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TITLE OF THESIS...British Ambassadors in Berlin, 1920-1939:..
The Diplomat as a Source of Information for..
the Formulation of British Policy Toward Germany..
UNIVERSITY.....Carleton University.....
DEGREE.....Master..... YEAR GRANTED ..1969.....

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PERMANENT ADDRESS:

206 Belmont St.
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.....

DATED...29 May... 1969

Fairbairn, Garry L

BRITISH AMBASSADORS IN BERLIN, 1920--1939:
THE DIPLOMAT AS A SOURCE OF INFORMATION FOR
THE FORMULATION OF BRITISH POLICY TOWARD GERMANY

GARRY LAWRENCE FAIRBAIRN

M. A. THESIS (HISTORY 599)

CARLETON UNIVERSITY

MAY, 1969

ABSTRACT

The British ambassadors in Berlin between the wars, diplomats still in the nineteenth century tradition but faced with new problems, generally handled their difficult task well, with the exception of Sir Neville Henderson. The ambassadors of the 1920's and 1930's displayed a general continuity of interpretation and advice, expressing consistent support for a policy of appeasing German desires. These diplomats saw German society as unstable and given to outbreaks of extremism, but in the long run amenable to conciliatory treatment, since the governing elite was predominantly moderate and responsible. This moderate element was, in the eyes of the ambassadors, trustworthy and could be strengthened by timely British gestures and concessions. The advent of Hitler altered the picture only in that the threat of extremist elements became more immediate. Nazi ambitions were increasingly seen as legitimate, as one ambassador succeeded another, and Hitler was portrayed as a moderate within the Third Reich. This coincided with a continuing decline in the ambassadors' relations with German leaders and officials and in the quality of their sources of information. Nevertheless, the British representatives also described the risks of an appeasement policy and the need for caution and the development of British strength while executing this policy. On the whole, the despatches of the ambassadors suggest that any divergence of views between them and the British government has been exaggerated.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The status of an ambassador in international law may be complicated, but his general role may be stated in simple terms:¹

The first commandment of a diplomatist is faithfully to interpret the views of his own government to the government to which he is accredited; and the second is like unto it: namely, to explain no less accurately the views and standpoint of the government of the country in which he is stationed to the government of his own country.

The implications of this role are demanding; it requires good relations with foreign leaders and officials, reliable sources of information, and the ability to analyze the problems and policies of the foreign government. Each of these in turn creates other tasks.

Although the duties of an ambassador are complex in any period, the years between the two World Wars presented certain special problems for diplomats. The first arose from the great increase in popular concern with diplomacy and the widespread distrust of professional diplomats, both being results of the Great War, which had brought home to the ordinary man the price he would pay for diplomatic failures. Such popular feelings restricted diplomatic flexibility; traditional methods such as alliances, threats of war and expedient agreements that violated popular conceptions of morality were viewed by the British public with disfavour. A more immediate manifestation of this

¹
N. Henderson, Failure of a Mission: Berlin 1937-1939 (Toronto: Musson Book Co. Ltd., 1940), viii.

general opinion was the increased direct involvement of political leaders in the conduct of foreign relations. In the early twenties, Lloyd George initiated a series of numerous summit conferences while in the following decade cabinet ministers frequently visited foreign heads of state. 'Amateurs' were given diplomatic functions -- Lord D'Abernon as ambassador to Berlin, Sir Horace Wilson, head of the Treasury, as Neville Chamberlain's unofficial emissary, and others. This involvement on the part of political leaders was greatly facilitated by technological progress; transportation was rapid and communication could be instantaneous. At the same time as the ambassador's advice was limited by the restricted range of policy alternatives, he found his daily actions under closer and more immediate scrutiny by his superiors. An unfortunate phrase uttered to a foreign leader in the morning could² produce a reprimand from London that afternoon. Nevertheless, improved communication facilities did not imply improved relations between the Cabinet, Foreign Office and diplomats abroad. The relations between cabinet minister and an ambassador could be closer than between the ambassador and the Foreign Office.

Other problems flowed from the Great War and the forces it had loosed on the world. New or newly prominent ideologies

²

Vide infra, 40.

had to be understood and their effect on foreign policy assessed. Sociology, economics and psychology, three rapidly-developing disciplines, acquired increased importance while more emphasis was also placed on military and strategic considerations. An ambassador who retained a narrow concentration on politics would soon find himself out of touch with modern society.

In addition to the great changes in attitudes, diplomatic methods, and the range of foreign policy considerations, the international system itself changed, with the creation of the League of Nations. This organization, though possessing no independent material power, added a new dimension and a new set of rules to diplomacy. Conflicts and disputes were brought before the League council or the Hague Tribunal, if for no other reason than to satisfy European public opinion.

All these developments influenced the way in which ambassadors reported events and the advice that they gave. The subject of this study is the British ambassadors in Berlin during this period and the manner in which they met the above difficulties in the performance of their duties as representatives, observers, analysts, and advisers to the British government.

The ambassadors in Berlin were faced with the most serious long-range problem for British foreign policy in the inter-war years. Germany -- defeated, disarmed, and beset by economic

troubles, -- nevertheless remained the greatest single potential threat to British security. The key to this apparent paradox was that German recovery was inevitable and the Allies could not forever maintain the system of treaty provisions which imposed restrictions on Germany. When the German economy had recovered, Germany would be in a position to dominate the economies of the small east European states. The German government, driven by public opinion, would seek to reassert German pride and to support its foreign policy by rebuilding the armed forces beyond the Versailles limits. Territorial objectives would include union with Austria, acquisition of the Sudetenland, regaining Danzig and obtaining a land link across the Polish Corridor to East Prussia. Taken by themselves, these developments would mean diplomatic conflicts and some risk of sanctions; in connection with German resentment over the treaty of Versailles, they implied a serious danger of European war. Germany had to be allowed to regain its position as a great power, but in such a manner that international tension was minimized and Germany was not led to attempt to dominate Europe.

British policy toward Germany would naturally vary with the methods used by German governments to advance their policies and on the extent of German ambitions. British leaders had to keep a continuous watch on German foreign policy and to anticipate, by observing German domestic affairs, changes in that policy. For guidance in these matters, the British government

naturally looked to its official representatives in Berlin. Their reporting and counsel provided a basis for British policy.

What, then, was the nature of this analysis and advice? There have been few works specifically on British diplomats and their despatches,³ but many writers have stated that the ambassadors from 1933 to 1937 sought to 'warn' their government about German intentions. In particular, the Foreign Office and Foreign Service have been portrayed as being almost unanimous in their vigorous opposition to Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement. A recent study of the appeasers asserts that: "Diplomats challenged the appeasers from the first weeks of the Hitler regime. They denied that the Germans would make excellent friends, or allies. . . . Rumbold saw everything".⁴ A former member of the Foreign Office has stated that:⁵

. . . the Foreign Office was a victim, not a culprit. It was the servant and executant of policy, not the master. In the general allocation of blame for the succession of catastrophes which descended on Britain and the world between 1931 and 1940, the direct responsibility of the Foreign Office must be regarded as limited. It was to the lasting honour of many officials in it . . . that their warnings were incessant and outspoken, and that the advice which they gave -- unpalatable as it seemed to their political masters -- was as correct as it was courageous. It was the most grievous part of the nightmare . . . that they knew, again and again, that their warnings were unheeded and their advice disregarded.

This view, which has been assumed by most writers on the period,

³ Vide infra, Bibliographical Note.

⁴ M. Gilbert and R. Gott, The Appeasers (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963), 26.

⁵ J. Connell, The 'Office': The Story of the British Foreign Office 1919-1951 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1958), 121-122.

6
was reaffirmed in 1968:

The thirties was a period of uncertainty about the proper role of the diplomatist. . . . Old-guard diplomatists resented what they termed the 'ignorance' of politicians and grew more assertive in their claims to authority just at the time when these claims were being questioned. Politicians resented what they believed to be the attempts of civil servants to 'make' policy rather than advise them. . . . This tangled web of personal relationships, . . . of disagreement about the responsibilities of politicians and experts, lies behind the British approach to Munich.

Another assertion is that the position of "Head of the Civil Service" weakened Foreign Office authority in the thirties while the holders of that position prevented warnings from ambassadors from reaching the Cabinet in an effective form.⁷

Virtually the sole voice of dissent from this view of a dramatic confrontation between diplomats and appeasers has come from the provocative author of The Origins of the Second World War. He emphasizes the support given Chamberlain's policy by Neville Henderson in the Berlin embassy and Eric Phipps, then in Paris, and states that "Some members of the Foreign Office disliked Chamberlain's policy. But . . . none of them could suggest an alternative".⁸

6

K. Robbins, Munich 1938 (London: Cassell, 1968), 283-284.

7

F. T. A. Ashton-Gwatkin, The British Foreign Service (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1950), 27.

8

A. J. P. Taylor, The Origins of the Second World War (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1963), 198.

Despite the existence of such assumptions, there have been few works focusing on the ambassadors or their advice. A new examination of the contents of their despatches may lead to another interpretation that would clarify the motives and rationale behind British policy toward Germany. In any case, it is not enough to make general statements in passing to the effect that the ambassadors 'warned' the government about Germany. The important questions concern the nature of these warnings: did their authors also express optimism about the prospects of removing the danger by some form of appeasement? If so, what was regarded as the limit of British concessions or the minimum of German desires? Did the ambassadors in fact present any alternative to appeasement?

Another question concerns the degree and role of continuity in the reports from Berlin. A memorandum of 7 April, 1934, by the Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs asserted that "while there is continuity in the German spirit, there is an equal continuity on the part of our representatives in warning us against it".⁹

⁹
 "Memorandum by Sir R. Vansittart on the future of Germany", 7 April, 1934, in E. L. Woodward and R. Butler (ed.), Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939; 1st series, vol. 1-15 (1919-21); 1st series, vol. 1 (1925-26); 2nd series, vol. 1-9 (1929-34); 3rd series, vol. 1-10 (1938-39); abbreviated DBFP (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1946-1966); 2nd series, vol. 6, Appendix III.

British foreign policy has evolved over many years, with one government's policy being the culmination of decisions made by several preceding governments. It is in this context that the reports of the ambassadors before 1933 acquire significance in the formulation of British policy toward Nazi Germany. For however much British leaders saw Hitler as a Nazi, they also saw him as a German, influenced by the same ambitions and attitudes that influenced previous leaders. In viewing Hitler in this light, they relied to a great extent on reports of previous ambassadors for an interpretation of the values of the German society -- in effect, for a description of 'the German character'. Furthermore, any interpretation of German society held by all the ambassadors would acquire added credibility from that very fact. To take one possible example, if, contrary to the above quotation, the British representatives in Berlin displayed consistency in advocating reliance on German trustworthiness, the British government would be more inclined to base their policy on that assumption.

In short, the views of the ambassadors must be examined in relation to one another and with the purpose of discovering the cumulative impact of any continuity in interpretation.

During the inter-war period there were five British ambassadors in Berlin; Lord D'Abernon from 1920 to 1926, Sir Ronald Lindsay, 1926 to 1928, Sir Horace Rumbold to 1933, Sir Eric Phipps to 1937, and Sir Neville Henderson from 1937 to the outbreak of war. No British documents have been published for

the short time in which Sir Ronald Lindsay was in Berlin and he must¹⁰ must thus remain outside the scope of this study. Each of the remaining four observed and analyzed the German scene in his own style, with his own set of preconceptions. Thus, before an examination of the reports of the ambassadors, their backgrounds and personalities will be discussed. The next stage will be a study of their descriptions of the basic characteristics of German society, followed by analysis of their reporting on the Weimar Republic and Third Reich. Finally, the way in which each ambassador applied his overall interpretation to a specific issue will further clarify his views.

¹⁰

Vide infra, appendix, for brief notes on Sir Ronald Lindsay.

II. THE AMBASSADORS

Of the four ambassadors, Lord D'Abernon was unique in being of noble birth and in having had no previous experience in the Foreign Office or Foreign Service. The younger son of an eleventh baronet, he went from Eton into the Coldstream Guards as Edgar Vincent. While serving as a lieutenant in the Guards from 1877 to 1882, he helped write A Handbook of Modern Greek. In 1880 he became private secretary to the Commissioner for Eastern Roumelia and the following year worked as assistant to H. M. Commissioner for the evacuation of territory ceded to Greece by Turkey. D'Abernon's seventeen years of involvement in Near East finance began in 1882, when he resigned his commission in the Guards. In that year D'Abernon, at the age of twenty-five, was appointed to the Council of the Ottoman Public Debt, in Constantinople, as the representative for Britain, Belgium and Holland; by 1883 he was President of the Council. The next six years, however, were spent in Cairo, as Financial Adviser to the Egyptian government.

From 1889 to 1897 D'Abernon, as Governor of the Imperial Ottoman Bank, reached a peak of success which he was not to equal again until his mission to Berlin. His great personal influence in Constantinople made him "an important Englishman

at a time when Englishmen were immensely important".¹ Through bold financial speculations he acquired a considerable fortune and his matrimonial success was no less -- in 1890 he married Lady Helen Duncombe, "by far the most beautiful of all the Edwardian beauties".² However, the Ottoman Bank did not share in this good fortune, suffering serious losses in speculative investments. D'Abernon felt obliged to resign in 1897 and returned to Britain with a shadow over his career. His departure from Turkey was probably not otherwise distasteful to him,³ as he was sickened by the massacres of 1896 in Constantinople.

From 1899 until his defeat in 1906 D'Abernon sat as the Unionist M. P. for Exeter. An attempt at election as a Liberal in Colchester in 1910 proved unsuccessful. During this period he became "one of the most note-worthy authorities on horse-breeding of our time", with several successful racehorses.⁴ In

¹ H. Nicolson (D'Abernon's obituary), Spectator, no. 167, 7 Nov., 1941. And vide infra,

² Connell, op. cit., 74. Connell asserts that even in the 1950's old gentlemen in the St. James's Club, hearing other women praised, would "rumble with drowsy, irritable nostalgia, 'Ah, my boy, you never saw Helen D'Abernon'".

³ Nicolson, supra. The massacres had followed a temporary seizure of the Ottoman Bank building by agitators with hand-grenades. D'Abernon evaded capture by fleeing over the rooftops, then supervised the negotiations which resulted in the agitators being given safe passage to his yacht, where they were housed until they could leave the country.

⁴ Marquess of Londonderry, Wings of Destiny (London: Macmillan, 1943), 36.

1912 D'Abernon became Chairman of the Dominions Royal Commission, which enquired at length into the means of improving imperial trade and communications. After a period of inactivity due to the outbreak of war, the commission completed its report in 1917. In the meantime D'Abernon had been elevated to a baron and became chairman of the Central Control Board (Liquor Traffic), displaying great skill in getting the diverse elements represented on the board to co-operate. D'Abernon's belief in the harmful effects, to society and the individual, of excessive use of liquor and his advocacy of higher taxes on liquor undoubtedly won Lloyd George's approval.

From the Central Control Board (Liquor Traffic) Lord D'Abernon went to the British embassy in Berlin as the first post-war ambassador. Before becoming fully involved in his new duties, however, he went on a special mission to Warsaw in July, 1920, with General Weygand, to assist the Poles in their defence against the approaching Red Army. D'Abernon found himself with little to do, as General Weygand's talents were the type needed and the regular British representative, Sir Horace Rumbold, handled other duties capably. The interlude in Warsaw was nevertheless significant⁵ in that D'Abernon was very impressed with the Bolshevik threat to British interests and western civilisation.

⁵
Vide infra, 53-54.

Despite Lord D'Abernon's apparent personal ability, in 1920 he had no experience in the Foreign Service and was 63 years of age. Nor had the Central Control Board (Liquor Traffic) been a major recruiting-ground for ambassadors. The reasons for D'Abernon's appointment shed light on the duties expected of him. House leader Bonar Law explained in the Commons that the government wanted a representative who possessed experience and knowledge related to current economic and financial problems.⁶ The appointment was to be "of a temporary character". Foreign Secretary Curzon gave the same reasons on 25 June, 1920, when he offered the post to D'Abernon, saying that the case for a special appointment was "overwhelming".⁷ Lloyd George was closely involved in the selection. When D'Abernon informed Curzon that he could not carry on a discussion in German, Curzon said he would have to check with the Prime Minister to be sure that this did not invalidate the offer. Later Curzon telephoned to say that Lloyd George "did not consider this absence of German sufficient⁸ detriment to outweigh other special qualifications". Apparently

⁶ Bonar Law, statement, 1 July, 1920, Great Britain. House of Commons, Parl. Deb., 5th series, vol. CXXXI, col. 663-664.

⁷ Lord D'Abernon, An Ambassador of Peace: Pages from the Diary of Viscount D'Abernon (Berlin, 1920-1926), 3 vols. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1929-1930); abbreviated Diary; I, 53.

⁸ Ibid. 53-54.

financial expertise was at a high premium in 1920. The French ambassador appointed at the same time, Charles Laurent, had⁹ also had experience administering the Ottoman Public Debt, while his successor Bruno de Margerie had some experience at a post in Constantinople.¹⁰ Perhaps some persons in the two governments were disposed to compare Germany of 1920 to Turkey of 1890 and to hope that the men who had exercised influence in Turkey through financial means could do the same with Germans.

However, the professional diplomats in the British Foreign Office strenuously opposed the appointment. Hardinge, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State, was not consulted on the appointment, "probably because my absolutely certain¹¹ criticism was foreseen". Sir Robert Vansittart, then private secretary to Curzon, was asked by the Foreign Secretary what the reaction of the Foreign Service would be. Vansittart replied that the appointment of an 'outsider' would have a

⁹
E. Stern-Rubarth, Three Men Tried...: Austen Chamberlain, Stresemann, Briand and their Fight for a New Europe (London: Duckworth, 1939), 35.

¹⁰
D'Abernon, Diary, II, 143n.

¹¹
Hardinge of Penhurst, Old Diplomacy (London: John Murray, 1947), 249. In retrospect, Hardinge considered that D'Abernon had done "sufficiently well" to justify his appointment.

"disastrous" effect on morale.¹² In his memoirs Vansittart
gave an additional reason for his opposition, saying that he:¹³

. . . questioned the intrusion because the French had lost money when he was President of the Ottoman Bank, and their press challenged his probity in terms which made harmony at a key-point improbable.

Vansittart nevertheless admitted that D'Abernon knew more than
anyone in the Foreign Service about currency and economics.¹⁴

Curzon's personal views on the selection are obscure. He and D'Abernon had been friends since their days at Eton fifty
years before¹⁵ and according to Vansittart Curzon was influenced
By "the opportunity to rehabilitate an old friend".¹⁶ Hardinge,
however, believed that "certain pressure" had to be exerted on
Curzon before he would agree to the appointment.¹⁷ Another
account asserts that the Foreign Secretary "strongly resisted"
the choice of D'Abernon "because he disliked him as a man and

¹² Vansittart, speech, Great Britain. House of Lords, Parl. Deb. 1944-1945, vol. CXXXIV, col. 295.

¹³ Vansittart, The Mist Procession (London: Hutchinson, 1958), 253.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ D'Abernon, diary, entry of 10 March, 1925, in Diary, III, 148. See also H. Nicolson, Curzon: The Last Phase 1919-1925, 2nd ed. (London: Constable, 1934), 23; and Vincent to Curzon, letter of 11 Aug., 1898, in Lord Ronaldshay, The Life of Lord Curzon (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1928), 309-310.

¹⁶ Vansittart, Mist Procession, 253.

¹⁷ Hardinge, op. cit., 74.

because he dissapproved of some phases of his career".¹⁸ There is no evidence that Curzon disliked D'Abernon, but the Foreign Secretary may well have considered him unsuitable for such a position. If so, the appointment is all the more remarkable. 'Outsiders' are seldom appointed ambassadors, especially against the combined opposition of the Foreign Secretary, the Permanent Under-Secretary, and the former's private secretary.

D'Abernon may have been aided by his friendships with members of the British elite such as the Earl of Balfour, then Lord President of the Council and a former Foreign Secretary, with whom D'Abernon visited and golfed. Lady D'Abernon was well enough acquainted with the royal family to lunch privately with them¹⁹ early in 1921.

Nevertheless, Lloyd George was probably the decisive factor behind D'Abernon's appointment. He valued D'Abernon's knowledge enough to ignore his deficiency in German, while no other person was in a position to override Foreign Office opposition and outside criticism. Such action would be consistent with Lloyd George's distrust of the regular officials and his preference for less orthodox channels. For D'Abernon, the

¹⁸

Connell, op. cit., 74.

¹⁹

Helen D'Abernon, diary, entry of 10 March, 1921, in Red Cross and Berlin Embassy, 1915-1926: Extracts from the Diaries of Viscountess D'Abernon (London: John Murray, 1946), 90.

circumstances of his appointment produced both benefits and difficulties. The support of the Prime Minister would strengthen the ambassador's position and tend to increase the influence of his advice; but the initial hostility of the Foreign Office would have to be overcome. Fortunately, D'Abernon soon won the respect of his superiors.

* * * *

Born at the British embassy in St. Petersburg, where his father was ambassador, Sir Horace Rumbold spent his early years in several foreign countries. After his education at Eton, he became Honorary Attaché at the Hague in 1888, serving under his father. Three years later, after promotion to Attaché, Rumbold wrote the Foreign Service examination, passing first of thirteen candidates. In the next six years he worked at Cairo and Teheran, quickly acquiring fluency in Arabic and Persian and becoming a second secretary. In 1897 Rumbold went to his father's embassy in Vienna, then to Cairo in 1900 after his father's retirement. Promoted to first secretary in 1904, Rumbold next spent two years in Madrid, with a brief interlude for marriage in 1905.

Rumbold rose rapidly in the next few years, acting as chargé d'affaires in Munich in 1908 and being sent to Tokyo as councillor in 1909. While at Tokyo, he acted as chargé for three periods totalling ten months and added Japanese to his list of languages. In November, 1909, he went to Berlin and

was chargé for most of the crucial month of July, 1914.

Recalled on the outbreak of war, Rumbold went to the Foreign Office, where he headed the Prisoners and Aliens Department. As Minister to Switzerland from September, 1916, to September, 1919, Rumbold presumably had some contact with abortive peace negotiations. After a short period in Warsaw, he went to Constantinople as High Commissioner and Ambassador²⁰ in November, 1920.

Rumbold's first ambassadorial post proved to be highly successful. While at Constantinople, he was second British plenipotentiary, after Curzon, at the Lausanne Conference, from November, 1922, to February, 1923. At the second session of the conference, from April to July, he was chief British delegate and signed the Treaty of Lausanne on behalf of the British Empire. The major event of his years in Constantinople, however, occurred during the Chanak crisis of 1922. On 29 September the British cabinet instructed the commander of British occupation forces, General Harington, and Rumbold to

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The selection of Rumbold for this post was at least partly due to D'Abernon and Neville Henderson, who met on their way to London. Henderson, himself about to go to Constantinople, said that Rumbold would be the best choice to head the mission. D'Abernon, who had met Rumbold in Warsaw, agreed, made notes on his career, and promised to speak to Lloyd George and Curzon in his favour. -- N. Henderson, Water Under the Bridges (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1945), abbreviated Water, 98-99.

order Turkish forces to withdraw from their positions near the British lines; failing such a withdrawal, Harington was to open fire on the Turks. Both the British commander and Rumbold decided to refrain from issuing this ultimatum and were subsequently²¹ thanked by their government.

After a four-year ambassadorship in Madrid, Rumbold was sent to Berlin in August, 1928, at the age of 59. Of the five inter-war ambassadors, he was the only one with any previous experience in Germany.

* * * *

Even more than Rumbold, "Sir Eric Phipps est né diplomate".²² His great-grandfather Lord Mulgrave was Foreign Secretary from 1805 to 1806, while both his grand-uncle the Marquis of Normanby and his father had been ambassadors in Paris. While accompanying his parents, Phipps was educated in Dresden, Vienna and Paris, the only one of the five ambassadors not to have been to a British public school. After a year at King's College, Cambridge, Phipps went to the University of Paris for a Bachelier ès Lettres.²³ A colleague later wrote of Phipps that:

This education gave a foreign, and especially a French, tinge to his character and tastes, which showed itself in the profound knowledge which he acquired of French politics and culture, and in the sympathy which he felt for France throughout his life.

²¹ Nicolson, Curzon, 275.

²² 'Verax', "Sir Eric Phipps," Revue des Deux Mondes, vol. 46, 1 July, 1938, 199-203.

²³ O. G. Sargent, (obituary of Phipps) in L. G. W. Legg and E. T. Williams (ed.), The Dictionary of National Biography 1941-1950 (London: Oxford U. P., 1959); abbreviated DNB.

Passing the Foreign Service examination in 1899, Phipps began his diplomatic career as attaché in Paris. During his six years in Paris he was promoted to third secretary and served as assistant secretary to the Brussels Sugar Conference. After twenty months in Constantinople and three years in Rome, he returned to Paris for three years as private secretary to the ambassador. In 1906 he had taken a French wife, daughter of the Comte de Louvencourt, only to become a widower in two years. During his second stay in Paris, Phipps married again, this time to the daughter of an English painter there.

In April, 1912, Phipps was promoted to first secretary and transferred to Petrograd, where he served for one year. After three years in Madrid and three at Paris again, he attained the rank of counsellor and transferred to the Foreign Office. For ^{the} next year he worked with the delegation to the Paris Peace Conference and in the Foreign Office. In 1920 he went to Brussels, then two years later returned to Paris. During the following six-year period Phipps was promoted to the rank of minister. From Paris, he moved to Vienna for five years.

On 2 August, 1933, Sir Eric Phipps at the age of 58 received his first ambassadorial appointment, to Berlin. With no previous experience in Germany, but with a total of eighteen years spent in Paris, Phipps entered the newly-established Third Reich.

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Unlike Rumbold or Phipps, Sir Nevile Henderson was not marked for the diplomatic service from birth and in fact entered it only reluctantly. His father, a director of the Bank of England, had died when his son was 13 and Neville's career was decided for him by his mother, whom he described as "a wonderful and masterful woman if ever there was one".²⁴ Henderson initially intended to join the army and he did write and pass the entrance examination to Sandhurst. He would have gone overseas to fight in the Boer War, but a report that his older brother was dying in South Africa caused the family to dissuade him from enlisting.²⁵

Thus, after going to Eton and spending four years on the continent learning French and German, Henderson wrote the Foreign Service examination in 1905 and began work at St. Petersburg in the same year. From then until 1940, he never spent more than four months of any one year in Britain, usually much less.²⁶ From Russia Henderson moved to Tokyo, where Rumbold was counsellor, in 1909 and quickly learnt Japanese. Three years later, Henderson was back in St. Petersburg, where he became second secretary in 1913, with Phipps as the first secretary.

²⁴ Henderson, Water, 11.

²⁵ Ibid., 18.

²⁶ Henderson, Failure, x.

In March, 1914, he was sent to Rome, but remained there only a few months. After the first of what were to be four unsuccessful applications for permission to join the army, the higher authorities informed him that since he was apparently not needed in Rome, he would go to Nish in September.²⁷ After a year with the Serbs and four months at the Foreign Office, Henderson went to Paris in January, 1916, again serving with Phipps. At Paris, Henderson rose to first secretary in 1918 and became chargé d'affaires for a short period in 1920. From Paris Henderson moved to Constantinople, where he worked under Sir Horace Rumbold.²⁸ There Henderson acquired greater responsibilities, being promoted to counsellor in 1922 and serving as Acting High Commissioner for lengthy periods. In 1924 he became minister to Cairo, where he was involved in a delicate situation when the British government and its High Commissioner Lord Allenby found themselves in sharp disagreements.

After another year in Paris, Henderson became ambassador to Belgrade in November, 1929, where he formed a close relation-

²⁷ During an interlude in Britain in 1914, Henderson helped smuggle revolvers into Ulster. -- Henderson, Water, 67-68.

²⁸ Henderson had a great admiration for Rumbold, whom he referred to as "that sterling and typical Britisher . . . ideally suited for Berlin".-- Ibid., 52. Rumbold's action in disregarding instructions in the Chanak crisis may have led Henderson to exaggerate the independence and discretionary powers of an ambassador.

ship with the dictator, King Alexander, and his family.²⁹ After Alexander's assassination in October, 1935, Henderson went to Buenos Aires, to represent Britain in both Argentina and Paraguay.

When, on 29 April, 1937, he became ambassador in Berlin at the age of 55, Henderson had behind him a creditable diplomatic career that had covered five continents. However, ³⁰Like D'Abernon, Lindsay and Phipps, he had never worked in Germany.

Like D'Abernon, Henderson was an ambassador with a special personal mission, to conciliate Germany, and this mission was supported by the Prime Minister.³¹ However, Henderson was not selected for this reason. In view of the allegation that

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The years with the Yugoslavs seem to have been influential in the development of several important attitudes of Henderson's. He felt that no one in London, from the king to the Foreign Office, had any appreciation of the value, past services, or legitimate grievances of the Yugoslavs.-- Henderson, Water, 170-171. British press treatment of the Yugoslavs made him "infuriated" and he believed Britain should have vigorously opposed what he saw as a French attempt to gain a monopoly of influence in Yugoslavia.-- ibid., 186. Although these experiences are not by themselves sufficient to explain Henderson's later departures from instructions, hatred of 'the press' or distrust of France, they would nevertheless tend strongly to promote such feelings.

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Throughout his career Henderson had had a "horror" of working in Berlin.-- Henderson, Water, 59.

³¹

Vide infra, 37-38.

the British government decided in 1937 to replace Phipps with someone more sympathetic to the Nazi regime and chose Henderson for this reason.³² the circumstances of this appointment should be examined.

Henderson was selected through normal channels, by the Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir Robert Vansittart. Vansittart, after reviewing the otherwise equal records of the two men under consideration, minuted that "Sir Neville has done his stint in South America. He shall have his reward".³³ Later he wrote that "Neville Henderson, our Minister at Belgrade, made such a hit with the dictator by his skill in shooting that he was ultimately picked for Berlin".³⁴ Henderson's success with King Alexander was also given by Foreign Secretary Eden as a reason.³⁵ In short, they felt Henderson was competent, with one success to his credit,³⁶ and deserved to 'come in from the cold' to a major post. Vansittart is also reported to have feared that a 'politician'

³²

Connell, op. cit., 247.

³³

I. Colvin, None So Blind (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., 1965), 146.

³⁴

Vansittart, op. cit., 360.

³⁵

Earl of Avon, The Eden Memoirs, (vol. I, Facing the Dictators (London: Cassell, 1962), 503-504.

³⁶

In 1935 the Foreign Office had reportedly told the previous Foreign Secretary that Henderson was the 'coming young man' in the Service.-- Viscount Templewood, Nine Troubled Years (London: Collins, 1954), 299.

directly connected to the Prime Minister would be appointed
 instead of a career diplomat.³⁷ Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin
 approved of Henderson, not because of any of the latter's views,
 but because he felt no one better was available in the whole
 service than Henderson, "who was a man and a good shot".³⁸
 Apparently Henderson, who affected the mannerisms of the old-
 style 'English gentleman', had created a favourable impression
 in some circles. Whatever may be said about the wisdom of the
 selection, it is clear that Henderson was chosen on his record
 and not because he seemed ideal for the role of apostle of
 appeasement.

* * * *

A survey of the careers of the ambassadors reveals
 several interesting facts. One, already commented on, is that
 only Rumbold had seen any previous service in Germany. On the
 other hand, all ambassadors had worked in Turkey and four had
 other experience in the Near East. Virtually all of D'Abernon's
 career was in Turkey, from 1881 to 1883 and 1889 to 1897, with
 the interval being spent in Egypt. Lindsay was at Constantinople

37

This reason was given by Sir Lewis Namier in private
 conversation: Jones to Flexner, letter of 12 June, 1946, in
 T. Jones, A Diary With Letters (London: Oxford University
 Press, 1954), 543. If true, then a comparison with D'Abernon
 produces a highly ironic contrast: the 'amateur', chosen despite
 Foreign Office criticism, became a success and won the respect
 of the professionals, while Henderson's viewpoint proved to be
 identical with that of the Prime Minister and he received reprim-
 ands from the Foreign Office.

38

Jones, diary, entry of 15 Feb., 1937, in op. cit., 314.

from 1924 to 1926 and at Cairo from 1913 to 1919. Rumbold spent four years in Constantinople at a time of severe crisis and a total of ten years in Cairo. Henderson spent four years each at Constantinople and Cairo. Phipps, however, spent only twenty months at Constantinople.

It is easier to note this pattern than to find a reason for it. When Germany was still subject to Allied controls, as in D'Abernon's time, experience in forms of indirect rule might be considered an advantage; but by the time D'Abernon left, this could not be true. One effect of the periods spent in the Near East would be that the ambassadors would have an increased consciousness of vital British interests outside Western Europe and of threats from Russia to these interests. Such experience in a traditional area of Anglo-French rivalry might also have led the ambassadors to consider France as a potential threat to British interests rather than as a dependable ally.³⁹

The careers of the ambassadors also display a consistency in being the type of career that could be expected to produce a 'traditional', upper-middle class diplomat similar to those of the nineteenth century.⁴⁰ D'Abernon may have been an 'amateur'

³⁹ Vide infra, 51, for Henderson's reactions to his Chanak experience.

⁴⁰ The absence of information on the subjects studied by the ambassadors at school and on their religious beliefs prevents a more detailed comparison of their backgrounds.

diplomat, but he began his career in 1890 and had a close view of traditional diplomacy in the Near East. Rumbold and Phipps began their careers in the nineteenth century and Henderson followed in 1905. All three were professionals, with little outside experience. Thus the approaches of the ambassadors to diplomacy had been established before the First World War transformed the attitudes of Europeans toward foreign affairs.

The environments that produced the ambassadors reinforced their traditional outlooks. All were of the upper classes and all save Phipps attended Eton. This type of background raised certain difficulties for the ambassadors in understanding the new forces sweeping Europe, such as National Socialism or Communism, and failed to provide them with an outlook that went beyond narrow political considerations to economic, military and sociological factors. D'Abernon, of course, was an exception in his natural concern with finance. In other cases, these issues were treated as secondary, either sketched in general terms or left for the attention of subordinates.

* * * *

A resumé of each ambassador's career still leaves much unsaid about the ambassador. For an understanding of the motives and reasoning behind their reports, one must examine the general personalities of the ambassadors, their instinctive reactions to such factors as Communism, French policy and Nazi treatment of minorities. Moreover, the prominence each assigned to moral

considerations also plays a part in his recommendations on foreign policy.

* * * *

Lord D'Abernon had a distinguished appearance, aristocratic and self-assured, not easily ruffled. He "had a fine and cultivated flair for living. His manners were gay, easy and self-confident".⁴¹ Another observer wrote that "Lord D'Abernon possessed all the impulse, virtuosity, glamour and impatience of a Renaissance patrician".⁴² Accustomed to a high status and the company of the elite, D'Abernon expressed his views forcefully. He could be extremely disconcerting; he spoke with "almost incredible frankness", without a trace of diplomatic finesse, and asked questions point-blank.⁴³ However, his very frankness made him "clearly impossible to distrust".⁴⁴

No mention of D'Abernon's personality can omit the effect he had on those with whom he dealt. He acquired great influence with the German government by the force of his personality and sound advice. A French writer has provided a somewhat exaggerated

⁴¹

Connell, op. cit., 74.

⁴²

H. Nicolson, King George the Fifth: His Life and Reign (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1952), 408.

⁴³

Stern-Rubarth, op. cit., 36.

⁴⁴

Ibid.

LORD D'ABERNON

account of D'Abernon's influence, but one which shows the powers
⁴⁵attributed to him:

Derrière les volets souvent clos de son palais à peu près désert, il tissait seul, dans la silence, la trame de l'immense conspiration contre les traités. Il flattait les chefs de partis et les capitaines d'industrie, . . . Il les manoeuvrait comme les émiris et les pachas que son infernale habileté avait enrôlés jadis sous le pavillon britannique. Ses méthodes n'avaient pas changés. C'étaient celles d'un agent secret mitigé d'homme d'affaires . . . Il agissait presque sans paraître, mais était informé de tout, avait les émissaires dans tous les milieux . . .

When a British journalist asked in the corridors of the Reichstag who was the Chancellor at the moment, he was answered, "De facto,
⁴⁶ou en titre? De facto, c'est votre ambassadeur". A German cabinet minister described an occasion in 1927 when Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann said to the Cabinet, "It is strange that you gentlemen should have so few ideas now that Lord D'Abernon has left". The minister summed up the cabinet's reaction:
⁴⁷"We thought it unkind," he said, "but true".

Whether because of their friendship, D'Abernon's advice, or the knowledge that D'Abernon advocated British conciliation of Germany, Stresemann valued the British ambassador highly. In September, 1924, Stresemann wrote to the British government,

⁴⁵
 G. Suarez, Briand: Sa Vie -- Son Oeuvre; tome IV, L'Artisan de la Paix 1918-1923 (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1952), 130.

⁴⁶
Ibid., 131.

⁴⁷
 Nicolson, (D'Abernon's obituary) 445.

without D'Abernon's knowledge, to ask if he could be allowed
 or induced to extend his stay.⁴⁸ At a dinner with Austen
 Chamberlain in December, 1925, the German Foreign Minister
 requested his British counterpart to extend D'Abernon's mission.⁴⁹
 Another instance of the respect accorded D'Abernon by the German
 government occurred on 10 November, 1923. As Lady D'Abernon
 described it,⁵⁰

The extent to which the Auswartiges Amt turn to
 D'Abernon in all their difficulties was somewhat inconven-
 iently emphasized last night, owing to Herr Excellenz Maltzan
 forcing an entrance at 2 a. m. He insisted on the night
 porter waking D'Abernon in order that his advice might be
 taken about an attempted revolution in Munich.

* * * *

The personalities of Rumbold and Phipps left little
 impact on their despatches. Sir Horace Rumbold was a profess-
 ional diplomat by character and upbringing; detached and
 composed, he described events in Germany factually, seeking to
 view the most revolutionary acts with objectivity and to
 balance unpleasant aspects against worthwhile achievements. In

⁴⁸
 Stresemann to Lord Parmoor, letter of 15 Sept., 1924, in
 E. Sutton (ed.), Gustav Stresemann: His Diaries, Letters and
 Papers (London: Macmillan, 1935-1940), abbreviated Stresemann,
 I, 451.

⁴⁹
 Stresemann, diary, entry of December, 1925, in Stresemann,
 III, 238.

⁵⁰
 Helen D'Abernon, diary, entry of 10 Nov., 1923, in op. cit.,
 117; see also D'Abernon, diary, entry of 10 Nov., 1923, in
Diary, II, 269-271.

March, 1933,⁵¹ he described the 'Nazification' of the German government:

The revolution has been accomplished on the whole with leniency, and though there is no doubt that many innocent men have been murdered, incarcerated, or maltreated, . . . the transition might have been much more sanguinary. Most revolutions are accompanied by a reign of terror . . .

Rumbold's air of calm could be misinterpreted, as it was by Curzon, who once described him as "not alert enough for Berlin".⁵² Rumbold's detached attitude also showed itself in a tendency to snobbishness. He spoke of Nazi leaders as "seemingly recruited from a bad class".⁵³ His essentially conservative outlook was apparent in the high value he placed on maintaining order in society, for which he considered the army to be a guarantor.⁵⁴

* * * *

Sir Eric Phipps, although just as much a professional as Rumbold, was not as stolid or reserved. He has been described as "short and thickset and perhaps Latin rather than English

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Rumbold to Simon, 21 March, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 4, 268.

⁵²

Vansittart, op. cit., 274.

⁵³

Rumbold to Simon, 30 June, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 229.

⁵⁴

See, among others, Rumbold to Simon, 7 April, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 23, and ibid., 14 June, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 212.

in appearance, a man of great charm and wit, shrewd and somewhat cynical".⁵⁵ Like his brother-in-law, Sir Robert Vansittart,⁵⁶ he was attracted to France and French culture. He had also a certain poetical streak that is most clearly shown in a despatch which described the moods evoked by a visit to Goering's estate.⁵⁷ But however much "charm and wit" Phipps showed in social conversation, he also knew how to be discreet.⁵⁸ The American ambassador noted this on several occasions, one being a dinner given by Roehm for the diplomats.⁵⁹

On the left of the host sat Sir Eric Phipps, British Ambassador, who never said a word the whole evening that could in any way be considered as revealing any kind of attitude of mind.

On a similar occasion, the attentive American ambassador was disappointed to find that at the end of the evening, "Somehow Sir Eric and Francois-Doncet laughed a good deal but said nothing".⁶⁰

⁵⁵

O. G. Sargent, (obituary of Phipps) DNB.

⁵⁶

Both Eden and Henderson felt that Paris was Phipps' "spiritual home".-- Avon, op. cit., 503; H. Dalton, Memoirs (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1953-1962), II, 105.

⁵⁷

Phipps to Simon, 13 June, 1934, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 452.

⁵⁸

One possible exception to this occurred after the purge of 30 June, 1934, when Goering arrived late for a diplomatic dinner, saying he had just returned from shooting. "Animals, I hope," commented Phipps.-- I. Kirkpatrick, The Inner Circle (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1959), 90.

⁵⁹

Dodd, diary, entry of 23 Feb., 1934, in W. E. Dodd, Ambassador Dodd's Diary (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1944), abbreviated Dodd's, 81.

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Ibid., 10 June, 1934, in Dodd's, 109.

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Nevile Henderson's personality cannot be described simply or briefly, for his character was complex. In addition, his personality intruded on his reports and actions to a greater extent than that of the other ambassadors. For these reasons, as well as the attention he has received from historians, Henderson's personality requires close examination. Historians, who have been content to describe other ambassadors in a phrase of moderate approval, have often considered Henderson worthy of several sentences, all derogatory. He has been called:

. . . erratic, vain, muddle-headed, and at times almost hysterical. . . . driven by anxiety and prejudice into a pro-German position. (61)

Neurotic, vain, self-important and ignorant, . . .
[a] poor bemused fool, a victim of his own silly and ignoble obsession and others' exploitation of it and him. (62)

Rigid and self-centred, though industrious, energetic and indeed restless, Henderson seemed neither to listen nor to observe, but to adhere with finality to his preconceived ideas. (63)

In 1937, however, Henderson's contemporaries had a radically different view of him.⁶⁴ If the historical judgments are balanced

61

M. Gilbert, The Roots of Appeasement (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 182-183.

62

Connell, op. cit., 247-248.

63

L. Namier, Diplomatic Prelude 1938-1939 (London: Macmillan, 1948), 218.

64

Vide supra, 24.

assessments of Henderson's qualities, then the British Foreign Office deserved severe criticism for giving such a man such a critical post.

Nevile Henderson was an aloof, solitary person, with few if any close friends. His travels kept him from being attached to any one community for any length of time and he spent only short periods in Britain. Henderson himself realized that "A man who lives abroad all his life becomes a stranger in his own country and loses touch with his own people and the personalities in it".⁶⁵ In addition, of his three closest friends as a youth, two were killed in the war⁶⁶ and he was not even close to his sister or two brothers.⁶⁷ In dealings with his subordinates,⁶⁸ Henderson appears to have been somewhat of a bully. Ivone Kirkpatrick, however, has written that Henderson was "a human chief for whom it was a pleasure to work" -- except on the few occasions when Kirkpatrick disagreed with him.⁶⁹

Henderson's lack of contact with Britain and rapid moves

⁶⁵ Henderson, Water, 23.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁷ His sister lived a life of her own after marriage in 1903, his eldest brother died in 1925, and the youngest was killed in 1916, serving with the Kenya armed forces.-- ibid., 11.

⁶⁸ Colvin, op. cit., 210.

⁶⁹ I. Kirkpatrick, The Inner Circle (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1959), 91.

Photo: Bassano Ltd.

Neville Henderson

Sir Neville Henderson

from one nation to another produced a compensating desire in him to find an identity in the role of an Edwardian English gentleman. His umbrella, ever-present carnation, and the haughty bearing which greatly irritated Hitler⁷⁰ were manifestations of this desire. With this role went a superior, pseudo-aristocratic outlook. After hearing of the 1918 armistice, Henderson went up to London from the country, not because he wished to join the general rejoicing, but because "One felt one must be there to see how the people reacted after the long strain of war".⁷¹ Nevile Henderson was a man out of tune with the times. To him the growing power of the popular press was alarming: "The Press is making diplomacy impossible; . . . it is such a serious menace to civilisation that I cannot forbear to write bitterly about it".⁷² Another cause for alarm was "the irresponsible hot-headedness of youth".⁷³

Woven throughout Henderson's character was a strong sense of mysticism. When he barely escaped drowning as a child, he felt

⁷⁰
P. Schmidt, Hitler's Interpreter; ed. R. H. C. Steed (London: Heinemann, 1951), 86.

⁷¹
Henderson, Water, 89.

⁷²
Henderson to Halifax, letter of 26 April, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 5, App. I.

⁷³
Henderson to Sargent, letter of 18 July, 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 1, 514.

he must have been saved for some great purpose.⁷⁴ Decades later, when he was chosen to go to Berlin, he thought he had found that purpose:⁷⁵

I was presumptuous enough to think, or rather to pray, that I had been selected, under Providence, for the post for the sole purpose, for I could see no other, of helping to avert another world war. I based my whole attitude, while I was in Berlin, on that presumption.

Henderson held strong views, but they were not the result of careful thought; he was not a deep thinker, nor did he have an analytical mind. Many of his opinions were superficial and contradictory. For example, he saw nothing inconsistent in believing that "many of Herr Hitler's social reforms, in spite of their complete disregard of personal liberty of thought, word or deed, were on highly advanced democratic lines".⁷⁶

Henderson's notorious indiscretions provide an important insight into his character and are a major factor in any assessment of his performance. For these he has met with universal condemnation. The Permanent Under-Secretary and the two Foreign Secretaries of Henderson's time were extremely critical of

⁷⁴ Henderson, Water, 16.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 209. See also Henderson, Failure, 3.

⁷⁶ N. Henderson, Final Report by Sir Neville Henderson (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1939), 2.

some of their ambassador's acts.⁷⁷ On the other hand, a sympathetic biographer of Luftwaffe chief Hermann Goering has blamed Henderson for leading the Nazis astray, for making them think that Britain would not oppose any German expansion.⁷⁸ The criticisms made by his superiors were not wholly undeserved, but it would be inaccurate to describe Henderson as a person who consistently undercut British policy either through hysteria, pro-Nazi sympathies, or stupidity.

In the first place, Henderson had given advance notice of his intentions and they had received approval. In 1937 he saw Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, and both "agreed that I should do my utmost to work with Hitler and the Nazi party as the existing government in Germany".⁷⁹ Henderson balanced this by saying to Chamberlain that, while intending to do his utmost to work "as sympathetically as possible" with the

⁷⁷ In 1938 a diarist recorded: "Vansittart is appalled by the line taken by Henderson in Berlin, and says that Henderson is a complete Nazi and that the Foreign Office do not trust him to represent their real point of view. He says that Henderson is stupid and vain and has become almost hysterical in the Berlin atmosphere".-- Nicolson, diary, entry of 11 April, 1938, in H. Nicolson, Harold Nicolson: Diaries and Letters 1930-1939 (London: Collins, 1966), 334. Eden, on hearing of some remarks by Henderson, lamented "I wish he would not go on like this to everybody he meets".-- Dalton, op. cit., II, 109. For rebukes from Lord Halifax, vide infra, 40, 159, 162.

⁷⁸ C. Bowley, Hermann Goering and the Third Reich (New York: The Devlin-Adair Company, 1962), 252.

⁷⁹ Henderson, Failure, 7.

German government, he felt British rearmament must be "relent-
⁸⁰lessly pursued". Chamberlain even approved Henderson's
 suggestion that the ambassador could be "slightly indiscreet"
⁸¹on his arrival to inaugurate the new policy of co-operation.
 Eden, then Foreign Secretary, was told "that I should probably
⁸²incur the appellation of pro-German". The key to Henderson's
⁸³attitude was in his belief that:

An official representative abroad cannot really
 serve his own country to the best purpose if he is known
 to be hostile to the government of the country in which
 he resides.

Accordingly, Henderson, in spite of his own dislike of Nazism,
 went to Berlin resolved "to do my utmost to see the good side
 of the Nazi regime as well as the bad" and to explain its
⁸⁴aspirations as "objectively" as possible.

There is a good deal of common sense in this approach,
 which received ministerial encouragement, and Henderson cannot
 be condemned out of hand for adopting it. However, it is
 equally true that he did not temper his efforts at conciliation
 with enough caution and restraint. Perhaps it was wise to

⁸⁰

Ibid.

⁸¹

Ibid., 8.

⁸²

Ibid., 13.

⁸³

Ibid., 198.

⁸⁴

Ibid., viii.

mention British sympathy with many of Germany's demands; but this should not have been extended to a near-promise of complete acquiescence in Germany's methods of solving its grievances. In short, Henderson did not know where to stop. Spurred on by hopes of encouraging 'moderate' Nazi elements, always conscious of the shadow of war, favourably disposed to the demands made by all German governments since 1919, Henderson kept trying to get on better terms with the Nazis and only lost their respect. Ironically, Henderson in doing this was going contrary to his own natural inclinations; the events of Munich were personally distasteful to him.⁸⁵

A brief summary of some of Henderson's indiscretions, unparalleled in any acts of the other ambassadors, does more than anything else to reveal his lack of self-discipline and of responsibility. Although the British government wished to use diplomatic pressure to induce Hitler to pursue his ambitions by peaceful means, Henderson's words could only have encouraged the German leaders to believe that Britain would give them virtually a free hand. While discussing the German desire for

85

After Munich, he wrote to the Foreign Secretary: "To me personally all this affair has been intensely disagreeable and painful. I want to wash the taste out of my mouth and I will rejoice from the bottom of my heart if you c'd remove me to some other sphere. I never want to work with Germans again".-- Henderson to Halifax, letter of 6 Oct., 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 3, App. I.

86

union with Austria, Henderson said that:

... he was convinced that England fully understood the historical need for a solution of this question in the Reich-German sense . . . 'But please', continued the British Ambassador, 'do not betray to my Vienna colleague that I entertain this opinion'.

Sent to protest Nazi pressure on the Austrian Chancellor Schuschnigg, who was seeking to avert an annexation by calling a plebiscite, Henderson weakened the British case by admitting to Goering that Schuschnigg "had acted with precipitate folly".⁸⁸ This earned Henderson a severe reprimand from the Foreign Secretary.⁸⁸ Six months later, during the Munich crisis of September, 1938, Henderson told a German official that Sudeten

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Papen to Hitler, 1 June, 1937, in Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, series C, vol. 1-5 (1933-37), series D, vol. 1-13 (1936-45), (Washington: Govt. Printing Office, 1957-); abbreviated DGFP; series D, vol. 2, no. 482. In March, 1938, Henderson expressed similar opinions.-- Ribbentrop to Henderson, 4 March, 1938, DGFP, D, 1, 138. However, the German minutes in this case seem to have exaggerated Henderson's words, for he objected to the minutes: "I never said that I had spoken here in favour of the Anschluss. What I did say was that I had sometimes expressed personal views which may not have been entirely in accordance with those of my Government".-- Henderson to Ribbentrop, 4 March, 1938, DGFP, D, 1, 139. But even by the latter account it is clear that he left the Germans with an impression of his sympathy for their policy.

87

Henderson to Halifax, 12 March, 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 1, 46.

88

Halifax to Henderson, 12 March, 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 1, 54. After receiving this reprimand, Henderson corrected his earlier report to say that he had only declared that "even if" Schuschnigg's action was wrong, Germany's response was excessive.-- Henderson to Halifax, 13 March, 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 1, 68. See also Henderson, Failure, 126. In any case, knowing Henderson's strong feelings on this subject, as shown in his despatch to Halifax, 12 March, 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 1, 49, it would be safe to assume Goering did in fact receive the impression that Henderson thought Schuschnigg had acted unwisely.

Germans should not have been included in Czechoslovakia and⁸⁹
declared that he "had no sympathy at all" with the Czechs.

Henderson did not confine his indiscretions to German officials. At the time of Munich he told the Polish ambassador that Britain's only concern was that the Czechoslovak frontiers be revised peacefully; such revision could give the Sudetenland⁹⁰ to Germany, Teschen to Poland, and other territory to Hungary.

Such untimely outbursts of opinion were the result of Henderson's irrepressible emotionalism and sincerity. He was convinced of the validity of his ideas and passionately clung to them. As he wrote to Halifax, "the stakes for which we are playing are too high to allow me to remain silent on a matter on which I feel so strongly".⁹¹ Henderson's emotional involvement with his work led to his having sensitive nerves, which were often strained in a crisis. A British cabinet minister who met him in August, 1938, believed that Henderson's nerves then were⁹² "stretched almost to breaking point".

* * * *

A comparison of the basic attitudes held by the four ambassadors on various key issues will also help to explain

⁸⁹
"Memorandum by SS-Untersturmfuhrer Baumann", 15 Sept., 1938, DGFP, D, 1, 139.

⁹⁰
Lipski, memorandum, 11 Sept., 1938, in J. Lipski, Diplomat in Berlin 1933-1939: Papers and Memoirs of Jozef Lipski, Ambassador of Poland; ed. M. Jedrzejewicz (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), abbreviated Lipski, 400.

⁹¹
Henderson to Halifax, letter of 22 Aug., 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 2, 665.

⁹²
Templewood, op. cit., 299.

93
 their reports. One of the most important attitudes in this regard was the ambassador's view of what basic assumptions should underly British foreign policy. In D'Abernon's case, pursuit of a balance of power was seen as a sine qua non for
 94
 any British policy:

It is abundantly evident that the disarmament of Germany without any reduction of armaments by France was a grave political mistake. As long as one Power is in a position of military superiority over all other Powers in Europe no real pacification is possible. . . . The theory of balance of power is unfashionable, but the absence of balance raises problems not less difficult than its presence.

Concern for the balance of power influenced D'Abernon's
 95
 attitude toward France. The creation of the League of Nations did not, in D'Abernon's opinion, detract from the importance of this traditional concept, for he felt that a power equilib-
 96
 rium was a prerequisite for an effective League. He consid-
 97
 ered the League potentially capable of sponsoring an inter-
 national force to guard Germany's eastern frontiers. However, D'Abernon felt that the great powers should have special rights

93
 Unfortunately, as the only available sources of significance for Rumbold and Phipps are their actual reports, it is not possible to include their attitudes on some issues. The revealing nature of D'Abernon's and Henderson's memoirs, plus Henderson's tendency to be more opinionated in his reports, provides material for a study of their attitudes on background factors.

94
 D'Abernon, diary, entry of 4 April, 1923, in Diary, II, 186.

95
Vide infra, 49.

96
 D'Abernon, diary, entry of 2 Aug., 1922, in Diary, II, 74-75.

97
Ibid., 6 June, 1924, in Diary, III, 73.

98

and greater influence in the League organization. The balance of power, and not an organization whose only strength lay in the respect accorded it by the public, determined international affairs. Britain, in D'Abernon's opinion, was in an ideal position to hold the balance. As he wrote of the Locarno pacts,

99

The direct advantage to England is less obvious, but the indirect advantage of becoming arbiter between France and Germany gives us a position of enormous potentiality. It makes us a dominating factor in European politics.

Nevile Henderson, on the other hand, accepted the popular belief that a balance of power policy was no longer desirable. In a memorandum of May, 1937, he referred to "the out-of-date premiss as regards British opposition to any predominant Power in Europe".¹⁰⁰ For him, moral principles took priority over considerations based on history or even strategy or economics.¹⁰¹ Henderson's definition of a moral principle was explicit, if restricted; "the truest British interest is to come down on the side of the highest moral principles. And the only lastingly right moral principle is self-determination".¹⁰² In holding this opinion, Henderson was adopting the theory that 1919 had

⁹⁸

Ibid., 16 March, 1926, in Diary, III, 235.

⁹⁹

Ibid., 11 Aug., 1925, in Diary, III, 184.

¹⁰⁰

Henderson, memorandum of 10 May, 1937, in L. Thompson, The Greatest Treason (New York: William Morrow, 1968), 270-273.

¹⁰¹

Henderson to Halifax, letter of 6 Aug., 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 2, 590/

¹⁰²

Ibid., letter of 12 Aug., 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 2, 613.

established a new set of rules for the conduct of international relations: 'morality' and the right of self-determination were to be guides for statesmen. D'Abernon, however, was able to recognize that a state with predominant power would interpret these precepts in its own interests and not in the general interest.

* * * *

Both D'Abernon and Henderson, for different reasons, were led by their above views to criticize the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Writing in 1929, D'Abernon drew up, in somewhat legalistic terms, his indictment, listing three major defects. First, it was "imposed upon Germany"; "the engagements taken under duress by Germany were not considered binding by German public opinion".¹⁰³ Second, German responsibility for reparations was founded on the assertion that Germany and its allies were responsible for the war, an assertion which "was not capable of impartial determination or of convincing proof" and "therefore a dangerous foundation for a contractual obligation".¹⁰⁴ His third major criticism was that the creation of small states¹⁰⁵ impeded trade and multiplied centres of diplomatic activity. Clearly D'Abernon had little sympathy with the proposition that all national groups should have their own state. Nor did he

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D'Abernon, Diary, I, 24.

¹⁰⁴

Ibid., 25.

¹⁰⁵

Ibid.

feel that Germany should be punished for any infraction of
 106
 'morality' in 1914. Elsewhere he wrote that:

. . . the broad spirit of appeasement which animated
 Locarno was in strong contrast with the somewhat vindictive
 preoccupations which hampered wisdom at Versailles.

In keeping with his elevation of the concept of self-determination to the status of the highest moral principle, Henderson criticized the Treaty of Versailles for not going far enough in this direction. His particular criticisms concerned the German minorities in Czechoslovakia and Poland. Before 1933, while in Belgrade, he had spoken of the "artificiality" of Czechoslovakia. 107 From the beginning of his Berlin mission he believed there was no prospect of stability in Germany or Europe until the "grievances" arising out of the 108 treaty were eliminated. 109 Before the Munich crisis he wrote:

It is sheer waste of time to argue now about strategical considerations, historical frontiers or economic difficulties, etc. We did all that in 1919 and it has failed.

One of his principles during the crisis was that "Versailles 110 was the error which has got to be corrected". The treaty

106

D'Abernon, Diary, III, 9.

107

Henderson to Halifax, 26 July, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 6, 460.

108

Henderson, Failure, 27.

109

Henderson to Halifax, letter of 8 Aug., 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 2, 594.

110

Henderson to Wilson, letter of 9 Sept., 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 2,

App. I.

provisions concerning Danzig and the Corridor, which were the major issue in the crisis of August, 1939, were also considered unjust by Henderson, who felt that a truly impartial arbitrator would support the German claims.
 111

* * * *

Another factor influencing the advice of the ambassadors was their opinions of the place of Europe in British foreign policy as a whole. Britain could either orient its policy toward Europe or toward the United States and/or the Commonwealth. A desire to concentrate on either of the latter would strongly tend toward support of a general policy of appeasement in Europe. If Britain were to co-operate with the United States, it could not appease Japan, lest American opinion be antagonized. Since Britain could not take a firm credible stand against both Japanese and German ambitions, this meant the appeasement of Germany. In addition, the First World War had apparently indicated the inability of Britain and France to restrain Germany without American aid. The aversion of the United States to involvement in another such war was thus another argument for appeasement. If Commonwealth unity were to be preserved and translated into joint participation in war, the pro-appeasement advice of the Dominions had to be heeded. In short, tendencies toward neo-imperial isolationism

111

Henderson to Halifax, letter of 4 May, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 5, 364.

or 'Atlanticism' logically implied tendencies toward appeasement of Germany.

D'Abernon revealed his inclination to a policy of non-¹¹² European orientation most clearly in a 1923 diary entry:

We should not penetrate too far into Europe: all we want there is peace, extended commercial relations, and no military hegemony.

If, in addition to preserving intact our position and influence in the maritime commercial countries, we reserve our financial resources for the development of our Colonial Empire, we shall find in this policy a security and strength greater than in the expensive and embroiling Central-European connection.

From his work on the Royal Commission inquiring into imperial trade D'Abernon concluded that the Empire should develop its internal trade and resources to enable it to withstand pressure from any foreign state or group of states that might control¹¹³ essential commodities.

For the limited British aims in Europe D'Abernon regarded American assistance as highly desirable. He felt American co-operation might be essential to enable Britain¹¹⁴ to restrain France and to assist German recovery. In separate talks with¹¹⁵ the Foreign Secretary¹¹⁶ and the Prime Minister he strongly

¹¹²

D'Abernon, diary, entry of 25 Dec., 1923, in Diary, II, 290.

¹¹³

Lord D'Abernon, Final Report of the Dominions Royal Commission (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1918), 400.

¹¹⁴

D'Abernon, diary, entry of 29 April, 1921, in Diary, I, 156; ibid., 20 March, 1924, in Diary, III, 60.

¹¹⁵

Ibid., 29 April, 1921, in Diary, I, 156.

¹¹⁶

Ibid., 30 April, 1921, in Diary, I, 158.

expressed the view that Britain must bring the United States into European affairs.

Sir Eric Phipps shared D'Abernon's desire to obtain the aid of the United States. In June, 1935, Phipps felt that Anglo-American co-operation "was about the only means of preventing a world war within a few years".¹¹⁷ Although Nevile Henderson did not place such a great value on American support, he did believe the Americans could be trusted more than any European state.¹¹⁸ Henderson did, however, feel that Britain should strictly limit its involvement in European affairs. In November, 1937, he wrote:¹¹⁹

The main point is that we are an island people and Germany a continental one. On that basis we can be friends and both go along the road to its own destiny without the clash of vital interests.

Concerned about Commonwealth unity, Henderson wrote before the Munich crisis that to go into war without "our Empire" solidly behind Britain would be "inconceivable".¹²⁰

* * * *

¹¹⁷

Dodd, diary, entry of 15 June, 1935, in Dodd's, 253.

¹¹⁸

Dalton, op. cit., II, 108.

¹¹⁹

Henderson to Halifax, letter of Nov., 1937, in Earl of Birkenhead, Halifax (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 367. At another time Henderson put it in this fashion: "Did Providence give us an island in order to send millions of our young men to fight on the Continent? . . . We cannot dissociate ourselves from Europe, but it has always seemed to me a mistake to get too deeply involved in those far-off ~~remote~~ areas of it, where our sea and today our air power would be at a great disadvantage".--Henderson, Water, 88-89.

¹²⁰

Henderson to Halifax, letter of 22 Aug., 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 2, 665.

Each of the four ambassadors expressed criticism of French policy, if not distrust of France. D'Abernon, worried about the imbalance of power, thought that French leaders were putting forward excessive reparation demands in order to obtain territorial and economic gains from Germany.¹²¹ D'Abernon would have liked close Anglo-French relations, but he felt that excessive French power inevitably produced tension between the two states. In a significant diary entry of August, 1923, he¹²² expressed his views in these terms:

. . . the essential interest of England is to prevent the breaking up of Germany. As long as Germany is a coherent whole, there is more or less a balance of power in Europe. Directly Germany breaks up that balance disappears; France remains in undisputed military and political control, based upon her army and upon her military alliances.

Many of the arguments which were valid in 1914 against Germany are valid to-day against France. . . . That is no reason for unnecessary quarrelling, but it is a powerful reason against still further increasing the dis-balance of power.

Anyone who supposes that a French Government dominating the Continent as Napoleon dominated it after Tilsit will remain friendly to England must be a poor judge of national psychology. No more foolish expectation could be entertained. It is equally improbable, under such circumstances, that we should be friendly to France. Desiring the maintenance of the Anglo-French Entente, I am compelled to desire the existence of a strong Germany.

In view of the potentiality for Anglo-French tension, D'Abernon felt that the Locarno pacts should contain a guarantee of the

¹²¹

D'Abernon, diary, entry of 23 July, 1923, in Diary, II, 224.

¹²²

Ibid., 20 Aug., 1923, in Diary, II, 238-239.

123

inviolability of the Channel.

D'Abernon also believed that French policies were unwise and criticized the British government for being influenced by these policies. When Premier Poincaré blocked German entry into the League in 1922, D'Abernon interpreted the event as yet another instance of Britain giving in to any French objections.¹²⁴ Similarly, he criticized British concessions to France over Allied reparation demands on Germany.¹²⁵ In his view only when the public was aroused were British interests firmly defended:¹²⁶

The more I hear of what goes on at Geneva, the more inclined I am to believe that French influence and Catholic influence there are the dominant forces. England only gets her way when public opinion at home awakes to the danger and returns a dogged 'No'.

However, D'Abernon was not prejudiced against the French themselves. He praised the "French mind" as being superior to others in its clarity, orderliness, balance, wit and restraint.¹²⁷ Nor did he condemn all French policies, for he thought France had sounder policies with regard to Russia and Turkey than Britain.¹²⁸

¹²³ Ibid., 20 July, 1925, in Diary, III, 177; ibid., 22 July, 1925, in Diary, III, 178; ibid., 24 July, 1925, in Diary, III, 178-179.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 5 Aug., 1922, in Diary, II, 75-76.

¹²⁵ D'Abernon, Diary, I, 28.

¹²⁶ D'Abernon, diary, entry of 22 Feb., 1926, in Diary, III, 226.

¹²⁷ D'Abernon, Diary, II, 11.

¹²⁸ D'Abernon, diary, entry of 17 May, 1922, in Diary, I, 317.

An echo of D'Abernon's views is found in Rumbold's
 129
 complaint that:

Our post-war policy towards Germany . . . was deplorable. The French are principally to blame for this but we must share the blame owing to the subserviency of our policy to that of the French.

Even Phipps wrote that mistaken French policy toward Germany weakened the Weimar system and helped cause its replacement
 130
 by the Third Reich. Neville Henderson had acquired a deep-rooted distrust of France during his years in Turkey. He later
 131
 wrote:

. . . if there was one thing which I learnt during my stay in Constantinople it was that coalitions are a snare and a delusion and that it is impossible ever to count on Allies who do not speak the same language or share the same ideals as oneself. I felt this very strongly when I went to Berlin in 1937.

Henderson felt that Phipps had co-operated too closely with
 132
 French representatives in Berlin. Accordingly, Henderson resolved to make all Anglo-German relations "independent and

129
 Rumbold to Londonderry, letter of 12 April, 1938, in Londonderry, op. cit., 194-197.

130
 Phipps to Simon, 31 Jan., 1934, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 241.

131
 Henderson, Water, 111. He also wrote, "Throughout the crisis and right on to Lausanne it was always the same thing. No sooner had we taken up a position or defined a policy than we found that the French and Italians had ratted on us and retreated far behind us".-- ibid., 109. Rumbold, then head of the Constantinople mission, may well have had related feelings.

132
Ibid., 111-112.

133
 bilateral". As he told the American ambassador, "France
 is a back number and unworthy of support".¹³⁴

* * * *

The attitudes of the ambassadors toward Russia and Communism played a major role in their interpretations of Germany's foreign and domestic situation. Germany could be seen as a bulwark and ally against Russia and the spectre of Communism; or Russia could be portrayed as a potential ally against a resurgence of German expansionist nationalism. The choice between these two views would depend upon the ambassador's assessment of the relative dangers of Russian Communism and German nationalism. Evaluations of these dangers were complicated by the difference between ideological and strategic threats and by the German domestic political situation. Russia could be a threat to British interests in Europe and the Middle East through ideological influence or through the traditional methods of power politics. At the other extreme, the Soviet government might present no threat in either area. Between these extremes various permutations were possible: Russia might constitute an ideological threat in Europe and a physical threat in the Middle East; or the

133
 Chargé in Germany to Secretary of State, 25 Aug., 1937, in United States. Dept. of State, Foreign Relations of the United States (Washington: Govt. Printing Office, 1951-), abbreviated ForRelUS, 1937, II, (page) 379.

134
 Dodd, diary, entry of 23 June, 1937, in Dodd's, 421.

Soviet rulers could ignore Europe and limit themselves to propaganda elsewhere. Within Germany, there was the problem of evaluating the threat of a Communist coup. If this threat were real, British interests might best be served by a rightist government. Another problem was whether a German leftist government would seek close ties with the Soviet Union. The actual course of events, in which Russo-German co-operation was due to the German Right, was unpredicted and unrecognized by the ambassadors.¹³⁵

Of the four ambassadors, D'Abernon was most hostile to the Soviet government and most alarmed at the danger of Communism. The U. S. S. R. was for him a strange land, the centre of an alien and incomprehensible contagion. When he talked to a member of the British Commercial Mission to Moscow, who had stopped in Berlin on his way to Britain, D'Abernon noted in his diary that he appeared "as sane as anyone can be who has been two years in Russia".¹³⁶ In D'Abernon's view, the consequences of Russian expansion would go far beyond changes in frontiers or the balance of power:¹³⁷

Had Pilsudski and Weygand failed to arrest the triumphant advance of the Soviet Army at the Battle of Warsaw, not only would Christianity have experienced a disastrous reverse, but the very existence of Western civilisation would have been imperilled.

¹³⁵ Vide infra, 88, for D'Abernon's conviction that the German army would never co-operate with the Bolsheviks.

¹³⁶

D'Abernon, diary, entry of 28 Oct., 1922, in Diary, II, 119.

¹³⁷

Lord D'Abernon, The Eighteenth Decisive Battle of the World: Warsaw, 1920, (London: Hodder, 1931), 9.

Moreover, D'Abernon did not forget the non-ideological threat from Russia. He felt that a strong Russia was a serious menace to India, whereas a Balkanized Russia would provide no danger; a separate Ukraine would lead to a "safer and more healthy position" in the Black Sea and facilitate British commercial control of the Straits.¹³⁸ Thus Britain had both sets of reasons for opposing Communist Russia.

Because of his belief in the threat within Germany from Communist elements guided from Moscow, D'Abernon was opposed to any European alignments which left Germany isolated and "a prey to Russian wiles and Russian influence".¹³⁹ One method of preventing a Communist Germany, in his opinion, was to ensure a strong Poland.¹⁴⁰ This would prevent the spread of Soviet influence. The internal threat from Communist agitators was not merely potential, for D'Abernon called it "a real menace" at certain times in 1920 and 1923.¹⁴¹ Fear of Communism influenced D'Abernon's recommendations on German disarmament. While he believed the larger pieces of war material should be strictly accounted for, he thought the Allies should be lenient on the surrender of rifles, since any more rifles delivered up would

¹³⁸

D'Abernon, diary, entry of 30 Aug., 1922, in Diary, II, 99.

¹³⁹

D'Abernon, Diary, I, 22.

¹⁴⁰

D'Abernon, diary entry of 9 Aug., 1920, in 18th Battle, 67.

come from "the more law-abiding citizens", while the
 "Communists connected with Moscow" would retain their
 142
 weapons.

Neither Rumbold nor Phipps, however, were swayed by
 the argument that Germany should be given conciliatory
 treatment so that it would be a bulwark against Communism
 rather than a spearhead of Communism in the heart of
 western Europe. They, however, had the advantage of seeing
 several years pass without Russian expansion or any immed-
 iate danger of a Communist coup inside Germany. Rumbold
 told one German politician that there was little danger of
 the German people adopting Communism and that any increase
 in Communist votes was temporary, "largely due to bad
 143
 economic conditions". In the case of Soviet foreign
 policy, Phipps in early 1936 felt that "Russia is now
 emerging into a more rational state and we can afford to
 144
 co-operate with her to keep the peace". To this end,
 145
 Phipps also advocated a Franco-Soviet pact. Although
 Neville Henderson in his memoirs asserted that he preferred

142

D'Abernon to Curzon, 6 Nov., 1920, DBFP, 1st, 10, 313;
ibid., 23 Nov., 1920, DBFP, 1st, 10, 325.

143

Rumbold to Simon, 25 Jan., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 4, 227. See
 also ibid., 7 April, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 23.

144

Dodd, diary, entry of 12 Feb., 1936, in Dodd's, 310.

145

Ibid., 13 Dec., 1936, in Dodd's, 372.

146

Bolshevism to National Socialism, while in Berlin he believed
 Communists generally were a major threat to peace through
 style="text-align: center;">147
 their extremism.

* * * *

The attitudes of the ambassadors toward various racial groups also influenced their view of German policy. Even before the Third Reich, much of German foreign policy was directed against Poland and Czechoslovakia, while German society was permeated with prejudice against these nationalities and the Jews.

D'Abernon on the whole was tolerant of different races and nationalities. For the Poles, whom he saw as guardians of Germany and the West against Communism, he had a special regard, believing that the Poles had "saved Europe
 style="text-align: center;">148
 from Asia on more than one occasion". This sympathy for Poland is all the more noteworthy since support of Poland was a key element in French policy, designed to restrict German power. D'Abernon's portrayal of European Jews, however, shows some prejudice. In 1922 he described a "large number

146

Henderson, Water, 45.

147

Henderson to Cadogan, letter of 22 July, 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 1, 534.

148

D'Abernon, diary, entry of 6 Feb., 1924, in Diary, III, 45.

149

of small Jewish traders" in Germany

. . . who are strongly attracted by the large profits obtainable on transactions in arms. In a certain section of their complicated mentality these classes have more than a sneaking affection for the Bolsheviks. Many of them are inclined to regard their co-religionaries at Moscow as rather fine fellows, who have done something to avenge the misfortunes of the Jewish race; they consider Trotsky and the Cheka the apostolic successors to Judith and Deborah.

European Jews as a whole, he thought, were hostile to Britain and the British Empire.¹⁵⁰ However, D'Abernon was not markedly prejudiced against Jews individually. His final verdict was that the ones he had known were "the most faithful of friends and the wisest of advisers".¹⁵¹ Rumbold, who often stressed Nazi anti-semitism, admired German Jews, considering them to be an elite intellectually superior to the average German.¹⁵²

The feelings of Neville Henderson toward other races and nationalities are easily summed up: he had no respect for anyone but the British and perhaps the Americans. Slavs were unreliable as allies¹⁵³ and "incurably corrupt".¹⁵⁴ Czechs

149

Ibid., 10 May, 1922, in Diary, I, 312-313.

150

Ibid., 24 July, 1925, in Diary, III, 179; ibid., 17 Sept., 1923, in Diary, II, 251-252.

151

Ibid.

152

Rumbold to Simon, 28 March, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 5.

153

Henderson to Halifax, letter of 17 June, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 6, App. I.

154

Dalton, op. cit., II, 108.

in particular were "a pig-headed race",¹⁵⁵ while Henderson
said "I don't think much of the Russians or the Poles".¹⁵⁶

As might be expected, the Czechs got little sympathy from
Henderson at the time of Munich. Typical of Henderson was the
'reasoning' he used to show that Jews were a threat to peace:¹⁵⁷

Cui bono is not a bad basis for argument in policy
as well as detective stories. War would undoubtedly serve
the purposes of all the Jews, communists and doctrinaires
in the world for whom Nazism is anathema.

Virtually the only relieving item in this catalogue of
prejudice was a conversation Henderson had with the first secret-
ary of the Polish embassy on 31 August, 1939. Henderson
asserted that his attempt to settle the Polish-German dispute
by compromise was due only to his belief that war would
result in disaster for Poland, where he had "many true friends".
Knowing he would die of cancer before the end of the coming
war, Henderson asked the Polish secretary to explain his
motives to his compatriots when peace returned.¹⁵⁸ Perhaps

¹⁵⁵
Henderson to Halifax, letter of 26 July, 1938, DBFP, 3rd,
2, 551.

¹⁵⁶
Dalton, op. cit., II, 108.

¹⁵⁷
Henderson to Halifax, letter of 26 July, 1938, DBFP, 3rd,
2, 551; and to Cadogan, letter of 26 July, 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 1, 534.

¹⁵⁸
Malhomme, note of conversation, 31 Aug., 1939, in
Lipski, 569-570.

Henderson had undergone a belated conversion; more likely, he was preparing the way for his self-justificative memoirs.

* * * *

On the whole, the careers and attitudes of the ambassadors were influences for support of a policy of conciliation toward Germany, rather than the pursuit of an Anglo-French entente to oppose German ambitions. All the ambassadors had been exposed to areas of Anglo-French conflict. All, but especially D'Abernon and Henderson, criticized French opposition to German attempts to revise the treaty of Versailles. The reluctance to accept extensive British commitments on the Continent evident in D'Abernon's and Henderson's writings, plus the former's anti-Communism, were also factors tending against any policy of opposition to Germany. Phipps alone may have had some inclination to work for Anglo-French co-operation, but even he was to advise a conciliatory policy toward Germany.

* * * *

An influence of another type on the reports of the ambassadors, as well as another indicator of their personal abilities, is the nature of their sources of information. If an ambassador is to get accurate information and to maintain good relations with all influential elements, he needs a wide-spread system of contacts. An ambassador is always to some extent limited in his sources of information; not all persons will give out information and in many cases only a few, who may or may not be favourably disposed toward the ambassador's

country, will even have the important information. Nevertheless, within these limits, the persons selected by the ambassador may reveal his own personal preferences.

Lord D'Abernon, to all appearances, had the best contacts of the four, among politicians, officials, and fellow ambassadors. He maintained close relations with Stresemann, before and after the latter became Chancellor in 1923.¹⁵⁹ Joseph Wirth, minister of finance in 1920 and later Chancellor,

President Friedrich Ebert, and minister for reconstruction Walter Rathenau were frequent dinner companions. Foreign Minister Walter Simons called on D'Abernon at the embassy, rather than summoning the ambassador to the ministry, on several occasions.¹⁶⁰ In addition, D'Abernon often telephoned cabinet ministers, giving them advice on such matters as whom to appoint head of the Reichsbank.¹⁶¹ Only with a few persons was D'Abernon not on good terms -- Count Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau,¹⁶² Foreign

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Vide supra, 29, and infra, 93.

¹⁶⁰

D'Abernon, diary, entry of 24 Feb., 1921, in Diary, I, 125; ibid., 8 March, 1921, in Diary, I, 129, among others.

¹⁶¹

Nicolson, (D'Abernon's obituary) 445.

¹⁶²

D'Abernon referred to him as "Quite the stage type of a somewhat degenerate and diabolical diplomatist of the old school".-- diary, entry of 6 Feb., 1924, in Diary, III, 44. Brockdorff-Rantzau was a leading proponent of Russo-German co-operation.

Minister in 1919, later ambassador to Russia, and those whom he considered ignorant of economics, such as Hugo Stinnes and Karl Helfferich, "the determined opponents of any reasonable settlement"¹⁶³ and the men behind the irresponsible currency policy.¹⁶⁴

Among the German diplomats D'Abernon had sources in the 'conservative' as well as the 'new school' group. Persons like Dr. Sthamer, a former mayor of Hamburg, brought into the service by Ebert to give it a less rightist character,¹⁶⁵ were highly respected by the British ambassador. But persons like Secretary of State Baron Ago von Maltzan, the most powerful member of the 'old guard' after 1919 and a leading supporter of Russo-German collaboration, were also on good terms with D'Abernon, who affirmed "a great liking for Maltzan and a sincere admiration for his talents".¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, D'Abernon did not allow such feelings to blind him to the fact that the Secretary of State had few pro-British sympathies. He wrote

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D'Abernon, Diary, II, 43.

¹⁶⁴

Vide supra, 82.

¹⁶⁵

H. Holborn, "Diplomats and Diplomacy in the Early Weimar Republic," 153, in G. Craig and F. Gilbert (ed.), The Diplomats 1919-1939 (London: Athenum, 1965), I, 123-171.

¹⁶⁶

D'Abernon, diary, entry of 8 Nov., 1920, in Diary, I, 89.

¹⁶⁷

D'Abernon, Diary, II, 40.

that there would have been no Locarno pacts had Maltzan, who was "too wedded to the Russian connection", remained as Secretary of State.¹⁶⁸ Karl von Schubert, Maltzan's successor, was very close to the ambassador and was praised by D'Abernon for his contribution to European pacification and for his "sagacity and moderation".¹⁶⁹ Schubert, however, deliberately put conservative professional diplomats back into all positions of power at the Wilhelmstrasse.¹⁷⁰

D'Abernon's sources naturally stretched beyond the confines of Berlin officialdom. The Bavarian premier, von Kahr, was one of these, as was General von Kluck, with whom D'Abernon had long talks concerning the 1914 campaign.¹⁷¹ Miscellaneous activities such as dinners with newspaper editors¹⁷² and excursions into the "minor intellectual world" broadened his range of contacts.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 41. See also D'Abernon, diary, entry of 30 Dec., 1921, in Diary, I, 238.

¹⁶⁹ D'Abernon, Diary, I, 28. On the high degree of co-operation and mutual trust between D'Abernon and Schubert, see F. G. Stambrook, "'Das Kind'-- Lord D'Abernon and the Origins of the Locarno Pact," Central European History, Sept., 1968, I, 3, 233-263; K. Rosenbaum, Community of Fate (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1965), 124; Z. Gasiorowski, "The Russian Overture to Germany of December 1924," Journal of Modern History, June, 1958, XXX, 2, 102.

¹⁷⁰ Holborn, supra, 151.

¹⁷¹ D'Abernon, diary, entry of 9 March, 1922, in Diary, I, 271-274; also ibid., 13 March, 1922, in Diary, I, 274-276.

¹⁷² Ibid., 14 April, 1921, in Diary, I, 148.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 29 Aug., 1921, in Diary, I, 204.

Despite his many German sources of information, D'Abernon did not neglect his ambassadorial colleagues. Of these, he thought the best informed were the Papal Nuncio¹⁷⁴ and the Czech minister Tusar.¹⁷⁵ D'Abernon considered the French ambassador, Laurent, "a man of exceptional influence and spirit".¹⁷⁶

Sir Horace Rumbold apparently lacked the same wide range of contacts as D'Abernon,¹⁷⁷ but in Rumbold's period German political power was less pluralistic. Decisions were increasingly made by the Chancellor and President, aided by their advisers, and enacted by 'emergency' decree. This process, necessitated by the inability of German parties to co-operate, lessened the role of other elements in the making of decisions. Among political leaders Rumbold admired Heinrich Brüning¹⁷⁸ and continued to discuss the German situation with him even after the Chancellor's overthrow and the advent of the Nazis.¹⁷⁹ Rumbold disliked Franz von Papen,

¹⁷⁴

Ibid., 7 Nov., 1920, in Diary, I, 88.

¹⁷⁵

Ibid., 21 March, 1922, in Diary, I, 284. When Tusar died, D'Abernon wrote that "of the Central European colleagues, he was the one with whom I discussed things most freely".--ibid., 10 April, 1924, in Diary, III, 65.

¹⁷⁶

Ibid., 26 Oct., 1920, in Diary, I, 78.

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The absence of diaries by Rumbold may well be a major factor in this apparent disparity.

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Vide infra, 83.

¹⁷⁹

Rumbold to Simon, 14 June, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 212.

Bruning's successor as Chancellor, but held long discussions with him in 1932 and when Papen was a member of Hitler's government.¹⁸⁰ Another major source for Rumbold among politicians was Gottfried Treviranus, minister of transport and leader of the German Conservative People's Party.¹⁸¹

Rumbold's most useful sources, however, appear to have been among the officials close to positions of power. Robert Weismann, Prussian Secretary of State, Hermann Punder, the Chancellor's Secretary of State, and Otto Meissner, chief of the Presidential Chancellery, were all well placed. Rumbold considered Punder the most reliable source for information on Reichstag affairs.¹⁸² Within the Wilhelmstrasse, Rumbold talked to Foreign Minister Julius Curtius, his successor Baron Konstantin von Neurath, and Secretary of State Bernard Wilhelm von Bulow, but there is no sign that he was on exceptionally good terms with any of them.

Other contacts included General Groener, minister of defence and of the interior, who was a frequent dinner guest of Rumbold's. Through persons like Baron Lersner, a close

¹⁸⁰

Ibid., 17 June, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 215.

¹⁸¹

Rumbold to Henderson, 17 July, 1931, DBFP, 2nd, 2, 215. See also ibid., 30 March, 1931, DBFP, 2nd, 2, 22, for Rumbold's contact with a businessman close to Treviranus.

¹⁸²

Ibid., 13 Feb., 1931, DBFP, 2nd, 1, 349.

friend of Papen, and Baron Kurt von Schroeder,¹⁸³ Rumbold
¹⁸⁴ was able to keep informed of intrigue. Rumbold also read the
 press daily, frequently sending in lengthy summaries of German
 newspaper opinion on given issues.

With the advent of Hitler, the ambassadors' sources began
 to be very unreliable, due to the difficulty of finding lines
 of communication into the Nazi hierarchy.¹⁸⁵ Rumbold apparently
 had no contacts in the Nazi party, relying on his connections
 with non-Nazis in the government. Sir Eric Phipps seems to have
 seen Hitler more regularly, at least in 1933 and 1934, than
 his successor or colleagues and to have had fairly good relat-
 ions with the Führer.¹⁸⁶ Certainly Phipps preferred Hitler as
 a person to someone like Papen.¹⁸⁷ Field-Marshal Werner von
 Blomberg, defence minister, had several talks with Phipps, and

¹⁸³ Schroeder, a banker, acted as intermediary between Papen
 and Hitler in January, 1933.

¹⁸⁴ Rumbold to Simon, 18 Jan., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 4, 226.

¹⁸⁵ Vide infra, 166-2, The sources available to other members
 of the embassy may have mitigated this deficiency.

¹⁸⁶ Phipps talked with Hitler on 24 Oct., 5 Dec., and 8 Dec.,
 1933; and on 19 Jan. and 29 Jan., 1934. He was also present at
 the long Hitler-Eden talks on 20 and 21 Feb., 1934. The French
 ambassador saw Hitler four times in the same period. Hitler also
 dined at the British embassy in February, the first embassy so
 honoured.

¹⁸⁷ Phipps to Simon, 24 Oct., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 490.

188

Phipps visited Goering's estate on at least one occasion.
However, Phipps had apparently no other contacts of significance.

With reliable information difficult to obtain from German sources, Phipps turned to his French and American colleagues. In November and December, 1933, Phipps submitted ten despatches relating information received from André François-Poncet. Phipps also often had lengthy discussions with the American representative, William Dodd.¹⁸⁹

Sir Nevile Henderson suffered even more from poor lines of communication into the Nazi government. Virtually all his talks with Hitler went badly. Henderson saw this as bad luck, saying later "It was always my fate to see him when he was under the stress of some emotion or other".¹⁹⁰ Schmidt, the ubiquitous interpreter, saw matters differently, recalling that Henderson's general bearing, "which was that of the perfect English gentleman", always irritated Hitler and Ribbentrop, "who could not endure fine people".¹⁹¹ Hitler's

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Ibid., 13 June, 1934, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 452.

189

See Dodd's, entries from Oct., 1933, to Dec., 1936, passim. Despite the friendliness of these talks, Dodd in 1937 decided that Phipps was "almost a Fascist, as I think are Baldwin and Eden".-- diary, entry of 11 Jan., 1937, in Dodd's, 378.

190

Henderson, Failure, 42.

191

Schmidt, op. cit., 86.

antagonism, however, may well have been simulated in an attempt to bully Henderson. After one stormy 1939 session,¹⁹² Hitler burst into laughter as soon as Henderson left. Nor did Henderson achieve good relations with Joachim von Ribbentrop,¹⁹³ the man of "sinister influence" as Foreign Minister, Gestapo chief Heinrich Himmler, his assistant Reinhard Heydrich, or propaganda minister Dr. Josef Goebbels, all of whom Henderson detested and distrusted.

The only top Nazi with whom Henderson became friendly was Goering. In his book, Henderson spent twelve pages listing Goering's personal qualities, service to peace, organizational ability and service to sport.¹⁹⁴ The ambassador was a frequent caller at Goering's home and they often discussed events, but Henderson was not completely taken in by him: "Goering is not much better than the others really but at least I feel sure¹⁹⁵ that he does not want war, and hates Ribbentrop". Considering Henderson's feelings about Ribbentrop, the last phrase would be all the qualifications Goering needed to be termed a 'reasonable' man. Goering did indeed have a personal desire to

¹⁹²

E. Weizsacker, Memoirs (London: Victor Gollancz, 1951), 203.

¹⁹³

Henderson, Failure, 64.

¹⁹⁴

Ibid., 76-88.

¹⁹⁵

Henderson to Halifax, letter of 28 May, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 5, 659.

appear moderate, objective and balanced,¹⁹⁶ but it is difficult to call him a moderate in any meaningful sense. During the annexation of Austria Goering spent much time on the telephone¹⁹⁷ seeking to arrange a 'legal' invitation for German troops. When Jews were being killed in November, 1938, Goering was concerned about preventing damage to their property, which was to be seized, and busy framing a decree 'legally' to¹⁹⁸ deny Jews insurance payments for damage. Neither for Austrian democrats nor for Jews was there any difference between Goering's 'moderation' and Nazi policy. Goering does seem to have wanted peace in August and September, 1939, when he sought to arrange a compromise settlement through a¹⁹⁹ Swedish businessman, but he did not voice any opposition to Hitler's desires.

Henderson's contacts with the military consisted of Blomberg and General Wilhelm Keitel. Field-Marshal Blomberg, war minister and commander-in-chief of the armed forces, whom

¹⁹⁶ R. Manvell and H. Fraenkel, Hermann Goring (London: Heinemann, 1962), 121-122.

¹⁹⁷

Ibid., 158-165.

¹⁹⁸

Ibid., 175-176.

¹⁹⁹

Vide infra, 162-163.

Henderson may have inherited from Phipps, was one of the first Germans Henderson entertained and particularly impressed the ambassador.²⁰⁰ Henderson was unlucky in that Blomberg, who opposed rash moves in foreign affairs, was dismissed in February, 1938. Perhaps the limited number of his contacts led Henderson to place excessive faith in what sources he did possess. Just before the Anschluss, the British consul-general in Munich telephoned Henderson to say that German armour was moving toward the Austrian border. Henderson's immediate reaction was "It cannot be true. General Keitel assures me that there are no tropp movements".²⁰¹

Henderson apparently obtained much of his information from Secretary of State Ernst von Weizsacker and Italian ambassador Attolico, two sincere but ineffectual proponents of peace. Henderson also had "feelings of high regard" for Franz Gurtner, minister of justice, Count Lutz Schwerin-Krosigk, minister of finance, and Heinrich Lammers, head of the Reichschancellery,²⁰² but it is questionable whether they were of any use as sources of information.

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Henderson, Failure, 40-41.

²⁰¹

Colvin, op. cit., 197, quoting Consul-General Gainer in private conversation.

²⁰²

Henderson, Failure, 16.

Among his diplomatic colleagues, Henderson kept in "the closest touch" with American ambassador Hugh Wilson, of whom he said "I have seldom met his equal for keen observation and sound judgment".²⁰³ Wilson, however, was withdrawn in November, 1938. The South African ambassador was another whom Henderson consulted.²⁰⁴ Feeling that his predecessor had been too closely associated with the French ambassador, Henderson²⁰⁵ made a point of keeping away from the latter. Like Rumbold, Henderson read the German press regularly -- three morning newspapers and two evening ones -- but, as he noted, under²⁰⁶ the Third Reich there was little variation in content.

* * * *

In evaluating the ambassadors' performances, the question of their sources must be considered. The decline in reliable sources of information from D'Abernon to Henderson would naturally, taken by itself, tend to lessen the quality of the reporting. Whether the later ambassadors could have significantly improved the nature of their sources, or whether the changing political conditions barred this, is an open question.

²⁰³

Ibid., 39-40.

²⁰⁴

Ibid., 39.

²⁰⁵

Vide supra, 51-52.

²⁰⁶

Henderson, Failure, 61.

III. VIEWS ON THE GERMAN CHARACTER AND GERMAN SOCIETY

The picture of German character and society drawn by the ambassadors provided the British government with a historical and social background against which to view the problems of Weimar leaders and the actions of the Nazi government. The ambassadors on the whole complemented one another in depicting Germans as a basically good people, though prone to authoritarianism and an arrogant style of behaviour. If treated in a conciliatory fashion and given support against domestic extremists, the German governing elite could be induced to behave reasonably. This general picture, the composite of reports by different ambassadors, provided the British government with a source of optimism and support for the general principle of appeasement.

Several ambassadors sought to describe and evaluate the basic German character. D'Abernon wrote that "If super-¹ficially unattractive, they are fundamentally great". He saw in Germans a "sturdy, solid masculine sense"² which produced "a virile and masterful race".³ Following a

¹ D'Abernon, Diary, I, 6.

² D'Abernon, diary, entry of 5 June, 1921, in Diary, I, 181.

³ D'Abernon, Diary, I, 14.

description of Germans' distinctive physical characteristics -- "dome-like heads", "thick-set, round bodies", "stiff, angular manners", physical capacity for working long hours -- which reveals more about D'Abernon than the Germans, he gave his support to the traditional belief that "the German mind" had a peculiar "predilection for severe discipline and precise orders".⁵ The two main faults of the German people, in his opinion, were an "absence of political instinct and their peculiar addiction to envy and jealousy".⁶ Despite these faults, the Germans were "orderly, methodical, thorough, and to a great extent men of their word".⁷ D'Abernon's general praise of the Germans may indicate a tendency toward a broad pan-Anglo-Saxonism, the Belief that British and Germans, as well as British and Americans, have a natural ability and desire to co-operate.

Sir Horace Rumbold, on the other hand, put stress on the darker side of the German character, referring to "the barbarous streak inherent in so many Germans"⁸ and their worst traits,

⁴
Ibid., 7.

⁵
Ibid., 9.

⁶
Ibid., 11.

⁷
D'Abernon, diary, entry of 31 Jan., 1924, in Diary, III, 42.

⁸
Rumbold, The War Crisis in Berlin: July-August, 1914 (London: Hutchinson Constable & Co., 1940), x.

namely "a mean spirit of revenge, a tendency to brutality,⁹ and a noisy and irresponsible jingoism". One must not regard them as similar to the average British citizen, for "Germans have a streak of brutality which is quite absent in the ordinary Englishman".¹⁰ However, Rumbold felt that the majority of Germans were "moderate and reasonable people", opposed to the extremist minority "composed very largely of millions of immature young men and women".¹¹ In keeping with this view, he asserted that Germans as a whole¹² should not be condemned for the persecution of Jews.

Nevile Henderson, who had prejudices against virtually all non-British groups, was no less derogatory of Germans, who were "a docile, credulous and disciplined people who like being governed".¹³ In asserting a German predilection for discipline, Henderson was more patronizing and lurid

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Rumbold to Simon, 14 March, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 4, 263.

¹⁰

Rumbold to Dawson, letter of 13 June, 1936, quoted in E. Wrench, Geoffrey Dawson and Our Times (London: Hutchinson, 1955), 334-335.

¹¹

Rumbold to Simon, 22 Feb., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 4, 243.

¹²

Ibid., 5 April, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 22.

¹³

Henderson, Failure, 54.

than D'Abernon: "The German, who has a highly developed herd instinct, is perfectly happy when he is wearing a uniform, marching in step, and singing in chorus".¹⁴ Henderson had little respect for German intelligence, believing that "If they could do a stupid thing at the wrong moment they always went off and did it".¹⁵ For Henderson too, Germans had a dark side, being unable "to understand the meaning of civilized decency and moderation".¹⁶ In contrast to these remarks, however, he also wrote that the repugnant Prussian ideology had been imposed on the "purser" Germans, "with whom an Englishman on his travels abroad finds himself in such natural sympathy".¹⁷ There could hardly be a clearer statement of the pan-Anglo-Saxon ideal applied to British-German relations.

The nineteenth-century phraseology apparent in D'Abernon's writings can also be seen in his successors. Simplistic generalizations, often just repetitions of popular catchphrases, were out of place in an era when the disciplines of psychology and sociology were rapidly developing. Such an attitude would perhaps not be a significant

¹⁴ Ibid., 67.

¹⁵ Henderson to Halifax, letter of 26 July, 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 2, 551.

¹⁶ Henderson, Failure, 222.

¹⁷ Ibid., 5

handicap in the nineteen-twenties, but could only be an obstacle to a full understanding of the Nazi movement, which could not be viewed in terms of traditional concepts.

* * * *

In view of the World War, the first ambassadors had a natural concern with the question of German militarism and war spirit. D'Abernon noted in 1922 that "No one that I have met here would think a successful war morally reprehensible".¹⁸

19

In a 1925 despatch he wrote:

The German of to-day is still something of an anachronism. Over and above the atavistic instincts of the race lies the age-old habit of mercenary military service, of internecine and, finally, of foreign war, reinforced by an education and a code of honour adapted deliberately to the military ideal. . . . It is thus not astonishing that there are in this country great numbers of ordinary mankind -- excellent husbands and fathers of family -- who can think of foreign policy only in terms of war -- the natural and honourable prerogative of man -- and who cannot conceive future frontiers otherwise than on the time-honoured scale of batteries and battalions.

However, D'Abernon felt these tendencies could be checked or even cured, if the "peace spirit" in Germany received "nourishment" from enlightened Anglo-French policy.²⁰

The theme of traditional militarism was generally ignored by D'Abernon's successors. In one brief reference,

¹⁸

D'Abernon, diary, entry of 13 March, 1922, in Diary, I, 279.

¹⁹

D'Abernon, despatch of 1925, quoted in Vansittart, memorandum of 7 April, 1934, DBFP, 2nd, 6, App. III.

²⁰

D'Abernon, Diary, I, 17.

Rumbold described Germany as passing in 1933 from its liberal tradition to the militarist tradition.²¹ Phipps in 1933 emphasized militarist tendencies in Germany, but did not discuss their historical background.²²

* * * *

The assumption that Germans would follow the lead of the government obediently made the nature of the German governing elite important. The British government had to form some opinion of these men, the higher officials as well as the political leaders. If the type of man who rose to the top in German society was reasonable, responsible, peaceful and trustworthy, then appeasement of German desires was a fairly safe course in the long run. Appeasement might also strengthen a moderate government against extremist opinion. A predisposition to regard Germany in this manner, combined with a defective view of the Nazi government when it came to power, induced the British government to believe that even the Third Reich had moderate elements whose position would be aided if Germany won concessions through peaceful negotiation.

D'Abernon found many faults and weaknesses in individual German leaders,²³ but such particular criticisms heightened

²¹

Rumbold to Simon, 21 March, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 4, 268.

²²

Phipps to Simon, 21 Nov., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 60.

²³

Vide infra, 81-82.

the effect of D'Abernon's overall praise of the type of man who governed Germany. At the end of his mission in Berlin, he noted that "I have found German statesmen reliable and strong.

What higher praise is there?"²⁴ His assessment was expressed

in words that Neville Chamberlain might well have spoken

²⁵
twelve years later:

I am constantly having to explain the attitude of Germany and assert her seriousness and goodwill. Paris and London are distrustful and too ready to criticise. I have no extravagant belief in anyone, but incline to the maxim that you make many people better by treating them with consideration and confidence. The German is partly what you make him.

D'Abernon thought German leaders were generally difficult to deal with and reluctant to make specific promises, but when they did make a specific statement it could be relied upon.²⁶

Rumbold, in the years before Hitler, did not engage in discussion of whether German leaders were more trustworthy than those of other nations. He did, however, believe that there was a tradition of duplicity running from Frederick the Great to Bismarck and then to Hitler.²⁷ Rumbold, as his

²⁴
D'Abernon, diary, entry of 8 Oct., 1926, in Diary, III, 268.

²⁵
Ibid., 10 July, 1925, in Diary, III, 174-175.

²⁶
Ibid., 25 Dec., 1923, in Diary, II, 287; also Diary, III, 28.

²⁷
Rumbold, War Crisis, viii.

book on the July crisis of 1914 shows, believed in German
²⁸war guilt. He was proud of the fact that his father "was,
indeed, one of the first Englishmen to realise the German
²⁹danger". To Rumbold, the German governing elite was suspect.
In July, 1930, he complained of the apparent insatiability
of German desires, since the "receipt of favours" brought
³⁰little gratitude and fresh demands.

In discussing the various German governments before
Hitler, the ambassadors were careful to point out the dangers
each faced from domestic public opinion. D'Abernon felt that
Stresemann's support of the Locarno negotiations put the
³¹Foreign Minister in danger of assassination. More often,
though, it was a question of the survival of ministries
rather than ministers. In 1920, D'Abernon warned Curzon that
a rupture in Allied-German talks on reparations "would
seriously endanger present ministry and might give us a
³²worse one". In a personal letter to Austen Chamberlain

²⁸

Ibid., 337-342.

²⁹

Ibid., 4.

³⁰

Rumbold to Henderson, 3 July, 1930, DBFP, 2nd, 1, 308. In
contrast to this general comment on German behaviour, however,
Rumbold in July, 1932, thought that the German government had
"real appreciation" of recent British assistance.-- Rumbold
to Tyrrell, 18 July, 1931, DBFP, 2nd, 2, 217.

³¹

D'Abernon, Diary, III, 16.

³²

D'Abernon to Curzon, 4 July, 1920, DBFP, 1st, 10, 171.

early in 1926, D'Abernon said that Luther and Stresemann had an effective answer to charges of slackness in fulfilling treaty obligations: "If we had attempted more we should not be here".³³

Rumbold had a similar view of the problems of the Bruning government, but was not as pessimistic, at least in 1931, concerning the character of a ministry that might replace it.³⁴ Rumbold wrote that the German people were convinced the Allies in 1919 had promised to disarm after Germany did and that "Any Government which attempts at this stage to correct this popular conception would not remain long in office".³⁵ Rumbold felt that a collapse of the government would be serious, but Germans had borne previous catastrophes well, such as the war and the occupation of the Ruhr, and the nation, with the aid of "unplumbed reserves of strength", especially in the business community, would eventually master its difficulties.³⁶

* * * *

The overall result of these views was to build up an attitude that tended to favour the conciliation of Germany. On the one hand, the German elite was represented as honest and responsible; on the other the German rulers were considered

³³ D'Abernon to Chamberlain, letter of 5 Feb., 1926, DBFP, 1A, 1, 247.

³⁴ Vide infra, 85.

³⁵ Rumbold to Henderson, 26 Feb., 1931, DBFP, 2nd, 1, 352.

³⁶ Ibid., 6 March, 1931, DBFP, 2nd, 1, 353.

in need of assistance, in the form of concessions by the former Allies, to ensure their supremacy over temporary currents in public opinion and extremists within their own ranks. Those who held these opinions were thus already prepared for appeasement, or practising it, by 1933. For men still bearing the emotional scars of the first great war, it was an easy step to adopt the same attitudes toward the Nazis, to find grounds for optimism in Hitler's peace speeches and to believe that moderate elements in the Third Reich would predominate, if Germany could obtain concessions peacefully. The Fuhrer may be a dictator -- but were the Germans not conditioned to periods of dictatorship? The S. A. and S. S. may be brutal -- but was this not just another example of an age-old tendency to brutality? By such processes men could easily slip into a feeling of false optimism. Along the way, they lost their chance of recognizing the fact that there was a new movement in Germany, not just another swing to the Right, and that this new movement carried with it an inevitable menace to Europe.

IV. THE WEIMAR EXPERIMENT

The first democratic German republic appeared in the midst of political chaos following defeat in war. The problem for the men who made British foreign policy was whether this new government represented a 'reformed' Germany and whether the new democracy would endure. If both questions could be answered in the affirmative, then Britain could confidently seek to appease grievances and to build up a strong Germany as the cornerstone of a prosperous Europe.

Both Lord D'Abernon and Sir Horace Rumbold were cautiously optimistic in discussing the prospects of the Weimar system. The four principal areas covered by their reports were evaluations of particular German leaders, of the problems facing Weimar governments and of the aims of German foreign policy, as well as recommendations for British policy toward Germany.

D'Abernon considered the German governing elite to be trustworthy,¹ but he was careful to note the exceptions. First were "the members of the old school" of statesmen and diplomats, who "remain overbearing, bullying, and tyrannical, and give the impression of unabashed unreliability".² D'Abernon also thought that German governments included a significant

¹
² Vide supra, 77.

D'Abernon, diary, entry of 8 Nov., 1920, in Diary, I, 89.

proportion of irresponsible individuals who frequently caused irrational acts. The Reichsbank director was D'Abernon's particular bête noire and the ambassador said in private talks "that Havenstein was a public danger, and would, in any state which had sound views about currency, be handed over to the common hangman".³ When Havenstein proudly announced that forty-⁴ six billion marks were being printed each day, D'Abernon wrote:

It appears impossible to hope for the recovery of a country where such things are possible. It is certainly vain to hope for it unless power is taken entirely away from the lunatics at present in charge . . .

D'Abernon was also contemptuous of what he felt to be occasional irrational fear of parliamentary criticism on the part of the government; in October, 1921, he wrote that he had done everything in his power to cure the government's "fit of nerves" and "suicidal mania".⁵ Significantly, however, the individuals criticized by D'Abernon were in secondary positions. The Chancellors, Foreign Ministers, and other men of the first⁶ rank were respected by the ambassador.

Sir Horace Rumbold passed fewer personal judgments on Weimar leaders, apparently not finding them remarkably

³ Ibid., 4 Nov., 1924, in Diary, III, 110.

⁴ Ibid., 20 Aug., 1923, in Diary, II, 240.

⁵ Ibid., 13 Oct., 1921, in Diary, I, 216.

⁶ Vide supra, 60.

different from rulers elsewhere. Of the German Chancellors, Rumbold most admired Bruning, "one of the leading statesmen of Europe".⁷ Bruning's successor, however, received no praise from Rumbold; "The choice of Herr von Papen as Chancellor was largely due to the fact that no candidate of any standing was willing to take office".⁸ When General Kurt von Schleicher, previously influential as Reichswehr minister, became Chancellor, Rumbold was pleased. The ambassador saw him as "a man of intelligence", honest, patriotic, not personally ambitious, "the only possible candidate" to be Chancellor.⁹ Rumbold was one of the few men to praise Schleicher, who in fact was generally distrusted, lacking in political principles, and had a natural tendency to intrigue.

The ambassadors' view of Weimar leaders was related to their estimate of the problems these leaders faced. German public opinion, consistently less compromising than German statesmen were inclined to be, was one of the major problems of Weimar governments. Lord D'Abernon considered public opinion to be a great hindrance

7

Rumbold to Simon, 9 June, 1932, DBFP, 2nd, 3, 129. Vide infra, 141-145, for Rumbold's campaign to get British assistance for Bruning.

8

Ibid.

9

Ibid., 7 Dec., 1932, DBFP, 2nd, 4, 44.

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 for German leaders. Rumbold wrote that Bruning could not have moderated his stand on the Austro-German customs union project because of the German people's insistence that such
 11
 a project was within their rights.

The inter-related economic and political instability characteristic of Weimar was naturally emphasized by the ambassadors. D'Abernon warned of the dangers of financial collapse from his first days in Berlin, saying in July, 1920,
 12
 that Germany was "uncommonly near bankruptcy". He also wrote that the extremist parties were "capable of any excess in order to achieve a temporary victory over their common
 13
 enemy, the Centre".

Rumbold, however, was not alarmed at the situation in 1931. When the banks were forced to close, he noted "an atmosphere of extreme tension" but felt Bruning's government was
 14
 still secure and there would be no disorder. At the end of
 15
 the year, he expressed optimism about the political situation:

10
Vide supra, 78-79.

11
 Rumbold to Henderson, 27 March, 1931, DBFP, 2nd, 2, 17.

12
 D'Abernon to Curzon, 30 July, 1920, DBFP, 1st, 10, 355, Enc. I.

13
 D'Abernon to Tyrrell, 20 Jan., 1926, DBFP, 1A, 1, 196.

14
 Rumbold to Henderson, 24 July, 1931, DBFP, 2nd, 2, 225.

15
 Rumbold to Simon, 18 Dec., 1931, DBFP, 2nd, 2, 317.

There is a German proverb which says that the soup is not eaten as hot as it is cooked. A coalition of the Right, including the Hitlerites, might prove more amenable in matters of foreign policy than the world suspects, and it would probably contain some of the ablest men and the best brains in the country.

Just one month later, however, Rumbold gave more weight to the problems facing the German government. He warned in January that severe financial and economic problems existed which could lead to a Nazi government replacing Bruning and unilaterally abolishing reparation payments.¹⁶

After Bruning's fall, Rumbold was concerned about the political situation but saw hope in President Hindenburg, "the chief bulwark of the constitution".¹⁷ Hindenburg's "indispensability", however, worried Rumbold, since the President could die at any time.¹⁸ In November, 1932, Rumbold was again optimistic, excessively so, when he depicted a slight decrease in Nazi votes as the "defeat of the Hitler movement".¹⁹

* * * *

Although both ambassadors made qualifications, they essentially agreed that the Weimar leaders were honest men in a difficult situation. In judging the foreign policies of the

¹⁶

Ibid., 20 Jan., 1932, DBFP, 2nd, 3, 43.

¹⁷

Rumbold to Simon, 18 Aug., 1932, DBFP, 2nd, 4, 16.

¹⁸

Ibid., 21 Sept., 1932, DBFP, 2nd, 4, 26.

¹⁹

Ibid., 19 Nov., 1932, DBFP, 2nd, 4, 37.

German governments, both ambassadors kept this assumption in mind.

In D'Abernon's eyes, Gustav Stresemann was virtually the model of a 'good European', seeking to act in the general interest rather than for narrow nationalistic purposes. The ambassador summed up Stresemann's policy as being:

To bring about such a moderation of hostility between France and Germany as would permit European pacification. . . . Once public opinion in Germany and France was reassured as to the particular danger arising from the other side of the Rhine, everything became easier. There was no more definite objective in Stresemann's mind than the above. The first step was all that he visualized clearly; once that step was taken international politics would settle down and many other things might become possible.

In saying this, D'Abernon missed a great deal in the Foreign Minister's policy and depicted him as being more of an idealist than he actually was. Stresemann did in fact have specific long-term objectives. He was also a proponent of a strong army, which he felt was "the main factor in a successful foreign policy", and gave at least tacit support to illegal

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D'Abernon, Diary, III, 18.

21

Stresemann described these objectives to an assistant as being: ending the demilitarization of the Rhineland; recovery of Eupen-Malmedy and the Saar; union with Austria; and acquisition of a colony in Africa.-- H. L. Bretton, Stresemann and the Revision of Versailles (Stanford: Stanford U. P., 1953), 22.

22

H. Gatzke, Stresemann and the Rearmament of Germany (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1954), 25.

23
rearmament.

D'Abernon did on occasion criticize German policy, as when he wrote that German financial leaders were in effect wrecking the German economy in order to avoid reparation payments.²⁴ In other cases, the ambassador felt that there was genuine popular pressure in support of certain goals in foreign policy. The German public, he wrote in November, 1920, would never accept Danzig or the Polish Corridor as being outside Germany; thus "on every opportunity" Germany could be expected to seek to overturn this arrangement.²⁵

D'Abernon's major misinterpretation of German foreign policy concerned Russo-German relations. Viewing Germany as purely Western-oriented and a potential ally against Communism, the ambassador underestimated the pro-Russian tendencies among German leaders. D'Abernon considered the Russo-German treaty of Rapallo in May, 1922, as an accident. He referred to the Germans' "blundering mistake in being duped into signing the Rapallo Treaty"²⁶ and depicted it as an impulsive act on

²³ Stresemann presided at a November, 1923, cabinet meeting which discussed increases of the Reichswehr beyond Versailles limits.-- ibid., 18, quoting Stresemann Papers.

²⁴ D'Abernon, diary, entry of 20 Aug., 1923, in Diary, II, 239.

²⁵ D'Abernon to Curzon, 2 Nov., 1920, DBFP, 1st, 11, 629. Vide infra, 89 and 156, for Rumbold's and Henderson's similar views.

²⁶ D'Abernon, diary, entry of 17 May, 1922, in Diary, I, 314-315.

the part of Rathenau, whom Lloyd George had refused to see
²⁷ shortly before. Certainly D'Abernon was unwilling to believe
 that Germany and Russia could have any substantial or prolonged
 relations. He belittled reports of German officers in Russia,
 since the German military class was too anti-Communist to
²⁸ co-operate with the Soviet rulers. In March, 1925, D'Abernon
 said to Stresemann that "The German Army could only co-operate
 with the Russians if they adopted bolshevistic ideas, or were
²⁹ converted by bolshevistic propaganda".

However, D'Abernon had been proved wrong four years
 earlier. The Reichswehr and the Russians began conversations
 in spring, 1921, with a view to giving German aid to the Russian
 armaments industry, which could produce artillery shells for
 Germany. Russo-German military co-operation was known to all
 German political leaders. Wirth and Maltzan followed the above
³⁰ negotiations closely, while both Ebert and Stresemann
 approved Russo-German co-operation in armament production and
³¹ testing.

²⁷

²⁷ Ibid., 8 May, 1922, in Diary, I, 309.

²⁸

²⁸ Ibid., 10 May, 1922, in Diary, I, 312; and 27 Oct., 1922,
 in Diary, II, 118.

²⁹

²⁹ Ibid., 5 March, 1925, in Diary, III, 146.

³⁰

³⁰ H. Gatzke, "Russo-German Military Collaboration During the
 Weimar Republic," American Historical Review, April, 1958, 63, 567-8.

³¹

³¹ Ibid., 595. See also Gasiorowski, supra, 117, and Rosenbaum,
op. cit., 69. Stresemann's apprehensions were removed in late
 1926, after revelations of some of this military co-operation
 produced no foreign counteraction. Stresemann thus agreed even
 to participation in poison gas experiments with the U. S. S. R.

Rumbold found nothing reprehensible in the fact that the German government should have specific goals in foreign affairs. In August, 1930, he asserted that the election campaign had "brought out into the open" all the objectives of German foreign policy.³² These goals he listed as: revision of the Young Plan on reparations; revision of the peace treaties to provide full equality of rights for Germany, even in armaments; return of the Saar; protection for German minorities in other states; and the acquisition of colonies. However, Rumbold added that Foreign Minister Curtius had "the courage of patience" and that the election agitation should not be taken too seriously. The ambassador also emphasized, in another despatch, the importance of German hostility to the Polish Corridor:³³

. . . a war against Poland to rectify the eastern frontiers would be in the nature of a crusade. A large part of the population would eagerly join in it without compulsion.

Rumbold, however, went on to assert that the majority of Germans preferred both Poland and Germany to be disarmed, rather than that Germany should rearm to Poland's level.

In March, 1931, Rumbold began warning of a more determined German drive to achieve foreign policy goals. Referring to

³²

Rumbold to Henderson, 29 Aug., 1930, DBFP, 2nd, 1, 318.

³³

Ibid., 26 Feb., 1931, DBFP, 2nd, 1, 352.

Bruning, he wrote that "We must expect, under this Chancellor, to see Germany affirming with increasing emphasis any rights to which she thinks she is entitled".³⁴ Five months later, the ambassador reported that the pace of German foreign policy was quickening. Previously he had felt that Germany would devote its energies to internal affairs after securing the evacuation of the Rhineland and the Saar, but now, he wrote, many Germans were convinced that revision of the Polish frontier could not be indefinitely delayed.³⁵ He summed up German aims as: first, re-establishment as a world power, with colonies; second, union with Austria; third, rearmament; and fourth, revision of the Polish frontier. When Papen became Chancellor, Rumbold again warned that German aims would be more actively and insistently pursued.³⁶ A month later, Rumbold expressed his fears that the German government, led by Papen and Schleicher, would unilaterally cancel treaty restrictions and "take the law into their own hands" if equality of status were not conceded.³⁷

In summary, both Rumbold and D'Abernon saw German foreign policy aims as 'legitimate' in the sense that these aims were pursued by honest persons who felt they had a good moral case and the support of public opinion. This interpretation acquires

³⁴ Ibid., 27 March, 1931, DBFP, 2nd, 2, 17.

³⁵ Ibid., 18 Aug., 1931, DBFP, 2nd, 1, 317.

³⁶ Rumbold to Simon, 4 Aug., 1932, DBFP, 2nd, 4, 9.

³⁷ Ibid., 8 Sept., 1932, DBFP, 2nd, 4, 77.

additional importance when related to the post-1933 government, for Hitler professed to have the same aims. Even when he acted unilaterally, he was not breaking with previous government policy, according to Rumbold's above despatch. Thus Nazi foreign policy aims, and even to some extent methods, could be considered as legitimate as those of Weimar.

* * * *

The advice given by D'Abernon and Rumbold to the British government has several points of similarity. Comparison, however, is difficult since D'Abernon expressed his personal views freely, whereas Rumbold confined himself mainly to reporting.

The Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office later looked back on D'Abernon as "the pioneer of appeasement"³⁸ and such indeed was D'Abernon's aim. At the end of his mission he accurately summed up the principles he had attempted to³⁹ establish:

My underlying convictions have been throughout:

(1) That Germany should be treated as a Great Power and not as an outlaw.

(2) That the restoration of German finances and the stabilisation of German currency were necessary preliminaries to a settlement of the Reparation problem.

(3) That Security -- to be real -- must be reciprocal and bilateral. The defeated in the Great War to receive the same security for peaceful development as the victors.

³⁸

Vansittart, op. cit., 276.

³⁹

D'Abernon, diary, entry of 24 Aug., 1926, in Diary, III, 258. Vide infra, 134-141, for D'Abernon's efforts on behalf of a reciprocal and bilateral security pact.

From the beginning, D'Abernon advised leniency and assistance to Germany in the case of reparations. He advised Curzon to postpone fixing a total for German reparation payments "until the situation has developed" and went on to oppose even an attempt to fix a sliding scale based on production, exports or revenue because of the instability of German currency, which prevented an accurate forecast of Germany's financial future.⁴⁰ In April, 1923, D'Abernon felt the absolute minimum required for financial recovery was a two-year moratorium on all forms of reparation payments.⁴¹

D'Abernon, however, did not merely advise leniency toward Germany; he believed that the German government had to do its share and make the necessary sacrifices to ensure financial recovery. An excess of expenditure over revenue was, in D'Abernon's opinion, "the main cause of financial peril", which the German government sought to remove by "constant recourse to the printing press", a short-sighted policy leading to inflation and an unstable exchange rate.⁴²

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D'Abernon to Curzon, 30 July, 1920, DBFP, 1st, 10, 355, Enc. I.

⁴¹

D'Abernon, diary, entry of 9 April, 1923, in Diary, II, 193.

⁴²

D'Abernon to Curzon, 4 Nov., 1920, DBFP, 1st, 10, 401.
D'Abernon's crusade for an enlightened currency policy had the co-operation of the embassy's commercial counsellor, who wrote in 1920 that "the root of the evil is beyond doubt the incessant flow of paper money which ever swells the note circulation".-- J. Thelwall, General Report on the Industrial and Economic Situation in Germany, December, 1920; Great Britain. Parliament. Papers by Command. Cmd. 1114, Overseas Trade Dept., 3.

Throughout 1921 D'Abernon urged German leaders to stop excessive issues of currency.⁴³ D'Abernon's views were endorsed in late 1922 by a conference of international currency experts, called by the German government on D'Abernon's prompting.⁴⁴ The majority report, presented by Keynes and three others, advocated suspension of reparations payments and budget equilibrium.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, neither the French nor the German governments took heed; reparation demands were maintained, as were the budgetary deficits. Not until a major crisis occurred did improvements follow. On 11 January, 1923, following minor defaults in reparation deliveries, French and Belgian forces began the Ruhr occupation. A crisis atmosphere continued until 27 September, when the short-lived Stresemann government decreed an end to the German policy of passive resistance in the Ruhr.

In August, 1923, D'Abernon saw the beginnings of the acceptance of his ideas, when the new Chancellor, Stresemann,⁴⁶ said to him:

You had so often told me privately that the first thing for Germany to do was to set her internal affairs--and particularly her finance -- in order; I adopted that view in my Government declaration.

⁴³

D'Abernon, diary, entry of 4 Nov., 1924, in Diary, III, 108.

⁴⁴

Ibid., 109.

⁴⁵

"Reports of the International Financial Experts summoned by the German Government to Advise them on the Financial Situation in Germany," Great Britain. Parliament. Papers by Command. Cmd. 1812.

⁴⁶

D'Abernon, diary, entry of 17 Aug., 1923, in Diary, II, 236. With the acceptance of the Dawes Plan on 16 August, 1924, a provisional reparations plan was achieved.

D'Abernon's policy of advising both sides to make concessions and conciliatory gestures, treating each other as equals, is also evident in his advice on sanctions and on disarmament. D'Abernon regarded sanctions as unnecessary, disruptive and embittering. In 1920 he expressed his objections to an occupation of the Ruhr:⁴⁷

Grave labour troubles would probably ensue and the orderly progress of the process of restoration in Germany would be violently disturbed. . . . There is a further reason against it, namely, that if carried out, our most powerful means of compulsion on Germany would cease to exist. The menace of the occupation of the Ruhr undoubtedly keeps the German Government up to the mark. Once executed, this means of pressure would not exist, and we should be embarrassed to know what to substitute.

In his diary, D'Abernon phrased it in this manner: "The menace of the occupation undoubtedly keeps the German Government up to the mark, if it does not keep the mark up".⁴⁸ D'Abernon's warning proved justified; when the Ruhr occupation was used as a sanction by the French in 1923, Germany pleaded economic dislocation and inability to pay. A historian neatly summed up the basic dilemma: "The Allies, or some of them, threatened to choke Germany to death; the Germans threatened to die".⁴⁹

Maintaining his balanced attitude, D'Abernon rejected territorial occupation as a sanction but expressed approval

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D'Abernon to Curzon, 23 Nov., 1920, DBFP, 1st, 10, 325.

⁴⁸

D'Abernon, diary, entry of 23 Nov., 1920, in Diary, I, 93.

⁴⁹

Taylor, op. cit., 54.

of Anglo-French control of specific administrations, such as the Reichsbank and Customs, if such action were necessary to make the German government fulfill its promises.⁵⁰ Any control of German finance should, in his opinion, be concentrated exclusively on essential areas, the most important being⁵¹ currency control.

In the field of disarmament, D'Abernon again urged that the issue be put in perspective and a policy of toleration applied. He wrote to Curzon that Germany was already effectively disarmed with regard to the question of capability for war against Britain or France; consequently, and in view of the internal Communist threat, there was little need to insist on reductions in paramilitary forces.⁵² D'Abernon also felt it useful in one case to try to suppress a dissenting viewpoint. A memorandum, "The Possibilities of a German Military Revival and the Means of Frustrating It", written by an anti-German British military representative on the Control Commission was⁵³ given to D'Abernon but not passed on to the British government. Again, however, D'Abernon pressed both sides to make concessions. With German leaders he argued that even though Germany was

⁵⁰ D'Abernon, diary, entry of 16 Dec., 1922, in Diary, II, 140.

⁵¹ Ibid., 9 Aug., 1922, in Diary, II, 78.

⁵² D'Abernon to Curzon, 6 Nov., 1920, DBFP, 1st, 10, 313.

⁵³ J. H. Morgan, Assize of Arms (London: Methuen & Co., 1945), 34.

disarmed on the whole, the remaining "shreds and remnants", which did not benefit Germany at all, were "profoundly irritating to those who desire to clean up the situation and to prove it has been cleaned up"; Germany should thus speedily remove the grounds for complaint.⁵⁴

In other matters, D'Abernon also advised making conciliatory gestures or concessions to Germany. During a luncheon with Lloyd George in 1921, D'Abernon urged that Britain make some declaration, on the removal of sanctions or on economic assistance to Upper Silesia, that would "assist the German Government in the Reichstag".⁵⁵ Several times in 1923 he pressed on members of the government the need to offer Germany a quid pro quo for abandoning passive resistance to the Ruhr occupation.⁵⁶ After Locarno, D'Abernon advised a British gesture to cement the new spirit of goodwill.⁵⁷

I consider it of real importance that evacuation of Cologne should be carried out with the utmost rapidity. Surprise execution and completion of this operation in advance of public expectation would enhance our reputation both for efficiency and good faith, and would constitute a great diplomatic and political gain here.

⁵⁴ D'Abernon, diary, entry of 20 March, 1922, in Diary, I, 286.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 21 June, 1921, in Diary, I, 184-185.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 11 June, 1923, in Diary, II, 222.

⁵⁷ D'Abernon to Chamberlain, 20 Nov., 1925, DBFP, 1A, 1, 113.

Compared to Lord D'Abernon, Sir Horace Rumbold gave very little advice, apparently seeing himself mainly as an executor of policy and a dispassionate observer. However, Rumbold did wage a subdued campaign to get assistance for Bruning.⁵⁸ At one time, he suggested an invitation to the⁵⁹ Chancellor to visit London:

. . . a visit to England would, I think, give him an international prestige which would be helpful to him in Germany itself. I cannot imagine anything which would more impress and please the Germans than if he were to spend a week-end at Chequers, for instance.

Like D'Abernon, Rumbold felt that minor infractions of disarmament provisions should be looked at in perspective and tolerated. Thus he advocated the removal of restrictions which were⁶⁰ "more irksome than effective".

* * * *

Taken together, the reports of both ambassadors favoured a policy of appeasement of German grievances. This, however, was a responsible and cautious appeasement, to be promoted from a position of strength and in a deliberate fashion. Wherever possible, appeasement would be pursued through conciliatory and inexpensive gestures. When concessions were made, they would be on a reciprocal basis, in return for a German quid pro quo.

58

Vide infra, 141-145.

59

Rumbold to Henderson, 6 March, 1931, DBFP, 2nd, 1, 354, The visit took place in June, 1931.

60

Vide infra, 144.

British interests would be carefully considered in making concessions and alternative means of protecting those interests studied.

Unfortunately, although the British government had developed a pro-appeasement attitude by 1933, it did not put into effect a concrete policy of appeasement. As a result, instead of new arrangements arising out of a dialectic between British and German negotiators, the driving force of diplomacy became German demands for revisionism, with Britain playing a passive role and slowly acquiescing to the demands. French opposition to German ambitions was neither checked by Anglo-German agreement nor rendered viable by British support against Germany. With the coming of Adolf Hitler, German pressure increased.

V. INTERPRETATIONS OF THE THIRD REICH

The advent of the Nazis created an urgent need for the British government to obtain comprehensive information on the new Germany. The new set of leaders could be anything from madmen and barbarians to merely uncouth demagogues. Their chief, Adolf Hitler, could be anything from an absolute dictator to a figurehead. Nazi leaders had made alarming declarations in the past, but would they be 'reasonable' in office? Above all, would there be a new, aggressive German foreign policy, or would the new leaders pursue the same ends as Stresemann and Brüning in only a slightly more insistent manner? The answers to these and other questions were necessary before British policy could be determined.

The first problem for observers in Berlin was to penetrate the cloud of obscurity that hung about the leading Nazis. Several persons could be identified as being in the inner circle around Hitler, but there was no clearly delineated hierarchy nor any specific division of responsibilities among them. All were involved in intrigues and feuds. Goering and Goebbels were scarcely on speaking terms, while Himmler and Goering conspired against SA leader Röhm. This state of affairs proved a great handicap for the ambassadors. Prediction was difficult when no one knew who had Hitler's ear on a given issue -- Ribbentrop, who believed Germany could press on at full speed without

meeting British opposition? or Goering, who preferred a more gradual series of coups, with more attention to legalistic forms? Often, minor events altered the influence of these men, as when Goebbels lost Hitler's favour for wanting to divorce his wife.

The question of sources of information assumed importance when positions of influence were unclear or changed. Apparently useful sources might turn out to be outside the real decision-making channels, or the channels themselves might shift away from the source. Configurations of influence changed drastically on occasion, as on 30 June, 1934, when Ernst Roehm and the SA were repressed. A more significant, if less bloody, purge occurred in February, 1938.¹ In that month Hitler dismissed the leading 'moderates' who had expressed reservations about his intention to seek territorial gains by unilateral action in the near future and to maintain a relatively high level of armament expenditure.

The Third Reich had a distinctly Byzantine flavour. The Fuhrer had the ability to intervene anywhere, reversing policies or dismissing officials, while responsibilities were divided

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General von Brauchitsch replaced von Fritsch as Commander-in-Chief of the Army. Blomberg, war minister and C-i-C of the armed forces, resigned, Hitler personally becoming C-i-C and the war ministry itself being replaced by a new High Command of the Armed Forces (OKW) headed by General Keitel. Ribbentrop replaced Neurath as Foreign Minister, while the finance ministry's power was decreased and transferred from Dr. Schacht to the obedient Walter Funk.

on a basis of personality rather than by departments. For important matters, Nazi administrative practice was to create an ad hoc organization about one individual, who² then competed with other groups and ministries for power.

The divided and overlapping control of foreign policy illustrates the Nazi system. Neurath, a holdover from the Weimar years, was the head of the Foreign Ministry. Although moderate, he was anxious to please Hitler and in the spring of 1934 persuaded President Hindenburg to appoint Ribbentrop Special Commissioner for Disarmament Questions. Ribbentrop immediately began expanding his influence, creating a private foreign ministry, the Buro Ribbentrop, which functioned even when its master was absent in London as ambassador. Simultaneously, the Nazi party had its own Foreign Organization (AO), headed by E. W. Bohle, that looked after anything affecting German citizens living abroad. The AO became active in subversion within Austria in 1935. Moreover, in 1936 a Party Office for Minority Germans (VOMI) was established with an S. S. officer as head. This competed with the AO until the latter⁴ was amalgamated with the Foreign Ministry. The subject of

²
A. Milward, The German Economy at War (London: Athlone Press, 1965), 9.

³
On the AO see A. L. Smith, "Hitler's Gau Ausland," Political Studies, Feb., 1966, 90-95.

⁴
See L. Hill, "Wilhelmstrasse in the Nazi Era," Political Science Quarterly, Dec., 1967, 546-570.

foreign propaganda was claimed by both Ribbentrop and Goebbels as their responsibility.

Luftwaffe chief Goering threw his ample weight into this jurisdictional chaos.⁵ In January, 1937, he was chosen to go on a special diplomatic mission to Mussolini to prepare the way for the Anschluss. Four months later, however, Ribbentrop, as ambassador to Britain, was able to deny Goering the prestige of an official visit to London. The overlapping of responsibilities was somewhat lessened in February, 1938, when Ribbentrop replaced Neurath, but at the same time Goering began to concentrate even more on foreign affairs. In addition to those with specific tasks in the conduct of foreign relations, high officials in the finance ministry, army, navy, air force and Gestapo could claim a legitimate concern with foreign policy decisions.

The effect of all this rivalry was that no one could know who was most influential, or what channels might be used in the execution of Nazi foreign policy. To the observer, this obscurity was disheartening and a potential source of error, for it would be very easy to see preconceived configurations in the midst of the fog.

A recent work on the British quality press and its interpretation of the Nazis before 1934 provides a background for

⁵ Goering also invaded finance minister Schacht's territory when the former was placed in charge of the Four-Year Plan in 1936 and set up a competing ministry.

the reports of the ambassadors and material for comparison.⁶ British newspapers based their reports on certain incorrect assumptions from the beginning of the rise of the Nazis. Chief among these was a complete misinterpretation of Hitler's role in the Nazi party. Hitler was considered to be a near-mediocre leader, a moderate within a party composed of factions with differing views.⁷ The S. A. was portrayed as a somewhat autonomous wing of the party, containing the extremists.⁸ These views missed the reality of the situation; Hitler's power within the Nazi party was supreme and he could enforce any policy he chose. The few cases of insubordination and dissent, by Gregor Strasser in 1932 and Ernst Roehm in 1934, were soon eliminated. Disunity and disagreement existed only on the level below Hitler, when he left his lieutenants to quarrel among themselves. Moreover, far from being a moderate trying to restrain an extremist wing, his ambitions were at least as far-reaching and his methods as unscrupulous as any prominent Nazi.

In effect, the British press imposed its own political concepts on the German scene, viewing Hitler as if he were a British party leader. Just as the once-suspect Labour party

⁶
B. Granzow, A Mirror of Nazism (London: Victor Gollancz, 1964),

⁷
Ibid., 187.

⁸
Ibid., 119.

had shown itself to be reasonable and moderate when faced with the responsibilities of office, the Nazis, in the eyes of the press, would do the same.⁹ The British press described inflammatory Nazi speeches, mass demonstrations by Nazis, their tirades against the Versailles restrictions, military and territorial, and the various outrages committed by members of the S. A.;¹⁰ but no one put together the jigsaw:

If the English journalists saw so much so clearly, said so much of great perceptiveness and lasting interpretative value, and still missed any real understanding of the novelty of totalitarianism and of the unprecedented threat, the explanation must be that Hitler himself was the hidden, unique factor who, in a sense, drew everything together, but in so doing went far beyond what any or all of these other factors, when seen separately or even together, could lead observers to expect.

Virtually all the British newspapers, in particular the 'quality press', propagated these views. The Times, with Geoffrey Dawson as editor, was especially influential in this regard. The assumptions that formed the basis of appeasement were spread throughout the British elite by such respected newspapers and crept into the thought processes of political leaders. The obvious counterweight to this daily diet of misinformation should have been thorough and well-reasoned reports and assessments from the ambassadors in Berlin. What was actually received requires close examination.

⁹
Ibid., 34-35, 41-42.

¹⁰
Ibid., 235.

The ambassadors had three main tasks, the first being to describe the nature of the Nazi party. This involved an assessment of the Führer's position within the party, evaluation of Hitler and other top Nazis, and a judgment as to whether Nazism amounted to anything more than militarism, racism, and the quest for power. The second and third tasks were to analyze Nazi goals in foreign policy and to submit advice for the formulation of British policy.

* * * *

Sir Horace Rumbold recognized Hitler's supremacy within the party from an early date. In December, 1931, the ambassador¹¹ wrote:

Too much importance need not be attached to the discrepancies between Hitler's statements and those of his auxiliaries. For the moment the Nazi movement holds its followers in a grip resembling that of a religious revival. The hypnotic effect of an order from the Brown House is admitted by Hitler's enemies to be even more alarming than before. Whatever his followers may say or do, the Nazi leader has only to issue a command to ensure instant obedience.

In April, 1933, when Hitler was in power, Rumbold held the same view.¹² On the question of whether Hitler was being driven by an extremist faction, Rumbold was ambiguous. He cautioned that the government's anti-semitic policy was due to Hitler himself¹³ and that Hitler in this regard was more extreme than official Nazi policy.¹⁴ However, in his last despatch, on 30 June, 1933, Rumbold expressed doubts

¹¹

Rumbold to Simon, 18 Dec., 1931, DBFP, 2nd, 2, 317.

¹²

Ibid., 26 April, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 36.

¹³

Ibid., 11 May, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 139.

as to Hitler's position. Referring to the persons around Hitler, he asked "Are these men driving Hitler? Can he control them?" and asserted that the answers to these questions could not yet be determined.¹⁵ In the same despatch he said that Berlin did not keep a very close watch on provincial Nazi leaders.

Phipps' interpretation was consistent with Rumbold's, depicting Hitler as supreme, but also implying the existence of potential dissension and of persons more extreme than Hitler within the party. In October, 1933, Phipps wrote that the position of the Nazi government with regard to non-Nazi elements was "virtually impregnable", so that:¹⁶

Any danger for the future appears to me to lie within the party itself. . . . Herr Hitler will have to keep a tighter grip of his followers than he has done in the past, if he is to hold them together. . . . I am not disposed, however, to attach too much importance to . . . reports of dissensions, since Herr Hitler has the power, if he has the will, to restore unity in the party.

Three months later, Phipps gave a more qualified assertion of Hitler's supremacy, saying that there was no reason to believe Hitler would fall in the near future, despite his

¹⁴ Ibid., 13 April, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 30.

¹⁵ Ibid., 30 June, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 229.

¹⁶ Phipps to Simon, 25 Oct., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 492.

"many real difficulties with his own extremists"¹⁷.

Nevile Henderson stated his views in slightly different terms. He referred to the difficulty in making predictions "When all, as in this country, depends on the decision of a single individual"¹⁸. However, Henderson felt Hitler often sat back and let his subordinates take the initiative, particularly when a crisis arose.¹⁹ In normal times, "Hitler is a directing brain for the big things but he leaves his subordinates a free hand in detail"²⁰. While the last statement, taken literally, is necessarily true of any leader, it had inherent dangers when used as a guide to Nazi actions. These dangers, which Henderson did not avoid, and the criticism he received from the Foreign Office are well demonstrated by a minute that Sir Orme Sargent put on the latter report:²¹

I find it difficult to believe that, when a Nazi coup is on foot in foreign affairs, Hitler is prepared to leave the preparations for the coup to his subordinates and to allow them to choose the time and manner of launching it.

¹⁷

Ibid., 22 Jan., 1934, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 195.

¹⁸

Henderson to Halifax, letter of 22 Aug., 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 2, 665.

¹⁹

Ibid., 20 May, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 5, 573.

²⁰

Henderson to Cadogan, letter of 23 May, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 5, 604.

²¹

Ibid., n.

Henderson did not feel able to place Hitler in any definite position with regard to moderate or extremist factions. The ambassador thought Hitler was a moderate "in his saner moments",²² but could be "egged on" and deliberately misled by an extremist faction.²³ Not until after war had begun did Henderson come around to the opinion that "Hitler himself is an extremist"²⁴ and the leader of the war party.²⁵

* * * *

The three ambassadors also showed similarities in their description of the personalities of Hitler and other Nazi leaders. Rumbold felt Hitler was "an idealist rather than a politician",²⁶ "very sensitive and vain".²⁷ Rumbold saw no qualities of statesmanship in Hitler, but did not underestimate the "uncommonly clever and audacious demagogue".²⁸ To Phipps, Hitler was "an abnormal man with an artistic

²² Henderson to Halifax, 25 May, 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 5, 604.

²³ Ibid., letter of 23 Aug., 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 2, 672.

²⁴ Henderson, Failure, 205.

²⁵ Ibid., 110.

²⁶ Rumbold to Simon, 11 Jan., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 4, 224.

²⁷ Ibid., 7 Feb., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 4, 238.

²⁸ Ibid., 22 Feb., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 4, 243.

temperament",²⁹ often given to moods of indecision.³⁰ Phipps personally preferred Hitler to Papen.³¹ Neville Henderson was able to find even more things to like about Hitler. He considered the German leader to have the "rare quality" of gratitude.³² Nor did he portray Hitler as a very alarming figure; "Hitler himself fought in the World War and his dislike of bloodshed, or anyway of dead Germans, is intense. His personal tastes are artistic".³³ On another occasion, however, Hitler was described as a "fanatical and unbalanced individual whose reactions are arbitrary and personal".³⁴ In one of Henderson's more flagrant misinterpretations he referred to Hitler's³⁵ "hesitation of risking his regime on a gambler's throw". Henderson never realized that Hitler's greatest strength -- and ultimate weakness -- was his willingness to gamble, to take chances that alarmed his generals, to hazard all on his intuitive impressions of his opponents.

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Phipps to Simon, 25 Oct., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 492.

³⁰

Phipps to Vansittart, 18 Jan., 1934, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 187.

³¹

Phipps to Simon, 24 Oct., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 490.

³²

Henderson to Halifax, 9 March, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 4, 195.

³³

Ibid.

³⁴

Ibid., 24 March, 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 1, 115.

³⁵

Ibid., 5 Sept., 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 2, 776.

The other Nazi leaders did not receive as good treatment in the ambassadorial reports. Rumbold in 1931 described them as all "third or even fourth rate men".³⁶ To him, living in a country ruled by such men was like living in a nightmare:³⁷

The outside world is best acquainted with the three chiefs, Hitler, Goring and Goebbels. All three are notoriously pathological cases. . . . One looks in vain for any men of real worth amongst the other leaders, who are seemingly recruited from a bad class.

I have the impression that the persons directing the policy of the Hitler Government are not normal. Many of us, indeed, have a feeling that we are living in a country where fanatics, hooligans and eccentrics have got the upper hand, and there is certainly an element of hysteria in the policy and actions of the Hitler regime.

The same sense of unreality, of being in an incomprehensible and frightening land, was also felt by Phipps and Henderson. Phipps, after a visit to Goering's estate, noted the "almost pathetic naiveté" of the Luftwaffe chief, who had the air of a "big, fat, spoilt child" when showing off his estate; Phipps could not help thinking of the airplanes that might some day be launched "in the same child-like spirit and with the same child-like glee".³⁸ It is little wonder that Phipps warned:³⁹

It must be remembered that Germany's present rulers are moved by feelings and reasons which are entirely alien to British habits of thought, and that the Chancellor would have no hesitation in taking action which would fill an orthodox banker or economist with horror.

³⁶ Rumbold to Henderson, 5 Jan., 1931, DBFP, 2nd, 1, 344.

³⁷ Rumbold to Simon, 30 June, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 229.

³⁸ Phipps to Simon, 13 June, 1934, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 452.

³⁹ Ibid., 26 April, 1934, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 408.

Or an orthodox soldier, diplomat or politician, Phipps might have added. If British leaders, and Phipps himself, had kept this in mind and not persisted in expecting Hitler to do the 'sensible' things -- to listen to his generals, to pursue his ambitions peacefully, to consolidate his gains before seeking more -- they would not have been so optimistic about the prospects for a negotiated and definitive settlement of the Third Reich's grievances.

Nevile Henderson was unable to make the same judgments on Nazi leaders as Rumbold and Phipps, since he was lost in the Byzantine world of Berlin, where the Nazi hierarchy⁴⁰ manœuvred and jostled for Hitler's favour:

One of the chief handicaps of Berlin is the almost complete lack of contact with the sole arbiter of Germany's fate. Hitler lives more and more in a practically hermetically sealed case and no one seems to know who his chief advisers are. Possibly no one.

One is constantly groping in the dark.

Henderson did, however, distrust most Nazis, and particularly Ribbentrop.⁴¹ Goering was an exception, considered a 'moderate', a sincere man who could be trusted when he said Hitler wanted⁴² peace.

⁴⁰ Henderson to Cadogan, letter of 20 July, 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 1, 524. One is tempted to compare Henderson's success in this "groping" to an earlier occasion when he literally went groping in the dark in the St. Petersburg embassy to catch an intruder and succeeded in half-strangling the ambassador, Lord Carnock.

⁴¹ Vide supra, 67.

⁴² Henderson to Halifax, 18 Feb., 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 4, 118; and vide supra, 67.

The irresponsible speeches of Nazi leaders, the disturbing characteristics of individual Nazis, and the government's tendency to sudden action led the ambassadors to create, or at least to support, one of the most harmful legends about the Third Reich; that in a crisis or under provocation the Nazi rulers might well lose their heads and take action that they would not otherwise consider. This view naturally led to the conclusion that Nazi leaders must be treated delicately; stern warnings or sharp provocations at the wrong time might provoke a violent reaction. Attention, instead of being focused on the cause of a crisis, Nazi ambitions, was diverted to ways of removing the pretexts for German action.

Following the burning of the Reichstag building in 1933, Rumbold telegraphed that "Government are in a distinctly hysterical mood".⁴³ In another matter, Rumbold warned that foreign protests against Nazi anti-semitism might well provoke the German rulers to harsher measures, since the state was in the hands of "a hypersensitive Chancellor supported by three inexperienced and brutal colleagues who are deaf to level-headed advice".⁴⁴ Phipps also contributed to this view, saying

⁴³ Rumbold to Simon, 1 March, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 4, 245; and ibid., 2 March, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 4, 253.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 31 March, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 14.

after the purge of the S. A. that "The future outlook, then, seems gloomy, directed as she is by a now less than ever balanced Fuhrer".⁴⁵

Nevile Henderson, however, was by far the most energetic proponent of this interpretation. During the Munich crisis he successfully objected to instructions to deliver a warning to Hitler. Henderson wrote that:⁴⁶

I am convinced Chancellor, whilst resolved to act if genuine solution is achieved, has not yet decided what this action is to be or when it is to be taken. . . . in the unbalanced state of mind in which I think he is, any solemn warning . . . will drive him to the very action which we seek to prevent.

Referring to an earlier British warning given four months before, Henderson requested "for Heaven's sake send no more instructions as on May 21st";⁴⁷ and in another letter, "The form of Hitler's genius is on the borderline of madness. . . . A second 21st May will push him over the edge".⁴⁸

* * * *

Each ambassador, despite his overall distaste for the Nazis, saw certain worthwhile 'ideals' in their movement. Sir Horace Rumbold felt that Nazism had a "healthy side"

⁴⁵ Phipps to Simon, letter of 5 July, 1934, DBFP, 2nd, 6, App. III.
⁴⁶ Henderson to Halifax, 10 Sept., 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 2, 823.
⁴⁷ Henderson to Wilson, letter of 9 Sept., 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 2, App. I.
⁴⁸ Ibid., 10 Sept., 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 2, App. I.

consisting of "striving for a greater, better, cleaner and less corrupt Germany"⁴⁹. In February, 1933, Rumbold declared that there were "certain affinities" between Nazism and Catholicism and that Hitler would, as a Catholic, follow the same policies as the Centre party with regard to education and cultural affairs.⁵⁰ On 30 June, 1933, in his last despatch, Rumbold interpreted the purposes of "the Hitler ideology" as⁵¹ being:

. . . to develop a spirit of comradeship and of unselfish devotion to the State. . . . the movement aims at restoring the self-respect of the citizen and, through him, of the State itself. Class warfare is to cease and labour to be ennobled.

Nevertheless, Rumbold, after describing measures taken by the Nazis to abolish civil liberties, democracy, and freedom of speech, stated that a comparison between the Nazis and the Kaiser's government "redounds entirely to the credit of the latter".⁵² Those were strong words for an old-school diplomat given to understatement and a firm believer in German war guilt.

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Rumbold to Henderson, 31 Oct., 1930, DBFP, 2nd, 1, 334.

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Rumbold to Simon, 7 Feb., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 4, 238.

⁵¹

Ibid., 30 June, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 229.

⁵²

Ibid., 22 Feb., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 4, 243.

Sir Eric Phipps used the same comparison, but with different results, saying that there was in National

⁵³
Socialism

. . . a certain idealism and sentimentality, and it may be that there are possibilities in it which, if it survives, may ultimately prove of value to European politics. It must not be identified with the sterile German nationalism of 1914, from which Europe could expect nothing. With skilful handling Herr Hitler and his movement may be brought to contribute some new impulse to European development. . .

On another occasion Phipps noted that Hitler was able "to do things which the country needed but which the party system obstructed".⁵⁴ These included fixing prices, a winter works campaign, and more severe treatment for habitual criminals. To some extent, then, Phipps sympathized with the Nazi tenet that a dictatorship was the most efficient means of governing Germany. Phipps, however, was not blind to the dangerous themes in the Nazi ideology, recognizing that militarism was the "leitmotiv" of the Third Reich.⁵⁵ Nevile Henderson made scant comment on Nazi ideology, but did feel that many Nazi "social reforms" were "on highly advanced democratic lines".⁵⁶

* * * *

What sort of foreign policy could be expected from the

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Phipps to Simon, 25 Oct., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 492.

⁵⁴

Ibid., 21 Nov., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 60.

⁵⁵

Ibid.

⁵⁶

Henderson, Final Report, 2.

unbalanced rulers of the Third Reich? Each of the ambassadors at one time or another claimed that prediction was impossible. In his last despatch Rumbold confessed that he could not forecast the development of events in Germany for even the next twelve months.⁵⁷ In March, 1933, he had written that he could predict neither German actions at the coming Disarmament Conference nor general German foreign policy.⁵⁸ A year later, Phipps lamented, "Never before was true prophecy more essential and never more hopeless to attempt".⁵⁹ In July, 1934, he wrote:⁶⁰

It will be seen that one thing only is certain, and that is the general uncertainty. The actors are too unstable, the factors too numerous and too shifting, to allow of prophecy for more than a few weeks . . . To attempt any reasoned prognostication on the future course of events in Germany would be the height of unreason.

Henderson, as noted, felt as if he were "groping in the dark".

Despite their feelings of uncertainty, Rumbold and Phipps were able to give some remarkably accurate warnings about Hitler's ambitions and methods. Rumbold had been following the rise of the Nazis for several years, providing full reports on such matters as Hitler's testimony in 1930 at a trial of Nazis in Leipzig, where the Nazi leader declared that a Nazi government would seek to end the restrictions of

⁵⁷ Rumbold to Simon, 30 June, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 229.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 7 March, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 4, 259.

⁵⁹ Phipps to Simon, 25 April, 1934, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 405.

⁶⁰ Ibid., letter of 5 July, 1934, DBFP, 2nd, 6, App. I.

Versailles by "means which, in the opinion of the world, will be regarded as illegal means".⁶¹ Rumbold noted Hitler's frequent derision of the concepts of "international understanding, peace pacts, the spirit of Locarno, the policy of conciliation and the like".⁶²

Rumbold's gravest warning, however, was his despatch of 26 April, 1933, which was read by the Prime Minister and circulated among the Cabinet.⁶³ Its accuracy and comprehensive nature make it well worth quoting at length:

The prospect is disquieting, as the only programme, apart from ensuring their own stay in office, which the Government appear to possess may be described as the revival of militarism and the stamping out of pacifism. The plans of the Government are far-reaching, they will take several years to mature and they realise that it would be idle to embark on them if there were any danger of premature disturbance either abroad or at home. They may, therefore, be expected to repeat their protestations of peaceful intent from time to time and to have recourse to other measures, including propaganda, to lull the outer world into a sense of security.

At this point, Rumbold described the principles set forth in Mein Kampf, that man is and must continue to be a fighting animal, that all scattered German elements must be included in the new Reich, and that Germany must attack its enemies singly. Lest the book be dismissed as out of date, Rumbold added that

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Rumbold to Henderson, 26 Sept., 1930, DBFP, 2nd, 1, 325.

⁶²

Rumbold to Vansittart, 15 March, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 4, 265.

⁶³

Rumbold to Simon, 26 April, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 36 and page 55n.

"the foreign policy which emerges from his speeches is no less disquieting than that which emerges from his memoirs".

He said that the Nazi government

. . . have to rearm on land, and, as Herr Hitler explains in his memoirs, they have to lull their adversaries into such a state of coma that they will allow themselves to be engaged one by one. It may seem astonishing that the Chancellor should express himself so frankly, but it must be noted that his book was written in 1925, when his prospects of reaching power were so remote that he could afford to be candid.

Rumbold in this despatch left little room for optimism:

I fear that it would be misleading to base any hopes on a return to sanity or a serious modification of the views of the Chancellor and his entourage. Hitler's own record goes to show that he is a man of extraordinary obstinacy. . . . Herr Hitler has, of course, sufficient native cunning to realise the necessity for camouflage.

I have the definite impression that a deliberate policy is being pursued; a policy which was dimly outlined during the chancellorship of Herr von Papen, which has now the support of the entourage of the President. The aim of this policy is to bring Germany to a point of preparation, a jumping-off point from which she can reach solid ground before her adversaries can interfere . . .

Although in general terms, this warning accurately forecast the coming danger and the style in which Hitler would pursue his ambitions. As good and as potentially valuable as this despatch was, Phipps provided an even clearer and more detailed warning. In January, 1934, he too wrote a comprehensive forecast of Nazi foreign policy. Emphasizing both the contrast and

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Phipps to Simon, 31 Jan., 1934, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 241.

similarity between Weimar and Nazi policy, he noted

. . . the elimination of the men who stood for the policy of treaty revision through the League of Nations or through negotiation. In their place there are now men, whose ultimate aims are much the same, but whose radically different methods may at some future date precipitate an international conflict. For Nazi Germany believes neither in the League nor in negotiation . . .

Germany's foreign policy may be said to comprise the following aims:-

- (1) Fusion with Austria.
 - (2) Rectification of the eastern frontiers.
 - (3) Some outlet for German energy toward the south or east.
 - (4) The recovery of some colonial foothold overseas.
- The order may vary with the needs of the moment. Dr. Brüning, for example, placed fusion with Austria first on the list, not because of its urgency, but because it seemed easiest of attainment. . . . Herr Hitler has found that Austria is amenable to Nazi treatment, and therefore for the moment leaves the Brüning order of precedence unchanged.

Herr Stresemann hoped to reach these objectives by conciliatory methods. . . . All reasonable and cautious opinion in Germany foretold disaster, occupation of the Rhineland, sanctions, perhaps blockade, if Germany reverted to nationalism. The Nazis seized power, and nothing happened. Herr Hitler left the League and still nothing happened. On the contrary, the statesmen of Europe were represented here as having been galvanised into running after Germany. . . . It is therefore not surprising if the Chancellor pursues methods which hitherto have brought him success.

To attain his aims, the first step is obviously to discard the remaining servitudes of the Peace Treaty which stand in his way, namely, the disarmament stipulations. His policy is simple and straightforward. If his neighbours allow him, he will become strong by the simplest and most direct methods. The mere fact that he is making himself unpopular abroad will not deter him . . . If he finds that he arouses no real opposition, the tempe of his advance will increase. On the other hand, if he is vigorously opposed, he is unlikely at this stage to risk a break, and his policy will probably be to gain time and to go forward as best he can, trying to divide his opponents, and even reverting to the derided methods of his predecessors. In the event of really serious opposition, he may fall back on his so-called

'long-term programme' which is fully described in 'Mein Kampf'. A new political bloc of Germans, Austrians and scattered Teuton elements is to be established in the centre of Europe. Time is of no consequence. . . .

Recent events have, however, given heart to the Nazis, and the 'long-term programme' is receding into the background. There is an ever-growing conviction that the day is not so far distant when Germany can at last emerge safely into the open. . . . Although Germany appears now to be flouting the opinion of Europe over a variety of major questions, she is doing so because she believes she can now safely pursue this course. She is, I consider, still sufficiently conscious of her weakness and isolation to be brought to a halt by a united front abroad, though the time is not far distant when even a threat of force will prove ineffective.

When Germany is rearmed and feels secure from foreign intervention, it will be possible to take in hand the programme outlined above.

Virtually the only mistake Phipps made was in over-estimating the period of calm that would exist while Germany was building up its strength and security. He concluded his despatch by estimating that the above programme would not be pursued "in a manner likely to precipitate deliberately an armed conflict" for at least a decade.

While depicting Hitler's general goals as similar to those of Stresemann and Brüning, Phipps did not fall into the trap of assuming that Nazi foreign policy would be essentially the same as that of Hitler's predecessors. The ambassador recognized that the methods of seeking these goals were as important as the goals themselves. Phipps also deserves credit for his emphasis on the flexibility of Hitler's policy, for Hitler had no specific order of timetable in which to realize his ambitions.

The obvious question is why such warnings were not fully accepted, why British statesmen continued to act on the assumptions that Nazi aims fell short of the domination of Europe and that the German government would accept compromise settlements arrived at by rational negotiation. Foreign Secretary Sir John Simon had minuted on Phipps' despatch that "This is a most illuminating document --⁶⁵ and terrifying"; the Prime Minister had also read it. The answer is not that the political leaders ignored all professional advice, nor that they were so terrified at the thought of war that they sought 'peace at any price'.⁶⁶ It is a sad fact that even Rumbold and Phipps were unwilling to place complete faith in their own warnings. Both felt themselves to be in the midst of uncertainty and neither could consistently restrain the natural human tendency to optimism. In so doing, they lessened the effect of their own warnings -- even contradicting themselves in places -- and provided an opportunity for the political leaders to reassure themselves. Phipps may have put a great deal of care and thought into the above despatch and

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Phipps to Simon, 31 Jan., 1934, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 241, page 366n.

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Their revulsion to total war, however, led them to rule out that course of action, or serious risk of it, except in the event that they felt they had a cast-iron moral case -- which was impossible in the midst of such uncertainty.

impressed the Foreign Secretary; but a less significant despatch which showed optimism would be more emotionally appealing and would to a great extent cancel out the previous despatch.

A good example is Rumbold's last despatch, written two months after the warning of 26 April. After condemning the characters of Nazi leaders and emphasizing the great uncertainty as to the course of future events, he concluded on the reassuring note that there was little hostility to Britain in Germany, particularly in official circles.⁶⁷ In saying this, Rumbold may well have been thinking of the passages in Mein Kampf which he had briefly mentioned in his despatch of 26 April, where Hitler⁶⁸ expressed his desire for an Anglo-German-Italian alliance. In May, Rumbold had also shown optimism by implying that the Nazis⁶⁹ might be induced to see reason:

. . . the Nazi regime is steadily consolidating itself and there have been signs lately of a saner and more responsible attitude on the part of the three leaders, Hitler, Goebbels and Goring.

In saying in the same despatch that "the Government have been forced by the pressure of world opinion to pay lip service to the policy of Dr. Stresemann", Rumbold also implied that the Nazi leaders might modify their policies rather than antagonize

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Rumbold to Simon, 30 June, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 229.

⁶⁸

A. Hitler, Mein Kampf (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943), 620ff, 665ff.

other peoples. A week later he wrote that a recent speech by Hitler indicated that the German leader was reluctant⁷⁰ to antagonize foreign public opinion.

Phipps expressed similar views on 13 October, 1933, when he said that the German government "was very anxious" not to have the responsibility before world opinion for a breakdown in the Geneva disarmament negotiations.⁷¹ Unfortunately for the impact of this analysis, Germany announced its withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference and the League on 14 October, 1933. The ambassador, however, continued to believe that Germany could be induced to restrain itself voluntarily, through a negotiated agreement. On 25 October, 1933, he wrote that "a sound disarmament convention with present-day Germany is, perhaps, not entirely a Utopian idea".⁷² Phipps was careful to phrase this suggestion in a very qualified manner, but the tone is still a vivid contrast to his despatch of 31 January, 1934, which lost much of its impact through being both preceded and followed by references to the possibility of German acceptance of disarmament restrictions.⁷³

⁷⁰

Ibid., 17 May, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 153.

⁷¹

Phipps to Wellesley, 13 Oct., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 448.

⁷²

Phipps to Simon, 25 Oct., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 492.

⁷³

Vide infra, 146-150.

Sir Neville Henderson gave no warnings about coming German aggression in the first place and so could not lessen their impact. Like his two predecessors, he had read Mein Kampf, but his reaction was that it was a remarkable production for a man with as little formal education as Hitler.⁷⁴ Henderson, in fact, did not view German ambitions in the same terms as Rumbold and Phipps. Whereas they looked for means of preventing German aggression, he saw the danger in conditions and events. Hitler, in his view, had a choice between risking war and attempting a potentially disastrous change in the pattern of the German economy, but would "show his humanity to the extent of shirking the dilemma as long as he possibly can".⁷⁵ Henderson thought war might come not from the excessive ambition or brutal methods of an aggressor but from the unwise acts of lesser officials or from the "irresponsible hot-headedness of youth".⁷⁷

Henderson's accidentalist view of history is plain in his reports: "human actions are at the mercy of chance occurrences";⁷⁸ "It is events not individuals which are the danger".⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Henderson, Failure, 4.

⁷⁵ Henderson to Halifax, 24 May, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 5, 616.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 17 May, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 5, 541.

⁷⁷ Henderson to Sargent, letter of 18 July, 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 1, 514.

⁷⁸ Henderson to Halifax, 9 March, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 4, 195.

⁷⁹ Ibid., letter of 19 May, 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 1, App. I.

With such an outlook, Henderson could hardly realize that the various crises owed their gravity to conscious German initiatives. Writing in March, 1938, he felt that the Anschluss with Austria was the result of a series of unplanned events; provoked by his disapproval of the Blomberg marriage, Hitler had dismissed his moderate advisers in early 1938⁸⁰ and produced a chain reaction which led to the Anschluss.

Although Henderson felt that the Nazis were not bent on aggression, he did recognize some of their ambitions and the danger that the Third Reich could, at some distant date, undertake a policy of aggression. In April, 1938, he listed German ambitions as the Sudetenland, the Corridor, Danzig and Memel,⁸¹ them continued:

Any material advance beyond those limits, except so far as colonies are concerned, which come into a separate category, is, in fact, not only hypothetical but contrary to Hitler's own doctrine of nationality and of a pure German race. Once the above quite definite programme has been accomplished . . . we shall certainly have to consider the implications of a possible long-term German 'Machtpolitik' and, if it is really such as the prophets would have us believe, Europe will presumably, in due course, unite in self-defence to meet the danger with which it is threatened. But there is, on the other hand, at least an equal possibility that, once the unity, which is comprised in the above programme and to which she claims that she is legitimately entitled, is attained, Germany will settle down . . . and concentrate her efforts on internal and economic development and on the acquisition of colonies overseas. . . . I am personally much more inclined to think that this latter

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Ibid., 24 March, 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 1, 115.

81

Ibid., 1 April, 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 1, 121.

contingency will be nearer the truth . . . adventures may come later, but not in this generation or in Hitler's lifetime.

In writing this, Henderson assumed that German ambitions were traditional, rational, limited and legitimate. Hitler, in fact, appeared as virtually just a reincarnation of Bismarck, in so far as both sought to achieve German unity and a world position. Thus Henderson failed to grasp the dynamics of the Nazi movement, to understand that the very nature of the Nazi principles and the character of Nazi leaders would result in a continual increase in the speed and ruthlessness with which German aims were pursued.

* * * *

The British government looked to the ambassadors not only for information and analysis, but for explicit advice as to what British policy should be. In this sphere Rumbold was less outspoken in his reports and less forthcoming than his successors. Whether because of uncertainty or a natural reluctance to give much advice, Rumbold made only one recommendation, that Germany's neighbours should be "vigilant" and might have to "determine their attitude towards coming developments in this country sooner than they may have contemplated".⁸² Unfortunately, the British government made little effort to determine its attitude to German treaty

⁸²

Rumbold to Simon, 26 April, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 36.

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⁸²

Rumbold to Simon, 26 April, 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 36.

violations in advance.

Sir Eric Phipps, despite his warnings, felt that the only practical course open to Britain was to seek an agreement⁸³ with Germany:

In view of the notorious disinclination of any Power to embark on sanctions the only alternatives that I can see are the controlled or the uncontrolled rearmament of Germany, in other words the rearmament of Germany under certain restrictions and limitations and in return for certain concessions on her part, or her rearmament pure and simple, up to the limit of her financial capacity, and without any concessions from her in return.

Phipps, however, warned that the European countries should be prepared to form a united front against "undue German pretensions" and to put themselves in a position where they could credibly threaten Germany with sanctions in the event of⁸⁴ infractions of an armaments agreement. These sanctions would presumably have been economic, for in discussions with the American ambassador Phipps advocated European co-operation to place Germany in the midst of "an encirclement system which⁸⁵ may even bring economic collapse". Phipps was not sanguine about the prospects of achieving a lasting agreement,⁸⁶ but he saw at least a possibility of success in this course:

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Phipps to Simon, 27 Nov., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 81.

⁸⁴

Ibid., 22 Jan., 1934, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 195.

⁸⁵

Dodd, diary, entry of 3 Aug., 1934, in Dodd's, 139.

⁸⁶

Phipps to Simon, 21 Nov., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 60.

We cannot regard him Hitler as the author of 'Mein Kampf', for in such case we should logically be bound to adopt the policy of a 'preventive' war . . . nor can we afford to ignore him. Would it not, therefore, be advisable soon to bind that damnably dynamic man? To bind him, that is, by an agreement freely and proudly given? By some odd kink in his mental make-up he might even feel impelled to honour it. . . . His signature, moreover, would bind all Germany like no other German's in all her past. Years might then pass and even Hitler might grow old, and reason might come to this side and fear leave that.

Phipps also provided some tactical advice, raising the possibility of using unorthodox methods in a period of emergency. Stating that the Führer would not be swayed by reasonable arguments, the ambassador suggested that "some rather theatrical personal appeal
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to his emotions" be considered.

In short, Phipps felt that there was no alternative to some degree of appeasement, but that this appeasement be from a position of strength, a combination of European states resolved to enforce any armaments agreements and to resist excessive Nazi ambitions. In effect, this was a call for a renewed Anglo-French alliance. The difficulty in Phipps' advice was that Anglo-French agreement on appeasing Germany was virtually impossible, since the French government opposed all proposals that would increase German power.

Neville Henderson's advice was based on an aversion to European commitments and a willingness to go to greater lengths

87
Ibid., 25 Oct., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 495; and ibid., 24 Oct., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 489.

in appeasing Germany. Henderson believed that Britain should not oppose German expansion to the east. In a lengthy memorandum⁸⁸ written before he arrived in Berlin, he stated:

To put it bluntly, Eastern Europe is emphatically is neither definitely settled for all time nor is it a vital British interest and the German is certainly more civilised than the Slav, and in the end, if properly handled, also less potentially dangerous to British interests -- one might even go so far as to assert that it is not even just to endeavour to prevent Germany from completing her unity or from being prepared for war against the Slav provided her preparations are such as to reassure the British Empire that they are not simultaneously designed against it . . .

In March, 1939, Henderson repeated these views, adding that Germany would not turn on the western powers unless Hitler believed such action necessary to enable him to drive eastward without⁸⁹ risking a two-front war. This was an accurate analysis, but Henderson did not fully realize the dangers for Britain in a German victory in the east. Had Nazi Germany eliminated Russia as an opponent and gained the resources of the east, Britain and France would have been extremely vulnerable to German pressure. Henderson, however, because of his faith in the limited nature of Hitler's aims and because of his rejection of balance of power concepts, could not accept this view.

This is not to say that Henderson was completely immune to power considerations, for he realized that Britain needed

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Henderson, memorandum of 10 May, 1937, in Thompson, op. cit., 270-273.

⁸⁹
Henderson to Halifax, 9 March, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 5, 195.

vastly increased air strength to preserve its independence of action.⁹⁰ The annexation of Austria was to him proof of "the futility of forcible protests unbacked by force or the fear of force".⁹¹ Moreover, Henderson on several occasions expressed doubts about his belief that German expansion would not be directed against British interests. In May, 1939, he wondered whether the German leaders should be overthrown by preventive war before German power became even greater.⁹² However, in the previous year Henderson had stated his reasons for opposing such a course. Then he believed Britain and France would win such a war, but "it will mean that we shall have to go on fighting her again and again, until one day we may be ourselves beaten".⁹³ A major factor in this outlook was Henderson's conviction that though Hitler may be overthrown in such a war, Nazism would live on; "every young German is a rabid Nazi and will remain so".⁹⁴ In July, 1939, Henderson gave another reason; "I would still oppose a preventive war as an utterly immoral doctrine".⁹⁵ The question of preventive war soon became academic.

⁹⁰

Ibid., letter of 12 Oct., 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 3, App. I.

⁹¹

Ibid., 24 March, 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 1, 115. In December, 1937, Henderson asserted that Britain should not approach Germany without an "air equivalent of the Maginot Line".-- Henderson to Londonderry, letter of 12 Dec., 1937, in Londonderry, op. cit., 185.

(notes 92 to 95 on next page)

Henderson's advice on more immediate issues showed less hesitation. He felt that British policy should seek to remove potential provocations⁹² to Hitler and simultaneously seek to put the German leader in a good mood. Before the Munich crisis, Henderson wrote that the Sudeten youth were looking for an excuse to create a serious incident that would provoke German intervention; Britain therefore should concentrate on fore-⁹⁶stalling any such excuse. At the same time he suggested that leading British newspapers be persuaded to "write up Hitler as the apostle of Peace" whenever the German leader made a peaceful speech; "give Hitler as much credit as possible. . . . give him a chance of being a good boy".⁹⁷ If the British press refrained from criticizing Hitler, he might, in Henderson's⁹⁸ opinion, be induced to reject the advice of Nazi extremists.

* * * *

⁹²

Ibid., letter of 6 May, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 5, 403; and Henderson to Cadogan, 14 May, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 5, App. I.

⁹³

Henderson to Halifax, letter of 22 Aug., 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 2, 665. See also ibid., 19 Aug., 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 2, 647, and ibid., letter of 6 Aug., 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 2, 590.

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Henderson to Cadogan, letter of 8 June, 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 7, App. I.

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Henderson to Halifax, 28 July, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 6, App. I.

⁹⁶

Ibid., 6 June, 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 1, 378.

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Henderson to Cadogan, letter of 6 Sept., 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 2, 793.

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Henderson to Halifax, 30 July, 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 2, 560.

The overall picture emerging from a study of the ambassadors' reports suggests a modification of the view that the policies of Neville Chamberlain received virtually no support from the 'professionals'. Henderson was not a solitary pro-appeasement voice in the Foreign Service; there is a continuous current of thought running from Rumbold -- if not D'Abernon -- up to Henderson, where the climax of appeasement is reached. Rumbold gave warnings, but also expressed uncertainty and qualified his more alarmist interpretations. Phipps also provided warnings, but explicitly said there was no alternative to seeking an agreement with Germany. Henderson went still further, being willing to leave all of eastern Europe to Germany. This is not to say that Rumbold or Phipps would have fully accepted Chamberlain's principle of appeasement -- they would not have made the mistake of considering German demands legitimate grievances and as such to be satisfied without concessions on the part of Germany. However, neither Rumbold nor Phipps put forward a viable policy that would have provided safeguards against the growing strength of the Third Reich. Moreover, every time they spoke of the chance of achieving a lasting agreement, of signs of moderation shown by Hitler, or of the dangers in provoking Hitler and helping the 'extremist faction', they gave their masters in London encouragement, however unwarranted, for a policy of appeasement.

It is to the lasting credit of Rumbold and Phipps that they gave as clear warnings as they did on 26 April, 1933, and 31 January, 1934, respectively; but the effect of their other despatches should not be ignored. Perhaps the British leaders would have read grounds for optimism into any type of reports from Berlin; as it was, they could reassure themselves by shifting emphasis from one interpretation to another. Such unconscious distortion was only natural. Few men wish to be pessimistic, and even fewer would cause bitterness and confrontation because it appeared that a more dangerous confrontation would occur otherwise. The tragedy of the thirties was that no one could have been too pessimistic.

VI. THE AMBASSADORS AT WORK: FOUR CASE STUDIES

The advice and reports of the ambassadors may be better understood when their action in specific cases is studied. The calm campaigns of Rumbold to assist Hitler's predecessors and of Phipps to advance the negotiations for an armaments agreement with Germany complement their interpretations of the Third Reich. Neville Henderson's actions in the last weeks of peace, as he saw approaching the wreck of all his hopes, similarly illuminate his policy.

For Lord D'Abernon, the obvious period to examine is that of the genesis of the Locarno pacts, which were the culmination of the policies he supported. The years from 1919 to 1924 had been full of frustration and bitterness: the questions of reparations and German disarmament kept mutual distrust alive. Public opinion in Germany and France was an obstacle to negotiators who would have found agreement difficult in any case. In 1923 the French occupation of the Ruhr area and the unparalleled German inflation demonstrated the utter failure of European leaders to that date.

Throughout this period, D'Abernon worked tirelessly to remove friction and to bring about a general reconciliation. In the midst of the tangled web of personal and national antagonisms, fear and suspicion, ultimata, sanctions, inflamm-

atory speeches and provoking incidents, D'Abernon seemed to glide from one person to another, providing reassurance, sound advice or firm pressure as the need arose. Others may have become trapped by the web or lost in the maze of issues, but he kept his balance and his perspective. From the beginning he had seen the key principles essential to any decrease in tension and he continually worked for their general acceptance; "Germany should be treated as a Great Power and not as an outlaw. . . . Security -- to be real -- must be reciprocal and bilateral".¹

Late in 1924, D'Abernon's great opportunity came. The acceptance of the Dawes Plan on 16 August, 1924, had established a provisional reparations settlement. A general inspection of German armaments had begun in September.² With these issues temporarily shelved, conditions were right to begin negotiations on the security question.

Since February D'Abernon had suggested, in letters to Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald and then to Baldwin's Foreign Secretary, Austen Chamberlain, and in talks with Stresemann and Schubert,³ a Franco-German agreement to prevent any

¹ D'Abernon, diary, entry of 24 Aug., 1926, in Diary, III, 258. Vide supra, 91

² Only minor infractions of the Versailles treaty were discovered, but Allied charges of obstruction were to delay the evacuation of the Cologne zone, scheduled for January.

³ D'Abernon, diary, entry of 7 Feb., 1924, in Diary, III, 48.

activity in the Rhineland or Palatinate. This plan, which would involve no British guarantee, made little progress, since clearly France would not consider it sufficient for security.⁴ Following the conclusion of an Anglo-German commercial treaty⁵ on 2 December, D'Abernon tried again. Cuno and Stresemann had made abortive proposals in 1922 and 1923 for a Franco-German mutual guarantee of frontiers and a pact renouncing the right to go to war without submitting the question ~~to~~ a national referendum. On 29 December, 1924, D'Abernon suggested to Schubert, the new State Secretary, that it was time to renew these proposals, but without the qualification that a state could go to war if a referendum⁶ approved it. In a memorandum written later, Stresemann⁷ named this as the first suggestion for the security pact.

The first German move was secretly to ask Britain for advice as to the best form in which an offer for such a pact should be made. D'Abernon played a major role in the drafting

⁴ Stambrook, supra, 240-246.

⁵ This treaty was in large part due to D'Abernon's advocacy of it at the Foreign Office and in Germany.-- D'Abernon, diary, entry of 21 Oct., 1924, in Diary, III, 108. See also Diary, III, 105-107. Prior to this date, Germany was not allowed to discriminate among the Allies in matters of commerce. D'Abernon was spurred into urging a commercial treaty by a French attempt to secure a similar agreement.

⁶ Schubert, memorandum of 29 Dec., 1924, reproduced in Stambrook, supra, 247.

⁷ Stresemann, note of 1 July, 1925, in Stresemann, II, 98.

of the German note to Britain, all the more so because the Germans were not aware his actions were completely unauthorized. Stresemann thought D'Abernon had at least sounded out London, and wrote that "It is scarcely to be expected that Lord D'Abernon acted in this matter entirely on his own⁸ initiative and without the instructions of his government". In consultations with Schubert, D'Abernon approved including a suggestion that the Rhine frontiers be internationally⁹ guaranteed. D'Abernon persuaded Schubert to make the first¹⁰ step quickly, in the form of a note to Britain alone. The ambassador read to Schubert the report he was going to send to London with the German proposal. Schubert wanted D'Abernon to include a reference to his own role in its drafting, but D'Abernon refused, saying that such an action would create suspicions in London, whereas it would assist

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Stambrook, supra, 253, quoting Stresemann to Paris, 15 Jan., 1925.

⁹
Stambrook, supra, 254-256.

¹⁰
D'Abernon wanted speed to deflect his government from Chamberlain's goal of an Anglo-French defensive alliance, which a C. I. D. sub-committee seemed on the point of advising.-- ibid., 255-256. Comparing this with D'Abernon's assurances to Schubert that the proposal would be well received in London, Stambrook concludes, "It is difficult to escape the conclusion that D'Abernon was being deliberately mendacious".-- ibid., 256, n.75.

Germany's image of the proposal appeared to be a German
¹¹ initiative. The German note to Britain was sent on 20
 January, but met a cool reception. The British government
 was unwilling to have any type of negotiations in which
¹² France did not share. On 9 February, 1925, therefore,
 Germany made a formal and direct offer to France. This
 note, when it finally leaked out to the French press, was
¹³ labelled the "Stresemann--D'Abernon Memorandum". Negot-
 iations proceeded in spite of many obstacles. D'Abernon
¹⁴ wrote that:

As for my own share in the genesis of the Pact, I
 have steadily advocated something of the kind for the
 last three years. Since October I have frequently talked
 matters over with Schubert. . . These conversations prob-
 ably resulted in the German move of January 20, but what-
 ever was done previous to that date was of minor importance
 compared with the obstacles overcome or avoided during
 the last six weeks.

During this delicate period D'Abernon continued to advise
 London that the German initiative was "a serious guarantee

¹¹ Ibid., 258, quoting Schubert, memorandum of 20 Jan., 1925.
 The British Permanent Under-Secretary, however, immediately
 detected D'Abernon's hand in the German proposal.-- ibid.,
 260, quoting Sthamer to German Foreign Ministry, 22 Jan., 1925.

¹² D'Abernon felt that the British government committed "a
 grave mistake" in not responding more warmly.-- D'Abernon,
 diary, entry of 3 Feb., 1925, in Diary, III, 126.

¹³ Ibid., 19 March, 1925, in Diary, III, 151.

¹⁴ Ibid.,

of peaceful intention",¹⁵ In July he wrote that "I am constantly having to explain the attitude of Germany and assert her seriousness and goodwill. Paris and London are distrustful and too ready to criticise".¹⁶ Leaving no stone unturned,¹⁷ D'Abernon wrote to the King:

If the Allies can be persuaded to negotiate rapidly and to treat the present German Government with a certain degree of confidence, I believe that a Pact of Non-Aggression which could give the French real security and which would, at the same time, give Europe a much enhanced prospect of peace, can be arranged.

After receiving this, George V immediately wrote to Austen Chamberlain urging him to seize the opportunity.¹⁸

In Germany, D'Abernon strove to encourage the Chancellor and his government. While Stresemann sat for a portrait, D'Abernon turned up every day to urge him to persevere, even if the Allies' first reaction seemed to be cool.¹⁹ When some Germans accused Briand of plotting to wreck the negotiations, D'Abernon

¹⁵

Ibid., 3 Feb., 1925, in Diary, III, 137.

¹⁶

Ibid., 10 July, 1925, in Diary, III, 174-175.

¹⁷

D'Abernon to George V, letter of 9 Feb., 1925, in H. Nicolson, King George the Fifth (London: Constable, 1952), 406-407.

¹⁸

Nicolson, ibid., 407.

This letter came at an opportune moment, for the Foreign Secretary had been seriously considering the German proposals after the C. I. D. decided in February not to recommend an Anglo-French defensive alliance.-- Stambrook, supra, 262; D. Johnson, "Austen Chamberlain and the Locarno Agreements," University of Birmingham Historical Journal, 1961-1962, vol. VIII, 62-81.

¹⁹

D'Abernon, diary, entry of 19 March, 1925, in Diary, III, 153.

told them flatly that they were wrong, that "Briand's good faith and willingness to proceed with the negotiations are apparent on the face of the documents"²⁰. D'Abernon's efforts proved justified when, on 15 October, 1925, the Locarno agreements were signed. After Locarno, Chamberlain wrote to D'Abernon, "we have owed much to your action and influence in Berlin -- exactly how much I want some day to learn"²¹.

In his last eight months as ambassador, D'Abernon worked to implement the 'Locarno spirit'. While pressing the German government to fulfill Allied conditions for an early evacuation of Cologne,²² he advised his own government that a rapid evacuation of that area would win a great deal of goodwill in Germany.²³ Such advice led to a polite disagreement with the Foreign Secretary, who was less disposed to make allowances for the difficult position of the German government.²⁴

In many ways, D'Abernon is a good example of the effective execution of an ambassador's role. In addition to interpreting the policies of each government to the other, he used

²⁰

Ibid., 24 June, 1925, in Diary, III, 171.

²¹

Stambrook, supra, 233, quoting Chamberlain to D'Abernon, letter of 11 November, 1925, in Chamberlain Papers.

²²

D'Abernon, diary, entry of 20 Oct., 1925, in Diary, III, 202.

²³

D'Abernon to Chamberlain,²⁰ Nov., 1925, DBFP, 1A, 1, 113.

²⁴

Chamberlain to D'Abernon, 1 Feb., 1926, DBFP, 1A, 1, 231; ibid., letter of 2 Feb., 1926, DBFP, 1A, 1, 236; D'Abernon to Chamberlain, 6 Feb., 1926, DBFP, 1A, 1, 248; ibid., letter of 5 Feb., 1926, DBFP, 1A, 1, 247.

his influence on both to induce them to move closer together, all without losing sight of his own country's interests. With an enlightened view of the true interests of both states, the courage and conviction of well-reasoned principles, persistence, known honesty, and a reputation for good advice, he was able to accomplish much. D'Abernon may have been mistaken in attributing innocuous ambitions to Stresemann, but the ambassador was correct in evaluating the German leader as a man who could be trusted to be moderate and to work for general pacification. There is more than a grain of truth in the tributes paid to D'Abernon by a noted authority on British diplomacy: "one of the most acute and broad-minded diplomatists which this country has ever possessed";²⁵ "at the summit of his life he was able to mould history into channels which, if adhered to, might well have spared us the insanity in which today we live".²⁶

* * * *

Sir Horace Rumbold sought to obtain better treatment for Weimar Germany, realizing that the worsening internal crisis might well result in greatly increased international tension if German grievances were not eased. In a despatch of March, 1931, Rumbold praised the Brüning government, because he felt it

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Nicolson, Curzon, 236-237.

²⁶

Nicolson, (D'Abernon's obituary) 445.

had refused to be "stampeded by the extremist agitation" and was not seeking to strengthen its domestic position by making demands in the international field. After saying that the fall of Bruning would have a serious, though not fatal, effect on international relations, Rumbold declared that;

I am entirely in agreement . . . with the view that the policy of His Majesty's Government should be to lend such support as may be feasible to the Government of Dr. Bruning. . . . it is not so much actual concessions that are needed as some tangible evidence, some indication of a readiness to consider the German point of view.

Recognition of the need to adopt a conciliatory policy toward Germany also lay behind Rumbold's reaction to the announcement of the Austro-German Customs Union agreement on 21 March, 1931.

Although France vigorously objected on the grounds that the treaty of Versailles forbade any union of the two states, Rumbold was inclined to be more permissive. Eight days before the announcement Rumbold had reported that the two states were holding discussions on the topic, but emphasized that any such union would not be like the nineteenth century Prussian Zollverein since there would still be a customs barrier and other states could be admitted. After the announcement, Rumbold, in subdued but serious tones, advised the British government to be wary before it unconditionally

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Rumbold to Henderson, 4 March, 1931, DBFP, 2nd, 1, 383.

28

Ibid.

29

Ibid., 13 March, 1931, DBFP, 2nd, 1, 358.

opposed such an agreement. Again asserting that the German government would not raise the question of political union,

³⁰
he said:

I submit that His Majesty's Government should therefore be particularly sure of the necessity of action and careful of their ground before themselves taking any steps which would bring up the question of political union in Germany. For such action would greatly embarrass the Chancellor and might well have consequences the reverse from those desired. . . .

Any outside interference which is not based on legal and convincing grounds is liable to be represented as an attempt to bully Germany and to be exploited to detriment of ex-Allies.

The ambassador also warned that the German government felt itself "on strong ground" and would not easily abandon the

³¹
project. Rumbold's portrayal of German policy was, to say the least, charitable and optimistic, for the German leaders did in fact regard the customs union as a prelude to anschluss.³²

³⁰

Ibid., 26 March, 1931, DBFP, 2nd, 2, 14.

³¹

Ibid., 30 March, 1931, DBFP, 2nd, 2, 19.

³²

The German Foreign Minister and State Secretary felt that the customs union would also, in connection with planned tariff preference treaties with Rumania, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, ensure German dominance of the Danube Basin and the Balkans. Czechoslovakia and the Baltic states would then be drawn into the German sphere, isolating Poland and raising the possibility that Poland would make political and territorial concessions in return for economic advantages. -- F. G. Stambrook, "The German-Austrian Customs Union Project of 1931: A Study of German Methods and Motives," Journal of Central European Affairs, no. 21, 1961, 15-44.

Foreign opposition led Austria and Germany to renounce the plan on 3 September, 1931. In Germany, speakers like Hitler had been given yet another argument to use against the parties of moderation. Rumbold's advice, however, may still have had an effect, for British opposition to the project was considerably less than that of France and Czechoslovakia. Foreign Secretary Henderson, in fact, went no further than asking that the project's legality be considered by the League Council and Hague Tribunal in view of the strong objections made by other states.

Rumbold continued to press for some form of aid to the Bruning government. He predicted that at the Disarmament Conference

The Germans will . . . almost certainly insist on the abrogation of those clauses of article 160 which prescribe the organisation of the army, and which they particularly dislike.

Incidentally, on this last point there is something to be said for giving way. To concede the general staff means little in effect, as it already exists in everything but name. The removal, moreover, of restrictions which are more irksome than effective would provide us with the argument that, given freedom to organise the army as they wish, the Germans, as in conversation they so constantly declare, could effect substantial economies.

With the fall of Bruning, Rumbold ceased his campaign for aid to the German government. He had no liking for Chancellor

³⁴
Papen and did not plead for concessions to the short-lived Schleicher government. Rumbold's advice in the pre-Nazi period was sound. If he did not fully realize the enormity of the dangers inherent in the fall of Bruning, or the imminence of the Hitler regime, he did see the necessity to aid the Weimar governments. Had the British and French governments followed his advice in 1931 and 1932, Bruning might have stayed in power long enough to see the decline of the Nazi movement. Rumbold may have been reluctant to offer specific advice and too much given to deference, imperturbability and understatement, but that was his style; a calm suggestion from such a man as Rumbold should have had at least as great an impact as one of Henderson's emotional pleas. A Permanent Under-Secretary of an earlier time wrote that "Rumbold was one of those diplomats who will never let the Government down".³⁵ His reputation for reliability was well earned.

* * * *

The failure to achieve an Anglo-German arms agreement in 1933 and 1934 was not due to a lack of effort on the part of Sir Eric Phipps. In October, 1933, Germany announced its withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations. As with his later violations of international law

³⁴
Vide supra, 83.

³⁵
Hardinge, op. cit., 237.

and morality, Hitler obscured the implications of this act by declaring his willingness to conclude an apparently reasonable agreement. His specific proposals included raising the German army to 300,000 men, fixing other armies at their existing level, allowing Germany all types of 'defensive' weapons -- but not 'offensive' ones like tanks, heavy artillery or bombers -- and prohibiting the use of poison gas or bombing behind battle zones in wartime. Phipps gave qualified support to an agreement along these lines:³⁶

It seems to me that there is considerable force in . . . [the] contention that the Chancellor's offer, provided it were accompanied by the application of some strict system of universal supervision, might provide a suitable basis of negotiation.

Shortly after this Phipps wrote the despatch asking "Would it not, therefore, be advisable soon to bind this damnably dynamic man . . . by an agreement bearing his signature freely and proudly given?"³⁷ At the same time he assured London that, although more officers were being trained, there was no indication of imminent increases in the German army.³⁸ In late November, Phipps recognized that Hitler's offer of the previous month contained potential dangers,

³⁶ Phipps to Simon, 26 Oct., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 5, 494.

³⁷ Vide supra, 128.

³⁸ Phipps to Simon, 21 Nov., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 60.

that discussion of details might imply approval in principle of German rearmament and that Germany might play Britain and France off against each other if negotiations were bilateral and not co-ordinated.³⁹ He asserted that the powers could reduce German proposals for an army of 300,000 in the course of negotiations and recommended that they initiate joint conversations.

During an interview in early December, Hitler gave Phipps additional ammunition to use in advocating an agreement. Hitler said that the German request for an army of 300,000 was based on that total being twenty-five per cent of the combined forces of France, Poland and Czechoslovakia, and he was willing to have the same principles apply to the German air force.⁴⁰ Hitler was also willing to accept international supervision, agree to the abolition of submarines, and exempt Britain from the provision fixing other armies at their existing level. After reporting on this conversation,⁴¹ Phipps wrote:

³⁹ Ibid., 27 Nov., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 80.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 5 Dec., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 97.

⁴¹ Ibid., 5 Dec., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 98. Rumbold, in retirement, later wrote that he felt the April, 1933, German proposal for an army of 300,000 should have been accepted.-- Londonderry, op. cit., 194-197.

I do not wish to seek to hasten unduly any decision that His Majesty's Government may reach but Chancellor's offer seems one calculated to impress general public in many countries as highly reasonable despite very large measure of German rearmament that it implies. If therefore we unduly delay with an answer the dynamic Chancellor may well repeat it in stentorian tones in a press interview or even broadcast it and place us all at a tactical disadvantage. If we wish to reduce his figures we should quickly say so if not the 300,000 may well become crystallized as an irreducible German minimum.

London was not slow in pointing out some significant omissions and defects in Hitler's offers. Simon wrote that disarmament would be facilitated by political assurances and asked for details on the non-aggression pacts to which Hitler had briefly referred; the Foreign Secretary added that a final decision would have to await consultations with other powers, but in the meantime Phipps could say that the proposed increase in men "will certainly be considered excessive".⁴² Simon also said that the S. A. and S. S. should be counted as part of the military, not in addition to it. Assistant Under-Secretary Sargent, with a little use of arithmetic, also dampened Phipps' enthusiasm by pointing out that the German principle of twenty-five per cent only entitled Germany to 230,570 men, even including French colonial troops in the combined total; if the same principle applied to airplanes, Germany would have 728 while Britain had 850, a major part of which were overseas.⁴³

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Simon to Phipps, 7 Dec., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 105.

⁴³

Sargent to Phipps, 9 Dec., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 124.

Phipps raised the question of the S. A. and S. S. with Hitler, who "assured me that the S. A. and S. S. might be compared to the Salvation Army. (Here I regret to say I laughed.)"⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Phipps believed that Hitler was justified in refusing Simon's stipulation as to these⁴⁵ organizations:

The S. A. and S. S. are indispensable to Herr Hitler for internal political reasons. To dissolve them (for that is what our suggestion amounts to) at the behest of foreign Powers would be absolutely fatal to the Hitler régime, which would indeed collapse. Moreover, from the point of view of internal order in Germany the removal of the discipline imposed even spasmodically on some two millions of the inhabitants would have very unfortunate consequences.

I think therefore that a solution of this question must be sought on other lines, and here the spontaneous suggestion of Herr Hitler himself that these bodies be subject to the automatic and periodic supervision to which he agrees seems distinctly helpful.

While pressing the British government to come to terms with Hitler, Phipps did not ignore the dangers involved in such a course. He felt that the Allies should negotiate with a firm manner and co-operate closely to prevent German breaches of faith.⁴⁶ A united Anglo-French front would have been the best insurance against this, but such a front could not be achieved if it involved French acquiescence in German rearmament.

⁴⁴ Phipps to Simon, 8 Dec., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 114.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 9 Dec., 1933, DBFP, 2nd, 6, 120.

⁴⁶ Vide supra, 127.

During the first half of 1934, Phipps continued to advise that Hitler's proposals were the best obtainable and represented real concessions on Germany's part.⁴⁷ When Sir Anthony Eden visited Berlin in February, he found himself in agreement with the ambassador on the desirability of pursuing an armaments agreement. Both felt Hitler had made a real effort to meet British criticisms.⁴⁸ Eden wrote to London that Phipps was "frankly delighted" with Hitler's proposals.⁴⁹ Britain and Germany, however, were unable to reach an armaments agreement in 1934. Such events as the attempted Nazi putsch in Austria in July, when Chancellor Dollfuss was assassinated, hindered negotiations and ruled out an agreement, as did French objections.

A lack of documents prevents a study of Phipps' actions in subsequent years, but there are indications that he continued to support attempts to reach agreements with Germany. In March, 1935, Germany announced the re-establishment of conscription and the formation of an air force, both violations of the treaty of Versailles. Phipps during 1935 advised

⁴⁷

Avon, op. cit., 84-85.

⁴⁸

Ibid., 67.

⁴⁹

Eden to MacDonald, letter of 22 Feb., 1934, in Avon, op. cit., 71.

that Britain open negotiations for an air limitation agreement without delay.⁵⁰ Phipps also apparently supported the Anglo-German naval agreement of 18 June, 1935, by which Germany could build up to thirty-five per cent of British naval strength, with parity in submarines. The naval attaché in Berlin, holding different views, wrote in his annual report for 1936 that: (*italics added*)

The Anglo-German naval agreement was one of the master strokes of policy which have characterized Germany's dealings with her ex-enemies since the war. When the time is ripe, as history shows, it will unquestionably go the same way as other agreements: but the time is not yet.

When this report was annexed to the ambassador's annual report,⁵¹ Phipps excised the italicized words. His motives may have been simply that he felt a naval attaché should make no political comments, but like D'Abernon he could also have been suppressing a discordant opinion.

Phipps' constant advocacy of an agreement with Germany, despite his fears about German intentions, could not have failed to impress British leaders. If Phipps, who 'terrified' Simon with his warnings, felt there was no alternative to an agreement, British leaders, who were inclined to be more optimistic, would hardly disagree.

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Hoare to Phipps, 5 Dec., 1935, in Correspondence showing the course of certain Diplomatic Discussions...; Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons. Papers by Command. Cmd. 5143, Misc. No. 3, 59.

51

D. McLachlan, Room 39: a Study in Naval Intelligence (New York: Athenum, 1968), 139-140. Phipps' report was Phipps to Eden, 12 Jan., 1937, C357/357/18.

* * * *

In the spring of 1939 Neville Henderson, for a short period, began to doubt the wisdom of his own belief in appeasement. The German occupation of Prague on 14 March was a major factor in his new suspicion of Nazi policies. Henderson had been caught by surprise; on 12 March he had said there was no evidence of any German intention to "exploit the present unrest in Czechoslovakia".⁵² On 13 March he changed his mind, admitting that "the German government is contemplating some form of intervention either by force or by ultimatum under armed menace".⁵³ Henderson's reaction to the actual invasion was immediate and severe:⁵⁴

The utter cynicism and immorality of the whole performance defies description. . . .

The annexation of Bohemia and Moravia . . . cannot be justified on any grounds which weakened opposition to incorporation of Austria and Sudetenland.

55 56

In conversations with Ribbentrop,⁵⁵ Goering,⁵⁶ and State Secretary Weizsacker,⁵⁷ Henderson declared that the occupation of Prague

⁵²

Henderson to Halifax, 12 March, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 4, 217.

⁵³

Ibid., 13 March, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 4, 220.

⁵⁴

Ibid., 16 March, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 4, 288.

⁵⁵

Ibid., 2 May, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 5, 330.

⁵⁶

Ibid., 28 May, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 5, 658.

⁵⁷

Ibid., 26 April, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 5, 288.

had caused the British government to reconsider its policy of seeking to conciliate Germany. However, as the events of summer were to show, neither Henderson nor his government had lost their basic faith in appeasement.

On the surface, British policy did appear to have changed. On 31 March, 1939, Prime Minister Chamberlain declared in the House of Commons that Britain would aid Poland if the latter's independence was threatened by another power and the Polish government felt obliged to resist. This promise was transformed into a reciprocal Anglo-Polish guarantee on 6 April. During this period, Henderson was in London, recalled in protest over the occupation of Prague, and so wrote no despatches on the pact. However, his later actions strongly indicate that he viewed the pact with disfavour. As he wrote in June, "Heaven knows what Poland is going to cost us".⁵⁸

Henderson's forecasts in the spring and summer of 1939 were in many respects remarkably accurate. His was one of the first voices to warn of the Russo-German pact which was signed in August. On 8 May, Henderson reported rumours of a coming Nazi-Soviet agreement.⁵⁹ A Foreign Office minute

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Henderson to Cadogan, letter of 13 June, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 6, App. I.

⁵⁹

Henderson to Halifax, 8 March, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 5, 413.

correctly remarked that there was no evidence for the rumour but also called such a pact "inherently improbable". On 18 May Henderson wrote that he believed the Germans were doing all in their power to secure a promise of Russian neutrality. ⁶⁰

⁶¹
A month later he declared:

I feel intuitively that the Germans are getting at Stalin. . . . if Poland does not talk a little less about her bravery and think a little more about the realities of her geographical position, we may yet live to see a fourth Partition.

Henderson exaggerated the imminence of the Russo-German pact, but he clearly saw the danger and did not commit the error of calling it "inherently improbable". However, he did not advocate that Britain make a great effort to prevent this by reaching an agreement with the U. S. S. R. first. Henderson believed that Hitler would not "knuckle down" even if faced by a coalition reinforced by Russia, ⁶² and thus felt it was not essential to win Russia to the side of Britain and France.

Henderson also pinpointed the week of crisis, in a despatch of 12 July, when he said "I have an uneasy feeling that . . . that week from August 27 onwards will be the crisis". ⁶³
However, Henderson's intuition was of little help in analyzing

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Henderson to Cadogan, letter of 18 May, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 5, 552.

⁶¹

Ibid., letter of 13 June, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, App. I.

⁶²

Lipski to Beck, 15 Aug., 1939, in Lipski, document 149.

⁶³

Henderson to Halifax, letter of 12 July, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 6, App. I.

the current situation and making recommendations.

Throughout the crisis and the preceding months, Henderson placed a great deal of the blame for the situation on Poland and urged that the Poles be forced into making concessions. In the first place, he felt that the German claim to Danzig was just:

. . . my opinion is that there cannot be two kings in Brentford. Even Versailles did not give Danzig to Poland: ergo it must go to Germany.

. . . Prague to my mind altered our whole policy toward Hitler and his gangster crown, but it did not affect the moral and practical issues so far as Danzig was concerned.

Furthermore, Henderson felt that the Polish government was being unnecessarily provocative in such activities as closing some German clubs in Poland on grounds of illegal activity. Henderson therefore suggested that Britain either issue a public warning to Poland or state that the British guarantee would only apply if Poland observed "the rules of international and goodneighbourly relations" with Germany.

The Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir Alexander Cadogan, noted in reference to this despatch that the Secretary of State felt such action "could only have the effect of encouraging the German Government to believe that we were

⁶⁴ Henderson to Cadogan, letter of 23 May, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 5, 604.

⁶⁵ Ibid., letter of 20 June, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 6, 108.

weakening in our support of the Poles and preparing the way
⁶⁶for another Munich". Henderson was not at all taken aback;

he wrote that even though he felt his warnings of "Polish provocations" were unwelcome in London, it was his duty to

repeat them, for "they constitute a serious danger".⁶⁷ He

admitted the danger that Hitler might use concessions to put more pressure on Poland, but he asserted that it was a

necessary risk, since "there will be no real peace . . .

until the Free City is once more declared a German Free City".⁶⁸

In support of his proposal to concede Danzig to Germany,

Henderson claimed that "Of all Germans, believe it or not,

Hitler is the most moderate so far as Danzig and the Corridor

⁶⁹are concerned".

⁶⁶

Ibid., n. See also Halifax to Henderson, letter of 28 July, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 6, 481, for a more direct rebuke.

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Henderson to Halifax, letter of 28 June, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 6, 161.

⁶⁸Ibid., 26 July, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 6, 460.

⁶⁹Henderson to Strang, letter of 16 Aug., 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 37. See also Henderson to Halifax, letter of 25 July, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 6, App. I. Henderson's views may be compared to Hitler's words in "Minutes of a Conference on May 23, 1939", DGFP, D, 6, 433: "It is not Danzig that is at stake. For us it is a matter of expanding our living space in the East . . . Poland sees danger in a German victory over the West and will try to deprive us of victory. There is therefore no question of sparing Poland and we are left with the decision : To attack Poland at the first suitable opportunity".

With these views, Henderson found it difficult to transmit firm warnings to German officials. In May he attempted to give Weizsäcker a warning that Britain would stand by the Poles, but the impression he left was hardly
70
one of British firmness:

Henderson said that unfortunately public opinion in Britain had become progressively worse during his period of service in Berlin, and was now even ready to enter a European war for the Poles, of whom Henderson had nothing favourable to say. . . . This war, added Henderson, would be conducted defensively by the Western Powers.

The ambassador did much better on 15 July, when he told Weizsäcker that if the Danzig Senate proclaimed reattachment of the city to Germany and Poland began a war by intervening in Danzig, Britain would still come to Poland's aid, knowing that such action on the part of the Senate would be due to
71
Hitler's orders. In the middle of August, Henderson again warned Weizsäcker that Britain was prepared to go to war to
72
support Poland. The Germans may not have fully believed Henderson's new attitude of firmness; impressions built up over a period of two years would not disappear at once.

Henderson, moreover, was more than willing to let the Germans win their demands, provided this could be achieved

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Weizsäcker, memorandum of 15 May, 1939, DBFP, D, 6, 385.

71

Henderson to Halifax, 15 July, 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 6, 332.

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Ibid., 16 Aug., 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 32; Weizsäcker, memorandum of 18 Aug., 1939, DGFP, D, 7, 114.

in 'gentlemanly' fashion, through direct Polish-German negotiations. This encouraged the Germans to hope that Poland would be placed in the position of refusing British entreaties to negotiate and that Britain would then abandon Poland.

The events of the last days of peace, when the confrontation had begun, reveal Henderson's continuing efforts to bring about negotiations, interspersed with periods of despair and disillusionment. The British fully realized the seriousness of their position after the announcement, late on 21 August, that Ribbentrop was flying to Moscow to negotiate an agreement. On 23 August, Henderson delivered a warning from the British government that Britain would support Poland to the fullest extent. Hitler responded with a torrent of accusations of Polish atrocities which Henderson disputed.⁷³ In reporting back on Hitler's accusation of persecution of Germans in Poland, however, Henderson remarked that "there is no doubt that there is much ground⁷⁴ for German complaints in this respect".

Henderson advised that war could not be avoided unless

⁷³ Henderson to Halifax, 23 Aug., 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 200. See also record of interview, 24 Aug., 1939, DGFP, D, 7, 200.

⁷⁴ Henderson to Halifax, 24 Aug., 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 219.

the Polish ambassador saw Hitler soon.⁷⁵ On the 25th Henderson urged the Polish ambassador, Lipski, to get his government to take the initiative in seeking negotiations.⁷⁶

At another interview with Hitler, on the 25th, Henderson was asked to fly to London in a German plane with a German offer to guarantee the British Empire and to conclude an agreement to that effect after the conclusion of the crisis. Henderson made the trip and while in London participated in the drafting of the British reply.

On the 28th he delivered the reply, which politely declined the guarantee and suggested Germany seek to resolve its grievances through normal negotiations with Poland.⁷⁷ During the course of the conversation

Herr Hitler asked whether England would be willing to accept an alliance with Germany. I said speaking personally I did not exclude such a possibility provided the developments of events justified it.

This lapse earned Henderson a critical minute⁷⁸ which formed

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⁷⁵ Ibid., 24 Aug., 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 241.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 25 Aug., 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 293.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 29 Aug., 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 455.

⁷⁸

"An alliance means a military alliance if it means anything. And against whom should we be allying ourselves with such a gang as the present régime in Germany. The merest suggestion of it would ruin us in the United States. . . . Even to play with such an idea would be once again to lose sight of Germany's ultimate objectives. . . . Hitler's intention is to dominate Europe".-- Vansittart, minute, in DBFP, 3rd, 7, 455n.

the basis of a rebuke from the Foreign Secretary, who told him not to discuss 'alliances' with the Germans.⁷⁹

On the evening of the 29th, Henderson again saw Hitler, who demanded that a Polish plenipotentiary arrive in Berlin within twenty-four hours. Henderson's first reaction was one of justifiable anger and, in an attempt to impress Hitler with British determination, the ambassador "proceeded to out-shout Herr Hitler".⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Henderson, despite his misgivings, quickly decided to advise "that the Polish Government should swallow this eleventh hour effort to establish direct contact with Herr Hitler".⁸¹ According to the established tactical precepts of diplomacy, such action on the part of the Poles would have placed them at a grave disadvantage in the negotiations, but Henderson showed no concern over this.

82

On the 30th Henderson urged Lipski to seek talks and asked Attolico, the Italian ambassador, to work for a Papal compromise proposal.⁸³ Henderson's idea of a just compromise was to give Danzig to Germany, provide extra-territorial communication from Germany proper to East Prussia across the Polish Corridor, and arrange an exchange of minority populations.⁸⁴ These were very similar to the demands the Germans

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Halifax to Henderson, 30 Aug., 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 545.

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Henderson to Halifax, 30 Aug., 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 508.

⁸¹

Ibid., 30 Aug., 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 520.

⁸²

Ibid., 30 Aug., 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 510.

were making and to the formal German proposals made by Ribbentrop later that day. A settlement on such lines would have given Germany virtual control over Polish trade, infringed Polish sovereignty and created potential pretexts for future German claims.⁸⁵

At midnight on the evening of 30 August, Henderson saw Ribbentrop and listened while the latter read out a list of detailed proposals. Whether or not Ribbentrop read them extremely fast,⁸⁶ Henderson caught the main points:⁸⁷ restoration of Danzig to Germany, German gains in the Corridor, a plebiscite to determine possession of the rest of the Corridor. The German proposals were clearly just a propaganda weapon, especially since Ribbentrop declared that they were out of date

⁸³

Ibid., 30 Aug., 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 522.

⁸⁴

Ibid., 30 Aug., 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 537.

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On the incompatibility of German demands with Polish independence see A. Cienfiala, Poland and the Western Powers 1938-1939 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968).

⁸⁶

In his despatch, Henderson said that Ribbentrop read the proposals "at top speed".-- Henderson to Halifax, 31 Aug., 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 574. In his book, Henderson said Ribbentrop "gabbled through" the proposals.-- Henderson, Failure, 284. But Schmidt, the German interpreter whose services were not used in the interview, has written that Ribbentrop read out the list without hurrying and even elaborated on some points.-- Schmidt, op. cit., 152. Perhaps part of the difficulty was in Henderson's incomplete grasp of spoken German.

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Henderson to Halifax, 31 Aug., 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 574. Henderson sent the complete list to London late on the 31st.-- ibid., 31 Aug., 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 622.

because no Polish plenipotentiary had arrived before the German deadline. Nevertheless, Henderson, after protesting heatedly to Ribbentrop,⁸⁸ went straight to Lipski, at two a. m., to say that the proposals were "on the whole not too unreasonable" and to urge Lipski to ask Ribbentrop for the list.⁸⁹ Lipski, however, would only agree to telephone his government in the morning.

On 31 August, Henderson was frantically trying to arrange Polish-German negotiations based on the German proposals. At 10:15 a.m., unable to find Lipski, he told Weizsacker he was pressing the Poles on his own responsibility to negotiate.⁹⁰ Shortly afterward, Henderson received a complete list of the proposals from a Swedish businessman acting as intermediary under Goering's patronage and Henderson and the businessman went to give Lipski the list.⁹¹ Henderson had already, on the morning of the 31st,

⁸⁸ Schmidt, op. cit., 152. The interpreter was afraid the two would come to blows.

⁸⁹ Lipski, 607; Henderson, Failure, 287; Henderson to Halifax, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 575.

⁹⁰ Weizsacker, memorandum of 31 Aug., 1939, DBFP, D, 7, 466.

⁹¹ Henderson to Halifax, 31 Aug., 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 597. At 12:30 Dahlerus, the businessman, telephoned the Foreign Office to say that he and Henderson had talked to Lipski and "it was obvious to us" the Poles were obstructing negotiations. Knowing that the lines were tapped, but unable to get Dahlerus to stop talking, the listener in London hung up.-- Wilson, minute, 31 Aug., 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 589. This earned Henderson a double rebuke from the Foreign Secretary, one denying that the Poles were being obstructive (Halifax to Henderson, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 591), and the other saying "You really must be careful of use of telephone".-- ibid., 592. On Dahlerus' role, see B. Dahlerus, The Last Attempt (London: Hutchinson, 1947).

persuaded the French ambassador to warn Paris that there would be a German attack if Poland did not open negotiations.⁹² In the afternoon, Henderson and Dahlerus saw Goering⁹³ to enlist his help.⁹⁴ Late on the evening of the 31st, Henderson wired London:

War may be justified on grounds that Nazi regime is an immoral one which one must fight sooner or later. But I submit that on German offer it would be completely unjustifiable.

Henderson suggested that Poland should be pressed to send a plenipotentiary to Berlin, preferably a military leader, who could talk to the 'moderate' Goering instead of to Ribbentrop.

When hostilities actually began, Henderson was no closer to any real comprehension of the forces behind the crisis than he had been earlier. He reported that the Poles had initiated hostilities by blowing up a bridge, leading Hitler to give orders that Polish forces "be driven back from the border-line".⁹⁵ By the early afternoon, Henderson was slightly more balanced, saying that peace could not be re-established because of "Mutual distrust of Germans and Poles"; he concluded

⁹² R. Coulondre, De Staline à Hitler (Paris: Hachette, 1950), 301.

⁹³ Henderson to Halifax, 31 Aug., 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 613.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 1 Sept., 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 631.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 1 Sept., 1939, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 644.

by deciding that there was no alternative for Britain but war: "Last hope lies in inflexible determination to resist force by force".⁹⁶ After Britain had demanded a German withdrawal, Dahlerus asked Henderson if his country would remain at peace in the event of a Polish-German ceasefire. Henderson gave the correct answer, saying that Britain would consider no German response but complete evacuation of Polish land.⁹⁷ However, Henderson to the last affirmed that war could have been averted if the Polish government had opened negotiations.⁹⁸ The British ambassador insisted on regarding the Nazi leaders as men prepared to negotiate in good faith.

* * * *

From 1937 to the present, Nevile Henderson has had a 'bad press'. Perhaps because of the inevitable unfairness of attempts to sum up a person's character and actions in a few lines, his failings have been exaggerated in general works on the period. Henderson may have resolutely supported appeasement to the end, but he was not blind; he was often torn by doubt and realized that appeasement was a gamble. At times he made commendable forecasts and was firm with

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Ibid., 1 Sept., 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 658.

⁹⁷

Ibid., 2 Sept., 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 7, 717.

⁹⁸

Chargé in Germany to the Secretary of State, 1 Sept., 1939, ForRelUS 1939, 1, p. 401.

Nazi officials.

Nevertheless, an account of Henderson's actions and reports does not make pleasant reading. Rebuked by his superiors for indiscretions, unable to establish good relations with Nazi leaders, incapable of understanding the Third Reich, why was Henderson kept in Berlin? Shortly after Munich, he had written to Halifax to ask for removal,⁹⁹ and his long absence due to illness, from October, 1938, to February, 1939, provided a perfect pretext. In March, 1939, Henderson felt he should be recalled,¹⁰⁰ as the symbol of the wrecked policy of appeasement. Perhaps this was the reason for his retention, that he was a symbol of appeasement, proof to the Germans and to the world that Britain would go to virtually any lengths to obtain a peaceful settlement of the problems of Europe. For appeasement did not end with the British guarantee to Poland; the influence of that policy was still evident in the two days Britain remained at peace while its ally was being invaded and

⁹⁹
Henderson to Halifax, letter of 6 Oct., 1938, DBFP, 3rd, 3, App. I.

¹⁰⁰
Henderson, Failure, 224.

101
bombed. The role of symbol was, unfortunately, the only role filled with any capacity by Henderson: a moral, sincere, and energetic person, but the wrong man, in the wrong place, at the wrong time.

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Another indication of the survival of appeasement after Prague was the talks between Horace Wilson, head of the Treasury, R. S. Hudson, a secretary in the Department of Overseas Trade, and Helmuth Wohltat, a director in Goering's Four Year Plan office. During these talks, in July, 1939, Wilson and Hudson raised the possibility of Anglo-German financial and economic co-operation, as well as British encouragement for the development of a German colonial empire.

VII. CONCLUSION

The four British ambassadors to Berlin possessed many points of similarity, in their backgrounds, attitudes, interpretations and advice. All came from upper-class families and were educated at relatively exclusive schools. Their careers were not such as to prepare them for service in twentieth-century Germany; even D'Abernon's financial knowledge and Rumbold's previous experience in Berlin, neither of which was shared by the others, did not offset a common tendency to evaluate events in terms of traditional concepts. Nevertheless, D'Abernon, Rumbold and Phipps were able to adjust sufficiently to fulfill their diplomatic duties capably. D'Abernon, the 'amateur' with unorthodox methods, achieved perhaps the greatest success in establishing personal relations with German leaders. Henderson, on the other hand, was unable either to understand the Germany of his day or to achieve the respect and confidence of the Nazis.

The ambassadors exhibited a certain degree of unity in their opinions on factors related to the German problem. All criticized the French policy of opposing any German revisionism, although Phipps was sympathetic to France and advised Anglo-French co-operation. D'Abernon and Henderson, the two strongest proponents of appeasement, were also the most suspicious of

France, as well as believing that British policy should not have a predominantly European orientation. These two ambassadors were also influenced by their attitudes toward Russia, the first wishing to strengthen Germany against the Bolsheviki threat, the second feeling that the Third Reich should be allowed to clash with Russia. Rumbold and Phipps, on the other hand, held different opinions.

The ambassadors were more consistent in their comments on Germany. The four portrayed Germany as an unstable nation, given to outbreaks of extremist agitation and inflammatory speech. The German government, however, was in the long run amenable to conciliatory treatment and could resist extremist pressure if it achieved successes in foreign affairs. The advent of Hitler increased, in the eyes of the British representatives, the urgency of the need to support the 'moderate' faction and achieve a modus vivendi. If handled properly and with great tact the Nazis were considered capable of honouring an agreement that bound them to peaceful and gradual methods. A comparison of the views of Rumbold, Phipps and Henderson shows an increasing acceptance of Nazi goals as legitimate and a growing tendency to regard Hitler as personally inclined to moderation. This coincided with the rise of the school of active appeasement in London. Whereas the mood of Baldwin's government was passive, Chamberlain set out to take the

initiative, to resolve problems -- in accordance with German desires -- before they became crises. These trends in London and the Berlin embassy influenced and reinforced one another.

A comparison of the periods of D'Abernon and Henderson yields several similarities. Both ambassadors had, from the first, a conscious mission, to achieve stable and friendly Anglo-German relations through the resolution of divisive issues and the appeasement of grievances. However, D'Abernon's success was misleading as a precedent. In the conditions of the early twenties, when the German government had moderate requests and moderate methods, Britain could safely and of necessity rely on their good faith to some extent. During the Nazi era, this policy was not practical; in order to have any chance of success, concessions had to be accompanied by a readily apparent resolve to resist excessive German ambitions and an insistence on firm guarantees from the German side.

The failure of the ambassadors of the thirties, including Rumbold and Phipps, was the failure to note fully the changed conditions, in particular the nature of the Nazi movement, and to emphasize to the government in London these essential safeguards that had to be included in any attempt to appease

the Nazi appetite. Yet this was not wholly their failure, for few ears were open to such unpalatable advice.

The fact that the ambassadors supported a policy of appeasement does much to increase understanding of the government's decision to adopt that policy. It also raises the question of whether appeasement found active support within the Foreign Office itself. Two 1931 memoranda, by Vansittart and Sargent, advocated timely British concessions to appease Germany.¹ These may easily have been examples of a more widespread pro-appeasement attitude that continued into the Chamberlain era. If so, a study of this issue may well reveal Neville Chamberlain as a Prime Minister acting in co-operation with the Foreign Office and appeasement as a policy that found support at all levels, rather than being imposed by an influential minority.

¹ M. Gilbert, op. cit., 130-132.

APPENDIX : SIR RONALD LINDSAY

Sir Ronald Lindsay is the forgotten ambassador of the inter-war years. Rarely mentioned in history books or memoirs, and then almost invariably for his later work in Washington, he seems to have made little impression at Berlin. There were no dramatic events or crises between his arrival on 12 October, 1926, and Rumbold's on 1 August, 1928, to bring him the attention of posterity. Nevertheless, it was an important period for the opportunity it gave the nations of Europe to establish a stable peace. The wartime grievances had been shelved, the days of the Great Depression and Adolf Hitler were yet to come. Perhaps when the British documents for these years are published, the story of this collective failure will emerge.

Sir Ronald Lindsay was born 3 May, 1877, the fifth son of the twenty-sixth earl of Crawford, in Scotland. His education was by private tutors and at Winchester, where he specialized in languages. After becoming an attaché in October, 1898, and passing a competitive examination in January, 1899, he became third secretary and was sent to St. Petersburg. In January, 1901, he became third secretary and obtained an allowance for knowledge of Russian. Six months later he passed an examination in Public Law. The ambassador, Lord Hardinge, later Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office, considered Lindsay "an old friend, in whom I had great confidence". From Russia, Lindsay went to Teheran, soon receiving an allowance for knowledge of Persian. Promotion to second secretary came ten months later, and in April, 1905, Lindsay received the first of several postings to Washington, followed by a stay in Paris, from July, 1907, to November, 1908.

Lindsay was then brought to the Foreign Office, to be assistant private secretary to the Secretary of State, Sir Edward Grey. This employment ended in March, 1909, but Lindsay remained in London until 1911. In 1909, he married Martha Cameron, daughter of the United States Senator from Pennsylvania. She was to die nine years later. From the Foreign Office he went to the Hague in September, 1911, and was appointed first secretary in December. While there, he acted as chargé for a total of four months and was secretary to the British representatives at the International Opium Conference. From 1913 to 1919, Lindsay was out of the diplomatic service, working as under-secretary in the Egyptian finance ministry. In May, 1919, he was appointed first secretary and acting assistant counsellor at Washington. From June to September, 1919, and January to April, 1920, he acted as chargé.

In September, 1919, he was promoted to counsellor. After a period in Paris from August, 1920, to January, 1921, during which he received the rank of minister, Lindsay became an assistant under-secretary at the Foreign Office, in charge of Near Eastern Affairs.

In February, 1924, Lindsay succeeded Rumbold as ambassador in Constantinople. There he played a significant part in settling the dispute over Mosul (treaty of Angora, 1926). For this, he received a commendation from the British government and the personal thanks of the Foreign Secretary and the King and Prime Minister of Iraq. In 1924 he married a second time, again to an American, Elizabeth Sherman from New York.

On 12 October, 1926, Lindsay at the age of 49 became ambassador to Berlin. Virtually the only material on his work there is a few references in the Stresemann papers, which record Lindsay as emphasizing the British government's confidence in Stresemann (to a third party) and expressing fears that there was still a strong spirit of militarism in Germany, but approving the idea of including the right-wing German Nationals in a future government.

After less than two years at Berlin, Lindsay was recalled to become Permanent Under-Secretary and then ambassador to Washington for a decade. He seems to have performed his duties capably and won the respect of his associates, although few personal appreciations of him exist. A King's Messenger later wrote: "Of all the diplomatic figures of those days none was more liked or more respected . . . He was a strong man, who knew his own mind and was not afraid to say so. He never seemed to be in a hurry, never fussed, and never scolded. His judgment was always sound and, no matter what the circumstances, he never failed to keep his head". Unfortunately, perhaps symbolically, the distinguished Silver Greyhound could not correctly remember Lindsay's first name. The New York Times obituary noted that some persons called him a snob, but his friends said he was just shy and sometimes inattentive because of a slight deafness. A letter of 1939 from an American correspondent to a member of the Cliveden 'set', referring to Lindsay and his predecessor in Washington, can perhaps be given a wider application: "Howard and Lindsay have doubtless transacted faultlessly all their business with the State Department, but America at large has never known that either of them was here".

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The main source for a study of the work of British ambassadors in Berlin is Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939 (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 36 volumes, 1946-1966), edited by E. L. Woodward and R. Butler. This contains 135 of Lord D'Abernon's despatches (40 for 1920, 95 for 1925-1926), 352 for Rumbold (1929-1933), 156 for Phipps (1933-1934), and 610 for Henderson (1938-1939). The third series documents would have been far more enlightening had the minutes of cabinet ministers and officials been included; without these it is impossible to determine the reception given despatches. For Henderson's period the Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945 (Washington: Govt. Printing Office, 1957-), series D (1936-1945), presents a complement to, and a check on, the British documents.

Scarcely less important are the writings of the ambassadors themselves, particularly in view of the many years for which there are as yet no published documents. Lord D'Abernon's three volumes of diaries,¹ each prefaced by relevant essays, provide both a personal insight and a fairly complete account

¹ Lord D'Abernon, An Ambassador of Peace: Pages from the Diary of Viscount D'Abernon (Berlin, 1920-1926) (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1929-1930).

of his work in Berlin. The diaries are all the more valuable because he often used despatches as diary entries, and perhaps on one occasion vice versa.² Thus the diaries for the years not covered by the volumes of documents give a good indication of the tenor of his reports. D'Abernon's other publications, on his journey to Warsaw³ and economic affairs,⁴ also give a background to the views in his despatches. The ambassadors between D'Abernon and Henderson have written nothing, save Rumbold's The War Crisis in Berlin: July-August, 1914 (London: Constable & Co., 1940), which gives little indication of the author's personality. Henderson's Failure of a Mission: Berlin

² Compare, for example, the diary entry of 30 July, 1920, with his despatch of 30 July in DBFP, 1st, 10, 355; the entry of 23 Nov., 1920, with the despatch of 23 Nov. in 1st, 10, 325; the entry of 23 Dec., 1925, with the despatch of 23 Dec. in 1A, 1, 155; the entry of 23 Jan., 1926, with the despatch of 23 Jan. in 1A, 1, 200. D'Abernon's diary entry of 22 March, 1926, was written in almost the same form as his despatch of 30 March in 1A, 1, 384. The editors of DBFP have found it convenient to refer readers to D'Abernon's diary for subjects omitted from the published documents.-- 1st, 10, pages 534 and 450.

³ Lord D'Abernon, The Eighteenth Decisive Battle of the World: Warsaw, 1920 (London: Hodder, 1931).

⁴ Lord D'Abernon, "German Currency: Its Collapse and Recovery, 1920-1926," Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, vol. 90, Jan., 1927, 1-40; The Economic Crisis -- Its Causes and the Cure (London: Royal Empire Society Pamphlet No. 7, 1931); The Path to Recovery (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1931).

1937-1939 (Toronto: Musson Book Co., 1940) and the Final Report by Sir Nevile Henderson (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1939) have now been superseded by the British documents as far as events are concerned, but they are still useful for insights into their author's character. More important in this regard is Water Under the Bridges, a revealing and entertaining memoir of Henderson's life and career before the mission to Berlin. The Foreign Office List and Diplomatic and Consular Year Book (annually) is the most comprehensive source of biographical data.

Substantial references to the ambassadors in the writings of colleagues, cabinet ministers, foreign diplomats and others are few. The Dictionary of National Biography 1941-1950 (London: Oxford U. P., 1959) contains a brief personal appreciation of each ambassador, written by a colleague, and is the best source in this regard. The comments in other works, even those of Lady D'Abernon,⁵ Phipps' friend the French ambassador,⁶ and Henderson's subordinate Kirkpatrick⁷ are of only minor value.

Historical treatments are even fewer. Rumbold has one-third of a chapter and Henderson half a chapter in

⁵ Viscountess D'Abernon, Red Cross and Berlin Embassy 1915-1926 (London: John Murray, 1946)

⁶ A. François-Poncet, Souvenirs d'une Ambassade à Berlin (Paris: Flammarion, 1946).

⁷ I. Kirkpatrick, The Inner Circle (London: Macmillan, 1959).

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The Diplomats. Both are sound essays, but do little more than give a general sketch of the ambassador's work. A recent article by F. G. Stambrook, "'Das Kind' -- Lord D'Abernon and the Origins of the Locarno Pact," (Central European History, September, 1968, I, 3, 233-263), is a well-written analysis based on intensive research, and provides new material on D'Abernon's co-operation with the German Secretary of State, but only covers a short period of the ambassador's mission. D. C. Watt's three-page article, "Sir Nevile Henderson Reappraised," in Contemporary Review, March, 1962, 201, 151-154, does little or nothing to revise the common view. Besides these there is only a thesis by R. Strauch, published in book form, Sir Neville (sic) Henderson, Britischer Botschafter in Berlin von 1937 bis 1939 (Bonn: Rohrschied, 1959). Strauch's book apparently "contains little interpretation and analysis. . . . One cannot help wondering whether it is justifiable to publish a book of 359 text pages in which only conclusions which others have reached before are presented".⁹

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F. L. Ford, "Three Observers in Berlin: Rumbold, Dodd, and François-Poncet," in G. A. Craig and F. Gilbert (ed.), The Diplomats 66 (New York: Atheneum, 1965), II, 437-477; F. Gilbert, "Two British Ambassadors: Perth and Henderson," in ibid., II, 537-555.

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F. Gilbert, (review) Journal of Modern History, March, 1961, 99-100.

In summation, the secondary material available on the British ambassadors is comparatively little, with few contemporary or historical treatments of their character or work. While their published despatches are of course the primary source, their memoirs and whatever descriptions of them that may exist are also essential, in order to give a background to their reports and activities.

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