

**The Paris Embassy of Sir Eric Phipps,
1937-1939**

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ABSTRACT

When Sir Eric Phipps arrived in Paris in April 1937 to begin his duties as H.M. Ambassador at Paris, he had just completed four years service as HM Ambassador at Berlin where he had achieved a reputation as a staunch anti-Nazi and as an anti-appeaser. By the end of his tenure at Paris in October 1939, however, he was widely accused of being a "defeatist/appeaser" and his reputation has never recovered.

When Phipps left Berlin, German military power was in its ascendancy. He arrived in Paris at the age of 62 when French military preparations were at their nadir and the Popular Front was disintegrating. These factors led him to support that French political faction which was opposed to a resolute French policy and which by inclination was not Anglophile. This put him out of step with, and open to criticism from, the Foreign Office.

His consciousness of French economic, political and military weakness propelled Phipps into playing a role which French historians have termed that of "the English Governess" towards the French, pressing them into adopting British policies and interfering in their internal affairs. While this was within the general framework of his instructions from the Foreign Office, he pursued his conception of Chamberlain's appeasement policy with a zeal that seems to have been based on closer contact with the Prime Minister and his entourage rather than with his professional colleagues.

From the Spring of 1939 onwards, Phipps adopted a firmer attitude towards Germany bringing him more into conformity with the new orientation of British policy. On instructions from London, he took advantage of divisions in the French Cabinet to support Bonnet in bringing pressure on Daladier to make concessions to Italy which brought him into increasingly direct contact with 10 Downing Street. At the onset of the war, Phipps was a resolute advocate of a total Anglo-French victory over Nazi Germany.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

Diplomatists, it is generally, though by no means exactly agreed, form an important link in the process by which one group of national decision makers form their perceptions, obtain their information on, and communicate their intentions to their opposite numbers in charge of other states, whether potential allies or potential enemies. They reflect, to a certain extent, the value systems of those who have appointed them and to whom they report. At the same time, living in an enclosed milieu, apart from the state to which they are appointed and physically distant from their country of origin, they are subject to various déformations professionnelles (the range of which would make a fascinating study in itself). They are at once prisms and heliographs. Moreover, the role diplomats play changes as the nature of the elites they represent also changes....(1)

Prior to 1914, British foreign policy decisions were taken by 'specific and easily identifiable individuals working within the confines of the foreign and diplomatic service' and their 'background, personal beliefs and character were all of great significance'.⁽²⁾ After 1914, ambassadors and attachés 'had to operate in a world where the familiar restraints of diplomacy were fast disappearing'⁽³⁾ and, in the period of appeasement, their traditional authority and influence appeared to have been further eroded.

By 1937, the British Government were faced with a declining economic and strategic position and a rapidly deteriorating international situation. The intensity of the international crisis, his personality, and his impatience with the Foreign Office increasingly led the new prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, to virtually

1) D.C. Watt, 'Foreword: the New International History' (to a special issue on Ambassadors & Attachés). *The International History Review*, IX, 4, November 1987, p.519.

2) Keith Neilson, 'My Beloved Russians: Sir Arthur Nicholson & Russia 1906-1914', *ibid*, p.521.

3) Alan Cassels: 'Afterword: Diplomats in an Age of Alien Ideologies and Bureaucratization', *ibid*, p.614.

take over control of British foreign policy himself. This led to his reliance on a personal entourage including Sir Horace Wilson and Joseph Ball whom he encouraged to bypass the normal channels. An obvious effect of this was that the conflict between 10 Downing Street and the Foreign Office became acute. Paradoxically, this, in turn, increased the importance and influence of certain diplomats frequently in uneasy equilibrium between the two, particularly in the crisis capitals. It is significant that the three most important British ambassadors of the period (towards all of whom Vansittart would be bitterly critical). Henderson (Berlin), Perth (Rome), and Phipps (Paris), were amongst the most ardent supporters of Chamberlain's appeasement policy. Phipps, for example, increasingly reported what he thought Chamberlain and Halifax wanted to hear. During the Munich Crisis this brought him on a collision course with the Foreign Office, and there were calls for his dismissal. His powerful protectors included Sir Warren Fisher and Sir Maurice Hankey and his detractors were led by Vansittart and Oliver Harvey. In the struggle over policy, he was able to ride out the storm albeit with a diminished reputation in Foreign Office circles.

In these circumstances, the informal aspects of the decision making process became increasingly important. In the case of Phipps, a close examination of his ambassadorship in Paris reveals that it was at least as, if not more, important than the traditional or formal machinery was frequently bypassed or ignored. There is, for example, the considerable amount of private and unofficial correspondence to, and from, the Embassy frequently amending, explaining or even contradicting official despatches and instructions which were intended for use 'off the record. Sir Orme Sargent, the assistant under secretary and superintendent of the Central

Department, was nominally his immediate superior at the Foreign Office. There were strong hints and suggestions in some of his private letters to Phipps of possible or desirable courses of action which, he hastened to add, should not be taken or interpreted as constituting official instructions. Furthermore, he occasionally sent Phipps copies of the confidential minutes which he had appended to his despatches with instructions to destroy them as they were intended 'for (his) eyes only' which was highly irregular, to say the least. In theory, this not only enabled Phipps to obtain a unique insight into F.O. thinking but also to amend, suppress or develop his officially expressed views in accordance with those of his nominal superiors at the Central Department. However, as the European situation deteriorated, this increasingly conflicted with Phipps's growing conviction of the correctness of Chamberlain's views, and exacerbated his relations with the Foreign Office particularly vis-à-vis his brother-in-law, Sir Robert Vansittart, the permanent under secretary and, later, chief diplomatic advisor to the Government.

To these examples of the informal decision making process must be added Phipps's large private correspondence with his old friend, Sir Maurice Hankey, the secretary of the cabinet and of the C.I.D. Hankey, who was instrumental in securing his appointment to Paris, sent him, in the strictest confidence, highly confidential information on British defence policy and strategic problems as well as reports on cabinet meetings. He also provided Phipps with high level intimate political gossip which enabled him to tread a careful tightrope between the Foreign Office and 10 Downing Street. This unusual source from London partially complimented the information on the French political scene which he had obtained

from personal and Embassy sources, and probably rendered him unique amongst the ambassadors of the late 1930s.⁽⁴⁾

Finally, as the Phipps papers show, letters were drafted at the Paris Embassy with instructions that copies should not be made and the originals should be returned to the ambassador in order that they should not enter the Embassy archives.⁽⁵⁾ In any case, Phipps frequently served as his own typist (his typing skills constituted a permanent private joke between Hankey and himself)⁽⁶⁾ which greatly facilitated his ability to bypass the normal channels and control the flow of information emanating from the Embassy. With the assistance of Sir Charles Mendl, the Embassy's press officer, this latter aspect was extended during the Czech crisis and its aftermath to encompass the exclusion of certain British and French journalists from the Embassy, as well as collusion in Bonnet's attempt to expel the Times correspondent from France, and to gag any public/y expressed criticism of Chamberlain's policy by prominent British visitors to Paris such as Duff Cooper. In short, Phipps's Paris Embassy serves not only as a microcosm of British appeasement policy in the late 1930s, but also as a study in the informal decision making process as well as an example of a possible déformation professionnelle of a British diplomat during this period.

4) The Phipps-Hankey correspondence is located in the Phipps Papers at Churchill College Archives, Cambridge (hereafter referred to as PHPP), PH.3/3.

For correspondence with Sargent, see *ibid* PHPP.2/10, see also Sargent's private papers at the Public Record Office, Kew, FO.800/272-279.

5) For example: Phipps to Eden, 6 October 1937 contains the marginal note 'To be copied in chancery and returned to me unentered', PHPP.1/19; Phipps to Eden, 12 October 1937 contains the marginal note 'Return to me unentered then typed no copies, Min(ister) to see', PHPP.1/19.

6) For example: Hankey to Phipps, 8 December 1933 (PHPP.3/3) and 8 March 1935 (*ibid*). See also Valentine Lawford, Bound for Diplomacy, London 1963, p.344.

Anglo-French relations on the eve of the second world war have been covered in considerable detail in a number of excellent studies.⁽⁷⁾ The role played by Sir Eric Phipps, as depicted by the secondary sources had remained, however, almost entirely negative. Phipps was British ambassador in Berlin from 1933 to 1937 and at Paris from 1937 to 1939. His two key ambassadorships thus span the crucial period between Hitler's advent to power in Germany, and the outbreak of the second world war which makes them intrinsically important. A puzzling aspect of Phipps's career and of British diplomacy in the 1930s, is the contrast between his reputation as an 'anti-appeaser' in Berlin and as an 'arch-appeaser' in Paris. This contrast, which has never been satisfactorily explained, appears sufficiently striking as almost to constitute the activities of two entirely different individuals.

Dalton, who before the Munich crisis had regarded Phipps as one of the most able diplomats, quoted 'someone who knew him well' to the effect that 'Phipps was a better man in Berlin'.⁽⁸⁾ Birkenhead wrote that 'he (Phipps) was transferred to Paris where his former robustness succumbed during the Czech crisis to the atmosphere of defeatism that surrounded him'⁽⁹⁾ and, that 'the air of Paris seemed to have produced a debilitating effect' on Phipps.⁽¹⁰⁾ One could hardly describe his activities during the Czech crisis which included three meetings with

7) Most notably in Anthony Adamthwaite, France and the Coming of the Second World War, London 1977; Robert Young, In Command of France, Harvard 1978; J.B. Duroselle, La décadence, Paris 1979, and Les Relations franco-britanniques 1935-39, Paris 1975.

8) Hugh Dalton, The Fateful Years, memoirs 1931-45, London 1957, p.191.

9) Birkenhead, Life of Halifax, London 1965, p.358.

10) Ibid, p.387

Daladier and five telegrams to the Foreign Office, all on the same day (13 September 1938), as evidence of debilitation.

Gilbert and Gott presented Phipps in Berlin as an 'anti-appeaser', together with Vansittart, whom 'the Cliveden set' wished to replace in order to ameliorate Anglo-German relations; his activities in Paris, on the other hand, are conveniently descriptive with the moralizing and value judgements which accompany their earlier account, thus completely avoiding the problem of Phipps's apparent change of attitude.⁽¹¹⁾ There is also Shirer's caricature of Phipps as 'a nervous little man whose previous tour of duty in Berlin seemed to have left him with a mighty fear of Hitler's wrath'.⁽¹²⁾ This hardly corresponds to the Führer's own reminiscences of successive British ambassadors to Berlin, as revealed in his table talk, in which he described 'Sir Phipps (sic)' as 'a complete thug'.⁽¹³⁾ Despite the rise of a revisionist school, the traditional picture is still, overwhelmingly, a negative one, and 'defeatist' is the pejorative most frequently employed to describe his despatches from, and his activities in, Paris.

The secondary sources have concentrated heavily on Phipps's negative role during the Munich crisis which meant that the older school of appeasement found him more than adequately suitable for inclusion amongst the legendary 'guilty men'. The traditional picture, which has remained constant for over fifty years has, in fact, been reinforced rather than altered by the additional new evidence of the

11) Martin Gilbert & Richard Gott, The Appeasers, London 1963. Compare for e.g. pp.37 & 45 on Berlin with p.142.

12) William Shirer, The Collapse of the Third Republic, London 1970 (Pan Books edition 1972), pp. 382 & 397.

13) Hitler's Table Talk, 1941-45. Introductions & new preface by H.R. Trevor-Roper. Second edition, London 1973, p.488.

extent of his interference into French domestic politics. Why has Chamberlain's role been reassessed and his reputation undergone a revision, whereas that of Phipps, admittedly a lesser figure but one of his most devoted followers, has continued to suffer? Why has Phipps been allowed to remain in the 'guilty men' category by historians who are well aware that this is no longer an adequate explanation of British appeasement policy in the late 1930s?

Phipps's curious blend of cynicism, opportunism, realism and conviction as revealed in his letters and despatches from Paris has not improved his image. Neither has his hostility to the Popular Front dislike of communism and apparent anti-semitism, as well as his penchant for intrigue and for the most reactionary, defeatist or collaborationist elements in France such as Bonnet, Flandin and Caillaux, whose opinions he quoted at such length in his despatches. It would be a truism to remark that despite his unusual background and immense talents, he remained in many ways (particularly in his class-bound prejudices), a typical example of those limitations of the pre-1914 Foreign Office and diplomatic service which Zara Steiner has described in her classic study.⁽¹⁴⁾ Coming from a narrow, privileged and wealthy strata of society, he appeared incapable of understanding the impact of the Popular Front on the hopes and aspirations of ordinary Frenchmen and French women less fortunate than himself, and there was a supercilious and snobbish element in his frequent references to the French workmen. In this connection, the picture drawn by Lawford, who was a junior secretary at the Paris Embassy during this period, is very revealing:

....Phipps moved through all the contemporary follies and horrors with the alert senses and expert steps of a Frenchman of the eighteenth century, seeing everything or more than most, and

14) Zara Steiner, The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1898-1914, London 1969, passim.

disliking much of what he saw, but reserving his real feelings for the shafts of wit for which (for good or ill) he had come to be well known.⁽¹⁵⁾

Nevertheless, the traditional picture as presented by the secondary sources tends to be one dimensional. Above all, it conveys the misleading impression that Phipps's activities in Paris, particularly his interference in French domestic politics and his pressure on the French Government to adopt British policies, were conducted almost entirely on his own initiative.

Given Chamberlain's domination of foreign policy, which was apparent even before he became prime minister,⁽¹⁶⁾ it was inconceivable that he would have allowed an ambassador to conduct a totally independent policy à la Stratford Canning. During Chamberlain's premiership, Phipps served under two different foreign ministers, two permanent under secretaries at the Foreign Office and retired at his own request, which can be taken as some indication that he was, in fact, carrying out official government policy.

To what extent were Phipps's other activities in Paris part of his official brief, and to what extent were they undertaken on his own initiative? As will be demonstrated in Chapter 3, Phipps inherited a situation in April 1937 where, after the victory of Léon Blum and the Popular Front ten months earlier, the Foreign Office, alarmed at the extent of French instability and financial weakness, had already revealed a strong temptation to intervene in internal French affairs. They also anticipated, and later shared, Phipps's dislike of certain French politicians associated with the Popular Front - especially Herriot, Paul-Boncour and Cot, whose attitude, particularly over Spain and Italy, was regarded as a danger to

15) Valentine Lawford, *op.cit.*, p.344.

16) Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2, 18, Preface by Professor Medlicott, p.v.

official British policy and campaigned as vigorously as the Embassy, for their dismissal.

Why should Phipps have been categorized as a defeatist by many of the leading officials of the Foreign Office when, as has already been seen, they appeared, very frequently, to have accepted many of his basis premises? Did their objections towards Phipps relate solely to his style or were their differences more profound? Was Phipps, as a lesser target, made a convenient scapegoat for their hardening attitude towards the Munich settlement specifically, and Chamberlain's appeasement policy generally?

Any study of Phipps's Paris Embassy will involve, almost inevitably, an analysis of the conflict between 10 Downing Street and the Foreign Office. From the outset, therefore, it is important, not only for the light it sheds on Anglo-French relations on the eve of the second world war, but also on 'the actual rather than the formal functioning of the British foreign policy making apparatus of the 1930s'.⁽¹⁷⁾

This thesis, therefore, will attempt to analyse three major problems raised by Phipps's Paris Embassy which makes the traditional view unsatisfactory:

1. Why is there such a contrast between Phipps's activities (and his reputation) in Berlin and Paris?
2. Given French dependence on the British, and British alarm at the French internal situation in the late 1930s, did Phipps play the role of 'the English

17) Professor Watt drew attention to the need for a close investigation of this topic in 'Appeasement: the Rise of a Revisionist School', Political Quarterly, XXXVI (1965), pp.191-213. Also cited in Susan Bindoff Butterworth, 'Daladier and the Munich Crisis: a Reappraisal', Journal of Contemporary History 1974, vol.9, no.3, pp.191-241 at p.91.

Governess'⁽¹⁸⁾ as the French suggest, and what was the extent of his interference in French internal politics. How far was he acting in accordance with the spirit of his général instructions and within the framework of Chamberlain's appeasement policy? How far did the British Government and the Foreign Office share his prejudices, and to what extent were they prepared to intervene in domestic French affairs to achieve their aims?

3. When did the Foreign Office attitude towards Phipps change, and why?

It is hoped that an analysis of these themes, and the images of France which he conveyed to London in his despatches, will help to elucidate the ultimate question - how successful was Phipps's Paris Embassy, particularly in the light of the French collapse of 1940?

18) The expressions was coined by Bédarida. François Bédarida, 'La gouvernante anglaise', in Edouard Daladier, Chef de Gouvernement Avril 1938-Septembre 1939, sous la direction de René Rémond & Janine Bourdin, Paris 1977, pp 228-240.

CHAPTER 2

PHIPPS'S BACKGROUND, THE PARIS EMBASSY & THE IMPACT OF BERLIN

A) Phipps's Background

Sir Eric Clare Edmund Phipps, who was born in Madrid in 1875, was the only son of Sir Edmund Constantine Henry Phipps, and he was descended from the wealthy Mulgrave and Normanby families who had a long and distinguished tradition of service in the navy, diplomacy and the colonies. His father, who had been a Minister at Brussels and a Minister Plenipotentiary in Paris was 'retired on a pension' in January 1906.⁽¹⁾ As a child, Phipps had accompanied his parents to his father's various diplomatic posts and he was educated privately in Dresden, Vienna and Paris. As Sir Orme Sargent pointed out::

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.⁽²⁾

Phipps entered the diplomatic service in 1899 and he served in Constantinople, the Foreign Office, Rome, St. Petersburg and Madrid as well as three times as a secretary in Paris. A British delegate to the Paris Peace Conference (under Hankey) in 1918-19, he was also a counsellor in Brussels and, between 1922 and 1928, a Minister Plenipotentiary under Lord Crew^f at the Paris Embassy. In 1928 he became minister at Vienna. His first ambassadorship was at Berlin in 1933 and,

1) Foreign Office List 1906, London 1906, p.326.

2) Dictionary of National Biography 1941-50, London 1959, p.670. The entry on Phipps is by Sir Orme Sargent.

in April 1937, he achieved his life's ambition by being appointed British ambassador at Paris.⁽³⁾

B) Phipps, Vansittart, Hankey & the Paris Embassy

Phipps's continental background, his 'profound knowledge and sympathy for France', and the fact that he had served at the Paris Embassy three times previously, made him appear 'pre-eminently qualified'⁽⁴⁾ for the most prestigious job on the diplomatic list. His appointment to Paris, which Eden described as 'Phipps's spiritual home',⁽⁵⁾ was to be regarded as the fulfilment of his ambitions as well as the crowning achievement of his career before retirement.

Significantly, Phipps took up his ambassadorship in Paris in April 1937, a month before Neville Chamberlain became prime minister. Equally significantly, he was not the first choice for this coveted post which had been offered to Sir Robert Vansittart three times previously as a method of removing him from his post of permanent under secretary at the Foreign Office after the disastrous Hoare-Laval Pact for which he was held personally responsible. This he repeatedly declined 'on public and personal grounds', the latter because of the 'well-known predilection' of his brother-in-law, Sir Eric Phipps, 'to take the Paris Embassy'.⁽⁶⁾ There is no evidence, however, to support Norman Rose's inference that this was facilitated by Vansittart. From the outset, controversy, intrigue and personal rivalry surrounded

3) These two paragraphs are drawn from *ibid*, and also from the F.O. List for 1934 and 1937.

4) *Ibid* (DNB)

5) The Earl of Avon, The Eden Memoirs, Facing the Dictators, London 1962, p.503.

6) Norman Rose, Vansittart, study of a diplomat, London 1978, p.200.

the Embassy appointment; its previous incumbent, Sir George Clerk, complained bitterly that he was 'being removed under an age rule from Paris at the age of 63 and was being replaced by Phipps who is only eleven months younger'.⁽⁷⁾

In fact, Phipps had been Clerk's rival for the Paris Embassy when it became vacant in 1933/34 and had, instead, been appointed to his first ambassadorship in Berlin, replacing Rumbold. This had not deterred Phipps from fulfilling his ambition to obtain the Paris post, and in early January 1934, he had mobilized his extremely influential friend, Sir Warren Fisher, the Secretary of the Treasury, to write to Vansittart on his behalf. Fisher told Vansittart that he denigrated the idea of Clerk being sent to Paris (which had been Vansittart's idea), and that: 'it follows that we should have in Paris a man well-known to and strongly trusted by the French - conditions which are fulfilled in the person of Phipps' and that

The situation is far too serious in my opinion for us to allow personal predilections to influence us: and it is really imperative to apply selection pure and simple in the filling of a key post as Paris.⁽⁸⁾

In the meantime on 4 January 1934, Phipps, somewhat impatiently, had sent an extraordinarily frank 'private and personal' letter to Sir John Simon, the Foreign Secretary, pleading his own case. Phipps told him that his 'great wish' would be to succeed Tyrrell at Paris and that he could 'do really useful work there in the difficult times ahead'; he had spent 'the greater part of (his) life and nineteen years of (his) official life there', and had served in Paris on four different occasions. After enumerating the French personalities whom he knew intimately, Phipps added that the personal factor counted for nothing in Berlin, 'all is concentrated in

7) The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart, edited by Kenneth Young, London 1973, vol 1, p.383.

8) PRO. FO.794/8. Warren Fisher to Sir Rbt. Vansittart, 8 January 1934.

Hitler, whom one sees rarely and officially and in the presence of Neurath, and then he shouts at me'. Phipps concluded that

This is, of course, only supposing you decided I was the best candidate for Paris. I feel sure that both Lord Crewe and Sir Austen Chamberlain, who was Secretary of State during the last four years of my last term of service at Paris, would tell you whether they considered that my services were really useful, and whether I inspired the French with confidence. (9)

Phipps's informal and unauthorised approaches to Simon, and especially to Fisher, proved counter productive. Sir Warren Fisher, as Secretary of the Treasury, was also the Head of the Civil Service and he 'extended this authority so as to interfere in the appointment of British Ambassadors and in the submission and non-submission of Foreign Office advice to the Cabinet'.⁽¹⁰⁾ Vansittart must have regarded Phipps's attempts to bypass him as a further attempted erosion of his authority as Permanent Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and was alarmed and irritated. In a long and savage reply to Simon, he temporarily destroyed Phipps hopes for the Paris post: Tyrell, he wrote had 'strongly recommended Sir George Clerk' which had been endorsed by the Promotions Board and there was little to choose in ability between Clerk and Phipps'. The latter 'only took up his duties at Berlin three months ago' and if he were moved to Paris 'at the end of so short a period' it would give the Germans the impression that Berlin was 'the inferior post' which was being treated with 'légèreté'. Phipps should not have asked him (Simon) for the Paris Embassy 'almost immediately after he had obtained his first Embassy, and a very good one at that - probably the most important of all'. Vansittart added that

9) FO. 794/16. Phipps to Secretary of State (Sir John Simon), 'Private and Confidential', 4 January 1934.

10) Frank T. Ashton-Gwatkin, The British Foreign Service, Syracuse University Press 1950, pp.26-27.

There is one other point that I ought to add for your information and safeguard. Phipps alludes to having already had nearly 20 years service in Paris. This is true - and I think it may fairly be said that he did well during them. But in the service generally it gave great dissatisfaction that he did obtain 20 years in Paris by asking for it, and that he never did a distant post. This gave rise to complaints and allegations of injustice and intrigue. If again he were to obtain Paris by asking, we here all know very well what would be said and felt in the service. And that I should frankly deplore; and therefore I must needs counsel you to avoid it. (11)

Vansittart's remark that Phipps 'never did a distant post' was blatantly untrue since he, above all, must have known that Phipps's recorded diplomatic service included Constantinople (in 1905) and St. Petersburg (in 1912).⁽¹²⁾ Apart from the personal tension between them, Vansittart was probably fighting to protect himself against any potential charges of nepotism and favourism. His own appointment as Permanent Under Secretary in 1930 had been controversial; it was described by one official as 'scandalous' and there had been rumours of 'string pulling' and intrigue by both Fisher and himself.⁽¹³⁾ Like Phipps, he suffered bouts of insecurity and anxiety regarding his personal position which in both cases, albeit for different reasons, would increase after Neville Chamberlain became prime minister.

There was, however, some truth in Vansittart's allegations of 'complaints and allegations' at the Foreign Office since, at least on one occasion previously, Phipps had fought for and obtained a special dispensation for service rendered in Paris. In 1927, while Phipps was Chargé d'affaires in Paris, Lord Crewe (the British Ambassador) had notified Austen Chamberlain that:

11) FO. 794/16. Vansittart to Sir John Simon ('Strictly Personal'), n.d. but probably January 1934.

12) Foreign Office List 1934, London 1934. Statement of Service (Phipps), pp. 375 & 376.

13) Rose, op.cit., p.69.

.....Phipps, I fear, is very much disappointed at being obliged to refuse to Legion of Honour for the third time. but I can see that he is extraordinarily keen about this, no doubt from a very long and close connection with the life of Paris. Do you think it will be possible, at some time, to make an exception in his favour, as the circumstances are not likely to be repeated. The King would be more than willing to consent. (14)

Austen Chamberlain replied that '.... in recognition of the exceptional services which have been rendered by Phipps in Paris, I am ready to agree to a departure from the customary regulations'⁽¹⁵⁾

It would be presumptuous however, to assume that, in 1936/37, Vansittart tried to make amends for his earlier savage intervention, even at the risk of being accused of nepotism, by finally recommending Phipps for the Paris appointment. Certainly, there was intense speculation amongst the French as to Clerk's successor, and the field appeared to be wide open. Corbin, the French ambassador in London, speculated that Cadogan had been recalled to the F.O. to be groomed as Vansittart's successor and that

..... si les bureaux (e.g. the F.O.) étaient maîtres de préconiser un candidat de leur choix, Sir Robert Campbell, actuellement Ministre à Belgrade, qui fut si longtemps Conseiller à Paris, aurait les plus grandes chances de l'importer'. (16)

Corbin accurately predicted that 'Sir Ronald Campbell conserve donc de grandes chances pour l'avenir' (in fact, he succeeded Phipps at Paris in October 1939) and

14) FO.794/16. Lord Crewe (Paris) to Sir Austen Chamberlain, 15 June 1927.

15) Ibid. Sir Austen Chamberlain to Lord Crewe (Paris), 15 July 1927.

16) Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Quai, d'Orsay. Z series, 179. Z-274-5. Corbin (Ambassade de France à Londres) to Quai d'Orsay, 'Succession de Sir G. Clerk', 26 Janvier 1937.

that: 'Dans ces conditions, l'on en vient à se demand si Sir Eric Phipps ne finira pas se mettre sur les rangs'.⁽¹⁷⁾

In the event, under the F.O. rules of retirement, Phipps would be appointed ambassador at Paris for a period of only two years. His pleasure and gratitude must surely have been tempered with resentment at having received it virtually on the eve of his retirement. As Norman Rose pointed out, 'the controlled tension' which had existed between Phipps and Vansittart while the former was at Berlin was 'based more on an ambivalent family relationship than on differences in policy'.⁽¹⁸⁾ The shadow of Vansittart continued to hang over Phipps. On the surface there were remarkable similarities between the two men. Both were of swarthy Mediterranean appearance and their personalities made them resemble continentals; both were passionate Francophiles and had served earlier at the Paris Embassy, both hated the Nazis and both had been widowers. Their second wives were two sisters, the daughters of Herbert Ward, the artist who had left them a large trust fund.⁽¹⁹⁾ Vansittart had regarded Phipps as his man in Berlin, and their relationship, always uneasy, deteriorated rapidly after Neville Chamberlain became prime minister in May 1937, a month after Phipps's Paris appointment, which coincided with Vansittart's waning prestige.⁽²⁰⁾ By 1938-39, Phipps's unswerving loyalty towards Chamberlain's appeasement policy and his fear that Vansittart's

17) Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Corbin to Quai d'Orsay, 26 Janvier 1937, op.cit.

18) Rose, op.cit., p.111.

19) Rose, op.cit., p.77.

20) Phipps Papers, Churchill College Archives Centre (hereafter PHPP), 3/3. Hankey to Phipps (Berlin), 2 January 1936.

'subterranean activities'⁽²¹⁾ were undermining his position would lead to a final estrangement between the two men.

In the event, Eden informed Phipps on 15 January 1937 that Clerk's tenure of the Paris Embassy ended on 17 April and that he had 'decided to submit your name to the King as his successor'.⁽²²⁾ Phipps assured Eden that his confidence in him was not misplaced⁽²³⁾ and, as will be seen, his gratitude survived the latter's resignation. Phipps's two powerful friends, Fisher and Hankey, were delighted with his appointment to Paris. Recent scholarship has suggested that while Fisher retained powers over top appointments at the F.O., he had none over the appointment of ambassadors⁽²⁴⁾ although, as been seen, he undoubtedly attempted to pull strings on Phipps's behalf in 1934. In his congratulatory letter, he disclaimed any credit for the appointment:

Wonders will never cease, do they? You know what I've thought was right from the day of W(illiam) T(yrell)'s departure - And I have cursed and expostulated in vain. Suddenly when I almost decided to give up hope, they belatedly and surprisingly have done the obvious thing. You really have nothing to credit me with, for normally if the F.O. think a thing is right they do the opposite'.⁽²⁵⁾

21) The expression was coined by Phipps. PHPP, 3/5. Phipps (Paris) to Horace Wilson, 13 December 1938.

22) PHPP, 1/18. Eden to Phipps (Berlin), 15 January 1937.

23) Ibid. Phipps (Berlin) to Eden, 18 January 1937.

24) Eunan O'Halpin, Head of the Civil Service, a study of Sir Warren Fisher, London 1989, p.250.

25) PHPP. 3/2. Fisher to Phipps, 21 January 1937.

In fact, as their private and strictly unofficial correspondence shows, it was Phipps's close friend Sir Maurice Hankey, the secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence and of the Cabinet, who secured the Paris appointment for him. As early as 2 January 1936 he told Phipps that 'if he (Vansittart) does not go to Paris will they send you there? I don't think I count for much in these appointments but I will do my best....'⁽²⁶⁾ Phipps replied pessimistically that he was grateful to him

for what you say about my unworthy self, but I do not see how I can get to Paris for my three years are up in August 1936 whereas George Clerk's are only up in August 1937, although he is a year younger than me. Of course Paris has always been and will always be my dream for the simple reason that I honestly believe it to be the place where I could really be of use. The only other people I profess to understand are the French and their feelings and politics.
(27)

Throughout October, 1936, Hankey made oblique references to 'the personal affair' and 'the other matter' and that, as yet, there was no news.⁽²⁸⁾ By 23 December 1936, he told Phipps that

I hear that another effort has been made to get Van to Paris. My strong impression is that he has refused.... and I know his determination not to go and they will not force him to do so. I believe therefore that you still have a good chance... Anthony (Eden) has gone up north, so I have not been able to see him, but he took my last intervention on your behalf favourably if non-committally. (29)

Phipps's reply expressed his despair:

I shall never be able to adequately to express to you my gratitude for your belief in me and for all you have done on my behalf. Van has clearly made up his mind quite definitely that there are two

26) PHPP. 3/3 Hankey to Phipps, 2 January 1936.

27) Ibid. Phipps (Berlin) to Hankey, 14 January 1936.

28) Ibid. Hankey to Phipps, 9 & 15 October 1936.

29) Ibid. Hankey to Phipps, 23 December 1936.

persons who shall not go to Paris: one being himself and the other me. (30)

He thought that Vansittart's 'natural inclination' would be to send Drummond ('who is a great friend and admirer of Lady Vansittart') or Cadogan ('who is perhaps an inconvenient understudy to himself in the F.O.').⁽³¹⁾ However, on 21 January 1937, Hankey was able to tell Phipps that he was delighted that 'it has all come out right in the end', and that

It is always a delicate business for me to butt in this kind of thing, in which I really have no status. But I adopted a steady policy for years, in carefully sowing the seed and tending it as we near the moment of possible harvest.towards the end of the week I got a further opportunity with the P.M. himself, and he went so far as to say "Perhaps when the appointments are made you will find some of them to your liking". ...I am quite certain that you are the ideal man for the job.(32)

In the aftermath of the Munich Crisis, Hankey would 'butt in' again as a powerful defender of Phipps against his many vociferous critics (foremost amongst whom was Vansittart), who accused him of defeatism and campaigned for his dismissal. Phipps's road to Munich began during his ambassadorship in Berlin where he witnessed, at first hand, Hitler's consolidation of power and the extent of German rearmament. The impact of his experiences in Berlin cannot be underestimated, and it is to this that we must briefly turn in order to comprehend his role in Paris.

30) PHPP, 3/3. Phipps (Berlin) to Hankey, 29 December 1936.

31) Ibid.

32) Ibid. Hankey to Phipps, 21 January 1937.

C) The Impact of Berlin, 1933-37.

Despite his admirers, Phipps ambassadorship in Berlin was not universally regarded as successful and the evidence suggests that he himself regarded it as a failure.⁽³³⁾ Baldwin's well-known observation was that 'Phipps's despatches contained too much wit and not enough warning'⁽³⁴⁾ while Thomas Jones, the assistant secretary to Baldwin's cabinet, urged the dismissal of Phipps (who loathed the Nazi leaders) as 'a preliminary to Anglo-German understanding'.⁽³⁵⁾ More relevant to Anglo-French relations, Laroche, the French ambassador at Brussels, informed Delbos on the eve of Phipps's departure from Berlin that

le Vicomte Davingnon (Belgian ambassador at Berlin) a fait un grand éloge de M. François-Poncet que les Allemandes tiennent en haute estime, il trouve par contre que sir Eric Phipps avait perdu de son autorité et il se demande si son successeur saura tenir à Berlin un langage digne de l'Angleterre.⁽³⁶⁾

Phipps had probably 'perdu de son autorité' in Berlin because there were serious leakages of information at the Embassy and copies of his despatches had been obtained by the Italians. In 1936 this included Eden's confidential memorandum to the cabinet on 'The German Danger', to which was attached a collection of the embassy's reports which, according to Eden

contained clear evidence of German policy under Hitler whose ambitions were defined as the militarization of the whole German nation and economic and territorial expansion so as to absorb those of German race who were citizens of neighbouring states. He concluded that it was "vital to hasten and complete our

33) Phipps's complaint to Simon (cited on p.18) suggests that he realised, as early as 1934, that his Berlin ambassadorship was doomed to failure.

34) Cited in W.N. Medlicott, Britain & Germany, the search for an agreement, London 1969, p.7.

35) Gilbert & Gott, op.cit., p.45.

36) Documents Diplomatiques Français, Series II, vol.5, no.214, Laroche (Brussels) à Delbos, 3 avril 1937.

rearmament", and within a few weeks the Cabinet did indeed agree to a vastly larger programme⁽³⁷⁾

This memorandum and the despatches were handed over to Hitler by Ciano, and included Phipps's description of the German Government as 'composed of dangerous adventurers' which, apparently, made 'a profound impression on the Führer'.⁽³⁸⁾

Earlier, in 1935, Phipps's despatches 'which had the usually fairly wide circulation to the Cabinet' were also probably leaked in Berlin.⁽³⁹⁾ His 'similarly devastating despatch' of 22 March 1935 describing Goering's wedding in sarcastic and derogatory terms was 'kept in the F.O. on Sargent's instructions in order to prevent further indiscretion'.⁽⁴⁰⁾ The latter explained to him that

You may be wondering why your admirable despatch no.285 has not reached you in print. Well the truth is that we did not dare to circulate it lest Cabinet Ministers should give it the same embarrassing publicity as they gave to your bison despatch... lest the temptation to readers to pass on such good things to their friends might prove irresistible. ...We cannot count upon our Masters discretion so long as you continue to write such brilliant despatches.⁽⁴¹⁾

Hankey also reassured him that 'everyone speaks highly of you and your telegrams and despatches'.⁽⁴²⁾ Nevertheless, by December 1935, Phipps was complaining to him that his reports were being ignored:

Have you seen my despatches no 1344 of December 16 and 1359 very confidential of December 19 (my conversation with Hitler and my impressions thereon) particularly the latter? Perhaps 1359 will

37) David Dilks, 'Appeasement and Intelligence' in Retreat from Power, vol.I, edited by David Dilks, London 1981, p.152.

38) Ciano's Diplomatic Diaries, ed. M. Muggeridge, London 1948, pp.56-57.

39) Medlicott, op.cit.

40) Ibid.

41) PHPP, 2/10. O. Sargent to Phipps (Berlin), 26 April 1935.

42) PHPP, 3/3. Hankey to Phipps (Private & personal), 8 March 1935.

be suppressed'. If so I will send you a copy. My views are set forth "ad nauseam" in these and many other despatches & telegrams from here. I never get much back, however, and I should much welcome a few lines from you as to what the PM, Eden, and others contemplate doing. of course the eventual re-formation of the Stresa Front would be the ideal solution....(43)

Vansittart too appreciated Phipps's despatches from Berlin, and told him that 'everyone here, myself not least, appreciates enormously the excellent and full reports you have been sending'.⁽⁴⁴⁾ However:

since Ribbentrop's visit there has been a sort of intangible whispering campaign started against you, based on nothing in particular but run, I think, by the ultra pro-German sections in this country. You need not, of course, pay the least attention to it. It represents nothing and, as you know, you have of course full support here.(45)

He agreed with Phipps that 'the whispering campaign' may have been based on the suggestion 'that I am a Germanophobe and have infected you to some extent'.⁽⁴⁶⁾ This was the highpoint of their personal relationship and their agreement over the German question which reached its apogee during Vansittart's visit to Berlin in August 1936, ostensibly to attend the Olympic Games, when he stayed, as Phipps's guest, as the British Embassy.

Hankey, Sargent and Vansittart were undoubtedly correct in appreciating the value of Phipps's despatches from Berlin. Despite Baldwin's unfair strictures he was under no illusions concerning the fundamental nature of the Nazi régime which he reported back faithfully to the Foreign Office. A typical Vansittart minute to one of his despatches from Berlin reads '.... Sir E. Phipps warns us once more and

43) Ibid. Phipps (Berlin) to Hankey, 30 December 1935.

44) PHPP, 2/18. Vansittart to Phipps (Berlin), 23 March 1936.

45) Ibid. Vansittart to Phipps (Berlin), 23 June 1936.

46) PHPP. 2/18. Vansittart to Phipps (Berlin), 23 June 1936.

as clearly as usual, Hitler will not bind himself to a fluid Europe'.⁽⁴⁷⁾ In his four years in Berlin, Phipps moved from a simplistic description of the Nazi leaders as 'gangsters' to a highly sophisticated analysis of the Third Reich. His views on the essential relationship between its built-in dynamics and its economic (as well as ideological and strategic) need for territorial expansion anticipates the later theories of Tim Mason,⁽⁴⁸⁾ and are classics of their kind.

Phipps's valedictory despatch from Berlin⁽⁴⁹⁾ summarised German aims which included: '(i) the absorption of Austria and other Germanic peoples, e.g. the German "fringe"; (ii) Expansion in the east; (iii) the recovery of the colonies'. After stating that German rearmament 'is now nearing completion and her entente with Italy has strengthened her position', Phipps warned that 'it is again dawning on the German consciousness that of all Europe countries perhaps the most inconvenient is Great Britain' and that 'some Nazi Party extremists have already come to the conclusion that the effort to conciliate England has failed and that the threat of force must be used to coerce her'. Regarding German co-operation with England and Italy, Phipps quoted from Mein Kampf that:

.... this alliance would, on the other hand, give Germany the possibility of working in all tranquillity for the preparatory measures required, within the framework of such a coalition, for a final settlement with France.... Thus the mortal enemy of our country, France, will be isolated'

German policy was 'to keep Italy deeply committed in Africa and the Mediterranean, so that she cannot interfere in Central Europe, and to exploit

47) Minute by Vansittart, May 1936, DBFP, 2, 16, no.328.

48) Compare for e.g., Phipps's despatch to Eden, DBFP, 2, 17, no.350 with T.W. Mason's 'The Primacy of Politics: Politics and Economics in National Socialist Germany' in S.J. Woolf, The Nature of Fascism, London 1968, pp. 165-195.

49) DBFP, 2, 18, no.399. Phipps (Berlin) to Eden, 13 April 1937.

Anglo-Italian differences, so that she remains tied to Germany'. His despatch concluded:

To induce Germany however to follow the narrow path of even relative virtue the following factors are essential:

- 1) The might of Britain. Any pandering to German threats or any slackening of our rearmament would, in my considered opinion to court disaster.
- 2) The might of France. If civil strife, so serious as to impair the efficiency of the French Army, were to break out, the temptation to Germany would be irresistible.
- 3) The maintenance of the closest Anglo-French friendship, amounting in all but name to an alliance.

Vansittart regarded this report as 'a very valuable conspectus' which should have cabinet circulation while Eden minuted that it was valuable.⁽⁵⁰⁾

In Berlin, Phipps became associated with hostility to Nazi Germany, to such an extent, that in June 1937, in support of their suspicions that the British Government were changing their policy, the Soviet ambassador in London 'gave a number of instances beginning with the transfer of Sir E. Phipps from Berlin to Paris'.⁽⁵¹⁾ Nor did Phipps's basic attitude towards Nazi Germany change after his appointment to Paris. His relationship with Henderson, his successor at Berlin, was never cordial, and he even warned Halifax not to place any credence on anything that the Nazi leaders should tell Henderson.⁽⁵²⁾ None of this is preparation for the traditional picture of Phipps in Paris as 'the arch defeatist-appeaser'. To what extent, therefore, did his views change?

There is no doubt that, in Paris, Phipps became increasingly pessimistic and that the deteriorating French situation, underpinned by his experiences in Berlin,

50) Op.cit. (Phipps (Berlin) to Eden, 13 April 1937). The quotation from 'Mein Kampf' is cited as p.155 but the version is not specified.

51) DBFP, 2, 18, no. 642. Eden to MacKillip (Moscow), 22 June 1937.

52) FO.800/315, X/XV/136. Phipps (Paris) to Halifax ('secret') 17 March 1938.

were amongst the contributory factors. While in Berlin, he had maintained a keen interest in French affairs, and was well aware that Hitler regarded France as being 'on the verge of collapse both politically and financially and he was counting upon that collapse to smooth his path in Europe.'⁽⁵³⁾ His despatches from Berlin, in fact, foreshadowed some of the fears, anxieties, attitudes and prejudices that he was to display in Paris.

In May 1936, for example, contemplating the Popular Front victory, which also alarmed the F.O., he wished he could be certain that 'Blum will not be run by Moscow and that the French socialist dog will not be wagged by the communist tail' and that 'if this does in fact occur and if Anglo-Italian relations do not soon improve events will indeed be playing into the hands of Herr Hitler'.⁽⁵⁴⁾ As a personal letter to Eden in November 1936 shows, he was also aware that the serious political divisions in France could have dangerous consequences for Britain, and that if Ribbentrop's attempt to 'woo Great Britain' failed

the "Party" will give up playing what the French call "la carte anglaise" and will strain every nerve to isolate us, and then "Gott Strafe England" will be their motto. To attain that object they hope (1) that France will go Communist and fall prey to civil war "a l'Espagnol", or (2) that France will go Fascist and come to a separate arrangement with Germany. Here perhaps the German medicine men of the mind may make a wrong diagnosis, for it seems by no means certain that a Fascist France need necessarily turn her back on us or throw in her lot with Frau Germania. But in any case it seems absolutely essential for us that (1) a strong Government, capable of restoring and preserving order, should soon emerge in France, and (2) that we should continue to work in as close collaboration with France as possible. I hardly dare to advocate a (3), but at the risk of shocking you I will set down as an eventuality so blissful for a British dweller in the Wilhelmstrasse to contemplate as to savour of Paradise - a re-establishment of our traditional friendly and cordial relations with Italy. Then with an admittedly

53) DBFP, 2, 18, Encl. in no.46. Gainer (Munich) to Ogilvie-Forbes (Berlin), 30 April, 1937.

54) DBFP, 2, 16, no.343 Phipps (Berlin) to Eden, 27 May 1936.

well-disposed Roosevelt America in the background, we could pursue the even tenor of our rearmament course without worrying too much over the German gangster's hot air and breath.(55)

In Paris, Phipps's remedies for the emergence of a strong government in France 'capable of restoring and preserving order' would lead, with the connivance of his superiors if not at their actual behest, to his interference in French domestic affairs. A return to an Anglo-Italian alliance would, with Halifax's support, manifest itself in his attempts to pressurize the French into making concessions to Mussolini. Like Chamberlain, it is possible that Phipps regarded Mussolini as the key to Hitler. Certainly his concern with the Italian problem looms large in his valedictory despatch from Berlin in April 1937:

If any one event may be said to have influenced the course of German policy decisively during recent years it was the imposition and subsequent failure of the League sanctions against Italy. It was the cause, direct or indirect of the reoccupation of the Rhineland in March 1936, of the gradual deterioration of Anglo-German relations, and of the Italo-German "rapprochement".(56)

Above all, the impact of his farewell visits to Hitler and Goering must have haunted him in Paris:

Having duly impressed me with German might & wealth, General Goering compared the situation in Germany, where, under beneficent Nazi rule, there was an actual shortage of labour, with that in France & England, where unemployment was rife. He then remarked that, going from Berlin to Paris, I should have the opportunity of comparing the order existing in the former capital with the disorders and civil strife rampant in the latter. France was clearly falling into decomposition.... A forty hour week was an economic impossibility; a vicious circle would set in, prices would rise and then wages, and then prices again. When the worst happened perhaps Great Britain would at least realise that she had "backed the wrong horse". After all there were only two powers in Europe that really counted - Germany and Great Britain - and united, nobody could prevent them from doing what they wished(57)

55) DBFP, 2, 17, no.365 Phipps (Berlin) to Eden, 10 November 1936.

56) DBFP, 2, 18, no.399 Phipps (Berlin) to Eden, 13 April 1937.

57) FO.371/20726. (C2840/78/18). Phipps (Berlin) to Eden, 13 April 1937.

To which, despite Phipps's spirited reply, an F.O. official minuted that 'General Goering is trying to make Sir E. Phipps's flesh creep'. By comparison, Hitler's parting remarks were in a low key:

Referring to the endless strikes in France he (Hitler) said that the German pavilion at the Paris Exhibition was practically finished; the German workmen had returned to their country completely and healthily disgusted with conditions in France; but they had continued working all the time and had even succeeded in persuading the French workers in the Pavilion to join them.Germany needed peace... the French, however, as represented by a number of lawyers and journalists carried on a poisonous press campaign against Germany and seemed to wish for war. The Bolsheviks always sought to make trouble everywhere.(58)

On the other hand, discussing Phipps's appointment to Paris, the leading article in Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung was strangely sympathetic and even mildly encouraging:

.... that Sir E. Phipps should now go to Paris as British Ambassador is important in that he has experienced the great revolution in our country.this agreeable Englishman and his wife leave many friends in Berlin who follow his further diplomatic career which it deserves. The delicate relations between Germany and England have not been clarified on all points as far as might be wished. An intelligent Englishman in Paris, who knows the new Germany, has the opportunity of rendering Europe a real service.(59)

58) FO.371/20710. (C2880/3/18). Phipps (Berlin) to Eden, 15 April 1937.

59) FO.371/20747. (C2960/1495/18). Ogilvie-Forbes (Berlin) to Eden, 16 April 1937.

CHAPTER 3

PHIPPS'S UNSPOKEN ASSUMPTIONS AND THE PARIS MILIEU, ANGLO-FRENCH RELATIONS AND THE FOREIGN OFFICE

As indicated previously, Phipps's despatches from Paris became increasingly pessimistic, and his experiences in Berlin had led him to the conclusion that 'Hitler could not be bluffed',⁽¹⁾ a propensity of the French Government particularly during the Czech crisis. His awareness of Hitler's aims, and the extent of German rearmament, was reinforced by his knowledge of French economic, political, social and military weakness, particularly the inadequate state of the French air force and the deficiencies of its aircraft industry - a recurrent theme in his reports and those of the Embassy's air attaché, Wing Commander Colyer.

Phipps's close friendship with Sir Maurice Hankey, 'his old friend of the Paris 1919 and the Hague 1929 and 1930 conferences'⁽²⁾ remained extremely important. Hankey, as secretary of the cabinet and the Committee of Imperial Defence, was an immensely powerful and influential figure even after his retirement in late 1938. After his appointment to Paris, Phipps continued to obtain from him, in a purely private capacity, highly confidential information not only regarding British defence policy and strategic problems but also reports on cabinet meetings which were considered so confidential that he was instructed to destroy them although Hankey himself, apparently, retained copies.⁽³⁾

1) Roy Douglas, In the Year of Munich, London 1977, p.128 (cited in).

2) Stephen Roskill, Hankey, Man of Secrets, London 1977, vol 1, p.18.

3) Ibid, vol. 3, p.304.

Phipps's argument and convictions were, therefore, buttressed by confidential and privileged information regarding Britain's political, economic and strategic situation. Additionally, Sargent's confidential and highly unofficial letters enabled him to obtain a unique insight into Foreign Office thinking. This latter factor enabled Phipps to amend, suppress or develop his officially stated views in conformity with those of his nominal superiors at the F.O., at least until ^{the} Munich crisis. Finally, it should be emphasized that his devotion to Chamberlain's policy of appeasement was not immediate. Again the question arises, why should his reputation have suffered so badly?

In his obituary of Phipps, Sargent stated that

By the time he reached Paris a serious demoralization was showing itself in what was still the governing class in France, Phipps clearly saw the implication of this moral breakdown and warned the British government of it, only to attain the unjust stigma of being "defeatist". Where he failed, however, was in not appreciating that the demoralization he saw so clearly was confined to a special section of French life, and that there were other healthier elements which could assert themselves only after the collapse of 1940.(4)

To what extent did Phipps succumb to or share this demoralization and how far did his despatches reflect the views of only a narrow segment of society? The internal situation was complex and highly fluid, the amount of information available to the Embassy was huge, and there were severe problems of selectivity and compression.

This was a problem which had earlier affected Sir George Clerk's Paris Embassy:

I was horrified to see in the sections which arrived this morning the amount of space taken up by the telegrams from Paris, and I am afraid that this is not the first time that we have offended in this way. The fact is, the situation here is so complicated that one feels obliged, if you are to be kept informed, to report at some length, and, on the other hand, it changes so rapidly, almost from day to day, that reports by despatch are almost out of date by the time you

4) DNB, op.cit., p.670. The entry is by Sir Orme Sargent.

get them. We will do our best to cut down the no. of telegrams and not be so long-winded in future.(5)

As the internal situation deteriorated, Phipps's Paris Embassy became even more guilty in this respect, and were severely admonished by Vansittart for wasting the F.O's time and 'getting into the habit of reporting every ephemeral utterance at inordinate length'.⁽⁶⁾ There was undoubtedly occasions when the Embassy were unable to see the wood for the trees. In 1938, for example, Barclay minuted that there was 'a serious mis-statement' in the Annual Report on France for 1937, and that it was 'strange that Chancery should have allowed the statement that there is no pact or treaty binding the U.K. and France (para 363) to pass'.⁽⁷⁾

During periods of crisis, Phipps's despatches were circulated to the Cabinet and their impact was profound. The question of objectivity, selectivity and the sources of his information in his reporting were, therefore, extremely relevant. Phipps approached the Paris ambassadorship at the age of 62 with a lifetime of experiences, personal convictions, prejudices and beliefs. As has been seen, he was already personally acquainted with the leading political personalities in France who still constituted its ruling classes. His unspoken assumptions and the Paris milieu were, therefore, extremely important.

5) FO. 800/274. Lloyd Thomas (Paris) to O. Sargent, 28 October 1936. Fr/36/2.

6) FO.371/20687. Minute by Vansittart, 30 October 1937 to Phipps telegram no.642, 24 October 1937 summarizing Chautemps's speech at the Fifth Congress of the West Central Socialist Radical Federation. C7337/18/17.

7) FO.371/21611. (C686/686/17). Minute by Barclay.
The volume of telegrams received and despatched by the F.O. increased dramatically during this period. In 1936 it was 26,921; 1937 = 27,690, which swelled dramatically in 1938 to 35,493. FO.366/1081 (X540/330/505). The Annual Report on France increased from 45 pages in 1932 to 115 pages in 1936. FO.371/20697 (C1903/1903/17), Barclay minute to Ann.Rpt. 1936.

A. Phipps's Unspoken Assumptions and the Paris Milieu

Andrew Rothstein a Communist propagandist of 'the guilty men' school noted that during the Munich crisis, Phipps had expressed views very similar to those of Maurras in l'Action Française ⁽⁸⁾. Earlier, the United States ambassador at Berlin, William E. Dodd, recorded that his British colleague, Sir Eric Phipps, had 'revealed more sympathy for the fascist crowd in Spain than I had noted before.... I believe now he is almost a Fascist'. ⁽⁹⁾

If, as has been seen, Phipps's France was not that of Blum and the popular Front, would it be unfair to conclude that his concept of 'the other France' was that of the anti-Dreyfusard tradition and the Action Française? Did his connection with the reactionary elements in France denote a genuine spiritual affinity (reinforced by his aristocratic background and his hatred of communism) or was it merely a tactical move in his attempts to get the French government to adopt 'British' (or rather Chamberlain's) policies? Would Flandin, who sent Hitler a telegram of congratulation after the Munich settlement, ⁽¹⁰⁾ and who became Minister for Foreign Affairs under the Vichy Régime, have called him as a defence witness at his post-war trial? ⁽¹¹⁾ Despite the frequency with which Flandin's views were cited in his despatches, Phipps's description of him is distinctly unflattering, 'perhaps the most unpopular prime minister that France has ever known.... a man whom it is

8) Andrew Rothstein, The Munich Conspiracy, London 1958, p.130.

9) Ambassador Dodd's Diary 1933-38, edited by Wm E. Dodd Jr & Martha Dodd, London 1941. Entry for 11 January 1937, p.383. It will be recalled that Phipps was born in Spain.

10) For which, at ceremonies at the Arc de Triomphe, Flandin had his face slapped by Maître Jacques Renouvin who 'declared that his presence would dishonour the Unknown Soldier's tomb'. FO.371/21600 (C14079/55/17), Phipps to Halifax, 17 November 1938.

11) Le procès Flandin devant la haute cour de justice, 23-26 juillet, 1946, Paris n.d. Phipps died in 1945.

difficult to like and dangerous to trust'.⁽¹²⁾ While elements of cynicism and opportunism are not lacking, perhaps the most relevant passage in the same report is, 'a reliable friend of England', confirming Cowling's observation regarding Phipps's ladder of reputability on which believers in the Entente come top and the advocates of "ideology" bottom'.⁽¹³⁾ There is, however, circumstantial evidence on both counts but against this there is Phipps's undoubted tendency towards anti-semitism which, while not precluding close friendships with individual Jews, became more pronounced in Paris.⁽¹⁴⁾

Phipps's anti-semitism was that of the pre-1914 Edwardian variety, based perhaps more on religion and class than on race, and frequently associated with G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc. The latter was a strong influence on Lady Phipps who was a convert to Catholicism, and was such a frequent visitor that the upper entresol of the embassy became known, apparently, as 'Belloc's room'.⁽¹⁵⁾ Belloc was a vehement anti-semite of the catholic right and his book, The Jews, published in 1922, equated them with Bolshevism whereas Phipps equated them with the Popular Front. Belloc's anti-semitism was in the French tradition; he had been born in France, completed his national service in French artillery, and had

12) FO.432/4 Confidential Print (France), no.4, 6 January 1938.

13) Maurice Cowling, The Impact of Hitler. British Politics & British Policy 1933-40, London 1975, p.284.

14) Phipps's attitude in Berlin was ambivalent. Remarks differentiating 'good' and 'bad' Jews are recorded in these despatches where systematic Nazi racial persecution (which his aristocratic disdain may have found vulgar) probably kept his personal prejudices in check. See particularly, FO. 408/65 Confidential Print on Germany, vol LXX, no.7, Phipps (Berlin) to Simon, 10 May 1935, and Ibid, vol. LXII, no.35 Phipps (Berlin) to Hoare, 24 Oct. 1935.

15) Cynthia Gladwyn, The Paris Embassy, London 1976, p.219.

'borrowed his ideas and even his manner of expressing them from Drumont'.⁽¹⁶⁾

Phipps himself frequently made strange references to individual Jews, whom he delighted in identifying by their 'real' family names, especially those whom he regarded as being opposed to Chamberlain's appeasement policy. Thus, 'it is curious that (General) Spears is a Jew and that his real name was Spiers'⁽¹⁷⁾

(Spears's father's name was Charles McCarthy Spears,⁽¹⁸⁾ hardly a semitic sounding patronym) while 'Mandel is a Jew and his real name is Rothschild'⁽¹⁹⁾ (Phipps admitted, however, that 'he was no relation of the great banking magnates')⁽²⁰⁾ He also conveniently quoted the views of others when it coincided with his own - hence Caillaux, the president of the Finance Commission in the Senate, after the Munich agreement:

anti-Jewish feeling that had begun to shown itself during M. Blum's "lamentable" terms of office was now increasing because the French public realised that the chief war-mongers in the recent crisis were Jews (including the Paris Rothschilds) and the Communists.⁽²¹⁾

Phipps conveniently omitted to remind the F.O. that Caillaux's 'pacifism' during the first world war consisted of being 'the chief of the defeatists' and Clemenceau ^{him} arrested for treason.⁽²²⁾ He reserved his own anti-semitism for his private

16) Friederich Heer, God's First Love, London 1967, p.342.

17) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/319). Phipps to Chamberlain, 4 November 1938.

18) Who Was Who, vol VII, 1971-80, London 1981, p.745.

19) FO.371/21601 (C15350/55/17). Phipps to Halifax, 6 December 1938.

20) For Mandel's ancestry, see John M. Sherwood, Georges Mandel and the Third Republic, Stanford, California 1970, p.1 and pp.303-4. Even Phipps's old friend, André Maurois, failed to escape the former's obsession with unmasking Jewish names and was revealed in the Embassy's personality report as Emile Herzog. FO.432/4. Pt IX, no.4, 6 Jan. 1938.

21) FO.371/21600 (C12965/55/17). Phipps telegram, 25 October 1938.

22) D.W. Brogan, The French Nation, London 1957, pp.241 & 243. In October 1938, Harvey reminded Halifax of Caillaux's 'treacherous activities in 1914 and 1915', see Chapter 8.

letters to Halifax and Chamberlain and it would serve as a method of ingratiating himself on them. Those to the F.O. would be more discreet, mirroring, in a curious manner the divisions between 10 Downing Street and the Foreign Office.

Against this must be set Phipps's generous character description of other French Jews such as Léon Blum.⁽²³⁾ Also his close friendship with the Franco-Jewish anglophile writer, André Maurois,⁽²⁴⁾ who was the biographer of Disraeli, Byron and Shelley. Maurois, ironically, was also the hagiographer of Marshal Lyautey⁽²⁵⁾ (with whom Phipps had corresponded),⁽²⁶⁾ who was not only an ardent support of the Entente during the first Moroccan crisis in 1905 but also, in later life, of the Croix de Feu. Above all, there is his friendship with, and the influence of, Sir Charles Mendl, the Embassy's press attaché, who has been regarded as the éminence grise of the Embassy and whose role has never been satisfactorily explained.⁽²⁷⁾

Continuity between ambassadors was provided by Mendl, the son of a Bohemian Jew, and a somewhat shadowy, cosmopolitan figure who had been press

23) FO.432/4. Confidential Print (France) no.4, 6 January 1938.

24) André Maurois, Memoirs 1885-1967, London 1970. pp.200, 226-7, 257. Phipps had successfully recommended Maurois for a CBE in 1927. He then warmly recommended his further promotion to a KBE in 1937 for his literary work which was 'invariably inspired by real understanding and sympathy' for England. PHPP.1/18. Phipps (Berlin) to Eden, 11 March 1937.

25) André Maurois, Lyautey, Paris 1931.

26) Index to the Phipps Papers, PHPP.3/4. Marshal Lyautey.

27) References to Mendl in this period are scarce. Apart from his correspondance with Tyrrell (at the PRO); the 17th Earl of Derby (at Liverpool Record Office) and a few items in the Phipps & Spears papers (at Churchill College), only a few scattered documents survived and his private papers appear to have been destroyed. Mendl has therefore become the 'missing dimension' in any discussion of Phipps's Paris Embassy. For a brief description of his personality and activities, see Valentine Lawford, Bound for Diplomacy, London 1963, pp.309-313.

attaché there since 1926 and who, it was rumoured, was a British intelligence agent. He was a close friend of the Windsors⁽²⁸⁾ and his wife was an immensely rich American woman whose soirées were immortalized by Janet Flanner.⁽²⁹⁾ Mendl had build up an immense range of contacts in Paris from all walks of life and had the reputation of being an intriguer and a 'fixer'. He was undoubtedly an important source of Phipps's information and his daily newsletter to the ambassador, which included, a digest of the French press as well as the latest political gossip in Paris, was regarded as invaluable. Mendl's function was 'to observe and record from day to day, almost hour to hour, the ebb and flow of many tides of French opinion'.⁽³⁰⁾ He was, as Oliver Harvey pointed out

in daily touch with everyone who knows anything, Cabinet Ministers, senators, deputies, editors, foreign correspondents, anyone of importance who happened to be passing through. He knew all Paris and all Paris knew him, and what is more he knew what Paris was doing, thinking and saying.... being less tarred with the official brush than members of the regular diplomatic staff (a fact that led me once to define his function as those of a Canard à la Press) he could put questions, express views or put things across with great authority but in a noncommittal way than we; many good services were performed by him in this manner⁽³¹⁾

Laval was convinced that he was 'in the pay of the secret service' and had leaked the details of the Hoare-Laval plan in order to sabotage it; Laval was also purported to have told the Italian press attaché in Paris some years later than Mendl, 'had been heard to boast that his government has spent more money to

28) J. Bryan & C.J.V. Murphy, The Windsor Story, London 1981 (Granada paperback edition), p.473.

29) Janet Flanner, Paris Was Yesterday, London 1973, p.221.

30) Lawford, op.cit., p.309.

31) DNB (1951-60), pp.734/5. The entry is by O. Harvey.

bring the Laval government down than on a colonial war'.⁽³²⁾ Harvey, Halifax's private secretary, bracketed Mendl with Phipps in his condemnation of the embassy's interference into French domestic affairs.⁽³³⁾

In fact, the problems raised by the press attaché's role at the Embassy had been anticipated earlier when, in February 1936, the question of Mendl's retirement had been broached. The Standing Committee of Retirement Officers had agreed that 'as a general rule unestablished staff should retire at 65', and that 'Mendl would reach this age in December and would have completed 15 years service'.⁽³⁴⁾ In view of his subsequently increased influence at Phipps's Paris Embassy, Wigram's minute was shrewd:

.... I do not, from my own experience of Paris, believe that the collection of information second hand through certain prominent journalists is altogether good - and I believe that it diminishes the first-hand contacts, which are important not merely for the members of the Embassy but for the French politicians themselves. On broad grounds then I recommend that, when Sir C. Mendl reaches retirement age, the position of Press Attaché in Paris be abolished
(35)

In the event, Mendl managed to escape these retirement restrictions, and remained press attaché at the Embassy until 1940. A second minute to this paper had^a curiously prophetic ring:

There is an idea that the press officer is apt to weight too heavily in the councils of the Embassy, but this is not the case in Paris. It is not the business of a press officer to do political work but to collect information and to put the staff in contact with those whom it is useful for them to know. The press officer from long residence in

32) Geoffrey Warner, Pierre Laval and the Eclipse of France, London 1968, p.213.

33) PRO. FO.800/311. Memorandum by Harvey to Halifax, 27 October 1938. H/XIV/307. See also The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-40, edited by John Harvey, London 1970, appendix M, p.427 which reproduces this memorandum.

34) FO 366/966. Sir C. Mendl's retirement. Minute by Keighley, 7 February 1936.

35) Ibid. Minute by Wigram, 11 February 1936.

the post may probably have a bias - that is perhaps inevitable, but it is the business of the more detached regular staff to use the information and correct the bias of the press officer (36)

After April 1937, Phipps and Mendl worked in tandem, and the latter's views did 'weigh too heavily in the councils of the embassy'. Phipps's 'informal' activities involved him, to a certain extent, in the formulation of policy while Mendl's role became increasingly political. Harvey was therefore correct when he bracketed them together as both interfering in French domestic politics.⁽³⁷⁾ Regarding the persistent rumours, doubtless encouraged by Mendl himself, that he was a British Intelligence Officer, Commander Dunderdale, head of the British SIS station in Paris from 1926 to 1940 (and his exact contemporary there), stated authoritatively that 'Mendl did not have any secret service connections and really was only the press attaché at the embassy'.⁽³⁸⁾

B. Some Aspects of the Paris Milieu

The background to other important aspects of the Paris milieu which influenced and underpinned the Embassy's despatches included financial and business circles, the press, the military, the intellectuals (including literary and cultural circles) and diplomatic circles, and frequently overlapped. While the first

36) Ibid. The initials appended to this minute are illegible but the writer's comment, that 'speaking now as the Private Secretary and not as the last head of Chancery in Paris', identifies him as Oliver Harvey.

37) Harvey, Diaries 1937-1940, op.cit., pp.427-428.

38) Interview with Commander Wilfred Dunderdale in London, 26 September 1984 in connection with the introduction to my English adaptation of Major General Rygor Slowikowski's memoirs, In the Secret Service, London 1988. Cmdr. Dunderdale later became MI6's liaison officer with the Free French and Polish Intelligence services during the second world war. The Germans, however, appear to have regarded Mendl as a British agent; his secretary was apparently arrested in German occupied Paris and a Captain Rostin of the Gestapo investigated Mendl's activities and his address books. FO.371/24314 (C12516/65/17). Sir Noel Charles (Lisbon) to W.H.B. Mack (F.O.), 9 November 1940.

three were traditionally the province of the commercial, press and service attachés, whose specialized reports were frequently forwarded as enclosures, their interlocking importance to the overall picture of the French (or rather the Parisian) scene also made them an intrinsic part of the Ambassador's own despatches. The Embassy's almost total immersion in the richness and the intensity of the Paris milieu made it appear, especially during periods of crisis, that a section of its 'aristocratie républicaine' spoke for all the France - thus narrowing still further the base of its reporting.

a) The Press provided a rich source of the Embassy's information. French newspapers were concentrated into a few hands, were frequently unprofitable, and 'tended to attract millionaires whose aim was not so much to increase wealth as to win power and influence'; for example, François Coty, the perfume manufacturer, who bought Le Figaro in 1922 also subsidised several extreme right wing newspapers including Action Française and Le Flambeau, the organ of the Croix de Feu.⁽³⁹⁾ As Osgood showed, the extreme right wing press were 'at the forefront of the attack on perfidie Albion' and the 'real import of its campaign was its contribution to the process of demoralization which permeated France on the eve of the second world war'.⁽⁴⁰⁾

The French press was also notoriously corrupt:

'les Etats étrangers ne s'y trompent d'ailleurs point, puisque les manoeuvres occultes sur certains organes de presse sont devenue de notoriété publique, les uns accusant l'argent tchèque ou polonaise,

39) Theodore Zeldin, France 1848-1945, vol 2, London 1977, pp.532-3.

40) S.M. Osgood, 'Anglophobia and other Vichy Press Obsessions', The Wiener Library Bulletin, XXII, no 3, new series no.12 (Summer 1968), pp.15 & 18.

les autres les subsides allemands ou italiens de façonner curieusement les mentalités françaises'.⁽⁴¹⁾

After the Munich agreement, the Embassy increasingly used selected quotations from some of the most venal sections of the French press as a method of denigrating certain French politicians and British journalists whom they regarded as being opposed to Chamberlain's appeasement policy.⁽⁴²⁾

b) Financial and Business Circles. Giveⁿ the fact that 'the Franc was the Achilles heel of French policy',⁽⁴³⁾ the almost legendary power of 'the two hundred families' and 'le mur d'argent' encountered by Blum's Popular Front Governments, financial and business circles were an important aspect of the Paris milieu. These were particularly cultivated by Phipps especially, as Jeanneney has shown, because of the strong connection between business circles and the Quai d'Orsay.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Joseph Caillaux, whose views Phipps repeated so assiduously to London, was President of the Finance Committee of the Senate, and in this role was responsible for the fall of Blum's first Popular Front Government. François de Wendel, another of Phipps's regular sources, was the head of the great family of iron masters in Lorraine and was President of the Comité de Forges. Wendel was deputy then senator for

41) René Girault, 'La décision gouvernement en politique extérieure' in Edouard Daladier, chef de gouvernement, sous la direction de René Rémond & Janine Bourdin, Paris 1977, p.211.

42) For Phipps's hostility towards Cadett of The Times, see Chapter 8.

43) Adam Adamthwaite, 'Reactions to the Munich Crisis' in Troubled Neighbours, edited by Neville Waites, London 1971, p.17. Girault stated that French financial weakness gave the British Government a leverage over French foreign policy: René Girault, 'The Impact of the Economic Situation on the Foreign Policy of France', in The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement, edited by W.J. Mommsen & L. Kettenacker, London 1983, p.217.

44) Jean-Noël Jeanneney, L'argent caché: milieux d'affaires et pouvoirs politique dans la France du XXe siècle. 2nd edit., Paris 1984 especially pp.47-50 and 118-168.

Meuthe-et-Moselle and associated with the Union Républicaine group, and he was a major shareholder in several newspapers including Temps.⁽⁴⁵⁾

c) The Military, with whom the Embassy enjoyed excellent relations, both on the level of their service attachés and Phipps's friendship with General Gamelin and other high ranking officers. This had three aspects:

i) The traditional role of the French armed services, i.e. in defence and security particularly in the light of the French attempts to involve the British Government in staff talks and to obtain a military commitment to France.

ii) The increasing involvement of the military in diplomacy which became an increasingly important aspect of the French decision making process during this period. Marshal Pétain became the first French ambassador accredited to Franco's Spain; General Weygand led a political-military mission to Rumania and Turkey while General Doumenc led the French military negotiations in Moscow in August 1939 with virtual carte blanche.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The military remained, however, 'technicians' rather than 'décideurs'.⁽⁴⁷⁾

iii) Civil-Military relations, as it concerned the internal situation, given that ^{the} role of the army in France has always been difficult'.⁽⁴⁸⁾ General Gamelin, the French Chief of Staff, who described himself as a liberal and a Dreyfusard, was originally

45) FO.432/4. Part IX, 4, Personalities Report for 1937.

46) Girault ('La décision'), op.cit., p.210; André Beaufre, 1940, the Fall of France, London 1967, pp.89-144.

47) Girault ('La décision'), op.cit., p.210.

48) D.C. Watt, Too Serious a Business, London 1975, p.35; P.C.F. Bankwitz, Maxim Weygand and Civil-Military Relations in Modern France, Harvard 1967, passim.

appointed as a political counterweight to his predecessor, General Weygand.⁽⁴⁹⁾ In

this connection, the reported conversation with the ex-head of the Deuxième

Bureau in June 1937 is relevant:

(Colonel Lainey) spoke of possibility of disorders in the event of the fall of the Front Populaire government... danger spots were SW France particularly neighbourhood of Toulouse which had been contaminated by Spanish poison and Paris itself. First act of prime minister who succeeded Blum should and would be to declare an "état de siege" whereby the forces of law and order, the army, garde-mobile and police, would automatically pass under the supreme control of the general officer commanding the Paris district.... If the country were left at the mercy of the Front Populaire government for another year or two, it would be the end of law and order and there would be a real danger of civil war.⁽⁵⁰⁾

The Embassy's reports on the Cagoulard conspiracy⁽⁵¹⁾ which involved high ranking army officers (including a member of Pétain's personal staff) also illustrated the fundamentally unstable internal situation in France during this period. In the light of subsequent events, Phipps's concluding remarks in his introduction to the

Annual Report on France for 1938 have a certain irony:

At this juncture it is less about the qualities of the country that doubt arises than about the adequacy of its leaders. That doubt is felt by Frenchman themselves is shown by the frequent discussions, whether if a strong and stable government cannot be secured otherwise, some form of political directorate may not, if events take a serious turn for the worse, be less impossible than might be supposed. The name most often mentioned in 1938 as leader, if only nominal, of such a directorate was that of Marshal Pétain. Time, however, plays against him for he is 82. ⁽⁵²⁾

49) Bankwitz, op.cit., p.39 & 76. For Gamelin's desire to preserve harmonious civil-military relations with the Popular Front, see Martin S. Alexander, The Republic in Danger: General Gamelin & the politics of French defence, 1933-1940. Cambridge 1992, pp.80-109.

50) FO.371/20686 (C4517/18/17). Phipps to Sargent (enclosure by Lloyd Thomas), 18 June 1937.

51) These can most conveniently be found in FO.432/3, Part VIII Nov & Dec. 1937.

52) FO.371/22934 (C1667/1667/17). Annual Report on France for 1938.

d) Given the extraordinarily influential role of the French intellectuals, literary and cultural circles remained an extremely important aspect of the Paris milieu. They constituted a fraternity and maintained close links with the ruling classes of which, frequently, as in the case of Blum, they themselves formed a part. The tradition of the involvement of French men of letters in politics is also strong. To cite only two examples: Phipps's friend, André Maurois, served as an unofficial publicist for the Entente Cordiale⁽⁵³⁾ while Alexis Léger, the General Secretary of the Quai d'Orsay, a poet of great distinction under the pseudonym St. John Perse and a recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature, provided Jean-Paul Sartre with confidential information regarding the Munich crisis which he incorporated into his trilogy, Les chemins de la liberté.⁽⁵⁴⁾

The impact of ideas, their power to influence and change society, is an important factor in modern French history and does not need any further elaboration. The political commitment of the French intellectual in modern times, revealed sharply by the Dreyfus affair, was intensified by the rise of communism and fascism and reached its zenith during the Popular Front period. The demoralizing effect of certain French right wing writers associated with the fascist leagues, was an important part of the intellectual milieu in Paris on the eve of the second world war. For example, Céline's notorious Bagatelles pour un massacre was discussed in an Embassy despatch as a serious symptom of anti-semitism in France.⁽⁵⁵⁾ The activities of Otto Abetz, who played a key role in Nazi propaganda

53) André Maurois, op.cit., pp.200-2, 225-7.

54) Martin Gilbert & Richard Gott, The Appeasers, London 1963, p.419.

55) FO.432/4. Part IX, no.42 Phipps to Halifax, 13 April 1938. The Annual Report on France occasionally contained a 'Books of Interest' section.

in France, is also relevant. Abetz, who was head of the French section of the Hitlerjugend and Ribbentrop's consultant on France, promoted the Comité France Allemagne and other cultural organisations favouring exchanges and cooperation.⁽⁵⁶⁾ He was the patron of Drieu la Rochelle, and his activities were supported by Brasillach and the Je suis partout group.⁽⁵⁷⁾ Abetz was appointed Ambassador to France during the German occupation where, as a pre-war pioneer of the 'New Europe', his 'ready-made circle of French contacts' stood him in good stead.⁽⁵⁸⁾

e) Diplomatic Circles were obviously an essential part of the Paris milieu. The British Embassy's web of relationships extended not only to the leading French politicians, the Quai d'Orsay, and the ambassadors of the other great powers in Paris but also to the British and French ambassadors accredited to the other important capitals notably Berlin and Rome. There were 12 embassies, 46 legations and 4 general consulates in Paris⁽⁵⁹⁾ and the amount of work in which the Embassy was involved was considerable. As indicated previously it is hardly surprising that, in a highly fluid and complex situation, there were times when they were unable to see the wood for the trees.

Given the instability of the Third Republic, the Quai d'Orsay played a unique role in maintaining the continuity of French foreign policy, and its power and influence were legendary. Alexis Léger, its Secretary General between 1933

56) Herbert Lottman, The Left Bank, London 1982, p.142.

57) Ibid, pp.69 & 142. Brasillach was executed for treason in 1945.

58) H.R. Kedward, Occupied France. Collaboration & Resistance 1940-44, Oxford, 1985, p.12.

59) J.B. Duroselle, La décadence 1932-1939, Paris 1979, p.276.

and 1940, served under eight successive foreign ministers and was regarded, almost inevitably, as 'the permanent master of French policy in this period'.⁽⁶⁰⁾ At the onset of Phipps's Paris Embassy, Léger's reputation was at its zenith and his influence on the foreign policy of Blum's Popular Front Government was regarded as decisive.⁽⁶¹⁾ As will be seen, his apparent hostility to a Franco-Italian rapprochement, alleged intransigence towards compromise with the dictators, and his close association with Vansittart, led Phipps, increasingly, into a hostile attitude towards him.

Intertwined with the activities of the Paris Embassy were those of its French counterpart in London, who were equally energetic in pursuing French policies, and with whom Phipps increasingly regarded as rivals. Corbin, the French ambassador, who was extremely well informed, was hostile to the Munich agreements, had a close relationship with Léger, and was friendly with Churchill, Eden, Amery, Duff Cooper and especially Vansittart who were 'francophiles'⁽⁶²⁾ - a euphemism in Phipps's eyes for those whom he regarded as attempting to sabotage Chamberlain's appeasement policy. As with Léger, Phipps's relationship with Corbin who, it was alleged, was 'instigating Daladier to be obstinate about Italy'⁽⁶³⁾ also deteriorated and became increasingly hostile.

60) This paragraph has been drawn largely from Elizabeth R. Cameron's excellent (but somewhat dated) essay on Léger in Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert, The Diplomats 1919-1939, Princeton 1971, Vol.2, pp. 378-405.

61) Ibid, p.392.

62) Duroselle, op.cit., p.278.

63) DBFP, 3,5, no.76 Perth (Rome) to Halifax, 6 April 1939.



Amongst the important ambassadors in Paris, Phipps's relationship with Bullitt was, perhaps, the most problematic. In a tense European situation, the British Government were concerned to retain the benevolent neutrality of the United States. Like Phipps, Bullitt, the United States ambassador, had close personal relationships with a whole variety of French politicians across the political spectrum. He was also the intimate of Roosevelt, 'with whom he had daily protracted telephone conversations'.⁽⁶⁴⁾ Bullitt reported personally to him and acted as his roving emissary in Europe. The freedom of action accorded to him gave him 'the opportunity to affect policy in Paris and London',⁽⁶⁵⁾ and the Embassy regarded him as insincere, instinctively anti-British, and 'a man to be carefully handled'.⁽⁶⁶⁾

C) **Anglo-French Relations on the eve of Phipps's Paris Embassy**

France's security situation deteriorated rapidly after March 1936 and, by April 1937 when Phipps arrived in Paris, the demoralization in French circles to which Sargent had alluded had already begun.⁽⁶⁷⁾ The German remilitarization of

64) FO.432/3. Confidential print France Part VII, no.33. Report on the Heads of Foreign Missions in Paris for 1936) (written in Oct. 1936).

65) Wm. W. Kaufmann, 'Two American Ambassadors: Bullitt & Kennedy', in Craig & Gilbert, vol 2 (op.cit), pp. 653 & 655-6.

66) Reports on the Heads of Foreign Missions for 1936, op.cit., ibid. Phipps shared Sir George Clerk's views on Bullitt, consequently the entry in the 1937 report remains virtually unchanged. FO.432/4 Part IX, no.1.

67) See Ch. 3, p.34.

the Rhineland on 7 March 1936⁽⁶⁸⁾ had revealed a French loss of will (particularly disturbing to its East European allies), and the contradiction between its defensive strategy and its commitments in Eastern Europe which became more pronounced during the Czech crisis. The Belgian Government had denounced the Franco-Belgian alliance on the previous day, and had declared their neutrality. The Treaty of Locarno was in disarray while the half-hearted French sanctions against Italy at the behest of the British had alienated Mussolini from France,⁽⁶⁹⁾ ending all possibility of Franco-Italian military co-operation against Germany.

On the domestic front, French political, social and economic weakness had become apparent in 1936 and, together with the British reaction, had acted as a restraint on her policy. The election of the Popular Front Government in May with its consequent wave of strikes, factory occupations, loss of production, and a run on the Franc had weakened France still further. It would be a truism to state that France was on the brink of civil war with the country almost equally divided between left and right - a situation which, as Phipps was aware, was extremely well known to Hitler⁽⁷⁰⁾ and to Mussolini.

With the outbreak of the Spanish civil war in June 1936, a new and dangerous situation arose. Anti-fascism was the raison d'être of the Popular Front which had been formed after the Stavisky Riots to combat the fascist leagues.

68) J.T. Emmerson, The Rhineland Crisis of 7 March 1936, London 1977, is the most comprehensive work on this topic.

69) Frank M. Hardie, The Abyssinian Crisis, London 1974, *passim*.

70) See Phipps's farewell conversations with Hitler & Goering in ch.2. This factor was also envisaged by Hitler in his war plans against Czechoslovakia in the Hossbach Memorandum. Documents on German Foreign Policy, D, 1, no.19.

French domestic and foreign policy appeared to be irrevocably intertwined.⁽⁷¹⁾ Fearing that the civil war would spread to France (and under indirect British pressure), Blum initiated a policy of non-intervention in Spain.⁽⁷²⁾ Nevertheless the Spanish civil war had brought Mussolini closer to Hitler and, together with the remilitarization of the Rhineland, the formation of the Rome-Berlin Axis and the Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan, by the end of 1936 Germany had seized the diplomatic initiative and had become the dominant power in Europe.⁽⁷³⁾

In the aftermath of the Rhineland Crisis, the British Government still regarded themselves as being bound by the Locarno Agreements and, on 19 March 1936, had 'joined a mutual guarantee with Belgium and France against unprovoked aggression'.⁽⁷⁴⁾ The Anglo-French staff talks which followed were, however, only of a perfunctory nature and disappointing to the French who wanted a more binding military commitment by Britain. Eden's speech at Leamington on 20 November in which he stated that 'if the occasion presented itself, the British army would be used for the defence of France and Belgium' helped to redress the balance and, while it did not imply any additional obligations towards the French, 'special importance was attached to it in France'.⁽⁷⁵⁾ The French reciprocated on 4 December when Delbos made a voluntary assurance in the Chamber that 'all the land, sea and air forces of France would be spontaneously used for the defence of

71) J. Néré, The Foreign Policy of France from 1914 to 1945, London 1975, p.196.

72) David Carlton, 'Eden, Blum & the Origins of Non-Intervention', JCH, VI, 3, 1971.

73) G.L. Weinberg, The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: Diplomatic Revolution in Europe, 1933-1936, Chicago 1970, *passim*.

74) DBFP, 2, 16, no.144.

75) FO.371/20697 (C1903/1903/17). Annual Report on France for 1936, p.4.

Great Britain and Belgium as well, against unprovoked aggression⁽⁷⁶⁾ and, as Sir George Clerk pointed out, 'No French Government since the war had given so unrestrained an undertaking to come to the defence of Great Britain'.⁽⁷⁷⁾ The Embassy's Annual Report for 1936 concluded that Franco-British relations had been 'transformed from the atmosphere of suspicion and recrimination' which had existed at the beginning of the year, and that

it was, however, gradually realized in this country (i.e. France) that the threat to French security occasioned by the action of Germany was best met by close co-operation with Great Britain and that the interests of the two countries coincided in all essentials. This was the view consistently held by the Front populaire government which came to power in June, and which, from the beginning expressed an almost pathetic desire to walk hand in hand with HMG and to work in close harmony with them. (78)

Despite these sanguine comments, both Sir George Clerk, Phipps's predecessor in Paris, and the Foreign Office were deeply concerned at the internal situation in France. Phipps would, in fact, inherit a situation in April 1937 where, after the victory of Blum and the Popular Front ten months earlier, some of the leading members of the F.O. had already revealed a strong temptation to intervene in French internal affairs. Their initial concern was summarized in Clerk's warning from Paris that 'the preliminary to Communist victory is the establishment of what is called the Popular Front' and that

although it is premature at the present juncture to speak of the "Sovietisation" of France, the trend of recent developments in this country is not yet such as to create an atmosphere in which, given certain conditions, a successful attempt at "Sovietization" might be made.⁽⁷⁹⁾

76) Ibid, p.5.

77) Ibid.

78) FO.371/20697. (C1903/1903/17) Annual Report on France for 1936, p.4

79) FO.371/19859 (C6238/1/17). Encl. in Sir George Clerk's memorandum to A. Eden, 8 September 1936 on the Sovietization of France.

Clerk's views had been anticipated earlier in a minute by Sargent in August 1936 in

which he strongly advocated British intervention in French internal affairs:

We ought to be able to strengthen the French Government in its efforts - or indeed bring pressure to bear to force it- to free itself from Communist domination both domestic and Muscovite. Even though this might involve at a certain stage something like interference in the internal affairs of France, surely it would be worth while running this risk? ... all these considerations seem to indicate the importance of (1) our prevention France by hook or by crook from 'going Bolshevik' under the influence of the Spanish civil war; and 2) our freeing Italy from the feeling of isolation & vulnerability which the Abyssinian affair has left her with. (80)

Points 1) and 2) read almost like guidelines for Phipps's future brief in Paris. Additionally, the British decision makers were alarmed at the extent of French instability and financial weakness. Apart from disliking the Franco-Soviet Pact,⁽⁸¹⁾ there was an underlying British anxiety concerning the commitments of France ('with whose future our European strategic position is closely linked')⁽⁸²⁾ with Poland and the Little Entente. In February 1937, they were specifically mentioned in the Committee of Imperial Defence's review of factors which may lead to war:

(they) involve great probability that in any struggle in the east or south-east of Europe she will become involved. If France becomes involved by a decision for which we should have no part, we, owing to our geographical and strategical position, are in danger of being drawn into a general European war, even though at the moment it might be highly dangerous for us.⁽⁸³⁾

80) DBFP, 2, 17, No.84. Minute by O. Sargent on The Danger of a Creation of Rival Ideological Blocs in Europe, 12 August 1936.

81) DBFP 2, 18, Appendix I, Review of Imperial Defence by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee of the C.I.D., 22 February 1937, Part I, p.967.

82) Ibid. Part II. Review of Factors which may lead to war, p.969.

83) Ibid. The Italics appear in the printed documents.

Their most immediate fear, however, was that Franco-Italian relations would continue to deteriorate because of the ideological tension between a Popular Front France and a Fascist Italy. After de Chambrun's resignation as French ambassador at Rome in October 1936, the Popular Front Government refused to send his successor there on the grounds that he would be accredited to 'the King of Italy and Emperor of Ethiopia' (an indirect admission of Mussolini's conquest) and, for the next two years, the French would only be represented there by a *Chargé d'affaires*, Jean Blondel.⁽⁸⁴⁾

By April 1937, this tendency was regarded as potentially dangerous, foreshadowing the Committee of Imperial Defence's well-known warning of the emergence of three potential enemies (Germany, Italy and Japan) against whom Britain, lacking adequate resources, would be unable to fight simultaneously.⁽⁸⁵⁾ Neville Chamberlain, who already dominated British foreign policy, would seek a rapprochement with Italy, not only to lessen the number of Britain's potential enemies but also because Mussolini was regarded as 'the key to Hitler' and an agreement with Germany was the ultimate aim of his policy. Franco-Italian relations were, therefore, regarded as crucially important by the British Government especially in the context of the Spanish Civil War where its official policy was 'to prevent the civil war from developing into a European war, and to maintain the integrity of Spain'.⁽⁸⁶⁾

84) Duroselle, *op.cit.*, p.296.

85) CAB.23/90A. Cabinet Conclusions, 8 December 1937. Warning given by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee (CID paper no.1366B).

86) DBFP 2, 18, Appendix I, Review of Imperial Defence 22 February 1937, *op.cit.*, p.969

Despite divided counsels, most of these precepts were shared by the leading officials of the Foreign Office who anticipated, and later shared, Phipps's dislike of certain prominent French politicians associated with the Popular Front, particularly Herriot, Paul-Boncour and Cot, who were regarded as either 'hopelessly anti-Italian' or who wished to intervene in Spain or both. According to Sargent, Herriot and the extreme left were 'of course, in the pockets of the Bolsheviks and playing the Russian game with the aid of Russian money'.⁽⁸⁷⁾ Pierre Cot, who was considered responsible for the deficiencies of the French aircraft industry, was singled out for particular vilification.

Blum himself was exempt from these strictures and was, on the contrary, the recipient of their almost universal admiration tinged with some anxiety. Sargent, in a 'personal & secret' letter to Phipps in December 1936, recounting his recent visit to Paris (which he found 'somewhat subdued and frightened') wrote that

..... the monde is extraordinarily bitter on the subject of Blum. When I suggested that he had steered them through a social revolution without a drop of blood being shed, they replied hotly that he was out to ruin the country at the behest of Moscow, and that the only man to save France was Daladier. I suggested that Daladier has been traître et assassin no.1 only two years ago, and that at this rate two years hence they might be acclaiming Blum as the saviour of France. But they would have none of it.⁽⁸⁸⁾

The Embassy regarded him as being 'most attractive intellectually', and 'thoroughly honest'⁽⁸⁹⁾ while Lloyd Thomas, the Embassy's minister, told Eden that Blum 'is a man of passionate conviction and complete integrity of mind and

87) DBFP 2, 16, no.129 Minute by Sargent, 18 March 1936.

88) FO.800/274 (Fr/36/4) Sargent to Phipps (Berlin), 29 December 1936. Sargent had stayed in Paris with Victor Perowne, head of the Embassy's Chancery.

89) FO. 432/4. Part IX, no.4. Report on the Leading Personalities in France for 1937.

purpose'.⁽⁹⁰⁾ Delbos, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, whose views were close to those of Blum, was also regarded as 'a convinced exponent of close co-operation with Great Britain'.⁽⁹¹⁾

Nevertheless, the evidence previously cited suggests that, even before Phipps's arrival in Paris, the F.O. were not adverse to using discreet pressure on the French Government to achieve their own ends. The most striking example was Clerk's advice to Delbos on 7 August 1936 (which the Foreign Office hoped would be followed 'as strictly as possible') regarding the supply to Spain of French aircraft ordered before the outbreak of the civil war. Clerk warned Delbos not to take any action which would make 'close co-operation' between their two countries 'more difficult'.⁽⁹²⁾ This interview took place immediately before the French Cabinet meeting which then decided to 'observe an attitude of strict non-intervention' in Spanish affairs.⁽⁹³⁾ According to Lloyd Thomas, 'the general opinion amongst the diplomatic corps' was that Clerk's intervention had been decisive.⁽⁹⁴⁾ Strong elements of continuity therefore existed between the Paris Embassies of Clerk and Phipps although 'the English Governess' aspect only reached its fruition under the latter. Ironically, the decline in Phipps's reputation at the F.O. would occur when he appeared to be faithfully carrying out some of their basis precepts.

90) FO. 371/20685. (C2775/18/17). Lloyd Thomas (Paris) Eden, 12 April 1937.

91) FO. 432/4. Part IX, no.4. *Leading Personalities in France for 1937*. Delbos & Blum lived in the same block of flats in Paris which reflected their close relationship. This is described in John E. Dreifort, *Yvon Delbos at the Quai d'Orsay*, London 1973 *passim*.

92) FO. 371/20528 (W7964/62/41). Sir G. Clerk (Paris) tel., 7 August 1936 and minute by Shuckburgh, 8 August 1936, who 'approved Clerk's language'.

93) *Ibid.* W8055/62/41). Clerk (Paris), tel., 8 August 1936.

94) FO. 371/20531. (W8676/62/41). Lloyd Thomas (Paris) to Cadogan, 11, August 1936.

CHAPTER 4

THE FIRST FIVE MONTHS (APRIL-SEPTEMBER 1937)

A) The French Internal Situation (I. To the Fall of Blum)

In the interregnum preceding Phipps's arrival in Paris, the internal situation became increasingly unstable. The riots at Clichy on 16 March had resulted in five deaths and several hundred injured,⁽¹⁾ and Colonel de la Rocque was charged with reconstituting the illegal Croix de Feu.⁽²⁾ Blum's problems had increased with strikes at Lyons⁽³⁾ and in Paris,⁽⁴⁾ demands from the CGT for more public works,⁽⁵⁾ and the possibility that 'ultimately he would be forced into a "showdown" with the Communists'.⁽⁶⁾ Nevertheless, Clerk, in his final despatch,⁽⁷⁾ and Lloyd Thomas,⁽⁸⁾ the Embassy's Minister who was deputizing for the Ambassador, both continued to adopt a sympathetic attitude towards Blum.

Phipps's first long despatch on 28 April outlining the internal situation was sober, cautious and descriptive, in low key, and without his customary hyperbole or wit. Despite following the French internal situation closely from Berlin, it is possible that the reality may have come as something as a shock to him.

1) FO.371/20685 (C2348/18/17). Lloyd Thomas to A. Eden, 24 March 1937.

2) Ibid (C2604/18/17) Ibid, 6, April 1937.

3) Ibid (C2630/18/17) Lloyd Thomas, 7, April 1937.

4) Ibid (C2941/18/17) Ibid, 19, April 1937.

5) Ibid (C2902/18/17) Lloyd Thomas to A. Eden, 16 April 1937.

6) Ibid (C2837/18/17) Ibid, 14, April 1937.

7) FO.371/20685 (C2499/18/17). Clerk (Paris) to Sargent, 30 March 1937.

8) Ibid. (C2775/18/17). Lloyd Thomas (Paris) to Eden, 12 April 1937.

Nevertheless, he concluded that it appeared possible 'to regard the immediate future with rather less pessimism than a few days ago'.⁽⁹⁾

On 4th June, the Embassy transmitted a memorandum by Sandford, a moderate right wing socialist and Paris correspondent of the Daily Herald, on the plight of the French middle classes.⁽¹⁰⁾ Phipps's comments on Sandford's views provided a unique glimpse into his own image of France. They amounted to a passionate defence of the French petit-bourgeoise, and there was no doubt where his sympathies lay:

As regards Mr Sandford's statement that the little men, the real "classes moyennes" are likely to disappear from France, it should be remembered that small landowners, shop keepers etc. with not more than 5 employees, independent artisans and persons engaged in the liberal professions account in France for nearly 50% of the occupied population. To the protection of the interests of this numerous class successive Radical Governments have given special care. But it is this class more than any other which is likely to suffer from the application of the new social laws and, indeed, the whole trend of the social & economic policy of the Front Populaire Government is inimical to their interests and may well result ultimately, as Sir G. Clerk pointed out in the encl. to his despatch no.1164 of September 8th 1936, in their "proletarianisation". Such a process is likely to be painful and such a prospect is to be deplored on many counts, not least because it is this class with its individualistic conception of life which has been responsible in the past for so many of the most characteristic productions of the French spirit. (11)

The Foreign Office were impressed with both Sandford and Phipps's observations. Sargent minuted that although approving of the French Government's policy 'in a great many particulars' it was well to bear in mind their warnings that the French Government's policy was 'likely in its ultimate results to bring about a general proletarianisation of the French nation' and that 'this might well have

9) Ibid. (C3206/18/17). Phipps to Eden, 28 April 1937.

10) FO.371/20686 (C4042/18/17) Phipps to Eden, 4 June 1937 (enclosure in Memorandum by Sandford on the plight of the French Middle Classes.

11) Ibid. Clerk's despatch on the Sovietization of France is cited in chapter 3.

serious and far reaching repercussions on this country (and Europe)'. Vansittart, presumably with the German example in mind, minuted 'not might but will most certainly have such repercussions'.⁽¹²⁾

Phipps reported on the 11th that Joseph Caillaux, the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, whose reactionary views he would report to London so zealously over the next sixteen months,⁽¹³⁾ and who would play an important role in bringing down Blum's government a fortnight later

takes a very gloomy view of the financial situation and advocates formation of a government of National Defence. Says the Government itself torn in different directions. Some of its own members are anxious to leave it and disapprove of its policy.

Caillaux does not believe it possible for Blum to extricate himself from his acute financial difficulties. Blum is a "doctrinaire" who does not know France, outside Paris, and does not realize completely different circumstances obtain in the various provinces. M.Caillaux, however, admits, and even admires the great ability of M.Blum. M.Mandel whom I have seen twice lately is even more pessimistic.⁽¹⁴⁾

The reference to 'not knowing France outside Paris' is ironic, given the Foreign Office's subsequently severe criticism of the Embassy precisely on this point. As later reports confirm, Caillaux was undoubtedly an extremely important influence on Phipps and his views coloured the latter's perception of the French internal situation to a markedly unbalanced extent.

12) FO.371/20686 (C4042/18/17). Minutes by Sargent & Vansittart.

13) For the F.O.'s extremely low opinion of Caillaux during the Munich crisis, and his involvement with high finance, see chapters 7 & 8.

14) FO.371/20689 (C4247/53/17). Phipps tel., 11 June 1937.

Baudouin of the Bank d'Indochine & Exchange Committee confirmed to Rowe Dutton, the Embassy's financial adviser, that the French Government were 'facing their gravest (financial) crisis so far', *ibid.* (C4220/53/17). V. Perowne (Paris) tel. 10 June & minute by Ashton Gwatkin, 15 June 1937.

By mid-June, the Embassy was bombarding the F.O. with telegrams, five being sent to London on one day alone (21 June). The crisis was sufficiently severe for Phipps himself to attend the debate in the Senate on the 20th when the Senate supported Caillaux's refusal to agree to the Government's proposals.⁽¹⁵⁾ Blum resigned on the night of 20/21 June, and the Chautemps agreed to President Lebrun's request to form a new government,⁽¹⁶⁾ 'the support if not the participation of the socialist being a 'sine qua non' to his formation of an administration'.⁽¹⁷⁾ Meanwhile strikes continued with a building strike declared on the 21st.⁽¹⁸⁾ However, the disorders following the fall of the Front Populaire Government and the need to declare an 'état de Siege' which Colonel Lainey, the ex-head of the Deuxième Bureau, had gloomily prophesied to Lloyd Thomas,⁽¹⁹⁾ never materialized. After a strong appeal by Blum, the socialists supported Chautemps.⁽²⁰⁾ Always a great stickler for legality, Blum was reported by the Embassy as

doing all he can to ensure that the transfer of power from himself to Chautemps should proceed smoothly. Most newspapers have given prominence to Blum's appeal to all for calm in order that the transfer of power may take place in accord with republican legality.
(21)

15) FO.371/20686 (C4442/2/18/17) Phipps tel. 20 June 1937.

16) Ibid. (C4453/18/17). Phipps tel. 21 June 1937.

17) Ibid. (C4462/18/17). Ibid. 21 June 1937.

18) Ibid. (C4486/18/17). Ibid. 21 June 1937.

19) Ibid. (C4517/18/17). Phipps to Sargent, 18 June 1937. Colonel Lainey's views are cited in chapter 3.

20) Ibid. (C4487/18/17). Phipps to Sargent, 21 June 1937.

21) Ibid. (C4489/18/17). Ibid. 21 June 1937.

B) The French Internal Situation (II. The Chautemps Administration)

Phipps reported that most of the important portfolios remained in the same hands⁽²²⁾ including Daladier and Delbos at Defence and Foreign Affairs respectively. The notable exception was Georges Bonnet, the new Minister of Finance, whom the Embassy regarded as, 'able and industrious an authority on finance' but 'not in the heroic mould'.⁽²³⁾ Cot, the Radical Minister of the Air, a particular bête noir of the Embassy and of the Foreign Office, who was regarded by them as being personally responsible for the deficiencies in the French aircraft industry, was retained by Chautemps in the same post. Phipps subsequently reported that

I learn on reliable authority that, when M.Chautemps was forming his Government, the President of the Republic strongly opposed the retention of M.Pierre Cot at the Air Ministry. M.Chautemps was quite prepared to drop him, but the socialist ministers made it a sine qua non of their support that M.Cot should not only be included in M.Chautemps Government but that he should be retained at the Ministry of the Air.⁽²⁴⁾

Caillaux assured Phipps that Chautemps would be supported by the Senate, and would follow Blum's policy of friendship towards Britain but that he would try to improve relations with Italy as Blum 'was possessed of a violent hatred towards Mussolini as being the murderer of Matteoti'.⁽²⁵⁾ Phipps confirmed on 23 June that 'in certain circles the new government is considered to be the first in a series of ephemeral administrations' but that, on the whole, it had received a good reception

22) Ibid. (C4547/18/17). Phipps tel., 23 June 1937.

23) Ibid. (C4512/18/17). Phipps tel., 22 June 1937.

24) FO 371/20686 (C4778/18/17). Phipps tel., 1 July 1937. The F.O. were puzzled 'to find the socialists insisting on the retention of a minister who is a radical' (Ibid, minute by Barclay). Mandel provided Phipps with the explanation on 6 July, see p.79.

25) Ibid. (C4515/18/17). Phipps tel., 22 June 1937.

in the press.⁽²⁶⁾ The demonstrations in Paris by the Rassemblement Populaire including speeches by Thorez, the Communist leader, and Jouhaux, the CGT leader, did not bode well for the new Government.⁽²⁷⁾ The socialists continued to criticize the Senate's role in 'provoking' Blum's resignation and insisted that the Government maintain the programme of the Front Populaire.⁽²⁸⁾ Blum conciliatory as always, explained that he had resigned in order to save France from 'grave social disturbances'⁽²⁹⁾ while President Lebrun appealed for 'calm, order and discipline and the abandonment of partisan politics in the interests of the country as a whole'.⁽³⁰⁾

In these circumstances, German and Italian assessments of the French internal situation which the Embassy conveyed to London in July, were regarded as extremely important. Despite the outward signs of turmoil, both Dr Schacht (who was in Paris for talks with the Government) and Count Welczeck (the German Ambassador in Paris) considered that these manifestations of French internal weakness were superficial. In a very confidential telegram on 12 July, Phipps reported that Cerruti, the Italian Ambassador in Paris, had told him that

Dr Schacht had been impressed by the complete order which he had found reigning in Paris, and had scoffed at the idea that France was trembling on the brink of Communism and drew attention to Count Welczeck's impatience with his Government. So annoyed was he that on 11 July he had sent his considered opinion to Berlin on the recent change of Government in France and had added in his report

26) Ibid. (C4548/18/17). Phipps tel., 23 June 1938.

27) Ibid. (C4643/18/17). Phipps tel., 26 June 1937.

28) Ibid. (C4678/18/17). Phipps tel., 28 June 1937.

29) Ibid. (C4887/18/17). Phipps tel., 5 July 1937.

30) FO.371/20686. (C4886/18/17). Ibid, 5 July 1937.

that public opinion in Germany had been misled in this matter by foolish reports issued in the Nazi press.(31)

There appears to be no reasons to doubt the veracity of their remarks.

Cerruti, a former Italian Ambassador to Germany, was an old colleague of Phipps from his Berlin days. He had a Jewish wife, disliked Nazism and had 'spoken his mind too plainly about Hitler' who, regarding him as an obstacle to good relations with Italy, had obtained his removal from Berlin in 1935.⁽³²⁾ Count Welczeck, the German Ambassador in Paris, an aristocrat and a career diplomat of the old school who was 'much liked by the Quai d'Orsay', was believed by the Embassy 'to have no sympathy with some of the tenets of the German régime, but to be so valuable as a diplomatic representative that, although this is recognized in Germany, it is unlikely to interfere with his career'.⁽³³⁾ Phipps added, 'I believe that his reports occasionally annoy Hitler, for he writes what he believes to be the truth about France and not what the Nazis wish to hear'.⁽³⁴⁾ As early as December 1936, in the midst of the Popular Front Government's severe problems, Welczeck had reported to Berlin that

If the sum total of all factors necessary for a successful war is taken into account, France's position can be described as strong... the dangers of a communist revolution, in which well informed people have never believed, appears to have been banished.(35)

31) Ibid. (C5081/18/17). Ibid, very confidential, 12 July 1937.

32) Esmonde M. Robertson, Mussolini as Empire Builder, London 1977, p.42 and pp.142-3.

33) FO.432/4, C.P.France, Part IX, no.1 Reports on Heads of Foreign Missions in Paris for 1937. The entry was written (presumably by Clerk) in 1936.

34) Ibid, addition by Phipps in 1937.

35) Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series C, Vol VI, no.110, Ambassador Welczeck to Foreign Minister Neurath, 26 December 1936 (sent 6 January 1937).

Schacht too, according to the German documents, had expressed his reservation to Berlin concerning supposed French social, political and financial weakness.⁽³⁶⁾

Circumstantial evidence would indicate, therefore, that their remarks concerning the French internal situation were genuine. Sargent minuted shrewdly that, 'the trouble is that however strong France may really be, the outward and visible signs which she at present displays are those of weakness rather than strengths', to which Eden added 'Yes, even my colleagues in the Government feel this, and I confess it is difficult always to deny the justification'⁽³⁷⁾ - sentiments with which Phipps would have probably agreed.

On 2 July, the Chamber and the Senate gave Chautemps the full powers which they had denied to Blum.⁽³⁸⁾ In his detailed commentary to Rowe Dutton's analysis of Bonnet's financial programme, Phipps agreed that his attempts at financial reform were 'honest and whole hearted', the Government realized that vigorous action was needed and that capital should not be frightened away:

... if social progress is to be continued within the framework of the democratic system, the acquiescence of both labour and capital must be secured in certain sacrifices. M. Blum fell because he failed to secure the co-operation of capital. M. Chautemps with the same majority & the same programme, but under Radical instead of Socialist direction, has equally to command these two elements if he is to succeed. His appointment of M. Bonnet, a man who was considered to enjoy to a considerable extent the confidence of capital and of the Right, and to be on terms of trust & friendship with banking interests, gave rise to the hope that M. Chautemps would be more successful than M. Blum. Meanwhile, his left flank

36) DGFP, D, vol. I, no.72 Schacht: Memorandum on visit to Paris May 25-29, 1937. Schacht added that 'Political dependence (by France) on England is extraordinarily great'.

37) FO.371/20686 (C5081/18/17) Minutes by Sargent & Eden, 15 & 16 July 1937.

38) FO.371/20690 (C4864/53/17). Phipps to Eden, 2 July 1937.

was protected by the acceptance by M.Blum of the post of Vice-President du Conseil.(39)

Phipps reiterated that other observers also feared that the government would not last long and that it would be succeeded by 'a number of transitory governments representing the same majority in different forms'.⁽⁴⁰⁾ Unless they had the support of both capital and labour 'national unity and confidence' would be weakened

and at a moment when labour is in ferment and its future organisation & relations with the political world are undetermined, the prospect of drastic financial reforms having eventually to be undertaken by a Government much further to the Right which did not enjoy the confidence of labour would be disquieting. A great deal depends on the extent to which M.Chautemps can count on the Socialist Party. (41)

Phipps was correct in his diagnosis although unlike Noble Hall,⁽⁴²⁾ and others, his sympathies lay almost entirely (and uncritically) with 'capital', and his most severe strictures were reserved for 'labour'. Noble Hall and Strang's severe

39) FO.432/3. C.P. France, part VIII, no.3 Phipps to Eden, 12 July 1937.

40) Ibid.

41) Ibid.

42) On 20 April, Lloyd Thomas had forwarded a memorandum from Noble Hall, the Secretary of the Travel Association of Great Britain in Paris, a somewhat shadowy organization with links to the British Council and the Secret Intelligence Service, on public opinion in the French provinces. Noble Hall emphasized that 'the plutocratic interests believe that the social revolution now in progress is the most serious France has ever known and they are so thoroughly alarmed that they would sacrifice even the interests of their country to save their skins', and that 'some of the most prominent industrialists would rather see the establishment of fascism in France with the armed support of Hitler & Mussolini than submit to the dictation of labour; others equally influential & perhaps more numerous would rather run the risk of another war'. Gudgeon, HM Consul at Lille, endorsed Noble Hall's reference to 'the unpatriotic attitude of the economic & financial interests' while Strang minuted that 'the moneyed classes... will apparently sacrifice the national interest for the sake of their pockets'. FO.371/ 20685 (C2990/18/17). Lloyd Thomas to Eden, 20 April 1937 (Encl. memo by Noble Hall), and minutes by Ashton Gwatkin & Strang, 30 April 1937. For the Travel Association, which was used by MI6 and British clandestine propaganda, see Nicholas Pronay & Philip M.Taylor, 'An Improper Use of Broadcasting', Journal of Contemporary History, vol.19 no3, 1984, pp.357-383.

criticism of the 'plutocratic interests' and the 'moneyed classes' was an element which would be entirely missing from his subsequent reports from Paris.⁽⁴³⁾

C) **FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

a) **The Schacht Discussions and the Western Pact**

The Schacht discussions illustrate that Phipps's resistance to appeasing Germany remained consistent both in Berlin and in Paris throughout 1937. They reveal that his views had not yet converged with those of Chamberlain but were, however, still very acceptable to Eden and the Foreign Office particularly to its Assistant Permanent Under Secretary, Sir Orme Sargent.⁽⁴⁴⁾

Initially the Foreign Office regarded colonial discussions with Dr Schacht, the German Minister of Economics and President of the Reichsbank, as a distraction from their real task, the creation of a new Western Pact to replace the Locarno agreements. While in Berlin, Phipps had reiterated that 'the subject of colonies had become a monomania with Dr Schacht' and was merely a ploy 'in order to retain the Chancellor's good will' which would not deflect Hitler from 'the course of expansion in Eastern Europe outlined in Mein Kampf...' ⁽⁴⁵⁾ He admitted,

43) It is significant that after his retirement from the F.O., Phipps became a director of the Midland Bank. Who was Who, Vol IV, 1941-1950, London 1952, p.912.

44) Sargent was also the Superintending Under Secretary of the Central Department (headed by William Strang) which dealt with France and Germany. FO.371/19930 (C7870/97/18), Phipps (Berlin) telegram 4 November 1936 and ibid (C7894/97/18) 5 November 1936.

45) Phipps (Berlin) to A.Eden, 19 October and 22 October 1936 quoted in Andrew J, Crozier, Appeasement and Germany's Last Bid for Colonies London 1988, p.184.

however, that if Schacht succeeded in initiating negotiations then he (Schacht) would be in a position to influence Hitler.⁽⁴⁶⁾

On 2 February 1937, Sir F. Leith Ross, the British Government's Chief Economic Advisor, had provided Phipps with an account of his discussions with Dr Schacht at Badenweiler.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Phipps's reply on 11 February, revealing his opposition to colonial discussions with Germany, had created tension inside the Berlin Embassy and has provoked an unprecedented and a highly irregular intervention by a member of his own staff. Phipps reported that

The question of the return of the colonies to Germany is one of high politics for decision by HMG. My own views on this subject have been set forth more than once and I will not inflict them upon you again. There is one point, however that I think should be remembered. If HMG essentially decide in favour of the return of certain colonies I hope they do so with their eyes open and without harbouring any illusions regarding possible "guarantees" from Germany that she will never establish air or submarine based there or train black troops etc. (48)

Pinsent, the Financial Adviser at the Berlin Embassy, told Leith-Ross privately on 10 February that he, and another member of the staff, had both understood Phipps's draft to mean that 'Germany would not keep any agreements she makes therefore it is useless to conclude agreements with her'. Pinsent had argued that this was 'a sterile and dangerous attitude' but Phipps had told him that 'his meaning was quite different' and, despite its ambiguity, he had refused to change the text. Pinsent informed Leith-Ross that he was

46) DBFP, 2, 18 no.53 Phipps (Berlin) to Sir Orme Sargent, 11 January 1937.

47) T188/169. Leith-Ross to Phipps (Berlin), 4 February 1937. This also contains the former's congratulations on the latter's appointment to Berlin.

48) T188/169. Phipps (Berlin) to Leith-Ross, 11 February 1937.

a little alarmed at the possibility of the F.O. reading it in the first sense above and taking it as E.P.'s final word. If this should occur, could you possibly, without giving me away, raise a query as to the Ambassador's meaning and ask the F.O. to verify it.

I have never written on any important point without the Ambassador's knowledge and I only do it this time because I have his own word for what he means, though he refused to take the hint and express himself more clearly. (49)

On 13 March, Phipps forwarded the German reply to the British note of 19 November 1936 regarding the Western Pact negotiations which amounted to a virtual rejection of the British offer,⁽⁵⁰⁾ and this was discussed at the meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy on 18 March. Chamberlain, who was still the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was adamant that no opportunity should be lost to reduce international tension and, following Leith-Ross's earlier talks with Schacht it was decided to begin exploratory talks with the French to initiate a joint approach to Berlin.⁽⁵¹⁾ It was further agreed on 6 April that, since Schacht's démarche was regarded as crucial and Phipps would not arrive in Paris until the 25th, Lloyd Thomas, the Embassy's Minister would open the discussion with Delbos.⁽⁵²⁾

Phipps, who had taken over Lloyd Thomas's brief immediately on his arrival in Paris, notified Eden on the 26th⁽⁵³⁾ that during his first interview with Delbos

49) Ibid. Pinsent (Berlin) to Leith-Ross, 10 February 1937. The identity of the second member of the staff, referred to as 'Brian', has proved impossible to trace. According to the F.O. List for 1937 none of the staff at the Berlin Embassy bore this christian name.

50) DBFP, 2, 18, no.280. Phipps (Berlin) to Eden, 12 March 1937.

51) CAB.27/622. Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy, F.P.(36) Concl. 7th meet. 18 March 1937.

52) Ibid Cab. C/tee on For.Policy, F.P.(36) Concl. 8th meet, 6 April 1937.

53) FO 371/20707 (C3139/1/18). Phipps tel., 26 April 1937.

(and as instructed) he had been careful to emphasize that 'we did not ask the French Government to consider the possibility of weakening in any way the operation of France's existing obligations'. Eden reiterated to Phipps on the 27th⁽⁵⁴⁾ that while there was uncertainty as to Schacht's exact authority, 'every advantage should be taken to explore the possibilities of an agreement with Germany'. He suggested a joint Franco-British communication seeking a German assurance that the negotiations would ultimately include, inter alia, a treaty to replace Locarno, limitations on armaments, and Germany's return to the League of Nations. The French Government should regard the communication as highly secret, and Phipps was instructed to seek their views but not to leave any written communication with them.

Fortunately, Phipps had achieved a close rapport with his old acquaintance, Blum, and with Delbos, in the short time he had been in Paris. He had had four meals with Delbos in less than a week⁽⁵⁵⁾ and, at 'a very friendly luncheon' with Delbos and Blum at the latter's house on 2 May, they were mostly in agreement with the British views.⁽⁵⁶⁾ However, they dug in their heels over the possible transfer of the French mandates (Togoland and the Cameroons) and Phipps felt that 'in view of the Minister's reaction to our enquiry, it would be desirable to let the matter drop',⁽⁵⁷⁾ Delbos, he reported, was even more opposed to the cession of

54) CAB.27/626. Cab. C/tee on For.Policy F.P.(36). Eden to Phipps (Paris), 27 April 1937. Eden's despatch was based on the final version of drafts circulated to the Cabinet earlier and especially on Chamberlain's 'Outline Programme' with F.O. revisions.

55) FO. 371/20735 (C3362/270/18). Phipps (Paris) to Eden, 4 May 1937.

56) Ibid.

57) FO.371/20735 (C3362/270/18) Phipps (tel) to Eden, 4 May 1937. Also CAB27/626. F.P.(36)30

the French colonies than Blum.⁽⁵⁸⁾ There was consternation at the Foreign Office and intense discussion over their next move. Cadogan and Vansittart felt that it would be better to abandon the colonial idea altogether rather than 'disappoint' the Germans' to which Eden minuted 'attractive, but I think impossible, like isolation'.⁽⁵⁹⁾ In reply Sargent's request to clarify his remark about letting 'the matter drop'.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Phipps replied that he

only meant that we should let the question of a possible cession of Togoland and Cameroons drop, in view of the strong objections of the French Ministers to making what French opinion would consider a one sided sacrifice on the part of France. (61)

Phipps clarified this further on 10 May, that in order to bring about 'a satisfactory and final general settlement with Germany', the French ministers would not refuse to consider the cession of certain mandates - providing the British Empire should 'make at least as great territorial sacrifice as France with a view to that general settlement'.⁽⁶²⁾ Eden thought that it was undesirable for Leith-Ross to meet Schacht as it would attract unwelcome publicity, and he was opposed to Bullitt, the United States ambassador, being drawn into the conversations.⁽⁶³⁾ Phipps, who regarded Bullitt with intense suspicion, had

58) Ibid. (C3362/270/18. Phipps (letter) to Eden, 4 May 1937.

59) Ibid. Marginal comment by Eden to Cadogan's minute.

60) Ibid. Sargent to Phipps, 7 May 1937.

61) Ibid. Phipps tel. 8 May 1937.

62) CAB.27/626. F.P(36)31. Phipps to Eden, 10 May 1937.

63) Ibid. Eden to Phipps, 11 May 1937.

criticized his earlier for 'advocating talks with Hitler' and for 'being convinced of his ability to work political wonders',⁽⁶⁴⁾ now renewed his attack on him:

Mr Bullitt is inconveniently active here and has established relations of greatest intimacy with the French Government. He will certainly see Dr Schacht in any case; but I did indicate that conversations proposed by M. Delbos between Mr. Bullitt & Dr Schacht should have no connection with those the French wished to have with the latter and French Ministers agreed. Mr Bullitt is, however, known here to be in the President's confidence, and I fear in future, as in the past, it will prove difficult to prevent him from putting his finger into every pie. Efforts to do so would almost certainly become known to him, and might make him into an even more awkward enemy than he may... (65)

Phipps was criticized at the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy meeting on 10 May.⁽⁶⁶⁾ Sir Samuel Hoare the First Lord of the Admiralty thought that he 'had not pressed the French Ministers very hard at his meeting with them on 3 May' and asked, somewhat sharply, 'what exactly Sir Eric Phipps meant by his concluding remark that "in view of the French Ministers reaction to our enquiry it would be desirable to let the matter drop". Chamberlain, the Chancellor of the Exchequer,

agreed that Sir Eric Phipps did not appear to have stressed the Government's point of view strongly at the meeting in question. He seemed to have accepted the French Ministers' "non possumus" too readily. After all, M. Blum had stated that France would not refuse to consider the return of German colonies in the last resort and in return for a final settlement. (67)

It is significant that, at this early stage of his ambassadorship at Paris, Phipps was accused of 'not pressing the French Ministers very hard'. Subsequent criticism of him was the reverse, and he would be accused of interfering too much

64) PHPP. 1/19. Phipps to Eden, 2 May 1937.

65) CAB.27/626. F.P(36)31. Phipps to Eden, 11 May 1937.

66) CAB.27/622. Cab.Comm. on For.Pol. Concl. of 10th Meet, 10 May 1937.

67) Ibid.

in internal French politics. An interesting insight into Phipps's real views during his early ambassadorship in Paris was provided, ironically, by Bullitt himself in two despatches of 30 April 1937. While Phipps regarded Bullitt as unreliable, these reports of their two conversations have the ring of authenticity (including Phipps's cynicism and pessimism), and confirm that his views on appeasing Germany had been formed in Berlin:

(At lunch with Delbos & Phipps) Phipps who had just been transferred to Paris from Berlin exhibited a hostility to Germany and the German Government surprising to me. I questioned him with regard to Germany's colonial demands. He said that the German Government had informed him that it would be satisfied with nothing less than the return of all the colonies taken from Germany by the Treaty of Versailles. He went on to say that he considered Hitler a fanatic who would be satisfied with nothing less than domination of Europe.

There was much conversation between Delbos & Phipps on the theme that peace might be preserved in Europe if England and France should show their teeth to Germany and have behind them the benevolent neutrality of the United States. ... They agreed that it was now desirable to attempt to push conversations with regard to settlements in the matter of armaments not because they thought that any result would be achieved but because they felt it would be desirable to keep Germany talking about something while Britain rearmed.(68)

Bullitt's account of his long conversation with Phipps that afternoon was even more revealing. Phipps has stated that he 'did not see the faintest possibility of coming to any agreement with Hitler', and that his Berlin experiences had shown him that 'the only thing which would impress the Germans today was military force':

He (Phipps) believed that any negotiations which might be begun today with Germany by England or France would end in failure unless France and England should be prepared to accord Germany absolute domination of the international situation. .. it was his opinion and that of his Government that the only chance of preserving peace was for Great Britain to rearm as fast as possible and during the period of rearmament try to keep Germany quiet... it

68) Foreign Relations of the United States 1937, vol 1, nos 556-557, pp.84-85.

would be absolutely impossible for Great Britain to promise to come to the support of Czechoslovakia if Czechoslovakia should be attacked by Germany... Germany could take Austria at any time she liked... Sir Eric then said he was somewhat disappointed to find that there were people in Paris who still believed that it might be possible for France to come to terms with Germany. He considered this totally impossible...(69)

There is no doubt, therefore, that Phipps had no faith whatsoever in negotiations with Germany at this stage, i.e. while Britain's rearmaments were still in a state of unpreparedness, and that he was not, as yet, fully committed to all of Chamberlain's views. This, plus his intense sympathy for the French viewpoint, particularly over the colonial question, had rendered him psychologically unable 'to press them' over concessions to Germany.

In the event, Phipps's reservations had proved correct. On 23 May, he reported that Neurath had stated that French should not take Schacht's declarations 'too seriously'.⁽⁷⁰⁾ Even more authoritatively, Goering had reiterated Neurath's 'identical words' that the colonies were 'Dr Schacht's hobby but were not regarded by Herr Hitler or himself as of the same immediate importance' and that as the Führer's representative in charge of the Five Year Plan, Schacht 'came under his orders'.⁽⁷¹⁾ The discussions themselves on 28 May were something of an anti-climax. Blum told Schacht that 'in the first instance a general political settlement must be reached, after which economic discussions, with or without possible colonial concessions, could follow'.⁽⁷²⁾ Schacht was 'uncharacteristically

69) Ibid, nos 563 & 565, pp 85-86.

70) FO.371/20710 (C3738/3/18) Phipps (tel) 23 May 1937.

71) T188/169. Henderson (Berlin) tel, 25 May 1937.

72) PREM.1/330. Conversation with Dr Schacht about a general settlement 1936-37. F.O. Memorandum, 22 January 1938.

mute', he did not hurry to report the results to his superiors, and it was obvious that 'his initiative had run its course'.⁽⁷³⁾ Léger informed Phipps that the German press had been ordered 'to make as little of the Schacht visit as possible'.⁽⁷⁴⁾

b) Phipps, Dodd and Henderson

As a footnote to the Schacht discussions, the brief affaire Dodd illustrates the pitfalls facing Phipps as an ambassador and his skills as a diplomat. Despite their ambivalent relationship,⁽⁷⁵⁾ his ex-colleague, William E. Dodd, the United States ambassador at Berlin, wrote privately to him on 1 July asking whether there was anything they could do 'to limit the pressures in the direction of war'.⁽⁷⁶⁾ Dodd was concerned by the excessively pro-German attitude of Sir Nevile Henderson, Phipps's successor at Berlin, and whether his views represented official British policy. Phipps, for his part, was particularly disturbed by Dodd's comment that German pressure 'for English approval of German control, and actual annexations, of the Danube-Balkans zone is greater than at any time since my residence began', and that:

I can see how English public opinion might even favour that rather than a risk of war. Your Ambassador here has said more than once to me that English public opinion for such "Bismarckian" expansion is the proper thing and even asked if the United States would not approve such a move and join a moral triple alliance.

73) Crozier, op.cit., pp 204 & 205.

74) T188/169. Phipps (Paris) tel. 29 May 1937.

75) Apart from anything else, Dodd disliked Phipps's sympathies for ^{the} fascists in Spain. See chapter 3.

76) FO.371/20711.(C5541/3/18). William E. Dodd (U.S. Embassy Berlin) to Phipps (Paris), 1 July 1937.

Dodd was unable 'to give any intimation' (presumably to Henderson) that Roosevelt's government would consider 'such a combination' and neither would 'a reactionary regime in the United States'.

Well aware of the sensitivity of Dodd's information, Phipps saw Vansittart on 28 July. On 11 August, he told the latter that he had written to Dodd promising him a lengthy reply and that, in the meantime, he had assured him that 'the policy of HMG... was by no means as that derived by him (Dodd) in conversation with Neville Henderson'.⁽⁷⁷⁾ He also sought material from Vansittart for his promised reply.⁽⁷⁸⁾ Vansittart was unhappy with the F.O.'s suggested draft reply which Phipps would be authorized to sign, and was adamant that a misunderstanding had not occurred (as Phipps had discreetly suggested) since 'this sort of language accords with what... Henderson has written in papers I have seen'. He was most anxious that this should not get to the USA in the guise of any view representative of this country... it is a melancholy reflection that we should have to spend any time in thinking how to protect ourselves against our own Ambassador. (79)

The Foreign Office concluded that as far as Phipps was concerned, 'there is nothing more that need be done'⁽⁸⁰⁾ and Phipps for his part, was relieved to let the

77) FO.371/20711 (C5541/3/18). Vansittart to Phipps, 11 August 1937.

78) Ibid.

79) Ibid. Minute by Vansittart, 4 August 1937, Vansittart had bitterly criticized Henderson's views on Anglo-German relations and the League as expressed to Garnett of The League of Nations Union, and had minuted that 'This kind of thing cannot go on.-- Sir N.Henderson seems to have failed so far to grasp the responsibility of his position, and we shall have to recall it to him'. Vansittart concluded 'In 35 years experience I cannot recall such a series of incidents created by an ambassador - and in so short a while. He is exceeding his functions and exceeding them light headedly'. FO 371/20736 (C5377/270/18) Henderson to Sargent, 20 July 1937 (Enclosure: Henderson to Garnett (League of Nations Union), and minute by Vansittart, 30 July 1937.

80) FO.371/20711 (C5541/3/18). Vansittart to Phipps, 11 August 1937.

'correspondence' drop.⁽⁸¹⁾ Vansittart sent him the Central Departments 'compendious' draft letter for him to sign, and made no secret of his anxiety at Henderson's 'injudicious expression of his views'.⁽⁸²⁾ In the event, Eden decided not to send the drafts to Henderson at Berlin and Lindsay at Washington but to 'discuss the matter orally' with Henderson instead, and he was instructed to come to London at the beginning of September.⁽⁸³⁾

C) Intervention in Spain

Any French Popular Front Government would be bound to produce tensions in Anglo-French policy towards Spain not least over the extent to which Italian intervention could be tolerated. While ideological considerations were of lesser importance for Chautemps than for Blum, there were grave strategic reasons for French anxiety. This aspect tended to be underestimated by the British Government which feared the spread of the civil war beyond the confines of Spain, and whose official policy was to localize it by means of the Non-Intervention Committee which discriminated against the Republican Government. Above all, as they perceived it, they had no intention of allowing themselves to be sucked into a Franco-Italian conflict which could lead to a European war.

For this reason alleged French violations of the Non-Intervention Agreement (which the Italians had already seized upon),⁽⁸⁴⁾ albeit considerably

81) Ibid. Phipps to Vansittart, 12 August, 1937.

82) Ibid. Vansittart to Eden, and to Phipps, 12 August 1937.

83) Ibid. F.O. minute, 16 August 1937.

84) For e.g. FO.371/21330 (W6624/7/41). Drummond (Rome) tel., 5 April 1937.

more modest than those of the Axis powers, were of particular concern to the Cabinet and to the Foreign Office. Information concerning these French breaches were reported by the Embassy, where possible, to the latter. It was public knowledge, for example, (mostly through the sensational French press reports on the 'arms traffic') that Cot, the Minister of the Air, and an ardent supporter of the Spanish Republic had organized aircraft shipments to Spain in July 1936 and that part of the Spanish gold reserves were used as a guarantee for the payment.⁽⁸⁵⁾

On 4 June, the Embassy's Air Attaché reported a conversation with a representative of the British Aircraft Company in Paris regarding aircraft supplied to Spain by foreign countries, and Group Captain Colyer concluded that

When I asked Captain Bartlett whether it could really be true that M. Pierre Cot would deprive his own Air Force of the aircraft which it so badly needed in order to hand them over to the Spanish Government, he said that unfortunately it was capable of proof beyond any possibility of doubt that was in fact what he was doing.
(86)

Vansittart described this as

not only... a shameless breach of faith & honour by the French Government in the person of this young crook - it is a deliberate weakening of a French Air Force that is already in a pretty poor way. And, since we are bound to France by pledges that they value in eventualities that cannot be excluded in Western Europe, we have more than an interest, we have a locus standi in some sort in considering it not only compromising to France's reputation but to her security if all these new machines are to be sent & used up in Spain, and only the crocks retained in France. (87)

85) Hugh Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, London 1965 (Revised Penguin edition) p.295.

86) FO.371/21335 (W10771/7/41). Memorandum by Grp Capt. Colyer (Air Attaché, Paris), 4 June 1937.

87) Ibid. Minute by Vansittart.

Eden, who was surprised that Phipps 'had not commented at all upon this story', initially considered taking up the matter in Paris but it was decided not to proceed beyond Vansittart's 'oral communication' to Corbin.⁽⁸⁸⁾

Georges Mandel confided to Phipps (in Bonnet's presence) that the aeroplanes despatched to Spain by Cot were sent with Blum's permission:

on mention being made of the stories of the despatch by M.Cot of aeroplanes to Spain a year ago, M.Mandel... stated that the machines had been sent by the French authorities with the explicit permission of M.Blum and that it was because of this "skeleton" between them that M.Blum had insisted upon the inclusion of M.Pierre Cot in the Chautemps Government. (89)

In fact, throughout his tenure of office, Cot continued to send arms deliveries to Spain.⁽⁹⁰⁾ Additionally, as will be seen, he was also bitterly attacked by the Foreign Office over the deficiencies of the French military aircraft industry for which he was held personally responsible.

The divergence between the British and French attitude was highlighted by the Embassy's despatch of 23 September which Eden circulated to the Cabinet on the 29th which

explained the point of view of the French Government, which was very generally held at Geneva. It brought out what M.Chautemps had now emphasized, that the Spanish Question had ceased to be one of politics of the Left or of the Right in France, but had become one on which the General Staff predominated.⁽⁹¹⁾

88) Ibid. Minute by Eden.

89) FO.371/21340 (W13091/7/41). Phipps tel., 6 July 1937.

Duroselle described Blum as practicing 'la pieuse supercherie de fermer parfois les yeux sur des passages clandestins d'armes, et de munitions à travers les Pyrénées-Orientales'; Auriol, Cot & Moch were in charge of this 'très modeste opération' which qualified as 'contrabande officielle'. J.-B. Duroselle, *La Décadence 1932-1939*, Paris 1979, p.318.

90) Hugh Thomas, *op.cit.*, pp.305 & 332.

91) FO.371/21345 (W18656/7/41). Cabinet Conclusions: Spain, 29 Sept. 1937. Chautemps had emphasised this in his long conversation with Eden who had passed en route through Paris on his way home from Geneva. Eden had provided the Embassy with an account of their conversation including Chautemps's threat to reopen the frontier if the Italians obtained bases in the Balearics & the Canaries and if French communications were threatened.

The F.O. were unsympathetic to French fears that Italian intervention in Spain threatened their security, and they were in general agreement with Sargent's long minute on the dangers of the situation which would form the basis of his 'strictly private' letter to Phipps in October⁽⁹²⁾ outlining their views on the situation.

Phipps was aware of divisions in the French Cabinet - Bonnet, in particular, had informed him that 'General Franco would win' and criticized French and British policy 'for not knowing which side they wished to see triumph'.⁽⁹³⁾ Divisions in the British Cabinet - over how to deal with the Italians and the opposition to Eden's Spanish policy, were described by Sargent in a second private letter to Phipps in October.⁽⁹⁴⁾

Phipps's despatch of 28 September came, therefore, at a sensitive moment. Léger had told him that the French Government were convinced that Mussolini would support Franco until he was finally victorious; Italian assurances only meant that this support would not be directed against France and that more reinforcements were on the way to Spain. Léger was 'more violently anti-Italian than ever', and had no confidence in Italian good faith - they were 'brigands and pirates and all possible precautions should be taken against them'.⁽⁹⁵⁾ Vansittart

FO.371/21345 (W17810/17853/7/41) Eden to Lloyd Thomas (Paris), two tels., 22 September 1937.

92) FO.800/274 (Fr. 37/6). Sargent to Phipps ('Private'), 8 Oct. 1937. see ch.5.

93) FO.371/21340 (W13081/7/41). Phipps tel., 6 July 1937.

94) PHPP II.2/1. Sargent to Phipps ('Private'), 15 October 1937. See Ch.5. By July 1937, Chamberlain had lost confidence in Eden's ability to ameliorate Anglo-Italian relations and had 'begun to bypass Eden and the F.O., preferring to deal directly with Mussolini'. Jill Edwards, The British Government & the Spanish Civil War 1936-39, London 1979, pp 119 & 153.

95) FO.371/21345 (W18099/7/41). Phipps tel., 29 September 1937.

sent a 'strictly private' letter to Phipps on the 29th (with instructions that it should be destroyed) stating that 'the passages referring to Léger's anti Italian feelings may have added to our difficulties' and that 'interesting and valuable information of this kind' should be contained in a despatch or else in a letter to Eden or himself. Both he and Eden felt that 'these passages are likely to be fastened upon to the exclusion of others by some of our critics'.⁽⁹⁶⁾

Following Vansittart's advice, Phipps elaborated on his conversation with Léger in a 'private and confidential' letter to Eden on 30 September. Léger had told him that Hitler would 'swallow up' Austria without force whereas 'a general conflagration' would be required for Mussolini to obtain 'valuable Mediterranean booty'. According to Phipps, Léger's 'whole tone' regarding Italy was 'unbalanced and almost hysterical'. He contrasted him with Chautemps, who 'has no more illusions regarding Mussolini than any of us' but who was sufficiently realistic 'to feel that it is advisable for the present to conceal that fact from the Duce'. Phipps was

so acutely aware of the importance of not giving the Quai d'Orsay the impression that I wish to work on Chautemps behind their backs that I asked Léger himself to arrange my interview with Chautemps, and even went so far as to express to him the hope that he (Léger) should be present thereat. He was not present, however.

Phipps reminded Eden that if the franc suddenly dropped sharply, 'we shall have a Government of National Union here' - in which case, Chautemps amongst others, would have 'a great deal to say in all big decisions'.⁽⁹⁷⁾ The Autumn of 1937, therefore, marked the beginning of the informal aspects of the decision making

96) PHPP.2/18. Vansittart to Phipps ('Strictly private'), 29 September 1937. Despite Vansittart's injunction, this letter was preserved amongst Phipps papers and is reproduced in DBFP, 2, 19, p.335, f.3.

97) PHPP.1/19. Phipps to Eden ('Private & Personal'), 30 September 1937.

process as it affected Phipps's Paris Embassy, which would increase as the international situation deteriorated.

D) The Condition of the French Armed Services and of France's Security

The British Government still regarded themselves as being bound by the Treaty of Locarno and the question of French security and the condition of its armed services was, therefore, of vital interest to them. This was monitored closely by the Embassy's service attachés and their reports were forwarded to London via Phipps who was thus fully appraised of the French military situation and its preparedness for war. Foremost amongst their concerns was the poor state of the French Air Force and its military aircraft industry which had recently been nationalized. These considerations were amongst the primary factors underlying Phipps's pessimistic reports during the Munich crisis.

Throughout this period, Group Captain Colyer, the Embassy's Air Attaché, forwarded a series of pessimistic reports on the state of the French Air Force⁽⁹⁸⁾ which were confirmed by the Industrial Intelligence Centre and Air Staff Intelligence.⁽⁹⁹⁾ These, in turn, produced increasingly bitter attacks by the Foreign

98) Colyer's reports of 14 May, 24 June, 17 Aug. & 13 Sept.1937 are in FO.371/20694 (C3571/C4601/C5966/C6436/122/17).

99) FO.371/20694 (C5215/122/17). Industrial Intelligence Centre. Report on the situation & production capacity of the French Aircraft Industry (signed by D.Morton), 26 June 1937.

Office on Pierre Cot,⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ the Minister of the Air, whom they regarded as being personally responsible for its deficiencies.⁽¹⁰¹⁾

These attacks on Cot culminated in Colyer's report in September - that sections of the French press had accused Cot of being a Comintern agent but that it was 'difficult to see what advantage the Comintern would reap from a weakened France'⁽¹⁰²⁾ while Lloyd Thomas found it 'impossible' to believe the allegations.⁽¹⁰³⁾ The British delegates travelling to Geneva via Paris were provided with copies of Colyer's reports in case an opportunity arose of discussing the matter privately with Delbos.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ Rumbold minuted that

... this report must finally dispose of any illusions we might still have on the subject of the French Air Force, for Capt. Colyer now frankly describes it as "a broken reed". In their report to the CID in July (C5604/G) the Air Staff said that it was safe to assume that the French Air Force would not be fit to engage in a European War for another year. At the same time it appeared from their report that the French Air Force would, regarded numerically, become progressively more inferior to the Germans as time went on...

100) Two examples in June 1937 are Sargent's remark that 'I wish for our own safety that M.Cot could be got rid of, and Vansittart's description of Cot as 'a remarkable liar'. FO.371/20694 (C5049/C5215/122/17). Minutes by Sargent & Vansittart, June 1937.

101) The excessive French self confidence in their air superiority, to which Cot had greatly contributed, lasted until the end of 1937. Patrick Fridenson & Jean Lecuir, La France et la Grande-Bretagne face aux problèmes aériens 1935 - mai 1940, Vincennes 1976. p.14.

102) FO.371/20694 (C6436/122/17). Lloyd Thomas to A.Eden, 13 Sept.1937 (Enclosure in: Grp.Cpt. Colyer to Grp.Cpt. Buss (Director of Operations & Intelligence, Air Ministry), 7 September 1937.

103) Ibid. Lloyd Thomas to Eden, 13 September 1937. Transmits copies of Air Attaché's report of 6 Sept. together with his covering letter of 6/9/37 to the Air Ministry. Lloyd Thomas's observation was probably correct. No conclusive evidence appears to exist proving that Cot was a Comintern agent; he did, however, virtually become a fellow traveller after 1945.

104) Ibid.

Vansittart minuted that he had already spoken to Corbin 'unofficially and personally' on the subject and Eden stated that he had expressed his concern twice to Delbos.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾

In a wide ranging conversation with Phipps in July, General Gamelin told him that the French Army was in excellent condition and well supplied. The Germans, on the other hand, would 'never build anything as formidable as in Maginot Line' and they would be unable to sustain a long war. Responding to Phipps's question regarding the French air force, Gamelin stated that it would, 'in conjunction with the British, prove a match for the Germans'. Phipps also asked him 'what would happen in the event of an attack by Germany on Czechoslovakia', and derived 'the strong impression' that France would respond. Gamelin was certain, however, that Germany 'would not move as long as our two countries remained strong and united'. In the light of subsequent events, Phipps conclusion was unintentionally misleading:

The general impression that I derived from my talk with General Gamelin is that he is a man of quite remarkable common sense and sang-froid and unlikely ever to give way to any kind of panic or undue pessimism. 106)

Phipps's elaborated his own views on the probable French reaction to any potential German aggression against Czechoslovakia or Austria in a despatch to

105) Ibid. Minutes by Rumbold, Sargent, Vansittart and Eden. The C.I D's report on the French Air Force dated 7 July 1937 was printed together with a paper on the Progress of German Air Rearmament. FO.371/ 20734 (C5604/185/18). Its other main conclusion was that the French Air Force was 'generally inferior' to the Luftwaffe and could 'no longer be considered superior to the Italian Air Force'. Strang and Cadogan had found its comparisons and conclusions 'disquieting'.

106) FO.371/20696 (C4888/822/17). Phipps tel., 5 July 1937. Phipps's 'strong impression' that the French would respond to a German attack on Czechoslovakia was at variance with the view of the Embassy's military attaché. Comparing the French military position to that of Germany in July 1937, Colonel Beaumont-Nesbitt noted cryptically that 'the reluctance to resort to war as a solution to political or national problems is shared by the French General Staff'. Ibid. (C5048/122/17) Col. Beaumont Nesbitt (Military Attaché, Paris), 5 July 1937.

Eden on 13 July. This was included in a collection of papers circulated to the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy which met on 29 July to discuss possible German action in Central Europe. Adopting a reproachful tone towards Blum for having given reassurances to the Czechs that the French would assist them (and referring to Blum's 'somewhat facile optimism towards political and social problems'), Phipps concluded on a careful note:

It would be outside my province to express an opinion on the efficacy of any assistance which the French could afford to Czechoslovakia in present circumstances, but since the German occupation of the Rhineland, I admit that I have found competent and impartial observers to be generally sceptical on the subject. As regards Austria I can speak with much less confidence, France has no treaty obligations towards her. ... The strategic difficulties of French intervention on behalf of Austria, would, I understand from my military attaché, present even greater difficulties in the eyes of the French General Staff than in the case of Czechoslovakia...

Phipps did not see at the present time how the French Government 'could do otherwise than once more accept the painful fait accompli'.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ This prophetic despatch, written eight months before the Anschluss and almost eighteen months before Munich, shows that, despite his eulogy of Gamelin's supposed qualities, Phipps was under no illusions regarding the limitations of France's military power or her strategic dilemma.

107) FO.371/20711 (C5126/3/18), Phipps to Eden, 13 July 1937. Also in CAB.27/626 Cab.Com. on For.Pol. F.P. (36)36 Meet. 29 July 1937, Possibility of Action by Germany in Central Europe.

CHAPTER 5

THE DECLINE OF THE POPULAR FRONT AND THE ANSCHLUSS

(OCTOBER 1937 - MARCH 10, 1938)

This period, which included the French ministers' visit to London and Delbos's visit to Eastern Europe) marked Phipps's emergence as a convinced Chamberlainite. The decline in the French international situation plus the deterioration in the international situation coincided with two important changes which had a profound effect on his Paris Embassy.

a) In early 1938, Eden's resignation as Foreign Secretary marked Chamberlain's temporary ascendancy in the field of foreign policy making. Eden's dislike of Mussolini was well-known and his views on Spain were criticized by the Cabinet. Phipps, who had been appraised of the background privately by Sargent and Hankey, was caught between these changing and conflicting views. After Eden's resignation, he was able, more openly, to advocate the pro-Italian views which he had consistently held since his Berlin days, and this was facilitated by his more relaxed relationship with Halifax.

b) Vansittart was relieved of his post as Permanent Under Secretary and was replaced by Cadogan. Theoretically this removed an important source of personal tension since it ended Phipps's quasi-subordination to Vansittart. However, towards the Munich crisis, in his less influential role as Chief Diplomatic Advisor, the latter emerged as one of his bitterest critics.

Anglo-French differences over the question of Italian intervention in Spain intensified with the French threatening to reopen their frontier thus nullifying the

Non-Intervention Agreement. The Sudeten problem (which had been simmering throughout 1936 and early 1937) also began to emerge as a second, and potentially more serious bone of contention. Chautemps's Government fell in March 1938 and the Anschluss, which pointed to the direction of Hitler's next target, Czechoslovakia, occurred while France was without a Government. This interim period, and the political instability which followed, was the prelude in March 1938 to the Embassy's first major interference in French internal affairs.

I) 1 October to 31 December 1937

A) Informal Aspects and Cross Currents in London

Sargent's three personal, informal and highly irregular letters to Phipps provided him with a rudimentary framework which generally underpinned many of his official reports to the F.O. during this period.

The background to Sargent's first letter was the increased Franco-Italian tension in late September/early October 1937. Mussolini and Ciano had visited Berlin, references had been made to 'the solidarity between 115 million Germans and Italians',⁽¹⁾ and French anxiety had increased.⁽²⁾ Almost simultaneously, Colonel Stone, the British military attaché in Rome, had personally presented his report on the movement of Italian forces in Abyssinia, Libya and Spain which the F.O. considered important.⁽³⁾ Sargent, who regarded it as proof that Mussolini

1) FO.371/21175 (R6538/200/22). Phipps tel. 1 October 1937.

2) Ibid. (R6444/200/22). Lloyd Thomas tel. 28 September 1937.

3) FO.371/21169 (R6799/69/22). Movements of Italian forces overseas, Colonel Stone, Military attaché Rome), 1 October 1937.

would reinforce his 'volunteers' if the French frontier was opened, wanted it to be made clear that

we are not going into any adventures with them (i.e. the French) in Spain and that all we can expect is to get Mussolini to implement his promise to declare openly that he had no territorial ambitions in that country.(4)

Sargent's concern was that the opening of the French frontier would amount to a denunciation of the Non-Intervention Agreement, and he concluded that 'we shall have firmly to take the lead, so as to prevent any foolish or precipitate action on the part of the French'.⁽⁵⁾

This F.O. minute formed the basis of Sargent's 'personal and private' letter to Phipps on 8 October in which he admitted that

it is very irregular of me to be writing to you in this way so don't refer to this letter either in any despatches or private letters which you may write to me. On the other hand, it may be of use to you, if you decide to report further on French policy: to have in mind the various questions which are preoccupying some of us here, while of course, personally, I need hardly say how very much I should like to know what your own views and impressions are on this important subject.(6)

Sargent's private letter was precipitated by the joint British and French notes to the Italian Government on the 1st reminding them of their assurances regarding the Balearic Islands and the despatch of further 'volunteers' to Spain.⁽⁷⁾ Above all, it

4) Ibid. Minute by Sargent, 4 October 1937.

5) Ibid.

6) FO.800/274 (Fr/37/6). Sargent to Phipps (Paris), 8 October 1937. Sargent had been guilty of similar 'irregularities' at least twice. In December 1936, when he had forwarded to Phipps in Berlin a minute which he had 'conveyed to the Secretary of State' (presumably appended to the former's despatch) with instructions to destroy it 'as it had better not enter the Embassy archive'. Ibid (Fr/36/4) Sargent to Phipps (Berlin), 29 December 1936. Later, in a 'secret' letter to Phipps in May 1937 regarding the colonial discussions, he had enclosed a copy of the minute he had appended to one of his telegrams with the comment 'for your own very private ear & eye (only)'. Ibid. (Fr/37/4) Sargent to Phipps (Paris), 7 May 1937.

7) DBFP, 2, 19, no.216 F.O. to Perth (Rome), 1 October 1937.

was prompted by alarm at Delbos's remarks to Phipps on the 5th that, in the event of a negative reply, they should consider 'taking some prise de gages, open the frontier, and permitting the Spanish Government to obtain arms and ammunition in transit across France'.⁽⁸⁾

Sargent confided to Phipps that he was unhappy about the way in which the British Government, 'more or less at the instance of the French', were trying to 'get Mussolini to withdraw his volunteers without waiting for a Franco victory', and he was uncertain whether the French were bluffing. He was concerned that, if the French publicly opened their frontier they would be 'tearing up the non-intervention agreement' and the Italians could send further reinforcements and 'legally this time'. Would the French then intervene militarily, and would Hitler remain neutral? If, however, the Italians remained there permanently, 'it would become another Nazi state taking orders from Hitler and Mussolini and threatening the flanks of France and Great Britain'. The main question, however, was whether the French were prevaricating:

In fact, are they proposing the "reopening of the frontier", against their better judgement and fully conscious of developments it may lead to, only because it is the gesture demanded by their Socialist & Communist supporters? If so, would they welcome a firm veto by HMG as a pretext to use with their own people for not opening? And, lastly, in all these calculations how much are the French influenced, by their wish to prevent, for purely ideological reasons, the establishment of a dictatorship of the Right and to facilitate the establishment of one of the Left?(9)

As requested by Sargent, Phipps did not reply directly to any of these questions, but there is evidence that he bore these aspects very much in mind.

8) Ibid. no.220, Phipps (Paris) to Eden, 5 October 1937.

9) FO.800/274 Fr.37/6). Sargent to Phipps, 8 October 1937.

On 12 October, Delbos, who considered that the Italian reply to the joint British and French notes could 'hardly have been more negative in essential points', read Phipps a summary of his instructions to Corbin for his interview with Eden on 13 October.⁽¹⁰⁾ He wanted both governments to state jointly that withdrawal of volunteers should begin immediately and a reinforced system of control instituted. If these proposals were rejected they should consider the Non- Intervention was 'suspended' and both governments should 'authorise temporarily the transit of arms to the Spanish Government through our own countries and from our own countries'.⁽¹¹⁾ Eden informed Phipps that he had told Corbin that 'it was asking a lot of us' to suggest that, if this attempt failed, arms should be supplied to 'the Spanish Government only' as there was 'much attachment' in Britain to the non-intervention policy. Eden concluded that

On the other hand, if this final attempt to secure progress in their Committee were to fail, I thought the French Government would be justified if they decided to allow the transit of arms across their frontier to Spain, but it was one thing to ask us to endorse that decision and another to ask us to take similar action to that which the French Government might decide upon in respect of the export of arms to Spain.⁽¹²⁾

Two days later, with Delbos's démarche (and Eden's response) very much in mind, Sargent sent Phipps a second, far more revealing, 'private' letter with the

10) DBFP, 2, 19, no.240 Eden to Phipps, 12 October 1937. The quotation from Delbos appears in both the English & French texts of his instructions to Corbin and the latter's interview with Eden. There is a curious discrepancy in the passage which follows. The English text continues: 'It ruled out, though in the most friendly manner, each of the proposals that we made' (Ibid). However, the French original states: 'Non seulement il écarte les propositions qui lui avaient été faites en termes amicaux...' (DDF, 2e series, VII, no.55). This distorts (and softens) Delbos's remarks which were that the French conducted their proposals in a friendly way, not that the Italians rejected them in a friendly way. It seems doubtful whether Corbin deliberately disregarded Delbos's instructions by changing their meaning. The question arises whether the mistranslation was intentional (for the record) or a straightforward error.

11) DBFP, 2, 19, no.240 Eden to Phipps, 12 October 1937 (Note 1, p.391).

12) Ibid.

plea that, 'for heavens safe keep all this to yourself and tear up when read'.⁽¹³⁾

According to Sargent, Eden's Spanish policy had met with 'considerable opposition' from a number of his (cabinet) colleagues who:

1) Refused to believe in the urgency, gravity or inevitableness of the Italian danger; (2) object to having our Spanish policy dictated by France (& particularly a socialist France); and consider the French plan of frontier opening... as provocative without being effective, and (3) hold that it is essential (having regard to Germany) for this country to be friends with Italy & that an offer of friendship is a better way of averting the Spanish danger than direct action.

Sargent included Hoare, Kingsley Wood and the Chiefs of Staff amongst the opposition, and he regarded Chamberlain as the 'conciliation' between Eden and the opposition. Eden and Vansittart had apparently returned from their conversations with Chautemps and Delbos (at Geneva and in Paris) convinced that the French were united in believing that the Italians must leave Spain. Sargent, who appeared to be contradicting or reversing his earlier view that the British Government should not involve themselves in 'adventures' with the French in Spain, now stated that

We were in honour - and in interest - bound to give the French Government all possible support in the measures they wanted to take in defence of French security, on the grounds that in the present state of Europe French security was identical with British security and that any sign of disagreement between Great Britain & France at the present moment would be fatal.

Furthermore, Eden and Vansittart now believed that a Franco victory, 'above all a Franco victory this year', would be contrary to British interests because he would

13) PHPP II 2/1. Sargent to Phipps, 15 October 1937.

'never be able to maintain himself without his Italian allies who would dig themselves in'.⁽¹⁴⁾ The only hope was that this victory would be delayed until the

Italians buckled under the strain:

But meanwhile we have committed ourselves to the threat of "resuming our liberty of action" and the impending problem is how to save our faces if when challenged we do not put the threat into force and if we do put it into force we do so effectively.⁽¹⁵⁾

Sargent's letter was indicative of the confusion reigning in Foreign Office circles. Confirmation concerning the disarray caused by Eden's attitude towards Spain was provided to Phipps privately by Hankey who told him that 'an official of one of our departments' was distressed because 'a member of the Staff of the French Embassy' had complained to him that

his chief was much bothered because he didn't know whether, when Anthony (Eden) talked to him he was speaking the views of HMG as a whole or his own. This enabled me to talk with great freedom to Van. The latter had received a similar message through the mouth of (queer emissary!) a supposedly discreet journalist.⁽¹⁶⁾

Hankey further informed Phipps that he had appealed to Vansittart that 'an effort should be made to bring about the complete agreement and coordination that is vital in these dangerous times'. Vansittart had agreed (a) to advise Eden, inter alia, to 'exercise great care in the correctness of all information given to the Cabinet or

14) Eden reiterated these views to the Cabinet on 29 September, adding that it would not be a Spanish victory because of Franco's dependence on the Italians who would stay in Spain indefinitely after the war ended. He agreed with the French General Staff that Italian motives were to obtain submarine bases 'for bargaining purposes or pressure' in the event of war. DBFP, 2, 19 no.208 Cabinet Conclusions 35(37), 29 Sept.- 1937. Chamberlain's official view at the Cabinet Meeting on 13 October 1937 was that 'it did not matter which side one so long as it was not a German or an Italian victory... if we could secure the removal of the volunteers it would become a Spanish civil war, and not a foreign war'. CAB.23/89, Cabinet meeting 13 October 1937 (p.290) 37(37). Chamberlain appears to have relied solely on appeasing Italy to achieve this aim. According to Keith Feiling, he 'pressed' the application of non-intervention 'to the full', Life of Neville Chamberlain, London 1946, p.299.

15) PHPP.II. 2/1. Sargent to Phipps, 15 October 1937.

16) PHPP.3/3. Hankey to Phipps, 11 November, 1937.

the French and avoidance of tendencious information on matters of fact', and (b) to suggest to the French that they should keep their frontier closed. Hankey who had 'prepared the ground' via Horace Wilson 'at the other end' and had urged that Eden should meet privately with Chamberlain before the cabinet meeting, told Phipps that this was 'the best' he could do.⁽¹⁷⁾

Sargent's third 'irregular' letter to Phipps, written on the eve of the visit of the French ministers to London in late November, illustrated clearly the struggle which was continuing in London over the direction of policy. It also echoed Vansittart's warning to Phipps in late September to be careful about what he put in saving telegrams which were circulated to the Cabinet:

A word of warning. When you want to tell us what critics of the present French Government say about the latter, don't send your information in a Saving telegram but in a private letter or despatch. Saving telegrams on political subjects (except telegrams summarizing the press) receive a wide distribution. This means that they go automatically to Cabinet Ministers, certain of whom are only too glad to quote and exploit any criticism of that terribly pseudo-Communist Government in France, to the coat tails of which our F.O. is usually tied, when it would be so much nicer and more proper to have it tied to the good conservative and anti-communist coat-tails of Hitler and Goering. This kind of thing gives the poor Secretary of State unnecessary fil à retordre, for which we would like to save him. (Indeed it is he who asked us to write to you in this sense...(18)

Phipps, whose views on Italy were closer to Chamberlain than to the F.O., did not reply directly to Sargent's irregular' letters. He reserved his personal views for a private letter to his old friend, Hankey:

Chautemps is really like an English liberal, bound for internal reasons, to Labour & Communist allies. Franco British union will not necessarily be served by blindly following the foreign policy of the extreme Left Wing (under Blum) of the Front Populaire Government. On the contrary, a majority of the French people,

17) Ibid.

18) FO.800/274. (Fr/37/7). Sargent to Phipps, 29 November 1937.

including Chautemps, bless us today for appointing agents to Franco, and would dearly like to follow our good example.(19)

Like Sargent, Phipps also professed to admire Blum (who had initiated non-intervention) and was well aware that neither he nor Delbos were 'extreme left wingers' and that the French strategic dilemma was real. This period, the conclusion of which marks Phipps's emergence as a convinced follower of Chamberlain's views, also marks the zenith of his personal relationship with Sargent. In the small closed circle of the Foreign Office and diplomatic service, Sargent obviously regarded him not only as an old colleague but also as a close confidant and possibly as a friend.⁽²⁰⁾ After March 1938, their private correspondence becomes sparse and the informal aspects, as they relate to the Paris Embassy, shifted away from the Foreign Office and closer to the real centre of power at 10 Downing Street.

Meanwhile, despite Hankey's letter of 11 November, Phipps may not, at this stage, have been appraised of the full extent of the divisions over policy which were taking place in London. Hankey had been concerned at 'F.O. gullibility about stories of Italian reinforcements to Spain', and had prepared a note to the Prime Minister.⁽²¹⁾ He had omitted to tell Phipps that Chamberlain had asked him 'privately' to do anything he could to stress to the F.O. the importance of 'better

19) PHPP.3/3 Phipps to Hankey, 25 November 1937.

20) In December 1937, for example, Sargent told Phipps (somewhat touchingly) that 'I am distressed to think that I shall not see you and Frances (i.e. Lady Phipps) when I come to Paris for Xmas'. PHPP.2/1. Sargent to Phipps, 4 December 1937.

21) PREM.1/360. Hankey to Horace Wilson, 6 October 1937.

relations with Italy'.⁽²²⁾ Neither had he conveyed to Phipps the intensity of his remarks to Vansittart:

... perhaps I am wrong to say what follows, and I only do so because I know that some other people feel the same, namely a doubt as to whether the F.O. are really convinced from the bottom of their hearts that we ought to make friends with Italy or that we can do so. It would obviously require a good deal of effort on the part of the whole Office including especially the Press Dept. It is the sort of effort that can only be made by people who are absolutely convinced. ...my only excuse for writing is that from the point of view of Imperial Defence some development of the kind to be vital to the existence of the Empire & of the U.K. as a first class Power. (Hankey's italics). We must have it even if it is only for a few years while we rearm.(23)

However, Hankey told Phipps that he had 'discreetly passed on' what he had said about Chautemps and 'the risk of blindly following the French right' (sic), and added that

Strictly between ourselves, I think it probable that an attempt will be made at the same time to get a little bit further at the other end of the "Berlin-Rome axis". Van has now come round to the point of view that it is desirable and by no means impossible to do something at the Rome end. I do not think he is equally hopeful of the Berlin end. He thinks the fundamental difficulties are too great. At heart I do not think his Chief thinks there is very much doing at either end. Burn this.(24)

In any case, given their close friendship and the similarity of their views over Germany and Italy, Hankey's ideas were part and parcel of Phipps's own unspoken assumptions. As will be seen, they were expressed more openly and confidently during this period.

22) CAB.21/558. Hankey to Horace Wilson, 5 November 1937.

23) Ibid. Hankey to Vansittart, 3 November 1937.

24) PHPP.3/3. Hankey to Phipps, 26 November 1937.

The reference to the dangers of 'blindly following the French Right' is surely a Freudian slip, and Hankey intended to write '... French Left'. As has been seen, Phipps habitually ignored injunctions by Hankey, Vansittart and Sargent, to burn or destroy their personal, private or 'irregular' communications to him and, fortunately, many of them are still extant. Given the intricacies of British foreign policy in the late 1930s, he presumably retained them as an insurance policy rather than out of sentimentality.

Phipps was not, however, merely the passive recipient of these 'irregular' and 'private' letters. Apart from those to Hankey, his two personal and secret letters to Eden in October also fall into this category.

(1) On 6 October, Phipps reported his conversation with Buneau-Varilla, the owner of the Matin and an old acquaintance⁽²⁵⁾ who told him 'under the seal of secrecy' that:

Delbos, soon after taking over the Quai d'Orsay told him that Léger was in the pay of the Soviets. B.V. advised Delbos to kick Léger out at once, but this he has failed to do. The other day Delbos infuriated B.V. by remarking: "J'aime mieux être Russe qu' Allemand".

Buneau-Varilla further alleged that Sauerwein had been sacked from the Matin because he had discovered that Léger was paying him 'about 30,000 francs a month'. Phipps concluded that 'of course B.V. (like Rothermere) has a bee in his bonnet over Bolshevism, but nevertheless I feel I must let you know'. The marginal note on the draft in Phipps's handwriting read: 'To be copied in Chancery & return to me unentered'. This was a blatant attempt to denigrate Léger (who was rapidly becoming Phipps's bête noir) and Delbos who both favoured a more militant attitude towards Italian intervention. Phipps knew that Buneau-Varilla was an extremely unreliable source. His rule at Matin was characterized by nepotism, corruption and hypocrisy and Theodore Zeldin, who described him as 'representing the mad dictator type of press magnate', stated that 'his conceit verged on megalomania'.⁽²⁶⁾ Phipps himself had reported in May that Buneau-Varilla's 'fear of communism, combined with his admiration of force leads him to favour undue

25) PHPP.1/19. Phipps to Eden, 'Personal & Secret', 6 October 1937.

26) Theodore Zeldin. France 1848-1945, vol 2, Oxford 1977, pp. 531-2.

weakness to the Führer', and that he had stated that Britain was 'on the brink of Bolshevism'.⁽²⁷⁾ His mild observation that he had 'a bee in his bonnet over Bolshevism' was a deliberate understatement. By omitting to remind Eden of his previous despatch and by refraining from clarifying Buneau-Varilla's personality and career, Phipps was misleading Eden as to the reliability of his information.

(2) On 12 October, Phipps informed Eden that Flandin had told him that François-Poncet, his ex-colleague in Berlin, was very depressed about 'the rapprochement between Hitler and Mussolini' even though there was 'little personal sympathy' between them.⁽²⁸⁾ The draft contained a marginal note in Phipps's handwriting, 'Return to me unentered then typed no copies... Min(ister) to see'. Given Mussolini and Ciano's recent and apparently successful, visit to Berlin, it appears puzzling that Phipps had chosen to be so secretive about such a comparatively inconsequential piece of information, unless he was attempting to influence Eden's views. Flandin was known as a strong supporter of the appeasement of Italy and was adamant that the French frontier should remain closed. It may be possible that Phipps was attempting, in some way, to reinforce certain of Flandin's views prior to their forthcoming conversation on 19 October.⁽²⁹⁾

27) FO.371/20710 (C3348/3/18). Phipps tel., 2 May 1937.

28) PHPP.1/19. Phipps to Eden, 12 October 1937.

29) See p.99.

B) Foreign Relations

While Sargent had informed Phipps privately that Eden and Vansittart were convinced that 'all sections of French society were united in their belief that the Italians must leave Spain',⁽³⁰⁾ there was by no means any agreement in Paris on how this should be achieved. Phipps had reported that Delbos and Léger had advocated a more militant line against Mussolini. The Embassy regarded Chautemps's views, as reported in September, as being more satisfactory, and Phipps had insinuated his own views into the conversation:

Chautemps did not conceal his profound distrust of Mussolini but agreed that distrust must be concealed from latter as much as possible. He also agreed that the price we should pay at Italian end to avoid a maximum working of Rome-Berlin axis would be infinitely smaller than at the German end. (31)

Even before Sargent's 'irregular' letters on the Italians in Spain, Phipps was cautiously attempting to mould the views of certain prominent French politicians along the lines of 'official' British policy. His dispatches outlining important conversations now frequently also described his own responses and were not merely one sided reports of his interlocutor's views. In this he was assisted by his long acquaintance with the leading French personalities which gave these reports an informal aspect. This was particularly striking in the case of Blum on 10 October to whom he gave the misleading impression that their conversation was 'a friendly and entirely private one' and which he then proceeded to report in its entirety to London.⁽³²⁾

30) See p.91.

31) FO.371/21175 (R6460/200/22). Phipps tel., 29 September 1937.

32) FO.371/21162 (R6741/1/22). Phipps tel., 10 October 1937.

Blum made it clear that the Berlin-Rome Axis was unshakeable and Phipps therefore urged great caution and the avoidance of giving Mussolini 'any pretext for causing a clash' while British rearmament was nearing completion and during the transitional state of the French air force. Phipps then attempted to undermine his credibility by emphasizing his unworldliness by drawing attention to Blum's 'astonishment' at his (Phipps's) remark concerning the poor state of the French air force. Blum assured him that

he was passionately anxious to avoid war but felt that the best way of doing so was that France and Great Britain should not give any undue impression of weakness in the face of Italian aggression. To this I naturally agreed.(33)

Phipps's hand was firmly on the tiller and he was not adverse to borrowing the views of those on the left (including Blum) when his interlocutor veered too far to the 'right' as was the case with Flandin.

Flandin's reaction to the threat to reopen the frontier was, in fact, probably the strongest. On 19 October, he told Phipps that if it was opened for arms shipments to the Spanish Republic, he would demand the immediate summoning of Parliament adding that Chautemps and Bonnet were cautious and that 'the majority of French people were absolutely opposed to being dragged by Russia into a war over Spain'. Flandin emphasised:

how vital it was to show great caution in present incomplete state of British rearmament and in present highly unsatisfactory state of French military aviation... French production now only amounts to 70 aeroplanes per month, and will not be more for many months to come.(34)

Flandin's arguments echoed those which Phipps had himself used to Blum in their conversation of the 10th. Phipps, in a diplomatic balancing act, then

33) Ibid.

34) FO.371/21347 (W19342/7/41). Phipps tel., 20 October 1937.

proceeded to quote Blum's words almost verbatim as if they were his own views. He warned Flandin that it was important to avoid giving Mussolini the impression of French and British weakness. Flandin agreed but strongly objected to 'a one-sided opening of the French frontier:

the result of which would be to afford excellent pretext to Mussolini for sending more troops to Spain, or even for taking some step opposed to really vital French or British interests such as effective occupation of Majorca.(35)

According to Phipps, Caillaux also wanted non-intervention to continue unless 'a great power' installed itself in Spanish territory and threatened the vital interests of France.(36)

President Lebrun, who had invited Phipps into his box at the opera on the 22nd, spoke 'rather feelingly' about 'the uphill fight he had been waging for some time against "certain ministers" who had been inclined to pursue a policy of adventure in Spain'. Such a policy, he told Phipps, had

no majority in the country and there would be no majority even in the present Front Populaire Chamber: five sixths of the Socialist Radical Party would in the last resort vote against it... M.Lebrun told me that it had been his endeavour throughout the Spanish conflict to remain completely neutral and impartial. He declines to believe that Franco's victory need necessarily be against the interests of France, or that Franco would seek to purchase that victory by the surrender of Spanish territory. The President's calm & dispassionate view of the Spanish war does not, however, imply that he ignores the grave danger to the peace presented by Mussolini and his brutal methods.(37)

Bonnet went further and told Phipps that he was grateful for 'the way in which the British Government had kept the French government on the right lines regarding

35) Ibid.

36) Ibid. (W19440/7/41). Phipps tel., 21 October 1937.

37) FO.371/21347 (W19542/7/41), Phipps tel., 23 October 1937.

Spain' and referred to 'the uphill fight he had waged against most of his colleagues of the French Cabinet'.⁽³⁸⁾

The British Cabinet had, in fact, concluded on 20 October that, 'HMG should tell the French that they could not agree to sell arms to Spain... that they should continue the policy of non-intervention'.⁽³⁹⁾ However, Delbos told Phipps, presumably with his forthcoming visits to Eastern Europe in mind, that 'any undue weakness on our part' would produce a very bad effect on the smaller powers, and that

the only way he can see for France & G.B. to "resume their liberty of action" is for both to declare that they will permit freedom of transit for arms & munitions to Spanish Government territory only (France by land & G.B. by sea). For G.B. merely to approve such French action without taking it herself would be a lamentable confession of disunion. In that event France would probably decide not to open her frontier and would have to resign herself to becoming a second class power. If HMG have any other plan to suggest in event of a breakdown, the French Government will be only too ready to consider it.⁽⁴⁰⁾

Delbos was reiterating the views expressed to Eden via Corbin on 13 October⁽⁴¹⁾ which were anathema to Phipps. The latter replied somewhat lamely that the quantities of arms which the British could send 'would probably be small', to which Delbos retorted that this was unimportant 'what was essential was the close

38) Ibid. (W19656/7/41). Phipps tel., 23 October 1937. It is curious that the expression 'uphill fight' which is attributed to President Lebrun on 23 October was also ascribed to Bonnet on 25 October. There are other such similarities in Phipps's reports of his conversations with French personalities. They were conducted in French, presumably written up from memory, and were then translated by him for his despatches which were in English. Some interpolation may have occurred, intentionally or unintentionally.

39) FO.371/21347 (W19573/7/41). Extract from Cabinet Conclusions (38/37) 20 October 1937.

40) FO.371/21347 ((W19543/7/41). Phipps tel., 23 October 1937, and Ibid. (W19609/7/41). Phipps tel., 25 October 1937.

41) Delbos had read these instructions to Phipps who had also received Eden's report of the interview. DBFP, 2, 19, no.240 Eden's to Phipps, 12 October 1937.

solidarity of France and Great Britain'.⁽⁴²⁾ Delbos's remarks carried an added urgency during the Italian troop concentrations in Libya in October which was sufficiently serious for the Commander in Chief Mediterranean Fleet to ask Eden whether it called, at least temporarily, for 'special measures being undertaken for the defence of Egypt'.⁽⁴³⁾

The Embassy received a further, unwelcome, reminder of the difficulties involved in appeasing Italy. The French had been without an ambassador since the Comte de Chambrun had left Rome in October 1936. On 30 October 1937, unable to 'tolerate the resulting "disparité" any longer', the Italian Government recalled Cerruti.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Phipps, whose tenure at the Berlin Embassy had overlapped with that of Cerutti, regarded him as 'a loyal and friendly colleague' who had always reported 'the truth' to Rome, he anticipated a further deterioration in Franco-Italian relations⁽⁴⁵⁾ and in fact the Italian press attacks on France intensified.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The Italian perception of French weakness (which the Italian press had emphasised) was again raised by Cerruti during his farewell conversation with Phipps:

when last he (Cerruti) saw Ciano the latter had reproached him for being alone in sending optimistic reports about France and that in reply he told the Count that in spite of internal difficulties the

42) FO.371/21347 (W19610/7/41). Phipps tel., 25 October 1937.

43) FO.371/21169 (R6972/69/22). Cmdr. in Chief Mediterranean, 16 Oct. 1937. The Italian naval reservists had been called up on 7 October. The French naval attaché at Rome thought they were probably 'confined to certain specialists who are needed to serve on the anti-piracy patrols when they are finally started' but McDermott minuted that 'our latest information suggests less satisfactory conclusions'. FO.371/21168 (R6703/69/22) Phipps tel., 8 October 1937.

44) FO.371/21182 (R7260/2143/22). Phipps tel., 30 October 1937.

45) Ibid. (R7216/2143/22). Phipps tel., 28 October 1937.

46) Ibid. (R7369/2143/22). Perth (Rome) to Eden, 1 November 1937, and (R373/2143/220) 2 November 1937.

French Army was the finest in the world and untouched by communism.(47)

Phipps, who commented that all the Italian 'unofficial agents' regarded France as weak and who recalled Goering's similar remarks to him in Berlin, had warned Cerutti that 'such wild prophesies were positively dangerous' and could result in 'foolish policies' being pursued towards France by Hitler and by Mussolini. Cerruti had agreed and had told him that Welczeck was in a similar position 'owing to the absurd reports sent to the Nazi big wigs such as Goering, Goebbels and Rosenberg by their agents in France, who tell their masters what they wish to hear and not what they ought to know'; Welczek and the German military attachés, who had reported 'in a similar sense to himself', had warned Berlin that 'it would be several years before the German Army could hope to equal the French'.⁽⁴⁸⁾

However, in a second despatch on 1 November, Phipps notified Eden that:

shortly before leaving Paris, Cerruti told an intimate friend, who repeated it to Pertinax, that he (Cerruti) was convinced that Mussolini wanted to make war upon Gt.Britain, and that it was the purest illusion to think that he could be detached from Hitler it would, however, be possible to detach Hitler from Mussolini. Cerruti also said that Mussolini counted very much upon Stoyadinovitch in case of war.(49)

According to Phipps, this information had been passed on to the Embassy by an Italian source which had 'hitherto been trustworthy'. Vansittart told Eden that the prime minister and the cabinet should be informed, and he may have exceeded his authority by adding that

a great deal of your colleagues, and the public servants who work with them, have no idea of the real urgency and danger of our position. Nothing but a really great shake-up in the Cabinet seems

47) Ibid. R7304/2143/22). Phipps tel., 1 November 1937.

48) Ibid. Phipps tel., 1 November 1937. For Cerruti's earlier conversation with Phipps on this topic, see p.63.

49) F0.371/21162 (R7531/1/22). Phipps to Eden, 1 November 1937. Stoyadinovitch, the prime minister of Yugoslavia, had concluded an agreement with Italy in March 1937.

to me capable of getting the necessity of rearmament seen in the right light.⁽⁵⁰⁾

Eden showed Phipps's despatch to Chamberlain who refused to allow it to be circulated to the Cabinet.⁽⁵¹⁾ The latter was convinced that 'the best insurance against the possibility of Italy starting war would be a friendly Germany',⁽⁵²⁾ and additionally relied on his personal contacts with the Italians.⁽⁵³⁾

By 5 November, the Italian threat to Tunisia or Egypt appeared to have subsided, and Léger told Phipps that General Gamelin had concluded that, 'Mussolini's aggressive behaviour was primarily due to (the) fear... of being attacked himself, furthermore he doubted his intention to attack within the next year as Hitler would not support him.'⁽⁵⁴⁾ Nichols minuted that

Generally speaking, this telegram... seems to show the French once again have, to some extent, shifted their ground, whereas a few weeks ago they were extremely apprehensive in regard to the possibility of Italian action in the Balearic Islands, they are now as cool on the subject as they were a year ago. The moral seems to be that we should trust our own judgement and not be too perturbed by recurrent fits of depression and perturbation in Paris.⁽⁵⁵⁾

The calm in Paris was short lived and, within a week, Phipps was compelled to reassure the French Government over a number of issues, most importantly the official announcement on 12 November that a British agent, Sir Robert Hodgson, had been appointed to General Franco which was criticized in the

50) FO.371/21162 (R7531/1/22). Vansittart minute to Eden, 6 November 1937.

51) Ibid.

52) FO.371/21160 (R4963/1/22). CID Meeting, 5 July 1937 & minute by P.Nichols.

53) On 3 November, Chamberlain told the House of Commons that his correspondence with Mussolini was 'personal' but that he had 'no objections' to telling the House 'the purport of it'. FO.371/21162 (R7342/1/22), 3 November 1937.

54) FO.371/21169 (R7380/69/22), Phipps tel., 5 November 1937.

55) Ibid. Minute by P Nichols, 8 November 1937.

Commons as 'constituting official recognition' of Franco's régime.⁽⁵⁶⁾ The Embassy's Annual Report stated blandly that this 'caused impatience with HMG by certain left sections of French opinion'.⁽⁵⁷⁾ In fact, Chautemps was extremely disturbed at the British decision⁽⁵⁸⁾ especially as it coincided with Halifax's impending visit to Berlin which was regarded with suspicion by the French press and alarm by Delbos who feared that Czechoslovakia and the colonial question would be discussed.⁽⁵⁹⁾ These events precipitated Chautemps's visit to London⁽⁶⁰⁾ which occurred while the Italian press campaign over Campinchi's speech concerning 'the defence of Corsica from Italian aggression' was at its most violent.⁽⁶¹⁾

French concentration on the Italian problem had partially obscured the Sudetendeutsche problem which had been simmering throughout 1936 and 1937 which can be summarised by Delbos's statement to Krofta, the Czech foreign minister, in October 1937 that:

Czechoslovakia could always rely on French loyalty honouring their engagements between the two countries, and that in any clear case of German movements against Czechoslovakia, France would be compelled to go to the latter's assistance unless she were content to become a second-rate power.⁽⁶²⁾

56) DBFP, 2, 19, p.471, f/note 2.

57) FO.371/21611 (C686/686/17). Annual Report on France 1937, p.28 (para.113).

58) FO.371/20698 (C7847/3285/17). Phipps tel., 14 November 1937.

59) FO.371/20751 (C7852/7324/18). Eden to Phipps, 13 November 1937, also in CAB.21/542, folio 68.

60) CAB.23/90. Cabinet meeting of 24 November 1937, folio 163.

61) FO.371/21182 (R7935/2143/22). Perth (Rome) to Eden, 29 November 1937 and *ibid* (R7928/2143/22) Phipps tel., 29 November 1937.

62) FO.432/3 (Confidential Print France, July-Dec.1937). no.13 Phipps to Eden, 7 October 1937.

Delbos's refusal to put pressure on the Czechs to make concessions to their German minority was a further source of Anglo-French friction. On 20 October, Phipps admitted to Sargent that, in his conversation with Delbos, he had 'used all the arguments I properly could out of the brief etc' but that he 'could not shake him'. Delbos had insisted that 'it would be unreasonable to expect the (Czech) Government to take into their midst any of the Sudetendeutsche Party proper, who openly demand autonomy, nor could he recommend the Czechs to do this'. Phipps reported that all he could do was:

to make him (Delbos) promise he would give reasonable advice at Prague with a view to the Czech Government showing themselves as conciliatory as possible towards the Henlein Party, and thus removing one of the chief pretexts for German aggression or even aggression. I laid great stress upon the extreme desirability of our both giving similar advice to the Czechs, whom we had always urged and would continue to urge to, be forthcoming and conciliatory to their German minority.(63)

Following the arrest of the Sudetendeutsche deputies, Phipps had seen Delbos 'who offered very scant hope of French advice in Prague similar to our own'.⁽⁶⁴⁾ The F.O. regarded the French as 'pursuing a most unsatisfactory line in Prague in regard to the Sudeten question',⁽⁶⁵⁾ and Sargent suggested that Phipps make another approach 'to make M.Delbos see reason'.⁽⁶⁶⁾

63) FO.371/21131 (R7005/188/12). Phipps tel. 19 October 1937. Delbos's account of their conversation corresponds in its essentials to that of Phipps. DDE, 2e, VII, no.136 Delbos aux Représentants Diplomatiques de France à Prague, Londres, Berlin, 25 octobre 1937.

64) FO.371/21131 (R6981/188/12). Phipps tel., 20 October 1937.

65) FO.371/21130 (R6258/188/12). F.O. Memorandum. Minute by Bramwell, 14 Sept. 1937.

66) FO.371/21131 (R7107/188/12) F.O. Memorandum on the Germany Minority in Czechoslovakia, 21 October 1937. Minute by O.Sargent. Corbin reported the F.O.'s dissatisfaction with the way the situation in the Sudetenland was developing and that Sargent had told his colleague that 'Cette situation nous préoccupe tellement que nous avons prié Eric Phipps d'en entretenir M.Delbos car votre crédit à Prague est plus grand que le notre'. DDE, 2e, VII, no.124 Corbin à Delbos, 21 octobre 1937.

C) Perceptions of France on the eve of the French Ministers' Visit

The Embassy was in danger of being swamped by the sheer volume of reports which they felt necessary to send to London, and there were severe problems of selection and compression which they were unable to solve. This was a problem which had earlier affected Clerk's Paris Embassy in 1936.⁽⁶⁷⁾ In October 1937, Phipps's Paris Embassy was savagely attacked by Vansittart for 'reporting every ephemeral utterance at inordinate length' and he minuted that 'they must be told to exercise more judgement in what is reported at all';⁽⁶⁸⁾ Strang drafted a milder version of this criticism adding gently that, 'we, of course, do not want to damp the zeal of the chancery'.⁽⁶⁹⁾

The Embassy's task became increasingly difficult. German and Italian perceptions of French internal weakness, alluded to earlier, were of considerable concern to the British Government. It coloured their own perceptions to a certain extent (which veered between optimism and pessimism), and was an added reason for the necessity for continual assessments of France's strength and stability in a

67) Lloyd Thomas's explanation is cited in chapter 3.

68) FO.371/20687 (C7337/18/17). Phipps's long telegram of 24 October 1937 'summarising' Chautemps's speech at the Fifth Congress of the West Socialist Radical Federation at Châteauroux. Minute by Vansittart, 30 October 1937.

69) Ibid. Draft letter by Strang (F.O.) to Perowne (Paris), 1 November 1937. Strang may have been recalling Talleyrand's advice to an aspiring diplomat, 'surtout pas trop de zele'. The Embassy's zeal was dampened in July when Phipps told Sargent he had asked the military attaché to make him a 'short analysis from the strategic point of view, of possible Italian action arising out of the present situation in Spain & the Mediterranean' and send it privately to the War Office. Nichols minuted that 'it did not necessarily represent W.O. views.... accordingly no distribution has been given'. FO.371/21175 (R4959/200/22). Phipps to Sargent, 15 July 1937.

highly fluid situation.⁽⁷⁰⁾ Two of the Embassy's reports immediately prior to the visit of the French ministers to London, were particularly important:

(1) The Embassy's military attaché's memoranda on the attitude of the French General Staff concluded that despite the Italian problem, 'the German peril looms ever menacingly in the background' and ultimately determined the French attitude towards all important questions'. The naval and air attachés added that 'the obsession of the French navy and air force with the German menace is hardly less than that of the French army', and the latter's comments were sombre:

My impression is that now the attitude is becoming one of somewhat fatalistic resignation to the inevitability of war in which the French losses will be frightful. It is far from being panic and I feel that the French believe that they will ultimately emerge victorious, probably with our assistance, but that in winning the victory, and especially in the opening stages when Germany will have the initiative in the choice of the hour to strike, she will be exposed to blows which will seriously shake the foundations of her a life.⁽⁷¹⁾

Colyer had touched upon the crucial question of French morale, and his conclusions did not bode well for the future. French losses in the Great War were 10% of its active male population; it was the kind of war which they knew they could never fight again and, as the Rhineland crisis had shown, pacifist feeling was deeply rooted in France.⁽⁷²⁾

70) At the C.I.D. Meeting on 1 December, Eden had concluded that 'the outstanding feature of the present situation was its extreme fluidity'. DBFP, 2, 19, no.378. Cabinet Conclusions.

71) FO.371/20712 (C7386/3/18). Phipps to Eden, 26 October 1937 (Encl: Memorandum by Military attaché: 'Attitude of the French General Staff towards Germany'; Ibid (C7576/3/18) Phipps tel., 3 November 1937 (Encl: Comments by naval & air attachés to the military attaché's memorandum).

72) Pacifism in France came from the Left and from the Right. Maurras's slogan during the Rhineland crisis, 'surtout pas de guerre', was effective and was the forerunner of Déat's later, more specific, slogan 'mourir pour Danzig?' Jean Renoir's classic anti-war film, La Grande Illusion was released in France in 1937.

2) Phipps, in his long summary of the situation in France, appears to have anticipated Sargent's remarks (in his private letter of 29 November) regarding the negative effect of some of his reports on the French internal situation. In view of his previously expressed views, and even allowing for his appreciation of Chautemps's 'moderate policies', its conclusions were somewhat surprising:

... there are signs that the violent swing towards the extreme left is spending itself, and the country is settling back to a moderate left line, which since the war has been the axis of health of French politics. (This has been particularly observable as regards foreign politics). Moderate Left governments in France have shown themselves anxious to co-operate with HM Government, and to have a grasp of European needs and realities. On the other hand the further to the Right the Government, the more narrowly French and the more shortsighted, especially towards Germany, has the policy been, and the less easy has been co-operation with HM's Government).

Eden, in a pencilled note to the passage in italics, commented that 'this is very true'.

Echoing the views of Cerruti and Welczeck, Phipps stated that it was 'astonishing' to see how France's difficulties had been magnified in the German and especially in the Italian press:

Viewed at any rate from Paris, the financial and economic difficulties of France appear to be, both actually and potentially less grave than those of Italy and Germany. France has survived the war and the years that followed it, as well as the world economic crisis, without disaster... Whatever her financial vicissitudes she has maintained an immensely powerful army, the second, perhaps even still the first in Europe, which is in a high state of efficiency and reasonably free of political influences. Opinions may vary as to whether her present troubles are symptoms of decadence to growing pains, but it would be foolish to deny her abiding vitality or to under-rate her fundamental strength.

While French relations with Italy were poor, Phipps admitted that this was 'perhaps France's misfortune rather than her fault' and that it

is really not open to the French Government to take any concrete action which could be hoped to place French relations with Italy on a satisfactory footing at the present time.⁽⁷³⁾

Phipps's report was extremely well received by the Foreign Office, and his reputation and his professed optimism regarding the internal situation were both at their zenith. Barclay noted that Phipps saw little signs of economic recovery but that he 'takes on the whole an optimistic view of the French internal situation and on France's strength'.⁽⁷⁴⁾ Eden regarded it as 'most 'most useful'⁽⁷⁵⁾ while Strang replied warmly that it was 'of special value' and would be 'of more permanent service to my Department for the purposes of reference'.⁽⁷⁶⁾

(D) December and the Balance Sheet for 1937

Sargent told Phipps on 4 December that the Anglo-French conversations were 'a most timely antidote after the Halifax visit', and that the French had been reassured by Chamberlain.⁽⁷⁷⁾ They had no objections to the opening of Anglo-Italian conversations⁽⁷⁸⁾ and Non-Intervention in Spain would be continued by both sides.⁽⁷⁹⁾ The French Ministers had also explained that they intended to

73) FO.371/20687 (C8134/18/17). Phipps's despatch of 25 November 1937. Phipps repeated that 'the current of political life seemed to be shifting back to the moderate Left line, which in recent years has been the axis of health in France' in his Introduction to the Annual Report on France for 1937. FO.371/21611 (C686/686/17).

74) FO.371/20687 (C8134/18/17). Minute by Barclay to Phipps's desp. of 25 Nov.

75) Ibid. Minute by Eden, 28 November 1937.

76) Ibid. Strang to Phipps, 4 December 1937.

77) PHPP, II.2/1. Sargent to Phipps, 4 December 1937.

78) DBFP, 2, 19, no.355. Text of conclusions after conversations of Nov. 29-30.

79) Ibid. Annex to 354. Communiqué issued at concl. of conversations. Sargent stated that most of it had been prepared by Strang and himself 'before the conversation began'. PHPP.II,2/1 Sargent to Phipps, 4 December 1937.

purchase a considerable quantity of matériel for their air force in the United States,⁽⁸⁰⁾ consequently the F.O. considered that it was no longer necessary for Phipps to take up the matter in Paris.⁽⁸¹⁾

The F.O. were, however, still deeply concerned at the Italian image of French weakness. They reemphasised that the Italian Government were ignoring the reports of their own embassies and recalled that their 'false values' had been deplored by Cerruti:

while Italian technical experts seem to be convinced, as also are HMG, of the excellence of the French Army and the efficiency of the French General Staff, Sr Mussolini and the Italian Government themselves appear to discount this on the grounds of the French political situation... it would be a great pity if Sr. Mussolini were to entertain any illusions as to the inherent strength & efficiency of the French Army and of the spirit behind it. Whatever the political state of France may be, the army is hardly effected by it. The more this is rubbed into the Italians the better.⁽⁸²⁾

The discovery of the Cagoule conspiracy, which Phipps had reported on at some length,⁽⁸³⁾ was proof that the army was affected by 'the political state of France' and that Italian involvement, and close contact with its leaders, did tend to reinforce Mussolini's 'illusions'.

In November, further cachés of arms had been discovered in Paris, Lille and Dieppe belonging to the Comité Secret d'Action Révolutionnaire or Cagoule and

80) CAB.23/90A, Cabinet 45(37). Cabinet meeting of 1 December 1937.

81) FO.371/20694 (C8237/22/17). Minute by Sargent, 6 Dec.1937, Phipps had reported his information 'from a reliable source' that Chautemps had sent for Cot and had told him that there was 'a deep preoccupation in England' with the inadequate state of the French air force. FO.371/20694 (C8551/ 122/17). 13 December 1937.

82) FO.371/21163 (R8571/1/22). F.O. memoranda on Anglo-Italian relations, 22 Dec. 1937. Memo prepared for Perth for use in connection with Lord Lloyd's visit to Rome. Part E: The Inherent Strength of France.

83) Phipps's reports on the Cagoule in Sept.1937 are in FO.371/20686.

General Duseigneur, amongst others, was arrested.⁽⁸⁴⁾ Chautemps personally confirmed to Phipps that the arms were of German and the ammunition was of Italian make while Delbos had added that the latter had been brought into France from Spain.⁽⁸⁵⁾ In December, M. Moitessier, head of the Paris Sûreté, furnished Pertinax with a history of the movement which he passed on to the Embassy; its origins lay in the dissolution of the (fascist) Leagues in 1936, it had some 5,000-6,000 members in Paris alone, and it had been responsible for several murders including the Rosselli brothers.⁽⁸⁶⁾ Phipps's impression, however, was that 'the Cagoulard plot need not be taken too seriously'.⁽⁸⁷⁾ Even the information in January from M. Pironneau, the editor of the right wing Epoque, to Beaumont-Nesbitt that 'the personal staff of Marshal Petain had been seriously implicated' although 'the Marshal himself was entirely unaware of the fact',⁽⁸⁸⁾ failed, it appears, to change Phipps's views.

In fact, the Cagoule not only sought to overthrow the Republic and instal a dictatorship, but it also had a close relationship with the Italians and the Franquistes. Acting in close collaboration with General Roatta, head of the Italian Servizio Informazioni Militari, it undertook on Mussolini's behalf, the assassination of the Rosselli brothers and other prominent Italian anti-fascist exiles living in

84) FO.371/20687 (C800/18/17) Phipps tel. 20 November 1937; *ibid* (C8060/18/17) 23 Nov; *ibid* (C8086/18/17) 24 Nov; *ibid* (C8089/18/17) 24 Nov.1937.

85) *Ibid.* (C8130/18/17). Phipps to Eden, 24 November 1937.

86) FO.371/20688 (C68563/18/17). Phipps to Eden, 13 December 1937.

87) *Ibid.*

88) FO.371/21598 (C478/55/17). Phipps tel., transmits memo by military attaché 21 January 1938.

France.⁽⁸⁹⁾ Its activities included sabotaging French aircraft destined for Republican Spain (at Toulouse and elsewhere), and signalling the movements of ships destined for Spanish Republican controlled territory at French ports.⁽⁹⁰⁾ As Boudrel said, 'la cagoule a besoin du mythe du péril communist pour se justifier', and it therefore received financial backing from certain French industrialists including Lemaigre-Dubreuil.⁽⁹¹⁾ Major Loustaunau-Lacau, a member of Marshal Pétain's personal staff, was the founder of its military wing, the Corvignolles,⁽⁹²⁾ whose supposed task was to ferret out communist cells in the army. Pétain himself was discreetly involved, and its activities were known to Daladier (the Minister of War) and Generals Gamelin and Georges.⁽⁹³⁾ Marshal Franchet d'Esperey was extremely active in its ranks, and was responsible for introducing Loustaunau to Eugène Deloncle, the head of the CSAR, in order to facilitate a fusion between its military and civilian wings.⁽⁹⁴⁾ General Gamelin later stated that, on Daladier's orders, he asked individually each member of the Conseil supérieure de la guerre, with exception of the Marshals, whether they had had relations with the CSAR.⁽⁹⁵⁾

89) Philippe Boudrel, La cagoule, Paris 1970, pp.144-5.

90) Boudrel, op.cit., pp. 137, 139-40.

91) Ibid. pp. 110,111.

92) Ibid p.181. P.C.F. Bankwitz, Maxime Weygand and Civil-Military Relations in Modern France, Harvard 1967, pp.268-9.

93) Boudrel, p.192. For Pétain's involvement see ibid p.206 and Bankwitz pp.272-6.

94) Boudrel, op.cit., pp 195-6.

95) Ibid., p.204.

Given Phipps's close relationship with General Weygand, who once told him that, 'Mon cher ami, vous ne me dérangez jamais',⁽⁹⁶⁾ and with General Gamelin, and also his profound knowledge of the Third Republic including its traditionally tense civil-military relationships, it appears surprising that Phipps did not appear to be better appraised of the implications of the Cagoule affair. Neither is there any evidence that Mendl, with his extensive Parisian connections, appeared any more enlightened. General Weygand was closely connected with the Croix de Feu when it was founded in 1927 and remained friendly with Colonel de la Rocque who had been his subordinate on Marshal Foch's staff.⁽⁹⁷⁾ Phipps had been a Minister Plenipotentiary in Paris during this period and must have been aware of Weygand's involvement. Similarly, it was well known that, in the events of 6 February 1934, Marshal Lyautey had threatened to march on the Chamber at the head of the extreme right wing Jeunesses Patriotes to overthrow the Government.⁽⁹⁸⁾

It is possible, however, that Phipps knew more than he was prepared to reveal at this stage. His own intensely anti-communist views, his desire to appease Mussolini, and his strongly held pro-Franco sympathies should not be entirely discounted.⁽⁹⁹⁾ More feasible, however, is that, as an ardent francophile, he was

96) PHPP.3/5. Weygand to Phipps, 8 October 1937.

97) Bankwitz, *op cit.*, p. 180.

98) *Ibid.*, p.178. Alexander Werth, *The Twilight of France 1933-1940*, London 1942, p.20. Maurois, Phipps's close friend, omitted to mention Lyautey's political activities in the revised edition of his biography of the latter published in 1938.

99) In January 1938, Phipps appeared to be more concerned with the retired French army officers who, it was alleged, were assisting the Spanish Republic rather than with any potential threat from the Cagoule. FO 371/22635 (W394/83/41) Phipps to Chamberlain, 8 January 1938.

reluctant to add fuel to speculation regarding French internal weakness. Certainly his pessimism appears to have been repressed over the following months. It spilled out briefly during Eden's resignation, and more openly in his 'all that is best in France is against war' telegram on the eve of the Munich crisis in which he asked himself the rhetorical question, 'it may be asked why I have not reported sooner...'⁽¹⁰⁰⁾

Nevertheless, despite the Cagoule, the Italian withdrawal from the League on 12 December⁽¹⁰¹⁾ and their build-up in Libya, December and the balance sheet for 1937 was regarded, on the whole, optimistically, both by Phipps and by the Foreign Office. Even a general strike in Paris in the last days of December which resulted in a sharp fall in the franc⁽¹⁰²⁾ failed to dispel this mood. Phipps wrote optimistically, even lyrically, in his introduction to the Annual Report on France for 1937 that:

France is neither dominated by Communist views, nor trembling on the verge of revolution. Nor is she weak. She has maintained an immensely powerful army, untainted by communism, comparatively free of political influence and in a high state of efficiency.... Reforms, sufficiently radical to constitute social revolution, have been introduced without upsetting her political framework... She remains the most difficult country for a foreigner to understand. Perhaps that is why she is so worthy to be understood... Paradoxical the French are, and presumably always will be... They prefer freedom to the massed efficiency of the robot. They are only too ready, in close agreement with ourselves, to make reasonable sacrifice that may be necessary to bring about a general settlement with Germany. If reason and sacrifice prove alike unavailing, they will be prepared in the last resort to fight again, magnificently as

100) DBFP, 3, 2, no.1076, Phipps to Halifax, 24 September 1938.

101) FO.371/21179 (R8295/655/12). Phipps tel., 12 December 1937.

102) FO.371/20688 (C8883/C8901/C8902/C8903/C8920/18/17. Phipps tels of 29 December 1937.

before, to preserve that freedom, physical and spiritual, without which after all life would not be worth living.(103)

II 1 January - 10 March 1938

A) The Internal Situation and Foreign Relations

Despite the F.O's eager acceptance of Phipps's more optimistic assessments (which Chamberlain never shared),⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ there was a deep undercurrent of anxiety and an unspoken assumption on both their parts that, in actual fact, France was fundamentally weak and unstable. These doubts, which surfaced, occasionally, were confided to Phipps by Cadogan during the preliminary preparations in January for King George VI's proposed State visit to Paris in the Summer:

No-one can foresee what will happen in France between now and next Summer. There may be changes of government; there may be a serious deterioration of the international situation it may perhaps not even be out of the question that some extreme elements might use the occasion of H.M.'s visit to stage a kind of general strike as they did at Xmas time, in order to exhort concessions at inconvenient moments. If therefore you have any qualms at all about the desirability of a State visit by H.M. to Paris next summer, I hope that you will express them now.(105)

On 14 January, Chautemps unexpectedly resigned and Phipps correctly prophesied that 'another Front Populaire but under Socialist Radical direction' was likely.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ It was not until the 18th, however, that Chautemps was able to form his fourth ministry with a slightly more right wing orientation, the Socialists and

103) FO.371/21611 (C686/686/17). Phipps to Eden, 24 January 1938. Introduction to the Annual Report on France for 1937.

104) Chamberlain, on the other hand, readily accepted Phipps's most pessimistic reports. For Chamberlain's view of France see, for e.g. pp.125-126 and *passim*.

105) FO.371/20698 (C8797/8427/17). Cadogan to Phipps, 7 January 1938. Phipps's reply does not appear to have been recorded.

106) FO.371/21598 (C240/55/17). Phipps tel., 14 January 1938.

Communists finally supporting him in order to maintain the Front Populaire.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾

Delbos and Daladier retained their portfolios but, much to the relief of the Embassy

and the F.O., La Chambre replaced Cot as Minister of the Air.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾

The British and Soviet Governments were both blamed by the French press for interfering in the political crisis and Phipps reported on the 18th that

There is a growing and rather alarming tendency here to consider that Great Britain and in particular our press is too much inclined to give advice and take sides in the present French crisis. Despatch will reach you by bag tomorrow morning. Meanwhile if possible it would be advisable if leading articles in the British press tomorrow morning would confine themselves to mere comment.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾

Barclay admitted that there had been 'a great deal of advice to avoid exchange controls' while the F.O.'s News Dept. felt that there was nothing 'especially objectionable' to the French in the British press but they had 'taken such action as is possible'.⁽¹¹⁰⁾

Phipps further reported that, following Chautemps's resignation,

there have been widespread rumours in the lobbies of the Chamber of Deputies to the effect that HMG had intimated to the French Govt. that the institution of exchange control would not only mean the termination of the Tripartite Monetary Agreement but might put an end to close co-operation between the two governments in other fields as well. It was also rumoured that HMG had let it be known that it would welcome a Ministry without Communist co-operation, and the formation of a Government of concentration.

107) Ibid. Phipps's telegrams of 14-18 January 1938; Henri Dubief, Le Déclin de la IIIe République 1929-1938, Paris 1976, pp.214-215.

108) Ibid. (C363/55/17). Phipps tel., 19 January 1938. Vansittart minuted that 'with Sir Eric Phipps I join in giving thanks that M.Cot has gone'. FO.371/22636 (W1150/83/41), 25 January 1938.

109) Ibid. (C333/55/17). Phipps tel., 18 January 1938.

110) Ibid. Minutes by Barclay & Baxter, 18 January 1938.

Comert, the head of the Quai d'Orsay's press section, and Jacques Kayser, the Vice President of the Socialist Radical Party, were worried by the extent of the rumours which they attributed to Flandin. Keyser was concerned by its effects on the Left which blamed Britain 'for having prevented France from following a more forward policy during the past 18 months' and

M.Kayser added that pressure was supposed to be brought to bear through banking and perhaps also through diplomatic channels and through the Press. M.Palewski, the ex-Chef de Cabinet of M.Paul Reynaud confirmed M.Kayser's statements.

Thorez also claimed that 'the Grand Patronat and the English conservatives had conspired to bring about Chautemps's fall' and L'Humanité and the Right wing Ordre repeated the rumours. The Socialists and Radical Socialists had also greatly resented the Daily Telegraph's leader stating that all of France's present problems were caused by 'l'expérience Blum' and that 'any Government capable of surmounting the present crisis must command support wider than the Popular Front'.⁽¹¹¹⁾

Phipps considered that it was advisable that 'any appearance of interference by the British press should so far as possible be avoided' and, in view of his subsequent role after Chautemps's fall in March 1938, his conclusions were of particular interest:

Only a few days ago I was approached by a well-known writer of the Right and an old friend of mine, who suggested that I should seek an interview with the President of the Republic and impress upon the latter the extreme desirability of the speedy formation of a Government of National Union. I need hardly say that I scouted this suggestion, which indeed merely confirms me in my conviction that it is essential from the point of view of Anglo-French relations that I should continue, as heretofore, to abstain carefully from conveying

111) FO.371/21598 (C340/55/17). Phipps to Eden, 18 January 1938.

the impression that I am in any way intervening in French internal affairs.(112)

Peake minuted that whenever the French Left were compelled to adopt unpopular policies they blamed the British Government for 'coercing them' but that the News Department would try and tone down criticism of the French Government in the press'.⁽¹¹³⁾ Strang felt that while comment in the British press naturally followed party lines (and the city were obviously not well disposed towards the Front Populaire)

what is outrageous is the suggestion that HMG have used their influence to secure the exclusion of the Communists from power or the formation of a government of concentration; or have suggested that the introduction of exchange control would put an end to the existing co-operation between GB and France.(114)

Sargent, who had been in the forefront of those advocating intervention in French internal affairs in 1936, suggested that there was nothing they could do 'to contradict these misrepresentations of HMG' and that the rumours would die down.⁽¹¹⁵⁾ The Foreign Office's indignation was premature. While there is no evidence to suggest that either they or the Embassy intervened in January 1938, their interference in French internal affairs during (and after) Blum's second ministry was, as will be seen, quite blatant.

Fortunately for the Embassy, these rumours were being replaced in Paris by those concerning the role of the French Communist Party. The right wing Petit Parisien alleged that their attitude in the Chamber had been 'dictated by reasons of

112) Ibid.

113) FO.371/21598 (C340/55/17). Minute by Charles Peake, 20 January 1938.

114) Ibid. Minute by William Strang, 20 January 1938.

115) Ibid. Minute by Sargent, 27 January 1938. For his suggested British intervention in French internal affairs in 1936, see Ch.3, part C.

foreign policy'; Chautemps and Delbos were unenthusiastic about extending the Franco-Soviet Pact and Moscow feared 'a settlement of general European questions without the USSR'.⁽¹¹⁶⁾ Delbos had, in fact, spoken 'bitterly' to Phipps about the recent Communist attacks on him, and had summoned Suritz to the Quai d'Orsay to complain about 'Moscow's intervention in French affairs'.⁽¹¹⁷⁾ In a somewhat waspish minute, Strang noted that 'some of M.Delbos's recent remarks to Sir E.Phipps have been nervy and petulant and this is one of them'.⁽¹¹⁸⁾ Generally speaking, the F.O. also disliked Delbos, whom they regarded as anti-Italian and, as subsequent minutes reveal, would have been delighted to have seen him replaced.

B) Informal Aspects and Reactions to the F.O. Changes

Vansittart's removal as permanent under secretary had been mooted for some time,⁽¹¹⁹⁾ and his new appointment as Chief Diplomatic Advisor to the Government was officially announced on 31 December 1937.⁽¹²⁰⁾ On 9 January, Phipps sent two private letters to Hankey which had been typed by himself 'and

116) FO.371/21598 (C341/55/17). Phipps to Eden, 18 January 1938.

117) FO.37/21598 (C395/55/17). Phipps tel., 20 January 1938.

118) Ibid. Minute by Strang, 21 January 1938.

119) Eden had spoken to Chamberlain in May 1937 about the necessity of replacing Vansittart; Chamberlain agreed but thought it would 'obviously be wise to wait a while'. The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1937-1940, edited by J.Harvey, London 1970, pp 43 & 44.

120) DBFP, 2, 19, 408, Press notice re new F.O. appointments 31 Dec. 1937.

have not been seen by anyone here'. The first⁽¹²¹⁾ explained that he was writing because Hankey's chief was acting head of the F.O. in Eden's absence and it would be awkward for him to write to Cadogan. Churchill had invited himself to the embassy, and had told him that Vansittart's 'displacement' was very dangerous as 'it would be represented as a victory for the pro-Germans in England'. The French press, on the other hand, exaggerated his importance as 'a big victory for the pro-French party in England'. Phipps himself had no idea of the significance of Vansittart's new post and was concerned:

the danger is that, divested of all routine work, he will spread himself unduly and end by causing trouble, unless put on the right lines from the start. I feel sure that you will realise that if... Van was in fact charged with a mission by the P.M. I would do all in my power to help.

Phipps's second letter⁽¹²²⁾ stressed that the French public opinion and the press were 'magnifying in a really alarming manner the importance of Van's new appointment'. The latter, who proposed to stay at the Embassy for a few days en route from Monte Carlo, wanted him to arrange interviews with Chautemps and Daladier and, in any case, would be seeing Léger. Phipps needed Chamberlain's agreement otherwise 'the exaggerated press campaign' would give the visit 'altogether undue importance' as if he (Vansittart) were 'charged with a special and highly important mission by the prime minister'. He therefore enclosed his letter to Vansittart for Hankey to show to Chamberlain.

Hankey replied that Chamberlain was away, he was reluctant to show it to Cadogan, but that Horace Wilson had agreed with him that it would be inadvisable for Vansittart 'to meet all the bigwigs in Paris'. He assured Phipps that 'the

121) PHPP.3/3. Phipps to Hankey, Personal & Very Confidential, 9 Jan. 1938.

122) PHPP.3/3. Phipps to Hankey, 9 January 1938.

fantastic ideas of the French press' were without foundation.⁽¹²³⁾ Meanwhile, Phipps had already told Vansittart that the French press would misrepresent his visit, it would arouse 'all kinds of misapprehensions and anxiety', and advised him not to come to Paris.⁽¹²⁴⁾ It was a storm in a teacup. Vansittart readily agreed and would postpone his trip 'till next time'.⁽¹²⁵⁾

Meanwhile, like Phipps, Hankey had written two letters to him on the same day, 11 January. His second, handwritten, letter marked 'most secret and personal'⁽¹²⁶⁾ informed him that 'my typewritten letter is a discreet one, which I can show to the P.M... this is not so discreet and more informative', and it gave the background to Vansittart's dismissal. Vansittart's ability had not been questioned because he was apt 'to get rather jumpy' and paid too much attention to the foreign press and the secret service:

He got on a good many people's nerves and there is an idea about that F.O. suspiciousness has prevented us from taking advantage of opportunities to get on better terms with Italy and perhaps with Germany. The present re-organisation is a way out of the difficulty.

After briefly outlining Vansittart's division of responsibilities with Cadogan,

Hankey concluded that

Van is immensely popular with us all. I personally am immensely in his debt for help with the defence programmes, and no-one wanted him thrust into the outer darkness where (to put the matter at its lowest) he might be dangerous. Meanwhile his great abilities ought to be put at the service of the state.

123) PHPP3/3. Hankey to Phipps (Personal & Confidential), 11 January 1938.

124) Ibid. Phipps to Vansittart, 9 January 1938.

125) PHPP.II.2.1. Vansittart to Phipps, 12 January 1938.

126) PHPP.3/3. Hankey to Phipps, 11 January 1938.

Phipps had hastened to supply Cadogan with the French newspaper cuttings regarding Vansittart's new role. Cadogan replied that he did not think it possible 'to prevent the press or public from writing and talking a lot of rubbish' most of which he regarded as harmless, but

What is appearing in some quarters here is definitely dangerous... the suggestion that Van has direct access to the P.M. (which is not the case), with the implication that the latter, with Van's aid, is going to run a foreign policy of his own in rivalry with the Secretary of State. I am doing what I can to scotch such rubbish here.(127)

Eden's resignation, however, had more impact in the short run on Phipps personally and on the French Government. He was summoned to the Quai d'Orsay on 20 February and confronted with an alarmed Chautemps, Delbos, Léger and Corbin who demanded reassurances from the British Government,⁽¹²⁸⁾ and he was so badly shaken that he sent off, in Cadogan's words, 'a wild S.O.S' to the Foreign Office.⁽¹²⁹⁾ J.P L. Thomas, Eden's parliamentary private secretary, who had accompanied the latter to the south of France, threw an interesting light on Phipps's state of mind at this juncture:

127) PHPP.2/1. Cadogan to Phipps, 11 January 1938.

128) FO.371/21590 (C1192/13/17). Phipps (telephoned), 20 February 1938.

129) The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan 1938-45, ed. by Dilks, London 1971, p.52.

Good news all round. Eric Phipps in despair and thought of resignation himself when he heard that Anthony (Eden) had gone. Anthony told him not to be foolish and to stay and hold the fort.(130)

Was Phipps's despair due the apparent disarray of British policy in the face of potential German and Italian aggression, French internal weakness, and impending French governmental crisis? It appears that, at least temporarily, he may have panicked - a situation which would repeat itself during the Munich crisis. Additionally, there may also have been a more personal element: gratitude, and perhaps loyalty, towards Eden for having appointed him to Paris.⁽¹³¹⁾ Almost inevitably, his stalwart friend, Hankey, came to his rescue and, in his most protective manner, told Phipps that, 'I imagine that, as usual, you are left almost in the dark as to what is going on, so I will send you some account'.⁽¹³²⁾

Hankey reminded Phipps that he had warned him previously that 'matters must come to a head' over the Italian question since Chamberlain had been determined from the outset of his premiership to improve relations with Italy 'and Germany, if possible'. on the other hand,

The Foreign Secretary was always chopping & changing, blowing hot one day, cold the next... He went to Paris & Geneva and did good work in preparing the way for recognition (of Ethiopia) as part of a general bargain of reconciliation. When he got back he seemed to have gone back on the whole idea... A.E. refused to budge an inch. The Prime Minister is rather a stiff man, but he is mobility itself compared with his late colleague. Anyhow, he has

130) Oliver Harvey Papers, British Library (Brit.Museum). Add 56402. J.P.L.Thomas (St.Jean-Cap-Ferrat) to O.Harvey, n.d. but circa March 1938.

131) Eden appreciated Phipps's concern, and replied that they 'may have a talk about it one day: Meanwhile I am happy to think that you are where you are. It is a real consolation in these difficult times; nor can I forget how much I owe to your unfailing help in two difficult years'. PHPP.3/2 Eden to Phipps, 1 March 1938.

132) PHPP.3/3. Hankey to Phipps ('Private & Personal'), 21 February 1938.

gone. Fond as I am of him on personal grounds, I woke this morning with a strange feeling of relief... Today I felt there was just a possibility of peace. I only hope I am right.(133)

As usual after an intervention by Hankey, Phipps was reassured, his self-confidence was speedily restored, and he replied with bravado that

It is very good indeed of you to keep me posted and I am most grateful: it makes all the difference, for otherwise one is working in the dark. I quite see that A's departure was inevitable. You know what I preached consistently from Berlin from the very start of the fatal sanctions policy. I bellowed in vain that the only one to gain by that would be Hitler.

Phipps then reiterated that an anti-Italian policy after sanctions had broken down was sterile, and referred sardonically to the French Left's allegiance to 'the tottering League (of Nations)'.⁽¹³⁴⁾ If J.P.L. Thomas's description of Phipps's despair and his threat to resign is accurate, and there is no reason to doubt it, then Phipps's subsequent account of Delbos's reaction to the news of Eden's resignation is ironic and an unintentionally amusing piece of psychological projection on his part:

... poor Delbos's collapse when he heard of A(nthony)'s going, and his first impulse (was) to retire himself. Now however, the first panicky impression has subsided...(135)

Neither should the French have been entirely surprised by Eden's resignation. Corbin had reported to the Quai d'Orsay in September 1937 that from the outset of his premiership, Chamberlain had 'montré la résolution du contrôler directement la politique étrangère du Royaume-Unis', and that

M.Eden ne prendra désormais aucune initiative qu' il n'en ait délibéré par avance avec M. N.Chamberlain; mais il en résulte aussi nécessairement que toute décision du Secrétaire d'Etat a reçu par avance l'approbation du Chef du Gouvernement, et sera donc couverte par lui.(136)

133) Ibid.

134) PHPP.3/3. Phipps to Hankey ('Private'), 23 February 1938.

135) Ibid.

136) MFA (Quai d'Orsay). Z series, Z284-1. Corbin (Londres) à Delbos, 23 septembre 1937.

In the aftermath of Eden's resignation in March, Corbin reemphasised that since becoming prime minister, Chamberlain had become increasingly active in the field of foreign policy, and that

Dès cette époque, un élément nouveau était intervenu dans la politique anglaise: la personnalité de M.Chamberlain. Celle-ci est, comme chacun le sait, très marquée, et l'introduction de ce nouveau facteur ne pouvait manquer d'avoir des répercussions, sinon sur l'orientation générale de la politique anglaise, du moins sur ses méthodes et ses procédés. Depuis déjà plusieurs mois, M.Eden n'était plus le seul chef du FO, et quelques orateurs ont fait remarquer, non sans apparence de raison, au cours des récents débats parlementaires, qu'il aurait dû démissionner non pas en Février 1938, mais dès Juillet 1937.(137)

Corbin failed to record, or may have been unaware of, the depths of Chamberlain's suspicion and contempt towards France which dated back, at least, to the Ethiopian crisis when he recorded that the 'the French have been as disloyal as they could'.⁽¹³⁸⁾ On 16 January 1938, Chamberlain told a friend that

Unhappily France keeps pulling her own house down about her ears. We are on excellent terms with her. With the Chautemps government... we found ourselves in general agreement about all aims and objects. But France's weakness is a public danger just when she ought to be a source of strength and confidence, and as a friend she has two faults which destroy half her value. She never can keep a secret for more than half an hour, nor a government for more than nine months'.(139)

Eden's plea to him on 31 January may well have fallen on deaf ears:

I believe, moreover, that there is a tendency among some of our colleagues to underestimate the strength of France. I am myself convinced, however, and Phipps and others better qualified than I to express an opinion share that conviction, that the French Army is absolutely sound, and surely, if we had to choose between France and Italy as an ally, we could not hesitate for a moment.(140)

137) Ibid. Corbin (Londres) tel., 14 mars 1938.

138) Keith Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain, London 1946, p.268.

139) Feiling, op.cit., p.323.

140) PREM.1/276. Eden to Phipps, 31 January 1938.

After the fall of Chautemps's third ministry in March 1938, Chamberlain's contemptuous attitude towards the French became more open and culminated in his harsh and bitter verdict on them in June 1940.⁽¹⁴¹⁾

C) Anglo-French Tensions on the Eve of the Anschluss

In mid-February the British Government decided to make: (a) 'soundings' in Berlin,⁽¹⁴²⁾ and (b) a démarche in Rome for unilateral conversations. Coming against the background of Eden's resignation, and an impending German threat to Austria (and ultimately to Czechoslovakia), these British initiatives were of considerable concern to the French Government. Phipps, who was also shaken by Eden's resignation, regarded it as his self-appointed task to reassure them that no major British decision would be taken without prior consultation with them.

On 20th February, the French press expressed general dismay at Eden's resignation and, amongst others, Pertinax and Tabouis concluded that any attempts to weaken Rome-Berlin Axis by coming to terms with Mussolini would be unsuccessful.⁽¹⁴³⁾ As mentioned previously, Phipps was summoned to the Quai d'Orsay and confronted with an agitated Chautemps, Delbos, Léger and Corbin who sought reassurances⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ and in Cadogan's words, he sent 'a wild S.O.S.' to the

141) See postscript (Ch.9).

142) FO.371/21655 (C1027/42/18). Eden Phipps, 14 February 1938.

143) FO.371/22403 (R1568/23/22). Phipps to Eden, 20 February 1938.

144) FO.37/21590 (C1192/13/17). Phipps to F.O. by telephone, 20 Feb.1938.

F.O. 'earnestly begging' them to authorize him to give it to them.⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ Cadogan drafted a 'soothing reply' which Chamberlain accepted, it was telephoned back to Phipps and he was able to state that 'HMG certainly intend to remain in close consultation with them'.⁽¹⁴⁶⁾

Chautemps regarded Eden's resignation and Hitler's 'Austrian coup' as an Axis victory, and he told Phipps that Suritz, the Soviet Ambassador, had reproached him for 'treating the Russians like poor relations'.⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ Phipps successfully urged Chamberlain (via Halifax) to make a friendly reference to France in Parliament which would be 'warmly appreciated here'.⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ While this had been received 'with great satisfaction', he warned that there was still 'intense anxiety' in Paris regarding the possible consequences of Eden's resignation.⁽¹⁴⁹⁾

As anticipated, the Cabinet had decided on 19 and 20 February to make a démarche to the Italians for unilateral conversations⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ which did nothing to assuage these French anxieties. Despite the British reassurances, Delbos was 'disturbed' to discover that he had not been consulted⁽¹⁵¹⁾ and he feared that unless

145) Ibid. Cadogan's diaries, op.cit., p.52.

146) FO.371/21590 (C1192/13/17). F.O. to Phipps by telephone, 20 Feb. 1938: see also Cadogan, op.cit., p.52.

147) Ibid. (C1193/13/17). Phipps to Halifax, 21 February 1938.

148) Ibid.

149) Ibid. (C1235 & C1250/13/17). Phipps tels, 22 February 1938.

150) CAB.23/92. Cabinet Conclusions, 19 & 20 February 1938.

151) FO.371/22403 (R1696/23/22). Halifax to Phipps, 23 February 1938.

he was appraised of Perth's instructions, he would be compelled to admit in the forthcoming foreign affairs debate in the Chamber that he was ignorant of their nature which would cause 'a storm of indignation'. Phipps, who reported that Delbos appeared to be under considerable strain, urged Halifax to provide them to him⁽¹⁵²⁾ and, in a telephoned message to the F.O. the 25th, he again stressed the importance of taking the French Government fully into their confidence. Remembering the resentment of the moderate French Left caused by the rumours of British interference during Chautemps's resignation, he was concerned that

The French Government are unlikely to last much longer and when they go I feel it is essential that their going should not be attributed to the slightest weakening of Anglo-French solidarity. It must be remembered that the axis of French politics has for many years been based on and is now based on the Left The approval of M.Flandin would therefore be small compensation for creating distrust in moderate French circles.(153)

Strang was unsympathetic and minuted that it was 'a familiar gamble of French foreign ministers to tell us that unless we do something or other, the French Government would fall'. He thought that any new French Government could be formed on a wider political basis and that

If, as a result of the change we were to see M.Chautemps at the Quai d'Orsay, the change would be all to the good. M.Chautemps is much more in sympathy with, and has a greater understanding of, British policy than M.Delbos.(154)

152) FO.371/22404 (R1784/23/22). Phipps to Halifax, 24 February 1938.

153) FO.371/21590 (C1300/13/17). Phipps telephoned tel., 25 February 1938. Flandin, who had been frightened by his visit to Germany in December 1937, had emerged as an arch advocate of the appeasement of Germany & of Italy. His views were regarded with grave suspicion by both the French Left and the F.O. See chapter 6.

154) Ibid. Minute by Strang, 25 February 1938.

Strang's prognosis proved incorrect - Delbos would be replaced by Paul-Boncour whose appointment as Foreign Minister was regarded by the Embassy and by the F.O. as a complete disaster and whose strident anti-fascist views were anathema to them.

Despite Phipps's entreaties, Halifax informed him that he did not want Perth's instructions to be divulged but that they would keep the French Government informed of 'all major questions' concerning common interests.⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ Delbos, who dined with Phipps on 4 March, was 'still greatly perturbed over Austria and told him that

once Hitler had seized Austria he will undoubtedly proceed to attack Czechoslovakia, and in that case France will faithfully and unhesitatingly carry out her engagements towards the latter. This means war, in which France will be fighting for her existence, and Gt. Britain will not be able to stand aside.⁽¹⁵⁶⁾

After Perth's instructions had been partially revealed to Corbin, the French Government made a series of requests via Phipps including eventual participation in the conversations.⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ On 10 March, and following Perth's advice closely,⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ Halifax instructed Phipps to inform Delbos that 'there can be no question of "conversations à trois", and that the French Government could 'consider the possibility of bilateral conversations whenever proposals are made affecting French interests'.⁽¹⁵⁹⁾ This situation never arose. Early that morning (the day after the

155) FO.371/22404 (R1784/23/22). Halifax to Phipps, 25 February 1938.

156) FO.371/22313 (R2097/137/3). Phipps to Halifax, 4 March 1938.

157) FO.371/22405 (R2117/23/22). Phipps to Halifax, 5 March 1938.

158) Ibid. (R2188/23/22). Perth (Rome) to Halifax, 7 March 1938. Perth was 'greatly disturbed' by the French requests and feared a 'blank refusal' from the Italians.

159) Ibid. (R2188/23/22). Halifax to Phipps, 10 March 1938.

Austrian plebiscite), Chautemps resigned and France was still without a government on 13 March when Hitler announced the annexation of Austria.

CHAPTER 6

THE MAY CRISIS AND ITS AFTERMATH (11 March - 31 August 1938)

I. Blum's Second Ministry (13 March - 8 April 1938)

A) The Internal Situation

Blum's second administration, formed on 13 March, was greeted with dismay both by Phipps and by the Foreign Office.⁽¹⁾ Paul-Boncour, who had replaced Delbos as Foreign Minister,⁽²⁾ was regarded as excessively anti-fascist (especially in the context of the Spanish civil war) and over zealously pro-League. Barclay minuted that his appointment 'seems particularly deplorable' and that Blum, who had also retained the Finance Ministry, was 'notoriously incapable of comprehending finance and that a further fall in the franc could be expected'. Strang agreed that Paul-Boncour was 'not a happy choice' while Sargent was even more vociferous:

This is the most deplorable Ministry that could possibly be imagined in present circumstances. A typical Front Populaire administration, composed of little men in the wrong places. The appointment of Paul-Boncour to the Quai d'Orsay is particularly bad. ('Hopeless' - A.C.). We can only hope that they will fall very soon: indeed, the best thing of all would be for the Chamber to refuse to give them a vote of confidence... but that, I am afraid, is too much to hope for. I am not at all sure that the moment may not be coming when we will have to convey tactfully to the French that if they expect us to enter into closer co-operation with them in order to deal with the international crisis, we in turn expect to be able to deal with an administration which really represents the true strength of France and not merely ephemeral combinations of parliamentary groups -

1) The exceptions to this universal dismay were Daladier & La Chambre's reappointments at Defence and Air respectively.

2) FO.371/21598 (C1728/55/17). Phipps tel., 13 March 1938. According to Duroselle, Delbos was 'complètement découragé' by the political situation and did not wish to participate in Blum's new cabinet because of its fragility; Blum therefore offered the Quai d'Orsay to Paul-Boncour. J.-B. Duroselle, La Décadence 1932-1939, Paris 1979, p.329.

an administration, in fact of 'concentration nationale' which will give us satisfactory guarantees of authority and durability.(3)

Cadogan commented, 'that really is an element with which we must reckon... until France can pull together under a strong Government, she is really rather a broken reed'.⁽⁴⁾

Phipps himself regarded Paul Boncour's appointment as detrimental to Franco-Italian relations since the latter had described Mussolini, at the onset of his power, as 'ce César de Carnival' and 'this is not been forgotten either in France or in Italy',⁽⁵⁾ and he commented acidly that

The general sentiment, in fact, is one of surprise and even disgust that France should have been unable to produce anything more impressive in her hour of need. The new Cabinet is far from receiving a good press this morning, and generally regarded as being one of transition.

That M.Blum himself should have taken one of the financial Ministries is regarded as surprising, since he does not claim to be a financial expert... In any case the Cabinet is not expected to last and it is thought that it will soon give way to one of national union... The appointment of Paul-Boncour as MFA is in many quarters considered to be a "gaffe" and to be a gesture of defiance to Mussolini .(6)

The Paris markets were very weak on 14 March and the franc slumped in value against sterling.⁽⁷⁾ Phipps, who had dined with François de Wendel, the senator and President of the Comité des Forges, and Louis Marin, the right wing deputy for Nancy, reported that they were both extremely pessimistic about the

3) Ibid, Minutes by Barclay, Strang & Sargent.

4) Ibid Minute by Cadogan, 16 March 1938.

5) FO.371/21599 (C1751/55/17). Phipps tel., 13 March 1938.

6) Ibid. (C1748/55/17). Phipps tel., 14 March 1938. Phipps confirmed that Blum had originally wanted a government 'à l'image Rassemblement Populaire' including the Communists which alarmed the Radical Socialist and 'he fell back on (the) concept of a narrower basis 'à la image du Front Populaire'. Ibid. (C1731/55/17), 13 March 1938.

7) FO.371/21599 (C1994/55/17). Phipps tel., 22 March 1938.

political situation although he carefully added that 'they are both, however, too far to the right to judge dispassionately'.⁽⁸⁾ Barclay minuted that it was clear that the new French Government could not last long and that 'it would perhaps be no great misfortune if they were defeated in the Chamber tomorrow'.⁽⁹⁾

In the event, on 17th March Blum received the vote of confidence in the Chamber which the F.O. had hoped he would be refused,⁽¹⁰⁾ and Phipps reported that his administration 'continued to be regarded on all hands as an ephemeral and, in the circumstances, even somewhat embarrassing phantom'.⁽¹¹⁾ Blum had made a further appeal to the minority groups for national union which floundered on the opposition of Flandin (of the *Républicaine de Gauche*)⁽¹²⁾ and, on 24 March, the Socialist Populaire warned that 'certain elements of the Right' were attempting to form an anti-socialist Government of Public Safety and it warned 'the ex-servicemen' not to allow themselves to be exploited.⁽¹³⁾

8) Ibid. (C1748/55/17). Phipps tel., 14 March 1938. However, François de Wendel & Marin had assured Phipps that 'the Communist danger was now practically negligible in France', most French workers took 'a much more realistic view' of recent events in Russia, and that large scale strikes were 'no longer to be feared'. Ironically, unlike the supposedly 'liberal' Chautemps, the right wing Marin was staunchly opposed to the armistice in 1940. Maj.-Gen. Sir Edward Spears, Assignment to Catastrophe, London 1956, pp. 528, 531, 549, 562 & 570.

9) Ibid. Minute by Barclay, 16 March 1938.

10) FO.371/21599 (C1830/55/17). Phipps tel., 17 March 1938 & minute by Barclay.

11) Ibid. (C1870/55/17). Phipps tel., 18 March 1938. Mendl's 'chief lobby correspondent' wrote that the new Government would be forced to resign 'before the end of the month' particularly because of the financial situation. PHPP.2/21 Mendl (Newsletter) to Phipps, 17 March 1938.

12) FO.371/21599 (C1868/55/17). (Phipps tel., 18 March 1938.

13) Ibid. (C2036/55/17). Phipps tel., 24 March 1938. This was obviously a reference to the P.S.F. (formerly the Croix de Feu) which remained a formidable organisation.

Phipps's concern with the image of weakness which the French were projecting was reinforced by his conversation with Ward Price, the journalist, who told him on 26 March that he had interviewed Goering who

had urged (like he did to me in my Berlin days) that Great Britain was now at the parting of the ways and should enter closer collaboration with Germany in which case the world would be at their feet. When Mr Ward Price mentioned France the Marshal contemptuously remarked that she counted for exactly nothing and no longer existed as a Great Power.(14)

Herriot appeared 'excessively complacent' about the internal situation, and Phipps therefore informed him of Goering's derogatory remarks concerning France and urged on him 'the necessity for a strong French Government' broadly based and stable which would 'confound the foreign critics and reassure the foreign friends' of France. Herriot replied that he himself would be unable to form a 'national Union Government' but that he would 'recommend a certain person' whom Phipps suspected was Reynaud and he

spoke rather slightly of Chautemps, whom he described as an eel. That may well be, but I am partial to him for his wriggings were, at any rate so far as foreign policy was concerned, in the right direction.(15)

Barclay commented acidly that in view of Herriot's opinions on foreign policy (he was an ardent supporter of a military alliance with Russia and advocated intervention in Spain), 'it is perhaps just as well that he would not consider accepting office at the present moment'. Strang minuted that he wished he

could see a ray of hope for the formation of a stable government: but with the Chamber in its present composition and with the lack of goodwill between employers and employed to collaborate in the national interest, it is difficult to believe that a government of national union is possible. M.Daladier has his own ideas about what to do next, and he would propose to use the dissolution. (The

14) Ibid. (C2142/55/17). Phipps tel., 26 March 1938.

15) FO.371/21599 (C2142/55/17). Phipps tel., 26 March 1938.

consent of the Senate is required for a dissolution). It is pretty clear that some drastic course of this kind is what is really required.⁽¹⁶⁾

Flandin was extremely active during this period, and the Embassy's unflattering description of him has been quoted earlier.⁽¹⁷⁾ His private visit to Berlin in December 1937 was regarded with suspicion by the F.O.;⁽¹⁸⁾ Vansittart had commented succinctly that 'he has come back frightened'⁽¹⁹⁾ and, on his return, he had become the arch exponent of the appeasement of Nazi Germany.⁽²⁰⁾ Phipps, who equally distrusted him, continued to repeat his views - necessarily at this stage, but at excessive length, and to the exclusion of a wider range of views, towards the Munich crisis.

On 27 March, in a conversation at the Embassy with Flandin and Churchill (whom Halifax had instructed Phipps to keep an eye on while in Paris),⁽²¹⁾ the former stated that he did not believe in 'the likelihood of a Government of National Union or in its efficacy if it were formed'. Flandin's suggested remedy was:

briefly, for a Government of Socialist-Radicals and Centre, after the break-up of the Front Populaire, to obtain parliamentary assent (he admits by a majority of only about 20 votes) for government by decree for a certain specified time, perhaps the next general elections in May 1940. He admitted that a General Strike might well

16) FO.371/21599 (C2142/55/17). Minute by Strang, 28 March 1938.

17) FO.432/4. Pt.IX, no.4 Personalities Report, 6 Jan. 1938. See Chapter 3.

18) DBFP, 2, 19, no.388 Henderson (Berlin) to Eden, 14 December 1937. Minutes by Strang & Eden, 22 & 23 December 1937.

19) *Ibid.* no.478. Minute by Vansittart.

20) Alexander Werth, The Twilight of France: 1933-1940, London 1942, p.154. During a foreign affairs debate in the Chamber in February 1938, the Left and especially the Communists, 'rose to their feet and greeted (Flandin) with the Nazi salute, shouting "Heil Hitler!" "Heil Flandin!" and "A Berlin!" and "Seyss-Inquart!"'. *Ibid.*, p.160.

21) See p.151.

be declared as a result, but affected to be hopeful of being able easily to crush it.(22)

Churchill warned Flandin that, 'such a procedure would alienate all Left sympathies in Britain' but, according to Phipps, the latter 'did not consider that a dissolution would be preferable and added that a general strike would be quite likely to break out during the electoral campaign'.(23)

Daladier confided to Phipps on 7 April that he had warned Blum that if the strikes did not end immediately, he would resign as the present situation was 'a national danger'. Phipps accurately prophesied that, 'the days of the Popular Front now seem to be numbered' since, in this eventuality, Daladier could govern 'with the support of the Socialist Radicals and the Centre against the Socialists and the Communists'.(24) In a virtual rerun of the events of 20 June 1937, the full powers which the Chamber had voted to Blum on 1 April 1938 were, again at Caillaux's instigation, overwhelmingly rejected by the Senate on 7 April. As Dubief said, 'le temps était loin où l'euphorie ouvrière pouvait mobiliser plusieurs centaines de milliers de personnes dans les rues de Paris',⁽²⁵⁾ and the transition to Daladier's ministry proceeded reasonably smoothly on 12 April.

B) Paul-Boncour and Foreign Affairs

The initial French reaction to the Anschluss^v was to attempt to involve Britain in a joint protest to Berlin and, more importantly, in their obligations to

22) FO.371/21599 (C2187/55/17). Phipps tel., 27 March 1938.

23) Ibid. Considering Churchill's rôle during the General Strike of 1926, there were elements of irony in his concern for 'Left sympathies in Britain'.

24) FO.371/21599 (C2660/55/17). Phipps tel., 7 April 1938.

25) Henri Dubief, Le déclin de la IIIe République 1929-1938, Paris 1976, pp.216-7.

Czechoslovakia which was perceived as being Hitler's next target. The British Government, for its part, evinced a growing determination to avoid becoming involved in France's East European commitments. Delbos had reaffirmed the French commitment to Czechoslovakia on 12 March and had urged HMG 'to consent to a warning, preferably a joint warning' to Germany.⁽²⁶⁾ However, as Duroselle remarked, the British Government preferred 'les démarches unilatérales' and, in the event, it was a parallel rather than a concerted démarche.⁽²⁷⁾

Paul-Boncour, who had succeeded Delbos on 14 March, told Phipps on the 15th that HMG should declare publicly that, if Germany attacked Czechoslovakia and France went to the latter's assistance, Great Britain would stand by France. Phipps gave him his personal opinion (with which the F.O. agreed) that, in view of the French and Russian alliances with Czechoslovakia, German 'absorption' could materialize through 'terribly severe economic pressure forcing the Czechoslovakians themselves to ask for some Customs Union with Germany', and he concluded that

In any case, again speaking personally, I thought the French should not try to press HMG unduly to make a declaration that they could not make in advance. Controversy on the subject might arise in Great Britain and this would be unfortunate, and would only give satisfaction to the Germans. I do not pretend to have convinced Paul-Boncour.⁽²⁸⁾

The Embassy was advised that, continuing the French pressure on the British Government, Corbin had asked Halifax on the 15th why Chamberlain had not been

26) FO.371/22337 (R2453/162/12). Phipps tel., 12 March 1938.

27) Duroselle, op.cit., pp.327 & 328.

28) FO.371/22337 (R2674/162/12). Phipps tel., 15 March 1938, and minutes by M.J.Curwell, A.M. Noble & C.N.Stanley.

'more explicit about Czechoslovakia in the event of German aggression'.⁽²⁹⁾

Phipps, in turn, had reported that Chamberlain's speech had led to 'some underlining disappointment' amongst the French.⁽³⁰⁾

In fact, the French image of British prevarication masked the most intense internal discussions in London on the Sudeten problem. This had begun almost from the outset of the Anschluss which had been privately greeted with relief in some Foreign Office circles.⁽³¹⁾ The Chiefs of Staff circularized a pessimistic survey of the military implications of German aggression against Czechoslovakia, concluding that Britain could do nothing to save her from defeat or occupation and that, 'an attempt to do so must involve war with Germany, and if that took place Italy and Japan would certainly join in'.⁽³²⁾ Furthermore, their report gave a 'deplorable account' of the French air force and the French aircraft industry.⁽³³⁾

29) Ibid. (R2672/162/12). Halifax to Phipps, 15 March 1938. Corbin had also pressed Sargent on 14 March, *ibid* (R2610/162/12) minute by Sargent, 14 March 1938; curiously no trace of this meeting has been preserved in the French archives, see *DDF*, 2e, VIII, editor's note (1) to doc.441.

30) Ibid. (R2650/162/12). Phipps tel., 15 March 1938. Mendl had reported to Phipps that Chamberlain's speech 'will not satisfy those Frenchmen who had hoped for a more definite decision on Czechoslovakia'. PHPP.2/21, Mendl (newsletter) to Phipps, 15 March 1938. Following Mendl's information, Phipps reported to the F.O. that Pertinax had interpreted Chamberlain's speech as a warning to Germany 'although it lagged behind the magnificent speech of Winston Churchill' but it showed that HMG 'were moving in the right direction'. FO.371/22337 (C2649/162/12) Phipps tel., 15 March 1938.

31) For a description of 'the enormous flurry of activity in policy-making sectors of the British Government in the last half of March', see Williamson Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938-1939*, Princeton 1984, p.157.

32) CAB.53/37. C.O.S.698 (Revise) of 28 March 1938. Commenting on the Military Attaché's conversation with General Gamelin, Roberts minuted that 'the French Generals seem to take it for granted that Italy will fight with Germany in a European war'. FO 371/21674 (C2018/132/185) Phipps tel., 19 March 1938.

33) FO.371/21713 (C2040/1941/18). Cabinet Conclusions 15(38) 22 March 1938. Their report is in *ibid* (C2038/1941/18). Foreign Policy Committee FP(36) 57th meeting: Military implications of German aggression against Czechoslovakia, 21 March 1938. Report by Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee, C.I.D.

Anxiety concerning France's internal weakness, her commitments to Czechoslovakia (which could drag Britain into war) and the composition (and policy) of Blum's Government extended, therefore, to the highest levels of the British decision making process. Chamberlain pointed out, during the Foreign policy Committee's discussion on 18 March that

the French had always relied on the argument that whatever might be the position under the Locarno Treaty, we in fact could not afford to see France destroyed and we must therefore come to her aid if she was attacked by Germany.(34)

Chamberlain considered that it was hopeless to give 'any effective help' to Czechoslovakia, British armaments were in 'no position' to engage Germany in a war and 'it would be dangerous for us to do so'. He concluded with a gloomy prognosis of the French situation based partly on his interpretation of the Paris Embassy's reports:

No doubt France's army was good and would fulfil expectations but in other respects e.g. finance, air, the domestic political situation, France was at present in a hopeless position. Her relations with foreign countries, Germany, Italy & Nationalist Spain were bad, while her influence in Eastern Europe was steadily declining. In these circumstances he would have thought that the policy of France would have been directed to giving us whole hearted support in an attempt to find a peaceful solution to avoid any risk of an outbreak of war.(35)

Despite the potentially dangerous Czech situation, Paul-Boncour's attitude towards Spain was regarded as being of more immediate concern. On 16 March, he had summoned Phipps to inform him that Spanish Government forces were being overwhelmed by the massive Italian and German intervention. The Spanish ministers wanted an armistice; Paul Boncour thought that if mediation took place, it should be attempted by Britain, and he stated that

34) CAB.27/623. Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy, F.P.26 Meet. 18 March 1938.

35) CAB.27/623. Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy, F.P. 26 Meet. 18 March 1938.

(The) French Committee of National Defence was meeting this afternoon to consider the whole Spanish question, with its grave implications for French security. If Franco's forces broke through towards the north on Aragon front, they would be quite close to French frontier, and question would soon arise as to whether French should not intervene actively with men & material on Government side in order to counterbalance the more and more massive Italian & German intervention in favour of Franco.

Phipps urged him not to make any hasty decision,⁽³⁶⁾ and his telegram (which included Paul-Boncour's erroneous statement that the Germans were sending 30,000 regular troops to Spain) was discussed at the Cabinet meeting of 16 March where it was concluded that 'French intervention would make war inevitable'.⁽³⁷⁾

Almost simultaneously, Phipps warned the F.O. that there were 'persistent rumours' that Blum was finding it increasingly difficult to 'withstand (the) pressure of extremists' to intervene in Spain, and that the French were 'already closing their eyes more than before to the passage of arms and ammunition to Spain'.⁽³⁸⁾ He was instructed to inform the French Government immediately that HMG were 'gravely

36) FO.371/22639 (W3363/86/41), Phipps tel., 15 March 1938 (6.35pm). The F O. advised Phipps that he should discourage the idea of British involvement in mediation. Ibid. FO. to Phipps, 25 March 1938. Meetings of the Comité permanent de la Défense Nationale (like its predecessor the Haut Comité militaire) were 'curiously spasmodic... it had only 13 meetings in 3 years (1936-39)... in the crisis year 1938 it met only twice'. Anthony Adamthwaite, 'France's Government Machine in the Approach to the Second World War', in France & Germany in an Age of Crisis 1900-1960: Studies in Memory of Charles Bloch, ed. by H. Shamir, Leiden 1990, p.207. Paul -Boncour told Phipps that it had originally been summoned only in order to discuss Czechoslovakia. FO.371/22337/(R2674/162/12) Phipps tel., 15 March 1938.

37) FO.371/22639. (W3539/83/41). Cabinet Conclusions 14(38)3. 16 March 1938.

38) FO.371/22639. (W3423/83/41). Phipps tel., 16 March 1938. (7.25pm). On 16 March, Phipps had urged Sir Walter Citrine and two other members of the International T.U.C. 'not to be encouraged by the French to violate the non-intervention agreement'. He told them that non-intervention was 'perhaps a misnomer and that it should be called more or less partial and limited intervention which had been practised by all except us' and that it was 'better than open & visible intervention which must end in general war', Ibid. (W3422/83/41). Phipps tel., 16 March 1938 (7.30pm).

concerned at the rumours' and to ascertain their response to 'the recent events in Spain'.⁽³⁹⁾

Phipps, who had been dining with General Gamelin when the F.O.'s telegram arrived, immediately went to see Paul-Boncour at his private residence. He reported that his interview with the latter was 'most unsatisfactory' and that it had 'left a bad impression' on him. He had spoken to him

very strongly indeed as to the folly of abandoning non-intervention at this stage, and said that HMG absolutely relied on (the) French Government not do so. He repeated ad nauseam the arguments reported in my tel. no.83. I pointed out that there was no confirmation from any source of 30,000 Germans supposed to be on their way to Spain. He replied that he had every reason to believe the report true, and (the) French Government could not tolerate any longer presence of Germans & Italians in Spain. They must be got out at once and he wished to know what plan HMG had to deal with situation. I urged that time should be given for our conversations in Rome to bear fruit, but M.Boncour would not agree to this.

Herriot, who had been waiting in another room, had suggested to Paul-Boncour that the British and French ministers should meet over the week-end to discuss Spain and Czechoslovakia. Phipps advised the F.O., that he would 'frankly deprecate any step calculated to prolong the life of the present Ministry and particularly that of M.Boncour'.⁽⁴⁰⁾

Sargent supported 'most strongly' Phipps's view that the French Ministers should not be allowed 'to come to London during the week-end to discuss Spain and Czechoslovakia', and added that

39) Ibid. (W3379/83/41). F.O. to Phipps, 16 March 1938 (8.40pm).

40) Ibid. (W3424/83/41). Phipps tel., 16 March 1938 (1.10am). Gamelin had assured Phipps, immediately prior to his interview with Paul-Boncour, that 'there was no question of French intervention in Spain which would indeed not be tolerated by French public opinion'. Ibid. Henderson was unable to confirm the despatch of 30,000 German troops to Spain & the German Embassy in Paris issued a denial. Ibid. (W3487/W3493/83/41) FO. to Henderson (Berlin); Henderson tel & Phipps tel. 16, 17 & 19 March 1938.

M. Paul-Boncour at the Quai d'Orsay is a disaster and an invitation to him would only strengthen his position, whereas it must be our sincere wish to see him out of office at the earliest possible moment. In fact, I should go so far as to say that anything we can do to weaken the present French Government & precipitate its fall would be in the British interest.

Cadogan agreed and would also 'deprecate a conversation with Paul-Boncour' while Halifax approved Sargent's minute. Phipps was advised that the F.O. confirmed that such a meeting was 'inadvisable'.⁽⁴¹⁾

On 17 March, Phipps saw Blum and told him of HMG's 'grave anxiety' at the possibility of abandonment by the French Government of non-intervention in Spain. Blum had stated that 'two heavily mechanized Italian divisions' and 'considerable numbers' of Italian and German aeroplanes had led to the Spanish Government's defeat. In the circumstances, all that Phipps could extract from him was that

although M. Blum promised faithfully that no open & public infraction of non-intervention policy would be committed by French Government he could not undertake that no help of any kind would be sent. Such intervention as there was would be of a "hypocritical questionable nature" as he curiously put it.

Blum had admitted that there was a 'violent division of French public opinion over Spain', which enabled Phipps to emphasise that this was only 'an additional reason to follow (the) common policy hitherto pursued by our two countries with anyhow relative success'.⁽⁴²⁾

In this situation, both Phipps and the Foreign Office were convinced that any Anglo-French attempt at appeasing Mussolini would be doomed to failure

41) FO 371/22639 (W3424/83/41). Minutes by Sargent & Cadogan & F.O. to Phipps, 17 March 1938. Léger told Phipps that he should not 'take too tragically the unreasonable attitude of M. Boncour' who was new at the Ministry and 'had not yet quite grasped the situation', and that he (Léger) had succeeded in getting his view that non-intervention should continue, accepted by the French Cabinet. Ibid. (W3491/83/41). Phipps tel., 17 March 1938.

42) Ibid. (W3484/83/41). Phipps tel., 17 March 1938. (12.45pm).

while Blum's weak and anti-Italian administration remained in office. In mid March, Phipps received Sargent's carefully worded and very informal advice that they (the F.O.) would be 'very pleased' if the French Government fell and Paul-Boncour was replaced as Minister for Foreign Affairs which was not to be interpreted as an official instruction.⁽⁴³⁾ As will be seen Phipps's intervention in French internal affairs was successful and he obtained Halifax's approval. In the meantime, part of this pressure consisted in refusing to allow the French ministers to visit London on the assumption that it would only strengthen their position.⁽⁴⁴⁾

Like Paul-Boncour,⁽⁴⁵⁾ Herriot had again pressed Phipps who replied that

speaking frankly but confidentially, such a meeting seemed to me quite useless until the days of transitory French Governments were over: when a strong and durable Government appeared here they would, on the other hand, be very useful.

Barclay and Sargent minuted that Phipps had 'returned the right reply'.⁽⁴⁶⁾

Phipps provided additional justification for the F.O.'s chilly attitude towards Blum's Government. He reported on the 21st that his 'trusted friend', a French official, had told him that the Quai d'Orsay were convinced that 'if France goes to the assistance of Czechoslovakia were (the latter) attacked by Germany, Great Britain would be obliged to come in whether she liked it or not'. Phipps warned that, 'this state of mind for the Quai d'Orsay to be in with such a completely unsound and foolish Minister as M.Boncour, is clearly dangerous', and he

43) FO.800/274 (Fr/38/1), Sargent to Phipps, 17 March 1938, see p.149.

44) FO.371/21590 (C1832/13/17). Halifax to Phipps, 17 March 1938.
Ibid (C2256/13/17), 25 March 1938.

45) Ibid (C2042/13/17). Phipps tel., 24 March 1938 & minute by Barclay.

46) FO.371/21590 (C2133/13/17). Phipps tel., 26 March 1938 & minutes by Barclay & Sargent.

suggested that Blum, Corbin and the Czechoslovak Government should be warned.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Roberts minuted that

The Quai d'Orsay have for many years believed that we should be bound to support France in any major European struggle. M.Boncour might well act upon this conviction. The public statement of policy and the proposed note to the French now under consideration should be sufficient warning and perhaps the action suggested by Sir E. Phipps is not therefore necessary.⁽⁴⁸⁾

In a situation of considerable internal instability, and with what was universally regarded as a transitional French Government, it was imperative for Phipps to report the views of prominent French politicians who, in theory, could become the future French decision makers. At this stage, Phipps reported a range of views but his overt hostility towards those of Paul-Boncour, and Herriot, were fully shared by the Foreign Office.

Herriot's views on foreign affairs were, in fact, even less reassuring to the Embassy and the F.O. than those of Paul-Boncour. Herriot told Phipps on 26 March that it was 'absurd' to ignore Russia and, in reply to the latter's comment regarding the effect of 'the mass executions in the (Red) Army' on its efficiency, he appeared

genuinely shocked... and he reminded me of the wonderful efficiency of the French revolutionary armies at a time when French generals etc. were being guillotined in considerable numbers. In this connection Herriot, who would hesitate to destroy a fly, expressed keen regret that several more French generals had not been executed in 1793 and 1794.⁽⁴⁹⁾

According to Herriot, Italy was 'tied hand and foot' to Hitler and he (Herriot) despised her so much that 'any engagement she makes is valueless and that G.B.

47) FO.371/21674 (C1936/132/18). Phipps tel., 21 March 1938 'Very Confidential'.

48) Ibid. (Minutes by Roberts & Mallet, 23 & 27 March 1938.

49) FO.371/21612 (C2134/1050/17). Phipps tel., 26 March 1938.

demeans herself by talking to her as an equal'. Phipps, who would reserve his more vehement criticism of Paul-Boncour and Herriot for his semi-private letters to Halifax, commented that

his (Herriot's) hatred of Fascism in general and of Mussolini in particular is such that communication with him on the subject quickly leads into a blind alley. The French Left have adopted that attitude towards the Duce from the start. Years ago at a big dinner-party, I remember M.Painlevé shouted out that the assassination of Mussolini would cause him "savage joy".

Herriot stated that Britain and France should be 'welded together' into one great defensive machine against Hitler; non-intervention in Spain was 'profoundly immoral' (and all surplus arms and ammunition should be sent to the Government side), and that the 'fait accompli' of Manchukuo, Ethiopia and Austria should not be recognized.⁽⁵⁰⁾

Strang minuted that Herriot 'cut across our policy at almost every point' while Sargent found his views 'quite deplorable' and hoped that 'he will not be called upon to "save" France'.⁽⁵¹⁾ Sargent, Cadogan and Halifax were concerned whether Phipps had made it clear to Herriot that 'his policies would at practically every point be in direct conflict with those of HMG',⁽⁵²⁾ and Phipps confirmed that he had indeed pointed out to Herriot that HMG's policy

was directly opposed to his own but in most cases these have been superfluous as Herriot made his various points in plaintive criticism of the policy advocated and pursued by HMG. We should not take this too tragically, however, so long as the "Jelly Fish" (as Ramsay MacDonald used to call him) is not at the Quai d'Orsay. If and when

50) Ibid.

51) FO.371/21612 (C2134/1050/17) Minutes by Strang, Sargent, Cadogan & Vansittart, 28 March & 2 April 1938. Vansittart wondered whether there was 'anything dreadful or silly' about Herriot's views on Russia whose weaknesses could be 'exaggerated'.

52) Ibid. Sargent to Phipps, 6 April 1938.

he is he will have to put water into his wine. The danger spot directly the wretched Paul-Boncour took over was Spain.(53)

As a contrast to Herriot, Phipps must have found Flandin's views on foreign policy considerably more reassuring. Flandin told him that 'the great majority' of the French people were opposed to intervention in Spain but that huge quantities of arms and ammunition continued to 'pour across the frontier'. He insisted that Czechoslovakia was 'impossible to defend', it would therefore be 'folly' to attempt to try to do so, and that it would be 'very wise to enter talks with Italy'.⁽⁵⁴⁾

Some of Laval's views, which were reported without comment by Phipps on 1 April, were also congenial to the Embassy. Notwithstanding Laval's advocacy of a Committee of Public Safety under Marshal Pétain which would rule by decree with himself as Foreign Minister or Minister of the Interior (which directly anticipated the Vichy Régime founded in June 1940), he was convinced that only a renewal of the Stresa Front (which was one of Phipps's own cherished beliefs) could save the peace. Laval regarded himself as the only prominent Frenchman 'whom Mussolini trusted' and he was certain that if he were given a free hand he could 'come to terms with him'.⁽⁵⁵⁾

Two of the Embassy's despatches during the twilight of Blum's second administration illustrated the powerful influence of certain French journalists as a conduit for rumours, information or misinformation in their reports.⁽⁵⁶⁾ Because of

53) Ibid. Phipps to Sargent, 7 April 1938.

54) Ibid. (C2188/1050/17) Phipps tel., 27 March 1938.

55) F0.371/21612 (C2459/1050/17). Phipps tel., 1 April 1938. Laval became Deputy Prime Minister in Marshal Pétain's Vichy Régime from July to Dec. 1940 & from April to Aug 1944; Flandin was Vichy's Foreign Minister.

56) For the corruption of the French press, see Ch.3.

its importance and the need for speed, some of their information had, of necessity, to be conveyed to London unchecked.

a) Phipps reported that Laval had told Osusky, the Czech minister, that Ribbentrop had informed de Brinon, the French journalist, that 'if the French Government intervened in Spain, Germany would attack Czechoslovakia'. Osusky, who had immediately relayed this information to Blum, Herriot and Boncour, told Phipps that he 'deplored French attempts to induce Britain to make some declaration about Czechoslovakia'. Phipps further reported that Laval had heard this information from de Brinon himself, and was careful to state that the latter was regarded in France as 'an avowed pro-German if not actively a German agent'⁽⁵⁷⁾

b) Jules Sauerwein, another French journalist, informed Phipps that he had recently returned from Czechoslovakia and that Benes 'had no intention of stopping the persecution of the "various minorities"'. Sauerwein was going to impress upon the French Government 'the dangers inherent in the situation' and 'urged that they should be pressed by HMG to warn Benes'. Strang regarded this as 'very disturbing' while Sargent was concerned that 'we must not allow the idea to grow up that we have given a sort of unconditional pledge to France and Benes'.⁽⁵⁸⁾

57) FO.371/21713 (C2002/1941/18). Phipps tel., 23 March 1938. Fernand de Brinon, who was one of the first foreign journalists to interview Hitler in 1933, was probably a German agent. With Otto Abetz of the Dienststelle Ribbentrop, he was a founder of the Comité Franco-Allemagne in 1935. (Duroselle, op.cit., pp.207-8). He became Laval's agent in Paris in 1940 & then the official Vichy Government's delegate in (occupied) Paris. Robert Paxton, Vichy France, Old Guard & New Order 1940-44. Columbia (paperback edition) 1982, p.380.

58) FO.371/21713 (C2186/1941/18). Phipps tel., 28 March 1938 & minutes by Roberts, Strang & Sargent. For Buneau Varilla's allegation that Sauerwein had been receiving funds from Léger while working for Matin, see Phipps's personal & secret letter to Eden of 6.10.37, see p.96.

The Embassy forwarded further examples of increasing resistance in certain French circles to honouring their commitments to Czechoslovakia.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Marin and de Wendel, two of Phipps's regular sources, who had again dined with him at the Embassy, both told him that

at a luncheon party last week there was a rather painful scene between M. Caillaux and the Czech Minister. It seems that M. Caillaux shouted out angrily to M. Osusky that France was not bound and would not fight Germany on behalf of Czechoslovakia.⁽⁶⁰⁾

Caillaux's outburst was a foretaste of things to come. The Foreign Office was obviously reluctant to become involved in France's East European commitments. Increasingly, therefore, the Embassy began supplying them with what they thought they wanted to hear - that 'all that is best in France' was against war. Foremost amongst these exponents, to be quoted ad nauseum by Phipps, was Caillaux himself, Flandin and also Bonnet. The immediate problem in Anglo-French relations as they perceived it, however, was the removal of Blum's Government and especially the replacement of its foreign minister, Paul-Boncour. Additionally, as Halifax told the Cabinet on 6 April:

he had noticed a tendency in France rather to over-rate the likelihood of our rendering assistance to that country in coming to the aid of Czechoslovakia. He proposed to take the opportunity to instruct H.M. Ambassador in Paris to correct this view.⁽⁶¹⁾

59) For example, Phipps forwarded Aimé Berthod's article in Dépêche de Toulouse (regarded as a leading organ of Radical opinion) examining the validity of French obligations to Czechoslovakia. Malkin, the F.O.'s Legal Advisor, agreed with Roberts that this was unaffected by the German denunciation of Locarno and added that the important point was 'what the two parties... regard the existing situation as being'. The Embassy was advised accordingly. Ibid. (C2801/1941/18). Phipps tel., 5 April 1938 & minutes by Roberts, Mallet, Strang & Malkin; Ibid, Strang to M R. Wright (Paris), 3 May 1938.

60) FO.371/21714 (C2572/1941/18). Phipps tel., 5 April 1938. For a brief description of Marin and de Wendel, see Ch.3.

61) Ibid. (C2664/1941/18). Cabinet Conclusions 18(38), 6 April 1938.

C) **The Informal and Semi-official Aspects**

The Embassy's intervention in internal French politics during this period should not have come as a surprise to the French Embassy in London who were au courant with the pessimism in British decision making circles regarding the situation in France. Corbin had spoken of 'l'impression pénible' produced in Britain by the French inability to form a government of national unity.⁽⁶²⁾ Roger Cambon, the Chargé d'affaires, had informed Massigli that

Le fait que nous n'ayons pu constituer une union nationale a été pour eux une grande déception. Actuellement, ils se demandent ce que durera le cabinet Blum, et par quoi il sera remplacé. Notre crédit politique baisse chaque jour et dans les circonstances actuelles le risque devient vraiment trop grand... Au Foreign Office, la situation est qualifiée de tragique, pour nous et aussi pour ce pays et son empire. Avant hier, on me disait: si vous n'arrivez pas à constituer un gouvernement fort et durable, Dieu sait où nous allons tous.

In such a situation, Cambon continued, their adversaries in the Cabinet felt that it would be 'une pure folie' to be closely allied to France, and that 'nous offrons certainement le plus utile prétexte à ceux qui tergiversent et ne veulent au fond rien faire'.⁽⁶³⁾ The Foreign Office, however, in collusion with Halifax, decided to act.

Phipps's green light to intervene in French internal affairs was provided by Sargent in an informal letter on 17 March. After enclosing ('in strict confidence') a minute to one of Phipps's despatches, he continued that:

you may very properly be shocked at the suggestion that we - or rather you - should do anything which might embarrass or weaken a French Government, even if it be in the hope that it will as a result be replaced by a government more adequate to the critical situation *with* which we are all faced. But you need not - indeed you must not - take my minute, or even the Secretary of State's approval thereof,

62) DDE, 2e, VIII, no.416 Corbin à Delbos, 13 mars 1938.

63) DDE, 2e, VIII, no.481, Roger Cambon, Chargé d'affaires de France à Londres, à M.Massigli, Directeur des Affaires politiques au Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 17 mars 1938.

as representing in any way an instruction as regards this particular matter. Officially you have not seen it, or heard of it. But if the present Government falls and is speedily replaced by a gouvernement nationale with a strong, sensible, reasonable Minister of Foreign Affairs, we shall be very pleased. Voila tout.(64)

Sargent's letter was based on his minute of 17 March which had the agreement of Cadogan and the approval of Halifax, and was cited earlier.⁽⁶⁵⁾ Assent to the Embassy's intervention in internal French politics, therefore, took place at the highest levels of the British decision making process.

Phipps's informal channel to Halifax enabled him to express many of his views openly. At the latter's request, the Embassy kept an eye on prominent British visitors to Paris who were associated with opposition to Chamberlain's appeasement policy and reported their movements back to London. Phipps, who later described Lloyd George as indulging in 'mischievous pro-war propaganda' during his visit to Paris, reported the latter's interview with Blum, Paul-Boncour, Herriot and Cot, and his own efforts to impress upon Léger that he should notify 'all the French parties' that Lloyd George only represented himself.⁽⁶⁶⁾ Halifax was appreciative, he showed the reports to Chamberlain, and was 'very grateful' to Phipps for the line he took about Lloyd George's visit.⁽⁶⁷⁾

64) FO.800/274 (Fr/38/1). Sargent to Phipps, 17 March 1938.

65) FO.800/274 (Fr/38/1). Minute by Sargent, 17 March 1938.

66) FO.800/311 (H/HIV/270 & 272). Phipps to Halifax, 18 & 22 March 1938. Phipps later reported that at a large luncheon, and in Bonnet's presence, Lloyd George had 'urged the French to go to war against the dictators and assured them of full British support'. FO.371/22650 (W9551/83/41) Phipps tel., 16 July 1938.

67) Ibid (H/XIV/273). Halifax to Phipps, 25 March 1938. Phipps had ample opportunity to display his legendary wit in these private letters to Halifax. This was particularly successful at the expense of Churchill's enthusiastic but notoriously fractured spoken French.

Churchill was another important visitor to Paris. Phipps was apprehensive about his stay at the Embassy and his scheduled meetings with Herriot, Reynaud, Blum, Paul-Boncour, Flandin and Léger, and he told Cadogan that

I fervently hope that all these meetings will not unduly excite the French. In any case I shall do my best to calm them down and to convince them that Winston is not the arbiter of our destinies.⁽⁶⁸⁾

Churchill had told Herriot, Blum and Paul-Boncour that 'a solid Anglo-French bloc against Germany' was urgently needed with 'a kind of Central European and Balkan Grand Alliance joined thereto as the next step', and he advocated 'close and immediate' Anglo-French air, military and naval talks and the placing 'at our disposal' of all French ports in the Mediterranean.⁽⁶⁹⁾ Phipps commented that these suggestions 'fell in the main on willing ears' (although Herriot had apparently shown 'commendable caution'), and he had again emphasised that Churchill 'only speaks for himself and a very small section of British public opinion'.⁽⁷⁰⁾ Halifax had read Phipps's letter to the Cabinet⁽⁷¹⁾ and he told him that some members

were disposed to be a little critical of my having encouraged you, as I think I did, to show hospitality to him and generally to keep an eye on his movements. I still think it was better so, and the P.M. was on the whole of the same opinion.⁽⁷²⁾

Churchill had visited him on his return to London and Halifax thought that Phipps should warn those with whom he had come into contact ('especially perhaps Daladier and Herriot') that

the right source from which to ascertain British Government policy is the declarations of the British Government, rather than Winston's

68) PHPP.2/1. Phipps to Cadogan, 24 March 1938.

69) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/276). Phipps to Halifax, 27 March 1938.

70) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/276). Phipps to Halifax, 27 March 1938.

71) FO.371/21590 (C300/13/17). Cabinet Conclusions 17(38), 30 March 1938.

72) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/278). Halifax to Phipps, 30 March 1938.

exuberant interpretations of it. I am always a little bit anxious lest his enthusiasm should lead him, quite unwittingly, to misrepresent HMG's attitude.(73)

Reverting to the internal French situation, Phipps confided to Halifax on 30 March that he would 'breath easier next week if we are rid of that alarmingly light weight Paul Boncour', and he again drew attention to the latter's description of Mussolini as 'ce César de Carnaval'.⁽⁷⁴⁾ On 11 April, Phipps was able to report that he had intervened successfully to prevent Daladier, the Prime Minister designate, from reappointing Paul-Boncour: as Minister for Foreign Affairs:

We were nearly cursed by having Paul-Boncour again at the Quai d'Orsay. Not only the Socialists, but also Herriot wanted him to remain there. I therefore had Daladier & Reynaud informed indirectly that it would be most unfortunate if Paul-Boncour were to remain, not only because of his mad hankering after intervention in Spain, but because it seemed highly desirable for France to get on better terms with Italy, and this author of "ce César de Carnival" would be unable, even if he were not unwilling to do so.(75)

73) Ibid.

74) Ibid. (H/XIV/279). Phipps to Halifax, 30 March 1938. The Embassy's personality report described Paul-Boncour as: 'a vain & somewhat futile personality... studiously cultivates resemblance to Robespierre by wearing long white hair... he may, possibly be sea green, but it be doubted whether he is entirely incorruptible (associated with Mme Stavisky in 1934)'. FO.432/4, Pt IX, no.4, 1938. In fact, in a later discussion of German subversion, Claude Cockburn stated in The Week that the General Staff regarded the Union Socialiste Républicaine 'not as a French political party, but as a bought agent of the German Government' and that Paul-Boncour was an 'honourable exception'. FO.800/274 (Fr/39/2) Chas. Peake to Sargent, 27 July 1939. Both the Embassy & the F.O. freely levelled charges of bribery against those French politicians whom they regarded as being too pro-Soviet, e.g. Herriot, Cot & Moch.

75) FO.800/311 (X/XIV/281). Phipps to Halifax, 11 April 1938 Private & Confidential. Phipps had strongly expressed his views on intervention in Spain in a conversation with the Duchess of Atholl, who was a staunch Republican sympathiser, on 31 March 1938. While refraining from actually supporting General Franco, he told her that 'if it was her wish to make a preventive war on Hitler plus Mussolini it was now too late' and that they would not 'allow France & England to defeat them quietly in Spain without proceeding to general hostilities'. Foreshadowing his fears during the Munich crisis, Phipps added that this would presumably entail 'aerial bombardments of Paris & London'. Blum had confirmed to him that public opinion in France was extremely divided over Spain, and Phipps thought that 'a civil war would, in such a case, be quite within the bounds of probability'. FO.371/22641 (W4309/83/41) Phipps to Halifax, 1 April 1938.

Reynaud, who was apparently convinced by Phipps's argument, 'used his influence' with Daladier 'who hesitated a great deal' for political reasons and finally appointed Bonnet. Phipps, who displayed extraordinary self-confidence, told Halifax that he would have 'much preferred' Chautemps but they must 'be grateful for being spared Paul-Boncour, who was a positive danger to the peace of Europe'. He added that he was 'always most particularly careful' to avoid intervening in French internal affairs but that it had been 'his duty' to take a small risk as his messages were 'quite indirect' and could easily be disavowed. Phipps concluded by suggesting that, 'if Daladier does well and Bonnet shows himself to be sound', they could be fortified by being invited to London.⁽⁷⁶⁾

Halifax was 'most grateful' for Phipps's action, and agreed that if Paul-Boncour had remained at the Quai d'Orsay it might have been disastrous. Certainly Bonnet is not an ideal choice but I should imagine that his weaknesses are more the result of personal ambition than of misguided principles. In other words, he is far less dangerous! I agree that you are right in being most careful to avoid intervening in French politics; but I have not the slightest hesitation in warmly approving the hint you conveyed to Daladier on the subject of the late Foreign Minister.⁽⁷⁷⁾

76) FO.800/311 (X/XIV/281). Phipps to Halifax, 11 April 1938. Paul-Boncour believed that there was an orchestrated campaign against him and that Phipps was influenced by 'les bruits mensongers qui avaient été répandus et qui allaient si directement à l'encontre de la politique de son gouvernement'. He appeared to have been unaware of Phipps's involvement in his failure to be reappointed MFA which he attributed to differences with Daladier over foreign policy. Paul-Boncour's severe criticism was reserved for Mendl whose zeal, he considered, served interests 'qui n'étaient ni ceux de l'Angleterre ni les nôtres'. J.Paul-Boncour, Entre deux guerres, vol 3, Paris 1946, pp.90-91 & 100-101.

77) F.O.800/311 (H/XIV/283). Halifax to Phipps, 13 April 1938 (Personal). Additionally, Halifax was influenced by Phipps's information on 7 April (which incensed the latter) that his Dutch colleague in Paris had told him that Marshal Pétain had confirmed that the French Government ('on or about March 16') had wanted to send two French Army divisions to help the Barcelona Government. General Gamelin & other Staff officers had 'threatened to resign if this was done', and Phipps had concluded that 'the French General Staff acted as a brake on the present French Government'. FO.371/22642 (W4579/83/41), Phipps to Halifax, 7 April 1938.

Their letters crossed on 13 April. Phipps then stated categorically that an 'indirect intimation' had been conveyed to him that Daladier's position 'would be greatly fortified' if he (Halifax) and Chamberlain could pay an early visit to Paris, and that he was certain that 'we cannot do better at present than the existing Daladier-Bonnet combination'.⁽⁷⁸⁾ Phipps was notified on the 20th that the King had invited Daladier and Bonnet to stay at Windsor Castle on 28 April.⁽⁷⁹⁾ As has been seen, Phipps was now initiating as well as executing British policy towards France. The Embassy's intervention in French internal politics created a precedent, and their surveillance of prominent British visitors increased as the Czech crisis deepened.

II. Daladier, Bonnet and the May Crisis

A) The Internal Situation

The F.O. regarded Daladier's cabinet as 'a great improvement on its predecessor',⁽⁸⁰⁾ but Phipps noted cautiously that 'it remains to be seen how long virtual Parliamentary unanimity (can) endure without a real Government of National Union'.⁽⁸¹⁾ On 19 April, he described the intrigues within the French Cabinet privately to Halifax. According to Phipps, Reynaud was convinced that

78) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/282). Phipps to Halifax, 13 April 1938 ('Private').

79) PHPP.2/21. D.Hoyar Millar (F.O.) to Phipps, 20 April 1938.

80) FO.371/21599 (C2858/55/17). Phipps tel., 10 April 1938 & minute by Barclay. Its principal composition was: Daladier (President of the Council & Minister of National Defence); Chautemps (Vice President); Reynaud (Finance); Sarraut (Interior); Bonnet (Foreign Affairs); La Chambre (Air); Zay (Education); Charpentier de Ribes (Pensions); Mandel (Colonies). This Cabinet retained the same composition throughout the Munich crisis & remained virtually unchanged at the outbreak of the war.

81) FO.371/21599 (C304/55/17). Phipps tel., 14 April 1938.

the administration could not last without Socialist participation (and would therefore not take over finance); Chautemps was jealous of Daladier and wanted the Quai d'Orsay; Mandel wanted to 'tighten the Soviet connection' while Herriot, 'the arch villain of the intrigue', wanted 'a grand Ministère from Thorez to Marin'. Bonnet had told Phipps (and Chautemps had agreed) that such a ministry composed of 'diametrical opposites' would 'never be able to agree on a single point of home or foreign policy'. Phipps hoped that Daladier would return 'with some kudos' from London which would transform his transitory Government into 'a long lived one', otherwise:

Herriot is the most likely alternative and his views on foreign policy are incredibly foolish and even dangerous. He came to see me last week and spoke again in a similar strain. His candidate for the Quai d'Orsay was the ineffable Paul-Boncour, and he only finally consented to Bonnet in order to avoid the hated Chautemps! He weeps with Boncour over Red Spain: he revels in Soviet blood baths and feels convinced they will enormously increase the efficiency of the beloved Red Army. I do not believe that Daladier to be a really strong man, despite his determined aspect, but he is certainly better than the "jellyfish", Herriot.⁽⁸²⁾

Halifax regarded Phipps's private letter as sufficiently important to send a copy to the King⁽⁸³⁾ who was 'greatly interested in its contents'.⁽⁸⁴⁾

In late June the divisions in the Popular Front intensified⁽⁸⁵⁾ but it was clear to the Embassy that 'neither the Communists nor the Socialists' wanted the

82) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/284). Phipps to Halifax ('Private'), 19 April 1938. Phipps conveniently forgot to mention that Herriot was also very pro-British. Phipps himself had reported only a fortnight earlier on an incident in the Chamber when an article in Humanité attacking Chamberlain was quoted and 'Herriot was loudly applauded by the whole house when he stated that when Franco-British friendship was in question the whole Chamber was in agreement'. FO.371/21590 (C2740/13/17) Phipps tel., 7 April 1938.

83) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/286). Hoyer Millar (F.O.) to Sir Alexander Hardinge, 25 April 1938. This information was regarded as being useful to the King in connection with his forthcoming State Visit to Paris on 28 June-1 July.

84) Ibid. (H/XIV/287). Hardinge to Hoyer Millar (F.O.), 26 April 1938.

85) FO.371/21600 (C6310/55/17). Phipps tel., 24 June & minute by Barclay 27.2.38.

break-up of the Front Populaire.⁽⁸⁶⁾ Daladier needed to balance this left wing support against right wing support especially those of financial circles. As Susan Bindoff Butterworth pointed out, 'Daladier's freedom of action, initially circumscribed by the situation of April, became more constrained as the crisis mounted'.⁽⁸⁷⁾ Even without British pressure, the internal political (and financial) situation would act as a constraint on his policy towards Czechoslovakia. Phipps was, therefore, fully justified in reporting on it in such great detail to London.

B) Bonnet and Foreign Affairs

In early April, Phipps had been instructed to warn the French Government verbally that, in the event of a German attack on Czechoslovakia, the Anglo-French military situation would be unfavourable, and that

any such misconception of the military situation and of the probability of action by HMG, whether on the part of either the French or the Czechoslovak Government, would increase the danger of an already dangerous situation. Unless the French & Czechoslovak Governments can be brought to face the realities of the present position, it is to be feared that the Czechoslovak Government will not realise the necessity of making drastic concessions to the German minority.

The French and the British Governments should, therefore, 'use all their influence in Prague' to urge the Czechs to reach a settlement with the German minority by direct negotiations with Henlein.⁽⁸⁸⁾

86) FO.432/4. Part X, no.3 Campbell (Paris) to Halifax, 6 July 1938, Report on events in France in the 2nd quarter of 1938.

87) Susan Bindoff Butterworth. 'Daladier and the Munich Crisis: a Reappraisal', Journal of Contemporary History, vol 9, no.3, July 1974.

88) FO.371/21715 (C2770/1941/18). Halifax to Phipps, 11 April 1938. These instructions had been agreed by the Cabinet on 6 April and at the Foreign Policy Committee meeting on 7 April 1938 (Ibid). Strang had minuted that 'no step need be taken at Berlin for the present and that nothing could be hoped from enlisting Yugoslavia & Roumania'. (Ibid).

Bonnet's response to Phipps's démarche⁽⁸⁹⁾ was initially regarded by the F.O. as 'satisfactory' and his 'much more helpful attitude' was contrasted favourably with that of Paul-Boncour.⁽⁹⁰⁾

Despite the disturbing news from Bonnet on the 27th that François-Poncet 'and other French personages') had heard from Goering that 'Germany meant to settle the question of Czechoslovakia this Summer at the latest', and Bonnet even feared that they could 'act forcibly' in May,⁽⁹¹⁾ Phipps kept his sang froid. Reynaud told him that France would be 'absolutely bound' to go to the assistance of Czechoslovakia, and appeared relieved when Phipps told him that he

could not imagine why Germany should use force, with the attendant risk of the Russo-Czech & Franco-Czech Pacts coming into play, when she could clearly strangle Czechoslovak economy by closing Hamburg & the Elbe to her, and by other measures of economic pressure.

Curwell regarded Phipps's reply as being 'much to the point', and Sargent was amused by Reynaud's relief 'at the thought that economic strangulation of Czechoslovakia might get France out of its dilemma...'⁽⁹²⁾

The Embassy's long report on France, produced in anticipation of the French Minister's visit to London, was generally praised by the F.O. The annex on the French army was optimistic, those on the economic situation and the French

89) Phipps carried out his instructions on 13 April, Ibid (C3009/1941/18). This included his warning to Bonnet not to interpret Chamberlain's declarations 'trop large' (DDF, 2, IX, no.172 (f/note 3), 13 April 1938.

90) Ibid. (C3052/1941/18). Phipps tel., 14 April 1938 & minute by Roberts. Vansittart had expressed the hope that HMG would not allow themselves 'to drift into pressing Czechoslovakia into making unreasonable demands'. Ibid. (C3065/1941/18). F.O. minute by Vansittart, 8 April 1938.

91) FO.371/21716 (C3477/1941/18). Phipps tel., 27 April 1938.

92) FO.371/21716 (C3523/1941/18). Phipps tel., 28 April 1938 and minutes by Curwell & Sargent.

navy and air force were more gloomy . Phipps reiterated that there was a 'strong movement in Right circles against France fighting for Czechoslovakia unless assured of British support', the Radical Socialists were divided over the issue, and that it was 'less certain' than its predecessors that 'the present French Government would carry out (its) undertaking to the letter'. Barclay drew attention to Phipps's 'perceptive advice' that

The French are at present in a mood extremely receptive to advice from HMG. I consider that it would be most valuable if a tactful opportunity could be taken of impressing on M.Daladier & M.Bonnet while in London the extreme importance, if Franco-British collaboration in Europe is to carry its full weight, for France to set her financial house in order; and thereby to secure a period of continuity and stability.(93)

As anticipated by Phipps, the British took the lead during their meeting with the French ministers in London on 28 and 29 April⁽⁹⁴⁾ which did not, however, completely dispel mutual Anglo-French suspicion. The Cabinet was disturbed by Phipps's information from his 'old friend' Quinones de Léon (a deeply biased source) that 'enormous quantities of arms and munitions were pouring across the French frontier' for the Spanish Government forces, possibly preparatory to any

93) FO.371/21599 (C3388/55/17). Phipps to Halifax, 24 April 1938. (Report on France prior to visit of the French Ministers). Annex A. on the economic situation was produced by the Commercial Counsellor; those in B. on the French army, navy & air force were by the Asst. military, the naval & air force attachés respectively. Strang told Phipps that it was 'most valuable' (Ibid) Strang to Phipps, 2 May 1938 & minute by Barclay.

94) DBFP, 3, 1, no.164. Record of Anglo-French Conversation held at 10 Downing Street on April 28 & 29, 1938. Reynaud had informed Phipps that the French Cabinet had instructed Daladier & Bonnet 'to stand firm in London regarding necessity for France to honour all Treaty obligations', to which Sargent had minuted that 'they cannot carry out these instructions'. FO.371/21612 (C3509/1050/17) Phipps tel. 27 April & minute by Sargent, 29 April 1938.

agreement to close the French border.⁽⁹⁵⁾ The F.O. were also alarmed at his report of 'exaggerated interpretations' by the French press which had assumed that 'military co-operation' had committed Britain to 'the active support of France' if the latter assisted the Czechs in the event of German aggression.⁽⁹⁶⁾ However, after Phipps had told Daladier that 'it had been made clear in London that HMG could not assume any fresh military commitments',⁽⁹⁷⁾ it was 'very noticeable' that the French press abandoned some of its 'exaggerated interpretations'.⁽⁹⁸⁾

Phipps's report on the views of Patenôtre, the Minister of National Economy, also gave rise to some concern in London. Patenôtre considered that

If Czechoslovakia were attacked by Germany, France would be obliged to honour her obligations by mobilizing immediately, in the hope that England would come in, and that with the Czech army and the Russian air force, the Anglo-Franco-Russian-Czech combination will be stronger than Germany.

Strang minuted that while Patenôtre was not advocating a preventive war, 'there are many people in France (and Czechoslovakia) who think there is a good deal to be said for having a war now, rather than in the future'.⁽⁹⁹⁾

95) FO.371/21591 (C3988/13/17). Cabinet Conclusions 22(38), 4 May 1938. Quinones de León, the former ambassador of King Alphonso XIII & Franco's official representative in Paris, was Phipp's regular source for matters appertaining to alleged French breaches of the Non-Intervention Agreement. For Phipps's description of him as 'an old friend of mine', and the similarity of their views, see FO.371/22643 (W5319/W5320/83/41). Phipps tels 26 & 27 April, 1938.

96) FO.371/21591 (C3720/13/17). Phipps tel., 2 May 1938. Pertinax, Sauerwein, Nizan & d'Ormeson were amongst those French journalists who assumed that 'G.B. was now bound to support France in any action taken by the latter on behalf of Czechoslovakia'. Ibid. (C3891/13/17) minute by Strang, and Strang to Phipps, 4 May 1938.

97) Ibid. (C3720/13/17). Phipps tel., 2 May 1938.

98) Ibid. (C3891/13/17). Phipps to Strang, 5 May 1938. Halifax had instructed Phipps to again raise this issue with Daladier (ibid, Strang to Phipps, 4 May 1938).

99) FO.371/21675 (C4037/132/18). Phipps tel., 7 May 1938, and minute by Strang, 10 & 19 May 1938.

Patenôtre and two other Ministers - Reynaud (Justice) and Mandel (Colonies) continued this theme at a dinner for Stephen King-Hall in Paris. Phipps reported that all three had stated that Germany could 'at any time become a direct threat', and that time was on her side as she was 'outstripping Britain and France'. Phipps considered their views especially interesting as he regarded them as the three 'most intelligent and determined members of Daladier's cabinet' occupying 'key positions in the centre of French politics'.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ The F.O. noted that while they had expressed the same opinions as Daladier at the London conference (but 'even more outspokenly'), they were still unable to suggest how the French could offer effective support to the Czechs.⁽¹⁰¹⁾ These two despatches relating to Patenôtre marked the emergence of Phipps's obsession with a soi disant 'war party' within the French Cabinet to which he would allude with increasing bitterness at the height of the Munich crisis.

C) The May Week-end Crisis

On 20 May, there were mounting rumours of German troop concentrations in Bavaria and Saxony which were denied by the German State Secretary who claimed that they had 'emanated from Czech sources'.⁽¹⁰²⁾ The French Deuxième Bureau noted this unusual activity, adding that 'cette activité anormale vient d'être

100) Ibid. (C4416/132/18). Phipps tel., 17 May 1938.

101) FO.371/21675 (C4416/132/18). Phipps tel., 17 May 1938. Minutes by Strang & Vansittart. Meanwhile the F.O. had noted that the only reply the French gave to the question of how they would assist the Czechs was an invasion of Libya'. FO.371/21591(C4095/13/17) Phipps to Halifax, 6 May 1938 (Encl. in) Interview between Col. Beaumont-Nesbitt & Col. Petitbon, & minutes by Strang & Cadogan, 11 & 12 May 1938.

102) FO.371/21719 (C4583 & C4666/1941/18). Henderson (Berlin) tels 20 & 21 May 1938.

confirmée par l'état-major tchécoslovaque'.⁽¹⁰³⁾ Simultaneously, Phipps reported that de Brinon, who had recently returned from Germany, had informed the Embassy that Goering had told him that 'the Czech affair would be liquidated this summer amicably, if Benes saw reason, but liquidated', and that he (Brinon) had notified Daladier; Roberts noted apprehensively that 'so far the Germans have held in, despite the shooting of the two Sudeten farmers'.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾

On 21 May, Bonnet summoned Phipps to the Quai d'Orsay and informed him that he had heard that the

Czechs had mobilized two classes without consulting French beforehand. He (Bonnet) is therefore going to warn Czechoslovak Minister in Paris what serious consequences this may have and how unfortunate such hasty action is. MFA will tell M. Osusky that Czechs must on no account proceed to any further mobilization without consulting France or Great Britain. His Excellency assured me that French Government would apply all possible pressure upon Prague to reach a peaceful settlement of the Sudeten question.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾

Phipps gave Bonnet his own personal view that the Czechs had 'put themselves in the wrong' over mobilization without consultation and by the killing of the two Germans, and he hoped that Bonnet would speak 'most severely' to Osusky and even warn him that the 'Czechoslovak Government had in effect broken their treaty with the French by mobilizing two classes'. Cambon telephoned from London in his presence to advise Bonnet that instructions were being sent to Henderson:

to warn (the) German Government of (the) extreme danger of using force which would probably compel France to come to (the) help of Czechoslovakia and mean that Britain would stand by France.

103) DDF, 2e, IX, no.386. Note du 2e Bureau de l'état-major de l'armée, 20 mai 1938.

104) FO.371/21719 (C4634/1941/18). Phipps to Halifax, 21 May 1938 and minute by Roberts. Phipps added that 'Brinon, of course, is noted for his pro-German propensities but he seemed genuinely alarmed'. Henderson had also reported that the Nazi 'extremists' were pressing for 'immediate action in Czechoslovakia'. Ibid (C4665/1941/18) Henderson (Berlin), 18 May 1938.

105) DBFP, 3, 1, No.256. Phipps to Halifax, 21 May 1938.

Bonnet added that François-Poncet was 'most pessimistic' and had reported a 'very dangerous atmosphere in Berlin'.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ Phipps derived the impression that he was 'only too anxious to follow the British lead at Prague' in order to avert war but that if German aggression took place, 'it seems certain that France would aid the Czechs'; and Bonnet had, in fact, informed the press to this effect immediately before their interview.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾

Phipps was concerned, however, that Bonnet may have received the 'wrong impression' from Cambon that the warning Henderson had been instructed to give in Berlin 'went further than in fact it did'. He therefore arranged for Campbell, who had replaced Lloyd Thomas as the Embassy's Minister, to read Henderson's instructions to Massigli who promised to inform Bonnet immediately.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾

In an important statement on 22 May, Halifax told Phipps that it was imperative that the French Government 'should not be under any illusions' regarding the British attitude in the event of a breakdown in negotiations. While a warning had been made to Berlin

it might be highly dangerous if French Government were to read more into these warnings than is justified by their terms. HMG would of course always honour their pledge to come to the assistance of France if she were the victim of unprovoked aggression by Germany. In that event they would be bound to employ all the forces at their command. If, however, the French Government were to assume that HMG would at once take joint military action with them to preserve Czechoslovakia against

106) Ibid.

107) FO,371/21720 (C4693/1941/18). Phipps to Halifax, 21 May 1938, At a press conference, Bonnet had reaffirmed publicly that the 'French would observe her treaty obligations in (the) event of German aggression' although he hoped that the Sudeten problem 'could be settled amicably'. (Ibid C4694/1941/18) Phipps tel. 21 May 1938.

108) FO.21720 (C4695/1941/18). Phipps to Halifax, 22 May 1938. Lloyd Thomas had died on 22 February and was replaced by Campbell in May.

German aggression, it is only fair to warn them that our statement does not warrant any such assumption.

Halifax reiterated that Britain and France would be unable 'to prevent from

Germany from over-running Czechoslovakia'.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾

On 23 May, Phipps read Halifax's telegram clarifying the British position to Bonnet.⁽¹¹⁰⁾ The authentic voice of 'the English Governess' is missing from the account which he sent to London but is recorded in the French documents:

Sir Eric Phipps a ajouté que, parmi les mesures pour lesquelles le gouvernement français doit consulter, avant de les prendre, le gouvernement britannique, il y a la mobilisation partielle ou générale. Il a terminé en disant qu'il convenait de faire un effort considérable à Prague en vue de l'amener à une vue prudente de la situation et à lui faire comprendre la nécessité d'un règlement amiable de la question des Sudètes.⁽¹¹¹⁾

Bonnet, who appeared to be relieved that the British Government were taking the lead, promised that his Government would not take action without consulting London and agreed to 'readily put any pressure' on the Czechs which HMG thought necessary to achieve a peaceful solution. Phipps, who again revealed his hostility towards Benes, remarked sharply that 'it behoved the Czechs to be more than reasonable, for (the) alternative for them would be total annihilation'. Bonnet went further and added that

if Czechoslovakia were really unreasonable the French Government might well declare that France considered herself released from her bond. M.Bonnet remarked that all the French Government desired was not to be placed before the dreadful alternative of breaking their pledge or of beginning another world war.⁽¹¹²⁾

109) Ibid. (C4695/1941/18). Halifax to Phipps, 22 May 1938 (4.30pm). Halifax advised Phipps separately that it would be 'all the more effective' if Bonnet could advise the Czechs to countermand their military measures. Ibid. (C4692/1941/18). FO. to Phipps, 22 May 1938 (11.10pm).

110) FO.371/21721 (C4722/1941/18). Phipps to Halifax, 23 May 1938.

111) DDE, 2e, IX, no.419 Communication de l'ambassade de Grande-Bretagne au Département (Note remise par sir Eric Phipps le 22 mai à 23h.15, de la part de lord Halifax).

112) FO.371/21721 (C4722/1941/18). Phipps to Halifax, 23 May 1938.

He also concurred with Phipps's view that neither the French nor the Czech press should appear to be too triumphant about the outcome of the crisis or imply, in any way, that Hitler had been humiliated.⁽¹¹³⁾

Bonnet reassured Phipps on the 24th that he had again spoken 'with the utmost severity' to Osusky who had returned to Prague, presumably for consultations, and that Hodza and Krofta 'were moderate and reasonable but Benes less so'. This was the cue for Phipps to reveal his own personal attitude towards Benes (an by implication the Czechs):

I (Phipps) added that this did not surprise me, having during the years I spent in Vienna deplored the persistent refusal of M.Benes to help Austria. At the Hague Reparations Conference M.Benes far from helping Austria had produced a ridiculous bill against her, well knowing that she could not pay a penny for it.

Phipps again urged Bonnet to bring 'very firm and persistent' pressure to bear on Benes and not to allow him 'to wreck the now brighter chances of a peaceful settlement'.⁽¹¹⁴⁾

The May crisis cemented Phipps's friendship with Bonnet, who increasingly regarded him as a close confidant, which intensified as the latter's differences with Daladier became more apparent. This was confirmed later in the month when Bonnet told him that Daladier's 'private and secret' conversation with Welczeck was 'of a friendly nature' but he did not (or was unable to) reveal any details. He also confided to Phipps that he himself had had 'a long talk' with Welczeck in

113) Ibid. (C4761/1941/18). Phipps to Halifax, 23 May, 1938.

114) Ibid. (C4841/1941/18). Phipps to Halifax, 24 May, 1938.

which he had emphasized the Anglo-French pressure on the Czechs.⁽¹¹⁵⁾ The F.O.'s attitude was summarized by Halifax's reminder to Phipps that Bonnet had told him earlier that 'if Czechoslovakia were really unreasonable the French Government might well declare that France considered herself released from her bond', and that he (Halifax) felt that the time had now come for such a warning to be issued.⁽¹¹⁶⁾ Its urgency was emphasized by the Chiefs of Staff's review of plans for an emergency which revealed 'an alarming number of serious deficiencies to be made good' before Britain could be 'anything like ready to meet sudden aggression'.⁽¹¹⁷⁾

As is well known, the consequences of the May week-end crisis were profound. There is general agreement that no aggressive German troop movements appear to have taken place.⁽¹¹⁸⁾ Its effect was to produce, from a furious Hitler, his military directive of 30 May to 'smash Czechoslovakia at the earliest available opportunity'⁽¹¹⁹⁾ and, as D.C. Watt said, 'to bring about that opportunity

115) FO.371/21722 (C4994/1941/18). Phipps to Halifax, 26 May 1938. Daladier had spoken movingly in London about his war-time experiences in the trenches (Bonnet was also a war veteran). His 'private & secret' conversation with Welczeck as 'one serviceman to another' to avoid another conflict is summarized in Documents on German Foreign Policy. D, II, no.194 Welczeck to the German Foreign Ministry. According to Welczeck, Daladier was impressed by his references to 'a group of war mongers in Prague, backed by Russophile elements & international Jewry'. He further stated that Daladier was 'anti-semitic'. Whether Daladier was attempting to ingratiate himself with Welczeck or the latter on his masters in Berlin or whether this statement was simply factual, remains unverified.

116) FO.371/21723 (C5234/1941/18). F.O. to Phipps, 31 May 1938.

117) FO.371/21722 (C5222/1941/18). C.I.D. 1432-B (COS 733) Review of Plans for an Emergency. Minute by R.L. Speaght, 7 June 1938.

118) See, for example, Christopher Thorne, The Approach of War 1938-39, London 1967, p.63; A.J.P. Taylor, Origins of the Second World War, London (Penguin edit.) 1964, p.206; Duroselle op.cit., pp.338.

119) Documents on German Foreign Policy, D, II, no.221.

himself.⁽¹²⁰⁾ Its significance for Anglo-French relations was no less far reaching. Halifax's note of 22 May, that Britain would not intervene 'to preserve Czechoslovakia', was described by Duroselle as of an 'extrême sécheresse et d'un ton autoritaire'⁽¹²¹⁾ and it virtually forbade the French Government from taking any initiative. It could also be said to have legitimized Phipps's role as 'the English Governess' at Paris. The inter-action of these factors would produce the Munich crisis, and elevate his Paris Embassy to the zenith of its importance.

III. Towards the Munich Crisis (June - August 1938)

a) The French Commitment to Czechoslovakia

Phipps's instructions on 31 May had been to urge the French Government to exert 'the greatest possible pressure' on Benes without delay⁽¹²²⁾ and, due to Bonnet's continual evasions,⁽¹²³⁾ this remained an important activity throughout out this period. His dislike of Benes and of the Czechs was noted previously and, as a corollary, he emphasized the views of those French personalities who were opposed to fighting for Czechoslovakia. On 14 June, he reported that Caillaux had

120) D.C. Watt, 'Hitler's Visit to Rome & the May Crisis', JCH, 9, 1, Jan. 1974 p.31

121) Duroselle, op.cit., p.338.

122) FO.371/21723 (C5234/1941/18). Halifax to Phipps, 31 May 1938. Halifax had agreed to Bonnet's request that representations to Prague should be made separately as a joint démarche would 'only encourage the Germans to be more intransigent'. Ibid (C5277/1941/18) Phipps tel. 1 June and Halifax to Phipps, 2 June 1938.

123) The F.O. were dissatisfied with Bonnet's memorandum to Benes (which Phipps had provided to them on 27 June). Sargent minuted that 'as we expected M.Bonnet has wriggled out of his promise', and that he suspected that Léger and the officials of the Quai d'Orsay were 'also largely to blame, as we know that throughout they have done their utmost to protect the Czech Government from any real pressure by the French Government'. FO.371/21725 (C6378/1941/18), minute by Sargent 29 June 1938.

reiterated that 'France would never fight for Czechoslovakia' and that the French Government had acted 'very indiscreetly'.⁽¹²⁴⁾ Mistler, the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Chamber, whom the F.O. regarded as 'a reliable interpreter of French intentions', had echoed Caillaux's views.⁽¹²⁵⁾

In a discussion with Bonnet on 2 July, Phipps reported that he had agreed with François-Poncet and Henderson that

Germany is bent on the disruption of a Czechoslovakia which, allied to Russia, constitutes a perpetual menace to Germany. I added that I agreed entirely with this view. When I was in Berlin the fact that Czechoslovakia was allied to the Soviet seemed to fill the Nazis with a fury which I believed to be genuine.⁽¹²⁶⁾

Bonnet told him on the 16th that pressure would continue on Benes particularly as the latter was sounding out Russian help. Phipps, who was alarmed, replied that 'this seemed to me to indicate what a dangerous frame of mind M.Benes was in and how desirable it was to speak plainly to him, and M.Bonnet agreed'.⁽¹²⁷⁾ Strangely, it was noted that Phipps had been 'very wise' to have taken the opportunity of

124) FO.371/21724 (C5805/1941/18). Phipps to Halifax, 14 June 1938.

125) Ibid. (C5806/1941/18). Phipps to Halifax, 14 June 1938. Mistler was anti-war in 1939, D. Cameron Watt, How War Began, London 1989, pp. 545 & 584.

126) FO.371/21726 (C6624/1941/18). Phipps to Sargent, 2 July 1938. The italics are Phipps's.

127) FO.371/21728 (C7155/1941/18). Phipps tel., 16 July 1938. Phipps' was on leave in England from 4-16 July where he saw Chamberlain on at least one occasion when, together with other guests, he attended a lunch at 10 Downing Street on 8 July. Neville Chamberlain Papers, Birmingham University, NC12/1/1 ('lunch lists'). Any other meetings which he may have had with Chamberlain during this period are not recorded.

'repeating the warning to Bonnet'.⁽¹²⁸⁾

At the end of August 1938, the Embassy's views were generally in accordance with those of the Foreign Office and this included Phipps's hostility towards some of the permanent officials of the Quai d'Orsay.⁽¹²⁹⁾ Only Vansittart, who would attempt to stiffen the resolve of the French Government during the Munich crisis, appears to have 'strongly deprecated' pressurizing France into dishonouring her treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia.⁽¹³⁰⁾

B) The View from the Paris Embassy

The view from the Embassy throughout the Summer of 1938 remained sanguine and was characterized by a certain complacency (which contrasted sharply with their hysterical reaction at the height of the Czech crisis), and this was also reflected in the narrowing of the base of its reporting. Five main factors underlay the Embassy's assumptions during this period:

128) FO.371/21728 (C7155/1941/18). Minute by Strang, 20 July 1938. Phipps's reiteration of the warning was effective; Bonnet specifically referred to it in his note to Lacroix on 17 July in which he stated that, in view of the talks with the Sudeten leaders, it was necessary to explain the French position clearly to the Czechs. DDE, 2 X, no.222. Note remise par Bonnet à Lacroix, Min.de France à Prague, 17 juillet 1938. On 20 July, Bonnet read out to Osusky the relevant passages from Halifax's memorandum of 22 May regarding the British attitude and reiterated to him that 'la France, comme l'Angleterre n'irait pas à la guerre' over the Sudeten question. DDE, 2, X, no.238. Note du Ministre des Affaires étrangères sur sa conversation du 20 juillet avec M.Osusky. The document contains a brief minute by Daladier that 'elle résulte des conseils des ministres et non de la décision d'un ministre'. Ibid (note 2, p.437). For Halifax's very important memorandum of 22 May 1938, see p.162.

129) Massigli had told Campbell that the 'Czech barrier' should be maintained and that 'Czechoslovakia was useful as a military base for French aircraft against Germany'. Mallet minuted that 'there was scant chance of settling the Czech question unless the Quai d'Orsay was overruled', and Sargent added that Massigli was 'quite hopeless'. FO.371/21731 (C8329/1941/18) Campbell (Paris) to Sargent 13 August & minutes by Mallet & Sargent, 22 & 27 August 1938.

130) FO.371/21734 (C9004/1941/18). F.O. minute by Vansittart, 27 August 1938.

(a) In conjunction with his instructions from London, Phipps remained confident of his ability to put pressure on the French Government to pressurize Benes into making concessions to the Sudeten Germans. (b) The deterioration in Franco-Italian relations provided a distraction from the Czech problem while, simultaneously, Phipps shared Chamberlain and Halifax's somewhat facile optimism, partly engendered by the signing of the Anglo-Italian Agreement, that Mussolini could be weaned away from Hitler. (c) Many of the Embassy's unspoken assumptions (including their right to intervene in French internal affairs) were common currency in certain influential circles in Paris. (d) The comparative stability of the French Government as compared to its predecessors. (e) Preparations for the Royal Visit to Paris in July 1938 absorbed a large amount of Phipps's time and energy and facilitated the Embassy's almost total immersion in the Paris milieu.

Phipps's assessment of Franco-Italian relations in June 1938 revealed that his attitude was realistic albeit hopeful. He reported that Daladier and Bonnet were extremely concerned about 'Italy's seeming determination to humiliate France', and that Léger had insisted that he had 'consistently advised' the French Government to show themselves as reasonable as possible to the Italians but that it was clear that 'Italy has no intention of being friendly to France, even to the France of Daladier and Bonnet as opposed to that of Blum and Boncour'. This was because:

Mussolini had got what he wanted over Ethiopia at Geneva, and therefore only wished to humiliate France and thereby separate her from Great Britain. This separation would undoubtedly take place if ever HMG put the Anglo-Italian Agreement into force while France was being "bafouée" at Rome.(131)

131) FO.800/311 (H/TV/292). Phipps to Halifax, 16 June 1938.

Earlier, Phipps had admonished Léger for being 'very negative' towards Italy. He admitted, however, that Mussolini's Genoa speech had come as a shock and was resented 'on the Right as well as the (French) Left'. Bonnet and Daladier were disturbed by 'the discourteous way' the French Government had been treated, and they wanted Perth to be instructed to pressurize the Italians into immediately resuming conversations with them in Rome.⁽¹³²⁾

Fortunately, Phipps had ignored the excessively biased pro-Italian views of Vladimir Poliakov, a somewhat shady Russian emigré journalist and one of the Embassy's regular sources, which Campbell had reported at considerable length on 8 June.⁽¹³³⁾ Poliakov considered that Russian influence was 'alarmingly strong and wide-spread' and that the French situation was 'so rotten', and its statesmen 'so inadequate', that HMG should 'discreetly intervene', (Campbell had replied that, 'as he knew, this sort of thing was not at all in our line'). Leeper had warned Phipps about Poliakov, and Vansittart had minuted that he was

really astonished that the Embassy should spend so much energy in reporting M.Poliakov (& M.Laval). The former is entirely in the Italian pocket, and has consistently stooped to every form of fabrication. He is so unreliable and biased - for good reasons - that he was barred from our missions at one time. It looks as if he still ought to be... (134)

132) FO.371/22426 (R4132, R4281, R4824, R4861, R4881 & R5293/240/22).- Phipps's tels of 21 April, 15, 16 & 17 May and 3 June 1938. Nevertheless Halifax made it clear that the Anglo-Italian Agreement could not be delayed until Franco-Italian differences were settled. Ibid (C5818/240/22) Cabinet Conclusions 29(38), 22 June 1938.

133) FO.371/21612 (C5815/1050/17). Campbell (Paris) to Cadogan, 8 June 1938.

134) FO.371/21612 (C5816/1050/17). Minute by Vansittart, 18 June 1938. The reference to Leeper's warning is in Campbell's despatch op.cit. Vansittart was also apparently convinced that Poliakov was receiving money from the Germans. The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-40, edited by J.Harvey, London 1970, p.167. For his earlier activities as an interloper, see Nicholas Rostow, Anglo-French Relations 1934-36, London 1984, pp.94-5.

More bizarre was that similar views had been expressed to Perowne that morning by Mrs James Hazell Hyde, a well-known French political hostess and the mother-in-law of M.Patenôtre, the Minister of National Economy, who told him that French foreign policy must be directed by Britain, and that the Radical Socialists needed to obtain 'funds for propaganda and organization'. They would be unable to raise the them from their own supporters and it would be necessary therefore

that England should, in the interests of the establishment of joint-Franco-British foreign policy under British direction, supply the necessary amount, which Mrs Hyde estimated at between 60 & 80 million francs. If G.B. did this the eventual Socialist Radical administration would faithfully "march" at any behest as regards foreign affairs of the Cabinet of London.

Like Campbell, Perowne had replied that the proposal involved interference in the internal affairs of another country 'which was quite unheard of, even if HMG disposed money for such a purpose, which was not the case'.⁽¹³⁵⁾

Doubtless if Vansittart had remained permanent under secretary he would have railed at the Embassy for 'reporting every ephemeral utterance at inordinate length' as he did in October 1937.⁽¹³⁶⁾ These views were, however, a further indication that the desire for British interference in French affairs was not confined to the Embassy or the F.O., but was actively encouraged by certain French

135) Ibid. (C5815/1050/17). Campbell (Paris) to Cadogan, 8 June 1938. Perowne appears to have forgotten (or have been ignorant of) the circumstances surrounding Paul-Boncour's failure to be reappointed MFA in April 1938.

136) See p.107.

personnages, and were a part of the Paris milieu.⁽¹³⁷⁾

Foremost amongst them was Bonnet who was more malleable and closer to the F.O.'s views on Italy than Daladier. Bonnet increasingly portrayed himself to Phipps as a close confidant, and regarded the latter as a conduit to the British Government for them to put pressure on Daladier to change his attitude towards Italy. Halifax's visit to Paris in connection with the Royal Visit provided an opportunity. Bonnet told Phipps on 16 June that he hoped that Halifax would impress on Herriot and his friends 'the wisdom of the French Government's policy'.⁽¹³⁸⁾ Phipps therefore suggested to Halifax 'very privately and confidentially' that he (Halifax) should

lay great stress with Daladier on the importance you attach to the Pyrenees frontier remaining closed. The fact is, Daladier is inclined to listen to the syren voices of Mandel, Reynaud & Herriot, who sing pro-Soviet and anti-dictator, particularly anti-Mussolini songs to him. Bonnet will probably have Herriot invited to the luncheon in order that you may help to convert him. Herriot, as Bonnet remarked, is sound in so far as he puts the Anglo-French Entente no.1 on the list of French requisites; but he puts the Soviet Pact too close a second, and attaches an undue importance to it.⁽¹³⁹⁾

137) The French themselves were not immune from interfering in the internal affairs of others. In Jan.1938 Phipps had been instructed to warn the Quai d'Orsay that French interference in internal Romanian affairs would 'rouse the fury of the nationalists elements' and only benefit the Iron Guard. FO.371/22451 (R204/26/37) R.Hoare (Bucharest) to Sargent, 31 Dec. 1937, and Sargent to Phipps (ibid) 7 January 1938. Ironically, Strang told Phipps that the French were contemplating appointing 'a strong man' (as ambassador) to Bucharest 'who would have instructions to bring the Romanians to heel' (Ibid). Shades of Phipps and 'the English Governess'. In Oct.1939 the French interfered in the reconstruction of the Polish Government-in-exile, see for e.g., Yves Beauvois, Les relations franco-polonaises pendant la Drôle de Guerre, Paris 1989, passim.

138) FO.371/21612 (C7408/1050/17) Phipps tel. 16 July & minute by Strang, 18 July 1938.

139) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/293). Phipps to Halifax, 23 June 1938. Halifax took Phipps's advice and, at a lunch at the Quai d'Orsay, and in the presence of Herriot & Blum, he complimented Bonnet on closing the Spanish frontier. DDF, 2, X, no.237 Conversations Halifax-Daladier- Bonnet 20 juillet 1938, p.436, note 1. It was Phipps himself, however, who, on 30 June, had successfully obtained an unenthusiastic assurance from Daladier to keep the Spanish frontier closed after he had impressed upon 'the absolutely vital importance' the British Government attached to its 'continual closure'. FO.371/22427 (R5954/240/22) Phipps tel., 30 June 1938. For Vansittart's subsequently severe criticism of Phipps on this issue, see ch.8.

This was the origin of the triangle which Cowling stated Phipps had 'created' in which 'he pressed Halifax (on Bonnet's behalf to neutralise the pressures Daladier received from Mandel, Reynaud and Herriot' and which would develop in early 1939 to include François-Poncet, the French ambassador to Rome.⁽¹⁴⁰⁾

Caillaux also 'greatly approved' Bonnet's (and the British Government's) policy towards Italy.⁽¹⁴¹⁾ As President of the Finance Commission of the Senate his views were regarded as significant which was an additionally convenient reason for Phipps to quote them continually. The latter must have been greatly relieved that Caillaux was adamant that Herriot would not become President of France in May 1939, and that the entire Senate would vote against him 'owing to his well-known and absurd subservience to Soviet influence'.⁽¹⁴²⁾ Also agreeable to the Embassy were his views on the Czechs:

Caillaux has no trust in the good sense of Benes who, he thinks, will never be reasonable until he is told that neither France nor Gt. Britain will fight to prevent a full measure of autonomy being granted to the Sudeten Germans.

Significantly, Phipps told the F.O. that he 'could only confirm everything Caillaux said about Bonnet and remark that I always found it a pleasure to work with him'. Barclay minuted that Caillaux was 'a shrewd observer' and that his comments were interesting.⁽¹⁴³⁾

140) Maurice Cowling, The Impact of Hitler, British politics & British policy 1933-1940, London 1975, p.285. Phipps did not 'create' the triangle as Cowling suggested. It emerged through a convergence of circumstances and he utilized it fully with Halifax's continual approval.

141) FO.371/21612 (C6636/1050/17). Phipps tel., 3 July 1938.

142) Ibid.

143) Ibid. Minute by Barclay.

Laval and Flandin's views on the European crisis also reinforced those of the Embassy and were reported in some detail to London. Laval alleged that Mussolini was 'furious with the Quai d'Orsay', Germany and Italy were working in unison, and that there would be a war before the Autumn. His views on the internal situation were even more pessimistic: the financial situation was 'very bad' and Daladier was 'heading for disaster'.⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ His prophecy of another 'Ministère en route' in the Autumn (providing that war had not broken out) consisting of Herriot, Paul-Boncour and Blum must have filled Phipps and the F.O. with apprehension. Flandin was also reported to have bitterly criticised successive Popular Front Governments especially their attitude towards the Spanish civil war and towards which, he maintained, 'official France was not neutral'. Phipps was presumably unaware that Oliver Harvey, Halifax's private secretary, had minuted (for his chief's benefit) that his friend, Palewski, who was Reynaud's private secretary, had telephone him from Paris to say that Flandin's speech had caused 'great resentment' in French circles'

particularly by his allegation that an order for general mobilization had been prepared during the week-end crisis over Czechoslovakia. This was a travesty of the truth and nothing of the kind had occurred. I had no doubt that although the call was described as a personal one, Reynaud intended it to be brought to your notice.⁽¹⁴⁵⁾

Even before the Munich crisis erupted, the base of the Embassy's reporting had therefore narrowed and Phipps was predominantly emphasising the views of those French personalities whom he believed to be fully in accord with Chamberlain's appeasement policies. Those whom he judged to be opposed to

144) Ibid. (C5816/1050/17). Phipps tel., 10 June 1938.

145) FO.371/21599 (C5767/55/17). Phipps tel & minute by O.Harvey, 13 June 1938.

them were neither ignored, dismissed or ridiculed. His account of Herriot's support of Republican Spain, and his alleged 'fanaticism' towards Italy, for example, could easily have been a description of his own views during the Munich crisis:

At times M.Herriot, so physically different, reminded me of Hitler: the same veiled and glassy gaze fixed exclusively upon what he wishes to see, and the same imperviousness to any argument or idea opposed to his own.⁽¹⁴⁶⁾

Despite his reported criticisms of the French Government, and the parlous financial situation,⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ Phipps was aware that Daladier's position was, in fact, sufficiently secure for the latter to mount a successful assault on the hitherto sacrosanct concept of the forty hour week,⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ one of the most important concessions obtained by Blum's Popular Front Government in 1936. Two other factors, however, also contributed to the Embassy's complacency which contrasted with their almost hysterical reaction in mid-September: a) the Royal Visit to Paris, and b) the French reaction to the German build-up,

In January 1938, Phipps had reassured Cadogan, who had expressed anxiety regarding the unstable situation in France, that he 'had no qualms about the (Royal) Visit' and that, on the contrary, 'it would be an excellent move' which would have 'a most healthy effect' on Hitler and Mussolini, 'who like to think that the streets of Paris are running in blood'.⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ Consequently Phipps, who was

146) FO.371/22427 (R5955/240/22). Phipps tel., 1 July 1938.

147) Both Daladier & Bonnet were disturbed by the French tendency to hoard gold, the subsequent gold losses and its effect on the franc. Chamberlain was unable to offer any 'material assistance' to the French. PREM.1/267 Daladier to Chamberlain, 12 August 1938; Campbell tel. 13 August; Chamberlain to Daladier, 17 August 1938.

148) FO.371/21600 (C7807/55/17). Campbell tel., 31 July 1938.

149) FO.371/21606 (C174/174/17). Phipps to Cadogan, 10 January 1938. The initiative for the State Visit appears to have come from the British side.

summoned by King George VI to London to discuss 'certain details connected with the visit',⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ regarded himself as being personally responsible for its success.⁽¹⁵¹⁾

The result was that preparations absorbed the Embassy's time and energy from May to June while their final despatches describing its outcome from the provinces which Phipps had instructed the Consular Officers to submit in detail, extended into September.⁽¹⁵²⁾ While enormously successful, and a triumphant reassertion of the Entente Cordiale,⁽¹⁵³⁾ its effect was to facilitate the Embassy's almost total absorption in the Paris milieu and to make it overestimate its ability to influence, or rather to manipulate, events in Paris. This latter aspect was reinforced, not only by

150) FO.371/21607 (C4171/174/17). Phipps tel., 11 May 1938.

151) Memories of King Alexander's assassination at Marseilles were comparatively fresh and anxieties concerning the visit were not, therefore, confined to the British side. Harvey confirmed that Phipps had spoken to Halifax about the anxiety felt by some members of the French Cabinet and 'the danger of an attack by the Gestapo'. He felt that 'it was a terrible risk and the chance of ruining Anglo-French relations for a generation might well tempt the Nazi gangsters', however, 'to call it off now would be almost as bad'. Oliver Harvey Papers, British Library. 56381 Diary III March 6, 1938 to July 1, 1938. Entry for 9 May 1938.

152) FO.371/21608 (C9481/174/17). Phipps to Halifax, 1 September 1938. Phipps had instructed the Consular Officers to remain at their posts and 'report in due course what celebrations, if any, had been organized in their districts in connection with the Royal Visit'. This was a further reflection of his anxiety & the way in which he felt personally responsible for its success.

153) The French desperately wanted it to succeed. Despite the parlous state of the economy, the Chamber unanimously approved a bill to raise a further 24 million francs in connection with the Royal Visit. FO.371/21607 (C5722/174/17) Phipps tel; 12 June 1938. Halifax told the Cabinet that it was 'a notable success' and that he had 'no doubt at all about the valuable political effect which the visit had'. FO.371/21608 C7734/174/17) Cabinet Conclusions 35(38) 27 July 1938. For an excellent account, see Richard Dubreuil, 'La visite des souverains britanniques' in La France et les Français en 1938-1939, ed. R.Rémond et J.Bourdin, Paris 1978, pp.77-94 which confirms that an examination of the French press during this period 'laisse l'impression d'un incontestable élan d'unanimité', p.81. Dubreuil omitted, however, to mention the alleged conspiracy by Catalan separatists to organize an assassination attempt on the King & Queen in Paris which was reported by General Franco's Nationalist Intelligence Service but which was not taken seriously by the Paris Embassy. FO.371/ 21607 (C6062/174/17) Thomas (Hendaye) tel. 17 June 1938.

Phipps's role during the May crisis, but also by his successful pressure on Daladier in June to keep the Spanish frontier closed.⁽¹⁵⁴⁾

Despite (or perhaps because of) French pressure on Czechoslovakia, the French reaction to the German military build up in July and August was initially characterized by complacency. General Gamelin continued to maintain the 'remarkable sang froid' which Phipps had attributed to him earlier,⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ and Roberts noted on 9 August that 'the Czechs and the French were surprisingly confident about the immediate future'.⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ By 10 August, however, the F.O. were sufficiently disturbed by the War Office's information regarding the scale of the 'German measures' to instruct the Embassy to ascertain Bonnet's views,⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ and the latter told Campbell on the 14th that he had

mentioned the question of (the) German manoeuvres to Massigli and he, like M. Bonnet said that they would enquire what the military authorities thought & knew. (He) expressed no views and showed no nervousness but remarked that people in England seemed to be taking a very black view of things.⁽¹⁵⁸⁾

Bonnet's sanguine attitude towards the German military measures appears to have rubbed off on Phipps and, again, provides a sharp contrast with the former's collapse and the latter's hysteria at the height of the crisis. By late August,

154) See f/note 139; for Vansittart's subsequently severe criticism of Phipps on this latter issue, see Ch.8.

155) Gamelin told Beaumont-Nesbitt on 2 July that the Germans were not yet ready for war as they lacked basic matériel such as petrol & oil. FO.371/21675 (C6872/132/18) Campbell, 2 July 1938 (encl. Military attaché's memo).

156) FO.371/21667 (C8066/65/18). Minute by Roberts, 9 August 1938.

157) FO.371/21667 (C8098/65/18). Col. van Cutsem (War Office) to Roberts (F.O.), 9 August 1938; *ibid.*, (C8068/65/18). F.O. to Campbell, 10 August 1938.

158) F.O.371/21668 (C8375/65/18). Campbell to Sargent, 14 August 1938; Bullitt had also noticed the 'almost uncanny calm of the French', see Ch.7.

however, the French attitude began to change.⁽¹⁵⁹⁾ Colonel Gauché told Colonel Fraser, who had replaced Beaumont-Nesbitt as the Embassy's military attaché, on 30 August that

everyone recognized that the German active army is mobilized... From the military point of view Germany is ready for war again against Czechoslovakia with a couverture on (the) western front and it rests entirely with (the) political side if it is to be averted. The German Government is still under the impression that neither France nor Britain will fight to save Czechoslovakia...

Roberts commented acidly that 'it is surprising that the French should only now be waking up to the significance of all these measures'.⁽¹⁶⁰⁾

The French decision makers, and the Embassy, would have soon 'be waking up' to the devastating impact of the Vuillemin and Lindbergh visits to Germany with its concomitant realisation of the desperate state of the French air force vis-à-vis the Luftwaffe,⁽¹⁶¹⁾ and this would be a major factor underlying Phipps's

159) On 25 August, the Deuxième Bureau stated that the additional evidence confirmed their report of the 24th that Hitler would attack Czechoslovakia on 25 September, DDF, 2, X, no.485. 2e Bureau de l'État-Major de l'Armée (Compte Rendu du renseignements, Paris 25 août 1938).

160) FO.371/21668 (C8975/65/18). Campbell encl. 30 August 1938 (Conversation between Military attaché & Col. Gauché); *ibid* minute by Roberts, 31 Aug. 1938. Col. Gauché's conclusions are elaborated in the Deuxième Bureau's report of 30 Aug. 1938. DDF, 2, X, no.506. Colonel Fraser had succeeded Col. Beaumont-Nesbitt as military attaché at Paris on 22 August 1938. Colonel (later Major-General) Beaumont-Nesbitt had been recalled by the War Office and was appointed Deputy Director, then Director, of Military Intelligence (1939-40).

161) General Vuillemin's visit to Germany was discussed at the Cabinet meeting of 30 August at which Henderson was present. It was stated that Vuillemin had been 'a good deal impressed, in an unfavourable sense' by Goering (and the Luftwaffe). Their conclusions were that 'we continue to impress on the French that they should consult us before taking any action which might involve them in war' and that they would further consider the situation as it arose. CAB.23/94 Cabinet meeting of 30 August 1938. For Vuillemin's account of his visit, see DDF, 2, X, No.429 François-Poncet (Berlin) à Bonnet, 21 août 1938 and *ibid* No.444 *Compte rendu du Général chef d'état-major de l'Armée de l'air*, 23 août 1938.

pessimistic reports during the crisis. Colonel Gauché told the military attaché on 31 August that 'we must consider the whole of the (French) army as mobilized and ready to fight'. Colonel Fraser reported that whether the French were really prepared to do so 'seems a little uncertain' and that while Gauché was certain that the German occupation of Czechoslovakia meant a European war, Mendl was convinced that 'French will not fight except in self-defence'.⁽¹⁶²⁾ Phipps's own personal views, which were reserved for his 'all that is best in France is against war' despatch of 24 September, would strike the Foreign Office with 'a sense of outrage'.⁽¹⁶³⁾

162) WO.106/5413. Colonel Fraser (Paris) to Col. van Cutsem (War Office), 31 August 1938. Fraser's reference to Sir Charles Mendl was a reminder of the important role the latter played as the Embassy's press attaché. For a description of his background, see Ch.3.

163) See Ch.7.

CHAPTER 7

THE MUNICH CRISIS - SEPTEMBER 1938 ⁽¹⁾

Phipps's reaction to the Munich crisis severely damaged his reputation at the Foreign Office from which it never completely recovered. His reports between 1 and 24 September (until Chamberlain's meeting with Hitler at Godesberg) remained, however, calm and comparatively objective, and he continued to urge the French Government: (a) to co-operate fully in intensifying Anglo-French pressure on Benes to make concessions to the Sudeten Germans, and (b) not to take any steps without consulting the British Government. Both fell well within the framework of his general instructions and he was complimented, at least twice, by Halifax for his diplomatic skills. Hardly anything in these pre-Godesberg despatches prepared the Foreign Office for the impact of his notorious 'all that is best in France is against war' telegrams of the 24th which would strike Strang and the F.O. with 'a sense of outrage'.⁽²⁾

(A) Towards Berchtesgaden (1-14 September 1938)

During the early period of the crisis, Phipps reported a range of views but, until Godesberg on the 24th, he refrained from expressing his innermost anxieties to the F.O. Bullitt, who had also noticed 'the almost uncanny calm of the French during the (German) build-up' and who was equally conscious of the weakness of the French air force, told him on the 2nd that France would 'undoubtedly fight for

1) There is a vast & growing literature on the Munich crisis and this chapter is therefore confined to those aspects which relate directly to Phipps's Paris Embassy.

2) Lord Strang, At Home and Abroad, London 1956, p.136.

Czechoslovakia because her very existence is at stake'.⁽³⁾ Phipps was aware, however, ^{of} the lengths to which Bonnet would go in order to avoid war. The latter told him that he had informed Welczeck that France would be 'quite ready to accept any solution proposed by Lord Runciman' and that if this was rejected by Benes, 'France would consider herself released from her engagements to Czechoslovakia'.⁽⁴⁾

During the crisis, Phipps increasingly allied himself with those elements in France (notably Bonnet, Flandin and Caillaux) who were 'against war at any price'. His despatch of the 2nd confirmed his growing obsession with a soi disant 'war party' in France, and it is significant that he should have attributed his source to Flandin. Phipps had told Bonnet that he had heard 'alarmist rumours indirectly from Flandin that war was inevitable and was being precipitated by Herriot, Mandel and Reynaud' and he sounded him out as to 'any possible desire for war amongst public men in France'. Bonnet assured him that Herriot's 'one bogey' was Mussolini ('and not the Germans') and that Mandel ('though not Reynaud') was bellicose but fortunately he was isolated in the Cabinet and that 'his (Mandel's) feelings were doubtless prompted by his Jewish origin'.⁽⁵⁾

Phipps's doubts concerning French intentions surfaced during his conversation with Daladier on the 8th. The latter has been positive that if Germany

3) FO.371/21734 (C9157/1941/18). Phipps tel., 2 September 1938.

4) FO.371/21734 (C9163/1941/18). Phipps tel., 2 Sept. 1938.
Welczeck reported to Berlin that Bonnet had informed him that 'the pressure being exerted on the Prague Government was much greater than was supposed' and that 'the Czechoslovak Government would be forced to accept Runciman's verdict resulting in a fulfilment of 70-90% of the Sudeten Germans' demands'. DGFP, D, Vol II, no.422 Welczeck to German Foreign Ministry, 2 September 1938.

5) FO.371/21735 (C9155/1941/18). Phipps tel., 2 September. 1938.

invaded Czechoslovakia, 'the French would march to a man' because they realised that 'this will not be for les beaux yeux of the Czechs but for their own skins' as Germany would, 'with enormously increased strength turn against France'. Daladier insisted that Gamelin had assured him that 'he would be able to undertake a series of limited offensives'. Phipps's officially expressed view was that 'French action would follow pretty soon on any German attack on Czechoslovakia'.⁽⁶⁾ Privately, however, after continual exposure to Bonnet's defeatist views, it appears that he was somewhat taken aback by Daladier's firmness; Cambon told Strang that

what Daladier told Sir Eric Phipps was that if Germany attacked Czechoslovakia, France would "mobilize and declare war"; that Phipps had appeared surprised at this statement, and that his surprise had surprised M. Daladier.⁽⁷⁾

Phipps, however, retained all of his old self-confidence at this stage, as is evident from his conversation with Bonnet on the 10th. Bonnet had asked him for a copy of the warning which had been conveyed to him on 22 May defining the British attitude in the event of German aggression upon Czechoslovakia.⁽⁸⁾ He repeated that he would accept any plan for a settlement of the Sudeten problem 'that either HMG or Lord Runciman might put forward', and Roberts minuted that

6) FO. 371/21596 (C9420/36/17). Phipps tel., 8 September 1938.

7) FO. 371/21596 (C9420/36/17). Minute by Strang, 9 September 1938. Léger had told Phipps on the 5th that Corbin had notified the Quai d'Orsay that 'several political men' in Britain including members of the Government 'thought that the French Government had reacted with insufficient vigour to the provocative military measures of the Germans'. FO.371/21596 (C9403/36/17). Phipps to Halifax, 5 September 1938.

8) Ibid (C9559/1941/18). Phipps tel., 10 September. 1938. The F.O. agreed that Phipps could provide Bonnet with a copy of Halifax's telegram of 22 May but he was instructed to say that 'you are not repeating to him the representations contained therein, but are merely at his request handing him a copy'. Ibid. F.O. to Phipps, 11 September. 1938, for the text, see p.162.

Bonnet 'could not have been more categorical'.⁽⁹⁾

Phipps informed Halifax privately that during their conversation, Bonnet had asked him not 'as the Ambassador' but 'as a friend' the question:

Supposing the Germans attacked Czechoslovakia & France mobilized, as she at once would. Supposing France then turned to Great Britain and said "We are going to march; will you march with us?" What would our answer be? Bonnet said it was tremendously important to know, and if the question were put it would be tremendously important that the answer should be immediate and quite plain, one way or another.⁽¹⁰⁾

Phipps had replied that he could not answer a hypothetical question and that he 'did not believe that HMG could either'; there were many different variations on what constituted an act of aggression and he 'could not conceive of a cut-and-dried reply that would apply to all of them'. Bonnet asked him to treat the matter as confidential and he did not want his question to be 'officially recorded'. Phipps explained to him that their situations were different as France was bound by a definite pact and Britain was not. Bonnet then reiterated that the French would accept any plan suggested by Runciman or HMG, and Phipps's impression was that

Bonnet, perhaps more than Daladier, and certainly much more than Mandel, Reynaud & Co., is desperately anxious for a possible way out of this impasse without being obliged to fight. I of course always indicate that, although Lord Runciman may produce a plan as a last card, it would be greatly preferable that (the) last card should not have to be played. The ideal solution remains one agreed upon by the Sudeten (sic) & Czechoslovakia.⁽¹¹⁾

9) Ibid (C9541/1941/18). Phipps tel 10 September. 1938 & minute by Roberts, 12 September 1938.

10) FO.371/21737 (C9740/1941/18). Phipps to Halifax, 10 September. 1938 'Private & Confidential'. Bonnet's note of his conversation with Phipps on 10 September, whom he found 'comme toujours... extrêmement compréhensif', is almost identical to Phipps's own account to Halifax, DDF, 2, XI, no.78 Note du Ministre, 10 September 1938

11) Ibid. Phipps's italics.

Phipps's letter was circularized at the Cabinet meeting on 12 September where Halifax, who told his colleagues that he had had insufficient time to consult the F.O., obtained their approval for the 'general line' of his reply.⁽¹²⁾ Halifax complimented Phipps on his 'admirable language' to Bonnet and told him that, as he had correctly stated, 'the question could not be disassociated from the circumstances in which they are posed, which are necessarily at this stage completely hypothetical', and that HMG would also be unwilling to commit the Dominions. Halifax concluded in the wording which had been agreed by the Cabinet:

So far, therefore, as I am in a position to give any answer at this stage to M. Bonnet's question, it would have to be that, while HMG would never allow the security of France to be threatened, they are unable to make precise statements of the character of their future action, or the time at which it would be taken, in circumstances that they cannot at present foresee.⁽¹³⁾

Above all, it was Phipps's controlled and confident response to the crisis on 13 September which revealed that, until Godesberg, he had kept his sang froid and still appeared to believe that the conflict could be resolved peacefully. Hitler's violent speech at Nuremberg, assuring the Sudeten Germans that they were 'neither defenceless nor deserted', had unleashed riots in the Sudetenland on the 13th.⁽¹⁴⁾ During that afternoon and evening, Phipps sent a total of eight telegrams to London in a day which culminated in Chamberlain's personal message to Hitler that he would fly immediately to Germany to meet him. These telephoned despatches,

12) CAB.23/95 Cabinet meet. of 12 September. 1938 (Cab.37(38). FO.371/21737 (C9740/1941/18). Memo by Halifax, 13 September. 1938 CP 197(38). The Cabinet also decided that they should 'neither put a break on the French nor yet apply the accelerator'; that further discussions should await Hitler's Nuremberg speech that evening, and that the Chiefs of Staff should prepare an up-to-date assessment of the (strategic) situation.

13) FO.371/21737 (C9740/1941/18). Halifax to Phipps, 12 September 1938.

14) Christopher Thorne, The Approach of War, 1938-39, London 1967, p.71

reflecting the deterioration in French morale, played an important role in precipitating Chamberlain's decision and were also an indication of the strain under which Phipps was labouring.

1) Phipps reported at 1.00am that Léger had enquired whether they had considered his suggestion regarding a Four Power Conference; Émile Roche, who was 'in close contact with Caillaux', had hinted in La République that 'this was the best way out of the impasse', and Phipps considered that public opinion was 'becoming more and more ready, in order to avoid war, to accept even the solution of a plebiscite for autonomy outside the Reich'.⁽¹⁵⁾

2) At 1.35pm he informed the F.O. that Bonnet had telephoned him, 'begging' that, in view of the grave situation in Czechoslovakia, Runciman should immediately issue a declaration stating that 'he is about to propose a plan calculated to bridge over differences between the two parties'; Bonnet told Phipps that 'the whole question of peace or war may now only be a matter of minutes instead of days'.⁽¹⁶⁾

3) At 6.15pm he further reported that Bonnet had told him confidentially that if Runciman adopted the Karlsbad programme the French Government would be ready to 'press it upon the Czechs'. Phipps added that Bonnet seemed 'completely to have lost his nerve and to be ready for any solution to avoid war'.⁽¹⁷⁾

15) FO.371/21737 (C9654/1941/18). Phipps tel. 13 September 1938 (1.00pm). 1st tel. Léger had suggested to Phipps on the 11th that a Four Power Conference should be summoned 'to discuss a general settlement'. FO.371/21736 (C9560/1941/18). Phipps tel. 11 September. 1938.

16) FO.371/21737 (C9655/1941/18). Phipps tel., 13 September. 1938 (1.25pm) 2nd Tel

17) Ibid. (C9703/1941/18). Ibid (6.15pm). 3rd Tel.

4) Phipps's despatch at 7.10pm was, perhaps, his most important of the day.⁽¹⁸⁾ Bonnet had been 'very upset' and had told him that 'peace must be preserved at any price as neither France nor Great Britain were ready for war'. Colonel Lindbergh had returned from Germany 'horrified at the over-whelming strength' of the Luftwaffe and the 'terrible weakness' of the other powers: Bonnet had predicted that British and French cities would be 'wiped out' and that retaliation would be ineffective. Phipps had found his collapse 'so sudden and extraordinary' that he was seeking an immediate interview with Daladier.

5) At 7.30pm, Phipps reported that Bonnet had repeated his proposal for a four power conference to avert war, and that this would not obviate Runciman's efforts.⁽¹⁹⁾

6) Phipps reported at 8.30pm that he had seen Daladier and that he had been careful 'not to give away M.Bonnet' during his conversation as this could have provoked a cabinet crisis. Daladier was disturbed by the crisis 'and felt that every minute was now precious'. Phipps asked him 'point blank' whether he adhered to the policy which he had enunciated on 8 September, viz. that 'if German troops cross the Czechoslovak frontier, the French will march to a man'. Daladier replied,

18) Ibid. (C9704/1941/18). Ibid. (7.10pm). 4th Tel.

19) Ibid. (C9707/1941/18). Ibid. (7.30pm). 5th Tel. Bonnet's memoirs (which are notoriously unreliable) fails to mention his role in the events of 13 Sept. His official note of his conversation with Phipps confirms his concern with Lindbergh's report but omits his hysterical description of the effects of German aerial bombing. It also adds two important items which are missing from Phipps's despatches:

a) Bonnet's alleged remark that he had been surprised by a note seemingly emanating from the F.O. giving the impression that 'l'Angleterre acceptait volontiers l'idée de la guerre à propos l'affaire tchécoslovaque' especially as he had recently been reminded of the terms of their note of 22 May, and Phipps's purported reply that HMG's position remained unchanged.
b) that speaking personally, Phipps 'ne me cacha pas qu'il y avait au Foreign Office deux tendances et que ces tendances, étaient tout à fait opposées sur la question de la paix ou de la guerre'. DDE, 2, XI, no.125 Note du Ministre, 13 Septembre 1938.

'but with evident lack of enthusiasm', that 'if (the) German used force (the) French would be obliged also'. Phipps concluded that:

(The) Daladier of today was quite a different one to the M.Daladier of September 8, and his tone & language were very different indeed. I fear (the) French have been bluffing, although I have continually pointed out to them that one cannot bluff Hitler. Rather than give in to it, which would mean actual suicide, he would in (the) last resort prefer war.(20)

7) At 8.30pm, Phipps further reported that Daladier appeared to prefer a Three Power Conference, providing Hitler agreed, but Phipps thought that this would be 'most unlikely'⁽²¹⁾ Daladier's demand, to speak to Chamberlain on the telephone, was refused by Cadogan who insisted that he 'must give a message through Phipps'.⁽²²⁾

8) Finally at 10.10pm on 13 September, Phipps read the 'very urgent message' which Daladier had dictated to him for Chamberlain's immediate attention. Daladier stated that events were out of control and that

20) FO.371/21737 (C9708/1941/18). Phipps tel., 13 Sept.1938 (8.30pm). 6th Tel.

21) Ibid. (C9709/1941/18). Ibid. (8.30pm). 7th Tel. According to Alexander Werth's colourful account, Phipps had two meetings with Daladier on 13 September: one in the afternoon & another in the evening. Werth stated that Phipps was at the Opera Comique that night, and on receiving a message from Daladier 'asking to see him at once', he 'jumped into a taxi and drove to the War Office'. On leaving he was purported to have 'dropped the enigmatic phrase: "Il faut que cette chamaillerie cesse". Alexander Werth, The Twilight of France, London 1942, pp.237-8. Phipps reported only one meeting with Daladier that day (in the evening). Given the sequence of his telegrams, and the fact that he had reported at 7.10pm that he was seeking an immediate interview with Daladier, his legendary visit to the Opera Comique in an already extremely busy day appears to be dubious, and the usually reliable Werth may have been mistaken. The most recent biographer of Daladier appears to have completely ignored the events of 13-16 September, Elisabeth du Réau, Edouard Daladier, Paris 1993, especially pp.254-258.

22) The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan 1938-45, ed. D.Dilks, London 1971, p.97. Bullitt was under the misapprehension that Daladier had telephoned Chamberlain & had proposed a conference personally to him but that 'Chamberlain whose French is not good, had difficulty in understanding and the message was finally transmitted through the British Ambassador in Paris'. FRUS, Vol I (General) 1938, Bullitt to Secretary of State, 14 Sept.1938, p.594. Bullitt must have obtained this misinformation (which he passed on to Washington) either from Phipps or from Daladier himself.

the entry of German troops into Czechoslovakia must at all costs be prevented. If not France will be faced with her obligation, viz: automatic necessity to fulfil her engagement.

Daladier suggested that Runciman should immediately make his plan public and, if possible, arrange personally for the two sides to be brought together. If this was not sufficient he suggested immediately proposing a Three Power Meeting and perhaps later, 'a more general settlement with the other additional powers'.⁽²³⁾

On 14 September, Chamberlain told the Cabinet that he had considered putting his 'Z Plan' into operation at the end of the week but that he had been overtaken by events. Amongst the three specific events which he mentioned, two had been relayed by Phipps in his despatches of the 13th:

a) Chamberlain referred to 'the remarkable communication' from Phipps describing Bonnet's collapse, and he pointed out that the latter 'seemed thoroughly cowed', convinced that French and British cities would be devastated, and that he had been frightened by Lindbergh's report. (b) He also singled out Phipps's comments that he had found Daladier 'a very different person from what he had been on 8 September', and the latter's remark that Germany had to be prevented 'at all costs' from invading Czechoslovakia because France 'would be faced with her obligations'; Chamberlain thought that Daladier's language was 'significant'. (c) The news of the Sudeten German ultimatum to the Czechs, the latter's refusal, and Henlein's announcement that negotiations had been broken off.⁽²⁴⁾

23) FO.371/21737 (C9710/1941/18). Phipps tel., 13 Sept. 1938 (10.10pm). 8th Tel. Cadogan noted that when Daladier's message arrived 'it was not quite as limp as Bonnet, but had very little backbone' Cadogan diaries (Dilks), op.cit., pp.97-98.

24) CAB.23/95. Cabinet Meeting of 14 September 1938 Cab.38(38).

With these factors in mind, the Cabinet endorsed Chamberlain's suggestion that 'Plan Z' should be put into operation immediately, and his personal message to Hitler (via Ribbentrop) was despatched to Berlin that day.⁽²⁵⁾ Cadogan's diaries provide additional confirmation that Phipps's despatches of 13 September played a vital role in the Cabinet's decision.⁽²⁶⁾

B) Towards Godesberg (14/15-23 September 1938)

Phipps had retained his sang froid after Bonnet's reported collapse and the momentous events of 13 September. This was undoubtedly facilitated by the optimism generated by Chamberlain's visit to Hitler at Berchtesgaden news reached the Embassy at 12.40am on the 14th.⁽²⁷⁾ Phipps described the atmosphere in Paris privately to Halifax on the 14th.⁽²⁸⁾ Bonnet had appeared to be 'genuinely pleased' by Halifax's negative response to his question of whether Britain would march with France, and he had even agreed to provide him with it in writing as 'ammunition to fire off at any war mongers either in or outside the (French) Cabinet' although he

25) CAB.23/95. The Cabinet recorded their 'whole hearted approval' of Chamberlain's personal initiative & endorsed Halifax's reply to Phipps's private & confidential letter of 10 Sept. For Chamberlain's message to Hitler, see DBFP, 3, 2, no.862 Halifax to Henderson, 13 Sept. 1938.

26) This was confirmed by Cadogan's diary entry for 13 Sept. His meeting with the Ministers that morning had been 'pretty inconclusive', by 7.30pm, however, telegrams were arriving from Paris 'showing that Bonnet was completely deflated' and that Daladier had demanded to speak to Chamberlain on the telephone. By 11pm, 'Bonnet's messages showed that he at least was panicking, and the situation slipping, P.M. decided on 'Plan Z'. Cadogan Diaries (ed. Dilks), op.cit., p.98.

27) Phipps was instructed to deliver Chamberlain's message to Daladier that, before deciding on the latter's proposal, he would explore the 'possibility of direct action in Berlin'. FO.371/21737 (C9708/1941/18). Halifax to Phipps, 14 Sept. 1938, 12.40am. The background to Chamberlain's decision and his more detailed instructions were sent to Phipps at 4.10pm. Ibid. (C970/1941/18).

28) FO.800/311 (H/XIV). Phipps to Halifax, 14 September 1938.

(Phipps) thought that Mandel was 'the only one of that kidney in the Cabinet'.

Phipps had always regarded Bonnet as being 'reasonable and prudent' over

Germany and Italy, and he believed that his collapse had been due to:

- 1) The realisation that the German danger is "ante portas".
- 2) Litvinov's evasions at Geneva on September 11, and
- 3) Lindbergh's hair raising report on the vastness and excellence of the German air force, and the terrible shortcomings of all others.

Guy La Chambre, the Minister of the Air who was also acutely aware of the serious deficiencies of the French air force, had been 'especially rattled' by Lindbergh's description of the poor state of the Soviet air force. As for Daladier,

Phipps warned Halifax that

The fact is Daladier always talks bigger than he acts. His enemies say he is "un taureau à cornes de limaçon", and I fear this is rather true. But as reported, whatever the texture of his horns, they were much less apparent yesterday than they were on September 8th, for instance.

Bonnet had read him 'a mysterious telegram' from Corbin to the effect that Halifax had gone further than his previous declarations and had said that:

l'Angleterre viendrait à notre secours, non pas si la France était menacée, mais si elle se trouvait engagée dans un conflit avec l'Allemagne pour avoir exécuté ses engagements avec la Tchécoslovaquie.

Phipps had been unable to determine whether Halifax had made this statement and he told the latter that he was 'always careful' to hand Bonnet copies of his despatches reporting his conversations with Corbin 'so that there should not be any misunderstanding or magnifying of your language'.

Phipps reported further on the 14th that there was no doubt that, in order to avoid war, French public opinion would welcome Sudeten autonomy 'outside the Reich, if imposed on the Czechs by the British and French Governments'.⁽²⁹⁾

29) FO.371/21737 (C9724/1941/18). Phipps tel. 14 Sept.1938 (12.00 noon).

Bonnet had gone further during their interview,⁽³⁰⁾ and had told him that 'France would accept any solution of (the) Czechoslovak question to avoid war' adding that 'we cannot sacrifice ten million men in order to prevent three and a half million Sudeten from joining the Reich' and that, in the last resort, they would agree to a plebiscite. Bonnet was also concerned by Litvinov's indication at Geneva that, in the event of aggression, the USSR would consult the League Council and 'would not act directly' in defence of Czechoslovakia and he feared that 'France could not fight, alone in the first instance, on three fronts, viz. Germany, Italy and Spain'. He was also angry with the Czechs whom, he alleged, would mobilize without consulting France and had therefore given a 'broad hint' to Benes that French obligations towards Czechoslovakia may have to be reconsidered. Bonnet concluded by informing Phipps that

we are not ready for war and must therefore make (the) most far-reaching concessions to the Sudetens and to Germany, adding that this must be done in spite of (the) Czechs and Soviets quickly, in order to forestall any aggression by Germany.⁽³¹⁾

Roberts minuted that 'the French are now ready to consider any scheme to avoid German aggression' and that they were 'searching for excuses to put the blame on the Czechs and Soviets'. Summarizing the events of 13/14 September, Mallet stated succinctly that 'French opinion has developed, or perhaps one should say

30) Ibid. (C9740/1941/18). Phipps tel. 14 Sept. 1938. (2.20pm).

31) FO.371/21737 (C9740/1941/18). Phipps tel, 14 Sept. 1938 (2.20pm). Bonnet & Phipps's views on the Czechs were close. Phipps had told Bullitt, somewhat disingenuously that morning, that 'it had become clear to the British Government that the trouble maker in the present situation was Benes' and that 'for the first time yesterday' the French Government had become 'convinced' of this. Bullitt commented that it had seemed to him for some that 'Bonnet shared this view'. Anticipating his telegram of 24 Sept., Phipps added that 'the French at the present time were ready for peace at almost any price'. FRUS, Vol I (General) 1938, p.595, Bullitt to Secretary of State, 14 Sept. 1938.

collapsed, in a very rapid manner.⁽³²⁾

Phipps reported at 10pm that Daladier had 'not looked very pleased' at the news of Chamberlain's decision to meet Hitler as he had wanted a meeting 'à trois'.⁽³³⁾ but that Bonnet, Léger, Millerand, Herriot and Reynaud had all hastened to express their appreciation to him in very warm terms. A slight note of discord was struck by Bonnet's comment that:

he (Bonnet) and other members of the French Government had been rung up yesterday on the telephone from London by well-known British Members of Parliament enquiring whether it was true that the French Government had changed their attitude in the last few days. He remarked smilingly that it was difficult enough to answer questions of French Parliamentarians without having to reply to awkward questions from foreign ones over the telephone.⁽³⁴⁾

On the 16th, Phipps told Halifax privately ⁽³⁵⁾ that Bonnet was 'perturbed' because he had heard from the Czech Legation in Paris that Masaryk had stated that Phipps had reported on the 13th that he had been told by Bonnet that 'France would not assist Czechoslovakia even if that state were attacked by Germany'. Phipps thought that Masaryk could have 'picked up in the F.O. or elsewhere something of the substance of my telegram 244 Secret of September 13',⁽³⁶⁾ and he was concerned that, if a leak had occurred, this would place him in a 'very

32) Ibid. Minutes by Roberts & Mallet.

33) Ibid. (C9796/1941/18). Phipps tel., 14 Sept. 1938 (10.00pm). Halifax had explained the background to Chamberlain's decision at 4.10pm, and had instructed Phipps to immediately inform the French Government. At 4.45pm, he further informed the Embassy that Hitler had agreed to a meeting for the following day. Ibid. (C9708/1941/18). Halifax to Phipps, 14 Sept. 1938 (two tels).

34) FO.371/21737 (C9782/1941/18). Phipps tel., 15 September 1938.

35) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/299). Phipps to Halifax, 16 Sept. 1938.

36) This telegram had reported Bonnet's statement that 'peace must be preserved at any price' and Bonnet's collapse and had been despatched at 7.10pm on 13 September 1938. See f/note 18 for reference.

awkward position' with Bonnet. The latter had exclaimed to him, with some bravado, that 'Tout de même il ne faudrait pas que les Anglais nous poussent à la guerre', which he had heatedly denied.

Bonnet had also complained to Phipps again about the 'belligerent attitude' of sections of the British press, and also Churchill and General Spears's telephone calls to Paris enquiring whether there had been a recent change in the French attitude. Phipps shared Bonnet's hostility towards those advocates of a firmer Anglo-French policy towards any potential German aggression towards Czechoslovakia, and he commented sharply to Halifax that 'our M.P.'s should realise that whatever they say by telephone of any interest probably goes to the Germans and certainly to those French who had best not hear it'. He also reminded Halifax of the difference between Daladier's 'brave words' on the 8th and his 'more cautious statement of 13th', and that Bonnet had repeated that any plan submitted by Chamberlain or Runciman would be accepted by the French Government and imposed on the Czechs. His own impressions were that

despite Bonnet's rather braver language to me today (braver) because war seems rather more remote, that I feel pretty certain that the French will by no means resort automatically to arms, even if the German forces cross the Czechoslovak frontier. They will, I believe, examine very closely the circumstances in which the "aggression" takes place, and I do not suppose we shall blame them for caution in this respect.(37)

Cadogan, Mallet and Strang all denied 'hinting at the contents' or speaking to anyone 'outside official circle' about the substance of Phipps's telegram of 13

37) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/299). Phipps to Halifax, 16 September 1938.

September.⁽³⁸⁾ While the origins of the leak remains obscure, the original source of the garbled version may well have been Vansittart.

Almost predictably, it was Vansittart, in fact, who first introduced a discordant note into the consensus at the F.O. regarding the objectivity of the Embassy's reports. He told Halifax that he was 'uneasy' and 'perhaps unfounded suspicions' had occurred to him but

It seems to me odd that all we know definitely as to the attitude of the French Government is really as to the attitude of Bonnet. We do not know much about Daladier, for we have only one telegram which seemed to show that he was possibly weakening, and as to the attitude of all the rest of the French Cabinet we know really nothing. I should have thought that before we come to any decision we ought to make more certain where the French really stand. It is conceivable that Bonnet does not really represent the whole... (39)

Vansittart was concerned that they might get the 'unenviable responsibility' of taking the lead 'before we know where France really stood', and that this would damage both Anglo-French and Anglo-American relations.⁽⁴⁰⁾ Cadogan thought that this had been 'largely answered by the invitation' to Daladier and Bonnet to come to London immediately.⁽⁴¹⁾

Phipps advised Halifax privately that it would be 'very desirable' if the French ministers could be questioned individually and separately in different rooms when they come to London. Lindbergh's report could provide a 'peg' on which to

38) Ibid. Minutes by Cadogan, Mallet & Strang.

39) Ibid. (H/XIV/301). Memorandum by Vansittart to Halifax, 17 Sept. 1938.

40) Ibid.

41) Ibid. Minute by Cadogan, 17 September 1938.

hang questions regarding the 'true state' of the French air force and he explained that

Bonnet almost collapsed when he mentioned this report to me, whereas Daladier affected hardly to have heard of it. Which spoke the truth? Or were both lying, the one from funk, and the other from over-assurance? Veracity is not, I regret to say, the strongest point of the average French politician, but there is rather a better chance of extracting the truth from him when he is not in the presence of another Frenchman. This applies with added force in the present case, for Bonnet undoubtedly has his eye on the Présidence du Conseil.(42)

On 19 September, the French Ministerial Council unanimously approved of the solution proposed in (the) agreement with the British Government'.⁽⁴³⁾ As is well known, this 'solution' consisted in putting intense pressure on Benes to accept the Anglo-French plan which would have satisfied virtually all of Hitler's Berchtesgaden demands. Phipps played an important role in this, *inter alia*, by pressing Bonnet into issuing the necessary instructions to Lacroix to support Newton's representations in Prague which began on the 19th, immediately after the London meeting.

Bonnet's information, that the Czechs had not decided whether to appeal to arbitration or to accept the Anglo-French plan, provided a striking confirmation of the way in which Phipps extended his brief and was playing a leading role in the decision making process. Bonnet had telephoned him 'in great excitement' while he was lunching with Bullitt on the 20th, and told him that if Benes appealed to

42) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/300). Phipps to Halifax, 17 Sept 1938. Ironically, in a separate despatch to the F.O. on the same day, Phipps had reported that Col. Petitbon had given the military attaché a more complete statement of General Gamelin's views on possible French action in the event of war, and that this had corresponded to the views expressed to him by Léger on 4 Sept. & Daladier on 8 Sept. FO. 371/21596 (C10082/36/17). Phipps tel. 17 Sept. 1938. For Léger and Daladier's statements, see *op.cit.*

43) FO.371/21739 (C10106/1941/18). Phipps tel., 19 Sept. 1938. For the Anglo-French conversation in London on 18 Sept., see *DBFP*, 3, 2, no.928.

arbitration the German army would 'enter Czechoslovakia tonight'.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Bonnet was instructing Lacroix to urge Benes to immediately accept the Anglo-French plan and 'begged' Phipps that Newton should make immediate démarche in Prague.⁽⁴⁵⁾

Bullitt reported that Phipps had told him that

he (Phipps) said he had replied to Bonnet that he was so sure of the position of his Government that, without consulting his Government, he would at once telephone to Praha (sic) and tell the British Minister to express the opinion to the Czechoslovak Government that if the Czechoslovak Government should appeal for arbitration German troops would enter Czechoslovakia tonight.⁽⁴⁶⁾

According to Bullitt, Phipps had added that the British and French Governments had made it 'entirely clear' to Benes that if he rejected the Anglo-French plan and German troops invaded Czechoslovakia, 'no support' would be given to the Czechs 'either by Britain or France', and that Phipps then telephoned Newton in Prague and the F.O. in London who were 'in entire accord with his views and actions'.⁽⁴⁷⁾ The Foreign Office minutes confirm that Strang telephoned the contents of Phipps's despatch to Cadogan 'at his house' and, on his instructions, saw Chamberlain who authorized his suggestion that Newton should support Lacroix in Prague. Strang then telephone Newton who told him that he had 'already acted on Paris telegram 265' and that

He (Newton) had explained to the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister that he had no instructions, but that he was certain that HMG would wish to associate himself fully and whole heartedly with what the French Minister had said. Mr Newton told me that he had added a

44) FRUS, Vol I (General) 1938. Bullitt to the Secr. of State, 20 Sept. 1938.

45) FO.371/21739 (C10187/1941/18). Phipps tel., 20 Sept. 1938 (2.15pm).

46) FRUS, op.cit., p.627.

47) *Ibid*.

warning to the Czechoslovak Government against any bargaining on their answers.⁽⁴⁸⁾

The Paris Embassy's action may have prompted Halifax into expressing his appreciation of Phipps's services by thanking him personally for his letter during the crisis which were 'most useful' to him.⁽⁴⁹⁾

Phipps's collusion with Bonnet's defeatist attitude, and his active role in discouraging the French Government from any positive action in support of Czechoslovakia, was again demonstrated on the 20th and 21st. Bonnet had told him that 'elements on the Left in Paris' were pressurising Benes to reject the Anglo-French plan. Phipps therefore suggested that Benes should be warned that unless he gave a 'straightforward acceptance', France and Britain would 'wash their hands of Czechoslovakia in the face of a German attack'.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Bonnet agreed and was emphatic that, if Benes were evasive, a joint communication along these lines should be made to him immediately.⁽⁵¹⁾ Phipps also advised Bonnet to speak severely to Osusky, and the former promised to do so immediately and also to warn the Czechoslovak Government.⁽⁵²⁾ He also warned Halifax that Churchill and Spears were in Paris, 'giving bad advice to Osusky and to certain French

48) FO.371/21739 (C10187/1941/18). Minute by Strang. 20 Sept. 1938.

49) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/302). Halifax to Phipps, 20 Sept. 1938.

50) FO.371/21739 (C10207/1941/18). Phipps tel., 20 Sept. 1938 7.45pm.

51) Ibid. (C10208/1941/18). Phipps tel., 20 Sept. 1938. 8.30pm.

52) Ibid. (C10319/1941/18). Phipps tel., 21 Sept. 1938. 5.5pm. The Czechoslovak Government replied on 21 Sept. that, 'under the pressure of urgent insistence culminating in (the) British communications of 21 September', they 'sadly accept(ed) the French & British proposals'. Ibid. (C10320/1941/18). Newton (Prague), 21 Sept. 1938.

politicians'⁽⁵³⁾(meaning that they should resist the German demands), which was a source of immense irritation both to Bonnet and to himself. Despite Bonnet's assurance to him that 'there was no truth' in the rumours that several members of the Government had wanted to resign, Phipps heard, on the 21st, that Mandel, Reynaud and Champetier de Ribes 'had actually offered their resignations to Daladier' who had refused to accept them.⁽⁵⁴⁾

Subsequent events deprived Phipps of any important initiative in the decision making process until 24 September albeit he remained extremely active in liaising between Paris and London. This included relaying Halifax's urgent message to Léger on the 22nd asking whether, in view of the lack of news from Godesberg and reports of Sudetendeutsch incursions into Egerland,⁽⁵⁵⁾ the advice

53) Ibid. (C10319/1941/18). Phipps tel., 21 Sept.1938. Churchill was in Paris (20-22 Sept.) to stiffen the French resolve and he successfully dissuaded his friends, Reynaud & Mandel, from resigning from the Government. DDF, 2, XI, no.281 Corbin à Bonnet, 22 Sept.1938; W.S. Churchill, The Gathering Storm, London 1946, p.309. Bonnet later remarked sarcastically that, 'Il est vrai qu'il suffit de parcourir les Mémoires de Churchill pour constater qu'il considérait dans cette période comme le Premier d'Angleterre... et de France!' Georges Bonnet, Le Quai d'Orsay sous trois républiques, Paris 1961, p.218. General Spears saw Léger on the 22nd and reported his disturbing findings to Vansittart. (See f/note 56).

54) FO.371/21600 (C10459/55/17). Phipps tel., 22 Sept.1938

55) FO.371/21775 (C10631/4839/18). Halifax to Phipps, 22 Sept. 1938. 5.15pm.

to Prague not to mobilize should be withdrawn;⁽⁵⁶⁾ Léger's concurrence,⁽⁵⁷⁾ and the suspension of the proposed communication to Prague on Chamberlain's advice.⁽⁵⁸⁾

Summarizing the latest French reactions to the Czech crisis on the 22nd, Phipps reported that it was 'causing acute heart break among the various political parties', and that 'all hopes are fastened on Chamberlain's conversations at Godesberg'.⁽⁵⁹⁾ By 6pm on the 23rd, it was obvious that the talks had reached deadlock, and Phipps was requested to obtain a statement from the French Government regarding their intentions in the event of a German attack on Czechoslovakia.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Fatefully for Phipps, and precipitating his 'all that is best in France' telegram of the 24th, he was also instructed to provide his personal

56) Ibid. General Spears saw Léger on the 22nd and reported his disturbing conversation to Vansittart. Léger told him that Bonnet had 'two or three documents the purpose of which is that the British Government was in no circumstances prepared to be involved in war over Czechoslovakia'. Pressed by an amazed Spears, Léger added that 'it was quite clear from the documents that we would not even consent to go to war in support of France if she became involved in a war over Czechoslovakia', and that Bonnet 'had told this to the French Government'. Spears also gathered that Léger had not seen these documents himself nor had he seen Phipps 'for some time'. Spears Papers (Churchill College Archives), SPRS.1/245, Spears to Vansittart, 23 September 1938. Vansittart passed this letter to the F.O. who produced a lengthy memorandum on this topic on 23 September. The F.O. concluded that, after Phipps's clarification of the Halifax-Corbin Conversations (see f/note 27) and his subsequent assurances, 'if, on Sept. 22 M.Léger still professed to believe that we would not fight over Czechoslovakia in any circumstances, one cannot escape the conclusion that his misrepresentation of our attitude was deliberate'. Mallet agreed with Spears's suggestion that Bonnet was 'preparing a dossier for his future protection'. FO.371/21745 (C12085/1941/18). Minutes by Speaight & Mallet, 29 Sept. & 3 Oct. 1938.

57) FO.371/21770 (C10398/4786/18). Phipps tel., 22 Sept.1938. 6.30pm.

58) The Embassy were notified at 10.10pm that Chamberlain had issued a statement urging all the parties to refrain from action of any kind that might interfere with (the) progress of (the) conversation'. The proposed Anglo-French communication to Prague was therefore suspended. Ibid (C10640 & C10400/4786/18). Halifax to Phipps, 22 Sept.1938 (10.10pm) & Phipps tel. 22 Sept. 1938 (11.0pm).

59) FO.371/21600 (C10460/55/17). Phipps tel., 22 September 1938.

60) Ibid. (C10665/1941/18). F.O. to Phipps, 23 September 1938. 6.5pm.

impressions of 'feeling in political and public opinion'.⁽⁶¹⁾ In the meantime, he reported that Litvinov had stated that 'Russia would come in after France had already come in' which Bonnet regarded as 'late and limited help'.⁽⁶²⁾

C) 'All that is best in France' (24-31 September 1938)

The immediate cause of Phipps's 'all that is best in France' despatch can be traced back to the early morning of the 24th when he was instructed to communicate a copy of the memoranda containing Hitler's Godesberg demands to the French Government,⁽⁶³⁾ and Chamberlain had emphasised that they constituted Hitler's 'last word'.⁽⁶⁴⁾ This was followed by the news at noon on the 24th that the Socialist Radical Group in the Chamber had expressed full confidence in Daladier 'to defend the interests of France', and that Cot had made an authorised press statement to the effect that:

France had gone to the extreme limit of concessions. She cannot cede more. M.Daladier authorises me to say that if Germany carries out a coup de force against Czechoslovakia, France would fulfil her commitments.⁽⁶⁵⁾

Phipps's despatch at⁽⁶⁶⁾ 3pm provided some clues to his own personal views which he would express more fully some two hours later. General Gamelin had

61) Ibid.

62) FO.371/21777 (C10586/5302/18). Phipps tel., 23 Sept.1938.

63) FO.371/21740 (C10561/1941/18). Brit. Delegation (Godesberg) to Phipps, 24 September 1938. 3am.

64) Ibid. (C10560/1941/18). Brit. Deleg. (Godesberg) to Newton (Prague, 24 Sept. 1938. 10.10am (Repeated to Paris).

65) FO. 371/21740 (C10574/1941/18). Phipps tel., 24 Sept.1938. (12.30pm).

66) Ibid. (C10589/1941/18). Phipps tel., 24 Sept. 1938 (3pm) & minute by Speaight. Vansittart had noted earlier that Phipps relied heavily on a narrow range of sources for his assessment of the situation in France. See p.192.

informed Colonel Fraser that Daladier had told him that, 'the only way to save peace now was to demonstrate that France was prepared to fight', and he had enumerated the latest French preparations. Bonnet, on the other hand, had asked for more time to consider Halifax's question regarding French intentions. Flandin had called on him (Phipps) spontaneously to inform him that 'all (the) peasant class were against war and although in case of necessity they would march, their hearts would not be in it'. Phipps added that this was confirmed by several of his other sources and, significantly, he referred to his despatch of 3 July 'in which M. Caillaux (had) used similar language in regard to (the) war in Spain'. Flandin's pessimistic conclusions which Phipps quoted could well have been an expression of his own views:

In the event of initial reverses and heavy air bombardments they would agitate for an early peace. Communist leaders who are the most active in egging on war are already telling their men if there were these heavy air bombardments they would rise up, declare that France had been betrayed by her Government and set up a communist régime.

Phipps's impression was that the deputies who represented agricultural constituencies would be 'most reluctant' to vote for war, and he concluded that:

It is impossible however to foretell precise reactions of public opinion beforehand as public opinion would depend on circumstances of German aggression and amount of bloodshed thereby.

Phipps's telegram at 5.45pm reporting his 'purely personal impression',⁽⁶⁷⁾

struck Strang and the Foreign Office with 'a sense of outrage'.⁽⁶⁸⁾ Any analysis of their response, Phipps's motives for his apparent volte-face and its consequences, requires this telegram to be cited in full:

67) FO.371/21740 (C10602/1941/18). Phipps tel., 24 September 1938. (5.45pm)

68) Lord Strang, At Home and Abroad, London 1956, p.136.

Unless German aggression were so brutal, bloody & prolonged (through gallantry of Czechoslovak resistance) as to infuriate French public opinion to the extent of making it lose its reason, war now would be most unpopular in France. I think therefore that HMG should realise extreme danger of even appearing to encourage small, but noisy & corrupt war group here.

All that is best in France is against war, almost at any price (hence the really deep & pathetic gratitude shown to our Prime Minister). Unless we are sure of considerable initial successes we shall find all that is best in France, as well as all that is worst, turn against us and accuse us of egging French on to fight what must have seemed from the outset a losing battle.

To embark upon what will presumably be the biggest conflict in history with our ally, who will fight, if fight she must, without eyes (Air Force) and without real heart must surely give us furiously to think.

It may be asked why I have not reported sooner in the above sense. The answer is that up to the last hour the French have hypnotised themselves into believing that peace depended upon Great Britain, and not upon Herr Hitler. They were convinced, that is to say, that if Great Britain spoke with sufficient firmness Herr Hitler would collapse. Only now do they realise that Herr Hitler may well be meaning to take on both our countries.

Chamberlain read this highly influential telegram to the Cabinet on the 24th when he provided them with an account of his meeting with Hitler at Godesberg.⁽⁶⁹⁾ Its significance can be assessed by Chamberlain's comment on the 25th, immediately prior to the crucial meeting with the French Ministers in London that evening, that 'in the last analysis it seemed likely that Czechoslovakia's attitude was determined by the attitude of France and that sooner or later the French Government would have to define their attitude'.⁽⁷⁰⁾

Strang's sense of outrage at this despatch was shared by Harvey, Sargent, Cadogan and, inevitably, Vansittart. Oliver Harvey noted that:

69) CAB.23/95. Cabinet Conclusions 42(38), Saturday, 24 September 1938.

70) Ibid. Cabinet Conclusions 43(38), Saturday, 25 September 1938. According to Bullitt, Bonnet believed that 'it would be folly to destroy the continent of Europe on the issue of whether Hitler took these (Sudetenland) districts on 25th September or the 25th October', and that Phipps had expressed 'exactly the same opinion'. FRUS, Vol I (General) 1938, Bullitt to Secretary of State, 24 September 1938, p.641.

I have never seen anything like the defeatist stuff which Phipps is now sending us. He is either not reporting honestly feeling in France or else is taking no trouble to find out opinions which may be unpalatable to HMG. It is tragic that at such a time we have three such wretched Ambassadors (Rome, Berlin and Paris).(71)

Sargent, who, as has been seen from their private and strictly unofficial correspondence, had been close at one time to Phipps, was now extremely critical:

Sir E.Phipps's generalisations on the moral question are I think unfair and misleading. Far from strengthening his arguments they tend to make me suspect them. For instance I don't know what reason he has for damning the "war group" as corrupt, anymore than he is entitled to assert that all that is best in France is against war. The picture cannot possibly be just a contrast between black and white - between good and bad - As a matter of fact I should have thought that there might be a good deal of "corruption" among the "good" peace party. For instance what about Flandin & Caillaux to mention only two.

As for the corruption of the war group I think that Sir E.Phipps should be asked to explain & substantiate this charge (Does he include General Gamelin in this group? Is he corrupt). The last paragraph of this tel. does not read to my mind very convincingly.(72)

Cadogan also purported to be puzzled by the reference to the 'corrupt war group' and thought that Phipps should be asked 'to amplify his telegram'.⁽⁷³⁾

Vansittart, who had now emerged openly as Phipps's most powerful detractor, expressed his shrewd and telling criticism sardonically:

If Sir E.Phipps really believes that MM.Caillaux, Flandin & Bonnet are "all that is best in France", I think he grievously underrated France, and I am surprised at such an under-estimate on his part. He talks of a "noisy & corrupt war group here". I should not hesitate for a moment to apply both these epithets to MM.Caillaux, Flandin and Bonnet.(74)

71) The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-1940, edited by J. Harvey, London, 1970, p.195. (Entry for 24 September 1938).

72) FO. 371/21740 (C10602/1941/18). Minute by Sargent, 24 Sept.1938.

73) Ibid. Minute by Cadogan, 25 Sept. 1938.

74) Ibid. Minute by Vansittart, 24 Sept.1938.

In answer to Phipps's rhetorical question why he had not reported sooner 'in the above sense', Vansittart retorted that he had done so, 'for he has most frequently quoted MM. Bonnet, Flandin and Caillaux'. He wanted the 'field of enquiry' widened, and compared Phipps's reports unfavourably with those of Thomas Cadett, 'the very well-informed Times correspondent in Paris', who was the bête noir of the Embassy. Vansittart urged that immediate reports be obtained from all the British consuls, 'for provincial feeling in France is extremely important at a moment of this sort', and he concluded that

I feel bound to take these reports with some caution because our Embassy as a whole in Paris has frequently been described to me by French people, who are also among "all that is best in France" as being very defeatist.

I must not be understood as contradicting this telegram, because after the surprising collapse of MM Bonnet & Daladier a week ago, I naturally have my own reasons for not believing the French renaissance until I see it. What I do say, however, is that the basis of a telegram like this is too narrow, and is indeed founded not on what is "best in France", but what is morally & notoriously worst. I should have thought that even if the inside of MM. Bonnet & Flandin were not a matter of some public comment, as indeed it is, the past of M. Caillaux, at least speaks for itself.(75)

Following up these suggestions, and 'in order to complete our information as to the feeling among public men', Cadogan asked Phipps on the 25th to ascertain immediately the views of Generals Gamelin and Weygand, Marshal Pétain, Herriot, Blum, Reynaud, Marin, Laval, Chautemps and Cardinal Verdier, and to instruct the Embassy's Commercial Counsellor and Financial Advisor to collect those of

75) FO. 371/21740 (C106021/1941/18). Minute by Vansittart, 24 Sept.1938. Vansittart's reference to the Embassy frequently being described to him 'by French people... as being very defeatist' may also have related to his letter from Gen. Spears describing his conversation with Léger on 22 Sept. Spears stated that 'what does seem to be the fact is that a very pessimistic view seems to have been received by those who conferred with our Ambassador...' Spears Papers, Churchill College, SPRS 1/245, Brig.Gen.Spears to Vansittart, 23 September 1938.

commercial and financial circles. Cadogan, who was opposed to a 'total surrender' to Hitler's Godesberg demands, concluded coldly that

We do not entirely understand your reference in your tel. no.292 to (a) "small but noisy & corrupt war group here". By "war group" you surely do not include all those who feel that France must carry out her treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia. If so, what precisely does this group consist of and what does it represent and what are your reasons for describing it as "corrupt"? (76)

Phipps was told to instruct the Superintending Consular Officers to immediately furnish reports on French provincial feeling which they should send directly to the F.O.,⁽⁷⁷⁾ in order, as Harvey confided to his diary, to 'prevent the Embassy from doctoring them'.⁽⁷⁸⁾

In the meantime, completely oblivious to the impact of his earlier despatch and entirely unaware of Cadogan's rejoinder, Phipps's telegram at 1.15pm on the 25th consisted entirely of Caillaux's pessimistic and apocalyptic views on the effects of a future war. Caillaux had 'definitely assured him' that a large majority of the French people were against war, that further pressure should be put on Benes ('who was under Soviet influence'), and that

War with Germany means war with Poland, Hungary and Japan. In the air our towns will be wiped out, our women and children will be

76) Ibid. Cadogan to Phipps, 25 September 1938. (10.15pm). Cadogan's coldness towards Phipps related to his own opposition to Chamberlain's 'total surrender' to Hitler's Godesberg demands. Cadogan was 'still more horrified' to find that Chamberlain had 'hypnotised Halifax who capitulates totally'. Ruminating on his attempts to change Halifax's mind, Cadogan wrote, 'I know that there is a shattering telegram from Phipps about (the position in France', and that Britain & France were 'in no position to fight' but 'I'd rather be beat than dishonoured... how can we hold Egypt, India & the rest'. Cadogan Diaries (Dilks), op.cit., entry for Sat. 24 Sept. 1938, pp.103-4. The impact of Phipps's telegram was, therefore profound. As is well known, Cadogan succeeded in changing Halifax's mind.

77) FO.371/21740/(C10602/1941/18). F.O. to Phipps, 25 Sept. 1938, 7.30pm. The instructions to obtain supplementary information quickly from the Consular Officers came from Halifax. Ibid, Minute by Halifax, 24 Sept.1938.

78) Harvey noted the F.O. could not trust Phipps's 'defeatist telegram', feared that the Embassy would doctor those from the Consuls, and complained that Phipps only quoted the opinions of Caillaux & Flandin. Harvey Diaries, op.cit., p.200 (entry for 27 Sept.1938).

slaughtered. The French Army will fight magnificently. It will be incidentally safer in its Maginot Line than civilians. Heavy air bombardments of factories around Paris may well cause another Commune.(79)

Phipps's reputation at the F.O. was now at its nadir and, as the mood in Paris grew calmer, Vansittart described the Embassy's telegrams as 'these two hysterical outbursts of a few days ago'.⁽⁸⁰⁾ Bullitt's judgement on the 25th, that Phipps 'who like Bonnet is for peace at any price continues to hope that his Government and the French will abandon the Czechs completely in order to avoid a general war',⁽⁸¹⁾ appeared to have been a harsh but a fair assessment.

What then were the factors and motives underlying these despatches? First and foremost, it will be seen from the foregoing that all of Phipps's accumulated fears from Berlin, his anxieties and inhibitions in Paris, and his deeply rooted prejudices were encapsulated and expressed openly in his 'all that is best in France' despatch. The impact of Berlin, his awareness of the extent of German rearmament (compared to Britain's perceived unpreparedness), and his conviction that Hitler could not be bluffed have been emphasised previously.⁽⁸²⁾ Hitler and Goering's farewell remarks to him in Berlin, that he would now have the opportunity of comparing 'the order' reigning in Berlin with 'the disorder and civil strife rampant'

79) FO.371/21740 (C10624/1941/18). Phipps tel., 25 Sept.1938. 1.15pm.

80) Ibid. (C10602/1941/18). Minute by Vansittart, 27 Sept.1938.

81) Bullitt received a translation of Hitler's Godsberg demands from Phipps on the morning of 25 Sept. and had told him that he 'could not see how any Government could conceivably accept such a proposal', his assessment of Phipps's views then followed. FRUS, 1938 (Gen 1) vol.1. Bullitt to Sec.of.State, 25 Sept. 1938.

82) See Chapter 2.

in Paris,⁽⁸³⁾ must have haunted him as he witnessed the full extent of French weakness including the parlous state of the French air force.

Central to the background of these despatches are: (a) the role of Chamberlain - his relationship with the F.O. and his influence on Phipps, and (b) In uneasy equilibrium between Chamberlain and the F.O. - Phipps's objective and subjective assessment of an extremely dangerous situation including personal and psychological factors.

Three aspects of Chamberlain's policy are particularly relevant:- his search for an agreement with Germany and Italy: his impatience with the Foreign Office, and his contempt for the French.⁽⁸⁴⁾ Chamberlain's criticism of the F.O., and the extent of his interference in the operation of foreign policy is well documented, for example, he told his sister in September 1937 that he was 'not too happy about the F.O. who seem to me to have no imagination and no courage'.⁽⁸⁵⁾ Commenting on Eden's speech in November 1937, Chamberlain wrote that

...(it) shows again a characteristic of the F.O. mind which I have frequently noticed before. They never can keep the major objects of foreign policy in mind with the result that they make abstractions for themselves by endeavouring to give smart answers to some provocative foreign statement.⁽⁸⁶⁾

83) See Ch.2.

84) Chamberlain described the French as 'an impossible people... their only idea seems take as much and give as little as they possibly can'. Neville Chamberlain Papers, Birmingham University. NC18/1/1017 Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 22 August 1937. For Chamberlain's derogatory views on France see pp.125-6 and passim.

85) NC18/1/1020. Neville Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 12 Sept. 1937.

86) NC18/1/1027. Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 6 November 1937.

Chamberlain had arrived at the conclusion that Eden 'did not want to talk either to Hitler or Mussolini as I did (and) he was right to go',⁽⁸⁷⁾ and he 'thank(ed) God' for Halifax's steady unruffled Foreign Secretary who never causes me any worry'.⁽⁸⁸⁾ The most complete statement of his views on foreign policy, however, was made in August 1937: 'I believe the double policy of rearmament and better relations with Germany and Italy will carry us safely through the danger period if only the F.O. will play up'.⁽⁸⁹⁾

Regarding Czechoslovakia, Chamberlain had decided in March 1938 that it was indefensible and that 'you have only to look at the map to see that nothing that France or we could do could save Czechoslovakia from being overrun by the Germans if they wanted to'. He had therefore 'abandoned any idea of giving guarantees to Czechoslovakia or to France in connection with her obligations to that country'.⁽⁹⁰⁾ In September 1938, he added that 'we should be wrong to allow the most vital decision that any country to take, the decision as to peace or war, to pass out of our hands' into that of another country'.⁽⁹¹⁾

The Foreign Office had a virtual monopoly on the foreign policy decision making process under Baldwin's premiership, and its erosion under Chamberlain was resented. Like Vansittart and Sargent, Phipps belonged to predominant

87) NC18/1/1040. N.Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 27 February 1937.

88) NC18/1/1053. N.Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 22 May 1938. That is until Halifax's rejection of Hitler's Godesberg demands.

89) NC18/1/1014. N.Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 1 August 1938.

90) NC18/1/1042. N.Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 20 March 1938.

91) NC18/1/1068. N.Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 11 September 1938.

'pro-French group' in the F.O. whose influence Chamberlain was attempting to break up,⁽⁹²⁾ and this group tended to be critical of Chamberlain's appeasement policies. Phipps's peers at the F.O. automatically assumed that, as a member of their group, he shared their views. Hence the bitterness of their response to his despatches in September 1938 which they perceived as his final defection from their ranks and as an act akin to betrayal on his part.

Phipps's dilemma was that, even before the Czech crisis, he had evolved into a convinced and devoted follower of Chamberlain to whom, after Munich, he would pay obsequious tribute.⁽⁹³⁾ This conflicted, to a certain extent, with his ardent Francophile sympathies which inhibited him (and others in the F.O.) from fully expressing their anxieties regarding France which they tended to reveal mostly only to each other or in moments of crisis. Hence Sargent and Vansittart's strictly private warnings to him in late 1937, that 'sensitive' information (i.e. 'what critics of the present French Government say about the latter') should be conveyed in a despatch or a private letter, and not in savings telegrams which went 'automatically to Cabinet Ministers' and were 'fastened upon by some of our critics'.⁽⁹⁴⁾ As indicated previously, despite the F.O.'s eager acceptance of Phipps's more

92) This group was described by R.A. Butler, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to an anonymous official at the German Embassy in London who reported it to the Wilhelmstrasse. Butler added that Eden shared this attitude, that Henderson's appointment to Berlin represented the first breach in 'the French line' followed by the 'side-tracking' of Vansittart, and that Sir Horace Wilson, Chamberlain's 'closest advisor', was regarded as 'decidedly pro-German'. Documents on German Foreign Policy, D, vol I, no.128 Memorandum, 25 February 1938. The editorial note states that 'this memorandum was written on the letter-head of the German Embassy in London but it has not been possible to determine its origin further'. (Ibid, f/note 71, p.223). Phipps was not mentioned in the memorandum. This theme was elaborated in Felix Gilbert's essay, 'Two British Ambassadors: Perth & Henderson', The Diplomats, ed. by Craig & Gilbert, Vol. 2, pp.550, from whom the term 'pro-French group' was derived.

93) See p.227.

94) See p. 80 & 93.

optimistic assessments, there was a deep undercurrent of unease and an unspoken assumption on both their parts that France was, in fact, fundamentally weak and unstable.⁽⁹⁵⁾ The Royal Visit to Paris provided a rare example of these doubts and anxieties surfacing and being articulated officially despite Phipps's reassurances.⁽⁹⁶⁾ Chamberlain, on the other hand, was suspicious and contemptuous of the French and readily accepted Phipps's more pessimistic assessments from Paris.⁽⁹⁷⁾

Phipps attempted to reconcile his intense Francophile sympathies with his ardent support of Chamberlain's appeasement policies by restricting his main sources to those whom he considered suitable for his purposes. They represented a very narrow strata of French society, and were drawn entirely from the Paris milieu⁽⁹⁸⁾ justifying the F.O.'s criticism that he was blanketing out other views. This would, in fact, increase after Munich and, with Mendl's enthusiastic help, it would be extended to attempting to control all the information emanating from the

95) See p. 115-6.

96) The taboo against criticising the French Army or the reliability of France was strong and lasted beyond the inter-war period. The British failure of perception in assessing the low morale of the French Army in May 1940 (despite the Duke of Windsor's report) has been described as an intelligence failure as spectacular as that of the Americans at Pearl Harbour. D.C. Watt, 'Le moral de l'armée française tel que se le représentaient les Britanniques en 1939 et 1940: une faillite des services de renseignements?', in Français et Britanniques dans la drôle de guerre, Paris 1979, pp.201-2. Channon related that Londonderry was convinced that his political prospects had been blighted because he had argued with Churchill before the war that 'France was rotten and unreliable and could not be depended upon'. Churchill 'lost his temper, being a fanatical francophile; and could not forgive Londonderry then and certainly not later'. Quoted in François Kersaudy, Churchill and de Gaulle, London 1981, p.381.

97) For Chamberlain's views on France, see pp 125-6 and passim.

98) For example, the idea of a 'small but noisy & corrupt war group' was commonly held in these (mostly business) circles. Flandin had referred to a 'war party' on 2 Sept. (see f/note 5). The industrialist, Marcel Boussac, a friend of Bonnet, stated on the 26th that 'Il y'avait à Paris un partie de la guerre inspiré par les Juifs (sic) et qui comprend des communistes, des socialistes...' and that Bonnet had told him that they 'menait une active campagne dans les couloirs du Palais-Bourbon' and were 'jusqu' alors y avait eu pour ainsi dire libre cours et sans opposition'. Quoted by du Réau, op.cit., p.271.

Embassy. Phipps's main sources - Bonnet, Flandin and Caillaux, not only shared his views on appeasement but also his prejudices - hostility to the Popular Front, dislike of Benes, hatred of communism and, at least in the case of Caillaux, anti-semitism.⁽⁹⁹⁾ In short, they represented the most reactionary and defeatist elements in France. His description of them as 'all that is best in France', represented more than 'hysteria' (to use Vansittart's phrase) or a failure of sensibility - it also identified him completely with their views, arousing the F.O.'s criticism and hostility.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ Henceforth they would regard his reports with the suspicion that they had hitherto reserved for those of Nevile Henderson.

On a personal level, Phipps was a curious mixture of opportunism and conviction. Opportunism in the sense of tactics which frequently became indistinguishable from his prejudices. Conviction in the sense that his views grew more rigid (especially after the Munich crisis) and he became obsessed with the correctness of Chamberlain's policies and increasingly intolerant of those whom he perceived as being opposed to them. His sense of insecurity has been alluded to previously: his long struggle to obtain (and retain) the Paris Ambassadorship which had eluded his father, Sir Constantine Phipps; the tension created by the hostility of his brother-in-law, Sir Robert Vansittart, and his psychological dependency on his

99) Phipps's anti-semitism surfaced in November 1938, see Ch.8.

100) Apart from Bonnet, Flandin & Caillaux, another of Phipps's main sources was regarded with grave suspicion by the F.O. Quinones de Léon, Franco's agent in Paris, was Phipps's main source of information on the Popular Front's breaches of the Non-Intervention Agreement, and could hardly be described as an impartial witness. De Léon was also severely criticized by Vansittart whose close friend, Senor Ayala, the former Spanish Ambassador in London, considered him 'unreliable and indeed unbalanced'. Vansittart was surprised that Phipps 'should report in full and by telephone the outpourings of this lightweight', and Halifax agreed to restrict his communications to 'circulation in the F.O.'. FO.371/22646 (W6704/83/41). Phipps tel., 25 May 1938, minutes by Vansittart and Halifax, 26 May 1938.

protector, Sir Maurice Hankey.⁽¹⁰¹⁾ To these may be added the bitterness generated by the opposition to Chamberlain and Bonnet's policies (in London and Paris),⁽¹⁰²⁾ and the sheer physical and mental exhaustion incurred during a period of intense crisis. Above all, his understandable concern for the fate of his six children in a war which was foreseen as being terrible and which, he felt, must be avoided 'at almost any price'.⁽¹⁰³⁾ His cynicism and wit masked a deep pessimism which turned, at least temporarily, to despair and then briefly to hysteria.

Any analysis of Phipps's 'all that is best in France' telegram reveals, in fact, that this was a projection of his own fears and anxieties which he attributed to the French. Phipps was almost 63 at the time of the Czech crisis and, on the eve of his retirement, after almost forty years of diplomatic service, he was faced with the imminent prospect of, to use his own words, 'the biggest conflict in history'. Like Chamberlain, the avoidance of war was uppermost in his mind, and the 'deep and pathetic gratitude' shown to our Prime Minister' which he attributed to 'all that is best in France' was a manifestation of his own feelings towards Chamberlain and he had emerged as, to use Hankey's phrase, 'a convinced believer in and a powerful exponent of the Chamberlain-Halifax policy'.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾

101) Hankey had retired at the end of July in order 'not to miss the chance of the vacancy on the Suez Canal Board'. PHPP.3/3 Hankey to Phipps, 25 May 1938. The temporary loss of Hankey's crucial psychological support in late Sept. 1938 may have contributed to Phipps's nervous tension during the crisis.

102) See, for e.g. his impassioned letter to Chamberlain on 30 Sept. 1938 immediately after the crisis, cited on p. 227 and also Ch.8.

103) Phipps's foreboding were justified. His eldest son was killed on active service during the second world war.

104) FO.794/16. Hankey to Halifax, 14 November 1938. See chapter 8.

Unfortunately, Phipps's exaggerated, intemperate and revealing language obscured a profound warning to the F.O. which had been gestating since his arrival in Paris in April 1937. His reference to 'a losing battle' was realistic - even without the crucial question of French morale, in terms of demography and industrial capacity alone, it was obvious that the military disparity between France and Germany was too great.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ Furthermore, he was only too keenly aware, partly from Hankey's information, of the deficiencies and problems connected with the British rearmament programme. On the crucial question of French morale and military effectiveness, as ambassador he saw most of his service attaché's reports and his covering letters forwarding them to London frequently highlighted important aspects. Three reports from his attachés and a French report (all previously forwarded to the F.O.) provided the crucial background to his 'all that is best in France' telegram of 24th September.

1. Colonel Fraser's conversation with Colonel Gauché, the head of the French Deuxième Bureau, on 20 September. Fraser had repeated that Kuhlenthal, the German military attaché, was convinced that there would be no European war to which Gauché had replied:

"Of course there will be no European War, since we are not going to fight". He (Gauché) went on to say that they would not face the risk of the German air threat - since their material was so superior that they (the French) were powerless to deal with it.

105) Général Jean Delmas spoke of 'la faiblesse fondamentale de la puissance militaire française en 1938'. For a short but excellent survey of French military strength & industrial capacity vis-à-vis Germany in 1938 and associated problems: the weakness of France's East European allies, the absence of a military alliance with the USSR, and the dependence on Britain, see his 'La perception de la puissance militaire française' in La Puissance en Europe 1938-1940, edited by René Girault & Robert Frank, Paris 1984, pp.127-140 (especially p.135).

Phipps had pointedly directed Halifax's attention to this remark in his covering letter to the F.O., and the report was printed and circularized to the Cabinet.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾

2. Colonel Fraser's conversation with General Dentz, the Deputy Chief of the French General Staff, on 22 September. Dentz stated that the French General Staff's information was that 'German troops would occupy Czechoslovakia on 24 September' and that Chamberlain would be presented with a *fait accompli* at Godesberg. Fraser responded;

I said "What then since you don't intend to fight" and went on to suggest that the situation had deteriorated since Colonel Lindbergh's visit and his stories of the German Air Force. General Dentz did not react; he merely pointed out that French cities would be laid in ruins and that they had no means of defence. They were now paying the price of years of neglect of their Air Force.

On the instructions of Cadogan and Halifax, this report was also circulated to the Cabinet.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾

3. Amongst the vast amount of material forwarded by the Embassy on the weak state of the French air force, Phipps's despatch of 16 September stands out in importance. Phipps stated that the French Air Ministry had recently provided the Air Commission of the Chamber with a description of the French Air Force which revealed 'its considerable inferiority to the Assistant Air Attaché's estimate, and that

106) FO.371/21669 (C10467/65/18). Phipps tels 21 Sept.1938 (and enclosure from Col. Fraser, military attaché, to Phipps 22 Sept.1938). Mallet had minuted that 'Lindbergh's visit appears to have had a catastrophic effect on France' and that 'the French appeared to be exaggerating their own weakness and German strength'.

107) FO.371/21740 (C10441/1941/18). Phipps tel 22 Sept. 1938 (& enclosure from Col. Fraser). Roberts minuted that this was 'further confirmation that the French do not intend to fight because of the weakness of their airforce'. General Dentz's defeatism in 1938 was in striking contrast to his role during the Syrian Campaign in 1941 when his pro-Vichy forces strongly resisted a mixed Allied force including Australian & Free French troops. See, for e.g. Geoffrey Warner, *Iraq & Syria 1941*, London 1974, pp.122-158.

the knowledge of this probably contributed to Bonnet's gloom early this week and to the feelings of pessimism which were manifested in Government circles. One Frenchman aptly described France with her magnificent army and adequate navy as a strong man with no eyes.

Phipps commented that this 'lamentable state of affairs' confirmed Caillaux's estimates to him on November 1937, and the Air Attaché's subsequent reports, while Roberts minuted that it was

even worse than we had supposed and fully explained French reluctance to be drawn into a war in which they would have to take the offensive to achieve any useful result.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾

It will be observed that Phipps's reference to the French having to fight 'without eyes (air force)' in his 'all that is best in France' telegram was an almost direct quotation from this earlier despatch and that this description must have impressed him deeply.

4. This despatch was followed by the Air Attaché's information from Delaplanque on the 17th that the expansion programme of the French Air Force would soon break down and that the French aircraft industry was producing 45 aircraft per month while Germany was producing approximately 600.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ Curwell commented that 'even we' produce 'about half the (German) quantity' while Sargent minuted bravely that 'M. Delaplanque is a journalist in close touch with Caillaux and therefore prejudiced and anxious to draw as black a picture as possible'.⁽¹¹⁰⁾

The Air Ministry, however, concluded that:

in every way, numbers quality of aircraft, technical and administrative organisation, factory organisation, designs, general

108) FO.371/21596 (C9944/36/17). Phipps tel., 16 Sept. & minute by Robert, 17 Sept. 1938.

109) Ibid. (C10028/36/17). Phipps tel., 17 Sept. 1938 (& encl. memo by air attache).

110) Ibid. Minutes by Curwell & Sargent, 19 & 23 Sept. 1938.

vulnerability, France is hopelessly outclassed by Germany in everything to do with air warfare.⁽¹¹¹⁾

The Vuillemin and Lindbergh reports on the efficiency and strength of the Luftwaffe, which were cited earlier, dealt a devastating blow to French morale and both were discussed by the Cabinet.⁽¹¹²⁾ General Vuillemin, the Chief of the French Air Staff, had warned the French Government previously about the weakness of its air force. He returned from his visit to Germany (on 16-21 August) convinced that the French Air Force would be destroyed by the Luftwaffe within 14 days of operations.⁽¹¹³⁾ As a close personal friend of Bonnet (their families spent their holidays together)⁽¹¹⁴⁾ he must have personally conveyed his despair to the latter. Phipps was correct in assessing that this, together with the similarly devastating report of Lindbergh (whom Kingsley Wood, the Secretary of State for Air, described as having become 'the unwitting tool of the Germans'),⁽¹¹⁵⁾ precipitated Bonnet's collapse on the 13th. He failed to realise, however, that immersed in his narrow Paris milieu, and reliant on a handful of reactionary French politicians for his main sources, he too had succumbed to the corrosive and contaminating effects of their prevalent defeatism.

111) FO.371/21596 (C10163/36/1). Wing Commander Goddard (Air Ministry) to Mallet (F.O.), 19 Sept. 1938. Minute by Curwell, 20 Sept. 1938.

112) Vuillemin's report had been discussed by the Cabinet on 30 Aug., (See p.178, f/note 161). Lindbergh's visit to Germany was discussed by the Cabinet on 25 Sept. CAB.23/95 Cabinet Concl.43(38), 25 September 1938.

113) J.B. Duroselle, La décadence 1932-1939, Paris 1979, pp.341-2. Vuillemin's remarks provides a good example of the unreliability of Georges Bonnet's memoirs: in Dans la Tourment 1938-1948, Paris 1971, p.46, he attributes these remarks as having been made some days before the Anschluss, and in his earlier volume, le Quai d'Orsay sous trois républiques, Paris 1961, p.208 to the aftermath of Vuillemin's visit to Germany.

114) Henri Noguères, Munich or the Phoney Peace, London 1965, p.89.

115) CAB.23/95 Cabinet Conclusions 43(38), 25 September 1938. Kingsley Wood concluded by saying that Lindbergh had given 'a fair, if somewhat superficial estimate of the relative strengths of the French, Russian & German air forces'.

Hugh Dalton, in fact, confirmed that Phipps was 'most defeatist' when he called on him on 23 September. The latter immediately referred to 'French weakness in the air', and told him that

If the French Air Force was knocked out early, not only would there be no air defence for Paris and other large towns, but a French Army attacking the Siegfried Line would have lost its eyes, whereas the Germans would still have theirs. He referred to the "Lindbergh Report", and seemed to take it seriously...

Phipps had stated that 'we have missed one preventive train after another' and feared that 'now no train will reach a preventive terminus'. Foreshadowing his 'all that is best in France' telegram, he did not believe that the French would march unless they were actually attacked but that 'if the Germans go into Czechoslovakia and brutalise the Czechs beyond a certain point, opinion here might find this intolerable'. In short, Dalton found him 'drifting with the tide' and making no effort to move against it. He recorded that someone who knew Phipps well told him a few days later that 'Phipps was a better man when he was in Berlin'.⁽¹¹⁶⁾

In the event, and in reply to Cadogan's angry telegram of the 25th, Phipps climbed down. He explained, on the 26th, that 'public opinion clearly changes rapidly with rapid changes in (the) situation', his despatch had been sent before Hitler's latest demands' were known, and that:

By "(a) small but noisy and corrupt war group", I mean the Communists who are paid by Moscow & have been working for war for months. A well-known French Minister has also been advocating a preventative (sic) war for many months.⁽¹¹⁷⁾

116) Hugh Dalton, The fateful Years, Memoirs 1931-1945, London, 1957, pp. 190-191.

117) FO.371/21741 (C10727/1941/18). Phipps tel., 26 Sept.1938 (11.48pm) & minute by Barclay, 26 Sept.1938. Phipps's statement that his 'all that is best in France' despatch had been sent 'before Hitler's latest demands were known' may have been disingenuous. The F.O. had informed him on 23 Sept. that Chamberlain had stated that his interview with Hitler had been 'most unsatisfactory'. The latter had 'regarded the Anglo-French plan as unacceptable', its operation 'would be too slow', and Chamberlain was considering writing to Hitler 'making it clear that British & French opinion could not accept his demands'. FO.371/21740 (C10511/1941/18). F.O. to Phipps, 23 Sept. 1938. Furthermore, important telegrams (to & from) Prague were usually repeated to Paris.

Barclay minuted that 'presumably the well-known Minister was Georges Mandel'.⁽¹¹⁸⁾

As if attempting to make amends for his pessimistic attitude, Phipps, further reported on the 26th that the French public were showing 'calm and resolution', opinion had 'undergone a complete change since Hitler's last demands have become known', and that Herriot, the President of the Chamber, had confirmed that 'a complete swing-over of public opinion' had occurred:

He (Herriot) assures me that there is an overwhelming majority in the Chamber (that) will now be for resistance. He says there is no kind of enthusiasm for war in the country, but a firm & melancholy determination to resist.⁽¹¹⁹⁾

On the morning of the 27th, he reported that Jeanneney, the President of the Senate, 'who naturally abhors war', felt that it was now 'practically inevitable' and that

If we give way to Hitler's latest demands we should only be postponing the evil day and he would then turn with renewed prestige and strength against France. M.Jeanneney assured me feeling in the whole country though grave even sad, was absolutely firm. Realisation was general that it was either war now or a little later and that we now have a better chance of victory. He does not fear Communist trouble in case of heavy air raids. ⁽¹²⁰⁾

Vansittart, who had no intention of letting Phipps off the hook so easily, minuted that 'Let us now ask the Embassy in Paris how they reconcile these telegrams and others like them, with their two hysterical outbursts of a few days ago', and Cadogan agreed that 'this might be considered later'.⁽¹²¹⁾

118) FO.371/21741 (C10727/1941/18). Minute by Barclay, 26 September 1938. Mandel had infuriated Bonnet and Phipps by telephoning Benes several times during the crisis telling him that he was 'the head of a free and independent nation' and urging him to resist the Anglo-French demands. DDF, 2e, XI, No.252 Note du Ministre. 22 Sept 1938, f/note 2. For Phipps's less inhibited comments on Mandel including references to his Jewish ancestry, see Ch.8.

119) Ibid. (C10713/1941/18). Phipps tel., 26 Sept.1938; (2.15am).

120) Ibid. (C10804/1941/18). Phipps tel., 27 Sept.1938 (10.55am).

121) FO.371/21740 (C10602/1941/18). Minutes by Vansittart and Cadogan, 27 Sept.

Barclay commented on the 27th that the Paris Embassy had reported that French opinion had undergone a change 'since Hitler's last demands had become known', and that the reports from the principal Consular posts confirmed Herriot's opinion (as expressed to Phipps) that 'there is no kind of enthusiasm for war in the country but a firm and melancholy determination to resist'.⁽¹²²⁾ The Consular reports from Lyons, Marseilles, Lille, Strasbourg, Nantes, Rouen, and Havre, together with Phipps's reports of his 'most recent conversation with leading Frenchmen' (copies of all of which were sent to the Service Departments) enabled Mallet to summarise French feeling as follows:

There is little enthusiasm for war but a growing feeling that it is a question, not of fighting for Czechoslovakia, but of engaging now in an otherwise inevitable struggle for the very life of France. Resignation is the dominant feeling but it is coupled with one of determination and the country is falling in solidly behind the Government now that they have made every possible effort to preserve peace.⁽¹²³⁾

Phipps reported that the Financial Advisor had found that 'while there is no enthusiasm for war, people are resolute', and the Commercial Advisor found that 'the opinion of the ordinary French businessman has hardened during the last few days' as a result of Britain and France having gone to 'the limit of possible concessions'. The latter added that there was also 'the feeling that war is inevitable now or later' and that the 'petit-bourgeois' were reluctant to risk their lives for the

122) FO.371/21741 (C10713/1941/18). Minute by Barclay, 27 Sept.1938. Amongst items of particular interest in the Consular Reports were: 'the French decision to guarantee Czechoslovakia was wrong but it should be honoured' (Rouen); 'If Germany invades Czechoslovakia and it resists people realise that it is war now - everyone is pessimistic, hoping against hope' (Havre); 'there is no enthusiasm for war but there should be no trouble should it break out..., if war comes it will be accepted with resignation' (Marseilles). The original reports are in Ibid including C10715-C10718; C10726; C10753/1941/18 and are dated 26 Sept.1938.

123) Ibid. Minute by Mallet, 27 Sept. 1938.

Czechs but that the workers appears to be in favour of France honouring her obligations.⁽¹²⁴⁾ Cadogan minuted that he thought that a subsequent telegram had arrived from Phipps 'swinging right back again' and, in a rare moment of false modesty, added that, 'these kaleidoscopic changes are much too rapid for anyone as slow-witted as myself'.⁽¹²⁵⁾

Ironically, amongst those whose views Phipps was instructed to report, Cardinal Verdier, the Archbishop of Paris, who was regarded as a liberal and whose sympathies for the working classes were well known, came closest to endorsing Phipps's views:

Apart from (the) Communists nobody in France wants a war over the present issues. French are prepared to fight and will obey without exception if honour demands it. But they do not consider it opportune or necessary and still refuse to believe that war will come. (The) Communists pushed for war in Spain and they are pushing for war now. In so acting they are obeying Moscow. They will of course say that France and Great Britain have dishonoured themselves if we now compromise. After all only questions of amor propre now divide us. The mass of French people would not consider dishonourable certain further more concessions necessary to ensure peace. In future war may be necessary, but they know neither France nor Great Britain are well prepared now. Peasants would be very hostile... He repeated again and again that (the) French are ready to obey in (the) last resort if honour demands, but without any enthusiasm.

Barclay minuted that, Cardinal Verdier's views were 'not altogether in accord with the other reports we have received on the state of French public opinion'; Speaight thought that his suggestion that 'war is being worked up by communists is absurd' while Mallet commented that this was 'the Vatican's anti-communist line'. Sargent retorted that

124) FO.371/21741 (C10713/1941/18). Minute by Barclay, 27 Sept. 1938. The Embassy's report on feeling in financial circles is in Ibid (C10755/1941/18).

125) Ibid. Minute by Cadogan, 28 Sept. 1938.

Of course the Communists are working for a war... that is quite irrelevant to our question which was that French public opinion was as to the hateful dilemma of honouring or dishonouring France's treaty obligations. (126)

To summarize briefly: the impact of Phipps's despatches was profound but he was excessively influenced by the narrowness of the milieux in which the Embassy operated and this aspect was criticized by the F.O. Chamberlain placed considerable importance on the reports of his diplomatic representatives in the field (especially when they appeared to confirm his own predilections) and was greatly influenced by them. (127) Cadogan had admitted that he was bewildered by the kaleidoscopic changes in the French mood immediately after Munich. (128) Is it possible, therefore, to assess the accuracy of Phipps's highly subjective reports in late September 1938?

The difficulties involved in attempting to assess French public opinion during this period are considerable, and were described by J.L. Crémieux-Brilhac as 'tentative hasardeuse'. (129) As a distinguished French historian, author of the monumental Les Français de l'an 40, who as a young student was mobilized in

126) Ibid. (C10824/1941/18). Phipps tel. 27 Sept. 1938 and minutes by Barclay, Speaight, Mallet and Sargent, 27-28 Sept. 1938.

127) Chamberlain told the Cabinet on 12 September that Henderson 'was on the spot and familiar with the local atmosphere' and that 'it was impossible for us to disregard the Ambassador's strongly expressed opinion'. CAB.23/95 Cabinet meeting of 12 September 1938. During the Munich crisis, Chamberlain regarded this as applying to Phipps's opinions as well. For certain similarities between Henderson and Phipps's views, see Ch.8.

128) See p.218.

129) J.L. Crémieux-Brilhac, Les Français de l'an 40, vol 1, Paris 1990, p.18. See also the essay by Pascal Ory, 'L' opinion publique et la "puissance" française vers 1938: quelques jalons', La puissance en Europe 1938-1940, edited by René Girault and Robert Frank, Paris 1984, pp.341-348.

1938, perhaps Crémieux-Brilhac's own private témoignage provides the most authoritative interim judgement:

L'opinion publique française dans la semaine la plus critique de septembre 1938 était mauvaise, je veux dire très peu disposé à faire une guerre donc elle ne comprenait pas la nécessité puisque.

a) on avait accepté de négocier et donc de faire des concessions depuis l'entrée en action de Runciman; il était difficile de mobiliser les esprits pour ce que beaucoup de gens considéraient comme une affaire de procédure:

b) la campagne anti-guerre, anti-sovietique et même anti-tchèque battait son plein depuis l'Oeuvre jusqu'à Je suis partout. La mobilisation militaire ne s'est pas bien faite (contrairement à août/septembre 1939).

Cela dit je trouve la formulation de Phipps excessif: almost at any price est juste pour une large fraction de l'opinion (majorité de la droite et syndicats pacifistes). All that is best in France me paraît forcé, excessif.(130)

D) Munich and its Immediate Aftermath

After the visit of the French ministers to London on 25-26 September to discuss Hitler's Godsberg demands,⁽¹³¹⁾ Phipps found himself reverting to his customary role as Bonnet's confidant. Immediately after the latter return to Paris, on the evening of the 26th, he was summoned by Bonnet to the Quai d'Orsay and asked the following questions:-

Supposing that, as a result of German aggression on Czechoslovakia, France mobilised and proceeded to an act of war against Germany, will Great Britain:

- 1) Mobilise immediately and at the same time as France?
- 2) Introduce conscription? 3) Pool ('mettre en commun') the economic and financial resources of the two countries?

Bonnet explained to him that he and Daladier had 'thought it best' to ask these questions 'after their visit (to London) rather than verbally' in order to give HMG

130) Letter from Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac, 10 July 1993.

131) See DBFP, 3, II, nos 1093 & 1096 Anglo French Meeting at 10 Downing Street, Record of conversation, 25 & 26 September 1938.

the time 'to consider them carefully'. Phipps added that Caillaux had told him the previous day that he would also have asked whether conscription would be introduced 'if he were President of the Council'.⁽¹³²⁾

Neither Vansittart's nor the F.O's comments on Caillaux's latest utterances were recorded on this occasion. After Hankey's retirement as Secretary of the Cabinet and of the CID, and therefore no longer at the centre of power, Phipps was deprived of his authoritative advice (albeit conveyed in a strictly informal and irregular manner).⁽¹³³⁾ Sargent had also ceased his occasional, and highly irregular, practice of sending Phipps copies of the minutes which he had appended to his despatches and of informal, private, letters outlining desired policy. This, perhaps, now reflected their increasing estrangement. Phipps had no way of knowing, therefore, the extremely negative effect which his continual references to Caillaux's reactionary and defeatist views were having on the F.O. Neither were there any specific references in their responses and communications to him. Conscious of Vansittart's threatening presence looming in the background, and the virulent opposition to aspects of Chamberlain's policy in London and Paris, Phipps was uneasily aware that his position was being undermined, and he blamed the Prime Minister's critics with increasing bitterness for adding to the tension and to his own personal insecurity.

132) FO.371/21741 (C10756/1941/18). Phipps tel 'Secret', 26 Sept. 1938. Bonnet's note of their conversation (which is similar to that of Phipps) is in DDE, 2, X1, no. 379 Note du Ministre: Conversation avec Sir E. Phipps, 26 Sept 1938.

133) For Vansittart's attack on Phipps in November, in which he specifically mentioned the latter's continual references to Caillaux's views, see Ch. 8. Hankey remained an immensely influential figure even after his retirement, and strongly defended Phipps in a letter to Halifax in November. The question of Phipps's retirement (on the grounds of his age) had arisen, and Hankey again intervened successfully. (See Ch. 8).

The swings in French opinion continued. On the 27th, Phipps reported Bonnet's remark that feeling was 'more optimistic in Government circles' and they considered that Chamberlain's statement that morning was 'admirable and most helpful'.⁽¹³⁴⁾ Blum and Martin called separately at the Embassy to express their appreciation for Chamberlain's 'continual efforts for peace' and both emphasised that the French people would be unable to understand why they should go to war on a question of procedure. Blum added that 'if it became clear' that Hitler had decided to destroy Czechoslovakia then

France would march to the last man without war enthusiasm but with the firm conviction that war was inevitable and had therefore better come now and without previous dishonour. (135)

Marin, who had expressed very similar views, concluded that 'if France were attacked the matter would be different, but for France to attack first would be folly'. As if attempting to convey additional authority to Marin's words, Phipps added that 'M. Caillaux used this last phrase to me on September 25'.⁽¹³⁶⁾

On the morning of the 28th, Phipps again expressed his personal views on French opinion directly, and somewhat boldly, to Chamberlain via the Foreign Office:

You will have seen from my recent telegrams tenor of opinion of notable Frenchmen of quite different political shades on (the) present position. That position has only become clear to the French public in the last hours and since the publication of (the Sudeten) areas map.

134) FO.371/21741 (C10813/1941/18). Phipps tel., 27 September 1938.

135) Ibid. (C10815/1941/18). Phipps tel., 27 Sept. 1938.

136) FO.371/21742 (C10919/1941/18). Phipps tel., 27 Sept. 1938. 9.40am. Phipps also summarised Flandin's letter in the right wing Temps expressing his personal opposition to French military intervention in the Sudeten-Czech crisis. FO.371/21741 (C10814/1941/18). Phipps tel., 27 Sept. 1938.

Phipps told Chamberlain, almost defiantly, that it was now his duty 'to repeat word for word' his 'considered views' as reported in his ('all that is best for France') telegram of 24 September. Bonnet had assured him that Benes, 'through his Ministers in London and Paris', had been conducting 'a regular campaign against yourself and the French Government and working in with all the forces in favour of a preventive war'. Phipps reported that only Communist Party favoured war, 'even the Socialists' were divided and that

Representatives of 200 deputies are going to M.Daladier this morning and then to President of the Republic to protest against being led into war on a mere question of procedure. France is prepared to march to the last man to defend herself if attacked but will not fight with any heart in a hopeless offensive war against Germany, for which she is not prepared.(137)

Curiously, there was no officially recorded protest by the F.O. to this reiteration of Phipps's 'all that is best for France' views in this later despatch. Phipps's reply to Cadogan's furious rejoinder to his earlier telegram had stressed that it had been despatched 'before Hitler's latest demands had become known'.⁽¹³⁸⁾ This merely represented a tactical climb down and he had adhered consistently to his original views. Apart from the question of whether he had actually known of Hitler's 'latest demands' at the time, and it could have been feasible, his latest despatch reiterating the same views, even more forcibly, was patently despatched well after they had been publicized. Whether it was because Phipps's despatch was addressed to Chamberlain, and this caused in the F.O. some reluctance to criticize

137) FO.371/21742 (C10913/1941/18). Phipps tel. 'for Prime Minister, 28 Sept.1938. 11.40am

138) Later, Phipps was anxious to clarify Daladier's statement on 25 Sept. that Hitler's memorandum of the 23rd had only reached him that morning. Phipps stated that '(the) taking down of (the) Godesberg telegram no.9 to me by telephone from F.O. was completed at about 8.35pm on Sept. 24' and then immediately deciphered. FO.371/21741 (C10871/1941/18). Phipps tel. 27 Sept. His 'all that is best in France' despatch was telephoned to the F.O. at 5.45pm on the same day, ie. 24 Sept. 1938.

it, or whether, after receiving the reports from the Consular Officers they decided that, despite its exaggerated and unacceptable language, his original assessment contained an element of truth, is a moot point. In the event, Barclay minuted, somewhat anxiously, that 'French opinion has hardened and was now resigning itself to the inevitability of war with Germany (and) there now seems to have been a sudden reversal of feeling'.⁽¹³⁹⁾ Copies of this despatch were circulated to the King, Chamberlain, Halifax and Cadogan.

After strongly expressing his personal views on the morning of the 28th, Phipps immediately notified the F.O. that the French Government were pressing for a reply to Bonnet's questions posed in his telegram of the 26th marked 'immediate'.⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ Whether his pessimistic assessment had been a deliberate attempt to influence Halifax's reply is a debatable point. In the event, Halifax replied cautiously to Bonnet's three questions at 8.20pm, and there was no mention of conscription.

Further manifestations of French pacifism were forwarded by the Embassy on the 28th. Phipps reported that Daladier had received Chichéry, the President of the Socialist Radical group of the Chamber, who asked him 'to continue his courageous efforts in favour of peace' and who also stated that;

M.Daladier was completely informed of the feelings of Parliament and of the country and that he would know how to interpret them in the best interests of France, even, if necessary by the appropriate measures.

139) FO.371/21742 (C10913/1941/18). Minute by Barclay, 28 Sept. 1938. This may have been the Paris Embassy's despatch which Cadogan had in mind when he minuted that 'these kaleidoscopic changes are much too rapid for anyone as slow witted as myself'. See p.218

140) FO.371/21742. (C10920/1941/18). Phipps tel., 28 Sept. 1938. 11.45am. It appears from Creswell's minute that the F.O.'s previous minutes, 'all bearing on the attitude of (the) French Government and people' were consulted before Halifax made his reply.

Representatives of the Parliamentary group of the Socialist Party and of the Union Socialiste et Républicaine Party were received by Daladier's Chef de Cabinet, and they urged him that 'everything should be done to safe-guard peace'. Representatives of the minority groups of the Right, led by Marin, also saw Daladier, and later President Lebrun, urging him not to order general mobilisation without consulting Parliament to which Daladier had agreed. Phipps himself was visited by several deputies and by Léon Bailby, the proprietor of Jour-Écho-de-Paris, who, according to Phipps:

impressed upon me their repugnance for a war over the present issue and their indignation at the really criminal and Bolshevik attempts to render a general conflagration inevitable.

These views coincided with Phipps's own, and Barclay minuted that this was 'more evidence of anti-war feeling in France'.⁽¹⁴¹⁾

The negative impact of Phipps's reports on the crisis can be assessed by Sargent's minute of the 28th. Sargent was convinced that it was 'becoming increasingly evident that Hitler wants war, and above all war with us, and that he is determined to have it'. He therefore suggested, somewhat quixotically, that the Czechoslovak Government should be urged to accept the memorandum of the 24th to show the world that 'we have all been forced into war by Hitler and not - to use Sir Eric Phipps's phrase - by any "small noisy and corrupt war group'. Vansittart commented sardonically that 'if anyone wants more proof, he should have his head examined'.⁽¹⁴²⁾

141) FO.371/21743 (C11019/1941/18). Phipps tel. 28 Sept. 1938 & minutes by Barclay, 29 Sept. 1938.

142) FO.371/21744 (C11294/1941/18). F.O. Minute by Sargent to Cadogan, 28 Sept. 1938. More cautiously, Cadogan minuted that the Cabinet had 'definitely decided against this line' the previous evening, and added that 'I really don't think the world should want any further proof of Hitler's insincerity or guilt'. Ibid.

On the morning of the 29th, immediately prior to the Munich Conference, Bonnet 'begged' Phipps to urge Halifax.

how absolutely vital he felt it was that an arrangement should be reached over (the) Sudeten question at Munich at almost any price. M.Bonnet tells that after that, and in the near future, we must make up our minds to proceed gradually to a peaceful modification of many existing frontiers in Europe, as the Treaty of Versailles has collapsed.(143)

Bonnet could not have expressed his defeatist views more clearly, and there is no evidence that Phipps ever attempted to contradict them.

Flandin, the second member of the triumvirate of Phipps's main sources, was even more vociferous in his anti-war views. His 'Appeal to the French people', stating that they were being deceived into thinking that war was inevitable, was published in Doriot's extreme right wing newspaper La Liberté and the edition was confiscated on the orders of Sarraut, the Minister of the Interior. Flandin's appeal then appeared in the Right Wing Socialist Radical paper République, and he threatened to interpellate Sarraut on this issue in the Chamber.⁽¹⁴⁴⁾

Phipps's own personal views were expressed in a slightly hysterical letter of congratulation to Chamberlain in the immediate aftermath of the Munich Agreement on 30 September. After enclosing a letter from Millerand, the ex-President of the Republic, expressing the 'greatest admiration for yourself and

143) FO.371/21743 (C11116/1941/18). Phipps tel., 29 Sept. 1938. 11.25am. Phipps and Bonnet had accompanied Daladier to Orly airport for the latter's flight to Germany.

144) FO.371/21744 (C111167/1941/18). Phipps tel., 29 Sept. 1938. The significance of Flandin's appeal in a fascist newspaper was ignored by Phipps. Doriot, who was probably the most formidable leader of French fascism in the 1930s, was an ex-communist, former mayor of the industrial city of Saint-Denis, and the leader of the PPF. See, for e.g. Gilbert D. Allardyce, 'The Political Transformation of Jacques Doriot', The Journal of Contemporary History, vol 1, no.1 (1966), pp.56-74. During the second world war he was a founder of the Légion des Volontaires contre le Bolshevisme and fought with the Waffen SS on the Russian front. (Flandin became Foreign Minister in Pétain's Vichy Régime).

the wonderful work you have done in the cause of peace', Phipps added his own 'warm and sincere congratulations for your noble efforts and the success that has crowned them'. He told Chamberlain that he had 'tried to report faithfully French feeling on the crisis from day to day', and that the tumultuous scenes on Daladier's return had not occurred in Paris since the armistice. In two very revealing passages, he showed his almost fanatical devotion to Chamberlain:

This morning at Munich Daladier felt grave misgivings as to the reception that awaited him here. This shows how surrounded he has been of late by the war-party - the mad and criminal war party, who, having missed every preventive train since Hitler's accession to power that might have led to a terminus of not too expensive victory, wished to embark in a train at this late hour that could only have led to utter destruction and chaos.

The evil forces working for war combined with foolish and misguided although patriotic forces, and I have had the distinct impression lately that those forces, both here and in England, were working their hardest to undermine your efforts.

Phipps concluded by telling Chamberlain that 'the true France knows what you have done and will give you the greatest welcome ever accorded to a foreign statesman if and when you come to Paris' which he hoped would be soon.⁽¹⁴⁵⁾

Chamberlain gratefully acknowledged Phipps's letter⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ but it was left to Halifax to explain to Phipps in November, 'the lessons of the crisis'.⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ Phipps

145) PHPP.3/1. Phipps to Chamberlain, 30 Sept 1938. Daladier's 'grave misgivings', and his amazement at his reception, on his return from Munich were described vividly in Jean-Paul Sartre's novel The Reprieve (English transl, Penguin Bks 1963, pp.376-7) which has achieved the status of a primary source. Cited, for e.g. by du Réau, op.cit., p.285. Chamberlain was inundated with letters of congratulation after the Munich Agreement, and a file of them is extant amongst his papers. NC.13/9/1-119. Chamberlain & his wife visited Paris in November, See Ch.8.

146) PHPP.3/1. O.S. Cleverly (F.O.) to Phipps, 3 October 1938.

147) See ch.8.

reserved his deeper feelings for an extraordinary private letter to his old friend and protector, Hankey, in which he revealed the depths of his bitterness (especially towards Vansittart) and his almost pathetic craving for some kind of 'outward and visible sign' of appreciation for his services in Paris.⁽¹⁴⁸⁾

148) Ibid.

CHAPTER 8

FROM MUNICH TO THE POLISH GUARANTEE

(1 October 1938 - 31 March 1939)

Part I. 1 October-31 December 1938

Phipps had emerged from the Munich crisis as a convinced and devoted follower of Chamberlain's appeasement policies. While retaining the support of Chamberlain and Halifax, his reputation at the F.O. had suffered a severe decline, and he was uneasily aware that the divisions between 10 Downing Street and the Foreign Office had increased. Consequently this period was marked by a heavy emphasis on the informal aspects, as his private and unofficial correspondence with Halifax, Chamberlain, Hankey and Horace Wilson makes clear, which enabled him to be less inhibited in emphasising his views. This overlapped with the official (or rather formal) aspect of the Embassy's activities which occasionally became a subjective division on Phipps's part since some of his private letters to Halifax were forwarded to the F.O. and minuted by them.⁽¹⁾ While these separate, parallel, channels of communication could not be interpreted as constituting entirely different or contradictory policies, their importance to a more complete picture of Phipps's Paris Embassy, and its activities, necessitates that they be treated separately.

1) There is a comparison with Henderson who, during the Munich crisis, frequently wrote to Halifax privately. According to a minute to Sargent and Mallet on 1 Sept. 1938, they had seen all of these letters and, with Halifax's consent, the important ones had been copied and placed in the F.O. archives for reference. The minute stated that 'the great majority' were 'in no way personal and concern questions which are simultaneously dealt with officially'. FO.371/21743/ (C11048/1941/18 Private letters between Halifax and Henderson 20 March-4 Sept.1938). There appears to have been no similar arrangement for Phipps's private letters. While copies of some of them can be found in the FO.371 files (and were therefore seen by the F.O), others were retained amongst Halifax's private papers and remained confidential.

A) **The Informal Aspects**

Bonnet's tribute to Phipps's services during the Munich crisis,⁽²⁾ and Hankey's visit to Paris on 1-3 October⁽³⁾ (during which Phipps undoubtedly unburdened himself to him), failed to assuage his frustration, resentment and his sense of insecurity which was aggravated by the question of the renewal of his ambassadorship after April 1939. These accumulated feelings culminated in his extraordinarily bitter private letter to Hankey on 6 October. Phipps told him that Bassée, the political director of Havas, had informed him that Pertinax has seen Vansittart in London soon after 'my famous report' of 13 September (describing Bonnet's collapse), 'and before the leakage in the Epoque and Humanité', and that 'Van had told him about my report'. Vansittart was also alleged to have told Pertinax that he (Phipps) 'did not properly represent to the French Government the views of H.M. Government and that the P(rieme) M(inister) would soon be overthrown as British public opinion was hostile to his foreign policy'. Phipps added bitterly that

I shall not tell anyone else but you, for I quite see that our politicians do not care a damn whether the Ambassador in Paris is stabbed in the back by his brother-in-law. Moreover, it is, as you say, difficult to prove, for in a lying match I would back Van plus Pertinax against the honest Bassée.

He assured Hankey that he was 'not at all anxious' to be renewed as Ambassador and that he would prefer to 'hand on the very painful torch to a younger man in

2) PHPP.1/21. Bonnet to Halifax, 3 Oct. 1938. Halifax had replied somewhat cautiously that 'I feel sure that your kind words about him are justified'. Ibid. Halifax to Bonnet, 6 October 1938.

3) Hankey Papers, HNKY 5/5. Hankey had visited Paris (1-3 Oct. 1938) in connection with the monthly meeting of the Suez Board, See 252.

April, and one, let us hope, without a treacherous relation in the F.O.', adding, on a note of pathos, that

In order, however, that it should not be felt by all that I had been a lamentable failure here, it would, I think, be only fair that some "outward & visible sign" should be given me that this was not the case. I have not received any such sign since June 1934 when I was grudgingly given a GCMG, six months after Harry Chilton at Buenos Aires, who is over three years junior to me. I am now the senior member of the Service and shall have been at it for 40 years next January. I don't mind hard work, but underhand intrigue is discouraging and produces in me a feeling of tired disgust.

Phipps concluded that if it had not been for Hankey's 'friendship and consistent help and encouragement' he would have 'thrown in (his) hand a long time ago'.⁽⁴⁾

Hankey himself recorded that 'attempts have been made continuously both in our F.O. and in the Quai d'Orsay to sabotter both the Chamberlain peace policy and Phipps himself. He was also convinced that there was a campaign against Phipps in London where he was being described as a 'defeatist', and that 'his secret despatches are quoted to opposition French newspapers':

He (Phipps) showed me two extracts from French papers reproducing not incorrectly, what he had reported about an interview with Bonnet. That information could only have been received from the F.O. He has protested to Cadogan... Generally he finds the publicity of F.O. tendentious and not setting out the Government's policy adequately. All this he is inclined to attribute to Van who... remains in charge of all propaganda, and is almost certainly in touch with Churchill, Eden, the Labour leaders and with Léger in the Quai d'Orsay who is playing the same tricks over here.⁽⁵⁾

4) PHPP.3/3. Phipps to Hankey, 6 October 1938. There were elements of continuity in Phipps's letter. His craving for honours was nothing new - he had been 'extraordinarily keen' to accept the Legion of Honour in 1927, (see Ch.2) and Vansittart had been economical with the truth when he told Simon in 1934, in order to block Phipps's appointment to Paris, that the latter 'never did a distant post', see Ch.2. Ironically, the Embassy had described André Geraud ('Pertinax') as 'a man of knowledge and conviction, fearless and likeable'. FO.432/4. Pt IX, no.34 Report on Leading Personalities in France for 1937.

5) Stephen Roskill, Hankey, Man of Secrets, vol 3, London 1974, p.390.

Phipps had complained earlier to Halifax about the leak of this telegram, and the F.O. had denied divulging it to anyone 'outside official circles'.⁽⁶⁾ He again pursued the question with Halifax and Cadogan but neither were able to ascertain whether it had occurred in London. The former wanted to speak to him about it when he came to London⁽⁷⁾ while the latter added cryptically that he had 'an indication of which I am not at the moment in a position to give particulars' that it may have occurred in Paris.⁽⁸⁾ Nevertheless, despite the lack of concrete evidence, Phipps still appeared to be convinced that Vansittart had been responsible for the leakage.

More important were the anticipated changes in French foreign policy and the possibility of a France-German rapprochement. François-Poncet, Phipps's old colleague in Berlin, had been designated as the new French ambassador at Rome. Phipps informed Halifax privately that Bonnet had told him confidentially that Hitler had been extremely friendly to François-Poncet during the latter's valedictory interview with him at Berchtesgaden on 18 October. Hitler had wanted 'to reach some rather spectacular agreement with France'⁽⁹⁾ and, although he was bitter that

6) See pp. 190-1.

7) PHPP.1/21. Halifax to Phipps, 7 October 1938. Phipps had told Hankey that he was coming to London on 12 or 13 October 'chiefly for the France-Great Britain Association Banquet on the 18th'. HNKY.5/5, op.cit.

8) PHPP.2/1. Cadogan to Phipps, 7 October 1938. Cadogan's mysterious 'indication' may have been the matter about which Halifax had wanted to discuss with Phipps when he visited London.

9) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/303). Phipps to Halifax, 'Private & Very Confidential', 20 Oct. 1938. The Quai d'Orsay had prepared the ground for this as early as 3 Oct. Massigli had noted that a Franco-German declaration analogous to the Anglo-German Declaration... elle ne nous apporterait aucun élément nouveau de sécurité, mais elle n'en aurait pas moins une réelle valeur psychologique'. DDF, 2, XII, no.29 Note de la direction politique au sujet d'une éventuelle déclaration franco-allemande', 2 octobre 1938.

Munich had not resulted in an improvement in relations with Britain and France, he 'ardently wished' to improve them with both countries. He contemplated a Franco-German declaration and had no desire 'to make any difficulties for France in Spain'. Phipps commented that

François-Poncet, who I can guarantee is not inclined to undue optimism is, Bonnet declares, deeply impressed with Hitler's genuine desire for general pacification and anxiety to avoid a European war. He expressed warm sympathy for Daladier and Bonnet and the hope that France would soon move in the direction of a Franco-German understanding.

Léger, on the other hand, whose views Phipps had sought on the post-Munich situation, was 'as convinced as ever' of France's inability to reach any 'arrangement' with Germany and Italy, and he had concluded that his views were 'hopelessly sterile'.⁽¹⁰⁾

Halifax replied that Chamberlain was well disposed towards Phipps's idea that they should visit Paris, and that it could provide Chamberlain with the opportunity to 'rub into French ministers the importance we attach to putting their aircraft production in order' which had again been high-lighted by the 'very gloomy' reaction of the Chief of the Air Staff to his recent visit to France. He concluded, on a personal note, that he was 'still enjoying in retrospect the charm of your (Phipps's) speech at the Anglo-French dinner' which had taken place in London.⁽¹¹⁾

10) Ibid. (H/XIV/304). Phipps to Halifax, 'Secret', 24 October 1938. Bonnet also told Phipps that Buré, the owner of Ordre, to which Pertinax contributed, was in regular receipt of funds from Moscow.

11) Ibid. (H/XIV/305). Halifax to Phipps, 'Personal & Secret', 25 October 1938. Halifax told Chamberlain that he should 'see this letter from Phipps which is interesting' and would be 'willing to be guided by you as to whether it would be of any advantage to let others see it'. Ibid (H/XIV/306) Halifax to Chamberlain, 'Personal & Secret', 25 October 1938. Corbin had also admired Phipps's speech which he found 'moving'. DDE, 2, XII, no.190 Corbin à Bonnet, 20 Oct. 1938.

Halifax's friendly and appreciative remarks were in marked contrast to Cadogan's derogatory diary entry for 14 October (Eric Phipps looked in - he is not very enlightening'),⁽¹²⁾ and reflected Phipps's relaxed relationship with Halifax and Chamberlain on the one hand, and his uneasy relationship with the F.O. on the other. Halifax, who valued Phipps's services in Paris,⁽¹³⁾ also protected him from his (Halifax's) own private secretary, Oliver Harvey, who was one of Phipps's severest critics.⁽¹⁴⁾ This was apparent in the reaction to Phipps's 'private and confidential' letter to him of 26 October:

Phipps had gleefully described Bonnet's mini-purge at the Quai d'Orsay in the aftermath of Munich and that Caillaux had expressed to him his

great satisfaction at what he describes as the cleaning out of the Augean stables at the Quai d'Orsay. He is much relieved at the departure of Massigli for Angora and the shunting of Comert to the American department.

Phipps had been evasive about Caillaux's enquiry concerning his own impression of Léger's 'activities during the crisis'. Caillaux had wanted Léger to be shunted as well but Phipps believed that

Léger's great wish is to cling on to his present post as long as possible. If he absolutely must leave he would like London. A bird, whose chirpings are not always reliable, has whispered to me that he might be shunted definitely by being appointed a Suez Canal Director. I shall believe that when I see it.

If Daladier shares Bonnet's wish to reach some really comprehensive settlement with Italy and Germany Léger will certainly not work there for "con amore". When Italy is mentioned he looks like a cross between a mule and a viper.

12) The Diplomatic Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-1945, London 1971, p.115.

13) See for e.g. Halifax's positive reaction to Phipps's successful attempts to remove Paul-Boncour as foreign minister in March 1938, p.152.

14) For Harvey's severe criticism of Phipps & his attack on his 'all that is best in France' telegram of 13 September 1938, see p. 200.

Bonnet had 'typically issued a communiqué white-washing' Comert. He had also assured Phipps that 'notwithstanding reports to the contrary he and Daladier saw eye to eye', to which Phipps acidly commented that, 'in that case the eyes must be astigmatic'.⁽¹⁵⁾

Phipps's letter produced an alarmed memorandum to Halifax from Harvey who was very concerned at the Embassy's activities and the possibility of a direct 'Franco-German agreement' which he linked together:-

I cannot help feeling that Sir E.Phipps is getting into dangerous waters if he lends himself in any way to the encouragement of the removal of high officials in the Quai. Reports are already too current in Paris that the Embassy has been intervening overmuch in French internal political during the recent crisis. Sir C.Mendl was certainly far too active in particular.⁽¹⁶⁾

Harvey emphasised that Massigli and Comert had always been 'good friends of Britain' and that if Léger were removed 'we may find ourselves badly short of friends in the Quai'. The pro-German elements in France would then be encouraged to 'reach an agreement with Germany behind our back and at our expense' which would involve France disinteresting herself in Europe. The 'School of Flandin and Caillaux' favoured France 'abandoning the struggle and becoming a second class power', and he reminded Halifax of Caillaux's 'treacherous activities in 1914' and

15) FO.800/311 (X/XIV/307). Phipps to Halifax, 'Private & Confidential', 26 October 1938. This despatch was seen by the F.O. Strang minuted that Léger had retained Daladier's confidence while both Sargent & Cadogan agreed that 'Notwithstanding M.Massigli's shortcomings I think that we may have reason to regret his departure from the Quai d'Orsay'.FO.371/21592 (C14520/13/17). Minutes by Strang, Sargent & Cadogan, 17 & 18 November 1938. Léger was a close friend of Daladier, see for e.g. the former's personal letter to the latter on his accession to the Presidency of the Council in January 1933, quoted in du Réau, p.15. for Daladier's attitude towards Bonnet, see Ch.9.

16) FO.800/311. (X/XIV/307). O.C.Harvey to Halifax, 27 October 1938. Harvey's fears of a 'direct Franco-German Agreement' were precipitated by Phipps's account of François-Poncet's conversation with Hitler (and the manner in which Bonnet had emphasised its secrecy) as described in his letter to Halifax of 24 October 1938, see p.233. This memorandum (together with Halifax's reply) was also placed in the FO archives (FO.371/21631 (C13356/1050/17) and are reproduced in The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-1940, ed. by J.Harvey, London 1970, appendix M, pp.427-429

that he was 'identified with high finance and his past reputation still stinks'. Harvey concluded that

French politicians being what they are and French opinion being easily influenced, I do not think one can exaggerate the importance to us of the Quai d'Orsay. The politicians come and go, the Quai remains. It represents the permanent element in French diplomacy. If the basis of British policy remains close friendship with France and no separate agreements with Germany, and if our aim is to see France strengthen herself, then we must beware of weakening the position of those like Léger and Massigli. They are absolutely sound on this policy, but if replaced they might be succeeded by a very different type of man.⁽¹⁷⁾

Halifax replied that they had discussed that matter, and that he did not 'see any evidence of Phipps acting unwisely in his letter'.⁽¹⁸⁾

Halifax's appreciation of Phipps's services was undoubtedly facilitated by his awareness of the value of the latter's close relationship with Bonnet, and certain other French personalities, which enabled Phipps to provide him with confidential information. This was evident in Halifax's concern at what had actually transpired during François-Poncet's valedictory conversation at Berchtesgaden. The American ambassador had provided him with 'a somewhat different account' in which Hitler had apparently made direct reference to the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, and he wanted Phipps to make discreet enquiries about it; Chamberlain told Halifax that he would be 'interested to see the reply'.⁽¹⁹⁾

17) FO.800/311 (X/XIV/307). Harvey to Halifax, 27 October 1938.

18) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/309). Halifax to Harvey, 28 October 1938. Technically speaking, Halifax was correct and there appears to be no direct evidence, either in Phipps's letter or elsewhere, of the Embassy's direct involvement in Bonnet's mini-purges at the Quai d'Orsay. However, given Phipps's strongly held views, his dislike of the permanent officials at the Quai, and the record of the Embassy's previous involvement in French internal affairs, Harvey's allegations were probably justified.

19) Ibid. (H/XIV/312). Halifax to Phipps, 28 October & minute by Chamberlain, 29 Oct. 1938.

François-Poncet, Phipps's old colleague in Berlin, who was in Paris en route for Rome, saw him on the 29th and Phipps discreetly refrained from pressing him immediately for further details. François-Poncet felt that Mussolini was now 'the key to Hitler, who is very subject to the influence of the Duce' but he realised that his new position at Rome would be difficult and Phipps, who saw him as a potentially valuable channel to the Italians, put in a strong plea for him:

I fear that François-Poncet will have a terribly uphill task at first and I hope you will instruct Perth to help him in every possible way directly he arrives in Rome (on November 7th). He is not a "grand seigneur", but a very honest and honourable man. His tongue is apt to be rather sharp, and he cannot refrain from a "bon mot" even at the risk of making an enemy. if the Italians are inclined to crab at first I feel sure Perth's approval and defence of him would be most valuable. He is whole-heartedly for Anglo-French collaboration. (20)

Halifax passed on his endorsement of Phipps's plea to Perth at Rome who was 'not too pessimistic about future possibilities'.⁽²¹⁾

In reply to Phipps's point blank question on 1 November regarding references to the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, François-Poncet replied that Hitler had 'merely remarked that he had told Mr Chamberlain that circumstances might eventually compel him to consider whether or not that Agreement should be revised'. Phipps thought that it was obvious that

either (1) Poncet does not wish to make mischief and was, therefore more outspoken to the U.S. Ambassador than to me, or (2) Mr Wilson (the U.S. Ambassador in Berlin) may have, quite unwittingly, slightly exaggerated what Poncet said to him. (His predecessor at Berlin, Mr Dodd, had a quite surprisingly firm grasp of the wrong end of every stick). François-Poncet seemed anxious

20) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/13). Phipps to Halifax, 'Private & Very Confidential', 31 October 1938.

21) Ibid. (H/XIV/318 & 323). Halifax to Perth (Rome), 3 November 1938; Perth (Rome) to Halifax, 7 November 1938.

to give me the impression that Hitler despite his complaints regarding our debates and regarding colonies, was not really disagreeable about Great Britain.(22)

François-Poncet also stated that Hitler would only be prepared 'to stabilize the West if he gets a free hand in the East', and Phipps's self confessed cynicism came to the fore in his comment that

It would therefore be well, in François-Poncet's opinion, to get an undertaking from Hitler to consult with us before making any further move even in the East. It seems to me that if Hitler is determined to make this move in any case the less we are consulted the better; but perhaps this is too cynical a view to take.(23)

These private letters to Halifax described the initiation of the Franco-German Agreement of December 1938. Equally important, as his letter of 1 November makes clear, is that they also look forward to Phipps's attempts to enlist Bonnet's support in pressurizing Daladier into making concessions to Italy thus neutralizing Léger's supposedly anti-Italian influence:

Poncet does not believe that any secret military convention yet binds Italy to Germany; but he fears that if we let more than about three months elapse without a general settlement that may materialise. He thinks Mussolini would still welcome some understanding with France & Great Britain which would render him rather less dependent on Hitler's goodwill. In this connection, but very much between ourselves, he deplores Bonnet's weakness in not getting rid of Léger, who is hopelessly and incurably anti-Italian, and will do his best to "saboter" his (François-Poncet's) efforts at Rome. Léger, it seems may also do this for personal reasons as a number of people here would like to see François-Poncet in Léger's post as Secretary General... François-Poncet says that Charvériat, Massigli's successor as Political Director, is merely a satellite of Léger's.(24)

22) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/314). Phipps to Halifax, 'Private & Confidential', 1 Nov. 1938. The printed French documents relating to François-Poncet's farewell visit to Hitler do not contain any references to the Anglo-German Naval Agreement. There is an abridged account in Le Livre Jaune Français. Documents Diplomatiques 1938-39, Paris 1939, no.18 François-Poncet à Georges Bonnet, 20 octobre 1938, and a more complete version in Documents Diplomatiques Français, 2e, XII, no.197 Ibid.

23) Ibid. (H/XIV/316). Phipps to Halifax, (Private & Confidential). 1 November 1938 (2nd despatch).

24) Ibid.

This private despatch overlapped with Halifax's long confidential letter to Phipps of 1 November in which he told him that 'German predominance in Central Europe' was inevitable, and that

The greatest lesson of the crisis has been the unwisdom of basing a foreign policy on insufficient armed strength... I spoke of the efforts which we are making to fill up the gaps in our own defences and the importance we attach to France doing likewise. It is one thing to allow German expansion in Central Europe, which to my mind is a normal and natural thing, but we must be able to resist German expansion in Western Europe or else our whole position is undermined. It would be fatal to us to be caught again with insufficient strength.

Halifax feared that France could 'in certain circumstance turn so defeatist as to give up the struggle of maintaining adequate defences even for the safety of metropolitan France'. It was therefore of the utmost importance to encourage her to rearm as rapidly as possible otherwise 'we might have to face alone the full weight of German military power in the West'. Halifax hoped that the Anglo-Italian Agreement would ameliorate relations with Italy, 'and that France would succeed in doing likewise', and that it would 'increase Mussolini's power of manoeuvre' making him less dependent on Hitler.⁽²⁵⁾

Phipps regarded Halifax's confidential letter as more valuable for his guidance than 'an official despatch on a set subject', and he assured him that

I do not see any prospect of France turning so defeatist as to abandon the necessary defences for the safety of metropolitan France. I am convinced, moreover, that the French would fight like tigers to maintain their independence.⁽²⁶⁾

This apparent conviction had not, however, prevent him from continuing to attack the soi-disant 'war party', and Daladier's bitter complaint about General Spears's activities in Paris after the Munich agreement provided him with the opportunity of

25) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/314A). Halifax to Phipps, Confidential, 1 November 1938.

26) Ibid. (H/XIV/320). Phipps to Halifax, 7 Nov. 1938.

conveying his views on the subject privately to Chamberlain, who would shortly be visiting Paris. Phipps told him that Spears had seen 'all the members of the war party such as Reynaud, Mandel and co. (sic)', and that Daladier was particularly indignant by the fact that

Spears went to see General Maurin, formerly Minister for War, and actually told him that he (Spears) considered France to have been so completely disgraced that no right-thinking Englishman should shake a Frenchman's hand.

Phipps had confirmed to Daladier that Spears 'counted for nothing in England' and that Spears's 'chief raison d'être during the war was that he spoke French rather better than English'. Using anti-semitism as a method of ingratiating himself on Chamberlain, he added that

It is curious that Spears is a Jew and that his real name is Spiers. When he changed it I remember that somebody suggested that his motto should be "Dum Spiro spearo".(27)

In the meantime, the question of the renewal of Phipps's ambassadorship on 1 April had become the subject of the most intense informal activity involving, almost inevitably, his mentor, Hankey. Hankey told Phipps on 1 November that he was 'about to take up the question of your extension, whether you like it or not!'

27) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/319). Phipps to Chamberlain, 4 November 1938. There is no evidence to suggest that Spears was Jewish (see p.38). This was a partial attempt by Phipps to provide 'the war party' with a motive (see, for e.g. his comments on Mandel's Jewish ancestry, *ibid*). As remarked previously, Phipps also used anti-semitism as a method of ingratiating himself with Chamberlain (& Halifax). Mendl told Phipps that he had heard 'on good authority' that when Chamberlain visited Paris, Bonnet, was 'going to complain officially' about Vansittart's activities and 'in particular of a recent visit to Paris in which certain intrigues were set on foot'. PHPP.2/21. Mendl to Phipps, 8 November 1938. There appears to be no further reference to this in the British archives. Ironically, Mendl, whose Jewish ancestry was undisputed and who acted in tandem with Phipps, had himself been very friendly with Spears whom he habitually addressed as 'Beaucaire'. Their correspondence appears to be extant for the years 1923-1931/2 only. Spears Papers, 1/230.

adding, playfully, that 'I shan't tell you my plans!'⁽²⁸⁾ On 28th, he reported that he had 'fired (his) big gun' and would have to 'lie low for a little'.⁽²⁹⁾ He was able to tell Phipps on the 30th that 'what I have been working for will come off, but only for six months in the first instance', and that he was reluctant to 'say anything more explicit in a posted letter'.⁽³⁰⁾

The 'big gun', to which Hankey had referred, was his extremely effective letter to Halifax on 15 November, extolling Phipps's virtues as British ambassador at Paris. Hankey referred, *inter alia*, to Phipps's 'very remarkable influence over French ministers', the fact that he was liked and trusted, the devotion of his staff and, 'such is the confidence in him that he knows many Cabinet secrets before they reach the Cabinet', but

Above all, from the point of view of the public interest, Phipps is a convinced believer in and powerful exponent of the Chamberlain-Halifax policy. No-one can put it over the French as he, because he speaks with conviction and knows how to "get under their skins". He has proved this. We have a real national asset there. Phipps knows Paris as no-one else in the Embassy does, except possibly Mendel (sic) - a rare thing for an Ambassador.⁽³¹⁾

Hankey's high opinion of Phipps was not universally shared at the F.O.

Harvey recorded on the 17th that the Promotions Board had recommended against prolongation owing to the block in promotion; Phipps was 'well over age';

28) PHPP.3/3. Hankey to Phipps, 11 November 1938. Hankey also stated that 'by next Spring and still more by next Summer we shall possess a very powerful defence indeed'. He warned Phipps, however, that only meagre resources were being given to the army and that, 'if France needs an army to help her - as she will - we shall be no better than in 1914, in fact worse'.

29) PHPP.3/3. Hankey to Phipps, 28 November 1938.

30) Ibid. Hankey to Phipps, 30 November 1938.

31) FO.794/16. Hankey to Halifax, 15 November 1938. Hankey also referred to Phipps's 'astonishingly wide contacts over a wide range' whereas it was precisely the latter's heavy reliance on a narrow range of contacts, viz. Bonnet, Caillaux & Flandin which brought him into such disrepute with the F.O.

Cadogan and himself 'both feel strongly that he did not show up well during the crisis and that Ronnie Campbell would be far better', and that

H(alifax) had agreed to this when he received a letter from Hankey (now on the Suez Canal Co) praising Phipps to the skies as the greatest Ambassador ever! I think Phipps must have got him to do this - anyway, it shook H. and we are now trying to get him to agree on a compromise extension till the Autumn only. (32)

In the event, Halifax endorsed all of Hankey's comments about Phipps and was certain that 'this opinion is shared by all the authorities here'.⁽³³⁾ The problem was, as he explained to Harding³⁴ that

there is a great deal to be said in favour of keeping Phipps on in Paris where he has established an exceptionally good position for himself. On the other hand, by next Spring he will be 63½ and he has already, in fact, passed the age at which most Ambassadors have been retiring recently. There is, at the moment, too a very serious block in promotion in the Diplomatic Service.⁽³⁴⁾

Phipps was kept in suspense during Chamberlain's visit to Paris and, despite his bravado statement, that he 'would not lift a finger to be renewed',⁽³⁵⁾ his effusion of gratitude towards Hankey for his intervention suggested otherwise:

You are angelic, but also very wicked to have written to Halifax about my renewal. I have only known one indispensable person in my life and that is yourself: and this was clearly proved when you retired and were given three successors. If Cadogan or Ronnie Campbell come here all will go beautifully, but the intriguing Van would really be a disaster. Nothing was said to me during the visit about my future so I am still in the dark... Whatever the decision

32) The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-1939, edit. by J. Harvey, London 1970, pp.220-1. Harvey had recorded during the Czech crisis that Phipps had 'done his utmost to discourage the French from anything resembling positive action in fulfilment of their treaty with Czechoslovakia', he had 'skilfully worked on Bonnet's fears and weakness' and had 'consistently reported his views without seeking or encouraging the views of other more important Frenchmen such as Blum, Herriot, Reynaud or Mandel who stand for firmer policies'. Harvey did not consider it wise 'to blanket other opinions to the extent he has... HMG are entitled to know all sides and not only what they want to hear'. Ibid, p.188 (Entry for 19 Sept.1938). For Harvey and Cadogan's severe criticism of Phipps's all that is best in France' telegram, see Ch.7.

33) FO.794/16. Halifax to Hankey, 21 November 1938.

34) Ibid. Halifax to Sir A. Hardinge, 22 November; Halifax to Chamberlain, 21 November 1938.

35) See his letter to Hankey of 6 October 1938 cited on p.231-2.

maybe I should like to know one way or the other as many plans have to be made before a big move like this, and we are barely five months off it now.⁽³⁶⁾

Phipps's anxieties proved groundless. After Halifax had discussed the matter with Chamberlain, his appointment was extended for a further six months, prolonging it until 24 October 1939.⁽³⁷⁾

Chamberlain had, in fact, been highly appreciative of Phipps's services and had regarded his visit to Paris as a great success to which, he told him he had 'contributed so much'. He also assured Phipps that 'more than one of your guests (in Paris) spoke to me in warm terms about you and Lady Phipps and about the good work you had done for the Entente'.⁽³⁸⁾ Phipps replied that the French were certainly 'overjoyed at your coming over'; the visit had, in fact, given Daladier 'the necessary confidence' to adopt a firm attitude towards the general strike which, consequently had been 'a complete fiasco'.⁽³⁹⁾ He also assured Chamberlain that the French understood, and had accepted, his prospective visit to Rome 'except the incorrigible "Pertinax", who of course tried to make trouble over it'.⁽⁴⁰⁾

Thus reassured by Chamberlain, Phipps resumed his role as the self-appointed guardian of the Prime Minister's policies with renewed vigour. This

36) Hankey Papers, HNKY 5/5, Phipps to Hankey, 25 November 1938.

37) FO.794/16. Hardinge draft to F.O., 30 June 1939. Hardinge also explained that Phipps was appointed to Paris in April 1937 for only two years 'as he was already a year and a half over the normal retiring age of sixty when he took up his appointment'.

38) PHPP.3/1. Chamberlain to Phipps (handwritten), 30 November 1938.

39) Neville Chamberlain Papers. NC7/11/31/218. Phipps to Chamberlain, 1 Dec.1938. Phipps was correct in stating that the general strike had collapsed. Lefranc wrote; 'La grève générale fut un échec brutal pour le CGT. Le gouvernement ayant requis les transports et les administrations et menacé de sanctions les grévistes, le nombre des grévistes fut très réduit'. Georges Lefranc, Histoire du Front Populaire, Paris 1965, p.280.

40) Ibid.

included censoring the text of Duff Cooper's speech which he was due to deliver in Paris immediately after the publication of the Franco-German Agreement. Phipps wanted him to 'lay more stress on closer Anglo-French co-operation', and to omit two paragraphs which, he told Duff Cooper

would chiefly be welcomed and applauded by the Communists: coming from the lips of a man so well-known and respected here as yourself they would be considered unnecessarily harsh and wounding to the French President of the Council. To furnish ammunition in these critical times to M. Daladier's enemies is to furnish indirectly ammunition to Hitler or to... Stalin.(41)

Phipps explained to Chamberlain that parts of the speech were 'too harshly critical' of Daladier's policy, and he had therefore asked André Chaumeix of the Académie Française, and 'a whole hearted admirer of your policy', to impress upon Duff Cooper that it would be unfortunate if he provided ammunition 'for Daladier's enemies on the left':

This Chaumeix did, and in general tried to impress upon Duff Cooper that the chief war mongers, in France at any rate, were the Communists and some of the Socialists. The Duff Coopers left first and Chaumeix told me he was surprised to find how bitterly Duff Cooper defended his anti-Munich thesis.(42)

In the event, Duff Cooper omitted the offending paragraphs and, at Phipps's prompting, added that he had not realised that his visit to Paris would coincide with that of Ribbentrop.⁽⁴³⁾ Chamberlain was grateful for Phipps's efforts to 'curb Duff Cooper' but still regarded the remainder of his speech as 'mischievous and

41) PHPP.3/1. Phipps to Duff Cooper, 6 December 1938.

42) PHPP.3/1. Phipps to Chamberlain, 7 December 1938. It will be recalled that Duff Cooper had resigned from the Cabinet over the Munich agreement.

43) PHPP.3/1. Duff Cooper to Phipps, 7 December 1938. The former publicly confirmed that he had 'accepted certain alterations' which Phipps had suggested. Duff Cooper, Old Men Forget, London 1953, p.254.

untimely enough'.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Phipps was able to reassure him however that 'nothing was said which could offend Daladier'.⁽⁴⁵⁾

Vansittart's visit to Paris in December was of considerably greater concern to Phipps who told Horace Wilson (who, as Chamberlain's closest adviser could be expected to pass the information on to him) about 'the subterranean activities of the Chief Diplomatic Adviser'. Vansittart had been 'entertained' by Thomas Cadett, the Times Correspondent in Paris and one of Chamberlain's most vociferous critics, whose simmering feud with the Embassy would erupt in January. Phipps had warned that Cadett had also invited Reynaud, Palewski (the latter's chief secretary), and Blum to 'this gathering' commenting bitterly that

These activities (of Vansittart) are, I am well aware, only a sample of what has been going on throughout my time as Ambassador - a time now rapidly drawing to a close. I can only hope that my successor will have an easier task here in this respect than I have had. Above all I earnestly hope that he will only be chosen after his loyalty to the PM's policy of appeasement has been proved "beyond a peradventure". Otherwise the danger to that policy, already none too easy of executing owing to intrigues on both sides of the channel, will be greater than it need be.⁽⁴⁶⁾

Phipps was less fortunate in keeping his private letter to Halifax of the 8 December confidential. Halifax, who was going on a short holiday, asked Harvey to acknowledge it and, intentionally or otherwise, the latter forwarded it to the F.O. where it met with a storm of criticism. Phipps had expounded the views of Montigny, the deputy for Sarthe, 'who is a great friend and admirer of Caillaux', at considerable length. Montigny had called upon him at the Embassy

44) Ibid. Chamberlain to Phipps, 8 December 1938.

45) Ibid. Phipps to Chamberlain, 8 December 1938 (& encl. Duff Cooper's letter).

46) PHPP.3/5. Phipps to Horace Wilson, 13 December 1938. Phipps had received this information from Mendl, PHPP.2/21 Mendl to Phipps, 13 December 1938.

expressly to warn me that the French "war Party", defeated by the Munich agreements and the wisdom of the British Prime Minister was again raising its head. He remarked that the "bellicists" apart from the Communists, who were openly paid by Russia & were unanimous in desiring war, cut across all parties in France. A minority of the Socialists, a minority of the Catholics and the great majority of the Jews were for war merely because they were anti-Nazi.

Montigny specifically warned Phipps against Georges Mandel, the Minister of the Colonies, whom he described as 'the leader of the war-party in France and the most dangerous man in the country', and that

What the latter's motive might be, whether financial or racial (Mandel is a Jew and his real name is Rothschild, although no relation to the great banking magnates), or whether merely the remembrance of the war days when he wielded great power as the right hand man of Clemenceau, M.Montigny could not say, but the fact remained and, owing to his forceful personality and intelligence, Mandel constituted a real danger for peace.(47)

Montigny had then attacked Mandel's campaign against any cession of the colonies which, he claimed, had been launched 'in order to wreck' Daladier's post Munich appeasement policy. Phipps reminded Halifax that, like Montigny, Bonnet had informed him that he wanted to 'loosen French ties with Russia and Poland', and that Ribbentrop would probably 'press for this' when he visited Paris.(48)

47) FO.371/21601 (C15350/55/17). Phipps to Halifax, Private & Confidential, 6 Dec. 1938. Phipps was pursuing one of his favourite themes. He had quoted Caillaux to the effect that anti-semitism had increased because the French public 'realised that the chief war-mongers in the recent crisis were Jews (including the Paris Rothschilds)'. FO.371/21600 (C12965/55/17). Phipps tel., 25 Oct. 1938. However, some six months earlier Caillaux had shouted 'Juif insolent!' at Blum when he had replied to the former's 'rough heckling' and there were similar racist taunts in the Chamber. FO.432/4 (Part IX). Phipps to Halifax, 13 April 1938.

48) Ibid.

Phipps's private despatch to Halifax revealed that he was completely out of step with current Foreign Office thinking.⁽⁴⁹⁾ There had been a great swing in opinion at the F.O. since early November 1938⁽⁵⁰⁾ as a result of (a) Kristallnacht on the 10th (with its attendant hostile British press reaction against Nazi Germany),⁽⁵¹⁾ and (b) the intelligence reports, and other information, summarized by Halifax at the Foreign Policy Committee meeting on the 14th.⁽⁵²⁾ Consequently the Central Department, Sargent and Vansittart were extremely critical of Phipps's views.

Roberts minuted that, 'there is not much to choose between M.Caillaux and his friends and M.Mandel as regards trustworthiness... the latter has at least the merit of being a patriot, whereas M.Caillaux's claim to such a description are at best doubtful'.⁽⁵³⁾ In a further breach with Phipps, Sargent minuted that

49) Phipps's views since the onset of the Czech crisis had increasingly resembled those of Henderson. Henderson also disliked Benes and the Czechs; the Soviet-Czech pact; Mandel, the Jews and the Communists. He had told Halifax in July that 'war would doubtless serve the purpose of all Jews, Communists and doctrinaires in the world for whom Nazism is anathema', a view which had been criticized by the F.O. FO.371/21730 & 21729 (C7868 & C77678/1941/18). Henderson (Berlin) to Cadogan, 22 July & Henderson to Halifax (and minutes), 26 July 1938.

50) See for example, the important collection of papers by Cadogan, Strang & the SIS in FO.371/21659 (C14471/42/18) Possible future course of British policy, 9 November 1938. These are discussed in Donald Lammers, 'From Whitehall after Munich: the F.O. and the future course of British Policy', The Historical Journal, 16, 1973.

51) The British reaction to Kristallnacht is analysed in D. Cameron Watt, *op.cit.*, pp. 88-89.

52) CAB.27/624. Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy F.P. (36) 32nd Meeting, 14 November 1938. Halifax stated, *inter alia*, that Hitler was dissatisfied with Munich, that 'as regards Germany the immediate objective should be the correction of the false impression that we were decadent, spineless and with impunity be kicked about', and that no useful purpose would be served by a further resumption at the present time of the Anglo-German conversations.

53) FO.371/21601 (C15350/55/17). Minute by Roberts, 13 December 1938.

I am not so frightened of the French war party as Sir E.Phipps seems to be. In the first place the expression "war party" is merely a term of abuse, used to give a bad name to the dog. I am surprised at Sir E.Phipps using it. Secondly the so-called "war party" happens also to be the Anglophil party - a fact which Sir E.Phipps seems to forget. And thirdly, the fact that they are denounced by Caillaux and his followers is I should have thought, from the English point of view, a strong recommendation in their favour - French défaitism surely cannot be a British interest.(54)

Vansittart agreed with Sargent and commented, in his convoluted prose, that the Paris Embassy 'continues to give us but one "son de cloche" and that

even this misleading picture gains little in resemblance to "all that is best in France" - I am quoting from the famous telegram of the crisis so describing MM Caillaux, Flandin and Bonnet! - by the invocation of a hanger on of one of this unsavoury trinity.(55)

B) The Formal Aspects

Phipps's informal despatches during this period had revealed the extent to which the Embassy was immersed in intrigues in Paris. His official despatches were dominated by the anticipated changes in French foreign policy which, after Munich, had freed them from the straight jacket of their commitments to the Czechs, culminating, in late December, with the Franco-German Declaration which coincided with the potentially dangerous increase in Franco-Italian tension. Independent sources revealed aspects of the French internal scene which were disturbing to the Foreign Office, and confirmed to them their diagnosis of the malaise which appeared to be gripping France. Phipps himself continued to rely heavily on 'the unsavoury trinity' (to use Vansittart's description) of Bonnet,

54) Ibid. Minute by Sargent. Phipps was now temporarily addressing Sargent by his surname rather than by his familiar nickname 'Moley' which reflected the change in their relationship. For an example of their former close friendship, see p.94.

55) FO.371/21601 (C15350/55/17). Minute by Vansittart, 23 December 1938.

Caillaux and Flandin as his main sources albeit slightly more critically of the latter, possibly because of the odium he had attracted during the Munich crisis.⁽⁵⁶⁾

These changes were initially described by Phipps on 12 October.⁽⁵⁷⁾ French opinion considered that Germany's influence in Central and Eastern Europe would be increased and that of France 'diminished if not extinguished' and Blum, amongst others, had, in fact, warned that French commitments to Poland and the USSR 'should be reviewed'. He also highlighted two significant internal developments: (a) The Oeuvre (Socialist Radical) had approved the demand of the President of the Union Confederation des Anciens Combatants (representing six million ex-servicemen) for a 'non-political government of national safety', and Phipps commented that this 'well reflects the general mood of search for a strong hand to lead France out of her troubles'. (b) He warned (or rather admitted) for the first time that there was an undercurrent of defeatism in France (which did not, however, prevent him from continuing to attack the 'war party' in early December):-

It may indeed be said in general that the country now desires unity and a strong government and recognises the need for a further armaments effort particularly in the air. But there are undercurrents of defeatism which feel that France's future as a Great Power is dangerously compromised. This feeling is to be found among the pacifists of the Left and among M.Flandin's followers on the Right. Meanwhile at a moment of such uncertainty and depression French

56) Flandin had sent Hitler a telegram of congratulation after the Munich agreement for which, at ceremonies at the Arc de Triomphe, he had his face slapped by Maître Jacques Renouvin who 'declared that his presence would dishonour the Unknown Soldier's Tomb'. FO.371/21600 (C14079/55/17). Phipps to Halifax, 17 November 1938.

57) FO.371/21612 (C12160/1050/17). Phipps tel., 12 October 1938. This document was reproduced in DBFP, 3, III, no.187.

opinion and not least in financial circles is leaning heavily on Great Britain for leadership and guidance...(58)

These sombre views may have been influenced by the delayed Nice Consular District Officer's report on the local reaction to the Czech crisis in which he stated that 150,000 people had 'left Nice alone during the Crisis', and that the French Government had 'taken no steps whatsoever for the protection of the people'.⁽⁵⁹⁾ The 'under current of defeatism' to which Phipps referred had also been underlined by Colonel Fraser's conversation with General Dentz, the Deputy Chief of the French General Staff, that morning; Dentz stated that it was England rather than France which was currently threatened, and that:

Germany wanted colonies and the easiest place to capture them was on the Scheldt and the Meuse. If Germany attacked Holland or Belgium, England might consider it vital for her to fight; but he was not at all convinced that French public opinion would see it in the same way. He thought the French would be very inclined to say, "it is not our affair". He reiterated several times "take care of French public opinion... France does not intend to allow England to fight her battle with French soldiers".⁽⁶⁰⁾

Phipps's reference to 'leaning heavily on Britain for leadership and guidance' related, subjectively, to his close rapport with Bonnet and would provide added justification for his increased interference in French internal affairs in early 1939.

58) FO.371/21612 (C12160/1050/17). Curiously, there were no F.O. minutes to this important despatch. The Embassy's report of a leading article in the semi-official Temps of 5 Oct., declaring that the recent crisis had shown the need for 'a revision of values in the sphere of foreign policy' was, however, minuted by the F.O. (Ibid. C11695/1050/17), Phipps tel. 5 Oct.1938).

59) Ibid. (C12016/1050/17). Phipps tel., 8 Oct.1938 (Encl. copy of Nice Despatch no.33 of 4 Oct. 1938). There had also been 'something approaching panic at Monte Carlo' during the Crisis. FO.371/21613 (C12852/1050/17), Phipps tel. 22 Oct. 1938 (encl. despatch from British Consul at Nice), minute by Barclay, 28 Oct.1938.

60) DBFP, 3, 3, 189. Campbell (Paris) to Halifax, 12 October 1938 (Encl: Memorandum by the Military Attaché, Colonel Fraser). Gen. Dentz later emphasised that he was only expressing a personal view.

Phipps's second despatch of the 12th outlined the changes in French foreign policy in more detail. Bonnet had informed him that the Treaty of Versailles and 'definitely crumbled away'; Britain and France should continue discussions with the dictators whilst pushing on rapidly with rearmament; and that he was considering revising France's treaty commitments with Poland and the USSR because

he did not wish to risk finding the French Government placed again in the terrible position that it was owing to the Treaty with Czechoslovakia. France, in a word, must no longer be exposed to the dangers of being involved in war on behalf of Soviet Union or Poland as a result of circumstances over which she has no control.

Bonnet had quoted Coulondre's report from Moscow describing 'Soviet anger' at the Munich settlement and the Comintern's intention of stirring up trouble in France. He also stated that he hoped to appoint a French agent to Burgos within the near future.⁽⁶¹⁾

This important despatch elicited a considerable discussion at the F.O., where its implications for Britain led to a division of opinion.⁽⁶²⁾ The Moscow Chancery complained that it was of 'such interest' that a copy should have been sent to them directly in the diplomatic bag,⁽⁶³⁾ and a long report on French foreign policy based entirely on Phipps's two despatches of 12 October was circulated to the Dominions.⁽⁶⁴⁾

The problems which these two despatches raised became intertwined with the question of French rearmament. Hankey had visited Paris in early October and

61) FO.371/21612 (C12161/1050/17). Phipps tel., 12 October 1938. (2nd despatch).

62) Ibid. Minute by Barclay, Sargent, Cadogan and Vansittart, 13, 17 & 18 October 1938.

63) Ibid. Moscow Chancery to Northern Dept., 5 Nov. 1938.

64) Ibid. (C12502/1050/17). Dominions Office circular tel. on French Foreign Policy, 18 October 1938.

his general impression had been one of 'intense relief and gratitude to the British Government in general and to the P(rieme) M(inister) in particular'. Phipps had confirmed Hankey's impressions and had emphasised that

Several French friends of mine have spoken to me in the same sense as General Weygand spoke to Sir Maurice and have urged how essential it now is that HMG should put continuous pressure on the French Government to set the French defences in order. They have also begged me to point out to individual members of the French Government how vital it is for French finances to be put on a sound basis...(65)

Phipps had wanted to deliver a message from Chamberlain 'on these lines' to Daladier⁽⁶⁶⁾ but he was instructed to broach the topic with him and to emphasise that he was only speaking 'personally and unofficially'.⁽⁶⁷⁾ Daladier's assurance to Phipps, that considerable funds had been allocated to aviation in the forthcoming year and that he intended to create a Ministry of Supply specifically to deal with these problems,⁽⁶⁸⁾ partly mollified the F.O.

Phipps's almost identical agreement with Bonnet's views were confirmed on 3 November when the latter, 'in the seclusion of his sick room', confided to him how relieved he was that war had been averted by Chamberlain and that he had 'castigated(d) in no measured terms the French war mongers' whom, he was certain, must have been aware of French military weakness. Bonnet then revealed

65) FO.371/21600 (C11641/55/17). Phipps to Halifax, 4 October 1938; Hankey Papers, HNKY 5/5 Memor. of Impressions in Paris by Sir Maurice Hankey, 1-3 Oct. 1938. (Reprinted in DBFP, 3, III, no.122).

66) FO.371/21600 (C11641/55/17). Phipps to Halifax, 4 October 1938.

67) Ibid. (C11641/55/17). Halifax to Phipps, 28 October 1938.

68) FO.371/21613 (C13360/1050/17). Phipps thought that Raoul Dautry, the Director of State Railways and a talented technocrat, would head the Ministry of Supply. It was not until September 1939, however, that Daladier created a Ministry of Armaments, headed by Dautry.

to him the events at the 'council of war' on 15 March, when Blum was Prime Minister and Paul-Boncour had been Foreign Minister, which had been called to 'consider the possibility of French intervention in Spain'. Phipps reminded Halifax that he had cut short his dinner with Gamelin in order to interview Paul-Boncour at the latter's home and that

(Paul Boncour) admitted to me the despatch of French troops to Spain was contemplated, whereupon I told him that he evidently wished to start a general conflagration. After a heated argument he led me into the next room where I discovered M. Herriot... and the discussion continued until past midnight. Next morning early I saw Blum at his private house... I extracted from Blum a regretful half-promise that he would confine himself to a merely "hypocritical" intervention in Spain. What he heard at that Council from the lips of Generals Gamelin and Vuillemin may have helped to make him keep his promise.(69)

Bonnet explained to Phipps that he realised that intervention would 'entail a serious risk of war on three fronts viz. the Alps, the Pyrenees and the Rhine', and had questioned the military advisers closely. Gamelin had told him (Bonnet) that 'certain limited offensives' were possible but that the war would be mainly in the air, and that Poland and Rumania would never allow the transit of Soviet troops across their territories. Vuillemin had been even more pessimistic, and had stated that all the Czech aerodromes would be 'entirely destroyed' by the Germans and no Soviet aeroplanes would be able to land there. Phipps added that

M.Bonnet further me that during the recent international crisis General Vuillemin had declared that a fortnight after the outbreak of hostilities the entire French air force would be destroyed by the Germans (this confirms what M.Pierre Bérenger told me on Sept. 28, see my tel.640 Saving of Sept.30). (Bonnet) finally said that

69) FO.371/21613 (C13372/1050/17). Phipps tel., 3 November 1938. For Phipps's earlier description of these events and his pressure on Daladier not to reappoint Paul-Boncour as MFA, see Ch.6. The Comité Permanent de la défense nationale met on 15 March 1938 not on 17 March as Phipps erroneously stated.

General Vuillemin had announced his intention of resigning his post as Chief of the Air Staff in the event of France declaring war on Germany.⁽⁷⁰⁾

This telegram provided Phipps with additional self-justification for his role in preventing Daladier from reappointing Paul-Boncour, and Halifax considered it sufficiently important for copies to be sent to Chamberlain, the War Office, the Admiralty, the Air Ministry and the C.I.D.⁽⁷¹⁾

Nevertheless by mid-November, and despite Phipps's reassurances, the F.O. were concerned by the evidence from other sources of the malaise which appeared to be gripping France which, in their frequently uncritical reiteration of the views of the most reactionary and defeatist elements the Embassy appeared to be reflecting rather than responding to. Two independent reports in particular were regarded by them as important and they were incorporated directly into their instructions to Phipps.

1) Ashton Gwatkin's interview with Dr Schairer, who had just returned from Paris on 21 November where he had seen Reynaud whom he described as 'a staunch friend of England and of the English alliance'. Dr Schairer had warned, however, that

some of his (Reynaud's) colleagues are already intriguing with Hitler's and Ribbentrop's emissaries especially Bonnet, Lamoureux, Flandin. These are all corrupt fellows. Bonnet is connected with a bank (Lazards) (sic) which has large sums locked up in Germany;

70) Ibid. Bonnet's account of Vuillemin's pessimistic views follows closely the official French account of the meeting. (DDE, 2, VIII no.446 Procès verbal Comité permanent de la défense nationale, 15 mars 1938) except that there is no mention of Gen. Vuillemin's threat to resign. Bonnet, who was not a minister at the time, did not attend (and presumably was not entitled to attend) the meeting. The circumstances under which he questioned the military advisors 'closely' as he alleged must, therefore, remain a matter of conjecture. He may, however, have received details of this meeting from Gen. Vuillemin. For the close relationship between their families and Vuillemin's repeated prophecies regarding the destruction of the French air force, see pp. 213-4.

71) FO.371/21613 (C13372/1050/17). Minutes by Mallet & Harvey, 8 & 9 Nov.1938. It was not, however, given 'political distribution as it was regarded as highly confidential.

Lamoureux, true to his name, keeps too many women to remain independent; Flandin is notorious. All these men would make a settlement with Hitler at almost any price. They have recently supported proposals from German sources... Daladier is nothing - 'the body of a bull with the heart of a cow' - he is pushed this way and that by the last speaker...

Roberts commented that 'this fits in with other information we have', and Makins minuted that 'this is of considerable interest and probably not very wide of the mark'.⁽⁷²⁾

2) Kenneth de Courcy's report on the European situation (gleaned 'from very reliable sources') that there was a persistent leakage of French Cabinet secrets into Germany and that de Brinon was one of the main channels of communication between Paris and Berlin. De Courcy alleged that at least two members of the French Cabinet were 'not in an independent situation'; Brinon had obtained 'some of his information' from one of them, and that

I believe, for example, that many of the papers relating to financial scandals in which these two Ministers have been involved are now in the possession of the German Government, and that de Brinon is aware of this. It will be recalled that de Brinon is the leader writer of l'Information the principal French financial newspaper, and in that position has great influence upon the Stock Markets. He has already received the close attention of the Sûreté Générale, and it may be well to encourage them in their activities.⁽⁷³⁾

Inskip, the Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence, stated in the C.I.D.'s covering note that Courcy's reports had been 'quite remarkable in their anticipation of what has happened'. Echoing Dr Schairer's earlier information, Roberts thought that the French ministers referred to was Bonnet and the other, possibly

72) FO.371/21665 (C14758/62/18). F.O. memorandum (F.A. Gwatkin), 22 Nov.1938. & minutes by Roberts & Makins. Dr Reinhold Schairer was 'a German refugee and educationalist at the University of London', who acted as an intermediary between Dr Goerdeler (& the German opposition) and Arthur Young (& the F.O.). Sidney Aster, 1939, the Making of the Second World War, London 1973, p.39.

73) FO.371/21675 (C14251/132/18). Sellar (CID) to Jebb (FO), 18 Nov. 1938. (Encl. in, De Courcy's report on the European Situation). For Brinon's pro-German proclivities, see p.146.

Lamoureux while Cadogan told Inskip that this 'fitted in with our other information'. Sargent minuted:

As regards France all the reports we receive seem to show that she is passing through a very unhealthy phase and requires very careful watching. I think this might be impressed on the Paris Embassy privately.(74)

De Courcy's information was directly incorporated, therefore, into Sargent's warning to Phipps on 29 November that:

This is, I think the first time we have heard the suggestion that de Brinon is in German pay, and sells French Cabinet secrets to the Germans. On the other hand, it is clear from your reports and from reports which have reached us from our own secret sources that France is passing through a very unhealthy phase and requires very careful watching, both as regards the internal situation and the risk lest certain elements in French public life might prove unduly susceptible to German blandishments. I am sure you are fully alive to the dangers to which the enclosed note draws attention and will continue to keep a close eye on them.(75)

Sargent had emphasised that de Courcy's report should be 'regarded as secret,' and that his previous reports had generally 'turned out to be rather accurate'.⁽⁷⁶⁾ His letter appeared to have scant effect. A week later, Phipps was still enthusiastically expounding the views of Caillaux's defeatist entourage and attacking the soi-disant 'war party' at great length in a 'private and confidential' letter to Halifax which was inadvertently seen by the Foreign Office and bitterly criticized by them.⁽⁷⁷⁾

74) Ibid. Minute by Roberts; Cadogan to Inskip, 21 Nov; minute by Sargent, 23 Nov. 1938. Kenneth de Courcy was the Hon. Secretary of the Imperial Policy Group (1934-39) & travelled as the group's chief observer of Foreign Affairs in Europe & America 1935-39 with special missions of enquiry to Mussolini, Benes, Schuschnigg etc. He was also the proprietor of the Intelligence Digest 1938-76. Who's Who, 1991.

75) Ibid. Sargent to Phipps, 'Secret', 29 November 1938.

76) FO.371/21675 (C14251/132/18). Sargent to Phipps, 'Secret', 29 November 1938.

77) FO.371/21601 (C155550/55/17). Phipps to Halifax, 'Private & Confidential', 6 December 1938. See p.246-9 for its contents and the caustic FO minutes.

The F.O. continued to be concerned by the 'very unhealthy phase' in France which did not appear to perturb the Embassy. On 13 December, Phipps reported without comment the increase in support for the extreme right wing PSF (formerly the Croix de Feu) and quoted Bonnet's remark that a socialist had told him (Bonnet) that he hoped that Daladier would not dissolve the Chamber in the near future, 'as the result would be a terribly reactionary Chamber'. Strang minuted that

We generally find it easier to work with Left-ish Governments in France than with Right-ish governments. There is a good deal of latent anti-British feeling in the right wing (Sargent added '& défaitism'). And the Right Wing might perhaps make terms with Germany over Eastern Europe (Sargent added 'and colonies') and with Italy (over Spain) and leave us isolated in Europe.(78)

In this respect, and the Embassy's warning on 12 October that the French were searching for 'a strong hand', Phipps's earlier interview with Marshal Pétain was significant. Pétain, who warmly approved of Chamberlain's policy, regarded the French Army as 'good' but her military aviation 'non-existent'. He was not hopeful for the future of France although he admitted 'her wonderful powers of recovery when all seemed lost', and he regarded the 'spiritual forces of France' to be 'receding at the same time as her economic and financial resources'. Phipps's private information was that Pétain was prepared to form a Cabinet 'if public opinion should demand it' probably with Laval as foreign minister. Mallet wondered 'how far the ancient and embittered Pétain and the right wing Caillaux were really representative of French opinion', and suggested that

78) Ibid. (C15422/55/17). Phipps tel., 13 Dec. 1938 and minute by Strang, 14 December 1938. Colonel de la Rocque, the leader of the PSF, claimed that it had between one million and two million paid-up members in 1938. Eugene Weber, 'France' in The European Right: A Historical Profile, edited by Hans Rogger and Eugene Weber, London 1965, p.106.

a rather wider field of French opinion would have to be canvassed before one could safely assume that France does not possess that abiding vitality to which Sir E. Phipps himself paid tribute in the conclusions of his despatches of November 26 last and... of January 24.(79)

Ironically, Chamberlain informed his sister that Phipps had laid on a large dinner for him during his visit to Paris with 40 or 50 guests. He had spoken to 'a good many ministers, ex-ministers and guests' but that 'the one who made the greatest impression on me was Pétain'.⁽⁸⁰⁾

Against this uneasy internal background, two inter-related events dominated the Embassy's reports in December. On the 1st, François-Poncet reported the cries of 'Tunis, Corsica and Savoy!' in the Italian Chamber⁽⁸¹⁾ and, on the 6th, Ribbentrop arrived in Paris to sign the Franco-German Declaration.

Initially, Bonnet told Phipps that he did not take the demonstration in the Italian Chamber too seriously and that Spain was 'the real bone of contention'.⁽⁸²⁾ By the 26th, however, he was sufficiently anxious to summon Phipps who reported that

he (Bonnet) fears that Mussolini rendered desperate by the poor result of his foreign policy and consequent popular discontent, may decide to provoke a general conflagration in the hope of deriving some benefit therefrom.

79) FO. 371/21613 (C12967/1050/17). Phipps tel., 26 Oct. 1938 and minute by Mallet, 27 Oct. 1938. It will be recalled that Phipps was instructed to seek Pétain's views during the Czech crisis.

80) Neville Chamberlain Papers. NC18/1/1077. N. Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 27 November 1938. Chamberlain had added that 'He is now 81 or 82 but... vigorous and with a fine martial expression that was very attractive'.

81) DDF, 2, XII, no.1 François-Poncet (Rome) à G. Bonnet, 1 décembre 1938.

82) FO.371/22657. (W15932/83/41). Phipps tel., 2 December 1938. Phipps had also reported that the anti-French manifestations had made a profound impression in France and had aroused 'considerable depth of feeling'. FO.371/22427 (R9591/240/22) Phipps tel., 2 December 1938.

Bonnet reiterated that the French Government were 'absolutely determined' not to cede any territory to the Italians, and Phipps confirmed that 'they would be swept away by French public opinion if they tried'.⁽⁸³⁾

Despite this apparent firmness, Bonnet's tendency towards compromise immediately reasserted itself and he told Phipps that some topics could eventually be discussed including Italian representation on the Suez Board (to which Phipps objected), and that he did not believe that Germany was encouraging Italy to make its 'absurd claims' which could lead to war. Apparently Coulondre had reported his impressions that the Germans did not approve of the Italian demands and were 'aiming at the Ukraine and wanted to buy off Poland rather than attack her'. This opening provided Phipps with the opportunity of asking Bonnet 'what the French Government would do if Germany attacked Poland', but he only received the 'evasive answer that such an attack now seemed very unlikely'.⁽⁸⁴⁾

Ribbentrop's visit to Paris, to which this question related was, in fact, of considerable concern to the F.O. Phipps reported that Bonnet had alleged that Ribbentrop, while complaining about the attitude of the British press and the parliamentary opposition, had stated that Germany was 'absolutely determined to

83) FO.371/22429 (R10238 & R10085/240/22). Phipps tel of 19 & 26 Dec. 1938.

84) Ibid. Phipps's review of Franco-Italian relations on 19 Dec., was highly sympathetic to the French position. He explained that 'successive French Governments had been anxious to re-establish friendship with Italy as a makeweight against Germany', and that persistent French efforts 'to improve the atmosphere' had 'only met with a rebuff'. He concluded that Spain was the main obstacle, and that Left, Centre & the General Staff were 'alarmed at the establishment of Germany & Italy on the French lines of communications'. FO.371/22429 (R10098/240/22) Phipps to Halifax, 19 Dec. 1938. Ingram regarded it as a 'very useful survey' & wanted to take copies of the print to Rome for the visit (Ibid, Minute by Ingram, 27 Dec). Only Perth dissented from this favourable F.O. view and attempted to defend the Italian position. DBFP, 3, III, no.488 Perth (Rome), 31 Dec. 1938.

stand by the Anglo-German declaration at Munich'.⁽⁸⁵⁾ He had apparently further assured Bonnet that he 'knew nothing about Italian claims against France', and the latter's distinct impression was that they 'were not backed by Germany'. Bonnet was adamant that if Halifax and Chamberlain 'speak firmly on this subject in Rome next week these absurd claims will be abandoned'.⁽⁸⁶⁾ The press had mostly adopted a 'remarkably moderate attitude' towards the visit and the attitude of the public was one of 'polite indifference' to which Roberts added 'and scepticism'.⁽⁸⁷⁾ According to Bonnet the colonial question had not been raised neither had Ribbentrop insisted on any modification of France's eastern pacts.⁽⁸⁸⁾ Léger had explained to Phipps that Daladier had deliberately not participated in the conversations 'in order to mark their unofficial and limited character'.⁽⁸⁹⁾

Nevertheless, despite these apparently reassuring reports, the F.O. were deeply suspicious of Bonnet and, like Sargent, Cadogan was concerned about

85) FO.371/21659 (C15102/42/18). Phipps tel., 7 December 1938.

86) PHPP.1/21. Phipps to Halifax, 'Private & Very Confidential', 7 Dec. 1938. The Italians had denounced the 1935 Agreement, and Bonnet was aware that Chamberlain had stated in the Commons that 'le gouvernement britannique n'ont pas d'engagements envers la France au cas d'une attaque italienne contre celle-là'. (DDF, XIII, no.115. Note du ministre, 13 décembre; see also Ibid, no.102 Note du Secrétariat Général au Département, 12 déc. 1938).

87) FO.371/21673 (C15164/85/18). Phipps tel., 7 Dec.1938 & minute by Roberts. Criticism was largely confined to Pertinax in the Ordre, Kerillis in the Epoque, and Humanité and Populaire; Wladimir d'Ormesson warned in (Figaro) that the impression should not be given that 'France has washed her hands of everything east of the Rhine'.

88) Ibid. (C15195/85/18). Phipps tel., 8 December 1938. As will be seen, this was a matter of considerable concern to the F.O. Phipps had told Halifax on 5 December that Ribbentrop would probably press for a modification of France's eastern pacts and that Bonnet had told him that he wished to 'loosen the ties that bind France to Russia & Poland'.

89) FO.371/21789 (C15268/11169/18). Phipps tel., 9 December 1938.

'what and how much M.Bonnet may have given away'.⁽⁹⁰⁾ These suspicions were compounded by the Embassy's reports of speculations in the French press regarding what Bonnet had revealed to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber on the 14th, to which Makins had commented sardonically that Bonnet's statement had not been 'remarkable' for its clarity.⁽⁹¹⁾

Sargent therefore informed Phipps on the 22nd that the F.O. were concerned about the ramifications for France and Britain of a German attack on Poland, and that Bonnet's account of the discussions which he had given to Phipps were

quite anodyne and considerably at variance with what we believe from other sources to be the ruling disposition at the present moment in Germany. We are also inclined to suspect that Ribbentrop may have left Paris with the impression that Bonnet had given him a free hand to do what he likes in Eastern Europe, without interference from France, much as Mussolini inferred from Laval's attitude in Rome in January 1935 that he had a free hand in Abyssinia, so far as France was concerned.⁽⁹²⁾

If this occurred, a potentially powerful Germany could threaten the security of Britain and France and, above all, the latter could then be faced with carrying out

90) FO.371/21809 (C14878/2688/55). Minutes by Sargent & Cadogan, 13 Dec. 1938. Much of Bonnet's account of his conversation with Ribbentrop (as he reported it to Phipps) does not appear in the procès verbal of the conversation 'redigé par le Secretary-General'. (DDF, 2, XIII, no.58 Note by Sec.Gen), but this is an edited version.

91) FO.371/21613 (C15506 & C15624/1050/17). Phipps tels 15 & 16 Dec. 1938 and minute by Makins. Neither was the text of Bonnet's brief conclusions to the Committee very informative (Ibid, C15623/1050/17) minute by Roberts 19 Dec.1938. When asked point blank during the proceedings, Bonnet denied that he had given Germany a free hand in the east, 'and had added that the pacts of France with Poland held entirely'. (Ibid. C15866/1050/17) Phipps tel., 22 December 1938.

92) FO.371/21809 (C14878/2688/55). Sargent to Phipps, 22 December 1938. Sargent's assessment of the 'ruling disposition' in Germany was similar to that of François-Poncet. Curiously, the latter had also used the expression 'a free hand in the East' in his comments to his farewell conversation with Hitler: 'le Führer reste fidèle à sa préoccupation de disjoindre le bloc franco-anglais et de stabiliser la paix à l'ouest, pour avoir les mains libres à l'est'. DDF, 2, XII, no.197 François-Poncet (Berlin) à Bonnet, 20 octobre 1938. For the controversy surrounding the Declaration, see the essays by Adam Adamthwaite & Fernand L'Huillier in Les relations franco-allemandes.

their treaty obligations towards Poland. As in the case of Czechoslovakia, 'this decision would greatly depend on how far France could count on British support', and the F.O. were attempting to define their attitude to such an eventually. Sargent concluded that Phipps had been authorised by Halifax to

explore the subject discreetly with Bonnet, though you should carefully avoid, when doing so, giving any impression that we desire France to repudiate her obligations to Poland. You may find it possible, when this subject is under discussion to discover from Bonnet exactly what passed between him and Ribbentrop on the question of France's Eastern treaties, and how much he may have given away...(93)

Phipps replied that he had already tried to broach the subject with Bonnet who had been very evasive and that 'the French are like us in disliking to cross bridges before they reach them'. His own impression, however, was that:

The French will scratch their heads long and thoroughly before they rush into war on behalf of Beck's Poland or Stalin's Russia. If they do decide to fight, it will be because they think they have a very good chance of victory, but not because of any old-fashioned ideas of honouring their signatures. Personally I believe that the French will fight to the last man in defence of French territory, metropolitan or colonial, against Italy. I also believe the French would fight if Great Britain were attacked by Germany. My belief, already strong, on this latter point will increase with every increase in our strength at sea, in the air and on land. (Phipps's italics).(94)

Barclay commented that 'all the evidence appeared to support Phipps's view that the French will be very loth to go to war' on behalf of Poland and the USSR while Strang minuted that Phipps had summed up the position accurately and that this confirmed Colonel Fraser's views regarding Poland.⁽⁹⁵⁾

93) Ibid.

94) FO.371/21809 (C14878/2688/55). Phipps to Sargent, 28 December 1938. It will be recalled that on 1 November, Phipps had told Halifax privately, and somewhat cynically, that if Hitler was determined to move in the east, 'the less we are consulted the better', see p.239.

95) Ibid. Minutes by Barclay & Strang, 30 & 31 December 1938.

Meanwhile, Bonnet told Phipps on the 31st that he wanted to 'slacken both these pacts but was unwilling to approach the Polish or Soviet Governments on this matter' which confirmed the latter's impression that 'there will not be any alacrity here... to help Stalin or Beck against Hitler'. Barclay commented that

Not ten days before this conversation Bonnet asserted emphatically to Sir E. Phipps that the French pacts with Poland and Russia held entirely. Now he admits that circumstances with regard to both pacts have completely altered and that he would be glad to slacken them both still further. There seems to be no reason to doubt this statement - or the inference drawn by Phipps.(96)

II. 1 January - 15 March 1939

As is well known, this period - which included the further deterioration in Anglo-German and Franco-Italian relations; the war scares (leading to an outright British guarantee to France on 6 February) and staff conversation between the two countries)⁽⁹⁷⁾ and, above all, the German occupation of Prague which marked a turning point in British appeasement policy towards Germany, were amongst the most crucial events in the immediate origins of the second world war.⁽⁹⁸⁾ Their significance for the evolution of Phipps's Paris Embassy was that it prepared the ground for their more systematic involvement in Franco-Italian relations and in a more intense pressure on the French Government to make concessions to Italy, culminating in the full-scale emergence of Phipps as the 'English Governess' after the British guarantee to Poland.

96) FO.371/22912 (C150/90/17). Phipps to Sargent, 31 Dec. & min. by Barclay.

97) For the background to the decisions to give the Guarantee to France and to initiate Staff conversations, see N.H. Gibbs, Grand Strategy, vol 1, London 1976, pp.654-5. They were tightly controlled from London and Phipps's role in them was confined to carrying out his instructions.

98) 1939 has been covered exhaustively by Sidney Aster (op.cit) and especially by D. Cameron Watt, How War Began, London 1989.

A) The War Scares and Franco-Italian Tension

Phipps was present on 10 January when Chamberlain and Halifax (en route to Rome) met informally with Daladier and Bonnet who were both adamant that the French Government would not make concessions to Italy.⁽⁹⁹⁾ The Rome conversations⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ had confirmed Chamberlain's belief in Mussolini as 'the key to Hitler'. The rumours of an imminent German attack in the west⁽¹⁰¹⁾ coincided, however, with a sharp increase in Franco-Italian tension. By mid-February the French had responded to a violently anti-French article in the Italian press⁽¹⁰²⁾ by sending reinforcements to Tunis and the Italians reciprocated by threatening to substantially reinforce their garrison in Libya.⁽¹⁰³⁾ Halifax, who was very

99) DBFP, 3, 3, no.496. Phipps to Halifax, Confidential, 11 January 1939. (Enclosure in Memoranda: gist of conversations.

100) Ibid. no.500. Perth (Rome) to Sir.J.Simon, 14 January 1939 (Conversations between British & Italian Ministers, Rome, Jan. 11-14, 1939). Mussolini had confirmed to Chamberlain & Halifax that he regarded Spain 'as the main obstacle to Franco-Italian relations' since, he alleged, France was sending aid to the Republicans. He was repeating his comment to François-Poncet during their first interview that 'la question espagnole est le principal obstacle aux bonnes relations franco-italiennes'. DDE, 2, XII, no.433. François-Poncet (Rome) à G.Bonnet, 29 novembre 1938.

101) The Embassy's service attachés reported that they had received similar information from the Deuxième Bureau. DBFP, 3, 3 nos 522, 536 & 553, 7-19 January 1939. Phipps was instructed in late January to notify the French Government that their reports indicated that Hitler was 'considering an attack on the Western Powers as a preliminary to subsequent action in the East'; the danger period would be 'towards the end of February', and that a German invasion of Holland would be regarded as a casus belli. Ibid. no.40. Halifax to Phipps, 28 January 1939. Phipps had also received a copy of a 'very confidential' report from the French military attaché in Berlin in Berlin containing similar information. FO.371/22963 (C1231/15/18), Report by French military attaché, 10 January 1939.

102) FO.371/23793 (R1120/7/22) Perth (Rome) tel., 14 Feb. 1939 & minute by Noble 7.2.39; Ibid (R1175/7/22) minutes by Noble & Halifax, 12 Feb. 1939; ibid. F.O. to Perth (Rome) 25 Feb.1939. The offending article in Relazioni Internazionale of 11.3.39 concluded that 'if Italian aspirations are not realised by negotiations, they will be realised by force'. Halifax found Ciano's attitude 'thoroughly unsatisfactory' and had instructed Perth to express HMG's 'surprise' at his 'refusal to discuss the statement that Italy was prepared to attack France if the latter did not make unspecified concessions'.

103) DBFP, 3, 4, no.346. Perth (Rome) to Halifax, 27 February 1939.

conscious of the implications of the British guarantee to France of 6 February, believed that the situation was 'beginning to drift dangerously'.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ While disclaiming any attempt at mediation, he instructed Phipps to suggest tactfully to Bonnet that their good offices were available for a 'mutual reduction of Franco-Italian troop concentrations' and to improve the atmosphere between them.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾

Bonnet informed Phipps on 2 March that further French reinforcements to North Africa would cease provided that the Italians reciprocated ⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ and that it would be impossible to begin conversations with them until all of their 'volunteers' had left Spain.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ His firmness, as usual, did not last long and, on the 4th, he told Phipps that he wanted Perth (rather than François-Poncet) to inform Ciano that

The French Government do not dream of attacking the Italians in Libya or anywhere else... it was absurd for (the) Italians to fear a French attack as the latter have no claims against Italy whereas the Italian press continue to advance fantastic claims against France.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾

François-Poncet had 'prêche la fermeté' during the recrudescence of Italian hostility towards France,⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ and Bonnet's decision was based on the former's new information on 1 March that

104) FO.371/23793/ (R1379/7/22). Halifax to Phipps, 28 February 1939.

105) Ibid. (R1379/7/22). Halifax to Phipps, 28 February 1939. Cadogan had also discounted any intention of mediation and had told Corbin that they were 'simply concerned at possible dangers that might result from troop movements and were anxious to do anything that might be possible to avert the danger'. Ibid (R1475/7/22) minute by Cadogan, 2 March 1939.

106) Ibid. (R1461/7/20). Phipps tel., 2 March 1939.

107) Ibid. (R1457/7/22). Phipps to Halifax, 2 March 1939.

108) Ibid. (R1483/7/22). Phipps tel., 4 March 1939.

109) DDF, 2, XIV, no.130. François-Poncet (Rome) à Paris, 16 février 1939.

Mussolini souhaiterait à l'heure actuelle que l'Angleterre prît l'initiative d'amorcer une négociation franco-italienne. Si la Grande-Bretagne ne s'y décidait pas d'elle-même peut-être provoquerait-il un incident, pour amener à intervenir comme médiatrice.(110)

Bonnet's request may have acted as a catalyst and created a precedent for active British involvement (or rather interference) in Franco-Italian relations. It also coincided with Cadogan's attempt to prevent François-Poncet from spreading alarmist rumours in Rome that war was inevitable.⁽¹¹¹⁾ Phipps reported, on the eve of the German occupation of Prague, that Bonnet had confirmed that he would prefer the démarche to be made through Perth,⁽¹¹²⁾ and it was carried out on the 16th.⁽¹¹³⁾

B) The Embassy, the Press and the Emergence of the 'English Governess'

Like Chamberlain and Halifax, Phipps perceived that the potentially dangerous international situation (and the outright British guarantee to France) had made it more imperative than ever that French policy should be closely aligned with that of Britain. While the Embassy's previous interference in French internal affairs had tended to be on an ad hoc basis (most notably in March 1938 to prevent Daladier from reappointing Paul Boncour as foreign minister), this period marks

110) Ibid. no. 238. François-Poncet (Rome) à Bonnet, 1 mars 1939.

111) Cadogan had informed Phipps on 6 March that Perth was worried by François-Poncet's attitude in Rome, 'apparently he telling everyone that war is inevitable' which was 'causing concern in certain circles'. Phipps, who conveniently remembered Poncet's 'excessive pessimism' at Berlin, replied that he had seen Bonnet who would drop a 'personal hint' in a private letter to Poncet. PHPP.2/1. Cadogan to Phipps & Phipps to Cadogan, 6 & 13 March 1939.

112) FO.371/23793 (R1661/7/22). Phipps tel., 13 March 1939. The Southern Dept. believed that Bonnet's proposals were 'more or less similar' to the F.O.'s original suggestion. Ibid. Minute by Noble, 14 March 1938.

113) Ibid. (R1796/7/22). Perth (Rome) tel., 16 March 1939.

the systematic emergence of Phipps (especially in the of Franco-Italian relations), as the 'English Governess' (to use Bédarida's phrase). In this, he acted on instructions from Halifax (and ultimately on the authority of Chamberlain) or else, given his perception of the exigencies of the situation, on his own initiative but always with their official or unofficial support. This situation was facilitated by rumours of a growing division between Bonnet and Daladier over Italy.⁽¹¹⁴⁾

As a preliminary, Phipps and Mendl had attempted to extend their writ to controlling all of the information emanating from the Embassy, and had conducted a feud against those British and French journalist (Pertinax and Cadett with Werth, Tabouis and David Scott as lesser targets⁽¹¹⁵⁾) whom they regarded as being bitterly opposed to Chamberlain's appeasement policy. Fortunately for the Embassy Pertinax was also the *bête noir* of Daladier, and Cadett that of Bonnet. Daladier had, in fact, been so incensed by the attacks on him in Humanité and by Pertinax in Ordre that he had proposed a decree law in early November 1938 to prevent press attacks on prominent citizens.⁽¹¹⁶⁾ Phipps regarded Pertinax with particular loathing, not only for the militancy of his anti-appeasement views, but also for his supposed association with Vansittart who appeared to be leaking information to

114) For example, Daladier's firm speech in the Chamber refusing to cede 'an inch of territory' was rumoured to have been made in response to 'the lamentable impression left by Bonnet's speech'. FO.371/22912 (C1091 & C1126/90/17) Phipps tels 27 & 28 Jan 1939 and minute by Roberts.

115) 'Pertinax' (of L'Ordre); Thomas Cadett (of the Times); Alexander Werth (of the Manchester Guardian); David Scott (of the News Chronicle), and Geniève Tabouis (of l'Oeuvre).

116) FO.371/21613 (C13323 & C14017/1083/17). Phipps tels 2 & 17 November 1938. Amongst these decree laws was one enabling the Foreign Minister to 'invoke legal proceedings against any newspaper publishing statements offensive to foreign governments or their leaders'. The Left wing press was very critical and the decrees were dropped. (Ibid).

him⁽¹¹⁷⁾ and, at least since November 1938, he had been banned from the Embassy.⁽¹¹⁸⁾

Phipps felt his personal position threatened by Pertinax and, on 19 January, he told Halifax bitterly that Pertinax had spread the rumour that his appointment had been prolonged for only six months because 'the F.O. considered me too pacifist'; Pertinax had apparently added that his informant was Charles Peake (of the F.O.'s News Department), and Phipps commented that

It is (a) strange and rather discouraging coincidence that this is the second occasion where I have found Pertinax attacking me under cover of the F.O. If Peake did say this to Pertinax it would convey to the latter that there are two different policies in Downing Street...(119)

The Embassy's feud with Bonnet's bête noir, Thomas Cadett, which had been simmering since the Munich crisis was a more serious affair and it involved the French Government as well as the Embassy and the Foreign Office. The F.O.'s attempts to unravel the affair shed unwelcome light on the seamier aspects of the Embassy's activities from which both Phipps and Mendl emerged further discredited in their eyes.

On 30 January, Bonnet had protested officially to Phipps (on behalf of Daladier and himself) against what he described as Cadett's 'poisonous and perfidious message' in the Times which had distorted the remarks he had made 'in

117) For Vansittart's connections with Pertinax, see p.229.

118) FO.371/21600 (C14023/55/17). Minute by Barclay, 21 November 1938, who also stated that Pertinax 'has recently shown himself very hostile to HMG'.

119) FO.794/16. Phipps to Halifax, 19 January 1939. Charles Peake was a member of the F.O.'s Press Dept. Presumably the first occasion on which Pertinax had attacked Phipps 'under cover of the F.O.' was in late Sept/early Oct. 1938 which had produced Phipps's bitter complaint to Hankey, see p.229. Phipps himself had told Bonnet during the Munich crisis that there were two tendencies at the F.O. which were opposed to each other, see p.184 f/note 19.

the strictest confidence' to journalists after a Cabinet meeting. He was particularly incensed by Cadett's insinuation that 'there may be differences between Daladier and himself over Italian claims' which, Bonnet alleged, were 'completely false'. Bonnet claimed that Cadett had persistently reported 'in a sense similar to the violent attacks made upon him by his bitterest enemies among the French communists and socialists', and he wanted the editor of the Times to warn Cadett that such messages were 'calculated to cause trouble between the British and French Governments', and to urge him to 'show more tact in future'. Cambon, the French Chargé d'Affaires, had also been instructed to bring the matter to Halifax's attention,⁽¹²⁰⁾ and he informed Sargent that Bonnet wanted Cadett to be expelled from France.⁽¹²¹⁾

Cadogan directed that 'the most suspicious members of the office, and those with the most sensitive noses for the more scabrous form of intrigue' should collaborate in advising him how to proceed in the affair, and he suggested the names of Peake, Strang and Sargent.⁽¹²²⁾ Peake established that one of the nine journalists, to whom Bonnet had spoken, had related the story to Cadett and had added that Daladier had been 'extremely annoyed' and had summoned Bonnet to discuss it with him. Apparently, the Cabinet had not supported Bonnet's proposal that a French agent should immediately be sent to General Franco, and Bonnet had told the journalists that he was 'personally in favour of a less rigidly negative

120) FO.371/22912 (C1234/90/17). Phipps tel., 30 January 1939.

121) Ibid. (C2268/90/17). Minute by O.Sargent, 6 February 1939.

122) FO. 371/22912 (C1404/90/17). F.O. minute. 3 February 1939.

attitude to Italian claims than is M.Daladier' and that he wanted them 'to bear this in mind'.⁽¹²³⁾

Peake commented that while Cadett may have been 'injudicious' to have published the story, no breach of confidence had occurred as he had not been present at the briefing. Furthermore, it was published in the Manchester Guardian and the News Chronicle, as well as in the French press, but Bonnet had concentrated his attack entirely on the Times. He regretted that such a serious complaint about Cadett should have occurred while his relations with the Embassy were 'so strained', and emphasised that Cadett was 'a close close friend and confident of Reynaud, who was 'at daggers drawn with Bonnet', and that Bonnet had been 'pursuing a vendetta against Cadett since last September' who had responded vigorously. Peake added that no other foreign minister had complained about Cadett, in fact, Delbos had trusted him implicitly. A French journalist, who was unsympathetic towards Cadett's views, had told him that Bonnet and Phipps were 'so obviously making common cause' against Cadett that it was gaining the latter sympathy.⁽¹²⁴⁾

Cadogan asked rhetorically what the F.O. was supposed to do about the affair, and referred to 'the unsavoury facts' of the case.⁽¹²⁵⁾ While Dawson, the editor of the Times, could not be reproached, Cadogan thought that he could be

123) Ibid. (C1234/90/17) Minute by Peake, 1 Feb. 1939; C1404/90/17 Peake to Cadogan, 1 February 1939.

124) Ibid (both references).

125) Ibid. (C1404/90/17). Minute by Cadogan, 2 February 1939.

advised of Bonnet's complaint and that 'some discretion' should be exercised.⁽¹²⁶⁾

Peake, who never doubted the veracity of Cadett's version of events which had been confirmed to him 'from too many sources', drafted a letter to Dawson on Halifax's instructions⁽¹²⁷⁾ which proved unnecessary as the latter discussed it personally with him instead.⁽¹²⁸⁾

In the meantime, on 31 January, Phipps had forwarded the hostile criticism of Cadett's report which had appeared in L'Homme Libre and in L'Action Française which drew Peake's comment that the former was Bonnet's newspaper and the latter was disreputable.⁽¹²⁹⁾ Phipps followed this on 2 February with an extract from Le Matin strongly attacking 'the disseminators of false information' who provided ammunition to 'the war seekers in every country' and which mentioned Cadett.⁽¹³⁰⁾ Vansittart, who had compared the Embassy's reports unfavourably with those of Cadett, repeated Peake's criticism adding that Le Matin 'never had a clean record' and that

One could hardly have a more typical example than this article which tries to link Mr Cadett with "the disseminators of false war news". The attempted connection is quite dishonest, and it is weighting the scales unfairly for Sir C.Mendl or Sir E. Phipps to send home this kind of garbage...It will be widely known or guessed by both French & British journalists - on the basis of best form - that our Embassy in Paris is backing Bonnet in a complaint which he should either have made of general application or not made at all.

126) FO.371/22912 (C1234/90/17). Minute by Cadogan, 1 Feb. 1939.

127) Ibid. Minute by Peake 3 Feb 1939 & draft letter to G.Dawson from Sec. of State.

128) Ibid. Minute by Halifax, 7 February 1939.

129) Ibid. (C1254/90/17). Phipps tel. 31 Jan.1939 & minute by Peake 2 Feb.1939. Peake told Cadogan that Bonnet had recently acquired 47% of the shares in L'Homme Libre (Ibid. C1404/90/17), 1 Feb.1939).

130) Ibid (C1404/90/17). Phipps tel., 2 Feb. 1939.

Vansittart warned that the Paris Embassy had been 'much attacked for the past year', and that it should therefore be 'all the more careful to be "au-dessus de la mêlée" in a matter of this kind'. With more than his usual bitterness towards his brother-in-law, he asked the F.O. to tell Phipps that 'he has done his bit in this matter - which is making quite a transient stink in the journalistic world - and that he and his had far better keep out of it in future'.⁽¹³¹⁾

Peake confirmed that Le Matin's reputation was 'most unsavoury' adding revealingly that

It is notorious that M.Buneau-Varalla (sic) its proprietor, was bought by the Italians at the time of the Abyssinian crisis and has been the recipient of largest sums of money from the fonds secrets for the last 6 months at least. For this reason I could wish that the "va et vient" between him and Sir Charles Mendl were less the subject of comment by French journalists than it is.

He also regarded it as being unusual for an Ambassador to 'accept and pass on to the F.O. a complaint against a leading British correspondent without first sending for him and asking for his statement of the case'.⁽¹³²⁾

The Cadett affair dragged on during the height of the war scares in February 1939, providing the Foreign Office with an irritating and time consuming distraction from more urgent matters. On the 9th, Peake minuted that MacDonald, the Diplomatic Correspondent of the Times, had, on the instructions of the Editor, told him that during the previous week

Mr Cadett... had been rung by Sir.C.Mendl who had told him on the instructions of HM Ambassador that it was the policy of HMG to minimise Franco-Italian differences. The Ambassador greatly hoped

131) Ibid (C1404/90/17). Minute by Vansittart, 3 Feb. 1939. According to Phipps, Vansittart had been 'entertained' by Cadett in Paris in December 1938, see p.246.

132) FO.371/22912 (C1404/90/17). Minute by Charles Peake, 3 February 1939. Buneau-Varilla was a fanatical anti-communist and an old acquaintance of Phipps whose information was notoriously unreliable. Phipps had used him as a confidential source in October 1937 in order to denigrate Léger. See p.96.

that the Times correspondent would eschew all sensationalism in reporting these differences and generally conform itself to the British Government line.

Cadett was 'incensed by these instructions', and the Editor felt that 'the telephone message had not been very happily conceived'. Peake had reassured MacDonald that there was nothing in Cadett's recent despatches to which the F.O. objected, and that he would speak to Mendl about it personally, adding that

Something ought to be done to stop this constant feud between the Times correspondent in Paris and the Embassy. It is undignified and unnecessary and is contrary to the interests of the Times and of the public service.

Phipps had spoken to him about Cadett's attitude during the Munich crisis 'with the strongest censure' but he (Peake) thought that 'it would be difficult to see anything particularly objectionable' in what he had written. Peake thought that it was pointless to mention the matter to Phipps whom he regarded as being 'deeply prejudiced' against Cadett but he would 'certainly speak to Mendl' when he saw him again.⁽¹³³⁾ Sargent minuted that Cambon had spoken to him twice about the affair, Bonnet was 'out for his (Cadett's) blood' and wanted to demand his expulsion 'on the strength of the present incident'; he had told Cambon that 'the idea of expelling the Times correspondent in Paris' was 'quite inconceivable' and that he 'could not believe that the French Government could even contemplate such action'.⁽¹³⁴⁾

Cadogan advised Phipps on 20 February that Bonnet had wanted to expel Cadett and that Sargent had warned Cambon that this would 'produce a most

133) FO.371/22912 (C2268/90/17). Peake to Cadogan, 9 February 1939. This minute formed the basis of Cadogan's letter to Phipps on 20 February 'after a detailed enquiry into the history of this affair' (minute by Makins n.d.), *ibid.*

134) *Ibid.* Minute by Sargent, 6 February 1939.

deplorable effect' and should 'on no account be resorted to', and that this must have been reported to the Quai d'Orsay since Cadett was 'to be given another chance'. Nevertheless Cadogan wanted Phipps to impress upon Bonnet 'the danger of his idea of expelling Cadett', and he was reproachful towards both Phipps and Mendl. The latter should have asked Cadett for an explanation which, Cadogan added, 'has taken a good deal of trouble to elicit for ourselves', and the Embassy 'should have had it out with him personally'. He also professed surprise at the way in which Phipps had quoted the three highly prejudiced French newspapers as evidence against Cadett.⁽¹³⁵⁾

Phipps replied on the 22nd that he was enclosing a minute by Mendl which was self explanatory, adding that 'Mendl performs his duties most faithfully'. Summoning all his diplomatic skills, Phipps explained, somewhat disingenuously, that he had cited L'Homme Libre precisely because it was 'Bonnet's organ' and that 'it would be useful for the F.O. to know what it is saying about, Cadett'. He, and other British journalists who shared his views, had not taken up his offer in September to visit the Embassy because they 'were not in sympathy with the Munich and subsequent policy of HMG'. Bonnet was grateful that Halifax had spoken to Dawson and, as for the possibility of Bonnet expelling Cadett, he (Phipps) could 'guarantee that I would squelch it'.⁽¹³⁶⁾

135) Ibid. (C1182/90/17). Cadogan to Phipps, 20 February 1939. Cadogan's long letter was sent on Strang's suggestion and incorporated the information contained in Peake's minute of 9 February (see f/note 133).

136) FO.371/22912. (C2720/90/17). Phipps to Cadogan, 22 February 1939. Unintentionally emphasising his close relationship with Bonnet, Phipps had previously sent Halifax an extract from L'Homme Libre containing a flattering description of his (Phipps's) speech at a banquet in Paris. Ibid. (C1865/281/17). Phipps to Halifax, 8 February 1939.

Mendl stated that his relationship with Cadett until the Munich crisis was 'of the warmest' but that an incident had occurred in September. The Comtesse de Montgomerie, who was partly English and 'very pro-British', had recounted to him that

she had been shocked, when dining with M.Paul Reynaud, that when he was called to the telephone he had said, coming back laughing, "I was called to the telephone by Cadett who speaks of a second visit the P.M was going to make to Hitler, had said "This time he will I suppose go in livery". The Comtesse... said that she had been horrified that a correspondent representing an English paper of the calibre of the Times could speak of the English P.M. at such a moment in such terms to a foreign minister. I agreed, and said that it was deplorable.

The Comtesse had presumably mentioned Mendl's 'disgust' to Cadett, and their relations became cooler. Regarding Cadett's expulsion, Mendl stated that he had immediately seen Bassée (the Political Director of Havas) and advised him that such a step was 'unthinkable and that he should advise both Bonnet and Bressy (the latter's private secretary) of the deplorable effect it would have in England'. Bassée informed him that 'the idea had been dismissed', and Mendl, in somewhat breathless prose, showed an unintentionally comic concern for Cadett's welfare and for his finer feelings:

Having got this idea of expelling him dismissed, I did not think it advisable or necessary to hurt Cadett's feelings, as I felt sure any such thing would have hurt his rather delicate feelings. I heard some days afterwards that he was told of this threat by someone else in an agency, who heard it from the Quai. I may add also that I spoke to Bressy in the same sense as I spoke to Bassée, though not in such words as to Bassée, who is, as Your Excellency knows, an intimate friend of mine. (137)

Strang minuted that he hoped that 'we can let this episode die'.⁽¹³⁸⁾

David Scott of the News Chronicle, whose relations with Mendl had also cooled since September, was another recalcitrant British journalist who had refused to accept the Embassy's version of events. Phipps told his confident, Horace Wilson, in January that Scott had made 'a mischievous speech' at the American Club in Paris attacking Chamberlain's policy and declaring that his position at home 'was weak'. Mack, his head of Chancery, had severely admonished Scott whom Phipps described as 'a foolish, feather-brained fellow like the worthy Vernon Bartlett'.⁽¹³⁹⁾ Horace Wilson was pleased that Phipps had been 'able to chastise Scott' but thought that

you will be very busy if you take in hand the job of correcting all the funny little people that go over to Paris & get caught up in the queer backwaters there! Perhaps in practice they don't do much harm (though if I were here I should share your annoyance) at a time when we are steadily enhancing our position - at home and abroad - by quietly getting on with the job and by refusing to be driven off the course by puffs, whether from within or without. My impression is that its consistency and persistency of the P.M's policy are telling more and more...

Wilson concluded that Chamberlain was 'impressing the people who really matter', and thought that Phipps would agree that

the more we build up Chamberlain the greater is the contribution we can make to the sense of firmness which we must develop a bit if we are to see it grow into a sense of security in Europe. All my information is that his stock is rising in all the hemispheres!(140)

138) Ibid. Minute by Strang, 8 March 1939. Cadett himself merely received a mild reproach from the Editor of the Times. G.Dawson to T.Cadett, 1 February 1939 cited in The History of the Times, vol 5, London 1984, p.80 which briefly mentions the affair, ibid pp.79-80.

139) PHPP.3/5. Phipps to Horace Wilson, 27 January 1939. Phipps added that Spears was in Paris again 'making as much trouble as he can and abusing the P.M. to Frenchmen, but I think the French at last realise that Spears's only "raison d'être" is that he talks French better than English'.

140) Ibid. Horace Wilson to Phipps, 2 February 1939.

Phipps, in his unrecorded reply, would undoubtedly have agreed with Wilson's conclusion. Doubtless too that Chamberlain, who told his sister a few days later that he wished 'the press could be controlled a bit better',⁽¹⁴¹⁾ would also have approved of Phipps's treatment of Cadett and Scott.⁽¹⁴²⁾

Allied to the Embassy's attitude towards the press, Vansittart's complaint that Phipps was putting intense pressure on the French to close their frontier with Spain, also foreshadowed the more systematic emergence of Phipps as 'the English Governess'. Reinforcing the mutual hostility between the two men, and increasingly embittered as his influence diminished, Vansittart saw Phipps as embodying those aspects of Chamberlain's appeasement policies which he most disliked. This included official British non-intervention policy regarding the Italians in Spain which Phipps zealously supported for personal as well as for professional reasons. As early as June 1938, and contrary to Phipps's views, Vansittart had stated that it was not in British interests that Franco should win.⁽¹⁴³⁾

141) N.Chamberlain Papers. NC18/1/1085, Neville Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 12 February 1939. For Chamberlain's relationship with the media, see Richard Cockett, Twilight of Truth, London 1989 and especially P.M. Taylor & Nicholas Pronay, 'An Improper Use of Broadcasting', Journal of Contemporary History, 19, 3, (1984).

142) A further example of Phipps's treatment of the Press was his personal, and severe, admonition of the Editor of the Continental Daily Mail, whom he had summoned to the Embassy, for incorrectly announcing that Daladier's visit to Tunisia & Corsica would be accompanied by 23 French warships. Daladier & Bonnet were 'very upset' by the message, and the latter complained that Pertinax and Tabouis were sending 'false reports' to the British press 'without any indication being given of their origin' which were then used to forment a press campaign in Paris by 'unscrupulous journalists'. Nichols minuted that Phipps had 'acted with great thoroughness' and hoped that Bonnet was now mollified'. FO.371/22249 (R10253/240/22) Phipps tel. 28 December 1938 and minute by Nichols 29 December 1938.

143) Vansittart had warned that 'it is not in our interest that Franco should win', and that 'we should not therefore press the French any further about their frontier so long as the Italians are supplying Franco...and we should use upon Mussolini pressure at least equal to that which we have put upon the French in order to deter them both from sending such supplies and from bombing our ships'. FO.371/22627 (W8723/29/41). Memo (by Vansittart) discussing the trend of HMG's policy in regard to Italy and Spain, 27 June 1938.

On 16 January 1939 Vansittart had told Halifax that he was 'greatly perturbed' to discover that when the French military attaché at Barcelona had 'made an impassioned appeal' to Daladier for arms to the Republicans, the latter had replied that 'this was impossible owing to the attitude of His Majesty's Government'. The military attaché had then warned him that Barcelona would fall before the Spring. Vansittart considered Daladier's remark 'singularly ominous', Chamberlain had denied publicly that the French had been pressurised into closing their frontier but

Sir E. Phipps by his telegram of June 30th, has shown most clearly and undeniably that he has put very great pressure indeed on the French to keep their frontier closed. The French will, and are entitled to, quote the Ambassador against the Prime Minister so long as the Ambassador's action is not disavowed. The French consider honestly that they have been subjected to pressure by ourselves because we want Franco to win; and if Franco does win they will not unnaturally quote the official action of H.M.'s Ambassador - in flagrant contradiction of the assurances of the Prime Minister.(144)

Vansittart was concerned that the French would blame the British Government for a situation which would 'create a great storm in France', and which could prove 'disastrous' for French and British interests:

surely at least we ought to prevent this situation from arising by making it immediately clear to the French that Sir E. Phipps had no right to speak as he did and that he was (to the best of my knowledge) speaking without instructions. (Vansittart's italics).

He reiterated that a Franco victory would be 'disastrous to our interests', and that the Italians had kept up a flow of military assistance to Franco:

and yet we allowed Sir E. Phipps to act as he did on June 30th, since when the French frontier has been so tightly sealed that all Mussolini can find to complain about is that some flour has been allowed through, and he has the effrontery to rank that with Italy's export of men, guns, shells, aviators and aeroplanes.(145)

144) FO.371/24115 W973/5/41). Vansittart to Halifax, 16 January 1939.

145) Ibid.

Coulson of the Western Department minuted that Phipps had 'only urged the French Government to keep their frontier closed to enable the Non-Intervention Committee's plan to come into operation'.⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ On 6 July, the F.O. specially exonerated him from the accusation that he had exerted pressure on the French Government⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ (as Vansittart had suggested) in order to appease Mussolini.⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ Given Phipps's surfeit of zeal, this had, however, taken place, Coulson later admitted that, 'Once the frontier was closed Sir.E.Phipps then, not apparently acting under instructions, impressed upon the French Government the importance of keeping the frontier closed' - to which Vansittart retorted that this

146) Ibid, Minute by Coulson, 21 January 1939.

147) This was described in the F.O.'s brief for Chamberlain's parliamentary answer on 6 July in which he denied that the French had been pressurised into closing their frontier. Phipps had been instructed on June 7 to obtain Bonnet's consent, the latter agreed, and de Léon informed Phipps that 'he was satisfied that the frontier had been closed'. On 30 June, Phipps had impressed on Daladier the importance which HMG attached to the 'continued closure of the Pyrenean frontier in order to give reasonable time for the British non-intervention plan to come into operation', and Daladier gave the assurances. The brief concluded that 'all that has been done therefore is to ask the French Government if they would close their frontier in certain circumstances & to represent to them the undesirability of re-opening the frontier now that it has been closed'. FO.371/22627 (W8723/29/41), D.Maclean to F.Roberts, 5 July 1938.

148) On 4 July 1938, the Acting British Agent at Burgos was informed that 'the Nationalist Govt. are satisfied that the French have loyally closed their frontier', and Perth was instructed to report this to Ciano to obtain a quid pro quo from the Italians. FO.371/22627 (W8723/29/41) F.O. to Perth (Rome), 12 July 1938. Halifax told the Cabinet on 27 July 1938 that the French Ministers had 'displayed no feeling that they had been pushed by us into action', and had told him that 'in closing the French frontier they had acted on their own responsibility in the interests of non-intervention'. CAB.23/94. Cabinet Conclusions, 27 July 1938, folio 219.

was precisely the point that he had made.⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ As in the case of his intervention over Paul-Boncour's reappointment in March 1938, Phipps's action met with Halifax's and the F.O.'s discreet approval.

149) FO.371/24116 (W1855/5/41). Minute by Coulson, 19 January 1938 and marginal comment by Vansittart. In pursuit of his conviction that the appeasement of Italy at France's expense was harmful, Vansittart was almost as hostile to Perth as he was towards Phipps. See, for e.g. his vehement attack on Perth in his minute of 21 February 1939. FO.371/23793 (R1174/7/22). Circumstantial evidence also suggests that Halifax and Chamberlain (via Phipps) may have pressurised the French in February 1939 into recognising General Franco 'le plus tôt possible'. They agreed, however, to Daladier and Bonnet's request to delay British recognition until 27 February. DDE, 2, XIV no 92. Phipps communication au Ministre, 10 février and no.217 Communication téléphonique de Phipps, 26 février 1939. Marshal Pétain presented his letters of credence as French Ambassador at Burgos on 24 March 1939.

CHAPTER 9

THE OUTBREAK OF WAR, RETIREMENT & CONCLUSION

(17 March - 23 October 1939)

I. The 'English Governess' (17 March - 24 August 1939)

During this crucial period Phipps acted as an Anglo-French conduit conveying and explaining British, and relaying French, policy during their negotiations leading to the guarantees to Poland, Rumania, Greece and Turkey, and also the torturtuous negotiations with the USSR.⁽¹⁾ His main role, however, was to put pressure on the French Government, more specifically on Daladier, to make concessions to Italy. Phipps was not the initiator of this policy, the decision for which was taken at the highest Cabinet level and which was supported by the F.O. Since, however, he was able to influence Anglo-French policy, he was more than merely its enthusiastic instrument. Given his general instructions, his formal and informal activities converged as did his private convictions and his official brief which he pursued with the utmost zeal. The return of Italy to the Stresa front was an ideal which Phipps had consistently advocated since 1935 and which he had reiterated in his valedictory telegram from Berlin.⁽²⁾ The minimizing of Franco-Italian tension was a priority which had led Phipps and Mendl into attempting to control all the information emanating from the Embassy and, in the

1) Telegrams between Moscow and the F.O. were repeated to Paris during the Anglo-Franco-Soviet negotiations. They were seen by the Cambridge spy, Donald Maclean, who was a third secretary at the Paris Embassy, and he was 'thus able to advise the Russians of the British response, as Stalin raised the stakes and drew closer to Hitler'. Robert Cecil A Divided Life: a biography of Donald Maclean, London 1988, p.54. For speculation regarding his controller in Paris, see *ibid*, pp.55-57.

2) For Phipps's valedictory telegram from Berlin in April 1937, see ch.2.

case of Cadett, it had complicated the Embassy' relations with the F.O.⁽³⁾ As has been seen, the Embassy had intervened previously in French internal affairs but mostly on an ad hoc basis. It is this period, however, where it became more systematic which justified Bédarida's description of British policy towards France as 'La gouvernante anglaise'.⁽⁴⁾

The problem of Franco-Italian relations was, however, temporarily overshadowed by the impact of the far reaching events of 15 March and Phipps, amongst others, was not immune from the spate of alarmist rumours which followed Prague.⁽⁵⁾

A) The British Decision to Intervene in Franco-Italian Relations

By mid March the F.O. had discerned two viewpoints in French policy towards Italy: (a) Bonnet's, that an attempt should be made to reach a settlement,⁽⁶⁾ and (b) Daladier's, which was one of complete intransigence regarding any French concession to Italy. Rumours of these divisions were rife in Paris; Phipps's 'well informed' French source had notified him that Daladier was taking the Secret Service funds 'out of Bonnet's hands' and would control them himself, and that he would probably replace him with Chautemps during the Presidential

3) See ch.8.

4) François-Bédarida, 'La "gouvernante anglaise", Edouard Daladier, Chef de Gouvernement, avril 1938 - septembre 1939, sous la direction de René Remond et Janine Bourdin, Paris 1977, pp.228-239.

5) For example Phipps informed Halifax privately that his secret & reliable source in Germany had warned him that Hitler wanted 'to make war on Great Britain before June or July'; that the Wehrmacht was reluctant to fight Britain & France, and that 'no credence whatsoever should be placed on anything the Germans might say to Henderson'. FO.800/315 (H/XV/136) Phipps to Halifax, 17 March 1938. Reprinted in DBFP, 3, IV, App.I. (IX).

6) See for e.g. FO.371/23794 (R2012/7/22). Minute by Sargent, 21 March 1939.

elections.⁽⁷⁾ Baudouin's secret mission to Rome added a temporary complication to this apparently clear cut division, and Gladwyn Jebb noted that Bonnet had 'for some time been negotiating behind our backs' and with Daladier's 'cognisance' but that these unofficial negotiations had broken down.⁽⁸⁾ Nevertheless, Cadogan minuted that such negotiations should be encouraged.⁽⁹⁾

In an influential memorandum of the 27th, de Courcy informed Chamberlain that Laval and his friends had 'asked us to urge upon London the necessity of pressing Daladier into capitulation', and he cautioned prudence.⁽¹⁰⁾ Jebb minuted that this should be accompanied by an announcement of conscription which would enable the French to 'discard (sic) from strength and not from weakness'; Cadogan agreed and added that in other countries, conscription was regarded as 'the test of sincerity'.⁽¹¹⁾

The Italian attitude towards France appeared to have undergone a change in late March. On the 28th, Bonnet told Phipps that François-Poncet had reported

7) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/351). Phipps to Halifax, 31 March 1939. Halifax replied that he and Bonnet 'got on well together, although I know that he is not everybody's cup of tea', PHPP.1/22 Halifax to Phipps, 6 April 1939.

8) FO.371/23794 (R1939/7/22). F.O. minute by G.Jebb & Jebb to Cadogan, 21 March. For Baudouin's conversations with Ciano see DDF, 2, XIV no.46. For Baudouin's secret mission to Rome and Brinon's to Berlin (without the knowledge of the French ambassadors) see *ibid* no.112 François-Poncet (Rome) à G. Bonnet, 14 février 1939. In fact, Daladier told Baudoin on 20 March that 'Aucune négociation ne peut s'ouvrir tant que le climat franco-italien n'est pas amélioré... les démarches plus ou moins secrètes, puis rapidement révélées, sont de nature à affaiblir le moral de la France'. DDF, 2, XV, no.91 Daladier à Baudouin, 30 mars 1939.

9) *Ibid.* (R193/7/22). Minute by Cadogan, 28 March 1939.

10) *Ibid.* (R193/7/22). K. de Courcy to N. Chamberlain, Secret & Confidential, 27 March 1939.

11) FO.371/23794 (R2193/7/22). Minutes by Jebb & Cadogan, 28 March 1939.

that the atmosphere was more favourable for Franco-Italian discussions⁽¹²⁾ and, on 4 April, Ciano informed Perth that 'If France was prepared to take the initiative Italy would not refuse discussion' but Cadogan advised that 'until the Albanian situation is clarified... we must hold our hand'.⁽¹³⁾ Halifax, however, who had read Perth's telegram to the Cabinet on 5 April, instructed Phipps to communicate its contents to Bonnet and to suggest to him that he (Bonnet) could raise the matter with Guariglia, the Italian ambassador at Paris, 'without compromising himself'.⁽¹⁴⁾

In the meantime, Perth reported on 6 April that François-Poncet was now 'most anxious' that Franco-Italian conversations should begin. Poncet, who shared Perth's view that the Italians were also anxious to begin talks, had written to Bonnet privately and had sent a courier to Paris but Daladier was 'extremely obstinate' and was 'strongly opposed to any conversations with Italy'. Poncet wondered, therefore whether London could 'influence the French Government to facilitate better relations with Italy'.⁽¹⁵⁾ Phipps was immediately advised that Perth's telegram had 'considerable bearing' on his previous instructions and that it would be left to his discretion to decide whether he could 'safely give advice and make suggestions' to Daladier and Bonnet 'on the lines suggested by M.François-Poncet'.⁽¹⁶⁾ Phipps replied that in view of the Italian attack on

12) Ibid. (R2085/7/22). Phipps tel., 28 March & minute by Sargent, 31 March 1939.

13) Ibid. (R2392/7/22). Perth (Rome), 4 April 1939 & minute by Cadogan, 6 April 1939.

14) Ibid. (R2576/7/22). Cabinet Conclusions, 5 April 1939.

15) Ibid. (R2393/7/22). Perth (Rome), 6 April 1939. François-Poncet complained bitterly to the Quai d'Orsay on 15 April that it was regrettable that he had not been authorised since 15 March to establish contact with the Italian Government and that 'cette situation le réduit à un rôle de simple spectateur et équivant à une suspension des relations diplomatiques'. DDE, 2, XV, no.409 Rome à Paris, 15 avril 1939

16) FO.371/23794 (R2393/7/22). F.O. to Phipps, 6 April 1939.

Albania, he would not be acting on his instructions and Noble minuted that his decision was 'clearly right' and that the F.O. could not 'press the French to open negotiations with the Italians under the present circumstances'.⁽¹⁷⁾

An added complication was that the British Government were in the process of giving a guarantee to Greece (which would be directed against any potential Italian aggression), and Halifax urgently needed to know whether the French Government would take similar action.⁽¹⁸⁾ In fact, Daladier told Phipps on 9 April that he 'entirely approved' of Halifax's actions, and

he said solemnly that if Corfu or any other point (sic) of Greek territory were attacked and Great Britain helped Greece to resist, the French Government would also help and would declare war on Italy.

Daladier added that he had no faith in Italian assurances and that they were dealing 'with gangsters who merely seek to throw dust in our eyes'.⁽¹⁹⁾

Nevertheless the Cabinet decided on 19 April to renew pressure on the French Government. Chamberlain, who had stated that François-Poncet was convinced that it should be possible to obtain a Franco-Italian settlement if the French Government could be persuaded to take the first step, added that 'the French were not doing their share in smoothing out difficulties with Italy'. Halifax then quoted Bonnet's views as reported by Phipps on the 17th that the French Government would 'be ready to make reasonable concessions over the Suez Canal

17) Ibid. (R2508/7/22). Phipps tel. 7 April 1939. Bonnet hastened to inform Phipps that France 'was not bound in any way to defend Albania'. *ibid.*

18) DBFP, 3, V no.100 Halifax to Phipps, 9 April 1939.

19) PHPP.1/22. Phipps to Halifax, 9 April 1939. The French documents confirm that Phipps 'ayant demandé si le gouvernement français participerait éventuellement à cette assistance (to Greece), Daladier 'a été répondu affirmativement'. DDE, 2, XV, no.354 Bonnet à Corbin, 12 avril 1939.

and Jibuti etc. (sic)'. This was the catalyst for Chamberlain's suggestion that 'it was time the French took some action themselves', and Halifax agreed to put 'suitable pressure on the French Government to this end'.⁽²⁰⁾

Phipps was therefore advised on the 20th that, in consequence of the Italian attack on Albania, his decision not to act on his previous instructions was correct but that he should now provide Bonnet with the substance of Perth's despatch of 19 April and to inform him that

from other information which has reached us there is some indication that the Italians genuinely fear that they may become involved in war with France as the result of some incident for which Italy was not directly responsible.

Halifax had no illusions about Mussolini's moderation but he thought that it was a risk worth taking especially as Bonnet had indicated that the French Government would be able to make 'certain concessions'. Phipps was instructed to do his utmost to induce the French to 'reestablish contacts with the Italians', and to emphasise that 'we will give them our entire support in resisting any unreasonable claims that Italy may put forward'. He was also advised, confidentially, that Perth had been instructed to urge the Italians to make the first advance 'direct and privately to the French Government' but that this information should be withheld

20) FO371/23794 (R3106/7/22). Cabinet conclusions 21 (39) 19 April 1939. Halifax had cited Phipps's despatch of 17 April (DBFP, 3, V X, no.194) reporting that Bonnet, who felt that 'peace or war may be decided within the next two or three weeks', had urged HMG to send Lorraine to Rome as soon as possible (as Perth's successor) as his presence 'may just turn the scale and make the Italians reasonable'.

from the French as 'it would only encourage them to do nothing pending results of my démarche in Rome'.⁽²¹⁾

B) The 'English Governess' (21 April - 24 August 1939)

Phipps regarded his interview with Bonnet, whom as he had anticipated was 'in agreement with HMG', as 'quite satisfactory'.⁽²²⁾ His interview with Daladier on the 22nd proved more difficult even though his hand had been strengthened by Chamberlain's forthcoming announcement of conscription and Perth's valedictory interview with Mussolini (which had been repeated to Paris) and which revealed, not only the latter's professed 'anxiety for peace' but also the full scope of Baudouin's secret mission to Rome.⁽²³⁾ Keeping Perth's despatch secret, Phipps skilfully used 'every possible argument to bear upon him (Daladier)' including a reference to his 'old friend Berthelot', Léger's predecessor at the Quai d'Orsay, whose 'violent Italophobia' may have been 'inherited by some of (its) permanent officials' and a warning to Daladier 'not to attach undue importance to secret service reports regarding sinister Italian intentions'. Phipps told him that

21) Ibid. (R3077/7/22). F.O. to Phipps, 20 April 1939. Perth had stated on the 19th that his informant had told him that Mussolini was 'probably very worried' and anxious for France to make a gesture. Perth said that Mussolini believed that he had been 'rebuffed by the French'; he reminded the F.O. that the latter had told Chamberlain that 'he will not use his influence in favour of peace, i.e. to check Hitler, until the French show their willingness to talk', and he reiterated that the French attitude towards Italy 'may well be the key to the situation'. DBFP, 3, V, no.214 Perth (Rome) to Halifax, 19 April 1939.

22) FO.371/23794 (R3144/7/22). Phipps tel. 21 April 1939.

23) FO.371/23795 (R3166/7/22). Phipps tel., 22 April 1939. Mussolini had told Perth that he was 'really anxious for peace' and that Italian claims on France were 'mainly juridical and administrative', e.g. the status of Italians in Tunis. Perth was amazed by his revelation of the scope of Baudouin's secret mission to Rome. According to Mussolini, Baudouin had, on the instructions of the French Government, communicated to the Italians 'what France was prepared to offer' in considerable detail. These French proposals had been accepted by the Italians as the basis of negotiations with the proviso that they took place through 'ordinary diplomatic channels'. DBFP, 3, V, 242 Perth (Rome) to Halifax, 21 April 1939. For the French record of the Baudouin conversation, see DDF, 2, XIV, no.46.

France and Great Britain were getting stronger and stronger materially: a slight sign from the former that she was ready to listen to reasonable claims by Italy could not possibly be interpreted as proof of weakness... If Italian claims proved preposterous a firm French negative could close the talks.

He laid 'great emphasis' on Perth and François-Poncet's experience of the dictators, their conviction that Franco-Italian relations were 'the key to peace or war' and that

Our distinct impression was that Mussolini still wished to avoid war, from which he and his country knew they had most to lose. If we were wrong the harm done was infinitesimal compared to our gain if we were right.

Phipps therefore suggested that François-Poncet could see Ciano before Hitler's speech on 28 April to discuss several minor questions and, at a favourable moment, casually ask him 'what in effect Italy's claims were'.⁽²⁴⁾

Daladier, who was extremely friendly during the interview, was convinced that the Italian Government were 'gangsters' and that Chamberlain and himself had been 'bluffed and lied to at Munich'. He told Phipps that

The Albanian outrage had rendered conversations almost impossible. Moslem opinion was violently anti-Italian in consequence and he (Daladier) had received countless messages and telegrams from North African Chieftains expressing intense loyalty to France, hatred of Italy and calling upon French Government to show utmost firmness. If nations in French North Africa heard (and Italians would trumpet it abroad) that the French Government had asked what Italy wanted, they would despise them and French prestige there would be reduced to zero.

24) FO.371/23795 (R3166/7/22). Phipps tel., 21 April 1939 (also in PHPP. 1/20). Notwithstanding his reference to Berthelot's alleged 'violent Italophobia', Phipps recorded in his unpublished memoir that Berthelot was 'the most interesting and fascinating personality that I ever met'. PHPP.;9/1. Diplomatic Light and Shade, p.113.

Phipps's assumption that Daladier paid considerable attention to the secret service reports was correct. In late January 1939 Daladier had been secretly informed by the Service de Renseignement (which had deciphered a series of messages from Rome) of 'l'objectif de la diplomatie de Mussolini' in the Mediterranean, Djibouti, Tunisia and elsewhere. Elizabeth du Réau, Edouard Daladier, Paris 1993, p.309, French military intelligence on Italy was, in fact, excellent. See Robert J.Young, 'French Military Intelligence and the Franco-Italian Alliance 1933-1939', The Historical Journal, 28, 1 (1985), p.167.

In short, Daladier feared 'a trap laid purposely by the Italian gangsters' to destroy North African solidarity with France, and although he promised to consider the matter, Phipps was not optimistic about the outcome.⁽²⁵⁾

During his interview with Daladier, Phipps had made 'great play' with Chamberlain's forthcoming announcement of conscription⁽²⁶⁾ and he endeavoured unsuccessfully to have it advanced to the 25th (instead of the 26th) in order to achieve the maximum effect.⁽²⁷⁾ Daladier and Bonnet were 'deeply grateful' for this 'great step'⁽²⁸⁾ which Phipps immediately attempted to capitalise on. He told Bonnet on the 27th that he hoped that, now that this had been effected, 'a serious attempt would be made to establish contacts between France and Italy'; Bonnet then, 'under the seal of secrecy', read him François-Poncet's telegram reporting that Ciano had told him that 'there was nothing that could not be settled amicably between France and Italy' and that Italy had no territorial claims against France. In a preliminary step towards their full scale collusion to pressurise Daladier, Bonnet

25) Ibid.

26) Ibid. (R3577/7/22). Phipps tel., 22 April 1939.

27) Ibid. (R3563/7/22). Phipps tel., 22 April 1939. Phipps had told Bullitt that this was a response to Daladier's 'impassioned appeal' to have the announcement made before Hitler's speech on 28 April. FRUS, I (1939) Bullitt to Secr. of State, 19 April 1939, p.169. Hankey told Phipps that 'serious people' were irritated by the French pressure on the British to introduce conscription when they (the French) 'have spent all their money in funk-holes (the Maginot Line) and grossly neglected the main offensive weapon of modern war, the air force'. PHPP.3/3 Hankey to Phipps, 24 April 1939.

28) DBFP, 3, V, no.294 Phipps to Halifax, 26 April 1939. Halifax told the Cabinet on the 26th that there was no further news regarding the suggestion that the French Govt. should make an approach to Italy but the announcement of conscription would 'enable France to make such an approach from strength and not weakness'. CAB.23/99 Cabinet Conclusions, 4 (39), meeting of 26 April 1939.

asked Phipps somewhat slyly to inform Daladier 'how much importance HMG attaches to the establishment of contact between France and Italy'.⁽²⁹⁾

Phipps reported to Halifax privately on the 28th that he had seen Daladier at 'the Rumanian luncheon' and, while not revealing Bonnet's information concerning François-Poncet's satisfactory conversation with Ciano, he had again emphasised the British announcement of conscription and had told him that

now that HMG had taken a step which I know had caused him and the French in general such pleasure too, I hoped he on his side would give great pleasure to HMG too by losing no chance of establishing contact with the Italian Government. If the latter showed themselves unreasonable he (Daladier) could respond by a resounding "mot de Cambronne" and nobody would be the worse off. If, on the other hand, they were reasonable it would make a very great difference to the whole international situation.

Daladier again promised to consider the matter but refrained from mentioning the François-Poncet-Ciano conversation which Phipps felt 'it would be difficult for him to ignore'. Phipps had also spoken very discreetly to Campinchi, Reynaud, Saurraut and Mandel about Italy but they were 'all rabid on this subject and feel that moderation towards the Italian gangsters is positively dangerous' as it would only encourage their demands.⁽³⁰⁾

Bonnet, who was 'delighted' that Phipps had spoken to Daladier 'without giving him (Bonnet) away', had shown him François-Poncet's private letter stating that 'it would be utterly criminal to let the chance slip' and expressing his disbelief

29) FO.371/23795 (R3350/7/22). Phipps tel., 27 April 1939. Ciano had stated that the Italian demands were: (1) a free port at Jibuti; (2) Share in Jibuti railway; (3) Two Italian directorships on Suez Canal Board; (4) prolongation of 1896 Agreement regarding Italy. Bonnet admitted that he had heard unofficially from Baudouin about the Italian attitude but that it was 'far more satisfactory' to have received 'an official pronouncement' from Ciano.

30) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/355). Phipps to Halifax, Personal & Secret, 28 April 1939. Phipps informed the F.O. separately that Daladier had told him that Hitler, 'whatever he may pretend' was 'greatly impressed by conscription in Britain' and that without it his speech would have been more violent. Phipps also reported that the announcement had been generally welcomed in France including the French Left. FO.371 22971 (C6162/15/18). Phipps tel., 28 April 1939.

that Mussolini was preparing a trap to wreck French prestige in North Africa. Phipps then revealed Bonnet's increasingly active role in their collusion which would be an important factor throughout:

Bonnet will tell me when he wants me to attack Daladier again. Meanwhile I am glad that you spoke to Corbin on April 26th. Bonnet remarked to me "You know Daladier is easier to influence than I am!" When saying this he looked sly and proud. At the same time he was good enough to remark that I had an influence over Daladier.(31)

Nichols informed Phipps that the F.O. were 'most appreciative' of the way in which he had handled the question of Franco-Italian relations.⁽³²⁾

In early May, an impatient Halifax told Phipps that he wished that 'we could get Daladier to move on the Italian thing' and that

I do feel in my bones that Dantzig (sic) is dangerous: that Musso wants to play with us and curb Hitler: but that he won't do this unless and until we can get going with France. I have just seen Eric Perth who is my confident to Musso - and Ciano - an(d) now men of peace: I hope he is right.(33)

Grandi had convinced Halifax that Mussolini wanted 'to get on with Franco-Italian conversation' but felt that it would be extremely difficult to influence Hitler 'unless his (Mussolini's) position could be reinforced'.⁽³⁴⁾

31) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/355). Phipps to Halifax, Personal and Secret, 28 April 1939. (Also in PHPP.1/22). Bonnet drove Phipps back to the Quai d'Orsay after 'the Rumanian luncheon for the French Government', presumably just after he had spoken to Daladier.

32) PHPP.2/19. P.Nichols (F.O.) to Phipps, Most Secret, 29 April 1939. Nichols letter also contained all the F.O.'s information from 'very secret sources' regarding Baudouin's activities.

33) PHPP.1/22. Halifax to Phipps (Handwritten), 1 May 1939.

34) PHPP.1/22. Halifax to Phipps, Private and Confidential, 2 May 1939.

Lorraine, who had succeeded Perth as British ambassador at Rome, had been informed by Gafencu that Mussolini had 'stated categorically that he was not making any territorial claims on France' and was awaiting a British or a French initiative.⁽³⁵⁾ Phipps reported on the 5th that Bonnet, who had received similar reports from Gafencu (via François-Poncet), had agreed that the latter's talks with Ciano should continue. He also reminded Halifax that Daladier was resisting the conversations and that Léger, 'who held forth in a most anti-Italian vein to Sir P. Lorraine and myself on May 1', was even more antagonistic to them. In order to 'strengthen Bonnet's hands', Phipps had provided him with a copy of Halifax's despatch of 1 May in which the latter had emphasised to Corbin the desirability of enlisting Mussolini's aid in restraining Hitler.⁽³⁶⁾

Phipps's despatch was minuted extensively by the F.O. Ingram doubted whether anything further could be done immediately and that the conclusion of a military agreement between Italy and Germany would 'only make the French less inclined than ever to come to terms with the Italians'.⁽³⁷⁾ Sargent agreed that there was

abundant evidence to show that the Italians are making unprecedented efforts at the moment to get talks started with the French without having to lose face by making the first open and official contact. We must suppose that Italy's anxiety is in large measure due to the fact that the Italian Government wish when

35) DBFP, 3, V, no.369 Lorraine (Rome) to Halifax, 5 May 1939. François-Poncet had seen Gafencu and was discouraged by Paris's response to his reports on 'the nature of the Italian claims', *ibid.* no.370 Lorraine to Halifax, 5 May 1939.

36) FO.371/23795 (R3675/7/22). Phipps tel., 5 May 1939, see also DDF, 2, XVI no.76. Lorraine had asked Phipps to arrange a private interview with Bonnet in Paris. FO.800/311 (H/XIV/352 & 3). Lorraine to Phipps, 6 April & Phipps to Halifax, Private & Confidential, 7 April 1939.

37) *Ibid.* Minute by Ingram, 8 May 1939. The Vatican's suggestion of a five power conference to discuss Franco-Italian differences (and the Danzig question) had been rejected by Bonnet on 5 May, and Léger considered that such a conference would be 'very dangerous'. DBFP, 3, V, nos.375 & 418, Phipps to Halifax, 5 & 8 May 1939.

negotiating the treaty of alliance with Germany, to which they are now committed, to be able to argue that they have re-established normal relations with France and to that extent are no longer dependent on Germany for diplomatic and military support as hitherto. Mussolini may also be hoping by normalising his relations with France he will reassure and gratify his own public who are terrified of getting involved in a war with England and France.

Sargent concluded that the F.O. knew from Phipps that Bonnet favoured talks while Daladier and Léger opposed them and that, 'since Bonnet's influence has presumably declined of late', negotiations would not be possible unless they could 'get Daladier to revise his present attitude'. Cadogan agreed that the problem was that Daladier could not be certain of obtaining a quid pro quo from the Italians while Vansittart advised caution:

We have already pressed (the French) twice, and must now be careful not to slam the Quai d'Orsay too much on this topic. (1) These things get around and don't make relations or results any easier. (2) French feelings on this topic go wider than the Quai. (38)

Halifax informed the Cabinet on 10 May that he would speak to Daladier about Franco-Italian relations when he went to Geneva for a meeting of the Council of the League.⁽³⁹⁾ Meanwhile, Phipps told him privately that 'I hope (and

38) FO.371/23795 (R3675/7/22). Minutes by Ingram, Sargent, Cadogan and Vansittart, 8-13 May 1939. Sargent's conclusion was confirmation that the F.O. perceived that, in the last analysis, Daladier was the principal decision maker on the French side. For the latter's distrust of Bonnet, see footnote 141.

39) CAB.23/99. Cabinet Conclusions 27(39) Meeting of 10 May 1939. Halifax repeated at the Cabinet meeting of 17 May that he proposed to speak to Daladier and Bonnet on his way to Geneva and to tell them that 'France was making a mistake in not willing to take some advantage of the feelers which were continuously being put out from Rome'. Ibid Meet 28 (39) 17 May 1939. Corbin had already explained Daladier's position to Halifax on the 8th, and had added that London did not appear to understand the gravity of the problem facing the French in Tunisia. They had to take into account, not only the French public 'qui n'est pas précisément enclin aux concessions en ce moment' but also, a recurring theme, the moslem population of North Africa 'qui verrait un échec dans une concession inopportune ou injustifiée' as well as Italian ambitions in the Mediterranean. MAE Papiers 1940 (Sous-Serie: Léger), vol 12. Corbin (Londres) à Léger (Quai d'Orsay), 9 mai 1939, ff 215-216.

Bonnet in his heart of hearts also hopes) that you will urge your point of view upon Daladier regarding Spain, Italy etc. with considerable force'.⁽⁴⁰⁾

On 20 May, Daladier told Halifax in Paris that the Franco-Italian situation had not changed. Ciano had spontaneously informed François-Poncet of the Italian claims, but the effect would be that France would be making great concessions to a country who had firmly placed herself in the opposite camp, and would enjoy no reciprocity'. He was adamant that

it was impossible for France to make such concessions in present circumstances... To agree to the Italian demand would be damaging to the prestige and interests of France. The Moslem population in North Africa would think that Mussolini was the stronger...⁽⁴¹⁾

Phipps, who attended the conversations, then asked 'ce que devraient être les concessions attendues de l'Italie', to which Daladier replied, 'qu'avant tout, le gouvernement italien qui conserve 1.800.000 hommes sous les armes devrait démobiliser'.⁽⁴²⁾ Daladier concluded that:

he had already stated this publicly with the unanimous approval of the French Council of Ministers. France could not abandon any of her rights without reciprocity. The shouts in the Italian Chamber about Corsica and Nice at a time when France was threatened by a general strike had created a tremendous effect in France. He doubted whether the general disposition of the Italian Government would change merely as a result of two or three concessions like a free port at Jibuti. Italy was now in Germany's hand...⁽⁴³⁾

40) FO.800/311/(H/XIV/357). Phipps to Halifax, Private & Confidential, 8 May 1939.

41) DBFP, 3, v, no.570 Record of Conversation between the Secr. of State and Daladier & Bonnet at the Ministry of War in Paris, 20 May 1939. The Anglo-Soviet negotiations, Danzig & Spain were also discussed at this meeting.

42) DDF, 2, XVI, no.243. Compte rendu. Notes prises au cours de l'entretien franco-britannique du 20 mai 1939 entre M.Daladier, M.Georges Bonnet et Lord Halifax de passage à Paris se rendant à Genève.

43) DBFP, 3, V, 570. Record of Conversation, op.cit.

In the event, Halifax was compelled to admit that he 'failed to move Daladier'.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Partly influenced by Loraine's anxious despatch of 23rd urging a response to Mussolini's latest speeches in order that 'we should burn no bridges which one day (the) Italians might wish to recross',⁽⁴⁵⁾ Halifax asked Phipps on the 26th whether in the light of Loraine's telegram, a personal letter from Chamberlain would induce Daladier 'to modify the negative attitude which he adopted in his conversation with me on 20 May'.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Phipps strongly advised waiting until the atmosphere improved and the Italian press attacks against France ceased, and Sargent accepted his advice.⁽⁴⁷⁾

However, Halifax, who had recalled Daladier's remark that if the Italians demobilised he 'might be ready to consider certain concessions', instructed Phipps to ascertain whether the French Government 'would be willing to authorise us to sound the Italians as to their willingness to play their role in such an arrangement'.⁽⁴⁸⁾ Phipps replied that in view of Loraine's account of his interview with Mussolini he did not propose to act on Halifax's instructions until he heard further from him as 'we should thereby risk upsetting the French without any chance of inducing Mussolini to demobilize'.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Cadogan agreed with Noble that

44) FO.800/311(H/XIV/359). Halifax to Sir J. Colville, 26 May 1939. Halifax added that 'unfortunately' Daladier had been immensely impressed by his reception by 'his North African Arabs' but that if the Italians 'demobilized a bit' in Libya the situation would be eased. He was considering action along these lines at Rome but it was 'very difficult to extract an undertaking from the Italians when one cannot feel sure that the French will honour the bargain if by any accident it should come off'.

45) DBFP, 3, V, no.593. Loraine to Cadogan, 23 May 1939.

46) FO.371/23795 (R4391/7/22). Halifax to Phipps, 26 May 1939.

47) *Ibid.* (R4396/7/22). Phipps tel 27 May & minute by Sargent, 31 May 1939.

48) *Ibid.* (R4410/7/22). Halifax to Phipps, 27 May 1939.

49) *Ibid.* (R4490/7/22). Phipps tel., 31 May 1939.

it would be better to delay action as Phipps had suggested.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Phipps, who on 1 June had reported his information from 'a highly placed person in the Italian Embassy' that there was 'great unrest and depression in Italy', was personally convinced that a slight effort by the French would elicit a French response; he warned however that

Daladier is more and more under the influence of M.Léger, who has made him change his attitude to the Italian Ambassador during the last few months. The complaint was made that the Embassy was cut off from official contacts.⁽⁵¹⁾

Halifax informed the Cabinet on 7 June that the Franco-Italian discussions had not progressed and that Chamberlain was considering sending a personal letter to Daladier 'urging him strongly to agree to discussions with Italy'.⁽⁵²⁾ Chamberlain told his sister that he still believed that their best plan was 'to keep up contacts with Rome' where he was positive that 'war is looked upon with horror' but that Paris was the stumbling block:

Léger the F.O. permanent official is strongly anti-Italian and he seems to have great influence with Daladier who refuses to do more. I am thinking of putting strong personal pressure on him to be more forthcoming, both with Italy and Spain and for that purpose have got Eric Phipps over under cover of the Russian affair. I have kept him till Monday when I hope to thrash things out with him. Meanwhile we don't get much further with the Bolshies.⁽⁵³⁾

Phipps himself was probably not privy to the secret that he was being recalled to London 'under cover of the Russian affair'; the discussions in London over the negotiations with the USSR were genuine, and Seeds had also been

50) Ibid. (R4490/7/22). Minute by Noble & Cadogan, 1 June 1939.

51) Ibid. R4558/7/22). Phipps tel. Highly Confidential, 3 June 1939.

52) CAB.23/99. Cabinet Conclusions 31 (39). Meeting of 7 June 1939.

53) Chamberlain Papers. NC.18/1/1102. N.Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 10 June 1939.

recalled from Moscow as a matter of urgency.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Daladier had, in fact, told Phipps, before the latter left for London on 8 June, that any delay in concluding the negotiations with the Soviets would only encourage Hitler to seize Danzig.⁽⁵⁵⁾ Chamberlain discussed the question of whether he should personally write to Daladier with Halifax and Phipps on the 12th,⁽⁵⁶⁾ and it was decided to defer any decision for a fortnight until the possibilities of an agreement with the USSR became clearer.⁽⁵⁷⁾ The short delay had apparently been Phipps's idea, and he requested Chamberlain's permission 'to be allowed to handle this matter personally'.⁽⁵⁸⁾ In the meantime, he was provided with copies of the various 'tentative drafts' to take back and study in Paris.⁽⁵⁹⁾

54) Phipps was instructed on 6 June 'to visit London in order to take part in the drafting of fresh instructions for Sir W. Seeds'. DBFP, 3, VI, p.2, f/note 1. Seeds was also recalled as a matter of urgency to participate in the discussions. DBFP, 3, V, no.720 Halifax to Seeds (Moscow), 6 June 1939. On 6 June, Sargent told Cambon that Seeds & Phipps had been recalled to London in connection with the Soviet negotiations. FO.371/23067 (C8146/3356/18) minute by Sargent, 6 June 1939.

55) PHPP.1/23. Phipps to Halifax, 8 June 1939. (Reprinted in DBFP, 3, VI, no.2)

56) PREM.1/329. Minute by J.W. (?), 12 June 1939.

57) FO.371/23795/(R4872/7/22). Minute by Ingram, 15 June 1939.

58) CAB.23/100. Cabinet conclusions 33(39). Meeting of 21 June 1939.

59) FO371/23795 (R4872/7/22). Minute by Sargent, 16 June 1939. Halifax had requested Mallet to provide Phipps with the 'original letter to Daladier prepared at no. 10'; the draft prepared by the F.O., and Vansittart's rough draft. PHPP.1/23, Mallet (F.O.) to Phipps, 12 June 1939. Sargent had told Vansittart that Horace Wilson's draft 'appeared so ill-calculated to produce the desired result that the Department and I have now attempted to put up a counter draft, which Alec (Cadogan) wished you to see...', and that it would have made Daladier 'hopping mad'. Vansittart replied that 'If we are contemplating still further persistence, we shall have to be extraordinarily careful how we put this unsavoury proposition if we are not merely to compromise ourselves without achieving anything but a negatively irritated result' and that most of France felt that way and it was 'a great mistake to suppose the feeling is confined to Daladier and the Quai d'Orsay'. FO.371/23795 (R4872/7/22) Sargent to Vansittart; Vansittart to Sargent, 7 & 8 June 1939.

Immediately after his return to Paris on 13 June, Phipps saw Bonnet who admitted that Franco-Italian relations had reached an impasse and

then quite spontaneously suggested that another approach should be made to Daladier on this subject, preferably by means of a message from you the Prime Minister to the President of the Council, delivered by myself. Also, and without any kind of prompting from me, Bonnet said that the favourable time to do this would be once the Soviet agreement had been concluded.

To avoid any suspicion of collusion, Bonnet wanted Phipps to make it clear to Daladier that his démarche was on the direct instructions of Halifax or Chamberlain.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Daladier contemplated proroguing Parliament for two years but if there was a British announcement of an election in the Autumn it would provide ammunition to his opponents. Bonnet therefore 'begged' Phipps to pass on Daladier's personal request that Chamberlain should refrain from announcing any intention of holding an election in the Autumn, and Phipps told the latter that this would strengthen their hand when 'making your appeal over Italo-French relations!'⁽⁶¹⁾ His account of Daladier's intention to prorogue Parliament made Chamberlain's 'mouth water', and he 'gladly acceded to his request' that no announcement should be made before August.⁽⁶²⁾ He also agreed to Phipps's suggestion that they should 'await events in Moscow' before putting the 'appeal' into operation.⁽⁶³⁾

On 22 June, Phipps informed Chamberlain and Halifax that 'directly Bonnet thinks the moment propitious he will, in strict confidence, tell me when I should

60) PHPP.3/1. Phipps to Chamberlain/Halifax, Private & Very Confidential, 13 June 1938. (Also in PREM. 1/329).

61) Ibid. Phipps to Chamberlain (& copy to Halifax) 13 June 1939 (2nd letter).

62) Ibid. Chamberlain to Phipps, 14 June 1939 (Also in PREM.1/329).

63) Ibid. Chamberlain to Phipps, 14 June 1939 (2nd letter).

again approach Daladier on this subject' ⁽⁶⁴⁾ and, on the 28th, he repeated that this would probably be after the conclusion of the Soviet negotiations. ⁽⁶⁵⁾ Sargent and Cadogan agreed with Phipps that it would be advisable to await its outcome. ⁽⁶⁶⁾ Halifax told Phipps that there was continued evidence of 'Musso's extreme discomfort' and that

if we want him to pull his weight over Danzig, I feel pretty sure it would be easier for him to do so if he could at least get out of the position of having his issues with France entirely side-tracked.

He complained that 'the Russian business... blocks everything'. ⁽⁶⁷⁾

On the 7 July, Phipps informed Chamberlain and Halifax that Bonnet thought that Daladier should be tackled the following week. Phipps therefore sought permission

to make it clear that I am making this appeal on direct instructions from yourself/the P.M. that you (the P.M.) have had great pleasure in acceding to several requests made recently by Daladier, e.g. guarantee for Rumania, conscription, preventing any mention in the Press regarding an autumn election in Great Britain, etc., and that now I have been instructed to urge with the utmost earnestness that a step should be taken that can at the worst do no great harm and at the best may prevent a general conflagration.

He also sought authorization to inform Daladier that 'we will get an assurance from the Italians... that they will confine their demands to the four they put forward unofficially', ⁽⁶⁸⁾ and Halifax confirmed that Chamberlain had agreed to his

64) PHPP.1/23. Phipps to Halifax & Chamberlain, Private & Confidential, 22 June 1939.

65) PREM.1/329. Phipps to Halifax & Chamberlain, 28 June 1939.

66) FO.371/23795 (R4872/7/22). Minutes by Sargent & Cadogan, 28 & 29 June 1939.

67) PHPP.1/23. Halifax to Phipps, 7 July 1939. Halifax also told Phipps that Bruce, the Australian High Commissioner, had informed him that Australian opinion was 'getting a bit restive with what they thought was the French habit of missing opportunities: Italy, Spain etc'

68) PHPP.1/23. Phipps to Chamberlain & Halifax, 7 July 1939. The four 'unofficial Italian demands' which Ciano had made were Tunisia, Jibuti port, Jibuti Railway & Suez Canal Directorship. See f/note 29.

suggestion.⁽⁶⁹⁾ Bonnet had strongly advised him when 'making (the) appeal' to hand Daladier a short letter from Chamberlain which Phipps now urgently requested⁽⁷⁰⁾ in time for his interview with Daladier on the 14th before going on leave, and he suggested to Sargent that it should be brief and that he himself would 'set out the necessary arguments' verbally.⁽⁷¹⁾ After F.O. discussions with Chamberlain, a revised version of Vansittart's draft was sent by bag to the Embassy on the night of the 13th.⁽⁷²⁾

On 14 July, Phipps reported directly to Chamberlain that he had seen Daladier and 'read to and left with him' his letter. Chamberlain had told Daladier that he had asked Phipps to 'enlarge further on what I have said', and, after reading out a French translation, he therefore told Daladier that

I had had the great pleasure on at least three occasions lately of telling him that you had granted three of his requests, viz., conscription, our guarantee for Rumania, and the avoidance of any public mention of the likelihood of elections in Great Britain in order not to render it more difficult for the French Government to postpone their elections for another two years from May. I added that Franco-Italian relations were a subject to which you attached the highest importance, for you felt that on it probably hung the question of war or peace.

69) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/369). Halifax to Phipps, 10 July 1939. Chamberlain told Phipps separately that he 'entirely concurred' with Halifax's letter and that he could assure Daladier that they would try to obtain such an assurance from the Italians. PHPP.3/1 Chamberlain to Phipps, 10 July 1939.

70) FO.371/23795 (R5631/7/22). Phipps to F.O. (Deciphered message), Personal & Most Confidential, 11 July 1939. Phipps had suggested to Henderson, who was en route to Berlin, that he should visit Bonnet and then arranged for him to do so incognito. Henderson emphasised to Bonnet that Mussolini's intervention during the Munich crisis had been decisive, he was 'the one man in Europe' who could play a similar role 'if the crisis became acute', and that he therefore 'deplored the hesitation of the French Government in opening their conversations with the Italians'. DBFP, 3, VI, no.296 Henderson (Berlin) to Halifax, 11 July 1939.

71) Ibid (R5780/7/22). F.O. Minute (Sargent) re his telephone conversation with Phipps, 13 July 1939.

72) Ibid (R5780/7/22). Minute by Ingram, 17 July 1939; PHPP.1/23 Halifax to Phipps, 13 July 1939.

Daladier had reiterated his old fear of an 'Italian trap' and its 'deplorable' effect' on the Moslems of North Africa. He noted Phipps's assurance that HMG would try to obtain an Italian assurance that 'their demands would be confined to the four points put forward unofficially' but complained that when François-Poncet had asked whether they could be put forward officially, Ciano had promised to ask Mussolini but they had not received any reply. Phipps urged Daladier, who was 'most friendly', to give a positive reply and he 'promised faithfully' that he would try to satisfy Chamberlain's request. Phipps was not, however, 'very hopeful' of its outcome and reported that Bonnet was convinced of the soundness of Chamberlain's arguments but was 'too frightened of Daladier to back it up' while Léger, on the other hand, continued to be 'violently anti-Italian' and urged his views on Daladier 'with vehemence and iteration'.⁽⁷³⁾

Phipps informed Chamberlain that he was leaving for London within a few days and that Daladier's reply would be 'handed to Campbell here or sent to Corbin to deliver to you'.⁽⁷⁴⁾ He went on leave in England from 16 July to 24 August⁽⁷⁵⁾

73) PREM.1/329. Phipps to Chamberlain, 14 July 1939. Also in PHPP.3/1 and printed in DBFP, 3, VI, no.326. Chamberlain's letter to Daladier, 13 July 1939 is in *ibid*; FO.371/23796 (R5780/7/22); PHPP.3/1, and printed in DBFP, 3, VI, no.317.

74) *Ibid*. Halifax told the Cabinet on 19 July that Phipps had spoken to Daladier who 'had undertaken to consider the matter but his response had not been very encouraging'. CAB.23/100. Cabinet Conclusions 38 (39), 19 July 1939. Du Réau commented that 'Sur ce point, il était clair que la France refusait de s'aligner et de suivre le voie proposée par Londres... Conseiller par Léger, Daladier avait choisi la fermeté'. Du Réau, *op.cit.*p334.

75) DBFP, 3, VI, p.358, f/note 6.

and played no further role in the events of this period.⁽⁷⁶⁾

C) Images of France and Aspects of the Embassy

Phipps's reputation, and the images of France which he sent back to London were always inextricably intertwined.⁽⁷⁷⁾ Harvey noted on 3 May that 'Phipps continues to intrigue against Daladier through Bonnet and to send us patently one-sided accounts of French opinion'.⁽⁷⁸⁾ Harvey was well aware that Phipps's 'intrigues against Daladier' took place within the framework of his general instructions to induce the French Government to negotiate with Italy and that they were officially sanctioned by their mutual chief, Halifax. His criticism of Phipps's 'patently one-sided accounts of French opinion' was, however, at least up to Prague, justified. The most blatant example was his despatch in January 1939 in which he had attributed opinions to Blum and Mandel which he had received at third hand (and in the case of Patenôtre at second hand) which was severely

76) Daladier's letter to Chamberlain of 24 July & Chamberlain's reply of 3 August 1939 are in PREM.1/329 & FO.371/23796 (R6343/7/22) and printed in *DBFP*, 3, VI, nos 428 & 536. Copies were forwarded to the Embassy, FO.371/23796 (R6343/7/22) Ingram (F.O.) to Campbell (Paris) 11 August 1939 and are extant in PHPP. 5/8. Vansittart considered Daladier's letter 'a very well reasoned & friendly one' which gave 'rather a convincing record of his previous attempts'; Chamberlain's reply, leaving the door open for a further approach, seemed to him to be 'just right'. FO.371/23796 (R6343/7/22). Minute by Vansittart, 9 August 1939.

77) See p.242 for Harvey's description of Cadogan's views on this connection.

78) Harvey diaries, op.cit. (Entry for 3 May 1939), p.286. Both Harvey and Tyrell (whom Phipps had wanted to succeed as Ambassador at Paris in 1933/4) did not think that a Franco-Italian agreement would make any difference, and the latter felt that 'it would be wrong to press Daladier any more'. Ibid, 5 June, p.295.

criticized by the F.O.⁽⁷⁹⁾ On the other hand, his four page despatch detailing the views of their bête noir, Caillaux, on the international situation in late March 1939 was, surprisingly, circulated to the Cabinet after he had reminded them that the latter was a 'highly influential figure' in the Senate.⁽⁸⁰⁾

While Phipps's views on Italy remained consistent, and he continued to be vigilant of any opposition to Chamberlain's policy in Paris,⁽⁸¹⁾ his attitude towards resisting German aggression had hardened after Prague and he fully supported the new orientation of British policy. He considered that it was essential for conscription to be adopted in order to show that Britain 'was in earnest',⁽⁸²⁾ he wanted Britain to support Poland 'to the utmost' in resisting German demands (otherwise 'the entire edifice of resistance to Germany which was being built might crumble') and he wanted the Americans to change their Neutrality Act.⁽⁸³⁾ The occasional doubts which he harboured were influenced by Hankey, who told him

79) FO.371/23792 (R388/7/22). Phipps tel., 16 January 1939. Strang had minuted that 'their testimony has been somewhat coloured in transit' and that Phipps was attempting to discredit Mandel whose views he disliked. Sargent refused to believe, in view of Phipps's friendly relations with so many French politicians, that he had to rely upon 'anonymous third parties' for the views which he easily could have obtained at first hand. Vansittart commented scathingly that 'no Embassy has a right to send this third hand and shoddy material, particularly when it is not fair to those whom it dislikes'; he concluded that 'the last paragraph is evidently pro-Bonnet, with whom Phipps is very intimate' and that 'the Embassy should not indulge in telegrams of this kind or overweight the scales in 1939 with the views of the Journal des Debats and the Temps and "les 200 familles" just as we got too much of Bonnet-Flandin-Caillaux in 1938!' (Ibid) Minutes by Strang, Sargent & Vansittart, 18 & 23 January 1939.

80) FO.371/22912 (C4286/90/17). Phipps tel., 27 March 1939. Caillaux's views were also surprisingly positive regarding the necessity of standing firm against Hitler. (Reproduced as a confidential print; FO.432/5, Pt.XI, no.28 Phipps to Halifax, 27 March 1939).

81) FO.800/311 (H/XIV/354). Phipps to Halifax, 25 April 1939. Phipps had again asked Duff Cooper to show him the draft of a speech which he would be making at the St. George's Day Banquet in Paris on 24 April.

82) FRUS. (Vol I 1939). Bullitt to Secretary of State, 19 April 1939, p.169.

83) Ibid. Bullitt to Secretary of State, 29 April 1939, pp. 242-3.

privately that he 'felt instinctively that a number of mistakes have been made... which we shall soon be regretting'; that 'we cannot save these eastern nations'; Hitler would attack Poland as soon as he felt 'ready to hold us in the west' (using the excuse that Germany was being encircled), and

for all the denials of Chamberlain and Halifax and the cant of the Times he is being encircled... the only trouble is that with Italy on the wrong side the circle cannot be completed.(84)

These doubts were reflected in the apologetic note which crept into Phipps's report on the defeatist articles by Delebecque in Action Française and Déat's 'Mourir pour Danzig' in Oeuvre, both of which dealt with French commitments to Poland, and which reflected his own anxieties. He explained that

(he) felt bound to report the above articles which reflect an uneasiness which is probably felt among sections of French opinion lest M.Beck should precipitate a conflict without exhausting all reasonable possibilities of peaceful compromise in consultation with his ally.(85)

Phipps hastened to add, however, that Daladier had dismissed these views, the latter's 'daily correspondence' was now 'in favour of resistance to German aggression', and that

This development of opinion is borne out by views expressed to myself and to members of my staff by various Frenchmen who emphasise that Frenchmen everywhere now feel that they have had enough of Germany's aggressive policy.(86)

Moreover, Déat's article had elicited separate press statements from Daladier and Bonnet reaffirming France's commitments towards Poland (Roberts was reassured to find them both 'in agreement in advocating a firm line' against Hitler),⁽⁸⁷⁾ and it

84) PHPP. 1/22. Hankey to Phipps, 4 April 1939.

85) FO.371/23017 (C6547/54/18). Phipps tel., 4 May 1939.

86) Ibid. (C6547/54/18). Phipps tel., 4 May 1939.

87) FO.371/23018 (C6674/54/18). Phipps tel., 5 May 1939 and minute by Roberts, 8 May 1939.

had also been widely criticized in the French press as being virtually indistinguishable from German propaganda.⁽⁸⁸⁾ Above all, Phipps contrasted current French opinion with that which existed during the Munich crisis, and Speaight was able to minute that the French attitude was 'encouraging'.⁽⁸⁹⁾

The Embassy's positive reports on the new mood of determination in France produced, in turn, an enthusiastic response from the Foreign Office. Daladier's speeches on the radio and at the closure of the French Parliamentary session which appeared to have received general approval were regarded by the F.O. as being 'firm and confident'.⁽⁹⁰⁾ His special powers had resulted in only 'formal criticism', and his decree law proroguing Parliament until 1 June 1942 was passed virtually unopposed on 30 July.⁽⁹¹⁾ Only the continual revelations of the extent of German intrigue, subversion and propaganda in France appeared to mar

88) Ibid. (6901/54/18). Phipps tel., 10 May 1939. Déat's article had also been attacked by the Right Wing Epoque and by Colonel de la Rocque in Petit Journal, ibid (C6674/54/18) Phipps tel., 5 May 1939.

89) Ibid. (C6901/54/18). Phipps tel., 10 May 1939, and minute by Speaight, 11 May 1939.

90) Ibid. (C8001 & C9083/25/17). Phipps tels 4 & 28 June 1939 and minutes by Makins & Barclay, 6 June & 8 July 1939.

91) Ibid. (C9079 & C10606). Tels from Phipps & Campbell, 28 June & 30 July 1939.

this optimistic picture.⁽⁹²⁾

Phipps's important despatch of 22 June describing Daladier's determination to resist German aggression also highlighted the activities of certain French politicians whose views the Embassy had hitherto enthusiastically reported to London. Daladier had told Phipps that his information was that Hitler intended to incorporate Danzig into the Reich and that

The German Government is convinced that neither France nor Britain will do anything. Hitler hopes, on recent information from Paris, that certain French politicians (presumably Laval & Flandin) will prevent any serious action. As regards Great Britain, Hitler thinks she will not move.

Furthermore, Abetz, the Paris representative of the Dienststelle Ribbentrop, had 'telephoned openly to various people (in Paris) announcing a coup for Danzig for the week-end', and Daladier had told the German Chargé d'Affaires that unless Abetz left voluntarily he would be expelled. Bonnet, however, disguised the expulsion order by refusing him an entry visa into France. Daladier had also instructed Bonnet to summon Welczeck immediately to emphasize that 'in the event of a conflict between Germany and Poland France would at once come to the

92) In July, Aubin of the Temps and Poirier of Figaro were arrested on charges of spying for the Germans. Mme Bonnet had been unwittingly involved in the affair (which Daladier had hushed up) through her friendship with Elizabeth Buttner, a German agent. FO.371/22939 (C9855, C10260, C10354/9855/17). Tels by Phipps & Campbell, 13, 21 & 24 July, and FO.371/23039 (C10485/94/18) Campbell tel., 24 July 1939. Sargent had requested as much information as possible which proved difficult. Eventually the Embassy asked Commander Dunderdale, head of the SIS station in Paris, to approach the Deuxième Bureau. A partial summary of their information was that 'the ramifications of Nazi propaganda extended to every walk of life and are found in the Press, cultural associations, films, railway and tourist agencies etc', and included the local German Chamber of Commerce. It was directed by Karl Otto Faber of the German Embassy in Paris, and the French investigation centred on Poirier, Aubin, Abetz, Bauer & Hirsch. FO.371/23039 (C114894/94/18) Campbell to Sargent, 31 July 1939. Claude Cockburn revealed in The Week that Hirsch, with Gestapo funds, had greatly influenced the French newspapers the Oeuvre and République and had practically purchased the Union Socialiste Republicaine with the 'honourable exception' of Paul-Boncour. FO.800/274 (Fr/39/2) Peake to Sargent, 27 July 1939. See also the post-war testimony of Pierre Comert in Les Événements survenus en France de 1933 à 1945, Paris 1947, vol. VII, p.2175.

assistance of the latter'.⁽⁹³⁾ The effect of the interview was only partially weakened by Bonnet, who described it to Phipps as 'a long and friendly conversation', since Welczeck was also handed a note reiterating Daladier's views.⁽⁹⁴⁾

The Embassy's newly founded objectivity even extended to individuals whom it had previously regarded as their bête noir. Phipps, who had hitherto included Campinchi, the Minister for Marine, amongst the soi disant war party reported that the latter had rebuked Lukasiewicz, the Polish Ambassador, for his 'ridiculously bellicose talk' and that

M.Campinchi... had pointed out to the Ambassador that in case of war in the near future Poland would in all probability be overrun within about 10 days after an intensive bombardment by 3,000 aeroplanes. This had seemed to calm M.Lukasiewicz's ardour and had even caused him to pale quite considerably.

Phipps commented that this was 'remarkable coming from M.Campinchi, for during the September crisis he was violently anti-Munich; nor is he in the least defeatist now', and the Foreign Office had this despatch copied to the Service Departments.⁽⁹⁵⁾

93) FO.371/23021 (C9191/54/18). Phipps tel., 30 June 1939 (also in DBFP, 3, VI, no.186); Documents on German Foreign Policy, D, 6, no.640 Foreign Minister (Berlin) to Welczeck (Paris), 9 July 1939 which also includes Ribbentrop's furious reaction. See also DDF, 2e, XVII, p.443 f/note 3 and *ibid* XVIII, p.57 f/note 3. Abetz's 'expulsion déguisée' was followed, significantly, by the arrest of two French Journalists: Aubin of the Temps and Poirier of Figaro on charges of receiving money from German sources. See the telegrams from Phipps & Campbell of 13-27 July 1939 in FO.371/22939 and also previous f/note. Phipps surmised that Daladier's source regarding an imminent German coup in Danzig was 'M.Simon' who, together with ex-Chancellor Wirth, obtained the information in Basle from 'a person connected with the Reichswehr who had come direct from Germany' to see Wirth. FO.371/23021 (C9232/54/18) Phipps tel., 1 July 1939.

94) FO.371/23021 (C9235/54/18). Phipps tel., 1 July 1939 (also in DBFP, 3, VI, no.212). Ribbentrop's response and Bonnet's rejoinder were forwarded by the latter to Halifax on 27 July 1938: DBFP, 3, VI, no.471 Bonnet to Halifax, 27 juillet 1939. These private letters were reprinted in Le Livre Jaune Française, Paris 1939, nos 163 & 168.

95) FO.371/23020 (C8591/54/18). Phipps tel., 16 June 1939 and minute by Speaght, 19 June 1939, Welczeck had told Mendl that 'there was a war party headed by Campinchi and he was not sure Daladier, who was in some respects more like a Prussian than a Frenchman, was not coquetting with it'. FO.371/23019 (C7513/54/18). Phipps to Sargent (Enl. from Mendl), 22 May 1939.

This more objective approach did not prevent Phipps from continuing to pursue his role as the self-appointed guardian of Chamberlain's policies which was not solely confined to the question of Franco-Italian relations. In May, the delicate question of Eden's invitation to speak at the Conférence des Ambassadeurs had arisen,⁽⁹⁶⁾ followed by invitations for him to speak elsewhere in Paris.⁽⁹⁷⁾ Harvey recorded gleefully that 'much annoyance had been caused to Phipps' by the announcement 'because he tried to prevent his coming!' Apparently Eden had asked Harvey to contact the Embassy and Phipps had replied that 'June was a bad month for lectures and it would be better to reconsider it in the Autumn'. Harvey regarded this as tantamount to sabotage and Peake and himself

therefore arranged the whole thing ourselves through the Figaro correspondent in London who fixed it with A.E. and the Ambassadeurs people. Phipps and Charles Mendl are furious especially as the whole French Cabinet propose to give A.E. a banquet.⁽⁹⁸⁾

In the event, Phipps invited Eden and his wife to stay at the Embassy⁽⁹⁹⁾ and informed Halifax that he 'had a very small dinner for the Edens on the night of their arrival... we were only 12, in black ties, and all supporters and admirers of the

96) Avon Papers. AP.13/2/JJ. Eden to Boutelleau, 15 May 1939; Ibid, AP.13/2/4A. La Conférence des Ambassadeurs, 18 May 1939. Paul Reynaud had been invited to preside over the conference which was not calculated to please the Embassy.

97) Ibid. AP.13/2/5E. R. de Margery to Eden, 19 May 1939. Eden had also accepted an invitation to speak at the Cercle Politique des Étrangers.

98) The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-40, ed J.Harvey, London 1970, pp.290-1. (Entry for 20 May 1939). It will be recalled that Peake was involved in the Cadett affair, see Ch.8.

99) Avon Papers, AP13/2/5N. Phipps to Eden, 23 May 1939 (also in PHPP.3/2). Phipps's invitation was a warm one, and he also hoped that Eden would 'dine with us at least once during your visit, although I know that the French will fight to get you!' (Ibid). In fact, Eden received numerous invitations including those from Reynaud & Blum (Ibid, AP.13/2/50, Eden to Phipps, 30 May 1939).

policy of HMG'.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾

Phipps explained to Chamberlain that he had asked the Edens to stay at the Embassy 'to prevent any irresponsible talk in Paris that Anthony had come to air views contrary to your own'.⁽¹⁰¹⁾ Chamberlain found nothing objectionable in Eden's lecture and, with his habitual vanity, he was pleased by Phipps's account of 'the feeling about myself'. In an oblique reference to Franco-Italian relations, he concluded that 'in our present troubles in the Far East I feel more than ever conscious of the danger of quarrelling with all the strongest powers at once!' ⁽¹⁰²⁾ Phipps replied that the Left were 'very disappointed' that Eden had not taken up a 'position very much in advance of yourself and Bonnet', they had been 'non-plussed' by his invitation to stay at the Embassy and that

Altogether this was a good lesson for Péri, Kérillis, Pertinax & Co. (not to mention Paul Reynaud and Mandel). British unity is as desirable and as wholesome for them as it is for the dictators.⁽¹⁰³⁾

Pertinax had not, in fact, learned Phipps's 'good lesson' since his 'mischievous wireless message' discussing the state of Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations was sent en clair to several American newspapers and had been intercepted by Bonnet. The latter complained 'most strongly' to Phipps that there were

unscrupulous people on both sides of the channel who continue trying to make bad blood between Great Britain and France and also to render war inevitable Bonnet declared emphatically that Mr Chamberlain had literally saved both our countries from supreme catastrophe last August and September. If we had gone to war then

100) PHPP.1/23. Phipps to Halifax, Personal, 16 June 1939 (also in FO.800/311, (H/XIV/363). The guests included Georges Bonnet and André Maurois and their wives, André Chaumeux and the Comte de Castellane. Avon Papers, 13/2/5R, Phipps to Eden, 4 June 1939. Phipps told Halifax that he would be writing separately to Chamberlain to describe Eden's visit.

101) PHPP.3/1 Phipps to Chamberlain, Private & Confidential, 16 June 1939.

102) Ibid. Neville Chamberlain to Phipps, Private & Confidential, 19 June 1939.

103) Ibid. Phipps to Chamberlain, 23 June 1939.

France would have had only two aeroplanes capable of flying 450 kilometres per hour.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾

Phipps told Horace Wilson privately that Pertinax's message should be seen in the light of Daladier's comment to him on the 8th that the Soviets were offended because Strang, instead of a more senior figure, was going to Moscow, and he was convinced that his remark had been inspired by Léger. He reminded Wilson that Léger was 'on the very closest terms of friendship' with Vansittart and that, as he had told him 'in the Prime Minister's room' the previous morning, Léger's influence over Daladier was 'unfortunately increasing daily'.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ Wilson showed Phipps's letter to Chamberlain who expressed his appreciation.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾

Phipps's reputation as an arch appeaser, his almost complete identification with Bonnet's views, and his frequently unfortunate style, left him vulnerable to attacks by his enemies who found no difficulty in ascribing negative motives to all of his activities. This inevitably affected his reputation even when it was unjustified. During this period Bullitt, the United States Ambassador at Paris, became the unwitting catalyst to the serious allegation that he (Phipps) had distorted or withheld important information regarding the Anglo-French negotiations with the USSR.

104) FO.800/311 (HXTIV/360). Phipps to Halifax, 16 June 1939 (also in DBFP, 3, VI no.117.

105) PHPP.3/5. Phipps to Horace Wilson, Personal & Very Confidential, 13 June 1939. Daladier's remark had been made to Phipps immediately before he was recalled to London on 8 June. FO.371/23067 (C8212/3356/18).

106) Ibid. Horace Wilson to Phipps, 15 June 1939.

On 29 April, Bonnet had shown Bullitt the text of the latest French proposal to the Soviet Union.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ Bullitt reported on 5 May that he had seen Vansittart in London and had asked him

why the British had refused to accept the French proposal which the Soviet Government had indicated its willingness to accept. Vansittart replied that he had no knowledge of any French proposal. I expressed my amazement and he said that no French proposal had yet reached the British Government.

Bullitt informed him that his (Vansittart's) 'intimate friend Léger and also Daladier' had felt that the USSR would reject the British proposal and that he himself was positive that the French Government 'had expressed these views to the British Government and had made a constructive counter proposal'. Vansittart had then replied that

these views of Daladier's might have expressed by Bonnet to Sir Eric Phipps and by Sir Eric Phipps to the British Government in such watered down form that they had made no impression.

Vansittart regarded these proposals as being 'far superior to the British proposal', and he wanted Bullitt to see Léger and Daladier and urge the latter to telephone Corbin immediately to convey them to the British Government.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ Bullitt then asked Léger.

how on earth it could have been possible that the British Government had not received either the French proposal or the true views of the French Government with regard to the British proposals to the Soviet Union. He replied that conversations on this subject had been conducted by Bonnet with Sir Eric Phipps. He added that in point of fact both Bonnet and Sir Eric Phipps were opposed to bringing the Soviet Union into close cooperation with France & England.

Léger concluded that he had spoken to Campbell on the subject and had handed the French proposals to him, adding that 'it seemed evident from Vansittart's

107) Foreign Relations of the United States, Vol I (General), Bullitt to Secretary of State, 29 April 1939, pp.242-3.

108) FRUS, Vol 1 (General) Bullitt to Secretary of State, 5 May 1939, pp.248-250.

ignorance of the French proposal that the British Minister had not transmitted this information to his Government'.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾

Vansittart and Léger's insinuations, that the Paris Embassy had withheld or doctored French reports regarding their negotiations with the USSR, if correct, would have constituted a serious déformation professionnelle on Phipps's part. His well-known hatred of communism, and his distrust of the Soviet Union (which he shared with Chamberlain),⁽¹¹⁰⁾ would have provided him with a motive. But he was also an experienced and an astute diplomat who, as has been seen, usually operated within the framework of his general instructions. Phipps had in fact carefully reported all the negotiations including: (a) the new French proposals and Bonnet's verbal remarks,⁽¹¹¹⁾ and (b) Campbell's conversation at the Quai d'Orsay together with Léger's information,⁽¹¹²⁾ in some detail to London. The false impression of Phipps's role in the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations created by

109) Ibid.

110) Chamberlain told his sister that 'I must confess to the most profound distrust of Russia'. Chamberlain Papers, NC18/1/1091, Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 26 March 1939.

111) Phipps's full survey of the new French proposals (and Léger's remarks) was forwarded to the F.O. on 3 May, FO.371/23065 (C6540/3356/18) Phipps tel. 3 May 1939 (printed in DBFP, 3, V, no.350). Charvériat's 'oral communication' (made at Bonnet's request) was forwarded separately on the same date (Ibid C6541/3356/18 Phipps tel. 3 May 1939 (printed in DBFP, 3, V, no.351). The Quai d'Orsay had communicated these new proposals to Suritz on 29 April 1939, DDE, 2, XV, no.523 Communication au Département à l'Ambassade de URSS à Paris, 29 avril 1939. The French and British texts are identical. Phipps's information was incorporated into the F.O. Memoranda on the Anglo-Soviet negotiations dated 7 May 1939 (Ibid, C7010/3356/18).

112) Campbell's conversation with Léger, and a copy of 'the formula proposed by the French Government', were communicated by the Embassy on 20 April, FO.371/23064 (C5694/3356/18). Phipps to Sargent, 20 April 1939 (printed in DBFP, 3, V, no.241). Corbin informed the Quai d'Orsay on 25 April that Cadogan had received 'le dernier exposé de vue françaises sur les propositions russes'. DDE, 2, XV, no484 Corbin à Bonnet, 25 avril 1938.

Bullitt was left uncorrected and served to reinforce for posterity the entirely negative image of his Paris Embassy.

The question of Phipps's impending retirement in October arose during this period. On 20 May, Harvey recorded that 'propaganda for Phipps is beginning to work heavily and obviously from all sides'.⁽¹¹³⁾ As part of this 'propaganda', the indefatigable Hankey had spoken to Lothian and Geoffrey Dawson of the Times who, as he told Phipps:

both agreed that it was monstrous from the point of view of the public interest that you should be leaving Paris in the Autumn. Both of them especially Dawson are friends of Halifax, and I hope they would tackle him on the subject. I have not myself seen either the P.M. or Halifax, the latter of whom has been at Geneva... (114)

On 27 May, Harvey revealed a possibly less than altruistic motive for his continual denigration of Phipps:

Alec (Cadogan) proposes that I should go to Paris in December as Minister in place of Ronnie Campbell, who will have to go when the other Ronnie Campbell goes there in November. It is very flattering and in some ways very tempting, but I don't want to go... on the other hand it looks as if I could not stay on much longer as Private Secretary.

Agonizing over his own future career possibilities, Harvey concluded that it was by no means certain that 'we shall get Phipps out in October'; Cadogan was 'anticipating a campaign for his renewal but he hopes to be able to resist it'.⁽¹¹⁵⁾

113) Harvey diaries, op.cit., (entry for 20 May 1939), p.291.

114) PHPP.3/3. Hankey to Phipps, 25 May 1939.

115) Harvey diaries, op.cit. (entry for 27 May 1939), pp.293-4. Ironically, Phipps himself had suggested in March 1938 that Harvey should succeed Hugh Lloyd Thomas as Minister at the Embassy, PHPP.2/1 Cadogan to Phipps, 4 March 1938. Confusingly, there were two Ronald Campbells in the diplomatic service: Sir Ronald Campbell, Ambassador at Belgrade (who eventually succeeded Phipps at Paris), and R.I. Campbell, the Paris Embassy's Minister (who succeeded Sir Ronald at Belgrade). Lord Tyrell, who was a former ambassador to Paris, had heard that Vansittart would succeed Phipps at Paris and begged Harvey to warn Halifax of the consequences as 'Van was so much involved with French Party politics'; Harvey reassured him that such an appointment was improbable. Ibid (entry for 5 June 1939), pp.295-6.

In fact, Phipps had informed Hankey on 13 July that Campbell ('from Belgrade') would succeed him on 24 October. In an effusion of gratitude he told Hankey that it was entirely due to him that he had been appointed to Paris and that 'It has been a stormy time here, preceded by nearly four stormy years at Berlin, but of course when the time to go comes it will leave a gap'.⁽¹¹⁶⁾ As part of the process of winding down Phipps's Paris Embassy, Cadogan had already told him that Mendl, who would be 69 in December, was 'now employed from year to year'.⁽¹¹⁷⁾ Phipps himself, whose leave in England ended on 24 August and who returned to Paris during the last ten days of peace would, in fact, be somewhat grudgingly offered an extension of a further six months which he refused to accept.

II. The End of Phipps's Paris Embassy. Conclusions and a Postscript

(A) The Outbreak of War and Retirement (25 August-23 October 1939)

Phipps played an active role in the immediate events leading to the French declaration of war.⁽¹¹⁸⁾ Unlike his role during the Czech crisis when he sought to discourage the French from any kind of positive action, he interpreted his instructions positively and vigorously encouraged them to fulfil their obligations to

116) Hankey Papers, HNKY 5/5. Phipps to Hankey, 13 July 1939.

117) PHPP.2/1. Cadogan to Phipps, 7 July 1939. Halifax valued some of Mendl's occasional minutes highly which may have been responsible for his reprieve. He deemed Mendl's two minutes in May recording his conversation with Welczeck on the possibility of a war over Poland and the latter's information on the eclipse of Bonnet, to have been sufficiently important to be circulated to the Cabinet. FO.371/23019 (C7512 & C7513/54/18) Phipps to Sargent (encls in), 20 May 1939, and minutes by Halifax & Kirkpatrick, 27 May & 1 June 1939.

118) Phipps's brief was far ranging. His discussions with Bonnet included the problem of anti-British propaganda in the Middle East and its extension to the Magreb, and the question of the French attitude towards Japan. DDE, 2e, XIX, no.73, Bonnet au Général Nogues (Resident Général de France à Rabat), 27 août 1939, and *ibid* no.119 Bonnet à Corbin, 28 août 1939.

the Poles. He unreservedly supported the war against Nazi Germany without any trace of his former defeatism, and was highly critical of those French individuals whom he considered to be less enthusiastic in the pursuance of those aims than himself.

Instructed to inform Daladier in late August that Britain and France should immediately concert together in the event of a German aggression on Poland, ⁽¹¹⁹⁾ to which Daladier entirely agreed, Phipps added:

I put it to him that if we failed in such case to fulfil our obligations we should have to fight Germany later on, dishonoured and without friends, with a Japan (now angered against Germany) probably ranged against us, and a contemptuous America. M.Daladier heartily agreed. ⁽¹²⁰⁾

Remembering his instructions during the Czech crisis, Phipps also sought the views of a wide range of leading French personalities including Cardinal Verdier. ⁽¹²¹⁾ The general consensus was that morale was high. Even Caillaux 'now (felt) strongly that only firmness could save the situation and was very happy' about the French internal situation. ⁽¹²²⁾

Two of Phipps's initiatives met with the approval of the F.O. (a) He urged that, if Britain declared war on Germany in fulfilment of their guarantee to Poland:

they should do so either jointly with, or after the French Government; but not, if possible before. France is an old ally of Poland. It would be advisable that, in the event of war, emphasis should be laid in speeches and in press less on the fact that Great Britain is standing by Poland than by both Poland and France.

119) FO.371/22977 (C12044/15/18). Halifax to Phipps, 25 August 1939.

120) FO.371/22925 (C12096/281/17). Phipps tel., 26 August 1939.

121) For e.g. Chautemps, Marin & Cardinal Verdier's views are recorded in FO.371/22978 (C12208/15/18); FO. 371/22913 (C12209/90/17) & DBFP, 3, VI, no.44. Phipps tels 26, 27 & 28 August 1939. It will be recalled that Phipps had been instructed to obtain Cardinal Verdier's views during the Munich crisis, see ch.7.

122) FO.371/22913 (C12337/90/17). Phipps tel., 28 August 1939.

The F.O. considered that these observations were important, and Cadogan minuted that the first point was 'being attended to'.⁽¹²³⁾ (b) They also agreed that Duff Cooper's article in Ordre on the breakdown of the Soviet negotiations was 'most mischievous'; Phipps had requested permission to inform the French Government that 'HMG would quite understand if in future, such articles, even written by an ex-Cabinet minister, were suppressed by the French censorship', and this was granted.⁽¹²⁴⁾

On 31 August, the French resolve still appeared to be strong. Daladier told Phipps that he would rather resign than accept 'Mussolini's invitation to a second Munich on September 5'.⁽¹²⁵⁾ General Prétalat told Colonel Fraser that morale was high throughout the country; the Reservists regarded war as preferable to twice yearly mobilisation, and Phipps confirmed that he had received similar information from other sources.⁽¹²⁶⁾ The first cracks in the Government's resolve came late that night when Bonnet told Phipps that the French Government 'now realised that it would not be possible to decline the Italian proposal (of a conference)

123) FO.371/22913 (C12221/90/17). Phipps tel., 27 August 1939 and minutes by Barclay, Kirkpatrick & Cadogan, 28-29 August 1939.

124) Ibid. (C12492/90/17). Phipps tel., 30 August 1939 and minute by Barclay who described Duff Cooper's article as 'a very foolish one'; ibid F.O. to Campbell (Paris) 31 August 1939.

125) FO.371/22980 (C12544/15/18). Phipps tel., 31 August, 1939.

126) FO.371/22913 (C12566/90/17). Phipps tel., 31 August 1939. Phipps added that General Prétalat would be 'in command of the group of armies from the Swiss border to the North Sea in the event of war'.

offhand'.⁽¹²⁷⁾

Following the German attack on Poland on 1 September, the Embassy reported that the Council of Ministers had unanimously agreed to maintain 'firmly the engagements undertaken by France'.⁽¹²⁸⁾ By noon, however, an anxious Halifax told Phipps that the delays in Paris were 'causing some misgivings here' and that 'we shall be grateful for anything you can do to infuse courage and determination into M.Bonnet'.⁽¹²⁹⁾

On 2 September, Phipps who was sympathetic to the French dilemma, emphasised that 'every hour gained to enable French mobilisation to proceed unhindered is precious' and that Henderson should not 'act in advance of Coulondre'.⁽¹³⁰⁾ Chamberlain's parliamentary statement was expected at 3pm, and Phipps was instructed to 'obtain the French Government's concurrence at once' since 'it was impossible to wait for more than a limited time' and Anglo-French responses should be 'simultaneous and identical'.⁽¹³¹⁾

127) FO.371/22980 (C12556/15/18). Phipps tel., 1 September 1939 (2.0am). Léger was deeply opposed to the Italian suggestion of a conference which he regarded as a trap, Bonnet had replied with 'une extrême viguer' that it was 'la dernière minute pour éviter la guerre à laquelle Hitler était résolu'. DDF, 2, XIX, Addenda I, Extrait du journal de Georges Bonnet, Jeudi 31 août 1939, 1.15pm conversation with Léger. Daladier told Corbin that 'il est en principe absolument contraire à l'idée d'une conférence'. Ibid, Addenda II, Compte rendus des journées des 30 et 31 août, 1er et 2 septembre 1939.

128) FO.371/22913 (C12762/90/17). Phipps tel., 1 Sept. 1939. The delays preceding the British & French declarations of war have been described exhaustively in D.Cameron Watt, How War Came, London 1989, Sidney Aster, 1939 The Making of the Second World War, London 1973, Adam Adamthwaite, France and the Coming of the Second World War, London 1977. See also J.B.Duroselle, La Décadence 1932-1939, Paris 1979, pp.481-493.

129) Ibid. (C12710/90/17). Halifax to Phipps, 1 Sept. 1939 (11.55am). The F.O. continued to hold Bonnet responsible for the French delay, see p. 322.

130) Ibid. (C12710/90/17). Phipps tel., 2 Sept. 1939 (9.35pm).

131) DBFP, 3, VII, no.700. Halifax to Phipps, 2 Sept. 1939 (12.30pm). Halifax added that the French Govt. had informed him that they were constitutionally bound to summon parliament in order to declare war, and that the French Parliament would be sitting at 3pm.

Phipps reported that the French Government wanted a 48 hour limit and that he himself was convinced that their attitude was due solely to the request of the General Staff to evacuate large towns and enable general mobilisation to proceed smoothly, a view with which Halifax now agreed.⁽¹³²⁾ Nevertheless, Halifax explained to him that the French position was 'very embarrassing to HMG'; a statement had to be made to Parliament in the evening and a 48 hour delay was 'quite impossible'.⁽¹³³⁾ Phipps replied that the French Government 'had been unable to agree to less than 48 hours' as the evacuation was 'still in full swing' and the French Cabinet were still in session.⁽¹³⁴⁾ Against the background in London of increasing rebellion by the Cabinet and uproar in the Commons, Phipps telephoned the F.O. at 7.10pm confirming that Daladier had agreed to Chamberlain's statement but that Bonnet 'had made difficulties' and that he (Phipps) had urged Daladier to agree on the time limit but the latter had been unable to do so without consulting his Cabinet.⁽¹³⁵⁾ The debate shifted to a higher level: Chamberlain spoke to

132) FO.371/22981 (C12782 & C12791/15/18). Phipps tels., 2 Sept. 1939 (1.15pm & 1.30pm). The general feeling in the Commons was that 'the French were trying to run out of their engagements to Poland and were taking us with them'; Halifax, however, agreed with Phipps's explanation but could not convince some of the Cabinet, FO.800/317. Halifax; 'a Record of Events before the War'. Corbin confirmed that Daladier 'insiste de son côté sur les considerations diplomatiques et techniques qui dictait notre attitude, et il invoque particulièrement le sentiment de notre état-major'. DDF, 2, XIX, Addenda III, Corbin (Londres) à Bonnet, 7 septembre 1939. For Bonnet's role as 'the villain of the peace', see p. 322.

133) DBFP, 3, VII, no.727. Minute by Cadogan (Tel. conversation between Halifax & Phipps), 2 Sept. 1939 (6.0pm). For Lukasiewicz's bitter comments on the 48 hour delay and his intense pressure on the French Government to immediately honour their commitments to Poland, see MAE, Papiers 1940, Papiers Fouques-Duparc, 56, fol.199-200, Lukasiewicz à Daladier, 2 septembre 1939. (Reprinted in DDF, 2e, XIX, no.399).

134) *Ibid.*

135) *Ibid.* no.730. Minute by Mallet, 2 September 1939.

Daladier at 9.50pm and Halifax spoke to Bonnet at 4pm and 10.30pm. ⁽¹³⁶⁾

On Sunday, 3 September, Phipps reported at 8.45am that Bonnet had informed him that the French time limit would 'only expire at 5am on Monday morning'. ⁽¹³⁷⁾ At 12.14pm, however he informed the F.O. that this had been advanced to 5pm that day 'in order to have as little divergence as possible from our action'. ⁽¹³⁸⁾ In the event, the British ultimatum expired at 11am and, as Duroselle pointed out, 'La France, alliée de la Pologne depuis 1921, n'entrera en guerre que le 3 septembre à 17 heures soit six heures après la Grande Bretagne'. ⁽¹³⁹⁾

Following closely the views expressed in Sargent's minute of the 4th, ⁽¹⁴⁰⁾

Cadogan wrote privately to Phipps on the 6th that

In looking back at the crisis of the last few days, one cannot help suspecting that M.Bonnet was the villain of the piece. Although M.Bonnet has been defeated in the recent encounter, we must regard him as the rallying point of French defeatism and expect that he will continue to exert his baleful influence on French policy. He may well intrigue, whenever he can, to get France out of the war, or failing that to limit her war effort to a minimum...

Cadogan regarded it as 'difficult to establish confident and sincere collaboration with the French' as long as Bonnet was at the Quai d'Orsay and that

What we should like, of course, to do is to take discreet measures with the object of getting Bonnet removed from office and ensuring that the Quai d'Orsay is placed in charge of an honest man. But I

136) Ibid. nos 716, 740 & 741. Minutes by Cadogan, 2 Sept. 1939 (4pm, 9.50pm, 10.30pm). Cadogan himself also had a telephone conversation with Bonnet at 5pm (ibid no.718). Bonnet had again brought up the question of a conference with Halifax ('à laquelle participera la Pologne'), and confirmed that he had told Phipps that 'Je désire 48 heures parce que c'est la demande de notre État-major'. DDF, 2, XIX, Addenda I, op.cit. Samedi, 2 septembre 1939. (14h 20) Halifax-Bonnet conversation.

137) DBFP, 3, VII, no.759. Phipps tel., 3 Sept. 1939 (8.45am). Bonnet recorded that he had fixed this time with the agreement of Daladier & General Coulson, DDF, 2e, XIX Add. I, Extraits du journal de G.Bonnet, 3 Sept. 1939.

138) Ibid. no.764. Phipps tel., 3 Sept. 1939 (12.14pm).

139) Duroselle, op.cit., p.481.

140) FO.371/22982 (C13021/15/18). Minutes by Sargent & Cadogan, 4 Sept. 1939.

confess that I do not quite see how this is to be done and we should be grateful for an expression of your views.(141)

Phipps minuted ironically in his spidery handwriting that 'Elegant solution will probably be Herriot will get the Quai!' ⁽¹⁴²⁾ - a comment which was prompted by rumours in Paris of imminent Cabinet changes involving Herriot and which he sought to confirm privately with Mandel and Reynaud.⁽¹⁴³⁾ In the event, Daladier himself replaced Bonnet as foreign minister on the 13th,⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ and it is highly unlikely that Phipps was involved in the latter's removal. Phipps, who had been closely identified with Bonnet's views (at least until late August 1939) and who never lacked a strongly opportunistic streak, was compelled to admit discreetly that

there is general relief among the "durs" and on the Left at the departure of Bonnet from MFA. Even among those who supported

141) Ibid. Cadogan to Phipps, Secret, 6 Sept. 1939. (also in PHPP.2/1). Cadogan was puzzled why Daladier had retained Bonnet since their views differed and the latter 'had practically no following in France'. In fact, Welczeck had complained to Mendl that Daladier controlled foreign affairs and that it was difficult to do anything 'when one knew that the man one was talking to (i.e. Bonnet) was not listened to by M.Daladier'. FO.371/23019 (C7513/54/18) Phipps to Sargent, 22 May 1939 (Enclosure from Mendl). Daladier had told Bullitt in May that he distrusted Bonnet and was contemplating replacing him in the near future with Champ  tier de Ribes whom he trusted. *FRUS*, 1939, Vol I (General) Bullitt to Secr. of State, p.180. Lukasiewicz had complained bitterly about Bonnet's unreliability in August, and Daladier had told him to communicate in future either directly with himself or with L  ger in whom he had 'complete confidence'. Juliusz Lukasiewicz, *Diplomat in Paris 1936-39*, Columbia, 1970, p.263. Daladier's relationship with Bonnet is scarcely touched upon in E. du R  au's biography of the former, op.cit.

142) PHPP.2/1. Cadogan to Phipps, Secret, 6 September 1939, handwritten comment on the original by Phipps dated 8 Sept.1939.

143) Pi  tri had called on Phipps on 9 September to express his 'serious misgivings if Herriot was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs owing to his anti-fascist activities'. The F.O. were also extremely uneasy about this possibility. FO.371/22910 (C13257/25/17) Phipps tel. 9 Sept. and minutes by Sargent & Cadogan, 10 & 11 Sept. 1939. Both Mandel and Reynaud with whom Phipps had lunched privately and separately confirmed that Herriot 'would go to the Quai d'Orsay'. FO.371/22913 (C13206 & C13449/90/17). Phipps tel., 7 & 10 Sept. 1939.

144) FO.371/22910 (C13908/25/17). Phipps tel. 14 September 1939. Halifax, who appears to have forgotten his stern injunction to Phipps on 1 September to 'infuse courage and determination into Bonnet', somewhat exaggeratedly told the latter that he appreciated 'our collaboration and the personal relations of friendship that came of it' and referred to 'the loyal collaboration and mutual trust of our two Governments and... the conviction that they could have followed no other policy'. FO.800/311 (H/XIV/382) Halifax to Bonnet, 15 Sept. 1939; Bonnet's reply is in *ibid* (H/XIV/383).

his policy last year, he was not considered to possess the requisite determination for the post of Foreign Minister in time of war. High officials at the MFA are also pleased at the change.⁽¹⁴⁵⁾

In fact, Duroselle's verdict, that 'les manoeuvres de Bonnet' were intended to delay 'le plus possible' the French ultimatum to Germany in order to obtain Mussolini's diplomatic intervention,⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ was unanswerable.

Phipps's own position at Paris was now reaching its dénouement. Halifax had decided in May that, on the grounds of age and as Sir Ronald Campbell was 'a very suitable successor', he was unable to recommend that Phipps's 'term should be further extended'.⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ In September 1939, however, Chamberlain and Halifax decided that 'it would be highly undesirable' to change Ambassadors at Paris and at Belgrade 'so soon after the outbreak of war', and Phipps would therefore be offered a further extension of six months.⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ Halifax, whose view of Phipps was not always consistent, told him that

Although you have no doubt been looking forward to the rest which you have earned, I feel sure that we may count upon you for further sacrifice, and I need hardly add that it will be a particular satisfaction to me personally, if you feel able to stay on, to know that I can look forward to a continuation of the advice which your long experience renders you specially fitted to give. (149)

145) Ibid (C13909/25/17). Phipps tel., 15 September 1939. Phipps had continued to support Bonnet's desire to keep Italy out of the war, and reported that the latter had told him that Bullitt, amongst others, was 'urging the French Government to force the Italians into war' which was 'very foolish'. FO.800/319. (H /XIX/62) Phipps to Halifax, Private & Confidential, 1 September 1939.

146) Duroselle, op.cit., p.482. Bonnet's intense concern with the Italian proposals is very evident in the French documents, see for e.g. MAE Papiers 39-40, Dossier Hoppenot 1, Chronologie, especially fol 58-62, 1 Sept 1939.

147) FO.794/16. A.H.L. Hardinge (from Private Secretary), 30 June 1939.

148) Ibid. Mallet (F.O.) to Hardinge, 25 Sept & ibid Hardinge to Mallet, 26 Sept. 1939.

149) Ibid. Halifax to Phipps, 27 Sept. 1939; PHPP.2/1 Cadogan to Phipps, 27 Sept. 1939. Halifax had also 'expressed a very strong hope' to Hankey that Phipps 'would stay on' and, more surprisingly, Vansittart was also anxious for him to continue. PHPP.3/3 Hankey to Phipps, 27 Sept. 1939.

Phipps, who had decided that his retirement was now overdue, replied that he and Campbell had agreed that 'there was no reason' at Belgrade or Paris why the moves should not take place, and that Cadogan had confirmed to the latter that they could take place as originally planned. He preferred this 'for various private reasons' but would obviously be available if Halifax still wanted him to stay on for a further six months.⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ Phipps told Cadogan separately that he was certain that 'Ronnie will do splendidly here' but that 'from the point of view of the service and on both general and personal grounds' he favoured the earlier date.⁽¹⁵¹⁾ Halifax and Chamberlain felt that they were unable to press him 'to stay on against his wishes and against the interests of his health' when Campbell was available.⁽¹⁵²⁾

Halifax appreciated his readiness 'to stay on if necessary' and told him that

While I am perfectly confident that Campbell will adequately fill your place, I shall miss the advice which your unique knowledge of France has enabled you to give to me as well as to my predecessors. My regrets at your retirement will, however, be tempered with envy that you should now, at last, be able to enjoy your rest. (153)

Hankey, whose plan for Phipps to take his place on the Suez Canal Board had fallen through,⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ was even more fulsome in his praise. He told Phipps that he was 'delighted' that his son, Henry

is to be on the staff of the greatest diplomat of the day, even in a very minor capacity and for a short time. If he is able to see anything of your methods he will never forget it.(155)

150) Ibid. Phipps to Halifax, 2 October 1939.

151) Ibid. Phipps to Cadogan, 2 October 1939.

152) Ibid. Harvey to Hardinge, 8 October; PHPP.2/1 Cadogan to Phipps, 7 Oct. 1939.

153) FO.794/16. Halifax to Phipps, Personal, 11 October 1939. For Halifax's valedictory letter to Phipps, see p.326.

154) PHPP.3/3 Hankey to Phipps, 14 September 1939.

155) Ibid.

The outbreak of war, his age, and his health were important factors in Phipps's decision to retire.⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ His temporary separation from Lady Phipps who had apparently been evacuated to England⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ was undoubtedly a contributory factor. Also highly relevant was Bonnet's removal from the Quai d'Orsay, and his realisation that he would be unable to establish the same close rapport with Daladier who had added the Foreign Ministry to his other portfolios.⁽¹⁵⁸⁾

October 1939, Phipps's final month at the Paris Embassy, was particularly strenuous. He continued enthusiastically to support the war against Nazi Germany and, reversing his role during the Munich crisis, he identified himself with 'les durs' against the French defeatists.

Sargent had asked him to confirm whether the impression reported by a Roumanian diplomat regarding French morale was correct.⁽¹⁵⁹⁾ In his long

156) Phipps's awareness of the onset of old age and that he was living through a *fin de siècle* had been foreshadowed by his speech in Paris to celebrate Empire Day in which he referred to himself as belonging, 'alas, to a generation now rapidly approaching extinction, that remembers the 24 May as the birthday of the great Queen whose memorable reign was the longest in our history'. FO.800/311 (H/XIV/358) Phipps to Halifax, 25 May 1939. Hankey told Phipps that 'you have rather special reasons for retiring, particularly in view of the threat to your eyesight'. PHPP.3/3 Hankey to Phipps, 10 October 1939.

157) Hankey thought that things would be easier for Phipps if Lady Phipps 'at any rate paid you an occasional visit' especially as it was possible that 'the present lull may last some time'. PHPP.3/3 Hankey to Phipps, 27 September 1939.

158) Hankey, who deplored Phipps's 'departure from a post where you have made history', also realised that it would be impossible for him to maintain 'the same close contact' with Daladier (and Léger) as 'in former times'. PHPP.3/3 Hankey to Phipps, 10 October 1939.

159) FO.371/22913 (C15394/90/17). Sargent to Phipps, 29 Sept. 1939. Sargent added that he was 'sorry to have to add to (Phipps's) labours, but energy devoted to such a report at the present time would certainly not be wasted'.

despatch of the 3rd which was given 'Special and War Cabinet distribution', Phipps replied that

The French Cabinet as a body is determined to do all that is necessary to end the constant peril of German aggression. It may contain individuals on the solidity of whose courage or character it is not possible to count, but I do not believe that at present at any rate such men are in a position to shake the resolution of their colleagues.

Phipps regarded those 'congenitally weak-kneed' politicians (such as Flandin and Mistler) and the 'political intriguers' as not being 'really dangerous'. The socialist and trade union leaders were divided (with Blum and Jouhaux advocating a speedy victory), and the Communists were 'now experiencing a bitter moral struggle between their loyalty to Stalin and natural patriotism'. He was convinced that the vast majority of the French nation realised that 'a thorough victory' over Germany was necessary. The morale of the army was high, and Bonnet and his entourage would not be able to persuade the Government to accept peace 'at any price'. The main danger was that German propaganda was very active, and 'the enforced silence with respect to the British Expeditionary Force for some time made counter measures difficult'.⁽¹⁶⁰⁾

Phipps concluded that the general morale of the French people was 'fundamentally sound' and that their attitude towards the war 'coincides with ours'. He warned, however, that 'doubts and anxieties' could be exploited 'if things go very ill or there appears to be any lack of determination or support on our part'.⁽¹⁶¹⁾

The 'Rumanian Report', that the French could 'show signs of weakness in Germany should launch a peace offensive against France alone with the object of

160) Ibid. (C15610/90/17). Phipps tel., 3 October 1939.

161) Ibid.

detaching her from Great Britain', was brought up at the War Cabinet meeting on 21 October, and Phipps was asked for a further up-to-date assessment of French opinion.⁽¹⁶²⁾ He reported on the 23rd that the last three weeks had reinforced his conviction regarding the soundness of French morale and the 'firm determination' of the French army, and that the Consular Officers had also reported unanimously that opinion in their districts was 'hard'.⁽¹⁶³⁾ Any political 'doubts and weakness' were mainly centred in Paris - Laval was an active intriguer, Mistler was 'also dangerous'; Bonnet, de Monzie and Pomaret, were Cabinet ministers who needed 'constant watching', and Flandin's character 'had not changed'. However, Daladier, backed by Reynaud and the majority of the Cabinet, retained 'the overwhelming support of the country'.⁽¹⁶⁴⁾

Phipps concluded that German propaganda continued to exploit potential Anglo-French weaknesses but that a German peace offensive would meet with a negative French response. In two passages carefully underlined by Vansittart, Phipps stated that: (a) now that Germany had 'revealed her war aim is the destruction of the British Empire' there was no sign of any French weakening, and (b) that

There is considerable fear in France that Great Britain will again wish to encourage a beaten Germany to greatness. If this fear were given definite shape, for e.g. through an announcement of war aims

162) FO.371/22913 (C17084/90/17). War Cabinet Conclusions 55(39), 21 Oct.1939. Ibid (C15610/90/17) F.O. to Phipps & Minute by Makins, 21 October 1939.

163) A survey of the political reports by the Superintending Consuls was forwarded by the Embassy on 3 October 1939. (ibid C15611/90/17).

164) Ibid. (C17161/90/17) Phipps tel., 23 October 1939. Phipps, who had invited Monzie to dine with him privately in order to ascertain his views, produced a fascinating account of his 'mantle of impenetrability'. Monzie had told him that Italian neutrality 'must be preserved at all costs' and that he was 'keeping in close touch with the Italian Ambassador with that object in view'. Roberts minuted that Monzie was 'a thoroughly unattractive & dangerous member of the French Cabinet'. FO.371/22910 (C16506/25/17) Phipps tel., 22 Oct. & minute by Roberts, 14 October 1939.

disappointing to him, the Frenchman might well consider that it was not worth to continue the fight. France will be more than sceptical of peace terms based on a hope that kindness might divert the German mind from militarism & imperialism; these will not seem to her sufficient and she will want, besides terms which if the hope proves futile as in the past, will also make a repetition of German aggression physically impossible. (165)

In a rare compliment to his estranged brother-in-law, Vansittart minuted that he endorsed everything Phipps had said; they were 'not fighting to destroy Nazism but the whole of the Prussian caste system' and that, for the reasons 'so well explained by Sir Eric Phipps', they should hesitate before defining their war aims.⁽¹⁶⁶⁾ Strang agree^d with Vansittart that the last two paragraphs of Phipps's telegram were important.⁽¹⁶⁷⁾

On 23 October, Phipps's reported his impression derived from his conversations with prominent French personalities prior to his departure from Paris which revealed the extent to which his opinions had evolved. His greatest approval was now reserved for those towards whom he had hitherto been most critical: Mandel and Reynaud (of the soi-disant 'war party'), and Léon Blum whose attitude towards the war and towards Britain he regarded as being 'beyond reproach'. Only the views of Flandin, whom he had previously quoted with such enthusiasm, were now regarded as unsatisfactory. Flandin had been 'even more defeatist than I had supposed', and Phipps would 'not weary' Halifax with 'the objections I made to

165) FO.371/22913 (C17161/90/17). Phipps tel., 23 October 1939.

166) Ibid. (C17161/90/17). Vansittart to Halifax, 25 October 1939.

167) Ibid. Minute by Strang, 25 October 1939.

(his) more mischievous remarks for I failed to shake him in the slightest'.⁽¹⁶⁸⁾

Phipps departed for England, and for retirement on the same day.⁽¹⁶⁹⁾

Halifax told him, in his valedictory despatch, that he wanted

to take this occasion to convey to you an expression of warm appreciation on behalf of HMG for the services which you have rendered to them, and I would add my personal thanks for the ready assistance and wise counsel which you have afforded to me. I trust that you may long be spared to enjoy the leisure which you have so well deserved.⁽¹⁷⁰⁾

B) Conclusions

"It is difficult to criticise a diplomat without knowing the instructions which he has received for the general policy, of which he is the slave, while the general policy itself is difficult to appreciate, even in wartime". Carcassonne (replied): "No, my friend, I am given to understand that the policy of (Robert) Murphy & of the Americans in Algiers is to a large extent personal. The State Department acts in accordance with their reports, which are false".⁽¹⁷¹⁾

168) FO.371/22910 (C17093/25/17). Phipps tel., 23 October 1939. General Gamelin was 'full of quiet confidence' and Herriot 'showed no signs of defeatism'. Laval was missing from these final conversations as was Daladier who 'had the support of the army and the people' (Ibid). Caillaux, a notable omission, was described separately as having shown 'no signs of defeatism' and was now advocating the French annexation of the left bank of the Rhine after Germany had been defeated. FO.371/22913 (C14285/90/17). Phipps tel., 18 Sept. 1939. Phipps was sceptical of Daladier's claim that Flandin, whom he considered a wealthy man, had received money from Germany (Daladier had also mentioned Laval and Mistler in this connection). FO.800/311 (H/XIV/386) Phipps to Halifax, 25 Sept. 1939.

169) FO.371/22936 (C17095/3249/17). Ronald Campbell (Paris) tel., 23 Oct. 1939. Ronald Campbell temporarily 'assumed charge' of the Embassy and then became Ambassador at Belgrade. Sir Ronald Campbell had been designated as the Ambassador at Paris & Oliver Harvey was appointed as Minister.

170) Ibid. (C21020/3249/17). Halifax to Phipps, 27 December 1939. Hankey told Phipps that he 'greatly deplored' his 'departure from a post where you have made history' but that obviously 'no-one can stay for ever'. PHPP.3/3 Hankey to Phipps, 10 October 1939.

171) FO.898/203 (F.1/11). To P.W. Scarlett (F.O), 3 April 1943. 'Interview of March 26th with M.Carcassonne' dated 27 March 1943. Interview conducted by an unknown French expert on North Africa with Pierre or Roger Carcassonne, one of the leaders of the French resistance in French North Africa.

International History is, in many ways, the most personalised of all the varieties of history.⁽¹⁷²⁾ In the case of Phipps, psychological factors undoubtedly played an important role. He hated Nazi Germany and loved France and he had tried, desperately in 1934, to exchange his Berlin Ambassadorship for that of Paris.⁽¹⁷³⁾ His tragedy was that he was fated, in the twilight of his diplomatic years, to personally witness the ascendancy of the former between 1933 and 1937, and the decline of the latter between 1937 and 1939. While his struggle to obtain, and retain, the greatly coveted Paris Embassy which had eluded his father, Sir Constantine Phipps; the mutual antagonism between Vansittart and himself; his prejudices, limitations and unspoken assumptions have been described in detail,⁽¹⁷⁴⁾ in the last analysis, two principal factors remain:

(a) His experiences of Berlin (including his interviews with Hitler) were of such an intensity that they underpinned his entire approach at Paris. (b) His advent to the Ambassadorship at Paris coincided with Chamberlain's appointment as Prime Minister, and Phipps became the most devoted follower of Chamberlain's appeasement policies. It was the combination of these two factors, together with his aristocratic disdain for the Popular Front, which made him appear uniquely suited to the role of 'the English Governess'. As with appeasement itself, British tutelage of France especially as it related to Franco-Italian relations, had the active approval of, and was instigated by, the Cabinet and the Foreign Office. Its successes and failures cannot, therefore, be entirely attributed to Phipps.

172) This theme has been continually reiterated by Prof. D.C. Watt throughout his work especially in Personalities and Policies, London 1965.

173) See chapter 2.

174) See chapter 3.

How successful then was Phipps's Paris Embassy, and was Commander Dunderdale's comment that 'all we thought the Embassy produced was gossip',⁽¹⁷⁵⁾ a fair assessment of its achievements and its performance? Above all, was Phipps's negative reputation as a 'defeatist-appeaser' justified?

Ironically it was when Phipps was most successful in implementing the general guidelines of his instructions that he frequently received the most odium from the Foreign Office. Two examples will suffice: in preventing the French Government (a) from taking action over Czechoslovakia, and (b) from assisting the Spanish Republic. Haunted by his perception of French weakness vis-à-vis Germany, Phipps had ignored Talleyrand's warning to the aspiring diplomat (which he himself had frequently quoted): 'surtout pas ^{trop} de zèle'.⁽¹⁷⁶⁾

This zeal included an attempt to control all the information emanating from the Embassy (hence the Cadett affair) and a deliberate concentration on a handful of sources whose views either coincided with his own or which he found convenient to quote. These sources: Bonnet, Caillaux and Flandin were amongst the most reactionary and defeatist elements in France (albeit Caillaux underwent a belated transformation in late August 1939). All three were important French personalities but the criticism, that their opinions were quoted excessively to the exclusion of others, was justified. They only represented a narrow segment of French society, and it was Phipps's categorisation of them as 'all that is best in France' during the Munich crisis which produced an almost violent reaction from

175) Interview with Commander Dunderdale, 26 Sept. 1984; for the circumstances of our interview, see p.42 f/note 38.

176) See p.107 f/note 69. Phipps also quoted Talleyrand's advice in his unpublished memoir, Diplomatic Light and Shade, p.86, PHPP.9/1.

the Foreign Office and calls for his dismissal. Harvey put it succinctly during the Czech crisis:

he (Phipps) had given the definite impression that HMG wish to hold France back (which of course is true). Again over Spain he has consistently supported the Franco side and done his utmost to stop the French Government from helping Barcelona. In all this of course he has faithfully interpreted and anticipated the views of the present Cabinet. But I do not think it wise to blanket other opinion to the extent he has. HMG are entitled to know all sides and not only what they want to hear.(177)

Phipps was badly out of step with F.O. thinking during the very fluid international situation between November 1938 and January 1939, and he failed to take into account the full extent of the deterioration in Anglo-German relations. In November, his constant reiteration of Caillaux and his entourage's warning of the activities of the soi-disant "war party" and of Mandel's motives (and his Jewish ancestry) occurred against the background of Kristallnacht and the hostile British press criticism of Germany which had incensed Hitler. His vendetta against Cadett occurred during the war scares in January 1939, and the F.O.'s investigation into the affair unnecessarily strained their limited resources during the crisis. Neither of these examples were calculated to enhance his reputation.

Phipps's conversation in the late Spring of 1939 to an advocate of firm resistance to Hitler (which brought him rare praise from Vansittart) is less well-known. By August 1939, this had evolved into an ardent support of his old adversaries of the 'war party' against his former allies the 'defeatist-appeasers'. This transformation was most strikingly demonstrated in October 1939 when Marin had told him that 'he had four children and he would rather he and they were killed now

177) Harvey diaries, op.cit., (entry for 19 September 1938), p.188.

than that they should survive to become the slaves of Hitler', and Phipps had 'warmly echoed this sentiment'.⁽¹⁷⁸⁾

This conversion came too late to rehabilitate Phipps's reputation, and the F.O. gave the impression that they were conducting a clean sweep of the Paris Embassy after his retirement.⁽¹⁷⁹⁾ In November 1939, for example, Cadogan refused to press Phipps to reconsider his decision not to broadcast to France.⁽¹⁸⁰⁾ Similarly, the legendary influence which Mendl was alleged to have wielded at the Embassy evaporated quickly. The F.O. were unhappy at the request of the head of the British Military Mission with Gamelin to have access to Mendl's daily memoranda to the Ambassador on the grounds that it consisted of 'political gossip circulating in Paris' and did not 'necessarily represent the Embassy's viewpoint' to which Roberts added:

In fact, quite often it definitely does not do so. Major General Howard-Vyse (Head of the British Military Mission with Gamelin) would however naturally assume that it did and his judgement might be affected accordingly. (181)

178) FO.371/22910 (C15974/25/17). Phipps tel., 6 October 1939. As mentioned previously, Phipps had six children and his eldest son was killed in 1943 while on active service.

179) Significantly Duff Cooper (whose activities in Paris Phipps had attempted to curb in 1938 & 1939), and Oliver Harvey (one of Phipps's bitterest critics), became, successively, the first two post-war British ambassadors to France.

180) FO.371/22942 (C19429/19429/17). Cadogan to Ogilvie (BBC), 28 November 1939. Phipps was later offered, and accepted, a further invitation to broadcast to France. FO.371/24324 (C2636/2636/17). Phipps to Kirkpatrick, 12 February 1940.

181) Ibid. (C20285/20285/17). Brig.General Beaumont Nesbitt to Strang, and minute by Roberts, 15 December 1939. Sir Ronald Campbell told Strang that it was 'not a daily press memoranda' but 'a confidential letter addressed by Mendl to the Ambassador giving an account of any interesting conversations' and that distribution outside the Embassy would 'cramp Mendl's style and is otherwise open to objection'. Ibid, (C20846/20285/17). Both the Embassy & the F.O. were aware of the necessity of having 'a proper daily summary of the French press'. Ibid.

The balance sheet of Phipps's achievements as 'the English Governess' included the prevention of Paul-Boncour's reappointment as foreign minister; the discouragement of any kind of action by the French Government to assist Czechoslovakia in September 1938, and a substantial contribution towards preventing them from assisting the Spanish Republic and encouraging them to keep the Franco-Spanish border closed. Since all of these activities were in conjunction with official British policy they can, within these narrow confines, be judged successful.⁽¹⁸²⁾ Phipps's attempts, on the direct instructions of Chamberlain and with the full support of the Cabinet and the Foreign Office, to pressurise Daladier into making concessions to Mussolini must be judged unsuccessful. Italy's neutrality in September 1939 was due to Mussolini's belated recognition of the full implications of the Pact of Steel, and of Hitler's attempts to drag him into a war for which he felt unprepared, rather than any British efforts to appease Italy.

Similarly, Phipps's reports and the images which he conveyed to London were the corollary of his role as the 'English Governess'. While their sheer volume makes them more difficult to assess, he increasingly regarded himself as Chamberlain's man in Paris and they therefore varied from the objective to the highly subjective. At their worst they reflected his prejudices and unspoken assumptions which he equated with British interests and policies. Their influence on Chamberlain and the Cabinet, particularly during the Czech crisis, was always

182) Phipps's continual warnings to London (& his vigorous support for those of the Embassy's air attaché) regarding the weak state of the French air force, and his pleas for them to put pressure on the French Government were also effective. Colyer told Harvey on 27 May 1939 that French aircraft production had 'at last turned the corner and is really at last going ahead'. Harvey diaries, op.cit., p.292. See also P.Fridenson & J. Lecuir, La France et la Grande Bretagne face aux problèmes aériens 1935 - mai 1940, Vincennes 1976, especially pp. 42-43, for the rapid increase in French aircraft production in 1939.

greater than on the Foreign Office. The strongest images which he conveyed were of a French nation unprepared and unwilling to go to war in September 1938, but able and willing to do so in September 1939. In the last analysis, this accurately reflected the change in emphasis in British policy towards Nazi Germany after the German occupation of Prague.

Finally, it would be absurd to blame Phipps, who retired in October 1939, for not warning of the long and debilitating effects of the drôle de guerre on French morale or for not predicting the French collapse in June 1940 as some of his critics have implied. Other later, and possibly more qualified, observers also failed to consider the possibility of a decisive French defeat.⁽¹⁸³⁾ When it came, it was sudden and unexpected, and its scale was so complete that organised resistance only emerged after Operation Barbarossa in June 1941. Given his profound knowledge of France, and his tendency towards pessimism, it is not impossible that Phipps may have had a presentiment of those terrible events and that they were a subconscious motive in his decision to retire.

The French débâcle of 1940 also led some of Phipps's Foreign Office critics to reassess the value of his warnings during the Munich crisis. Strang, for example, who had been 'outraged' by Phipps's 'all that is best France' telegram, later admitted that

in reporting that war would be unpopular in France and that there were many in positions of authority who were against war at almost any price, the Ambassador was probably not at fault in his judgement. Some of the dominant figures in governing circles in

183) Sir Ronald Campbell's political review of the general attitude of France during 1939 (produced in lieu of the Annual Report) followed closely the lines of argument, and even the language, of Phipps's final despatches in October. FO.371/24324 (C1632/1632/17). Sir R. Campbell (Paris) to Halifax, 27 January 1940. For the British failure of perception in May/June 1940, see p.211 f/note 96.

France had become deeply infected by the corroding spirit of the times which was to produce its full effects in June 1940. (184)

Strang omitted to mention that during the crisis, and its immediate aftermath,

Phipps himself had been 'deeply infected by the corroding spirit of the times'.

Nevertheless, regardless of Phipps's motives, Ivone Kirkpatrick's partial rehabilitation of the former was undoubtedly correct:

The Ambassador (Phipps) warned the Government that the French were against fighting and would not hesitate to take the first opportunity of blaming us for having dragged them into war. This diagnosis was later confirmed by the events of September 2, 1939, by the French refusal to allow offensive operations against Germany in 1939 and by the conduct of the French Cabinet in June 1940.(185)

A Postscript

Phipps's sense of grievance continued after his retirement,⁽¹⁸⁶⁾ and his attempts to justify himself were unfortunate and only served to reinforce his negative image.⁽¹⁸⁷⁾ In 1941, he applied for permission to publish a book supposedly based on his Berlin diary which revealed a strange lack of proportion and of discretion in an ex-diplomat living in war-time Britain. In his detailed criticism, Frank Roberts singled out, inter alia, references to Dr Goebbels's 'charm

184) Lord Strang, At Home and Abroad, London 1965, p.136.

185) Ivone Kirkpatrick, The Inner Circle, London 1959, p.133.

186) Phipps's resentment was only partly assuaged by his recommendation for a high award. He told Hankey that, 'it warms the cockles of my heart to feel that my years in Berlin & Paris spent in circumstances of really peculiar difficulty (owing to constant stabs in the back from my relative in the F.O.), which you alone are able to realise, have received public recognition'. Hankey Papers, HNKY 5/5, Phipps to Hankey, 29 December 1940.

187) Phipps's reputation in Berlin also suffered a post-war decline. Replying to Sargent's query in 1949, the F.O's Research Dept. were unable to confirm that Phipps had 'attempted to analyse Hitler's foreign policy & forecast its development and objectives'. Vansittart, who had been perfectly satisfied with Phipps's Berlin Embassy, discovered in retrospect that Baldwin's judgement (viz. 'too much wit and not enough warning') had 'not been unjust'. FO.370/2049 (L5749/81/402) Sargent to Passant, 11 Oct. 1949 & C.H.Fone to Sargent, 27 October 1949; Sir Rbt. Vansittart, The Mist Procession, London 1958, p.445. These judgements were excessively harsh, see chapter two.

and good taste'; a consistently favourable portrait of Laval (which he regarded as being 'most unfortunate at the present moment'); warm support for the Anglo-German Naval Agreement; Phipps's belief that 'Hitler was sincere in not wanting war'; references to Lenin as 'the most dangerous microbe of all'; Hitler as 'an idealist', and of 'the xenophobia of the Spanish Left'. Woodward's comment was masterly understated:

it is not a diary or a general survey, but a reproduction verbatim of official despatches & confidential letters... the book gives out a feeling of superficiality, and I am afraid it might provide an opportunity to those critics who say that British-and-other-diplomats spent far too much of their time lunching & dining in a very narrow circle... (188)

The intemperate and self-indulgent views expressed by Phipps in his Berlin diary must throw grave doubts over any attempts to fully rehabilitate his reputation, and tarnishes the positive contribution which he made after the German occupation of Prague. Chameleon-like, he again attempted to redress balance in a letter to the Times in 1943 on Foreign Office Reform which constituted, indirectly, his only published defence of his pre-war role:

what the British public should know is whether HM representatives abroad warned the Government from 1933 onwards of the grave dangers ahead and, if so, why those warnings were disregarded. How was it possible, for instance, that the country was allowed to remain in such complete ignorance of danger as to indulge in the farce of the peace ballot? In the years preceding the war only one prominent man had the courage to utter words of repeated warning against the growing German menace; but his was a cry in the wilderness. His reward is that he now leads the country to victory. ... Diplomats are accused of living too sheltered lives; but was it not rather the public that was allowed to live in a sheltered world of illusions while HM representatives abroad struggled with grim realities? Our political system seems to need some reform whereby public opinion will be properly enlightened by politicians with

188) FO.371/26579. F.O. Minute by F.K.Roberts, 25 November 1941 & minute by E.L.Woodward, 27 November 1941. Makins regarded it as 'superficial' and commented that 'it is not a book of memoirs but scissors & paste with despatches & semi-official letters'. (Ibid). The original manuscript was only deposited amongst his papers in 1993 (PHPP. 10/2). It remains unpublished as does his sentimental & romanticised memoir of his early diplomatic impressions, Diplomatic Light and Shade, (PHPP.9/1).

sufficient courage to reveal the truth, however unpalatable to the nation. (189)

The reference to Churchill reads strangely in the light of his hostile attitude towards him especially during the Munich crisis. It constitutes yet another Phipps paradox and raises further questions. Did Phipps genuinely have second thoughts about his role in Paris or was it, perhaps, merely a spontaneous gesture of patriotism in the midst of war - a war which he had desperately tried to avoid and in which his son was killed?⁽¹⁹⁰⁾

Regardless of the answer, over a half of Phipps's forty year career in the F.O. and the diplomatic service had been spent in Paris.⁽¹⁹¹⁾ Apropos Phipps's four years in Berlin, François-Poncet told the post-war French Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry that the Germans had complained that, before Henderson's arrival, there had been two French ambassadors in Berlin - himself and Phipps and that 'il n'y a pas d'ambassadeur d'Angleterre'.⁽¹⁹²⁾ Phipps's close friend, the Franco-Jewish writer André Maurois, recalled 'le tendre amitié' of Phipps and his wife when they had tried to console him at their Wiltshire home over the week-end of 15-17 June 1940 during the capitulation of France.⁽¹⁹³⁾ Vansittart, Phipps's fellow Francophile and alter ego, may therefore have written both of their epitaphs in the first stanza of his moving poem on the Entente Cordiale and the fall of France, with its curious echoes of 'all that is best in France':-

189) Phipps's letter to the Times, 3 February 1943.

190) One of Phipps's four sons was killed in action in the same year.

191) Halifax had acknowledged this in his valedictory telegram to Phipps, FO.371/22936 (C21020/3249/17), 27 December 1939.

192) Les Evénements survenus en France de 1933 à 1945, vol 3, Paris 1947, p.769.

193) André Maurois, Mémoires, Paris 1970, p.303

Was I not faithful to you from the first?
When have I ever failed you since my youth?
I loved without illusion, knew the worst,
But felt the best was nearer to the truth.(194)

Such sentiments were alien to Chamberlain whose dislike of France had always been apparent and who had sought (through Phipps) to control its foreign policy.⁽¹⁹⁵⁾ In a harsh and bitter judgement on the French in June 1940, he told his sister that

We are at any rate free of our obligations to the French who have been nothing but a liability to us. It would have been better if they had been neutral from the beginning.(196)

194) Sir Robert Vansittart's poem on the fall of France, '1904-1940' is quoted in its entirety in English & French in Elie J. Bois, La Malheur de la France, récits et témoignages, London n.d., pp X-XI. Bois commented: 'en voici le texte, qui restera dans les anthologies futures comme un des plus beaux cris de douleur arrachés à l'âme d'un poète'.

195) For Chamberlain's views on France, see ch.5. For additional evidence of Chamberlain's hostility to the French see John Cairns, 'A Nation of Shopkeepers in Search of a Suitable France: 1919-1940', American Historical Review, 79 (1974), pp.710-743 especially pp.729 &731.

196) Keith Feiling, Life of Neville Chamberlain, London 1946, p.449. In a tragic twist of fate, Captain (later Vice-Admiral) Cedric Holland, the former naval attaché at Phipps's Paris Embassy, was the emissary who conveyed the ultimatum leading to the British attack on the French fleet at Mers-el-Kebir on 3 July 1940. R.T. Thomas, Britain and Vichy France: the Dilemma of Anglo-French Relations 1940-42, London 1979, pp. 44-45.

APPENDIX I

THE PRINCIPAL OFFICIALS AT PHIPPS'S PARIS EMBASSY, 1937-39.

Ambassador Extraordinary & Plenipotentiary:

Sir Eric Phipps (24 April 1937-23 Oct. 1939)

Envoy Extraordinary & Minister Plenipotentiary:

H. Lloyd Thomas (Aug 1935-Feb. 1938).

R.I. Campbell (May 1938-Dec 1939).

1st Secretary: M.R. Wright (2nd/1st Secr. Oct.1936-Jan 1940)

J.V. Perowne (Feb 1936-Aug 1938)

W.H. Mack (Aug 1938 - June 1940).

2nd Secretary: A.R. Dew (May 1935-Sept 1938)

V.G. Lawford (3rd/2nd Secr. March 1937-Sept 1939).

3rd Secretary: D.D. Maclean (Sept 1938-June 1940).

Financial Advisor: E. Rowe-Dutton (Oct. 1934 - April 1939).

Commercial Counsellor: Sir J.R. Cahill (Feb. 1921 - July 1939)

Press Attaché: Sir Charles Mendl (June 1926 - May 1940)

Naval Attaché: Capt. Cedric Swinton Holland, RN (resid: Paris, Brussels,
Madrid, Lisbon & the Hague). (June 1938- June 1940).

Military Attachés: Lt.Col. Frederick George Beaumont-Nesbitt M.C. (Paris,
Madrid, Lisbon & Berne). (Feb.1936 - Aug. 1938).
Lt.Col. the Hon. William Fraser (Paris, Madrid, Lisbon &
Berne) (Aug.1938 - Nov.1939).

Asst. Military Attachés: Capt. Christen Albert de Linde, RE (Paris, Madrid,
Lisbon) (Aug. 1936 - June 1940).
Capt. E.C. Richards (Paris, Madrid, Lisbon).
Major R.F.G. Jayne (Paris& Lisbon)

Air Attaché: Wing Commander Douglas Colyer, DFC (Paris, Lisbon, Madrid)
(June 1936 - June 1940).

Asst. Air Attaché: Squadron Leader Chamberlayne (Paris, Madrid & Lisbon).

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The amount of literature on France in the inter-war years, and on appeasement is vast. This bibliography is therefore limited to those works which were either cited in the footnotes or which were found to be useful.

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