was suggested that, when the Locarno proposals were presented to parliament the following day, Eden should trace the history of British commitments beginning with the treaty of Versailles.

Some members of the Cabinet appear to have been less than happy with this line of argument. Simon wrote to Eden and Baldwin, on the day of the Cabinet, complaining that he felt left out of discussions. He wanted an assurance that the proposed Anglo-French staff conversations would not entail an automatic British military commitment, because he felt that 'the revulsion' of British public opinion to much that was in the White Paper on Defence meant that the British really did not contemplate sending their sons to fight on the continent. He also thought that the French had tied Britain down so much that the prospect of agreement with Germany was getting dimmer and dimmer.¹

The speech itself seems to have targeted dissident parliamentary opinion as well as 'the great mass.' Eden appealed to both, painting British overtures to Germany, for conciliation, as part of their obligations under Locarno. The opening of the speech appeared to be less conciliatory than the attitude towards Germany he had previously displayed, reflecting earlier comments, that condemnation of the German move should be unreserved. At the beginning of the speech, he said that a distinction should be made between national sentiment and Britain's national obligations. Even if most people thought that French and German territory should be treated on equal terms, that was not

¹ PRO PREM 1/194, fol.25. See also N. Pronay, 'Rearmament and the British Public: policy and propaganda' in J. Curran, A. Smith and P. Wingate (eds.), *Impacts and Influences. Essays on English Media Power in the Twentieth Century* (1987), p.57-58 for the view that this perception of public opinion remained that which the Cabinet acted on in defence matters from 1934 until the outbreak of war.

the term of the treaty of Locarno which Britain had guaranteed.¹ He followed this statement by referring to that part of the Locarno treaty which said that the treaty should not restrict the duty of the League to take whatever steps it deemed wise to safeguard peace.² It was in the spirit of this article, Eden stated, that Britain had pursued the course of conciliation between France and Germany.

He also stated, categorically, that a contribution from the German Government was necessary to set negotiations in train. Its contribution so far, although important in itself, was not sufficient and some guarantee, for example that they would not fortify the Rhineland during the negotiations, was needed. Eden reported that he had been told that the German Government could not even give that undertaking.³ He also made a direct appeal to the British public. He exhorted them to realize, and to accept, Britain's international obligations. If the public would not take these obligations upon themselves, he argued, the Government could not ensure peace. He then reiterated the common aims of the British people and the British Government: peace, a strengthened League of Nations and a greater confidence in Europe, in which countries would rely more on law and order than force of arms.⁴

In reply, Hugh Dalton outlined the sections of the proposals which were unacceptable to the Labour party, namely the Italo-British force to be stationed on German territory in the zone.⁵ He also said, explicitly, that the Labour party, and public opinion, would not agree to economic or military sanctions to put the German troops out

¹ Hansard, 5th Series, 1935-6, 310, 1435-1436.

² Hansard, 5th Series, 1935-6, 310, 1439.

³ Hansard, 5th Series, 1935-6, 310, 1446.

⁴ Hansard, 5th Series, 1935-6, 310, 1448-1449.

⁵ Hansard, 5th Series, 1935-6, 310, 1450.

of the Rhineland. Pre-empting a comparison with the Abyssinian situation, Dalton drew careful distinctions between the two scenarios,

*'Public opinion here does, I think, draw a clear distinction between the action of Signor Mussolini in resorting to aggressive war and waging it beyond his frontiers and the actions, up-to-date at any rate, of Herr Hitler which, much as we may regard them as reprehensible, have taken place within the frontiers of the German Reich. The public here draw that distinction and it is a proper distinction.'*¹

Other speakers, notably Winston Churchill and Neville Chamberlain, noted the consensus of opinion on Eden's speech.² The German ambassador was less pleased with the debate. Von Hoesch reported that it had confirmed his sense that the House of Commons was a good deal less sympathetic to Germany than the broad mass of public opinion. He thought that Eden's speech had secured parliamentary and press support for the demand for a German contribution to the process by making some good will gesture. He thought that there was no immediate danger of a change in the sympathetic attitude of public opinion but that the public would certainly not oppose the demand for a German contribution either.³

Despite Dalton's counter-attack, Eden scored a huge parliamentary success on 26 March. Bernays described it as a 'strong and courageous speech' and Harold Nicolson thought that Eden's phrase, that he would not be the first British Foreign Secretary to break his word, had had particular impact. Nicolson's own speech in the debate referred to the present pro-Germanism as a wave, and not a tide, that it was only a fluctuation and that Britain should base herself on certainties such as French support. Even the critical Austen Chamberlain described it as 'a first-class performance such as we rarely get now-

¹ Hansard, 5th Series, 1935-6, 310, 1454.

² Hansard, 5th Series, 1935-6, 310, 1523 and 1538.

³ DGFP Series C vol.V no.223: 27 March 1936.

a-days.¹ Bernays thought that Eden's speech would do a great deal to clear the air and would still some of the conceptions abroad about the state of English public opinion.² At one of the Chatham House meetings, Robert Boothby said that this speech had been one of the few acts of public opinion leadership by the Government and that it had received a wonderful response.³ Paul Emrys-Evans also thought that a great change had taken place in the attitude of the House of Commons and the country, since the speech, and that this should be followed up.⁴

Nigel Law had delayed sending another report on City opinion to Sargent because he wanted to see what effect Eden's speech would have. He seems to have been justified in waiting, as he was able to report, on 30 March, that there had been an almost complete change in opinion, away from antipathy to the French towards support for the British policy. Even the ultra pro-Germans now accepted that Germany had to offer the next move. The only issue on which there was still some doubt was the wisdom of holding staff conversations with the French and Belgians. Law singled out Eden's 'very lucid account of the history which led up to the treaty of Locarno' and his promise not to dishonour Britain's signature as the clinching factors of the speech.⁵ The Cabinet's advice had clearly paid off.

Three days later, Law reported that the City, as a whole, was no longer pro-German. There was now more widespread distrust of Germany's motives and future policy and the need for Anglo-French staff conversations was accepted. There was an

¹ R.C. Self, (1995), p.503.

² N. Smart, (ed.), (Lewiston, NY, 1996), p.249 and N. Nicolson, (ed.), (1966), 254.

³ *Germany and the Rhineland. A Record of the Proceedings of 3 meetings held at Chatham House on March 18th, 25th and April 2nd*, (Mar/April 1936), p.65.

⁴ *ibid.*, p.60.

⁵ DBFP 2nd vol.XVI no.186: 30 March 1936.

unanimous desire that negotiations should go on, preferably in private.¹ The need for Britain to proceed as rapidly as possible with her own rearmament was also felt keenly. Chamberlain considered that Eden had done his work in the Commons well and that the success of the debate had greatly strengthened the Government in dealing with the Germans who, he felt, had been counting on the pro-German sentiment which, undoubtedly, existed. He hoped that von Ribbentrop had warned Hitler that, if he continued to refuse to make any contribution to the discussions, he might lose the sympathy of England and find that she had resorted to an alliance with France and Belgium.²

The speech and White Paper were less well received in Berlin. The Germans sent counter proposals to the White Paper discussed in the Commons, which arrived on 1 April.³ The German proposals did not accept any of the suggested concessions to France and suggested, instead, that long-term security pacts should be put on the table. Henry Pownall, Military Assistant Secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence, thought that this was a clever move,

*'the Germans make a number of proposals for a 'long-range' peace, including disarmament matters and no bombing of civilians. These and the idea of 25 years peace will certainly go down well with this country – it is a clever effort on Hitler's part, he is really appealing to public opinion here.'*⁴

Stymied by the German move, which had been justified by objections to the Anglo-French military conversations, the Cabinet's attention turned to further

¹ DBFP 2nd vol.XVI no.206: 3 April 1936.

² BUL NC 1/18/1 fol.954: 28 March 1936.

³ DBFP 2nd vol.XVI no.193: 1 April 1936.

⁴ B. Bond (ed.), *Chief of Staff. The Diaries of Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Pownall Volume One 1933-1940* (1972), p.108.

justifications of their policy for public consumption.¹ Despite the German protestations, they sent the letter to France and Belgium agreeing to staff talks on 2 April.² They planned another White Paper, this time on relations with Germany during the previous two years, and a further statement in the House of Commons to steady public opinion.³ On 30 March, the Cabinet sub-committee dealing with the crisis had a general discussion about the guidance of public opinion. It was thought that public opinion was very ignorant about the reasons behind the Government's policy and that a broadcast might help. The need to give the opposition leaders equal air time was mooted as a reason for Baldwin not to talk to the nation, although Duff Cooper could not see what harm it would do if all three party leaders gave talks. A decision was deferred until the full Cabinet on 1 May, but the issue was not raised again.⁴ A questionnaire to Germany, enquiring what further territorial grievances she had, was announced as under preparation on 22 April.⁵ This had been designed by Wigram and Sargent to test German sincerity about achieving a settlement.⁶ Cabinet rationale for the questionnaire was enunciated at the end of the month, again with reference to public opinion,

'the impression it [the questionnaire] should give should be that we were most anxious to reach a bargain with Germany but as a preliminary stop we want to clear up their attitude on certain points. The document also must satisfy our own public, but it was

¹ PRO FO 371/19899 C 2544/4/18: Major General J.J. Dill (War Office) to Sargent and minutes by Sargent and Vansittart, 30 March 1936, 'It is to be noted that when the Germans first commented on the proposals of 19th March [...] no complaint, indeed no reference, seems to have been made at all to the proposed Anglo-French military conversations. It was only when after the debate in the House of Commons the Germans tumbled to the fact that there was a certain antagonism to the idea among certain elements of British public opinion and that it was worth exploiting this antagonism, that they proceeded to erect the existence of these conversations as a major grievance.' See also the Rt. Hon. The Earl of Avon, (1962), p.369 for Ribbentrop using staff conversations as an excuse, also BUL NC 1/18/1 fol.955: 4 April 1936.

² PRO CAB 23/83 25 (36), 1 April 1936. See also M.L. Roi, (Westport, Connecticut, USA, 1997), p.128 for Sir John Simon's opposition to holding staff conversations with the French. See A. Adamthwaite, (1977), p. 40 for the argument that France at this time achieved the first steps towards a defensive alliance in the British guarantee to send two divisions to France in the event of an unprovoked German attack.

³ PRO CAB 23/83 27 (36), 6 April 1936.

⁴ PRO CAB 27/603. L.P. 5 (L), Meeting of Ministers, 30 March 1936.

⁵ PRO CAB 23/83 30 (36), 22 April 1936.

⁶ M.L. Roi, (Westport, Connecticut, USA, 1997), p. 129.

*suggested that our countrymen probably realised by this time that one of the objects of the questions was to gain time for the French during the elections and would read it with that background.*¹

By this time, the Abyssinian position was worsening and the question of what could be done to prevent the Italians imposing impossible terms on the defeated Abyssinians was raised.² It was at this point that perceptions of both ‘mass’ and ‘parliamentary’ public opinion during the Rhineland crisis had a direct impact on Cabinet discussions about the future of collective security. Runciman recounted, to his wife, that Eden had only three supporters in his desire to restrain Italy. He also told her that the Cabinet was terrified of a repetition of the Hoare-Laval business, presumably meaning that the Cabinet might not appreciate the feeling in the Commons. He, himself, had pointed out to the Cabinet that the proposals in themselves had not been wrong, just their timing and that that must not be allowed to happen again. Hilda was rather scathing about the Cabinet’s attitude to public opinion, writing at the conclusion of her account of the Cabinet meeting of 22 April,

*‘How terribly timid these tones are about public opinion, they don’t seem to think that Government which after all has the information is better informed and therefore must for every reason lead [sic] and not follow an ignorant public.’*³

Chamberlain was also aware of the public opinion difficulties that the Abyssinian crisis continued to present. He had described the difficulties that it would cause in a letter to his sister on 4 April, ‘we shall be faced with a situation in which public opinion here will be outraged by Italian barbarity and eager to see them punished while the Italians

¹ PRO CAB 23/84 31 (36), 29 April 1936. See also BUL NC 1/18/1 fol.955: 4 April 1936 for the aim of spinning out the negotiations until after the French elections and Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954), p.185 for Baldwin’s sense that the Cabinet would have to wait until after the elections before they could do anything more.

² PRO CAB 23/83 27 (36), 6 April 1936.

³ NUL WR Addit.11 Hilda Runciman’s diary, 22 April 1936.

will be in possession of the country and of complete surrender terms.’¹ Thomas Jones wrote, on 25 April, that there were multitudes who were ashamed of British impotence in the face of the way Italy had used bombs and poison gas.² On the subject of what to do next, Walter Runciman told his wife that Baldwin had, candidly, stated that he would not take Britain into war with her defences in their current state. Runciman himself was very opposed to sanctions, and thought it apparent that Italy had beaten the League and that the best possible terms of closure should now be obtained.³

This discussion led, in turn, to a general policy review in the Cabinet meeting on 29 April. Potential commitments in eastern Europe, engendered by Article XVI of the League Covenant, were considered in terms of the state of Britain’s armaments and the state of her public opinion. This latter consideration seemed to extrapolate from the perception of public timidity about confronting German treaty breaches, a fear of confronting other self-determinatory German moves in the East. Discussion centred, therefore, on the effect of a possible revision of the League Covenant on British commitments in eastern Europe. This was based on the suggestion that Britain should repudiate Article XVI, which read that resort to war, by any member, should be deemed to be an act of war against all other members of the League.⁴

The Government perceived that the Rhineland crisis had demonstrated that the public would not contemplate war on any of the potential issues which would be covered by this heading, largely because the public was now realizing that imposing sanctions ran

¹ BUL NC 1/18/1, fol.955: 4 April 1936.

² Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954), p.187.

³ NUL WR Addit.11 Hilda Runciman’s diary, 6 April 1936.

⁴ See <http://www.tufts.edu/departments/fletcher/multi/texta/historical/LEAGUE-COVENANT.txt> for the text of this article. See Parker, p.69 for discussion of this meeting.

the risk of war in Europe. This was a distinct change to the atmosphere in December 1935. Foreign Office theorizing, which had conditioned the Cabinet's perceptions of the public during the Rhineland crisis, had already evaluated the Hoare-Laval affair as a blip in public opinion. It had been assumed, almost immediately afterwards, that the public had at that time failed to realize that sanctions risked war. Three months later, the Rhineland crisis was thought to have clearly demonstrated this to them. The Cabinet now stated the implications of this perception for the future of collective security. On 29 April, Eden asked the Cabinet if an excision of Article XVI would mean that Britain was surrendering central Europe to Germany. He, himself, thought it improbable that British public opinion would be willing to interfere in Austria, in support of one party bolstered up by Mussolini, against another bolstered up by Hitler.¹ Thomas Jones thought the same of the British public and for almost identical reasons,

*'the man in the street, while he would no doubt join in resisting aggression by Germany on the West, could not be counted on to go to war for Austria and the Balkans and trouble is much more likely to arise there. One hears rumours that half the Austrians are being armed from Germany and the other half from Italy.'*²

The argument was advanced by some of his colleagues that there was every advantage to be gained in pressing on with negotiations for a western pact because public opinion was such that the country would not be willing to honour any commitments, unless these were vital to security, which meant those of the Locarno type.³ Eden then returned to the question he had posed to the Cabinet at the beginning of the year. He asked them to consider if a détente between Britain and Germany was really possible, if

¹ PRO CAB 23/84 31 (36), 29 April 1936.

² Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954), p.188.

³ PRO CAB 23/84 31 (36), 29 April 1936. Baldwin told Thomas Jones on 30 April that it would be impossible to get the British people to fight for objects in Eastern Europe, see Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954), p.191.

Britain should go ahead trying to negotiate a new western security pact and whether more cordial relations with Germany could be achieved, on the basis that the public was prepared to honour very limited international obligations.

The next day, the Cabinet foreign policy committee met, as arranged the previous day. In this meeting, Eden expressed the view that a unilateral repudiation of Article XVI would have unfortunate effects and that continued adherence to the article, pending review, was the best course to pursue. Simon asked whether the League of Nations was going to undertake an enquiry into the efficacy of Article XVI. He thought this would be useful because it would conclude that sanctions were useless, unless participants were prepared to run the risk of war. This idea was received favourably by the committee. According to Hankey's minutes, it seemed logical and it was thought that it would probably be welcome to British public opinion and the to House of Commons.¹ If such conclusions were reached, however, Lord Hailsham pointed out that the public would want to know on what basis the Government's policy was to operate, since its keystone, the Covenant, had been shown to be ineffective. The committee agreed to concentrate on three issues: reflections on the recent break down, the line to be taken in public and what reform of the Covenant was needed.

The shift in the Cabinet's attention, towards the effect of Italy's success in Abyssinia, was reflected in other information about public opinion. At the end of April, Nigel Law wrote to Sargent informing him that the City had all but forgotten about the Rhineland and were now focused, once more, on the Abyssinian question. Opinion had stiffened against Italy and it was felt that Britain had somehow let the Abyssinians down.

¹ PRO CAB 63/622 (Foreign Policy Sub-Committee Meetings), F.P. (1) 30 April 1936.

There was also support for continuing the existing sanctions, with no further questions about the moral right to impose them. Opinion about the League, however, was divided. Some felt that the League had been dealt a death blow, others that it should be patched up and made more effective. The majority wanted the continuation of sanctions by France or, perhaps, an increase in their severity. It was certain, he wrote, that the forces which tore up the Hoare-Laval proposal were, at least in the City, as strong as ever.¹

On 30 April, the link between policy towards Germany and policy towards Abyssinia was demonstrated at the Commons' foreign affairs committee. Here, however, support for the continuation of sanctions was much less pronounced. Winston Churchill spoke on the need for practical opposition to Germany through the League, on the basis that Britain's foreign policy was, traditionally, to oppose a dominant power in Europe. He then went on to say that he was also in favour of dropping sanctions against Italy to promote the negotiation of 'specific arrangements under the aegis of the League'. Leo Amery noted, with amusement, how far this attitude differed from Churchill's sanctionist stance the previous October.² Thomas Jones wrote, on 26 April, that the Government were now thoroughly discredited and that Winston and Austen were seizing the chance to promote disunity in their own party.³ Austen Chamberlain reported to his sister that he was against the continuation of sanctions but doubted whether sentimental public opinion would allow the Government to pursue this course.⁴ Lord Robert Cecil confirmed to

¹ DBFP 2nd vol.XVI no.280: 29 April 1936.

² Amery, p.415. For the increasingly anti-sanctionist feeling of this committee see *ibid.*, p. 416-417. See N.J. Crowson, (1997), p.69-73 on the Commons' swing away from support for sanctions in order to prise Italy away from Germany. Harold Nicolson described the committee on 14 May as exactly divided over sanctions, see Balliol HN, diary for 1936, fol.63: 14 May 1936.

³ Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954), p.189.

⁴ R.C. Self, (1995), p.507.

Winston Churchill, on 22 April, the more general sentiment that a very strong anti-French feeling was still raging in the country.¹

Others were turning to the possible implications of the British and French acceptance of the reoccupation of the Rhineland for German ambitions in the East. There was some concern that Hitler might consider a quick move against Austria to force an Anschluss.² Others looked further down Hitler's list of demands to the Czech situation.³ Harold Nicolson lunched with Robert Vansittart, on 28 April, and the Permanent Under-Secretary made it plain that he did not think that Britain had the right to buy security from Germany by giving her a free hand in the East. Nicolson felt that Vansittart was right but, in practice, it would be quite impossible to get the British people to fight Germany for the sake of the Czechs.⁴ However, Nicolson's views were not wholly consistent on commitments in eastern Europe, since in the sanctions debate in the Commons on 12 June, he criticized Lloyd George's assumption that the British people would not fight for Austria, which he thought an obvious abandonment of the League of Nations point of view.⁵ Robert Bernays reported a dinner party, on 8 May, at which Robert Vansittart had declared that the Hoare-Laval proposals were the result of the discovery that no power in Europe was either able, or willing, to operate against Italy in the event of war. Bernays added that he thought that the protest against the proposals had

¹ Churchill Chartwell 2/253 fol.92: Cecil to Churchill, 22 April 1936.

² Amery, p.414, B.Bond (ed.), (1972), p.110-111, PRO CAB 23/84 31 (36), 29 April 1936.

³ N. Smart, (ed.), (Lewiston, NY, 1996), p.264, 28 May 1936: Robert Bernays had heard from Eden's private secretary, Roger Lumley, that the Foreign Office thought that Hitler would strike next against Czechoslovakia.

⁴ N. Nicolson, (ed.), (1966), p.259.

⁵ *ibid.*, p.266.

been right because the League had had to be tested and the fact that it had failed now meant that people had to think very hard about its whole future.¹

Henry Pownall agreed with the Cabinet's view of the public's attitude to eastern Europe, writing, on 7 May, that it was no good thinking that Articles X and XVI of the Covenant could remain, because people who relied upon them would be let down. He said that the Government knew that public opinion would not allow war, or even the risk of it, for Austria, Czechoslovakia, Memel or the Polish corridor. He was thankful that there had been a test case and that it had been in Abyssinia and not in these regions.² Lord Lothian was also sceptical about the future of collective security. He claimed to have seen this trend developing in British public opinion. In a letter to Gerald Barry of the *News Chronicle*, he said that the country was, finally, coming to realize why the American Senate had rejected Articles X and XVI of the Covenant. He thought that facing up to the realities of the League commitment, rather than to the colonial question, would dominate the British political scene for the following six months.³ At Cliveden over the Easter break, most people were in favour of carrying on with the German negotiations, although Arthur Salter described this as 'treating with gangsters.' Thomas Jones had even written to ask Baldwin not to ply Germany with questions, as if she were in the dock. His sense was that Eden's diplomacy had been played out and had not achieved anything. 'We are all defeated and depressed,' he wrote, ' [...] for the talk is always of foreign problems, apart from the perennial game of remaking the Cabinet.'⁴

¹ N. Smart, (ed.), (Lewiston, NY, 1996), p.260, 9 May 1936

² B. Bond (ed.), (1972), p.112.

³ NAS (Philip Kerr papers) GC 40/17/312 fol.709: letter to Gerald Barry, 23 April 1936.

⁴ Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954), p.193.

Gilbert Murray, of the League of Nations Union, thought that the Cabinet's perception of public opinion was wrong. Murray wrote to Austen Chamberlain, on 23 May, in alarm at the hesitating attitude about the League and collective security which, he thought, had suddenly affected the Government. He added that he was sure this did not represent the real opinion of the country, as local branches of the L.N.U. were sending innumerable letters in favour of continuing sanctions.¹ Murray had, however, received a letter from Austen Chamberlain, in April, which said that if the Peace Ballot were held again, the figures would be very different, to which he had replied that he agreed that the British public were not ready to carry out all the obligations that collective security entailed. Earlier in May, Baldwin had received a deputation from the League of Nations Union. He had reaffirmed that League policy was still the policy of the Government. The only problem with this policy was, he told them, that neither France nor Britain were in a military position that allowed them to contemplate backing sanctions, if it entailed the possibility of military action on the territory of the aggressor, given the huge rearmament programmes of the probable (and actual) aggressor nations.²

The Cabinet waited for a reply to their questionnaire to Germany, during May and June, and discussed whether public opinion would let them discuss terms with Mussolini if sanctions were raised.³ On 27 May, Eden recorded, in his diary, that he was in favour of pressing on with sanctions until September because the decision should be taken by the whole League and not unilaterally. He also recorded that the majority of the Cabinet,

¹ Bodleian MSS.Murray 77, fol.36: letter to Austen Chamberlain, 2 June 1936.

² PRO PREM 1/195 Deputations from the League of Nations Union, fols.9-11. The meeting took place on 4 May 1936.

³ PRO CAB 23/84 39 (36), 27 May 1936 and 23/84 41 (36), 10 June 1936. Robert Bernays also thought that public opinion would not allow the government to discuss terms with Italy in order to concert measures against potential German aggression, N. Smart, (ed.) (Lewiston, NY, 1996), p.264, 28 May 1936.

apart from himself and Neville Chamberlain, was in favour of lifting sanctions.¹ Despite the Cabinet's perception of the public's growing knowledge of the implications of sanctions it was felt, nonetheless, that raising sanctions would be shocking. It was thought that the political significance of this shock might be cancelled out by the significance of freeing Italy to participate in an international settlement, and by avoiding pushing her into Germany's arms.² A report from Eden, at the next meeting, that the Italians had expressed an interest in getting on better terms with Britain turned the Cabinet's view towards abandoning sanctions and the decision was finally taken on 17 June. On 18 June in a Commons' debate, the Cabinet announced its decision to abandon sanctions against Italy, apparently acting on its view of mass public opinion's unwillingness to risk war, rather than the more divided parliamentary spectrum.³ Indeed, the announcement produced a speech by Lloyd George which was generally considered to have done the Government considerable damage.⁴

The Cabinet committee on foreign policy did not meet again until 15 July, by which time their attention had turned to the issue of a possible transfer of colonies to Germany. In early July, the possibility of a Locarno meeting to discuss the Italian situation also arose, with the opportunity to invite Germany, and to include her in discussions because, although she had not answered the questionnaire, she could not be left out of plans for a potential western pact.⁵ This prompted a further Cabinet review of

¹ BUL AVON AP 20/1/16, diary, 27 May 1936.

² PRO CAB 23/84 39 (36), 27 May 1936.

³ D. Waley, (1975), p. 79-81. The decision that Eden should take the lead at Geneva in raising sanctions was taken in Cabinet on 17 June, see PRO CAB 23/84 42 (36), 17 June 1936.

⁴ N. Nicolson, (ed.), (1966), p.266, Amery, p. 422, R. Rhodes James, (1967), p.67.

⁵ See also PRO CAB 23/84 38 (36), 20 May 1936 for the Cabinet's view that to press the Germans further on the questionnaire would not achieve the next stage of their policy, in answer to Eden's argument for publishing the text of the questionnaire.

policy towards the League, eastern Europe and colonies, in case Eden had to face a German delegation at such a meeting.¹ The state of British armaments and public opinion made a solution to the Mediterranean and western security issues a priority,

'it was pointed out that our defensive arrangements were in such a condition that we could not face war in Europe this year and that public opinion would never support the government in such a policy.'

In general discussion, the Cabinet seemed to rue this situation slightly, in which they had practically been forced to abandon eastern Europe for the time being. The point was made that, if Britain had been strong enough and public opinion better instructed, it might have been possible for Britain to have guaranteed peace in Europe, both East and West. The Cabinet decided that it could not announce any such view of eastern Europe although Britain should privately consider what contingencies she would accept definite commitments for, and those where she wanted to keep her hands free. Eden said that Article XVI could not be repudiated because it gave the impression that Britain would not fight. Another member of the Cabinet added to this the idea that a public announcement of where Britain drew the line might deter Hitler, whereas ambiguity might encourage an aggressive German policy. Negotiations with other European powers, for this Locarno meeting, dragged on through the summer and nothing more solid than these Cabinet conclusions about policy was reached.

We may conclude from this chapter that it was not just lack of military preparedness which prevented the Government from wholeheartedly backing sanctions and collective security in the summer of 1936, but that perceptions of public opinion, based on a mixture of official advice and unofficial social exchange, also played a role. We can, therefore, agree with the historiographical consensus about the importance of

¹ PRO CAB 23/84 50 (36), 6 July 1936.

public opinion but can add greatly to the way it which it has been characterized and suggest some ways in which perceptions about it were formed. There were two different characterizations of the public opinion of 'the-man-in-the-street,' one pro-French and the other pro-German, in London political circles. The overwhelming sense was that the public were pre-dominantly pro-German until Eden's speech on 26 March, but that they became more aware of their obligations to France thereafter. Social gatherings and parliamentary events, during March and April, suggest, very strongly, that some members of the Cabinet, and the most influential, such as Eden and Chamberlain, would have been aware of these characterizations.

The Cabinet was also influenced by the portrayal of the state of public opinion which Eden had been theorizing about since January 1936. In terms of making policy, it was most concerned with parliamentary opinion, and it was the various members of the backbench foreign affairs committee which they tried most to influence, away from a confrontation, towards a middle ground of supporting France, by demanding a symbolic gesture from Germany with which to launch negotiations. By the summer of 1936, however, the Government took a chance on the divided state of the Commons to lift sanctions on Italy in order to facilitate an agreement with both Germany and Italy. The Cabinet justified this move towards national diplomacy, rather than collective security, because of the perception that 'mass' public opinion was unwilling to fulfil the Locarno obligations, which it was only just realizing it had, and which entailed the risk of war. This theory, which doubted the strength of the public's commitment to collective security which risked war, had been developing in the Foreign Office since 1935, despite evidence to the contrary, as we saw in chapter four.

This is the most surprising perception of public opinion in circulation during the crisis. The Cabinet cited no evidence for their theory that massed public opinion was unwilling to fulfil their international obligations, with the exception of Eden's taxi driver. If the Cabinet were using this theory as an excuse not to fulfil international obligations, because of a lack of military preparedness, the Rhineland did, indeed, function as an excuse for Baldwin to fall back from the general election position of 1935. As Eden could point to some sections of parliamentary opinion, in January and February 1936, to support his argument that public opinion wanted further negotiations with Germany, so he and Baldwin could point to the divided views in the foreign affairs committee over the Rhineland, and sanctions on Italy, to justify this invocation of public opinion. This usage of public opinion by Eden and Baldwin was, therefore, not wholly cynical, and could have been supported by the evidence of some sections of parliamentary opinion. The tenor of Eden's speech, which combined the contradictions of condemnation of Germany, loyalty to France and the desire for negotiation, is the best example of the Foreign Secretary's careful reading of the House, aided and abetted by the group of confidants he had collected. The opinions of the parliamentary circle appear to have been more important than those of the man in the street, but it was the latter about whom the parliamentary group most often spoke.

We can also suggest that, above and beyond the political motivations for using public opinion to justify a course of foreign policy, the phrase may just have been used, casually, in conversation. Deference to public opinion in conversation, at a time of confrontation with Germany in western Europe, is entirely consistent with the perceived importance of the common man in issues of war and peace discussed in chapter one and

shown here by the speeches made at Chatham House. Methodologically, the richness of sources for this period enables us to reconstruct, to a high level of detail, the opinions of various political groups. Whilst we still cannot demonstrate, definitively, that conversations at Grillion's, for example, persuaded Eden of the opinions of a section of the House, there is enough circumstantial evidence to render such meetings more important in the decision-making process than has been suggested before. In chapter six, we examine the role of perceptions about parliamentary opinion and the man in the street at a time of much greater international tension, during the Sudeten crisis in September 1938.

Chapter Six.

Convincing Chamberlain: the invocation of public opinion by the Cabinet during the Sudetenland crisis, September 1938.

On 23 March 1938, the Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, received a letter from his Cabinet colleague, the Secretary of State for War, Leslie Hore-Belisha. With the Prime Minister due to make a Commons' statement in two days' time, on European relations in the wake of the German Anschluss with Austria, Hore-Belisha wrote that he was responding to Halifax's invitation to the Cabinet to offer suggestions about the content and tenor of this statement. His suggested approach to the House was a mixture of condemnation of Nazi methods, together with optimism that a similar crisis could be averted in Czechoslovakia. His final comments, however, were clearly not intended to be heard in the Commons. He informed Halifax that, amongst his own circle of friends, two questions were constantly being asked. Firstly, when would Britain consider the time to be appropriate to call a halt to the dictator states? Secondly, would Britain really go to war to prevent the incorporation of the Sudeten Germans into the Reich?¹

At the time of the Sudetenland crisis, later that year, the same questions were being asked among the Cabinet's social circles. Broadly speaking, Cabinet perceptions about public opinion have not been regarded by historians as playing much of a part in 1938, until the culmination of the Czechoslovak crisis in September, when public opinion is generally described as swinging against Germany violently between the Berchtesgaden and Godesberg meetings. Of the two major British narratives of 1938, Keith Middlemas brings in public opinion, as a factor within the Cabinet, as early as March, but Keith

¹ PRO FO 800/309 Halifax Papers, fol.138-142: Hore-Belisha to Halifax, 23 March 1938.

Robbins delays its introduction until the summer months.¹ Anthony Adamthwaite, however, has argued that the interplay between the Government and public opinion was crucial at the denouement of the crisis, but from the point of view of how the Government tried to control opinion.² He does point out the use of public opinion in diplomatic rhetoric but concludes by saying that the Cabinet were only constrained by their failure to exert a definitive influence over public opinion, and that public opinion could have been made to support them in resisting the dictators.³

We argue, in this chapter, that public opinion was at least as important as Britain's level of military preparedness in decision-making during September 1938, until the Munich meeting itself. We extend Adamthwaite's points to suggest that there was some evidence for a swing against Germany in both non-parliamentary public opinion and in their own social circles which influenced the Cabinet considerably in their decision to refuse the Godesberg terms. In this way, we elevate the significance of public opinion during the crisis from its current historiographical position. Where this analysis agrees with existing historical narratives, we attempt to describe the actual manifestations of

¹ Middlemas, p.191; Robbins, p.239. For specific treatments of the Sudeten crisis, J. Wheeler-Bennett, *Munich. Prologue to Tragedy* (1948) gives a 'j'accuse' analysis. T. Taylor, Munich. *The Price of Peace* (1979) gives a very detailed account, particularly of negotiations in Prague but makes some unsubstantiated generalisations about public opinion and individuals, for example, p.852, 'And so, at home and abroad, all these voices whispering or shouting in Neville Chamberlain's ear: "You are right. Stick at it. There must be no war"'. R. Rosecrance and Z. Steiner, 'British Grand Strategy and the Origins of World War Two' in R. Rosecrance and A.A. Stein (eds.), *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy* (Cornell University Press, 1993), p.134 looks at public opinion in terms of by-elections. There are many other treatments including, A. Teichova, *An Economic Background to Munich* (Cambridge, 1974), B.R. Farnham, *Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis* (Princeton, 1997), A.J. Crozier, 'Prelude to Munich: British Foreign Policy and Germany, 1935-8' *European Studies Review* vol.6 no.3 (1976), p.357-381, M. Newman, 'The Origins of Munich' *HJ* vol.21 no.2 (1978), p.371-386, P.W. Schroeder, 'Munich and the British Tradition' *HJ* vol.19 no.1 (1976), p.223-243, D. Dilks, ' "We must hope for the best and prepare for the worst": The Prime Minister, the Cabinet and Hitler's Germany' *PBA* vol.73 (1987), p.309-352.

² A. Adamthwaite, 'Democracies, Dictatorships and Public Opinion: Government, Press and Opinion in Britain and France in the Approach to Munich' in *Opinion Publique et Politique Extérieure Vol.2, 1915-1940*, Collection de l'école française de Rome, no.54 part 2 (1984), p.341.

³ *ibid.*, p.250.

public opinion which the Cabinet could have been aware of much more fully. During the crucial decision-making meetings of 30 August to 27 September, their use of perceptions of public opinion changed from apparently arbitrary appraisals, which seem purely to score rhetorical points in Cabinet meetings, to an apparently genuine belief that public opinion was against Chamberlain's conciliatory attitude towards Hitler. This belief was used by Cabinet members as a lever to try to persuade Chamberlain to modify his position. Described, originally, as opposed to a continental commitment, public opinion was perceived, by the end of September, as deeply involved with the moral and symbolic position of the Sudetenland against the dictator states.

This transition can, most obviously, be demonstrated in relation to Halifax's attitude, which changed dramatically on 25 September. His conversion, to the idea that the Czechs should not be coerced by Britain to surrender the Sudetenland, marked a sharp contrast with Chamberlain's continued belief that it was not a matter over which Britain could even bluff the threat of war and that he, alone, with the support of Neville Henderson, had correctly appreciated Nazi aims.¹ The effectiveness of the public opinion ploy, by members of the Cabinet against Chamberlain, was shown by the knife edge position of 28 September, when a German incursion into the Sudetenland would have brought Britain into war. The decisions taken at the Munich conference, therefore, appear to be a contradiction of the Cabinet's decision to resist secession on the Godesberg terms, under the threat of force, and suggests that the decision was almost entirely that of Chamberlain, despite the Cabinet's attempts to describe to him their view of the feelings of the electorate, against Germany. We start by examining the state of theoretical debate

¹ See P. Neville, (2000), p.84-118 for Henderson's role in the Sudetenland crisis.

about public opinion in the summer of 1938, by looking at debates at Chatham House. We then chart the meetings of the Cabinet during the month of September, interspersing the narrative with methodological comments about the role of the press, social circles, protest letters and demonstrations as possible sources of public opinion for the Cabinet.

After the resignation of the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, in February 1938, and the Anschluss in March, attention rapidly became focused on Britain's position if she were called upon, by her Locarno obligations to France, to make a stand against Nazi Germany. Chatham House duly presented a series of talks by prominent M.P.s, public servants and academics entitled, 'The Issues in British Foreign Policy', the results of which were published in the May-June edition of 'International Affairs'. Within these foreign policy debates, public opinion was seen to be crucial. Firstly, the public was thought to have certain views about the type of issue it would go to war for. Arnold Toynbee, the director of Chatham House and Professor of International History in the University of London, was certain that the public would only support a League of Nations war, suggesting a continued adherence to the principle of collective security.¹ In contrast, the Independent M.P., Eleanor Rathbone, thought that public opinion had changed since the Peace Ballot in 1935 and that it had reacted against commitments that were too wide and too indefinite, but would now rally behind a policy of definite and limited commitments.² The journalist, Henry Wickham Steed, and the former diplomat, Nigel Law, agreed that the public was fed up with running away from threats of force and wanted a stand to be taken against such threats, on a principle they could understand.³

¹ A.J. Toynbee, 'Is there a crisis?', *IA*, vol.xvii no.3 (May-June 1938), p. 318-9.

² Discussion following speech by Lord Cecil of Chelwood, *IA*, vol.xvii no.3 (May-June 1938), p. 357-8.

³ Discussion following speech by A.J. Toynbee, (May-June 1938), p. 332-333.

On the question of the public's relationship to the Government, there was general agreement that the system needed reform. Earlier in the year, Zimmern had pointed out the problems of educating the public about the foreign affairs in which it was thought to be so interested.¹ Criticisms were levelled against the newspapers, particularly against the London press, for their failure to provide adequate information - a concern which was mirrored by the founders of the Mass Observation movement, in their study of the Munich crisis, which was published the following year.² In particular, Norman Angell thought that the public needed to be awakened to what an obligation to France really meant.³

If given any sort of lead at all, however, one school of thought held that the country would fall in with whatever the Government was proposing.⁴ Another group considered the opposite to be true: Government credibility was in question. Nigel Law suggested that the people had been 75% in favour of Anthony Eden's policy and were waiting to see what Chamberlain would do now that he had dispensed with the services of one Foreign Secretary. If he slipped up at all, Law warned, there would be a price to pay, drawing an implicit parallel with the governmental crisis over the Hoare-Laval Pact in 1935,

*'there would be a terrific outburst of public opinion which would sweep the present Government out of office, or at least sweep out the old men in it who wished to have peace in their very short time, and also those rather irreverently referred to as the "shiver sisters".'*⁵

¹ Sir Alfred Zimmern, 'The Decline of International Standards', *IA*, vol.xvii no.1 (Jan.-Feb. 1938), p. 18.

² See, for example, discussion following speech by Lord Lothian, *IA*, vol.xvii no.3 (May-June 1938), p. 384; C. Madge and T. Harrison, *Britain by Mass Observation* (1939).

³ Discussion following speech by Lord Cecil of Chelwood, (May-June 1938), p. 353.

⁴ Discussion following speech by Lord Lothian, (May-June 1938), p. 384.

⁵ Discussion following speech by A.J. Toynbee, (May-June 1938), p. 333.

At the end of the discussions, Alfred Zimmern proclaimed himself very worried when estimates as to the unpopularity of the Government were suggested to range between 40 and 60% of the population. It was extremely dangerous, he said, that there should be such divides within a country, when a crisis might strike at any moment. Other speakers had echoed this need for unity and had also wondered how the bulk of public opinion might make itself heard by the Government. Earlier in the year, Zimmern, himself, had said that governments were constrained by their public opinions. He had also pointed out how the public might hinder the Government,

*'The British Government could not move very far in foreign affairs unless they had the country behind them. That was why it was so difficult for Great Britain to commit herself to any obligations for any indefinite period, or indeed commit herself at all in areas of the world where she was not quite sure of the interests of her people. The common man had the absolute veto on government actions in foreign affairs.'*¹

The only Government spokesman to attend these discussions was the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, R.A. Butler, who spoke on the guiding principles of the Government's policy, without using the phrase 'public opinion.' Answering his critics at the end of the discussion, Butler referred, instead, to the Government's desire for co-operation with Britain's huge industrial population. He said that the Government attached great importance to this co-operation and that both the industrial population and the audience at Chatham House would all come to have faith in the Government's foreign policy when they had seen it working. If it was given a chance, he was sure that it would achieve something real and lasting for the peace of Europe and the world.²

This was the political and intellectual atmosphere in which the Cabinet met, in

¹ Sir Alfred Zimmern, (Jan.-Feb. 1938), p. 30.

² Discussion following speech by R.A. Butler, *IA*, vol.xvii no.3 (May-June 1938), p. 407.

late August, to discuss the crisis with Germany that was brewing over the Sudetenland. Whilst there was a consensus at Chatham House on the importance of the public's feelings, where issues of war and peace were at stake, and the lack of information that that public was receiving, there seemed little agreement about the type of war that the public would support and what the principles of the Government's policy ought to be. Although these debates contained some prominent general critics of the Government, such as Law and Wickham Steed, they also represented a broad political spectrum, from League of Nations men such as Toynbee and Zimmern, to old soldiers, such as Jacob Waley Cohen and Major Henry Jourdain. Figures on the social fringes of the Cabinet and politically minded London society, such as Lord Lothian, had also been present, thus giving grounds for regarding this meeting of Chatham House as a reasonable sample of political opinion about public opinion just before the Sudetenland crisis.¹

By the end of August, Chamberlain and Halifax had decided that the likelihood that Germany would intervene forcibly in the Sudetenland was so acute that the Cabinet should be recalled. The Foreign Secretary opened the meeting, on 30 August, with a summary of the events of the past month, which suggested that Hitler's motivations were open to several interpretations, some more sinister than others.² Chamberlain emerged as the principal voice in this meeting which considered that the public would not support a deterrent declaration to protect Czechoslovakia. He reminded the Cabinet that many people in the country, and in Germany, took the view that, if such a declaration were

¹ A.J. Crozier, 'Chatham House and Appeasement' in A. Bosco and C. Navari, *Chatham House and British Foreign Policy, 1919-1945* (1992), p.252 considered that there was a considerable overlap between Chatham House opinion and elite opinion, 'the government, the Foreign Office and Chatham House shared a number of convictions about international affairs common among the foreign-policy-making élite of which it was itself an integral part.'

² PRO CAB 23/94 36 (38), 30 August 1938.

made, there would be no war. He then added his own, rather different, view that no democratic State should make a threat of war unless it was both ready and prepared to carry it out. Chamberlain wrote to his sister, Ida, a week later, that he had derived this view from a book about the nineteenth century Foreign Secretary, Canning, which had been sent to him by Professor Harold Temperley.¹ In the meeting, he went on to say that, at that time, the press were supporting the Government's attitude, but that, if up against war, public opinion might well change suddenly. Simon, MacDonald, Kingsley Wood and Hoare agreed with the Prime Minister, on the grounds that public opinion would be divided by any guarantee. Hore-Belisha expressed this slightly differently, saying that such a threat could only be made if the demand for it already existed in the public mind, which at present it did not. The Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries, Herbert Morrison, the President of the Board of Trade, Oliver Stanley, and the Scottish Secretary, David Colville, all agreed with Halifax that, 'the question of going to war on behalf of Czechoslovakia or indeed the imminence of war at all at the present time, had not really found its way into the mind of the public.' Halifax also thought it would have the effect of dividing public opinion in the country and the Empire.

The only voice to dissent from the idea that the public would be against a guarantee was that of the First Lord of the Admiralty, Duff Cooper, who thought that the people would expect something tangible to be done if Germany invaded Czechoslovakia, although they might not have any clear views as to what. Consequently, he felt that it ought to be shown that there was a possibility of Britain using force. He felt that the effect on public opinion of sending the Fleet to Scapa Flow a few days earlier, as an

¹ BUL NC 18/1/1068; letter to Ida, 11 September 1938. See J.D. Fair, 'The Chamberlain-Temperley Connection: Munich's Historical Dimension' *Historian* vol.48 no.1 (1985), p.1-23.

answer to the German naval manoeuvres, would be advantageous. This proposal did not receive much support. The Lord Privy Seal, Earl De La Warr, whilst agreeing that there should be no guarantee, thought that this decision should not be made public and that Britain risked alienating allies in eastern Europe, if it became known that the Cabinet had virtually decided to take no action if Hitler marched into Czechoslovakia. The only other voice of dissent was that of Walter Elliot, the Minister for Health, who thought that Britain's moral position would be gravely weakened if it was thought, in the world, that she would not take action in a crisis. The Cabinet, eventually, resolved not to make any threat of military action by Britain in the event of a German attack on Czechoslovakia. The questions of public opinion and of Germany's ultimate aims appear to have been at least as important as military considerations as factors in this meeting for all concerned. Whilst fear of air attack can clearly be seen, the rest of the comments that followed from around the Cabinet table all dealt with the issue of public support for a deterrent declaration to Germany, rather than with the strategic situation.

The Cabinet did not reassemble until 12 September, although informal discussions resumed among its inner circle, when its members started to return from the country, on about 7 and 8 September. Most of these discussions centred on whether or not to send a private, deterrent warning to Hitler, which would not suggest to the French or to the Czechs that they were guaranteed British military support in eastern Europe. On 12 September, Halifax was considerably more sceptical about the likelihood that a warning would deter Hitler, whom, he thought, might well have made his mind up to attack Czechoslovakia, whatever the cost, because he was probably mad. Halifax further thought that nothing should be said to humiliate the Führer, because it would impede the

possibility of getting him back to a sane outlook. This time it was Duff Cooper who brought public opinion into the debate, opposing the gentleness with which Halifax wanted Hitler to be handled. He pointed out that public opinion, both at home and abroad, was insistent that a démarche be made to Germany, setting out exactly where Britain would stand if Germany used force against Czechoslovakia. He regretted that the private warning to Hitler, prepared on 9 September, had not been delivered and asked that the Cabinet should now consider giving Hitler a formal warning.¹

The final ministerial meeting of 12 September took place while the younger dissenting group of the Cabinet, Stanley, Duff Cooper and De La Warr, were dining together at De La Warr's house.² The Ministerial meeting took place at 9.30pm, at 10, Downing Street, between Chamberlain, Halifax, Hoare, Simon, Vansittart, Cadogan, Wilson and the Cabinet secretary, Bridges. Cadogan recorded that they studied the text of Hitler's Nuremberg speech, which gave them little help in determining a course of action. Despite Oliver Harvey's sense that the Cabinet was vehemently anti-war at this point, the need to give Germany some display of strength was keenly felt in this meeting, and the Home Secretary recommended that the Anderson report on evacuation procedures should be delayed, from the point of view of public opinion at home and abroad. It was necessary not to give Germany the impression that Britain was less prepared than she actually was.³

From his wife's diary, it appears that Alec Cadogan, the permanent under-

¹ PRO CAB 23/95 37 (38), 12 September 1938. See Parker, p.159.

² See N.A. Rose, (1973), p. 98 for Baffy's description of them as 'the dissident group.' This group had combined in 1936 as well to discuss the idea of forming a 'Centre Party', Balliol HN, diary for 1936, fol.69-70, 19-20 May 1936.

³ PRO CAB 27/646 (Cabinet Committee on Czechoslovakia) C.S.(38) 1: 12 September 1938, 9.30pm.

secretary at the Foreign Office, was feeling the strain of the crisis at this point but had not lost his sense of humour. When he returned home after this meeting, he remarked that it had been a pretty ghastly day trying to prevent a world cataclysm.¹ However, Cadogan noticed a change in the attitude of the principal Ministers on the morning of 13 September. He had been worried that they would not act after Hitler's speech but, whilst nothing had been finally decided, inaction appeared to have been ruled out.² Oliver Harvey again described the Cabinet on this day as painfully anxious to avoid war, in stark comparison to the British public which, he thought, was very worked up. Yet, Harvey now inclined to the view, which had been put forward before the September crisis, that if the Sudetens or Hitler demanded a plebiscite, it would be impossible to get the British public to think that it was worth a war, no matter how much Czechoslovakia disliked it and how false a position it was.³ By the evening of 13 September, it had been decided, again at a late night meeting of Ministers, to accept a plebiscite, on fair and reasonable terms, if it were offered, but not to raise the subject with Hitler if he accepted Chamberlain's offer to visit him.⁴

Chamberlain's plan to negotiate with Hitler personally on this basis was announced to the Cabinet on 14 September, at 11am, as a fait accompli.⁵ There was some remonstrance against this form of presentation, largely by the Minister of Health, Walter Elliott, who felt that those Ministers who had not been concerned in all the discussions were being led, by pressure, to do what they would not have done by their own free will.

¹ Churchill ACAD 8/1, Lady Theodosia Cadogan's diaries, 13 September 1938 and 14 September 1938.

² Dilks, p.97.

³ Harvey, p.178. See PRO FO 371/21736 C 9446/1941/18: Halifax to Runciman, 6 September 1938 for Halifax's repetition of this perception that if a demand for a plebiscite were made, British opinion would find nothing terribly unreasonable about it.

⁴ PRO CAB 27/646 C.S.(38) 3: 13 September 1938, 10pm.

⁵ Dilks, p.98.

However, there was general support for the idea, with further discussion of the state of public opinion. Morrison said that it had greatly changed in the last few years and that the people who had been loudest in opposing rearmament were now loudest in demanding that Britain should take a firm line. Both he and the Secretary of State for Scotland, David Colville, considered that the temper of the country was rising, but Colville thought that most people would still consider a plebiscite to be preferable to war. Malcolm MacDonald agreed with this diagnosis, and said that, on this occasion, the views of The Times represented those of the majority of the country, and that the Dominions would also support a plebiscite over recourse to war.

From where did the Cabinet derive the impressions of public opinion which they acted upon at this meeting and continued to invoke throughout September? The Cabinet and Foreign Office did have some front-line reports about the state of public opinion, both from individuals known to them and from organizations and ordinary members of the public. Most of the reports were written after the meeting on 30 August, so cannot be cited as evidence for the opinions which the Cabinet professed there, but are useful, contextual sources for evaluating the meetings of 12 and 14 September. One of the most prolific of these sources, Nigel Law, whom we met earlier at Chatham House, sent in his assessment of City opinion on 6 September. He reported that the majority of people regarded an eventual war between Britain, France and Germany as inevitable and the only difference of opinion was on the question of whether war would come within weeks or years. Appreciations of German aims differed, but all thought they extended beyond the Sudetenland, and some were convinced that Germany planned expansion to the East. He described those who thought that war should break out imminently, before Germany

was better prepared, as political realists and contrasted them with those business folk who felt that the commercial world should not be constantly exposed to shocks and that some way must be found to curb Hitler's power.¹

Edward Spears, M.P. for Carlisle, wrote a similar type of report, having spent several days canvassing his constituency, and wrote to Halifax with his findings on 14 September.² Spears has been shown by Nick Crowson to have been a member of the Eden/Amery parliamentary combination, which constantly criticized the Chamberlain Government for its lack of backbone at this time, and so he may also have had a specific motivation for portraying his constituents as in favour of a stand against Germany.³ He claimed to have spoken to a wide spectrum of his constituents, from working men to business men, of all persuasions. All, without exception, according to Spears, were expecting the Government to take the strongest action in relation to Germany, and he felt sure that there would be no dissenting voices, no matter how drastic the steps that the Government might choose to take. In fact, Spears thought that public opinion in Carlisle would be very perturbed if the Government showed any hesitation. He added, to bolster Halifax's confidence, that he perceived the prestige of the Government to be very high.

From organizations around the country, the general mood was also one of belligerence. Lord Lytton wrote to the Foreign Secretary, on 8 September, on behalf of the League of Nations Union, to ask for a 'clear intimation that the employment of military force [by Germany] will be resisted'. They also objected to pressure being

¹ PRO FO 371/21780 C 9443/6490/18: Law to Sargent, 6 September 1938.

² PRO FO 800/328 Halifax Papers: fol.134, 14 September 1938. In *More Thoughts and Talks* (1939), p.153, Sir Arnold Wilson also recorded his constituency's opinions which appear to have been rather more mixed.

³ N.J. Crowson, (1997), p. 206.

exerted on the Czechs to cede the Sudeten fringe and said that they would work to encourage support for a policy of appeasement together with a clearly avowed determination to resist aggression and any policy of hesitation in fulfilment of Covenant obligations.¹ The League of Nations Union continued this line of argument on 22 and 26 September.² These protests were sent to the Foreign Office and the minuting does not allow us to tell whether Halifax saw them, although he is more likely to have seen letters from M.P.s and friends, which demanded, and got, personal replies. We might surmise that Halifax's officials gave him a broad overview of the tone of the post bag, but there is no record of this.

The peace organizations were particularly vociferous in the condemnation of the policy which had placed Britain in the current position. The International Peace Campaign wrote to Halifax on 11 September, reporting a meeting held in the Kingsway Hall, the previous evening, at which a resolution had been passed which urged that Hitler be left in no doubt that Britain would become immediately involved in any war initiated by the crossing of German armies over the Czechoslovak frontier.³ Robert Cecil was the chairman of this group and wrote to Halifax, on 22 September, asking whether it would be wise to hold a further public meeting to assure the Government of support in preventing an invasion of Czechoslovakia by Germany. Halifax was not enthusiastic, replying that such a meeting would go beyond the stated aims of the Government and might give the wrong impression. This response suggests that, before the Godesberg

¹ PRO FO 371/21780 C 9886/6490/18: Earl of Lytton to Halifax, 8 September 1938. Of the rest of the Cabinet, Walter Elliot was receiving information about L.N.U. opinion from Baffy Dugdale, N.A. Rose (1973), p.94-5, 14 September 1938.

² See D.S. Birn, (1981), p.193-4.

³ PRO FO 371/21780 C 9909/6490/18: International Peace Campaign (British National Committee) to Halifax, 11 September 1938.

meeting, Halifax, at least, did not want to provoke a strong stand by public opinion, not even as a gesture to Germany. At this point, he clearly did not envisage threatening Germany with retaliation if she invaded before such an invasion was actually happening.¹

The Hampstead Peace Council was slightly more subtle in its approach. It asked that the Government should strengthen its pledges to the Czechs in the event of aggression from outside but also that it should endeavour, by every means within its power, to prevent the destruction of Czech independence, even by methods which appeared to be peaceful.² The National Peace Council was particularly anxious that the Government should take account of public opinion. In a press release, on 10 September, which came to the Foreign Office, it asked for the recall of parliament so that the full weight of public opinion could be brought to bear on the situation and also that the Government should make a clear and unequivocal statement to public opinion of its policy in relation to the crisis, and, in particular, of any commitments it had assumed or was likely to assume, thereby hinting at the diplomacy of July 1914.³ Only the Peace Pledge Union's press release stood out in advocating complete pacifism and British imperial sacrifices to remove the tension in Europe.⁴

Neville Chamberlain also received some touching personal pleas from individuals, including one from a Mrs. Dorothy Cook, who sent one letter for the Prime Minister and another to be forwarded to Hitler. Mrs. Cook's letter was sent to Halifax's private secretary, Mr. Hoyer Miller, by the Prime Minister's office. The letter to Chamberlain thanked him for all his efforts for peace, as there were thousands of mothers

¹ PRO FO 371/21780 C 10382/6490/18: Cecil to Cadogan and reply from Halifax, 22 September 1938.

² PRO FO 371/21780 C 9910/6490/18: Hampstead Peace Council to Halifax, 12 September 1938.

³ PRO FO 371/21780 C 9915/6490/18: National Peace Council to Halifax, 10 September 1938.

⁴ PRO FO 371/21780 C 9990/6490/18: Peace Pledge Union to Halifax, 13 September 1938.

spending restless nights wondering whether their children's lives would be cut off before they had begun. It concluded by thanking him for the smiles he gave the crowd when, she supposed, his heart must be filled with anxiety. The letter to Hitler was more formal and spoke of the admiration of many English people for the way in which he had steered his people through difficult times and of the English desire to know the Germans better and to be their friends. She signed off by hoping that he would use all his influence to secure peace, which she felt that he wanted as much as the English.¹

Chamberlain and Halifax also had some evidence about opinion outside Britain. On 30 August, the American Ambassador, Joseph Kennedy, told Chamberlain that, if Britain and France were involved in war, the United States would follow before long, and that Roosevelt was convinced that any course Chamberlain took would be the right one. The following day, however, Kennedy was much more guarded and said that the United States did not see any reason to bring Europe into a general war because of German economic penetration. Regarding the opinion of the Dominions, MacDonald thought that it might risk breaking up the Commonwealth, and would certainly put a great strain on the loyalty of the Dominions, if the Cabinet issued a threat to Germany.²

There are two other ways in which the Cabinet would have encountered public opinion: crowds and newspapers. The former started to gather in Downing Street and Whitehall, on 11 September. The Times reported these crowds to be several thousands strong 'wedged the whole way from Whitehall to the door of No.10.' There was a special cheer for Lord Halifax, when he emerged, and The Times printed a large photograph on

¹ PRO FO 371/21780 C 9901/6490/18: Mrs. Dorothy Cook to Chamberlain, 12 September 1938.

² R. Ovendale, *Appeasement and the English Speaking World. Britain, the United States, the Dominions, and the Policy of Appeasement, 1937-1939* (Cardiff, 1975), p.142-143.

its illustrations page of the tall, bowler-hatted Foreign Secretary leaving the Foreign Office in front of a swarm of people.¹ The following day, the crowds were described by The Times, on the home news page, as containing 'Elderly Men in a Quiet Crowd.' This day, 12 September, was widely known to be the day of Hitler's main speech at the Nuremberg party rally and it was expected that he would make clear his intentions towards Czechoslovakia. On the foreign news page, however, the paper reported the crowd to be slightly more agitated,

*'There were such large crowds in Downing Street after the speech had been delivered that police reserves were called up and the gates of the Park entrance into Downing Street closed. Editions of evening papers containing the speech were sold in large numbers and read under the electric light. There has been noted among ordinary people as well as in official circles a growing resentment that so much disturbance of common peace of mind should go on so long and this was more apparent than ever in Downing Street last night.'*²

Earl Winterton had observed these crowds in Downing Street on arriving back in London, and noted, in his diary that the Sunday press had been unanimous in warning Germany of the consequences of armed action in Czechoslovakia and that the situation was very critical.³ The Times was printing other evidence for divisions in public opinion and considerable concern existed in the Cabinet that the newspaper should not give the impression of division to foreign governments, as The Times was often assumed in Germany to be a government mouthpiece. However, Harold Nicolson had heard, from a source within The Times, that the Government had been allowing the papers to say what they liked about Germany since 30 August.⁴ Yet, the Cabinet, both inner and outer circle, seem to have been worried about The Times' letters page. On 12 September, a letter from

¹ The Times, 12a, 11 September 1938.

² The Times, 12a, 12 September 1938.

³ Bodleian MSS. Winterton 1/43, diary, 12 September 1938. Harold Nicolson also noticed them on 12 September, remarking that they were in Horse Guards and Whitehall but had been kept out of Downing Street, Balliol HN, diary for 1938, fol.62: 12 September 1938.

⁴ Balliol HN, diary for 1938, fol.58: 30 August 1938.

Anthony Eden was published, which exhorted the Government to find a peaceful solution, that the Czechs had conceded a lot, and that it should not be assumed that, if conflict broke out, it could be localized. It finished, echoing much diplomatic rhetoric at the time, with the reminder that Britain would, of course, resist any threat to French security.¹ Eden had, in fact, suggested that he should write such a letter when he saw Halifax, on the afternoon of 10 September, and a draft had been approved by both Halifax and Chamberlain. Eden had even given it personally to Geoffrey Dawson, the editor of *The Times*, to ensure next day coverage.² On the evening of 12 September, however, a young writer on *The Times*, Anthony Winn, joined the party at De La Warr's house after dinner. Winn had come hot foot from Printing House Square and revealed that Geoffrey Dawson was going to run a supposedly 'balanced' series of 'Letters to the Editor' the following morning, on the advantages and disadvantages of handing over the complete Sudeten territories to Germany. Realizing that such a correspondence would suggest anything but national unity to the Nazi leaders, Duff Cooper rang up 10, Downing Street immediately and told, as he put it, 'the Big Four'. Halifax got on to Geoffrey Dawson straight away to try to get things changed, but it was too late and the first edition had already gone out.³ We can only surmise what the Foreign Secretary said to the editor of *The Times* the next day, on this subject, when they lunched together.⁴

The correspondence was, in fact, balanced, with four opinions supporting *The Times* and four against, including the Foreign Office City correspondent, Nigel Law.⁵

¹ *The Times*, 13e, 12 September 1938.

² Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/42, diary, 11 September 1938. See also BUL AVON AP 20/1/18 entries for 10-11 September 1938.

³ Churchill Norwich 1/9/5: letter to Diana, 13 September 1938.

⁴ Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/42, diary, 13 September 1938.

⁵ *The Times*, 8a,b,c, 13 September 1938.

Five days earlier, The Times had been a good deal less balanced. Its leader of 7 September had brought the question of a fair plebiscite to support the self-determination of the Sudeten Germans to the fore. Dawson's diary evidence makes it plain that he was acting on his own initiative, on his first day back in the office after a holiday, and that the Foreign Office was very unhappy that The Times should have taken this step.¹ Whether representative of public opinion or not, this Times leader made the idea of a plebiscite, in the face of a military threat from Germany, part of the mainstream argument and it seems to have been with some relief that the Cabinet embraced the concept, in the meetings of 12 and 13 September, as a solution to accept from Hitler, were he to moot it. On 30 August, they had thought that the idea of a settlement, under threat, would divide the country.² The letters page of The Times still supported this view, to some extent, but the Cabinet now seemed much more certain that it could carry the idea of a plebiscite.

Thus, the ventilation of an idea in a public organ does seem to have influenced the Cabinet. It is too general to say that if an idea were offered for public consumption in a newspaper, it constituted a test of public opinion for the Cabinet, but we may, tentatively, conclude that, on this occasion, this was the case. Chips Channon had certainly heard a rumour that Halifax had dined with Dawson on the night of the fifth of September and that the leader had been a deliberate 'ballon d'essai', to see how the public would react

¹ Cockett, p.71-74 suggests that Dawson floated this idea on behalf of Chamberlain and Halifax on the basis of a meeting and a letter from Halifax in July 1938. Dawson's diaries make it clear that Halifax was not consulted before the leader was launched and although he was not as dismayed at the Foreign Office by the secession suggestions, Dawson described him as being as in the dark as everybody else as to what would happen next, see Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/42, diary, 6-7 September 1938. Other people were very unhappy about it too, such as Earl De La Warr and Walter Elliot, see N.A. Rose (1973), p.94-5, 14 September 1938. Baffy Dugdale wondered whether the government had been behind the article and though she had once been in favour of secession, she considered it to be impossible under threat of force, *ibid.*, p.94, 7 September 1938.

² PRO CAB 23/94 36 (38), 30 August 1938.

and to prepare them for the Runciman report.¹ Unfortunately for the gossip hungry Channon, Halifax dined with Cadogan on the night of the fifth and Dawson was still at his house near Settle in Yorkshire.²

On the night of the sixth, there is no evidence for Halifax's whereabouts, but Dawson recorded that he, himself, dined at the Beefsteak with George Clerk and Claud Russell before going back to The Times' offices.³ We may speculate that they spoke on the telephone. Dawson and Halifax did lunch together, on the day the leader was published, at the Travellers' Club (which was a firm Foreign Office haunt so they were not trying to hide their conversation) and Dawson said that Halifax was not nearly as angry as the Foreign Office but was as much in the dark as everybody else as to what would happen next.⁴ However, Leo Kennedy, leader writer responsible for the article, noted in his diary that the leader of 7th September had only gone ahead because it was known that Chamberlain had mentioned secession as a possibility to a lunch party for American journalists at Nancy Astor's house in the summer.⁵ The Times, therefore, thought that it was on reasonably safe ground with this article, particularly since Geoffrey Dawson had also had a letter from Halifax, in July, containing a Foreign Office memorandum arguing against secession but Halifax had added a note saying that this was not necessarily the Government's final word.⁶

The only other way to have launched a 'ballon d'essai' for the Cabinet would have been to have recalled parliament. On 30 August, Chamberlain told his colleagues

¹ R. Rhodes James (ed.), (1967), p.164-5. See also Cockett, p. 73 for the statement of Chips' gossip as fact.

² See Dilks, p. 94 and Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/42, diary, 6 September 1938.

³ Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/42, diary, 6 September 1938.

⁴ Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/42, diary, 7 September 1938 and MSS.Dawson 80, fols.24-25: Dawson to Barrington-Ward, 7 September 1938.

⁵ See C. Sykes, *Nancy: The Life of Lady Astor* (1972), p.391 for an account of this lunch.

⁶ Churchill Kennedy 1/22, diary, 15 July and 17 October 1938.

that he had considered this, but had decided against it, because it gave the impression that Britain was on the edge of war. On 4 September, he wrote to the Conservative Chief Whip, David Margesson, to report what had happened while Margesson had been on holiday. Chamberlain was relieved to tell Margesson that he had avoided any premature summoning of the House of Commons.¹ On 12 September, he told the Cabinet that he had had a letter from the Opposition leader, Attlee, asking for parliament to be summoned. He had decided that he would now tell the Opposition leaders what his plans were, ignoring nicely Attlee's demand for public discussion of his plans. Chamberlain's real views about the recall of parliament were only revealed after his trip to Berchtesgaden when he told the Cabinet that a parliament would wreck the very delicate negotiations on the table and that parliament would be informed of the decision after it had been taken. They could then say whether they approved the course and would ratify it.² This statement seems to reveal Chamberlain's desire to have at least nine tenths of the glory, if there were any glory to be had.

Evidence for Dominion opinion was gathered, throughout early September, through a series of meetings with Dominion representatives in Geneva. From the outset, the most belligerent nation was New Zealand, whose representative, Jordan, announced, on 12 September, that it was quite intolerable to go on living in the atmosphere of ultimatums which German actions in recent months had created.³ Lapointe, of Canada, also thought that Britain had been playing the peacemaker to the point of criticism. He

¹ Churchill Margesson 1/3, fol.20: Chamberlain to Margesson, 4 September 1938.

² PRO CAB 23/95 39 (38), 17 September 1938. The failure to recall parliament did not go unnoticed in London and Baffy Dugdale described it on 20 September as 'an abrogation of parliamentary Government', N.A. Rose (1973), p.99, 20 September 1938.

³ PRO FO 371/21776 C 9916/4839/18: United Kingdom Delegation at Geneva, meeting with Dominion and Indian Representatives, 12 September 1938.

said that the attitude of France would affect Canadian opinion, but, if the British strategy continued, yet a war still broke out, he felt that the British Government would have their public behind them because of their efforts to maintain peace. These comments suggest that Ovendale's judgement that Canada approved the role of Britain as a peacemaker may be a slight misreading, and that Canada also would also have supported Britain, if her efforts for peace had failed.¹

Among those members of London society who were actually in London, cross-party consultations were taking place. Harold Nicolson was optimistic about the state of public opinion, on 30 August, describing it as 'admirable,' by which he probably meant calm.² Robert Cecil was the most energetic member of this group. He was forwarding a letter, which he had sent to his friends in the Cabinet, to everybody else as well. He had sent it to Walter Elliot and Oliver Stanley with notes saying that Britain was morally bound to France so, if war broke out, Britain would be in it. They knew it, so why didn't they say it? The letter, itself, argued for a strong stance from the Government on the grounds that, 'public opinion in this country is not prepared to see the Germans on the Black Sea – a thing we fought for four years to prevent – or to abandon France to her fate. And it is highly desirable that this fact should be made plain before it becomes apparent with the march of events.'³ In addition to the Cecil letters, Winston Churchill received pleas from the Duchess of Atholl and Eleanor Rathbone to do something to rally the country. The Duchess said she would support any protest against surrender. Bernard

¹ R. Ovendale, (1975), p.151. In later life, Halifax made much of the lack of confidence that the Dominions would follow Britain's line as a defence for the Munich agreement. See Borthwick HKTON A4.410.12: 'Foreign Policy 1938-9: an unpublished note' undated memorandum but written after the publication of the British Official Documents volume for 1939 after the second world war.

² Balliol HN, diary for 1938, fol.58: 30 August 1938.

³ Churchill Chartwell 2/331, fols.45-6 and 56-7: 9 September 1938.

Pares, of London University, said he was at Churchill's disposal to do anything to make the country see the real point of the crisis.¹

Some critical elements were communicating directly with the Cabinet inner circle. Harold Nicolson recorded an interview which Robert Bernays had had with Sir John Simon, on 9 September, about the tone of public opinion. Bernays had told Simon that he thought the papers fully reflected public feeling: that if Britain allowed Hitler to intimidate the Czechs into sacrificing their independence, it would mean a triumph of force over law. Simon asked whether Bernays had approved of the speech he had made in Lanark, on 28 August, and Bernays had said that he had.² Simon then remonstrated with him that he could not possibly imagine that that speech had committed Britain to armed intervention. Bernays thought it had implied that, if the Czechs offered reasonable concessions, Britain would support her if they were refused and that this should be conveyed to Hitler at once. Simon pointed out the difficulties of getting hold of Hitler during the Nuremberg rally and was amazed that a liberal like Bernays could have any sympathy for the Czechs. Bernays followed up this interview with a letter to Simon in which he said that to betray the Czechs would be an act he could not commend to his constituents.³

In contrast, Chamberlain's engagement diaries for the period give very little idea that he was talking to anybody outside the Cabinet. A letter to his sister, Ida, records much, unsolicited, written advice arriving on his desk, but its tone suggests that he regarded this as a hindrance to planning of his trip to Germany, describing a situation

¹ Churchill Chartwell 2/331, fol.60: 10 September; fol.66: 20 September; fol.94: 14 September 1938.

² See D. Dutton, (1992), p.256.

³ Balliol HN, diary for 1938, fol.60: 9 September 1938.

where 'busybodies of all kinds intrude their advice and the papers do their best to ruin all one's efforts.'¹ Halifax, on the other hand, was in close touch with Geoffrey Dawson, lunching with him on 7th and 13th September. Dawson, himself, was eating regularly at the Beefsteak and Travellers' Clubs, noting, on 8 September, that the latter had been packed at lunchtime. Robert Cecil, Vernon Bartlett and 'half the Foreign Office' had been there.² Harold Nicolson, who was also dining there regularly during this time, noted that people at the Beefsteak were being rather cold to Dawson because of the leader of 7 September.³ It is highly implausible that Dawson and Halifax were not discussing the situation. Consequently, Halifax did have a channel to London political society which he could have relayed to Chamberlain, and at this time, he was one of Chamberlain's closest companions.

Halifax was also receiving direct advice from outside the Cabinet. Eden came to see him on 9 September and urged that a deterrent warning be sent to Hitler. Two days later, Halifax explained to him that such a warning had been drafted, but had not been sent, on the advice of Nevile Henderson.⁴ Oliver Harvey recorded that Lord Lloyd had come to see Halifax, on the afternoon of 12 September, and had urged strong and courageous action.⁵ Lloyd also wrote to Halifax on this day, and it can be surmised that the interview mirrored the letter to a large extent, since there is no mention in the letter that Lloyd had already seen him. Lloyd firstly urged Halifax not to hint to the Germans that Britain would stomach a plebiscite because it would remove Britain and France from

¹ BUL NC 18/1/1068: letter to Ida, 11 September 1938.

² Bodleian MSS. Dawson 1/42, diary, 7, 8 and 13 September 1938.

³ Balliol HN diary for 1938, fol.62: 12 September 1938.

⁴ BUL AVON AP 20/1/18 entries for 9-11 September 1938.

⁵ Harvey, p.176.

Hitler's worries and cause Italy to solidify her arrangements with Germany. Secondly, he painted the Nazi racial claim as a pawn in their political game. He saw the loss of Czechoslovakia as the loss of south-eastern Europe and the opening of a path to the Black Sea for Germany. His final comments, about the nature of war itself, however, are perhaps the most significant and moving,

*'War is truly terrible, but to consider it as the worst issue, to be avoided at all costs, is utterly unchristian and wrong. There are worse issues even than war - a still worse issue would be if we were found morally too feeble to stand up and too cowardly to sacrifice ourselves for what is Right over what is manifestly Wrong. It would be worse than war to be unwilling to be the champions of weak peoples or that we should, through a shrinking from suffering, fail in a task surely set us by Providence.'*¹

Lloyd's words must have had increased significance for Halifax when it is considered that they marked a considerable change of heart from the view which Halifax had attributed to Lloyd at the last Cabinet meeting, that he thought that the country was not at present in a position to go to war.² There were also words of advice for Halifax from W.G.A. Adams, the Warden of All Souls. He wrote, on 13 September, with a brief suggestion about an international trial of the German claims, saying that it could do what nothing else could to calm and guide public opinion.³

The Astors had also been active. They had been staying at Sandwich when a visit from Robert Boothby, describing the Cabinet as weakening against Hitler's threats on 11 September, had persuaded Waldorf Astor and Thomas Jones to drive up to London. According to Jones, they managed to see Inskip before he went into Cabinet on 12 September. The latter said he had just come down overnight from Scotland and had

¹ PRO FO 800/309 Halifax Papers, fol.301-4: Lloyd to Halifax, 12 September 1938. See also Churchill Lloyd 28/21, Lady Lloyd's diary, 18-19 September record Lloyd's meetings with Sinclair, Churchill and Rex Leeper.

² PRO CAB 23/94 36 (38), 30 August 1938.

³ PRO FO 800/328 Halifax Papers, fol.133: Adams to Halifax, 13 September 1938.

spoken to nobody. He also seemed to regret The Times' article of 7th September and Jones theorized that Dawson had still been away when it was published and that it had been prompted by information from Allen of Hurtwood.¹ By 25 September, Thomas Jones had retired from St. James' Square back to Sandwich, but Waldorf went back to London to be in the thick of things. Jones had gone, via Oxford, to spend the night with Warden Adams at All Souls, before ending up on the coast with Lord Brand, in Sandwich. He and Brand were not impressed with Chamberlain's second visit to Germany, 'War is such a terrible way out that we were glad the P.M. went to tell Hitler (as we thought) how determined we were that he had better not go too far and bring it about. The net result of the two visits appears to be to show how determined he was and how weak we were.'² By 29 September, Jones' appreciation of German air strength had converted him to the idea of peace, at any humiliating price, and he had found Stanley Baldwin to be of the same opinion.³

We should also mention here those sources for public opinion which are often cited by historians as demonstrating the swing of public opinion against Germany in middle of the month but to which politicians, in fact, did not have access. Mass Observation, with its list of questions about public support for Chamberlain, did not publish its surveys on the crisis until January 1939.⁴ The other form of nascent opinion polling, the Gallup polls, published their findings monthly in the News Chronicle and only asked questions about the Sudetenland crisis in October.⁵ Roger Eatwell has,

¹ Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954), p.406-7, 12 September 1938.

² *ibid.*, p.409, 25 September 1938.

³ *ibid.*, p.411, 29 September 1938.

⁴ C. Madge and T. Harrison, *Britain by Mass Observation* (1939).

⁵ G.H. Gallup (ed.), *The Gallup International Opinion Polls: Volume 1: Great Britain 1937-1964* (1976).

however, pointed out that there had been a public opinion poll about Czechoslovakia in February 1938 which might have influenced the Cabinet.¹

During the first days' conversation with Hitler, at Berchtesgaden, Chamberlain did not use public opinion as a major debating point, but when it was invoked, its use demonstrates that Chamberlain was well aware of the existence of a section of opinion which believed the Sudetenland to be emblematic of wider German expansion. Whilst distancing himself from this view, Chamberlain told Hitler that many people in England thought that he, the Führer, was not sincere, that his words, in respect to peace, were only words and that he had behind them a plan which was not at all consistent with what he was saying.² In discussing what arrangements the Führer would accept as a settlement in the Sudetenland, Chamberlain reiterated the point that many people felt that Hitler's aims were to dismember Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain retired from this meeting with the intention of returning to Britain to consult about the possibility of allowing the Sudetens to secede to avoid a German invasion, having told Hitler that he did not possess the authority from his Cabinet to give him such an assurance.³

Chamberlain saw the King firstly, when he arrived back during the afternoon of 16 September, and then proceeded to give an account of his meeting to Simon, Hoare, Halifax, Vansittart, Cadogan, Wilson and Runciman.⁴ Chamberlain told the inner Cabinet that he had sensed that things were desperate when he arrived in Germany and that, although Hitler had not made up his mind to move, he could do so at any point, and that,

¹ R. Eatwell, 'Munich, Public Opinion and Popular Front' *JCH* vol.vi (1973), p.122-139.

² PRO FO 371/21738 C 10084/1941/18: Minute of the conversation between the Prime Minister and the Führer, 15 September 1938.

³ DBFP 3rd vol.II no.897: Undated notes by Sir Horace Wilson on conversations during Mr. Chamberlain's visit to Berchtesgaden and appendix: letter from Neville Chamberlain to Herr Hitler, 16 September 1938.

⁴ Robbins, p.269-270.

the only solution was self-determination.¹ When Chamberlain met the full Cabinet, the following day, conflicting conceptions emerged of the public's reaction to a Sudeten secession brokered by Britain.² The group which had appeared to be emerging around Duff Cooper was again vocal against the Government line. Duff Cooper's own opinion appeared to be that the country was singularly united and that the Dominions would probably be more attracted by the idea of supporting the democratic countries in a fight against dictators than they had been by the issue which Britain had faced in 1914. Winterton, the chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster, agreed with this, saying that there was hard fibre in the British people which did not like to be told that, unless they acquiesced in certain things, it was all up with them. He also considered that parliament would see such a settlement for the Sudetens as a surrender to force, unless Hitler made some concessions in return. In general, however, the Cabinet demonstrated support for the Prime Minister's actions. He concluded the meeting by rebutting the criticisms, saying that the prospect of war was very different from what it had been in 1914. War now affected the whole population and he wished he could show his colleagues some of the many letters he had received, in the previous few days, which showed the immense feeling of relief, throughout the country and of thankfulness and gratitude for the load which had been lifted, at least temporarily. At Baffy Dugdale's house, on 18 September, discussions between De La Warr, Stanley and Duff Cooper took place as to the point at which they would have to resign. Winterton thought that his group had made their views clear to Chamberlain the previous day but De La Warr thought that he should have made

¹ PRO CAB 27/646, C.S (38) 4, 16 September 1938, 6.30pm. See PRO FO 371/21738 C 10046/1941/18: 17 September 1938 for Henderson's warning to Göring that precipitate action by Germany would exasperate British public opinion.

² PRO CAB 23/95 39 (38), 17 September 1938, 11am.

his own disagreement more categorical.¹ On the same day, Walter Elliot told Baffy that, if he had to choose between giving in altogether and war, he would choose war.²

Some members of the Cabinet were less sanguine after the meeting about the reaction of the British public to the suggestion of a plebiscite. Hore-Belisha reminded himself of the gust of public feeling which had swept up after the Hoare-Laval agreement, and that no test of reactions had been made, because parliament had not been summoned.³ He also wrote that most of his colleagues agreed with him in being against a general acceptance of the principle of self-determination and that there certainly should be no scheme evolved without informing the Czech Government.⁴ In this same set of notes, Hore-Belisha also expressed the interesting view that if it did come to war, the British military situation was not so bad, since Japan was engaged in China and Italy in Spain. He was a little more concerned, however, that the reactions of parliament had not been tested and that the public did not know what was planned. He was also worried that those who were hopeful that Chamberlain's visit would lead to an honourable peace might end by being the most indignant.

However, in Cabinet the following day, only Malcolm MacDonald raised the question of public opinion. He saw a guarantee as an essential part of any deal because many people in the country would be disappointed at the idea of a cession of territories and would seek to represent it as a complete capitulation. The guarantee could be set against this, as it would show British determination to resist further aggression.⁵ While

¹ N.A. Rose, (1973), p.98. This rumour of the intended resignations had spread through London, see Thomas Jones, (Oxford, 1954), p.409, 23 September 1938.

² N.A. Rose, (1973), p.99, 19 September 1938.

³ R.J. Minney, *The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha* (Aldershot, 1960) p.141.

⁴ Churchill HB 5/34: Notes made after Cabinet meeting, 17 September 1938.

⁵ PRO CAB 23/95 40 (38), 19 September 1938, 11am.

waiting for the Czechoslovak reply, a select group discussed what concessions might, reasonably, be expected from Hitler in return for this settlement.¹ This inner Cabinet seems to have thought that opinion around them was beginning to stiffen. Cadogan recorded, on 21 September, that the amount of courage needed to be a coward was steadily increasing as both the British and the American press were developing a campaign against the betrayal of Czechoslovakia. These hints were picked up at the meeting of Ministers on 20 September. The view was expressed that it was very desirable that the Prime Minister should, if possible, obtain some concessions from Hitler, in consideration of the large concessions which had been made to him.² The need for some concessions was reiterated at the Cabinet the following day (21 September) when the President of the Board of Trade said that if German troops were allowed to march in, the last chance of the plan being accepted by British public opinion would be destroyed.³

When Hitler rejected the principle of self-determination, presented to him by Neville Chamberlain at Bad Godesberg on Thursday 22 September, which had been agreed by both the British Cabinet and the French, Chamberlain rebutted the Führer with the statement that public opinion was against him. He pointed out that the support for his initial mission had now been translated into accusations that he was selling the Czechs, yielding to dictators and that he had been booed on his departure from Britain. It was not just amongst the Left, as Hitler had suggested, that this feeling existed, but amongst people in his own party from whom he had received written protests.⁴ He reiterated the

¹ Harvey, p.187.

² PRO CAB 27/646 C.S. 7 (38), 21 September 1938, 3pm.

³ PRO CAB 23/95 41 (38), 21 September 1938, 3pm.

⁴ DBFP 3rd vol.II no.1033: Notes of a conversation between Mr. Chamberlain and Herr Hitler at Godesberg on 22 September 1938.

idea that many people, amongst whom he did not number himself, believed that Hitler wanted to annex Czechoslovakia and that public opinion was not favourably disposed towards the proposals he had brought back from Berchtesgaden and would be even less eager to accept an enlargement of these concessions. Hitler's proposal to draw an arbitrary line to be drawn and to occupy territory behind it, pending plebiscites, would not be admitted by English public opinion as fair. Hitler concluded this conversation by saying that, while he would order General Keitel not to take military action at that point, he, himself, had never believed that a peaceful solution could be reached.

Horace Wilson telephoned to London with the first reports of the meeting at 8.15pm, and Chamberlain spoke to Halifax at 10.30pm.¹ The Prime Minister told his Foreign Secretary that he had told Hitler that the new plan was unacceptable but that he feared that he had not been able to make the Führer appreciate the fact that British and French opinion would not accept such a solution. At 2am, Chamberlain telephoned with the news that he was writing to Hitler. This letter did not take issue with the idea of the imposition of an arbitrary line but objected strongly to the entry of German troops to the area,

*'I do not think you have realised the impossibility of my agreeing to put forward any plan unless I have reason to suppose it will be considered by public opinion in my country, in France and indeed in the world generally as carrying out the principles agreed upon in an orderly fashion and freedom from threat of force [sic]. I am sure that an attempt to occupy forthwith by German troops the areas which will become part of the Reich at once in principle and very shortly afterwards by delimitation would be condemned as an unnecessary display of force.'*²

In Godesberg, the British delegation had received a letter from Hitler, in response to Chamberlain's late night missive, saying that he stood by the demands he had outlined

¹ Harvey, p.192-3.

² PRO FO 371/21740 C 10497/1941/18: British Delegation at Godesberg to Viscount Halifax, 23 September 1938.

to Chamberlain when he had arrived, and that he would send a memorandum of his exact demands which could then be forwarded to London.¹ Neville Henderson then telegraphed to London that the British delegation were planning to leave for London the next morning.²

In London, Ministers became worried that Chamberlain might be underestimating the strength of public opinion, perhaps because the repeated exhortations from Godesberg not to withdraw the prohibition on Czech mobilization suggested a last ditch attempt at a settlement. Hitler's reiteration of his new demands, on 23 September, suggested, in addition, that Chamberlain was having little impact upon the Führer. Consequently Halifax telegraphed their perceptions of domestic political views to Chamberlain, just before his last meeting with Hitler on 23 September.³ Halifax sent a description of public opinion which, he said, had been drawn from the press and elsewhere and on which the Cabinet was agreed. Oliver Harvey recorded that Halifax had had a talk with Vansittart before drafting it, but that Sam Hoare had fully approved its firm tone. The telegram said that, whilst public opinion had been reluctantly prepared to accept the original plan as an alternative to war, the great mass of public opinion seemed to be hardening, in the sense of feeling that Britain had gone to the limit of concession, and that it was up to Hitler to make some contribution. It urged Chamberlain not to leave Germany without making it plain to Hitler that, after the great concessions made by the Czechoslovak Government, for him to reject the opportunity of a peaceful solution, in favour of one that must involve

¹ DBFP 3rd vol.II no.1045: British Delegation (Godesberg) to Viscount Halifax, 23 September 1938, received 2pm.

² DBFP 3rd vol.II, no.1057, n.1.

³ Harvey, p.194.

war, would be an unpardonable crime against humanity.¹ The telegram was supposed to reach the Prime Minister just before he left to receive the memorandum of demands from Hitler at 11pm. It is possible that the telegraph was sent so that the Germans would intercept it, since its cypher details are unclear. Telegraph may just have been used for speed's sake, and the personal tone of the message slightly belies this argument, but it is worth bearing in mind.²

Halifax's biographer, Andrew Roberts, is sceptical about the Foreign Secretary's use of the phrase 'public opinion' in this telegram, arguing that, like so many politicians and diplomats before the advent of opinion polls, when Halifax wrote of 'the great mass of the people' he really meant his own opinion, together with that of whatever friends he had spoken to and newspapers he had read.³ Is there any other way of reading Halifax's use of public opinion? Halifax did not, in fact, decide to reject the Godesberg terms until Sunday 25 September, three days after this telegram.⁴ Is it possible that the perception of mass public opinion which he sent to Chamberlain on behalf of the Cabinet was simply that; what he thought the rest of the country was thinking? On the day that Chamberlain left for Godesberg, there was a large protest in Whitehall against the Anglo-French proposals, in response to an appeal by the International Peace Campaign. The Times report, on 23 September, the day that Halifax sent his telegram, is worth quoting,

'Special police precautions were taken and a cordon of police prevented anyone entering Downing Street. At one time the crowd was estimated to be about 10 000 and a large section began to repeat "Stand by the Czechs" and "Recall parliament". It became necessary to call in an additional attachment of 30-40 police, who handled the position

¹ PRO FO 371/21740 C 10664/1941/18: Viscount Halifax to the British Delegation (Godesberg), 23 September 1938, 10pm. See also Harvey, p.194 for Hoare's strong support of this memorandum.

² My thanks to David Dilks for this suggestion.

³ Andrew Roberts, *The Holy Fox: A Biography of Lord Halifax* (1991), p. 114.

⁴ See also PRO FO 800/328 Halifax Papers: fol.139, 22 September 1938 for his feeling at this stage that accepting Hitler's terms for a transfer of populations was the only way to avoid the certainty of a German invasion.

*tactfully. Just before 10.30 the crowd became restive and there was a fresh outburst of shouting. Women fainted and were treated by ambulance men. More mounted police were drafted into Downing Street after an announcement from a loudspeaker van that a deputation from the International Peace Campaign to the Foreign Office was on its way.*¹

The Times then reported that the petition had been delivered to the Foreign Office, the crowd had been addressed by the International Peace Council and people had then dispersed quietly towards midnight. The Times' letters page was also starting to show some disapproval of the Berchtesgaden proposals, in reaction to the National Council of Labour's description of the proposals as a 'shameful betrayal of a peaceful and democratic people.'² Dawson had again chosen to use the 'balance of opinions' approach, giving four or five letters on both sides of the argument each day, with a mixture of well known and unknown correspondents. By this time, only the Sunday Times remained, unambiguously, adamant that the Czechs should accept the Anglo-French proposals.³

It can be argued, therefore, that Halifax was using a rhetoric which Chamberlain would have expected from the Cabinet, because they had been using it all month, backed up by rather more empirical evidence. Halifax clearly even thought that Chamberlain might be moved by an appeal from public opinion not to concede anything further. When Hitler handed the memorandum of final demands to Chamberlain at about 11pm, on 23 September, the British Prime Minister remarked that, even if a peaceful solution was possible but was not acceptable to public opinion, he hoped it would mark a turning point

¹ The Times, 14d, 23 September 1938. See also PRO FO 371/21780 C 10749/6490/18: Dr. Beldon communicating a statement by the International Peace Campaign to Halifax, 23 September 1938.

² The Times, 12e, 22 September 1938.

³ F.R. Gannon, (1971), p.222. The editor of The Sunday Times, W.W. Hadley, does not mention his closeness to Chamberlain at the time of the crisis in his memoirs, *Munich: Before and After* (1944). My thanks to David Dilks for reminding me of this contact.

in Anglo-German relations. If the memorandum only contained what Hitler had demanded the previous day, British public opinion would not be satisfied, as they had had no real response to attempts to achieve a peaceful solution. He added that the inclusion of a time limit (the Czech evacuation of the Sudetenland had to be completed by 28 September) made the memorandum look like an ultimatum and that it would have a deplorable effect on public opinion.¹

Chamberlain seems to have mirrored the language which Halifax suggested in his public opinion telegram in this conversation with Hitler, although he had also used it, unprompted, in his first meeting. He did seek to change parts of the memorandum, for example, to limit the areas which were to come under immediate occupation. Yet, by and large, he stuck to the role of mediator, pointing out how objectionable these proposals were (Hitler had agreed to 'demands' being changed to 'proposals') and promising to transmit the document to the Czechs, who had by this time, mobilized, suggesting that they would reject it.

Public opinion was also the Prime Minister's first concern in his report to Cabinet on Saturday 24 September, but his approach, two hours previously, to a smaller meeting of Ministers had been somewhat different. Just before the meeting of the inner circle, he had lunched with Halifax where their approach appears to have been agreed, given the consonance of their views at the meeting. At 3.30pm, Chamberlain told the inner circle that, whilst the new proposals went a lot further than those that the Cabinet had previously agreed upon, he felt sure that they were Hitler's last word. It was Hoare who pointed out that the Government might find some difficulties in carrying acceptance of

¹ DBFP 3rd vol.II no.1073: Notes of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and Herr Hitler at Godesberg, 23-24 (overnight) September 1938.

the new proposals unless there was something to put on the other side. This argument was countered by Halifax, who said that he doubted whether the disadvantages of Hitler's proposals were so great as to justify Britain going to war.¹ Cadogan recorded that, to his horror, there was practically no discussion about whether to accept or reject the proposals, and Chamberlain was clearly for 'total surrender'. Cadogan also recorded that, whilst Simon had completely forgotten his bellicosity of the past few days, he thought that Hoare might feel as he did, but was too puny a creature to say anything.² However, Hoare's memoirs record, sweepingly, that this meeting decided that these proposals were unacceptable and that there was no dissension.³

At 5.30pm that afternoon, Chamberlain began his report to the full Cabinet by saying that public opinion would not regard occupation of the transferred areas by German troops as acceptable in the present circumstances. He then undercut this by saying that he thought accepting these proposals was the only way to achieve a peaceful solution and that it would be a great tragedy if Britain lost this opportunity of reaching an understanding with Germany on all points of difference.⁴ Chamberlain's opponents in the Cabinet stuck to their public opinion rhetoric. Duff Cooper said that he was sure that the House of Commons, and the country, would not accept the proposed settlement and that, if Czechoslovakia were being violently attacked by Germany, public opinion would bring about a position in which Britain would have to intervene. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Winterton, agreed. The fear of immediate air attack was particularly strong at this meeting, but Inskip was able to reassure the Cabinet, saying that the Chief of the

¹ PRO CAB 27/646 C.S. 13 (38), 24 September 1938, 3.30pm.

² Dicks, p.103.

³ Viscount Templewood, (1954), p.312.

⁴ PRO CAB 23/95 42 (38), 24 September 1938, 5.30pm.

Air Staff had told him that Germany could not start a heavy bombing attack on Britain unless she either concentrated her bombing squadrons on north-east Germany, or flew over Holland and Belgium.¹ The latter course would have involved an infringement of neutrality, whilst the former concentration would involve some delay.² Even with this fear slightly allayed, Hore-Belisha pointed out that mobilization should take place at once, as it would take 48 hours to deploy the anti-aircraft artillery and the searchlights.³

The following day, rejection of the proposals was agreed upon as Halifax's change of heart swung the Cabinet discussion away from defeatism to a more belligerent attitude. Chamberlain's amazement and disappointment at Halifax's decision suggests that he, himself, had been willing to work with the Godesberg proposals, believing that they were Hitler's last word and would save peace.⁴ Eden had also left a message for Halifax, on the morning of 25 September, saying that if the Godesberg terms in any way corresponded with what was published in the press, the Government should not endorse them, but we do not know whether this message reached him. After Cabinet, on 23 September, Halifax had had an unpleasant interview with a belligerent Labour Party

¹ See U. Bialer, (1980), p.157-59 for a very brief account of fears of aerial bombing of British cities during the Sudeten crisis. Most of the literature on fear of air attack deals with assessing the actual strength of the German air force rather than the decision-making process in London. See Williamson Murray, 'Munich, 1938: The Military Confrontation' *JSS*, vol.2, no.3 (December 1979), p.282-302 and 'German air power and the Munich crisis' in B. Bond and I. Roy (eds.), *War and Society. A Yearbook of Military History* (1977), p. 107-118. The official history of the Allied bombing campaign against Germany cites the fear of a knock-out blow as unfounded but as one of the major factors which allowed Czechoslovakia to fall under German control, see Sir C. Webster and N. Frankland (eds.), *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945 Vol. I: Preparation* (1961), p. 80.

² PRO CAB 23/95 42 (38), 24 September 1938, 5.30pm.

³ R.J. Minney, (Aldershot, 1960), p.145. Middlemas, p. 345 n.11 makes the point that the Chiefs of Staff report which said Germany was unlikely to launch an immediate attack was not pressed on the Cabinet, but Inskip is recorded in the minutes as saying that his information about bombing came from the Chief of the Air Staff, so some military advice did make it to the Cabinet table.

⁴ After the event, some commentators did point out that Chamberlain had himself broken off negotiations at Godesberg and therefore could not be described as having weakly acceded to all Hitler's demands, see Bodleian MS. Eng.Hist.c.6565 Somervell Papers, fol.275, p.68 'Politics'.

delegation and had then suffered his well-known sleepless night, having been badgered by Cadogan to review his position.¹ Anthony Eden had also sent him a note urging him to reject the Godesberg terms.² At the Cabinet meeting the next morning, 25 September, Halifax made his case against the proposals by saying that there was no guarantee of Hitler's good intentions and that he was currently dictating terms as if he had won a war. During the meeting, Halifax passed a note across the table to Chamberlain which explained his position. He said he did not agree with De La Warr (and by implication Duff Cooper); he wanted the Czechs to agree to the proposals, but did not think that Britain should force them.

Winterton and Duff Cooper expressed their support for Halifax, both pointing out that, if the Cabinet accepted the Godesberg proposals, there would be a great revulsion of public opinion and parliament would defeat the Government. MacDonald agreed that some public opinion reaction was likely and only the Secretary of State for India, Lord Zetland, felt that, as regards public opinion, many of those who were clamouring for a stronger attitude to be taken with Germany would take a different view when a world war had been in progress for a month or two. Earl De La Warr added that he felt the moral

¹ There is considerable evidence to suggest that this change of heart was prompted by a diatribe which Cadogan delivered to Halifax as he drove him home on the evening of 24 September. Lady Theodosia Cadogan's diary recorded that after the meetings of 25 September, her husband had come home and told her that Halifax had told him that, owing to him, he had slept very badly, not one wink after one o'clock, and that he had lain awake thinking about Alec urging him not to take the defeatist line and as the result of a bad night, he completely changed his mind to Alec's point of view. See Churchill ACAD 8/1, Lady Theodosia Cadogan's diaries, entry 25 September 1938. See also Dilks, p.105. Of Halifax's correspondence, there is a letter from Leo Amery, written on 24 September, which also urges that Britain should put no further pressure on the Czechs, that the House of Commons would not stand for further surrender to Hitler and that Britain had no choice but to set her teeth and go through with it, see PRO FO 800/309 Halifax Papers: fol.354, 24 September 1938. See also Churchill, microfilms of Garrowby Papers, A4.410.3.7 for copies of the notes exchanged by Halifax and Chamberlain during Cabinet meetings on 25 September.

² Harvey, p.196.

basis of the British case was being abandoned.¹ Hore-Belisha's notes for this meeting also suggest that he thought the moral nature of the issue was being overlooked. He wrote,

*'there are things worse than war. Life is only worth living for certain things: respect for law, liberty and the decent treatment of human beings ... Europe is today littered with the wrecks of lives of good people who have nothing to hope for while these methods prevail. We are the trustees of that civilisation which is being abruptly assaulted.'*²

After the lunchtime adjournment, further voices were raised about public opinion but in a quite contrary sense. Morrison thought that the decision should not be made too much on public opinion. If war were to break out, there would, no doubt, be a ringing of bells, but, before long, a wringing of hands too. The Minister of Labour added that he did not accept the inevitability of war, however much they all detested the Nazi system and methods. In his view, there was a section of public opinion which thought that the Sudeten issue should not be allowed to provoke a world war and that it was the stronger.

The Prime Minister's summary of the meetings, bearing in mind that he had still to meet the French that evening, seems oddly bland, perhaps because he was admitting defeat, or, perhaps, because Bridges was minuting tactfully. He said that he saw little difference of opinion among his colleagues, that it was unnecessary to take any immediate decision which went beyond the policy which had already been accepted by the Government. He did acknowledge, however, that a position had arisen in which Britain might, before long, be involved in war and, if that happened, it was essential that she should enter the war united. It was, therefore, crucial that the Government should try to bring the whole country and empire along with them and should allow public opinion

¹ PRO CAB 23/95 43 (38), 25 September 1938, 10.30am.

² See p.257 for very similar language from Lord Lloyd to Halifax; Churchill HB 1/5, Diaries 1938-1939, notes for speech given in Cabinet 25 September 1938.

to realize that all possible steps had been taken to avoid a conflict. The news that six or so of the Cabinet, led by Oliver Stanley, had brought the others round to reject the Godesberg terms percolated into political society that evening.¹

On 26 September, after obtaining French and Cabinet agreement, Horace Wilson was dispatched with a private letter for Hitler. The letter proposed an international commission to help the Czechs implement the proposals that they had already agreed to and, thus, to try to forestall the German occupation. When Wilson tried to deliver this message to Hitler, that afternoon, he answered the angry Führer with repeated references to the shock that violent methods had on public opinion. As Hitler stormed from the room, he claimed that Germany had intercepted messages between Masaryk and Benes urging the latter to play for time as British opinion could quickly be mobilized against Germany and Chamberlain overthrown. Hitler declared that come what may, Sudeten German territory would be under German military occupation by 1 October.²

At the meeting of Ministers on the afternoon of 27 September, in London, the public opinion question suddenly became secondary to the practicalities of organizing mobilization. It was agreed that the fleet would partially mobilize the next day and that a warning would be sent to the French not to start a defensive action without consulting Britain. The firmer line against Germany was maintained by Halifax for the rest of the day. He prevented a telegram, drafted by Horace Wilson, asking the Czechs to accept the Godesberg memorandum being sent.³ The Cabinet did not meet again until Chamberlain

¹ Bodleian, MS. Eng. Hist. D.359 (Crookshank Papers), diary, fol. 216: 25 September 1938. See also BUL AVON AP 20/1/18 diary, 24 September 1938, for Eden's meeting with Harry Crookshank where the latter said he would have to resign over the government's handling of foreign policy.

² PRO FO 371/21785 C 11970/11169/18: C.S.B. paper 214 (38) Records of Sir Neville Chamberlain's conversations with Hitler, 23 September 1938, Sir Horace Wilson's conversations with Hitler, 26-7 September 1938 and the Munich conference.

³ PRO CAB 23/95 46 (38), 27 September 1938, 9.30pm. See also Dilks, p. 107, for Halifax's firmness.

delivered his report of the Munich conference, on Friday 30 September. There were no further decisions to be taken by the Cabinet, unless Germany sent troops into Czechoslovakia, which possibility was prevented by Hitler's agreement to a conference on 28 September.¹

For Chamberlain, peace, at almost any price, was more important than public, or even parliamentary approbation. It was not until Monday 26 September that he agreed that parliament should be summoned, for the Wednesday of that week. On the evening of 26th September, he made a broadcast to the nation which did not suggest that war was inevitable but did admit the principle that, if he were convinced that any nation wanted to dominate the world by fear of its force, he should feel that it should be resisted.² For Halifax, coercing the Czechs to accept unreasonable proposals seems to have been the final straw. The rest of the Cabinet couched their objections to the Godesberg proposals in terms of public opinion.

Was this just a way of opposing Chamberlain or was there evidence available to the Cabinet that supported these abstract notions of the public's view? The evidence of public feeling, which arrived at the Foreign Office, had slowed during the Berchtesgaden conference and over the weekend of the 17 and 18 September, but had resumed by Tuesday 20 September. On that day, the Women's International League protested that the Czech proposals were sufficient to satisfy the Sudeten demands and that the demand for cession of territory was unjust. They saw this issue as part of a repeatedly declared German policy, of which the forcible annexation of Austria had been the first step, and

¹ Dilks, p.109. The news was received at the Foreign Office whilst Chamberlain was making a statement in the Commons. Cadogan ran to the House himself with the message, fished, as he put it, Halifax out of the Peers' Gallery, entered the House behind the Speaker's chair and had it sent along to Chamberlain.

² Feiling, p.372.

that calling such secession an example of peaceful change would not promote international justice.¹ The Peace Council reiterated its views two days later.² On 21 September, the Liberal Party organization issued a condemnation of the Government's surrender to force, demanded the immediate recall of parliament and the settlement of the Czech crisis as part of a general European settlement.³ Further condemnation came from the Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries,⁴ and the Civil Service Clerical Association.⁵ The Women's Peace Crusade demanded the recall of parliament so that the people of the country could make their voice heard and only the Peace Pledge Union continued to affirm that nothing justified war, although they also protested against Britain's demands for concessions from Czechoslovakia.⁶

Between the Godesberg meeting and the parliament which finally assembled on 28 September, a wide range of public interest groups registered very different views on the situation, ranging from outraged criticism of the Government's policy, to pleas for counter propaganda against Germany, to exhortation that British bombers should not be asked to attack civilian targets.⁷ Amongst Halifax's and Chamberlain's correspondents, the feeling was considerably more vehement against Germany and against the Government's policy. Edward Grigg wrote to Halifax, on 25 September, that his

¹ PRO FO 371/21780 C 10393/6490/18: Women's International League to Halifax, 20 September 1938.

² PRO FO 371/21780 C 10636/6490/18: National Peace Council to Halifax, 20 September 1938.

³ PRO FO 371/21780 C 10745/6490/18: Liberal Party Organisation to Halifax, 21 September 1938.

⁴ PRO FO 371/21780 C 10637/6490/18: Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries to Halifax, 22 September 1938.

⁵ PRO FO 371/21780 C 10859/6490/18: Civil Service Clerical Association to Halifax, 23 September 1938.

⁶ PRO FO 371/21780 C 10746/6490/18: Women's Peace Crusade to Halifax, 23 September 1938; PRO FO 371/21780 C 10744/6490/18: Peace Pledge Union to Halifax, 22 September 1938.

⁷ PRO FO 371/21780 C 10860/6490/18: Welsh National Council of the League of Nations to Halifax, 25 September 1938; C 10987/6490/18: League of Nations Union to Halifax, 23 September 1938; C 11104/6490/18: F.O. minute, record of conversation between Halifax and a deputation from the National Council of Labour, 21 September 1938; C 11101/6490/18: Mr. E.C. Willis to Halifax, 27 September 1938;

C 11425/6490/18: Mr. H.L. Hoff to Halifax, 27 September 1938; C 11426/6490/18: Mr. F. Carey to Halifax, 30 September 1938; C 10983/6490/18: Women's Peace Crusade to Halifax, 27 September 1938.

impression of opinion in the country was that parliament should be summoned and that no further steps should be taken to conciliate German intransigence without parliamentary consent. Grigg also thought that, if the Czechs were made to submit to the full vigour of what were believed to be Hitler's demands, promises that he would pursue a policy of appeasement would cut very little ice.¹ From Oxford, the Warden of All Souls advocated facing the risk of attack to Britain herself and sending the greater part of the air force to Czechoslovakia to defend her against invading Germans.² Amery's correspondence with the Prime Minister shows a gradual disillusionment with the terms the Government was asking the Czechs to accept.³ By 25 September, Amery was furious at the Godesberg terms and rang up Eden to tell him that he thought Chamberlain intended to accept them.⁴ Only Neville Henderson remained depressed that the British public could not see that there was no chance of peace in central Europe until the Czechs allowed the Sudetens to cede, and that, consequently, Britain should allow this to happen. The failure to allow self-determination remained one of the things that was worse than war for Henderson.⁵

Pressure group and parliamentary opinion considered communicating with Chamberlain while he was in Munich but failed to do so.⁶ Just before parliament met, on 28 September, a meeting of about a hundred people had gathered in a House of Commons committee room. Baffy Dugdale described this meeting as the result of attempts to co-

¹ PRO FO 800/328 Halifax Papers: fols.146-7, Grigg to Halifax 25 September 1938.

² PRO FO 800/309 Halifax Papers: fol.367, Adams to Halifax 25 September 1938. See A. Roberts, (1991), p.52-3.

³ BUL NC 7/2/78-81: 17, 19 and 25 September 1938.

⁴ BUL AVON AP 20/1/18 diary, entry 25 September 1938.

⁵ PRO FO 800/309 Halifax Papers: fol.368, 28 September 1938.

⁶ Harold Nicolson recorded that it was the refusal of Eden and Attlee to sign a telegram to Chamberlain begging him not to betray the Czechs which scuppered the idea, Balliol HN, diary for 1938, fol. 76: 29 September 1938.

ordinate the activities of all those who had been involved in the peace movement. It included Norman Angell, Victor Gollancz, representatives from youth movements and some opposition M.P.s.¹ Deputations were sent to leaders of the political parties, before parliament met, to express the views of the group but Baffy, tantalizingly, does not say what those views were. After the announcement that Hitler had agreed to a conference, the same group reassembled. Relief was mingled with incipient doubts about what the conference would decide and Violet Bonham Carter refused to speak to Archibald Sinclair because of his failure to say anything in the Commons. Baffy noted some of the ideas flying around which included, 'this is the first time a British House of Commons has acted like a Fascist parliament', 'Germany's road to the East is now cleared. This is just a first instalment of Danegeld', and 'The Four Power Pact to be concluded at Munich wrong ... both Russia and Czecho ought to have been invited.'² The activities of this committee, together with the 'Focus' group, continued during the conference itself.³ Harold Nicolson recorded a meeting with De La Warr, on the evening of 28 September, at which the latter had said that the younger members of the Cabinet were having the very greatest difficulty in keeping Chamberlain firm.⁴

Whilst all the major chroniclers of this period assess the parallel narratives of defence preparations, the opinion of the Dominions and public opinion during this month, there has been reluctance to record which, if any, of these factors was crucial at given moments. Of those who have offered a judgement, Harinder Aulach has rated public

¹ Gollancz was a publisher and founder of the Left Book Club.

² N.A. Rose (1973), p. 106-7, 28 September 1938

³ *ibid.*, p. 108, 29 September 1938. Harold Nicolson recorded that Focus met at the Savoy on 29 September. Churchill, Cecil, Lytton, Salter, Wickham Steed, Layton, Sinclair, Arthur Henderson, Liddell Hart, Angell, Lloyd George, Violet Bonham Carter and Lord Lloyd amongst others had been present, Balliol HN, diary for 1938, fol.76: 29 September 1938.

⁴ Balliol HN diary for 1938, fol.69: 28 September 1938.

opinion a parenthetical third behind military unpreparedness and Hitlerian unpredictability, as factors in the decision to reject a commitment to Czechoslovakia, whereas the account above demonstrates that public opinion operated as a twin to the strategic question, and that the two were inextricably linked because of the possibility of air attacks on civilians.¹ The diary accounts of Gort, Ironside and Pownall suggest that the memoranda that were prepared for the Cabinet during September, particularly Ismay's balance sheet on war in 1938 or 1939 were not presented to the Cabinet by Inskip in the meetings from 25th September onwards, although they were in his possession.² Shay points out that these papers were not, in fact, published for the Cabinet until 4th October.³ There had been meetings between Hore-Belisha, the Service Chiefs, Chamberlain and Halifax about precautionary defence measures, on 12 and 13 September, but no minutes survive, and Hore-Belisha just recorded the general feeling at them as being against premature action.⁴

If the Cabinet were not using papers prepared at the time of the crisis itself to decide military questions, several historians have argued that they might have been acting on the conclusions of the Chiefs of Staff paper of March 1938. This paper had concluded that, although Britain would not give Hitler a free hand in eastern Europe, Britain could not get involved militarily on behalf of that region, and it had been accepted by the

¹ H. Aulach, 'Britain and the Sudeten Issue, 1938: the Evolution of a Policy' *JCH* vol.18 no.2 (1983), p.235.

² B. Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars* (Oxford, 1980), p.280-1, M. Howard, *The Continental Commitment* (1972), p.123, Middlemas, p.330. Both Pownall and Gort noted Hore-Belisha's apparent lack of interest in military planning during the crisis, B. Bond, *Chief of Staff* (1972), p.161, J. Colville, *Man of Valour. Field-Marshal Lord Gort V.C.* (1972), p.110.

³ R.P. Shay Jnr., *British Rearmament in the Thirties. Politics and Profits* (Princeton, 1977), p.226. S.

Roskill, *Hankey, Man of Secrets Vol.III 1931-1963* (1974), p.379 argues that the papers were presented in September, but there seems to be no evidence that they were shown to the Cabinet.

⁴ R.J. Minney, (Aldershot, 1960), p.139.

Government.¹ It seems to have been the case that military unpreparedness was widely accepted in both military and political circles and so it is, perhaps, all the more remarkable that, in light of this, the Cabinet put the country in a position in which it had threatened to retaliate against Germany. Ironside certainly credited Chamberlain with knowledge that war against Germany would be suicide,

*'we cannot expose ourselves now to a German attack. We simply commit suicide if we do. That is the fallacy of his argument. At no time could we stand up against German air bombing. Chamberlain knows this. He dare not say it to the people. What a mess we are in.'*²

When he left Britain for the Munich conference, Chamberlain was leaving the Cabinet's final judgement behind. Halifax had shown himself, albeit at the last minute, to be against the idea of allowing German troops on Czech soil in advance of an agreement, although prepared to accept a secession under a plebiscite. After this acceptance of the self-determinatory principle by the British, French and Czech Governments, the point at which the Cabinet had decided to stick was the use of force to achieve this aim. Chamberlain, alone, seems to have seen avoiding war as more important than this principle before Munich, largely because of his view, which the interviews with Hitler had only reinforced, that a negotiated settlement on the Sudeten issue would put an end to German policies of reclamation and annexation. He had tried to deter Hitler from threatening force by invoking the readiness of public opinion to oppose him if he did. Personally, however, he seems to have decided that, if force were threatened or used, acquiescing in what Germany asked for was a better policy than causing a world war over the Sudetenland. Military considerations were a concomitant factor to the perceived need

¹ B. Bond, (1980), p.279. See also D. Dilks, ' "The Unnecessary War"? Military Advice and Foreign Policy in Great Britain, 1931-1939' in A. Preston (ed.), *General Staffs and Diplomacy before the Second World War* (1978), p.124.

² Col. R. Macleod and D. Kelly (eds.), *The Ironside Diaries 1937-1940* (1962), p.62, 22 September 1938.

to make a stand against the threat of German aggression. Yet, the fact that Chamberlain did not persuade the Cabinet to accept the Godesberg terms, on 25th September, and had to allow the situation to progress to the brink of war, in itself suggests that perceptions of the public's desire (in all its manifestations) to resist German aggression was more significant as a factor in decision-making until the Munich conference itself. At that point, Chamberlain could play upon the very understandable, if temporary, relief manifested around him when war was averted.

To conclude, perceptions of public opinion were as important a factor as military considerations in Cabinet decision-making, until 28 September 1938. At decisive moments, public opinion was even the language in which politicians communicated dissent from the Prime Minister's line. Contrary to the judgements of historians about Chamberlain's receptiveness to public opinion, Cabinet members appear to have believed that they could influence their Prime Minister by invoking it. Assumptions about what the public would and would not fight for changed during the month, from an isolationist approach to the support of allies who had obligations to resist aggression. Public opinion was an important negotiating ploy abroad to suggest unity of national purpose, even for Chamberlain when dealing with Hitler.

The undefined sense of what 'the country' was thinking formed an integral part of the advice offered to the principal actors. Some M.P.s knew that the advice they gave about currents of opinion was a personal construction, as Edward Grigg wrote to Halifax, on 25 September, 'I have refrained from bothering you with my personal reading of opinion in the country because I felt we should wait until the whole story could be told.'¹

¹ PRO FO 800/328 Halifax Papers: fols.146-147, 25 September 1938.

Alternatively, M.P.s used it as a means of spurring the Government on to the type of action that they themselves wished to see, as Leo Amery did to Halifax on 16 September,

*'One thing is certain. If we are forced into war you and Neville will have the whole country and the whole Empire solid behind you.'*¹

Some of the Cabinet's perceptions may have been based on the evidence of newspapers and demonstrations and we have outlined the circularity of this process, particularly with reference to reports in The Times. In the absence of parliament, the Cabinet's social circles were smaller and the pressure of business meant less time for socializing, but within small groups, opinions were formed and we have illustrated some of the channels through which these could have made their way to Chamberlain's inner circle. In this case study, we see London political society again functioning both as public opinion itself for the Cabinet and as commentators about the nature of public opinion in the rest of the country.

Of the principal actors, Chamberlain does seem to have been isolated from much contact, outside the Cabinet and his senior advisors, and to have been entirely fixated by the idea that only his personal visits to Germany could save the situation. His fear or dislike of parliament, it is not clear which, contributed to this sense, but he was backed by some of the Cabinet on this issue, showing that he was not alone in thinking that a display of national unity would not have been produced by a debate. Given the tone of correspondence in September, particularly within the Churchill circle, they may have been right. On the other hand, the democratic process would have been active at an earlier stage in the negotiations. Although Chamberlain's statement, on 28 September, did register the type of stand against Germany which many seemed to want, the fact that

¹ PRO FO 800/309 Halifax Papers: fol.319, 16 September 1938.

there had been no discussion of the Godesberg proposals because of Hitler's message arriving in the middle of Chamberlain's speech meant that the Munich settlement itself was made without any form of parliamentary consultation. It was this betrayal of some sections of parliamentary opinion and of the parliamentary process which contributed to the criticisms Chamberlain faced in the autumn of 1938, which are discussed in the final chapter.

Chapter Seven.

Public Outcry and the Cabinet's freedom of action: perceptions of public opinion in the wake of the Munich agreement and the Kristallnacht pogrom, October-December 1938.

On 15 December 1938, the Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, met the German Ambassador, von Dirksen, to discuss the state of Anglo-German relations. Reviewing events since the Munich conference, Halifax made plain his disappointment that the British now felt that that an agreement with the German Government was not really possible, since the Germans had made no response to any overtures. He attributed the deterioration in relations since Munich, in part, to the treatment of Jews in Germany. Von Dirksen's reply was that Dr. Schacht was coming over to Britain in the near future with proposals about the Jewish question which, he believed, would relieve British opinion to some extent.¹

Historians are divided as to the effect of Kristallnacht, on 9 November 1938, on negotiations after Munich. D.C. Watt has identified it as one of four factors which locate a shift in British public opinion towards recognition of the probability of war in late 1938, rather than after Hitler's occupation of Prague in March 1939.² Tony Kushner has suggested that the British Government's attitudes towards Jewish persecution were inflexible during the 1930s, and that it was certainly not an issue, even post-Kristallnacht, that was allowed to stand in the way of Anglo-German understanding.³ Nick Crowson saw the parliamentary response as conditioned by perceptions of public opinion. Using a

¹ PRO FO 371/21660 C 15529/42/18: Viscount Halifax's conversation with Herr von Dirksen, 15 December 1938.

² D.C. Watt, 'British domestic politics', (Paris, 1975), p.255. See P. Kennedy, in G. Martel (ed.) *The Origins of the Second World War reconsidered: the A.J.P. Taylor debate after twenty-five years* (1986) p. 147 for further doubts that British public opinion was in favour of appeasement until March 1939.

³ T. Kushner, 'Beyond the Pale? British Reactions to Nazi anti-Semitism, 1933-39' *IM* vol.viii nos.1-2 (1989), p.155.

Gallup opinion poll, published in the News Chronicle in 1939, to show that a majority of the public thought that persecution of the Jews was an obstacle to understanding between Germany and Britain, he argued that to have talked of further concessions to a régime capable of such brutality would have produced a wave of public condemnation. He added that Jewish persecution also reinforced the view that the only way to deal with Nazism was through a show of strength, as the only policy respected by such an intolerable régime.¹ He made, fundamentally, the same point as A.J.P. Taylor, that Nazi anti-Semitism was to prove an important factor in reducing Conservative support for Munich because it highlighted the threat that the Nazi régime posed to the entire free world.²

Most historians have judged that Chamberlain wanted to continue negotiations with both Italy and Germany after Munich. Watt described Chamberlain's attitude, in the wake of Munich, as dedicated to this purpose.³ Similarly, Parker's citation of Chamberlain's comments in Cabinet, on 3 October, that he hoped the contacts which Munich had opened up would pave the way for a solution of the armament race, argues for Chamberlain's desire for continued territorial appeasement.⁴ Historians of German foreign policy have also tended to see Chamberlain's actions as the unmodified continuation of appeasement. Klaus Hildebrand saw the inner Cabinet, led by Chamberlain, as wedded to an appeasement policy, which might include territorial concessions.⁵ Both Watt and Middlemas have described Chamberlain's conviction, after

¹ N.J. Crowson, 'The British Conservative Party and the Jews during the late 1930s' *Patterns of Prejudice* vol.xxix nos.2-3 (1995), p.30-1.

² A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Penguin, 1975), p.515.

³ Watt, p.82.

⁴ Parker, p.183. See also Middlemas, p.435.

⁵ K. Hildebrand, *The Third Reich* (trans. 1984), p.32-33. Hildebrand's earlier work suggests, however, that some limitations to the expansion of the Reich were envisaged, see K. Hildebrand, *The Foreign Policy of the Third Reich* (trans. A. Fothergill, 1973), p. 82.

Munich, that the Anglo-German agreements should be exploited and that work should continue towards a European settlement.¹ Only Wesley Wark has hinted, through a study of intelligence information, that Chamberlain agreed with Halifax that attention should shift away from Germany because of the effects of Kristallnacht.² Halifax's biographer considers that Halifax's stance against Germany, over Kristallnacht, was part of his more general move against Chamberlain after Munich.³ Most recently, Louise London has written that Chamberlain was horrified by the pogrom but that his response was in terms of its effect on Anglo-German relations. She argued, in addition, that the role of public opinion in producing greater sympathy, in the Government, for refugees is hard to establish since Chamberlain and Hoare had differing views about the public's tolerance of a further influx from Germany.⁴

This chapter asks whether the Cabinet perceived any change in public opinion to be taking place after Kristallnacht and how their perceptions influenced decision-making about the future of Anglo-German relations after the Munich agreement. It is argued, building on Crowson's work, that the decision, taken by Halifax, not to pursue diplomatic relations with Nazi Germany, was to a large extent conditioned by the perception that the public would not tolerate negotiations with a country capable of treating its civilian population in this way. These perceptions were not only based on the reactions of parliament but also represented a current of belief in the Foreign Office which had been developing throughout the year and which officials expressed in terms of what the public

¹ Watt, p. 82. See also D. Dilks, 'The Prime Minister, the Cabinet and Hitler's Germany, 1937-9' (1987), p. 332.

² W. Wark, 'Something very stern: British Political Intelligence, Moralism and Strategy in 1939' *Intelligence and National Security* vol.v no.1 (1990), p.156.

³ A. Roberts, (1991), p.125-7.

⁴ L. London (2000), p.106-7.

expected of the Government. This current was the product of the detailed reports, that the Berlin embassy and the British consulates had been providing, about the severity of the violence, throughout 1938. It was also the result of the sense that Britain no longer had much to lose in confronting the Nazi administration about the Jewish pogroms and in trying to reduce the attacks. By late 1938, a sense of having little to lose, diplomatically, had been created by the increasing signals from Berlin that Hitler was no longer courting British friendship.¹

We also suggest that the mere fact that Chamberlain acknowledged that the public outcry showed negotiations were impossible, for the immediate future, means that he did take some account of outside opinion. This follows Louise London's line that Chamberlain responded to the pogrom in terms of the practicality of Anglo-German relations. We argue, therefore, that he was reluctant to postpone negotiations but that he realized that he had no alternative. His response had some consonance with his initial ambivalence towards the immediate continuation of negotiations with Germany after Munich, because of the parliamentary backlash, but, since he argued that he wanted to help the Jews but not to threaten Germany, we may surmise that these initial doubts had been allayed by the time of the pogrom. The plausibility of the perception, among the Cabinet, that the public were ill-disposed to conversations with Germany was partly a product of parliamentary opposition to Chamberlain after Munich and was also indicative of their own growing distrust and dislike of the Hitler régime.

¹ G.L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany. Vol. II* (Chicago, 1980), p.465-66 argues convincingly that after the Munich agreement, Hitler's foreign policy was dedicated to two aims: the elimination of the Czech state which had been interrupted by Munich, and the staging of a war with France and Britain and that these two aims were now to be made to occur concurrently.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first reviews the evidence for the attitudes of Chamberlain, Halifax, the Cabinet and the Foreign Office, in October 1938, towards negotiations with Germany and Chamberlain's initial uncertainty in the face of parliamentary opposition. The second section looks at the various motivations for the lead which Chamberlain and Halifax gave to the Cabinet, after the Kristallnacht pogrom, not to continue negotiations. We then examine possible outside influences on this decision. We start with the Foreign Office's shifting perceptions of public opinion about Jewish persecutions, during 1938, then move to parliamentary reactions and, finally, examine how the wider political environment could have influenced the decisions which were taken not to pursue negotiations.

We start with an appreciation of Chamberlain's intentions towards Germany in the aftermath of Munich. His first hurdle was the 'trying ordeal' of the Commons' debate on the Munich agreement, between 3 and 6 October.¹ Despite winning the vote of approval at the end of the debate, proceedings had revealed the strength of a dissentient Conservative group, led by Leo Amery and Anthony Eden, in its moderate form, and by Winston Churchill on its more extreme fringe.² He was also facing potential resignations from Oliver Stanley, Robert Bernays and Harry Crookshank.³ Chamberlain felt more confident by the end of the debate, when he thought he had almost won over figures such as Eden and Amery but was no fonder of the idea of broadening the Government to

¹ BUL NC 18/1/1071: letter to Ida Chamberlain, 9 October 1938.

² Churchill was facing some constituency backlash over his opposition to Munich at this time, see Gilbert, p.1012-1014. Lord Rothermere advised him to soft pedal as Epping was on the bomber route from Germany and the people were so afraid of being bombed that they would support anyone who kept them out of war. Churchill did, however, win the motion against him in Epping, see Churchill, Chartwell 2/332, fol.85: Rothermere to Churchill, 15 October 1938 and 2/333, fol.13: Churchill to Ramsay Muir, 5 November 1938.

³ See, for example, Bodleian, MS.Eng.Hist.D.359, diary for 1938, fols.217-218 for Crookshank's account of his resignation threat.

reflect opinions in the Commons.¹ He confided to his sister, Ida, that any further step towards agreement with the dictators might precipitate further resignations and that he was trying to console himself with opinion outside Westminster,

*'I tried occasionally to take an antidote to the poison gas by reading a few of the countless letters and telegrams which continued to pour in expressing in the most moving accents the writers' heartfelt relief and gratitude. All the world seemed to be full of my praises except the House of Commons, but of course that was where I happened to be myself so its voice spoke loudest in my ear.'*²

The debate, itself, revealed the division of the Munich issue into two parts. Firstly, the party political line, shown by the abstention of forty-seven M.P.s and the opposition of three, was played out in the calls for the broadening of the Cabinet.³ Secondly, the debate about the future of policy continued with the need for rearmament as its bedrock. In the debate, public opinion had been, variously, described as calm, resolute, relieved, shamed and unconvinced that war had been averted for the foreseeable future. The contribution of the Labour M.P., Herbert Morrison, perhaps illustrates this type of speech most neatly, 'This is what I think is going through the minds of the masses of the British people. They came right up to the edge of war; they saw the gas masks being distributed, and the anti-aircraft defences being mounted. They were looking war in the face...the man-in-the-street is increasingly asking himself, are we safe from war in the future as far as we can see?'⁴ Given the flexibility of the phrase 'public opinion' as a rhetorical feature, such statements are not very revealing, but the point that the public had looked war in the face and, therefore, had some appreciation of the need for rearmament seems to have influenced the Cabinet.⁵ There was no further talk of the public not

¹ BUL NC 18/1/1071: letter to Ida Chamberlain, 9 October 1938.

² BUL NC 18/1/1071: letter to Ida Chamberlain, 9 October 1938.

³ See Parker, p. 187 for these figures.

⁴ Hansard, 5th Series, 1937-8, 339, 170.

⁵ See D. Dilks, 'The Prime Minister, the Cabinet and Hitler's Germany, 1937-9', (1987) p. 332.

supporting further rearmament expenditure, though Leo Amery noted in his diary, on 21 October, that he doubted whether Chamberlain was really committed to radical defence measures and thought he might only go as far as public opinion insisted.¹

After the unnerving experience of vocal opposition to his policy from within his own party, Chamberlain sought comfort in his close friends, even though some, such as Nancy Astor, were not wholeheartedly behind his Government. Geoffrey Dawson's diary records the events of the last weekend in October, when he escaped to Cliveden, where the Prime Minister, also, was relaxing. He described the arrival of a typical weekend party, including the Speaker and his wife, Walter Elliot, Sir John Anderson, the Alec Cadogans and the hostess. Before dinner, Dawson had 'sat talking' with Chamberlain and Cadogan.² Chamberlain had kept in close contact with Dawson in late October, discussing 'the whole ground of Anglo-German relations' with him, on 24 October, two days before the Cabinet met. According to Dawson, they discussed the Italian agreement, opinion in England and the vacancies in the Cabinet where, he considered, there was a terrible shortage of good men.³ Leo Kennedy confided to his diary, on 25 October, that Dawson had told him that Chamberlain's plan was to get on terms with Italy first and to leave Germany alone until early 1939.⁴ Chamberlain's sisters also took pains to reassure him during October, pointing out the discrepancy, which Chamberlain had, himself, noticed, between the letters of congratulations he was receiving and the atmosphere in the House of Commons.⁵

¹ Amery, p. 533. See also BUL NC 18/2/1074: letter to Ida, 22 October 1938 for Chamberlain's desire to get the newspapers back to the view that although there were gaps to be filled, there need not be huge additions to the rearmament programme already underway.

² Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/42, diary, 29 October 1938.

³ Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/42, diary, 24 October 1938.

⁴ Churchill Kennedy 1/22, diary, 25 October 1938.

⁵ BUL NC 18/2/1096: letter from Ida Chamberlain, 9 October 1938.

Some measure of the thoughts of the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary about Germany, during early October, can also be gleaned from Halifax's correspondence. On 11 October, Halifax wrote to the Prime Minister setting out his reasons for agreeing with a proposal put to him by Anthony Eden that it would be a good moment to broaden the base of the Cabinet and to include some critics of governmental policy within it.¹ Hoare had suggested a similar move to Chamberlain, in a note written on 5 October, on the grounds that the country demanded new blood and that some reform of the inner Cabinet was necessary, as people thought that the present machinery was slow and obsolescent.²

Halifax's letter to Chamberlain, setting out Eden's proposal, contains, perhaps, the best single description of what the Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister saw themselves trying to do, between October 1938 and March 1939. Halifax reported that he had said to Eden that he feared that, if a broader range of people were included in the Cabinet, they would automatically object to the Prime Minister's policy. He described the policy as 'getting on terms with dictators, however much you may feel, as we were saying to each other the other day, that while hoping for the best it is also necessary to prepare for the worst.' Eden had replied that he thought such people wanted merely to be reassured that the Government was not being naïvely deceived by the dictators and that, if this could be seen to be the case, they would not feel so strongly about the practical steps that it might be thought right to take towards rapprochement with the dictators.

Chamberlain saw grave difficulties in the idea of widening the Cabinet but, in reply to Halifax three days later, he said that he thought that the Germans had no grounds

¹ PRO FO 800/328 Halifax Papers, fols. 169-173: Halifax to Chamberlain, 11 October 1938. See Feiling, p.385 for further discussion of this letter. BUL AVON AP 20/1/18, diary, 11 October 1938 gives an account of Eden's interview with Halifax on which Halifax's letter to Chamberlain was based.

² BUL NC 7/11/31 fol. 133: letter from Hoare, 5 October 1938.

for annoyance with the continuation of British rearmament, since they had not been so forthcoming with gestures on their side that he felt that Britain should do nothing to annoy them.¹ Chamberlain's reluctance to risk broadening the Cabinet in favour of a 'National Solidarity' line, as Halifax and Eden had urged, suggests that he did not see 'getting on terms with dictators' as a straightforward affair, either from a domestic, or from a German, point of view. In a letter to his sister, Chamberlain described Eden's approach as still being at odds with his own. He also considered that it would be difficult to work with Eden because the former Foreign Secretary did not realize that 'the conciliation part of the policy is just as important as the rearming.'²

Within the Foreign Office, there were even greater worries about how to 'get on terms with dictators'. Officials were concerned by the level of public knowledge about the growing state of confrontation between Britain and Germany, and about British deficiencies in armaments. There was still no consensus on the extent of Hitler's aims. In mid-October, a collection of Foreign Office memoranda on the possible future course of British policy was presented to Halifax. Cadogan's contribution pointed out that, whilst Hitler knew that British rearmament was at this point in a position of considerable inferiority compared to Germany, the British public were not aware of this, and, thus, might be vulnerable to the charge Hitler would, inevitably, levy that the British were destroying the spirit of Munich by accelerating their programme of rearmament.³ Strang's

¹ PRO FO 800/328 Halifax Papers, fol.191: Chamberlain to Halifax, 14 October 1938. See BUL NC 18/2/1097: letter from Ida Chamberlain, 21 October 1938 for her agreement that it would be impossible for Neville to work with further Labour members of Cabinet.

² BUL NC 18/2/1072: letter to Hilda, 15 October 1938.

³ PRO FO 371/21659 C 14471/42/18: Foreign Office Minute by Mr. Cadogan, Cadogan memorandum 14 October 1938. See D. Lammers, 'From Whitehall to Munich: The Foreign Office and the Future Course of British Policy' *HJ* vol.xxvi no.4 (1973), p. 831-856. Cadogan first started to draft this paper on 9th October, see Dilks, p. 114. He found the task difficult, writing that whilst he did not know what the policy should be, he did know the one they had followed was wrong.

memorandum carried this argument one stage further, suggesting ways in which public support might be won for further rearmament. He identified anti-fascism as the motif most likely to succeed, rejecting others on the grounds that people would not believe that their security was in peril, so self-preservation could be ruled out, and rejecting democracy and empire as spent forces in terms of propagandistic value.¹

Beyond these broad assessments of what the British public might and might not respond to, two divergent images of what the British public was thinking emerged. Laurence Collier, general critic of Chamberlain's policy and head of the northern department, argued that there was some feeling in the country of living under a dictatorship, comparable to that of Germany or Italy, because of the lack of definition in foreign policy and the high-handedness of the Government,

*'the average working man, the average Liberal and the average idealistic Conservative can hardly be blamed for feeling suspicious of a policy which is never defined in precise terms but which they see supported by Lord Rothermere, Lord Beaverbrook, Mr. Garvin, the bankers of the City of London and the business men of Birmingham; and until these suspicions are dispelled by some announcement which will make it clear that we really have a national foreign policy, I for one, shall not be able to feel much confidence in our future.'*²

Gladwyn Jebb, on the other hand, saw the aftermath of Munich as a period in which the country might be prepared to make sacrifices to achieve peace that might not have been possible before, surmising that the universal sense of relief would soon be followed by foreboding and that the public would, therefore, be in a state peculiarly receptive and appreciative of constructive efforts for peace.³

¹ PRO FO 371/21659 C 14471/42/18: Foreign Office Minute by Mr. Cadogan, Strang memorandum, 10 October 1938.

² PRO FO 371/21659 C 14471/42/18: Foreign Office Minute by Mr. Cadogan, Collier memorandum, 29 October 1938.

³ PRO FO 371/21659 C 14471/42/18: Foreign Office Minute by Mr. Cadogan, undated Jebb memorandum.

It seems clear, from these two examples, that the pre-Munich divides about gauging Nazi intentions and the probability of a general settlement in Europe continued within the Foreign Office in the wake of the agreement. Donald Lammers has pointed out that Collier's view came closest to a vision of a Germany whose internal dynamic would always throw up fresh demands to be met by the international community.¹ The views of the Secret Intelligence Service just before the Munich crisis, attached to the October policy review, attributed fairly broad aims to the Nazi Government, although not war with France or Britain. This report saw German aims as the extension of the economic vassal State principle, not only to central and south-eastern Europe, but also to Belgium, Holland, the Baltic and other northern states.² It envisaged the British role as containment of Germany, without provocation or encirclement. It even envisaged friendship, in so far as this did not compromise British principles and interests. Unremitting rearmament was justified in this paper by the reliance, in Germany and Italy, on force as the keynote of policy. British policy, therefore, should also possess the capacity to retaliate with adequate force,

'Platitudinous though it may be, our only chance of preserving peace is to be ready for war on any scale, without relying too much on outside support.'

Cadogan's memorandum recommended that Germany might still be asked what more, if anything, she wanted, at an international conference, in order to forestall Hitler. He regarded German activity in eastern Europe on a purely economic basis, saying that Britain should cut her losses there and let Germany find her Lebensraum if she could, as he could see no reason why that, automatically, jeopardized the British economic

¹ D. Lammers, 'From Whitehall to Munich' (1973), p. 842.

² PRO FO 371/21659 C 14471/42/18: Foreign Office Minute by Mr. Cadogan, S.I.S report, 18 September 1938.

situation.¹ Cadogan's memorandum was given to Halifax to peruse, on Sunday 15 October, and he recorded several conversations with the Foreign Secretary over the next week on the subject, until Monday 31 October, when he learnt that Chamberlain intended to 'follow-up Munich' and that this would necessitate another paper.²

The Cabinet, itself, had to wait until 31 October for any discussion of what 'following-up Munich' might mean. In the two Cabinet meetings before this, on 19 and 26 October, there had been discussion of likely public reactions to attempts to implement the Anglo-Italian agreement but no mention of what line should be taken with Germany. By the time the Cabinet met, press relations had deteriorated between the two countries and there was little sign that Hitler was infusing the spirit of Munich into the commission settling the Sudeten question, where the Germans had been obstructionist from the outset.³ On 31 October, Chamberlain outlined to his Cabinet colleagues the intended content of his speech to the Commons for the following day. This stated that the Government's policy was one of appeasement and that the British aim was to establish relations with the dictator powers which would lead to a settlement in Europe and to a sense of stability.⁴ He described the 'following-up' of Munich as the pursuance of the Anglo-Italian agreement and that, one day, some limitation of arms might be arrived at.

¹ Dilks, p. 118-9.

² Dilks, p. 122.

³ See DGFP, Series D, vol. IV no. 250: 11 October 1938 for Ambassador von Dirksen's comments to Weizsäcker that whilst the British press, particularly the provincial press, criticized the observation that Britain should not bother her head about German domestic affairs, responsible circles had quite taken the hint and did not deny that the objections to being lectured by a governess were justified. The German press had continued to berate British interference in German affairs throughout early October. See PRO FO 371/21658 C 11787/42/18: Henderson to Halifax, 6 October 1938 for complaints about the National Council of Labour's 'Message to the German People' of 27 September 1938. Halifax himself thought this speech much more for German consumption than for British and was not unduly perturbed by it, see PRO FO 800/328 Halifax Papers, fols. 169-173: Halifax to Chamberlain, 11 October 1938.

⁴ PRO CAB 23/96 51 (38), 31 October 1938.

He also acknowledged the talk in the country and the press about the need for Britain to rearm and he was very anxious to demonstrate to Italy and Germany that the need for rearmament was not directed against them but was purely for national defence. Kingsley Wood, gloomily, reminded the Cabinet, at this point, that Britain's air provision was so deficient that it practically invited aggression. John Simon said that he thought that there would be no dispute on the general proposition, that Britain should increase her defensive strength, but that the real question was how this was to be presented.

It was not until 7 November that Halifax put forward some appreciation of how diplomacy should be conducted with Germany. In the Foreign Policy Committee on 7 November, Halifax did not state the case any more strongly than he and the Prime Minister had done in correspondence on 11 October. He said that he thought Munich should be capitalized on soon, and that some step should be taken in the direction of further appeasement, possibly by way of asking Germany if she had any suggestions as to how the outstanding matters should be discussed.¹ At this point Cadogan was still writing his paper on the subject and Halifax did not receive it until two days later, but his statement bears close resemblance to Cadogan's idea, that Germany should be asked to state what it was she wanted. In committee, Kingsley Wood again underlined the fears of air bombardment in the country and said that the strengthening of British air defences would benefit diplomacy and would satisfy public opinion.

In the following Cabinet meeting, on 9 November, debate shifted to Anglo-French conversations, Germany's possible colonial demands and some imperial matters.² The next time that the Cabinet met, in any form, was five days after the Kristallnacht pogrom,

¹ PRO CAB 23/96 53 (38), 7 November 1938.

² PRO CAB 23/96 54 (38), 9 November 1938.

when the foreign policy committee met, in special session, to review Anglo-German relations in light of the actions against the Jews. The day before the meeting, Chamberlain had written to his sister about the jinx that he thought plagued Anglo-German relations, 'There does seem to be some fatality about Anglo-German relations which invariably blocks all efforts to improve them.'¹ At the meeting itself, Chamberlain expressed concern at the deterioration in Anglo-German relations, caused by the pogrom, and pointed out that there was a very general and strong desire that something should be done to alleviate the terrible fate of the Jews in Germany.² He said that he was surprised that certain sections of the press were not pushing harder for immediate action on Jewish refugees. The Secretary of State for Colonies pointed out that they had been reviewing the German colonial claims but that the pogrom had made it impracticable to do anything tangible about this for the time being. Chamberlain, Inskip and Hoare were against tying the alleviation of the Jewish issue to the colonial settlement. Chamberlain preferred the option of helping the Jews, but without threatening Germany. Halifax seemed to agree more with Stanley, however, saying that he feared Britain would have to say she would not discuss the colonial question with Germany until she mended her ways or ceased to be Nazi.³ Hitler's anger at the outcome of Munich meant that conversations would be

¹ BUL NC 18/2/1076, letter to Ida, 13 November 1938.

² See also BUL NC 18/2/1099: letter from Ida Chamberlain, 11 November 1938 for her comment that Hitler's treatment of the Jews did make it difficult for those who wished to keep friendly relations with him and that German press endeavours to link the actions of a desperate Jew driven by the persecution of his parents to Churchill's anti-Nazi comments would not make Chamberlain's task in Britain any easier. Watt, p.89; S. Aster 'Guilty Men: the case of Neville Chamberlain' in R. Boyce and E.M. Robertson (eds.), *Paths to War* (1989), p.252 and L. London (2000), p.106 have all noted Chamberlain's personal indignation about the pogroms. See also BUL NC 18/2/1076 letter to Ida, 13 November 1938.

³ Cadogan had briefed Halifax for this meeting, Dilks, p.125.

useless anyway, since a decision had been taken to ostracize the British in the German press.¹

Two days later, in full Cabinet, Halifax made a much stronger statement on the impact of the pogroms on British public opinion, reiterating that any further approaches to Germany were out of the question at this point and that Italian negotiations were to be pursued instead. Chamberlain also stated that any colonial settlement was only being considered as part of a general settlement and that this was clearly impossible in the existing circumstances.² Halifax adduced both British public opinion and the American ambassador's view that inaction over the Jewish issue was creating an anti-British atmosphere in the States as justifications for this decision.³ From the evidence we have, Halifax's interview with the American ambassador was the only piece of outside advice he received, in person, between the two Cabinet meetings. The rest of the discussion centred on what practical arrangements could be made for Jewish resettlement.

Did Halifax just use the pogroms as an excuse to put off Anglo-German conversations, whilst he and Chamberlain went to Paris for negotiations with the French before turning their attention to Italy, as Leo Kennedy's evidence suggests?⁴ In this section, we suggest that, whilst this might have been Chamberlain's motivation, Halifax's response to Kristallnacht may well have been the result of accumulated evidence on the Jewish issue throughout 1938 and was not purely cynical. Both Bruce Strang and D.C. Watt have argued that the embassy and consular reports from Germany 'stung' Halifax

¹ See also Watt, p.90-91 and M. Cowling, (Cambridge, 1975), p.202-3 n.40. This was information from the intelligence services.

² PRO CAB 23/96 55 (38), 16 November 1938, 10am. See also Harvey, p.220 for the Cabinet decision not to try to make further progress with the Munich settlement as the result of the Jewish persecutions.

³ Harvey, p.219 records the visit of the American ambassador to Halifax on 15 November 1938.

⁴ See p.288.

into action, in November 1938.¹ The most likely explanation for Halifax's decision, in light of the other evidence presented here about the general atmosphere in October 1938, seems to be that the pogroms put paid to what was, already, not a very strong urge to reopen negotiations with Germany, on his part, since all the evidence since the Munich conference suggested that Germany was making no effort to improve relations with Britain.² Developing the Weinberg argument, that the pogrom was coincidental with high-ranking decisions to ostracize the British, it can also be surmised that, as November drew on, British resolve not to continue discussions with the Germans was the result of a growing appreciation that German press attacks would not abate, even if Britain were conciliatory.³

Attitudes to the Jewish issue in the Foreign Office during 1938 did not guarantee that Halifax would have support for a stand on this issue. Opinion had been divided, throughout the year, as to the efficacy and wisdom of British protests. Halifax, himself, had been sceptical about direct opposition to Germany. The publicity attached to the case of Pastor Niemöller, not a Jew but, nevertheless, a victim of persecution, illustrates this

¹ Watt, p.89 and Bruce Strang, 'Two unequal tempers: Sir George Ogilvie Forbes, Sir Nevile Henderson and British Foreign Policy, 1938-9', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, vol.1 (1994), p. 107-137.

² German evidence makes it very clear that this was a conscious policy decision by Berlin, see DGFP, Series D vol.IV no.251: Ambassador von Dirksen to State Secretary Weizsäcker, 12 October 1938, enclosure 2; DGFP, Series D vol.IV no.254: State Secretary Weizsäcker to Ambassador von Dirksen, 17 October 1938; DGFP, Series D vol.IV no.253: State Secretary Weizsäcker to Ambassador von Dirksen, 17 October 1938; Ulrich von Hassell, *The von Hassell Diaries, 1938-1948* (1948) p. 16-18, entries for 10 October and 23 October 1938. More extreme criticism depicted the British moves as designed for an aggressive war against Germany, DBFP, 3rd vol.III no.198: Henderson to Halifax, 13 October 1938. Michael Creswell in the central department also noticed this tendency and enquired whether the British press might be encouraged not to give Germany the impression that Britain was full of people who wanted an aggressive, preventive war against them, PRO FO 371/21658 C 12968/422/18: Ogilvie Forbes to Halifax, minute by Creswell, 25 October 1938.

³ Ogilvie-Forbes reported on 18 November that the violence of attacks on Britain during November was not only due to the British resentment at the treatment of the Jews, but also because Hitler no longer placed any value on British friendship, DBFP, 3rd vol.III no.315. See No. 311 for Ogilvie Forbes' earlier comment that all the press odium had been reserved for British reactions to Kristallnacht and that there had been no published criticism of the French outcry.

neatly.¹ In March 1938, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Lang, wrote to the new Foreign Secretary, Halifax, to express the 'strong indignation' he knew to exist in many parts of Britain, as well as in the United States, about the imprisonment of Dr. Niemöller, in a concentration camp, after his acquittal at trial in 1937. He hoped that Halifax would be able to point out to Ribbentrop, in his forthcoming conversations with him, that this feeling was so strong and so widespread that it must seriously prejudice the establishment of British friendship with Germany and wanted his approval to sign a statement about to be issued by other leaders of European Christian communities.²

Strang's advice to the Foreign Secretary on this matter was that it was difficult to see why they should not use the same influence with the church as was used with the press, to avoid statements which were likely to exacerbate Anglo-German relations, and that, whilst he was sure the statement would be issued anyway, it might be better to dissuade the Archbishop from signing it as no German would believe that he was not the representative of the Government. Sargent agreed with this view, as did Cadogan, who added that such representations were not calculated to improve the lot of Dr. Niemöller or to mitigate persecution of the church in general.³

Two days later, a set of letters appeared in *The Times* from Lords Cecil and Allen of Hurtwood and the Archbishop of York, amongst others, protesting on behalf of Niemöller. On 10 March, Nevile Henderson wrote to Halifax, from Berlin, deploring this approach, and saying that it was not too much to say that, if there had not been such an

¹ See also, K. Robbins, *History, Religion and Identity in Modern Britain* (1993), p.161-194.

² PRO FO 800/313 Halifax Papers, fols 13-14: Lang to Halifax, 7 March 1938.

³ PRO FO 800/313 Halifax Papers, fols. 15-16: minutes by Strang and Sargent, 8 March and by Cadogan, 9 March 1938.

outcry in England, Niemöller might never have been sent to a concentration camp at all.

He tempered the apparent callousness of this statement by saying that,

*'to attempt to express in public one's feelings or to mobilise public opinion in England or in Germany against persecutions here of religion or of individuals merely recoils against the very causes which we are seeking to defend. It is terribly sad, but so it is.'*¹

Halifax sent extracts from this letter to The Times' signatories immediately, with a covering note to the effect that he felt Henderson might be right in his appreciation of the situation. Allen of Hurtwood replied that he had been aware, throughout, of the possibility that far more harm than good might be done by public protests. He went on to say, however, that his efforts through private channels, in an attempt to obviate this problem, had met with very little success and that he felt that there was even some danger in those people who were working sympathetically for understanding with Germany not saying frankly, and, yet, with restraint, how troubled they were by these persecutions.²

Lord Cecil's reply was somewhat terser, saying that he thought that letters in The Times did very little harm or good except to inform public opinion in Britain what was really going on under the Nazi tyranny.³ The Archbishop of York appeared much more chastened by Henderson's rebuff and promised to be very careful before signing anything of a similar nature in the future. From Canterbury, in contrast, came the reply that Lang's own informants in Germany had assured him that the German authorities were more likely to take extreme measures, if they thought they could do it quietly, and that they were, in spite of all their protests, not insensitive to expressions of public opinion in Britain and elsewhere.⁴

¹ PRO FO 800/313 Halifax Papers, fols. 22-23: Henderson to Halifax, 10 March 1938.

² PRO FO 800/313 Halifax Papers, fols. 32-32B: Allen of Hurtwood to Halifax, 14 March 1938.

³ PRO FO 800/313 Halifax Papers, fol.33: Cecil to Halifax, 14 March 1938.

⁴ PRO FO 800/313 Halifax Papers, fol.49: Lang to Halifax, 24 March 1938.

This contrast between Halifax's line, that representations could only harm those in Germany and views that such representations could nonetheless serve a useful purpose in informing public opinion, was mirrored among Foreign Office staff. In May, further economic measures were enacted against the Jews, eliciting a variety of responses about how this new wave of oppression should best be approached. Henderson stuck to his line that representations were of no use, suggesting that,

*"International Jewry which, as everyone knows, had ample funds at its disposal in America and England", would do better to help this relatively small percentage of Jews to leave Germany than to break into loud lamentations over their fate.*¹

On the question of whether Britain should make any representations about the new laws being applied to British citizens in Germany, as the United States' Government had done, Frank Roberts minuted that, whilst such a protest might be popular with public opinion and with the House of Commons, it was unlikely to help the individuals concerned or to improve general British relations with Germany.² A few days later, Speaight and Sargent minuted that it was increasingly difficult to ignore the reactions of parliament and public opinion to the question of lodging a protest in concert with the French.³ Sargent, however, concluded that, rather than issue a protest, the British Government should state that it reserved all rights in relations to the interests of British Jews instead, and this course of action was agreed upon by Cadogan.⁴

Yet, in late May, an escalation in Jewish persecution was noted in the Foreign Office. A series of consular reports, from Breslau, Frankfurt and Munich, transmitted to

¹ PRO FO 371/21693 C 3875/251/18: Henderson to Halifax, 3 May 1938.

² PRO FO 371/21693 C 4340/251/18: Phillip Guedalla to Mr. Butler, 12 May, Roberts minute, 18 May 1938. Frank Roberts was a second secretary in the central department.

³ Speaight does not appear in the F.O. list for 1938 as working in London and so he was probably filling in in the central department between postings.

⁴ PRO FO 371/21694 C 4379/251/18: Roche to Halifax, 14 May 1938.

London by Henderson, illustrate, clearly, that the Foreign Office was increasingly aware that German actions against the Jews amounted to the fact that, 'only the complete and total destruction of Jewish life and enterprise will satisfy the national-socialist programme.'¹ The final report in the consular series, received on 9 June, was from Munich and was seen, not only by Creswell but also by Sargent, R.A Butler, Mallet, Makins and Cadogan.² Consul Carvell made two substantive points: firstly, that the recent events in Bavaria seemed to justify the apprehensions of Jews that the registration of property decree, of 26 April, would be the forerunner of persecution designed to eliminate Jews from all ranks of society other than the proletariat. Secondly, he struggled to understand the mentality of those in Germany who must have been well aware of the instances which he had reported and, yet, who persisted in barefacedly asserting that Jews had never been persecuted in Germany.³

In June, reports from Berlin and Vienna reported a recrudescence of anti-Semitism.⁴ After this spate of increasingly disturbing reports, Vansittart felt that the Foreign Office was starting to compromise its position on the subject, minuting the report from Vienna with the exhortation that the Foreign Office would give some publicity to the savagery. He considered it to be a heavy load on their consciences that there had been nothing outspoken, although they had the material.⁵ During this time, Vansittart's

¹ PRO FO 371/21635 C 4628/1667/62: Henderson to Halifax, 13 May 1938, minute by J. Cairncross, 25 May 1938.

² Creswell was a third secretary and Makins was assistant advisor on League of Nations affairs. Patrick Reilly helped with this information.

³ PRO FO 371/21635 C 5608/1667/62: Henderson to Halifax 8 June, enclosure from H.M. Consul-General at Munich, 3 June 1938.

⁴ See Friedländer, (1997), p. 261-262 for Goebbels' instructions to Berlin police officers in June 1938 that the Jews must get out of Berlin, and the beginning of marking of Jewish shops, and the intimidation and looting carried out by the Hitler Youth.

⁵ PRO FO 371/21635 C 5609/1667/62: Consul-General Gainer, Vienna, to Halifax, undated and Vansittart minute.

thoughts were echoed in another appeal from the Board of Deputies of British Jews which wrote to the Foreign Office, on 19 July, asking that they declare their reprobation of the persecution and that they should not rest until complete equality for the Jews in Germany had been restored.¹

It is not clear whether Vansittart's comments had a direct influence on the steps taken by Henderson, in June, to protest against the treatment of the Jews in conversation with Göring.² It seems that Henderson's complaints about private individuals and the press making such protests did not translate into his own diplomatic contacts, through which he pointed out that the Nazi treatment of the Jews was making friendship between Germany and Britain much harder. Göring had assured Henderson that orders had already been given for the removal of all the offensive epithets and signs on the Jewish shops and the cessation of the actual barbarities. He seemed, nevertheless, unable to understand why British public opinion should be so incensed over such matters.³

It was in this atmosphere of confusion about how far to alienate Germany, combined with revulsion at the increasing violence, that the news of the expansion of anti-Jewish activity after Munich was received. It had to some extent been foreseen in the Foreign Office, although Roger Makins remained sceptical whether 'the position of the Jews in central Europe is any way a British interest'. In the same paper, however, Makins had written, 'the increase of German power and prestige in central and southern Europe

¹ PRO FO 371/21635 C 7295/1667/62: Board of Deputies of British Jews, 19 July 1938.

² Henderson did report on 29 June 1938 that he had been exerting pressure on the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Göring, Himmler, Lammers and others in accordance with the language approved for use at Prague by Mr. Newton, urging moderation and patience, see DBFP, 3rd vol.I no.451.

³ PRO FO 371/21657 C 6542/42/18: Henderson's conversation with Göring, 28 June 1938. See also conversation with Göring at Karinhall on 22 August 1938 at which the latest Jewish persecution was discussed, DBFP, 3rd vol.I no.439. Saul Friedländer, (1997), p.262, n.106 suggests that this representation was superfluous and that Hitler had realized six days earlier that the Jewish persecution was causing difficulties for the resolution of the Sudeten issue and ordered violence in Berlin to stop, which it did.

as the result of the Munich agreement is bound to lead to an increase in anti-Semitism in that area.¹ Makins' apparent disinterest had been overruled, however, by Mallet and Sargent who minuted that the Jewish deputation, which had prompted this comment from Makins, should be received, and that since it was unlikely the Foreign Office would have any good news to give them, they should be seen by the Foreign Secretary himself.

When Halifax interviewed the deputation, on 26 October, they presented him with the argument that the policy of appeasement would meet with much wider public support if it included a change of attitude on the part of the German Government towards the Jews. They considered that this had, hitherto, been regarded as an internal German question but that, as far as it had repercussions on international relations, it should be regarded as an international question and, as such, be raised in any negotiations with Germany.² Halifax had replied that he agreed that German treatment of the Jews did not make reaching an understanding any easier, but that he felt that British protests, that persecution had an adverse effect on foreign opinion, simply did not sink in with the Germans, because discrimination was part of the Nazi philosophy. He went on to say that whilst he fully agreed with the importance of the question, he did not think that it, necessarily, affected or prevented the conduct of negotiations with the German Government on matters involving peace and war but that the British Government would raise the question if they felt it would be useful to do so. This was consistent with Halifax's comment in the foreign policy committee meeting, on 14 November, that he

¹ PRO FO 371/21636 C 12037/1667/62: Mr. Cleverly sends a letter from Mr. Laski asking if the Prime Minister would receive a deputation to discuss the position of the Jews of Central Europe to the Foreign Office, minute by Makins, 8 October 1938.

² PRO FO 371/21636 C 13160/1667/62: Foreign Office minute by Mr. Makins, 31 October 1938 and record of an interview between the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Mr. Laski, 26 October 1938.

was anxious that Germany should not go to war with Britain as a consequence of any action that she might take to help the German Jews.¹ However, he had also supported the thesis, in this meeting, that the negotiations with Germany, on the colonial issue, might have to be aborted because of the nature of the Nazi régime.

By the time of Kristallnacht, therefore, there were still divisions in the Foreign Office itself about the Jewish issue, although it is possible to discern slightly more sympathy in some quarters, such as that of Orme Sargent, than had been apparent earlier in the year. Halifax's own attitude seems to have been altered by the pogrom, itself, although he maintained the line that no, official, protests could be made. If Halifax was not guaranteed complete support on this issue in the Foreign Office, however, did he have other grounds for thinking that a stand, whether official or unofficial, against Germany, on the Jewish issue, would be popular? What were the influences on Halifax's perception of public opinion outside the Foreign Office? There is one fragment of evidence which suggests that, by the end of the year, Halifax was considering taking wider foreign policy advice than he had done before. On 31 December, Churchill reiterated an invitation to Halifax to come to lunch with his 'Focus Group'. Halifax had, apparently, shown interest in this at the Guildhall banquet and had suggested January as a possible date. Churchill was anxious that Halifax should realize the confidentiality of the group and told him that not a word had ever been reported of these luncheons, although there had been quite a few. Churchill also thought it would do Halifax good to meet some Liberal and left wing elements, many of whom were life-long pacifists but who now thought that Britain must

¹ PRO FO 371/21658 C 14369/42/18: Cabinet Paper (36) 32, Draft Conclusions, 14 November 1938.

be prepared to make a stand, if there were no other way. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that Halifax ever attended.¹

The number of public protests, from outside London political circles, sent to the Foreign Office over the Kristallnacht pogroms was not as great as the number received over the Munich crisis, but at least one of the protests seems to have made its way higher up the information chain than any individual protest during September. Expressions of horror and condemnation were received from the National Union of Distributive Workers, on 14 November,² from the Institute of Historical Research, on 11 November³, from the Baptist Union of Great Britain, on 18 November⁴ and from the British Women's Commonwealth League, on 14 November.⁵ The latter, together with the Free Church of Scotland, urged the Government to combine its policy of peacemaking with righteous indignation against evil.⁶ A petition of individuals was also received on 19 November, which said that,

'We feel that British public opinion is overwhelmingly with us in this expression of disgust and ask that the British Government will use strong, speedy and effective measures to make this point of view known to the leaders of the Nazi nation.'

It was a plea from the undergraduate population of Oxford University which actually moved Halifax sufficiently to present their views in Cabinet on 16 November. He may well have chosen this particular expression of opinion because it came from an environment which most of his colleagues would have known and respected. He had been

¹ Churchill Chartwell 2/334 fol.71: Churchill to Halifax, 31 December 1938.

² PRO FO 371/21636 C 13995/1667/62: National Union of Distributive Workers, 14 November 1938.

³ PRO FO 371/21636 C 13827/1667/62: Institute of Historical Research, 11 November 1938.

⁴ PRO FO 371/21789 C 14357/11169/18: Rev. M.E. Aubrey, Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland to the Foreign Office, 18 November 1938.

⁵ PRO FO 371/21636 C 13949/1667/62: British Commonwealth League, 14 November 1938.

⁶ PRO FO 371/21636 C 14172/1667/62: Free Church of Scotland to the Foreign Office, 17 November 1938.

⁷ PRO FO 371/21636 C 14304/1667/62: Mr. Still to Halifax, 19 November 1938.

explaining to his colleagues that he was much impressed by the powerful repercussions which the pogroms had had, all over the world, and, in particular, in the United States, where opinion had turned against Britain. Halifax backed this view up, and hinted that he shared it, by saying that he had also received a letter from a large number of undergraduate clubs in Oxford, all of which took the view that the Government was not taking sufficient action in the matter.¹ The protest, lodged by the executive committee of the Student Christian movement in Oxford, and other societies, actually said that, if Britain was to retain any shred of its reputation as the protector of weak and defenceless peoples, it was imperative that she should take some vigorous action against one of the most barbarous and cowardly persecutions in the history of the western world.²

There was clearly considerable criticism of Germany from the British press, which fact can be shown, in part, by the German reactions to it. Despite the German tendency to exaggerate the scale of British criticism, even the acting British ambassador could point to considerable British press coverage of the Jewish attacks. On 21 November, Ogilvie Forbes reported his assessment of Hitler's views on relations with Britain so that Halifax and Chamberlain could bear them in mind during their negotiations in France. He said that Hitler had been disappointed by the Munich agreement because it had had the effect of accelerating, rather than retarding, British rearmament. He then outlined the effect of public opinion and the press,

'On top of this came widespread criticism in England of the Munich Agreement and finally the storm of indignation over treatment of the Jews. In consequence Herr Hitler considers that there is now nothing to be gained by taking British public opinion into consideration and he feels free to give expression to intense resentment which the slightest breath of opposition of criticism now arouses in him. He has revealed himself

¹ PRO CAB 23/96 55 (38), 16 November 1938.

² PRO FO 371/21636 C 14276/1667/62: Ian Crombie to Halifax, 15 November 1938.

*not only in all his public speeches since Munich but in the press which continues its scurrilous campaign against England.*¹

Of those press men close to the Cabinet, there was, certainly, willingness to cover the story. The editor of *The Times*, Geoffrey Dawson, conducted a series of interviews, in late November, about possible relief funds for the Jews and about the tide of indignation which was rising, particularly in America.² On 22 November, he drove Halifax down to Eton to a meeting of the Provost and Fellows, discussing 'the state of public opinion' all the way.³ Two days later, he was discussing 'the state of the nation' with the Warden of All Souls, in Oxford.⁴ Most other memoirs of the period are slightly less forthcoming with personal reactions to the Jewish pogroms. Oliver Harvey, however, had no doubts as to the storm it had caused in world opinion, and even in the City of London, finally demonstrating the character of the 'criminal régime in Germany'. He also offered a synopsis of what he saw to be opinion in the country at this time. He was not sure whether or not the country was, finally, beginning to stir *en masse* against the dictator powers. He reported that, on all sides, there were rumours of uneasiness and dissatisfaction, especially among the people in the provinces, the intelligent classes in London but not amongst the rich, industrialists, landowners, the idle and the party hacks.⁵

In other parts of London, other feelings of indignation about the Jewish persecution were noted and anti-Chamberlain rumbles were registered. Harold Nicolson recorded that he had never seen such an outburst of fury, as that over the pogrom, and

¹ DBFP 3rd vol.III no.320: 21 November 1938. See also A. Mayor, (trans.), *Ciano's Diary 1937-8* (1952), p.194 for Mussolini's worries that religious persecution made the Axis unpopular.

² Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/42, diary, 14 November, 17 November 1938.

³ Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/42, diary, 22 November 1938. Dawson also met Halifax for discussions on 26 October, 10 November and 28 December 1938; see diary for these dates.

⁴ Bodleian MSS.Dawson 1/42, diary, 25 November 1938.

⁵ Harvey, p.218.

thought it would tell against Chamberlain.¹ In a letter to Lord Lothian, Sir Percy Harris (Labour M.P. for south-west Bethnal Green) reported that even those who had little sympathy with the Jewish case thought that Kristallnacht was too much. He, himself, thought a non-party deputation to the Prime Minister to protest, however fruitlessly, was the only way forward.² Chips Channon recorded, on 8 November, that he thought the anti-Government sentiment was confined to London society at that point. On both 15 and 21 November, however, he reported universal horror at the treatment of the Jews and asked himself whether the present régime in Germany were mad. He continued that the Jewish persecutions, carried to such a fiendish degree, were short-sighted, cruel and unnecessary and that there were suggestions that attention would turn next to the Roman Catholics. As parliamentary private secretary to R.A. Butler, Channon also had access to Foreign Office information, and remarked, on the same day, that the secret telegrams did not give a very roseate view of Hitler's attitude. The Führer was reported to be morose, anti-English, yet maintaining a grudging liking for Chamberlain.³ Baffy Dugdale was even more pessimistic. With considerable involvement in the affairs of Palestine, we would expect her to have noted the pogroms, but she did so mainly in terms of British policy in Europe. She thought that they would have far-reaching political consequences and that appeasement lay in ruins. According to her close friend, Chaim Weizmann, Chamberlain had admitted as much to him.⁴

Samuel Hoare, on the other hand, merely recorded in his memoirs the difficulty he faced at the Home Office and in the Commons, in overcoming parliamentary

¹ Balliol HN, diary 1938, fol.86: 13 November 1938.

² NAS (Philip Kerr papers), GD 40/17/372 fol.366: letter from Sir Percy Harris, 11 November 1938.

³ Robert Rhodes James, (ed.), (1967), p.177-8.

⁴ N.A. Rose (1971), p.116, 15 November 1938.

opposition to letting in more refugees.¹ In looking at the parliamentary response to Kristallnacht, it is useful to compare the two major debates in November. The first, on 1 November, was a follow-up debate on the international outlook continued from the debate on 4 October, and the second, on 21 November, was called specifically to look at the refugee issue. Within these debates, the Government remained unshakeable on the point that to make direct protests would be counter-productive. Opposition to the Government, however, took as its basis Halifax's argument to the Cabinet, that the Jewish pogroms had made further overtures to Germany impossible for the time being.

In the first debate, Sir Archibald Sinclair argued that the Munich agreement had directly caused the addition of scores of thousands of Czechs, Germans and Jews to the flood of world refugees and had condemned thousands of others to Nazi concentration camps and lesser forms of tyranny and brutality. In response to this and to Attlee's criticism that the Munich agreement was a failure for Britain, Chamberlain defended an active policy of peacemaking, and the agreement itself, as opening the possibility of a new era of peace. He found himself in complete agreement with the Opposition, that the refugees deserved a very sincere sympathy, and reiterated that it was part of the British tradition to offer asylum, as far as possible, to the victims of religious or racial persecution.²

Criticism was also levelled at the failure to remonstrate with the Germans about their treatment of the Jews. George Muff, Labour M.P. for Hull East, pointed out that the Germans had made the British position harder because of the persecution of minorities and, especially, of the Jews. Noting the German retaliatory press attacks against the

¹ Viscount Templewood, (1954), p.239-40.

² Hansard, 5th Series, 1937-8, 340, 77.

British management of Palestine, he suggested that, unless the Foreign Office was to be subject to the desires and whims of the German Government, Britain was in a sufficiently strong position to tell Germany 'where to get off', instead Germany saying it to her, concluding that Britain should tell Germany that she had no right to criticize Britain whilst her own concentrations camps were so full.¹

The debate on 1 November suggests that the Government could have derived nothing but support for the decision taken on 16 November, but the Government spokesmen, on 21 November, seem to have been reluctant to admit that this decision had been taken, concentrating instead on the refugee question. Many speeches were made in the Commons to support the ostracizing of Germany. Speaking for the motion, which asked for condemnation of the violence and a concerted policy with the United States, Noel-Baker described some of the atrocities that had taken place within a framework which argued that the pogroms were part of a deliberate campaign which was moving, with gathering and terrible momentum, towards its predestined end. Perhaps his most harrowing piece of evidence was an account of a victim of Buchenwald camp,

*'He tells of their ghastly convict work on the road, 17 1/2 hours a day on their feet with not enough food to keep a child in health. He describes the nameless tortures given as punishment for the most trivial offence. He says that of his batch of 2,000, 105 died on their feet in the first five weeks.'*²

The House had already had the details of the Kristallnacht violence confirmed to them by Chamberlain, on 14 November.³ Answering the Nazi defence, that the Jews were a purely internal matter for Germany, Noel-Baker argued that the treatment of minorities had always been an international question. Answering the Government defence, that

¹ Hansard, 5th Series, 1937-8, 340, 107.

² Hansard, 5th Series, 1937-8, 341, 1432.

³ Hansard, 5th Series, 1937-8, 341, 503-6.

verbal protests tended to harm those they were intended to help, he claimed that the whole history of Nazi Germany had shown that verbal protests did work, that other Governments had complained and that Berlin should be left in no doubt that there could be no cordial relations between Britain and Germany whilst the martyrdom of the Jews, Socialists, Protestants and Catholics continued.¹ Later speakers in the debate noted a change in public opinion, from the debate that had taken place before the summer recess, and suggested that there was, now, a sense that unity, based on common humanity, was moving to offer more help to the Jews.²

Speaking for the Government, Hoare expressed his full agreement with the motion and with Sir Archibald Sinclair's point about the international nature of the problem. He asked how a question could remain exclusively domestic when it involved scores of thousands of men, women and children, destitute and penniless, seeking admission into other countries.³ He viewed internationalism, however, as operating through the work of the Evian conference, in which he pledged that Britain would play a full part, rather than through unilateral representations.⁴ Contrary to his memoirs, it was Hoare, himself, who expressed concern in this debate at the possible rise of anti-Semitism, on economic grounds, in Britain if large numbers of Jews were admitted. Passing over an interjection by Colonel Wedgwood, who shouted, 'Fascists,' Hoare mentioned the fact that, in certain parts of London, he had had to prohibit demonstrations and that this necessitated a tight control over immigration levels. This was consistent with

¹ Hansard, 5th Series, 1937-8, 341, 1435-6.

² Hansard, 5th Series, 1937-8, 341, 1453 and 1455-6.

³ Hansard, 5th Series, 1937-8, 341, 1464.

⁴ Hansard, 5th Series, 1937-8, 341, 1465.

the line he had taken in Cabinet, on 16 November, that the Government was going as far as public opinion would allow in terms of immigration figures.¹

Condemnation of Nazi methods and criticism of the British Government's level of intervention seems to have been cross-party and reasonably widespread within parliamentary circles. The German ambassador, von Dirksen, reported to the German Foreign Ministry, on 17 November, before the debate, that pro-German circles had had their confidence in the possibility of an Anglo-German understanding severely shaken. He also remarked that Chamberlain's opponents had lost no time in exploiting the anti-German wave to renew the contention that collaboration with a country, in which such brutalities were possible, should be rejected for ideological reasons. By this time, the Cabinet had taken its decision not pursue negotiations, and von Dirksen went on to report that this was already being asserted in well-informed circles. He concluded by saying that, in his experience of the trends of British public opinion, political perspicacity usually regained the upper hand over emotional impulses, after a short time.²

Chamberlain may also have received the opinion of the Conservative Party Research Department on the effect of the Munich agreement on by-election behaviour, via a memorandum addressed to the director of the department, Chamberlain's confidant, Joseph Ball, on 24 November. After presenting a statistical analysis of the recent results, Mr. Hanrott, of that department, concluded that the Government vote had remained fairly stationary that the Socialist vote had not appreciably increased but that there had been a large Independent vote. He surmised that the inference to be drawn from the results was that the voting was conducted in an emotional and abnormal atmosphere, produced by the

¹ PRO CAB 23/96 55 (38), 16 November 1938.

² DGFP, Series D, vol.IV no.269: 17 November 1938.

uncertainties of the international situation and aggravated by the strong feeling aroused by the Jewish persecutions. The overall result had been a degree of public interest not ordinarily manifested at by-elections.¹ Keith Middlemas has used opinion polls to suggest that the Government was particularly sensitive to electoral opinion after Munich. However, he also adduced a Mass-Observation survey, which was not published until January 1939, and a Gallup poll, which did not appear in the *News Chronicle* until February 1939, to prove that the Government did not call a general election in the autumn of 1938 because there was evidence that there was a 'steady and serious weakness in the Government's position.'²

Chamberlain also received evidence of a lack of support for continuing negotiations with Germany from within his own correspondence, although some correspondents thought that Hitler might be given opportunities in eastern Europe which would not provoke conflict and that the subjects which should be taboo lay outside Europe. On 21 November, Leo Amery wrote to him about his own particular sphere of interest, the colonial question. Amery was convinced that any cession of territory to Germany, or even discussion of it, was more likely to lead to war than peace. Although not convinced that the Germans could not be persuaded to pursue only eastern European territorial aims, as long as Hitler had not already made up his mind to war, Amery did feel that taking a strong line, and saying that the colonial question would never be

¹ Bodleian Conservative Party Archive, CRD, 1/7/35, fol. 14: Note by Mr. Hanrott on the 'Munich' By-elections. See BUL NC 18/2/1075 letter to Hilda, 6 November 1938 for Chamberlain's satisfaction with municipal election results, except in London. See also R. Eatwell, 'Munich, Public Opinion and Popular Front', (1971), p. 122-139 for an analysis of the primary factors affecting the six by-elections after Munich. Eatwell concludes that these provide the key to the shift of opinion which he suggests took place in March 1939, against Nazi Germany.

² Middlemas, p.417-8. Cockett, p.101 has shown how some newspapers spared the government embarrassment by selectively publishing the results of opinion polls at this time.

discussed at all, would strengthen Chamberlain's domestic position, pull the country together and greatly diminish the chances of war.¹

Two days after the parliamentary debate, Halifax and Chamberlain opened discussions in Paris. The Jewish question was third on the agenda after the Franco-German agreement and Anglo-French defence measures and dealt with the question of immigration rather than of protests. Chamberlain reiterated Hoare's concerns, that there were fears of causing anti-Semitic feeling in Britain if immigration levels got too high, and directed discussions towards a possible colonial resettlement programme. The more important point to emerge from the discussions was the need to persuade Germany to relax her emigration restrictions on the Jews, so that they would be able to take some capital out of Germany with them. Chamberlain urged the French to try to exert some influence over Ribbentrop, on his forthcoming visit to Paris, since the German Government had, up until this point, been completely deaf to requests from Britain. Bonnet agreed that France would try to achieve this and emphasized the urgency of the question, since a recent interview, which Ribbentrop had given to western ambassadors in Berlin, had only served to underline the fact that Germany intended to get rid of the Jews.²

However, by the beginning of December, the effects of the debates and of his correspondence seem to have affected Chamberlain's view of the European situation. He was even suffering from doubts about the public's reaction to his projected Italian visit. He thought that Mussolini was making it almost impossible for him to justify his mission

¹ BUL NC 7/2/85: letter from Leo Amery, 21 November 1938.

² DBFP, 3rd vol.III no.325: 24 November 1938.

to Rome, as Kristallnacht had made it impossible to open negotiations with Berlin.¹ Cadogan wrote to the British ambassador in Rome, the Earl of Perth, on 12 December, expressing the Prime Minister's worries that the anti-French feeling in Italy would make his task impossible.² A further consideration was that, since it was impossible to tell how close the Rome-Berlin axis actually was, British public opinion might be forgiven for assuming that they were in complete solidarity. This might mean that the public laid some of the blame for the storm of abuse from Berlin, about Britain, at Italy's door. This was compounded by the fact that a section of British opinion thought it was useless to try to get on terms with dictators at all. Perth was asked to convey these thoughts to Mussolini in the hope that Chamberlain would not have to abort his mission.³ However, Chamberlain remained optimistic that matters would improve, remarking to the Countess of Stanhope how quickly things changed.⁴ To deal with the public opinion problem, Chamberlain admitted, in a letter to Baldwin at this time, that he had also decided to create an organization whose objectives would be to 'provide accurate and unbiased [sic] information about foreign affairs and to promote friendly intercourse with other countries.'⁵

Despite his use of perceptions of public opinion in diplomatic conversations, which this letter further illustrates, not everybody believed that the Prime Minister took such considerations too seriously. Two days previously, his sister Hilda had commiserated with him over the attitude of the foreign press, which she thought must

¹ BUL NC 18/2/1079: letter to Hilda, 11 December 1938.

² Chamberlain complained about the Italian stupidity in putting another obstacle in the way of negotiations to his sister, Ida, see BUL NC 18/2/1078: letter to Ida, 4 December 1938.

³ PRO FO 800/318 Halifax Papers, fols. 256-259: Cadogan to the Earl of Perth, 12 December 1938.

⁴ Centre for Kentish Studies, Chevening MSS.U1590 C658 [c]: Chamberlain to Countess Stanhope, 10 December 1938.

⁵ CUL BWIN Foreign Affairs Series B 174 fols.19-21: Chamberlain to Baldwin, 7 December 1938.

have tried his equanimity sorely in the past week. She considered that the British press had not helped, by playing down the importance of the Franco-German pact and talking as if war were inevitable, when history taught that wise diplomacy could always avert war. She consoled herself with the thought that her brother was impervious to this sort of influence,

*'It is indeed a blessing that you possess a stable character which is not blown about by the gusts of public opinion – and I know that you have cultivated with great care that sort of detachment which enables you to realise how ephemeral they are and as you are the least "personal" person I know you do always manage to preserve an even keel.'*¹

Despite Hilda's faith in her brother's sang-froid, her sister's next letter to him revealed that the electoral element of public opinion, even if not the abstract, was very much on both their minds. In response to his comment that he had been rather depressed the previous week, Ida reassured him that, even if Conservative Central Office was nervous about facing a general election, she was sure that in the event of an election, people would forget both their criticisms and the fear which the crisis had engendered and from which, she believed, people had not yet recovered.²

In this chapter we have seen perceptions of public opinion operating on a diplomatic level in the protests made to Germany about the pogroms, at the level of Cabinet decision-making between Halifax and Chamberlain and on the broader level of a plausible justification for the Cabinet at large for halting attempts to negotiate with Germany. In this way, its function is more akin to that demonstrated in chapter two, when there was little threat of war, than to that in chapters five and six, when the possibility was more acute. Halifax took a line against continuing negotiations with Germany after Kristallnacht on the basis that he could capitalize on parliamentary criticism of

¹ BUL NC 18/2/1103: letter from Hilda Chamberlain, 9 December 1938.

² BUL NC 18/2/1104: letter from Ida Chamberlain, 16 December 1938.

Chamberlain after Munich and on the general, and growing, abhorrence of the Nazi régime to legitimate this line in Cabinet. Although the refugee problem assumed greater importance, official protests were still rejected, in favour of private representations and the reporting of Commons' debates to send messages to Germany. Both Halifax's arguments were bolstered by the knowledge that conversations with Germany were unlikely to be fruitful at this time, anyway, because of Hitler's annoyance with Britain for denying him a show of force in the Sudetenland. Disapprobation over the Government's line at Munich, from all forms of public opinion, appears to have created the impression, in the Cabinet, that a firm stand against Germany on this issue would be welcome; in stark contrast to the timidity they had displayed about taking such a stand in early September.

Chamberlain's support for Halifax's argument may have been more cynical but, by December, the effect of parliamentary criticism over the Government's efforts to help the Jews had shaken his confidence about pressing ahead with his visit to Rome. He seems to have differentiated between the mass of the electorate, whom he thought were grateful for his efforts at Munich and parliament, where he was continually coming under fire. This narrative of perceptions about public opinion has not elucidated exactly how far Chamberlain intended to pursue German conversations to include a general settlement, but has shown that he did take account of the public opinion outcries which the dictators were capable of stage-managing. These, he felt, hindered his own efforts greatly, and he felt compelled to retard the pace of approaches to Germany and Italy as a result. Therefore, despite his sister's reassurances to the contrary, Chamberlain does appear to

have been 'blown about by the gusts of public opinion' rather more than we previously thought.

Conclusion

Perceptions of public opinion were an important, sometimes decisive, factor for the British Cabinet in its choices about war and peace with Nazi Germany. The level of importance was dictated by the proximity of the war threat. In times of crisis which did not entail the immediate threat of war, perceptions of public opinion functioned as a central feature of diplomatic rhetoric. All three Prime Ministers, of the period under scrutiny, used it as both a factor in decision-making and as a rhetorical ploy. Even Neville Chamberlain, who has been criticized for his lack of responsiveness to public opinion, referred to it in correspondence, to confidants, as a factor to be taken into account. The attitudes of individual Ministers differed as to the significance of public opinion in decision-making but there was a consensus that, in theory, public opinion should be taken into consideration. Consequently, using the phrase public opinion had considerable currency both at home and abroad.

Perhaps the most significant implication of the account presented here is its interpretation of the Munich conference. Britain came to the point of war with Germany, on 28 September 1938, because the Cabinet perceived that the public wanted a stand to be made against the threat of force to Czechoslovakia, despite Britain's serious military deficiencies. Chamberlain, although not without some cynicism, responded to the statements of his colleagues about the domestic political implications of coercing the Czechs into the secession of the Sudetenland under the threat of force. The Munich agreement, itself, however, was more the product of Chamberlain's own desire to broker a general solution in Europe than it was of Cabinet consultation during the immediately preceding days. At Munich, as during the Rhineland crisis, perceptions of the boundaries

of public tolerance of politician's actions were at least as important, and sometimes more so, than military considerations.

In terms of the history of the National Government, this account shows that despite large majorities, successive Cabinets felt themselves threatened within parliament, mainly by dissentient Conservative groups. The experience of coalition did not seem to breed any confidence in cross-party acceptance of Government foreign policy action outside the House of Commons. The overlap between the leadership of national pressure groups and politicians close to the Cabinet meant that not only was the House of Commons directly linked to possible manifestations of public opinion but that they, themselves, had a vested interest in communicating with and gauging the response of the electorate. That the Cabinet used public opinion phraseology so often is a reflection of the concept's ubiquity in public life in general. Theoretical literature on the subject from the inter-war period suggests a sense, amongst the politically-minded, that they had to be seen to be nodding in the direction of public opinion on foreign policy in public, regardless of public opinion's actual significance in decision-making. Criticisms about the way in which war had broken out in 1914 undoubtedly influenced this perception, but the extension of the franchise and the growth of mass media techniques seem also to have informed it.

The methodology used here has illustrated several circular processes by which ideas about public opinion might have been formed. The press, the Cabinet, M.P.s and their social circles were engaged in an unconscious, but perpetual, merry-go-round of statements about public opinion. It is almost impossible, apart from the few documented examples, to say whose statement about public opinion influenced whom on specific

occasions. However, the criticism that the juxtaposition of social events does not serve to show influence has been answered by the description of a way of life which would have made it remarkable if these circular processes had not resulted in the dissemination of ideas and rumours about the state of public opinion.

In semantic terms, public opinion could mean any number of things to the Cabinet, from parliamentary opinion to that of the man in the street. Yet the models which have suggested that Cabinet statements were amalgams of all these dimensions have been shown to be over-generalized. The Cabinet did differentiate between types of opinion, and did identify the need to communicate, specifically, with the electorate in a very different way from that needed to convince the House of Commons. It is entirely possible that a vague invocation of public opinion by a Cabinet Minister was, on occasion, window-dressing: a frill to back up his own point of view. Yet, this need not be a criticism of Ministers, as some historians have implied, merely one possible function of the phrase itself. Although strong perceptions of what public opinion was thinking did exist, on certain occasions, there was also confusion about the limits of the public's tolerance on some issues. In these circumstances, vague statements could act as ways of testing that opinion.

The sources used in these studies also show that there are limitations to what the historian can reconstruct in describing public opinion. Coincidences (rather than juxtapositions) of press articles, conversational opportunities and public meetings can give us the limits of evidence of public opinion which the Government could have drawn upon. Cabinet minutes, however, obscure the vehemence, plausibility or humour with which public opinion was discussed. Through private papers, we can go much further

than has been previously suggested in describing the environment of the principal actors and the number of situations in which they used the phrase public opinion. However, the term is so open to personal construction that we sometimes remain hazy about its significance in some cases and, in these cases, we have to adduce it, as a factor in decision-making, with considerable caution.

Despite these limitations, this type of methodological model has potential applications in other subject areas. In the field of foreign policy, in the 1930s, the most obvious successor to this study would be an examination of the guarantee to Poland followed by the outbreak of war in 1939. It would also be instructive to compare conclusions about the 1930s with a study of 1914 to see how far governmental attitudes towards public opinion really had changed, or whether what we have described here is part of a trend which was well advanced before the first world war. Unemployment policy in the 1930s might also benefit from a similar approach. It is likely that the reliance on private papers which this model entails limits the possible subjects to the twentieth century. Questions need to be asked, however, about whether the reliance on perceptions of public opinion demonstrated here was a phenomenon confined to the 1930s, because of a strange coincidence of circumstance, or whether it is part of a broader trend in decision-making. At first glance, the most recent press, and Government, statements about public opinion on humanitarian and intervention issues in the Balkans suggest that it is not a phenomenon confined to the first half of this century.

On learning the subject of this thesis, many people asked what new things could possibly be said about appeasement. Historical methodology produces a perpetual search for a new level of detail in reconstructing the past. That, in itself, might be considered

enough. The continued commemoration of the first and second world wars in television documentaries, films and books shows, however, that inter-war history is far from dead and so any new angle should, therefore, be welcomed to answer that curiosity. Public opinion, itself, remains a very neglected historical topic, whether defined as a study of its actual beliefs or as a study devoted to perceptions of its beliefs. The importance of work on its various elements is demonstrated daily by newspaper opinion polls, Government speeches and by the recent experience of war. Britain has been militarily involved in central Europe during the last twelve months. We are still debating whether or what the public thinks drives foreign policy, and whether or not it should. The immediate relevance of this issue is the overall significance of these case studies.

Appendix 1: Governmental District of London

St. James's Square:

No.4: Nancy Astor's house (now the Naval and Military Club)
The London Library
Chatham House
Army and Navy Club

Clubs on Pall Mall:

The Athenaeum
The Travellers' Club
Royal Automobile Club
Oxford and Cambridge Club
The Carlton Club (now in St. James' ST. after being bombed in the second world war)

Clubs on St. James' Street:

White's
Brooks's
St. James' Club

Irving Street:

Beefsteak Club

Whitehall Place:

National Liberal Club



Downing Street

Foreign Office

Houses of Parliament

Appendix 2: Members of Some Prominent Social Groups¹

- **Chamberlain's social circle (taken from BUL NC 2/29/1-39 Pocket Diaries):**

1933:

M. Barlow
P. Sassoon
Spender Clay
Sam Hoare
Hilton Young
Vansittarts
Abe Bailey
Leo Amery
Cliveden

1936:

M. Barlow
P. Sassoon
Cliveden
Sam Hoare
Spender Clay
Camrose
Abe Bailey

1938:

Sam Hoare
P. Sassoon
Swinton
Astors
Cliveden
Abe Bailey

- **Ramsay MacDonald's social circle (taken from PRO 30/69/1757/2 Engagement diaries):**

1933:

P. Sassoon
Lord Weir
Lord Horder
Duke Elder
Louis Greig
Arthur Salter
Cliveden
Bogey Harris

1936:

Bogey Harris
Lord Horder
Louis Greig
Duke Elder
Abe Bailey

¹ These lists are not exhaustive and only contain those people relevant to foreign policy making.

- **Visitors to Cliveden (taken from
RUL Nancy Astor Papers, 2421/7
Cliveden Visitors Book):**

1933:

Sir Edward Grigg
Lord Salisbury
Robert Bernays
Geoffrey Dawson
William OrmsbyGore
Thomas Jones
Walter Elliot
Peter Fleming
Lord Brand
Lionel Curtis
Lord Cranborne
Lord Dufferin and Ava
Sir Thomas Inskip
Anthony Eden
Lord Robert Cecil
Lord Lothian

1936:

Lionel Curtis
Peter Fleming
Lord Brand
William Ormsby Gore
Vernon Bartlett
Neville Chamberlain
Geoffrey Dawson
Sir Edward Grigg
Sir Thomas Inskip
Walter Elliot
W. Morrison
Thomas Jones
Lord Lothian
Lord Cranborne
Harold Nicolson
Robert Bernays
Earl Winterton
Sir Horace Rumbold
Arthur Salter
Sam Hoare

1938:

Lord Robert Cecil
Sir Thomas Inskip
Geoffrey Dawson
Neville Chamberlain
Sir Alec Cadogan
Sir Edward Grigg
David Margesson
Thomas Jones
Lord Lothian
Robert Bernays
Lionel Curtis
Lord Cranborne
Malcolm MacDonald
Walter Elliot

- **Sir Maurice Hankey's social circle
(PRO CAB 63/64: Engagement
Diary 1936):**

P. Sassoon
Sir Eric Phipps
Sir John Simon
Anthony Eden
Sir Robert Vansittart

- **Baffy Dugdale's social circle
(taken from N.A Rose (ed.),
(1973)):**

1936

Walter Elliot
Lewis Namier
Colin Coote
Earl De La Warr
Members of the LNU
Astors

1938:

Walter Elliot
Chaim Weizman
Earl De La Warr
Lewis Namier

Archibald Sinclair
 R. W. Seton-Watson
 Malcolm MacDonald
 Colin Coote
 Harold Nicolson
 Robert Boothby
 Robert Bernays
 Philip Noel Baker
 Violet Bonham-Carter
 Lord Lytton
 Members of the LNU

• **Members of The Beefsteak Club**
 (taken from its own account and
 membership books). Regular
 diners are shown by an asterix:

*Robin Barrington-Ward
 *Geoffrey Dawson
 *Harold Nicolson
 *Alfred Duff Cooper
 Lord Halifax
 *Harold Macmillan
 *Edward Grigg
 Robert Bernays
 Walter Elliott
 Archibald Sinclair
 Sir Robert Vansittart
 Sir Horace Rumbold
 Robert Boothby
 Sir Alexander Cadogan
 Leo Amery
 Sir Eric Phipps

• **Members of Grillion's (taken from
 Geoffrey Dawson's diaries,
 Bodleian, Dawson MSS.1/37-42):**

Alfred Duff Cooper
 Anthony Eden
 Cosmo Lang
 Earl Halifax
 Earl Middleton
 Earl Winterton
 Geoffrey Dawson

Lord Cranborne
 Lord Eustace Percy
 Lord Fitzalan
 Lord Hailsham
 Lord Hugh Cecil
 Lord Londonderry
 Lord Staonehavem
 Lord Zetland
 Philip Chetwode
 Sir Alec Hardinge
 Sir Austen
 Chamberlain
 Sir Clive Wigram
 Sir Frank Lindley
 Sir Harcourt Butler
 Sir Horace Rumbold
 Sir John Gilmour
 Sir John Simon
 Sir Samuel Hoare
 W.S. Morrison
 Walter Elliott
 William OrmsbyGore
 Winston Churchill

• **Members of The Literary Society**
 (taken from Geoffrey Dawson's
 diaries, Bodleian, Dawson
 MSS.1/37-42):

Lord Brand
 Sir Harcourt Butler
 Geoffrey Dawson
 Sir Edward Grigg
 Earl Halifax

• **Members of the Anglo-French
 Luncheon Club (taken from
 Churchill Spears papers 1/9):**

Sir Edward Grigg
 Duncan Sandys
 Archibald Sinclair
 Sir Edward Spears
 Henry Wickham Steed

Lord Stonehaven
Lord Zetland

- **League of Nations Union (taken from D.S. Birn, (1981)):**

Viscount Cecil of Chelwood (Robert Cecil)

Philip Noel-Baker
Gilbert Murray
Sir Austen Chamberlain
Vyvyan Adams
Norman Angell
Lady Violet Bonham Carter

- **The Round Table: (taken from J. Kendle, *The Round Table Movement and Imperial Union* (Toronto, 1975):**

Lord Brand
Geoffrey Dawson
Lord Lothian
Lionel Curtis
Sir Edward Grigg
Leo Amery
Sir Dougie Malcolm
H.V. Hodson

- **Philip Sassoon's Thursday Lunch Group (taken from R.C. Self, *The Austen Chamberlain Diary Letters* (Cambridge, 1995), p.454):**

Many Cabinet and other Ministers.
Regular attendees included:
Ramsay MacDonald
Maurice Hankey
Neville Chamberlain

- **Fellows of All Souls College, Oxford (both All Souls lists are taken from D.C. Wenden, 'Appeasement and All Souls' in J. Clark, (ed.), *All Souls: College, Europe, Empire* (forthcoming):**

Geoffrey Dawson
Earl of Halifax
Lionel Curtis
Arthur Salter
Dougie Malcolm
William Adams (Warden)
Cosmo Lang (Archbishop of Canterbury)
Patrick Reilly (Foreign Office)
Roger Makins (Foreign Office)
Isaiah Berlin
Leo Amery
Lord Brand
Edward Bridges (Cabinet Secretary)
H.V. Hodson (editor of Round Table, 1934-9)
Douglas Jay (journalist)
Dermot Morrah (Times' leader writer, 1928-61)
Con O'Neill (Foreign Office)
A.L. Rowse (Labour candidate during the 1930s)
John Simon
Donald Somervell (M.P. (Con.) Crewe 1931-45)

- **All Souls Foreign Policy Group, 1937-8:**

Arthur Salter
Allen of Hurtwood
Lionel Curtis
H.V. Hodson
Norman Angell
Basil Liddell-Hart
Harold MacMillan
Gilbert Murray

Harold Nicolson
Arnold Toynbee
A.L. Rowse
H.A.L. Fisher

Advice and comment sought from:
Leo Amery
Bob Brand
Geoffrey Dawson
Hubert Henderson (also a Fellow)
Philip Lothian
J.A. Spender

- **The Clubs of Prime Ministers,
Foreign Secretaries and Foreign
Office Grandees (taken from
Who's Who 1934 and 1938):**

Ramsay MacDonald: Athenaeum

Stanley Baldwin: Carlton,
Athenaeum, Traveller's

Neville Chamberlain: Naval and Military

Sir John Simon: Reform, Garrick,
National Liberal

Samuel Hoare: Carlton

Anthony Eden: Carlton

Earl Halifax: Carlton, Brooks'

Sir Robert Vansittart: St. James'

Sir Alec Cadogan: St. James'

Sir Orme Sargent: Travellers'

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Harold Nicolson Papers

- **Private Papers in Birmingham University Library:**

Sir Neville Chamberlain

Sir Austen Chamberlain

Lord Avon

- **Private Papers in the Bodleian Library, Oxford:**

Sir Alfred Zimmern

Earl Winterton

Lionel Curtis

Geoffrey Dawson

Gilbert Murray

Sir Edward Grigg

Sir John Simon

Donald Somervell

Sir Harry Crookshanks

- **Private Papers in the Borthwick Institute, University of York:**

Lord Halifax (Garrowby Papers)

- **Private Papers in the British Library:**

Lord Cecil of Chelwood

- **Private papers in Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge:¹**

Chartwell Papers

Sir Eric Phipps

Sir Robert Vansittart

Sir Maurice Hankey

Lord Norwich

Lord Strang

Sir Alexander Cadogan

A.L. Kennedy

Lord Lloyd of Dolobran

Hore-Belisha

David Margesson

Sir Edward Spears

Sir Henry Page Croft

Lord Swinton Baron Noel Baker

¹ The papers of Lord Swinton and Baron Noel Baker were also consulted but did not yield any useful material.

Sir Archibald Sinclair

• **Private Papers in Cambridge University Library:**

Lord Baldwin of Bewdley

Viscount Templewood

• **Private Papers in Durham University Library:**

Malcolm MacDonald

• **Private Papers in the House of Lords Record Office:**

Lord Beaverbrook

J.C.C. Davidson

• **Private Papers in National Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh:**

13th Earl of Lothian

• **Private Papers in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh:**

Sir Walter Elliot

• **Private Papers in Newcastle University Library:**

Sir Walter Runciman

• **Private Office Papers in the Public Record Office:**

James Ramsay MacDonald

Anthony Eden

Lord Halifax

Sir Orme Sargent

Sir Alexander Cadogan

Sir Neville Henderson

Sir Maurice Hankey

• **Private Papers in Reading University Library:**

Nancy, Viscountess Astor

• **Private Papers in Trinity College, Cambridge:**

R.A. Butler

• **Official Papers in the Public Record Office:**

FO 371 (Central Department and General Political files)

FO 395 (News Department)

CAB 23

CAB 24

CAB 27

CAB 63

PRO 800 (various private office papers)

PRO 30/69 James Ramsay MacDonald Papers

• **Papers held privately:**

Memoirs of Lord Sherfield by kind permission of Virginia Makins.

Memoirs of Sir Patrick Reilly by kind permission of the author.

• **Archives of Organisations:**

National Liberal Club

The Travellers' Club

The Reform Club

The Beefsteak Club

The Athenaeum

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