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Facing the Führer: The Conservative Party's Attitudes and Responses to Germany, 1937 to 1940, with Particular Reference to Backbench and Constituency Opinion.

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ABSTRACT

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FACING THE FÜHRER: THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY'S ATTITUDES AND RESPONSES TO GERMANY, 1937-1940, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO BACKBENCH AND CONSTITUENCY OPINION.

by Nicholas Julian Crowson

This thesis concerns the Conservative Party's responses to the deepening crisis in Anglo-German relations during the premiership of Neville Chamberlain from May 1937 to May 1940. Based upon the private correspondence of Conservative MPs, peers and officials and an extensive survey of the surviving regional and constituency Conservative Party records this study is a survey of how the whole of the Party responded to Chamberlain's defence and foreign policies. Such a methodological approach enables one to hurdle the Party's wall of silence and provide a more balanced and nuanced appraisal not previously possible. The historiography of appeasement has been exclusively concerned with 'elite' history. This study removes that vacuum and reveals the nature and importance of the interaction between the centre and the constituencies and enables a fuller appreciation of the dynamics of the British political system. The opening chapter considers the different categories of attitude towards Germany that existed amongst Conservatives during the period, whilst also assessing the factors that influenced them. The second chapter examines the response to Chamberlain's German foreign policy between 1937 and 1939. Chapters three and four consider the Conservatives' military response to the German threat, firstly assessing the Party's attitude to the rearmament programme during the years 1937 and 1938, and secondly explaining its receptivity to the issue of national service. The final chapter will examine the prosecution of the war during the period of the phoney war and explain the Conservative grievances that contributed to the Norway parliamentary revolt on 9 May 1940.

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Abbreviations

AA	anti-aircraft defence
AGM	annual general meeting
ARP	air raid precautions
CPA	Conservative Party Archive
CRD	Conservative Research Department
HJ	Historical Journal
JCH	Journal of Contemporary History
MP	Member of Parliament
NDC	National Defence Contribution tax
PM	Prime Minister
PPS	parliamentary private secretary
RAF	Royal Air Force
SCA	Scottish Conservative Party Archive
TUC	Trades Union Congress

An Introduction to the Conservative Party and Germany in the Late 1930s

On 3 September 1939 Britain declared war upon Germany for the second time in twenty-five years. Neville Chamberlain, who had been Prime Minister since May 1937, presided over the British declaration. For him the commencement of war was a bitter personal blow, after his attempts to negotiate and conciliate with the European dictators. When he spoke to the House of Commons about the declaration, he made no attempt to disguise his feelings: 'Everything that I have worked for, everything that I have hoped for, everything that I have believed in during my public life, has crashed into ruins'.[1] The fact that Chamberlain persisted as Prime Minister and was determined to see the war through says much for his tenacity. But he hated war and it took its toll. Nevertheless, he did draw some comfort from the morality of Britain's position. As he explained to the Archbishop of Canterbury, 'It was of course a grievous disappointment that peace could not be saved, but I know that my persistent efforts have convinced the world that no part of blame can lie here. That consciousness of moral right, which it is impossible for the Germans to feel, must be a tremendous force on our side.'[2] However, it became apparent that elements within the Conservative Party were less than satisfied with the National government's prosecution of the war effort and were inclined to suggest that had an alternative foreign policy been adopted in the last years of peace then war might have been avoided altogether. Eight months into the war effort, after a parliamentary revolt following reverses in Finland and Norway, Chamberlain resigned. The following day the Second World War in western Europe began in earnest when the German forces invaded the Low Countries and France.

Before commencing with the first chapter, it will be necessary to place this thesis in context: to explain the historiography of Chamberlain's foreign policy; to justify the necessity for another study of appeasement; and to provide finally a brief chronological outline of the international situation between Hitler's rise to power in 1933 and the outbreak of war.

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[1] *Parliamentary Debates: Commons*, 5th series, [hereafter *HofC Debs*], vol. 350 col. 297, 3 Sept. 1939.

[2] Chamberlain Mss: Neville to Hilda Chamberlain, 15 Oct. 1939, NC18/1/1125; diary, 10 Sept. 1939, NC2/26; The Chamberlain papers are cited with the permission of Dr B.S. Benedikz, Birmingham University Library. Neville to Archbishop of Canterbury, 5 Sept. 1939 cited Keith Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, (London: Macmillan, 1946), p. 419.

I

For a student coming afresh to study the subject of 'appeasement' there is a bewildering array of literature. The topic has generated its own scholastic mini-industry, with clear lines of debate established, all generating much controversy. Three schools of thought can be identified: the 'guilty men' or popular interpretation, the revisionist, and the counter-revisionist. For the Conservative Party which propagated appeasement its legacy has been considerable and the stigma, particularly the infamous 1938 Munich settlement, still rests heavily upon the leadership of today's Party. In May 1992, John Major, the Prime Minister and Conservative Party leader, sought to exorcise his Party of the ghost of appeasement by signing an Anglo-Czech declaration formally nullifying the Munich agreement which his forerunner Neville Chamberlain had initialed in September 1938. Two years previously, Major's predecessor, Margaret Thatcher, had apologised for the 'shame' of Munich whilst on a visit to Prague.[3] That the legacy of appeasement should still haunt Conservative leaders over fifty years later is testimony to the deep wounds the issue wreaked upon the Party. Yet the post-1940 leadership did little to try and dispel the 'guilt' associated with appeasement. This was not so surprising when one considers many of those involved in the anti-appeasement action of the 1930s, most notably Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden and Harold Macmillan, were to rise to the highest echelons of the Party after 1940. The damning of appeasement conveniently enabled these politicians to secure their past and amplify, through their memoirs, their heroic rebellion against the 'Guilty Men'. The early historiography similarly reflected this condemnation. Only by the late 1960s were historians at last beginning to study the subject more objectively but to this day it remains an emotive subject. Before progressing to consider several of the important works within the debate, it is worth dwelling upon the definition of 'appeasement'.

Professor W.N. Medlicott has suggested that the term 'appeasement' has become so generalised in meaning that the historian should avoid using it.[4] Indeed, under the collective generalisation of 'appeasement' one is confronted with a series of interlinking sub-themes - economic, political, military and colonial. Some historians have argued that appeasement had been 'traditional'

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[3] *Daily Telegraph*, 28 May 1992; Bernard Ingham, *Kill The Messenger*, (London: Harper Collins, 1991), p. 271. Douglas Hurd echoed the populist belief that appeasing aggressors only encouraged further outrages following the Iraqi seizure of Kuwait in 1990: *Daily Telegraph*, 14 Jan. 1991, 'Why Iraq's challenge has to be crushed'.

[4] W.N. Medlicott, *British Foreign Policy since Versailles, 1919-63*, (London: Methuen, 1967), p. xix.

British foreign policy since at least the mid-nineteenth century. They argue that successive Foreign Secretaries proclaimed British policy to be the preservation of peace, revealing the willingness to compromise to secure it.[5] Others have argued that appeasement was a phenomenon of the 1930s that sought peace by the redress of German grievances and specifically a policy of the 1937-1939 Neville Chamberlain ministry, based upon 'a fusion of moral values, political constraints, economic necessities and military exigencies' all of which necessitated some form of understanding with the fascist powers, Italy and Germany.[6] In other words, appeasement could be advocated for apparently sound strategical reasons. Yet, whilst it is common to speak of appeasement as a policy, it is evident on closer scrutiny that men who thought of themselves as appeasers could advocate different specific policies. For example John McEwen, the MP for Berwick and Haddington, was willing for there to be negotiations with the Italians but he could not accept the necessity for such talks with Germany. The popular view of appeasement is that it was a policy of surrender for which Munich and appeasement have become synonymous. However, such a definition is no longer accepted by academic opinion. As one historian recently wrote: appeasement

> was not a feeble policy of surrender and unlimited retreat. Chamberlain thought war futile and rejected it but never pursued "peace at any price". His policy meant intervention in continental Europe to induce Hitler's Germany to insist only on expansion so limited that it would not threaten the safety or independence of the United Kingdom. In retrospect this appears a bold, venturesome policy, certain, given the ambitions of Hitler, to lead to an Anglo-German war. As Prime Minister, Chamberlain struggled to impose his system of orderly conduct on continental Europe. He thought that he could do it in co-operation with Hitler. When Hitler proved difficult, he hoped to exploit the restraining influences of Mussolini and German moderates.[7]

Likewise the former American diplomat, Henry Kissinger has concurred that 'Munich [...] was not a surrender' and argues that it was 'a state of mind and the nearly inevitable outgrowth of the democracies efforts to sustain a

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[5] P.M. Kennedy, 'The tradition of appeasement in British foreign policy, 1895-1939', *British Journal of International Studies*, 2, 3 (1976), pp. 195-215; P.W. Schroeder, 'Munich and the British tradition', *Historical Journal*, 19, 1 (1976), pp. 223-43.

[6] Keith Robbins, *Appeasement*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 8. See Paul Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy*, (London: Fontana paperback edition, 1981), chapters 5 and 6 *passim* for further expansion.

[7] R.A.C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War*, (London: Macmillan, 1993), p. 345.

geopolitically flawed [Versailles] settlement with rhetoric about collective security and self-determination.'[8] Yet all these are retrospective definitions. In view of the intention of this thesis to examine Conservative attitudes towards Germany from the perspective of the 1930s, it is necessary to consider the phrase in its contemporary context. There is a distinction that must be drawn between those who advocated appeasement. On the one hand there were those Conservatives such as the Prime Minister who favoured such a foreign policy for strategic reasons believing that a war with Germany would cause the demise of the British Empire and allow Europe to become dominated by bolshevism. On the other, it is apparent that there were those who supported negotiations with the dictators because of Germanophile, pro-fascist sentiments or because of pacifist ideals. Equally, appeasement appears to have been a mentality. Sir Nevile Henderson, British ambassador to Berlin, 1937-39, and a leading protagonist of appeasement, in his memoirs described it as 'the search for just solutions by negotiation in the light of higher reason instead of by the resort to force.'[9] It is in this sense that one ought to conceive 'appeasement' as an underlying attitude of mind which aimed to anticipate and avoid conflict by concession and negotiation, which is why 'realism' and 'appeasement' were practically synonymous for Conservatives in the 1930s.

It is not surprising that the failure of Neville Chamberlain's foreign policy to prevent hostilities commencing between Britain and Germany in September 1939 sealed the immediate fate of appeasement's reputation. Chamberlain feared that history, written by those who had replaced him, would judge him harshly, and he was correct.[10] Even before his death in November 1940 the die was cast. In July of that year, three young left-wing journalists under the pseudonym of 'Cato', published *Guilty Men*.[11] This polemical study was an instant best-seller providing a damning indictment of the pre-war National governments in the humiliating aftermath of the allied evacuation from Dunkirk. The blame for Dunkirk was squarely laid at the feet of Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain because of their inability to fulfil their promises to rearm Britain adequately. Members of the National government, and particularly Chamberlain, were further deemed 'guilty' because of the naivety with which they regarded Hitler and because of the failure during

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[8] Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, (London: Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 312.

[9] Nevile Henderson, *Water Under The Bridges*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1945), p. 49.

[10] Chamberlain Mss: Neville to Ida Chamberlain, 25 May 1940, NC18/1/1158.

[11] Cato, *Guilty Men*, (London: Gollancz, 1940).

1938 and 1939 to overcome their prejudices and conclude an alliance with communist Russia. *Guilty Men* laid the foundation for the popular 'orthodox' indictment of appeasement for at least the next twenty years, and one that newspaper journalists are always ready to re-hash these days.[12] These proponents argue that the British government's inability to resist the ambitions of Hitler stemmed either from a sense of guilt derived from the Versailles settlement, or personal gullibility, or even out of a sympathy for fascism.[13] They argue that the appeasers would only realise the danger of Hitler's plans for world domination when Prague was invaded in March 1939 which caused popular outrage and forced the British guarantee to Poland. The 'guilty men' indictment was neither helped by the selective release in 1945 of official government papers from the period (despite the fifty year rule), nor by the contemporary leaders of the Conservative Party attempting to disassociate themselves from appeasement for reasons of their own political expediency.[14] The force of this analysis was compounded by the work of John Wheeler-Bennett and Martin Gilbert with Richard Gott, (and more recently articulated by Richard Lamb).[15] Significantly, Martin Gilbert was to modify his views considerably with his 1966 publication, *The Roots of Appeasement*.[16] Appeasement was not 'a silly or treacherous idea in the minds of stubborn and gullible men, but a noble idea, rooted in Christianity, courage and common sense.'[17] *The Roots of Appeasement* can be seen as Gilbert's attempt to answer criticism of his previous publication. It had been suggested that *The Appeasers*, whilst explaining the execution of foreign policy in the late 1930s, offered little on the motives behind the policy.[18] In this 1966 work Gilbert argued that 'appeasement was born' on 4 August 1914 and is therefore a study

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12 *Sunday Times*, editorial and Norman Macrae column 6 Jan 1991; 17 July 1994.

13 Indeed these views are articulated in a historical novel by Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of The Day*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), and in the film version produced by Merchant Ivory.

14 Quintin Hogg (now Lord Hailsham), *The Left Was Never Right*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1945) - a political tract which admits to errors in pre-war foreign policy but argues the situation would have been far worse if the Left had been in power. 'It is true that the Conservative party may have been doing too little. For that it may be criticised. But it was on the right lines. The Left was on the wrong lines all along.' (p. 56).

15 John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *Munich, Prologue to Tragedy*, (London: Macmillan, 1948); M. Gilbert and R. Gott, *The Appeasers*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962); Richard Lamb, *The Drift to War, 1922-1939*, (London: Bloomsbury, 1989).

16 Martin Gilbert, *The Roots of Appeasement*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966).

17 D.C. Watt, 'The historiography of appeasement', in *Crisis and Controversy*, eds. Cook & Sked, (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 118.

18 L. Kochan, 'Inquest on appeasement', *AJR Information*, July 1963,; C. Mowat, review of *The Appeasers*, in *English Historical Review*, Jan. 1965, LXXX, CCCXIV, pp. 217-8.

of British policy towards Germany in the inter-war years. This argument has since been developed further by Paul Kennedy and P.W. Schroeder who argue that the roots of appeasement were to be found in the nineteenth century, and that until the guarantee to Poland in March 1939 Chamberlain's foreign policy was little different from that of previous foreign secretaries (except that by the 1930s Britain was struggling to retain her place in world affairs as she was burdened by military and economic demands that were increasingly difficult to shoulder).[19] In contrast, Gilbert's 1966 account appears both over simplified and unconvincing in contrasting the noble qualities of appeasement before 1937 and its sudden descent into disreputability thereafter.

Since the mid-1960s, the revisionists have argued that the British inability to resist Hitler was the inevitable result of various restraints: military and economic weakness, dominion and public opinion, and a global perspective that meant war with Germany would enable Italy, Japan and the USA to benefit at the expense of the empire.[20] In this vein came Keith Robbins' *Munich 1938* which did much to destroy the 'myth' surrounding Munich.[21] The chief fault of Robbins' study rested in its ability to make everything that happened seem inevitable. Further, twenty years later Robbins admitted to a weakness of the work in that it had not differentiated *between* the appeasers. He correctly regarded it as a transitional book that 'appears to say farewell to the preoccupations and prejudices of the years since 1945 but [left] open the future direction of research and criticism.'[22]

The revisionism and future direction of research was moulded by two significant changes. Firstly, a modification of the 1958 Public Records Act lowered the closed period of public archives to thirty years and secondly, a new generation of younger historians, products of the 1944 Education Act, were anxious to demythologise the 1930s. As Robbins admitted, he had been attracted to writing his study on the Munich crisis because he 'had not even been alive during the appeasement years and wanted to approach the entire

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19 This school of thought is exemplified by Kennedy, 'The tradition of appeasement'; Schroeder, 'Munich'.

20 For the revisionists see, for example: W.N. Medlicott, *Britain and Germany: The Search for Agreement, 1933-1937*, (London: Athlone Press, 1969); D.C. Watt, *How War Came: The Immediate Origins of the Second World War*, (London: Heinemann, 1989); Keith Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion: The British Government and Germany, 1937-1939*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972).

21 Keith Robbins, *Munich 1938*, (London: Cassell, 1968).

22 Robbins, *Appeasement*, p. 7.

topic afresh without the emotions which still so clearly troubled an older generation.'[23] These new historians were working in the 1960s cold war climate and in the aftermath of the 1956 Suez fiasco. Suez had revealed Britain's decline as a great power. It had revived interest in appeasement because of the Eden government's 'anti-appeasement' rhetoric and methods. That these failed, and the Egyptian dictator Nasser survived, posed questions about whether the alternative options for the 1930s might not also have been practicable. In addition Czechoslovakia was again threatened with subjugation to another power and the events of 1968 reminded contemporaries of Munich. Against this background the new historians of the 1960s had fresh questions to ask of those who executed policy in the 1930s. Therefore these changes were to redirect the emphasis upon research, though not always in a totally beneficial way. The emergence of 'instant history', written to publishers' deadlines, and often based upon the latest release of public records without any serious collation to other sources, was the negative aspect of this re-direction. A notable example was Ian Colvin's *The Chamberlain Cabinet* which purported to tell for the first time from the cabinet papers how the meetings in 10 Downing Street led to war.[24] Colvin, a former journalist expelled from Berlin in March 1939, suggested that the cabinet documents do not vindicate Chamberlain's foreign policy. Rather they make it even more certain that he undermined the principle of government accountability by making some vital decisions without consulting the cabinet and that these ultimately led to war.

The reduction in the 'closed' period for official records also encouraged a spate of biographies and edited diaries based upon private archives.[25] Individual participants of the 1930s, or their families, were anxious to present "their" version of events. This has provided an additional perspective for the student of the appeasement era. Alongside these, the military, economic and other hitherto neglected aspects of appeasement came under the historians' scrutiny: George Peden and R.A.C. Parker on the economic logistics of

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[23] Robbins, *Appeasement*, p. 6.

[24] Ian Colvin, *The Chamberlain Cabinet*, (London: Gollancz, 1971).

[25] For example: *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1937-1939*, (hereafter *Harvey Diaries*), ed. J. Harvey, (London: Collins, 1970); *Chips: The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon*, (hereafter *Channon Diaries*), ed. R. Rhodes-James, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967); *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart*, ed. K. Young, (London: Macmillan, 1973); *Harold Nicolson: Diaries and Letters: I: 1930-39*, (hereafter *Nicolson Diaries*), ed. N. Nicolson, (London: Collins, 1966); Lord Birkenhead, *Halifax: The Life of Lord Halifax*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1965); *The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha*, ed. R.J. Minney, (London: Collins, 1960).

appeasement; Robert Shay and Gaines Post Jnr. on rearmament; Brian Bond, Stephen Roskill, Uri Bialer and Malcolm Smith on the military situation; Anthony Adamthwaite and Robert Young on the French perspective; and the likes of Wesley Wark and Christopher Andrew on intelligence issues.[26] All these studies, although specific in nature, have added to the complexity of the 'appeasement debate' by demonstrating that British foreign policy towards Germany cannot be studied in isolation and that many of the above factors must be taken into consideration.

In recent years the debate has been developed further by two studies: John Charmley's *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace*, and R.A.C. Parker's *Chamberlain and Appeasement*.[27] Charmley's account of Chamberlain's pursuit of a lasting peace in the 1930s was a fervent revisionist account, although it recognised the weakness of both the man and his foreign policy. It argued that Chamberlain's policy was the only method which offered any hope of avoiding war - of saving lives and the British Empire. Charmley dissents from the suggestion that the Second World War was in some way a triumph for Britain. This study perhaps uses hindsight a little too much to suggest that a bankrupt Britain and an increase in Russian power in 1945 were the very outcomes Chamberlain had feared in 1937-39 and striven to prevent. It was Charmley's belief that in the fifty years or so since Munich 'the "guilty men" syndrome has run its course'.[28] The work unfortunately is peppered with superficial quotations which make the text rather turgid reading. This work is purely an analysis of the British decision-making 'elite' and appeasement. As it stands it provides an analysis of the cabinet and Foreign Office mechanisms

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26 G.C. Peden, *British Rearmament and the Treasury, 1932-39*, (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1984); Robert Paul Shay, *British Rearmament in the Thirties: Politics and Profits*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); Gaines Post Jnr., *Dilemmas of Appeasement: British Deterrence and Defence, 1934-7* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1993); R.A.C. Parker, 'British rearmament, 1936-39: Treasury, trade unions and skilled labour', *English Historical Review*, 96, 2 (1981), pp. 306-43 ; Brian Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); Uri Bialer, *Shadow of the Bomber: The Fear of Air Attack and British Politics*, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1980); Malcolm Smith, *British Air Strategy Between the Wars*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); Anthony Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, (London: Frank Cass, 1977); Robert Young, *In Command of France: French Foreign Policy and Military Planning, 1933-40*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978); Wesley Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy: British Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1933-39*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); S. Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars*, vol. 2, 1930-39, (London: Collins, 1976); Christopher Andrew, *The Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community*, (London: Heinemann, 1986).

27 John Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989); Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement.*

28 Charmley, *Chamberlain*, p. 212.

by which foreign policy was implemented, but fails to provide any wider insight into the reception appeasement received from the Conservative Party at large, or British public opinion more generally.

In contrast Parker's work challenges Charmley's assumption that Chamberlain's policy was the only viable option. Indeed Parker's study has created a new school of counter-revisionist thought. Parker believes that the sheer volume of documentation that survives from the period 'has sometimes overwhelmed historians into interpretative surrender.' He accepts that appeasement was not a policy of surrender or 'peace at any price', and indeed suggests it was a 'bold, venturesome policy' intended to induce Hitler to limit his expansion so as not to threaten Britain.[29] However, he believes that after the *Anschluss* Chamberlain could have worked for a closer alliance with France and a policy of containing and encircling Germany, and that if he had so chosen to abandon appeasement after Munich, he would have secured the support of his Party. His thesis is therefore that the Chamberlain government, having chosen a policy, ignored the alternative options after each setback. If these alternatives had been adopted then possibly war might have been avoided. Parker does attempt to place his conclusions within the wider context of the 'non-elite' politicians, but his archival material (which was exclusively elite and national) has only enabled him to provide tentative and limited generalisations in this field. This thesis will provide a bolster to a number of these tentative conclusions. Nevertheless, both Charmley's and Parker's works demonstrate that the debate over British foreign policy during the 1930s is far from complete.

Much has been written about the nature, application and consequences of Chamberlain's foreign policy. In terms of the Conservative Party's relationship with appeasement research has been approached from one of three perspectives: analysing the pursuit of peace from the ministerial angle; assessing the role of a particular individual; or examining the so-called anti-appeasers. Charmley's and Parker's accounts meet the first criterion. The principal political figures of the era, Chamberlain, Eden, Churchill and Halifax amongst others have been subjected to continual reappraisal and the interest appears to be far from abated.[30] Neville Thompson's study of the

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[29] Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, passim, quotes pp.. 343, 345.

[30] Eden: David Carlton, *Anthony Eden: A Political Biography*, (London: Allen-Lane, 1981); Robert Rhodes-James, *Anthony Eden*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1986), A.R. Peters, *Anthony Eden at the Foreign Office*, (Aldershot: Gower, 1986); Churchill: Paul

parliamentary Conservative Party's opposition to appeasement falls into the last category, as does Maurice Cowling's *The Impact of Hitler*.[31] Thompson's *The Anti-Appeasers* does much to demonstrate the inability of the dissidents within the parliamentary Party to oppose Chamberlain and provoke debate upon the merits of appeasing the dictators. It dismisses the popular myth of a coherent, purposeful and effective group of anti-appeasers, and demonstrates that there were two groupings of dissidents, one around Churchill, the other around Eden and Amery. The weakness of this work, which was the product of an Oxford doctoral thesis, lies principally in the sources it used, being based mainly upon newspapers and *Hansard*. It relied upon only four collections of private manuscripts - those of Lloyd-George, Lord Cecil, Austen Chamberlain and Leo Amery (of whom only the latter two were Conservatives). Since its completion a number of important private archive holdings have become available for public inspection, especially those for Neville Chamberlain, Lord Avon (or Anthony Eden as he was in the 1930s) and Rab Butler. When such holdings are combined with the recent research into the inter-war Conservative Party, it becomes apparent that Thompson's work had certain shortfalls.[32] Although essentially a study of dissent, its emphasis purely on 'elite' parliamentary Conservative opinion fails to provide a perspective on the role grass-roots Conservatives play in ensuring an MP's loyalty to the leadership, and to develop fully the theme of the leader's role and the relationship between the leader and rank and file of the Party. Further, Thompson limited his analysis purely to foreign policy, failing to appreciate that during the 1930s rearmament was its "twin" - one the necessary precondition of the other. Nevertheless, Thompson has shown that these Conservative dissidents were few in number and unsure of their intentions. However it would appear that he devotes too much attention to these few without adequately explaining why the overwhelming majority of

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Addison, *Churchill on the Home Front*, (London: Cape, 1992), John Charmley, *Churchill: The End of Glory*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993); Clive Ponting, *Churchill*, (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994); Martin Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life*, (London: Heinemann, 1991); Halifax: Andrew Roberts, *The Holy Fox*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991); Simon: David Dutton, *Simon: A Political Biography*, (London: Aurum Press, 1992).

31 Neville Thompson, *The Anti-Appeasers: Conservative Opposition to Appeasement in the 1930s*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler: British Politics and British Policy, 1933-40*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

32 John Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, (London: Longman, 1979); Stuart Ball, *Baldwin and the Conservative Party*, (London: Yale University Press, 1989); Martin Pugh, *The Tories and the People, 1880-1935*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); Philip Williamson, *National Crisis and National Government*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

the Party appeared to back Neville Chamberlain. Cowling's study of British politics during the 1930s argued that foreign policy was important - not only because of the international situation but also because it provided the politicians of the period with the venue for political battle. His study was not exclusively about the Conservative Party - it also considered the attitude of the Liberal and Labour Parties. The leading 'anti-appeasement' figures are assessed, as are the 'dissident' phoney war groupings. Cowling places British foreign policy in the context of European, imperial and isolationist sentiments and takes account of the financial and strategic limitations imposed upon Chamberlain. He demonstrates the extent to which ministers heeded parliamentary criticism and suggests that foreign policy and the party political system were so inter-connected that neither can be understood in isolation from the other. The account takes the debate through to Chamberlain's fall from power in May 1940. Cowling argues that during the period of the phoney war the Prime Minister's critics exploited foreign policy difficulties to damage him. Unlike Thompson's study, Cowling had based his work upon extensive public and private archival material. Yet, it still remains an 'exclusive' study of the British political 'elites' with only the occasional reference to more obscure backbenchers. It was these 'unknowns' whom Chamberlain relied upon to secure victory in parliamentary divisions; when they withdrew their support in May 1940, Chamberlain was forced from office.

Chamberlain's fall from power has received a certain amount of analysis. From the historiography it is possible to discern several distinct approaches to the analysis. One line of enquiry has scrutinised the 'elites' of the Norway debate.[33] Others, such as Rasmussen, have placed emphasis upon the role of backbench MPs, some of whom played a critical role in the events of May 1940.[34] Paul Addison has pointed to Chamberlain's inability to harness the extra-parliamentary dimension, in this particular instance the trade unions, which encouraged dissatisfaction with the prosecution of the war.[35] More recently, Kevin Jeffreys has argued that the uniqueness of Chamberlain's fall lies not simply in the reversal of his huge majority but also because of the decisive part played by backbenchers in the proceedings of parliament. He

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33 Winston Churchill, *The Second World War: The Gathering Storm*, (London: Cassell, 1948).

34 Jorgen S. Rasmussen, 'Party discipline in war-time: the downfall of the Chamberlain government', *Journal of Politics*, 32, 2 (1970), pp. 379-406.

35 Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War*, (London: Cape, 1975).

argues that although hindsight enables the historian to realise that Chamberlain's demise can be charted from the events of September 1939, the Prime Minister contributed to his own downfall, despite having public support and a largely united cabinet, due to his personality and the ill-advised selection of personnel.[36] The debate about Chamberlain's period as Prime Minister would appear to be far from complete and this thesis is evidence of the continued debate.

II

It was, and still remains, a widely perceived view that loyalty is the Conservative Party's greatest strength.[37] Indeed, Brian Harrison has suggested this loyalty manifests itself in silence which makes Conservatism an elusive topic to study. However, one historian has suggested that this silence may not be so advantageous because 'expectations of unity are raised so high that a minor policy debate among Conservatives occasions as much interest as a public row in the Labour Party.'[38] Since 1940 historical interest concerning the appeasement era has emphasised the divisions within the Party, distinguishing between the appeasers and anti-appeasers. As was indicated earlier, this has been a convenient explanation from the perspective of the post-war Conservative leadership keen to foster the 'myth' of rebellion. However, has not this study of minority opinion merely reinforced post-1940 legends and prevented a fuller understanding of how the majority of the Party responded to Chamberlain's defence and foreign policies? Could it not be suggested that historians, by concentrating upon the attitudes of a minority, have given the divisions greater emphasis than they merit? These questions gain greater clarity if one places this dissension in the context of the political situation. Owing to the huge majority of the National government and the relative ineffectiveness of the opposition benches, was it not inevitable that Conservative backbenchers (some of whom were frustrated by the lack of promotional opportunities) might have felt less inhibited about voicing dissatisfaction and less wary of initiating policy debates amongst themselves?

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[36] Kevin Jeffreys, 'May 1940: The downfall of Neville Chamberlain', *Parliamentary History*, 10, 2 (1991), pp. 363-78.

[37] A Conservative is taken to mean an identifiable member of that political party whether he be a member of a constituency Association in the localities, a Member of Parliament sitting on the backbenches or a serving minister in the National government. During this period the Party was officially the Conservative and Unionist Party, however for the purposes of simplicity and continuity the terms Conservative shall be used throughout this work.

[38] John Ramsden, *The Making of Conservative Party Policy: The Conservative Research Department since 1929*, (London: Longman, 1980), p. 3.

For these reasons alone an evaluation of the response of the Conservative Party as a whole is required. In fact, although historians accept that the overwhelming majority of the Party supported Chamberlain's foreign and defence policies, the wall of silence surrounding the Party has limited the scope for analysis. If silence *is* the Party's strength then it is important to understand the private attitudes of members so that a complete picture can be drawn of these crucial years. This thesis will highlight that a boundary must be drawn between the public and private views of Conservatives. Once this distinction is made the thesis will demonstrate that from mid-1938 there was mounting private unease with Chamberlain's policies, and that in this private disquiet lies the origins of Chamberlain's fall from power in May 1940.

The availability of sources does much to explain the present historiography of the subject. There is a disproportionate bias in favour of the anti-appeasers when considering collections of private papers available for public inspection. In part, this is because many of the dissidents were later to rise to the higher echelons of the Party. It is a bias that continues to expand to this day. It is anticipated that the papers of Harold Macmillan and Robert Boothby will both be available for consultation within the next few years. Unfortunately this bias is intensified as the 'ordinary' Conservative MP from the period left either no papers or only collections that comprise mainly of newspaper cuttings.[39]

How therefore may one attempt to consider the views of the 'ordinary' Conservative? The answer lies in the Party's archives. Not nationally in the collection deposited at the Bodleian, for much of the pre-1940 material and in particular the correspondence between Central Office and the constituencies has been lost, but rather in the surviving minute books of local Conservative Associations themselves. These are either held by local records offices or still remain in the possession of the Associations. These enable the historian to hurdle the wall of silence. Local Association minute books had, until John Ramsden's *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, been a neglected source for historians of the twentieth century Conservative Party.[40] Until then historians appeared uncomfortable about the grass-roots manifestations of Conservatism.

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[39] An exception are the Cuthbert Headlam diaries. Headlam was the MP for Barnard Castle until 1935, and then chairman of Northern Area National Union, before returning to parliament in 1940. The originals are held in Durham Record Office but an edited volume is available: *Parliament and Politics in the Age of Baldwin and MacDonald: The Headlam Diaries, 1924-35*, ed. Stuart Ball, (London: Historians' Press, 1992). A second volume is forthcoming.

[40] Ramsden, *Balfour and Baldwin*.

In part this was due to source material. Before 1970 most Associations retained their minute books, rarely (if ever) granting researchers access. However, Central Office, anxious to counter what it saw as a disproportionate emphasis in studies of the history of the Labour Party, suggested that Associations might henceforth deposit their old minute books in county record offices. This lack of source material reinforced the image that Associations were merely there for ceremonial purposes and to provide bodies for canvassing purposes at election times. It was an impression of irrelevancy reinforced by the trend that had been taking place since the 1950s, namely the diminishing status and role an Association played in the affairs of a local community.

Ramsden's example was developed further by Stuart Ball with his re-assessment of the creation of the 1931 National government and Baldwin's leadership during the period.[41] As these studies have shown, when national archives (such as the cabinet documents and the papers of leading Conservative figures) are combined with a comprehensive analysis of the surviving regional and constituency Conservative Party records, the historian is able to provide a more balanced and nuanced appraisal than previously possible. They have shown that the influence of the rank and file can be channelled through two means: firstly, via the connections of leading figures in the National Union and Central Office who always have regular and unpublicised contacts with the chairman and leadership; and secondly, through the reaction of Associations to policy initiatives. It is this methodological procedure that is being applied in this thesis. The importance of such an approach to Conservative politics is further justified by the trend in British political history that has emerged over the past decade which analyses parties from all levels. Such studies reveal the nature and importance of the interaction between the centre and the constituencies and enables a fuller appreciation of the dynamics of the British political system.[42]

This work removes the vacuum that exists in the current literature of appeasement, for it provides the first analysis of how the *whole* of the Conservative Party responded to the German threat during Chamberlain's premiership. The historiography of appeasement has been exclusively concerned with 'elite' history. In contrast, this study of the Conservative Party

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[41] Ball, *Baldwin*.

[42] Duncan Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-18*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

and appeasement is total for it is an analysis of the Party from its leadership to its followers in the constituencies. The justification for a political history of the Conservative Party rests with the need to assess the receptivity to Chamberlain's policies of the many thousands who comprise the grassroots. At each general election over five hundred and fifty parliamentary Conservative candidates rely upon the grassroots to ensure re-selection, canvassing and fund-raising, and during the interim to guarantee the maintenance of a local organisation. Therefore the leadership cannot afford to ignore the grass-roots. This had revealed itself in 1922 when the discontent in the constituencies clearly influenced the voting behaviour of the middle-ranking MPs in the infamous Carlton Club revolt.[43] This thesis also extends Maurice Cowling's argument that parliamentary party politics and foreign policy were interlaced by demonstrating that Conservative national and international policy cannot be understood without reference to the 'low politics' of the local constituency Associations. It would be these Associations that were at the frontline of any election campaign, and they were responsible for disseminating the government's policies to the local electorate. As will become apparent, foreign and defence policy provided a field for political battle in the constituencies too. Additionally, a premise has existed about British right-wing politics which believed that it was the domain of parliamentary elites whose contact with their grass-roots followers are infrequent and often a disagreeable, if ultimately obligatory, activity. Yet during the inter-war years a Member's relations with his Association was undergoing a fundamental transformation. Ball has shown that from the end of the 1920s politicians increasingly relied upon local constituency officials and agents for analysis of public or party opinion. This replaced the role formerly dominated by the popular press (a considerable proportion of which was effectively controlled by a limited number of men, known to wield editorial control for their own ends, and as a result were no longer considered effective barometers of voter and party morale).[44] Indeed, Beaverbrook whose press empire included the *Daily Express*, the *Sunday Express*, and the *Evening Standard*, admitted to the 1937 Royal Commission on the Press that he ran his papers 'purely for the purposes of making propaganda and with no other object.'[45]

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[43] Ball, *Baldwin*, pp. xv-xvi.

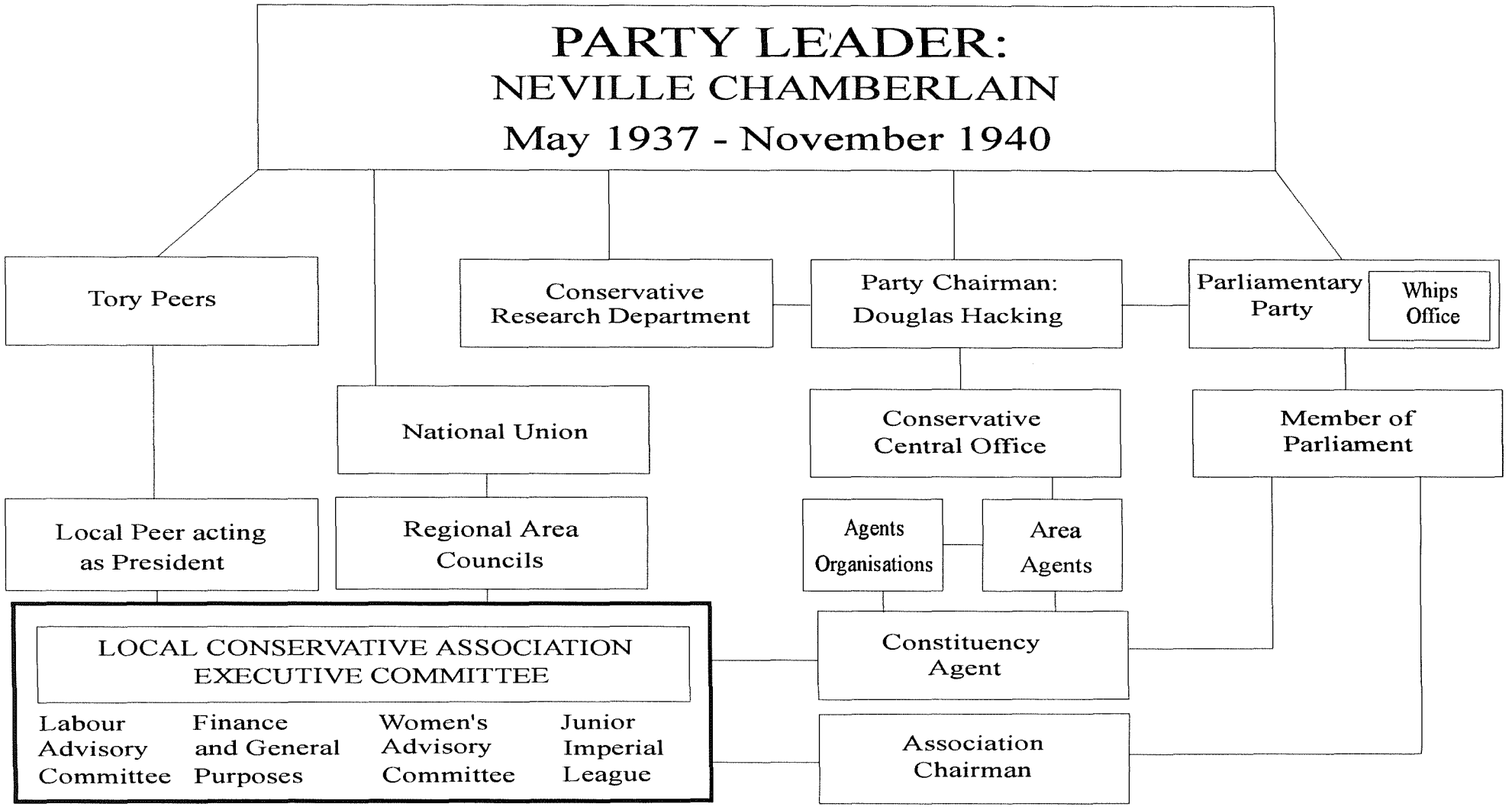
[44] Ball, *Baldwin*, passim.

[45] Franklin Reid Gannon, *The British Press and Germany, 1936-1939*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 36.

It must be acknowledged that Association minute books as primary source material do have certain limitations. For example, there is no uniformity from one Association to another. Quite often the prose is dry and one wonders about the criteria for recording the meetings. Some can be very specific, noting the various differing opinions in a debate and who said what. Others might record a motion being put to the meeting and state whether it was passed or rejected. Some may merely record that a lively discussion followed on a particular subject without giving any details. With some minute books there is no consistency whatsoever, with some discussions being fully recorded and others not, with no apparent reason for this. It is unusual for the minutes to be verbatim reports of the discussion - this seems to be more of a Liberal Association tenet - rather addresses are paraphrased. This inevitably makes the minute books subjective reports of the proceedings. Of course, these are problems that befall any such source. But shortfalls in the minute books' descriptions of meetings can often be supplemented by reference to the local newspapers which tended to report at length the more important meetings such as the AGM. Further, it might be thought that there is the danger that the sample of minute books consulted might prove unrepresentative. In fact this can be safeguarded by reference to the minutes of the National Union of Conservative Associations since this was the Party's barometer for constituency opinion.

It is important to bear in mind the role of Conservative Associations. Essentially their object was to provide an organisation in a constituency which could promote the interests of the Party and assist in the election of a Conservative candidate in local and national elections. A considerable portion of their time was consumed by fund raising and providing a social focus for Conservative sympathisers. This did not, though, exclude them from political issues. Active discussions occurred on a wide variety of topics, and reflected a belief that the Associations saw themselves as the guardians of constituency Conservative opinion. Associations supposedly had complete autonomy in the management of their own affairs: to elect officers, appoint agents and to select candidates. However it will become apparent that in practice during the 1930s, especially in marginal seats, this autonomy might not be total. Nor in theory was this autonomy absolute because the Association could not control the day to day activities of its MP and only had a limited role in directly influencing the formulation of Party policy. Figure one illustrates the structure of the Party during the 1930s.

Figure One: The Structure of the Conservative Party Organisation During the Premiership of Neville Chamberlain



Constituency Associations could pass resolutions up through the Party structure, via the Provincial Areas to the executive of the National Union. The National Union executive then decided what action to take with a resolution. It might be passed to the relevant minister or even the Party leader, either with or without the executive's endorsement. If the subject was a particularly contentious issue then they could merely allow the resolution to lay on the table or alternatively refer it to the central council for further discussion. If a resolution was forwarded to a minister, it was normal for that individual or his department to provide an official response.[46]

As will become apparent in the following pages, it is difficult (and indeed dangerous) to generalise about attitudes within the Party. Further, it will be shown that to perceive the Party as being simply divided along the lines of appeaser and anti-appeaser is too crude and ultimately, a limiting exercise. As historians have already shown the anti-appeasement faction was a small and disorganised grouping. The experiences of dissident MPs at the hands of their constituency Associations testify to the immense dislike of disloyalty towards the leadership at the Party's grass roots. This censure of dissident Members leads to important questions about the exact relationship between a Conservative Association and its MP, and the Conservative Association and the national leadership, which this thesis will clarify.

This thesis is in many ways an extension of my earlier work which considered Chamberlain's control of his Party, with many of its conclusions applying directly. One must dispel the image conveyed by contemporary newsreel footage of Chamberlain as a weak old man, 'pompous, insufferably slow in "diction", and unspeakably repellent in "person"'.[47] Similarly one must not allow hindsight to cloud judgement of a man who was the first Prime Minister of the modern ilk and worthy of comparison with Margaret Thatcher, herself the ultimate party manager.[48] Neville Chamberlain's accession to the premiership in May 1937, though long overdue, was eagerly anticipated by those Conservatives who desired a firmer style of leadership. More generally

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[46] For further analysis of the Party organisation see: R.T. McKenzie, *British Political Parties: The Distribution of Power within the Conservative and Labour Parties*, (London: Heinemann, 1963), pp. 21-60, 188-253; Ramsden, *Making of Conservative Party Policy*; A.M. Potter, 'The English Conservative constituency association', *The Western Political Quarterly*, 9, 2 (1956), pp. 363-75.

[47] Chamberlain Mss: Neville to Hilda, 21 Nov. 1937, NC18/1/1029.

[48] For comparisons see N. Crowson, 'Neville Chamberlain, the premiership and the party, 1937-40', (Southampton University: BA dissertation, 1991); Douglas Johnson, 'The fall of the mighty', *History Today*, 42, 2 (1992), pp. 8-10.

the expectations and reactions to Chamberlain's succession were positive. Samuel Hoare noted that Chamberlain 'seemed at once to crystallise all the fluid forces in the Cabinet his clear-cut mind and concrete outlook had an astringent effect upon opinions and preferences that had hitherto been only sentiment and impressions', whilst one backbencher believed Chamberlain would 'be an efficient, controlled, unimaginative PM' in whom he could have great confidence.[49] This thesis is not merely another study of appeasement. It will provide a fresh analysis of how the Conservative Party, as a whole, responded to the foreign and defence policies of Neville Chamberlain. Further it will suggest that defence policy in the aftermath of Munich, rather than foreign policy, was the more divisive and controversial subject for the Party. It will consider how the Conservatives of the late 1930s perceived the problem of Germany, rather than from the perspective of hindsight and recrimination provided by post-1940 British politics. The opening chapter will consider the different categories of attitude towards Germany that existed amongst Conservatives during the period, whilst also assessing the factors that influenced them. The second chapter will examine the Party's response to Chamberlain's foreign policy towards Germany between 1937 and 1939. Chapters three and four consider the Conservatives' military response to the German threat, firstly assessing the Party's attitude to the rearmament programme during the years 1937 and 1938, and secondly explaining its receptivity to the (hitherto ignored) issue of national service. The final chapter will examine the prosecution of the war during the period of the phoney war and explain the Conservative grievances that contributed to the Norway parliamentary revolt on 9 May 1940. Before progressing further, however, it is necessary to place the debate within the context of the international situation and to indicate the response of the Chamberlain government.

III

Hitler came to power in 1933 and by the end of the year had already left both the Geneva disarmament conference and the League of Nations. By 1934 German rearmament had recommenced. Feeling threatened by this action the British government responded in March 1935 with its own full scale rearmament programme. Within days Hitler retaliated by admitting to the existence of the German air force and announcing the re-introduction of

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[49] Viscount Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years*, (London: Collins, 1954), p. 257; Robert Rhodes-James, *Victor Cazalet: A Portrait*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1976), p. 192 fn. 1; Also, Chamberlain Mss: Benson to Rushcliffe, 16 Oct. 1937, NC7/11/30/26.

conscription. In October, Italy invaded Abyssinia which threatened Anglo-Italian relations and once again highlighted the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations. With attention distracted towards the Mediterranean, Hitler took the opportunity in March 1936 to flout once more the Versailles treaty, by reoccupying the demilitarised Rhineland. Within months another flashpoint occurred, this time in Spain when the militarists, supported by the Catholics, monarchists and fascists, began a Nationalist uprising against the left wing Popular Front government. Soon, despite being signatories of the non-intervention pact, Germany and Italy were providing troops for the Nationalist cause and Russia for the Socialists.

During 1937 a realisation grew that Britain was potentially threatened not only by Germany, but also from Italy in the Mediterranean and North Africa, and Japan in the Far East. This not only re-emphasised the necessity of rearmament but gave a greater urgency to diplomacy. In January, the Committee of Imperial Defence had been warned that Italy ought no longer to be considered an ally, though she was still not belligerent enough to be labelled an enemy. From May onwards Britain was simultaneously approaching Germany and Italy believing that to separate one from the other was the means to success. Mussolini was perceived to be the more amenable of the dictators and it was felt he could be used to pressure Hitler into peace.[50] In December, the Chiefs of Staff warned that Britain was in no position militarily to sustain a simultaneous war against three aggressors, even if assisted by France and other allies. The report's conclusion was that it was of vital importance 'to reduce the numbers of our potential enemies and to gain the support of potential allies.' In other words, the chances of success in keeping peace now lay with diplomacy. It was a scenario that Lieutenant-General John Dill, commander of British forces in Palestine, had foreseen earlier in the year. He judged that the Berlin-Rome axis was 'going to cause us a lot of trouble before it breaks' since 'the two European gangsters do know what they want on their road to perdition and have the will and power to make it very uncomfortable for opulent unarmed wafflers who obtrude themselves but dare not stand directly in their way.'[51]

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[50] *The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries, 1929-45*, (hereafter *Amery Diaries*), ed. John Barnes & David Nicholson, (London: Hutchinson, 1988), 10 Nov., 15 Nov. 1937, p. 452; Cilcennin Mss: account of debate of [Conservative] foreign affairs committee (incomplete), n.d.[?March 1938], (Victor Raikes), Cilc.coll.52, Dyfed Record Office.

[51] Peter Dennis, *Decision By Default: Peacetime Conscription and British defence, 1991-39*, (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1972), p. 106; Headlam Mss: Lt. Gen. John Dill to Cuthbert Headlam, 24 Mar. 1937, D/He/135/72, Durham Record Office.

Baron Von Neurath, the German Foreign Minister, was due to visit London in July 1937 and the government strove to create a climate conducive to reaching an agreement. For instance, Eden prevailed upon the editor of *The Times*, Geoffrey Dawson, not to publish a series of articles by Lord Lothian for fear they might encourage the Germans to arrive in London with unrealistic expectations.[52] In fact, the visit was cancelled at the last minute over the alleged torpedoing of a German battleship, the *Leipzig*. British attention was therefore re-focused upon Rome, but Mussolini proved both vacillatory and vague. In a speech at the end of October, Mussolini added his support to Hitler's colonial claims, which appeared to confirm his increasingly belligerent status. Therefore, when Lord Halifax was invited to attend a hunting convention in Germany, in his capacity as master of the Middleton Hunt, Chamberlain saw an opportunity.

The Halifax visit has often been cited as the first indication of a rift emerging between the PM and his Foreign Secretary.[53] The consequence of the visit was that it encouraged the British government to resurrect the idea of a colonial settlement when in reality Hitler desired a revision of the central European borders (although a minority of Conservatives, such as Leo Amery, suggested it was the other way around). It was perhaps easy to misinterpret Hitler's intentions during this period - many Conservatives returned from visits to Germany during 1937 conscious that for the Germans the colonial issue was a topic for which there was much enthusiasm.[54] Equally the question of returning German colonies was an issue which aroused passion amongst Conservative supporters - mostly negative.[55]

Hitler had given the issue of colonial restitution considerable prominence during his talks with Simon and Eden in March 1935 and again during the Rhineland crisis. Such overtures led the British government to believe that

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[52] Avon Mss: correspondence between Eden and Dawson, 16-20 June 1937, AP13/1/52-52H; Eden to Philip Dawson, 16 June 1937, AP13/1/52A, Birmingham University Library.

[53] For example, Andrew Crozier, *Appeasement and Germany's Last Bid for Colonies*, (London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 225. Peters, *Anthony Eden*, pp. 285-95, suggests the rift had emerged between August and September 1937 over Chamberlain's attempts to re-start talks with the Italians.

[54] Headlam Mss: diary, 7 Sept., 12 Sept. 1937, D/He/33; Avon Mss: Kenneth Chance to Eden, 5 Feb. 1937, AP13/1/51T.

[55] See Amery's and Page-Croft's letters to *The Times*, 22 Dec. 1936, 18 Oct. 1937; Minutes and Records of the British Conservative Party [hereafter CP]: National Union, exec. 10 Mar. 1937, card 56, (Harvester Press, series II).

colonial appeasement could lead to a general settlement. Nevertheless, the Plymouth committee which investigated the issue, and reported in June 1936, concluded that colonial concessions would only be a short term diversion and that Germany would not necessarily be diverted from pursuing her aspirations in Europe.[56] At the Imperial Conference of May-June 1937, Chamberlain gave the impression that the issue was dead - at least for the present. That month the League of Nations began an enquiry into the raw materials of mandate colonies which, when published in September, invalidated the economic basis of the German claims for a return. During this period German demands were assiduously promoted by Hjalmar Schacht, the Reich Minister of Economics. That Chamberlain should decide following the Halifax visit that the issue was once more alive appears to have been denying the evidence. At Berchtesgaden Hitler had been vague on the issue whilst declaring it was the 'only direct issue' between Britain and Germany. Chamberlain had been warned by Philip Lothian that Schact had control only over economic and not political policy.[57] Yet, at the beginning of December Chamberlain made it clear to the cabinet that a colonial agreement on its own was not satisfactory: it had to be part of a general settlement.

Whether the Halifax visit weakened relations between Chamberlain and Eden has been the subject of continuous debate. Harry Crookshank, the Minister for Mines, found Paul Emrys-Evans, MP for South Derbyshire and chairman of the Conservative foreign affairs committee, 'very fussed at what he suspects is an intrigue against Anthony.' Oliver Harvey, Eden's Principal Private Secretary at the Foreign Office, also initially subscribed to the intrigue theory and even at one point suggested that Eden ought to resign over the issue. However, by the end of November, Harvey seemed to feel that Eden and Chamberlain were once again on 'satisfactory' terms and he shortly felt able to record that the two men 'were in absolute agreement about Germany - viz. no settlement except a general European settlement.'[58] The reality was that it was not so much Eden who posed the problem but the Foreign Office itself. Some observers felt that there existed a situation whereby Britain had to be prepared to trust the Germans. However it was an attitude which they could

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[56] *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, (hereafter *DBFP*), II, XVI, appendix 3: Plymouth Report, 9 June 1936, paras. 46, 165.

[57] Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, p. 74.

[58] Crookshank Mss: diary, 14 Nov. 1937, MS.Eng.hist.d.357 f.187, Bodleian Library; *Harvey Diaries*, 7, 8, 11, 14, 23 Nov. 1937, 7 Dec. 1937, pp. 57-60, 62-3.

not 'see the F[oreign] O[ffice] people' adopting.[59] Victor Cazalet, the MP for Chippenham, was rather disturbed to observe the anti-Germanic attitude of British diplomats abroad.[60] Chamberlain certainly expressed exasperation, desiring to be able to 'stir-up' the Foreign Office, but equally he seems to have assumed agreement with Eden. One consequence of the Halifax visit was to reveal the similarity between Halifax's and Chamberlain's perspective upon foreign policy, the significance of which was yet to be appreciated.

The declared policy of the government, with regard to Europe, was the securing of a general European settlement. Although the specific details intended for such a settlement differed from time to time, the main platforms of such an agreement would involve a revision of the Versailles treaty, a series of security pacts and possibly limitations upon rearmament. The intention was that by settling the outstanding grievances of the dictators they could be brought back into the international fold.

The problem for Chamberlain and Eden was that they increasingly differed over the priorities of securing a general settlement. Both men were in accord over the necessary approach towards Germany, but found themselves increasingly disputing the Italian dimension. Whilst they jointly engineered the sidelining of Robert Vansittart during December 1937 by promoting him to the position of Chief Diplomatic Adviser in the Foreign Office, relations between the two men were to deteriorate rapidly during the opening weeks of 1938. Their conflict was initially over the Roosevelt initiative (whereby the American President offered to mediate with the dictators) and then finally concerned Anglo-Italian negotiations. The outcome was Eden's resignation on 21 February 1938 and Halifax's appointment as successor.[61]

To add further humiliation to Chamberlain, within weeks of the Eden resignation German troops marched into Austria and announced the *Anschluss*. Although condemning the means by which Hitler secured the union with Austria, Chamberlain resisted demands from the opposition and elements of his own backbenches to respond immediately to the threat by

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[59] Headlam Mss: diary, 12 Nov. 1937, D/He/33.

[60] Cazalet Mss: journal, March 1937, cited with permission of Sir Edward Cazalet.

[61] For historical analysis of Eden's resignation see Norman Rose, 'The resignation of Anthony Eden', *Historical Journal*, 25, 4 (1982), pp. 911-31; Roy Douglas, 'Chamberlain and Eden', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 13, 1 (1978), pp. 97-116; R.A.C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, pp. 93-123; Peters, *Anthony Eden*, pp. 321-57.

guaranteeing Czechoslovakia. Instead he waited until the 24 March before explaining to the House of Commons the government's revised rearmament plans and foreign policy. He pointed out that Britain had no treaty obligations *vis-à-vis* Czechoslovakia and warned France that Britain would only assist if she were attacked by Germany. He concluded with a veiled threat that 'where peace and war are concerned, legal obligations are not alone involved, and if war broke out, it would be unlikely to be confined to those who have assumed such obligations [...] it would be quite impossible to say where it might end and what governments might be involved.'[62]

For the next twelve months Czechoslovakia was to become the focus of foreign policy attention. The *Anschluss* left her, as the Chiefs of Staff commented, like a bone in the jaws of a dog.[63] With a vocal German minority population in the Sudetenland being actively stirred up by Nazi propaganda it was perhaps only a matter of time before confrontation was bound to occur. From the British government's perspective the aim was to place pressure upon Prague to try and cajole them into concessions and better treatment of the German minority whilst simultaneously trying to improve relations between London and Berlin and London and Rome. Equally, the British wished to discourage the French government from honouring her obligations to the Franco-Czech mutual assistance treaty, by suggesting that Britain would not come to France's assistance until alien forces had entered her territory. By August 1938, after an initial scare during May, it appeared increasingly likely that Germany intended to annex the Sudetenland. Having adopted a policy of 'realism' in March, which was intended as isolation, Britain had found herself being drawn deeper into the crisis. As William Strang, from the Foreign Office's central desk, reported after visits to Berlin and Prague in late May, 'we are naturally regarded as having committed ourselves morally at any rate to intervene if there is a European war, and nothing that we are likely to say will remove that impression.'[64] The despatching of Lord Runciman to the region during August effectively signalled Britain's active participation.

Despite concern that the situation was sliding towards war, Chamberlain remained confident that a personal appeal to Hitler would sway the dictator from any rash move. He had therefore secretly devised a diplomatic coup of

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62 *HofC Debs*, vol. 333 cols. 1399-1413, 24 Mar. 1938.

63 Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, p. 137.

64 *DBFP*, 3rd series, I 349, 26-7 May 1938, pp. 403-12.

last resort, Plan Z. This involved Chamberlain flying to Germany to negotiate personally with Hitler. Initially hatched between Chamberlain and Horace Wilson, a civil servant and confidant of the Prime Minister, on 28 August, Foreign Office officials and most senior members of the cabinet were not told about the idea until 8 September whilst the full cabinet was not party to the plan until the day before Chamberlain departed. Robert Vansittart, Chief Diplomatic Adviser to the Foreign Office and a noted Germanophobe, was opposed, whilst Inskip, the Minister for the Co-Ordination of Defence, felt 'a little trepid[ation] about the proposal'. Other cabinet members reacted similarly. Oliver Stanley admitted to Edward Winterton that he was 'apprehensive'. For his part, Winterton, along with De La Warr, was 'a little doubtful of the ultimate result' of such a mission. Nevertheless despite these doubts there were no overall objections from the cabinet.[65]

Plan Z resulted in Chamberlain flying to Germany three times. First to Berchtesgaden, then Bad Godesberg and finally Munich from where he returned to Britain on 1 October to wave his piece of paper at Heston airport and infamously claim 'peace in our time'. The Czechs who had not been invited to the four-power conference at Munich were persuaded by Britain and France to cede the Sudetenland to Germany. For the Czechs to have resisted would have meant fighting Germany alone. Therefore, reluctantly and amid recriminations the Czech government complied.

If Chamberlain had hoped Munich would have persuaded Hitler to become a 'good citizen' then he was to be disappointed. The German leader continued to display his old traits of unreliability, and in November the British public was to be morally outraged at the reports of mass arrest, the burning of synagogues and loss of life during *Kristallnacht* - the Nazi pogrom against German Jews. In the end, with no likely prospect of further advances with Germany, the government once again turned its attention towards Italy. The Anglo-Italian agreement was the result of the approaches Chamberlain had made to Mussolini at the beginning of the year and the talks whose proposal finally provoked Eden's resignation in February. In exchange for granting *de jure* recognition of Mussolini's annexation of Abyssinia, the Italian dictator affirmed his friendship towards Britain and promised to withdraw Italian 'volunteers' from Spain. The agreement was initially presented to the House

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[65] Caldecote Mss: Inskip diary, 8, 14 Sept. 1938; Churchill College Archive; Winterton Mss: diary, 14 Sept. 1938, 1/43, Bodleian Library. Cab. 23/95, 38(38), 14 Sept. 1938.

of Commons on 4 April 1938 and easily secured a majority. In the wake of Munich Mussolini urged Chamberlain for an immediate ratification. Therefore, the Anglo-Italian treaty was formally ratified in early November, although Italy had only partially withdrawn her 'volunteers' from Spain. In January 1939 Chamberlain and Halifax visited Rome to demonstrate the newfound Anglo-Italian friendship. One Conservative cynically wrote that Chamberlain was wasting his time since Mussolini 'has ceased to count (if he ever did count) except as an irritant. The centre of gravity is in Berlin.'[66]

In March 1939 German troops crossed the Sudeten border and marched into Prague violating the Munich agreement. Unable to justify Hitler's behaviour Chamberlain was forced through a combination of parliamentary and public opinion to abandon his policy of appeasement. The Territorial Army was doubled in size and shortly peacetime conscription was introduced. On 31 March, Chamberlain broke with the traditions of recent foreign policy and offered a guarantee to the Polish nation.[67] Formally ratifying the guarantee nevertheless proved more problematic. The Anglo-Polish negotiations began in April 1939 when Jozef Beck, the Polish Foreign Minister, visited London. Beck was only too conscious of the awkward position Poland was in, having a resurgent nationalist Germany to the west anxious to secure the Polish corridor and the implacable Soviet Empire to the east still smarting at the loss of territory from the 1919 Polish-Soviet conflict. Beck had no wish to antagonise either party. Eventually the British guarantee of Poland was reciprocated with a Polish declaration of mutual defence. These were ratified days before war occurred. The British and French government were also involved in negotiations with the Soviet Union in an effort to secure a second potential front in the east. Soviet Russia was less than enamoured with the British Polish guarantee since its wording implied that Britain would support Poland from either western or eastern attack. Throughout the negotiations with both Poland and Russia a continuing stumbling block was the mutual suspicion between the two countries. Russia argued that she would not agree to any pact unless Poland agreed also and granted the Soviets concessions. Ultimately, Hitler secured a dramatic diplomatic coup when the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact was officially announced on 23 August 1939. With the eastern

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[66] Headlam Mss: diary, 11 Jan. 1939; For historical analysis of the visit see Paul Stafford, 'The Chamberlain-Halifax visit to Rome: a reappraisal', *English Historical Review*, 158, 1 (1983), pp. 61-100.

[67] See Simon Newman, *March 1939: The British Guarantee to Poland*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976); Anita Prazmowska, *Britain, Poland and the Eastern Front, 1939*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

front secured Hitler was free to turn his attention towards Poland without the risk of a war on two fronts. Within a week Europe was once again plunged into war. There were few, if any Conservatives, in May 1937 who would have desired to fight another war against Germany, but by September 1939 the majority of the Party grimly accepted the necessity. As the Member for Lewes, T.P.H. Beamish, observed:

> I see heavy hearts, clear minds and grim determination. [...] Noone can foresee the duration of this conflict, the Germans are confident, highly trained, unscrupulous; all the talk of quick decisions is the refuge of unpractical minds.[68]

The following chapters will illustrate how and why Conservative assessments of Germany altered during the remaining years of peace.

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[68] Beamish Mss: autobiographical notes, 2 Sept. 1939, BEAM3/3, Churchill College Archives.

Chapter One: Facing the Führer: Conservative Attitudes Towards Germany

This chapter examines the different attitudes within the Conservative Party towards Germany between 1937 and 1939. After defining the general types of attitude that existed, the chapter will move on to consider the possible influences in the formulation of these assessments of Germany. It will then progress to an analysis of Conservative perceptions of the nature and the threat posed by Hitler's regime. General historical assessments of the Conservative Party's relationship with Nazi Germany argue that its members fell into one of two categories: appeaser or anti-appeaser. At its simplest, it is assumed that an appeaser solidly followed the foreign policy of premier Neville Chamberlain as he attempted to compromise with the European dictators; whilst an anti-appeaser sought to resist the weak and debilitating policies of Chamberlain, believing that a firmer response to the dictators would persuade them to toe a peaceful line. This assessment has been to some extent re-evaluated over the past twenty years with regard to the anti-appeaser minority but there still remains a less than clear appreciation of how the residuum of Conservatives responded to the German threat. Whilst Conservatives who possessed the appeasement mentality represented the majority of the Party, it will become apparent that this did not mean that they were all agreed on the methods for putting the theory into practice. Therefore what will be shown in this chapter, and throughout the thesis, is that the idea of an overwhelming majority of staunch Chamberlainite Conservatives subservient to the Prime Minister is overly simplistic and indeed erroneous.

I

The importance of understanding the differing attitudes towards Germany held by Conservatives was that these determined the extent to which the Party was prepared to accept the government's defence and foreign policies. From the illustrated case-studies undertaken in this chapter it will become apparent that Conservatism was a broad church unifying a number of different attitudes under one collective banner. The chapter will also demonstrate that these categories were not mutually exclusive, and that over the time-scale of this work it was possible for individual Conservatives to satisfy the criteria for more than one classification, or alternatively to move from one to another. These categories are not necessarily "new", but it is necessary to identify them

and explain their common characteristics.[1] A further complication, and an important one, will be the necessity to distinguish between the views uttered publicly and those confined to the private sphere.

The first grouping that can be identified are the 'sceptics', and they have been subject to the greatest historical scrutiny. As with the majority of Conservatives the sceptics were distrustful of German ambitions and believed that they recognised the threat posed to European peace. The distinction was that these Conservatives disputed with the Party's decision-makers the means and methods by which the threat could be neutralised. As a grouping these 'sceptics' are the most readily identifiable because many of them responded to the perceived German threat in such a way as to enable a ready assessment. In the first instance, there were those who from 1933 onwards were advocating the need to rearm with greater haste because of German militarism. Following the resignation of Anthony Eden this scepticism mutated and one is able to discern the gradual emergence of a group of 'anti-appeasers'. Munich provided the impetus to a wider group which drew Amery and Eden together - creating a situation whereby they found themselves 'the nucleus of a group of like-minded Conservatives who began to come together at frequent intervals to discuss the situation.'[2] However, historians have dismissed the myth of a coherent, purposeful and effective group of anti-appeasers and have generally accepted that they never really numbered more than thirty, which was approximately a tenth of the parliamentary Party. One monograph has likened them to a mirage, 'the more it is studied the less substantial it appears; but in this case it never vanishes completely.'[3] In fact there was considerable inconsistency and variance in the actual attitudes to foreign policy in general and Germany in particular amongst these dissidents that makes the 'anti-appeasers' label a rather crude definition. As will become apparent a more realistic descriptive title would be 'foreign policy sceptics'.

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[1] For an overview of British opinions of Germany since the mid-nineteenth century see, P.M. Kennedy, 'Idealists and realists: British views of Germany, 1864-1939', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 25 (1975), pp. 137-56; John Mander, *Our German Cousins: Anglo-German Relations in the 9th and 20th Centuries*, (London: John Murray, 1974).

[2] L.S. Amery, *My Political Life: The Unforgiving Years, 1929-40*, III, (London: Hutchinson, 1955), p. 298.

[3] Thompson, *The Anti-Appeasers*, p. 2; Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler*, especially pp. 223-56; N.J. Crowson, 'Conservative Parliamentary dissent over foreign policy during the premiership of Neville Chamberlain'. *Parliamentary History*, 14, 2 (1995).

Indeed, it must be argued that there were two varieties of sceptic: the hard-core, or rather those normally identified as anti-appeasers, such as Macmillan, Emrys-Evans and Churchill, who made little secret of their criticisms; and the 'fellow-travellers', who periodically swelled the ranks of the hard-core, and who were to play a crucial role in the fall of Chamberlain in May 1940. An example of the latter was Ernest Makins, MP for Knutsford, who appears throughout 1938 to have had his doubts about the wisdom of British foreign policy. His son Roger served in the Foreign Office and frequently briefed his father upon the international situation and likened Chamberlain to 'a babe in the wood' who was 'living in fools' paradise.' When Eden resigned, Makins' 'sympathies' were with the former Foreign Secretary although he still voted for the government. In June 1938 he felt the government to be 'rather feeble' over foreign policy, and these private doubts finally surfaced when he abstained from the government's Munich motion. When a vote of no confidence in the government's handling of foreign affairs was forced in mid-December he only gave his vote 'reluctantly' to the government and wondered as to 'how long I can go on doing so and keep my self respect?'[4]

Identifying the hard-core sceptics is considerably easier than recognising the fellow-travellers due to the propensity of the former to identify themselves in diaries and memoirs. It has been possible to compile a list of those associated with the foreign policy sceptics after Munich. Harold Nicolson, a National Labour MP, wrote to his wife in November 1938 describing how he

> went to a hush-hush meeting with Anthony Eden. Present: Eden, [Leo] Amery, [Bobbety] Cranborne, Sidney Herbert, [Ronald] Cartland, Harold Macmillan, [Edward] Spears, Derrick Gunston, [Paul] Emrys-Evans, Anthony Crossley, Hubert Duggan. All good Tories and sensible men. This group is distinct from the Churchill group. It also includes Duff Cooper. We decided that we should not advertise ourselves as a group or even call ourselves a group. We should merely meet together from time to time, exchange views, and organise ourselves for a revolt if needed. I feel happier about this. Eden and Amery are wise people, and Sidney Herbert is very experienced. Obviously they do not mean to do anything rash or violent. [...] It was a relief to me to be with people who share my views so completely, and yet who do not give the impression (as Winston [Churchill]

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[4] Makins Mss: diary, 21 Feb., 21 June, 17 Dec. 1938. Courtesy of Lord Sherfield.

does) of being more bitter than determined, and more out for a fight than for reform.[5]

From the memoirs of Anthony Eden we are able to add the names of J.P.L. Thomas, Mark Patrick, Lord Wolmer, Richard Law, Robert Bower, Dudley Joel and Ronald Tree to the sceptics group. Tree's memoirs include J.R.J. Macnamara and describe the Churchill group as consisting of Brendan Bracken, Duncan Sandys and Robert Boothby with Edward Spears acting as an intermediary between the Eden and Churchill groups. Harold Nicolson suggested that Lords Cecil, Lloyd and Horne and Roger Keyes, MP for Portsmouth North, were also associated with Churchill.[6] The hard-core sceptics, therefore, represented the complete spectrum of the Party: Macmillan and Vyvyan Adams came from the left wing, Eden was from the centre, whilst Wolmer's political views were centre-right. Churchill and Lord Lloyd were die-hards of the early 1930s, who saw the rising spectre of nazism as a threat to Britain's status and therefore championed rearmament before becoming involved in foreign policy dissent.[7] A number of these, such as Churchill, Amery, Horne, Eden and Duff Cooper, had seen government office at one time or another, but at the time of their association with foreign policy scepticism none was serving ministers; in the cases of Eden and Cooper they had resigned from office in opposition to aspects of Chamberlain's foreign policy. Naturally being ex-ministers these individuals commanded a greater degree of influence in the lobbies and corridors of Westminster than the remainder of their junior back-bench associates, but the extent to which they were able to influence policy remains debatable.

Scrutiny of the parliamentary divisions that occurred on questions of foreign policy during 1938 suggest that there were a number of Conservative backbenchers who were regularly absent for such votes.[8] The implication is that there was a wider body of sceptics than is normally assumed. This approach offers the potential to identify the fellow-travellers and scrutinise the consistency of the hard-core. Some MPs, such as Barkston Ash's

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[5] *Nicolson Diaries*, H. Nicolson to wife, Vita Sackville-West, 8 Nov. 1938, pp. 377-8.

[6] Avon, *The Eden Memoirs: Reckoning*, (London: Cassell, 1964), pp. 31-2; Ronald Tree, *When the Moon was High: Memoirs of Peace and War, 1897-1942*, (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 75-6.

[7] For analysis of the common characteristics of these dissidents see Crowson 'Conservative Parliamentary dissent'.

[8] This theme is developed at greater length in Crowson, 'Conservative Parliamentary dissent'. See appendix for an explanation of the vote analysis.

representative Leonard Ropner, appear to have regularly abstained, yet their names are not mentioned in connection with the Eden or Churchill groups. This applied to Vyvyan Adams, the Member for Leeds West, and the duchess of Atholl, Kinross and West Perth's MP. A further complication was that some Conservatives appear to have distinguished between appeasing Italy and appeasing Germany. J.J. Withers and J. McConnell were consistently absent for the various votes concerning Anglo-Italian relations,[9] whilst Eden resigned as Foreign Secretary over Chamberlain's approaches to Mussolini. In contrast, Sidney Herbert supported the government's implementation of the 1938 Anglo-Italian agreement, as did Leo Amery. Both these men were hard-core sceptics. The Munich agreement appears to have encouraged a number of back-benchers, Richard Law, B.H.H. Neven-Spence, and J.J. Stourton, into absence on foreign policy votes thereafter.[10] Nor does the record of those commonly associated with the 'anti-appeasers' always stand up to analysis. Lord Wolmer despite his Munich abstention voted with the government thereafter, perhaps because of the pressure from his constituency Association. Amery also supported the government in the 19 December 1938 vote of confidence on foreign policy. Robert Bower appears to have abstained only on the Munich votes; while Mark Patrick and J.R.J. Macnamara remained loyal to the government after their abstentions in the Eden vote of censure. But scepticism about Germany did not necessarily have to mean abstention or rebellion in parliamentary votes. For instance, Harry Crookshank, the Minister for Mines, caused Neville Chamberlain a good deal of irritation by regularly threatening resignation during 1938. This occurred first over Eden's resignation then again with Munich and finally in December when he was associated with the Under-Secretaries' revolt that demanded the removal of Hore-Belisha from the War Office, quicker rearmament and a change in the government's agricultural policy.[11] Likewise Duff Cooper recognised the threat Germany posed from as early as 1933. 'The whole of that country is preparing for war on a scale and with an enthusiasm that are astounding and terrible' he explained to his sister-in-law following a short holiday there in 1933. He was labelled a war-monger

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[9] These votes were on 2 May 1938 concerning the Anglo-Italian agreement; and the 2 Nov. 1938 vote approving the introduction of the Anglo-Italian treaty.

[10] Absent from the two Munich votes 6 Oct. 1938; 2 Nov. 1938 vote approving the introduction of the Anglo-Italian treaty; and the 17 Dec. 1938 vote of confidence in the government's foreign policy.

[11] Crookshank Mss: diary, 1938 *passim*, MS.Eng.hist.d.593; Chamberlain Mss: Neville to Ida Chamberlain, 9 Oct. 1938, NC18/1/1071.

by some sections of the British press for urging British rearmament.[12] Cooper remained within the government pushing unsuccessfully for a continental role for the army whilst Secretary of State for War. He supported Chamberlain's diplomatic initiatives until the terms of the Munich agreement proved unpalatable and he resigned.[13] Cooper's distrust of Germany remained with him throughout the 1930s and he secured himself something of a reputation amongst the London social set for his anti-Germanic outbursts.[14] The reality was that attitudes amongst sceptics were both complicated and diverse and that merely to assume the similarity of response would be a mistake. The sceptics revealed an ability to identify the German 'problem' but equally demonstrated an inability to offer a unified response: should one offer parliamentary resistance, advocate rearmament or propose alternative foreign policies?

The polemical Left Book Club study, *Tory MP* published in 1939, implied that within the parliamentary Conservative Party during the 1930s there existed two opposed groupings of approximately equal strength which either supported or disapproved of fascism in its European context.[15] The opponents were the so-called 'anti-appeasers', who in reality were as a political force scattered, disorganised and small in numbers. In *Tory MP* the sympathisers were identified on the assumption that support for appeasement denoted support for Hitler (a categorisation justified through the exercise of selective quotation). Just as with the foreign policy sceptics, the inference that these 'sympathisers' were either numerous or influential was an erroneous assumption. In fact, 'sympathisers' for the purposes of this thesis needs defining. Some would assume that it included the right-wing die-hards of the Party such as John Gretton, Henry Page Croft or Patrick Donner, but this would be too imprecise

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12 John Charmley, *Duff Cooper: The Authorised Biography*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1986), p. 75 citing Cooper's letter to 'Kakoo' Rutland 11 Sept. 1933 and a speech to St George's Junior Imperial League Oct. 1933.

13 See Bond, *British Military Policy*, chp. 8; In contrast to his anti-Germanism, Cooper was a Francophile who deliberately suppressed anti-French references in his 1936 biography of Haig for fear they might damage Anglo-French relations and who regarded Mussolini, whom he met in 1934, as 'nicer than I expected - simpler, more humorous and completely lacking in pose. We talked chiefly about disarmament and were quite in agreement.' Cited Charmley, *Duff Cooper*, pp. 73-4, 76.

14 *Channon Diaries*, 1 Aug., 8 Nov. 1936, pp. 73, 78; Cazalet Mss: journal, Jan. 1939.

15 Simon Haxey, *Tory MP*, (London: Gollancz, 1939).

a grouping.[16] The die-hards were a small inarticulate group of backbenchers from the Party's right. They had played a central role in the opposition to Indian reform throughout the 1920s and in the early 1930s and were renowned for their hostility to change and their inflexibility. However they were to be divided in their attitude and response to Germany: some followed the Churchillian calls for rearmament, the remainder expressed varying levels of sympathy for fascism and supported Chamberlain's methods.[17] Nor should 'sympathiser' be taken to imply purely a general sympathy for German grievances because this was - as will be shown below - a commonly held view of Conservatives of all creeds. Ultimately there were two sorts of sympathiser, each revealing a varying degree of exuberance for the Nazi regime: the 'enthusiast' and the 'fraterniser'.[18]

'Enthusiasts' were those Conservatives of an extreme right-wing persuasion who expressed an admiration for the Nazi system of government and who continued to believe in the necessity of Anglo-German friendship even as war appeared increasingly likely, and then favoured "peace" once hostilities had commenced. There were very few Conservatives who actually met this criteria, the dukes of Buccleuch and Westminster, Lord Brocket and Captain Ramsay, the MP for Peebles, and C.T. Culverwell, the Bristol West MP, being the most readily identifiable. Culverwell's pro-German sentiments emerged during the Munich debate when he denied German 'war guilt' for the 1914-18 conflict and suggested

> that the methods to which Germany has been compelled to resort, in order to obtain what I believe so far to be her just rights, have been forced upon her by the stupidity of the allies. There would have been no reason for a German resort to force for the attainment of any of the aims [...] had it not been for the fact that we never willingly granted her any concessions, and, in my opinion, if the concessions for which she asked had been given in time, it

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16 In May 1937 Donner was accused of making a pro-fascist speech concerning the Spanish Civil War. He responded to the attack in the House of Commons with the defence that he was 'so little a fascist that I am being attacked by fascists in my own constituency.' *HofC Debs*, vol. 323 cols. 1357-8, 6 May 1937.

17 See Ball, *Baldwin*, pp. 21-2 for further analysis of the die-hards; also W.D. Rubinstein, 'Henry Page-Croft and the National Party, 1917-22', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 9, 1 (1974), pp. 129-48.

18 Richard Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right: Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany*, (London: Constable, 1980), pp. 1-2, he calls his sympathisers, 'enthusiasts' suggesting that although there were varying degrees of enthusiasm, the common factor was the ability of these people to make positive statements of approval of Germany.

would have promoted good feeling between this country and that great empire.[19]

Following a visit to Germany and the Sudetenland in the aftermath of Munich, Culverwell wrote of his impressions of the Nazi regime in his local newspaper and admitted that there were many features that were 'commendable'. His article also displayed his anti-semitic streak. On the German persecution of the Jews he wrote: 'However greatly we deplore the harsh methods adopted to deal with this problem, we must admit that the problem exists. The Jews occupied a position in Germany incommensurate with their numbers.' Culverwell was displaying what has been labelled liberal or assimilationist anti-semitism: a philosophy which blamed the Jews' behaviour and inability to blend into society for the existence of prejudice.[20] Following Prague, Buccleuch lamented the 'anti-German bias' in London which he found 'depressing' believing it to be 'now so impossible for a few individuals to stand up successfully against the powerful influence of public men of the Churchill, Amery, Eden type, and so many of those who control the press.'[21] After the outbreak of war in 1939 Buccleuch was one of a small number of "defeatists", who urged the government to make terms at what ever cost with the Germans.[22] Archibald H. Maule Ramsay had been elected a Conservative MP in 1931, but was increasingly viewed as a wild eccentric on the extreme fringes of the Party. Having read the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in 1938 he became converted to the idea of a Jewish world conspiracy. In his memoirs published in 1952 Ramsay denied being a fascist declaring that he had merely wished to purge the Conservative Party of all Jewish influence.[23] The historian, Richard Thurlow, has labelled Ramsay as 'the most significant figure on the fascist fringe of British politics' along with Mosley, leader of the British Union of Fascists.[24] However Ramsay's influence amongst the Conservative Party's decision makers was limited, if not negligible. A series of anti-semitic speeches in early 1939 created a 'difficult situation' in Ramsay's Peebles constituency but one which the Scottish Unionist's secretary, Colonel Blair

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19 *HofC Debs*, vol. 339 col. 107, 3 Oct. 1938.

20 Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers*, p. 336 citing *Bristol Evening Post*, 7 Nov. 1938; For 'assimilationist' anti-semitism see Tony Kushner, 'Beyond the Pale? British reactions to Nazi anti-semitism, 1933-39', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 8, 1-2 (1989), pp. 143-60.

21 Butler Mss: Buccleuch to Butler, 24 Apr. 1939, RABG10f3, Trinity College, Cambridge.

22 This "defeatist" element within the Conservative Party is considered in greater detail in chapter five.

23 A.H.M. Ramsay, *The Nameless War*, (Chumleigh, Devon: Britons Publishing, 1952 - 5th edn. 1968), pp. 99, 105.

24 Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: A History, 1918-85*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 79.

believed to be 'part of a vigorous press campaign against the Member' which he 'hoped would blow over.'[25] Privately, Ramsay was involved in two anti-semitic and extreme right groups, the Nordic League, for which he was the convenor, and as leader of the Right Club. Both groups supposedly disbanded on the outbreak of war but the Right Club's leaders continued to meet secretly providing the authorities with the excuse in 1940 to intern many fascist sympathisers, including Ramsay, without trial under the 18B regulations.[26] Ramsay was also associated with 'The Link' an organisation which wished to avoid war between Britain and Germany by educating the British population about the 'true' nature of nazism and by correcting the 'false' impression cultivated by the press.[27] *The Times* published a letter on 12 October 1938 from 'The Link' which praised the Munich agreement and which was signed by Ramsay, John Smedley Crooke, the Member for Deritend, and Conservative Lords Londonderry and Mount-Temple.[28] These Conservatives on the extreme right were increasingly isolated after October 1938, and their impact upon the wider Party was negligible. Unlike on the continent, the vast majority of the British Conservative right was never 'frustrated' enough to need its own 'extremism'. The Party's leadership recognised, and the right appreciated, that policy moderation was required to secure a substantial part of the centre vote and sustain electability, especially in marginal seats.[29]

The second kind of 'sympathiser', the 'fraternisers' were a more broad and numerous grouping, encompassing many from the right and centre of the Party. As with the 'enthusiasts', they were capable of expressing positive statements of approval about the nature of nazism. A few of them, with a die-hard background, such as Sir Thomas Moore, the Member for Ayr Burghs, had associated themselves during the early 1930s with the emerging, and at that

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25 Scottish Conservative Archive (SCA), eastern div. council, exec. 15 Feb. 1939, Acc.10424/49, National Library of Scotland.

26 See Thurlow, *Fascism*, pp.78-84; A.J. Kushner, *Persistence of Prejudice*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), chp. 1; Griffiths, *Fellow-Travellers*, pp. 371-2 suggests that internment only removed the eccentrics and that the real sympathisers (mainly from the aristocracy) remained free for the duration of the war.

27 For analysis of 'The Link' see J.S. Wiggan, *'The Link'*, (St Andrews: MA dissertation, 1985).

28 *The Times*, 12 Oct. 1938. In fact Mount-Temple had been warned to avoid associating with the Link by the Anglo-German fellowship's secretary, Conwell-Evans: 'The "Link" is so indiscriminate, and its members without influence and standing.' Ashley Mss: T.P. Conwell-Evans to Mount-Temple, 18 Jan. 1938, BR81/9, Southampton University Library Archive.

29 Bruce Coleman, 'The Conservative Party and the frustration of the extreme right', in *The Failure of Political Extremism in Inter-War Britain*, ed. Andrew Thorpe, (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1989), pp. 49-66.

time "respectable", British Union of Fascists.[30] However, these links were soon severed after the violence of the 1934 Olympia meeting and the withdrawal of support by the Rothermere press empire. This flirting with fascism may have been due to a sense of frustration with the existing political situation in Britain. The National governments of the early 1930s, despite their huge Conservative majorities, appeared unable to deal with the problems in foreign policy, defence and the economy; problems which the fascist dictatorships seemed so readily to overcome. It encouraged some to question the effectiveness of British institutions and to ask whether they were sustainable. In turn, they expressed admiration for some of the features of fascism. Many of these 'fraternisers' visited Hitler's Germany as guests of the regime during this period. Conservative MPs and peers were frequently invited to Nuremberg to hear Hitler speak. For example, Lord Apsley, Sir Frank Sanderson, Sir Thomas Moore, Sir Arnold Wilson and Admiral Sir Murray Sueter were guests of Ribbentrop in September 1936, whilst 'Chips' Channon attended the Berlin Olympics of that same year as part of the Ribbentrop party.[31] One Nazi official observed that a greater number of British 'guests' then ever before attended the crucial September 1938 Nuremberg rally, including the Member for Stockport, Norman Hulbert. What distinguished these 'fraternisers' from the 'enthusiasts' was that in the aftermath of Munich they increasingly recognised Hitler's hegemonic ambitions and the brutality of which his regime was capable. By the time Hitler annexed Prague in March 1939 the vast majority of 'fraternisers' had realised that Hitler posed a serious threat to British interests which required his being challenged, and some were to be called upon to give their lives fighting nazism from September 1939.[32]

Many of these 'fraternisers' were associated with the Anglo-German fellowship. This was a non-political organisation with a principal purpose of promoting 'fellowship between the two peoples'. However its annual report for 1936-7 considered that even if apolitical in intention 'its fulfilment must inevitably have important consequences on policy.' Left-wing critics suggested the fellowship was a propaganda tool for Hitler with its members willing

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30 G.C. Webber, 'Patterns of membership for the British Union of Fascists', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 19, 4 (1984), pp. 575-606.

31 *Channon Diaries*, 4 Aug.-20 Sept. 1936, pp. 105-13;

32 One example was Arnold Wilson who despite his age of 58 secured an active service duty with the RAF as a rear-tail gunner only to be killed 31 May 1940 during the Dunkirk evacuation.

pawns in the hegemonic ambitions of the German leader. Indeed, questions were asked about the fellowship's role in the House of Commons. It was an accusation strenuously denied by members.[33] Assheton Pownall, the MP for East Lewisham, told parliament in April 1939 that the organisation existed 'only to promote good relations between us and Germany.'[34] Lord Mount-Temple, formerly a Conservative Whip and Transport Minister in the 1920s and president of the New Forest and Christchurch Conservative Association during the latter part of the 1930s, was chairman of the fellowship. He met Hitler in 1937 and had frequent contact with leading Nazi officials.[35] Throughout 1938 and 1939 Mount-Temple frequently entertained Nevile Henderson, the British ambassador to Berlin, at his Hampshire estate, Broadlands. This illustrates the extent to which the fellowship had access to the foreign policy decision-making elites. At the end of February 1938, Mount-Temple wrote to *The Times* concerning the 'rise of German nationhood'. Having read the letter Henderson wrote to Mount-Temple expressing agreement: 'it may not be pleasant for ourselves or others but *nothing* is going to prevent the unity of Germany during this century or the oneness of the *Deutsches Volk.*'[36] Other Conservatives who sat on the fellowship's council were Norman Hulbert, Thomas Moore, Sir Assheton Pownall, and Lords Arnold, Eltisley and Hollenden. In total, out of a membership of nine hundred, 22 were Conservative MPs, in addition to a further eleven Conservative and eleven cross-bench peers.[37] To left-wing critics, such as Simon Haxey, the importance of the fellowship lay not in its existence (for its activities were rather limited in scope) but in revealing 'the section of British society which

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[33] *HofC Debs*, vol. 346 col. 356 (Mander), 19 Apr. 1939 col. 502 (Adams), 20 Apr. 1939, col.s 787-8 (Adams), 24 Apr. 1939

[34] *HofC Debs*, vol. 346 col. 357, 19 Apr. 1939.

[35] Ashley Mss: Anglo-German Fellowship files, 1935-38, BR81/1, BR81/9.

[36] Ashley Mss: Neville Henderson to Mount-Temple, 1937-37. Letter cited 9 Mar. 1938, BR76/2; *The Times*, 26 Feb. 1938.

[37] The Conservative Members of the Fellowship, 1936-7: J. Sandeman Allen (West Birkenhead), Peter Agnew (Camborne), W.W. Astor (East Fulham), Robert Bird (West Wolverhampton), Robert Bower (Cleveland), Robert Gower (Gillingham), Loel Guiness (Bath), H.C. Haslam (Horncastle), Norman Hulbert (Stockport), A.W.H. James (Wellingborough), Alfred Knox (Wycombe), G.K.M. Mason (North Croydon), Thomas Moore (Ayr Burghs), Assheton Pownall (East Lewisham), Ralph Rayner (Totnes), Alexander Russell (Tynemouth), Stuart Russell (Darwen), Frank Sanderson (Ealing), Louis Smith (Sheffield Hallam), J.J. Stourton (South Salford), Murray Sueter (Hertford), Edward Wickham (Taunton); the Conservative Peers: Lords Barnby, Decies, Eltisley, McGowan, Mount Temple, Earls Galloway, Glasgow, Harrowby, Malmesbury, Marquess of Londonderry, Viscounts Massereene and Ferrard.

desires to befriend the Nazis and for whom the fellowship provides a suitable meeting place.'[38]

Outside these more obvious and controversial coteries there does appear, amongst the remainder of Conservative centre-right and left, to have been a general degree of Germanophile sentiment. The origins of this pro-Germanism are complex and mixed. To the authoritarian centre-right nazism was seen as a bulwark against communism, and whilst it was not a democratic creed they were prepared to tolerate it so long as it did not threaten British interests. This sympathy for Germany contrasted with a general distrust of the French which emerged in the aftermath of Versailles. Other elements associated with this philo-Germanism were the descendants of the various liberal groupings that had between 1916 and 1931 joined (and since remained with) the Conservative Party and those who drew religious inspiration from Christian science such as Lord Lothian, Nancy Astor and Victor Cazalet. It was argued that Germany had been unduly mistreated at Versailles and felt that the judicious removal of these injustices would pacify the feared Nazi foreign policy. Consequently these different groupings were favourably disposed to Chamberlain's foreign policy and to reaching some form of compromise with the dictators. From within the cabinet, Kingsley Wood was seen to be championing this attitude which to one junior minister appeared to suggest a 'wish to be friends with the dictators at all costs.'[39] Only as Hitler began to challenge the European balance of power - first with the *Anschluss* and then the Czech crisis - was the residuum prepared to contemplate alternative diplomatic measures. This meant increased rearmament coupled with continued but more resistive diplomacy. Only after Prague were European commitments contemplated and then with reservations.

Many Conservatives were unwilling until Prague to consider a commitment to the continent. This isolationist attitude was a common trait amongst those from the right and centre of the Party. The isolationists believed that Britain's vital interests lay in the consolidation and protection of British assets, which in practice was the motherland and the empire. To their minds eastern Europe was not a British sphere of influence and most certainly not worth sacrificing British soldiers for. Hitler was therefore welcome to expand eastward. When

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38 Haxey, *Tory MP*, p. 209.

39 Butler Mss: R.A. Butler to Lord Brabourne, 1 Jan. 1938, RABG8 29.

it appeared possible that Chamberlain might guarantee Czechoslovakia following the German seizure of Austria, the isolationists were actively ensuring that their objections were canvassed behind the scenes. Michael Beaumont, MP for Aylesbury, pleaded with Rab Butler, who had recently been appointed Under-Secretary to the Foreign Office, 'to stop the country being stampeded by hysteria' into any foreign commitments.[40] Such views were mirrored at constituency level. In January 1937 Aldershot Association carried a resolution which urged the government 'to press for the drastic revision of the League [of Nations] covenant, so as to render possible an immediate reduction in this country's foreign commitment.' Likewise, Tynemouth Association executive supported the Prime Minister 'in his policy of refusing to enter into further commitments abroad' at the end of March 1938.[41] Maurice Petherick, the Member for Penryn and Falmouth, explained the rationale behind isolationism to his Association at their AGM in December 1938. He suggested that the Munich crisis

> had taught us a valuable lesson. It was a thing which he had been trying to persuade the electorate to realise for the last few years, and that was we really could not afford to go on meddling in affairs in central Europe. History would show that for the last 2,000 years there had hardly been ten consecutive years when the frontiers of some part of Europe had not been changed by force. If we were going to be constantly willing to fight on an issue with which our people had no direct concern, we would have war every twenty years.

Petherick continued by explaining that his definition of 'direct concern' was the defence of Britain and the empire plus the 'strategical lines' of France's eastern frontier, Egypt and Portugal.[42] The isolationist cause was assisted by the Beaverbrook press (*Daily Express*, *Sunday Express* and *Evening Standard*) which had a combined circulation of nearly four million evenly spread over all income groups. Reports on the European situation in these papers were minimal and the emphasis was upon splendid isolation from the world and defence of the empire. As a *Daily Express* editorial explained during the 1938 May week-end crisis, isolation 'means that Britain does not undertake to look after Abyssinia, Austria, China, or Czechoslovakia. And we are happy [...]

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[40] Butler Mss: Michael Beaumont to Butler, 16 Mar. 1938, RABG9 5-6.

[41] Aldershot CA, central council, 9 Jan. 1937, 114M84/2, Hampshire Record Office; Tynemouth CA, exec. 25 Mar. 1938, TWAS1633/2, Tyne & Wear Archives.

[42] Penryn and Falmouth CA, AGM 3 Dec. 1938, DDX551/10, Cornwall Record Office.

that the first three clients are already off our books, and the fourth may be off, too, at any time now.'[43]

An important element of the isolationist philosophy was the emphasis upon the empire. For Conservatives the empire's significance lay in it being an index of Britain's strength and prestige. The theme of empire drew together elements from all aspects of the Party: die-hards, such as Henry Page Croft and Lord Lloyd, who saw the empire as essential for the preservation of social order and the prestige of the nation and who had fought the 1935 India act; advocates of imperial preference, such as Leo Amery, who saw the value of the empire as an economic unit; and those from the left who saw imperialism as a means of educating and civilising native populations, such as Vyvyan Adams. Some, such as Amery and Lloyd, were by the end of 1938 associated with foreign policy scepticism, but the remainder were supportive of Chamberlain's efforts at appeasement. There was, however, one important exception: the area of colonial restitution. Although colonial appeasement had been debated by the government since 1936, the issue would assume especial importance for backbench and rank-and-file Conservatives during 1938. Imperialists feared that the surrender of British mandates would signal the weakness of the empire, threaten it strategically and hasten its demise. For the foreign policy sceptics the desire from October 1938 was to avoid any further concessions to the Nazi regime. It is a topic that will be considered in greater detail in the second chapter. Once again it is apparent that generalisations can be too crude. The German problem was capable of eliciting diverse attitudes from Conservatives of supposedly similar pedigrees.

This diversity of support and mercurial nature of categories was apparent amongst those who supported appeasement. One underlying argument of this work is that Conservative support for Chamberlain's foreign policy was less universal than has been previously assumed. However appeasement was as much an attitude as a specific policy of the 1937-39 Chamberlain peacetime government. The 'pro-appeasement' faction in the Party constituted the largest grouping. It was also the least defined group and one subject to fluidity. 'Pro-appeasers' were those Conservatives whose mentality accepted the need to negotiate with and conciliate the European dictators for the purposes of

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[43] Cited Gannon, *The British Press*, pp. 36-7; For circulation figures of papers see Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p. 25, and for the social class and readership of newspapers, Ball, *Baldwin*, pp. 224-5.

maintaining peace. For these Conservatives appeasement was synonymous with realism. In 1937 this would have constituted the vast majority of the Party (although in response it would have excluded a few of the imperialist element if a general settlement was to have involved the return of former German colonies, and a limited number on the left who were doubtful of the possibility of securing a lasting settlement). Eden, although he was to be later perceived as one of the fore-most critics of appeasement, was a member of the government until February 1938 and was at one with Chamberlain over the means by which to secure agreement with Germany. His resignation was concerned with approaches to Italy. Not until the Munich agreement was Eden to become critical of appeasing Germany. Likewise, Munich was the impetus for drawing Leo Amery into the sceptics camp. Ordinary Conservatives, such as Cuthbert Headlam and Victor Cazalet were 'pro-appeasers'. However, as will be shown, they in common with many others began privately to have doubts about the wisdom of such a policy. Nevertheless they were prepared to support publicly such a stance until the government itself abandoned appeasement following Prague. It would appear that the line between appeaser and sceptic was a thin one. R.A. Butler, Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office from February 1938, and his PPS, 'Chips' Channon were the most extreme of the 'pro-appeasers'. Even after Prague, Butler set out to oppose his superior, Lord Halifax, by encouraging Chamberlain to continue the conciliatory approaches to the dictators. He proposed re-opening negotiations with Hitler about trade, raw materials, colonies and a new naval agreement; pressing Poland to make concessions to Germany; and ceasing attempts to negotiate an alliance with the Soviet Union. Throughout these last months, Butler himself was encouraged in his efforts through his contacts with the likes of the duke of Buccleuch and other 'enthusiasts'.[44] From 1938 the sceptics increasingly emphasised the need to rescue the League of Nations and when it was apparent that this had failed, they moved towards demanding 'collective' resistance to fascism, (whereas, the residuum of the Party asserted the ability of other methods of securing peace). Both had the same aims, namely peace and international stability, but the means of securing this intent were disputed. In other words, the pro-appeasement sentiment was acceptable to virtually all Conservatives at one time or another, only the responses would differ. Only by Prague was the overwhelming majority of Conservatives willing to concede

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[44] For Butler's role in appeasement see Paul Stafford, 'Political autobiography and the art of plausible: R.A. Butler at the Foreign Office, 1938-39', *Historical Journal*, 28, 4 (1985), pp. 901-22; *The Times*, 28 Aug. 1989, 'Rab's part in appeasement', Paul Stafford.

that the appeasement attitude was no longer legitimate in the face of blatant aggression. The considerable inconsistency and variance in actual Conservative attitudes towards Germany in particular and to foreign and defence policy in general will become apparent as this thesis develops. Yet from the start it must be made clear that to consider the Party from purely the perspective of appeasers and anti-appeasers is too crude and ultimately, a limiting exercise.

II

Now that the diversity of attitude categories within the Party has been highlighted, it is necessary to ascertain the means by which Conservatives formed their assessments of Germany. Although many of these influences are difficult to quantify it has nevertheless been possible to identify a number of potential factors. In source these influences came from one of two levels, primary or secondary. Primary influences were those experienced first-hand by participants, whilst the secondary were those attitudes and responses gleaned from what was read and heard.

If contemporaries wished to form an assessment of a particular country then one way of achieving this was to visit the nation in question, and therefore secure first-hand experience. In the 1930s holidays to Germany were popular. The package holiday to Lanzarote or the Costa del Sol was still a phenomenon of the future. It was a feature of the period, rather reminiscent of the eighteenth and nineteenth century 'grand tours', for Conservatives to travel to several European nations over a period of weeks, and Germany was a fashionable destination. For example, during the summer of 1933 Duff Cooper and his wife motored through Germany *en route* for Austria, whilst 'Chips' and Honor Channon toured Germany, Austria and Yugoslavia during August and September 1936.[45] In another example the Scottish Junior Unionist League had planned a two week trip to Germany for mid-1938. Ultimately, the trip was abandoned 'in view of the recent changes in the political situation' that arose because of the *Anschluss*.[46] These visits by Conservatives to Germany were undoubtedly important in shaping many of their future responses to the threat posed by Hitler. At the same time impressions created by the Nazi regime from such visits were mixed. A constituent of Eden's wrote following a

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[45] Alfred Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, (London: Hart Davis, 1953), pp. 180-82; *Channon Diaries*, 4 Aug.-20 Sept. 1936, pp. 105-13.

[46] SCA, Scottish Junior Unionist League, central council, 20 Nov. 1937, 26 Mar. 1938, Acc. 10424/91.

business visit there in early 1937 that 'they are a queer lot over there, they look at things from an entirely different viewpoint to ours and they appear to see no difficulty in holding opinions which on the face of them are mutually contradictory.'[47] An executive member of Chippenham Association paid a visit in July 1937 and returned impressed at the 'vigour and efficiency' of the Nazi state but had 'little doubt' that the European dictators were contemptuous of British policy because of her military weakness.[48] Cuthbert Headlam visited Germany in September 1937. He departed expecting to hear a lot and possibly 'get some new ideas about the German point of view, and where the world is going' and returned believing 'more clear[ly]' that trouble was brewing. Although such visits reinforced to tourists the threat posed by Germany, they did not necessarily discourage them from supporting Chamberlain's policy of negotiation and concession.[49] Headlam, at least until after the Munich crisis, believed 'that the only policy now is for us to try and get on friendly terms with the Nazi government: express our willingness to discuss the whole economic position with them directly - and then, if it is possible to let them have some territory, to make certain that we get a good return for what we give' whilst pushing on with rearmament if all else failed.[50] This was equally demonstrated by Victor Cazalet who visited Germany in April 1936 with sister Thelma, Irene Ward, and Hamilton Kerr who were MPs for Chippenham, Islington, Wallsend-on-Tyne, and Oldham respectively.[51] The Cazalet party returned gloomy at the prospect of Hitler's determination to re-unite the German-speaking people and at the corrupt and brutal nature of the regime. The 'trip did not alter our views, but merely endorsed those which we already had', Victor Cazalet wrote.[52] Nevertheless, he continued to keep faith in

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47 Avon Mss: Kenneth Chance to Eden, 5 Feb 1937, AP13/1/51T.

48 Altrincham Mss: Col. Fitzgerald to Edward Grigg, 25 Sept. 1938, MS\Film1005Reel#7, Bodleian Library.

49 For example: J.B.C. Grundy, *The Second Brush Up Your German*, (London: Dent and Sons, 1939). Grundy was head of Modern Languages, Shrewsbury School. The preface of this language grammar guide notes that in 1939 'holiday plans are altered, study-tours abandoned, as though the prospective visitors had intended to call personally upon the German government rather than see for themselves the men and the land of Germany. [...] In this, [...] Herr and Frau Meyer go [to Germany] by car, taking with them their son Werner. Herr Meyer is no Nazi, not even when he returns; but, as he comes across the new institutions of the Third Reich, he begins to realise that they are not all humbug. If others will follow in this the author will be more than content.'

50 Headlam Mss: diary, 5, 10, 12 Sept. 1937.

51 Irene Ward was fully aware of the ways in which the regime treated political opponents. In May 1934 she was in Berlin attempting to secure the release of a prominent female Nazi critic from a concentration camp. See Tree, *Memoirs*, p. 57.

52 James, *Cazalet*, pp. 182-3.

appeasement: 'personally I take the view that whatever you may feel and think about dictators - it is good to talk, always be willing to talk and listen and then by chance you may be able to influence them.'[53] This view would remain with Cazalet even after Munich, although from then onwards he, as with Headlam, felt increasingly pessimistic about the possibilities of avoiding war.[54] Cazalet and Headlam are good examples of 'ordinary' Conservatives. Public displays of rebellion over foreign policy were extremely rare, but in private they were expressing doubts which they ensured became known to the leadership. There might appear to be a contradiction of terms with Conservatives recognising the brutality of the Nazi dictatorship and yet finding no qualms about conciliating and negotiating with such a system. In fact, it stemmed from a sense of realism. Critics of appeasement have retrospectively argued that if Britain had stood more firmly against Hitler then dissident elements within Germany might have overthrown the regime. Some have even suggested that the British government ignored the pleas from these elements for assistance.[55] However, there was a firmly held belief amongst Conservatives that no matter how repellent the Nazi dictatorship may appear it was essentially a German system for governing Germans, chosen and accepted by the population. In other words, internal politics of foreign nations were none of Britain's business. It was a view accepted by contemporary Conservatives - both supporters and critics of appeasement.[56]

But what influenced peoples' perceptions of Germany, if they were unable to visit the country for themselves? This meant a reliance on secondary information. Undoubtedly, newspaper coverage had an impact, especially upon the backbencher and the local Association member who were not privy to civil servant briefings. Although such questions are extremely difficult to quantify, one can assume that those involved in the Conservative Party were from a middle to upper-class background, educated and therefore literate enough to read one of broadsheet papers, such as *The Times* or *The Daily*

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53 Cazalet Mss: journal, 4 Aug. 1937.

54 Cazalet Mss: journal, 22 Apr. 1938, 18, 20 Mar., 29 Apr.-1 May 1939; Headlam Mss: diary, 3, 18 Feb., 24 Mar., 15 May 1939, D/He/35.

55 Patricia Meehan, *The Unnecessary War: Whitehall and the German Resistance to Hitler*, (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1992), pp. 3-7.

56 Avon Mss: Cranborne to Eden, 29 Oct. 1938, AP14/1/721; Heneage Mss: Heneage to J.M. Lill, 12 Oct. 1938, HNC1/L, Lincolnshire Archives; Clitheroe CA, AGM 3 Mar. 1938, DDX800/1/3, Lancashire Record Office; *Birmingham Post*, 29 April 1938, Lennox-Boyd addressing Birmingham Conservative women; Lord Londonderry, *Ourselves and Germany*, (London: Robert Hale, 1938), pp. 168-9.

Telegraph. The popular Conservative press, the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*, had large circulations vastly in excess of the broadsheets, and appealed to the wider Conservative rank and file and electorate.[57] In the aftermath of Munich it was the reports in the Beaverbrook press that Chamberlain had discussed colonial restitution with Hitler that revived Conservative concern about a possible colonial settlement. The press's significance lay in its role as an opinion former. As one local Association executive member explained 'most of them got their ideas from newspapers'.[58] It was an evaluation supported by a Mass-Observation assessment in March 1940 which concluded that at the time of Munich the national press had been the most important opinion former.[59] The significance of the press as an attitude former was that although none of the major papers actually condoned Nazi Germany there was nevertheless a reluctance from editors to adopt a critical stance for fear of aggravating the international situation.[60]

One area that must have made an impact upon Conservative perceptions of Germany was its culture. Germany was the land of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Wagner. Their works were popular in Britain and emphasised that, with the exception of a few individuals like Elgar, Britain lacked its own cultural base. In the considered opinion of Chamberlain, Beethoven's quartets 'knocked spots out of all the rest.'[61] Since the mid-nineteenth century there had been an increased awareness of romantic German literature and authors such as Goethe, due to the influence of Coleridge, Carlyle and Arnold. German methods had been influential in the field of science and history methodology had also benefited from the 'German school of history' during the previous century. Such links emphasised the linking of the Anglo-Saxon races of Europe and stressed the common teutonic heritage. Whilst it is difficult to define the extent to which these cultural influences encouraged Germanophile sentiments they nevertheless must have at least

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57 Ball, *Baldwin*, pp. 210, 224-5. *The Times* was the newspaper predominately read by the upper strata of British society which would include not only MPs but also the leading figures in constituency associations.

58 Winchester CA, exec. 26 May 1937, 73M86W/5, Hampshire Record Office.

59 Richard Cockett, *Twilight of Truth: Chamberlain, Appeasement and the Manipulation of the Press*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), p. 122.

60 For historical analysis of the Press and appeasement see Gannon, *The British Press*. It includes an analysis of each daily paper during the various crises; Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*.

61 Parker, *Chamberlain*, p. 3.

suggested to Conservatives that Germany could be a civilised nation. It is perhaps significant that unlike during the First World War there was no attempt during the next war to purge the Henry Wood promenade concerts of their Germanic composers. The answer to this perhaps lay in the thesis expressed by Sir Kenneth Clark, director of the National Gallery, in 1941 that there was a difference between the Germany of the 1914-18 conflict and that ruled by Hitler: 'in the last war all the best elements of German culture and science were still in Germany and were supporting the German cause, whereas now they are outside Germany and supporting us.'[62]

The study of history appears to have been important too and not purely because Britain had fought Germany between 1914 and 1918.[63] Undoubtedly, Chamberlain's enjoyment of historical biographies must have had some impact upon his thinking, although the historian, R.A.C. Parker has concluded that he was 'sufficiently sensible not to stress the "lessons of history"'.[64] The one exception to this rule was to be with Harold Temperley's *The Foreign Policy of Canning* which had been published in 1925. Chamberlain read the book in September 1938 having been sent a copy by the author. The premise that 'you should never menace unless you are in a position to carry out your threat' was acceptable to Chamberlain and he used it to support his objections to giving Hitler an ultimatum during the Czech crisis.[65] Lord Maugham had also recently read the book and likewise argued most vigorously from this stance in the cabinet discussions over Czechoslovakia. Another book that appears to have been widely read amongst Conservatives was Professor Stephen Robert's *The House That Hitler Built* which argued that the existing Nazi Party organisation would not last and that ultimately the army would become the dominant force, which made war inevitable unless Germany was able to secure

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62 Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War Two*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1979), p. 156. For the anti-German culture movement of the 1914-18 war see Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*, (London: Bodley Head, 1990), pp.67-78; also for more on Anglo-Germanic cultural links see Mander, *Our German Cousins*, and Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980), pp. 109-23, 389-400.

63 Ramsden, *Balfour and Baldwin*, p. x, notes a survey of Conservative MPs carried out in 1976 on reading matter: few admitted to being influenced by the books they read, although those that did agreed that it was history and biography (rather than philosophy) that guided their thinking.

64 Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, p. 8.

65 Chamberlain Mss: Neville to Ida, 11 Sept. 1938, NC18/1/1068.

her goals by threats. The Prime Minister read it early in 1938 and was found to be 'much less optimistic of [the] prospects of agreement with Germany' and was even talking of trying to encircle her via an alliance with Soviet Russia. Eden had also read this anti-Nazi tract and believed it to be 'a realistic account' but which 'said no more than the Foreign Office had been saying for months.'[66] Chamberlain however overcame his initial doubts believing that to accept the author's conclusion meant he 'should despair, but I don't and won't'.[67] Cuthbert Headlam also read Roberts' book and finished wondering whether 'the Nazi regime must lead to war if it goes to its logical development'?[68] Duff Cooper and Winston Churchill were other examples of Conservatives who were moved by a sense of history. Duff Cooper came from a school of Conservatives that was deeply distrustful of Germany and who believed that history powerfully bore out their distrust. Headlam felt that Cooper's arguments were flawed because 'if one is not prepared to fight the Germans, one has to negotiate with them. Our only policy is to treat them as civilised beings but to see to it that we are strong enough to stand up to them if they don't play the game. They recognise force and nothing else.' This was despite conceding that history could reveal the German threat.[69] For Duff Cooper, himself a former diplomat, the system created at Versailles, and a strong France with allies in eastern Europe, were the essential barriers against the resurrection of German power. Cooper, as evidence of the 'German menace', drew upon the 1907 'Crowe memorandum', which had argued that Germany represented the latest in a line going back through Napoleon and Louis XIV to Philip II of challenges to the traditional British policy of maintaining the balance of power in Europe.[70]

It would appear that few Conservatives actually sought to read Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. It was first published in Britain in English in 1933, but in an edited form. In comparison to the 230000 word German original the English edition was a mere 80000 words. One of those who decided to read it towards the end of 1935 was the right-wing duchess of Atholl. Following the Rhineland re-occupation she was disquieted by the threat Germany posed and wrote to the

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66 *Harvey Diaries*, 31 Jan. 1938, pp. 80-1; Avon, *The Eden Memoirs: Facing the Dictators*, (London: Cassell, 1962), pp. 570-1.

67 Chamberlain Mss: Neville to Hilda, 30 Jan. 1938, NC18/1/1037.

68 Headlam Mss: diary, 11 Feb. 1938, D/He/34.

69 Headlam Mss: diary, 1 Oct. 1938, D/He/34.

70 Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, p. 230; He developed this theme during his resignation speech to the House of Commons in Oct. 1938, *HofC Debs*, vol. 339 cols. 29-40, 3 Oct. 1938.

Manchester Guardian warning that *Mein Kampf* clearly illustrated Hitler's hegemonic ambitions. However, she found that the abridged English translation expressed little of the provocative tone of the original. As a result, the duchess together with a group called the Friends of Europe, sought to remedy this by providing a translation of the omissions. By May 1936 she had reached the conclusion that Germany was 'the only serious danger to peace in Europe'.[71] Another Conservative who made the effort to wade through the work was Leo Amery in May 1934. His copy was in 'the original unexpurgated German' and he 'found it very interesting and stimulating. [Hitler's] intense sincerity and clear thinking on some points, as well as really careful study of propaganda methods, attracted me very much. On the other hand he is quite insane about Jews and Socialists, and indeed entirely incapable of realising that there can be any other policy but that of the fanatical assertion of one particular race.' As a result Amery concluded that he doubted if Hitler 'will really settle down to ordinary statesmanship for long. His success all round may be a great danger.'[72]

It appears that Conservatives did look back on recent German history in order to support their concerns at the perceived 'nature' of the German character. The president of Chelmsford Association shortly after Prague felt 'history was repeating itself' and roused his AGM audience with the prediction that 'if Germany made war Germany would again be defeated.'[73] This was not surprising considering in 1938 it was only twenty years since Britain had finished fighting a major war against her, a war moreover which Germany was widely perceived as having started.[74] Certainly one does find examples of Conservatives, from both sceptic and enthusiast schools, citing comparisons and similarities between the Germany of Hitler and the Germany of Kaiser Wilhelm to justify their particular view on the contemporary situation. Headlam who during 1939 increasingly felt war to be inevitable compared

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[71] S. Hetherington, *Katharine Atholl: 1874-1960: Against the Tide*, (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989), pp. 169-70; Ball, 'The politics of appeasement', p. 56.

[72] *Amery Diaries*, 14 May 1934, p. 380.

[73] Chelmsford CA, AGM 20 Mar. 1939, D/Z96/4, Essex Record Office.

[74] Ruggles-Brise Mss: *East Anglian Daily Times*, 27 Jan. 1939 - Ruggles-Brise 'Germany was the disturber of the peace with her armed might in 1914, and today she was even more so.' Not all Conservatives accepted Germany's 'war guilt'. C.T. Culverwell during the Munich debate expressed his lack of belief in German 'war guilt' *HofC Debs*, vol. 339 cols. 106-7, 3 Oct. 1938.

what he believed were the strengths and weaknesses of the Nazi state as opposed to the Wilhelmine Empire. He considered

> that Germany is not nearly so strong and united as she was in 1914, and that the Nazi domination is not so great as was that of the emperor. But of course the Nazi regime is a great tyranny - and the Nazi creed is a more powerful influence over the young in this age of mass psychology than was that of the old regime. So long as Hitler avoids war he has his country behind him - if he decides on war, it will follow him - but unless he can bring off a successful lightning war, he will be up against it, and his regime will not last.[75]

In contrast Thomas Moore, the 'fraterniser', declared in March 1937 that he did not consider Germany capable of war until Britain had finished rearming herself:

> In 1914, Germany was at the peak of her power, at the peak of her grandeur. She had, I suppose, the greatest and most efficient army in the world; she certainly had the second greatest and most efficient navy; she had a close alliance with the great and powerful Austro-Hungarian Empire; she had a prosperous colonial empire; she was rich; she had immense reserves of men and materials; and yet, with all these immense assets, all these tremendous advantages, she lost the war. Today Germany is undoubtedly strong, but only by comparison with her previous weakness. She has no aggressive alliances; she has an army and a navy which I must say [...] are still largely on paper; she has an air force, I admit, but she has not the pilots, at any rate to anything like the extent which was feared in this House, and about which the right Hon. [Winston Churchill] has so frequently alarmed us. She has a moderate navy, as navies go; and she is practically bankrupt. Therefore it seems to me that she has nothing except her honoured, trusted and admired leader and a spirit that is still unconquered.[76]

South Oxfordshire Association during the summer of 1938 discussed a resolution concerning the return of Germany's former colonies. The debate that followed, and especially the arguments constructed by the proposer and seconder, reveal accepted stereotyping of the German character. The proposer was dismissive of the suggestion of returning the mandated territories believing that they were compensation for Britain since Germany had 'held a pistol at the allies stomach for four years' during the First World War. The seconder drew

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[75] Headlam Mss: diary, 16 Apr. 1939, D/He/35.

[76] *HofC Debs*, vol. 321 col. 634, 4 Mar. 1937.

upon his personal experiences out in east and west German Africa before the 1914 war to validate his argument that the time was 'not ripe' for a return of mandates. Using typical liberal arguments that British colonialism was in the best interests of native populations since it both civilised, educated and protected them, he suggested that in the past Germany had treated its native populations with extreme brutality and posed the question of if it had been that bad then what would happen if the Nazis ruled these people?[77]

Conservative images of nazism were most certainly tarnished by its association with brutality and violence towards its political opponents and subject minorities. The majority were slow to recognise this brutality because until 1938 it rarely made an impact on areas of direct concern to them. This was unlike the labour movement in Britain whose internationalist outlook and contacts with sister movements in Germany made it extremely conscious of the need for self-preservation from the very beginning of Hitler's rule. As Ernest Bevin, leader of the Transport and General Workers Union, told the 1936 Labour conference, 'which is the first institution victorious fascism wipes out? It is the trade union movement.'[78] Indeed, certain elements in the Conservative Party were more than willing to ignore repression of the union movement and to perceive fascism as a bulwark against the left, and particularly the 'bolshevik menace'. However, from 1938 it was hard for Conservatives to ignore the Nazi regime's potential for oppression and inhumanity. This revealed itself following the *Anschluss*. Although the principle of German and Austrian union was not objectionable to the majority of Conservatives, the repression and brutality that the media soon began reporting touched the consciences of those from all wings of the Party.[79] The die-hard, Henry Page-Croft, felt it necessary to 'deplore the brutality of method which was employed by Germany', whilst Cuthbert Headlam thought the Nazis in Austria were treating the Jews just 'as little bullies treat the smaller boys at private school.'[80] German treatment of their Jewish populations certainly pricked the moral consciences of many Conservatives and played an important role in their decreasing receptivity to

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[77] South Oxfordshire CA, AGM 18 June 1938, S.Oxon.Con.I/3, Oxfordshire Archives Centre.

[78] *Labour Party Conference Report*, 1936, p. 203.

[79] For a summary of what each of the main newspapers reported about the *Anschluss* see Gannon, *British Press*, pp. 149-65. Not all Conservatives felt able to immediately accept the reports of German brutality. The 'fraterniser', Lambert Ward questioned the authenticity of such reports in Parliament. *HofC Debs*, vol. 333 cols. 133-6, 14 Mar. 1938.

[80] *HofC Debs*, vol. 333 col. 73, 14 Mar. 1938; Headlam Mss: diary, 24 Mar. 1938, D/He/34.

Chamberlain's efforts to appease Hitler after Munich. One joke circulating around parliament after *Kristallnacht* concerned a Mrs Thompson with her newly born baby twins meeting a friend:

Friend: 'What names are you giving your twins?
Mrs Thompson: 'Hitler and Mussolini.'
Friend: 'But that is surely not patriotic, Mrs Thompson.'
Mrs Thompson: 'Not unless you can suggest any better names for a couple of bastards!'[81]

Social anti-semitism was not an uncommon taint amongst Conservatives.[82] In 1937 for the Cheltenham by-election the local Association refused to adopt as candidate the mayor of Cheltenham, Daniel Lipson, because he was Jewish. As a result, Lipson ran as an Independent Conservative against the official Conservative and narrowly won.[83] Certainly, Hore-Belisha, the Minister for War, as a Jew was the butt of many anti-semitic jokes. Ultimately it would cost him a place in the cabinet in January 1940 when Halifax warned Chamberlain against moving him to the Ministry of Information because having a Jew there would provide Germany with a propaganda coup.[84] 'Chips' Channon, the Member for Southend, was a well-known social anti-semite. It was Channon's considered opinion when Chamberlain first flew to Germany in September 1938 that 'some Jews' and the 'more shady pressmen who hang about Geneva' would be 'furious' that war and revenge on Germany was being avoided. Following *Kristallnacht* he admitted in his diary that 'no-one ever accused me of being anti-German, but really I can no longer cope with the present regime which seems to have lost all sense and reason. Are they mad? The Jewish persecutions carried to such a fiendish degree are short-sighted, cruel and unnecessary'. This was a revealing entry for it suggested that Channon considered some forms of anti-semitism were acceptable, others dangerous and unjustified. The Nazi methods of murder, assault and expulsion

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81 Adapted from the Makins Mss: diary, 28 Nov. 1938.

82 At the extreme though two Conservative MPs from London, Edward Doran (Tottenham North) and Arthur Bateman (North Camberwell) had repeatedly attacked Jewish refugees and made anti-semitic comments during the early 1930s. Both lost their seats at the 1935 general election, and were prevented from being re-selected on the instructions of Central Office. They nevertheless represented an extreme minority view, that few were prepared to publicly articulate. Cited Griffiths, *Fellow-Travellers*, p. 81 and Andrew Roberts, 'King-size prejudice', *Jewish Chronicle*, 22 July 1994.

83 Geoffrey Alderman, *The Jewish Community in British Politics*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 120.

84 Belisha's fall from power is considered in greater detail in the final chapter.

could not be condoned, nor could its need be understood.[85] Neville Chamberlain, although 'horrified' at *Kristallnacht*, confessed to his sister in July 1939 of the Jews: 'I don't care about them myself.'[86] David Lindsay, the earl of Crawford, felt 'ill' at the news of the November pogrom, but nevertheless six months later remarked that 'prizefighting, dog racing, ordinary horse betting, football and the disgraceful pools - in all these directions the Jew betting man is supreme. Other amusements and occupations are rapidly falling into their clutches and the *Protocols* [*of the Elders of Zion*] whether Jewish in origin or not, at least provide a definite programme for Jewry today. Why don't the respectable Jews assert themselves?'[87] Like Channon and Chamberlain, Crawford displayed evidence of social anti-semitism, but also an inability to rationalise Nazi anti-semitic behaviour. Cuthbert Headlam perhaps represents a "typical" Conservative reaction to the German Jews and their plight. Whilst he felt that events surrounding *Kristallnacht* were 'too appalling' to be going on in the twentieth century he retained a wariness of Jews. In fact the following day a certain professor Rosinski came to visit him. Headlam found himself wondering about the man's credibility admitting that one 'always rather distrusts German Jews who are expelled from Germany - one ought not to, especially today, but one has an instinctive suspicion of them.' A few months later, whilst travelling to Portugal by sea, the ship's doctor recounted his belief that the current international crisis was all part of a Jewish world conspiracy. Headlam found himself admitting that 'perhaps there is something in it - undoubtedly the Jews have far too much influence politically and in the press - both in England and in the USA.' It was only after Headlam met a pair of German Jewish refugees, one of whom had formerly been a judge, that he recognised the cruelty and injustice of the Nazi system: 'the more one hears about the Nazis, the more one loathes them. They are utterly foul and their creed is the Devil's own.'[88] Not all Conservatives took so much convincing of the plight of the Jews. Arnold Wilson, the Member for Hitchin, despite being a 'fraterniser', told parliament in 1935 that he viewed the 'recent recrudescence of persecution of Jews and particularly the latest speech of Dr Goebbels with disgust and resentment.' The following year, Wilson gave his approval to

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[85] *Channon Diaries*, 15 Sept., 15, 21 Nov. 1938, pp. 166, 177-8.

[86] Chamberlain Mss: Neville to Ida, 13 Nov. 1938, NC18/1/1076, Neville to Ida, 30 July 1939, NC18/1/1110.

[87] *Crawford Papers: The journals of David Lindsay*, ed. John Vincent, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 10 Nov. 1938, 21 June 1939, pp. 591, 596.

[88] Headlam Mss: diaries 13, 14 Nov. 1938, 29 Apr., 30 July 1939, D/He/34-5.

German Jewish immigration although he warned the government not to ignore the grievances of residents of the reception areas.[89] Victor Cazalet was an active campaigner for refugees and for the Zionist cause in Palestine. Cazalet wrote to *The Times* in May 1938 deploring the treatment of the Austrian Jews and urging the British government to offer assistance. In the aftermath of *Kristallnacht* Cazalet found that all his time was absorbed with the refugee issue.[90] Lord Mount-Temple resigned as president of the Anglo-German fellowship in protest at the November pogrom, although he retained his membership.[91] One friend of Mount-Temple's wrote suggesting that since he was such 'a sincere friend of Germany' his resignation 'should bring home to the leaders of the German nation the very deep feeling aroused in this country' by the Nazi Jewish persecution.[92] Ultimately, the anti-Jewish activities the Nazis instigated during 1938 and especially the *Kristallnacht* pogrom convinced many Conservatives of the brutality of the German system. The issue attracted discussion in many local Associations. The chairperson of Chelmsford Conservative women after debate on the matter concluded that 'it was generally felt that this country should take a definite lead in evolving a policy to help a persecuted people.'[93] Arthur Heneage explained in the Louth edition of *Home and Empire* that in foreign affairs during November 'the main preoccupation has been the treatment of the Jews in Germany, and how they can be helped to settle in various parts of the world.' This implicitly suggested that Heneage desired the re-location of German Jewish refugees in countries other than Britain. Nevertheless the column indicated that the Nazi persecution had stiffened attitudes against Germany and encouraged those Conservatives opposed to the returning of former German colonies.[94] The consequences of *Kristallnacht* were effectively understated by *The Times* when it explained 'that the Prime Minister's work for European appeasement is not being made any easier - to put it mildly - by present events in Germany.'[95] All the evidence from Conservative circles suggests that opinion was so incensed by the event that had Chamberlain been tempted to continue publicly his approaches to

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89 *HofC Debs*, vol. 304 cols. 953-57, 16 July 1935; vol. 314 col. 1629, 10 July 1936.

90 Cazalet Mss: journal, 25 Nov. 1938; *The Times*, 6 May 1938.

91 *The Times*, 19 Nov. 1938.

92 Ashley Mss: R.C. Reginald Mills to Mount-Temple, 21 Nov. 1938, BR81/9.

93 Chelmsford CA, women's council 22 Nov. 1938, D/Z96/13.

94 Heneage Mss: *Home and Empire*, 28 Nov. 1938.

95 *The Times*, 15 Nov. 1938.

Hitler then there would have been a universal outcry of protest, not only from the parliamentary backbenches but also from the Party at large, and this helps to explain why Chamberlain eased the entry restriction for refugees into Britain.[96]

Nevertheless, the Conservative Party's attitude towards Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany was complex and ambivalent. Local Associations had expressed concern since 1933 at the levels of refugee immigration, especially in the areas of reception. The Member for Finchley, J.E.F. Crowder urged stricter immigration controls in July 1937 during a parliamentary debate.[97] Churchill revealed his xenophobic tendency when he expressed concern in 1937 about the possibility of German and Italian aliens spying in Britain.[98] This was an argument that would be revived once war began in September 1939 by those favourable to the internment of 'enemy' aliens. Only ten days after *Kristallnacht* the National Union's labour sub-committee unanimously carried a resolution (which was subsequently endorsed by the executive) that viewed 'with grave concern the large number of aliens entering this country, and calls upon the government to exercise a closer scrutiny of their "permits" with a view to reducing the number.'[99] During December, the Home Secretary, Samuel Hoare received a deputation of Conservative back-benchers disquieted by the volume of Jewish refugees entering Britain. Included in the deputation were John Gretton, A.W.H. James, John Shaw, Ernest Makins, Adrian Moreing, and Maurice Petherick. Makins believed the group 'put our point of view and although we did not get much change, I expect it will do good.'[100] There was a belief that alien labour was depriving British people of jobs. This economic argument was applied not purely to menial unskilled work, but also professional careers. At the behest of the British Medical Association, during July 1938, a number of Conservative MPs received letters from local doctors

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96 Louise London, 'British immigration control procedures and Jewish refugees, 1933-1939', in *Second Chance*, ed. Mosse, pp. 485-517; Louise London, 'Jewish refugees, Anglo-Jewry and British government policy, 1937-1940', in *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry*, ed. Cesarani, pp. 163-90; London suggests that it was Chamberlain's personal intervention in the issue of alien entry restrictions in the aftermath of *Kristallnacht* that caused an easing of the restrictions.

97 *HofC Debs*, vol. 326 cols. 1986-7, 20 July 1937.

98 *HofC Debs*, vol. 326 col. 1836, 19 July 1937.

99 CP: National Union, exec 14 Dec. 1938, card 59; Conservative Party Archive (CPA), Essex & Middlesex labour advisory cttee., AGM, 5 Feb 1938, ARE8/1/1, Bodleian Library.

100 Makins Mss: diary, 20 Dec. 1938.

who felt that the Home Office had already shown 'great latitude' and allowed alien doctors into Britain 'for no valid professional reason' and every such one 'puts an Englishman out of a job.' Buchan-Hepburn, MP for Toxteth East, agreed that 'there must not be any question of great numbers of German doctors coming here and taking the bread out of the mouths of our medical practitioners', (he did, however, feel that it was beneficial that eminent refugees should be given the opportunity to work in Britain). By contrast, Vyvyan Adams, Leeds West's Member, and himself of Jewish origin, was less tolerant of anti-alienism. His information revealed that out of 50,000 practising doctors in Britain in June 1938 only 187 of these were 'of German Jewish extraction.' In no uncertain terms he informed his correspondents that he found their statements 'very disquieting. There is the extremely formidable problem of discrimination and persecution which is being carried out abroad for no reason at all except racial and religious apathy, and I should be reluctant to see our professions entirely barred to good material from abroad, which might enrich them.'[101] The alien question received renewed prominence towards the end of 1939 and early in 1940. In February 1940 Charles Ponsonby, the MP for Sevenoaks, wrote to Chamberlain on behalf of Wing Commander A.W.H. James (MP for Wellingborough) hoping that the refugees present in Britain would not be naturalised as it would 'result in the permanent increase of our already over-large Jewish population. Most of us feel that we would rather hand down to posterity a slowly denuding number of people of British stock than provide new material for increasing the stock of Jewish or Jew-British population', which was already 'a most unhealthy symptom in the body politic.'[102] The calls from local Conservatives for the internment of aliens was pronounced. Euan Wallace, promoted to the Ministry of Transport, was surprised to attend a meeting of Conservatives in his Hornsey constituency and find demands 'for much stricter control of aliens, some even suggesting that every alien should be interned regardless of their antecedents, occupation or place of residence.'[103] The Northern Counties Area April 1940 AGM also debated the topic at the instigation of Darlington Association women's branch.

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101 Adams Mss: H. Waite to Adams, July 1939, Dr C.G. Kay Sharp to Adams, 20 July 1938; Adams to Dr Waite, 15 July 1938, file 9, BLPES; Hailes Mss: Dr Knox-Thompson to Buchan-Hepburn, 25 July 1938; Buchan-Hepburn to Dr Knox-Thompson, 27 July 1938, HAIL1/2, Churchill College Archive.

102 Charles Ponsonby (on behalf of A.W.H. James) to Chamberlain 21 Feb. 1940, PRO H0213/444E409. I am grateful to Tony Kushner for pointing me to this reference.

103 Wallace Mss: diary, 3 Apr. 1940, Ms.Eng.hist.c.496, Bodleian Library.

A resolution which believed 'that the government should take further and stronger measures, especially in the north east coast, to supervise the movements and activities of aliens of whatever nationality they may claim to belong' was carried unanimously. The initial resolution had called for stronger measures nationally but this was altered to give it a regional emphasis.[104]

It was apparent therefore that there was no straight line between Conservative attitudes to Jews and their attitudes to Germany. Some favoured an anti-semitism of exclusion believing that Jews were not British. Others considered that the German Jews' inability to assimilate into society provoked the Nazi response. British 'anti-semitic' views enabled some Conservatives favourable to Anglo-German friendship to ignore the Nazis' Jewish persecution. As Lord Londonderry wrote in March 1938 'we must not overlook the German point of view [regarding the Jews]. We must remember that, when the National-Socialists came to power in Germany, the Jews had absorbed a very great number of positions, far in excess of the numbers which they bore to the total position.'[105] Equally, the Nazi methods of brutality were inconceivable to the British 'mind' and were considered irrational. Even those Conservatives anxious to secure German friendship found it difficult to excuse the methods. J.R.J. Macnamara, MP for Chelmsford, drew the conclusion from the German Jewish persecution that it had 'made it difficult for the friends of the Germans to argue for co-operation with their country. However, at least it should be a lesson to others not to allow themselves to be underdogs to a German.'[106] The reports and images of Nazi brutality were therefore important in encouraging Conservatives to question the sincerity of the German regime to secure peace.

III

So far the difficulties and complexities of identifying the types of Conservative attitude towards Germany that existed and the possible factors that influenced these perspectives have been assessed. With these in mind the pages below will explain how Conservatives perceived the nature and threat posed by

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104 Northern Area, AGM 6 Apr. 1940, NRO3303/1, Northumberland Record Office. Similarly Lord Wolmer was questioned by women of Aldershot Association who were concerned about alien women and who felt that although there were thousands of anti-Nazi foreigners in Britain there was a nevertheless a danger of spies. Selborne Mss: *Aldershot News*, 31 May 1940, MS.Eng.hist.c.1015, Bodleian Library; See also Ealing CA, exec. 27 May 1940, 1338/2, Greater London Record Office.

105 Londonderry, *Ourselves and Germany*, pp. 170-1.

106 J.R.J. Macnamara, *The Whistle Blows*, (London: Eyre & Spottiswode, 1938), p. 210.

Hitler's regime. If Conservatives were prone to varying degrees of Germanophile sentiments how was nazism portrayed? One of the Munich rebels, J.P.L. Thomas, during a speech in his constituency described the Nazi regime as one 'fighting Christianity, which exalts paganism, and which crushes with merciless persecution in concentration camps all those who resist.'[107] Derby Association heard in March 1939, shortly after Prague, how 'our beloved country is in dire peril at the hands of a man who has defined "force" as the only instrument worth while; peace, liberty, freedom of speech, thought and conscience - even God himself - need no longer be considered; love and charity, truth and honour, are meaningless. [...] that is the Nazi creed, and it is this we must fight to the death if need be.'[108] However, these descriptions of Nazi Germany were in the first instance presented by a Munich rebel trying to justify his stance and in the second being made at a time when Hitler had destroyed all pretence of being content with his position by his seizure of Prague. Typically these were minority images that few Conservatives were publicly prepared to acknowledge before March 1939. One foreign policy sceptic, Mark Patrick, complained that many of his colleagues were under the 'singular delusion that nazism is "Conservative".'[109] At least until the *Anschluss*, and probably up to the time of Munich, Conservative attitudes towards fascism were ambivalent. Certainly many of those on the Party's centre and right were able to think of the Nazi Party in favourable terms. As Edward Ruggles-Brise, the Member for Maldon, explained to a public meeting, 'Mussolini and Hitler had both sprung into power because of communism, and both were great men for their own countries and had rescued their countries from the scourge of communism'. At a future meeting Ruggles-Brise returned to this theme of Hitler being a bulwark against communism: 'the ideology of Russia was not acceptable. Fascism and toryism were the antidotes to Soviet proposals', but he agreed that fascism, totalitarianism and communism 'were as poisons to the democracies of Britain and France.'[110] Sir Kay Muir, a member of the Kinross Association executive, favoured Hitler and the fascists above Stalin and the communists because 'the former confine their activities to the particular country they happen to rule, while the declared policy of the

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[107] Cilcennin Mss: transcript of speech, n.d. (Oct./Nov. 1938), Cilc.coll.54.

[108] Derby CA, AGM, 23 Mar. 1939, Derbyshire Record Office.

[109] Avon Mss: Mark Patrick to Eden, 15 Mar. 1938, AP14/1/795.

[110] Ruggles-Brise Mss: *Hertfordshire and Essex Observer*, 5 Nov. 1938; *East Anglian Daily Times*, 27 Jan. 1939; Lord Halifax, *Fulness of Days*, (London: Collins, 1957), section on visit to Hitler p. 185.

communists is to undermine the ordered government of all countries.'[111] Equally, Nancy Astor told the Commons in 1937 that 'when we talk about rearming it is absurd only to talk about the menace of Germany. [...] Russia has an army far greater than Germany's, and she has an air force far greater than Germany's, and furthermore Russia has a policy of an international war. An international world war is what she wants.'[112] A British Institute of Public Opinion poll of January 1939 which asked the question 'if there were war between Germany and Russia, which side would you rather see win?' saw only ten per cent of the sample opt for Germany. This limited sympathy for Germany was 'most pronounced among government supporters, the rich and the elderly.'[113] Ever since the 1917 Russian revolution, British Conservatives had been fearful of the bolshevik menace. They had played upon the 'red threat' in 1924 with the forged Zinoviev letter which alleged that the Labour Party was receiving Soviet funding. It was believed that Joseph Ball, working for Conservative Central Office, had instigated the affair.[114] Likewise, in 1925 the Baldwin government tried along with the French to impose an oil embargo upon the USSR, whilst in 1927 diplomatic ties were severed following the Arcos raid.

If nazism was viewed positively by some elements of the Party because it was seen as a barrier against the spread of bolshevism, were such favourable assessments extended to the German leadership (especially Hitler) and did perceptions change over time? Headlam, who on his 1937 visit to Germany attended a Nuremberg rally, admitted to being 'rather terrified at their appearance - they looked *capables de tout* and no doubt are. Hitler himself is a bigger man than I thought, by which I mean he is of average size: otherwise, he is exactly like his pictures.' Later on the tour, Headlam was given a personal introduction to the Führer. Others in the party commented upon the somewhat frosty reception they received, but Headlam did not notice, only remembering 'that when he shook me by the hand he fixed me with a penetrating eye and that I gazed back at him with equal steadiness wondering why *he* had become a national hero'? The visitors also noticed the indoctrination of youth who were 'being brought up to believe in a new creed -

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[111] Atholl Mss: James Paton to duchess of Atholl, 9 June 1937, File 22/18, Blair Atholl Castle Archive.

[112] *HofC Debs*, vol. 321 col. 624, 4 Mar. 1937.

[113] *News Chronicle*, 9 Jan. 1939: 59% for Russia, 10% for Germany, and 31% of no opinion. Cited Gannon, *The British Press*, p. 28.

[114] Robert Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher*, (London: Fontana, 1985), p. 225.

a profound belief in national socialism and an implicit obedience for the Führer.'[115] Edward Halifax on his mission to *Berchtesgaden* in November 1937 when getting out of the car mistook Hitler for a footman. Just as he was to hand Hitler his coat and hat, Von Neurath whispered in his ear, *'Der Führer! Der Führer!'*. Following his meeting, Halifax recorded his impressions of Hitler, being able to 'see why he is a popular speaker. The play of emotion, sardonic humour, scorn, something almost wistful - is very rapid. But he struck me as very sincere'. When Halifax met Göring the following day his impressions were of an amenable aristocrat, who 'immensely entertained'. Despite wondering how many people Göring may have killed during the Night of the Long Knives in June 1934, when the SA was purged, Halifax considered his personality 'with that reserve [...] frankly attractive, like a great schoolboy [...] a composite personality - film star, great landowner interested in his estate, Prime Minister, party manager, head gamekeeper at Chatsworth.' Even when Halifax met Goebbels, the Reich's Propaganda Minister, he found that despite himself he rather liked the man and wondered whether 'it must be some moral defect in me'?[116] In fact, Foreign Office officials 'deplore[d] his saint-like qualities which prevent[ed] him from seeing evil in anyone.'[117] Halifax was not the only Conservative to be charmed by the Nazi leadership. Leo Amery had met Hitler in August 1935 and the German leader obviously made an impression:

> We talked [...] for over an hour and a half. I did not find the hypnotic charm I had heard of, and no attempt to exercise it, but liked his directness and eagerness to let his hearer know all his mind. Intellectually he has a grip on economic essentials and on many political ones, too, even if it is crude at times and coloured by deep personal prejudice. A bigger man, on the whole, than I had expected.[...] It will be interesting to see how he shapes in the next twenty years, if he lasts, and there is no particular reason why he shouldn't. [...] We got on well together I think, owing to the fundamental similarity of many of our ideas. But I admit we didn't discuss some

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115 Headlam Mss: diary, 7, 10, 11 Sept. 1937.

116 Roberts, *Holy Fox*, pp. 70-74; Halifax, *Fulness of Days*, pp. 184-5, 191. Although Halifax is quoting from his diary in the memoirs it is evident that they have been "improved" for publication (without altering the meaning) as there is variance between the originals cited in Roberts and the memoirs.

117 Cilcennin Mss: J.P.L. Thomas to anon, 12 Apr. 1938, Cilc.coll.40.

controversial subjects like Austria, constitutional liberty, Jews or colonies.[118]

This was an assessment that Amery would revise over the next three years. Twenty years later in his memoirs, Amery presented a very different picture of this meeting with Hitler:

> While I found him shrewder than I expected, he certainly did not strike me as of outstanding intellect, still less as possessing a peculiarly impressive or hypnotic personality. In spite of his efforts to be agreeable I found him unattractive and, above all, commonplace - my first impression was that both his appearance and manner were those of a shopwalker.[119]

Others were equally bewitched by the regime. 'Chips' Channon, who was elevated to the Foreign Office in February 1938 as PPS to Rab Butler following Eden's departure, was to his detractors a 'little man [who] is a well-known Nazi'.[120] Channon, who was in Berlin for the 1936 Olympics, found Hitler to be 'exactly like his caricature - brown uniform, Charlie Chaplin moustache, square, stocky figure, and a determined but not grim look. [...] I was more excited than when I met Mussolini in 1926 in Pergunia, and more stimulated, I am sorry to say, than when I was blessed by the Pope in 1920.' Of Göring, Channon wrote that, 'people say that he can be very hard and ruthless, as are all Nazis when occasion demands, but outwardly he seems all vanity and childish love of display.'[121] Harold Nicolson, National Labour MP for Leicester West, and a critic of nazism who 'hate[d] to see all that is worst in the German character being exploited at the expense of all that is best', considered that the Channons had

> fallen much under the champagne-like influence of Ribbentrop [...] and had not been in the least disconcerted by Göring or Goebbels. They think Ribbentrop a fine man, and that we should let gallant little Germany glut her fill of reds in the east and keep decadent France quiet while she does.

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118 *Amery Diaries*, 13 Aug. 1935, p. 397.

119 Amery, *My Political Life*, p. 130.

120 Cilcennin Mss: J.P.L. Thomas to anon, 12 Apr. 1938, Cilc.coll.40; a view supported by the duchess of Atholl, 'I have regarded Mr Channon for the last eighteen months as one of the strongest pro-Nazis in our Party in the House.' Atholl Mss: Duchess to A.C. Alston, 16 Feb. 1938, File 22/5.

121 *Channon Diaries*, 6, 13 Aug. 1936, pp. 106, 111.

> Otherwise we shall have not only reds in the west but bombs in London, Kelvedon and Southend.[122]

Certainly, at least until the *Anschluss*, there was a certain amount of pro-German sentiment amongst Conservatives who felt that Germany had been too harshly treated by Versailles. This sympathy would only be fully dispersed when Hitler seized Prague in March 1939. Conservative descriptions of the German leadership could range from scientific phrases like irrational to paternalistic expressions that likened them to naughty school children. Prague changed all that with the German leadership evidently becoming the "bad guys". It was the final proof that Hitler could no longer be trusted. He was 'nothing less than an international gangster with a vision of Napoleon and the mentality of the backstreets of Chicago.'[123] Cuthbert Headlam wondered at the oddity of a 'hysterical little ex-house painter' rising to such a position of power whereby the whole world seemed to be heeding his every beck and call. He recognised that Hitler's ambitions to dominate left 'no room for any other empire of world dimensions remaining in existence', a position which Britain could never tolerate which would mean 'in the long run no escape from war.'[124] Even 'Chips' Channon felt betrayed by Hitler's action and felt 'his callous desertion of the PM is stupefying. I can never forgive him.'[125] What the invasion of Prague proved was that Nazi ambitions were no longer purely confined to restoring the injustices of Versailles. The Rhineland had been Germany's own backyard, Austria was historically linked with Germany, whilst the Sudeten Germans had been denied self-determination, but the annexation of the Czech rump was unjustifiable. The Czechs were not ethnic Germans and the invasion could be explained as being nothing less than blatant aggression. Nevile Henderson, the British ambassador to Berlin between 1937 and 1939, effectively summed up the changed impressions of Hitler in a despatch to Halifax in June 1939:

> From beginning to end the world has made the fatal mistake of underestimating Hitler. At first he was either a mountebank or a kind of Charlie Chaplin, an Austrian house-painter or inferior sort of corporal and now he is a madman or paranoiac. While in fact he is one of those

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[122] *Nicolson Diaries*, 20 Sept. 1936, p. 273. It was said by Channon that Nicolson was such an implacable enemy of Nazism that he would not allow himself to set foot on Germany soil and would always travel around Germany's borders to get to eastern Europe.

[123] South Oxfordshire CA, AGM 10 June 1939 (Sir Gifford Fox), S.Oxon.Con.I/3.

[124] Headlam Mss: diary, 16 Apr., 15 May 1939, D/He/35.

[125] *Channon Diaries*, 15 Mar. 1939, p. 186.

> extraordinary individuals whom the world throws up from time to time, sometimes for its ultimate good but generally for its immediate misfortune.[126]

Nevertheless, until Prague many Conservatives considered that Hitler had revived the German nation. Lord Londonderry, who was a member of the Anglo-German fellowship, published *Ourselves and Germany* in 1938 in which he wrote that:

> Herr Hitler restored the [German] sense of national pride and self-respect. He carried out his programme in the face of the tremendous difficulties which had assailed his country - of being defeated, of suffering acute privation, of passing through various stages of political revolution, of having an army of occupation within the German frontiers for a decade and finally of being disappointed and refused a fair hearing in the councils of Europe.[127]

Another of the 'fraternisers' told the BBC in 1934 following a visit to Germany that as a result of Hitler the German people 'rejoice to feel and believe that they are again a united nation - able to look the world in the face.'[128] It was an appeal that the sceptic, Jack Macnamara, recognised because 'the Germans, above all people, consider it impossible to be self-respecting unless one can stand up for oneself'.[129] In April 1938, E.W. Salt, MP for Yardley, told the Birmingham Conservative Association central council that Hitler was 'an inspiring and masterful leader' who was 'determined to free his nation from the effects of the Versailles treaty.'[130]

The appreciation of the German leadership extended to general sympathy for their desire to revise Versailles. The Germanophile tendency of the Conservative Party had been highlighted during the Rhineland re-occupation in March 1936. One Liverpool Conservative observed 'everybody I meet just now seems to be pro-German or at any rate anti-French. The general view seems to be that France has been the stumbling block in the path of peace for the last fifteen years.' Another wrote suggesting that amongst his friends, businessmen and fellow constituents there was a feeling that Germany was 'largely justified'

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126 *DBFP*, 3, VI, Appendix 1(iv), p. 706.

127 Londonderry, *Ourselves and Germany*, pp. 16-7.

128 Wilson, *Walks and Talks* Abroad, (London: Longman, 1936), p. 96.

129 Macnamara, *The Whistle Blows*, p. 207.

130 Birmingham CA, central council, 29 Apr. 1938, AQ329.94249, Birmingham Central Library.

in her reoccupation and that 'this government's life would be a very short one if it in any way involved this country in hostilities against Germany on account of what has recently happened.'[131] This episode had already highlighted the extent to which Conservatives favoured some form of "peaceful" revision of Versailles, and it was an attitude that persisted. Consequently, there was widespread sympathy for Hitler's wish to re-unite the Germanic peoples. Sir William Brass, addressing his Clitheroe Association AGM at the beginning of March 1938, declared of the Nazis' desire to unite the German-speaking people of Europe that 'they should be allowed to do it', arguing that it was not an affair for Great Britain 'anymore than it might be the affair of Germany to say what we should do with our dominions or any British people in other parts of the world.'[132] Brass was reflecting a commonly held belief that self-determination had been denied the Germanic peoples at Versailles due to French intransigence despite this supposedly being a guiding principle of the treaty. This sympathy for Germany was equally matched by a dislike of the French. The 2nd earl of Selborne, himself favourable to revision, blamed the French for the resurrection of a belligerent Germany. He believed the French had had two options available to them when Hitler began revising Versailles. Firstly, 'to invade Germany and say "no you don't"', but this had not been possible because France was 'now really a very pacific nation' prepared to defend her own soil but 'not willing in cold blood to invade another country.' Secondly, to sit around the conference table and 'make a new treaty by agreement. Every British government wanted that; but the French *would not do it*.'[133] There was also a certain attitude amongst Conservatives on the right and imperial wing of the Party that eastern Europe was not part of Britain's strategical interests and they were therefore prepared to concede Germany a free-hand in the east so long as this did not affect British interests in the west European and imperial spheres. As Brass continued explaining to his Association, it was entirely up to the German and Italian peoples what form of government they adopted, 'it is only when that government tries to harm the British Empire that it becomes a different matter.'[134] That the 1925 Locarno agreement had not guaranteed Germany's eastern frontiers was not unintentional from the British perspective. Austen Chamberlain's comment 'that no British government ever will or even

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131 Hailes Mss: anon to Buchan-Hepburn, 25 Mar. 1936, Cameron Foster to H-B, 26 Mar. 1936, HAIL 1/2.

132 Clitheroe CA, AGM 3 Mar. 1938, DDX800/1/3.

133 Selborne Mss: 2nd Earl to Lord Wolmer, 28 Mar. 1938, MS.Eng.hist.d.443f.108-111.

134 Clitheroe CA, AGM 3 Mar. 1938, DDX800/1/3.

can risk the bones of a British Grenadier' for the Polish corridor still held considerable sway amongst portions of the Party in 1937-8. It was the rationale behind foreign policy until it was revoked in March 1939 with the Polish guarantee. The Conservative calls for revision were made at frequent intervals throughout the Anglo-German crisis. The young Somerset de Chair spoke in parliament in July 1937 of the need to revise Versailles.[135] Inskip's PPS, Ralph Glyn, expressed sentiments favourable to revision at the height of the Czech crisis in September 1938, although he accepted that such changes could not take place under the threat of German action.[136] Even after the German seizure of Prague in March 1939, one Conservative MP, Roy Wise, was publicly prepared to tell his Smethwick constituents of his 'sneaking admiration' for Germany and of the fact that he still favoured revision of Versailles - this despite the fact that to all intents and purposes Hitler had already revised the treaty.[137] Nor were the foreign policy sceptics as critical of German attempts at revision as their retrospective accounts might suggest, highlighting their inconsistency of approach. Harold Macmillan, who sat for Stockton, expressed the view to his constituents in March 1938 that the German breaches of Versailles thus far 'were not, in principle, of a kind to which real objection could be made.' Indeed, he felt 'there was a good deal of reason' behind the reoccupation of the Rhineland, German rearmament and the union with Austria. He did qualify this by adding that in Austria's case 'it was not the actual union which provoked resentment, but the brutality and persecution which would inevitably follow.'[138] However at the other end of the spectrum, sceptic MP Paul Emrys-Evans, himself a former diplomat, found it 'particularly irritating' that some junior ministers were 'liable to begin a lecture on the present position [in Austria] with a sentence such as this: "after all the Austrians you know, are Germans."'[139]

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135 *HofC Debs*, vol. 326 col. 1877, 19 July 1937; Even after the invasion of Prague de Chair told Parliament that he did 'not think Herr Hitler means to challenge the dominance of this country, and that is why I believe that the Anglo-German agreement, signed by Herr Hitler and the Prime Minister [at Munich], was perfectly true when it said that there is no fundamental cause of war between the two countries.' *HofC Debs*, vol. 345 col. 494, 15 Mar. 1939.

136 Glyn Mss: Glyn to Mother, 13 Sept. 1938, D/EGlC9/9, Berkshire Record Office.

137 *Preston Guardian*, 24 Mar. 1939.

138 Stockton CA, women's AGM 19 Mar. 1938, D/X322/11, Durham Record Office.

139 Avon Mss: Emrys-Evans to J.P.L. Thomas, 19 Mar. 1938, AP14/1/799.

Even though there was sympathy for some peaceful revision of the Versailles treaty in Germany's favour, it was another matter when it came to interpreting specifically which grievances she actually wished to be rectified. Not surprisingly in this area there was less than unanimity. Aware of the delicacy of relations between Britain and Germany, it was normal for parliamentary Conservative visitors to Germany to report their impression to the Foreign Office upon their return.[140] One theme that such visitors during 1937 and early 1938 always noticed was the issue of colonial restitution. This was especially apparent for those who attended Nazi Party rallies or meetings. Headlam visited one such rally at Nuremberg and noted 'a reference to the colonial question much applauded.'[141] A constituent of Anthony Eden's felt 'unquestionably' that the colonies aroused 'the strongest feelings' amongst German businessmen and that 'the desire for the recovery of which amounts to an obsession.'[142] Such reports undoubtedly filtered back through the Foreign Office to the Prime Minister. When combined with Halifax's account of his visit to Germany in November 1937, they must have encouraged Chamberlain to believe that once more colonial returns might provide the basis for a possible general settlement. This led to the Henderson offer in March 1938. However its rejection by Hitler, and the *Anschluss* ruled out a colonial solution in the minds of the cabinet. Nevertheless throughout 1938, and especially after Munich, grassroots Conservatives feared that Chamberlain still sought such a colonial settlement.[143] The *Anschluss* firmly re-focused Conservative attention on Europe. Did Hitler seek living space in the east? Would he resort to the use of force to achieve these goals? Viscount Wolmer, a foreign policy sceptic, believed Hitler now intended to 'eat up the Danubian states one by one' using 'methods of coercion and pressure rather than by war.'[144] The debate over whether to guarantee Czechoslovakia certainly suggested that Conservatives expected her to be Hitler's next target. Those who visited eastern Europe sensed the desire of the Sudeten Germans for union with Germany. One such traveller was Victor Cazalet although he was unclear as to how far this sentiment was 'due to bad treatment [and], German propaganda'.

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140 Tree, *Memoirs*, p. 56.

141 Headlam Mss: diary, 7 Sept. 1937, D/He/33.

142 Avon Mss: Kenneth Chance to Eden, 5 Feb. 1937, AP13/1/51T.

143 This theme is developed further in the 'foreign policy' chapter, pp. 80-1, 110-13. For an historical analysis of colonial appeasement see Crozier, *Appeasement.*

144 Selborne Mss: Wolmer to 2nd earl, 30 Mar. 1938, MS.Selborne.adds.5, Bodleian Library.

He was, however, sure that 'general poverty and unemployment have accentuated it.'[145] In July, as a result of this visit, Cazalet felt able to assure his constituents that Germany was not prepared to absorb the Sudeten Germans for a mix of economic and ideological reasons. He believed that the Sudeten Germans were too widely scattered and therefore any annexation would include non-Germans which was contrary to Nazi ideology. Furthermore, the union with Austria had aggravated Germany's economic problems and absorbing any further territory would only exacerbate the situation.[146] Cazalet during his visit to Czechoslovakia the previous April met the leader of the Sudeten Germans, Henlein. After a 'v[ery] interesting' one and a half hour meeting, Cazalet left the 'intelligent and delightful' man who 'makes a good impression. Honest and single. Not yet completely controlled by Berlin. He appears to be not entirely unamiable although one gather[s] it will be a hard bargain.'[147] Yet despite his optimistic public report on the unlikelihood of war, in his journal Cazalet confessed his belief that 'we have *definitely* entered the pre-war period.'[148] Certainly, a number of Conservatives feared in the immediate months after the *Anschluss* that Hitler 'may at any moment provide another shock in central Europe'.[149] Not everyone expected it necessarily to be Czechoslovakia; for a while Ralph Glyn believed Danzig (another of the Versailles grievances) to be the object of Nazi desires. Nor was the belief that Hitler intended further immediate expansion a universally held view within the Party. Some felt that there was no evidence to suggest this expansionist intent. After all Hitler had waited two years since the Rhineland seizure, what evidence was there to suggest that he would not do the same again? One such thinker was the 2nd earl of Selborne who confidently predicted that with the present British government following the 'right' foreign policy it was doubtful 'if Germany will be ready for another two years' by which time Britain would be 'much stronger than we are now, both actually and relatively.' Similarly, Francis Fremantle, the Member for St Albans, believed after the Polish

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145 Cazalet Mss: journal, 14 Apr. 1938.

146 North Wiltshire CA, *North West Wilts Critic*, July 1938, 'Member's monthly letter', 2436/69, Wiltshire Record Office.

147 Cazalet Mss: journal, 19 Apr. 1938.

148 Cazalet Mss: journal, 22 Apr. 1938. Emphasis added.

149 Cilcennin Mss: J.P.L. Thomas to anon, 12 Apr. 1938, Cilc.col.40.

guarantee that this had 'collared Hitler' and it was unlikely there would be any further serious trouble.[150]

Although Conservatives could dispute German intentions one factor that many felt would be crucial in determining whether Hitler embarked upon foreign adventures was the healthiness of the German economy. It was a widely held belief amongst Conservatives that the German economic situation, due to the pressures of rearmament, was rapidly deteriorating during the late 1930s.[151] In 1937 Churchill warned the Commons that the dictators of Europe were 'welding entire nations into war-making machines at the cost of the sternest repression of all the amenities and indulgences of human existence.'[152] This belief had implications upon how best to enact foreign policy towards the dictators. One school of thought, the 'explosion' theory, argued that a grave economic position would encourage a dictator to challenge the balance of power in order to distract domestic opinion. Another line of argument believed the opposite to be true suggesting that a dire economic situation was a restraint upon Hitler because the German economy could not cope with having to sustain a military adventure. Supporters of the 'explosion' theory suggested that 'if countries such as Germany became more prosperous, the fear of war would quickly disappear.'[153] Peter Thorneycroft, in his maiden Common's speech in November 1938, made a plea for greater co-operation with Germany. Although accepting that there was plenty to dislike about the German system of government, he felt 'we should co-operate with them in trade, commerce and industry; that we should try to understand them, and that we should devote our enormous resources, not to the building of armaments, but to increasing the prosperity of both peoples.'[154] It was felt that although the dictators might ignore the counsel of their expert advisors and rashly use war as a means of relieving economic instability and other domestic problems, they presumably would listen to reasoned proposals for economic stability and peace. Even if the government had abandoned direct diplomatic approaches towards Germany

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150 Selborne Mss: 2nd earl to Lord Wolmer, 31 Mar. 1938, MS.Eng.hist.d.443ff.114-5; Birchall Mss: Francis Fremantle to J.D. Birchall, 10 June 1939, Box 33, cited with permission of Birchall family.

151 *Essex Chronicle*, 19 May 1939, (Ruggles-Brise); Avon Mss: Cranborne to Eden, 21 Feb. 1939, AP14/2/22.

152 *HofC Debs*, vol. 321 col. 573, 1 Mar. 1937.

153 Clitheroe CA, div. council, 18 Nov. 1937, DDX800/1/3.

154 *HofC Debs*, vol. 341 col. 363, 10 Nov. 1938.

during early 1939 more subtle efforts were being made, especially in the economic sphere.

Conservatives increasingly recognised that nazism was a brutal and undemocratic political creed, but did they automatically equate being Nazi with being German? For those Conservatives, like Duff Cooper, who had always been anti-German then there was no problem in distinguishing, nazism was merely further proof of all that was bad about the German character and nation. In general terms, Conservatives were able to refer to 'Germany' or 'the Germans' when using these phrases in reference to intended pursuits of the Nazi regime. For example, one Conservative peer following the *Anschluss* was fearful that 'the Germans see now they have time to devour eastern Europe.'[155] In that sentence, 'the Nazis' could quite easily have been exchanged for 'the Germans' and the meaning would not have been affected. At other times, however there were deliberate efforts to distinguish between the Nazi and non-Nazi. What becomes apparent is that the more obviously "evil" the regime became then the less Conservatives felt able to excuse the German people for not standing up to Hitler. This was especially true once hostilities commenced in September 1939.[156] Many Conservatives accepted the idea that nazism had arisen and secured its position because of grievances about Versailles, therefore they argued that if these were removed then the Germans would not need Hitler. This view was particularly prevalent amongst government ministers, and helps to explain why during the opening months of the war they appeared unwilling to enter into direct conflict with Germany. Such views were also expressed by a number of the editors and proprietors of the Conservative press.[157] Some Conservatives believed that if a firmer stance was adopted towards Hitler it might precipitate his overthrow since 'there are many who disapprove of present methods and that feeling is growing.'[158] Likewise, during early 1939 the foreign policy sceptic, Viscount Cranborne, criticised the idea that Britain should offer Germany some form of economic assistance, believing that 'nothing could do more to convince the German and Italian peoples that authoritarian gov[ernmen]t based on the repudiation of

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155 Cilcennin Mss: David [Lindsay] to J.P.L. Thomas, 28 [Mar.] 1938, Cilc.coll.29.

156 *HofC Debs*, vol. 360 cols. 1167-8 (Winterton), 7 May 1940.

157 Gannon, *The British Press*, pp. 292-3.

158 Hailes Mss: Buchan-Hepburn to Mr Johnstone, 23 Mar. 1938, HAIL1/2.

obligations does not work' than a deteriorating economic situation.[159] Following *Kristallnacht* and the continued attacks upon Britain in the Nazi media, Cuthbert Headlam believed that it looked 'as if these mad creatures who are in charge in Germany really mean to have war.'[160] Headlam appears always to have been able to distinguish between 'the German people' and the Nazis. Following suggestions of a possible European conference in the summer of June 1939, he thought 'it is just possible that the effect might be to make the German people realise we were not intending "to encircle" them [... and ...] have a steadying effect upon them and make them less inclined to believe that the Nazis were leading them in the right direction.' Equally, however, as Europe lurched closer to war Headlam dismissed as 'nonsense' talk about the friendliness of the Germans and how little they liked the Nazi regime, recognising that 'decent people no longer count in Germany: they may dislike Hitler and his national socialism, but they dare not oppose it - and the bulk of the people do believe in Hitler and regard him as infallible.'[161]

It was apparent that Conservative perceptions of the German leadership and Nazi ambitions underwent a period of re-evaluation during Chamberlain's occupancy of Downing Street. Although many Party members visited Germany and returned with generally favourable impressions, especially of the Nazi elite, the deterioration in international relations, between the *Anschluss* and Prague, stimulated a gradual reappraisal of the dangers posed. Equally, as Conservative attitudes hardened to Nazi aggression and Hitler's hegemonic ambitions became more apparent, so diminished their ability to distinguish between the Nazis and ordinary Germans. As with the First World War, when Germany had been equated with Prussia and therefore militarism, in the aftermath of Prague, Germany now equalled nazism which meant aggression. It was a stereotype that would be compounded by the advent of war in September 1939.

IV

When Neville Chamberlain secured the premiership in May 1937 the overwhelming majority of Conservatives could be considered pro-appeasers. This was an attitude of mind that aimed to anticipate and avoid conflict by

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159 Avon Mss: Cranborne to Eden, 21 Feb. 1939, AP14/2/22.

160 Headlam Mss: diary, 16 Nov. 1938, D/He/34.

161 Headlam Mss: diary, 6 June, 8 Aug. 1939, D/He/35.

concession and negotiation. What became apparent over the next three years was that this theory was capable of producing heterogeneous responses. The various attitude groups that existed within the Party, whether they were sceptics, fraternisers, isolationists or imperialists, were shaped and influenced by personal experience, prejudice and the successive international incidents of the late thirties. However the impact of these influences was complex and diverse. There existed a sizeable Germanophile tendency in the Party which stemmed from a mixture of guilt, sympathy and admiration. However each international crisis steadily eroded this Conservative support for Germany. For some, such as the foreign policy sceptics, the process was more rapid than for others, but what was apparent was that by Prague (for all bar an extreme 'enthusiast' minority) the Party as a whole had come to recognise the threat Hitler posed. There is difficulty in trying to prove a 'typical' example, since the experiences, attitudes, and responses of individual Conservatives were all very different. Nevertheless, it is apparent that to suggest simply that Conservatives were either appeasers or anti-appeasers is too crude an analysis. This chapter has illustrated the complex attitudes and assumptions that existed amongst Conservative opinion. As the future chapters will demonstrate, these attitudes were to prove crucial in shaping the Party's receptivity to Chamberlain's foreign and defence policies.

Chapter Two: Conservative Responses To Chamberlain's German Foreign Policy, 1937-39

In the two and a half years following Neville Chamberlain's succession to the premiership, the international situation (and especially relations between Britain and Germany) deteriorated very rapidly. As an issue of concern, foreign affairs was the dominant topic - to such an extent that one Conservative Area chairman complained in early 1938 that it was 'the *only* thing which seems to exercise the minds of people.'[1] Historians have repeatedly scrutinised the methods and mechanisms which the British government adopted in its search to secure peace.[2] What this chapter proposes to assess is the reaction of the Conservative Party to these policies, both from the perspective of the parliamentary backbenchers and those at the grass-roots level. What will be shown is that Chamberlain's policies were less universally acclaimed by the Party than is commonly supposed. While publicly Conservatives were prepared generally to support appeasement, in private there were increasing doubts. The other theme that is explored is, unsurprisingly, the mounting distrust with which Conservatives regarded Germany and her territorial ambitions. Once again, one can distinguish between public and private observations of Germany. Working chronologically through the events between May 1937 and September 1939, this chapter will demonstrate how the Conservative Party reversed its position of isolation and allowed Britain to become entangled in a European war for the second time in less than three decades.

I

It was widely anticipated that Chamberlain's accession to the office of Prime Minister would mark a new departure in the National government's foreign policy. It was a field in which the "drift" of the Baldwin years would be reversed and re-directed. Anthony Eden, who retained the post of Foreign Secretary in the new cabinet, welcomed Chamberlain's succession and looked forward to working closely with the new Prime Minister. The events of February 1938 were still far away and working relations between the two men were good. Other Conservatives hoped too for new direction in foreign

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[1] Headlam Mss: diary, 31 Jan. 1938, D/He/34 - emphasis added.

[2] Watt, *How War Came*; Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*; Charmley, *Chamberlain*; Christopher Hill, *Cabinet Decision-Making in Foreign Policy: The British Experience, October 1938-June 1941*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

affairs. Donald Somervell, the Member for Crewe and Attonery-General, expected Chamberlain to be 'a great standby in foreign politics' and was confident that he would be a 'tower of strength'. Others were more specific, sensing the need for urgency: if the peace was to be saved then Chamberlain had to intervene actively.[3] This was exactly what Chamberlain intended to do.

During the opening months of the new premiership, Chamberlain's government made several approaches to Berlin and Rome, but it was not until Lord Halifax was invited to visit Germany in November 1937 that a tangible opening offered itself. The idea of the visit appears to have been generally welcomed by Conservatives, although John McEwen, the MP for Berwick and Haddington and secretary of the Conservative foreign affairs committee, was one of the few publicly opposed to the visit on the grounds that Italian friendship was of greater importance than German. McEwen considered that 'historically, traditionally, and culturally, we have a great deal in common with the Italian people, and to maintain that the same can be said of ourselves and the German people argues, I submit, a fundamental misconception of the character of that great and dangerous people.'[4] More typically Conservative public declarations about the visit echoed the official government line that Halifax was going to Germany 'in order to try and find out what the Germans really wanted, and how Great Britain could help them.'[5] But privately expectations were not high. Cuthbert Headlam, the former Barnard Castle Member, was 'not very sanguine of great results' whilst Leo Amery wondered whether Britain had got 'into the rut so deeply that we may find it impossible to extricate ourselves.'[6] If a consequence of the visit for Chamberlain was to highlight the similarity of views between himself and Halifax, then for the remainder of the Conservative Party, particularly on the imperialist wing, it heightened fears that Hitler and Chamberlain proposed to reach a deal on the mandated ex-German colonies. This is a theme that will be considered in greater detail later in this chapter.

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3 Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, p. 445; Halifax, *Fulness of Days*, p. 193; Somervell Mss: journal, Apr. 1937, Bodleian Library; Headlam Mss: diary, 28 May, 8 Nov. 1937, D/He/33.

4 *HofC Debs*, vol. 333 cols. 1482, 24 Mar. 1938.

5 Clitheroe CA, div. council, 18 Nov. 1937 (William Brass, MP), DDX800/1/3.

6 Headlam Mss: diary, 15 Nov. 1937, D/He/33; *Amery Diaries*, 15 Nov. 1937, p. 452.

II

Events soon overtook the Party's deliberation on colonial restitution and distracted their attention. This principally involved the "shock" resignation of Anthony Eden as Foreign Secretary in February 1938, in disgust at the proposed Anglo-Italian negotiations. The resignation shook the Party, at least temporarily.[7] Some thirty Conservative MPs abstained from the Labour vote of censure, whilst Vyvyan Adams, the Member for Leeds West, voted against the government.[8] On the whole the majority of these dissidents represented the younger element of the Party's centre and left - about two-thirds were forty-five years of age or below at a time when the average age of a Conservative MP was fifty-one. Furthermore, many of these MPs were foreign policy enthusiasts who had seen service in the colonial or diplomatic corps before beginning their political careers. In terms of numbers, Chamberlain's 281 majority asserted his dominance in parliament. Nevertheless, one observer noted that those who voted for the government were generally 'obscure Members who have never spoken [...] if quantity was on Chamberlain's side, quality was in Eden's camp.'[9] But Eden's resignation was not to signal automatically the beginnings of a sustained revolt over foreign policy amongst the Conservative backbenches, as some of these contemporaries would later suggest.[10] Chamberlainite supporters were nevertheless quick to emphasis their loyalty to the Prime Minister. Many MPs were hastily summoned back to their constituencies to account for their views on the reasons for the resignation. In some cases, as J.R.J. Macnamara, Katharine Atholl, Paul Emrys-Evans and Vyvyan Adams amongst others found, it was to explain why they had failed to support the government against

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7 Winterton Mss: diary, 22 Feb. 1938, 1/43.

8 See Appendix for explanation of how the list of abstentions has been arrived at. 'Certain abstainers': Duchess of Atholl, B. Bracken, W.S. Churchill, Cranborne, H. Duggan, A. Eden, P. Emrys-Evans, S. Herbert, D. Joel, R. Keyes, H. Macmillan, E.L. Spears, J.P.L. Thomas, R. Tree, J.R.J. Macnamara, M. Patrick, R.A. Cary, H. Kerr, R. Pilkington, R.H. Turton, R.G. Briscoe, J.W. Hills, L. Ropner; 'Probable abstainers' J.J. Withers, Viscount Castlereagh, G. Palmer, H.R. Cayzer, S. Storey, A. Russell; 'Possibles' A. Law, J. Shute, T. Sinclair, T. Hunter, L. Kimball, S.A. Maxwell. But not Joseph Nall as suggested by Philip Goodhart, *The 1922: The Story of the Conservative Backbencher' Parliamentary Committee*, (London: Macmillan, 1973), p. 87 his name features on the division list for the government lobby.

9 Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, p. 122 citing the French ambassador to London.

10 Randolph Churchill, *Rise and Fall of Sir Anthony Eden*, (London: 1954), p. 154 implied 'Eden group' existed before his resignation; Wheeler-Bennett, *Munich*, p. 183 says after the resignation, whilst Eden vaguely suggests the summer of 1938 *The Reckoning*, p. 31. See Crowson, 'Conservative Parliamentary dissent' for a more realistic time-scale and explanation.

the Labour censure vote.[11] The popularity of Eden was a cause of concern to some Conservatives, and many were openly thankful that they did not have to face an immediate election.[12] Equally, for some there was barely disguised relief at his departure. This was due to Eden's relatively meteoric rise through the Party which had aroused considerable jealousy and envy. One such envious Conservative was Cuthbert Headlam. He believed Eden little deserved his reputation,

> He crashed badly over sanctions and the European situation has gone from worse to worse since he has been in power. Three years ago we could have got almost any bargain we liked with Germany: now it is not going to be easy to get a decent agreement - and the same applies with Italy.[13]

Conservatives generally were bemused as to the reasoning behind Eden's departure. Victor Cazalet, the Member for Chippenham, 'talked to nearly all his colleagues including his best friends like Shakes [Morrison], Oliver [Stanley] and Walter Elliot, and they all say, they were, and are still, equally amazed at what happened.'[14] The souring of relations between Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary caused by the Roosevelt initiative were kept secret from the House of Commons and the wider public, therefore the episode was seen purely in the context of Anglo-Italian negotiations - although some suspected there to be more. The use of the media by the government further contributed to this image.[15] Consequently many Conservatives were left believing that Eden really had little cause to resign and that at most his departure was caused merely by differences of opinion over method rather than objective.[16]

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[11] For example: Middleton CA, finance and general purpose cttee. 24 Feb. 1938, PLC 1/2, Lancashire Record Office; Chelmsford CA, exec. 3 Mar. 1938, D/Z96/7; Sowerby CA, exec. 23 Feb. 1938, CV2, Calderdale District Archives; West Leeds CA, exec. 28 Feb. 1938, No5 minute book, West Yorks Archives: Leeds; Kinross and West Perth CA, exec. 22 Apr. 1938, with North Tayside CA; Makins Mss: diary, 25 Feb. 1938.

[12] Hailes Mss: Buchan-Hepburn to Lord Mayor of Liverpool, 22 Feb. 1938, HAIL1/2.

[13] Headlam Mss: diary, 20, 22 Feb. 1938, D/He/34.

[14] James, *Cazalet*, p. 198.

[15] Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, pp. 49-52.

[16] Hailes Mss: Buchan-Hepburn to Lord Mayor of Liverpool, 22 Feb. 1938, HAIL1/2; Birchall Mss: 'Notes on Eden resignation', 25 Feb. 1938, Box 33; Stockton CA, men's branch AGM 10 Mar. 1938, D/X322/8.

Eden's resignation had repercussions for the Conservative foreign affairs committee - an official backbench organisation with its own elected officers that regularly met to discuss questions of foreign policy. A number of those who had abstained from the Eden censure vote were leading figures in this committee. The media, particularly in the London press, carried reports about the committee's divisions over government foreign policy. Paul Emrys-Evans, the committee's chairman, and Harold Nicolson (National Labour MP for Leicester West) the vice-chairman, had both abstained in the Eden vote; while the committee's secretary John McEwen, MP for Berwick and Haddington, had supported the government. A number of Chamberlainite loyalists certainly felt that Emrys-Evans and Nicolson ought to resign their positions because they represented a minority view on foreign affairs. However, at a meeting of the committee a few days later a near unanimous vote (only Nancy Astor voted against) refused to accept the two men's resignations. Emrys-Evans accepted the decision and resolved to retain his post until Easter when a new chairman was due to be elected. He explained to his local Association chairman that this course was 'an expedient' that would satisfy his critics on the committee and which would enable him 'to disappear inconspicuously.' Nicolson remained too, although his continued criticism of foreign policy led the committee to ask for his resignation in April. Both men correctly observed that many Conservative MPs had no wish for them to resign their positions on the committee so suddenly after Eden's departure for fear that it would embarrass the government even further. Emrys-Evans claimed to 'have no desire to create a split or to cause any unnecessary embarrassment' and avoided speaking in the House of Commons on foreign affairs thereafter whilst using his contacts in the media to try and ensure that the press presented the details of his tendered resignation correctly.[17]

In four Conservative held constituencies, Bradford North, Manchester Exchange, Cambridge and Clapham, the Council for Action attempted to carry out a mini-referendum on Eden's resignation. Local Conservatives in these constituencies considered the question ambiguous and urged voters to ignore the ballot. As one Bradford Conservative explained in an open letter to the

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[17] *Nicolson Diaries*, Nicolson to wife, 25 Feb. 1938, diary 7 Apr. 1938; Emrys-Evans Mss: Evans to Doncaster, 1 Mar. 1938, n.d. [after 12 Apr. 1938], Add.MS.58249, Bill Astor to Evans, n.d. [?22 Feb. 1938], Add.MS.58250, British Library; *Amery Diaries*, 24 Feb. 1938, p. 458; Charmley, *Churchill*, p. 338 has confused the accounts of the meetings of the foreign affairs committee for 24 Feb. and 7 Apr. and portrayed them as occurring only during the 7 Apr. meeting.

local press the 'question prejudices the issue by stating that Mr Eden is standing for good faith and peace, so by inference Mr Chamberlain and the rest of the cabinet prefer bad faith and war, which the voter must also seem to endorse by writing "No".' Moreover, the chairman of North Bradford Association, James Wood, believed the differences between Chamberlain and Eden were of 'method only and not of aim or principle, but the electors are given no opportunity of saying which method they prefer. The question on the ballot paper is deliberately misleading and a direct answer to it could be variously construed.' Ultimately 48,000 voters participated out of an eligible 170,000 with the overwhelming majority of these approving of 'Eden's stand for good faith in international affairs.'[18] Although it must be assumed that most of those who participated in the ballot were of a left-wing political persuasion and/or were firm supporters of the League of Nations, this episode nevertheless heightened Conservative concerns that Eden's departure would provide a popular rallying call for the Opposition.

In reality these fears were to prove unfounded. The sense of crisis was soon defused as Eden removed himself to southern France for a holiday. He departed having assured Chamberlain that he would grant the premier a free run for his policy.[19] At the same time if backbench Tories generally had concerns then they kept these doubts to themselves. Some observers sensed a hardening of right-wing sentiments amongst the Party and noted that Chamberlain had made 'supreme efforts' to assert his authority: 'the result is that he has the right wing and middle of the Tory Party cheering hysterically behind him.'[20]

III

The reaction of the Conservative Party to the *Anschluss* a few weeks after Eden's resignation was taken as further proof by those on the Party's left (usually Edenite sympathisers) of a general swing to the right by the majority of the Party. The *Anschluss* had been prohibited under the terms of the Versailles treaty, but many Conservatives, from government ministers downwards, felt this to be unnecessarily harsh and were by the 1930s prepared to contemplate a peaceful union between Germany and Austria in

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[18] *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, 5, 10, 11, 24 Mar. 1938.

[19] Emrys-Evans Mss: Eden to Evans, 28 Apr. 1938, Add.MS.58242.

[20] Cilcennin Mss: J.P.L. Thomas to anon, 12 Apr. 1938, Cilc.coll.40.

return for a general European settlement.[21] Conservative reactions to the German annexation of Austria ranged from outrage to tacit acceptance 'in principle', through to general unease and bemusement. Cuthbert Headlam, who had 'always regarded the Germanification of Austria as inevitable', noted that despite the 'indignation' of the press there was 'no apparent anxiety' on the part of the British population 'to rush to arms in defence of the "aggressed" nation.'[22] However, the methods by which the Nazis sought to secure the *Anschluss* rapidly eroded Conservative sympathy for their position. Even those who expressed no objections 'in principle', such as Harold Macmillan, to German revision of the Versailles treaty, felt disgust at the reports of Nazi atrocities against Austrian political opponents and Jews and were left wondering as to Germany's next move.[23] Victor Cazalet felt Friday 10 March was 'a real black letter day' but realised 'one can't fight if the Austrians won't'. Twelve months previously Cazalet had visited Vienna. The visit left him equating Austrian independence with that of Belgium's during the nineteenth century: 'if we do nothing we shall inevitably be drawn in and you will get the Belgium situation of August 1914 all over again.' This rationale enabled Cazalet to support wholeheartedly Neville Chamberlain's efforts at negotiating with the dictators until at least November 1938 because by being 'willing to talk and listen [...] then by chance you may be able to influence them.'[24]

For many Conservatives the forcible Austro-German union coming so soon after Eden's resignation naturally caused them to question whether Chamberlain's foreign policy was really a viable option. Therefore, the *Anschluss* was important in moulding their perceptions of how future British foreign policy ought to develop. Most accepted that Austrian independence had been lost, and that it was not Britain's place to intervene since the Austrians had made no efforts to resist themselves. It did have the effect of focusing attention on Hitler's next widely anticipated target, Czechoslovakia. It was to be over the question of intervention, diplomatically and militarily, that debate was concentrated. One local Association chairman noted 'the

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21 See previous chapter for a fuller discussion of Conservative sympathy for Germany.

22 Headlam Mss: diary, 17 Feb., 12 Mar. 1938, 7 May 1938, D/He/34.

23 Stockton CA, women's AGM 19 Mar. 1938 (Harold Macmillan, MP), D/X322/11; See also, *HofC Debs*, vol. 333 col. 73 (Henry Page-Croft);, 14 Mar. 1938 Also, Headlam Mss: diary, 22, 24 Mar., 7 May 1938, D/He/34.

24 Cazalet Mss: journal, Mar. 1937, *passim*, 4 Aug. 1937, 10 Mar. 1938.

clamour' for guarantees in the weeks following the *Anschluss*.[25] During a 'stormy' emergency House of Commons debate, on 14 March, the usual foreign policy sceptics made calls for Britain to offer a guarantee to Czechoslovakia in view of the threats Hitler had made towards her in a speech to the *Reichstag* on 20 February.[26] For the next ten days the Prime Minister was subjected to repeated requests from both the Opposition benches and from some Conservative backbench sceptics, like Vyvyan Adams, to guarantee the Czech republic. They argued that since Britain had been one of those responsible for the nation's rebirth at the Paris Peace settlement of 1919 it was her duty to continue to uphold Czechoslovakia's independence. Each time, however, Chamberlain refused to be drawn on the likely government response, merely reaffirming his declaration of 14 March 'that His Majesty's government emphatically disapprove, as they have always disapproved, actions such as those of which Austria has been made the scene.'[27] This delay in confirming or denying the possibilities of a guarantee 'brought about a lot of coming and going and hatching and whispering in the lobbies and smoking room' of the House of Commons.[28] Yet, those favourable to a guarantee represented a minority view within the Party. Certainly for many Conservatives there was considerable fear of becoming embroiled in the European quagmire by giving Czechoslovakia a guarantee. 'Everybody in our Party that I spoke to', recorded Leo Amery, 'was dead against any form of commitment on behalf of Czechoslovakia.' In fact Amery, immediately after the *Anschluss*, had been favourably disposed to a guarantee only to change his mind because he realised that 'we shall not get dominion or home public opinion sufficiently united, even more because geography is against us and with Austria gone, we cannot prevent the steady economic squeeze on Czechoslovakia or the increase of domestic trouble fermented from Germany.'[29] Alan Lennox-Boyd, MP for Mid-Bedfordshire and Under-Secretary to the Ministry of Labour, appears to have been echoing these fears when in a speech to constituents on 18 March he declared that Britain ought

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25 City of London CA, AGM 17 May 1938, 487/31, Westminster Public Library.

26 Winterton Mss: diary, 14 Mar. 1938, 1/43; *HofC Debs*, vol. 333 cols. 64 (Boothby), 120-23 (Atholl), 150-1 (Adams), 14 Mar. 1938.

27 *HofC Debs*, vol. 333 col. 50, 14 Mar. 1938.

28 Cilcennin Mss: Ronald Cartland to J.P.L. Thomas, 22 Mar. 1938, Cilc.coll.44; Winterton Mss: diary, 16 Mar. 1938, 1/43.

29 *Amery Diaries*, 20-21 Mar. 1938, pp. 498-9; Headlam Mss: diary, 12 Mar. 1938, D/He/34; Butler Mss: Michael Beaumont to Butler, 16 Mar. 1938, RABG9f.5-6; *Channon Diaries*, 20 Mar. 1938, p. 152; Avon Mss: Mark Patrick to Eden, 22 Mar. 1938, AP14/1/796; Stirling CA, *Stirling Journal & Advertiser*, 12 May 1938, (Dr. Richard Ropner, provisional candidate West Stirlingshire).

only to go to the assistance of other European nations if her security was directly threatened, and as far as he was concerned Germany 'could absorb Czechoslovakia and Britain would remain secure.'[30] Had Boyd not been a member of the government (and admittedly he was only a junior minister with no position in the cabinet), this speech would probably have gone largely unnoticed by the national press. Instead, it caused a sensation and an outcry from Francophiles, sceptics and Opposition MPs who claimed Boyd's words were being used for propaganda purposes in the Sudetenland.[31] It was Boyd's tactless choice of words and frank assessment of British self-interest, rather than the sentiments he expressed, which embarrassed the government. Chamberlain was forced to defend the government in a debate upon the subject and deny that the speech had been intended as a trojan horse for the government. Boyd apologised for his conduct and claimed that he had been speaking as an individual MP not as a member of the government.[32] In fact, at the time Boyd made his speech the cabinet had still not confirmed its response to the alleged threat to Czechoslovakia. The cabinet foreign affairs committee which had met on the afternoon of Boyd's speech heard Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, suggest that a refusal to commit Britain to action would have the effect of keeping France and Germany 'guessing'. The uncertainty would restrain them both. It was a view that Chamberlain echoed. However, it was not until 22 March that the government's policy of "bluff" received cabinet approval. At this cabinet meeting Chamberlain offered a concession to public opinion, by redrafting his prepared statement to be given to the House of Commons to make it friendlier to France.[33] This at least conciliated the Francophile First Lord of the Admiralty, Duff Cooper, who had got up from his sick-bed to attend the cabinet meeting and defend the French perspective.[34] The Member for Tavistock, Mark Patrick, who was an Edenite sympathiser, probably reacting to the rumours emanating from Downing Street and the Foreign Office on the 22 March, felt that 'the emphasis has been

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30 *The Times*, 19 Mar. 1938.

31 Emrys-Evans Mss: Evans to Chamberlain, 20 Mar. 1938, Ad.MS.58248f.48; *HofC Debs*, vol. 333 col. 955-6, 21 Mar. 1938.

32 *HofC Debs*, vol. 333 cols. 953-5, 959, 21 Mar. 1938.

33 For a more detailed analysis of the government's deliberations over a guarantee see Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, pp. 134-39 and Charmley, *Chamberlain*, pp. 64-8. Parker argues that Chamberlain and Halifax were both anxious to avoid a guarantee and that the Chiefs of Staff assessment that Czechoslovakia was indefensible provided the justification and not the explanation for the 24 Mar. declaration by Chamberlain.

34 Charmley, *Duff Cooper*, p. 110.

shifted towards what they call "realism", which in practice means towards isolation.'[35]

When Chamberlain addressed the House of Commons on 24 March 1938 the statement he gave appears to have been universally welcomed by Conservatives both publicly and privately. The ambiguity of the declaration meant that Chamberlain succeeded in more than just keeping the European powers guessing, he also managed to satisfy almost all shades of Conservative opinion. It was a speech demonstrative of Chamberlain's political acumen. Maurice Petherick, MP for Penryn and Falmouth and an isolationist, hailed the speech as 'a very wise one and a courageous one', while Viscount Wolmer, the rebellious foreign policy sceptic and Member for Aldershot, believed Chamberlain had avoided the mistakes committed by Sir Edward Grey before World War One, by leaving the House and Germany 'in no sort of doubt as to what are the commitments, moral and textual, of this country.'[36] Victor Cazalet, who had recently visited central Europe and was 'rather anxious for a clear statement as to our intentions if C[zecho]s[lovakia] was invaded', believed it to be 'a really great and important speech' which 'satisfied' his view on Czechoslovakia.[37] Leo Amery, who privately felt that the speech 'was all right as far as it went', observed that the Prime Minister 'had the Party solidly behind him and even Winston [Churchill] could not criticise it beyond suggesting that he might have been a little more definite over Czechoslovakia.'[38] Likewise, Mark Patrick, who only days previously had been critical of the government's apparent move towards isolation, admitted the speech,

> was far better than I had hoped. I have no doubt at all that it has averted any serious division of opinion, on our side, for some time to come. Some of the isolationists feel that we are committed too far, but on the whole it has been a very successful compromise.[39]

Leonard Ropner, MP for Barkston Ash, and one of those who abstained on the Eden censure motion, explained the following week to his local Association that at the time of Eden's resignation

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[35] Avon Mss: Mark Patrick to Eden, 22 Mar. 1938, AP14/1/796.

[36] *HofC Debs*, vol. 333 cols. 1463, 1470, 24 Mar.1938.

[37] Cazalet Mss: journal, 24 Mar. 1938.

[38] *Amery Diaries*, 24 Mar. 1938, p. 499.

[39] Avon Mss: Mark Patrick to Eden, 25 Mar. 1938, AP14/1/797.

there were not a few supporters of the National government who felt that the [ex-]Foreign Secretary had expressed views more in accord with their own than the policy announced by the Prime Minister. Last week Mr Neville Chamberlain made a speech which in our view, went far to meet those we had expressed, and although some differences of approach to the urgent questions arising out of foreign policy may still remain, it is in complete confidence that I can now confirm that had a vote been taken after the Prime Minister's speech last week, no supporter of the National government would have voted against the government.[40]

Indeed, when Labour forced a vote of confidence a few days later on the government's foreign policy, Ropner was amongst those in the government lobby alongside fellow sceptics Harold Macmillan, Jack Macnamara, Paul Emrys-Evans, Edward Spears, Brendan Bracken, and Roger Keyes.[41] The grass-roots also received Chamberlain's speech warmly. Several MPs who had returned to their constituencies felt it necessary to write to the Prime Minister recounting the grass-roots' 'whole-hearted support' for his stance.[42] In Kinross and West Perth the local executive moved a resolution of confidence in Chamberlain's foreign policy which was accepted by 19 votes to 6. Despite claims to the contrary from the chairman, the tabling of this resolution appears to have been a deliberate effort by disaffected elements in the Association to expose the disloyalty to the Prime Minister of their MP, the duchess of Atholl. The duchess had been an enthusiastic advocate of a guarantee. At the executive meeting the chairman was only prepared to allow her to move a direct negative to the resolution rather than an amendment which had the effect of exposing the rift between the two groupings and which prompted the duchess to announce her intention of resigning the Party Whip.[43] Without doubt the 24 March declaration did much to restore Chamberlain's reputation following the set-backs of the Eden resignation and the *Anschluss*.

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[40] *Skyrack Express*, 1 Apr. 1938.

[41] Vote of confidence, 4 April 1938: 'Certain abstainers' V. Adams, duchess of Atholl, W.S. Churchill, S. Herbert, D. Sandys, J.P.L. Thomas, R. Boothby: 'Probables' R. Perkins, J.J. Withers; 'Possibles' A. Chorlton.

[42] Chamberlain Mss: G.W. Rickards to Chamberlain, 30 Mar. 1938, NC7/11/31/226, Murray F. Sueter to Chamberlain, 31 Mar. 1938, NC7/11/31/258; Tynemouth CA, exec. 25 Mar. 1938, TWAS 1633/2; Pembroke CA, AGM 26 Mar. 1938, HDSO/51/1, Pembrokeshire Record Office; CP: National Union, exec. 6 Apr. 1938, card 58 approved and forwarded to the PM a number of motions of approval from East Leicester CA, Bosworth CA, Finchley CA, and Kingston-upon-Thames CA.

[43] Kinross CA, exec 22 Apr. 1938 and addendum to this meeting authorised 13 May 1938; Atholl Mss: memo: 'Table of events in regard to Kinross and West Perth executive', duchess of Atholl, n.d. [June 1938], File 22/6.

IV

During the summer of 1938 Czechoslovakia became the focus of foreign policy attention. Against this increasingly volatile international situation, Conservatives began privately to express concerns and doubts about the wisdom of conciliating Hitler. Despite its best intentions the British government found itself being drawn deeper into the crisis. This involvement was effectively signalled with the despatching of Lord Runciman to the region in August. Some Conservatives had reservations about Runciman's mission, but typically these were kept private.[44] Equally, it was recognised that the region was a potential flash-point, in view of Czechoslovakia's mutual assistance pacts with France and the Soviet Union which might be sanctioned by a German assault on the Sudetenland. As the agent for Leeds West Association explained to one correspondent critical of intervention in European affairs:

> The powder barrel of Europe is in Czechoslovakia and any explosion there would involve this country, then it cannot be said that it is interference if efforts are being made by this country to bring that controversy to a peaceful issue. [...] it will have been interference well worth while if the results achieved prevent our country from going to war.[45]

Czechoslovakia was crucial for whilst there was 'uncertainty about the future [...], there is little chance of easing the tension that exists everywhere today', wrote one MP. However, for this same MP then to assert that Germany, for a mixture of economic and ideological reasons, was not ready yet to absorb the Sudeten Germans was short-sighted to say the least.[46] By September such denials were impossible in light of the blatant German propaganda. The government still persisted with its approach 'to keep Hitler guessing, while we pressed Benés to get on with negotiations.'[47] Certainly Conservative critics, such as Cranborne and Emrys-Evans, looked on with a degree of glee at the government's predicament. Although the Czech situation was 'all very revolting', they thought it would 'be interesting to see how the policy of appeasement deals with a mobilised army of a million men.'[48]

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[44] Headlam Mss: diary, 15 Aug. 1938, D/He/35; For Halifax's assessment of success see Charmley, *Chamberlain*, p. 90.

[45] Adams Mss: C.H. Thickbroom to Fred Owen, 7 Aug. 1938, File 7.

[46] North Wiltshire CA, *North West Wilts Critic*, 'Member's monthly letter', July 1938, (Cazalet), 2436/69.

[47] Caldecote Mss: diary, 30 Aug. 1938, INKP1/1.

[48] Avon Mss: Cranborne to J.P.L. Thomas, 15 Aug. 1938, AP14/1/826A.

Hitler was due to make a keynote speech to a Nazi rally at Nuremberg on 12 September and the British waited tensely.[49] Ralph Glyn, the Member for Abingdon, listened to the speech on the radio, and found 'it gave one an extraordinary feeling of a kind of mad revivalist meeting.' This Member felt 'the time has come for a "show down" and we should all say to Hitler that this uncertainty and methods of intimidation are impossible and he must declare if he does not recognise the sovereignty of C[zecho]S[ovakia].'[50] Edward Winterton, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster,decided that although 'the speech did not make things any worse [it] certainly made them no better'. It had been a 'clever abusive speech'.[51] Conservatives were conscious that the Nazi leadership 'have been beating the big drum' and were fearful that they were intent upon war.[52] Of course, with hindsight the historian is only too aware that Hitler planned to annex Czechoslovakia on 1 October.[53] Hitler had not however calculated for the personal determination of Chamberlain to avoid war. The diplomatic coup the British Prime Minister secured with his proposal personally to fly to Germany to meet with the Führer thwarted any German ideas of a forcible annexation of the Sudetenland for the present.

When the 'Plan Z' was made public it caused a sensation, and left 'the world completely astounded.'[54] In the more recent era of "shuttle diplomacy" it is all too easy not to be able to appreciate the uniqueness of Chamberlain's actions in September 1938. It was seen by contemporaries to be all the greater because Chamberlain at the age of 69 was flying for the very first time. The contrast could not have been more marked, Neville, with his winged collars and Edwardian dress sense and umbrella, flying as an ambassador of peace to Nazi Germany to be confronted with a man twenty years his junior, dictator of the most powerful continental nation.

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[49] Winterton Mss: diary, 15 Aug. 1938, 1/43.

[50] Glyn Mss: Ralph Glyn to mother, 13 Sept. 1938, D/EGlC9/9.

[51] Winterton Mss: diary, 13 Sept. 1938, 1/43.

[52] Headlam Mss: diary, 10 Sept. 1938, D/He/34.

[53] 'Hitler and the Outbreak of World War Two', HiDES, Hossbach Memorandum: minutes of meeting at Reichs Chancellery, 5 Nov. 1937; *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, D, 2, 221, pp. 357-8, Directive for Operation Green.

[54] Headlam Mss: diary, 14 Sept. 1938; Crookshank Mss: diary, 15 Sept. 1938, MS.Eng.hist.d.359f.214.

While in public Conservatives continued to express satisfaction with Chamberlain's actions as he shuttled between Britain and Germany, in private doubts were apparent - and from more than just the normal foreign policy sceptics. Even Douglas Hacking, the Party chairman, was 'dubious' about what he saw as Chamberlain's policy of surrender. Some felt it to be 'very odd' that Chamberlain had only taken Horace Wilson and William Strang with him as advisors.[55] Cuthbert Headlam's daily diary entries for September reveal something of the tension, fear and bewilderment contemporaries experienced during the crisis. One moment Headlam appears confident of a successful and peaceful outcome yet twenty-four hours later he could equally be feeling very pessimistic. In common with many other Conservatives, Headlam became increasingly concerned at the apparent betrayal of the Czechs, although equally conscious of the practical realities of the situation. Following Berchtesgaden he saw trouble in reconciling the Czechs to a plebiscite, or in expecting them to give up their frontier with its strategic and economic implications. He felt that

> it all comes from making impossible little states. They were created by woolly headed idealists and extreme nationalists who never seem to have contemplated a revival of Germany, or that the League of Nations must inevitably be a wash-out.

A week later with little apparent improvement Headlam was of the opinion that 'this time we shall be lucky if we get out of the mess without a war.' However, he believed Britain, even though not pledged to assist the Czechs, ought to intervene since she was 'a party to the calling into existence of their unhappy country and [we] are supposed to stand up for the smaller nations.'[56] Headlam was, however, well-versed in military matters, having seen service in World War One and through a historical/practical interest as editor of *Army Quarterly*. As a consequence he reached the conclusion, in common with the Chiefs of Staff, that Britain 'cannot prevent the Czechs being annihilated even if we do go to war on their behalf.'[57]

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[55] Headlam Mss: diary, 19 Sept. 1938; Crookshank Mss, diary, 15 Sept. 1938, MS.Eng.hist.d.359f.214.

[56] Headlam Mss: diary 17, 19, 25, 26 Sept. 1938, D/He/34. Winterton also confirms this in his diary. He felt that the 'crisis varies from day to day. One day hopeful, the next most gloomy like variations in the health of a sick patient.' Winterton Mss: diary, 5 Sept. 1938, 1/43. For the reactions of an 'ordinary' civilian living in Streatham see Samuel Rich Mss: diary, Sept. 1938, AJ217/34, Southampton University Archive.

[57] Headlam Mss: diary, 26 Sept. 1938, D/He/34.

Certainly by 28 September many Conservatives expected war to occur within a matter of days.[58] Chamberlain felt it necessary to broadcast to the nation. During the course of his talk he referred to the Sudeten crisis as being 'in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing'. The broadcast left one group of foreign policy sceptics with the impression 'of a broken man' which was something they felt would only encourage Hitler.[59] For the agent of Sedgefield Conservatives it meant 'that peace is hanging on a hair and that we may be faced with a world war almost immediately.'[60] It was under this sense of crisis and foreboding that the following day a parliamentary debate on the situation was scheduled. Chamberlain had expected to announce the failure of his mission, except that part-way through his speech an invitation was received to return to Germany for a four power conference to be held in Munich. Relief more than anything explains the eruption from Members as the announcement was made to the House.

V

In due course Chamberlain returned from Munich claiming peace in our time and proudly waving the scrap of paper which, on the spur of the moment, Hitler and he had both signed, agreeing friendly relations between Britain and Germany. However the initial euphoria about avoiding war quickly subsided. Although in public most Conservatives expressed satisfaction with the Munich agreement in private many revealed reservations. The duke of Atholl, president of Kinross Association, was 'very nervous' about 'Europe being handed over to Hitler', nor did he 'like the confession that our armaments are insufficient, and only being told so at the last minute.'[61] It was especially this latter point that caused Conservatives the most concern, and as will be shown in the next chapter it was rearmament rather than foreign policy that was proving to be the more divisive issue for the Party in the latter part of 1938. Those Conservatives who went public in their criticisms of Munich were subjected to pressure from the Whips and local Associations. It was an issue that at outward appearances gave the impression of being capable of splitting the Party. However, it was a schism that was to the greatest extent kept private, and one that was far less serious than at first supposed. In part this

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[58] *Channon Diaries*, 28 Sept. 1938, p. 170.

[59] *Amery Diaries*, 28 Sept. 1938, p. 520.

[60] Headlam Mss: Leslie Lonie to Headlam, 28 Sept. 1938, D/He/135/136.

[61] Atholl Mss: Lord Atholl to James Paton, 2 Nov. 1938, File 22/13.

was a tribute to the Whips and Party managers, but even more because the Party prided itself on loyalty. To some this was, and still remains, the Conservatives' greatest asset. In the Party the tradition of veneration and loyalty to the leader was extremely powerful, and dislike of factionalism could prove stronger than the desire for a change of policy or leader. Such beliefs help to explain why the overwhelming majority of Conservative MPs backed the government during the four day Munich debate despite many having private doubts. Harry Crookshank, who had tried to resign as Minister for Mines in protest at Munich, decided after a personal interview with the Prime Minister, that his 'reservations would remain mental not vocal.' In fact, Crookshank believed he had won a moral victory over the Prime Minister for the private threat of resignation had enabled him to present an 'ultimatum' which Chamberlain had agreed to: to take back the words 'peace with honour'; to press on with rearmament; aim at collective arrangements for diplomacy; and not to dissolve parliament.[62] It appears to have been widely accepted that the pressing of claims in private to ministers and Whips was a more lucrative exercise than public criticism which only provoked hostility and invariably retribution. The subject of loyalty to an even greater extent helps one understand why the rank-and-file reacted, almost violently at times, against rebels in the constituencies.[63] Loyalty towards the leadership was always strongest and most extreme at the grassroots. Munich was very much Chamberlain's policy and therefore an attack on Munich was perceived as an attack on the Prime Minister. The exception taken by members of Winchester Association to a suggestion by one of their executive in March 1939 that Munich had caused 'national humiliation' illustrates the cult of the leader.[64] Dissident MPs claimed that Conservative Central Office had been encouraging local Associations to censure their actions. However, in the case of Duff Cooper and St George's Association, the Chief Organisational Officer at Central Office, Marjorie Maxse (herself an Edenite sympathiser) said they had actually intervened to prevent the retribution getting out of control.[65] It would appear that local Association executives needed no second encouragement to reprimand dissidents. This was also demonstrated in the

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62 Crookshank Mss: diary, 4, 6 Oct. 1938, MS.Eng.hist.d.359f.218.

63 For further analysis of censure of dissidents and the features of rebellion see Crowson, 'Conservative Parliamentary dissent'; Thompson, *Anti-Appeasers*, and Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler*.

64 Winchester CA, AGM 25 Mar. 1939, 73M86W/5; *Hampshire Advertiser*, 1 Apr. 1939.

65 *Harvey Diaries*, 12 Oct. 1938, p. 213.

constituency of Aldershot, home to Neville Chamberlain's spinster sisters, Hilda and Ida. They had thought about 'ginger[ing] up' the local women's Association against Lord Wolmer, but were very pleased to discover that the 'local Association far from needing a lead was bristling with indignation.'[66]

How then did supporters of the Munich agreement justify their acquiescence? Since May 1940 Munich has become synonymous with betrayal and humiliation and many who supported it in October 1938 sought to distance themselves from the agreement. The fact that Chamberlain secured an overwhelming majority in the parliamentary debate was testimony to the contemporary Conservative support Munich received. Yet, historians have failed adequately to explain why, and it has been too easy merely to label these backbenchers as "yes-men". Certainly, a critique of these has been that few had much understanding of the conduct of foreign policy, but it seems hard to believe that in 1938 when foreign policy dominated the news that these MPs had not formed their own opinions of the situation. Certainly some voted with the government purely from loyalty and because of pressure from the Whips Office. Yet many did accept that Munich was a victory for peace. One such Member who believed this admitted retrospectively he may have been 'over-optimistic' when Chamberlain returned, but 'we regarded him rather like an Old Testament patriarch who had returned with God's blessing to preserve peace in our time'.[67] The contemporary public defence that supporters of Munich mounted is all the more interesting in view of the mounting private unease about the agreement. How therefore did Conservatives justify the transfer of the Sudetenland to Germany? Sir Roger Lumley, formerly an MP and at this time governor of Bombay, had 'not the slightest doubt' that were he still in parliament he would have cheered himself 'hoarse' about Munich. For this reason he believed he would 'find it hard to be patient with those who, now that the danger is over for the present, are no doubt beginning to criticize the Munich agreement.' Nevertheless, he agreed that

> there was a greater issue in the background - nazism versus decency; but if a struggle on that fundamental issue has got to come I would prefer (a) to

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66 Chamberlain Mss: Ida to Neville, 9 Oct. 1938, NC18/2/1096; Hilda to Neville, 13 Oct. 1938, NC1/15/3/159.

67 Somerset de Chair to author, 2 Sept 1992.

have it over a pretext which is better and less likely to cause doubts than the Czecho[slovakian] issue, and (b) to have it when we are ready.[68]

Arthur Heneage, the Member for Louth and a die-hard, had a series of correspondents who criticised Munich. There were three lines to his argument, firstly, that 'we should not go to war because we dislike other countries having dictators [...] that is their own business.' Although dictators have an inherent inability to be peaceful, this has been proved wrong in Germany's case 'and the contact established between this country, France and Germany in admitting injustices should go far to make possible further peaceful negotiation.' Secondly, Heneage felt it was 'a bad case to have three million Germans in a country where they do not want to stay, and certainly a bad case on which to go to war. You cannot have self-determination for some nations and refuse it for the Germans.' Thirdly, it was argued that one could not go to war for a country that was indefensible and it was 'evident that Czechoslovakia would have been overwhelmed and wiped out.'[69] Peter Thorneycroft, who had been elected MP for Stafford in May 1938, explained to his Association that Munich was only one part or incident in Chamberlain's foreign policy. Such a foreign policy had been working when Chamberlain and Mussolini established friendly relations in February 1938 and this had borne fruit when during the autumn Czech crisis Mussolini had been prepared to intervene to secure peace rather than war.[70] However, there must be a distinction made between public and private statements, which reveal the Party's general unease about the whole situation. During the Munich debate a quip worked round the backbenches which likened the crisis to St. George who 'having failed to rescue the maiden remarked that she was no better than she should be.'[71] The unease was further illustrated by the behaviour of Captain C.G. Lancaster who stood as the Conservative candidate in the November 1938 Fylde by-election. In his election addresses Lancaster stood by the Munich agreement:

I sincerely believe that there was set on foot at Munich a movement out of which may grow a new spirit in the settlement of international problems. The Prime Minister has declared that we shall never secure peace by sitting still and waiting for it. We must take firm and practical measures to

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68 Avon Mss: Roger Lumley to Eden, 2 Oct. 1938, AP13/1/66P.

69 Heneage Mss: Heneage to J.M. Lill, 12 Oct. 1938, HNC 1/L; Heneage to J.R. Jennings, 16 Nov. 1938, HNC 1/J.

70 *Staffordshire Chronicle*, 11 Mar. 1939.

71 Makins Mss: diary, 6 Oct. 1938.

promote it. We must do what lies in our power to create a spirit of understanding and appeasement which will make it impossible ever again for war to come so near to us.[72]

However, upon his election to parliament, Lancaster aligned himself with the foreign policy sceptics. This action came as no surprise to the Fylde agent who felt Lancaster at the selection interviews 'had not been very satisfactory in his statement about his political views and had given you to understand that he was not prepared to give whole-hearted support to the present government whom he thought behaved all right at the [Munich] crisis but were to a certain extent responsible for all the trouble and unpreparedness now.'[73] Party officials appear to have been alert to the unease. Conservative Central Office produced a propaganda leaflet 'Chamberlain the peacemaker', which they encouraged Associations to purchase and distribute.[74] As the secretary of the Scottish Conservative Association, Colonel Blair, explained this leaflet distribution was of 'the highest importance' because 'of widespread misrepresentation and misapprehension regarding Mr Chamberlain's policy.'[75]

The foreign policy sceptics had tried to co-ordinate their voting during the Munich debate. Many of them had met regularly throughout the crisis, and had considered the resignation of Duff Cooper a bolster to their position, therefore they decided that they should vote *en bloc*. Churchill had favoured voting against the government, but was persuaded to join in abstaining on the two Munich motions.[76] His damning of Munich in the parliamentary debate as a total and unmitigated defeat was to ensure that he came to be seen as the central figure in British opposition to nazism and Hitler. It would appear that Eden and Amery came very close to supporting the government, after hearing Chamberlain's closing speech which appeared to suggest to them a new line of realism. Nevertheless, a sense of loyalty to his followers made Eden stick to the pre-arranged plan, but both he and Amery took the precaution of ensuring that the Prime Minister was aware of the situation.[77] Usually historians

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[72] Almond Mss: Fylde by-election address, DDX1202/1/24, Lancashire Record Office.

[73] Almond Mss: J.R. Almond to Lord Derby, 5 Nov. 1938, DDX1202/1/47.

[74] One such Association that bought the leaflet was Sowerby who thought it 'good propaganda' and distributed 18,500 copies at a cost of £32-16-9. Sowerby CA, finance cttee., 2 Nov. 1938, CV3.

[75] SCA: western div. council, 2 Nov. 1938, Acc 10424.

[76] The details of the dissidents meetings during September 1938 are explained in the editorial analysis of the *Amery Diaries*, pp. 483-90.

[77] Chamberlain Mss: Leo Amery to Chamberlain, 6 Oct. 1938, NC7/2/82; Roberts, *Holy Fox*, p. 125.

suggest that around twenty-five Tories followed Eden's example and abstained. However, analysis of the voting behaviour of Conservative MPs on foreign policy votes during 1938 suggests that this number was greater, possibly as many as forty. This is certainly a figure that fits more closely with the retrospective claims of Churchill and Eden. Amongst those who abstained, in addition to the names usually associated with dissent, were John Gretton, Ernest Makins, J.J. Stourton, and Victor Raikes, all of whom voted against the Labour amendment but were absent from the vote supporting the government. Duff Cooper's Parliamentary Private Secretary, Hamilton Kerr (who had abstained on the Eden vote), followed his former political master and abstained.[78] Robert Boothby, who was one of Churchill's coterie, voted against the Labour amendment but was unable to support the government motion. However, not all supposed sceptics were consistent in their criticisms of foreign policy and a number actually supported the government during the Munich votes. Interestingly J.R.J. Macnamara as well as Mark Patrick and Ronald Tree - both of whom had resigned as Parliamentary Private Secretaries in February in sympathy with Eden - walked into the government lobbies. Tree explained to Eden that he felt the government motion had been phrased to refer only to the immediate crisis. Therefore he had felt able to support it, although he would have considered abstention if he had believed it would have been of definite assistance to Eden. This action was later overlooked by Tree, who declared in his memoirs that he 'had consistently abstained from voting with the government on matters of foreign policy.'[79]

It is worth considering the motives behind the dissidents' abstentions. They were at pains, especially to their local Associations, to emphasise their personal admiration for Chamberlain's selfless action of flying to Germany. Such declarations were always appended to their objections. These criticisms were both specific to the Munich agreement and to the government's policy in general. Though many of them accepted there was a need to revise the 1919

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[78] The known abstentions on the Government motion were V. Adams, D. Gunston, A. Crossley, B. Bracken, R. Cartland, W. Churchill, Duff Cooper, Cranborne, H. Duggan, A. Eden, P. Emrys-Evans, S. Herbert, D.B. Joel, R. Keyes, R.K. Law, Wolmer, H. Macmillan, D. Sandys, E.L. Spears, J.P.L. Thomas, L. Amery, and R. Boothby - all of whom are usually cited as 'anti-appeasers' - in addition J. Gretton, E. Makins, H.V.A. Raikes, J.J. Stourton and Kerr Hamilton; 'Probable abstainers', L. Ropner, B.H.H. Neven-Spence, A. Law, Lord Apsley, A. Duckworth, C.E. Ponsonby, A.T. Wilson; 'Possibles' T. Somerset, W.F. Higgs, W.H. Davison, C.G. Gibson, J. Lee-Jones, T. Sinclair.

[79] Avon Mss: R. Tree to Eden, 7 Oct. 1938, AP14/1/836; Tree, *Memoirs*, p. 82.

Versailles treaty, they argued that the government's pursuit of a misguided foreign policy had contributed directly to the Czech crisis and made the 'humiliation' of Munich necessary. Many pointed to the weakness of Britain's defences and argued that unless Britain had a strong enough military capacity she would continue to be at the dictators' mercy. Munich was 'a victory for brute force' and merely 'a stepping stone' to further outrages. To have supported the government in the votes would have implied general support for both past and future foreign policy, the consequences of which could be profound. Viscount Wolmer felt that the issue at stake was 'whether Europe shall be dominated by equity or force. That is an issue for which England has repeatedly gone to war, because we have known that if we do not resist such force we shall be crushed by it.' Specifically, many questioned the terms of the Munich agreement particularly the guarantee of Czechoslovakia's new borders. As Paul Emrys-Evans told his Association chairman, when the Czechs had their army and border defences there had been a degree of British interest in preserving her integrity,

> When, however, Czechoslovakia is indefensible, when every British interest has disappeared, the government has guaranteed a state whose frontiers do not yet exist. They cannot fulfil this obligation without placing immense new burdens on this country and without recasting the whole scheme of our defences.[80]

It is impossible to tell the impact Munich had upon Conservative membership since detailed membership numbers do not exist. Despite some thirty to forty Conservatives abstaining from the Munich divisions (this was only one tenth of the parliamentary Party) only one MP, the duchess of Atholl, felt obliged to resign her seat and fight a by-election upon the issue.[81] The cabinet suffered only one resignation, that of Duff Cooper, while the usual ministerial malcontents - Winterton, Elliot, Crookshank and Oliver Stanley - overcame

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[80] Cilcennin Mss: J.P.L. Thomas, transcript of speech n.d. [Oct./Nov. 1938], Cilc.coll.54; J.P.L. Thomas to G.C. Irving, 20 Oct. 1938, Cilc.coll.37; Selborne Mss: Wolmer to Sir Godfrey Fell, 7 Oct. 1938, MS.Eng.hist.c.1014ff.51-8; Emrys-Evans Mss: Emrys-Evans to Doncaster, 7 Oct. 1938, Add.MS.58249; Atholl Mss: 'The Munich conference and after' duchess of Atholl, 7 Nov. 1938, file 22/2; *HofC Debs*, vol. 339 cols. 110-14 (Richard Law), 3 Oct. 1938; Harold Macmillan, *The Price of Peace*, (London: Heron, 1938)

[81] See Stuart Ball, ' The politics of appeasement: the fall of the duchess of Atholl and the Kinross and West Perth by-election, December 1938', *Scottish Historical Review*, LXIX, 1 (1990), pp. 49-83.

their objections in the euphoria of peace.[82] Indeed Winterton considered the agreement was better than the *Godesberg* terms and believed 'Neville was right to sign it in the circumstances especially as it was accompanied by a mutual affirmation of goodwill by Neville and Hitler in the form of a joint signed statement.'[83] It is even more difficult to ascertain the impact looking down towards the rank-and-file membership. It would appear that while the overwhelming majority of local Associations sent messages of congratulations to Chamberlain there was some unease. Indeed many of these communications from the grassroots carried appendages. This was demonstrated by the mass meeting organised by Stone Association which carried a motion congratulating Chamberlain on securing peace but which also called for 'a ministerial statement to say what was the government's future plan of appeasement.'[84] This demand reflected a widely held fear amongst the rank-and-file that Chamberlain proposed further concessions to Germany especially in the colonial sphere. Likewise we will see in a future chapter how the apparent weaknesses of defence, as revealed by the crisis, became the major point of disquiet. There were divisions of opinion over Munich that not all the minute books could conceal and there were certainly Conservatives who resigned their positions (especially in constituencies represented by dissident MPs).

One member of the Newbury executive committee resigned in protest at Munich, whilst in Newcastle the local agent noted the sense of guilt felt amongst supporters over the betrayal of the Czechs.[85] In Derbyshire, Hugh Molson, the prospective candidate for the High Peak constituency, actively considered withdrawing his candidature. Molson saw the whole business of the Czech negotiations as 'a complete and abject surrender to Hitler.' At the height of the crisis he had urged Eden to attend the Newcastle National Union conference (which was ultimately cancelled) and 'either oppose any motion of approval or move a vote of censure on the gov[ernmen]t.'[86] Ultimately

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82 Headlam was amused by Cooper's resignation for he had once told him that there were three golden rules in politics: '"never ask for anything, never refuse anything, never resign".' Headlam Mss: diary, 1 Oct. 1938, D/He/34.

83 Winterton Mss: diary, 30 Sept. 1938, 1/43.

84 Stone CA, newspaper clippings, Nov. 1938, D1289/5/2, Staffordshire Record Office.

85 Newbury CA, exec 12 Nov. 1938, letter from Mr Cathorine-Hardy, D/EX409/3, Berkshire Record Office; Headlam Mss: diary, 10 Oct. 1938.

86 Avon Mss: Hugh Molson to Eden, 20 Sept. 1938, AP 14/1/781.

Molson did remain because he was elected at the 1939 by-election, caused by the death of Alfred Law. His views about the government's foreign policy did not change and he associated himself with the sceptics and ultimately voted against the government over Norway in May 1940. Equally, in another of Derbyshire's constituencies the dispute between MP Paul Emrys-Evans, and his Derbyshire South Association chairman, Doncaster, reached a climax with the latter resigning in protest at Evans' continued opposition to Chamberlain's foreign policy. Relations between Evans and his chairman had been rather volatile since the MP had abstained from the Eden censure motion. Through a series of misunderstandings and failed compromises the situation continued to deteriorate during the summer of 1938. Matters reached a head when Evans abstained over the Munich vote. Until this point both parties, as far as was possible, had wished to keep the divisions over foreign policy out of the public domain. After Eden's resignation Evans had refrained from speaking in the House of Commons on foreign policy and sought to counter the press speculation concerning his proffered resignation from the Conservative foreign affairs committee. As he assured Doncaster 'you may rely upon me to be as discreet as possible. If, however, I was convinced that the public interest demanded it, I would feel bound to speak out again.'[87] Munich provided that opportunity, and when Evans notified Doncaster of his intention to publish a letter in the local newspaper explaining his actions, the chairman objected:

> If you desire to send to the press a considered statement of your attitude then that is a matter for your personal discretion but until South Derbyshire Association has had an opportunity of considering and deciding upon the action to take such a course would be manifestly unfair to those who have worked for you.[88]

Doncaster decided to resign following a series of further misunderstandings and doubts about whether Evans was going to be able personally to present his views to the Association. Doncaster believed 'it would be invidious for me to continue to act as chairman of the Association which whilst it stated itself to be in complete accord with the Prime Minister *and his policy* yet in effect it pledged itself to support a Member who not only openly expressed his hostility to that policy but quite honestly stated that he would continue to act

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[87] Emrys-Evans Mss: Evans to Doncaster, n.d. [after 12 Apr. 1938] Add.MS.58249.

[88] Emrys-Evans Mss: Doncaster to Evans, 12 Oct. 1938, Add.MS.58249.

in that spirit.'[89] This time around it was Doncaster's turn to prevent the dispute being publicly aired by only giving his reasons to the Association executive at a private meeting.[90] In Yorkshire the sceptical attitude of the *Yorkshire Post* aroused the hostility of Party activists. York Association passed a motion which 'deplore[d]' the paper's Edenite stance believing that it was 'doing a signal disservice to the country in general and to the Conservative Party in particular.' This was forwarded to Arthur Mann the paper's editor and other constituency Associations were canvassed to act likewise. West Leeds Association, whose MP was the sceptic Vyvyan Adams, concurred with the York resolution but had no desire to exacarbate the situation 'generally agreeing that no useful purpose would be served in sending this or any similar resolution to the press.'[91] The dispute continued into 1939 with the paper's editor continually fighting to retain editorial freedom. This example and that of South Derbyshire demonstrate the Party's natural instinct for maintaining a façade of unity at all times.

These instances of MPs being made to answer to their Associations for their behaviour illustrates a number of interesting features about rebellion in the Conservative Party. These concerned the role of local Associations, their intolerance of disloyalty, the part played by constituency chairmen, their financial solvency and the degree of independence an MP was allowed. For example, the duchess of Atholl was not unusual in being censured for her attitude on foreign policy. Other dissidents experienced similar responses. J.R.J. Macnamara's abstention from the Eden resignation censure motion was considered by his Chelmsford Association to be 'unwise'. Vyvyan Adams, MP for Leeds West, who voted with the opposition on the same question was rebuked by his executive (and likewise, Viscount Wolmer, Aldershot's MP, when he abstained from the Munich vote).[92]

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89 Emrys-Evans Mss: Doncaster to Harriss, 18 Nov. 1938, Add.MS.58249 ff.43-4.

90 *Nottingham Evening Post*, 4 Nov. 1938, 'an authoritative source' informed the paper of Doncaster's resignation. The report continued explaining that Evans' public statement 'that he cannot support the Government's foreign policy and this attitude appears to have some bearing on the reported resignation [...] Some secrecy is being observed, and the press were not admitted to a special meeting of the Sandiacre and Risley Conservative Association last night, when Sir Robert outlined his views.'

91 York CA, exec. Nov. 1938, York City Archive; West Leeds CA, exec. 5 Dec. 1938; Avon Mss: Arthur Mann to Forbes Adam, 30 Nov. 1938, AP14/1/777A.

92 Chelmsford CA, exec. 3 Mar. 1938, D/Z96/7; West Leeds CA, exec. 28 Feb. 1938; Aldershot CA, central council, 22 Oct. 1938, exec. 14 Dec. 1938, 114M84/2.

The crucial factor in preventing these instances of censure going further was the degree of support from the Association chairman for the MP. This is particularly illustrated by comparing the example of Viscount Wolmer with that of the duchess of Atholl. As was the case with the duchess, moves were made by some elements of Wolmer's Association to de-select him. James Paton, the duchess's chairman, initially seemed unsure of his position and then was unwilling to use his personal prestige to prevent the splitting of the Conservatives in the Kinross constituency. In contrast, Colonel Charrington warned the Aldershot executive that if Wolmer was de-selected he would resign his own position.[93] In both of the cases of Churchill and Boothby, only the intervention of their chairmen prevented their local executives passing resolutions condemning their criticisms. In Leamington Spa, Eden was to find the support of his chairman Sir Spenser Flowers absolutely crucial in safeguarding his position.[94]

Invariably in any of these clashes between MP and local Association the issue at stake was the extent to which the MP felt able to assert the right for independence of action. The duchess of Atholl felt that her opposition to foreign policy was justified under the terms agreed with her Association at the 1935 general election allowing her the freedom of action upon issues that did not directly affect the constituency.[95] In a different instance, Winchester Association when discussing the controversial national defence contribution tax in May 1937 revealed the uncertainty about the degree of control an Association could expect to exercise over its MP. Some members of the executive seemed to feel that they were not qualified to pass judgement on matters such as the NDC tax and that it was a matter for parliament. Others argued it was their role to keep their MP informed of opinion - in this instance

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[93] Compare Aldershot CA, central council, 22 Oct. 1938, exec. 14 Dec. 1938; Selborne Mss: correspondence between Sir Godfrey Fell and Wolmer, Oct. 1938, MS.Eng.hist.c.1014; with Kinross & West Perth CA, exec. 2 June 1937, 22 Apr. 1938, special general meeting 13 May 1938, exec. 27 May 1938, 31 Oct. 1938; Atholl Mss: 'Resume of proceedings of exec.... 27 May 1938' by Will Hally, file 22/6; 'Table of events in regard to Kinross & West Perth exec.' by duchess, n.d. [1938] file 22/6; duke of Atholl to Paton, 2 Nov. 1938, file 22/13.

[94] Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: V: 1922-1939*, (London: Heinemann, 1976), pp. 1012, 1014-5; Robert Rhodes-James, *Boothby: A Portrait*, (London: Curtis & Hodder, 1991), p. 186-8; Avon Mss: correspondence between Eden and Spenser Flowers, 4 Oct. 1938, AP13/1/66I-J.

[95] Kinross CA, exec. 30 June 1937.

their opposition to the tax - and that they expected him to support them.[96] In a different example, one Association chairman told his MP that 'whilst not accepting your point of view, [I] admit your right to exercise your independence in so far as you have already done so, but I wish to be very frank and to say that we do not expect you to harass the government.'[97]

Another element taken into consideration by Associations when allowing their MPs freedom of action was the solvency of the Association and the degree to which it relied upon the support of the Member. Not untypically many Associations during this period experienced some degree of financial difficulty and relied upon the generosity of their MP and wealthier members to maintain activities. In short, the greater the reliance upon the MP then the more likely the Association was to tolerate the independent actions of the Member. The extreme case was that of Harold Macmillan and his Stockton Association. In 1936 Macmillan had resigned the Whip in opposition to the government's Abyssinian sanctions policy. Despite returning to the Whip in 1937 Macmillan's criticism continued; he abstained from most of the foreign policy votes during 1938 including Eden's resignation and the Munich agreement. At no point did his Association censure his action, but during 1938 Macmillan was paying the salary of the agent and women's organiser because the Association carried a £700 overdraft. The following spring he waived £400 rent on the Association's premises. As the chairman told his executive 'if it were not for the generosity of Mr Macmillan, it would be impossible for the organisation to carry on.' Further, Macmillan seems to have been careful when speaking to his Association on matters of foreign policy to adopt a conciliatory tone.[98] This can be neatly contrasted with the position of the duchess of Atholl. Her husband had been forced to sell the family seat of Blair Atholl Castle in the early 1930s. In 1938 the duchess's subscription to the Kinross Association was £5. It was at this point that the chairman warned her to start following the party line on Spain or else a number of wealthy members would withdraw their subscriptions from the Association.[99] Certainly the financial relationships between MPs and their Associations was a major point of disquiet to both parties during this period. Ultimately the 1949 Maxwell-

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96 Winchester CA, exec. 27 May 1937, 73M86W/5.

97 Emrys-Evans Mss: Doncaster to Evans, 12 Apr 1938, Add.MS.58249.

98 Stockton CA, financial cttee., 23 Nov. 1938, exec. 27 Feb. 1939, D/X 322/5.

99 Kinross CA, addendum to exec. 13 May 1938.

Fyfe report attempted to resolve such anomalies, but what is often forgotten is that such questions of democratising the Party were already under investigation by 1939 only to be interrupted by the war.[100]

One concern amongst Conservative dissidents in the months after Munich was that Chamberlain would call an early general election. Sidney Herbert, during the Munich debate had intervened to warn Chamberlain:

> We can be led but we cannot be bullied. I am not talking so much about what appears in the press, but if it is a case of going into the lobbies and if we are told that only those who vote straight are to get the coupon, then I say, quite honestly, that there will be a great many people in the Conservative Party who will not vote straight.[101]

Herbert's cautionary words carried all the more weight because he was a highly respected backbencher who was rarely moved to intervene in debates. Some considered the possibility of fighting such an election as independents or even possibly forming a new political party.[102] For those Members, such as Winston Churchill and Viscount Wolmer, the de-selection threats from their local Associations made this issue one of pressing concern. From the perspective of the local Association executives the possibility of an early election may also have explained the hostility with which they treated dissident MPs - an Association's duty was to uphold Conservative values in its constituency and ensure the election of its candidate. To have a Member standing for re-election who dissented publicly from the Prime Minister's foreign policy, the issue most likely to dominate the campaign, would not augur well.[103] As the Newbury Association executive agreed upon hearing that their current Member, Clifton-Brown, would be standing down at the next election, the new candidate must be loyal to the government's foreign policy.[104] There were certainly elements within the Party who favoured the electoral option so that the Party might gain political capital from Chamberlain's personal prestige. Elements of the Party machine had for some time been preparing for an election. For instance, the Conservative Research

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100 e.g. Sowerby CA, exec. 24 Nov. 1937, CV2; Chelmsford CA, 'honourary treasurer's report' year ending Dec. 1936, D/Z96/3; Headlam Mss: diary, 21 Jan. 1937, D/He/33.; Ramsden, *Balfour and Baldwin*, pp. 359-60.

101 *HofC Debs*, vol. 339 col. 243, 4 Oct 1938.

102 *Harvey Diaries*, 8 Oct. 1938, p. 210.

103 West Leeds CA, exec 24 Feb. 1938, No5 minute book; Emrys-Evans Mss: Doncaster to Evans, 12 Oct. 1938, Add.MS.58249.

104 Newbury CA, constituency council 12 Nov. 1938, D/EX409/3.

Department (CRD) acting upon Chamberlain's instructions had already prepared a shortlist of 'danger' seats. Their analysis of by-election results was always measured in relation to possible general election performances. During mid-November D.F. Clarke of the CRD confidently reported that study of the by-election results since 1935 left the impression that a general election now would make 'very little difference' to the government's current majority. However, two weeks later the analysis was more worrying. In an urgent memorandum to Joseph Ball, the CRD's director, Clarke concluded that the political situation had deteriorated:

> the outlook is far less promising than it was a few months ago, and there are a large number of seats held by only small majorities, so that only a small turnover of votes would defeat the government.

The assessment carried a further 'important' warning that, 'while a general election would be fought largely on foreign policy, home issues would not be put entirely in the background.'[105] This report coincided with a *News Chronicle* commissioned poll which indicated a two per cent fall in 'satisfaction' levels with Chamberlain and recorded a forty per cent level of dissatisfaction.[106] There is evidence that Chamberlain continued to keep an open mind about the possibility of an early election not least because it offered an opportunity to force the re-unification of the Party. However, the deteriorating electoral situation cannot have escaped his attention when he suggested to his sisters in December that he had abandoned plans for an election because of the 'behaviour of the dictators.'[107]

VI

While the vast majority of Conservatives were prepared to tolerate the Munich agreement, it was soon apparent that many were unprepared to accept further concessions to Germany. It was a factor that was increasingly re-emphasised following the Nazi pogroms against the German Jews in November 1938. In Britain the news of *Kristallnacht* was received with obvious disgust.[108] Although social anti-semitism was not an uncommon trait amongst Conservatives, the intensity and violence of Nazi anti-semitism was

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105 CPA: 'by-elections results Nov. 1935-Nov. 1938', D.F. Clarke, 14 Nov. 1938; 'by-election results', D.F. Clarke to J. Ball, 28 Nov. 1938, CRD1/7/35.

106 *News Chronicle*, 28 Nov. 1938.

107 Chamberlain Mss: Neville to Hilda, 11 Dec. 1938, NC18/1/1079.

108 Headlam Mss: diary, 13 Nov. 1938, D/He/34; Chelmsford CA, women's council 22 Nov. 1938, D/Z96/13.

abhorrent to most.[109] Events such as *Kristallnacht* and the manner in which Germany annexed the Sudeten territory pushed British Conservative opinion against further approaches towards Germany, particularly in the colonial sphere. Such behaviour pricked the moral sensibilities of Conservatives and suggested something of the true nature of nazism. It must also have been recognised that public opinion was incensed by the atrocities. To have talked of further concessions to a regime capable of such brutality would have brought a wave of public condemnation.[110]

This Nazi savagery occurred at a time when the Party was expressing concern about the possibility of Britain returning her former colonial territories to Germany. The need for Nazi anti-semitism to resort to murder and brutality was an unacceptable development for Conservatives, and it led many to question the advisability of continuing negotiations with the Nazi regime. For rank-and-file Conservatives during the latter half of the 1930s the return of former German colonies was a question that more often than not aroused opposition. Both the 1936 and 1937 National Union annual conferences had adopted motions opposing any colonial restitution, and such similar sentiments were very visible during 1938. This hostility observably stiffened in the months following Munich. Rumours, particularly in the Beaverbrook press, that Chamberlain had talked to Hitler about colonial returns brought a wave of protests from local Associations.[111] An example of the colonial debate during 1938 at the local level, and the stiffening of attitudes, was demonstrated by South Oxfordshire Conservative Association. At its AGM in June 1938 a resolution that the time was 'not ripe for considering the return to Germany of any of her former colonies' had been debated. Supporters of the resolution argued that the last war had been instigated by Germany and that the colonies were compensation for that conflict. Equally it was felt that Germany was demanding these colonies as a right and not as a settlement. It was also felt that the attitude of the dominions was important especially since they held some of these mandated territories. The strategic significance of some of the colonies, like Tanganyika, was also pointed out. Perhaps

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[109] See Chapter One for further development on this theme, pp. 56-60.

[110] *News Chronicle*, 28 Nov. 1938, British Institute of Public Opinion survey asked the sample 'Do you think the persecution of the Jews in Germany is an obstacle to good understanding between Britain and Germany?' Yes 73%, No 15%, No Opinion 12%.

[111] Harborough CA, constituency council 19 Nov. 1938, DE 1170/4, Leicestershire Record Office; Chelmsford CA, exec. 4 Nov. 1938; Headlam Mss: diary, 10 Oct. 1938, D/He/34; Inverness CA, exec. & AGM 20 Oct. 1938.

unsurprisingly the German character was called into question with a portrayal of the Germans as bad colonialists who maltreated native populations. The current German regime was revealing its intolerance towards subject and ethnic minorities therefore any native populations surrendered to the Nazis was likely to be ill-treated. Opponents countered by questioning the loyalty of the proposers and moving an amendment which felt that acceptance of such a resolution 'would make it appear that they had lost faith in the government.' Disloyalty was a loaded term in Conservative circles and such a charge was enough to encourage the withdrawal of the original resolution. The question of colonies was forced back upon the South Oxfordshire executive in November when their Peppard branch sent a resolution expressing 'alarm' at press speculation about colonial restitution. Gifford Fox, their MP, had also been in correspondence with a constituent about the same question in which he too expressed objections. The executive concluded that they were only prepared to consider colonial returns if they meant 'an absolute guarantee of peace' but this could not be done until Germany disarmed both numerically and morally.[112] Similar views were not uncommon amongst Conservatives and in colonial circles. A further argument, which may have stemmed from an imperial arrogance and a prejudicial view of the German character, was that no colony should be returned without the consent of the native populations.[113] This view must certainly have seemed credible in light of the Nazi mistreatment of their Jewish populations and political opponents.[114] Certainly *Kristallnacht* was a catalyst. 'Even some of the staunchest supporters of the government are puzzled and disconcerted' observed *The Times* on 15 November. The paper's political correspondent,

> understood that this feeling was reflected in speeches at last night's meeting of the 1922 Conservative Private Member's committee, when the subject of ex-German colonies was raised. These speeches, and the way in which they were received, appear to show a stiffening of the attitude of a number of government backbenchers.

That same day an early-day motion was tabled in the House of Commons which urged 'that no agreement should be made under which any British colonies or mandated territory should be transferred to Germany without the

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112 South Oxfordshire CA, AGM 18 June 1938, exec. 9 Nov. 1938, S.Oxon.Con.I/3.

113 Birchall Mss: Sir Robert Brooke-Popham to J.D. Birchall, 14 Oct. 1938, Box 33.

114 CP: National Union, exec. 14 Dec. 1938, card 58; Maidstone CA, exec. 21 Feb. 1939, A3/1/2, Kent Record Office; Heneage Mss: *Home & Empire* (Louth edn.), 28 Nov. 1938, HNC 2/48; Stockton CA, AGM 10 Mar. 1939, D/X322/5.

consent of the people of Great Britain.' It soon had forty signatures including those of Vyvyan Adams, Leo Amery, Edward Ruggles-Brise, Crawford Browne and Robert Cary.[115] The signatories were a mix of loyalists and foreign policy sceptics. Sections of the media speculated that Chamberlain had given Hitler some verbal assurances at Munich about the return of colonies. These rumours particularly aroused the suspicion of the dissident Conservative foreign policy critics.[116] Eden was being urged by supporters to 'come out very strongly' against colonial restitution and request a ministerial statement. They felt that a very large part of the Party were 'disturbed and anxious' and that an appeal 'put with vigour would have a disturbing effect on the backbenches and would rally many doubtful supporters in the country.' Eden 'would speak as a Tory for Tories.'[117]

Of course, not all Conservatives were opposed to returning former German colonies. Oswald Lewis, the Member for Colchester, 'doubted' in December 1938 if there could ever be 'any settlement with Germany until something was done to meet her half way in the matter of the colonial question.'[118] Nevertheless, most accepted that in the last months of 1938 such advances were not practical given the current political outlook, and this view applied equally to the cabinet, parliamentary Party and constituencies. As the National Union executive agreed in mid-December, such returns 'would not be conducive to the maintenance of peace'.[119] Certainly Chamberlain felt frustrated at the attitudes of the dictators in the months following Munich. Even the prospect of an early general election to capitalise upon the euphoria of peace had to be ruled out because the dictators appeared incapable of behaving themselves.

Unable to make any immediate approaches to Hitler, Chamberlain sought to maintain the initiative by improving Anglo-Italian relations. At Mussolini's request, Chamberlain set out to reward him for involvement in the Munich conference, by a hasty ratification of the Anglo-Italian agreement. When it was presented to the House at the beginning of November there were only a

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115 *The Times*, 18 Nov. 1938; *Financial Times*, 18 Nov. 1938.

116 Cilcennin Mss: Robert Boothby to Lt. Col. Duff, 2 Dec. 1938, Cilc.coll.42.

117 Avon Mss: Emrys-Evans to Eden, 4 Nov. 1938, AP14/1/742.

118 Ruggles-Brise Mss: *Essex County Telegraph*, 17 Dec. 1938.

119 CP: National Union, exec. 14 Dec. 1938, card 59.

few Conservative abstentions with a number of leading foreign policy critics supporting the government. Eden, who was one of the abstentions, explained that he 'could not vote against the government without voting with Labour. Moreover it would be impossible to vote against the government on a major issue such as this without refusing the government Whip and ceasing in effect to be a government supporter.' It would have meant a by-election.[120]

With many of the Munich rebels still experiencing trouble from their local Associations such considerations of expediency were not surprising. One rebel, the duchess of Atholl, who had refused the Whip in April found that her local Association decided to select another candidate for the next election. The Munich agreement had forced the issue. The duchess found the terms of Munich unacceptable and she resigned her Kinross seat and fought a by-election against the official Conservative candidate. She was defeated - none of her fellow rebels had been prepared to speak upon her behalf. Only Churchill gave a degree of public support by sending the duchess an open letter of endorsement. De-selection, as Lord Wolmer, Duff Cooper and Winston Churchill were finding, was a very real threat. As it was the government had to fight eight by-elections between Munich and Christmas 1938 - losing at Bridgwater and Dartford. CRD analysis concluded that the degree of public interest in the by-elections was due to the 'emotional and abnormal atmosphere produced by the uncertainties of the international situation and of national defence, and aggravated by the strong feeling aroused by the Jewish persecutions.'[121]

VII

Certainly a number of Conservatives were by February 1939 becoming increasingly concerned about Hitler's next move. During January conflicting rumours emerged from Germany which suggested that London might at any moment be subject to a 'mad-dog' air raid or that Hitler's attentions were turned to the Low Countries. Ralph Glyn admitted that it would be a 'critical

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120 Avon Mss: Eden to Timothy Eden, 9 Nov. 1938, AP14/1/737C.

121 CPA: H.G. Hanrott, 'Munich by-elections', 25 Nov. 1938, CRD1/7/35. The eight by-elections that took place were Oxford City (27/10/38), Dartford (7/11/38), Walsall (16/11/38), Doncaster (17/11/38), Bridgwater (17/11/38), West Lewisham (24/11/38), Fylde (30/11/38), Kinross (21/12/38). For analysis of Oxford, Bridgwater and Kinross see I. McLean, 'Oxford and Bridgwater' in *By-Elections in British Politics*, ed. Chris Cook & John Ramsden, (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 140-65, Ball, 'Politics of appeasement'.

fortnight' but he still believed that 'peace and reason' would be preserved.[122] The foreign policy sceptics were less confident about Hitler's intentions and were fearful that Chamberlain proposed to launch a fresh diplomatic initiative.[123] Their gloomy assessment was being echoed by some sections of the press causing Scottish Conservatives to complain that 'the persistent pessimism of widely read organs, from which government support might ordinarily be expected was doing great harm by creating an atmosphere of undue anxiety among people of all classes, besides giving a false impression abroad.'[124] It was perhaps to counter these defeatist press reports that Chamberlain told lobby correspondents in early March that the international situation was so hopeful that disarmament talks might begin before the year's end. This was despite the government being aware of rumours that Germany was now intending to absorb the remainder of Czechoslovakia, and of the German forces being massed on the Czechoslovak border. Leo Amery met a Czech man who claimed that the British and French secret services were aware of Hitler's intentions from 7 March.[125] One week later the news reached London that advanced mobile German units had entered Prague, blatantly flouting Munich and signalling the failure of Chamberlain's appeasement policy. As Headlam confessed in his diary it was 'the death-knell of poor Neville's policy'. He was firmly of the opinion that it should also mean the end of all dealings with Hitler who henceforth should 'be treated as outside the pale.'[126] Although Chamberlain stoutly defended his position to a hostile House of Commons, its reaction meant that a few days later, during a speech to Birmingham Conservatives, he effectively signalled the end of appeasement. Pressure had been brought to bear by Halifax who recognised the very real danger of the government falling from power if they persisted in their current vein. The House of Commons debate had revealed the concern amongst Conservative ranks. Viscount Wolmer seized on Chamberlain's declaration that he would persevere to keep the peace of Europe. In a speech laced with sarcasm Wolmer asked 'what sort of peace are we enjoying today?

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122 Glyn Mss: Ralph Glyn to mother, 30 Jan. 1939, D/EGlC9/10.

123 Avon Mss: Cranborne to Eden, n.d. [before 3 Feb 1939 since this is date of Eden's reply], AP14/2/20.

124 SCA: western div. council, 1 Feb. 1939, Acc10424.

125 *Amery Diaries*, 16 Mar. 1939, p. 549.

126 Headlam Mss: diary, 15 Mar. 1939, D/He/35.

Is it proper, legitimate, right and sensible to describe the state of Europe today as one of peace? I do not think it is.'[127] Richard Law was equally damning:

> It is no time to apportion blame. But at the same time we must admit that that policy [of appeasement] has not worked out as we were told it would work out. We must admit that the predictions which were being made by critics of that policy have been fulfilled in a most alarming degree, and that every published calculation of the supporters of that policy has been falsified by the event.[128]

A few backbenchers did try to defend Chamberlain but declarations like Archibald Southby's 'that the policy of appeasement is still right [...and...] is the only policy which we can expect to gain a peace that will last' did not really sound convincing.[129] The parliamentary debate had been, as one Chamberlainite loyalist admitted, a 'great day' for the foreign policy sceptics.[130] The situation had not been alleviated by the impression that Chamberlain had not performed 'very convincing[ly]'.[131] If publicly some Conservatives felt obliged to support the Prime Minister the majority remained silent. In private though the leadership was left in no doubt about their criticisms, the hostility of the parliamentary Party being expressed at a meeting of their foreign affairs committee.[132]

Chamberlain's Birmingham speech, which was extensively reported in the press and relayed live to some local Associations, averted a Party revolt and the tributes from the rank-and-file were soon dispatched to London. The prospective candidate for Barnard Castle, Miss A. Headlam-Morley, proposed for the Northern Counties Association one such resolution of 'confidence' which promised 'unqualified support' for the Prime Minister.[133] A similar

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127 *HofC Debs*, vol. 345 col. 466, 15 Mar. 1939.

128 *HofC Debs*, vol. 345 col. 470, 15 Mar. 1939.

129 *HofC Debs*, vol. 345 col. 523, 15 Mar. 1939. Other Conservatives who defended Chamberlain in the debate were cols. 477-80 (A.A. Somerville), 489-94 (Somerset de Chair), 501-05 (Patrick Donner).

130 *Channon Diaries*, 15 Mar. 1939, p. 186.

131 York Mss: diary, 15 Mar. 1939.

132 *Amery Diaries*, 16 Mar. 1939, p. 548. It was perhaps as a result of the ability of this committee to provide a platform for criticism from foreign policy sceptics that the government ensured a loyalist, Sir John Wardlaw-Milne, was elected chairman in May 1939 when John McEwen stood down. *Channon Diaries*, 4 May 1939, p. 197.

133 Northern Counties Area, AGM 18 Mar. 1939, NRO3303/1.

resolution was approved by Derby Association, an action repeated by many other Associations around the country.[134]

The government after consideration responded further by guaranteeing Poland's territorial integrity on 31 March, as well as that of a number of other European nations. Measures were announced that doubled the size of the Territorial Army and finally conscription was introduced in April. Once again, rank-and-file Conservatives were quick to assure Chamberlain of their support for the new foreign policy emphasis on 'guarantees'.[135] The parliamentary Party, including the sceptics, publicly received the new measures positively. Even Winston Churchill 'did not harangue the government, but actually praised it'.[136] Christopher York felt the guarantee meant 'that the blame for any war now rests solely on Hitler and the PM has manoeuvred him into the position that he will have the whole world against him including probably America.'[137] Although one Area chairman thought it ironic that 'now possibly the next European war may arise in defence of the Polish corridor! How odd that would be.'[138] Leo Amery later wrote that with Poland 'the Germans often had better grounds for complaint than in the case of Czechs and Sudetens the year before. Polish crowds were far less restrained in venting their anti-German sentiments, while some Polish newspapers [...] were openly provocative.'[139] Despite this Conservatives still continued to refer to the dictators in conciliatory terms; members of the cabinet were asked to refrain from making personal attacks upon Hitler, while the suggestion that Britain was trying to encircle Germany was denied.[140] Instead Conservatives insisted that Chamberlain was merely creating a peace bloc whose role was defensive not aggressive. The City of London Association heard how Hitler had 'betrayed' Chamberlain and that now the Prime Minister had 'adopted the only other method available - a peace front with other European countries. [...]

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134 Derby CA, AGM 23 Mar. 1939; Maidstone CA, AGM 27 Mar. 1939, A3/1/2; SCA: Scottish Junior League, central council 25 Mar. 1939, Acc10424/91.

135 Harborough CA, AGM, 29 Apr. 1939, DE 11170/4; CP: National Union, exec. 14 June 1939.

136 *Channon Diaries*, 3 Apr. 1939, p. 192; Also sceptic Ronald Tree expressed his approval to his association, Harborough CA, AGM 29 Apr. 1939, DE1170/4; *HofC Debs*, vol. 345 cols. 2496-2505 (Churchill), 2511-15 (Eden), 2524-29 (Nicolson), 3 Apr. 1939.

137 York Mss: diary, 31 Mar. 1939.

138 Headlam Mss: diary, 31 Mar. 1939, D/He/35.

139 Amery, *My Political Life*, p. 315.

140 Hitler on 28 Apr. had made a speech accusing Britain of trying to encircle Germany.

the great prestige enjoyed by the country was [being] shown by the readiness with which other countries had accepted our guarantees against aggression.'[141] One Yorkshire MP assured his local Association that since Prague

> we have re-oriented our foreign policy and we have been building up a peace front which will be able to confront Germany and Italy if they start on any further acts of aggression with force equal to or superior to their own. This peace front has no hostile or aggressive intentions but it was determined to preserve its integrity.[142]

To many observers Soviet Russia was the key to any successful 'peace bloc' Chamberlain may have been wishing to create after the Prague spring. Certain elements within the Conservative Party had been suggesting since early 1938 that the British government should try to incorporate Russia into some sort of anti-fascist pact. This was being most vocally expressed by Winston Churchill and his suggestion of a 'grand alliance'.[143] This envisaged a network of nations assembled around Britain and France in a mutual defence pact based upon the covenant of the League of Nations and 'sustained by a moral sense of the world'.[144] Critics of the Munich agreement were by 1939 arguing that Britain and France would have had the help of Russia, Poland and Czechoslovakia if Chamberlain had stood firm against Hitler in September 1938.[145] Following the fall of Prague and the threat being placed upon Danzig and Poland these advocates of the 'grand alliance' suggested it was all the more essential to secure an agreement with Soviet Russia. However to the vast majority of Conservatives any thoughts of an alliance with the communists was anathema. Many, especially those to the right of the Party, were of the opinion that many of the world's troubles could be attributed to communism and they argued that Hitler and Mussolini had come to power because of it. Some were even prepared to argue that Hitler 'stood as a bulwark' against Soviet Russia.[146] Not even all the foreign policy sceptics

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141 City of London CA, AGM 16 June 1939, 487/31.

142 Sowerby CA, AGM 11 May 1939 (McCorquodale, MP), CV3.

143 *HofC Debs*, vol. 333 cols. 93-100, 14 Mar. 1938, cols. 1444-55, 24 Mar. 1938, vol. 346 cols. 29-38, 13 Apr. 1939.

144 W.S. Churchill, *Arms and the Covenant*, (London: Cassell, 1938), p. 451.

145 Selborne Mss: 'The relative situation in Sept. 1938 and Sept. 1939', MS.Eng.hist.c.1015ff.13-27; Paul Emrys-Evans to Wolmer, 21 Nov. 1939, MS.Eng.hist.c.1014ff.221-24.

146 Ruggles-Brise Mss: *Hertfordshire & Essex Observer*, 5 Nov. 1938; *Halstead Gazette*, 2 Dec. 1938; *East Anglian Daily Times*, 27 Jan. 1939. This theme of anti-communism is developed further in the previous chapter.

were agreed that it was necessary to approach Russia. Leo Amery was always very cynical of the value of Soviet help. During the Czech crisis he had argued vigorously with the other foreign policy sceptics against involving Russia and was again during 1939 less than enthusiastic for an alliance.[147]

Prague did force Chamberlain into an approach to Moscow, but there was an apparent lack of enthusiasm on the British part. One motive behind the negotiations was to prevent Stalin making a pact with Hitler. Cuthbert Headlam saw this as the 'only reason' for an agreement with Russia.[148] Whilst the thought that fascism and communism, two supposedly irreconcilable ideologies, could reach terms was inconceivable to some contemporaries, others were aware that both Germany and Soviet Russia had their sights upon Poland. The replacement of Litvinov as Soviet Foreign Minister with Molotov meant that a sympathetic Germanophile was in place. Indeed there were rumours emanating from Moscow that suggested negotiations were taking place. Dissident Conservatives were inclined to suggest that Chamberlain was not doing enough to entice Russia. Leo Amery considered the trouble to be that Chamberlain was being 'pushed all the time into a policy which he does not like, and [he] hates abandoning the last bridges which might still enable him to renew his former policy.' Even the loyalist 'Chips' Channon was inclined to admit that he felt Chamberlain's heart was not in the Russian talks.[149] Particular criticism was made of the failure to establish direct personal contact with Stalin in the opening stages.[150] William Strang, from the Foreign Office's central department, was despatched to Moscow in July to conduct the negotiations. Many observers, and not least the Russians, felt that if Chamberlain had been prepared to fly to meet Hitler, then at least he or another senior cabinet minister ought to have tried to negotiate with Stalin - at the very least it would have revealed the genuineness of the British approaches.[151] Halifax had suggested the possibility of despatching Eden while Churchill had offered his services to David Margesson, the Chief Whip.

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147 *Amery Diaries*, 26, 27 Sept. 1938, pp. 516-20.

148 Headlam Mss: diary, 28 May 1939, D/He/35.

149 *Amery Diaries*, 19 May 1939, p. 553; *Channon Diaries*, 13 Apr., 5 May 1939, pp. 193, 197.

150 Avon Mss: Eden to Cranborne, 12 July 1939, AP14/2/28.

151 Avon Mss: Eden to Cranborne, 12 July 1939, AP14/2/28.

Chamberlain believed that if either man was despatched to Moscow it would only legitimise their claims to be recalled to cabinet office.[152]

In the summer months of 1939 Conservatives were imbued with a fatalistic consciousness of the impending doom. Ralph Glyn wrote to his mother explaining that 'the only way in which to keep sane is to farm and do things that Hitler and Co. cannot control.'[153] As the crisis moved towards Danzig and the Polish corridor the situation was such that one MP felt that 'the present impasse can only be ended in two ways. 1. by peaceful agreement. 2. by war.' This Member was confident that the government would tolerate no further aggression arguing that the dictators had been given their chance.[154] Other Conservatives were rather more doubtful about the government's resolve. Chamberlain's decision to allow parliament to adjourn for the summer recess brought a tirade of abuse from some backbenchers fearful that the Prime Minister might try and negotiate another Munich in parliament's absence. In an outspoken attack, fellow Birmingham Member, Ronald Cartland, rounded on Chamberlain suggesting it was more important 'to get the whole country behind you than make jeering pettifogging party speeches which divide the nation.'[155] Certainly throughout August the signs emanating from Germany were unpromising. Cranborne noted the media talk of "a war of nerves" and observed that

> If they mean by this phrase that the Germans still hope to bully us into another Munich without war, no doubt that is Hitler's game. But if they mean, further, that he is bluffing, I'm not so sure. He may, equally, be confident or desperate - I see today that the German press seem to have orders to say that Germany's honour is involved. This is a bad sign, as it is taking up a position from which it is very difficult for them to retreat.[156]

By August it does appear that many Conservatives were reconciling themselves to the inevitability of war. The Polish corridor was the sole

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152 Chamberlain Mss: Neville to Ida, 10 June 1939, NC18/1/1102.

153 Glyn Mss: Glyn to mother, 2 July 1939, D/EGlC9/10.

154 Hailes Mss: Buchan-Hepburn to Chas Adamson, 30 July 1939, HAIL 1/2.

155 *HofC Debs*, vol. 350 col. 2495, 2 Aug. 1939. After this attack, Chamberlain sought to have Cartland deselected. Chamberlain Mss: Neville to Ida, 5 Aug. 1939, NC18/1/1111, R.H. Edwards to Chamberlain, 4 Aug. 1939, NC7/11/32/38, T.B. Pritchett to R. Cartland, 4 Aug. 1939, NC7/11/32/39. See also Barbara Cartland, *Ronald Cartland*, (London: Collins, 1942), pp. 219-229.

156 Avon Mss: Cranborne to Eden, 17 Aug. 1939, AP14/2/32A.

remaining vestige of Versailles and there was little to suggest that Hitler would be deterred. The only difference this time was that the Poles were unprepared to stand back and Britain was obligated to assist her. Moreover, the British public was unprepared to tolerate a second Munich. Cuthbert Headlam admitted 'the issue now depends on the Poles - if they really mean business, we shall really have no alternative but to go in with them.' Soon he was musing about 'how many English people will be called upon to die' for Poland.[157] News of the Nazi-Soviet pact confirmed many peoples' worst fears. The Member for Southend, Henry Channon, 'realised that the Russians have double-crossed us, as I always believed they would. They have been coquetting secretly with Germany, even as our negotiations proceeded. They are the foulest people on earth. Now it looks like war, and the immediate partition of Poland.'[158] Walter Elliot was relieved to find at cabinet 'that we intended to stand by Poland whatever the result of the German Russian talks.' He admitted that,

> the business looks rather bad - not so much because of the pact itself, which may mean anything or nothing, but because of the psychological reactions. I should think it could be interpreted by Hitler as a free hand in the east. In that case, so far as I see, there will be war. On the other hand Hitler may start guessing as to what the Russians really mean and that may delay things a little.[159]

Unbeknown to the British, although not totally unexpected, the Nazi-Soviet pact contained a secret clause which agreed the annexation and division of Poland between the two signatory nations. *Fall Weiss*, the German directive to invade Poland, was now in countdown. On 1 September 1939 at 6 am German troops crossed the Polish border.

VIII

Between May 1937 and September 1939 Conservative perceptions of Germany and their considered response to this threat changed dramatically. Although there are dangers in making generalisations, it was apparent that the majority of Conservatives were publicly prepared to back the Prime Minister's policy of conciliation and negotiation until the seizure of Prague. In private, however, doubts were certainly more apparent. These first emerged during

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[157] Headlam Mss: diary, 1, 17 Aug. 1939, D/He/35.

[158] *Channon Diaries*, 22 Aug. 1939, p. 208.

[159] Elliot Mss: Walter Elliot to wife, 27 Aug. 1939, Box7F1, National Library of Scotland.

August and September 1938 and became very noticeable in the few months after Munich. These private doubters expressed their disquiet behind the scenes believing this to be the more effective method. The retribution delivered upon the foreign policy sceptics following Munich was probably enough to deter others from going public and therefore attract the unwelcome attention of either the Whips or local grass-roots zealots. The Party's uneasiness with Chamberlain's foreign policy especially between September and November 1938 was more considerable than has been previously supposed. Nevertheless, Chamberlain was able to weather the storm. This was due to three factors. Firstly, the inability of his opponents to present a viable and cogent substitute foreign policy. Secondly, the reality was that to many Conservatives, both MPs and rank-and-file alike, there was no credible alternative to the Prime Minister. And finally, there did not there exist at that time any formal mechanism whereby the Party could oust their leader. By the summer of 1939 Eden had failed to capitalise upon his popularity and present himself as a worthy alternative; whereas Churchill, although he had done much to improve his stature, was still viewed with considerable suspicion. Moreover, it is apparent that to consider the foreign policy sceptics as one 'anti-appeaser' bloc is an overly simplistic analysis. Sweeping generalisations have been made that categorise these MPs as consistent critics, yet it is apparent that many were inconsistent in their approach, attitude and response to foreign policy during this period. Their numbers were limited, being less than a tenth of the parliamentary Party, while as a political force they were scattered and disorganised. Of greater significance were those Conservatives who were dissenting in private. Hitherto, historians have failed to scrutinise these individuals. However, it will become apparent in the final chapter that at a parliamentary level these people were to play a crucial role in May 1940 in ensuring the resignation of Chamberlain - their sense of national duty under the pressure of war meant they would restrain their criticism no longer. In summary, Conservative perceptions of how foreign policy towards Germany ought to be conducted were not so nearly divisive as has been supposed, and by the end of 1938 it was to be rearmament and not foreign policy that was the most contentious of issues.

Chapter Three: Rearmament and the Conservative Party, 1937-38

This chapter examines the attitude of the Conservative Party to the National government's rearmament programme from 1937 to the end of 1938. It will highlight the link between the deepening international abyss and Conservative concerns that British rearmament was failing to deliver. After considering the means by which the defence programme was funded, this chapter moves on to assess the Party's reception of the Inskip defence review and the subsequent impact this had upon the rearmament programme. Rearmament was perceived in terms that required the prioritisation of the best deterrent capabilities, but what did Conservatives judge to be the greatest deterrents? The Munich crisis will be examined from the perspective of its impact on Conservative assessments of the success of the rearmament programme. What will become apparent was that as 1938 drew to a close it was defence policy and not foreign policy that proved the most controversial and divisive of topics.

In March 1935 the government announced a white paper which planned to increase the all-round spending upon rearmament for the first time since the end of World War One. From that moment onwards debate was to be waged in media, military and political circles over the priorities for rearmament: was the air force, army or navy of greatest importance? Should the Royal Air Force prioritise bombers or fighters? And was a continental expeditionary army necessary or not? By 1935 few Conservatives denied the necessity for rearmament. During the November general election campaign 84 per cent of Conservative candidates declared their approval for the defence programme.[1] Nevertheless, there were concerns that the British population would not tolerate such measures. This domestic concern had to be balanced against the deteriorating international situation. During these years the European dictators attempted to consolidate and then expand their spheres of influence, thereby threatening to embroil Europe in another major conflict. This was the backdrop to the British rearmament programme.

I

The years of neglect experienced by the three armed services since the cessation of World War One meant that the task facing the British authorities was a phenomenal one. To make matters worse the British economy was

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[1] Ramsden, *Balfour and Baldwin*, p. 344.

depressed and her balance of payments fragile. It was a situation not alleviated by the financial pressures of the defence programme. For example, the level of rearmament between 1937 and 1938 diverted attention away from exports towards imports and consequently produced an adverse balance of payments of about fifty-five million pounds. Further, the funding of rearmament through domestic loans weakened confidence in financial institutions.[2] Consequently, there was a battle not only over priorities, but also over funding, with the Treasury attempting to tailor the demands of the service chiefs with the practical realities of what Britain could afford. During the 1930s Neville Chamberlain occupied a pivotal position in the debate, firstly as Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1931-37 and then as Baldwin's successor to the premiership. Ultimately, the Treasury's view that rearmament should be constrained within the boundaries of what could be afforded prevailed. Not surprisingly when Chamberlain became Prime Minister in May 1937 there was no change in emphasis.[3] Under the influence of Chamberlain, British rearmament was increasingly based upon the concept of limited liability. This was the idea that Britain should limit her defence responsibilities and classify those that she did accept in terms that provided the greatest deterrent capabilities combined with value for money. This defence concept, which some historians have suggested was little different to Britain's former policy of splendid isolation, reached maturity with its application in the Inskip defence review of 1937, which will be considered later in this chapter.

If Chamberlain had hoped for a smooth transition to the premiership then he was to be mistaken. The question of funding rearmament caused a turbulent beginning for the new Prime Minister to the extent that Chamberlain felt he had 'risked' the premiership.[4] Since 1935 the cost of rearmament had risen at so rapid a pace that by early 1937 the projection was for £1500 millions over the next five year period. Such expansion meant that the Treasury was forced to look for alternative or new sources of income - in practical terms this meant either greater borrowing or greater taxation. The former held the risk of fuelling inflation and weakening still further confidence in Britain's financial institutions, whilst the latter was a potential electoral liability. In his final

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[2] Peden, *Treasury*, pp. 64-5; Shay, *British Rearmament*, pp. 145-7.

[3] Peden, *Treasury*, passim; Shay, *British Rearmament*, pp. 35-46, 77-8, 84-5, 142-4.

[4] Chamberlain Mss: Neville to Hilda, 25 Apr. 1937, NC18/1/1005.

months as Chancellor, Chamberlain decided upon the "income" option with a new temporary tax, the National Defence Contribution (NDC).[5]

This proposal was introduced to the House of Commons in Chamberlain's last budget during April 1937 when he warned that 'the national finances have, and must continue to be dominated and governed by the vast expenditure on defence'.[6] The Chancellor explained that his motive behind the NDC was to avoid imposing 'a succession of new taxes hitting first in one direction then in another', whilst also ensuring that the general expansion of trade was not hindered further. Therefore, the proposal was for a graduated tax upon the growth of business and industrial profits in excess of £2000 during the period of the rearmament programme.[7] Chamberlain anticipated that this would immediately yield over two million pounds, a figure which would increase to somewhere between twenty and twenty-five million pounds within a full year. The NDC tax was designed not only to raise revenue for rearmament, but also to forestall severe labour unrest in the event of serious price rises and prevent the possibility of excessive profiteering by defence contractors.[8]

B.E.V. Sabine, the fiscal historian, has suggested that the parliamentary Conservative reaction to the proposals 'showed an interesting division of opinion, not of course amounting to anything like a real split in the ranks.' As evidence, Sabine cites the cautious welcome for the NDC from backbenchers Loftus and Somerville and compares the criticisms of Wardlaw-Milne and Boothby.[9] This analysis needs revision principally because Sabine sourced his assessment from the parliamentary debates. Invariably parliamentary etiquette and rhetoric as well as party loyalty prevented Conservatives from directly and openly expressing their objections. Equally when this measure was first announced there was considerable uncertainty over the precise nature of the proposal. This was because Chamberlain during his budget speech only gave the briefest of outlines about the new tax. He admitted that he 'could hardly expect Hon[ourable] Members to grasp at the first hearing all the implications of the system' and it is apparent from the first two days of

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[5] For the Treasury decision-making process with the tax see Robert P. Shay, 'Chamberlain's Folly: The National Defence Contribution of 1937', *Albion*, 7, 4 (1975), pp. 317-21.

[6] *HofC Debs*, vol. 322 col. 1601, 20 Apr. 1937.

[7] *HofC Debs*, vol. 322 cols. 1615-20, 20 Apr. 1937.

[8] *HofC Debs*, vol. 322 cols. 1619-20, 20 Apr. 1937.

[9] B.E.V. Sabine, *British Budgets in War and Peace, 1932-45*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970), p. 103.

debate that many MPs were clearly unsure what the proposal entailed. Indeed this confusion extended to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Lieutenant-Colonel John Colville, when concluding the debate for the government. From the speech it was by no means clear that Colville followed his own explanation.[10] Only after time had allowed for greater analysis of the precise nature of the plans did Conservative criticisms crescendo to an almost intolerable level. In private even the initial reaction of Conservatives was critical. Leo Amery noted the 'hostile buzz' in the lobbies as soon as the proposal was announced and his diary entries over the next few months reveal the continued furore against the tax.[11] Many Conservatives, at both a national and grassroots level, felt that the measure was the sort one would have expected a socialist government to introduce, not one of their own Party. Victor Cazalet, the Member for Chippenham, although finding morally and ethically 'much to recommend the idea' nevertheless considered the NDC to be in practice the 'most unfair tax ever been put forward.'[12] The growth of opposition at all levels is apparent from the constituency correspondence files of backbench MPs which testify to the hostile response of businessmen, whilst big industries and the City lobbied vigorously against the measures, clandestinely aided by a Conservative Central Office insider.[13]

Winchester Association executive discussed the tax in May, just days before Chamberlain succeeded as Prime Minister. It was a debate that not only exposed the executive's attitude to the proposals but one that revealed the confusion about the extent to which an Association could expect its Member to reflect its concerns in parliament. Critics of the tax desired it to be 'less onerous and more equitable'. One speaker felt that 'the present proposals would cause hardship as there were many companies who had made no profits between 1933 and 1936 and they would be heavily penalised.' Similarly, another speaker argued that 'the businessman would be penalised and the professional man would escape.' Others cautioned against hasty decisions believing that the Chancellor was still considering compromise and suggested that the issue was one for parliament and not them to decide. Some members of the executive felt the proposed motion tied the hands of their Member and

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[10] *HofC Debs*, vol. 322 col. 1873-1881, 21 Apr. 1937; Sabine, *Budgets*, p. 107.

[11] *Amery Diaries*, 20 Apr., 27 May 1937, p. 440.

[12] Cazalet Mss: journal, 1 June 1937.

[13] This figure was Sir Joseph Ball, Director of the Conservative Research Department, usually a staunch ally of Chamberlain's. This appears to be the one instance when he betrayed his political master: See Ramsden, *Making of Conservative Party Policy*, pp.87-8.

would push him against the government. This provoked one of the committee to explain that the

> one duty of the Association was to keep the Member of Parliament informed and all opinions should be weighed and he should know about it. He, himself, was against people keeping their mouths shut when they disapproved of anything and from what he had heard he thought the tax should be modified.

This interjection appears to have carried the day and persuaded the chairman to modify the motion so as not to stifle the disapproval being expressed and which requested their MP, Gerald Palmer, 'to use his influence to get the National Defence Contribution tax made as fair in its application as possible under the circumstances.' Other Conservatives at the grassroots were equally critical. One Lincolnshire man felt 'it will crack the foundations of the Conservative Party which will ultimately crumble.' Others threatened to withdraw subscriptions to their local Associations. The situation was such that one Party worker warned his MP that he found among the "'thinking people"' a 'distinct dislike to the present government gradually growing through allowing such taxation.' The chairman of Kinross Association met one businessman who was 'foaming at Mr Chamberlain's new tax. Says it is the most "socialistic" measure ever introduced by Unionists - he refuses to subscribe to our Association in future.'[14] The prominence of local businessmen and the professional elites on local Association platforms meant that the Party leadership could not afford to overlook their views. As a consequence this hostile reaction, not only from natural supporters of the Conservatives but also from backbench MPs, publicly (during the report stages of the budget) and in private (to whips and ministers), forced a humiliating climb-down by the government. Chamberlain's successor at the Exchequer, Sir John Simon, was obliged in June to introduce a general flat five per cent rate of taxation on profits.[15] This actually had been the proposal of Beverley Baxter, MP for Wood Green and 'Atticus' columnist for *The Sunday Times*, during the report stage of budget in late April.[16]

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[14] Winchester CA, exec. 27 May 1937, 73M86W/5; Heneage Mss: Mr Greenfield to Arthur Heneage, 22 Apr. 1938, HNC 1/G; Mr Charlesworth to Heneage, 13 May 1937, HNC 1/C; Mr Goulton to Heneage, 25 May 1937, HNC 1/G; Atholl Mss: James Paton to duchess of Atholl, 1 May 1937, File 22/18.

[15] Chamberlain Mss: Neville to Hilda, 25 Apr. 1937, NC18/1/1003; Headlam Mss: diary, 22 Apr. 1937, D/He/33; *Channon Diaries*, 1 June 1937, p. 130.

[16] *HofC Debs*, vol. 323 cols. 292-4, 27 Apr. 1937.

The negative reaction of Conservatives to the NDC tax demonstrates something of the contradiction being experienced over rearmament. They were prepared to declare that 'we have to re-arm, [and] the cost must be met, that is of course a certainty and is generally recognised', but in the same breath they would shy away from any measure that might have been electorally unfavourable, or that was in conflict with their own self-interest.[17] A likely explanation for this inconsistency was the inability of many Conservatives to conceive the sense of "crisis" and because few really believed that rearmament needed to be made a "national" rather than purely "party" issue. Some of this may have stemmed from a delusion about the "greatness" of Britain and also from a failure fully to comprehend the danger that Germany posed to post-Versailles Europe - these assessments would be radically reversed over the following eighteen months. In the meantime the problem of financing rearmament remained. It is unclear exactly where these critics of the NDC tax expected the additional finance to be found. Certainly in comparison to German business, which was subject to a 40 per cent tax on profits, British business escaped relatively lightly.[18] Some, such as Charles Williams, the Member for Torquay, argued that borrowing was the answer since they believed direct taxation imposed a 'heavy burden on trade and industry.' Others confessed to concerns about borrowing further amounts but believed that under the current circumstances it was the lesser evil. In contrast Members such as Wardlaw-Milne and Robert Boothby felt that the necessary money could be secured by income tax and surtax increases.[19] However, Chamberlain believed that the 3d in the pound income tax increase he announced with his budget was the most that could be squeezed from that source.[20] The level at which income tax was already pegged was considered high enough by most contemporaries. During the 1931 financial crisis, income tax had been one of the principal means of trying to bridge the deficit (it being levied at 5 shillings in the pound). Thereafter, income tax rates were seen as an indicator of the healthiness of the economy so for Chamberlain to have gone any higher than the 5s 6d rate he now introduced would have left the impression of a financial crisis.[21]

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17 Heneage Mss: Mr Charlesworth to Heneage, 13 May 1937, HNC1/C.

18 Peden, *Treasury*, p. 105.

19 *HofC Debs*, vol. 321 col. 53 (Charles Williams), 55 (Oswald Lewis), 1 Mar. 1937; vol. 322 cols. 1629-32 (Wardlaw-Milne), 20 Apr. 1937; vol. 323 col. 288 (Robert Boothby), 27 Apr. 1937.

20 Peden, *Treasury*, p. 89; *HofC Debs*, vol. 322 cols. 1613-16, 1621-22, 20 Apr. 1937.

21 Peden, *Treasury*, p. 89; Shay, *British Rearmament*, p. 159.

The cost of the rearmament programme explains why the topic featured heavily in the addresses MPs made to their Associations during 1937 and 1938 justifying its necessity. As one Yorkshire MP explained 'nothing was more calculated to ensure the peace of the world, to inspire the small nations with confidence and certain powerful nations with prudence,' than the defence programme. Consequently, 'the English taxpayer was saving civilisation.'[22] It must have seemed particularly necessary to justify rearmament in 1937 because internationally it was a relatively crisis-free year, with the events that were to occur in 1938-9 by no means appearing predictable. Rearmament was therefore justified in terms that emphasised Britain's role as a leading world power, and that underscored the deterrent capabilities of a strong Britain.[23] Indeed, deterrence was to be the rationale of the British rearmament programme from its inception in 1935 to the outbreak of war in September 1939.

II

If the inter-war period was the era of the League of Nations, by the late 1930s it was apparent to many Conservatives that the League had failed. From the very beginning the absence of the United States of America seriously debilitated it whilst the 1931 Manchurian crisis first publicly highlighted the League's failings, merely confirming what many Conservatives thought privately. The disarmament conferences of the early 1930s achieved very little and were effectively scuppered by Hitler's announcement that Germany would be leaving the League in 1933. The British government had reaffirmed its support for the League and collective security in the 1935 general election principally for electoral gain. This was despite Chamberlain's urging Baldwin to fight upon the rearmament platform and thereby secure a popular mandate for the issue.[24] The 11.2 million who participated in the 1935 peace ballot and by-elections, such as East Fulham in 1933, which John Wilmott won for Labour, suggested to the Conservative leadership that pacifism still persisted and that there still remained popular support for the League. The League,

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[22] Sowerby CA, AGM 12 Apr. 1937,(McCorquodale, MP), CV2.

[23] For example: CPA: Wessex Prov. Area, exec. 1 May 1937, ARE10/1/2 adopted the resolution 'that this meeting realising that a strong and united British Empire is the best guarantee of world peace, assures the National government of its full support in the steps being taken to strengthen the defence forces.'

[24] Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler*, (paper edn.), pp. 91-4; Tom Stannage, *Baldwin Thwarts the Opposition*, (London: Croom Helm, 1980).

however, effectively sounded its own death-knell with its failure to intervene successfully in the Italian Abyssinian conflict. The sanctions imposed upon Mussolini's Italy were feeble and widely flouted. Consequently, by 1938 at least thirteen countries had given *de jure* recognition to Italy's annexation of Abyssinia.

For many Conservatives the failings of the League were widely accepted. They conceded that theoretically the principles of the League were right, but in practice it had been shown to be moribund. With many of the leading nations either absent from Geneva or having never joined there was little point in giving it new duties which it had no hope of carrying out.[25] The constituency postbags of Conservative MPs nevertheless testify to the persistence of popular support for the League even until 1939. The re-introduction of conscription in April of that year brought demands for a return to League principles. One Leeds man considered that the army's recruitment problems would be resolved 'if the government was really pursuing a peace policy based on the League of Nations, instead of the bad old game of power politics.'[26] Conscious that to reject publicly the League would leave the Conservatives open to the charge that they had broken electoral promises, Chamberlain set about a more subtle revision of support. Memories of the Hoare-Laval debâcle can never have been far from the minds of Party workers. Not until the March 1938 *Anschluss* did Chamberlain feel confident enough to suggest publicly that collective security had failed.[27] He was perhaps conscious of his half-brother, Austen Chamberlain, warning that international obligations can only be fulfilled 'as far as public opinion in this country allows.'[28] This meant that public opinion had to be gradually alerted to the weaknesses of the League and the necessity for rearmament.

From the beginning, rearmament was couched in League phraseology - emphasis being placed upon acceptance of the League's principles because of Britain's preference for negotiation and discussion as opposed to war. This approach was still in evidence in 1937. It was pointed out that Britain had led

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25 Astor Mss: Sir William Munday to Lady Astor, 15 Dec. 1937, MS1416/1/1/1522, Reading University Library.

26 Adams Mss: A. Carter to Adams, 26 Apr. 1939; W. Caggan to Adams, 26 Apr. 1939; Lewis Dacse to Adams, 24 Apr. 1939, File 9; Joseph Pearson to Adams, 28 Mar. 1938; Hailes Mss: M.J. Yates to Buchan-Hepburn, 4 Oct. 1938; Mrs Lister to Buchan-Hepburn, 2 May 1939, HAIL1/2; Heneage Mss: E.L. Rammell to Heneage, 22 Feb., 28 May, 2 Oct. 1938, HNC1/R.

27 *HofC Debs*, vol. 332 col. 1565, 7 Mar. 1937.

28 quoted *HofC Debs*, vol. 321 col. 619 (Harold Balfour), 4 Mar. 1937.

the way in disarming but it was now only too apparent that other nations had little or no intention of following suit and were ultimately threatening the European balance of power by their own rearmament programmes. If Britain was to make collective security a working reality she had to deter aggressors and this could only be done 'if we were strong enough'. As one MP explained, rearmament 'was meant to restore that respect for the word of Britain' which had been absent during the Abyssinian crisis because of British military weakness.[29] A member of the Kinross Association believed that the government's foreign policy 'must be largely governed by the strength of our defence forces, and it is perfectly evident these forces are not up to [the] standard aimed at, especially our air force, and in the event of war with a weak air force our towns would suffer badly.'[30] The assumption was that military might also gave diplomatic strength. This was to become the standard argument justifying rearmament during 1938 as Hitler began further to challenge the European order.

At this point, it is important to outline contemporary perceptions of what form another war would assume and what implications this had on the rearmament debate. Few expected the next war to be one of attrition, as World War One had been. For example, Chamberlain, having read the theories of Liddell-Hart, wrote on 9 February 1936: 'I cannot believe that the next war, if it ever comes, will be like the last one, and I believe our resources will be more profitably employed in the air, and on the sea, than in building up great armies.'[31] The advancement of technology, particularly in terms of aviation, encouraged this belief. Many feared that on the declaration of war, Britain would be subjected to a massive air attack aimed at forcing a quick surrender, primarily through the collapse of civilian morale.[32] Declarations made by public figures, such as Stanley Baldwin, suggesting that 'the bomber will always get through'[33], and the pictures of the bombed Spanish town of Guernica in 1937, added greatly to the popular fear of a knock-out blow. Consequently, British rearmament

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29 North Wiltshire CA, *North West Wilts Critic*, 'Member's monthly letter', Apr. 1937, (Cazalet), pp. 2-3, 2436/69; Rushcliffe CA, AGM 20 Feb. 1937, (Ralph Assheton, MP),DD.PP.1/1, Nottinghamshire Record Office; Ipswich CA, exec. 26 Mar. 1937, (Sir John Ganzoni, MP), GK 401/1/1, Suffolk Record Office.

30 Atholl Mss: Peter Comrie to duchess of Atholl, 9 June 1938, file 95/2.

31 Cited Feiling, *Chamberlain*, p. 314.

32 See Bailer, *Shadow of the Bomber*, *passim*; M.S. Smith, 'Rearmament and deterrence in Britain in the 1930s', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, I, 3 (1978), pp. 313-37.

33 *HofC Debs*, vol. 270 col. 632, 10 Nov. 1932.

was preoccupied with the needs of the RAF and ensuring parity with the German *Luftwaffe*. By contrast, the demands of the British army were deemed of lowest priority.[34] At the same time during the late 1930s there was growing concern about the inadequate nature of Britain's defences against air attacks. These defences had initially been designed to provide protection for London and south east England against attacks from France. The rise of Germany as a belligerent power during the 1930s meant that the Midlands and north were now exposed to the possibility of enemy air assaults. This made the provision of air defences a matter of considerable urgency.

Rearmament was considered necessary for more than purely defensive purposes. A sizeable number accepted that there were also economic benefits. For instance, some felt that the necessity of creating shadow armaments factories offered the opportunity of reviving the local economies for some of the officially designated 'special areas'. Indeed it had been Chamberlain's argument during the 1935 general election that if rearmament had been made the leading issue it would have secured their Party crucial votes in labour heartlands such as Tyne and Wear with their shipyards.[35] Nor did every Conservative accept war to be the inevitable outcome of rearmament. There were, however, concerns expressed about the over-reliance of the British economy on rearmament. A number, including Chamberlain, felt able to talk during 1937 of a possible scaling down of the programme. Consequently, it was felt necessary to consider the implications for the British economy of a reduced defence scheme.[36] Indeed the suggestions of reducing armaments production were not inconceivable. Despite the Spanish civil war there was little on the international scene that suggested the imminence of armageddon. Even the Spanish situation had been side-lined by the British and French non-intervention, making it little more than a bloody and noisy regional conflict. Equally, some Conservatives were confident by 1937 that the rearmament ought to have plugged the gaps in Britain's defences and therefore one could expect a reduced defence budget.

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[34] For arguments over British defence policy and priorities during the 1930s see Bond, *British Military Policy*, especially chps. 7-9; Dennis, *Decision By Default*, especially chps. 3-5; Smith, *British Air Strategy*, chps. 5-7.

[35] Ian Macleod, *Neville Chamberlain*, (London: Muller, 1961), p. 184; Stannage, *Baldwin*, pp. 135-6.

[36] *Darwen News*, 31 July 1937, (Stuart Russell, MP for Darwen); *HofC Debs*, vol. 320 cols. 2219-2226 (Chamberlain), 25 Feb. 1937, vol. 321 col. 679 (Chamberlain), 4 Mar. 1937.

Because rearmament was a domestic issue it was subject to the scrutiny of local Associations. These Associations, while not denying in principle the necessity for a rearmament programme, at times were not always prepared to accept the optimistic rhetoric of their MPs. Consequently they appear to have had concerns of both general and specific natures. Some Conservatives certainly felt that defence had to be placed within a framework that allowed for more than purely the armaments dimension. This meant the adoption of a strategy that made allowances for all aspects of supply such as foodstuffs and raw materials, in addition to armaments, that would be crucial in wartime. This so-called 'Ministry of Supply' debate had received considerable media publicity during late 1935 and early 1936 and would again emerge as a limited issue during and after the 1938 Czech crisis, in between which it was an issue that never entirely disappeared from Conservative thought. For example, Chelmsford Association at their 1937 AGM unanimously agreed a resolution which expressed concern at the 'unparalleled growth of armaments' in Europe and therefore gave its 'warm approval' for the government's defence programme but it also pointed out the need for a long term agricultural policy which would 'provide our people with adequate food supplies in times of peace and war.'[37] Similarly, the Northern Counties Area Union (also at its 1937 AGM) was faced with a resolution on air defence which called for greater emphasis to be placed upon the production of aerodrome ground equipment and the organisation and conservation of food supplies.[38] At the back of many of these Conservative minds was the realisation that any future conflict would be on similar proportions to the 1914-18 war which was the first 'total war' - and that Britain could no longer rely upon her island status to shelter her population from involvement in war. The cult of the bomber made this all too apparent. As will be shown in a future chapter, the supply issue following the *Anschluss* mutated into a question concerning the supply of manpower. It was an issue that many grassroots members believed would have a more profound and obvious impact upon the ordinary elector than a ministry of supply.

Equally this concern about supply was reflected amongst the parliamentary Conservative Party with their criticisms about the co-ordination of the

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[37] Chelmsford CA, AGM 24 Mar. 1937, D/Z96/4.

[38] Northern Counties Area, AGM 27 Feb. 1937, NRO 3303/1. This resolution was forwarded to the National Union exec. and on their recommendation forwarded to the Minister of Air, CP: National Union, exec. 10 Mar. 1937, card 56. Also Norwich CA, AGM 23 Apr. 1937, SO122/4.678x9, Norfolk Record Office.

rearmament programme. This stemmed from fears that the traditional rivalry between the three services was preventing defence planning from keeping up to date with technical developments which cut across service boundaries. An example of this was the argument over who controlled the Fleet Air Arm. In response to these fears in 1936 Baldwin had appointed, after considerable deliberation, Thomas Inskip, the Member for Fareham and a lawyer, as Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence. 'With one room, two secretaries, and very little executive power, Inskip set out to "co-ordinate" defence.'[39] Inskip's PPS, Ralph Glyn, later admitted that his boss had faced an near impossible task which was not alleviated by his civilian background.[40] Winston Churchill had been widely tipped to secure the appointment and his continued criticism of the post thereafter may have been due to more than a little sour grapes. Nevertheless, Inskip's remit found itself under continual attack from Conservative backbenchers with an interest in military affairs. In July 1937 Wing Commander A.W.H. James (Wellingborough) offered his interpretation of Inskip's first year 'as they appear to an obscure backbench Member.' James felt there to be 'an obvious lack of strategical planning apparent in the whole of our rearmament programme.' Like many other Members he believed that the departmental battles 'continue[d] unabated' and considered there to be 'grave disappointment' amongst the Services at the lack of results.[41] In the same debate, Leo Amery questioned Inskip's role and expressed his 'profound dissatisfaction' with the job description. At the same time he could

> not feel that he has at all answered the kind of case which has been put up time and again from every quarter of this House for an organisation such as Germany possesses, which could provide a minister who would be the minister primarily responsible to the cabinet and parliament for the general defence, and for its proper co-ordination, with a staff of his own to help him work that out.[42]

It was in light of these criticisms and the continued financial strains the rearmament programme was imposing that Inskip was commissioned in October 1937 to assess Britain's rearmament and strategical priorities.[43] At

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[39] Dennis, *Decision By Default*, p. 64.

[40] Glyn Mss: Glyn to mother, 30 Jan. 1939, D/EGlC9/10.

[41] *HofC Debs*, vol. 326 col. 2940-3, 27 July 1937.

[42] *HofC Debs*, vol. 326 cols. 2966-70 quote col. 2970, 27 July 1937.

[43] Peden, *Treasury*, p. 41 argues it was the Treasury's "rationing" ceiling that led to the Inskip review.

the same time there were a number of strategical factors that also suggested the need for a reappraisal of the rearmament programme. There now was the possibility of providing some form of viable air defence for major cities due to the development of radar and a new generation of monoplane fighters, like the Hurricane, coming off the production line. At the same time the estimates of German air capacity underlined the failure of parity as a deterrent. Despite this the core of the air staff continued to press for long-range heavy bombers. Also the Chiefs of Staff warned that Britain could not hope to fight Germany, Italy and Japan simultaneously.

It was with this backdrop that the cabinet accepted the recommendations of Inskip's interim report in December. It recognised that economic stability was the 'fourth arm of defence', and consequently agreed that defence expenditure should be kept within the Treasury's £1500 million limitation. It also identified the defence priorities: the direct defence of Britain was deemed of primary importance followed by the preservation of her trade routes and then the defence of the empire. The field force was given lowest priority, making the army's primary role one of home and imperial defence. The report also dismissed the long-held view of the air staff's counter-offensive by seeing the RAF's primary role as to prevent a potential knock-out blow - therefore it was fighters and not bombers that were needed. In terms of priorities the Inskip review was little different to the 1891 Stanhope memorandum, which had placed home and imperial defence foremost and argued that involvement in a major European conflict was unlikely. However, the major significance of the review was to switch defence spending from the limited, short-term diplomatic reinforcement of the last three years to a basis for war preparation - the implications of which were readily noticed by Lord Halifax when he warned that preserving economic stability placed 'a heavy burden on diplomacy.'[44]

III

The concept of limited liability as embodied in the Inskip report was generally welcomed by Conservatives. For most the idea of a continental expeditionary force was abhorrent. The delegation of Conservative figures that had met Baldwin in July 1936 made this abundantly clear - with Edward Grigg arguing that such a 'fear' was the greatest single deterrent to recruiting. Such

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[44] For further analysis see Shay, *British Rearmament*, pp. 173-83; G.C. Peden, 'A matter of timing: the economic background to British foreign policy', *History*, 69, 1 (1984), pp. 15-28.

beliefs were again echoed during the 1937 army estimates. In fact, recruiting and the failings of the 'Cardwell system'- whereby the army needed to keep as many battalions at home as abroad so as to ensure a regular flow of relief and replacements - were the dominant sources of debate for Conservatives. Winterton thought it 'obvious' that the system was 'breaking down before our eyes' but admitted it was difficult to suggest an alternative. Likewise, Leo Amery and Alfred Knox criticised the system - these doubts arose from a fear that so long as the army was considered a second-class citizen it would fail to attract enough recruits which had the cumulative effect of threatening not only the defence of the empire but also of Britain. In short, the army was suffering from 'imperial overstretch'. Therefore recruiting was a topic of pressing concern, and Members were anxious that the army 'should not be considered the last resort'. Equally, the fact that the army was under its establishment was 'undoubtedly making a serious, [and] a very unfortunate impression' upon the dictators. If these Conservatives were opposed to a field force, then what role did they envisage for the army? It appears that they foresaw the regular army providing the nucleus of home defence as well as imperial defence whilst the Territorials would assist with home defence. By home defence, Conservatives meant 'defence against air attack' which envisaged anti-aircraft batteries and other fixed air defences, as well as passive defences for the civilian populations such as ARP.[45]

Twelve months later, the interest in the army estimates was more acute.[46] These were the first estimates presented by Leslie Hore-Belisha, who had been appointed Secretary of State for War the previous May, and were the first of the service estimates of 1938 to be announced that took account of the new defence priorities assigned by Inskip. Chamberlain had acquainted parliament with these priorities three days previously, on 7 March. Then, he had disclosed that rearmament now took into consideration the resources of manpower, of productive capacity and of finance, because 'wars are not only won with arms and men; they are won with reserves of resources and credit.'[47] Interest was also greatly aroused in the estimates because of the deteriorating

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[45] *HofC Debs*, vol. 321 cols. 1926 (Winterton), 1934-42 (Amery), 1946-7 (Knox), 1970-1 (Anstruther-Gray), 1975, 1979 (Grigg), 16 Mar. 1937.

[46] Although this is not reflected in a comparison of actual parliamentary debate time devoted to the army estimates between 1937 and 1938. In 1937 16 & 18 March 12 hrs 10 mins compared 1938 10 & 22 March 12hrs 51 mins. The estimates in 1938 for air secured 14 hrs 29 mins and the navy, 10 hrs 45 mins.

[47] *HofC Debs*, vol. 332 col. 1558, 7 Mar. 1938.

situation in Austria. Hore-Belisha's proposals generally appear to have been well received, both publicly and privately by the army's parliamentary supporters, only Major-General Sir Alfred Knox, the Member for Wycombe, expressed concern that the army was being restricted in size. He suggested that if it was acceptable on the continent then 'there must be something in that idea of these big armies still.'[48] During his speech Belisha confirmed that the army would be responsible for coastal and anti-aircraft defence at home, whilst overseas its responsibility was imperial defence. As regards a continental field force Belisha felt that assistance to an ally could be best made in other areas - on the sea and in the air.[49] The War Minister appears to have taken the precaution of briefing those Members most likely to be critical beforehand.[50] Although it was evident from the 7 March defence debate that the army was still considered the least important of the three defence services, it was also apparent that for those Members who took an interest in the army the emphasis was now on value for money and ensuring that the army was not only adequately supplied but also properly trained in its required role, 'the defence of this country against air attack.' As a consequence, the issue of national service arose. This was a subject that increasingly attracted the attention of Conservatives at all levels over the next year and will be considered in greater detail in the following chapter.

The *Anschluss* marks a turning point in Conservative attitudes not only towards Germany but also towards rearmament. It reminded them that Hitler still posed a threat to European stability. Samuel Hoare and Leo Amery concluded that to 'hurry on even more determinedly with our military preparations' was the 'only practical conclusion' that could be drawn.[51] As another backbench Conservative decided, 'Germany respects force and force only, and the moral is that we must do everything in our power to increase our forces and everything to increase the speed of our rearmament programme.'[52] The *Anschluss* emphasised the continued necessity for rearmament, for as Mark McCorquodale, MP for Sowerby, observed 'the country must re-arm for self-protection.'[53] Publicly Conservatives expressed their continued

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[48] Makins Mss: diary, 10 Mar. 1938; *Amery Diaries*, 10 Mar. 1938, p. 460; *HofC Debs*, vol. 332 col. 2174 (Knox), 10 Mar. 1938.

[49] *HofC Debs*, vol. 332 cols. 2136, 10 Mar. 1938.

[50] *Amery Diaries*, 7 Mar. 1938, p. 459.

[51] *Amery Diaries*, 12 Mar. 1938, p. 496.

[52] *HofC Debs*, vol. 333 col. 290 (Assheton), 15 Mar 1938.

[53] Sowerby CA, AGM 16 Mar. 1938,(McCorquodale, MP), CV3.

satisfaction with the state of Britain's defences: MPs reassuring both constituents and rank-and-file, that it had been 'carried out just in time', that it was an 'insurance premium' and no premium was too great for peace; whilst Associations continued to pass resolutions welcoming the defence programme.[54] Privately, however, concern was being expressed. The Member for Rushcliffe, Ralph Assheton, codedly spoke to his Association about defence being the country's 'greatest need' whilst to political colleagues he was swearing that rearmament was 'going badly wrong, or rather unavoidably slowly because (1) there is not enough drive at the top (2) there is no *real* business direction'.[55] Some were concerned that by the time Britain had sufficiently rearmed 'everything worth saving in Europe will be gone.'[56] Lord Tyrrell, a Tory peer and former British ambassador to Paris, was so concerned about the state of affairs that during April 1938 he was in contact with TUC leaders attempting to enlist their assistance. The necessity was urgent because he believed rearmament to be the 'one language' that Germany understood.[57] Tyrrell advised that in any conversations with the government, concerning the dilution of skilled labour and the rearmament programme, the TUC 'insist' on being shown the 'rearmament figures before they consent[ed] to any agreement'. These he believed 'would be so damaging that they would then be able to insist on [Chamberlain] widening the government by taking in A[nthony] E[den] again as Foreign Secretary and Winston [Churchill] as defence minister and two TUC leaders.'[58]

These doubts were also being expressed in parliament, although disguised behind parliamentary rhetoric. Even with the role of the army which had almost universal approval less than two weeks previously, there now appears to have been increased concern. The *Anschluss* alerted many to the potential threat now posed by nazism. J.R.J. Macnamara, formerly an officer in the Indian army and now the Member for the army town of Chelmsford, expressed doubts about the reliability of the Maginot line and questioned 'our strategy at home [which] relies, in the first place, on somebody else's line

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54 CPA: Wessex Prov. Area, exec. 7 May 1938, ARE10/1/2; CP: National Union, exec. 6 Apr. 1938, approving resolution from East Leicester CA, card 58; Heneage Mss: Arthur Heneage, *Home and Empire* (Louth edn.), 24 Mar. 1938; Clitheroe CA, AGM 3 Mar. 1938,(Sir William Brass, MP), DDX 800/1/3.

55 Rushcliffe CA, AGM 5 Mar. 1938, DD.PP1/1; Cilcennin Mss: Gerald [Creasy] to J.P.L. Thomas, 23 Mar. 1938, Cilc.coll.45.

56 Cilcennin Mss: David [Lindsay] to J.P.L. Thomas, 28 [Mar.] 1938, Cilc.coll.29.

57 Cilcennin Mss: unsigned carbon of letter, 13 Apr. 1938, Cilc.coll.39.

58 *Harvey Diaries*, 13 Apr. 1938, p. 127.

abroad, and secondly, on a very small army of very young men.'[59] Likewise, Edward Grigg, who was one of the foremost advocates of national service, criticised the 'extremely questionable doctrine that man power counts less than machine power in modern war.' The fact that the army was still 20,000 under establishment when 'facing difficulties and contingencies such as we are facing at the present time' was dangerous. He believed that

> The role of the British army must be carried out by great mobility, great versatility and by training in that offensive spirit that it has always possessed. I believed that doctrine holds true wherever you may have to apply it - whether in the east, the Middle East or the west.[60]

Concern was expressed also by Anstruther-Gray that complacency had set in regarding the recruiting position of the army and he warned 'we are in the position where one other emergency would strain the army to breaking point.'[61] One backbencher, Roy Wise, even went as far as explicitly expressing his doubts about the doctrine of limited liability. As he explained:

> Assuming that we base our theories on a limited liability war, if our contribution to any campaign in Europe is to be small then it must be superlatively good. [...] For the purposes of a campaign in Europe the army must be superlatively good. In other words it must be composed of adequate numbers, full establishments and men of high quality. I doubt whether that is, in fact, the case today. [...] I do not believe that on mobilisation a British expeditionary force would be the equal in the field, in training and in practice, to a corresponding number of men in a continental conscript army who had just finished two years' service.[62]

Wise was a little ahead of his fellow Conservatives with this declaration. Yet twelve months later such pronouncements became the norm.

IV

The *Anschluss* forced the government not only to make a ministerial statement concerning the diplomatic situation but also to announce alterations to the recent defence estimates. Chamberlain explained to the House that:

> We have now come to the conclusion that in the present circumstances acceleration of existing plans has become essential and, moreover, that there must be an increase in some parts of the programme, especially in that

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[59] *HofC Debs*, vol. 333 cols. 1052-3, 22 Mar. 1938.

[60] *HofC Debs*, vol. 333 cols. 1062-4, 22 Mar. 1938.

[61] *HofC Debs*, vol. 333 col. 1074, 22 Mar. 1938.

[62] *HofC Debs*, vol. 333 cols. 1091-2, 22 Mar. 1938.

of the Royal Air Force and anti-aircraft defences. In order to bring about the progress which we feel to be necessary, men and materials will be required, and rearmament work must have first priority in the nation's efforts.[63]

The announced acceleration was welcomed by the Conservative Party, but there nevertheless remained a certain amount of concern, especially since the international situation showed no signs of improving.[64] Viscount Wolmer, a foreign policy sceptic, accepted 'that there should be one last effort at appeasement' but warned that if the dictators 'shut the door altogether to a general agreement, they will make a war in the near future inevitable.' As a consequence he argued that the democracies must make sacrifices and go to the same lengths in military preparations as the dictators because 'it is no use hoping that democracy can be defended unless it puts its entire heart into the task of defence.'[65] Another backbencher Victor Cazalet noticed 'most think we shall have to fight Germany - not a pleasant prospect', but he drew comfort from the fact that 'rearmament goes a-pace' and was to be accelerated. Two weeks later Cazalet dined with Churchill and found him 'v[ery] anti-gov[ernmen]t for not having got on with rearmament. We are, apparently, lamentably behind, but of course its all a matter of degree.'[66] Cazalet, especially for a backbencher, was particularly well connected socially and was friendly with many of the Party's senior figures. He was nevertheless a typical loyalist of the leader firmly believing in the policy of appeasement. Only after Munich would he become less trusting but even then, despite his doubts which he never publicly expressed, he voted with the government during the Norway division in May 1940.

The concern about the state of rearmament boiled over in the Houses of Westminster during May 1938 in a debate on air defence during which Edward Winterton, recently appointed Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and House of Commons spokesman for Air, gave a singularly inept performance.[67] In the opinion of John Simon, the Chancellor, it was a speech

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63 *HofC Debs*, vol. 333 col. 1410, 24 Mar. 1938.

64 Cilcennin Mss: J.P.L. Thomas to anon, 12 Apr. 1938, Cilc.coll.40.

65 *HofC Debs*, vol. 333 cols. 1471-3, 24 Mar 1938.

66 Cazalet Mss: journal, 24 Mar., 10 Apr. 1938.

67 *HofC Debs*, vol. 335 cols. 1758-90, 12 May 1938. During his speech Winterton was repeatedly interrupted especially by Churchill and Sandys. Winterton Mss: diary, 12 May 1938, 1/43: 'I had a number of interruptions which I particularly and laboriously (too particularly and laboriously I think) answered thereby making a consecutive and coherent statement difficult [...] my matter was good

for which 'the first hour of it was better than the second!'[68] Senior members of the cabinet were concerned about the implications, for Samuel Hoare confessed to 'Chips' Channon that he was 'very worried'.[69] Hoare was acutely aware of the Party's attitude to air defence because of the generally critical reaction he had received the previous week when addressing the 1922 committee on ARP preparations.[70] Winston Churchill's reaction to the Winterton speech was to table a motion, supported by twenty-five other Conservatives, demanding an enquiry into Britain's air defences, a call that the Opposition took up when they moved a formal motion on 25 May.[71] Part of the problem lay behind the fact that the Air Minister, Lord Swinton, sat in the House of Lords. It was an arrangement that many backbenchers found unsatisfactory. During the 1937 air estimates Mavis Tate, the Member for Wallsend, had declared that 'it is extraordinarily difficult to have to ask questions of, and to have to attack, a Minister who is not the one that is responsible for his department.'[72] Other reactions to the Winterton speech were far from complimentary. Eden felt that debate 'made a very poor showing' for the government. Like many Conservatives he seemed perplexed by the decision to abandon parity. 'It does not seem to me exactly "realistic"', he told the editor of the *Yorkshire Post*, 'to surrender the determination to maintain our parity with Germany, and excuse it by saying it would be impolitic to mention that country's name.' Eden's solution to the problems of rearmament was a government of 'national unity and national inspiration' which he believed would enable Britain to parallel the efforts of the dictators.[73] In fact, Chamberlain confounded his critics who were calling for a widening of the government's basis by taking steps to eliminate his critics from the government and promoting within the existing cabinet. Viscount Swinton was removed as Minister for Air and William Ormsby-Gore, the Colonial Secretary was dismissed. For Ormsby-Gore his elevation to the House of Lords as Lord Harlech was the excuse - it being argued that the

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tho' the general effect appeared unconvincing to judge from the attitude of the House [...]. Got little support in the debate which followed.'

68 *Amery Diaries*, 18 May 1938, p. 505. Indeed Winterton agreed with this assessment, Winterton Mss: diary, 12 May 1938, 1/43.

69 *Channon Diaries*, 13 May 1938, p. 155.

70 Makins Mss: diary 9, 12 May 1938; *Amery Diaries*, 9 May 1938, p. 503.

71 *Nicolson Diaries*, Nicolson to wife, 17 May 1938 p. 341; Chamberlain made the Labour motion a vote of confidence and comfortably survived the division, only Churchill and Robert Perkins were prepared to abstain. See Smith, *British Air Strategy*, pp. 210-11.

72 *HofC Debs*, vol. 321 col. 2620, 22 Mar. 1937.

73 Avon Mss: Eden to Arthur Mann, 27 May 1938, AP14/1/772A.

Lords/Commoners ratio in the cabinet could not support another peer as minister. It is suggested that Winterton's poor performance was merely a pretext for Swinton's dismissal. In reality, Swinton was a long standing critic who had annoyed Chamberlain by his fight for extra resources, and for advocating the need for the State to take compulsory powers to overcome skill shortages in the rearmament industries.[74] Winterton for his part in the fiasco escaped relatively lightly keeping his post in the cabinet, although being relieved of parliamentary responsibility for the air ministry.[75]

Since the 1935 defence white paper the government had been aiming at parity between the German *Luftwaffe* and the RAF. Chamberlain, as Chancellor, had played a significant role in ensuring the primacy of the RAF. He had argued that there was no need for a large army, accepting Liddell-Hart's view that the army of the future would be a small, professional, mechanised affair and that the "British way in warfare" demanded spending on an air force and navy. The historians Bialer and Watt have seen public opinion as crucial in prioritising the RAF: 'public opinion acted as a catalyst, affecting official views on defence and - in general terms - influencing the choice of the form which rearmament was to take.'[76] Memories of the Somme and Passchendaele, propaganda organisations like the 'Air League of the British Empire' and popular writing on air power, such as P.R.C. Groves' *Behind the Smoke Screen*, encouraged the belief that a strong RAF was the best defence as a deterrent.[77] It was a view that held sway with many Conservatives. In 1933 Churchill described the RAF as 'almost a complete protection for the civilian population [...] against destruction.'[78] During the wranglings over a possible continental commitment during 1936 Chamberlain had objected to a field force on the grounds that mobilisation would be too slow and wondered if 'from the point of view of deterrent, a strong offensive air force was not more effective than a field force which could not be put in the field for two weeks.' It was resolved at the next meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence sub-committee on defence policy and requirements that the RAF programme should have latitude 'so as to improve its offensive power and

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74 Shay, *British Rearmament*, p. 220.

75 Winterton Mss: diary, 16 May 1938, 1/43. Winterton 'felt very crushed at this tragic curbing of two months strenuous but happy work.'

76 Uri Bialer, 'Elite opinion and defence policy', *British Journal of International Studies*, 5-6 (1979-80), pp. 32, 40-3.

77 P.R.C. Groves, *Behind the Smoke Screen*, (London: Faber & Faber,1934).

78 *HofC Debs*, vol. 275 col. 1822, 14 Mar. 1933.

constitute the most effective deterrent against Germany.'[79] These views were acceptable to the majority of Conservative MPs who had no liking for an expeditionary field force. For them the necessity was parity with the *Luftwaffe* and it was to be their watchword over the coming years. Problems arose from defining parity. The poor quality of long range intelligence predictions, personalities at the Air Ministry and rivalry between the Foreign Office and Air Ministry (which led to a lack of co-ordination between military and economic intelligence and a failure properly to appreciate the German air force strategy) all hindered accurate predictions of the threat posed.[80] The over-riding fear of a knock-out blow blinkered official and public minds.[81] The debates on the 1937 air estimates revealed backbench concern that the British programme was falling behind on the parity levels. Criticism was levied at the Air Ministry for its 'overbearing' attitude towards manufacturers and its failure to show due regard for continued research. Concern was also expressed at the lack of shadow factories. Admiral Sueter, MP for Hertford, believed that under the circumstances industry was coping, but Churchill responded with a broadside that claimed the current first-line air strengths to only be forty-four per cent of their projection. Likewise, Oliver Simmonds, the Member for Duddeston, believed that during 1937 Britain's air 'inferiority will be ever increasing. We may only hope that the European skies will clear during this year, but it does behove the government and the Air Ministry to apply themselves with ever increasing vigour.' Earlier in the debate, Harold Balfour, the Member for Thanet, had criticised Churchill for his manipulation of statistical comparisons.[82] This loyalty to the government may explain why Balfour was rewarded with the post of Under-Secretary in Chamberlain's administration. Nevertheless, the Inskip defence review of the same year accepted that parity had failed as a deterrent. It had decided that the priority should be fighters and the air defence of Britain as opposed to a long-range bomber force as favoured by the Air Ministry and many

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79 Documents on British Rearmament (Southampton University Library): Committee of Imperial Defence, sub-committee on defence policy and requirements, minutes 14, 16 Jan. 1936. Cab 16/123 40213. (Xerox of original from PRO).

80 Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, chps 2-3.

81 Bialer, *Shadow of the Bomber*, passim; Smith, *British Air Strategy*, chps 5-7.

82 *HofC Debs*, vol. 321 cols. 1703-4 (Moore-Brabazon), 1768-9 (Balfour), 1776-7 (Simmonds), 15 Mar. 1937; vol 321. cols. 2599 (Sueter), 2610 (Churchill), 22 Mar. 1937; Balfour was not the only Conservative who expressed exasperation with Churchill's attacks on the government's air policies: Austin Hopkinson wrote to Winterton complaining that he did not 'like Winston's calm assumption that he alone has any regard for the country. He talks and talks while some of us work - and I doubt whether his talk does anything except hinder us.' Winterton Mss: Austin Hopkinson to Winterton, 27 May 1938, 2/66.

Conservative backbenchers. Indeed, during the debates on the 1938 air estimates the Conservative backbench air protagonists were deeply critical of the decision to abandon parity and of the skilled labour shortages in the air construction industry. As Wing-Commander Wright explained government supporters, like himself, had 'been so staunch that we have been prepared to accept everything that we have been told with regard to rearmament [now] certain things had happened which made us feel anxiety ourselves.'[83]

V

Conservative anxieties about defence were to be displayed again in the aftermath of the Czech crisis. The ramifications of the Munich agreement were not purely confined to the political map of Europe and the unity of the Conservative Party. The emergency revealed serious inadequacies in Britain's defence programme. As Victor Cazalet told his Chippenham constituents, the crisis had shown rearmament 'to be sadly behind what is necessary and essential if this country is to play its proper role in Europe.'[84] At the height of the incident trenches had been dug, air raid shelters hastily erected, gas masks distributed, anti-aircraft batteries mobilised and the Royal Navy placed on alert. The private fears many Conservatives had been sustaining since the *Anschluss* now appeared to have been realised. David Margesson, the Chief Whip, admitted he had 'never looked forward less to the opening of a session - everyone with a complaint about guns or sheep or Czechs or something.'[85] Paul Emrys-Evans, the Member for Derbyshire South, expressed 'profound disquiet' at the position of Britain's defences, and cited it as one of the reasons why he abstained from the Munich votes:

> It is impossible to have a foreign policy at all unless there is adequate force to support it. The recent mobilisation displayed to all the world the alarming inadequacy of our preparations. Three years after the mandate had been given to rearm and after hundreds of millions had been voted we found ourselves in a position of the utmost peril because we were not ready. I cannot help feeling that the government have been half-hearted in rearming, and they have given assurances to the House of Commons which have simply not been carried out.[86]

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[83] *HofC Debs*, vol. 333 cols. 65 (Boothby), 281 (Moore-Brabazon), 14 Mar. 1938; vol. 335 cols. 1827-9 (Wright), 12 May 1938.

[84] North Wiltshire CA, *North West Wilts Critic*, Dec. 1938.

[85] Elliot Mss: Walter Elliot to wife, 26 Oct. 1938, Acc 6721 Box 7F1.

[86] Emrys-Evans Mss: Evans to Doncaster, 7 Oct. 1938, Add.MS.58249.

One confidential memorandum drafted by Edward Spears, the Member for Carlisle, and circulated amongst Conservative MPs, considered that the crisis had revealed the whole organisation of anti-aircraft defence in London to be 'grossly incompetent'. The report considered this situation to be 'principally due to the fact that the War Office is only interested in the organisation of expeditionary forces, and attaches virtually no importance to anti-aircraft defence.' The author concluded that there would be no change unless the War Office was stripped of control for AA defence.[87] Some sources suggested this was a deliberate move to engineer the War Minister's downfall.[88] During the opening week of the autumn session in a debate on ARP, Hore-Belisha who 'had got wind' of the document tried to defuse the situation by 'boldly' announcing the AA deficiencies himself during his speech: 'For this he got a good deal laughed at' one backbencher observed, but considered that it 'undoubtedly weakened the effect which would have been produced by subsequent disclosure.'[89] At the time of the crisis RAF fighter command only had twenty-nine squadrons of fighters, and the ninety-three Hurricanes in the command were useless above 15,000 feet because their guns jammed from cold. A group of foreign policy sceptics were horrified to hear how air headquarters in London had no means of getting through to their bombers in Suffolk except by sending two MP's down by motor car.[90] The implications of such weakness in Britain's defences were only too painfully apparent to Conservatives not least because they 'grievously injured our power to reason with dictators.' The situation left many Conservatives feeling 'disgusted and appalled at the position'. Sidney Herbert effectively summarized the Party's opinion and fear when he declared 'that this lack of rearmament is known. Of course it is known to Herr Hitler. It is known to the children in my village. [...] I am deeply dissatisfied with what the government have been doing for many months beforehand.'[91] But who was to blame? Here Conservative opinion divided. Some argued that the electorate was really responsible since they had supported pacifist ideals for so long, and professed through such things as the League of Nations Union peace ballot to favour disarmament

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87 Glyn Mss: D/EGl 093 & Heneage Mss: HNC2/ , Memo: 'A.A. defence, London'.

88 *Chief of Staff: The Diaries of Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Pownall*, I, 1933-40, (hereafter *Pownall Diaries*), ed. Brian Bond, (London: Leo Cooper, 1972), 10 Oct. 1938, p. 165.

89 *HofC Debs*, vol. 340 cols. 521-30, esp. 527-8, 3 Nov. 1938; *Amery Diaries*, 3 Nov. 1938, p. 534.

90 *Amery Diaries*, 24 Nov. 1938, p. 537.

91 Inverness CA, 'annual report, 1938', 20 Oct. 1938; Winchester CA, exec. 29 Nov. 1938, 73M86W/5; *HofC Debs*, vol. 339 col. 245, 4 Oct. 1938.

which had prevented the government from implementing an adequate defence programme soon enough. Indeed, this theme was expounded upon by Oswald Lewis, MP for Colchester, during a public meeting in Essex in December. He warned his audience that 'it was at present a very dangerous situation, and up to the present it had been very difficult to interest public opinion in the matter.'[92] Others though felt that only the government was responsible. Viscount Wolmer suggested that it was the failure of the government to make rearmament a national issue rather than one purely of party politics, believing that 'if Members of Parliament in the past had not sometimes allowed their personal loyalty to their leaders to outweigh their judgement, we should not now be in our present arrears in regard to national defence.'[93] Rather perversely, and ignorantly, some Conservatives supporting this argument suffered from selective amnesia and tried to suggest that Chamberlain was free from responsibility since he had only been in charge eighteen months - the fact that he had been Chancellor and absolutely crucial in shaping the 1935 and 1936 defence white papers was conveniently overlooked. For some Conservatives, most notably Churchill and other Munich rebels, the inadequacies of the defence programme validated some of their warnings and consequently helped to dilute some of the anger felt by loyalists towards them. Wolmer stressed this point during correspondence with his local chairman, Sir Godfrey Fell, following his Munich abstention. He assured Fell that, in view of Chamberlain's emphasis on the need for greatly accelerated rearmament: 'that is a policy I have advocated for four years and I shall do everything in my power to support it.'[94] Similarly Churchill's supporters in Epping used such arguments. Consequently, instead of immediately facing a resolution critical of his disloyalty to the leadership, Churchill found himself being urged 'to continue his work for national unity and national defence'. It was suggested that if Chamberlain had heeded the warnings made by Churchill over the past five years 'about the proper and timely rearmament of our country' the Prime Minister would have found himself 'in a far better position to negotiate with the heads of the dictator states.'[95]

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92 *Essex County Telegraph*, 17 Dec 1938; similarly argued Inverness CA, 'annual report' 20 Oct. 1938.

93 Selborne Mss: Wolmer to Godfrey Fell, 7 Oct. 1938, MS.Eng.hist.c.1014.

94 Selborne Mss: Wolmer to Godfrey Fell, 7 Oct 1938 MS.Eng.hist.c.1014.

95 West Essex (now Epping) CA, special central council, 4 Nov. 1938, D/Z120A6853, Essex Record Office; For a historical analysis of Churchill and rearmament see D.C. Watt, 'Churchill and appeasement', in *Churchill*, ed. Louis & Blake, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 202-4.

It has been argued retrospectively that Munich bought additional time for Britain's rearmament programme.[96] Conservative apologists and historians have suggested that the months between October 1938 and September 1939 were crucial because vital improvements were made in Britain's anti-aircraft defences, radar and the development of fighter aircraft. It has, however, been assumed that this was a retrospective argument devised by contemporaries in their memoirs to justify their past and divert some of the criticisms of their Munich prosecutors. This was the purpose of the short polemical tract *The Left Was Never Right* written in 1945 by Quintin Hogg, the Conservative who had won the 1938 Oxford 'Munich' by-election.[97] Somerset de Chair, in 1938 one of the youngest MPs at the age of 27, maintains to this day his firm belief that Munich had bought Britain a breathing space.[98] Whilst it can not be denied that the additional eleven months of peace proved invaluable to Britain equally it gave Germany additional time to prepare for conflict. It would seem, however, that historians have failed to appreciate the extent to which contemporary Conservatives actually saw Munich as a delaying tactic. At the height of the Czech crisis one Conservative Central Office official wrote to Rab Butler, Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, to explain that as a consequence of Chamberlain's negotiations with Hitler 'everyday may make the preparations on the other side greater *but it is also quite invaluable to us*.'[99] During the Munich debate a number of Conservatives argued similarly. As John Wardlaw-Milne, Kidderminster's MP, suggested 'there can be very little doubt that we shall be considerably better off a year or two hence than we are today. Germany's rearmament has gone very far; ours still has a long way to go', (although he did warn that the crisis had illustrated the need to push on with rearmament, especially in the sphere of civil defence, and to this end a national register was 'essential').[100] Archibald Southby, the Member for Epsom, took the argument to the government's prosecutors:

> If the arguments brought forward by critics of the government be true, and we have only put off the evil day [of having to fight Germany] I would ask those who take this view to consider whether we ourselves are entirely

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96 Colin Thornton-Kemsley, *Through Winds and Tides*, (Montrose: Standard Press, 1974), pp. 86-9.

97 Hogg, *The Left Was Never Right*, especially pp. 207-9.

98 Somerset de Chair to author, 2 Sept. 1992.

99 Butler Mss: Cuthbert Alport to Butler, 14 Sept. 1938, RABG934.

100 *HofC Debs*, vol. 339 cols. 397-8, 5 Oct. 1938.

ready for a world war at the present time and whether we should not be in a better position in two years' time?[101]

In fact one such critic, Wolmer, who had been a protagonist for rearmament since the mid-thirties, was prepared to concede in October 1939 that the additional year had been invaluable when comparing the relative military positions between September 1938 and 1939. A similar attitude was adopted by Lord Chatfield who speaking to the 1936 Club in June 1939 as Minister for the Co-Ordination of Defence, declared that 'every day that war is postponed [...] is of the greatest value to us.'[102]

Following Munich, Chamberlain quickly sought to remedy some of the deficiencies in the rearmament programme.[103] Once more these measures were justified in terms that emphasised the necessity of a strong defensive force in order to maintain Britain's diplomatic prowess.[104] These measures were generally welcomed by the Party, although they were increasingly to be appended to calls for a national register or national service.[105] Such actions, at a time when Chamberlain was supposedly claiming to have secured peace invariably left the Prime Minister open to jibes from critics. It was apparent from the public declarations of Conservatives that there were deliberate efforts afoot to contradict these criticisms and place the expanded rearmament programme into a viable context. Captain C.G. Lancaster declared during the Fylde by-election in November that Chamberlain was 'bent on building up this country's defences because he realises that weakness in armed strength means weakness in diplomacy and negotiation, and that it is only by being armed ourselves that we can ever hope to persuade other countries to agree to an all-round reduction of armaments.'[106] This was Lancaster's public stance. In private he was inclined to blame the government for the predicament in which

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101 *HofC Debs*, vol. 339 col. 119, 3 Oct. 1938.

102 *Channon Diaries*, 15 June 1939, p. 203.

103 Chamberlain announced his intention to review the rearmament programme in his closing speech during the Munich debate: *HofC Debs*, vol. 339, cols. 551-2, 6 Oct. 1938.

104 *HofC Debs*, vol. 339 col. 407 (Sandeman Allen), 5 Oct. 1938; Inverness CA, 'annual report, Oct. 1938'; CPA: women's advisory cttee, 24 Nov. 1938, ARE3/11/2; *Essex County Telegraph*, 17 Dec. 1938 (Ruggles-Brise & Oswald Lewis); Bute & North Ayrshire CA, AGM 23 Dec. 1938, with Ayr CA.

105 CPA: North West Area, quarterly council, 5 Nov. 1938, ARE3/1/2; Women's advisory cttee., 24 Nov. 1938 ARE3/11/2; *HofC Debs*, vol. 339 col. 398 (Wardlaw-Milne), 5 Oct. 1938, col. 536-7 (Grigg) 6 Oct. 1938; vol. 341 cols. 58-9 (Macquisten), 8 Nov. 1938, cols. 364 (Milner), 401 (Keyes), 10 Nov. 1938.

106 Almond Mss: Lancaster's by-election address, DDX1202/1/24.

it found itself.[107] Once again rearmament was being justified from the ethos of deterrence. It was as one recently elected Tory MP declared 'simply taking reasonable precaution against the emergency.'[108] At the same time attempts were being made to try and alleviate the concerns about Britain's defences that public opinion and the Party's grass roots were experiencing. The situation was, as Arthur Heneage, MP for Louth, told a constituent, such that 'if it comes to a contest between dictator ruled and democratic countries, we shall be in a better position, both morally and materially [than Britain was before Munich].'[109] A similar vein was adopted by Charles MacAndrew when addressing his Bute Association AGM. He defended the government's programme reminding his audience that with a five year programme 'obviously' the first year or two had to be employed 'arranging the workshop and so forth'. He sought to reassure his listeners by explaining that he possessed private information which 'convinced him that there was in fact an immense output of aeroplanes, and that this country was in a position of which we need not be ashamed.'[110]

Privately, Conservatives continued to feel concerned at the rearmament position. This was especially true of the foreign policy sceptics who were not so readily assured of the situation. Paul Emrys-Evans believed the government and dissidents were drifting further apart 'not only on foreign policy but on defence. I have had two conversations with Jock McEwen, who is now frankly, much more defeatist than anyone I have talked to, and some importance must be attached to his view point as he is close to the PM [...] He says that he doesn't really think it worth while making a really big effort to rearm.' Eden found himself 'inclined to agree' with Evans' analysis of the government's attitude towards rearmament and felt McEwen to be 'probably fairly representative' of Conservative backbench opinion.[111] The air situation still gave grounds for disquiet, with Eden unsure whether the emphasis upon fighters only was 'wise'. He believed that they were not as great a deterrent as bombers. At the same time, Eden appears to have questioned the strategy of limited liability, unable to believe 'that we can be secure in our tight little

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107 Almond Mss: Almond to Lord Derby, 5 Nov. 1938, DDX1202/1/47.

108 *Staffordshire Chronicle*, 11 Mar. 1939, (Peter Thorneycroft).

109 Heneage Mss: Heneage to J.M. Lill, 12 Oct. 1938, HNC1/L.

110 Bute and North Ayrshire CA, AGM 23 Dec. 1938.

111 Avon Mss: Evans to Eden, 4 Nov. 1938, AP 14/1/742, Eden to Evans, 8 Nov. 1938, AP 14/1/742A.

island and ignore the rest of the world.'[112] Robert Boothby's declaration in the House of Commons during November that 'a great number' of Conservatives 'feel that no real effort is to be made by the government, even now, in this question of rearmament' was simply giving public expression to backbench private sentiment.[113] Inskip addressed the 1922 committee at the beginning of December and made what many considered to be a 'lamentably feeble statement'. As a consequence the committee agreed to bring forward their planned defence debate. Amery opened this talk with a broad survey of the military position if Britain and France had to fight the axis powers. 'I had hardly realised myself, till I attempted the survey,' confessed Amery in his diary, 'how serious the situation is and I think my talk profoundly affected the 60 to 80 Members who were there.'[114] At a constituency level, as the next chapter will show, there was equal concern at the defence situation which compounded the calls for national service. Discontent was not merely confined to the back-benches and grass-roots. A numbers of junior ministers were actively considering resigning over the situation. Their criticisms would have remained within the confines of Whitehall had not Randolph Churchill leaked the news of this "Under-Secretaries revolt" to the *Evening Standard.* The malcontents were Robert Hudson, Under-Secretary for Trade; Lord Strathcona, Under-Secretary for War; marquess of Dufferin and Ava, Under-Secretary for Colonies; Kenneth Lindsay, Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education; and Harry Crookshank, the rebellious Minister for Mines who had already threatened resignation over Eden's departure and the Munich agreement. Oliver Harvey, a civil servant in the Foreign Office, noted that 'they wish to resign because of their dissatisfaction with re-armament, failure of the Munich policy and agricultural policy.'[115] Hudson also told Amery that in their meetings with Chamberlain they had let him 'know that they think [Hore-]Belisha, Inskip, Runciman and Winterton all incompetent and that defence is in a hopeless condition.'[116] It was observed that the ministerial plotters were 'hesitant because of the risk that the PM will spring an election on them.'[117] They were afraid that an election in the wake of their resignations would expose them to the risk of being dropped as official Conservative

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[112] Avon Mss: Eden to Mr Meville, 15 Nov. 1938, AP14/1/779A.

[113] *HofC Debs*, vol. 341 col. 47, 8 Nov 1938.

[114] *Amery Diaries*, 5, 12 Dec. 1938, pp. 539, 540.

[115] *Harvey Diaries*, 13 Dec. 1938, p. 227.

[116] *Amery Diaries*, 19 Dec. 1938, p. 540.

[117] *Harvey Diaries*, 13 Dec. 1938, p. 227.

candidates. The premier emphasised this during personal interviews with the ministers before persuading them to withdraw their resignations.[118] Many observers suggested that Chamberlain would remove these malcontents in the New Year once the media interest had died down. This was believed to be especially likely for Strathcona, who, Ralph Glyn felt, had made his position with Hore-Belisha impossible by his betrayal.[119] Indeed, Chamberlain reflected that 'the recent appointment of younger men have saddled me with a number of colleagues whose judgement I cannot trust and who are always a source of trouble in difficult times.' However, he was loath to make any reshuffle because he could foresee it making no change in the situation.[120]

VI

This chapter has demonstrated the mounting Conservative unease with rearmament during 1938. The semi-mobilisation necessitated by the Munich crisis highlighted the gaps in British defence plans, especially in the anti-aircraft sphere. British fears of an aerial knock-out blow meant that air defence was the primary priority for many Conservatives. As the next chapter will reveal, the growth of support for national service would be encouraged by the desire to rectify these deficiencies in air defence. Although rearmament was accepted as a 'twin pillar' with foreign policy, it was increasingly perceived during 1938 as the issue of greater concern. A strong defence programme would enable a government to negotiate with the dictators from a position of strength, whilst if that negotiation failed, an adequately prepared defence scheme would repel the initial aerial assault and ultimately ensure victory.

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118 Chamberlain Mss: Neville to Ida, 17 Dec. 1938, NC18/1/1080.

119 Glyn Mss: Glyn to mother, 30 Jan. 1939, D/EGlC9/10.

120 Chamberlain Mss: Neville to Hilda, 11 Dec. 1938, NC18/1/1079.

Chapter Four: The Conservative Party and the Call for National Service, 1937-1939: Compulsion Versus Voluntarism

As has been shown in the previous chapters, the Conservative Party's perceptions of the threat Germany posed to Britain had a direct bearing upon its support for defence and foreign policy. This chapter proposes to extend that argument further and consider how these attitudes influenced the calls for national service from 1937 onwards. As will be shown, current historiography hardly suggests this to be a topic worthy of historical scrutiny from the perspective of the Conservative Party. The reality is somewhat different. It is apparent that national service was a political issue for Conservatives before Munich. For some Tories, such as Leo Amery, MP for Birmingham Sparkbrook, it was a cause long advocated. What will be demonstrated was that the March 1938 *Anschluss* between Germany and Austria was the trigger, within the Conservative Party, for a critical debate on Britain's defences, with the question of the marshalling of manpower and resources the central theme. This chapter will explore the opinion and pressures for and against compulsory service, a national register and conscription. It will be demonstrated that within the Party, just as in the pre-1914 period, grass-roots Conservative support for compulsion was always more advanced than the leadership either wished to believe or acknowledge.[1] Additionally, it will illustrate how Conservative perceptions of the threat posed to Britain by Germany influenced their views on national service.

I

The debate may be divided into four phases between Chamberlain's succession to the premiership in May 1937 and the introduction of conscription in April 1939. The initial phase was before the German annexation of Austria in March 1938, during which time there was substantial

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[1] Before World War One, the ostensibly non-political National Service League had widespread grassroots Conservative support. They claimed after the 1910 election to have 177 sitting M.P.s as members, in reality this was more likely around 80. No similar organisation existed in the 1930s, although there was the Army League (Citizens' Service League from January 1939) which did draw some support from late 1938. For National Service League see R.J.Q. Adams & Philip Poirier *The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain*, (London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 23; John Morton Osborne *The Voluntary Recruiting Movement in Britain, 1914-16*, (London: Garland, 1982), pp. 17-18; Rhodri Williams *Defending the Empire: The Conservative Party and British Defence Policy, 1899-1915*, (London: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 57-8, 143-8, 150-4, 171, 185-92, 201, 220, 222.

Conservative sympathy for a peaceful revision of the 1919 Versailles treaty. During this period national service was of limited importance, being restricted to a few long term advocates. In terms of defence matters the preoccupation was with the pace and nature of the rearmament programme. This chapter does not suggest that the concern about rearmament ever diminished during the next three phases - quite the contrary. Rather, it will be shown that national service was increasingly recognised as the missing component of the rearmament programme, and therefore rapidly assumed importance. The second phase, between March 1938 and the Munich settlement of September 1938, was typified by growing support for some form of national service and, in particular, calls for a national register. In parallel was a growing distrust of Germany. The Munich settlement, which indicates the beginning of the third period, caused a temporary pause in the expanding support for national service, as many Conservatives tried to reconcile the contradiction of adopting greater measures of rearmament at a time when a supposedly new era of international co-operation had been inaugurated. Events such as *Kristallnacht* - the Nazi pogrom against German Jews in November 1938 - however, began to suggest something of the true nature of nazism. It rapidly became apparent that national service was now acceptable in principle to many Conservatives, and the question was whether it should be voluntary or compulsory. It was during this period that the government opted, in December 1938, to introduce a voluntary register and proposed a scheme of voluntary national service. The final phase runs from the introduction of this scheme in January 1939 through the German invasion of Prague in March and the official abandonment of the policy of appeasement, to the government's decision to introduce conscription in April. The period was typified by the failure of the voluntary service scheme to attract enough recruits, whilst within the Party there was an ever greater clamour, especially after Prague, for compulsion to show both Germany and Britain's allies that it meant business.

On 26 April 1939 Chamberlain announced to the House of Commons the National government's decision to introduce unprecedented measures of peacetime conscription. In the debate the following day one Conservative Member after another rose to add support for the bill. The proposal was for more than simply compulsory military training, for it included plans to prevent individuals and industries from profiteering in the event of war.[2] Yet less than

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[2] *HofC Debs*, vol. 346 cols. 1343-1464, 26 Apr. 1939. Of anecdotal interest is the account in Channon's diary that during the debate during Archibald Sinclair's speech he 'watched the PM write copious notes on House of Commons writing paper. I wondered what could

a month previously Chamberlain had appeared to rule out all possibility of introducing measures of compulsion, reaffirming his and fellow ministers' declarations since 1936 that conscription would not be introduced in peacetime.[3] The following pages analyse the growing calls for the adoption of such measures and explain why the policy reversal occurred.

For some historians the decision to introduce conscription in 1939, during peacetime, is not seen as surprising. To quote one: the First World War had meant that,

> the modern principle of conscription had been accepted, and a return to voluntarism was not to mean that the whole controversy was to be repeated. For only an emergency of sufficient gravity was required to raise the new as from the ashes of the old.[4]

The German seizure of Prague in March 1939 provided that emergency. Unlike the conscription issue before and during World War One its introduction in April 1939 has received comparatively little historical attention.[5] General histories of the period give only the briefest of references, often merely mentioning that conscription was introduced, whilst standard historical studies of the Conservative Party fail even to mention the topic.[6] All this makes Keith Feiling's declaration, as Chamberlain's official biographer, that the Prime Minister 'battled with a powerful current in his own Party' favouring the introduction of measures of national service or

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so interest him in the middle of Archie's diatribe. And afterwards discovered that he was making notes on salmon fishing which he then passed to Anthony Crossley who is writing a book on the subject. What a commentary on Chamberlain, especially as Anthony Crossley has been one of the disloyal band, and nothing has been too bad for him to say against the PM who, now with his infinite patience, finds time to help him with his book.' *Channon Diaries*, 27 Apr. 1939, p. 195.

3 *HofC Debs*, vol. 310 col. 1992 (Stanley Baldwin), 1 Apr. 1936; vol. 331 col. 2057 (Neville Chamberlain), 17 Feb. 1938; vol. 336 col. 1792 (Thomas Inskip), 30 May 1938; vol. 345 cols. 2029-51 (Neville Chamberlain), 29 Mar. 1939

4 Dennis Hayes, *The Conscription Controversy*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1949), p. 318; Adams & Poirier, *The Conscription Controversy*, p. 248.

5 Keith Grieves, *The Politics of Manpower, 1914-18*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); Osborne, *Voluntary Recruiting*; Roy Douglas, 'Voluntary enlistment in the First World War and the work of the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee', *Journal of Modern History*, 4, 1970 pp. 564-85; Williams, *Defending the Empire*; Adams & Poirier, *Conscription Controversy*.

6 For example: Martin Pugh, *State and Society: British Political and Social History, 1870-1992*, (London: Arnold, 1994); A.J.P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-45*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), pp. 530, 543-4; Robert Blake, *The Decline of Power, 1915-64*, (London: Paladin, 1986), p. 223; Lamb, *The Drift to War*, p. 296; Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War*, (London: Pelican, 1968), p. 223; Charles L. Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars, 1918-40*, (London: Methuen, 1955), p. 640; Henry Pelling, *Modern Britain, 1885-1955*, (London: Head, 1960), pp. 119, 129; John Ramsden, *Balfour and Baldwin* and Blake, *The Conservative Party*.

conscription appear both surprising and rather unsubstantiated.[7] For the inter-war years there has only been one specific monograph on the subject of national service and conscription, namely Peter Dennis' *Decision By Default*, although Brian Bond's study of British inter-war military strategy also examines the issue. This perhaps suggests the limited scope of the subject.[8] Indeed, Dennis questioned the extent to which national service and conscription really became issues in the late 1930s. He concluded that it was only after the September 1938 Czech crisis that it became anything like a political issue (in the sense that it was debated in parliament and discussed critically in the press). Furthermore, he argued that not until early 1939 did it become the central issue in the debate on British defence policy. He showed that conscription's final introduction in April 1939 owed more to the necessity of satisfying British and foreign public opinion than to military concerns. It was his belief that conscription was inextricably linked with the idea of a British continental commitment, and that with the memories of the wholesale slaughter on the western front during World War One still fresh in contemporary minds, support for a continental expeditionary force (and therefore conscription) was limited.[9] These assessments of national service have been predominantly from the perspective of leading soldiers, the general staff, the chiefs of staff and government ministers. By contrast, this chapter will assess the issue of national service from the perspective of the Conservative Party as a whole, from the members of the Conservative Associations in the localities, through to the back-bench Conservatives sitting in parliament, to those serving as ministers in the National government.

II

There appears to be a certain degree of confusion, both amongst contemporaries and historians alike, over the terms used in the national service debate. This has parallels with the Edwardian situation when 'national service' meant anything from conscription by ballot to compulsory military service for all males to compulsory training.[10] What follows represents an attempt to define the three measures most commonly urged in the debate: national registration, national service and conscription. National registration

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[7] Feiling, *Chamberlain*, p. 405.

[8] For the inter-war years in addition to Dennis, *Decision By Default* see Bond, *British Military Policy*, chps. 9-11 and Michael Howard, *The Continental Commitment*, (London: Temple Smith, 1972), pp. 129-30.

[9] Dennis, *Decision By Default*, *passim*, especially chapter 10 & 11.

[10] Williams, *Defending the Empire*, p. 57.

was relatively straightforward to define. Under this system a register would be compiled of the nation's citizens, listing their special qualifications that would be useful in time of war. Individuals would be assigned their wartime roles in advance which would enable important industries to shelter their skilled labour from call-up. The difficulty arose over whether - if adopted - it should be compulsory or voluntary. Ought the government or another body be responsible for its compilation? And what were the limitations of registration: should it be purely restricted to vocational skills or should it also be a registration of wealth?[11]

A register was seen by advocates as the necessary foundation for a scheme of national service. It was over this latter phrase that the most confusion arose, with some even using it interchangeably with conscription. There appear to have been two forms of service advocated by contemporaries. In the first place it was mooted that a scheme should provide some form of annual or periodic training for individuals to play a part in civil home defence in the event of war. The roles envisaged included anti-aircraft defence training or placed emphasis on the preparation of air raid precaution officers. It was argued that a body of the population should be trained and familiarised in their wartime roles during peacetime so that in the event of hostilities the transition to a war footing would be smoother and more efficient. The second form to be discussed was military national service - most probably taking the form of duty in the reserve services.[12] If backed by compulsion it would be reminiscent of military conscription as experienced during the First World War with all the connotations of slaughter. This to an extent provides some excuse for the confusion and distrust of national service. Naturally, the controversy centred around whether either scheme should be adopted at all and, if one was, whether it ought to be compulsory or voluntary.

It was widely accepted that conscription of manpower for military purposes would be introduced in the event of war because it was regarded as the fairest means of ensuring that the burden of hostilities was evenly spread. The controversy was whether such a measure could be justifiably introduced in times of peace. Conscription, however, meant more than just compulsory military service by the 1930s. It was recognised that the twentieth century

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[11] 1922 committee minutes 16 May 1938 cited Goodhart, *The 1922*, p. 88; *HofC Debs*, vol. 339 cols. 536-7, 6 Oct. 1938.

[12] L.S. Amery, 'National service', *National Review*, vol. CXI, Dec. 1938, pp. 725-35; *HofC Debs*, vol. 332 cols. 2225-27 (Beamish) 10 Mar. 1938; *Glasgow Herald*, 22 Oct. 1938 (Richard Ropner prospective candidate for West Stirlingshire).

was the era of 'total war', and that a nation's staying power during hostilities was just as important as the forces it could send into battle. Important war industries, such as munitions, would require both skilled labour and special powers to ensure priority in the supply of materials and orders. The administrative and organisational confusion of the 1914-18 war had amply shown the necessity of such measures.[13] Supporters of compulsion suggested that the creation of a Ministry of Supply would prevent any repetition of the chaos witnessed in the last conflict. Additionally, there was a third form of conscription, namely of wealth. This could be applied by methods such as a tax on excess profits during war time to prevent any one profiteering from the emergency. Chamberlain's proposed NDC tax was a form of conscription of wealth, and the opposition it aroused from within his own Party bears testimony to the Conservatives' distrust of such measures. Conscription of wealth was deemed a socialistic measure.[14] Throughout the national service debate Conservatives thought solely in terms of the conscription of manpower; however not in terms that envisaged a million strong field force as had been the case in the Edwardian situation. Rather this manpower was required to resolve the recruitment shortages in realm of anti-aircraft defence.

To this extent, the national service debate was linked with the fate of the army since it was the most manpower-intensive of the three services. However the debate was not to be conducted along the lines of the Edwardian discussion. Dennis's assumption that support for national service automatically meant support for a continental commitment will be disputed. What will be shown is that the emphasis upon national service did not contradict the idea of a small professional army concerned primarily with home defence and imperial duties. Rather it dovetailed with the doctrine of limited liability and deterrence, in the sense that Conservative advocates of national service envisaged it primarily as a measure of home defence which would help cushion the nation from the feared aerial knock-out blow. Therefore, it became an issue for Conservatives from the time of the *Anschluss* as German aggression heightened fears about the weakness of Britain's air defences, not just in London and the south east of England, but also in the Midlands and north which were now exposed to

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[13] Osborne, *Voluntary Recruiting, passim*, especially pp. 21-24; Grieves, *Manpower*, argues that a total war effort should include the ability to make effective use of mobilised resources and the existence of a co-ordinating manpower authority which he believes did not arise until the last year of World War One, pp. 207-9.

[14] Chapter Three considers the NDC furore in greater detail.

the threat of German aerial assault. As Sir Edward Grigg explained to the 1922 Committee in May 1938:

> Speeding up rearmament was not enough, organisation of the nation was essential. "Key-men" had been recruited into the anti-aircraft units and would not be available when required. Three things were necessary for efficiency: (1) compulsory national registration: (2) concentration on the organisation for defence of vital spots: (3) setting up of air defence authorities for important areas. The moral effect of such action on Germany would be tremendous.[15]

Although conscription was introduced after the abandonment of limited liability and following the re-acceptance of a continental commitment the emphasis remained on home defence. The first batch of conscripts was expected to spend six months training in AA defence, before serving a further three and a half years as members of the Territorial Army which had been responsible for AA ground defence since 1923. However it experienced difficulty attracting enough recruits before September 1938.[16] Such measures were unacceptable before March 1939 to government ministers obsessed with the 'fourth arm of defence' and the belief that war mobilisation during peacetime would disrupt the economy whose strength was also vital in the event of war.[17]

III

As was shown in the previous chapter, the subjects of rearmament and defence, being domestic topics, were subjected to the scrutiny of Conservative Associations. The vast majority of AGM addresses for 1937 referred directly to the rearmament programme and sought to provide justification for the vast expenditure and more generally to allay fears. Speakers usually argued that if Britain was strong other nations would be deterred from aggression and would be more willing to negotiate with Britain. In other words, rearmament stood for peace.[18] Nevertheless, it was apparent that Associations were not always

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[15] 1922 committee minutes 16 May 1938 cited Goodhart, *The 1922*, p. 88.

[16] For a history of the Territorial Army see Peter Dennis, *The Territorial Army*, (Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society, 1987).

[17] For historical scrutiny of the 'fourth arm of defence' see, Peden, *Treasury*; Shay, *British Rearmament*; R.A.C. Parker, 'Economics, rearmament and foreign policy', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 10, 4 (1975), pp. 637-48; R.A.C. Parker, 'British rearmament 1936-9'; Gustav Schmidt, *The Politics and Economics of Appeasement*, trans. Jackie Bennet-Ruete, (Leamington: Berg, 1986).

[18] Rushcliffe CA, AGM 20 Feb. 1937, (Ralph Assheton, MP): 'If we were strong enough, it was most unlikely that any country would want to attack us.' DD.PP 1/1; Sowerby CA, AGM Apr. 1937, (M.S. McCorquodale, MP): 'The rearmament programme stood for

satisfied with the optimistic assessments from their MPs and there appear to have been instances of concern about the pace and nature of the defence programme. This concern was more vocally expressed in private.[19] The urgency appeared all the greater to those who actually visited Germany. Cuthbert Headlam, former MP and chairman of the Northern Area Council, returned from such a visit in September 1937 convinced that whilst the government should try and come to some form of negotiated settlement with Hitler, it must also 'prepare for war all the time and for all we are worth.'[20] The accepted necessity for rearmament would not diminish over the next eighteen months, but the priorities for this programme, as perceived by Conservatives, were to alter.

British defence strategy was based upon the assumption that on the outbreak of hostilities the country would be subjected to a 'knock-out blow'. Priority was therefore given to measures of defence that would provide a deterrent to this. Consequently British rearmament was preoccupied with the needs of the RAF and ensuring parity with the German *Luftwaffe*. By contrast, the demands of the British army were deemed of lowest priority. Advocacy of national service would, at initial inspection, appear incompatible with these priorities because of the synonymity between measures involving manpower and an expeditionary field force. By the late 1930s this was an erroneous comparison. It was an area where a fundamental difference existed when a comparison was made between the Edwardian calls for national service and those of the thirties. Whereas before World War One the preoccupation had been with recruiting the necessary manpower for a million strong army, by the 1930s, for most Conservatives, the idea of a conscript expeditionary force was abhorrent. Moreover, for contemporary advocates of national service the necessity was recruitment for measures of home defence, such as anti-aircraft batteries.[21] Therefore, national service was a proposal that met with the perceived defence priorities of 'limited liability'.

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peace [..] Those who might have wanted to break the peace were beginning to realise that it would not be worth while.' Cited *Halifax Courier & Guardian*, 'Sowerby MP & Arms', 17 Apr. 1937.

19 For a fuller discussion of this theme refer to Chapter Three.

20 Headlam Mss: diary, 12 Sept. 1937, D/He/33.

21 See Williams, *Defending the Empire*; Altrincham Mss: Edward Grigg to George Kinnear, 5 Jan. 1937: 'the security of this country depends mainly on its decision in regard to some form of compulsory organisation and training to deal with air attack.' MS/Film1005Reel#7.

IV

On 13 March 1938 German troops entered Vienna and announced the *Anschluss*. This signalled the opening of the second phase in the debate. In part this was because the *Anschluss* occurred during the AGM season for constituency Associations and therefore it was possible to chart the reaction of the Party's grassroots. The *Anschluss* was Hitler's first foreign adventure outside the boundaries of the Reich. Contemporaries were left wondering whether Hitler would be content with Austria alone or whether this expansion was the beginning of something infinitely greater and more menacing? Many Conservatives had expressed sympathy for Hitler's desire to unite the Germanic peoples. Only as the brutality with which Hitler enforced the Austro-German union became apparent did doubts emerge.

During the two defence debates, which occurred the week before the *Anschluss*, various Conservative MPs made calls for the adoption of differing measures of compulsion. Winston Churchill urged the creation of a Ministry of Supply, whilst Sir Edward Grigg proposed a national register so as to allocate individuals to home defence and safeguard those in key industries from call-up. This was followed by Rear-Admiral Beamish demanding compulsion to assist in recruiting for the Territorials.[22] The *Anschluss* actually occurred between the two parliamentary debates on that year's army estimates and before the 1938 air and naval estimates had been presented to Parliament. It was apparent that Conservatives were concerned about the implications this had upon British rearmament plans, particularly regarding Britain's vulnerability to German air assult. This was reflected by the Parliamentary calls for national service and the similar demands being widely echoed by Conservative Associations around the country. The chairman of Kinross Association reported that several members had expressed support for the suggestion 'that a mild form of compulsory service would be good and have a wonderful effect on the continent.'[23] Winchester Association at their March 1938 AGM passed a motion urging the introduction of conscription. The motion, approved by ninety per cent of the meeting, believed conscription was needed because 'of the inability of the League of Nations to deal with major world issues and the unfortunate but obvious advent of an age of power

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[22] *HofC Debs*, vol. 332 cols. 1600-07 (Churchill), 7 Mar. 1938; vol. 332 cols. 1620-26 (Grigg), 7 Mar. 1938; vol. 332 cols. 2225-27 (Beamish), 10 Mar. 1938.

[23] Atholl Mss: James Paton to duchess of Atholl, 17 Mar. 1938, file 22/18.

politics'.[24] North Wiltshire Association discussed, and then rejected, a motion proposing universal national service. The proposer, Colonel Fitzgerald, complained that he had been outvoted 'by an opposition which immediately raised the cry of "conscription".' Fitzgerald had visited Germany in May 1937 and like so many Conservatives who visited the Nazi state had been 'impressed' with the 'vigour and efficiency of that country.' Nevertheless the experience had left him in 'little doubt that the dictators treat our policy almost with contempt because they know that we have neither the power nor the will to carry out a strong line.'[25]

The example of Chelmsford Association demonstrated the dilemma for Conservatives of accepting the idea of national service, and, if it was deemed necessary, whether it should be compulsory or voluntary. It was a debate that was instigated in May 1938, by their MP, J.R.J. Macnamara, and one which was not finally resolved until early 1939. Macnamara had already publicly declared his support for such measures during the second day of debate on that year's army estimates.[26] The MP explained to his Association that he believed in the 'vital importance' of having not only a strongly armed defence force but also one that possessed 'adequate efficient manpower'. Therefore he suggested that his Association's executive accept a motion which proposed a scheme of elementary military and labour training lasting six months for all seventeen to twenty year olds. Despite managing to postpone immediate debate, the executive was forced to confront the issue at the end of May 1938. Then an alternative resolution was proposed which envisaged a voluntary civil and military national training scheme. This was immediately amended by the Association's president, General Wigan, so as not to exclude the possibility of compulsion. It was apparent from the debate that a significant portion of the executive feared that this 'virtually meant conscription and that as such did not consider the country would accept it'. Ultimately, Wigan's amendment and the original resolution were rejected; the executive instead calling for a voluntary scheme of fitness and vocational training.[27]

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[24] Winchester CA, AGM 26 Mar. 1938, 73M86W/5. The motion was then forwarded to the National Union exec. which decided to allow it to 'lay on the table'. CP: National Union, exec. 16 June 1938, card 58.

[25] North Wiltshire CA, AGM 1 Apr. 1938, 2436/1; Altrincham Mss: Col. Fitzgerald to Edward Grigg, 25 Sept. 1938, MS/Film 1005Reel#7. For further examples see: Kennington CA, 29 Apr. 1938, BLPES; Altrincham Mss: Mabel S. Lomax to Edward Grigg, 12 Apr. 1938, MS/Film1005Reel#7.

[26] *HofC Debs*, vol. 333 cols. 1054-5, (J.R.J. Macnamara), 22 Mar. 1938.

[27] Chelmsford CA, AGM 29 Mar. 1938, D/Z 96/4; exec. 6 May 1938 & 27 May 1938, D/Z 96/7.

This experience, and that of Fitzgerald in North Wiltshire, showed how contemporaries were liable to perceive national service as conscription. It reflected a fear that conscription was unacceptable in peacetime and an electoral liability. Just as leading Unionists, before World War One, had feared that the adoption of compulsion as a Party policy would wreck their electoral chances, so now some Conservatives worried that with a general election due in 1939 or early 1940, any popular suspicion that they were advocating conscription would destroy their chances of re-election.[28] Overlaying these considerations of electoral expediency was the philosophical argument that compulsion was not the 'British way'. One of those who had argued in this manner before 1914, the 4th Marquess of Salisbury, was by 1938-9 putting his signature as a member of the Army League to motions calling for compulsory national service.[29]

Additionally, by the 1930s there was a practical argument that weighed heavily upon the minds of government ministers. This was the belief that any measure of compulsion, whether it be in the field of defence or industry, would incur the wrath of the trade unions and workers, the opposition of which would ensure the disruption of industry as a whole with disastrous consequences for the rearmament programme. Limited approaches, following the *Anschluss*, had been made to TUC leaders to enlist their support for the rearmament programme, but fears were expressed by ministers of the possible implications of such negotiations.[30] As it was, nothing concrete was established by the talks. Individual Conservatives were, however, independently 'sounding' the Labour Party and unions on various matters of defence.[31] These approaches reflected a belief, held by some Tories, that the

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28 Williams, *Defending the Empire*, pp. 188-9, 217.

29 Compare Williams, *Defending the Empire*, p. 147 with Amery, *My Political Life*, p. 299 fn. 1. By 1938 Salisbury was a member of the Army League.

30 For instance, Sir Thomas Inskip, Minister for the Co-Ordination of Defence, foresaw a situation whereby the unions 'would make conditions: for example, they might demand the Government undertake the use of arms in support of Czecho-Slovakia, or insist on the question being dealt with by the League of Nations.' Cited in Peden, *Treasury*, p. 82; For analysis of the unions attitudes to national service and conscription see Hugh A. Clegg, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889: Volume III: 1934-1951*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 140-3.

31 Cilcennin Mss: 13 Apr. 1938, copy of unsigned letter - pencilled note at top: 'J.P.L. Thomas to Lord Baldwin', Cilc.coll.39. Tory peer Lord Tyrrell approached TUC leaders during Apr. 1938. *Harvey Diaries*, 13 Apr. 1938, p. 122; Leo Amery and Sir Edward Grigg approached Labour leaders during Czech crisis in an attempt to secure their support for National Service: *Amery Diaries*, pp. 490-1;

issue of national defence should be above party politics. Further, the very deliberate attempts by advocates of national service to emphasise that they were not championing conscription was in the hope of making their proposals more palatable to the unions.

Leo Amery and Edward Grigg actively canvassed government supporters during the summer of 1938, spurred on by the belief that support for a national register was growing. The 1922 committee had added its voice to the call at Whitsun.[32] At the end of May a deputation of backbenchers, which included Hugh O'Neill, Edward Grigg and Ernest Makins, met the Prime Minister to argue their case. However, the deputation departed, disappointed with Chamberlain's attitude and viewing the situation with 'increasing anxiety'.[33] Even more indicative of the changing mood was the one hundred and seventy-four signatures collected, between July and October, for a motion on national service. This reflected a belief amongst Conservative MPs that registration was increasingly necessary so as to stimulate voluntary recruitment for the armed services.[34] Further, during the summer parliamentary recess senior backbenchers sought to persuade the government to include a national register in the King's address for the new session.[35] As far as the cabinet was concerned national registration was not a viable option. Ministers feared that if a register was introduced it would be interpreted as the first step towards conscription. Alternatively, any postponement of introduction until war seemed imminent would run the risk of its then being viewed as tantamount to mobilisation. They therefore concluded that the preferable option was to do nothing for the present.[36]

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Altrincham Mss: Edward Grigg to Lord Camrose, n.d., MS/Film1005 Reel#7. This must be 1938 before the autumn session of parliament because in the course of the letter Grigg refers to having nearly 100 signatures for a motion on national service - this motion was in circulation between July and Sept. 1938.

32 Goodhart, *The 1922*, p. 88.

33 Altrincham Mss: 'Deputation to the Prime Minister', 31 May 1938, MS/Film1012 Reel#14; Makins Mss: diary, 31 May 1938.

34 Altrincham Mss: Edward Grigg to Neville Chamberlain, 26 July 1938; Grigg to Geoffrey Dawson, 29 July 1938; Ralph Glyn to Grigg, 23 Sept.1938, MS/Film1005 Reel#7. Signatories for the motion included Sir Hugh O'Neill, chairman of the 1922 executive committee; Sir John Anderson, shortly to be appointed Lord Privy Seal with responsibility for civil defence; and Ralph Glyn, PPS to Inskip.

35 Goodhart, *1922*, p. 88.

36 C.P. 177(37), Cab 24/270 cited Dennis, *Decision By Default*, p. 105.

The crisis over Czechoslovakia culminating with the Munich settlement in September 1938, which ceded the Sudetenland to Germany, sharpened the debate over national service and signalled a new phase. The emergency had exposed serious inadequacies in Britain's defences, particularly with regard to anti-aircraft defence. These concerns encouraged a number of MPs during the Munich debate to propose the introduction of at least a national register.[37] How far then did the Party concur with Leo Amery's assessment 'that what happened at the time of Munich was a failure of our voluntary system'?[38] If such a view was accepted, then what was the response to be?

The debate, however, was complicated by the 'anti-appeasers'. Many of them were associated with calls for greater rearmament and saw the national service debate as the next progression. For example, when a House of Commons amendment was tabled urging a compulsory register in early December 1938, a number of the foreign policy sceptics, such as Robert Boothby, J.P.L. Thomas, Viscount Wolmer, Anthony Crossley and Viscount Cranborne, gave their support. As a consequence the issue became tinged with the suggestion of disloyalty. This was a charge never taken lightly by Conservatives - the experiences of dissident MPs at the hands of their local Associations following Munich amply bearing testimony to this.[39] Equally, a parliamentary motion tabled by the sceptics in March 1939, which called for national service, secured little support. Amery suspected this was because it also urged the creation of a truly national government and was therefore regarded as disloyal.[40]

The November executive meeting of the Winchester Association typically demonstrated the complexities of the national service debate following Munich. A resolution of thanks for Munich was discussed which a portion of the executive felt ought to be amended to mention their concern at the position of rearmament. Following the chairman's intervention it was agreed to move this as a separate resolution. This was done in due course by Lieutenant Colonel Savile who protested at the inadequate steps being taken to fill the gaps in Britain's defences and urged the immediate introduction of both a compulsory register and a system of compulsory training. Although the

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[37] *HofC Debs*, vol. 339 cols. 398 (Wardlaw-Milne), 514 (Gilmour), 536-7 (Grigg), 5-6 Oct. 1938.

[38] *HofC Debs*, vol. 342 col. 1065, 6 Dec. 1938.

[39] See Chapter Two.

[40] *Amery Diaries*, 27 Mar. 1939, p. 549.

minute book then only recorded that, after much discussion, the resolution was defeated 15 to 9, it may be conjectured as to why it was defeated. In the months following Munich the political situation was highly charged. Conservative dissidents were increasingly making their criticisms heard. To loyalists *any* attack on Munich was a personal attack on the Prime Minister. Indeed, the sensitivity within the Winchester Association towards such criticism was demonstrated in March 1939 when one speaker addressing the AGM was greeted with cries of derision from the floor for suggesting that Munich had caused national humiliation. Further, there was the anomaly that at the AGM in March 1938 a resolution calling for conscription had been passed, begging the question as to why eight months later the executive should reject a call for similar but lesser measures.[41] Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that following Munich many people felt that a new era of international understanding had been inaugurated and were anxious that Chamberlain's methods should be followed up; the introduction of national service would be interpreted in Berlin as an aggressive action. Moreover, it might be seen, as Chamberlain feared, as an admission of the inevitability of war and therefore of the failure of his foreign policy.

If advocates of national service worried, as did Leo Amery, about 'the whole thing sliding back before Christmas into general complacency and inertia', the Party's rank and file thought otherwise.[42] The debate was working its way up through the Party structure. Resolutions concerning national service were now being discussed at a regional level. At the end of June the National Union's central council by a large majority approved a motion proposed by Duncan Sandys, on behalf of his Norwood Association.[43] It was probable that the annual National Union conference, to be held in Newcastle during September, would have discussed the topic had not the international crisis forced its cancellation. The National Union's executive committee in early November forwarded a number of resolutions urging a compulsory register to the Prime Minister 'with a covering letter explaining that while the committee appreciated that this matter was receiving the close attention of the government there was a strong feeling that some system of registration should

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41 Winchester CA, AGM, 26 Mar. 1938, central exec. council 29 Nov. 1938, AGM 28 Mar. 1938, 73M86W/5; *Hampshire Advertiser*, 1 Apr. 1939.

42 Altrincham Mss: Leo Amery to Edward Grigg, 12 Oct. 1938, MS/Film1005 Reel#7.

43 *The Times*, 1 July 1938.

be inaugurated without delay.'[44] By the end of November the issue had reached the highest level within the women's branch of the National Union. That same month Scottish Conservatives unanimously adopted two resolutions calling for national service at their annual conference. The chief agent of Leeds, Frederick Walker, wrote to all the city's Conservative Members to explain the attitude of the Association:

> Our officers feel that the situation of this country after Munich and having regard to the situation in other parts of the world and our imperial commitments requires nothing short of national organisation, including compulsory service, to enable us successfully to meet the challenge which may come, and they think will come, at a comparatively early date. They feel that the assurance given by Mr Chamberlain that there will be no conscription in this parliament indicates that the government intend to carry on with their present policy probably somewhat strengthened, and they fear that the reason for this decision is the possibility of loss of support at the polls by the introduction of a policy such as we outline.[45]

Overall, the idea of a national register had widespread support. Furthermore, national service now appeared acceptable, in principle at least, to many Conservatives: the issue was whether it should be compulsory or voluntary.[46] Opinion was evenly divided on this issue, reflecting the virtual split of a *Daily Mail* readers' poll on the same question.[47] The 1922 executive committee meeting shortly before the autumn session decided that Hugh O'Neill and other senior backbenchers should see the Chief Whip to request 'that if mention was made in the King's speech of a national register, the register should not be voluntary.'[48] This growing support for national service reflected

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[44] CP: National Union, exec. 9 Nov. 1938, card 58. These resolutions were from the Midland Union (14 Oct.), South East Area (20 July), Cannock (11 Oct.), Winchester (23 Oct.), Cambridge (29 Oct.). In fact the exec.'s resolutions sub-committee had already forwarded the South East area resolution 7 Sept. 1938 but without their endorsement.

[45] Adams Mss: Frederick Walker to Vyvyan Adams, 13 Oct. 1938, file 10.

[46] For example: Altrincham Mss: C.H. Fuller to Edward Grigg, 12 Oct. 1938, MS/Film1005 Reel#7; Chelmsford CA, exec. 4, 21 Nov. 1938, D/Z 96/7; CPA: women's advisory cttee 24 Nov. 1938, ARE 3/11/2; North West Prov. Area, quarterly council, 5 Nov. 1938, ARE 3/1/2; SCA: annual conference 17 Nov. 1938, Acc. 10424/64. The issue had also been discussed in the previous phase by the CPA: South Eastern Prov. Area Council 20 July 1938, ARE 9/24/1.

[47] *Daily Mail*, 26 Oct. 1938: They asked readers whether they favoured compulsory or voluntary national service. They defined National Service as including 'not only military service, but ARP duties, work on munition, and in special industries, distribution of food, and other national defence activities.' The result was 50.184% for voluntary; 49.816% for compulsory. Cited Dennis, *Decision By Default*, p. 149 fn. 4.

[48] Goodhart, *The 1922*, p. 88.

a widening concern amongst Conservatives as to the true nature of nazism. As one backbench MP wrote shortly after *Kristallnacht*: 'I cannot help feeling that the recent disgraceful news from Germany will help the cause of those who believe that what is being done is not enough.'[49]

On 1 December 1938, the government announced that it would compile a voluntary national register and would introduce a voluntary national service scheme in the third week of January 1939. Sir John Anderson, Lord Privy Seal and Minister charged with Civil Defence, felt 'that there is no scope for compulsion in peacetime when the man-power available is so much in excess of actual requirements and when the selection that has to be made can best be effected by relying on voluntary efforts.' Further, ministers argued that there was no possibility of getting a united nation behind compulsory proposals when there was no necessity for them.[50] The majority of those Conservative MPs who spoke in the debate however did not seem particularly convinced by the measures, with the vast majority of them urging the adoption of varying forms of compulsion.[51] Leo Amery privately recorded that the proposals were 'really feeble' and felt that Anderson's dismissal of compulsion 'showed that he had never even given the matter serious thought.' He too was rather perplexed by Grigg's speech which 'joined in disclaiming all idea of compulsory training or service but stating the case quite effectively for a compulsory register. Ned really is [a] queer fellow. After all these months in which he has shown courage enough to press for national service he now runs away from it.'[52] Indeed, this typified the biggest weakness of the advocates of national service: the persistence of a diversity of views amongst supporters made it difficult to co-ordinate their strategy.

VI

Analysis of the Conservative MPs who favoured national service is revealing. The issue attracted Conservative supporters in parliament from a broad political spectrum. This becomes apparent from an assessment of the

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[49] Hailes Mss: Patrick Buchan-Hepburn to Mr A.R. Hughes, 15 Nov. 1938, HAIL 1/2; also Avon Mss, Sir Cecil Weir to Eden, 14 Nov. 1938, AP 14/1/842.

[50] *HofC Debs*, vol. 342 cols. 597-604, 1 Dec. 1938; quote Sir John Anderson, 6 Dec. 1938, vol. 342 cols. 1038-9.

[51] Six backbench Conservative MPs spoke during the debate, four of whom requested compulsion, a fifth admitted he had begun the debate favouring a compulsory register but had been convinced by Anderson's arguments for a voluntary system. See *HofC Debs*, vol. 342 cols. 1023-1140, 6 Dec. 1938.

[52] *Amery Diaries*, 6 Dec.1938, p. 539.

signatories for four parliamentary motions on the subject tabled between July 1938 and April 1939.[53] In total, two hundred different Conservatives added their names to one or more of the motions. The ratio between MPs representing borough and county seats reflected the Party's actual constituency distribution. Additionally, it was apparent that these seats were concentrated in London, south east England, the Midlands and north east England - those areas considered to be most at risk from a German aerial assult. The age distribution of the signatories mirrored that of the whole parliamentary Party. Similarly the average age of these MPs in 1938 was 51 matching that for the parliamentary Party as a whole. Like most of their male contemporaries, those old enough experienced military service during the 1914-18 conflict. The frequency of signatures suggested three general categories of advocate. The first grouping one could label the "hard-core". These were members who had favoured national service for several years and who supported at least three of the four motions. Included in this grouping were Arnold Wilson, the member for Hitchin, Edward Grigg, Hugh O'Neill, chairman of the 1922 executive committee, Nancy Astor who represented Plymouth Sutton, Leo Amery and Roger Keyes, the naval hero of Zeebrugge. This grouping consisted of senior back-bench members which was reflected in their average age being 57 years and by the fact that most had entered Parliament in the early 1920s. Noteworthy was the fact that a significant number of this grouping had pursued a professional military career before entering parliament. In this category were Roger Keyes, Ernest Makins, T.P.H. Beamish, Murray Sueter and Arnold Wilson. Historians of the Edwardian debate have noted the support professional soldiers gave to compulsion during that period. Perhaps now, over two decades later, some of these former officers still retained their favourable disposition for such measures. A second grouping were the "foreign policy sceptics". Critical of Chamberlain's foreign policy towards the dictators they become involved in the national service debate following Munich for political expediency, perhaps recognising the grass-roots support for the issue. Critics like J.P.L. Thomas, the Member for Hereford, Viscount Wolmer, who was Aldershot's MP, and Harold Macmillan, MP for Stockton, fall into this category. The final grouping, but by far the largest, have for the purposes of generalisation been named the "occasionals". The vast majority of these were obscure backbenchers, never destined for high office, but who could be relied upon to follow the government line in divisions and yet who were prepared occasionally to add

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[53] These being 26 July 1938, 12 Nov. 1938, 6 Dec. 1938, 18 Apr. 1939.

their support to the calls for national service. Such examples were Somerset de Chair, the twenty-seven year old member for Norfolk South West, John Eastwood, who sat for Kettering, and Louis Gluckstein, MP for Nottingham East. Significantly, Conservative women seem to have favoured national service. Four of the seven female Conservative MPs, Nancy Astor, Irene Ward, Mavis Tate and Katherine Atholl were signatories for at least two of the four motions. Likewise in the constituencies women were often the prime instigators, or most vocal supporters, of resolutions concerning national service. The example of Mrs Western, Chelmsford Association women's president, was a well documented one, whilst the National Union women's advisory committee had added its voice to the calls for national service in November 1938.[54]

Comparison of the two principal advocates in Parliament, Grigg and Amery, is revealing. Though both men seem to have favoured very similar measures, their perspective from the foreign policy angle was different.[55] Edward Grigg, having briefly sat as Liberal MP in the 1920s, re-entered parliament in 1933 as a 'National' Conservative. He took an immediate interest in defence matters and supported the policy of appeasement.[56] By contrast, Amery had been in parliament since 1911 and was no stranger to the battle for national service having been a leading proponent before World War One. He was not averse to appeasing the Italians, but found it increasingly difficult to justify the same of Germany. Amery consequently found it necessary to abstain from the Munich divisions.[57] The common ground between the two men was their interest in imperial matters. Grigg had been governor of Kenya before his return to politics and Amery was a former Dominions Secretary and a leading figure in the imperialist wing of the Party. One wonders about the extent to which concerns about imperial defence and fears of overstretch encouraged their support for national service. This had been fostered by their association before World War One with Lord Milner and the Round Table movement.

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54 See Chelmsford CA, 1938, *passim*; CP: National Union, women's advisory committee, 24 Nov. 1938, card 58.

55 Compare Grigg's arguments in his book, *Britain Looks At Germany*, (London: Nicolson & Watson, 1938) with Amery's memoirs, *My Political Life*, pp. 296-299, also Amery's article 'National Service',

56 See Grigg's justification of the necessity of appeasement: *Britain Looks At Germany*, pp. 20-1, 49-53, 73, 155.

57 Amery, *My Political Life*, pp. 176, 239-42, 244, 259-95;

Milner was a leading activist in the Edwardian National Service League and both men were clearly influenced by him.[58]

Although a number of foreign policy dissidents joined the debate as a means of rebellion, it was apparent that this was not a finite response. J.P.L. Thomas told his Hereford Association's joint council in November that if the government was to secure his support they must reconstruct the government, establish a Ministry of Supply, and establish a compulsory register from which they could urge a form of national service. He believed a voluntary register's value would be very small since it would fail to give a complete picture of what the country was capable of in the event of war.[59] However, Thomas was unable to persuade his friend Anthony Eden to add his support to the calls, even though Eden was advocating increased rearmament. They felt Eden ought to 'crack right out on national service and home defence' believing that 'none of these things can bring you anything but good from the Tory Party.'[60] This unwillingness to act bore a great similarity to Eden's response to foreign policy after his resignation in February 1938 as foreign secretary, whereby he went to great lengths not to appear disloyal to the government. Certainly this stance disappointed Amery, especially when he refused to add his signature to an open letter to *The Times* urging such measures.[61] Equally, Winston Churchill remained remarkably quiet upon the issue. Even in the aftermath of Prague at a meeting of the 1922 committee which made a call for compulsory service, Churchill 'never said a word' no doubt having no wish to prejudice a possible return to cabinet office cynics suggested.[62] Meanwhile there still remained a substantial body of Chamberlainites prepared to advocate the government line. If voluntarism failed the government would have little option but to adopt compulsory measures. As the Member for Thirsk and Malton, Richard Turton, told parliament during the debate on the voluntary national service scheme: 'We must show the world in the third week of January that we

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58 John Turner (ed.), *The Larger Idea: Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty*, (London: Historians' Press, 1988), p. 4; For Milner on compulsory service see Williams, *Defending the Empire*, pp. 55-6, 147, 153, 155, 182.

59 Cilcennin Mss: Cilc.coll.56 .

60 Avon Mss: J.P.L. Thomas to Eden, 25 Nov. 1938, AP14/1/829.

61 *Amery Diaries*, 22 Sept. 1938, p. 512; Avon Mss, Eden to Amery, 24 Oct. 1938, AP14/1/673A.

62 *Amery Diaries*, 21 Mar. 1939, p.549.

in this country, as a free democracy, are willing voluntarily to offer our services to the nation'.[63]

Advocates of stronger measures were prepared to concede that it was 'hopeless' to expect the government to introduce peacetime compulsion, but nevertheless believed public opinion was 'really anxious' for such measures.[64] Certainly those MPs who have retained their constituency correspondence files show there to be growing support for compulsion from December 1938 onwards.[65] Likewise, Party opinion from that date onwards increasingly concurred with the opinion of one junior minister that the measures as they stood were simply 'not good enough'.[66]

VII

It became apparent throughout February and March 1939 that the national service appeal was not attracting enough volunteers, especially for the Territorial Army. The initial enthusiasm of the press was soon tempered, and the government's attitude appeared ambivalent. The national service appeal handbooks which were supposed to have been sent to every household to coincide with the launching of the campaign by Chamberlain on 23 January were not despatched until days after. Similarly when the reserve occupations list was published, it was found that *chefs de cuisine* and sleeve link makers were amongst those deemed 'essential to the war effort'. By mid-February, the appeal was failing to attract much media attention and was subject to sustained criticism from the *Daily Telegraph*.[67] A Mass-Observation survey in West Fulham conducted in April 1939 concluded that politicians had 'conspicuously failed' to impose their political agenda upon the minds of 'public opinion' and suggested that they ought to learn to communicate their messages 'in a language everyone can understand. Not the formal prose of the national service handbook, or Sir John Anderson's scholarly introduction,

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63 *HofC Debs*, vol. 342 cols. 1096-1099, quote col. 1096 (Turton), 6 Dec. 1938; Penryn & Falmouth CA, AGM 3 Dec. 1938, (Maurice Petherick, MP for Penryn & Falmouth), DDX 551/10. *The Times*, 1 July 1938, 20 Apr. 1939.

64 Headlam Mss: diary, 2 Dec. 1938, D/He/34;.

65 Hailes Mss: correspondence between Patrick Buchan-Hepburn and A.R. Hughes, Oct.-Nov. 1938, HAIL 1/2; Altrincham Mss: G.F. Panton to Sir Patrick Donner (MP for Basingstoke), 6 Dec. 1938 (copy sent by Donner to Grigg); Grigg to Donner, 9 Dec. 1938, quoting Altrincham agent's report from the constituency that 'opinion is very definitely that if we are to have a register at all it should be compulsory'. MS/Film1005 Reel#7.

66 Crookshank Mss: diary, 1 Dec. 1938, MSS.Eng.hist.d.360f.322.

67 Dennis, *Territorial Army*, p. 236.

or Chamberlain's aldermanic broadcasts.' A further survey undertaken in this London borough between April and July 1939 noted only a 'small' peak between January and February in ARP recruitment.[68]

The government was temporarily able to deflect those demanding the adoption of compulsion and the increasing critics of limited liability with Hore-Belisha's second army estimates. These marked a radical departure away from the guiding principle of limited liability whilst reinforcing the vital role of home defence that had been the cornerstone of that doctrine. In his speech Belisha suggested that the greatest threat facing Britain was the danger of air attack. He therefore proposed to increase the number of Territorial AA divisions from five to seven. At the same time a continental expeditionary force comprising nineteen units was proposed. Nevertheless, Belisha's speech appeared to rule out the possibility of peacetime national service because although 'providing a larger army now, may be argued in grounds of physical and moral well being, it would not necessarily effect in the degree sometimes imagined the dimensions of our initial military contribution.'[69] During the debate a number of Conservative MPs made calls for compulsory national service or even conscription to be adopted.[70] One week later German troops entered Prague.

When Hitler displayed continued belligerence Chamberlain came under a 'good deal of Conservative pressure' to introduce conscription.[71] During the emergency debate following Prague, Viscount Wolmer made an appeal for compulsory national service, especially military, since 'there is one argument [...] alone that the dictator states respect, and that is the argument of force.'[72] The German invasion of the remainder of Czechoslovakia increasingly accentuated these calls from both backbench MPs and local Associations as well as some cabinet ministers. Such action flagrantly broke the Munich agreement, and forced Chamberlain to abandon appeasement and guarantee the integrity of Poland. In the words of one Association chairman, 'the senior partner of the Berlin-Rome axis had shown his true colours', which meant that compulsory universal training must be introduced immediately in the interests

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68 Mass-Observation Archive: FR, A16: 'Home or Foreign?' April 1939 FR, A24: 'ARP survey in Fulham', Apr.-July 1939, Sussex University Library

69 *HofC Debs*, vol. 344 cols. 2161-82, 8 Mar. 1939.

70 *HofC Debs*, vol. 344 cols. 2216 (Knox), 2223-24 (Macnamara), 2266 (Ponsonby), 2289 (Adams), 8 Mar. 1939.

71 *Pownall Diaries*, 27 Mar. 1939, p. 195.

72 *HofC Debs*, vol. 345 cols. 446-7 , 15 Mar. 1939.

of national defence.[73] From within the cabinet, Halifax, Simon and Hore-Belisha had accepted the need for conscription, whilst backbenchers Harold Macmillan, Patrick Hannon and George Mitchenson wrote to *The Times* announcing their conversions to the issue. At two meetings of Conservative backbenchers, first with the foreign affairs committee in the immediate aftermath of Prague and then with the full 1922 committee a week later, national service was discussed: 'a few were critical but the great majority at the meeting[s] were determined that some form of compulsory service ought to be introduced and that the government should one way or another get ahead with the matter.' In an attempt to try and stifle the growing calls for conscription, Chamberlain seized upon Hore-Belisha's off the cuff suggestion of doubling the size of the Territorial Army and this was shortly announced as government policy on 29 March.[74] Once again the government appeared to Conservatives to be shirking conscription. Cuthbert Headlam considered the measure 'a ridiculous step' unless it was a prelude to conscription. He could not believe that either enough men could be found or that such a force could be maintained for particularly long.[75] This measure was a last-ditch effort by Chamberlain to avoid the introduction of peacetime compulsion. The pressure, however, continued to mount over the following weeks. Thirty backbenchers, including Churchill, Eden, Duff Cooper, Amery and Wolmer, tabled a motion that called for the immediate formation of a truly national government and the immediate introduction of conscription. The foreign policy sceptics had in fact spent several days wrangling over the wording of the motion. Eden had been 'sticky' about coupling the calls for a national government with a demand for universal service and had favoured a more general reference to manpower, whereas Amery believed linking the two points would 'justify' themselves to both the House and the country. Ultimately, the final draft left out direct reference to universal service, leaving Amery hesitant about signing.[76] But the proponents of universal service were not to be discouraged. Grigg, Amery and Wolmer then tabled a parliamentary motion urging 'the immediate acceptance of the principle of the compulsory mobilisation of the men, munition and money power of the nation' which secured sixty-five signatures. At the same time numerous Associations were

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[73] Chelmsford CA, AGM 20 Mar. 1939, D/Z96/4.

[74] Minney, *Papers of Hore-Belisha*, pp. 185-88, for an account of the decision-making process behind this decision.

[75] Headlam Mss: diary, 30 Mar. 1939, D/He/35.

[76] *Amery Diaries*, 27 Mar. 1939, pp. 549-50.

passing resolutions demanding compulsory service.[77] Chamberlain eventually bowed to the pressure and introduced limited measures of conscription on 26 April.[78]

VIII

It appears certain that Conservative perceptions of Germany had a direct bearing upon their thinking with regard to matters of defence, for ministers and rank and file alike. Each German violation of Versailles slowly but surely eroded a general sympathy for the German predicament. It would suggest that for contemporary Tories the rearmament programme was seen as an integral part of foreign policy - the idea of negotiating from a position of strength. Whilst the necessity of rearmament was not in question there was considerable debate about the extent, nature and pace of the programme. The calls for national service must be seen in this context. Such demands reflected a belief that the mistakes of the 1914-18 conflict must not be repeated and that preparation was essential in an age when the advances of technology meant that war could be brought to the civilian population within hours of the commencement of hostilities. It is important to note that Conservatives tended solely to think of the issue in terms of the 'conscription of manpower'. Chamberlain's attempt at a limited measure of 'conscription of wealth' in 1937, with his ill-fated National Defence Contribution tax, was brought down through Party pressure and can be interpreted as a warning not to allow the resourcing of war to interfere in the world of business, traditionally a bastion of Conservative support. Conservatives were favourable to national service because they believed that it could be used to resolve the recruitment problems in anti-aircraft defence. It was not a debate conducted in terms that favoured the creation of a large expeditionary field force.

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[77] From the Cabinet: Halifax, Simon and Hore-Belisha, see Minney, *Papers of Hore-Belisha*, pp. 187, 195, and Bond *British Military Policy*, pp. 309-10; From Parliamentarians: *The Times*, letters to editor 21, 23 Mar. 1939; Chamberlain Mss: Leo Amery to Neville Chamberlain, 24 Mar. 1939, NC7/2/89; Selborne Mss: Wolmer, Grigg & Amery tabled the motion on 18 Apr.. It secured 65 Tory signatures (Amery in memoirs claims nearly 70: *My Political Life*, p. 311). *Amery Diaries*, 13, 18 Apr. 1939, p. 551. For constituency demands: North Wiltshire CA, AGM 21 Apr. 1939, 2436/1; City of Leeds CA, AGM 21 Apr. 1939, 1. AGM minute book, 1937-56, West Yorkshire Archives: Leeds; Aldershot CA, central council, 15 Apr. 1939, 114M84/2; Horncastle CA, AGM 17 Apr. 1939, Misc.Dep.268/1, Lincolnshire Archives.

[78] For the party reaction to its introduction see: North Hampshire CA, AGM 5 May 1939, NHCA/1/7, Bodleian Library; Sowerby CA, AGM 11 May 1939, CV3; Harborough CA, AGM 29 Apr. 1939, DE1170/4; SCA: eastern div., central exec. 3 May 1939, Acc.10424/49; For a military perspective see *Pownall Diaries*, 24 Apr. 1939, p. 201.

A comparison of the calls for national service must be made with those for a Ministry of Supply. In terms of historiography, national service has been totally overshadowed by the calls for the creation of a Ministry of Supply, which in this chapter has only been referred to in passing. This is because for the local Associations it failed to elicit much comment during the years under consideration. The preoccupation of the Associations was with national service; an issue which was likely to have a more profound and obvious impact upon themselves and the voter. This in part may have been because of the imminence of a general election which could never have been far from the minds of Party workers anxious to capitalise on the popular fear of a 'knock-out' blow and conscious that after Munich their Party had to be seen to be actively taking steps to plug the holes in Britain's air defences. Additionally, the considerable number of persons holding a military rank within the local organisation structure might further explain the interest national service aroused. When the Liberal Party tabled an amendment during November 1938 urging the creation of a Ministry of Supply, despite Churchill exhorting fifty Conservatives to follow him into the 'aye' lobby, only Macmillan and Bracken followed. It might be fair to suggest that the so-called Ministry of Supply debate has assumed its prominence more because of who was advocating it, namely Winston Churchill, than from any impression of widespread discussion within the Conservative Party as a whole. In fact, national service was *the* important question for Conservatives. The debate about the Conservative's foreign and domestic policies in the last years before the war cannot be understood without reference to this issue.

Chapter Five: The Prosecution of the War, September 1939 to May 1940

In May 1940, eight months after Britain's declaration of war on Germany, Neville Chamberlain resigned as Prime Minister after his parliamentary majority of 281 was reduced to 81 in a vote of confidence on his government's prosecution of the Norway military campaign. In fact the Norway debate was more than simply a deliberation on the failure of one military campaign; it was seen as a referendum on the Chamberlain government's whole war conduct. It proved to be the first twentieth century example of a Prime Minister being forced out of office by a parliamentary vote. This chapter will consider how the Conservative Party reacted to the Chamberlain government's handling of the war effort between September 1939 and the German invasion of France in May 1940. This period, which became known as the 'phoney war' or the 'strange war' because of the failure of the allied forces actively to engage the axis enemy, was to prove crucial in the fall of the Chamberlain government.[1] After an initial show of unity immediately following the declaration of war (because of their belief that it was their patriotic duty), many Conservatives soon expressed disquiet with the prosecution of the war. This chapter analyses those areas of policy that caused Conservative disgruntlement and asks to what extent Chamberlain's fall from office was inevitable.

Not surprisingly war had immediate implications for the continued functioning of the Party organisation and the pursuit of party politics. Shortly after the commencement of hostilities, Douglas Hacking, the chairman of the Party, sent a circular to all constituency Associations requesting upon behalf of the authorities that they close down for the duration of the war 'in the interests of the economy'. In fact, this left Hacking feeling 'greatly worried about the Party's position.' He believed that,

> whatever the duration of the war may be, it will be disastrous if, when hostilities have ceased, we find ourselves confronted with a situation where

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[1] The phrase 'phoney war' was American and it only came into British circulation later. At the time in Britain the period was known as the 'Bore War' or 'strange war'. Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain, 1939-1945*, (London: Cape, 1969), p. 57.

the other parties are in possession of their organisation and ours has ceased to exist.[2]

In fact within weeks another memorandum was dispatched rescinding the original instructions. However many Associations did cease activities for the duration of the war, feeling that it was impossible to continue party politics at a time when national unity was of the utmost importance. Some Associations co-operated with the creation of Local Information Committees established under the auspices of the Ministry of Information.[3] Others attempted to continue functioning, if on a somewhat reduced scale, arguing that since the Labour Party had not yet seen fit to join a war coalition government Conservatives could not afford to rest on their laurels. Agents were released so that they could participate in the war effort, women's branches merged with the main Association, and expenditure was limited.[4] Other Associations like the Edinburgh North women's decided 'that as politics were meanwhile in abeyance owing to war, it would be a means of keeping in touch with our people, if a party or work parties could be arranged to do some war work, probably knitting war comforts for the troops.'[5] Ultimately, many Associations managed to maintain activities until shortly following the invasion of France in May 1940. After this point, most appear to have ceased all political undertakings. As the chairman of East Toxteth Association explained: 'we do not think it would be any good having a divisional council now. So many of them are doing war work [...] and the women are working too that we think it would not be worth calling them and at the same time we feel sure nobody wants to think of politics now.'[6]

Whilst the war had an obvious impact upon the functioning of local Associations it also affected the activities of MPs. Attendances at the House of Commons were reduced, as many MPs felt it necessary to participate in the war effort. By January 1940 some sixty-two government backbenchers were

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[2] Headlam Mss: diary, 26 Oct. 1939, D/He/35; CPA: Douglas Hacking, 12 Sept. 1939, cited in 1940 annual report, North West Area council 15 June 1940, ARE3/1/2; To a level these fears were not without justification. In spring 1940 there were 51 resolutions on the agenda of the Labour Party conference calling for a termination of the by-election truce. Cited Addision, *Road to 1945*, p. 58.

[3] McLaine, *Ministry of Morale:* p. 46.

[4] Northwich CA, chairman's advisory cttee. 22 Sept. 1939, LOP1/1/4, Chester Record Office; Ayr Burghs CA, exec. & finance cttee. 21 Sept. 1939; Ealing CA, exec. 30 Sept. 1939, 1338/2; Barkston Ash CA, AGM 23 Apr. 1940.

[5] Edinburgh North CA, women's exec., 2 Oct. 1939, Edinburgh City Archives.

[6] Hailes Mss: E. Deane to Buchan-Hepburn, 18 June 1940, HAIL1/4.

on active service with the army, a further sixteen with the Royal Air Force and seven with the Navy.[7] Members such as Ronald Cartland, Christopher York, Major Mills and Maurice Petherick joined up with their regiments upon the declaration of war.[8] Others divided their time between home defence service and parliament. Victor Cazalet served with an anti-aircraft battery in Kent which he had formed, but continued to attend important parliamentary debates, whilst Ruggles-Brise, the Member for Maldon, would only turn 'up for his agricultural c[ommi]ttee on Tuesdays and home again the same evening to run the L[and] D[efence] V[olunteers]'s of Essex.'[9] For those MPs who joined up for active service with the armed forces there were problems for the continued representation of constituency affairs. Buchan-Hepburn, the Member for East Toxteth, arranged for a secretary to respond to correspondence and for another older MP to handle any issues that required pursuit. Ronald Cartland on joining his regiment in September 1939 notified his King's Norton constituents, through local newspapers, to address all correspondence for him to the House of Commons. Then on being posted to France in January 1940 he arranged for his secretary, Ruth Leonard, to reply on his behalf.[10] Other MPs participated in the war effort in different manners. Ronald Tree, MP for the constituency of Harborough, joined the Ministry of Information, and within three weeks of the war's declaration had been seconded to America to set-up an Information Service. He returned to Britain the following January and worked thereafter at Senate House under Lord Reith.[11] Duff Cooper was also in America during this period on a lecture tour, returning to Britain via France in March 1940.[12] Others such as Richard Law were away from Westminster because of work, in Law's case running a steel mill in Wales, or like Viscount Cranborne because of ill health.[13] Some MPs who were too old for active service, and, unable to secure other wartime work, remained at Westminster. But not all were happy in their role. Frank Fremantle, the Member for St Albans, complained that 'we MPs are acting as

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[7] Addision, *Road to 1945*, p. 69.

[8] Cartland, *Ronald*, p. 231; York Mss: diary, 31 Aug. 1939; Goodhart, *The 1922*, p. 93.

[9] James, *Cazalet*, pp. 218-9; Birchall Mss: Frank Fremantle to J.D. Birchall, 15 July 1940, Box 33.

[10] Hailes Mss: E. Deane to Buchan-Hepburn, 18 June 1940, HAIL1/4; Cartland, *Ronald*, pp. 232, 238.

[11] Tree, *Memoirs*, p. 92.

[12] Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, pp. 262-276.

[13] Emrys-Evans Mss: Richard Law to Evans, 30 Dec. 1939, Add.MS.58239 ff. 4-6; Both these men would be called to government office when Churchill became PM.

postmen between constituents and gov[ernmen]t dep[artmen]ts; and as a safety valve for the former - as a body guard, guide and sometimes to kick the latter.' As the war continued, this same Member felt increasingly despondent, confiding in a former colleague that 'the House is changing fast, through resignations, deaths and service; and many feel there is no object in their attending, where there are no divisions and awkward questions are passed. [...] I have lost all my old friends. The lads - up to fifty - naturally look on a 68-er as "an old buster".'[14] Chips Channon thought about taking 'some semi-military occupation' but decided to remain at Westminster. He excused himself, joking of flat feet, unfitness, 'inefficiency and loathing of drill, exercise, discipline and danger.' But he recognised at 42 he was too old for military service: 'Old enough not to have to do anything, yet occasionally embarrassed and envious of people in uniform.'[15] It was in this rather strange atmosphere of political suspension that the debate about Chamberlain's suitability as a war leader was to be conducted.

I

The declaration of war by Britain and France upon Germany was greeted with sombre resignation by the British population. Observers noted the difference in reception between this declaration of hostilities and that of July 1914.[16] The war against Nazi Germany was accepted with grim resignation by British public opinion - it was seen as ironic that within hours of the declaration of war that the air raid sirens should be wailing. The long expected knock-out blow was being unleashed.[17] Ultimately it proved to be not only a false alarm, but also a false theory. Victor Cazalet admitted that at the time it was 'very dramatic. People running to shelters. We joked for a time, then when we realised it was a real raid we had a sort of sinking feeling.'[18] That British land forces failed to commence battle for a further six months after the fall of Poland created a rather unusual situation.[19] Thomas Inskip, now elevated to the House of Lords as Lord Caldecote, admitted it was 'an odd affair' and

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[14] Birchall Mss: Frank Fremantle to J.D. Birchall, 9 Feb., 15 July 1940, Box 33.

[15] *Channon Diaries*, 4 Sept., 20 Sept. 1939, pp. 217, 221.

[16] Beamish Mss: autobiographical notes 2 Sept. 1939, BEAM3/3; Headlam Mss: diary, 1-3 Sept. 1939, D/He/35.

[17] Rich Mss: diary, 3-5 Sept. 1939, AJ217/35 for the reactions of civilian to the declaration of war and the first air raids on London.

[18] Cazalet Mss: journal, 6 Sept. 1939, referring to 3 Sept..

[19] The navy were involved in skirmishes, the most famous of which being the sinking of the *Graf Spee* in Dec. 1939, whilst the RAF confined themselves to dropping leaflets over Germany and the occasional bombing raid.

noted the bemusement of one allied Foreign Minister who 'had heard of wars waged without a declaration of war but never of a war not waged after a declaration.'[20] As this chapter will show, the stand-off between the allies and axis was to prove crucial in the fall of Chamberlain's government in May 1940. The failure of British forces to engage the enemy immediately, particularly the Royal Air Force who merely dropped propaganda leaflets over Germany, provoked considerable criticism from Conservatives. Critics noted that 'there is a good deal of discontent' in non-governmental circles and were left wondering 'whether we are trying to win the war, or whether we are waiting for the German people to do it for us?'[21] During the Norway debate, Earl Winterton, formerly a cabinet minister, attacked the government for this attitude suggesting it was 'one good example of our wrong approach'. He felt the German people 'follow Hitler with a fanatical devotion comparable only to the followers of Genghis Khan or the Prophet Mohammed in days of Moslem ascendancy. [...] You cannot appeal to such people by moral exordiums. Right or wrong mean nothing to them; only superior force and its effective use.'[22] Unlike 1914, many contemporaries did not expect a quick and victorious war. Conservatives in one Norfolk constituency during November 1939 were asked whether they felt the war would last months or years to which one third believed months, another third thought it would continue for years and the remainder were unable to decide.[23] Ronald Cartland, the King's Norton Member now serving with the 53rd Worcestershire regiment, wrote to his sister at the end of September indicating that he did not expect the war to end until 1946, but at least it would enable him to get his 'red tabs or two rows of medals'![24] Not every Conservative perceived the failure to engage the enemy as a sign of weakness. Indeed one survey of civilian morale noted that people regarded 'the slow movement of this [1939-1940] winter as a sign of our superiority and Germany's inability to face up to a real equal.'[25] The secretary of one Norfolk Association branch considered that Hitler was 'waiting for something to occur to save him.' This the secretary felt to be

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[20] Birchall Mss: T. Inskip to J.D. Birchall, 27 Sept. 1939, Box 33.

[21] Cilcennin Mss: Cranborne to J.P.L. Thomas, 29 Sept. 1939, Cilc.coll.27.

[22] *HofC Debs*, vol. 360 cols. 1167-8, 7 May 1940.

[23] Mass-Observation Archive: TB: file5/H, 'Somerset de Chair questionnaire and responses, Nov. 1939'

[24] Cartland, *Ronald*, pp. 234, 250; Barkston Ash CA, AGM 2 Apr. 1940; Headlam Mss: diary, 14 Jan. 1940, D/He/36.

[25] Mass-Observation Archive: FR: 125, 'Morale: summary of M-O reports submitted to Home Intelligence (Feb.-May 1940) and M-O morale reports dating back to Munich.

'strange' because without fighting 'we must be increasing our strength in men, arms and position at a far greater rate than he.'[26] For others it suggested that the government at least appreciated the likelihood of a long war and therefore possessed some understanding of the realities of the military situation. Cuthbert Headlam was relieved to hear that the government was basing its plans upon the assumption of a three year conflict, 'a wise policy if it is true.'[27]

For the present those Conservatives previously critical of Chamberlain were prepared to keep their doubts about his suitability as a war leader private, since two of their principal pre-war objectives had been achieved, namely the return to office of Winston Churchill, as First Lord of the Admiralty, and Anthony Eden, as Colonial Secretary. Not surprisingly a view prevailed in wartime that it was almost disloyal to express strong antagonisms about government leaders, at least publicly. This view was reflected by the fact that until the Norway debate Conservatives kept their public criticisms muted and were only prepared to express these in the private sessions of Parliament or in private discussion groups. Leo Amery, himself disappointed at having not been recalled to office, assumed the unofficial chairmanship of the formerly named Eden group. The Amery group met weekly in a private function room at the Carlton Hotel - numbers were slightly diminished in view of the fact that a number of former attendees, such as Ronald Cartland, were on active service, or like Richard Law, working away from Westminster. J.P.L. Thomas continued to attend despite having returned to the government fold once again being PPS to Anthony Eden, whilst Brendan Bracken, who was Churchill's PPS at the Admiralty, began attending. As a consequence both Eden and Churchill were to be aware of how dissident Conservative opinion continued to operate. Indeed, both PPSs' were instructed to vote with the government during the Norway division. Neither wished to follow such a course of action. However, they realised that their rebellion would be taken as the 'private views' of their chiefs which might prejudice Eden's and Churchill's future position if Chamberlain resigned.[28] Although calling a truce, within weeks these critics were again meeting and expressing concerns about the government's handling of the war.

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[26] Mass-Observation Archive: TB: file5/H, 'Somerset de Chair questionnaire and responses, Nov. 1939', Shipdham branch,

[27] Headlam Mss: diary, 10 Sept. 1939, D/He/35. The government announced on 8 Sept. that this was the timetable on which they were planning the war effort.

[28] Andrew Roberts, *Eminent Churchillians*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994), p. 139.

In addition to the Amery group, several other groupings of Conservative supporters emerged in criticism of government prosecution of the war. The second grouping was centred around the National Liberal, Clement Davies, and was an all party grouping, with Eleanor Rathbone, an Independent MP, as secretary. The all-party group began meeting in September 1939. Davies resigned the National government Whip in December because there were 'so many instances of failure on the part of the government to take the necessary measures for the vigorous prosecution of the war, that the government has not the resolution, policy or energy demanded by the country'.[29] From the Conservative Party, Robert Boothby and Leo Amery were associated.[30] Boothby chaired the economics sub-committee, and it was the issue of economics that drew Amery's interest in the group. It was this committee that proposed making Amery Minister for Economics.[31]

The third group of critics were the Watching Committee. Formed around the Cecil family, and comprising members from both Houses of Parliament, they held their first meeting on 4 April 1940. Its purpose was 'to watch the conduct of the war. [...] to make representations to the government where they consider there is a risk of mistakes being made or where it seems that the trend of public opinion is not appreciated.'[32] At their inaugural meeting the topics under discussion were the war cabinet, strategy, economics and the home front. Many of the Amery group were also associated with the Watching Committee. In addition to these potential critics a number of loyal government supporters were affiliated to the Committee including the chairman of the 1922 committee, Patrick Spens, Sir Joseph Nall and Geoffrey Ellis and a number of technical specialists such as Lord Trenchard. The combination of critics and loyalists was deliberately created so that all sides of Party opinion would be represented.[33] This would of course make any

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29 *Amery Diaries*, 27 Sept., 14 Nov. 1939, pp. 573, 575; Chamberlain Mss: Clement Davies to Chamberlain, 14 Dec. 1939, NC7/11/32/62.

30 *Amery Diaries*, 14 Nov. 1939, 11 Jan., 13 Mar., 4 Apr. 1940; Surprisingly Boothby's biographer makes little reference to this, merely mentioning in passing the existence of the group and a little later citing a retrospective interview Boothby gave which explains Clement Davies' role in Chamberlain's fall, James, *Boothby*, pp. 232, 236, 245.

31 *Amery Diaries*, editorial, p. 562.

32 Emrys-Evans Mss: Lord Salisbury to Evans, 31 Mar. 1940 Add.MS.58245.

33 Emrys-Evans Mss: Evans to Amery, 1 July 1954, Add.MS.58247 f.22.

representations to government more acceptable. The Committee was chaired by Lord Salisbury with Paul Emrys-Evans as honorary secretary. The Committee was also divided into sub-committees, each responsible for assessing a particular aspect of the war.[34] Owing to the seniority of many of the Committee's members they would pass their recommendations and concerns on to government ministers. Of these, Lord Halifax was their most regular contact - perhaps this was because he was perceived as the minister mostly likely to listen and because of his sympathies for a broader national government, but also because he was considered as the likely successor to Chamberlain.[35]

II

The inactivity of military forces in the opening weeks of the war fuelled the suspicion held in some quarters that Chamberlain may have been seeking a peace accord with Germany. The delays in declaring war were taken as proof that the appeasers were trying for another Munich. The reality was somewhat different - the delay being necessary because of the British government's desire to declare war in unison with the French and not because they were giving serious consideration to Mussolini's proposal of an international conference.[36] Some Conservatives felt that the delay was 'good moral propaganda'.[37] Fears were again heightened of a negotiated settlement when Hitler offered peace terms on 6 October, but Chamberlain publicly rejected these six days later.[38] However, the belief that elements within the government favoured coming to terms with Germany was not helped by the declarations of a defeatist element within the Party comprising several Conservative peers, Brocket, Buccleuch and Westminster, and a number of MPs, Culverwell, Southby and Ramsay. The duke of Westminster, an old personal friend of Winston Churchill, allegedly told a private meeting in early October 1939 that Britain need not be at war with Germany at all, it all being part of a Jewish and Masonic plot to destroy Christian civilisation. The

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34 *Amery Diaries*, 16 Apr. 1940, p. 587.

35 *Amery Diaries*, editorial, p. 567.

36 For historical analysis of the British declaration of war see R.A.C. Parker, 'The British government and the coming of war with Germany', in *War and Society*, ed. M.R.D. Foot, (London: Paul Elek, 1973), pp. 1-16; Hill, *Cabinet Decisions*, pp. 85-99.

37 Headlam Mss: diary, 2 Sept. 1939, D/He/35.

38 For an analysis of the decision-making process taking place during the rejection of these terms see Hill, *Cabinet Decisions*, chp. 5, pp. 100-45. For Chamberlain's parliamentary rejection see *HofC Debs*, vol. 352 cols. 563-8, 12 Oct. 1939.

speech was reported to the war cabinet the following day and earned the duke a rebuke and warning from Churchill: 'When a country is fighting a war of this kind, very hard experiences lie before those who preach defeatism and set themselves against the will of the nation.'[39] Some contemporary wits suggested the duke's desire for peace stemmed from economic sensibilities: he owned considerable tracts of property in London and a German aerial assault was likely to inflict considerable material damage to these assets! The duke of Buccleuch was, by February 1940, still arguing with Number Ten officials that peace was essential: 'in a year's time the same people would be in power in Germany and we should eventually have to make peace with them. Why not do so now, when comparatively little damage has been done and when there is still time to avert economic ruin?'[40]

Leo Amery felt the attitude of "surrender" adopted by some Conservatives to be one of a number of concerns in the domestic situation. He considered that 'there has been a certain amount of pretty sorry defeatism going about, though only confined to a few persons' some of whom were members of the 1922 committee. 'If it should become serious we may have to rally all forces to scotch it', he explained to Robert Bower.[41] This 'defeatism' had revealed itself during a debate on a secret session by the 1922 committee on 4 October. The minutes of this meeting reveal that Cyril Culverwell, the Bristol West MP, felt Britain was heading for disaster since

> the country, in his view, had been stampeded into war by the press, opposition and right-wing Conservatives. Poland would never be restored, nor would we break through in the west, and the defeat of Germany would mean that Europe would become bolshevik. It was folly to pursue the war and we should make peace, recognising Hitler's claim to Poland if he offered reasonable terms.[42]

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[39] Martin Gilbert, *Finest Hour: Winston S. Churchill: VI: 1939-41*, (London: Heinemann, 1983), pp. 27-8. See also Leslie Field, *Bendor: The Golden Duke of Westminster*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1983), pp. 260-64. The issue of Westminster's pro-German sentiments is virtually ignored in Ridley's account occupying only one page out of two hundred: George Ridley, *Bend'Or:Duke of Westminster: A Personal Memoir*, (London: Robin Clark, 1985), p. 144.

[40] *The Fringes of Power: The Downing Street Diaries, 1939-55*, (hereafter *Colville Diaries*), ed. John Colville, (London; Hodder & Stoughton, 1985), 9 Feb. 1940, pp. 94-5; Brocket was arguing in a similar manner see Addison, *Road to 1945*, p. 71.

[41] Bower Mss: Leo Amery to Robert Bower, 7 Oct. 1939, 1/4, Churchill College Archive.

[42] Goodhart, *The 1922*, p. 94.

Concerned that this 'miserable effort seemed to meet with some approval from various quarters', Amery intervened, and counter-argued that 'the idea of making peace with Hitler at the present time, after his victory in Poland, was sheer madness and would have a deplorable effect on the neutrals. The only task before us was the successful prosecution of the war.' Sir Archibald Southby 'voiced in a rather woolly fashion the defeatist version' that it was wrong to refuse categorically to discuss terms when they had not even been received. Sir Joseph Lamb and Victor Raikes 'well answered' this attitude before Wardlaw-Milne 'urged' the committee not to waste time even discussing the matter and proposed an adjournment of the debate which was carried.[43]

Culverwell's continued defeatist stance during the opening months of the war, especially following his airing of such views during a parliamentary debate, was to incur the wrath of his local Bristol West Association. At a specially convened executive meeting Culverwell was called to account for his opinions. He 'refuted the charge of being a pacifist, pro-Nazi, or pro-German' and claimed he was 'a strong and consistent supporter of the premier and the government'. When questioned by members of the executive who doubted if any guarantee given by Hitler as part of a peace deal could be trusted, Culverwell replied that 'he was only trying to correct the impression that earlier speakers had had [in the parliamentary debate] that it was possible to build up a utopian Europe after the war.' He further explained that 'the only peace worth while is by negotiation, coupled with guarantees, disarmament etc.' Although, Culverwell appeared to have secured the support of a few of the executive, the majority of members were openly hostile, led by the chairman and vice-chairman. It was urged that Culverwell 'be severely reprimanded' and that the Association do 'something definite' about his position. This led to the acceptance of a resolution by 42 votes to 3 (with 10 abstentions) which 'express[ed] their disagreement with his views, as not representing those of his electorate' and a further resolution passed by a similar majority which 'cannot encourage' Culverwell to expect re-selection as candidate for the next election.[44] In fact, deselection occurred in 1944.[45]

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[43] *Amery Diaries*, 4 Oct. 1939, p. 575; Goodhart, *The 1922*, p. 94.

[44] Bristol West CA, special exec. 15 Dec. 1939 - these resolutions were confirmed by the AGM 6 May 1940, 38036/BW/2(b), Bristol Record Office.

[45] Bristol West CA, special exec. 22 May 1944, 38036/BW/1(b); Culverwell to Down-Shaw, 6 June 1944, 38036/BCA/1(a).

Grass-roots Conservatives were unprepared to tolerate defeatist talk. In December, Scottish Conservatives urged 'greater efforts [...] to counteract pacifist and subversive elements, and to keep up morale "on the home front"'.[46] Lord Bingley, chairman of Barkston Ash Association, exhorted his members 'to quash defeatist talk.'[47] Maidstone Association at their March 1940 AGM passed a resolution that 'strongly' protested at the activities of the pacifist Peace Pledge Union, considering their undertakings to be 'an insult to the great mass of British people' and therefore demanded 'that steps be taken drastically to curtail the potentiality for evil.'[48]

One Conservative MP, Captain Ramsay, who sat for Peebles, was to be imprisoned in May 1940 for the remainder of the war under regulation 18B.[49] This emergency legislation had originally been passed as a means of responding to the IRA terrorist threat, but was invoked to arrest a number of leading fascist sympathisers. It was Ramsay's continued operation of the Right Club and his involvement in the Tyler Kent affair that provided the authorities with the excuse for the round-up.[50] In the view of the Home Office, the Right Club 'was designed secretly to spread subversive and defeatist views among the civil population of Great Britain, to obstruct the war effort of Great Britain, and thus to endanger public safety and the defence of the Realm.' Ramsay continued to protest his innocence throughout his time in Brixton prison, arguing that the main objective of the Right Club was 'to oppose and expose the activities of organised Jewry'.[51] Like the other 'defeatists', Ramsay believed that the war was a deliberate Jewish plot to secure world domination, but unlike Lords Westminster and Brocket (who were never interned) Ramsay had little, if any, access to the decision-making elites and therefore minimal influence.

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[46] SCA: western association, div. council 15 Dec. 1939, Acc.10424.

[47] Barkston Ash CA, AGM 2 Apr. 1940.

[48] Maidstone CA, AGM 9 Mar 1940, A3/1/2.

[49] For the reactions of Ramsay's Peebles Conservative Association see: *Peeblesshire Advertiser*, 16, 17 Mar. 1940; *The Times*, 24 May 1940, 25 Mar., 4 Aug. 1941; *Hardwick Express*, 29 Sept. 1944, chairman of CA: 'so far as we are concerned, Captain Ramsay has no longer anything to do with us.'

[50] For further details of the Tyler Kent affair see: Ray Bearse & Anthony Read, *Conspirator: Untold Story of Churchill, Roosevelt and Tyler Kent*, (London: Papermac, 1992).

[51] Ramsay, *The Nameless War*, pp. 93-111, quotes pp. 104-5.

For the residuum of the Party there was concern that this 'defeatism' might spread to the general public. Cuthbert Headlam noted this, and expressed concern that the longer hostilities dragged on the more 'certain' disillusionment became, 'and then?'[52] It was a concern shared by the Ministry of Information.[53] This loss of public morale Amery blamed upon the 'generally negative attitude of things, excessive concentration on "funk-holism", the forbidding of meetings and the discouragement of volunteering.' This latter point was particularly ridiculous to Amery, who had long been an advocate of national service. The problem was that although Parliament had passed the national service (armed forces) act on the opening day of the war the call-up was divided into three age categories between the years of eighteen and forty-one. Registration did not begin until the 21 October and then only for the first group aged 18-23. The process of compiling the register was not completed until the beginning of the following year. These delays confirmed the very fears that had been expressed by the peacetime advocates of a compulsory register. Amery considered it 'preposterous' that able bodied men should be prevented from coming forward for some form of training in a situation of war. However, he predicted that 'when the big German push comes it will shake us up quickly enough and almost [certainly] bring most of the peace-mongers to their senses.'[54] There was a concern that with Conservatives and Liberals volunteering to participate in the war effort it left the arena open for the pacifist and communist factions to go unchallenged. Nevertheless, Amery felt that freedom of speech was essential since it was easiest to counter communist and fascist propaganda in the open. It was a view which fellow Birmingham MP, Sir Patrick Hannon, supported during a 1922 committee debate.[55]

III

Whilst the desire to secure an early peace with Germany was limited to a minority of Conservatives, the remainder were concerned with issues specific to the war effort and to making the British war machine more effective. The questionnaire Somerset de Chair distributed amongst Party officials in his constituency reflected the concerns being expressed amongst backbenchers.

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[52] Headlam Mss: diary, 14 Jan. 1940, D/He/36.

[53] McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, pp. 34-5.

[54] Bower Mss: Leo Amery to Robert Bower, 7 Oct. 1939, 1/4.

[55] Goodhart, *The 1922*, p. 94.

The questions posed spanned all aspects of the war, enquiring about the expected duration of the war, the reaction to the possibility of fighting bolshevik Russia, the position of agriculture, the healthiness of the Labour Party, the success of the government's war prosecution and popularity of ministers and their war aims, to the domestic concerns about ARP and evacuation.[56] Specifically in parliamentary and media circles, the composition of the war cabinet came in for criticism. It comprised nine members, including the service chiefs. This latter grouping had originally been excluded until the refusal of the Liberals to join the coalition and the threatened resignations of the air and war ministers warranted their addition.[57] The inclusion of the three service chiefs in the cabinet meant it was rather large and therefore considered to be too unwieldy to make decisions, and 'in times like these speed does count.'[58] The Watching Committee considered the subject of a smaller, more effective cabinet on 4 April 1940 in a debate led by Amery and Philip Swinton with 'practically all the peers for it, but one or two of the commoners like Spens and Nall, doubtful.'[59] As a result of this discussion Amery then circulated a memorandum, which received Swinton's approval, amongst members of the Committee, and to Geoffrey Dawson, editor of *The Times*, that put the argument for a 'cabinet which will think ahead in terms of policy and not of routine day to day administration [...] like a general staff, free of departmental work.'[60] Two days later *The Times* carried a leader entitled 'Relief for Ministers' which urged a smaller and more effective war cabinet.[61] *The Times*, although it had been a staunch supporter of appeasement, during the phoney war became one of Chamberlain's most objective and constructive critics.

A considerable area of concern was the apparent incapability of government departments to overcome bureaucracy and red tape and the implications these had on supplying the war effort. Headlam was ever conscious of the complaints and rumours about the 'futilities and follies of government

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56 Mass-Observation Archive: TB: file 5/H, 'Somerset de Chair questionnaire and responses, Nov. 1939'.

57 *Amery Diaries*, 4 Sept. 1939, p. 571.

58 Crookshank Mss: diary, 3 Sept. 1939, Ms.Eng.hist.d.360f30; Wallace Mss: diary, 3 Sept. 1939, MS.Eng.hist.c.495; Emrys-Evans Mss: Evans to James Stuart, 12 Feb. 1940 Add.MS.58248 f. 74; Richard Law to Emrys-Evans, 13 Sept. 1939 Add.MS.58239 ff. 2-3.

59 *Amery Diaries*, 4 Apr. 1940, p. 585.

60 Emrys-Evans Mss: Amery to Evans, 10 Apr. 1940, Add.MS .58245 Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p. 150.

61 *The Times*, 12 Apr. 1940.

departments and their inability to get war work commensurate with their claims.'[62] A number of branch secretaries in the Norfolk South West constituency represented by Somerset de Chair noted the ARP equipment shortages and indicated that these caused 'a good deal of comment.'[63] Victor Cazalet, who was serving with an AA Battery, found the situation at the War Office exasperating. He felt there was an 'incredible amount of fuss over everything and such muddle as beggars description'. His own battery was short of ammunition to the extent that they only had enough for seventy-five seconds of firing time.[64] For those Members on active service the first-hand experiences of bureaucracy and red-tape preventing the equipping and supplying of the armed forces must have had an important, if unquantifiable, impact upon their attitudes to the government's prosecution of the war. Their cross-voting or abstentions would prove crucial during the Norway vote. Those members in military service represented the younger elements of the Party. As was apparent during the expressions of dissent over peacetime foreign policy youth was an important characteristic of the 'sceptics'. During the Norway debate youth and military service reinforced each other and culminated in a more vigorous opposition to Chamberlain than either did singularly. In February 1940 one service Member wrote from France that 'there are innumerable scandals out here; we want another Miss Nightingale, another Lloyd-George, and every soldier I've spoken to wants Churchill in place of Chamberlain.'[65] For the first secret session debate that took place in the House of Commons on 13 December a number of MPs on active service sought special leave in order to air their grievances. One such Member was Colin Thornton-Kemsley, who sat for Kincardine and Aberdeenshire West and was serving in the Royal Artillery. He was called early in the debate and was able to elaborate on the question of equipment shortages. As he explained in his memoirs, his unit had soon

> learned of the necessity to become good inventors, for our resources were few. We mounted prismatic compasses on home-made tripods to give an approximate line of fire to our unserviceable guns; we pasted printed scales on our obsolete dial sights and, when the rain washed these off, we pasted

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62 Headlam Mss: diary, 5 Dec. 1939, D/He/35.

63 Mass-Observation Archive: TB, file5/H, 'Somerset de Chair questionnaire and responses, Nov. 1939', Swaffham, Nordelph.

64 James, *Cazalet*, pp. 218-9.

65 Ronald Cartland to Lady Colefax cited Cartland, *Ronald*, p. 244.

them on again; we cut up old motor tyres to take the place of leather kneeling pads. But there were some things we could not improvise.

Critical in this area was the shortage of ammunition.[66] The situation appeared not to improve during the opening months of 1940. Ronald Cartland, now serving in France, wrote home to his family suggesting he would return if there was another secret session in order to 'revive the scandal. Believe me there are some too - the colonel said tonight it might yet be my best war work - forty-eight hours in the House of Commons!'[67]

The government's performance in the House of Commons also came in for criticism. Although it was felt that fighting a defensive military war and an offensive economic one was probably the correct strategic course of action, critics could not but

> help feeling that it ought to be explained rather more forcibly to the British people and neutral countries. The PM's weekly talks are far too colourless. Parliamentary language is quite alright in the piping times of peace, but a meagre ration of departmental platitudes, which have an evasive air, are not adequate in these strenuous days.[68]

Lord Macmillan, as Minister for Information, in a memorandum of December 1939 considered that it was essential that 'Great Britain must be represented as fighting Germany on land, in the air, and at sea, ceaselessly, without remorse, with all her armed might, with financial resources, industrial manpower, and commercial assets, with all her idealism and determination.'[69] Yet to observers the government was failing to provide any such image. Indeed one Norfolk Conservative when asked in November 1939 whether the government was pursuing the war effort satisfactorily responded that 'when more is heard of how the war *is* being won we can tell better if people *are* satisfied! The general feeling is we know *too little*.'[70] Amery noted a speech Chamberlain gave to a 1922 dinner at the Junior Constitutional which he could only describe as a 'city councillor's speech': a narrow party speech which gave a 'complacent review' of the situation and which struck Amery 'as lacking real grip of things as well as platitudinous in diction and wholly

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66 Kemsley, *Through Winds and Tides*, p. 116-19.

67 Cartland, *Ronald*, p. 243.

68 Cilcennin Mss: Cranborne to J.P.L. Thomas, 29 Sept. 1939, Cilc.coll.27.

69 McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, p. 45.

70 Mass Observation Archive: TB: file 5/H, Somerset de Chair questionnaire and responses, Nov. 1939', Dewer.

without inspiration.' He noted that 'even Nancy Astor who is on the whole a good yes-woman frankly expressed her disappointment.'[71] Astor admitted that what Chamberlain said

> depressed me more than anything else since the war began [...] He said that the critics had been confounded, and the axis instead of working was breaking [...] he implied that the government's policy had been definitely planned and carried out, and that we had entered upon the war fully prepared, when everyone knows that the Russian-German alliance altered the whole face of things. He sneered at the Labour Party for not coming in and said we were better off without them. Worse than all, he said that some people were talking about what we would do after the war, but there could only be one thing before us - winning the war [...]. I am sure that he meant it to be a fighting speech, but its effect on me was to make me wish that Winston was PM (This was only momentary, and I know it was wrong, but that was my reaction!)[72]

Indeed, such sentiments about Chamberlain's failure to rouse the House - let alone his own backbenchers - were being privately expressed by government ministers.[73]

This in itself led to another area of debate and concern, namely, for what purpose was Britain fighting the war? There was a growing awareness of the need to establish the criteria which Britain required to be satisfied in advance of any peace settlement so that no one side would be under any delusions. Did this mean the restitution of Poland to her pre-September 1939 borders, or was merely her "independence" enough? Were the liberation of Czechoslovakia and Austria intended goals? Was Britain fighting to destroy Hitler personally or to ensure the total destruction of the Nazi system? Somerset de Chair polled the branch secretaries of his Norfolk constituency in November 1939 about war aims and found that thirty six per cent believed Britain was fighting to 'smash Hitler' and a further twenty-eight per cent to 'restore Poland and Czechoslovakia', with 'one or two [who] want[ed] to divide Ger[many] up or restore a monarchy.'[74] Headlam noted that the correspondence in the press

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[71] *Amery Diaries*, 22 Nov. 1939, p. 576.

[72] Addision, *Road to 1945*, pp. 65-6 citing Nancy Astor to Lord Lothian, 23 Nov. 1939.

[73] Wallace Mss: diary, 26 Sept. 1939, MS.Eng.hist.c.495.

[74] Mass-Observation Archive: TB: file5/H, 'Somerset de Chair questionnaire and responses, Nov. 1939',

about war aims continued 'vigorously' to demand a government statement.[75] He believed 'if we are only fighting to destroy Hitlerism, our aim is simple enough - but if we are fighting to restore the *status quo ante* of before the war in eastern Europe [...] well it may lead to many awkward complications and necessitate a very long war.'[76] Buchan-Hepburn, now serving in the Whips Office, in correspondence in October 1939 with an east Toxteth constituent who favoured reaching a settlement with Germany, posed the question, 'if we are to allow the gradual destruction of liberty in Europe to go on unchecked, what is to be the eventual fate of all free peoples in the world, including our own?'[77] To Hepburn, the choice was clear, either surrender and be subjugated under nazism or fight to the end to ensure the destruction of nazism and preserve the liberty of the British people. Viscount Wolmer was equally clear, that it was 'a fight to the finish between the British Empire and nazidom'.[78] Likewise Lord Lloyd in his pamphlet, *The British Case*, believed that 'the people of the British Commonwealth are engaged today in a life and death struggle for a political principle necessary to the liberties and therefore to the prosperity and progress of the peoples of Europe. It is the principle of national independence. This principle is the sole guarantee of the survival of individual liberty in Europe.' In this work Lloyd sought to present the necessity for war in a manner that drew upon history and Christianity. With a whig interpretation of history that went back to Cæsar, Lloyd attempted to play upon the British sense of fair play. Germany was a 'tyranny' determined upon world domination. With Austria and Czechoslovakia 'the humanitarian motives of the German government could not be accepted at their face value by a world deeply disgusted by the steady growth of religious, racial and political persecution within the now enlarged political boundaries of the new Reich.' The sole responsibility of securing 'European freedom' rested with Christian Britain.[79]

That Britain was now at war with Germany enabled Conservatives to unleash their hostility towards the German nation. Germany was now the enemy and

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[75] For an analysis of the press demands over 'war aims', and how either the editors or proprietors of some papers suppressed criticisms of the government see Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, pp. 152-59.

[76] Headlam Mss: diary, 24 Sept. 1939, D/He/35.

[77] Hailes Mss: Buchan-Hepburn to A. Kingpens, 24 Oct. 1939, HAIL1/10.

[78] Selborne Mss: Wolmer to Editor, *Aldershot News*, 16 Oct. 1939, MS.Eng.hist.c.1014 ff. 157-60.

[79] Lord Lloyd, *The British Case*, (London: Eyre and Spottiswode, 1939), quotes pp. 13, 44. Includes an introduction by Lord Halifax.

in war it is almost axiomatic that the individuals of participant nations must hate each other. When Sir Thomas Moore was pictured in the *Sunday Pictorial* shortly after the outbreak of hostilities and described in the blurb as 'Hitler's friend', his Ayr Burghs executive was quick to express disquiet.[80] Conservatives who had been associated with the unease over peacetime appeasement had no difficulty in attacking Germany. They even portrayed Germany and Hitler in a light that suggested it was obvious that Hitler had been planning world domination, thereby justifying their past behaviour and criticisms. 'Poland was not an isolated incident' wrote Lord Wolmer to the *Aldershot News*, 'but the culmination of a whole series of similar attacks on peaceful neighbours [...] against such a challenge England must always fight.' This letter was written at the time during October 1939 when Hitler had made his alleged 'peace offer', and Wolmer in common with other sceptics was keen to quash any suggestion of a negotiated settlement. For this purpose the ghost of Munich was resurrected: 'it is impossible to attach any reliance to any promise made by Herr Hitler or his gang. Before peace can be considered we must have something more reliable to go on than "scraps of paper".'[81] The inference was clear, Wolmer did not have to mention Munich in name, for that would have implied disloyalty at a time when the national unity was required, but rather the reference to the "scraps of paper" was enough of a connotation, but with the emphasis of blame being laid upon Hitler, the enemy. In a similar vein Leonard Ropner addressed his Barkston Ash Association AGM in April 1940. Britain, the empire and the world 'had not forgotten Hitler's growing ambition, *or how successful aggression had whetted his appetite*. The declaration of war had come almost as a relief.'[82] Again, the underlying message was clear, appeasement and its surrenders had stimulated Hitler's desire, but once more this was subtly disguised behind an attack on Hitler. Ropner concluded with a robust declaration 'that Hitler would be crushed, and that millions of slaves living under his tyranny would be liberated. No sacrifice was too great to accomplish that.' The use of highly emotive words and loaded phrases such as 'slaves' and 'tyranny' was a typical exercise in order to rouse audiences against the Nazi threat. Winston Churchill was a prime example of this phenomenon. Although the emotive nature of his oratory had discredited the value of alarmism during peacetime, in war

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[80] Ayr Burghs CA, central council, Sept. 1939.

[81] Selborne Mss: Wolmer to Editor, *Aldershot News*, 16 Oct. 1939, MS.Eng.hist.c.1074 ff. 157-60.

[82] Barkston Ash CA, AGM 2 Apr. 1940 - emphasis added.

Churchill's mastery of the English language made him a powerful speaker. During his first wartime radio broadcast, which earned him considerable praise, Churchill spoke of the Allies' intention to prevent the 'Nazis carrying the flames of war into the Balkans and Turkey'. He confidently predicted victory against Hitler 'and his group of wicked men, whose hands are stained with blood and soiled with corruption' and was convinced that the British were 'the defenders of civilisation and freedom'. In another broadcast, Churchill defiantly declared:

> The whole world is against Hitler and Hitlerism. Men of every race and clime feel that this monstrous apparition stands between them and the forward move which is their due [...] Even in Germany itself there are millions who stand aloof from the seething mass of criminality and corruption constituted by the Nazi Party machine.[83]

Some observers were inclined to feel that at times these Churchillian speeches were over the top, which they believed lessened their intended impact. Indeed the BBC Director of Talks was concerned that these broadcasts were having the wrong impact upon dominion opinion which 'makes one more doubtful than ever about the value of Mr Churchill's broadcasts. In addition of course he has managed to offend both Italy and the US in successive talks.'[84]

That nazism was the enemy was not in question. The real problem lay in defining the expected aims once nazism had been defeated. Some Conservatives saw a risk in emphasising the crusade as purely against Hitlerism for fear that he might be replaced by another Nazi government (and thereby invalidating the legitimacy of continuing a war, especially to American and dominion opinion). Earl Winterton believed that since the German people accepted that Hitlerism and the German nation were one it had to be made clear that Britain intended 'to smash both in overwhelming force. Then and then only can we both settle down [...] in peace in Europe. We do not want permanent enmity between us [and Germany], but we are going to make it impossible for [her] to make another war of aggression.'[85] But such a view was not accepted by the British government until the withdrawal from Norway.[86] The difficulties of the British position were summarized by Alec

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[83] Gilbert, *Churchill, 1939-41*, pp. 50, 81.

[84] D.J. Wendan, 'Churchill, radio and cinema', in *Churchill*, ed. Blake and Louis, p. 222; *Colville Diaries*, 12, 13 Nov. 1939, p. 56.

[85] *HofC Debs*, vol. 360 cols. 1168, 7 May 1940.

[86] McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, p. 142.

Cadogan, Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Office, when at the end of September 1939 Lord Halifax asked for his assessment of war aims: 'I told him I saw awful difficulties. We can no longer say "evacuate Poland" without wanting to go to war with Russia, which we don't want to do! I suppose the cry is "Abolish Hitlerism". What if Hitler hands over to Goring?!'[87] The apparent conclusion of the war cabinet was the generally vague idea that the purpose was to free Europe from its fear of German aggression and enable these peoples to preserve their liberties and their independence, which basically meant the removal of Hitler. As Lord Halifax wrote, he 'wished to fight long enough to induce such a state of mind in the Germans that they would say they'd had enough of Hitler! And that point is not really met by talking about CZ[echoslovakia], Poland and all the rest of it. The real point is, I'm afraid, that I can trust no settlement unless and until H[itler] is discredited. When we shall achieve this nobody can say, but I don't think any "settlement" is worth much without!'[88] In other words, whilst Chamberlain persisted as Prime Minister and the war was confined to eastern Europe the British government persisted with the belief that Germany was like a juvenile offender who could be brought to his senses by a short sharp shock. Such an attitude did not resolve the debate, and these criticisms and concerns were to persist throughout the months that Chamberlain remained Prime Minister. Indeed, Lord Reith, who was appointed Minister for Information in January 1940, was longing during mid-March 'for some more concrete indication from the war cabinet of the precise policy they intended to pursue to defeat Germany' which would enable him to counter the 'general atmosphere of anxiety in regard to high policy and the conduct of the war in general.'[89] Nevertheless, these doubts were kept private. The public utterances of Conservative individuals, and Associations, with the use of phrases and words such as 'liberty', 'defeat Nazi aggression in Europe', 'lasting peace', suggested that at least for the sake of the national unity, they were prepared publicly to accept the government's aims.[90] By the time Churchill succeeded to Number Ten Downing Street the immediate war aims were much clearer, having been narrowed specifically to military issues of survival or surrender.

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87 *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, ed. David Dilks, (London: Cassell, 1973), 23 Sept. 1939, p. 219.

88 Roberts, *Holy Fox*, p. 185.

89 Wallace Mss: diary, 18 Mar. 1940, MS.Eng.hist.c.496.

90 Northern Counties Area, AGM 6 Apr. 1940, NRO3303/1; City of Leeds CA, AGM 6 May 1940; Barkston Ash CA, AGM 2 Apr. 1940; Mass-Observation Archive: TB: file5/H, 'Somerset de Chair questionnaire and responses, Nov. 1939'.

IV

Despite the debates about Britain's war aims and war prosecution these did not make Chamberlain's defeat and Churchill's succession to the premiership in May 1940 inevitable. What would prove crucial was the perceived suitability of a minister for conducting a war. Chamberlain had once commented that the nearer war came then the better Churchill's chances of returning to office and vice versa.[91] Therefore once war broke out, Churchill's standing improved. The transformation in fortunes was quite astonishing; just a few months earlier in July 1939 it was reported that four out of five backbenchers would not tolerate his inclusion in the cabinet. Churchill's hostility to Indian reform and his role in the abdication crisis had left him isolated on the fringes of the Party. However, by the end of 1939 he, along with Halifax, was talked of openly as successor to Chamberlain. Victor Cazalet thought Churchill 'would inevitably become PM, perhaps after an inter-reign of Halifax', and told his old friend, Churchill, so.[92] This support seems also to have been filtering down to the grass-roots. Somerset de Chair canvassed the branch secretaries of ninety polling districts in his North West Suffolk constituency in November 1939 as to whom they considered to be the four most popular ministers. Churchill's name was listed by 63 per cent and Chamberlain by 53 per cent. Rather surprisingly a number of the responses included the name of the former ambassador to Berlin, Nevile Henderson![93] From mid-September onwards, sections of the press, principally the *Sunday Pictorial* and *Daily Mirror*, began canvassing for Churchill's succession.[94] In contrast to Chamberlain's ineffective performances on the radio, Churchill seemed to revel in this medium.[95] Ernest Makins heard a 'good fag' that when the Prime Minister broadcast 'he thinks he is on the National, but it is only the Midland Regional.'[96] In contrast Churchill's first radio broadcast on 1 October received all-round praise, with one senior minister noting how 'the

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91 Chamberlain Mss: Neville to Ida, 23 Apr. 1939, NC18/1/1095.

92 Cazalet Mss: journal, 11 Oct. 1939.

93 *Us: Mass Observation's Weekly Intelligence Service*, 6, 9 Mar. 1940, p. 44. The original questionnaire is to be found Mass-Observation Archive: TB: file5/H,' 'Somerset de Chair questionnaire and responses, Nov. 1939'. In addition, Eden 36%, Halifax 32%, Kingsley Wood 18%, Morrison & Hore-Belisha 10% each, Chatfield, Simon and Neville Henderson, 3% each.

94 Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p. 158.

95 Headlam Mss: diaries, 1 Oct. 1939, 20 Jan. 1940, D/He/35-6; Wallace Mss: diary, 24 Oct. 1939, MS.Eng.hist.c.495.

96 Makins Mss: diary, 14 Apr. 1940.

press talked of him as Prime Minister.'[97] Likewise, Churchill seized every opportunity to improve his standing by some impressive parliamentary performances. As one junior minister observed in the opening weeks of the war, little had roused the House of Commons until Churchill spoke on the naval situation, a speech with which he took 'a long step forward towards being a future Prime Minister.'[98] Churchill was also clever at ensuring that he was associated with good news about the war effort which boosted national morale (the *Altmark* incident, whereby the navy intercepted a German ship carrying British prisoners of war, and the *Graf Spee* scuttling in December 1939, being the most spectacular). Nevertheless, Churchill did not appear to have been actively plotting for the premiership - at least publicly. Privately, there is some evidence to suggest that Churchill was encouraging newspaper criticism so as to stiffen the war effort, but whether these were deliberate attempts to undermine Chamberlain's position for his own benefit is less than certain.[99] Nevertheless, in parliament he continued steadfastly to defend the government's line - even during the Norway debate.

In accordance with a growing awareness of the improved standing of Churchill was a mounting consciousness amongst Conservative backbenchers of the potential threat Labour would pose after the war. Although for Conservatives, their concern was the prosecution of the war, backbenchers were occasioned to notice the manner in which the opposition conducted themselves. The Labour leadership followed a policy of 'constructive opposition' which was underlined by the electoral truce agreed on 5 September 1939. At a parliamentary level various Labour frontbenchers took up official contacts with particular ministers and departments. That this growing stature for Labour became apparent to a number of Conservatives once Labour joined the Churchill Coalition in May 1940 cannot be disputed, but what is interesting was that there were limited signs of this realisation during the period of the phoney war.[100]

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[97] Gilbert, *Churchill, 1939-41*, p. 51.

[98] Wallace Mss: diary, 11 Oct. 1939, MS.Eng.hist.c.495; an assumption shared by Cazalet who felt the broadcast and House of Commons speech were a 'tremendous success', Cazalet Mss: journal, 11 Oct. 1939; also Cartland, *Ronald*, p. 232.

[99] Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, pp. 151-2.

[100] Birchall Mss: Frank Fremantle to J.D. Birchall, 1 Mar. 1940, Box 33; The secretary of Shipdham Conservatives considered Greenwood and Herbert had adopted a 'reasonable and helpful' approach to the war. See Mass-Observation Archive: TB, file 5/H, 'Somerset de Chair questionnaire and responses, Nov. 1939'. De Chair's seat was a safe Conservative constituency. Branch

After the initial few months of the war Chamberlain asserted his leadership at least over the government and the Conservative Party, though it is by no means clear that this confidence extended any further. The government's popularity was rather volatile, and certainly by December 1939 it was ill-regarded once again. The appointments of W.S. 'Shakes' Morrison, as Minister for Food, and Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, as the Minister for Agriculture, were unpopular and they were deemed a weakness for the government.[101] Both men were reserved a chapter of their own in Cato's *Guilty Men* entitled 'How to look a fool'. To critics these appointments were taken as evidence of the undue influence wielded by Horace Wilson and David Margesson, the Chief Whip. Margesson, however, saw the problem of personnel from a different perspective. He recognised that Chamberlain was experiencing difficulties in finding men and women of sufficient quality for ministerial appointments, therefore 'it was considered that some accession of strength to the government might be found by importing one or two people from outside.'[102] This was not a new concern for Chamberlain, for even in peace time he had lamented the lack of young talent on the government back benches.[103] Now under the pressures of war the necessity for ministerial aptitude was much greater and Chamberlain was forced to look to the world of business for men he deemed worthy. This led to the appointments of the 'super-men', Lord Reith as Minister of Information and Sir Alan Duncan to the Board of Trade in January 1940. Unfortunately, neither man appeared particularly comfortable in his post, and both would remain in office only until Chamberlain's fall from power. Further, many of the key personnel in the cabinet had been ministers since at least 1935 and this led some critics to suggest that perhaps they were too 'tired' to continue with the strains of office

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secretaries asked if any increase in Labour support: 28% Less, 3% More, and 60% politics forgotten/no change. Also asked if favoured a coalition govt.: 57% no, 14% yes, 23% indifferent. For analysis of Labour's activities during the phoney war period see Stephen Brooke, *Labour's War: The Labour Party during the Second World War*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 34-51; For the Conservative Party's response to social reform during the war see H. Kopsch, 'The approach of the Conservative Party to social policy during World War Two', (London University: PhD, 1970).

101 See Ralph Glyn's comments as MP for Abingdon cited Addision, *Road to 1945*, p. 68.

102 Wallace Mss: diary, 12 Nov. 1939, MS.Eng.hist.c.495.

103 Chamberlain Mss: Neville to Ida, 17 Dec. 1938, NC18/1/1080.

and especially in a time of war.[104] One wonders to what extent Chamberlain's declining health affected the running of the war effort? His Private Secretary, John Colville, recorded on several occasions in his diary that the Prime Minister was too ill to fulfil his duties, to the extent that at the end of 1939 Chamberlain was 'worried at the prospect of not being able to carry on if these attacks increase in number and violence'.[105]

The problems over personnel and the suitability of individuals to act as war ministers persisted into the new year. In January 1940, Leslie Hore-Belisha was sacked as Secretary of State for War.[106] Belisha, suitably aggrieved by his dismissal, especially since Chamberlain had assured him only the previous month of his backing, therefore refused to accept demotion to the Board of Trade. It had been suggested that Belisha be moved to the Ministry of Information, but Halifax had intervened suggesting that this would have a poor impact upon the neutrals and enemy in view of Belisha's Jewishness and methods.[107] Belisha was in no doubt as to why he was dismissed, and he summarised it in two words to a friend, ""Jew-Boy"".[108] The press, whom Belisha had been careful to cultivate during his years in office, came to his defence, but Chamberlain stood his ground arguing that he must be free to make changes in his team as he thought necessary. Observers of the resignation debate felt that the Prime Minister's performance was rather 'lame' whilst the impression Belisha's speech 'left on one was "well, if he and the generals, the cabinet and the PM saw eye to eye on every question of foreign policy, why was he forced to resign?"'. The general consensus was that Chamberlain had handled the whole situation poorly.[109] Belisha had made few friends in military circles. His use of Liddell-Hart as an informal advisor during the early years of his tenure at the War Office had irritated the military establishment. To their detractors, Hore-Belisha was 'just a charlatan out for his own publicity' and Liddell-Hart 'a fanatic about things military about which

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104 Emrys-Evans Mss: Cranborne to Evans, 7 May 1940, Add.MS.58240 ff. 32-4. In fact this view had been articulated by a leader in *The Times*, 16 Apr. 1940, which angered Chamberlain. See *Channon Diaries*, 16 Apr. 1940, p. 241.

105 *Colville Diaries*, 9, 14, 17 Nov., 28 Dec 1939, pp. 56-8, 67.

106 For further historical analysis of this episode see A.J. Trythall, 'The downfall of Leslie Hore-Belisha', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 16, 3 (1981), pp. 391-411.

107 *Colville Diaries*, 4 Jan. 1940, p. 75.

108 Rich Mss: diary, 16 Jan. 1940, AJ217/36.

109 *Colville Diaries*, 16 Jan. 1940, p. 80; Cazalet Mss: journal, 6, 9 Jan. 1940.

he really is not an expert.'[110] Belisha had managed to survive the under-secretaries' revolt in December 1938, which involved his junior, Lord Strathcona, and which had demanded his removal, but his doubling of the Territorial Army and support for peacetime conscription during 1939 further angered the military. The phoney war and problems of supplying the British expeditionary force, and particularly the 'pill-box affair', were too much for the senior generals and the duke of Gloucester. Unprepared to tolerate any more they presented Chamberlain with an ultimatum. Belisha's successor to the War Office confirmed in a conversation with Cuthbert Headlam that he 'was sacked for his insolence to Gort and Co. and that the mess he has made will take a lot [of] clearing up'.[111] Lieutenant-General John Dill considered Hore-Belisha's passing to be good but felt the manner of his dismissal to be 'clumsy'. He expected it to be some time before the army would be able to recover from the havoc Belisha had wrought and thought it preposterous 'that a man with his record could ever have been instructed with a great department of state'. He suggested his correspondent read the 12 January edition of the journal *Truth*.[112] This was a venomous anti-semitic character assassination in a weekly journal that was secretly controlled by Sir Joseph Ball, director of the Conservative Research Department, on behalf of the Conservative Party. Churchill, Eden and Hore-Belisha regularly suffered under the journalists' pen in *Truth*. It was the latter though who received the most extreme condemnation. He was regularly made the subject of jokes through their articles and poem feature, for example the 30 June 1937 issue, carried a poem entitled 'Belisha bares the knee', which asked whether he would be wearing a kilt when he addressed the Scottish Liberal National Association. His dismissal provoked another poem called, 'Exodus from Whitehall' and the article 'Belisha is no loss'. Numerous copies of this particular issue were posted to prominent persons during the ensuing week, presumably to counter the support the ex-war minister had been receiving from large sections of the press. The article was again reprinted 19 January, 'by popular demand', along with a further condemnation of the man.[113] Vansittart, who conducted an

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[110] Headlam Mss: diary, 12 Nov. 1937, D/He/33.

[111] Headlam Mss: diary, 3 Feb. 1940, D/He/36.

[112] Headlam Mss: John Dill to Cuthbert Headlam, 27 Jan. 1940, D/He/135/74.

[113] *Truth*, 30 June 1937, 12, 19 Jan. 1940. Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, who uncovered much of this rather sordid episode refers to the 12 Jan. 1940 article p. 11 but has mis-dated it as 4 Jan. Also see A.J. Kushner, 'Clubland, cricket tests and alien internment, 1939-40', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 11, 3 (1992), pp. 80-2. For attacks on Churchill and Eden see *Truth*, 27 Oct. 1939, 8 Mar. 1940.

enquiry into the activities of *Truth* in 1941, concluded that the two articles represented 'a deliberate effort to kill Belisha once and for all as a political force.'[114] One joke circulating amongst Conservative backbenchers concerning Hore-Belisha was the story of Queen Mary asking King George 'Who is this Hore-Belisha?' to which the King replied 'My dear I've never heard of the woman'![115] The significance behind the joke was only apparent from the account of the Belisha resignation in Chips Channon's diary which revealed that King George had personally intervened and 'insisted' on Belisha's removal, perhaps being the 'extra pressure' Lieutenant-General Henry Pownall alluded to in his own account of the dismissal.[116]

The cabinet reshuffle that followed failed to inspire confidence, at least amongst the politicians. Oliver Stanley, son of Lord Derby, became Minister for War. Victor Cazalet understood that Stanley had been appointed 'to give [the] W[ar] O[ffice] a period of rest, and as Lord Derby's son it would please [the] French, not two very good reasons.'[117] Headlam, whilst not doubting Stanley's abilities, wondered whether he would be able 'to stand the strain of the W[ar] O[ffice] in war time - still more, whether he possesses the guts to become leader'?[118] A similar view was held by Paul Emrys-Evans who considered it an 'astonishing appointment'. Stanley was 'a weak man,' and Evans could not 'help feeling that it is his weakness which has been his chief recommendation in the eyes of the PM. He has proven on so many occasions that he will not resign in the last resort.'[119] Even the usually sycophantic Chips Channon felt it was a 'calamity' that 'a dry stick' like Stanley was taking the War Office.[120]

Nevertheless Chamberlain gained confidence from dismissing Belisha and during the next month appeared to be at his best.[121] Several speeches to the House of Commons were well received. Although the collapse of the Finnish

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114 Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p. 169.

115 Makins Mss: diary, 19 May 1938.

116 *Channon Diaries*, 8 Jan. 1940, p. 229; *Pownall Diaries*, 11 Jan. 1940, p. 275.

117 Cazalet Mss: journal, 5 Jan. 1940.

118 Headlam Mss: diary, 6 Jan. 1940, D/He/36.

119 Emrys-Evans Mss: Evans to Eden, 7 Jan. 1940, Add.MS.58242 f. 20.

120 *Channon Diaries*, 6 Jan. 1940, p. 228.

121 Birchall Mss: Frank Fremantle to J.D. Birchall, 9 Feb. 1940, Box 33.

resistance in mid-February left the House feeling 'rather glum' with 'all the old Munich/Chamberlain doubts rampant again' Chamberlain asserted his leadership with a series of fighting speeches that improved the House's attitude.[122] All this caused Euan Wallace to remark that parliament was 'really an extraordinary volatile assembly.'[123]

All was to change during April. Initially the cabinet reshuffle of that month was very poorly received.[124] Samuel Hoare went to the Air Ministry, Kingsley Wood became Lord Privy Seal, Morrison took the Post Office, Hudson moved to Shipping, De La Warr was given the Office of Works and Geoffrey Shakespeare the Department of Overseas Trade. Lord Wolmer considered this reshuffle the 'last straw'.[125] Chamberlain did not expect the changes to satisfy his critics, but believed that they were necessary for the smooth and efficient running of the government and that in time they would justify themselves.[126] This was followed by the reversals for the British expeditionary forces in Norway and their subsequent withdrawal as German forces overran another country. By early May following the Norway evacuation and the announcement of a debate on the fiasco it was 'clear that a serious political crisis was developing.'[127]

In the six weeks or so before the Norway debate it had been the AGM season for local Associations, or at least those that had overlooked the request of Douglas Hacking and continued to function. On the public face, the Associations continued to express their confidence in the government. For example, Leeds City Association carried 'with acclamation', the day before the Norway debate, a resolution which expressed 'its complete confidence in His Majesty's government and assures them of the determination of the peoples of this country to support all measures necessary to defeat Nazi aggression in Europe.' But the resolution carried an additional sentence 'calling for the prosecution of the war with the utmost vigour' which implied that the Leeds

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122 Crookshank Mss: diary, 13 Feb. 1940, MS.Eng.hist.d.360 f.52; *Colville Diaries*, 19 Mar. 1940, p. 99.

123 Wallace Mss: diary, 19 Mar. 1940, MS.Eng.hist.c.946.

124 Crookshank Mss: diary, 4 Apr. 1940, MS.Eng.hist.d.360 f.55; Wallace Mss: diary, 3 Apr. 1940, MS.Eng.hist.c.496.

125 Selborne Mss: letter to *Aldershot Times*, 13 May 1940 - minute on draft, MS.Eng.hist.c.1015ff.46-9.

126 Chamberlain Mss: Neville to Ida, 30 Mar. 1940, NC18/1/1148.

127 Emrys-Evans Mss: diary, 2 May 1940, Add.MS.58246 ff.123-9.

Conservatives felt a degree of dissatisfaction.[128] Likewise, a month earlier, the Northern Areas council had adopted a resolution which recorded 'its complete confidence in the government to prosecute the war with the utmost vigour and determination until victory is attained and the liberty of the world secured.' This resolution had been proposed by their chairman, Cuthbert Headlam who throughout the period of the phoney war had been expressing increased concern about the government's handling of the war effort. Once again, this illustrates the ability of Conservatives to express disquiet in private whilst preserving a outward façade of loyalty.[129] Indeed, the fact that Associations felt it necessary to carry resolutions of acclamation for the Prime Minister most likely indicated an awareness in the constituencies of the all-round criticism that was being made of the government. These were views that most certainly would have been communicated to local MPs. Indeed Mass-Observation were noting the increased public dissatisfaction with the government, the Norway reversals having left people 'staggered'.[130]

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The Norway debate took place over two days and was to be the instrument that led to Chamberlain's fall from power. Attendance was very high with many Members on active service gaining leave to return for the debate. The atmosphere was highly charged and 'uncomfortable' with 'even the strongest supporters of the government [...] doubtful about its survival.'[131] Chamberlain opened the debate and made no attempt to minimise the fact that the Norway evacuation had been a reverse. Shortly before the debate Chamberlain had written to his sister setting out his thoughts. He believed that most of his domestic critics were

> enemies of the government in general [and of himself] in particular, and they will try and use every setback to weaken or if possible to destroy us. But then there are a lot of other critics, not malevolent at all, but merely not

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128 City of Leeds CA, AGM 6 May 1940.

129 Northern Counties Area, AGM 6 Apr. 1940, NRO33033/1; Headlam Mss: diaries, Sept. 1939-May 1940 passim, D/He/35-6.

130 Mass-Observation Archive: FR: 125, 'Morale: summary of M-O reports submitted to Home Intelligence, Feb.-May 1940; FR: 95,'Norway crisis, 3 May 1940' noted 'two marked tendencies: 1. a steady and rapid increase in pessimism, 2. a soaring distrust of news channels.'

131 Emrys-Evans Mss: diary, 7 May 1940, Add.MS.58246 ff. 123-29.

very intelligent and it should be possible to answer them effectively. I only wish I did have the answering, but I shall have to lead off.[132]

As the debate would show Chamberlain's recognition of the significance of the governmental closing speeches was to prove correct.

The debate reached fever pitch when the Member for Portsmouth North, Roger Keyes, rose dressed in naval uniform as Admiral of the Fleet, and in 'the most sensational episode' of the first day attacked the government. He compared Trondhjem to another Gallipoli and told the House that he had daily urged the Admiralty to allow him personally to lead the naval assault. Keyes was not the greatest of orators, but his speech made 'a considerable emotional appeal to the House' which one minister considered 'rather frightening on an occasion of this kind.'[133] Leo Amery's speech was more significant for it openly attacked the government's war record. He argued that wars were 'won not by explanations after the event but by foresight, by clever decision and by swift action.' It was his belief that the government neither 'foresaw what Germany meant to do, [n]or came to a clear decision when it knew what Germany had done, or [had] acted swiftly or consistently throughout the whole lamentable affair.' If Trondhjeim had been an isolated incident of 'indecision, slowness and fear of taking risks' then it could be excused, however it displayed similar traits to the Finnish campaign, to the government's wartime economic policies, to the re-training of workers and production of munitions, as well as the handling of agriculture. Recalling the words of Oliver Cromwell when dismissing the Long Parliament, Amery urged Chamberlain to go: 'you have sat too long here for any good you have been doing. Depart, I say, and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go!'[134] Oliver Stanley, the War Minister, was left to wind-up for the government. His speech was continually interrupted by Members from all parties.[135] It was judged a bad performance with the minister not being 'at ease at all.' Wallace felt that it was 'idle to pretend that his speech convinced either the opposition, or, more still, the malcontents in our own Party.'[136]

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132 Chamberlain Mss: Neville to Hilda, 4 May 1940, NC18/1/1153.

133 *HofC Debs*, vol. 360 col. 1106, 7 May 1940; Wallace Mss: diary, 7 May 1940, MS.Eng.hist.c.946.

134 *HofC Debs*, vol. 360 cols. 1140-50, quotes cols. 1141, 1146, 1150, 7 May 1940.

135 *HofC Debs*, vol. 360 cols. 1178-1191, 7 May 1940.

136 Crookshank Mss: diary, 7 May 1940, MS.Eng.hist.d.360; Wallace Mss: diary, 7 May 1940, MS.Eng.hist.c.496.

The outcome of the debate was by no means settled after the first day. Not all the Conservative speakers had attacked the government. Henry Page-Croft had suggested that the situation had been artificially created by the press, without true reference to the facts. In the opinion of Archibald Southby, Norway had merely been a 'minor setback' and he had rounded on those who sought to destroy the government 'by means of intrigue' for it 'would be a great disservice to the allied cause which might well be irreparable.'[137] Whether such defences impressed other backbenchers was another matter. Margesson, the Chief Whip, felt that the government had put up a creditable performance under difficult circumstances and seemed to feel that they would achieve a reasonable majority if forced to a division. By contrast, 'Harold Macmillan and his friends were jubilant over what they regarded as the certain overthrow of "the worst government this country has seen since the [First World] War and probably for 100 years".'[138] Even so when the Watching Committee meet on the second morning, shortly before the debate was to begin, their chairman Lord Salisbury was only prepared to suggest that in the event of a division Conservative critics should abstain. However, as the debate reconvened it soon became apparent to Emrys-Evans that a substantial proportion of Conservative Members, particularly those in the services, were intending to vote against the government. When the Service Members Committee met all bar one indicated that they would be voting against the government whatever happened.[139] Members of this Service Committee included Anstruther-Gray, Victor Cazalet, Somerset de Chair, Quintin Hogg, Keeling, Hamilton Kerr, Medlicott, John Profumo, Stuart Russell, Charles Taylor, Roy Wise, and James Wright.[140] Emrys-Evans was now of the belief 'that the position had gone too far and that abstention was really impossible.' This view was communicated to Alec Dunglass, Chamberlain's PPS, when he tried to broach a compromise with Evans. Dunglass implied that Chamberlain was prepared to meet his critics who could 'place any demands' they wished with the suggestion that the Prime Minister was prepared drastically to reconstruct the government. Evans left Dunglass with no illusions. They were 'thoroughly dissatisfied' with the likes of Simon and Hoare whilst Horace Wilson's 'intolerable interference in politics and his evil influence on policy' was too

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137 *HofC Debs*, vol. 360 cols. 1106-16, (Page-Croft) 1151-60, (Southby) 7 May 1940.

138 Wallace Mss: diary, 7 May 1940, MS.Eng.hist.c.496.

139 James, *Cazalet*, p.226. Cazalet was chairman of this committee and Hamilton Kerr was the secretary.

140 Addison, *Road to 1945*, p. 98 fn. 75 and James, *Cazalet*, p. 226.

much. Evans also criticised the Whips believing they had adopted a 'disastrous' attitude. Nor was it felt that Chamberlain had 'the right temperament' to continue as head of a wartime government.[141] Samuel Hammersley, the Member for East Willesden, later explained in a letter to *The Times* that he had voted against the government because there had been a failure of the party system and that the leadership was 'not susceptible to the criticisms of its own supporters.'[142] Victor Cazalet, who reluctantly decided to vote with the government, was aware that the

> story of discontent against [the] PM is a long one. It's partly the result of Margesson and Whip hostility to all who voted against or criticised gov[ernmen]t at time of Munich. Anyone connected with Winston and Eden was condemned. There was general discontent v. war effort and particularly v. Sam Hoare and Simon.[143]

Roy Wise let it be known to one government loyalist that he intended to vote against the government as 'it was the only way to shock us out of our complacency', whilst Charles Taylor, Eastbourne's Member, admitted he intended rebellion too.[144] At the suggestion of Alec Dunglass, Cazalet and Wise reiterated all the criticisms to Chamberlain on the evening of 8 May. They also explained why the Service Members rebelled: 'Gun position of AA Territorials in Norway never fired a shot. Medical Services - all we wanted was more guns and ammunition. We had no personal quarrel with him, in fact we were his most loyal supporters.'[145]

It would appear that from the previous displays of Conservative rebellion during the Chamberlain premiership that voting behaviour during any particular crisis was conditioned by the immediate circumstances. With the February 1938 Eden censure vote those who defied the Whips were moved by an identification with the policies and principles that Eden represented whilst the vast majority of the Party considered that an expression of loyalty to the Prime Minister was required. Likewise with the Munich votes the euphoria of peace encouraged many to support the government despite the persistence of private doubts. The rebellion of Members in military service with the Norway

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141 Emrys-Evans Mss: diary, 8 May 1940, Add.MS.58246.

142 *The Times*, 15 May 1940.

143 James, *Cazalet*, p. 226.

144 *Channon Diaries*, 8 May 1940, p. 246.

145 Cazalet Mss: journal, 9 May 1940.

division was linked with their relative youthfulness. In peacetime it had been the under fifties who had been most inclined to question Chamberlain's foreign and defence policies and occasionally to give public expression to these doubts. However, war service exposed these MPs to direct and compelling evidence of Britain's ineffectual war effort. Further, active service removed these Members from the rarefied atmosphere of Westminster and the scrutiny of the Whips and placed them in situations whereby they were potentially expected to sacrifice their lives in defence of their country. Perhaps not surprisingly then the normal bonds of loyalty were weakened.

The sense of crisis, even panic, gradually filtered through to the government. At one point on the second day Margesson was worried that the government would actually be defeated. This was probably reflected by the continual interruption of speakers in the opening half of the day's debate.[146] 'Chips' Channon refused to take a bet with Hamilton Kerr, the Member for Oldham, that a hundred of the government's supporters would rebel. Nevertheless he agreed a five pound bet with Mavis Tate that fifty would defy the Whips.[147] Chamberlain bullishly fought on. However, he appears to have made a crucial error when responding to Labour's calls for a division. In reply, Chamberlain made the division one of a motion of confidence which he believed his 'many friends' would assist him in defeating.[148] This was the final straw for many backbenchers. It suggested that Chamberlain was too concerned with party politics and personalities at a time when the gravity of the war situation demanded national unity. Duff Cooper rose to declare that 'in the three speeches that we have already heard from the front bench, there has not been the slightest admission that something is fundamentally wrong with the machinery of government, that there is something rotten in the State.'[149] As the House divided Channon and fellow loyalists shouted insults from the Aye lobby at the rebels filing out of the opposition lobby.[150] When the result was announced Chamberlain's normal majority of 281 had been reduced to 81. In the end forty-four Conservatives had cross-voted and sixty abstained. Although the majority of Conservative backbenchers had supported

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146 *HofC Debs*, vol. 360 cols. 1265-1296, 8 May 1940.

147 *Channon Diaries*, 8 May 1940, p. 246. Tate in the end withdrew the bet.

148 *HofC Debs*, vol. 360 col. 1266, 8 May 1940.

149 *HofC Debs*, vol. 360 col. 1301, 8 May 1940.

150 *Channon Diaries*, 8 May 1940, pp. 246-7.

Chamberlain the defection of over one hundred supporters was a very serious and humiliating reversal.

The following day news reached Britain that the German attack on western Europe had begun. Negotiations behind the scenes attempted to create a new coalition government. For a while Chamberlain appeared to harbour ideas of remaining in office, but when Labour rejected outright all offers of joining a coalition with him as leader he resigned. Charles Waterhouse, MP for South Leicester and a former Whip, admitted Chamberlain had no course but resignation: 'he cannot stand the strain of war against half the world, two opposition parties and a considerable section of his own.'[151] Halifax, who had widely been seen as the possible successor, refused the job and Churchill became Prime Minister, although Chamberlain retained the Party leadership. This he felt was 'essential, if Winston was to have whole-hearted support' as many Conservatives were wary of Churchill reflecting that perhaps they had been rather harsh on their leader.[152] Indeed, following Hitler's invasion of the Low Countries, the secretary to the 1922 committee, Hely-Hutchinson, told Rab Butler, 'you must not underestimate the great reaction which has been caused among Conservative Members, among whom you will find over three-quarters are ready to put Chamberlain back.'[153] Indeed the divisions and ill-feeling ran deep, as one of the rebels, Ronnie Tree, discovered. He had been due to be elected to the Royal Yacht Squadron the day after the Norway division, but was surprised to find himself blackballed. Apparently, it transpired that this was the 'childish revenge' of one of the Whips who had been heard to say 'I'll cook Tree's chances'.[154] Chamberlain must have been gratified with the reaction he received on his return to the Commons for the first time following his downfall: whilst Churchill was 'greeted with some cheers [on Chamberlain's entry] MPs lost their heads; they shouted; they cheered; they waved their order papers, and his reception was a regular ovation.'[155] To some this was disquieting and for about a month some observers were concerned about divisions in the new Churchill administration with some elements 'fighting war on two fronts, against Hitler and against

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151 Waterhouse diary, 9 May 1940, cited Roberts, *Eminent Churchillians*, p. 145.

152 Feiling, *Chamberlain*, p. 303.

153 Anthony Howard, *Rab: The Life of R.A. Butler*, (London: Cape, 1987), p. 94.

154 Tree, *Memoirs*, p. 114.

155 *Channon Diaries*, 13 May 1940, p. 252.

enemies much nearer home.'[156] Nevertheless, the Conservative grass-roots, acutely conscious of the need for national unity at such a grave time, fell in behind the new premier with pledges of loyalty.[157] This did not prevent some Associations from rebuking their Members if they had rebelled.[158] Chamberlain later filed amongst his papers a memorandum from the Party's general director to Douglas Hacking, the Party chairman which noted that

> there has been serious anxiety in the Party with regard to the change of government and the utterances of our political opponents before and since the change took place. While members of our organisation are willing and anxious to give support to the new Prime Minister and his government, there is great resentment at the criticism of Mr Chamberlain and the other members of the previous government who have accepted office in the new administration.[159]

Nevertheless by July, it appeared that Churchill, "the war leader" had won the confidence of both the Conservative Party and the nation. As one Chamberlainite backbencher noted with 'every week that passes, the more does one appreciate Winston's astonishing power and statesmanship. He keeps his team and the whole House together, in spirit as in fact.'[160]

VI

There was no inevitability about Chamberlain's fall from power. He was under no obligation constitutionally to resign after the Norway division for he had secured a majority vote. If the failed Norway expedition had been an isolated incident then it would have been unlikely to cause the fall of a government. Nevertheless many Conservatives perceived it as yet another example of indecision, weakness and ineffectiveness. From the outbreak of war Chamberlain appeared to act on the assumption that the National government would be able to continue running the country through a limited war, without major upheavals in the pre-war *status quo*. Major differences

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156 Selborne Mss: Richard Law to Wolmer, 22 June 1940, MS.Eng.hist.c.1015 f.53.

157 Northwich CA, exec. 23 May 1940, LOP1/1/4; Northern Area Union, joint meeting, 5 Oct. 1940, NRO3303/1.

158 Selborne Mss: *Aldershot Times*, 31 May 1940, MS.Eng.hist.c.1015f.52.

159 Chamberlain Mss: Memo. from General Director, Robert Topping, to Chairman (Central Office), 26 June 1940, p. 3, NC8/21/19.

160 Birchall Mss: Frank Fremantle to J.D. Birchall, 15 July 1940, Box 33. This view is not shared by Roberts, *Eminent Churchillians*, pp. 137-210. Roberts argues that Churchill's position was not secure amongst Conservatives until May 1941. The account often fails to distinguish between critics who were Conservatives and others who were coalition supporters. In addition it freely labels MPs as 'Chamberlainites' when a number certainly were not eg Makins.

with the unions on the questions of wages, as inflation increased, and the severe shortages of skilled labour were left unresolved for months. When combined with the disgruntlement concerning the war cabinet and its personnel, and the supposed unwillingness of the government to take the war to Germany, these ingredients provided a molotov cocktail only requiring its fuse to be lit. The discontent that had been simmering beneath the surface since October 1939 spontaneously combusted in May 1940. War no longer required party politics but necessitated national unity - a realisation that had dawned upon many of the younger MPs, especially those on active service. It would appear that Chamberlain had failed to recognise the flammability of the situation. In part this was due to his character with its combination of vanity and shyness. 'Ungregarious by nature,' wrote Duff Cooper, Chamberlain 'never frequented the smoking room of the House of Commons, where Stanley Baldwin and Winston Churchill were familiar figures, often in the centre of groups which included political opponents.'[161] This failure to mix freely with his own backbenchers had by 1940 created the belief amongst Conservative MPs that the leadership was no longer receptive to their criticisms. Chamberlain's own conservative conviction combined with his reserved nature tended to divorce him from many of the younger minds in the Party whom he was inclined to dismiss as a disappearing lot. All this must have emphasised the generation gap within the Party. Defeat also represented a failure in the whips system which left Chamberlain ignorant of the extent and intensity of dissatisfaction within the Party. Many of those who were to rebel over the Norway vote were the foreign policy sceptics of the peace years and their fellow-travellers - their sense of national duty under the pressure of war meant they could no longer keep their criticisms private. The significance of the Norway vote lies in it being the only twentieth century instance of a majority government being forced out of office by a House of Commons vote. But further it is an illustrative example of the temporary suspension of the shackles of loyalty. The younger MPs who rebelled felt unconstrained by normal obligations to the Party Whip. Such behaviour would have been inconceivable in peacetime. MPs on war service attended the Commons infrequently. This denied them the normal channels of communication

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161 Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, p. 188. James Stuart, at this time deputy whip, in his memoirs describes an incident in which a number of MPs were summoned to the Smoking Room to await the PM's visit and the awkwardness of the situation as the backbenchers sought to conduct a conversation on fly-fishing - Chamberlain's passion. Viscount Stuart, *Within the Fringe*, (London: Bodley Head, 1967), p. 83.

through which to express concerns over a period of time and lobby for a particular issue. If an MP was only attending for one special debate then a public registration of protest must have been perceived to be a most profitable exercise. At an extreme, there were some young Conservatives, like Richard Law and Ronald Cartland, who were so disillusioned with the state of the Party, that they were contemplating never returning to politics, which meant that the action of cross-voting or abstention and its expected censure carried no risks. Therefore whilst the Norway debate is significant because it brought down a government, it perhaps should be viewed as an untypical example of the breakdown of a party system, but one nevertheless which carried important lessons for the future Party leadership.

Conclusion

During the three years in which Neville Chamberlain was Prime Minister there was a very rapid deterioration in Anglo-German relations, to the extent that for the last eight months of this premiership Britain and Germany were formally at war. This study has been an analysis of how the Conservative Party responded to this crisis of relations with Germany and a consideration of the means which they advocated in order to answer the threat. Moreover, it has shown the extent to which conceptions of Party loyalty prevented an open discussion on the relative merits of Chamberlain's defence and foreign policies. Whilst this work has opened up new perspectives specific to the Conservative Party and appeasement, it has also provided a number of conclusions that one may apply more generally to the Party in the twentieth century.

Specifically regarding the period of Chamberlain's premiership, this study has provided a fuller and more nuanced appraisal of the Party's reactions to the crisis with Germany. Firstly, it is apparent that contemporary Conservatives perceived both diplomacy and rearmament as the tandem mechanisms by which to respond to Nazi Germany's increased belligerence. Germany was like a lintel being prevented from smashing down onto the foundations of the British Empire by the twin pillars of diplomacy and rearmament. Throughout 1938 and 1939 these pillars increasingly buckled under the weight of Nazi belligerence and aggression. If one of these pillars failed then the remaining one was expected to shoulder the entire burden. A strong defence programme would enable the government to negotiate with the dictators from a position of strength, whilst if that negotiation failed, an adequately prepared defence scheme would repel the initial aerial assult and ultimately ensure military victory.

Secondly, attitudes in the Party towards Germany were varied and fluid over time. At the beginning of 1937 there was a certain level of pro-German sentiment amongst Conservatives, which was expressed with varying levels of exuberance. However, extreme philo-Germanic sentiments were limited to a minority of the Party. When war was declared in September 1939 few of the 'fraternisers' denied the need to resist Hitler by force - except for a few 'defeatists' who saw the war as being a "Jewish plot" aimed at securing world domination. Indeed many who during the past six years had been favourably

disposed to Hitler's regime sought active service, some, such as Arnold Wilson, ultimately losing their lives. More generally Conservatives, although sympathetic to German desires to regain 'great power' status, nevertheless recognised the potential threat Hitler posed to the British Empire. It was not uncommon for individual Conservatives, such as Cuthbert Headlam (chairman of the Northern Area) and Colonel Fitzgerald (Chippenham Association), to return from visits to Germany impressed with elements of the regime, but nevertheless anxious about the challenge it presented to Britain. In Headlam's case the necessary response was diplomacy coupled with increased defence spending and, for Fitzgerald, the adoption of national service.

Thirdly, Conservative attitudes, from all sections of the Party, underwent transformation during the period of 1937 to 1940. Each international crisis produced a hardening of attitudes towards the Nazi regime. In March 1938 following the *Anschluss*, few Conservatives, from the grass-roots upwards, were willing to guarantee Czechoslovakia and consider a commitment to the continent, yet twelve months later (after Hitler's seizure of Prague) the Party welcomed, even demanded, the Polish guarantee. This transformation occurred to such an extent that in the aftermath of Prague, in the mind of many members, the German nation was indistinguishable from the Nazi tyranny and beyond the pale. Yet in May 1937 there were few Conservatives who did not possess the mentality for appeasement: an attitude of mind which preferred the methods of negotiation and conciliation as means of anticipating and avoiding conflict. However, as the international situation deteriorated during 1938, it was the means of implementation that caused debate and friction within the Party.

Fourthly, however, to suggest simply that Conservatives were either appeasers or anti-appeasers is too crude an analysis. It was apparent that complex attitudes and assumptions existed amongst Party members. There was considerable inconsistency and variance in actual Conservative attitudes towards defence and foreign policy. It has been crucial to distinguish between public façades and private observations. Only then does it become apparent that there was a far larger section of the Party uneasy with the position *vis-à-vis* Germany. These doubts first emerged during September 1938 and gained increased currency during the autumn of that year as the Nazi regime revealed its potential for brutality with *Kristallnacht*. The implication can be shown from this that had it not been for the constraints of public loyalty then Chamberlain might have been persuaded before March 1939 to pursue a

different line in foreign policy. Indeed it can be argued that this belief in maintaining an image of public unanimity prevented a fuller debate about the wisdom of conciliating Germany.

Fifthly, it is also apparent that concern was very acute in the aftermath of Munich about the position of Britain's defence, especially against an aerial assault. This growth of concern was reflected in the demands from the constituencies, supported by increasing numbers of backbenchers, for the adoption of national service. This national service debate was not being conducted on the lines of acquiring a million-man field force, but rather from the perceived necessity of preparing the population to resist and over-come the feared knock-out blow. Indeed by the end of 1938 the Party's concerns about defence were proving more divisive and potentially damaging than those concerning foreign policy - purely because this debate was being conducted with greater publicity.

Finally, during the years of peace there was no real doubt about Chamberlain's suitability as leader. Foreign and defence policies, though increasingly dominating peoples attentions, were not the only areas of government policy. In domestic policies, the Chamberlain administration's achievements were considered sound. Certainly by 1939 Central Office (or more specifically the CRD) had detected a change in public opinion that desired a greater emphasis on domestic reforms - an assessment confirmed by independent analysis. This trend suggested that if the government expected to be returned convincingly at the next election then a revised domestic policy was required. It would only be in the atmosphere of war, when all aspects of life and governmental policy were subjugated to the war effort, that doubts about Chamberlain's leadership abilities arose. For those Conservatives who had been foreign policy sceptics during the years of peace, Chamberlain's weaknesses were already apparent and the lingering suspicion that Chamberlain was only half-hearted about his desire to pursue the war was not easily dispelled. But more importantly, in view of the Norway debate, it was those middle-ranking backbench MPs, some of whom had expressed private reservations about peacetime policy, who were to feel increasingly despondent about the prosecution of the war. The apparent inability of the government to adopt a positive and constructive approach to various areas of the war effort, especially the economy and agriculture, when combined with the reverses of Finland and Norway in early 1940, created an atmosphere of despondency. This was compounded by Chamberlain's personality and the personnel problems of his cabinet.

Although one speaker suggested during the Norway debate that these problems, if true, would have been reflected in his constituency postbags and they were not, many Conservatives were not so convinced.[1] Public opinion polls suggested also that civilians had been shocked by the Norway reversals and were increasingly critical of the government's war prosecution and of Neville Chamberlain in particular. A number of Conservatives such as J.P.L. Thomas, Victor Cazalet and Brendan Bracken, only gave their support to the government reluctantly, whilst crucially the younger MPs on leave from active service (who had been experiencing first-hand the equipment shortages and bureaucratic red-tape) felt able to disregard the Party's conventions on loyalty and free either to abstain or cross-vote.

More generally, whilst this study has yielded a new perspective on the era of appeasement it has also proved important in enabling an understanding of how some mechanisms of the Party operated. The debates about foreign and defence policies have highlighted issues concerning the relationship between MPs and their grass-roots support. The chairman of an Association played a pivotal role acting as an intermediary between the MP and the rest of the Association. Providing the chairman and Member respected each other then the chairman acted as a form of buffer zone. This role was especially important if the Member was ever considered to have acted disloyally towards the leadership. The chairman could be crucial in restraining the more vigorous censors. During the late 1930s it would appear that the relationship between a Member and his Association was undergoing a transformation. Disquiet was being expressed by both parties concerning the financial relationship between the two, and about the extent to which an MP felt able to assert the right for independence of action. The role Associations played in censoring the activities of MPs who criticised the government's foreign and defence policies reveals the importance of the Association's role in the Party's structure. Loyalty at the grass-roots tends to be at its most exuberant, and Association executives appear to have assumed their role as second-line whips. The backlash against the Munich rebels in the constituencies revealed the grass-roots belief that a public façade of loyalty was crucial. It suggested that the grass-roots were aware of the uneasiness within the Party over post-Munich foreign policy and that they considered the situation best quelled by demonstrations of Party unity.

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[1] *HofC Debs*, vol. 360 col. 1317 (Courthorpe), 8 May 1940.

These demonstrations of loyalty, whilst providing the Party with a useful electoral tool, perhaps have also restricted the Party's development. Certainly, the media have always been keen to seize upon the slightest sign of dissension and portray it in terms often out of proportion. At the same time the need to restrain criticisms prevents open debate on policy, and can cause the build up of resentment and accusations that the leadership has lost touch with its followers. Indeed Chamberlain's fall from power at the hands of disgruntled backbenchers was not dissimilar to Margaret Thatcher's in November 1990 - although it must be noted that from the late 1960s a formal mechanism existed for removing an unwanted leader. Similar observations can be made about displays of grass-roots affection for a toppled leader in the months immediatly afterwards. Images of loyalty often mean that the Conservative Party is presented as a block of unwaivering followers of the leader. Indeed, Chamberlain's critics within the Party were apt to make such accusations.[2] Yet the claims are to a certain extent unfounded and result from a fundamental misconception of how the Conservative Party operated. The Party was undemocratic, and still remains so. Policy was decided from above by the leadership, but this does not mean that the opinions and attitudes of the followers were ignored. Naturally the leadership have had to adopt policies that are acceptable to the membership, and therefore to this extent the advocacy of particular issues by groups of followers can enable their acceptance as Party policy. The Party have their own perception of Conservative 'democracy' - a view that persists into the 1990s whereby the parliamentary Party is responsible for the election of a leader. Constructive criticisms made privately, through the Party structure, have enabled members to communicate their concerns with the leadership. It is recognised that this private debate is more productive than public expositions of doubt which usually provoke retribution and hostility from the whips office and local Associations. Further it is recognised that the image of unity is a powerful electoral tool.

To summarise: this work has removed the vacuum that exists in the current literature of appeasement, by providing the first analysis of how the *whole* of the Conservative Party, from the members of Associations in the localities

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[2] *Nicolson Diaries*, 11 Apr. 1939 (Harold Macmillan), p. 397; *Off the Record: W.P. Crozier: Political Interviews, 1933-1944*, ed. A.J.P. Taylor, (London: Macmillan, 1973), p. 156, interview with Bracken, 29 Mar. 1940.

through to those serving as MPs and cabinet ministers, responded to the German threat during Chamberlain's premiership. Whilst it is specifically a study of the Conservative Party between the years of 1937 and 1940 it provides conclusions that can be applied more generally and offers a perspective previously obscured by the Party's carefully constructed wall of silence.

Appendix: The Means by which Abstention was Determined

This thesis is only concerned with the voting behaviour of Conservative MPs, and therefore the abstention lists do not include the names of those National Liberal and National Labour MPs who were normally government supporters, nor of Peers.

The House of Commons Debates (or *Hansard*) are not very helpful when attempting to determine whether an MP abstained from a particular vote since it only lists those who went through the Lobbies either for the 'Ayes' or 'Noes'. By checking the names of those who voted on a motion off against a master list of MPs one is able to establish a listing of those who were *absent* from a vote. I considered six 'key' votes that occurred during 1938: 22 February, vote of censure following the Eden resignation; 4 April, no confidence vote on foreign policy; 2 May, the two divisions concerning the Anglo-Italian agreement; 6 October, votes on the Munich agreement; 2 November, approval for the implementation of the Anglo-Italian agreement; and 19 December, vote of confidence on foreign policy. Looking at the numbers in the government lobbies for these votes, always in the 300s, it was likely that a three-line whip was being applied. Based on this assumption it is taken that each absentee is a potential abstainer; however the numbers involved, for example, 75 for the 22 February vote, suggested that was not the case. Certainly some of the absentees were missing legitimately, as was Ralph Assheton with the 19 December vote of confidence which may be explained by the fact that he was in the West Indies as part of a Royal Commission. Alternatively, a Member may have been absent under the pairing system. Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine the pairing partnerships because they were destroyed when the House of Commons was bombed during World War Two. Some MPs made life easy by either speaking in the actual debate or the House on the particular day they were absent from a vote, therefore in view of the three-line Whip position the assumption must be that they abstained. However there are only a few instances of this, since Conservative MPs are never overly keen to advertise disloyalty to the leadership, and also since there are few opportunities to speak in debates. In view of this it was decided to scrutinise the regularity with which these absent MPs voted in the 5 divisions before and after each of the 'key' votes. From this one was able instantly to disregard a

number of names, such as J.C.M. Guy, MP for Edinburgh Central, who failed to vote in any of the divisions sampled.

There are three categories of 'abstention' used in this paper, each with a lesser degree of certainty. Those one is most confident about are the 'certains': invariably these are the usual names associated with foreign policy dissent in the late 1930s but also include those seen by lobby journalists not to have voted as well as the obvious abstentions. By this latter phrase one means those who are obviously in the Chamber at the time of the division when there are two simultaneous votes, yet they only register their vote for one of the divisions or may have spoken but not registered a vote. The second category is the 'probables': these are the MPs who were absent on a 'key' vote yet in the before and after votes have a high voting attendance and who generally over the whole sample are in attendance for the majority of divisions. Further attempts have been made to validate these abstentions by references to the press, debates in the Chamber, diaries and other contemporary sources. The third category is the 'possibles': these are MPs who are absent for a 'key' vote, but with a nevertheless good average voting attendance, but one which leaves a greater element of doubt that cannot be removed by other sources. These listed names are not a definitive analysis, some may not have actually abstained - those named are suggestions that fit according to the criteria defined above.

Appendix Two: The Divisions Sampled

Division Number	*Date*	*Votes (Ayes/Noes)*	*Subject*
99	*14/2/1938*	*205/127*	*Import Duties*
100	*15/2/1938*	*258/137*	*Unemployment Insurance*
101	*16/2/1938*	*150/98 (Free Vote)*	*Unmarried Womens Pensions*
102	*17/2/1938*	*263/140*	*Exemption of Business*
103	*17/2/1938*	*169/116*	*Housing*
104	*18/2/1938*	*147/126*	*Bakehouses Bill (Labour amendment)*
105	***22/2/1938***	***168/330***	***Eden Resignation Censure (Labour moved)***
106	*23/2/1938*	*234/124*	*Exemption of Business*
107	*23/2/1938*	*140/201*	*Cinema Film Bill*
108	*24/2/1938*	*245/122*	*Exemption of Business*
109	*28/2/1938*	*101/194*	*Supply Committee*
110	*28/2/1928*	*226/99*	*Adjournement*

Appendix Two: The Divisions Sampled

Division Number	*Date*	*Vote (Ayes/Noes)*	*Subject*
158	*31/3/1938*	*254/124*	*Exemption of Business*
159	*31/3/1938*	*122/196*	*Coal Bill*
160	*31/3/1938*	*179/119*	*Coal Bill*
161	*1/4/1938*	*61/121*	*Army and Air Forces Annual Bill*
162	*1/4/1938*	*108/33*	*Post Office (Sites) Bill*
163	***4/4/1938***	***152/359***	***Censure of Foreign Policy of Government***
164	*5/4/1938*	*256/111*	*Exemption of Business*
165	*6/4/1938*	*250/126*	*Exemption of Business*
166	*6/4/1938*	*141/227*	*Caledonian Power Bill*
167	*7/4/1938*	*248/125*	*Exemption of Business*
168	*7/4/1938*	*126/209*	*Sea Fish Industry Bill*

Appendix Two: The Divisions Sampled

Division Number	*Date*	*Vote (Ayes/Noes)*	*Subject*
326	*25/7/1938*	*281/14*	*Supply Committee - Class VI of Civil Estimates*
327	*26/7/1938*	*243/132*	*Exemption of Business*
328	*26/7/1938*	*275/128*	*Supply - Foreign Affairs*
329	*27/7/1938*	*224/118*	*Summer Adjournment*
330	*6/10/1938*	*313/150*	*Adjournment*
331	***6/10/1938***	***369/150***	***Munich vote to reject Labour amendment***
332	***6/10/1938***	***366/144***	***Munich vote approving Government's policy***
333	*2/11/1938*	*345/144*	*Anglo-Italian Treaty Ratification*
334	*3/11/1938*	*130/355*	*Air-raid Defence*
1	*15/11/1938*	*151/341*	*Debate on Address - Amendment*

Appendix Two: The Divisions Sampled

2	*16/11/1938*	*114/89*	*Abolition of Death Penalty*
3	*17/11/1938*	*130/326*	*Debate on Address - Amendment*
4	*18/11/1938*	*131/157*	*Workmen's Compensation Bill*

Appendix Two: The Divisions Sampled

Division Number	*Date*	*Vote (Ayes/Noes)*	*Subject*
19	*14/12/1938*	*122/219*	*Land Nationalisation*
20	*14/12/1938*	*203/123*	*Land Nationalisation*
21	*14/12/1938*	*164/116*	*Land Nationalisation*
22	*14/12/1938*	*123/135*	*Safety in Mines*
23	*14/12/1938*	*135/117*	*Safety in Mines*
24	***19/12/1938***	***143/340***	***Vote of Censure on Foreign Affairs***
25	*20/12/1938*	*270/9*	*National Service*
26	*31/1/1939*	*258/133*	*Adjournement Debate on foreign affairs*
27	*1/2/1939*	*142/202*	*Public Assistance*
28	*1/2/1939*	*203/107*	*Condition of Agriculture*
29	*2/2/1939*	*204/103*	*High Court of Justice*

Appendix Three: The Voting Record of Possible Conservative Abstainers from the Eden Resignation Vote, 21 February 1938

Division	99	100	101	102	103	104	**105**	106	107	108	109	110
Vyvyan Adams	V	V	FV	V	V		**VA**	V				
CERTAIN												
Katharine Atholl		V	F		V		——					
Brendan Bracken	V		F	V			——				V	V
Winston Churchill			F	V			——	V		V	V	V
Robert Cranborne			F	V			——					
Hubert Duggan	V	V	FV	V			——	V	V	V		V
Anthony Eden			F	V			——	A	A	A	A	A
Paul Emrys-Evans	V	V	FV	V			——	V	V			V
Sidney Herbert			F				——					
Dudley Joel			F				——					
Roger Keyes		V	F				——					
Harold Macmillan		V	F				——					
Edward Spears		V	FV				——		V	V	V	
J.PL. Thomas		V	F	V			——		V		V	V
Ronald Tree		V	F	V	V		——	V	V			V
Jack Macnamara		V	FV	V			——	V			V	V
Mark Patrick		V	FV	V			——					
Robert Cary	V		F		V	V	——	V	V	V	V	V
Hamilton Kerr		V	FV	V	V		——	V	V	V	V	V
R. Pilkington		V	FV	V			——	V		V		
R.H. Turton			F									
R.G. Briscoe	V	V	F	V		V	——	V	V	V		V
J.W. Hills			F									
Leonard Ropner	V	V	F	V	V	V	——	V	V		V	V
PROBABLES												
J.J. Withers			F	V			——	V	V	V		
Castlereagh	V	V	F				——	V	V	V		
Gerald Palmer			F			V	——	V		V	V	V
H.R. Cayzer	V		F	V		V	——	V				
S. Storey	V	V	F	V	V	V	——	V	V	V	V	V
A. Russell	V	V	FV			V	——	V	V	V	V	V

Appendix Three: The Voting Record of Possible Conservative Abstainers from the Eden Resignation Vote, 21 February 1938

Division	99	100	101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109	110
POSSIBLES												
Alfred Law		V	F	V		V	——					
J. Shute		V	F	V			——			V		
T. Sinclair	V	V	F	V	V	V	——					
T. Hunter	V	V	F	V	V		——				V	V
L. Kimball	V	V	FV	V								
S.A. Maxwell		V	F	V	V		——			V		

Codes:

V	Voted
F	Free Vote - attendence not compulsory
-----	Abscence from Key Vote
A	Known abscence
VA	Voted Against Government

Appendix Four: The Voting of Behaviour of Possible Abstainers from the 4 April 1938 vote of confidence

Division	158	159	160	161	162	**163**	164	165	166	167	168
CERTAIN											
Vyvyan Adams	V	V	V			—				V	V
Katharine Atholl						—		V	V	V	V
Winston Churchill						—		V			
Sidney Herbert						—					
Duncan Sandys	V					—				V	V
J.P.L. Thomas						—			V	V	V
Robert Boothby	V					—					
PROBABLES											
Robert Perkins	V	V	V	V	V	—				V	
J.J. Withers	V	V	V	V	V	—	V	V		V	
POSSIBLES											
A. Chorlton	V	V	V			—					V

Appendix Five: The Voting Record of Possible Abstainers from the Munich Divisions, 6 October 1938

Division	326	327	328	329	330	**331**	**332**	333	334	1	2	3	4
CERTAIN													
Vyvyan Adams			V	V	VA	—	—	----	V		F		
Derrick Gunston	V			V		—	—	V	V	V	F	V	V
Anthony Crossley	V	V	V	V	V	—	—	V		V	F		V
Brendan Bracken						—	—	----			F		
Ronald Cartland	V	V	V	V		—	—	----	V	V	F	V	
Winston Churchill		V			VA	—	—	----			F		
Duff Cooper				V		—	—	V	V	V	F	V	
Robert Cranborne						—	—	----	V	V	F	V	
Hubert Duggan	V	V	V	V		—	—	----	V	V	F	V	
Anthony Eden		V				—	—	----	V	V	F	V	
Paul Emrys-Evans	V	V	V	V		—	—	----	V	V	F		
Sidney Herbert	V	V	V			—	—	V	V	V	F		
Dudley Joel						—	—	----	V	V	F	V	V
Roger Keyes				V	V	—	—	V	V	V	F		
Richard Law	V		V			—	—	----		V	F		V
Wolmer						—	—	V	V	V	F	V	
Harold Macmillan	V		V		VA	—	—	----		V	F		
Duncan Sandys		V		V		—	—	----			F		
Edward Spears	V	V	V		VA	—	—	----		V	F		
J.P.L Thomas	V	V		V		—	—	----	V	V	F		
Leo Amery			V		V	—	—	V	V	V	F	V	
Robert Boothby					V	**V**	—	----	V	V	F		
John Gretton	V	V	V	V	V	**V**	—	V	V	V	FV	V	
Ernest Makins	V	V	V	V	V	**V**	—	V	V	V	F	V	V
Victor Raikes	V	V	V	V	V	**V**	—	V	V	V	FV	V	
John Stourton					V	**V**	—	----	V	V	F	V	V
Hamilton Kerr	V	V	V	V		—	—	V	V	V	F	V	V

Appendix Five: The Voting Record of Possible Abstainers from the Munich Divisions, 6 October 1938

Division	326	327	328	329	330	**331**	**332**	333	334	1	2	3	4
PROBABLES													
Leonard Ropner	V	V	V			—	—	—	V	V	FV	V	
B Neven-Spence	V	V	V	V		—	—	V	V	V	FV		
Alfred Law	V	V	V	V		—	—	V	V	V	F	V	
Lord Apsley	V		V			—	—	V	V	V	F	V	
A. Duckworth	V	V		V	V	—	—	V	V	V	F	V	V
Charles Ponsonby	V	V	V			—	—	V		V	F	V	V
Arnold Wilson		V	V			—	—	V	V	V	F	V	
POSSIBLES													
Thomas Somerset						—	—	V		V	F		
W.F. Higgs						—	—	V		V	F	V	
W.H. Davison						—	—	V	V	V	F	V	
C.G. Gibson						—	—	V	V	V	F	V	V
J. Lee-Jones			V	V		—	—	V	V	V	F		
T. Sinclair						—	—	—	V	V	F	V	V

Appendix Six: The Voting Record of Possible Conservative Abstainers from the 19 December 1938 vote of confidence

Division	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
CERTAIN											
Vyvyan Adams	V	V	V	V	V	—	V		V	V	FV
Brendan Bracken						—				V	F
Ronald Cartland						—	V			V	FV
Winston Churchill						—					F
Duff Cooper						—					FV
Robert Cranborne						—					F
Anthony Crossley	V	V	V	V	V	—		V	V		F
Hubert Duggan	V	V	V	V	V	—		V			FV
Dudley Joel	V	V	V	V	V	—		V		V	F
Roger Keyes						—		V			F
Richard Law	V	V				—			V	V	FV
O. Locker-Lampson					V	—	V	V			F
Harold Macmillan						—			V		FV
Edward Spears	V		V	V	V	—			V		FV
J.P.L. Thomas						—					F
Ronald Tree						—		V			FV
PROBABLES											
A.C. Reed	V	V		V	V	—					F
Leonard Ropner	V	V		V	V	—	V		V	V	FV
B.H. Neven-Spence			V	V	V	—	V	V	V	V	FV
POSSIBLES											
J.J. Stourton	V					—		V	V	V	FV

Appendix Seven: Age Profiles of Parliamentary Party and Foreign Policy Sceptics

AGE IN 1939	WHOLE PARTY[1]	EDEN REBELS	MUNICH REBELS
21-29	6	0	0
30-39	67	11	12
40-49	102	11	11
50-59	84	3	7
60-69	76	3	6
70+	24	2	4
	359	30	40

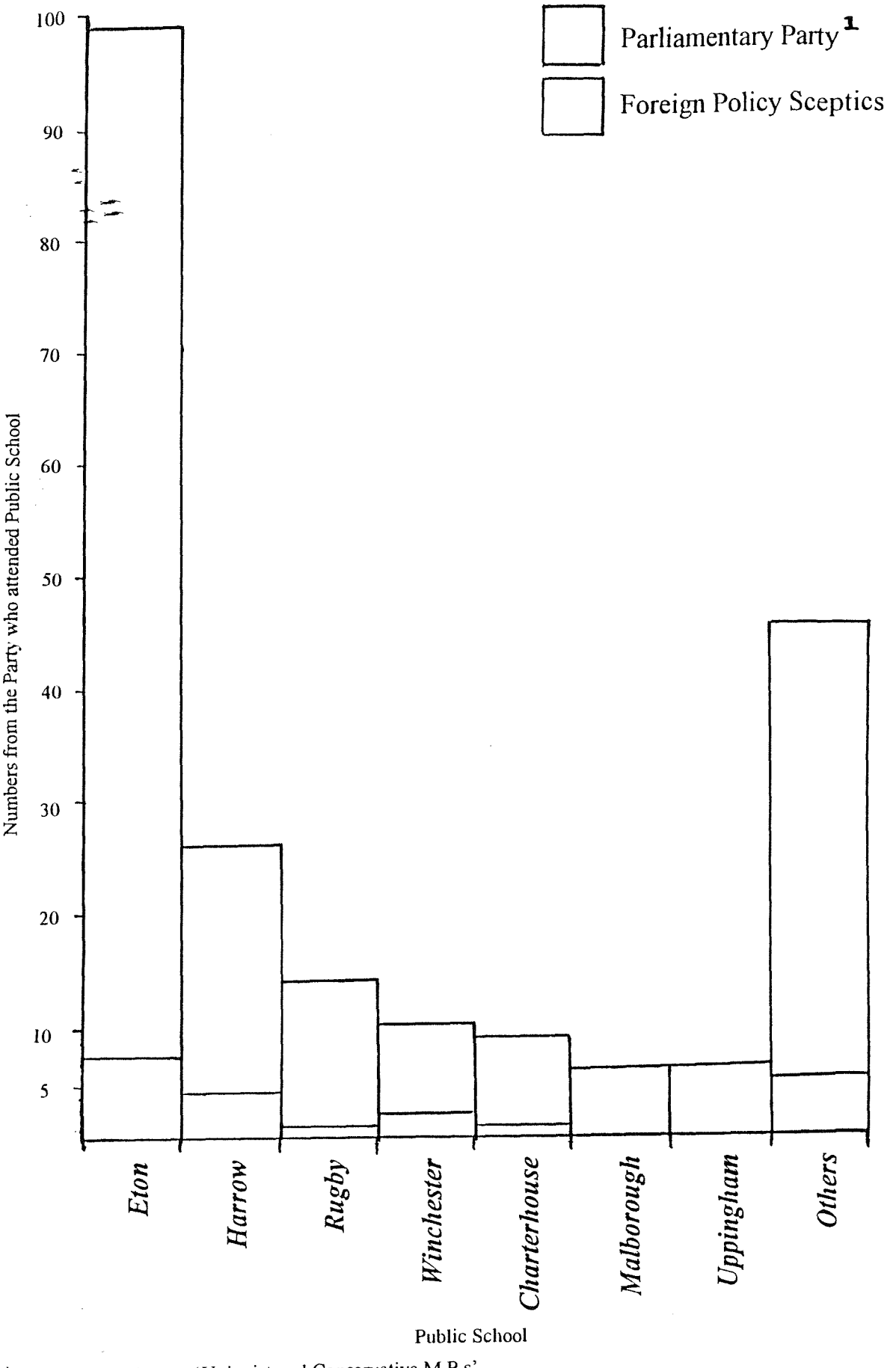
Appendix Eight: The Percentage Geographical Distribution of Constituencies Held by the Parliamentary Party and Foreign Policy Sceptics

Region[2]	Sceptics	Party
London	12%	9%
Southern England	27%	34%
Midlands	30%	16%
Northern England	23%	24%
Scotland	8%	9%
Others	0%	8%

[1] From J.M. McEwen, 'Unionist and Conservative M.P.s', (London University: PhD, 1959)

[2] The regions are as defined in British Political Facts, ed. D. Butler, (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 145.

Appendix Nine: The Educational Background of the Parliamentary Party and Foreign Policy Sceptics



[1] From J.M. McEwen, 'Unionist and Conservative M.P.s'

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R.A. Butler Mss	Trinity College, Cambridge
Caldecote [Thomas Inskip] Mss	Churchill College, Cambridge
Neville Chamberlain Mss	Birmingham University Library
Harry Crookshank Mss	Bodleian Library, Oxford
Walter Elliot Mss	National Library of Scotland
David Margesson Mss	Churchill College, Cambridge
Edward Winterton Mss	Bodleian Library, Oxford

Conservative MPs, candidates and Peers:

Vyvyan Adams Mss	BLPES
Altrincham [Edward Grigg] Mss	Bodleian Library, Oxford
Ashley [Mount-Temple] Mss	Southampton University
Lord & Lady Astor Mss	Reading University Library
Duke & Duchess of Atholl Mss	Blair Atholl Castle
T.P.H. Beamish Mss	Churchill College, Cambridge
John Birchall Mss	Courtesy of Birchall family
Robert Bower Mss	Churchill College, Cambridge
Victor Cazalet Mss	Courtesy Sir Edward Cazalet
Winston Churchill Mss	M. Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: V: Companion:1936-1939,* (London: Heinemann, 1982)
Cilcennin [J.P.L. Thomas] Mss	Dyfed Record Office, Carmarthen
Paul Emrys-Evans Mss	British Library
Ralph Glyn Mss	Berkshire Record Office
Hailes [Patrick Buchan-Hepburn] Mss	Churchill College, Cambridge
Cuthbert Headlam Mss	Durham Record Office
Arthur Heneage Mss	Lincolnshire Archives
Ernest Makins Mss	Courtesy of Lord Sherfield
Edward Ruggles-Brise Mss	Courtesy of Sir John Ruggles-Brise
2nd Earl of Selborne Mss	Bodleian Library, Oxford
3rd Earl of Selborne [Lord Wolmer] Mss	Bodleian Library, Oxford
Donald Somervell Mss	Bodleian Library, Oxford
Euan Wallace Mss	Bodleian Library, Oxford

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Conservative Party Officials:

J.R. Almond Mss	Lancashire Record Office

Party Organisation:

National:

Conservative Party Archive (CPA)	Bodleian Library, Oxford
Scottish Conservative Archive (SCA)	National Library of Scotland

Regional: (Bodleian Library, Oxford unless stated otherwise)

Cornwall Provincial Area	
Eastern Scotland	National Library of Scotland
Essex & Middlesex Provincial Area	
Northern Area	Northumberland Record Office
North Western Area	
South Eastern Provincial Area	
Wessex	
Western	
Western Scotland	National Library of Scotland

Local Associations: (by regional area)

Metropolitan (London) Area:

Clapham (Wandsworth)	BLPES
Kennington (Lambeth)	BLPES
London, City of	Westminster Public Library
St George's Hanover	Westminster Public Library

Wessex Area:

Aldershot	Hampshire Record Office
Newbury	Berkshire Record Office

North Hampshire	Bodleian Library, Oxford
North Wiltshire (Chippenham)	Wiltshire Record Office
Salisbury	Wiltshire Record Office
South Oxfordshire	Oxfordshire Archives
Winchester	Hampshire Record Office

West Midlands Area:

Bewdley	Worcester Record Office, St Helens Branch
Birmingham, City of	Birmingham Central Library
Edgbaston	Birmingham Central Library
Ladywood	Birmingham Central Library
Stafford	Staffordshire Record Office
Stone	Staffordshire Record Office
Warwick and Leamington	Warwickshire Record Office
Worcester	Worcester Record Office

Wales:

Cardiff Central	National Library of Wales
Cardiff South	National Library of Wales
Llandaff and Barry	National Library of Wales
Monmouth	National Library of Wales
Pembrokeshire	Pembroke Record Office
Wrexham	National Library of Wales

East Midlands Area:

Bosworth	Leicestershire Record Office
Derby	Derbyshire Record Office
Harborough	Leicestershire Record Office
Horncastle	Lincoln Archives
Rushcliffe	Nottinghamshire Record Office
South Nottingham	Nottinghamshire Record Office
West Derbyshire	Derbyshire Record Office

North Western Area:

Accrington	John Rylands Library, University of Manchester
Blackpool	Lancashire Record Office
Clitheroe	Lancashire Record Office
Darwen	Lancashire Record Office
Fylde (as part of Almond Mss)	Lancashire Record Office

Middleton, Prestwich & Chadderton	Lancashire Record Office
Northwich	Chester Record Office
Waterloo	Lancashire Record Office
Essex & Middlesex Area:	
Chelmsford	Essex Record Office
Ealing	Greater London Record Office
West Essex (Epping)	Essex Record Office
South Eastern Area:	
Guildford	Surrey Record Office
Maidstone	Kent Record Office
Gravesend	Kent Record Office
Reigate	Surrey Record Office
Northern Area:	
Stockton & Thornaby	Durham Record Office
Tynemouth	Tyne & Wear Archives
West Newcastle	Tyne & Wear Archives
Yorkshire Area:	
Barkston Ash	West Yorks Archives: Leeds
Bradford Nat. Lib. Assoc.	West Yorks Archives: Bradford
Bradford, City of	West Yorks Archives: Bradford
Eccleshall	Sheffield Archives
Hallam	Sheffield Archives
Leeds, City of	West Yorks Archives: Leeds
Sheffield, City of	Sheffield Archives
Sowerby	Calderdale District Archives
West Leeds	West Yorks Archives: Leeds
York	York Archives
Western Area:	
Bristol	Bristol Record Office
North Cornwall	Cornwall Record Office
Penryn & Falmouth	Cornwall Record Office
South East Cornwall	Cornwall Record Office
West Bristol	Bristol Record Office

Eastern Area:

Ipswich	Suffolk Record Office
Bury St Edmunds (branch)	Suffolk Record Office
Norwich	Norfolk Record Office

Universities:

Oxford University	Bodleian Library, Oxford

Scotland:

Ayr Burghs	Ayr Conservative Association
Bute & North Ayrshire	Ayr Conservative Association
Edinburgh North	Edinburgh City Archives
Glasgow, City of	National Library of Scotland
Inverness	Inverness Conservative Association
Kinross & West Perth	North Tayside Conservative Association
Stirling	Stirling Conservative Association

Conservative Agent's Organisations: (Bodleian Library, Oxford unless stated otherwise)

National Association of Conservative & Unionist Women Organisers

National Society of Conservative Agents	Westminster Public Library
Metropolitan Conservative Agents Association	BLPES

Wessex Area Agents Society

Wales & Monmouthshire Conservative & Unionist Women's Organisers

West Midlands Area Conservative & Unionist Women's Organisers

East Midlands Agents Association	Derby Record Office
Scottish Agents Association	Ayr Conservative Association

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