Volume One

The Role of Public Opinion in the Formulation of British and French Foreign Policy, 1938-1939

Daniel Hucker

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DECLARATION

This work has not been previously accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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STATEMENT 1

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to examine the role of public opinion on the formulation of British and French foreign policy between the Munich Agreement of September 1938 and the outbreak of the Second World War. More specifically, it analyses how public opinion was perceived by the respective policymaking elites, and thus influenced the course of foreign policy. Therefore, rather than offering an analysis of public opinion per se, it shall examine how certain dominant tendencies of public opinion carried more weight, pervading the corridors of power, and thus assuming significance as an historical actor, contributing to the policymaking process. In so doing, a considerable gap in the existing literature will be filled. Within the abundant historiography of this period, the subject of public opinion remains relatively under-explored. More pertinently, those studies that purport to analyse public opinion rarely seek to examine the specific link between public opinion and the policymaking process. Utilising a notion of 'representations', this thesis seeks to ascertain how certain dominant tendencies of opinion assumed greater potency than others, and thus had a greater impact on the policymaking elites. Differentiating between 'residual' and 'reactive' representations of opinion, it illustrates how elite perceptions of public opinion evolved in the crucial period between the Munich Agreement and the outbreak of war in September 1939.
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Introduction

"We know how easily public opinion makes itself felt in this country when it takes a strong line on an issue of foreign policy. We know how susceptible Members of Parliament are to the pressure of their constituents". E. H. Carr, 1936.1

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of public opinion in the formulation of British and French foreign policy in the twelve months prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. More specifically, it will analyse the relationship between elite perceptions of public opinion and the direction of foreign policy. Therefore, this is not an attempt to explain and define what public opinion actually was. Rather it is an attempt to illustrate how certain perceptions and representations of public opinion permeated the milieux of the decision-making elites and thus impacted upon the formulation of policy. In so doing, the aim is to better reveal the genuine impact of public opinion on the foreign policies pursued by France and Great Britain in the final months of peace.

The historiography of appeasement is vast, and the scope for new perspectives has become increasingly narrow. Nonetheless, this constraint has not prevented the field remaining vibrant. Indeed, comparisons between the 'appeasement' of the 1930s and contemporary international politics ensure that this period of history remains the subject of constant re-evaluation and contention. It is therefore unsurprising that any new trends and perspectives within the discipline of history and international relations are regularly employed to re-assess the events of the 1930s. One such perspective is that of public opinion. This study will argue that existing studies of the role of public opinion fail to explain its impact satisfactorily. The aim is thus to address this lack by approaching the subject from a fresh angle and within a comparative framework.

The Historiography of Appeasement

The very word 'appeasement' resonates with meaning, largely negative, ignominiously symbolic. As Wesley Wark has noted, it "continues to enjoy mythic status as a foreign policy of catastrophic failure".2 Moreover, appeasement evokes the infamous Munich agreement, and Chamberlain's notorious claims of "peace in our time". Within the

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1 E. H. Carr, 'Public Opinion as a Safeguard of Peace', Inaugural lecture delivered at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, October 14, 1936. Published in International Affairs, 15:5 (1936), pp. 846-862.
discourse of contemporary international relations, Munich remains a dirty word, synonymous with diplomatic weakness and failure. The very word 'Munich' has, according to Yvon Lacaze, "acquired an eminently symbolic value system, indicating an illusion". In sum, the concept of appeasement is equated with failure, weakness and self-delusion. Indeed, one could contend that little has changed since the early days of the war, when the backlash against the appeasers was fervently articulated.

In Britain this immediate backlash manifested itself with the 1940 publication of Guilty Men, in which the British governments of the 1930s were castigated for consistently making concessions to, and putting their trust in, a dictatorial megalomaniac clearly intent on world war. Munich is described thus: "Mr Chamberlain sighed with satisfaction when this distasteful scheme had, by the united efforts of himself and the French premier, been crammed down the reluctant gullet of the Czech rulers and eventually, with many a groan and retch, swallowed into their stomachs. That year also saw the publication of Cecil Melville's Guilty Frenchmen, in which he differentiated between the "consciously guilty" and the "unconsciously guilty" men of the Third Republic. Three years later saw the publication of André Géraud's Les Fossoyeurs: défaite militaire de la France, (written under the pseudonym 'Pertinax'), the gravediggers in question being Daladier, Gamelin, Reynaud and Pétain.

Within the British historiography, Cato's 'Guilty Men' thesis held sway for many years, buttressed by the early post-war histories of appeasement. Such accounts were lent additional weight by the publication of Churchill's The Gathering Storm in 1948, and numerous other memoirs, notably Duff Cooper's Old Men Forget (1953), Vansittart's The Mist Procession (1958), and Eden's The Eden Memoirs: The Reckoning (1965). Of course, amongst the plethora of memoirs that emerged during and after the Second World War were those offering sympathetic accounts of appeasement, notably Nevile Henderson's

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8 Churchill's reputation as an anti- appeaser inevitably gave him greater kudos after the war, allowing him to present an account of the appeasement era that was widely accepted. It has also been persuasively argued that Churchill's status after the Second World resulted in his analysis of the appeasement era in The Gathering Storm becoming the dominant interpretation in the early historiography of the period and beyond. David Reynolds has suggested that "Churchill's extended essay in retrospective wisdom has guided the writing of history ever since". In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War, (London: Allen Lane, 2004), p. 128.
Failure of a Mission (1940) and Sir Samuel Hoare’s Nine Troubled Years (1954). An abundance of memoirs also emerged in France. As Robert Young has noted, “politicians, diplomats, officers of army, navy and air force, intellectuals, and people from the world of journalism, all hurried to save their reputations — often at the expense of others”. Amongst the most notable are the memoirs of Georges Bonnet, Maurice Gamelin, Pierre-Etienne Flandin, Pierre Laval (posthumously), and Paul Reynaud. There were also the defences offered by Daladier, Blum and Gamelin at Riom. Generally, such memoirs sought to justify personal actions within the context of a fundamentally flawed system, indicative of a fragile and inept Third Republic.

By the mid-1960s a revisionist argument emerged in Britain, stimulated by D. C. Watt’s 1965 article ‘Appeasement: The Rise of a Revisionist School?’, which itself made reference to the seminal work of A. J. P. Taylor, The Origins of the Second World War (London, 1961). Revisionists essentially offered a more sympathetic interpretation of appeasement, or, in the words of Ralph B. A. Dimuccio, presented “an effort to relieve Chamberlain from his ‘guilt’”. The revisionist school gained momentum with the 1967 Public Records Act, which reduced the restriction on the release of official documents from fifty to thirty years. Consequently, access to official documents allowed historians to compile more detailed analyses, suggesting that the harsh economic, military and strategic realities of the 1930s demanded a policy of appeasement. Historians highlighted the relative military weakness of Britain, noting how the politicians of the time were acutely aware of Britain’s shortcomings. Furthermore, attention was drawn to the strategic headaches caused to imperial Britain by Japanese expansionism in the Far East, and the financial constraints on rearmament. Adding further weight to the revisionist

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argument are a number of works drawing attention to the pro-appeasement Dominions, the isolationism of the United States, and the complex internal workings of the Conservative Party.\(^{17}\)

In France, the historiography evolved along somewhat different lines.\(^{18}\) The immediate post-war accounts of the French defeat, rather than following the condemnatory tone of *Les Fossayeurs*, instead concurred with an argument first established by Marc Bloch in *L'étrange défaite* (written in 1940, published in 1946), which was critical of all aspects of French society during the Third Republic. Maurice Baumont, in *La faillite de la paix, 1918-1939* (Paris, 1946), highlights complex explanations for the ‘décadence’ of France between the wars: “France had been reduced to the defensive... symbolised by the construction of the Maginot Line”.\(^{19}\) Alongside Baumont, two other prominent French historians during the 1950s were Pierre Renouvin and Jean-Baptiste Duroselle. Renouvin, in *Histoire des relations internationales* (Paris 1958), identified a tension within the Third Republic between deterrence and conciliation, the subsequent impotence compounded by economic and demographic constraints. Duroselle, in *Histoire diplomatique de 1919 à nos jours* (Paris 1953), agreed that there was a particular inevitability to the Republic's collapse, indicative of a general failure amongst the democratic countries to resist the dictators. John Cairns offered a similar argument, suggestive of a general European failure, but, unlike Duroselle, offered a significantly more sympathetic account of the French people themselves.\(^ {20}\)

As in Britain, widening access to official French archives resulted in an increasing number of works emerging during the 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, several analyses emerged from the historical sections of the French armed forces, highlighting German military supremacy over France, whilst emphasising the progress made in military

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cooperation with Britain. The 1970s also saw the publication of papers given at two Paris conferences, both serving, for the most part, to undermine the perception of a widespread decadence. Essentially these new analyses sought to position French foreign policy within a more rational and realistic context. However, not everyone was in agreement, instead continuing to offer condemnatory assessments of the Third Republic. The most influential of these was undoubtedly Duroselle's *La décadence* (Paris 1979). For Duroselle, the old themes remained crucial, culminating in a castigation of the political decadence that had beset France during the 1930s, located within a broader context of social and economic fragility.

However, despite Duroselle's efforts, the thesis of *La décadence* failed to become the dominant interpretation. Indeed, more recent works have tended to criticise the 'decadence' school, instead offering a more sympathetic account of the final years of the Third Republic, including more favourable appraisals of French rearmament and the French military. Elisabeth du Réau, in her meticulous and sympathetic biography of Daladier, is another who rejects decadence, presenting the policies pursued by Daladier's government as entirely understandable given the military, strategic and economic context. On the other side of the coin are those who revisit themes of guilt and weakness, suggesting that, with a firmer and more decisive leadership, France could successfully have gone to war with Germany in 1940. Other scholars, such as Julian


Jackson and Peter Jackson generally reject decadence, yet also argue that alternative arguments are insufficient. 27 Some of the more recent work on Britain has also presented a more complex and nuanced approach to appeasement, neither strictly orthodox nor revisionist in conclusion. 28 However, several analyses can be positioned within the orthodoxy, such as Richard Cockett's *Twilight of Truth: The British Weekly News and Nazi Germany during the 1930s*, (London, 1989), L.W. Fuchser's *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement* (London, 1982), and, to a lesser extent, Frank McDonough's *Neville Chamberlain, appeasement, and the British Road to War* (Manchester, 1998). Similarly, there are works that fall broadly within the revisionist camp including sympathetic biographies of two of the primary protagonists of appeasement, Lord Halifax and Nevile Henderson. 29 Furthermore, there is the counterfactual argument famously forwarded by John Charmley in *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace* (London, 1989). This argument suggests that the policy of appeasement was pragmatic, and could conceivably have been carried on beyond 1939, involving an agreement with Hitler resulting in Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia fighting one another into oblivion, allowing Britain, her Empire, and even her superpower status to remain intact. Although such an argument is easily undermined, it is nevertheless of interest as perhaps the most extreme defence of the appeasement policy.

Despite the vast body of literature concerning this period, the specific issue of public opinion has been left relatively untouched. Most works in this domain have come

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27 Julian Jackson, in *The Fall of France: The Nazi Invasion of 1940*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), argues that decadence has been overstated, although one must be careful not to go too far in the other direction. Robert Young's *France and the Origins of the Second World War*, suggests a notion of ambivalence, between confidence and apprehension, hope and despair, that essentially crippled the Third Republic. Peter Jackson, in *France and the Nazi Menace: Intelligence and Policy Making 1933-1939*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), suggests that neither decadence nor the alternative 'determinist' approach are adequate explanations, emphasising the differences between French perceptions and intelligence calculations of the Nazi threat. Talbot Imlay, in *Facing the Second World War: Strategy, Politics, and Economics in Britain and France 1938-1940*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), the only comparative work to date on the late 1930s, whilst questioning the inevitability of French defeat, nevertheless argues that comparison with Britain reveals that France failed "to meet the test of modern war", within the strategic, domestic-political and political-economic dimensions. (p. 366).


from the French side, notably Yvon Lacaze, *L'opinion publique française et la crise de Munich*, (Berne, 1991), Pierre Laborie, *L'Opinion française sous Vichy*, (Paris, 1990) and several essays in Édouard Daladier, *chef de gouvernement* (Paris, 1977) and *La France et les Français en 1938-1939*, (Paris, 1978). Several works focusing on certain sections of French society, such as war veterans and pacifists, also touch upon the wider issue of public opinion. Another notable study analysing the role of public opinion within a broader context is Jean-Louis Créminieux-Brilhac, *Les Français de l'an 40*, 2 volumes, (Paris, 1990). The remaining studies focusing on public opinion consist of a number of essays that are of considerable interest but inevitably lack sufficient depth to offer a comprehensive analysis. However, it must be noted that very little literature on the role of French public opinion is available in English.

On the British side, studies looking at public opinion tend to focus primarily on the press. For example, Benny Morris’ *The Roots of Appeasement: The British Weekly News and Nazi Germany during the 1930s*, (London, 1991), Franklin Reid Gannon’s *The British Press and Germany, 1936-1939*, (Oxford, 1971), Cockett’s, *The Twilight of Truth*, and Frank McDonough’s examination of *The Times* in a chapter of *Neville Chamberlain, appeasement and the British road to war*, (Manchester, 1998). Public opinion is also touched upon in Martin Ceadel’s masterful study of the British peace movement, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945: The Defining of a Faith*, (Oxford, 1980), as well as in several essays looking at pacifism, the post-Munich by-elections, and more general analyses of the impact of domestic politics. Finally, Talbot Imlay has provided the only genuinely comparative approach in *Facing the Second World War*, (Oxford, 2003), particularly his analysis of the domestic-political situation in the two countries, although his scope is far wider than the issue of public opinion alone.

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Much of the work produced on the subject of public opinion fails to explain adequately the direct relationship between opinion and the decision-making process. Indeed, this is often the case with studies of public opinion. As Bernard C. Cohen observed in 1970: “the literature of public opinion and foreign policy in particular, largely evades the question of the relationship between opinion and policy”. Little has changed in the thirty-five years since Cohen made this observation, and this relationship continues to be largely evaded. Much of the general literature exploring both the French and British responses to the challenges of the 1930s cite public opinion as a causal factor in the policies pursued by the two governments. At best, such references are supported by speculative suggestions as to the actual impact of opinion on policy. The alleged role of public opinion assumes a greater significance in the period between the Munich Agreement and the outbreak of war. This is particularly true of Britain, as a consensus has emerged that public opinion underwent a transformation in these few months, from widespread support of appeasement during the Munich crisis to resisting Nazi expansionism following the Nazi occupation of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939. As Zara Steiner has observed, “There is no study in depth of the sea-change in British opinion between September 1938 and August 1939, though every historical work on the subject refers to the phenomenon”.

Defining Public Opinion

What is ‘public opinion’? Any study aspiring to explain the role of public opinion must address this question, and it is the lack of consensus as to a definition of public opinion that makes this subject so contentious. Richard Hodder-Williams utilises a three-pronged definition, where public opinion is “the views expressed on a given topic by a public..., the opinion common to the public..., [and] whatever views a community

34 Steiner, ‘On Writing International History: Chaps, Maps and Much More’, *International Affairs*, 73:3 (1997), pp. 543-544. R. A. C. Parker has suggested that the British Cabinet believed that the British public “would be divided” by going to war on behalf of Czechoslovakia, yet in the aftermath of the Prague Coup, Chamberlain “understood how widespread dissatisfaction had become with the policy that had culminated in the Munich Agreement”, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, p. 156 & p. 201. Similarly, such a transformation has been identified within French opinion. P. M. H. Bell has suggested that the anti-war petitions prevalent in September 1938 “attracted much support and preyed heavily on Daladier’s mind”, and that later, “Prague was a turning-point for French opinion”, *France and Britain, 1900-1940: Entente & Estrangement*, (London: Longman, 1996), p. 216 & p. 223.
makes public". This provides a useful template, identifying three palpable criteria: firstly, it is an expressed opinion; secondly, it must be a common opinion, a collective opinion or view; and thirdly, it is necessarily distinct from private opinions, thus being expressed in the public realm. Nevertheless, this definition remains problematic, not least because Hodder-Williams bases his definition on the role of public opinion in post-war Britain, in an age of widespread opinion polling. For historians of the 1930s, a period when opinion polls were in their infancy, an alternative means of gauging how opinions were expressed is required, in order to locate and illustrate which opinions were commonly held, and the extent to which they permeated the corridors of power. Moreover, Hodder-Williams's definition is rather imprecise. Must an opinion be widely held for it to have impacted on the political elites? Similarly, what constitutes a 'publicly expressed' opinion? Must it be expressed nationally, regionally, or just within an influential social circle?

In his study of Bavarian public opinion during the Third Reich, Ian Kershaw has expressed similar reservations, noting that "the task of reconstructing trends in popular opinion in any society before the introduction and general use of opinion surveys (and sometimes even then) is a difficult one, even when one can work with pluralistic expressions of opinion through political parties, interest groups, trade unions, and the mass media". Nevertheless, Kershaw contends that a diverse array of sources can be utilised in an attempt to locate the character of popular opinion. It would appear, therefore, that one must abandon any aspirations of identifying a single public opinion, and employ a somewhat broader definition. That is, accept that rather than there being one single homogenous public opinion, there are multifarious public opinions. The challenge is thus to identify which of the many opinions were dominant, and consequently possessed greater significance and impact. This is an approach favoured by Lacaze in his meticulous study of French public opinion during the Munich crisis, who defines public opinion thus: "a collective phenomenon, a reflection and affirmation of a dominant position within a social group".

Evidently, public opinion can emanate from a diverse array of groups and organisations throughout society. But which expressions or manifestations of opinion have the greatest importance? Are more vocal expressions of opinion "a reflection and

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37 Yvon Lacaze, L'opinion publique française et la crise de Munich, p. 15.
affirmation of a dominant position within a social group" because they are widely held, or are they simply the views of a more vocal minority and subsequently less representative? Moreover, as the focus of this study is to assess elite perceptions of public opinion, are some expressions of opinion more effective in permeating the consciousness of the decision-making elites than others? Such questions illustrate the problems for any historian attempting to grasp the nettle of public opinion. As Jean-Noël Jeanneney has observed, public opinion is "difficult to apprehend, rarely clear, and which often, when we believe we have seized it, escapes, as sand from our fingers".  

Similarly, Pierre Laborie, in his seminal study of French opinion under Vichy, offers a particularly lucid description of the problems inherent in attempting to ascertain public opinion: "that which is visible is often not the most significant, and that which is logical is rarely the most revealing."  

However, this study differs from existing analyses of public opinion by explicitly seeking to identify how public opinion was perceived within a particular social group, namely the policymaking elites. These elites, due to the foreign policy orientation of the thesis, consist of those particular individuals who wielded influence in that domain. Obviously, the two Prime Ministers, Neville Chamberlain and Édouard Daladier fall into this category, as do the two foreign ministers, Lord Halifax and Georges Bonnet. One must also include prominent figures within the diplomatic service, such as the respective Ambassadors in Berlin, Rome, Moscow, as well as in Paris and London. Finally, powerful figures within both the Foreign Office and the Quai d'Orsay were evidently influential in the formulation of foreign policy. Of course, other individuals, both within and outside of politics and the diplomatic service, also assume a significant importance in this respect, which will become clear as the thesis progresses.  

The aim is thus to identify the manner in which public opinion was perceived by the French and British policymaking elites, and to ascertain the impact that these perceptions had upon the formulation of foreign policy. As regards elite perceptions, the thesis will approach the question via a notion of representations. That is, identifying how public opinion was perceived and defined by the elites by analysing how certain representations of opinion assumed a dominant position, not only transcending and marginalizing others, but often concealing them altogether. To an extent, such a methodology borrows from Pierre Laborie, who has suggested that using representations as an historical tool is particularly advantageous when considering public opinion. Doing  

so enables one to locate, within the multifarious expressions of opinion, how specific dominant tendencies emerge, around which “a common notion of opinion” can be identified. This shared perception of opinion allows the historian to “define the historical status of the phenomena of opinion, and its place in the explanatory process”.

Given the myriad voices of a given society, identifying dominant voices becomes a necessary if challenging task for any historian seeking to elucidate the formative role of public opinion vis-à-vis foreign policy. These dominant voices and “common notions” are crucial inasmuch as they were the foundations upon which elite perceptions of public opinion were based.

Accepting initially that the term ‘public opinion’ encompasses myriad tendencies of opinion, and fundamentally lacks homogeneity, it is practically impossible to define what public opinion actually was. Therefore, when attempting to isolate ‘elite perceptions’ of public opinion, the utilisation of a notion of representations is beneficial, providing an analytical tool with which to locate the specific opinions that permeated the realm of the political elites. It was via a system of ‘representations’ of opinion, and the emergence of dominant representations, that elite perceptions of public opinion were constructed. These representations are particularly worthy of study as they become an historical actor, influencing the decision-makers and thus the decision-making process. Therefore, attempting to identify dominant tendencies of opinion through the prism of representations enables a more sophisticated analytical framework to emerge, illustrating how the complex and intangible phenomena of opinion was reduced to a more manageable series of dominant representations, which the elites then responded and reacted to accordingly.

The study of representations has, for the most part, been pioneered within the disciplines of sociology and social psychology. One such pioneer is Serge Moscovici, who suggests that social representations fulfil two principal roles: firstly, they “conventionalize the objects, persons and events we encounter. They give them a definite form, locate them in a given category and gradually establish them as a model of a certain type, distinct and shared by a group of people”; secondly, “representations are prescriptive,

41 Such an analysis inevitably borrows from much of the post-structuralist emphasis on the importance of ‘silences’, identifying not only the dominant actors in any historical process, but also the inevitable marginalisation of others. For more on this subject, see Gabrielle M. Spiegel’s ‘Introduction’, in Gabrielle M. Spiegel (ed.), Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing After the Linguistic Turn, (London: Routledge, 2005), particularly pp. 22-24.
that is, they impose themselves upon us with an irresistible force". 42 Stuart Hall elaborates further, suggesting that: "Representation is the production of a meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the 'real' world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events". It is thus through such mental representations — the imaginaire sociale — that events becomes defined and understood: "Without them, we could not interpret the world meaningfully at all". 43

Hall goes on to define three broad theories of representation: the reflective approach, in which language as a representation acts as a mirror, reflecting a true meaning that already exists; the intentional approach, which contends that it is the actor who imposes his own meaning on the world through language; and finally, a constructivist approach, which holds that "things don't mean: we construct meaning, using representational systems — concepts and signs". Of the constructivist approach, Hall observes: "It is the social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others". 44 It is the latter, constructivist approach, which will inform the use of 'representations' of opinion in this study. Therefore, it was only through a process of representation that the intangible notion of 'public opinion' came to be understood, defined, and perceived within the corridors of power. Indeed, public opinion existed only inasmuch as it was perceived through channels of mental representations.

Such an analytical framework is conducive to understanding the role of public opinion in Great Britain and France in the months leading up to war. Broadly speaking, this study will employ two distinct categories of representations through which the political elites themselves defined contemporary public opinion. Firstly, the 'reactive' representations of opinion; that is, the immediate and spontaneous reactions of the public to circumstances/events as they occur, as represented to the political elites. These forms of representation can include the tone of the contemporary press, recent police reports on the state of opinion, election results, an analysis of political leaflets, posters and pamphlets in current circulation, and the conversations, gossip, correspondence and


44 Ibid. p. 25 (original emphasis).
rumours within social networks of friends, family and colleagues. The latter is not easy to identify, but crucial nonetheless. As Sir Henry Channon, the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (R. A. Butler) noted in his diary in May 1939: “the PM gets all his mental stimulus and confidence from his two maiden sisters with whom he corresponds constantly”.45 Such representations need not, therefore, correspond in any way to public opinion ‘as it was’, or even the more widely-held tendencies of opinion. As Jeanneney has noted, “the telegrams we find in the archives of foreign ministries are often the simple reflection of rumours circulating in newspaper offices, or what is spread in the bars frequented by diplomats, with a tendency amongst all to interpret the repetition of the same assertions as a guarantee of their pertinence”.46 This category of representations is, therefore, the way in which political elites perceived public opinion as fluid, constantly in transition, fluctuating and diverse.

Secondly, there are certain ‘residual’ representations, which can be defined (albeit somewhat simplistically) as the remnants of previous memories and experiences, the more general tendencies of opinion considered characteristic of previous years, even previous decades. These lack the specificity of the contemporary, reactive representations, but nonetheless retained sufficient power to be habitually projected onto perceptions of current opinion. By means of an explanatory example, one can consider pacifism, both in Britain, but particularly in France. Such was the pervasiveness of the idea that both societies had assumed a pacifist stance following the carnage and horror of the Great War that it formed a potent ‘residual’ representation of public opinion, persuading the policymaking elites that opinion was largely ‘pacifist’ throughout the interwar years. Indeed, the impact of popular literature, cinema and radio was crucial in perpetuating such residual representations in both countries.47 It was thus difficult to

46 Jeanneney, Une histoire des médias, p. 11.
47 Literature on all these areas is vast, although the following may offer a useful starting-point: for British literature between the wars see Martin Ceadel Popular Fiction and the Next War, 1918-1939, in Frank Goversmith (ed.), Class, Culture and Social Change: A New View of the 1930s, (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980); for an overview of British cinema during the 1930s see Jeffrey Richards, The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain 1930-1939, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984); an analysis of the legacy of World War One in British and French film can be found in Andrew Kelly, Cinema and the Great War, (London: Routledge, 1997); for an overview of French culture in the interwar years see Charles Rearick The French in Love and War Popular Culture in the Era of the World Wars, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), chapter 5 for Britain, and chapter 7 for France; for the relationship between French cinema and government, see Paul Législe Histoire de la politique du cinéma Français, Tome I: Le cinéma et la IIIe République, (Paris: Librairie Générale de droit et de jurisprudence, 1970); for an overview of the relationship between radio and Government in France see Christian Brochand, Histoire générale de la radio et de la télévision en France, Tome I: 1921-1944, (Paris: La Documentation française, 1994); a more detailed analysis of radio during the late 1930s is André-Jean Tudesq, L’utilisation gouvernementale de la radio’, in René Rémond & Janine
conceive that the majority of the people would, just twenty years later, have abandoned this sentiment to the extent that they would favour resistance to appeasement.

The thesis will therefore analyse not only the relative significance and impact of both reactive and residual representations, but also the interplay between the two categories. The two can often be complementary, but they can also be conflicting. This can have two consequences. Firstly, certain reactive and residual representations can be overemphasised, interpreted in such a way as to distort reality by means of a dominant and vocal minority providing formative representations that are subsequently projected onto the wider corpus of opinion. As Jeanneney asserts, "we know well, by personal and historic experience, that the intense opinion of an active minority often exerts more pressure on proceedings than the half-hearted reactions of an indifferent majority". Secondly, residual representations can become so pervasive that they retain a potentially unrepresentative influence, stubbornly refusing to yield to the changes and fluctuations of opinion(s) in response to the progression of time and events. Indeed, they become, to borrow from James Joll, 'unspoken assumptions'. For the historian, such unspoken assumptions are inevitably problematic. As Joll remarked, "one of the limitations of the documentary evidence is that few people bother to write down, especially in moments of crisis, things they take for granted".

Locating Representations of Opinion

Amongst the 'residual' representations of public opinion, it is possible to locate specific examples that carried more potency than others and thus continued to inform elite perceptions of what public opinion was in the frenetic period between the Munich Agreement and the outbreak of war. For French policymakers, two such residuals stand out. Firstly, the belief that French opinion was, if not pacifist, certainly infused with an anxiety regarding the prospect of war. That is, it was understood that the French public was desperate to avoid a repetition of the First World War, especially in light of the technological advances that were certain to make a future conflict even more catastrophic

Bourdin (eds.), Édouard Daladier, chef de gouvernement, pp.255-264. For the role of literature see Mysyrowicz, Autopsie d'une défaite, pp. 278-304.

48 Jean-Noël Jeanneney, Une histoire des médias, p. 16.

than the last. Indeed, the 1930s provided ample evidence of the horrors of modern warfare, with the examples of Manchuria and Spain graphically illustrating – thanks to the advent of photojournalism and cinema newsreels – the utter devastation of aerial bombardment, particularly on civilian populations. Secondly, the elites were only too conscious of the ideological schisms prevalent in French society, as the events of February 1934 and the emergence of the Popular Front clearly demonstrated. Left-right polarisation was a dominant factor in French domestic politics, with Fascist Leagues and communism both enjoying considerable support and influence. As the European situation became increasingly ominous, the task of creating a unified France free from the influence of political extremism was far from straightforward.

For the British, such ideological polarisation was not a factor. Compared with France, the influence of both the far right and the far left was minimal. Moreover, a National government had been in power since 1931, offering a stark contrast to the short-lived administrations that had shaped French politics during the same period. This provided a basis of stability for Chamberlain, augmented by a large Parliamentary majority that negated the need to create uneasy coalitions. Consequently, a residual representation of British opinion was that it was stable, moderate, and largely immune to the influence of extremist doctrine. Although such stability afforded the British policymakers greater room for manoeuvre, they were nonetheless constrained by public opinion. As in France, a particularly potent residual representation was that of war anxiety. Memories of the Great War weighed heavily, and a repetition was greatly feared. Again, the devastating nature of a future war perpetuated anxieties. Furthermore, fear of becoming embroiled in another European conflict created a further residual representation of British public opinion, namely hostility to committing Britain to the affairs of the Continent. Therefore, any firm commitment to engage in Europe, beyond the auspices of the League of Nations, was adjudged to be folly. Even as the impotence of the League was revealed, British opinion was perceived to be opposed to undertaking any Continental commitments.

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50 Chamberlain's control over his own Cabinet was commented upon by contemporaries. The Conservative Chief Whip, Sir David Margesson, remarked, “In Mr. Baldwin’s Cabinet Chamberlain has been as powerful, if not more powerful, than his chief. In his own Cabinet, after he got rid of one or two tiresome members [Eden and Duff Cooper], his was the only will that prevailed”. Cited in John Ruggiero, Neville Chamberlain and British Rearmament: Pride, Prejudice, and Politics, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999), p. 84. Chamberlain also enjoyed considerable support and loyalty from the grassroots of the Conservative Party. See N. J. Crowson, Facing Fascism: The Conservative Party and the European Dictators, 1935-1940, (London: Routledge, 1997).
The residual representations of pacifism (in both Britain and France), ideological polarisation (in France), and hostility to continental commitments (in Britain), all contributed to the democratic responses to the outbreak of civil war in Spain. For France, the Spanish conflict was almost prophetic of what fate could befall them. In Britain, it demonstrated the desire to remain unburdened by continental and ideological conflict through a policy of detachment and non-intervention. For both countries, apprehension lest the Spanish imbroglio escalate into a European conflict brought the prospect of war very much to the fore. With the residual representation of a public desperate to avoid such a conflict, non-intervention hardly seems surprising. Of course, although nailing down the impact of public opinion on such decision-making is difficult, locating the dominant perceptions of public opinion held by the elites at least enables the historian to assess the influence of public opinion at any given time and in relation to any specific event. Non-intervention can thus be seen as a decision taken with British and French public opinion very much in mind.

However, it is the perceived anti-war sentiment that has ultimately proved to be the most widely cited element of public opinion in both countries, manifested by the existence of numerous pacifist organisations. The significance of such pacifist organisations is often assumed to have been critical during the interwar years, particularly in France. However, clearly differentiating between, on the one hand, pacifism, and on the other, a more widespread anxiety regarding the 'next' war, facilitates a more accurate understanding of the public's apprehensions regarding the prospect of war. Of particular interest here is the prospect of aerial bombardment, and how technological advancements since the Great War had made any future conflict considerably more devastating, not least in endangering the lives of civilians. As Uri Bialer has noted, "every level of the nation appeared to have been mesmerized by the slogan culled from Baldwin's warning to the House of Commons in 1932 - 'The bomber will always get through'. Such fears were exacerbated by the media. Crémeux-Brilhac makes the following observation regarding French radio: "The radio played its part in the pacifist concert: it popularised, in 1935-1936, across a wide body of opinion, the terrifying risks of air bombardments on cities".

51 A persuasive account of the impact of representations of the Spanish war on French opinion can be found in Pierre Laborie, *Les Français des années troubles*, part 2, chapter 1.
concluding *Homage to Catalonia* with his fear that sleepy England shall never awaken "till we are jerked out of it by the roar of bombs".\(^{54}\)

This distinction between pacifism and war-anxiety – or more accurately, anxiety as regards the 'next war' – is one that needs to be made. It is rather crude simply to label much of the desire for peace as being motivated by pacifism (in all its guises, ideological, doctrinal, religious etc.). Indeed, it has been noted that towards the end of the 1930s the desire amongst some British pacifists to reach a peaceful agreement with Germany was no longer motivated by pacifist sentiment, but rather by isolationism. War was considered intolerable not only because it causes suffering, but more specifically, causes the suffering of British people.\(^{55}\) Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that as war became increasingly likely, the distinction between pacifism and a more intangible 'anxiety', or even 'fear' of war became more conspicuous. Such an anxiety was arguably far more widespread than pacifism, in the stricter definition of the term. Moreover, it was shared by the public and policymaking elites alike.

Much of this stems from the continued potency of memories of the Great War, recalled daily through visual reminders such as war memorials and war veterans. Indeed, it has been observed that it is "impossible to understand the political behaviour of Daladier or Bonnet, Mistler or Flandin, without seeing them as war veterans".\(^{56}\) Taking this into account, one must consider the possibility that the personal opinions of the elites may have been crucial in the formulation of perceptions of public opinion as a whole. In their study of how perceptions of public opinion are constructed, Fields and Schuman observed that quite often "people appear to look out into the world and somehow see their own opinions reflected back".\(^{57}\) This theory of 'looking-glass perceptions' needs to be considered as a potential explanatory tool in assessing the perceptions held by the political elites in Britain and France during the 1930s, not only in terms of projecting individual perceptions on to an entire society, but moreover, in terms of continuing to project residual perceptions on to a public opinion that has evolved.

Indeed, this theory also needs to be taken into consideration when analysing the issue of anti-communism and how this may have contributed to formulation of foreign policy, particularly in the case of the British government during the Triple Alliance

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\(^{56}\) Crémieux-Brilhac, *La Guerre, oui ou non?*, p. 84.

negotiations during the spring and summer of 1939. Similarly, the theory of a ‘vocal minority’ having an unrepresentative degree of political leverage must be taken into account. Were those who argued for a rapprochement with Germany, seeing the Third Reich as a necessary bulwark against the rising tide of Soviet Bolshevism, representative of a majority of opinion, or were they simply more vocal in expressing their opinions and/or in positions of power and influence? Were the political elites generally more wary of Bolshevism than they were of Fascism? Did they therefore simply project their own beliefs on to the public as a whole? Furthermore, the question of manipulation of the media must also be assessed: to what extent was there a concerted effort on behalf of the elites to shape/mould public opinion?

The impact of reactive representations must also be considered in this regard. Such representations were primarily acquired through the press, as both the British and French elites believed that an examination of a cross-section of the press provided an accurate picture of overall opinion. Reactive representations expressed in the press were supplemented by others, including police reports, parliamentary debates, political leaflets and tracts, conversation, and even gossip and rumour. It was through such representations that the policymaking elites understood how opinion was evolving in response to events; the public’s immediate reactions to international events as they unfolded. However, just as certain residual representations of opinion were more potent than others, so too were reactive representations. In France, the elites appeared to focus primarily on the reactive representations emanating from the political extremes, notably the left. Daladier patently distrusted the communists, and appeared particularly sensitive to representations of opinion deriving from this social group. Obviously, the communists drew attention to themselves on account of their outspoken views on foreign policy – notably Spain – as well as their capacity to foment domestic agitation. As such, the voluble expressions of opinion coming from the left arguably resulted in such tendencies assuming a disproportionate degree of influence in terms of shaping overall perceptions of opinion. These vocal representations provoked a great deal of apprehension in official circles, as it was feared that they were increasingly pervading a wider cross section of opinion. Conversely, in Britain, where extremist political opinion was further confined to the margins, the dominant and voluble representations of opinion were those expressed in the moderate press, particularly the conservative newspapers. Indeed, in the eyes of the British elites, perceptions of public opinion were
largely constructed upon representations expressed in the politically conscious sections of society.

However, despite the dominance of certain representations of opinion, both the British and French policymaking elites were aware that overall opinion was more diverse than such voluble representations would suggest. Consequently, there seems to be an underlying, implicit assumption that beyond the dominant reactive representations of opinion lay what can be labelled as the majority section of opinion; in essence 'mainstream' opinion. For the French, this consisted of those less vocal sections of opinion beyond the extreme fringes of the political spectrum, whilst for the British, it consisted of those sections of British opinion less politically conscious than the editorial writers in the popular press or those who penned letters 'To the Editor' in the *Times*. This 'mainstream' category of opinion is largely undefined and does not appear to have been widely scrutinised or discussed, other than loosely and abstractly referred to as 'the French/British people' or the 'man in the street'. No concerted effort was made to gauge this category of public opinion, other than perusing a cross-section of the press. Consequently, it is this category of opinion, the 'silent majority', on which the residual representations were principally projected, representations that had become so ingrained as to be perceived as a mirror of genuine popular opinion.

In France, the less vocal and more ambiguous category of opinion was certainly thought to be malleable, and could be favourably influenced if only the government showed the will. There was a belief that France could learn a lot from the dictatorships in terms of manipulating public opinion. Although the press would be difficult to control, the mediums of cinema and radio could yet be utilised to mobilise opinion.\(^58\) The period 1938-1940 witnessed an unprecedented attempt to coordinate and centralise the radio and cinema industries, ensuring that they were immune to overseas propaganda and served the interests of the government. This was seen as an area that had been neglected for too long. Daladier regularly used the medium of radio to broadcast his speeches, his rhetoric advocating the necessity of national unity.\(^59\) Similarly, the British considered opinion to be pliable. Ensuring favourable press coverage of the government's policies would likewise ensure that opinion remained supportive.

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\(^{58}\) Léon Blum's attempts to introduce greater regulation of the French press in 1936 met with considerable hostility and criticism from the press of the right and centre, and even some newspapers ostensibly sympathetic to the Popular Front, such as *l'Événement*, *l'Éve nuev e* , and *l'Europe nouvelle*, were critical. See Joseph J. Mathews, 'Death of Press Reform in France', *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 3:3 (July, 1939), pp. 409-419.

\(^{59}\) Crémieux-Brilhac has described Daladier as the 'Homme de radio', *La Guerre, oui ou non?*, p. 297.
Although the majority of the British press voluntarily supported the Chamberlain government and his policy of appeasement, thus largely negating the need to coerce or manipulate the press, the government nonetheless made use of the press to advance their particular agenda.60

This study will therefore examine how perceptions of public opinion evolved in the period between the Munich Agreement and the outbreak of war. The continuing influence of residual representations will be considered alongside an evaluation of reactive representations of opinion in response to the rapid evolution of international events. In so doing, it is hoped to explain how both forms of representation continued to inform overall perceptions of public opinion and thus influence both the British and French policymaking process. This will enable a more comprehensive understanding of the apparent transformation in British and French public opinion during this period, from a pacifist-tinged support for appeasement to the firmness and resolve that emerged in the aftermath of Hitler’s Prague coup in March 1939. Moreover, the comparative nature of the study will expose how perceptions of the other’s public opinion was equally crucial in explaining the policies pursued by the two governments, particularly those policies directly linked to Anglo-French relations.

Sources

Identifying how certain representations of public opinion permeated the corridors of power is not straightforward. However, by scrutinising an array of archival sources, it is possible to identify how public opinion was perceived by the policymaking elites at any given time. Firstly, it is necessary to locate how, when, and in what context public opinion was referred to within the decision-making process. An analysis of Cabinet meetings, Anglo-French conversations, Foreign Office and Quai d'Orsay memoranda, and other official diplomatic correspondence, is obviously crucial in this regard. Locating references – however allusive – to the perceived nature of public opinion can reveal how it influenced the decision-making process and, furthermore, how public opinion was cited to justify the adoption or rejection of particular policies. This is vital not only in revealing how one set of decision-makers perceived and responded to opinion in their own country, but also how opinion in another country – for example,

British elite perceptions of French opinion – affected the considerations of the foreign policymaking elites.

Of course, an analysis of official documents can only reveal so much, and does not necessarily reflect the concerns harboured by the elites regarding the demands of public opinion. Consequently, it is essential to consult other sources, particularly, where available, private correspondence and diaries. The unofficial nature of such sources allowed the elites to be more open about their perceptions of opinion, voicing concerns and beliefs that might not have been expressed in official discussions. Memoirs are also of value, although one must evidently approach such sources with a considerable degree of caution and scepticism. As mentioned, memoirs were often used as an attempt to salvage reputations and, inevitably, to portray oneself in a positive light. Nevertheless, a fusion of such sources enables one to detect the dominant perceptions of public opinion within political circles, establishing how certain tendencies of opinion were held to be a given, and were thus paramount in the considerations of the elites. Moreover, it is not only the dominant residual representations that can be revealed. Diaries and personal correspondence are also invaluable in ascertaining how the elites recognised (or failed to recognise) the evolution of reactive representations during the period under scrutiny.

Analysing a combination of official and unofficial sources also enables one to identify which particular representations were most pervasive in terms of permeating the policymaking process. In this regard, one crucial factor stands out. The press was considered by both sets of elites as the most accurate barometer of popular opinion. This is, of course, unsurprising, as the 1930s largely predated the scientific mechanisms for gauging opinion with which we are now so familiar. The import of opinion polling from the United States only began in the late 1930s, with the establishment of the British arm of the Gallup organisation, the British Institute of Opinion Polling (BIPO) in 1937, and their French counterpart, the Institut français d'opinion publique (IFOP) in 1938.61 In Britain, there was also the advent of Tom Harrison and Charles Madge’s Mass

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Observation, which sought to gauge the views of the British public on a wide variety of issues, particularly social and domestic concerns.  

Although these organisations conducted a small amount of fascinating research on public attitudes towards international affairs in the post-Munich period, their impact on the political elites is questionable. In London, even though the results of the BIPO polls were, from October 1938, published in a major national newspaper, the *News Chronicle*, the absence of discussion of the polls in both official and personal papers is glaring. Indeed, it was not until the spring of 1939 that either the BIPO or Mass Observation became the subject of serious discussion, specifically for their future potential under the auspices of a wartime Ministry of Information. Even then, the British were hesitant to embrace such a technique. Mass Observation was considered of interest, although "it cannot yet be regarded as giving scientific results". Even after the outbreak of war and the creation of a Ministry of Information, hesitancy was prevalent. Lord Macmillan, appointed Minister of Information in September 1939, concluded of both Mass Observation and the BIPO: "I am not prepared to sanction the employment of these agencies".  

In France, the results of the IFOP polls were not published in any newspaper. The French elites were certainly aware of opinion polling, as despatches from the French Embassies in Washington and London detailed the results of polls conducted in the United States and Great Britain. However, when the founder of the IFOP, Jean Stoetzel, sought newspaper publication for his findings, he found that "no one showed the slightest interest in polls". Despite this, it appears as if Daladier himself would have been aware of the organisation's findings. Jon Cowans has suggested that Stoetzel "found one official in ... Daladier's office who seemed curious about his polls on French foreign policies, but Daladier himself never reacted to the information Stoetzel sent him.  

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64 The National Archives [hereafter TNA], INF 1/711: Publicity: Home, September 1938 - May 1939, memorandum by Ivison Macadam, Deputy Director Designate of the Publicity Division, 18 March 1939; TNA, INF 1/261, Minister’s minute, 30 September 1939. For more on the planning for a Ministry of Information in the months preceding the Second World War, see Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, pp. 12-33.  
65 Cited in Jon Cowans, 'Fear and Loathing in Paris', p. 75. As Cowans notes, the only newspaper that printed any of the IFOP findings was the *Petit Parisien*, which published some results concerning the relative popularity of Daladier and Thorez.
and never asked for any further research". Although Daladier never replied to Stoetzel, one can suppose that having been in receipt of the IFOP's findings, the French Premier would have been conscious that opinion was more divided on foreign affairs than a reading of the French press would imply.

Nonetheless, the press was certainly considered the most reliable source of information regarding the nature of public opinion. Indeed, in one report on the results of a BIPO poll, Corbin sounded caution over the value of opinion polling, suggesting that the tendencies of opinion revealed were worthy of note only inasmuch "as they corroborate with those furnished by the permanent barometer of opinion that is the press". The content of the press was evidently crucial. The elites in both countries were keen to analyse press commentary, including the two Prime Ministers. Chamberlain's letters to his sisters make frequent references to newspaper editorials, whilst Daladier's papers contain extensive press cuttings. Moreover, references to press opinion also offers clues as to which newspapers were most intensely scrutinised by the elites. Indeed, Daladier's papers indicate a preoccupation with the hostile commentary expressed in the left wing press, particularly Le Populaire and l'Humanité. By contrast, Chamberlain was often more perturbed by the criticisms he encountered within the conservative press, suggesting that he was less troubled by opinions expressed on the left than by potential signs of dissent from within his own party.

A more detailed analysis of the differing degree of intensity with which the British and French elites scrutinised leftist opinion will be provided in chapter one, including an assessment of the surveillance of leftist (and, indeed, rightist) organisations by the police. For now it is sufficient to note that press opinion was pivotal in providing those representations of public opinion (particularly reactive representations) from which the elites formed the basis of their overall perceptions of public opinion. Consequently, in attempting to identify elite perceptions of opinion, a detailed analysis of the British and French press is essential, particularly those journals that appear to have been of particular significance and concern to the policymakers. In essence, it shall be argued that the elites themselves considered a reading of a cross-section of the press to be a

66 Ibid.
68 See the letters sent by Chamberlain to his two sisters, Ida and Hilda, contained within the Chamberlain Papers, held at the University of Birmingham Library, Special Collections Department. For Daladier's preoccupation with press commentary, one only has to consult his papers held at the Quai d'Orsay (MAE, Papiers 1940, Papiers Daladier, No. 2), as well as extensive press cuttings held in the Daladier Papers at the Archives Nationales [hereafter AN], AN, Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/10, 2DA3, Dr. 3, sdrc, and 2DA3, Dr. 5.
sufficient mechanism of gauging opinion. Therefore, by retrospectively analysing a cross-section of the British and French press, in conjunction with the official and unofficial archival sources described above, it is possible to recreate the atmosphere of representations that would have confronted the policymaking elites between the Munich Agreement and the outbreak of the Second World War.

The Advantages of a Comparative Study

Throughout the thesis the comparative nature of the study will be very much in the forefront. The decision to undertake a comparative study offers several advantages in this particular analysis. Comparisons in historical analyses are becoming increasingly popular, and its origins can be traced back to the influential French historian Marc Bloch in the first half of the twentieth century. In his influential 1928 essay 'Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes', Bloch wrote of the need to cease simply talking “of national history to national history”, which is merely “a dialogue between the deaf”. In essence, he advocated a move away from individual national histories towards comparison, which would re-invigorate the discipline and enhance understanding. The promise of comparison is to reveal more about a certain society or country by examining it in comparison to others. As Stefan Berger has observed, “no other historical method is so adept at testing, modifying and falsifying historical explanation than comparison”. For Raymond Grew, there are four major contributions of comparison to historical analysis: it poses new, previously unasked questions; it can be used to define more distinctly the problem to be addressed; it is useful in research design and selection of methodology; and finally, “there is no better means of testing the generalizations and hypotheses that result from social research than by systematic comparison”.

However, Grew also suggests that the main thrust of Bloch’s prescription and intention for the pursuit of comparative history has rarely come to fruition in existing historical comparisons, persuasively arguing that “the less formal uses of comparison – to break out of old patterns of thought, to ask important questions that have not yet been
posed at all, and to mould perceptions into significant historical problems that make feasible topics of research – are the least common or at least the least discussed in academic writing”. There is certainly a need for comparative history to move beyond merely offering two simultaneous narratives and actually engage with the challenges that the approach presents. This study intends to pursue a comparison more in line with Bloch’s original aims, seeking not only to compare and contrast but, moreover, to consider what the specific French and British perceptions of public opinion tell us about their respective societies and decision-making processes, their perceptions of one another, and the impact that representations of opinion ultimately had upon the course not only of foreign policy towards the dictatorships, but also of Anglo-French relations.

This latter point is particularly crucial if one considers the weight of available evidence. Quantitatively, there are far more direct references to public opinion – in both the British and French archives – that relate to the perceived state of opinion in the other country. That is, reports from the British Embassy in Paris, and from the French Embassy in London, focus upon public opinion in the two countries to a degree that is not matched by explicit evaluations of one’s own public opinion. Indeed, the French ambassador, Charles Corbin sent regular reports to Paris focusing entirely upon the British press and opinion, whilst many of the despatches from the British ambassador in Paris, Sir Eric Phipps, are merely an appraisal of press opinion in France. A reading of such reports reveals two critical aspects as to how an historian can grasp elite perceptions of opinion at this time. Firstly, it shows the importance of the press in evaluations of opinion. For example, if it is felt that British opinion could be gauged by a reading of the British press, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the French government in Paris would have sought to gauge French opinion in a similar manner. Furthermore, the reports of conversations between various Embassy officials and members of the political milieu in the respective capitals can also shed light on how opinion was perceived. Such conversations can be seen as fairly representative of the typical conversations, gossip and rumour that permeated the corridors of power, and thus reflective of how public opinion in the two countries was perceived at any given time. Indeed, this can also reveal how perceptions of opinion within the capitals were not always representative of wider opinion. Daladier himself alluded to this in 1937, telling Alexander Werth: “You also must remember that Paris is not France. Paris is hysterical; but when I leave Paris by the night train and arrive in the morning in my native Provence, I find that everybody is

72 Ibid. p. 331.
quiet, peaceful and tremendously balanced. They don't get worried the way the people of Paris are constantly worried".73

Furthermore, an analysis of how the other's public opinion was perceived can reveal something more fundamental about Anglo-French relations. That is, the policies pursued towards one another were directly influenced by how they perceived the current condition and attitude of the other's public opinion. For example, the French detected a change in British opinion in the immediate post-Munich period, which would have encouraged them to persuade London to adopt a firmer stance vis-à-vis the dictators. Similarly, the French campaign to see compulsory military service introduced in Britain appeared to fluctuate in intensity in direct relation to their understanding of British public opinion on this issue. On the other side of the coin, portraying one's own public opinion in a specific way could be used to further the government's objectives. The French deliberately fostered a belief in London during the winter of 1938-39 that French opinion was becoming increasingly frustrated at Britain's lack of commitment to the Franco-British entente, to the extent that defeatism might well set in, leaving the British isolated in a future confrontation with Nazi Germany. Such fears were taken very seriously in London. It is possible to argue that the public declarations of British solidarity with France in early 1939, and the decision to introduce peacetime conscription in April of that year, were taken partly to satisfy the demands of French public opinion.74 However, it is also necessary to note that the French pressure in this respect was only applied as and when they perceived British public opinion to be favourable to their cause.

This study therefore seeks to offer a sophisticated and detailed analysis of how public opinion impacted upon the policymaking process, not simply by offering a portrayal of public opinion 'as it was' and then comparing it to the actions of the political elites, but, moreover, by attempting to emphasise the importance of perceptions of public opinion. Through a prism of representations, the manner in which opinion was perceived and acted upon by the policymaking elites shall be elucidated, and the overall impact of public opinion in these critical months assessed. In so doing, I intend to offer a fresh perspective on the origins of the Second World War, tackling one of the few areas of the period yet to be sufficiently scrutinised: the role of public opinion in the foreign policy formulation in the two major European democracies.

73 I would like to thank Talbot Imlay for drawing my attention to this quote. It is taken from the John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester, Alexander Werth Correspondence, B/W170/24: Werth to Crozier, 30 April 1937.

1. The Prelude to Munich

By the time of Munich, several residual representations of public opinion had become dominant to the extent that they formed the basis of elite perceptions of overall opinion. For the British elites, the public was considered hostile to fighting another war, suspicious of any form of continental commitment, and equally unsympathetic to both communism and fascism. In France, the elites considered public opinion to be fragile, ideologically polarised, and infused with a pacifist sentiment bordering on defeatism. This chapter will first examine how such residual representations of opinion came to be formed and perpetuated in the period preceding the Munich Agreement. It will then consider how reactive representations at the time of Munich either altered perceptions, or merely reinforced the predominant residuals. Firstly, it is necessary to establish how several 'residual' representations of public opinion came to be formed and subsequently influenced elite perceptions of public opinion thereafter. To identify these 'residual' representations, it is first necessary to explain the specific political contexts within which Chamberlain and Daladier were acting.

Chamberlain & Daladier

Neville Chamberlain had been a prominent figure in British politics for many years, notably as Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1931 to 1937. During his tenure as Chancellor, Chamberlain's influence grew steadily, especially over foreign policy. Therefore, there was a degree of inevitability about his becoming Prime Minister on the departure of Stanley Baldwin in 1937. Baldwin's impending departure had been common knowledge for many months, so when Chamberlain took office on 28 May 1937, the transition was smooth. For Chamberlain, the Premiership provided him with public popularity and parliamentary admiration.¹ His government, although nominally referred to as a National government, was essentially Conservative. In the 1935 General Election, the Conservatives gained a majority of 243 seats in the House of Commons, winning a 53½% share of the vote. As Prime Minister, Chamberlain was not easily swayed from his chosen path, preferring to surround himself with like-minded individuals.²

¹ Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler*, p. 150.
² R. A.C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, pp. 1-11. In his biography of Chamberlain, Keith Feiling has remarked that "his approach was arduously careful but his mind, once made up, [was] hard to sway". *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, (London: Macmillan, 1946), p.303. Another Chamberlain biographer, David
Nonetheless, he was not an authoritarian Prime Minister; he had no need to be. The party was loyal, minimising the potential for internal dissent. As D. C. Watt has observed, "His Cabinet respected him. His Parliamentary majority, marshalled, even dragooned, by Captain Margesson, then Conservative Chief Whip, followed him unquestioningly, stirred by appeals to their loyalty as well as to their fear of political ostracism". Furthermore, loyalty to the Prime Minister extended to the grassroots level, ensuring Chamberlain's position.

The massive Parliamentary majority enjoyed by the Chamberlain-led National government, coupled with the overwhelming support and loyalty of the Party faithful, made any significant challenge to Chamberlain's leadership inconceivable. Even the resignation of the popular Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, in February 1938, failed to undermine Chamberlain's authority. Furthermore, the opposition parties failed to offer a viable and sustainable challenge. The Liberal Party had rapidly lost influence during the 1930s. The 513 candidates they fielded in 1929 had dwindled to just 161 by the 1935 General Election. The Labour Party had also experienced a turbulent decade, suffering from factional infighting. The Party leadership, hostile to the notion of a Popular Front alliance due to the perceived extreme-left genesis of the idea, was equally reluctant to embrace potential allies from the other mainstream political parties. This was later to result in the Labour leadership rejecting the overtures of dissident Conservatives who sought to form a viable cross-party alternative to the Chamberlain government. Chamberlain himself viewed the Labour Party with disdain, describing it at various times as "ignorant", "stupid", and even a "pack of wild beasts".

The absence of effective opposition also stretched to the realms of the more extreme political organisations, particularly the Communist Party. This stood in stark contrast to the situation in France. The French Communist Party (Parti communiste français, PCF) boasted 73 deputies in the French Chamber, and a membership of 318,459 in September 1938, which, although a decline of some 20,000 on the previous year, was nonetheless far greater than their British counterparts. The Communist Party of Great

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Dutton, concurs, describing Chamberlain as "intolerant of views which did not coincide with his own". Neville Chamberlain, (London: Arnold, 2001), p. 43.


4 For an analysis of Conservative opinion at the grassroots level, see Crowson, Facing Fascism, passim.


6 Cited in Ruggiero, Neville Chamberlain and British Rearmament, p. 86.

Britain (CPGB) could boast only a solitary MP (William Gallacher, in the East Fife constituency) and a membership that had yet to reach 18,000 by the outbreak of war.\(^8\) Similarly, other far-left organisations, such as the Left Book Club, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the Socialist League, failed to gain significant degrees of influence.\(^9\) A further example of the different degree of leftist influence in the two countries was the Trade Union movement. British Trade Unions, though boasting a larger paid-up membership than their French counterparts, were considerably less militant.\(^10\) The majority of British unions remained relatively faithful to the Labour Party, and co-operative vis-à-vis the government. By contrast, the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) remained prone to communist infiltration, despite the attempts of the Secretary-General, Léon Jouhaux, to maintain an independent line.\(^11\) Subsequently, industrial unrest on the scale that plagued interwar France was largely absent in Great Britain.

On the other side of the political spectrum, the situation was similar. Despite the highly visible presence of far-right organisations in Britain, notably Sir Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists (BUF), their influence was minimal.\(^12\) Such a conclusion is largely borne out by consultation of Home Office reports concerning the activities of the BUF and other extreme-right groups. Their meetings and demonstrations were monitored and carefully policed (primarily to minimise confrontation between Fascists and anti-fascists, usually communists), but ultimately were considered neither a genuine threat nor a potentially disruptive social force.\(^13\) In this respect, police reports from

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\(^{9}\) Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s*, p. 195.

\(^{10}\) The majority of the British Trade Union leadership, including such highly respected figures as Sir Walter Citrine and Ernest Bevin were, above all, moderate patriots. However, it has been argued that the communist activity within the unions during the 1930s significantly contributed to the expansion of the Trade Union movement in the post-war years. Nina Fishman, *The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions, 1933-1945*, (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995), p. 337.

\(^{11}\) On the continued influence of the CGT, despite its relative decline in membership and adherents after the decline of the Popular Front, see Jean Bruhat, 'La CGT', in Remond and Bourdin (eds), *La France et les Français*, pp. 159-188.

\(^{12}\) Richard Thurlow has argued that, "[t]he impact of the BUF on British society in the 1930s was small; it was merely a minor irritant for the Government", *Fascism in Britain: A History, 1918-1985*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p.117. D. S. Lewis, in *Illusions of Grandeur: Mosley, Fascism and British Society, 1931-81*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987) reaches much the same conclusion (p. 259).

\(^{13}\) See the MEPO files for the period 1938-39 in The National Archives. Despite this, D. S. Lewis has suggested that the British government took the threat seriously, citing the 1936 Public Order Act as evidence. This Act, argued Lewis, was intended to do more than just prevent fascist marches through the east end of London, as it was a statute "aimed not only at fascism but capable of striking at the heart of any political movement which attempted to harness the support of the masses". *Illusions of Grandeur*, p. 150. However, Lewis's analysis of State attention on fascist organisations primarily focuses on the early to mid-1930s, the period when the movement reached its zenith, as do other studies in this area. See John Stevenson, 'The BUF, the Metropolitan Police, and Public Order', in Kenneth Lunn and Richard Thurlow
France paint a similar picture; far-right groups were monitored, but not, by the late 1930s, considered a threat. Indeed, in comparison with the attention lavished upon the manifestations of the extreme-left, the French far-right appear little more than an annoying inconvenience. Nevertheless, the sheer size and scale of such groups in France contrast sharply with those in Britain. Jacques Doriot’s *Parti populaire français* (PPF) has been estimated to have had some 300,000 sympathisers and 60,000 active members in 1937. The other principal far-right group in France was Colonel de La Rocque’s *Croix de Feu*, whose impact, like that of the PPF, was widespread. On 8 May 1938, de La Rocque organised a parade of 100,000 people in front of the statue of Joan of Arc. This figure alone is double the peak membership claimed by the BUF in 1934 (when they still enjoyed the support of the Rothermere press) of 50,000. Notwithstanding the lively and on-going debate as to whether the French far-right organisations of the 1930s can legitimately be regarded as ‘fascist’, their impact was certainly greater than the analogous organisations in Britain.

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14 The files in the Archives de la Préfecture de Police [hereafter APP], focus on the extreme left, and there is relatively little attention devoted to the activities of the far-right. Similarly, the police files in the Archives Nationales, series F7, also lavish more attention on the left than the right. Even the dossiers focusing specifically on such organisations as the PSF (F7/14.817), and those on anti-Semitism (F7/14.781) tend to suggest that the threat posed by such sections of opinion were minimal. Furthermore, most of the information tends to originate from the earlier 1930s, and as the decade progressed the far right threat appears, at least in the eyes of the police, to have diminished. By 1938-39, the principal concern relating to the extreme right appears to be that of German propaganda (see F7/14.713).


18 Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, p. 303. Although membership of the BUF fell sharply in 1935, when Rothermere withdrew his support, G. C. Webber has suggested that membership steadily increased thereafter, reaching 22,500 by September 1939. Moreover, Webber has suggested that “there existed a considerable reservoir of latent Fascist support, even in the days when the movement itself was in dire straits”. ‘Patterns of Membership and Support for the British Union of Fascists’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 19:4 (1984), pp. 575-606. Despite this, it is apparent that their membership figures were tiny in comparison to equivalent organisations in France.

Sizeable extremist sections of French society were not the only problem for Édouard Daladier. Having become Président du Conseil for the third time in April 1938, Daladier's government was the latest in a long line of administrations faced with guiding France through the treacherous waters of internal division and external menace. With the fall of the Popular Front, and the short-lived governments of Camille Chautemps and the second Blum administration, the 'bull from the Vaucluse' was looked upon from many quarters as the ideal candidate to unify the nation at such a critical juncture. One such quarter was London, which had been contemptuous of Blum's second government. "This is the most deplorable Ministry that could possibly be imagined in present circumstances", noted one Foreign Office minute, "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. We can only hope that they will fall very soon". British dissatisfaction with the French government led to the British Embassy in Paris actively intervening in domestic French affairs. "I am always most particularly careful to avoid intervening in any way in French politics", wrote Phipps to Halifax, "but this time I felt it was my duty to take a certain risk". The British got their wish as Blum's government proved ephemeral. Daladier's new government was more favourably received, although Phipps sounded a note of caution: "M. Daladier is sensible and honest, but I fear not quite as determined as he looks".

The refusal of the French Socialists to participate in Daladier's government resulted in the emergence of a Cabinet dominated by the Radical Party. Moreover, Daladier himself was considered to be the dominant player within the Council of Ministers. "In the eyes of a notable part of French opinion, but also of foreign opinion, Daladier was a 'strong man'", his biographer, Elisabeth du Réau, has remarked, "the only one capable of resolving the situation". Churchill shared the confidence in Daladier's ability to transform the fortunes of France, writing to the French Premier: "The time now seems ripe to carry forward those plans for the common safety of our two countries which we talked over together when I had the pleasure to visit you in Paris. You will

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23 Du Réau, Édouard Daladier, p. 220.
find the ground well-prepared for you over here: & I do not doubt of success. But strike while the iron is hot".24

As the European situation became increasingly threatening, Daladier sought to eradicate political instability and social schisms. France needed to rediscover national unity, reduce the scale of social unrest, and inject energy and discipline in order to restore economic stability and enhance military preparedness. If Daladier was to achieve this he needed to overcome several hurdles, not least in terms of clarifying exactly what his government stood for. His administration was a diverse mix of left and right, both pro and anti-Popular Front. On becoming Président du Conseil in April 1938, Daladier's intentions and future direction of policy were shrouded in uncertainty.25 The extent to which this uncertainty was a hindrance or benefit to Daladier is questionable. It has been argued that it worked in Daladier's favour, and, moreover, that Daladier deliberately cultivated it. In such a context, Daladier was the principal source of unity and thus his individual prestige was enhanced.26 Consequently, his newly formed government received an almost unanimous vote of confidence in the French Chamber. However, for Phipps, this "virtual Parliamentary unanimity" was no guarantee of longevity, which required "a real Government of National Union".27 Nevertheless, the absence of the Socialists allowed him to assemble a Cabinet of his choosing, omitting those he did not trust. This in turn enabled him to distance his administration from the communists, and gravitate towards the right.28

Tensions between former partners of the Popular Front created significant difficulties in terms of establishing a government capable of achieving stability and satisfying the multifarious demands of the populace. Jacques Kayser, a close confidant of Daladier, acknowledged such tensions, and the inevitable problems that ensued. "If the Rassemblement populaire wants to survive", he wrote, "one of the first questions that it must examine and solve, is that of the rapport to be established between its members. The tension that exasperatingly persists between Socialists and Radicals, Communists and Socialists, and Radicals and Communists, is incompatible with a resurgence of

24 Archives d'histoire contemporaine, Centre d'histoire de Sciences Po, Fonds Roger Genbrier [hereafter Fonds Genebrier], GE12: Letter from Churchill to Daladier, 14 April 1938.
27 TNA, FO 371/21599/C304/55/17: Phipps to Halifax, 14 April 1939.
28 As Duroselle has noted, Daladier appeared "the most capable, in his centrist position, of creating a Government without the Communists – whom he detested – and leaning towards the Right", La Décadence, 1932-1939, (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1979), p. 332.
Rassemblement activity". Such statements reflected the lingering attachment of many Radicals to the Popular Front, and a desire to see the ideals of the Rassemblement populaire maintained. Indeed, the British perceived French public opinion to be inclined towards the left. Phipps reported how “French Ministers are obliged to bear constantly in mind the predominance of moderate left feeling in the country”.

However, a reaffirmation of the compromise achieved during the Popular Front era was not forthcoming. A combination of the Socialists’ refusal to participate and Daladier’s latent distrust of the communists heralded the demise of the Front. A move towards the right now seemed inexorable, as Daladier’s emphasis on national defence naturally aligned him with the right wing of the Radical Party. Furthermore, as the British recognised, the influence of Paul Reynaud was crucial. He carried considerable authority, not just on the right, but also with Daladier himself. As one Foreign Office official noted, “To some extent the fate of the Cabinet is dependant on the loyalty of M. Reynaud”.

Daladier’s determination to abolish the 40-hour law, which had become a sacred tenet of the Popular Front, amply illustrated his shift to the right. During the summer of 1938, the strikes in Marseille were just one manifestation of the workers’ attachment to it. The 40 hours law had, according to Antoine Prost, become a “dogma”, and their resistance to any modification was absolute. Daladier’s willingness to sacrifice it, as announced in his broadcast of 21 August 1938, explicitly demonstrated the political stance he would subsequently seek to adopt. The French left, and partisans of the Popular Front elsewhere, were to be disappointed.

Residual Representations of Opinion

For both governments, the domestic political context furnished several representations of public opinion that continued to exert influence in the months to come. That is, certain representations formulated in previous months and years remained potent in dictating and formulating elite perceptions of opinion thereafter. Within an ideologically polarised society such as 1930s France, one obvious ‘residual representation’ is that of internal division and lack of unity. Moreover, it suggested to the elites that the more

32 TNA, FO 371/21599/C4173/55/17: Mallet minute, 13 May 1938.
extreme manifestations of political opinion were particularly powerful and seductive to a
large number of the French people. Nonetheless, it is imperative to avoid exaggerating
this ideological split.\footnote{Talbot Imlay has warned that these ideological divergences are prone to exaggeration. Facing the Second World War, p. 131.} Despite the focus upon the activities of extremist groups, they
were nonetheless seen as exactly that – extremist. They were not considered to represent
the majority, and it was implicitly recognised that the more voluble and militant
sentiments were not representative of opinion as a whole. Therefore, public opinion was
perceived as being two-tier: on the one hand, vocal minorities, on the other, a more
subdued and less hysterical majority. Ideological polarisation was far less pronounced
within this majority category of opinion than between the extremist minorities.

Whilst it is important to recognise the perceived existence of these two distinct
categories, the opinions represented by the more extreme manifestations often assumed
dominance in terms of overall elite perceptions of opinion. Consequently, even though it
is possible to exaggerate the ideological polarisation, it is credible to suggest that the
French political elites themselves exaggerated it. The routine police reports whose function
was, amongst others, to report on the state of opinion within the various départements,
invariably focused upon the activities and gatherings of the more extreme tendencies of
opinion. Thus the more vocal expressions and representations of opinion had, for many
years, been given greater prominence, arguably resulting in a distorted perception of
overall opinion. Although acknowledged to be minority opinions, they remained the
focus of attention, and subsequently permeated the mindsets of the French elites.\footnote{Extremist tendencies of opinion were inevitably the focus of considerable State attention. See police reports in the AN, particularly F7/14.781: antisémitisme, 1938-39; F7/14.817: Parti social français, Parti populaire français; F7/14.809: Communistes, période 1938-1940, and in the APP, particularly reports in BA/1650: Front Populaire manifestations, en 1939 notamment; BA/1815: Communauté juive: antisémitisme, propagande antisémitique, 1938/39; BA/1720: Journal l'Humanité – l'Humanité: 1937 correspondance, comités de défense - l'Humanité 1938 à 1939; BA/1780: propagande anti-militariste, Dossiers divers; BA1781: propagande anti-militariste; BA/1632: Manifestations du 1er mai 1938 et 1939 and BA/1692: Fédération des jeunesse socialistes Révolutionnaires. One must, however, add a caveat. The police reports that have survived in the French archives are somewhat sketchy, and should not necessarily be considered a definitive record of what the police were interested and not interested in.}
material with which to undertake such an analysis. There existed in France a newspaper or journal clearly identifiable with most of the existing political and ideological tendencies, so it was assumed that an analysis of a cross-section of the press could furnish an accurate portrayal of public opinion throughout the country.\(^{36}\) What is interesting in this respect is that Daladier—who paid significant attention to the press—tended to focus on hostile press commentary. Once again, the focus upon the more vociferous criticism of French foreign policy, especially the more extreme manifestations of far left opinion, could arguably lead to a distorted perception of public opinion.\(^{37}\)

Relying on the press to act as a barometer of public opinion was also true in Britain. The personal papers and diaries of contemporary politicians frequently refer to the editorials of major British newspapers, from which public opinion was, to a large extent, ascertained. However, whilst Daladier appeared to focus on criticism, Chamberlain preferred to concentrate on the positives. Indeed, in personal correspondence, especially prior to Munich, Chamberlain frequently mentioned the conservative press, rarely troubling himself with the Labourite *Daily Herald* or far left *Daily Worker*. Of course, this is evidently a reflection of the political context. The stability of the National government inevitably resulted in a greater focus upon potential opposition and dissent from within rather than outside. If the Labour Party was incapable of offering an effective opposition to the government, why concern oneself with the editorial comments of their affiliated newspapers? Although certainly sensitive to criticism, Chamberlain confidently brushed it aside. Although he considered any criticism of his policies as akin to a personal affront, he was always able to gather contrary assessments of his popularity. A typically critical article in the *Daily Herald* was summarily dismissed. “I am not disturbed by such blatant misrepresentations”, he wrote to his sister on 28 May, “and I get plenty of evidence it is not the general view”.\(^{38}\)

36 Certainly, in reporting the state of French opinion to London, Phipps relied heavily on the press, usually in conjunction with debates in the French Chamber. Similarly, Corbin’s assessments of British opinion were invariably based upon newspapers and House of Commons debates. It is possible to suggest therefore, that in an age prior to widespread opinion polling, such a method of analysing opinion was common to all members of the political elites, and not only overseas Ambassadors.

37 A clear illustration of Daladier’s preoccupation with hostile press commentary can be seen in the dossier in the Papiers Daladier, (MAE, Papiers 1940, Papiers Daladier, No. 2) concerning press reaction to the Munich Agreement. The overwhelming majority of this dossier focuses upon left-wing criticism, as well as outspoken critics from the right such as Pertinax, Henri de Kérillis and Georges Bidault. Furthermore, extensive press cuttings reflecting the other extremes of opinion, such as Flandin’s defeatism or the pro-German arguments of *L’Action Française* were also retained by Daladier, (AN, Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/10, 2DA3, Dr. 3, sdrc, and 2DA3, Dr. 5).

While the ideological divisions prevalent within the French press perpetuated the image of ideological polarisation, the British focus on the moderate press, particularly conservative newspapers, ensured that residual representations acted to confirm—at least in the eyes of the elites—the secure position of the government and support for their policies. As with perceptions of French opinion, the British elites perceived two distinct categories: the mainstream majority on the one hand, and the more hostile minority opinions on the other. Therefore, the majority opinion—as represented by the mainstream press—was considered as favourable to the government; hostility to the government, as represented via the opposition in Parliament and in the pages of the opposition newspapers, could generally be dismissed as the opinions of a minority. Nevertheless, it is essential to add a caveat: such perceptions of opinion within the British elites must not be interpreted as complacency. Public opinion remained a concern, and hostile opinion was certainly not disregarded or ignored. Indeed, it has been argued that events such as the Zinoviev letter and the public outcry regarding the Hoare-Laval pact clearly illustrated to elites that public opinion remained a powerful force irrespective of the size of Parliamentary majorities.39

Pacifism and the Prospect of War

Perhaps the most significant of 'residual representations' in both countries was that of pacifism, or more accurately, the fusion of pacifism and a wider trepidation concerning the 'next war'. A distinction between 'pacifism' and a more intangible 'war anxiety' is one that must be made. It would be far too simplistic, and indeed, misleading, to assume that all those in Britain and France who sought to avoid war were motivated by pacifist sentiment. The Oxford English Dictionary offers the following definition of pacifism: "the belief that war and violence are morally unjustified and that all disputes should be settled by peaceful means".40 Does it therefore follow that all those who sought to avoid war held this belief? Would this mean that if Nazi Germany attacked France and Great Britain that those who sought to avoid war would refuse to fight on the grounds that it would be morally unjustifiable?

40 Of course, one must acknowledge Norman Ingram's observation that a semantic debate has arisen regarding the use of the term 'pacifism', as the French concept of 'pacifisme' is more all-encompassing than the Anglo-Saxon use of 'pacifism', which tends to be more value-laden. See Norman Ingram, 'Repressed Memory Syndrome: Interwar French Pacifism and the Attempt to Recover France's Pacifist Past', French History, 18:3 (2004), p. 316.
Evidently, the answer to both these questions is no, yet there remains a tendency to almost arbitrarily apply the term 'pacifist' when describing both French and British society during the interwar years. Crémieux-Brilhac has evoked "the passionate attachment of the French to peace, their certainty that other peoples shared this attachment, and that it would suffice to strongly cling to the idea of peace in order to preserve it as a reality".\(^{41}\) Julian Jackson has described France as a "profoundly pacifist society", with the Munich Agreement marking "the high point of inter-war pacifism".\(^{42}\) Jackson also notes the existence of pacifism in Britain, although suggests that it was not as powerful as the pacifist current in France, echoing the conventional wisdom that the movement in Britain was largely peripheral. Such an argument is convincing, as the existence of numerous pacifist organisations were of little concern to the British government.\(^{43}\) Nonetheless, the existence of a peace movement at all can be argued to have had an impact in moulding elite perceptions of opinion, particularly during the 1920s and the early 1930s when the movement was at its zenith. Furthermore, anti-war novels were in abundant supply, including Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That*, and Beverly Nichol's *Cry Havoc*. Indeed, it is attractive to suggest that the prevailing mood was neatly summarised in February 1933, when the undergraduates of the Oxford Union debating society overwhelmingly approved the motion 'this house will not fight for King and Country'.\(^{44}\)

In France, a similar representation of pacific sentiment was expressed in 1928, when a majority of students at the École Normale Supérieure (ENS) signed a petition against having to undergo a course preparing them for their military service as officers.\(^{45}\) Pacifism was also given an influential platform via its strong presence within the teaching profession. "By the mid-1920s", observes Mona Siegel, "tens of thousands of French schoolteachers came to identify with a pacifist political agenda, rallying in ever-increasing numbers to declare a 'war on war' within and without the classroom walls". Their influence on future generations of French men and women meant that such a

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42 Julian Jackson, *The Fall of France*, pp. 147-149.
"conversion to pacifism was a matter of political importance to the entire nation". 46 Similarly, the anciens combattants provided a forum in which pacifism flourished. Antoine Prost has commented, "The root of the combattants pacifism is the horror of war. It is a heartfelt cry, spontaneous, vehement, absolute". 47

Despite similarities in the pervasiveness of British and French pacifist sentiment, it was more widespread in France. Of course, France had paid a significantly higher price during the First World War, suffering more casualties and experiencing a larger number of war veterans in the aftermath. However, another plausible explanation for the greater prevalence of pacifism in France is that a combination of demographics (the low birth rate), and geographical position (if another European war was to break out, France would almost certainly be in the front line) resulted in heightened anxiety. Thus there was a paradox in the demands of French opinion; a widespread condemnation of war coupled with an unwillingness to abolish the means for defence. 48 At the Disarmament Conference in Geneva, the French delegation were preoccupied with French security, a concern that, despite the pacifism pervading French society at that time, was not totally out of step with public opinion. Paris could not contemplate disarming if Germany were to rearm, the latter now a distinct possibility following Hitler’s seizure of power. As Maurice Vaisse has noted, “The public spirit itself did not avoid these contradictions. In a country and at a time when pacifism was widespread, disarmament was far from achieving unanimity”. 49 However, although there was a certain paradox between pacifism and the desire to maintain the level of military preparedness, the latter is compatible with ‘war anxiety’. The promise of preserving peace through deterrence ensured that it was possible to reconcile advocacy of peace with advocacy of rearmament. 50 The concept of ‘war anxiety’ better explains the conflict between the ideals of disarmament and the security offered through military strength. War was not desired, but it was essential to be adequately prepared for the eventuality.


49 Vaisse, Sécurité d'Abord, p. 598.

50 That this thesis was not confined to the political right is amply illustrated by the rearmament programmes implemented by the Popular Front administrations in 1936-38.
In Britain, perceptions of opinion during the mid-1930s were dominated by the negative connotations associated with armaments, illustrated by a profound distrust of the proliferation of the weapons of war connected with the 'merchants of death'. Coupled with this sentiment was a continued belief that the League of Nations provided the ultimate mechanism with which to resolve international disagreements, thus avoiding recourse to war. For the British public and policymaking elites alike, the two sentiments appeared inextricably linked. It has been noted that within many branches of the League of Nations Union, pacifists “were often the most active participants . . . [thus contributing to] label the LNU ‘pacifist’ in the public mind”. Therefore, amongst the political elites, the double-pronged representation of a British public faithful to the League and hostile to rearmament contributed to an overriding perception of a largely ‘pacifist’ society.

However, such a perception was not wholly accurate, as ‘pacifism’ declined in the late 1930s. Paradoxically, the so-called ‘Peace Ballot’ of 1935 illustrates the demise of pacifism. This Ballot, the brainchild of Lord Cecil, posed questions deliberately designed to demonstrate overwhelming public support for the League of Nations, in essence endorsing a system of collective security unpalatable to the more doctrinal pacifists of the Peace Pledge Union (PPU). As Martin Ceadel has argued, “[f]or all its technical imperfections and propagandist distortions it can be seen as a reliable indicator of genuine public support for collective security”. Indeed, during the 1935 general election, Baldwin’s National government campaigned on a ticket of League-enforced collective security, under the premise that the League of Nations provided the ‘key to peace’. Consequently, the circumvention of the League with the Hoare-Laval plan provoked a public backlash, forcing Hoare to resign as British Foreign Secretary on 19 December 1935. Moreover, this backlash, coupled with the results of the Peace Ballot, reflected a growing hostility to Italian actions in Abyssinia, arguably indicative of an

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51 On 11 March 1938, the *News Chronicle* published an editorial under the title 'Still Merchants of Death', illustrating how this argument continued to find support well into the late 1930s. For a general overview of this issue, see David G. Anderson, 'British Rearmament and the “Merchants of Death”: The 1935-36 Royal Commission on the Manufacture of and Trade in Armaments', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29:1 (1994), pp. 5-37. There was also criticism of the armaments industry in France. See Martin Alexander, ‘À bas les marchands de canons! Efforts to control the private manufacture and trade in arms in France during the 1930s’, in Väisse (ed.), *Le Pacifisme en Europe*, pp. 285-300.


increasingly bellicose sentiment regarding the Dictators. For the British pacifist movement this was hugely detrimental. Consequently, as the National government began to embrace appeasement, some pacifists did likewise, simultaneously attacking the LNU for promoting collective security, which for many pacifists was tantamount to warmongering.55

Nonetheless, the perception of a largely pacifist society still carried much weight, due in no small part to residual representations. Indeed, the Peace Ballot, although not an expression of ‘pacifism’, could easily been seen as such, not least because of the name popularly given to it. Therefore, in the latter half of the 1930s, residual representations of public opinion in Britain were dominated by a handful of often contradictory strands. Despite losing ground, a notion of pacifism persisted, and the public at large was considered particularly hostile to the possibility of going to war. Specifically, they were believed to be hostile to another Great War, contributing to a widespread reluctance to commit to the continental affairs or to despatch a large field army to the continent in the event of war. In August 1937, Major-General Sir Edmund Ironside, who was later to become Chief of the Imperial General Staff in September 1939, lamented how “[T]he nation does not believe an Army is necessary and the Government, so democratic is it, will not make up the nation’s mind for it”.56 Brian Bond argues that the “disquiet” with which the British public viewed a continental commitment was “inspired chiefly by bitter memories of the trench deadlock which had recently been freshly stirred up by a flood of ‘anti-war’ literature”.57 Simultaneously, belief in the League of Nations assumed a heightened significance, seemingly offering an alternative to the alliance system that had dragged Britain into the trenches in 1914.

The rapid evolution of events during the mid-1930s patently altered the European outlook. German rearmament and reoccupation of the Rhineland demonstrated Hitler’s flagrant disregard for the terms of Versailles, whilst the Italian invasion of Abyssinia was a flagrant challenge to the imperial supremacy of Great Britain and France. However, ‘next war’ anxiety continued to influence the British and French elites. Major-General Sir Henry Pownall, since January 1938 the Director of Military Operations and Intelligence, noted Hitler’s proposals for a “long range” peace in the

aftermath of the Rhineland reoccupation, “including disarmament matters and no bombing of civilians. These and the ideas of 25 years peace will certainly go down well with this country – it is a clever move on Hitler’s part, he is really appealing to public opinion here”.

French public opinion was perceived in similar terms. A police report from April 1936 details a speech made by the pacifist journalist Georges Pioch, in which he declared that, ‘the true French pacifist must do everything possible to obtain from their leaders a policy of conciliation with Germany and invite them to negotiate with Hitler, who has proposed a peace of 25 years’.

Therefore, although the growing fascist threat meant it was essential to convey to an uneasy public the impression of French strength, it was considered equally essential to consistently reiterate her peaceful intent. Indeed, French strength was considered an instrument of peace, deterring would-be aggressors. As Daladier told the Executive Committee of the Radical-Socialists in December 1936, “In order for France to be free and happy, it is necessary that she is strong. [...] [O]ur country must always be capable of maintaining her territorial integrity”.

The increasingly menacing posture of the dictators exacerbated anxieties regarding the prospect of war. Moreover, throughout the interwar years anxieties grew that the ‘next’ war would be very different from that of 1914-1918. The evolution of aircraft technology was such that, as Baldwin famously stated in the House of Commons in November 1932, “the bomber will always get through”. In June 1936, Haile Selassie, after giving a speech to the League of Nations in Geneva, allegedly prophesised: “It is us today. It will be you tomorrow”.

Such representations consistently contributed to shaping popular consciousness during the 1920s and 1930s, to the extent that one historian has suggested that, “British attitudes to the European situation and ‘the German problem’ during the thirties was largely determined by air fear”. Such an anxiety, even fear, of the potential devastation of a ‘next war’ was not confined to Britain. Robert Young has suggested that the prevalence of ‘next war’ imagery in France created an impression of living between two wars: “literature on the subject of air war rarely

59 APP, BA/1777: Police report, 19 April 1936, on a meeting of the LICP, held on 18 April 1936
60 Fonds Genebrier, GE6, speech by Daladier to the Executive Committee of the Radical-Socialists, 16 December, 1936.
61 Cited in Rankin, Telegram From Guernica, p. 77.
use[d] Berlin as a figurative example of an air target. Rather, the French used Tours, or Dijon, or Reims, or, especially, Paris".63

Representations of ‘war anxiety’ remained prevalent in the late 1930s, reinforcing residual representations in this regard. Police reports conveyed numerous examples of the integral pacifism embraced by a small minority. At a meeting of the Ligue Internationale des Combattants de la Paix (LICP) on 31 March 1938, Guy Jernan, of the Anciens Combattants Pacifistes, argued that “the independence of Czechoslovakia must not be a motive for war”.64 Although the LICP was a marginal organisation, such reactive representations served to reinforce the residual perception of a French public attached to the maintenance of peace. However, it is essential that ‘war anxiety’ is not restricted only to those with a developed and politicised pacifism. As Norman Ingram has noted, “In a country which had borne the brunt of the Great War public opinion and politicians alike took seriously the pacifist cry ‘plus jamais ça’”65

Therefore, by early 1938, the imperative of peace continued to inform elite perceptions of public opinion, and subsequently French and British foreign policy. For both sets of policymakers, the perceived necessity of avoiding war was paramount. Notwithstanding the financial, military and strategic constraints on their foreign policy decisions, the perceived public demand for peace to be maintained retained a residual importance during 1938/39 that was not necessarily reflective of British and French public opinion. The legacy of the Great War, fused with prophecies regarding the next, created an atmosphere in which ‘war anxiety’ flourished. More than any of the other residual representations, war anxiety was the most internalised, and thus the most significant factor in shaping overall perceptions of opinion at the time of Munich. Only over the next twelve months was much of its residual influence eroded. It was the manner in which the British and French political elites responded to the evolution of opinion over this time that would, to a considerable extent, dictate the course of British and French foreign policy thereafter.

64 APP, BA/1777: Police report, 31 March – meeting organised by the LICP, 30 March 1938. For more on the LICP, see Norman Ingram, The Politics of Dissent, passim.
The Czechoslovakian Crisis

As noted, the formation in April 1938 of the new Daladier government raised expectations that France could now unite in face of the heightened menace of the European dictatorships. Nonetheless, residual representations of public opinion continued to restrict Daladier's room for manoeuvre. Persistent anxieties regarding the repercussions of the 'next war' required the government to continue advocating the pacific intentions of France, whilst simultaneously increasing the efforts to cultivate a union sacrée and augment the material and moral capacity of the nation to undertake the very war that provoked such unease. In a radio broadcast explaining the implementation of new decree laws in May 1938, which afforded greater powers to his government, Daladier emphasised the two principal requirements that France urgently needed to address: "Above all it is necessary to restore social peace, the peace between Frenchmen [...] The second difficulty is external. It is the result of a Europe which unceasingly rearms when it needs to unite". 66 Daladier therefore acknowledged the two most pressing and influential of residual representations: societal divisions and war anxiety.

Residual representations of opinion also continued to inform the British elites. As in France, anxieties with regard to the 'next war' retained considerable influence. Indeed, this was graphically illustrated by a speech given by Chamberlain in July 1938: "[When] I think of the 7,000,000 young men who were cut off in their prime, the 13,000,000 who were maimed and mutilated, the misery and the suffering of the mothers and the fathers, the sons and the daughters, and the relatives and the friends of those who were killed, and the wounded, then I am bound to say again what I have said before, and what I say now, not only to you but to all the world - in war, whichever side may call itself the victor, there are no winners, but all are losers". Chamberlain was thus using public opinion - or rather, what he perceived public opinion to be - in order to legitimise his policy of appeasement, and convince doubters of its righteousness. Therefore, he could publicly suggest that "I cannot believe that anyone who is not blinded by party prejudice, anyone who thinks what another war would mean, can fail to agree with me and to desire that I should continue my efforts". 67

At the same time, the prevalence of pacifism within the overriding perceptions of public opinion was seen as a constraint. Although Chamberlain could use it to his

66 Fonds Genebrier, GE7: Déclarations d'Édouard Daladier sur les décrets-lois, 4 May 1938.
advantage, others recognised the potential of anti-war sentiment to weaken Britain's bargaining position. On 7 April, in a telegram to the then French Foreign Minister, Paul-Boncour, Corbin noted how Halifax accused "the pacifists, the 'preachers' of the League of Nations Union, the Trade-Unionists themselves and defeatists of all kinds, and finally the ideologues, of having 'emasculated' Great Britain to such a point that any firm policy is no longer possible, and that it was necessary to govern in disorder and weakness". 68 Above all, British public opinion was considered to be reluctant to go to war. The extent to which this was a factor in influencing policy vis-à-vis the Czechoslovakian problem was certainly understood by the French Ambassador. British hesitancy in committing herself to a firm policy on behalf of Czechoslovakia was, suggested Corbin, at least partially attributable to "fear of the public's reaction". 69

Recent events had further perpetuated the residual representation of 'war anxiety'. The horror and revulsion provoked by the news and imagery of modern warfare in Spain and China only heightened the sense that such events must not be allowed to occur in France or Great Britain. Newsreels, photo-journalism and evocative newspaper articles graphically brought the horrors of war to the French and British people. A Gaumont newsreel report of the bombing of Guernica, ended with the line, 'These were homes once, like yours'. 70 Moreover, fear of aerial bombardment manifested itself at the highest political level. The issue of air raid precautions (ARP) became a much-debated issue in both the French and British parliaments, undoubtedly lent greater urgency by representations and imagery from China and Spain. Daladier himself referred to these bombings as "an attack on civilisation itself", lamenting the loss of "centuries of heritage and thousands of innocent lives". 71

It was within such a context that the Czechoslovakian crisis came to dominate the foreign policy agenda during the summer of 1938. In both countries, the public were perceived to be reluctant to assist the Czechoslovaks to an extent that might embroil them in a war with Germany. Indeed, it was frequently argued that to deny the Sudeten Germans self-determination was not publicly justifiable. Such was the belief of the British Ambassador in Berlin, Sir Nevile Henderson, who in a letter to Halifax alluded to

68 Documents Diplomatiques Franfais [hereafter DDF], 2e Serie, Tome IX, No. 132: Charles Corbin to Paul Boncour, 7 April 1938.
69 MAE, Papiers 1940, Papiers Leger: Letter from Corbin to Alexis Leger, 17 March 1938.
a parallel example: "I presume we would not want to coerce South Ireland again".\textsuperscript{72} Coupled with Chamberlain's continued pursuit of appeasement, the British attitude to the Sudeten issue was dominated by the necessity of avoiding conflict. Although Chamberlain was not immune to criticism, the overall tone of the British press during the summer of 1938 was generally in his favour. Furthermore, Chamberlain's sisters consistently offered reassurance that his policies enjoyed widespread public support. "[T]he one common reaction among the vast majority of your fellow countrymen", wrote Ida on 23 May, "is a sense of intense thankfulness that we have at the head of affairs a man of cool head and clear vision, with a definite policy and the determination to carry it through undeterred by whatever other people may say".\textsuperscript{73} Indeed, Chamberlain did not have to look far for support. Throughout the summer of 1938, as German pressure on Czechoslovakia intensified, the majority of the British press retained an astonishing degree of optimism.\textsuperscript{74}

Furthermore, a firm stance over Czechoslovakia would close the door on attempts to reach a general understanding with Nazi Germany. Prior to the Anschluss, the British government had sought to progress further along the road of appeasement by considering a colonial settlement.\textsuperscript{75} The idea was to make colonial concessions to the Germans in exchange for a durable European settlement. Such a proposal was fraught with difficulties, as not only were numerous politicians hostile to the idea, but so too was a considerable section of public opinion. In discussions within the Foreign Office as to how the idea might be raised by Henderson in Berlin, Cadogan noted that, "as the German Government was well aware, public opinion in this country was extremely sensitive on this subject".\textsuperscript{76} Furthermore, aspirations for a colonial settlement were severely dented by the Anschluss, further testing the patience of the British public with the actions of Nazi Germany. The almost immediate threat posed to Czechoslovakia thereafter demonstrated that Hitler's Central and Eastern European ambitions would

\textsuperscript{72} TNA, FO 371/21657/C3148/42/18: Henderson to Halifax, 13 April 1938.
\textsuperscript{73} Chamberlain Papers, NC/18/2: Ida to Neville, 23 May 1938.
\textsuperscript{74} Anthony Adamthwaite, 'The British Government and the Media, 1937-1938', \textit{Journal of Contemporary History}, 18:2 (1983), p. 286. Such optimism has been attributed to Downing Street's attempts to control the dissemination of news and information from governmental sources, particularly by silencing the Foreign Office News Department from which many diplomatic correspondents garnered their information. See Cockett, \textit{Twilight of Truth}, pp. 66-83.
\textsuperscript{75} The notion of a colonial settlement had been on the agenda for several years. A noteworthy example is the letter by George Lansbury to \textit{The Times} on 19 August 1935, in which he expressed the opinion that if Germany were allowed to share the spoils of empire, then Hitler would become more moderate. For a detailed analysis of the colonial question, see Andrew Crozier, \textit{Appeasement and Germany’s Last Bid for Colonies}, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988).
\textsuperscript{76} TNA, FO 371/21655/C995/42/18: Cadogan to Henderson (and Eden), 12 February, 1938
require more than colonial concessions to appease. Although the public did not want to go to war, hostility to the methods of the dictators was increasing. However, although doctrinal pacifism may have declined as a consequence of a growing anti-fascism, 'war anxiety' remained prevalent, ensuring that Chamberlain's policy of appeasement remained credible and popular.

In France, the Anschluss and its immediate aftermath were somewhat overshadowed by internal strife. Indeed, France was without a government when news of the Anschluss broke, exacerbating the need to establish a durable administration capable of guiding France through the troubled months ahead. Press hostility to the Anschluss was muted, with criticism directed at the Germans rather than the inaction of Paris and London. Moreover, war in Spain continued to preoccupy the French left, illustrated by their unabated demands for the Spanish frontier to be opened in order to facilitate the flow of supplies to the beleaguered Spanish government. However, the French were only too aware that British support for intervention in Spain was starkly absent. As one French visitor to England in early summer 1938 noted, the British perspective (particularly among conservatives) was neatly summarised by the comment made to him by an English friend, a Professor at the London School of Economics: "[The British] are ready to defend the security of the Western Mediterranean until the last drop of French blood". Moreover, intervention in Spain threatened to re-open the societal divisions within France. Even for many on the left, fear that the Spanish Civil War may develop not just into a European war, but a civil conflict in France, forbade the possibility of intervention. Léon Blum, who had been French Premier at the outbreak of the Spanish conflagration, chose a policy of non-intervention. He later described the dilemma he had confronted in a letter to his wife: "Before any foreign war, France would have had civil war, with precious little chance for a victory for the Republic".

Reactions in Britain to the Anschluss were initially hostile to Germany, particularly on the left. This did not always go down well with those of a more pacifist persuasion, illustrated by Vera Brittain's diary entry for 14 March 1938: "L.N.U., Labour Party & the so-called peace lovers (except the P.P.U.) are shouting war! For 20 years they have been propaganding [sic] in favour of negotiation rather than war. But in this, the acid test, they are back again preferring war to negotiation". In Vera Brittain, Diary of the Thirties, 1932-1939: Chronicle of a Friendship, edited by Alan Bishop, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1986), p. 320.

Ceadel, Pacifism in Britain, pp. 262-265.

AN, F60/172: Note by Robert Marjolin, 'Les Anglais et le Probleme Espagnol', 16 June 1938.

French recognition that London was unwilling to intervene in Spain was mirrored during the Czechoslovakian crisis. Consequently, when Daladier and Bonnet visited London in late April 1938, one of the more pressing objectives was to persuade London to augment the degree of military assistance Britain was prepared to offer in the event of a European war. A Defence Ministry note of 24 April observed that British assistance was essential, but that “the British army [...] are not currently prepared for this effort”. Thus it was imperative that “one of the first things to ask of Britain would be to take as soon as possible, even at the cost of conscription, measures permitting them to despatch an Expeditionary force in proportion to their population”. Halifax’s response was brusque: “with the best will in the world”, he informed the French ministers, the best guarantee Britain could give “would be two divisions”. Public opinion was again influential, as the perceived hostility of the British public to repeat the slaughter of 1914-18 led the elites to believe that the public would not tolerate the undertaking of any continental commitment analogous to those preceding the Great War. Thus, when Chamberlain stated that “[d]uring the course of the war we might, of course, send more than two divisions”, he felt compelled to add the caveat: “The British public were, however, very nervous about land commitments”. Halifax also warned Chamberlain of the public’s antipathy to any firm commitment to France, suggesting that nothing “would more prejudice Anglo-French relations than when people recover their reasoning powers, for them to realise that we had committed British foreign policy more or less blindly to that of France”.

British perceptions of French opinion induced them to believe that the question of British support for France in the event of war was an issue on which the French response to the Czechoslovak crisis hinged. As Phipps noted on 24 April, “public attention has been fixed upon Czechoslovakia, and France’s obligations towards her, since the seizure of Austria by Germany, and acute heart-searching is taking place as to the attitude which France should adopt”. Britain’s response should France elect to fulfil her obligations to Prague was, according to Phipps, of the utmost importance to the

81 AN, Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/35, 4DA8, Dr. 3, sdrb: Président du Conseil, Ministre de la Guerre, Conseil Supérieur de la Défense National, Secrétariat Générale, note sur la Collaboration Militaire Franco-Britannique, 24 April 1938. The importance of Britain to France, and the lack of preparedness of the British to give the necessary assistance, had long been a concern. See, for example, Gamelin’s note to Daladier of 11 February 1938, AN Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/30, 4DA3, Dr. 1, sdra.
82 Documents on British Foreign Policy [hereafter DBFP], Third Series, Vol. 1, No. 164: Record of Anglo-French conversations held at No.10 Downing Street on April 28th and 29th, 1938.
83 Ibid.
84 TNA, FO 800/313: Halifax to Chamberlain, 19 March 1938. This pertains in particular to the French commitments to Czechoslovakia.
French public and policymakers alike. "There is a strong movement in right circles against France fighting for Czechoslovakia unless assured of British support", he reported, "and Socialist-Radical opinion seems to be divided". Not only were those on the political right questioning the logic of fighting on behalf of the Czechs, but many in the centre and left, partly motivated by 'next war' anxiety, saw little sense in going to war in order to prevent Sudeten self-determination. Throughout the summer of 1938, reactive representations of opinion, as expressed via the press, suggested that the French public would be hostile to going to war on this issue, especially without guaranteed British assistance.

The majority of reactive representations of British opinion also argued that war over the Sudeten question would be folly. Many in Britain would have agreed with Henderson that, "in this age we cannot with safety or moral satisfaction deny the right of self-determination in areas where the population lives in predominant majorities on the frontier of the State in which it may desire to be incorporated". Moreover, the fact that Sudeten Germans were living beyond the boundaries of the German Reich was often attributed to the largely discredited Versailles Treaty. The 'Diktat' clause of the Versailles Treaty, which held Germany responsible for the outbreak of the Great War, had been significantly undermined by recent revisionist interpretations, particularly those emanating from American historians. One such example was Sidney Bradshaw Fay, who argued that, "the verdict of the Versailles Treaty that Germany and her allies were responsible for the war, in view of the evidence now available, is historically unsound".

Although the bulk of the British population would not have read such a specialised text, the general argument certainly pervaded the mainstream, in particular through the popular press. That Versailles had been unjust was a widely held sentiment, particularly on the political right, and the tendency to attribute much of the blame for this to the French was similarly commonplace. As Pownall remarked in 1934, "I believe all this German trouble could have been avoided if years back, perhaps in Stresemann's time, that country had been properly treated and allowed some revision of at least the disarmament clauses of the Treaty. But the chief blame for the failure to do this must surely lie with the French". Consequently, sympathy for Czechoslovakia was muted,

85 TNA, FO 371/21599/C3388/55/17: Phipps to Halifax, 24 April 1938.
86 See Lacaze, L'opinion publique française et la crise de Munich, p. 168.
87 TNA, FO 371/21657/C3148/42/18: Henderson to Halifax, 13 April 1938.
89 Bond (ed.), Pownall Diaries, diary entry for 30 November 1934, p. 55.
and the majority of the press, particularly on the right, was hostile to the idea of allowing the issue of the Sudeten Germans to be the catalyst for a general European conflict. For Daladier, the British position left little room for manoeuvre. Although he superficially adopted a firm attitude with regard to Germany, his arguments fell on deaf ears. "Impassioned appeals by Daladier", recorded Cadogan in his diary, "putting the whole of Van[sittart]'s case about German 'hegemony'. Very beautiful, but awful rubbish".90

The war-scare during the weekend of 19-21 May 1938 provided the real acid test as to whether the French would follow the British lead or pursue an independent policy. They chose the former, pressurising Prague to make concessions, although such pressure ultimately proved unnecessary as rumours of an imminent German move on Czechoslovakia proved unfounded. Although the British sent a strongly worded warning to Ribbentrop that Britain might well be drawn in to any conflict arising from German-Czechoslovakian disputes, it was the pressure that London brought to bear on France that was most indicative of their approach to the Czechoslovakian crisis. Moreover, Bonnet's readiness to accept British leadership during this crisis was a clear illustration to Prague that the French were unwilling to act alone.91 During April and May, the British government had convinced Bonnet that their intervention in Central Europe would be unpopular with British public opinion. Whilst outlining his general foreign policy objectives to the Senate foreign affairs committee in June 1938, Bonnet cited Halifax's perceptions of Dominion opinion during the ministerial discussions in April: "We are in the course of our rearmament; we have disarmed far too much; and in the affairs of central Europe we risk having the Dominions and their public opinion against us".92

Halifax's comments reveal much about British perceptions of public opinion, notably the lingering impact of the residual representation of hostility to continental commitments. They also demonstrate how such perceptions impacted upon foreign policy. Furthermore, Bonnet was subsequently influenced by perceptions of French opinion. In a note to be given to the Czechoslovak government by the French Minister in Prague, Victor de Lacroix, Bonnet observed that, "it would be extremely difficult for the French Government to have with them the entirety of French opinion in the event of

91 This has been interpreted as clear evidence of the 'English Governess' exerting influence on French foreign policy. See Herman, The Paris Embassy of Sir Eric Phipps, pp. 90-93. For more on the notion of the 'English Governess', see François Bédarida, 'La "gouvernante anglaise"', in Rémon and Bourdin (eds.), Édouard Daladier, chef de gouvernement, pp. 228-240.
92 MAE, Papiers 1940, Papiers Cabinet Georges Bonnet Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, No. 1: Bonnet, to the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, 8 June 1938.
war with Germany if [...] France was not certain of having Britain on her side".\(^93\) Although the French publicly suggested that they could act alone, and that they stood firmly behind Prague, the British were receiving somewhat different information. The Minister for War, Leslie Hore-Belisha, reported Gamelin as admitting to him that, “it was impossible for France to give military assistance to Czecho-Slovakia”.\(^94\) Despite the firm words of the French ministers, British perceptions of French opinion suggested that such rhetoric was far from representative of French public opinion. Bonnet’s own comments indicate that he too shared this view. For Yvon Lacaze, the belief that the French public was unprepared to support a firm pro-Czechoslovak stance without the guarantee of British support was well founded: “Unanimously, in the eyes of the press, Prague’s fate strictly depended on the degree of British commitment to France in the event of conflict”\(^95\)

Towards Munich

By late summer 1938, residual representations of public opinion in both Britain and France had already influenced the foreign policies of both powers. Above all, anxieties concerning the effects of the ‘next war’ were critical. The German Ambassador in London, talking to French Embassy officials, reflected upon the reaction of British public opinion towards a potential war with Nazi Germany. “The British people [...] increasingly tend to envisage the destruction of an air war as the inevitable result of German aggression against Great Britain”, he claimed, although he admitted that, in general terms, “public feeling [is] currently against Germany”.\(^96\) Anxiety regarding a possible air war was widespread, and Germany was largely held responsible for the existence of such a menace. Once again, British opinion appeared torn between a ‘war anxiety’ and a growing distrust and resentment of the Fascist dictatorships.

For the British elites, the extent of public awareness of international affairs was a source of concern. On 2 August 1938, the Foreign Office News Department advised Halifax that the Foreign Office was failing to provide adequate information to newspaper correspondents. With regard to the Runciman mission, it was observed how “the news

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\(^93\) AN, Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/9, 2DA2, Dr. 1, sdra: Bonnet note, to be given to Czech Government by Lacroix, 16 July 1938.
\(^94\) TNA, FO 371/21617/C3783/3474/7: Hore-Belisha, record of a conversation with Gamelin, 25 April 1938.
\(^95\) Lacaze, L’opinion publique française et la crise de Munich, p. 168.
first came out from Paris then from Prague and later from Berlin. Yet throughout that
time the Foreign Office had 'nothing to say'”. For the Foreign Office, this led to the
concern that other sources of information were being sought, potentially resulting in the
dissemination of news and information objectionable to the Foreign Office, or even
wholly inaccurate. However, for the American press, such lack of information amounted
to deliberately keeping the public in the dark. The New York Times suggested that the
public were “only dimly aware of what is going on, of the fundamentally violent character
of the contest, of the Continental preference for a kind of all-in match instead of the
courteous and regulated sportsmanship of cricket”. A Foreign Office minute did not
refute this argument, but suggested that it was the press themselves who were largely
responsible for this state of affairs: “The accusation is justified, and one is tempted to
wonder whether such sang-froid is such an advantage – was it in 1914? Lord
Beaverbrook and other ‘peace at any price’ publicists must bear a heavy share of the
blame”.

However, reports from the French Embassy in August 1938 contended that
British press coverage of European events was unprecedented. The Chargé d’Affaires,
Roger Cambon, noted that, “seldom has British opinion had at its disposal such
abundant information and commentary”. Of course, much of the information relayed
by the press was gleaned from government sources. It has been argued that the
government urged newspaper editors and proprietors to publish only that which was in
the ‘national interest’, implying that they should support the government’s policies.
Such an argument is persuasive, but fails to appreciate the extent to which most editors
and proprietors pursued their own agenda, which was often the same (or very similar) to
the government line, and not necessarily the consequence of governmental pressure.
There was little need for censorship, as the press essentially censored themselves. Lord
Beaverbrook even felt that more government control was necessary, writing to
Chamberlain in September: “I desire so much that a Minister be appointed to deal with
the newspaper proprietors. They are all anxious to follow you. I am certain that the

97 TNA, FO 395/562/P1726/4/150: Notes for the Secretary of State prior to a meeting between him and
representatives of the Telegraph, Yorkshire Post, and the Manchester Guardian, to take place on 2 August 1938.
99 TNA, FO 371/21675/C8345/132/18: Cresswell minute, 19 August 1938. Zara Steiner has suggested
that despite the difference in public ‘mood’ between 1914 and 1939, it is important not to exaggerate the
jingoism of 1914 or indeed to overlook the evolving public sentiment regarding the prospect of war
between Munich and September 1939. In sum, the contrast can easily be overstated. ‘Views of War:
Britain Before the “Great War” – and After’, International Relations, 17:1 (2003), pp. 7-33.
100 MAE, Série Z: analyse de la presse anglaise, No. 237: Cambon to Bonnet, 26 August 1938.
101 See Cockett, Twilight of Truth, pp. 55-83.
newspapers of the Right and the Left will go with you in your decisions. But we are in
the dark”. Anxiety regarding the prospect of the ‘next war’ was also crucial, with the
majority of editors and proprietors seeing little benefit in inciting public panic.

In France, the summer of 1938 was dominated by the domestic agenda. Foreign
affairs largely took a back seat, with the exception of the far-left’s unrelenting campaign
on behalf of the Spanish government. For the Radical-Socialists, the Czechoslovakian
crisis was intrinsically tied up with domestic politics. Many left-leaning Radicals,
partisans of the Popular Front, argued that France must uphold her obligations to
Prague. On the right of the party were those who favoured a rupture of the Popular
Front and advocated the abandonment of Czechoslovakia. For them, the order of the
day was the appeasement of Germany and Italy and the rejection of the Franco-Soviet
Pact. Across the French press, the necessity of a firm Franco-British alliance was
increasingly urgent. As Lacaze observes, “in the summer of 1938 the press continued to
give all its support to Franco-British cooperation”. For all, the spectre of war loomed
on the horizon, and the potential repercussions of a future European conflict, especially
one without British support, weighed heavily. The American Ambassador, William
Bullitt, encapsulated the prevailing mood when informing President Roosevelt that, “if
war should begin, the result would be such a devastation of Europe that it would make
small difference which side should emerge the ostensible victor”.

In these conditions, it is unsurprising that the willingness of the French public to
go to war on behalf of the Czechs was questioned. The British Military Attaché in Paris,
Colonel William Fraser, had his doubts: “Whether or not the French are prepared to
fight seems a little uncertain”. He also referred to the view of the Embassy’s press
attaché, Charles Mendl, who was “most emphatic in his opinion that the French will not
fight except in self-defence”. It is difficult to dispute that certain influential circles in
France were vocally hostile to intervention on behalf of the Czechs, providing an acutely
vuluble representation of reactive French opinion. Such opinions were especially
influential in shaping the perceptions of French opinion held by the British elites. One
of the more vocal and notorious figures in this regard was Pierre-Étienne Flandin, who

102 House of Lords Record Office, Beaverbrook Papers, [hereafter Beaverbrook Papers], BBK/C/80:
Beaverbrook to Chamberlain, 16 September 1938. Beaverbrook also wrote in this vein to Halifax the
following day (BBK/C/80).
103 Berstein, Histoire du parti Radical, tome II, p. 549.
104 Lacaze, L’opinion publique française et la crise de Munich, p. 197.
wrote to Chamberlain on 14 September: “[French public opinion] is more likely to be in
the direction of non-intervention than that of intervention”. 107 Flandin also made his
opinions known to the British press, commenting to staff at the Paris offices of the Daily
Express that “the Chief of the French Army had told him that a French defeat was
certain”. The majority of the French people desired peace, he continued, “[i]t is the
communists and the Jews who are leading us into this war. They are determined to push
us into it”. 108

The British thus perceived French public opinion as hostile to war, reinforcing
their conviction that the French government was blustering when stating their
determination to come to the assistance of Czechoslovakia. For the French, perceptions
of British opinion were more diverse. Residual representations of British opinion,
coupled with the British government’s insistence that the public was hostile to
continental commitments, suggested that John Bull would refuse to march for
Czechoslovakia. However, at the beginning of September, Corbin detected a change in
British opinion, noting that Churchill’s firm stance, which had previously contrasted
sharply with overall opinion, were now far more representative: “the general state of
spirit is no longer so different to his”. 109 Nevertheless, the notorious leading article in the
Times of 7 September (advocating the cession of the Sudeten areas to Germany) was
considered reflective not only of government opinion, but also of a significant body of
British public opinion. The immediate impact of the Times leader was to influence
Bonnet in sending a communiqué to the French Minister in Prague on 8 September:
“They [the Czech government] must not ignore the fact that in the failure of an amicable
understanding, British opinion would not understand if any means had been neglected in
search of a new peaceful solution”. 110

The Times article certainly triggered much debate in France. Phipps reported that
it “has caused considerable excitement here”, not least within the Quai d’Orsay. Phipps
was compelled to inform Bonnet’s Chef de Cabinet “that I knew nothing about it and
that, as he was no doubt aware, the Times was not the organ of His Majesty’s
Government”. 111 Nonetheless, the Times was considered as being precisely this, not least
in France, so one can suppose that Phipps’ denials would have been met with

107 TNA, PREM 1/249: Flandin to Chamberlain, 14 September 1938.
108 Beaverbrook Papers, BBK/B/293: Letter to Beaverbrook from Lord Forbes (from the Paris offices of
the Daily Express), 25 September 1938, detailing notes of an interview with Flandin.
109 DDF, 2e Série, Tome X, No. 531: Corbin to Bonnet, 1 Sept 1938.
110 AN, Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/9, 2DA2, Dr. 1 sdc: Bonnet to the French Minister in Prague, 8
September 1938.
111 TNA, FO 371/21764/C9361/4770/18: Phipps telegram, 7 September 1938.
Moreover, the article provoked considerable debate in the pages of the French press, with several writers applauding the stance taken by the London paper. Émile Roche, director of the Radical newspaper, La République, had already made such a suggestion the previous day, and cited the Times article with approval on both the 8th and 9th September. The PPF leader, Jacques Doriot, in La Liberté, and Stéphane Lauzanonne, chief editor of Le Matin, did likewise on 9 September, while Léon Bailby provided further favourable comment in the Jour-Echo de Paris on 10 September. To what extent such approval reflected the genuine state of French opinion was uncertain. The Foreign Office mirrored this ambiguity: “The writers are not very representative of French opinion, but I understand that the French provincial press has published suggestions on these lines”.

By the time Chamberlain embarked on his shuttle diplomacy to Germany in mid-September 1938, a fusion of reactive and residual representations combined to suggest that public opinion widely endorsed missions designed to maintain peace. This was assumed to be so even if such an attempt necessitated a form of diplomacy beyond the League of Nations. The residual representation of public attachment to the League remained, but was superseded by the representation of ‘next war’ anxiety. Moreover, within most Conservative circles, attachment to the League was less strong than elsewhere. Indeed, there was far more inclination towards the doctrine of British isolationism, best exemplified by the Beaverbrook press. Hostility to becoming entangled in another ‘European war’ was often fierce, and thus seemed to dictate that the public desired a peaceful resolution to the current crisis. If the League was unable to provide a peaceful solution, an alternative solution beyond the mechanisms of the League was deemed acceptable.

Reactive representations of opinion had, during the first half of 1938, served simultaneously to erode residual representations of the public’s attachment to the League, and strengthen the residual representation of ‘next war’ anxiety. Such reactive representations would almost certainly have been expressed to the elites during their regular visits to Cliveden, the house of Lord and Lady Astor. Although Cliveden was certainly not the forum for the conspiratorial ‘cagoulards’ portrayed in the pages of The...
Week or in the cartoons of David Low, it was nonetheless important in contributing to elite perceptions of opinion. As Claud Cockburn, who first coined the term ‘Cliveden Set’, later observed, “there was no [Set] – just people interested in the same objectives standing around in a co-operative frame of mind”. For Chamberlain and his fellow appeasers, being around like-minded people would offer reassurance that their policy was both righteous and popular. There is little doubt that many important newspaper editors and proprietors shared Chamberlain’s objectives, and reflected this in their newspapers. The editor of the Times, Geoffrey Dawson, famously stated: “I do my utmost, night after night, to keep out of the paper anything that might hurt their [German] susceptibilities”.

In deciding to fly to Germany to meet Hitler in person, Chamberlain was convinced that he had the support of the majority of the British people. Moreover, if he could succeed in resolving the Czechoslovakian crisis without recourse to war, he would have achieved something for which the British public would be extremely grateful. Public opinion was cited at governmental level as one of the principal motivations for seeking a peaceful settlement. In a Cabinet meeting on 30 August, Chamberlain stated that the “policy of an immediate declaration or threat might well result in disunity, in this country, and in the Empire”. Hore-Belisha added “that a threat of war could only be made if there was an overwhelmingly public demand first. Such a demand did not exist. There was no way of preventing the Sudeten Germans from joining their compatriots”.

Furthermore, a note from July 1938 discussing the potential of publicity explicitly stated concerns vis-à-vis public opinion: “If it is arguable that even in 1914 the war-making powers of the Cabinet are already much more limited than in 1899 (Boer War), it is undeniable that in 1938 public opinion is the dominant factor”. With this in mind, it was stated that clearly-defined objectives were essential, suggesting that only a handful would be acceptable to the public: defence of British territorial integrity; defence of Iraq and Egypt; defence of France and Belgium against aggression; and possible intervention.

15 David Low was the regular cartoonist in the Evening Standard, where, despite the opinions of the proprietor, Lord Beaverbrook, he was allowed to portray events as he saw fit. Consequently, he was often scathingly anti-appeasement, and contributed to the overall public perception of the ‘Cliveden Set’, and the intrigues of the appeasers that allegedly took place there. For more on the curious relationship between Beaverbrook and Low, see Adrian Smith, Low and Lord Beaverbrook: The Cartoonist and the Newspaper Proprietor, Encounter, (1985), pp. 7-24.
18 TNA, CAB 23/94: Cabinet meeting, 30 August 1938.
elsewhere, if British interests were menaced. It was noted that “[t]hese commitments are probably the absolute maximum public opinion will stand”.\textsuperscript{119}

Moreover, the public’s attachment to the League was still regarded as crucial. It was remarked that “the ‘next war’ must be fought under the League umbrella” and that “our action must be completely in accordance with League principles and with League authority”.\textsuperscript{120} However, attachment to peace was considered to outweigh attachment to the League. The dominant perception of a public eager for a peaceful solution encouraged Chamberlain to believe that his decision to meet Hitler would enjoy widespread public support, despite sidelining the League. Additionally, the public could be induced to endorse his actions, inasmuch as public opinion was considered malleable; that it could be, if not coerced, at least directed. On 13 September, a home publicity Sub-Committee report referred to a period in which “the public mind in this country (and also abroad) will be particularly sensitive to publicity and during which, indeed, what publicity there is may give it a decisive orientation. [...] The public mind is now in the doubtful and receptive state referred to. Its final crystallisation may, in certain circumstances, govern the choice between peace and war”.\textsuperscript{121} The report advocated systematic propaganda, although not yet the establishment of a Ministry of Information. It is, therefore, unsurprising that Cabinet members would utilise their links with the press to try to ensure favourable coverage of Chamberlain’s initiatives, although the press were, on the whole, prepared to do so anyway.\textsuperscript{122}

The Daladier government was offered precious little opportunity to contribute to Chamberlain’s initiative. Indeed, Phipps simply informed the French government of Chamberlain’s decision on 14 September. The French press broadly welcomed the news, particularly the right and centre.\textsuperscript{123} Even on the left, there was support. “From whatever point of view I envisage the audacious decision of M. Neville Chamberlain”, wrote Blum, “[it is] a chance for peace that I foresee. That is why I applaud [...] we applaud all that

\textsuperscript{119} TNA, INF 1/712: Publicity, Sub-Committee proceedings, note by Stephen King-Hall, 11 July 1938.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{121} TNA, INF 1/713: Publicity: Home, Sub-Committee Reports, Interim report, 13 September 1938.
renders war more difficult". Less surprising is the attitude adopted by those of a more pacifist persuasion. "Naturally, the Sudeten problem is the most critical, the most pressing to be resolved", remarked Paul Faure, "and it must be done by pacific means". For the right, and for the majority of the centre, views on foreign policy remained tied up with domestic politics, resulting in the communists being an almost lone voice of dissent (the conservative, Henri de Kérillis, writing in l'Époque, being a notable exception). The communists had consistently advocated French support for Czechoslovakia. "It is necessary that they know in Berlin that France will honour her signature", argued l'Humanité, "creating a situation where Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States of America will eventually be by her side in order to assure the integrity of Czechoslovakia".

Overall, the French political elites, like their British counterparts, interpreted public opinion as hostile to war on behalf of Czechoslovakia. Those advocating otherwise were deemed to be the voice of a minority. In France, the aftermath of the Times leader of 7 September reinforced the belief that, in the event of war, Britain would stand aside. Consequently, it was not only pacifists who objected to war, but also those who feared its repercussions, especially if France found herself fighting Germany alone. Daladier and Bonnet, when visiting London on 18 September, would certainly have shared many of these apprehensions. Their task was complex, influenced not only by their perception of the majority of French opinion but also by the potentially dangerous minority opinion, as vocally expressed by the communists. To abandon their obligations to Prague would indeed result in a loss of prestige and honour for France, a loss that the communists could perhaps seek to exploit. Peace with honour might have appeared a realistic and attainable target for the British elites, but for the French, there was arguably much more at stake.

Daladier was also in a difficult position given French reliance on Great Britain, which had been a constant source of discussion within the French press for many months. The need for close co-operation between the two democracies had been constantly re-iterated, and the French elites thus perceived public opinion as being particularly keen to ensure that the two governments work in tandem. If France assumed an overly firm position vis-à-vis the German demands on Czechoslovakia, many in Britain would interpret this as French aggression, thus rendering British assistance to France in a Franco-German conflict unnecessary. This was too great a risk for the

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124 Léon Blum, Le Populaire, 15 September 1938; Paul Faure, Le Populaire, 18 September 1938.
125 L'Humanité, 10 September 1938.
French government. Despite some tough talking, the French had little option but to toe the British line. However, the situation altered dramatically on 22 September, when Hitler announced his Godesberg demands to Chamberlain. The Polish and Hungarian claims on Czech territory were to be incorporated, and Germany was to occupy the Sudeten areas, on their own terms, by 1 October. For a brief moment, it appeared that British public opinion had irreparably lost patience with Hitler's increasingly unreasonable demands. Even Halifax, who had previously been a firm and loyal supporter of Chamberlain's policy, began to have some doubts. On 23 September, he sent a telegram to Chamberlain at Godesberg, noting: "Great mass of public opinion seems to be hardening in sense of feeling that we have gone to the limit of concession". Halifax may well have been influenced by the editorials in the Manchester Guardian and the News Chronicle on 23 September 1938, both of which detected a hardening of British opinion between Berchtesgaden and Godesberg.

How the elites actually judged this transition within public opinion is hard to ascertain, although it is probabe that the press played a pivotal role. As Andrew Roberts, in a biography of the Foreign Secretary, has suggested, "when Halifax wrote of the 'great mass of people' he really meant his own opinion, together with that of whichever friends he had spoken to and which newspapers he had read". The British press, following Hitler's Godesberg demands, had certainly been increasingly hostile. A typical example is the Daily Mirror, which warned: "Since his return from Bad Godesberg, Mr. Chamberlain must be aware of the hardening of opinion here, of rising exasperation against further cajoling of war maniacs". Even on the right, there seemed to be a recognition that Britain might have to take a firm stance. The Sunday Times emphasised British solidarity with France, noting that, "though we are under no automatic obligation to support France in her Czechoslovakian policy, Mr. Chamberlain has repeatedly said that we should probably be drawn into such a war".

In London, it was not only British opinion that was perceived to be hardening. On 23 September, Oliver Harvey noted that "French opinion like ours seems to getting more and more restive and takes the line that P.M. must get as minimum full acceptance of Anglo-French plan". Phipps himself had remarked that French opinion pinned much hope on the Godesberg talks, predicting that "if Hitler makes still further

128 Daily Mirror, editorial, 26 September 1938; Scrutator, Sunday Times, 25 September 1938.
demands, there would be great opposition to fresh concessions”. Nonetheless, a perusal of the French press suggests that the Godesberg demands, whilst met with some incredulity and annoyance, did not lead to an abandonment of aspirations for a peaceful settlement.¹³⁰ Moreover, it was even suggested that the press were misleading the French public. Pertinax argued that due to overly optimistic press commentary, French public opinion did not demonstrate enough support for the “show of resistance” of the French ministers. Furthermore, Pertinax argued, many on the political right “had arrived at the sentiment that the social danger superseded the German danger, that the totalitarian States had to be regarded as an insurance against Moscow”.¹³¹ An example of such right wing opinion appeared the following day. On 25 September, Bailby continued to portray the extreme left as warmongers, arguing that “France will not march into an offensive war on the orders of the Soviets”.¹³²

Nevertheless, there were signs of revolt at governmental level. Jean Zay noted on 22 September: “Chamberlain has left for Godesberg. There is talk of the possible resignations of ministers: Reynaud, Campinchi, Mandel, Zay, Champetier de Ribes”. Zay concurred with Pertinax in suggesting that the press had misled the public: “One wonders how it could occur, that for a week, the press campaign for French neutrality (République, Journal, Matin, Flandin) has led to our retreat and portrayed us as divided in Hitler’s eyes, without the Quai d’Orsay reacting”.¹³³ Phipps noted that the increased demands placed on Prague had provoked “acute heartsearching among the various political parties”, and in particular had “aroused bitter reactions from the Left”.¹³⁴ Nonetheless, any notion of a firmer stance being adopted was discarded, at least on the political level. Phipps later suggested that throughout the Czech crisis “public opinion fluctuated from hour to hour […], although all that is best in France was against war at almost (but not quite) any price”.¹³⁵ With this comment, Phipps both explicitly condemned the ‘war-mongers’, and implicitly downplayed the influence of those who favoured a course of resistance.

In Britain, it was uncertain as to what public opinion actually made of the rapid turn of events. Chamberlain continued to show how deeply influenced he was by ‘next

¹³⁰ As Lacaze has noted, “if Hitler’s Godesberg demands provoked unanimous resistance in the British press, this unanimity was not encountered in the Parisian newspapers”, L’opinion publique française et la crise de Munich, p. 272.
¹³¹ Pertinax (pseudonym of André Géraud), in L’Europe nouvelle, 24 September 1938.
¹³⁴ TNA, FO 371/21600/C10460/55/17: Phipps telegram, 22 September 1938.
¹³⁵ TNA, FO 371/21600/C12854/55/17: Phipps report on events in France during the 3rd quarter of 1938, 22 October 1938.
war' anxiety, telling the Cabinet on 24 September: "We must not lose sight of the fact that war to-day was a direct threat to every home in the country". In a Cabinet meeting the following day, whilst Halifax expressed the opinion that it would be inconsiderate to coerce Prague into capitulation, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Malcolm MacDonald, suggested that the apparent hardening of British opinion should not be taken at face value: "As regards public opinion [...] many of those who were now clamouring for us to take a stronger attitude with Germany would adopt a different view when a world war had been in progress for a month or so". Once again, the prospective 'next war' was evoked; the insinuation being that it was something the British people would be unable to stomach at that juncture.

By the time the French Ministers visited London on the 25 and 26 September, the British government believed that public opinion remained hostile to war. Moreover, they were also under the firm impression that French public opinion was similarly hostile, if not more so. Phipps' despatches, although biased in favour of Chamberlain and certainly hostile to the French communists, reinforced this impression, suggesting that only the far-left elements in France took the opposite line. This is not to say that Phipps' reports were unanimously believed. Oliver Harvey lamented their lack of balance: "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 H.M.G. It is tragic that at such a time we have three such wretched Ambassadors (Rome, Berlin and Paris)". Nonetheless, it was the arguments made by Phipps that Chamberlain utilised in his discussions with his French counterpart. As Daladier recalled, "they [Chamberlain, Hoare and Simon] invoked French newspapers advocating submission to Hitler, the hostility of a section of French opinion, the weakness in aviation, and the overwhelming German forces". Daladier retorted, "at this moment a million Frenchmen pass to the frontiers, without any incident and without weakness of morale. You ask me, without enthusiasm? Do you

136 TNA, CAB 23/95: Cabinet meeting, 24 September 1938.
137 TNA, CAB 23/95: Cabinet meeting, 25 September 1938. It has been argued that Halifax's volte-face at this time had prevented a Cabinet split during this Cabinet meeting (see Roberts The Holy Fox, p.118). While there is much to suggest that the Cabinet was showing signs of division, the potential for serious rupture was always minimal.
138 Harvey Diaries, 24 September 1938, p. 195. In this appraisal, Harvey found some support from Orme Sargent and particularly Vansittart, although the latter was, of course, now sidelined. For more on this subject, see Dockrill, British Establishment Perspectives on France, pp. 103-111.
139 AN Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/10, 2DA3 Dr. 2, sdra: Conférence de Londres, 25-26 September 1938: Notes manuscrites d'Édouard Daladier.
believe, therefore, that it is with enthusiasm that I have asked them to respond to my appeal?" 140

Such a tone was typical of how Daladier approached his conversations with the British Ministers during the Czechoslovakian crisis: expressions of bravado whilst acknowledging that war was undesirable to the majority of the French people. Moreover, Daladier was only too aware that France could do little alone, a fact not lost on the British. "We had to listen to Daladier", Cadogan confided to his diary on 18 September, "voice trembling with carefully modulated emotion, talking of French honour and obligations. But we brought him back to earth before lunch adjournment". 141 However, by 25 September, the situation had changed. Further concessions would be potentially divisive both within the British government and the country at large. As Cadogan noted, "[s]eems Cabinet wouldn't allow P.M. to make any further concessions (and I'm sure country wouldn't)". 142 The British and French thus agreed that one final effort be made to negotiate, through sending Sir Horace Wilson to Berlin. But, if this should fail, France would honour her obligations to the Czechoslovaks, and Britain would subsequently honour her undertakings to the French.

Munich

It was, therefore, Hitler himself who averted the immediate danger by agreeing to the Munich Conference on 28 September. Reactive representations of both British and French opinion responded with relief to news of the Conference. Léon Blum described Munich as "an armful of tinder thrown into the sacred hearth at the very moment the flame had fallen and threatened to go out". In l'Intransigeant, an editorial proclaimed: "if a chance of peace remains, the French and British governments, united by the closest solidarity, have the firm resolution to fulfil their duties, which is to thoroughly exploit this chance". Moreover, it was claimed that it "would be more than absurd that war should take place if it was only about the transfer of several square kilometres of territory". 143 A police report of 29 September further contributed to this tone of representation: "The announcement of a meeting today in Munich of the heads of the French, British, Italian

140 Ibid. For the official records of these conversations, see DBFP, 3rd Series, Vol. II, No. 1093 and No. 1096; DDF, 2nd Série, Tome XI, No. 356 and No. 375.
141 Cadogan Diaries, p. 100.
142 Ibid., Diary entry for 25 September, p. 105.
and German Governments, has produced a strong impression of relaxation amongst the public. Many people place high hopes on this final meeting as regards the maintenance of peace”. Furthermore, it was observed how many who had previously planned to evacuate Paris had now changed their minds.

However, dissent from the far-left prevented unanimity. L’Humanité predictably criticised the absence of the Soviet Union from the Munich conference, and continued to speak of the dishonour and humiliation that would befall France should she abandon Czechoslovakia. The Socialists, meanwhile, remained divided. At a meeting of the SFIO Parliamentary Group on 29 September, Jean Zyromski, representing the Bataille Socialiste fringe of the Party, declared: “it was a dishonour for the French flag to witness our Government accept what had been proposed yesterday”. In response, Paul Faure claimed “that he would rather be treated as a Hitlerite than to make war”. Overall, initial reactive representations of French opinion suggested that a final attempt to safeguard peace was broadly welcomed. Representations of opinion suggested to the French elites that any objection to Munich would be unpopular, and would, furthermore, align them with the extreme-left and thus potentially exacerbate societal divisions.

In Britain, reactive representations were very similar, with the chance of peace afforded by the Munich conference broadly embraced. Even if distrust of Hitler’s intentions and trustworthiness had grown over the previous few days, there was an unmistakable tone of relief in the British press that an agreement still appeared attainable. The Daily Mirror accurately portrayed the overall mood: “We are still in darkness, encouraged by a gleam that may be either a false dawn, or real daylight”. As the chances of peace grew, so too did the realisation that British military weaknesses had contributed to the crisis. “This then, is the nation’s new resolve while its premier works and strives for armistice in Europe”, argued the Evening Standard, “to make ourselves so strong that no Power on earth shall ever again challenge the British peace”. As in France, the left-wing press, such as the Daily Herald and the Daily Worker were bitterly critical of Munich, ostensibly because of the exclusion of the Soviet Union. However, such dissenting voices were undoubtedly in the minority.

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144 APP BA/1685, memo dated 29 September 1938. For more on the nature of French public opinion in the period between Berchtesgaden and Munich, see Lacaze, L’opinion publique française et la crise de Munich, pp. 249-286.


146 Daily Mirror, editorial, 29 September 1938; Evening Standard, editorial, 29 September 1938.

147 See the editorial in the Daily Worker, 29 September 1938, describing “Chamberlain’s efforts to give Hitler what he wants” as a menace not only to the Czechs, “but also to the lives of the British people”.

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Similarities with France are also evident inasmuch as reactive representations reinforced and consolidated residual representations. Anxieties regarding the repercussions of the 'next war' informed the elites that no attempt should be spared to avoid such an eventuality. The way in which the Munich conference was welcomed by the British press did little to erode the belief that British public opinion remained resolutely hostile to war. Moreover, the marginal but vocal pacifist organisations continued to exert influence. Halifax received a letter from the PPU on 22 September stating that “the sponsors of the Peace Pledge Union reaffirm their conviction that nothing can justify a resort to war. […] The last war settled nothing. Another would slaughter its hundreds of millions and still settle nothing”. Although the PPU was not considered reflective of mainstream opinion, the fears they expressed were considered widely held. It would not be inaccurate to suggest that Chamberlain believed he summed up the sentiment of many of his countrymen when, just prior to flying to Munich, he asserted: “When I come back I hope I may be able to say, as Hotspur said in Henry IV, ‘Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety’.”

Of course, public opinion was not the only consideration for foreign policymakers at the time of Munich. For the French elites, a paramount strategic consideration was that standing by the Czechoslovakiains would almost certainly leave France isolated. The system of eastern alliances had already collapsed, with Yugoslavia and Romania neutral, and Poland set to share the spoils of any territorial concessions accepted by Prague. Most crucially, British support for French intervention would not be forthcoming. On top of this, Paris was constrained by her relative military weaknesses in comparison with Germany, particularly in the domain of aviation. This perceived inferiority was further perpetuated by the impression of French financial and industrial shortcomings, contributing to a belief that France was in no position to sustain a great power conflict. Another strategic consideration for both Paris and London was the potential attitude of the Soviet Union. During the summer of 1938, Bonnet became convinced that Soviet support for France in the event of the latter upholding her


149 Chamberlain Papers, NC 15/23: Speech at Heston, prior to leaving for Munich, 29 September 1938.


151 Peter Jackson, France and the Nazi Menace, pp. 269-294.

obligations to Prague would not be forthcoming, concluding that "the Soviet Government can easily find a loop-hole in order to justify her abstention at a time when France already finds herself engaged".153

The British were similarly sceptical regarding Soviet intervention.154 Other considerations also contributed to the British decision to pursue appeasement, including financial constraints, perceptions of opinion in the Dominions, and the traditional British desire to distance themselves from Continental affairs.155 A fusion of these considerations ultimately pointed towards one policy objective for the British elites at the time of Munich: peace must be maintained, irrespective of strategic repercussions. By contrast, strategic repercussions were crucial for Paris. Consequently, Talbot Imlay has described Munich as a disaster for the French and a success for the British.156 Preserving the peace was enough for the British, and representations of public opinion certainly added to this imperative. However, although Munich was a strategic defeat for the French, representations of French public opinion, like British opinion, indicated that preserving peace was the major preoccupation for the French people. It was only in the aftermath of Munich that strategic considerations would come to the fore. Indeed, in Britain as much as France, the extent of the strategic defeat endured at Munich became a major preoccupation for the public, and would thus contribute to the evolution of opinion thereafter.

153 AN, Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/9, 2DA2 Dr. 3: Conversation between Bonnet and Litvinov at Geneva, 11 September 1938.


155 For financial constraints see Shay, British Rearmament in the Thirties, Gustav Schmidt, The Politics and Economics of Appeasement, G. C. Peden, British Rearmament and the Treasury, and idem, Treasury and British Public Policy, chapter 6, pp. 247-302. The concept of 'economic appeasement' also contributed, in which it was believed that the financial imperatives for going to war could be removed by allowing Germany access to vital raw materials and international markets. For a discussion of this, see Bernd-Jürgen Wendt, "Economic Appeasement" – A Crisis Strategy", in Wolfgang K. Mommsen, and Lothar Kettenacker (eds.), The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), pp. 157-182. For more on Dominion opinion, see Ovendale, Appeasement and the English Speaking World, pp. 118-180, and Michael Graham Fry, 'Agents and Structures: The Dominions and the Czechoslovak Crisis, September 1938', Diplomacy & Statecraft, 10: 2 & 3 (1999), pp. 293-341. Reluctance to commit to the Continent is tied up with the British interwar doctrine of 'limited liability'. For discussions of this, see Michael Howard, The Continental Commitment, pp. 96-120, and Brian Bond, Britain’s Military Policy Between the Two World Wars, pp. 209-229. For a discussion of how this perception of continental Europe had an impact on the elites at the time of Munich, see Erik Goldstein, 'Neville Chamberlain, the British Official Mind and the Munich Crisis', Diplomacy & Statecraft, 10: 2 & 3 (1999), pp. 276-292.

156 Imlay, Facing the Second World War, pp. 23-33 & 76-84.
Nonetheless, reactive representations in the immediate aftermath of Munich reinforced the belief that the British and French public remained firmly attached to peace. The most visible and spontaneous were the welcomes received in London and Paris by the respective heads of government. Corbin reported that on his arrival at Heston, Chamberlain was “the object of delirious cheering”, the enthusiasm only intensifying after he spoke of the Anglo-German Agreement and the infamous claim of ‘peace in our time’.\(^{157}\) The German Chargé d’Affaires in London, Theodor Kordt, reported how moved he had been by “the reception which the whole of London gave old Chamberlain in the early hours of the evening”.\(^{158}\) However, not everyone shared the enthusiasm. In his diary, Oliver Harvey somewhat disdainfully noted the “Vast crowds in the streets – hysterical cheers and enthusiasm. P.M. on balcony at Buckingham Palace. But many feel it to be a great humiliation”.\(^{159}\) The situation in Paris echoed that in London, with large crowds gathering to welcome Daladier at Le Bourget and on the streets between the airfield and the Ministry of Defence. The \textit{Times} correspondent recorded Daladier’s “triumphal journey into Paris”, all along the way being “greeted with shouts of ‘Vive Daladier!’, ‘Vive la Paix!’”.\(^{160}\) A police report notes how Paris “welcomed M. Daladier with much enthusiasm on his return from Munich. From the Gare du Nord to the Opéra, the President du Conseil’s car could only with difficulty make its passage, owing to the crowds of people who had come to cheer. No discordant shouts or movements were noted”\(^{161}\). However, Daladier had feared the opposite, and was somewhat taken aback by the reception awaiting him.\(^{162}\)

The French Premier was markedly less optimistic about the immediate future than his British counterpart. Bonnet subsequently informed Lamoureux that Daladier, on the plane returning from Munich, “was sombre and preoccupied. He dreaded the welcome that the people of Paris had in store for him”.\(^{163}\) Chamberlain appeared intoxicated by the Anglo-German Declaration, and thus felt confident enough to assert peace for a generation. Daladier, on the other hand, was more laconic, revealing to the

\(^{157}\) DDF, 2e Série, Tome XI: No. 492: Corbin to Bonnet, 30 September 1938.
\(^{158}\) \textit{Documents on German Foreign Policy} [hereafter DGFP], Series D, Vol. IV: No. 248: Chargé d’Affaires in Great Britain to the Foreign Ministry, 3 October 1938.
\(^{159}\) Harvey Diaries, entry for 30 September 1938, p. 203.
\(^{160}\) \textit{The Times}, Paris correspondent, 1 October 1938.
\(^{162}\) Étienne de Crouy-Chanel, an official at the Quai d’Orsay, reports Daladier as having turned to Léger as the door of his aeroplane opened, and saying: “Ces gens sont fous!” See de Crouy-Chanel, \textit{Alexis Léger ou l’autre visage de Saint-John Perse}, (Paris: Éditions Picollec, 1989), p. 235. He also refers to the more infamous quote attributed to Daladier (“Quels cons!”), but insists that his testimony is accurate.
\(^{163}\) Bibliothèque de Documentation internationale contemporaine [BDIC], Papiers Lucien Lamoureux, ‘Souvenirs politiques’, [hereafter Papiers Lamoureux], Mfm 31.
Chamber: "I shall confess to you that, the other day, arriving at Bourget in the midst of this spontaneous joy of the people of Paris, I could not help but feel anxious. I think that peace is not a completed conquest". 

René Massigli, the Political Director of the Quai d'Orsay was another for whom Munich provoked a mixed reaction. In his memoirs, he recalled telling Bullitt, "If, by next spring, we have 5000 planes, today's acclamations will be excusable; if not ...". Two days after Daladier's return to Le Bourget, Massigli had written: "it is terrible and shameful that a defeat is transformed into a victory". The people of Paris, however, continued to express relief that war had been averted. A police report of 1 October noted that the "contentment demonstrated by the Parisian population following the results of the Munich Conference continues to be given free expression". The police also reported the prevalence of large SFIO posters, proclaiming that the "socialists assert their satisfaction that an agreement has been concluded at the Munich Conference".

Such reactive representations rapidly superseded the perceived hardening of opinion - particularly in Britain - that occurred between Godesberg and Munich. In the immediate aftermath of Munich, relief at having escaped from the abyss naturally and understandably gained prominence. This 'honeymoon period' was amply illustrated by the tone of the press on both sides of the channel. The Petit Parisien claimed "this entente will provoke immense satisfaction in the whole world. The threat of war has lifted. A new era of peace for Europe". For Le Temps, Chamberlain, Daladier and Bonnet, "the most active artisans of this work of reconciliation and appeasement [have] created for themselves the recognition and gratitude of friends of peace and all men of goodwill". Blum in Le Populaire, stated that "there is not a man or woman in France who refuses to pay their rightful tribute of gratitude to M. Neville Chamberlain and M. Édouard Daladier". L'Œuvre meanwhile, described the reception afforded Daladier as "a day of enthusiasm which appears to us comparable to no other in its history", in which the crowd spontaneously gathered "to declare their joy and acknowledgement". Gallus, in l'Intransigeant, celebrated the fact that "four great peoples, powerful and armed, proclaimed their horror of massacre". Others were quick to compliment not only Chamberlain, but also the British people, serving to perpetuate the perception that

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164 Cited in du Réau, Édouard Daladier, p. 255.
166 APP, BA/1685: Report, 'La situation à Paris', 1 October 1938; copy of SFIO poster, dated 1 October 1938, retained in the APP.
167 Petit Parisien, 30 September 1938; Le Temps, editorial, 1 October 1938; Blum, Le Populaire, 1 October 1938; Gallus, l'Intransigeant, 2 October 1938.
opinion demanded close co-operation and friendship with Britain. *La Petite Gironde*, paid homage to “the loyalty and courage, the firmness and obstinate adaptability, the moral grandeur and human sensibility” demonstrated by Chamberlain and the British people throughout the crisis.\(^{168}\)

The press was overwhelmingly favourable to Munich, but the communist attitude prevented unanimity. *L'Humanité* was unsurprisingly hostile: “At Munich, the ‘Four’ decide, in her absence, the fate of Czechoslovakia”. The following day, Gabriel Péri asserted, “we do not join the brigade of acclamations. We shall not write that the Munich Agreement saved the peace. [...] We are convinced that the current threat to millions of men in France and in Europe is more serious today than it was yesterday”.\(^{169}\)

Criticism was not, however, confined to the press of the extreme-left. De Kerillis had long been hostile to French foreign policy, so it would have come as little surprise to the elites that he should be critical of Munich. “[W]e have lost an ally, and more than 30 divisions will be available to be turned against us”, he wrote in *l'Époque*: “If we were incapable of resisting the formidable German menace in the past, when we were stronger, how can we resist the next time when we shall be weaker”. Pertinax, another long-time critic of French foreign policy, voiced a similar argument: “The distribution of military power between, on the one hand, the western powers, and on the other, Germany and Italy, by no means justifies the spirit of panic against which, in Paris, too many politicians were unable to defend themselves”.\(^{170}\) Others identified a moral weakness, even decadence, in explaining why the maintenance of peace was so embraced. Georges Bidault, writing in *l'Aube*, suggested: “The disarray before the threat of war was certainly general in Europe: the fact that it manifests itself at home stronger than elsewhere undoubtedly testifies that the attachment to peace is particularly fervent in France, but also testifies to a flagging in the moral armour of the nation, for which a cure is now quickly going to be needed”.\(^{171}\)

Initial press reactions to Munich were similar in Britain. On the whole, the mainstream press was favourable, reflecting relief and gratitude that the ‘next war’ had been at least temporarily averted. *As the Daily Mirror* noted, “there is a profound sense of public gratitude towards Mr. Chamberlain here”. The *Daily Mail* concurred: “This is the hour of triumph for Neville Chamberlain”. The *Daily Express* celebrated the fact that,

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\(^{168}\) *La Petite Gironde*, 2 October 1938.

\(^{169}\) *L'Humanité*, 30 September 1938; Péri, *l'Humanité*, 1 October 1938.

\(^{170}\) De Kerillis, *l'Époque*, 1 October 1938; Pertinax, *l'Europe nouvelle*, 1 October 1938.

\(^{171}\) Georges Bidault, *l'Aube*, 1 October 1938.
"A war which would have been the most criminal, the most futile, the most destructive that ever insulted the purposes of the Almighty and the intelligence of men has been averted". Another of Beaverbrook's newspapers, the Evening Standard, defended the elites from potential future criticism: "The unanswerable argument in their favour is that this agreement is better than the irreparable catastrophe of war". Even the Daily Telegraph, which was not always so quick to lavish praise on the government, was unfettered in its appreciation: "Peace, even at a price, is a blessing so inestimable that the first and predominant reaction to our release from the torturing fears of the past few days is necessarily one of profound thankfulness. [...] No one can deny him [Chamberlain] the honours of a noble battle nobly won".172

The reaction of the British far left was similar to that of their French counterparts. The Daily Worker was unequivocal in its interpretation of the agreement, publishing a declaration of the Central Committee of the CPGB on 1 October, stating: "The Four-Power Pact of Hitler and Chamberlain, of Mussolini and Daladier, is directed against your future interests even more than it is against the people of Czechoslovakia now". Furthermore, the paper called on the masses to "repudiate Munich and save the peace of the world". Criticism was not, however, confined to the political left. The liberal Manchester Guardian was guarded in its praise: "The instinct of the people's [sic] today to praise (even to the pitches of extravagance) the peacemakers is sound. [However], no one in this country who examines carefully the terms under which Hitler's troops begin their march into Czechoslovakia today can feel other than unhappy. Certainly the Czechs will hardly appreciate Mr. Chamberlain's phrase that it is 'peace with honour'". Similarly, the News Chronicle voiced scepticism as to what the agreement actually entailed, lamenting the fact that "we have purchased a temporary escape at the price of a wholesale betrayal of every principle of courage, justice and honour".173

Nonetheless, there is no denying that the majority of press comment was favourable, and this would certainly have informed Chamberlain's perceptions of British public reaction to Munich. 'Next war' anxiety is inescapable in a reading of a cross-section of both the British and French press in the days immediately following the agreement. Even the Labourite Daily Herald observed that the "one fact that this crisis has made clear above all others is the hatred of war which exists among ordinary people

172 Daily Mirror, 1 October 1938; Daily Mail, editorial, 1 October 1938; Daily Express, editorial, 30 September 1938; Evening Standard, editorial, 30 September 1938; Daily Telegraph, 1 October 1938.
173 Manchester Guardian, 1 October 1938; News Chronicle, 3 October 1938.
everywhere". In terms of how public opinion was perceived by the elites, representations along these lines had been predominant for some time. Reactive representations of opinion after Munich served only to reinforce the existing residual representations. It was unsurprising that public figures in Britain and France were reluctant to criticise an agreement that had prevented a war that the British people were so anxious to avoid.

In the debate in the House of Commons that took place in the immediate aftermath of Munich, the agreement was accepted with much relief and little dissent. As Corbin observed, “the majority [of MPs] confirmed with their cheers Chamberlain’s personal triumph. The opposition appeared somewhat embarrassed”. The most prominent voice of dissent was that of Duff Cooper, who explained his resignation to the House on 3 October. Nonetheless, even he had to acknowledge the overriding popularity of Chamberlain in light of Munich, although suggested that Britain had been better prepared for war than was commonly perceived: “God knows how thankful we all are to have avoided it, but we also know that the people of this country were prepared for it – resolute, prepared, and grimly determined”. However, he felt he could not ignore the fundamental divergence of opinion between himself and Chamberlain. Whilst the latter “believed in addressing Herr Hitler through the language of sweet reasonableness [he himself] believed that he was more open to the language of the mailed fist”. He also expressed his concern vis-à-vis another of the aforementioned residual representations: “For the first time in our history we have committed ourselves to defend a frontier in Central Europe”. Any war that may have erupted during the previous crisis, argued Duff Cooper, would have been waged on principle rather than on behalf of Czechoslovakia. It now appeared that the government was prepared to undertake a continental commitment by guaranteeing the post-Munich Czechoslovak State.

Common to all critiques of the government was acknowledgement of the widespread relief with which Munich was welcomed. The Labour leader, Clement Attlee, whilst describing the Agreement as “one of the greatest diplomatic defeats that this country and France have ever sustained” nonetheless accepted that, for most people, any humiliation was tempered by feelings of relief. The Liberal leader, Sir Archibald Sinclair, recognised that the “hatred of the masses of people in every country for war, which has been the theme of so many of our speeches in this House, was strikingly illustrated in the

174 Daily Herald, editorial, 3 October 1938.
175 MAE, Série Z, Grande-Bretagne, No. 280: Corbin to Bonnet, 2 October 1938.
176 Hansard, (339 H.C. Deb. 5s): Duff Cooper speech to the House of Commons, 3 October 1938 (col. 38).
flood of relief and thanksgiving which has swept over the world since the Munich Conference”. Such widely perceived sentiments of relief are testimony to the strength with which many in Britain, across both minority and majority bodies of opinion, foresaw the implications of the next war with acute anxiety. Many would have shared Chamberlain’s opinion that the real triumph of Munich had been that “four great powers can find it possible to agree on a way of carrying out a difficult and delicate operation by discussion instead of by force of arms, and thereby they have avoided a catastrophe that would have ended civilisation as we have known it”.177 Even Churchill told the House that he did not begrudge the British people “the natural, spontaneous outburst of joy and relief when they learned the hard ordeal would no longer be required of them”. However, he did go on to warn, “This is only the first sip, the first foretaste of a bitter cup which will be proffered to us year by year unless by a supreme recovery of moral health and martial vigour, we arise again and take our stand for freedom as in the olden time”.178

The Parliamentary debate in France was even more one-sided. Phipps reported that “M. Daladier received an enthusiastic welcome in the Chamber today from all sections except the Communists who maintained a respectful silence throughout his statement”.179 As a later Foreign Office minute commented, “its most notable feature was the general absence of criticism of the Govt’s policy, with the obvious exception of the Communists and M. de Kerillis”.180 In his speech, Daladier paid warm tribute to those French men and women who had been mobilised or lived in the frontier areas for refusing to panic and adhering to official instructions. Moreover, he alluded to another residual representation of French opinion, namely that it was bitterly divided, and that such divisions were a root cause of French weakness. For the elites, the orderly and disciplined manner with which the French had responded to the partial mobilisation in September demonstrated that, in times of crisis, the French could still be relied upon to pull together. More impetus in this direction was deemed essential. “A moral transformation is required for this country”, Daladier told the Chamber: “Her unity was

177 Ibid., speeches by Attlee, Sinclair and Chamberlain, in the debate on Munich in the House of Commons, 3 October 1938, (cols. 52, 67 & 45 respectively).
178 Ibid., Churchill’s speech during the Munich debate, 5 October 1938, (col. 373).
179 TNA, FO 371/21600/C11605/55/17: Phipps telegram, 4 October 1938.
180 TNA, FO 371/21600/C12015/55/17: Barclay minute, 12 October 1938.
recovered, during the previous few days, around her mobiliised forces. My dear friends, let us not allow it to crumble in vain quarrels and subsidiary polemics". 181

Despite this call for greater unity, there was already a considerable degree of unanimity in the manner in which the French Chamber accepted the Munich accords. As both Phipps and the Foreign Office observed, opposition was limited. The communists provided the primary voice of dissent, calling on the French people to oppose the Munich settlement. Gabriel Péri told the Chamber, "It is not the first time in their History that our people will have corrected the weaknesses of governments. You [Daladier] have signed defeat on the mutilated body of a free people. It is against you that we shall win the fight for peace". For de Kerillis, the fact that relief was the predominant reaction to Munich had to be acknowledged, although he suggested that it had, to an extent, been engineered by the authorities: "I did not want war, which horrifies me, as much as it horrifies all of you. [...] God knows I understand the shouts of joy from a people who had escaped the scourge of war. However, I would have liked the official radio not to have attempted to provoke these demonstrations and effusions". Blum also recognised that the majority of the population were thankful for the reprieve: "The French people feel an immense elation to have avoided a war that had been so close". 182

The initial representations that informed and influenced elite perceptions of public opinion were thus dominated by the sense that both the British and French public were relieved to have avoided war, and grateful to the statesmen who had achieved it. Chamberlain in particular was justified in believing that his popularity had reached unprecedented levels. Indeed, there was speculation that he might call a General Election in order to capitalise on it. Corbin reported that, given "the current state of spirits and the participation of women voters, an election would confirm the triumph of Chamberlain and place the opposition in a very delicate situation". 183 In such an assessment, Corbin, who usually provided well-balanced reports, sensitive to dissenting

181 Journal Officiel de la République Française, Débats et comptes-rendus, chambre des députés (hereafter JO), séance du 4 octobre 1938: Daladier speech to the Chamber of Deputies, 4 October 1938.
182 Ibid., speeches of Gabriel Péri, Henri de Kérillis and Léon Blum, during the Munich debate in the Chambre des Députés, 4 October 1938.
183 MAE, Série Z, Grande-Bretagne, No. 280: Corbin to Bonnet, 2 October 1938. Corbin was no doubt aware that women tended to show more enthusiasm for the policy of appeasement than men, and were arguably more anxious as regards another war. Consequently, Chamberlain could rely on winning a considerable share of women's votes. However, the subsequent by-elections in the autumn of 1938, particularly Bridgewater, did not augur well for Chamberlain. Indeed, the Conservative Research Department suggested that foreign policy was proving too divisive to risk a General Election, essentially quashing any hopes that Chamberlain might have had in this regard. See Inlay, Facing the Second World War, pp. 190-191.
voices, reflected the pervasiveness of the post-Munich representation of relief and gratitude to the Prime Minister. Moreover, Chamberlain's apparent popularity was not confined to Great Britain. Reports from both France and Germany suggested that his stature in those countries was just as high, if not higher than at home. Maurice Hankey, on a visit to Paris, had reported that the "general impression was one of intense relief and gratitude to the British Government and the Prime Minister in particular". The French press also contributed to this perception. L'Œuvre asked its readers to contribute towards purchasing a gift for Mrs Chamberlain, whilst Paris-Soir launched a campaign to buy a house for the Chamberlains in France. As regards Germany, a report from the British Consul in Dresden suggested that the public "are certainly profoundly thankful at being saved from war but see no cause for thanking any one but Mr Chamberlain". The British Consul at Munich reported that "he [Chamberlain] has gained a place in their hearts", whilst a report from Hamburg noted that the "part played by the Prime Minister in preserving peace is gratefully recognised".

Although there was also acknowledgement of the role played by Daladier, the French premier was the subject of more frequent and vocal far-left criticism than his British counterpart. Furthermore, Daladier's preoccupation with far-left opinion inevitably resulted in a somewhat skewed perception of overall French opinion, considerably more divided and hostile than might actually have been true. The residual representation of an ideologically polarised France lingered, as did the more recent social troubles regarding the 40-hour law and the strikes during the previous summer. Communist opposition to Munich appeared to demonstrate that the Popular Front was no longer tenable. The French people awaited Daladier's next move, uncertain as to the future direction of both his domestic and foreign policy. Along with widespread relief at maintaining peace was a widespread recognition that France herself was lacking both the military and moral fortitude for war. Lack of air raid protection, the weakness of the French air force, combined with the prevailing perception of the French public being acutely anxious as regards the 'next war' appeared to demand that further steps be taken towards a fundamental recovery. This was abundantly reflected in the moderate French

184 TNA, FO 371/21600/C11641/55/17: Memorandum by Sir Maurice Hankey on impressions in Paris, 1-3 October 1938, forwarded to the Foreign Office by Phipps on 4 October.

185 TNA, FO 371/21665/C12202/62/18: Report from the British Consul in Dresden (F. M. Shepherd), on public opinion in Saxony during the crisis, 5 October 1938.

press. The *Petit Parisien* stated simply: "[France] awaits a plan of redressement. She waits to be spoken to clearly".  

Dominant 'residual' representations of British and French public opinion contributed to the decision to appease Nazi Germany at Munich. Specifically, widespread anxieties regarding the potential consequences of the 'next war' preyed heavily, inducing the policymaking elites in London and Paris to perceive opinion as hostile to the notion of going to war on behalf of Czechoslovakia. Although, on his return to Paris, Daladier might have betrayed some doubts about his reading of public opinion, the reception he received appeared to demonstrate that such a perception was astute. Furthermore, the initial reactive representations after Munich reinforced the residuals. Relief and gratitude were freely expressed, suggesting that the British and French public supported the Munich accords, and were eternally grateful to the British and French politicians who had grasped the flower of peace. However, other less vocal reactive representations were also in evidence. Above all, Munich had cruelly exposed the military deficiencies of the Western democracies, triggering a growing public clamour that such shortcomings be rectified. For many, on both sides of the channel, the lesson to be learnt from Munich was that it should not happen again. If Britain and France were stronger, it would be possible to resist the dictators.

The dominant reactive representations immediately after Munich would thus prove to be ephemeral, both in France and in Britain. The appeasement of Hitler was far from unanimously popular; the escape from an impending war was. The residual representation of 'next war' anxiety may have contributed to the signing of the Munich accords, and may have been reinforced by the initial reactive representations, but opinion remained fickle, difficult to grasp, and liable to fluctuation. As the repercussions of Munich were digested, and the lessons of the crisis analysed, both British and French opinion would change, moving away from many of the residual representations that had formed the basis of elite understanding of opinion to date. The question was, therefore, how the respective elites would react and respond to such transition.

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187 *Petit Parisien*, 4 October 1938.
Munich appeared to confirm that a profound war anxiety pervaded the British and French populations. War had been avoided, and reactive representations indicated that public opinion was enormously relieved and grateful. However, residual representations were fluid, and soon began to evolve. Nonetheless, the dominant representations did not dissipate overnight. Indeed, the transition was gradual, and depended largely on individual political convictions. This was particularly the case in France, where the residual representations of ideological polarisation continued to resonate after Munich. However, towards the end of 1938, foreign affairs provided a greater focus of unity in France, papering over the cracks of internal division and strife. Subsequently, the Daladier government would not only reject a policy of retreat from Eastern and Central Europe, but also seek to take a lead in directing the Franco-British entente. Encouraged by representations of a more united French public opinion, the French elites also perceived an evolution in British opinion, indicative of a growing disillusionment with appeasement. A fusion of such perceptions persuaded the Daladier government to adopt a firmer foreign policy, and push London towards an analogous position.

For the British elites, however, reactive representations of British public opinion struggled to overcome the residuals. The joy with which Munich was received strengthened Chamberlain's conviction that appeasement was popular with the British public. Moreover, although opinion was evolving, not all reactive representations were unfavourable to the Prime Minister's policy, particularly those emanating from the political right. However, Chamberlain's complacency was not universally shared amongst the elite. Within the Foreign Office, it was recognised that opinion was not as enamoured with Munich as the initial reactive representations suggested. Furthermore, the French drift towards a firmer policy put London under pressure to follow suit, as British perceptions of French opinion placed much emphasis on the imperative of close Franco-British co-operation. Indeed, the French deliberately played upon British perceptions, fostering the fear that a failure on the part of London to fully commit to the Franco-British entente might result in French opinion lapsing into isolationism and defeatism, leaving Britain to face the German threat alone. Through the autumn of 1938, growing public disillusionment with Munich coupled with French scaremongering forced the British elites to question the efficacy of appeasement, and to re-evaluate Britain's commitments to France.
After the Honeymoon

In France, the initial fervour that welcomed the maintenance of peace appeared to most contemporary observers as heartfelt, genuine, and thoroughly understandable. Moreover, such representations were generally projected onto the wider ‘mainstream’ section of opinion, resulting in the usually more voluble extremist opinions being superseded by expressions of relief and gratitude. Confirmation of this widespread sentiment was provided by the newspaper L'Œuvre, which noted that of the letters they had received from the public on the issue of Munich, 4,555 approved the agreement with only 193 voicing dissent.¹ The overriding representation of opinion in the immediate aftermath of Munich was relief that war had been averted, largely reinforcing the residual representation of a society so infused with pacifist sentiment that recourse to war was simply unpalatable.

The situation in Britain was strikingly similar. The cheering crowds and positive press appeared to vindicate Chamberlain's policy. As in France, the immediate reactive representations endorsed the residual representation of ‘next war’ anxiety. For Chamberlain, who fervently believed in his mission to preserve the peace, such instant adulation (both in Britain and overseas) went to his head. As D. C. Watt has observed, he had “returned from Munich to the kind of triumph that even successful politicians can only dream of. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that even he was carried away by it”.² Indeed, such was the extent of the triumph, that what little criticism there was could easily be dismissed as a minority opinion contrary to the general sentiment of the British public. Furthermore, Chamberlain could also boast of obtaining Hitler's signature on a piece of paper promising peace for a generation. In France, the Anglo-German Agreement would provide Bonnet with the impetus and inspiration to seek an equivalent agreement between Paris and Berlin; in Britain, it would prove to be the focus of the first signs that public appetite for appeasement was on the wane.

For the British elites, the dominant representations of public opinion, at least those provided by the press, remained favourable to Chamberlain and appeasement. The Daily Express rejected the arguments of dissident conservatives, notably Churchill, Eden,

¹ L'Oeuvre, 4 October 1938.
² D. C. Watt, How War Came, p. 82.
Cranborne and Duff Cooper: “They are wrong. Mr. Chamberlain is right”. The Daily Mail felt confident enough to assert that Chamberlain “emerges from these four days of debate as a dominating national figure, an undisputed leader to whom our people turn with a trust that equals their gratitude”. Even newspapers that would later become associated with an anti-appeasement line remained faithful to the Prime Minister in the aftermath of Munich. “Public opinion”, argued the Daily Telegraph, “whatever its reserves as to the soundness of the policy pursued, is unanimous in recognising the services rendered by the head of the Government in a supremely critical hour”. Despite such support, the signs that dissenting voices - either in the press or in the political milieu - were influencing the elites become more prominent. Cadogan betrayed his uncertainty in a diary entry on 9 October: “tried my hand at a skeleton draft of a paper on future policy. But it’s very difficult, as I don’t know what it’s to be. I only know the one we have followed is wrong”.

Despite general support for the policy pursued, the British press began to question Britain’s military capacity to confront the dictatorships. More pertinently, the residual fear of aerial bombardment resurfaced, resulting in an almost unanimous clamour in the press for enhanced measures of passive defence. Initially, the bare fact that conflict had been avoided was cause for celebration. Garvin, in the Observer, summed up the sentiments of many, suggesting that a war over the Czechoslovak issue would have been folly: “While Britain was being bombed Czecho-Slovakia would have been irrevocably crushed. Including women and children – especially here where they are most exposed – millions and millions would have died on account of a racial medley in Central Europe”. This latent war-anxiety was considered by many as the ultimate justification for Chamberlain’s policy. Lord Rothermere warned Churchill that “Neville Chamberlain’s reputation will be undimmed so long as he is Prime Minister and any member of his Party who challenges that fact may suffer a complete eclipse”. The main reason for his popularity was, in Rothermere’s opinion, because the “public is so terrified of being bombed that they will support anyone who keeps them out of war”.

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4 Daily Mail, editorial, 7 October 1938.
5 Daily Telegraph, editorial, 7 October 1938.
6 Cadogan Diaries, entry for 9 October 1938, p. 114 (Original emphasis).
7 The Observer, 9 October 1938.
Given the largely positive press, Chamberlain can be forgiven for believing that his popularity had reached new heights in the days following Munich. Moreover, such was the nature of Conservative Party loyalty, that criticism from within was muted, with private reservations rarely voiced in public. Chamberlain felt so moved as to comment: "Perhaps if I were differently constituted I might just sit about in this popularity - while it lasted". Despite Chamberlain’s confidence, signs began to emerge that his popularity might prove ephemeral. As the lessons of Munich were digested, a clear differentiation was made between, on the one hand, the welcomed avoidance of war and, on the other, the Anglo-German declaration. The dominant representation of opinion was, therefore, relief that war had been averted, rather than a widespread conviction that Hitler’s word could be relied upon. British opinion harboured few illusions that peace was assured for a generation. Consequently, opinion demanded that Britain be better prepared for any future confrontation with the dictators.

In this regard, two central themes emerged: firstly, the issue of ARP; secondly, the question of rearmament. Having so nearly tumbled into war, the residual fear and anxiety concerning enemy bombing became prominent. Subsequently, the need to improve ARP was vital. Coupled with this was a more general appraisal of the overall state of Britain’s armed forces, the consensus emerging that British and French inadequacies had contributed to the decisions taken during the September crisis. Rearmament became a pressing issue, despite the obvious contradiction between proclaiming ‘peace for a generation’ whilst simultaneously equipping the country for future conflict. The dominant representation of opinion suggested an almost unanimous demand to prepare the country for potential confrontation with the Dictators. Even the Labour opposition, traditionally opposed to rearmament, was reluctant to argue to the contrary, although it continued to criticise the exclusion of the Soviet Union from the Munich Conference. “Defence is necessary”, argued the Daily Herald, “but a constructive policy for peace is more necessary still”. For the British left, collective security, inclusive of the Soviet Union, would constitute such a constructive policy: “therein lies the only true defence against war”.

A greater dispute between left and right would concern another facet of defence policy pushed onto the agenda after Munich: the issue of National Service. The extent of

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9 Crowson, Facing Fascism, p. 96.
10 Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1072: Neville to Hilda, 15 October 1938.
11 For example, the Daily Mirror on 3 October dismissed the Anglo-German Declaration as a "scrap of paper", expressing the opinion that the Nazi signature was practically worthless.
British military shortcomings exposed by the recent crisis appeared to have generated a greater readiness to serve than had been evident hitherto. On 12 October, the Daily Mail launched a ballot on the subject, asking readers to state whether or not they were in favour of a voluntary or compulsory system of National Service. Whilst not expressing an opinion either way, the newspaper hoped that the result might “be a useful guide to the Government in planning how best to direct into the proper channels the widespread desire for service”. Such a “widespread desire” could be interpreted as a shift away from the residual notion of war-anxiety, towards a stance more receptive to resistance. However, it was far from unanimous. As one letter to the Daily Mail of 15 October neatly summarised, “No doubt it is those with no sons who want it, but I can assure you that we British mothers don’t want to see our boys’ freedom taken away”. Moreover, the result of the ballot suggests that enthusiasm for a compulsory system ebbed away as international tensions eased. On the first day of the ballot, six to one favoured compulsion; by day ten, it was evens.

Nonetheless, the public had undoubtedly been awakened to Britain’s military shortcomings and was prepared to contribute to the effort of rectifying them. Publicly, Cabinet members did not attempt to conceal military deficiencies. In the post-Munich Commons debate, Sir Thomas Inskip stated that “nobody who has seen this most valuable test of our arrangements can be unaware of the fact that there have been gaps, serious gaps, and defects which must be remedied in our preparations”. Of course, it could be argued that public references to such shortcomings helped legitimise the policy pursued at Munich, and began to prepare the British public for the sacrifices that would subsequently be demanded of them in the name of rearmament. Nevertheless, the elites perceived a growing willingness among the British people to comply. As Sir John Simon, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, suggested to the Commons, “[t]here has been an awakening on our own side. Our people have been roused as never before to the danger. There is a realisation of the extent of the sacrifice that may be made for Britain”.

Early opinion polls supported the representations of opinion furnished by the press. A poll immediately after Munich revealed that 57% were satisfied with Chamberlain’s premiership, 33% dissatisfied, and 10% expressing no opinion. The

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13 Daily Mail, 12 October 1938 and 13 October 1938.
14 The results of the ballot were published in the Daily Mail on 28 October 1938.
*News Chronicle* applied an anti-Chamberlain spin. Although acknowledging that a majority remained favourable, it was noted that “there is no widespread faith or belief that 'peace for our time' is assured”. Although opinion on Chamberlain was divided, the question regarding a National Register indicated greater unanimity, reinforcing the reactive representations in the press. The poll revealed that 78% of respondents were in favour a Register being drawn up immediately.\(^8\) Furthermore, 72% expressed themselves favourable to increased defence expenditure, thus underlining the dominant reactive representation regarding the urgent need to rectify British military shortcomings. As the relief at avoiding war subsided, so recognition grew that Britain must be better prepared to meet future crises. The extent to which the Anglo-German Agreement was a guarantee of permanent peace was put in doubt, increasing the need to be better prepared than hitherto. Reactive representations of opinion demanded that Britain be stronger.

The French elites perceived British public opinion in similar terms. Indications that the peace secured at Munich would be a bitter pill for the British public to swallow soon challenged the representations of gratitude and relief that had dominated the immediate post-Munich period. Within a week of Munich, Corbin reported that British public opinion was considerably more difficult to assess. The press, and not simply opposition papers, were becoming more reflective as the euphoria died down. “On the whole”, reported Corbin, “the tone of the editorials indicates a certain fatigue, be it in the approval of Chamberlain’s policy, or in the critiques. This testifies to the disarray in which the Munich Agreement has left opinion”.\(^9\) Such an assertion is not surprising given the general tone of the British press in the fortnight following Munich. Expressions of enthusiasm and relief gave way to recognition of the deficiencies that had necessitated a compromise solution. The problems that lay ahead were duly noted, as the press presented a sober assessment of the current European situation. Corbin also noted how the public, press, and Parliament alike, tended to distinguish between the saved peace and the Anglo-German declaration, expressing surprise that the latter “had such little impact in Britain”.\(^9\) In sum, suggested Corbin, British public opinion was not as unanimously behind the government as initial representations suggested.

\(^8\) *News Chronicle*, 19 October 1938. See the *News Chronicle* of 15 October 1938 for the initial announcement that several of the results of the BIPO polls were to be published thereafter.

\(^9\) MAE, Série Z, Grande-Bretagne, No. 280: Corbin to Bonnet, 7 October 1938.
Another indicator of national feeling was the BIPO polls, which Corbin scrutinised in his reports to the Quai d'Orsay. However, Corbin treated the results with caution: "It is obvious that despite of the intelligence and honesty of the enquirers, surveys of this nature carry a degree of arbitrariness and must, therefore, be received with prudence".\(^{20}\) Despite his reservations, Corbin interpreted the results as confirmation "that the Prime Minister's policy continues to be approved by the majority of the country".\(^{21}\) Furthermore, the questions relating to British defence clearly demonstrated a public desire to augment the nation's capacity for war. For Corbin, such sentiment transcended traditional political allegiances, suggesting that once lessons of Munich were digested, "opinion and the press have begun to sense some malaise". Above all, he continued, it was now apparent that the British people wished to see appeasement succeed "in parallel to the organisation of the forces and resources of the country".\(^{22}\) For Paris, such representations of British opinion encouraged them to exert more pressure on London to increase British military commitment to the entente. With British public opinion seemingly more amenable to an effort in this respect, the coming weeks would see French attempts intensify to convince the British government to adopt a form of conscription.

Meanwhile, reactive representations of French opinion had consistently indicated to the French elites that a strengthening of the Franco-British entente was considered desirable. However, they also continued to be dominated by domestic political polarisation, hardly encouraging London to enhance their commitment to the French. After Munich, the dominant topic in the French press was the extent to which the recent crisis had damaged the Popular Front.\(^{23}\) The communists had, of course, voted against the government in the debate in the French Chamber, and their attacks on governmental policy continued relentlessly in the pages of l'\textit{Humanité}. Following the Chamber debate, Jacques Duclos claimed: "These parliamentary votes do not translate the amplitude of popular protest, both in our country and in Britain".\(^{24}\) The French communists

\(^{20}\) MAE, Série Z, No. 280, Grande-Bretagne, octobre 1938: Corbin to Bonnet, 24 October 1938. On the issue of American opinion polling, see DDF, Tome XII, No. 262: Saint-Quentin to Bonnet, 3 November 1938.


\(^{22}\) MAE, Série Z, Grande-Bretagne, No. 280: Corbin to Bonnet, 31 October 1938.

\(^{23}\) Berstein suggests that "The first political exploitation of Munich was the rupture with the Communists, prelude to a dissolution of the Popular Front", \textit{Histoire du Parti Radical}, tome II, p. 551.

\(^{24}\) l'\textit{Humanité}, 7 October 1938.
invariably portrayed Munich as a betrayal, the result of a foreign policy sympathetic to
fascism, motivated by the latent anti-bolshevism of the French elites. On the other side
of the coin, certain sections of the conservative French press seized the opportunity to
attack the communists, portraying them as warmongers, enslaved by the capricious
whims of Moscow.  

For the right, the previous influence of the communists had been damaging. "All
direction of Foreign Affairs" suggested the *Journal des débats*, "has been compromised and
distorted by the alliance of the Radicals and Marxists".  

Although the rupture with the communists is indisputable, and, with hindsight, marked the demise of the Popular
Front, this was not so obvious at the time. For the communists themselves, as well as
the Socialists and Radicals, the fate of the Popular Front was a pressing issue, and by no
means clear-cut. Léon Blum predictably suggested that, "the position taken vis-à-vis the
Munich Agreements will not [...] be held as a sign of fidelity or infidelity to the
engagements of the Front populaire".  

In contrast, *Le Temps* declared that in "the
disarray of the parties, clearly not yet adapted to a completely new situation, only one fact
appears clear: the majority of 1936 no longer exists".  

Right wing attacks on the
communists, coupled with the persistent attachment to the Front of many Socialists and
left-leaning Radicals, ensured that the future remained unclear. Furthermore, the
prevailence of this debate within the French press ensured that the issue of foreign policy,
having been the focus of attention during the September crisis, was once more subsumed
by the residual representation of domestic political squabbling.

However, despite the uncertainties regarding the Popular Front, it was another
domestic political issue that took precedence on the post-Munich agenda, just as it had
done in Britain. This concerned the state of French defences, and the extent to which
French weaknesses had been pivotal in the decision to appease Germany. Military
considerations had certainly been foremost in Daladier's mind during the Czech crisis,
particularly aerial deficiencies. A note on air power by General Vuillemin, Chief of the
French Air Staff, of 26 September, was described by Daladier as "more pessimistic than
normal".  

Such concerns undoubtedly influenced French policy, and were subsequently
the subject of press discussion. Léon Blum was adamant that during the frantic

26 *Journal des débats, politiques et littéraires*, editorial, 13 October 1938.
28 *Le Temps*, editorial, 19 October 1938.
29 AN, Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/32, 4DA5, Dr. 5, sdre: Note on a letter from Vuillemin of 26 September
1938. See also du Réau, *Édouard Daladier*, pp. 251-253, Peter Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, pp. 268-
diplomacy of the previous weeks, "the comparative reports on military aviation played a considerable role". Furthermore, the issue of passive defence also became prominent. The fact that war had come so close brought home to the French public the need to be adequately protected from the inevitable peril of aerial bombardment. Sections of the French press did not hesitate to campaign for French aerial deficiencies to be immediately rectified. On 15 October, l'Intransigent carried the headline: "Planes! planes! Is France resigned to die or does she have the will to live?" This campaign would continue for the next week, vigorously urging the necessity of augmenting French air power.

In sum, the French press became preoccupied with domestic issues in the weeks following Munich, whether French rearmament or the future of the Popular Front. In terms of foreign policy, the sentiment of French public opinion is significantly more difficult to assess. The conventional wisdom is that opinion was largely divided between the munichois and the antimunichois; that is, between those favourable to the policy of appeasement and those who believed that a firmer stance should be adopted towards the European dictatorships. Generally, the political right was considered pro-Munich whilst the left, at least the more extreme-left, was considered anti-Munich. Such a demarcation was inevitable, given the vocal grievances of the communists. However, as long as opposition could principally be associated with the more extreme left, it was possible for the elites to dismiss it as a minority sentiment. In terms of the majority category of opinion, it would have been straightforward to assume that simply avoiding the cataclysm of war was sufficient to win their gratitude and support. Indeed, the contemporary press and the Parliamentary vote subsequently reinforced this dominant representation.

However, early opinion polls conducted by the IFOP suggest that opposition was far more widespread. In October 1938 when asked "Do you approve of the Munich Agreement?" 57% of respondents said yes, 37% no, with 6% electing to abstain. As Christel Peyrefitte has observed, the 57% in favour certainly fails to correspond with the 87.5% in the Chamber. Furthermore, the 37% answering 'no' represents "more than one in three Frenchmen, well exceeding the support base of the Communist Party".

30 Le Populaire, 17 October 1938.
31 See l'Intransigent, 15-22 October 1938.
32 To a large extent, this categorisation of opinion is based upon the reactions of the French press to the Munich Agreement. See Lacaze, L'opinion publique française et la crise de Munich, pp. 299-301, and Charles Micaud, The French Right and Nazi Germany, p. 180 and passim.
33 Peyrefitte, 'Les premiers sondages d'opinion', p. 266.
However, the influence of opinion polls on the policymaking elites is questionable. No reference to the polls can be found within the official or personal papers consulted for this dissertation, and the fact that the results were not published in any newspaper raises severe doubts as to whether these polls were acknowledged at all.34

However, the press was certainly considered to provide an accurate reflection of public opinion, and by the end of October, domestic issues transcended foreign affairs as the major preoccupation. This was clearly illustrated by the debate concerning the Popular Front, an issue at the forefront of the Radical Party Congress in Marseilles between 27–29 October. The ratification of Daladier’s policies confirmed the rupture between the Radicals and the communists, essentially sounding the death knell for the Rassemblement populaire.35 For Daladier, the Congress had afforded him an opportunity to do just this. His distrust of the communists had led him to distance himself from them since becoming Premier in April.36 The rupture over Munich merely confirmed this separation, allowing the right wing of the Radical Party to extricate themselves conclusively from the Popular Front.

The situation seemed particularly opportune for a shift to the right as the Socialists were divided between the blumistes and the fauristes, failing to offer a united opposition regarding foreign policy. The National Council of the Socialist Party met on the 5th and 6th November, with Phipps reporting “wide divergences of view[s]”, between the pro-Munich position of the fauristes and the opposition of the Bataille Socialiste led by Zyromski. Blum, noted Phipps, “threw all his weight in favour of party unity”, and argued in favour of rearmament. “To avoid war”, Blum was quoted as saying, “she [France] must be prepared to run the risk of war”.37 Despite Blum’s firmness, the divisions within the SFIO meant that the socialists were in no position to present a united opposition to the Daladier government. Indeed, it was to Daladier that many looked to provide the firm and decisive leadership necessary to unite the nation. The Journal des débats asked if Daladier could be the ‘strong man’ that France required. If he

34 See Jon Cowans, “Fear and Loathing in Paris”, p. 75.
36 Du Réau, Édouard Daladier, pp. 290-292.
37 TNA, FO 371/21600/C13554/55/17: Phipps to Halifax, 7 November 1938. See also Richard Gombin, “Socialisme et pacifisme”, in Rémond & Bourdin (eds.), La France et les Français, pp. 253-255. As B. D. Graham has observed, the divisions between the blumistes and fauristes continued to rage, with the latter favouring peaceful coexistence with the dictatorships, whilst the former were increasingly inclined towards a policy of firmness and resistance. Choice and Democratic Order: The French Socialist Party, 1937-1950, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 224-227.
was not, it was suggested, "his efforts will be in vain, and his government will be ephemeral".  

Although representations of domestic political schisms were also noted in London, British elite perceptions of French opinion were dominated by two other themes. Firstly, the relief and gratitude of the French people for having been spared another war, reinforcing the residual representation of a pacifist infused society. Secondly, the desire for the closest Franco-British cooperation coupled with discontent at the degree of military support the British were currently prepared to offer in the event of war. Regarding the first theme, representations were in plentiful supply. Not only had the majority of the French press lavished praise on the British Prime Minister, but many French towns renamed streets in his honour, umbrellas were referred to as ‘mon Chamberlain’, and a new dance, ‘Le Chamberlain’, swept Paris, inevitably featuring the ubiquitous umbrella.

Reports from Paris reinforced this impression. In early October, Phipps sent the Foreign Office a memorandum by Sir Maurice Hankey, written whilst he was in Paris on official business regarding his duties as a Director of the Suez Canal Board. Hankey suggested that Chamberlain’s policies were enthusiastically welcomed by the French, noting that the “general impression was one of intense relief and gratitude to the British Government in general and the Prime Minister in particular”. Importantly, however, Hankey considered it necessary to add the caveat: “The majority went on to say that, all the same, they felt a deep sense of humiliation, especially in view of the French engagements to Czechoslovakia”. It is necessary to note that Hankey’s observations about French opinion were primarily based upon discussions with the higher echelons of French society, so cannot be taken as representative of wider French opinion.

Nonetheless, gauging opinion in this manner was by no means atypical of both the British and French political elites, who inevitably based much of their perceptions of opinion on such conversations. Similarly, conversations with friends and colleagues, and people who mingled in the same social circles were crucial. Moreover, such perceptions

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38 Journal des débats, politiques et littéraires, 22 October 1938.
41 For example, Hankey wrote of a conversation he had had with “a good class Frenchman [who was] lavish with praise to Chamberlain for finding the way to peace over the German-Czech affair, and declared that all France, except for the Communists, who merely want an excuse to make trouble, is the same. That feeling is widespread among all whom I have met so far”. (See Hankey’s diary entry of 2 October 1938, in the Churchill Archives Centre [hereafter CAC], Hankey Papers, HNKY 1/8).
of French opinion were reinforced from elsewhere. The British Consul in Bordeaux portrayed post-Munich opinion as being dominated by "the utmost relief and thankfulness", culminating in the "unstinted thanks of practically everybody for the wonderful efforts made by the Prime Minister".\(^{42}\) Such sentiments were repeated in the reports from British Consuls elsewhere in France, leading one Foreign Office official to observe that, "opinion in the Bordeaux district was probably fairly typical of French provincial reactions".\(^{43}\)

However, London was also influenced by reports suggesting that French opinion was perpetually troubled by the lack of British commitment to the entente. Indeed, the French were not shy to cite French public opinion in order to coerce Britain to take action vis-à-vis national service. General Dentz, the Deputy Chief of the French General Staff, in conversation with the British military attaché, Colonel Fraser, was unequivocal: "take care of French public opinion. France does not intend to allow Britain to fight her battles with French soldiers". In relaying this conversation to Phipps, Fraser noted that Dentz "evidently felt very strongly on this point".\(^{44}\) Such opinions were neither isolated nor new, but they did have the effect of accentuating British fears that many in France favoured a rapprochement with Germany, leaving Britain isolated. As a Foreign Office minute noted, "there are certainly circles in France who would like to reach agreement with Germany & who feel that such agreement would be easy to obtain today, now that France has been driven out of Central Europe".\(^{45}\)

Evidently, the British were anxious to avoid a French retreat into defeatist isolationism. Consequently, London was forced to re-evaluate the pros and cons of implementing compulsory national service. By introducing conscription, the British could feasibly increase the size of an Expeditionary Force for despatch to the continent, thus alleviating many French public anxieties. Throughout the summer of 1938, the British had perceived French opinion to be increasingly anxious to attain a greater commitment from Great Britain, to the extent that this had become a residual representation. At the same time, the British perceived French opinion as desperate to avoid another war, laden with pacifism, bordering on defeatism. Without assurances of British support, this latter tendency would be accentuated. Indeed, the French played

\(^{42}\) TNA, FO 371/21613/C12852/1050/17: Report from the British Consul in Bordeaux, 13 October 1938.

\(^{43}\) Ibid, Foreign Office minute by Barclay, 27 October 1938. See also the Consul reports from Mentone (12 October 1938), Nice (12 October 1938), and Cannes (13 October 1938), all in the same file at TNA.

\(^{44}\) TNA, FO 371/21785/C12144/11169/18: Memorandum by Colonel Fraser, on a conversation with General Dentz, 12 October 1938.

\(^{45}\) TNA, FO 371/21785/C12144/11169/18: Mallet minute, 19 October 1938.
upon such British perceptions, invoking the spectre of French defeatism in order to persuade London into taking a measure intended to satisfy French public demand.

Although the French government and military sought to perpetuate such British perceptions of their public opinion, the French press offered little comment on the subject of British military commitment, preoccupied as they were with domestic politics and the need for a French redressement. A rare example of press interest on British military commitment came from the PPF's *La Liberte*, which, just prior to Munich, merged the two in their prescription for future policy: “Our answer to Hitler’s imperialism must be: work and discipline in France, conscription in Great Britain”.66 Another compelling argument in favour of conscription was the psychological impact it would have on the dictatorships. The French already possessed evidence that the current press interest in Britain was having an effect. François-Poncet reported to Paris that “it is not without astonishment, nor a hint of worry, that they [the German government] note that the British, previously so resistant to any idea of obligatory service, now appear rather favourable”.47 Consequently, in spite of the absence of French press commentary on this issue, the French pressure was having a palpable impact on the Foreign Office. Orme Sargent suggested that, “we must be prepared for some time to come for French policy to take on a definite isolationist tinge”. Consequently, Halifax considered it necessary to warn: “we must certainly be careful to keep the French very close”.48

Whilst perceptions of French opinion were forcing many in London to re-evaluate British commitment to the Franco-British entente, the military weaknesses of her ally were also observed. In order for Britain to be stronger, it was recognised that France must be better prepared. Many in Britain had been impressed by the partial mobilisation of the French Army during the September crisis. Furthermore, there was much faith in both the French Army and the impregnability of the Maginot Line. However, even the most optimistic accounts of French military capabilities recognised the weakness of the French air force. On 4 October 1938, Phipps suggested to London that, “His Majesty’s Government should put continuous pressure on the French Government to set the French defences in order”.49 Halifax responded that, for fear of being seen to meddle in French internal politics, such attempts at coercion should be subtle and informal, although: “If a favourable opportunity presented itself for you to

47 DDF, 2ème Série, tome XII, No. 110: François Poncet to Bonnet, 13 October 1938.
49 TNA, FO 371/21600/C11641/55/17: Phipps to Halifax, 4 October 1938.
speak to Daladier or Bonnet themselves, preferably the former, on these lines, I think it would be very desirable for you to make the most of it."

The time was certainly considered ripe for some form of pressure to be exerted in this direction. The reports from Phipps and Hankey, conveying the thoughts of French military officials such as Weygand and Dentz, suggested to the Foreign Office that there was in France, "unanimity of opinion that France was totally unready for war". Therefore, towards the end of October, there existed a situation where, on the one hand, the French were urging Britain to provide a greater military commitment to Continental Europe, and on the other, the British exerting pressure on the French government to redress their military deficiencies. This two-way pressure was to be a recurrent theme in Franco-British relations for several months to come.

Domestic Politics in France

Although the British were influenced by perceptions of potential French defeatism, there was a reluctance to enhance British commitment to France whilst the latter appeared beset by domestic political unrest. Indeed, reports from the Paris Embassy interpreted domestic political squabbling in France as a recurrent theme in the days following Munich, thus reinforcing the residual representation in this respect. As one Foreign Office official commented, "There seems to be some difference of opinion as to whether or not the Front Populaire is dead". Consequently, Daladier was conscious that France must strengthen and unite. Despite Daladier's lack of enthusiasm for Munich, the reactive representations of opinion in the immediate aftermath provided a pretext to further marginalize the communists. Indeed, in expressing outright hostility to Munich, the communists had isolated themselves (the handful of other critics such as Pertinax and de Kérillis notwithstanding). On the other extreme, defeatists like Flandin were

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50 Ibid., Halifax to Phipps, 28 October 1938.
51 Ibid., Barclay minute, 8 October 1938.
53 See for example Pertinax's article of 15 October 1938, 'L'accord de Munich n'est pas la Paix', in L'Europe nouvelle. Typical of Communist criticism, in terms of referring to Munich as treason, and predicting another Munich at the expense of Republican Spain can be found in l'Humanité throughout the month of October, in particular the article by Gabriel Péri of 15 October 1938. See also the police dossier concerning l'Humanité, (APP: BA/1720: Journal l'Humanité - l'Humanité : 1937 correspondance, comités de défense; l'Humanité 1938 à 1939).
similarly lacking in popular support. Between the two extremes lay the majority section of opinion, relieved to have avoided war, but in little doubt that France must be better prepared for the eventuality. Therefore, the opportunity presented itself to assume firm leadership and discipline on the domestic scene, to the inevitable detriment of the communists. On 20 October, Bonnet suggested to Phipps that this was very much the intention of the government: “His Excellency says that the Front Populaire is definitely dead, and that both he and M. Daladier are determined to cut adrift from the Communists”.

Munich had clearly exposed French shortcomings, and far-left agitation was frequently blamed for many of them. Not only were the communists portrayed as a ‘war party’, but they were also held accountable for fomenting the very domestic agitation that rendered France hopelessly unprepared for a great power conflict. Little surprise, therefore, that the French right rejoiced in the aftermath of the Senatorial elections (in which the right made gains) and the Radical Party Congress during October. Reactive representations since Munich, coupled with the shift to the right in the Senatorial elections, suggested that the communist position was not widely shared by the majority of the French people. Indeed, on 26 October, Phipps reported the French Interior Minister, Albert Sarraut, as having “confirmed the immense rôle that the desire for peace had played in the Senatorial Elections. He [Sarraut] said there was only one voice among the simple folk, namely that of relief that war appeared to be further off, and of fury that it had been allowed to come so close with such poor preparation for meeting it”.

For the majority section of opinion, an attack upon communism was not unwelcome, and in his speech at the Marseilles Congress, Daladier did not hold back. He dismissed communist accusations that social reforms were driven by national and international capitalist agents, intent on destroying the working class: “I believe that the chiefs of the Communist Party risk, by their violence, leading the country towards dramatic destinies”. The press of the right and centre broadly welcomed Daladier’s speech. Léon Bailby in Le Jour, wrote: “Without reserve, one can write that M. Daladier’s speech was a good speech, crisp and clear, and which seems to translate to a will of

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54 On the perceived lack of popularity of Flandin’s campaign, see Reynaud’s letter of 20 October 1938 to Churchill, CAC, Churchill Papers, CHAR 2/332.
57 CAC, Phipps Papers, PHPP I 1/21: Phipps to Halifax, 26 October 1938.
action". For much of the right and centre, confirmation of the rupture with the communists was welcomed. "The Front populaire is definitively broken", stated L'Intransigeant, "the Communists are excluded. Against them, the President of the Council drew up an exceptionally strong indictment".

With regard to foreign affairs, Bonnet told the Congress that, "The cornerstone of this policy of peace is, above all, the Franco-British entente, the friendship between France and Great Britain". Nonetheless, he was careful to indicate that this central tenet of French policy would not be prioritised at the expense of others: "There is nothing in such a conception of policy that is not totally reconcilable with the attachment of France to all her friends, with the USSR in particular, as well as with Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia and Belgium". Bonnet was seeking to appeal to various sections of opinion, but primarily the majority or mainstream category, for whom the British alliance was paramount. Furthermore, there was concern that the current condition of France was causing considerable discomfort in Britain. A note for Daladier by the military historian Louis Aubert, observed: "It is necessary to take the highest interest in the current indecision in Britain on the subject of France: the deceleration of our production, the state of our finances, the gaps in our air armaments, the indecision of our political parties, and the uncertainty of our opinion, makes them wonder whether France exists and up to what point it exists". As British assistance in an eventual conflict with Germany was considered essential, not least in terms of land forces, it was considered imperative that France take measures to reassure her British ally that she could be relied upon.

The French elites were thus influenced by perceptions of both French and British public opinion. French opinion attached the greatest importance to the Franco-British entente, and wanted British commitment increased. British opinion was considered to be concerned at French social unrest and polarisation, reluctant to fully embrace an entente with a country paralysed by domestic unrest and disunity. At the same time, British opinion was perceived by the French as being more amenable to the idea of conscription, something that would be broadly welcomed by the French public. As the French government sought to intensify their campaign for British conscription, it was imperative to present a united front to their ally. By late October, following both the Senatorial elections and the Radical Party Congress, the way was clear for the Daladier government

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59 Le Jour, 28 October 1938.
60 L'Intransigeant, 29 October 1938. See Le Temps, 30 October 1938, for another example.
62 MAE, Papiers 1940, Papiers Daladier, No. 2: Note: 'Politique extérieure de la France après Munich' par Louis Aubert, 21 October 1938.
to take the necessary measures for such a redressement. The left was divided, the communists increasingly isolated, and most crucially, the mainstream category of opinion generally favourable to attempts to rebuild France's flagging economy.

In this respect, the decision to replace Paul Marchandeau with Paul Reynaud as Finance Minister was an unequivocal statement of intent. Such a move was not entirely unexpected, as Reynaud had been linked with this position before, turning it down in April. Furthermore, as was pointed out in l'Œuvre on 2 November, "the name of Paul Reynaud has been suggested, on several occasions, for a sort of 'Super Ministry' of production and exchange". Again, the press of the right and centre welcomed the announcement. The Petit Parisien expressed the hope that the French government would move "towards a bold liberal policy", providing the necessary impetus for "a financial and economic redressement". 63 There were, however, expressions of discontent, unsurprisingly emanating from the left. After the announcement of Reynaud's economic plan, and the decree-laws put in place to implement it, many on the left did not hesitate to voice their disapproval. "To serve the nation", argued l'Humanité, "is not to subject oneself to the demands of an international financial Mafia". Several days later the same newspaper claimed: "a redressement will not be realised. Experience proves it: one will not save France by this policy of kneeling before the banks and trusts". 64 As for the Socialists, a Resolution passed by the Conseil National du Parti Socialiste stated that they could not have confidence in a government who "present a financial scheme in absolute opposition to the doctrines and intentions which had inspired the Front populaire Government's democratic plan of financial redressement last April". 65

Nonetheless, despite hostility to the Reynaud plan, one of the most striking features of the Conseil National was the continued divergence between Paul Faure and Léon Blum. Faure reiterated his preference for the Munich Agreement over war, advocating that the Socialists must continue to urge disarmament. Blum, by contrast, whilst acknowledging that the relief following Munich was both natural and understandable, argued that a disarmament conference would be futile: "in the present state of Europe one can only have little confidence in its outcome". 66 On the issue of Reynaud's plan, however, there would be more unanimity within Socialist ranks. Blum

63 Article by Charles Morice in Le Petit Parisien, 3 November 1938.
64 Benoît Frachon, 'Programme de redressement ou plan d'agression contre la classe ouvrière?', l'Humanité, 10 November 1938; l'Humanité, 13 November 1938.
65 Cited in Le Populaire, 7 November 1938.
66 See the speeches of Faure and Blum of 7 November 1938, cited in Le Populaire, 8 November 1938. For more on the attitude of Blum towards the Czechoslovak crisis and the Munich Agreement, see Nicole Jordan, 'Léon Blum and Czechoslovakia, 1936-1938', op.cit.
neatly summarised their concerns, asking: “is it not, at the present hour, a strange conception to present to the nation a mass of sacrifices which will weigh heavily on the life of the most modest and poor families, while the first effect will be the restoration and increase of profit”67 Such reactive representations demonstrated that ideological polarisation continued to afflict France, hardly contributing to a more favourable image of France overseas. Nonetheless, Daladier and Reynaud could be satisfied that the majority of French opinion was, if not supportive of their actions, at least acquiescent. As far as perceptions of public opinion could be ascertained from the press, the dominant representations were favourable. However, although the press of the right and centre applauded the measures taken towards redressing France's economic problems, the future of French foreign policy remained uncertain. *Le Figaro* expressed a degree of impatience in suggesting that foreign policy “awaits something other than rhetoric”.68

Representations of French public opinion regarding foreign policy issues were considerably less pronounced whilst domestic affairs dominated. Even the events of *Kristallnacht* failed to generate the level of response one might expect. In retaliation for the assassination by a Polish Jew of Ernst von Rath, a German Embassy official in Paris, German persecution of the Jewish population reached a terrifying crescendo on 10 November 1938. *L'Œuvre* described the events as “something which can never be understood by the French”.69 French newspapers certainly expressed outrage, but were far less vociferous than their British counterparts. Indeed, much of the French press commentary focused on the condemnation emanating from Britain and America. *Le Temps* commented upon the astonishment in Berlin that their actions had “provoked indignation overseas, mainly in Britain and the United States”. Pertinax also referred to the “profound repercussions on the Anglo-Saxon people”, as did Gallus in *l'Intransigeant* and, several days later, de Kérillis in *l'Époque*.70

In terms of reactive representations, even the heightened awareness of Nazi atrocities roused by *Kristallnacht* failed to dislodge domestic issues from the front pages. The rupture within the Popular Front, the repercussions of the Reynaud plan, the divisions within the SFIO, and the influence of the PCF were all dominant themes in the French press during November, culminating in the General Strike at the end of the

month. The CGT's decision to call a general strike for the 30 November would prove to be a decisive test for the future of the Daladier-Reynaud plan. For the right, the need to defeat leftist opposition was essential. "Despite the opposition of the Marxists", suggested the Journal des débats, "the Daladier cabinet can survive if the Radicals are firmly determined to do what is necessary". The Radical newspaper, l'Europe nouvelle argued that, "in its broad outline, Paul Reynaud's plan imposes itself with an inescapable necessity". L'Intransigeant appealed to a sense of patriotism, expressing a willingness "to accept sacrifices which, though pleasant for nobody, are essential for the country". Again, opposition was largely confined to the more militant left, and in this sense, Daladier could be confident that mainstream opinion would be prepared to accept the aforementioned sacrifices.

However, the situation remained precarious. The voluble representations of opinion emanating from the left remained a source of concern, especially to Daladier. Indeed, press cuttings in Daladier's private papers are dominated by l'Humanité and Le Populaire, suggesting that Daladier feared that such tendencies of opinion might infiltrate the mainstream. On the other side of the coin, his reliance on the right for political support meant that he could not risk opposing them too vehemently on domestic issues. Furthermore, it was domestic issues (at least until the aftermath of the General Strike) that dominated representations, compelling Daladier to placate the political right, and right wing sections of public opinion. He could do so with more confidence given the fact that opposition was still largely confined to the left, suggesting that the majority of the public were not seduced by dissenting voices. If the elites considered the strikes to be instigated primarily by the communists, such an assertion was not necessarily wide of the mark. Roger Genebrier, Daladier's chef de cabinet, certainly saw it this way, subsequently recalling: "It is certain that since the Czech crisis, the Communist Party, under the influence of Soviet policy, was considered in France as the war party, and was rejected, little by little, by the national community".

Identifying the communists as a war party allowed the French government to attack the PCF whilst simultaneously portraying their own policies as those best suited to maintain peace. In a speech commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the Armistice,
broadcast on French radio on 12 November 1938, Daladier proclaimed: “To preserve Peace, to ensure the security of France and to be ready to crush all attempts which could be directed against her, it is necessary for us to be morally and materially strong, and the source of this strength, for a great Nation like ours, is work”.

He reiterated his determination to quell leftist agitation in another radio broadcast on 17 November: “I shall not be the man of failure just as I have not been the man of war”. Any form of industrial unrest was, therefore, vulnerable to attack on the basis of its potential to weaken France and thus exacerbate the chances of war. By playing the peace card, Daladier could continue to draw on the residual perception of French opinion as being, if not pacifist, at least burdened by an acute anxiety regarding the ‘next war’. The anti-communist press was not slow to play upon this perceived sentiment. “The Communists wanted war last September”, remarked Le Temps, “and, do not doubt, want it still”.

For the British, Daladier’s determination to undermine extremist influence and instil national discipline in France was welcome. However, there were indications that the reports received from Phipps, invariably seeking to undermine the PCF and bolster Daladier, could not be entirely trusted. For Phipps, the Senatorial elections “may be regarded as a victory for moderate opinion and a defeat for Communism”. Furthermore, the Radical Party Congress was considered remarkable for the unanimity regarding the need to rectify French military deficiencies. However, a Foreign Office minute was quick to qualify Phipps’ appraisal, noting that “press reports on the Congress have laid rather more emphasis on the division of opinion on internal affairs between the right and the left wing of the party. A lot will clearly depend on future relations between Radicals and Socialists”. Once again, the residual representation of French political instability was prevalent, reflecting how certain residuals continued to inform elite perceptions.

Phipps’ reports regarding the reshuffle at the Quai d’Orsay were also a cause for concern. Bonnet’s manoeuvring saw René Massigli moved to the post of French Ambassador to Turkey, and Pierre Comert, the head of the Quai d’Orsay’s press section, moved to the American Department. Both Massigli and Comert were far from

74 Copy of this speech can be found in Fonds Genebrier, GE6.
75 Cited in l’Aube, 18 November 1938.
76 Le Temps, 12 November 1938.
78 Ibid., Barclay minute, 7 November 1938.
enthusiastic followers of Bonnet’s policy. 79 Indeed, according to Massigli’s biographer, “it is undeniable that Massigli was punished, in a resounding manner, for his convictions”. 80 For Phipps, this was a positive step, facilitating greater French cooperation in Chamberlain’s pursuit of appeasement. Less favourable was the fact that Alexis Léger remained, another who was hostile to the policy of Bonnet. As Phipps noted, “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”. 81

However, concern was expressed within the Foreign Office at Phipps’ portrayal of the situation in France, and that his closeness to Bonnet was tantamount to interference, not least in encouraging the latter to re-shuffle French Foreign Ministry officials. Oliver Harvey warned Halifax that Phipps is “getting into dangerous water if he lends himself in any way to the encouragement of the removal of high officials in the Quai”. Harvey went on to suggest that a “purged” Quai would be beneficial for the defeatists in France, encouraging her to seek an agreement with Nazi Germany at the expense of Great Britain: “French politicians being what they are and French public opinion being easily influenced, I do not think one can exaggerate the importance to us of the Quai d’Orsay. Politicians come and go, the Quai remains”. 82

Halifax embraced these comments. In a letter to Phipps he expressed concerns at potential French defeatism, asserting his firm conviction that both France and Britain must assume a firmer stance as regards Germany. With Germany now preponderant in Central Europe, “Great Britain and France have to uphold their predominant position in Western Europe by the maintenance of such armed strength as would render any attack upon them hazardous”. Therefore, France must be maintained as the closest of allies, so as to prevent her from turning “so defeatist as to give up the struggle of maintaining adequate defences even for the safety of Metropolitan France”, and thus potentially resulting in Britain having “to face alone the full might of German military power in the West”. 83 In response, Phipps considered it necessary to assuage such fears: “I do not see any prospect of France turning so defeatist as to abandon the necessary defences of

79 Duroselle, La décadence, p. 369.
80 Ulrich-Pier, René Massigli, p. 499.
81 TNA, FO 800/311: Phipps to Halifax, 26 October 1938. See also Herman, The Paris Embassy of Sir Eric Phipps, pp. 130-131.
82 TNA, FO 800/311: Harvey to Halifax, 27 October 1938.
83 TNA, FO 800/311: Halifax to Phipps, 1 November 1938. See also a minute by Halifax of 28 October 1938, in which he expresses similar concerns regarding the potential turn to defeatism in France, TNA, FO 371/21613/C13356/1050/17, (original emphasis).
Metropolitan France. I am convinced, moreover, that the French would fight like tigers to maintain their independence".Nevertheless, this episode demonstrates the extent to which Halifax was troubled by the future direction of both British and French foreign policy.

The British were clearly anxious to see what course French policy would take. Phipps continued to portray French public and political opinion as fractured and incoherent, identifying the emergence of two dominant strands. Firstly, those who advocated increased strength without the abandonment of friends or Empire. Secondly - the minority group - favouring a settlement with Germany while sitting in isolation behind the Maginot line. As one Foreign Office official remarked, much would depend on the outcome of the domestic upheaval: "It may well be that France is now at the parting of the ways. If the Reynaud plan is rejected and the Daladier Govt. overthrown, the future is quite unpredictable. On the other hand, if criticism and opposition give place to reluctant acquiescence - one can scarcely hope for much more - there are grounds for hope of a gradual recovery and immediate increased stability". The residual representation of a fractured and polarised French society continued to inform British perceptions of France. Although there was considerable optimism that a recovery of national unity was imminent, a significant degree of doubt always lingered.

Some of this doubt was motivated by scepticism within the Foreign Office regarding the objectivity of Phipps' reports on French opinion. Indeed, it is possible that many of the French politicians who met with Phipps deliberately intended to furnish the British Ambassador with a particular portrayal of French public opinion so as to further their own agenda. Phipps' reputation has been summarised by John Herman as being that of a 'defeatist-appeaser', largely due to Foreign Office concerns about the reliability of his sources, particularly the likes of Caillaux, Bonnet and Flandin. Phipps' apparent meddling in French domestic politics once more worried the Foreign Office. Vansittart was especially critical of Phipps, much to the chagrin of the latter. Phipps had written to

84 TNA, FO 800/311: Phipps to Halifax, 7 November 1938. See also Herman, The Paris Embassy of Sir Eric Phipps, pp. 133-134.
85 TNA, FO 371/21600/C14025/55/17: Report from the British Embassy in Paris on the current situation in France, prior to the visit to Paris of the Prime Minister and Secretary of State, 16 November 1938, minute by Barclay, 18 November 1938.
86 Herman, The Paris Embassy of Sir Eric Phipps, pp. 180-181. Herman refers the notorious "all that is best in France" telegram, (TNA, FO 371/21600/C12854/55/17: Phipps report on events in France during the third quarter of 1938, 22 October 1938).
Hankey on 6 October, “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”. 87

Herman has suggested that Phipps “was badly out of step with FO thinking during the very fluid international situation between November 1938 and January 1939,” especially with his persistent references to the ‘war party’ within France. 88 However, his reputation as a ‘defeatist appeaser’ can in part be explained by deliberate French attempts to portray French opinion in this way. There was little risk to the French in creating the impression that there existed in France at least the genesis of a defeatist tendency. As a means of leverage in establishing a firmer British commitment, such concerns among the elites in London would certainly have proved beneficial. Coupled with French perceptions of British public opinion, chiefly furnished by Corbin, suggesting a growing disillusionment with attempts at appeasing the dictators and an increase in support for some form of conscription, such diplomatic manoeuvring was opportune.

It was in this context of Anglo-French relations that the decision was taken for Chamberlain and Halifax to visit Paris in late November, a decision welcomed by the British Ambassador. Phipps was eager for Chamberlain to visit, both to bolster the Anglo-French entente and provide an opportunity for Chamberlain to revel in his popularity in France. On 3 November, Bonnet had told Phipps that “Mr Chamberlain’s popularity in France seemed to grow greater as time passed and as people realised more and more how near they had been to disaster”. Bonnet’s impression, remarked Phipps, is that, “grateful as the British people may be to the Prime Minister, the French are even more so”. 89 Such compliments certainly had an impact on Chamberlain. On 6 November, in a letter to his sister, he wrote that the Paris visit would enable him to sense “the feelings of gratitude and affection, - to strengthen Daladier and encourage him to do something at last to put his country’s defences in order and to push his people into greater unity”. 90

As well as allowing Chamberlain to revel in his deluded sense of grandeur, the Paris visit provided an opportunity to alleviate Halifax’s fears regarding potential French defeatism. 91 Recent representations of French discontent regarding British military assistance forewarned the Foreign Office that the French would use the visit to urge the

87 CAC, Phipps Papers, PHPP I 3/3: Phipps to Hankey, 6 October 1938.
89 TNA, FO 371/21613/C13372/1050/17: Phipps telegram, 3 November 1938.
90 Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1075: Neville to Hilda, 6 November 1938 (original emphasis).
91 Andrew Roberts, The Holy Fox, p. 130.
introduction of conscription. A Foreign Office minute of 3 November observed: “The French cannot altogether understand the feeling in this country against any form of conscription in peace time”. 92 Phipps had also reported a “wide-spread propaganda in France, which I believe to be fostered to some extent from German sources, to the effect that in a major emergency France can only rely on Great Britain ‘to fight to the last Frenchman’”. 93 This latter observation, with regard to the fostering of propaganda by German sources, fuelled another fear circulating within the Foreign Office: the possibility that Germany may attempt to provoke a rift between France and Great Britain. Given the residual representations of a French populace inculcated with ‘war anxiety’, it was feared that German scaremongering - to the effect that British support for France would not be forthcoming - could easily take hold. The Paris visit would thus provide an opportunity to demonstrate that the Paris-London axis remained firm and resolute.

**Domestic Politics in Britain**

Chamberlain's conviction that his personal popularity in France remained undimmed since Munich echoed his confidence regarding public opinion at home. However, reactive representations of British opinion had evolved from the initial expressions of relief and gratitude of early October. The popularity of Chamberlain’s policy in the weeks preceding the Paris visit can be gauged by an assessment of a series of by-elections during the autumn of 1938. 94 The first of these took place in Oxford on 27 October, in which a ‘Popular Front’ candidate took on the National government, principally on the issue of foreign affairs. The defeat of the Popular Front candidate failed to mask the decline in support for the government, despite the efforts of the pro-Chamberlain press. For The Times, the result was “a demonstration that the British people are emphatically with him in his determination to work for a peace of reason, reconciliation, and reciprocity”. The Daily Mail celebrated the rejection of “the disintegrating efforts of the so-called ‘Popular Front’”. 95 Nonetheless, the fact that opposition had crystallised around a ‘Popular Front’ candidate suggested that opinion was more divided than

92 TNA, FO 371/21613/C13320/1083/17: Barclay minute, 3 November 1938.
93 TNA, FO 371/21600/C14025/55/17: Phipps report on the present situation in France prior to Chamberlain/Halifax visit, 16 November 1938.
95 The Times, ‘A Decisive Vote’, 29 October 1938, the Daily Mail, editorial, 28 October 1938.
previously assumed. The *Manchester Guardian* detected "a distrust of the Government spreading wide over all sections of opinion and all classes of people". 96

Two specific issues dominated debates on foreign policy: firstly, the notable lack of faith in the words of Hitler, and the Anglo-German agreement specifically; secondly, the coming into force of the Anglo-Italian Agreement. On both issues, representations of opinion suggested that appeasement was far from universally popular. Discontent was even expressed within the Conservative Party, whether Churchill's warnings about the Nazi threat or Eden's continued reluctance to embrace rapprochement with Italy. However, the extent to which these representations pervaded the mindset of the elites is debatable. Chamberlain continued to believe that appeasement could potentially lead "to the time when we can put all thoughts of war out of our minds". 97 Moreover, he was reluctant to embrace rearmament for fear that it might unnecessarily provoke the Dictators and thus prove detrimental to the appeasement policy. Above all, he feared that Germany and Italy would suspect a British rearmament drive to be "directed against them, and it was important that we should not encourage their suspicions". 98 Such an attitude suggests that Chamberlain remained convinced that if his policy continued to prevent war, the gratitude witnessed after Munich would continue to flow.

Chamberlain's assessment of the situation was not unreasonable. Although there were clear indications that public opinion was becoming more restless, opposition to the government was far from unanimous or coherent. As regards categories of opinion, Chamberlain could legitimately regard opposition as limited to a minority, albeit a vocal one. Conservative dissidents failed to provide a united front, and the prospects of forming a cross-party opposition with the Labour and Liberal parties were fleeting and short-lived. 99 The majority of opinion was still considered to be thankful that war had been averted, and thus amenable to further acts of appeasement. The residual representation of 'next war' anxiety cannot be underestimated in this regard, particularly following the recent reminder of the horrific consequences of a European conflagration. As long as the British public was perceived to be attached to the maintenance of peace, Chamberlain could retain faith in the foreign policy he was pursuing.

Nevertheless, the Foreign Office detected an evolution, partly attributable to a growing awareness of the nuances of British public opinion. Even Halifax was beginning

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97 Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1072: Neville to Hilda, 15 October 1938.
to diverge in his views from the Prime Minister, and Cadogan was clearly perturbed by a lack of policy direction. His diary entry of 31 October noted: "P.M. wants to 'follow up Munich', but I don't know that his ideas are any more definite than that". Chamberlain, however, remained intoxicated by the representations of his popularity in the immediate aftermath of Munich. He referred to his prestige at home, noting how the "tide of letters, flowers, testimonials and gifts continues to flow in without much abatement", whilst as far as Germany was concerned, "I frequently hear that I am more popular there than Hitler himself". The Prime Minister was evidently brimming with self-confidence.

However, representations of public opinion were increasingly offering an alternative interpretation. The consistently hostile German press comment, specifically with regard to British rearmament, certainly contributed to the conviction that Hitler's intentions were not in accordance with the now infamous Anglo-German Agreement. The Labour victory at the Dartford by-election on 8 November indicated that post-Munich reactive representations had significantly dissipated. Even the pro-Chamberlain Daily Express observed that the result must "cast some doubts on the degree of support which the public is giving to Mr. Chamberlain's policy". The News Chronicle concurred: "Assertions that Mr. Chamberlain would sweep the country if a general election were held have proved very wide of the mark; and as the onward march of totalitarianism becomes clearer, criticism of the Government will increase in volume and intensity". Meanwhile, the Daily Worker predictably interpreted the result not only as a defeat for Chamberlain's foreign policy, but also for rearmament and possible conscription: "The Labour victory at Dartford has proved one thing - Britain's people want neither Chamberlain's friendship for fascism nor his plan for sweeping economics at the expense of essential services". Chamberlain, however, was reassured by his sister that, "it was almost a foregone conclusion that we should lose it and it was hardly a representative constituency". It is therefore unlikely that Chamberlain's assessment of public opinion had been substantially shaken.

It was internal events in Germany that most damaged the credibility of Chamberlain's continued faith in appeasement. British press reaction to Kristallnacht was

100 Andrew Roberts, The Holy Fox, pp. 131-132.
101 Cadogan Diaries, p. 122.
102 Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1075: Neville to Hilda, 6 November 1938.
103 The Daily Express, 9 November 1938; News Chronicle, 9 November 1938; Daily Worker, 9 November 1938.
104 Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/2/1099: Ida to Neville, 11 November 1938.
unanimous in expressing horror and disgust at Nazi atrocities. The *Daily Herald* suggested that, "public opinion everywhere has been shocked and embarrassed by its crude reminder of the fundamental barbarities of Nazi doctrine". This was echoed in the *News Chronicle*, for whom "this ferocious pogrom cannot fail to have a big effect on the policy of this country, for British policy is determined by British opinion, and British opinion regards this outburst of Nazi fury with loathing and contempt". The *Sunday Times* simply described it as "a backslide towards barbarism for which it is difficult to find a parallel for many generations past".\(^{105}\) Such reactive representations of opinion could not fail to be noticed. The Home Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, asked whether "any special action in regard to Germany's persecution of the Jews was contemplated", noting that, "unless something was done there were signs that the House of Commons and the country might get out of hand". Interestingly, Chamberlain expressed some surprise at how mild the press reaction had been, including papers such as the *Daily Herald* and the *News Chronicle*.\(^{106}\) Evidently, the British elites considered public opinion to be particularly volatile with regard to Nazi Germany.

Despite this, the Cabinet concluded that making overly critical representations to Berlin would only worsen the situation for Germany's Jews. Nonetheless, it was recognised that public opinion, at least as represented in the popular press and in the House of Commons, had made itself heard. Indeed, the press was dominated by commentaries on *Kristallnacht*. Charles Peake of the Foreign Office News Department, observed that another issue, the coming into force of the Anglo-Italian Agreement, had received less hostile press comment than had been anticipated, partly due to criticism being "limited somewhat by news of the persecution of the Jews in Germany".\(^{107}\)

Another issue temporarily put on the backburner was that of National Service, although the attention already lavished on this issue certainly had an impact on the political elites. In a Cabinet discussion of 14 November, Chamberlain expressed the opinion that a National Register would be of little practical value, a view echoed by Hoare, although the latter added that it "would provide a valuable safety valve for public zeal and enthusiasm". Moreover, Hoare added that, "only by acceding to the demand would public opinion really be reassured". However, concerns were expressed concerning the possible dissent of the Labour Party and Trade Unions, leading to the overall conclusion that only a voluntary scheme should be adopted. Halifax again

\(^{105}\) *Daily Herald*, 12 November 1938; *News Chronicle*, 14 November 1938; *Sunday Times*, 13 November 1938.

\(^{106}\) TNA, CAB 27/624: Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy, meeting of 14 November 1938.

expressed a firmer stance, suggesting that, "to the foreigner a compulsory National Register meant the organising of the entire nation to meet an emergency". Halifax's argument was clear: introducing compulsory service would send a definite statement of British determination not to be cowed by the dictators. Nevertheless, for the time being, Chamberlain's hesitancy continued to win the day.

Chamberlain's confidence in his own popularity showed no signs of waning over the autumn of 1938, despite considerable evidence to the contrary. A frequently cited example is the Bridgwater by-election on 17 November, in which Vernon Bartlett, standing on an anti-appeasement ticket, defeated the National government candidate. For the Daily Mirror, the result "cannot be regarded as anything but a severe criticism - to put it mildly - of the course of British foreign policy". For the Evening Standard, it was "a defeat, and a serious defeat, for the Government", whilst the Manchester Guardian concluded: "In short, the country does not like his policy". Nevertheless, such press comment was by no means the only source of representations of public opinion. Indeed, the extent to which such reactive representations were able to supersede residual representations must be questioned, especially for one so evidently attached to the policy of appeasement as Chamberlain. Above all, the residual representation of the public's attachment to peace, recently and volubly reinforced by the initial reactive representations after Munich, stubbornly refused to be displaced by frequently dissenting reactive representations thereafter.

Moreover, the forthcoming Paris visit gave the Prime Minister an opportunity to savour the adulation and gratitude that he had been led to believe was awaiting him. Convinced of his popularity at home and in France, he was not prepared to listen sympathetically to any French attempt to coerce him into reneging on his recently reaffirmed pledge not to introduce peacetime conscription. British public opinion regarding conscription, at least as it was perceived by the elites, was delicate. Not only were many Cabinet members reluctant to take such measures, but it was suggested that the country would be divided, as such a move would be profoundly unpopular on the left. Therefore, a confident Chamberlain went to Paris with no intention of being

108 TNA, CAB 27/624: Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy, meeting of 14 November 1938.
110 Opposition in Cabinet was voiced by, amongst others, Chamberlain and Runciman during the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy meeting on 14 November 1938 (TNA, CAB 27/624). As regards public opinion, the probable opposition of the left can be seen in the unambiguous attitude of the left wing press. For example, the Daily Worker of 28 October claimed that the "working class of Britain will not submit to be regimented while capitalists are left free to pick our pockets". Even on the right, opposition to
swayed by French pressure. Indeed, Chamberlain considered the Paris visit as providing a fruitful opportunity for putting pressure on the French government to rectify their own military shortcomings and display a greater degree of national unity.

By contrast, French perceptions of British public opinion convinced them that further pressure on the conscription issue might pay dividends. Discussion of a National Register had been prevalent in the British press since Munich, including calls for conscription. As early as 17 October, a Deuxième Bureau note stated: “One awaits to see if the British Government will act firmly in the way of rearmament; [British] public opinion appears little disposed to be satisfied with promises or half-measures”. Corbin noted the BIPO poll, which indicated that 78% favoured a Register (though not compulsory), suggesting: “one must expect to see the Government of a democratic country such as this to immediately take those measures that have been deemed necessary”. The French Military Attaché in London, General Lelong, observed: “The European crisis which has just unfolded has drawn the attention of British opinion onto questions of National Defence”. Far from masking “the disagreeable facts”, continued Lelong, the military experts in the British press were eager to stress Britain’s weaknesses. Nevertheless, Chamberlain refused to run the gauntlet of opposition to conscription, settling instead with bolstering the Territorial Army. As Lelong lamented, “On several occasions efforts have been made, on the French side, to obtain an unspecified precision regarding the possibility of significantly reinforcing the Expeditionary Force. These efforts were always in vain: the War Office responded to such questions with a deaf ear”.

The British also countered French pressure by highlighting French military shortcomings, notably in the domain of aviation. At the same time, domestic unrest in France exacerbated a negative British perception of France. Churchill wrote to Paul Reynaud on 10 October, expressing anxieties that were doubtless shared by many in Britain: “I feel deeply concerned about the position of France, and about our own

implementing conscription in order to satisfy French demands was expressed. The Daily Mail of 21 November argued that the necessity of concentrating on home defence “leaves no time for the creation of a larger military force for duty on the Continent”.

111 AN, Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/35, 4DA8 Dr. 3 sdrb: Etat-Major de l’Armée, 2ème Bureau, Note sur le réarmement Britannique (Armée territoriale et défense anti-aérienne), 17 October 1938.
112 DDF, 2ème Série, tome XII, No. 209: Corbin to Bonnet, 24 October 1938.
113 MAE, Papiers 1940, Papiers Rochat, No. 17: Note by Lelong on the military weakness of Great Britain, 27 October 1938. Also in AN, Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/35, 4DA8 Dr. 3 sdrb.
114 AN, Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/35, 4DA8 Dr. 3 sdrb: Lelong: Etude sur la participation de l’Angleterre dans l’éventualité d’une action commune franco-britannique en cas de guerre, 8 November 1938.
course. I cannot see what foreign policy is now open to the French Republic". Moreover, he lamented the fact that he could not ascertain “the forces now governing French action. The accursed Flandin is surely only typical of very large interests and moods which are at work beneath the surface of French politics”. In reply, Reynaud made no attempt to disguise what he considered to be the current state of France: “France is, alas, in a more serious situation than in 1871”. However, it was not all doom and gloom. Reynaud expressed his conviction that the French people had been reawakened by the recent crisis, providing France with the necessary impetus to embark upon the road to recovery: “After a humiliation such as that which we have just undergone, both nations are tempted to toss the blame on to the other. I believe that, for my country, instead of accusing her only remaining ally, it is better to endeavour to win back her esteem by means of a heroic redressement”.

The French, therefore, needed to reassure the British on several levels, and French public opinion was perceived to be in a suitable condition to undertake the necessary programme of recovery. The Senatorial Elections and Radical Party Congress suggested that a shift to the right would not necessarily catapult the nation into a crippling internal dispute. It was deemed essential to rectify this negative British perception of France if the latter was to successfully persuade London to implement conscription. As Corbin remarked, “Must we wait six months, as in 1914, for the ‘First hundred thousand’ [...] to make their appearance on our soil, and can we accept, in such a situation, that Neville Chamberlain and his colleagues continue to repeat before both Chambers, ‘that there is no question of the United Kingdom composing an army on the continental model?’ A troisième bureau note prior to the Paris visit noted how “The immediate assistance which Great Britain brings to us is very weak in terms of land forces. [Therefore] It is essential to demand that Great Britain intensify and accelerate her military effort, particularly regarding the action of land forces on the continent”.

Paris was also encouraged by representations of British public opinion vis-à-vis Germany. Kristallnacht had provoked considerable concern and repugnance amongst the British populace. Corbin reported that “the reactions of the British press to the persecution of the Jews in Germany becomes sharper each day, and the majority of

117 AN, Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/10, 2DA4 Dr. 3 sdr: Corbin to Bonnet, 8 November 1938.
118 AN, Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/11 2DA4 Dr. 2 sdr: 3ème Bureau: Note concernant les demandes à presenter au Gouvernement Britannique relatives à l'action militaire terrestre, 23 November 1938.
newspapers draw the conclusion that the British attitude towards the Reich can no longer fail to be influenced by it". Nonetheless, Corbin ventured that Chamberlain’s position was not in jeopardy, and remained committed to his foreign policy. As Corbin reported, Chamberlain had become, “in the eyes of the entire world, the living symbol of the doctrine of appeasement”. However, indications of an evolution of opinion were evident, if not yet assuming dramatic proportions. As Corbin noted after the Bridgwater by-election, “in light of recent events, the evolution of public spirit in Britain is accentuated, but without assuming the character of a revolution”.

The Paris Visit and the General Strike

In anticipation of the visit of Chamberlain and Halifax, the Paris police warned of potential trouble from sections of the extreme-left. A Gabriel Péri article in l’Humanité on 15 November was duly noted, in which he warned that the visit would result in a second Munich, this time at the expense of Spain. A police report noted that such comments demonstrated “the disapproval of the communist leadership regarding the arrival in Paris of Mr Chamberlain and Lord Halifax, and their hostility with regard to the conversations that will take place”. However, it added that potential communist disturbances would probably be limited, due to the fact that communist leaders were currently preoccupied with organising a conference in support of Republican Spain. Nevertheless, it had already been considered necessary (or at least routine) to issue the following circular: “On the occasion of this visit, you are asked to undertake very particular monitoring of those circles susceptible to acts, gestures or demonstrations of hostility with regard to the British Ministers”. On the arrival of the British Ministers at the Gare du Nord on 23 November, the police reported “demonstrations in which hostile comments to Chamberlain’s speech were uttered. Twenty-two individuals were arrested and taken to nearby police stations”. A later police report noted another 27

119 MAE, Série Z, Grande-Bretagne, No. 281: Corbin to Bonnet, 16 November 1938. It was generally noted that hostility to the German atrocities was far more pronounced in the Anglo-Saxon world than in France. From Washington, the French Ambassador reported how, “The news received from Germany in the last few days has [...] profoundly shocked the consciousness of all Americans”. (DDF, 2ème Série, tome XII, No. 305: Saint-Quentin to Bonnet, 15 November 1938).
120 AN, Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/10, 2DA4 Dr. 3 sda: Corbin to Bonnet, 8 November 1938.
121 DDF, 2e Série, Tome XII, No. 351: Corbin to Bonnet, 21 November 1938.
arrests for “for having whistled, or incited hostile shouts at the passage of Chamberlain’s and Halifax’s cars”. 123

The extent to which these police reports were widely read amongst the political elites is unclear, although one can assume that they would have reached the desk of the Interior Minister, Albert Sarraut. Furthermore, Sarraut was close to Daladier, so much of the content of these reports might well have been disclosed to the Président du Conseil. Indeed, in the absence of any written record of French Cabinet conversations, one has little alternative but to make such tentative assumptions. Furthermore, much of the content of the police reports regarding Chamberlain’s visit were echoed in the press. “M. Chamberlain and Lord Halifax cheered by the Parisian crowd”, proclaimed a headline in l’Œuvre, while Le Jour noted, “From the Gare du Nord to the British Embassy, a considerable crowd had gathered to acclaim Mr and Mrs. Chamberlain, and Lord and Lady Halifax”. 124 By and large, the public’s reception to the visit was favourable, despite evident signs of hostility among some Parisians to the British Ministers. Dissenters were certainly outnumbered by those who acclaimed.

The official business of the visit essentially covered all the ground that had been anticipated. 125 In terms of subsequent representations of opinion, several issues assumed prominence. Firstly, news of the Franco-German declaration, a non-aggression treaty between France and Germany on the same lines as the Anglo-German Agreement signed at Munich. The text of the declaration, which had been agreed on 22 November 1938, was shown to the British Ministers during their stay in Paris, although it came as no surprise. The British government had always told Paris that they would have no objection, although the press in both countries would not be so easily convinced. Although Le Temps could claim that the pacific settlement of problems could now be sought with more confidence, there was an appreciable lack of enthusiasm elsewhere. Gabriel Péri expressed disbelief that Ribbentrop could be “received in Paris, the capital of the French Republic, the city which seized the Bastille and made the Commune”. 126

However, the communists’ position, irrespective of whether or not it was widely held, was undermined by their commitment to further social agitation, particularly the General Strike. The Europe nouvelle noted a contradiction within their platform: “Whilst

124 L’Œuvre, headline, 24 November 1938; Le Jour-Écho de Paris, 24 November 1938.
125 For the British account of the conversations, see DBFP, 3rd Series, Vol. III, No. 325; for the French account, see DDF, 2ème Série, tome XII, No. 390.
they have often spoken most pertinently on foreign policy, they continue to pursue, on social issues, the most dangerous and insane agitation". *Le Temps* was unequivocal: "A general strike, resulting in public services coming to a standstill, is organized by the Confédération du Travail; a strike in which the total illegality is not contested, because it is not really contestable". The left predictably adopted a contrary line. Blum felt compelled to condemn the government's decrees: "Do not believe that the workers emotion is fictitious, do not believe that it is the result of a political conspiracy, a straw fire on which one blows so as to believe it is an inferno. No, the emotion is authentic; it is spontaneous". The communists emphasised the solidarity between themselves and the CGT: "The C.G.T. declare that we have reason to consider the decrees as illegal: it approves our immediate resistance to the sabotage of the forty hours law".

As regards the provincial press in France, a note for Daladier from the President of the Council's press service suggested that "They are in accord, with the exception of some newspapers of the extreme-left, in insisting on the need to maintain law and order, and they deplore the current social agitation that harms the position of France". However, although the press appeared to support the move towards the right on internal matters, there was no such enthusiasm when it came to Bonnet's foreign policy: "As to the Franco-German Declaration, the majority of regional newspapers question the degree of confidence one can place on Germany's signature". Nonetheless, in the domestic sphere, the predominant representations of opinion suggested to Daladier that a firm stance could be adopted against the strike movement without fear of considerable dissent.

Daladier was also under pressure from the French right to take decisive action against the strike movement, and he did not disappoint, ordering the police to forcibly evacuate strikers from factories. This action exacerbated the relative decline of the French trade union movement, with membership of the CGT, by the end of 1938, having fallen by 25% from its peak in 1937. The leftist press, however, portrayed the strike as a success. *Le Populaire* 's headline read: "Despite the formidable measurements of intimidation taken by Government, the industrial workers responded, in a large proportion, to the call of the C.G.T.". Blum, however, was more balanced: "It is not a

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129 AN, Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/11, 2DA4 Dr. 1 – Politique Intérieur (fin 1938): Présidence du Conseil: Service de presse et d'information, 28 November 1938.  
130 Julian Jackson, *The Fall of France*, p. 117.
victory for the working class. But is it a victory for the Government?" \textit{L'Humanité} was predictably less cautious, describing "the general strike against the woeful decrees [as] a magnificent movement".\footnote{Le Populaire, 1 December 1938, headline and Blum article; \textit{L'Humanité}, headline, 1 December 1938.} Overall, however, the strike was widely perceived as a failure for the PCF and a victory for Daladier. \textit{Le Temps}, on 1 December, summarised it thus: "What is certain, is that France does not intend to become a field of Marxist experiments or be subjected to a unionist and Communist dictatorship". Jean Zay later described the strike as "An error and a fault". An error because, "a workers movement can only succeed if it benefits from the secret acquiescence of opinion, and this was hostile to an inopportune demonstration"; a fault because, "it occurred at a time of exterior peril and diverted energies from vital tasks".\footnote{Jean Zay, \textit{Souvenirs et solitude}, (Paris: René Julliard, 1945), p. 163.}

\textbf{The Italian Demands and the Franco-German Declaration}

This time of 'external peril' was a reference to the events of 30 November, when a 'spontaneous' outburst erupted in the Italian Chamber, in which claims were made for 'Tunis, Corsica, Nice, Savoy'. The spontaneity of this outburst was a fiction, as the campaign was premeditated and intentionally designed to coincide with the General Strike.\footnote{See \textit{Ciano's Diary, 1937-1943}, (London: Phoenix Press, 2002): entry for 8 November 1938, in which Count Ciano relates a briefing by Mussolini in which future demands to be made of the French are outlined, (p. 154).} The French Ambassador in Rome, François-Poncet, was in no doubt that the events "had been planned in advance". This interpretation was echoed by the journalist Geneviève Tabouis, writing in \textit{l'Œuvre}: "In Rome as in Berlin, no parliamentary demonstration can take place without having been ordered in advance by the leaders".\footnote{MAE, Série Z, Italie, No. 309: François-Poncet to Bonnet, 1 December 1938; In \textit{l'Œuvre}, 1 December 1938.} The reaction of the French press was unanimous, condemning the Italian demands and advocating a firm response, (although the left was largely preoccupied with the aftermath of the General Strike, particularly the government's subsequent actions taken against the participants). For \textit{l'Intransigeant}, the Italian demands, together with the failure of the General Strike, resulted in the emergence of a new unity: "despite what some say overseas, there remains in France a courage, an energy, a feeling of duty which is intact. ‘La Corse! La Tunisie!’ they believed could be shouted in Rome yesterday. Hold on, our
country is not dead!"\textsuperscript{135} Other newspapers reported the reaction amongst members of the public. "The spiritual riposte of the Latin Quarter", reported l'Aube. "Several thousand Parisian students demonstrate for the annexation of Venice for France".\textsuperscript{136} On the left, the tendency was to portray such demands as the inevitable consequence of previous French foreign policy.\textsuperscript{137}

The ill-judged Italian claims enabled Daladier to assume a much firmer stance on foreign policy, without alienating those who had previously supported appeasement. As Talbot Imlay notes, "the maladroit intervention of Mussolini's Italy offered him an escape".\textsuperscript{138} This 'escape' was crucial given the fact that public opinion in France was divided upon the foreign policy pursued under Georges Bonnet. The perceived popular demand for a firm stance to be adopted against the Italian claims provided an opportunity to adopt a policy of resistance independently of Great Britain and conclusively reject a French retreat into isolationism.\textsuperscript{139} At the same time, it allowed Daladier to dissociate himself from appeasement, leaving Bonnet to bear the brunt of the intensifying disillusionment with the foreign policy of the munichois. Daladier would have been heartened when his statement to the French Chamber on 13 December - "France will not cede an inch of territory to Italy" - was enthusiastically received.\textsuperscript{140}

Ribbentrop's visit to Paris for the signing of the Franco-German Declaration reinforced those reactive representations urging firmness. His visit was far from popular, and confidence in the Declaration was glaringly absent. Even on the right, scepticism was prevalent; the Journal des débats declared: "Let us take the declaration for what it is, a piece of paper [...] that in itself means absolutely nothing". The hard-right Petit Parisien was almost alone in endorsing Bonnet's policy: "it is beyond doubt that nine Frenchmen out of ten [...] totally approve the Government's foreign policy and the patient, prudent and persevering efforts of M. Georges Bonnet".\textsuperscript{141} However, Ribbentrop's visit was carefully coordinated so as to avoid any unpleasant scenes, suggesting that the French elites predicted and feared a hostile reception. In Cabinet, Jean Zay argued that public hostility made it "necessary to postpone the visit", although his argument was defeated

\textsuperscript{135} Gallus, 'Vers l'union des Français', l'Intransigant, 2 December 1938.
\textsuperscript{136} L'Aube, 9 December 1938.
\textsuperscript{137} For example, Péri in l'Humanité, 1 December 1938.
\textsuperscript{138} Imlay, Facing the Second World War, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{140} JO, Chambre des députés, 13 December 1938.
\textsuperscript{141} Pierre Bernus in Journal des débats, politiques et littéraires, 8 December 1938; Petit Parisien, 8 December 1938.
primarily because "Bonnet insisted". Geneviève Tabouis recalled how the French press "was urged to give the German Foreign Minister a 'warm reception'", as well as noting the "rather amusing" police precautions taken during Ribbentrop's visit: "the authorities [were] afraid that the people might be hostile", even concerned that there could be "an attack on the German Minister". In sum, even if the French public desired good relations with Germany, the dominant reactive representations indicated widespread scepticism as to how much confidence could be placed in the Declaration.

A further indication of growing French hostility to the dictators was the response to news that Chamberlain intended to visit Rome in January. The French press were concerned that the British Prime Minister might utilise this visit to mediate between Paris and Rome, and the French government were subsequently aware that any British mediation would be received with hostility by the French public. Pertinax considered Chamberlain's trip to be of "manifest importance in the current circumstances", warning that Mussolini intended to follow up the "continental capitulation of Munich with an equivalent capitulation in the Mediterranean and Africa". Le Temps sought to downplay the possibility of British mediation, emphasising how "British opinion completely recognises that the interests of Great Britain are intrinsically linked to those of France". L'Intransigeant expressed the hope that whilst in Rome, Chamberlain might be able to "convince the Duce that Italy has more to gain from a good understanding than from a futile irritation". Typically, l'Humanité was more forthright, prophesising that "In the forthcoming tête-à-tête at Rome, Neville Chamberlain intends to make a new 'gesture of peace' to the detriment of France".

Representations of French opinion were unambiguous. Concessions to Italy would not be tolerated, and the utmost pressure should be placed on the British government to prevent them undermining the firmness of Paris. This position was made explicitly clear in a note from Bonnet to Roger Cambon, the French Chargé d'Affaires at the London Embassy, on 27 December: "The Prime Minister and Lord Halifax have not, therefore, any alternative but to make perfectly clear to Mussolini that the attitude of France is completely understood by the British Government and British opinion".

142 Jean Zay, Carnets Secrets, 23 November 1938, p. 37.
145 MAE, Papiers 1940, Papiers Daladier, No. 2: Bonnet to Roger Cambon, 27 December 1938.
Similar representations of French opinion pervaded London, where the British elites were increasingly conscious of a growing unity within French public opinion. The failure of the General Strike was particularly crucial in this respect. Prior to the strike, the British press was divided along traditional ideological lines. On the right, it was hoped that the French would see sense and ensure that the strike failed. On the left, particularly the extreme-left, vitriol was saved for Daladier: "It is not the French workers who are endangering the safety of the French people", argued the Daily Worker, "It is the Daladier Government, which represents the interests of the big monopoly capitalists [including] the closest friends of Hitler". However, reports from Paris suggested that the strike was not universally popular among the French left. Phipps, in accordance with his tendency to belittle communist influence, downplayed the popularity of the strike movement. "Only the extremist Labour leaders now favour the strike", he reported, "The moderates, such as M. Jouhaux and most of the Socialists, would prefer a compromise". Despite previous Foreign Office uncertainty regarding the accuracy of Phipps's reports, his reading of the General Strike was confirmed by sections of the British press. The Paris correspondent of the Sunday Times concurred that the strike "was called largely under extremist pressure", although warned that it would be erroneous to suggest that the French working class had "turned their backs on trade unionism".

However, as in France, the Italian claims rapidly displaced the General Strike as the object of attention. For the British, especially the pro-appeasers, the Italian demands were inopportune and frustrating. Italy was seen as the key to further European appeasement. During the Paris visit, the British Ministers had officially informed their French counterparts of Chamberlain's planned trip to Rome in January. After the outburst in the Italian Chamber, this visit was seriously jeopardised, not only by fears of upsetting the French, but also fears of upsetting British public opinion. The British press had reacted to the Italian demands with almost as much vitriol as the French, further illustrating a loss of patience with the Dictators. The Daily Express commented that the only possible result of the Italian demands was the "uniting of Frenchman with Frenchman in an unbreakable front of resistance". The Times emphasised solidarity with France, noting, "Great Britain is wholeheartedly behind France in making a firm stand against methods which, if successful, will never allow Europe to settle down into a

146 The Daily Worker, editorial, 28 November 1938.
147 TNA, FO 371/21602/C14724/92/17: Phipps telegram, 29 November 1938.
148 Sunday Times, Paris correspondent, 4 December 1938.
stability at all". In the Paris Embassy, the counter demonstrations of Parisian students were also noted. Phipps reported how, "several thousand students of the Sorbonne marched down the Boulevard St. Michel shouting for Sardinia, Sicily, ‘Venice pour nos amoureuses’ and Vesuvius". For the British elites, reactive representations of French public opinion were easily interpreted – no concessions to the Italian demands.

Chamberlain’s hopes regarding his forthcoming visit to Rome were under threat. He expressed his frustration to his sisters, writing: "what fools the dictators are", noting that the demands could “only have the effect of uniting all France against them". The French were also urging the British to re-assert Franco-British solidarity, particularly with regard to a potential Franco-Italian conflict. Paris had been unhappy with Chamberlain’s response to a question posed in the Commons asking what obligations tied Britain to France in the event of an Italian attack: “No such specific requirement exists in any treaty or pact with France". As Phipps reported, although his statement was acknowledged to be technically accurate, “the bare form in which it was made has caused a certain chill of disappointment”. Along with criticism in both the British press and the House of Commons, it was felt that a stronger tone needed to be assumed in Chamberlain’s speech to the Foreign Press Association on 13 December. Although this speech was better received, it did not go far enough for some in the Foreign Office. Cadogan described it as “very feeble and bad”, commenting that it “went fairly well, but it got applause in the wrong places (as I had predicted)".

Within the Foreign Office, there was considerable momentum towards doing more to appease French demands, coupled with an increased irritation regarding the content of Phipps’ reports. Orme Sargent was critical of Phipps’ repeated references to a ‘war party’ in France - primarily communists, and all those who openly advocated a firm line against the Dictators – noting that many within the so-called ‘war party’ were anglophiles, as opposed to defeatists: “French défaitisme surely cannot be a British interest”. This view was echoed, and indeed, had consistently been echoed, by Phipps’ nemesis, Vansittart. “[T]here is a very wide-spread feeling of discontent with us in France”, he remarked, emphasising French anger that Britain appeared intent to ‘fight to the last Frenchman’. Furthermore, such a sentiment could separate France from Great

150 TNA, FO 371/22428/R9809/240/11: Phipps to Halifax, 9 December 1938. See also the report on the demonstrations in l’Aube, 9 December 1938.
151 Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1078: Neville to Ida, 4 December 1938.
152 Hansard, (342 H. C. Deb. 5s), col. 1580.
154 Cadogan Diaries, entries for 12 and 13 December 1938, p. 129.
Britain: “I have always said that it would be easier for France to make her terms with Berlin than for us to do so”. In sum, British perceptions of French opinion were twofold. Firstly, reactive representations suggested that the French public favoured a firm stance against the dictators, particularly Mussolini. Secondly, that a firm Franco-British alliance remained an imperative for French opinion. Consequently, the British government found itself having to support the French stance against the Italian demands so as to avoid French opinion lapsing into isolationism.

However, it was not only perceptions of French opinion that were pushing the British towards a firmer foreign policy. The evolution of British public opinion continued, reflecting a growing malaise with regard to appeasement. During the Paris visit, the British press had not neglected to draw attention to the hostility of certain sections of the French crowd. As Cadogan noted in his diary: “Large crowds and quite good reception (though the Times says we were hooted!)”. Nevertheless, although Chamberlain was angered by such comments, he did not consider his popularity diminished. In letters to his sisters he reflected upon the success of the visit, particularly his continued popularity in France. In response, Ida congratulated her brother “on the success of your visit to Paris and the warmth of your reception there, which we thought was not done sufficient justice to in the press over here”. With the support of his close family, Chamberlain could thus turn a relatively blind eye to the more negative reactive representations, choosing instead to revel in the comfort of those portraying opinion as he would prefer it to be. Chamberlain’s perceptions of opinion stubbornly refused to alter despite the evolution of reactive representations. The News Chronicle, in publishing the latest BIPO polls, provided another such reactive representation. The poll revealed a drop in those expressing satisfaction with Chamberlain’s premiership from the 57% of the previous month to 55%. It also revealed that should Anthony Eden be at the head of an all-party political grouping, he would, according to the News Chronicle’s interpretation, “command a considerable following”. In short, argued that newspaper, “Mr. Chamberlain’s stock is falling in the public estimation”.

156 Cadogan Diaries, entry for 23 November 1938, p. 126.
157 Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1077: Neville to Hilda, 27 November 1938; NC18/2/1101: Letter from Ida to Neville, 2 December 1938.
158 News Chronicle, 28 November 1938.
Another voluble reactive representation following the Paris visit concerned conscription. Public opinion had always been fractured upon this issue, chiefly along ideological lines, given the traditional hostility of the left. Once it became known that the French had raised the issue of conscription, dissenting voices in the press became more voluble. Even the Daily Express, which had generally been in favour of accelerated British rearmament - albeit within an isolationist policy - forewarned, "[i]f we promise the French any military assistance, however small, we are pledging the whole youth of Great Britain to a war for France's frontiers". The Daily Mirror was even more emphatic: "Is it true that, in spite of the Maginot Line, the French want another big conscript army for France? What, another big army of fine young men for idiotic and arrogant dud generals to drive to death and destruction?" Reviving memories of the sacrifices of the Great War was undoubtedly a powerful argument for those who campaigned against conscription, playing on the latent war anxiety of the British public.

For the British elites, such representations reinforced the residual perception of public hostility to conscription, particularly if intended to augment an Expeditionary force for despatch to France. However, reactive representations with regard to the Italian claims suggested that the British public supported and admired the firm French response to fascist threats. Furthermore, the lukewarm reception afforded the Franco-German Declaration did not escape attention. As the Daily Mirror caustically remarked, "We are glad to hear that Herr von Ribbentrop [...] has managed to find his way, softly and secretly, by back streets and a branch line to the official quarters of Paris". At the same time, the left were quick to suspect Chamberlain of seeking further acts of appeasement during his forthcoming visit to Rome. Such criticism was having an impact within government, much to Chamberlain's frustration. In a letter to his sister, he expressed concern at both his own party, "who seem to be all over the place", as well as public opinion, noting the "doubts about my foreign policy owing to the behaviour of the dictators". As usual, his sisters did their utmost to reassure him. On 9 December, Hilda wrote, "It is indeed a blessing that you possess a stable character, which is not blown about by gusts of public opinion and I know that you have cultivated with great care that sort of detachment".

159 Daily Express, 26 November 1938; Daily Mirror, 26 November 1938.
160 Daily Mirror, editorial, 7 December 1938.
161 Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1079: Neville to Hilda, 11 December 1938; NC 18/2/1103: Hilda to Neville, 9 December 1938.
Chamberlain remained a stable character, little influenced by the ebbs and flows of public opinion, especially in showing reluctance to abandon his proposed visit to Rome. This despite growing speculation in both the British and French press that he might use the opportunity to achieve a ‘second Munich’, this time making concessions to Mussolini at the expense of Republican Spain or, indeed, at the expense of France. Despite similar criticism at Westminster, Chamberlain stuck resolutely to his guns. In response to a Parliamentary Question on 5 December, he stated: “it is clear that the Italian Government do not associate themselves with the demonstration. [...] I see no reason to alter the arrangements for my visit to Rome next month”. 162

Therefore, it was not only in France that Chamberlain’s intransigence was a cause of anxiety. Indications of growing hostility within the Cabinet to the existing direction of foreign policy were further reinforced by the Junior Minister’s revolt just prior to Christmas, described by the Evening Standard as a “Revolt in Government”. 163 Although it ultimately proved to be of little consequence, it certainly illustrated the growing disillusionment that was arguably spreading throughout the country. However, even at this time, Chamberlain could be consoled by the most recent by-election result, in which the National government candidate defeated another attempt to fight them on a foreign policy platform. Chamberlain’s supporters considered the Duchess of Atholl’s defeat in West Perthshire as a ringing endorsement of the Prime Minister. As the Daily Express noted, “If he required any encouragement – which he does not – to persevere in his policy of appeasement, here he would find plenty of it”. 164

Nonetheless, reactive representations of British opinion between Munich and Christmas 1938 certainly suggested that British opinion was hardening. Indeed, the French detected growing signs of firmness within British opinion. For the French Ambassador, the latest BIPO results coupled with the overall tone of the British press, suggested that many Britons were becoming increasingly opposed to Chamberlain. The French certainly perceived an evolution of British opinion, and if they were to use this to their advantage – particularly with regard to conscription - the need to alter negative perceptions of France was a priority. During the Paris visit Corbin had warned Paris that the British press expressed a rather pessimistic attitude towards the internal divisions and

162 Hansard, (342 H.C. deb. 5s), col. 853.
163 Evening Standard, headline, 19 December 1938. See also Harvey’s diary entry for 13 December 1938, Harvey Diaries, p. 227.
164 Daily Express, editorial, 23 December 1938.
strife plaguing France: "[It is] beyond doubt that news of workers' agitation produces only a disagreeable impression on British opinion". Immediately after the visit, Corbin noted that for the British press "the political situation in France appears [...] so serious as to eclipse any other concern. All of the press concentrates upon this". That was, until the Italian claims.

The immediate British press response to the Italian claims would have been music to French ears. As Corbin reported, "The newspapers [...] believe that not only must Italy obtain nothing from France, but that she risks, by her attitude, compromising her relations with Britain". As Corbin considered the press an accurate barometer of public opinion, the reaction of the British press to the Italian demands was welcomed: "As a whole, the British press adopts an attitude that we can consider very satisfactory, showing the Fascist leaders the practical value of Franco-British solidarity". Similarly, Chamberlain's speech to the Foreign Press Association on 13 December assuaged many French fears. Corbin remarked how references to the Franco-British entente were best received of all: "Undoubtedly, the acclamations were intended not only to underline the significance of the Franco-British entente, but also to dissipate the ambiguity that had arisen from the response given the day before by Mr. Chamberlain at Westminster". The French press, though not unanimous, showed more enthusiasm. Phipps reported that the press of the centre and the right "express great satisfaction at this amplification of Mr. Chamberlain's reply to the question in the House of Commons on December 12th". However, the French wanted more, not least an assurance that Chamberlain would refrain from mediating between Paris and Rome. The importance of British commitment to France grew ever more pressing for the French public and government alike. As Bonnet told the Chamber Foreign Affairs Committee on 14 December, "it would be dreadful for the morale of the French army for Frenchmen to feel that they would be alone for so long before having the support of their allies".

Although the French had yet to attain the explicit guarantee of British support that they were seeking, the pressure they were applying on London was certainly having an effect. The French elites had detected an evolution of British opinion, particularly in

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166 MAE, Série Z, Grande-Bretagne, No. 291: Corbin to Bonnet, 26 November 1938.
167 MAE, Série Z, Italie, No. 309: Corbin to Bonnet, 3 December 1938.
169 Cited in Anthony Adamthwaite, France and the Coming of the Second World War, p. 251.
light of Kristallnacht and the Italian demands. Daladier was similarly attuned to the evolution of French opinion. The French Premier had taken full advantage of Socialist divisions and communist isolation to bolster his authority, implementing a programme of financial recovery and rejecting a French retreat from European affairs. In both cases, the majority of French opinion was perceived to be supportive. Consequently, the residual representations of 'war anxiety' and ideological polarisation had been partially usurped by reactive representations demanding French unity and resolve.

The evolution of French opinion was also influencing London, encouraging them to contemplate further commitments to Paris. However, it is crucial to note that this was primarily the position of the Foreign Office rather than Downing Street. Chamberlain, although acknowledging that the Italian demands had united the French, remained reticent about embracing the Franco-British entente wholeheartedly. In this respect, he was influenced by residual representations of British opinion, not least a perceived hostility to continental commitments and a latent 'war anxiety'. Indeed, the two were linked, as continental commitments were often seen as likely to increase the likelihood of becoming embroiled in war. Furthermore, Chamberlain was convinced that appeasement remained popular, doubtless influenced by the representations of relief and gratitude that had followed Munich. One can suggest that the sheer volume of these reactive representations, coupled with Chamberlain's self-confidence, had transformed them into a residual. That is, Chamberlain was utterly convinced that the British people would support appeasement as long as it maintained peace.

Chamberlain's problem was that reactive representations since Munich suggested a loss of public confidence in appeasement. Both Kristallnacht and the Italian demands demonstrated that Munich had failed to satiate the dictator's appetites. Reactive representations suggested that a firmer foreign policy was demanded, the cornerstone of which was a firm Franco-British alliance. The Foreign Office appeared far more attuned to this evolution of British opinion than the Prime Minister. However, although reactive representations in both countries had evolved towards a position of firmness, the residual representations continued to linger. By the advent of 1939, Daladier was alert to the reactive representations, and thus appeared to perceive French opinion as favouring resistance to appeasement. Chamberlain, however, continued to be informed by the residuals, and thus perceived British opinion as amenable to further acts of concession.
3. Towards the Prague Coup, January – March 1939

By early 1939, reactive representations of French opinion informed the French elites that ideological polarisation and defeatism were dissipating. However, these latter residual representations had not been overcome entirely. Indeed, Paris intentionally cultivated British fears of a re-emergence of French defeatism as a lever with which to urge London to augment their military commitment to the Franco-British entente, even at the cost of conscription. Over the coming months, French efforts in this regard would continue apace, lent additional weight by rumours of an imminent German move in the west. Given the uncertain international outlook, reactive representations of British opinion indicated increased support for the French alliance. However, as international tensions eased in February, optimism increased that the Dictator's demands could still be peacefully accommodated. However, this optimism was to prove short-lived. In sum, British and French opinion had evolved to such an extent that a return to appeasement was, if not unthinkable, at least profoundly distrusted. The public reaction to the events of March 1939, when the Germans nonchalantly marched into Bohemia and Moravia, merely confirmed the extent of this evolution. The Prague coup was not a turning-point for British and French public opinion. It was simply the moment at which the evolution of reactive representations finally assumed the necessary potency to supersede the residual representations that had previously underpinned the policy of appeasement.

Another Munich? The Rome Visit, January 1939

By January 1939, the Italian demands dominated the agenda and the French government's position of firmness remained popular with the majority of opinion. Phipps felt sufficiently impressed to remark, "I must say that I have never known French public opinion so unanimous as it is against Italy". Most French newspapers displayed a resolute determination not to be cowed by Italian belligerence, stressing that British support in this regard was crucial. *Le Temps* emphasised how Chamberlain's recent statements echoed those of Bonnet, ensuring that Paris and London, "in the same spirit,

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1 TNA, FO 371/23791/R55/7/22: Phipps to Halifax, 21 December 1938. Duroselle has suggested that the Government's response to the claims had been dictated by "the quasi-unanimity of French public opinion", *La décadence*, p. 391.
have marked the same tendencies, [and] assigned the same goal to their efforts". However, not everyone was confident of Franco-British solidarity. Geneviève Tabouis suggested that the dictators wanted Chamberlain to act as a mediator between Italy and France during the Rome visit, doing nothing to dampen speculation that this was indeed the British Prime Minister's intention. The French government shared this fear, and did not shy away from raising their concerns in London. Bonnet informed Cambon on 27 December that "it is important, before going to Rome, that the British Prime Minister and Lord Halifax are exactly informed of the very clear-cut position of the French Government [...] The Italian initiative clearly reveals the dangers which threaten Britain and France when their policy is not in perfect alignment. Such an experience must remain a lesson for future".

Chamberlain's decision to visit Paris on 10 January 1939, on route to Rome, was partly taken to assuage French anxieties. The pressure put on the Foreign Office by the French Embassy was persistent, and the chance to discuss the situation directly with Chamberlain and Halifax offered the French government an opportunity to articulate their concerns. A Quai d'Orsay note of 8 January 1939 made it explicitly clear that Chamberlain and Halifax must "leave Paris wholly convinced of our considered and unshakeable will". At the meeting, Daladier referred to the current climate of French opinion, suggesting that, even if he wanted to make concessions to the Italian demands (which he certainly did not), "he would not be able, since the Italian Government had succeeded in producing a 'union sacrée' in France, and any government that attempted to do so "would be swept away ('serait balayé')". In portraying French opinion in this manner, Daladier demonstrated that he was alert to the evolution of reactive representations. The unanimous response to the Italian claims indicated that appeasement of Italy would be unpopular across the political spectrum. Moreover, leftist support for Daladier's position was always qualified by suggestions that the demands would never have materialised had it not been for the precedent of capitulation.

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2 *Le Temps*, editorial, 'Les positions de la France et de l'Angleterre', 21 December 1938. The reference was to Chamberlain's speech on 13 December, emphasising the solidarity of British and French interests.
3 Geneviève Tabouis, in *L'Œuvre*, 22 December 1938.
4 AN, Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/12, 2DA5 Dr. 2, sdrb: Corbin to Cambon, 27 December 1938.
5 AN, Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/12, 2DA5 Dr. 2 sdrb: Le Sous-Directeur d'Europe - Note: Entretiens franco-britanniques du 10 janvier 1939: Rapports franco-italiens, 8 January 1939.
established at Munich. In short, if French unity was to be maintained, Daladier could not contemplate further appeasement.

Further appeasement was far from Daladier's mind during his voyage to North Africa and Corsica in early January. The trip was a successful public relations exercise, receiving extensive press coverage in both Britain and France. Daladier's popularity in France was undoubtedly bolstered, as he capitalised on the vitriol inspired by the Italian demands. The voyage irritated Chamberlain, but few in Britain denied that Daladier's resolve accurately reflected French public opinion. Reactive representations, as reflected in the press, provided confirmation. French newspapers lavished attention on the visit, emphasising the crowds applauding Daladier throughout the tour. The *Petit Marseillaise* of 3 January exclaimed: "Corsica gives a triumphal welcome to M. Daladier", and on the 4 January reported the 200,000 Tunisians who had welcomed Daladier in Tunis. Such sentiments were echoed in many other newspapers. *L'Œuvre* headlined: "M. Mussolini profoundly impressed by the demonstrations of loyalty which have taken place during the course of M. Daladier's trip". Even *l'Humanité* acknowledged the success of Daladier's voyage, despite arguing that the crowds were there to celebrate France and democracy, rather than the *Président du Conseil* himself.

As France galvanised around a firm response to Mussolini's Italy, the residual representation of 'war anxiety' showed signs of dissipating. Daladier's voyage to North Africa and Corsica, widely covered not only in the printed press but also in cinema newsreels, contributed to an upsurge in patriotic sentiment and, moreover, of pride and faith in the loyalty and strength of the French Empire. Mainstream popular culture also conveyed more optimistic messages. Within French cinema, the 'pacifist' films of the early 1930s gave way to pictures that, whilst not glorifying war or revelling in the prospect of a future conflict, nonetheless portrayed French courage and ingenuity in face of the German menace. Bravery and guile replaced cowardice and decadence; the Maginot Line was celebrated, and the valour and glory of the Empire upheld. Officially

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7 See Gabriel Péri, in *l'Humanité*, 8 January 1939.
9 *Le Petit Marseillaise*, 2, 3, 4 & 7 January 1939; *l'Œuvre*, 8 January 1939 (original emphasis); *l'Humanité*, 4, 5 & 8 January 1939.
10 For more on newsreel coverage of Daladier's voyage, see Marianne Benteli, Daniel Jay and Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, 'Le cinéma français: thèmes et public', in Rémond and Bourdin (eds.), *La France et les Français*, pp. 34-35.
11 For more on the content and impact of French cinema during this period, see Benteli, Jay and Jeancolas, ibid.; Charles Rearick, *The French in Love and War*, pp. 234-235; Rémy Pithon, 'Opinions publiques et représentations culturelles face aux problèmes de la puissance: Le témoignage du cinéma français (1938-1939)', *Relations internationales*, 33 (1983), pp. 91-102, and Elizabeth Grottle Strebel, 'Political polarisation and
sanctioned films sought to capitalise upon this perceived sentiment, with productions such as *Unite francaise* and *Sommes-nous defendus* reiterating the strength and unity of France. *Unite francaise*, released just after Daladier's voyage, contained such statements as: "This country, pacific and tranquil ..., is capable of facing all attacks and all challenges".12

French opinion appeared to relish manifestations of French firmness and resolve. A government note suggested that the press "appears to await with optimism the initial echoes of Daladier's voyage in Tunisia".13 Daladier's voyage, coupled with the unity of French opinion in light of the Italian demands, also helped convince the British that France was resolute, united and strong. For the French press, it was crucial that Chamberlain avoid mediation during the Rome visit. Daladier's success in portraying a rediscovered French patriotism and unity was therefore propitious. The *Journal des debats* noted: "Nothing could better prepare the visit to Rome of Mr Chamberlain and Lord Halifax than the present trip of M. Daladier". Similarly, *Le Populaire* emphasised that the British must be made aware, in no uncertain terms, that France was prepared to cede absolutely nothing to Italy.14

The British were undoubtedly conscious of the strength of French feeling. Ingram, the head of the Southern Department at the Foreign Office, had to reassure Corbin that London "had no intention of accepting any position of quasi-mediation".15 Cadogan informed Corbin of the line the British intended to pursue in Rome, later noting in his diary: "we must reassure the French and he was evidently greatly relieved".16 The British had decided that the Rome visit would not be used to mediate between Paris and Rome, or to promote appeasement. Halifax, like many in the Foreign Office, was anxious to avoid antagonising the French, and saw little benefit in further Munich-style concessions. "I don't think the French are the least likely to open negotiations", he remarked, "and I would prefer to keep ourselves out of it for the present".17

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13 AN, F7/15962/3: Ministere des Colonies: Service Intercolonial d'information et de documentation, Bulletin Quotidien, 2 January 1939.
15 TNA, FO 371/23791/R153/7/22: Ingram to Phipps, 4 January 1939.
16 Cadogan Diaries, entry for 6 January 1939, p. 134.
Further pressure emanated from home, with certain sections of the press and political society strongly supporting the French stance. Churchill was in no doubt as to French opinion, commenting in a letter to his wife that, “the whole of France is united against Mussolini”. Such unity enabled the French to be more assertive within the Franco-British entente. The notion of the ‘English Governess’ dictating French foreign policy is certainly not apparent at this juncture. Furthermore, representations of French opinion with regard to Daladier’s voyage to North Africa and Corsica reinforced the British perception that the stance of the French government was broadly supported by French public opinion. As Phipps concluded, “his journey is regarded by the French press, without distinction of party, as an encouraging demonstration, if such were needed, of the unity and devotion of the French Empire”.

Representations of British opinion indicated that the firm French stance was widely popular. Prior to the Rome visit, considerable scepticism was voiced in the British press, suggesting that further acts of appeasement would be publicly unpopular. Far left newspapers were stirring up controversy. The Daily Worker suggested that finding “some arrangement ... of giving Mussolini the advantage he needs, is the central purpose of the Rome visit”. The Manchester Guardian suggested that British opinion was irrevocably shifting away from the spirit of Munich, observing that reaction to the Italian demands favoured firmness: “The view that the policy of ‘appeasement’ is coming to an end would seem to be finding confirmation”. Prior to the visit, the Foreign Office News Department expressed concern that press coverage of the Rome visit might be unfavourable. It was thus considered essential to “prevent the special correspondents sending messages of which we do not approve. This will be no easy task since some of them are very anti-Italian”.

Such reactive representations appeared to influence the discussions in Rome. The Foreign Office was conscious that adopting anything other than a firm stance would unsettle not only the French, but also considerable sections of British opinion. The British public was increasingly perceived to have lost faith in the goodwill of the

20 TNA, FO 371/23791/R223/7/22: Phipps telegram, 8 January 1939.
21 The Daily Worker, editorial, 3 January 1939; the Manchester Guardian, diplomatic correspondent (F. A. Voigt), 30 December 1938.
22 TNA, FO 395/563/360: Peake to Cadogan, 7 December 1938.
Dictators. The demand for rearmament – even conscription – illustrated how little faith was placed on the Anglo-German Agreement, whilst the resentment and exasperation expressed towards the Italian demands demonstrated their disdain for Mussolini. Regarding the latter, even the Times joined the chorus, commenting that “neither the French Government nor the British Government intend the forthcoming conversations in Rome to take on the aspect of British mediation in a purely French-Italian dispute”. The impact of such reactive representations reinforced the elites’ decision to avoid mediation between Paris and Rome, and also exacerbated the belief of many within the Foreign Office that a firm line must be pursued with Mussolini. Therefore, whilst Chamberlain hoped to obtain “something for something”, Halifax’s aspirations were more restrained, merely seeking “nothing for nothing”.

Above all, Halifax was convinced that the British government must reassure the French. Consequently, hopes for the advancement of appeasement during the Rome visit were effectively destroyed. The French were adamant that no compromise be offered, and the British, alert to the state of both French official opinion and British public opinion, acted accordingly. In effect, the visit achieved little. The Times concluded: “The estimate of those most closely concerned is in popular parlance that ‘neither side scored’; and what is particularly satisfactory in this diplomatic match is that neither side tried to score”. The majority of the British press offered a similar appraisal. The Manchester Guardian suggested that official as well as popular support for appeasement was dwindling: “It is certain that he could not have made concessions in Rome without the risk of resignations from his Cabinet”. Potential Cabinet dissent was also predicted in France, a police report noting a “certain malaise” within the British Cabinet regarding “the forthcoming trip of Mr Chamberlain to Rome”.

In sum, the British press expressed relief at the outcome of the Rome visit, maintaining a contemptuous perception of the Italian demands. The Daily Mirror evoked the false and organised nature of the initial demonstrations in the Italian Chamber: “The cheers that saluted Mr. Chamberlain in Italy yesterday seemed to sound with a greater

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23 The Times, Paris correspondent, 10 January 1939.
24 Halifax and Chamberlain to the Cabinet, just prior to their departure for Rome, cited in Andrew Roberts, The Holy Fox, p. 138. For Halifax’s decision to adopt a “nothing for nothing” course, see Harvey’s diary entry for 25 December 1938, Harvey Diaries, p. 231.
25 See Cadogan’s diary entry of 6 January 1939, Cadogan Diaries, p. 134. Oliver Harvey had earlier remarked that “we cannot win Italy at the expense of France”, recalling a meeting in Halifax’s room in late December in which it was decided “to give nothing for nothing”, and that the British “could not support any territorial claims on France”. Diary entry for 25 December 1938, Harvey Diaries, p. 231.
spontaneity than those other recent Italian shouts of ‘Corsica, Tunis, Nice!’28 Churchill reflected the opinion of those Conservatives eager to embrace a firmer foreign policy, expressing relief that the visit “did no harm”. That, according to Churchill, “is the most we can say of it”. Furthermore, Churchill believed Chamberlain to be vain in supposing “that he could make peace by giving everything away! Everything looks as if he and his Government are stiffening up on foreign matters”.29

However, Chamberlain’s reception in Rome succeeded only in perpetuating his conviction that his status as the architect of appeasement made him universally popular. On his return, he referred to the favourable reception he had received, and also spoke encouragingly of Mussolini: “Halifax, who went expecting not to like him came away with a very favourable impression”.30 The American journalist, William Shirer, noted that Chamberlain was “much affected by the warmth of the greeting”, although added, not without incredulity, “[c]an it be that he doesn’t know they’re arranged?” Ciano also noted Chamberlain’s satisfaction, suggesting it was partly attributable to “the boos with which he was received some months ago in friendly France”.31 Ciano was referring to Chamberlain’s reception in Paris the previous November, choosing to overlook Chamberlain’s more recent visit on 10 January. On this occasion, the Paris police reported no significant degree of hostility: “Three to four hundred curious onlookers assembled in front of the Railway station. A certain number of them cheered the English Statesmen with cries of ‘Vive Chamberlain’”.32

The Rome talks resulted in neither an unequivocal statement of British solidarity with France nor anything resembling another Munich. This satisfied Daladier for whom a firm position vis-à-vis Italy offered the best chance of preserving the peace. This was a view shared by Henri Hoppenot, the sous-directeur d’Europe at the Quai d’Orsay, who considered it imperative to convince Mussolini that France and Britain could not be bullied, thus preventing him from pursuing “the dangerous road on which he appears to have committed himself”.33 The German attitude towards a potential Franco-Italian

30 Chamberlain Papers, NC18/1/1082: Neville to Hilda, 15 January 1939.
33 MAE, Papiers 1940, Papiers Daladier, No. 3: Note: Le sous-directeur d’Europe, sur les Entretiens franco-britanniques, 10 January 1939.
conflict was also used to dissuade London from adopting a conciliatory approach to Rome. Paris emphasised that Germany would be impressed by a display of firmness, and that it was crucial not to allow the Italian demands to rupture the Franco-British alliance. Cambon relayed to London the opinion of the French Chargé d'Affaires in Berlin: “provided the French attitude remains absolutely firm towards Italian claims, Germany would not only refrain from military support for Italy, but would reduce her diplomatic support to a minimum”.

The French were further encouraged to apply pressure by their perceptions of British public opinion. British press sympathy for France was clearly evident during January 1939, exemplified by the favourable coverage of Daladier’s visit to Corsica and North Africa. Daladier’s voyage was undertaken as a publicity exercise, a tangible demonstration of both the French desire to resist Italian demands and the loyalty of the people of Corsica and North Africa to France. London was impressed. As Corbin reported on 4 January, “The welcome given to M. Daladier in Tunisia, and the demonstrations of the loyalty of the population that saluted his arrival in Bizerte and the capital, received considerable publicity in the British press”. Several factors thus contributed to the nature and outcome of the Rome visit. As Ciano noted in his diary, the appraisal of the Times, that the outcome was a no-score-draw, was “a good characterization”. The French press generally concurred. As Léon Blum remarked, for better or for worse, “the trip to Rome has changed nothing”. The French right, meanwhile, emphasised how the absence of British attempts at mediation proved the strength and cordiality of Franco-British relations. The Journal des débats commented: “Not only have they compromised nothing, but they also showed that in face of the Rome-Berlin axis there is a very solid Franco-British understanding”.

The National Service Debate

French perceptions of British public opinion encouraged them to intensify their efforts to induce London to implement peacetime conscription. Recent reports from the London Embassy suggested that opinion was increasingly amenable to such a measure.

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55 MAE, Série Z, Italie, No. 311: Corbin to Bonnet, 4 January 1939.
56 Ciano’s Diary, entry for 13 January 1939, p.177.
57 Blum, Le Populaire, 14 January 1939.
Corbin informed Paris that there are “numerous Englishmen who realise that the military contribution of their country is far from sufficient and who, deep down, are troubled by the disproportionate sacrifices that the British and French people would have to make in wartime”. Such a realisation, suggested Corbin, permitted optimism. British opinion has awakened, “little by little, to the demands of the situation, and would be prepared to provide a much more important effort”. 39

The French government continued to exert pressure, not least by extending their own two-year model of military service, emphasising the need to possess a sizeable army in the current international climate. A Premier Bureau note laid bare the simple facts: “In face of the 1,400,000 active servicemen which the German-Italian bloc can align, France currently has at her disposal, on her Metropolitan territory, in the event of a sudden attack, only 450,000 men”. 40 The pressure on London had certainly gathered pace, and several British political figures lent their support to the French campaign. Duff Cooper not only advocated that Britain must refrain from acting as a mediator in the Franco-Italian quarrel, but also intimated that the British must be prepared to make further sacrifices: “they [the French] are beginning to get a little tired of making great sacrifices and not getting any increased assurance of peace in return for them”. 41

Under pressure from both the French government and considerable sections of British opinion, the government adopted a voluntary system of service, announced by Chamberlain on 22 January. However, in so doing, a latent war anxiety resurfaced. Referring to Chamberlain’s announcement, Corbin noted: “The phrase in Chamberlain’s broadcast of yesterday evening which appears to have most struck the imagination of the journalists is when he said ‘this plan must allow us to be ready for war’”. Nonetheless, Chamberlain was at pains to argue that war was not yet inevitable, characteristically playing upon war anxiety: “War to-day differs fundamentally from all the wars of the past inasmuch as to-day its first and its most numerous victims are not the professional fighters but the civilian population, the workman and the clerk, the housewife and, most horrible of all, the children”. 43 Chamberlain may have employed such evocative language in order to augment his popularity as the man who prevented the catastrophe of war the previous September. However, he certainly perceived a future war in such terms.

39 MAE, Papiers 1940, Papiers Rochat, No. 18: Corbin to Bonnet, 7 January 1939.
40 AN, Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/30, 4DA3 Dr. 3: État-Major de l’Armée, 1er Bureau: ‘Note relative à la nécessité du maintien du Service du 2 ans’, 25 January 1939. This note comes from the Section d’Armements et d’Etudes Techniques (SAET), the section responsible for French Army training.
41 Duff Cooper, Evening Standard, 10 January 1939.
42 MAE, Série Z, Grande-Bretagne, No. 282: Corbin to Bonnet, 24 January 1939.
Furthermore, Chamberlain was seeking to justify the introduction of a policy that was believed to be unpalatable to sections of British opinion.

Indeed, the voluntary system did not go unopposed. The British left was predictably hostile, interpreting the move as a precursor to conscription. As Corbin reported, "[a]ny idea of compulsion, even inspired by the need to defend the security of the country and the democratic system itself, appears to them [the British left] a foretaste of totalitarianism, of which they have such a profound horror". Nevertheless, Paris considered the time to be propitious to accelerate the campaign for British conscription. Despite the stance of the British left, it was felt that the French campaign was influencing the British, both officially and in the press. Corbin detected an increase in "the attention of the British Government to the inequality of the sacrifices to which the French and British populations would have to consent in times of war". Moreover, Corbin implied that the decision to adopt a voluntary system was insufficient, arguing that more French pressure for conscription must be applied: "I think that an intervention on our part in this sense is more necessary than ever". French perceptions of British opinion were again crucial. For Corbin, pro-conscription voices in the conservative press indicated that the mass of British opinion was now amenable. Press commentary, suggested Corbin, exactly reflected "the opposing tendencies of public opinion on the question of voluntary or obligatory service".

In Paris, the tendency of the British left to oppose peacetime conscription was considered bizarre. For the French left, national service was necessary to prevent a potentially repressive professional army, used by the ruling classes to quell social dissent to the inevitable detriment of the working classes. Given the existing European climate, Britain's reluctance to adopt conscription was considered peculiar and potentially dangerous. The decision to undertake a form of voluntary service was construed by some as a step in the right direction. It was a measure of "capital importance" argued l'Intransigeant, indicating that the British had "finally decided to abandon the old prejudice against conscription". For others, however, it remained pitifully inadequate. Pertinax

44 DDF, 2ème Série, Tome XIII, No. 424: Corbin to Bonnet, 25 January 1939.
45 MAE, Papiers 1940, Papiers Rochat, No. 18: Corbin to Bonnet, 26 January 1939.
47 In 1934, Charles de Gaulle published a book entitled Vers l'armée de métier, advocating a professional army in place of a conscript force. De Gaulle's arguments enjoyed some political support, notably from Paul Reynaud. However, despite sympathy from the political right, the French left remained hostile to the notion of professional army. "Military service is not the exercise of a profession, but a civic responsibility", argued Léon Blum, "Every citizen is a soldier, every soldier a citizen". Le Populaire, 30 November 1934, cited in Elizabeth Kier, Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine Between the Wars, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 58.
was particularly vociferous. Chamberlain and his colleagues, he wrote, "continue to think that conscription can be deferred until the first sign of war".\(^48\)

Leftist hostility, however, suggested that many sections of British opinion had yet to abandon their 'old prejudices'. A CPGB statement proclaimed: "The Labour and trade union movement should refuse to assist these pro-conscription moves of a Government which has allied itself to Fascism, and whose Premier is intriguing this very moment with Mussolini in an attempt to crush the Spanish Republic".\(^49\) This statement was made prior to the distribution of 20 million copies of the National Service Handbook on 25 January, designed to encourage people to volunteer. This halfway measure shows how the British government was sensitive to different facets of public opinion, conscious that conscription was potentially divisive. Furthermore, any suggestion that conscription had been introduced in order to furnish a larger Expeditionary Force to assist the French would be unpalatable to the isolationists, for whom a European commitment remained abhorrent. Meanwhile, for the handful of integral pacifists, conscription was anathema. George Lansbury, writing in the PPU's Peace News on 20 January 1939 noted that, "Every true pacifist is against conscription and will always oppose it". Such reactive representations, although representing peripheral interests, reinforced residual representations, thus ensuring that such sentiments were never wholly eradicated.

Fears that the voluntary scheme was intended to furnish a field force for use on the continent were somewhat misplaced, as it focused on securing men for passive defence, notably ARP. This can be partly attributed to fears of the potential repercussions on British opinion of making an explicit reference to increasing Britain's land army, and thus her potential to despatch a sizeable Expeditionary Force to France. However, there were indications that reactive representations had evolved in this respect, not least the strong degree of support for France in her quarrels with Italy. Moreover, the immediate post-Munich period had already indicated that many in Britain would be prepared to make further sacrifices in order to make the country stronger, particularly in terms of national service. As the Daily Telegraph noted, "it now rests with the individual citizen to show that the readiness for service displayed last September was no mere abstract and flickering enthusiasm".\(^50\) Nonetheless, the extent to which this readiness to serve would transcend resistance to the implementation of conscription was

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\(^{48}\) L'Intransigent, 24 January 1939; Pertinax, l'Europe nouvelle, 28 January 1939.

\(^{49}\) Statement of the CPGB, 'The Best National Service', published in the Daily Worker, 18 January 1939.

\(^{50}\) Daily Telegraph, editorial, 25 January 1939.
questionable, especially given leftist hostility. However, with the exception of the *Daily Worker*, the left wing press was relatively restrained in criticising the government’s line on National Service. Indeed, the left was preoccupied with internal divisions, particularly the debate over a ‘Popular Front’ and the expulsion of Sir Stafford Cripps.\(^{51}\) Moreover, the conservative right was more favourable. The *Times* reflected the perceived need to do something tangible in the current conditions: “No one, looking at the world to-day can have the slightest excuse for thinking that service is unnecessary”.\(^{52}\)

British perceptions of French opinion were also crucial. As Fraser reiterated in a letter to Phipps on 4 January, the experience of Munich demonstrated how “French public opinion was undoubtedly disturbed by the apparent refusal of Great Britain to accept the realities of the European situation and to adopt in peace measures necessitated by the totalitarian nature of modern war”.\(^{53}\) As previously discussed, the British feared that the French might, in the absence of a firm commitment from Britain, lapse into isolationism, leaving Britain alone in any potential conflict with Nazi Germany. In the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy on 23 January, Halifax noted the “growing feeling in certain quarters in France” that Britain would leave the French to do all the fighting on land. Chamberlain, however, was unmoved, concluding that the French must be made aware that on the outbreak of war there could be “no possibility of Britain landing a large army on the Continent”.\(^{54}\) Strang relayed this stance to Corbin, arguing that Britain could not equip a larger force even if she had the manpower. Corbin replied that he appreciated this, “but he thought that French opinion would have been rather discouraged by the small prominence given in our national appeal to the needs of the Regular Army”.\(^{55}\)

The French government re-iterated this argument in the following weeks. Their perceptions of British opinion continued to offer encouragement. For Paris, the residual representation of a British public hostile to both conscription and continental entanglements appeared to be receding under the pressure of reactive representations. London too was conscious of an apparent evolution of British opinion towards the conscription question. Furthermore, the British perceived French opinion to attach a

\(^{51}\) For more on this debate, see Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s*, chapter 18, ‘Cripps and the Petition Campaign’, pp. 170-182.

\(^{52}\) *The Times*, editorial, ‘National Service’, 24 January 1939.

\(^{53}\) TNA, CAB 21/555: Fraser to Phipps, 4 January 1939.

\(^{54}\) TNA, FO 371/22962/C1098: Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy, Conclusions of 35th Meeting, 23 January 1939.

\(^{55}\) TNA, WO/208/2037A: Strang to Phipps, 28 January 1939.
great importance to the introduction of compulsory military service. In order to avoid isolationist sentiment gaining ground among the French people, Chamberlain was finding himself under increasing pressure to relent. By early 1939, reactive representations of both British and French opinion advocating conscription had become ever more voluble, superseding the previously dominant residuals. As European tensions continued to rise, the pressure on London became increasingly unrelenting.

Strengthening the Entente

Coupled with the French desire for British conscription was a more general desire to persuade London to provide a more emphatic statement of Franco-British solidarity. In this respect, Paris was aided by the war scares in early 1939. Recent intelligence regarding German intentions reinforced the necessity, from a British perspective, of ensuring that France not lapse into a defeatist mindset. Various reports received by the Foreign Office since December had raised the distinct possibility that, contrary to previous assumptions, Germany may be make a move on the West rather than the East. A memorandum by Halifax of 19 January noted: “All the reports seem to show that Hitler is contemplating a coup early this year, the danger period beginning towards the end of February”. After noting the conventional wisdom that Hitler would move eastwards, notably in the Ukraine, Halifax continued: “More recently, we have been receiving reports showing that he may decide that the moment is propitious for dealing an overwhelming blow at the Western Powers”.

The object of such an ‘overwhelming blow’ could well include the Netherlands. For London, any such attack must be regarded as a direct challenge to British security. Halifax, in a later Cabinet meeting, commented that “[f]ailure on our part to intervene would undermine our position in the world and would only mean that at some later stage we would have to face the same struggle with Germany with fewer friends and in far worse circumstances”. In terms of the ‘fewer friends’ comment, it was absolutely imperative that France remain a reliable ally. The British were aware that the French would be seeking assurances that a German attack on Switzerland would evoke the immediate assistance of Great Britain. The British Cabinet was therefore obliged to seriously consider giving a firm commitment to France. Halifax concluded, “[f]
Switzerland was invaded by Germany it would be in pursuance of German aggression against France, and in that event we should be bound to go to France's help and would have to say so”. Chamberlain agreed, adding that in such circumstances “we should not be fighting for the security or integrity of Holland or Switzerland, but in defence of the freedom of all neutral countries”. Only the most vehemently isolationist sections of opinion could disagree, as neither Holland nor Switzerland could accurately be described as ‘far away countries of which we know nothing’.

The anticipated French pressure soon emerged. A French aide-mémoire of 1 February made it clear that although no contractual obligation existed, the French government would consider an invasion of Holland as a casus belli, and requested a reciprocal assurance from Britain in the event of an invasion of Switzerland. Moreover, they used this opportunity to further press for the introduction of conscription: “The French Government, for their part, are ready for this community of efforts and sacrifices which, corresponding with a real community of responsibilities, will give Franco-British collaboration its full material efficacy”.

London showed little hesitation in accepting the French demand for reciprocity regarding Switzerland. However, on the issue of conscription, the British were less forthcoming. William Strang, head of the Central Department of the Foreign Office, acknowledged that the French aide-mémoire was “a very important communication”, the response to which “may have far-reaching effects upon our relations with France, and indeed on our future position in the world”. Nonetheless it was concluded that, “for the present, at any rate, the reference in the French note to the question of conscription in England should be ignored”. However, the necessity of French collaboration was not questioned, the British fearing that France may seek an agreement with Berlin and lapse into isolationism. For Strang, this was highly dangerous, because “we, not France, are now Germany's enemy No.1”. Cadogan agreed that France must be given greater assurances, but was reluctant to commit Britain to “an automatic obligation to come into the war if Italy attacks France, because that simply brings in Germany, and France ought

57 TNA, FO 371/22962/C1099: Conclusions of Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy, 36th Meeting, 26 January 1939. For more on the impact of the 'war scares', and subsequent French attempts to bolster British commitment to the entente during January and February 1939, see Imlay, Facing the Second World War, pp. 84-93, Robert Young, In Command of France, pp. 192-230, Peter Jackson, France and the Nazi Menace, pp. 322-328, Alexander, The Republic in Danger, pp. 236-278, and, idem., 'Les reactions à la menace stratégique allemande en Europe occidentale: La Grande-Bretagne, la Belgique et le “cas Hollande”, décembre 1938 – février 1939', Cahiers d'histoire de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, 7 (Brussels, 1982), pp. 5-58.
58 TNA, FO 371/22963/C1318/15/18: French aide-mémoire for His Majesty's Government, 1 February 1939.
59 MAE, Papiers 1940, Papiers Cabinet Georges Bonnet, No. 2: Copy of British memo to the French Government, 13 February 1939.
to be able to deal with Italy single-handed". Cadogan's reading of the situation was that it should be left to the French to say "whether and when she needs our help". Isolationist tendencies of opinion would certainly be hostile to any firm contractual obligation to France, although Cadogan voiced some exasperation at this sentiment: "I know all the objections about 'putting our foreign policy in the hands of the French govt.', but again, in these days, is there much risk in that?" The fact was, Cadogan suggested, in a future war, France was unlikely to be the aggressor.60

Bonnet raised the stakes in a speech to the French Chamber on 26 January, publicly declaring that in the event of war, "All the forces of Great Britain would then be at our disposal, just as all the forces of France would be at the disposal of Great Britain".61 Many in France interpreted Bonnet's speech as effectively laying down the gauntlet regarding Franco-British solidarity. Tabouis, in l'Eure, reported the reception in London: "In all circles and in all parties they consider that, thanks to the manner in which Georges Bonnet expressed Franco-British understanding, Neville Chamberlain would be forced to provide, in his speech at Birmingham, precision and insurance regarding Franco-British solidarity, in the Mediterranean and on the Rhine".62 If Bonnet's declaration of Franco-British solidarity had been intended to compel Chamberlain to reciprocate, it did not work. In his Birmingham speech on 28 January, the British Prime Minister primarily sought to justify Munich and emphasise the benefits of his recent sojourn in Rome. In defence of Munich, Chamberlain could "see nothing to regret nor any reason to suppose that another course would have been preferable". Indeed, he once more utilised 'war anxiety' as justification. "War today", he remarked, "is so terrible in its effects on those who take part in it, no matter what the ultimate outcome may be; it brings so much loss and suffering even to the bystanders that it ought never to be allowed to begin unless every practicable and honourable step has been taken to prevent it". His visit to Rome was portrayed as just such an attempt, and Chamberlain was proud to recall "the most remarkable, spontaneous, universal demonstration of welcome that I have ever witnessed". Such a welcome, he continued,

60 TNA, FO 371/22963/C1318/15/18: Minutes by Strang and Cadogan, 4 February 1939. For more on Anglo-French relations during this period, see Talbot Imlay, The Making of the Anglo-French Alliance, 1938-39, op.cit.
61 Cited in TNA, FO 371/22922/ C1326/281/17: Note on British obligations to France in the event of a Franco-Italian war, 31 January 1939.
“demonstrated as clearly as possible the intense, the passionate desire of the Italian people for peace – a desire which is matched by an equal feeling in this country”.

However, Chamberlain was coming under increasing pressure to clarify Britain’s position vis-à-vis the Franco-British entente, not only from sections of the Foreign Office but also reactive representations of public opinion. The latter were significantly reinforced by the British press reaction to Hitler’s Reichstag speech on 30 January. The Daily Express was certainly isolated in proclaiming: “We were right. We have got confirmation straight from Hitler’s mouth. There will be no war involving Britain in 1939.” More widespread was the exasperation voiced by Duff Cooper in the Evening Standard on 31 January: “How much longer are the periods of European history to be determined by the intervals between Herr Hitler’s speeches. How much longer are the attendant nations to scramble for the crumbs of comfort that fall from the table?”

Such reactive representations compelled Chamberlain to provide a clear pledge of British support for France on 6 February. In response to a Parliamentary Question, the Prime Minister stated: “I feel bound to make plain that the solidarity of interest, by which France and this country are united, is such that any threat to the vital interests of France from whatever quarter it came must evoke the immediate co-operation of this country”.

The Observer welcomed the statement, noting how the “suggestion that Britain and France could be divided and reduced to isolation and helplessness in turn had been one of the most serious dangers to peace”. For the Daily Telegraph, Chamberlain had “reaffirmed the solidarity of interests between his country and France in terms which will be universally welcomed and approved by all sections of British opinion”. The isolationist press refrained from criticism, offering little comment on Chamberlain’s declaration, instead focusing on events in Spain. The far-left, meanwhile, were predictably sceptical as to what Chamberlain’s declaration actually amounted to: “This new pledge is a smokescreen. [...] The ‘pledge’ is intended only to lull people here and in France while the next Munich, the next concession to Fascism against democracy is prepared”. Implicit within such critiques was the suspicion that Chamberlain was simply attempting to deflect the growing tendency of reactive representations to doubt

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63 Chamberlain Papers, NC 15/23: Transcript of a speech delivered by Chamberlain to the Birmingham Jewellers Association Dinner, 28 January 1939.
64 Daily Express, editorial, 1 February 1939.
65 Duff Cooper, Evening Standard, 31 January 1939.
66 Hansard, (343 H. C. Deb. 5s.), col. 623.
67 Garvin, Observer, 12 February 1939; Daily Telegraph, editorial, 7 February 1939.
68 See for example, the Daily Mail editorial, ‘Why Prolong It?’, 7 February 1939, and their editorial of 13 February 1939, ‘Recognise Franco’.
69 Daily Worker, editorial, 8 February 1939.
the efficacy of appeasement. Chamberlain was an appeaser to the core, it was suggested, simply waiting for a propitious moment to return to the Munich policy.

However, the majority of the British press were less cynical, welcoming the decision to clarify British support for France. Furthermore, pressure from within Britain also appeared to be rising on the issue of conscription. Liddell-Hart, who had previously advocated maintaining only a small army, had now come to the conclusion that Britain must be prepared to send a much larger military contribution to France. Such arguments were certainly impacting upon the Foreign Office. In relaying the views of Liddell-Hart, a Foreign Office official concluded, "I continue to believe that Hitler, who seems to have an uncanny flair in politics, may have been right when he declared, according to our information, that if the English had not introduced compulsory service by March 1939, they might consider their world empire as lost". Of course, conscription continued to be perceived as potentially divisive. Nonetheless, in publishing the findings of a Mass Observation survey on the issue of National Service, the Daily Herald generally refrained from the vitriolic hostility to conscription that might have been anticipated. Indeed, the main criticism levelled at the government was that the National Service Handbook was simply too confusing. Above all, the general conclusion of the Mass Observation survey was that the British public — particularly the working class — were ambivalent.

However, some particularly vocal sections of right wing opinion remained hostile to continental commitments, and thus to the introduction of compulsory military service if the objective was to furnish a larger Expeditionary Force. Again, residual representations came to the fore, not least 'war anxiety'. Arguments against both conscription and the continental commitment consistently evoked the legacy of the First World War. Continental alliances were held to be responsible for dragging Britain into the Great War and the subsequent slaughter of hundreds of thousands of conscripted young men. Paradoxically, such arguments momentarily united a section of the political right with the more extreme-left, albeit for very different motives. Whilst the Beaverbrook newspaper, the Evening Standard, could counter the French campaign for

70 Although Liddell Hart had come to acknowledge this after Munich, he nonetheless remained hostile to conscription, and after the Prague coup, once more argued against Britain assuming such a prominent role in Continental affairs. For more on this, see Azar Gat, Fascist and Liberal Visions of War: Fuller, Liddell Hart, Doubt and Other Modernists, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 221-226.
71 TNA, FO 371/22922/C1652/281/17: Jebb minute for Cadogan, recording the views of Sir Edward Grigg and Captain Liddell-Hart, 1 February 1939. The reference to Hitler's comments regarding British conscription had come from intelligence reports the previous autumn, and had indeed already been cited to the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy by Halifax on 14 November 1938 (TNA, CAB 27/624).
72 The Daily Herald, 'National Service: What They Think', by Mass Observation, 8 February 1939.
British conscription by asserting that "the French people must be able to defend their own frontiers, while Britain holds the sea and supplies the sinews of financial resource"; the Daily Worker could maintain that "the National Service scheme is a device conceived by the Government to make a loud clatter so that the people should be fooled into believing that they are being protected against the attacks of Chamberlain's murderous fascist friends". Such views on conscription reflected the difficulties faced by the British in taking a decisive step on this issue. Both the far left and isolationist right resisted the implementation of conscription, and even the more mainstream category of opinion was far from enthusiastic.

Nevertheless, for the French government, the fact that conscription was the subject of considerable press discussion was an encouraging sign. Furthermore, the British had also raised the idea of Staff talks between the two countries, another indication that London considered a close entente between the two Powers as essential. Although it has been argued that the British decision to arrange Staff talks was motivated primarily by uncertainty regarding Hitler's intentions, it is important not to underestimate the impact of French pressure and British perceptions of both French and British public opinion. Since Munich, pressure from Paris had been steadily increasing, and reactive representations of opinion indicated that a more intimate and binding Franco-British alliance would be publicly popular on both sides of the Channel. For Paris, the Staff talks provided a further opportunity to urge conscription. A Quai d'Orsay note commented that, "the moment would be favourable to strongly mark ... to the British Government, that recourse to conscription is the essential element in the effective participation of Britain in common defence".

The impression furnished by the French Embassy in London suggested that British opinion had evolved, thus making the British elites more disposed to adopt conscription. The full Staff talks, coupled with Chamberlain's public declaration of

73 Evening Standard, editorial, 9 March 1939; Daily Worker, editorial, 10 March 1939.
74 For example, the newspapers most representative of liberal opinion, the Manchester Guardian and the News Chronicle both shied away from offering any firm opinion either way over the issue of conscription. The general tone was one of opposition, although this was never explicitly argued.
75 Anthony Adamthwaite has made this argument, suggesting that "it was not French pressure but increasing uncertainty about Hitler's intentions which forced the British government to make the first major concession to Paris — full staff talks". France and the Coming of the Second World War, p. 252. However, Talbot Imlay has convincingly argued that it was French decisions taken during late 1938 and into 1939 that subsequently dictated the orientation of the Franco-British alliance, suggesting that French pressure was considerably more effective than it has often been given credit for. See Imlay, 'Retreat or Resistance: Strategic reappraisal and the Crisis of French Power in Eastern Europe, September 1938 to August 1939', in Alexander and Mouré (eds), Crisis and Renewal in France, pp. 105-131.
76 MAE, Papiers 1940, Papiers Cabinet Georges Bonnet, No. 2: Note, par le Directeur-Politique, 29 January 1939.
Franco-British solidarity on 6 February, indicated that the British government was finally embracing the position that reactive representations of public opinion had been advocating for several weeks. Of course, the demand of the British public to reinforce the London-Paris alliance was reinforced by the war scares of January 1939, fuelling the conviction that the threat of war was real and imminent. Corbin had repeatedly informed Paris that British opinion had been awakened to this realisation, and continued to reinforce this assessment in early 1939. On the 24 January, he alluded to the gradual transition of opinion since Munich: “The memory of the events of September irrefutably renders opinion, such as it is expressed in the press, more sensitive to the signs of danger”.

Another legacy of the previous September was the growing lack of faith in Hitler’s word. Hitler’s Reichstag speech had certainly offered some encouragement to the pro-appeasers, notably the passage: “Germany has no territorial demands against England and France, apart from that for the return of our colonies. While the solution of this question would contribute greatly to the pacification of the world, it is in no sense a problem which could cause a war”. Among sections of the British press, this passage had generated a degree of optimism. For Corbin, such optimism was confined to the more extreme-right, which displayed “a superficial optimism regarding the intentions of Hitler”. Therefore, Corbin noted two categories of opinion in Britain: on the one hand, the optimists who continued to preach appeasement; on the other, the pessimists, favouring the adoption of a firmer foreign policy. The latter were little enthused or encouraged by Hitler’s reference to the strength of the Rome-Berlin axis. “It can only serve the cause of peace”, the Führer had stated, “if it is quite clearly understood that a war waged against the Italy of today will, once it is launched and regardless of its motives, call Germany to the side of her friend”.

This statement did not make comfortable listening in Paris, hence the increased urgency of French representations to London. On 5 February, Bonnet instructed Corbin to re-iterate to Halifax that the French government wanted the British to “guarantee us the same solidarity of forces against Italian aggression, with or without the public entrance into the war of Germany”. Chamberlain’s statement to the House of Commons the following day appeared to satisfy French demands. However, French

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77 MAE, Série Z, Grande-Bretagne, No. 282: Corbin to Bonnet, 24 January 1939 (original emphasis).
78 AN, F60/174, Affaires Étrangères – Allemagne: Text of Hitler’s Reichstag speech, 30 January 1939.
79 MAE, Série Z: Allemagne, No. 720: Corbin to Bonnet, 1 February 1939 and 2 February 1939.
80 AN, F60/174, Affaires Étrangères – Allemagne: Text of Hitler’s Reichstag speech, 30 January 1939.
81 DDF, 2e Série, Tome XIV, No. 40: Bonnet to Corbin, 5 February 1939.
pressure was not only designed to obtain a greater degree of British and French solidarity of interests, but continued to urge the necessity of conscription. Hoppenot suggested that Munich had, to a considerable extent, awakened British opinion to the necessity of rectifying their military deficiencies: “The country appeared prepared to accept heavy sacrifices, and several observers even estimated that the establishment of conscription would have been easily imposed at this time”. However, it was also observed that traditional British distaste for conscription would continue to be problematic. Even those politicians and newspapers most vocal in proclaiming the necessity of rectifying existing deficiencies were wary of “explicitly proposing the establishment of conscription”.

British politicians added their voices to the campaign within the French press. Eden, writing in Paris-Soir, was unequivocal: “It is necessary that Great Britain is now capable of providing larger and more rapid military assistance to France”. In the same newspaper several days later, Churchill sought to persuade the French that British opinion had irreversibly changed: “In Britain, the national union has been reaffirmed. The attitude of the government has become firmer, and past divergences have become confined to History”. Evidence of increased governmental firmness appeared to come from Lord Halifax, who on 23 February reinforced the solidarity of interest between Paris and London in a speech to the House of Lords. Corbin suggested that the Foreign Secretary’s statement had been exactly what the British public had wanted to hear. Halifax’s speech, he remarked, had “certainly heightened his prestige in political circles and enhanced his personality in the eyes of opinion”.

However, French hopes of convincing London to introduce conscription continued to be hampered by the intransigence of the British left. Corbin informed Paris of their continued hostility: “[it] continues to feel significant repugnance in relation to compulsory military service, which appears as a veritable forfeiture of rights”. Consequently, it is to be “foreseen that the Government will meet very serious difficulties in deciding to establish it in peacetime”. In spite of this, the more favourable light with which the British public viewed a French alliance encouraged Paris. By early March, the French Military Attaché in London, General Lelong, had detected a

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82 MAE, Papiers 1940, Papiers Rochat, No. 18: ‘Note – conscription en Angleterre (le Sous-directeur d’Europe)’, 30 January 1939.
83 Eden, Paris-Soir, 7 February 1939; Churchill, Paris-Soir, 10 February 1939.
85 DDF, 2e Série, Tome XIV, No. 65, Corbin to Bonnet, 7 February 1939.
transition in British perceptions of the entente. Franco-British cooperation had, he suggested, previously been a source of little enthusiasm, merely accepted with resignation by the British people: “Now, resignation has made room for a firm conviction”. 86

It was within such a climate of information and perceptions that the French government pursued a firmer line on foreign policy. This line had already been reinforced during the debate in the French Chamber in late January 1939. The majority of the French press warmly received Daladier’s speech of 26 January, which once more emphasised French firmness in face of Italian threats. The French Premier reiterated that France will surrender nothing to the threat of force, “Not an acre of our territory, and not a single one of our rights”. 87 Nonetheless, attention was quickly deflected by Hitler’s speech to the Reichstag on 30 January. Émile Roche was practically alone in suggesting: “Above all, Germany maintains that she wants to live in peace with France and Britain. Nothing is more natural after the agreement between Chamberlain and Hitler signed in Munich and that of Bonnet and Ribbentrop signed in Paris”. 88 The overriding tone was one of dwindling confidence in Hitler’s promises and increased frustration at the continued intransigence of the British. One particular point of concern was Hitler’s failure to disassociate Germany from the anti-French campaign in Italy. 89

More than ever, a firm Franco-British front was considered essential and, prior to February, Chamberlain’s proclamations had comprehensively failed to provide comfort. Gabriel Péri proclaimed that, “For him, Munich remains the example to be followed”, suggesting that France should now seek to take the lead in the Franco-British entente: “A gesture by France, particularly a gesture in favour of French security in Spain, would profoundly alter the general orientation of British policy”. Émile Buré argued that both Paris and London find themselves “in a situation immensely more formidable than last September”. It is vital, he claimed, that the two countries work in tandem: “Their vital interests are, this time, undoubtedly at stake. But M. Chamberlain still appears not to share this sentiment”. 90

The French press therefore, welcomed Chamberlain’s statement of 6 February, even if it was considered long overdue. Le Populaire paid equal tribute to “the House of Commons, which, by its applause, unanimously linked British popular feeling to the words of the Prime Minister”. L’Humanité advocated that Chamberlain’s statement

86 Ibid., No. 65: Corbin to Bonnet, 7 February 1939, and No. 254: Lelong to Daladier, 2 March 1939.
88 Émile Roche, La République, 31 January 1939.
89 See, for example, Léon Blum in Le Populaire, 31 January 1939.
90 Gabriel Péri, l’Humanité, 30 January 1939; Émile Buré, l’Ordre, 1 February 1939.
“renders inexcusable the march towards a new Munich. [...] It is precise and categorical”. The *Journal des débats* considered it auspicious: “Nothing could be more opportune and salutary than this statement by the British Prime Minister”. *Le Temps* welcomed the fact that Chamberlain’s declaration had “precisely defined the exact position of Britain, [and] that it gives, when it was necessary, a warning which will be pondered upon by those still tempted to intentionally open the door to war”. Above all, the guarantee of British support instilled confidence in France. The fear of having to face Germany alone was profound, hence the intense desire of many in France to secure British and, if possible, American support. As Pierre Cot, writing in *l'Œuvre*, remarked, “Isolated, we are powerless, united with Britain and the United States, we risk nothing”.

The British undoubtedly perceived French public opinion as wanting a firm entente between Paris and London. Moreover, it was clear that Daladier’s firm position towards Italy was widely popular. Indeed, the Paris correspondent of the *Times*, in reporting Daladier’s latest statement of French firmness in the French Chamber in late January, remarked: “it must be repeated that if the attitude of the vast majority of Deputies is any criterion (and their attitude undoubtedly reflects feeling in the constituencies), then M. Daladier’s categorical ‘No’ means what it says, and any tendency abroad to doubt this can only lead to trouble”. Furthermore, the hostile reaction of the French press to Hitler’s Reichstag speech of 30 January reinforced the hostility expressed by sections of French opinion to the Franco-German Declaration. Nonetheless, Phipps portrayed French opinion differently: “The average Frenchman is relieved that Herr Hitler’s speech was more moderate than he had feared last week when apprehension was rife about what Herr Hitler would announce”.

Phipps provided a similarly skewed portrayal of French reaction to Chamberlain’s speech of 28 January. Understandably, the reaction in France was far from positive, as Chamberlain comprehensively failed to assert the solidity of the Franco-British entente. Phipps, however, painted an altogether rosier picture, although even he had to note that, “in various quarters ... attention is called to the absence of any specific assurance that Great Britain would stand by France should she be attacked in the Mediterranean”. A more accurate assessment was given following Chamberlain’s statement of Franco-

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93 *The Times*, Paris correspondent, 30 January 1939.


95 TNA, FO 371/22934/C1314/1314/17: Phipps to Halifax, 1 February 1939.
British solidarity in the House of Commons on 6 February: "Paris press from the extreme-left to right is unanimous in welcoming the Prime Minister's statement on Franco-British solidarity in the House of Commons". Overall, Phipps appeared intent on reporting how popular Chamberlain was in France, choosing to ignore dissenting voices. However, although his reports might have distorted overall perceptions of French opinion in London, the scepticism cast on his reports within the Foreign Office ensured that his reading of French opinion was not unquestioningly embraced.

Moreover, representations of French opinion emanating from Phipps were always qualified by those furnished by the French Embassy in London, from where the demand for an increased British military commitment to France continued unabated. A Foreign Office official noted how, "[t]he French demand for conscription in England is loud and continuous", although concluded that, "we should be well-advised to ignore the agitation". In order to achieve parity with the French Army, it was noted that Britain would require an additional 200,000 men. This could only be achieved through conscription, but even then, Britain would be unable to equip them. Consequently, "the conscripted army would be a sort of militia. This militia we already possess in the form of the Territorial Army, which is about 200,000 men strong". Another facet of the French pressure was also referred to: "the French argue that the introduction of conscription would have a tremendous moral effect. So it would. But if the measure really would give rise to dissensions here, [if] it would split the country, the moral effect in Germany and France would from our point of view be disastrous". Once again, residual fears of leftist hostility remained prevalent, yet to be entirely superseded by reactive representations more favourable to the notion of conscription.

Nonetheless, a fusion of French pressure and perceptions of public opinion (both British and French) had a profound impact on the British government, even if the response fell short of the introduction of conscription. On 22 February, the Cabinet effectively abandoned 'limited liability' as the guiding mantra of British policy. The Cabinet conclusions noted that, due to a fusion of French concerns and reports of increased German strength, it was now "necessary to depart from the conception of an army available for service anywhere, and to envisage one army equipped for service on

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96 TNA, FO 371/22922/C1585/281/17: Phipps to Halifax, 7 February 1939.
98 For more on the notion of 'limited liability' within British military and strategic planning, see Michael Howard, The Continental Commitment, pp. 96-120 and Brian Bond, British Military Policy between the Two World Wars, pp. 209-229.
the Continent and a second army equipped for service in the Colonies or elsewhere overseas". Chamberlain agreed, adding "while he had come to this conclusion with some reluctance, he saw no alternative". In terms of commitments to France, it was concluded that more must be done to alleviate French concerns. Regarding the second echelon of the regular field army, it was noted that: "hitherto there had been no commitment to send these divisions to France. It was now proposed that we should enter into such a commitment". This commitment was not only necessary to assuage French concerns. It was also intended to satisfy the demands of certain representations of British opinion, advocating that Britain should do her utmost to guarantee France the level of support and commitment demanded by the current European situation.

The French Left and the Quest for Cohesion

Throughout early 1939, the French socialists continued to be plagued by divisions over foreign policy. 1938 had come to a close with the SFIO Congress at Montrouge between 24 and 25 December. At the preceding Congress in Royan, in June 1938, a compromise motion on foreign policy secured at least the façade of consensus. By the end of the year, this façade could no longer be maintained, as Munich divided the Socialists more than ever on issues of external policy. For the first time, Blum offered a motion distinct from that of Paul Faure. Blum's firm approach won the day, by 4,322 votes to 2,837, with some 1,000 abstentions. The French press offered surprisingly little comment on the proceedings at Montrouge, still preoccupied by the Italian demands and the forthcoming visit to Rome of the British Ministers. L'Europe nouvelle did however welcome the gravitation towards Blum's position. "In order for France to be disencumbered of the Munich virus which has stupefied her for three months", it was argued, "it is necessary that the Socialist Party start by eliminating it from itself. For the country to condemn the policy of Georges Bonnet, it is necessary that it first be condemned by the Socialist Party".

At the same time, events in Spain threatened to re-open the ideological schisms that had been papered over by the unanimous response to the Italian demands. The news from the Iberian peninsula was rapidly becoming gloomier for supporters of the

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99 TNA, FO 371/22923/C2606/281/17: Cabinet Conclusions, 22 February 1939.
101 Figures cited from Crémiex-Brilhac, La Guerre, oui ou non? p. 96.
Spanish Republic, as a Franco victory appeared inevitable. The French press responded along predictable ideological lines. The far left suggested that Republican Spain was not yet lost, advocating immediate French intervention. Le Peuple wrote that “The victory of Franco would be a defeat for French democracy”, and that “European peace depends on the political and territorial integrity of Spain”. L’Humanité reported a gathering at the Vélodrome d’Hiver in Paris: “40,000 Parisians gathered yesterday to the cry of ‘Open the frontier!’”\(^{103}\) For the right, recent events in Spain were widely interpreted as the death knell of the Republic, and any attempt to deny this reality was considered futile and dangerous. For l’Intransigeant, the situation was clear: “to throw us now into the Spanish imbroglio, is to deliberately expose us to the peril of war.”\(^{104}\) Le Matin concurred, raising the spectre of the Spanish war escalating: “More than ever, France must be careful not to intervene in the Spanish Civil War. Intervention would have one single effect: prolonging the Civil War and perhaps a foreign war.”\(^{105}\)

The fall of Barcelona on 26 January reinforced this conviction on the French right. Indeed, by early March, the far right could scarcely contain their joy at Franco’s victory. Je Suis Partout did not hold back, proclaiming: “La République espagnole est morte! Vive l’Espagne”\(^{106}\). However, the French left refused to acknowledge Franco’s success, and bitterly opposed the suggestion of sending an Ambassador to Burgos. Hitler and Mussolini are always the masters of Franco”, claimed the Administrative Commission of the SFIO, “[b]ut Franco is not yet the master of Spain”\(^{107}\). “The Spanish Republic is not dead”, asserted Blum, whilst Jacques Duclos stated: “the French people will never acknowledge the assassins of women and children”.\(^{108}\) The Paris police recorded numerous gatherings on behalf of Republican Spain, from those organised by l’Humanité to the more extreme Socialists such as Jean Zyromski. On 4 February, Zyromski spoke of the “treason of Georges Bonnet within the Government, and of Flandin in the Chamber”. Meanwhile, at a Humanité gathering of 20 February, attended by upwards of 17,000 people, the police recorded cries of ‘Gloire aux courageux Espagnols’.\(^{109}\)

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\(^{103}\) Albert Buissin, Le Peuple, 17 January 1939; headline in l’Humanité, 19 January 1939.


\(^{105}\) Le Matin, 19 January 1939.

\(^{106}\) Je Suis Partout, 3 March 1939.

\(^{107}\) Appeal by the Commission administrative permanente du Parti socialiste, published in Le Populaire, 3 February 1939.

\(^{108}\) Léon Blum, ‘La République Espagnole n’est pas mortel’, Le Populaire, 7 February 1939; Speech by Jacques Duclos at Saint-Étienne, 5 February 1939, cited in l’Humanité, 6 February 1939.

\(^{109}\) APP, BA/1650: Police report, 4 February 1939, on a meeting held at the Palais de la Mutualité, 3 February 1939; APP, BA/1720: Police report, 20 February 1939, on the “7ème Cross du journal l’Humanité.”
Events in Spain certainly brought the old ideological schisms to the fore once more. Leftist criticisms of the government’s policy towards Spain were countered by increased right wing attacks on domestic communism. Right wing anti-bolshevism was freely expressed. “The Government must be preoccupied with our internal situation”, argued the *Journal des débats*, “Communism is a permanent danger”. Similarly, Pierre Dominique, writing in *La République*, observed how “the Communists, beaten again and again since June 1936, nevertheless remain a public danger”. Reactive representations of opinion suggested that the façade of unanimity that had arisen in light of the Italian claims was dissipating. The residual representation of internal polarisation threatened to re-emerge. Given the pervasiveness of this particular residual, the elites could be forgiven for viewing the current reactive representations with trepidation. Nonetheless, there were signs that the threat from the left was less acute than in the past. The more extremist sections of the SFIO were perceived as being a minority opinion, restricted to the likes of Zyromski, and there were also indications that support for the PCF was dwindling. A police report of 28 February noted a decline in sales of *l’Humanité*. “until last October, sales had been growing compared to the previous year, but since then, it has been decreasing”.

Furthermore, the influence of another residual representation of opinion – that of France being a society widely infused with pacifism – was diminishing. Widespread support for the resolute stance over the Italian claims demonstrated that the French people were prepared, if necessary, to forcibly resist unreasonable demands. In this respect, the broader ‘mainstream’ category of opinion could be interpreted as widening, while the extremist categories of opinion were in decline. Indeed, within the SFIO, support for the blumiste position suggested that the pacifist paulfauristes were becoming increasingly marginalised. However, the reality was not as clear-cut. As B. D. Graham has observed, “the Fauristes subsequently improved their position by broadening the grounds of conflict. In particular, they created confusion amongst their opponents by suggesting that co-operation with the Communists should be ended”. This suggestion divided the blumistes. Some were attracted to a divorce from the communists, whereas for others, notably those of the *Bataille Socialiste*, such an argument was anathema.

The paulfauristes new position faced its first test at the Party’s National Council in Paris on 4-5 March 1939. Despite an opposing motion forwarded by Zyromski, the

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100 *Journal des débats, politiques et littéraires*, 11 March 1939; Pierre Dominique, *La République*, 5 March 1939.
111 APP, BA/1720: Police report, 28 February 1939.
Party voted in favour of the *paulfauriste* motion, arguing that an alliance with the PCF, whilst beneficial back in 1934, was no longer advantageous. Therefore, it was evident that despite the apparent decline of the *paulfauristes* following Montrouge, they retained considerable support and attraction, even if this was not wholly attributable to their pacifist stance. The popularity of dissociating the SFIO from the PCF was not, however, simply about labelling the communists a ‘war party’. Rather it was a reaction to the increasing isolation of the communists in recent months, and their reputation for fomenting social disruption at a time when national unity and discipline was considered paramount in order to meet the fascist threat. The motions on foreign policy illustrated that increasing anti-Fascism was similarly prevalent, with the *blumiste* motion defeating the *paulfauriste* motion.\(^{113}\) Increased support for the *paulfauristes* should not, therefore, be interpreted as a victory for the pacifist tendency.

In terms of British perceptions of domestic French politics, the Communist Party and the *Bataille Socialiste* sections, represented by Zyromksi and Pivert, appeared to be losing popular support. Phipps informed London that “[t]he reports from His Majesty’s Consular Officers confirm the impression in Paris that the Communist Party, which probably never exceeded about 350 thousand members, is continuing to lose ground”. Moreover, Phipps suggested that French public opinion was swaying away from the extremism that had culminated in 1936, and that “the country has for some time past wanted a moderate but strong Government, and a truce from social and political agitation”. Such an assessment was undoubtedly influenced by the failure of the General Strike and reactive representations of French opinion in light of the Italian claims. The latter, concluded Phipps, “consolidated national and patriotic feeling, increased France’s consciousness of her Empire, and greatly strengthened the Government and M. Daladier. On no issue in recent years has France been so united”.\(^{114}\)

Although Phipps’ reports must be treated with caution — they certainly betrayed a latent anti-communism, and were invariably designed to talk up Daladier’s personal authority and popularity — his appraisal of the situation in the first quarter of 1939 was not wide of the mark. By assuming a firmer stance in foreign policy, and thus distancing himself from the negative connotations of Munich, Daladier was essentially taking from

\(^{113}\) However, the 41.3% of the vote won by the *paulfauriste* motion was a notable improvement from the 34.1% achieved at Montrouge, suggesting that the pacifism of Paul Faure remained attractive in Socialist circles. Ibid., pp. 232-233.

his far-left critics the very stick with which they had attempted to beat him. Indeed, Daladier’s categorical response to Italian demands ensured that this stick was, in early 1939, primarily used to beat Bonnet rather than himself.\textsuperscript{115} In so doing, he was appealing to a large section of the French public for whom the communist’s foreign policy platform had been attractive. At the same time, by distancing himself from the communists, and by clamping down on far-left agitation, he was certainly appealing to many sections of the right. In fact, the French middle classes had provided the backbone of popular support for the French far right during the mid-1930s. In 1937, the PSF asserted, “We are essentially defenders of the middle classes, or, if one prefers, we seek a formula for national salvation by the middle classes and for the middle classes”.\textsuperscript{116} Therefore, Daladier’s anti-communism successfully enticed many of those who had been seduced by the extremist fringes of French conservatism during the Popular Front era. In essence, he was expanding the middle ground, to the detriment of extremism. The question remained, however, if he could continue to pull off this balancing act as the international situation became ever more ominous.

\textit{‘Bursting optimism breaks through the clouds’}

Although Chamberlain had been compelled to publicly affirm British commitment to France, he could still reassure opinion that this was not necessarily a portent of another European conflict. He continued to believe that appeasing Italy could significantly reduce the chances of a European conflict. The British thus continued to apply pressure on Paris to work towards this end, especially once the tensions of the January ‘war scares’ appeared to dissipate. British attempts to stimulate Franco-Italian conversations were clearly at odds with the firm French response to the Italian claims and the recent efforts in Paris to extract a pledge of support from the British in the event of a Franco-Italian conflict. However, the French elites were not unanimously unreceptive to such a course. Despite his firm rhetoric concerning the Italian claims, Georges Bonnet was certainly

\textsuperscript{115} For example, one pro-Popular Front gathering witnessed a Communist Party member expressing approval for “the energetic rhetoric of M. Daladier who has known how to say ‘No’ to Mussolini’s demands”. However, the speaker added that Bonnet continues to encourage the aggressors. APP, BA/1650: Police report of a gathering on 8 February 1939, citing Georges Fournial of the PCF.

considered amenable to attempts at relaxing Franco-Italian tensions, as were other members of the French Cabinet such as de Monzie, Chautemps and Marchandeau.117

Furthermore, pro-appeasers in Britain were confident that Chamberlain's popularity could be used to publicly further their cause, particularly in France. "[T]he more we build up Chamberlain", wrote Horace Wilson to Phipps, "the greater is the contribution that 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 raising in all the hemispheres".118 Moreover, despite the growing firmness in the Foreign Office, Chamberlain's hopes for further appeasement had not been totally eradicated. On 28 February, Halifax instructed Phipps to ask Bonnet if Paris agreed with London in believing "that no reasonable opportunity be neglected of improving the atmosphere and of exploring possible means of removing the present tension".119

Although Bonnet sympathetically received the British request, the British were only too aware that the French foreign minister was far from popular in France. Following a visit to Paris in January 1939, Kenneth de Courcy, a newspaper proprietor and secretary of the pro-appeasement Imperial Policy Group, and Colonel W. S. Pilcher, observed, "Monsieur Bonnet seems to be generally distrusted by most Frenchman of the centre and right".120 However, the most voluble and sustained criticism undoubtedly came the political left, especially over Spain. "The cabalist Bonnet prepares the 2nd Munich", was how Gabriel Péri interpreted the move towards recognition of Franco. Criticism of the foreign minister also arose from certain sections of the right. Pertinax suggested that Bonnet's personal authority in formulating foreign policy bordered on autocratic. "In theory", he wrote, "foreign policy is conducted by the entire Cabinet, the Ministers being collectively responsible for their actions. In reality, the Minister of Foreign Affairs is the absolute master of his department".121 There were also indications that Daladier himself was beginning to tire of his Foreign Minister. Following the visit of Chamberlain and Halifax to Rome, Bullitt reported Daladier's laments: "he had been unable to get any exact information as to what had happened. He had only Bonnet's reports on the subject and he could not trust Bonnet". In a later letter to Roosevelt,

117 Bonnet's willingness to countenance a more conciliatory tone towards Italy was prevalent throughout the spring and summer of 1939, finding support from de Monzie, Chautemps and Marchandeau. See Adamthwaite, France and the Coming of the Second World War, p.307, and Zay, Carnets Secrets, pp. 50-53.
119 TNA, FO 371/23793/R1379/7/22: Halifax to Phipps, 28 February 1939.
121 Péri, l'Humanité, 21 February 1939; Pertinax, l'Europe nouvelle, 11 March 1939.
Bullitt cited Daladier as referring to Bonnet and "the other members of the Quai d'Orsay", as being "thoroughly unreliable".122

Nonetheless, London sought to capitalise on Bonnet's willingness to work towards soothing French relations with Rome. The British attempted to alleviate Franco-Italian tensions by expressing concern at the build-up of French troops in Tunisia. British hopes of relaxing these tensions were contingent upon such issues as the disputed Italian colony in Tunis being resolved. Perth informed the Foreign Office of his view on 22 February: "It is to my mind almost unthinkable that the whole world should go up in flames because France and Italy cannot agree about the status of the Italian colony. [...] If the negative attitude taken up by my French colleague is that of the French Government the situation may easily become perilous". Such comments induced Halifax to suggest that the British should "get into some discreet discussions with the French if it could be done without arousing their suspicions". It was acknowledged that this would not be easy. Halifax warned that in making such an approach, Phipps "must not give the French the impression that we are starting to put pressure on them, out of love or fear of Musso".123

Consequently, Phipps was instructed to ask Bonnet if the French "would care to make use of our good offices to induce the Italian Government to refrain from further [troop] concentrations in return for some corresponding undertakings of a reasonable character on the part of the French Government".124 This caused considerable consternation in Paris. Corbin subsequently expressed French concerns to the British, telling Cadogan of his fears that the British government "were contemplating getting into the position of mediating between Paris and Rome", especially on the issue of troop concentration in North Africa. Vansittart lamented that such pressure had ever been brought to bear: "I knew this would have a bad effect, and I wish we had not done it".125 Further evidence of French disquiet came from the Paris Embassy. Ronald Campbell, the British Chargé d'Affaires in Paris, in relaying details of a conversation with Léger, wrote, "M. Daladier had been annoyed and wished to send a tart reply. H. M. Government were, he said, trying to put the brake on the French Government".126

122 Telegram from Bullitt to the US Secretary of State, 6 February 1939; Letter from Bullitt to Roosevelt, 21 February 1939, both in *For the President*, p. 310 and p. 313 respectively.
124 Ibid., Halifax to Phipps, 28 February 1939.
125 TNA, FO 371/23793/R1475/7/22: Cadogan minute, 2 March 1939; Vansittart minute, 4 March 1939.
126 TNA, FO 371/23793/R1491/7/22: Campbell minute, 3 March 1939.
The official response of the French government came on 8 March 1939, clearly expressing their conviction that only a firm position with regard to the Italian claims could provide a guarantee of peace. "Any appearance of concession to intimidating manoeuvres", it was added, "would only serve to encourage the Italian Government to formulate further demands, and Mussolini would wrongly assume that France was resigned to be subjected to them rather than to resist". The firm French response to the British government's démarche was partially motivated by perceptions of French opinion. Despite tentative moves towards negotiation with Italy, the overriding consideration was how the firm stance adopted since 30 November had been popular in France. Similarly, recent reactive representations had clearly indicated that French opinion was hostile to any British mediation between Paris and Rome. For the French left in particular, following the depressing events in Spain, the idea of making any concessions to Mussolini was abhorrent. The French government was thus encouraged to become more assertive with London as a result of perceptions of French opinion. On the subject of Italy, French opinion appeared united, less prone to the ideological polarisation that had plagued France for many years. Moreover, public support for the firm stance towards Rome indicated that the residual representation of 'war anxiety' had been somewhat superseded, permitting, and even encouraging the French government to pursue a foreign policy of firmness rather than capitulation.

This is not to say, however, that Daladier refused to test the water regarding the possible relaxation of Franco-Italian tensions. Paul Baudouin, of the Banque Indo-Chine, was sent to Italy in order to explore how certain Italian claims could be accommodated. For Bonnet, such attempts were essential in order to appease those sections of French opinion that would want to see all diplomatic avenues exhausted before going to war. "[I]t would be necessary that French public opinion should know that they [attempts at negotiation] had been made", he noted, so that they would "have no reproaches to address us". However, when details of Baudouin's mission were exposed in the French press, little gratitude was expressed. As Bonnet himself observed, "an extremely lively press campaign was undertaken", primarily on the left, that was

127 TNA, FO 371/23793/R1584/7/22: French reply to British Governments démarche of 28 February 1939, 8 March 1939.

deeply critical and suspicious of the apparent return to Munich-style diplomacy. Once again, criticism was not confined to the left. Pertinax bemoaned the negative impression that Baudouin’s trip would cause in Italy and Germany. Both Hitler and Mussolini, he suggested, always believed that the British and French governments, who had been responsible for the Munich Agreement, “would end up capitulating in the Mediterranean and in Africa in the same fashion as they had capitulated in Central Europe”. The Baudouin mission merely fuelled this conviction. Press hostility to the Baudouin mission similarly reinforced the reactive representations of opinion since the Italian claims were first made. Simply put, French opinion would not tolerate any notion of concession to Mussolini.

The determination of Paris to resist pressure to negotiate with Italy was further encouraged by their perceptions of British opinion. Within weeks of Munich, the French Embassy in London had been furnishing Paris with reports indicating that British opinion was hardening against the dictatorships. Most crucially, public statements made by Chamberlain and Halifax in February 1939 provided Paris with assurances that London remained committed to the entente. Such perceptions encouraged hopes that the British would increase their military assistance to France in the event of war, even at the cost of conscription. A directive for the French Delegation to the forthcoming Staff conversations noted: “it is essential that British land forces for despatch on the continent are planned to be increased as soon as possible, and broadly equipped with medium armoured vehicles”. However, although the French considered the forthcoming staff conversations as another platform from which to urge conscription, their hopes would continue, for the time being, to be quashed.

Nonetheless, British commitment to France had undoubtedly become more binding. The impact of Chamberlain and Halifax’s public statements was not lost on British officials when discussing British commitments in March 1939. The Committee of Imperial Defence noted that Britain had now entered “into an entirely new and frank phase of our relations with the French on questions affecting the joint defence of the two countries. We are indeed assuming a mutual commitment which is even more close
and binding than those existing with some of our Dominions". The Chiefs of Staff, however, were uncertain as to how binding the commitment to despatch a field force to France in the event of war actually was, requesting clarification from the Foreign Office. Strang minuted that although existing obligations do “not commit us to send any military force to France at all”, it is imperative to note that, “[s]ince then there have been public statements which would seem to show that we are now more likely to commit ourselves in this respect than in the past”.

As well as public statements of solidarity and the abandonment of the ‘limited liability’ doctrine, London also began planning for an expansion of the Expeditionary Force. For Pownall, the concerted French pressure had been pivotal: “We have been very greatly helped by Halifax in particular – the French pressure on him had the required effect”. However, although representations of public opinion may have contributed to the British government’s desire to increase British commitment to France, residual representations during February 1939 clearly illustrated that not all sections of opinion approved of preparing a sizeable field force intended for use on the continent. Indeed, the only newspapers constantly in favour of conscription – the *Evening Standard* and the *Daily Express* – were equally voluble in espousing their isolationist stance. This is clearly illustrated by the *Express* on 20 February: “The French Government asks us to send an army to the Continent if we are required to implement our pledge of assistance to France. The country is utterly opposed to such an expedition”.

Furthermore, by mid-February 1939, as the ‘war scares’ dissipated, the pro-appeasers in Britain hoped that a general European settlement could yet be reached. Downing Street in particular exuded optimism regarding the European situation. Henderson’s reports from Berlin increased confidence. On 18 February, he suggested

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132 TNA, FO 371/22923/C2751/281/17: Committee of Imperial Defence, Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee Report, 6 March 1939.
133 TNA, FO 371/22923/C3861/281/17: Committee of Imperial Defence, Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee, 6 March 1939; Strang minute, 10 March 1939; Reply to the Chiefs of Staff from Downing Street, 6 March 1939.
134 Pownall Diaries, diary entry for 20 February 1939, p. 189. J. P. Harris has suggested that the Chiefs of Staff had always accepted the necessity of a sizeable field force for despatch to France, but that it was only by February 1939 that Cabinet reluctance to embrace it had been overcome. J. P. Harris, *The British General Staff and the Coming of War, 1933-39*, in French and Reid (eds.), *The British General Staff*, p. 187. Michael Howard concurs, suggesting that Chamberlain was convinced of the need for a Field Force by late February. *The Continental Commitment*, pp. 126-128. Brian Bond also suggests that it was only at this time that the Cabinet accepted the necessity of a field force for France, but argues that it was only accepted with reluctance, and under pressure from public and Parliamentary opinion. Bond also suggests that reluctant converts – Hoare, Simon and Chamberlain – only altered opinion in March and April: “Ministers who had appealed somewhat rhetorically for years to the alleged wishes of ‘public opinion’ as a pretext for opposing military expenditure, were now hoist by their own petard as ‘public opinion’ was clearly seen to favour increased military support to France”. *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars*, pp. 301-302.
that “Hitler does not contemplate any adventures at the moment and that all stories and
rumours to the contrary are completely without real foundation”. Henderson was also
eager to reassure Göring that the views espoused by the likes of Churchill and Eden
“carried no weight at all with great mass of British public opinion or had any influence
except with a section of the intelligentsia”. While Henderson’s prognosis was treated
cautiously by the Foreign Office – Vansittart commented that “Sir N. Henderson does
not seem to be in close touch with reality, particularly when he represents Hitler as being
anxious to return to respectability” – the pro-Chamberlain sections of the British
government were eager to capitalise on any opportunity to alleviate tension. 135
Chamberlain was particularly infused with optimism, informing his sister, “we have at
last got on top of the dictators”. Furthermore, Chamberlain considered the moment
propitious for normalising relations with Franco’s Spain, and, “if the Italians are not in
too bad a temper, [getting] Franco-Italian conversations going”. 136

Chamberlain was keen that his optimism be reflected in the popular press. On 9
March, he addressed the press lobby, putting a particularly positive spin on the European
outlook.137 His actions were certainly effective. “Bursting optimism breaks through the
clouds”, proclaimed the Evening Standard: “It comes direct from the British Foreign
Office and it is founded on a solid array of fact”. The Daily Express went further,
advocating that colonial concessions be made to Germany, despite acknowledging that
such a step might be “in defiance of the weight of public opinion”. Even the Manchester
Guardian conveyed the official view that “the European outlook is easier and that the
possibilities of a dangerous international crisis arising in the near future have to some
degree receded”. 138 This ‘bursting optimism’ did not go unnoticed by the French.
Corbin reported how this was “the dominant tone of British press commentary”.
Although the French Ambassador was under no illusion that the press coverage was
inspired by Chamberlain’s statement to the press lobby, he nonetheless considered it
genuine: “if it is inspired, it is irrefutably shared”.139

However, for Corbin, the optimism rapidly subsided. In assessing the press on
the morning of 11 March, he noted how it was “more reserved than yesterday in their

135 TNA, FO 371/22965/C2139/15/18: Henderson to Halifax, 18 February 1939; Vansittart minute, 22
February 1939.
136 Chamberlain Papers, NC 18/1/1086: Neville to Hilda, 19 February 1939.
137 For more on Chamberlain’s attempts to secure favourable press coverage at this time, see Cockett, The
Twilight of Truth, pp. 103-106.
138 Evening Standard, editorial, 10 March 1939; Daily Mail, editorial, 3 March 1939; Manchester Guardian,
Foreign Editor, 8 March 1939.
139 MAE, Série Z, Grande-Bretagne, No. 282: Corbin to Bonnet, 10 March 1939.
evaluation of the international situation”, and, moreover, that it was “very probable that the Foreign Office News Department applied itself to modifying the tone of the newspapers, and to soften the overly favourable conclusions which could be drawn from yesterday’s semi-official note [Chamberlain’s statement to the Lobby correspondents]”. As German intentions regarding Czechoslovakia became more ominous, optimism undoubtedly waned. Nonetheless, the pro-appeasement press sought to play down the predicament. “This crisis”, noted the Daily Mail, “is not Great Britain’s immediate concern. It is only a move in the map-making which we must expect to go on in Middle Europe for many years to come”. Similarly, the isolationism of Lord Beaverbrook continued to be articulated in the editorials of the Evening Standard: “As far as can be seen at this stage, the end of Federal Czecho-Slovakia does not increase the risk of general hostilities in Europe or, indeed, put any fresh obstacle in Mr. Chamberlain’s path”.

The Prague Coup

The events of mid-March 1939 abruptly erased the optimism that had briefly re-surfaced in Great Britain. German meddling in Slovakia, leading to the latter’s declaration of independence, was swiftly followed by the invasion of Bohemia and Moravia by German troops. Germany had effectively destroyed the Munich settlement, spectacularly changing the landscape of European politics. Consequently, London and Paris were forced to dramatically re-appraise their foreign policy. However, Chamberlain’s initial response in the House of Commons on 15 March was muted: “I am bound to say that I cannot believe that anything of the kind which has now taken place was contemplated by any of the signatories to the Munich Agreement at the time of its signature”. Despite this, he had to admit that it was “not in accord with the spirit of the Munich Agreement”. One of Chamberlain’s closest allies, Sir John Simon, acknowledged that “these recent events constitute disappointment and an overthrow of some of the highest hopes which were built at the time of Munich”. Simon, however, refused to accept that “the policy which the Prime Minister pursued is a mistaken one”.

140 MAE, Série Z, Italie, No. 313: Corbin to Bonnet, 11 March 1939.
141 Daily Mail, editorial, 11 March 1939; Evening Standard, editorial, 14 March 1939.
142 Hansard, (345 H.C. Deb. 5s), 15 March 1939, speeches by Chamberlain and Sir John Simon, (cols. 440 & 550 respectively).
The majority of the British press castigated Chamberlain for his lacklustre response. The *News Chronicle* caustically observed that there is "no sign that the Prime Minister repents the part he played in the [Munich] business. His answers in the Commons yesterday were those of a distant spectator of a tiresome conflict in a land of which he 'knows nothing'". For the *Daily Telegraph*, there could be no doubt as to the impact of events: "Yesterday's proceedings were not merely not in accord with the spirit of Munich; they reduced Munich to a complete and utter mockery". The *Manchester Guardian* concurred, arguing that recent events "should finally dissipate any illusions that remain about the character, aims, and methods of Hitler". Corbin informed Paris of the largely negative attitude of the British press: "The press, including the isolationist newspapers, is more and more ardent in denouncing this deliberate violation of Munich".

However, Chamberlain was not without support in his initial reluctance to abandon faith in appeasement. The isolationist press had initially offered an alternative representation of reactive opinion. The *Evening Standard* spoke of the inevitable collapse of the "Ramshackle state," whilst the *Daily Express* suggested that the issue "cannot possibly be a matter of concern for Britain to the extent of leading us into any commitment on the Continent of Europe. Those distant regions on the Danube lie quite outside our bailiwick. We cannot be expected to influence the course of events there". The pro-appeasement *Daily Mail* adopted a similar line, stating that the "final destruction of Czecho-Slovakia was almost inevitable", although did express some shock as to "the swift and brutal manner of its end".

As the "swift and brutal" manner of the German action became clear, the press demonstrated a near-unanimity in condemning the aggressive and expansionist actions of Hitler. Even the pro-appeasement and isolationist press began to voice disapproval. The *Evening Standard* noted that the justification of uniting ethnic Germans within the Reich was no longer viable: "The march was not that of a patriot army bringing deliverance to a people of its own blood. It was the arrogant stamping of a body of men, drunk with the hallucination of power". Other journals chose to rubbish the arguments forwarded the previous day by the isolationist press. The *Daily Mirror* argued that "[i]f Czechoslovakia was a ramshackle mix-up of diverse peoples and languages, so is

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143 *News Chronicle*, editorial, 16 March 1939; *Daily Telegraph*, editorial, 16 March 1939.
144 MAE, Série Z, Grande-Bretagne, No. 282: Corbin to Bonnet, 17 March 1939.
Switzerland. If it was wrong of Czechoslovakia to exist may not the same be said of Switzerland? Elsewhere, the left seized the opportunity to advocate the necessity of collective security, based upon an alliance with the Soviet Union. The *Daily Herald* did not hesitate to attack Chamberlain: “This is no time for self-deception. The British people have, under Mr. Chamberlain's direction, deceived itself more than enough already - and the people of Czecho-Slovakia suffer to-day because of it. Let us face the facts and the threat”. The *Daily Worker* was equally unequivocal in criticising the government: “The lie of September is now admitted. The Nazi Government is tearing Czechoslovakia to pieces. And the British Government is not lifting a finger”.

The French press also expressed outrage at German actions, coupled with hostility and criticism directed at their own government. Inevitably, this was most prominent on the left. The *Peuple* wrote: “The consequences of Munich have become visible. [...] In vain, the authors of this catastrophe today attempt to evade responsibility”. Blum lamented the passivity of the French government during the previous few days: “Prague, seized by the throat, did not even have time to ask for assistance. If she had asked for it, what would have been the response? Will they dare to pretend that the commitments of Munich would have been kept? For a week the storm brewed over unfortunate Czechoslovakia. Did they provide Prague with encouragement? Did they sound a warning in Berlin?” Pierre Brossolette, in *Le Populaire*, was unambiguous: “The Munich policy is dead. Dead are the illusions widespread in the aftermath of Munich. Dead are the fallacious assurances of Hitler before, during and after Munich. Dead is the deluded optimism of M. Georges Bonnet since Munich. Dead is the phantom policy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs”. *L'Humanité* continued their campaign against Bonnet, noting that he had thus far failed to respond to the destruction of Czechoslovakia. By his willing complicity, it was suggested, Bonnet had “encouraged the assassination of Czechoslovakia”. Moreover, it was claimed that Bonnet and Daladier “remain faithful to the spirit of Munich”, intent on “working against France”.

The press of the centre and right were equally forceful. The *Petit Parisien* voiced frustration and contempt for the Nazis, for having simply taken the ‘living space’ she claimed to need at the expense of others, asking the French people “to reflect if this is an

146 *Evening Standard*, editorial, 16 March 1939; *Daily Mirror*, editorial, 16 March 1939.
147 *Daily Herald*, editorial, 16 March 1939; *Daily Worker*, editorial, 15 March 1939.
enviable fate”. *Le Temps* described the events as “absolutely abominable for the political morals of our epoch”, after which one can harbour “no illusion as to the methods and conditions of the development of Germanic expansion in Eastern and Central Europe”. *L’Intransigeant* agreed, claiming that Germany was intent on dominating Central Europe. Moreover, the power and means at her disposal appeared unprecedented: “It is perhaps the first time in the history of the world that one nation can appropriate huge territories simply by diplomatic manoeuvring”. For *Le Figaro*, the events in Czechoslovakia had provoked “an indignant stupor”, whilst Léon Bailby, in *Le Jour-Echo de Paris*, claimed that no-one, however much goodwill they possess, could any longer “grant the slightest credit to a German signature”.149

Nevertheless, Bailby continued to betray the residual anti-Soviet sentiment prevalent on the French right. Despite Hitler’s flagrantly belligerent actions, he argued, the Soviet Union posed the immediate danger. Moscow, suggested Bailby, continued to “hold some of our politicians by corruption and blackmail”, intent on reviving the Popular Front.150 Bailby’s prognosis was not widely shared. For de Kérillis, the immediate danger was Germany. The demise of Czechoslovakia, he suggested, provided an opportunity for the French to take a lead in the re-orientation of the Western Powers’ diplomatic efforts: “France can galvanize Europe. France can again play a large part in preventing the world from falling into the abyss. No, everything is not lost. The fate of our catastrophe is not yet inscribed in history”. However, he was equally convinced that this would require the removal from office of Bonnet: “M. Bonnet must go. I demand it of him. I plead it”.151

For others, the turn of events demanded French unity. *Le Matin* argued that, “in the presence of the external situation it is more necessary than ever that the French unite behind the Daladier Government”. For others, the urgent necessity remained that of maintaining the closest Franco-British solidarity. Pierre Bernus, in the *Journal des débats*, commented: “in light of everything, the perpetual objective for Paris and London must be rearmament and establishing a perfect collaboration at all times between France and Great Britain. [...] The well-being of peace and civilisation lies in the solidarity of the West”. From other quarters, the opportunity was seized to ask whether or not the

French people were now fully aware of the perils of the situation. Léon Broussard rhetorically asked the French people: “will this new warning finally awaken you?”

The most striking feature of the press reaction to the Prague coup, in both Britain and France, was the disdain and anger directed at Nazi Germany. Above all, reactive representations of opinion illustrated that the spirit of Munich was assumed dead. Moreover, any aspirations that the Anglo-German agreement, or the subsequent Franco-German declaration, could ensure peaceful coexistence had been fundamentally shattered. The French Military Attaché in London informed Daladier of reactive representations of British opinion. “By its intervention in Czechoslovakia” reported Lelong, “the Reich appears to have discredited itself amongst those who sought in its policies explanations or extenuating circumstances. The condemnation expressed by the majority of the press is almost sans appel”. Reports from the British Embassy in Paris furnished a similar impression of French opinion. Phipps noted that the French press, irrespective of political persuasion, concurred in expressing “their shock and indignation”. However, he was equally eager to point out that there was unanimity in the French press “that France and Great Britain can take no action”. Phipps also noted that the French press returned to the issue of British conscription, noting Paris-Soir of 16 March. Indeed, the change in the European outlook was immediately considered by the French elites as posing considerable future risks. A Deuxième Bureau note suggested, “if it can be considered as a prelude to a deeper penetration in Eastern Europe, it can be equally be interpreted as the prelude to operations aimed at the Western Powers”. Such future orientation of German policy would certainly threaten France directly. The British would, therefore, have anticipated even more French pressure on the issue of conscription.

For the British elites, the Prague coup illustrated how opinion had evolved since Munich. The press was unanimous in condemning the German action, demanding a re-orientation of foreign policy. However, in terms of representations, Prague was not a turning point. For several months, reactive representations had evolved towards a

153 DDF, 2nd Series, Tome XV, No. 17: Lelong to Daladier, 16 March 1939.
154 TNA, FO 371/22993/C3227/19/18: Phipps to Halifax, 16 March 1939.
155 Phipps observed how Paris-Soir argued that recent events necessitated recourse to conscription in Britain. (See above telegram).
156 AN, Fonds Daladier, 496 AP/11, 2DA4 Dr. 4 sdrb: 2ème Bureau, ‘Note sur la situation crée par la disparition de la Tchécoslovaquie’, 16 March 1939.
growing position of firmness, gradually undermining the residual representations of ‘war anxiety’ and hostility to continental entanglements that had informed elite perceptions at the time of Munich. Prague was, however, a turning point for elite perceptions of opinion. For the first time, reactive representations advocating a foreign policy of resistance were expressed with near unanimity. Chamberlain could no longer dismiss them, irrespective of the crumbs of comfort proffered him by his sisters and other supporters. Moreover, the Foreign Office had already proved more sensitive to the evolution of opinion, and had steadily been pushing the Prime Minister towards the firmer foreign policy stance already embraced by Paris.

For the French elites, reactive representations to the Prague coup reinforced the perception of a French public rapidly losing patience with the dictators. The response to the Italian claims had demonstrated that a firm stance carried favour with the majority of French opinion. The Prague coup provoked similar representations, suggesting that a firm policy be adopted not only towards Mussolini but equally towards Hitler. Furthermore, the reaction to the Italian demands demonstrated that foreign policy could provide a rare platform for French unity. The French left, despite the lingering pacifism of the paufauristes, were becoming increasingly anti-fascist, so such a foreign policy would naturally appeal to them. It had also proved that the French centre and right were becoming equally disillusioned with the Munich policy, a disillusionment that only increased after Prague. As in Britain, the significance of the Prague coup was the sheer weight and unanimity of reactive representations demanding a firm response. If the Italian demands had undermined the residual representations of ideological polarisation and widespread ‘war anxiety’, the Prague coup suggested that such residuals had lost their potency. For Daladier, the evolution of French opinion was confirmed by Prague; for Chamberlain, the Prague coup shattered the complacent perceptions of a supportive public opinion that he had been clinging to since Munich.